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13th Edition

by Marc Llewellyn & Lee Mylne

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An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

About the Authors

Sydney resident **Marc Llewellyn** is one of Australia's premier travel writers and the winner of several travel writing awards, including the Australian Society of Travel Writer's Travel Writer of the Year award 2001/2002. His latest travelogue, *Riders to the Midnight Sun*, tells of his cycle journey from the Ukrainian Black Sea to Arctic Russia—in a bid to escape the Australian heat.

Lee Mylne is a Brisbane-based travel writer who writes for a range of publications, including the national travel trade magazine, *Travel Week Australia*. Born and raised in New Zealand, she traveled widely before finally figuring out she could make a living out of it. She has lived in Australia for the past 16 years and is currently president of the Australian Society of Travel Writers. She is also a co-author of *Frommer's Australia 2004*, and *Frommer's Portable Australia's Great Barrier Reef*.

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The Unofficial Guide to the World's Best Diving Vacations

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **Find** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
-  **Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **Kids** Best bets for kids, and advice for the whole family
-  **Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
-  **Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Australia

Since our last edition, getting to and around the land Down Under has changed once again; when you get here, there are facelifts and updates to old favorites, and a couple of new museums you might wish to check out. Here's a brief summary, with more detail in each of the regional chapters.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP The Australian skies have seen many changes in recent years, the most notable being the growth of no-frills carrier **Virgin Blue** (☎ 07/3295 2296). Rapidly expanding routes now see Virgin Blue servicing all capital cities as well as an ever-growing list of smaller centers such as Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, the Whitsunday Coast, Rockhampton and Gold Coast in Queensland, Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, Hobart and Launceston in Tasmania, Alice Springs in the Red Centre, and Broome in Western Australia. Stay tuned; this is a moveable feast.

Another newcomer is **Regional Express** (☎ 13 17 13 in Australia; www.regionalexpress.com.au), which picked up the pieces from the old Kendall Airlines. It flies to many places; of note are Broken Hill, Balina, and Merimbula (all in NSW) from Sydney; Melbourne to northern Tasmania; and Adelaide to Kangaroo Island and Broken Hill. Virgin Blue and Regional Express often have good Internet deals.

On the ground, early 2004 will see the opening of a long-awaited rail line

linking Alice Springs and Darwin. It will be serviced by the iconic **Ghan**, operating weekly between Adelaide and Darwin and twice weekly between Adelaide and Alice Springs. In Queensland, the new high-speed Brisbane-Cairns **Tilt Train** has knocked hours off the journey.

On Oz highways, an extension of the M5 motorway south of Sydney has cut 45 minutes off the road trip to Canberra and the Snowy Mountains. You can now make Canberra in less than 3½ hours.

SYDNEY New entrants on the bar scene in Sydney include the groovy **Cargo Bar & Lounge** (☎ 02/9262 1777) on Kings Street Wharf, on the city side of Darling Harbour (its outdoor areas are great on a sultry evening), and **The Establishment** (☎ 02/9240 3000) on George Street in the city center.

BRISBANE Brisbane's pub scene has taken on new life, with the renovation of several of its historic hotels. The Heritage-listed **Breakfast Creek Hotel** (☎ 07/3262 5988) on Brisbane's Kingsford Smith Drive has undergone a A\$4-million (US\$2.6-million) renovation and restoration, and the **Regatta Hotel** (☎ 07/3870 7063), on Coronation Drive, has also had a face-lift and become one of the trendiest places to be seen. Access to the Regatta has been helped by the opening of a new CityCat terminal practically on its doorstep.

The **Queensland Museum** (☎ 07/3840 7555) is undergoing a major

revamp, with a new entrance and the incorporation of an interactive Science centre.

The free **Museum of Brisbane**, scheduled to open in October 2003, is housed in the historic City Hall and is designed to capture the history and essence of Brisbane. It will include a small theater showing a short film about the city and will relate the stories, events, and ideas that have shaped the city as well as giving practical information for visitors.

Brisbane's new Cultural Industries Precinct at Kelvin Grove, still under construction at press time, is the new home to the innovative **La Boite Theatre** (www.laboite.com.au). La Boite was due to move into a new 400-seat theater-in-the-round in late 2003.

QUEENSLAND **Queensland Rail's** (C 13 22 32) fast new *Tilt Train* links Brisbane and Cairns, cutting the journey by about 7 hours. The 160kmph (99 mph) "business class" trip takes 25 hours.

When you get to Cairns, you'll find a city transformed by a major redevelopment of the Esplanade, which includes a massive new saltwater swimming lagoon. Nearby is the new Reef Fleet Terminal from which the Great Barrier Reef boats leave.

There are also new artificial lagoons in Airlie Beach and Townsville, resolving the problem of where to swim in stinger season.

Two of a planned six **Great Walks of Queensland** will open in June 2004, in the Whitsundays and Fraser Island. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (C 07/4946 7022; www.env.qld.gov.au) is planning tracks that will highlight some of Queensland's most valuable parks and forests in World Heritage areas.

THE TOP END From early 2004, the opening of the long-awaited Alice Springs–Darwin railway line will give

the Top End its first rail link. Great Southern Railway's *The Ghan* (C 13 21 47 in Australia; www.trainways.com.au) will run one weekly return journey between the two cities, leaving Alice Springs on Mondays and arriving in Darwin about 24 hours later.

PERTH & WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The **Mining Hall of Fame** (C 08/9026 2700; www.mininghall.com), in the Outback gold town of Kalgoorlie, continues to expand, with new attractions, including a Chinese garden and more galleries opening in late 2003.

MELBOURNE The new place to hang out is Federation Square, which is on target to attract an estimated 6 million visitors a year. The architecture is weird: a kind of post-industrial cubic look with a wonky square paved with stones. There are plenty of cafes, restaurants, and art spaces around. One eatery to look out for is the **Chocolate Buddha** (C 03/9654 5688), a Japanese-inspired noodle place that's well worth a visit.

The latest hotel of note is the **Ramada Melbourne** (p. 536), a new four-star hotel opposite Flinders Street Railway Station. It's cozy, friendly, and has great offers—especially on the weekends.

TASMANIA Long linked by air, Sydney and Tasmania were brought together by the start of a high-speed car ferry link in January 2004. The *Spirit of Tasmania III* is operated by TT-Line, who also run car ferries from Melbourne to Tasmania. The ferry departs at 3pm from Sydney on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday, and arrives in Devonport at 11:30am the next day. Then it loads up and ships out back to Sydney again. Prices for the 20-hour journey range from A\$230 to A\$500 (US\$150–US\$325) per person one-way. Cars will be transported free for 45 weeks of the year.

The Best of Australia

Maybe we're biased, but Australia has a lot of bests. It's got some of the wildest natural scenery, the weirdest wildlife, certainly some of the most brilliant scuba diving, the best beaches (shut up, California), the oldest rainforest (110 million years and counting), the world's oldest human civilization (some archaeologists say 40,000 years, some say 120,000), the best wines (stop browsing the Napa and come see what we mean), the world's most laid-back people (when they're not from Melbourne and watching Aussie Rules football), the best weather (ignoring the Wet Season up north), the most innovative East-meets-West-meets-someplace-else cuisine—all lit by the world's most pervasive white sunlight.

"Best" means different things to different people, but scarcely a visitor lands without having the Great Barrier Reef at the top of their "Things to See" list. It really is the Eighth Wonder of the World. Also high on most folks' lists is Ayers Rock. This monolith must have some kind of magnet inside it to attract plane-loads of tourists. We're not saying the Rock isn't special, but we think the Australian desert all around it is even more special. The third attraction on most visitors' lists is Sydney, the Emerald City that glitters in the Antipodean sunshine on—another "best"—the best harbor spanned by the best bridge in the world (sorry, San Francisco).

These "big three" attractions are understandably popular with travelers. What the TV commercials or the travel agent window displays don't show, however, is how much else there is to see. There are the World Heritage wetlands and Aboriginal rock art of Kakadu National Park, the second Great Barrier Reef on the western coast, and the snowy mountain hiking trails of Tasmania. As planes zoom overhead delivering visitors to the Reef, the Rock, and Sydney, Aussies in charming country towns, on far-flung beaches, on rustic sheep stations, in villages, and in mountain lodges shake their heads and say, "They don't know what they're missin'." You will no doubt find your own "bests" as you travel, as well as ours below, and we would like to hear about them. In the listing below, NSW stands for New South Wales, QLD for Queensland, NT for the Northern Territory, WA for Western Australia, SA for South Australia, VIC for Victoria, TAS for Tasmania, and ACT for the Australian Capital Territory.

1 The Top Travel Experiences

- **Experiencing Sydney** (NSW): Consistently voted one of the best cities in the world by almost every major travel publication, Sydney is more than just the magnificent Harbour Bridge and Opera House. No other major city has beaches in abundance like Sydney, and few have such a magnificently scenic harbor. My advice: Get aboard a ferry, walk across the bridge, and plan on spending at least a week, because you'll need every minute. See chapter 3.
- **Discovering the Great Barrier Reef** (QLD): It is hard to believe

God would create such a glorious underwater fairyland, a 2,000km (1,250-mile) coral garden with electric colors and bizarre fish life, *and* have the grace to stick it all somewhere with warm water and year-round sunshine. This is what you came to Australia to see. See chapter 6.

- **Exploring the Wet Tropics (QLD):** City folk can't get over the moisture-dripping ferns, the neon blue butterflies, the primeval peace of this World Heritage patch of rainforest stretching north, south, and west from Cairns. Hike it, 4WD it, or glide over the treetops in the Skyrail gondola from Cairns. See chapter 6.
- **Bareboat Sailing in the Whitsundays (QLD):** Bareboat means unskipped—that's right, even if you think port is just an after-dinner drink you can charter a yacht, pay for a day's instruction from a skipper, then take over the helm and explore these 74 island gems. Anchor in deserted bays, snorkel over reefs, fish for coral trout from the deck, and feel the wind in your sails. See p. 312.
- **Exploring the Olgas (Kata Tjuta) and Ayers Rock (Uluru) (NT):** Just why everyone comes thousands of kilometers to see the big red stone of Ayers Rock is a mystery—that's probably why they come, because the Rock *is* a mystery. Just 50km (31 miles) from Ayers Rock are the round red heads of the Olgas, a second rock formation more significant to Aborigines and more intriguing to many visitors than Uluru. See p. 387.
- **Taking an Aboriginal Culture Tour (Alice Springs, NT):** Eating female wasps, contemplating a hill as a giant resting caterpillar, and seeing in the stars the face of your grandmother smiling down at you

will give you a new perspective on your own culture. See what we mean on a half-day tour from the Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre in Alice Springs. See p. 374.

- **Listening to the "Sounds of Silence" (Ayers Rock, NT):** Billed as a "million star restaurant" because it's outdoors under the Milky Way, this culinary treat is a fabulous way to soak up the desert. Sip champagne to the strains of a didgeridoo as the sun sets, then settle down to a "bush tucker" feast of emu, kangaroo, and crocodile at white-clothed tables in the sand. Then it's lights out, the music stops, and everyone listens to the eerie sound of silence. See p. 391.
- **Exploring Kakadu National Park (NT):** Australia's biggest national park is a wild wonderland of lily-clad wetlands, looming red escarpment, Aboriginal rock art, fern-fringed waterholes, countless birds, big barramundi (that's a fish), and menacing crocs. Cruise it, hike it, 4WD it, fish it. See "Kakadu National Park" in chapter 8.
- **Cruising the Kimberley (WA):** Australia's last frontier, the Kimberley is a cocktail of giant South Sea pearls, red soil, crocodiles, Aboriginal rock art called "Wandjina," and million-acre farms in a never-ending wilderness. Cross it by 4WD on the Gibb River Road, stay at a cattle station (ranch), base yourself on the beach in Broome, or cruise its dramatic red coastline. See chapter 9.
- **Rolling in Wildflowers (WA):** Imagine Texas three times over and covered in wildflowers. That's what the state of Western Australia looks like every spring from August to mid-November when pink, mauve, red, white, yellow, and blue wildflowers bloom their hearts out. See chapter 9.

- **Drinking in the Barossa Valley (SA):** One of Australia's largest wine-producing areas, this German-speaking region less than an hour's drive from Adelaide is also the prettiest. Adelaide's restaurants are some of the country's best, so test out your wine purchases with the city's terrific food. See "Side Trips from Adelaide" in chapter 10.
- **Following the Great Ocean Road (VIC):** This 106km (65-mile) coastal road carries you past wild and stunning beaches, forests, and dramatic cliff-top scenery—including the Twelve

Apostles, 12 pillars of red rock standing in splendid isolation in the foaming Southern Ocean. See "The Great Ocean Road: One of the World's Most Scenic Drives" in chapter 12.

- **Driving Around Tasmania:** The island-state is one of Australia's prettiest, a picturesque Eden of lavender fields, wineries, snow-topped granite tors, whitewater wildernesses, and haunting historic prisons. A bonus is that it's small enough to drive around in a few days. See chapter 14.

2 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Horse Trekking in the Snowy Mountains (NSW):** The film *The Man from Snowy River* alerted travelers to the natural beauty of these ranges, where you can stay in bush lodges or go camping under the stars. See p. 207.
- **Abseiling in the Blue Mountains (NSW):** Careering backwards down a cliff face with the smell of gum trees in your nostrils is not everyone's idea of fun, but you sure know you're alive. Several operators welcome both novices and the more experienced. See "The Blue Mountains" in chapter 4.
- **White-Water Rafting on the Tully River (Mission Beach, QLD):** The Grade 3 to 4 rapids of the Tully River swoosh between lush, rainforested banks. The guides are professional, the scenery is pretty, and the rapids are just hair-raising enough to be fun. See p. 277.
- **Canoeing the Top End (NT):** Paddling down the sun-drenched ochre walls of Katherine Gorge sharpens the senses, especially when a freshwater crocodile pops its head up! Head downriver with Gecko Canoeing to meet Aboriginal communities, shower under

waterfalls, and camp in swags along the riverbanks. See "Exploring Katherine Gorge" in chapter 8.

- **Surfing in Margaret River (WA):** A surfing lesson with four-time Western Australia champ **Josh Palmateer** (☎ 04/1895 8264) is a great introduction to the sport—if only to hear Josh's ripper of an Aussie accent! From July to September, Josh shifts his classes to Cable Beach in Broome. See p. 459.
- **Sea Kayaking with Sea Lions (WA):** Snorkel with sea lions and watch penguins feeding on a sea-kayaking day trip from Perth with **Rivergods** (☎ 08/9259 0749). They also run multi-day sea kayak expeditions past whales, dolphins, and sharks in Shark Bay, and over the brilliant coral of Ningaloo Reef on the Northwest Cape in Western Australia. See p. 444.
- **Skiing in the Victorian Alps (VIC):** Skiing in Australia? You bet. Where else can you swish down the mountain between gum trees? See "The High Country" in chapter 12.
- **Learning to Surf (NSW):** Head up from Sydney to Byron Bay on a surf safari. Plenty of camping

and lots of beach stops to flex your newfound surfing skills. See p. 194.

- **Hiking Cradle Mountain National Park** (TAS): The 80km (48-mile) Overland Track is known as the best bushwalking

(hiking) trail in Australia. The trek, from Lake St. Clair to Cradle Mountain, takes anywhere from 5 to 10 days, depending on your fitness level. Shorter walks, some lasting just half an hour, are also accessible. See p. 628.

3 The Best Places to View Wildlife

- **Montague Island** (Narooma, NSW): This little island on the south coast is a haven for seabirds, but it's the water around it that's home to the main attractions. Dolphins and fairy penguins are common, and during the whale-watching season you are almost sure to spot humpback and southern right whales, some with their calves. See p. 203.
- **Jervis Bay** (NSW): This is probably the nearest place to Sydney where you are certain to see kangaroos in the wild and where you can pet them, too. The national park here is home to hundreds of bird species, including black cockatoos, as well as plenty of possums. See p. 199.
- **Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary** (Brisbane, QLD): Cuddle a koala (and have your photo taken doing it) at this Brisbane park, the world's first and largest koala sanctuary. Lots of other Aussie wildlife—including lizards, frogs, 'roos, wallabies (which you can hand-feed), and colorful parakeets—are on show. See p. 232.
- **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** (Kuranda, near Cairns, QLD): Walk through the biggest butterfly "aviary" in Australia and see some of Australia's most gorgeous butterflies, including the electric-blue Ulysses. See many species of butterfly feed, lay eggs, and mate, and inspect caterpillars and pupae. Wearing pink, red, or white encourages the butterflies to land on you. See p. 274.
- **Wait-a-while Rainforest Tours** (Cairns, QLD): Head into the Wet Tropics behind Cairns or Port Douglas with this eco-tour operator to spotlight big-eyed possums, lizards, pythons, the bizarre bats—even a platypus, which are so shy that 95% of Aussies have never seen one in the wild. About once a month on average, one lucky group will spot the rare and bizarre Lumholtz's tree kangaroo. See p. 290.
- **Heron Island** (off Gladstone, QLD): There's wonderful wildlife on this "jewel in the reef" any time of year, but the best time to visit is November to March, when the life cycle of giant green loggerhead and hawksbill turtles is in full swing. From November to January, the turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. From late January to March, the hatchlings emerge and head for the water. You can see it all by just strolling down to the beach, or you can join a university researcher to get the full story. See p. 330.
- **Monkey Mia** (WA): There are several places you can see, hand-feed, or swim with wild dolphins Down Under. If you want an almost guaranteed dolphin sighting, head to Monkey Mia on the lonely Outback coast, where they cruise past your legs (see "The Midwest & The Northwest: Where The Outback Meets the Sea" in chapter 9). Even better is a cruise on the *Shotover* catamaran

to see some of the area's 10,000 dugongs (manatees), plus turtles, sea snakes, sharks—and more (p. 467).

- **Curumbin Wildlife Sanctuary** (The Gold Coast, QLD): Tens of thousands of unbelievably pretty red, blue, green, and yellow rainbow lorikeets have been screeching into this park for generations to be hand-fed by visitors every morning and afternoon. There are 'roos, wombats, crocodiles, and other Australian animals at the sanctuary, too, but the birds steal the show. See p. 350.
- **Lamington National Park** (The Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD): Every day brilliant black-and-gold Regent bowerbirds, satin bowerbirds, crimson and cobalt rosellas, and loads of other wild birds feed right out of your hand at **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse**, located in this mountainous national park a 90-minute drive inland from the Gold Coast. Hike the trails and soak up the cool mountain air while you're here. See "The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature" in chapter 6.

- **Kakadu National Park** (NT): One-third of Australia's bird species live in Kakadu; so do dingoes, snakes, frogs, and lots of dangerous saltwater crocs. A cruise on the Yellow Waters billabong is like a wetlands theme park. It is at its best later in the Dry Season around September and October, when wildlife converges around this shrinking water source. See p. 409.

- **Northwest Cape** (WA): Go snorkeling with a whale shark. No one knows where they come from, but these mysterious monsters up to 18m (60 ft.) long surface in these remote waters every March to mid-June. Snorkelers can swim alongside the sharks as they feed (on plankton, not snorkelers). See p. 469.

- **Kangaroo Island** (SA): You are sure to see more native animals here—including koalas, wallabies, birds, echidnas, reptiles, seals, and sea lions—than anywhere else in the country. Another plus: The distances between major points of interest are not great, so you won't spend half the day just getting from place to place. See p. 511.

4 The Best Places to Experience the Outback

- **Broken Hill** (NSW): There's no better place to experience real Outback life than in Broken Hill. There's the city itself, with its thriving art scene and the Royal Flying Doctor service; a ghost town on its outskirts; a national park with Aboriginal wall paintings; an opal mining town nearby; and plenty of kangaroos, emus, and giant wedge-tailed eagles. See p. 208.
- **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park** (Ayers Rock, NT): Sure, this magical monolith will enthrall you with its eerie beauty, but the nearby Olgas are more soothing,

more interesting, and actually taller than the Rock, so make the time to wander through them, too. Don't go home until you've stood still in all that sand and felt the powerful heartbeat of the desert. See "Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas)" in chapter 7.

- **The MacDonnell Ranges** (NT): The Aborigines say these red rocky hills were formed by the Caterpillar Dreaming that wriggled from the earth and came to rest here. To the west of Alice Springs are dramatic gorges, idyllic (and bloody cold) waterholes,

and cute wallabies. To the east are Aboriginal rock carvings, and the Ross River Resort, where you can crack a stock whip, throw a boomerang, feast on damper and billy tea, and ride a horse through the bush. See “Road Trips from Alice Springs” in chapter 7.

- **Kings Canyon** (NT): Anyone who saw the cult flick *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* will remember that scene where the transvestites climb a soaring cliff and survey the desert floor. That was Kings Canyon, about 320km (200 miles) from Alice Springs in one direction and

Ayers Rock in the other. Trek the dramatic rim or take the easier shady route along the bottom. Don't forget your lipstick! See “Kings Canyon” in chapter 7.

- **Finke Gorge National Park** (NT): If you like your wilderness scenic and ancient, come here. Finke Gorge is home to “living fossil” palm trees, survivors of the ice ages, and to what scientists think may be the world's oldest river. Camp, hike, and just soak up the timeless bush. Visit for a day from Alice Springs or camp out. Access is by four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicle only. See p. 384.

5 The Best Beaches

- **Palm Beach** (Sydney): At the end of a string of beaches stretching north from Sydney, Palm Beach is long and very white, with some good surfing and a golf course. See chapter 3.
- **Hyams Beach** (Jervis Bay, NSW): This beach in pretty, off-the-beaten-path Jervis Bay is said to be the whitest in the world. You need to wear sunblock if you decide to stroll along it, because the reflection from the sun, even on a cloudy day, can give you a nasty sunburn. The beach also squeaks as you walk. See “South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway” in chapter 4.
- **Four Mile Beach** (Port Douglas, QLD): The sea is turquoise, the sun is warm, the palms sway, and the low-rise hotels starting to line this country beach can't spoil the feeling that it is a million miles from anywhere. But isn't there always a serpent in paradise? The “serpent” in this case is north Queensland's seasonal—and potentially deadly—marine stingers. Come from June to September to avoid them, or swim in the stinger net. See chapter 6.
- **Mission Beach** (QLD): Azure blue sea, islands dotting the horizon, and lush white sand edged by dense tangled vine forests make this beach a real winner. So does the fact that hardly anyone ever comes here. Cassowaries (giant emu-like birds) hide out in the rainforest, and the tiny town of Mission Beach politely makes itself invisible behind the leaves. Visit from June to September to avoid deadly marine stingers. See “The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands” in chapter 6.
- **Whitehaven Beach** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD): It's not a surf beach, but this 6km (3¾-mile) stretch of silica sand on Whitsunday Island is pristine, peaceful, and as white as snow. Bring a book, curl up under the rainforest lining its edge, and fantasize that the cruise boat is going to leave without you. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 6.
- **Main Beach, Noosa** (Sunshine Coast, QLD): The trendy shops of Hastings Street line the white sand and gently rolling surf of this

pretty beach. Dust off your designer swimsuit for this one. When you get tired of the scene, you can hike the green walking trails of nearby Noosa National Park. See “The Sunshine Coast” in chapter 6.

- **Surfers Paradise** (Gold Coast, QLD): All the beaches on the 30km (19-mile) Gold Coast strip in south Queensland are worthy of inclusion. Every one of them has clean sand, great surf, and fresh breezes. Just ignore the tacky high-rises behind you. Surfers will

like Kirra and Burleigh Heads. See “The Gold Coast” in chapter 6.

- **Cable Beach** (Broome, WA): Is it the South Sea pearls they pull out of the Indian Ocean, the camels loping along the sand at sunset, the surf, or the red earth that comes down to meet the green water that gives this beach its exotic appeal? Maybe it's the 22km (14 miles) of glorious white sand. June to September is the only time to swim here, because of deadly marine stingers. See “The Kimberley: A Far-Flung Wilderness” in chapter 9.

6 The Best Affordable Diving & Snorkeling Sites

- **Port Douglas** (QLD): Many fabulous dive sites can be found off the shores of Port Douglas, north of Cairns, including Split-Bommie, with its delicate fan corals and schools of colorful fusiliers; Barracuda Pass, with its coral gardens and giant clams; the swim-through coral spires of the Cathedrals; and numerous ribbon reefs renowned for their variety of coral and fish life. See p. 285.

- **Green Island** (QLD): This island is made of coral, so you'd expect the snorkeling to be good. Plunge off the beach just about anywhere around the island and marvel at the scenes before you. Come over for the day from Cairns or stay at the island's upscale resort. Divers will like it here, too. See p. 271.

- **Cairns** (QLD): In addition to Green Island (see above), Moore, Norman, Hardy, Saxon, and Arlington reefs and Michaelmas and Upolu cays—all about 90 minutes off Cairns—offer great snorkeling and endless dive sites. Explore on a day trip from Cairns or on a 3-day sailing adventure. See p. 271.

- **Yongala wreck** (Off Townsville, QLD): Sunk by a cyclone in

1911, the 120m (394-ft.) SS *Yongala* lies in the Coral Sea off Townsville. Big schools of trevally, kingfish, barracuda, and batfish surround the wreckage; giant Queensland grouper live under the bow, lionfish hide under the stern, turtles graze on the hull, and hard and soft corals make their home on her. Extended live-aboard dive trips run from Townsville and Cairns. See p. 264.

- **The Whitsunday Islands** (QLD): These 74 breathtaking islands offer countless dive sites among the islands themselves and on the Outer Great Barrier Reef 90 minutes away. Bait Reef on the Outer Reef is popular for its cascading drop-offs. The underwater life is as varied and stunning here as anywhere else along the Great Barrier Reef, and when you're not diving or snorkeling, the above-the-water landscape is a beautiful playground. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 6.
- **Rottneest Island** (WA): Just 19km (12 miles) off Perth, excellent snorkeling and more than 100 dive sites await you in the sheltered bays of this former prison island. Wrecks, limestone overhangs, and

myriad fish will keep you entertained. There are no cars on the island, so rent a bike and snorkel gear, grab a map of snorkel trails, and find your own private coral garden. See “Side Trips from Perth” in chapter 9.

- **Ningaloo Reef** (WA): A stunningly well kept secret is how we’d describe Australia’s second great barrier reef stretching some 260km (163 miles) along the

Northwest Cape halfway up Western Australia. Dazzling coral starts right on shore, not 90 minutes out to sea like at the Great Barrier Reef. You can snorkel or dive with manta rays, and dive to see sharks, angelfish, turtles, eels, grouper, potato cod, and much more. See “The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea” in chapter 9.

7 The Best Places to Bushwalk (Hike)

- **Blue Mountains** (NSW): Many bushwalks in the Blue Mountains National Park offer awesome views of valleys, waterfalls, cliffs, and forest. They are all easily reached from Sydney. See p. 168.
- **Whitsunday Islands** (QLD): Most people think of snorkeling and water sports when they come to these 74 tropical islands clad in dense rainforest and bush, but every resort island we recommend in chapter 6, except Daydream Island, also has hiking trails. Some are flat; some are hilly. Wallabies and butterflies are common sights en route. South Molle has the best network of trails and 360-degree island views from its peak. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 6.
- **Lamington National Park** (Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD): Few other national parks in Australia have such a well-marked network of trails as this one—160km (100 miles) of them, all up. Revel in dense subtropical rainforest, marvel at mossy 2,000-year-old Antarctic beech trees, watch for blue and white Lamington Spiny Crayfish in the streams, and soak up the cool mountain air 900m (3,000 ft.) above sea level. See p. 357.
- **Larapinta Trail** (The Red Centre, NT): Soon you will be able to start at Alice Springs and walk this

entire 220km (138-mile) semi-desert trail that winds through the stark crimson MacDonnell Ranges. The trail is still under construction, but plenty of day-length and overnight sections are ready for your boots now. See p. 378.

- **Kakadu National Park** (NT): Whether you want a pleasant wetlands stroll or a tough overnight hike, you can find it in this World Heritage-listed park. Hike past red cliffs, cycads straight from a dinosaur movie set, lily-filled lagoons hiding human-eating crocodiles, and what looks like Australia’s entire bird population. There’s some good Aboriginal rock art here, too. See p. 409.
- **Cape-to-Cape** (WA): Rugged sea cliffs, china blue sea, eucalyptus forest, white beaches, and coastal heath are what you will experience hiking between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin, in the southwest corner of Western Australia. Walk a short section or tackle the whole 6-day extravaganza. In season you will see whales and wildflowers. See p. 455.
- **Freycinet National Park** (TAS): The trek to Wine Glass Bay passes warty pink granite outcrops, with views over an ocean sliced by a crescent of icy sand. It’s prehistorically beautiful. See p. 619.

8 The Best Places to Learn About Aboriginal Culture

- **Native Guide Safari Tours** (Port Douglas, QLD): Hazel Douglas, an Aborigine who was brought up in the 110-million-year-old rain-forest of the Daintree and Cape Tribulation area, takes you on a full-day 4WD safari to explain Aboriginal legends, point out what different plants are used for, and teach you stuff like how to know when a crocodile is in the water. See p. 290.
- **The Ubarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Wallaga Lake, near Narooma, NSW): This center offers boomerang and spear throwing instruction, painting with natural ochres, discussions on Aboriginal culture, and guided walking tours of Aboriginal sacred sites. See p. 203.
- **Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park** (Cairns, QLD): This multi-million-dollar center showcases the history of the local Tjapukai people—their Dreamtime creation history and their often harrowing experiences since the white man arrived—using a film, a superb theatrical work, and a dance performance. Its Aboriginal arts and crafts gift shop is one of the country's best. See p. 269.
- **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Alice Springs, NT): You'll taste bush food, see traditional houses, throw boomerangs and spears, and learn about Aboriginal family values in a half-day tour of this Aborigine-owned center. Be sure to visit the museum and art gallery where you can take a didgeridoo lesson. See p. 274.
- **Anangu Tours** (Ayers Rock, NT): The Anangu are the owners of Ayers Rock, or Uluru, as it is called in their native tongue. Join them for walks around the Rock as you learn about the legendary poisonous snake-men who fought battles here, pick bush food off the trees, throw spears, visit rock paintings, and watch the sunset over the monolith. Their Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre near the base of the Rock has good displays of cultural and Dreamtime life. See p. 390.
- **Mangarrayi People** (Katherine, NT): Mike Keighley of **Far Out Adventures** (☎ 02/6557 6076 or 04/2715 2288) takes tours to the beautiful Elsey Station where you get to visit with the children of the local Mangarrayi people. You'll get to sample bush tucker, learn a little bush medicine, and swim in a vine-clad natural "spa-pool" in the Roper River. See p. 420.
- **Yamatji Bitja Aboriginal Bush Tours** (Kalgoorlie, WA): Geoffrey Stokes, who was brought up living a traditional Aboriginal life out in the bush near Kalgoorlie, takes you out tracking animals, foraging for bush food, and even hunting a 'roo for dinner (with a gun, not a boomerang!). Explore the bush, learn about creation myths, and find out what his childhood was like. See p. 463.
- **Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute** (Adelaide, SA): This is a great place to experience Aboriginal life through Aboriginal eyes. You might catch one of the dance or other performances, although there are plenty of other opportunities to find out more about Aboriginal culture. See p. 500.

9 The Best of Small-Town Australia

- **Central Tilba** (NSW): Just inland from Narooma on the south coast, this hamlet is one of the cutest you'll ever see, complete with its

own blacksmiths and leatherwork outlets. The ABC Cheese Factory offers visitors free tastings, and you can spend hours browsing for antiques or admiring the period buildings. See p. 203.

- **Broken Hill (NSW):** Known for its silver mines, the quirky town of Broken Hill has more pubs per capita than just about anywhere else. It's also the home of the School of the Air—a “classroom” transmitting lessons by radio to isolated communities spread over thousands of kilometers of Outback. You'll also find the eccentric Palace Hotel, featured in the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, as well as colonial mansions and heritage homes. See p. 208.
- **Mission Beach (QLD):** You'd never know this tidy village, hidden in lush rainforest off the highway, existed if you weren't a well-informed traveler. Aussies know it's here, but few of them bother to patronize its dazzling beach, cute restaurants, and secluded trails, so you'll have the place all to yourself. There's great white-water rafting on the nearby Tully River, too. See p. 295.
- **Broome (WA):** This romantic pearling port on the far-flung Kimberley coast on the Indian Ocean blends Australian corrugated-iron architecture with red pagoda roofs left by the Chinese pearl divers who settled here. The town combines a sophisticated international ambience with a rough Outback attitude. Beautiful Cable Beach (see “The Best Beaches” above) is just outside town. This is the place to add to

your South Sea pearl collection. See p. 471.

- **Kalgoorlie (WA):** Vibrant Kalgoorlie sits on what used to be the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth ever. Have a drink in one of the 19th-century pubs (especially at night when the miners come on shift), peer into the open-cut gold mine (the world's biggest), descend an old-fashioned mine shaft and pan for riches, and wander the ghost town streets of Coolgardie. See “The Goldfields” in chapter 9.
- **Hahndorf (SA):** A group of Lutheran settlers founded this German-style town, located in the Adelaide Hills, just outside Adelaide, in the 1830s. You'll love the churches, the wool factory and crafts shops, and the delicious German food served up in the local cafes, restaurants, and bakeries. See p. 508.
- **Coober Pedy (SA):** For a *fair dinkum* (that means “genuine”) Outback experience, few places are as weird and wonderful as this opal-mining town in the middle of nowhere. You can visit mines, wacky museums, and stay in a hotel underground—which is not really that unusual considering all the locals live like moles anyway. See p. 522.
- **Launceston (TAS):** Tasmania's second city is not much larger than your average European or American small town, but it's packed with Victorian and Georgian architecture and plenty of remnants of Australia's convict days. Spend a couple of days here discovering the town and the local scenery, and splurge a little on a stay in a historic hotel. See p. 621.

10 The Best Museums

- **Australian National Maritime Museum (Sydney, NSW):** The best things about this museum are

the ships and submarines often docked in the harbor out front. You can climb aboard and explore

what it's like to be a sailor. Inside are some fascinating displays relating to Australia's dependence on the oceans. See p. 136.

- **Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (Alice Springs, NT): It's not called a museum, but that's what this restored telegraph repeater station out in the picturesque hills by a spring—Alice Springs—really is. From the hot biscuits turned out of the wood-fired oven to the old telegraph equipment tapping away, this 1870s settlement is as real as history can get. See p. 376.
- **Australian Aviation Heritage Centre** (Darwin, NT): The pride of this hangar is a B-52 bomber on permanent loan from the U.S. But there's loads more, not just planes, engines, and aviation paraphernalia, but detailed stories, jokes, and anecdotes associated with the exhibits—put together by enthusiastic members of the Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory. See p. 403.
- **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Kakadu National Park, NT): This circular building was built in the shape of a pignose turtle at the direction of the Aboriginal owners. Exhibits about the bush tucker, Dreamtime creation myths, and lifestyles of the local Bininj Aboriginal people are on display. See p. 413.
- **Western Australian Museum** (Perth, WA): Skip the natural history displays and head straight to the country's best display of Aboriginal culture. Evocative photographs, artifacts, and display boards paint a sad and thoughtful portrait of Australia before and after the arrival of Europeans. See p. 440.
- **Western Australian Maritime Museum** and the adjacent **Shipwrecks Museum** (Perth, WA): Housed in a brand new building in the historic port precinct of Fremantle, Perth, this museum tells tales of the harsh Western Australian coastline since the Dutch first bumped into it and abandoned it as useless in the 1600s. Anyone who ever dreamed of finding a shipwreck laden with pieces of eight will relish the displays of treasure recovered from the deep. See p. 443.
- **York Motor Museum** (York, WA): This multimillion-dollar collection of veteran, vintage, classic, and racing cars is one of the most wide-ranging in the country. If you're a car buff, head for the historic town of York and make a day of it. See p. 453.
- **Migration Museum** (Adelaide, SA): This fascinating museum gives visitors insight into the people who came to Australia, how and where they settled, and how many suffered getting here. Full of interactive activities and exhibits, the museum gives visitors much more to do than just look and read. See p. 499.
- **Australian War Memorial** (Canberra, ACT): Given its name, you might think this museum is a bleak sort of place, but you'd be wrong. The museum gives important insight into the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) spirit, including an evocative exhibit on the tragic battle of Gallipoli. There's also a pretty good art collection. See p. 596.

11 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

- **Explorers Inn** (☎ 1800/623 288 in Australia, or 07/3211 3488) and **Hotel George Williams** (☎ 1800/064 858 in Australia, or 07/3308 0700) both in Brisbane, QLD: These two hotels around

the corner from each other in Brizzie are shining examples of what cheap hotels should be—trendy, clean, and bright with useful facilities like electronic keys, and an inexpensive restaurant. See “Accommodations You Can Afford” in chapter 5.

- **Archipelago Studio Apartments** (Port Douglas, QLD; ☎ 07/4099 5387): They may be tiny, but these pretty apartments have a homey atmosphere and are just seconds from spectacular Four Mile Beach. Some units have sea views. The solicitous proprietor is a mine of advice on things to see and do. See p. 292.
- **Miss Maud Swedish Hotel** (Perth, WA; ☎ 1800/998 022 in Australia, or 08/9325 3900): Staying here, in the heart of Perth, is like staying at grandma’s—even if your grandma’s house doesn’t have a somewhat Swedish flavor. Friendly

staff members who actually look pleased to see you and great food complete the picture. See p. 432.

- **North Adelaide Heritage Apartments and Cottages** (Adelaide, SA; ☎ 08/8272 1355): These accommodations actually consist of 21 separate fabulous properties in North Adelaide and Eastwood. The former Friendly Meeting Chapel Hall resembles a small church stocked with Victorian antiques. An especially memorable unit is the George Lowe, Esq. apartment done up in the style of a 19th-century gentleman’s bachelor pad. See p. 495.
- **Macquarie Manor** (Hobart, TAS; ☎ 03/6224 4999): As soon as you walk into this classically colonial-style manor, you’ll know you want to stay. Check out the delightful dining room, and the drawing room complete with old couches and a grand piano. See p. 613.

12 The Best Alternative Accommodations

- **Underground Motel** (White Cliffs, NSW; ☎ 1800/021 154 in Australia, or 08/8091 6677): All but two of this motel’s rooms are underground in this fascinating opal-mining town. Rooms are reached by a maze of spacious tunnels dug out of the rock. See p. 212.
- **Whitsunday Wilderness Lodge** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD; ☎ 07/4946 9777): The 10 beach-front cabins are basic, but your vacation at this island retreat will be anything but. Activities include sea kayaking, sailing, snorkeling, hiking trails, dining outside under the Milky Way, and swimming with Myrtle, the pet kangaroo. Considering you won’t put your hand in your wallet except for wine and maybe a seaplane trip to the Reef, this is a great value. See p. 321.
- **Binna Burra Mountain Lodge** (☎ 1800/074 260 in Australia, or 07/5533 3622) and **O’Reilly’s Rainforest Guesthouse** (☎ 1800/688 722 in Australia, or 07/5544 0644), both in the Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD: Tucked snugly almost 1,000m (3,280 ft.) up on rainforested ridges behind the Gold Coast, these retreats offer fresh mountain air and instant access to Lamington National Park. At O’Reilly’s you can hand-feed brilliantly colored birds every morning. See “The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature” in chapter 6.
- **Emma Gorge Resort** (The Kimberley, WA; ☎ 08/9169 1777): At this spick-and-span settlement on the 1-million acre El Questro cattle station, guests stay in safari tents with wooden floors and electric

lights, eat at a rustic gourmet restaurant, and join in hikes, bird-watching tours, river cruises, and more. A hike up Emma Gorge takes you to an Edenic swimming hole surrounded by red cliffs. See p. 476.

- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ☎ 08/8648 4844): This remarkable tin-roofed, stone-walled Outback pub in the Flinders Ranges has quaint rooms,

a great bar out front where you can meet the locals, and some of the best food in Australia. See p. 521.

- **Freycinet Lodge** (Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay, TAS; ☎ 03/6257 0101): These eco-friendly bush cabins are right next to one of the nation's best walking tracks. The ocean views from the magnificent restaurant and the surrounding balconies are spectacular. See p. 620.

13 The Best Places to Stay on a Shoestring

- **Sydney Central YHA** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9281 9111): One of the biggest, busiest youth hostels in the world, this place has a popular night spot, a bistro selling cheap meals, a convenience store, pool tables, a movie room, a heated pool, and a sauna—all in the center of Sydney. See p. 110.

- **Holiday Village Backpackers** (Byron Bay, NSW; ☎ 02/6685 8888): For a bohemian kind of place, this Byron Bay lodging is loaded with comforts. You can stay in a dorm room if you want, but for a couple of dollars more you can get a fully self-contained unit with a bedroom, lounge, and kitchen area. There's also a volleyball court, a spa and pool, and a TV and video lounge. Cool. See p. 196.

- **Halse Lodge** (Sunshine Coast, QLD; 1800/242 567 in Australia, or 07/5447 3377): How many backpacker lodges do you know located in Heritage-listed Queenslander houses, with neat private rooms, incredibly cheap

meals, a wide veranda with attractive furniture and garden views, an atmospheric bar and courtyard, and free surfboards to use at the excellent beach just a stroll away? Well, now you know this one. See p. 342.

- **Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village** (Mission Beach, QLD; ☎ 07/4068 8129): Right across the road from what is arguably the prettiest beach in Australia, this oh-so-pretty campground has freshly painted cabins with little balconies, en suite bathrooms, cooking facilities, and even separate bedrooms for you and the kids. Cassowaries wander out of the dense jungle at the back and come right up to you. See p. 299.

- **The Kimberley Klub** (Broome, WA; ☎ 08/9192 3233): Low-slung Outback architecture, trendy private rooms, a rustic open-sided bar and restaurant serving great food, and a rock-lined pool make this one of the coolest places to stay in pricey Broome. See p. 484.

14 The Best Worth-a-Splurge Restaurants

- **Bambu** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9247 6044): Housed in the Overseas Passenger Terminal (OPT), Bambu has fantastic views of the Opera House and offers cutting

edge food and a cocktail lounge. It won't break the bank either. See p. 124.

- **Fishlips Bar & Bistro** (Cairns, QLD; ☎ 07/4041 1700): Clever

ways with fresh seafood and uniquely Aussie ingredients—such as crocodile—make this cheerful blue beach house on a busy Cairns highway a real winner. This place is the pick of the bunch in Cairns. See p. 284.

- **Zouí Alto** (Townsville, QLD; ☎ 07/4721 4700): Townsville is not a place that springs to mind when compiling a “Best Restaurants” list, but this rooftop venue fully deserves to be here for faultless Mediterranean fare and fab views of the bay. It’s one of the best places to eat on the Queensland coast. See p. 305.
- **e’cco bistro** (Brisbane, QLD; ☎ 07/3831 8344): Simple food, elegantly done, has won this small but tasteful bistro a stack of awards, and you’ll soon see why. Not least among its titles is Australia’s top restaurant award, the Remy Martin Cognac/Gourmet Traveler Restaurant of the Year. Booking ahead is essential. See p. 232.
- **Fraser’s** (Perth, WA; ☎ 08/9481 7100): The city center and Swan River sparkling in the sunshine seem so close that you can almost reach out and touch them from the terrace of this parkland restaurant.

Superb mod Oz food turned out with flare and flavor is what you come here for; seafood is a specialty. You can go for a bike ride in Kings Park afterwards to work it off. See p. 435.

- **Newtown House** (Vasse, near Margaret River, WA; ☎ 08/9755 4485): Chef Stephen Reagan makes intelligent, flavorsome food that beautifully partners the premium Margaret River wines being made all around him. Stay in his homestead B&B overnight and explore the wineries the next day. See p. 460.
- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ☎ 08/8648 4895): Chef Darren (“Bart”) Brooks serves up some very high-class cuisine in the middle of nowhere. His “feral” foods, such as kangaroo tail soup and a mixed grill of emu sausages, camel steak, and kangaroo, is remarkable. See p. 521.
- **The Tryst** (Canberra, ACT; ☎ 02/6239 4422): Canberra has far grander and more expensive restaurants, but this place has found a spot in our hearts for its consistently delicious food. It’s also relaxed, feeling almost communal on busy nights. See p. 596.

15 The Best Dining Bargains

- **Returned Services League (RSL) Clubs:** RSL clubs, or their equivalent, can be found in most cities and towns in Australia. Just sign in at the door, and you enter a world of cheap drinks and inexpensive meals. You’ll probably find a couple of pool or billiards tables, too, as well as an atmosphere unique to Australia.
- **The Great Aussie Barbecue:** Australian parks are full of public barbecues, often in scenic settings, that are free or cost just a couple of dollars to coin operate. Stock up on meat, veggies, paper plates,

plastic glasses, and cheap cooking utensils you can buy from the supermarket, and get ready to cook up a storm. Hand the utensils on to someone else if you can’t be bothered carrying them in your suitcase.

- **Govindas** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9380 5155): Eat as much as you want at this Hare Krishna vegetarian restaurant in Kings Cross, and then take in a free movie in the theater upstairs. See p. 127.
- **Irish Times** (Melbourne, Vic; ☎ 03/9642 1699): An Irish bar more authentic than most, the

Irish Times is a character-filled eatery with unusual dishes. See p. 541.

- **The Outback Pioneer Barbeque** (Ayers Rock Resort, NT; ☎ 1800/089 622 in Australia, or 08/8956 2170): Forget the expensive eats at Ayers Rock Resort and join the happy throng at this rollicking bar-cum-shearer's mess. Throw your shrimp, steak, or emu sausage on your own barbie, have a beer or two, and you're still looking at a tab of less than A\$28.60 (US\$19). See chapter 7.
- **A Picnic on the Grounds of the Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (Alice Springs, NT): What could be more enjoyable (and affordable) than an alfresco spread on the grounds of this historic site. You'll be surrounded by river red gums, green lawns, and a few historic cottages. Admission to the picnic grounds is free. See chapter 7.
- **Mindil Beach Sunset Markets** (Darwin, NT): Every Thursday night between May and October, thousands of Darwin folk pack

wine and beach blankets and flock to this city beach to feast at food stalls featuring every Asian cuisine you can name, and a few you can't. Eat Vietnamese, Cambodian, Singaporean, Malaysian, Indonesian, and more, and then shop the 200 arts-and-crafts stalls, get a Chinese head massage, or have your tarot cards read. See box on p. 406.

- **Queen Victoria Market** (Melbourne, VIC): The markets are the heart of this vibrant city, and there's nowhere better to pick up a satisfying snack. The pizzas on sale at Café Bianca are some of the best in Australia, and there are plenty of stalls selling fresh bread and deli produce for a sandwich to take away. See p. 547.
- **Chinatown** (Melbourne, VIC): Head to this colorful part of town, centered on Little Bourke Street, for super-cheap eats. You'll be hard-pressed to find a lunch costing more than A\$5 (US\$3.25). This is where the locals go, so you know it's got to be good—and authentic. See p. 538.

Planning an Affordable Trip to Australia

by Lee Mylne

This chapter aims to answer all the practical questions that may pop up as you're planning your trip: How will you get there; how much will it cost; the ins and outs of traveling Down Under; and myriad other details. We've done the legwork—ferreting out ways to nail down deals on airfares, listing package companies, locating outdoor adventure operators, and more—so you won't have to.

1 The Regions in Brief

About 84% of Australia's 19 million people huddle in cities around the coast covering a mere 1% of this vast continent. The reason is simple: Much of Australia is harsh Outback country, characterized by savannah land, spectacular rocky outcrops, shifting deserts, and dry salt lakes. In these parts of the country, the soil is poor, the rainfall scarce, and some rivers don't even make it to the ocean. The roads that traverse the interior are sometimes barely worthy of the name, and most people choose air travel or stick to the coastal fringe.

In spectacular contrast, on the coast—particularly the east, where most people live—Nature's bounty has almost overdone it. Here, Australia is blessed with one of the greatest natural attractions in the world—the Great Barrier Reef. There are also rainforests in Queensland, alpine scenery in Tasmania, wildflowers in Western Australia, rolling wine country in South Australia, a great coastal drive in Victoria, bird-filled wetlands in the Northern Territory, and countless sand beaches more or less everywhere.

Australia is made up of six states—New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania—and two internal “territories”—the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory. The national capital is Canberra, in the ACT.

See the map on p. 20 or the map on the inside back cover to visualize the regions described here.

NEW SOUTH WALES Australia's most populated state is also the most-visited by tourists. They come to see Sydney—and who can blame them? It's one of the most glamorous and beautiful cities in the world, with dozens of harbor and ocean beaches within and around the city, and a mixture of bushland and city development around Sydney Harbour itself. Sydney is also a good base for day trips or overnight excursions inland, especially to the scenic Blue Mountains and the wineries of the Hunter Valley.

Farther afield, a string of quaint beachside towns stretches all the way down the southern coast to Victoria. Along the north coast are remnant

 Tips Size Does Matter

When planning your trip, keep in mind that Australia is about the same size as the 48 contiguous U.S. states. Melbourne and Brisbane are a long day's drive from Sydney, and it takes the best part of a week to drive from Sydney to Perth.

areas of rainforest and a more tropical air in the laid-back hangout of Byron Bay, where “Croc Dundee” himself, movie star Paul Hogan, has a home.

The inland is dry and sparsely forested. Highlights include the mining town of Broken Hill (known for wildlife, art galleries, and Aboriginal influences), and Outback opal-mining towns White Cliffs and Lightning Ridge, which exist in a wacky underground world of their own.

QUEENSLAND Without doubt, the biggest draw for visitors to Queensland is the Great Barrier Reef. Ogling the tropical fish, sea creatures, and rainbow-hued corals is a holiday highlight for most people. The Reef stretches more than 2,000km (1,240 miles) along Queensland's coast, as far south as Bundaberg, 384km (238 miles) north of Brisbane. Alluring island resorts are dotted along the coast; while most are expensive, we've found a few that won't break the bank.

Queensland is also known for its white-sand beaches. Many of the best are on the Gold Coast in the state's south (about an hour's drive from Brisbane), and the Sunshine Coast, a 2-hour drive north of Brisbane. Cairns and Port Douglas in the north have their fair share of beaches, too, but be warned: Swimming in their waters can be *very* hazardous to your health. Deadly box jellyfish, or “stingers,” call a halt to all ocean swimming at beaches in the northern third of the country October through May. All patrolled beaches have warning signs, and the lifeguards do regular net drags

to see if there are any in the water. If they find any, the beach is promptly closed. But to be absolutely sure, you should stick to the waterfront lagoons at Airlie Beach and Cairns, or your hotel pool this time of year. The jellyfish are mainly found in coastal waters and do not interfere with Great Barrier Reef activities like snorkeling or diving, as these are out of the habitat of marine stingers.

Island swimming is mostly stinger free, but be careful and take advice from the lifeguards before plunging into that inviting water.

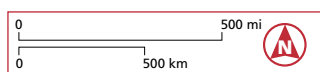
One of the most appealing of Queensland's destinations is the aquatic playground made up of the 74 Whitsunday Islands in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. These mostly uninhabited islands are a paradise for kayaking, snorkeling, diving, fishing, hiking, watersports, bird-watching, and bareboat sailing.

Another big attraction is the lush 110-million-year-old Daintree rainforest, just north of Port Douglas.

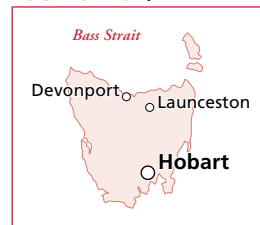
The capital, Brisbane, has Australia's largest koala sanctuary (you can cuddle one if you like) and you can hand-feed wild dolphins on a day trip across Brisbane's Moreton Bay. In the Gold Coast hinterland is Lamington National Park, a rainforested mountain region great for hiking and spotting wildlife.

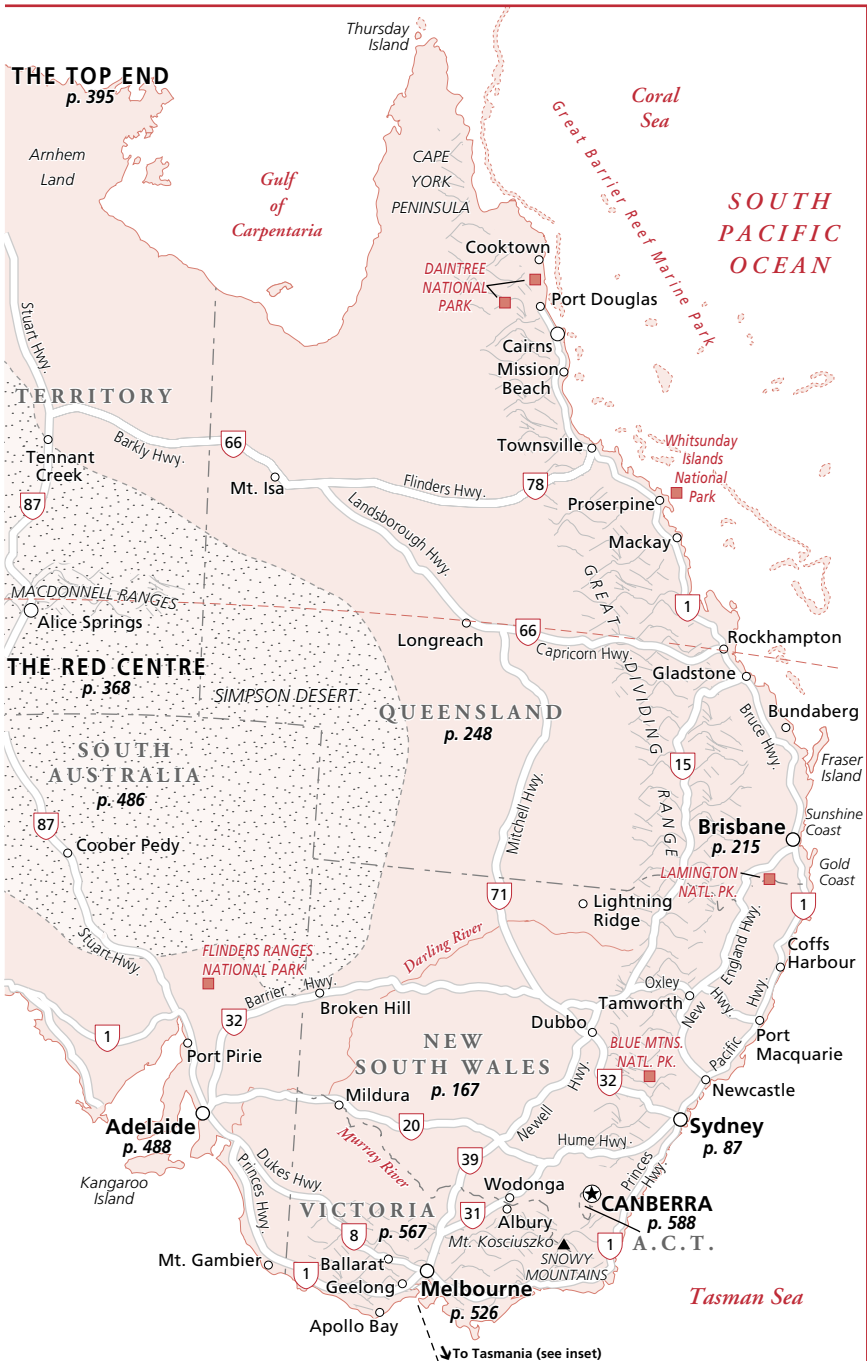
THE RED CENTRE The eerie silence of Uluru, also known as Ayers Rock, is what draws everyone to the sprawling ochre sands of the Red Centre, the heart of the Northern Territory. For many, there is the delightful

Australia



Tasmania p. 602





discovery that the lesser-known nearby domes of Kata Tjuta, or “the Olgas,” are even more spectacular (if that’s possible). A half-day’s drive from the Rock brings you to Kings Canyon, an awesomely lovely desert gorge popular with hikers. If you visit the Red Centre, try to spend at least a few days in Alice Springs. This laid-back Outback town has the best Aboriginal arts-and-crafts shopping in Australia, Aboriginal tours, a world-class desert wildlife park, stunning scenery, hikes through the stark MacDonnell Ranges, an Outback ranch to stay at, and even camel rides along a dry riverbed.

THE TOP END The northwest reaches of Oz (from the rocky red ranges of the Kimberley in Western Australia to the northern 3rd of the Northern Territory) encompass what Aussies eloquently dub “the Top End.” This is Crocodile Dundee territory, a remote, vast, semi-desert region where men are heroes and the cattle probably outnumber the people. In this book, we have concentrated on the Northern Territory section of the “Top End,” with the Kimberley included in the Western Australia chapter.

Near the tropical city of Darwin, the territory’s capital, is Kakadu National Park, where you can cruise past crocodiles on inland billabongs, bird-watch, and visit ancient Aboriginal rock-art sites. Closer to Darwin is Litchfield National Park, where you can take a dip in fern-fringed swimming holes surrounded by red cliffs—stuff straight from Eden. You can cruise the waterways of Katherine Gorge, a few hours’ drive south of Darwin, or explore them by canoe. Near Katherine you can learn to make your own didgeridoo, and canoe rarely explored, croc-infested inland rivers.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA Distance and high airfares work against Western Australia’s tourism industry, which is a shame because this is one of Australia’s most wild and beautiful regions. The

seas teem with whales in season, and thrill seekers can swim alongside gigantic but gentle whale sharks on the Northwest Cape every fall (Mar–June). This cape is home to one of Australia’s best-kept secrets, a second barrier reef called Ningaloo Marine Park, which runs for 260km (161 miles), one of the few reefs in the world to grow on a western coast. You can snorkel with manta rays here, and the diving is great. Just 19km (12 miles) off Perth, snorkelers can gaze at corals and fish on Rottnest Island, and in Shark Bay at Monkey Mia, tourists greet wild dolphins (or is it the other way around?).

In the southwest “hook” of the continent lies the Margaret River wine region. Wild forests, thundering surf, dramatic cliffs, rich bird life, and wild ’roos make it one of the country’s most attractive wine regions. The state’s capital, Perth, has surf beaches and a restored 19th-century port with a fun atmosphere and some great museums. One or two hours’ drive from the city brings you to some cute towns, like the Spanish Benedictine monastery town of New Norcia. Inland, the state is mostly wheat fields and desert, but if you have the inclination, head west 600km (372 miles) from Perth to the gold-mining town of Kalgoorlie, where you’ll find the world’s largest open-cast gold mine. With its gracious old pubs lining the wide bustling streets, it’s what an Aussie country town should look like.

In the Kimberley, you can visit the ancient Geikie and Windjana gorges, pearl farms where the world’s best South Sea pearls grow, and the charming (in a corrugated-iron sort of way) beachside frontier town of Broome. This tract of the country is so little populated and so under-explored that most Aussies never contemplate coming here. Getting around can be expensive, because it’s so vast. Near Kununurra, on the eastern edge of the

Kimberley, is a million-acre cattle station, El Questro, where you can camp in safari tents, fish for barramundi, hike through the bush to Aboriginal rock art, take all kinds of active tours from horseback riding to 4WD jaunts, and dine every night on terrific modern Oz cuisine. From Kununurra you can hike into the beehive-shaped rock formation of the Bungle Bungle, cruise on the croc-infested Ord River, and tour the world's biggest diamond mine.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA Stretched between Western Australia and Victoria is the nation's breadbasket, South Australia. The capital, Adelaide, is a stately place known for its conservatism, parks, and churches, and is an ideal base for exploring Australia's illustrious wine region, the Barossa Valley. Big labels like Penfolds, Sepelts, and Wolf Blass are here, but take time to sniff out the many smaller but no less outstanding vineyards. And it's less than an hour from the city!

Bring your binoculars for the massive water bird sanctuary, the Coorong. Stay in an underground hotel in the offbeat opal-mining town of Coober Pedy (it's too hot above ground), or order a 'roo-burger at the historic Prairie Hotel in the craggy, ancient lands of the Flinders Ranges in the South Australian Outback.

The greatest of South Australia's attractions (apart from wine, of course!) is Kangaroo Island, the best place in Australia to see native animals. In a day you can spot wallabies, kangaroos, koalas, oodles of birds from black swans to kookaburras, echidnas, and penguins. The beach teems with sea lions.

VICTORIA Australia's second-largest city, Melbourne, is the capital of Victoria. Melbourne is more stately and "Old World" than Sydney, and offers an exciting mix of ethnicity and the country's best fashion shopping. Nearby Phillip Island is famous for its

Penguin Parade, where hundreds of tiny penguins dash up the beach to their burrows at dusk; and, the historic gold-mining city of Ballarat is not far away. Victoria is also the site of one of Australia's great road trips, the Great Ocean Road, which stretches for 106km (66 miles) along the southern coast, where the eroded rock towers named the Twelve Apostles stand tall in the sea. Then there's the inland "high country," *The Man from Snowy River's* stomping ground.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACT) Surrounded entirely by New South Wales is the Australian Capital Territory. The ACT is made up of bushland and the nation's capital, Canberra, a planned city similar in architectural concept to Washington, D.C. Many Australians consider the capital boring, but Canberra will surprise you. It has some of the country's best museums and great restaurants, so don't automatically exclude it from your itinerary.

TASMANIA Last stop before Antarctica is the island state of Tasmania. Visit the Apple Isle for its beautiful national parks, stretches of alpine wilderness and gloomy forests, fruit and lavender farms, the world's best trout fishing, and an exquisitely slow pace of life rarely experienced anywhere else. If you're up to it, you could tackle the Overland Track, an 85km (53-mile) hiking trail between Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair that passes through highland moors, dense rainforests, and several mountains. A more leisurely option is a visit to the picturesque stone ruins of Port Arthur, Australia's version of Devil's Island, where thousands of convicts brought in to settle the new British colony were imprisoned and died. All of Tasmania is spectacular, but you haven't seen anything until you've experienced Freycinet National Park, with its pink granite outcrops set against an emerald-green sea.

2 The \$50-a-Day Premise

Can't believe you can really travel and stay comfortably around this huge country for as little as \$50 a day? It *can* be done. Australia's abundance of family-run motels, authentic country pubs, friendly B&Bs, and inexpensive ethnic restaurants offer a wide variety of great eating, welcoming accommodations, and some of the most amazing sights you'll ever see, without sacrificing fun, comfort, and adventure to a budget.

The "\$50-a-day" premise is based on the assumption of two adults traveling together who, between the two of them, have at least US\$100, or US\$50 per person, to spend per day on accommodations and meals. (We used a calculation of A\$1 equals US65¢.) But fluctuations in the value of the Australian dollar against the U.S. dollar in recent years may mean you will get even more value for your money at the time you travel. Sightseeing, entertainment, and transport costs are extra, but

we have unearthed loads of free and next-to-free ways for you to see the sights and get around without breaking the bank. Because airfare is likely to be the most expensive part of your trip, we provide tips on finding low-cost deals and packages.

But make no mistake: This isn't a backpacker's guide to Oz. Although the book includes the best backpacker-style accommodations and hostels, its aim is to suggest the best places to stay and dine at the best price. In fact, if you frequent the places recommended and follow our money-saving tips on transportation and sightseeing, you'll be traveling the same way most average Australians do. They would rather stay in a mid-priced country guesthouse that has a bit of charm, and eat at the cheap, fabulous Thai nosh-house, than pay a fortune to sit around a five-star resort's swimming pool eating \$15 hamburgers.

3 Fifty Money-Saving Tips

GENERAL TRAVEL

1. Even if you never set foot in a youth hostel, an all-time great buy is membership in the Australian Youth Hostels Association (AYHA), or its U.S. counterpart, Hostelling International—American Youth Hostels. It entitles you to a huge array of discounts. See "Youth Hostels & Backpacker Lodges" in "Tips on Accommodations" later in this chapter.
2. Try to buy a discounted ticket. Many companies, particularly airline ticket consolidators ("bucket shops") that buy tickets wholesale, and some Australian tour companies, offer discounts for booking direct with them, rather than through a travel agent, to whom they must pay commission. Do check with the travel agent, too, to make sure you're getting the best deal, or if you have complex traveling needs.
3. When booking a hotel room at a major chain or renting a car from a major agency, be sure to ask whether you qualify for frequent-flier miles. If you have acquired a load of frequent-flier miles, they may be redeemable for award travel, lodging, and other travel needs.
4. If you are a senior or student, ask about discounts at every chance—when booking your airfare, hotel, rental car, or sightseeing tour; buying theater tickets; or visiting museums or attractions.
5. Full-time students should arm themselves with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC)**, which offers substantial savings on

rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available for \$22 from **STA Travel** (☎ 800/781-4040 in the U.S.—if you're not in North America there's probably a local number in your country; www.sta-travel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world.

6. If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions).
7. Before you purchase travel insurance, check that you do not already have it as part of your credit card agreement or existing health insurance policy. Check to see if your current health insurance covers you fully for medical treatment and evacuation anywhere in the world and if your credit card company insures you against travel accidents if you buy plane, train, or bus tickets with its card (see "Health & Safety" later in this chapter). Your homeowner's insurance should cover stolen luggage. However, if you have paid a large portion of your vacation expenses up front, it might be a good idea to buy trip-cancellation insurance.
9. Traveling on certain days of the week can save you money. Monday-to-Thursday departures can shave an extra US\$60 off your airfare.
10. Consider a package. Whether you opt for an independent or group tour, package deals are terrific values because they typically include airfare (usually from Los Angeles), decent accommodations, some or all meals, tours, transfers, and other extras. The per-day price of a package (including airfare) can work out to be about the same as a night's accommodations in a midrange hotel.
11. Look for travel agents and consolidators specializing in cheap fares to Australia. See "Getting There" later in this chapter, for a list.
12. The quickest way between two points is not always the cheapest. Sometimes airlines and travel agents release spot specials for people prepared to travel via a lengthier route, or at short notice. If this is you, scour the travel sections of newspapers, and visit airline websites for the latest deals.
13. The cheapest fares are usually the ones with the most restrictions. With **Qantas's** 21-day advance purchase fare, for example, you must pay for the ticket within 21 days after booking, stay at least a week, and no more than a month in Australia; you can't make stopovers, and you cannot change the routing once you have paid for the ticket. For many people, these conditions are fine for the trip they are planning.
14. Flying within Australia is expensive—but not if you pre-purchase Qantas coupons. The coupons can cost less than half the regular fares. Only non-Australians can buy them, and you must buy them before you leave home.

AIR TRAVEL

8. In terms of airfare, the off-season runs from mid-April to the end of August. This is not only the cheapest time to fly from America, but it's also the best time to visit Australia! That's because Down Under winter (June, July, and Aug), when the days are balmy and nice, is more pleasant than the too-hot summer (Dec, Jan, and Feb).

15. Because air travel within Australia is so expensive, Qantas offers discounts of around 30% off regular fares for non-Australian passport holders. To obtain the discount, quote your passport number when booking your flight.
16. If you belong to a frequent-flier club, use your miles to contribute toward your airfare, or take advantage of any offers to buy miles at a reduced rate to reach an award level. If you are not already a frequent flier, join when you buy your ticket. The flight to Australia may earn you another trip!
17. To get even more frequent-flier miles, pay for your airline ticket on a credit card that gives you miles for every dollar you spend. Just be sure you don't get zapped with sky-high interest charges.
22. Bed-and-breakfasts are a friendly alternative to a cheerless motel room, and in Oz they're often quite cheap. Many pretty B&Bs charge A\$75 (US\$49) or less for a double room with breakfast—about the same as a motel room without breakfast. We recommend many B&Bs; see “Bed-&-Breakfast Inns” later in this chapter for details on how to find more.
23. Youth hostels and backpacker lodges are not just for the young. Some are almost as good as resorts, with a pool, a tour desk, and Internet access, and they often offer inexpensive meals. Many have basic but clean private rooms for under A\$50 (US\$33) for a double. As long as you can handle sharing a bathroom, these rooms are often the cheapest comfortable beds in town.

ACCOMMODATIONS

18. Airfare and accommodations will take the biggest bite out of your budget, so look for package tours that include both plane ticket and 5 or more nights' accommodations—often at substantial savings for both.
19. If you get an apartment with a full kitchen, you can save money by not eating out at every meal. Australian cities and holiday destinations are awash with this kind of accommodations. Even if you only make breakfast every morning, you could save enough to splurge on a really special meal.
20. Try to avoid visiting Australia during the country's school holidays (see the “When to Go” section later in this chapter). Hotel and apartment rates in popular vacation spots like the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, and Cairns in Queensland soar during the Australian school vacations.
21. Many accommodations chains offer discounted rates for customers of a particular car-rental company with which the hotel chain is partnered. When making your reservation or checking in, it never hurts to ask whether you qualify for a discount.
24. **YWCA** has comfortable budget hotels in Sydney, Melbourne, and Darwin with private rooms, dorms, and family rooms—a cut above the average backpacker digs. (See “Tips on Accommodations” later in this chapter).
25. Many pubs, especially those in the country, offer lodging. Staying in a pub can be a money-saving option if you don't mind sharing a bathroom (some have private bathrooms, but don't expect it) and coping with the din of drinkers in the bar downstairs (often until midnight Fri–Sat). The quality varies, but most rooms have a measure of historical charm. Rates can be as little as A\$40 (US\$26) for a double and are rarely more than A\$75 (US\$49); most include breakfast.

26. Most hotels accommodate kids up to age 12 (and even older) free of charge in your room if they use existing beds; if a hotel does charge extra for a child, it's usually only A\$10 to A\$20 (US\$6.50–US\$13) at most.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

27. Bus travel in Oz is quite comfortable—the buses are clean, the seats are comfortable, and you sometimes even get a video onboard. Passes from the two national coach companies, **Greyhound Pioneer** and **McCafferty's**, represent great value, especially as some of them include tours.
28. Train fares in Australia cost about the same as bus fares, if you travel in a sitting berth (the seats recline somewhat). If you want a sleeper cabin, fares get expensive fast. Check out the money-saving passes **Rail Australia** offers, outlined in “Getting Around Australia” later this chapter.
29. **Countrylink**, which oversees rail travel in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, offers advance-purchase discounts of up to 40%.
30. Before you book a rental car in Australia, consider whether you really need one. In major tourist towns like Alice Springs and Cairns, travelers fall into the trap of renting a car and then letting it sit outside their hotel the whole vacation, because every local tour company picked them up at the door. If you need a car only to drive into town for dinner, take a cab.
31. Fill up your rental car at a nearby gas station before you return it, not at the much-more-expensive car rental depot's pump.
32. Gas in cities is often cheaper on Mondays because most people fill up their tanks before the weekend.
33. Whether you go by air, rail, bus, or car, try not to backtrack. In a

country as big as Australia, you can waste a lot of money retracing your steps.

34. Don't buy maps. Most visitor centers dispense free or next-to-free maps of the area. If you are a member of an automobile club with which the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) has a reciprocal agreement, you can often obtain free state, regional, and city road maps. The American Automobile Association, and the Automobile Associations in the U.K., Canada, and New Zealand, have such an arrangement with Australia. Pick up the maps before you leave, or collect them at the AAA offices in Australia. See “Getting Around Australia” for locations.

WINING & DINING

35. The letters to look for when dining out in Oz are BYO, which means Bring Your Own: Buy wine or beer at the cheapest bottle shop (“liquor store” to Americans, “off-license” to Brits) you can find, and take it with you to the restaurant. That way you avoid the markup of 100%, 200%, or more that restaurateurs are so fond of adding. All you pay is a corkage charge of about A\$1 to A\$3 (US\$65¢–US\$1.95) per person.
36. Go ethnic and you're almost guaranteed great food at low prices—Indian, Cambodian, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Italian, and Thai are all pretty sure bets. The smarter Chinese restaurants are good, but often a tad pricey, and not always BYO.
37. An advantage of going out for Asian food is that dishes are usually shared, so small eaters can get away with not ordering a whole meal for themselves (great for families). Because one Asian main course is often enough for two people, the golden rule is to order

and eat one dish first, then order a second if you need it.

38. In cities, head to an Italian sidewalk cafe for tasty pasta and stylish sandwiches. A focaccia sandwich with salami, provolone cheese, sun-dried tomatoes, and arugula will set you back around A\$8 (US\$5.20) and keep you going 'til dinner.
39. Backpacker lodges, youth hostels, and universities almost always have restaurants or cafes attached, which serve up big portions of tasty, healthy food for not much money.
40. Tipping is not necessary, although it is common to tip 5% to 10% in restaurants and round cab fares up to the nearest A\$1 (US\$65¢). Plenty of Aussies don't tip, so don't feel embarrassed about hanging on to your coins.
41. If you are traveling by car, keep a box of cereal and long-life milk in the trunk and use the hotel coffee cups as bowls. It beats paying A\$10 (US\$6.50) for the same thing in the hotel restaurant.
42. **RSL** (Returned and Services League) clubs and **League clubs** (as in Rugby League football) serve hearty meals—along the roast, chicken Kiev, and steak lines, with vegetables or salad, and bread and potato included—for around A\$10 (US\$6.50). You will have to sign in before you enter the club and put up with their uniquely lurid brand of neon-lit decor, but that's part of the fun. Kids' meals are about A\$5 (US\$3.25).

TOURS & SIGHTSEEING

43. Australian city councils are big on providing free entertainment—for example, Sydney has free dance performances or concerts at Darling Harbour many weekends, and free lunchtime concerts in Martin Place most days; Brisbane has street performers at South Bank Parklands most weekends;

and Darwin has free Sunday Jazz by the sea at the MGM Grand Casino in Dry Season. Check local newspapers for details.

44. You can often get half-price theater tickets on the day of the performance. We've listed half-price ticket agencies in the "After Dark" sections of each chapter, where relevant. Matinees are often around A\$8 (US\$5.20), cheaper than evening shows.
45. Walking tours can be half the price of bus tours, and they give you a good close-up view of the city and sights.

SHOPPING

46. Skincare products, cosmetics, perfume, electronics, imported designer accessories, liquor, cigarettes, and other luxury items attract high duty in Australia. If you need to buy these products, get them in duty-free stores, which can be found in capital cities and major tourist destinations. You will need to show your airline ticket and passport to buy.
47. If you buy anything expensive—jewelry, for example—ask if there is a tax-free price for international travelers. Most non-duty-free stores selling high-ticket items offer tax-free prices to international travelers who show their airline ticket and passport.
48. Aboriginal artifacts make great souvenirs and gifts, but look for the shops just a block or two away from the center of town, which sell the same items a good bit cheaper than the ones on the main streets.

NIGHTLIFE

49. There are no cover charges at pubs, and drinks are cheaper than in nightclubs. Some have live entertainment, pool, and sports video screens.
50. Aussies love beer any time, but it never tastes better than during

happy hour, that period from around 4 to 6pm when many city bars and pubs mark drinks down to half price or less. Happy hours are especially common Thursday

and Friday, but any time of the week you are never far from a pub that makes an art form of brand-based specials.

4 Visitor Information

The **Australian Tourist Commission (ATC)** is the best source of information on traveling Down Under. Its website, www.australia.com, has more than 10,000 pages of listings for tour operators, hotels, car-rental companies, specialist travel outfitters, holidays, maps, distance charts, suggested itineraries, and much more. It provides you with information tailored to travelers from your country of origin, including packages and deals. By signing up for the free online Travel Club, you will be e-mailed news of hot deals, events, and the like on a regular basis, and you can also order brochures online. The ATC operates a website only, no telephone lines. Other good sources are the websites of Australia's state tourism marketing offices. They are as follows:

- **Canberra Tourism:** www.canberra.tourism.com.au.
- **Northern Territory Tourist Commission:** www.Ntholidays.com, or www.australiasoutback.com, written for international visitors.
- **South Australian Tourism Commission:** www.southaustralia.com.
- **Tourism New South Wales:** www.visitnsw.com.au, or www.sydneyaustralia.com.
- **Tourism Queensland:** www.queenslandholidays.com.au; or www.destinationqueensland.com, geared for North Americans.
- **Tourism Tasmania:** www.discovertasmania.com.au.
- **Tourism Victoria:** www.visitvictoria.com.
- **Western Australian Tourism Commission:** www.westernaustralia.net.

5 Entry Requirements & Customs

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Along with a current passport valid for the duration of your stay, the Australian government requires a visa from visitors of every nation, except New Zealand, to be issued before you arrive. If you are a short-term visitor or business traveler, the process is easy

and takes a few minutes on the Internet, using the Australian government's **Electronic Travel Authority (ETA)**. This is an electronic visa that takes the place of a stamp in your passport.

You can apply for an ETA yourself, or have your travel agent or airline do it when you book your plane ticket.

Tips Get Help from the ATC

The ATC maintains a network of "Aussie Specialist" travel agents in hundreds of cities across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and other countries. The agents are trained on the best destinations, hotels, deals, and tours in Oz. Get a referral to the nearest two Aussie Specialists by clicking the "Certified Aussie Specialist" button on the home page on the ATC's website, www.australia.com.

(They may charge you extra to do this.) Apply online at www.eta.immi.gov.au. There is a A\$20 (US\$13) charge, payable by credit card (Amex, Diners Club, MasterCard, or Visa). Assuming you do not have a criminal conviction and are in good health, your ETA should be approved quickly. You can also apply at Australian embassies, high commissions, and consulates (see below). Children traveling on their parent's passport must each be issued with their own ETA.

Tourists should apply for a Visitor ETA. It's free and valid for as many visits to Australia as you like of up to 3 months each within a 1-year period. Tourists may not work in Australia, so if you are visiting for business, you have two choices: apply for a free Short Validity Business ETA, which is valid for a single visit of 3 months within a 1-year period, or pay A\$65 (US\$42) to apply for a Long Validity Business visa, which entitles you to as many 3-month stays in Australia as you like for the life of your passport; this cannot be done online.

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and many other countries, most agents and airlines are ETA-compatible. But you can also apply for a visa the old-fashioned way—by taking or mailing your passport, a completed visa application form, and the appropriate payment to your nearest Australian embassy or consulate. You will also need to do it this way if you are someone other than a tourist or a business traveler—for example, a student studying in Australia; a business person staying longer than 3 months; a long-term resident; a sports person; a member of the media; a performer; or a member of a social group or cultural exchange. If you fall into one of these categories, you will need to apply for a Temporary Residence visa. There is a A\$65 (US\$42) fee for non-ETA tourist and business visas for stays of up to 3 months, and

A\$160 (US\$104) for business visas for stays between 3 months and 4 years. Non-ETA visa application fees for other kinds of travelers vary, from nil to thousands of dollars. Contact the nearest Australian embassy, consulate, or high commission to check what forms of payment they accept.

Apply for non-ETA visas at Australian embassies, consulates, and high commissions. In the United States, apply to the **Australian Embassy**, 1601 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036 (☎ 202/797-3000; dima-washington@dfat.gov.au). The website of the Australian Embassy in North America is www.austemb.org. In Canada, contact the **Australian High Commission**, 50 O'Connor St., No. 710, Ottawa, ON K1P 6L2 (☎ 613/783 7665; www.ahc-ottawa.org). For business-visa inquiries in the United States and Canada, call ☎ 800/579 7664. In the United Kingdom and Ireland, contact the **Australian High Commission**, Australia House, The Strand, London WC2B 4LA (☎ 090/6550 3500 for 24-hr. recorded information, or 020/7379 4334; www.australia.org.uk). You can obtain an application form for a non-ETA visa via the Internet at the **Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs** website (www.immi.gov.au). This site has a good explanation of the ETA system.

Allow at least a month for processing of non-ETA visas.

For information on how to get a passport, go to the Fast Facts section of this chapter—the websites listed provide downloadable passport applications as well as the current fees for processing passport applications. For an up-to-date country-by-country listing of passport requirements around the world, go the “Foreign Entry Requirement” Web page of the U.S. State Department at <http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html>.

 Tips Passport Savvy

Allow plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing normally takes 3 weeks but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). And keep in mind that if you need a passport in a hurry, you'll pay a higher processing fee. When traveling, safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt and keep a copy of the critical pages with your passport number in a separate place. If you lose your passport, visit the nearest consulate of your native country as soon as possible for a replacement.

CUSTOMS WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO AUSTRALIA

The duty-free allowance in Australia is A\$400 (US\$260) or, for those under 18, A\$200 (US\$130). Anyone over 18 can bring in up to 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of cigars or other tobacco products, 1.125 liters (41 fl. oz.) of alcohol, and "dutiable goods" to the value of A\$400 (US\$260), or A\$200 (US\$130) if you are under 18. "Dutiable goods" are luxury items such as perfume, watches, jewelry, furs, plus gifts of any kind. Keep this in mind if you intend to bring presents for family and friends in Australia; gifts given to you also count toward the dutiable limit. Personal goods that you're taking with you are usually exempt from duty, but if you are returning with valuable goods that you already own, file form B263. Customs officers do not collect duty of less than A\$50 (US\$33) as long as you declared the goods in the first place. A helpful brochure, available from Australian consulates or Customs offices, is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, contact **Australian Customs Services**, GPO Box 8, Sydney NSW 2001 (☎ **02/6275-6666**), or check out www.customs.gov.au.

Cash in any currency, and other currency instruments such as traveler's checks, under a value of A\$10,000 (US\$6,500) need not be declared. Firearms in Australia are

strictly controlled; contact the nearest Australian diplomatic post for advice on importing a handgun.

Australia is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which restricts or bans the import of products made from protected wildlife. Examples of the restricted items are coral, giant clam, wild cats, monkey, zebra, crocodile or alligator, bear, some types of caviar, American ginseng, and orchid products. Banned items include ivory, tortoise (marine turtle) shell, products from rhinoceros or tiger, and sturgeon caviar. Bear this in mind if you stop in other countries en route to Australia where souvenirs made from items like these may be sold. Australian authorities may seize and not return the items to you.

Because Australia is an island, it is free of many agricultural and livestock diseases. To keep it that way, strict quarantine applies to importing plants, animals, and their products, including food. "Sniffer" dogs are used at Australian airports to detect these products (as well as drugs). Some items may be held for treatment and returned to you; others may be confiscated; and others may be held over for you to take with you when you leave the country. Amnesty trash bins are available before you reach the immigration counters in airport arrivals halls for items such as fruit. Don't be alarmed if, just before landing, the flight attendants spray the

aircraft cabin (with products approved by the World Health Organization) to kill potentially disease-bearing insects. For more information on what is and is not allowed, contact the nearest Australian embassy or consulate, or Australia's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry, which runs the **Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service** (☎ 02/6272 4143; www.affa.gov.au). Its website contains a list of many restricted or banned foodstuffs, animal and plant products, and other items.

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM AUSTRALIA

Returning **U.S. citizens** who have been away for at least 48 hours are allowed to bring back, once every 30 days, \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. You'll be charged a flat rate of 4% duty on the next \$1,000 worth of purchases. Be sure to have your receipts handy. On mailed gifts, the duty-free limit is \$100. With some exceptions, you cannot bring fresh fruits and vegetables into the United States. For specifics on what you can bring back, download the invaluable free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at www.customs.gov. (Click on "Travel," then "Know Before You Go.") Or contact the **U.S. Customs Service**, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229 (☎ 877/287-8867) and request the pamphlet.

For a clear summary of **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.ccr-aadrc.gc.ca). Canada allows its citizens a C\$750 exemption, and you're allowed to bring back duty-free 1 carton of cigarettes, 1 can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada valued at less than C\$60 a day, provided they're

unsolicited and don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited gift, under \$60 value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of valuables you already own, such as expensive foreign cameras. **Note:** The \$750 exemption can only be used once a year and only after an absence of 7 days.

U.K. citizens returning from a non-EU country have a Customs allowance of 200 cigarettes; 50 cigars; 250 grams of smoking tobacco; 2 liters of still table wine; 1 liter of spirits or strong liqueurs (over 22% volume); 2 liters of fortified wine, sparkling wine, or other liqueurs; 60cc (ml) perfume; 250cc (ml) of toilet water; and £145 worth of all other goods, including gifts and souvenirs. People under 17 cannot have the tobacco or alcohol allowance. For more information, contact **HM Customs & Excise** at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult www.hmce.gov.uk.

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ\$700. Citizens over 17 can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g); plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency does not carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs**, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ 04/473-6099 or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

6 Money

For American and European travelers, Australia is very affordable because of the perilous state of the Australian dollar the past few years. Most travelers will find money matters are relatively easy in Australia, but beware the small town where traveler's checks may not be readily accepted.

CURRENCY

The Australian dollar is divided into 100¢. Coins are 5¢, 10¢, 20¢, and 50¢ pieces (silver) and \$1 and \$2 pieces (gold). Prices often end in a variant of 1¢ and 2¢ (for example, 78¢ or \$2.71), a relic from the days before 1-cent and 2-cent coins were phased out. Prices are rounded to the nearest 5¢—so 77¢ rounds down to 75¢, and 78¢ rounds up to 80¢. Bank notes come in denominations of A\$5, A\$10, A\$20, A\$50, and A\$100.

The Universal Currency Converter (www.xe.com/ucc) will give you up-to-the-minute conversions for your dollar or pound in dozens of countries.

It's a good idea to exchange at least some money—just enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home, so you can avoid lines at airport ATMs (automated teller machines). You can exchange money at your local American Express or Thomas Cook office or your bank. If you're far away from a bank with currency-exchange services, **American Express** offers traveler's checks and foreign currency, though with a \$15 order fee and additional shipping costs, at www.americanexpress.com (☎ 800/807-6233).

ATMS

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine). The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) before you leave home and find out your daily withdrawal limit before you depart. Also keep in mind that many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to \$5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than \$1.50). On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks' ATM fees within the U.S., use www.bankrate.com. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

You can also get cash advances on your credit card at an ATM. Keep in mind that credit card companies try to protect themselves from theft by limiting the funds someone can withdraw outside their home country, so call your credit card company before you leave home.

Most ATMs in Australia will be linked to a network that likely includes your bank at home, but in Outback areas, carry cash and a credit card because ATMs can be hard to find in small country towns, and

Small Change

When you change money, ask for some small bills or loose change. Petty cash will come in handy for tipping and public transportation. Consider keeping the change separate from your larger bills, so that it's readily accessible, making you less of a target for theft.

The Australian Dollar, the U.S. Dollar & the British Pound

For U.S. Readers The rate of exchange used to calculate the dollar values given in this book was US\$1 = approximately A\$1.54 (or A\$1 = US 65¢).

For British Readers The rate of exchange used to calculate the pound values in the accompanying table was £1 = A\$2.60 (or A\$1 = 38p).

Note: International exchange rates for the Australian dollar can fluctuate markedly. Check the latest rate when you plan your trip. The table below, and all the prices in this book, should be used only as a general guide.

A\$	US\$	UK£	A\$	US\$	UK£
0.25	0.16	0.09	30.00	19.50	11.40
0.50	0.33	0.19	35.00	22.75	13.30
1.00	0.65	0.38	40.00	26.00	15.20
2.00	1.30	0.76	45.00	29.25	17.10
3.00	1.95	1.14	50.00	32.50	19.00
4.00	2.60	1.52	55.00	35.75	20.90
5.00	3.25	1.90	60.00	39.00	22.80
6.00	3.90	2.28	65.00	42.25	24.70
7.00	4.55	2.66	70.00	45.50	26.60
8.00	5.20	3.04	75.00	48.75	28.50
9.00	5.85	3.42	80.00	52.00	30.40
10.00	6.50	3.80	85.00	55.25	32.30
15.00	9.75	5.70	90.00	58.50	34.20
20.00	13.00	7.60	95.00	61.75	36.10
25.00	16.25	9.50	100.00	65.00	38.00

shopkeepers in remote parts may not cash traveler's checks.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the ATM made cash accessible at any time. Traveler's checks used to be the only sound alternative to traveling with dangerously large amounts of cash. They were as reliable as currency, but could be replaced if lost or stolen.

These days, traveler's checks are less necessary because most cities have 24-hour ATMs that allow you to withdraw small amounts of cash as needed. But if you expect to withdraw money every day, you might be better off with traveler's checks, since you will be charged an ATM withdrawal fee if the bank is not your own.

You can get traveler's checks at almost any bank. **American Express** offers denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and (for cardholders only) \$1,000. You'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%. You can also get American Express traveler's checks over the phone by calling ☎ **800/221-7282**; Amex gold and platinum cardholders who use this number are exempt from the 1% fee. **AAA** members can obtain checks without a fee at most AAA offices.

Visa offers traveler's checks at Citibank locations nationwide, as well as at several other banks. The service charge ranges between 1.5% and 2%; checks come in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and \$1,000. Call ☎ **800/732-1322** for information.

 Tips Dear Visa: I'm Off to Kununurra!

Some credit card companies recommend that you notify them of any impending trip abroad so that they don't become suspicious when the card is used numerous times in a foreign destination and your charges are blocked. Even if you don't call your credit card company in advance, you can always call the card's toll-free emergency number (see "Fast Facts" later in this chapter) if a charge is refused—a good reason to carry the phone number with you. But perhaps the most important lesson here is to carry more than one card with you on your trip; a card might not work for any number of reasons, so having a backup is smart.

MasterCard also offers traveler's checks. Call ☎ **800/223-9920** for a location near you.

Note: Traveler's checks are not as widely accepted in Australia, and if you do opt for them, get them in Australian dollars. Although checks in U.S. dollars are accepted at banks, big hotels, currency exchanges, and some shops in major tourist regions, smaller shops, restaurants, and other businesses will have no idea what the exchange rate is when you present a U.S. check. Another advantage of Australian-dollar checks is that the two largest Aussie banks, **ANZ** and **Westpac**, cash them for free; it will cost you around A\$5 (US\$3.25) to A\$11 (US\$7) to cash checks in foreign currency at most Australian banks. **American Express**, **Visa**, and **MasterCard** offer checks in Australian dollars.

If you choose to carry traveler's checks, be sure to keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a safe way to carry money; they provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they

generally offer good exchange rates. You can also withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN. If you've forgotten yours, or didn't even know you had one, call the number on the back of your credit card and ask the bank to send it to you. It usually takes 5 to 7 business days, though some banks will provide the number over the phone if you tell them your mother's maiden name or some other personal information. Your credit card company will likely charge a commission (1% or 2%) on every foreign purchase you make, but don't sweat this small stuff; for most purchases, you'll still get the best deal with credit cards when you factor in things like ATM fees and higher traveler's check exchange rates.

Visa and MasterCard are universally accepted in Australia, but American Express and Diners Club are considerably less so. Always carry a little cash, because many merchants will not take cards for purchases under A\$15 (US\$9.75) or so.

For tips and telephone numbers to call if your wallet is stolen or lost, go to "Lost & Found" in the Fast Facts section of this chapter.

7 When to Go

When it is winter in the Northern Hemisphere, Australia is basking in the Southern Hemisphere's summer, and

vice versa. Midwinter in Australia is July and August, and the hottest months are November through March.

Remember, unlike in the Northern Hemisphere, the farther south you go in Australia, the colder it gets.

THE TRAVEL SEASONS

Airfares to Australia offered by U.S. airlines are lowest from mid-April to late August—that's just the time when it's best to travel in the Red Centre, the Top End, and the Great Barrier Reef!

HIGH SEASON The peak travel season in the most popular parts of Australia is the Aussie winter. In much of the country—Queensland from around Townsville and northward, all of the Top End and the Red Centre, and most of Western Australia—the most pleasant time to travel is April through September, when daytime temperatures are 66°F to 88°F (19°C–31°C) and it rarely rains. June, July, and August are the busiest months in these parts; you'll need to book accommodations and tours well in advance, and you will pay higher rates then, too.

On the other hand, Australia's summer is a nice time to visit the southern states—New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia from Perth to the south, and Tasmania. Even in winter, temperatures rarely dip below freezing, and snow falls only in parts of Tasmania, in the ski-fields of Victoria, and in the Snowy Mountains of southern New South Wales.

Perhaps the best months to visit Australia are September and October. It's often still warm enough to hit the beach in the southern states, and cool enough to tour Ayers Rock. The

humidity and rains have not come to Cairns and the Top End (although it will be very hot by Oct), and the wild-flowers are in full bloom in Western Australia.

LOW SEASON October through March (summer) it is just too hot, too humid, too wet, or all three, to tour the Red Centre, the Top End, and anywhere in Western Australia except Perth and the southwest. The Top End, the Kimberley, and North Queensland, including Cairns, suffer an intensely hot, humid Wet Season November or December through March or April. In the Top End and Kimberley, this is preceded by an even stickier “build-up” in October and November. Some attractions and tour companies close, floodwaters render others off-limits, and hotels drop their rates, often dramatically. So if you decide to travel in these areas at this time—and lots of people do—be prepared to take the heat, the inconvenience of floods, and in tropical coastal areas, the slight chance of encountering cyclones.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to the period from December 26 to the end of January, when Aussies take their summer vacations, the 4 days at Easter (from Good Friday to Easter Monday) and all school holidays are very busy, so book ahead. The school year in Australia is broken into four semesters, with 2-week holidays around Easter-time, the last week of June and the first week of July, and the last week of September and the first week of October. Some

Tips Steer Clear of the Vacation Rush

Try to avoid Australia from Boxing Day (Dec 26) to the end of January, when Aussies take their summer vacations. In popular seaside holiday spots, hotel rooms and airline seats get scarce as hen's teeth, and it's a rare airline or hotel that will discount even a dollar off their full tariffs.

states break at slightly different dates. There's a 6-week summer/Christmas vacation from mid-December to the end of January.

Almost everything shuts down on Christmas Day, Boxing Day (Dec 26), and Good Friday, and much is closed New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday. Most things are closed until 1pm, if not all day, on Anzac Day, a World War I commemorative day on April 25.

Among the major public holidays are: New Year's Day (Jan 1); Australia Day (Jan 26); Labour Day (2nd Mon in Mar, WA and VIC); Eight Hours Day (1st Mon in Mar, TAS); Canberra Day (3rd Mon in Mar, ACT); Good Friday; Easter Sunday; Easter Monday; Anzac Day (Apr 25); May Day (1st Mon in May, NT); Labour Day (1st Mon in May, QLD); Adelaide Cup (3rd Mon in May, SA); Foundation Day (1st Mon in June, WA); Queen's Birthday (2nd Mon in June, except WA); Royal National Show Day (2nd or 3rd Wed in Aug, QLD); Queen's Birthday (Mon in late Sept/early Oct, WA); Labour Day (1st Mon in Oct, NSW/SA); Melbourne Cup Day (1st Tues in Nov, Melbourne only); Christmas (Dec 25); and Boxing Day (Dec 26, or on the next Mon if 26th falls on a weekend; if Christmas Day is a Sat and Boxing Day a Sun, then both the following Mon and Tues are holidays).

AUSTRALIA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

Sydney Festival. Highlights of Sydney's visual and performing arts festival are free jazz or classical music concerts held outdoors on 2 Saturday nights near the Royal Botanic Gardens. (Take a picnic and arrive by 4pm to get a place.)

Contact ☎ **02/8248 6500** or go to www.sydneyfestival.org.au. Three weeks in January.

Hyundai Hopman Cup, Perth. Tennis greats from the world's nine top tennis nations are invited to battle it out in a 7-day mixed-doubles competition. Contact the booking agent, BOCS Ticketing (☎ **08/9484 1133**), or check www.hopman.cup.com.au. Late December/early January.

Tamworth Country Music Festival, Tamworth (459km/285 miles northwest of Sydney), New South Wales. It may look like an Akubra Hat Convention, but this gathering of rural folk and city folk who would like to be rural folk is Australia's biggest country music festival. The Tamworth Information Centre (☎ **02/6755 4300**; www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au) takes bookings.

Australia Day. Australia's answer to the Fourth of July marks the landing of the First Fleet of convicts at Sydney Cove in 1788. Every town puts on some kind of celebration; in Sydney, there are ferry races and tall ships on the harbor, food and wine stalls in Hyde Park, open days at museums and other attractions, and fireworks in the evening. January 26.

February

Johnnie Walker Classic, Perth. The country's richest golf tourney with A\$2.8 million (US\$1.8 million) up for grabs draws top players to Perth. South African golfer Ernie Els was the 2003 winner, with past winners including Tiger Woods and Greg Norman. Contact IMG (☎ **03/9639 2333**) or check the Western Australian Tourism Commission's events site at www.eventscorp.com.au for ticketing details.

March

Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. A spectacular parade of costumed dancers and decorated floats, watched by several hundred thousand onlookers, followed by a giant warehouse party (by invitation only). Contact Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras (☎ 02/9557 4332; www.mardigras.com.au). Usually the last Saturday night in February or first Saturday in March.

Australian Formula One Grand Prix, Melbourne. The first Grand Prix of the year on the international FIA Formula One World Championship circuit is battled out on one of its fastest circuits, in Melbourne. For tickets, contact Ticketmaster (☎ 13 16 41 in Australia) or order online at www.grandprix.com.au. Four days in the first or second week of March.

Australian Surf Life Saving Championships, Kurrawa Beach, Gold Coast, Queensland. Up to 6,000 bronzed Aussie and international men and women swim, ski paddle, sprint relay, pilot rescue boats, parade past admiring crowds, and resuscitate “drowning” swimmers in front of 10,000 spectators. Contact Surf Life Saving Australia (☎ 02/9130 7370; www.slsa.asn.au).

June

Sydney Film Festival. World and Australian premieres of Aussie and international movies are shown in the State Theatre and other venues. Contact the Sydney Film Festival (☎ 02/9660 3844; www.sydneyfilmfestival.org). Two weeks in June.

August

Sun-Herald City to Surf, Sydney. Fifty thousand Sydneysiders pound the pavement (or walk, or wheel-chair it) in this 14km (8¾-mile) “fun run” from the city to Bondi Beach. Entry details are posted on the

website <http://city2surf.sunherald.com.au> from June onwards. If there are still slots available, you can enter the day of the race. The fee is around A\$25 (US\$16). Second Sunday in August.

September

Floriade, Canberra. A million tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and other blooms carpet the banks of Canberra’s Lake Burley Griffin in stunning themed flowerbed designs at this celebration, which features performing arts and other entertainment. Contact Canberra Visitors Centre (☎ 1300/554 114; www.canberratourism.com.au or www.floriadeaustralia.com). Four weeks from second or third week of September.

Henley-on-Todd Regatta, Alice Springs. Sound sophisticated? It’s actually a harum-scarum race down the dry bed of the Todd River in homemade “boats” made from anything you care to name—an old four-wheel-drive chassis, say, or beer cans lashed together. The only rule is the vessel has to look *vaguely* like a boat. Contact the organizers at ☎ 08/8952 3040; www.henleyontodd.com.au. One Saturday in late September.

October

Lexmark Indy 300 Carnival, Surfers Paradise, Queensland. The world’s best Indy-car drivers race a street circuit around Surfers Paradise on the glitzy Gold Coast, as part of the international FedEx Championship champ car motor-sport series. Contact Ticketek (☎ 1300 303 103 in Australia, or 07/3404 6700 in Brisbane; www.ticketek.com), or check the event’s website at www.indy.com.au. Four days in mid- or late October.

November

Melbourne Cup. They say the whole nation stops to watch this

horse race. That's about right. If you're not actually there, you're glued to the TV for this A\$3.39-million (US\$2.2-million) race, or well, you're probably not an Australian. Women wear hats to the office, files on desks all over the country make way for a late chicken and champagne lunch, and don't even think about flagging a cab at the 3:20pm race time. First Tuesday in November.

December

Sydney-to-Hobart Yacht Race. Find a cliff-top spot near the Heads to watch the glorious show of spin-nakers as a hundred or so yachts leave

Sydney Harbour for this grueling world-class event. The organizer is the Sydney-based Cruising Yacht Club of Australia (☎ 02/9363 9731; www.cyca.com.au). The event's website is www.s2h.tas.gov.au. Starts December 26.

New Year's Eve. Watching the Sydney Harbour Bridge light up with fireworks is a treat. The main show is at 9pm, not midnight, so young kids don't miss out. Pack a picnic and snag a Harbour-side spot by 4pm, or even earlier at the best vantage point—Mrs. Macquarie's Chair in the Royal Botanic Gardens.

8 Travel Insurance

Check your existing insurance policies and credit card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, canceled tickets, or medical expenses. The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age, health, and the type of trip you're taking.

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip, if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Allowed reasons for cancellation can range from sickness to natural disasters to the State Department declaring your destination unsafe for travel. (Insurers usually won't cover vague fears, though, as many travelers who tried to cancel their trips in Oct 2001 discovered.) In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance is a good buy if you're getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 9 months? Insurance policy details vary, so read the fine print—and especially make sure that your airline or cruise line is on the list of carriers covered in case of bankruptcy. For information, contact

one of the following insurers: **Access America** (☎ 800/284-8300; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-1300; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (☎ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (☎ 800/228-9792; www.travelex-insurance.com).

MEDICAL INSURANCE Most health insurance policies cover you if you get sick away from home—but check, particularly if you're insured by an HMO. With the exception of certain HMOs and Medicare/Medicaid, your medical insurance should cover medical treatment—even hospital care—overseas. However, most out-of-country hospitals make you pay your bills up front, and send you a refund after you've returned home and filed the necessary paperwork. And in a worst-case scenario, there's the high cost of emergency evacuation. In Australia, hygiene standards are high, hospitals are modern, and doctors and dentists are well qualified, but the continent's immense distances mean you can sometimes be a long way from a hospital or a doctor. Make sure your policy covers medical evacuation by

helicopter or Australia's Royal Flying Doctor Service airlift. (You might well need this if you become sick or injured in the Outback.)

One of the most potentially financially ruinous situations arising from getting sick in Australia is evacuation to your home country. Your policy should cover the cost to fly you back home in a stretcher, along with a nurse, should that be necessary. A stretcher takes up three coach-class seats, plus you may need extra seats for a nurse and medical equipment.

Australia's national health system, Medicare, has a reciprocal medical-care agreement with Great Britain and a limited agreement with Ireland and New Zealand in which travelers are covered for medical expenses for immediately necessary treatment in a public hospital (but not evacuation to your home country, ambulances, funerals, and dental care). It's crucial to buy insurance, though, because medical care in Australia is expensive and the national health-care system typically covers only 85%, sometimes less, of treatment; you will not be covered for treatment in a private hospital; and evacuation insurance is a must. Most foreign students must take out the Australian government's Overseas Student Health Cover as a condition of entry.

If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX International**

(☎ **800/527-0218** or 410/453-6300; www.medexassist.com) or **Travel-Assistance International** (☎ **800/821-2828**; www.travelassistance.com).

LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE

On domestic flights, checked baggage is covered up to \$2,500 per ticketed passenger. On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), baggage is limited to approximately \$9.07 per pound, up to approximately \$635 per checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport, as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage, as many valuables (including books, money, and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the contents. For most airlines, you must report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

9 Health & Safety

STAYING HEALTHY

Hygiene standards in Australia are high, hospitals are modern, and doctors and dentists are well qualified. Australia's immense distances mean you can sometimes be a long way from a hospital or a doctor, but help is never far away thanks to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. However, standard medical travel insurance may be advisable (see previous section on insurance).

GENERAL AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

No vaccinations are needed to enter Australia unless you have been in a yellow-fever danger zone—South America or Africa—in the past 6 days.

Australian pharmacists may only fill prescriptions written by Australian doctors, so carry enough medication with you for your trip. Doctors are listed under "M" for Medical Practitioners in the Yellow Pages, and most

large towns and cities have 24-hour clinics. Failing that, go to the local hospital's emergency room.

BUGS, BITES & OTHER WILD-LIFE CONCERNS Snake and spider bites may not be as common as the hair-raising stories you will hear would suggest, but it pays to be wary. Australia's two deadly spiders are the large hairy funnel web and the tiny red-back, which has a distinctive red slash on its back. Snakes are common throughout Australia, and you are most likely to see one if you are in the "bush" or hiking. If you are bitten, keep calm; moving as little as possible may save your life. Demobilize the limb, wrap that whole section of the limb tightly (but not tight enough to restrict the blood flow) with a wide cloth or bandage (not a narrow tourniquet), and then send someone to the nearest hospital, where antivenin should be available.

If you go bushwalking, check your whole body for ticks, which are common; if you find one, dab it with methylated spirits or some other noxious chemical. Wait for a while, then pull the tick gently out with tweezers, carefully ensuring you don't leave its head buried inside the wound.

Many Aussie marine creatures are deadly. Avoid stingrays, stonefish (which look like stones, so don't walk on underwater "rocks"), lionfish, and puffer fish. Never touch a blue-ringed octopus (it has blue circles all over its body) or a cone shell (a large shellfish shaped like a blunt cone). Marine stingers, or box jellyfish, inhabit the coastal waters of the northern third of the country in summer. Their sting is very painful and can cause heart failure and death. Pour vinegar over the affected site immediately—local councils leave bottles of vinegar on the beach specifically for this purpose. On beaches in Sydney and other areas, you might come across "blue bottles"—these blue jellyfish with long tentacles inflict a generally harmless but painful

sting that can last for hours. Sometimes you'll see warning signs on patrolled beaches. The best remedy if you are stung is to apply vinegar or have a very hot shower.

There are two types of crocodiles in Australia: the freshwater, which grows to almost 3m (10 ft.), and the highly dangerous estuarine (or saltwater) crocodile, which reaches 5m to 7m (17 ft.–23 ft.). Freshwater crocs are considered harmless; unfortunately, estuarine crocs aren't. They are called "saltwater" crocs but live mostly in freshwater rivers, wetlands, gorges, and billabongs (ponds). They are very dangerous, move at lightning speed, and are invisible even an inch beneath the water; few people survive an attack. *Never* swim in, or stand near the bank of, any river, swamp, or pool in the northern third of Australia, unless you know for certain it's croc-free, and don't swim at beaches near stream or river mouths.

SUN/ELEMENTS/EXTREME WEATHER EXPOSURE Australians have the world's highest death rate from skin cancer because of the country's intense sunlight. Limit your exposure to the sun, especially during the first few days of your trip, and from 11am to 3pm in summer and 10am to 2pm in winter. Remember that UV rays reflected off walls, water, and the ground can burn you even when you're not in direct sunlight. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a high protection factor (SPF 30+). Wear a broad-brimmed hat that covers the back of your neck, ears, and face (a baseball cap won't do it), and a long-sleeved shirt. Remember that children need more protection than adults do. Don't even think about traveling without sunglasses, or you'll spend your entire vacation squinting against Australia's "diamond light."

Cyclones are occasionally experienced in tropical areas such as Darwin and Queensland's coastal regions from about Gladstone north, during January

and February, but serious damage is relatively rare.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

In most cases, your existing health plan will provide the coverage you need. But double-check; you may want to buy **travel medical insurance** instead. (See the section on insurance, above.) Bring your insurance ID card with you when you travel.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **Medic Alert Identification Tag** (☎ 800/825-3785; www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through Medic Alert's 24-hour hot line.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry prescription medications in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Don't forget an extra pair of contact lenses or prescription glasses. Carry the generic name of prescription medicines, in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name.

Contact the **International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IAMAT)** (☎ 716/754-4883 or 416/652-0137; www.iamat.org) for tips on travel and health concerns in the countries you're visiting, and lists of local, English-speaking doctors.

The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (☎ 800/311-3435; www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on necessary vaccines and health hazards by region or country. Any foreign consulate can provide a list of area doctors who speak English. If you get sick, consider asking your hotel concierge to recommend a local doctor—even his or her own. You can also try the emergency room at a local hospital; many have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life threatening. You may not get immediate attention, but you won't pay the high price of an emergency room visit.

STAYING SAFE

Driving probably poses one of the greatest risks to visitors to Australia. Australians drive on the left, something which North American and European visitors still often have difficulty remembering. Drivers and passengers, including taxi passengers, must wear a seatbelt at all times, by law. Avoid driving between dusk and dawn in country areas, because this is when kangaroos are most active, and a collision with a 'roo is something to be avoided at all costs. Road trains—as many as three big truck carriages linked together can be up to 54m (177 ft.) long—are another danger, particularly in the Outback. If you break down or get lost, **NEVER** leave your vehicle. Most people who get lost do so in Outback spots, and those who wander off to look for help or water usually die in the attempt. If it happens to you, stay with your car. See “Getting Around Australia” later in this chapter.

10 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling. There are more options and resources out there than ever before. Most hotels, major stores, attractions, and public restrooms in

Australia have wheelchair access. Many smaller lodges and even B&Bs are starting to cater to guests with disabilities, and some diving companies cater to scuba divers with disabilities. National parks make an effort to include wheelchair-friendly pathways,

too. Taxi companies in bigger cities can usually supply a cab equipped for wheelchairs. TTY facilities for the deaf are still limited largely to government services. For information on all kinds of facilities and services in Australia for people with disabilities (not just travel-related organizations), contact **National Information Communication Awareness Network (NICAN)**, P.O. Box 407, Curtin, ACT 2605 (☎ **1800/806 769** voice and TTY in Australia, or 02/6285 3713; www.nican.com.au). This free service can put you in touch with accessible accommodations and attractions throughout Australia, as well as with travel agents and tour operators who understand your needs.

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ **507/451-5005**; www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Accessible Journeys** (☎ **800/846-4537** or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

Organizations that offer assistance to travelers with disabilities include the **MossRehab Hospital** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; and the **Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality** (☎ **212/447-7284**; www.sath.org; annual membership fees: \$45 adults, \$30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services. For more information specifically targeted to travelers with disabilities, the community website **iCan** (www.icanonline.net/channels/travel/index.cfm) has destination guides and several regular columns on accessible

travel. Also check out the quarterly magazine **Emerging Horizons** (\$14.95 per year, \$19.95 outside the U.S.; www.emerginghorizons.com); **Twin Peaks Press** (☎ **360/694-2462**; <http://disabilitybookshop.virtualave.net/blist84.htm>), offering travel-related books for travelers with special needs; and **Open World Magazine**, published by the Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality (see above; subscription: \$18/year, \$35 outside the U.S.).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Sydney is one of the most gay-friendly cities in the world, and across most of Australia, the gay community has a high profile and lots of support services. There are plenty of gay and lesbian bars, and most Saturday nights see a privately operated gay dance party taking place in a warehouse somewhere in the inner city. The cafes and pubs of Oxford Street in Darlinghurst, a short cab ride or long stroll from Sydney's downtown area, are the liveliest gay spots. The annual Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, with a huge street parade and party in late February/early March, is a high point on the city's calendar.

In rural areas of Australia, you may still encounter a little conservative resistance to gays and lesbians, but Australians everywhere are generally tolerant. Noosa, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, was a favored destination for revelers after the 2002 Mardi Gras, and there are a couple of resorts in north Queensland catering to gay and lesbian travelers.

Liberty Resort at Kuranda near Cairns (☎ **1300 650 464** in Australia or 07/4093 7556; www.libertyresort.com.au), opened in late 2002, billing itself as the world's most luxurious gay and lesbian resort. It has 56 villas, eight apartments, and an 80-bed backpacker hostel set on 3.2 hectares (8 acres) of tropical rainforest. By the time you get to Australia, there may be

more resorts in the Liberty chain, including possibly one in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney.

Turtle Cove Resort (☎ 1300/727 979 in Australia or 07/4059 1800; www.turtlecove.com.au), located on a private beach between Cairns and Port Douglas, is another well-known resort for lesbians and gay men.

Some services you may find useful are the **Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service** of NSW (☎ 02/9207 2888 for the administration office), which runs a hot line from 4pm to midnight daily (☎ 1800/805 379 in Australia, or 02/9207 2800). The **Albion Street Centre** (☎ 02/9332 9600 for administration, or 1800/451 600 in Australia outside Sydney and 02/9332 9700 in Sydney for the information line) in Sydney is an AIDS clinic and information service.

The International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) (☎ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on “Members.”

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **JMS Global Travel**, 263 Liverpool St., Darlinghurst, NSW 2010 (☎ 1800/672 120 in Australia, or 02/9360 9611) is one of the biggest travel agencies specializing in gay travel in Australia.

Fellow Traveller (☎ 03/9429 6110), Australia’s only free gay and lesbian accommodations guide, is produced annually by Melbourne’s weekly gay and lesbian newspaper *MCV*. It is distributed nationally. The following travel guides are available at most travel bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores, or you can order them from **Giovanni’s Room** bookstore, 1145 Pine St., Philadelphia, PA 19107

(☎ 215/923-2960; www.giovanisroom.com): **Out and About** (☎ 800/929-2268 or 415-644-8044; www.outandabout.com), which offers guidebooks and a newsletter 10 times a year packed with solid information on the global gay and lesbian scene; **Spartacus International Gay Guide** and **Odysseus**, both good, annual English-language guidebooks focused on gay men; the **Damron** guides, with annual books for gay men and lesbians; and **Gay Travel A to Z: The World of Gay & Lesbian Travel Options at Your Fingertips**, by Marianne Ferrari (Ferrari Publications; Box 35575, Phoenix, AZ 85069), a good gay and lesbian guidebook series.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention the fact that you’re a senior when you make your travel reservations. Although all of the major U.S. airlines except America West have canceled their senior discount and coupon book programs, many hotels still offer discounts for seniors.

Seniors—often called “pensioners” in Australia—from other countries don’t always qualify for the discounted entry prices to tours, attractions, and events that Australian seniors enjoy, but mostly they do. Always inquire about discounts when booking hotels, flights, and train or bus tickets. The best ID to bring is something that shows your date of birth, or something that marks you as an “official” senior, like a membership card from AARP.

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 800/424-3410 or 202/434-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market.

Elderhostel (☎ 877/426-8056; www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for those ages 55 and over (and a spouse or companion of any age) in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. **ElderTreks** (☎ 800/741-7956; www.eldertreks.com) offers small-group tours to off-the-beaten-path or adventure-travel locations for travelers 50 and older.

Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include: the quarterly magazine *Travel 50 & Beyond* (www.travel50andbeyond.com); *Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the Mature Traveler* (Avalon); *101 Tips for Mature Travelers*, available from Grand Circle Travel (☎ 800/221-2610 or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com); *The 50+ Traveler's Guidebook* (St. Martin's Press); and *Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50* (McGraw-Hill).

FAMILY TRAVEL

If you have enough trouble getting your kids out of the house in the morning, dragging them thousands of miles away may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But family travel can be immensely rewarding, giving you new ways of seeing the world through smaller pairs of eyes.

Australians travel widely with their own kids, so facilities for families, including family passes to attractions, are common.

A great accommodations option for families is Australia's huge stock of serviced or unserviced apartments. Often less expensive than a hotel room, they offer a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom or two, and the privacy of a separate bedroom for adults. "Tips on Accommodations" later in this chapter, has details on the major apartment chains. Most Australian hotels will arrange babysitting given a day's notice.

International airlines and domestic airlines in Australia charge 67% of the adult fare for kids under 12. Most charge 10% for infants under 2 not occupying a seat. Australian transport companies, attractions, and tour operators typically charge half price for kids under 12 or 14 years.

Many Australian resorts have "kids clubs" with extensive programs designed for children under 12, and in some cases teenagers. The French-owned Accor chain of hotels and resorts, which is Australia's largest chain, has kids clubs, kids menus designed by a nutritionist (and not just the same boring fodder you get everywhere else), and other family-friendly facilities including family rooms, while other resorts such as Hamilton Island have "kids stay, eat, and play free" offers, particularly during holiday periods. Many hotels will offer inter-connecting rooms or "family rooms." Ask when booking, and look out for our "kid-friendly" icon in this book.

Don't forget that children entering Australia on their parent's passport still need their own visa. See "Entry Requirements & Customs" earlier in this chapter.

Rascals in Paradise (☎ 415/921 7000; www.rascalsinparadise.com) sells family vacation packages to Australia.

Familyhostel (☎ 800/733-9753; www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel) takes the whole family, including kids ages 8 to 15, on moderately priced domestic and international learning vacations. Lectures, field trips, and sightseeing are guided by a team of academics.

You can find good family-oriented vacation advice on the Internet from sites like the **Family Travel Network** (www.familytravelnetwork.com); **Traveling Internationally with Your Kids** (www.travelwithyourkids.com), a comprehensive site offering sound advice for long-distance and international travel with children; and **Family Travel Files** (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com),

which offers an online magazine and a directory of off-the-beaten-path tours and tour operators for families.

How to Take Great Trips with Your Kids (The Harvard Common Press) is full of good general advice that can apply to travel anywhere.

STUDENT TRAVEL

If you're a student planning to travel to Australia, you'd be wise to arm yourself with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC)**, which offers substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available for \$22 from **STA Travel** (☎ 800/781-4040, and if you're not in North America there's probably a local number in your country; www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world. If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions). (**Note:** In 2002, STA Travel bought competitors **Council Travel** and **USIT Campus** after they went bankrupt. It's still operating some offices under the Council name, but it's owned by STA.)

Travel CUTS (☎ 800/667-2887 or 416/614-2887; www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadians and U.S. residents. Irish students should turn to **USIT** (☎ 01/602-1600; www.usitnow.ie).

SINGLE TRAVELERS

Many people prefer traveling alone, and for independent travelers, solo journeys offer infinite opportunities to make friends and meet locals. Unfortunately, if you like resorts, tours, or cruises, you're likely to get hit with a

"single supplement" to the base price. Single travelers can avoid these supplements, of course, by agreeing to room with other single travelers on the trip. One Australian resort that will fix you up with a same-sex roommate if you're traveling alone is **Contiki Great Keppel Island Resort** (☎ 1800/245 658 in Australia, or 07/4939 5044; www.contikiresorts.com), off the Queensland coast (see chapter 6).

An even better idea is to find a compatible roommate before you go from one of the many roommate locator agencies. **Travel Buddies Singles Travel Club** (☎ 800/998-9099; www.travelbuddiesworldwide.com), based in Canada, runs small, intimate, single-friendly group trips to a range of destinations including Australia, and will match you with a roommate free of charge. **TravelChums** (☎ 212/787-2621; www.travelchums.com) is an Internet-only travel-companion matching service with elements of an online personals-type site, hosted by the respected New York-based Shaw Guides travel service. Many reputable tour companies offer singles-only trips. **Backroads** (☎ 800/462-2848; www.backroads.com) offers more than 160 active trips to 30 destinations worldwide, including Australia, New Zealand, and Bali.

For more information, check out Eleanor Berman's ***Traveling Solo: Advice and Ideas for More Than 250 Great Vacations*** (Globe Pequot), a guide with advice on traveling alone, whether on your own or on a group tour. (It's been updated for 2003.) Or turn to the **Travel Alone and Love It** website (www.travelaloneandloveit.com), designed by former flight attendant Sharon Wingler, the author of the book of the same name. Her site is full of tips for single travelers.

11 Planning an Affordable Trip Online

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The “big three” online travel agencies, **Expedia.com**, **Travelocity.com**, and **Orbitz.com** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go to expedia.co.uk and opodo.co.uk.) Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it’s wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare becomes available to your favorite destination. Of the smaller travel agency websites, **Side-Step** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer’s authors. It’s a browser add-on that purports to “search 140 sites at once,” but in reality only beats competitors’ fares as often as other sites do.

Also remember to check **airline websites**. Even with major airlines, you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency’s transaction fee. But you’ll get these discounts only by **booking online**: Most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to and from Australia, go to “Getting There” later in this chapter.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. Most of these are announced on Tuesday or Wednesday and must be purchased online. Most are only valid for travel that weekend, but some can be booked weeks or months in advance. Sign up for weekly e-mail alerts at airline websites or check mega-sites that compile comprehensive lists of last-minute specials, such as **Smarter Living** (www.smarterliving.com). For last-minute trips, **www.site59.com** in the U.S. and **www.lastminute.com** in

Europe often have better deals than the major-label sites.

If you’re willing to give up some control over your flight details, use an **opaque fare service** like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a “mystery airline” at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en-route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers—but your chances of getting a 6am or 11pm flight are pretty high. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire, but you have to play their “name our price” game. If you’re new at this, the helpful folks at **BiddingForTravel** (www.biddingfortravel.com) do a good job of demystifying Priceline’s prices. Priceline and Hotwire are great for flights within North America and between the U.S. and Europe. But for flights to other parts of the world, consolidators will almost always beat their fares.

For much more about airfares and savvy air-travel tips and advice, pick up a copy of *Frommer’s Fly Safe, Fly Smart* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

SURFING FOR HOTELS

Shopping online for hotels is much easier in the U.S., Canada, and certain parts of Europe than it is in the rest of the world, but Australian hotels—even the small ones—are pretty Internet savvy, as are B&Bs. Of the “big three” sites, **Expedia** may be the best choice, thanks to its long list of special deals. **Travelocity** runs a close second. Hotel specialist sites **www.hotels.com** and **www.hoteldiscounts.com** are also reliable. An excellent free program, **Travel Axe** (www.travelaxe.net), can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of.

Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

For an excellent travel-planning resource, we highly recommend Frommers.com (www.frommers.com). We're a little biased, of course, but we guarantee that you'll find the travel tips, reviews, monthly vacation giveaways, and online-booking capabilities thoroughly indispensable. Among the special features are our popular **Message Boards**, where Frommer's readers post queries and share advice (sometimes even our authors show up to answer questions); **Frommers.com Newsletter**, for the latest travel bargains and insider travel secrets; and **Frommer's Destinations Section**, where you'll get expert travel tips, hotel and dining recommendations, and advice on the sights to see for more than 3,000 destinations around the globe. When your research is done, the **Online Reservations System** (www.frommers.com/book_a_trip) takes you to Frommer's preferred online partners for booking your vacation at affordable prices.

SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline

and Hotwire work well for rental cars, too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

12 The 21st-Century Traveler

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME

Travelers have any number of ways to check their e-mail and access the Internet on the road. Of course, using your own laptop—or even a PDA (personal digital assistant) or electronic organizer with a modem—gives you the most flexibility. But even if you don't have a computer, you can still access your e-mail and even your office computer from cybercafes.

WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cybercafes, and that certainly applies in Australia. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—three places to start looking are at www.cybercaptive.com, www.netcafeguide.com, and

www.cybercafe.com. In major tourist cities like Cairns and Darwin, there are whole streets full of cybercafes. Aside from formal cybercafes, most **youth hostels** nowadays have at least one computer you can get to the Internet on. And most **public libraries** offer Internet access free or for a small charge. Avoid **hotel business centers**, which charge exorbitant rates.

Most major airports now have **Internet kiosks** scattered throughout their gates. These kiosks, which you'll also see in shopping malls, hotel lobbies, and tourist information offices around the world, give you basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. The kiosks' clunkiness and high price means they should be avoided whenever possible.

To retrieve your e-mail, ask your **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** if it

has a Web-based interface tied to your existing e-mail account. If your ISP doesn't have such an interface, you can use the free **mail2web** service (www.mail2web.com) to view (but not reply to) your home e-mail. For more flexibility, you may want to open a free, Web-based e-mail account with **Yahoo! Mail** (mail.yahoo.com). (Microsoft's Hotmail is another popular option, but Hotmail has severe spam problems.) Your home ISP may be able to forward your e-mail to the Web-based account automatically.

If you need to access files on your office computer, look into a service called **GoToMyPC** (www.gotomypc.com). The service provides a Web-based interface for you to access and manipulate a distant PC from anywhere—even a cybercafé—provided your “target” PC is on and has an always-on connection to the Internet (such as with Road Runner cable). The service offers top-quality security, but if you're worried about hackers, use your own laptop rather than a cybercafé to access the GoToMyPC system.

WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Major Internet Service Providers (ISP) have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by simply placing a local call. Check your ISP's website or call its toll-free number and ask how you can use your current account away from home, and how much it will cost.

If you're traveling outside the reach of your ISP, the **iPass** network has dial-up numbers in most of the world's countries. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com. One solid provider is **i2roam** (www.i2roam.com; ☎ **866/811-6209** or 920/235-0475).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone

adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable. Australia's electricity supply is 240 volts, 50 hertz. North Americans and Europeans will need to buy a converter before they leave home, as Australian stores usually only stock converters for Aussie appliances to fit American and European outlets. Most business-class hotels throughout the world offer dataports for laptop modems. You'll have to bring your own cables either way, so **call your hotel in advance** to find out what the options are.

Community-minded individuals have also set up **free wireless networks** in major cities around the U.S., Europe, and Australia. These networks are spotty, but you get what you (don't) pay for. Each network has a home page explaining how to set up your computer for their particular system; start your explorations at www.personaltelco.net/index.cgi/WirelessCommunities.

USING A CELLPHONE IN AUSTRALIA

The three letters that define much of the world's **wireless capabilities** are GSM (Global System for Mobiles), a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. In the U.S., T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Cingular use this quasi-universal system; in Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM, and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM.

If your cellphone is on a GSM system, and you have a world-capable phone such as many (but not all) Sony Ericsson, Motorola, or Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas on much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for “international roaming” to be activated on your account.

World-phone owners can bring down their per-minute charges with a bit of trickery. Call up your cellular

Online Traveler's Toolbox

Veteran travelers usually carry some essential items to make their trips easier. Following is a selection of online tools to bookmark and use:

- **Visa ATM Locator** (www.visa.com), for locations of PLUS ATMs worldwide, or **MasterCard ATM Locator** (www.mastercard.com), for locations of Cirrus ATMs worldwide.
- **Intellicast** (www.intellicast.com) and **Weather.com** (www.weather.com). Gives weather forecasts for all 50 states and for cities around the world.
- **Mapquest** (www.mapquest.com). This best of the mapping sites lets you choose a specific address or destination, and in seconds, it will return a map and detailed directions.
- **Universal Currency Converter** (www.xe.com/ucc). See what your dollar or pound is worth in more than 100 other countries.
- **Travel Warnings** (http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html, www.fco.gov.uk/travel, www.voyage.gc.ca, www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice). These sites report on places where health concerns or unrest might threaten American, British, Canadian, and Australian travelers. Generally, U.S. warnings are the most paranoid; Australian warnings are the most relaxed.

operator and say you'll be going abroad for several months and want to "unlock" your phone to use it with a local provider. Usually, they'll oblige. Then, in your destination country, pick up a cheap, prepaid phone chip at a mobile phone store and slip it into your phone. (Show your phone to the salesperson, as not all phones work on all networks.) You'll get a local phone number in your destination country—and much, much lower calling rates.

Otherwise, **renting** a phone is a good idea. In Australia—reputed to have one of the world's biggest per-capita ownership of cellular or "mobile" telephones, as they are known here—they are available for daily rental at major airports and in big cities, and increasingly from car- and campervan-rental companies. The cell network is digital, not analog. Calls to, or from, a mobile telephone are generally more expensive than a call to, or from, a fixed telephone—A60¢ (US\$40¢) a minute is

a ballpark guide, although the price varies depending on the telephone company, the time of day, the distance between caller and recipient, and the telephone's pricing plan.

An advantage of renting the phone before you leave home is that you can give loved ones your new number, make sure the phone works, and take the phone wherever you go—especially helpful when you rent overseas, where phone-rental agencies bill in local currency and may not let you take the phone to another country.

In Australia, mobile phone company **Vodafone** (www.vodarent.com.au) has outlets at Brisbane, Cairns, Sydney, Perth, and Melbourne international airports as well as stores in Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast and at 50 Park Street in Sydney. They cost between A\$8 and A\$10 (U.S\$5–US\$6.50) a day, plus call charges and insurance, depending on the kind of phone and coverage you want.

Two good wireless rental companies are **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchglobal.com) and **Road-Post** (www.roadpost.com; ☎ 888-290-1606 or 905/272-5665). Give them your itinerary, and they'll tell you what wireless products you need. InTouch will also, for free, advise you on whether your existing phone will work overseas; simply call ☎ 703/222-7161 between 9am and 4pm ET, or go to <http://intouchglobal.com/travel.htm>.

For trips of more than a few weeks spent in one country, **buying a phone** becomes economically attractive, as

many nations have cheap, no-questions-asked prepaid phone systems. Stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than \$100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

Per-minute call charges can be even cheaper than roaming charges with a regular cellphone, but the phone itself is more expensive (up to \$150 a week), and depending on the service you choose, people calling you may incur high long-distance charges.

13 Getting There

BY PLANE

Australia is a long, long haul from anywhere except New Zealand. Sydney is a nearly 15-hour non-stop flight from Los Angeles, longer if you come via Honolulu. From the east coast, add 5½ hours. If you're coming from the States via Auckland, add transit time in New Zealand plus another 3 hours for the Auckland–Sydney leg. If you are coming from the United Kingdom, brace yourself for a flight of 12 hours from London to Asia; then possibly a long day in transit, because flights to Australia have a habit of arriving in Asia early in the morning and departing around midnight; and finally the 8- to 9-hour flight to Australia.

Sydney, Cairns, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Darwin, and Perth are all international gateways, but most airlines fly only into Sydney, and a few fly to Melbourne and Brisbane.

THE MAJOR CARRIERS

Here are toll-free reservations numbers and websites for the major international airlines serving Australia. The "13" prefix in Australia means the number is charged at the cost of a local call from anywhere in the country.

Carriers Flying from North America

- **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262 in the U.S. and Canada, 02/92868900 in Sydney, or 1300/655 757 from elsewhere in Australia; www.aircanada.ca)
- **Air New Zealand** (☎ 800/262-1234 in the U.S., 310/615-1111 in the Los Angeles area, or 13 24 76 in Australia. In Canada: 800/663-5494 for English, 800/799-5494 for French, or 604/606-0150 in Vancouver; www.airnewzealand.com)
- **Qantas** (☎ 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada, or 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au)
- **United Airlines** (☎ 800/538-2929 in the U.S. and Canada, or 13 17 77 in Australia; www.ual.com or www.united.ca)

Carriers Flying from the United Kingdom

- **British Airways** (☎ 0845/773-3377 in the U.K., 1800/626-747 in Ireland, 1300/767 177 in Australia; www.britishairways.com)
- **Cathay Pacific** (☎ 020/8834-8888 in the U.K., or 131 747 in Australia; www.cathaypacific.com/uk)

- **Malaysia Airlines** (☎ 0870/607-9090 in the U.K and Ireland, or 13 26 27 in Australia; www.malaysiaairlines.com.my or www.malaysiaairlineurope.com)
- **Qantas** (☎ 0845/774-7767 in the U.K., or 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au)
- **Singapore Airlines** (☎ 0870/608-8886 in the U.K., or 13 10 11 in Australia; www.singaporeair.com/uk)
- **Thai Airways International** (☎ 0870/606-0911 in the U.K., or 1300/651 960 in Australia; www.thaiair.com)

GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **1½ hours** before a domestic flight and **2 hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and you'll probably be whisked to the front of the line.

Bring a **current, government-issued photo ID** such as a driver's license or passport, and if you've got an E-ticket, print out the **official confirmation page**; you'll need to show your confirmation at the security checkpoint, and your ID at the ticket counter or the gate. (Children under 18 do not need photo IDs for domestic flights, but the adults checking in with them need them.)

Security lines are getting shorter than they were during 2001 and 2002, but some doozies remain. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline employee; the airline will provide a wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles or clanky earrings. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners.

Keep in mind that only **ticketed passengers** are allowed past security, except for folks escorting passengers with disabilities, or children.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't**. The general rule is that sharp things are out, nail clippers are okay, and food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but that security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. Carry-on hoarders can stuff all sorts of things into a laptop bag; as long as it has a laptop in it, it's still considered a personal item. The **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)** has issued a list of restricted items; check its website (www.tsa.gov/public/index.jsp) for details.

Despite the phasing out of **gate check-in** at all U.S. airports in 2003, passengers with E-tickets and without checked bags can still beat the ticket-counter lines by using **electronic kiosks** or even **online check-in**. Ask your airline which alternatives are available, and if you're using a kiosk, bring the credit card you used to book the ticket. If you're checking bags, you will still be able to use most airlines' kiosks; again call your airline for up-to-date information. **Curbside check-in** is also a good way to avoid lines, although a few airlines still ban curbside check-in entirely; call before you go.

At press time, the TSA also recommends that you **not lock your checked luggage** so screeners can search it by hand if necessary. The agency says to use plastic "zip ties," which can be bought at hardware stores and can be easily cut off.

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

If you're flying from the United States, keep in mind that the airlines' low season is from mid-April to the end of August—and this happens to be the best time to travel most parts of Australia. High season is December through February, and shoulder season is September through November, and again from March to mid-April.

Keep an eye out for special deals throughout the year. Unexpected lows in airline passenger loads often lead airlines to put cheap offers on the market. The catch is these usually have a short lead-time, requiring you to travel in the next 6 weeks or so. Some deals involve taking a circuitous route, via Japan, for instance.

Some travel agents specializing in cheap fares include **Austravel** (☎ 800/633-3404 in the U.S. and Canada, or 0870/055-0239 in the U.K.; www.austravel.net); **Downunder Direct**, a division of Swain Australia (☎ 800/642-6224 in the U.S. and Canada; www.downunderdirect.com); and **Goway** (☎ 800/387-8850 in the U.S. and Canada; www.goway.com).

Here are some other ways to keep your airfare costs down:

- Passengers who can book their tickets **long in advance**, who can **stay over Saturday night**, or who

fly midweek or **at less-trafficked hours** will pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your plans.

- Save on airfares by keeping an eye out in local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars**, when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars offered for peak travel times, but if you travel in the off-months, you may snag a bargain.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see "Planning an Affordable Trip Online" above).
- Try to book a ticket **in its country of origin**. For instance, if you're planning a one-way flight from Sydney to Auckland, an Australian-based travel agent such as **Flight Centres** (☎ 13 31 33 in Australia) will probably have the lowest fares. For multi-leg trips, book in the country of the first leg; for example, book Melbourne-Auckland-Los Angeles in Australia.
- **Consolidators**, also known as bucket shops, are great sources for international tickets. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections; U.S. travelers should focus on the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Miami Herald*.

Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

At press time, two major U.S. airlines were struggling in bankruptcy court and most of the rest weren't doing very well either. To protect yourself, **buy your tickets with a credit card**, as the Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy). **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against "carrier default" for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust mid-trip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than \$25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

Beware: Bucket shop tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines with questionable safety records. Several reliable consolidators are worldwide and available on the Net. **STA Travel** (© 800/781-4040; www.statravel.com) is now the world's leader in student travel.

- Join **frequent-flier clubs**. Accrue enough miles, and you'll be rewarded with free flights and elite status. It's free, and you'll get the best choice of seats, faster response to phone inquiries, and prompt service if your luggage is stolen, your flight is canceled or delayed,

or if you want to change your seat. You don't need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.

- For many more tips about air travel, including a rundown of the major frequent-flier credit cards, pick up a copy of *Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS: HOW TO STAY COMFORTABLE

Long flights can be trying; stuffy air and cramped seats can make you feel as if you're being sent parcel post in a small box. But with a little advance planning, you can make an otherwise unpleasant experience almost bearable.

Tips Coping with Jet Lag

Jet lag is a pitfall of traveling across time zones. If you're flying north-south, say from Canada to Australia, and you feel sluggish when you touch down, your symptoms will be caused by dehydration and the general stress of air travel. When you travel east to west or vice versa, however, your body becomes thoroughly confused about what time it is, and everything from your digestion to your brain gets knocked for a loop. Traveling east is more difficult on your internal clock than traveling west, as most peoples' bodies find it more acceptable to stay up late than to fall asleep early.

Here are some tips for combating jet lag:

- **Reset your watch** to your destination time before you board the plane.
- **Drink lots of water** before, during, and after your flight. Avoid alcohol.
- **Exercise and sleep well** for a few days before your trip.
- If you have trouble sleeping on planes, **fly eastward on morning flights**.
- **Daylight** is the key to resetting your body clock. At the website for **Outside In** (www.bodyclock.com), you can get a customized plan of when to seek and avoid light.
- If you need help getting to sleep earlier than you usually would, doctors recommend taking either the hormone **melatonin** or the sleeping pill **Ambien**—but not together. Take 2 to 5 milligrams of melatonin about 2 hours before your planned bedtime.

Flying with Film & Video

Never pack film—developed or undeveloped—in checked bags, as the new, more powerful scanners in U.S. airports can fog film. Scanners can damage the film you carry with you as well. X-ray damage is cumulative; the slower the film, and the more times you put it through a scanner, the more likely the damage. Film under 800 ASA is usually safe for up to five scans. If you're taking your film through additional scans, U.S. regulations permit you to ask for hand inspections. In international airports, you're at the mercy of airport officials. On international flights, store your film in transparent bags, so you can remove it easily before you go through scanners.

Most photo supply stores sell protective pouches designed to block damaging X-rays. The pouches fit both film and loaded cameras. They should protect your film in checked baggage, but they also may raise alarms and result in a hand inspection.

An organization called **Film Safety for Traveling on Planes, FSTOP** (☎ 888/301-2665; www.f-stop.org), can provide additional tips for traveling with film and equipment.

Carry-on scanners will not damage **videotape** in video cameras, but the magnetic fields emitted by the walk-through security gateways and handheld inspection wands will. Always place your loaded camcorder on the screening conveyor belt or have it hand-inspected. Be sure your batteries are charged, as you will probably be required to turn the device on to ensure that it's what it appears to be.

- Your choice of airline and airplane will definitely affect your legroom. Research firm Skytrax has posted a list of average seat pitches for international airlines at www.airlinequality.com.
- Emergency exit seats and bulkhead seats typically have the most legroom. Emergency exit seats are usually held back to be assigned the day of a flight (to ensure that the seat is filled by someone able-bodied); it's worth getting to the ticket counter early to snag one of these spots for a long flight. Keep in mind that bulkheads are where airlines often put baby bassinets, so you may be sitting next to an infant.
- To have two seats for yourself, try for an aisle seat in a center section toward the back of coach. If you're traveling with a companion, book an aisle and a window seat. Middle seats are usually booked last, so chances are good you'll end up with three seats to yourselves. And in the event another passenger is assigned the middle seat, he or she will probably be happy to trade for a window or an aisle.
- Ask about entertainment options. Many airlines offer seatback video systems where you get to choose your movies or play video games—but only on some planes. (Boeing 777s are your best bet.)
- To sleep, avoid the last row of any section or a row in front of an emergency exit, as these seats are the least likely to recline. Avoid seats near highly trafficked toilet areas. You also may want to reserve a window seat so that you

can rest your head and avoid being bumped in the aisle.

- Get up, walk around, and stretch every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. This helps avoid deep vein thrombosis, or “economy-class syndrome,” a rare but deadly condition that can be caused by sitting in cramped conditions for too long.
- Drink water before, during, and after your flight to combat the lack

of humidity in airplane cabins—which can be drier than the Sahara. Bring a bottle of water on board. Avoid alcohol, which will dehydrate you.

- If you’re flying with kids, don’t forget to carry on toys, books, pacifiers, and chewing gum to help them relieve ear pressure buildup during ascent and descent. Let each child pack his or her own backpack with favorite toys.

14 Packages for the Independent Traveler

Before you start your search for the lowest airfare, you may want to consider booking your flight as part of a travel package. Package tours are not the same thing as escorted tours. Package tours are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as car rentals, airport transfers, and sometimes even activities) at the same time and often at discounted prices—kind of like one-stop shopping. Packages are sold in bulk to tour operators—who resell them to the public at a cost that usually undercuts standard rates.

One good source of package deals is the airlines themselves. Most major airlines offer air/land packages to Australia, including **American Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/321-2121; www.aavacations.com), **Delta Vacations** (☎ 800/221-6666; www.deltavacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/301-3800; www.coolvacations.com), and **United Vacations** (☎ 888/854-3899; www.unitedvacations.com). Several big **online travel agencies**—Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, Site59, and Lastminute.com—also do a brisk business in packages. If you’re unsure about the pedigree of a smaller packager, check with the Better Business Bureau in the city where the company is based, or go online at www.bbb.org. If a packager won’t tell you where it’s based, don’t fly with them.

Austravel (☎ 800/633-3404 in the U.S. and Canada, or 0870/055-0239 in the U.K.; www.austravel.net) is an American company offering independent packages Down Under. The following companies offer both independent and escorted tours: **ATS Tours** (☎ 800/423-2880 in the U.S. and Canada; www.atstours.com); **Collette Vacations** (☎ 800/340-5158 in the U.S., 416/626 1661 in Canada, or 0189/581-2333 in the U.K. through Adventures Unlimited, Inc.; www.collettevacations.com); **Goway** (☎ 800/387-8850 in the U.S. and Canada; www.goway.com); **Inta-Aussie South Pacific Tours** (☎ 800/531-9222 in the U.S. or 310/568-2060; www.inta-oz.com); **Maupintour** (☎ 800/255-4266 in the U.S. and Canada; www.maupintour.com); **Qantas Vacations** (☎ 800/348-8139 in the U.S. and 800/268-7525 in Canada; www.qantasvacations.com); **Sunbeam Tours** (☎ 800/955-1818 in the U.S. and Canada; www.sunbeamtours.com); **Swain Australia Tours** (☎ 800/22-SWAIN in the U.S. and Canada; www.swainaustralia.com); Swain Australia’s budget-travel division, **Downunder Direct** (☎ 800/642-6224 in the U.S. and Canada; www.downunderdirect.com); and **United Vacations** (☎ 800/917-9246 in the U.S. and Canada; www.unitedvacations.com).

Travel packages are also listed in the travel section of your local Sunday

newspaper. Or check ads in the national travel magazines such as *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine*, *Travel & Leisure*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and *Condé Nast Traveler*.

Package tours can vary enormously. Some offer a better class of hotels than others. Some offer the same hotels for lower prices. Some offer flights on scheduled airlines, while others book charters. Some limit your choice of accommodations and travel days. You are often required to make a large payment up front. On the plus side, packages can save you money, offering group prices but allowing for independent travel. Some even let you add

on a few guided excursions or escorted day trips (also at prices lower than if you booked them yourself) without booking an entirely escorted tour.

Before you invest in a package, get some answers. Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices for each. Then look up the hotels' reviews in a Frommer's guide and check their rates for your specific dates of travel online. You'll also want to find out what **type of room** you get. If you need a certain type of room, ask for it—don't take whatever is thrown your way. Finally, look for **hidden expenses**. Ask whether airport departure fees and taxes, for example, are included in the cost.

15 Escorted General-Interest Tours

Escorted tours are structured group tours, with a group leader. The price usually includes everything from airfare to hotels, meals, tours, admission costs, and local transportation.

Connections for 18 to 35's (call Australian Pacific Touring, ☎ 800/290-8687 in the U.S.; Goway, ☎ 800/387-8850 in Canada; ☎ 1800/077 251 in Australia or 07/3839 7877; www.connections1835.com.au), and **Contiki** (☎ 888/CONTIKI in the U.S.; 800/268-1835 in Canada; 020/8290-6777 in the U.K.; 09/309 8824 in New Zealand; or 02/9511 2200 in Australia; www.contiki.com) specialize in escorted tours for 18- to 35-year-olds. These trips attract a lot of Australians, too, so they are a good way to meet locals. **Connections for 18 to 35's** also does a range of active holidays for people of any age. **Premier Vacations** (☎ 800/321-6720 in the U.S. and Canada; www.premierdownunder.com) is another reliable escorted tour operator.

Many people derive ease and security from escorted trips. Escorted tours—whether by bus, motor coach, train, or boat—let travelers sit back and enjoy their trip without having to

spend lots of time behind the wheel. All the little details are taken care of, you know your costs up front, and there are few surprises. Escorted tours can take you to the maximum number of sights in the minimum amount of time with the least amount of hassle—you don't have to sweat over the plotting and planning of a vacation schedule. Escorted tours are particularly convenient for people with limited mobility.

On the downside, an escorted tour often requires a big deposit up front, and lodging and dining choices are predetermined. As part of a cloud of tourists, you'll get little opportunity for serendipitous interactions with locals. The tours can be jam-packed with activities, leaving little room for individual sightseeing, whim, or adventure—plus they also often focus only on the heavily visited sites, so you miss out on the lesser-known gems.

Before you invest in an escorted tour, ask about the **cancellation policy**: Is a deposit required? Can they cancel the trip if they don't get enough people? Do you get a refund if they cancel? If *you* cancel? How late can you cancel if you are unable to go?

When do you pay in full? **Note:** If you choose an escorted tour, think strongly about purchasing trip-cancellation insurance, especially if the tour operator asks you to pay up front. See the section on “Travel Insurance” earlier in this chapter.

You’ll also want to get a complete **schedule** of the trip to find out how much sightseeing is planned each day and whether enough time has been allotted for relaxing or wandering solo.

The **size** of the group is also important to know up front. Generally, the smaller the group, the more flexible the itinerary, and the less time you’ll spend waiting for people to get on and off the bus. Find out the **demographics** of the group as well. What is the age range? What is the gender breakdown? Is this mostly a trip for couples or singles?

Discuss what is included in the **price**. You may have to pay for transportation to and from the airport. A box lunch may be included in an excursion, but drinks might cost extra. Tips may not be included. Find out if you will be charged if you decide to opt out of certain activities or meals.

Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices, look up the hotels’ reviews in a Frommer’s guide, and check their rates for your specific dates of travel online. If you need a certain type of room, ask for it—request a nonsmoking room, a quiet room, a room with a view, or whatever you fancy. If you plan to travel alone, find out if a **single supplement** will be charged or if the company can match you up with a roommate.

16 The Active Traveler

Australia’s wide open spaces and great weather cry out to even the most dedicated lazy-bones. Most operators and outfitters listed below specialize in adventure vacations for small groups. Meals, accommodations, equipment rental, and guides are usually in their packages, though international airfares are not. Where you end up spending the night varies depending on the package you select—on a sea-kayaking trip you almost always camp on the beach; on a hiking expedition you may stay at a wilderness lodge; and on a biking trip you often stop over at B&B-style lodgings. More information on the outdoor activities discussed below is contained in the relevant regional chapters. Before you hit the outdoors, review the safety tips in the “Health & Safety” section earlier in this chapter.

SCUBA DIVING

Diving Down Under is one of the best travel experiences in the world. There are good dive sites all around the coastline, not just on the Great Barrier Reef.

A second barrier reef in Ningaloo Reef Marine Park stretches 260km (161 miles) off the coast of Western Australia. (See chapter 9 or Exmouth Diving Centre’s website at www.exmouthdiving.com.au for a description of dive sites there.) Not all the good sites are on coral. In Tasmania, for instance, you can dive kelp beds popular with seals, and in South Australia you can cage-dive with great white sharks. For a run-down on outstanding dive areas, see “The Best Affordable Diving & Snorkeling Sites” in chapter 1.

Wherever you find coral in Australia, you’ll find dive companies offering learn-to-dive courses, day trips, and, in some cases, extended journeys on live-aboard vessels. Most international dive certificates, including PADI, NAUI, SSI, and BSAC, are recognized. It’s easy to rent gear and wet suits wherever you go, or you can bring your own.

Beginners’ courses are known as “open-water certification” and usually require 2 days of theory in a pool at the

Tips Peak Time on the Reef

August through January is peak visibility time on the Great Barrier Reef, but the marine life will amaze you any time of year.

dive company's premises, followed by 2 or 3 days on a live-aboard boat where you make between four and nine dives, including a night dive if you opt for the 5-day course. Open-water certification courses range from an intensive 3 to 5 days, for which you can expect to pay between about A\$350 and A\$600 (US\$228–US\$390). A 5-day course is considered the best. When comparing the value offered by dive schools, keep in mind that if the practical section of your course does not take place on a live-aboard boat, you will have to budget for accommodations and meals. If you're pressed for time, a PADI Referral course might suit you. It allows you to do your theory work at home, do a few hours of pool work at a PADI dive center in your home country, and then spend 2 or 3 days in the Australian ocean doing your qualifying dives. Remember to allow time in your itinerary for a medical exam in Australia.

If you're already a certified diver, remember to bring your "C" card and log book. If you're going to do a dive course, you'll need a medical certificate from an Australian doctor that meets Australian standard AS4005.1, stating that you are fit for scuba diving. (An all-purpose physical is not enough.) Virtually all dive schools will arrange the medical exam for you; expect to pay around A\$50 (US\$33) for it. Remember, you must complete your last dive 24 hours before you fly in an aircraft. This catches a lot of people off guard when they are preparing to fly on to their next destination the day after a visit to the Reef. Check to see if your travel insurance covers diving. **The Divers Alert Network** (☎ 800/446-2671; www.diversalertnetwork.org

) sells diving insurance and has diving and non-diving medical emergency hot lines, and an information line for dive-related medical questions.

If you've never been diving and don't plan to become qualified, you can see what all the fuss is about on an "introductory" dive that lets you dive in the company of an instructor on a one-off basis, with a briefing beforehand. Most dive operators on the Great Barrier Reef and other dive locations offer introductory dives.

Section 1 of chapter 6 contains more information on diving the Great Barrier Reef.

For information on dive regions and operators, try the state tourism marketing boards' websites (see "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter). **Tourism Queensland's** website www.queenslandholidays.com.au has links to most dive operators working the Great Barrier Reef. If you know where you want to dive, you may obtain an even more detailed list of operators by bypassing the big tourism boards and contacting the local tourist office for a list of local dive operators. The Queensland Dive Tourism Association, **Dive Queensland** (☎ 07/4051 1510; fax 07/4051 1519; www.dive-queensland.com.au) requires its member operators to abide by a code of ethics. Its website has a list of members and the services they offer. Another good source is **Diversion Dive Travel & Training** (☎ 07/4039 0200; www.diversionoz.com), a Cairns-based travel agent that specializes in dive holidays on the Great Barrier Reef, as well as in other good dive spots in Australia.

Peter Stone's Dive Australia is a 608-page guidebook to more than 2,000 dive sites all over Australia. It by no

means lists every site, but it does contain many sites off the dive-tourist trail (many not on the Great Barrier Reef), so divers in search of new territory may find it handy. It also contains a lot of background such as dive operators and associations, a chapter on Australian diving law, the nearest hyperbaric chambers, and travel tips. Order from the publisher, Oceans Enterprises (☎ 03/5182 5108; www.oceans.com.au). It costs A\$36 (US\$23) plus postage.

BUSHWALKING (HIKING)

With so much unique scenery and so many rare animals and plants, it is not surprising Australia is full of national parks crisscrossed with hiking trails. You're never far from a park with a bushwalk, whether it's an easy stroll or a 6-day odyssey on the Cape-to-Cape trail in Western Australia.

The best place to get information about bushwalking is the National Parks & Wildlife Service, or its equivalent in each state. A good Australian bushwalking Web page is at www.bushwalking.org.au.

- **Environmental Protection Agency** (QLD Parks & Wildlife Service; ☎ 07/3227 7111; www.epa.qld.gov.au).
- **NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service** (☎ 02/9585 6444 administration; www.npws.nsw.gov.au). It has a visitor information center at 110 George St., The Rocks, Sydney (☎ 02/9247 5033).
- **Parks & Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory** (☎ 08/8999 5511; www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt/). The Northern Territory Tourist Commission (see "Exploring the Red Centre" in chapter 7) is the official dispenser of information on parks and wildlife matters.
- **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).
- **South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage**

(☎ 08/8204 1910; www.denr.sa.gov.au).

- **Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service** (☎ 1300 135 513; www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au) has comprehensive information on Tasmania's many national parks.
- **Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management** (CALM; ☎ 08/9334 0333; www.calm.wa.gov.au).

Some parks charge an entry fee, which can be from around A\$6 to A\$18 (US\$3.90–US\$12).

MORE ACTIVE VACATIONS FROM A TO Z

ABSEILING Rappelling is another name for this sport that involves backing down vertical cliff faces on a rope and harness. The rugged, beautiful Blue Mountains near Sydney are Australia's abseiling capital. You can also do it in the Margaret River region of Western Australia, as mighty breakers crash on the cliffs below, or in the city heart of Brisbane on riverside cliffs.

BIKING Much of Australia's countryside is flat and ideal for cycling, as Aussies call biking, but consider the heat and vast distances before setting out. There are plenty of biking trails. The rainforest hills behind Cairns hosted the world mountain-biking championships in 1996, and Sydney's Blue Mountains have good mountain-biking trails. On Rottnest Island off Perth, it's the only mode of transport. All major towns and most resort centers rent regular bikes and mountain bikes.

If you're interested in taking an extended trip, you may find a copy of *Cycling Australia: Bicycle Touring Throughout the Sunny Continent*, by Australian Ian Duckworth (Motorbooks, 1996) useful. This 224-page guide outlines short trips and eight long trips with maps and route descriptions. Any bookstore can order it, or it is available from the Adventurous Traveler Bookstore (☎ 800/282-3963 in the

Fun Fact Something Different: Camel Trekking

Camels Down Under? You bet. Australia has one of the world's largest camel populations, and even exports racing camels to the Middle East. Camels were imported to negotiate waterless deserts in the 1900s but were later set free. They are now a popular way to trek the country. Short rambles of an hour or two in Alice Springs and at Ayers Rock are a novel way to see the Outback, or you can join extended camel treks through Outback deserts offered by a number of operators. Several companies in Broome lead guided rides along beautiful Cable Beach.

U.S. and Canada; www.adventurous-traveler.com), or from the Quayside Bookshop in the United Kingdom (☎ 01626/77-5436; quaybooks@aol.com).

Remote Outback Cycle Tours (☎ 08/9279 6969; www.cycletours.com.au) takes novice and expert riders, young and old, on extended tours across the country. The distances are vast, but the trip is combined with 4WD travel in parts. Itineraries include the Red Centre, the historic Oodnadatta Track cattle-driving route from Alice Springs to Adelaide via the underground opal-mining town of Coober Pedy in South Australia, and from Adelaide to Perth across the Nullarbor Plain desert, and through the pretty Margaret River wine region in southern Western Australia.

BIRD-WATCHING Australia's unique geography as an island continent ensures it has species you won't see anywhere else. It is probably best known for its brilliant parrots, but you will see species from the wetlands, savannah, mulga scrub, desert, oceans, dense bushland, rainforest, mangroves, rivers, and other habitats. More than half of the country's species have been spotted in the Daintree Rainforest area in north Queensland, and one-third live in wetlands-rich Kakadu National Park in the Top End. The Coorong in South Australia and Broome in the Top End are home to marvelous waterfowl populations.

To get in touch with bird-watching clubs all over Australia, contact **Birds Australia** (☎ 03/9882 2622; www.birdsaustralia.com.au).

Kirrama Wildlife Tours (☎ 07/4065 5181; www.gspeak.com.au/kirrama/) operates birding expeditions to remote regions in northern Australia from a base in north Queensland. Broome-based ornithologist George Swann of **Kimberley Birdwatching, Wildlife & Natural History Tours** (☎ 08/9192 1246; www.kimberleybirdwatching.com.au) tailor-makes extended birding trips throughout the Kimberley and the Northern Territory. **Fine Feather Tours** (☎ 07/4094 1199; www.finefeathertours.com.au) based near Port Douglas near the Daintree Rainforest, operates bird-watching day trips and afternoon river cruises.

CANOEING & SEA KAYAKING Katherine Gorge in the Northern Territory offers some spectacular flat canoeing. You'll find delightful canoeing on the bird-rich Ord River in the Top End. Katherine Gorge and the Ord are full of generally harmless freshwater crocodiles, but *never* canoe in saltwater-crocodile territory. White-water canoeing can be found in Barrington Tops National Park north of Sydney.

A growing number of operators all around the coastline rent kayaks and lead guided expeditions. Popular spots are the Whitsunday Islands in north Queensland, the cold southern seas

around Tasmania, and Byron Bay, where you can take a 3-hour “dolphin kayaking” trip to see wild dolphins (and whales June–Oct) and “kayak-surf” the waves.

Rivergods (☎ 08/9259 0749; www.rivergods.com.au) conducts multiday sea kayaking, canoeing, and white-water rafting adventures throughout Western Australia’s pristine ocean and rivers, in which whales, sharks, dugongs (manatees), sea snakes, turtles, and dolphins abound. They also run a “sea kayak with wild seals” day outing from Perth. **Gecko Canoeing** (☎ 08/8972 2224; www.geckocanoeing.com.au) leads canoeing trips of 1 to 21 days from Katherine along remote Top End rivers between April and September.

CAVING Australia doesn’t have a lot of caves, but the ones it has are spectacular. The best spots are the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, and the Margaret River region in southwest Western Australia. For tourists who want to see caves and stay clean and safe (as opposed to spelunkers), the best caves are the spectacular Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains, a honeycomb of caverns bursting with intricate stalactites and stalagmites; and the 350 limestone caves in Margaret River, of which 5 are open to the public. Two are “adventure caves,” which any novice caver (as opposed to an experienced spelunker) can explore on a 2- or 3-hour tour. You can also go caving at the Capricorn Caves in Central Queensland.

FISHING Reef, game, deep sea, beach, estuary, and river fishing—Australia’s massive coastline lets you do it all. Drop a line for coral trout on the Great Barrier Reef; go for the world record black marlin off Cairns; hook a fighting “barra” (barramundi) in the Northern Territory or the Kimberley; or cast for trout in Tasmania’s highland lakes. Charter boats will take you out for the day from most coastal towns.

GOLF Australians are almost as passionate about golf as they are about football and cricket—after all, Greg Norman started life as an Aussie! Queensland has the lion’s share of the most stunning resort courses, such as the Sheraton Mirage in Port Douglas, Laguna Quays Resort near the Whitsundays, and the Hyatt Regency Sanctuary Cove Resort on the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast has more than 40 courses. Joondaloo Country Club in Western Australia was voted Number One Resort Course in Australia by *Golf Australia* magazine for 2003. One of the world’s best desert courses is at Alice Springs.

Most courses rent clubs for around A\$30 (US\$20). Greens fees start at around A\$20 (US\$13) for 18 holes but average A\$65 (US\$42) or more on a championship course.

HORSE-RIDING Horse-riding operators are everywhere in Australia. A particularly pleasant vacation is a multiday riding and camping trek in *The Man from Snowy River* country in the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales.

SAILING The 74 islands of the Whitsundays in Queensland are an out-of-this-world backdrop for sailing. And you don’t have to be an expert sailor—the Whitsunday region is Australia’s “bareboating” capital. Bareboating means you can charter an unskipped yacht and sail yourself. Even those without a scrap of experience can do it, although it’s best to have someone on board who knows aft from fore. Perth and Sydney are mad about sailing; head to the nearest yacht club and see what on-board places are going, especially during summer twilight races. The clubs are often short of sailors and most will welcome out-of-towners.

SURFING You’ll have no trouble finding a good surf beach along the

Australian coast. Perth and Sydney are blessed with loads right in the city. Other popular spots include the Gold and Sunshine coasts in Queensland, the legendary Southern Ocean swells along Victoria's southern coast, and magnificent sets off Margaret River in Western Australia. Don't take your board much north of the Sunshine Coast—the Great Barrier Reef puts a stop to the swell from there all the way to the northern tip of Queensland. Loads of companies rent surf gear. Beginner's lessons are offered at many surf beaches. Remember, surf only at patrolled beaches and never surf alone.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING The best rapids are the Grade 5 torrents on the Nymboida and Gwydir rivers behind Coffs Harbour in New South Wales. More Grade 5 rapids await you on the Johnstone River in north Queensland, although they must be accessed by helicopter. Loads of tourists who have never held a paddle hurtle down the Grade 3 to 4 Tully River or the gentler Grade 2 to 3 Barron River on a day trip from Cairns. The Snowy River National Park in Victoria and the Franklin River in the wilds of Tasmania are other popular spots. See also "Canoeing & Sea Kayaking" above.

AUSTRALIA-BASED OUTFITTERS & OPERATORS

Auswalk (☎ 02/6457 2220; www.auswalk.com.au) offers self-drive or escorted walking tours through picturesque parts of Australia such as the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, tropical Magnetic Island in Queensland, and the Fraser Island wilderness.

Tasmanian Expeditions (☎ 03/6334 3477; www.tas-ex.com) conducts

day trips and extended expeditions featuring hiking, cycling, rafting, abseiling, canoeing, sea kayaking, and rock-climbing throughout Tasmania's national parks and unspoiled rural areas.

World Expeditions (☎ 415/989-2212 in the U.S., 020/8870-2600 in the U.K., 09/368-4161 in New Zealand, or 02/9279 0188 or 1300/720 000 in Australia; www.worldexpeditions.com.au) runs expeditions in many parts of Australia, including to places less traveled such as Hinchinbrook Island in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and the long-distance Bibbulmun Track in Western Australia's Southwest. Some trips incorporate other pursuits like rafting, sailing, or biking.

U.S.-BASED OUTFITTERS & OPERATORS

The **Great Outdoor Recreation Pages (G.O.R.P.)** site at www.gorp.com not only has links to adventure-tour operators in Australia, but also contains articles, sells books and maps, and has links to heaps of Australian sites with an action slant.

Adventure Express (☎ 800/443-0799 or 206/441 3482) sells diving packages and custom-built itineraries on the Great Barrier Reef.

Outer Edge Expeditions (☎ 800/322-5235 or 517/552 5300; www.outer-edge.com) and **The World Outdoors** (☎ 800/488-8483 or 303/413-0938; www.theworldoutdoors.com) both offer ecologically minded multi-sport diving, hiking, mountain-biking, canoeing, and kayaking packages to the Great Barrier Reef and North Queensland rainforest.

17 Getting Around Australia

Lesson number one: You won't be able to see Uluru from your Sydney hotel room window. It's 2,841km (1,761

miles) away. Possibly the biggest mistake tourists Down Under make (apart from getting horribly sunburned) is

failing to comprehend the distances between popular locations. Another urban legend that grew up around the 2000 Olympics was the tale of the tourist who asked which part of Sydney Harbour he could get the boat to the Great Barrier Reef from. That's a mere 2,800km (1,736 miles) north. Don't try to cram too much into your trip.

Traveling overland may make sense in Europe or North America, but in Australia flying is the best way between most points. People who go by train, bus, or car are often disappointed at Australia's flat vistas of desert, wheat fields, and gum trees—the same landscape can go on for days. A good compromise is to take to the air for long trips and save the land travel for short hops of a few hours. Try not to backtrack, because it eats up valuable time and money.

BY PLANE

Australia is a big country with a small population to support its air routes. Airfares are high. This section contains tips to help you save.

Most domestic air travel is operated by **Qantas** (☎ 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada, 0845/774-7767 in the U.K., 09-357-8900 in Auckland, 0800/808-767 in New Zealand, and 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au). You may get a cheaper fare with the no-frills airline **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au). It operates to every capital, as well as Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gold Coast, and Sunshine Coast, all in Queensland; Coffs Harbour in New South Wales; Launceston in Tasmania; Broome in Western Australia; Alice Springs in the NT—and its network is growing, so it may have added more cities by the time you read this.

Australia's air network is not as well developed as that of North America or Europe, so don't assume there is a direct flight to your chosen destination, or

that there is a flight every hour or even every day. **Note:** All flights in Australia are nonsmoking.

FARES FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS

Qantas typically offers international travelers a discount of around 30% off the full fares that Australians pay for domestic flights bought within Australia. To qualify, quote your passport number and international ticket number when reserving. Don't assume the fare for international travelers is the best deal, though—the latest deal in the market that day (or even better, perhaps, a package deal with accommodations thrown in) may be cheaper still.

AIR PASSES If you are planning on whipping around to more than one city, purchasing a Qantas **Boomerang Pass** is much cheaper than buying regular fares. You must buy the minimum-size pass before you arrive in Australia and it can be extended to other cities once you get there; residents of Australia and New Zealand cannot purchase them.

With Qantas's Boomerang Pass, for example, you must purchase a minimum of two coupons (with a maximum of 10) priced at different fares depending on where you travel, and whether the flights are in high demand. Fares are A\$260 (US\$169) or A\$300 (US\$195) per coupon for travel within one zone, or A\$330 (US\$215) or A\$390 (US\$254) per coupon for travel between zones. The difference between the higher and lower fares depends on the airline's yield management system (availability of seats), so your coupons may cost the lower or higher amount depending on the day you buy them and how many seats are available on the flight you book.

Passes are a great value when you consider that a fully flexible one-way fare from Melbourne to Cairns—a 2,254km (1,400-mile), 2-hour journey—is around A\$530 (US\$345),

compared with the Boomerang pass fare of A\$260 (US\$169).

Coupons are also good for travel to and from New Zealand and to the most popular South Pacific nations, and can also be used with Air Pacific. Zone 1 covers Western Australia; Zone 2 covers the Red Centre and Darwin; Zone 3 covers major towns in South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland; and Zone 4 covers many small towns in the east coast states, including island gateways like Hayman Island, Hamilton Island, and Gladstone. You must book your first two coupon destinations before you arrive, but you can book the rest as you go by phoning or calling in to any Qantas office. Another great thing about these fares is that they are changeable and the unused portion is refundable; you will incur a A\$50 (US\$33) fee to change destinations after the coupons have been issued. Many small towns and short flight sectors, some island resorts, and some airports served by subsidiaries of Qantas are not covered by the passes, but most times you can find local fares to these places which are just as good in value as the Boomerang pass.

BY TRAIN

Australia's trains are clean, comfortable, and safe, and for the most part service standards and facilities are perfectly adequate. The rail network in Australia links Perth to Adelaide, and continues on to Melbourne and north to Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, and right up the coast to Cairns. There's also a line from Adelaide to Alice Springs and Darwin, and some rural towns, such as Broken Hill, also have rail services. Trains generally cost more than buses, but are still reasonably priced. Most long-distance trains have sleepers with big windows, air-conditioning, electric outlets, wardrobes, hand basins, and fresh sheets and blankets. First-class sleepers have en suite bathrooms, and

meals are often included. Second-class sleepers use shared shower facilities, and meals are not included. Some second-class sleepers are private cabins; on other trains you share with strangers. Single cabins are usually of broom-closet dimensions but surprisingly comfy and have their own toilet and basin. The food ranges from mediocre to pretty good. Smoking is usually banned, or allowed only in the club cars or special smoking rooms.

Australia's rail routes are managed either by the private enterprise **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47 in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au), which runs the *Indian Pacific*, the *Overland*, and *The Ghan*, or by one of the following government bodies. **Traveltrain**, the long-distance train division of Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia; www.traveltrain.qr.com.au), handles rail within that state. **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) manages travel within New South Wales and from Sydney to Canberra, Melbourne, and Brisbane. **WAGR** (Western Australian Government Railways; ☎ 13 10 53 in Western Australia, or 08/9229 2065; www.wagr.wa.gov.au), operates trains in Western Australia.

Outside Australia, the umbrella organization **Rail Australia** (www.railaustralia.com.au) handles inquiries and makes reservations for all long-distance trains, with the exception of WAGR, through its overseas agents: **ATS Tours** (☎ 310/643-0044) in the United States; **Goway** (☎ 416/322 1034) in Canada; **International Rail** (☎ 0871/201 606) in the United Kingdom; and **Tranz Scenic** (☎ 03/339 3809) in New Zealand.

Great Southern Railway's *Indian Pacific* ★ links Sydney, Broken Hill, Adelaide, and Perth in a 3-day Outback run twice a week. Slightly less posh but still comfortable, *The Ghan* (named after Afghani camel trainers

who traveled the Outback in the 19th century) travels between Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Alice Springs twice a week, with connections from Sydney and Perth on the *Indian Pacific* and from Melbourne on the *Overland*. With the opening of a new rail line linking Alice Springs and Darwin, expected in early 2004, the iconic train will operate one weekly return service between Adelaide and Darwin and twice weekly return services between Adelaide and Alice Springs.

Both *The Ghan* and the *Indian Pacific* have a choice of economy seats and second- or first-class sleepers.

Great Southern Railway's third train, the *Overland*, links Adelaide and Melbourne twice a week. **Countrylink** runs daily trains from Sydney to Melbourne, Canberra, and Brisbane, and to a number of New South Wales country towns.

Queensland Rail's **Traveltrain** operates two trains on the Brisbane–Cairns route: *The Sunlander* runs twice a week to Cairns, offering a choice of the premium, all-inclusive Queenslander Class; single-, double-, or triple-berth sleepers; or economy seats. Two services also run to Townsville without Queenslander Class. The high-speed **Tilt Train** operates three weekly services on the same route offering a shorter journey time—by about 8 hours—and business-class style seating. Tilt Trains also service Rockhampton daily. Traveltrain also operates trains to Outback towns. All Traveltrain and most Countrylink long-distance trains stop at most towns en route, so they're useful for exploring the eastern states. Great Southern Railway, Countrylink, and Queensland Rail Traveltrain offer rail packages that include accommodations and sightseeing.

RAIL PASSES National, East Coast, New South Wales, Queensland, and Great Southern Railway rail passes are available from Rail Australia (see

above) at its overseas agents. National passes must be bought before you arrive and are available only to holders of non-Australian passports. East Coast (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns) and Queensland passes can be purchased before or after you arrive in Australia. Passes are not valid for first-class travel, but upgrades are available.

The national **Austrail Flexi Pass** is good for economy seats and second-class sleepers on all long-distance trains (except WAGR services in Western Australia) and is even good for suburban city train networks. It allows you to travel for any 8, 15, 22, or 29 days, consecutive or not, within a 6-month period. An 8-day Flexipass is A\$560 (US\$364), with the price going up to A\$1,570 (US\$1,021) for a 29-day Flexipass. **Note:** You cannot use the 8-day pass on the *Indian Pacific* or *The Ghan*, meaning not on the Adelaide–Perth or on the Sydney–, Melbourne–, or Adelaide–Alice Springs routes.

BY BUS

Bus travel in Australia is a big step up from the low-rent affair it can be in the United States. Terminals are centrally located and well lit, the coaches are clean and air-conditioned, you sit in adjustable seats, videos are shown on board, and the drivers are polite and sometimes even point out places of interest along the way. All buses have restrooms. Unlike Australia's train service, there are few places the extensive bus network won't take you. Buses are all nonsmoking.

Australia has two national coach operators: **Greyhound Pioneer Australia** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia, or 07/4690 9888; www.greyhound.com.au; no relation to Greyhound in the U.S.) and **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia, or 07/4690 9888; www.mccaffertys.com.au). McCafferty's owns Greyhound Pioneer, hence the same telephone number, above. While the coach lines operate as separate

brands with their own networks, passes are combined and can be used interchangeably on either network. The coaches and service standards of both companies are virtually identical. The only real difference between them is that McCafferty's does not travel in Western Australia, while Greyhound Pioneer does (although McCafferty's reservations offices can book your travel in Western Australia aboard Greyhound Pioneer buses, anyhow).

Neither bus company operates within Tasmania; however, McCafferty's provides a booking and transfer service from Melbourne across the Bass Strait aboard the *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry to connect with one of Tasmania's **Redline Coaches**. As well as point-to-point services, both coach companies offer a limited range of tours at popular locations on their networks. McCafferty's/Greyhound Pioneer has many international agents, including **Inta-Aussie South Pacific** (☎ 310/568-2060) in the United States, **Goway** (☎ 800/387-8850) in Canada, and **Bridge the World** (☎ 020/7911 0900) in the United Kingdom.

BUS PASSES Bus passes are a great value. There are several kinds—Day

passes, Pre-set Itinerary passes, and Kilometre passes. Look into the one that suits you best. Note that even with a pass, you may still need to book the next leg of your trip 12 or 24 hours ahead as a condition of the pass, and in school vacation periods, which are always busy, it may be smart to book as much as 7 days ahead.

The **Aussie Day Pass** is good for 7, 10, 15, 21, or 30 days of travel, consecutive or not, within a 1- to 2-month period depending on how many days you buy. The pass is valid for unlimited travel, and backtracking is allowed. Fares range from A\$781 (US\$508) for a 7-day pass to A\$1,879 (US\$1,221) for a 30-day pass.

Greyhound Adventures (☎ 1800/800 260 in Australia; www.greyhoundadventures.com.au) has packages that can be tailor-made to combine bus travel with accommodations, some meals, and an “adventure” component.

SAMPLE TRAVEL TIMES & BUS FARES

Here are some sample bus fares and travel times, to give you an idea of what you're getting yourself into as you step aboard. All fares and travel times are one-way.

Route	Travel Time (Approx.)	Fare
Broome–Darwin	27 hr.	A\$255 (US\$166)
Sydney–Brisbane	17 hr.	A\$93 (US\$60)
Cairns–Brisbane	29 hr.	A\$192 (US\$125)

Note: Fares and some passes will be considerably cheaper if you're a student, a senior, a backpacker cardholder, or a Hostelling International/YHA member.

If you know where you are going and are willing to obey a “no backtracking” rule, consider an **Aussie Explorer** predetermined itinerary pass. These passes allow unlimited stops in a generous time frame on a preset one-way route (you are permitted to travel the route in either direction). There is a huge range of itineraries to choose from. As an example, the **Aussie Reef and Rock** pass takes in Alice Springs,

Katherine, Darwin, Mt. Isa, Cairns, and the whole east coast down to Sydney. The pass is valid for 6 months and costs A\$1,106 (US\$719). You can start at any point along any of the pass routes, in which case the pass may be cheaper. In the case of the Reef and Rock pass, that means you could start farther up the track at Brisbane (in which case the pass costs A\$1,022/US\$664), or Cairns (A\$682/US\$443).

McCafferty's does not serve Western Australia, so if you want a pass that covers the whole country, go for Greyhound Pioneer's All Australian Pass for A\$2,403 (US\$1,561); it's valid for a year.

The **Aussie Kilometre Pass** allows unlimited stops in any direction within the mileage you buy. Passes are available in increments of 1,000km (620 miles). Prices range from A\$321 (US\$209) for 2,000km (1,240 miles)—enough to get you from Cairns to Brisbane—to A\$2,258 (US\$1,467) for a whopping 20,000km (12,400 miles).

BY CAR

Australia's roads sometimes leave a bit to be desired. The taxes of 19 million people get spread pretty thin when it comes to maintaining roads across a continent. Most highways are two-lane affairs with the occasional rut and pothole, often no outside line markings, and sometimes no shoulders to speak of.

When you are poring over the map of Australia, remember that what looks like a road may be an unsealed (unpaved) track suitable for 4WD vehicles only. Many roads in the Top End are passable only in the Dry Season (about Apr–Nov). If you plan long-distance driving, get a road map (see below for sources) that marks paved and unpaved roads.

You cannot drive across the middle of the country (except along the north-south Stuart Hwy. linking Adelaide and Darwin) because most of it is desert. In most places you must travel around the edge on Highway 1. The map inside the back cover of this book marks the major highways.

You can use your current driver's license or an international driver's permit in every state of Australia. By law you must carry your license with you when driving. The minimum driving age is 16 or 17, depending on which state you visit, but some car-rental

companies require you to be 21, or sometimes 26, if you want to rent a 4WD.

CAR RENTALS

Think twice about renting a car in tourist hot spots such as Cairns. In these areas most tour operators pick you up and drop you back at your hotel door, so having a car may not be worth the expense.

The "big four" car-rental companies all have networks across Australia:

- **Avis** (☎ **13 63 33** in Australia, www.avis.com.au; 800/230-4898 in the U.S., www.avis.com; 800/272-5871 in Canada; 0870/606-0100 in the U.K., www.avis.co.uk; 21/281 111 in Ireland; 0800/655-111 in New Zealand, www.avis.co.nz)
- **Budget** (☎ **1300/362 848** in Australia, www.budget.com.au; 800/527-0700 in the U.S., www.budget.com; 800/268-8900 in Canada, www.budget.ca; 0035/9032-7711 in the U.K., www.budget-uk.com; 903/27711 in Ireland, www.budget-ireland.com; 0800/652 227 in New Zealand, www.budget.co.nz)
- **Hertz** (☎ **13 30 39** in Australia, www.hertz.com.au; 800/654-3131 in the U.S., www.hertz.com; 800/263-0600 in English, 800/263-0678 in French in Canada, or 416/620-9620 in Toronto, www.hertz.ca; 020/7026-0077 in the U.K., www.hertz.co.uk; 1/676 7476 in Ireland; 0800/654 321 in New Zealand)
- **Thrifty** (☎ **1300/367 227** in Australia, www.thrifty.com.au; 800/THRIFTY [847-4389] in the U.S. and Canada, www.thrifty.com; 01494/751600 in the U.K., www.thrifty.co.uk; 1800/51 5800 in Ireland, www.thrifty.ie; 0800/73 7070 in New Zealand, www.thrifty.co.nz)

Two other large companies with offices around Australia are:

- **Europcar** (☎ **1300/13 13 90** in Australia, or 03/9330 6160, www.deltaeuropcar.com.au; 877/940-6900 in the U.S. and Canada; 11324/22233 in the U.K., www.europcar.co.uk; 1/614 2800 in Ireland, www.europcar.ie; 1800/556 680 in New Zealand). It has the third largest fleet in Australia.
- **Red Spot Car Rentals** (☎ **1300/668 810** in Australia, or 02/9317

5771; www.redspotrentals.com.au). It has depots in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Cairns, and about 25 other outlets, mainly in New South Wales and Victoria.

SAMPLE DRIVING DISTANCES & TIMES

Here are a few sample road distances between popular points and the minimum time it takes to drive between them.

Route	Distance	Approx. Driving Time
Cairns–Sydney	2,495km (1,547 miles)	29 hr. (allow 4–5 days)
Sydney–Melbourne	873km (541 miles)	15 hr. (allow 1–2 days)
Sydney–Perth	4,131km (2,561 miles)	51 hr. (allow 6–7 days)
Adelaide–Darwin	3,024km (1,875 miles)	31 hr. (allow 4–6 days)
Perth–Darwin	4,163km (2,581 miles)	49 hr. (allow 6–8 days)

A small sedan for zipping around a city or touring a wine region will cost anything from about A\$45 to A\$80 (US\$29–US\$52) a day. A feistier vehicle with enough grunt to get you from state to state will cost around A\$70 to A\$100 (US\$46–US\$65) a day. Rentals of a week or longer usually reduce by A\$5 (US\$3.25) a day or so.

A regular car will get you to most places in this book, but because the country has a high number of unpaved roads, it can make sense to rent a 4WD vehicle. All of the major car-rental companies rent them. They are more expensive than a regular car, but you can get them for as little as A\$75 (US\$49) per day if you shop around; rentals of a week or longer are cheapest.

The rates quoted here are only a guide. Many smaller local companies, and the big guys, too, do competitive specials, especially in tourist areas with distinct off seasons. Advance purchase rates, usually 7 to 21 days, can offer significant savings.

INSURANCE Insurance for loss of, or damage to, the car, and third-party

property insurance are usually included, but read the agreement carefully, because the fine print contains information the front-desk staff may not tell you. For example, damage to the car body may be covered, but not damage to the windshield or tires, or damage caused by water or driving too close to a bushfire.

The deductible, known as “excess” in Australia, on insurance may be as high as A\$2,000 (US\$1,300) for regular cars and up to A\$5,500 (US\$3,575) on four-wheel-drives and campervans. You can reduce it, or avoid it altogether, by paying a premium of between about A\$17 to A\$47 (US\$11–US\$31) per day on a car or 4WD, and around A\$25 to A\$47 (US\$16–US\$31) per day on a campervan. The amount of the excess reduction premium depends on the vehicle type and the extent of reduction you choose. Your rental company may bundle personal accident insurance and baggage insurance into this premium. And again, check the conditions; some excess reduction payments do not reduce excesses on single-vehicle accidents, for example.

Tips Insurance Alert

Damage to a rental car caused by an animal (hitting a kangaroo, for instance) is not covered by car-rental companies' insurance policies, nor is driving on an unpaved road—and Australia has a lot of those.

ONE-WAY RENTALS Australia's distances often make one-way rentals a necessity, for which car-rental companies can charge a hefty penalty amounting to hundreds of dollars. A one-way fee usually applies to campervan renters, too—usually around A\$200 to A\$220 (US\$130–US\$143), more for remote Outback areas such as Broome and Alice Springs. And there's a 7-day rental minimum.

CAMPERVANS Campervans (as Aussies call motor homes) are popular in Australia. Generally smaller than the RVs in the United States, they come in two-, three-, four-, or six-berth versions, and usually have everything you need, such as a small refrigerator/freezer (icebox in the smaller versions), microwave, gas stove, cooking and cleaning utensils, linens, and touring information including maps and campground guides. All have showers and toilets, except some two-berthers. Most have air-conditioned driver's cabins, but not all have air-conditioned living quarters, a necessity in most parts of the country November through March. Four-wheel-drive campers are available, but tend to be small and some lack hot water, toilet, shower, and air-conditioning. The minimum driver age for campervans is usually 21.

Australia's biggest national camper-rental companies are **Apollo Motorhome Holidays** (☎ 1800/777 779 in Australia, or 07/3260 5466; www.apollocamper.com), **Britz Campervan Rentals** (☎ 1800/331 454 in Australia, or 03/8379 8890; www.britz.com), **Hertz Campervans**

(☎ 1800/335 888 in Australia, or 08/8271 8281; www.hertzcampervans.com.au), and **Maui** (☎ 1300/363 800 in Australia, or 03/8379 8891; www.maui-rentals.com).

Most local officials take a dim view of “free camping,” the practice of pulling over by the roadside to camp for the night. Instead, you will likely have to stay in a campground.

For a two-berth campervan with shower and toilet, Britz's 2003/2004 rates were between A\$114 and A\$230 (US\$74–US\$150) per day, over a 5- to 20-day rental period. For a four-berth with shower and toilet over the same period, you are looking at between A\$211 and A\$297 (US\$137–US\$193) per day. Rates vary with the seasons. May and June are the slowest months; December and January are the busiest. It's sometimes possible to get better rates by booking in your home country before departure. Renting for longer than 3 weeks knocks around A\$15 (US\$9.75) off the daily rate. Most companies will demand a minimum 4- or 5-day rental. Give the company your itinerary before booking, because some routes, such as the ferry across to Tasmania, or in a 4WD campervan's case, the Gibb River Road in the Kimberley, may need the company's permission. Apollo, Britz, and Hertz do not permit you to drive their two-wheel-drive campervans on unpaved roads; Maui allows two-wheel-drive campers to travel on unsealed access roads to recognized campgrounds.

ON THE ROAD

GAS The price of petrol (gasoline) will elicit a cry of dismay from Americans and a whoop of delight from Brits.

Prices go up and down, but roughly, you're looking at around A90¢ a liter (or US\$2.20 per U.S. gal.) for unleaded petrol in Sydney, and A\$1.20 a liter (or US\$2.45 per U.S. gal.), or more, in the Outback. One U.S. gallon equals 3.78 liters. Most rental cars take unleaded gas, and campervans run on diesel, which costs around A90¢ to A\$1.20 a liter (US\$2.20–US\$2.45 per U.S. gal.), depending on your location.

DRIVING RULES Australians drive on the left, which means you give way to the right. Left turns on a red light are not permitted unless a sign says so.

Roundabouts (traffic circles) are common at intersections; approach these slowly enough to stop if you have to, and give way to all traffic on the roundabout. Flash your indicator as you leave the roundabout (even if you're going straight, as technically that's a left turn).

The only strange driving rule is Melbourne's requirement that drivers turn right from the left lane at certain intersections in the city center. This allows the city's trams to carry on uninterrupted in the right lane. Pull into the left lane opposite the street you are turning into, and make the turn when the traffic light in the street you are turning into becomes green. These intersections are signposted.

The maximum permitted blood alcohol level when driving is 0.05, which equals approximately two 200 milliliter (6.6 fl. oz.) drinks in the first hour for men, one for women, and one drink per hour for both sexes after that. The police set up random breath-testing units (RBTs) in cunningly disguised and unlikely places all the time, so it is easy to get caught. You will face a court appearance if you do.

The speed limit is 50kmph (31 mph) or 60kmph (37 mph) in urban areas and 100kmph (62 mph) or 110kmph (68 mph) in most country

areas. Speed-limit signs are black numbers circled in red on a white background.

Drivers and passengers, including taxi passengers, must wear a seatbelt at all times when the vehicle is moving forward, if a belt is fitted in the car. Young children are required to sit in the rear seat in a child-safety seat or harness; car-rental companies will rent these to you, but be sure to book them. Tell the taxi company you have a child when you book a cab so that they can send a car with the right restraints.

MAPS The maps published by the state automobile clubs listed below in "Auto Clubs" will likely be free if you are a member of an affiliated auto club in your home country. None will mail them to you overseas; pick them up on your arrival. Remember to bring your auto-club membership card to qualify for discounts or free maps.

Two of the biggest map publishers in Australia are **HEMA Maps** (☎ 07/3340 0000; www.hemamaps.com.au) and **Universal Press** (☎ 1800/021 987 in Australia, or 02/9857 3700; www.universalpress-online.com). Both publish an extensive range of national, state, regional, and city maps. HEMA has a strong list of regional maps ("Gold Coast and Region" and "The Red Centre" are just a couple), while Universal produces a complete range of street directories by city, region, or state under the "UBD" and "Gregory's" labels. HEMA produces 4WD and motorbike road atlases and many regional 4WD maps—good if you plan to go off the trails—an atlas of Australia's national parks, and maps to Kakadu and Lamington national parks.

Both companies produce a range of national road atlases. Universal's *UBD Motoring Atlas of Australia* helpfully publishes street maps of small regional towns in each state. HEMA publishes a national road atlas on CD. As Australia is such as big country, a national atlas is

good for overall trip planning and long-distance or interstate journeys, but sometimes of limited use on day trips or short journeys because it is not detailed enough. Then, you may find it worthwhile to purchase a map to the local area—say, a “Cairns to Cooktown” map if you wanted to explore Cairns, Kuranda, Port Douglas, and other towns within an hour or two’s drive of Cairns.

HEMA and Universal Press maps are distributed in the United States by **Map Link** (☎ 800/962-1394; www.maplink.com). HEMA maps are also distributed in Canada, by **ITMB** (International Travel Maps and Books: ☎ 604/879-3621; www.itmb.com) and in the U.K. by Estate Publications (☎ 01580/764225; www.estate-publications.co.uk).

In Australia, auto clubs (see below), bigger newsagents, and bookstores are your best source of maps. Petrol stations stock a limited range relating to the route they are on, and visitor information centers sometimes stock a range of maps to the area and the whole state.

ROAD SIGNS Australians navigate by road name, not road number. The easiest way to get where you’re going is to familiarize yourself with the major towns along your route and follow the signs toward them.

AUTO CLUBS Every state and territory in Australia has its own auto club. Your auto association back home probably has a reciprocal agreement with Australian clubs, which may entitle you to free maps, accommodations guides, and emergency roadside assistance. Don’t forget to bring your membership card.

Even if you’re not a member, the clubs are a good source of advice on local traffic regulations, touring advice, road conditions, traveling in remote areas, and any other motoring

questions you may have. They sell maps, accommodations guides, and camping guides to non-members at reasonable prices. You can drop into numerous regional offices as well as the head office locations listed here:

- **New South Wales & ACT: National Roads and Motorists’ Association (NRMA)**, 74–76 King St. (at George St.), Sydney, NSW 2000 (☎ 13 21 32 in New South Wales, or 02/9848 5201).
- **Victoria: Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV)**, 550 Princes Hwy., Noble Park, VIC 3174 (☎ 13 19 55 in Australia, or 03/9790 2211). A more convenient city office is located at 422 Little Collins St., Melbourne 3000.
- **Queensland: Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ)**, 300 St. Pauls Terrace, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006 (☎ 13 19 05 in Australia, or 07/3872 8456). A more convenient city office is in the General Post Office building at 261 Queen St., Brisbane 4000 (☎ 07/3872 8465).
- **Western Australia: Royal Automobile Club of WA (RAC)**, 228 Adelaide Terrace, Perth, WA 6000 (☎ 13 17 03).
- **South Australia: Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA)**, 41 Hindmarsh Sq., Adelaide, SA 5000 (☎ 08/8202 4600).
- **Northern Territory: Automobile Association of the Northern Territory (AANT)**, 79–81 Smith St., Darwin, NT 0800 (☎ 08/8981 3837).
- **Tasmania: Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania (RACT)**, corner of Murray and Patrick streets, Hobart, TAS 7000 (☎ 13 27 22 in Tasmania, or 03/6232 6300).

All these clubs can be accessed on www.aaa.asn.au.

ROAD CONDITIONS & SAFETY

FATIGUE Fatigue is a killer on Australia's roads. The rule is to take a 20-minute break every 2 hours, even if you don't feel tired. In some states, "driver reviver" stations on major roads are set up during holidays. They serve free tea, coffee, and biscuits, and are often at roadside picnic areas with restrooms.

KANGAROOS & OTHER WILD-LIFE

It's a sad fact, but Skippy is a road hazard. Avoid driving between dusk and dawn in country areas, because this is when 'roos are most active. If you hit one, always stop and check its pouch for live joeys (baby kangaroos), because females usually have one in the pouch. Wrap the joey tightly in a towel or old sweater, don't feed or over-handle it, and take it to a vet in the nearest town or call one of the following wildlife care groups: **Wildlife Information & Rescue Service (WIRES)** in New South Wales (☎ 02/8977 3333); **Wildlife Victoria** (☎ 0500/540 000 or 03/9663 9211); **Wildlife Rescue** in Queensland (☎ 0418 792 598); **RSPCA Wildlife** in the ACT (☎ 02/6287 8100 or 04/1349 5031); **FAWNA Inc.** in Western Australia (☎ 08/9753 2118); **Wildlife Rescue** in the Northern Territory (☎ 08/8999 4536); **Fauna Rescue of S.A.** (☎ 08/8289 0896) in South Australia; or **Wildcare** in Tasmania (☎ 03/6233 6556). Most vets will treat native wildlife for free.

Some highways run through unfenced stations (ranches), where sheep and cattle pose a threat. Cattle like to rest on the warm bitumen road at night, so put your lights on high to spot them. If an animal does loom up, slow down but never swerve or you may roll, and, if you have to, hit it. Tell station owners within 24 hours if you have hit their livestock.

Car-rental companies will not insure for animal damage to the car, which

should give you an inkling of how common an occurrence this is.

ROAD TRAINS Road trains consist of as many as three big truck carriages linked together to make a "train" up to 54m (177 ft.) long. If you're in front of one, give them plenty of warning when you brake, because they need a lot of distance to slow down. Allow at least 1 clear kilometer (over half a mile) before you pass one, but don't expect the driver to make it easy—"truckies" are notorious for their lack of concern for other motorists.

UNPAVED ROADS Many country roads are unsealed (unpaved). They are usually bone dry, which makes them more slippery than they look, so travel at a moderate speed—35kmph (22 mph) is not too cautious and anything over 60kmph (37 mph) is dangerous. Don't over-correct if you veer to one side. Keep well behind any vehicles because the dust they throw up can block your vision.

FLOODS Floods are common in the Top End and north of Cairns November or December through March or April (the Wet Season). Never cross a flooded road unless you are sure of its depth. Crocodiles may be in the water, so do not wade in to test it! Fast-flowing water is dangerous, even if shallow. When in doubt, stay where you are and wait for the water to drop, because most flash floods subside within 24 hours. Check road conditions ahead at least once a day in the Wet Season.

RUNNING OUT OF GAS Petrol stations (also called "roadhouses" in rural areas) can be few and far between in the Outback, so fill up at every opportunity.

WHAT IF YOUR VEHICLE BREAKS DOWN?

If you break down or get lost, **NEVER** leave your vehicle. Many a motorist, often an Aussie who should

know better, has died wandering off on a crazy quest for help or water, knowing full well that neither is to be found for maybe hundreds of miles. Most people who get lost do so in Outback spots; if that happens, conserve your body moisture by doing as little as possible and staying in the shade of your car. Put out distress signals in patterns of three—three yells, three columns of smoke, and so on. The traditional Outback call for help is “coo-ee,” with the accent on the “ee” and yodeled in a high pitch; the sound travels a long way.

The state auto clubs listed above provide free breakdown emergency assistance to members of many affiliated automobile associations around the world.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

The emergency breakdown assistance telephone number for every Australian auto club is ☎ 13 11 11 from anywhere in Australia. It is billed as a local call. If you are not a member of an auto club at home that has a reciprocal agreement with the Australian clubs, you'll have to join the Australian club on the spot before they will tow/repair your car. This usually costs only around A\$80 (US\$52), not a big price to pay

when you're stranded (although in the Outback, the charge may be considerably higher). Most car-rental companies also have emergency assistance numbers.

TIPS FOR FOUR-WHEEL DRIVERS

Always keep to the 4WD track as going off-road causes soil erosion, a significant environmental problem in Australia. Leave gates as you found them. Obtain permission from the owners before venturing onto private station (ranch) roads. On an extended trip or in remote areas, carry 5 liters (1.3 gal.) of drinking water per person per day (dehydration occurs fast in the Australian heat); enough food to last 3 or 4 days more than you think you will need; a first-aid kit; spare fuel; a jack and two spare tires; spare fan belts, radiator hoses, and air-conditioner hoses; a tow rope; and a good map that marks all gas stations. In seriously remote areas outside the scope of this book, carry a high-frequency and CB radio. (A cellphone may not work in the Outback.) Advise a friend, your hotel manager, the local tourist bureau, or a police station of your route and your expected time of return or arrival at your destination.

18 Tips on Accommodations

Accommodation properties in Australia are given a star rating by AAA Tourism, which has been awarding ratings since the 1950s. This independent assessment is based on facilities, amenities, maintenance, and cleanliness, and awards range between one and five stars. Stars are featured in AAA Tourism guides, and recent research shows 70% of travelers use the star ratings when choosing their accommodations (these star ratings are noted below using asterisks). The rating scheme covers over 18,000 accommodations throughout every state and territory.

* Offers a basic standard of accommodations, simply furnished, with a resident manager.

** Similar standard to one star but offers more comfort and value with additional features. These are well-maintained properties offering an average standard of accommodations with average furnishings, bedding, and floor coverings.

*** Well-appointed, with a comfortable standard of accommodations, above average furnishings and floor coverings.

**** Exceptionally well-appointed establishments with high quality

furnishings, a high degree of comfort, high standard of presentation, and guest services.

***** International standard establishments offering superior appointments, furnishings, and decor, with an extensive range of first-class guest services. Reception, room service, and housekeeping available 18 hours a day with restaurant/bistro facilities available 7 nights a week. A number and variety of room styles and/or suites are available. Choice of dining facilities, 24-hour room service, housekeeping, and valet parking. Porter and concierge service are available as well as a dedicated business center and conference facilities.

Note: All accommodations listed in this book have private bathrooms unless otherwise noted.

HOTELS It's a rare hotel room that does not have reverse-cycle air-conditioning for heating and cooling, a telephone, a color TV, a clock radio, a small refrigerator if not a minibar, an iron and ironing board, and self-serve tea and coffee. Private bathrooms are standard, although they often have only a shower, not a tub. The largest hotel group in Australia is the French chain Accor, which has more than 100 properties (that's about 15,000 rooms) under its Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure and All Seasons, Ibis, and Formule 1 lines.

Many other international chains, such as Marriott, Sheraton, and Hilton, have properties in Australia.

SERVICED APARTMENTS Serviced apartments are favored by many Aussie families and business travelers. You get a fully furnished apartment with one, two, or three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen or kitchenette, a laundry, and often two bathrooms—in other words, all the facilities of a hotel suite and more, often for less than the cost of a four-star hotel room. A nice

two-bedroom apartment will usually cost anywhere between A\$165 and A\$255 (US\$107–US\$166) a night, depending on your location and the season. Australia's apartment inventory is enormous and ranges from clean and comfortable, if a little dated, to luxurious. Most apartments can be rented for 1 night, especially in cities, but in popular vacation spots, some proprietors will insist on a minimum 3-night stay, or even a week in high season.

Medina Serviced Apartments (☎ 1300/300 232 in Australia, or 02/9356 1000; www.medinaapartments.com.au) has a chain of midrange to upscale properties in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide, and—from mid-2004—Perth. Australia's biggest apartment chain is the **Quest Serviced Apartments** (☎ 1800/334 033 in Australia, or 03/9645 2566; 0800/944 400 in New Zealand; www.questapartments.com.au). It has four brands: the upscale Quest Establishments, the midrange Quest Inns, Quest Lodgings for longer stays, and Quest Resorts, in every state and territory except the Northern Territory.

MOTELS & MOTOR INNS Australia's plentiful motels are neat and clean, if often a little dated. You can count on them to provide air-conditioning, a telephone, a color TV, a clock radio, a minifridge or minibar, and self-serve tea and coffee. Most have only showers, not bathtubs. Some have restaurants attached, and many have swimming pools. Motor inns offer a greater range of facilities and a generally higher standard of rooms than motels. Rates average A\$70 to A\$110 (US\$46–US\$72) double.

BED-&-BREAKFAST INNS B&Bs are cheap and plentiful in Australia. It is easy to find charming rooms for around A\$80 (US\$52) for a double. Bathroom facilities are often shared, although more properties now offer private, if not always en suite, bathrooms.

Travel agents rarely list B&Bs because the establishments are not big enough to pay commission, so they can be hard to find. A good source is *The Australian Bed & Breakfast Book* (published by Moonshine Press; © 02/9985 8500), which lists more than 600 B&Bs across Australia. Although the B&Bs pay to be in the book, they have to meet standards required by the editors. The entire book is posted on the Web at www.bbbook.com.au. In Australia, it's widely available in bookshops and newsagents; you can also order it on www.amazon.com or contact Moonshine Press, which retails it for A\$17 (US\$11) plus A\$10 (US\$6.50) for overseas postage.

Orangewood, a Northern Territory B&B, provides an index of Australian B&B directories at this address: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~orangewood/ordir.htm>.

PUBS Aussie pubs are really made for drinking, not spending the night, but some offer rooms upstairs, usually with shared bathroom facilities. Because most pubs are decades old, the rooms may be either old-fashioned or just plain old. Pub accommodations are dying out but are still common in the country. Australians are rowdy drinkers, so sleeping over the bar can be hellishly noisy; but the saving grace is incredibly low rates. Most charge per person, not per room, and you will rarely pay more than A\$50 (US\$33) per person a night.

HOUSE SWAPS Many visitors to Australia have happily swapped homes with locals using the Internet to source their “perfect match.” There is a plethora of sites that you can use to make your search. Two that list up to 100 Australian homes each are www.holi-swaps.com/swapsau.htm and www.homebase-hols.com. You can browse the listings for free, but it costs around US\$37 to view the contact details, or list your home.

MEET THE AUSSIES

If you want to see an Australian Rules football game with a knowledgeable local in Melbourne or swim at Bondi Beach with a Sydneysider, contact **Friends Overseas—Australia** (© 718/261 0534; www.friendsoverseas.org). This program is designed to match visitors with friendly Aussies of like age and interests, so you can spend time with them. The membership fee is US\$25.

FARMSTAYS The Aussie answer to the dude ranch is a farmstay. Australian farmstays are rarely as well set up for tourists as the ranch visited by Billy Crystal's character in *City Slickers*. Most are farms first, tourist operations second, so you may have to find your own fun and know how to take care of yourself, at least to a degree. Accommodations on farms can be anything from a basic bunkhouse (ask if it's air-conditioned, because most farms are in very hot areas) to rustically luxurious digs. Do some research on your farm—a lot of activities are seasonal, some farmers will not allow you to get involved in dangerous work, not all will offer horseback riding, and “farm” means different things in different parts of Australia. If you like green fields and dairy cows, Victoria may be the place for you. If checking fences on a dusty 500,000-hectare (1.2-million acres) Outback station (ranch) sounds wildly romantic, head to Western Australia or the Northern Territory.

Australian Farm & Country Tourism (www.farmstaysaustralia.com) is a co-operative marketing organization for farmstay properties. It has no office, so your best contact is Farm & Country Tourism Victoria (© 1300/132 358 or 03/9614 0892; www.factv.com) which dispenses free brochures, one each for Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia, which detail the

accommodations, activities, and rates at a range of properties. Rates vary, but you will find many charging between A\$100 and A\$140 (US\$65–\$91) for a double, which sometimes includes breakfast. Meals are often available as an optional extra.

YOUTH HOSTELS & BACKPACKER LODGES Australia has oodles of backpacker hostels. Some are little more than grim dormitories (without air-conditioning); others are spiffy new complexes with cheerily painted rooms, a pool, tour desk, restaurant and bar, communal kitchens, and Internet access. If you like the idea of traveling cheap, but aren't wild about bunking with strangers, opt for one of the many that offer private double rooms or family rooms. Some hostels will impose a maximum stay of 3 nights; others are happy to accommodate you for a week or more. Blankets and pillows are provided, but you may need to rent bed linens for an extra \$2 or \$3 per stay; bring your own towel. Look for hostels that have lockers, as the backpacker circuit has more than its fair share of petty thieves. Hostels typically charge under A\$20 (US\$13) per dorm bed per night, and A\$40 to A\$50 (US\$26–US\$33) for a twin/double private room. Private rooms are in demand, so book ahead.

The **Australian Youth Hostels Association (YHA)**, 422 Kent St., Sydney, NSW 2000 (☎ 02/9261 1111; fax 02/9261 1969; www.yha.org.au) is the Australian arm of Hostelling International, and has more than 140 hostels in Australia. People of any age can stay at them. Quality and facilities vary, but YHA hostels are clean, and have communal kitchens and 24-hour access. You don't have to join the association to stay at a hostel, but members receive discounted rates and are entitled to myriad other discounts—on car rental, bus travel, and tours, for example—that can more the cover the membership fee.

In the United States, contact **Hostelling International/American Youth Hostels**, 802 Colesville Rd., Suite 600, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (☎ 301/495-1240; www.hihostels.com) or join at any hostel in the United States. In Canada, contact **Hostelling International-Canada**, 205 Catherine St., Suite 400, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1C3 (☎ 613/237-7884; www.hihostels.ca). In the UK, contact **Youth Hostels Association (England and Wales)**, Trevelyan House, Dimple Road, Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 3YH (☎ 1629/592600; www.yha.org.uk). In Scotland, contact the **Scottish Youth Hostels Association**, 7 Glebe Crescent, Stirling FK8 2JA (☎ 1786/891 400; www.syha.org.uk). In Ireland, contact **Hostelling International-Northern Ireland**, 22 Donegall Rd., Belfast BT12 5JN (☎ 2890/315 435; www.hini.org.uk), or the **Irish Youth Hostels Association**, 61 Mountjoy St., Dublin 7 (☎ 3531/830 4555; www.irelandyha.org). All of these offices are accessible at www.hihostels.com. **Note:** YHA properties are nonsmoking.

YWCA has comfortable budget hotels in Sydney (☎ 1800/994 994 in Australia), Melbourne (☎ 1800/468 359 in Australia) and Darwin (☎ 08/8981 8644) with private rooms, dorms, and family rooms—a cut above the average backpacker digs. Rates range from A\$35 (US\$23) for a dorm bed or A\$80 to A\$140 (US\$52–US\$91) for a double.

CAMPING & CARAVAN PARKS

Australians camp year-round, even in remote desert outposts and in winter. The only places you might want to avoid are Tasmania and the mountainous areas of New South Wales and Victoria in winter, when it's a bit nippy, and the Top End in the summer Wet Season.

Campsites are attached to nearly all the country's numerous caravan (camper) parks, and many lodges offer

Saving on Your Hotel Room

The **rack rate** is the maximum rate that a hotel charges for a room. Hardly anybody pays this price, however. To lower the cost of your room:

- **Ask about special rates or other discounts.** Always ask whether a room less expensive than the first one quoted is available, or whether any special rates apply to you. You may qualify for corporate, student, military, senior, or other discounts. Mention membership in AAA, AARP, frequent-flier programs, or trade unions, which may entitle you to special deals as well. Find out the hotel policy on children—do kids stay free in the room or is there a special rate?
- **Dial direct.** When booking a room in a chain hotel, you'll often get a better deal by calling the individual hotel's reservation desk than at the chain's main number.
- **Book online.** Many hotels offer Internet-only discounts, or supply rooms to Priceline, Hotwire, or Expedia at rates much lower than the ones you can get through the hotel itself.
- **Remember the law of supply and demand.** Resort hotels are most crowded and therefore most expensive on weekends, so discounts are usually available for midweek stays. Business hotels in downtown locations are busiest during the week, so you can expect big discounts over the weekend. Many hotels have high-season and low-season prices, and booking the day after high season ends can mean big discounts.
- **Look into group or long-stay discounts.** If you come as part of a large group, you should be able to negotiate a bargain rate, since the

associated campgrounds. Camping in national parks does entail some restrictions: You can camp only at designated campsites; sometimes bookings may be required 24 hours in advance. Open fires are often banned, so you will need to rely on a gas barbecue or, if none is

supplied, your own camping stove. Expect to pay about A\$5 to A\$8 (US\$3.25–US\$5.20) per adult in a tent, around A\$10 (US\$6.50) for a powered campsite, and about half price for kids. Definitely book ahead during school vacations and peak season.

19 Tips on Dining

One of the richest gifts that Australia's multicultural society has brought is the cuisine. In the last couple of decades, both restaurants and home tables have undergone massive change as traditional English-style fare of meat-and-three-veggies has given way to a blend of flavors and styles known as "Mod Oz." Asian, European, and Middle Eastern flavors are here to stay, and in some places you'll find a touch

of "bush tucker," based on traditional Aboriginal foods.

Moreover, you can't dismiss Australia's great wines. The first grape vines arrived with the First Fleet in 1788, and today more than 550 major companies and small winemakers produce wine commercially. Australian vintages consistently beat competitors from around the world in major international shows.

hotel can then guarantee occupancy in a number of rooms. Likewise, if you're planning a long stay (at least 5 days), you might qualify for a discount. As a general rule, expect 1 night free after a 7-night stay.

- **Avoid excess charges and hidden costs.** When you book a room, ask whether the hotel charges for parking. Use your own cellphone, pay phones, or prepaid phone cards instead of dialing direct from hotel phones, which usually have exorbitant rates. And don't be tempted by the room's minibar offerings: Most hotels charge through the nose for water, soda, and snacks. Finally, ask about local taxes and service charges, which can increase the cost of a room by 15% or more. If a hotel insists upon tacking on a surprise "energy surcharge" that wasn't mentioned at check-in or a "resort fee" for amenities you didn't use, you can often make a case for getting it removed.
- Consider the pros and cons of **all-inclusive** resorts and hotels. The term "all-inclusive" means different things at different hotels. Many all-inclusive hotels will include 3 meals daily, sports equipment, spa entry, and other amenities; others may include all or most drinks. In general, you'll save money going the "all-inclusive" way—as long as you use the facilities provided. The down side is that your choices are limited, and you're stuck eating and playing in one place for the duration of your vacation.
- **Book an efficiency.** A room with a kitchenette allows you to shop for groceries and cook your own meals. This is a big money saver, especially for families on long stays.

Australian wines are generally named after the grape varieties from which they are made. Of the white wines, both the fruity chardonnay and Riesling varieties; the "herbaceous," or "grassy" sauvignon blanc; and the dry semillon are favorites. Of the reds, the dry cabernet sauvignon, the merlot, the burgundy-type pinot noir, and the big and bold shiraz come out tops.

If your style runs more to the "amber nectar"—and there's nothing better than a cold beer on a hot day—you'll need to get the lingo right. A can of beer is a "tinnie," a small bottle is a "stubby," and a tall or large bottle is a "tallie." In the hotter climes, you may be offered a polystyrene container in which to place your beer to keep it cool.

In New South Wales, beer is served by the glass in a "schooner" and a

smaller "midi"—though in a few places it's also sold in British measurements, by pints and half pints. In Victoria you should ask for a "pot," or the less copious "glass." In South Australia a "schooner" is the size of a NSW "midi," and in Western Australia a "midi" is the same size as a New South Wales midi, but a glass about half its size is called a "pony." Confused? Just use your hands like a local to show whether you want a small glass or a larger one. Your accent will alert bartenders they are dealing with the uninitiated.

Australian beers vary considerably in quality, and there's no accounting for tastes. Among the most popular are Victoria Bitter (known as "VB"), XXXX (pronounced "four ex"), Fosters, and various brews produced by the Tooheys company. All are popular

Fun Fact **Witchetty Grubs, Lilli-Pillies & Other Good Eats**

In the past decade or so, Europeans have woken up to the variety and tastes of “bush tucker,” as native Aussie food is tagged. Now it’s all the rage in the most fashionable restaurants where wattle-seed, lemon myrtle, or some other native taste has a place in one or two dishes on the menu. Below is a list of those foods you may encounter in trendy restaurants:

BUSH TUCKER	EXPLANATION
Bunya nut	Crunchy nut of the bunya pine, about the size of macadamias.
Bush tomato	Dry, small darkish fruit more like raisins in look and taste.
Cranberry (native)	Small berry that tastes a bit like an apple.
Illawarra plums	Dark berry with a rich, strong, tangy taste.
Kakadu plum	Wonderfully sharp tangy green fruit that boasts the highest recorded Vitamin C level of any food.
Kangaroo	A red meat with a strong gamey flavor. Tender when correctly prepared, tough when not. Excellent smoked.
Lemon aspen	Citrusy, light yellow fruit with a sharp tangy flavor.
Lemon myrtle	Gum leaves with a fresh lemony tang; often used to flavor white meat.
Lilli-pillies	Delicious juicy, sweet pink berry; also called a riberry.
Macadamia nut	Sweet white nut. Macadamias come from Australia, not Hawaii as most of us think.
Quandong	A tart, tangy native peach.
Rosella	Spiky red petals of a flower with a rich berry flavor; traditionally used by Europeans to make rosella jam.
Wattle-seed	Roasted ground acacia seeds that taste a little like bitter coffee; commonly used by Europeans in pasta or desserts.
Wild lime	Smaller and more sour than regular lime; good in salads.

One ingredient you will *not* see on menus is **witchetty grubs**; most people are too squeamish to eat these fat, slimy white critters. They live in the soil or in dead tree trunks and are a common protein source for Aborigines. You eat them alive, not cooked. If you are offered one in the Outback, either freak out (as most locals would do) or enjoy its pleasantly nutty taste as a reward for your bravery!

in cans, bottles, or on tap (draft). Cascade, a German-style beer that you will usually find only in a bottle, is

also popular. It’s light in color, strong in taste, and made from Tasmanian water straight off a mountain. If you

want to get plastered, try Coopers—it's rather cloudy, very strong, and usually causes a fierce hangover. Most Australian beers range from 4.8% to 5.2% alcohol.

Tipping is not widely expected in Australia, but it is usual to tip around 5% to 10% or round up to the nearest A\$10 (US\$6.50) for a substantial meal in a good restaurant.

20 Recommended Books & Films

Australian literature has come a long way since the days when the bush poets A. B. "Banjo" Patterson and Henry Lawson penned their odes to a way of life now largely lost. The best known of these is Patterson's epic *The Man from Snowy River* (Buccaneer Books, 1996), which hit the bestseller list in 1895 and was made into a film. Australia has a wealth of classics, many with the Outback at their heart.

Miles Franklin wrote *My Brilliant Career* (HarperCollins, 2001) in 1901, the story of a young woman faced with the dilemma of choosing between marriage and a career; Colleen McCullough's *Thorn Birds* (Avon, 1996) is a romantic epic about forbidden love between a Catholic priest and a young woman; *We of the Never Never* (Avon, 1984) by Mrs. Aeneas Gunn, tells the story of a young woman who leaves the comfort of her Melbourne home to live on a cattle station in the Northern Territory; and *Walkabout* (Sundance, 1984) by James V. Marshall explores the relationship between an Aborigine and two lost children in the bush. It was later made into a powerful film.

If you can find it, *The Long Farewell* by Don Charlwood tells first-hand diary accounts of long journeys from Europe to Australia in the last century.

A good historical account of the early days is Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance*, first published in 1966. Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*, is a best-selling non-fiction study of the country's early days. For a contemporary, if somewhat dark, take on the settlement and development of Sydney, delve into John Birmingham's *Leviathan*. From an Aboriginal perspective, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington tells the true story of three young girls from the "Stolen Generation" who ran away from a mission school to return to their families (it is also a 2002 movie).

Modern novelists include David Malouf, Elizabeth Jolley, Helen Garner, Sue Woolfe, and Peter Carey, whose *True History of the Kelly Gang*, a fictionalized autobiography of the outlaw Ned Kelly, won the Booker Prize in 2001. West Australian Tim Winton evokes his part of the continent in stunning prose, with his latest novel, *Dirt Music*, no exception.

Outsiders who have tackled Australia include Jan Morris and Bill Bryson. Morris's *Sydney* was published in 1992, and Bryson's *In a Sunburned Country*, while not such a favorite with Australians, may appeal to Americans.

FAST FACTS: Australia

American Express For all travel-related customer inquiries regarding any American Express service, including reporting a lost card, call ☎ **1800/230 100**. To report lost or stolen traveler's checks, there is a separate line (☎ **1800/251 902**).

Area Codes See "Telephones" later in this section.

ATM Networks See "Money" earlier in this chapter.

Business Hours Banks open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm, 5pm on Friday. General business hours are Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm. Shopping hours are usually from 8:30am to 5:30pm weekdays and 9am to 4 or 5pm on Saturday. Many shops close on Sundays, although major department stores and shops in tourist precincts are open 7 days.

Car Rentals See “Getting Around Australia” earlier in this chapter.

Currency See “Money” earlier in this chapter.

Dates Australians write their dates day/month/year; so March 6, 1958 is 06/03/58.

Driving Rules See “Getting Around Australia” earlier in this chapter.

Drugstores These are called “chemists” or “pharmacies.” Australian pharmacists are permitted to fill only prescriptions written by Australian doctors.

Electricity The current is 240 volts AC, 50 hertz. Sockets take two or three flat, not rounded, prongs. North Americans and Europeans will need to buy a converter before they leave home (don’t wait until you get to Australia, because Australian stores are only likely to stock converters for Aussie appliances to fit American and European outlets). Some large hotels have 110V outlets for electric shavers or dual voltage, and some will lend converters; but don’t count on it in smaller, less expensive hotels, motels, or B&Bs. Power does not start automatically when you plug in an appliance; you need to flick the switch located beside the socket to the “on” position.

Embassies & Consulates Most diplomatic posts are in Canberra: **British High Commission**, Commonwealth Avenue, Canberra, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6270 6666); **Embassy of Ireland**, 20 Arkana St., Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6273 3022); **High Commission of Canada**, Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6270 4000); **New Zealand High Commission**, Commonwealth Avenue, Canberra, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6270 4211); and the **United States Embassy**, 21 Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6214 5600). Embassies or consulates with posts in state capitals are listed in “Fast Facts” in the relevant state chapters.

Emergencies Dial ☎ 000 anywhere in Australia for police, ambulance, or the fire department. This is a free call from public and private telephones and needs no coins. The TTY emergency number is ☎ 106.

Holidays See “When to Go” earlier in this chapter.

Information See “Visitor Information” earlier in this chapter.

Internet Access Internet access is available just about everywhere, including some of the smallest Outback towns, which generally have at least one cybercafe and/or coin-operated machines, which are also available at larger airports. Major tourist towns such as Darwin and Cairns sometimes have whole streets full of cybercafes.

Liquor Laws Hours vary from pub to pub, but most are open daily from around 10am or noon, to 10pm or midnight. The minimum drinking age is 18. Random breath tests to catch drunk drivers are common, and drunk-driving laws are strictly enforced. Getting caught drunk behind the wheel

will mean a court appearance, not just a fine. The maximum permitted blood alcohol level is 0.05. Alcohol is sold only in liquor stores, or in the “bottle shops” attached to every pub, and in some states in supermarkets.

Lost & Found Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. **Visa’s** U.S. emergency number is ☎ 800/847-2911 or 410/581-9994. **American Express** cardholders and traveler’s check holders should call ☎ 800/221-7282. **MasterCard** holders should call ☎ 800/307-7309 or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the **toll-free number directory** at ☎ 800/555-1212. In Australia, call toll-free: **American Express** (☎ 1800/230 100), **MasterCard** (☎ 1800/120 113), and **Visa** (☎ 1800/125 440).

If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via **Western Union** (☎ 800/325-6000; www.westernunion.com). Identity theft or fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you’ve lost your driver’s license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are **Equifax** (☎ 800/766-0008; www.equifax.com), **Experian** (☎ 888/397-3742; www.experian.com), and **TransUnion** (☎ 800/680-7289; www.transunion.com). Finally, if you’ve lost all forms of photo I.D., call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you’ve filed.

Mail A postcard costs A\$1 (US65¢) to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, or New Zealand.

Maps Newsagents, auto clubs, and bookstores are your best sources for maps (see “Getting Around Australia” earlier in this chapter).

Newspapers & Magazines The national daily newspaper is *The Australian*, which publishes an expanded edition with color magazine on Saturdays. Most capital cities have their own daily papers, usually a tabloid and a broadsheet. The Australian current affairs magazine, *The Bulletin with Newsweek*, is published weekly, and there is an Australian edition of *Time*.

Passports **For Residents of the United States:** Whether you’re applying in person or by mail, you can download passport applications from the U.S. State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov>. For general information, call the **National Passport Agency** (☎ 202/647-0518). To find your regional passport office, either check the U.S. State Department website or call the **National Passport Information Center** (☎ 900/225-5674); the fee is 55¢ per minute for automated information and \$1.50 per minute for operator-assisted calls.

For Residents of Canada: Passport applications are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central **Passport Office**,

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (☎ 800/567-6868; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/passport).

For Residents of the United Kingdom: To pick up an application for a standard 10-year passport (5-yr passport for children under 16), visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency, or contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at ☎ 0870/521-0410 or search its website at www.ukpa.gov.uk.

For Residents of Ireland: You can apply for a 10-year passport at the **Passport Office**, Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (☎ 01/671-1633; www.irlgov.ie/iveagh). Those under age 18 and over 65 must apply for a €12 3-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall, Cork (☎ 021/272-525) or at most main post offices.

For Residents of New Zealand: You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the **Passports Office** at ☎ 0800/225-050 in New Zealand or 04/474-8100, or log on to www.passports.govt.nz.

Pets Leave 'em at home. You will be back home planning your next vacation before Fluffy clears quarantine in Oz.

Police Dial ☎ 000 anywhere in Australia. This is a free call from public and private telephones and requires no coins.

Safety Violent crime is uncommon, and the political situation is stable. Guns are strictly controlled. Purse snatchers are the same threat they are all over the world. See "Health & Safety" earlier in this chapter.

Smoking Smoking in most public areas, such as museums, cinemas, and theaters, is restricted or banned. Increasingly Oz restaurants are banning smoking (those in Western Australia and New South Wales do); though in many states, restaurants have smoking and nonsmoking sections. Pubs are a territorial victory for smokers; after a night in one, nonsmokers smell as if they smoked a whole pack (which they probably did, second-hand). Most hotels have smoking and nonsmoking rooms. Australian aircraft on all routes are completely nonsmoking, as are all airport buildings.

Taxes Australia applies a 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST) on most products and services. Your international airline tickets to Australia are not taxed, nor are domestic airline tickets for travel within Australia *if you bought them outside Australia*. If you buy more Australian airline tickets once you arrive in Australia, you will pay GST on them.

Through the **Tourist Refund Scheme** (TRS), Australians and international visitors can claim a refund of the GST (and of a 14.5% wine tax called Wine Equalisation Tax, or WET) paid on a purchase of more than A\$300 (US\$195) from a single outlet, within the last 30 days before you leave. More than one item may be included in that A\$300. For example, you can claim back the GST you paid on 10 T-shirts each worth A\$30 (US\$19.50), as long as they were bought from a single store. Do this as you leave by presenting your receipt or "tax invoice" to the Australian Customs Service's TRS booths, located beyond passport control in the International Terminal departure areas at most airports. If you buy several things on different days from one store, which together add up to A\$300 (US\$195) or more, you must ask the store to total all purchases on

one tax invoice (or receipt)—now there's a nice piece of bureaucracy to remember Australia by! Carry the items in your carry-on baggage, as you must show them to Customs. You can use the goods before you leave Australia and still claim the refund, but you cannot claim a refund on things you have consumed (film you shoot off in the camera, say, or food). You cannot claim a refund on alcohol other than wine. Allow an extra 15 minutes to stand in line and get your refund.

You can also claim a refund if you leave Australia as a cruise passenger from Circular Quay or Darling Harbour in Sydney, Cairns, Darwin, or Fremantle (Perth). If your cruise departs from elsewhere in Australia, or if you are flying out from an airport other than Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Cairns, Perth, Darwin, Gold Coast, or Broome, telephone **the Australian Customs Service** (☎ 1300/363 263 in Australia, or 02/6275-6666) to see if you can still claim the refund.

Items bought in duty-free stores will not be charged GST. Nor will items you export—such as an Aboriginal painting, say, that you buy in a gallery in Alice Springs and have shipped straight to your home outside Australia.

Basic groceries are not GST-taxed, but restaurant meals are. Other taxes include departure tax of A\$38 (US\$25) for every passenger 12 years and over, included in the price of your airline ticket when you bought it in your home country; landing and departure taxes at some airports, also included in the price of your ticket; and "reef tax," officially dubbed the Environmental Management Charge, of A\$4 (US\$2.60) for every person over the age of 4 every time he or she enters the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. (This charge goes toward park upkeep.)

Telephones The primary telecommunications network in Australia is Telstra (www.telstra.com).

To call Australia: If you're calling Australia from the United States: Dial the international access code (011); dial the country code (61); dial the city code (drop the 0 from any area code given in this book) and then the number. So, if you're calling Sydney, the whole number you'd dial would be 011-61-2-0000-0000.

To make international calls: To make international calls from Australia, first dial 0011 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Ireland 353, New Zealand 64). Next dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 0011-1-202-588-7800. For other country codes, call ☎ 1222 or look in the back of the Australian White Pages.

For directory assistance: Dial 12455 if you're looking for a number inside Australia, and dial 1225 for numbers to all other countries.

For operator assistance: If you need operator assistance in making a call, dial ☎ 1234. To make a collect call, dial ☎ 12550. To find a number, Directory Assistance is ☎ 1223 for numbers in Australia and ☎ 1225 for international numbers.

Toll-free numbers: Numbers beginning with 1800 in Australia are toll-free, but calling a 1-800 number in the States from Australia is not toll-free; it costs the same as an overseas call. Numbers starting with 13 or 1300 in Australia are charged at the local fee of 25¢ anywhere in Australia. Numbers

beginning with 1900 (or 1901 or 1902, and so on) are pay-for-service lines, and you will be charged as much as A\$5 (US\$3.25) a minute.

Time Zone Eastern Standard Time (EST, also written as AEST sometimes) covers Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, and Tasmania. Central Standard Time is used in the Northern Territory and South Australia, and Western Standard Time (WST) is the standard in Western Australia. When it's noon in New South Wales, the ACT, Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania, it's 11:30am in South Australia and the Northern Territory and 10am in Western Australia. All states except Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia observe daylight savings time, usually from the last Sunday in October (the 1st Sun in Oct in Tasmania) to the last Sunday in March. However, not all states switch over to daylight savings time on the same day or in the same week.

The east coast of Australia is GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) plus 10 hours. When it is noon on the east coast, it is 2am in London that morning, and 6pm in Los Angeles and 9pm in New York the previous night. These times are based on standard time, so allow for daylight savings time in the Australian summer, or in the country you are calling. New Zealand is 2 hours ahead of the east coast of Australia, except during daylight savings time, when it is 3 hours ahead of Queensland.

Tipping Tipping is not expected in Australia. It is usual to tip around 5% or round up to the nearest A\$10 (US\$6.50) for a substantial meal in a restaurant. Some passengers round up to the nearest dollar in a cab, but it's okay to insist on every bit of change back. Tipping bellboys and porters is sometimes done, but no one tips bar staff, barbers, or hairdressers.

Useful Phone Numbers U.S. Dept. of State Travel Advisory: ☎ 202-647-5225 (manned 24 hr.); U.S. Passport Agency: ☎ 202-647-0518; U.S. Centers for Disease Control International Traveler's Hotline: ☎ 404-332-4559.

Water Water is fine to drink everywhere. In the Outback, the taps may carry warm brackish water from underground called "bore water" for showers and laundry, while drinking water is collected in rainwater tanks.

Sydney

by Marc Llewellyn

Sunny, sexy, and sophisticated, Sydney (pop. 4.1 million) basks in its worldwide recognition as the shining star of the Southern Hemisphere. The “emerald city” is one of the most attractive on earth. Some people compare it to San Francisco—it certainly has that relaxed feel—but the gateway to Australia is far from a clone of any American city.

First, of course, there’s the Sydney Opera House, one of the most recognized buildings in the world. This white-sailed construction on Sydney Cove, designed by Danish architect Jørn Utzon, is the pride of the city—but there’s far, far more on offer.

For example, you can walk across that other great icon, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, on the pathway beside the trains and traffic and catch the CityRail train back into town. Those with a daredevil spirit can join a Bridge Climb tour across catwalks and ladders to the top of the main arch for 360-degree views across the Opera House and the ferries and boats below.

Sydney is one of the biggest cities in the world—but fortunately most of the interesting things are concentrated in a relatively compact area around one of the finest urban harbors in the world.

As it is, there’s so much to do in Sydney that you could easily spend a week here and still find yourself crashing into bed at night exhausted by trying to fit all the main attractions in.

Sydney’s greatest summer experience is on the beaches—and with over 20 strung along the city’s oceanfront

and dozens more around the harbor, you’ll be spoiled for choice. The most famous of them all is Bondi, a strip of golden sand legendary for its Speedo-clad lifesavers and surfboard riders. From here a “must do” is the 3km (2-mile) coastal path which leads off across the cliff tops, via cozy Tamararama Beach (dubbed “Glamourama” for its chic sun worshippers), to glorious Bronte Beach, where you can cool down again in the crashing waves of the Pacific.

Another beach favorite is Manly, a 30-minute ferry trip from Circular Quay. Pick up some fish and chips and head for the main beach, flanked by a row of giant pines that chatter with hundreds of colorful lorikeets at dusk.

The best time to return is in the early evening, when the lights of the skyscrapers around Circular Quay are streaked like rainbows across the water of the harbor, and the sails of the Opera House and the girders of the Harbour Bridge are lit up—it’s magical.

History is enshrined in its many museums and art galleries, while modern Sydney comes alive in the more recent developments around Darling Harbour and the restaurant and entertainment area nearby at Cockle Bay and Kings Wharf. At Darling Harbour you’ll find the world-class Sydney Aquarium. You can also start your gourmet tour of Sydney’s “Modern Australian” cooking style, which encompasses the best of freshness with spices from the Orient and flavors from the Mediterranean.

Add to all this the side trips to the gorges and cliffs of the Blue Mountains, the wineries of the Hunter Valley, and the dolphin- and whale-watching around Port Stephens (see chapter 4), and you'll see why Sydney gets so much praise.

The frugal traveler will find that, compared to other major international

cities, Sydney offers good value for money. Food and public transport are cheap, and attractions are generally not prohibitively expensive. (Senior and student prices are almost always available if you have identification.) The price of a hotel room is far cheaper than in other major population centers such as New York and London.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING

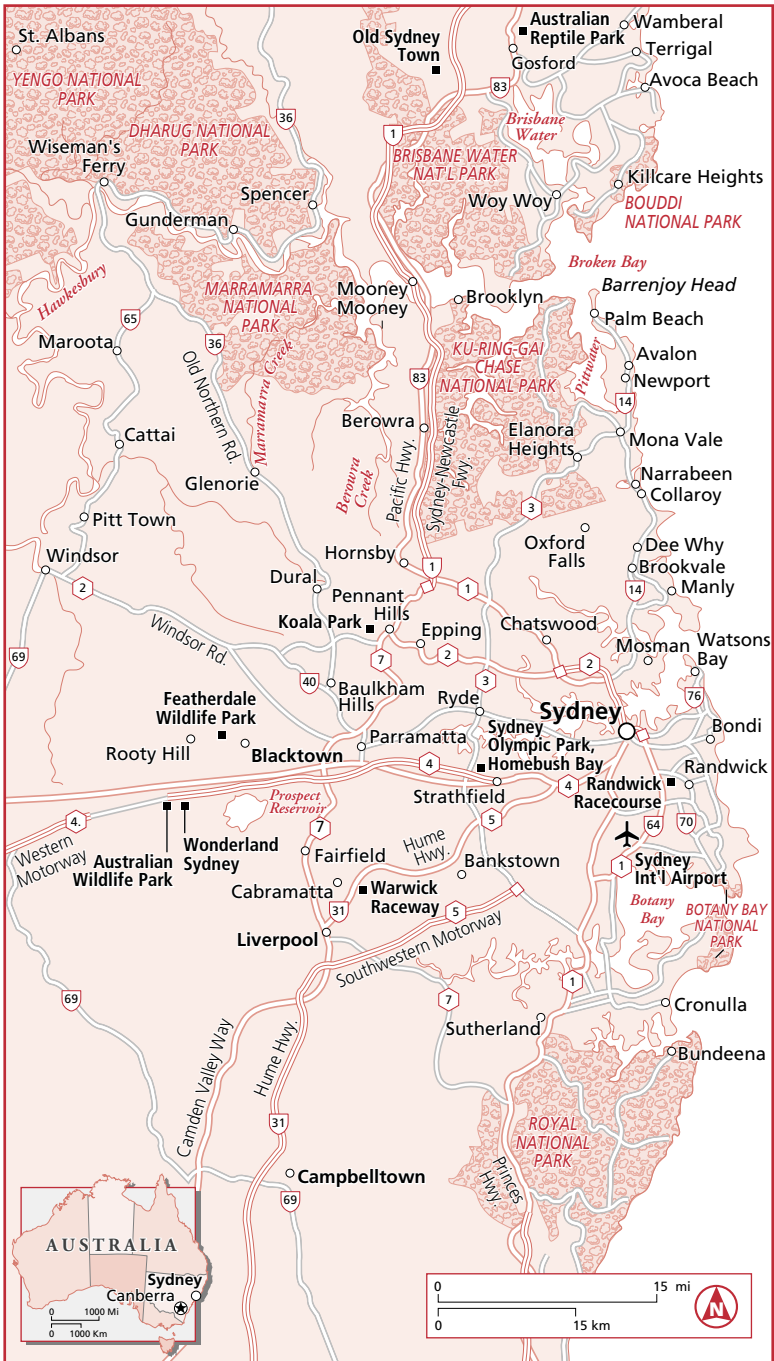
BY PLANE **Sydney International Airport** is 8km (5 miles) from the city center. The international and domestic terminals are separate but linked by free shuttle buses. In both terminals, you'll find luggage carts, wheelchairs, a post office (open Mon–Fri 9am–5pm), mailboxes, currency exchange, duty-free shops (including one before you go through Customs on arrival, selling alcohol and perfumes), restaurants, bars, stores, showers, luggage lockers and a Baggage Held Service for larger items, ATMs, and tourist information desks. You can hire mobile phones from the international terminal. There is also a Sydney Visitors Centre Bookings desk (☎ 02/9667 6050) offering cheap deals on hotels (see “Deciding Where to Stay” later in this chapter), as well as offering car rental, phone cards, and maps and brochures. You can also buy the SydneyPass (see section 2 “Getting Around”) and Airport Express tickets here (see below). The airport is efficient, has extremely strict quarantine procedures—you must declare all food—and is completely nonsmoking. On arrival, pick up a copy of *Sydney The Official Guide* from the rack just before passport control. It has tear-out discount tickets for some major Sydney attractions in it. Luggage trolleys are free in the arrival terminals, but cost A\$2 (US\$1.30) outside the departure terminal.

GETTING INTO TOWN The **Sydney Airport Train Link** connects the international and domestic airports to the city stations of Central, Museum, St. James, Circular Quay, Wynyard, and Town Hall. You'll need to change trains for other Sydney stations. Unfortunately, the line has no dedicated luggage areas and, as it's on a scheduled route into the city from the suburbs, it gets very crowded during rush hours (approximately 7–9am and 4–6:30pm). If you have lots of luggage and you're traveling into the city at these times, it's probably best to take an airport bus (see below) or a taxi. Otherwise walk to the end of the platform where there should be more room onboard. There are elevators at the Airport Train Link stations and some at the city train stations (but the crowds and lack of staff and signs mean you'll probably end up lugging it all up loads

Tips Tourist Refund Scheme

Visitors to Australia are entitled to claim any Goods and Services Tax (GST) on purchases over A\$300 (US\$195) per store. The GST component is 10% of the sale price. Do this at the refund booth located past Customs. After doing the paperwork—you need to have the goods and receipt with you, not in your luggage—you will be refunded by check on the spot. You can convert this to cash at any foreign exchange booth at Sydney Airport.

Greater Sydney Region



of steps anyway). The train takes 10 minutes to reach Central and then continues on to Circular Quay. Trains leave every 15 minutes or so and cost A\$10.60 (US\$6.90) one-way for adults and A\$7.30 (US\$4.50) for children, and A\$16.20 (US\$11) return for adults (A\$14/US\$9 off peak—for travel before 9am weekdays, and all day on weekends and public holidays), and A\$10.60 (US\$6.90) for children. Ask about special “Group Fares” for 3 or 4 people traveling together.

Fast and comfortable green-and-yellow **Airport Express buses** travel between the city center and both the international and domestic terminals from 5am to 9:30pm. The buses stop at Central Railway Station, Town Hall, Queen Victoria Building, Wynyard Station, Circular Quay, The Rocks, Kings Cross, and Potts Point before returning to the airport. The Airport Express operates every day of the year from approximately 6:30am to 7:50pm, leaving every 20 minutes on Monday through Friday and every 30 minutes on weekends and public holidays. The trip to Circular Quay takes about 45 minutes. One-way tickets cost A\$7 (US\$4.55) for adults, A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) for kids under 16, and A\$17.50 (US\$11) for families (any number of children). A round-trip ticket costs A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for kids, and A\$30 (US\$20) for families. You must use the return portion within 2 months.

Buy your tickets from the Airport Express booth outside the airport terminal, or on the bus. Purchase the SydneyPass and you get the Airport Express transfers included. The Airport Express buses also travel between the international and domestic terminals every 15 minutes and cost A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults, A\$1.50 (US\$95¢) for children, and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for a family.

The **Kingsford Smith Airport Coach** also operates to the city center from bus stops outside the terminals. This service will drop you off (and pick you up) at your hotel (pickups require at least 1 hr. advance notice; call ☎ **02/9667 3221**). Tickets cost A\$7 (US\$4.55) one-way and A\$11 (US\$7.15) round-trip. (The return portion can be used at any time in the future.)

The **Bondi Jetbus** (☎ **0500/886 008** mobile phone; fax 02/9487 3554) will deliver you anywhere on the eastern beaches, including Bondi and Bronte. Tickets are A\$10 (US\$6.50) for single adult, A\$8 (US\$5.20) each for two or more, and A\$4 (US\$2.60) for children. Call when you arrive at the airport, and they’ll come pick you up within 15 minutes or less.

A **taxi** from the airport to the city center costs about A\$25 (US\$16). An expressway, the Eastern Distributor, is the fastest way to reach the city from the airport. There’s a \$3.50 (US\$2.30) toll from the airport to the city (the taxi driver pays it, and you pay at the end of the trip), but there is no toll to the airport. A

Tips Taxi Savvy

Especially in busy periods, taxi queues can be long, and drivers may try to cash in by insisting you share a cab with other passengers in line at the airport. Here’s the scam: After dropping off the other passengers, the cab driver will attempt to charge you the full price of the journey, despite the fact that the other passengers paid for their sections. You certainly won’t save any money sharing a cab if this happens, and your journey will be a long one. I find it’s often better to wait until you can get your own cab, or catch an airport bus to the city center (and then take a taxi from there to your hotel, if necessary). If you are first in line in the taxi rank, the law states that you can refuse to share the cab with anyone else.

10% credit card charge applies on taxi fares. **Note:** A dispute with Visa means this credit card isn't accepted by Australian taxis, so make sure you have an alternative card, or get money from the ATM or currency exchange booths at the airport.

BY TRAIN **Central Station** (☎ 13 15 00 for CityRail, and ☎ 13 22 32 for Countrylink interstate trains) is the main city and interstate train station. It's at the top of George Street in downtown Sydney. All interstate trains depart from here, and it's a major CityRail hub. Many city buses leave from neighboring Railway Square for places like Town Hall and Circular Quay.

BY BUS The **Greyhound-Pioneer Australia terminal** is on the corner of Oxford and Riley streets in Darlinghurst (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia, or 02/9283 5977). **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) operates from the **Sydney Coach Terminal** (☎ 02/9281 9366) on the corner of Eddy Avenue and Pitt Street, bordering Central Station.

BY CRUISE SHIP Cruise ships dock at the **Overseas Passenger Terminal** in The Rocks, just opposite the Sydney Opera House, or in Darling Harbour if The Rocks facility is already occupied by another vessel.

BY CAR Drivers coming into Sydney from the north enter the city on the Pacific Highway, drivers from the south enter the city via the M5 and Princes highways, and those coming from the west enter via the Great Western Highway.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Sydney Visitor Centre**, 106 George St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9255 1788), is a good place for maps, brochures, and general tourist information, including for towns in New South Wales; it also has two floors of displays on The Rocks. The office is open daily from 9am to 6pm. Also in The Rocks is the **National Parks & Wildlife Centre** (☎ 02/9247 8861), in Cadmans Cottage, 110 George St. Elsewhere City Host information kiosks, located near the Town Hall (George St.), at Circular Quay (corner of Pitt and Alfred sts.) and at Martin Place (between Elizabeth and Castlereagh sts.) provide comprehensive information on Sydney. Two more Visitor Centres are located at the International Terminal at the airport and at Darling Harbour. If you want to inquire about destinations and holidays within Sydney or the rest of New South Wales, call **Tourism New South Wales'** help line at ☎ 13 20 77 in Australia.

Electronic information on cinema, theater, exhibitions, and other events can be accessed through **Talking Guides** (☎ 13 16 20 in Australia). You'll need a code number for each topic, which you can find on page 3 of the A-K section of the *Sydney Yellow Pages*. The service costs the same as a local call.

A good website for events, entertainment, dining, and shopping is **CitySearch Sydney** (www.sydney.citysearch.com.au).

CITY LAYOUT

Sydney is one of the largest cities in the world by area, covering more than 1,730 sq. km (675 sq. miles) from the sea to the foothills of the Blue Mountains. Thankfully the city center is compact. The jewel in Sydney's crown is its harbor, which empties into the South Pacific Ocean through headlands known simply as North Head and South Head. On the southern side of the harbor are the high rises of the city center; the Sydney Opera House; a string of beaches, including Bondi; and the inner-city suburbs. The Sydney Harbour Bridge and a tunnel connect the city center to the high rises of the North Sydney business district and the affluent northern suburbs and beautiful ocean beaches beyond.

MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS The city's main thoroughfare, **George Street**, runs up from **Circular Quay** (pronounced key), past Wynyard CityRail station, Town Hall, and to Central Station. A whole host of streets bisect the city parallel to George, including Pitt, Elizabeth, and Macquarie streets. **Macquarie Street** runs up from the Sydney Opera House, past the Royal Botanic Gardens and Hyde Park. **Martin Place** is a pedestrian thoroughfare that stretches from Macquarie to George streets. It's about halfway between Circular Quay and Town Hall—in the heart of the city center. The easy-to-spot **A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower**, facing onto the pedestrian-only **Pitt Street Mall** on Pitt Street, is the main city-center landmark. Next to Circular Quay and across from the Opera House is **The Rocks**, a cluster of small streets that was once city slums but is now a tourist attraction. Roads meet at Town Hall from Kings Cross in one direction and Darling Harbour in the other. From Circular Quay to The Rocks it's a 5- to 10-minute stroll, to Wynyard about 10 minutes, and to Town Hall about 20 minutes.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

South of the Harbour

Circular Quay This transport hub for ferries, buses, and CityRail trains is tucked between the Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House. The Quay is a good spot for a stroll, and its outdoor restaurants and buskers are popular. The Rocks, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the Contemporary Art Museum, and the start of the main shopping area (centered on Pitt and George sts.) are a short walk away. To reach the area via public transport, take a CityRail train, ferry, or city-bound bus to Circular Quay.

The Rocks This small historic area, a short stroll west of Circular Quay, is packed with colonial stone buildings, intriguing back streets, boutiques, pubs, tourist stores, and top-notch restaurants and hotels. It's the most exclusive place to stay in the city because of its beauty and its proximity to the Opera House and harbor. Shops are geared toward Sydney's yuppies and wealthy Asian tourists—don't expect bargains. On weekends a portion of George Street is blocked off for The Rocks Market, with street stalls selling souvenirs and crafts. To reach the area via public transport, take any bus

for Circular Quay or The Rocks (via George St.) or a CityRail train or ferry to Circular Quay.

Town Hall In the heart of the city, this area is home to the main department stores and two Sydney landmarks, the Town Hall and the Queen Victoria Building (QVB). In this area are the A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower (A.M.P. is the name of a local insurance company) and the boutique-style chain stores of Pitt Street Mall. Farther up George Street are major movie houses, the entrance to Sydney's Spanish district (around Liverpool St.), and the city's Chinatown. To reach the area via public transportation, take any bus from Circular Quay via George Street, or take a CityRail train to the Town Hall stop.

Darling Harbour Designed as a tourist precinct, Darling Harbour features Sydney's main convention, exhibition, and entertainment centers; a waterfront promenade; the Sydney Aquarium; the Panasonic IMAX Theatre; the Australian Maritime Museum; the Powerhouse Museum; Star City, Sydney's casino; a major food court; and plenty of shops. Nearby are the funky restaurants of Cockle Bay and Kings

Wharf. To reach it via public transport, take a ferry from Circular Quay (Wharf 5), the monorail from Town Hall, or the light rail (tram) from Central Station.

Kings Cross & the Suburbs Beyond “The Cross,” as it’s known, is the city’s red-light district—though it’s also home to some of the city’s best-known nightclubs and restaurants. It houses plenty of backpacker hostels, a few bars, and some upscale hotels. The main drag, Darlinghurst Road, is short but crammed with strip joints, prostitutes, addicts, drunks, and such. Also here are cheap e-mail centers that offer discount overseas phone rates. Fortunately, there’s a heavy police presence, but do take care. Beyond the strip clubs and glitter, the suburbs of Elizabeth Bay, Double Bay, and Rose Bay hug the waterfront. To reach the area via public transport, take a CityRail train to Kings Cross. From the next train stop, Edgecliff, it’s a short walk to Double Bay and a longer one to Rose Bay along the coast.

Paddington/Oxford Street This inner-city suburb, centered on trendy Oxford Street, is known for its expensive terrace houses, off-the-wall boutiques and bookshops, and restaurants, pubs, and nightclubs. It’s also the heart of Sydney’s large gay community and has a liberal scattering of gay bars and dance spots. To reach the area via public transport, take bus no. 380 or 382 from Circular Quay (via Elizabeth St.); no. 378 from Railway Square, Central Station; or nos. 380 and 382 from Bondi Junction. The lower end of Oxford Street is a short walk from Museum CityRail Station (take the Liverpool St. exit).

Darlinghurst Between grungy Kings Cross and upscale Oxford

Street, this extroverted, grimy terraced suburb is home to some of Sydney’s best cafes. It’s probably not wise to wander around at night. Take the CityRail train to Kings Cross and head right from the exit.

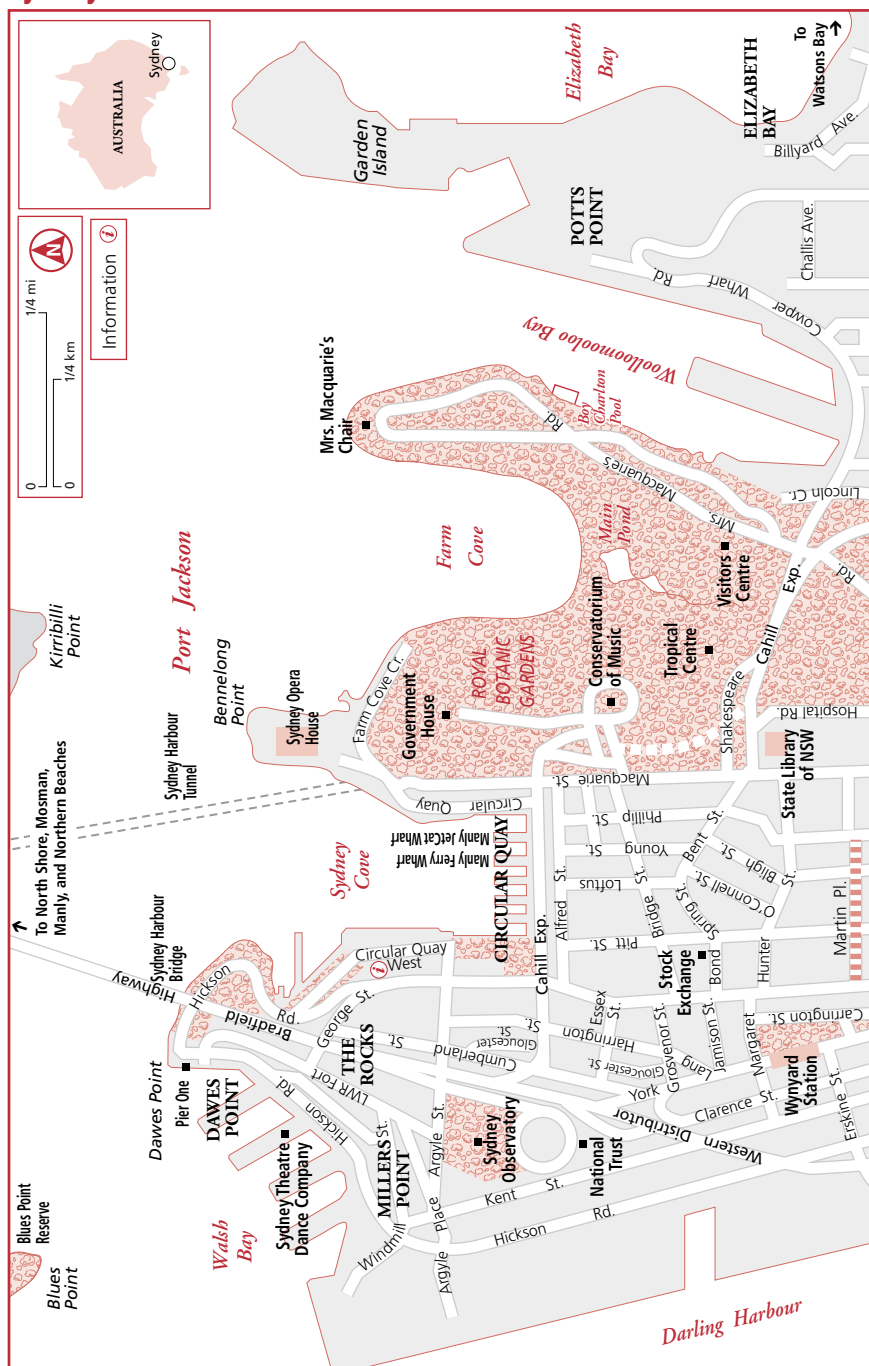
Central The congested and polluted crossroads around Central Station, the city’s main train station, has little to recommend it. Buses run from here to Circular Quay, and it’s a 20-minute walk to Town Hall. The Sydney Central YHA (youth hostel) is here.

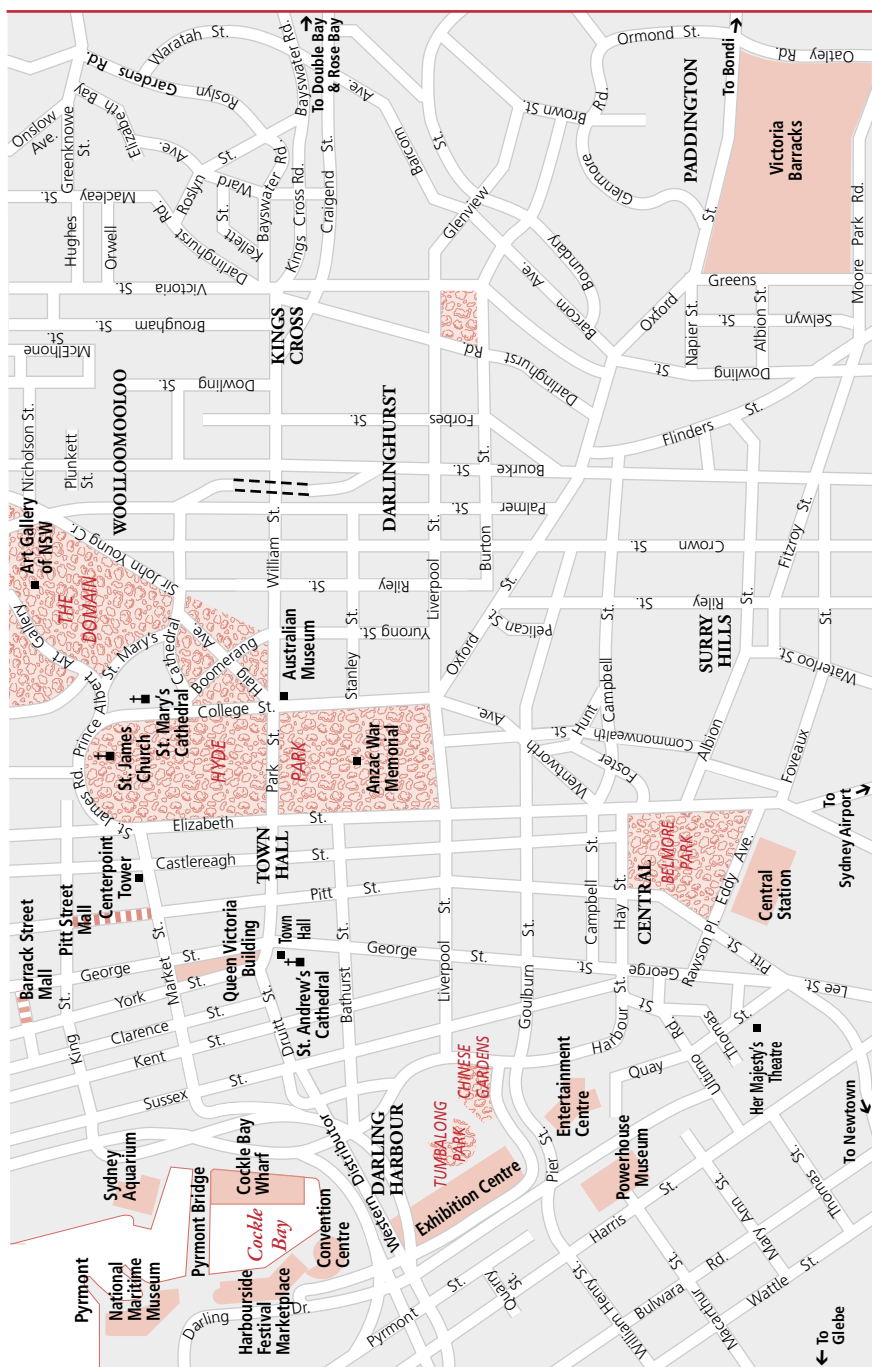
Newtown This popular student area is centered around car-clogged King Street, which is lined with alternative shops, bookstores, and ethnic restaurants. People-watching is the thing to do—see how many belly-button rings, violently colored hairdos, and Celtic arm tattoos you can spot. To reach the area via public transport, take a CityRail train to Newtown Station.

Glebe Young professionals and students come to this inner-city suburb for the cafes, restaurants, pubs, and shops along the main thoroughfare, Glebe Point Road. All this, plus a location 15 minutes from the city and 30 minutes from Circular Quay, makes it a good place for budget-conscious travelers. To reach Glebe, take bus no. 431, 433, or 434 from The Rocks (via George St.), or bus no. 459 from behind Town Hall.

Bondi & the Southern Beaches Some of Sydney’s most glamorous surf beaches—Bondi, Bronte, and Coogee—can be found along the South Pacific coastline southeast of the city center. Bondi has a wide sweep of beach (crowded in summer), some interesting restaurants and bars, and plenty of attitude and beautiful bodies—but no

Sydney at a Glance





CityRail station. To reach Bondi via public transport, take bus no. 380 or 382 to Bondi Beach from Circular Quay—it takes up to an hour—or a quicker alternative is a CityRail train to Bondi Junction to connect with the same buses. Bus no. 378 from Railway Square, Central Station goes to Bronte, and bus no. 373 or 374 travels to Coogee from Circular Quay.

Watsons Bay Watsons Bay is known for The Gap—a section of dramatic sea cliffs—as well as several good restaurants, such as Doyles on the Beach, and the Watsons Bay Hotel beer garden—also run by Doyles. It's a terrific spot to spend a sunny afternoon. To reach it via public transportation, take bus no. 324 or 325 from Circular Quay. There's a limited ferry service daily from Circular Quay (Wharf 2), starting at 10:15am on weekdays, 9:15am on weekends and holidays.

North of the Harbour

North Sydney Across the Harbour Bridge, the high rises of North Sydney attest to its prominence as a major business area. There's little for tourists here, except the possibility of being knocked over on a busy thoroughfare. Chatswood (take a CityRail train from Central or Wynyard stations) has some good suburban-type shopping, and Milsons Point has a decent pub, the Kirribilli Hotel, as well as Luna Park, an ill-fated amusement park that's basically out of action due to wealthy locals who complained the roller coaster was too noisy—you can see the giant smiling clown face from Circular Quay.

The North Shore Ferries and buses provide access to these wealthy neighborhoods across the Harbour Bridge. Gorgeous Balmoral Beach, Taronga Zoo, and upscale boutiques are the attractions in Mosman. Take

a ferry from Circular Quay (Wharf 2) to Taronga Zoo—10 minutes—and a bus from there to Balmoral Beach (another 10 min.).

Manly & the Northern Beaches

Half an hour away by ferry, or 15 minutes by the faster JetCat, Manly is famous for its ocean beach—it gives Bondi a run for its money—and scores of cheap food outlets. Farther north are more beaches popular with surfers. CityRail train lines do not go to the northern beaches. The farthest beach from the city, Palm Beach, has magnificent surf and lagoon beaches, walking paths, and a golf course. To reach the area via public transport, take the ferry or JetCat from Circular Quay (Wharves 2 and 3) to Manly. Change at Manly interchange for various buses (nos. 148 and 154–159) to the northern beaches. You can also take bus no. L90 from Wynyard station.

West of the City Center

Balmain A short ferry ride from Circular Quay, Balmain was once Sydney's main ship-building area. In the last few decades the area has become trendy and expensive. The suburb has a village feel to it, is filled with restaurants and pubs, and hosts a popular Saturday market at the local church. Take bus nos. 441, 442, or 432 from Town Hall or George Street, or a ferry from Circular Quay (Wharf 5), and then a short bus ride up the hill to the main shopping area.

Homebush Bay Sydney Olympic Park was the main site of the 2000 Olympic Games. You'll find Stadium Australia, the Aquatic Center, and Homebush Bay Information Center, parklands, and a waterbird reserve. To reach the area via public transport, take a CityRail train from Circular Quay to the Olympic Park station.

2 Getting Around

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

State Transit operates the city's buses and the ferry network, CityRail runs the urban and suburban trains, and Sydney Ferries runs the public passenger ferries. Some private bus lines operate buses in the outer suburbs. In addition, a mono-rail connects the city center to Darling Harbour and a light rail line (tram) runs between Central Station and Wentworth Park in Pyrmont.

MONEY-SAVING TRANSIT PASSES Several passes are available for visitors who will be using public transportation frequently—all work out to be much cheaper than buying individual tickets. Ticket prices change frequently, so use the prices below as a guide.

The **SydneyPass** includes return Airport Express transfers, unlimited travel on Sydney Explorer coaches and Bondi & Bay Explorer coaches, unlimited travel on any of four Sydney Harbour cruises (see “What to See & Do in Sydney” later in this chapter), unlimited travel on the JetCat to Manly and the high-speed RiverCat to Parramatta (linking the city center to this important heritage and business center along a historic waterway), and unlimited travel on all Sydney buses, Sydney ferries, and CityRail trains (within the “Red TravelPass” travel zone, which includes the entire city center, as well as to Bondi Junction). The SydneyPass costs A\$90 (US\$59) for adults and A\$45 (US\$29) for children for 3 days travel over a 7-day period; A\$120 (US\$78) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for children for 5 days over a 7-day period; and A\$140 (US\$91) for adults and A\$70 (US\$45) for children for 7-days’ consecutive travel. Family fairs are also available. Buy tickets at the Airport Express offices at the airport, the Transit-Shop at Circular Quay (outside McDonald’s), from the Sydney Ferries ticket office, Wharf 4, Circular Quay, or from Explorer bus drivers.

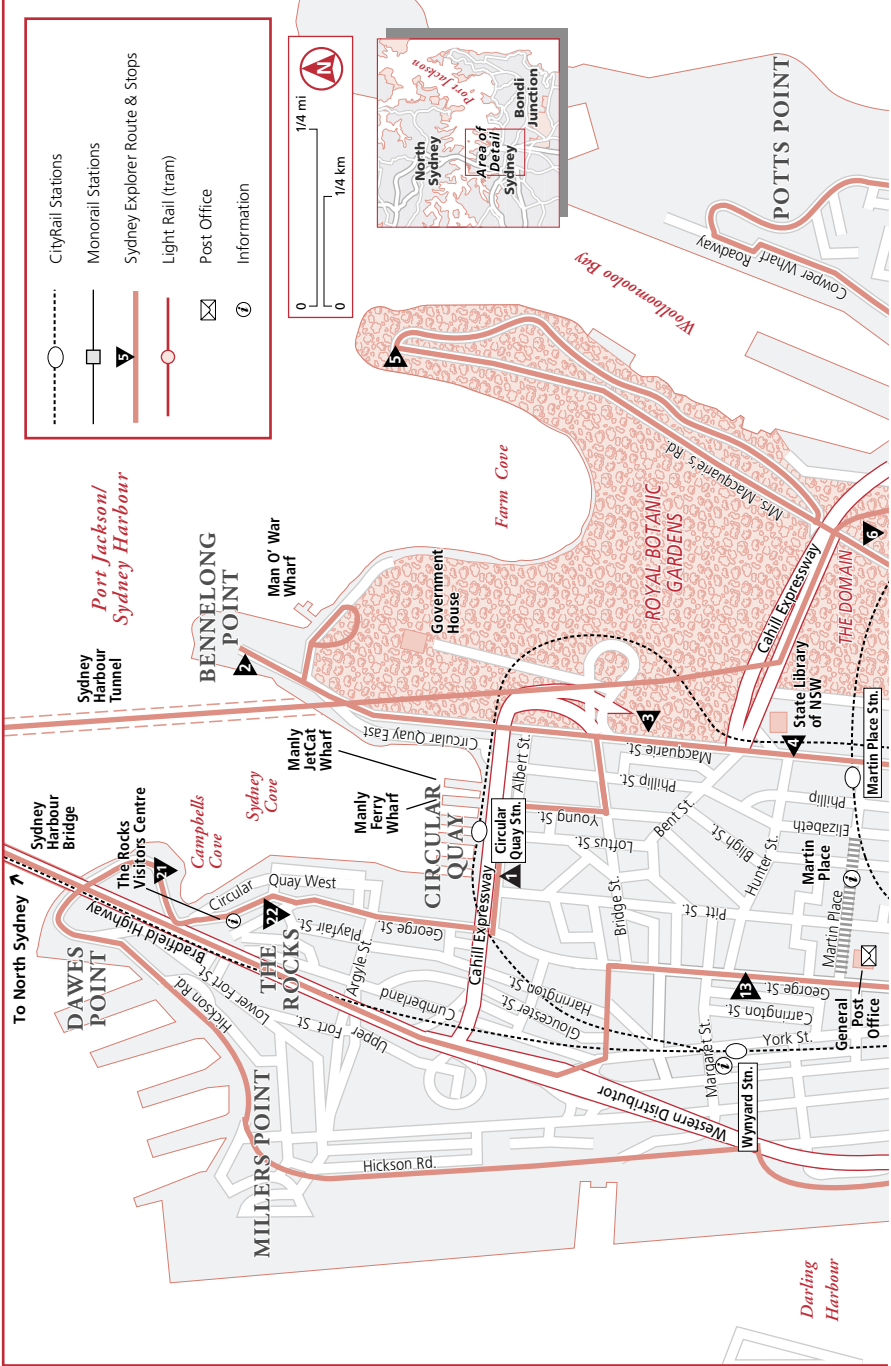
A **Weekly Travel Pass** allows unlimited travel on buses, trains, and ferries. There are six different passes (denoted by color) depending on the distance you need to travel. The passes most commonly used by visitors are the Red Pass and the Green Pass. The Red Pass costs A\$30 (US\$20) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for kids and covers all transportation within the city center and near surroundings. This pass will get you aboard inner harbor ferries, for example, but not the ferry to Manly. The Green Pass, which costs A\$38 (US\$25) for adults and A\$19 (US\$12) for kids, will take you to more far-flung destinations, including Manly (aboard the ferry but not the JetCat before 7pm). You can buy either pass at newsagents or bus, train, and ferry ticket outlets.

The **Day Tripper** ticket gives you unlimited bus, train, and ferry travel for 1 day. Tickets cost A\$13.40 (US\$8.70) for adults and A\$6.70 (US\$4.30) for children. The pass is available at all bus, train, and ferry ticket outlets.

Tips Transit Information

For timetable information on buses, ferries, and trains, call **Infoline** at ☎ **13 15 00** daily from 6am to 10pm. Otherwise check the website for Sydney buses and ferries (www.sydneybuses.nsw.gov.au), or CityRail (www.staterail.nsw.gov.au). Pick up a **Sydney Transport Map** (a guide to train, bus, and ferry services) at any rail, bus, or ferry office.

Sydney Transportation Systems



A CityHopper ticket allows unlimited all-day travel on CityRail trains bounded by Kings Cross, North Sydney, and Redfern. Peak time tickets cost A\$6.40 (US\$4.15) for adults and A\$3.20 (US\$2) for children, and off-peak tickets cost A\$4.60 (US\$3) for adults and A\$2.30 (US\$1.50) for children.

A **Travelten ticket** offers 10 bus or ferry rides for a discounted price. A Blue Travelten covers two sections on the bus route and costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults and A\$5.20 (US\$3.40) for children; a Brown Travelten covers up to nine sections and costs A\$18 (US\$12) for adults and A\$8.80 (US\$6.15) for children. The Travelten ferry ticket costs A\$26.30 (US\$17) for adults and A\$13.10 (US\$8.50) for kids for 10 trips within the inner harbor (this excludes Manly). The Manly ferry Travelten costs A\$39 (US\$25) for adults and A\$19 (US\$12) for children, while the JetCat Travelten to Manly (before 7pm) costs A\$55 (US\$36) for adults (no kids' price). Buy Travelten tickets at newsagents, bus depots, or at the Circular Quay ferry terminal. Tickets are transferable, so if two or more people travel together, you can use the same ticket.

A 7-day **Rail Pass** costs A\$16 (US\$11) for adults and A\$8.20 (US\$5.30) for children, traveling within the city center. For a full day's unlimited travel by bus, you can't go wrong with the One-Day Bus Tripper. It costs A\$9 (US\$5.85) for adults and A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children 4 to 15, and can be bought from newsagents and at bus depots. An unlimited One-Day Bus/Ferry Tripper costs A\$13 (US\$8.45) for adults and A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for children.

BY PUBLIC BUS Buses are frequent and reliable and cover a wide area of metropolitan Sydney—though you might find the system a little difficult to navigate if you're visiting some of the outer suburbs. The minimum fare (which covers most short hops in the city) is A\$1.50 (US\$1) for adults and A70¢ (US45¢) for children for a 4km (2½-mile) "section." The farther you go, the cheaper each section is. For example, the 44km (27-mile) trip to Palm Beach, way past Manly, costs A\$4.60 (US\$3) for adults and \$2.30 (US\$1.50) for kids. Sections are marked on bus-stand signs (though most Sydneysiders are as confused about the system as you will be—when in doubt, ask the bus driver).

Most buses bound for the northern suburbs, including night buses to Manly and the bus to Taronga Zoo, leave from Wynyard Park on Carrington Street, behind the Wynyard CityRail station on George Street. Buses to the southern beaches, such as Bondi and Bronte, and the western and eastern suburbs leave from Circular Quay. Buses to Balmain leave from behind the QVB.

Call the **Transport Info Line** (☎ 13 15 00) for information, or ask the staff at the bus information kiosk on the corner of Alfred and Loftus streets, behind Circular Quay CityRail station (☎ 02/9219 1680). The kiosk is open Monday through Saturday from 8am to 8pm and Sunday from 8am to 6pm. Buses run from 4am to around midnight during the week, less frequently on weekends and holidays. Some night buses to outer suburbs run after midnight and throughout the night. You can purchase single tickets onboard; exact change is not required.

BY SYDNEY EXPLORER BUS These bright red buses operate every day, traveling a 28km (18-mile) circuit and stopping at 26 places of interest. These include Sydney Opera House, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the State Library, Mrs. Macquarie's Chair, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Kings Cross, Elizabeth Bay House, Wynyard CityRail station, the QVB, A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower, the Australian Museum, Central Station, Chinatown, and Darling Harbour and The Rocks. Buses depart from Circular Quay at 18-minute intervals from 8:40am with the last "round-trip" service departing Circular Quay at

5:20pm. This service returns to Circular Quay at 7pm. Board anywhere along the route where you see the distinctive red Sydney Explorer stop sign, and leave at any attraction along the way. If you want to stay on the bus from start to finish, the full circuit takes 1½ hours to complete. Your Sydney Explorer ticket entitles you to free travel on regular “blue and white” Sydney Buses services within the same zone covered by your Sydney Explorer Ticket until midnight. When planning your itinerary for the day, remember that some attractions, such as museums, close at 5pm. Tickets cost A\$30 (US\$20) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children 4 to 16, and A\$75 (US\$49) for a family. Buy tickets onboard the bus. You can also buy a 2-day Twin Ticket for both the Sydney Explorer Bus and the Bondi Explorer (see below). This costs A\$50 (US\$33) for adults, A\$25 (US\$16) for children, and A\$125 (US\$81) for a family.

BY BONDI EXPLORER BUS The Bondi Explorer operates every day, traveling a 30km (19-mile) circuit around the eastern harborside bays and coastal beaches and back. Stops along the way include Kings Cross, Double Bay, Watsons Bay, Bondi Beach, Bronte Beach, Coogee Beach, Paddington, Oxford Street, and Martin Place. The bus departs from Circular Quay at 25-minute intervals from 9:15am, with the last round-trip service departing Circular Quay at 4:20pm. This service returns to Circular Quay at 5:55pm. Board anywhere along the route where you see the BONDİ & BAY EXPLORER sign, and leave at any attraction along the way. If you wish to stay on board from start to finish without making any stops, the entire circuit takes 1½ hours to complete. Your ticket entitles you to free travel on regular “blue and white” Sydney Buses services within the same zone covered by your Bondi & Bay Explorer ticket until midnight. The 1-day fare is A\$30 (US\$20) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children 4 to 16, and A\$75 (US\$49) for families. Buy the ticket onboard.

BY FERRY & JETCAT The best way to get a taste of a city that revolves around its harbor is to jump aboard a ferry. The main ferry terminal is at Circular Quay. Tickets can be bought at machines at each wharf, where there are also change machines. For ferry information call ☎ 13 15 00, or visit the ferry information office opposite Wharf 4. Timetables are available for all routes.

One-way journeys within the inner harbor (virtually everywhere except Manly and Parramatta) cost A\$4.20 (US\$2.75) for adults and A\$2.10 (US\$1.40) for children. The ferry to Manly takes 30 minutes and costs A\$5.30 (US\$3.50) for adults and A\$2.60 (US\$1.70) for children. It leaves from Wharf 3. The rapid JetCat service to Manly takes 15 minutes and costs A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) for both adults and children. After 7pm all trips to and from Manly are by JetCat at ferry prices. Ferries run from 6am to midnight.

BY CITYRAIL Sydney’s publicly owned train system is a cheap and efficient way to see the city. The system is limited, though, with many tourist areas—including Manly, Bondi Beach, and Darling Harbour—not connected to the network. CityRail trains have a reputation of running late and out of timetable order. All train stations have ticket machines, and most have ticket offices.

The single fare within the city center at any time of day is A\$2.20 (US\$1.40) for adults and A\$1.10 (US\$0.70) for kids. An off-peak (after 9am) return ticket costs A\$2.60 (US\$1.70) for adults and A\$2.20 (US\$1.40) for kids, while a peak return will cost A\$4.40 (US\$2.85) for adults and A\$2.20 (US\$1.45) for kids. Information is available from **Infoline** (☎ 13 15 00).

Comfortable and efficient **Countrylink** trains out of Central Station link the city with the far suburbs and beyond. For reservations call ☎ 13 22 32 between

6:30am and 10pm, or visit the **Countrylink Travel Center** (☎ 02/9224 2742), Station Concourse, Wynyard CityRail station for brochures and bookings.

BY METRO MONORAIL The metro monorail, with its single overhead line, is seen by many as a blight and by others as a futuristic addition. The monorail connects the central business district to Darling Harbour—though it's only a 15-minute walk from Town Hall. The system operates Monday through Wednesday from 7am to 10pm, Thursday through Saturday from 7am to midnight, and Sunday from 8am to 10pm. Tickets are A\$4 (US\$2.60), free for children under 5. An all-day monorail pass costs A\$8 (US\$5.20) for adults and A\$24 (US\$16) for a family. The trip from the city center to Darling Harbour takes around 12 minutes. Look for the gray overhead line and the plastic tube-like structures that are the stations. Call **Metro Monorail** at ☎ 02/8584 5288 (www.metrolightrail.com.au) for more information.

BY METRO LIGHT RAIL A system of “trams” opened in late 1997 with a route that traverses a 3.6km (2¼-mile) track between Central Station and Wentworth Park in Pyrmont. It provides good access to Chinatown, Paddy's Markets, Darling Harbour, the Star City casino, and the Sydney Fish Markets. The trams run every 10 minutes. The one-way fare is A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) or \$4.80 (US\$3.15), depending on distance. There are no child fares. A family-of-five day pass costs A\$24 (US\$16), and a day pass A\$8 (US\$5.20). Call **Metro Light Rail** at ☎ 02/8584 5288 (www.metrolightrail.com.au) for details.

BY TAXI

Taxis are a relatively economical way to get around. Several companies service the city center and suburbs. All journeys are metered. If you cross either way on the Harbour Bridge or through the Harbour Tunnel, it will cost you an extra A\$3 (US\$1.95)—a rip-off considering there's only an official toll on the way into the city, and if you take the Eastern Distributor from the airport, it's A\$3.50 (US\$2.30). An extra 10% will be added to your fare if you pay by credit card. **Note:** Visa cards are not accepted in Australian taxis.

Taxis line up at ranks in the city, such as those found opposite Circular Quay and Central Station. They are also frequently found in front of hotels. A yellow light on top of the cab means it's vacant. Cabs can be hard to get on Friday and Saturday nights and between 2 and 3pm every day, when cabbies are changing shifts after 12 hours on the road. Tipping is not necessary, but appreciated—a dollar or so is plenty. Some people prefer to sit up front, but it's certainly not considered rude if you don't. It is compulsory for passengers to wear seat belts in front and back. The **Taxi Complaints Hotline** (☎ 1800/648 478 in Australia) deals with problem taxi drivers. Taxis are licensed to carry four people.

The main cab companies are **A** (☎ 13 25 22); **Taxis Combined Services** (☎ 02/9332 8888); **RSL Taxis** (☎ 02/9581 1111); **Legion Cabs** (☎ 13 14 51); and **Premier** (☎ 13 10 17).

BY WATER TAXI

Harbour Taxis operate 24 hours a day and are a quick, convenient way to get to waterfront restaurants, harbor attractions, and some suburbs. They can also be hired for private cruises. A journey from Circular Quay to Watsons Bay, for example, costs about A\$60 (US\$39) for two. An extra passenger costs around A\$8 (US\$5.20); some taxis can hold up to 28 people. An hour's sightseeing excursion around the harbor costs A\$181 (US\$118) for two. The main operator is **Water Taxis Combined** (☎ 02/9555 8888).

BY CAR

Traffic restrictions, parking, and congestion can make getting around by car frustrating, but if you plan to visit some of the outer suburbs or take excursions elsewhere in New South Wales, then renting a car will give you more flexibility. The **NRMA's** (National Roads and Motorists' Association—the New South Wales auto club) emergency breakdown service can be contacted at ☎ **13 11 11**.

Car-rental agencies in Sydney include **Avis**, 214 William St., Kings Cross (☎ 1800/225 553); **Budget**, 93 William St., Kings Cross (☎ 13 27 27 or 02/9339 8888); **Dollar**, Domain Car Park, Sir John Young Car Park (☎ 02/9223 1444); **Hertz**, corner of William and Riley streets, Kings Cross (☎ 13 30 39); and **Thrifty**, 75 William St., Kings Cross (☎ 02/9380 5399). Avis, Budget, Hertz, and Thrifty also have desks at the airport. Rates average about A\$60 (US\$39) per day for a small car. One of the best value operations is **Bayswater Car Rentals**, 180 William St., Kings Cross (☎ 02/9360 3622), which has small cars for A\$48 (US\$31) a day and A\$25 (US\$16) a day for 6 days or more.

You can rent a campervan from **Britz Campervans**, 653 Gardeners Rd., Mascot, NSW 2020 (☎ **1800/331 454** in Australia, or 02/9667 0402; www.britz.com). Plan on about A\$105 (US\$68) a day for a two-person van in winter and around \$145 (US\$94) in summer. Both allow you to drop off your van at most state capitals and Cairns. It costs an extra A\$200 (US\$130) for this convenience.

FAST FACTS: Sydney

American Express The main Amex office is at Level 3, 130 Pitt St., near Martin Place (☎ **02/9236 4200**). You can cash traveler's checks here, and it also acts as a travel booking service. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to noon. Another foreign exchange office is located on the walkway leading up to the Sydney Opera House (☎ **02/9251 1970**). If you've lost your traveler's checks, then you need to go to the head office at 175 Liverpool St. (☎ **02/9271 1111**). It's a locked security building, so you'll need to call ahead first.

Babysitters Dial an Angel (☎ **02/9416 7511** or 02/9362 4225) offers a well-regarded babysitting service.

Business Hours General office and banking hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Many banks, especially in the city center, are open from around 9:30am to 12:30pm on Saturday. Shopping hours are usually from 8:30am to 5:30pm daily (9am–5pm Sat), and most stores stay open until 9pm on Thursday. Most city-center stores are open from around 10am to 4pm on Sunday.

Currency Exchange Most major bank branches offer currency exchange services. Small foreign currency exchange offices are clustered at the airport and around Circular Quay and Kings Cross. **Thomas Cook** can be found at the airport; at 175 Pitt St. (☎ **02/9231 2877**), open Monday through Friday from 6:45am to 5:15pm and Saturday from 10am to 2pm; and on the lower ground floor of the QVB (☎ **02/9264 1133**), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm (until 9pm Fri), Saturday from 9am to 6pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

Dentist A well-respected dentist office in the city is **City Dental Practice**, Level 2, 229 Macquarie St., near Martin Place (☎ 02/9221 3300). For dental problems after hours, call **Dental Emergency Information** (☎ 02/9369 7050).

Doctor The **Park Medical Centre**, Shop 4, 27 Park St. (☎ 02/9264 4488), in the city center near Town Hall, is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm; consultations cost A\$40 (US\$26) for 15 minutes. (**Note:** If you plan to take a dive course in Australia, get your medical exam done here. It costs A\$70/US\$46, about the cheapest in Australia.) The **Kings Cross Travelers' Clinic**, Suite 1, 13 Springfield Ave., Kings Cross, just off Darlinghurst Road (☎ 1300/369 359 in Australia, or 02/9358 3066), is great for travel medicines and emergency contraception pills among other things. Hotel visits in the Kings Cross area cost A\$80 (US\$52); consultations cost A\$40 (US\$26). The **Travelers' Medical & Vaccination Centre**, Level 7, 428 George St., in the city center (☎ 02/9221 7133), stocks and administers travel-related vaccinations and medications.

Embassies/Consulates All foreign embassies are based in Canberra. You'll find the following consulates in Sydney: **United Kingdom**, Level 16, Gateway Building, 1 Macquarie Place, Circular Quay (☎ 02/9247 7521); **New Zealand**, 55 Hunter St. (☎ 02/9223 0144); **United States**, Level 59, MLC Centre, 19–29 Martin Place (☎ 02/9373 9200); and **Canada**, Level 5, 111 Harrington St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9364 3000).

Emergencies Dial ☎ 000 to call police, the fire service, or an ambulance. Call the **Emergency Prescription Service** (☎ 02/9235 0333) for emergency drug prescriptions, and the **NRMA** for car breakdowns (☎ 13 11 11).

Eyeglass Repair **Perfect Vision**, Shop C22A, in the Centerpoint Tower, 100 Market St. (☎ 02/9221 1010), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm (until 9pm Thurs) and Saturday from 9am to 5pm. It's the best place to replace lost contact lenses, but bring your prescription.

Holidays See "When to Go" in chapter 2. New South Wales also observes Labour Day on the first Monday in October.

Hospitals Make your way to **Sydney Hospital**, on Macquarie Street, at the top end of Martin Place (☎ 02/9382 7111 for emergencies). **St. Vincents Hospital** is on Victoria and Burton streets in Darlinghurst, near Kings Cross (☎ 02/9339 1111).

Hot Lines Contact the **Poisons Information Center** at ☎ 13 11 26; the **Rape Crisis Center** at ☎ 02/9819 6565; the **Gay and Lesbian Counseling Line** (4pm–midnight) at ☎ 02/9207 2800; and the **Crisis Center** at ☎ 02/9358 6577.

Internet Access Several Internet/e-mail centers are scattered around the Kings Cross area, Bondi, and Manly. There's also one on Pitt Street, a 1-minute walk from Circular Quay.

Lost Property There is no general lost property bureau in Sydney. Contact the nearest police station if you think you've lost something. For items lost on trains, contact the **Lost Property Office**, 494 Pitt St., near Central Railway Station (☎ 02/9379 3000). The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. For items left behind on planes or at the airport, go to the Federal Airport Corporation's administration office on the

top floor of the International Terminal at Sydney International Airport (☎ 02/9667 9583). For stuff left behind on buses or ferries, call ☎ 02/9245 5777. Each taxi company has its own lost property office.

Luggage Storage You can leave your bags at the International Terminal at the airport. A locker here costs A\$5 (US\$3.25) per day, or you can put them in the storage room for A\$7 (US\$4.55) per day per piece. The room is open from 4:30am to the last flight of the day. Call ☎ 02/9667 9848 for information. Otherwise, leave luggage at the cloakroom at Central Station, near the front of the main building (☎ 02/9219 4395). Storage at the rail station costs A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) per article per day. The **Travelers Contact Point**, 7th floor, 428 George St., above the Dymocks bookstore (☎ 02/9221 8744), stores luggage for A\$15 (US\$9.75) per piece per month. It also operates a *poste restante* service, has Internet access, a travel agency, a jobs board, and ships items to the U.K. and Ireland.

Newspapers The *Sydney Morning Herald* is considered one of the world's best newspapers—by its management at least—and is available throughout metropolitan Sydney. The equally prestigious *Australian* is available nationwide. The metropolitan *Daily Telegraph* is a more casual read and has a couple of editions a day. The *International Herald Tribune*, *USA Today*, the British *Guardian Weekly*, and other U.K. newspapers can be found at Circular Quay newspaper stands and most newsagents.

Pharmacies Most suburbs have pharmacies that are open late. For after-hours referral, contact the **Emergency Prescription Service** (☎ 02/9235 0333).

Police In an emergency dial ☎ 000. Make non-emergency police inquiries through the Sydney Police Centre (☎ 02/9281 0000).

Post Office The General Post Office (G.P.O.) is at 130 Pitt St., not far from Martin Place (☎ 13 13 18 in Australia). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm and Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Letters can be sent c/o Poste Restante, G.P.O., Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia (☎ 02/9244 3733), and collected at 310 George St., on the 3rd floor of the Hunter Connection shopping center. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:15am to 5:30pm. For directions to the nearest post office, call ☎ 1800/043 300.

Restrooms These can be found on the second floor of the Queen Victoria Building (QVB), most department stores, at Central Station and Circular Quay, near the escalators by the Sydney Aquarium, and in the Harbourside Festival Marketplace in Darling Harbour.

Safety Sydney is an extremely safe city, but as anywhere else, it's good to keep your wits about you and your wallet hidden. If you wear a money-belt, keep it under your shirt. Be wary in Kings Cross and Redfern at all hours and around Central Station and the cinema strip on George Street near Town Hall station in the evening—the latter is a hangout for local gangs, though they're usually busy holding each other up for their sneakers. Other places of concern are the back lanes of Darlinghurst, around the naval base at Woolloomooloo, and along the Bondi restaurant strip when the drunks spill out after midnight. Several people have reported thieves at the airport. If traveling by train at night, travel in the carriages next to the guard's van, marked with a blue light on the outside.

Taxes Australia has a 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST) on most goods and most services. The GST applies to most travel-related goods and services, including transport, hotels, tours, and restaurants. By law, the tax has to be included in the advertised price of the product, though it doesn't have to be displayed independently of the pre-tax price.

Taxis See "Getting Around" earlier in this chapter.

Telephones Sydney's public phone boxes take coins (A40¢/US25¢ for local calls), while many also take credit cards and A\$10 (US\$6.50) phonecards available from newsgagents.

Transit Information Call the Infoline at ☎ 13 15 00 (daily 6am–10pm).

Useful Telephone Numbers For news, dial ☎ 1199; for the time, ☎ 1194; for Sydney entertainment, ☎ 11 688; for directory assistance, ☎ 12 455; for Travelers Aid Society, ☎ 02/9211 2469.

Weather For the local forecast call ☎ 1196.

3 Accommodations You Can Afford

There are hundreds of places to stay in Sydney for the frugal traveler, from great hotels to top-rate backpacker places. Although you're unlikely to find the city's hotels completely booked if you just turn up and start looking for a bed for the night, it's probably wise to reserve rooms in advance. A good idea is to check the Internet to find which hotels from the list below are promoting special deals around the time you want to stay. At any time, though, booking over the Net can be cheaper than paying at the front door. Most rooms are also cheaper when bought as part of a package (see "Packages for the Independent Traveler" in chapter 2). Most of the larger hotels also do special deals on weekends—when their corporate clients are hopefully home with the family—so don't be afraid to check them out to see if a deal suits your budget.

Serviced apartments are worth considering because they mean big savings on meals, and you can eat what you want. Many also have free laundry facilities.

Another option is a YHA youth hostel. Most hostels in Australia have basic double or family rooms that can work out significantly cheaper than hotels. All ages stay here, too.

The websites www.wotif.com.au and www.lastminute.com.au offer substantial discounts year-round.

DECIDING WHERE TO STAY The choice location for lodging in Sydney is in The Rocks and around Circular Quay—a short stroll from the Sydney Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the ferry terminals.

Hotels around Darling Harbour offer good access to the local facilities, including museums, the Sydney Aquarium, and the Star City casino. Most Darling Harbour hotels are a 10- to 15-minute walk, or a short monorail or light rail trip, from Town Hall and the central shopping district in and around Centrepint Tower and Pitt Street Mall.

More hotels are grouped around Kings Cross, Sydney's red-light district. While some of the hotels here are among the city's best, you'll also find a range of cheaper lodgings, including several backpacker hostels. Kings Cross can be unnerving at any time, but especially on Friday and Saturday nights when the area's strip joints and nightclubs are jumping. Staying here does have its advantages: You get a real

inner-city feel, and it's close to excellent restaurants and cafes around the Kings Cross/Darlinghurst and Oxford Street areas.

Glebe, with its ethnic restaurants, is another inner-city suburb popular with tourists. It's well served by local buses, as well as Airport Express Bus route 352.

If you want to stay near the beach, check out the options in Manly and Bondi, though you should consider their distance from the city center and the lack of CityRail trains to these areas. A taxi to Manly from the city will cost around A\$35 (US\$23) and to Bondi around A\$26 (US\$17).

Remember, always ask about discount rates, package deals, and any other special offerings when booking a hotel, especially if you are traveling in winter when hotels are less likely to be full.

Almost all hotels offer nonsmoking rooms; inquire when you make a reservation if it's important to you. Most moderately priced rooms will have tea- and coffeemaking facilities, and an iron. Coffeemakers are rare in Australia—you tend to get a few packets of Nescafe in your room. Like elsewhere, there's an increasing trend to rip off guests with pay-per-view movie channels (around A\$16/US\$10 per movie), rather than to provide full access to a range of free cable TV channels. In Australia, by the way, a "double" room means you normally get one double, queen-size, or king-size bed in a room.

THE ROCKS/CIRCULAR QUAY

The Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel Sydney's oldest pub was established in 1841 after serving as a private residence since its construction in 1836. It's an attractive, three-story sandstone building with a busy pub on the ground floor, a good brasserie on the second, and hotel accommodations on the third. The rooms, while compact, are spacious enough to swing your bags around without hitting the walls. From its creaky floorboards and bedroom walls made from convict-hewn sandstone blocks, to the narrow corridors, the wood fire, and homemade beer down in the bar, the Lord Nelson positively wallows in colonial atmosphere.

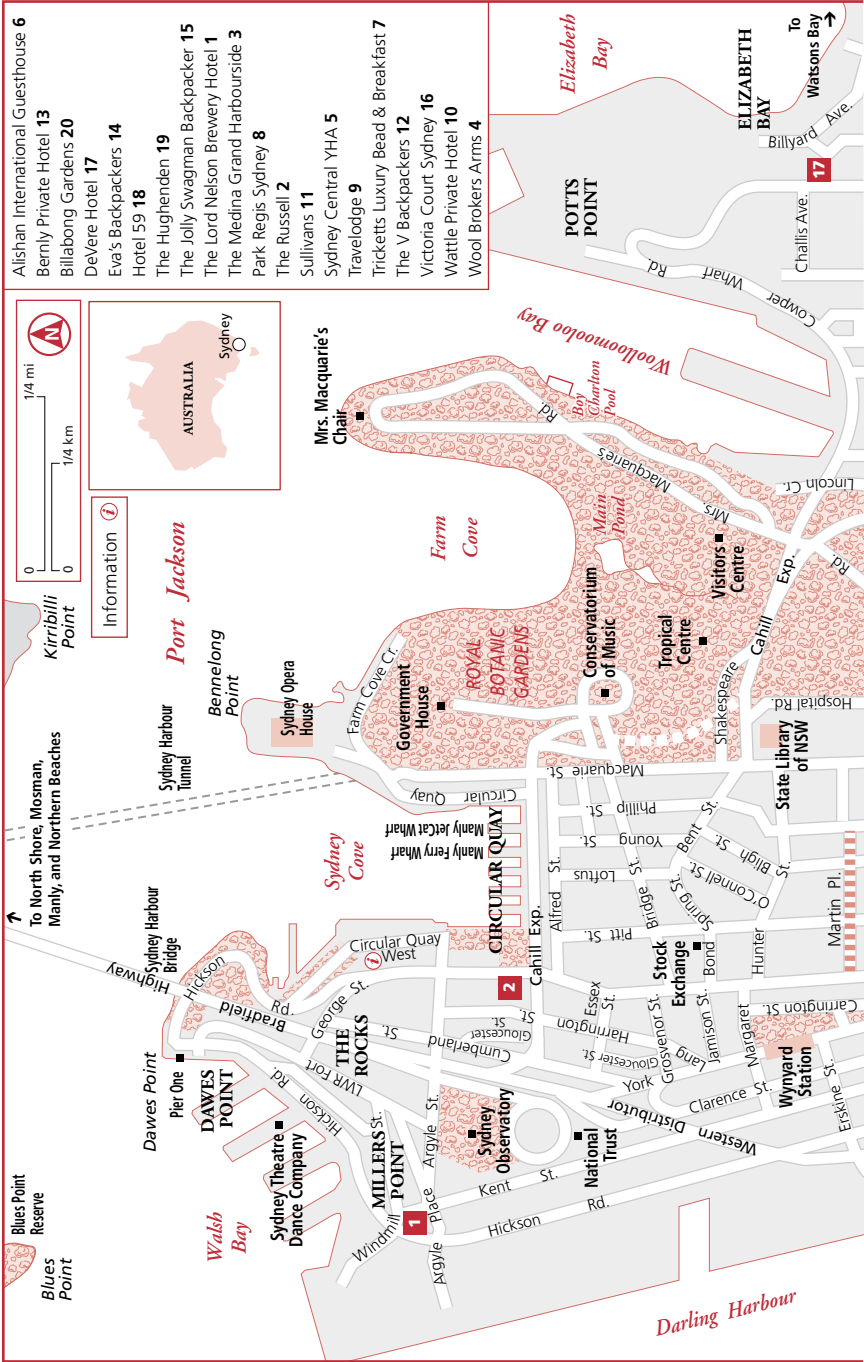
19 Kent St. (corner of Argyle St.), The Rocks, Sydney, NSW 2000. ☎ 02/9251 4044. Fax 02/9251 1532. www.thelordnelson.com.au. 9 units, 8 with bathroom. A\$120 (US\$78) double without bathroom; A\$180 (US\$117) double with bathroom. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. CityRail or ferry: Circular Quay. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar. *In room:* TV, fax, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

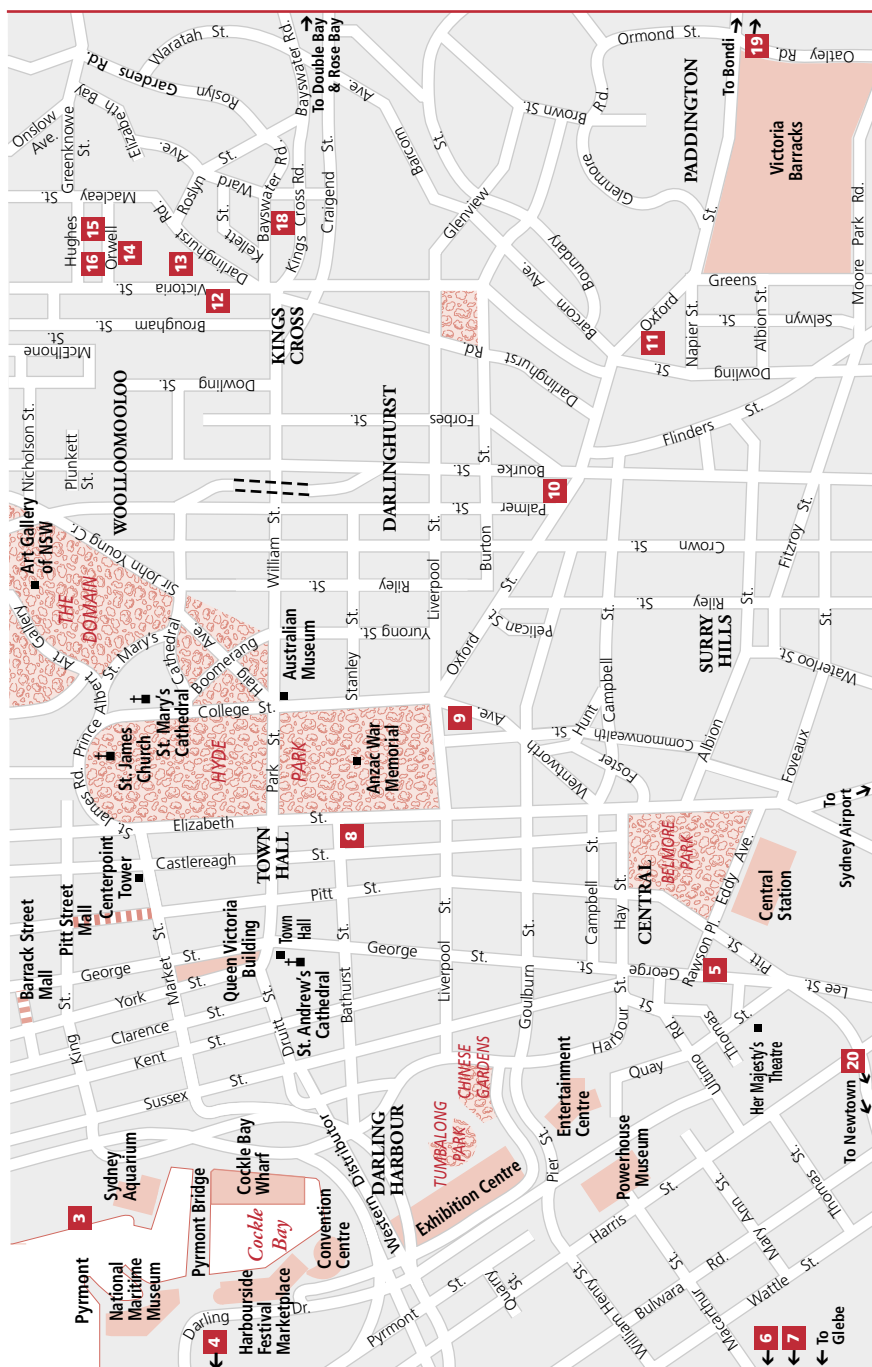
The Russell ★★ *Finds* This is the coziest place to stay in The Rocks, and perhaps in all of Sydney. It's more than 100 years old, and it shows its age wonderfully in the creak of the floorboards and the ramshackle feel of its brightly

Last-Minute Room Deals

If you turn up in town without a reservation, you should definitely make use of the **Sydney Visitors Centre Booking Desk** (☎ 02/9667 6050) in the arrivals hall of the airport's International Terminal. It negotiates deals with many of Sydney's hotels (but not hostels) and offers exceptional value discounts on rooms that haven't been filled that day—you can save up to 50% on a room. The desk is open from 6am to the last flight of the day and also offers discounts on tours (to the Blue Mountains, for example), and cheap tickets for flights within Australia.

Central Sydney Accommodations





painted corridors. Every room is different in style, size, and shape; all come with a queen-size bed and most have cable TV. (Others can have a TV moved in if requested.) All rooms have immense character, including a series of rooms added on in 1990 above the Fortune of War Hotel next door. There are no harbor views, but from some rooms you can see the tops of the ferry terminals at Circular Quay. Guests have the use of a comfortable sitting room, a living room with magazines and books, and a rooftop garden. The apartment is large and open, with a king-size bed, a small kitchen suitable for three people, and a double sofa bed. It overlooks Circular Quay. The place was refurbished in 2000 and 2001.

143A George St., The Rocks, Sydney, NSW 2000. ☎ 02/9241 3543. Fax 02/9252 1652. www.therussell.com.au. 29 units, 19 with bathroom. A\$140–A\$195 (US\$91–\$127) double without bathroom; A\$235–A\$290 (US\$153–US\$188) double with bathroom (the most expensive overlook Circular Quay); A\$320 (US\$208) suite and apartment. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking not available. CityRail or ferry: Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, iron.

CITY CENTER

Park Regis Sydney This hotel occupies the top 15 floors of a 45-story building and is well placed in the central business district, just 2 blocks from Hyde Park and Town Hall. There's nothing spectacular about the place, but the rooms are light, modern, and equally practical. The bathrooms have a shower and no tub. Many of the guests are business travelers, which gives the hotel a corporate feel. Nevertheless, it's a relatively good value considering the location. Rooms at the front have views over the city and park.

27 Park St. (at Castlereagh St.), Sydney, NSW 2000. ☎ 02/9267 6511, or 1800/221 138 in Australia. Fax 02/9264 2252. www.parkregissydney.com.au. 120 units. A\$165 (US\$107) double; A\$198 (US\$129) suite. Extra person A\$22 (US\$14). Children under 14 stay free in parent's room. Ask about lower rates available through Aussie auto clubs. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. CityRail: Town Hall. Monorail: Park Plaza. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool; concierge; tour desk; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Sydney Central YHA ★★ *Value* This multi-award-winning hostel is one of the biggest and busiest in the world. And it's just 1 of 140 YHA hostels in Australia (for the full list check the website below). With a 98% year-round occupancy rate, you'll have to book early. It's in a historic nine-story building that offers far more than standard basic accommodation. In the basement is the **Scu Bar**, a popular drinking hole with pool tables and occasional entertainment. There's also an entertainment room with more pool tables and e-mail facilities, TV rooms on every floor, and an audio-visual room showing movies. Try the heated swimming pool and the sauna. Rooms are clean and basic. The YHA is accessible to travelers with disabilities. Check the website for other hotels in Sydney—including the Glebe Point YHA, the Sydney Beachhouse YHA in the beachside suburb of Collaroy, and Pittwater YHA in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (only accessible by boat and a fabulous way to experience the “bush” around Sydney).

11 Rawson Place, Sydney, NSW 2000. ☎ 02/9281 9111. Fax 02/9281 9199. www.yha.com.au. 151 units, or 532 beds (54 twin rooms). A\$25–A\$31 (US\$16–US\$20) dorm bed; A\$78 (US\$50) twin without bathroom; A\$88 (US\$57) twin with bathroom. Non-YHA members A\$3 (US\$1.95) extra. MC, V. Parking A\$10 (US\$6.50) on the corner of Pitt St., outside Central Station. CityRail: Central. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; sauna; 2 kitchens; TV room.

Travelodge, Wentworth Avenue ★ This business-oriented hotel is cheap for Sydney, and comfortable and well located—making it a good option for the average traveler. The clean, brown-colored rooms are motel-like in appearance, with a queen-size bed. Many come with a sofa. From here it's a short walk to Oxford Street, Town Hall, Hyde Park, and the monorail to Darling Harbour.

27–33 Wentworth Ave., Sydney, NSW 2000. ☎ 02/8267 1700. Fax 02/8267 1800. www.travelodge.com.au. 406 units. A\$119 (US\$77) double and twin rooms. Extra person A\$16 (US\$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Parking around corner A\$17 (US\$11). CityRail: Museum. **Amenities:** Restaurant; massage; babysitting; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

AT DARLING HARBOUR

Wool Brokers Arms You'll find this friendly 1886 heritage building on the far side of Darling Harbour, next to the prominent four-star Novotel hotel and hidden behind a monstrous above-ground parking garage. It's set on a noisy road, so unless you're used to traffic, avoid the rooms at the front. Rooms are simply furnished with a double bed and a sink. Room no. 3 is one of the nicest. Family rooms have a king-size bed, a set of bunks, and two singles through an open doorway. There are 19 shared bathrooms. It's adequate for a few nights.

22 Allen St., Pyrmont, NSW 2009. ☎ 02/9552 4773. Fax 02/9552 4771. www.ozemail.com.au/~woolbrokers. 26 units, none with bathroom. A\$89 (US\$58) double; A\$110 (US\$71) triple; A\$130 (US\$84) family room for 4. Rates include continental breakfast. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). AE, MC, V. Parking A\$11 (US\$7) nearby. Bus: 501 from central business district or Central Station. Light Rail: Convention Centre. **Amenities:** Tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV.

SERVICED APARTMENTS

Worth a Splurge

Medina Grand, Harbourside ★★ This impressive serviced hotel offers modern and very comfortable rooms at competitive prices. It's a little oddly placed—reached by an offshoot road and a short, unattractive walk from the Sydney Aquarium in Darling Harbour—but it makes up for it by being close to all the Darling Harbour, Cockle Bay, and Town Hall attractions and shops. You can choose between studio and one-bedroom apartments, which all come with Italian designer furniture, large windows, and balconies (some with good harbor views). Studio units come with a kitchenette, and one-bedroom units with a fully equipped kitchen and a second TV. All have dataports. Medina offers very good package and weekend rates, which mean this place can work out to be a real bargain.

Medina has a series of other serviced-apartment complexes in Sydney, including the **Medina Executive**, Sydney Central (☎ 02/8396 9800), in a historic building near Central Station; the pleasant **Medina Classic** in Martin Place (☎ 02/9224 6400); coastal **Medina Executive**, near Coogee Beach (☎ 02/9578 6000); the gorgeous **Medina Executive** in Paddington (☎ 02/9361 9000); and the five-star **Medina Grand**, Sydney (☎ 02/9274 0000), between Town Hall and Darling Harbour. Check the website below for more details on these highly recommended properties. Rates range from A\$165 (US\$109) for a studio for two at the Medina Grand to A\$488 (US\$322) for a “Premier Plus” 2-bedroom apartment, with many prices and combinations in between.

55 Shelley St. (corner of King St.), King St. Wharf, Sydney, NSW 2000. ☎ 1300/300 232 in Australia, or 02/9249 7000. Fax 02/9249 6900. www.medinaapartments.com.au. 114 units. AE, DC, MC, V. CityRail: Town Hall. **Amenities:** Small pool; exercise room; concierge; tour desk; business center; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

IN KINGS CROSS & THE SUBURBS BEYOND

Bernly Private Hotel *(Finds)* This place, just off Darlinghurst Road, is indeed a find. It's an ants' nest of rooms run by friendly staff, catering to everyone from short-term travelers to newly arrived immigrants. All rooms are new and clean. The more expensive rooms are superior to most others of their price in the area. Budget rooms are a bit scruffier and smaller than the standards, but are perfectly

livable. Some come with a microwave oven, and all have a small TV. Backpacker rooms have two sets of bunk beds, though just two people seem to occupy most. Some of the backpacker rooms have a shower. There's a rooftop sun deck and a lounge with cable TV. Five family rooms come with double beds and two singles.

15 Springfield Ave., Potts Point, NSW 2011. ☎ 02/9358 3122. Fax 02/9356 4405. www.bernyprivatehotel.com.au. 95 units, 12 with bathroom. A\$50 (US\$33) single with shared bathroom; A\$60 (US\$39) budget double without shared bathroom; A\$80 (US\$52) double with bathroom; A\$100 (US\$65) triple with bathroom; A\$125 (US\$81) family room with bathroom. A\$25 (US\$16) dorm bed. Extra person A\$22 (US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. On-street meter parking. CityRail: Kings Cross. **Amenities:** Rooftop sun deck; TV lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

DeVere Hotel The DeVere has been recommended by several readers who comment on the friendly staff and the bargain-basement prices when booked at the Tourism New South Wales Travel Centre at the Sydney airport. Although the rooms are very modern, they are a little too standard gray for my liking (though the owner says some are now yellow). Superior rooms are a bit larger, and the executive room is larger still and comes with nicer furniture. They are certainly a bargain compared to similar, but far more expensive, rooms elsewhere in Sydney. The suites have views of Elizabeth Bay, a spa bath, and a king-size bed rather than a queen. Some suites have a kitchenette with no cooking facilities. Some standard rooms have an extra single bed. Breakfast is available from A\$8 (US\$5.20).

44–46 Macleay St., Potts Point, NSW 2011. ☎ 1800/818 790 in Australia, 0800/441 779 in New Zealand, or 02/9358 1211. Fax 02/9358 4685. www.devere.com.au. 100 units. A\$126 (US\$82) double; A\$163 (US\$106) superior room; A\$189 (US\$123) executive room or self-contained studio; A\$237 (US\$154) suite. Extra person A\$36 (US\$23). Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking at nearby Landmark Hotel A\$12 (US\$7.80) per exit. CityRail: Kings Cross. Bus: 311 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; laundry; dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Hotel 59 *Kids* This popular and friendly B&B is well worth considering if you want to be near the Kings Cross action, but far enough away to get a decent night's sleep. Deluxe rooms have either a queen- or king-size bed and a combined shower and tub, while the smaller standard rooms come with a double bed and a shower (no tub). The two large superior rooms come with a separate living room, two single beds, and two more that can be locked together to form a king. One comes with a small kitchen with a microwave and hot plates. All rooms are very clean and comfortable, and have private bathrooms. A fully cooked breakfast is served up in the cafe below. A flight of stairs and no elevator might make this a bad choice for older travelers or those with disabilities.

59 Bayswater Rd., Kings Cross, NSW 2011. ☎ 02/9360 5900. Fax 02/9360 1828. www.hotel59.com.au. 8 units. A\$115 (US\$75) standard double; A\$125 (US\$81) deluxe double; A\$135 (US\$88) superior room. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75), extra children 2–12 A\$10 (US\$6.50). Rates include cooked breakfast. MC, V. No parking. CityRail: Kings Cross. **Amenities:** TV lounge; cafe; tour/car-rental desk; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Victoria Court Sydney ★ This cute, good value little place is made up of two 1881 terrace houses joined together; it's situated near a string of backpacker hostels and popular cafes on a leafy street running parallel to sleazy Darlinghurst Road. The glass-roofed breakfast room on the ground floor is a work of art decked out with hanging ferns, giant bamboo, wrought-iron tables and chairs, and a trickling fountain. Just off this is a peaceful guest lounge stacked with books and newspapers. The very plush rooms come with either king- or queen-size beds, but lack a tub in the bathroom. There's a coin-op laundry just down the road.

Super Cheap Sleeps

The Kings Cross area has plenty of backpacker hostels to choose from—and most of them have double rooms, so, if you are traveling as a couple, you can lock yourself away from the crowd. You'll find most have discount rates if you stay for a week (normally a night free). While it's true that 20-somethings dominate, older adventurous travelers also make use of the cheap facilities. Most hostels are just off the main drag, called Darlinghurst Road. Here are three of the best. **The V Backpackers**, 144 Victoria St., Kings Cross (☎ 02/9357 4733; fax 02/9357 4434; www.vbackpackers.com). Modern and clean with a cafe and free breakfast included. Doubles A\$55 (US\$36). Free airport pickup if arranged in advance, and free barbecue dinner twice a week. **Eva's Backpackers**, 6-8 Orwell St., Kings Cross (☎ 02/9358 2185; fax 02/9385 3258; www.evasbackpackers.com.au). Five-star NRMA-rated Backpackers place. Family owned and operated, very friendly and popular. Has a good rooftop barbecue area and free Internet. Doubles A\$55 (US\$36); triples A\$66 (US\$43). **Jolly Swagman Backpackers**, 27 Orwell St., Kings Cross (☎ 1800/805 870 in Australia, or 02/9358 6400; fax 02/9331 0125; www.jollyswagman-backpackers.com). Five-star NRMA rated. Large hostel with lots of modern double rooms with TV and fridge. Very friendly and a good social scene. Free airport pickup, and free beer on arrival. Doubles and twin rooms A\$56 (US\$36).

122 Victoria St., Potts Point, NSW 2011. ☎ 1800/630 505 in Australia, or 02/9357 3200. Fax 02/9357 7606. www.victoriacourt.com.au. 22 units. A\$75–A\$115 (US\$49–US\$75) double, depending on the season; A\$165 (US\$108) deluxe double with sun deck; A\$250 (US\$163) honeymoon suite with balcony. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking in secured lot. CityRail: Kings Cross. **Amenities:** Guest lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV.

OXFORD STREET/DARLINGHURST

Sullivans Hotel About half of this boutique hotel's guests come from overseas, mainly from the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States. There's also a small corporate following. Sullivans is right in the heart of the action in one of Sydney's most popular shopping, entertainment, restaurant, and gay pub and club areas. The hotel is particularly popular with Americans during the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, held over the month of February. Rooms are cozy, with queen-size beds and a refrigerator; and all have a bathroom with a shower (no tub). There's a pleasant garden courtyard.

21 Oxford St., Paddington, NSW 2021. ☎ 02/9361 0211. Fax 02/9360 3735. www.sullivans.com.au. 64 units. A\$122 (US\$79) single; A\$144 (US\$94) garden room double and triple; A\$195 (US\$127) family room. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. Bus: 378 from Central Station or no. 380 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Breakfast cafe; garden courtyard area; small pool; free bike rental; laundry facilities. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe (garden rooms).

Wattle Private Hotel This attractive Edwardian-style house built between 1900 and 1910 offers homey accommodations in the increasingly fashionable inner-city suburb of Darlinghurst, known for its great cafes, nightlife, and restaurants. Rooms are found on four stories, but there's no elevator, so if you don't fancy too many stairs try to get a room on the lower floor. Rooms are smallish but are

opened up by large windows. Twin rooms have a better bathroom, with a tub. The decor is a jumble of Chinese vases, ceiling fans, and contemporary bedspreads. The owners are very friendly.

108 Oxford St. (at corner of Palmer St.), Darlinghurst, NSW 2010. ☎ 02/9332 4118. Fax 02/9331 2074. wattlehotel@yahoo.com.au. 12 units. A\$99 (US\$64) double. Extra person A\$11 (US\$7.15). Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. No parking. Bus: Any to Taylor Sq. from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, stocked minibar.

WORTH A SPLURGE

The Hughenden ★ *Finds* This boutique hotel in a restored 1870 Victorian mansion is a gem situated in Woollahra's tree-lined antiques district (just opposite the entrance to Centennial Park). Pleasant and reassuring, it's a bit like visiting your grandparents and comes complete with warmly romantic rooms, opulent iron beds, blue-on-white linen, and antique furniture. The owners, two artist sisters, have leant their personal touch to the place. Check out their paintings, book readings, and high teas incorporating classical recitals on Sundays. Breakfasts are served in their leafy conservatory.

14 Queen St., Woollahra, NSW 2025. ☎ 02/9363 4863. Fax 02/9362 0398. hughenden@ozemail.com.au. 33 units. A\$174 (US\$113) double; A\$204 (US\$132) deluxe room. English breakfast included. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 380, 382, or 387. **Amenities:** Restaurant; piano bar; park nearby (bicycling and horseback riding). *In room:* A/C, TV.

IN NEWTOWN

Billabong Gardens For that real inner-city feel, you can't beat Newtown with its busy street happenings, cheap restaurants, and "grunge" look. It's also easily accessed by buses and Newtown CityRail station. Billabong Gardens is just off the main drag, King Street, and is classed with a five-star backpackers rating. While there are dormitory accommodations here, you might also consider the double or twin rooms, which offer pretty good value. The more expensive rooms have their own bathrooms. It's a friendly place with lots of native plants scattered around and a pool set in a pleasant courtyard. Rooms are simply furnished in pine and have exposed brickwork. They are cleaned daily. On the property is a comfortable TV lounge and a large kitchen. It's very secure and offers 24-hour access. There are also motel rooms offered here.

5-11 Egan St., Newtown, NSW 2042. ☎ 02/9550 3236. Fax 02/9550 4352. www.billabonggardens.com.au. 37 units. A\$20-A\$23 (US\$13-US\$15) dorm; A\$66-A\$88 (US\$43-US\$57) double/twin. Motel rooms: A\$88 (US\$57) double; A\$105 (US\$68) triple. Family rooms available. MC, V. A\$5 (US\$3.25) parking. CityRail: Newtown. Bus: 422, 423, 426, or 428. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool; spa; laundry; TV room; game room; barbeque; fax; free Internet; kitchen; pay phones; safe.

IN GLEBE

Alishan International Guest House The Alishan is another quiet place with a real Aussie feel. It's at the city end of Glebe Point Road, just 10 minutes by bus from the shops around Town Hall. It's a mixture between a Youth Hostel and a typical guesthouse. Standard dorm rooms are spotless, light and bright, and come with two sets of bunks. Doubles have a double bed, a sofa and armchair, and a shower. Grab room no. 9 if you fancy sleeping Japanese-style on one of two single mattresses on the tatami mat floor.

100 Glebe Point Rd., Glebe, NSW 2037. ☎ 02/9566 4048. Fax 02/9525 4686. www.alishan.com.au. 19 units. A\$110 (US\$72) double; A\$154 (US\$100) family room. A\$30 (US\$20) dorm bed. Extra person A\$16 (US\$10). AE, MC, V. Secured parking available for 6 cars; otherwise, metered on-street parking. Bus: 431 or 433 from George St., or Kingsford Smith Shuttle from airport. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; TV room; barbeque area; Internet access. *In room:* TV, fridge.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Tricketts Luxury Bed & Breakfast ★★ As soon as I walked into this atmospheric old place, I wanted to ditch my modern Sydney apartment and move in. As you enter the tessellated, tiled corridor of this 1880s Victorian mansion, you're greeted with a jumble of plants and ornaments, high ceilings, Oriental rugs, and leaded windows. Guests play billiards over a decanter of port or relax among magazines and wicker furniture on the balcony overlooking the fairly busy Glebe Point Road. The bedrooms are quiet and homey, and there are no TVs. My favorites are no. 2, with its wooden floorboards and king-size bed, and no. 7, with its queen-size bed, extra single bed, and very large bathroom. Rooms all have showers. There's a nice courtyard out back with a barbecue.

270 Glebe Point Rd., Glebe, NSW 2037. ☎ 02/9552 1141. Fax 02/9692 9462. www.tricketts.com.au. 7 units. A\$150–A\$176 (US\$98–US\$114) double; A\$198 (US\$129) honeymoon suite. Rates include continental breakfast. Free parking. Bus: 431 from George St. **Amenities:** Tour desk; massage; nonsmoking rooms; barbecue area. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

IN BONDI

Bondi Beach is a good place to stay if you want to be close to the surf and sand, though if you're getting around by public transport, you'll need to catch a bus to Bondi Junction, then a train to the city center. (You can stay on the bus all the way, but it takes forever.)

As well as the properties recommended below, there are two good backpacker hostels: **Indy's** (☎ 02/9365 4900; www.indysbackpackers.com.au), at 35a Hall St. offers four- to eight-person dorm rooms for A\$18 (US\$12) in winter and A\$22 (US\$14) in summer, and double rooms in a separate building opposite North Bondi Surf Club for the same price per person; **Noah's**, 2 Campbell Parade (☎ 02/9365 7100; www.noahsbondibeach.com), has great ambience and offers clean, modern four- to eight-person dorm rooms from A\$21 to A\$24 (US\$14–US\$16) as well as doubles for A\$50 (US\$33), beach doubles for A\$55 (US\$36). Weekly rates from A\$126 to A\$330 (US\$82–US\$215).

Bondi Beachside Inn ★ With such a great location, right on the beachfront, you can't get much better value than this. A modern seven-story hotel, which prides itself on being family-friendly, the Beachside Inn has quite large rooms with compact bathrooms. The more expensive rooms have balconies with ocean views. It's well loved by return travelers, so it's very advisable to book well ahead, especially during the Australian summer.

152 Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach, NSW 2026. ☎ 02/9130 5311. Fax 02/9365 2646. www.bondiinn.com.au. 70 units. A\$100–A\$120 (US\$63–US\$76) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 380 or 382 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** 24-hr. reception; free security parking. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, tea/coffeemaker, toaster.

Ravesi's on Bondi Beach ★★ Right on Australia's most famous golden sands, this boutique property reopened in May 2002 after major renovations to the restaurant, bar, and many of its rooms. Now this three-star hotel offers modern minimalist rooms with chic white marble bathrooms and African tribal wall hangings. Standard doubles are spacious, and there's a one-bedroom suite and a split-level unit with the bedroom upstairs. Room nos. 5 and 6 and the split-level suite have the best views of the ocean. All rooms have Juliet balconies, and the split-level suite has its own terrace. If you're a light sleeper, request a room on the top floor because the popular Ravesi's Restaurant with its Modern Australian cuisine can cook up quite a bit of noise on busy nights. An attractive glass-sided ground floor bar is the "in" place on the Bondi scene, with lounge, house, and "chill" music every evening. It's a great place to dress up and watch the streetscene pass by outside.

Corner of Hall St. and Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach, NSW 2026. ☎ 02/9365 4422. Fax 02/9365 1481. www.ravesis.com.au. 16 units. A\$120 (US\$78) standard double; A\$185–A\$195 (US\$120–\$127) double with side view; A\$275 (US\$179) beachfront room; A\$245 (US\$159) 1 bedroom suites; A\$245–\$275 (US\$159–US\$179) split-level suites with terrace; Penthouse A\$450 (US\$292). Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). 2 children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking at the Swiss-Grand Hotel nearby for A\$8 (US\$5.20) for 24 hr. CityRail: Bondi Junction; then Bus 380. Bus: 380 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; room service; laundry/dry cleaning service. *In room:* AC, TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

SERVICED APARTMENTS

Bondi Serviced Apartments If you plan on staying a week or more in Sydney, then these pleasant, privately-owned managed apartments could be ideal. They're on busy Bondi Road, a 25-minute walk to the beach, and right opposite you'll find a post office (with phones—the apartment complex doesn't have any), an Internet parlor, and a 24-hour supermarket. The rooms at the front of the hotel suffer from traffic noise, but are larger than the quieter ones out back. That said, all are good-size and have a nice feel about them. Each has a double bed (the front rooms also have an extra single), and a full kitchen. There's no air-conditioning (though the sea breeze does tend to cool Bondi down a bit in summer). You must book for a week or more, but if there are free rooms you can negotiate a 4-night stay. The owner describes it as a “no frills” complex—hence once-weekly servicing and the lack of phones, Internet address, fax number, and credit card payments.

164–166 Bondi Rd., Bondi Beach, NSW 2026. ☎ 02/9363 5529. 12 apts. 12 units. A\$385–A\$550 (US\$250–US\$357) apt per week. Ask about cheaper rates for longer stays. No credit cards. Free parking. Bus 380 or 382 from city center and Bondi Junction. **Amenities:** Laundry; weekly servicing. *In room:* TV, kitchen, iron/ironing board.

IN MANLY

If you decide to stay at my favorite beachside suburb, then you'll need to be aware that ferries from the city stop running at midnight. If you get stranded, you'll be facing either an expensive taxi fare (around A\$35/US\$23), or you'll need to make your way to the bus stand behind Wynyard CityRail station to catch a night bus. Consider buying a Ferry Ten or JetCat Ten ticket, which will save you quite a bit of money in commuting expenses if you're staying in Manly for a few days.

As well as the recommendations below, Manly has several backpacker places worth checking out. The best is **Manly Backpackers Beachside**, 28 Ragland St. (☎ 02/9977 3411; fax 02/9977 4379; www.manlybackpackers.com.au), which offers dorm beds for A\$24 (US\$16), doubles without bathroom for A\$70 (US\$46), and doubles with bathroom for A\$80 (US\$52). There's a A\$30 (US\$20) key deposit.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Manly Lodge ★ *Kids* At first sight this ramshackle building halfway between the main beach and the harbor doesn't look like much—especially the cramped hostel-like foyer bristling with tourist brochures. But don't let these tacky features put you off. Some of the rooms are lovely, and the whole place has a nice atmosphere about it and plenty of character. Double rooms are not exceptional and come with a double bed, stone or carpet floors, a TV and VCR, and either a spa or a tub/shower combination. Some of the standard doubles, and all of the deluxe doubles, have a kitchen. Family rooms have a set of bunk beds and a double in one room, and a shower. Family suites are very classy; each has a small kitchen area, one double and three singles in the bedroom, and two sofa beds in the living area. The lodge also has a table tennis table, and even an Olympic-size trampoline.

22 Victoria Parade, Manly, NSW 2095. ☎ 02/9977 8655. Fax 02/9976 2090. www.manlylodge.com.au. 24 units. Standard double A\$132–A\$154 (US\$86–US\$100) peak season, A\$108–A\$132 (US\$70–US\$86) off season; deluxe double A\$154–A\$198 (US\$100–US\$128) peak season, A\$132–A\$154 (US\$86–US\$100) off season; family suite with spa A\$264–A\$330 (US\$172–US\$215) peak season, A\$187–A\$262 (US\$122–US\$170) off season. (Peak season: Christmas, Easter, and school holidays.) Extra adult A\$30 (US\$20); extra children under 10 A\$17 (US\$11). Ask about weekly rates; management will also negotiate off-season prices. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Ferry or JetCat: Manly. **Amenities:** Exercise room; spa; sauna; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Manly Paradise Motel and Beach Plaza Apartments ★ I walked into this place and immediately felt at home. The motel and the apartment complex are separate, but share the same reception area. Though there is one motel room that goes for A\$90 (US\$59), it's a bit small for my liking; the rest of the irregularly shaped rooms are big yet cozy, and come with a shower (no tub) and a springy double bed. Though there is no restaurant, you can get breakfast in bed. My only concern is that the traffic can make it a little noisy during the day (but you'll probably be on the beach anyway). Some rooms have glimpses of the sea. A pool (with views) on the roof is shared with the apartment complex.

The apartments are magnificent—very roomy, with thick carpets. They're stocked with everything you need, including a private laundry, a full kitchen with dishwasher, and two bathrooms (one with a tub). The sea views from the main front balcony are heart stopping.

54 North Steyne, Manly, NSW 2095. ☎ 1800/815 789 in Australia, or 02/9977 5799. Fax 02/9977 6848. www.manlyparadise.com.au. 40 units. A\$105–A\$165 (US\$62–US\$94) double motel unit; A\$295 (US\$192) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Ask about lower rates for long-term stays. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. Ferry or JetCat: Manly. **Amenities:** Pool; dry cleaning services; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

Periwinkle-Manly Cove Guesthouse Nicely positioned across the road from one of Manly's two harbor beaches, the Periwinkle is a short walk from the ferry, the shops along the Corso, and the main ocean beach. Rooms are small and come with a double bed. Some have a shower and toilet (these go for the higher prices noted below), but otherwise you'll have to make do with one of four separate bathrooms. (One has a tub.) A full kitchen next to a pleasant-enough communal lounge means you could save money by not eating out. Room nos. 5 and 10 are the nicest and have screened balconies overlooking the harbor (but no bathrooms). For atmosphere I prefer the Manly Lodge (see above). No smoking inside.

18–19 E. Esplanade, Manly, NSW 2095. ☎ 02/9977 4668. Fax 02/9977 6308. www.periwinkle.citysearch.com.au. 18 units, 12 with bathroom. A\$126 (US\$82) double without bathroom; A\$165 (US\$107) double with bathroom. Units with harbor views A\$10 (US\$6.50) extra. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Ferry or JetCat: Manly. **Amenities:** Kitchen; common lounge; laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge.

IN MOSMAN

Buena Vista Hotel If you want to see how wealthy Sydneysiders live, then stay in this upmarket northern suburb a 10-minute walk from Taronga Zoo. The rooms above this popular local pub, just down the road from some of Sydney's most exclusive boutiques, are clean and comfortable, and a bargain by Sydney standards. Each comes with a springy queen-size bed or two singles, a small TV, and a sink; a few have balconies. All except room no. 13 have good city views. The best is room no. 1, which is larger and brighter than the rest, and comes with a large balcony with good views. Family rooms come with a double bed, a foldout sofa bed, and a trundle bed—all in one room. All rooms share nice bathrooms. The fabulous Balmoral Beach is a 10-minute walk away, or just 5 minutes by bus.

Ask hotel staff for ferry times and bus/ferry connection details from Taronga Zoo and Mosman wharves. The taxi from the city is around A\$25 (US\$16). If you stay here I highly recommend the Japanese restaurant, Kyushu, at Shop 5, 9–11 Grosvenor St., Neutral Bay (☎ 02/9953 8272), about 5 minutes away by taxi. There's a good fish and chip shop, a supermarket, bakeries, and more in the cluster of shops next to the hotel.

76 Middle Head Rd., Mosman, NSW 2095. ☎ 02/9969 7022. Fax 02/9968 2879. 13 units (5 doubles, 6 single, 1 twin, 1 family room), none with bathroom. A\$75 (US\$49) single; A\$85 (US\$55) double/twin; A\$100 (US\$65) family room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Ferry: Taronga Zoo, then a 5-min. bus ride. Bus: Taronga Zoo from Wynyard station. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars. *In room:* TV.

AT THE AIRPORT

Stamford Sydney Airport ★★ This is the best airport hotel and the only five-star airport hotel in Australia. Opened in 1992, it has the largest rooms of all the airport hotels, each with a king-size bed or two doubles, access to airport information, and a good-size bathroom with tub. It's 7 minutes from the airport via a free pickup service. Day-use rates for 2 to 4 hours cost A\$85 (US\$55) and from 4 to 8 hours A\$115 (US\$75).

Corner of O'Riordan and Robey sts. (P.O. Box 353, Mascot, Sydney, NSW 2020). ☎ 1300/301 391 in Australia, or 02/9317 2200. Fax 02/9317 3855. www.stamford.com.au. 314 units. A\$270 (US\$176) double; from A\$370 (US\$240) and up for suites. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Ask about discount packages and weekend rates. Children under 17 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. A\$5 (US\$3.25) self-parking free for up to 10 days. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; good-size pool; fitness center; spa; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; currency exchange; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, dataport, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

4 Where to Dine

Sydney is a gourmet paradise, with an abundance of fresh seafood, a vast range of vegetables and fruit always in season, prime meats at inexpensive prices, and top-quality chefs making an international name for themselves. You'll find that

Value What to Know About BYO

Most moderate and inexpensive restaurants in Sydney are **BYO**, as in "bring your own" bottle, though some places may also have extensive wine and beer lists. More moderately priced restaurants are introducing "corkage" fees, which mean you pay anywhere from A\$1 to A\$4 (US\$65¢–US\$2.60) per person for the privilege of the waiter opening your own bottle of wine. Very expensive restaurants discourage BYO.

Sydney's **cheap eats** are congregated in inner-city areas such as along King Street in Newtown, Crown Street in Darlinghurst, and Glebe Point Road in Glebe. There are also inexpensive joints scattered among the more upscale restaurants in Kings Cross and along trendy Oxford Street.

I would avoid the takeout booths along the ferry wharves at Circular Quay, after revelations showed that some of them harbored nasty bugs. The fish-and-chip shop opposite the "bottle shop" (liquor store) is an exception—it also has some of the best hot chips (french fries) in Sydney.

Smoking is banned in all Sydney restaurants, except if you're eating from sidewalk tables.

Findings A Great Place for Picnic Grub

If you're looking for something to take with you on a harbor cruise or on a stroll through the Royal Botanic Gardens, you can't go wrong with **Quay Deli**, E5 Alfred St. (next to the pharmacy under the Circular Quay CityRail station, facing the road; ☎ **02/9241 3571**). Everything is fresh and tasty, and there are all sorts of goodies, including gourmet sandwiches and takeout foods such as olives, Greek dishes, pasta, salads, meat pies, and the best English-style custard tarts around. Lunch items go for A\$1.80 to A\$4.50 (US\$1.25–US\$3.15). It's open Monday through Friday from 5am to 6:45pm, Saturday from 9am to 4pm. No credit cards.

Asian and Mediterranean cooking have had a major influence on Australian cuisine, with spices and herbs finding their way into most dishes. Immigration has brought with it almost every type of cuisine you could imagine, from African to Tibetan, from Russian to Vietnamese, with whole areas of the city dedicated to one type of food, while other areas are a true melting pot of styles.

Sydney is a great place to try “Modern Australian,” or “Mod Oz,” cuisine, which has been applauded by chefs and food critics around the world. Modern Australian cuisine emphasizes fresh ingredients and a creative blend of European styles with Asian influence. (Some foodies complain that some restaurants use the label “Modern Australian” as an excuse to serve skimpy portions—like one lamb chop atop a miniscule mound of mashed potatoes sprinkled with curry sauce.) At its best, Modern Australian food is world-class, but you'll probably have to go to the best of Sydney's restaurants to really see what the scene is all about.

Australians think American-style coffee tastes like ditch water and largely favor a range of Italian-style coffee creations. Ask for a latte if you just want coffee with milk. “Bottomless” cups of coffee are very rare in Australia. By the way, in Australia, the first course is called the entree and the second course the main.

NEAR CIRCULAR QUAY

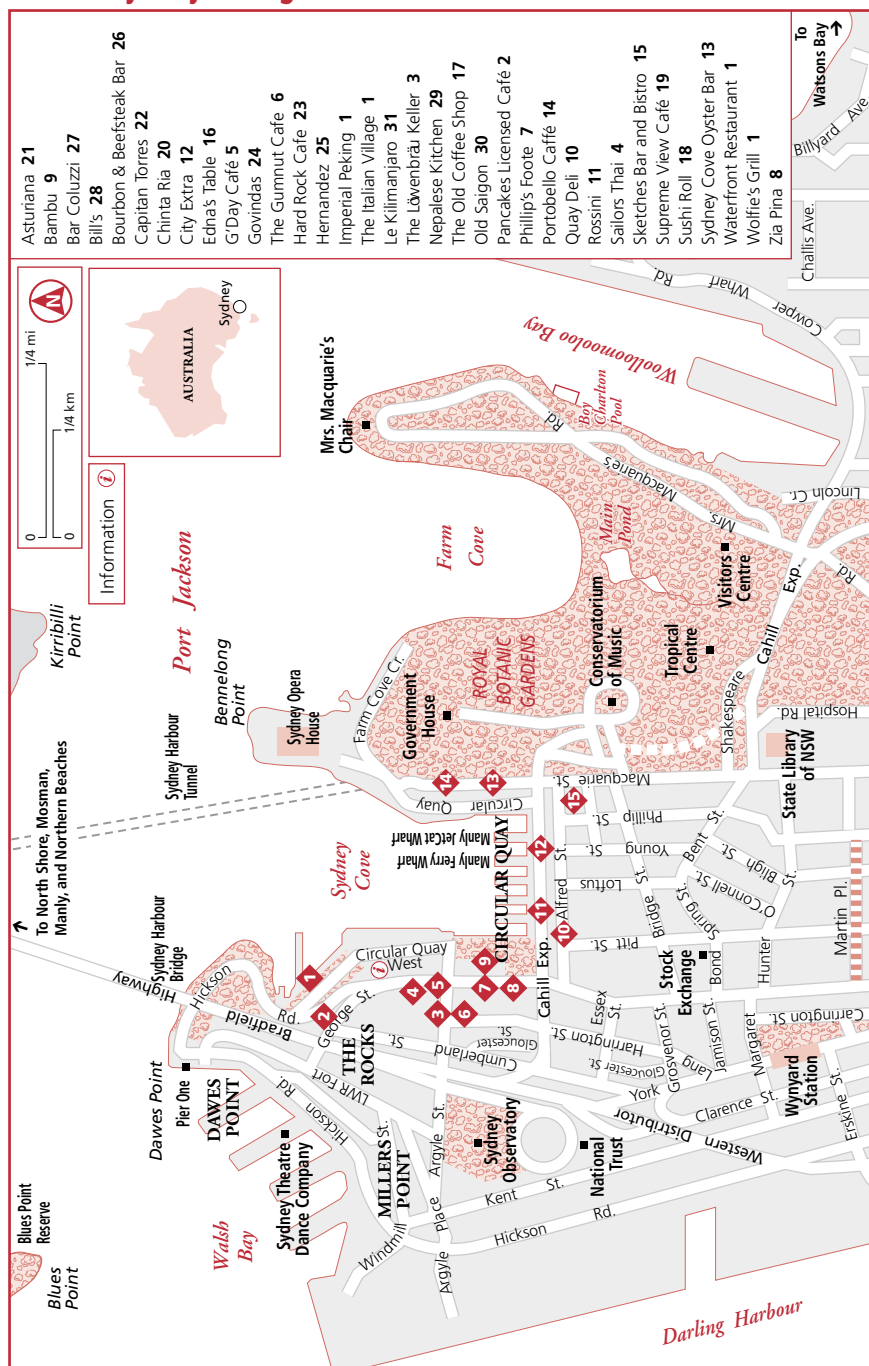
City Extra ITALIAN/AUSTRALIAN Because this place stays open 24 hours, it's convenient if you get the munchies at a ridiculous hour. It's also nicely placed right next to the Manly ferry terminal. The plastic chairs and tables placed outside make it a pleasant spot to while away time over an inexpensive meal. A range of pastas are on offer as well as salads, pies, steaks, ribs, fish, and Asian-influenced dishes. There's also a fat selection of desserts. Still, the food is much nicer and an even better value next door at Rossini (see below).

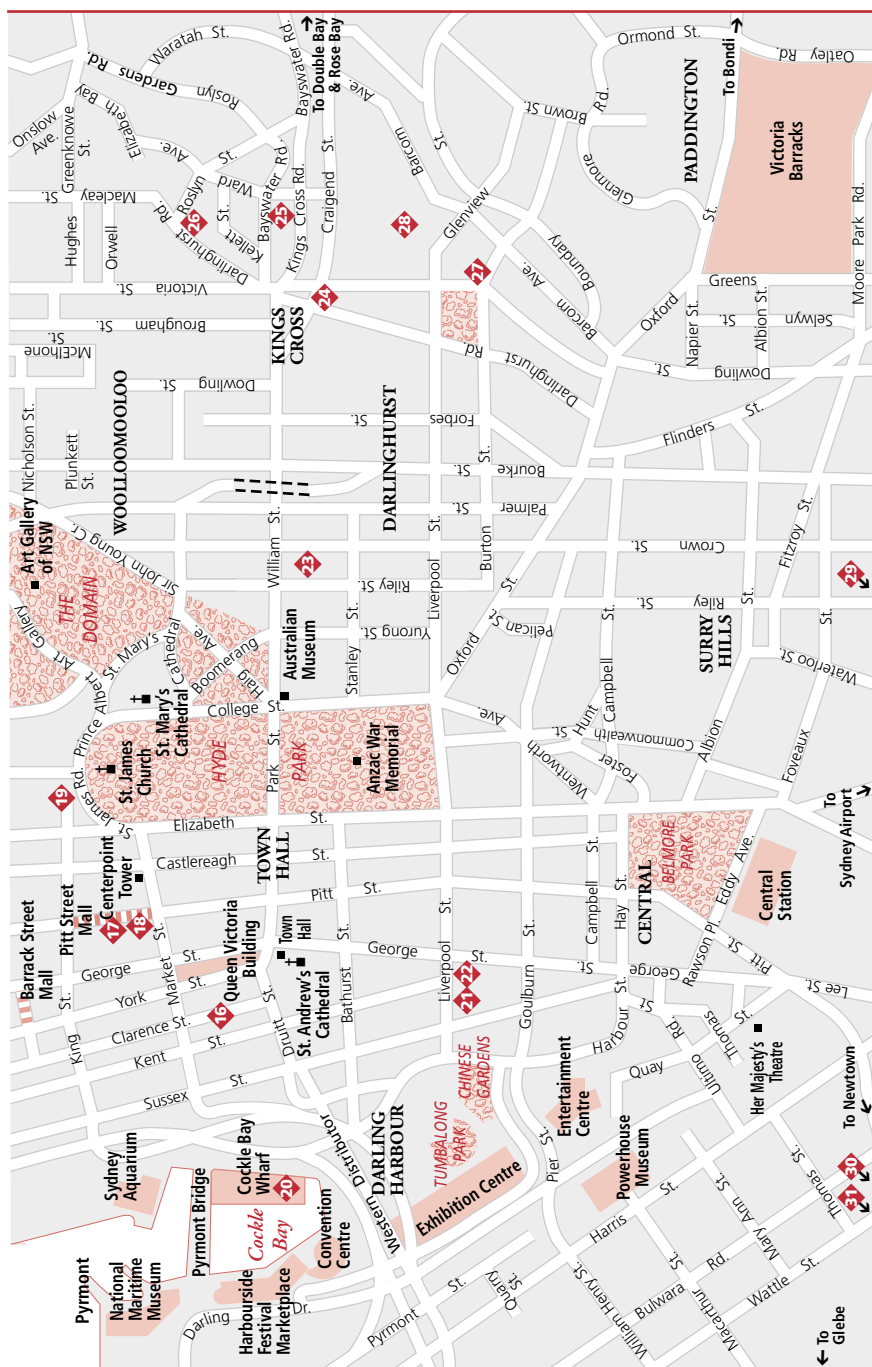
Shop E4, Circular Quay. ☎ **02/9241 1422**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses A\$13–A\$26 (US\$8.45–US\$17). 10% surcharge midnight–6am, Sun, and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Portobello Caffé PIZZA/SANDWICH Sharing the same address as the Sydney Cove Oyster Bar (and the same priceless views), the Portobello Caffé offers first-class gourmet sandwiches on Italian wood-fired bread, small but delicious gourmet pizzas, breakfast croissants, snacks, cakes, and hot and cold drinks. Walk off with sensational ice cream in a cone for around A\$3 (US\$1.95).

No.1 Eastern Esplanade, Circular Quay East. ☎ **02/9247 8548**. Main courses A\$8 (US\$5.20). 10% surcharge Sun and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Minimum credit card purchase A\$30 (US\$20). Daily 8am–11:50pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Central Sydney Dining





Rossini ★ *Kids* ITALIAN This cafeteria-style Italian restaurant opposite Ferry Wharf No. 5 at Circular Quay is wonderfully positioned for people-watching. The outside tables are great for breakfast or a quick bite before a show at the Opera House. Breakfast croissants, Italian donuts, muffins, and gorgeous Danish pastries cost A\$3 (US\$1.95), and bacon and eggs A\$9 (US\$5.85). Wait to be seated for lunch or dinner, make your choice, pay at the counter, take a ticket, and then pick up your food. Meals, including veal parmigiana, cannelloni, ravioli, chicken crepes, and octopus salad, are often huge. You can easily split one meal for two people—ask for an extra plate—and while not the best Italian you'll ever eat, it's tasty and filling. Coffee fanatics rate the Rossini brew as average.

Shop W5, Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9247 8026. Main courses A\$10–A\$15 (US\$6.50–US\$9.75). Cash only. Daily 7am–10pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Sketches Bar and Bistro ★ PASTA Sketches is a favorite with people on their way to the Opera House and those who know a cheap meal when they taste one. Here's how it works: After getting the barman's attention, point to one of three different size plates stuck to the bar above your head—the small size is adequate if you're an average eater, the medium plate is good for filling up after a hard day of sightseeing (and no lunch), but I've yet to meet a man who can handle the large serving with its accompanying bread, pine nuts, and Parmesan cheese. Then, with ticket in hand, head toward the chefs in white hats and place your order. There are 12 pastas to choose from and several sauces, including carbonara, marinara, pesto, vegetarian, and some unusual ones to dishearten pasta purists, such as south Indian curry. Meals are cooked in front of you while you wait.

In the Hotel Inter-Continental, 117 Macquarie St. (enter from Bridge St.). ☎ 02/9240 1210. Reservations recommended. Pasta A\$11–A\$17 (US\$7–US\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5:30–9:30pm; Sat 5:30–10:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Sydney Cove Oyster Bar SEAFOOD Just before you reach the Sydney Opera House you'll notice a couple of small shed-like buildings with tables and chairs set up to take in the stunning views of the harbor and the Harbour Bridge. The first one you come to is a Sydney institution, serving some of the best oysters in town. Light meals such as Asian-style octopus and seared tuna steak are also on the menu.

No. 1 Eastern Esplanade, Circular Quay East. ☎ 02/9247 2937. www.sydneycoveoysterbar.com. Main courses A\$25–A\$35 (US\$16–US\$23). 10% surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 11am–8pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

IN THE ROCKS

VERY EXPENSIVE

G'Day Café *Value* CAFE According to the manager, about half the tourists who visit Sydney visit this little place in the heart of The Rocks. That's not surprising considering it offers simple but satisfying food at around half the price you'd expect to pay in such a tourist precinct. The interior is uninspiring, but out the back there's a pleasant leafy courtyard. Among the offerings are focaccia sandwiches, hearty soups, salads, burgers, lasagna, chili con carne, and beef curry.

83 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9241 3644. Main courses A\$3–A\$7 (US\$1.95–US\$4.55). AE. Sun–Thurs 5am–midnight; Fri–Sat 5am–3am. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

The Gumnut Café *Kids* MODERN AUSTRALIAN A hearty lunch in a courtyard shaded from the sun by giant umbrellas—ah, heaven! With a great location in the heart of The Rocks, this 1890 sandstone cottage restaurant also has an extensive indoor seating area, so it's a perfect place to take a break from

all that sightseeing. On weekends live jazz sets the mood. The breakfast specials (A\$8.50/US\$5.50) are popular with guests from surrounding hotels, while at lunchtime it's bustling with tourists and local office workers. Lunchtime blackboard specials cost A\$11 (US\$7.15). More regular fare includes the disappointing Ploughman's Lunch (why spoil a traditional English meal of bread, cheese, and pickles by limiting the bread and adding unappealing vegetables and salad?), the better chicken and leek pies, and good pasta and noodle dishes. Filling Turkish sandwiches cost between A\$7.70 and A\$9 (US\$5–US\$5.85). The courtyard is heated in winter, making it quite cozy. It's BYO with no corkage fee.

28 Harrington St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 9591. Main courses A\$8.50–A\$14 (US\$5.50–US\$9.10). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Wed 8am–5pm; Thurs–Sat 8am–10:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

The Löwenbräu Keller ★ BAVARIAN Renowned for celebrating Oktoberfest every day for the past 20 years, this is the place to come to watch Aussies let their hair down. Come for lunch and munch a club sandwich or focaccia in the glassed-off atrium while watching the daytime action of The Rocks. For a livelier scene, head here on a Friday or Saturday night, when mass beer-sculling (chugging) and yodeling are accompanied by a brass band, and costumed waitresses ferry foaming beer steins about the atmospheric, cellar-like inside. Hearty southern German and Austrian fare and no less than 17 varieties of German beers in bottle or on draught (tap) are served. There's a good wine list, and, surprisingly, vegetarians are well catered for, too.

18 Argyle St. (at Playfair St.), The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 7785. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$15–A\$22 (US\$9.75–US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–2am (kitchen closes at 11pm). CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Pancakes Licensed Café AMERICAN/PANCAKES Buttermilk and chocolate pancakes; French crepes filled with seafood, chicken, and mushrooms; vegetables in a basil-cream sauce; or smoked ham and cheese are the most popular dishes served up in this old warehouse done up in Art Deco style. The beef ribs, pastas, and pizzas are also good sellers.

10 Hickson Rd. (enter from Hickson Rd. or George St.), The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 6371. Reservations not accepted. Main courses A\$13–A\$22 (US\$8.40–US\$14); breakfast (served 24 hr.) A\$8.95–A\$12 (US\$5.80–US\$7.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Phillip's Foote BARBECUE Venture behind this historic pub, and you'll find a courtyard strung with tables and benches and large barbecues. Choose your own steak, lemon sole, trout, chicken, or pork, and throw it on the "barbie." It's fun, it's filling, and you might even meet some new friends while your meal's sizzling.

101 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9241 1485. Main courses A\$22 (US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–midnight; Sun noon–10pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Sailors Thai ★ THAI With a reputation as hot as the chiles in its jungle curry, Sailors Thai canteen attracts lunchtime crowds who come to eat great-tasting noodles and the likes of pork and prawn won ton soup, red curry with lychees, and Thai salads. Seating is at its single, stainless steel table lined with some 40 chairs. Four other tables overlook the cruise-ship terminal and the quay. Downstairs, the a la carte restaurant serves inventive food such as stir-fried pineapple curry with chiles and cashew nuts, and a wonderfully glutinous coconut ash pudding made from the ash of burnt coconuts cooked with licorice root, coconut water, rice flower, and sugar—a far cry from your average Thai dishes!

106 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9251 2466. Reservations required well in advance in restaurant; not accepted in canteen. Main courses A\$26–A\$32 (US\$17–US\$21) in restaurant; A\$15–A\$23 (US\$9.75–US\$15) in canteen. AE, DC, MC, V. Restaurant Mon–Fri noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 6–10pm; canteen daily noon–9pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Zia Pina PIZZA/PASTA With 10 tables crammed downstairs and another 24 upstairs, there's not much room to breathe in this cramped traditional pizzeria and spaghetti house. But it's worth squeezing in between the close-fit bare-brick walls, and having fun with the clashes and clangs coming from the hard-working chefs in the kitchen. Pizzas come in two sizes; the larger feeds two people. Servings of delicious gelato go for a cool A\$4 (US\$2.60).

93 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 2255. Reservations recommended well in advance. Main courses A\$9–A\$22 (US\$5.85–US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm; Sun–Mon 5–9pm; Tues–Thurs 5–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 5–11:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Worth a Splurge

Bambu FUSION ★★ Bambu is an architectural wonder. Housed in the Overseas Passenger Terminal (OPT), it has fantastic views of the Opera House and incorporates a spectacular New York–designed white wall wave sculpture that mirrors the contours of Sydney's most famous icon. Last time I was here, I shared an entree of prawns with coconut caramel and lime served in coriander and mint leaves. It was delicate, innovative, and impeccably presented. I also highly recommend the *harissa* (spiced lamb with ratatouille and feta), and their signature dish, scallops with radicchio, white bean purée, and raspberry dressing. The service is as smooth as the silk laden decor, and very friendly. The lounge music is tasteful and well chosen. When booking, you should try to make sure that there's no ocean liner blocking the spectacular view as the OPT is still very much operational. The Bambu cocktail lounge, also with spectacular harbor views, is on the mezzanine level.

Bay 4, Overseas Passenger Terminal, West Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9247 6044. Reservations recommended. Entrees A\$20 (US\$13); main courses A\$30 (US\$20). Daily 6–10:30pm.

Waterfront Restaurant ★ You can't help but notice the mast, rigging, and sailing ship sails that mark this restaurant set in a converted stone warehouse, even though it's one of four in a row right next to the water below the main spread of The Rocks. It's very popular at lunchtime when businesspeople snap up the best seats outside in the sunshine, and at night with the colors of the city washing over the harbor it can be magical. You get a choice of such things as steaks, mud crab, fish filets, prawns, or the seafood platter—including lobsters, Balmain bugs (small odd-looking crayfish), prawns, scallops, baby squid, fish pieces, and octopus (A\$53/US\$34). The food is nice, simple, and fresh, with a price markup added for the glorious position and views.

In the same building you'll find sister restaurants **Wolfie's Grill** (☎ 02/9241 5577), which serves good chargrilled beef and seafood dishes for A\$22 to A\$26 (US\$14–US\$17), and **The Italian Village** (☎ 02/9247 6111), which serves regional Italian cuisine for A\$22 to A\$30 (US\$14–US\$20). The third in the line is an excellent Chinese restaurant, the **Imperial Peking** ★ (☎ 02/9247 7073), which serves excellent food for similar prices. All four restaurants offer fantastic water views and indoor and outdoor dining.

In Campbell's Storehouse, 27 Circular Quay West, The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 3666. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$26–A\$29 (US\$17–US\$19); A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) per person surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

NEAR TOWN HALL

Capitan Torres SPANISH Sydney's Spanish quarter, based on Liverpool Street (a 10-min. walk from Town Hall station on your right just past Sydney's main cinema strip) offers some great restaurants, of which Capitan Torres is my favorite. Downstairs is a tapas bar with traditional stools, Spanish staff, and lots of authentic dark oak. Upstairs on two floors is a fabulous restaurant with heavy wooden tables, chairs, and an atmosphere thick with sangria and regional food. The garlic prawns are incredible, and the whole snapper a memorable experience. The tapas are better at **Asturiana** (☎ 02/9264 1010), another Spanish restaurant a couple of doors down. (Make sure you insist on eating at the bar for that authentic experience.)

73 Liverpool St. (just past the cinema strip on George St., near Town Hall). ☎ 02/9264 5574. Fax 02/9283 2292. Main courses A\$18–A\$23 (US\$12–US\$15); tapas A\$8–A\$11 (US\$5.20–US\$7.15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 6–11pm; Sun 6–10pm. CityRail: Town Hall.

Supreme View Café ★ *Finds* CAFE If you happen to be in the city center, then this fabulous, largely undiscovered restaurant/cafe is a must for the great value food and absolutely fantastic views reaching over Hyde Park and even to the harbor. It's very large inside, has panoramic windows, and serves meals from the counter. Breakfasts are hearty and include bacon and eggs, omelets, and cereals. It's particularly handy if you are staying in the lower Oxford street area. All day dishes include the likes of sandwiches, Caesar salad, homemade pies, pastas, and lasagna. Even if you're not hungry, it's well worth popping in for a coffee.

Level 14. Law Courts Bldg., 184 Phillip St. (Queens Sq.). ☎ 02/9230 8224. Main courses A\$8–A\$13 (US\$5.20–US\$8.45); coffee and cake A\$5 (US\$3.25). Cash only. Mon–Fri 7am–5pm.

Sushi Roll ★ SUSHI The fresh, simple food at this bargain-basement take-out is a healthy alternative to the greasy edibles with which many travelers end up satisfying their hunger. A large range of sushi and nori rolls peek out from behind the counter if you turn up at lunchtime, and you can eat at the tables opposite. The gourmet sandwiches and meals served up by other establishments in the food court here make it a good stopover after a morning's shopping and sightseeing.

Sydney Central Plaza (downstairs in the food hall next to Grace Brothers dept. store on Pitt Street Mall). ☎ 02/9233 5561. Sushi rolls A\$1.70 (US\$1.10) each. No credit cards. Mon–Wed and Sat 8am–7pm; Thurs 8am–10pm; Sun 10am–6pm.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Edna's Table ★★ AUSTRALIAN Jennice Kersch and brother Raymond have Australian native cuisine in their hearts, and it shows as they introduce diners to such exotic specialties as crocodile and assorted local seafood. Interesting combinations include barramundi (a big freshwater fish from the Northern Territory) cooked in paperbark, carpaccio of tuna with native aniseed, and Balmain Bug (a small native crayfish with unusual armor), and ravioli in pepper-berry sauce. One of Australia's national icons—the kangaroo—also hops onto the menu, despite calls to preserve native wildlife in the wild, rather than in the refrigerator. It's all served up in one of Sydney's most beautiful heritage buildings—refurbished in a light and elegant style—close to the Town Hall and Queen Victoria Building.

204 Clarence St. ☎ 02/9267 3933. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$28–A\$33 (US\$18–US\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch Mon–Fri 12–3pm; dinner Tues–Sat 6–10pm. CityRail: Townhall. Monorail: Park St.

DARLING HARBOUR/COCKLE BAY

Chinta Ria (The Temple of Love) ★ MALAYSIAN Cockle Bay's star attraction for those who appreciate good food and fun ambience without paying a fortune, Chinta Ria, is on the roof of the three-story Cockle Bay development. In a round building dominated by a giant golden Buddha in the center, Chinta Ria serves up fairly good "hawker-style" (read: cheap and delicious) Malaysian food. While the food is good, the atmosphere is even more memorable. The service is slow, but who cares in such an interesting space, with plenty of nooks, crannies, and society folk to look at. There are seats outside (some get the noise of the highway), but the best views unfold inside. The hot-and-sour soup—a broth made with tofu, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and preserved cabbage—makes an interesting starter, and I recommend the chili prawns and the *Hokkeien Char* (soft-cooked egg noodles with extras) as main dishes.

Cockle Bay Wharf Complex. ☎ 02/9264 3211. Main courses A\$11–A\$28 (US\$7.15–US\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm. Ferry or monorail: Darling Harbour.

SURRY HILLS

Nepalese Kitchen NEPAL Adventurous gourmands around here dig into this somewhat mildly spiced cuisine, which is something like a mixture of Indian and Chinese. Steamed dumplings, called *momo*, and stuffed crispy pancakes made with black-lentil flour are interesting starters, and the goat curry is the pick of the main courses. Also popular is the chargrilled lamb or chicken marinated in roasted spices. The curries are very tasty, and there's a large selection of vegetarian dishes, including flavorsome eggplant curry. Accompany your meal with *achars* (relishes) to highlight the flavors of your dishes.

481 Crown St., Surry Hills. ☎ 02/9319 4264. Main courses A\$8–A\$12 (US\$5.60–US\$8.40); 2-course meal A\$18 (US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. CityRail: Central, then a 10-min. walk up Devonshire St.

IN KINGS CROSS/DARLINGHURST

Bourbon & Beefsteak Bar INTERNATIONAL Extensively renovated in 2003, the Bourbon & Beefsteak has been a Kings Cross institution for more than 30 years, and still attracts everyone from visiting U.S. sailors and tourists to businesspeople and ravers. The fact that it's open 24 hours means many people never seem to leave—occasionally you'll find someone taking a nap in the bathroom. The American-themed restaurant is always busy, churning out steaks, seafood, salads, Tex-Mex, ribs, and pasta. Breakfast is also served daily from 6 to 11am.

Something Fishy

If you like fresh seafood at cheap prices, then saunter down to the **Sydney Fishmarket** ★, on the corner of Bank Street and Pyrmont Bridge Road, Pyrmont (☎ 02/9660 1611, or call the Fishline at ☎ 02/9552 2180 for information on special events such as seafood cooking classes). The major fish retailers here sell sashimi at the cheapest prices in Sydney, but if you prefer your seafood cooked, then stay for lunch at one of the eateries scattered along the boardwalk and inside the main building.

To get to the Fishmarket, take the light rail from Central Station, Chinatown, or Darling Harbour to the Fishmarket stop, or you can walk from Darling Harbour (follow the signs).

Every night there's live music in the Piano Bar from 5 to 9pm, followed by a mixture of jazz, Top 40, and rock-and-roll until 5am. A dance club downstairs starts at 11pm every night (finishing at 6am.) The music is geared toward the 18-to-25 crowd of locals and tourists.

24 Darlinghurst Rd., Kings Cross. ☎ 02/9358 1144. Reservations recommended Fri–Sun. Main courses A\$13–A\$28 (US\$8.15–US\$18). A\$2 (US\$1.30) surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. (happy hour 4–7pm). CityRail: Kings Cross.

Govindas VEGETARIAN When I think of Govindas, I can't help smiling. Perhaps it's because I'm reliving the happy vibe from the Hare Krishna center it's based in, or maybe it's because the food is so cheap! Or maybe it's because they even throw in a decent movie with the meal. (The movie theater is on a different floor.) The food is simple vegetarian, served buffet style and eaten on black-lacquer tables. Typical dishes include pastas and salads, lentil dishes, soups, and casseroles. It's BYO and doctrine-free.

112 Darlinghurst Rd., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9380 5155. Dinner A\$16 (US\$10), including free movie. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. CityRail: Kings Cross.

Hard Rock Cafe AMERICAN The obligatory half a Cadillac through the wall beckons you into this shrine to rock-and-roll. Among the items on display are costumes worn by Elvis, John Lennon, and Elton John, as well as guitars from Sting and the Bee Gees, drums from Phil Collins and the Beatles, and one of Madonna's bras. The mainstays here are the burgers, with ribs, chicken, fish, salads, and T-bone steaks on the menu, too. Most meals come with french fries or baked potatoes and a salad. It's really busy on Friday and Saturday evenings from around 7:30 to 10:30pm, when you might have to queue to get a seat.

121–129 Crown St., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9331 1116. Reservations not accepted. Main courses A\$9.95–A\$22 (US\$6.50–US\$14). 10% surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight. Shop daily 10am–midnight. Closed Christmas. CityRail: Museum; then walk across Hyde Park, head down the hill past the Australian Museum on William St., and turn right onto Crown St. Sydney Explorer Bus: Stop no. 7.

CAFE CULTURE

Debate rages over which cafe serves the best coffee in Sydney, which has the best atmosphere, and which has the tastiest snacks. The main cafe scenes are centered around Victoria Street in Darlinghurst, Stanley Street in East Sydney, and King Street in Newtown. Other places, including Balmoral Beach on the north shore, Bondi Beach, and Paddington, all have their favored hangouts as well.

Note: Americans will be sorry to learn that, unlike in the States, free refills of coffee are rare in Australian restaurants and cafes. Sip slowly.

Here are a few of my favorites around town:

Balmoral Boatshed Kiosk ★ *Find* A real find, this beautiful rustic cafe is right on the water beside the dinghies and sailing craft of the wooden Balmoral Boatshed (located to the far right of the central beach as you look at the water). It's a heavenly place for enjoying a breakfast muffin or a ham-and-cheese croissant while basking in the sun. This place is popular with families on weekend mornings, so if you hate kids, find somewhere else (the nearby Sandbar has the best takeaway food and coffee).

2 The Esplanade, Balmoral Beach. ☎ 02/9968 4412. Daily 8am–6pm in summer; 8am–5pm in winter. Ferry to Taronga Zoo, then bus to Balmoral Beach.

Bar Coluzzi Although it may no longer serve the best coffee in Sydney, this cafe's claim to fame is that long ago it served up real espresso when the rest of

the city was drinking Nescafe. People-watching is a favorite hobby at this fashionably worn-around-the-edges spot in the heart of Sydney's cafe district.

322 Victoria St., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9380 5420. Daily 5am–8pm. CityRail: Kings Cross.

Bill's This bright and airy place, strewn with flowers and magazines, serves nouveau cafe-style food. It's so popular you might have trouble finding a seat. The signature breakfast dishes—including ricotta hotcakes with honeycomb butter and banana, and sweet corn fritters with roast tomatoes and bacon—are the stuff of legends. Last time I was here I asked for fried instead of scrambled eggs and was brusquely told I had to stick to the menu, which really is unforgivable.

433 Liverpool St., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9360 9631. Fax 02/9360 7302. Mon–Sat 7:30am–3pm. CityRail: Kings Cross.

Hernandez ★ *Finds* The walls of this tiny, cluttered cafe are crammed with eccentric fake masterpieces, and the air is permeated with the aroma of 20 types of coffee roasted and ground on the premises. It's almost a religious experience for discerning inner-city coffee addicts. The Spanish espresso is a treat.

60 Kings Cross Rd., Potts Point. ☎ 02/9331 2343. Daily 24 hr. CityRail: Kings Cross.

The Old Coffee Shop ★ Sydney's oldest coffee shop opened in the Victorian Strand Arcade in 1891. The shop may not serve Sydney's best java, but the old-world feel of the place and the sugary snacks, cakes, and pastries make up for it. It's a good place to take a break from shopping and sightseeing.

Ground floor, The Strand Arcade. ☎ 02/9231 3002. Mon–Fri 7:30am–5pm; Sat 8:30am–5pm; Sun 10:30am–4pm. CityRail: Town Hall.

IN NEWTOWN: GREAT ETHNIC EATS

Inner-city Newtown is three stops from Central Station on CityRail, and 10 minutes by bus from central Sydney. On Newtown's main drag, King Street, many inexpensive restaurants offer food from all over the world.

Le Kilimanjaro AFRICAN With so many excellent restaurants in Newtown—they close down or improve quickly enough if they're bad—I picked Kilimanjaro because it's the most unusual. It's a tiny place, with limited seating on two floors. Basically, you enter, choose a dish off the blackboard menu (while standing), and are escorted to your seats by one of the waiters. On a recent visit I had couscous, African bread (similar to an Indian chapati), and the *Saussou-gor di guan* (tuna in a rich sauce). Another favorite dish is *Yassa* (chicken in a rich African sauce). All meals are served on traditional wooden plates.

280 King St., Newtown. ☎ 02/9557 4565. Reservations not accepted. Main courses A\$8.50–A\$9.50 (US\$5.50–US\$6.20). No credit cards. CityRail: Newtown.

Old Saigon VIETNAMESE Another Newtown establishment bursting with atmosphere, Old Saigon was owned until 1998 by a former American Vietnam War correspondent who loved Vietnam so much he ended up living there and marrying a local, before coming to Australia. Just to make sure you know about it, he's put up his photos on the walls, and strewn the place with homemade tin helicopters. His Vietnamese brother-in-law has taken over, but the food is still glorious, with spicy squid dishes among my favorites. A popular pastime is grilling your own strips of venison, beef, wild boar, kangaroo, or crocodile over a burner at your table, then wrapping the meat in rice paper with lettuce and mint, and dipping it in a chili sauce. I highly recommend this place for a cheap night out.

107 King St., Newtown. ☎ 02/9519 5931. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$12–A\$43 (US\$7.80–US\$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sun 6–11pm. BYO only. CityRail: Newtown.

AT BONDI BEACH

The seafront drag of Campbell Parade is packed with restaurants. A new addition in 2003 to the restaurant scene was **Moorish Restaurant and Bar** (☎ 02/9300 9511) beneath the **North Bondi R.S.L. Club**, at the far end of Bondi Beach to your left as you look at the ocean. It's run by chef Luke Mangan, also behind Salt in Darlinghurst and Bistro Lulu, so the pedigree is excellent. It's a bit more casual than both and features a modern interpretation of Spanish and North African food, with a range of dishes from tapas to wood-fired grills. The views of the beach are terrific. A poolside cafe also opened in mid 2003 at the **Bondi Icebergs Club** at the other end of the beach, too.

Pompei's ★★ PIZZA/PASTA/ICECREAM Unbleached flour and olive oil. The recipe is simple: Use good ingredients, and you'll get good pizzas—regulars swear they are the best in Sydney. Toppings include figs, prosciutto, fresh goat cheese, and pumpkin. They also have a selection of pizzas without cheese. And leave some room for the homemade gelati, the best in Sydney by far—the last time I had anything so good was recently in Pompei, Italy, itself, and I swore then it was the best I'd ever eaten. Try the dense raspberry, the thick chocolate, the tiramisu, or the lemoncello. The water views and outside tables are another plus. 126–130 Roscoe St. at Gould St., Bondi Beach. ☎ 02/9365 1233. Reservations recommended. Pizza A\$13–A\$17 (US\$8.40–US\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–11pm.

Thai Terrific ★ THAI Thai Terrific by name, terrific Thai by nature. This superb place around the corner from the Bondi Hotel is run with flair and efficient service. The large back room can be noisy, so if you prefer less din with your dinner, sit at one of the sidewalk tables. The servings here are enormous—three people could easily fill up on just two mains. The *tom yum* (hot and sour) soups and the prawn or seafood *laksa* noodle soups (spicy soup made with coconut milk) are the best I've tasted in Australia and are very filling. I also highly recommend the red curries.

Equally as nice (and quieter) is the Bangkok-style **Nina's Ploy Thai Restaurant** ★, at 132 Wairoa Ave. (☎ 02/9365 1118), at the corner of Warners Avenue at the end of the main Campbell Parade strip. Main courses here cost between A\$8 and A\$12.50 (US\$5.60 and US\$8.75); cash only.

147 Curlew St., Bondi Beach. ☎ 02/9365 7794. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat nights. Main courses A\$11–A\$20 (US\$7–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Bus: 380 to Bondi Beach.

Turenne's ★ (Finds) CARIBBEAN Being greeted by the owner Turenne himself, armed with his delicious complimentary punch and welcoming smile, makes you feel at home the moment you enter this beautifully understated restaurant. You will then discover your service to be both attentive and professional as you dine on such creations as prawns, cashews, and crispy coconut

(Finds) Sydney's Best Fries

If you're looking for the best french fries in Sydney, head to **Manly Ocean Foods**, three shops down from the beach on the Corso. Avoid the fish and chips here (the shark is not the best in my opinion), and spend a few dollars extra on barramundi, salmon, perch, or snapper.

served on fresh betel leaf; I recommend the Court bouillon of a whole snapper with lentils and the crème brûlée with fresh fruit. The Caribbean music rounds off this relaxed experience perfectly.

49 Hall St. ☎ **02/9363 7609**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$15–A\$24 (US\$9.75–US\$16). Daily 6–11pm. Closed Tues in winter.

Yulla ISRAELI Good value for the money, this trendy restaurant is best enjoyed if you are able to score a spot out on the balcony overlooking Bondi. Go with the Mixed Plate, a generous selection of dips and char-grilled mushrooms with lots of hot pita bread. The spinach salad, with shredded green leaves, roasted pumpkin, corn, Parmesan, avocado, and croutons, is another favorite.

1st Floor, 38 Campbell Parade. ☎ **02/9365 1788**. Main courses A\$7.50–A\$18 (US\$5–US\$12); breakfast A\$5.50–A\$9.50 (US\$3.60–US\$6.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–11pm. Bus: Bondi Beach.

IN MANLY

Manly is 30 minutes from Circular Quay by ferry, or 15 minutes by JetCat. The takeout shops that line the Corso, as well as the pedestrian mall that runs between the ferry terminal and the main Manly Beach, offer everything from Turkish kebabs to Japanese noodles.

Ashiana ★ INDIAN You'll be hard-pressed to find a better cheap Indian restaurant in Sydney. It's tucked away up a staircase next to the Steyne Hotel (just off the Corso and near the main beach). Portions are large and filling, and the service is very friendly. The chicken vindaloo is magnificent, while the *Malai Kofta* (cheese and potato dumplings in a mild, creamy sauce) is the best this side of Bombay. Beer is the best drink with everything. Work off the heavy load in your stomach with a beachside stroll afterward.

Corner of Sydney Rd. and Corso Manly. ☎ **02/9977 3466**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$8.50–A\$18 (US\$5.50–US\$12). AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–11pm. Ferry or JetCat: Manly.

Green's Eatery VEGETARIAN Of the many eateries in Manly, this nice little vegetarian place, just off the Corso on the turnoff just before the Steyne Hotel, does the best lunchtime business. The food is healthy and good quality. The menu includes 11 different vegetarian burgers, vegetable curries and noodle dishes, patties and salads, soups, smoothies, and wraps. They serve some exceptionally nice cakes here, too, which despite being incredibly wholesome are still surprisingly tasty. On a nice day you can sit outside.

1–3 Sydney Rd., Manly. ☎ **02/9977 1904**. Menu items A\$1.20–A\$7.40 (US\$0.60–US\$4.80). Cash only. Daily 8am–7pm. Ferry or JetCat: Manly.

5 What to See & Do in Sydney

The only problem with visiting Sydney is fitting in everything you want to see and do. Of course, you won't want to miss the “icon” attractions—the **Opera House** and the **Harbour Bridge**. Everyone seems to be climbing over the arch of the bridge these days on the BridgeClimb Tour, so look up for the tiny dots of people waving to the ferry passengers below.

You should also check out the wildlife in **Taronga Zoo** and the **Sydney Aquarium**, stroll around the “tourist” precinct of **Darling Harbour**, and get a dose of Down Under culture at the not-too-large **Australian Museum**. Also try to take time out to visit one of the nearby national parks for a taste of the bush, and if it's hot take your *cozzie* (swimsuit) and towel to **Bondi Beach** or **Manly**.

Great Deals on Sightseeing

The **Privileges Card** is a great way to save money if you plan to visit Sydney's biggest attractions. The card costs A\$25 (US\$16), is good for up to 1 month, and can be used in Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne. In Sydney, all the major attractions offer some sort of discount if you show a Privileges Card, such as two-for-one admission or reduced-price admission if you're traveling alone, and buy-one-get-one-free reductions. With the card you'll also get discounts on harbor cruises (typically 20%), as well as discounts at certain restaurants (sometimes a free main course if two of you are dining, or a 20% rebate off the total bill for the cardholder and three others). To get a card, you'll need to fill out an application form, available on the Internet (www.privilegescard.com) or at tourist information centers in Sydney; you'll receive a booklet with details on where you can save. Call Privileges at ☎ **1800/675 500**, or fax at 02/6254 8788. If you book in advance, the company can arrange to have the card sent to your hotel.

The **See Sydney & Beyond card** is a cashless smart card packaging more than 40 of the city's main attractions and tours. It's valuable for avoiding queues, and as many attractions are free, using the card you could save money too—though you'll have to plan well to really get the most out of it. The card can be purchased for either a 1-, 2-, 3-, or 7-day period. One day passes cost A\$59 (US\$38) for adults and A\$39 (US\$25) for children. You can also purchase it with an option to get you around town on public transport. With this, the 1-day card costs A\$75 (US\$49) for adults and A\$46.50 (US\$30) for children. There are also discounts on Blue Mountains' attractions, but you'll need a multi-day card to take advantage of this as well as Sydney. For more information, call ☎ **02/9247 6611**; www.seesydneycard.com.

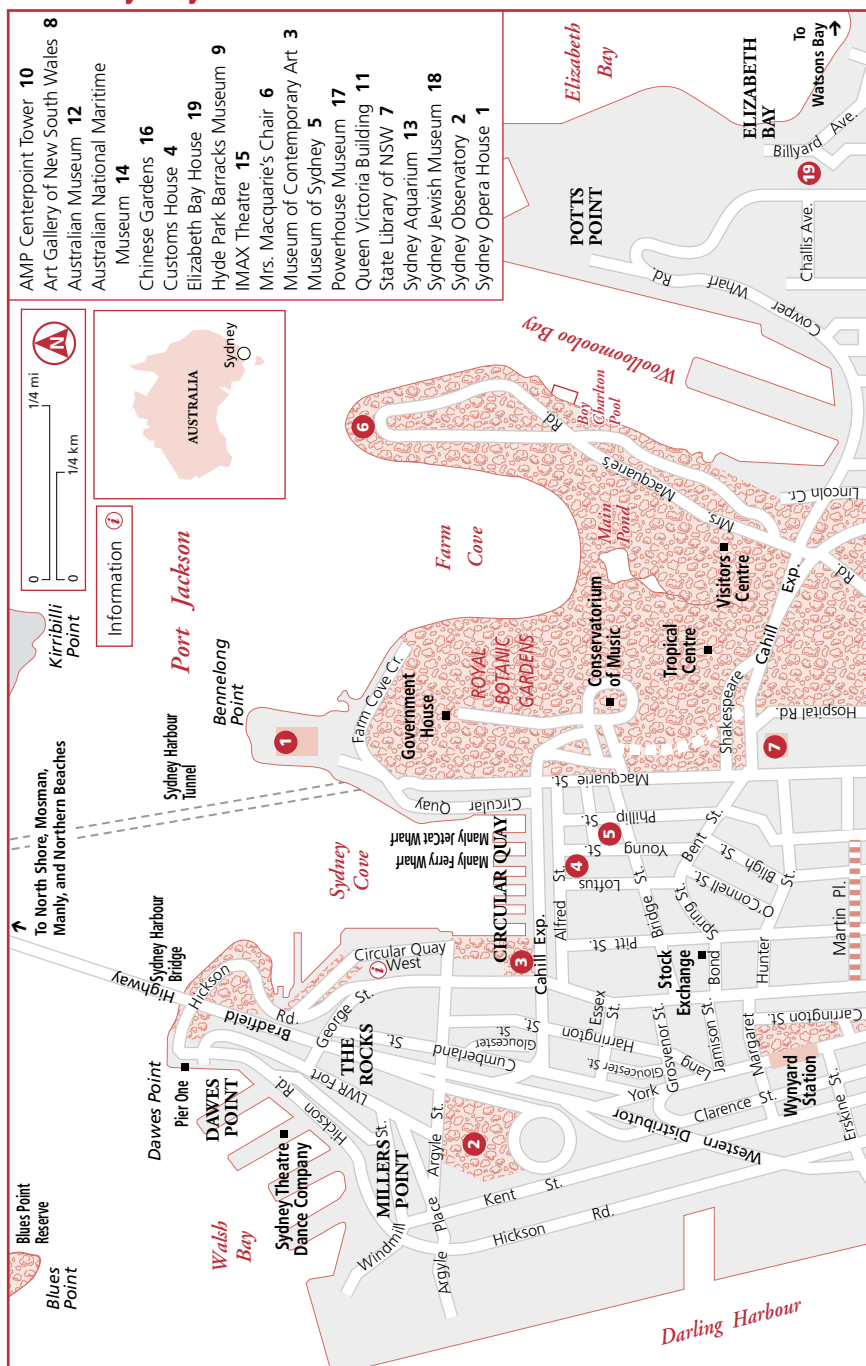
I also recommend a quick trip out of town. Go bushwalking in the **Blue Mountains**, wine tasting in the **Hunter Valley**, or dolphin spotting at **Port Stephens** (see chapter 4 for details on all three).

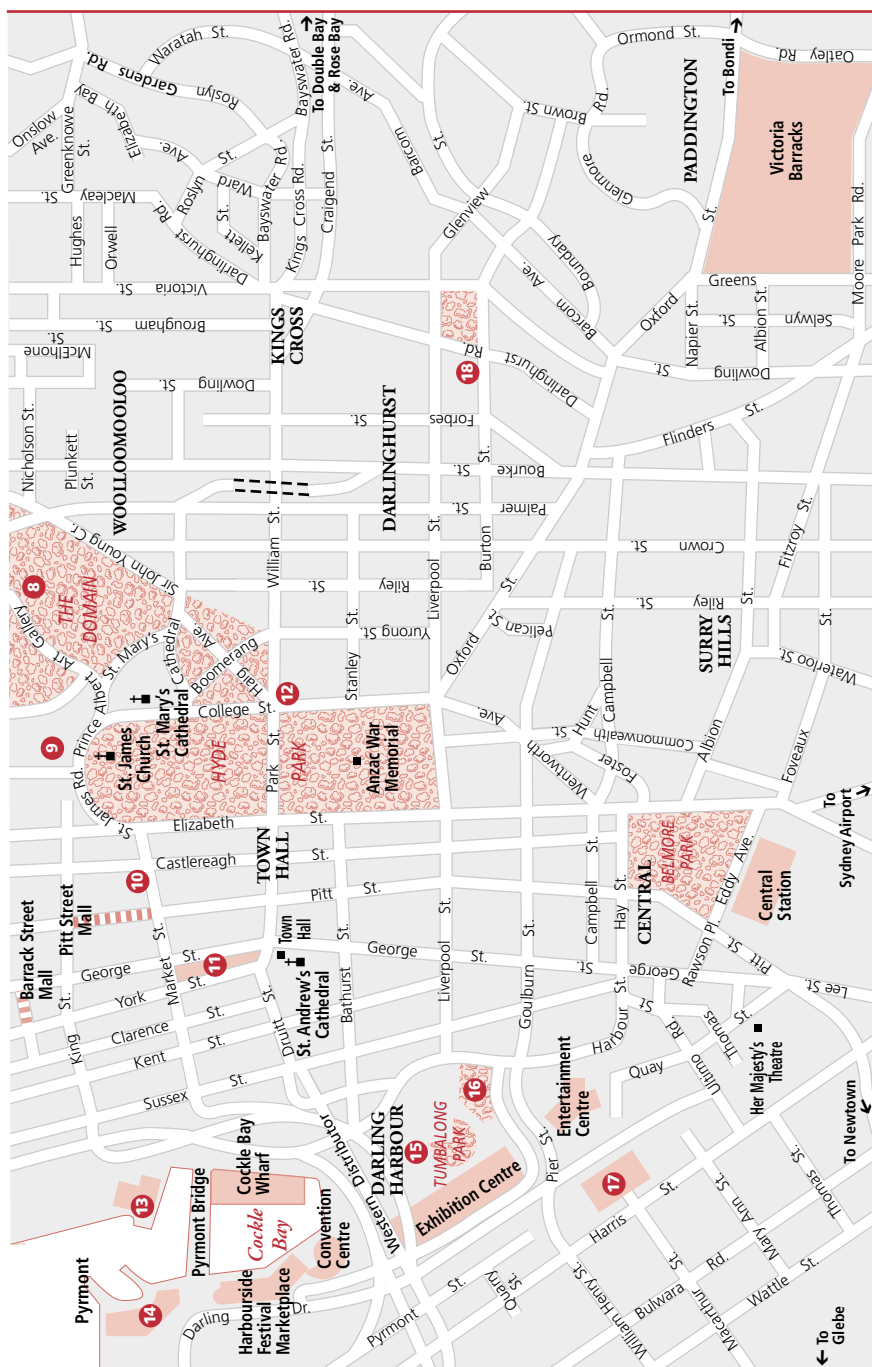
Whatever you decide to do, you won't have enough time. Don't be surprised if you start planning ahead for your next visit before your first is even finished.

THE OPERA HOUSE & SYDNEY HARBOUR

Officially called Port Jackson, **Sydney Harbour** is the focal point of Sydney and one of the features—along with the beaches and easy access to surrounding national parks—that makes this city so special. It's entered through **the Heads**, two bush-topped outcrops (you'll see them if you take a ferry or JetCat to Manly), beyond which the harbor laps at some 240km (149 miles) of shoreline before stretching out into the Parramatta River. Visitors are often awestruck by the harbor's beauty, especially at night when the sails of the Opera House and the girders of the Harbour Bridge are lit up, and the waters are swirling with the reflection of lights from the abutting high-rises—reds, greens, blues, yellows, and oranges. During the day, it buzzes with green-and-yellow ferries pulling in and out of busy Circular Quay, sleek tourist craft, fully rigged tall ships, giant

Central Sydney Attractions





container vessels making their way to and from the wharves of Darling Harbour, and hundreds of white-sailed yachts.

The greenery along the harbor's edges is a surprising feature, and thanks to the **Sydney Harbour National Park**, a haven for native trees and plants, and a feeding and breeding ground for lorikeets and other nectar-eating bird life. In the center of the harbor is a series of islands, the most impressive the tiny isle supporting **Fort Denison**, which once housed convicts and acted as part of the city's defense.

THE HARBOUR ON THE CHEAP The best way to see Sydney Harbour, of course, is from the water. Several companies operate tourist craft for fare-paying customers (see "Harbor Cruises & Organized Tours" later in this chapter), but it's easy enough just to hop on a regular passenger ferry (see "Getting Around" earlier in this chapter). The best ferry excursions are over to the beach-side suburb of **Manly** (come back after dusk to see the lights ablaze around The Rocks and Circular Quay); to **Watsons Bay**, where you can have lunch and wander along the cliffs; to **Darling Harbour**, for all the area's entertainment and the fact that you travel right under the Harbour Bridge; and to **Mosman Bay**, just for the ride and to see the grand houses that overlook exclusive harbor inlets.

FAST ACTION ON THE HARBOR A recent addition to the Sydney Harbour scene is a 420-horsepower jet boat, which zooms about on three high-speed waterway tours at speeds of up to 40 knots (about 74kmph/120 mph), with huge 240-degree turns with instant stops. **Harbour Jet** (© 1300/887 373 in Australia, or 02/9212 3555; www.harbourjet.com) offers a 35-minute Jet Blast Adventure costing A\$50 (US\$33) for adults, A\$35 (US\$23) for kids under 15, and A\$135 (US\$88) for a family of four. A 50-minute Sydney Harbour Adventure costs A\$65 (US\$42) for adults, A\$45 (US\$29) for kids, and A\$175 (US\$114) for a family; a 1-hour 20-minute Middle Harbour Adventure cruise costs A\$90 (US\$59) for adults, A\$60 (US\$39) for kids, and A\$240 (US\$156) for a family. Rides are fast and furious and pump with rock music. A 1-hour 15-minute Ultimate Scenic Adventure, which goes through Sydney Heads and out to sea, and ends up at Bondi, costs A\$175 (US\$114) for adults and A\$160 (US\$104) for kids. There's no family price. The boat leaves from the Convention Jetty, between the Convention Centre and the Harbourside Shopping complex on the far side of Darling Harbour. These trips don't leave every day, so check beforehand.

Another option is **Oz Jet Boat** (© 02/9808 3700; www.ozjetboating.com), which departs every hour from the Eastern Pontoon at Circular Quay (on the walkway to the Opera House). These large red boats are a bit more powerful than the blue Harbour Jet ones, but you might not notice the difference. This company offers a 30-minute ride for A\$45 (US\$29) for adults, A\$30 (US\$20) for kids, and A\$130 (US\$85) for a family; and a 1-hour trip out to Sydney Heads on weekends for A\$80 (US\$52) for adults, A\$50 (US\$33) for children, and A\$240 (US\$156) for a family.

SEA PLANE ESCAPE Sydney Harbour Sea Planes (© 02/8274 7777; www.sydneyseaplanes.com.au) take off from Sydney Harbour, fly around and over it, fly as far as Bondi (for A\$110/US\$72), or the Northern Beaches (for A\$190/US\$124). You can even fly to Cottage Point on the Hawkesbury River and have a nice boozy lunch before swooping back down again, all for A\$335 (US\$218).

Sydney Harbour Bridge ★★ ★ *Moments* One thing so few tourists do, but which only takes an hour or so, is to walk across the Harbour Bridge. The bridge, completed in 1932, is 1,150m (3,772 ft.) long and spans the 503m (1,650-ft.) distance from the south shore to the north. It accommodates pedestrian walkways,

Moments A Walk on the Wild Side: Climbing the Harbour Bridge

At one time, only bridge workers had the chance to see Sydney from the top of the main bridge arch. But since October 1998, Sydneysiders and tourists have been able to experience the spectacular view and the exhilarating achievement of climbing to the top of one of Australia's icons. The experience takes 3 hours from check-in at the **BridgeClimb**  base at 5 Cumberland St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9240 1100, or 02/8274 7777; fax 02/9240 1122; www.bridgeclimb.com) to completion. The office is open daily from 8am to 6pm, and climbers leave in small groups every 10 minutes or so. Climbers wear "Bridge Suits" and are harnessed to a line. Participants are also breath-tested for alcohol and are banned from carrying anything, including cameras. Climbs cost A\$145 (US\$94) for adults and A\$110 (US\$72) for children ages 12 to 16 on weekdays during the day and for nightclimbs Monday through Thursday; and A\$175 (US\$114) for adults and \$125 (US\$81) for children for twilight climbs daily, night climbs on Friday and Saturday, and day climbs on Saturday and Sunday. Children under 12 are not allowed to climb.

two railway lines, and an eight-lane road. The 30-minute stroll across offers some excellent harbor views. Once on the other side, you can take a CityRail train from Milsons Point train station back to the city (to Wynyard—change here for Circular Quay, Town Hall, or Central stations).

As you walk across, stop off at the **Pylon Lookout** (☎ 02/9247 3408), at the southeastern pylon. Admission is A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) for children, and A\$12 (US\$7.80) for a family. From the top of this bridge support, you are 89m (292 ft.) above the water and get panoramic views of Sydney Harbour, the ferry terminals of Circular Quay, and beyond. An interesting museum charts the building of the bridge. Reach the pylon by walking to the far end of George Street in The Rocks toward the Harbour Bridge. Just past the Mercantile Pub you'll see some stone steps that take you onto Cumberland Street. From there, it's a 2-minute walk to the steps underneath the bridge on your right. Climb four flights of stairs to reach the bridge's Western Footway, and then walk along to the first pylon. **Note:** Climbing up inside the pylon involves 200 steps. The Pylon Lookout is open daily from 10am to 5pm (closed Christmas).

Sydney Opera House   Only a handful of buildings around the world are as architecturally and culturally significant as the Sydney Opera House. But what sets it apart from, say, the Taj Mahal and the Great Pyramids of Egypt is that this white-sailed construction caught mid-billow over the waters of Sydney Cove is a working building. Most are surprised to learn it's not just an Opera House, but a full-scale performing-arts complex with five major performance spaces. The biggest and grandest of the lot is the 2,690-seat **Concert Hall**, which has the best acoustics of any man-made building of its type in the world. Come here to experience opera, but also chamber music, symphonies, dance, choral performances, and even rock-and-roll. The **Opera Theatre** is smaller, seating 1,547, and is home to operas, ballets, and dance. The **Drama Theatre**, seating 544, and the **Playhouse**, seating 398, specialize in plays and smaller-scale performances. The Boardwalk, seating 300, is used for dance and experimental music.

The history of the building is as intriguing as the design. The New South Wales Government raised the money needed to build it with a lottery. Danish Architect Jørn Utzon won an international competition to design it. From the start, the project was controversial, with many Sydneysiders believing it was a monstrosity. Following a disagreement, Utzon returned home, without ever seeing his finished project, and the interior fell victim to a compromise design, which, among other things, left too little space to perform full-scale operas. And the cost? Initially the project was budgeted at a cool A\$7 million (US\$5.44 million), but by the time it was finished in 1973 it had cost a staggering A\$102 million (US\$66.3 million), most raised through a series of lotteries. Since then, continual refurbishment and the major task of replacing the asbestos-infected grouting between the hundreds of thousands of white tiles that make up its shell has cost many millions more.

Tours & Tickets: Guided tours of the Opera House last about an hour and are conducted daily from 9am to 4pm, except Good Friday and Christmas. Though guides try to take groups into the main theaters and around the foyers, if you don't get to see everything you want it's because the Opera House is not a museum but a workplace, and there's almost always some performance, practice, or setting up to be done. Reservations are essential. Tours include approximately 200 stairs. (Tours for people with disabilities can be arranged.) Specialized tours, focusing on the building's architecture and engineering, for example, can also be arranged.

The Tourism Services Department at the Sydney Opera House can book **combination packages**, including dinner and a show; a tour, dinner, and a show; or a champagne interval performance. Prices vary depending on shows and dining venues. Visitors from overseas can buy tickets by credit card and then pick them up at the box office on arrival, or contact a local tour company specializing in Australia—a good idea, as performances are very popular. The views from the back rows are hardly worth the effort and expense if you turn up on the day of performance. Tickets for performances vary from as little as A\$12 (US\$7.80) for children's shows to A\$180 (US\$117) for good seats at the opera. Plays cost between A\$40 and A\$60 (US\$26–US\$39) on average.

Free performances are given outside on the Opera House boardwalks on Sunday afternoons and during festival times. The shows range from musicians and performance artists to school groups.

Bennelong Point. ☎ **02/9250 7250** for guided tours and inquiries. www.soh.nsw.gov.au. For box office bookings, call ☎ **02/9250 7777**; fax 02/9251 3943; bookings@soh.nsw.gov.au. Box office open Mon–Sat 9am–8:30pm; Sun 2 hr. before performance. Tours A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) children (family prices available on application); backstage tours A\$25 (US\$16) (no children's price). Tours run Mon–Sun 8:30am–5pm (around every 45 min.) subject to theater availability. (Tour sizes are limited, so be prepared to wait.) CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus. Parking: daytime A\$7 (US\$4.50) per hour; evening A\$23 (US\$15) flat rate.

ATTRACTIONS AT DARLING HARBOUR

Many tourists head to Darling Harbour for the Harbourside Festival Marketplace, a huge structure beside the Pyrmont pedestrian and monorail bridge that's crammed full of cheap eateries and a few interesting shops. However, Sydney's tourist precinct has a lot more to offer.

Australian National Maritime Museum ⚓ *Kids* Modern Australia owes almost everything to the sea, so it's not surprising there's a museum dedicated to the ships, from Aboriginal vessels to submarines. You'll find ships' logs, things to pull and tug at, and the fastest boat in the world, the *Spirit of Australia*. Docked in the

harbor are a fully rigged tall ship; an Australian Naval Destroyer, the *Vampire* (which you can clamber over); and an Oberon Class submarine. Allow 2 hours.

Darling Harbour. 📍 02/9298 3777. www.anmm.gov.au. A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children, A\$25 (US\$16) families (for entry without access to navy ships). A\$14 (US\$9.10) adults, A\$7 (US\$4.55) children, and A\$30 (US\$20) families (for museum entry and navy ships). Daily 9:30am–5pm (until 6:30pm in Jan). Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Harbourside. Sydney Explorer bus.

Chinese Garden The largest Chinese garden of its type outside China offers a pleasant escape from the city concrete. It was designed by expert gardeners from China's Guangdong Province to embody principles of garden design dating back to the 5th century. Allow 30 minutes.

Darling Harbour (adjacent to the Entertainment Centre). 📍 02/9281 6863. Admission A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) children, A\$10 (US\$6.50) families. Daily 9:30am–dusk. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Convention. Sydney Explorer bus.

IMAX Theatre Sydney Each day four different IMAX films usually show on the gigantic eight-story-high screen. Each flick lasts about 50 minutes or so. If you've ever been to an IMAX theater before, you know what to expect. As you watch, your mind is tricked into feeling that it's right in the heart of the action. Also shown are 3-D movies, which cost A\$1 (US\$65¢) extra.

Southern Promenade, Darling Harbour. 📍 02/9281 3300. Admission A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) students, A\$10 (US\$6.50) children 3–15, A\$35 (US\$23) families. Daily 10am–10pm (until 11:30pm Fri–Sat). Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Convention. Sydney Explorer bus.

Powerhouse Museum 📍 *Kids* Sydney's most interactive museum is also one of the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. Inside the post-modern industrial interior, you'll find all sorts of displays and gadgets relating to the sciences, transportation, human achievement, decorative art, and social history. The many hands-on exhibits make this fascinating museum worthy of a couple of hours of your time.

500 Harris St., Ultimo (near Darling Harbour). 📍 02/9217 0111. Admission A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) students, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children 5–15, A\$23 (US\$15) families. Free admission 1st Sat of every month. Daily 10am–5pm. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Harbourside. Sydney Explorer bus.

Sydney Aquarium 📍 *Kids* This is one of the world's best aquariums and should be near the top of any Sydney itinerary. The main attractions are the underwater walkways through two enormous tanks—one with an impressive collection of creatures found in Sydney Harbour, the other full of giant rays and gray nurse sharks. Other excellent exhibits include a giant plexiglass room suspended inside a pool patrolled by rescued seals, and a magnificent section on the Great Barrier Reef, where thousands of colorful fish school around coral outcrops. Also on display are two saltwater crocodiles and some fairy penguins. Try to visit during the week when it's less crowded. Allow around 2 hours.

Aquarium Pier, Darling Harbour. 📍 02/9262 2300. Admission A\$22 (US\$14) adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) students, A\$10 (US\$6.50) children 3–15, A\$48 (US\$31) families. Daily 9am–10pm. Seal Sanctuary closes at 7pm in summer. CityRail: Town Hall. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Sydney Explorer bus.

OTHER TOP ATTRACTIONS: A SPECTACULAR VIEW, SYDNEY'S CONVICT HISTORY & MORE

A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower 📍 The tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere is not hard to miss—it resembles a giant steel pole skewering a golden marshmallow. Standing more than 300m (984 ft.) tall, it offers stupendous 360-degree views across Sydney and as far as the Blue Mountains. Fortunately, an elevator takes you to the indoor viewing platform. Unfortunately, prices have rocketed in recent years, too. Don't be too concerned if you feel the building

tremble slightly, especially in a stiff breeze—I'm told it's perfectly natural. Below the tower are three floors of stores and restaurants. Allow 1 hour.

Pitt and Market sts. ☎ 02/9223 0933. Admission A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) children 5–16, A\$55 (US\$36) families (up to 3 kids). Daily 9am–10:30pm. CityRail: St. James or Town Hall. Sydney Explorer bus.

Hyde Park Barracks Museum ★ These Georgian-style barracks were designed in 1819 by the convict/architect Francis Greenway. They were built by convicts and inhabited by fellow prisoners. These days they house relics from those early days in interesting, modern displays, including log books, early settlement artifacts, and a room full of ships' hammocks in which visitors can lie and listen to fragments of prisoner conversation. If you are interested in Sydney's early beginnings, then I highly recommend a visit—the displays are also far more straightforward than those at the Museum of Sydney (see later in this chapter). The courtyard cafe is excellent. Allow for 1 hour or more.

Queens Sq., Macquarie St. ☎ 02/9223 8922. Admission A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children, A\$17 (US\$11) families. Daily 9:30am–5pm. CityRail: St. James or Martin Place. Sydney Explorer bus.

Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) This imposing sandstone museum set back from the water on The Rocks side of Circular Quay offers wacky, entertaining, inspiring, and befuddling displays of what's new (and dated) in modern art. It houses the J. W. Power Collection of more than 4,000 pieces, including works by Andy Warhol, Christo, Marcel Duchamp, and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as temporary exhibits. As it's relatively new and still building up its collection, don't expect it to be as impressive as major modern art museums in, say, London or New York. In mid-2001 there was talk of the museum closing because of financial concerns. Guided tours are offered Monday through Saturday at noon and 2pm, and Sunday at 2pm. Worth at least an hour.

140 George St., Circular Quay West. ☎ 02/9252 4033. www.mca.com.au. Free general admission. Daily 10am–6pm (5pm in winter). CityRail, bus, ferry: Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus.

Sydney Olympic Park ★ The site of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games is still very much a tourist attraction, as well as a major sporting venue. Most of the Olympic venues are at this dedicated Olympic precinct at Homebush Bay, which also has plenty of bars and restaurants. First port of call should be the Homebush Bay Information Centre (☎ 02/9714 7888), which offers displays, walking maps, and tour tips. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

Nearby is **Stadium Australia** (☎ 02/8765 2300; www.stadiumaustralia.com.au), the site of the Opening and Closing ceremonies, the track and field events, and some Olympic soccer games. Today it stages Australian Rules games, rugby league, rugby union, and soccer matches. A 20-minute tour of the stadium costs A\$15 (US\$9.50) for adults, A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children, and A\$42 (US\$27) for a family. A 1-hour “behind the scenes” tour is A\$26 (US\$17) for adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) for children, and A\$60 (US\$39) for a family.

Also at the Olympic Park is the **Sydney International Aquatic Centre** (☎ 02/9752 3666; www.siac.nsw.gov.au), which comprises the Olympic pool, diving pool, and training facilities. To swim here costs a whopping A\$16 (US\$10) for adults and A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children. At those prices, they should towel you off afterward!

There are wonderful views of the Sydney Olympic Park and the city from Level 17 of the **Novotel hotel** (☎ 02/8762 1111), located in the park. Entry to the observation area costs A\$4 (US\$2.60) for adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children (free for kids under 8). You can purchase a SuperPass entitling you to entry

to the Observation Center at the Novotel and a guided tour of Stadium Australia and the Sydney Aquatic Center (including swimming). Tickets are available from participating venues or the visitor center for A\$40 (US\$26) for adults, A\$20 (US\$13) for children, and A\$79 (US\$51) for a family.

One of the best ways to get to the Olympic Site is via the Sydney Explorer bus; otherwise, FJ Tours runs a daily afternoon Olympic Site tour from outside McDonald's at Circular Quay leaving at 1pm. It includes a tour of Stadium Australia and the Sydney International Aquatic Centre, as well as a river cruise, and costs A\$72 (US\$47) for adults, A\$66 (US\$43) for students, and A\$36 (US\$23) for children.

Sydney Olympic Site, Olympic Park, Homebush Bay. www.sydneypolympicpark.nsw.gov.au. CityRail: Olympic Park. Sydney Explorer bus.

Wonderland Sydney If you're used to big Disneyesque extravaganzas, then this theme park (until recently called Australia's Wonderland) might be a bit of a disappointment—though I guarantee The Demon roller coaster will more than satisfy in the terror department. Other big rides are Space Probe 7, which is basically a heart-stopping drop, and a cute and rattly wooden roller coaster called the Bush Beast. Live shows and bands round out the entertainment options. The entry ticket also includes admission to a wildlife park, with all the old favorites—koalas, wombats, kangaroos, wallabies, and more. Allow half a day.

100 Wallgrove Rd., Eastern Creek. ☎ 02/9830 9100. www.wonderland.com.au. Admission (includes rides, shows, attractions, and entrance to Australian Wildlife Park) A\$46 (US\$30) adults, A\$30 (US\$20) children, family tickets only available for wildlife park. Daily 10am–5pm. CityRail: Rooty Hill (trip takes less than 1 hr.); Wonderland buses leave from Rooty Hill station every ½-hr. on weekends, and at 8:55, 9:32, 10:10, 11:35am, and 12:14pm weekdays. Wonderland express coach is a convenient way to get to Wonderland Sydney, with city return transfers available daily from major CBD locations. For bookings and information call 02/9830 9187. Free parking.

'ROOS, KOALAS & OTHER AUSSIE WILDLIFE

The Sydney Aquarium is discussed above on p. 137.

Australian Reptile Park What started off as a one-man operation supplying snake antivenin in the early 1950s has ended up a nature park teeming with the slippery-looking creatures. But it's not all snakes and lizards; you'll also find saltwater crocodiles, American alligators, as well as plenty of somewhat cuddlier creatures, such as koalas, platypuses, wallabies, dingoes, and flying foxes. The park is set in beautiful bushland dissected by nature trails. A truly devastating fire burned down the entire park in mid-2000, killing all the animals. The staff has worked valiantly to start up a new collection, and it's looking as good as ever.

Pacific Hwy., Somersby. ☎ 02/4340 1022. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children, A\$40 (US\$26) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Somersby is near Gosford, 84km (52 miles) north of Sydney. By car: Take the Pacific Hwy. and the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy. (F3); the trip takes about 1 hr. CityRail trains leave from Central Station for Gosford every 30 min. From Gosford, take the bus marked Australian Wildlife Park (10-min. ride).

Featherdale Wildlife Park ★★ Kids If you only have time to visit one wildlife park in Sydney, make it this one. The selection of Australian animals is excellent, and most importantly, the animals are very well cared for. You could easily spend a couple of hours here despite the park's compact size. You'll have the chance to hand-feed friendly kangaroos and wallabies, and get a photo taken next to a koala. (There are many here, both the New South Wales variety and the larger Victorian type.) The park's newest addition is the "Reptilian Pavilion." It houses 30 different native species of reptiles in 26 spectacularly lifelike

exhibits. It's a bit of a hassle to get here by public transport, so ring the park in advance to get times for its twice-daily bus tours, which include hotel pickup and drop-off.

217 Kildare Rd., Doonside. ☎ 02/9622 1644. Fax 02/9671-4140. www.featherdale.com.au. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children 4–14, A\$40 (US\$26) families. Daily 9am–5pm. CityRail: Blacktown station, then take bus no. 725 to park. (Ask driver to tell you when to get off.) By car: Take the M4 motorway to Reservoir Rd., turn off, travel 4km (2½ miles), then turn left at Kildare Rd.

Koala Park This is probably the only place in the country (unless you travel all the way to Kangaroo Island in South Australia) where you'll be able to spot this many koalas in one place. In all, there are around 55 koalas roaming within the park's leafy boundaries. Koala cuddling sessions are free, and take place at 10:20, 11:45am, 2, and 3pm daily. There are also wombats, dingoes, kangaroos, wallabies, emus, and native birds here, too. You can hire a private guide to take you around for A\$70 (US\$46) for a 2-hour session, or hitch onto one of the free “hostess” guides who wander around the park like Pied Pipers.

84 Castle Hill Rd., West Pennant Hills. ☎ 02/9484 3141 or 02/9875 2777. www.koalapark.com. Admission A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children, A\$40 (US\$26) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas. CityRail: Pennant Hills station via North Strathfield (45 min.), then take any bus nos. 651–655 to park.

Oceanworld Manly  Though not as impressive as the Sydney Aquarium, Oceanworld can be combined with a visit to Manly Beach (see “North of Sydney Harbour” below) for a nice day's outing. There's a decent display of Barrier Reef fish, and more giant sharks. Also here are the five most venomous snakes in the world. Shark feeding is at 11am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. There is also a dive-with-the-sharks program.

West Esplanade, Manly. ☎ 02/9949 2644. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children, A\$40 (US\$26) families. Daily 10am–5:30pm. Ferry or JetCat: Manly.

Taronga Zoo   Taronga has the best view of any zoo in the world. Set on a hill, it looks out over Sydney Harbour, the Opera House, and the Harbour Bridge. It's better on the legs to explore the zoo from the top down. The main attractions are the fabulous chimpanzee exhibit, the gorilla enclosure, and the Nocturnal Houses, where you can see some of Australia's many nighttime marsupials out and about, including the platypus and the cuter-than-cute bilby (the official Australian Easter bunny). There's an interesting reptile display; a fabulous “Backyard to the Bush” area—with farm animals and water games for the kids; a scattering of indigenous beasts—including a few koalas, echidnas, kangaroos, dingoes, and wombats—and lots more (though you'd be better off going to Featherdale Wildlife Park [see above] for a superior display of native creatures). Animals are fed at various times during the day. The zoo can get crowded on weekends, so I strongly advise visiting during the week or going early in the morning on weekends. Allow around 2 hours.

Bradley's Head Rd., Mosman. ☎ 02/9969 2777. Admission A\$21 (US\$14) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) children 4–15. Ask about family prices. A Zoopass (includes entry, round-trip ferry from Circular Quay, and Aerial Safari cable-car ride from ferry terminal to upper entrance of zoo) is available from CityRail stations for A\$25 (US\$16) adults and A\$13 (US\$8.10) children (no family pass). Daily 9am–5pm (Jan 9am–9pm). Ferry: Taronga Zoo. At Taronga Zoo wharf, a bus to the upper zoo entrance is A\$1.30 (US\$85¢), or take a cable car to the top for A\$2.50 (US\$1.60). The lower zoo entrance is a 2-min. walk up the hill from the wharf.

HITTING THE BEACH

One of the big bonuses of visiting Sydney in the summer months (Dec–Feb) is that you get to experience the beaches in their full glory.

Most major city beaches, such as Manly and Bondi, have lifeguards on patrol, especially during the summer. They check the water conditions and are on the lookout for “rips”—strong currents that can pull a swimmer far out to sea. Safe places to swim are marked by red and yellow flags. You must always swim between these flags. If you are using a foam or plastic body board or “boogie board,” it’s advisable to use it between the flags. Fiberglass surfboards must be used outside the flags. (Expect a warning from the beach loudspeakers and an A\$100/US\$65 fine if you fail to take notice.)

WHAT ABOUT SHARKS & OTHER NASTIES? One of the first things visitors wonder when they hit the water in Australia is: *Are there sharks?* The answer is yes, but fortunately they are rarely spotted inshore—you are far more likely to spot a migrating whale. In reality, sharks have more reason to be scared of us than we of them; most of them end up as the fish in your average packet of fish and chips. (Shark filets are often sold as “flake.”) Though some beaches—such as the small beach next to the Manly ferry wharf in Manly and a section of Balmoral Beach in Mosman—have permanent shark nets, most rely on portable nets that are moved from beach to beach.

Another common problem off Sydney’s beaches are “blue bottles”—small blue jellyfish, often called “stingers” in Australia, and “Portuguese-Man-o’-Wars” elsewhere. You’ll often find these creatures washed up along the beach; they become a hazard for swimmers when there’s a strong breeze coming off the ocean and they’re blown in to shore (watch out for warning signs erected on the shoreline). Minute individual stinging cells often break off the main body of the creature, and they can cause minor itching or stinging. You might also be hit by the full force of a blue bottle, which will often stick to your skin and wrap its tentacles around you. Blue bottles deliver a hefty punch from their many stinging cells, causing a severe burning sensation almost immediately. If you are stung, ask a lifeguard for some vinegar to neutralize any stinging cells that haven’t yet sprung into action. Otherwise, a very hot bath or shower can help relieve the pain, which can be intense and last for up to a day. Wearing a T-shirt in the water reduces the risk somewhat (though a pair of waterlogged jeans isn’t a good idea).

SOUTH OF SYDNEY HARBOUR

Sydney’s most famous beach is **Bondi** ★★. In many ways it’s a raffish version of a Californian beach, with plenty of tanned skin and in-line skaters. Though the beach is nice, it’s cut off from the cafe and restaurant strip that caters to beachgoers by a road that pedestrians have to funnel across in order to reach the sand. On summer weekend evenings, it’s popular with souped-up cars and groups of disaffected youths. To reach Bondi Beach, take the CityRail train to Bondi Junction, then transfer to bus no. 380 (a 15-min. bus journey). You can also catch bus no. 380 directly from Circular Quay (but it can take an hour or so in peak time).

If you follow the water along to your right at Bondi, you’ll come across a very scenic cliff-top trail that takes you to **Bronte Beach** (a 20-min. walk), via gorgeous little **Tamarama**, nicknamed “Glamourama” for its trendy sun-worshippers. This boutique beach is known for its dangerous rips. Bronte has better swimming than Bondi, and thieves have been known to frequent Bondi. To get to Bronte, catch bus no. 378 from Circular Quay, or pick up the bus at the Bondi Junction CityRail station.

Clovelly Beach, farther along the coast, is blessed with a large rock pool carved into a rock platform and sheltered from the force of the Tasman Sea. This

beach is accessible for visitors in wheelchairs via a series of ramps. To reach Clovelly, take bus no. 339 from Circular Quay.

The cliff walk from Bondi will eventually bring you to **Coogee**, which has a pleasant strip of sand with a couple of hostels and hotels nearby. To reach Coogee, take bus no. 373 or 374 from Circular Quay (via Pitt, George, and Castlereagh sts., and Taylor Sq. on Oxford St.) or Bus no. 314 or 315 from Bondi Junction.

NORTH OF SYDNEY HARBOUR

On the north shore you'll find **Manly** ★★, a long curve of golden sand edged with Norfolk Island pines. Don't be fooled by the two small beaches on either side of the ferry terminal as some people have been—including the famous novelist Arthur Conan Doyle, who traveled to Manly by ferry and presuming the small beach near the ferry station was the best the suburb had to offer did not bother to disembark. Follow the crowds shuffling through the pedestrianized "Corso" to the main ocean beach. You'll find one of Sydney's nicest walks here, too. Looking at the ocean, head to your right along the beachfront and follow the coastal path to the small and sheltered **Shelly Beach** ★, a nice area for snorkeling and swimming. (There's also a small takeout outlet here selling drinks and snacks, next to the good, but pricey, Le Kiosk beachfront restaurant.) Follow the bitumen path up the hill to the parking lot. Here, a track cuts up into the bush and leads toward a firewall, which marks the entrance to Sydney Harbour National Park. Around here you'll get some spectacular ocean views across to Manly and the northern beaches (the headland further in the distance is Palm Beach). The best way to reach Manly is on a ferry or JetCat from Circular Quay.

Farther along the northern coast are a string of ocean beaches, including the surf spots of **Curl Curl**, **Dee Why**, **Narrabeen**, **Mona Vale**, **Newport**, **Avalon**, and finally **Palm Beach** ★, a long and beautiful strip of sand cut from the calmer waters of **Pittwater** by sand dunes and a golf course. Here you'll also find the Barrenjoey Lighthouse, which also offers fine views along the coast (see the "Greater Sydney" map earlier in this chapter for a map of this area.) Bus nos. 136 and 139 run from Manly to Curl Curl, while Bus no. 190 runs from Wynyard to Newport and then via the other northern beaches as far as Palm Beach.

The best harbor beach is at **Balmoral** ★, a wealthy North Shore hangout complete with some good cafes (The Sandbar is the best for food). The beach itself is split into three parts. As you look toward the sea, the middle section is the most popular with sunbathers, while the wide expanse to your left and the sweep of surreally beautiful sand to your right have a mere scattering. There's a

Fun Fact **Grin & Bare It**

If getting an all-over tan is your scene, you have a couple of options in Sydney. Head either to the nudist beach at **Lady Jane Bay**, a short walk from Camp Cove Beach (accessed from Cliff St. in Watsons Bay, reached by walking along the strip of sand—to the right as you look at the sea—at the back of the Watsons Bay Hotel). Or you can try **Cobblers Beach**, accessed via a short, but steep, bush track that leads from the far side of the playing field oval next to the main HMAS *Penguin* naval base at the end of Bradley's Head Road in Mosman. (Follow the procession of men in shorts.) Be prepared for a largely male-orientated scene—as well as the odd boatload of beer-swiggling peeping Toms.

caged pool area for swimming. Reach Balmoral via a ferry to Taronga Zoo and then a 5-minute ride on a connecting bus from the ferry wharf, or catch the bus from the stop outside the zoo's top entrance.

MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, HISTORIC HOUSES & MORE

Art Gallery of New South Wales ★ The numerous galleries here present some of the best of Australian art and many fine examples by international artists, including good displays of Aboriginal and Asian art. You enter from The Domain parklands on the third floor of the museum. On the fourth floor you will find an expensive restaurant and a gallery often showing free photography displays. On the second floor is a wonderful cafe overlooking the wharves and warships of Woolloomooloo. Every January and February there is a fabulous display of the best work created by school students throughout the state. Allow at least 1 hour.

Art Gallery Rd., The Domain. ☎ 02/9225 1744. www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au. Free admission to most galleries. Special exhibitions vary; expect to pay around A\$12 (US\$7.80) adults, A\$7 (US\$4.55) children. Daily 10am–5pm. Tours of general exhibits Mon 1 and 2pm; Tues–Fri 11am, noon, 1 and 2pm; Sat–Sun 11am, 1 and 2pm. Tours of Aboriginal galleries Tues–Sun 11am. Free Aboriginal performance Tues–Sat noon. CityRail: St. James. Sydney Explorer bus.

Australian Museum Though nowhere near as impressive as, say, the Natural History Museum in London, Sydney's premier natural history museum is still worth a look. Displays are presented thematically, the best being the Aboriginal section with its traditional clothing, weapons, and everyday implements. There are some sorry examples of stuffed Australian wildlife, too. Temporary exhibits run from time to time. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

6 College St. ☎ 02/9320 6000. www.austmus.gov.au. Admission A\$8 (US\$5.20) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children, A\$19 (US\$12) families. Special exhibits extra. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed Christmas. CityRail: Museum, St. James, or Town Hall. Sydney Explorer bus.

Customs House This museum, in the sandstone building with the clock and flags across the large square opposite the Circular Quay CityRail station and the ferry wharves, opened in December 1998. It's worth a look inside if you're interested in architecture. You might be hooked by the series of modern-art objects displayed on the ground floor, and the traveling exhibits on the third floor—though often you won't be. Outside in the square is a popular cafe selling reasonably priced coffee, cakes, sandwiches, and the like. Allow 15 minutes.

Alfred St., Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9320 6429. Free general admission. Daily 9:30am–5pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Elizabeth Bay House This good example of colonial architecture was built in 1835 and was described at the time as the “finest house in the colony.” Visitors can tour the whole house and get a real feeling of the history of the fledgling settlement. The house is situated on a headland and has some of the best harbor views in Sydney. Allow 1 hour.

7 Onslow Ave., Elizabeth Bay. ☎ 02/9356 3022. Admission A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children, A\$17 (US\$11) families. Tues–Sun 10am–4:30pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas. Bus: 311 from Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus.

Museum of Sydney You'll need your brain in full working order to make the most of the contents of this three-story post-modern building near Circular Quay, which encompasses the remnants of Sydney's first Government House. This place is far from being a conventional showcase of history; instead, it houses a rather minimalist collection of first-settler and Aboriginal objects and multimedia displays that “invite” the museumgoer to discover Sydney's past for

him- or herself. Some Frommer's readers have criticized the place, saying it's not just minimalist—it's simply unfathomable. By the way, that forest of poles filled with hair, oyster shells, and crab claws in the courtyard adjacent to the industrial-design cafe tables is called *Edge of Trees*. It's a metaphor for the first contact between Aborigines and the British. There's a reasonable cafe out front. Allow anywhere from an hour to a lifetime to understand.

37 Phillip St. ☎ 02/9251 5988. Admission A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children under 15, A\$17 (US\$11) families. Daily 9:30am–5pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus.

St. James Church Sydney's oldest surviving colonial church, begun in 1822, was designed by the Government architect, and former convict, Francis Greenway. At one time the church's spire served as a landmark for ships coming up the harbor, but today it looks totally lost amidst the skyscrapers. It's well worth seeking out, though, especially for the plaques on the wall, which pay testament to the hard early days of the colony when settlers were lost at sea, attacked by aborigines, and died while serving the British Empire overseas.

Queens Sq., Macquarie St. ☎ 02/9232 3022. Daily 8am–5pm.

St. Mary's Cathedral Sydney's most impressive worship place is a giant sandstone construction between The Domain and Hyde Park. The original St. Mary's was built in 1821, but the chapel was destroyed by fire. Work on the present cathedral began in 1868, but due to lack of funds remained unfinished until work began in 1999 to build the two spires. The stained-glass windows inside are impressive. St. Mary's is Roman Catholic and was built for Sydney's large population of Irish convicts. In perhaps Sydney's worst pre-Olympic planning, the beautiful brown sandstone building was marred by a wide stretch of dark gray paving outside—now the battleground of skateboarders and city council rangers. The two spires were completed in extra-quick time for the Olympics, too.

College and Cathedral sts. ☎ 02/9220 0400. Mon–Fri 6:30am–6:30pm, Sat 8am–7:30pm; Sun 6:30am–7:30pm.

State Library of NSW The state's main library is divided into two sections, the Mitchell and Dixon libraries, next door to one another. A newer reference-library complex nearby has two floors of reference materials, local newspapers, and microfiche viewers. Leave your bags in the free lockers downstairs. (You'll need an A\$2/US\$1.30 coin, which is refundable.) I highly recommend the library's leafy **Glasshouse Café**, in my opinion one of the best walk-in lunch spots in Sydney. The older building contains many older books on the ground floor, and often hosts free art and photography displays in the upstairs galleries. A small library section in the Sydney Town Hall building has international newspapers.

Macquarie St. ☎ 02/9273 1414. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun and selected holidays 11am–5pm. Closed New Year's Day, Good Friday, Christmas, and Boxing Day (Dec 26). CityRail: Martin Place. Sydney Explorer bus.

Sydney Jewish Museum Harrowing exhibits here include documents and objects relating to the Holocaust and Jewish culture, mixed with soundscapes, audio-visual displays, and interactive media. There's also a museum shop, a resource center, a theaterette, and a traditional kosher cafe. It's considered one of the best museums of its type in the world. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

148 Darlinghurst Rd., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9360 7999. Fax 02/9331 4245. www.sjm.com.au. Admission A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children, A\$22 (US\$14) families. Sun–Thurs 10am–4pm; Fri 10am–2pm. Closed Jewish holidays, Christmas, and Good Friday. CityRail: Kings Cross.

Sydney Observatory The city's only major museum of astronomy offers visitors a chance to see the southern skies through modern and historic telescopes. The best time to visit is during the night on a guided tour, when you can take a close-up look at some of the planets. Night tours are offered at 8:15pm from the end of May to the end of August and at 6:15 and 8:15pm the rest of the year; be sure to double-check the times when you book your tour. The planetarium and hands-on exhibits are also interesting.

Observatory Hill, Watson Rd., Millers Point. ☎ 02/9217 0485. Free admission in daytime; guided night tours (reservations essential) A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) children, A\$25 (US\$16) families. Daily 10am–5pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

Vaucluse House Looking over Sydney Harbour, this house includes lavish entertainment rooms and impressive stables and out-buildings. It was built in 1803 and was the home of Charles Wentworth, the architect of the Australian Constitution. It's set in 11 hectares (27 acres) of gardens, bushland, and beach frontage—perfect for picnics. Allow 1 hour.

Wentworth Rd., Vaucluse. ☎ 02/9337 1957. www.hht.nsw.gov.au. Admission A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children. House Tues–Sun 10am–4:30pm; grounds daily 7am–5pm. Free guided tours. Closed Good Friday and Christmas. Bus: 325 from Circular Quay, or Bondi & Bay Explorer.

PARKS & GARDENS IN SYDNEY

HYDE PARK In the center of the city is Hyde Park, a favorite with lunching businesspeople. Of note here are the **Anzac Memorial** to Australian and New Zealand troops killed in the wars, and the **Archibald Fountain**, complete with spitting turtles and sculptures of Diana and Apollo. At night, avenues of trees are lit up with twinkling lights giving the place a magical appearance.

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS ★ If you are going to spend time in just one of Sydney's green spaces, then make it the **Royal Botanic Gardens** (☎ 02/9231 8111), next to Sydney Opera House. The gardens were laid out in 1816 on the site of a farm dedicated to supplying food for the colony. They're informal in appearance with a scattering of duck ponds and open spaces, though there are several areas dedicated to particular plant species, such as the rose garden, the cacti and succulent display, and the central palm and the rainforest groves (watch out for the thousands of large fruit bats, which chatter and argue amongst the rainforest trees). **Mrs. Macquarie's Chair**, a spot carved out in rock along the coast path, offers superb views of the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. (It's a favorite stop for tour buses.) The sandstone building dominating the gardens nearest to the Opera House is the **Government House**, once the official residence of the Governor of New South Wales. (He moved out in 1996 in the spirit of republicanism.) The pleasant gardens are open to the public daily from 10am to 4pm, and the house is open Friday through Sunday from 10am to 3pm. Entrance to both is free. If you plan to park around here, it's well to note that parking meters cost upwards of A\$3 (US\$1.95) per hour, and you need A\$1 coins.

A popular walk takes you through the Royal Botanic Gardens to the **Art Gallery of New South Wales**. The gardens are open daily from 7am to dusk. Admission is free.

MORE CITY PARKS Another Sydney favorite is giant **Centennial Park** (☎ 02/9339 6699), usually accessed from the top of Oxford Street. It opened in 1888 to celebrate the centenary of European settlement, and today encompasses huge areas of lawn, several lakes, picnic areas with outdoor grills, cycling and

running paths, and a cafe. It's open from sunrise to sunset. To get there, take bus no. 373, 374, 378, 380, or 382 from the city, or via the Bondi & Bay Explorer.

A hundred years later, **Bicentennial Park**, at Australia Avenue, in Homebush Bay, came along. Forty percent of the park's total 100 hectares (247 acres) is general parkland reclaimed from a city rubbish tip; the rest is the largest remaining remnant of wetlands on the Parramatta River and is home to many species of both local and migratory wading birds, cormorants, and pelicans. Follow park signs to the **visitor information office** (☎ 02/9763 1844), open Monday through Friday from 10am to 4pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9:30am to 4:30pm. To reach the park, take a CityRail train to Homebush Bay station.

BEYOND SYDNEY

SYDNEY HARBOUR NATIONAL PARK You don't need to go far to experience Sydney's nearest national park. The Sydney Harbour National Park stretches around parts of the inner harbor and includes several small harbor islands. (Many first-time visitors are surprised at the amount of bushland still remaining in prime real-estate territory.) The best walk through the Sydney Harbour National Park is the **Manly to Spit Bridge Scenic Walkway** (☎ 02/9977 6522). This 10km (6-mile) track winds its way from Manly (it starts near the Oceanarium), via Dobroyd Head to Spit Bridge (where you can catch a bus back to the city). At a casual pace the walk takes around 3 hours, and the views across busy Sydney Harbour are fabulous. There are a few Aboriginal stone carvings, which are signposted along the route. Maps are available from the **Manly Visitors Information Bureau** (☎ 02/9977 1088), right opposite the main beach.

Other access points to the park include tracks around Taronga Zoo (ask the zoo staff to point you toward the rather concealed entrances), and above tiny Shelly Beach, opposite the main beach at Manly.

Also part of the national park is the recently restored **Fort Denison**, in the middle of the harbor between Circular Quay and Manly. The fort was built during the Crimean War due to fears of a Russian invasion, and was later used as a penal colony. One- to two-hour **Heritage Tours** of the island leave from Cadmans Cottage, in The Rocks (☎ 02/9247 5033). They cost A\$22 (US\$14) for adults and A\$18 (US\$12) for students and children. Call ahead for times and bookings. Pickup maps of Sydney Harbour National Park at Cadmans Cottage.

Another great walk in Sydney can be combined with lunch or a drink at Watsons Bay. A 15-minute bush stroll to **South Head** is accessed from the small beach outside the Watsons Bay Hotel. Walk to the end of the beach (to your right as you look at the water) then up the flight of steps into Short Street, then left along Cliff Street to the end of Camp Cove Beach. Continue along the coast past the nudist Lady Jane Bay Beach to the lighthouse at South Head, where there are some great views (of the coastline, not the nudists). Across the road in front of the Watsons Bay Hotel is another section of the national park, known for its cliff-top views. Here you'll find The Gap, a sheer cliff popular for suicides. Watsons Bay is reached by ferries from Circular Quay, and via the Bondi & Bay Explorer.

MORE NATIONAL PARKS Forming a semicircle around the city are Sydney's biggest parks of all. To the west is the **Blue Mountains National Park** (see chapter 4); to the northeast is **Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park**; and to the south is the magnificent **Royal National Park**. All three parks are home to marsupials such as echidnas and wallabies, numerous bird and reptile species, and a broad range of native plant life. Walking tracks, whether they stretch for half an hour or a few days, make each park accessible to the visitor.

Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (☎ 02/9457 9322 or 02/9457 9310) is a great place to take a bushwalk through gum trees and rainforest on the lookout for wildflowers, sandstone rock formations, and Aboriginal art. There are plenty of tracks through the park, but one of my favorites is the relatively easy Track 12, a 2.5km (1.5-mile) tramp to **The Basin**. The well-graded dirt path takes you down to a popular estuary with a beach and passes some significant Aboriginal engravings. There are also some wonderful water views over Pittwater from the picnic areas at **West Head**. Pick up a free walking guide at the park entrance, or gather maps and information in Sydney at the National Parks & Wildlife Service's center at **Cadmans Cottage**, 110 George St., The Rocks (☎ 02/9247 8861). The park is open from sunrise to sunset, and admission is A\$10 (US\$6.50) per car. You can either drive to the park or catch a ferry from Palm Beach to The Basin (from where you can walk up Track 12 and back). Ferries run on the hour (except at 1pm) from 9am to 5pm daily and cost A\$4 (US\$2.60) one-way; call ☎ 02/9918 2747 for details. Shorelink bus no. 577 runs from the Turrumurra CityRail station to the nearby park entrance every hour on weekdays and every 2 hours on weekends; call ☎ 02/9457 8888 for details. There is no train service to the park. Camping is allowed only at The Basin (☎ 02/9457 9853) and costs A\$12 (US\$7.80) for two people booked in advance.

If you have a car, you could visit the **Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden**, 420 Mona Vale Rd., St Ives (☎ 02/9440 8609), which is essentially a huge area of natural bushland and a center for urban bushland education. There are plenty of bushwalking tracks, self-guided walks, and a number of nature-based activities. It's open daily from 8am to 4pm. Admission is A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) for adults, A\$1 (US\$65¢) for children, and A\$6 (US\$3.90) for families.

To the south of Sydney is the remarkable **Royal National Park**, Farrell Avenue, Sutherland (☎ 02/9542 0648). It's the world's oldest national park, having been gazetted as such in 1879. (The main competitor to the title is Yellowstone in the United States, which was set aside for conservation in 1872 but not designated as a national park until 1883.) Severe bushfires almost destroyed the whole lot in early 1994, but the trees and bush plants have recovered remarkably, despite other major fire outbreaks in 2001 and 2003. There's no visitor center, but you can get park information at park entrances, where you'll have to pay a A\$10 (US\$6.50) per car entry fee.

There are several ways to access the park, but my favorites are the little-known access points from Bundeena and Otford. To get to Bundeena, take a CityRail train from Central Station to Cronulla. Just below the train station you'll find Cronulla Wharf. From there, hop on the delightful ferry run by **National Park Ferries** (☎ 02/9523 2990) to Bundeena; ferries run hourly on the half-hour (except 12:30pm) and stop at around 7pm. After you get off the ferry, the first turn on your left just up the hill will take you to **Bundeena Beach**. It's another 5km (3 miles) or so to the wonderfully remote **Little Marley Beach**, via Marley Beach (which has dangerous surf). The ferry returns to Cronulla from Bundeena hourly on the hour (except 1pm). The fare is A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) each way.

An alternative way to reach the park is to take the train from Central Station to **Otford**, then climb the hill up to the sea cliffs. If you're driving, you might want to follow the scenic cliff-edge road down into Wollongong. The entrance to the national park is a little tricky to find, so you might have to ask directions—but roughly it's just to the left of a cliff top popular for hang gliding, radio-controlled airplanes, and kites. A 2-hour walk from the sea cliffs through beautiful and varying bushland and a palm forest will take you to **Burning Palms Beach**. There is

Tips A Stroll on The Rocks

Sydney is a wonderful city for exploring on foot. I particularly recommend a wander through The Rocks, site of the oldest settlement in Australia, a rough-and-tumble place where prostitutes, gang members, and other shady characters loitered more than a century ago. **The Rocks Walking Tour** (☎ 02/9247 6678) has an organized stroll (see “Walking Tours” below). For my own take on the neighborhood, consult the self-guided walk that appears in *Frommer's Portable Sydney*.

no water along the route, and the walk back up is steep, so only attempt this trek if you're reasonably fit. Trains to the area are irregular, and the last one departs around 4pm, so give yourself at least 2½ hours for the return trip to the train station to make sure you don't get stranded. It's possible to walk the memorable 26km (16 miles) from Otford to Bundeena, or vice versa, in 2 days. (Take all your food, water, and camping gear.) The track sticks to the coast, crosses several beaches, and is relatively easy to follow.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

There are plenty of places kids can have fun in Sydney, but my choices below are particularly suitable for youngsters. (All of the places are reviewed in full above.).

Taronga Zoo (p. 140), where the barnyard animals, surprisingly, get as much attention as the koalas, is an all-time favorite with kids. If your kids want hands-on contact with the animals, though, then you'd better head to **Featherdale Wildlife Park** (p. 139), where they can get their photo taken next to a koala, and hand feed and stroke kangaroos and wallabies. (You can't stroke koalas in New South Wales.) Even more interactive are the exhibits just crying out to be touched and bashed at the **Powerhouse Museum** (p. 137).

The sharks at **Oceanworld** (p. 140) in Manly and at the **Sydney Aquarium** (p. 137) in Darling Harbour are big lures for kids, too, and the thrill of walking through a long plexiglass tunnel as giant manta rays perch over their heads will lead to more squeals of excitement.

Another outing for both adults and children is to crawl around inside boats and submarines at the **Australian National Maritime Museum** (p. 136).

And, of course, what kid wouldn't enjoy a day at the beach, and Sydney's got plenty to choose from, like **Bondi** or **Manly**.

6 Harbor Cruises & Organized Tours

For details on the Sydney Explorer bus, see “Getting Around” earlier in this chapter.

HARBOR CRUISES

The best thing about Sydney is the harbor, so you shouldn't leave without taking a cruise. **Sydney Ferries** (☎ 13 15 00 or 02/9245 5600; www.sta.nsw.gov.au) offers a 1-hour morning harbor cruise with commentary departing Circular Quay, Wharf 4, daily at 10 and 11:15am. It costs A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults, A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children under 16, and A\$38 (US\$24) for families (any number of children under 16). A 2½-hour afternoon cruise explores more of the harbor and leaves from Wharf 4 at 1pm on weekdays and 1:30pm on weekends and public holidays. This tour costs A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children,

and A\$55 (US\$36) for families. The highly recommended 1½-hour **Evening Harbour Lights tour**, which takes in the city lights as far east as Double Bay and west to Goat Island, leaves Monday through Saturday at 8pm from Wharf 5. The evening tour costs A\$19 (US\$12) for adults, A\$9.50 (US\$6.20) for children, and A\$48 (US\$31) for families.

Another option is a trip on the paddle steamer the **Sydney Showboat** (☎ 02/9552 2722; www.bluelinecruises.com.au). A daily lunch cruise on this oddly placed vessel starts at either 11:15am or 1:15pm and costs A\$51 (US\$33) for adults and A\$31 (US\$20) for children 4 to 12; it includes a good buffet lunch, a jazz band, and commentary. A daily 2½-hour dinner cruise and variety show runs from 7:30pm and costs from A\$99 (US\$65) for adults and A\$69.30 (US\$45) for children. Ask about other cruises, including afternoon excursions.

HARBOR CRUISE TICKETS & INFO

The one-stop shop for tickets and information on all harbor cruises is the **Australian Travel Specialists** (☎ 02/9247 5151; www.atstravel.com.au). Find outlets at jetty no. 6 at Circular Quay; at the Harbourside Festival Marketplace at Darling Harbour; and on the Podium Level of the A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower. It's a good idea to check the website before you come to Australia as cruise options and prices frequently change. You can book on the Net, too.

If you're going to splurge on a cruise, though, the best are aboard the fully rigged replica of **Captain Bligh's Bounty** ★ (☎ 02/9247 1789; www.thebounty.com). Based at Campbell's Cove in The Rocks, it was built for the movie *The Bounty* (1984), which starred Mel Gibson and Anthony Hopkins. Standard 2-hour and lunch cruises run from 12:30pm Monday through Friday and cost A\$65 (US\$42). Two-and-a-half-hour dinner cruises depart daily at 7pm in high season (Sept 1–Apr 30) and Friday and Saturday only from May 1 to August 31, and cost A\$99 (US\$64) for adults. On Saturday and Sunday (and public holidays) a 2½-hour Buffet Lunch Sail starts at 12:30pm and costs A\$95 (US\$62), and a 1½-hour pre-dinner sail on Saturdays from 4pm costs A\$53 (US\$34). An extra 1½-hour brunch sail on Sundays and public holidays also costs A\$53 (US\$34). There's a 40% discount for children under 12 on all cruises.

Captain Cook Cruises, departing jetty no. 6, Circular Quay (☎ 02/9206 1111; www.captaincook.com.au), offers several harbor excursions on its sleek vessels, with commentary along the way. The Harbour Highlights cruise operates several times daily and takes in most of the main points of interest in 1¼ hours, for A\$20 (US\$13) for adults and A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children. Another offering is the *Sydney Harbour Explorer* cruise which departs at 9:30, 11:30am, 1:30, and 3:30pm, and combines visits to five major Sydney attractions with a 2-hour cruise. You can get off where you want and join the boat again later. Tickets cost A\$25 (US\$16) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children. An Aquarium and Zoo Cruise, costing A\$37 (US\$24) for adults and A\$19 (US\$12) for children, includes the *Sydney Harbour Explorer* cruise and admission to either the Sydney Aquarium or Taronga Zoo.

The company also offers a 1½-hour Lunch Cruise, which leaves daily at 12:30pm. It costs A\$49 (US\$32) for adults and A\$29 (US\$19) for children. A Starlight Dinner Cruise leaves nightly at 7:30pm and costs A\$59 (US\$39) for adults and A\$35 (US\$23) for children.

Its nightly 1½-hour Sunset Cruise aboard the **John Cadman Cruising Restaurant boat**, departing just before sunset, costs A\$69 (US\$45) for adults and A\$35 (US\$23) for children, and includes a two-course meal and drinks. Yet

another option is the Opera Afloat Dinner (including opera singers, of course). This costs A\$99 for adults and A\$55 (US\$36) for children.

Matilda Cruises (☎ 02/9264 7377; www.matilda.com.au) offers a 1-hour Matilda Rocket sightseeing tour leaving the pontoon at the far end of Sydney Aquarium at Darling Harbour eight times daily beginning at 9:30am (6 times daily in winter, Apr 1–Sept 30, beginning at 10:30am). You can stay on for the full hour, or get off and on again at Circular Quay, the Opera House, Watsons Bay, and Taronga Zoo. The last boat leaves Taronga Zoo at 5:10pm in summer (4:10pm in winter). There's commentary and tea and coffee on board. The cruise costs A\$21 (US\$13) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children 5 to 12, and A\$50 (US\$33) for a family. The company also runs morning and afternoon cruises, and lunch and dinner cruises with good food.

WALKING TOURS

The center of Sydney is compact, and you can see a lot in a day on foot. If you want to learn more about Sydney's early history, then book a guided tour with **The Rocks Walking Tour** (☎ 02/9247 6678), based at the Shop K4, Kendall Lane (off Argyle St., The Rocks). Excellent walking tours leave Monday through Friday at 10:30am, 12:30pm, and 2:30pm, and Saturday and Sunday at 11:30am and 2pm (in Jan only 10:30am and 2:30pm on weekdays). The 1½-hour tour costs A\$16 (US\$10) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children 10 to 16, and A\$41 (US\$27) for families. Free for accompanied children under 10.

For other historical walks contact **Sydney Guided Tours** (☎ 02/9660 7157). The company's owner, Maureen Fry, has been in the business for over 12 years and employs trained guides qualified in disciplines such as history, architecture, and botany. She offers a range of tours including an introductory tour of Sydney, a tour of Macquarie Street, and many others. Walking tours cost A\$17 (US\$11) for 2 hours as part of a group. (Call in advance to find out what's available.)

A journey with a difference is **Weird Sydney Ghost and History Tours** (☎ 02/9555 2700; www.destinytours.com.au). The tour—in a hearse—is fascinating and fun, and explores a section of historic Sydney (and more modern additions) including a former VD Clinic, the Sydney Opera House, and some buildings along Macquarie Street. It costs A\$149 (US\$97) for the 1½- to 2-hour trip.

MOTORCYCLE TOURS

Blue Thunder Motorcycle Tours (☎ 1800/800 184 in Australia, or 0414/278 983; www.bluthunder.com.au) runs Harley-Davidson tours of Sydney, the Blue Mountains, and places around New South Wales. A 1-hour ride (you sit on the back of the bike) around the city costs A\$90 (US\$59). Half- and full-day trips are also available.

If you love motorbikes and want to take one out on your own on a self-guided or guided tour, then you should consider **Bikescape** (☎ 02/9356 2453; www.bikescape.com.au). You can hire a bike to go around Sydney, or as far afield as Byron Bay, or the Great Ocean Road in Victoria.

7 Staying Active

BIKING The best place to cycle in Sydney is in Centennial Park. Rent bikes from **Centennial Park Cycles**, 50 Clovelly Rd., Randwick (☎ 02/9398 5027), which is 200m (656 ft.) from the Musgrave Avenue entrance. (The park has five main entrances.) Mountain bikes cost A\$9 (US\$5.85) for the first hour, A\$13 (US\$8.45) for 2 hours, and A\$20 (US\$13) for 4 hours.

Bicycles in The City, 722 George St. (near Central Station; ☎ 02/9280 2229), rents mountain bikes from A\$5 (US\$3.25) per hour, or \$25 (\$16) per day. You can rent in-line skates here, too, for the same daily rate with all protective clothing. **Note:** Helmets are compulsory in Australia.

FITNESS CLUBS The **City Gym**, 107 Crown St., East Sydney (☎ 02/9360 6247), is a busy gym near Kings Cross. Drop-in visits are A\$10 (US\$6.50), and it's open daily 24 hours.

GOLF Sydney has over 90 golf courses and plenty of fine weather. The 18-hole championship course at **Moore Park Golf Club**, at Cleveland Street and Anzac Parade, Waterloo (☎ 02/9663 1064), is the nearest to the city. Visitors are welcome every day except all day Friday and Sunday mornings. Greens fees are A\$24 (US\$16) Monday through Thursday, and A\$27 (US\$18) Saturday and Sunday.

One of my favorite courses is **Long Reef Golf Club**, Anzac Avenue, Collaroy (☎ 02/9982 2943). This northern beach course is surrounded by the Tasman Sea on three sides and has gorgeous views. Greens fees are A\$25 (US\$16) weekdays, and A\$35 (US\$23) on weekends.

For general information on courses, call the **New South Wales Golf Association** (☎ 02/9264 8433).

IN-LINE SKATING The best places to go in-line skating are along the beachside promenades at Bondi and Manly beaches and in Centennial Park. **Manly Blades**, 49 North Steyne (☎ 02/9976 3833), rents skates for A\$12 (US\$7.80) for the first hour and A\$6 (US\$3.90) for each subsequent hour, or A\$25 (US\$16) per day. Lessons are A\$25 (US\$16) including 1-hour skate rental and a half-hour lesson. **Bondi Boards & Blades**, 148 Curlewis St., Bondi Beach (☎ 02/9365 6555), rents skates for A\$11 (US\$7.15) for the first hour, A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) for each subsequent hour, and A\$20 (US\$13) for 24 hours. Ask about a free lesson. **Total Skate**, 36 Oxford St., Paddington, near Centennial Park (☎ 02/9380 6356), rents skates for A\$10 (US\$6.50) for the first hour, A\$5 (US\$3.25) for subsequent hours, and A\$30 (US\$20) for 24 hours. Ask about a free lesson.

JOGGING The **Royal Botanic Gardens**, **Centennial Park**, or any **beach** are the best places to kick-start your body. You can also run across the Harbour Bridge, though you'll have to put up with the car fumes. Another popular spot is along the sea cliffs from Bondi Beach to Bronte Beach.

PARASAILING If being strapped to a parachute 100m (328 ft.) above Sydney Harbour while being towed by a speed boat is your idea of fun, contact **Sydney Harbour Parasailing and Scenic Tours** (☎ 02/9977 6781). A regular flight will see you in the air for 8 to 10 minutes at the end of a 100m (328-ft.) line. Flights cost A\$55 (US\$36) per adult. Tandem rides (for children and adults) are also available. The boat departs next to the Manly ferry wharf in Manly.

SCUBA DIVING Plenty of people learn to dive in Sydney before taking off for the Barrier Reef. Don't expect coral reefs, though. **Pro Dive**, 27 Alfreda St., Coogee (☎ 02/9665 6333), offers a 4-day learn-to-dive program costing A\$345 (US\$224). A day of diving for registered divers costs A\$105 (US\$68).

SURFING **Bondi Beach** and **Tamarama** are the best surf beaches on the south side of Sydney Harbour, while **Manly**, **Narrabeen**, **Bilgola**, **Collaroy**, **Long Reef**, and **Palm** beaches are the most popular on the north side. Most beach suburbs have surf shops where you can rent a board. At Bondi Beach, the **Bondi Surf Co.**, 72 Campbell Parade (☎ 02/9365 0870), rents surfboards for A\$45 (US\$29) for 4 hours or A\$60 (US\$39) all day. Body boards cost A\$20

(US\$13) for 2 hours and A\$60 (US\$39) all day. In Manly, **Aloha Surf**, 44 Pittwater Rd., Manly (☎ 02/9977 3777), also rents surfboards. **Manly Surf School** (☎ 02/9977 6977) offers 2-hour surf classes for A\$40 (US\$26), 2-day sessions for A\$70 (US\$46), and 3-day classes for A\$90 (US\$59). **Wave Action Surf School** (☎ 02/9970 6813, or mobile 0413/177 242) offers a similar service with the same rates as Manly Surf School, on the breakers at Palm Beach. Also, it offers a 1-day surf tour from central Sydney to Palm Beach and other northern Sydney beaches with sightseeing and lunch for A\$100 (US\$65).

SWIMMING The best place to swim indoors in Sydney is the **Sydney International Aquatic Centre**, at Olympic Park, Homebush Bay (☎ 02/9752 3666). It's open Monday through Friday from 5am to 9:45pm, and Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays from 6am to 7:45pm (6:45pm May–Oct).

The **Cook and Phillip Park** (☎ 02/9326 0444) is the most central of Sydney's public swimming pools, located at 4 College St. (on the corner of William St.). The best way to find it is to walk to the cathedral across Hyde Park, walk for a couple of minutes along the dark paving area outside the cathedral's front entrance (keeping Hyde Park on your right). Look out for the signs directing you down some stairs to the entrance. The center has three pools, one for serious swimmers, another with a wave machine, and a third hydrotherapy pool with easy ramp access and bubble jets. Entry is A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) for adults and A\$4 (US\$2.60) for children.

Another good bet is the **North Sydney Olympic Pool**, Alfred South Street, Milsons Point (☎ 02/9955 2309). It's just over the Harbour Bridge, near the amusement park, so why not have a swim after a walk over from the city. Swimming here costs A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) for adults and A\$1.65 (US\$1.10) for children. More world records have been broken in this pool than in any other. In 1999, the pool was renovated, and there's now a separate indoor pool, too. **The Bondi Icebergs Club**, on the rocks to the right of the beach as you look at the sea, also has a new Olympic-size swimming pool, and a children's pool. Entrance costs A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) and includes a sauna.

TENNIS There are hundreds of places around the city to play one of Australia's most popular sports. A nice spot is the **Miller's Point Tennis Court**, Kent Street, The Rocks (☎ 02/9256 2222). It's run by the Observatory Hotel and is open daily from 7:30am to 10pm. The court costs A\$25 (US\$16) per hour. The **North Sydney Tennis Centre**, 1A Little Alfred St., North Sydney (☎ 02/9371 9952), has three courts available daily from 6am to 10pm. They cost A\$16 (US\$10) until 5pm on weekdays and A\$20 (US\$13) other times.

WINDSURFING My favorite spot to learn to windsurf or to set out onto the harbor is at **Balmoral Beach**, in Mosman on the North Shore. Rent boards at **Balmoral Windsurfing, Sailing and Kayaking School & Hire**, 3 The Esplanade, Balmoral Beach (☎ 02/9960 5344). Windsurfers cost A\$27 (US\$18) per hour for beginners and A\$38 (US\$28) for advanced windsurfing equipment. Lessons cost A\$175 (US\$114) for 5 hours teaching over a weekend, for beginners, and A\$195 (US\$127) for advanced lessons. This place also rents fishing boats.

YACHTING **Balmoral Boat Shed**, Balmoral Beach (☎ 02/9969 6006), rents catamarans, 3.5m (11-ft.) aluminum runabouts, canoes, and surf skis. The catamarans and runabouts cost A\$35 (US\$23) for the first hour (with a A\$80/US\$52 deposit); a full day costs A\$120 (US\$78). Other vessels, such as canoes, cost A\$12 (US\$7.80) per hour with a A\$10 (US\$6.50) deposit.

Finds A Surf Adventure

If you've always fancied learning to surf, then head for **Waves Surf School** (☎ 1800/851 101 in Australia, or mobile 0414/682 228; www.wavessurfschool.com.au). They take budding surfers on 1-day trips from Sydney to the Royal National Park with equipment and lunch provided. Trips cost A\$65 (US\$42). If you're young enough to sleep the night in a "double-decker party bus," you might consider a 2-day surfing trip to Seal Rocks, north of Sydney, for A\$169 (US\$110). The company also takes travelers on a 4-day surfing trip for A\$399 (US\$259).

Sydney by Sail (☎ 02/9280 1110) offers learn to sail courses on Sydney Harbour. A long, 1-day introductory course costs A\$450 (US\$293).

8 Spectator Sports

CRICKET The **Sydney Cricket Ground**, at the corner of Moore Park and Driver Avenue, is famous for its 1-day and test matches, played October through March. Phone the **New South Wales Cricket Association** at ☎ 02/9339 0999 for match details, and **Sportspace Tours** (☎ 02/9380 0383) for stadium tours.

FOOTBALL In this city, "football" means rugby league. If you want to see burly chaps pound into each other while chasing an oval ball, then be here between May and September. The biggest venue is the **Sydney Football Stadium**, Moore Park Road, Paddington (☎ 02/9360 6601). Match information is available at ☎ 1900/963 133. Buy tickets at **Ticketek** (☎ 02/9266 4800).

HORSE RACING Sydney has four horse-racing tracks: Randwick, Canterbury, Rosehill, and Warwick Farm. The most central and best known is **Randwick Racecourse**, Alison Street, Randwick (☎ 02/9663 8400). The biggest race day of the week is Saturday. Entry costs A\$9 (US\$5.85) per person. Call the **Sydney Turf Club** at ☎ 02/9930 4000 with questions about Rosehill and Canterbury, and the Randwick number above for Warwick Farm.

SURFING CARNIVALS Every summer these uniquely Australian competitions bring large crowds to Sydney's beaches, as surf clubs compete against each other in various watersports. Contact the **Surf Lifesaving Association** (☎ 02/9597 5588) for times and locations. Other beach events include Iron Man and Iron Woman competitions, during which Australia's fittest struggle it out in combined swimming, running, and surfing events.

YACHT RACING While sailing competitions take place on the harbor most summer weekends, the start of the **Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race** on Boxing Day (Dec 26) is something not to be missed. The race starts from the harbor near the Royal Botanic Gardens.

9 Shopping

You'll find plenty of places to keep your credit cards in action in Sydney. Most shops of interest to the visitor are located in The Rocks and along George and Pitt streets (including the shops below the A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower and along the Pitt Street Mall). Other shopping precincts worth checking out are Mosman on the North Shore and Double Bay in the eastern suburbs for exclusive boutique

shopping, Chatswood for its general shopping centers, the Sydney Fishmarket for the sake of it, and the various weekend markets (listed below).

Don't miss the **Queen Victoria Building (QVB)**, on the corner of Market and George streets. This Victorian shopping arcade is one of the prettiest in the world and has some 200 boutiques—mostly men's and women's fashion—on four levels. The arcade is open 24 hours, but the shops do business Monday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm (Thurs to 9pm) and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

SHOPPING HOURS Regular shopping hours are generally Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 8:30 or 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 8:30 or 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5 or 5:30pm, and Sunday from 10 or 10:30am to 5pm. Exceptions are noted in the store listings below.

In addition to the QVB, several other arcades in the city center also offer good shopping potential, including the **Sydney Central Plaza**, beside the Grace Brothers department store on Pitt Street Mall; and the **Skylark Arcade**, which runs from Pitt Street Mall to Castlereagh Street. The **Strand Arcade** (between Pitt Street Mall and George St.) was built in 1892 and is interesting for its architecture and small boutiques, food stores and cafes, and the Down Town Duty Free store on the basement level.

On **Pitt Street Mall** you'll find record shops, including HMV, a branch of The Body Shop, and boutiques such as Just Jeans, Jeans West, Katies, and Esprit.

Oxford Street runs from the city to Bondi Junction through Paddington and Darlinghurst and is home to countless clothing stores for the style conscious. You could quite easily spend anywhere from 2 hours to a whole day making your way from one end to the other. Detour down the small William Street once you get to Paddington to visit the headquarters of celebrated international Australian designer Collette Dinnigan. On the same street are the trendy boutiques Belinda and the Corner Store for cutting edge designs, and Pelle and Di Nuovo for luxury recycled goods.

SYDNEY SHOPPING FROM A TO Z

ABORIGINAL ARTIFACTS & CRAFTS

Aboriginal & Tribal Art Centre This center carries a wide range of desert paintings and bark paintings, mostly of very high quality. Collectibles such as didgeridoos, fabrics, books, and boomerangs are on sale, too. Open daily from 10am to 5pm. Amex, Diners Club, MasterCard, and Visa are accepted. 1st floor, 117 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 9625. Fax 02/9247 4391.

Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery and Shop The proprietors of Coo-ee collect artifacts and fine art from more than 30 Aboriginal communities and dozens of individual artists throughout Australia. The gallery also stocks the largest collection of limited-edition prints in Australia. There are also plenty of hand-painted fabrics, T-shirts, didgeridoos, boomerangs, sculpture, bark paintings, jewelry, music, and books. Don't expect bargain prices, though; you pay for the quality here. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm and Sunday from 11am to 5pm. 98 Oxford St., Paddington. ☎ 02/9332 1544.

Didj Beat Didjeridoo's Here you'll find the most authentic and best-priced didgeridoos in Sydney. Open daily from 10am to 6:30pm. Shop 2, The Clock Tower Sq., corner of Argyle and Harrington sts. ☎ 02/9251 4289.

Gavala Aboriginal Art & Cultural Education Centre I'd head here first if I were in the market for a decent boomerang or didgeridoo. Gavala is entirely owned and operated by Aborigines, and there are plenty of authentic Aboriginal

Value Discount Shopping

If you're looking for bargains, head to **Foveraux Street** between Elizabeth and Waterloo streets in Surry Hills for factory clearance shops selling last season's fashions and seconds at deep discounts. If you're keen on bargain shopping, consider joining up with **Shopping Spree Tours** (☎ 1800/625 969 in Australia, or 02/9360 6220; fax 02/9332 2641), which offers tours to outlets and warehouses selling everything from clothes to cookware to electrical appliances. Full-day tours cost A\$70 (US\$46) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for children 3 to 12 and include pickup at your hotel, visits to 8 to 10 outlets and warehouses, and a two-course lunch at a good restaurant. Tours depart at 8:15am daily except Sunday and public holidays.

crafts for sale, including carved emu eggs, grass baskets, cards, and books. A first-rate painted didgeridoo will cost anywhere from A\$100 to A\$450 (US\$65–US\$293). Gavala also sponsors cultural talks, didgeridoo-making lessons, and storytelling sessions. Open daily from 10am to 9pm. Shop 377, Harbourside Festival Marketplace, Darling Harbour. ☎ 02/9212 7232.

Original & Authentic Aboriginal Art Quality Aboriginal art is on sale here from some of Australia's best-known painters, including Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, whose paintings even hang in the White House in Washington, D.C., and Janet Forrester Nangala, whose work has been exhibited in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. Expect to pay in the range of A\$1,000 to A\$4,000 (US\$650–US\$2,600) for the larger paintings. There are some nice painted pots here, too, costing from A\$30 to A\$80 (US\$20–US\$52). Open daily from 10am to 6:30pm. 79 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9251 4222.

ART PRINTS & ORIGINALS

Done Art and Design The art is by Ken Done, who's well known for having designed his own Australian flag, which he hopes to raise over Australia should it abandon its present one following the formation of a republic. The clothing designs—which feature printed sea- and beachscapes, the odd colorful bird, and lots of pastels—are by his wife Judy. Ken Done's gallery is in Hickson Road, just off George Street, in the Rocks. Open daily from 10am to 5:30pm. 1 Hickson Rd., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 2740.

Ken Duncan Gallery This photographer-turned-salesman is making a killing from his exquisitely produced large-scale photographs of Australian scenery. Open daily from 9am to 8pm in summer, until 9pm on Thursday and from 9am to 7pm in winter. Amex, Diners Club, MasterCard, and Visa. 73 George St., The Rocks (across from The Rocks Visitor Centre). ☎ 02/9241 3460. Fax 02/9241 3462.

BOOKS

You'll find a good selection of specialized books on Sydney and Australia for sale at the **Art Gallery of New South Wales**, the Garden Shop in the **Royal Botanic Gardens**, the **Museum of Sydney**, the **Australian Museum**, and the **State Library of New South Wales**.

Abbey's Bookshop This interesting, centrally located bookshop specializes in literature, history, and mystery, and has a whole floor on language and education. 131 York St. (behind the QVB). ☎ 02/9264 3111.

Angus & Robertson Bookworld One of Australia's largest bookshops, with two stories of books—including a good guidebook and Australian section—and games. 168 Pitt St., Pitt Street Mall. ☎ 02/9235 1188.

Dymocks One of the largest book department stores in the city, Dymocks has three levels of general books and stationery. There's a good travel section with plenty of guides. Open Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. 424–428 George St. (just north of Market St.). ☎ 02/9235 0155.

Gleebooks Bookshop Specializing in art, general literature, psychology, sociology, and women's studies, Gleebooks also has a secondhand store (with a large children's department) down the road at 191 Glebe Point Rd. Open daily 8am to 9pm. 49 & 191 Glebe Point Rd., Glebe. ☎ 02/9660 2333.

Goulds Book Arcade Come here to search for unusual dusty volumes. Located about a 10-minute walk from the Newtown CityRail station, the place is bursting at the seams with many thousands of secondhand and new books all in a very rough order. You can browse for hours here. Open daily from 8am to midnight. 32–38 King St., Newtown. ☎ 02/9519 8947.

Travel Bookshop Hundreds of travel guides, maps, Australian titles, coffee-table books, and accessories line the shelves of this excellent bookshop. There's also an Amex counter. Open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday from 10am to 5pm. Shop 3, 175 Liverpool St. (across from the southern end of Hyde Park, near the Museum CityRail station). ☎ 02/9261 8200.

CRAFTS

Australian Craftworks This place showcases some of Australia's best arts and crafts, collected from some 300 Australian artists from around the country. It's all displayed in a former police station built in 1882, a time of economic depression when mob riots and clashes with police were common in this area. The cells and administration areas are today used as gallery spaces. Open daily from 8:30am to 7pm. 127 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 7156.

The Puppet Shop at the Rocks *Find* I can't believe I kept walking past the sign outside this place for so many years without looking in. Deep down in the bowels of a historic building I eventually came across several cramped rooms absolutely packed with puppets, costing from a couple of dollars to a couple of hundred. The owners make their own puppets—mostly Australian in style (emus, koalas, and that sort of thing)—as well as import things from all over the world. Wooden toys abound, too. It's the best shop in Sydney! Open daily from 10am to 5:30pm. 77 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 9137.

Telopea Gallery This shop is run by the New South Wales Society of Arts and Crafts, which exhibits works by its members, all of whom are New South Wales residents. There are some wonderful glass, textile, ceramic, jewelry, fine metal, and wood-turned items for sale. Open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm. Shop 2 in the Metcalfe Arcade, 80–84 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9241 1673.

DEPARTMENT STORES

The two big names in Sydney shopping are David Jones and Grace Brothers. **David Jones** (☎ 02/9266 5544) is the city's largest department store, selling everything from fashion to designer furniture. You'll find the women's section on the corner of Elizabeth and Market streets, and the men's section on the corner of Castlereagh and Market streets.

Grace Brothers (☎ 02/9238 9111) is similar to David Jones, but the building is newer and flashier (though some might say it's a bit down market compared to David Jones). It's located on the corner of George and Market streets. Both stores are open Monday through Wednesday and Friday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 9am to 9pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

DUTY-FREE SHOPS

Sydney has several duty-free shops selling goods at a discount. To take advantage of the bargains, you need a passport and a flight ticket, and you must export what you buy. The duty-free shop with the best buys is **Downtown Duty Free**, which has two city outlets, one on the basement level of the Strand Arcade, off Pitt Street Mall (☎ 02/9233 3166), and one at 105 Pitt St. (☎ 02/9221 4444). Five more stores are at Sydney International Airport and are open from the first to the last flight of the day.

FASHION

The best places to shop for fashion are the **QVB** and the **Sydney Central Plaza** (on the ground floor of the mall next to the Grace Brothers department store on Pitt Street Mall). Otherwise, the major Pitt Street Mall outlets will keep you up-to-date. For really trendy clothing head to Paddington, and for alternative clothes, go to Newtown.

Australian Outback Clothing

R.M. Williams Moleskin trousers may not be the height of fashion at the moment, but you never know. R.M. Williams boots are famous for being both tough and fashionable. You'll find Akubra hats, Driza-bone coats, and kangaroo-skin belts here, too. 389 George St. (between Town Hall and Central CityRail stations). ☎ 02/9262 2228.

Thomas Cook Boot & Clothing Company Located on George Street between Town Hall and Central CityRail stations, this place specializes in Australian boots, Driza-bone coats, and Akubra hats. There's another shop at 129 Pitt St., near Martin Place (☎ 02/9232 3334). 790 George St., Haymarket. ☎ 02/9212 6616. www.thomascookclothing.com.au.

Men's Fashion

Esprit Mens Not so cheap, but certainly colorful clothes come out of this designer store where bold hues and fruity patterns are the in thing. Quality designer shirts cost around A\$60 (US\$39). Shop 10G, Sydney Central Plaza, 450 George St. ☎ 02/9233 7349.

Gowings Probably the best all-round men's clothing store in Sydney, Gowings sells quality clothing on several levels. There's also an eclectic mix of gardening equipment, gourmet camping gear, odds and ends for the extrovert, a good range of Australian bush hats, and R.M. Williams boots (at around A\$250/US\$163 a pair). If you want to risk it, you can even get a cheap haircut here. There's a similar store at 319 George St., near Wynyard CityRail station (☎ 02/9262 1281). 45 Market St. ☎ 02/9264 6321.

Outdoor Heritage Quality clothing with a yachting influence is what you'll find at this good-looking store specializing in casual, colorful gear. Shop 13G, Sydney Central Plaza, 450 George St. ☎ 02/9235 1560.

Unisex Fashion

Country Road This chain store has outlets all across Australia as well as in the United States. The clothes, for both men and women, are good quality but tend

to be quite expensive (though you might find something smart if you forgot to pack something). You'll find other branches in the QVB and the Skygarden Arcade, and in Bondi Junction, Darling Harbour, Double Bay, Mosman, and Chatswood. 142–146 Pitt St. ☎ 02/9394 1818.

Mostrada If you're looking for good-quality leather items at very reasonable prices, then this is your place. Leather jackets for men and women go for between A\$199 and A\$899 (US\$129–US\$584), with an average price of around A\$400 (US\$260). There are also bags, belts, and other leather accessories on offer. Store 15G, Sydney Central Plaza, 450 George St. ☎ 02/9221 0133.

Women's Fashion

In addition to the places listed below, head to Oxford Street (particularly Paddington), for more avant-garde designers.

Carla Zampatti There are some 30 Carla Zampatti stores around Australia offering stylish fashions at hard-to-swallow prices. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm. 143 Elizabeth St. ☎ 02/9264 3257.

Dorian Scott Probably the best place to go for hand-knit sweaters—called “jumpers” in Australia—Dorian Scott has a wide range of colorful garments from more than 200 leading Australian designers. While some items go for A\$80 (US\$52), others will set you back several hundred. You'll also find clothing accessories for men, women, and children in this two-story emporium, including Hot Tuna surfware and Thomas Cook adventure clothing. Open Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 7pm and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. There are also two Dorian Scott stores at Sydney International Airport (☎ 02/9667 3255) and another at the Inter-Continental Hotel at 117 Macquarie St. (☎ 02/9247 1818). 105 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9221 8145. Fax 02/9251 8553.

FOOD

The goodies you'll find in the downstairs food section of **David Jones** department store on Castlereagh Street (the men's section) are enough to tempt anyone. The store sells the best local and imported products to the rich and famous.

Coles One of the few supermarkets in the city center, this place is a good bet if you want to cater for yourself or are after ready-made food (including tasty sandwiches) and cheap soft drinks. There's another Coles beneath the giant Coca-Cola sign on Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross. Open daily from 6am to midnight. Wynyard station, Castlereagh St., Wynyard (directly opposite the Menzies Hotel and the public bus stands). ☎ 02/9299 4769.

Darrell Lea Chocolates This is the oldest location of Australia's most famous chocolate shop. Pick up some wonderful handmade chocolates as well as other unusual candies, including the best licorice this side of the Kasbah. At the corner of King and George sts. ☎ 02/9232 2899.

Sydney Fishmarket Finding out about what people eat can be a good introduction to a new country, and, in my opinion, nowhere is this more fascinating than a visit to the local fish market. Here you'll find seven major fish retailers selling everything from shark to Balmain bugs (a kind of squat crayfish), with hundreds of species in between. Watch out for the local pelicans being fed the fishy leftovers. There's also a sushi bar, a couple of cheap seafood eateries, a fruit market, and a good deli. The retail sections are open daily from 7am to 4pm. Get

here by light rail (get off at the Fishmarket stop), or walk from Darling Harbour. Parking costs A\$3 (US\$1.95) for the first 3 hours. At the corner of Bank St. and Pyrmont Bridge Rd., Pyrmont. ☎ 02/9660 1611.

GIFTS & SOUVENIRS

The shops at **Taronga Zoo**, the **Oceanarium** in Manly, the **Sydney Aquarium**, and the **Australian Museum** are all good sources for gifts and souvenirs. There are many shops around **The Rocks** worth browsing, too.

Australian Geographic A spin-off from the Australian version of *National Geographic* magazine, this store sells good-quality crafts and Australiana. On hand are camping gadgets, telescopes and binoculars, garden utensils, scientific oddities, books and calendars, videos, music, toys, and lots more. Harbourside Festival Marketplace, Darling Harbour. ☎ 02/9212 6539. A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower, Pitt St. ☎ 02/9231 5055.

Ikonstore This interesting little store located on the pedestrian pathway to the Sydney Opera House from Circular Quay has a fascinating collection of watches and gadgets for the gourmet collector. 16, Opera Quays, East Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9252 6352.

National Trust Gift and Bookshop You can pick up some nice souvenirs, including books, Australiana crafts, and indigenous foodstuffs here. An art gallery on the premises presents changing exhibits of paintings and sculpture by Australians. There's also a cafe. Closed Monday. Observatory Hill, The Rocks. ☎ 02/9258 0154.

The Wilderness Society Shop Australiana is crawling out of the woodwork at this cute little craft emporium dedicated to spending all its profits on saving the few remaining untouched forests and wilderness areas of Australia. You'll find some quality crafts items, cute children's clothes, books, cards, and knickknacks. A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower, Castlereagh St. ☎ 02/9233 4674.

MARKETS

Balmain Market Active from 8:30am to 4pm every Saturday, this market has some 140 vendors selling crafts, jewelry, and knickknacks. Take the ferry to Balmain (Darling St.); the market is a 10-minute walk up Darling Street. On the grounds of St. Andrew's Church, Darling St., Balmain ☎ 02/9555 1791.

Bondi Markets A nice place to stroll around on Sunday after your brunch on Campbell Parade and discover the upcoming young Australian designers. This market has somewhat specialized in clothing and jewelry, new, secondhand, and retro. Bondi Beach School, Campbell Parade. ☎ 02/9398 5486.

Paddington Bazaar At this Saturday-only market, you'll find everything from essential oils and designer clothes to New Age jewelry and Mexican hammocks. Expect things to be busy from 10am to 4pm. Take bus no. 380 or 389 from Circular Quay. On the grounds of St. John's Church on Oxford St., on the corner of Newcome St. (just follow the crowds). ☎ 02/9331 2646.

Paddy's Markets A Sydney institution, Paddy's Markets has hundreds of stalls selling everything from cheap clothes and plants to chickens. It's open Friday through Sunday from 9am to 4:30pm. Above Paddy's Markets is **Market City** (☎ 02/9212 1388), which has three floors of fashion stalls, food courts, and specialty shops. Of particular interest is the largest Asian-European supermarket in Australia, on level 1, and the **Kam Fook Yum Cha** Chinese restaurant on level

3, also the largest in Australia. At the corner of Thomas and Hay sts., in Haymarket, near Chinatown. ☎ 1300/361 589 in Australia, or 02/9325 6924.

The Rocks Market Held every Saturday and Sunday, this very touristy market has more than 100 vendors selling everything from crafts, housewares, posters, jewelry, and curios. The main street is closed to traffic from 10am to 4pm to make it easier to stroll around. On George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9255 1717.

MUSIC

Birdland This is the best store in Sydney for jazz and blues, and it stocks a sizable collection of rare items. The staff is very knowledgeable. 3 Barrack St. ☎ 02/9299 8527. www.birdland.com.au.

HMV This is one of the best music stores in Sydney. The jazz section is impressive. CDs in Australia are not cheap, with most new releases costing around A\$30 to A\$35 (US\$20–US\$23). Pitt Street Mall. ☎ 02/9221 2311.

Red Eye Records These two shops, tucked away downstairs in a small arcade not far from Pitt Street Mall and the Strand Arcade, are directly across from one another. The larger store sells a wide range of modern CDs, but the smaller store sells a great collection of quality secondhand and end-of-the-line CDs for around A\$20 (US\$13) each. Tank Stream Arcade (downstairs), at the corner of King and Pitt sts. (near Town Hall). ☎ 02/9233 8177 (new recordings), or 02/9233 8125 (secondhand CDs). www.redeye.com.au.

Sounds Australian You can find anything you've ever heard that sounds Australian here. From rock and pop to didgeridoo and country, it's all here. And if you haven't a clue what's good and what's bad, you can spend some time listening before you buy. The management is quite knowledgeable. In the Argyle Stores department store, The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 7290. Fax 02/9241 2873.

OPALS

There are plenty of opal shops around in Sydney, but don't expect to walk away with any bargains. Best just to choose one you like and haggle.

Altman & Cherny A good selection of opals—black, white, and boulder varieties—as well as jewelry are on sale here. Ask to see “The Aurora Australis,” the world famous black opal valued at A\$1,000,000 (US\$650,000). 19–31 Pitt St. (near Circular Quay). ☎ 02/9251 4717.

Australian Opal Cutters Learn more about opals before you buy at this shop. The staff here will give you lessons about opals to help you compare pieces. Suite 10, Level 4, National Bldg., 250 Pitt St. ☎ 02/9261 2442.

WINE

Australian Wine Centre This is one of the best places in the country to pick up Australian wines by the bottle or the case. The shop stocks a wide range of wines from all over Australia, including bottles from small boutique wineries you're unlikely to find anywhere else. Individual tastings are possible at any time, though there are formal tastings every Thursday and Friday from 4 to 6pm. Wine is exported all over the world from here, so if you want to send home a crate of your favorite, you can be assured it will arrive in one piece. The center owns the wine bar and bistro next door, which is open Monday through Saturday from 6am until 10pm. You can drink here without dining. 1 Alfred St., Shop 3 in Goldfields House, Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9247 2755.

10 Sydney After Dark

Australians are party animals when they're in the mood; whether it's a few beers around the barbecue with friends or an all-night rave at a trendy dance club, they're always on the lookout for the next event. You'll find that alcohol plays a big part in the Aussie culture. Thursday through Saturday, nightclubs are generally open 9pm to around 5am or so. Pubs, or "hotels" as they're also called in Australia, usually open daily from 10am to around midnight. You'll easily find some pubs that stay open to 2am, 3am, or even 24 hours.

WHERE TO FIND OUT WHAT'S ON

The best way to find out what's on is to get hold of the "Metro" section of the Friday *Sydney Morning Herald* or the "Seven Days" pullout from the Thursday *Daily Telegraph*.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

If you have an opportunity to see a performance in the **Sydney Opera House**, jump at it. The "House" is actually not that impressive inside, but the walk back after the show toward the ferry terminals at Circular Quay, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge lit up to your right and the crowd all around you debating the best part of this play or who dropped a beat in that performance—well, it's like being on the streets of New York after hearing Gershwin—you'll want the moment to stay with you forever. For details on Sydney's most famous performing-arts venue, see section 5 earlier in this chapter.

THE OPERA, SYMPHONY & BALLET

Australian Ballet Based in Melbourne, the Australian Ballet tours the country with its performances. The Sydney season, at the Opera House, is from mid-March until the end of April. A second Sydney season runs November through December. Level 15, 115 Pitt St. ☎ 02/9223 9522. www.australianballet.com.au/.

Australian Chamber Orchestra Based in Sydney, this well-known company performs at various venues around the city, from nightclubs to specialized music venues, including the Concert Hall in the Sydney Opera House. Opera Quays, 2 East Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9357 4111; box office ☎ 02/8274 3888. www.aco.com.au.

Opera Australia Opera Australia performs at the Sydney Opera House's Opera Theatre. The opera season runs January through March and June through November. 480 Elizabeth St., Surry Hills. ☎ 02/9699 1099; bookings ☎ 02/9319 1088. www.opera-australia.org.au.

Sydney Symphony Orchestra Sydney's finest symphony orchestra is conducted by the renowned Edo de Waart. It performs throughout the year in the Opera House's Concert Hall. The main symphony season runs March through November, and there's a summer season in February. Level 5, 52 William St., East Sydney. ☎ 02/9334 4644; box office 02/9334 4600. www.symphony.org.au.

THEATER

Sydney's blessed with plenty of theaters, many more than I have space for here—check the *Sydney Morning Herald*, especially the Friday edition, for information on what's currently in production.

Belvoir Street Theatre The hallowed boards of the Belvoir are home to Company B, which pumps out powerful local and international plays upstairs in a wonderfully moody main theater, formerly part of a tomato-sauce factory. Downstairs, a smaller venue generally shows more experimental productions,

Tips It's a Festival!

If you happen to be in Australia in January, then plan to attend one of the many events that is part of the annual **Sydney Festival**. The festival kicks off just after New Year's and continues until the last week of the month, with recitals, plays, films, and performances at venues throughout the city, including Town Hall, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the Sydney Opera House, and Darling Harbour. Some events are free. "Jazz in The Domain" and "Symphony in The Domain" are two free outdoor performances held in the Royal Botanic Gardens; each event (which generally takes place the third and fourth weekend in Jan) attracts thousands of Sydneysiders. For more information, contact **Festival Ticketek** (☎ 02/9266 4111; fax 02/9267 4460). Buy tickets and find out about performances on the Web at www.sydneyfestival.org.au.

such as Aboriginal performances and dance. 25 Belvoir St., Surry Hills. ☎ 02/9699 3444. Tickets around A\$34 (US\$22).

Capitol Theatre Sydney's grandest theater plays host to international and local productions, and major bands and songsters, including the likes of (cough) Australian singing superstar Kylie Minogue. It's also been the Sydney home of musicals such as *Miss Saigon* and *My Fair Lady*. 13–17 Campbell St., Haymarket, near Town Hall. ☎ 02/9320 5000. Ticket prices vary.

Her Majesty's Theatre A quarter of a century old, this large theater is still trawling in the big musicals. Huge productions that have run here include *Evita* and *Phantom of the Opera*. 107 Quay St., Haymarket, near Central Station. ☎ 02/9212 3411. Ticket prices average A\$55–A\$75 (US\$36–US\$49).

Wharf Theatre This wonderful theater is situated on a refurbished wharf on the edge of Sydney Harbour, just beyond the Harbour Bridge. The long walk from the entrance of the pier to the theater along old creaky wooden floorboards builds up excitement for the show. The Sydney Theatre Company is based here, a group well worth seeing whatever production is running. Dinner before the show at the Wharf's restaurant offers special views of the harbor. Pier 4, Hickson Rd., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9250 1777. www.sydneytheatre.com.au. Ticket prices vary.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

JAZZ, FOLK & BLUES

The Basement Australia's hottest jazz club also manages to squeeze in plenty of blues, folk, and funk. Pick up a leaflet showing who's playing when at the door. Acts appear every night, and it's best to book ahead. 29 Reiby Place, Circular Quay. ☎ 02/9251 2797. Cover A\$15–A\$20 (US\$9.75–US\$13) for local acts, A\$20–A\$40 (US\$13–US\$26) for international performers.

side-on café Known by locals as one of the few live venues in Sydney to showcase deliciously diverse jazz nearly every night of the week, this surprisingly decent restaurant is part of a multi-arts complex and serves a two-course meal for A\$27 (US\$18). Patrons are a cross-sectional blend of artists, musicians, and various other assorted jazz lovers. The side-on endeavors to promote upcoming local talent as well as established acts and is also home to an art gallery upstairs. Located just over 5km (3 miles) from the center of town, it's not all that central but is very easily reached by public transport and well worth the detour. Daily

7pm until late. 83 Paramatta Rd., Anandale, near Anandale Hotel. ☎ 02/9519 0055. www.side-on.com.au. Cover charge: A\$13 (US\$8.45). Bus no. 438, 440, or 461.

ROCK

Metro A rock venue with space for 1,000, the Metro is the best place in Sydney to see local and international acts. Tickets sell out quickly. 624 George St. ☎ 02/9264 2666. Cover varies.

DANCE CLUBS

Clubs come and go, and change names and music, so check the latest by planning ahead with a phone call. You can also check the “Metro” section in *Sydney Morning Herald* on Friday; otherwise, you might find free giveaway newspapers in some bars along Oxford Street that have info about the latest clubs.

Bourbon & Beefsteak Bar Right in the middle of Sydney’s red-light district, this 24-hour restaurant and nightclub freaks out to dance music downstairs nightly from 11pm to 5am. It’s popular with both young backpackers and the 25-to-35 crowd. 24 Darlinghurst Rd., Kings Cross. ☎ 02/9358 1144.

Chinese Laundry A couple of dance floors, one with rock walls to enhance the beat of the hip-hop, trance, and dance. What to wear? Dress like you want to un-impress. Open Friday to Saturday from 11pm to 4am. Sussex St. (turn right as you face the bridge from Cockle Bay across to Darling Harbour, and it’s a 2-min. walk, below the Slip Inn bar). ☎ 02/9299 4777. Cover A\$12 (US\$7.80) Fri; A\$18 (US\$12) Sat.

Home Cave-like in shape and feel with a balcony to look down upon the throng, Home has a reputation for bad bouncers—like the time the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper had a Christmas party there and even the influential journalists were abused. Still it’s managed to survive—hope you can. Funk and heavy drum-and-bass-style-music, good for the serious clubber. Cockle Bay Wharf, Darling Harbour. ☎ 02/9266 0600. Cover A\$25 (US\$16).

Mister Goodbar A young, trendy, local crowd inhabits Mister Goodbar’s two good-size dance floors, where they can groove to a range of rap, funk, and hip-hop music Wednesday through Saturday. 11a Oxford St., Paddington. ☎ 02/9360 6759. Cover A\$10 (US\$6.50) Wed; A\$5 (US\$3.25) Thurs; A\$10 (US\$6.50) Fri; and A\$15 (US\$9.75) Sat.

Riche Nightclub This hot spot is popular with the local over-25 club set, as well as with hotel guests wanting to shake their booties to “dance” music. Open only Friday and Saturday. In the Sydney Hilton, 259 Pitt St. ☎ 02/9266 2000. Cover A\$11 (US\$7.15) Fri; A\$17 (US\$11) Sat. Free for hotel guests.

Tantra “Upmarket nightclubbing for the likes of models and beautiful people from the north shore (read: affluent) of Sydney,” is how the manager describes this place. The interior is pseudo-Roman with lots of pillars. The club offers hardcore club/dance music. Dress code is fashionable, with a shirt collar required for men and no sneakers. “70s Boogie Wonderland” night Friday, commercial house music Saturday, and “funky” house music Sunday. 169 Oxford St., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9331 7729. Cover A\$15 (US\$9.75) Fri–Sat; A\$5 (US\$3.25) Sun.

GAY & LESBIAN CLUBS

Sydney has a huge gay community, so there’s a very happening scene. The center of it all is Oxford Street, though Newtown has established itself as a major gay hangout, too. For information on events concerning gays and lesbians, pick up a copy of the *Sydney Star Observer* or *Lesbians on the Loose* available at art-house cinemas, cafes, and stores around Oxford Street.

Arq This 24-hour club has an amazing light show and the best DJs in town. A very big place specializing in the latest dance tunes. Daily 24 hours. 16 Flinders St., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9380 8700.

Civic This original Art Deco hotel has been tastefully decked out to accommodate three levels of entertainment. There's a theater on the lower first floor (basement), a saloon bar on the ground floor, and upstairs there's an Australian restaurant with live jazz, as well as an outdoor cocktail terrace. Great bands. Corner of Pitt and Goulburn sts., Sydney. ☎ 02/8267 3181.

Gilligan's & Ginger's A cocktail bar on the first floor of The Oxford Hotel, Gilligan's & Ginger's is home to a thriving social scene and great views of Oxford Street and the city skyline. DJs spin the latest "handbag hits" (old pop and new pop) for the drag queens. 134 Oxford St., Darlinghurst, corner of Taylor Sq. ☎ 02/9331 3467.

The Stonewall Hotel An institution with three levels of entertainment and many special "nights." Don't miss Sydney's Diva, Ricca Paris, at the pickup night Malebox on Wednesdays. Daily noon to 5am. 175 Oxford St., Darlinghurst. ☎ 02/9360 1963. Free entry on most nights.

Taxi Club "Tacky Club," as it's affectionately known, is another Sydney institution good for "handbag music." 40 Flinders St., Darlinghurst (near Taylor Sq., Oxford St.). ☎ 02/9331 4256. No cover.

THE BAR SCENE

Most of Australia's drinking holes are known as "hotels," after the tradition of providing room and board alongside a good drink in the old days. Occasionally you might hear them referred to as pubs. You tend to find the term "bar" used in upscale hotels and trendy establishments. Bars close at various times, generally from midnight to around 3am.

Bondi Hotel This huge, conglomerate across the road from Bondi Beach offers pool upstairs, a casual beer garden outside, and a resident DJ Thursday through Sunday from 8pm to 4am. There's also a free nightclub on Friday nights. Watch yourself; too much drink and sun turns some people nasty here. 178 Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach. ☎ 02/9130 3271. No cover.

Cargo Bar & Lounge This split-level waterfront bar on the city side of Darling Harbour (past the Sydney Aquarium) has a large ground floor bar leading onto an outdoor beer garden. The lounge upstairs features trendy leather and red footstools (apparently you sit on them). Cocktails and cigars are upstairs and more casual beers downstairs. Some nice pizzas here, too—if you like them topped with emu, crocodile, and kangaroo. 52-60 The Promenade, King Street Wharf. ☎ 02/9262 1777.

The Establishment Another trendy night out is in store if you set foot in this restored historic building with its 42-meter-long bar, lots of floor-to-ceiling columns, and pressed-metal ceilings. It's fashionable, and the food downstairs—fish and chips and the like—nice but unadventurous. There's better eating upstairs in the fine-dining restaurant. 252 George St., City. ☎ 02/9240 3000.

The Friend in Hand In the same location as the fantastically cheap Caesar's No Names spaghetti house, The Friend in Hand offers cheap drinks, poetry readings on Tuesday evenings from 8:30pm, a trivia night on Thursday evenings from 8:30pm, and the distinctly unusual Crab Racing Party every Wednesday from around 8pm. Crab fanciers buy a crustacean for around A\$4 (US\$2.60), give it a name, and send it off to do battle in a race against around 30 others. There are

heats and finals, and victorious crustaceans win their owners prizes. 58 Cowper St., Glebe. ☎ 02/9660 2326.

Henry the Ninth Bar This mock-Tudor drinking hole gets very busy on Friday and Saturday nights. They serve up some good ales in an oaky atmosphere. An Irish band whips up the patrons on Thursday and Friday nights, and a cover band does the same on Wednesday and Saturday nights. A good-value happy hour brings beer prices tumbling Monday through Thursday from 5:30 to 7:30pm, Friday 5:30 to 8:30pm, and Saturday 8 to 10pm. In the Sydney Hilton, 259 Pitt St. ☎ 02/9266 2000.

Hero of Waterloo Hotel This sandstone landmark, built in 1845, was once allegedly the stalking ground of press gangs, who'd whack unsuspecting landlubbers on the head, push them down a trapdoor out the back, and cart them out to sea. Today, this strangely shaped drinking hole is popular with the locals, and hosts old-time jazz bands (the musicians are often in their 70s and 80s) on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 1:30 to 6:30pm, and Irish and cover bands Friday through Sunday evenings from 8:30pm. 81 Lower Fort St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9252 4553.

Jacksons on George A popular drinking spot, this place has four floors of drinking, eating, dancing, and pool playing, and is a popular haunt with tourists and after-work office staff. Pool is expensive here at A\$3 (US\$1.95) a game (you'll need to ask the rules, as Australians have their own), and drinks have a nasty habit of going up in price without warning as the evening wears on. The nightclub plays commercial dance, and there's a smart/casual dress code. Happy hour is Monday through Friday from 5 to 7pm, when drinks cost around one-third less than normal. 178 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 2727. Cover A\$10 (US\$6.50) for nightclub Fri–Sat after 10pm.

Lord Dudley Hotel The best way to get to this great English-style pub is via the Edgecliff CityRail station (between Kings Cross and Bondi Junction). From there, bear right along the edge of the bus station, walk up the hill for 5 minutes, and then take a right onto Jersey Road—ask the railway staff for the correct exit if you can find anyone working. The Lord Dudley has the best atmosphere of just about any drinking hole in Sydney, with log fires in winter, couches to relax in, three bars, and a restaurant. 236 Jersey Rd., Woollahra. ☎ 02/9327 5399.

Lord Nelson Hotel *Value* Another Sydney sandstone landmark, the Lord Nelson rivals the Hero of Waterloo for the title of Sydney's oldest pub. The drinks are sold English-style, in pints and half-pints, and the landlord even makes his own prize-winning beers. Of these beers, Three Sheets is the most popular, but if you can handle falling over on your way home you might want to try a drop of Quail (a pale beer), Victory (based on an English bitter), and a dark beer called Admiral. You can get some good pub grub here, too. Upstairs there's a more formal brasserie. At Kent and Argyle sts., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9251 4044.

Marble Bar Once part of a hotel demolished in the 1970s, the Marble Bar is unique as the only grand-café-style drinking hole in Australia. With oil paintings, marble columns, and brass everywhere, it's the picture of 15th-century Italian Renaissance architecture, a tourist attraction in itself. Live music, generally jazz or soul, is played here Tuesday through Saturday beginning at 8:30pm. Dress smart on Friday and Saturday evenings. Drinks are normally very expensive, but the happy hour (daily 7–9pm) cuts prices down to what you'd pay during normal drinking hours elsewhere. In the Sydney Hilton, 259 Pitt St. ☎ 02/9266 2000.

The Mercantile Sydney's original Irish bar is scruffy and loud when the Irish music's playing in the evening, but an essential stop on any pub crawl in The Rocks. The Guinness is some of the best you'll taste in Sydney. Irish bands kick off every night at around 8pm. 25 George St., The Rocks. ☎ 02/9247 3570.

Slip Inn This multifunctioning bar and bistro setup is a popular city place to drink and meet. There's a garden bar downstairs set in a courtyard, along with a trattoria selling pizzas. Upstairs there's a Thai bistro open for lunch and a large square bar. It's crowded on Friday evenings, but you'll never feel like a sardine. It's a 2-minute walk towards the city from the Town Hall/Cockle Bay side of the pedestrian bridge across to Darling Harbour. Sussex St., Darling Harbour. ☎ 02/9299 4777.

Watsons Bay Hotel If it's a sunny afternoon, get over to Watsons Bay for the best food you'll find in the sun anywhere. The beer garden serves good seafood and barbecue meat dishes while you sip your expensive wine or beer overlooking the harbor. Nearby are the fabulous Doyles Wharf Restaurant and Doyles at the Beach takeout. 1 Military Rd., Watsons Bay. ☎ 02/9337 4299.

MOVIES

The city's major movie houses, **Hoyts** (☎ 13 27 00 in Australia), **Greater Union** (☎ 02/9267 8666), and **Village** (☎ 02/9264 6701), are right next to each other on George Street just past Town Hall. They tend to show big-budget movie releases. Other options are the **Dendy Cinemas**, located at 19 Martin Place, City (☎ 02/9233 8166); 261–263 King St., Newtown (☎ 02/9550 5699); and the latest Dendy Quay movie theater located just before you reach the Opera House, at 2 East Circular Quay (☎ 02/9247 3800). All show art-house movies; the latter allows wine and beer bought on the premises to be consumed in the cinema. In Paddington the **Verona**, 17 Oxford St. (☎ 02/9360 6099), and the **Academy Twin**, 2 Oxford St. (☎ 02/9361 4455), conveniently located next to each other, are always screening the best local and foreign films in Sydney.

Another exceptional art-house/recent blockbuster cinema is the **Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace**, 380 Military Rd., Cremorne (☎ 02/9908 4344). This eight-screen Art Deco gem is an experience in itself, especially on Saturday and Sunday evenings when a Wurlitzer pops up from the center of the Cinema 2 stage, and a musician in a tux gives a stirring rendition of times gone by. Eat “Jaffas,” round candy-coated chocolates, if you want to fit in.

Movie prices hover around A\$15 (US\$9.40), with a half-price night generally on Tuesdays.

THE CASINO

Star City This huge entertainment complex, which opened in 1997, has 15 main bars, 12 restaurants, 2 theaters—the Showroom, which presents Las Vegas-style revues, and the Lyric, Sydney's largest theater—and a huge complex of retail shops. All the usual gambling tables are here, in four main gambling areas. In all there are 2,500 slot machines to gobble your change. Open 24 hours. 80 Pyrmont St., Pyrmont (adjacent to Darling Harbour). ☎ 02/9777 9000. No cover. Ferry: Pyrmont (Darling Harbour). Monorail: Casino.

New South Wales

by Marc Llewellyn

With so much to experience in a state as big as New South Wales, you're not going to see all the major attractions in one hit, so you must prioritize. If you have just a few days to spare, you should certainly head out to the Blue Mountains, part of the Great Dividing Range that separates the lush eastern coastal strip from the more arid interior. Although they are more hills than mountains, they are spectacular, with tall eucalyptus trees, deep river valleys, waterfalls, and craggy cliffs. Or spend a day in the vineyards of the lower Hunter (also known as the Hunter Valley). If you have a few more days, I recommend heading to Barrington Tops National Park, north of the Hunter, for a taste of rainforest and native animals, or down to the pristine beaches of Jervis Bay for gorgeous scenery and great bushwalks.

For longer trips, you can head north toward the Queensland border on the 964km (598-mile) route to Brisbane. You'll pass pretty seaside towns, deserted beaches, and tropical hinterland. Another option is to travel along the south coast 1,032km (640 miles) to Melbourne. Along the way are some of the country's most spectacular beaches, quaint hamlets, good opportunities to spot dolphins and whales, and extensive national parks. If you want to experience the Outback, then head west across the Blue Mountains. You are sure to see plenty of kangaroos, emus, reptiles, and giant wedge-tailed eagles. The main Outback destination is the extraordinary opal-mining town of Lightning Ridge, where you can meet some of the most eccentric *fair-dinkum* (that means "authentic" or "genuine") Aussies you'll come across anywhere.

EXPLORING THE STATE

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Sydney Visitors Centre**, 106 George St., The Rocks, NSW 2000 (☎ 13 20 77 in Australia; www.tourism.nsw.gov.au) will give you general information on what to do and where to stay throughout the state. Otherwise, **Tourism New South Wales** (☎ 02/9931 1111) will direct you to the regional tourist office in the town or area you are interested in.

GETTING AROUND By Car From Sydney, the **Pacific Highway** heads along the north coast into Queensland, and the **Princes Highway** hugs the south coast and runs into Victoria. The **Sydney–Newcastle Freeway** connects Sydney with its industrial neighbor and the vineyards of the Hunter. The **Great Western Highway** and the **M4 Motorway** head west to the Blue Mountains, while the **M5 Motorway** and the **Hume Highway** (via Canberra) are the quickest (and least interesting) ways to get to Melbourne.

The state's automobile association, the **National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA)**, 151 Clarence St., Sydney, NSW 2000 (☎ 13 11 22 in Australia), offers free maps and touring guides to members of overseas motoring associations, including the AAA in the United States, the CAA in Canada, the AA and RAC in the United Kingdom, and the NZAA in New Zealand.

By Train **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia) trains travel to most places of interest in the state and as far south as Melbourne in Victoria and across the border into southern Queensland. Countrylink also has special rates for car rental through Thrifty.

By Plane **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) and **Eastern Australia Airlines** (book through Qantas) fly to most major cities and towns within the state.

1 The Blue Mountains ★★

Although the **Blue Mountains** are today where Sydneysiders go to escape the humidity and crowds of the city, in the early days of the colony, the mountains kept at bay those who would explore the interior. In 1813, three explorers—Gregory Blaxland, William Charles Wentworth, and William Lawson—managed to conquer the sheer cliffs, valleys, and dense forest, and cross the mountains (which are hardly mountains at all, but rather a series of hills covered in bush and ancient fern trees) to the plains beyond. There they found land urgently needed for grazing and farming. The Great Western Highway and Bells Line of Road are the access roads through the region today—winding and steep in places, they are surrounded by the Blue Mountains and Wollemi national parks.

The area is known for its spectacular scenery, particularly the cliff-top views into the valleys of gum trees and across to craggy outcrops that tower up from the valley floor. It's colder up here than down on the plains, and the clouds can sweep in and fill the canyons with mist in minutes, while waterfalls cascade down sheer drops, spraying the dripping fern trees that cling to the gullies. You'll need at least a couple of days up here to get the best out of it—a single-day tour, with all the traveling involved, can only just scratch the surface.

The Blue Mountains are also one of Australia's best-known adventure playgrounds. Rock climbing, caving, abseiling (rappelling), bushwalking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and canoeing are practiced here year-round.

BLUE MOUNTAIN ESSENTIALS

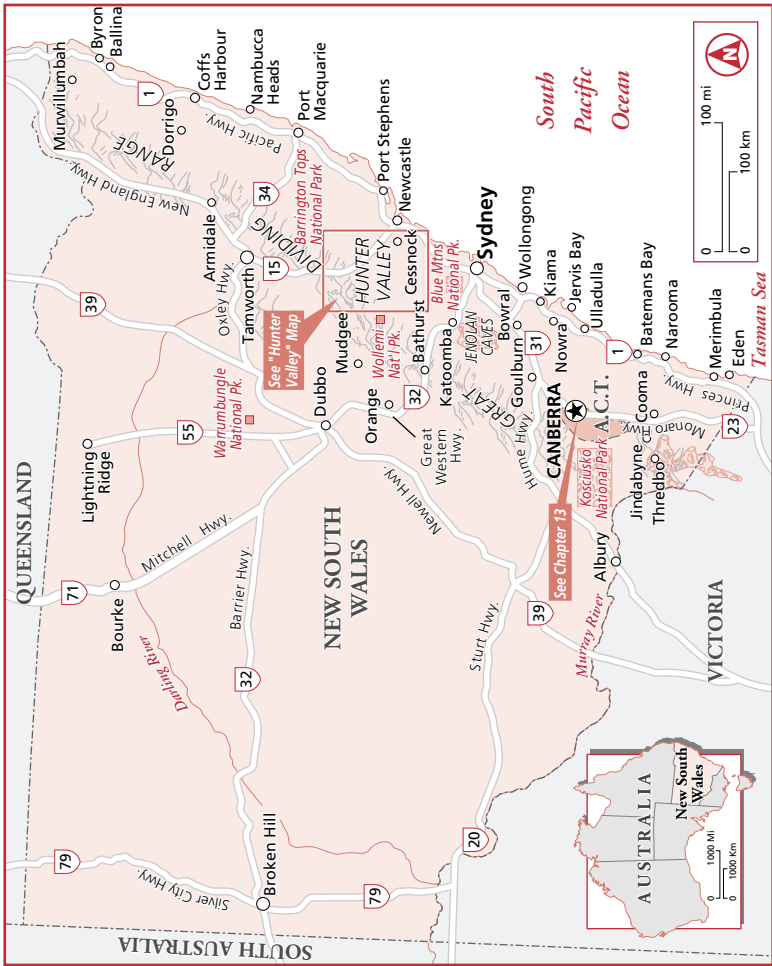
VISITOR INFORMATION You can pick up maps, walking guides, and other information and book accommodations at **Blue Mountains Tourism**, with locations at Echo Point Road, Katoomba, NSW 2780 (☎ 1300/653 408 in Australia, or 02/4739 6266), and on the Great Western Highway at Glenbrook, a small settlement 61km (38 miles) from Sydney (same telephone number). The Katoomba information center is an attraction itself, with glass windows overlooking a gum forest and cockatoos and lorikeets feeding on seed dispensers. Pick up a copy of the *Blue Mountains Pocket Guide*, a free guide to dining, accommodations, bushwalking, and entertainment. Both offices are open from 9am to 5pm daily (the office at Glenbrook closes at 4:30pm Sat–Sun).

The **National Park Shop**, Heritage Centre, the end of Govetts Leap Rd., Blackheath (☎ 02/4787 8877; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au), is run by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and offers detailed information about the

Fun Fact **Color Me Blue**

The Blue Mountains derive their name from the ever-present blue haze that is caused by light striking the droplets of eucalyptus oil that evaporate from the leaves of the dense surrounding forest.

New South Wales



Blue Mountains National Park. The staff can also arrange personalized guided tours of the mountains. It's open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (closed Christmas).

Check the website, www.bluemts.com.au, for more information on the area.

GUIDED TOURS FROM SYDNEY Many private bus operators offer day trips from Sydney, but it's important to shop around because some offer a guided coach tour where you just stretch your legs occasionally, while others let you get the cobwebs out of your lungs with a couple of longish bushwalks. One highly recommended operator is **Oz Trek Adventure Tours** (☎ 02/9360 3444; www.oztrek.com.au). Their trips include a tour of the Olympic site, a visit to Glenbrook National Park (where you'll see kangaroos and wallabies in the wild), tours of all the major Blue Mountain sites, and a 1½-hour bushwalk. It costs A\$54 (US\$35) for adults and A\$43 (US\$28) for kids. You can also add on overnight packages, horse riding, and abseiling.

Oz Experience (☎ 1300/300 028 in Australia, or 02/9213 1766; www.ozexperience.com) offers tours ranging from a day (includes lunch) to 4 days

Tips Timing Is Everything: When to Visit

If you can, try to visit the Blue Mountains on **weekdays**, when most Sydneysiders are at work and the prices are lower. Note that the colder winter months (June–August) are the busiest season. This period is known as **Yuletide**—the locals’ version of the Christmas period, when most places offer traditional Christmas dinners and roaring log fires.

aimed at younger people. A day trip including a visit to Featherdale Wildlife Park costs A\$70 (US\$45); and a 4-day trip including abseiling and canyoning costs A\$395 (US\$257).

Visitours (☎ 02/9909 0822; www.visitours.com.au) runs a fabulous minibus trip to the mountains, stopping off at Featherdale Wildlife Park and the Olympic site. You get to see all the usual 1-day sights, learn to throw a boomerang and play the didgeridoo, and take a ferry ride down the Parramatta River back to Circular Quay in Sydney.

Cox’s River Escapes, P.O. Box 81, Leura, NSW 2780 (☎ 02/4784 1621; www.bluemts.com.au/CoxsRiver/), offers recommended tours for those wanting to get off the beaten track. Half-day trips with morning or afternoon tea cost A\$110 (US\$72); full-day trips with morning tea, lunch, and afternoon refreshments and entry into Jenolan Caves cost A\$220 (US\$143).

AAT Kings, Shop 1, corner of Alfred St. and Ferry Wharf no. 1, Circular Quay (☎ 02/9518 6095; www.aatkings.com), operates three typical big bus tours of the mountains, taking in most of the usual sights, with a couple of short walks included. One tour includes a visit to Jenolan Caves. Tours range in cost from A\$85 to A\$113 (US\$55–US\$73) for adults, and A\$43 to A\$86 (US\$28–US\$60) for children. Another large operator, **Australian Pacific Tours** (☎ 1300/655 965; fax 02/9660 5016), offers a similar trip with a visit to the Australian Wildlife Park and a quick visit to the Sydney Olympic site at Homebush Bay. This tour costs A\$94 (US\$61) for adults and A\$47 (US\$31) for children. If you hate big-group travel, then choose another option.

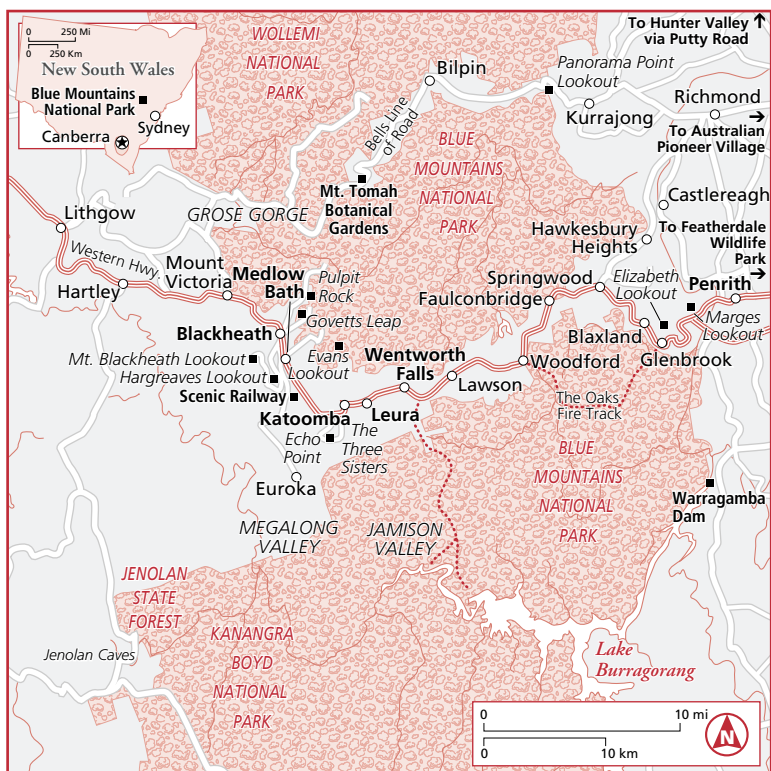
BUSHWALKING & OTHER ACTIVE ENDEAVORS

Whereas almost every other activity costs money, bushwalking (hiking) is the exception to the rule that nothing in life is free. There are some 50 walking trails in the Blue Mountains, ranging from routes you can cover in 15 minutes to the 3-day **Six Foot Track** (★) that starts just outside Katoomba and finishes at Jenolan Caves. If you are planning on some bushwalking, I highly recommend picking up *Sydney and Beyond—Eighty-Six Walks in NSW* by Andrew Mevissen (Macstyle Publishing). It features eight walks in the Blue Mountains, from easy 1-hour treks to 6-hour tramps. Buy it at bookshops and tourist information centers. Otherwise, the staff at the tourist offices and National Park office will be happy to point you in the right direction, whether it be for an hour’s stroll or a full-day’s hike.

Great Australian Walks, 81 Elliot St., Balmain, NSW 2041 (☎ 1300/360 499 in Australia, or 02/9555 7580; www.greatwalks.com.au), is a superb operator offering walks in the Blue Mountains. I had great fun on their 3-day “Six Foot Track Walk” from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves. Though not a wilderness trek, it goes through pockets of rainforest and gum forests and traverses farming country.

One of the best adventure operators in the area, **High ’n’ Wild**, Unit 3, No. 5 Katoomba St., Katoomba, NSW 2780 (☎ 02/4782 6224; www.high-n-wild.com.au), offers a series of canyon expeditions, taking in scenic rainforest

The Blue Mountains



gullies and caverns made up of dramatic rock formations and fern-lined walls. Generally there's a bit of swimming and plenty of walking, wading, and squeezing through tight spaces involved—and sometimes abseiling—but fortunately being double-jointed is not a prerequisite.

If you really want to test your head for heights, then try High 'n' Wild's 150m (492-ft.) "Mega Jump"—the highest continuous abseil in the Southern Hemisphere. This heart-pumping descent down a sheer cliff is suitable for the fearless beginner, but they assure me you soon settle in by learning the ropes on the 10-story-high junior slopes beforehand.

If that's too much to handle, then you could always try a day's rafting on an inflatable airbed between huge towering rock walls on the Wollangambe River. There are a few minor rapids to navigate, and the bushwalk down to the river and back up again can be a little testing, but it's certainly suitable for a family outing. Abseiling costs from A\$69 (US\$45) and canyoning from \$85 (US\$55). Airbed adventures cost \$169 (US\$110).

Other excellent adventure operators are **The Blue Mountains Adventure Company**, P.O. Box 242, Katoomba, NSW 2780 (☎ 02/4782 1271; bmac@bmac.com.au), located in Katoomba at 84a Bathurst Rd. (above the Summit Gear Shop); and the **Australian School of Mountaineering**, 166b Katoomba St., Katoomba, NSW 2780 (☎ 02/4782 2014). Both offer rock climbing, abseiling, and canyoning trips. The Company also offers caving and mountain biking, and the Australian School of Mountaineering offers bushcraft and survival training. Expect to pay

around A\$100 (US\$65) for a full-day's introductory rock-climbing course including abseiling, and between A\$99 to A\$125 (US\$64–US\$81) for a day's canyoning.

If you feel like some adventure on your own, you could always hire a mountain bike from **Cycletech**, 182 Katoomba St., Katoomba (☎ 02/4782 2800). Standard mountain bikes cost A\$19 (US\$12) for half a day and A\$28 (US\$18) for a full day (superior front-suspension mountain bikes cost A\$28/US\$18 for a half day and A\$50/US\$33 for a full day).

KATOOMBA: GATEWAY TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

114km (71 miles) W of Sydney

Katoomba (pop. 11,200) is the largest town in the Blue Mountains and the focal point of the Blue Mountains National Park. It's an easy 1½- to 2-hour trip by train, bus, or car. The town is a low-socio-economic pocket in a very affluent region, with one of the highest unemployment rates in the state.

GETTING THERE By car from central Sydney, travel along Parramatta Road and turn off onto the M4 motorway (around 2 hr. to Katoomba). Another route is via the Harbour Bridge to North Sydney, along the Warringah Freeway (following the signs to the M2). Then, travel along the M2 to its end and follow the signs to the M4, and the Blue Mountains. This takes around 1½ hours.

Frequent rail services connect Sydney to Katoomba from Central Station; contact **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00) or **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32) for details. The train trip takes 2 hours, leaving from platform nos. 12 and 13 of Central Station. Trains leave almost hourly, stopping at Katoomba, and then at Mt. Victoria and Lithgow. An adult day-return round-trip ticket costs A\$12 (US\$7.80) off-peak and A\$20 (US\$13) during commuter hours. A child's day-return round-trip ticket costs A\$3 (US\$1.95).

GETTING AROUND If you take the train to Katoomba from Sydney, walk up the stairs from the station onto Katoomba Street; at the top of the street you'll see the Savoy, formerly a theater, now a restaurant.

The best way to get around the Blue Mountains without your own transport is with the **Blue Mountains Explorer Bus** (☎ 02/4782 4807; www.explorerbus.com.au). This double-decker bus leaves from outside Katoomba train station every hour from 9:30am until 4:30pm and stops at 27 attractions, resorts, galleries, and tearooms in and around Katoomba and Leura. You can get on and off as often as you want. Tickets cost A\$25 (US\$16) for adults, A\$12.50 (US\$8) for children, and A\$62.50 (US\$41) for a family. You can also link this tour bus with the CityRail train from Sydney. The Blue Mountains Explorer Link Ticket, available from CityRail stations, costs A\$38.60 (US\$25) for adults, A\$15.40 (US\$10) for children, and A\$62 (US\$40) for a family, and includes return train fare and Explorer Bus tickets.

Another option is **Trolley Tours** (☎ 1800/801 577 in Australia; www.trolleytours.com.au), which is a kind of tram-car on wheels with commentary. An all-day pass costs A\$12 (US\$7.80), and for this you get to see various attractions around Katoomba and Leura, too. The trolley leaves Katoomba Station each hour, connecting with the trains from Sydney.

Fantastic Aussie Tours (☎ 1300/300 915 in Australia, or 02/4782 1866; www.fantastic-aussie-tours.com.au) runs several tours of the area, including a Blue Mountains Highlight Tour which takes you to many of the best sites. Tours leave at 10:30am (finishing at 1:15pm), 11:30am (to 3:15pm), and 2pm (to 5:15pm). Tours cost A\$37.50 (US\$24) for adults, A\$18.75 (US\$12) for children, and A\$88 (US\$57) for a family.

Seeing the Blue Mountains from the Back of a Harley

A thrilling way to see the Blue Mountains is on the back of a chauffeur-driven Harley-Davidson. **Blue Thunder Bike Tours** (☎ 02/4571 1154) leaves from Manly Wharf in Sydney (but they'll pick you up anywhere in the city). Rides cost A\$80 (US\$52) for the first hour, A\$130 (US\$85) for 2 hours, A\$255 (US\$166) for half a day, and A\$360 (US\$234) for a full day with lunch. The same company runs **Hot Heritage Tours**, operating out of the Blue Mountains (pickup anywhere in the Mountains), for the same prices.

EXPLORING THE AREA

The most visited and photographed attractions in the Blue Mountains are the rock formations known as the **Three Sisters** ★★. For the best vantage point, head to **Echo Point Road**, across from the Blue Mountains Tourism office. Or try Evans Lookout, Govetts Leap, and Hargreaves Lookout, all at Blackheath (see “Blackheath” below)—none of which are serviced by the Blue Mountains Explorer Bus or Trolley Tours.

One thing you have to do in the Blue Mountains is ride the **Scenic Railway**, the world's steepest. It consists of a carriage on rails that is lowered 415m (1,361 ft.) down into the Jamison Valley at a maximum incline of 52 degrees. Originally it was used to transport coal and shale in the 1880s from the mines below. The trip only takes a few minutes; at the bottom there are some excellent walks through forests of ancient tree ferns. Another popular attraction is the **Skyway**, a cable car that travels 300m (984 ft.) above the Jamison Valley. The trip takes 6 minutes round-trip. The Scenic Railway and the Skyway (☎ 02/4782 2699) each cost A\$8 (US\$5.20) round-trip for adults and A\$3 (US\$1.95) for children, and operate from 9am to 5pm daily (last trip at 4:50pm). They leave from the ticket office at 1 Violet St., Katoomba. (Follow the signs.)

Canyons, waterfalls, underground rivers—the Blue Mountains have them all, and before you experience them in person you can catch them on the giant screen in *The Edge* at the **MAXVISION Cinema**, 225–237 Great Western Hwy., Katoomba (☎ 02/4782 8900). The special effects shown on the screen, 18m (59 ft.) high × 24m (79 ft.) wide, make you feel like you're part of the action. The 38-minute *The Edge* film is shown every 40 to 50 minutes from 10am to 5:45pm. Tickets are A\$13 (US\$8.45) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for students, and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children. The cinema is a 5- to 10-minute walk from the train station. Recent release movies are shown on part of the giant screen in the evenings. There is a restaurant and a snack bar on the premises.

To get back to Sydney I highly recommend taking the Bell's Line of Road through Bilpin. It's up to 3-hour's driving via this route, but you can stop off at the wonderful **Mt. Tomah Botanic Gardens** ★. (You can't miss the large sign on your right about 10 min. before you get to Bilpin.) An adjunct of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, Mt. Tomah is dedicated to cold climate plants. It's compact and has a very good cafe serving lunch daily. Allow around 2 hours.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

There are plenty of places to stay throughout the Blue Mountains, including historic guesthouses, B&Bs, resorts, motels, and homestays.

Echo Point Holiday Villas ★ These are the closest self-contained accommodations to the Three Sisters Lookout. The two front-facing villas are the best because of their beautiful mountain views. Some villas have one double and two single beds, plus a foldout double bed in the lounge room. Bathrooms contain a shower, with no tub. There are barbecue facilities in the backyard. The two cottages here are also fully self-contained, sleeping up to eight, and have a tub, central heating, and access to nice gardens.

36 Echo Point Rd., Katoomba, NSW 2780. ☎ 02/4782 3275. Fax 02/4782 7030. www.echopointvillas.com.au. 5 villas, 2 cottages (all with shower only). Fri–Sat and public holidays A\$140 (US\$91) villa; Sun–Thurs A\$105 (US\$68) villa; A\$150 (US\$98) cottage for 2. Minimum 2-night stay required. Extra person A\$12 (US\$7.80). AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

Katoomba Mountain Lodge This two-star property is quite cozy, with rooms looking out across the mountains. Dorm rooms are clean and come with three to six beds. Doubles are basic and lack a TV, but are adequate for a couple of nights. All share bathrooms. On the premises you'll find a TV lounge with a log fire, a BYO dining room, and a game room. The staff can arrange tour packages. Breakfast costs an additional A\$9 to A\$10 (US\$5.85–US\$6.50) per person, and dinner and breakfast costs an extra A\$30 to A\$32 (US\$20–US\$21) per person.

31 Lurline St., Katoomba, NSW 2780. ☎/fax 02/4782 3933. 23 units, none with bathroom. Sun–Thurs A\$58 (US\$38) double; Fri–Sat A\$78 (US\$50) double. A\$11–A\$15 (US\$7.15–US\$9.75) dorm bed. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. *Amenities:* Tour desk; coin-op laundry.

Katoomba YHA Hostel This brand new YHA is set in a former cabaret club, and it still retains its fun atmosphere. It's very roomy, modern, friendly, and clean, and also well located in the heart of Katoomba. There's a log fire in the living room, a communal kitchen, dining room, game room, reading room, and a television. There's a nice balcony and barbecue area. The more expensive double rooms, and the family rooms, come with an attached bathroom. The dorm rooms accommodate 4 to 8 people.

207 Katoomba St., Katoomba, NSW 2780. ☎ 02/4782 1416. Fax 02/4782 6203. www.yha.com.au. 57 rooms (27 double/twin rooms). A\$62–A\$70 (US\$40–US\$45.50) double/twin; A\$100 (US\$65) family room. A\$19–A\$23 (US\$12.40–US\$15) dorm bed. MC, V. *Amenities:* Tour desk; coin-op laundry; bicycle hire.

Worth a Splurge

The Carrington Hotel ★★ *Finds* Construction started on this grand Victorian hotel in 1880, and it reopened in 2000 after a major renovation. A ramshackle building, The Carrington is a must-stay if you're into buildings of the British-Raj style. Downstairs is a restaurant/breakfast room (once a ballroom), a couple of lounges scattered with antiques, and a gorgeous wood-paneled billiard room. Chandeliers and 1930s-style lamps reflecting off silver trophies won by the local Rifle Club give everything a warm glow. Unfortunately, heavy plexiglass doors greet you as you enter each of the many corridors—a necessary fire precaution. All the rooms are delightful, with royal gold and blue carpets and drapes which would probably be considered gaudy if they didn't seem to fit in with the overall style. Traditional rooms share bathrooms; Colonial rooms come with a deep tub in the bathroom (with a noisy fan) and no view to speak of; Deluxe Colonial rooms have a balcony and mountain views; Premier rooms have spa baths and great views; and the suites are fit for a duke and duchess. Dinner here costs A\$100 (US\$65) per person, and the full breakfast is one of the best I've encountered.

15–47 Katoomba St., Katoomba (P.O. Box 28, NSW 2780). ☎ 02/4782 1111. Fax 02/4782 1421. www.the-carrington.com.au. 63 units. Traditional rooms Mon–Thurs A\$100 (US\$65), Fri–Sat A\$155 (US\$101); Colonial rooms Mon–Thurs A\$150 (US\$98), Fri–Sat A\$225 (US\$166); Deluxe Colonial rooms Mon–Thurs A\$185

(US\$120), Fri–Sat A\$300 (US\$195); Premier rooms Mon–Thurs A\$225 (US\$146), Fri–Sat A\$350 (US\$228); suites Mon–Thurs A\$265–A\$450 (US\$172–US\$293), Fri–Sat A\$410–A\$630 (US\$267–US\$409). Ask about weekend packages. Breakfast included. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; snooker room. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Katoomba Street has many places to eat and stop for a coffee. Among the cheaper and more atmospheric alternatives are **The Flapping Curtain Café**, 10 Katoomba St. (☎ 02/4782 1622); **Café Zuppa**, 36 Katoomba St. (☎ 02/4782 9247); **Blues Café**, 57 Katoomba St. (☎ 02/4782 2347); and the **Elephant Bean**, 159 Katoomba St. (☎ 02/4782 4620). All serve regular cafe fare such as focaccia, burgers, and typical breakfasts, as well as some more exotic dishes. All four are highly recommended by the locals. The not-so-great fish and chip shop on Katoomba Street is fine if you're starving.

Chork Dee Thai Restaurant TRADITIONAL THAI Loved by the locals, Chork Dee offers good Thai food in a pleasant but modest eatery. Served up is the usual Thai fare, including satay, spring rolls, and fish cakes to start, and lots of curries, noodles, and sweet-and-sour dishes for mains. While vegetarians won't find anything without meat or fish to start with, there are plenty of veggie and tofu dishes available as a main course. **BYO.**

216 Katoomba St., Katoomba. ☎ 02/4782 1913. Main courses A\$7.70–A\$17 (US\$5–US\$11). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–9pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10pm.

Lindsay's ★★ INTERNATIONAL Swiss chef Beat Ettlin has been making waves in Katoomba ever since he left some of the best European restaurants behind to try his hand at dishes such as pan-fried crocodile nibbles on pumpkin scones with a ginger dipping sauce. The food in this upscale, New York–style speakeasy is as glorious as its decor—Tiffany lamps, sketches by Australian artist Norman Lindsay, and booths lining the walls. The three-level restaurant is warmed by a cozy fire surrounded by an antique lounge stage that resounds every night to piano and classical music, or a jazz band. The menu changes every few weeks, but a recent popular dish was grilled veal medallions topped with Balmain bugs (small, saltwater crayfish), with potato and béarnaise sauce.

122 Katoomba St., Katoomba. ☎ 02/4782 2753. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$14–A\$24 (US\$9.10–\$16). AE, MC, V. Dinner Wed–Sun 6pm–midnight.

Paragon Café *Value* CAFE The Paragon has been a Blue Mountains' institution since it opened for business in 1916. Inside, it's decked out with dark wood paneling, bas-relief figures guarding the booths, and chandeliers. The home-made soups are delicious. The cafe also serves pies, pastas, grills, seafood, waffles, cakes, and a Devonshire tea of scones and cream.

65 Katoomba St., Katoomba. ☎ 02/4782 2928. Menu items A\$3–A\$10 (US\$1.95–US\$6.50). AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri 10am–3:30pm; Sat–Sun 10am–4pm.

TrisElies TRADITIONAL GREEK Perhaps it's the belly dancers and the plate smashing, or the smell of moussaka, but as soon as you walk through the door of this lively eatery you feel like you've been transported to an authentic Athenian *taberna*. The restaurant folds out onto three tiers of tables, all with a good view of the stage where every night Greek or international performances take place. The food is solid Greek fare—souvlaki, traditional dips, fried haloumi cheese, Greek salads, casseroles like mother could have made, whitebait (tiny fried fish), and sausages in red wine—with a few Italian and Spanish extras. If it's winter, come in to warm up beside one of two log fires.

287 Bathurst Rd., Katoomba. ☎ 02/4782 4026. Fax 02/4782 1128. www.triselies.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$17–A\$26 (US\$11–US\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5pm–midnight; Fri–Sat 5pm–3am.

LEURA

107km (66 miles) W of Sydney; 3km (2 miles) W of Katoomba

The fashionable capital of the Blue Mountains, Leura is known for its gardens, its pretty old buildings (many of them holiday homes for Sydneysiders), and its cafes and restaurants. The National Trust has classified Leura's main street as an urban conservation area. Just outside Leura is the **Sublime Point Lookout**, which has spectacular views of the Three Sisters in Katoomba. From the southern end of **Leura Mall**, a cliff drive takes you all the way back to Echo Point in Katoomba; along the way you'll get some spectacular views across the Jamison Valley.

WENTWORTH FALLS ★★

103km (64 miles) from Sydney; 7km (4½ miles) from Katoomba

This pretty little town has numerous crafts and antiques shops, but the area is principally known for its 281m (922-ft.) waterfall, situated in **Falls Reserve**. On the far side of the falls is the **National Pass Walk**—one of the best in the Blue Mountains. It's cut into a cliff face with overhanging rock faces on one side and sheer drops on the other. The views over the Jamison Valley are spectacular. The track takes you down to the base of the falls to the **Valley of the Waters**. Climbing up out of the valley is quite a bit more difficult, but just as rewarding.

A NICE SPOT FOR LUNCH

Conservation Hut Café CAFE This pleasant cafe is in the national park itself on top of a cliff overlooking the Jamison Valley. It's a good place for a bit of lunch on the balcony if you're famished after the Valley of the Waters walk, which leaves from outside. It serves the usual cafe fare—burgers, salads, sandwiches, and pastas. There are vegetarian options, too. There's a nice log fire inside in winter.

At the end of Fletcher St., Wentworth Falls. ☎ 02/4757 3827. Menu items A\$6–A\$15 (US\$3.90–US\$9.75). AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm.

MEDLOW BATH

150km (93 miles) W of Sydney; 6km (3¾ miles) E of Katoomba

In between Katoomba and Blackheath, Medlow Bath is a cozy place, with its own railway station, a secondhand bookstore, and a few properties hidden between the trees. Its one claim to fame is the **Hydro Majestic Hotel** (☎ 02/4788 1002), a must-do stop for any visitor to the Blue Mountains. The historic Hydro Majestic has fabulous views over the Megalong Valley; the best time to appreciate the views is at sunset with a drink on the terrace. Otherwise, it sells Devonshire tea all day, and plenty of cakes, snacks, coffee, and tea.

BLACKHEATH

114km (71 miles) W of Sydney; 14km (8¾ miles) W of Katoomba

Blackheath is the highest town in the Blue Mountains at 1,049m (3,441 ft.). The **Three Brothers** at Blackheath are not as big or as famous as the Three Sisters in Katoomba, but you can climb two of them for fabulous views. Or you could try the **Cliff Walk** from **Evans Lookout** to **Govetts Leap** (named after a surveyor who mapped the region in the 1830s), where there are magnificent views over the **Grose Valley** and **Bridal Veil Falls**. The 1½-hour tramp passes

through banksia, gum, and wattle forests, with spectacular views of peaks and valleys. If you want a guide while you're in the area, contact **Blue Mountains Magic** (☎ 02/4787 6354; www.bluemts.com.au), based in Blackheath. The guide, Phil Foster, is a trained botanist.

Blackheath itself has some interesting tearooms and antiques shops.

GETTING THERE The Great Western Highway takes motorists west from Katoomba to Blackheath. CityRail trains also stop at Blackheath.

VISITOR INFORMATION **The Heritage Centre** (☎ 02/4787 8877; www.npws.nsw.gov.au), operated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, is located close to Govetts Leap Lookout on Govetts Leap Road. It has information on guided walks, camping, and hiking, as well as information on local European and Aboriginal historic sites. It's open daily from 9am to 4:30pm.

EXPLORING THE AREA ON HORSEBACK

One of the nicest ways to get around is on horseback. **Werriberri Trail Rides** (☎ 02/4787 9171; fax 02/4787 6680), found at the base of the Blue Mountains, 10km (6 miles) from Blackheath on Megalong Road in the Megalong Valley, offers guided ½-hour to 3-hour rides through the Megalong Valley. Suitable for beginners to advanced riders. Half-hour rides cost A\$17 (US\$11).

JENOLAN CAVES ⚡

182km (113 miles) W of Sydney; 70km (43 miles) W of Katoomba

The winding road from Katoomba eventually takes you to a spur of the Great Dividing Range and a series of underground limestone caves considered some of the world's best. Known to the local Aborigines as *Binoomea* (dark place), the caves are an impressive amalgamation of stalactites, stalagmites, and underground rivers and pools. They have been open to the public since 1866.

GETTING THERE It's a 1½-hour drive from Katoomba to the caves. CityRail trains run to Katoomba and link up with daily Jenolan Caves excursions run by **Fantastic Aussie Tours** (☎ 02/4782 1866 or 1300/300 915; www.fantastic-aussie-tours.com.au). The day tour departs Katoomba at 10:30am and returns at 5:15pm. It costs A\$80 to A\$99 (US\$52–US\$64) depending on which cave you visit. The more expensive tour also includes a short wilderness walk. The company also runs transfers to Jenolan from Katoomba departing at 10:30am and leaving Jenolan at 3:45pm daily. They cost A\$47 (US\$31) for adults and A\$23 (US\$15) for children each way.

Day trips from Sydney are operated by **AAT King's** (☎ 02/9252 2788) and **Australian Pacific Tours** (☎ 02/9252 2988; fax 02/9247 2052). Coach tours depart from the coach terminal at Circular Quay. Since you end up spending 6 hours on a coach on these day trips, I recommend staying overnight in either Jenolan Village or somewhere else in the Blue Mountains.

EXPLORING THE CAVES

Nine caves are open for exploration, with guided tours operated by **Jenolan Caves Reserves Trust** (☎ 02/6359 3311; www.jenolancaves.org.au). The first cave tour starts at 10am weekdays and 9:30am weekends and holidays. The final tour departs at 4:30pm (5pm in warmer months). Tours last 1 to 2 hours, and each costs between A\$15 and A\$22 (US\$9.75–US\$14) for adults, and between A\$10 and A\$15 (US\$6.50–US\$9.75) for children under 15. Family concessions and multiple cave packages are available. The best all-round cave is **Lucas Cave**; **Imperial Cave** is best for seniors. Outings with **Adventure Cave Tours**, which

include canyoning, last from 3 hours to all day and cost from A\$55 to A\$187.50 (US\$36–US\$122) per person.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The Gatehouse Jenolan The Gatehouse is a clean and cozy budget-style lodge, with a separate cottage nearby. It's opposite the caves. The Gatehouse sleeps 66 people in all, in seven six-bed rooms and six four-bed rooms in the main building. The cottage can accommodate up to four couples. There are also two common rooms, lockers, washing machines and dryers, and kitchen facilities. There are outdoor barbecues on the premises, and apparently at least one ghost.

Jenolan Caves Village, NSW 2790. ☎ 02/6359 3322. Fax 02/6359 3227. 13 units. Weekend A\$90 (US\$59) 4-person dorm room, A\$120 (US\$78) 6-person dorm room; weekday A\$60 (US\$40) 4-person dorm room, A\$80 (US\$52) 6-person dorm room. Linen rental of A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) per person. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry.

Jenolan Caves House ★ This Heritage-listed hotel was built between 1888 and 1906 and is one of the most outstanding structures in New South Wales. The main part of the enormous three-story building is made of sandstone and fashioned in Tudor-style black and white. Around it are several cottages and former servants quarters. Rooms vary within the main house from simple budget bunkrooms, to “traditional” rooms with shared bathrooms and “classic” rooms with private bathrooms. The traditional and classic rooms are old-world and cozy, with heavy furniture and views over red-tile rooftops or steep slopes. Mountain Lodge rooms are in a building behind the main house and are more motel-like.

Jenolan Caves Village, NSW 2790. ☎ 02/6359 3322. Fax 02/6359 3227. www.jenolancaves.com. 101 units, some with bathroom. Weekend A\$255 (US\$166) Classic, A\$225 (US\$146) Grand Classic, A\$125 (US\$81) Traditional, A\$145 (US\$94) Mountain Lodge; weekday A\$185 (US\$120) Classic, A\$165 (US\$107) Grand Classic, A\$95 (US\$62) Traditional, A\$105 (US\$68.25) Mountain Lodge. Additional person A\$60 (US\$39). Family rooms and suites also available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; tour desk; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

2 The Hunter Valley: Wine Tasting & More ★

Cessnock: 190km (118 miles) N of Sydney

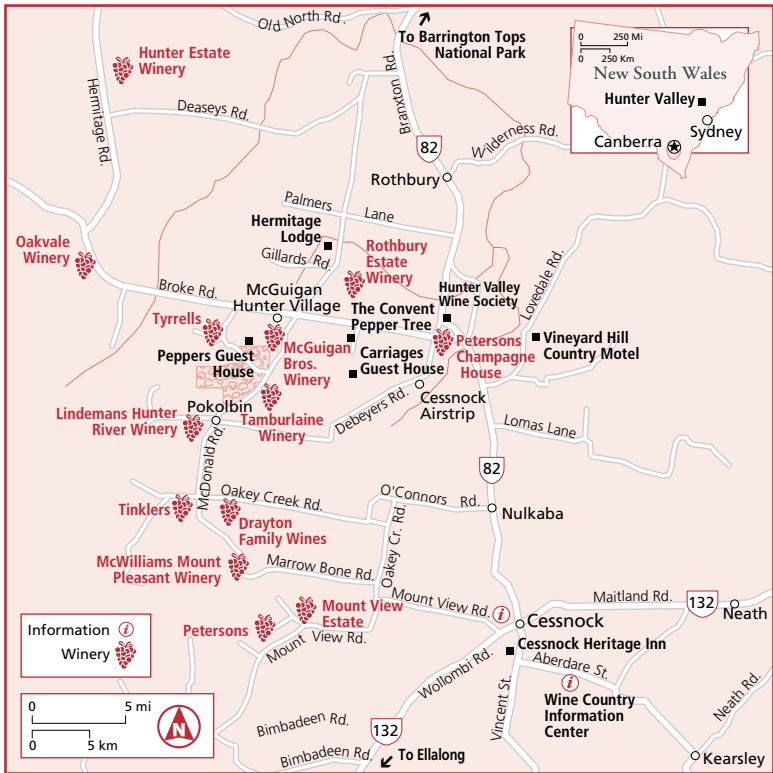
The Hunter Valley (or the Hunter as it's also called) is the oldest commercial wine-producing area in Australia, as well as a major site for coal mining. Internationally acclaimed wines have poured out of here since the early 1800s. Though the region falls behind the major wine-producing areas of Victoria in terms of volume, it has the convenient advantage of being just 2 hours from Sydney.

People come here to visit the vineyards' “cellar doors” for free wine tastings, to enjoy the scenery, to sample the area's highly regarded cuisine, or to escape from the city for a romantic weekend. The whole area is dedicated to the grape and the plate, and you'll find many superb restaurants amidst the vineyards and farmland.

In the **Lower Hunter**, centered around the towns of Cessnock and Pokolbin, you'll find around 110 wineries and cellar doors, including well-known producers such as Tyrell, Rothbury, Lindemans, Draytons, McGuigans, and McWilliams. Many varieties of wine are produced here, including semillon, shiraz, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, and pinot noir.

Farther north, the **Upper Hunter** offers the very essence of Australian rural life, with its sheep and cattle farms, historic homesteads, more wineries, and

The Hunter Valley



rugged bushland. The vineyards here tend to be larger than those in the south, and produce more aromatic varieties, such as traminers and Rieslings. February through March is when the harvest takes place.

The Upper Hunter gives way to the forested heights of the World Heritage-listed Barrington Tops National Park. The park is ruggedly beautiful and home to some of the highest Antarctic beech trees in the country. It abounds with animals, including several marsupial species and an abundance of birds.

HUNTER VALLEY ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE To get to the wine-producing regions of the Hunter, leave Sydney via the Harbour Bridge or Harbour Tunnel and follow the signs for Newcastle. Just before Hornsby, turn off the highway and head up the National 1/F3 freeway. After around an hour take the Cessnock exit and follow the signs

Tips A Wine-Buying Tip

The best years ever for red wines in this part of Australia were 1988 and 2000, when long, hot summers produced fewer, but more intensely flavored, grapes. Stock up on anything you can find from these vintages. At the other end of the scale, 1997 was a bad year, and 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2002 produced average vintages; 2003 is expected to be outstanding.

to the vineyards. The trip will take about 2½ hours. Barrington Tops National Park is reached via the Upper Hunter town of Dungog.

Keynes Buses (☎ 1800/043 339 in Australia, or 02/6543 1322) run coaches to Scone in the Hunter Valley from Sydney's Central Station. Buses depart Monday through Saturday at 3pm and arrive in Scone at 6:50pm; a second service on Friday leaves at 6pm, and on Sunday the bus leaves at 6:40pm. Round-trip tickets are A\$74 (US\$48) for adults and A\$38 (US\$25) for children.

A rental car should cost you from A\$45 (US\$29) a day from Sydney, and you might put in around A\$40 (US\$26) worth of petrol or so for a couple of days of touring (petrol in Australia hovers around A90¢ a liter, or US\$2.20 a gal.). In the Hunter, contact **Hertz**, 1A Aberdare Rd., Cessnock (☎ 13 30 39 in Australia, or 02/4991 2500).

ORGANIZED TRIPS FROM SYDNEY Several companies offer day trips to the Hunter Valley from Sydney.

Visitours (☎ 02/9909 0822; www.visitours.com.au) takes small groups to the Hunter to visit up to six wineries as well as cheese and fudge producers. The trip costs A\$89 (US\$58). The company also transfers passengers to the Hunter and back for A\$55 (US\$36) one-way.

Oz Trek Adventure Tours (☎ 02/9360 3444; www.oztrek.com.au) also offers a highly recommended trip, with a visit to the Australian Reptile and Wildlife Park. The Trip includes a barbecue lunch and wine tasting. It costs A\$85 (US\$55).

VISITOR INFORMATION **Wine Country Visitors Information Centre**, Main Road, Pokolbin, NSW 2325 (☎ 02/4990 4477; fax 02/4991 4518; www.winecountry.com.au), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm, and Sunday from 9:30am to 3:30pm. The staff can make accommodations bookings and answer any questions. The **Dungog Visitors Information Centre**, on Dowling Street, Dungog, NSW 2420 (☎ 02/4992 2212), has plenty of information on the Barrington Tops area. They're open weekdays 9am to 5pm; weekends 10am to 3pm. A good general website is www.winecountry.com.au.

VISITING THE WINERIES

Many people start their journey through the Hunter by popping into the **Hunter Valley Wine Society**, at the corner of Broke and Branxton roads in Pokolbin (☎ 1300/303 307 in Australia, or 02/4941 3000). The club basically acts as a Hunter Valley wine clearinghouse, sending bottles and cases to members all over Australia, and some overseas. It's also a good place to talk to the experts about the area's wines, and to taste a few of them. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

You might also like to visit the **Small Winemakers Centre**, McDonalds Road, Pokolbin (☎ 02/4998 7668). At any one time it represents around six of the region's smaller producers.

Tips Remember a Designated Driver!

Australia's drunk-driving laws are strict and rigidly enforced. If you are interested in tasting some grapes in the Hunter Valley, choose a designated driver or take a guided tour (see below). Both easily identifiable and unmarked police cars patrol the vineyard regions.

Tips A Wine-Tasting Tip

Some wineries routinely offer some of their inferior wines for tastings. I've made a habit of asking for a list of their premium wines available for tasting. Most wineries usually have a bottle or two of their better wines uncorked for those with a serious interest.

Most of the wineries in the region are open for cellar-door tastings, and it's perfectly acceptable just to turn up, taste a couple of wines or more, and then say your good-byes without buying anything. Though you will come across some unusual vintages, especially at the boutique wineries, don't expect to find any bargains—city bottle shops buy in bulk and at trade price, which means you can probably get the same bottle of wine for less in Sydney than at the cellar door in the Hunter.

Drayton Family Wines Drayton's produces some spectacular shiraz. Oakey Creek Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7513. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–5pm.

Hunter Estate Winery The Hunter's largest winery crushes some 6,500 tons of grapes a year. Come here for excellent semillon and shiraz. Hermitage Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7777. Daily 10am–5pm. Tours daily 11am and 2pm.

Lindemans This famous winery offers an interesting sparkling red shiraz. McDonald Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7684. Mon–Fri 9am–4:30pm; Sat–Sun 10am–4:30pm.

McGuigan Brothers Winery Another winery worth visiting in the area, McGuigan Brothers also has a cheese factory and bakery on the site. McDonald Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7402. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Tours daily at noon.

McWilliams Mount Pleasant Famous for both its Elizabeth Semillon, which has won 39 trophies and 214 gold medals since 1981, and its Lovedale Semillon, which has won 39 trophies and 74 gold medals since 1984. Marrowbone Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7505. Daily 10am–4:30pm. Tours daily 11am.

Mount View Estate The pioneer of Verdelho wines in Australia; the Verdelho is a grape attributed to Portugal, which is also grown in small quantities in Italy and France. It's a very crisp and dry white wine, which I like with seafood. Mount View Rd., Mount View. ☎ 02/4990 3307. Daily 10am–5pm.

Peterson's Champagne House This is the only specialist champagne winery in the Hunter. At the corner of Broke and Branxton rds., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7881. Daily 9am–5pm.

Peterson's Vineyard Peterson's produces fine chardonnay, semillon, and shiraz. Mount View Rd., Mount View. ☎ 02/4990 1704. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 10am–5pm.

Rothbury Estate ★ This very friendly winery produces the magnificent Brokenback Shiraz and the nice Mudgee Shiraz. The Rothbury Café serves meals. Broke Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7555. Daily 9:30am–4:30pm.

Tamburlaine Don't miss this boutique winery, the winner of many wine and tourism awards. McDonald Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7570. Daily 9:30am–5pm.

Tinklers If you want to taste the grapes in season, head to Tinklers. It sells some 30 different varieties of eating grapes between December and March, and nectarines, plums, peaches, and vegetables at other times of the year. It also offers wine tasting and free vineyard walks at 11am on Saturday and Sunday. Pokolbin Mountains Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7435. Daily 10am–4pm.

Tyrell's Tyrell's has produced some famous wines and exports all over the world. Broke Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4993 7000. Tours daily 1:30pm.

DAY TOURS, HOT-AIR BALLOON RIDES & OTHER FUN STUFF

If you don't have a car, you'll have to get around as part of a tour, as there is no public transport running between the wineries.

Trekabout Tours (☎ 02/4990 8277) offers half-day and full-day winery tours for a maximum of six people. Half-day tours cost A\$28 (US\$18), with visits to five or six wineries, and full-day tours cost A\$44 (US\$29), and take in up to nine wineries. The company can pick you up from your hotel in either Cessnock or Pokolbin.

Also offering local pickup is **Hunter Vineyard Tours** (☎ 02/4991 1659), which has a full-day tour on either 12- or 21-seat buses, taking in five wineries. They charge A\$38 (US\$25), or A\$55 (US\$36) with a two-course meal.

A tranquil way to see the wineries (but not sample the wines!) is from above. **Balloon Aloft**, in Cessnock (☎ 1800/028 568 in Australia, or 02/4938 1955; fax 02/6344 1852), offers year-round dawn balloon flights that include a post-flight champagne and optional breakfast costing A\$15 (US\$9.75). Flights last about an hour and cost A\$225 (US\$146) for adults on weekdays and A\$250 (US\$162) on weekends. Children ages 7 to 12 fly for A\$130 (US\$85) daily.

If you like adventure, try **Grapemobile Bicycle and Walking Tours** (☎ 0500/804 039 in Australia; phone and fax 02/4991 2339). This company supplies you with a mountain bike, helmet, guide, and support bus, and takes you on a peaceful meander through the wineries. Tours cost A\$98 (US\$64), including a restaurant lunch. It also hires out bicycles—A\$22 (US\$14) for a half day and A\$30 (US\$20) for a full day.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The Hunter Valley is generally expensive, especially if you want to be anywhere near the vineyards—and let's face it, there's little point in coming if you don't drink. Hotels are even more expensive on weekends and during public holidays, when room prices jump significantly and some properties insist on a 2-night stay. It's worthwhile checking out the information board located inside the Wine Country Visitors Information Centre (see "Visitor Information" above) for special deals, including self-contained accommodations, cottages, resorts, and guesthouses. Most tourists come here on a day trip, while Sydneysiders spend a couple of days here to get away from the Big Smoke.

IN CESSNOCK

Staying in Cessnock is a good idea if you don't have a car and are relying on local tour companies to pick you up and show you around the area.

Cessnock Heritage Inn This 1920s building, built as a pub, is right in the center of Cessnock, so there's easy access to all the local pubs and restaurants. All the rooms are done in country style, with dried grasses, floral bedspreads, and the like. All are quite large with high ceilings but differ greatly—the smallest room has a double bed, others have queen beds and singles, and there are two family rooms (sleeping five). All have ceiling fans and free video movies. There's also a guest lounge where you can chat with the owners.

Vincent St., Cessnock (P.O. Box 714), NSW 2325. ☎ 02/4991 2744. Fax 02/4991 2720. www.hunterweb.com.au/heritageinn.html. 13 units. Weekend A\$110–A\$120 (US\$72–US\$78) per person with full breakfast, 2-night weekend package A\$180–A\$200 (US\$117–US\$130). Midweek A\$90–A\$100 (US\$59–US\$65) double with full breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Tour desk; lounge room; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker.

Bunking Down in a Caravan, Man

Two caravan parks offer reasonably comfortable accommodations in caravans and cabins. **Cessnock Cabins and Caravan Park** (☎ 02/4990 5819; fax 02/4991 2944), Allandale/Branxton Road, Nulkaba (2km/1¼ miles north of Cessnock), has four on-site vans for A\$30 to A\$40 (US\$20–US\$26); a double and 12 cabins with shower from A\$48 to A\$69 (US\$3–US\$45)—the more expensive prices for weekends. There are also camping sites here for A\$14 (US\$9) and powered sites for A\$16 (US\$10).

The **Big 4 Valley Vineyard Tourist Park** (☎/fax 02/4990 2573) on Mount View Road (on the way out to the vineyards) has five caravans for A\$35 (US\$23) and 12 cabins with showers for A\$55 (US\$36). Two two-bedroom units cost A\$75 (US\$49). Powered sites cost A\$16 to A\$20 (US\$10–US\$13), and a camping site A\$12 (US\$7.80). There's a BYO restaurant, a camper's kitchen, and a pool on the site.

IN POKOLBIN

Vineyard Hill Country Motel ★ Motel is a bit of a misnomer for this place; it's more aptly described as a "fully self-contained chalet." Units are modern, with a separate bedroom, lounge and dining area, a full kitchen, and a balcony with views across a valley of vineyards to the Brokenback Ranges in the distance. It's all terrifically rural, with cows wandering about and kangaroos and possums creeping around at dusk. There's no restaurant, but there is a gourmet deli on the premises. In the garden are a large swimming pool and a spa.

Lovedale Rd., Pokolbin, NSW 2321. ☎ 02/4990 4166. Fax 02/4991 4431. www.vineyardhill.com.au. 8 units. Weekend A\$155 (US\$100) 1-bedroom unit, A\$218 (US\$142) 2-bedroom unit (for 4 people); midweek A\$107 (US\$70) 1-bedroom unit, A\$165 (US\$107) 2-bedroom unit. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). Ask about midweek and long-weekend packages. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; spa; room service; massage; babysitting; free laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Worth a Splurge

Carriages Guest House ★★ Tucked away on 15 hectares (37 acres), a kilometer off the main road, Carriages is a secluded retreat in the heart of Pokolbin. A two-suite cottage called the Gatehouse is on a separate part of the grounds. In the main two-story house, a veranda circles downstairs rooms, which are furnished with antique country pine. Upstairs, the two lofty gable suites are centered around huge fireplaces. The Gatehouse suites offer five-star luxury; although relatively new, the stained-glass windows and rescued timber give them a rustic feel (these two spa rooms share a lounge with a full kitchen and an open fire). There are open fires in six of the rooms. (The two standard doubles don't have them.) Breakfast is served in your room, and **Robert's** restaurant is next door. The friendly owner, Ben Dawson, assures me he'll take Frommer's readers up to the top of a nearby hill where they can see plenty of wild kangaroos.

Halls Rd., Pokolbin, NSW 2321. ☎ 02/4998 7591. Fax 02/4998 7839. www.thecarriages.com.au. 10 units. A\$185 (US\$120) double; A\$240–A\$265 (US\$156–US\$172) suite; A\$285 (US\$185) spa suite. Rates include breakfast. Minimum 2-night stay on weekends. Ask about 10%–20% discounts midweek. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; tennis court; spa; massage; babysitting, laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

IN THE UPPER HUNTER

Barrington Guest House ★★ *Value* Barrington Guest House is nestled in a valley just outside the Barrington Tops National Park. It retains an old-world charm and serves bacon and eggs for breakfast, scones and cream, and vegetables boiled soft enough for your dentures. The place has lace tablecloths in the dining room, a log fire beneath a higgledy-piggledy brick chimney, mahogany walls, high ceilings, and personalized service—despite the communal mealtimes and the lack of a menu. Rooms range from the original guesthouse chambers adjoining the dining room, to new and almost luxurious two-story self-contained cottages (sleeping up to five) that cling to a hillside. I highly recommend the latter—the former are basic, with no TV, and can be noisy if a party's in full swing in the dining room. This place is very popular with older travelers during the week but attracts a range of ages on the weekends. The guesthouse grounds attract plenty of animals and act as a wildlife reserve for several rescued kangaroos. Activities include horseback riding, guided walks through the rainforest, “billy tea” tours, and night spotting for quolls (native cats) and possums, bush dancing, tennis, film evenings, and skeet shooting. It can be a very social scene, too.

Salisbury (via Dungog), NSW 2420. ☎ 02/4995 3212. Fax 02/4995 3248. www.barringtonguesthouse.com.au. 20 rainforest cottages, 21 guesthouse units (13 with bathroom). All rates per person: Midweek A\$69 (US\$45) in a guesthouse room without bathroom, including meals and activities; A\$120 (US\$78) in a guesthouse room with bathroom, including meals and activities; A\$145 (US\$94) self-catering cottage, including activities. Weekend 2 nights room without bathroom A\$138 (US\$90) inclusive; A\$210 (US\$137) room with bathroom; A\$290 (US\$189) cottage. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. The guesthouse is about 3½ hr. from Sydney and 1½ hr. from the main Hunter wine region. Free pickup from Dungog railway station. **Amenities:** Restaurant, bar; 2 lit tennis courts; tour desk; massage; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* (Cottages only) TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Something Special: A Cattle Station in the Upper Hunter

Located just off the Golden Highway, 1 hour north of Mudgee, 2½ hours west of Cessnock, and 4 hours northwest of Sydney, **Runnymede**, Golden Highway, Runnymede, Cassilis, NSW 2329 (☎ 02/6376 1183; fax 02/6376 1187), is an 800-hectare (2,000-acre) sheep-and-cattle station where you can get a taste of Aussie ranch life. The ranch offers farm-style lodgings in a 1930s Californian bungalow. Two rooms have an en suite shower, while the third shares the hosts' bathroom down the hall. The homestead has an open fire in the living room (and a rarely used TV). There are plenty of native birds in the gardens, and kangaroos are common. May is the best time to see sheep shearing, and August is the best time to witness lambing and calving. Guests rave about hosts Libby and David Morrow. David offers 1-hour tours of the property for around A\$30 (US\$20) per “Toyota-load,” and other tours throughout the district.

Doubles go for A\$80 to A\$90 (US\$52–US\$59). Rates include breakfast, but dinner is A\$20 (US\$13) per person extra (BYO wine or beer). No credit cards.

WHERE TO DINE IN CESSNOCK

Amicos MEXICAN/ITALIAN PIZZERIA You can't mistake the Mexican influence in the decor, with bunches of chile peppers, cow skulls, ponchos, masks, and frescoes, but the Mediterranean/Italian connection is more evident in the menu. Mexican dishes include the usual nachos, enchiladas, burritos, barbecued chicken, and the like, while there are a few pastas and Mediterranean dishes, such as crumbed lamb brains. The pizzas are pretty good, and one could just about serve four people. They will deliver, too.

138 Wollombi Rd., Cessnock. ☎ 02/4991 1995. Fax 02/4990 9302. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$12–A\$20 (US\$7.80–\$13); pizzas A\$14–A\$18 (US\$9.10–\$12). MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

IN POKOLBIN

Blaxland's Restaurant ★ MODERN INTERNATIONAL This very atmospheric restaurant revolves around a winery theme, with pictures of vineyards on the walls, one of the most comprehensive Hunter wine lists in the area, and even the owner's homemade vintages on the menu. Parts of the building date from 1829, with wooden trusses holding up the ceiling and exposed sandstone block walls. Popular here is the roast spatchcock (a spring chicken) and the steamed black mussels. A large open fire brings a glow to the white tablecloths in winter.

Broke Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7550. Fax 02/4998 7802. www.blaxlandsrestaurant.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$20–A\$26 (US\$13–US\$17). A\$3 (US\$1.40) per person surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–late.

Café Enzo MODERN AUSTRALIAN This charming little café offers a nice ambience and good cuisine. Pastas, pizzettas, antipasti, and steaks dominate the menu. The pizzetta with chargrilled baby octopus, squid, and king prawns, Kalamata olives, fresh chile and onion, and freshly shaved Parmesan is particularly nice. Cakes and cheese plates are a specialty.

At the corner of Broke and Ekerts rds. (adjacent to Peppers Creek Antiques, near Peppers Guest House), Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7233. Main courses A\$10–A\$18 (US\$6.50–US\$12). Devonshire tea A\$7.50 (US\$4.90). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 10am–5pm (until 10pm Sat).

Casuarina Restaurant ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN This superb restaurant has taken a slew of awards for its cooking in recent years. The surroundings are elegant, with lots of antiques below the very high wooden ceilings. Flambés are the signature meal here, the most popular being a flambé of chili lobster and prawn for two. Other meals to write home about are the Thai-style chicken curry and the Caesar salad.

Hermitage Rd., Pokolbin. ☎ 02/4998 7888. Fax 02/4998 7692. www.casuarina.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$27–A\$34 (US\$18–US\$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–11pm.

3 Port Stephens: Dolphin- & Whale-Watching ★★

209km (136 miles) N of Sydney

Port Stephens, just 2½ hours north of Sydney, should be at the top of any New South Wales itinerary. It's a perfect add-on to a trip to the Hunter Valley (see above). Though you can come up from Sydney for the day, I recommend staying in the general area for at least 1 night. The sheltered Port Stephens bay itself is more than twice the size of Sydney Harbour, and is as clean as a newly poured bath. The sea literally jumps with fish, and the creamy islands and surrounding

Tomaree National Park boast more species of birds than even Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Two pods of bottle-nosed dolphins, around 70 individuals in all, call the bay home, and you are almost certain to see some on a dolphin-watching cruise. Port Stephens is also a fabulous place to watch whales during their migration to the breeding grounds farther north (roughly from June 1 to mid-Nov—though they are less frequently seen in Aug). There is also a large breeding colony of koalas in Lemon Tree Passage on the south side of the Tomaree Peninsula, which makes up the southern shoreline of the bay.

The main town, **Nelson Bay** (pop. 7,000) is on the northern side of the peninsula. The township of Shoal Bay, farther along the peninsula, has a spectacular beach edged with wildflowers. Another small resort town, **Anna Bay**, is the largest development on the southern side of the peninsula, and has excellent surf beaches. The Stockton Bight stretches some 32km (20 miles) from Anna Bay south to the large industrial town of Newcastle. The beach here is popular with ocean fishermen who have the awful habit of driving their four-wheel-drives along it. The first 500m (1,640 ft.) of the beach is swimming and surfing only. The Stockton Sand Dunes, which run behind the beach, are the longest in the Southern Hemisphere.

Opposite the Tomaree Peninsula, across the bay, are the small tourist townships of Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest, both at the mouth of the Myall River.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE To get to Port Stephens, take the Sydney to Newcastle Freeway (F3) to its end, then follow the Pacific Highway signs to Hexham and Port Stephens. **Port Stephens Coaches** (☎ 1800/045 949 in Sydney, or 02/4982 2940) travel between Port Stephens and Newcastle, and to Nelson Bay from Sydney daily at 2pm. Buses from Sydney leave from Eddy Avenue, near Central Station; the journey takes 3½ hours. Return tickets cost A\$44 (US\$29) for adults and A\$31 (US\$20) for children.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Port Stephens Visitor Information Centre**, Victoria Parade, Nelson Bay (☎ 1800/808 900 in Australia, or 02/4981 1579; fax 02/4984 1855; www.portstephens.org.au), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

SEEING THE AREA

Several operators have vessels offering **dolphin- and whale-watching cruises**. Some of the best are aboard **Imagine** (☎ 02/4984 9000; www.portstephens.com.au/imagine), a 15m (49-ft.) catamaran operated by Frank Future and Yves Papin, two real characters. They offer a daily “Island Discovery” trip that includes dolphin-watching and a trip around the offshore islands. The 4-hour cruise departs from **D’Albora Marina** in Nelson Bay daily at 11am and costs A\$49 (US\$32) for adults and A\$25 (US\$16) for children 4 to 14, including lunch.

Finds Through the Dunes on Horseback

You can ride a horse through the dunes with **Sahara Horse Trails** (☎ 02/4981 9077). A 2-hour trip costs A\$60 (US\$39), and a half-day excursion is A\$120 (US\$78). Bookings required 1 day in advance.

Four-hour whale-watching tours cost the same and leave at 11am from June 1 to November 15. You are most likely to spot humpback whales, but there's also a chance to see minke and southern right whales.

A morning dolphin-watching cruise runs from 10:30am to 12:30pm daily during summer and costs A\$20 (US\$13) for adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) for children, and A\$53 (US\$34) for families. If you happen to be around on the weekend nearest a full moon, ask about overnight **"Full Moon Tours."**

The **Port Stephens Ferry Service** (☎ 02/4981 3798) operates a 2½-hour "Early Bird Dolphin Watch" daily at 8:30am with a stop off at Tea Gardens. A similar 3½-hour cruise departs at noon (you can eat lunch at Tea Gardens), and a 2-hour dolphin-watching cruise departs at 3:30pm. All cruises cost A\$17 (US\$11) for adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) for children, and A\$40 (US\$26) for families.

Wonderbus (1800/669 800 in Australia, or 02/9555 9800; www.wonderbus.com.au) transfers passengers from Sydney and back for A\$55 (US\$36) one-way. Otherwise it offers wine tasting in the Hunter Valley, a 2-hour dolphin watch cruise, a visit to Oakdale wildlife farm, and lunch for A\$168 (US\$109).

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Port Stephens is very popular with Sydneysiders, especially during the Christmas holidays, January, and Easter, so you'll need to book well in advance then.

Port Stephens Motor Lodge Surrounded by tall trees and gardens, this motor lodge is a peaceful place to stay and a short stroll from the main township. The standard rooms are quite plain with raw-brick walls, a comfy double (and an extra single bed in most rooms), a private balcony, and an attached shower with half-tub. Adjacent to the lodge is a self-contained family unit with two bedrooms, a laundry, and water views. There's a barbecue area on the grounds. 44 Mangus St., Nelson Bay, NSW 2315. ☎ 02/4981 3366. Fax 02/4984 1655. psmlodge@aol.com. 17 units. A\$60–A\$120 (US\$39–US\$78) standard double (Christmas holiday period most expensive); weekdays A\$88 (US\$57) family unit; weekends A\$120 (US\$78). Extra adult A\$10 (US\$6.50); extra person under 15 A\$5 (US\$3.25). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Salamander Shores ★ Salamander Shores looks like a beached, ramshackle paddle steamer—it's all white-painted bricks and rails and stairs, fixed to the bay by a jetty. Set in a well-tended, sloping garden, this five-story hotel retains a certain 1960s charm, despite undergoing selective modernization. Standard rooms are similar to most motel rooms, but you really should throw caution to the wind and get a seaview room—you won't regret it. These rooms have spas and large balconies with extensive views of the bay. When the sun rises over the water and the garden is full of lorikeets and corellas, it couldn't be more picture-book perfect. There's a pub and bottle shop down below.

147 Soldiers Point Rd., Soldiers Point, NSW 2317. ☎ 1800/655 029 in Australia, or 02/4982 7210. Fax 02/4982 7890. www.salamander-shores.com. 90 units. A\$109 (US\$80) standard double; A\$142 (US\$92) garden-view double; A\$161 (US\$105) seaview double; A\$229 (US\$149) family suite; \$264 (US\$172) penthouse. A\$18 (US\$12) extra person. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; small outdoor pool; sauna; tour desk; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Most people head down to Nelson Bay for meals because of the great views across the bay. You'll also find a host of cheap takeout joints here, including **The**

Pure Pizza Café, D'Albora Marina (☎ 02/4984 2800), which offers pizzas for around A\$10 to A\$24 (US\$6.50–US\$15), depending on toppings, pastas for between A\$10 and A\$15 (US\$6.50–US\$9.75), and salads, too.

Rob's on the Boardwalk CAFE You can pick up a hearty American breakfast at this busy cafe overlooking the bay, or a snack throughout the day. The Caesar salad is popular, as are the half-dozen oysters for A\$13 (US\$8.20). One of the best mains is the mixed seafood bouillabaisse, while the prime scotch fillet with sautéed forest mushrooms, Jerusalem artichokes, gratin potatoes, and a red-wine sauce would tempt the most red-blooded carnivore.

D'Albora Marina. ☎ 02/4984 4444. Main courses A\$11.50–A\$23 (US\$8–US\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am until the last customer leaves.

Rock Lobster SEAFOOD Eat inside or out at this peaceful yet stylish restaurant. The plump Port Stephens Oysters should be enough to tempt you to start, while main courses such as smoked salmon in layers of wonton pastry with salad and wasabi sauce, or calamari flavored with chile and coriander in breadcrumbs with spicy passion-fruit dip should fill you up. There are usually a couple of meat dishes and a vegetarian option on the menu, too.

D'Albora Marina. ☎ 02/4981 1813. Main courses A\$24 (US\$16). Seafood platter for 2 A\$105 (US\$68). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 12–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm.

4 North of Sydney Along the Pacific Highway: Australia's Holiday Coast

The Pacific Highway leads over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and merges into the Sydney–Newcastle Freeway. It continues to the industrial coast town of Newcastle, bypassing Tuggerah Lake and Lake Macquarie (neither of real interest compared to what follows). From here, the Pacific Highway stays close to the coast until it reaches Brisbane, some 1,000km (620 miles) from Sydney.

Though the road is gradually being upgraded, the conditions vary, and the distances are long. Travelers should be aware that the route is renowned for its accidents. Though you could make it to Brisbane in a couple of days, you could also easily spend more than a week stopping off at the attractions along the way. The farther north you travel, the more obviously tropical the landscape gets. By the time visitors reach the coastal resort town of Coffs Harbour, temperatures have noticeably increased, and banana palms and sugar cane plantations start to appear.

Along the coast, you'll find excellent fishing and some superb beaches, most of them virtually deserted. Inland, the Great Dividing Range, which separates the wetter eastern plains from the dry interior, throws up rainforests, extinct volcanoes, and hobby farms growing tropical fruit as you head farther north toward Queensland. Along the way are a series of national parks, most of them requiring detours of several kilometers. Those you shouldn't miss out on include the **Dorrig** and **Mount Warning** national parks, both of which offer some of the country's best and most accessible rainforests.

PORT MACQUARIE

423km (262 miles) N of Sydney

Port Macquarie (pop. 28,000), about halfway between Sydney and the Queensland border, boasts some fabulous beaches; Flynn's Beach in particular is a haven for surfers. Boating and fishing are other popular pastimes.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Sydney, motorists follow the Pacific Highway and then the Sydney–Newcastle Freeway (F3). **Eastern Australia Airways** (☎ 02/9691 2333) flies between Sydney and Port Macquarie. The coach trip from Sydney takes about 7 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Port Macquarie Visitor Information Centre**, Port Macquarie, NSW 2444, at the corner of Clarence and Hay streets, under the Civic Centre (☎ 1800/025 935 in Australia, or 02/6581 8000; www.portmacquarieinfo.com.au), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

EXPLORING THE AREA

The Billabong Koala and Wildlife Park, 61 Billabong Dr., Port Macquarie (☎ 02/6585 1060), is a family-owned nature park where you can get up close to hand-raised koalas, kangaroos, emus, wombats, many types of birds, and fish. You can pat the koalas at 10:30am, 1:30, and 3:30pm. There are also barbecue facilities, picnic grounds, and a restaurant. Allow 2 hours to fully experience this recommended wildlife park. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is A\$8 (US\$5.20) for adults and A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children.

The 257-passenger vessel **Port Venture** (☎ 02/6583 3058) leaves from the wharf at the end of Clarence Street Tuesday and Thursday through Sunday at 10am and 2pm, for a 2-hour scenic cruise on the Hastings River. Cruises cost A\$20 (US\$13) for adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) for children 6 to 14, and A\$49 (US\$32) for families. Reservations are essential. The boat also travels up the river on a 5-hour Barbecue Cruise every Wednesday morning leaving at 10am. It docks at a private bush park along the way, and passengers can tuck into a traditional Aussie barbecue of steaks, fish, and salad. You can then fish, take a bushwalk, go swimming, or take a 20-minute 4WD trip. The cruise costs A\$37 (US\$24) for adults, A\$18 (US\$12) for children, and A\$94 (US\$61) for families. A 4-hour cruise also leaves on Monday at 10am. It costs A\$35 (US\$23) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children, and A\$88 (US\$57) for families.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

El Paso Motor Inn Located right on the waterfront, this motel offers standard-motel type rooms; the more expensive deluxe doubles are a little larger and have newer furniture and a fresher coat of paint after being refurbished in 1998. Two rooms come with spas, and some come with kitchenettes. The third-floor three-room suite has good ocean views and a kitchenette.

29 Clarence St., Port Macquarie, NSW 2444. ☎ 1800/027 965 in Australia, or 02/6583 1944. Fax 02/6584 1021. 55 units. A\$87 (US\$57) standard double; A\$97 (US\$63) deluxe double; A\$130 (US\$85) spa rooms; A\$150 (US\$98) suite. Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). A\$30 (US\$20) per-room surcharge Easter, Christmas, and some long weekends. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; good heated pool; sauna; spa; game room; tour desk; babysitting; nonsmoking rooms. **In room:** A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

COFFS HARBOUR: BANANA CAPITAL OF OZ 🍌

554km (344 miles) N of Sydney; 427km (265 miles) S of Brisbane

Rainforests, beaches, and sand surround the relaxed capital of Australia's Holiday Coast. The state's "banana republic" headquarters—the area produces more bananas than anywhere else in Australia—is bordered by hillsides furrowed with rows of banana palms. Farther inland, the rolling hills plateau into Dorrigo National Park, one of the best examples of accessible rainforests anywhere. Also inland is the Nymboida River, known for its excellent white-water rafting.

Coffs Harbour is a rather disjointed place, with an old town-center retail area; the Jetty Strip (with restaurants and fishing boats) near the best swimming spot, Park Beach; and a new retail area called The Plaza. Wide sweeps of suburbia separate these three areas; it's a difficult town to negotiate if you don't have a car.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE It takes around 7 hours to drive from Sydney to Coffs Harbour without stops; from Brisbane it takes around 5 hours. The Pacific Highway in this region is notoriously dangerous; there have been many serious accidents involving drivers enduring long hours behind the wheel. Ongoing road-widening projects should improve things. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies non-stop to Coffs Harbour from Sydney. Several coach companies, including **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia), make the trip from Sydney in about 9 hours. A **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia) train from Sydney costs A\$79 (US\$52).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Coffs Harbour Visitors Information Centre** (☎ 1800/025 650 in Australia, or 02/6652 1522) is just off the Pacific Highway, at the corner of Rose Avenue and Marcia Street, 2 blocks north of the city center. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. A good general website is www.holidaycoast.com.au.

GETTING AROUND If you don't have a car, you can get around on the **Coffs Harbour Coaches** (☎ 02/6652 2877), which runs day trips around the local area on weekdays (including a town tour on Mon., and a trip to the magnificent Dorrigo National Park on Wed.). **Blue Tongue Transport** ★ (☎ 02/6651 8566, or 1800/258 386 in Australia) offers smaller group tours of Dorrigo National Park daily costing A\$50 (US\$33) for adults and A\$40 (US\$26) for children; a morning city tour for A\$11 (US\$7.15); and an upmarket afternoon champagne tour of town for A\$22 (US\$14).

VISITING THE BIG BANANA & OTHER THINGS TO DO

You can't miss the 10m (33-ft.) reinforced concrete banana alongside the highway at the **Big Banana Theme Park** (☎ 02/6652 4355), 3km (2 miles) north of town. The park includes an air-conditioned, diesel-powered train that takes visitors on a 1-hour tour of the 18-hectare (44-acre) banana plantation that contains some 18,000 banana trees. Along the route it passes various off-the-wall exhibits relating to farming, Aborigines, and local history. It stops at the property's hydroponic glasshouses and at a viewing platform and cafeteria, which serves up all things banana—cakes, breads, splits, shakes, and so on. The park is open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (3pm in winter). Admission is free, but the train tour costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children, and A\$25 (US\$16) for families. I had my doubts about this place before I visited, but I ended up charmed—even if it was simply by the wackiness of the place.

The **Coffs Harbour Zoo** (☎ 02/6656 1330), 10 minutes north of town on the Pacific Highway, has plenty of koalas, as well as wombats, kangaroos, dingoes, Tasmanian devils, water birds, and aviaries. The award-winning native gardens are full of wild birds expecting a feed. The zoo is open daily from 8:30am to 4pm. Admission is A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children, and A\$30 (US\$20) for families.

A free natural attraction is **Mutton Bird Island**, which you can get to via the Coffs Harbour jetty. A steep path leads up the side of the island, but views from

the top are worth it. Between September and April the island is home to thousands of shearwaters (or mutton birds), which make their nests in burrows in the ground.

If you prefer fish, try diving with gray nurse sharks, manta rays, and moray eels with **Island Snorkle and Dive** (☎ 02/6654 2860) or **Dive Quest** (☎ 02/6654 1930). The **Pamela Star** (☎ 02/6658 4379) offers good-value deep-sea-fishing trips including all tackle and bait, and lunch, for A\$60 (US\$39). The boat leaves Coffs Harbour jetty at 7:30am and returns at 1:30pm daily.

For a taste of gold fever, head to **George's Gold Mine**, 40km (25 miles) west of Coffs Harbour on Bushman's Range Road (☎ 02/6654 5355 or 02/6654 5273). You get to go into an old-time gold mine, see the "stamper battery" crushing the ore, and pan for gold yourself. The mine is open Wednesday through Sunday (daily during school and public holidays) from 10:30am to 4pm. Admission is A\$9 (US\$5.85) for adults, A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children, and A\$26 (US\$17) for families.

You might also like to visit **Kiwi Down Under Farm** (☎ 02/6653 4449), a fascinating organic farm growing kiwi fruit and macadamia nuts, among other things. No nasty sprays are used here. Free 30- to 45-minute guided tours of the property leave at 2, 3, and 4pm on weekends and school holidays. The tea shop on the premises serves amazing scones and jam for A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) and excellent vegetarian lunches for A\$8.50 (US\$5.50). The farm is 14km (8½ miles) south of Coffs Harbour; turn off at Gleniffer Road, just south of Bonville, and follow the signs for 4km (2½ miles).

SHOPPING FOR ARTS & CRAFTS

There are several recognized "crafts drives" in the area, where tourists can go in search of quality souvenirs. Pick up a free copy of **Discover the Coffs Harbour Region** from the tourist information center for more details on the dozens of crafts shops in the area. One of the best is the **Australian Wild Flower Gallery** (☎ 02/6651 5763), just off West High Street and Bennetts Road. Wolfgang Shultze carves intricate designs out of pewter, silver, and gold to make detailed animal- and plant-inspired jewelry, charms, and spoons. Pieces cost between A\$5 and A\$36 (US\$3.25–US\$23). The gallery is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

On the way to or from the Dorrigo rainforest, stop off at the township of **Bellingen**, 20 minutes south of Coffs Harbour on Waterfall Way. It's a pleasant place with several crafts shops. Among the best is **The Old Church** (☎ 02/6655 0438), 8 Church St. (just off the main road), crammed full of wooden crafts items, cards, furniture, wacky mobiles, incense, hats, and knickknacks, and surrounded by gardens and fruit trees. It's open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm.

EXPLORING THE RAINFORESTS & OTHER OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Coffs Harbour's main tourist attraction is its position as a good base for exploring the surrounding countryside. You must see the World Heritage-listed **Dorrigo National Park** ★★, 68km (42 miles) west of Coffs Harbour, via Bellingen. Perched on the Great Dividing Range that separates the lush eastern seaboard from the arid interior, the rainforest here is one of the best I've seen in Australia. (It's a pity that so much fell to the axes of early settlers.) Entry to the rainforest is free.

The **Dorrigo Rainforest Centre** (☎ 02/6657 2309) is the gateway to the park and has extensive information on the rainforest. Just outside is the 21m (69-ft.) high **Skywalk**, which offers a bird's-eye view of the forest canopy. There

are several walks leaving either the Rainforest Centre, the Glade Picnic Area (about 1km/½ mile away), and the Never-Never Picnic Area (a 10km/6¼-mile drive along Dome Rd.). Most tracks are suitable for wheelchairs. Bring a raincoat or an umbrella—it is a rainforest after all! The **Dorrigo Tourist Information** office (☎ 02/6657 2486) is in the center of Torrigo township.

One of the best tour operators in the area is the award-winning **Mountain Trails 4WD Tours** (☎ 02/6658 3333; fax 02/6658 3299). Full-day tours that include visits to two rainforest areas and a good lunch cost A\$80 (US\$52) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for children under 16. Half-day tours of one rainforest cost A\$56 (US\$36) for adults and A\$40 (US\$26) for children.

For a bit more personal action, try horseback riding through the rainforest 23km (14 miles) southwest of Coffs Harbour with **Valery Trails** (☎ 02/6653 4301). Two-hour rides leave at 10am and 2pm daily and cost A\$35 (US\$23) per person; bookings are essential.

More hectic are **white-water rafting trips** ★ through the wilderness on the furious Nymboida River with **Wow Rafting**, 1448 Coramba Rd., Coramba via Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450 (☎ 1800/640 330 in Australia, or 02/6654 4066; www.wowrafting.com.au). Full-day trips, including morning tea, a high-energy snack, and a barbecue meal, cost A\$153 (US\$99). These adventurous trips operate year-around, depending on water levels. A 2-day trip costs A\$325 (US\$211), including all meals and overnight camping. If the water level in the Nymboida is low, then you raft on the Goolang Creek, a shorter but still exciting run. Most of the rapids are grade 3; some of them can be pretty hairy. The rafting guides are real characters; although they're safety-conscious, you're sure to be dunked a few times.

Rapid Rafting (☎ 1800/629 797 in Australia, or 02/6652 1741) also runs rafting trips on the Goolang River, costing A\$77 (US\$50) for a half-day trip, and A\$120 (US\$78) for a full day.

Looking for yet another adrenaline rush? Then head to the **Raleigh International Raceway** (☎ 02/6655 4017), where you can zip around the track behind the wheel of your very own . . . go-kart. It's 23km (14 miles) south of Coffs Harbour and 3km (2 miles) along Valery Road off the Pacific Highway north of Nambucca Heads. Six high-speed laps cost A\$16 (US\$10), 11 cost A\$23 (US\$15), and 16 cost A\$32 (US\$21). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (6pm in summer).

The **Pacific Explorer** catamaran (☎ 0418/663 815 mobile phone, or 02/6652 7225 after working hours) operates **whale-watching trips** between June and October; the 2½-hour cruises cost A\$44 (US\$29). Between November and May, they run half-day dolphin-watching cruises for the same price.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Coffs Harbour is a popular beachside holiday spot with plenty of motels along the Pacific Highway offering standard roadside rooms from A\$35 to A\$49 (US\$23–US\$32) per night. Vacancy signs are common except during Australian school holiday periods and the Christmas and Easter periods (when Coffs really fills up). A few to try are the **Caribbean Motel**, 353 High St., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450 (☎ 02/6652 1500; fax 02/6651 4158), with doubles ranging from A\$55 to A\$120 (US\$36–US\$78) depending on the season and the view; and the **Coffs Harbour Motor Inn**, 22 Elizabeth St., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450 (☎ 02/6652 6388; fax 02/6652 6493), with doubles ranging from A\$72 to A\$108 (US\$47–US\$70) depending on the season.

Sanctuary Motor Inn Resort If you like animals, you'll love this animal-sanctuary/guesthouse complex 2km (1¼ miles) south of town. Wandering around the grounds are wallabies, kangaroos, peacocks, and several species of native birds. The rooms are comfortable, with the more expensive rooms being larger and more recently renovated. The executive room comes with a spa.

Pacific Hwy., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450. ☎ 02/6652 2111. Fax 02/6652 4725. phiscato@hotmail.com.au. 38 units. A\$88 (US\$57) standard double; A\$94 (US\$60) superior double; A\$150 (US\$98) executive double. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Holiday surcharges A\$25 (US\$16). Ask about lower rates through Aussie auto clubs. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; large outdoor pool; tennis and squash courts; mini golf; spa; sauna; room service 7–9am and 6–8pm; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV with free satellite channels, kitchen (4 units), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Seafood Mama's 🍷 ITALIAN/SEAFOOD This charming and informal award-winning Italian restaurant packs a mean barbecue seafood dish of octopus, prawns, fish, calamari, and mussels. Also on the menu in this rustic, bottles-hanging-from-the-ceiling Italian joint are some well-regarded veal and steak dishes, and plenty of pastas. Seafood Mama's is right on the ocean, near the Pelican Beach and the older Nautilus resorts, 7km (4½ miles) north of Coffs Harbour. The restaurant will do takeout and deliver to your hotel.

Pacific Hwy. ☎ 02/6653 6733. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$13–A\$25 (US\$8.45–US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

BYRON BAY: A BEACH BOHEMIA 🍷

78km (48 miles) SE of Murwillumbah

As the most easterly point on the Australian mainland, the sun's rays hit Byron before anywhere else. This geographical position is good for two things: you can spot whales migrating north in June and July, and it's attractive to the town's "alternative" community. Painters, craftspeople, glass blowers, and poets are so plentiful they almost fall from the macadamia nut trees. The place is loaded with float tanks, "pure body products," beauty therapists, and massage centers. Though it attracts squadrons of backpackers each summer to its party scene and dance clubs, many of the locals stay at home, sipping their herbal tea and preparing for the healing light of the coming dawn. Families love Byron Bay for the beautiful beaches, and surfers flock here for some of the best surfing in the world.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE If you're driving up the north coast, leave the Pacific Highway at Ballina and take the scenic coast road via Lennox Head. It's around 10 hours by car from Sydney (790km/490 miles) and 2 hours (200km/124 miles) south of Brisbane. Regional Express airline (www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies from Sydney to Ballina. The round-trip costs about A\$280 (US\$182).

Byron Bus Transfers (☎ 02/6681 3354) meets all flights and transfers to Byron Bay for A\$20 (US\$13) single and A\$35 (US\$23) return. **Coolangatta airport** is 1 hour north of Byron Bay (112km/69 miles). **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia) runs daily trains from Sydney to Byron Bay; the one-way fare is A\$98 (US\$64) for adults and A\$47 (US\$31) for children, and the trip takes 12¾ hours. **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) buses from Sydney take 13½ hours; the one-way coach fare is A\$69 (US\$45).

ORGANIZED TOURS FROM SYDNEY An unusual way to get to Byron is on a 5-day surf safari from Sydney with **Surfaris** (☎ 1800/634 941 in Australia;

www.surfaris.com). You can learn to surf along the way as you stop off at several beaches, with camping overnight. Trips leave Sydney on Monday mornings and Byron Bay on Sunday mornings. It costs A\$499 (US\$324) all-inclusive—though you need to bring a sleeping bag.

Another great trip is with **Ando's Outback Tours** (☎ 1800/228 828 in Australia; www.outbacktours.com.au), which operates from Sydney every Sunday and heads inland deep into the Outback on a 5-day trip. Among the highlights are visits to Lightning Ridge and the wild Glengarry opal fields (see “Outback New South Wales” later in this chapter). The trip costs A\$435 (US\$283). A return trip to Sydney costs A\$35 (US\$23).

It's also worth checking the Youth Hostel website (www.yha.com.au) for trips to Byron Bay.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Byron Visitors Centre**, 80 Jonson St., Byron Bay, NSW 2481 (☎ 02/6680 9271), is open daily from 9am to 5pm. A half-hour farther south is the **Ballina Tourist Information Centre**, on the corner of Las Balsas Plaza and River Street, Ballina NSW 2478 (☎ 02/6686 3484), open daily from 9am to 5pm. Two good websites on the area are **www.byronbay.net.au** and **www.byronbay-online.com**.

SPECIAL EVENTS Byron really goes to town during 4 days over the Easter weekend with the **East Coast Blues & Roots Festival** (www.bluesfest.com.au). Up to 30,000 people camp out to listen to up to 80 acts, including the likes of Ben Harper, Midnight Oil, and Joan Armatrading. Book tickets on the Web. The first Sunday of every month is when the extraordinary local **crafts market** brings hippies and funky performers out from the hinterland. Byron Bay is very popular over the Christmas period so book well in advance.

HITTING THE SURF & SAND

Many accommodations in Byron Bay offer free surfboards for guests, or else head to the **Byron Bay Surf Shop**, on Lawson Street at the corner of Fletcher Street (☎ 02/6685 7536), which rents boards for A\$12 (US\$7.80) for 4 hours and A\$20 (US\$13) for 24 hours. The shop can also arrange surf lessons for around A\$25 (US\$16) per hour.

Wategos Beach and an area off the tip of Cape Byron called “**The Pass**” are two particularly good surf spots; because each of Byron's main beaches faces a different direction, you are bound to find the surf is up on at least one. **Main Beach**, which stretches along the front of the town (it's actually some 50km/31 miles long), is good for swimming. West of Main Beach is **Belongil Beach**, the unofficial nudist beach (when authorities aren't cracking down on covering up). **Clarke's Beach** curves away to the east of Main Beach toward Cape Byron.

The **Cape Byron Lighthouse** on Cape Byron is one of Australia's most powerful. It's eerie to come up here at night to watch the stars and see the light reach some 40km (25 miles) out to sea. A nice walk just south of town goes through the rainforest of the **Broken Heads Nature Reserve**.

The best place to dive around Byron Bay is at **Julian Rocks**, about 3km (2 miles) offshore. Cold currents from the south meet warmer ones from the north here, which makes it a good spot to find a large variety of marine sea life. **Byron Bay Dive Centre**, 111 Jonson St. (☎ 02/6685 7149), charges A\$70 (US\$46) for the first dive and A\$35 (US\$23) for each subsequent dive. **Sundive**, in the Byron Hostel complex on Middleton Street (☎ 02/6685 7755), has cheaper initial dives at A\$60 (US\$39) each.

EXPLORING THE HILLS & RAINFORESTS

Behind Byron you'll find hills that could make the Irish weep, as well as rainforests, waterfalls, and small farms burgeoning with tropical fruits. A good operator taking trips inland is **Forgotten Country Ecotours** (☎ 02/6687 7843). **Byron Bay to Bush Tours** (☎ 02/6685 6889, or 04/1866 2684 mobile; bush@mullum.com.au) operates day trips to the hippie hangout of **Nimbin** (last time I was there, I was approached four times in 10 min. by people selling marijuana) and up into the rainforest, visiting a macadamia-nut farm and having a barbecue on their organic farm. The trip leaves at 11am Monday through Saturday and costs A\$30 (US\$20). This company also operates trips to the Sunday market at Channon the second Sunday of each month and the one at Bangalow on the fourth Sunday. These trips cost A\$15 (US\$9.75).

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Thousands of backpackers and adventurous travelers of all ages flock to Byron Bay, and there's plenty of competition to relieve them of their money. This said, the battle for the tourist dollar means very good prices and facilities you might not find anywhere else for the same price. It's always best to book well ahead if you're coming here, though.

Arts Factory Lodge *finds* This is a wacky kind of place once famous as a music club popular with American draft-dodgers during the Vietnam War. Now

Byron on a Super Cheap Budget

Here's a run down of some of the best places with private rooms in Byron for the frugal traveler.

The **Cape Byron YHA** (☎ 1800/652 627 in Australia, or 02/6685 8788; www.yha.com.au) is a very good option. It's clean, friendly, has its own pool, twice-weekly barbecues, free body boards (boogie boards), and is very close to town. Dorms cost A\$22 to A\$28 (US\$14–US\$18); doubles A\$60 to A\$80 (US\$39–US\$52), and doubles with bathroom and TV A\$70 to A\$110 (US\$46–US\$72). **J's Bay YHA** (☎ 1800 678 198 or 02/6685 8853) is slightly farther from the beach. It's got lots of communal areas and a superb pool, and each room has its own outdoor deck, too. Bunks cost A\$22 to A\$27 (US\$14–US\$18); doubles A\$60 to A\$70 (US\$39–US\$46), and doubles with bathroom A\$70 to A\$90 (US\$46–US\$59).

A good camping, caravan, and cabin park is **Clarkes Beach**, off Lighthouse Road, Byron Bay (☎ 02/6685 6496; www.bshp.com.au/clarkes). It's a short walk to town, and just across from the beach. Unpowered sites cost A\$20 to A\$34 (US\$13–US\$22) depending on the season (Christmas/Jan period and Easter the highest rates); A\$23 to A\$38 (US\$15–US\$18) powered site; and A\$95 to A\$115 (US\$62–US\$75) self-contained cabin. It's run by the local government council, which also operates two other holiday parks: **Suffolk Park**, Alcorn Street, Suffolk Park (☎ 02/6685 3353) and the nicer **Broken Head Holiday Park**, Beach Road, Broken Head (☎ 02/6685 3234). Rates are around the same as Clarkes Beach, and both Suffolk Park and Broken Head are a short drive from Broken Hill—too far to walk, though.

it's popular with young travelers seeking an alternative place to stay and older folk who cut off their long hair years ago. Accommodation includes teepees, tents, rooms made from strips of bark, and funky indoor "cubes." The "love shack" is more standard, and quite tropical in its appearance. Workshops include didgeridoo making, massage, yoga, and boxing! The entertainment lineup includes live music, fire shows, a cinema, Aboriginal Culture Show, a Talent Night, basketball, and volleyball. A cafe serves vegetarian meals, and there's a good outdoor pool, lush gardens, free bicycles, and free minibus rides to town. They prefer if you book for 3 nights or more.

Skinner's Shoot Rd., Byron Bay, NSW 2481. ☎ 02/6685 7709. www.artsfactory.com.au. A\$75 (US\$49) dorms (for 3 nights); A\$195 (US\$127) cubes (for 3 nights); A\$210 (US\$136.50) Love Shack (for 3 nights). Discounts for 5 nights. MC, V. **Amenities:** Cafe; outdoor pool.

Byron Central Apartments If you don't want to eat out all the time, then this is the place for you. The self-contained apartments come with a queen-size sofa bed and free in-house movies. Those on the first floor come with balconies. There are also a few loft-style apartments with separate dining, lounge, and sleeping areas. Units for people with disabilities are available. The landscaped garden has a barbecue. The apartments are a 2-minute walk from the beach and town.

Byron St., Byron Bay, NSW 2481. ☎ 02/6685 8800. Fax 02/6685 8802. www.byronbay.com/bca. 26 units. A\$120–A\$260 (US\$78–US\$169) standard apt 1 night (depending on season). Higher rates apply Christmas/New Year period; low season Apr–Sept. Ask about discounts for multiple-night stays. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Medium-size saltwater pool; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Holiday Village Backpackers ★ Byron Bay's original hostel is still one of the best. It's in the center of town next door to Woolworth's supermarket and only a few minutes' walk from the bus and train stops, the main beach, and the town center. It's a five-star backpackers, which is as good as it gets. Dorm rooms are clean, and doubles in the hostel are above average and come with a double bed, a fan, and a wardrobe. For a couple of dollars more you can stay in a self-contained unit with a separate bedroom, lounge, and kitchen area. On the premises are a volleyball court, spa and pool, TV and video lounge (with a library), barbecues, basketball hoop, Internet and e-mail, and free surfboards, body boards, and bikes.

116 Jonson St., Byron Bay, NSW 2481. ☎ 02/6685 8888. Fax 02/6685 8777. 42 units, 13 with bathroom. A\$55–A\$65 (US\$36–US\$42) double in hostel; A\$70–A\$85 (US\$46–US\$55) self-contained double. A\$21–A\$29 (US\$14–US\$19) dorm bed. MC, V. **Amenities:** Medium-size pool; spa; bike hire; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV/VCR (some rooms); fridge.

WHERE TO DINE

Byron Bay's Jonson Street is crammed with eateries, so you certainly won't starve. For meals below the A\$10 (US\$6.50) mark try the organic menu at **Fundamental Foods**, Jonson Street (☎ 02/6685 6426). Otherwise, **Oz Bakehouse** (☎ 02/6685 6429) has lots of pies and the like, as well as inexpensive meals aimed at the backpacker market.

Beach Hotel Barbecue PUB/BARBECUE The outdoor meals at this pub near the beach make it popular with visitors and locals. About the cheapest thing on the menu is the burger, and the most expensive a steak. The Beach Hotel Bistro serves coffee, cakes, and snacks throughout the day, but lunch is only served from noon to 3pm and dinner from 6 to 9pm.

In the Beach Hotel, at Bay and Johnson sts. ☎ 02/6685 6402. Main courses A\$3.90–A\$14 (US\$2.50–US\$8.80). No credit cards. Daily 10am–9pm; lunch noon–3pm; dinner 6–9pm.

Earth 'n' Sea PIZZA/PASTA This popular spot has been around for years and offers a fairly extensive menu of pastas and pizzas, including some unusual combinations such as prawns, banana, and pineapple. Pizzas come in three sizes, and the small is just enough to satisfy the average appetite.

11 Lawson St. ☎ 02/6685 6029. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$9.50–A\$24 (US\$6.20–US\$15). AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–11pm.

The Pass Café ★ MEDITERRANEAN The Pass Café offers fabulous breakfasts and lunches, so, if you happen to be heading to or from the local rainforest on the Cape Byron Walking Track, you'll find this a great place to stop off. Breakfast items range from simple fresh fruit and muffins to gourmet chicken sausages. Lunch specials include Cajun chicken, octopus, and calamari salad, as well as fresh fish, meat dishes, and plenty of good vegetarian options.

At the end of Brooke Dr., on Cape Byron Walking Track, Palm Valley. ☎ 02/6685 6074. Main courses A\$10–A\$25 (US\$6.50–US\$16). MC, V. Sun–Wed 8am–3pm; Thurs–Sat 8am–6pm.

Raving Prawn ★ SEAFOOD Fish cover the walls at this excellent place, but there's more than that on the menu. You can tuck into veal, chicken, or vegetarian dishes if you want to, but I wouldn't miss out on the fabulous signature dish, the jewfish (a kind of grouper) with an herb-mustard crust. The forest-berry tart is the best dessert on the menu.

Feros Arcade (between Jonson and Lawson sts.). ☎ 02/6685 6737. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$19–A\$27 (US\$12–US\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm (until around 9pm in winter). Open daily during school holidays.

MURWILLUMBAH

321km (199 miles) N of Coffs Harbour; 893km (554 miles) N of Sydney; 30km (19 miles) S of Queensland border

The main town of the Tweed Valley, Murwillumbah is a good base for touring the surrounding area, which includes **Mount Warning**, picturesque country towns, and countryside dominated by sugar cane and banana.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Murwillumbah is inland from the Pacific Highway. The nearest airport is at **Coolangatta**, 34km (21 miles) away, over the Queensland border. **Countrylink** trains (☎ 13 22 42 in Australia) link Murwillumbah with Sydney, taking around 13 hours. **Greyhound-Pioneer** buses (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) run from Sydney to Murwillumbah; the trip takes 14½ hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Murwillumbah Visitors Centre**, at the corner of the Pacific Highway and Alma Street, Murwillumbah, NSW 2484 (☎ 02/6672 1340), is worth visiting before heading out to see more of the Tweed Valley or the beaches to the east. Another option is the **Tweed Heads Visitors Centre**, at the corner of Bay and Wharf streets, Tweed Heads, NSW 2485 (☎ 07/5536 4244). Both are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

SEEING THE AREA

If you're looking for a big avocado to go with your Coffs Harbour Big Banana, then head for **Tropical Fruit World**, on the Pacific Highway (☎ 02/6677 7222), 15km (9½ miles) north of Murwillumbah and 15km (9½ miles) south of Coolangatta. The Tweed Valley's top attraction grows some 400 varieties of tropical fruit, which can be discovered on an interesting 1½-hour tractor-train tour of the 81-hectare (200-acre) tropical fruit plantation, as well as on 4WD

rainforest drives and riverboat rides. It's open daily from 10am to 5pm. Also on the property are a kiosk, fruit market, and gift shop. Admission to food and shopping areas is free. Guided tours cost A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) for children 4 to 12.

The 1,154m (3,785-ft.) **Mount Warning** is part of the rim of an extinct volcano formed from volcanic action some 20 to 23 million years ago. You can hike around the mountain and to the top on trails in the Mount Warning World Heritage Park.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Worth a Splurge

Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat 🌿🌿 Crystal Creek is tucked away in a little valley of rainforest just 25 minutes by car from the Pacific Highway. Self-contained cabins skirt the edge of the rainforest that borders the Border Ranges National Park, a World Heritage site. There are plenty of native birds, possums, echidnas, wallabies, and bandicoots around and about. Though the water is always cold, guests can swim in the natural pools and laze around on hammocks strung up in the bush. Cabins have two comfortable rooms, a balcony, kitchen, barbecue, and plenty of privacy. Two glass-terrace cabins overlook the rainforest and mountain. All rooms have a king-size bed and a double spa; there are no curtains in the bathroom because the rainforest gives enough privacy. Several tours are offered, including 4WD rainforest tours and visits to local country markets and arts-and-crafts galleries, as well as walking tours around the property. Guests cook their own food or eat at the casual restaurant.

Brookers Rd., Upper Crystal Creek, Murwillumbah, NSW 2484. ☎ 02/6679 1591. Fax 02/6679 1596. www.crystalcreekrainforestretreat.com.au. 7 cabins. A\$240–A\$260 (US\$156–US\$169). Ask about midweek specials. AE, DC, MC, V. Pickup service from the airport, bus, and train stations available. Not suitable for children. **Amenities:** Restaurant; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. room service; massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, CD player, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

AFTER DARK

The clubs up here on the border of Queensland are huge and offer cheap bistro meals as well as pricier ones in the more upscale restaurants, inexpensive drinks at the bar, entertainment, and hundreds of poker machines. The biggest in New South Wales is the **Twin Towns Services Club**, Wharf Street, Tweed Heads (☎ 07/5536 2277). Another worth checking out is **Seagulls Rugby League Club**, Gollan Drive, Tweed Heads (☎ 07/5536 3433). Major entertainers such as Tom Jones, Joe Cocker, and Bob Hope have performed here over the last few years. It's open 24 hours. To gain admittance to these "private" clubs, you must sign the registration book just inside the door.

5 South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway

There are two main roads leading south out of Sydney: the Hume Highway and the Princes Highway. Both routes connect Sydney to Melbourne, but the Hume Highway is quicker. A favorite with truckers and anyone in a hurry, the Hume Highway will get you to Melbourne in about 12 hours. The Princes Highway is a scenic coastal route that can get you to Melbourne in 2 days, though the many attractions along the route make it well worth taking longer.

KIAMA

119km (74 miles) S of Sydney

Kiama (pop. 10,300) is famous for its **blowhole**. In fact, there are two, a large one and a smaller one, and both spurt sea water several meters into the air. The

larger of the two can jet water up to 60m (197 ft.), but you need a large swell and strong southeasterly winds to force the sea through the rock fissure with enough force to achieve that height. The smaller of the two is more consistent, but still fares better with a good northeasterly wind.

Pick up a map from the **Kiama Visitors Centre** (see below) to guide you on a Heritage Walk through the historic district of this quaint village, where you can tour a row of National Trust workers' cottages built in 1896. There's little reason to stay the night in Kiama, as plenty more scenic places await further south.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Sydney, travel south on the Princes Highway via the steel-works city of Wollongong. There's also a regular train service from Sydney and a **Greyhound–Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) coach service. The trip by coach takes about 2 hours, the train trip a little less.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Kiama Visitors Centre** at Blowhole Point, Kiama (☎ 02/4232 3322; fax 02/4226 3260; www.kiama.net/default.htm) is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

JERVIS BAY: AN OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK GEM ★★

182km (113 miles) S of Sydney

Bouderee National Park (formally known as Jervis Bay National Park), at Jervis Bay, is nothing short of spectacular. You should come here even if it means missing out on some of Sydney's treasures. How does this grab you: Kilometers of deserted beaches, the whitest sand imaginable, kangaroos you can stroke, lorikeets who mob you for food during the day time, and possums who do the same at night, pods of dolphins, some great walks through gorgeous bushland, and a real Aboriginal spirituality-of-place? I could go on, but see for yourself.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE It's best to reach Jervis Bay via Huskisson, 24km (15 miles) southeast of Nowra on the Princes Highway. Approximately 16km (10 miles) south of Nowra, turn left onto the Jervis Bay Road to Huskisson. The entrance to Bouderee National Park is just after Huskisson. It's about a 3-hour drive from Sydney. You'll probably need at least 2 days to get to know the area. Watch out for the black cockatoos.

Australian Pacific Tours (☎ 02/9247 7222; fax 02/9247 2052; www.apttours.com.au) runs a dolphin-watching cruise to Jervis Bay from Sydney every day between early October and mid-April, and Monday and Thursday in winter. The 12-hour trip—7 of which are on the coach—includes a visit to the Kiama blowhole, a 3-hour luncheon cruise looking for bottlenose dolphins, and a stop off on the way back at Fitzroy Falls in the Southern Highlands. The trip costs A\$117 (US\$76) for adults and A\$109 (US\$71) for children.

East Coast Adventure Tours (☎ 1800/666 000 in Australia; www.beachnbush.com.au) takes backpackers and other adventurous sorts on a 2-night trip to Jervis Bay every Friday evening. You walk deep into the huge **Morton National Park**, go on a dolphin cruise, and spend the rest of the weekend in Jervis Bay. The trip costs A\$219 (US\$142).

VISITOR INFORMATION For information on the area, contact the **Shoalhaven Visitors Centre**, at the corner of Princes Highway and Pleasant Way, Nowra, NSW 2541 (☎ 1800/024 261 in Australia, or 02/4421 0778; www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au). Pick up maps and book camping sites at the **Bouderee**

National Park office (☎ 02/4443 0977; www.ea.gov.au/parks/booderee), located just beyond Huskisson; it's open daily from 9am to 4pm. **Hyams Beach Store** (☎ 02/4443 0242) has an accommodation guide listing 34 rental properties from A\$100 (US\$65) a weekend.

SEEING THE AREA

If you want to see the best spots, you'll need to pay the rather extortionate park-entrance fee of A\$10 (US\$6.50) a day. Some of the places you could visit include **Hyams Beach** 🌊, reputed to have the whitest sand in the world. Notice how it squeaks when you walk on it. Wear sunscreen! The reflection off the beach can burn your skin in minutes on a sunny day. **Hole in the Wall Beach** has interesting rock formations and a lingering smell of natural sulfur. **Summer Cloud Bay** is secluded and offers excellent fishing.

Dolphin Watch Cruises, 74 Owen St., Huskisson (☎ 1800/246 010 in Australia, or 02/4441 6311; www.dolphinwatch.com.au), runs a hardy vessel out of Huskisson on the lookout for the resident pod of bottle-nosed dolphins—you have “more than a 95% chance of seeing them,” the company claims. A 2-hour coffee cruise runs at 10am on Saturdays and Sundays, public holidays, and school holidays, and costs A\$20 (US\$13) for adults and A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children. A 2½-hour dolphin watch and bay cruise leaves at 1pm and costs A\$25 (US\$16) for adults and A\$12 (US\$7.80) for children. It's possible to see humpback and southern right whales June and July and mid-September to mid-November. A 3-hour whale-watch cruise costs A\$40 (US\$26) for adults and A\$30 (US\$20) for children.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

If you have a tent and camping gear, all the better. **Caves Beach** is a quiet spot (except when the birds chorus at dawn) located just a stroll away from a good beach; it's home to resident eastern gray kangaroos. A campsite here costs A\$8 (US\$5.20) per tent in winter and A\$10 (US\$6.50) in summer and on public holidays, though at the time of writing moves were afoot to increase prices. It's about a 250m (about ¼ mile) walk from the parking lot to the campground. **Greenpatch** is more dirt than grass, but you get your own area

and it's suitable for campervans. It's infested with over-friendly possums around dusk. A camp spot here costs A\$13 (US\$8.45) in winter and A\$16 (US\$10) in summer.

Tips A Safety Warning

Jervis Bay is notorious for its car break-ins, a situation the local police force has been unable to control. If you park your car anywhere in the national park, remove all valuables, including things in the trunk.

For supplies, head to the area's main towns, **Huskisson** (pop. 930) and **Vincentia** (pop. 2,350). The **Huskisson RSL Club**, overlooking the wharf area on Owen Street (☎ 02/4441 5282), has a good bistro and a bar. You'll have to sign in inside

the main entrance. The Huskisson Hotel (also called the “Huskie Pub”) is just down the road and has a nice beer garden and cheapish meals at lunchtime.

Huskisson Beach Tourist Resort This resort is the very pinnacle of cabin accommodations on this part of the east coast. Cabins vary in price depending on size, but even the smallest has room enough for a double bed, triple bunks, and a small kitchen with microwave. Larger cabins have two separate bedrooms. There's a game room and barbecue facilities on the grounds.

Beach St., Huskisson, Jervis Bay, NSW 2540. ☎/fax 02/4441 5142. 38 units. Fri–Sat A\$75–A\$105 (US\$49–US\$68) cabin; Sun–Thurs A\$60–A\$95 (US\$39–US\$62) cabin. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool; tennis court; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

ULLADULLA

220km (136 miles) south of Sydney.

Very much a supply town on the south coast as well as a fishing center, especially for tuna, Ulladulla is a pleasant stopover on your journey south. This is also a good place to stock up on supplies from local supermarkets. On the outskirts of town (just to the south) are a series of saltwater lakes that make for good fishing, though you'll have competition from the pelicans. Inland is the giant **Morton National Park**, marked by the peak of Pigeonhouse Mountain. The 3- to 4-hour walk to the top and back starts at a parking lot a 30-minute drive from Ulladulla. The going is steep at first but levels out as it crosses a sandstone plateau. Another upward climb and you're rewarded with a magnificent view of peaks and ocean.

Several side roads worth exploring spur off between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay (see below). These lead to the tiny villages of Bawley Point and Kioloa, where holiday cottages nestle between isolated beaches, gum forests, and green patches studded with gray kangaroos.

There are more kangaroos at the pristine **Pebbly Beach** ★ in Murrumbidgee National Park, a short hop—20 minutes south—of Ulladulla. These furry creatures actually wander around the beach and adjacent campsite, or gather on the grassy dunes to graze. It's a good area for bird-watching, too.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Ulladulla is about a 3-hour drive from Sydney Central Business District down the Pacific Highway.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Ulladulla Visitors Centre**, Civic Center, Princes Highway, NSW 2539 (☎ 02/4455 1269; www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au), is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 5pm; Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Ulladulla is well known for its food (particularly seafood and beef) and wine. There are even a few boutique wineries in the area. For some of the best fish in Australia, head to one of the fish-and-chip shops on Wason Street, close to the harbor. The best of these is **Tiger Fish and Chips** (no phone). On the same street is **Torys Takeaway** (☎ 02/4454 0888), where you can buy good fish and chips on the ground floor at about a third of the price of the very nice restaurant above—**Torys Seafood Restaurant** (open in the evenings, same number)—and take them down to the harbor to eat amongst the seagulls.

Ulladulla Guest House ★★☆☆ This fabulous, award-winning property is one of the best places to stay in Australia. Run by the friendly Andrew and Elizabeth Nowosad—try to guess his accent—the Ulladulla Guest House is an impressive five-star establishment. It's surrounded by small but lovely tropical gardens—Andrew insists his coconut palms are the only ones this far south—and overlooks the harbor. Unusually, the house is also a registered art gallery, and the walls are festooned with paintings for sale. Past the cozy lounge are three types of rooms. Two self-contained units with private entrances to the garden are the lowest in price. The one-bedroom unit has a queen-size bed and a foldout sofa bed, and the two-bedroom unit has a double bed in one room, two singles in

another, and a double foldout sofa bed in the lounge. Luxury rooms have a queen-size bed, custom-made furniture, and original artwork. Executive rooms come with a marble bathroom and a private spa. There are three masseurs on standby.

39 Burrill St., Ulladulla, NSW 2539. ☎ **02/4455 1796**. Fax 02/4454 4660. www.guesthouse.com.au. 10 units. Weekdays A\$98 (US\$64), weekend and peak period A\$188 (US\$122) self-contained 1-bedroom unit; weekdays A\$120 (US\$78), weekend/peak A\$238 (US\$155) 2-bedroom unit; weekdays A\$118 (US\$77), weekend/peak A\$198 (US\$129) luxury units; weekdays A\$150 (US\$98), weekend/peak A\$238 (US\$155) executive units. Peak periods: public holidays, Easter, and Christmas school holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lagoon-style outdoor pool; golf course nearby; exercise room; spa; watersport rentals; bike rental; room service (7am–10pm); in-room massage; babysitting; free laundry room; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

BATEMANS BAY

275km (171 miles) S of Sydney

This laid-back holiday town offers good surfing beaches, arts-and-crafts galleries, boat trips up the Clyde River, good game fishing, and bushwalks in Morton and Deua national parks.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Batemans Bay is a 3- to 4-hour drive from Sydney, depending on the traffic. (Avoid leaving Sydney at rush hour, and prepare for long delays on holidays.) **Premier Motor Service** (☎ **1300/368 100** in Australia, or 02/4423 5233) runs coaches to Batemans Bay from Sydney's Central Station.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Batemans Bay Visitor Information Centre**, at the corner of Princes Highway and Beach Road (☎ **1800/802 528** in Australia, or 02/4472 6800), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

GAME FISHING & A RIVER CRUISE

If you fancy some serious fishing, contact **OB1 Charters**, Marina, Beach Road, Batemans Bay (☎ **1800/641 065** in Australia, 02/4471 2738, or 0416/241 586 mobile; www.southcoast.com.au/ob1). The company runs full-day game-fishing trips and morning snapper-fishing trips (afternoon snapper trips in summer, too). Expect to encounter black marlin, blue marlin, giant kingfish, mako sharks, albacore tuna, yellow-fin tuna, and blue tuna from November through June. The trip includes all tackle, bait, and afternoon and morning teas, but you must provide your own lunch. It costs A\$900 (US\$585) to hire the six-person boat (so it's worth booking way in advance with general dates in order to get other people to go with you and share the cost). Snapper (a nice-tasting fish) trips include all gear, bait, and morning or afternoon tea for A\$80 (US\$52) per person.

A river cruise on the **MV Merinda**, Innes Boatshed, Orient Street, Batemans Bay (☎ **02/4472 4052**; fax 02/4472 4754), is a pleasant experience. The 3-hour cruise leaves at 11:30am daily and travels inland past townships, forests, and farmland. It costs A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children, and A\$50 (US\$33) for families; a fish and chip lunch is A\$6 (US\$3.90) extra, and a seafood basket for two is A\$12 (US\$7.80).

A NICE PLACE TO STAY

The Bay Soldiers Esplanade Motor Inn ★ This four-star motel right on the Batemans Bay river estuary has fabulous views and is close to the town center. Rooms are light and well furnished, and all have balconies (some with water

views). Some doubles and suites have spas; they cost the same as non-spa rooms, so specify if you want one when booking. Eat at the hotel's restaurant or at the Batemans Bay Soldiers' Club just opposite, which has a restaurant, a bistro, cheap drinks, and a free evening kids club.

23 Beach Rd. (P.O. Box 202), Batemans Bay, NSW 2536. ☎ 1800/659 884 in Australia, or 02/4472 0200. Fax 02/4472 0277. www.esplanade.com.au/motel. 23 units. A\$107–A\$179 (US\$70–US\$116) double, depending on season, view, and spa; A\$156–A\$330 (US\$101–US\$215) suite. Extra person A\$12 (US\$7.80). Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood); laundry facilities; non-smoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

NAROOMA ★

345km (214 miles) from Sydney

Narooma is a seaside town with beautiful deserted beaches, a golf course right on a headland, a natural rock formation in the shape of Australia (popular with camera-wielding tourists), and excellent fishing. However, its major attraction is **Montague Island** ★★, the breeding colony for thousands of shearwaters (or mutton birds, as they're also called) and a hangout for juvenile seals.

Just 18km (11 miles) farther south is **Central Tilba** ★, one of the prettiest towns in Australia and the headquarters of the boutique **ABC Cheese Factory**. You'll kick yourself if you miss this charming historical township (pop. 35; 1 million visitors annually).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Narooma is a 7-hour drive from Sydney down the Princes Highway. **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 1300/368 100 in Australia, or 02/4423 5233) runs coaches to Narooma from Sydney's Central Station.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Narooma Visitors Centre**, Princes Highway, Narooma, NSW 2546 (☎ 02/4476 2881; fax 02/4476 1690; www.nature-coast-tourism.com.au), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO: WHALES, GOLF & MORE

A must if you're visiting the area is a boat tour with **Narooma Charters** (☎ 02/4476 2240; www.acr.net.au/~charters). It offers spectacular tours of the coast on the lookout for dolphins, seal colonies, and little penguins, and also includes a tour of Montague Island. Morning and afternoon tours take 3½ hours and cost A\$69 (US\$45) for adults, A\$50 (US\$33) for children, and A\$198 (US\$129) for families. A 4½-hour tour includes some of the world's best whale-watching (between mid-Sept and early Dec) and costs A\$89 (US\$58) for adults, A\$70 (US\$46) for children, and A\$299 (US\$194) for families. The last time I went on this trip we saw no fewer than eight humpback whales, some of them mothers with calves. An evening tour to see fairy penguins on Montague Island and a visit to the seal colony costs A\$69 (US\$45) for adults, A\$50 (US\$35) for children, and A\$198 (US\$128) for families. The company also offers game fishing from February to the end of June and scuba diving in the seal colonies from August to the end of December. You could also see giant fish-eating gray nurse sharks, dolphins, and even orcas. Dives cost A\$66 (US\$43) for a double dive, plus approximately A\$33 (US\$21) for gear rental.

Narooma Golf Club, Narooma (☎ 02/4476 2522), has one of the most interesting and challenging coastal courses in Australia. A round of golf will cost you A\$25 (US\$16).

While in the area I recommend stopping off at the **Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** ★, Wallaga Lake, off the Princes Highway on Bermagui Road

(☎ 02/4473 7232; umbarra@acr.net.au). The center offers activities such as boomerang and spear throwing, and painting with natural ochre for A\$6.25 (US\$4) per person, or A\$20 (US\$13) for a family. There are also discussions, Aboriginal archival displays, and a retail store. It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm (closed Sun in winter). The center's guides also offer 2- to 4-hour four-wheel-drive/walking trips of nearby **Mount Dromedary** 🦘 and **Mumbulla Mountain**, taking in sacred sites. The tours cost A\$45 (US\$29) per person. Reservations are essential.

If you want to attempt Mt. Dromedary without a guide, ask for directions in Narooma. The hike to the top takes around 3 hours.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Whale Motor Inn 🦘 This nice, quiet motor inn has the best panoramic ocean views on the south coast and the largest rooms in town. Standard rooms have a queen-size and a single-person sofa bed. Standard suites have a separate bedroom, two sofa beds, and a kitchenette. Executive and spa suites are very spacious, better furnished, and have a kitchenette and a large balcony or patio.

Princes Hwy., Narooma, NSW 2546. ☎ 02/4476 2411. Fax 02/4476 1995. www.whalemotorinn.com.au. 17 units. A\$90–A\$145 (US\$59–US\$94). Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor pool; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in all rooms except the cheapest), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

MERIMBULA

480km (298 miles) S of Sydney; 580km (360 miles) NE of Melbourne

This seaside resort (pop. approx. 7,000) is the last place of interest before the Princes Highway crosses the border into Victoria. Merimbula is a good center from which to discover the surrounding **Ben Boyd National Park** and **Mimosa Rocks National Park**; both offer bushwalking. Another park, **Bournda National Park**, is situated around a lake and has good walking trails and a surf beach.

Golf is the game of choice in Merimbula itself, and the area's most popular venue is the **Pambula-Merimbula Golf Club** (☎ 02/6495 6154), where you can spot kangaroos grazing on the fairways of the 27-hole course. It costs A\$14 (US\$9.10) for nine holes, or A\$25 (US\$16) for the day. Another favorite is **Tura Beach Country Club** (☎ 02/6495 9002), which is known for its excellent coastal views. A round of 18 holes costs A\$20 (US\$13).

Eden, 20km (12 miles) south of Merimbula, was once a major whaling port. The rather gruesome **Eden Killer Whale Museum**, on Imlay Street in Eden (☎ 02/6496 2094), is the only reason to stop here. It has a dubious array of relics, including boats, axes, and remnants of the last of the area's killer whales, called Old Tom. The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9:15am to 3:45pm, Sunday from 11:15am to 3:45pm. In January it's open daily from 9:15am to 4:45pm. Admission is A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) for adults and A\$1.50 (US\$1) for children. You can still see a scattering of whales off the coast in October and November.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The drive from either Sydney or Melbourne takes about 7 hours. The **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) bus trip from Sydney takes more than 8 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Merimbula Tourist Information Centre**, at Beach Street, Merimbula (☎ 1800/150 457 in Australia, or 02/6495 1129; fax 02/6495 1250), is open daily from 9am to 5pm (10am–4pm in winter).

SPECIAL EVENTS Jazz fans should head for the **Merimbula Jazz Festival** held over the long Queens Birthday weekend, the second weekend in June. A country-music festival takes place the last weekend in October.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Ocean View Motor Inn This pleasant motel has good water views from 12 of its rooms (the best are nos. 9, 10, and 11). The rooms are spacious and modern, with plain brick walls, patterned carpets, and one long balcony serving the top six rooms. Fourteen rooms have kitchenettes. All have showers. It's a friendly place. Breakfast is served to your room for A\$7.70 (US\$5) extra.

Merimbula Dr. and View St., Merimbula, NSW 2548. ☎ 02/6495 2300. Fax 02/6495 3443. www.oceanviewmotorinn.com.au. 20 units. A\$66–A\$120 (US\$43–US\$78) double (depending on season). Extra person A\$11 (US\$6.50). MC, V. **Amenities:** Medium-size solar-heated outdoor pool; limited room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker.

6 The Snowy Mountains: Australia's Ski Country ★

Thredbo: 519km (322 miles) SW of Sydney; 208km (129 miles) SW of Canberra; 543km (337 miles) NE of Melbourne

Made famous by Banjo Patterson's 1890 poem "The Man from Snowy River," the Snowy Mountains are most commonly used for what you'd least expect to happen in Australia—skiing. It starts to snow around June and carries on until September. During this time hundreds of thousands of people flock here to ski at the major ski resorts—Thredbo and Perisher Blue, and to a lesser extent Charlotte Pass and Mount Selwyn. It's certainly different skiing here, with ghostly white gums as the obstacles instead of pine trees.

The whole region is part of the **Kosciuszko** (pronounced ko-zi-os-co) **National Park**, the largest alpine area in Australia. During the summer months the park is a beautiful place for walking, and in spring the profusion of wildflowers is exquisite. A series of lakes in the area, including the one in the resort town of Jindabyne, are favorites with trout fishermen.

Visitors stay at **Jindabyne**, 62km (38 miles) south of Cooma, or **Thredbo Village**, 36km (22 miles) southwest of Jindabyne. Jindabyne is a bleak-looking resort town on the banks of the man-made Lake Jindabyne, which came into existence when the Snowy River was dammed to provide hydroelectric power.

Thredbo Village is set in a valley of Mt. Crackenback and resembles European-style resorts. From here, the Crackenback Chairlift provides easy access to an easy-grade pathway which leads to the top of Mt. Kosciuszko, which at 2,228m (7,308 ft.) is Australia's highest peak. The mountain has stunning views of the alpine region and some good walks.

SNOWY MOUNTAIN ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Sydney, take the Eastern Distributor road towards Sydney Airport and turn right just before the planes, following the signs to Wollongong and then Canberra, via the M5 motorway and the Hume Highway. Follow the Hume Highway south to Goulburn, where you turn onto the Federal Highway toward Canberra. From there take the Monaro Highway to Cooma, then follow the Alpine Way through Jindabyne and on to Thredbo. Chains may have to be used on the slopes in winter and can be rented from local service stations. The trip takes around 6 hours from Sydney with short breaks.

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) has daily flights from Sydney to Cooma. A connecting bus to the ski fields takes about 1 hour and

is available June through October. It's run by **Snowy Mountain Hire Cars** (☎ 02/6456 2957) and costs A\$48 (US\$31) one-way.

In winter only (from around June 19–Oct 5), **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) operates daily buses between Sydney and Cooma, via Canberra. The journey takes around 7 hours from Sydney and 3 from Canberra. A one-way ticket costs A\$50 (US\$33).

VISITOR INFORMATION Pick up information about the ski fields and accommodations options either at the **Cooma Visitors Centre**, 119 Sharp St., Cooma, NSW 2630 (☎ 02/6450 1740; fax 02/6450 1798), or at the **Snowy Region Visitor Centre**, Kosciuszko Road, Jindabyne, NSW 2627 (☎ 02/6450 5600; fax 02/6456 1249; srcv@npws.nsw.gov.au).

HITTING THE SLOPES & OTHER ADVENTURES

Obviously, skiing is the most popular activity here. More than 50 ski lifts serve the fields of Perisher Valley, Mt. Blue Cow, Smiggins Holes, and Guthega. Perisher Valley offers the best overall slopes; Mt. Blue Cow is generally very crowded; Smiggins Holes offers good slopes for beginners; and Guthega has nice light, powdery snow and is less crowded. Thredbo has some very challenging runs and the longest downhill runs, but I still prefer Perisher for atmosphere. A day's ski pass costs around A\$77 (US\$50) for adults and A\$42 (US\$27) for children.

A ski-tube train midway between Jindabyne and Thredbo on the Alpine Way travels through the mountains to Perisher Valley and then to Blue Cow. It costs A\$15 (US\$9.75) a day for adult skiers and A\$9 (US\$5.85) for child skiers; A\$30 (US\$20) for non-skiing adults and A\$17 (US\$11) for non-skiing children. Prices are cheaper in summer. Ski gear can be rented at numerous places in Jindabyne and Thredbo.

In summer, the region is popular for hiking, canoeing, fishing, and golf. Thredbo Village has tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, and mountain-bike trails.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

You'll have to book months ahead to find a place during the ski season (especially on weekends). And don't expect to find a lot of bargains. The **Kosciuszko Accommodation Centre**, Nuggets Crossing, Jindabyne, NSW 2627 (☎ 1800/026 354 in Australia, or 02/6456 2022; fax 02/6456 2945), can help find and book accommodations in the area. Other private agents who can help find you a spot for the night include **The Snowy Mountains Reservation Centre** (☎ 02/6456 2633) and the **Thredbo Resort Centre** (☎ 1800/020 622 in Australia).

Super cheap beds are offered by the **Thredbo YHA Lodge**, Jack Adams Pathway, Thredbo (☎ 02/6457 6043; www.yha.com.au). Dorms cost A\$23 (US\$15) and twins \$42 (US\$27). There's a ballot in April for places here during the ski season.

IN THREDBO

Riverside Cabins These fully self-contained studio and one-bedroom cabins are above the Thredbo River and overlook the Crackenback Range. They're also

Tips **Ski Condition Updates**

For up-to-date ski field information, call the **Snowy Region Visitor Centre** (☎ 02/6450 5600).

Moments In the Footsteps of the Man from Snowy River

Horseback riding is a popular activity for all those wanting to ride like the "Man from Snowy River." **Reynella Kosciuszko Rides**, located in Adamanaby, 44km (27 miles) northwest of Cooma (☎ 1800/029 909 in Australia, or 02/6454 2386; fax 02/6454 2530; reynellarides.com.au), offers multi-night rides through the Kosciuszko National Park from October to the end of April. Three-day/4-night rides cost A\$799 (US\$519), and 5-day/6-night rides A\$1,207 (US\$784). Transfers from Cooma cost A\$33 (US\$21) each way. The trips are all-inclusive and include camping and homestead accommodations. Shorter rides are offered by **Jindabyne Trail Rides** (☎ 02/6456 2421; fax 02/6456 1254). Gentle, 1½-hour rides on the slopes above Jindabyne cost A\$25 (US\$16) per person.

a short walk from the Thredbo Alpine Hotel and local shops. Most rooms have balconies. Rates vary wildly from weekday to weekend and season, so check before you come here.

Thredbo, NSW 2625. ☎ 1800/026 333 in Australia, or 02/6459 4299. Fax 02/6459 4195. 36 units. Winter A\$160–A\$516 (US\$104–US\$335) double. Summer A\$117–\$164 (US\$76–US\$107) double. Ask about weekly rates. AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* TV, kitchen, laundry, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Thredbo Alpine Apartments These apartments are very similar to the Riverside Cabins (see above) and are managed by the same people. All have balconies with mountain views. Some have queen-size beds. There's a limited daily maid service and in-house movies.

Thredbo, NSW 2628. ☎ 1800/026 333 in Australia, or 02/6459 4299. Fax 02/6459 4195. 35 units. Winter weekends A\$210–A\$441 (US\$137–US\$287) 1-bedroom apt; A\$289–A\$628 (US\$188–US\$408) 2-bedroom apt; A\$394–A\$770 (US\$256–US\$500) 3-bedroom apt; midweek rates approx. 20% cheaper. Higher rates apply July 30–Sept 2. Summer A\$127–A\$164 (US\$83–US\$107) 1-bedroom apt; A\$159–A\$190 (US\$103–US\$124) 2-bedroom apt; A\$180–A\$210 (US\$117–US\$137) 3-bedroom apt. Ask about weekly rates. AE, DC, MC, V. Undercover parking. *In room:* TV, kitchen, laundry, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Thredbo Alpine Hotel The center of activity in Thredbo after the skiing is finished for the day is this large resort-style lodge. Rooms vary; those on the top floor of the three-story hotel have a king-size bed instead of a standard queen. The rooms are all wood-paneled. Thredbo's only nightclub is here. There's also a pool, sauna, and spa.

P.O. Box 80, Thredbo, NSW 2625. ☎ 02/6459 4200. Fax 02/6459 4201. www.thredbo.com.au. 65 units. Winter A\$198–A\$498 (US\$129–US\$324) double. Summer A\$129–A\$189 (US\$84–US\$123) double. Ask about weekly rates and packages. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bistro; 4 bars; outdoor pool; golf course nearby; 3 lit tennis courts; spa; sauna; tour desk; massage; room service (winter only); coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV/VCR with in-house movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

7 Outback New South Wales

The Outback is a powerful Australian image. Hot, dusty, and prone to flies, it can also be a romantic place where wedge-tailed eagles float in the shimmering heat while you scan the unbroken horizon in all directions. If you drive out here, you have to be constantly on the lookout for emus, large flightless birds that dart open-beaked and wide-eyed across roads. When you turn off the car engine, it's so quiet you can hear the scales of a sleepy lizard, as long as your forearm, scraping the rumpled track as it turns to taste the air with its long, blue tongue.

The scenery is a huge canvas with a restricted palette; blood red for the dirt, straw yellow for the blotches of Mitchell grass, a searing blue for the surreally large sky. There is room to be yourself in the Outback, and you'll soon find that personalities often tilt toward the eccentric. It's a hard-working place, too, where miners and farmers try to eke out a living in Australia's hard center.

BROKEN HILL ★★

1,157km (717 miles) W of Sydney; 508km (315 miles) NE of Adelaide

At heart, Broken Hill—or “Silver City” as it's been nicknamed—is still very much a hard-working, hard-drinking mining town. Its beginnings date back to 1883 when the trained eye of a boundary rider named Charles Rasp noticed something odd about the craggy rock outcrops at a place called the Broken Hill. Today, the city's main drag, Argent Street, bristles with finely crafted colonial mansions, Heritage homes, hotels, and public buildings. Look deeper and you see the town's quirkiness. Around one corner you'll find the radio station built to resemble a giant wireless set with round knobs for windows, and around another the headquarters of the Housewives Association, which ruled the town with an iron apron for generations. Then there's the Palace Hotel—made famous in the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*—with its high painted walls and a mural of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* on the ceiling two flights up.

Traditionally a hard-drinking but religious town, Broken Hill has 23 pubs (down from 73 in its heyday) and plenty of churches, as well as a Catholic cathedral, a synagogue, and a mosque to serve its 21,000 inhabitants.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** Take the Great Western Highway from Sydney to Dubbo, then the Mitchell Highway to the Barrier Highway, which will take you to Broken Hill. **Southern Australian Airlines** (book through Qantas, ☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) also connects Broken Hill to Adelaide, Melbourne, and Mildura.

The *Indian Pacific* train stops here on its way to Perth twice a week. The fare from Sydney is A\$415 (US\$270) for adults and A\$283 (US\$184) for children in a first-class sleeper, A\$329 (US\$214) for adults and A\$198 (US\$129) for children in an economy sleeper, and A\$117 (US\$76) for adults and A\$53 (US\$34) for children in an economy seat. Call **Great Southern Railways** (☎ 08/8213 4530) for more information and bookings, or check out the timetables and fares on their website (www.gsr.com.au).

Greyhound-Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia; www.greyhound.com.au) runs buses from Adelaide for A\$58 (US\$38); the trip takes 7 hours. The 16-hour trip from Sydney costs from A\$93 (US\$60).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Broken Hill Visitors Information Centre**, at Blende and Bromide streets, Broken Hill, NSW 2880 (☎ 08/8087 6077; fax 08/8088 5209; www.murrayoutback.org.au; tourist@pcpro.net.au), is open daily from 8:30am to 5pm. The **National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)** office is at 183 Argent St. (☎ 08/8088 5933), and the **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia**, which offers reciprocal services to other national and international auto-club members, is at 261 Argent St. (☎ 08/8088 4999).

Note: The area code in Broken Hill is **08**, the same as the South Australia code, not 02, the New South Wales code.

GETTING AROUND Silver City Tours, 380 Argent St. (☎ 08/80873144), conducts tours of the city and surrounding Outback. City tours take around 4 hours and cost A\$45 (US\$26) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for children. They also offer a range of other tours of the area.

Broken Hill Corner Country Adventure Tours (☎ 08/8087 5142; www.cornercountryadventure.com.au) operates several small group tours into the desert from Broken Hill, staying in rural properties and bush pubs. The regular 4-day/3-night Corner Country Tour takes in a sheep station, White Cliffs, Mootwingee, and the red-sand Sturt National Park. It costs A\$850 (US\$552) all-inclusive. Other offerings include a 5-day trip to the Flinders Ranges and Lake Eyre—usually a vast dry bowl of clay, which sometimes floods—for A\$1,235 (US\$803); and an 8-day Birdsville and Outback tour, May through October, stopping off at the very impressive red sand dunes on the edge of the Simpson Desert, as well as the one-camel bush towns of Birdsville, Marree, and Innamincka in South Australia. This costs A\$1,790 (US\$1,163).

Another recommended small group tour operator, **Goanna Safari** (☎ 08/8087 6057; www.goanna-safari.com.au), offers personalized tours of the Outback from Broken Hill, and a range of regular camping (with good camp beds and cooking fires) or accommodated tours. Among them is a 3-day/2-night trip to Mootwingee, White Cliffs, and Menindee Lakes, where giant dams on the Darling River bristle with the half-drowned skeletons of gum trees and flutter with numerous species of wading birds, pelicans, and ducks. This trip costs A\$656 camping and A\$694 (US\$450) accommodated. Also on the agenda is a 3-day trip to Minindee, Kinchega National Park, and Lake Mungo, a dry lake famous for the 45,000-year-old skeletons and artifacts discovered here, as well as for a semicircle of huge sand dunes and shimmering white cliffs known as the Walls of China. This costs A\$582 (US\$378) camping and A\$694 (US\$452) accommodated.

Hertz (☎ 08/8087 2719; fax 08/8087 4838) rents 4WD vehicles suitable for exploring the area.

EXPLORING THE TOWN: GALLERIES, A MINE TOUR & THE WORLD'S LARGEST SCHOOLROOM

With the largest regional public gallery in New South Wales and 27 private galleries, Broken Hill has more places per capita to see art than anywhere else in Australia. The **Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery**, Chloride Street, between Blende and Beryl streets (☎ 08/8088 5491), houses an extensive collection of Australian colonial and Impressionist works. Look for the *Silver Tree*, a sculpture created out of the pure silver mined from beneath Broken Hill. This is also a good place to see works by the “Brushmen of the Bush,” a well-known group of artists, including Pro Hart, Jack Absalom, Eric Minchin, and Hugh Schultz, who spend many hours sitting around campfires in the bush trying to capture its essence in paint. The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children, and A\$6 (US\$3.90) for families.

Other galleries worth visiting around town include **Absalom's Gallery**, 638 Chapple St. (☎ 08/8087 5881), and the **Pro Hart Gallery**, 108 Wyman St. (☎ 08/8087 2441). All are open daily. Pro Hart's gallery is really worth a look. Apart from his own works—including works based on incidents and scenes relating to Broken Hill—his gallery is crammed with everything from a bas-relief of Salvador Dalí to a landscape by Claude Monet.

Fun Fact What Time Is It, Anyway?

Broken Hill runs its clocks to Central Standard Time, to correspond with South Australia. The surrounding country, however, runs half an hour faster at Eastern Standard Time.

To get a real taste of mining in Broken Hill, take an underground tour at **Delpat's Mine** (☎ 08/8088 1604). Visitors go 120m (394 ft.) below the surface. Children under 6 are not allowed. Tours run Monday through Friday at 10:30am and Saturday at 2pm. The 2-hour tour costs A\$23 (US\$15) for adults and A\$18 (US\$12) for children.

Be sure not to miss the **School of the Air** and the **Royal Flying Doctor Service base**, both of which help show the enormity of the Australian interior. The School of the Air—the largest schoolroom in the world, with students scattered over 800,000 sq. km (312,000 sq. miles)—conducts lessons via two-way radios. Visitors can listen in on part of the day's first teaching session Monday through Friday at 8:30am (except public holidays). Bookings are essential and must be made through the **Broken Hill Visitors Information Centre** (see "Visitor Information" above). Tours cost A\$2 (US\$1.30) per person. The **Royal Flying Doctor Service base** is at the Broken Hill Airport (☎ 08/8080 1777). The service maintains communication with more than 400 Outback stations, ready to fly at once in case of an emergency. The base at Broken Hill covers 25% of New South Wales, as well as parts of Queensland and South Australia. Continuous explanatory lessons are held at the base Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Admission is A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults, free for children.

OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO NEARBY

VISITING A GHOST TOWN At least 44 movies have been filmed in the Wild West town of **Silverton** ★ (pop. 50), 23km (14 miles) northwest of Broken Hill. It's the Wild West Australian-style, though, with camels instead of horses sometimes placed in front of the **Silverton Pub**, which is well worth a visit for its kitschy Australian appeal. Silverton once had a population of 3,000 following the discovery of silver here in 1882, but within 7 years almost everyone had left. There are some good art galleries here, as well as a restored jail and hotel.

DISCOVERING ABORIGINAL HANDPRINTS **Mutawintji National Park** (also known and pronounced by its old name, Mootwingee) ★, 130km (81 miles) northeast of Broken Hill, was one of the most important spiritual meeting places for Aborigines on the continent. Groups came from all over to peck out abstract engravings on the rocks with sharpened quartz tools and to sign their handprints to show they belonged to the place. The ancient, weathered fireplaces are still here, laid out like a giant map to show where each visiting group came from. Hundreds of ochre outlines of hands and animal paws, some up to 30,000 years old, are stenciled on rock overhangs. The fabulous 2-hour Outback trip from Broken Hill to Mootwingee is along red-dirt tracks not really suitable for two-wheel-drives and should not be attempted after a heavy rain.

Mootwingee Heritage Tours (☎ 08/8088 7000) organizes inspections of the historical sites every Wednesday and Saturday morning at 10:30am Broken Hill time (11am Mootwingee, or Eastern Standard, time). The tours may be

canceled in very hot weather. The **NPWS office** in Broken Hill (☎ 08/8088 5933) also has details. You can camp at the **Homestead Creek** campground for A\$11 (US\$7.15) a night. It has its own water supply.

EXPLORING WHITE CLIFFS ★★ White Cliffs, 290km (180 miles) east of Broken Hill, is an opal-mining town bigger than it looks. Unlike Lightning Ridge (below), which produces mainly black opals, White Cliffs is known for its less valuable white opals (as is Coober Pedy in South Australia). To escape the summer heat, most houses are built underground in mine shafts, where the temperature is a constant 73°F (23°C). Prospecting started in 1889, when kangaroo shooters found the colorful stones on the ground. A year later the rush was on, and by the turn of the 20th century about 4,000 people were digging and sifting in a lawless, waterless hell of a place. White Cliffs is smaller than Coober Pedy and less touristy—which is its great charm. You also have a lot more freedom to wander around the old opal tailings here, whereas in Coober Pedy they discourage it. However, given the choice between White Cliffs and Lightning Ridge (below), I'd opt for the latter (though if you have time you should see both).

If you fancy an after-hours round of golf in the dirt (and who doesn't?), contact the secretary of the **White Cliffs Golf Club**, John Painter (☎ 08/8091 6715 after hours). He'll be happy to supply you with a golf club or two and a couple of balls for A\$2 (US\$1.30). Otherwise, put A\$2 (US\$1.30) in the black box at the first tee if you have your own clubs—but be warned, bush playing can damage your clubs, and crows often make off with the balls. Visitors can play day or night, but if you want some company, come on Sunday when club members shoot it out.

Today, the countryside looks like an inverted moonscape, pimpled with bone-white heaps of gritty clay dug from the 50,000 mine shafts that surround the town. These days, White Cliffs is renowned for its eccentricity. Take **Jock's Place**, for instance, an underground museum full to the beams with junk pulled from old mine shafts. Then there's a house made of beer flagons and a nine-hole **dirt golf course** where locals play at night with fluorescent green golf balls.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD: ABOVEGROUND & BELOW

One option is to rent a local cottage from **Broken Hill Historic Cottages** (☎ 08/8087 9966) for A\$80 (US\$52) a night.

Broken Hill Overlander Motor Inn This is my favorite place to stay in Broken Hill, although admittedly that's not really saying much in this Outback town. It's set way back from the road, has nice green areas and barbecue facilities, and is very quiet. The more expensive four-star-rated rooms are much nicer than the cheaper variants, and considerably larger. Two family rooms sleep up to

Finds A Fabulous Place to Enjoy the Sunset

Just outside Broken Hill in the **Living Desert Nature Park** is one of the best collections of sculptures this side of Stonehenge. Twelve sandstone obelisks, up to 3m (10 ft.) high and carved totem-like by artists from as far away as Georgia, Syria, Mexico, and the Tiwi Islands, make up the Sculpture Symposium. Surrounding them on all sides is brooding mulga scrub. It's fantastic at sunset.

six in a combination of single and queen-size beds. You can order from several menus supplied by local restaurants, with the hotel supplying plates and cutlery.

142 Iodide St., Broken Hill, NSW 2880. ☎ 08/8088 2566. Fax 08/8088 4377. www.bestwestern.com.au/overlander. Reservations can be made through Best Western (☎ 800/780-7234 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/39 3130 in the U.K., 0800/237 893 in New Zealand, or 13 17 79 in Australia). 15 units. A\$85–A\$135 (US\$55–US\$88) double; A\$135 (US\$88) 2-bed unit. Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small pool; sauna; tour desk; laundry service; dry cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

Mario the Palace Hotel  With its high painted walls, a mural of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* on the ceiling two flights up, and an office crammed with stuffed animal heads and crabs, the Palace Hotel is an intriguing sanctuary for the night. The owners have put a lot of work into restoring the place. The more expensive doubles are larger and come with a small lounge area, but all are comfortable and cool. Ten double rooms come with an attached shower. The Priscilla Suite is famous because that's where the transvestites stayed in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Mario owned the place for "donkey's years," as he says, but he's now retired. It's still run by his family.

227 Argent St., Broken Hill, NSW 2880. ☎ 08/8088 1699. Fax 08/8087 6240. mariospalace@bigpond.com. 51 units, 10 with bathroom. A\$44 (US\$29) double without bathroom; A\$53–A\$70 (US\$35–US\$46) double with bathroom. Priscilla suite \$90 (US\$59) for 2. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Dining room; bar. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

Underground Motel  I love this place; it's worth making the scenic trip out to White Cliffs just to stay here for the night. All but two of the rooms are underground; they're reached by a maze of spacious tunnels dug out of the rock and sealed with epoxy-resin to keep out the damp and the dust. The temperature below ground is a constant 72°F (22°C), which is decidedly cooler than a summer day outside. Rooms are comfortable though basic, and toilets and showers are shared. Turn the light off, and it's dark as a cave. Every night guests sit around large tables and dig into the roast of the day. (Vegetarians are catered to, also.)

Smiths Hill, White Cliffs (P.O. Box 427), NSW 2836. ☎ 1800/021 154 in Australia, or 08/8091 6677. Fax 08/8091 6654. 30 units, none with bathroom. A\$83 (US\$54) double. Extra person A\$24 (US\$16). A\$25 (US\$16) 3-course meal. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small outdoor pool; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms.

WHERE TO DINE

The best place for a meal Aussie-style is at one of the local clubs. You'll find one of the best bistros at the **Barrier Social & Democratic Club**, at 218 Argent St. (☎ 08/8088 4477). It serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There's also a host of Chinese restaurants around town, including the **Oceania Chinese Restaurant** on Argent Street (☎ 08/8087 3695), which has a A\$7 (US\$4.55) lunch special.

LIGHTNING RIDGE: OPALS GALORE

793 (492 miles) NW of Sydney; 737km (457 miles) SW of Brisbane

Lightning Ridge, or "The Ridge" as the locals call it, is perhaps the most fascinating place to visit in all of New South Wales. Essentially, it's a hard-working opal-mining town stuck out in the arid far northern reaches of New South Wales—where summer temperatures hover around the 113°F (45°C) mark. Lightning Ridge thrives off the largest deposit of black opal in the world. Good quality opals can fetch a miner around A\$8,000 (US\$5,200) per carat, and stones worth upwards of A\$500,000 (US\$325,000) each are not unheard of. Tourists come here to get a taste of life in Australia's "Wild West." A popular

tourist activity in the opal fields is to pick over the old heaps of mine tailings. Stories (perhaps tall tales) abound of tourists finding overlooked opals worth thousands.

I strongly recommend you visit the **Grawin and Glengarry opal fields** ★★, both about an hour or so from Lightning Ridge on a dirt track suitable for two-wheel-drive cars in dry weather only. (Check with the Tourist Information Centre before you go.) These full-on frontier townships are bristling with drills and hoists pulling out bucket-loads of dirt and buzzing with news of the latest opal rush. If you can convince a local to take you there, all the better, as the tracks can be misleading. **Ando's Outback Tours** (see "Byron Bay: A Beach Bohemia" earlier in this chapter) takes in Glengarry and Lightning Ridge on its 5-day trip.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Sydney it takes about 9 hours to drive to Lightning Ridge, via Bathurst, Dubbo, and the fascinating town of Walgett. **Airlink** (☎ 02/6884 2435) flies to Lightning Ridge from Sydney via Dubbo.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Lightning Ridge Tourist Information Centre** on Morilla Street, P.O. Box 1779, Lightning Ridge, NSW 2834 (☎ 02/6829 0565; fax 02/6829 0565. On weekends call 02/6829 0429, or email lrinfo@walgettshire.com), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4pm.

SPECIAL EVENTS If you're in Australia around Easter, make sure you come to Lightning Ridge for the **Great Goat Race** and the rodeo. An okay website is www.lightningridge.net.au.

SEEING THE TOWN

Any visit to Lightning Ridge should start with an orientation trip with **Black Opal Tours** (☎ 02/6829 0368; fax 02/6829 1206). The company offers a 5-hour tour of the opal fields for A\$70 (US\$46) per person. Three-hour morning tours cost A\$35 (US\$23), and slightly shorter afternoon tours A\$30 (US\$20).

Among the many points of interest is the 15m (49-ft.) tall homemade **Amigo's Castle**, which dominates the worked-out opal fields surrounding the modern township of Lightning Ridge. Complete with turrets, battlements, dungeons, and a wishing well, the castle has been rising out of these arid lands for the past 17 years, with every rock scavenged from the surrounding area and lugged in a wheelbarrow or in a rucksack on Amigo's back. The wonderful Amigo hasn't taken out insurance on the property, so there are no official tours, though if he feels like a bit of company he'll show you around.

The **Artesian Bore Baths**, 2km (1¼ mile) from the post office on Pandora Street, are free, open 24 hours a day, and said to have therapeutic value. The water temperature hovers between 104°F and 122°F (40°C–50°C). A visit at night when the stars are out is amazing.

The **Bevan's Black Opal & Cactus Nursery** (☎ 02/6829 0429) contains more than 2,000 species of cactus and succulent plants, including rare specimens. Betty Bevan cuts opals from the family's mine, and many are on display. Admission is A\$4 (US\$2.60) to the cactus nursery, but free to see her opals.

There are plenty of opal shops, galleries, walk-in opal mines, and other distinctly unique things to see in Lightning Ridge. You might want to take a look at **Gemopal Pottery** (☎ 02/6829 0375), on the road to the Bore Baths. The resident potter makes some nice pots out of clay mine tailings and lives in one of his five old Sydney railway carriages.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

An interesting addition to the Lightning Ridge hotel scene is the **Lightning Ridge Hotel/Motel** (☎ 02/6829 0304; www.lightning-ridge-hotel-motel.com), set on 4 hectares (10 acres) of Australian bush, complete with birdbath to attract the native parrots. There are 40 log cabins here as well as a caravan park (for your own caravan or motor home) and camping sites. Cabins cost A\$46 (US\$30) without bathroom, and A\$52 (US\$34) with a bathroom, and motel rooms A\$60 (US\$39) for a double, A\$80 (US\$52) for a triple, and A\$122 (US\$79) for a quad. If you want to stay at the Glengarry opal fields, then your only option is at the **Glengarry Hilton**, a rustic Outback pub (not associated with the major hotel chain). Here you stay in mobile units sleeping 24. A night costs A\$12 (US\$7.80).

The Wallangulla Motel My choice of the four motels in town, the Wallangulla offers two standards of rooms, the cheaper ones being in an older section of the property. Newer rooms are better furnished and generally nicer; they're worth the extra money. Two large family rooms each have two bedrooms and a living room; one has a spa bath. Guests can use the barbecue facilities, and there is an arrangement with the bowling club across the road for meals there to be charged back to your room. The Bowling Club has a restaurant with pretty good food and a very cheap bistro.

Morilla St. (at Agate St.), Lightning Ridge, NSW 2834. ☎ 02/6829 0542. Fax 02/6829 0070. www.wj.com.au/wallangulla. 43 units. A\$55–A\$85 (US\$36–US\$55) double; A\$75–A\$95 (US\$49–US\$62) triple; A\$95–A\$110 (US\$62–US\$72) family room with spa. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, coffeemaker.

Brisbane

by Lee Mylne

Queensland's capital, set along the banks of the wide brown Brisbane River, is relaxed and laid-back. The city has grown up in recent years, assured of its attractions and confident of its appeal. It's one of those places that people don't always appreciate until they spend some time there, but which gives a welcome as warm as the weather. Green and leafy, it has huge Moreton Bay fig trees to give shade, and in the summer the purple haze of jacarandas competes with the blaze of poinciana trees in bloom. Palm trees sway, and a mango tree in the backyard is almost *de rigueur*.

Major commercial tourist attractions, such as theme parks, are all south of the city in the Brisbane–Gold Coast corridor. Brisbane folk don't see that as a drawback. They'll urge you to discover the delights of a city rich in history and character and get to know the locals . . . it's easy, as Queenslanders will strike up a conversation with just about anyone.

Brisbane (pronounced *Briz-bun*) is renowned for its timber “Queenslander” cottages and houses, set high on stumps to catch the breeze, with wide shady verandas. In some inner city sections, Queenslanders have been

converted to trendy cafes and restaurants, or into shops.

In the city center, gracious colonial sandstone buildings stand next to modern glass towers. Wander in the city botanic gardens, in-line skate or bike along the riverfront, have a cool drink in a pub beer garden, or get out on the river on a CityCat high-speed ferry. There are several bridges across the river, the most famous and attractive being the Story Bridge. Take a stroll across the new Goodwill Bridge, for pedestrians and cyclists only, from South Bank to the City Gardens. On weekends, browse in the handcraft markets, listen to the buskers, and people-watch. You can even cool off at a man-made beach. There's a lot of free entertainment, and plenty to keep you busy. Getting around is cheap, good food—including fantastic seafood—is abundant, and accommodations are affordable, especially in some comfortable and elegant bed-and-breakfasts.

Brisbane is on the southern coast of the state, with the Sunshine Coast less than 2 hours drive to the north, and the Gold Coast an hour to the south. The Brisbane River flows into Moreton Bay, which is dotted with islands that offer their own delights.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING

BY PLANE About 20 international airlines fly into **Brisbane International Airport** from Europe, Asia, and New Zealand, including Qantas, Air New Zealand, Singapore Airlines, Thai International, Malaysia Airlines, and Cathay Pacific. From North America you will likely fly to Sydney and connect on one

of several direct flights on Qantas, or fly direct from Auckland, in New Zealand. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) operates daily flights from state capitals, Cairns, and several other regional towns. No-frills **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) offers cheaper fares and services from all capital cities as well as Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and the Gold Coast in Queensland, Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, and Launceston in Tasmania.

Brisbane International Airport is 16km (10 miles) from the city, and the domestic terminal is 2km (1¼ miles) farther away. The Arrivals Floor, on Level 2, has an information desk open to meet all flights, help with flight inquiries, dispense tourist information, and make hotel bookings, and a check-in counter for passengers transferring to domestic flights. Traveler **currency-exchange bureaus** are located on both the departures and arrivals floors. **Avis** (☎ 07/3860 4200), **Budget** (☎ 07/3860 4466), **Hertz** (☎ 07/3860 4522), and **Thrifty** (☎ 1300/367 227) have desks on Level 2; in the airport there is also a free call-board connecting you to smaller local car-rental companies that may offer better rates. Free showers and baby change rooms are located on levels 2, 3, and 4; Level 4 has an ATM.

The domestic terminal has a Traveler currency-exchange bureau, showers, and the big four car-rental desks. (Call the telephone numbers above.) An inter-terminal shuttle runs every 15 to 20 minutes and is free if you have an airline ticket; if not, the cost is A\$2.70 (US\$1.75). You can also catch Airtrain, which costs A\$3 (US\$1.95).

Due to current security measures, lockers at both airport terminals are only available by contacting airport staff. Details are posted on the lockers, which cost A\$6 to A\$11 (US\$3.90–US\$7.15) for 24 hours.

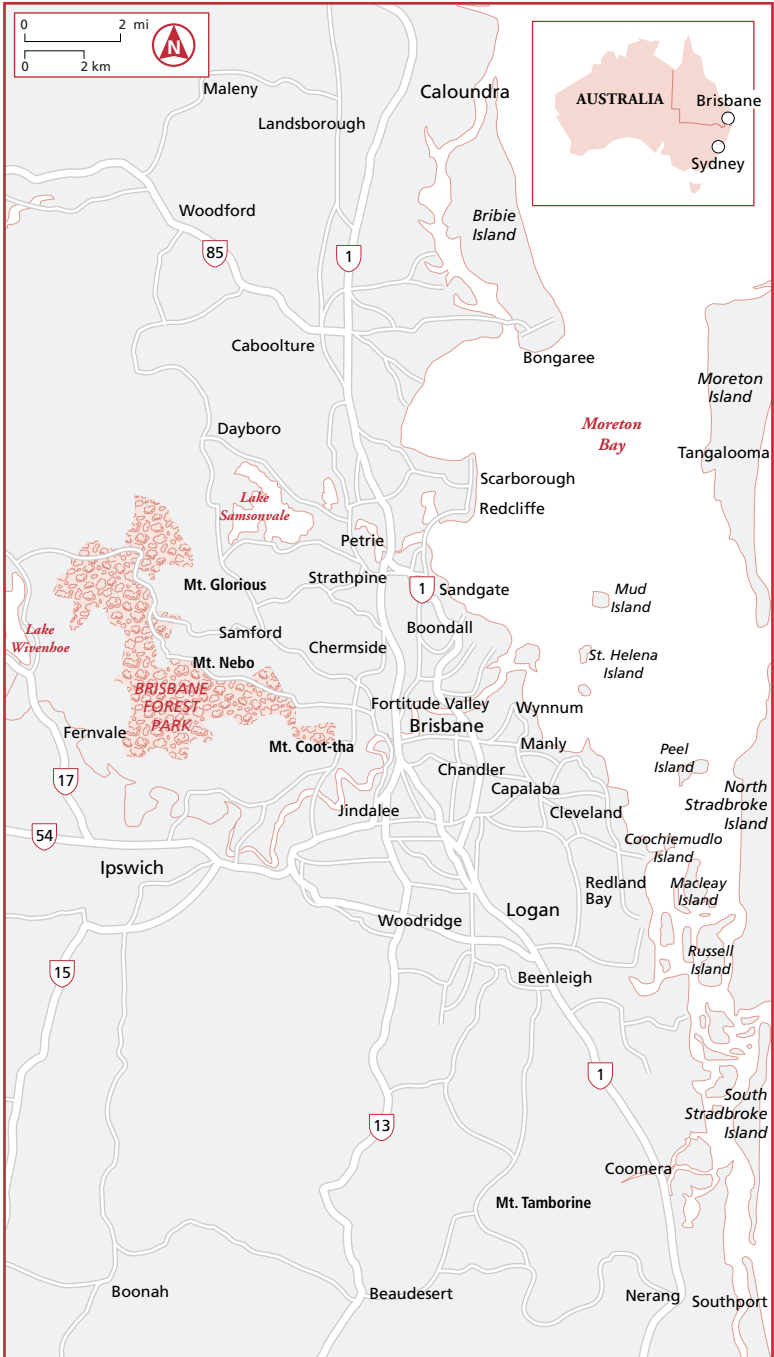
Coachtrans (☎ 07/3860 6999; www.coachtrans.com.au) runs a shuttle between the airport and Roma Street Transit Centre every 15 minutes from 5am to 7:30pm and every 30 minutes from 7:30 to 10pm. The cost is A\$9 (US\$5.85) per person one-way or A\$11 (US\$7.15) for hotel drop-off. Return fare is A\$15 (US\$9.75) or A\$17 (US\$11). Family tickets are A\$24 (US\$16) or A\$29 (US\$19) one-way. The trip takes about 40 minutes, reservations not needed. No public buses serve the airport. A taxi to the city costs around A\$20 (US\$13) from the international terminal and A\$25 (US\$16) from the domestic terminal, plus A\$2 (US\$1.30) for departing taxis.

BY TRAIN **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland; www.qr.com.au) operates several long-distance trains to Brisbane from Cairns. The fast new Tilt Train takes about 25 hours and costs A\$280 (US\$182) for a business class fare. The slower Sunlander takes 32 hours and costs A\$187 (US\$122) for a sitting

The Train from the Plane

Airtrain (☎ 07/3211 2855; www.airtrain.com.au), a rail link between the city and Brisbane's domestic and international airport terminals, runs every 15 minutes from 5:30am to 11:30pm daily, with a fare from Central Station to the airport costing A\$9 (US\$5.85) adults, A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) children ages 4 to 14, or A\$22 (US\$14) for a group of 4 (only from airport stations) and taking about 20 minutes. Airtrain also links the airport with the Gold Coast, twice an hour, a 90-minute trip that costs A\$20 (US\$13).

Greater Brisbane



berth, A\$235 (US\$153) for an economy-class sleeper, A\$352 (US\$229) for a first-class sleeper, or A\$646 (US\$420) for the all-inclusive Queenslander class. **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) runs daily train service to Brisbane from Sydney. The 14-hour trip from Sydney costs A\$110 to A\$154 (US\$72–US\$100) in a sitting berth, and A\$231 (US\$150) for a sleeper. Be sure to book the through-service; some services transfer to coach in Murwillumbah, south of the border, tacking an extra 2 hours to the trip. This train/coach service has no sleepers.

All intercity and interstate trains pull into **Brisbane Transit Centre at Roma Street** (in the city center), often called the Roma Street Transit Centre. From here, most city and Spring Hill hotels are a few blocks' walk or a quick cab ride away. The Transit Centre has food outlets, showers, tourist information, and lockers.

Queensland Rail CityTrain (☎ 13 12 30 in Queensland) provides daily train service from the Sunshine Coast, and plentiful services from the Gold Coast.

BY BUS All intercity and interstate coaches pull into the Brisbane Transit Centre (see "By Train" above). **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia; www.mccaffertys.com.au) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia, or 07/3258 1670; www.greyhound.com.au) serve the city several times daily. A one-way Cairns–Brisbane ticket costs around A\$192 (US\$125), and the trip takes 28½ hours. The Sydney–Brisbane trip takes 18 hours and costs A\$93 (US\$60) one-way. Coachtrans provides daily services from the Gold Coast. Call **Transinfo** (☎ 13 12 30) for details.

BY CAR The Bruce Highway from Cairns enters the city from the north. The Pacific Highway enters Brisbane from Sydney in the south.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Brisbane Marketing has an info booth (☎ 07/3006 6290) in the Queen Street Mall at Albert Street, open from 9am to 5:30pm Monday through Thursday, to 7pm or later Friday, and 4pm Saturday; Sunday it's open from 10am to 4pm. The Roma Street Transit Centre is another source of info (☎ 07/3236 2020).

The free weekly *Brisbane News*, available in newsstands, cafes, hotel lobbies, and information booths, is a great source of information on dining, entertainment, performing arts, galleries, shopping, and Brisbane's laid-back lifestyle.

CITY LAYOUT

The city center's office towers shimmer in the sun on the north bank of a curve of the Brisbane River. In the tip of the curve are the lush Brisbane City Gardens. The 30m (98 ft.) sandstone cliffs of Kangaroo Point rise on the eastern side of the south bank; to the west are the South Bank Parklands and the Queensland Cultural Centre, known as South Bank. The Goodwill Bridge (for pedestrians only) links South Bank with the City Gardens. To the west 5km (3 miles), Mt. Coot-tha (pronounced *Coo-tha*) looms out of the flat plain, providing a great vantage point for gazing over the city.

MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS It's easy to find your way around central Brisbane once you know all the east-west streets are named after female British royalty, and all the north-south streets are named after their male counterparts. The most northerly is Ann, followed by Adelaide, Queen, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Mary,

Margaret, and Alice. From east to west, the streets are Edward, Albert, George, and William, which runs into North Quay, flanking the river's northeast bank.

Queen Street, the main thoroughfare, becomes a pedestrian mall between Edward and George streets. Roma Street exits the city diagonally to the northwest. Ann Street leads all the way east into Fortitude Valley. The main street in Fortitude Valley is Brunswick Street, which runs right into New Farm.

STREET MAPS **The Brisbane Map**, free from Brisbane Marketing (see "Visitor Information" above) or your concierge, is a lightweight map that shows the river and outlying suburbs, as well as the city. It's great for drivers because it shows parking lots and one-way traffic directions on the confusing city-center grid. Rental cars usually come with street directories. Newsagents and some bookstores sell this map, and the state auto club, the **R.A.C.Q.**, in the General Post Office, 261 Queen St. (☎ 13 19 05), is also a good source.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

City Center The vibrant city center is where residents eat, shop, and socialize. Queen Street Mall, in the heart of town, is popular with shoppers and moviegoers, especially on weekends and Friday nights (when stores stay open until 9pm). The Eagle Street financial/legal office precinct houses some great restaurants with river views, and on Sundays there are markets by the Riverside Centre office tower and the Pier. Much of Brisbane's colonial architecture is in the city center, too. Strollers, bike riders, and in-line skaters shake the summer heat in the green haven of the Brisbane City Gardens at the business district's southern end.

Fortitude Valley Ten years ago, this suburb of derelict warehouses just east of the city center was one of the sleazier parts of town. Today, "the Valley" is a stamping ground for street-smart young folk who meet in restored pubs and eat in cool cafes. The lanterns, food stores, and shopping mall of Chinatown are here, too. Take Turbot Street to the Valley's Brunswick Street.

New Farm Always an appealing suburb, New Farm is now one of

the city's "in" destinations for cafe-hopping, shopping, and cinema-going. Merthyr Street is where the action is, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. From the intersection of Wickham and Brunswick streets, follow Brunswick southeast for 13 blocks to Merthyr.

Paddington This hilltop suburb, a couple of kilometers northwest of the city, is one of the most attractive in Brisbane. Brightly painted Queenslander cottages line the main street, Latrobe Terrace, as it winds west along a ridge top. Many of the houses have been turned into shops and cafes, where you can browse, enjoy coffee and cake, or just admire the charming architecture.

Milton & Rosalie Park Road, Milton might not quite be a little bit of Europe, but it tries hard—even right down to a replica Eiffel Tower above the cafes and shops. Italian restaurants line the street, buzzing with white-collar office workers who down cappuccinos at alfresco restaurants, scout interior design stores for a new objet d'art to grace the living room, and stock up on European designer rags. A few minutes' drive away, Baroona Road

and Nash Street (in Rosalie) are doing their best to catch up.

West End This small inner-city enclave is alive with ethnic restaurants, cafes, and the odd interesting housewares or fashion store. Most action is at the intersection of Vulture and Boundary streets, where Asian grocers and delis abound.

Bulimba One of the emerging fashionable suburbs, Bulimba has a long connection with the river through the boat-building industry. One of the nicest ways to get there is by CityCat (see below). Oxford Street is the main drag, around which trendy cafes and shops are springing up.

2 Getting Around

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Bus, train, and ferry services are run by **Brisbane Transport**. For timetable and route inquiries, call **Transinfo** (☎ 13 12 30, 6am–9pm Mon–Fri; 7am–9pm weekends; www.transinfo.qld.gov.au). The most convenient places to buy passes and to pick up timetables and maps are the Brisbane Transport outlets on the Elizabeth Street level of the Myer Centre, which fronts Queen Street Mall; at Brisbane Transport's Brisbane Administration Centre, 69 Ann St.; at the Roma Street Transit Centre; or at Brisbane Marketing's kiosk in the Queen Street Mall. You can buy passes on the bus, at the train station, or on the CityCat or ferry. Any news agency displaying a yellow-and-white BUS & FERRY TICKETS SOLD HERE banner sells passes, but not train passes, special tour tickets, or family passes.

A single sector or zone on the bus, train, or ferry costs A\$1.80 (US\$1.15). Whether traveling with a parent on a single ticket or a pass, kids under age 5 travel free, kids ages 5 to 15 pay half fare; all seniors except Queensland residents and all students pay full fare. If you plan on using the buses and ferries a lot, weekly passes and Ten Trip Saver tickets are available from the outlets described above.

The **Brisbane Mobility Map**, produced by the Brisbane City Council, outlines wheelchair access to buildings in the city center, and includes a detailed guide to the Queen Street Mall and a map of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens at Mt. Coot-tha. The council's disability services unit also has a range of other publications including a Braille Trail and an access guide to parks. These can all be obtained from council customer service centers (☎ 07/3403 8888).

MONEY-SAVING PASSES A **1-2-3 Ticket** can be used for up to 2 hours on a one-way journey on any combination of bus, train, or ferry, and costs A\$3.80 (US\$2.45). There are limits to how far you can go on the trains, but the pass will get you as far as the Australian Woolshed at Ferny Grove, which is probably as far as you will be traveling anyhow.

It's possible you won't use trains to get around Brisbane, as most attractions are on the bus and ferry networks. In that case, get a **Day Rover pass**, which allows unlimited travel on buses, CityCats (high-speed catamarans), and ferries for A\$8.40 (US\$5.50).

On weekends and public holidays, it's cheaper to buy an **Off-Peak Saver pass**, which lets you travel on buses all day for A\$4.60 (US\$3) for adults. The Off-Peak Saver is also available on weekdays, but remember to plan your sight-seeing around the fact that it cannot be used before 9am and between 3:30 and 7pm. And it can't be used on CityCats or ferries.

Note that Day Rover and Off-Peak Saver passes can't be used on tour buses like City Sights (see "River Cruises & Other Organized Tours" later in this chapter).

If you see peak-hour buses displaying a full-fare-only sign, that does not mean you cannot travel on them with a discounted ticket or pass. It just means you cannot purchase a ticket or pass on the bus; you will have to purchase your ticket or pass from a ticket agent before boarding the bus.

The excellent **City Sights bus tour** entitles you to unlimited travel on buses, ferries, and CityCats for the day, and at the same time gets you around to 19 points of interest (see "River Cruises & Other Organized Tours" later in this chapter for details).

BY BUS Buses operate from around 5am to 11pm weekdays, with fewer services on weekends. On Sunday many routes stop around 5pm. Most buses depart from City Hall at King George Square, from Adelaide or Ann streets. Weekdays, you can get around the city center on the free **Downtown Loop** bus service. The Loop's distinctive red buses run on two routes stopping at convenient places including Central Station, Queen Street Mall, City Botanic Gardens, Riverside Centre, and King George Square. Look for the red bus stops. It runs every 10 minutes from 7am to 5:50pm Monday through Friday.

BY FERRY Ferries run from around 6am to 10:30pm daily. The fast **CityCat** ferries run to many places of interest, including South Bank and the Queensland Cultural Centre; the restaurants and Sunday markets at the Riverside Centre; and New Farm Park, not far from the cafes of Merthyr Street. They run every half-hour between Queensland University, approximately 9km (5½ miles) along the river to the south, and Brett's Wharf, about 9km (5½ miles) to the north. Slower but more frequent Inner City and Cross-River ferries stop at a few more points, including the south end of South Bank Parklands, Kangaroo Point, and Edward Street right outside the City Botanic Gardens.

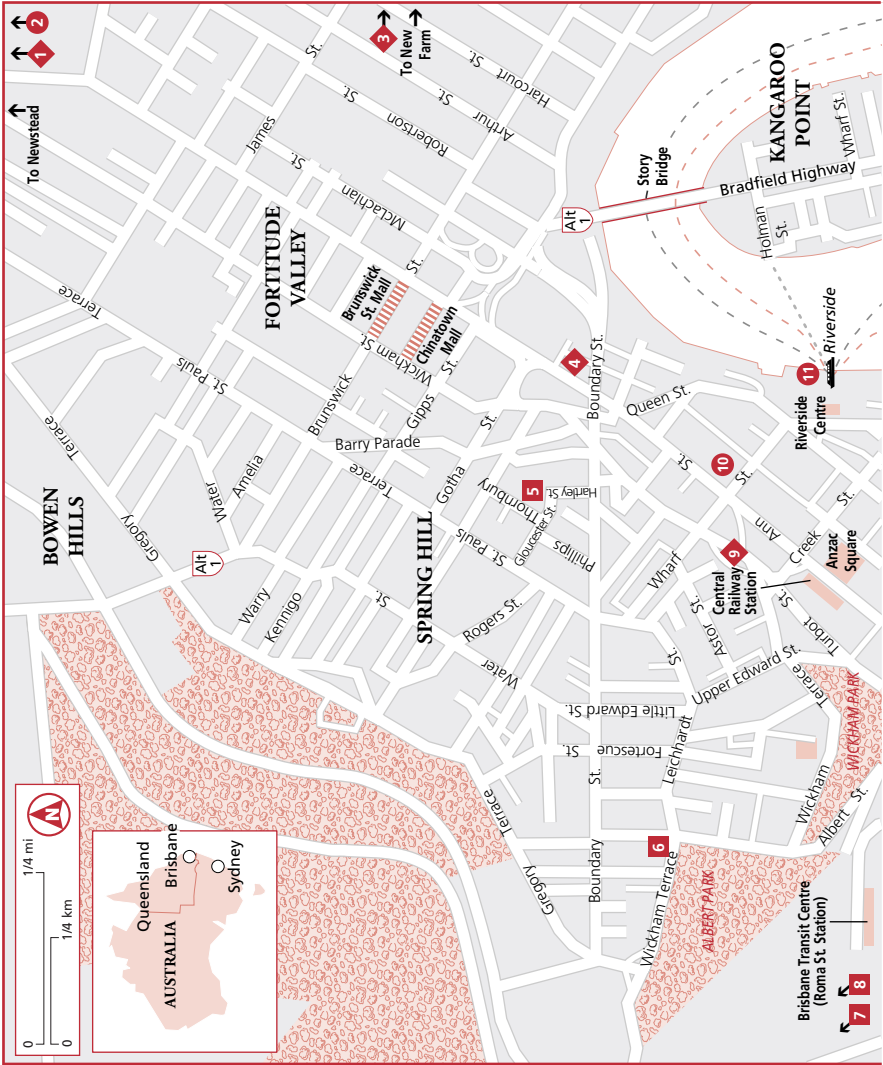
Even with a transit pass, you can't travel on ferries for more than 2 consecutive hours at a time. You are free to do another 2 hours later in the day if you wish. Two hours on the CityCat takes you the entire length of its run.

BY TRAIN Brisbane's suburban rail network is fast, quiet, safe, and clean. Trains run from around 5am to midnight, stopping at about 11pm on Sundays. All trains leave Central Station, between Turbot and Ann streets at Edward Street.

BY TAXI Call **Yellow Cabs** (☎ 13 19 24 in Australia) and **Black and White Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08 in Australia). There are major taxi ranks at each end of the Queen Street Mall, on Edward Street and George Street (outside the Treasury Casino).

BY CAR Brisbane's grid of one-way streets can be confusing, so plan your route before you set off. Brisbane's biggest parking lot is at the **Myer Centre** (enter from Elizabeth St.) and is open 24 hours (☎ 07/3229 1699). Most hotels and motels have free parking for guests.

Avis (☎ 13 63 33 or 07/3221 2900), **Budget** (☎ 1300/362 848 in Australia, or 07/3220 0699), and **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39 or 07/3221 6166) all have outlets in the city center. **Thrifty** (☎ 1300/367 227) is on the edge of the city center at 49 Barry Parade, Fortitude Valley.



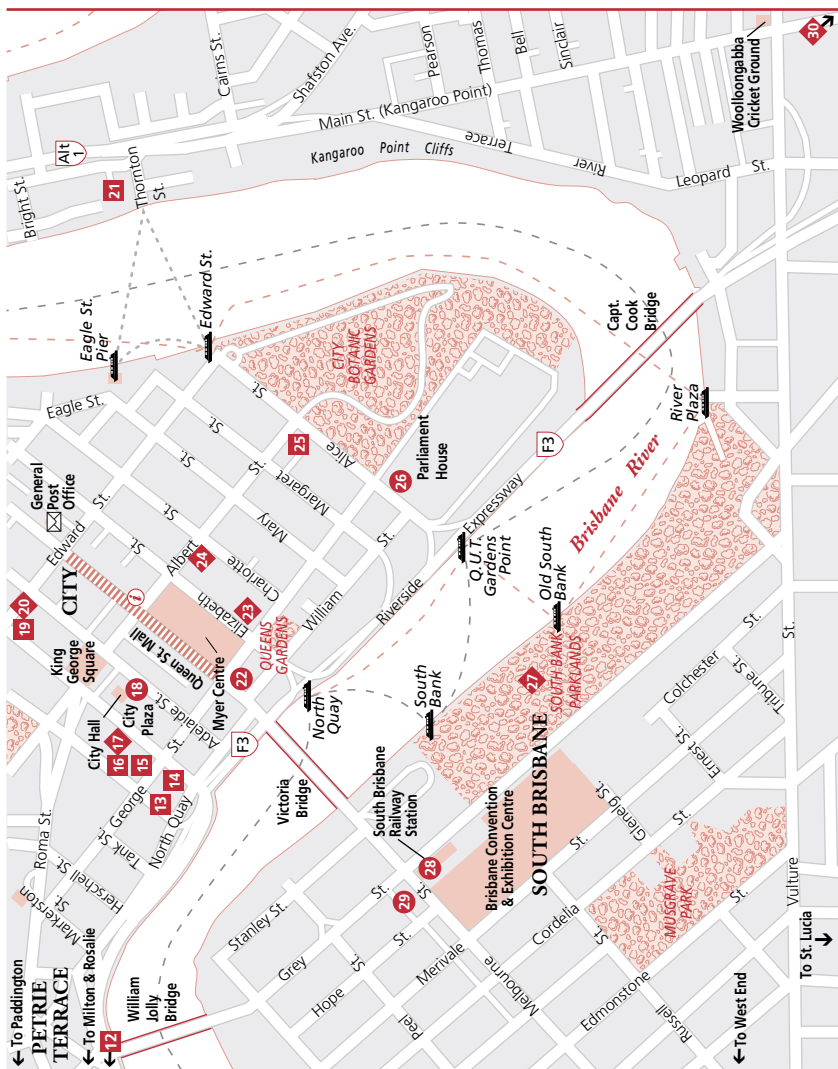
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FAST FACTS: Brisbane

American Express The office at 131 Elizabeth St. (☎ 1300/139 060) cashes traveler's checks, exchanges currency, and refunds lost traveler's checks.

Business Hours Banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm, and until 5pm on Fridays. See "The Shopping Scene" for store hours. Some restaurants close Monday and/or Tuesday nights, and bars are generally open from 10am or 11am until midnight.

Currency Exchange **Travellex**, Lennons Plaza, Queen Street Mall between Albert and George streets (☎ 07/3229 8610), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10:30am to 4:30pm.

Dentist The **Adelaide and Albert Dental Centre** (☎ 07/3229 4121), located at the Travellers Medical Service (see "Doctor" below), is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm.

Doctor **Travellers Medical Service** is located upstairs at 245 Albert St. at Adelaide Street, diagonally opposite City Hall (☎ 07/3211 3611). It's open Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 7pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10am to 4pm; for after-hours emergencies call ☎ 0412/452 400.

Drugstores (Chemist Shops) The **T&G Corner Day & Night Pharmacy**, 141 Queen Street Mall (☎ 07/3221 4585), is open Monday through Thursday from 7am to 9pm, Friday from 7am to 9:30pm, Saturday from 8am to 9pm, Sunday from 8:30am to 5:30pm, and public holidays from 9am to 7:30pm. There is also a pharmacy under the Travellers Medical Service (see "Doctor" above).

Embassies/Consulates The United States, Canada, and New Zealand have no representation in Brisbane; see chapter 3 for those countries' nearest offices. The **British Consul General** is at Level 26, Waterfront Place, 1 Eagle St. (☎ 07/3223 3200).

Emergencies Dial ☎ 000 for fire, ambulance, or police help in an emergency. This is a free call from a private or public telephone.

Eyeglass Repair **OPSM** in the Wintergarden, 171–209 Queen Street Mall (☎ 07/3221 1158), and in the Myer Centre, 91 Queen Street Mall (☎ 07/3229 2913), is a reputable chain retailer and repairer of eyeglasses.

Hospitals The nearest casualty ward is at **Royal Brisbane Hospital**, about a 15-minute drive from the city at Herston Road, Herston (☎ 07/3636 8111).

Hot Lines **Lifeline** (☎ 13 11 14) is a 24-hour emotional crisis counseling service. **Alcoholics Anonymous** can be reached at ☎ 07/3255 9162.

Internet Access **Dial Up Cyber Lounge**, in the Mayfair Arcade, 126 Adelaide St. (☎ 07/3211 9095), is open from 10am to 7pm Monday through Thursday and Saturday, and to 8pm Friday. In Paddington, **The Computer Café**, 107 Latrobe Terrace (☎ 07/3368 3190), above Woolworths, is open Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 10am to 9pm, and Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 10am to 6pm. There's also Internet access at the South Bank Information Centre, open from 9am to 5:30pm Saturday to Thursday and until 8:30pm Fridays, for A\$2 (US\$1.30) per 15 minutes.

Lost Property For lost property on **trains**, call ☎ 07/3235 1859, 10:15am to 2:15pm Monday through Friday; on ferries and buses, call the **Brisbane City Council** (☎ 07/3403 8888). Call police headquarters (☎ 07/3364 6464) for the telephone number of the police station closest to where the item was lost.

Luggage Storage/Lockers The **Brisbane Transit Centre** on Roma Street (☎ 1800/632 640) has baggage lockers.

Newspapers/Magazines *The Courier-Mail* (Mon–Sat) and the *Sunday Mail* are Brisbane's daily newspapers. The free color weekly *Brisbane News* provides a good guide to dining, entertainment, and shopping.

Police Dial ☎ 000 in an emergency, or ☎ 07/3364 6464 for police headquarters. Police are stationed 24 hours a day in the Pavilion Arcade, at 130 Queen St. (in the Queen Street Mall), near Albert Street (☎ 07/3224 4444).

Safety Brisbane is relatively crime free, but as in any large city, personal safety should be considered especially when out at night. Stick to well-lit streets and busy precincts.

Time Zone Brisbane is GMT plus 10 hours. It does not observe daylight savings time, which means it's on the same time as Sydney and Melbourne in winter, and 1 hour behind those cities from October to March, when they go to daylight savings. For the exact local time, call ☎ 1194.

Weather Call ☎ 1196 for the southeast Queensland weather forecast.

3 Accommodations You Can Afford

Accommodations in Brisbane are generally cheaper than in Sydney. Brisbane has many clean motels, nifty little budget places, and B&Bs in stylish homes close to the city or right in the heart of town. Spring Hill is just a few blocks (uphill) from the city center. For Kangaroo Point you need to drive or take a bus over the Story Bridge, or take one of the ferries (trip time: 3 min.) that depart every 10 minutes from 5:30am to midnight.

Catherine House ★ Vicki and David Mol's large, pretty two-story 1881 home, decorated with a blend of turn-of-the-20th-century and contemporary furnishings, and art collected from all around the world, is warm, inviting, and friendly. The guest lounge is cozy, with an open fireplace for winter, but on warm Queensland evenings most guests retreat to the cool rear deck overlooking the pool and palm-filled gardens. No smoking indoors.

151 Kelvin Grove Rd., Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, QLD 4059. ☎ 07/3839 6988. Fax 07/3236 9093. www.babs.com.au/catherine/index.htm. 2 double units, 1 family room (sleeps 4) and 1 self-contained flat (sleeps 5), all with private bathrooms. A\$95 (US\$62) single; A\$120 (US\$78) double; self-contained flat A\$495 (US\$322) per week. Extra persons A\$25 (US\$16). Rates include gourmet breakfast. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Free pickup from Roma St. Transit Centre on request. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; nearby tennis courts and golf course; Jacuzzi; babysitting; coin-op laundry or laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, VCR, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Explorers Inn Hotel ★ You'll be astonished to find such spruce decor and terrific value in one place—and in the heart of the city! Each tiny room at this former YWCA was designed by its architect owners to contain just the necessities—including a narrow desk. The front desk lends hair dryers, and the

friendly staff will help with booking tours and sending e-mails. Downstairs is the good-value Explorers Café restaurant and bar (see “Great Deals on Dining” below). South Bank, the casino, the Roma Street Transit Centre, and Queen Street Mall are all close by.

63 Turbot St. (near George St.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ **1800/623 288** in Australia, or 07/3211 3488. Fax 07/3211 3499. www.explorers.com.au. 58 units (all with shower only). A\$75–A\$97 (US\$49–US\$63) double; A\$97 (US\$63) family (sleeps 4). AE, DC, MC, V. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tour desk; car-rental desk; secretarial services; coin-op laundry; laundry and dry-cleaning service; all rooms are nonsmoking, but there is a smokers’ lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

Hotel George Williams ★ It’s hard to believe this smart 4-year-old hotel is a YMCA. Each room has vivid bedcovers, chrome chairs, and artsy bedside lamps on chrome stands. Rooms are small, but can accommodate up to four adults. Among the useful facilities are a 24-hour front desk, safe-deposit boxes, and a hip cybercafe. Hair dryers are available on request. Four rooms are designed for guests with disabilities, and there is access for those with disabilities to the gym and lifts. The City Y health club is the largest hotel gym in Australia, and offers free aerobics classes to guests, personal trainers, and massages.

317–325 George St. (between Turbot and Ann sts.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ **1800/064 858** or 07/3308 0700. Fax 07/3308 0733. www.hgw.com.au. 55 units (most with shower only). A\$92–A\$96 (US\$60–US\$62) double; additional person A\$22 (US\$14). Children 4 and under stay free. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free undercover secure parking. Airport shuttle. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: North Quay (CityCat and CityFerry). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry with iron and ironing board, and valet laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

Hotel Ibis Brisbane What you get is what you pay for at this three-star sister property to the Mercure, around the corner (see below). In this case, it is basically a room, with few amenities you might expect in a large hotel. But if you don’t mind doing without river views, porters, pool, or other small luxuries, this could be the place for you. Rebuilt inside an office building in 1998, the hotel has rooms furnished in a contemporary decor with sizable work desks and small but smart bathrooms.

27–35 Turbot St. (between North Quay and George St.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ **1300/656 565** in Australia, or 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 07/3237 2333. Fax 07/3237 2444. www.accorhotels.com.au. 218 units. A\$109 (US\$71) double. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Children under 16 stay free in parent’s room with existing bedding. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking at Mercure Hotel Brisbane (see below) at A\$10 (US\$6.50) per day. Airport shuttle. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: North Quay (CityCat and CityFerry). **Amenities:** Restaurant (breakfast, dinner only); coin-op laundry and laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Mercure Hotel Brisbane ★ Sweeping views of the Brisbane River come with many rooms at this bright 14-story four-star hotel across the water from South Bank. An A\$3 million (US\$1.9 million) refurbishment of all rooms in late 2002 has given them a fresh, contemporary look in red, cream, and latte. The four suites have river views, and the standard rooms are comfortable and unassuming. Rooms without water views have nice city views. Roma Street Transit Centre, Queen Street Mall, South Bank Parklands, and the Queensland Cultural Centre are a short walk away.

85–87 North Quay (between Ann and Turbot sts.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ **1300/65 6565** in Australia, or 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 07/3236 3300. Fax 07/3236 1035. www.mercurebrisbane.com.au. 194 units. A\$137–A\$226 (US\$89–US\$147) double;

A\$207–A\$266 (US\$135–US\$173) studio suite; A\$237–A\$296 (US\$154–US\$192) executive suite. Extra person A\$36 (US\$23). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A\$10 (US\$6.50) per day. Airport shuttle. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: North Quay (CityCat and CityFerry). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; access to nearby health club; car-rental desk; concierge; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Milton Motel Apartments A short train ride from downtown, close to the restaurant strip of Park Road, this two-story Tuscan-style complex has accommodation options including studio and two-bedroom apartments. It's just a stroll to the river, and a half-hour walk on the bike path to the city center. The apartments are modern, light, and compact but well designed. All units have a balcony and are serviced three times a week. No smoking indoors.

19 Sheehan St., Milton, Brisbane, QLD 4064. ☎ 07/3876 2360. Fax 07/3876 2359. www.milton-motel.com.au. 36 units. A\$78 (US\$51) studio double; A\$94 (US\$61) double one-bedroom apt; A\$115–A\$155 (US\$75–US\$101) family apt (sleeps 6). Weekly and monthly rates available. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Train: Milton. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, laundry.

Ryan's on the River ★★ River and city views from every room, friendly staff, and large, airy rooms make this one of Brisbane's best moderately priced hotels. The city ferry stop is a 2-minute walk across a strip of parkland, where a riverside walk/bike path leads to a playground, the Kangaroo Point cliffs, and all the way to South Bank. Out under a pergola by the saltwater pool and lounge chairs by the river, you can cook up a barbecue dinner provided by the hotel. Breakfast is served out here, too. The rooms all have balconies. Rooms on the south side have partial views of the river, those on the north are quieter and have great city and Story Bridge views (the bridge lights up at night), and rooms on the west side get a superb river-and-city vista that's the envy of every five-star hotel in Brisbane. You can also have day use of a room for A\$99 (US\$64) from 10am to 6pm.

269 Main St. (at Scott St.), Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, QLD 4169. ☎ 07/3391 1011. Fax 07/3391 1824. www.ryans.com.au. 23 units (all with shower only). A\$80–A\$199 (US\$52–US\$129) double; A\$350 (US\$228) suite. Extra adult A\$20 (US\$13); extra child A\$12 (US\$7.80). Crib A\$10 (US\$6.50). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. Ferry: Thornton St. from Edward St. or Eagle St. Pier (Cross River Ferry). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor saltwater pool; tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, iron.

Thornbury House Bed & Breakfast ★ *Finds* A 15-minute walk to Spring Hill from the city center brings you to this 1886 Queenslander cottage on a quiet street. Owner Michelle Bugler has decked out every room individually with Oriental rugs, comfortable beds, bathrobes, and lovely old furniture and knickknacks. Those without en suite bathrooms have their own pretty, clean private bathrooms down the hall. Downstairs is a self-contained apartment with contemporary decor. Breakfast is served in the ferny courtyard (a cool and restful place on a humid day), where you can help yourself to tea, coffee, cookies, and the newspaper any time of day. In early 2003, Michelle opened a second B&B, **Eton** (☎ 07/3236 0115; www.babs.com.au/eton), in a Heritage-listed cottage at 436 Upper Roma St., Brisbane, not far from the Brisbane Transit Centre. It's similar in style and price to Thornbury, with 5 rooms and an attic suite (sleeps three). Ask for room no. 1, at the front of the house, for its claw-foot bathtub and king-size bed. My pick is Eton, but Thornbury's location is quieter and more residential.

1 Thornbury St., Spring Hill, Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ 07/3832 5985. Fax 07/3832 7756. www.babs.com.au/thornbury. 6 units, all with bathroom (5 with shower only). A\$110–A\$120 (US\$72–US\$78) double; A\$420 (US\$273) apt weekly. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited free off-street parking and on-street meter parking A\$5 (US\$3.25) per day. Airport bus stop at front door. Train: Central. **Amenities:** Dinner on request; access to nearby pools, golf club, and health club; children's play area and toys; room service 8am–8pm; dry cleaning; free access to laundry, iron, fridge, and microwave; fax, computer, and dataport available; pay phone; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

Waverley ★★ *Finds* On the main shopping and restaurant strip in Paddington, this lovely three-story 1888 residence retains most of its original features such as bay windows, tongue-and-groove walls, soaring ceilings, and polished timber floors. The two air-conditioned front rooms are freshly painted, spacious, and individually furnished with supportive mattresses, comfy sofas, and attractive bathrooms. You can also stay in two self-contained apartments (with fans) downstairs. Your hostess, Annette Henry, cooks a hearty breakfast in the homey yellow kitchen. (Her fresh muffins are popular.) There's also a lounge, and a rear deck on both levels overlooks two old mango trees, busy with possums at night and visited regularly by day by a pair of native butcher-birds. No smoking indoors.

5 Latrobe Terrace at Cochrane St., Paddington, Brisbane, QLD 4064. ☎ 07/3369 8973, or 0419/741 282 mobile phone. Fax 07/3876 6655. www.babs.com.au/paddington. 4 units (shower only). A\$110 (US\$72) double; A\$440 (US\$286) self-contained apts per week. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Rates include full breakfast for B&B guests. AE, DC, MC, V. Free off-street parking for 4 cars. Bus stop 20m. Pickup available on request from Roma St. Transit Center. **Amenities:** Laundry facilities, safe. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (apts only), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

SUPER-CHEAP SLEEPS

Palace Backpackers Once a temperance hall, this lovely Heritage-listed five-story building with wrought-iron lace verandas now plays host to less than temperate backpackers. Don't avoid it on that account; the place is well run, and a beautiful restoration has provided simple, pleasant private rooms with iron beds, proper mattresses and crisp linen, lockers, and either air-conditioning or fans. Only someone literally carrying a backpack is entitled to a dorm bed. The spick-and-span renovated bathrooms are cleaned twice a day. There are rooms and bathrooms for travelers with disabilities. There's a rooftop sun deck with a barbecue, TV lounges with Internet access, a communal kitchen, and an excellent cafe (see "Great Deals on Dining" below). No smoking in rooms.

Corner of Ann and Edward sts., Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ 1800/676 340 in Australia, or 07/3211 2433. Fax 07/3211 2466. 120 units (350 beds), none with bathroom. A\$35 (US\$23) single; A\$48 (US\$31) double. A\$17–A\$20 (US\$11–US\$13) dorm bed. 4-night and weekly rates available. MC, V. Train: Central. Bus: City Circle 333. Courtesy shuttle to and from Roma St. Transit Center 7:45am–7pm. **Amenities:** Cafe; bar; tour desk. *In room:* A/C.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Quay West Suites ★★ When the business folk go home on Fridays, they leave available this glamorous all-suite hotel, just 4 blocks from Queen Street Mall; you'll find excellent package deals here. A one-bedroom suite will sleep four with the sofa bed. The suites have all the amenities of a five-star hotel—daily servicing, concierge, a bar and restaurant with a lovely outdoor terrace—and their own laundry, dining area, separate bedroom, and fully equipped kitchen. Pamper yourself in the plunge pool or Jacuzzi; then back in your room get into your bathrobe, gaze over the Botanic Gardens, read the free newspaper, turn up your CD player, or watch one of the two TVs.

132 Alice St. (between Albert and George sts.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ☎ 1800/672 726 in Australia, or 07/3853 6000. Fax 07/3853 6060. www.mirvac.com.au. 91 apts. A\$350–A\$370 (US\$228–US\$241) 1-bedroom apt; A\$430–A\$450 (US\$280–US\$293) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Ask about special packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet and self-parking A\$8 (US\$5.20). Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: Edward St. (Inner City and Cross River Ferry); or Riverside (CityCat), then a 10-min. stroll. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. room service; concierge; business center; valet drycleaning or laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV with in-house movies, kitchen, minibar, laundry, hair dryer, iron, safe.

4 Great Deals on Dining

There are plenty of places to eat well at a reasonable price in Brisbane. For cheap meals, head to the stylish Merthyr Street bistro strip in New Farm, the cafes of Given Terrace and Latrobe Terrace in Paddington, the Asian restaurants around the intersection of Vulture and Boundary streets in West End, and the cheap and cheerful cafes huddling shoulder to shoulder in Brunswick Street Mall in Fortitude Valley. Fortitude Valley is also where you'll find Brisbane's Chinatown. There are also moderately priced restaurants on Park Road in Milton, though few of these are BYO. In the city center you'll find cheap, lively sidewalk cafes along Albert Street.

A cluster of affordable good restaurants has mushroomed in the unlikely location of Baroona Road and Nash Street in Rosalie, an otherwise sleepy suburb next to Paddington.

IN THE CITY CENTER

Explorers Café *Value* CAFE FARE After 6 years with one of the best-value a la carte menus in town, this basement restaurant under the Explorers Inn (see "Accommodations You Can Afford" above) continues to offer great value, with all meals under A\$17 (US\$11). There are soups, pasta, seafood, steaks, and chicken dishes, with a choose-and-pay-at-the-counter format but with table service. There are vegetarian and gluten-free dishes on the lunch and dinner menus.

63 Turbot St. (near corner of George St.). ☎ 07/3211 3488. Fax 07/3211 3499. www.explorers.com.au. Reservations recommended at lunch. Main courses A\$10–A\$17 (US\$6.50–US\$11); breakfast A\$3.50–A\$10 (US\$2.25–US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–9:30am and 6–8pm; Mon–Fri noon–2pm. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop.

Palace Café *Value* CAFE FARE It's designed for the backpackers upstairs (see "Accommodations You Can Afford" above), but you don't have to sleep here to dine at this airy, colorful cafe. The menu is the same for both lunch and dinner, a simple mix of burgers, steaks, grilled chicken, and so on, along with a A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) salad bar and daily specials. A TV, magazines, and two computers with Internet access give a homey feel.

In the Palace Backpackers, corner of Ann and Edward sts. ☎ 07/3032 5740. Main courses A\$8.50–A\$13 (US\$5.50–US\$8.45). No credit cards. Weekdays 12–2pm; daily 6–9pm. Train: Central. Bus: Downtown Loop.

Pane e Vino MODERN ITALIAN/CAFE FARE A laid-back attitude attracts a mixed lunch-set to this contemporary open-sided cafe on a busy street corner. Sit inside in the mod decor of polished concrete floors and sleek timber, or choose a sidewalk table. The simple but sophisticated all-day menu boasts things like grilled King snapper on creamed zucchini with tomato, olive, and basil butter sauce. There's also a wide variety of lighter risottos and pastas, huge focaccias, and tasty panini (say, prosciutto, mushroom, onion, and provolone).

Albert St. at Charlotte St. ☎ **07/3220 0044**. Reservations recommended at lunch. Main courses A\$12–A\$20 (US\$7.80–US\$13); foccacias and panini A\$7–A\$8.50 (US\$4.55–US\$5.55). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–11:30pm. Bus: Downtown Loop.

SUPER-CHEAP EATS

Govinda's *Value* VEGETARIAN If you're a seasoned vegetarian traveler in Oz, you already know to seek out the Hare Krishnas' chain of Govinda restaurants. This one serves vegetable casserole, dahl, samosas, deep-fried kofta balls, and other tasty stuff. The atmosphere is pretty spartan, but who cares when the food is so satisfying? This is a stimulant-free zone, so don't come expecting alcohol, tea, or coffee. They do takeout.

99 Elizabeth St. (opposite Myer Centre), 2nd fl. ☎ **07/3210 0255**. A\$8 (US\$5.20) all-you-can-eat; A\$7 (US\$4.55) students and seniors. No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm; Fri 5:30–8:30pm. Sunday Feast 5:30–8:30pm, with lectures and dancing. Bus: Downtown Loop.

IN NEW FARM

New Farm Deli & Café CAFE FARE Well-heeled locals and the corporate crowd pack this cheery deli located at the rear of a shopping complex. Try to get a seat outside. Loads of inventive pastas, filling focaccia sandwiches, and gourmet burgers stack the menu, and there are blackboard specials such as hot pancetta, and tomato and mushroom risotto. Service is fast and pleasant. It's BYO, and there's no corkage fee.

900 Brunswick St. at Merthyr Rd. ☎ **07/3358 2634**. Main courses A\$3.50–A\$13 (US\$2.30–US\$8.45). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6am–6pm; Sun 7am–5pm. Closed public holidays. Bus: 167, 168, or 178.

IN MILTON

Arrivederci Pizza Al Metro PIZZA Cheapest of the bunch along the Park Road restaurant strip is this pizzeria with airy indoor seating and some alfresco tables. They offer a range of mostly basic but tasty toppings like salami, peppers, cheese, and mushrooms. It's a humble joint, but it's a nice night out if you bring a bottle of red, dine outside, and then stroll up the street to people-watch and window-shop.

1 Park Rd. ☎ **07/3369 8500**. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat dinner. Pizzas for 2 A\$13–A\$17 (US\$8.45–US\$11); pizzas for 4 A\$20–A\$28 (US\$13–US\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–late. Train: Milton. Bus: 410.

IN MT. COOT-THA

The Summit ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN It would be hard to find a better view of Brisbane than from this spot. A teahouse of some kind has been on this mountaintop for more than a century. Part 19th-century Queenslander house and part modern extension, the restaurant has wraparound covered decks with a view to the city and Moreton Bay. A changing menu features local produce and dishes with Asian and Mediterranean influences, teamed with Australian wines. Try grilled swordfish steak from North Queensland, or grilled kangaroo loin on rosemary skewers. And when you've finished dining, spend some time on the observation deck—at night the city lights provide a glittering panorama.

At the Mt. Coot-tha Lookout, Sir Samuel Griffith Dr., Mt. Coot-tha. ☎ **07/3369 9922**. Fax 07/3369 8937. www.mtcoot-tha.com. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat nights. Main courses A\$25–A\$33 (US\$16–US\$21); Chef's Selection 3-course menu A\$46 (US\$30); 2- or 3-course early-bird menu A\$24–A\$30 (US\$16–US\$20) available from 3pm if you finish by 7pm. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–midnight; Sun brunch 8–10:30am; Christmas Day for lunch only, New Year's Day, Boxing Day (Dec 26), and Good Friday, dinner only. Bus: 471. From Roma St. Transit Centre, take Upper Roma St. and Milton Rd. 3.5km (2¼ miles) west to the Western Fwy. roundabout at Toowong Cemetery, veer right into Sir Samuel Griffith Dr., and go approximately 3km (2 miles). Free parking.

IN EAST BRISBANE

Green Papaya ★ *Value* NORTH VIETNAMESE Clean, fresh, and simple are the key words to describe owner/chef Lien Yeoman's approach to her native cuisine. Two cheerful rooms—painted yellow and blue—are usually crowded with a faithful clientele. If you don't know your *Bo xao cay ngot* (spicy beef) from your *Nom du du* (green papaya salad), the staff willingly gives advice. The restaurant is licensed, but you can bring your own bottled wine only (no beer or spir-its) for a corkage charge of A\$3 (US\$1.95) per person. Cooking classes are also run from time to time, so call for a schedule. They also do takeout.

898 Stanley St. East (at Potts St.), East Brisbane. ☎ 07/3217 3599. www.greenpapaya.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$12–A\$30 (US\$7.80–US\$20); banquet menus (for minimum of 4 people) A\$35–A\$40 (US\$23–US\$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–10pm. Closed Good Friday, and from Christmas to early Jan. Located a 10-min. drive from town and 1 block from the Woolloongabba Cricket Ground. Train: Woolloongabba station. Parking at rear of restaurant and on street.

IN ALBION

Breakfast Creek Hotel ★ STEAK A\$4 million (US\$2.6 million) renovation and restoration has given fresh life to this Brisbane treasure. Built in 1889

Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants

Cilantro, Novotel Brisbane Hotel, 200 Creek St., in the city center. ☎ 07/3309 3364. Daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. All major credit cards. A special kids' menu, designed by a nutritionist to be healthy but appealing, is good enough for adults to eat, too. You won't find fish fingers or frozen fries on the menu here, more likely tender lamb cutlets with green beans and carrot sticks—and kids love every bite! Desserts include fresh fruit with ice cream, frozen yogurt, or apple crumble with vanilla custard. They also get a free placemat, cup, and puzzle when dining from the kids' menu in the restaurant. Main courses are A\$7.50 to A\$9.95 (US\$4.90–US\$6.50), desserts A\$3.50 to A\$4.50 (US\$2.30–US\$3).

Summit Restaurant, Sir Samuel Griffith Drive, Mt. Coot-tha. ☎ 07/3369 9922. Fax 07/3369 8937. Daily 11:30am to late, from 8am on Sundays. All major credit cards. Children's menu features several choices including chicken fingers with honey dipping sauce (A\$8.70/US\$5.65), sirloin steak burger with fried onions (A\$9.80/US\$6.40), and an old-fashioned banana split (A\$4.70/US\$3.05).

Morgan's Seafood Restaurant, Bird o' Passage Parade, Scarborough. ☎ 07/3203 5744. Fax 07/3880 1844. Daily for lunch and dinner. All major credit cards. A Brisbane institution, Morgan's offers great views across to Moreton Island and is paradise for parents and kids. The restaurant has its own fleet of trawlers which dock nearby to disgorge mussels, mud crabs, prawns, oysters, and the freshest reef fish. Classic seafood platters and Asian style dishes are available, and kids can choose anything they like for a "pint-size" special price of A\$9.90 (US\$6.45). Even the Teppanyaki grill has a kids' menu which includes *yakitori*, *fish furai*, and chicken *kara age* (A\$9.60–A\$10.50/US\$6.25–US\$6.85). All children's meals include steamed rice, and ice cream for dessert.

and listed by the National Trust, the Breakfast Creek Hotel is fondly known as the “Brekky Creek”—or simply “The Creek.” It is quintessentially Queensland, with a new outdoor dining area overlooking Breakfast Creek, and is famed for its gigantic steaks and XXXX (Fourex) beer “off the wood” (from the keg). The beer garden is always popular, and there’s usually a band on Sunday afternoons.

2 Kingsford Smith Dr. (at Breakfast Creek Rd.), Albion. ☎ 07/3262 5988. Main courses A\$17–A\$25 (US\$11–US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Mon–Fri 5:30–9:30pm; Sat 5–9:30pm; Sun 5–8:30pm. Pub: Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–11pm. Bus: 300 or 322. Wickham St. becomes Breakfast Creek Rd; the hotel is just off the route to the airport.

WORTH A SPLURGE

e’cco bistro ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN “Here it is” is one of the Italian translations for *e’cco*, and that’s the philosophy behind the food at this multi-award-winning bistro. Simple food, done exceptionally well. E’cco counts the title of Australia’s top restaurant award (the Remy Martin Cognac/Gourmet Traveler Restaurant of the Year) among its claims to fame, and deservedly so. Set in a former tea warehouse on the city fringe, it is enormously popular, and bookings are essential. Large windows, bold colors, and modern furniture make it a pleasant setting in a small but popular restaurant enclave. There’s a nice, simple price structure (each course’s offerings are all the same price), and there’s an extensive wine list—many by the glass. You can BYO wine for a corkage fee of A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) per bottle.

100 Boundary St. (at Adelaide St.). ☎ 07/3831 8344. Fax 07/3831 8460. www.eccobistro.com. Reservations required. Main courses A\$29.50 (US\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2:30pm; Tues–Sat 6–10pm. Also open Mon mid-Nov to Christmas. Closed for 10 days from Christmas. On-street meter parking.

5 Exploring Brisbane

WHERE TO CUDDLE A KOALA & OTHER TOP ATTRACTIONS

Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary ★★ Kids This is the best place in Australia to cuddle a koala—and one of the few places where koala cuddling is still allowed. Banned in New South Wales and Victoria, koala cuddling is allowed in Queensland under strict conditions which ensure each animal is handled for less than 30 minutes a day and they get every third day off! When it opened in 1927, Lone Pine had only two koalas, Jack and Jill, but is now home to more than 130 of the furry marsupials. You can cuddle them any time and have a photo taken holding one for A\$10 (US\$6.50); once you’ve purchased a photograph, your companions can take as many photos of you as they like with their own cameras. Lone Pine isn’t just koalas—you can also hand-feed kangaroos and wallabies and get up close with emus, parrots, wombats, Tasmanian devils, skinks, lace monitors, frogs, bats, turtles, possums, and other native wildlife. There is currency exchange, a gift shop, restaurant and cafe, and picnic and barbecue facilities. The nicest way to get to Lone Pine is a cruise down the Brisbane River aboard the M.V. *Miramar* (☎ 07/3221 0300), which leaves North Quay at the Queen Street Mall, next to Victoria Bridge, at 10am. The 19km (12-mile) trip to Lone Pine takes 90 minutes and includes a commentary. You have 2 hours to explore Lone Pine before returning, arriving in the city at 2:45pm. The fare is A\$25 (US\$16) for adults and A\$15 (US\$10) for children ages 3 to 13, including a map and hotel pick-ups. Cruises are every day except Christmas and Anzac Day.

Jesmond Rd., Fig Tree Pocket. ☎ 07/3378 1366. Fax 07/3878 1770. www.koala.net. Admission A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) children 3–13, A\$38 (US\$25) family pass, A\$13 (US\$8.45) seniors, backpackers, and students with ID, A\$10 (US\$6.50) pensioners. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily including Christmas

7:30am–5pm; 1:30–5pm on Anzac Day (Apr 25). By car, take Milton Rd. to the roundabout at Toowong cemetery, and then the Western Fwy. towards Ipswich. Signs will direct you to Fig Tree Pocket and Lone Pine. The sanctuary is 20 min. from the city center by car. There's a free parking lot. Bus 430 goes directly to the Sanctuary from the Koala platform "N" at the Myer Centre, Queen St. Mall, and leaves hourly from 8:45am–3:45pm weekdays; 8:30am–4:30pm weekends and public holidays. Bus fare is A\$2.80 (US\$1.80) adults and A\$1.40 (US\$0.90) children. A taxi will cost about A\$22 (US\$14) from the city center.

Queensland Cultural Centre *Kids* This low-rise, modern complex stretching along the south bank of the Brisbane River houses many of the city's performing arts venues as well as the state art gallery, museum, and library. Thanks to plenty of open plazas and fountains inserted by thoughtful architects, it is a pleasing place to wander or just to sit and watch the river and the city skyline.

The **Queensland Performing Arts Complex** (☎ 07/3840 7444 administration, Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, or 136 246 for all bookings) houses the 2,000-seat Lyric Theatre for musicals, ballet, and opera; the 1,800-seat Concert Hall for orchestral performances; the 850-seat Optus Playhouse Theatre for plays; and the 315-seat Cremorne Theatre for theater-in-the-round, cabaret, and experimental works. The complex has a restaurant and a cafe. Free 40-minute front-of-house tours leave from the box office at noon Monday through Friday; no bookings are needed. One hour backstage tours are available by arrangement for A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) per person (☎07/3840 7431).

The **Queensland Art Gallery** ★ (☎ 07/3840 7303) is one of Australia's most attractive galleries, with vast light-filled spaces and interesting water features both inside and out. It is a major player in the Australian art world, attracting international blockbuster exhibitions of works by the likes of Renoir, Picasso, and van Gogh, and showcasing diverse modern Australian painters, sculptors, and other artists. It also has an impressive collection of Aboriginal art. Admission is free. Free guided tours run Monday through Friday at 11am, and 1 and 2pm; Saturdays at 11am, and 2 and 3pm; Sundays at 11am, and 1 and 3pm. There is a gift shop and bistro. The gallery is open 10am to 5pm Mon–Fri, 9am to 5pm weekends; closed Good Friday, Christmas, and until noon on Anzac Day (Apr 25).

The **Queensland Museum** *Kids* on the corner of Grey and Melbourne streets (☎ 07/3840 7555) underwent a major revamp in 2003. Additions include a new entrance and the incorporation of the popular interactive **Sciencentre** on level one of the building. The museum houses an eclectic collection ranging from natural history specimens and fossils to a World War I German tank. Children will like the blue whale model and the dinosaurs, which include Queensland's own *Muttaburrasaurus*. The museum has a cafe and gift shop.

South Bank Parklands *Kids* Follow the locals' lead and spend some time at this delightful 16-hectare (40-acre) complex of parks, restaurants, shops, playgrounds, street theater, and weekend markets. The former World Expo 88 site has been happily transformed into a people's place that really works. There's even a man-made beach, lined with palm trees, with real waves and sand, where you can swim, stroll, and cycle the meandering pathways; sit over a *caffè latte* in one of the cafes and enjoy the city views. From the parklands it's an easy stroll to the museum, art gallery, and other buildings of the adjacent Queensland Cultural Centre (see above).

From the Queen St. Mall, cross the Victoria Bridge to South Bank or walk across the Goodwill Bridge from Gardens Point Rd. entrance to the City Gardens. ☎ 07/3867 2051 for Visitor Information Centre, or 07/3867 2020 for recorded entertainment information. Free admission. Park: daily 24 hr.; Visitor Information Centre: Sat–Thurs 9am–6pm; Fri 9am–10pm. Train: South Brisbane. Ferry: South Bank (CityCat) and Old South Bank

(Inner City Ferry). Bus: Countless bus routes depart Adelaide St. near Albert St., cross the Victoria Bridge, and stop at the Queensland Cultural Centre; walk through the Centre to South Bank Parklands. Plentiful underground parking in Queensland Cultural Centre. The Parklands are a 7-min. walk from town.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Australian Woolshed If you've never seen a sheep or visited a farm, this might be a novelty for you, but don't be surprised if your Aussie friends cringe

Cheap Thrills: What to See & Do for Free (or Almost) in Brisbane

- **Free shows at South Bank Parklands.** On weekends and holidays, there is almost always free entertainment at South Bank Parklands, such as street theater, live bands, movies under the stars, or concerts. Even when there's nothing going on, it's a great place to hang out, picnic by the river, and people-watch. Call the entertainment line (☎ 07/3867 2020) to see what's on.
- **Attend a lecture, film, or gallery talk at the Queensland Art Gallery or Queensland Museum Theater.** Free lectures and gallery talks on a topical artist or issue are held the first Wednesday of the month at the Gallery, and most Wednesdays and some Saturdays at the Museum. A free "Sunday at the Gallery" program features a talk, film, or musical performance and kids' activities. Book a seat for Wednesdays; just show up on Sundays. Call ☎ 07/3840 7303 (gallery) or 07/3840 7555 (museum) for details.
- **Watch the Queensland Parliament in action.** If Parliament is sitting (in session), the best show in town can sometimes be at Parliament House (see "More Attractions" below). Aussie politicians drop decorum in Parliament for no-holds-barred trading of taunts and insults that are sometimes banal, sometimes shocking, often funny. The free 10:30am tour at Question Time is the juiciest, when each party tries to goad the other.
- **Climb to the top of the City Hall clock tower.** For a fabulous view of the city, take the A\$2 (US\$1.30) elevator ride from the ground floor to the third floor, then climb the stairs to the glassed-in observation area. The clock tower is open Monday through Friday 10am to 3pm; Saturday 10am to 2:30pm (except public holidays). If you're there on the quarter hour, you'll get a close-up view of the chimes. Try not to be there at midday, when the clock chimes 12—it's deafening!
- **"Walking the walk" on the Mangrove Boardwalk.** The Mangrove Boardwalk extends 400m (¼ mile) out over the Brisbane River in the Brisbane City Gardens, along Alice Street. It's open and lit up until midnight. Free guided tours of the gardens are run at 11am and 1pm Monday through Saturday (except public holidays).
- **Check out the stunning St John's Anglican Cathedral.** At 373 Ann St, you can watch stonemasons work on the West End of the building, nearing completion after almost a century. Free guided tours of the cathedral are offered at 10am and 2pm Monday through Saturday, at 2pm on Sunday.

when you mention your intention to visit it. That said, this is a popular attraction with overseas visitors and school groups, and you may have to contend with busloads of them. The ram show features eight trained Australian rams that “answer” to their names and walk through the audience to take their place beside their named spots on the stage. There’s also sheep shearing, spinning, and sheep-dog demonstrations, and you can get your hands dirty classing wool, milking cows, feeding kangaroos, and cuddling koalas (a photo will cost you A\$14/US\$9). The gift shop has quality Australian-made souvenirs. A rustic restaurant serves Aussie specialties, including billy tea and damper. Some Friday and Saturday nights the Woolshed hosts a traditional bush dance and dinner, featuring country dancing, spoon-playing, singalongs, a live band, and a two-course dinner. Tickets cost A\$39 (US\$25) per adult and A\$17 (US\$11) for children 5 to 14. The fun starts at 7pm and goes until midnight. Bookings are essential.

148 Samford Rd., Ferny Hills. ☎ 07/3872 1100. www.auswoolshed.com.au. Admission to ram show A\$17 (US\$11) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) seniors and students, A\$11 (US\$7.15) children 3–14, A\$46 (US\$30) family (2 adults/3 children). Admission to billy tea and damper A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) adults, A\$4.10 (US\$2.65) children 3–14. Water slide A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for 1 hr.; A\$10 (US\$6.50) for 4 hr. Minigolf A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) for 9 holes. AE, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–4:30pm (Ram show 9:30 and 11am and 1 and 2:30pm) except Christmas Day and Anzac Day (Apr 25) morning. Train: Ferny Grove (station is 800m/2,624 ft. from the Woolshed). Car: Kelvin Grove Rd. from the city becomes Enoggera Rd., then Samford Rd.; the trip is 14km (8½ miles). Large off-street free parking lot.

Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mt. Coot-tha These 52-hectare (128-acre) gardens at the base of Mt. Coot-tha feature Aussie natives and exotics you probably won’t see at home, including an arid zone, a Tropical Dome conservatory housing rainforest plants, a cactus house, bonsai house, fragrant plants, a Japanese garden, African and American plants, wetlands, and a bamboo grove. There are lakes and trails, usually a horticultural show or arts-and-crafts display in the auditorium on weekends, and a cafe. Free 1-hour guided tours leave the kiosk at 11am and 1pm Monday through Saturday (except public holidays).

Mt. Coot-tha Rd., Toowong, 7km (4 miles) from the city. ☎ 07/3403 8888. www.brisbane.qld.gov.au. Free admission to Botanic Gardens. Gardens open daily 8am–5pm (5:30pm Sept–Mar). Bus: 471. Free parking.

Museum of Brisbane Brisbane’s newest attraction, opening October 2003, is housed in the historic City Hall and will incorporate the City Gallery. Designed to capture the history and the essence of Brisbane, the museum will include a small theater showing a short film about the city and a shop for “made in Brisbane” items. It should be an ideal starting point for your visit and will relate the stories, events, and ideas that have shaped the city as well as giving practical information for visitors. Exhibitions in development at press time included “One Square Mile” (about the 1844 establishment of an exclusion zone for Aborigines), one on Brisbane’s bridges, one on Brisbane Buddhas, and an Australian War Memorial exhibition of World War I photographs.

City Hall, King George Square, City. ☎ 07/3403 8888. Free admission. Opening times not set at press time.

Newstead House ★ Brisbane’s oldest surviving home has been restored to its late Victorian splendor in a peaceful park overlooking the Brisbane River. Wander the rooms, admire the gracious exterior dating from 1846, and on Sundays and public holidays between March and November, take Devonshire tea. The U.S. Army occupied the house during World War II, and the first American war memorial built in Australia stands on Newstead Point on the grounds.

Newstead Park, Breakfast Creek Rd., Newstead. ☎ 07/3216 1846 or 1800/061 846. A\$4.40 (US\$2.85) adults, A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) seniors and students, A\$2.20 (US\$1.45) children 6–16, A\$11 (US\$7.15) family pass.

Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; Sun and most public holidays 2–5pm. Last admittance 30 min. before closing. Closed Christmas, Boxing Day (Dec 26), Good Friday, and Anzac Day (Apr 25). Bus: 300, 306, or 322. Limited parking.

Parliament House Queensland’s seat of government was built in 1868 in an odd but happy mix of French Renaissance and tropical colonial styles. It’s impressive from the outside, and guided 20-minute tours show off its ornate interior of Waterford chandeliers, Colebrookdale balustrades, and the gold-leaf ceilings in the Council Chamber. When Parliament is in session, the tour is restricted, but you can see Parliament in action. The House is on Brisbane’s Heritage Trail (see “City Strolls” below) and the City Sights tour bus.

George St. at Alice St. ☎ **07/3406 7562**. Free admission, tours. Tours Mon–Fri 9am–4:15pm; Sat–Sun 10am–2pm when Parliament is not in session; Tues–Thurs 10:30am, 2:30pm when Parliament is in session. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Gardens Point.

Roma Street Parkland Opened in 2001, this is more botanic garden than a replica South Bank. Thousands of plants, including natives and some of the world’s most endangered, have been used to create lush subtropical gardens in an unused railway yard. The effect is stunning. Areas of the gardens are themed and there are guided walks twice a day Thursday through Sunday, including public holidays (10am and 2pm Sept–May, 11am and 2pm June–Aug). There are also self-guided walking tours, or you can take the “art walk” and discover the great public art on display. There are barbecues and picnic areas and a children’s playground. Brisbane people have taken to this new park, so it is busy and lively, but it’s large enough to handle the crowds.

Walk there from Roma St. train station. From King George Sq., it’s about a 500m (1,640-ft.) walk along Albert St. By car, access is from Roma St. or the Wickham Terrace/College Rd./Gregory Terrace intersection. ☎ **07/3006 4545**. Open 24 hr., except the Spectacle Garden which is open 6:30am–7pm. Information booths are located in the Spectacle Garden and at the Activity Centre.

CITY STROLLS

Because Brisbane is leafy, warm, and full of colonial-era Queensland architecture, it is a great city for a stroll. Pick up a free Heritage Trail Map from the Brisbane Tourism information booths (see “Visitor Information” earlier in the chapter) and explore on your own. The guides have a history of the area, and excellent detailed information and illustrations of historic buildings and other sights along the way. Free guided walks of the **Brisbane City Gardens** (☎ **07/3403 8888**) at Alice Street leave from the rotunda at the Albert Street entrance Monday through Saturday at 11am and 1pm (except public holidays and the first Mon of each month). Rainforest, camellias, lily ponds, palm groves, and formal flowerbeds offer a blissfully cool reprieve on a summer’s day. The Gardens are free and open 24 hours.

For organized walking tours, see below.

6 River Cruises & Other Organized Tours

RIVER CRUISES The best way of cruising the river, in my view, is aboard the fast **CityCat** ferries ★★. It’s also the cheapest. Board at Riverside and head downstream under the Story Bridge to New Farm Park, past Newstead House to the restaurant row at Brett’s Wharves; or cruise upriver past the city and South Bank to the University of Queensland’s lovely campus. (Take a look at its impressive Great Court while you’re there.) This trip in either direction will set you back a whole A\$3.80 (US\$2.45). Or you can stay on for the full trip, which takes about 2 hours. Cruises along the Brisbane River aboard the Kookaburra

River Queen paddle wheelers (☎ 07/3221 1300) are a good way to take in the Queenslander homes, historic buildings, and tropical foliage—especially in October and November when the jacaranda trees bloom. The boat departs from the Eagle Street Pier at 12:15am (boarding at 11:45am) and returns at 1:45pm. The cheapest option is the A\$24 (US\$16) “coffee, tea and cookies” fare, which provides a snack (you can also get a meal). Children pay half price; seniors get a 15% discount.

BUS TOURS Brisbane Transport (☎ 13 12 30 in Australia) runs two bus tours that are a much better value than commercial tours, especially as tour tickets entitle you to unlimited access to buses, ferries, and CityCats for the day. The **City Sights** ★ bus tour stops at 19 points of interest in a continuous loop around the city center, South Bank, and Fortitude Valley, including Chinatown, South Bank Parklands, the Queensland Cultural Centre, Sciencentre, the Riverside Centre (where markets are held Sun), the City Botanic Gardens, the casino, and various historical buildings. The driver of the blue and yellow bus gives a commentary, and you can hop on and off at any stop. The bus departs every 45 minutes from 9am to 3:45pm daily except Christmas, Good Friday, and Anzac Day (Apr 25). The whole trip, without stopping, takes 90 minutes. Tickets cost A\$20 (US\$13) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children ages 5 to 15. Buy your ticket on board. You can join anywhere along the route, but the most central stop is City Hall, Stop 2 on Adelaide Street at Albert Street.

The **City Nights** tour shows you the city lights from Mt. Coot-tha, the Brisbane River at South Bank, the illuminated cliffs at Kangaroo Point, New Farm Park, and Fortitude Valley. It departs City Hall, Stop 2 on Adelaide Street, daily (except Christmas, New Year's Eve, Good Friday, and Anzac Day) at 6pm (Mar–Oct) or 6:30pm (Nov–Feb) and takes about 2½ hours. Tickets are A\$20 (US\$13) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for kids ages 5 to 15. The trip also includes a sector by CityCat from South Bank to New Farm Park, where the bus waits to pick you up again.

WALKING TOURS The Brisbane City Council sponsors **Walking for Pleasure** (☎ 07/3403 8888): Most days a free guided walk departs from somewhere in the city or suburbs, exploring all kinds of territory from bushland to heritage buildings to riverscapes to cemeteries. The walks are aimed at locals, not tourists, so you get to explore Brisbane side-by-side with the townsfolk. Every walk has a flexible distance option and usually lasts about 2 hours. Most are easy, but some are more demanding. Most start and finish near public transport and end near a food outlet of some kind.

Historical Walking Tours are run by local historian Brian Ogden (☎ 07/3217 3673), who leads visitors on a journey into Brisbane's past, telling tales dating from convict settlement through the present day. Four different routes are taken, and each tour takes about 2 hours and costs A\$15 (US\$10).

Prepare for shivers up your spine if you take one of Jack Sim's **Ghost Tours** ★ (☎ 07/3844 6606), to relive Brisbane's gruesome past. City walking tours (A\$25/US\$16) are run on Friday nights, and there are also tours of the historic Toowong Cemetery and the now-disused Boggo Road Gaol. Bookings essential.

Read and walk the **Albert Street Literary Trail**, the best way to experience the city from a writer's view! Pick up a map from any Brisbane City Council Service Centre, ward office, or library (☎ 07/3403 8888).

Great Brisbane Walks, an inexpensive guide to more than 40 of Brisbane's best walks, is available from Brisbane City Council (☎ 07/3403 8888). Another

good book for those intending to explore Brisbane by foot is *Walking Brisbane*, a guide to 30 walks in and around the city, available from most bookshops.

7 Outdoor Pursuits in Brisbane

ACTIVITIES

ABSEILING & ROCK CLIMBING The **Kangaroo Point** cliffs south of the Story Bridge are a breeze for first-time abseilers, or so they say. **Outdoor Pursuits** (☎ 07/3391 8776; www.outdoorpursuits.com.au) stages rock climbs up the cliffs every second Sunday from 8:30am. The experience lasts 3½ hours and costs A\$39 (US\$25) per person. At 1pm you can abseil back during a 4-hour session for A\$39 (US\$25) per person. You will fit in four or five abseils in the course of the afternoon. If you want to climb in the morning and abseil in the afternoon, you can buy both experiences as a package for A\$59 (US\$38).

BIKING Bike tracks stretch for 400km (219 miles) around Brisbane. You often share them with pedestrians and in-line skaters. One great scenic route starts just west of the Story Bridge, sweeps through the City Botanic Gardens, and follows the river all the way to the University of Queensland campus at St Lucia; it's about 9km (5½ miles), all up. **Brisbane Bicycle Sales and Hire**, 87 Albert St. (☎ 07/3229 2433; www.brizbike.com), will rent you a bike and furnish you with the Brisbane City Council's free detailed bike maps. Rentals start at A\$12 (US\$7.80) for 1 hour and go up to A\$25 (US\$16) for the day; overnight (A\$45/US\$29), weekly (A\$80/US\$52), and fortnightly (A\$120/US\$78) rentals are available. The price includes helmets, which are compulsory in Australia. **Valet Cycle Hire** (☎ 0408 003 198 mobile phone) rents bikes, helmets, and maps for A\$30 (US\$20) for a half day, A\$40 (US\$26) full day, and A\$70 (US\$46) for 2 days. The company also operates an easy escorted tour each afternoon for about 2½ hours, departing from the Brisbane City Gardens, which costs A\$38 (US\$25) adults and A\$30 (US\$20) children 7 to 12 years. Bookings essential. **The Brisbane City Council** at City Hall (☎ 07/3403 8888) and Brisbane Tourism's information booths (see "Visitor Information" earlier in the chapter) also give out bike maps.

BUSHWALKING **Brisbane Forest Park**, a 29,000-hectare (71,250-acre) expanse of bush land, waterfalls, and rainforest a 20-minute drive north of the city, has many hiking trails from just a few hundred meters long up to 8km (5 miles). Some tracks have themes—one highlights the native mammals in the park. Another hike, the 1.8km (1-mile) Mt. Coot-tha Aboriginal Art Trail showcases contemporary Aboriginal art with tree carvings, rock paintings, etchings, and a dance pit. Most walks depart from one of seven regional centers that are up to a 20-minute drive from headquarters, so you will need a car. Make a day of it and pack a picnic. **Park Headquarters** (☎ 07/3300 4855) is at 60 Mt. Nebo Rd., The Gap, where there's a wildlife display, restaurant, crafts shop, and information center.

IN-LINE SKATING In-line skaters can use the network of bike/pedestrian paths. See "Biking" for where to find a map, or just head down to the **City Botanic Gardens** at Alice Street and find your own way out along the river. **SkateBiz**, 101 Albert St. (☎ 07/3220 0157), rents blades for A\$13 (US\$9) for 2 hours, or A\$20 (US\$13) for any time up to 24 hours. Protective gear is included. Take photo ID. The store is open from 9am to 5.30pm Monday through Thursday, 9am to 9pm Friday, 9am to 4pm Saturday, and 10am to 4pm Sunday.

JOGGING Take any pedestrian/bike path (see “Biking” for information about where to find a bike map) or head to the City Botanic Gardens and out along the river.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

Aussie Rules football and cricket are played at “The Gabba,” as Aussies call **Brisbane Cricket Ground**, 411 Vulture St. at Stanley Street, Woolloongabba, a 5-minute drive south of the city. Call **Transinfo** (☎ 13 12 30) for details on buses.

AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL (AFL) The Brisbane Lions are the local heroes in this uniquely Aussie sport. Tickets are about A\$50 (US\$33); book through **Ticketmaster** (☎ 13 61 22 in Australia). The season begins in late March and ends in late August. Most games are played on Saturday night.

CRICKET Boring to some, fascinating to others, cricket is big business in Australia, and some of the most important national and international matches are played in Brisbane in the season from October to late February. Most matches are played midweek and weekends during the day; a few are played at night. Tickets cost up to about A\$70 (US\$46). Book through **Ticketmaster** (☎ 13 61 22; www.ticketmaster7.com).

8 The Shopping Scene

Brisbane’s best shopping is centered on **Queen Street Mall**, which has around 500 stores to choose from. Fronting the mall at 171–209 Queen St., under the Hilton, is the three-level **Wintergarden** shopping complex (☎ 07/3229 9755), housing upscale jewelers and Aussie fashion designers. Farther up the mall at 91 Queen St. (at Albert St.) is the **Myer Centre** (☎ 07/3223 6900), which has Brisbane’s biggest department store and five levels of moderately priced stores, mostly fashion. The **Brisbane Arcade**, 160 Queen Street Mall (☎ 07/3221 5977), is lined with the boutiques of local Queensland designers. Just down the mall from it you will find the **Broadway on the Mall** arcade (☎ 07/3229 5233), which stocks affordable fashion, gifts, and accessories on two levels. Across from the Edward Street end of the mall is a smart new fashion and lifestyle shopping precinct, **MacArthur Central**, right next door to the GPO and taking up the block between Queen and Elizabeth streets. This is where you’ll find top name designer labels, Swiss watches, galleries, and accessory shops. Bookworms will find everything they need in Albert Street, which boasts several wonderful independent bookstores as well as a massive Borders bookshop.

The trendy suburb of **Paddington**, a couple of kilometers from the city by cab (or take bus no. 144 to Bardon), is where to go for antiques, books, art, crafts, one-of-a-kind clothing, and gifts. The shops—colorfully painted Queensland cottages—line the main street, Given Terrace, which becomes Latrobe Terrace. Don’t miss the second wave of shops around the bend.

You will find some elegant houseware and fashion boutiques, galleries, one or two antiques shops, and cafes and restaurants on **Park Road**, linking Coronation Drive and Milton Road in Milton. Parking is difficult, so take the Ipswich train from Central or Roma Street station to Milton station. Park Road is around the corner from the station.

SHOPPING HOURS Shops are open from 8:30am to 5:30pm Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 5pm on Saturday, and 10:30am to 4pm on Sunday. They stay open until 9pm Friday in the city, when the Queen Street Mall is abuzz with cinemagoers and revelers, and Thursday in Paddington.

MARKETS Authentic retro '50s and '60s fashion, off-beat stuff like old LPs, secondhand crafts, fashion by up-and-coming young designers, and all kinds of junk and treasure are all up for sale at Brisbane's only alternative markets, **Valley Markets**, Brunswick Street and Chinatown malls, in Fortitude Valley (☎ 07/3006 6200). Hang around in one of the many coffee shops and listen to live music. It's held Saturday and Sunday from 8am to 4pm.

Friday night is a fun time to visit the **South Bank Art and Craft Markets**, Stanley Street Plaza, South Bank Parklands (☎ 07/3846 4500 or 0414/754 082 mobile phone), when the buzzing outdoor handcrafts market is lit by fairy lights. The market is held Friday from 5 to 10pm, Saturday from 11am to 5pm, and Sunday from 9am to 5pm.

Brisbane's glamour set likes trawling the **Riverside Markets** ★ at the Riverside Centre, 123 Eagle St. (☎ 07/3870 2807) and the adjacent **Eagle Street Pier Craft and Deli Markets** (07/3846 4500, or 0417/635822 mobile phone) to buy attractive housewares, colorful pottery, wooden blanket chests, hand-made toys, painted flowerpots, and other stylish wares. It's held Sunday from 8am to 4pm.

For an authentic taste of Queensland's best produce, the **Farmers Markets** ★★ (☎ 0439/999 009) operates every second and fourth Saturday, from 7am to 1pm, in the grounds of the Brisbane Powerhouse, Lamington Street, New Farm. Here you'll find much to tempt your palate, brought into the city fresh that morning by farmers from around the southeast of the state. There's everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to homemade chutneys, quail, fresh seafood, free-range eggs, and patés. Foodies will find themselves in heaven.

9 Brisbane After Dark

You can find out about festivals, concerts, and performing arts events, and book tickets through **Ticketek** (☎ 13 19 31 in Queensland, 07/3404 6700 outside Queensland; www.ticketek.com.au). You can book in person at Ticketek agencies, the most convenient of which are on Level E at the Myer Centre at 91 Queen Street Mall, in the Roma Street Transit Centre, and in the Visitor Information Centre at South Bank Parklands. Or try **Ticketmaster** (☎ 13 16 00; www.ticketmaster7.com).

QTIX (☎ 13 62 46 in Australia) is a major booking agent for performing arts and classical music, including events at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex (QPAC). There is a A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) fee per booking, not per ticket. You can also inquire and book in person at the box office at QPAC between 8:30am and 9pm Monday through Saturday, and at its outlet at the South Bank Parklands Visitor Information Centre.

The free weekly newspaper *Brisbane News* lists performing arts, jazz and classical music performances, art exhibitions, rock concerts, and public events. The free weekly *TimeOff*, which comes out Wednesdays and can be found in bars and cafes, is a good guide to live music, as is the *Courier-Mail* newspaper on Thursday.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Most of Brisbane's performing arts happen at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex (QPAC) at Queensland Cultural Centre (see "Exploring Brisbane" earlier in this chapter). For information and tickets, call QTIX (see above) or www.qtix.com.au.

THEATER

Brisbane Powerhouse—Centre for the Live Arts A former electricity powerhouse, this massive brick factory is now a dynamic new art space for contemporary (some might say fringe) exhibitions, performance, and live art. The building retains its unique character, an industrial mix of metal, glass, and stark surfaces etched with 20 years of graffiti. It's a short walk from the New Farm ferry terminal along the riverfront through New Farm Park. 119 Lamington St., New Farm. ☎ 07/3358 8600 or www.brisbanepowerhouse.org. Ticket prices vary from free or a donation to A\$100 (US\$65) or more.

La Boite Theatre ★ (www.laboite.com.au) is a well-established innovative company which performs contemporary all-Australian plays in-the-round. In late 2003, La Boite moved to a new 400-seat theatre in Brisbane's new Cultural Industries Precinct still being constructed at Kelvin Grove as we went to print. Check the website for address and phone details. Tickets for the 2003 season were around A\$30 (US\$20), previews A\$25 (US\$16).

Queensland Theatre Company, the state theater company, offers eight or nine productions a year, from the classics to premiere Australian works, attracting some of the country's best actors and directors. Performing at Optus Playhouse and Cremorne Theatres at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex (QPAC), South Bank. ☎ 07/3840 7000 administration www.qldtheatreco.com.au. Tickets A\$17 (if you are age 24 or under) to A\$50 (US\$11–US\$33).

CLASSICAL MUSIC

The Brisbane City Council (☎ 07/3403 8888) sponsors free lunchtime concerts in City Hall most Thursdays, and sometimes on other days, too, usually from 12:30 to 1:30pm. Performers range from classical to percussion/folk fusion to military bands.

The Queensland Orchestra Provides classical music lovers with a diverse mix of orchestral and chamber music, with the odd foray into fun material, such as Cole Porter hits and gospel music; the orchestra presents about 30 concerts a year. Free talks are given in the foyer 1 hour before all major performances. The occasional "Tea and Symphony" concerts at City Hall include tea and coffee. Performing at the Concert Hall in the Queensland Performing Arts Complex (QPAC), City Hall, and intimate works at its studios at 53 Ferry Rd., West End. ☎ 07/3377 5000 for administration. Tickets A\$35–A\$50 (US\$23–US\$33); less if you are a full-time student or under age 26.

OPERA

Opera Queensland The state company performs a lively repertoire of traditional opera as well as modern works, musicals, and choral concerts. Free talks on the opera you are about to see start in the foyer 45 minutes before every performance, and free close-up tours of the set are held after every performance (except the final night). Lyric Theatre at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex (QPAC). ☎ 07/3875 3030 for administration. Tickets A\$33–A\$118 (US\$21–US\$77), or A\$37 (US\$24) at some performances if you're age 30 or under.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

NIGHTCLUBS

Downunder Bar In the basement of the Palace Backpackers, this is Brisbane's only dedicated backpacker and university student party bar open every night, so it's packed every night. There are nightly specials and giveaways, and the emphasis is on fun. Open Monday through Friday noon to 3am, and Saturday and Sunday 5pm to 3am. Palace Backpackers, corner Ann and Edward sts. ☎ 07/3211 2433. No cover.

Finds **Brisbane's Historic Pubs**

Brisbane's attractive historic pubs, many of them recently revitalized, have wide shady verandas and beer gardens just perfect for whiling away a sunny afternoon or catching a quick meal at night.

The best known is undoubtedly the **Breakfast Creek Hotel** on Kingsford Smith Drive, Breakfast Creek (see "Great Deals on Dining" earlier in this chapter). Built in 1889, the hotel is a Brisbane institution. For many people a visit to the city isn't complete without a steak and beer "off the wood" at the Brekkie Creek.

Another landmark is the **Regatta Hotel**, on Coronation Drive, Toowong. This heritage hotel with three stories of iron lace balconies is the perfect spot for a cool drink overlooking the Brisbane River. In 2002 it underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation that now sees it bursting at the seams on weekends. The new Boat Shed restaurant is popular but not inexpensive, and I think the tables around the hotel verandas are a better choice.

Not far from the Regatta, in High Street, Toowong, is the **Royal Exchange Hotel**, known simply as "the RE." The RE is popular with students, probably because of its proximity to the University of Queensland. It has a great garden bar at the back.

The **Story Bridge Hotel**, at 200 Main St., Kangaroo Point, is well-known as the venue for some of Brisbane's most unusual events, such as the annual Australia Day (Jan 26) cockroach races. Built in 1886, it is also a great place to find live music.

Another of the city's oldest pubs is the **Plough Inn** at South Bank Parklands, which has stood its ground through major changes in the neighborhood since 1885. There's even a ghost, they say . . .

Empire Hotel Friday and Saturday nights find this Heritage-listed pub packed with the Hip, the Young, and the Beautiful. Don't come here in a suit, and forget about it if you're over 35—you're not welcome. Super-cool groovers dance to an all-night beat upstairs, and most nights a DJ plays in the downstairs Art Nouveau bar. By day, the place is more like a friendly country pub. 339 Brunswick St. at Ann St., New Farm. ☎ 07/3852 1216.

Friday's This indoor/outdoor bar, restaurant, and nightclub complex overlooking the Brisbane River is a haunt for "the Zoolander generation" of 18–40s. Every Tuesday to Saturday night sees some kind of happy-hour deal, cocktail club, or drinks special, and the dance action starts pumping around 11pm on Fridays and Saturdays. Every third Wednesday of the month from 6–8:30pm the Wine Club welcomes over-30s with all the wine, champagne, spirits, beer, food, and live bands they can take for A\$30 (US\$20). "Sounds on Sunday," from 2pm till very late, features top DJs from around Australia. Upstairs in Riverside Centre, 123 Eagle St. ☎ 07/3832 2122. Cover A\$7–A\$10 (US\$4.55–US\$6.50). CityCat to Riverside.

Margaux's A smart mid-30s to mid-40s crowd gathers to dance and chat over cocktails and supper at this clubby joint. It's open Friday and Saturday from 9pm to 3am; happy hour is 9:30 to 10:30pm. 5th floor, Brisbane Hilton, 190 Elizabeth St. ☎ 07/3234 2000. Cover A\$5 (US\$3.25) Sat night.

COOL SPOTS FOR JAZZ & BLUES

Brisbane Jazz Club ★ *Finds* On the riverfront under the Story Bridge, this is the only Australian jazz club still featuring big band dance music (every Sun night). Watch out for the slightly sloping dance floor—it was once a boat ramp! Traditional and mainstream jazz is featured on Saturday nights. Once a month on Sunday afternoons guest artists play on the deck. It's open Saturday 8 to 11pm and Sunday 7 to 10:30pm and sometimes on Friday nights, but the best thing is to call and check what's on first. 1 Annie St., Kangaroo Point. ☎ 07/3391 2006. A\$10 (US\$6.50) most nights, with higher cover charges for some guest acts. CityCat to Holman St. Free parking lot.

Holiday Inn Jazz-n-Blues Bar One of Brisbane's leading live jazz venues is in the unlikely setting of this busy hotel. A mixed crowd in their 20s to 40s turns up to hear local, Australian, and international acts. Get there early, as there are only seats for 30; the rest is standing-room only. Open Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday 6pm to late, and Friday from 4pm. Ground floor of the hotel, next to Brisbane Transit Centre, Roma St. ☎ 07/3238 2222. Varying cover charges.

THE CASINO

Treasury Casino This lovely heritage building—built in 1886 as, ironically enough, the state's Treasury offices—houses a modern casino. Three levels of 100 gaming tables offer roulette, blackjack, baccarat, craps, sic-bo, and traditional Aussie two-up. There are more than 1,000 slot machines, five restaurants, and seven bars, and it's open 24 hours. Of the restaurants, the best value is at Pastano, where nothing costs more than A\$13 (US\$8.50). Free live bands appear nightly in the Livewire Bar. Ask about Ride and Dine deals, in which your bus, train, ferry, or taxi fare entitles you to buy a package of cheap gaming chips and a meal. Queen St. between George and William sts. ☎ 07/3306 8888. Must be 18 years old to enter; neat casual attire required (no beachwear or thongs). Closed Christmas, Good Friday, and until 1pm Anzac Day (Apr 25).

10 Moreton Bay & Islands

The Brisbane River runs into beautiful Moreton Bay, studded with hundreds of small islands—and a few large ones. Some, such as the former quarantine station and leper colony of Peel Island and Bird and Goat islands, can only be reached by private vessel. Others are national parks, and some are accessible either by tour boat or public ferry.

NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

A popular holiday spot for Brisbane families is **North Stradbroke Island**, one of the world's largest sand islands, with long white beaches fringing the east coast and fishing towns strung along the sheltered western side of the island.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND **Stradbroke Ferries** (☎ 07/3286 2666) operates a water-taxi service from Toondah Harbour, Middle Street, Cleveland, to Dunwich (about 30 min.) for A\$13 (US\$8.45) return (round-trip) adult fare. The vehicle barge takes walk-on passengers for A\$10 (US\$6.50) return (this takes about 1 hr.). A bus service meets almost every water taxi or ferry, and operates between the three main settlements, Dunwich, Amity, and Point Lookout. The trip takes about 30 minutes to either place and costs A\$8.60 (US\$5.60) for adults.

VISITOR INFORMATION **The North Stradbroke Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 07/4309 9555), in Junner Street, Dunwich (about 200m/660 ft.

from the ferry terminal) is open weekdays from 8:30am to 5pm and weekends 9am to 3pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO **North Stradbroke Island**, “Straddie” to the locals, was once home to a large Aboriginal population and still retains much of their history. The main town, where the ferry or water taxi will drop you, is **Dunwich**. Over the years the town has been a convict outstation, a Catholic mission, quarantine station, and benevolent institution. The local museum is open Wednesday and Saturday 10am to 2pm and displays historic photographs, items salvaged from shipwrecks, and information about the early settlement of the island. A self-guided historical walk begins at the information center, where you can pick up a free map. **Point Lookout**, at the northern tip of the island, is Queensland’s most easterly point. A “must” for all visitors is the **North Gorge Headlands Walk**, for breathtaking views and for spotting turtles, dolphins, and whales. There are plenty of places to stay on the island, at motels, low-key resorts, caravan parks, and camping grounds.

SOUTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

South Stradbroke is accessible from Runaway Bay near Southport, at the Gold Coast—about 45 minutes’ drive south of Brisbane city. There are three resorts on the island and four camping grounds. The resorts run boats for guests only, so the only other way to get to the island is by water taxi. **Gold Coast water taxi** (☎ 0418 759 789) takes groups to the camping grounds and resorts for about A\$10 (US\$6.50) per person (minimum of six people plus camping gear, if necessary). **Couran Cove Resort** runs day tours for A\$55 (US\$36) per person, which includes return transfers from Runaway Bay, morning tea, guided rainforest tour, lunch, and use of resort facilities for the rest of the afternoon. Fastcat leaves Runaway Bay at 10am, and you can return on either the 3 or 5pm boat.

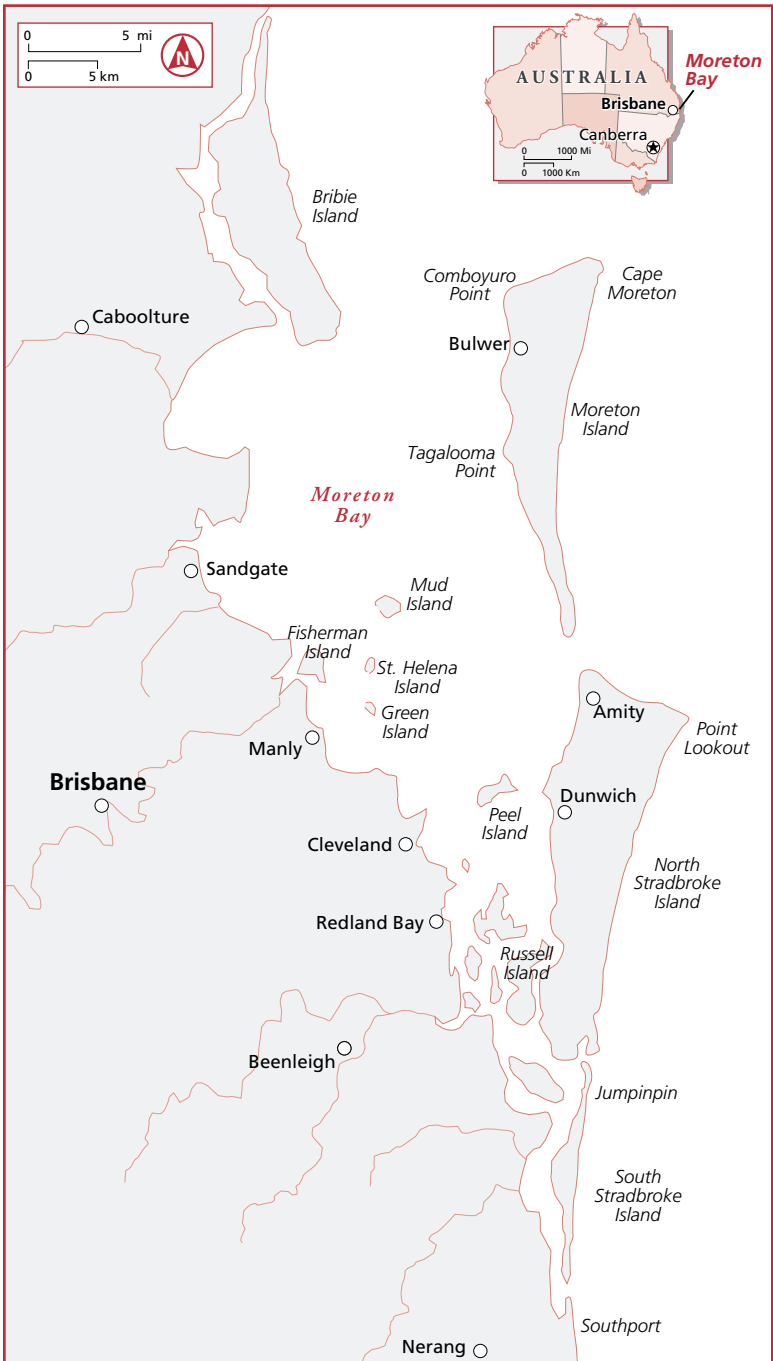
WHERE TO STAY

Worth a Splurge

Couran Cove Resort ★★☆☆ *Finds* You’ll be lucky to find a more peaceful resort than this one, which is an island idyll in a class of its own. On South Stradbroke Island, there are no cars, with everyone getting around on foot or bicycle or silent electric shuttle. And whether you’re a beach or bush person, you’ll find it here. You can hang around the pools or lagoon, head to the spectacular surf beach about 2km (1¼ mile) from the main resort, or stroll through remnants of primeval rainforest. The resort is committed to environmentally friendly practices, and is unique for its range of more than 100 recreational and sporting activities including a 9m (30-ft.) rock-climbing wall, three-lane sprint track, baseball and softball pitching cage, and a High Ropes Challenge course. There’s also beach volleyball, bocce and lawn bowls, shuffleboard, surfing, fishing, and a stargazing observatory, and for gentler pursuits an extensive day spa and a resident artist who’ll give you lessons. Guests can take in a wildlife show at the amphitheater. There are lots of accommodation choices. My favorite is a nature-cabin in the bush, but for water views and closer access to the restaurants and spa, choose one of the colorful waterfront units. All have kitchens, and there’s a general store and “pantry service” which will deliver supplies to your room. Smoking is only allowed in designated outdoor areas and on balconies, and no tobacco products are sold at the resort.

South Stradbroke Island, Moreton Bay, QLD or P.O. Box 224, Runaway Bay, QLD 4216. ☎ 1800/632 211 or 07/5597 9000. Fax 07/5597 9090. www.couran-cove.com.au. 357 units. Nature cabins (sleep from 3–8) from

Moreton Bay & Islands



A\$308 (US\$200) per night with a minimum 3-night stay; waterfront rooms from A\$299 (US\$194) per night (no minimum stay). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; poolside cafe; 10-lane heated pool; children's pool; golf driving range and putting green, free transfers to mainland golf courses; 2 tennis courts; 2 fully equipped exercise rooms; spa; extensive watersports equipment rentals; bike rental; children's programs and ½-acre adventure playground; game room; tour desk; massage; babysitting; laundry and dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C (waterfront units only, others have ceiling fans), TV w/pay movies, VCR, Fax, dataport, kitchen, minibar (marine resort only), hair dryer, safe.

MORETON ISLAND

At more than 200 sq. km (77 sq. miles) in area, Moreton is the second-largest sand mass in the world (after Queensland's Fraser Island) and has the world's largest sandhill, **Mt. Tempest**. There are three settlements and the **Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort**, where guests and visitors can take part in hand-feeding a pod of wild dolphins, which come in to the jetty each evening. It's an experience for which they line up in great anticipation, but be warned—it is highly regulated, you can't touch the dolphins, and it's over in a few seconds! Moreton has some other claims to fame: You can visit the 41-hectare (102-acre) "desert" and toboggan down the sand dunes. Or you can snorkel around the 12 wrecks just north of the resort, and visit historic points of interest including the sandstone lighthouse at **Cap Moreton**, built in 1857. A 4WD is essential for getting around, but tours are run from the resort. Permits for access and camping are available from National Park rangers and ferry operators.

GETTING THERE The high-speed catamarans *Tangalooma Flyer* and *Tangalooma Express* (© 1300/652 250) leave Brisbane's Pinkenba wharf at Eagle Farm twice daily, at 10am and 5pm (10am and 2pm on Sat). The trip takes 75 minutes. Coaches pick up from Roma Street Transit Centre at 9am daily to connect with the ferries and will pick up from city and Spring Hill hotels on request. Return transfers leave Tangalooma Monday to Friday at 3:30pm and Saturday at noon and 4:30pm. The return fare is A\$56 (US\$36) adults and A\$28 (US\$18) children 3 to 14. The *Combie Trader* vehicular and passenger ferry (© 07/3203 6399; www.moreton-island.com) departs from Scarborough on the Redcliffe Peninsula for Bulwer daily except Tuesday. The trip takes about 2 hours and costs A\$27 (US\$18) adults, A\$24 (US\$16) students 16 and over, and A\$16 (US\$10) children 5 to 15. The cost to take a four-wheel-drive and up to five passengers is A\$125 (US\$81). Day trips operate on Saturdays (11am–4pm) and cost A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) children 5 to 15, and A\$72 (US\$47) for a family of four. Combie Trader also runs four-wheel-drive trips to the island on Monday, Friday, and Sunday. The cost of A\$85 (US\$55) adults and A\$60 (US\$39) children under 14 includes the ferry crossing, tour, and lunch. Timetables are subject to change so check first.

WHERE TO STAY

Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort ★ *Kids* Once the Southern Hemisphere's largest whaling station, Tangalooma is the only resort on Moreton Island. The resort's big attraction is the pod of wild dolphins that comes into the jetty each evening. Guests are guaranteed one chance during their visit to hand-feed the dolphins; but you can't swim with, or touch, the dolphins. The feeding is regulated for the health of the pod, and your turn is over in a few seconds. Tangalooma is a good base for exploring the rest of the island, and a variety of tours are available, among them seasonal (late June to Oct) whale-watching cruises for A\$95 (US\$62) adults, A\$55 (US\$36) children. A dolphin research center is also based here. In the past year, 96 new hotel rooms have been added

to the accommodation, which also includes 56 modern two-story family villas only a year or so older. Villas are more pricey than regular rooms, and are a little farther from the resort facilities. The new hotel rooms sleep up to four and have air-conditioning, minibars, and hair dryers, which the other rooms do not, but the older rooms have kitchenettes. Each unit in the main resort area sleeps four to five people, and has a private balcony. A general store is on-site.

Moreton Island, off Brisbane, QLD or P.O. Box 1102, Eagle Farm, QLD 4009. ☎ 1300/652 250 or 07/3268 6333. Fax 07/3268 6299. www.tangalooma.com. 288 units (all with shower only). A\$328–A\$433 (US\$213–US\$281) including dolphin feeding. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; cafe; 2 outdoor pools; driving range and putting green; archery; tennis and squash courts; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment rental; children's programs and playground; tour desk; 4WD rental; babysitting; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C in some hotel rooms, TV, kitchenette in some rooms, full kitchen in villas, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer (some rooms only).

OTHER MORETON BAY ISLANDS

THE BAY ISLANDS Four small islands in Moreton Bay are known collectively as “the Bay Islands.” They are Russell, Lamb, Macleay, and Karragarra islands, clustered in the calm passage between the mainland and North Stradbroke at the southern end of Moreton Bay. They are perfect for day-tripping, and the **Bay Islands water taxi service** (☎ 07/3409 1145) from Redland Bay takes 10 to 20 minutes. It's A\$10 (US\$6.50) round-trip for adults, and A\$1.20 (US\$0.80) to island-hop between each.

ST. HELENA ISLAND ★ For 65 years, from 1867 to 1932, St. Helena was a prison island, known as “the hellhole of the Pacific” to the nearly 4,000 souls incarcerated there. Today, the prison ruins are a tourist attraction, with a small museum in the restored and reconstructed Deputy Superintendent's Cottage. Entry to the island—now a National Park—is by guided tour only. Excellent tours, most involving a re-enactment of life on the island jail, are run by **AB Sea Cruises** (☎ 07/3893 1240; 7am–7pm daily) on the launch *Cat-o-Nine-Tails*, leaving from Manly Boat Harbour. The cost is A\$65 (US\$42) adults, A\$55 (US\$36) concessions, A\$35 (US\$23) children 4 to 14, and \$139 (US\$90) for a family of four. The tour leaves at 9:15am weekdays, returning at 2:15pm, and 11am to 4pm on weekends and public holidays, and includes a box lunch. **St. Helena By Night Ghost Tours** are run on some Friday and Saturday nights. They include dinner, a dramatized version of life in the prison, and a few spooky surprises. Night tours cost A\$75 (US\$49) adults, A\$40 (US\$26) children, or A\$159 (US\$103) for a family of four. Bookings essential.

Eco-tours, run in conjunction with the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, take visitors to parts of the island not seen on the historical tours. The same departure times and prices apply.

COOCHIEMUDLO ISLAND British explorer Matthew Flinders landed here in 1799, and this event is re-enacted each July. “Coochie” is small enough to walk or cycle around, and is a great place for watersports along the 3.5km (2 miles) of beaches—windsurfing, sailing, swimming, and paddle-skiing are available. There is a 9-hole golf course, a tennis court, licensed cafe, galleries, and accommodations. Camping is not allowed. **The Bay Islands taxi service** (☎ 07/3409 1145) leaves from the Victoria Point jetty (Colburn Ave.) and Cleveland. The trip takes about 5 minutes from Victoria Point and costs A\$2.40 (US\$1.55) each way. From Cleveland, it takes about 20 minutes and costs A\$9 (US\$5.85) round-trip.

Queensland & the Great Barrier Reef

by Lee Mylne

With a landscape three times the size of Texas and a population that hugs the coast but embraces the Outback, Queensland is a treasure trove of stunning scenery, fantastic yarns, and eccentric personalities. Its most famous attraction is the Great Barrier Reef . . . hardly the only thing worth seeing. Great beaches, tropical weather, and the mystique of the Outback make “where to go” one of the most difficult decisions for visitors.

White sandy beaches grace almost the entire coast, and just offshore are a string of the beautiful islands and coral atolls. At the southern end, just north of the New South Wales border, travelers head for the Gold Coast beaches and theme parks. In the north, from Townsville to Cape York, the rainforest teems with unique flora and fauna.

The fertile coastal fringe and tropical climate is perfect for cultivating such fruits as bananas and pineapples and the warm, wet coastline hosts enough sugar cane fields that the area produces a significant amount of the world’s sugar.

Brisbane is the state’s amenable capital (see chapter 5). Less than an hour’s drive south is the Gold Coast “glitter strip,” with its 35km (22 miles) of surf and sandy beaches. To the north of Brisbane lies the Sunshine Coast—more white beaches, crystal-clear waters, and rolling green mountains dotted with villages.

Further north is the Fraser Coast and South Burnett. Maryborough will fascinate history buffs, with its original Queenslander homes and reminders of yesteryear. The majestic pines of the Bunya Mountains provide a lush backdrop for the South Burnett Valley, an area rich in history, agriculture, wineries and country towns.

No one should miss the stunning wild beauty of the largest sand island in the world, World Heritage-listed Fraser Island. Each year from August to October, humpback whales come to frolic in the sheltered waters between Fraser Island and Hervey Bay.

Inland, the gold, peanut, beef, wine, and emu country offers another insight into Queensland country life. Inland are rich farming areas and the gemfield towns of Sapphire, Emerald, Rubyvale, and Anakie, which attract modern day miners keen to seek their fortune—beautiful gems can still be unearthed by lucky fossickers.

The Town of 1770 marks the spot where Captain James Cook and his crew came ashore from the *Endeavour* in 1770. The clear waters and pristine coastline have changed little since then. Nearby Gladstone boasts many industries as well as a large yachting marina and good seafood restaurants. Gladstone is the gateway to Heron Island, an idyllic coral cay, where you’ll find a turtle rookery and other wildlife.

Around Rockhampton, the beef capital of Australia, more than three

million cattle roam among the gum trees, and at local pubs, steak sandwiches and barbecued *snags* (sausages) are always on the *plat du jour*. Throughout the region, the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef are within easy reach.

Traveling north along the coast, you will be drawn along by one tropical island after another until you get to the 74 islands of the Whitsunday and Cumberland groups.

Then you will enter a land where tropical islands, lush rainforest, rugged mountains, and romantic rivers unite. Green sugar cane fields are everywhere—Mackay is the largest sugar-producing region in Australia. This attractive city has its own beach, and the harbor is a departure point for cruises to the Great Barrier Reef and the Whitsunday islands. The Whitsundays region is on the same latitude as Tahiti, and for my money is equally lovely. The idyllic island playground is laced with coral reefs rising out of calm, blue waters teeming with colorful coral and fish, and it's warm enough for swimming all year round.

North of the Whitsundays is popular Dunk Island and the rainforest settlement of Mission Beach. The delights of the tropics are apparent everywhere in this area of Tropical North Queensland. From islands dotted with palm trees to Wet Tropics

Rainforest, the region is populated with friendly, laid-back people. The port city of Townsville boasts 320 days of sunshine per year, and marks the start of the Great Green Way—an area of great natural beauty leading to Cairns. The trip could take anywhere from 4 hours to 14 days depending on how many detours you wish to make.

Further north, you come to Cairns, with rainforest hills and villages to explore and a harbor full of cruise and dive boats waiting to take you to the Reef. Cairns is fine as a base, but many savvy travelers head an hour north to the village of Port Douglas, preferring its peaceful rural atmosphere, uncrowded beach, and less developed environs.

A visit to Queensland would not be complete without at least one trip into the Outback. You can head west from Rockhampton, to discover the heart of Queensland at Longreach, Barcaldine, and Winton, or from Townsville to the mining town of Mt. Isa. From Cairns, the Gulf Savannah region is rich in welcoming small towns.

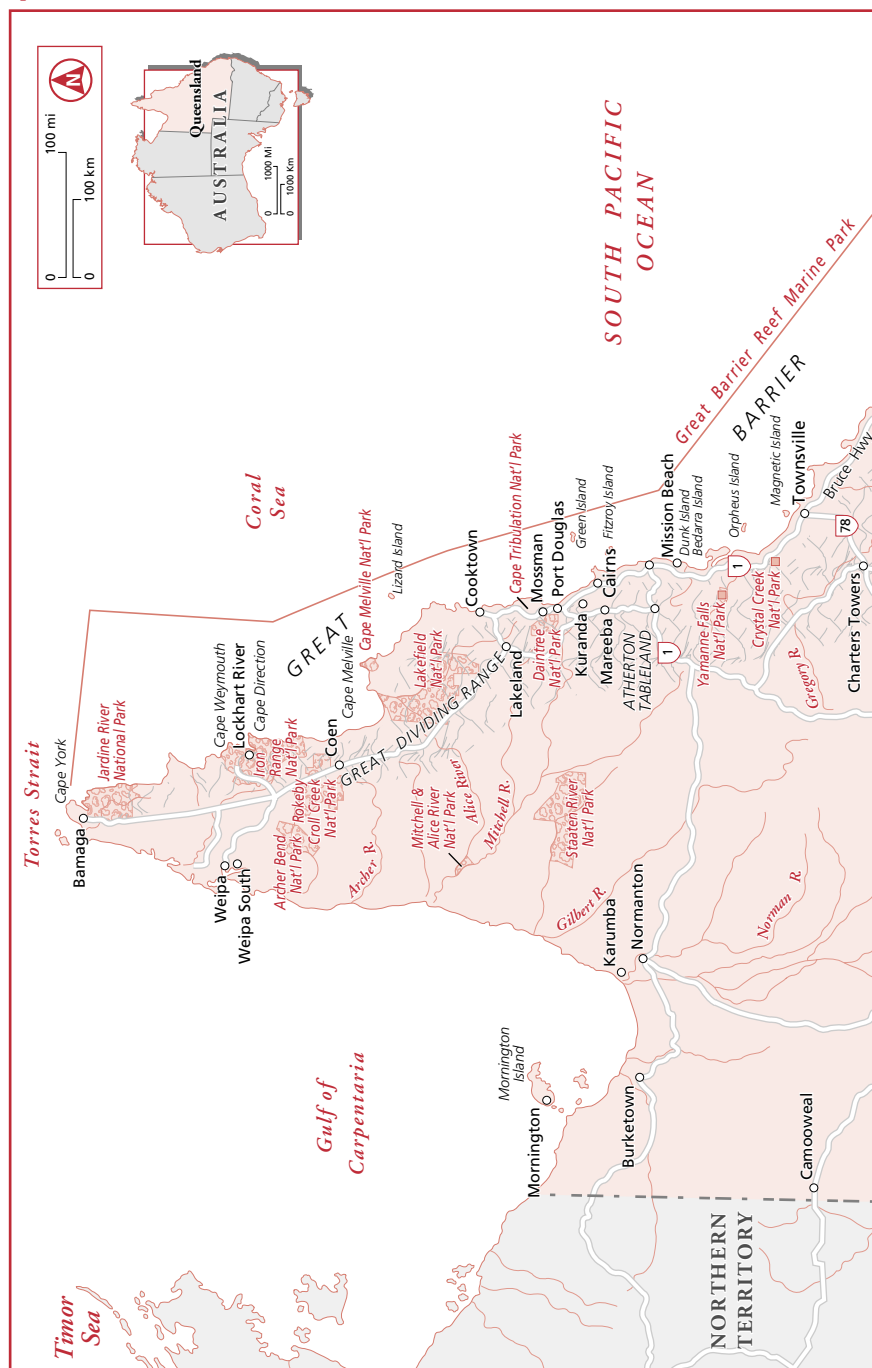
It's possible to spend a small fortune on watersports, sailing trips, cruises, game-fishing excursions, and rainforest 4WD tours in Queensland, but this chapter will help you scout out the best deals. Cheap accommodations and food are generally plentiful, and the sunshine and beaches are always free.

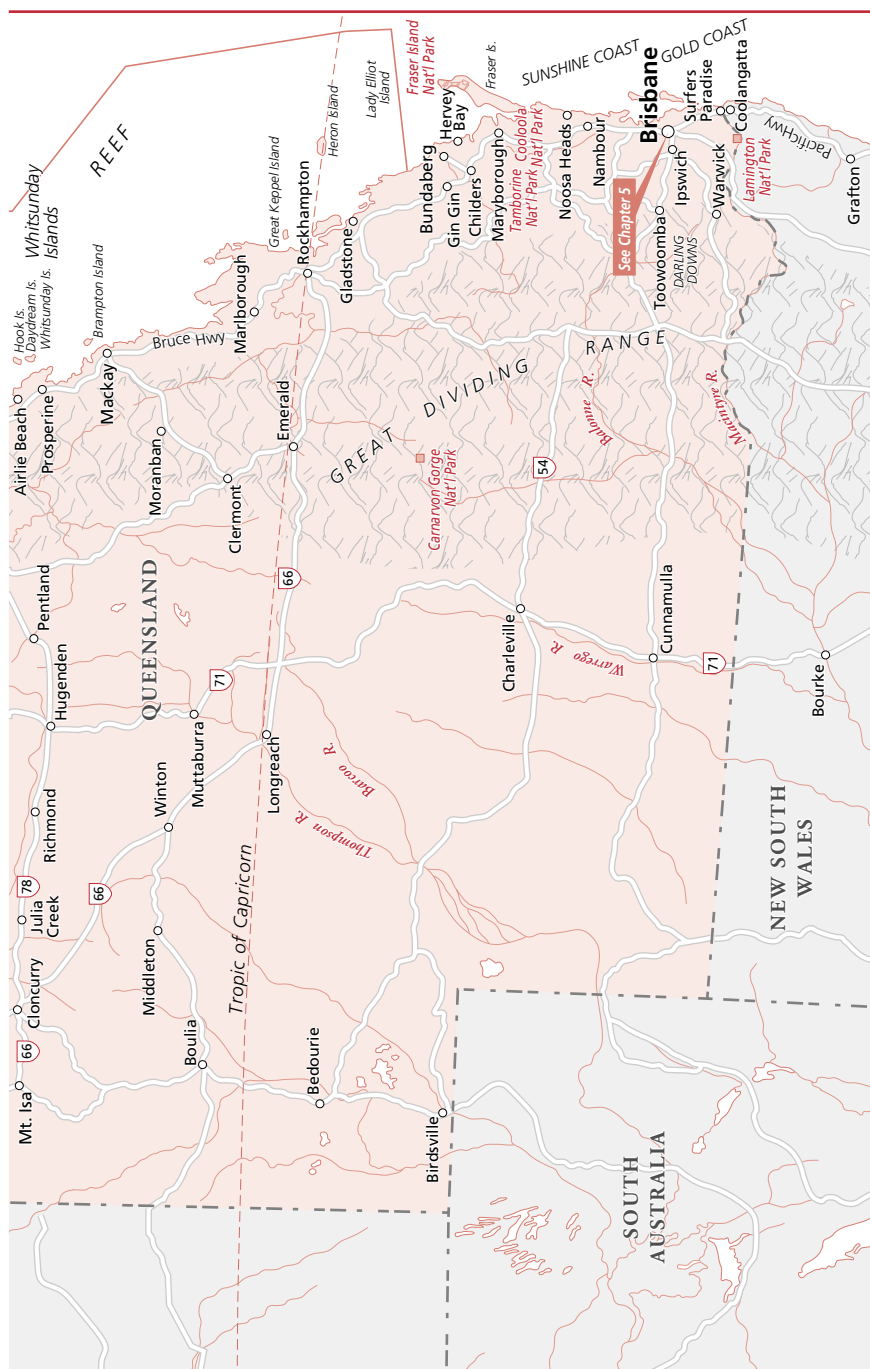
Queensland in 3 Days

If you have only 3 days in Queensland, you could happily spend them all on Heron Island, in my opinion, the most stunning Great Barrier Reef coral cay. Or you could spend all your time on a 3-day, 2-night sailing trip around the Whitsunday Islands. From here, you can head to the outer Great Barrier Reef for a day.

If you go to Cairns, spend the first day taking the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway—the longest cableway in the world—over the rainforest to the mountaintop rainforest village of Kuranda. The next day take a day trip to the Great Barrier Reef, perhaps aboard Quicksilver's *Wavepiercer* catamaran. The next day you'll explore the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest on a 4WD day safari.

Queensland





EXPLORING THE QUEENSLAND COAST

Without a doubt your itinerary will include at least one trip to the Great Barrier Reef. The Reef starts around Bundaberg and runs up the Queensland coast to New Guinea, so you have lots of departure points from which to explore. Don't think you have to go through Cairns or Port Douglas; the reef is as accessible and magnificent from the Whitsundays, Townsville, Gladstone, and Bundaberg. Cairns has the advantage of good flight connections from Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Queensland Travel Centre** is a great resource on traveling and touring the state, including the Great Barrier Reef. Visit the Destination Queensland website at www.destinationqueensland.com or call ☎ **13 88 33** in Australia. Tourism Queensland has offices in the United States and the United Kingdom—see “Visitor Information” in chapter 2.

Cheap Thrills: What to See & Do for Free (or Almost) in Queensland

- **Breathing in the sea air on a stroll along The Esplanade in Cairns.** Watch the cruise boats pull in during the late afternoon, and at night join the throngs of people enjoying a cheap feed at the hordes of fish and chips shops, hamburger joints, and pizzerias lining the strip.
- **Strolling the Flecker Botanic Gardens.** Located 3km (1¾ miles) northwest of Cairns, the walking tracks, gardens, ferns, wetlands, and orchids are blissful in the summer heat and relaxing anytime.
- **Exploring the Wet Tropics rainforests at Mission Beach.** The Daintree Rainforest north of Cairns is best explored on a commercial 4WD safari, but the even denser Wet Tropics rainforests at Mission Beach, a 90-minute drive south of Cairns, can be explored on foot for nothing. You may even spot a cassowary, a giant ostrich-like bird with a blue horny head like a dinosaur!
- **Hitting the beach!** Beaches are always free in Oz, and Queensland has hundreds of them. Park your towel on any of Cairns's pretty palm-lined crescents, such as Palm Cove or Trinity Beach, or head south to the almost deserted, incandescently beautiful Mission Beach, which is bordered by thick jungle and has magical views across to Dunk Island.
- **Checking out a koala colony.** You don't have to pay admission to a wildlife park to see koalas. Likely spots to find them in the wild include Noosa National Park, just a stroll from the main shopping strip on Hastings Street in Noosa Heads. Say hello to the koalas, then carry on around the headland along the park's network of trails. Park entry is free.
- **Feeding the birds at O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse in the Gold Coast hinterland.** Brilliant black and gold Regent bowerbirds, crimson and cobalt rosellas, and a flurry of other wild birds wait to be fed every morning. You will gasp with delight when they land on your hands to eat.

Follow the Heritage Trails

Queensland's Heritage Trails Network (☎ 1800/222 689; www.queensland-holidays.com.au/qhtn), launched in 2002, links 43 heritage experiences for visitors keen to get behind the tourist traps and learn about Queensland's history, culture, and natural wonders. It's a network that celebrates indigenous communities; pioneering feats; pastoral, mining, wool, and railway industries; ancient dinosaur relics; and Aboriginal legends of the night skies.

Journeys along the Queensland Heritage Trails Network can start from any part of Queensland, and all are accessible on sealed roads.

Attractions are identified by distinctive signs, and Heritage Gateways in Cairns (at the Tourist Information Centre on the Esplanade) and Maryborough (in the historic Custom's House) offer information on other network attractions within the region.

A series of spectacular walking tracks in Tropical North Queensland is part of the trail. The Wet Tropics Walking Tracks follow in the footsteps of Australia's indigenous people as they trekked from the coast to hinterland, offering the ultimate exploration of the World Heritage Wet Tropics' rainforests and mountains in locations as diverse as Atherton, Tully, Mission Beach, and Kuranda.

Network attractions are linked along major Queensland tourist routes, including the Matilda Highway (Cunnamulla to Karumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria); the Overlander's Way (Townsville to Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory); the Warrego Highway (Ipswich west to Charleville); and the Pacific Coast Touring Route (from Cairns south along the east coast).

You will also find excellent information on the **Great Barrier Reef Visitors Bureau's** website at www.great-barrier-reef.com. This is not an official tourist office but part of a private company, **Travel Online** (☎ 07/3876 4644; fax 07/3876 4645), which offers itinerary planning and booking services for a wide range of accommodations and tours throughout north Queensland.

For information on B&Bs and farmstays in Cairns, Port Douglas, Mission Beach, and Townsville, contact the **Bed & Breakfast and Farmstay Association of Far North Queensland**, P.O. Box 595, Ravenshoe, QLD 4888 (☎ 07/4097 7022; www.bnbmq.com.au).

WHEN TO GO Australia's winter (June–Aug) is high season in Queensland as shivering southerners from Sydney and Melbourne head north to the sun. Summer is hot and sticky across most of the state and in Brisbane. From the Whitsundays northward, winter almost doesn't exist. See "When to Go" in chapter 2 for average temperatures and days of rainfall in Brisbane and Cairns. North Queensland, from around Cairns northward, gets a monsoonal Wet Season from December to March or April, with heavy rains and cyclones. You can visit the Great Barrier Reef during the Wet without a problem, but swollen creeks and floodwaters sometimes cut off parts of the Daintree Rainforest. If you want to visit north Queensland between January and April, try heading a little

Tips Life's a Beach

Which Queensland beach is right for you? Surfers will head to the Gold Coast or Sunshine Coast close to Brisbane; divers to the Great Barrier Reef. North of Gladstone, deadly box jellyfish, known as “stingers,” put a stop to all swimming on the mainland (but not the islands) from October to May.

Never swim in unprotected seas at that time. Cairns, Townsville, and Airlie Beach have beachfront man-made lagoons to make the choice easy, and many other popular beaches have small net enclosures for safe swimming, but it can be a drag having to stay within those. If you love swimming and you're visiting this part of Queensland in stinger season, choose a hotel with a good pool!

farther south to the beautiful Whitsundays, which are generally beyond the reach of the rains (although not beyond the reach of cyclones).

GETTING AROUND By Car The Bruce Highway runs along the coast from Brisbane to Cairns. It is mostly a two-lane highway, and the scenery is pretty much eucalyptus bush land, but from Mackay north you will pass through sugar cane fields.

Tourism Queensland publishes regional motoring guides. All you are likely to need, however, is a state map from the **Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ)**, 300 St. Pauls Terrace, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, QLD 4006 (☎ 13 19 05 in Australia). In Brisbane, you can get maps and advice from the RACQ office in the General Post Office (GPO) at 261 Queen St. For road condition reports, call ☎ 1300/130 595 (recorded message), or 07/3361 2406. The state's **Department of Natural Resources** (☎ 07/3896 3216) publishes an excellent range of “Sunmap” maps that highlight tourist attractions, national parks, and the like, although they are of limited use as road maps. You can pick these up at newsagents and gas stations throughout the state.

By Bus **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) make the trip from Brisbane to Cairns in about 28 hours, stopping at most towns along the route. Both have good-value passes. See chapter 2 for more details on getting around by bus.

By Train Queensland Rail's **Traveltrain** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia; www.traveltrain.qr.com.au) operates two long-distance trains along the Brisbane–Cairns route, a 32-hour trip aboard *The Sunlander* or about 8 hours less on the new high-speed *Tilt Train*. Traveltrain also operates trains to Outback towns. See the “Getting Around Australia” section in chapter 2 for more details.

By Plane It isn't the cheapest, but it is the fastest way to eat kilometers in such a big state. **Qantas** and its subsidiary airline **Sunstate** (book through Qantas) serve most coastal towns from Brisbane, but only a few from Cairns. Virgin Blue services Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gold Coast, and Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast.

1 Exploring the Great Barrier Reef

It's the only living structure on Earth visible from the moon; at 348,700 sq. km (238,899 sq. miles), it's bigger than many countries; it's over 2,000km (1,250 miles) long, stretching from Lady Elliot Island off Bundaberg to just south of

The Great Barrier Reef



Papua New Guinea; it's home to over a thousand species of fish, hundreds of varieties of corals, thousands of kinds of shellfish, and uncountable sponges, worms, starfish, and sea urchins; in short, the Great Barrier Reef is the Eighth Wonder of the World. The Great Barrier Reef is a World Heritage Site and is the biggest Marine Park in the world.

INTRODUCING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

The Reef is not a plant, but a conglomeration of tiny animals called coral polyps. They coat themselves in limestone to keep safe, and as they die, the limestone bodies cement into a reef on which more living coral grows. And so it goes, the endless building of a megametropolis of coral polyp skyscrapers just under the surface of the water.

You will see three kinds of reef on the Great Barrier Reef—fringing, ribbon, and platform. *Fringe reef* is the stuff just off the shore of islands and along the mainland. *Ribbon reefs* create “streamers” of thin long reef along the outer edge of the Reef, and are found north of Cairns. *Platform*, or *patch reefs*, are splotches of coral emerging from the continental shelf along the Queensland coast. Platform reefs are the most common, and what most people think of when they refer to the Great Barrier Reef. Island resorts in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are either “continental,” meaning they are essentially part of the Australian landmass, or “cays,” crushed dead coral and sand amassed over time by water action. Dazzling coral and fish life surround cays. Continental islands may have terrific coral, some coral, or none at all.

Along with dazzling fish, the Reef is home to large numbers of green and loggerhead turtles, one of the biggest dugong (manatee) populations in the world, sharks, giant manta rays, and sea snakes. In winter (July–Sept) humpback whales gather in the warm waters around the Hervey Bay and the Whitsunday islands to calve.

You can snorkel, dive, fish (recreational fishing is permitted in most zones of the Reef), or fly over the Reef. The “Outer Reef,” the network of platform and ribbon reefs that lies an average of 65km (41 miles) off the coast (about 1 hr. to 90 min. by boat from the mainland) is what most people are referring to when they talk about the Great Barrier Reef. You should get out and see that, but there is plenty of fringing reef to explore around the islands closer to the mainland.

Reef Tax

Every passenger over 4 years old must pay a A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) Environmental Management Charge (EMC), commonly called “reef tax,” on every visit to the Great Barrier Reef. This money goes towards the management and conservation of the Reef. Your tour operator collects it when you pay for your trip.

Learning about the Reef before you get there will enhance your visit. **Reef Teach** ★ (☎ 07/4031 7794) is an evening slide show and talk by Paddy Colwell, a marine biologist and diver.

He shares much valuable information and history about the Reef: how it was formed; how coral grows; what dangerous creatures to avoid; how to take successful underwater photos. It's offered throughout the year at 14 Spence St., Cairns, Monday through Saturday at 6:15pm, and costs A\$13 (US\$8.45) per person.

Townsville is the headquarters of the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**, and a visit to its showcase, **Reef HQ** ★ (see “The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands” later in the chapter), is a superb introduction. The star attraction at the aquarium is a living reef ecosystem in a

Tips When to Visit the Reef

April to November is the best time to visit. December to March can be uncomfortably hot and humid, particularly as far north as the Whitsundays, Cairns, and Port Douglas. In the winter months (June–Aug), the water can be a touch chilly (Aussies think so, anyway), but it rarely drops below 72° F (22° C).

massive viewing tank. For more information, write the Authority at P.O. Box 1379, Townsville, QLD 4810 (☎ 07/4750 0700; fax 07/4772 6093; www.gbrmpa.gov.au or www.reefHQ.org.au).

EXPLORING THE REEF

Snorkeling ★ the Reef can be a wondrous experience. Green and purple clams, pink sponges, red starfish and purple sea urchins, and fish from electric blue to neon yellow to lime are a truly magical sight. Coral's rich colors only survive with lots of light, so the nearer the surface the brighter and richer the marine life. That means snorkelers bobbing about on top of the Reef are in a prime position to see it at its best.

If your Reef cruise offers a **guided snorkel tour**, often called a “snorkel safari,” take it. They are worth the extra cost of A\$30 (US\$20) or so. Most safaris are suitable for both beginners and advanced snorkelers, and are led by marine biologists. They will tell you heaps about the fascinating sea creatures before you. Snorkeling is easy to master, and the crew on cruise boats is always happy to tutor you.

A day trip to the Reef also offers you a great opportunity to go diving—even if you have never dived before. Every major cruise boat listed in “Day Trips to the Reef,” and many dedicated dive boats listed in “Diving the Reef” (see below) offer introductory dives that allow you to dive without certification to a depth of 6m (20 ft.) in the company of an instructor. You will need to complete a medical questionnaire on board and then undergo a 30-minute briefing session on the boat. Intro dives are also referred to as “resort dives” because many resorts offer something similar, giving you 1 or 2 hours' instruction in their pools before taking you to a nearby reef to dive.

CHOOSING A GATEWAY TO THE REEF

Travelers' lore has it that Cairns and Port Douglas are the best places from which to access the Reef. They are both great jumping off points, but the quality of the coral is just as good off any town along the coast between Gladstone and Cairns. The Reef is pretty much equidistant from any point on the coast—about 90 minutes away by high-speed catamaran. An exception is Townsville, where the Reef is about 2½ hours away. Think carefully about where you would like to base yourself.

The main gateways, north to south, are **Port Douglas**, **Cairns**, **Mission Beach**, **Townsville**, the **Whitsunday islands**, **Gladstone** (for Heron Island), and **Bundaberg**. The Whitsundays have the added attractions of being dazzling islands; having resorts offering watersports and other activities; and offering a large array of diving, fishing, and day cruises. You can snorkel every day off your island or join a sailing or cruise day trip to a number of magnificent inner reefs much nearer than the main Outer Reef. Many people stay in Cairns because of easy airport access.

Tips Reef Safety Warnings

Coral is very sharp and coral cuts get infected quickly. If you cut yourself, ask cruise boat staff for antiseptic cream and apply it right away.

The sun and reflected light off the water will burn you fast. Put sunscreen on your back and the back of your legs, especially around your knees and the back of your neck, even behind your ears, places that will be exposed as you swim face down. Apply more when you leave the water.

The Great Barrier Reef is a Marine Park. Removing coral (living or dead), shells, or any other natural item is an offense, not to mention offensive!

If you are a nonswimmer, choose a Reef cruise that visits a coral cay, because a cay slopes gradually into shallow water and the surrounding coral. The Low Isles at Port Douglas; Green Island, Michaelmas Cay, or Upolu Cay off Cairns; Beaver Cay off Mission Beach; and Heron Island are all good locations.

DAY TRIPS TO THE REEF

The most common way to get to the Reef is on one of the big motorized catamarans that carry up to 300 passengers and depart from Cairns, Port Douglas, Townsville, Mission Beach, and the Whitsunday mainland and islands. The boats are air-conditioned and have a bar, videos, and educational material on board, as well as a biologist who gives a talk on the Reef's ecology. The boats tie up at their own private pontoons anchored to a platform reef. The pontoons have glass-bottom boats for folks who don't want to get wet, dry underwater viewing platforms, usually a bar, sun decks, shaded seats, and often showers.

An alternative to traveling on a big tour boat is to go on one of the multitude of smaller boats. These typically visit two or three Reef sites rather than just one. There are usually no more than 20 passengers, so the crew offers you personal attention, and you and the other passengers can have a fun, friendly time. Another bonus of going in a small boat is that you will have the coral pretty much all to yourself. The drawbacks are that you have only the cramped deck to sit on when you get out of the water, and your traveling time to the Reef may be longer. If you're a nervous snorkeler, you may feel safer going in a big boat, and surrounded by 300 other passengers in the water.

Most day-trip fares include snorkel gear—fins, mask, and snorkel, and wet suits in winter, although you rarely need them—free use of the underwater viewing chambers and glass-bottom boat rides, a buffet or barbecue lunch, and morning and afternoon refreshments. Most of the big boat operators and many of the smaller boats offer introductory dives for novices, and regular dives for certified divers. Diving is optional and costs extra. The big boats post snorkeling scouts to keep a lookout for anyone in trouble and to count heads. If you wear glasses, check whether your boat offers prescription masks as this could make a big difference to the quality of your experience! You can also travel as a snorkel-only passenger on most dive boats, too.

The major launching points for day trips to the Reef follow, listed north to south.

FROM PORT DOUGLAS

The most glamorous large vessels visiting the Outer Reef are the **Quicksilver Wavepiercers** ⚓ (☎ 07/4099 5500) based in Port Douglas. These ultra-sleek

high-speed, air-conditioned 37m (121-ft.) and 45.5m (149-ft.) catamarans carry 300 or 440 passengers to Agincourt Reef, a ribbon reef 39 nautical miles (72km/43 miles) from shore on the very outer edge of the Reef. After the 90-minute trip to the Reef you tie up at a two-story pontoon, where you spend 3½ hours on the Reef.

Quicksilver departs Marina Mirage at 10am daily except Christmas Day. The cost for the day is A\$165 (US\$107) for adults and A\$85 (US\$55) for kids ages 4 to 14, or A\$415 (US\$270) for a family of four. Coach transfers from your Port Douglas hotel are an extra A\$5 (US\$3.25) adults, A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) children. Guided snorkel safaris cost A\$35 (US\$23) per person, and introductory dives cost A\$119 (US\$77) per person.

Qualified divers take a dive-tender boat to make two dives for A\$119 (US\$77) per person, all gear included. Because Quicksilver carries so many passengers, it is a good idea to book snorkel safaris and dives in advance.

The dive boat *Poseidon* (see “Diving the Reef” below) welcomes snorkelers. There’s a Reef ecology talk en route and a guided snorkel safari. Lunch and transfers from Port Douglas hotels are included in *Poseidon*’s price of A\$135 (US\$88) for adults and A\$100 (US\$65) for children ages 3 to 12.

Port Douglas also offers easy day-trip access to the Low Isles, two pretty coral-wrapped cays close to shore on the Inner Reef. See the “Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area” section later in this chapter.

FROM CAIRNS

Cairns passengers can board the **Quicksilver Cruises** *Wavepiercer* in Cairns (☎ 07/4087 2100; www.quicksilver-cruises.com) at the Reef Fleet Terminal at 8am and at Palm Cove Jetty on Cairns’s northern beaches at 8:35am. It arrives at Port Douglas at 9:30am and leaves for the Reef at 10am. All of these trips run daily except Christmas. The fare for the whole day for Cairns and Palm Cove passengers is A\$175 (US\$114) for adults and A\$90 (US\$59) for kids ages 4 to 14. A free pickup from your hotel is included in the price.

If you prefer to visit the Reef straight from Cairns, large-scale operator **Great Adventures** (☎ 07/4044 9944 or 1800/079 080; www.greatadventures.com.au) does daily cruises in fast, air-conditioned catamarans to a three-level pontoon on the Outer Reef. The pontoon has a children’s swimming area, a semi-submersible, and an underwater observatory. You get at least 3 hours on the Reef. The cost for the day is A\$152 (US\$99) for adults, A\$79 (US\$51) for children ages 4 to 14, and A\$388 (US\$252) for a family of two adults and two kids. Hotel transfers are available from Cairns and the northern beaches for an extra cost. The boat departs the Great Adventures terminal at the new Reef Fleet Terminal at 10:30am.

Guided snorkel tours are A\$25 (US\$16) per person extra. Introductory dives cost A\$110 (US\$72) per person extra, while certified divers pay A\$80 (US\$52) for one dive or A\$110 (US\$72) for two dives, with all gear.

You can also depart Cairns with Great Adventures at 8:30am and spend 2 hours on Green Island en route. This gives you time to walk nature trails, rent snorkel gear and watersports equipment, or laze on the beach before continuing

Tips Feeling Green?

If you are inclined to be seasick, come prepared with medication. Some boats sell a ginger-based natural anti-seasickness pill, but it doesn’t always work!

to the Outer Reef. This cruise costs an extra A\$16 (US\$10) per adult and A\$8 (US\$5.20) per child.

Sunlover Cruises (☎ 1800/810 512 in Australia, or 07/4050 1333) has a choice of two Outer Reef trips aboard its large, fast catamarans. The first stops at Fitzroy Island for a guided rainforest walk before heading to Moore Reef on the Outer Reef. Transfers from city and northern beaches hotels are included. The day costs A\$159 (US\$103) for adults, A\$80 (US\$52) for children ages 4 to 14, and A\$398 (US\$258) for a family of four. This trip includes a glass-bottom boat ride and semi-submersible viewing.

Sunlover's second trip departs Cairns and picks up passengers at Palm Cove then heads to Arlington Reef. You spend about 4 hours total on the Reef. The price is A\$141 (US\$92) for adults, A\$71 (US\$46) for kids, and A\$353 (US\$229) for a family.

Introductory dives on either trip cost A\$107 (US\$70). Certified divers pay the same price, including all gear. Both cruises include lunch and transfers from Cairns and northern beaches hotels. Both depart from the Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns at 9:30am daily.

An alternative to motoring to the Reef is to sail to it. **Ocean Spirit Cruises** (☎ 07/4031 2920; www.oceanspirit.com.au) operates two sailing catamarans that take 100 to 150 passengers to Michaelmas Cay or Upolu Cay, lovely white sand cays on the Outer Reef surrounded by rich reefs. This trip is a good value, since it includes a pleasant 2 hours' sailing to either cay, a guided snorkeling safari, guided beach walk, and a free glass of bubbly and live music on the way home—in addition to the usual reef ecology talks, semi-submersible rides, lunch, and transfers from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel. Another plus is that you spend your out-of-water time on a beautiful beach, not on a pontoon or boat deck. You get about 4 hours on the Reef.

The day trip to Michaelmas Cay is A\$155 (US\$101) for adults, A\$78 (US\$51) for children ages 4 to 14, and A\$425 (US\$276) for a family of two adults and two kids. The day trip to Upolu Cay costs A\$89 (US\$58) for adults, A\$45 (US\$29) for kids, and A\$240 (US\$156) for a family. Transfers from Cairns and the northern beaches are free, but from Port Douglas they cost an extra A\$39 (US\$25) adults and A\$19 (US\$12) children. Introductory dives cost A\$89 (US\$58), and certified divers pay A\$59 (US\$38) for one or A\$95 (US\$62) for two, all gear included, at Michaelmas Cay, less at Upolu. The boats depart Reef Fleet Terminal at 8:30am daily.

FROM MISSION BEACH

Mission Beach is the closest point on the mainland to the Reef, 1 hour by the high-speed **Quick Cat** catamaran (☎ 1800/654 242 in Australia, or 07/4068 7289). The trip starts with an hour at Dunk Island 20 minutes offshore, where you can walk rainforest trails, play on the beach, parasail, or jet ski for an extra fee. Then it's a 1-hour trip to sandy Beaver Cay on the Outer Reef, where you have 3 hours to snorkel or check out the coral from a semi-submersible or glass-bottom boat. There's no shade on the cay, so a hat and sunscreen are musts. The trip departs daily from Clump Point Jetty at 9:30am. It costs A\$148 (US\$96) for adults, A\$74 (US\$48) for children ages 4 to 14, and A\$370 (US\$241) for a family of four. An introductory scuba dive costs A\$80 (US\$52) for the first dive and A\$35 (US\$23) for the second. You should pre-book your introductory scuba dive to ensure a place. Qualified divers pay A\$60 (US\$39) for the first dive, A\$35 (US\$23) for the second, all gear included. Free pickups from Mission

Budget Snorkeling & Diving

As well as the “big guys” listed here, many smaller operators run cruises to the Reef from Cairns that are usually more affordable. **Down Under Dive** (☎ 1800/079 099 in Australia, or 07/4052 8300; fax 07/4031 1373; www.downunderdive.com.au) offers trips aboard its catamaran, *Supercat*, departing from the Reef Fleet Terminal at 8:30am daily. Although its capacity is 200 passengers, the boat carries a maximum of 80. The day trip is A\$64 (US\$42) for snorkelers or A\$125 (US\$81) for certified divers. The day includes a free guided snorkel safari and lunch. Introductory dives must be pre-booked and cost A\$99 (US\$64). Return hotel transfers are A\$7 (US\$4.55) from the city, A\$12 (US\$7.80) from the northern beaches, or A\$28 (US\$18) from Port Douglas.

Seahorse (☎ 07/4041 1919; www.seahorsedive.com.au), a brand new 20-passenger sailing catamaran, visits Upolu Cay daily for A\$89 (US\$58) for adults and A\$55 (US\$36) for children 4 to 14. There's an onboard marine naturalist and guided snorkel safari, and you can hire wetsuits for A\$6 (US\$3.90) a day. You can even lend a hand sailing if you like. Introductory dives are A\$65 (US\$42), and a certified dive is A\$45 (US\$29) with all gear supplied.

Reef Magic (☎ 07/4031 1588; www.reefmagic.com.au) is a 22m (72-ft.) air-conditioned catamaran that runs from the Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns daily at 9am to one of 10 Outer Reef locations, where the Reef is yours for 5 hours. The boat holds 140 people, but usually carries between 50 and 80. The price of A\$115 (US\$75) for adults, A\$69 (US\$45) for children 4 to 14, and A\$320 (US\$208) for a family of four includes a glass-bottom boat trip. Transfers are available from Cairns for an extra A\$7 (US\$4.55) per adult and from the northern beaches for an extra A\$12 (US\$7.80). A guided snorkel tour is A\$25 (US\$16) per adult or A\$12 (US\$7.80) per child. Introductory divers pay A\$60 (US\$39) for the first dive and A\$40 (US\$26) for a second; certified divers pay A\$35 (US\$23) for two dives.

Don't overlook **Green Island**, a stunning coral cay on the Inner Reef 50 minutes east of Cairns, as a Reef destination. It's closer to the mainland, and the snorkeling and diving are every bit as good as on the Outer Reef. Unlike the Outer Reef, where you will most likely be stuck on a pontoon or a boat when you are not in the water, Green Island has beautiful white coral sand beaches to lie on and lush rainforest to stroll in. See the “Cairns” section below.

Beach are included. You can also join this trip from Cairns; coach connections from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel will cost extra. Ask about Sunday and Wednesday specials during high season.

FROM TOWNSVILLE

Most boats visiting the Reef from Townsville are live-aboard vessels that make trips of two or more days, designed for serious divers. **Barrier Reef Dive, Cruise & Travel** (☎ 1800/636 778 in Australia, or 07/4772 5800) has day trips to

Keeper Reef and John Brewer Reef. It takes only 1 hour and 30 minutes to reach John Brewer Reef, where you can make introductory dives for A\$60 (US\$39) for the first and A\$30 (US\$20) for the second, while certified divers can make two dives for a very reasonable A\$60 (US\$39); all gear is included. The cruise costs A\$104 (US\$68) for adults, A\$84 (US\$55) for seniors, A\$54 (US\$35) for children 5 to 15, and A\$270 (US\$176) for a family of four. The price includes lunch and morning and afternoon tea. There are freshwater showers on board. Cruises depart Townsville at 9am, with a pickup at Magnetic Island en route, and returns by about 5:45pm. Several other operators including **The Dive Bell** (☎ 07/4721 1155), and **Adrenalin Dive** (☎ 07/4724 0600), have trips to the Yongala Wreck, the Coral Sea, and the Reef.

FROM THE WHITSUNDAYS

FantaSea Cruises (☎ 07/4946 5111) makes a daily trip to Hardy Reef from Shute Harbour, near Airlie Beach, in a high-speed, air-conditioned catamaran. The boat has a bar, and a biologist gives a marine ecology talk en route. You anchor at the FantaSea Reefworld pontoon, and spend up to 3½ hours on the Reef. The day trip costs A\$152 (US\$99) for adults, A\$130 (US\$85) for seniors and students, A\$81 (US\$53) for children ages 4 to 14, and A\$355 (US\$231) for a family of four. Guided snorkel safaris cost A\$19 (US\$12) extra. Cruise/dive packages are available for A\$78 (US\$51) extra for both introductory and certified dives. Cruises depart at 8am and pick up passengers at South Molle, Daydream, and Hamilton island resorts. Passengers from Long and Lindeman islands connect by water taxi.

A fun alternative is FantaSea's 2-day, 1-night **ReefSleep**, in which you spend the night on the pontoon. This gives you a fabulous chance to snorkel at night when the coral is luminescent in the moonlight and nocturnal sea creatures get busy. The trip includes a marine biologist's slide presentation, two scuba dives, plenty of night snorkeling, two buffet lunches, dinner under the stars with wine, and breakfast and more snorkeling on the second day. You can stay in either a clean, comfortable bunkroom for 4 for A\$325 (US\$211) per person, or in the double cabin, which has a king-size bed for A\$383 (US\$249) per person. With so few guests per night, you have the Reef all to yourself.

MULTIDAY CRUISES ALONG THE REEF

Down Under (☎ 1800/079 099 in Australia, or 07/4052 8300; fax 07/4031 1373; www.downunderdive.com.au) in Cairns offers a chance to "sleep on the Reef" aboard a 43m (141-ft.) 1890s-style brigantine, the *S.V. Atlantic Clipper*. It's a sleek, romantic sailing ship with towering masts, a roomy Jacuzzi on the foredeck, a cocktail bar, a comfortable dining room, and single, double, triple, or quad-share air-conditioned cabins. A motorized launch takes you from Cairns to the ship's reef mooring; from there you sail up to the four popular reef complexes of Norman, Hastings, and Saxon reefs, and Michaelmas Cay. The emphasis is on fun and relaxation, with lots of snorkeling and diving. Choose between

Fun Fact Postmark: Great Barrier Reef

Australia's only "floating post office" is on Agincourt Reef, about 72km (45 miles) offshore from Port Douglas. It is on the Quicksilver Connections pontoon, and your letter or postcard will be stamped with a special postmark from the Great Barrier Reef.

a 2-day/1-night stay in a two-, three-, or four-berth cabin for A\$210 (US\$137) for snorkelers or A\$290 (US\$189) for divers, and a 3-day/2-night journey for A\$340 (US\$221) for snorkelers or A\$400 (US\$260) for divers. Add a surcharge of A\$20 (US\$13) per person per night for a twin cabin and A\$30 (US\$20) for a double cabin with shower. The all-inclusive prices include all dive and snorkel gear (including prescription masks), meals, and pickups from your Cairns city accommodation. Transfers from Port Douglas available for an extra A\$27 (US\$18) return. Reef tax of A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) per person per day (to a maximum of A\$12/US\$7.80) applies.

DIVING THE REEF

Divers have a big choice of dive boats that make 1-day runs to the Outer Reef and live-aboard dive boats making excursions that last up to a week. As a general rule, on a typical 5-hour day trip to the Reef, you will fit in about two dives.

The outfits listed below will give you an idea of the diving trips available and general costs. This is by no means a complete list of operators on the Reef—there are far too many to include here. “The Active Traveler” in chapter 2 has more pointers for locating a dive operator. The prices quoted include full gear rental; knock off about A\$20 (US\$13) if you have your own gear.

FROM CAIRNS Tusa Dive (☎ 07/4040 6464; www.tusadive.com) runs two 20m (66-ft.) dive boats daily to two dive sites from a choice of 21 locations on the Outer Reef. The day costs A\$175 (US\$114) for divers and A\$115 (US\$75) for snorkelers, with wet suits, guided snorkel tours, lunch, and transfers from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel. For an extra A\$66 (US\$43) you can get a video done of the day's dive. If you want to be shown the best spots under the water, you can take a guided dive with the dive team for an extra A\$20 (US\$13). Day trips for introductory divers cost A\$180 (US\$117) for one dive or A\$215 (US\$140) for two. The groups are kept to a maximum of 25 people, so you get personal attention. The company is the Nitrox and Rebreather facility for north Queensland, and certified divers can take two introductory dives on Nitrox/Safe Air in 1 day for A\$200 (US\$130).

Deep Sea Divers Den (☎ 07/4046 7333; www.divers-den.com) does day trips to the Outer Reef on two vessels. On the *ReefQuest*, the cost is A\$75 (US\$49) for snorkelers. Divers pay A\$110 (US\$72) for two dives or A\$130 (US\$85) for three, plus A\$15 (US\$9.75) gear hire. A day trip with an introductory dive is A\$120 (US\$78), or A\$150 (US\$98) with two dives. Prices are slightly higher on the more upmarket *SeaQuest* boat. Hotel pickups are free in Cairns. Departures are daily at 8:30am.

TAKA II (☎ 07/4051 8722; fax 07/4031 2739; www.taka.com.au) is a solid 22m (72-ft.) live-aboard vessel that makes a 3-night trip to the ribbon reefs Cod Hole, Clam Garden, Agincourt Reef, and Opal Reefs. The boat carries a maximum of 26 people in air-conditioned deluxe double or single cabins, standard double cabins, or quad-share cabins. The trip costs from A\$930 to A\$1,150 (US\$605–US\$748), depending on your choice of cabin, and includes 10 dives, hotel pickups, and all meals. Dive gear rental is A\$66 (US\$43) extra. An alternative 4-night journey to the Coral Sea is A\$1,045 to A\$1,265 (US\$679–US\$822) per person, including 14 dives. Gear rental is A\$88 (US\$57) extra on this trip. TAKA runs underwater photography courses in conjunction with its trips for A\$165 (US\$107) plus camera hire of A\$75 (US\$49). Add reef tax of A\$12 (US\$7.80) per person to prices. Snorkelers can deduct about A\$100 (US\$65) from the prices.

FROM PORT DOUGLAS The waters off Port Douglas are home to coral spires and swim-throughs at the Cathedrals; giant clams and pelagics at Barracuda Pass; a village of parrot fish, anemone fish, unicorn fish, and two Moray eels at the pinnacle of Nursery Bommie; fan corals at Split-Bommie; and many other wonderful sites.

Poseidon (☎ 07/4099 4772; www.poseidon-cruises.com.au) is a fast 24m (79-ft.) vessel that visits three Outer Reef sites. The day-trip price of A\$135 (US\$88) for adults, A\$100 (US\$65) for kids ages 3 to 12, includes snorkel gear, a marine biology talk, snorkel safaris, lunch, and pickups from Port Douglas hotels. Certified divers pay A\$40 (US\$26) extra for 2 dives or A\$55 (US\$36) for 3, plus A\$20 (US\$13) gear rental. Guides will accompany you, free of charge, to show you great locations. Introductory divers pay A\$50 (US\$33) extra for one dive, and A\$40 (US\$26) each for the second and third. The vessel carries no more than 48 passengers, one-third its capacity, and gets you to the Reef in just over an hour, giving you 5 hours on the coral. The boat departs Marina Mirage daily at 8:30am.

The **Quicksilver Wavepiercers** (see “Day Trips to the Reef” above) runs dive-tender boats from their pontoon.

FROM MISSION BEACH **Quick Cat Dive Adventures** (see “Day Trips to the Reef” above) takes divers on its day cruises to the Reef.

FROM TOWNSVILLE Off Townsville, you can dive not only the Reef but also a wreck, the *Yongala* ⚓, which lies off the coast in 30m (98 ft.) of water with good visibility. A cyclone sent the *Yongala* with 49 passengers and 72 crewmembers to the bottom of the sea in a cyclone in 1911. Today it's surrounded by a mass of coral and rich marine life, including barracuda, grouper, rays, and turtles. **Diving Dreams** (☎ 07/4721 2500; fax 07/4721 2549; www.divingdreams.com) runs a day trip for around A\$220 (US\$143) and 2- or 3-day trips, which include dives at the *Yongala*, with prices at around A\$395 to A\$495 (US\$257–US\$322).

FROM THE WHITSUNDAYS In and around the Whitsunday Islands, you can visit the Outer Reef and explore the many excellent Reef dive sites close to shore. One of the most established companies is **Reef Dive** (☎ 07/4946 6508; www.reefdive.com.au). Expect to pay about A\$550 (US\$358) per person for a 3-day/3-night dive trip.

DIVE COURSES Many companies in Queensland offer dive courses, from open-water certification up to dive master, rescue diver, and instructor level. To take a course, you will need a medical exam by a Queensland doctor (your dive school will arrange it). You will also need two passport photos for your certificate, and you must be able to swim! Some courses take as few as 3 days, but 5 days is generally regarded as the best. Open-water certification usually requires 2 days of theory in a pool, followed by 2 or 3 days out on the Reef, where you make between four and nine dives.

Tips Pressed for Time?

If you don't have time for a full day on the Outer Reef, don't forget that you can dive the coral cay of **Green Island**, just 27km (16 miles) off Cairns, in half a day (see “Exploring the Islands & Beaches” in the Cairns section below). Just remember you can't fly for 24 hours after a dive.

Tips Money-Saving Tip

Dive-course prices drop if you travel to the Reef each day for your practical sessions, instead of living aboard the company's boat. Of course, then you have to pay for your meals and accommodations on land, so tally up the cost for both before you commit to either.

If time is short, a **Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI)** referral course might suit you. You can do your pool and theory work at home and spend 2 or 3 days on the Reef doing your qualifying dives.

Deep Sea Divers Den (☎ 07/4046 7333; www.divers-den.com) claims to have certified about 55,000 divers since 1974. The 5-day open-water course involves 2 days of theory in the pool in Cairns, and 3 days and 2 nights on a live-aboard boat. The course costs A\$550 (US\$356) per person, including all meals on the boat, nine dives (including a guided night dive), all gear and a wet suit, and transfers from your city hotel. The same course over 4 nights, with 1 night on the boat and 4 dives, costs A\$440 (US\$286). New courses begin every day of the week.

Other dive-course operators in Cairns include **Quicksilver Dive** (☎ 07/4099 5050; www.quicksilverdive.com.au), **Pro Dive** (☎ 07/4031 5255; fax 07/4051 9955), **Down Under Dive** (see above), **TAKA Dive** (see above), and **Tusa Dive** (☎ 07/4040 6464). **Great Adventures** (☎ 07/4044 9944 or 1800/079 080; www.greatadventures.com.au) runs courses on Green Island off Cairns. In Townsville, **Diving Dreams** (see above) runs courses for all levels of diver. In the Whitsundays, contact **Reef Dive** (☎ 07/4946 6508; www.reefdive.com.au), and in Bundaberg, contact **Salty's Dive Centre** (☎ 07/4151 6422; www.saltys.net).

2 Cairns

346km (207 miles) N of Townsville; 1,807km (1,084 miles) N of Brisbane

The Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest, both World Heritage attractions, are just a short hop from each other, offering glimpses of two completely different environments. In parts of the far north, the rainforest touches the reef. Cairns is the gateway to these natural attractions, and to man-made attractions such as the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway. It's also a stepping-stone to islands of the Great Barrier Reef and the grasslands of the Gulf Savannah.

When international tourism to the Great Barrier Reef boomed a decade or two ago, Cairns boomed with it. What was once a small farming town boasts five-star hotels, island resorts, big Reef-cruise catamarans in the harbor, and too many souvenir shops.

The 110-million-year-old rainforest, the **Daintree**, where plants that are fossils elsewhere in the world exist in living color, is just a couple of hours north of Cairns. The Daintree is part of the Wet Tropics, a World Heritage-listed area that stretches from north of Townsville to south of Cooktown, beyond Cairns, and houses half of Australia's animal and plant species.

If you are spending more than a day or two in the area, consider basing yourself on the city's pretty northern beaches, in Kuranda, or in Port Douglas (see "Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area" later in this chapter). Although prices will be higher in the peak season, which is the Australian winter

and early spring from July to October, the town has affordable accommodations year-round.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) has direct flights throughout the day to Cairns from Sydney and Brisbane, and at least one flight a day from Darwin and Ayers Rock. From Melbourne you can fly direct some days, but most flights connect through Sydney or Brisbane. **Sunstate Airlines** (book through Qantas) also flies several times a day from Townsville, and **Airlink** (book through Qantas) has flights from Alice Springs and Ayers Rock. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia) flies to Cairns direct from Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. Several international carriers fly to Cairns from various Asian cities, and from New Zealand.

Cairns Airport is 8km (5 miles) north of downtown, and a 5-minute walk or a A\$2 (US\$1.30) shuttle ride separates the domestic and international terminals. The cheapest ride to your hotel is the **Australia Coach** (☎ 07/4048 8355) shuttle, which costs A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults and A\$3.50 (US\$2.25) children 3 to 12 years, meets major flights at both terminals for transfers to city hotels. **Sun Palm Express Coaches** (☎ 07/4099 4850) provides transfers from the airport to the city and northern beaches. The one-way fare is A\$13 (US\$8.45) adults, A\$7.50 (US\$4.85) children 3 to 14 to the city, A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$8.75 (US\$5.70) children to Palm Cove.

A taxi from the airport costs around A\$15 (US\$9.75) to the city, A\$30 (US\$20) to Trinity Beach, and A\$40 (US\$26) to Palm Cove. Call **Black & White Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08).

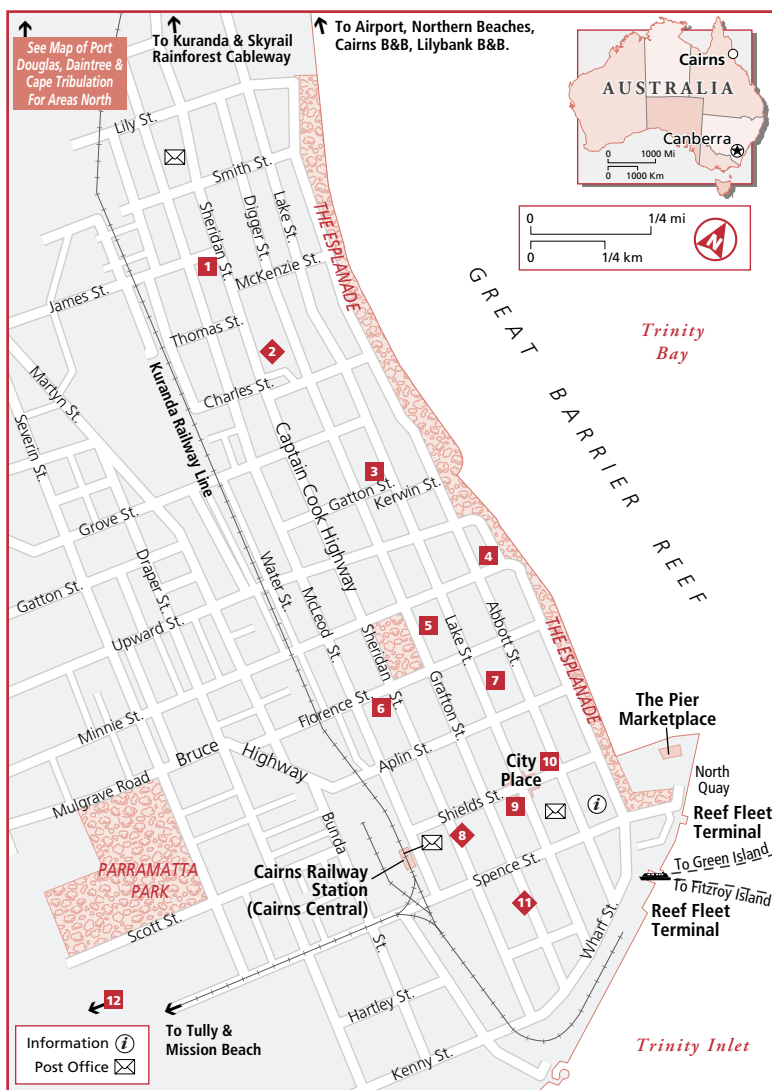
Avis, Budget, Hertz, and Thrifty all have **car-rental** offices at the domestic and international terminals (see “Getting Around” below).

By Train Long-distance trains operate from Brisbane several times a week. All services are operated by Queensland Rail’s **Traveltrain** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland; www.qr.com.au). The new 160kmph (100 mph) Tilt Train takes about 25 hours and costs A\$280 (US\$182). Northbound services leave Brisbane at 6:25pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; southbound services depart Cairns at 8.15am on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. The train features luxury “business class” seating, with an entertainment system for each seat including multiple movie and audio channels.

The Sunlander, which runs twice a week, takes 32 hours and costs A\$187 (US\$122) for a sitting berth or A\$235 (US\$153) for an economy-class sleeper. Trains pull into the Cairns Central terminal (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia for reservations or inquiries 24 hr. a day, or 07/4052 6297 for the terminal from 8am–6pm, 07/4052 6203 after hours) on Bunda Street in the center of town. The station has no showers, lockers, or currency exchange booths, but you will find 24-hour ATMs outside the Cairns Central shopping mall, right above the terminal.

For more details on Queensland’s long-haul trains, see chapter 2.

By Bus **McCafferty’s** (☎ 13 14 99, or 07/4051 5899 for Cairns terminal) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30, or 07/4051 5899 for Cairns terminal) buses pull into Trinity Wharf Centre on Wharf Street in the center of town. Buses travel from the south via all towns and cities on the Bruce Highway, and from the west from Alice Springs and Darwin via Tennant Creek on the Stuart Highway and the Outback mining town of Mt. Isa to Townsville, where they join the Bruce Highway and head north.



The 45-hour Sydney–Cairns trip costs A\$285 (US\$186), the 28½-hour trip from Brisbane is A\$192 (US\$125), and from Darwin, the journey takes about 41 hours and costs A\$402 (US\$261).

By Car From Brisbane and all major towns in the south, you'll enter Cairns on the Bruce Highway. To reach the northern beaches or Port Douglas from Cairns, take Sheridan Street in the city center, which becomes the Captain Cook Highway.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Tourism Tropical North Queensland** is located at 51 The Esplanade, Cairns, QLD 4870 (☎ 07/4051 3588; fax 07/4051 0127; www.tropicalaustralia.com.au). Its Visitor Information Centre has information on Cairns and its environs as well as on Mission Beach, Port Douglas and the Daintree rainforest, Cape York, and Outback Queensland. It's open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm, closed Christmas and New Year's Day and after 1pm on public holidays.

CITY LAYOUT A major redevelopment of the Cairns Esplanade, completed in 2003, has transformed the face of the city. The focal point is a 4,000 sq.-m (40,000 sq.-ft.) saltwater swimming lagoon with a wide sandy beach and surrounding parkland with public art-

 Tips Croc Alert!

Dangerous crocodiles inhabit Cairns waterways. Do not swim in, or stand on the bank of, any river or stream.

works and picnic areas—making up for the city center's lack of a swimming beach. A timber boardwalk runs 600m (1800 ft.) along the waterfront, suspended over the mudflats and providing a platform for bird-watching. It is lit for nighttime use. A walkway links the Esplanade to the new Reef Fleet

Terminal, which is where all the Great Barrier Reef boats leave. Downtown Cairns is on a grid 5 blocks deep, bounded in the east by the Esplanade on the water, and in the west by McLeod Street, where the train station and the Cairns Central shopping mall are located. In between are shops, offices, and restaurants.

Heading 15 minutes north from the city along the Captain Cook Highway, you come to the **northern beaches**: Holloway's Beach, Yorkey's Knob, Trinity Beach, Kewarra Beach, Clifton Beach, Palm Cove, and Ellis Beach.

GETTING AROUND **By Bus** **Local Sunbus** (☎ 07/4057 7411) buses depart City Place at the intersection of Lake and Shields streets. Buy tickets and passes on board, and try to have correct change. You can hail buses anywhere it's convenient for the driver to stop. Buses 2 and 2A travel to Trinity Beach; 1 and 1X (weekend express) travel to Palm Cove. The "N" route runs along the highway from the city to Palm Cove all night until dawn on Friday and Saturday nights, stopping at all beaches in between. Most other buses run from early morning until almost midnight.

By Car **Avis** (☎ 07/4051 5911), **Budget** (☎ 07/4051 9222), **Hertz** (☎ 07/4051 6399), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/4051 8099) all have office in Cairns city and at the airport. One long-established local outfit, **Sugarland Car Rentals**, has reasonable rates and offices in Cairns (☎ 07/4052 1300) and Palm Cove (☎ 07/4059 1087). **Britz Australia** (☎ 1800/33 1454 in Australia), **Budget Camper-van Rentals** (☎ 07/4032 2065), and **Maui Rentals** (☎ 07/4032 2065, or 1300/363 800 in Australia) rent motorhomes. Britz and most major rental-car companies rent 4WDs.

By Taxi Call **Black & White Taxis** at ☎ 13 10 08.

Value Travel Tip

If you stay in Cairns, check out what there is to see and do in and around Port Douglas (see “Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area” later in this chapter). Many tour operators in Port Douglas offer free or inexpensive transfers from Cairns.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN & AROUND CAIRNS

Without a doubt, the top attraction in Cairns—apart from the Great Barrier Reef—is the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (see below). For details on visiting the Reef from Cairns, see “Exploring the Great Barrier Reef,” earlier in this chapter.

LEARNING ABOUT ABORIGINAL CULTURE

Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park ★★ Don't miss this. Whether you choose the day or night experience, the Tjapukai (pronounced Jab-oo-gai) cultural park is one of the best chances you'll have to discover the history and culture of the Aborigines without going to Central Australia. American theater director Don Freeman and his French-Canadian show-dancer wife, Judy, founded the dance show in 1987, working with local Aborigines, including acclaimed dancer and songwriter David Hudson. Today it is a sophisticated, multi-award-winning cultural park with an international reputation. Don and Judy are still heavily involved, but the park is 51% owned by the Aborigines who work in it.

Housed in a striking modern building that incorporates Aboriginal themes and colors, the Tjapukai experience needs at least 2 to 3 hours. Start in the Creation Theatre, where the latest in illusion, theatrics, and technology are used to tell the story of the creation of the world according to the spiritual beliefs of Tjapukai people. Actors work with spectacular special effects and holographic images, sometimes up to 3m (9¾ ft.) high, to illustrate the legends. The production is performed in the Tjapukai language, translated through headsets.

Move on through the Magic Space museum and gallery section of the complex to the History Theatre, where a 20-minute film relates the history of the Tjapukai people since the coming of white settlers in the 1880s.

Outside, a suspension bridge links the main building with a cultural village where you can try boomerang and spear throwing, fire-making and didgeridoo playing, and learn about bush foods and medicines. In the open-sided Dance Theatre, Aboriginal men and women perform dances incorporating ancient and modern steps. Shows and demonstrations are planned so visitors can move from one to another easily, without missing anything. The complex also includes a restaurant and coffee shop, and an arts-and-crafts gallery and shop is stocked with the work of Aboriginal artists and crafts workers.

“Tjapukai by Night” tours operate on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday, from 7:30 to 11pm, and include transfers to and from accommodations, interactive time in the Magic Space artspace museum, a Creation Show performance, and an outdoor Serpent Circle—a new, interactive show featuring tapsticks for each guest, a join-in corroboree, and a dramatic ceremony involving fire and water. It is followed by a buffet dinner and dance show, and the chance to meet the Tjapukai dancers. The cost is A\$92 (US\$60) adults and A\$46 (US\$30) children 4 to 14.

Captain Cook Hwy. (beside the Skyrail terminal), Smithfield. ☎ 07/4042 9900. Fax 07/4042 9990. www.tjapukai.com.au. Admission A\$28 (US\$18) adults, A\$14 (US\$9) children 4–14, A\$70 (US\$46) family of 4. Ask about packages that include transfers, lunch, and a guided Magic Space tour, or Skyrail and/or Scenic Rail travel to and from Kuranda. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas and New Year's Day. Bus: 1C or 1E. Book shuttle transfers from Cairns and northern beaches hotels (A\$17/US\$11 adults, A\$8/US\$5.50 children) through the park. Park is 15 min. north of Cairns and 15 min. south of Palm Cove along the Captain Cook Hwy. Free parking.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Three kilometers (1¾ miles) northwest of Cairns in Edge Hill, are the **Flecker Botanic Gardens**, 94 Collins Ave., (☎ 07/4044 3398). You can see the wetlands, which include beautiful ferns and orchids, by following the park's many walking trails, and also inspect gardens illustrating Aboriginal plant use. Recently added is Australia's Gondwana Inheritance garden, devoted to the history of plant evolution. Free guided walks are Monday through Friday at 1pm. There is a licensed cafe and a nice book/gift shop. The gardens are open Monday through Friday 7:30am to 5:30pm, and from 8:30am weekends. The gardens are a 10-minute drive from the city, or take bus 1B.

In Cairns

Cairns Regional Gallery *(Finds)* Modern paintings, sculpture, computer installations, and other works by a changing array of Australian and international artists are on show at Cairns's premier gallery, including pieces by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders from Australia's far north. One-hour tours are run on Wednesday (11am and noon) and Friday (10:30 and 11:30am), starting in the gallery foyer.

Shields St. at Abbott St. ☎ 07/4031 6865. Admission A\$4 (US\$2.60) adults, free for children under 10. Daily 10am–5pm; Sundays and public holidays 1pm–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

Hartley's Crocodile Adventures *★★ (Kids)* Hartley's is the original Australian croc show, and after a move to a new location and a multi-million redevelopment in mid-2002, quite possibly the best. What makes it different from others is the fantastic natural setting—a 2-hectare (5-acre) lagoon surrounded by melaleuca (paperbark) and bloodwood trees and home to 23 estuarine crocs. The best time to visit is for the 3pm “croc attack” show, when you can witness the saltwater crocodile “death roll” during the 45-minute performance. At 11am you can see these monsters get hand-fed or hear an eye-opening talk on the less aggressive freshwater crocodiles. There are tours of the croc farm at 10am and 1:30pm; at 2pm there is a snake show; at 4:30pm it's koala-feeding time; and there are also cassowaries, which are fed at 9:30am and 4:15pm. This attraction makes a good stop en route to Port Douglas.

Capt. Cook Hwy. (40km/24 miles north of Cairns, 25km/16 miles south of Port Douglas). ☎ 07/4055 3576. Fax 07/4059 1017. www.crocodileadventures.com. Admission A\$24 (US\$16) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) children 4–14, A\$60 (US\$39) family pass for 2 adults and their kids. Tickets allow return entry for 3 days. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Transfers available through All In A Day Tours (☎ 07/4032 5050). Free parking.

Royal Flying Doctor Visitors Centre The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), the free aeromedical service that provides a “mantle of safety” for all Outback Australians, has a base in Cairns. Tours are run Monday through Saturday every 30 minutes from 9am to 4:30pm. You can also watch a film, attend a talk on how the service began, browse through memorabilia, and board a former RFDS plane. Allow about 45 minutes.

1 Junction St., Edge Hill. ☎ 07/4053 5687. Admission A\$5.50 (US\$3.55) adults, A\$2.75 (US\$1.80) children, A\$17 (US\$11) for a family. Mon–Sat 8:30am–5pm. Closed Sundays and public holidays. Bus: 6 or 6A.

Wild World—The Tropical Zoo  Get a dose of your favorite Aussie wildlife here—some kind of talk or show takes place just about every 15 or 30 minutes throughout the day, including koala cuddling (have your photo taken for an extra A\$13/US\$8.45), saltwater crocodile feeding and talks, lorikeet feeding, cane toad racing, and snake talks. Lots of other animals are on show, too, like kangaroos (which you can hand-feed for A\$1/US\$65¢ a bag), emus, cassowaries, dingoes, and native birds in a walk-through aviary. The park also runs a nocturnal tour, in which you can see many of the more elusive creatures on show. To take the park's 3-hour Cairns Night Zoo tour, book by 4pm that day, earlier if you want transfers. The evening starts at 7pm and includes a wildlife spotlighting walk, where you can pat a koala and a possum and feed kangaroos; a stargazing interlude; a barbecue dinner with beer and wine, billy tea and damper (a type of baked bread), and supper; and dancing to an Aussie bush band.

Captain Cook Hwy. (22km/14 miles north of the city center), Palm Cove. ☎ 07/4055 3669. Fax 07/4059 1160. www.wildworld.com.au. Admission A\$24 (US\$16) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) children 4–15. Cairns Night Zoo experience (daily except Fri–Sun) A\$109 (US\$71) adults, A\$55 (US\$36) children 4–15. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Bus: 1B. Cairns Night Zoo transfers from Cairns through All In A Day Tours (☎ 07/4032 5050) or from Port Douglas with Night Zoo Tours (☎ 07/4098 4929). Free parking.

EXPLORING THE ISLANDS & BEACHES

You don't have to go all the way to the Outer Great Barrier Reef to snorkel and get a taste of island living off Cairns. Fitzroy and Green Islands offer reef, beaches, rainforest tours, and watersports less than an hour from the city wharf. See “Where to Stay” later in this section for details of the resort on Fitzroy Island.

FITZROY ISLAND Scenic Fitzroy Island is a rainforested national park 45 minutes from Cairns, offering good diving. You can rent windsurfers, catamarans, and canoes; hike to the mountaintop lighthouse; view coral from a glass-bottom boat, or take a short boat trip from the island to snorkel it; take a beginners' or certified dive; and swim in the pool. A day trip is the price of the round-trip ferry fare, A\$36 (US\$23) for adults, A\$18 (US\$12) for kids 4 to 14, or A\$90 (US\$59) for a family of four. Departures from Cairns are daily at 8:30 and 10:30am, and 4pm, returning at 9:30am, and 3 and 5pm. Make reservations at ☎ 07/4030 7907, or through **Raging Thunder Adventures** (☎ 07/4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au). Raging Thunder also runs guided sea-kayak expeditions around Fitzroy Island. The trip includes 3 hours of kayaking, snorkeling gear, lunch on a deserted beach, and a rainforest walk to the lighthouse. The full-day trip costs A\$115 (US\$75), but you must be age 13 or over. You can also stay on the island for as little as A\$31 (US\$20) per person per night in multi-share bunkhouse accommodation (see “Where to Stay” later in this section).

GREEN ISLAND  Fifty minutes and 27km (16 miles) east of Cairns by motorized catamaran is 15-hectare (37-acre) Green Island, a beautiful Great Barrier Reef coral cay surrounded by dazzling reefs and marine life. The island is home to an expensive eco-resort, but anyone can visit for the day. Day visitors can use one of Green Island Resort's pools, its main bar, casual or upscale restaurants, and lockers and showers; they can buy basics, ice cream, and beachwear. Ask beach staff for their recommendations for the best snorkeling spots. If you don't snorkel, it's worth the admission charge to see the display of clown fish, potato cod, and anemones at the little underwater observatory. The island has a small attraction called **Marineland Melanesia** (☎ 07/4051 4032), where you

can see old nautical artifacts, primitive art, a turtle and reef aquarium, and live crocodiles. Admission is A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults and A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) kids; croc shows are at 10:30am and 1:45pm.

Great Adventures (☎ 07/4044 9944; www.greatadventures.com.au) and **Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises** (☎ 07/4051 0444; www.bigcatcruises.com.au) both make trips to Green Island from Cairns. Expect to pay around A\$65 (US\$42) for a half-day trip with snorkel gear or a glass-bottom-boat cruise. A full-day trip can be as much as A\$96 (US\$62), but Big Cat makes a day trip for as little as A\$60 (US\$39). Big Cat's boat is slower, but you still get 5½ hours on the island. Great Adventures also has transfer-only rates of A\$50 (US\$30), which also gives access to the island's day facilities. Both companies pick up from hotels in Cairns, the northern beaches, and Port Douglas for an extra cost; Big Cat also runs to the island direct from Palm Cove.

A SIDE TRIP TO KURANDA

Few travelers visit Cairns without making a day trip to the mountain village of **Kuranda**, 34km (20 miles) west of Cairns near the Barron Gorge National Park. Although it's undeniably touristy, the cool mountain air and mist-wrapped rainforest refuse to be spoiled. The shopping in Kuranda—for leather, Australian wool sweaters, opals, crafts, and more—is a little more individual and unusual than in Cairns, and the cafes and restaurants are more atmospheric. The town is easily negotiated on foot, so pick up a visitors' guide and map at the Skyrail gondola station or train station (see below for how to get there) when you arrive.

GETTING THERE Getting to Kuranda is part of the fun. Some people drive the winding 25km (15-mile) mountain road, but the most popular routes are to chuff up the mountainside in a scenic train, or to glide silently over the rainforest canopy in the world's longest gondola cableway, the **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway** ⚡.

The most popular way to get there is to go one-way on the Skyrail (mornings are best for photography) and the other way on the train.

By Skyrail The **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway** ⚡⚡⚡ (☎ 07/4038 1555; www.skyrail.com.au) is a magnificent feat of engineering and one of Australia's top tourism attractions. About 114 six-person gondolas leave every few seconds from the terminal in the northern Cairns suburb of Smithfield for the 7.5km (4½-mile) journey. The view of the coast as you ascend is so breathtaking that even those afraid of heights will find it worthwhile overcoming their nervousness. As you rise over the foothills of the coastal range, watch the lush green of the rainforest take over beneath you. Looking back, there are spectacular views over Cairns and north towards Trinity Bay. On a clear day, you can see Green Island. There are two stops along the way—at Red Peak and Barron Falls—and about 90 minutes is needed to make the trip properly. After about 10 minutes, you reach Red Peak. You are now 545m (1,788 ft.) above sea level, and massive kauri pines dominate the view. You must change gondolas at each station, so take the time to stroll around the boardwalks for the ground view of the rainforest. Guided walks are run every 20 minutes.

On to Barron Falls station, built on the cleared site of an old construction camp for workers on the first hydroelectric power station on the Barron River in the 1930s. A rainforest information center has been established here, and there are boardwalks to the lookouts for wonderful views of the Barron Gorge and Falls. From Barron Falls station, the gondola travels over the thickly rainforested

range, and it's easy to spot ferns and orchids and the brilliant blue butterflies of the region. As you reach the end of the trip, the gondola passes over the Barron River and across the Kuranda railway line into the station. A one-way ticket is A\$32 (US\$21) for adults and A\$16 (US\$10) for children ages 4 to 14; a round-trip ticket, including transfers from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel, is A\$61 (US\$40) for adults, A\$31 (US\$20) for children, or A\$153 (US\$99) for a family, and A\$78 (US\$51) for adults, A\$39 (US\$25) for children, or A\$195 (US\$127) family from Port Douglas. You must make a reservation to travel within a 15-minute segment. Don't worry if it rains on the day you've chosen to go—one of the best trips I've made on Skyrail was in a misty rain, which added a new dimension to the rainforest. The cableway operates from 8am to 5pm, with last boarding at the Cairns end at 3:45pm. The Skyrail terminal is on the Captain Cook Highway at Kamerunga Road, Caravonica Lakes, 15km (9½ miles) north of Cairns's city center.

By Scenic Railway The 34km (20-mile) **Kuranda Scenic Railway** (☎ 1800/620 324 in Australia, or 07/4031 3636) is rated as one of the top five scenic rail journeys in the world. The train snakes through the magnificent vistas of the Barron Gorge National Park, past gorges and waterfalls on the 90-minute trip from Cairns to Kuranda. It rises 328m (1,076 ft.) and goes through 15 tunnels before emerging at the Kuranda station, which sits amidst an abundance of ferns. Built by hand over five years in the late 1880s, the railway track is a monument to the 1,500 men who toiled to link the two towns, and the ride on the steam train adds to the atmosphere. It departs Cairns Central at 8:30am daily and 9:30am Sunday through Friday (except Christmas), and leaves Kuranda at 2pm Sunday through Friday and 3:30pm every day. The fare is A\$31 (US\$20) one-way for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children ages 4 to 14. A pass for a family of four is A\$77 (US\$50) one-way.

Skyrail/Train Combination Tickets In most cases, these packages represent convenience rather than savings. A package combining one-way travel on the Skyrail and a trip back on the Scenic Railway is A\$63 (US\$41) for adults and A\$31 (US\$20) for children, A\$78 (US\$51) for adults and A\$39 (US\$25) for kids with round-trip transfers from Cairns or the northern beaches. A shuttle bus operates between the Skyrail terminal and the nearest train station at Freshwater, 7km (4½ miles) away, for A\$5 (US\$3.25) adults, A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) kids one-way. A three-way package including the Skyrail, the Scenic Railway, and entry to the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (see above) is A\$91 (US\$59) for adults and A\$45 (US\$29) for kids, or A\$106 (US\$69) for adults and A\$53 (US\$34) for kids including transfers from Cairns/northern beaches. A Skyrail/Scenic Railway/Rainforestation option is A\$103 (US\$67) for adults and A\$51 (US\$33) kids. Book packages through Skyrail, Queensland Rail, or Tjapukai.

By Bus The cheapest way, by far, to reach Kuranda is by bus. **Whitecar Coaches** (☎ 07/4091 1855) operates several daily bus services to Kuranda departing from 46 Spence St., Cairns. The fare is an almost unbelievable A\$1 (US\$65¢) per person.

BROWSING KURANDA'S MARKETS

Kuranda is known for its markets that sell locally made arts and crafts, fresh produce, boomerangs, T-shirts, and jewelry. There are two markets—the small “original” markets at 7 Therwine St., behind Kuranda Market Arcade (open Wed–Fri and Sun), which mainly sell cheap imports; and the 90-stall Heritage

markets (open daily 9am–3pm), which offer better quality and a wider variety of goods. Try to visit Kuranda when both markets are open.

Even the Heritage markets have been invaded by commercial imported products, and in response, a group of about 50 local artisans sell their work in the **Kuranda Arts Co-Operative** ★, (☎ 07/4093 9026) at Shop 6, “The Settlement,” Rob Veivers Dr., next to the Butterfly Sanctuary. It’s open from 10am to 4pm daily. You will find quality furniture crafted from recycled Australian hardwoods, jewelry, handcrafts, and all kinds of stuff here.

SOAKING UP THE RAINFOREST SCENERY

You can explore the rainforest, the river esplanade, or Barron Falls along a number of easy walking tracks. If you want to learn about the rainforest, explore it with Brian Clarke of **Kuranda Riverboat & Rainforest Tours** (☎ 07/4093 7476 or 0412 159212), which runs informative 45-minute river cruises. The cruises depart from 10:15am to 2:30pm from the riverside landing across the railway footbridge near the train station. He also runs a daily 400m (1,312-ft.) walk through the rainforest, leaving at 11:45am and returning at 12:45pm. Brian is a former crocodile hunter and has lived in the rainforest for more than 30 years. The cruise or the walk costs A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children 5 to 15, and A\$30 (US\$20) for families. Buy your tickets on board.

KURANDA’S NATURE PARKS & OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Of Kuranda’s two walk-through aviaries, **Birdworld** (☎ 07/4093 9188), behind the Heritage Markets off Rob Veivers Drive, is probably the most interesting, as it has eye-catching macaws and a cassowary. The **Aviary**, 8 Thongon St. (☎ 07/4093 7411), is good if you want to see a bigger range of Australian species. Birdworld is open daily from 9am to 4pm; admission is A\$11 (US\$7.15) for adults, A\$4 (US\$2.60) for children 4 to 14, or A\$28 (US\$18) for families. The Aviary is open from 10am to 3:30pm; admission is A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults and \$6 (US\$3.90) for kids ages 4 to 16. Both aviaries are closed Christmas.

Australian Butterfly Sanctuary ★ *Kids* A rainbow-hued array of 1,500 tropical butterflies—including the electric blue “Ulysses” and Australia’s largest species, the Cairns birdwing—is housed in a lush walk-through enclosure here. Take the free guided tour and learn about the butterfly’s fascinating life cycle. The butterflies will land on you if you wear pink, red, and other bright colors.

8 Rob Veivers Dr. ☎ 07/4093 7575. Fax 07/4093 8923. www.australianbutterflies.com. Admission A\$13 (US\$8.45) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.15) seniors, A\$6.50 (US\$4.25) children 5–16, family pass A\$30 (US\$20) for 2 adults and 2 kids. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9:45am–4pm. Free guided tours every 15 min. from 10am; last tour departs 3:15pm. Closed Christmas. On-street parking. Bus stop 7-min. walk away.

Tips The Secret of the Seasons

High season in Cairns runs from early July to early October; 2-week school vacations around Easter, mid-July, and in late September; also the Christmas holiday through January. Hotel occupancy is high in those periods, so book ahead. During the low season, from November to June, ask about discounted rates. Many hotels will be willing to negotiate. Standby rates are usually easy to come by then, too.

Tips Wildlife-Viewing Tip

Many people on rainforest tours end up asking “Where are all the animals?” If you want to spot wildlife, be careful which tour you pick. To avoid contact with humans, animals are increasingly retreating to higher altitudes; but many tour operators to the Daintree and Cape Tribulation National Parks stick to the lowlands. Make sure you ask.

Rainforestation Nature Park ★ *Finds* At this 40-hectare (99-acre) nature and cultural complex, you can take a 45-minute ride into the rainforest in a World War II amphibious Army Duck. You’ll hear commentary on orchids and other rainforest wildlife along the way. You can also see a performance by Aboriginal dancers; learn about Aboriginal legends and throw a boomerang on the Dreamtime Walk; or have your photo taken cuddling a koala in the wildlife park. You can do any of these activities separately, or do them all (except cuddle a koala) in a package that costs A\$34 (US\$22) for adults, A\$17 (US\$11) for kids ages 4 to 14, or A\$84 (US\$55) for a family of four. Koala photos are A\$12 (US\$7.80). The Army Duck runs on the hour beginning at 10am; the Aboriginal dancers perform at 10:30am, noon, and 2pm; and the 30-minute Dreamtime Walk leaves at 10, 11, and 11:30am, noon, and 12:30, 1:30, and 2:30pm.

On the Kennedy Hwy., a 5-min. drive from the center of Kuranda. ☎ 07/4093 9033. Fax 07/4093 7578. www.rainforest.com.au. Shuttle from Thongon St., Kuranda, (opposite the Post Office) every 30 min. from 10:45am–2:45pm costs A\$6 (US\$3.90) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children 4–14, A\$15 (US\$8.95) family, round-trip. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9am–4pm. Closed Christmas. Ample parking.

EXPLORING THE WET TROPICS

The 110-million-year-old World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest, 2 hours north of Cairns, gets most of the attention (and is covered later in this chapter), but tracts of rainforest closer to Cairns are just as pristine. These are all part of the **Wet Tropics** that stretch from Cape Tribulation to Townsville. This dense, lush environment has remained unchanged by ice ages and other geological events, and the plants and animals here retain primitive characteristics. Within the tract’s mangroves, eucalyptus, and tropical rainforest are 65% of Australia’s bird species, 60% of its butterfly species, and many of its frogs, reptiles, bats, marsupials, and orchids.

Because so much rainforest wildlife is nocturnal and often difficult to spot, consider joining **Wait-a-while Rainforest Tours** (☎ 07/4098 7500; www.waitawhile.com), which offers afternoon-into-night trips into the Daintree and the Atherton Tableland designed to maximize your encounters with the wild things. Naturalist guides take you into the forest to spot a range of wildlife: musky-rat kangaroos, platypus, ringtail possums, cassowaries, amethystine pythons, birds, and tree frogs. They use only low-watt bulbs and quiet 4WD or off-road vehicles. Tours depart Cairns at 2pm and return around midnight or 1am. The best for wildlife spotting is the Atherton Tableland trip, which costs A\$165 (US\$107) for adults and A\$154 (US\$100) for children under 15, and includes binoculars, flashlights, reference books, National Park permits, dinner in a country restaurant or a picnic dinner, and candlelit supper in the rainforest. Tour groups include no more than 10 people. The Daintree trip is more expensive and more about getting back to a true wilderness.

Where's the Beach?

That may have been the question visitors to Cairns asked until last year, but a brand new man-made lagoon right on the Cairns Esplanade has made it somewhat obsolete now. Swaying palms and sandy white beaches—the stuff of postcards—are now part of the streetscape, but if you want the real thing (and are visiting out of stinger season), it's only a few minutes' drive north of the city center.

Heading north from Cairns, you'll come to Machans Beach, Holloway's Beach, Yorkey's Knob, Trinity Beach, Kewarra Beach, Clifton Beach, Palm Cove, and Ellis Beach, in that order.

The locals have kept quiet about these beautiful spots for years. At Machans Beach, about 10km (6 miles) north of Cairns airport, the esplanade is lined with private homes. The closest commercial beach-front accommodation north of Cairns is at Holloways Beach.

Holloways, like most of the beaches along the Marlin Coast, is patrolled and has a swimming enclosure for use during stinger season (Oct–May). There's playground equipment for the kids in the beach-front park, while parents can watch from the shady deck at the beach-front cafe.

At **Yorkeys Knob**, new apartment blocks line Sims Esplanade, across the road from beachside picnic shelters and the lifeguard post; Yorkeys Knob also has a golf course and marina. **The Half Moon Bay Country Club Golf Course** is off Wattle Street, and is well signposted from the main road into town.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING & OTHER THRILLS

RnR Rafting ★ (☎ 1800/079 039 in Australia, or 07/4051 7777; www.rnrrafting.com) and **Raging Thunder Adventures** (☎ 07/4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au) serve as one-stop booking shops for action pursuits in and around Cairns, including hot-air ballooning, skydiving, jet-boating, horse-back riding, ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle) safaris, parasailing, and rafting. Ask them about multipursuit packages.

BIKING **Dan's Mountain Biking** (☎ 07/4033 0128) runs a wide range of full- and half-day guided tours in small groups from A\$75 to A\$135 (US\$49–US\$88) per person.

BUNGEE JUMPING Contact **A. J. Hackett Bungy** (☎ 1800/622 888 in Australia, or 07/4057 7188). The cost is A\$109 (US\$71) per person including transport to the site, which is 20 minutes north of town on McGregor Road.

FISHING Cairns is the world's giant black marlin capital. Catches of over 1,000 pounds aren't unusual around here. The game-fishing season is September to December, with November the biggest month. Book early, as game boats are reserved months in advance. Game fishers can also battle Pacific sailfish, dog-tooth and yellowfin tuna, Spanish mackerel, wahoo, dolphinfish, barracuda, and tiger shark. Reef anglers can expect to land coral trout, red emperor (sea perch),

Trinity Beach, one of the most popular of the northern beaches, is a 1.5km (just under 1 mile) stretch of sand, complete with swaying coconut palms. **Vasey Esplanade** is a colorful, bustling mix of apartments, restaurants, shops, and holidaymakers. On the beach, you can rent a jet ski, catamaran, paddle-ski, windsurfer or boogie board, or join an impromptu game of beach volleyball. At the southern end of the beach, take the **Ron McKauge Walk** for 350m (1150 ft.) along the beach and around the point for spectacular views north over Trinity Beach and south to Yorkeys Knob marina. On the hill above Trinity Beach is the old pub, with million dollar views of the beach and Coral Sea.

Next is **Kewarra Beach**, home to a budget-busting luxury resort well hidden from the beach itself. From Kewarra Beach you can see all the way to Palm Cove. To walk there along the beach takes you past Clifton Beach.

Palm Cove has a long jetty for fishing or boarding one of the day-tripper boats that pull in. Melaleuca trees line **Williams Esplanade**, softening the row of hotels and apartments. Here, nothing can be built higher than the trees.

Absolute beachfront means just that at **Ellis Beach**, the most northerly, just 30 minutes from Cairns. This is one of the most unspoiled stretches of the coast, a 5km (3-mile) beach, fringed by 150 palms and dotted with mango trees.

and sweetlip. Mangrove jack, barramundi, and tarpon lurk in the estuaries. Check out www.fishingcairns.com.au or call **Destination Cairns Marketing**, 36 Aplin St. (at Sheridan St.), ☎ **1800/807 730** in Australia, or 07/4051 4066, to book a charter. Expect to pay around A\$400 (US\$260) per person or about A\$1,900 (US\$1,235) per day for a sole charter for heavy-tackle game fishing, A\$295 (US\$192) per person for light tackle stuff, from A\$145 (US\$94) for reef fishing, and A\$130 (US\$85) for a day or A\$75 (US\$49) for a half day in the Cairns Inlet estuary.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING Several companies offer exciting white-water-rafting trips from Cairns on the Grade 3 to 4 **Tully River** ★★, 90 minutes south of Cairns near Mission Beach; the Grade 3 Barron River in the hills behind the city; and the Grade 4 to 5 rapids of the inland Johnstone River. One of the best is **RnR Rafting** (see above).

One-day trips on the Tully are the most popular (see “Mission Beach: The Cassowary Coast” later in this chapter). The trip costs A\$145 (US\$94) from Cairns, or A\$160 (US\$104) from Port Douglas, including transfers.

Closer to Cairns, the gentler Barron River is good choice for the timid. The half-day trip with RnR Rafting costs about A\$83 (US\$54) from Cairns or A\$94 (US\$61) from Port Douglas, including pickup from your accommodations and 2-hours’ rafting. There is also a A\$6 (US\$3.90) National Park fee.

WHERE TO STAY

Cairns has a good supply of affordable accommodations, both in the heart of the city and along the northern beaches. You can also stay in the peaceful village of Kuranda, or get away from it all at an island resort.

IN CAIRNS

Unless noted otherwise, shops, restaurants, cinemas, the casino, bus terminals, the train station, and the Reef Fleet Terminal for Great Barrier Reef cruises are all within walking distance of the following accommodations.

Bay Village Tropical Retreat ★ A swimming pool tucked in a lush garden courtyard adds to the charm at this two-story hotel about 1km (½ mile) from the city center. After a major renovation in 2002, it now offers standard rooms, studios, and one and two bedroom apartments. All are smartly decorated with rattan cane furniture and have cool tiled or polished floors. There's lots of space, and helpful staff members are always around. Facilities include an Internet room, free barbecue, and a restaurant.

Comer Lake and Gatton sts., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4051 4622. Fax 07/4051 4057. www.bayvillage.com.au. 63 units (most with shower only). A\$130 (US\$85) double; A\$145 (US\$94) studio; A\$175 (US\$114) 1-bedroom apt; A\$205 (US\$133) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$42 (US\$27). Children under 15 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. Free city center and airport shuttle (7am–11pm). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; room service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C and ceiling fans, TV, kitchenette (apts only), coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Cairns Bed & Breakfast Norah and Bernie Holli's B&B is 5km (3 miles) away from the airport or city in a pleasant suburb close to good restaurants and the bus, and on the edge of a conservation wetlands area popular with bird-watchers. Guests share the house with Bill the dog, Martin the cat, and dozens of Norah's teddy bears. Each cool, tile-floored room has its own entrance; all are furnished in Laura Ashley, with throw rugs, embroidered towels, and framed prints. Hair dryers are available. Breakfast is served by the pool. Your hosts are a good source for advice on tours (Bernie is a tour guide), which mostly pick up from the door. No smoking.

48 Russell St., Edge Hill, Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4032 4121. Fax 07/4053 6557. www.cairnsbnb.com.au. 3 units (all with shower only). A\$85 (US\$55) single; A\$95–A\$135 (US\$62–US\$88) double. Rates include full breakfast. No credit cards. Free on-street parking. Free transfers from airport, trains, and coach terminals (arrange when booking). **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Club Crocodile Hides Hotel Time has left this colonial three-story hotel overlooking a pedestrian plaza in the center of town a little worse for the wear, but it does have redeeming features, such as the high ceilings with ornate plasterwork, new carpets, and fresh paint in all the rooms. Choose from smallish rooms in the original 1885 building, or larger, lighter tile-floored rooms in the 1960s wing. Most rooms have no views, but a few open onto a huge veranda that overlooks the busy streets. This is a great spot to eat your basic breakfast, but it gets very noisy on Friday and Saturday nights when the public bar below starts to roar. There's 24-hour reception, and even a hairdresser on the premises! Dive training classes are held in the pool.

87 Lake St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4051 1266. Fax 07/4031 2276. www.clubcroc.com.au. 105 units, 80 with bathroom (68 with shower only). A\$80 (US\$52) double without bathroom; A\$118 (US\$77) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast and dinner. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free security parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; room service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C and ceiling fan, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, modem, safe.

Coral Tree Inn *Value* The focal point of this airy, modern resort-style motel just a 5-minute walk from the city center is the clean, friendly communal kitchen that overlooks the palm-lined saltwater pool and paved sun deck. It's a great spot to cook up a steak or reef fish filet on the free barbecue and join other guests at the big communal tables. Local restaurants deliver, free fresh-roasted coffee is on the boil all day, and a vending machine sells wine and beer, so you don't even have to go down to the pub for supplies! The smallish, basic but neat motel rooms have painted brick walls, terra-cotta tile or carpeted floors, and clean new bathrooms sporting marble-look laminate countertops. In contrast, the eight suites are huge and stylish enough to do any corporate traveler proud. They are some of the best-value accommodations in town. All rooms have a private balcony or patio; some look out onto the drab commercial buildings next door, but most look out over the pool. Ask about packages that include cruises and other tours.

166–172 Grafton St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4031 3744. Fax 07/4031 3064. www.coraltreeinn.com.au. 58 units. A\$110 (US\$72) double; A\$136 (US\$88) suite (sleeps 4). Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking; ample on-street parking. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; access to nearby health club; bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry and laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette in suites, fridge, coffee maker, hair dryer, iron, safe (at reception).

Flying Horseshoe Motel You will find clean rooms and a warm welcome from your hosts at this pleasant spot halfway between the airport and the city center. It is a short bus or taxi ride, or a pleasant 30-minute walk along the Esplanade to the city. Breathe in the balmy evening air from your balcony, gather round the pool for a buffet, or soak in the courtyard Jacuzzi. Every room is freshly decorated and spacious; executive suites are slightly bigger and have desks and dataports. The apartments are by a main road, so expect some traffic noise. There is 24-hour reception and free newspaper delivery. The bus to the city stops just across the road. Nonsmoking rooms are available.

281–289 Sheridan St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 1800/184 171 in Australia, or 07/4051 3022. Fax 07/4031 2761. www.bestwestern.com.au/flyinghorseshoe. 51 units (shower only). A\$90–A\$145 (US\$59–US\$94) double; A\$130 (US\$85) double executive suite; A\$155 (US\$101) double family apt (sleeps 6). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Free pickup from airport, train or bus station. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; secretarial services; massage (in room); babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free in-house movies, dataport (suites only), minibar, kitchenette (suites and apts only), hair dryer.

Lilybank Bed & Breakfast ★ *Finds* This 1870s Queenslander homestead, originally a mayor's residence, is in a leafy suburb 6km (3¾ miles) from the airport and a 10-minute drive from the city. Guests sleep in large, attractive rooms, all individually decorated with such features as wrought-iron beds and patchwork quilts. Each bathroom is a good size. The largest room has French doors opening onto a "sleep-out," an enclosed veranda with two extra beds. You can also stay in the gardener's cottage, renovated with slate floors, stained-glass windows, a king-size bed, and a bar. The house is set in gardens with an attractive rock-lined saltwater pool. Breakfast is served in the garden room by the fishpond. Your gregarious hosts Mike and Pat Woolford also share their house with three poodles, an irrepressible galah, and a giant green tree frog. There's a guest TV lounge and kitchen, and phone, fax, and e-mail access. Many tours pick up at the door, and several good restaurants are a stroll away, so you don't need a car to stay here. No smoking indoors.

75 Kamerunga Rd., Stratford, Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4055 1123. Fax 07/4058 1990. www.lilybank.com.au. 5 units (3 with shower only). A\$88–A\$110 (US\$57–US\$72) double. Extra person A\$33 (US\$21). Rates include full breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1E or 1G. Taxi from airport approx. A\$15 (US\$9.75). Bus stop 120m (394 ft.). Not suitable for children under 12. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; tour desk; massage can be arranged; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer.

Super-Cheap Sleeps

Inn the Tropics ★ A cut above a backpacker hostel, this cheerful, well-run lodge in the city center has small, simple but appealing private rooms with well-lit, clean private bathrooms with plenty of counter space, and freshly painted concrete brick walls. Homey touches abound, from the framed Monet prints to the ornamental seahorses on the doors. The shared bathrooms are very clean. There's a communal kitchen, open 24 hours, or a courtyard barbecue where guests can cook their own dinner. The management provides currency exchange and e-mail access.

141 Sheridan St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 1800/807 055 in Australia, or 07/4031 1088. Fax 07/4051 7110. www.cairns.net.au/~innthetropics. 51 units, 6 with bathroom (shower only). A\$33 (US\$22) single without bathroom; A\$44 (US\$29) single with bathroom; A\$44 (US\$29) double without bathroom; A\$55 (US\$36) double with bathroom; A\$55 (US\$36) family of 4 without bathroom. A\$18 (US\$12) adult dorm bed. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; bike rental. *In room:* A/C (coin-op), TV (some rooms only), fridge, coffeemaker.

Uptop Downunder After a hard day's sightseeing, it's a pleasure to return to the lounge chairs around the palm-lined pool at this cheerful backpacker lodge set amid an acre of tropical gardens. The 4-bed dorm rooms are clean; the private rooms are simple but airy and clean, with a single bed, twin, or doubles. There are no bunks here, and all the mattresses are inner-sprung. Some are air-conditioned (a must Nov–Mar), others have fans. Don't fuss about sharing the showers—the communal bathroom block and laundry are superclean. The staff is friendly; amenities include a communal kitchen and dining area, a barbecue, free tea and coffee, a basic grocery store and snack bar, a TV lounge, telephones, free e-mail access and safes.

164 Spence St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 1800/243 944 in Australia, or 07/4051 3636. Fax 07/4052 1211. www.uptopdownunder.com.au. 45 units, none with bathroom. A\$34 (US\$22) single; A\$40 (US\$26) double. A\$18 (US\$12) dorm bed. Ask about 5- and 7-night specials. AE, MC, V. Free parking for 15 cars. Free transfer from airport, train, or coach terminal (book in advance, or call when you arrive). Lodge runs free shuttle to town throughout the day. **Amenities:** Tour desk; bike rental; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (some rooms only), ceiling fans, fridge.

Worth a Splurge

Inn Cairns ★ If you want stylish surroundings, you'll like these spacious new one-bedroom apartments in the town center. They feature terra-cotta floors, wrought-iron and rattan furniture, and timber-louvered blinds. The roomy bathrooms are equally smart, with thick white towels. Guests can enjoy the sun on the rooftop deck, which has palms and views to the sea, or around the small but elegant pool and barbecue gazebo. Each apartment has an intercom system for security. Hair dryers are available at reception. Stock up on supplies at the supermarket across the road, or dine at the bistro downstairs. You're 3 blocks from where the Great Barrier Reef cruises depart.

71 Lake St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4041 2350. Fax 07/4041 2420. www.inncairns.com.au. 38 units. A\$132 (US\$86) double low season; A\$158 (US\$103) double high season. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). Free cribs. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secure undercover parking. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, laundry.

Oasis Resort Cairns  The large free-form pool, complete with swim-up bar and a little sandy beach is the focus of this attractive six-story resort built in 1997. All the colorful, contemporary rooms have balconies with views over the tropical gardens, mountains, or the pool. The suites, with a TV in the bedroom and a large Jacuzzi bathtub, could well be the best-value suites in town.

122 Lake St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ **07/4080 1888**. Fax 07/4080 1889. www.oasis-cairns.com.au. 314 units. A\$215 (US\$140) double; A\$385 (US\$250) suite. Extra person A\$44 (US\$29). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Free crib. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free valet and self-parking. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; health club; concierge; tour desk; room service (6:30am–10:30pm); babysitting; coin-op laundry or laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, coffeemaker, stocked minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Tuna Towers The harbor views at this multistory motel and apartment complex are better than those at most of the five-star hotels in Cairns. Two blocks from town, the accommodations are a good size, with fresh, appealing furnishings, and modern bathrooms. If your balcony does not have a water vista, it has a nice aspect of the city or mountains instead.

145 The Esplanade (at Minnie St.), Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ **1800/117 787** in Australia, or 07/4051 4688. Fax 07/4051 8129. www.tunatowers.com.au. 60 units. A\$120–A\$135 (US\$78–US\$88) double; A\$131–A\$146 (US\$85–US\$95) studio apt double; A\$150–A\$170 (US\$98–US\$111) suite. Extra person A\$12 (US\$7.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor pool; golf course (1km/½ mile away); 4 day/night tennis courts nearby; access to nearby health club; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, dataport, kitchenettes in suites and studios, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

ON THE NORTHERN BEACHES

Beaches at Holloways Relaxed owners David and Josephine Hopkins have given over the upstairs of their light-filled home opposite Holloways Beach to guests. Rooms are fresh and comfortable; bathrooms are pretty and practical; and bathrobes are supplied. Two front rooms open onto a lovely bougainvillea-clad veranda overlooking the sea. There's a guest TV lounge. Several inexpensive restaurants, including a good alfresco Italian BYO, are just down the road. No smoking indoors.

2 Marietta St., Holloways Beach, Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ **07/4055 9972**. Fax 07/4055 9886. www.beaches-at-holloways.com.au. 3 units (2 with shower only). A\$66 (US\$43) single; A\$88 (US\$57) double. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Free on-street parking. Bus: 1C, 1H, or N. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C and ceiling fan, hair dryer.

Ellis Beach Oceanfront Bungalows

 Set on what is arguably the loveliest of the northern beaches, about 30 minutes from Cairns, these bungalows and cabins are set under palm trees between the Coral Sea and a backdrop of mountainous rainforest. Lifeguards patrol the beach, and there are stinger nets in season as well as a shady pool and toddlers' wading pool. There's plenty of privacy, and the accommodations are basic but pleasant. You can sit on the veranda and gaze at the ocean. Keep an eye out for dolphins. Each bungalow and cabin sleeps four and has full kitchen facilities (with microwave, fridge, and freezer). There are coin-operated barbecues and phone and fax facilities.

Tips Safe Swimming

Northern beaches have small, netted enclosures for swimming from October to May, because ocean swimming off the Queensland beaches becomes quite dangerous when the poisonous marine stingers (jellyfish) are present.

Captain Cook Hwy., Ellis Beach, QLD 4879. ☎ 1800/637 036 in Australia, or 07/4055 3538. Fax 07/4055 3077. www.ellisbeachbungalows.com.au. 15 units (all with shower only). A\$68 (US\$44) double cabins; A\$155 (US\$101) double bungalows. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75) in cabins, A\$24 (US\$16) in bungalows. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 pools; golf course nearby; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C and ceiling fans, TV, kitchen, iron.

The Reef Retreat ★★ Tucked back one row of buildings from the beach is this little gem—a low-rise collection of contemporary studios and suites built around a pool in a peaceful grove of palms and silver paperbarks. All the rooms in the newer or extensively renovated wings have cool tile floors and smart teak and cane furniture. The studios are a terrific value and much larger than the average hotel room. In the oceanview suites, you can even lie in bed and see the sea. The extra-private honeymoon suites (and some oceanview suites) have a Jacuzzi and a kitchenette outside on the balcony. There's a barbecue on the grounds and a Jacuzzi. There's no elevator. For long-stay guests, rooms are serviced twice weekly; stays of 4 days or less do not include cleaning service. Extra services A\$20 (US\$13).

10–14 Harpa St., Palm Cove, Cairns, QLD 4879. ☎ 07/4059 1744. Fax 07/4059 1745. www.reefretreat.com.au. 36 units (16 with shower only, 20 with shower and Jacuzzi). A\$140 (US\$91) studio double; A\$150 (US\$98) suite and spa suite; A\$160 (US\$104) oceanview suite; A\$260 (US\$169) 2-bedroom apt (sleeps 4). Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding; crib A\$25 (US\$16). AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1, 1B 1X, 2X, or N. Airport shuttle A\$15 (US\$9.75) per person one-way. **Amenities:** Pool; nearby golf course; tennis courts; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry and laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemakers, hair dryer, iron.

Tropical Holiday Units You're a block from Trinity Beach at these roomy, well-equipped apartments with friendly managers. The furnishings are rather dated, but each has everything a family or couple could want for a penny-wise vacation—a kitchen, comfy living and dining area, large bedrooms, laundry, balcony, and a poolside barbecue. Servicing is weekly, and there is access to Internet and fax facilities. A general store, a pub, and inexpensive eateries are just down the road.

63–73 Moore St. (at Trinity Beach Rd.), Trinity Beach, Cairns, QLD 4879. ☎ 07/4057 6699. Fax 07/4057 6565. www.ozemail.com.au/~trophol/. 43 units (with shower only). A\$96–A\$128 (US\$62–US\$83) 1-bedroom apt, A\$120–A\$160 (US\$78–US\$104) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$18 (US\$12). Children under 4 stay free. Weekly rates available. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1, 1A, 3X, or N. Airport shuttle. Free airport transfers for guests staying 5 nights or more. **Amenities:** 3 saltwater pools; 3 Jacuzzis; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, laundry.

IN KURANDA

A 30-minute winding mountain drive, a 90-minute train trip, or a 40-minute Skyrail gondola ride over the treetops brings you to this pretty village in the hills behind Cairns. A local bus travels from two to five times a day from Cairns city for A\$7 (US\$4.55) one-way. Kuranda is cool, rain-forestry, and blissfully peaceful, despite the daily influx of tourists from the city. There are a handful of good restaurants and quite a lot to see and do. One drawback is that not many tours pick up here.

Kuranda Rainforest Park The rainforest and exotic, colorful park-like gardens are the setting for this combination of cabins, budget rooms, and campsites. Annette and Hans Christensen have established their getaway on 10 acres just 10 minutes' walk from Kuranda's amenities, including Internet access. You can take a canoe on the nearby Barron River or go spotlighting on the grounds at night to see some of the local wildlife. There's also a public phone/fax and a store.

Kuranda Heights Rd., Kuranda, QLD 4872. ☎/fax 07/4093 7316. www.kurandatouristpark.com. 11 units, with private bathroom (shower only); 8 veranda rooms, with shared bathrooms. A\$110 (US\$57) double family cottages; A\$85 (US\$43) double cottages for couples or poolside cabins; A\$80 (US\$52) double park units; A\$45 (US\$29) double for budget rooms (sleeps 4). Extra adult A\$12 (US\$7.80), extra child A\$6 (US\$3.90). A\$17 (US\$11) double for unpowered campsites and A\$20 (US\$13) for powered sites. MC, V. **Amenities:** Large saltwater pool; tour desk. *In room:* TV.

ON AN ISLAND

Of several island resorts off Cairns, the Fitzroy Island Resort is the most affordable. It is idyllic, but every time you want to join a tour or go shopping on the mainland, you must pay for a transfer—about A\$35 (US\$23) round-trip.

Fitzroy Island Resort This is probably the most affordable island resort on the Great Barrier Reef. It's targeted at a young crowd looking for action and eco-fun in a pristine, beautiful location. It's no glamour-puss palace, but was revamped in 2000 to sport a new Hard Rock Cafe-style restaurant, spruced-up interiors, and a makeover around the pool. Fitzroy is a continental island offering little in the way of fringing coral and only a few narrow strips of coral sand. What it does have are catamarans, outrigger canoes, and surf skis; glass-bottom-boat rides; and hiking trails through dense national park forest to a lighthouse. Divers can make drift dives over the reefs dotted around the island to see manta rays, reef sharks, turtles, and plenty of coral. There is good snorkeling at two points around the island that you can reach twice a day on the dive boat, at an extra fee. You can also catch the Sunlover Cruises day trip to the outer Great Barrier Reef. The dive shop runs introductory and certified dives and certification courses. Each of the modestly comfortable beach cabins has a queen-size bed and two bunks in the back, and the rooms have ceiling fans and a large balcony with views through the trees to the sea. The bunkhouse accommodations are basic fan-cooled carpeted rooms with bunks and/or beds. Bunkhouse guests can use the communal kitchen if they BYO supplies from the mainland.

The restaurant is moderately priced, a kiosk sells takeout food, and the pool-side grill and bar does casual meals. The **Raging Thunder Beach Bar**, billed as "the only nightclub on the Reef," gets going on Saturday nights.

35km (22 miles) southeast of Cairns. P.O. Box 1109, Cairns, QLD 4870. ☎ 07/4051 9588. Fax 07/4052 1335. www.fitzroyislandresort.com.au. 52 cabins (all with shower only); 32 bunkhouses, none with private bathroom. Cabins A\$220 (US\$143) double. Extra person A\$35 (US\$23). Bunkhouses A\$31 (US\$20) per person per bed (sharing with up to 3 other people); A\$116 (US\$76) double (sole use); A\$124 (US\$81) family bunkhouse (sleeps 4). AE, DC, MC, V. Round-trip transfers 3 times daily from Cairns (approx. 45 min.) cost A\$36 (US\$23) adults, A\$18 (US\$12) children 4–14. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; watersports equipment; dive shop; tour desk. *In room* (cabins only): TV, minifridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE IN CAIRNS

The Esplanade along the seafront is always good for a cost-conscious feed, as it's packed with cafes, pizzerias, fish and chips places, and ice-cream parlors. The Pier Marketplace on the waterfront has a food court with water views, or you can try the food court in the Cairns Central Mall over the railway station on McLeod Street. All but a few food outlets in the mall close at night.

Perrotta's MODERN AUSTRALIAN The locals flock here for brunch and lunch, particularly at the weekends, and you can team it with a visit to the Cairns Regional Art Gallery, as the cafe is just outside. Breakfast differs from the usual bacon and eggs or pancakes fare, offering delights such as smoked salmon and Klimera hash browns with roasted Roma tomatoes, sour cream, and avocado. Sweet-tooths may go for the French toast with star anise-scented

pineapple and lime mascarpone. For lunch there's a choice of bruschettas, focaccia, or panini, pasta dishes, or more individual dishes such as Thai-style calamari with roasted peanuts, lemon grass, and chili. At dinner, try the barramundi, local swordfish, or Tasmanian salmon. Remember to check out the specials board. Licensed.

Abbott and Shields sts. ☎ **074031 5899**. www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au. Reservations recommended. Breakfast A\$4–A\$10 (US\$2.60–US\$6.50). Main courses (at dinner) all A\$25 (US\$16). MC, V. Daily 8am–late.

Red Ochre Grill ★ *(Kids)* GOURMET BUSH TUCKER You could accuse this restaurant/bar of using weird and wonderful Aussie ingredients as a gimmick to pull in crowds, but the diners who flock here know good food when they taste it. Daily specials are big on fresh local seafood, and the regular menu—which changes often—lets you devour the Aussie coat of arms in several different ways. Try the emu pâté with bush tomato chili sauce, or kangaroo filets done over a mallee wood-fired grill. Although the place is slick enough for a night out, it is also informal enough for a casual meal and there's a kids' menu.

43 Shields St. ☎ **07/4051 0100**. www.redochregrill.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$5.50–A\$24 (US\$3.60–US\$16) at lunch, A\$24–A\$32 (US\$16–US\$21) at dinner. Australian game platter A\$42 (US\$27) per person; seafood platter A\$50 (US\$33) per person. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 12pm–midnight (public holidays 6pm–midnight). Closed Christmas.

Thai Pan LAO/THAI Delicately fragrant curries and carefully prepared stir-fries and soups are served in this humble brick restaurant. Thai food is always a sure bet in Australia, and this place is no exception. Try the *pad gratium* (tender beef fried in a complex garlic sauce with crisp vegetables); one of the many seafood dishes, such as the mixed seafood cooked in basil and a hint of chili; or one of the plentiful vegetarian choices. The wine list is unremarkable, so bring your own. Licensed and BYO.

43–45 Grafton St. ☎ **07/4052 1708**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$16–A\$20 (US\$10–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10:30pm.

Worth a Splurge

Fishlips Bar & Bistro ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN/SEAFOOD Ask locals where they go for seafood—as opposed to where they send tourists—and they direct you to this 1920s bluebird-blue shack about 2km (1¼ miles) from town. Chef Ian Candy is renowned for his flair and innovation with seafood. All dishes come in small or large servings, and the local barramundi, or “barra,” shows up in several incarnations, maybe beer-battered with rough-cut chips (fries) and fresh tartar sauce, simply grilled, or served with eggplant pickle and rocket pesto on chargrilled zucchini and onion with charred polenta. There are plenty of non-seafood options as well. Be daring—try the crocodile, pan-fried

Tips Cheap Eats at the R.S.L.

R.S.L. (Returned Services League) Clubs are great places for a cheap feed. Almost all Queensland towns have an R.S.L. Club and they all have restaurants with main courses usually priced at under A\$15 (US\$9.75). The food is pretty basic—roasts, pasta, and so on—and the decor usually modest. And if you fancy a flutter after your meal, most of them also have gaming machines and Keno. If you're at the beach, try the local Surf Livesaving Club, which offers similar fare and prices. As they're clubs, you have to sign in at the door, but visitors are welcome.

with pinenuts, coriander, and cumin on avocado and cucumber salad with red onion, yogurt dressing, and crispy noodles. For dessert, don't go past the home-made ice cream with flavors that change each week. How nice to see that almost every choice on the wine list comes by the glass. Dine inside (air-conditioned for those humid nights) or on the front deck, with its bright blue pots and palm trees. Licensed Sunday through Thursday, and BYO wine only (no BYO beer or spirits).

228 Sheridan St. (between Charles and McKenzie sts.) ☎ 07/4041 1700. www.fishlips.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$12–A\$19 (US\$7.80–US\$12) small sizes, A\$20–A\$41 (US\$13–US\$27) large sizes. AE, DC, MC, V. Fri noon–2:30pm; daily 6pm–late.

On the Northern Beaches

Colonies MODERN AUSTRALIAN It may not have the ocean frontage of the grander restaurants along Williams Esplanade, but you are still within earshot of the waves from the veranda of this cheery little aerie upstairs behind a seafront building. The atmosphere is simple and the menu includes loads of inexpensive choices such as pastas, soups, green chicken curry, and seafood. Licensed and BYO.

Upstairs in Paradise Village shopping center, Williams Esplanade, Palm Cove. ☎ 07/4055 3058. Fax 07/4059 1559. www.palmcoveonline.com/colonies/. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$16–A\$29 (US\$10–US\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10:30pm. Closed mid-Jan to mid-Mar. Bus: 1, 1B, 1X, 2X, or N.

Mezza Luna Trattoria PIZZA It's no surprise that this place has been voted the best pizza joint in Queensland. Now the humble pizza place has been joined by a full-blown trattoria with a range of other dishes, but the pizzas are still as good. Try the Mezza Luna (tomato, mozzarella, Italian ham, mushroom, marinated artichoke, olives, and oregano) or the Gamberi (local prawns, mozzarella, onion, and fresh basil on a mango base). There are also more traditional toppings, as well as linguini, spaghetti, and lamb, chicken and fish dishes. BYO (corkage A\$2/US\$1.30 per person).

77 Vasey Esplanade, Trinity Beach. ☎ 07/4055 6958. Pizzas A\$13–A\$19 (US\$8.45–US\$12); main courses A\$16–A\$20 (US\$10–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

Worth a Splurge

Far Horizons MODERN AUSTRALIAN You can't quite sink your toes into the sand, but you are just yards from the beach at this pleasant restaurant within the Angsana Resort. The laid-back fine-dining fare includes plenty of fresh seafood—the catch of the day comes with chunky homemade chips and tartare, and there are interesting choices like Vietnamese salad with chargrilled reef fish. The restaurant sometimes sets up dining on the lawn among the palm trees beside the beach. The service is relaxed and friendly and the crowd is a mix of hotel guests from this and other nearby resorts. On Friday and Saturday nights a guitarist plays in the cocktail bar.

Angsana resort, 1 Veivers Rd. (southern end of Williams Esplanade), Palm Cove. ☎ 07/4055 3000. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$24–A\$33 (US\$16–US\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30pm–midnight (last orders at 9:30pm). Bus: 1, 1B, 1X, 2X, or N.

3 Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area

Port Douglas 67km (40 miles) N of Cairns; Mossman 19km (11 miles) N of Port Douglas; Daintree 49km (29 miles) N of Port Douglas; Cape Tribulation 34km (20 miles) N of Daintree

The tiny fishing village of **Port Douglas** ⚓ is where “the rainforest meets the reef.” The Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, two great wonders of the natural world, are right next to each other. Just over an hour's drive from

Cairns, through rainforest and along the sea, Port Douglas may be a one-horse town, but its main street is lined with stylish shops and trendy restaurants, and its beautiful **Four Mile Beach** ★ is not to be missed. This is a favorite spot with celebrities big and small—you may find yourself dining at a table next to anyone from Bill Clinton to Kylie Minogue, Sean Penn to Australian rock band Midnight Oil, or minor soap stars.

People often base themselves in “Port,” as the locals call it, because they like the peaceful rural surroundings, the uncrowded beach, and the charmed absence of tacky development (so far, anyway). Don’t think you will be isolated if you stay here—many reef and rainforest tours originate in Port Douglas and many of the tours discussed in the Cairns section earlier in this chapter pick up from Port Douglas.

Daintree National Park lies just north of Port Douglas; just north of that is Cape Tribulation National Park, another wild rainforest with hilly headlands down to the sea. Exploring these national parks is easy on a 4WD day-safari from Port Douglas.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Port Douglas is a scenic 65-minute drive from Cairns, in part along a narrow winding road that skirts the coast. Take Sheridan Street north out of the city as it becomes the Captain Cook Highway; stay on the highway and follow the signs to Mossman and Mareeba until you reach the Port Douglas turnoff on your right.

One of the most pleasant ways to get to Port Douglas is to take one of the giant **Quicksilver Wavepiercer** ★ (☎ 07/4087 2100) catamarans along the coast. They depart Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns at 8am, Palm Cove jetty at 8:35am, and arrive in Port Douglas at 9:30am. You can also stay onboard and go straight to the Great Barrier Reef for the day for an extra charge (see “Discovering the Great Barrier Reef” below). The cost of the trip from Cairns is A\$24 (US\$16) one-way, A\$36 (US\$23) round-trip, half price for kids ages 4 to 14.

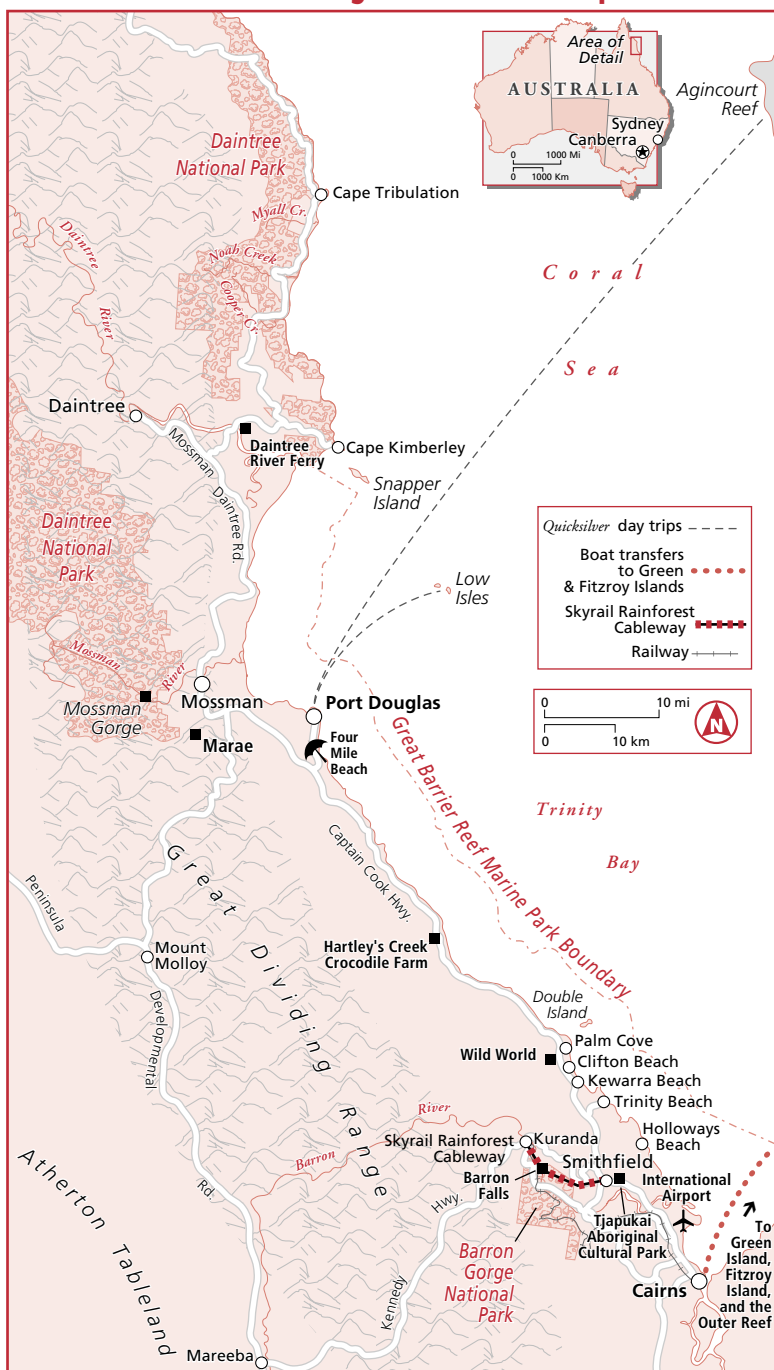
A one-way ticket aboard **Sun Palm Express Coaches** (☎ 07/4031 7577) to Port Douglas hotels is A\$28 (US\$18) from the Cairns airport. Fares for children are half price.

VISITOR INFORMATION Write for information to the **Port Douglas Daintree Tourism Association**, P.O. Box 511, Port Douglas, QLD 4871 (☎ 07/4099 4588; www.pddt.com.au). The association has no visitor information office in Port Douglas. Instead, visitors should visit one of several private tour information and booking centers in town. One of the biggest and most centrally located is the **Port Douglas Tourist Information Centre**, 23 Macrossan St. (☎ 07/4099 5599), open from 7:30am to 6pm daily.

GETTING AROUND Of the major rental companies, only **Avis** (☎ 07/4099 4331) has an office in Port Douglas. Check out the local companies, including **Port Douglas Car Rental** (☎ 07/4099 4988) and **Crocodile Car Rentals** (☎ 07/4099 5555). All rent four-wheel-drives as well as regular vehicles, and these are needed if you plan to drive to Cape Tribulation. If you need a taxi, call **Port Douglas Taxis** (☎ 07/4099 5345).

A good way to get around the town’s flat streets is by bike. **Port Douglas Bike Hire** (☎ 07/4099 5799) at 40–42 Macrossan Street (opposite Westpac Bank) rents bikes for A\$14 (US\$9.10) for 24 hours. The shop is open 9am to 5pm.

Port Douglas, Daintree & Cape Tribulation



Tips Beware the Sting(ers)

Deadly marine stingers (jellyfish) infest the water from October to May; swim only in areas partitioned off by stinger nets during those months.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

DISCOVERING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF For details on diving and snorkeling the outer Great Barrier Reef from Port Douglas, see section 1, “Exploring the Great Barrier Reef” earlier in this chapter.

Another way to spend a pleasant day on the Great Barrier Reef, closer to shore, is to visit the **Low Isles** 15km (9 miles) northeast of Port Douglas. There is nothing to the isles—just 1.5-hectare (3¾-acre) coral cay specks of lush vegetation surrounded by white sand and 22 hectares (55 acres) of coral—which is what makes them so appealing.

The trip aboard the 30m (98-ft.) luxury sailing catamaran *Wavedancer* (© 07/4087 2100), operated by Quicksilver, is A\$115 (US\$75) adults, A\$60 (US\$39) kids 4 to 14, and A\$290 (US\$189) families. You have the option of making an introductory scuba dive for an extra A\$98 (US\$64) per person. The *Wavepiercer* departs Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns at 8am and Palm Cove Jetty on the northern beaches at 8:35am to connect with *Wavedancer* departures from Port Douglas at 10am. The company picks you up free of charge from your hotel.

Snorkeling specialist boat *Wavelength* (© 07/4099 5031; www.wavelengthreef.com.au) does a full-day trip to the Outer Reef for A\$134 (US\$87) for adults, A\$90 (US\$59) for children ages 2 to 12, or A\$410 (US\$267) for a family of four. The trip visits three different snorkel sites each day and incorporates a guided snorkel tour and a reef presentation from a marine biologist. It caters to up to 30 passengers and includes snorkel gear, sunsuits, lunch, and transfers from your hotel. Both beginners and experienced snorkelers will like this trip. It departs daily from the *Wavelength* jetty in Wharf Street at 8:15am.

EXPLORING DAINTREE & CAPE TRIBULATION Almost everyone who comes to Port Douglas takes a guided 4WD day trip into the Daintree and Cape Tribulation rainforests. Although they are referred to as two separate national parks, the forests that cover them merge into one.

You can rent a 4WD and explore on your own (that is the cheapest option if you're traveling in a group of two or more), but you won't understand much about what you are seeing unless you have a guide to interpret it for you. Most companies basically cover the same territory and sights, including a 1-hour Daintree River cruise to spot crocs, a visit to the lovely **Marrdja Botanical Walk**, a stroll along an isolated beach, lunch at a pretty spot somewhere in the forest, and a visit to Mossman Gorge. Some tours also go to the picturesque **Bloomfield Falls** in Cape Tribulation National Park. Expect to pay about A\$130 (US\$85) per adult and about A\$90 (US\$59) per child. Trips that include Bloomfield Falls are more. A company that provides an excellent, gently adventurous alternative is Pete Baxendell's **Heritage & Interpretive Tours** ★ (Finds (© 07/4098 7897; www.nqhit.com.au). On a daylong bushwalk into a tract of privately owned rainforest with Pete, a naturalist and professional tour guide, you taste green ants (be brave, it's quite an experience) and other native “bush tucker,” discover how to rustle up a toothbrush from a shrub if you forgot to

pack yours, learn about bush medicine and the wildlife around you, and clam-ber up a stream to a waterfall. He takes a maximum six people at a time. Lunch and pickups are included in the price of A\$110 (US\$72). His walks run Tuesday and Saturday, leaving Port at 8:30am. You can also charter Pete and his 4WD on other days for day bushwalks for A\$160 (US\$104) per person (minimum of two) or for a “go anywhere” adventure for A\$540 (US\$351) per day. Pickups from the northern beaches cost A\$30 (US\$20) extra for bushwalks, but are included in the price for “go anywhere” charters. The charter prices compare favorably to a regular Daintree four-wheel-drive tour if there’s three or more of you—and you get a tailored itinerary, Pete’s knowledge, and the vehicle all to yourself. He often takes charter customers inland to Outback gold mining ghost towns, or north to tiny Cooktown, which boasts an excellent museum devoted to Australia’s “discoverer,” Captain James Cook. If you have 2 days, he can take you further west to see Aboriginal rock art and stay at an upscale tented camp, or to the Undara Lava Tubes, which have been hollowed from rock by lava flows. Other established operators are **Trek North Safaris** (☎ 07/4051 4328) and **BTS Tours** (☎ 07/4099 5665). As is the case in most tourist hot spots, some tour operators battle fiercely to pay tour desks the highest commission to recommend their tours, even though those tours may not necessarily be the best for your needs. Take tour desks’ recommendations with a grain of salt, and ask other travelers for their recommendations. You may not see too much wildlife, as rain-forest animals are shy, camouflaged, nocturnal, or all three! Most four-wheel-drive tours will pick you up in Port Douglas at no charge, although there is usually a small fee from Cairns and the northern beaches. Floods and swollen creeks can quash your plans to explore the Daintree in the Wet Season (Dec–Mar or Apr), so keep your plans flexible.

If your chosen safari does not visit **Mossman Gorge**, 21km (12 miles) north-west of Port Douglas near the sugar town of Mossman; try to get there on your own. The gushing river tumbling over boulders, and the short forest walks are magical. (Don’t climb on the rocks or enter the river, as strong currents are dangerous and have claimed at least one life in recent years).

Most 4WD Daintree tours include a 1-hour cruise on the **Daintree River**, but if yours doesn’t, or you want more time on the river, cruises are available on a variety of boats, from open-sided “river trains” to small fishing boats. One of the best is offered by **Dan Irby’s Mangrove Adventures** (★ *Finds* ☎ 07/4090 7017; www.mangroveadven.citysearch.com.au for bookings), whose small open boat can get up side creeks the bigger boats can’t. Originally from Oklahoma, Dan has been in Australia for 30 years, and is extremely knowledgeable about

Moments The Land that Time Forgot

The World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest has remained largely unchanged over the past 110 million years. It is home to rare plants that provide key links in the evolution story. In the 140,000-acre **Daintree National Park** you will find cycads, dinosaur trees, fan palms, giant strangler figs, and epiphytes like the basket fern, staghorn, and elkhorn. Night-time croc-spotting tours on the Daintree River vie for popularity with early morning cruises to see the rich bird life. Pythons, lizards, frogs, and electric blue Ulysses butterflies attract photographers, and sport fishermen come here to do battle with the big barramundi.

the wildlife and habitat. He takes no more than 10 people at a time on 2-, 3- and 4-hour cruises. Chances are you will spot lots of fascinating wildlife on his 2-hour night cruise, and even if you don't, it's worth it just to see the stars! A 2-hour trip costs A\$45 (US\$29). Night trips depart from the Daintree Eco Lodge, 20 Mossman Daintree Rd., 4km (2½ miles) south of Daintree village; day trips leave from the public jetty next to the Daintree River ferry crossing. Take the Captain Cook Highway north to Mossman, where it becomes the Mossman Daintree Road, and follow it for 24km (15 miles) to the signposted turnoff for the ferry on your right. The ferry is 5km (3 miles) from the turnoff. You'll need a car to get there.

Bird-watchers love the Wet Tropics rainforests of which the Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks are part. More than half of Australia's bird species have been recorded within 200km (120 miles) of this area. **Fine Feather Tours** (☎ 07/4094 1199; www.finefeathertours.com.au) has a full-day bird-watching safari through the Wet Tropics to the edge of the Outback for A\$185 (US\$120), an afternoon cruise on the Daintree River for A\$135 (US\$88), and other tours.

Rainforest Habitat wildlife sanctuary (☎ 07/4099 3235; www.rainforesthabitat.com.au) is a great place to get to see the animals that are too shy to be spotted in the wild. Here, 180 animal species from the Wet Tropics are gathered in one place for you to see up close. You can see saltwater and freshwater crocodiles, hand-feed kangaroos, and have your photo taken beside (but not holding) a koala (from 10–11am and 3–4pm for the cost of a donation). The highlight is the walk-through aviary, which houses 70 Wet Tropics bird species including cassowaries. You'll get the most out of your visit if you take one of the excellent free guided tours that leave every hour on the hour between 9am and 3pm. Rainforest Habitat is located on Port Douglas Road at the turnoff from the Captain Cook Highway. It's open daily (except Christmas) from 8am to 5:30pm (last entry at 4:30pm). Admission is A\$25 (US\$16) for adults and A\$13 (US\$8.45) for kids 4 to 14. Between 8am and 11am, the park serves a champagne buffet breakfast for A\$38 (US\$25) for adults and A\$19 (US\$12) for kids, including admission. Allow 2 hours here.

One company that shows you plenty of rainforest creatures in the wild is **Wait-a-while Rainforest Tours** (☎ 07/4098 7500) whose rainforest wildlife-spotting walks are described in "Exploring the Wet Tropics" in the Cairns section earlier in this chapter. They also do pick-ups from Port Douglas.

DISCOVERING ABORIGINAL CULTURE The native KuKu-Yalanji tribe will teach you about bush medicines and foods, Dreamtime legends, and the sacred sites their families have called home for tens of thousands of years. **KuKu-Yalanji Dreamtime Tours** ★ (☎ 07/4098 2595; www.yalanji.com.au) offers a guided walk through the rainforest to see cave paintings and visit "special sites"; the tour is followed by a Dreamtime story over billy tea and damper (a type of baked bread) in a bark warun (shelter). You can buy artifacts from the tribe's information center, gift shop, and art gallery. The tours depart Monday through Friday at 10am, noon, and 2pm from the Kuku-Yalanji community on the road to Mossman Gorge (1km/½ mile before you reach the Gorge parking lot). Tours cost A\$17 (US\$11) for adults and A\$8.25 (US\$5.35) for children. Allow 2 hours.

Hazel Douglas of **Native Guide Safari Tours** ★ (☎ 07/4098 2206; www.nativeguidesafaritours.com.au) runs 4WD tours of the rainforest from an Aboriginal perspective. Hazel is a full-blooded Aborigine who grew up in a tribal

lifestyle in the Daintree. She imparts her traditional knowledge of the plants, animals, Dreamtime myths, and Aboriginal history on a full-day tour departing at 9:15am from your Port Douglas hotel. Passengers from Cairns transfer up on the Quicksilver catamaran and return either by coach (northern beaches) or catamaran (Cairns city). The trip costs A\$120 (US\$78) for adults and A\$80 (US\$52) for children ages 3 to 14 from Port Douglas, and A\$10 (US\$6.50) extra from Cairns or the northern beaches. Charter and half-day tours are also available.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Some companies in Cairns that offer outdoor activities will provide inexpensive or free pick-ups from Port Douglas hotels. See “White-Water Rafting & Other Thrills” in the Cairns section above for details.

Every Sunday, a colorful **handcrafts and fresh food market** sets up on the lawns under the mango trees beside Dickson Inlet at the end of Macrossan Street. Stalls sell everything from fresh coconut milk to foot massages. It runs from 7:30am to 1pm. While you’re here, take a peek, or attend a non-denominational service, inside the pretty timber **St. Mary’s by the Sea church**.

The cheapest and best outdoor activity in Port Douglas, however, is to do absolutely nothing but laze on spectacular **Four Mile Beach** 🌴🌴. May through September the water is stinger-free. October through April, swim in the stinger safety net. **Get High Parafly** (☎ 07/4099 6366, or call the boat at 0407/996 366) offers parasailing, jet-skiing, tube rides, water-skiing, and other watersports on the beach. Expect to pay between A\$35 and A\$70 (US\$23–US\$46) for each activity. A boat runs every hour on the hour between 9am and 5pm from the booking office at Berth C4 at Marina Mirage to the company’s beach location at Four Mile Beach.

Visitor greens fees at the championship Sheraton Mirage golf course on Port Douglas Road are A\$145 (US\$94) for 18 holes or A\$85 (US\$55) for 9 holes, including a buggy. Club hire ranges from A\$38 to A\$60 (US\$25–US\$40). Whacking a ball on the hotel’s aquatic driving range costs A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for a bucket of 25 balls, A\$13 (US\$8.45) for 50 balls, plus A\$2.15 (US\$1.40) for club rental. Contact the **Pro Shop** (☎ 07/4099 5537). An 18-hole round on the humbler but equally picturesque 72 par public course at the **Mossman Golf Club**, Newell Beach Road, Mossman (☎ 07/ 4098 2089) is A\$25 (US\$16), or A\$15 (US\$9.75) for nine holes.

Mowbray Valley Trail Rides (☎ 07/4099 3268), located 13km (8 miles) inland from Port Douglas, offers 2-hour rides for A\$66 (US\$43) or half-day rides through rainforest and sugar cane fields to Collards Falls, or to a swimming hole in the Hidden Valley, for A\$88 (US\$57), including morning or afternoon tea and lunch. It also runs full-day trips along the mountainous Bump Track, followed by a dip in a rainforest pool and barbecue lunch at Mowbray Falls for A\$125 (US\$81). Transfers from your Port Douglas accommodations are included. Transfers from Cairns are A\$20 (US\$13) per person. **Wonga Beach Trail Rides** (☎ 07/4098 7583) does 3-hour rides through the rainforest and along Wonga Beach, 35 minutes north of Port Douglas, for A\$81 (US\$53), including transfers from Port Douglas and insurance.

Bike ‘n’ Hike (☎ 07/4099 4000; www.bikenhike.com.au) takes small groups biking, hiking, and swimming in natural lagoons in the Mowbray Valley in the rainforest near Port Douglas. You don’t need to be a strong cyclist to take part. Half-day tours cost A\$84 (US\$55). Full-day tours cost A\$128 (US\$83).

Tips The Secret of the Seasons

High season in Port Douglas is generally from June 1 through October 31.

Pickups from your Port Douglas hotel, a 27-speed mountain bike, a snack, and drinks (and lunch on the full-day trip) are included. Transfers from Cairns and Palm Cove are extra. Experienced mountain bikers can descend the steep 14km (8½-mile) Bump Track through dense rainforest from the top of the Great Dividing Range on a half-day trip designed for a maximum of eight riders.

WHERE TO STAY

Although there are plenty of ritzy hotels and resorts in Port Douglas, you can find good, inexpensive places. Many of the value-for-money choices are holiday apartments with kitchens (you can save money on meals). Booking agent **Port Douglas Accommodation** (☎ 1800/645 566 in Australia, or 07/4099 4488; fax 07/4099 4455; www.portdouglasaccom.com.au) represents several affordable apartments.

Archipelago Studio Apartments ★ You won't find a friendlier or more convenient place to stay in Port Douglas than these apartments, 10 seconds from the beach and less than 10 minutes' walk from town. Your hosts Wolfgang Klein and Christel Bader are eager to help with tour bookings and to give useful advice—and they also speak fluent German, conversational French, and some Spanish. The apartments are on the small side (most suit only three people, at the most), but all are well cared for and were refurbished in 2001. You can opt for a tiny Garden apartment with a patio; or upgrade to a Balcony or Seaview apartment, both a bit larger and with private balconies. Seaview apartments are quite roomy, and have side-on views along Four Mile Beach. Towels are changed daily and linen weekly, but general servicing will cost A\$20 (US\$13) extra. There's no lift and no porter, so be prepared to carry your luggage upstairs. Children under 3 are not catered for.

72 Macrossan St., Port Douglas, QLD 4871. ☎ 07/4099 5387. Fax 07/4099 4847. www.archipelago.com.au. 21 units (all with shower only). High season (June–Oct) A\$118–A\$199 (US\$77–US\$129) double; low season A\$96–A\$169 (US\$62–US\$110) double. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). 3-night minimum stay applies. MC, V. Free undercover parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor saltwater pool; nearby golf course; 6 nearby tennis courts lit for night play; access to nearby health club; spa; tour desk; coin-op laundry and laundry service; same-day dry cleaning can be arranged; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Comfort Inn Port Douglas This neatly maintained little motel, part of the Comfort Inn chain, is just a 10-minute stroll from town. Rooms are good-size and kept spick-and-span. The bathrooms are a little old but have plenty of counter space and nice thick towels. Hair dryers are available from the front desk. The motel's spacious and hip Mediterranean restaurant is popular with locals. The pool is lovely, but not very private. Four Mile Beach is a short stroll away (in stinger season, it's about a 20-minute walk to the stinger net).

123 Davidson St., Port Douglas, QLD 4871. ☎ 07/4099 5266. Fax 07/4099 5821. www.comfortinnportdouglas.com.au. 17 units. High season A\$110 (US\$72) double; low season A\$99 (US\$64) double. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Children 3–12 A\$5 (US\$3.25). Cribs A\$5 (US\$3.25). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; room service (breakfast only); coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, kitchenette, iron.

Port Douglas Beachfront Terrace  **Value** The best-value beachfront accommodations in town, especially in low season, may well be these clean, quiet units

in this low-rise complex on Four Mile Beach, a short walk from town. The apartments are airy and respectably furnished with an open-plan kitchen (some with dishwashers), tiny but up-to-date bathrooms, cool tile floors and balconies. All are serviced weekly. Room no. 4 has a garden patio as well as sea views. The roomier penthouses (nos. 11 and 14) have rooftop living areas overlooking the sea and larger bathrooms. If you don't mind missing out on a view, the two-bedroom units in the gardens at the rear are a little darker but also cheaper and nice enough with cane furniture and a patio or balcony.

17 The Esplanade, Port Douglas, QLD 4871. ☎ 1800/621 195 in Australia, or 07/4099 5397. Fax 07/4099 5206. www.portdouglasbeachfront.com.au. 17 units (some with shower only). High season (June–Oct and 18 Dec–14 Jan) A\$200 (US\$130) 1-bedroom beachfront apt; A\$240 (US\$156) 2-bedroom beachfront apt; A\$165 (US\$107) 2-bedroom garden apt; A\$250 (US\$163) 2-bedroom penthouse. Low season A\$150 (US\$98) 1-bedroom beachfront apt; A\$170 (US\$111) 2-bedroom beachfront apt; A\$125 (US\$81) 2-bedroom garden apt; A\$180 (US\$117) 2-bedroom penthouse. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). A\$6 (US\$3.90) crib. AE, DC, MC, V. Free undercover parking. Transfers from Cairns airport are A\$25 (US\$16) adults, A\$16 (US\$10) children 4–14, A\$70 (US\$46) family of 4, each way. **Amenities:** Outdoor saltwater pool; tennis court; bike rental; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR, kitchen, laundry, hair dryer, iron.

Port O'Call Lodge There's a nice communal feeling to this modest motel on a suburban street a 10-minute walk from town. Backpackers, families, and anyone on a budget seem to treat it like a second home, swapping travel stories as they cook up a meal in the communal kitchen and dining room. The rooms are light, cool, and fresh with tile floors, loads of luggage and bench space, and small patios. The compact bathrooms are efficiently laid out with old but neat fixtures (BYO hair dryer). Only the deluxe rooms have a TV, clock radio, self-serve tea and coffee facilities, and a minifridge. The hostel rooms have private bathrooms and no more than five beds and/or bunks in each. A 26-bed bunkhouse opened in 2001, and includes facilities for travelers with disabilities. At night the lively poolside bistro, **Port O' Call Bistro** (p. 294), is the place to be. Other facilities include free board games, a pay phone, Internet access, guest safe, and a kiosk.

Port St. at Craven Close, Port Douglas, QLD 4871. ☎ 1800/892 800 in Australia, or 07/4099 5422. Fax 07/4099 5495. www.portocall.com.au. 28 units (all with shower only). High season (June–Sept, Christmas and Easter) A\$89–A\$99 (US\$58–US\$64) double; shoulder season (May and Oct) A\$79–A\$89 (US\$51–US\$58) double; low season (Nov–Apr) A\$69–A\$79 (US\$45–US\$51) double. Extra person A\$11 (US\$7.15). Hostel rooms A\$23 (US\$15) or A\$22 (US\$14) YHA/Hostelling International members; bunkhouse A\$21 (US\$14) or A\$20 (US\$13) YHA/Hostelling International members. Children under 3 stay free. MC, V. Free minibus to and from Cairns Mon, Wed, and Sat. Free on-site parking. Bus stop at front door. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; 3 golf courses nearby; access to nearby health club; bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge in double motel rooms.

A LUXURY B&B HIDEAWAY IN THE COUNTRY

Marae ★★ *Finds* Your hostess Andy Crowe has turned her architecturally stunning timber home, on a rural hillside 15km (9½ miles) north of Port Douglas, into a glamorous and soothing retreat. The rustic-meets-sleek contemporary bedrooms have white mosquito nets and smart linens on timber beds, and elegant bathrooms. The downstairs room opens onto a plunge pool overlooking the valley. Wallabies and bandicoots (a kind of small marsupial) feed in the garden, kingfishers and honeyeaters use the pool, and butterflies are everywhere. You can enjoy the company of Andy's Jack Russell terrier and an irrepressible cockatoo called Cactus, laze on the two decks, or wander the rainforest trails of Mossman Gorge just a few kilometers away. You'll need your own transportation here.

Lot 1, Chook's Ridge, Shannonnvale (P.O. Box 133, Port Douglas, QLD 4871). ☎ 07/4098 4900. Fax 07/4098 4099. www.marae.com.au. 3 bedrooms (2 with shower only). From A\$140 (US\$91) double. Minimum 2-night

stay. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. From Port Douglas take Captain Cook Hwy. toward Mossman for 10km (6¼ miles), turn left onto Mt. Molloy turnoff for 1km (½ mile), then right onto Ponzo Rd. for 2km (1¼ miles); Chook's Ridge is on your left. Undercover parking. Pets by arrangement. No children under 13 allowed. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; nearby golf course; tour desk; use of laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE IN PORT DOUGLAS

A good place to chill out by the water over an inexpensive meal is the **Port Douglas & District Combined Club**, 7 Ashford St. (☎ 07/4099 5553). It's a humble corrugated iron shed with pool tables and slot machines, but the food is remarkably good, and it's got the same water views of Dickson Inlet as the pricier On the Inlet (see below). It's open 10am to 10pm daily, for meals 12:30 to 2pm and 5:30 to 8:30pm.

Court House Hotel PUB GRUB Since 1879 this lovely old pub has been a favorite with locals and visitors alike. In the past year, it has been painstakingly renovated and revamped. One thing that hasn't changed is its central location with a stunning outlook over the Coral Sea. From the veranda of the upstairs "Sunset Bar" you can watch the spectacular sunsets and enjoy fantastic cocktails. Great value pub/bistro meals are available from 11.30am till late, and there's live entertainment on the weekends in the courtyard, which boasts a magnificent giant mango tree.

Macrossan St. at Wharf St. ☎ 07/4099 5181. Bar open daily 10am–midnight; bistro daily 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–9pm. Main courses A\$15–A\$20 (US\$9.75–US\$13). AE, D, MC, V.

On the Inlet SEAFOOD No-nonsense seafood and a no-fuss atmosphere make this waterside venue popular with the locals. Relax in high-backed cane chairs on a shady timber deck with nice views, or kick back over a long lunch, which might include chile salt calamari on shinyo noodle salad, followed by a seafood linguini. Or try the seared scallops for an appetizer and a wonderful wild barramundi for a main course. "Happy Hour" from 3:30 to 5:30pm every day features specials such as a "bucket of prawns" or plate of oysters with beer or wine for just A\$15 (US\$9.75), and you can watch stingrays and groupers feed below. A take-out section up front serves fish and chips. The restaurant doubles as a seafood wholesaler, so you know it's fresh.

3 Inlet St. ☎ 07/4099 5255. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$16–A\$25 (US\$10–US\$16). AE, MC, V. Daily for lunch from noon–3pm; dinner from 5:30pm–late.

Port O' Call Bistro *(Kids)* CAFE/BISTRO Locals patronize this poolside bistro and bar at the Port O' Call Lodge (p. 293) almost as often as guests do, because it offers good, honest food like lamb shanks and steaks in hearty portions at painless prices. The atmosphere is fun and friendly. Tuesday is curry night, and if it's Sunday, there's a roast. Every night there are "chef's blackboard surprises," including local seafood. Kids' meals are all A\$6 (US\$3.90), and there are burgers, nachos, and pastas to appeal to everyone.

Value Camp Your Way Around Queensland

Another accommodations option is camping. You will find both campsites and air-conditioned self-contained park cabins at many prime locations around the state. Check the **Q-Parks website** (www.qparks.asn.au) for a full list of accredited parks which can offer big savings.

Tips Port Douglas After Dark

Locals meet at the 120-year-old **Court House Hotel** (☎ 07/4099 5181) at the west end of Macrossan Street at Wharf Street. Live bands play Monday, Friday, and Saturday nights and Sunday afternoon. The pub is open daily 10am until midnight (until 9pm Sun).

Port St. at Craven Close. ☎ 07/4099 5422. Main courses A\$7.50–A\$14 (US\$4.90–US\$9). MC, V. Daily 6–9pm. Happy hour 5–7pm. Bar opens 4pm.

Salsa Bar & Grill ★★ *Kids* MODERN/TROPICAL This trendy restaurant, in its lovely timber Queenslander with wrap-around verandas, has terrific food, great value prices, and lively, fun service. Open for brunch, lunch, or dinner, you can choose between the simplest of fare such as gnocchi, Caesar salad, or fantastic spring rolls, or such mouth-watering delights as sand crab pannacotta, or pan-fried Atlantic salmon with pickled ginger, coriander mash, and green papaya salad. Even if you usually resist dessert, don't. The buttermilk and almond nougat pannacotta is to-die-for, and the chocolate Cointreau soufflé is a "must." On Sundays there's a salsa band and the place really gets jumping. Oh, yes, and Bill Clinton's been here too—check out the signed plate on the wall, with its history-making date.

26 Wharf St. (at Warner St.). ☎ 07/4099 4922. www.salsa-port-douglas.com.au. Reservations essential. Main courses A\$20–A\$25 (US\$13–US\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–midnight; Sun 8am–midnight.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Nautilus ★★ TROPICAL/SEAFOOD Bill and Hillary Clinton dined here during a visit Down Under, and by all accounts loved it. So did I. The restaurant, which has been keeping the locals happy since 1953, is set under the palm trees and stars, with a clever seating plan and unusual high-backed chairs which give a wonderfully intimate atmosphere. Local produce and seafood is the mainstay of the menu, which serves such delights as whole coral trout deep fried, served with lotus root and bean shoot salad, sweet chile sauce, and steamed rice or yellow-fin tuna poached in broth with tofu, Vietnamese mint, coriander, chili and Nori tempura oysters. Or you may prefer to go for the fresh mud crab, bar-ramundi, or one of the many choices for non-seafood eaters.

17 Murphy St. (entry also from Macrossan St.), Port Douglas. ☎ 07/4099 5330. www.nautilus-restaurant.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$26–A\$38 (US\$17–US\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30–10:30pm or until the last diners leave. Closed Feb.

4 The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands

For years the lovely town of **Mission Beach** ★ was a well-kept secret. Farmers retired here; then those who liked to drop out and chill out discovered it; today, it's a petite, prosperous, and stunningly pretty rainforest town. The beach is one of the most gorgeous in Australia, a long white strip fringed with dense tangled vine forests, the only surviving lowlands rainforest in the Australian tropics. It is also one of the least crowded and least spoiled.

The nearby **Tully River** is the white-water rafting capital of Australia (although the folks on the Nymboida River in New South Wales might argue about that). Thrill-seekers can also bungee jump and tandem skydive when they're not rushing down the rapids between lush rainforest banks.

Tips Cassowaries, Crocs, and Stingers, Oh My!

Endangered cassowaries (ostrich-like birds with a blue bony crown on their head) can kill with their enormous claws, so never approach one. If you disturb one, back off slowly and hide behind a tree.

Dangerous crocodiles inhabit the local waterways. Do not swim in, or stand on the bank of, any river or stream.

You will spend plenty of time lazing and strolling the area's 14km (8½ miles) of gorgeous beaches, but be careful about where you swim. Deadly marine stingers inhabit the sea from October through April; in these times swim only within the stinger nets at the north and south ends of Mission Beach.

From Mission Beach it's a matter of minutes in a ferry to **Dunk Island**, a resort island that welcomes day-trippers. You can even kayak there from the mainland. Mission Beach is closer to the Great Barrier Reef than any other point on the coast—it's just an hour away, and cruise boats depart daily from the jetty, stopping en route at Dunk Island.

A few hours' drive south brings you to Townsville, also a gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, but more important to visitors, a gateway to **Magnetic Island**, a picturesque, laid-back haven for the flip-flop and watersports crowd.

MISSION BEACH: THE CASSOWARY COAST

140km (84 miles) S of Cairns; 240km (144 miles) N of Townsville

Tucked off the Bruce Highway, the exquisite township of Mission Beach has managed to duck the tourist hordes. It's a conglomeration of four beachfront towns: South Mission Beach, Wongaling Beach, Mission Beach proper, and Bingil Bay. Most commercial activity revolves around the small nucleus of shops and businesses at Mission Beach proper. It's so isolated that signs on the way into town warn you to watch out for cassowaries crossing the road. A dense rainforest hides the town from view until you come around the corner to Mission Beach to find tidy villages of appealing hotels, neat shops, and smart restaurants. Just through the trees is the fabulous beach. Less than a kilometer north of the main settlement is Clump Point Jetty.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** From Cairns, follow the Bruce Highway south. The Mission Beach turn-off is at the tiny town of El Arish, about 15km (9 miles) north of Tully. Mission Beach is 25km (15 miles) off the highway. It's a 90-minute trip from Cairns. If you're coming from Townsville, there is an earlier turnoff just north of Tully that leads 18km (11 miles) to South Mission Beach.

By Bus **Airport Connections** (☎ 07/4099 5950) operates door-to-door shuttles twice a day from Cairns for A\$39 (US\$25) adults and A\$20 (US\$13) children, and from the northern beaches for A\$44 (US\$29) adults and A\$25 (US\$16) children. **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) and **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) coaches both stop in Mission Beach proper (not South Mission Beach) several times daily on their Cairns–Brisbane–Cairns runs. The fare is A\$16 (US\$10) from Cairns, or A\$187 (US\$122) for the 26-hours-plus trip from Brisbane.

By Train Five trains a week on the Cairns–Brisbane–Cairns route call at the nearest train station, Tully, about 20km (12 miles) away. One-way travel from Cairns on the Tilt Train costs A\$43 (US\$28) for the 3-hour journey. From Brisbane, fares range from A\$183 (US\$119) in an economy seat to A\$345 (US\$224) for a first-class sleeper on the Sunlander. Call Queensland Rail's long-distance division, **Traveltrain** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia, or 07/3235 1122). A taxi from Tully to Mission Beach with **Tully Taxis & Buses** (☎ 07/4068 3937) is about A\$40 (US\$26).

A bus transfer to Mission Beach with **Mission Beach Bus & Coach** (☎ 07/4068 7400) is A\$7 (US\$4.55). You must book.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Mission Beach Visitor Centre**, Porters Promenade, Mission Beach, QLD 4852 (☎ 07/4068 7099; fax 07/4068 7066; www.missionbch.com), is located at the northern end of town. It's open Monday through Saturday 9am to 5pm, and Sunday 9am to 4pm.

GETTING AROUND **Mission Beach Bus & Coach** (☎ 07/4068 7400) travels day and night between the beach communities, stopping outside all the accommodations houses listed below, at Clump Point Jetty, and at Wongaling Beach near the water taxi to Dunk Island. **Sugarland Car Rentals** (☎ 07/4068 8272) is the only rental-car company in town. For Mission Beach taxi service, call ☎ 07/4068 8155.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN THE AREA

EXPLORING THE REEF The **Quick Cat** runs snorkel and dive trips from Mission Beach to Beaver Cay on the outer Great Barrier Reef. See "Exploring the Great Barrier Reef" section earlier in this chapter for details.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING ON THE TULLY A day's rafting through the rainforest on the Grade 3 to 4 Tully River is a memorable experience. In raft-speak, Grade 4 means "exciting rafting on moderate rapids with a continuous need to maneuver rafts." On the Tully, that translates to hair-raising but manageable rapids punctuated by calming stretches. You don't need experience, just a decent level of agility and an enthusiastic attitude. **RnR Rafting** ★ (☎ 07/4051 7777) runs a trip that includes 5 hours on the river with fun-loving and expert guides, a barbecue lunch in the rainforest, and a video screening of your adventure. With transfers, the day costs A\$135 (US\$88) from Mission Beach, A\$145 (US\$94) from Cairns, Palm Cove or Townsville, and A\$160 (US\$104) from Port Douglas, plus a A\$10 (US\$6.50) national park fee. The trip runs daily, and you must be 13 years or older.

EXPLORING THE RAINFOREST & COAST Walking, wildlife spotting, canoeing in the forest, and kayaking along the pristine coast are all well worth doing. Hiking trails abound through national-park rainforest, fan palm groves, and along the beach. The 8km (5-mile) **Licuala Fan Palm track** starts at the parking lot on the Mission Beach–Tully Road about 1.5km (1 mile) west of the turnoff to South Mission Beach. It leads through dense forest, over creeks, and

Bring Along the Cash . . .

There is no bank in Mission Beach, and the only ATM is at Mission Beach Resort, Wongaling Beach, so come with enough cash, traveler's checks, and/or a credit card.

comes out on the El Arish-Mission Beach Road about 7km (4 miles) north of the post office. When you come out, you can cross the road and keep going on the 1.2km (less than 1-mile) **Lacey Creek loop** in the Tam O'Shanter State Forest. A shorter **Rainforest Circuit** option leads from the parking lot at the start of the Licuala Fan Palm track and makes a 1.2km (less than a mile) loop incorporating a fan palm boardwalk. There's also a 10-minute "follow the cassowary footprints to the nest" **children's walk** leading from the parking lot.

If you would rather see the sea than rainforest, take the 7km (4-mile) **Edmund Kennedy track**, which starts below the Horizon resort at the southern end of the Kennedy Esplanade in South Mission Beach. You get alternating views of the ocean and the rainforest on this trail. The Mission Beach Visitor Centre has free trail maps.

Ingrid Marker of **Sunbird Adventures** (☎ 07/4068 8229; sunbird.adventures@bigpond.com) offers a range of sea-kayaking and trekking expeditions that interpret the rich environment around you. No more than eight people are allowed on each trip, so you get personal attention and time to ask questions. Her half-day sea-kayak expedition (A\$55/US\$36 per person) journeys around Bingil Bay. Night walks, starting at 7pm and returning around 9:30pm, are held on Bicton Hill and are great for kids because they spot glow-in-the-dark fungi, and frogs and shrimps in the streams (A\$30/US\$20 per person). Ingrid also runs 3-day sea kayak/camping trips, and a 3-day Misty Mountain Trails hike in the Tully River Gorge. They can be combined to make a 6-day trip, and prices for both can be worked out with Ingrid according to your needs. Pickup from your accommodation is included for all trips, and all food on the trip is locally grown organic produce. Not all tours depart every day, so check with her first.

HITTING THE BEACH Of course, lazing on the uncrowded beach is what everyone comes to Mission Beach to do. From June to September you can swim anywhere, and the water is still warm; from October to May stick to the stinger safety nets at Mission Beach proper (behind Castaways resort) and South Mission Beach.

A DAY TRIP TO DUNK ISLAND If you're a beachcomber at heart, Dunk will fulfill your dreams. Just 5km (3 miles) offshore from Mission Beach, Dunk was the inspiration for E. J. Banfield's book *Confessions of a Beachcomber*. Banfield moved to Dunk in the early 1900s to live out what he thought would be a short life. He lived for another 23 years, which must say something about the restorative powers of a piece of paradise. Ed and wife Bertha Banfield's graves are along the track to Mt. Kootaloo.

Thick bush land and rainforest cover much of the island's 12 sq. km (5 sq. miles), most of which is a national park. The island is renowned for its myriad birds and electric-blue Ulysses butterflies.

Staying at the upscale Dunk Island Resort is a budget-busting experience, but you can pop over for the day to snorkel, hike in the forest, or do watersports. **Dunk Island Ferry & Cruises** (☎ 07/4068 7211) runs day trips for A\$69 (US\$45) for adults and A\$25 (US\$16) for kids ages 4 to 14 (free for younger kids). The cruise includes lunch, boom-netting, a swing around Bedarra Island, and free snorkeling gear (with a A\$20/US\$13 refundable deposit). Daily departures are from Clump Point Jetty at 8:45 and 10:30am. You can also get to Dunk by the **water taxi** (☎ 07/4068 8310), which runs 5 times a day from Wongaling Beach. The round-trip fare is A\$29 (US\$19) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for kids ages 4 to 14. Ask at your accommodation about transfers between Clump Point and South Mission Beach.

Once on Dunk, you pay as you go for activities and equipment rental on the island. Everything from water-skiing to catamaran sailing is available, but Dunk has such nice beaches and rainforest walking trails (half a dozen, ranging in duration from 15 min. to 4 hr.), that you won't need to shell out a chunk of change for watersports to enjoy the day. On Monday and Thursday mornings, you can visit an artist's gallery reached via a 40-minute trail through the rainforest; admission is A\$4 (US\$2.60).

Ingrid Marker of **Sunbird Adventures** (see above) runs full-day guided **sea-kayak expeditions** to Dunk Island. Ingrid says if you can pedal a bike for an hour, you can sea kayak for the hour it takes to get to the island. You glide over reefs, looking for sea turtles; spend the morning snorkeling in Coconut Bay; have a picnic lunch of oysters, mussels, and fresh produce (all organic) in Hidden Palm Valley; then hike the rainforest. At morning and afternoon tea you get a choice of no less than nine organic teas and coffees. The trip costs A\$95 (US\$62) per person.

WHERE TO STAY

Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village ★ This caravan park, across the road from the beach (and, more important in summer, the stinger net), wins the local garden award every year. Its neat lawns and abundant palms are lovely, as are the deluxe cabins, which are almost as roomy and as well appointed as an apartment. "Villa" cabins have en suite bathrooms with a hair dryer and fluffy white towels, a separate living and dining area, a good-size kitchen, a master bedroom, bunkroom for the kids, and a Jacuzzi! The regular cabins have older decor and less room, but they're fine enough. Campers have a communal kitchen, a fridge, and barbecues. Pitch your tent at the jungle's edge, and keep an eye out for the cassowaries that stroll in now and then. There's a take-out shop that also sells basic groceries.

Kennedy Esplanade, South Mission Beach, QLD 4852. ☎ 1800/008 129 in Australia, or 07/4068 8129. Fax 07/4068 8671. www.big4.com.au. 27 cabins, 15 with bathroom (shower only), 4 with spa baths; 80 powered sites, approximately 20 tent sites. A\$21–A\$23 (US\$14–US\$15) double unpowered campsite; A\$23–A\$27 (US\$15–US\$18) double powered campsite; A\$45–A\$80 (US\$29–US\$52) double cabins; A\$99–A\$125 (US\$64–US\$81) 2-bedroom villas; A\$110–A\$135 (US\$72–US\$88) spa villas. Extra person A\$8 (US\$5.20) in campsite, A\$14 (US\$9.10) in cabin. Half price for children 2–15. Linen and towel hire A\$7 (US\$4.55), A\$4 (US\$2.60) blanket in regular cabins (free in deluxe cabins). MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; half-court tennis; tour desk; TV and game room; children's playground. *In room:* kitchen, hair dryer (villas only).

Mackays *Value* This delightfully well-kept motel is one of the best-value places to stay in town. It's just 80m (262 ft.) from the beach and 400m (¼ mile) from the heart of Mission Beach. The friendly Mackay family repaints the rooms annually, so the place always looks brand new. All the rooms are pleasant and spacious with white-tiled floors, cane sofas, colorful bedcovers, and very clean bathrooms. Those in the newer section are air-conditioned, and some have views of the attractive granite-lined pool and gardens. Rooms in the older painted-brick wing have garden views from a communal patio and no air-conditioning. Ask about special packages; they can be extremely good deals and may include extras like rafting on the Tully River and day trips to the Reef and Dunk Island.

7 Porter Promenade, Mission Beach, QLD 4852. ☎ 07/4068 7212. Fax 07/4068 7095. www.mackays.missionbeach.com. 22 units, 12 with bathroom (10 with shower only). A\$85–A\$110 (US\$55–US\$72) double; A\$110 (US\$72) 1- and 2-bedroom apt. Higher rates apply at Easter. Extra person A\$17 (US\$11). Children under 14 A\$6.50 (US\$4.20). Crib A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) extra. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free undercover off-street parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; access to nearby tennis courts; access to bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (breakfast 7:30–8:30am); in-room massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; non-smoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (in 12 units only), TV, fax, kitchenettes (in 4 units only), fridge, safe.

Mission Beach Eco Village This lodge occupies a magical site in the rainforest on Clump Point, surrounded on three sides by water. You don't see the sea from your room, but it's a step away to the sandy beach where you can swim and snorkel in a picture-perfect lagoon. Stay in simple, roomy bungalows under the trees. Each has pine paneling, tile floors, a very clean bathroom, and a deck. Some have a kitchenette and a dining area, some have Jacuzzis; family bungalows have three bunks for the kids. Breakfast is served on your balcony, and dinner is among the trees in an open-sided Malaysian longhouse-style restaurant. The natural-looking pool is lined with rocks and trees, and there's a barbecue area.

Clump Point Rd., Mission Beach. QLD 4852. ☎ **07/4068 7534**. Fax 07/4068 7538. www.ecovillage.com.au. 17 bungalows (all with shower; 6 with spa bath). A\$141 (US\$92) double; A\$155 (US\$101) family or spa bungalow. AE, DC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; children's playground; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV w/in-house movies, minibar (deluxe rooms only), hair dryer (some rooms), iron (some rooms).

Worth a Splurge

The Horizon ★ With its beguiling views across the pool to Dunk Island, its rainforest setting, and its impressive rooms, this resort perched on a steep hillside is one of the most comfortable and beautiful you will find. Even the least expensive rooms are spacious and have luxurious bathrooms. All but a handful of rooms have some kind of sea view; a half-dozen retain the older-style bathrooms from a previous resort development, but the sea views from these rooms are the best. It's just a minute or two down the rainforest track to the beach.

Explorer Dr., South Mission Beach, QLD 4852. ☎ **1800/079 090** in Australia, or 07/4068 8154. Fax 07/4068 8596. www.thehorizon.com.au. 55 units. A\$220–A\$420 (US\$143–US\$273) double. Children A\$20 (US\$13) extra. Ask about packages and specials. Rates are higher Dec 22–Jan 2. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; bar; large free-form saltwater pool; day/night tennis courts; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV with cable, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Having a picnic on the beach or in one of the many small rainforest parks and barbecue areas that dot the beachfront is the obvious way to enjoy a meal in Mission Beach. Most restaurants and cafes are in Mission Beach proper, but you will find a couple more in South Mission Beach. For tasty, cheap meals, try **That'll Do** (☎ **07/4068 7300**); it's next to the supermarket on Porter's Promenade in Mission Beach. The burgers, fish and chips, chili, and ice cream rarely cost more than A\$5 (US\$3.25). Take your food to go, or eat at one of the plastic tables. You can even BYO. It's open 11am to 8pm, closed Thursday.

Friends HOME COOKING The cozy interior and a hearty menu emphasizing local seafood make this place a long-standing favorite with locals. New owner Chris Britten changes the menu every three months and offers nightly specials. There are main courses to also tempt non-seafood lovers, such as marinated rib file, vegetarian curry, and jambalaya. Licensed.

Porters Promenade (opposite Campbell St.), Mission Beach. ☎ **07/4068 7107** or 0408 865928. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$14–A\$22 (US\$11–US\$14). MC, V. Tues–Sun 6pm–late.

TOWNSVILLE & MAGNETIC ISLAND

346km (207 miles) S of Cairns; 1,371km (822 miles) N of Brisbane

With a population of 140,000, Townsville claims to be Australia's largest tropical city. Because of its size, and economy based on mining, manufacturing, education and tourism, it is sometimes unjustly overlooked as a holiday destination. The people are friendly; the city pleasant, and there's plenty to do. The town is

nestled by the sea below the pink face of **Castle Rock**, which looms 300m (about 1,000 ft.) above, and the beachfront has recently undergone a A\$29 million (US\$18.8 million) revamp.

Townsville's major attraction is the world-class **Museum of Tropical Queensland**, where a full-size replica of the HMS *Pandora* is the stunning centerpiece. The museum is next to one of the city's most enduring attractions, the ReefHQ aquarium.

Remnants of bygone times are still apparent in surrounding towns like **Charter Towers** and **Ravenswood**, which offer splendid examples of colonial architecture, historic hotels, museums and displays of old gold mining machinery and cottages.

Cruises depart from the harbor for the Great Barrier Reef, about 2½ hours away, and just 8km (5 miles) offshore is Magnetic Island—"Maggie" to the locals—a popular place for watersports, hiking, and spotting koalas in the wild.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Townsville is on the Bruce Highway, a 3-hour drive north of Airlie Beach and 4½ hours south of Cairns. The Bruce Highway breaks temporarily in the city. From the south, take Bruce Highway Alt. 1 route into the city. From the north, the highway leads into the city.

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au), and subsidiary **Sunstate Airlines** (book through Qantas) have many flights a day from Cairns, and several from Brisbane. Sunstate flies from Proserpine and Hamilton Island airports in the Whitsundays. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia) flies to Townsville from Brisbane daily.

Airport Transfers & Tours (☎ 07/4775 5544) runs a door-to-door airport shuttle. It meets only flights from Brisbane, not from Cairns or elsewhere. A trip into town is A\$7 (US\$4.55) one-way or A\$11 (US\$7.15) return. A taxi from the airport to most central hotels costs about A\$12 (US\$7.80).

Seven **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122) long-distance trains stop at Townsville each week. The 19-hour Tilt Train journey from Brisbane costs A\$244 (US\$159). The 24-hour Sunlander journey costs from A\$162 (US\$105) for an economy seat to A\$316 (US\$205) for a first-class sleeper.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) buses stop at Townsville regularly on their Cairns–Brisbane–Cairns routes. The fare from Cairns is A\$51 (US\$33); trip time is 6 hours. The fare from Brisbane is A\$166 (US\$108); trip time is 22 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION For an information packet, contact **Townsville Enterprise Limited**, P.O. Box 1043, Townsville, QLD 4810 (☎ 07/4726 2728; www.townsvilleonline.com.au). It has two Information Centres. One is in the heart of town on Flinders Mall (☎ 1800/801 902 in Australia, or 07/4721 3660); it's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and weekends from 9am to 1pm. The other is on the Bruce Highway 10km (6 miles) south of the city (☎ 07/4778 3555); it is open daily from 9am to 5pm. Townsville Enterprise supplies information on Magnetic Island, but also check the island's website at www.magnetic-island.com.au.

GETTING AROUND **Local Sunbus** (☎ 07/4725 8482) buses depart Flinders Street Mall. Car-rental chains include **Avis** (☎ 07/4721 2688), **Budget** (☎ 07/4725 2344), **Hertz** (☎ 07/4775 5950), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/4725 4600).

Detours Coaches (☎ 07/4721 5977) runs tours to most attractions in Townsville.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

For details on visiting the Great Barrier Reef from Townsville, see “Exploring the Great Barrier Reef” earlier in this chapter.

Museum of Tropical Queensland ★★ A stunning 2002 addition to Townsville’s skyline is this A\$22-million (US\$14.3-million) museum, with its curved roof reminiscent of a ship in full sail. In pride of place is the amazing exhibition of relics salvaged from the wreck of HMS *Pandora*, which lies 33m (108 ft.) underwater on the edge of the Great Barrier Reef, 120km (74 miles) east of Cape York. The *Pandora* exhibit includes a built-to-scale replica of a section of the ship’s bow and its 17m (56-ft.) high foremast. Standing three stories high, the replica and its copper-clad keel were crafted by local shipwrights for the museum. *Pandora* sank in 1791, and the wreck was discovered in 1977. The exhibition traces the ship’s voyage and the retrieval of the sunken treasure. The museum has six galleries, including a hands-on science center, and a natural history display that looks at life in tropical Queensland—above and below the water. Another is dedicated to north Queensland’s indigenous heritage, with items from Torres Strait and the South Sea Islands as well as stories from people of different cultures about the settlement and labor of north Queensland. Touring exhibitions change every 3 months. Allow 2 to 3 hours.

70–102 Flinders St. (next to Reef HQ). ☎ 07/4726 0600 or 07/4726 0606 info line. www.mtq.qld.gov.au. Admission A\$9 (US\$5.85) adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) children 4–16, A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) seniors and students, A\$24 (US\$16) family of 4. MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas, Good Friday, and until 1pm on Anzac Day.

Reef HQ ★ *Kids* Reef HQ is the education center for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority’s headquarters and is the largest living coral reef aquarium in the world. It underwent a A\$6.4 million (US\$4.1 million) upgrade in 2002, but the highlight is still walking through a 20m (66-ft.) long see-through acrylic tunnel, gazing right into a giant predator tank where sharks cruise silently. The wreck of the SS *Yongala* provides an eerie backdrop for blacktip and whitetip reef sharks, leopard sharks, and nurse sharks, sharing their 750,000-liter (195,000-gal.) home with stingrays, giant trevally, and a green turtle. Watching them feed is quite a spectacle. The tunnel also reveals the 2.5-million-liter (650,000-gal.) coral reef exhibit, with its hard and soft corals providing a home for thousands of colorful fish, giant clams, sea cucumbers, sea stars, and other creatures. There’s a regular scuba dive show where the divers speak to you via intercom while they swim with the sharks and feed the fish. Other highlights include a marine creature touch-tank, a wild sea-turtle rehabilitation center, plus great interactive activities for children. Reef HQ is an easy walk from the city center.

2–68 Flinders St. ☎ 07/4750 0800. www.reefHQ.org.au. Admission A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) seniors and students, A\$9.50 (US\$6.20) children 4–16. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Public parking lot opposite Reef HQ. Bus stop 3-min. walk away.

OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO

The Strand is a 2.5km (1½-mile) strip with safe swimming beaches, a fitness circuit, a waterpark for the kids, and plenty of covered picnic areas and free gas barbecues. Stroll along the promenade or relax at one of many cafes, restaurants, and bars while you gaze across the Coral Sea to Magnetic Island. For the more

active, there are areas to in-line skate, bicycle, walk, or fish, and there's a basketball half-court. Four rocky headlands and a picturesque jetty adjacent to Strand Park provide good fishing, and two surf lifesaving clubs service the three swimming areas along The Strand. With 300 days of sunshine each year, Townsville is a place where you'll enjoy cooling off—in either the Olympic-size **Tobruk Pool**, the seawater **Rockpool**, or at the beach itself. During summer (Nov–Mar), three safe swimming enclosures operate to keep swimmers safe from marine stingers, and if watersports are on your agenda try a jet ski, hire a canoe, or take to the latest in pedal skis. A state-of-the-art waterpark has waterfalls, hydrants, waterslides, and water cannons, plus a huge bucket of water which continually fills until it overturns and dumps water on those below.

Don't miss the views of Cleveland Bay and Magnetic Island from Castle Hill; it's a 2.5km (1½-mile) drive or a shorter, but steep, walk up from town. To drive to the top, follow Stanley Street west from Flinders Mall to Castle Hill Drive; the walking trails up are posted en route.

Cotters Market, held every Sunday in Flinders Mall from 8:30am to 1pm, has 200 stalls featuring works by local and regional artists. There's everything from pottery and lead-lighting to homemade chocolates and orchids on sale. Townsville's three major suburban shopping complexes, containing major department stores and specialty shops, are Stockland in Aitkenvale, Castletown in Pimlico, and Willows in Kirwan.

At the **Billabong Sanctuary** (☎ 07/4778 8344; www.billabongsanctuary.com.au) on the Bruce Highway 17km (11 miles) south of town, you can see Aussie wildlife in a natural setting; hold a koala, a (baby) crocodile, a python, or a wombat; and hand-feed kangaroos (all for free). Bring your own camera. There are talks and shows continuously from 8:30am; one of the most popular is the saltwater-crocodile feeding at 12:15 and 2:30pm. There are also Aboriginal cultural talks, a kiosk, gas barbecues, and a pool. Admission is A\$23 (US\$14) for adults, A\$21 (US\$12) for students, A\$19 for seniors, A\$12 (US\$7.15) for kids ages 4 to 16, and A\$64 (US\$38) for a family of five. The sanctuary is open every day except Christmas from 8am to 5pm. Take your swimsuit as there is a pool. To save money on cafe food, pack a picnic or barbecue supplies and eat in the pleasant grounds.

WHERE TO STAY

Aquarius on the Beach ★ (Value) You get nice views of the bay and Magnetic Island from every room at this slightly older-style 14-story waterfront hotel. It's popular with business travelers who like the location, practical amenities like 24-hour reception and the excellent top-floor restaurant (see "Where to Dine" below). With a kitchenette, sofa, desk, and a small dining table with two chairs squeezed into every room, there's not much space left, but the accommodations are comfortable. If space is important, ask for a corner room, as they are slightly larger. All rooms have private balconies. Executive rooms on the top three floors also have CD stereo systems. The views and facilities make this a good value. The Strand beach is across the road; the town center and island ferry terminals are 15 minutes' walk away.

75 The Strand, Townsville, QLD 4810. ☎ 1800/62 2474 in Australia, or 07/4772 4255. Fax 07/4721 1316. www.aquariusonthebeach.com.au. 100 units. A\$132 (US\$86) double studio; A\$143 (US\$93) double executive room. Extra person A\$13 (US\$8.45). AE, DC, MC, V. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool and children's pool; room service; tour desk; car-rental desk. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, kitchenette, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

Seagulls Resort This popular low-key resort, a 5-minute drive from the city, is built around an inviting free-form saltwater pool in 1.2 hectares (3 acres) of dense tropical gardens. Despite its Esplanade location, the motel-style rooms do not boast waterfront views, but they are comfortable and a good size. The larger Reef Rooms have painted brick walls, a sofa, dining furniture, and a kitchen sink. Apartments have a main bedroom and a bunk bedroom, a kitchenette, dining furniture, and a roomy balcony. The rooms were last refurbished in late 1997, and the modest fittings are in good condition. The foyer was refurbished in late 2000, and the whole resort is wheelchair-friendly, with bathroom facilities for people with disabilities. The accommodation wings surround the pool and its pretty open-sided restaurant, which is popular with locals. It's a 10-minute walk to The Strand; the resort makes free transfers to the city and Magnetic Island ferry terminals, and most tour companies pick up at the door.

74 The Esplanade, Belgian Gardens, QLD 4810. ☎ 1800/079 929 in Australia, or 07/4721 3111. Fax 07/4721 3133. www.seagulls.com.au. 70 units (all with shower only). A\$103–A\$114 (US\$67–US\$74) double; A\$139 (US\$90) 2-bedroom apt. Additional adult A\$15 (US\$9.75); extra children under 14 A\$9 (US\$5.85); crib A\$9 (US\$5.85). AE, DC, MC, V. Airport shuttle A\$3 (US\$1.95) one-way. Bus: 7. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant, bar; 2 pools; golf course 3km (1¾ miles) away; small tennis court; access to nearby health club; children's playground; business center; tour desk; room service (6–9:30pm); coin-op laundry; laundry service (Mon–Fri); dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, free in-house movies, dataport, kitchenette (Reef rooms and suites), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

A B&B with Victorian Charm

The Rocks ★ *Finds* If you have a weakness for Victoriana, you will sigh with delight when you enter this exquisitely renovated old Queenslander home. The owners have fitted it with 19th-century antiques, from the crimson velvet settee to the grandfather clock in the drawing room. Even your meals are served on collectible dinnerware. Every room is decorated with lovely linens, old trunks, and in a few, even original washbasins tastefully wrapped in muslin “gowns.” One has an en suite bathroom; the others share a historically decorated bathroom with a cast-iron claw-foot bath. Complimentary sherry is served at 6pm on the wide veranda, where you have lovely views of Magnetic Island and Cleveland Bay. Despite the old-world ambience, the house has telephone, fax, Internet, and e-mail access for guests (although not in your room). Free tea and coffee are available. There's also an outdoor Jacuzzi, a billiards table (antique, of course), a small croquet court, and a guest laundry. The Strand is a minute's stroll away, and you are a 10- to 15-minute walk from town and the Magnetic Island ferries.

20 Cleveland Terrace, Townsville, QLD 4810. ☎ 07/4771 5700, or 0416/044 409 mobile phone. Fax 07/4771 5711. www.therocksguesthouse.com. 9 units, 3 with private bathroom (shower only). A\$105–A\$119 (US\$68–US\$77) double. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Airport shuttle. Limited free on-street parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor Jacuzzi; tour desk; business center; laundry service. *In room:* A/C (5 rooms only).

WHERE TO DINE

Apart from the suggestions below, you will find more restaurants and cafes on Palmer Street, an easy stroll across the river from Flinders Mall.

Michel's Cafe and Bar MODERN AUSTRALIAN This big contemporary space is popular with Townsville's “in” crowd. Choose a table on the sidewalk, or opt for air-conditioning inside. Owner/chef Michel Flores works in the open kitchen where he can keep an eye on the excellent service. You might choose a Louisiana blackened rib filet, or kangaroo, or something more casual, like the stylish pizzas, pastas, seafood, or warm salads.

7 Palmer St. ☎ 07/4724 1460. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$11–A\$23 (US\$7.10–US\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Tues–Sun 5:30–10pm.

Worth a Splurge

Zoui Alto ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN This is not just one of the best restaurants in Townsville, it's one of the best in the country. Chef Mark Edwards, who's cooked for the King of Norway, turns out terrific food, while his effusive wife Eleni runs the front of the house, which is idiosyncratically decked out in primary splashes and Greek urns. Main courses include ravioli with choice of filling—pumpkin and blue vein cheese, sweet potato and ginger, or sun-dried tomato and goat's cheese. Arrive before sunset, to make the most of the spectacular views of Castle Hill on one side and the bay on the other.

On 14th floor at Aquarius on the Beach, 75 The Strand. ☎ 07/4721 4700. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$18–A\$22 (US\$12–US\$14). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6:30–9:30pm. Bus: 1B.

TOWNSVILLE AFTER DARK

Not much happens until Friday and Saturday night in Townsville. **The Bank Niteclub**, 169 Flinders St. East (☎ 07/4721 1916), gets a young crowd who party, dance, and pick each other up. Less frenetic social animals prefer the city's lovely historical pubs edged with wrought-iron lace verandas. The most popular is the **Exchange** ★, 151 Flinders St. East (☎ 07/4771 3335)—choose your poison from the hip wine bar downstairs or the Western bourbon and cigar saloon upstairs; ask the bar staff to tell you about the resident ghost. Errol Flynn used to like staying at **The Australian Hotel**, 11 Palmer St. (☎ 07/4722 6999); no doubt he knocked back a beer or two on the wide upstairs veranda, and you can, too.

The Quarterdeck (☎ 07/4722 2333), by the water, belongs to the Jupiters Hotel & Casino at the Breakwater marina on Sir Leslie Thiess Drive, and has dinner music Thursday evening, live bands Friday and Saturday night from 9pm, and live jazz on Sunday winter afternoons and summer evenings. A grill is open for steaks, seafood, and light meals from 11:30am to 9pm daily. You may want to combine a meal here with a visit to the casino off the hotel lobby.

A SIDE TRIP TO MAGNETIC ISLAND

8km (5 miles) E of Townsville

"Maggie" is a delightful 51-sq.-km (20-sq.-mile) national park island 20 minutes from Townsville by ferry. Only 2,500 locals live here, but it's also popular with mainlanders who love its holiday atmosphere. If you want an island interlude during your Aussie vacation but don't want to pay through the nose at the ritzy island resorts, Maggie is an ideal alternative. It is a busy little place as visitors and locals zip about between the small settlements dotted around its coast, but peace-seeking visitors will find plenty of unspoiled nature to restore their souls. Most people come for the 20 or so pristine (and amazingly uncrowded) bays and white beaches that rim the island, but hikers, botanists, and bird-watchers may want to explore the eucalyptus woods, patches of gully rainforest, and granite tors. (The island got its name when Captain Cook thought the "magnetic" rocks were interfering with his compass readings.) The place is famous for wild koalas easily spotted up in the gum trees by the side of the road; ask a local to point you to the nearest colony. Rock wallabies are often spotted in the early morning. Maggie is off the international tourist trail by and large, and it's definitely a casual kind of place, so leave your Prada stilettos in your suitcase.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND **Sunferries** (☎ 07/4771 3855 for Flinders Street terminal, or 07/4721 4798 for Breakwater terminal) runs services from the 168–192 Flinders Street East terminal and the Breakwater terminal on Sir Leslie Thiess Drive throughout the day. The company has a courtesy coach that will pick you up from your hotel for the 10:30am ferry. Round-trip tickets are A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$14 (US\$9.10) for children ages 5 to 15, and A\$38 (US\$25) for a family of five. Combination tickets combining the ferry with an all-day Magnetic Island bus pass or *minimoke* (similar to a golf cart) rental can save you a bit.

You can take a car across on the ferry, but most people get around by renting an open-sided minimoke from the many moke-rental outfits on the island. Minimokes are unlikely to send your speedometer much over 60kmph (36 mph). **Moke Magnetic** (☎ 07/4778 5377) right near the jetty rents them for around A\$47 (US\$31) a day. The **Magnetic Island Bus Service** (☎ 07/4778 5130) runs a 3-hour guided tour of the island for A\$30 (US\$20) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for kids, or A\$75 (US\$49) for a family of four.

Out & About on the Island

There is no end to the things you can do on Maggie—snorkeling, swimming in one of a dozen or more bays, catamaran sailing, water-skiing, paraflaying, horseback riding on the beach, biking, tennis or golf, scuba diving, sea kayaking, sailing or cruising around the island, taking a Harley Davidson tour, fishing, and more. Equipment for all these activities is for rent on the island at reasonably moderate prices.

Most activities are spread out around **Picnic Bay** (where the ferry pulls in) and the island's three settlements: **Arcadia**, **Nelly Bay**, and **Horseshoe Bay**.

The island is not on the Great Barrier Reef, but its waters are part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. There's good reef snorkeling at Florence Bay on the southern edge, Arthur Bay on the northern edge, and Geoffrey Bay, where you can reef-walk at low tide (wear sturdy shoes and do not walk directly on coral to avoid damaging it). First-time snorkelers will have an easy time in Maggie's weak currents and softly sloping beaches. Outside stinger season there is good swimming at many secluded bays found all around the island. Alma Bay is a good choice for families as it is reef free and has shady lawns and a playground; Rocky Bay is a small, secluded cove.

Tips **The Most Magnetic Experience**

If you're going over to Magnetic Island for the day, pick up a copy of the free **Magnetic Island Guide** from any tourist information center or hotel lobby or at the ferry terminal in Townsville before you go. Because there are so many choices of activities, it will help if you plan your day before you arrive.

There is no bank on the island, so carry cash (not every place will cash traveler's checks) and a credit card.

Be warned: Marine stingers make swimming and snorkeling a bad idea from October to May except at the safe swimming enclosure at Picnic Bay. You can do watersports on top of the water, if you wear a lycra stinger-suit, but they are quite uncomfortable in the intensely sticky summer heat from November to March.

One of the best, and most popular, of the island's 20km (12 miles) of hiking trails is the Nelly Bay-to-Arcadia trail, a one-way journey of 5km (3 miles) that takes 2½ hours. The first 45 minutes, starting in rainforest and climbing gradually to a saddle between Nelly Bay and Horseshoe, are the most interesting. Another excellent walk is the 2km (1.25-mile) trail to the Forts, remnants of World War II defenses, which, not surprisingly, have great 360-degree sea views. The best koala spotting is on the track up to the Forts off Horseshoe Bay Road. Carry water wherever you go on the island, as some bays and hiking trails are not near shops.

If you feel like splurging, consider the jet ski circumnavigation of the island offered by **Adrenalin Jet Ski Tours & Hire** (☎ 07/4778 5533). The 3-hour tour is conducted on 2-seat jet skis and costs A\$115 (US\$75), which includes your wet suit, life jacket, and stinger suits in season. Tours depart from Horseshoe Bay morning and afternoon. Keep your eyes peeled for dolphins, dugongs (manatees), and sea turtles.

Where to Stay & Dine

Magnetic Island has plenty of affordable accommodations, from motels and apartments to A-frame chalets and permanent tents. In the peak season (June–Sept), some apartments are available on a weekly basis only. Maggie is littered with inexpensive restaurants, laid-back cafes, and take-out joints.

Maggie's Beach House Just a 30-second walk to the beach and calm sheltered waters of Horseshoe Bay, Maggie's Beach House was purpose-built for backpackers and opened in September 2000. You can laze in a hammock under the trees, or join a guided walk to spot koalas and enjoy spectacular 360-degree views of the island at sunset. Maggie's budget meals feature generous serves for A\$6 to A\$14 (US\$3.90–US\$9.10) which include burgers, pasta, steaks, fish, and salads. If you prefer to cook for yourself, there's a common kitchen and barbecues. There's also an Internet cafe with six computers.

Pacific Drive, Horseshoe Bay, Magnetic Island, QLD 4819. ☎ 1800/001 544 in Australia, or 07/4778 5144. Fax 07/4778 5194. www.maggiesbeachhouse.com.au. 35 units, 14 with en suite bathroom (with shower only). A\$52–A\$59 (US\$34–US\$38) single/double with share bathroom; A\$75 (US\$49) double with private bathroom. A\$21 (US\$14) dorm beds. MC, V. Free pickup from all daytime ferries. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; 3 coin-op laundries. *In room:* A/C.

5 The Whitsunday Coast & Islands

A day's drive, or a 1-hour flight south of Cairns brings you to the collection of 74 islands known as the Whitsundays. No more than 3 nautical miles (5.6km/3½ miles) separates most of them, and they contain countless bays, beaches, coral reefs, and fishing spots. On the same latitude as Hawaii, the water is at least 72°F (22°C) year-round, the sun shines most of the year, and winter requires only a light jacket at night.

The islands are composed of densely forested national parkland, mostly uninhabited, and the surrounding waters belong to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Don't expect palm trees and coconuts, these islands are covered with dry-looking pine and eucalyptus forests full of dense undergrowth, and rocky coral coves far outnumber the few sandy beaches. More than half a dozen islands have resorts that offer many outdoor activities: snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing trips, reef fishing, water-skiing, jet-skiing, parasailing, sea kayaking, hiking, rides over the coral in semi-submersibles, fish feeding, puttering around in dinghies to secluded beaches, tennis, squash, and aqua-aerobics classes. Accommodations

Tips Island or Mainland?

Does all this fun in the Whitsunday Islands come cheap? If you stay in a hotel on the mainland, yes. If you stay on an island, no. On any trip to the Whitsundays, you'll usually spend money on watersports, sailing, diving expeditions, and the like—all potential budget-busters. But standby and package deals on activities and accommodations abound most of the year, even at the most luxurious resorts.

range from small, low-key wilderness retreats to midrange family havens to Australia's most luxurious resort, Hayman.

The village of **Airlie Beach** is the center of the action on the mainland. The Whitsundays are just as good a stepping stone to the outer Great Barrier Reef as Cairns—some people think it is better because you don't have to make the 90-minute trip to the Reef before you hit coral. Just about any Whitsunday island has fringing reef around its shores, and there are good snorkeling reefs between the islands, a quick boat ride away from your island or mainland accommodations.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** The Bruce Highway leads south from Cairns or north from Brisbane to Proserpine, 26km (16 miles) inland from Airlie Beach. Take the “Whitsunday” turnoff to reach Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. Allow a good 8 hours to drive from Cairns. There are several car-storage facilities at Shute Harbour. Sandra and Roger Boynton of **Whitsunday Car Security** (☎ 07/4946 9955 or 0419/729 605) collect your car anywhere in the Whitsunday area and store it in locked undercover parking for A\$14 (US\$9) per 24 hours.

By Plane There are two air routes into the Whitsundays: Hamilton Island airport, and Whitsunday Coast Airport at Proserpine on the mainland. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies direct to Hamilton Island from Brisbane. **Sunstate Airlines** (book through Qantas) flies from Sydney, Cairns, and Townsville. Airlink and Sunstate Airlines fly to Proserpine direct from Brisbane. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia) flies to Proserpine direct from Sydney and with connections from Perth, Adelaide, and Melbourne.

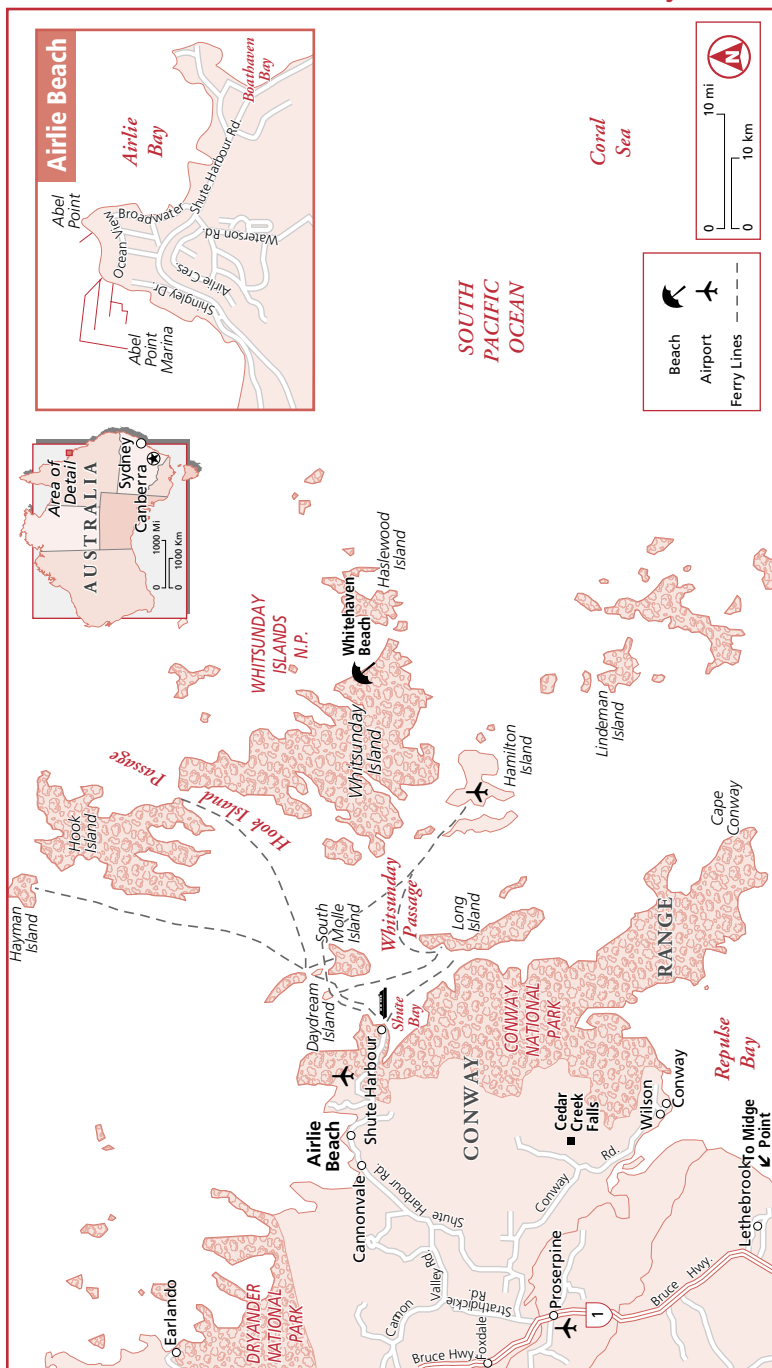
If you stay on an island, the resort may book your launch transfers automatically. These may appear on your airline ticket, in which case your luggage will be checked through to the island.

By Train Several **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122) long-distance trains stop at Proserpine every week. The one-way fare is A\$134 (US\$87) from Cairns on the Tilt Train. Brisbane fares range from A\$217 (US\$141) on the Tilt Train to A\$288 (US\$187) for a first-class sleeper on the Sunlander.

By Bus **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) operate plentiful daily services to Airlie Beach from Brisbane (trip time: around 18 hr.) and Cairns (trip time: 9–10½ hr.). The fare is A\$144 (US\$94) from Brisbane and A\$83 (US\$54) from Cairns.

Whitsunday Transit (☎ 07/4946 1800) meets all flights and trains at Proserpine to provide door-to-door transfers to Airlie Beach hotels, or to Shute

The Whitsunday Islands



Harbour. The fare is A\$29 (US\$19) from the airport, or A\$17 (US\$11) from the train station.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before you travel, contact **Tourism Whitsundays**, P.O. Box 83, Whitsunday, QLD 4802 (☎ 07/4946 6673; fax 07/4946 7387; www.whitsundaytourism.com). Another website is www.whitsunday.net.au. Tourism Whitsundays' information center (☎ 1800/801 252 in Australia, or 07/4945 3711) is in Proserpine, on the Bruce Highway in the town's south. It's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 5pm and Sundays and public holidays (except Christmas) from 8:30am to 1:30pm.

If you're staying in Airlie Beach, it's easier to pick up information from the private booking agents lining the main street, which all stock a vast range of cruise, tour, and hotel information, and make bookings free of charge. They all have much the same stuff; but because some manifest certain boats exclusively, and prices can vary a little from one to the next, shop around.

GETTING AROUND Island ferries and Great Barrier Reef cruises leave from **Shute Harbour**, a 10-minute drive south of Airlie Beach on Shute Harbour Road. Most other tour-boat operators and bareboat charters anchor at **Abel Point Marina**, a 15-minute walk west from Airlie Beach.

Avis (☎ 07/4946 6318), **Hertz** (☎ 07/4946 4687), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/4946 7727) have outlets in Airlie Beach and Proserpine Airport (telephone numbers serve both locations). Budget has no Whitsundays office.

Local bus company **Whitsunday Transit** (☎ 07/4946 1800) runs a half-hourly service between Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour to meet all ferries. The fare is A\$7.80 (US\$5.05).

Most tour-boat operators pick up guests free from Airlie Beach hotels and call at some or all island resorts.

Whitsunday All Over (☎ 07/4946 6900), **Whitsunday Island Adventure Cruises** (☎ 07/4946 5255 for the booking agent), and **FantaSea Cruises** (☎ 1800/650 851 in Australia, or 07/4946 5111) make ferry transfers from Shute Harbour to the islands and between the islands. One-way transfers from the mainland cost A\$18 (US\$12) to South Molle Island, and A\$29 (US\$19) from Hamilton Island. Children 4 to 14 pay around half price. It is not necessary to book these transfer services, but do book your arrival and departure ferry so that you don't miss your connections. Most islands receive a boat only every 2 to 4 hours, some only once or twice a day, so it's a long wait if you miss your boat.

CHOOSING A BASE

Many people like to combine a stay at Airlie Beach with a few days on an island. The advantages of staying on the mainland are cheaper accommodations, a

Tips Water Hazards!

Although there have been no major stinging incidents in areas with stinger nets since their introduction in the early 1980s, deadly marine stingers may inhabit the shoreline from October to April. The best place to swim during these months is in the brand new Airlie Beach lagoon.

The rivers here are home to dangerous saltwater crocodiles (which actually live in fresh water), so no swimming in streams, rivers, and water holes.

Value When to Look for Whitsunday Deals

High season in the Whitsundays is during school vacations: mid-April, late June to early July, late September to early October, late December, and all of January. The Aussie winter from June to August is tight, too. You have to book months ahead to get high-season accommodations, but any other time you can get very good deals indeed. Specials on accommodations, sailing trips, day cruises, and diving excursions leap off the blackboards outside the tour-bookings agents in Airlie Beach.

choice of restaurants, and freedom to visit a different island each day. There is jet-skiing, kayaking, parasailing, catamaran hire, and wind surfing on the mainland.

The main advantage of staying on an island is that swimming, snorkeling, bushwalking, and watersports—many of them free—are right outside your door. The deadly stingers that can infest Airlie's shores do not make it to the islands, so swimming is safe year-round. You won't be isolated if you stay on an island, as most reef cruise boats, "sail and snorkel" yacht excursions, Whitehaven Beach cruises, dive boats, fishing vessels, and so on stop at the island resorts on a frequent basis. Be warned, however, that once you're "captive" on an island, you may be sluggish with high food and drink prices. Bear in mind, too, that although most island resorts offer non-motorized watersports, such as windsurfing and catamarans, for free, you will pay for activities that use fuel, such as parasailing, water-skiing, and dinghy rental.

In some places in the islands, extreme low tides may reveal rocky mud flats below the sand line. Watersports can be limited at low tide because of the low water level.

EXPLORING THE ISLANDS

SAILING & SNORKELING TRIPS A cheaper alternative to skippering your own yacht around the Whitsundays is to join one of the numerous yachts offering 3-day, 2-night sailing adventures around the islands. You can get involved with sailing the boat as much or as little as you want, snorkel over one dazzling reef after another, beachcomb, explore national park trails, learn to sail if you want, call in secluded bays, swim, sunbathe, and generally have a laid-back good time. A few companies offer introductory and qualified scuba diving for an extra cost per dive. Most boats carry a maximum of 12 passengers, so the atmosphere is always friendly and fun. The food is generally good, the showers are usually hot, and you sleep in comfortable but small berths off the galley. Some have petite private twin or double cabins.

In peak season, expect to pay around A\$500 (US\$325) per person. Prices usually include all meals, any Marine Park entrance fees, snorkel gear, and courtesy transfers to the departure point (Abel Point Marina or Shute Harbour). In the off season, the boats compete fiercely for passengers; you'll see signboards on the main street in Airlie Beach advertising standby deals. Among the better-known operators are **Ragamuffin** (☎ 07/4946 7777), a 17m (56-ft.) ocean-going yacht; and **Prosail** (☎ 1800/810 116 in Australia, or 07/4946 5433; www.prosail.com.au), which runs trips on a fleet of 19 yachts. Prosail offers day trips (around A\$90/US\$58) as well as multiday sailing, and specializes in 3-day, 2-night guided sailing trips through the Marine and Great Barrier Reef Marine

Come Sail with Me

“Bareboating” simply means that you are sailing the boat yourself. And if that seems pretty daunting, rest assured that thousands of people do it safely every year, with a little tuition before they set out. Most of the many bareboat yacht charter companies in the islands will want one person on the boat to have a little experience at the helm of a vessel, but don’t worry if you don’t know one end of a boat from another. You do not need a license, and sailing is surprisingly easy in these uncrowded waters, where the channels are deep and hazard-free and the seas are protected from big swells by the Great Barrier Reef farther out. The 74 islands are so close to each other that land is always in sight, and safe anchorages are everywhere. If you have absolutely no boating experience, the company may require you to take a skipper along for the first day at an extra cost of around A\$200 (US\$130) a day or A\$230 (US\$150) for overnight. And if you think you know what you’re doing but just want extra reassurance, you can take a skipper along for an extra fee for the first couple of hours for A\$60 (US\$39) to help you get the hang of things. In any case, most companies mail you a preparation kit before you leave, and you get a thorough 2- to 3-hour briefing before departure and are given easy-to-read maps marking channels, anchorage points, and the very few dangerous reefs. Your charter company will radio in once or twice a day to check that you’re still afloat, and you can contact them any time for advice.

Most yachts are fitted for two to eight passengers. Try to get a boat with two berths more than you need if you can afford it, as space is always tight. The boats usually have a galley kitchen, a barbecue mounted to the stern, hot showers, toilet, linen, a radio and/or stereo, a motorized dinghy, and snorkeling equipment. Sleeping quarters are usually not that luxurious and include a mix of single galley berths and one or two compact private cabins. You can buy your own provisions or have the charter company stock the boat for you for about A\$35 (US\$23) per person per day. Most operators will load a windsurfer, fishing tackle, and scuba diving equipment on request for an extra fee, if they are not standard.

parks for around A\$500 to A\$550 (US\$325–US\$358). All trips include sailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, and bush walking, and you can sail on maxi-yachts such as *Matador*, *Condor*, *Broomstick*, and *Hammer*. They also offer 6-day packages. Contact the Tourism Whitsundays (see “Visitor Information” above) for details on other charters.

ISLAND HOPPING Day-trippers to Hamilton, Daydream, South Molle, Club Crocodile Long Island, and Hook Island resorts can rent the hotels’ water-sports equipment, laze by the beaches and pools, scuba dive, join the resorts’ activities programs, hike their trails, and eat at some or all of their restaurants. See “The Whitsunday Island Resorts” later in this chapter, for details on Hamilton, South Molle, and Hook islands. **Long Island Club Crocodile** is a rather noisy,

In peak season you may have to charter the boat for a week. At other times, most companies have a minimum of 5 days, but many will rent for 3 nights if you ask, rather than let a vessel sit idle. Five nights is a good length of time allowing you to get familiar with the boat, then relax and enjoy yourself.

In peak season, expect to pay around A\$530 to A\$730 (US\$345–US\$475) for a four- to six-berth yacht, per boat, per night. Rates in the off season, and even in the Whitsundays' busiest time, June through August, will be anywhere from A\$40 to A\$90 (US\$26–US\$59) less. If you are prepared to book within 14 days of when you want to sail, the deals can be even better; you should be able to find a boat at such late notice in the off season. You will be asked to lodge a credit-card bond of between A\$1,200 and A\$1,500 (US\$780–US\$975). Mooring fees apply if you want to call into one of the island resorts overnight. A number of bareboat-charter companies offer "sail 'n' stay" packages that combine a few days sailing with a few days at an island resort.

Most bareboat charter companies will make complete holiday arrangements for you in the islands, including accommodations, transfers, tours, and sporting activities. Most operate out of Airlie Beach or Hamilton Island, or both. Two of the largest bareboat charter companies, **Australian Bareboat Charters** and **Whitsunday Rent-A-Yacht** operate under the banner of Trinity Marine and share the same contact details: ☎ 1800/075 000 in Australia, or 07/4946 9232; www.rentayacht.com.au. Other well-known operators include **Queensland Yacht Charters** (☎ 1800/075 013 in Australia, or 07/4946 7400; fax 07/4946 7698; www.yachtcharters.com.au); **Sail Whitsunday** (☎ 1800/075 045 in Australia, or 07/4946 7070; fax 07/4946 7044); and **The Moorings** (☎ 888/952-8420 in the U.S.; www.moorings.com; or in Australia ☎ 1800/553 720 or 07/4946 8044. Tourism Whitsundays (see "Visitor Information" above) can furnish you with a complete list of operators.

If you don't want to sail yourself, there are countless skippered sailing trips through the islands (see the "Sailing & Snorkeling Trips" section for details).

unpretentious resort that has plentiful watersports, picturesque hiking trails, wild wallabies, and a large beach-cum-tidal flat where you can laze on lounges.

You can get to the islands on your own by ferry (see "Getting Around" above), or take an organized day trip that visits one, two, or even three islands in a day. **FantaSea Cruises** (☎ 1800/650 851 in Australia, or 07/4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au), **Whitsunday All Over** (☎ 1300/366 494 in Australia, or 07/4946 6900), and **Whitsunday Island Adventure Cruises** (☎ 07/4946 5255 for the booking agent) all offer them, as do several yachts. **Whitsunday All Over** also does a day trip to Whitehaven Beach and Bali Hai, an uninhabited isle where you can snorkel, dive, view the coral from a large submersible, or laze on the sand for A\$86 (US\$56) adults, half price for kids.

Moments **Hitting the Sand at Whitehaven Beach**

The 6km (3¾-mile) stretch of pure-white silica sand on **Whitehaven Beach** ★★ will leave you in rapture. The beach, on uninhabited Whitsunday Island, does not boast a lot of coral, but the swimming is good, and the forested shore is beautiful. Take a book and chill out. Some sailboat day trips visit it, as do several motorized vessel operators, including the **Lindeman Pacific** (☎ 07/4946 6922, or 07/4946 5580 after hours) and **FantaSea Cruises** (☎ 07/4946 5111) and **Whitsunday All Over** (☎ 07/4946 6900). Expect to pay around A\$70 (US\$46) per person for the day, with lunch.

Hamilton Island, 16km (9½ miles) southeast of Shute Harbour, is one of the most developed islands, and its resort (see “The Whitsunday Island Resorts” below) has the widest range of activities, including coral snorkeling (at low tide), parasailing, water-skiing, windsurfing, speedboat rides, sailing and fishing trips to nearby islets, tennis and squash, go-karts, a shooting range, minigolf, and an aquatic driving range. There are hiking trails, including a challenging trek up Passage Peak for panoramic views; a 1-hour bus tour that includes a stop at the island’s small fauna park, which has koalas and other Aussie wildlife; and a lovely freeform pool with lots of lounge chairs. Because the resort is spread out and divided by a steep hill, take advantage of the free shuttle service to get around. Renting a golf cart is expensive: A\$35 (US\$23) per hour or A\$60 (US\$39) per 24 hours. There’s a bakery, deli, and some cheap pizza/cafe/burger-style options among the resort’s 10 restaurants, and almost as many bars.

South Molle Island, 7km (4¼ miles) from Shute Harbour, is a pretty island covered with rainforests and open grassland, with an unpretentious resort (see “The Whitsunday Island Resorts” below). Visitors can golf on the 9-hole course; use the catamarans, windsurfers, and paddle skis; go parasailing, water-skiing, or jet-skiing; laze on the palm-lined beach or by the pool and Jacuzzi; or hike 16km (9.5 miles) of national park walking trails, including a steep climb to Spion Kop peak for fabulous 360-degree views of the Whitsundays. Free fish-feeding takes place on the jetty at 10am and rainbow lorikeet-feeding is at 3pm. You can take a speedboat to nearby reefs for a guided snorkel safari, or rent a dinghy to putter around the shore to a secluded snorkeling or fishing spot. The coffee shop serves inexpensive meals, and there’s a bar.

Daydream Island, 8km (5 miles) from Shute Harbour, is a popular day-trip choice because it has a good patch of coral reef just offshore.

Day-trippers to **Long Island Club Crocodile Resort** (see “The Whitsunday Island Resorts” below), 10km (6 miles) from Shute Harbour, can rent watersports equipment and use the resort’s beach, Jacuzzi, gym and sauna, volleyball court, basketball court, table tennis tables, and tennis courts. You can hike 20km (12 miles) of rainforest trails, swim in two pools, and snorkel among the modest coral in the bay. A 20-minute walk from Club Crocodile takes you to quiet little Palm Bay Hideaway, where you can swim, order meals, and chill out on a tiny pretty bay.

Hook Island (see “The Whitsunday Island Resorts” below), 40km (24 miles) from Shute Harbour, is the best day-trip destination for snorkelers. A day trip costs A\$59 (US\$38) adults and A\$30 (US\$20) children, and includes transfers, snorkel gear, free entry to the underwater observatory and to the Aboriginal cultural performance (Tues-Fri only). Cafe meals are about A\$5–A\$15 (US\$3.25–US\$9.75) at lunch.

MORE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

FISHING Reef fishing is superb throughout the islands; red emperor, coral trout, sweetlip, and snapper are common catches. A popular charter vessel is the 16.5m (54-ft.) timber cruiser *Moruya* (☎ 07/4946 7127, or 0415 185 653 mobile phone; www.fishingwhitsunday.com.au). Day trips depart Shute Harbour daily at 9:30am and return at 5:30pm. They include lunch, bait, and fishing rods. The crew will even clean your catch for you. Adults pay A\$100 (US\$65), seniors A\$90 (US\$59), children ages 4 to 14 A\$65 (US\$42), and a family of four A\$265 (US\$172).

The 12m (39-ft.) *Marlin Blue* (☎ 07/4948 0999 for bookings) takes reef and game anglers from Abel Point Marina and South Molle Island Resort for A\$245 (US\$159) per person for a full day, on a shared charter. That includes lunch, bait, and tackle; drinks are extra. The boat departs the mainland at 7am and returns around 5:30pm.

If you want to undertake your own fishing expedition, **Harbourside Boat Hire** (☎ 07/4946 9330), in Shute Harbour, rents motorized dinghies for A\$60 (US\$39) for a half-day or A\$90 (US\$59) for a full day. Half-cabin cruisers cost A\$90 (US\$59) for a half-day or A\$150 (US\$98) for a full day. They also hire fishing rods and sell tackle, bait, ice, and all your fishing needs.

ECO TOURS Visitors to the Whitsundays can get up-close-and-personal with crocodiles in their natural habitat with **Proserpine River Eco Tours** (☎ 07/4946 5111) which combines an open-air wagon ride through the pristine Goorganga wetlands and a boat trip on the river to learn more about one of Queensland's major crocodile-breeding grounds. This is the only place to see crocs in safety in the wild south of the Daintree. Bus pickups operate from Airlie Beach, Cannonvale, and Proserpine for the morning and afternoon tours, which each run for about 4 hours, depending on tides, and cost A\$59 (US\$38) adults, A\$40 (US\$26) kids ages 4 to 14, and A\$158 (US\$103) family of four. You finish up with a talk over billy tea and the best damper (a type of baked bread) I've ever tasted (and they'll even give you the recipe).

HIKING & 4WD SAFARIS The hills behind Airlie Beach stretch into nearby Conway State Forest and are rich in giant strangler figs, ferns, and palms. If you're lucky you'll spot a blue Ulysses butterfly. Several companies offer half-day 4WD safaris. Hiking trails ranging in length from 1km (just over .5 of a mile) to 5.4km (3.75 miles) lead through the forest or down to the beach in Conway National Park, which spans Shute Harbour Road between Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. One trail has signboards explaining the Aboriginal uses of the plants you are passing; several trails offer impressive views of the islands. The trails depart from one of three parking lots along Shute Harbour Road. **The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service information center** (☎ 07/4946 7022) on Shute

Whale-Watching in the Whitsundays

Humpback whales migrate to the Whitsundays every July to September to calve. These leviathans come right up to the boat. **FantaSea Cruises** (☎ 07/4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au) runs whale-watching cruises in season; trips feature an onboard whale talk and videos. The cost is about A\$95 (US\$62) per adult, and if you don't see any whales, you can go again another day for free, or choose another of FantaSea's cruises.

Tips Great Whitsunday Walking

The Whitsundays will have the first of six **Great Walks of Queensland** currently being developed. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (☎ 07/4946 7022; www.env.qld.gov.au) is planning tracks that will highlight some of Queensland's most valuable parks and forests in World Heritage areas. The Whitsundays Great Walk is due to open in June 2004, covering 36km (22 miles) in Conway State Forest and Conway National Park, behind Airlie Beach. The walk will offer a range of walking experiences from half-days to extended overnight adventures. Start the walk at the parking lot at the end of Brandy Creek Road, a short drive from Cannonvale. The trail will wind in three stages from Brandy Creek to Airlie Beach, with two camp sites at 12km (7 ½ miles) intervals. Walkers should take drinking water with them, as the water in natural systems is not good for drinking. A second Great Walk will open on Fraser Island in June 2004 (p. 336).

Harbour Road at Mandalay Road, 2.5 km (1½ miles) northeast of Airlie Beach, has maps and self-guiding brochures; it's open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm and most, but not all, Saturdays from 9am to 1pm.

SEA KAYAKING If you have strong arms, sea kayaking is a wonderful way to enjoy the islands. Daydream Island and the beaches and bays of the North, Mid, and South Molle are all within paddling distance of the mainland. It's common to see dolphins, turtles, and sharks. One of the area's most established operators is **Salty Dog Sea Kayaking** (☎ 07/4946 1388; www.saltydog.com.au), which takes escorted trips through the islands. Half-day trips run on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday and full-day trips on Monday, Thursday, and Friday, departing Shute Harbour at 8:30am. A half-day trip is A\$50 (US\$33) per person, and a day trip is A\$90 (US\$59). Three- and 6-day trips, where you camp out, are A\$395 (US\$257) and A\$995 (US\$647); rates include snorkel gear, meals, hotel pickup, and, on overnight trips, camping gear. They also deliver sea kayaks to you anywhere in the Whitsundays. A full day's rental is from A\$50 (US\$33) for a single kayak, A\$60 (US\$39) for a double, including delivery and pickup and all safety equipment. A A\$200 (US\$130) security deposit is required for rentals.

WATERSPORTS Airlie Beach is not great for swimming or snorkeling, but you can rent jet skis, WaveRunners, windsurfers, aquabikes, pedal cats, catamarans, and paddle skis to use on the bay. Choose from the several rental outfits along the beach.

AIRLIE BEACH

640km (384 miles) S of Cairns; 1,146km (687 miles) N of Brisbane

The town of Airlie Beach, only a few blocks long, is the focal point of activity on the Whitsunday mainland. It has some decent accommodations, a small selection of good restaurants and bars, a boutique or two, and facilities such as banks and a supermarket. Cruises and yachts depart from either Shute Harbour, a 10-minute drive south on Shute Harbour Road, or Abel Point Marina, a 10-minute walk west along the shore or a quick drive over the hill on Shute Harbour Road.

Airlie Beach has a new A\$8 million (US\$5.2-million) artificial lagoon, offset by sandy beaches and landscaped parkland, which resolves the problem of where to swim in stinger season. The lagoon is the size of about six full-size Olympic

swimming pools, set in 4 hectares (10 acres) of botanic gardens, with a children's pool, plenty of shade, barbecues, picnic shelters, toilets and showers, and parking.

Perched on the edge of the Coral Sea, with views across Pioneer Bay and the Whitsunday Passage, Airlie Beach has a village atmosphere where life revolves around the beach and the marina by day, and the bars and restaurants by night.

The spit of land between Airlie Bay and Boathaven Bay is home to the **Airlie Beach Sailing Club**. Shute Harbour, 11km (7 miles) from Airlie Beach, is one of Queensland's busiest ports, filled with yachts, cruisers, water taxis, ferries, and fishermen. For a bird's-eye view, head to the **Lions Lookout**.

WHERE TO STAY

Airlie Beach Hotel Extensively refurbished in mid-2000, the hotel is in the middle of town, next to the beach. The original 20 motel units have been totally refurbished, and 60 new beachfront units have been added, including 4 suites. The new units all have private balconies and bathtubs. Suites have full kitchen facilities. The original Mangrove Jack's restaurant (see "Where to Dine" below) remains intact, and is joined by a second bar and grill restaurant, Capers, which has tables overlooking the beach and which turns into a late-night dance bar after 10pm.

The Esplanade and Coconut Grove, Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ☎ 1800/466 233 in Australia, or 07/4964 1999. Fax 07/4964 1998. www.airliebeachhotel.com.au. 80 units (20 with shower only). A\$98 (US\$64) double for motel units; A\$149–A\$213 (US\$97–US\$138) double for hotel rooms; A\$169–A\$238 (US\$110–US\$155) double for suites. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secure undercover parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor salt-water pool; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, coffeemaker, kitchen (suites only).

Boathaven Spa Resort Friendly hosts Jan and Peter Cox run this new resort with well-appointed studios, one- and two-bedroom apartments (some with private Jacuzzi), and three-bedroom penthouses. Boathaven is set among lovely gardens only 300m (984 ft.) from town. All apartments have balconies with views over Boathaven Bay and the Coral Sea. The decor is attractive, with big living areas, kitchenettes, and en suite bathrooms for each bedroom. The "spa suites" and penthouses include laundry facilities and a Jacuzzi on the balcony.

440 Shute Harbour Rd., Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ☎ 07/4948 4948. Fax 07/4948 4999. www.boathavenresort.com. 27 units (all with shower; 12 with Jacuzzi). A\$155–A\$170 (US\$101–US\$111) double studio; A\$195–A\$210 (US\$127–US\$137) double 1-bedroom apt; A\$175–A\$190 (US\$114–US\$124) double spa studio; A\$270–A\$285 (US\$176–US\$185) 2-bedroom apt; A\$395–A\$410 (US\$257–US\$267) 2-bedroom penthouse (sleeps 4); A\$525–A\$540 (US\$341–US\$351) 3-bedroom penthouse (sleeps 6). Extra adult A\$25 (US\$16), extra child under 15 A\$15 (US\$9.75). Crib A\$10 (US\$6.50). Minimum stay of 3–5 nights apply over Christmas, New Year, and Easter holiday periods. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking (some undercover). **Amenities:** 2 large outdoor pools; Jacuzzi; gymnasium; game room; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, iron.

Whitsunday Wanderers Resort Set in 7 hectares (18 acres) of tropical gardens on the main street of Airlie Beach, this resort fits right in with the laid-back Airlie lifestyle. Accommodations are scattered around the grounds in blocks of four to eight rooms with open-air parking. The decor is old-fashioned, but you get plenty of space, a kitchenette, a decent-size bathroom, and a big balcony or patio. Hair dryers are on loan at reception. This is a good choice for families as there is plenty of room for the kids to run around, barbecues to cook on, an 18-hole minigolf course, archery, table tennis, volleyball, half- and full-size tennis courts, several pools, and a kids' playground, among other activities. All are free, and there's also a free kids' club during vacations.

Shute Harbour Rd., Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ☎ 1800/075 060 in Australia, or 07/4946 6446. Fax 07/4946 6761. www.wanderers.com.au. 104 units (102 with shower only). A\$98–A\$138 (US\$64–US\$90) double; A\$142–A\$149 (US\$92–US\$97) honeymoon suites (with spa bath). Free crib. Ask about packages, and packages that include meals. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 3 outdoor pools and children's pool;

5 tennis courts (3 are lit for night play); Jacuzzi; gymnasium; children's playground; tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, kitchenette, fridge, iron, safe.

Worth a Splurge

Coral Sea Resort ★ Set in Airlie Beach's best location, on the edge of Paradise Point, with 280-degree views of the ocean, this 5-year-old resort is one of the best places to stay on the Whitsunday mainland. There's a wide range of great accommodation styles to suit everyone from honeymooners to families, and although it's relatively sprawling, the design is such that you can easily feel you're alone. All the rooms have a nautical feel, and the Coral Sea suites are divine, with a Jacuzzi and double hammock on the balcony. There are four styles of suites, apartments, and family units, all serviced daily. Bayview suites have a Jacuzzi inside. It's a 3-minute walk along the waterfront to Airlie Beach village.

25 Oceanview Ave., Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ☎ 1800/075 061 in Australia, or 07/4946 6458. Fax 07/4946 6516. www.coralsearesort.com. 78 units. A\$185–A\$300 (US\$120–US\$195) double suites; A\$240–A\$295 (US\$156–US\$192) double 1-bedroom apt; A\$295–A\$325 (US\$192–US\$211) double 2-bedroom apt; A\$255 (US\$166) family unit (sleeps 5); A\$280 (US\$182) 1-bedroom penthouse; A\$375 (US\$244) 2-bedroom penthouse; A\$520 (US\$338) 3-bedroom penthouse. Cribs A\$12 (US\$7.80). Minimum 2-night stay at Easter, 3 nights Dec 26–Jan 5. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 25m/82-ft. outdoor pool; exercise room; game room; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C and ceiling fans, TV with satellite and free movies, kitchenette, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Mamma's Boys & Boardwalk Ethnic Kitchen INTERNATIONAL FOOD COURT Eating in Airlie is all about being casual, and you won't find a nicer place to hang out than under the old tree in this atmospheric streetside courtyard. Fetch a big, tasty meal from the food court next door, and eat at one of the timber tables under the tree. Go for Thai, Chinese, or Malaysian noodles; barbecued prime ribs; a beef kebab with spicy peanut sauce; a chargrilled seafood pizza; catch of the day battered or crumbed—you get the picture. A band plays most nights. The food court also does takeout.

In and next to Magnum's Backpacker's & Bar, 366 Shute Harbour Rd. ☎ 07/4948 2922. Menu items A\$3–A\$15 (US\$1.95–US\$9.75); many meals under A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–late.

Mangrove Jack's Café Bar PIZZA/CAFE FARE Bareboat sailors, local sugar farmers, Sydney yuppies, and European backpackers all flock to this big open-fronted sports bar/restaurant. The mood is upbeat but pleasantly casual, the surroundings are spic-and-span, and the food passes muster. Wood-fired pizza with trendy toppings is the specialty. There is no table service; just place your order at the bar and collect your food when your number is called. The more than 50 wines come by the glass.

In the Airlie Beach Hotel, 16 The Esplanade (enter via Shute Harbour Rd.). ☎ 07/4946 6233. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$7.90–A\$20 (US\$5.15–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight.

THE WHITSUNDAY ISLAND RESORTS

Almost no island resort in the Whitsundays comes cheap. There are about 10 resorts of varying degrees of splendor; accommodations range from positively glitzy to comfortably midrange to downright old-fashioned.

Of the full-service resorts, **Long Island Club Crocodile** and **South Molle Island Resort** represent the best value, as the rates at each include all meals. Both islands' rates also include a lot of activities. As a general rule, non-motorized activities and watersports such as catamarans, windsurfers, and paddle skis are free, while you pay extra for activities that use fuel, such as parasailing or

water-skiing. Of the two resorts, South Molle is prettier and a tad more upscale than Club Crocodile Long Island. It also has faster and more frequent connections to the mainland and other islands.

If you're looking for an alternative to these "big" island resorts, consider the quiet, low-key affairs tucked away under the palms, often with few facilities to speak of. **Hook Island Wilderness Resort** and **Whitsunday Wilderness Lodge** fall into this category. Unlike South Molle Island Resort and Club Crocodile, these resorts usually don't offer day trips to the Great Barrier Reef, fishing expeditions, dive excursions, or sail-and-snorkel trips, but that suits their quiet, nature-loving guests just fine.

Hook Island Wilderness Resort This humble collection of cabins and campsites on a white sandy beach is one of the few really affordable island resorts on the Great Barrier Reef. That makes it popular with backpackers and anybody who just wants to laze in the pool and Jacuzzi or chill out. Guests can also dive, rent canoes, play beach volleyball, visit the underwater observatory, hike, and fish in the four-person flat-bottom boat. Good snorkeling is footsteps from shore, and the resort's dive center conducts first-time and regular dives off the beach. Hook is a national park and the second-largest Whitsunday island. The cabins are very basic, with beds or bunks sleeping six or eight. All come with fresh bed linen, but you must bring your own bath towels. A store sells essentials, but try to bring everything you need.

Hook Island (40km/25 miles northeast of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands. (Postal address: P.M.B. 23, Mackay, QLD 4741.) ☎ 07/4946 9380. Fax 07/4946 9470. www.hookislandresort.com.au. 20 tent sites; two 10-bed dormitories; 10 cabins, 4 with bathroom (shower only). A\$79 (US\$51) cabin without bathroom double. Extra adult A\$24 (US\$16), extra child 4–14 A\$18 (US\$12). A\$119 (US\$77) cabin with bathroom double; extra adult A\$29 (US\$19), extra child A\$22 (US\$14). A\$24 (US\$16) dorm bed adult, A\$18 (US\$12) child 4–14. A\$15 (US\$9.75) tent site adult, A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) child 4–14. Ask about packages. MC, V. Transfers from the mainland cost A\$36 (US\$23) per person, round-trip. Boat leaves Shute Harbour at 9am and leaves Hook Island for the return trip at 3pm (trip time: 1 hr). Book through the resort. **Amenities:** Cafe and bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment (snorkel gear, canoes, and sea kayaks); tour desk. *In room:* A/C, minifridge, coffee-maker.

Long Island Club Crocodile Club Croc is probably the most unpretentious of all the Whitsunday resorts, and its package deals make it popular with families and young couples. It faces a wide, curving bay that has good reef snorkeling. Lots of beachfront watersports await: catamaran sailing, windsurfing, surf skiing, jet-skiing, water-skiing, scuba diving, and more. You can join organized activities, like jet ski races, or do your own thing. Entertainment can be anything from a raging dance club to casino games, live bands, karaoke, talent shows, or cane toad races. Other free activities include aerobics, beach and pool volleyball, basketball, table tennis, and tennis. There are also 20km (12 miles) of national park trails where you often see wallabies. There's a kids' playground and a free Kids' Club for 4- to 14-year-olds.

The beachfront rooms have a Mediterranean look, with glass-louver windows and a view of the sea through the trees. Garden rooms, located behind the beachfront rooms, are a little older and darker. Both types have air-conditioning, minifridges, TVs, telephones, Internet access, and patios or balconies. Beachfront rooms also have a minibar and safe. Your best value, however, are the appealing Lodge rooms, which have polished timber floors, freshly painted walls, and a fan (but no bathroom, telephone, or view). They're compact but nice if you just want a bed and don't mind shared bathroom facilities. They have no air-conditioning, so take them only from April to October. Hair dryers are

Value Go in the Low Season

You will probably have to pay the “rack” rates quoted below during school vacations. Other times, you can usually get a package deal that’s a much better value. Qantas offers airfare-inclusive packages from most Australian state-capital cities and Cairns. If you show up in the Whitsundays in the off season without a reservation, you can sometimes snare an excellent standby deal. It never hurts to ask.

available at reception. There’s nothing fancy about the food in the seafront buffet restaurant, so you may want to buy a barbecue-it-yourself meat pack from the little cafe. Casual is the byword here—pack your old surf shorts.

Whitsunday Passage, Whitsunday Islands, P.O. Box 1080, Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ☎ **1800/075 125** in Australia, or 07/4946 9400. Fax 07/4946 9555. www.clubcroc.com.au. 156 units, 140 with bathroom (shower only). A\$198–A\$240 (US\$129–US\$156) double lodge room; A\$298–A\$380 (US\$194–US\$247) double garden room; A\$348–A\$430 (US\$226–US\$280) double beachfront room. Children ages 3–16 A\$65 (US\$42). Rates include all meals. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Whitsunday All Over (☎ **07/4946 6900**) provides 30-min. launch transfers from Shute Harbour for A\$37 (US\$24) adults, A\$16 (US\$10) children ages 4–14, or A\$89 (US\$58) family round-trip. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; bar; 2 outdoor pools; Jacuzzi; sauna; gym; tennis courts; tour desk; salon; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (except lodges), ceiling fans, TV, fridge, minibar (beachfront rooms only), safe (beachfront rooms only), iron.

Palm Terrace, Hamilton Island This is the best value option for visitors to ritzy Hamilton Island. More than A\$2.3 million (US\$1.5 million) was spent in 2001 converting an existing lodge into this budget hotel set in quiet gardens near Catseye Beach. About a third of the rooms have uninterrupted ocean and beach views. The island has four other hotels, ranging from private bungalows to a five-star luxury Beach Club, as well as a choice of privately owned apartments and luxury villas. The rooms in Palm Terrace are large and have big balconies. Each sleeps three and has a king-size bed as well as a choice of double sofa bed or a single bed with a trundle. Guests have free use of non-motorized watercraft. Families staying in the Palm Terrace can take advantage of the “Kids Stay, Play and Eat for Free” program which includes free accommodation for children under 15 (using existing bedding), admission to the Clownfish Club (small charge for children under 3) and free meals in a selection of the island’s restaurants when dining with their parents.

Hamilton Island Resort, Hamilton Island (16km/10 miles southeast of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands, QLD 4803. ☎ **1800/075 110** in Australia, or 02/8353 8444 (reservations office in Sydney), or 07/4946 9999 (the island). Fax 02/8353 8499 (reservations office in Sydney), or 07/4946 8888 (the island). www.hamiltonisland.com.au. 60 units, all with bathroom (shower only). A\$249 (US\$162) per room per night (all units sleep 3). AE, DC, MC, V. Ask about packages. Free airport-resort transfers for all guests. FantaSea Cruises (☎ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111) provides the cheapest transfers from the mainland (Shute Harbour) and most other islands. **Amenities:** 11 restaurants; 6 bars; 6 outdoor pools; minigolf and driving range; day/night tennis courts; health club and spa; extensive range of watersports and activities; bike rental; child-care center for kids from 6 weeks–14 years (in 3 groups); tour desk; business center and secretarial services; shopping arcade; salon; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

South Molle Island Resort This is a good-value choice. It’s not glamorous, but many activities and all meals are included in the rates. The complex, built around a curving white sand bay, is getting on in years, so expect a nicely maintained but modest set of accommodations nestled in tropical gardens or along a hillside. Each unit has sea, garden, or golf course views. Following a 1999

refurbishing, some beachfront units, especially those with Jacuzzis, are looking positively trendy. The front desk lends hair dryers.

The 405-hectare (1,000-acre) island is a hilly National Park of grasslands, rainforest, and eucalyptuses with 16km (10 miles) of walking trails, including a steep climb to Mt. Jeffreys for fabulous 360-degree views. As well as a basic but pretty 9-hole golf course (small charge for balls), there are catamarans, wind-surfers, and paddle-skis (all free), jet skis, water skis, archery, table tennis, a volleyball net, and fishing tackle and snorkel gear to rent, and a boutique. The swimming pool is lined with welcoming lounge chairs under palms, as is the beach. A packed daily activities program offers everything from parasailing to coconut-throwing competitions. The dive shop makes dive and snorkel day trips, takes first-timers diving in the bay, and runs courses. The island is rimmed with inlets accessible by hiking or rented dinghy. On some days, snorkeling safaris are run to better reefs than those around the island. Rainbow lorikeets are everywhere, even on your shoulder stealing food at fish feeding time. A free kids' club for 5-and-unders operates every day, and during Aussie school vacations a free club runs for 6- to 12-year-olds.

Although the dining room lacks sea views, the buffet food is fine; good meals are available at extra cost in Coral's restaurant some nights, and a cafe sells light meals. There's live entertainment every night in the bar, from a staff song-and-dance show to cane toad racing to the Friday-night "Flames of Polynesia" dinner show.

South Molle Island (7km/4 miles east of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands; P.M.B. 21, Mackay, QLD 4741. ☎ 1800/075 080 in Australia, or 07/4946 9433. Fax 07/4946 9580. www.southmolleisland.com.au. info@southmolleisland.com.au. 200 units (some with shower only, some with Jacuzzi). A\$342–A\$474 (US\$222–US\$308) double. Extra adult A\$171–A\$237 (US\$111–US\$154), extra child 3–14 A\$55 (US\$36). Family rates available in some rooms. Rates include all meals. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. FantaSea Cruises (☎ 1800/650 851 in Australia, or 07/4946 5111) and Whitsunday All Over (☎ 1300/366 494 in Australia, or 07/4946 9499) provides launch transfers from Shute Harbour and most other islands. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool and children's pool; 2 day/night tennis courts; Jacuzzi; sauna; gymnasium; salon; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Whitsunday Wilderness Lodge ★★ This resort was designed to show off the Whitsundays' natural beauty. Tucked in a cove under towering hoop pines and palms, it is an environmentally sensitive lodge on a national-park island for people who want to explore the wilderness in basic comfort, but without the crowds, noisy watersports, or artificial atmosphere of a resort. It's also a great place to meet other travelers. A maximum 16 guests stay in simple but smart cabins facing the sea, each with a double and single bed, modern bathrooms, and a private deck facing the sea. Solar power rules, so there is no air-conditioning, TV, hair dryer, iron, or other appliances. There is one public phone. Social life centers on an open-sided gazebo by the beach, equipped with a natural-history library and CDs, where everyone dines together at slab tables under the Milky Way on fabulous buffet-style campfire meals. Access is only by a short but stunning helicopter flight from Hamilton Island.

Daily excursions include sailing away on the lodge's gleaming 10m (33-ft.) catamaran, a seaplane flight to the Outer Reef and Whitehaven Beach, sea kayaking the mangroves to spot giant green sea turtles (which are common around the lodge), snorkeling the fringing reef on uninhabited islands, or bushwalking to a magical milkwood grove no one else knows about. Or you may prefer to just laze in the hammocks, or head off with a free sea kayak and snorkel gear. The beach is more tidal flat than sand, but clean and firm enough to sunbathe on. Wildlife

abounds, including Myrtle, the lodge's pet kangaroo. Those who stay here consider it a plus that no ferries or cruise boats call and that the lodge is inaccessible to day-trippers or hikers from other resorts on this 1,215-hectare (3,001-acre) island.

Paradise Bay, Long Island (16km/10 miles southeast of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands; P.O. Box 842, Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ☎ 07/4946 9777. Fax 07/4946 9777. www.southlongisland.com. 10 units (all with shower only). A\$5,980 (US\$3,887) double for 5 nights (minimum stay). A\$800 (US\$520) double extra nights. Rates include all meals, helicopter transfers from Hamilton Island Airport, daily excursions, and equipment. Rates decrease with longer stays. On "Beachcomber Weeks," held several times a year, there's a 50% discount on 6-night rates—in exchange for helping clean up the island's shores for an hour a day. MC, V. No children under 15.

CAMPING ON THE ISLANDS

Despite the fact that camping facilities are almost nonexistent, camping on uninhabited islands in the Whitsundays is delightful. There are no showers, and few spots have toilets or even shelters, so be prepared to really rough it. Campfires are not permitted on the islands, so you will need a gas stove. **Island Camping Connection** (☎ 07/4946 5255) arranges camping on several deserted islands. The company provides transfers to any island for A\$45 (US\$29) per person (two-person minimum) round-trip (price includes water containers). They also rent camping kits with tent, bedroll, gas stove, mess kit, cutlery, cooler, and torch for A\$40 (US\$26) for two people for the first day, A\$20 (US\$13) every day thereafter. You need to bring other necessities such as toilet paper, linen, insect repellent, and washing-up gear. They also rent snorkel gear for A\$10 (US\$6.50) per person for 3 days and A\$5 (US\$3.25) per day after that, and inflatable double sea kayaks—ideal for getting around once you are on your island—for A\$55 (US\$36) per night. You bring your own food, a sense of adventure, and a **permit** from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Permits are A\$4 (US\$2.60) per person, per night for anyone over 5 years old or A\$16 (US\$10) for a family; you can pick them up from the **QPWS office** on Shute Harbour Road at Mandalay Road, in Airlie Beach (☎ 07/4946 7022). The office is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm, and most but not all Saturdays from 9am to 1pm. You must organize your boat transport before you go for your permit—consider a sea kayak! Although there are loads of sites, book ahead to secure a spot during school vacations.

6 The Capricorn Coast & the Southern Reef Islands

South of the Whitsundays, the Bruce Highway travels through rural country until it hits the beaches of the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane. It may not be the tourism heartland of the state, but there's plenty to discover. The most spectacular Great Barrier Reef island, **Heron Island**, is off the coast from Gladstone. Heron's reefs offer much to tantalize beneath the ocean's surface, its waters boasting 21 great dive sites. In summer, giant turtles nest on its beaches and in winter humpback whales cruise by.

North of Gladstone is **Rockhampton** and the pretty Capricorn Coast, named after the Tropic of Capricorn that runs through it. Rockhampton is also a stepping-stone to **Great Keppel Island**, a resort island popular with happy-go-lucky travelers and young Aussies on holiday. To the south, off the town of Bundaberg, lies another tiny coral cay, **Lady Elliot Island**, which is a nesting site for tens of thousands of sea birds, and has a first-rate fringing reef. Two little-known attractions in Bundaberg are its good shore scuba diving and a loggerhead turtle rookery that operates in summer on the beach. Farther south is the world's largest sand island: the World Heritage listed **Fraser Island**, which can be negotiated only on foot or by 4WD.

ROCKHAMPTON: THE BEEF CAPITAL

1,055km (633 miles) S of Cairns; 638km (383 miles) N of Brisbane

You may hear Queenslanders talk dryly about “Rockvegas.” Don’t be fooled. “Rocky” is the unofficial capital of the sprawling beef-cattle country inland, and the gateway to Great Keppel Island, which boasts some of the few inexpensive island retreats in Queensland, but bears no resemblance to Las Vegas. Heritage buildings line the Fitzroy River, where barramundi await keen fishermen. Every Friday night at the **Great Western Hotel**, bullriding cowboys take to the rodeo ring to test their skills against local Brahman bulls.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** Rockhampton is on the Bruce Highway, a 3½-hour drive south of Mackay, and almost 2 hours north of Gladstone.

By Plane **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) has flights from Brisbane, Mackay, Bundaberg, and Gladstone. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia) flies direct from Brisbane.

By Train **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122) trains call into Rockhampton daily. The trip from Brisbane takes just 7 hours on the high-speed Tilt Train; the fare is A\$94 (US\$61) economy class.

By Bus **McCafferty’s** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) and **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) call at Rockhampton on their many daily coach services between Brisbane and Cairns. The fare is A\$83 (US\$54) from Brisbane (trip time: just over 11 hr.) and A\$128 (US\$83) from Cairns (trip time: about 17 hr.).

VISITOR INFORMATION Drop by the **Capricorn Tourism Bureau**, whose information center is at the city’s southern entrance on Gladstone Road (at the Capricorn Spire; ☎ 07/4927 2055). It’s open daily 9am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND **Avis** (☎ 07/4927 3344), **Budget** (☎ 07/4926 4888), **Hertz** (☎ 07/4922 2721), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/4927 8755) have offices in Rockhampton. The local bus is **Sunbus** (☎ 07/4936 2133).

EXPLORING THE AREA: CAVERNS, ABORIGINAL CULTURE & MORE

The **Capricorn Caves** ★ **Kids** (☎ 07/4934 2883), 23km (14 miles) north of Rockhampton at Olsen’s Caves Road, off the Bruce Highway, have been a popular attraction in this part of the world ever since Norwegian pioneer John Olsen stumbled upon them in 1882. The limestone caves have origins in 380-million-year-old coral reef and today are a maze of small tunnels and larger chambers. The 1-hour tour, which winds through large caverns with stalactite and stalagmite formations before entering the 20m (66-ft.) high Cathedral Cave, is A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children ages 5 to 15. It departs daily (except Christmas) on the hour from 9am to 4pm (closing time is 5pm). Spelunkers (over 16 years old) can squeeze through tunnels and chimneys and rock-climb on a 3-hour adventure tour that costs A\$55 (US\$36); book 24 hours ahead for this. From December 1 to January 10, you can catch the Summer Solstice light cave on a tour departing every morning at 11am. On the longest day of the year the sun moves slowly over the Tropic of Capricorn and a ray of pure light pours through a hole in the limestone caves. It’s known as the Summer Solstice phenomenon and is the only time of year when the sun is directly over the Tropic of Capricorn. The caves are also home to thousands of small insectivorous bats, which leave the cave at sunset to feed. Plan enough time here to walk

the 30-minute dry rainforest trail, watch the video on bats in the interpretive center, and feed the wild kangaroos. If you like it enough to want to stay, there's a caravan and camping ground (with a pool) attached. Bus tours operate from Rockhampton; contact the Caves for details.

Another great place to go "batty" is at **Mt. Etna Caves National Park**, not far from Olsen's Capricorn Caverns. Tens of thousands of female bent wing bats pour from a small shaft atop a limestone cavern to feed in the evening. After gorging on insects, they return to **Bat Cleft** limestone caves, one of only five Little Bent Wing Bat maternity sites in the world. Guided tours are run in January and February by the Rockhampton's Department of Environment. Book tours through the **Department of Environment** (☎ 07/4936 0511) or **Capricorn Tourism** (☎ 07/4927 2055).

The **Dreamtime Cultural Centre** (☎ 07/4936 1655; www.dreamtimecentre.com.au), located on the Bruce Highway opposite the Yeppoon turnoff, 6km (3¾ miles) north of town, showcases Aboriginal culture. There's a sandstone cave replica, a display on the dugong (manatee) culture of the Torres Strait Islanders, and an Aboriginal crafts shop. The center is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 3:30pm. Admission, including the tour, is A\$13 (US\$8.45) for adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) for seniors, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for students and backpackers, and A\$11 (US\$7.15) for kids. Regular tours of burial sites and rock art, with didgeridoo demonstrations and boomerang-throwing classes, run from 10:30am.

Rockhampton has two free public gardens, nice for a stroll and a barbecue. **The Kershaw Gardens**, which display Aussie rainforest, wetland, and fragrant plants from north of the 30th parallel, also have a monorail and a pioneer-style slab hut where Devonshire teas are served. Enter off Charles Street. The **Rockhampton Botanic Gardens** (☎ 07/4936 8000) were established in 1869, and are quite lovely. Admission is free to the small zoo inside the grounds, which features 'roos, koalas, lorikeets, cassowaries, and a range of other creatures, including—rather bizarrely—two chimpanzees. The gardens are open 6am to 6pm daily, with the zoo open from 8am to 5pm. Enter off Ann Street or Spencer Street.

WHERE TO STAY

Southside Holiday Village Set in landscaped grounds near the tourist bureau, this well-run park of villas, cabins, and campgrounds is a pleasant place to stay. The kids will like the playground and the water slide in the pool; you will like the spick-and-span villas with separate bedrooms, bunk beds, tiny but neat bathrooms with fresh towels, and latticed patios. Ask for a villa away from the main road. There are public phones at reception (open 24 hr.), and the shop is open 6am to 11pm for basic supplies. For campers, there's a shared kitchen and barbecues. Three times a day, Monday through Saturday, the park runs a courtesy coach into town and the Botanic Gardens.

Lower Dawson Rd. (south side of town), Rockhampton, QLD 4700. ☎ 1800/075 911 in Australia, or 07/4927 3013. Fax 07/4927 7750. www.sshv.com.au. 20 tent sites; 37 powered campsites, 6 with bathroom (shower only); 26 cabins and villas, 20 with bathroom (shower only). A\$14–A\$18 (US\$9.10–US\$11.70) tent site double. Extra person A\$3–A\$5 (US\$1.95–US\$3.25). A\$18–A\$23 (US\$12–US\$15) powered campsite double. A\$36 (US\$23) caravan double. Extra person A\$6 (US\$3.90). A\$43–A\$62 (US\$28–US\$40) cabins and villas double. Extra person A\$6–A\$9 (US\$3.90–US\$5.85). Backpackers A\$17 (US\$11) for share accommodation. Linen in caravans and cabins A\$6 (US\$3.90) per set per night or A\$15 (US\$9.75) per week. A\$6 (US\$3.90) surcharge applies on cabins and villas on long weekends and public holidays. MC, V. **Amenities:** Heated outdoor pool with children's water slide; half-size tennis court; playground; tour desk. *In room* (villas only): A/C, TV, kitchenette, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Rockhampton R.S.L. Club TRADITIONAL AUSTRALIAN (Value) How can you beat the roast of the day when it includes three huge slices of pork with generous servings of hot vegetables and potatoes smothered in gravy, for under A\$15 (US\$9.75)? By ordering the half-serve, that's how, because that's still enough to fill you up. Australia's Returned Services League (R.S.L.) clubs are renowned for big meals at small prices. The wine is a great value, too. Sign in at the door.

Cambridge St. ☎ 07/4927 1737. Reservations recommended on weekends. Smart dress required. Main courses A\$8–A\$14 (US\$5.20–US\$9.10). No credit cards. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 6–8pm. Club open 10am–midnight.

GREAT KEPPEL ISLAND

15km (9 miles) E off Rockhampton

This 1,454-hectare (3,591-acre) island is home to one major resort, for the 18-to-35s, and a couple of smaller, family-oriented ones. You can stay at one of the resorts, or take a day trip from the mainland and pay to use many of the facilities including watersports equipment, pools, and food outlets. Seventeen beaches on the island are accessible by walking trails or dinghy (which you can rent). The shallow waters and fringing reef make the island a good choice for beginner divers; experienced divers will see corals, sea snakes, turtles, and rays. If you stay overnight, you will most likely be rewarded with one of the spectacular sunsets for which the island is famous.

GETTING THERE Launches operated by **Keppel Tourist Services** (☎ 07/4933 6744) and **Freedom Fast Ferries** (☎ 07/4933 6244) each make the 30-minute crossing from Rosslyn Bay Harbour, approximately 55km (34 miles) east of Rockhampton, three times daily. The return trip costs about A\$31 (US\$20) adults, A\$16 (US\$10) children ages 5 to 15, and A\$78 (US\$51) family of four.

From Rockhampton, take the Capricorn Coast scenic drive Route 10 to Emu Park and follow the signs to Rosslyn Bay Harbour. If you're coming to Rockhampton from the north, the scenic drive turnoff is just north of the city, and from there it's 46km (29 miles) to the harbor. You can leave your car in undercover storage at **Great Keppel Island Security Car Park** (☎ 07/4933 6670) at 422 Scenic Hwy., near the harbor, for A\$6.50 to A\$8 (US\$4.20–US\$5.20) per day.

Rothery's Coaches (☎ 07/4922 4320) runs a daily service from Kern Arcade on Bolsover Street in Rockhampton to Rosslyn Bay Harbour and back, three times a day. You can request a free pickup from the airport, train station, or your hotel. Round-trip fares from town are A\$14 (US\$9.10) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for seniors and students, A\$7 (US\$4.55) for children ages 5 to 14. The round-trip fare to/from the airport is A\$28 (US\$18) for adults, A\$22 (US\$14) for seniors and students, A\$14 (US\$9.10) for children, and A\$69 (US\$45) for families.

VISITOR INFORMATION **The Great Keppel Island Information Centre** at the ferry terminal at Rosslyn Bay Harbour (☎ 1800/77 4488 in Australia) dispenses information about the island's activities and accommodations.

Fun Fact Boom in the Net

A water activity invented in Oz is "boom netting," in which a large net is thrown off the back of a boat, and participants hang off it (and hang onto their bathing suits, as they sometimes lose tops or bottoms) and are towed across the waves.

WHERE TO STAY

Keppel Haven Not far from the ferry drop-off point at the beach is this campground-style enclave of humble but pretty cabins and tents, which is a good choice for families. Renovated in 1998, the cabins have terra-cotta-look floors, bright new kitchenettes, a small double bedroom, four bunks in the living/dining area for the kids, fans, and a little porch. The permanent tents come with twin or double beds, four bunks separated by a canvas partition, and electricity. Catamarans, windsurfers, fishing tackle, snorkel gear, and dinghies are available for hire on a pay-as-you-go basis. There's a general store selling basic groceries, and three communal kitchens and barbecues. The front desk has hair dryers; BYO towels or hire them (towels in cabins).

Great Keppel Island via Rockhampton, QLD 4700. ☎ **1800/35 6744** in Australia, or 07/4933 6744. Fax 07/4933 6429. ktsghi@networx.com.au. 40 permanent tents, none with bathroom; 6 family tents (double bed and 3 single beds); 12 cabins (each sleeps 6), all with bathroom (shower only); 12 bunkhouses (with 1 bathroom per 2 rooms). A\$18 (US\$12) tent per person triple or quad share; A\$20 (US\$13) per person twin/double; A\$28 (US\$18) single. A\$120 (US\$78) cabins twin or double. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). A\$80 (US\$52) bunkhouses double/twin; A\$25 (US\$16) quad share. A\$20 (US\$13) family tents per adult, A\$12 (US\$7.80) children 5–14. Free for children under 5. A\$5 (US\$3.25) per person linen for duration of stay for tents. Cabins and bunkhouses have linen supplied. Ask about 3-day, 2-night packages with Keppel Tourist Services that include ferry transfers and a 1/2-day snorkeling or boom-netting cruise. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tour desk; coin-op laundry.

Keppel Kampout The tents here are closer to permanent rooms: they have raised floors, little verandas, twin beds, cupboards and linen, and electricity. They're on a landscaped patch next door to Keppel Haven and a short walk from Contiki Great Keppel Island Resort and the beach. Catamarans, windsurfers, fishing tackle, snorkeling trips, and boom netting cruises are all free, and all your meals (even wine at dinner) are included in the one low price! All that is asked is that you wash your own dishes. BYO towels; they provide hair dryers.

Great Keppel Island via Rockhampton, QLD 4700. ☎ **1800/35 6744** in Australia, or 07/4933 6744. Fax 07/4933 6429. ktsghi@networx.com.au. 23 permanent tents, none with bathroom. A\$66 (US\$43) per person, shared accommodation. Standby rate A\$60 (US\$39) per person. Rates include 3 meals a day, watersports, and snorkeling and boom-netting tours. Ask about 2-night packages for added savings. MC, V.

Super-Cheap Sleeps

YHA Backpackers Village This self-contained village of cabins and permanent safari tents adjoins Keppel Haven Resort, and if you stay here, you have access to all the resort's facilities and budget meal packages, a bar, barbecue, boat/canoes, cafe, general store, Internet and e-mail access, and a tour desk which provides information on activities including hiking, diving, fishing, snorkeling, and windsurfing. The village also offers a package which includes 1 night's accommodation in Rockhampton, return bus and boat transfers, and 2 nights on the island for A\$110 (US\$72) per person quad share or A\$119 (US\$77) per person double or twin, or A\$146 (US\$95) per person double or twin with en suite bathroom.

Great Keppel Island, P.O. Box 571, Yeppoon, QLD 4703. ☎ **07/4933 6416** (7:30am–5pm). www.yha.org.au. 31 units, 9 with bathroom. 10 rooms are quad share, 19 are doubles, and 2 are family rooms. A\$18 (US\$12)

Value Saving Money on the Trip to Keppel

Keppel Tourist Services provides discounted round-trip transfers from the mainland for A\$30 (US\$20) per adult for guests of YHA Backpackers Village, Keppel Kampout, and Keppel Haven.

shared rooms adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) children 5–14; A\$20 (US\$13) double/twin with no bathroom; A\$30–A\$35 (US\$20–US\$23) double/twin with bathroom; A\$70 (US\$46) per family room. MC, V.

GLADSTONE: GATEWAY TO HERON ISLAND

550km (330 miles) N of Brisbane; 1,162 (697 miles) S of Cairns

The industrial port town of Gladstone is the departure point for beautiful Heron Island. It is also home to the delectable mud-crab, best savored over a glass of wine at the award-winning **Flinders Seafood Restaurant**. About 25km (16 miles) south of the town are the beach towns of **Boyne Island** and **Tannum Sands**, worth a detour.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND **By Car** Gladstone is on the coast 21km (12½ miles) off the Bruce Highway.

By Plane **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) has many flights a day from Brisbane (trip time: 75 min.) and two direct flights a day from Rockhampton and Bundaberg.

By Train **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122) operates trains most days to Gladstone from Brisbane and Cairns. The fare from Brisbane (trip time: 6 hr. on the high-speed Tilt Train) is A\$84 (US\$55); fares from Cairns (trip time: 20 hr.) range from A\$151 (US\$98) for a seat to A\$298 (US\$194) for a first-class sleeper on the Sunlander.

By Bus **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) and **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) operate many daily coaches to Gladstone on their Brisbane–Cairns runs. The fare is A\$78 (US\$51) from Brisbane (trip time: 10½ hr.) and A\$142 (US\$92) from Cairns (trip time: 17½ hr.).

Avis (☎ 07/4978 2633), **Budget** (☎ 07/4972 8488), **Hertz** (☎ 07/4978 6899), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/4972 5999) all have offices in Gladstone.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Gladstone Information Centre** is located in the ferry terminal at Gladstone Marina, Bryan Jordan Drive, Gladstone, QLD 4680 (☎ 07/4972 9000; www.gladstoneregion.org.au). It's open from 8:30am to 5pm Monday through Friday, and from 9am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday.

WHERE TO STAY

Country Plaza International This four-level hotel in the center of town runs a free shuttle to the wharf for guests bound for Heron Island. Gladstone's largest and best hotel, it caters primarily to business travelers, so it has ample facilities—spacious rooms with balconies, modern bathrooms, an upscale seafood restaurant, and a pool and sun deck. Most rooms have views over the port or the city. There are six three-bedroom apartments and one two-bedroom apartment.

100 Goondoon St., Gladstone, QLD 4680. ☎ 07/4972 4499. Fax 07/ 4972 4921. www.plazahotels.com.au/gladstone.htm. 80 units. A\$130 (US\$85) double; A\$140–A\$150 (US\$91–US\$98) apts. AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; business center; free transfers from airport, coach terminal, marina, and train station; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, fax, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

HERON ISLAND: JEWEL OF THE REEF

72km (43 miles) NE of Gladstone

The difference between Heron and other islands is that once there, you have no need to travel further to the reef. Step off the beach, and you enter magnificent fields of coral that seem to stretch for miles. The myriad life forms which abound are accessible to everyone through diving, snorkeling, reef walks at low tide, or

aboard a semi-submersible vessel which allows you to view the ocean floor without getting wet. When geologist Joseph Bette Jukes named this piece of paradise in 1843, he overlooked the turtles for which it is now famous and commemorated the reef herons that abounded on the island. There has been a resort here since 1932, and in 1943, the island was made a national park. It is a haven for wildlife and people, and an experience of a lifetime is guaranteed at almost any time of year. Heron is a rookery for giant green and loggerhead turtles. Resort guests gather on the beach from late November to February to watch the turtles lay eggs, and from February to mid-April to see the hatched babies scuttle down to the water. Humpback whales pass through from June to September.

Three days on Heron gives plenty of time to see everything. The island is so small you can walk around it at a leisurely pace in about half an hour. One of the first things to do is to take advantage of the organized activities which occur several times a day and are designed so guests can plan their own days. Snorkeling and reef walking are major occupations for visitors—if they're not diving, that is, for the island is home to 21 of the world's most stunning dive sites.

Guided island walks are another way to explore the island. Walks include a visit to the research station based on the island. As for the reef walk, just borrow a pair of sandshoes, a balance pole, and a viewing bucket and head off with a guide at low tide. The walk can take up to 90 minutes, but there's no compulsion to stay; if it gets too hot you can head back for the sanctuary of your room or the shady bar area.

A fishing trip should also be on the agenda, even for non-anglers. The reef fish seem to jump onto the hook and the resort chef is happy to cook it for you for dinner!

GETTING THERE A courtesy coach meets flights at 10:30am to take guests to Gladstone Marina for the launch transfer to the island (trip time: 1 hr. 40 min); it departs 11am daily (except Christmas). Round-trip boat transfer costs A\$170 (US\$111) for adults, half price for kids ages 3 to 14. A new 130-seater catamaran to be launched in August 2003 was designed to make the sometimes rough trip smoother; at press time, we hadn't been able to test it out, so make sure you take sea-sickness medication with you just in case.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE: WORTH A SPLURGE

Heron Island Resort ★★ ★ *Kids* This lovely, low-key resort has been transformed over the past few years, and changes to the accommodations continue alongside cosmetic changes. The latest are the chic new Wistari Suites, each with a private garden and veranda. But new accommodations, a revamped central complex, and a stylish, contemporary new look have not changed the focus on the outdoors. The brilliant colors of the island's surrounding water and Reef are reflected in the interiors, and everything is light-filled and breezy. Heron's central complex is equal parts grand Queenslander home and sophisticated beach house, with

Heron Island: Worth a Splurge

Heron Island's only resort isn't cheap, but it is included here because it is, quite simply, one of the world's special places and too good to miss. You can't make a day trip to Heron Island, so if you want to visit, you have to stay overnight. Meals are included in the tariff, and a number of activities, so factor that into your decision on whether to visit.

smart bar and lounge areas open to ocean views and sunsets. Duplex-style Turtle Rooms are designed for couples or families, both with en suite bathrooms, casual living area, and a shady veranda, or you can go for greater luxury in the suites or the private beach house.

Heron Island, via Gladstone, QLD 4680 (P&O Resorts, G.P.O. Box 5287, Sydney, NSW 2001). ☎ **1800/737 678** in Australia, 800/225 9849 in the U.S. and Canada, 020 7805 3875 in the U.K., 02/9257 5050 or fax 02/9299 2477 (Sydney reservations office). www.poresorts.com. 109 units (some with shower only). A\$460 (US\$299) Turtle Rooms double; A\$550 (US\$358) Reef Suite double; A\$660 (US\$429) Heron Beachside Suite double; A\$890 (US\$579) Point Suite, Wistari Suite, or private Beach House double. Extra adult A\$150 (US\$98), extra children 3–14 A\$90 (US\$59). Free crib. Rates include all meals and many activities. Ask about special packages. AE, DC, MC, V. No children allowed in Point suites or Beach House. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; 2 day/night tennis courts; Jacuzzi; limited watersports equipment rental; Heron Kids Junior Rangers program (7–12 only) during Australian school vacations only; game room; activities desk; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry. **In room:** Ceiling fan, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, no phone (except in the 4 Point Suites and the Beach House) or TV. There are public phones, a TV in the lounge, and Internet access is available at reception.

BUNDABERG: GATEWAY TO LADY ELLIOT ISLAND

384km (230 miles) N of Brisbane; 1,439km (863 miles) S of Cairns

The small sugar town of Bundaberg is the closest to the southernmost point of the Great Barrier Reef. If you visit the area between November and March, allow an evening to visit the Mon Repos turtle rookery. Divers may want to take in some of Australia's best shore diving right off Bundaberg's beaches.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND **By Car** Bundaberg is on the Isis Highway, about 50km (31 miles) off the Bruce Highway from Gin Gin in the north and 53km (33 miles) off the Bruce Highway from just north of Childers in the south.

By Plane **Sunstate Airlines** (book through Qantas at ☎ **13 13 13** in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies from Brisbane daily and from Gladstone three times a week.

By Train **Queensland Rail** (☎ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122) trains stop in Bundaberg every day en route between Brisbane and Cairns. The fare is A\$59 (US\$38) from Brisbane economy class on the Tilt Train; fares range from A\$163 (US\$106) for a seat to A\$316 (US\$205) for a first-class berth on the Sunlander from Cairns.

By Bus **McCafferty's** (☎ **13 14 99** in Australia) and **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ **13 20 30** in Australia) call here many times a day on their coach runs between Brisbane and Cairns. The 7-hour trip from Brisbane costs A\$58 (US\$38). From Cairns it is a 22-hour trip, for which the fare is A\$155 (US\$101).

Avis (☎ **07/4152 1877**), **Budget** (☎ **07/4153 1600**), **Hertz** (☎ **07/4155 2403**), and **Thrifty** (☎ **07/4151 6222**) all have offices in Bundaberg.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Bundaberg Region Visitor Centre** is at 271 Bourbong St. at Mulgrave Street, Bundaberg, QLD 4670 (☎ **1800/308 888** in Australia, or 07/4153 8888; www.bundabergregion.info). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The best shore diving in Queensland is in Bundaberg's **Woongarra Marine Park**. It has soft and hard corals, urchins, rays, sea snakes, and 60 fish species, plus a World War II Beaufort bomber wreck. There are several scuba operators. **Salty's Dive Centre** (☎ **1800/625 476** in Australia, or 07/4153 4747; fax 07/4152 6707; www.saltys.net) rents dive gear for A\$45 (US\$29). They also run day trips

Up Close & Personal with a Turtle

The egg in my hand is warm, soft, and about the size of a Ping Pong ball. At our feet, a giant green turtle sighs deeply as she lays a clutch of about 120 eggs in a pear-shaped chamber dug from the sand. A tear rolls from her eye. In the distance the wedgetail shearwaters call to each other over the sound of the waves.

Our guide has retrieved the turtle egg from the egg chamber, and we pass it around in silence. It is just one of the amazing experiences a few days on Heron Island can bring. The egg-laying ritual of the turtles is central to a trip to Heron Island in the summer, when they make their annual visit to the sandy shores of the atoll. At night and in the early morning, small groups of people gather on the beaches to witness the turtles lumber up the beach, dig a hole, and lay their eggs.

Every night during the season, volunteer guides from the University of Queensland research station based on the island are on hand to give an added dimension to the experience. You can watch and ask questions as the researchers tag and measure the turtles before they return to the water.

Or get up early in the morning and head to the beach. In a few minutes, I had found turtle tracks and followed them up the beach to find a nesting female. Nearby, another two turtles had attracted small clusters of spectators. The turtles are not easily disturbed and you can get very close.

The laying season is from December to February, with the hatchlings scrambling down the beach from January to May. Only one in 5,000 hatchlings will live to return in about 50 years to lay their own eggs.

Another good place to watch the turtles nesting is at **Mon Repos Beach** outside Bundaberg. Mon Repos Conservation Park is one of the largest loggerhead turtle rookeries in the South Pacific. The visitor center by the beach has a great display on the turtle life cycle and shows films at approximately 7:30pm each night in summer. Visitors can turn up anytime from 7pm on; the action goes on through the night, sometimes as late as 6am. Nesting happens around high tide; hatching usually occurs between 8pm and midnight. Get there early to join the first group of 70 people, the maximum allowed at one laying or hatching. Crowds can be up to 500 strong in mid-December and January. You may have to wait around for quite a while, and in fact, on our visit here with two young children we gave up when our turn had not come by about midnight. Take a flashlight if you can.

The **Mon Repos Turtle Rookery** (★ (📞 07/4159 1652 for the visitor center) is 14km (8¾ miles) east of Bundaberg's town center. Follow Bourbong Street out of town toward Burnett Heads as it becomes Bundaberg–Bargara Road. Take the Port Road to the left and look for the Mon Repos signs to the right. Admission to the visitor center is free April through November (9am–4pm), but when the turtles start nesting, you pay A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults and A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children ages 5 to 15. November through March, the center is open daily from 7pm until midnight.

for A\$100 (US\$65) including all equipment. Five-day open water and 4-day shore courses are A\$580 (US\$377) and A\$169 (US\$110), respectively. A 3-day/3-night southern Great Barrier Reef dive cruise costs A\$495 (US\$322), plus A\$65 (US\$42) for all equipment rental. Night dives are free but you pay A\$10 (US\$6.50) for chemical sticks and light.

WHERE TO STAY

Acacia Motor Inn This tidy motel is a short stroll from the town center. It recently has undergone a complete refit inside and out, with new furniture, carpets, and TVs, as well as a repaint and the addition of shade sails around the pool area. The rooms are clean and well-kept, extra-large family rooms at a decent price. Local restaurants provide room service, and many are within walking distance. The five family units have kitchenettes.

248 Bourbong St., Bundaberg, QLD 4670. ☎ 1800/351 735 in Australia, or 07/4152 3411. Fax 07/4152 2387. acabund@fc-hotels.com.au. 26 units (all with shower only). A\$72 (US\$47) double. Extra adult A\$11 (US\$7.15) adults, extra children under 12 A\$6 (US\$3.90). A\$5 (US\$3.25) crib. AE, DC, MC, V. Undercover parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor saltwater pool; nearby golf course; access to nearby health club; bike rental; tour desk; room service (6:30am–9pm); in-room massage; coin-op laundry; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, dataport, stocked minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

LADY ELLIOT ISLAND

80km (48 miles) NE of Bundaberg

The southernmost Great Barrier Reef island, Lady Elliot is a 42-hectare (105-acre) coral cay ringed by a wide shallow lagoon filled with dazzling coral life.

Reef walking, snorkeling, and diving are why people come to this coral cay that's so small you can walk across it in 15 minutes. You may snorkel and reef-walk during the 2 to 3 hours before and after high tide, so plan your schedule accordingly. You will see dazzling corals and brilliantly colored fish, clams, sponges, urchins, and anemones. Divers will see a range of marine life, including green and loggerhead turtles (which nest on the beach Nov–Mar). Whales pass by from June to September.

Lady Elliot is a sparse, grassy island rookery, not a lush tropical paradise, so don't expect white sand and palm trees. Some people will find it too spartan; others will relish chilling out in a beautiful, peaceful location with reef all around. Just be prepared for the smell and constant noise of those birds.

GETTING THERE You reach the island by a 30-minute flight from Bundaberg or Hervey Bay. Book your air travel along with your accommodation. Round-trip fares are A\$175 (US\$114) for adults and A\$88 (US\$57) for children ages 3 to 12. There is a 10-kilogram (22-lb.) luggage limit. **Seair Pacific** (☎ 07/5599 4509; www.seairpacific.com.au) operates day tours from Brisbane and the Gold Coast, which include flights, snorkel gear, glass-bottom boat ride, lunch, and guided activities.

Moments **The Birds of Lady Elliot**

When you land on the grass airstrip at Lady Elliot Island, you'll think you're on the set of Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The air is thick with tens of thousands of swirling noddy terns and bridal terns that nest in every available branch. They leave their mark on every surface, including you (so bring a big cheap hat for protection).

WHERE TO STAY

Lady Elliot Island Resort ★ Accommodation here is fairly basic, but visitors come for the reef, not the room. Top of the range are the Island Suites, which have one or two separate bedrooms, and great sea views from the deck. Most Reef rooms have a double bed and two bunks, and a deck with views through the trees to the sea. Shearwater bunkrooms sleep up to six, and all room types have modern private bathrooms. The cool, spacious tent cabins have four bunks, electric lighting, and timber floors, but share the public toilets and showers used by day guests. All accommodations have fans. The limited facilities include a boutique, a dive shop, and an education center. There is no air-conditioning, no keys (secure storage is at front desk), no TVs, no radio, and one public telephone. The food is basic. A low-key program of mostly free activities includes glass-bottom boat rides, badminton, guided walks, and beach volleyball, and because of the relatively low number of guests, you pretty much get the Reef to yourself. A minimum 3-night stay applies from December 24 to January 5.

Great Barrier Reef via Bundaberg. (P.O. Box 206, Torquay, QLD 4655). ☎ 1800/072 200 in Australia, or 07/5536 3644. Fax 07/5536 7285. www.ladyelliott.com.au. 40 units, 20 with bathroom (shower only). A\$290 (US\$189) double for tent cabins; A\$330 (US\$215) double for Shearwater bunkrooms; A\$390 (US\$254) double for Reef units; A\$450 (US\$293) double for 1-bedroom or A\$480 (US\$312) double for 2-bedroom Island Suites. Extra child 3–12 A\$75 (US\$49). Ask about 2-, 4-, 5-, and 7-night packages, and dive packages. Rates include breakfast and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Cafe/bistro and dining room; saltwater pool; children's program for ages 5–12 (during Queensland school holidays only). *In room:* Ceiling or wall fans, no phone.

7 Fraser Island: Eco-Adventures & 4WD Fun

1,547 (928 miles) S of Cairns; 260km (156 miles) N of Brisbane; 15km (9 miles) E of Hervey Bay

The biggest sand island in the world, this 164,000-hectare (405,000-acre) World Heritage-listed island off the central Queensland coast attracts a mix of sensitive eco-tourists and Aussie fishermen. Fraser is almost untouched, with eucalyptus woodlands, soaring dunes, clear creeks, ancient rainforest, blue lakes, ochre-colored sand cliffs, and a stunning 121-km-long (75-mile) beach. For 4WD fans though, Fraser's beauty lies in its complete absence of paved roads. On weekends when the fish are running, it's nothing to see 100 4WDs lining **75-Mile Beach**, which is a gazetted road. Pedestrians should beware!

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** Hervey (pronounced *Har-vey*) Bay is the main gateway to the island. Take the Bruce Highway to Maryborough, then the 34km (21-mile) road to Hervey Bay. If approaching from the north, turn off the highway at Torbanlea, north of Maryborough, and cut across to Hervey Bay. Allow 3 hours from the Sunshine Coast, a good 5 hours from Brisbane.

Guests at **Kingfisher Bay Resort** (see below) can get to the resort aboard the **Kingfisher Bay Fastcat**, which departs Urangan Boat Harbour at Hervey Bay four times a day between 8:30am and 6:30pm (7pm Fri–Sat). Round-trip fare for the 40-minute crossing is A\$35 (US\$23) adults and A\$17 (US\$11) kids 4 to 14. The resort runs a courtesy shuttle from Hervey Bay's airport and coach terminal to the harbor. You can park free in the open at the Fastcat terminal; **Fraser Coast Secure Vehicle Storage**, at 629 The Esplanade (☎ 07/4125 2783), a 5-minute walk from the terminal, gives covered parking for A\$7.70 to \$9.90 (US\$5–US\$6.45) per 24 hours.

By Bus Both **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCaferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) coaches stop several times a day in Hervey Bay

on their Brisbane–Cairns–Brisbane routes. The 6-hour trip from Brisbane costs A\$43 (US\$28). From Cairns, the fare is A\$177 (US\$115) for a 23-hour trip.

By Train The nearest train station is in **Maryborough West**, 34km (20 miles) from Hervey Bay. Passengers on the high-speed **Tilt Train** (Sun–Fri) can book a connecting bus service to Pialba via **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122). The fare from Brisbane for the 3½-hour Tilt Train trip is A\$52 (US\$34) economy class, plus nominal bus connection fare. Fares are A\$175 (US\$113) in a seat and A\$334 (US\$217) in a first-class sleeper from Cairns (trip time: just under 27 hr.). Train passengers from the north must take a courtesy shuttle to Maryborough Central, then take the next available local bus to Pialba.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND BY 4WD Four-wheel-drive is the only permissible mode of vehicle transport on the island. Many 4WD rental outfits are based in Hervey Bay. You must be 21 or over to rent a 4WD. You'll pay about A\$100 to A\$195 (US\$65–US\$126) a day, plus around A\$20 to A\$35 (US\$13–US\$23) per day to reduce the deductible, which is usually A\$4,000 (US\$2,600), plus a bond (typically A\$500/US\$325). You must also buy a government Vehicle Access Permit, which costs A\$30 (US\$20) from your rental-car company, Urangan Boat Harbour, or the River Heads boat ramp; or A\$40 (US\$26) from a Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service office on the island. Both **Bay 4WD Centre** (☎ 07/4128 2981; www.bay4wd.com.au) and **Ausbay 4WD Rentals** (☎ 07/4124 6177) rent four-wheel-drives, offer camping and accommodated four-wheel-drive packages; rent camping gear; organize Vehicle Access Permits, barge bookings, camping permits, and secure storage for your car; and pick you up free from the airport, coach terminal, or your hotel.

Four-wheel-drives transfer by **Fraser Venture barge** (☎ 07/4125 4444), which runs at least three times a day from Mary River Heads, 17km (11 miles) south of Urangan Boat Harbour. The round-trip fare for vehicle and driver is A\$82 (US\$53), plus A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) per extra passenger. It is a good idea to book a place for the 45-minute crossing.

Kingfisher Bay 4WD Hire (☎ 07/4120 3366) within Kingfisher Bay Resort (see below) rents four-wheel-drives for A\$195 (US\$127) a day, plus a A\$30 (US\$20) Fraser Island driving permit and a A\$2,000 (US\$1,300) security deposit (by credit card) held until return of the vehicle in the same condition as hired. They allow 1-day rentals. Book well in advance.

Tips 4WD Fundamentals

Driving a 4WD is great fun and not hard for a beginner, but if you've never driven one, get a good briefing from your rental company before you head out. Fraser's loose sand tracks can be tricky, and getting bogged is common. The beach can be dangerous for the novice—if you travel too high up, you can get trapped in soft sand; if you travel too low, a wave can bog your vehicle in soft sand under the water (and rust your car). Car-rental companies don't like that, and they can smell salt on an axle a mile away! Stick to the firmest tracks, know the tides, and ask for advice. You'll have to drive a lot slower on a 4WD trail than you would on a conventional road; take that into account when you plan your day. For example, it takes a full day to get to Indian Head and back, and then only when the tide is favorable. Look out for light planes landing on the beach (which is a runway as well as a road).

Tips Please Don't Feed the Dingoes

The dingoes that roam the island are emboldened by visitors who have—sometimes deliberately and sometimes unwittingly—fed them over the years. These dangerous wild animals have been responsible for one death and several serious attacks in recent years. Do not feed them, and keep your distance. There are fines of up to A\$3,000 (US\$1,950) for feeding dingoes on Fraser Island.

Fraser Island Taxi Service (☎ 07/4127 9188) is another option for getting around, and they use four-wheel-drive, of course. It's based at Eurong on the island's eastern side. A typical fare, from Kingfisher Bay Resort across the island to go fishing on 75-Mile Beach, say, is A\$65 (US\$42). The taxi seats five.

VISITOR INFORMATION Contact the **Hervey Bay Tourism Bureau**, Urraween Road at Maryborough–Hervey Bay Road, Pialba, or P.O. Box 8, Hervey Bay, QLD 465 (☎ 1800/811 728 in Australia, or 07/4124 2912; www.herveybaytourism.com.au). A better source for Web-connected travelers is www.hervey.com.au. The **Marina Kiosk** (☎ 07/4128 9800) at Urangan Boat Harbour is a one-stop booking and information agency for all Fraser-related travel. Several Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service information offices are on the island.

There are no towns and very few facilities, food stores, or services on the island, so if you're camping, take all supplies with you.

ECO-EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Fraser's gem-like turquoise lakes and tea-colored “perched” lakes in the dunes are among the island's biggest attractions. The brilliant blue **Lake McKenzie** is absolutely beautiful; a swim here may be the highlight of your visit. **Lake Birrabeen** is another popular swimming spot. Don't miss a refreshing swim in the fast-flowing clear shallows of **Eli Creek**. Wade up the creek for a mile or two and let the current carry you back down. You should also take the boardwalk through a verdant forest of palms and ferns along the banks of **Wanggoolba Creek**.

Don't swim at **75-Mile Beach**, which hugs the eastern edge of the island—there are dangerously strong currents and a healthy shark population to contend with. Instead, swim in the **Champagne Pools** (also called the Aquarium)—pockets of soft sand protected from the worst of the waves by rocks. The bubbling seawater turns the pools into miniature spas. The pools are just north of **Indian Head**, a 60m (197-ft.) rocky outcrop at the northern end of the beach.

View the island's famous colored sand in its natural setting—the 70m (230-ft.) cliffs called the **Cathedrals**, which stretch for kilometers north of the settlement of Happy Valley on the eastern side of the Island.

Some of Queensland's best fishing is on Fraser Island. Anglers can throw a line in the surf gutters off the beach (freshwater fishing is not allowed). Bream, whiting, flathead, and swallowtail are the beach catches. Indian Head is good for rock species and tailor, and the waters east off Waddy Point yield northern and southern reef fish. Kingfisher Bay Resort (see “Where to Stay: Worth a Splurge” below) offers free fish clinics, rents tackle, and organizes half-day fishing jaunts.

From August through October, tour boats crowd the straits to see humpback whales returning to Antarctica with calves in tow. Kingfisher Bay Resort runs a **whale-watching cruise** ⚓ from Urangan Harbour.

WHERE TO STAY

Fraser Island Retreat ★ *Finds* This is the wild side of Fraser Island, just minutes from 75-Mile Beach. Don't come expecting a luxury resort, but one that has comfortable timber cottages and all the amenities you need. There's a small pool, surrounded by a deck and deck chairs, and each cottage has a small veranda to sit out on. The rooms all have fans, limited cooking facilities, and a VCR (you can rent videos). The bar/bistro is open for all meals, but be warned that it is used by day-tour buses as their lunch stop so it can be crowded at those times. If you want to cook for yourself, there's a general store to buy food and you can also buy take-out liquor. The store also sells fuel, ice, and gas for campers. You can also hire a four-wheel-drive from the resort. There's a public phone to use. The only access is by plane (**Air Fraser Island**, ☎ 07/4125 3600) or bus. **Fraser Island Tours** (☎ 1800/446 655 in Australia, or 07/4125 3933) transfers guests to the resort from Hervey Bay and also runs day tours of the island for A\$99 (US\$64) adults and A\$55 (US\$36) children ages 4 to 14.

Happy Valley, Fraser Island, QLD 4650. ☎ 1800/446 655 in Australia, or 07/4127 9144. Fax 07/4127 9131. www.fraserislandco.com.au. 9 units (all with shower only). A\$110 (US\$72) 1-bedroom lodge (sleeps 1–3); A\$150 (US\$98) family lodge (sleeps up to 5). Ask about package deals. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV/VCR, kitchenette, small fridge, no phone.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Kingfisher Bay Resort ★★ *Kids* This sleek, environment-friendly eco-resort lies low along Fraser's west coast. Hotel guest rooms are smart and contemporary, with a Japanese-style screen opening onto a balcony looking into the bush, but my pick is the two- and three-bedroom villas just a short walk from the main resort area and pools. The hillside villas, which have Jacuzzis on their balconies, are fairly luxurious, but there's that long haul up the hill to contend with. Travelers on package tours (see "Organized Tours & Package Deals on Fraser Island" below) stay in the rustic Wilderness Lodge, which is eight lodges, each with four double, twin, or four-bunk rooms; simple but atmospheric shared living quarters; shared bathrooms; and a deck. They are not air-conditioned but have fans. There's a pool and the Sandbar Restaurant and you are free to join in all the daily activities. An impressive lineup of eco-educational activities includes daily four-wheel-drive tours with a ranger to points of interest around the island, free guided walks daily, and an excellent free Junior Eco-Ranger program on weekends and school vacations. You can also join bird-watching tours, guided canoe

Tips Organized Tours & Package Deals on Fraser Island

If staying at the Kingfisher Bay Resort is beyond your budget, consider a **day trip** or booking a package. Kingfisher Bay Resort offers a range of packages. Its 3-day, 2-night package (☎ 1800 172 555 in Australia; www.cooldingo.tour.com), includes Fastcat transfers from Hervey Bay, tours of the island, and twin or quad-share accommodations in the Wilderness Lodge (see "Worth a Splurge" above). The package, including most meals, is A\$303 (US\$197) quad share or A\$353 (US\$229) twin share per person plus National Park fees of A\$16.50 (US\$11). A 2-day/1-night package is A\$230 (US\$150) quad share or A\$270 (US\$176) twin share plus National Park fees of A\$11 (US\$7.15). The resort also offers a day trip from Hervey Bay with touring and lunch for A\$105 (US\$68) per person ☎ 07/4125 5155.

Tips Walking Fraser Island

The stunning Fraser Island World Heritage Area is the location for the second of Queensland's six Great Walks (p. 316). To open in June 2004, the Fraser Island Great Walk (☎ 07/5459 6114; www.env.qld.gov.au) will provide a continuous winding track from Dilli Village to Lake Garawongera. The main trail will be 85km (53 miles) long and take 6 to 8 days to complete, but there are off-shoots which provide short, full day, overnight and 2- to 3-day walks. The walk will take you to many of the island's popular landmarks such as Lake McKenzie, Central Station, Wangoolba Creek, Valley of the Giants, and Lake Wabby.

trips, sunset champagne sails, and dolphin and dugong (manatee) spotting cruises. Wildlife videos play continuously in the lobby, and the on-site ranger office lists the animals and plants you are most likely to spot.

Fraser Island (PMB 1, Urangan, QLD 4655). ☎ 1800/072 555 in Australia, or 07/4120 3333. Fax 07/4120 3326. www.kingfisherbay.com. 262 units. A\$270 (US\$176) double for hotel rooms; A\$825 (US\$536) 3 nights in 2-bedroom villa (sleeps 5); A\$1,260 (US\$819) 3 nights in 3-bedroom villa (sleeps 6); minimum 3-night stay in villas. Extra person A\$22 (US\$14). Free crib. Ask about package deals. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurant; 4 bars; 2 outdoor pools (with waterslide for kids); day/night tennis courts; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment and fishing tackle for hire; kids' club; game room; tour desk, babysitting; laundry (in villas only). *In room:* A/C (hotel rooms only), TV, kitchen (villas only), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

CAMPING

Fraser has seven camping areas, most with showers and toilets, or you can camp on the beach. Camping permits, which you can buy at the various **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service** offices on the island (☎ 07/4127 9191), are A\$4 (US\$2.60) per person or A\$16 (US\$10) per family per night.

8 The Sunshine Coast

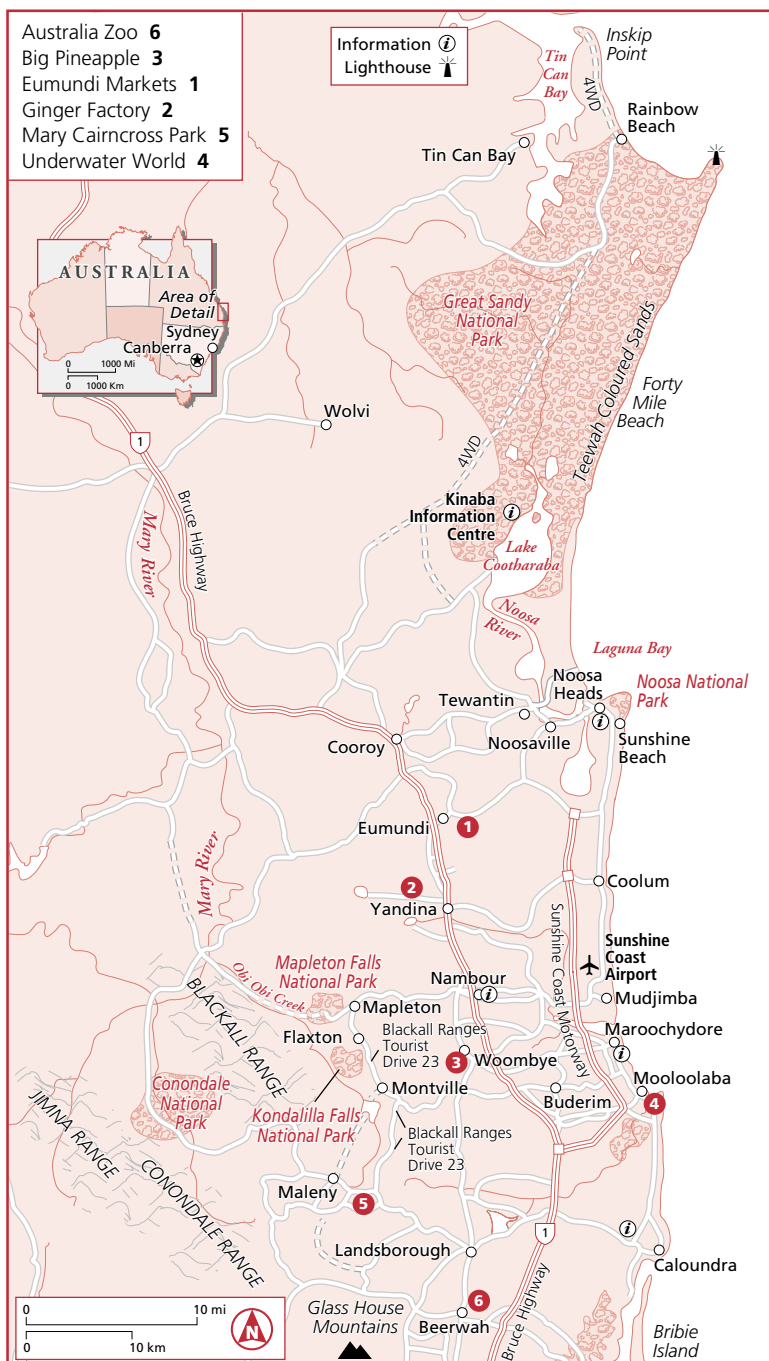
Warm sunshine, beaches upon beaches, trendy restaurants, and a relaxed lifestyle attract Aussies to the Sunshine Coast in droves. Despite some unsightly commercial development in recent years, the Sunshine Coast is still a great spot if you like lazing on sandy beaches and enjoying a good meal.

The Sunshine Coast starts at **Caloundra**, 83km (50 miles) north of Brisbane and runs all the way to **Rainbow Beach**, 40km (24 miles) north of **Noosa Heads**, where the fashionable crowd goes. There are plenty of inexpensive motels and holiday apartments to rent. Noosa's restaurants are great, and while none are super-expensive, few are cheap—so be prepared to spend a little if you want to eat out.

Most of the Noosa's sunbathing, dining, shopping, and socializing takes place on trendy Hastings Street, Noosa Heads, and the adjacent Main Beach. The commercial strip of Noosa Junction is a 1-minute drive; a 3-minute drive west along the river takes you to low-key **Noosaville**, where Australian families rent holiday apartments. Giving Noosa a run for its money is the newly spruced up **Mooloolaba**, about 30km (18 miles) south, which has a better beach and about 90 great restaurants.

A short drive away, in the hinterland, mountain towns like Maleny, Montville, and Mapleton lead the way to the stunning beauty of the Glass House Mountains, a dramatic series of 13 volcanic plugs.

The Sunshine Coast



SUNSHINE COAST ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** If you're driving from Brisbane, take the Bruce Highway north to Aussie World theme park at Palmview, then exit onto the Sunshine Motorway to Mooloolaba, Maroochydore or Noosa Heads. The trip takes about 2 hours.

By Plane **Sunstate Airlines** (book through Qantas), has two or three flights daily (trip time: 30 min.) from Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast Airport in Maroochydore, 42km (26 miles) south of Noosa Heads. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies direct from Melbourne. **Henry's Airport Bus Service** (☎ 07/5474 0199) meets all flights; door-to-door transfers to Noosa Heads are A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults and A\$8 (US\$5.20) for kids ages 4 to 14, one-way. Bookings are not necessary for arrival pickups but should be made for transfers back to the airport about 24 hours ahead.

By Train The nearest station to Noosa Heads is in **Cooroy**, 25km (15 miles) away, to which **Queensland Rail** (☎ 13 22 32 in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122) operates two daily services from Brisbane on its suburban **CityTrain** (☎ 07/3235 5555) network. The trip takes about 2 hours and 30 minutes and the fare is A\$18 (US\$12) including bus connection to Noosa Heads. Queensland Rail's long-distance trains departing Brisbane pick up but do not drop off passengers in Cooroy, with the exception of the high-speed **Tilt** train (which runs Sun–Fri). The fare is A\$28 (US\$18). The **Sunlander** makes several trips from Cairns each week; the fare is A\$183 (US\$119) for a seat, A\$345 (US\$224) for a first-class sleeper. Local bus company **Sunbus** (☎ 13 12 30 or 07/5450 7888) meets most trains at Cooroy station and travels to Noosa Heads; take bus no. 12.

By Bus Several companies have service to Noosa Heads from Brisbane, including **Sun-air** (☎ 1800/804 340 in Australia, or 07/5478 2811) and **Suncoast Pacific** (☎ 07/5443 1011 on the Sunshine Coast, or 07/3236 1901 in Brisbane) which also runs from Hervey Bay. **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) have many daily services from all major towns along the Bruce Highway between Brisbane and Cairns. Trip time to Noosa Heads is 2 hours and 20 minutes from Brisbane, and just under 26 hours from Cairns. The single fare is A\$21 (US\$14) from Brisbane and A\$186 (US\$121) from Cairns.

VISITOR INFORMATION Write to **Tourism Sunshine Coast Ltd**, P.O. Box 264, Mooloolaba, QLD 4557 (☎ 07/5477 7311; fax 07/5477 7322; www.sunshinecoast.org) for information. In Noosa, drop into the **Noosa Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 07/5447 4988; fax 07/5474 9494) at the eastern roundabout on Hastings Street where it intersects Noosa Drive. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. Other tourist information centers are: **Nambour Tourist Information Centre**, 5 Coronation Ave., Nambour (☎ 07/5476 1933); **Maroochy Tourism**, Sixth Avenue and Aerodrome Road, Maroochydore, (☎ 07/5479 1566); and **Caloundra City Information Centre**, 7 Caloundra Rd., Caloundra (☎ 07/5491 9233).

GETTING AROUND Major car-rental companies on the Sunshine Coast are **Avis** (☎ 07/5443 5055 Sunshine Coast Airport, or 07/5447 4933 Noosa Heads), **Budget** (☎ 07/5448 7455 airport, or 07/5447 4588 Noosa Heads), **Hertz** (07/5448 9731 airport, or 07/5447 2253 Noosa Heads), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/5443 1733 airport, or 07/5447 2299 Noosa Heads). Many local companies rent cars and four-wheel-drives, including **Trusty** (☎ 07/5491 2444).

The local bus company is **Sunbus** (☎ 13 12 30 in Australia, or 07/5492 8700).

EXPLORING THE AREA

HITTING THE BEACH & OTHER OUTDOOR FUN Main Beach, Noosa Heads, is the place to swim, surf, and sunbathe. If the bikini-clad super-model lookalikes are too much, head to Sunshine Beach, just behind Noosa Junction off the David Low Way, about 2km (1¼ miles) from Noosa Heads. It's just as beautiful. Both beaches are patrolled 365 days a year.

Learn to surf with two-time Australian and World Pro-Am champion **Merrick Davis** (☎ 0418/787 577 mobile phone; www.learntosurf.com.au), who's lived in Noosa for 10 years. Merrick runs 2-hour lessons daily for A\$35 (US\$23), 3-day certificate courses for A\$95 (US\$62), and 5-day courses for A\$125 (US\$81). He will pick you up and drop you off at your lodging, and also rents surfboards and body boards.

If you want to rent a windsurfer, canoe, kayak, surf ski, catamaran, jet ski, or canopied fishing boat that you can play with on the Noosa River, or take upriver into **Great Sandy National Park** (see below), check out the dozens of outfits along Gympie Terrace between James Street and Robert Street in Noosaville.

The **Aussie Sea Kayak Company** (☎ 07/5477 5335, or 0407/049 747 mobile phone; www.ausseakayak.com.au), at The Wharf, Mooloolaba runs a 2-hour sunset paddle on the Maroochy River every day for A\$40 (US\$26), including a glass of champagne on your return as reward for all the hard work! Owner/operators Natalie Stephenson and Rod Withyman are qualified kayak guides and instructors who worked for various companies in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico before returning to Australia to set up their tours. Half-day tours run every day for 3 to 4 hours at Mooloolaba (A\$60/US\$39), day tours for 6 hours, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday at Noosa (A\$110/US\$68). The company also runs overnight adventures to Moreton and North Stradbroke Islands, and to Fraser Island, Great Keppel, and the Whitsundays for up to 6 days.

EXPLORING NOOSA NATIONAL PARK A 10-minute stroll from Hastings Street brings you to the 437-hectare (1,080-acre) Noosa National Park. Anywhere you see a crowd looking up, you're sure to spot a koala. They're often seen in the unlikely venue of the parking lot at the park entrance. A network of well-posted walking trails leads through the bush. The most scenic is the 2.7km (1.5-mile) coastal trail. The shortest is the 1km (.5-mile) Palm Grove circuit; the longest is the 4.7km (3-mile) Tanglewood trail inland to Hell's Gates, definitely worth the effort.

NORTH OF NOOSA: GREAT SANDY NATIONAL PARK Stretching north of Noosa along the coast is the 57,000-hectare (140,000-acre) Great Sandy National Park (often called Cooloolo National Park), home to forests, beach, and freshwater lakes, including the state's largest, Lake Cootharaba. A popular thing to do is cruise the silent Everglades formed by the Noosa River and tributary creeks. The park's information office, the **Sir Thomas Hiley Information Center** (☎ 07/5449 7364; daily 9am–3pm), is on the western shore of Lake Cootharaba, about 30km (18 miles) from Noosaville. It has a display on the area's geography and a mangrove boardwalk; it's accessible only by boat, which you can rent from the numerous outfits in Noosaville. Several operators run half-day cruises into the Everglades, and guided kayak tours explore the park's lower reaches.

The other option is to take a 4WD along 40-Mile Beach, a designated highway with traffic laws, for a close-up view of the Teewah colored sand cliffs. This is a great place to get away from the crowds and enjoy nature's wonders. Lifeguards are not on duty, so do not swim alone, and take care. Tours are available, or you can

rent a 4WD and explore on your own. To reach the beach, cross Noosa River on the ferry at Tewantin, then take Maximilian Drive for 4km (2½ miles) to the beach. Stock up on water, food, and gas in Tewantin. The **ferry** (☎ 07/5449 8013) costs A\$8 (US\$5.20) per vehicle round-trip; it operates from 6am to 10pm Sunday through Thursday, and 6am to midnight Friday and Saturday. There's another information center just before the car ferry, at 240 Moorindil St., Tewantin (☎ 07/5449 7792), open 7am to 4pm daily.

WILDLIFE PARKS & THEME PARKS Small theme parks seem to thrive on the Sunshine Coast. Don't expect thrill rides, but you might find some of them a pleasant way to spend a few hours.

A transparent tunnel with an 80m (262-ft.) moving walkway which takes you through a tank filled with sharks, stingrays, groupers, eels, and coral is the highlight at **Underwater World** (☎ 07/5444 8488), at The Wharf, Mooloolaba. Kids can pick up starfish and sea cucumbers in the touch pool, and there are static displays on whales and sharks, shark breeding, and freshwater crocodile talks, an otter enclosure, and a 30-minute seal show. You can also swim with the seals (A\$75/US\$49), or dive with the sharks (A\$95/US\$62 for certified divers, including gear, or A\$125/US\$81 for non-divers). It's open daily from 9am to 6pm (last entry at 5pm), closed Christmas. Admission is A\$23 (US\$15) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for seniors, A\$16 (US\$10) for students, A\$13 (US\$8.45) for children ages 3 to 15, and A\$59 (US\$38) for a family of five. Allow 2 hours to see everything, more if you want to attend all the talks.

At the **Ginger Factory**, Pioneer Road, Yandina (☎ 1800 067 686 in Australia, or 07/5446 7096), you can watch the works of a ginger-processing plant that supplies most of the world's sugar-cured ginger. You can also shop for ginger plants and a huge range of ginger products, and browse a handful of gift shops. Entry is free. The park is open from 9am to 5pm daily, closed Christmas. (The factory is closed some weekends and around Christmas; you should call first, to make sure it's open.)

At the **Big Pineapple** (☎ 07/5442 1333; www.bigpineapple.com.au), 6km (3¾ miles) south of Nambour on the Nambour Connection Road in Woombye—don't worry, you can't miss the 16m (52-ft.) tall monument—you can take a train ride through a working pineapple plantation, ride through a rainforest and a macadamia farm in a macadamia-shaped carriage, and take a boat ride through a hydroponics greenhouse. The park also has a baby animal farm, kangaroos, koalas, a rainforest walk, a small but excellent nocturnal house called "Creatures of the Night," and a gift shop. It's open year-round from 9am to 5pm (opens later on Christmas and Anzac Day; call for exact time). Entry is free; each tour is priced separately so you can do all or just one, but the best option is to buy a family pass to all tours, which costs A\$69 (US\$45) for two adults and up to four children. Allow half a day if you do everything.

A SCENIC MOUNTAINTOP DRIVE THROUGH THE SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

A leisurely drive along the lush ridgetop of the **Blackall Ranges** ⚡ behind Noosa is a popular half- or full-day excursion. Cute mountain villages full of crafts shops and cafes, and terrific views of the coast are the main attractions. Macadamia nuts, peaches, and other homegrown produce are often for sale by the road at dirt-cheap prices.

On Saturdays, start at the colorful outdoor **Eumundi Markets** ⚡ in the historical village of Eumundi, 13km (8 miles) west of Noosa along the Eumundi

Tips Crikey! It's the Crocodile Hunter!

Crocodile hunter Steve Irwin's **Australia Zoo** 📍 (☎ 07/5494 1134; www.crocodilehunter.com) is on the Glass House Mountains Tourist Drive 24 at Beerwah, off the Bruce Highway. Steve and his wife Terri, stars of the **Crocodile Hunter** television shows, are renowned for handling dangerous salt-water crocs and are often around to say hello. The zoo is in the process of a A\$40 million (US\$26 million) upgrade which will expand it from 9 hectares (22 acres) to 102 hectares (251 acres) in the next 5 years. Watch out for new themed sections displaying animals from around the world including Madagascar, South East Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Demonstrations and feedings are held regularly throughout the day, but the highlight is the salt-water croc show at 1:30pm. You can also hand-feed 'roos, pat a koala, check out foxes and camels, and watch (even hold!) venomous snakes and pythons. Admission is A\$23 (US\$15) for adults, A\$19 (US\$12) for seniors and students, A\$14 (US\$9.10) for kids ages 3 to 14, and A\$65 (US\$42) for a family of five. The park is open daily from 8:30am to 4pm, closed Christmas. Courtesy buses will pick you up and return you to Beerwah and Landsborough railway stations or from Noosa, Maroochydore, Alexandra Headlands, Mooloolaba, and Caloundra.

Road. Locals and visitors wander under the huge shady trees among hundreds of stalls selling locally grown organic lemonade, fruit, groovy hats, teddy bears, antique linen, homemade soaps, handcrafted hardwood furniture—everything is handmade or home-grown. Get your face painted, your palm read, or your feet massaged. Listen to some didgeridoo music or bush poetry. When shopping's done, everyone pops into the trendy cafes on Eumundi's main street. The market runs from 6:30am to 3pm.

From Eumundi, take the Bruce Highway to **Nambour** and turn right onto the Nambour-Mapleton road. (The turnoff is just before you enter Nambour, so if you hit the town, you've gone too far.) A winding 12km (7¼-mile) climb up the range between rolling farmland and forest brings you to **Mapleton**. Stop at the pub for some spectacular views from the veranda. From here, detour almost 4km (2½ miles) to see the 120m (393½-ft.) **Mapleton Falls**. A 200m (656-ft.) bushwalk departs from the picnic grounds and ends with great views over the Obi Obi Valley. There is also a 1.3km (.75-mile) circuit.

Back on the Mapleton-Maleny Road, head south 3.5km (2 miles) through lush forest and farms to **Flaxton Gardens**. Perched on the cliff with breathtaking coast views is a wine cellar offering tastings and sales, a pottery, a cafe, and gift shop. A bit farther south you can detour right and walk the 4.6km (2.75-mile) round-trip trail to the base of the 80m (262-ft.) **Kondalilla Falls**. You can swim here. It's a slippery downhill walk, and the climb back up can be tough.

Take the main road south for 5.5km (3½ miles) to **Montville**. This English-style village has become such a tourist stop that it has lost some of its character and lots of people decry its touristy facade. But everyone still ends up strolling the tree-lined streets and browsing the gift shops and galleries.

About 13km (8 miles) down the road, is **Maleny**, more modern and less commercialized than Montville. Be sure to follow the signs around to **Mary Cairncross Park** for spectacular views of the **Glass House Mountains**, 11 volcanic plugs protruding out of the plains. The park has a kiosk, a playground, free wood

barbecues, and a rainforest information center; a 1.7km (1 mile) walking trail loops through the rainforest past some giant strangler figs.

You can return to Noosa the way you came or, if you're in a hurry, you can drive down to Landsborough and rejoin the Bruce Highway.

WHERE TO STAY

Halse Lodge ★ *Finds* It's a backpackers' hostel, but don't let that put you off staying here. The gracious National Trust-listed Queenslander house is set in two acres of rainforest on a hill overlooking the town and the sea, and just 100m (329 ft.) from Noosa's Main Beach. The lodge will give you free use of surfboards and boogie boards. It's almost as cozy and welcoming as a B&B, and it's kept extra-clean by on-the-ball managers. There's a kitchen, but smart guests order breakfasts, priced from A\$3 to A\$6.50 (US\$1.95–US\$4.20). Dinner in the bistro is an equally good deal, with main courses from A\$7.50–A\$9 (US\$4.90–US\$5.85). Smoking is not permitted in rooms, but there are areas on the veranda where you can indulge. There's Internet access, and if you're heading for Noosa's nightlife, the lodge will also give you free passes to local nightclubs.

2 Halse Lane, off Noosa Dr. at Noosa Parade, Noosa Heads, QLD 4567. ☎ 1800/242 567 in Australia, or 07/5447 3377. www.halselodge.com.au. 26 units, all with shared bathroom. 5 double rooms, 3 twin rooms, 1 twin bunk room, 1 twin/triple room, 6 share dorms (sleep 6), and 10 share dorms (sleep 4). A\$55 (US\$36) double for YHA/Hostelling International members or A\$65 (US\$42) non-members twin/double; A\$23–A\$25 (US\$15–US\$16) dorms. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; coin-op laundry.

Jacaranda Apartments These units are not as fancy as the swank apartment blocks up on the hill, but if you don't mind views of the river instead of the ocean, this neat block set back off the road in the thick of the Hastings Street action will do fine. Most of the one-bedroom apartments face the Noosa River; a few look onto the parking lot and the small pool. The decor is fine—stone-look tile floors, painted brick walls, and lime-washed furniture—although the kitchens are a little old. The studios are small, dark, and lack views, and have only a fridge and kettle, not a kitchen. Bring your own hair dryer. The beach is just down the alleyway across the road.

12 Hastings St. ☎ 07/5447 4011 (Holiday Noosa booking centre). Fax 07/5447 3410. www.holidaynoosa.com.au. 28 units (with shower only). High season A\$130–A\$145 (US\$85–US\$94) studio, A\$195–A\$220 (US\$127–US\$143) suite; low season A\$85–A\$95 (US\$55–US\$62) studio, A\$120–A\$135 (US\$78–US\$88) suite. MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (1-bedroom apts only).

Noosa Village Motel All the letters from satisfied guests pinned up on the wall here are a testament to owners John and Mary Skelton's hard work in continually sprucing up this clean, bright little motel in the heart of Hastings Street. The pleasant rooms are spacious and freshly painted, with a cheerful atmosphere. There's no air-conditioning, but the rooms all have ceiling fans. And at these rates, it must be one of Hastings Street's best values.

10 Hastings St., Noosa Heads, QLD 4567. ☎ 07/5447 5800. Fax 07/5474 9282. www.noosavillage.com.au. 11 units (9 with shower only). High season (Dec 24–Jan 14) A\$175 (US\$114) double, A\$230 (US\$150) family room; low season A\$100–A\$110 (US\$65–US\$72) double, A\$155 (US\$101) family room. Extra person A\$11–A\$15 (US\$7.15–US\$9.75). Discounts for longer stays. Ask about May–June specials. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; room-service (breakfast); babysitting; guest laundry; nonsmoking rooms available. *In room:* TV, kitchenette, fridge, hair dryer.

IN THE HINTERLAND

Avocado Grove Bed & Breakfast Joy and Brian Baxter's modern red cedar Queenslander home is in a peaceful rural setting in the middle of an avocado grove just off the ridge-top road. The cozy, comfortable rooms have country-style

Tips When to Get the Best Sunshine Coast Rates

Room rates on the Sunshine Coast are mostly moderate, but they spike in the Christmas period from December 26 to January 26, during school holidays, and the week after Easter. Book well ahead at these times. Weekends are often busy, too.

furniture, full-length windows opening onto private verandas, and oil heaters for cool mountain nights. The big suite downstairs has a TV and kitchen facilities. Colorful parrots and other birds are a common sight. Guests are welcome to picnic on the peaceful sloping lawns that have wonderful views west to Obi Obi Gorge in the Conondale Ranges.

10 Carramar Ct., Flaxton via Montville, QLD 4560. ☎/fax **07/5445 7585**. www.avocadogrove.com.au. 4 units, 3 with bathroom (shower only), 1 with private adjacent bathroom. A\$130 (US\$85) double; A\$150 (US\$98) suite. Rates include full breakfast. Ask about weekend and midweek packages. MC, V. Turn right off ridge-top road onto Ensby Rd.; Carramar Ct. is the first left. **Amenities:** Tour desk; in-room massage; non-smoking rooms. *In room:* Ceiling fan, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Worth a Splurge

Zanzibar ★ These luxury apartments all have ocean views, and are just across the road from Mooloolaba beach. There's a spa bath in every apartment and generous balconies where you can sit and watch the action on the beach and the esplanade. The decor is African-inspired, as you'd expect from the name, but it's not too overwhelming. There's plenty of space and full cooking facilities as well as extras like a microwave, dishwasher, heater (which you shouldn't need) and CD player. Courtyard apartments (which are more expensive) have an outside spa and barbecue area.

51 The Esplanade (entry from First Ave.), Mooloolaba, QLD 4557. ☎ **1300/553 800** in Australia, or 07/5444 5633. Fax 07/5444 5733. www.zanzibarresort.com.au. Low season A\$210 (US \$137) 1-bedroom apt; A\$250–A\$275 (US\$163–US\$179) 2-bedroom apt; A\$294–A\$320 (US\$191–US\$208) 3-bedroom apt; A\$300–A\$350 (US\$195–US\$228) penthouse. Minimum 7-night stay applies in high season (Christmas and New Year), but specials are sometimes available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Large heated pool; Jacuzzi; gym; tour desk; shopping arcade; babysitting; free undercover security parking. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay videos, kitchen, hair dryer, laundry facilities, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Noosa's Hastings Street comes alive at night with vacationers wining and dining at restaurants as sophisticated as those in Sydney and Melbourne. For a great breakfast try **Café Le Monde** at the southern end of Hastings Street (opposite the back of the Surf Club), or **Bistro C**, one of the few restaurants that still has beachfront dining. **Noosa Junction** is a better, if less attractive, bet for cheap eats, and there are about 90 restaurants at Mooloolaba to choose from. Noosa National Park has barbecues and tables at the entrance and many quiet spots with great ocean views.

Noosa Yacht and Rowing Club *Value* Value-for-money food and a great location on the Noosa River make this a popular venue for locals and visitors. Sit out on the deck and enjoy the cruising boats or a stunning sunset. It's basic roasts, seafood, and steak, and there are daily specials. It can get crowded so get there early.

Chaplin Park, Gympie Terrace, Noosaville. ☎ **07/5449 8602**. Reservations not required. Main courses under A\$15 (US\$9.75). No credit cards. Daily noon–2:15pm and 5:30–8:15pm; Sun 8am–10:30am.

Season ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN With one of the few beachfront locations in Noosa, this is one of Noosa's most popular restaurants. Former Sydney chef Gary Skelton has maintained his following, with vacationers from southern states rediscovering Season, and even if the locals balk at the A\$10 (US\$6.50) corkage for BYO wine, there's no question the food remains superb. Breakfast dishes start from A\$4 (US\$2.60) for muffins or you can indulge yourself with buttermilk and banana pancakes (with palm sugar butter and maple syrup) for A\$12 (US\$7.80). For dinner? How about the pan-fried reef fish fillet with crushed pinkeye potatoes, leek and tomato, or even simpler, the barbecued seafood antipasto. Smoking is not permitted.

25 Hastings St., Noosa Heads. ☎ 07/5447 3747. Reservations only accepted on the day you dine. Main courses A\$21–A\$26 (US\$14–US\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

Wok In Noosa ASIAN NOODLES Locals flock to this clean, cheery joint for tasty meals that are usually under about A\$15 (US\$9.75). Most get their food to go, but some eat in the colorful dining room, where you help yourself to cutlery, a bottle opener, and wine glasses. Don't overlook the big range of laksas (soups), a tummy-filler that comes in a bowl the size of a baby's bathtub. They deliver—minimum order is A\$15 (US\$9.75), plus A\$3 (US\$1.95) delivery charge. Kids' meals are A\$5.50 (US\$3.60), and come with a free popsicle. BYO.

77 Noosa Dr. (at the roundabout at Sunshine Beach Rd.), Noosa Junction. ☎ 07/5448 0372. Main courses A\$8–A\$13 (US\$5.20–US\$8.45). MC, V. Daily noon–9pm.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Ricky Ricardo's ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Owners Leonie Palmer and Steven "Stef" Fisher, stalwarts of the Noosa restaurant scene, named their latest one not for a Latin TV idol, but for Stef's great-uncle Ricky, a "gentleman scallywag" whose zest for life is reflected here. I'd choose it for lunch over dinner simply because of the fantastic setting; the food is sensational at any time. You can sit over a long lunch drinking in the view across the Noosa River while nibbling from an innovative tapas menu or something more substantial. The menu is Mediterranean style, with fresh seafood and regional produce used throughout, and changes seasonally.

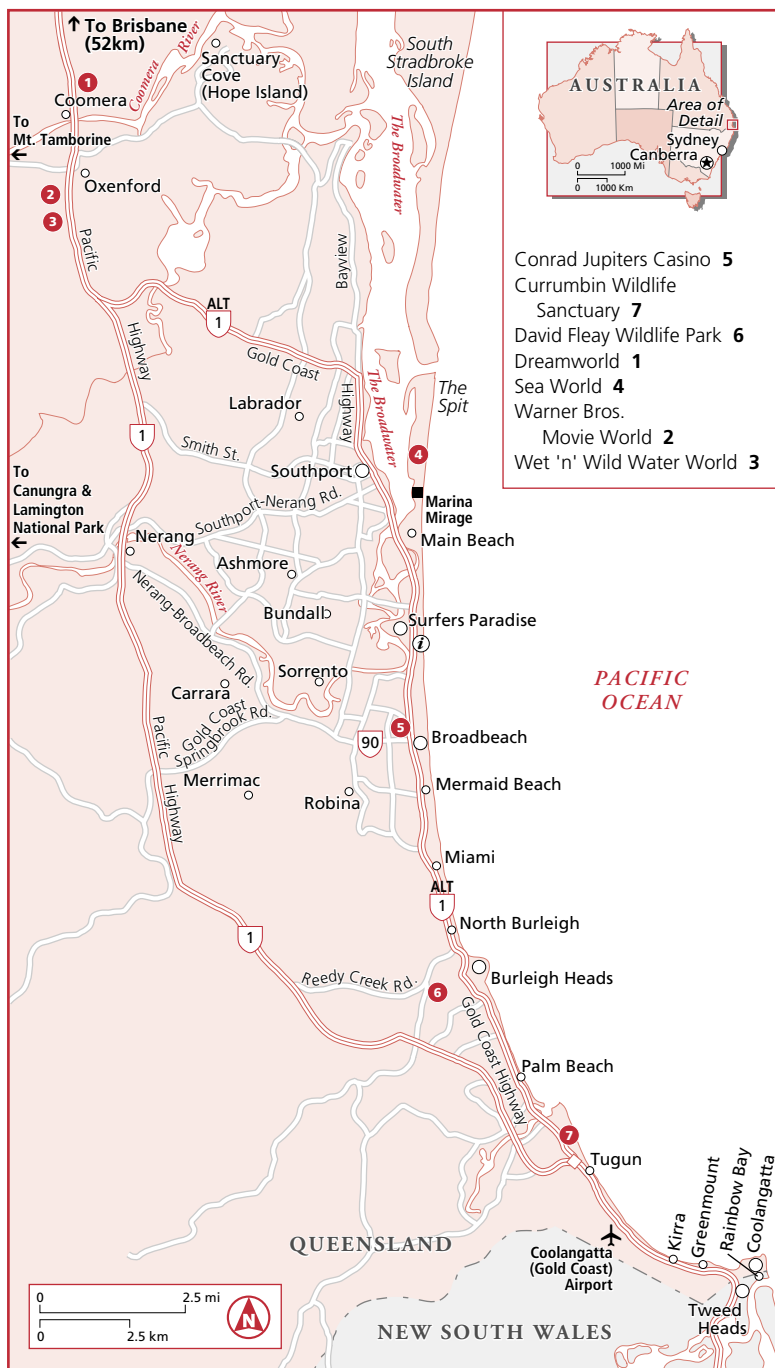
2/2 Quamby Place (inside the shopping center), Noosa Sound. ☎ 07/5447 2455. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$17–A\$33 (US\$11–US\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

9 The Gold Coast

Love it or hate it, the Gold Coast is an Australian icon. Bronzed lifesavers, bikini-clad meter maids, tanned tourists draped with gold jewelry, high-rise apartment towers that cast long shadows over parts of the beach . . . but the glitz, the glitter, and the over-development pales into insignificance as soon as you hit the beach. The white sands stretch uninterrupted for 70km (18 miles), making up for the long strips of neon-lit motels, and cheap souvenir shops. Since the '50s, Australians have been flocking to this strip of coastline and that hasn't changed. Today, they're queuing up with tourists from all around the world to get into the theme parks but everyone can still find a quiet spot on the beach and the sun shines on.

The Gold Coast's theme parks are not as large or as sophisticated as Disney World, but they're exciting enough. Apart from the three major parks—**Dreamworld**, **Warner Bros. Movie World**, and **Sea World**—there are of plenty of smaller-scale ones. If theme parks aren't your thing, there are also 40 golf courses, dinner cruises, and loads of adrenaline-based outdoor activities, from

The Gold Coast



bungee jumping to jet-skiing. The best activity on the Gold Coast, though, is the natural kind, and it doesn't cost a cent—hitting the surf and lazing on the beach.

GOLD COAST ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Car** Access to the Gold Coast Highway, which runs the length of the Coast, is off the Pacific Highway from Sydney or Brisbane. The drive takes about 80 minutes from Brisbane. From Sydney it's an 11-hour trip, sometimes longer, on the crowded, rundown Pacific Highway.

By Plane Domestic flights land at **Gold Coast Airport** at Coolangatta, 25km (15 miles) south of Surfers Paradise. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) operates plenty of direct flights from Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) flies direct from Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. The **Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle** (☎ 13 12 30) meets every flight and will transfer you to your accommodation; the fare is A\$14 (US\$9.10) one-way and A\$24 (US\$16) round-trip. A taxi from the airport to Surfers Paradise is about A\$30 (US\$20), depending on the traffic, which can be heavy.

The nearest international gateway is **Brisbane International Airport**. The **Coachtrans Airporter** bus meets most flights and makes about 20 trips a day from the domestic and international terminals at Brisbane Airport to Gold Coast accommodations for A\$35 (US\$23) adults and A\$18 (US\$12) for children 4 to 14. The trip takes about 90 minutes to Surfers Paradise. No need to book in advance unless you are on an evening flight.

AirtrainConnect services link Brisbane Airport and the Gold Coast by train and bus for A\$25 (US\$16) adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) children 5 to 14, or A\$80 (US\$52) for a group of four. Take Airtrain to the Gold Coast, then an air-conditioned coach shuttle will take you to any accommodation house between Southport Spit at the northern end of the Gold Coast and Burleigh Heads to the south. Airtrain's SmartPass, for which you pay A\$89 (US\$58) per adult, A\$43 (US\$28) per child ages 4 to 14, or A\$215 (US\$140) for a family of four for 3 days, covers AirtrainConnect transfers, as well as unlimited door-to-door theme park transfers on the Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle and use of the local Surfside bus network, 24 hours a day. Passes are also available for 5, 7, 10, and 14 days.

By Bus **Coachtrans** (☎ 13 12 30 in Queensland, or 07/5506 9777) also offers a transfer service between Brisbane and Gold Coast hotels. The fare is A\$30 (US\$20) adults one-way, half price for kids.

McCafferty's (☎ 13 14 99) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30) make daily stops at Surfers Paradise from Sydney and Brisbane. The trip from Sydney takes 15 to 16 hours, and the fare is A\$93 (US\$60). Trip time from Brisbane is 90 minutes, and the fare is \$17 (US\$11).

By Train Suburban trains (call **Queensland Rail Citytrain** at ☎ 07/3235 5555) depart Brisbane Central and Roma Street stations every 30 minutes for the 72-minute trip to the Gold Coast suburb of Robina. The fare is A\$9.30

Value Look for the Coupons

Discount coupons and special deals on tours, cruises, car rental, restaurants, nightclubs, and so on, are advertised in countless free weekly pocket guides available in hotel lobbies and shops everywhere. Grab a handful and make the most of them!

Tips The Secret of the Seasons

School holidays, especially the Christmas vacation from mid-December to the end of January, are peak season on the Gold Coast. Accommodations are booked months in advance at these times. The rest of the year, occupancy levels plummet and so do rates! Packages and deals abound in the off season, and perfectly adequate motel rooms can go for as little as A\$50 (US\$33) double on standby.

(US\$6.05) adults, A\$4.70 (US\$3.05) children ages 5 to 14. Numerous local buses meet the trains to take passengers to Surfers Paradise.

If you come by train to Surfers Paradise from Sydney or other southern cities you will need to transfer to a connecting coach in Casino or Murwillumbah, which are just south of the Queensland border; contact **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) for information. The trip from Sydney takes 14 to 15 hours and the fare is A\$105 (US\$68) for a sitting berth, and A\$218 (US\$142) for a sleeper.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Gold Coast Tourism Bureau** (www.goldcoasttourism.com.au) has an information kiosk on Cavill Avenue in Surfers Paradise (☎ 07/5538 4419). It is stacked with brochures on things to see and do, and they will book tours and arrange accommodations for you. The kiosk is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm, Saturdays and public holidays from 9am to 5:30pm, and Sundays from 9am to 3:30pm. A second information booth is at the corner of Griffith and Warner streets, Coolangatta (☎ 07/5536 7765). It is open 8am to 4pm weekdays, 8am to 3pm Saturday, 8am to 1pm public holidays, and closed Sunday.

To obtain material in advance, e-mail info@gctb.com.au or write to the bureau at P.O. Box 7091, Gold Coast Mail Centre, QLD 9726.

ORIENTATION The heart of the Gold Coast is **Surfers Paradise** 🌴 (“Surfers” to the locals), a high-rise forest of apartment towers, shops, cheap eateries, taverns, and amusement parlors. The pedestrian-only **Cavill Mall** in the center of town connects the Gold Coast Highway to **The Esplanade**, which runs along the beach.

The **Gold Coast Highway** is the main artery that connects the beachside suburbs lining the coast. Just north of Surfers is **Main Beach** 🌴, where Tedder Avenue is lined with shops, restaurants, and cafes. Heading south from Surfers, the main beach centers are **Broadbeach**, where retail complexes and restaurants are mushrooming; family-oriented **Burleigh Heads**; and the twin towns of **Coolangatta** in Queensland and **Tweed Heads** just over the border in New South Wales. Coolangatta still has the small-town feel ideal for families, despite some major development in the past few years. Gold Coast Airport is the other side of the highway from Coolangatta township.

West of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach are the affluent suburbs of Ashmore and Nerang, where luxury residential estates and many of the region's championship golf courses have sprung up.

GETTING AROUND You don't really need a car to get around. The hotels listed below are within walking distance of the beach, shops, and restaurants, and many tour companies pick up at hotels. You can reach the theme parks by bus. A car is handy for a day trip to the hinterland, and to get around to restaurants and

golf courses. Parking is cheap and plentiful in numerous parking lots and on the side streets between the Gold Coast Highway and The Esplanade.

Avis (☎ 07/5539 9388), **Budget** (☎ 97/5538 1344), **Hertz** (☎ 07/5538 5366), and **Thrifty** (☎ 07/5570 9999) have outlets in Surfers Paradise and at Gold Coast Airport. Many local outfits rent cars at cheap rates.

Surfside Buslines (☎ 13 12 30 or 07/5574 5111) is the local bus company. Its best deals are passes that allow you to hop on and off the buses anytime you like. The 1-day Ezy Pass costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults and A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children and is valid for 24 hours. The **Freedom Pass** costs A\$45 (US\$29) adults and A\$22 (US\$14) children ages 4 to 14 for 3 days; 5-, 7-, 10-, and 14-day passes are also available. This is a particularly good deal if you're planning to visit the theme parks, as the company's Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle operates door-to-door transfers four times every morning from anywhere on the coastal strip. You must book for this, but if you are staying in Surfers Paradise or Broadbeach you can just hop on the Surfside Theme Park Express, which leaves every 15 minutes from 8:30 to 11am from Pacific Fair shopping center at Broadbeach and picks up at bus stops along the way.

WHAT TO SEE & DO ON THE COAST

HITTING THE BEACHES

Needless to say, the wide white sandy beaches are the number one attraction on the Gold Coast—and best of all, they're free! No fewer than 35 patrolled beaches stretch almost uninterrupted from the Spit north of Surfers Paradise to Rainbow Bay, south of Coolangatta. In fact, the Gold Coast is really just one long fabulous beach—all you need do is step onto it at any point and you will spot the nearest set of red and yellow flags that signal safe swimming. The most popular beaches are **Main Beach**, **Surfers North**, **Elkhorn Avenue**, **Surfers Paradise**, **Mermaid Beach**, **Burleigh Heads**, **Coolangatta**, and **Greenmount** 🏄. All are patrolled 365 days a year.

Surfers will find a decent wave most places they put in their board, but the best breaks are at Burleigh Heads, Duranbah, and Kirra. **Surfers Beach Club** (☎ 07/5526 7077), on The Esplanade in front of the Paradise Centre (opposite McDonald's on Cavill Mall), rents surfboards, body boards, in-line skates, and bikes for A\$20 to \$25 (US\$13–US\$16) per 24 hours.

Cavill Mall is a good place for people-watching. Here you will find a **Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum**, souvenir stores, and loads of cheap restaurants. In the **Paradise Centre** on the mall's southern side are more shops, shooting galleries, a bowling alley, electronic video games, bumper cars, and an 18-hole minigolf course.

DOING THE THEME PARKS

The big three are **Dreamworld**, **Sea World**, and **Warner Bros. Movie World**. Right next door to Movie World is **Wet 'n' Wild Water World**.

Sea World is the only major theme park in the center of town. The others are in northern bushland on the Pacific Highway, about a 15 to 20 minutes' drive from Surfers Paradise. You can ride to the theme parks on the Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle (see above) or on **Surfside Buslines** (☎ 13 12 30 in Queensland) bus. Take Bus no. 1A to Movie World and Wet 'n' Wild; Bus no. 1A or X to Dreamworld; and Bus no. 2 or 9 to Sea World.

Coachtrans (☎ 13 12 30 or 07/5506 9777) does daily door-to-door transfers to the big three parks, as well as Wet 'n' Wild, and Currumbin Sanctuary. Round-trip fare is A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) for kids, or A\$38 (US\$25) for a family of four. Book a day ahead if you can, especially in peak season.

Value A Money-Saving Theme Park Pass

Sea World, Warner Bros. Movie World, and Wet 'n' Wild sell a **3 Park Super Pass** that gets you a full-day's entry to each park plus a free return visit to the one you like best. It costs A\$150 (US\$98) for adults and A\$94 (US\$61) for kids ages 4 to 13. You can buy it at any of the parks, online, from a travel agency, or at most Gold Coast hotels, apartments, and tour desks. **Dreamworld** has a second-day return pass for an extra A\$10 (US\$6.50), but you must buy it before leaving on your first day.

You can also hail the regular Coachtrans buses that run daily every 30 to 45 minutes between the Gold Coast and Brisbane. They will be marked Brisbane, and you will find them on the Gold Coast Highway.

Dreamworld ★ *Kids* Adrenaline-crazed thrill-seekers will love the action rides here, such as the aptly named Giant Drop, in which you free-fall 39 stories in 5 seconds, or the Tower of Terror which propels you forwards and upwards at 4.5Gs before falling backwards 38 stories in 7 seconds. They'll also get a kick out of the hair-raising Cyclone roller coaster, with its 360-degree loop and the Wipe-out, which spins, twists, and tumbles you upside down in a random sequence (but only exerts a sissy 2.5Gs units of pressure). These high-octane offerings make the park's other offerings look tame. Dreamworld is a family fun park, Disney-style—except that here giant koalas called Kenny and Belinda roam the streets instead of Mickey Mouse. Kids will love Nick Central, the only Nickelodeon cartoon attraction outside the U.S. Other activities include an IMAX theater, a native wildlife park where you can cuddle a koala and hand-feed kangaroos, river cruises livened up by a bushranger shoot-out, and a carousel and other rides for young kids. A big highlight is to watch trainers swim, wrestle, and play with Bengal tigers on Tiger Island. Souvenir stores, restaurants, cafes, and ice-cream shops abound, and there's a water-slide park, so bring your swimsuit.

Pacific Hwy. (25km/16 miles north of Surfers Paradise), Coomera. ☎ **1800/073 300** in Australia, 07/5588 1111, or 07/5588 1122 (24-hr. info line). www.dreamworld.com.au. Admission (all-inclusive except skill games, souvenir photos, and helicopter rides) A\$56 (US\$36) adults, A\$36 (US\$23) children 4–13. Daily 10am–5pm; Main St., Plaza Restaurant, and Koala Country open at 9am. Closed Christmas and until 1:30pm Anzac Day. Extended hours during Easter and Dec–Jan. Free parking for 1600 cars.

Sea World ★★ *Kids* Four polar bears—Ping Ping, Kanook, Lia, and Lutik—are the star attractions at this marine park, and crowds flock to see them frolic, dive, and hunt for fish in a large pool. You can also do a “behind-the-scenes” tour of their habitat for A\$40 (US\$26) adults, A\$20 (US\$13) children 4 and over. Sea World may not be as sophisticated as similar parks in the United States, but it's got its own charm and has all the things you'd expect to see—performing dolphins and sea lions, ski shows, an aquarium, shark feeding, and an array of rides. A monorail gets you around the grounds, and there's a free water-slide playground. Watersports are available for an extra fee. Adults (14 and over) can snorkel with seals or dolphins for A\$80 or A\$115 (US\$52–US\$75), including a souvenir photo. An hour-long Dolphin Dive Encounter uses “oceanwalker” technology to allow guests without dive qualifications to have a dive-like encounter with dolphins. It costs A\$165 (US\$107) per person (you must be 14 or older). Younger kids can attend a 30-minute dolphin talk, pat one, and have their photo taken with it for A\$50 (US\$33).

Sea World Dr. (3km/1¾ miles north of Surfers Paradise), The Spit, Main Beach. ☎ 07/5588 2222, or 07/5588 2205 (24-hr. info line). Fax: 07/5591 1056. www.seaworld.com.au. Admission (all-inclusive except dolphin experiences, helicopter rides, and powered watersports) A\$56 (US\$36) adults, A\$36 (US\$23) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–5pm; Anzac Day 1:30–6:30pm. Closed Christmas. Free parking.

Warner Bros. Movie World ★ *Kids* Australia's answer to Universal Studios just about matches its U.S. counterpart for thrills and spills. The park is based around working studios where *Scooby Doo*, *The Phantom*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and *Streetfighter* were filmed. If you already know how Superman flies across skyscrapers and you've heard a Foley sound studio in action before, the train ride around the sets might not interest you, but it's a great introduction to cinema tricks for first-timers. The latest hair-raising, tummy-turning ride is the A\$13 million (US\$8.5 million) indoor Scooby-Doo Spooky Coaster roller coaster, which joins the Lethal Weapon roller coaster and the simulated high-speed chase of Batman—The Ride in keeping thrill-seekers happy. Don't miss the hilarious Police Academy Stunt Show. Young kids can take rides and see stage shows by Yosemite Sam and Porky Pig in the Looney Tunes Village, and there's a Looney Tunes Parade through the streets each day. Most parades and shows take place between 11am and 4pm. New attractions set to open in 2004 are the Australian Outback Spectacular, a 2-hour evening show featuring up to 40 horses and stuntmen and an Aussie barbecue dinner, and Paradise Country, which will have koala and kangaroo displays, billy tea and damper around the campfire, boomerang throwing, whip cracking, horse-drawn wagon rides, sheep dog mustering, a stock horse round up, and cow milking. Tickets for the Outback Spectacular show are expected to be around A\$60 (US\$39).

Pacific Hwy. (21km/13 miles north of Surfers Paradise), Oxenford. ☎ 07/5573 3999, or 07/5573 8485 for recorded information. www.movieworld.com.au. Admission (all-inclusive) A\$56 (US\$36) adults, A\$36 (US\$23) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–5:30pm; rides and attractions operate 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas and until 1:30pm Anzac Day. Free parking.

Wet 'n' Wild Water World *Kids* Hurtling down a seven-story piece of fiberglass at 70kmph (43 mph) is just one of many water-slide options at this aquatic fun park. The rides have names like Double Screamer, Mammoth Falls, The Twister, Terror Canyon, and White Water Mountain. That just about says it all. Scaredy-cats can stick to the four regular white-water flumes, float gently past palm-studded "islands" at Calypso Beach, swim in the artificial breakers in the Wave Pool or in the regular pool, or soak in a spa at Whirlpool Springs. There's also a water playground for young kids. Every night in January, and Saturday night September through April, is Dive-In Movie night, during which film fans can recline on a rubber tube in the pool while watching the flick on a giant screen. **Note:** It is very popular and very crowded, and to get a tube or a seat you have to get there early. A stunt show plays at 2:30pm (5pm on movie nights). The water is heated to 79°F (26°C) April to September; there are lifeguards on duty, you can hire towels and lockers, and use the hot showers.

Pacific Hwy. (next to Warner Bros. Movie World), Oxenford. ☎ 07/5556 1610, or 07/5573 2255 for 24-hr. recorded information. www.wetnwild.com.au. Admission A\$35 (US\$23) adults, A\$22 (US\$14) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily Jan 10am–9pm; Feb 10am–5pm; Mar–Apr 10am–4:30pm; May–Aug 10am–4pm; Sept–Oct 10am–4:30pm; Nov–Dec 10am–5pm. Open to 9pm on Dive-In Movie nights. Closed Christmas and open from 1:30pm Anzac Day.

EXPLORING THE WILDLIFE & AUSTRALIAN PARKS

Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary ★ *Kids* Currumbin began life as a bird sanctuary, and is almost synonymous with the wild rainbow lorikeets which flock here

in the hundreds twice a day for feeding. It's quite an experience, as flocks of chattering birds descend onto visitors holding trays of food for them. Photographers go crazy and the tourists love it. These amazingly beautiful birds have a vivid green back, blue head, and red and yellow chest. Lorieet feeding is at 8am and 4pm. Don't miss it. You can also have your photo taken cuddling a koala, hand-feed kangaroos, stroll, or take a free miniature steam-train ride through the park, and attend animal talks and feeding demonstrations. An Aboriginal song and dance show takes place daily. The park's 27 hectares (67 acres) are home to 1,400 native birds and animals, including two enormous saltwater crocodiles, and lots of native birds are also drawn to the wetlands within the grounds. It also offers behind-the-scenes tours that take in the animal hospital and endangered-species-breeding area, a birds-of-prey display, and nighttime tours. Allow several hours to see everything. 28 Tomewin St., Currumbin (18km/11 miles south of Surfers Paradise). ☎ 07/5534 1266. www.currumbin-sanctuary.org.au. Admission A\$22 (US\$14) adults, A\$14 (US\$9.10) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–5pm. Closed Christmas and until 1pm Anzac Day. Ample free off-street parking. Bus stop 15m (49 ft.) from entrance.

David Fleay Wildlife Park ★ *Value* Established in 1952 by Australian naturalist David Fleay, this is one of Australia's premier wildlife parks. You'll see a platypus, saltwater and freshwater crocodiles, wallabies, kangaroos, glider possums, dingoes, wombats, the rare Lumholtz's tree kangaroo, and a big range of Australian birds, including emus, cassowaries, wedge-tailed eagles, black swans, and lorikeets. You walk on a series of raised boardwalks through picturesque mangrove, rainforest, and eucalyptus habitats, where most of the animals roam free. The nocturnal house is open from 11am to 5pm daily, and this is where you'll see many of the most elusive animals including Australia's answer to the Easter bunny, the bilby. Talks and feeding demonstrations throughout the day include a reptile show and saltwater croc feeding—usually only October through April, when the crocs are hungry. Aboriginal rangers give talks about weaponry, bush medicine, and their links with this region. Volunteers also give free guided tours throughout the day. The Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service (QNPWS) has run the park since 1983, but David Fleay continued to live here until his death in 1993. Because the QNPWS frowns on handling animals you can't cuddle a koala or hand-feed kangaroos here. There's a cafe, gift shop, and picnic tables.

West Burleigh Rd. (17km/11 miles south of Surfers Paradise), West Burleigh. ☎ 07/5576 2411. Admission A\$13 (US\$8.45) adults, A\$8.50 (US\$5.50) seniors and students, A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) children 4–17, A\$33 (US\$21) for a family of 6. MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Ample free parking.

CRUISING THE COAST

The Gold Coast is overrun with all kinds of cruise boats and sailing vessels clamoring to take you out for a morning or a day on **The Broadwater**, a calm strip of water between the mainland and The Spit, north of Surfers Paradise and Main Beach. Wander down to Marina Mirage, off Sea World Drive, in Main Beach, and take your pick from the many boats based there.

Two of the biggest companies are **Shangri-La Cruises** (☎ 07/5557 8888; www.shangrila.com.au) and **Island Queen Showboat Cruises** (☎ 07/5557 8800; www.islandqueen.com.au). Both run a similar range of cruises, including morning shopping forays to Sanctuary Cove Marine Village, seafood buffet luncheon trips to Stradbroke Island, canal cruises to spy on the luxury homes in the waterway estates, Polynesian or Vegas-theme dinner cruises, and transfers to the theme parks. The boats have air-conditioned covered spaces, bars, and an open-top deck. Expect to pay A\$37 (US\$24) for a 2-hour shopping cruise, and

Value Golf on the Cheap

Hitting the links on the Gold Coast doesn't have to cost you an arm and a leg. At the cheap and cheerful end of the spectrum is **Emerald Lakes Golf Course** on Nerang-Broadbeach Road at Alabaster Drive, Carrara (☎ 07/5594 4400). The course welcomes all comers for just A\$20 (US\$13) for nine championship holes or A\$38 (US\$25) for 18 holes on a par-72 course. You can even play under floodlights at night for A\$24 (US\$16) for 9 holes. The course is 10 minutes inland from Surfers Paradise.

A\$50 to A\$80 (US\$33–US\$52) for a dinner cruise. Senior, children's, and family rates are also available.

GETTING ACTIVE

Surfers Beach Club (☎ 07/5526 7077), on The Esplanade in front of the Paradise Centre (opposite McDonald's on Cavill Mall), rents surfboards and other sports gear, including in-line skates for A\$15 (US\$9.75) for 3 hours. For high-powered watersports, contact one of the many operators on The Broadwater at Sea World Drive, such as **Aussie Bob's** (☎ 07/5591 7577), located at Berth C67 at Marina Mirage.

Follow the screams to **Banzai Bungee** (☎ 07/5526 7611), on the corner of the Gold Coast Highway and Palm Avenue, Surfers Paradise where you can bungee jump for A\$80 (US\$52) or A\$75 (US\$49) if you are between 13 and 16 years old. And there's a video to prove you've done it! Jump between 10am and 10pm daily, or even on Christmas between noon and 10pm.

The Gold Coast boasts more than 40 golf courses. An 18-hole round generally costs about A\$100 (US\$65), including a cart, with additional charges of around A\$30 (US\$20) for clubs and A\$10 (US\$6.50) for shoes. Grandest is the **Hope Island Golf Club**, Oxenford-Southport Road, Hope Island, 25 minutes north of Surfers Paradise (☎ 07/5530 9000), designed by the Thomson–Wolveridge team. A 9-hole round is A\$70 (US\$46), but few golfers can resist going the whole 18 for A\$110 (US\$72), including cart rental. Other championship fairways can be found at **The Palms** at the Hyatt Regency Sanctuary Cove Resort, Casey Road, Sanctuary Cove on Hope Island (☎ 07/5577 6031); **Lakelands**, Gooding Drive, Merimac (☎ 07/5579 8700), designed by Jack Nicklaus; and the two 18-hole courses at **Royal Pines Resort**, Ross Street, Ashmore (☎ 07/5597 1111).

WHERE TO STAY

Ashmore Palms Holiday Village ★ *Finds* A rare collection of 22 colorful South American macaws is a major attraction at this award-winning budget tourist park. The former caravan park has grown and developed as the Illich family has transformed it into a lush tropical garden of 6 hectares (14½ acres) complete with swimming lagoon and waterfall, heated pool with fountains, barbecues, a general store, and a 1km (½-mile) rainforest walk through thousands of palm trees. All are self-contained with kitchens and bathrooms, and most have a private balcony overlooking the gardens. There's a wide selection of two and three bedroom cabins and villas to choose from; the newest and most elegant are the Mediterranean-style two-story Macaw Mansions, which have a parents' retreat with private bathroom (with Jacuzzi) upstairs. Lorikeet Lodges are designed for access for those with disabilities. Ashmore Palms has twice won the

Australian Tourism Award (1999 and 2000) for best budget accommodation, and although it is located in the Gold Coast suburbs, it is still less than a 10-minute drive to Surfers Paradise. It also has the advantage of being less than 15 minutes from the theme parks.

71 Hinde St., Ashmore, QLD 4214. ☎ 07/5539 3222. Fax 07/5597 1576. www.ashmorepalms.com.au. 85 units (most with shower only). A\$95–A\$116 (US\$62–US\$75) double holiday villa; A\$105–A\$125 (US\$68–US\$81) double hibiscus chalets; A\$115–A\$165 (US\$75–US\$107) double family villa; A\$120–A\$140 (US\$78–US\$91) double palm cottage; A\$145–A\$165 (US\$94–US\$107) double cactus cabana (can only be booked through a travel agent); A\$157–A\$177 (US\$102–US\$115) double lorikeet lodge; A\$200–A\$220 (US\$130–US\$143) double macaw mansions. Extra adult A\$10 (US\$6.50), extra child 3–13 A\$6 (US\$3.90). 2-night minimum stay applies in low season, and 7-night minimum at Easter and Christmas holidays. Linen hire is A\$8–A\$12 (US\$5.20–US\$7.80) per stay. Crib A\$2 (US\$1.30) per night or A\$10 (US\$6.50) per week. **Amenities:** 2 outdoor swimming pools (1 heated); tennis court; 3 coin-op laundries. *In room:* A/C (coin-op except cabanas, lodges and mansions), TV, VCR (deluxe family villas, cabanas, lodges, and mansions only), kitchen, hair dryer (except holiday villas), iron.

Mercury Resort Surfers Paradise ★ *Kids* If you're a parent and your idea of a holiday is to not even see your kids for most of the day, this place is for you. The resort has a licensed childcare center for little ones as young as 6 weeks up to 5 years old. For 5- to 12-year-olds, there's the Gecko Club, complete with pedal minicars, the Leonardo painting room, and an underwater themed pirate adventure world. You can laze around the leafy pool area and watch the kids play on the water slide. The childcare center charges moderate fees, but the Gecko Club is free; both operate daily year-round. The low-rise building is comfortable and rooms have views of the pool or the gardens. All rooms were refurbished in November 2000. Family quarters sleep up to five in two separate rooms, and some have kitchenettes. The resort rents a wide range of kiddy stuff such as prams (strollers), bottle warmers, car seats, and playstations, and there is a mini supermarket and take-out meal service. The big range of activities makes this a great value for families, and the center of Surfers Paradise and the patrolled beach are a few blocks across the highway. Some rooms are near the highway, so ask for a quiet spot.

122 Ferny Ave., Surfers Paradise, QLD 4217. ☎ 1800/074 111 in Australia, 1800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 0181/283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 07/5579 4444. Fax 07/5579 4496. www.mercurysurfers.com.au. 405 units. A\$205 (US\$133) resort room (sleeps 4); A\$235 (US\$153) deluxe room (sleeps 4); A\$265 (US\$172) resort family room (sleeps 5); A\$300 (US\$195) family studio (sleeps 5). Ask about special packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free undercover security parking. Local bus stop outside the resort. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; cafe/sandwich bar; bar; 4 outdoor pools; 2 tennis courts; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; childcare center and kids' club; game room/video arcade; concierge; tour desk; shuttle bus; business center; babysitting; guest laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/free and pay-per-view movies, kitchenette (family studios only), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe (some rooms only).

GOOD-VALUE VACATION APARTMENTS

Apartments make good sense for families and for any traveler who is prepared to self-cater to save money. Because the Gold Coast has a dramatic oversupply of apartments that stand empty except during school vacations, you can get a spacious modern unit with ocean views for the cost of a low-priced midrange hotel. The three complexes listed below are particularly good values. Apartment block developers got in quick to snag the best beachfront spots when the Gold

Tips Accommodations Tip

Most accommodations will require a 1-week minimum stay during school holiday periods, and a 4-day minimum stay at Easter and during the Indy car race carnival in October; book well ahead for those times.

Tips Indy Madness!

When the **Gold Coast Indy car race** takes over the town for 4 days in October, hotel rates skyrocket and most hostels demand a minimum stay of 3 or 4 nights. Don't leave accommodations bookings to the last minute! Contact the **Gold Coast Tourism Bureau** (☎ 07/5538 4419; fax 07/5570 3259) to find out the exact dates.

Coast boomed in the 1970s, so it's apartment complexes, not hotels, that have the best ocean views. The **Gold Coast Booking Centre** is a centralized booking service that offers great deals at more than 1,200 apartments in Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach. Book via www.gcbc.com.au or ☎ **1300/553 800**.

Enderley Gardens Just a block from the beach, and centered around a large lagoon-style pool, this older-style apartment block is a short walk from the Cavill Mall. Units are spacious, and all have balconies. They are simply but neatly furnished with a large kitchen and laundry facilities. Like many apartments on the Gold Coast, these are not air-conditioned, but the sea breeze is a good substitute. There are two barbecue areas, and the low-rise (four-story) block makes this a good choice for families or older people.

38 Enderley Ave., Surfers Paradise, QLD 4217. ☎ 07/5570 1511. Fax 07/5592 3878. www.enderleygardens.com.au. 86 units. High season A\$149 (US\$97) double 1-bedroom apt; A\$198 (US\$129) double 2-bedroom apt. Low season A\$109 (US\$71) 1-bedroom apt; A\$138 (US\$90) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). Weekly rates and discounts on stays of 3 nights or more available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool (heated in winter); half-court tennis; Jacuzzi; sauna; children's playground and wading pool; tour desk; babysitting; secure undercover parking. *In room:* TV, kitchen, iron.

Equinox Resort   This clean, well-maintained older-style apartment block is just across the road from the beach and a short walk from Cavill Mall. You can choose between a studio with a balcony and basic tea-and-coffeemaking facilities, or forego the balcony for a full kitchen in a suite. Or you can join a studio and suite together for a 2-bedroom apartment that has it all. Some of the studios have air-conditioning, and they are ideal for up to three people. It's good value for location, price, and comfort.

3458 Main Beach Parade, Surfers Paradise, QLD 4217. ☎ 07/5538 3288. Fax 07/5538 6862. www.equinoxresort.com.au. 90 units. High season A\$148 (US\$96) studio; A\$169 (US\$110) suite; A\$249 (US\$162) 2-bedroom apt. Low season A\$109 (US\$71) studio or suite; A\$138 (US\$90) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). Minimum 4-night stay during Indy, 5 nights at Christmas. MC, V. Free underground security parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool (heated in winter); 2 tennis half-courts; squash court; gym; Jacuzzi; sauna; children's playground; game room; tour desk; babysitting. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

The Gold Coast is full to the rafters with cheap restaurants, especially in and around Cavill Mall. Look for discount coupons in the free tourist guides available in hotel lobbies and information booths. Many stylish restaurants and cafes, most reasonably priced, are springing up around Surf Parade and Victoria Avenue at Broadbeach, as well as in the nearby Oasis shopping mall. A coffee and an Italian-style gourmet sandwich by the water won't cost the earth at the stylish Marina Mirage shopping center opposite the Sheraton on Sea World Drive at Main Beach, nor at one of the hip Tedder Avenue cafes in Main Beach.

Billy T. Bones on the Beachfront Café Bar & Grill STEAK/PASTA/SEAFOOD Write down your order at one of the timber dining tables, hand it

to the waitress, and sit back to enjoy the sea views from this casual spot across the road from the beach. They do big cooked breakfasts for A\$6.90 (US\$4.50), with thick toast and decent coffee. The long list of lunch and dinner options includes pastas, burgers, honey tempura prawns on rice, or southern fried chicken. Grain-fed steaks, hard to find Down Under, come with a baked potato with bacon bits and sour cream, coleslaw, and a choice of mushroom, pepper, or chili sauce. Look for the good-value blackboard specials.

Under the Illuka Beach Resort Hotel, The Esplanade at Hanlan St., Surfers Paradise. ☎ 07/5526 7913. Main courses A\$6.90–A\$18 (US\$4.50–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–10pm; weekends 6:30am–10pm.

Eazy Peazy Thai and Japanezy ★ THAI AND JAPANESE You can have a quick feed of tempura at the noodle bar or make a night of it at the relaxed tables and chairs set up alfresco on the corner of happening Tedder Avenue. Everything on the lengthy menu is light and tasty, from the sushi to the Thai chili beef salad to the marinated fried chicken on light Japanese veggies. The soups are good fillers for around A\$8 (US\$5.20).

Tedder Ave. at Peak Ave., Main Beach. ☎ 07/5591 9000. Main courses A\$10–A\$20 (US\$6.50–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 6–10pm; Sat–Sun noon–10pm.

THE GOLD COAST AFTER DARK

The jeans and T-shirt set love the laid-back **Billy's Beach House** on The Esplanade at Hanlan Street, Surfers Paradise (☎ 07/5531 5666) for its drinks specials. There's always a live band Sunday nights. At night a dress code of long pants and enclosed shoes (that is, no thongs or sandals) applies. All ages and types frequent **Melba's**, 46 Cavill Ave., Surfers Paradise (☎ 07/5538 7411), a popular neon-lit dance club. Cover is A\$8 (US\$5.20).

A genuine Rolls Royce parked in the corner at **Rolls** nightclub at the Sheraton Mirage, Sea World Drive, Main Beach (☎ 07/5591 1488) can be reserved as your booth for the night. A mixed-age crowd of sophisticated locals rubs shoulders with hotel guests. There is a A\$5 (US\$3.25) cover; the club is open Friday and Saturday night. At 10:30pm they push back the tables at **Saks**, Marina Mirage, Sea World Drive, Main Beach (☎ 07/5591 2755) and the elegant cafe/wine bar becomes a dance floor for fashionable 20- and 30-somethings. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are the coolest nights to turn up, there's a live band Sundays, no cover.

Revelers 20 to 35 years old go to **Shooters Saloon Bar**, in the Mark shopping complex, Orchid Avenue, Surfers Paradise (☎ 07/5592 1144), for a fun, hip, but not slavishly trendy night of dancing. There's usually some kind of competition going on, from Bachelor of the Year awards to swimwear parades. Cover is A\$5 (US\$3.25) after 10pm. It's open daily from 11am to 5am.

It's not as big as some Vegas casinos, but **Conrad Jupiters Casino**, Gold Coast Highway, Broadbeach (☎ 07/5592 8282), has plenty to keep the gambler amused—70 gaming tables and 1,200-plus slot machines with roulette, blackjack, Caribbean stud poker, baccarat and minibaccarat, craps, Pai Gow, and Sic Bo. Downstairs the 1,100-seat Jupiter's Theatre stages floor shows and concerts; and there are three bars, including an English-style pub. Of the five restaurants, the good-value **Food Fantasy** buffet is outrageously popular, so be prepared to wait. The casino is open 24 hours. You must be 18 to enter, and smart, casual dress is required.

Many head for the **Twin Towns Services Club**, Pacific Highway at Marine Parade, Tweed Heads (☎ 1800/014 014 in Australia, or 07/5536 1977 for bookings), for the 400 slot machines, Keno, and Club Tab for sports betting, but you can also catch popular—if somewhat dated—acts like Petula Clark,

Charlie Pride, Glen Campbell, Don McLean, and Gene Pitney in the Auditorium (tickets for performances A\$20 to A\$35/US\$13–US\$23). Live music plays every afternoon and evening. Just to make sure nothing comes between you and the one-armed bandits (slot machines), there's a supervised children's lounge (entry A\$5.50/US\$3.60 per child) for the over-4s open every evening until 10pm Sunday through Thursday and until midnight Friday and Saturday. Although the club is over the state border by a matter of meters, it ignores NSW daylight saving and runs on Queensland time year-round. Admission is free.

10 The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature

The cool, green Gold Coast hinterland is only a half-hour drive from the Coast, but is a world away from the neon lights, theme parks and crowds. Up here, at an altitude of 500m to 1,000m (about 1,500 ft.–3,500 ft.), the tree ferns drip moisture, the air is crisp, and there's no pressure to do anything too quickly.

Mt. Tamborine shelters several villages known for their crafts shops, galleries, cafes, and lovely B&Bs. Easy walking trails wander from the streets through rainforest and eucalyptus woodland, and as you drive you will discover magnificent views.

The impressive 20,000-hectare (50,000-acre) **Lamington National Park**  lies to the south of Mt. Tamborine. The park, at around 1,000m (3,328 ft.) above sea level, is a refreshing eucalyptus and rainforest wilderness crisscrossed with walking trails. It's famous for its rich, colorful bird life, wallabies, possums, and other wildlife. The road to the park is full of twists and turns, and as you wind higher and higher, gnarled tangled vines and dense eucalyptus and ferns make a canopy across the road so dark you need your car headlights on. The park is about 90 minutes from the coast—but once you're ensconced in your mountain retreat, the world will seem remote.

The hinterland is close enough to the Gold Coast and Brisbane to make a pleasant day trip, but you will almost certainly want to stay overnight, or longer, once you breathe that restorative mountain air.

MT. TAMBORINE

40km (24 miles) NW of Surfers Paradise; 70km (42 miles) S of Brisbane

Crafts shops, teahouses, and idyllic mountain vistas bring visitors to Mt. Tamborine. The mountaintop is more a plateau than a peak, and it's home to a string of villages, all a kilometer or so apart—Eagle Heights, North Tamborine, and Mt. Tamborine proper. Many of the shops and cafes are only open Thursday, Friday, and weekends.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND From the Gold Coast, head to Nerang and follow signs to Beaudesert. The Mt. Tamborine turnoff is off this road. Alternatively, take the Pacific Highway north to Oxenford and take the Mt. Tamborine turnoff, the first exit after Warner Bros. Movie World. Many tour operators run minibus and four-wheel-drive day trips from the Gold Coast, and some run tours from Brisbane. Another option is to pay A\$15 (US\$9.75) for the day to ride the **Tamborine Trolley Co.** buses ( 07/5545 2782), modeled on early-20th-century trams, which run on a 25km (16-mile) circuit linking four wineries, a distillery, pub, cafes, restaurants, antiques shops, markets, galleries, hang-gliding lookouts, and rainforest walks. The circuit takes an hour and you can hop on and off as you like. Owner/operator Sue Netherway will organize

transport to Mt. Tamborine on request. She also runs a food and wine tour, with pick-ups every Thursday at the Gold Coast, and an antiques tour on Fridays.

VISITOR INFORMATION Stop at the **Gold Coast Tourism Bureau** (see “Visitor Information” for the Gold Coast, above) for information and tourist maps before you head out. Brisbane Tourism outlets (See “Visitor Information” in chapter 5) also have information. Once you arrive, the **Tamborine Mountain Information Centre** is in Dougherty Park, where Geissmann Drive becomes Main Western Road in North Tamborine (☎ 07/5545 3200). It’s open daily from 10:30am to 3:30pm.

EXPLORING THE MOUNTAIN

With a map in hand, you are well equipped to drive around Mt. Tamborine’s roads to admire the wonderful views over the valleys and to poke around in the shops. New Age candles, homemade soaps, maple pecan fudge, framed tropical watercolors, German cuckoo clocks, and Aussie antiques are some of the things you can buy in the mountain’s crafts stores. The best place to shop is the quaint strip of galleries, cafes, and shops known as Gallery Walk on Long Road, between North Tamborine and Eagle Heights. Eagle Heights has few shops but great views back toward the coast. North Tamborine is mainly a commercial center where you still find the odd nice gallery or two. Mt. Tamborine itself is mainly residential.

The cool air has lent itself to winemaking, still in its infancy in this neck of the woods, but you can spend a pleasant day visiting some or all of the wineries in the region. Most cellar doors are open for free tastings from 10am to 4pm daily.

Allow time to walk some of the trails that wind through forest throughout the villages. Most are reasonably short and easy. The Tamborine Mountain Information Centre has maps marking them.

WHERE TO STAY: A RAINFOREST B&B

Tamborine Mountain Bed & Breakfast ☼ Tony and Pam Lambert’s restful timber home has stunning 180-degree views to the ocean from the breakfast balcony. Laze by the open fire in the timber-lined living room, or out on the lovely veranda where rainbow lorikeets, kookaburras, and crimson rosellas flit about over the bird feeders. The ferny gardens have four purpose-built rustic timber rooms, each individually decorated in cottage style and linked to the house by covered walkways. The rooms are heated in winter. No smoking indoors.

19–23 Witherby Crescent, Eagle Heights, QLD 4721. ☎ 07/5545 3595. Fax 07/5545 3322. www.tmbb.com.au. 4 units (all with shower only). A\$127 (US\$83) double midweek; A\$149 (US\$97) double at weekends. Rates include continental breakfast Mon–Fri and full breakfast at weekends. MC, V. Free parking. No children under 12. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, small fridge, coffemaker, iron.

LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK

70km (42 miles) W of Gold Coast; 115km (69 miles) S of Brisbane

Subtropical rainforest, 2,000-year-old, moss-covered Antarctic beech trees, giant strangler figs, and misty mountain air characterize Lamington’s suddenly ascending peaks and plunging valleys. It’s one of the most important subtropical parks in southeast Queensland, and one of the loveliest. The park has 160km (96 miles) of walking trails that track through thick forest, past ferny waterfalls, and along mountain ridges with soaring views across green valleys. The trails vary in difficulty and length, from 1km (1/2 mile) strolls up to 23km (14-mile) treks. The park is a haven for bird lovers who come to see and photograph the rosellas, bowerbirds, and other species that live here, but that’s not the only wildlife you will see. Groups of small wallabies, called pademelons, graze outside your

Tips Exploring Lamington National Park

The easiest way to explore the park is to base yourself at **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** in the Green Mountains section of the park, or at **Binna Burra Mountain Lodge** in the Binnaburra section (see "Where to Stay & Dine: Worth a Splurge" below). Most of the trails lead from one or the other of these resorts, and a 23km (14-mile) Border Trail connects them; it follows the New South Wales-Queensland border for much of the way, and can be walked by most reasonably fit folk in a day. Guided walks and activities at both resorts are for houseguests only; however, both properties welcome day visitors who just want to walk the trails for free. Both have inexpensive cafes for day-trippers.

It's a good idea to bring a torch (flashlight) and maybe binoculars for wildlife spotting. The temperature is often 10°F to 20°F (4°C–5°C) cooler than on the Gold Coast, so bring a sweater in summer and bundle up in winter when nights get close to freezing. September to October is orchid season, and the frogs come out in noisy abundance in February and March.

room. In summer you may see giant carpet pythons curled up in a tree or large goannas sunning themselves on rock ledges. Near streams a hissing Lamington Spiny Crayfish, an aggressive little monster 15 centimeters (6 in.) long, patterned in royal blue and white, may challenge you. The park comes alive with owls, possums, and sugar gliders at night.

Most visitors are fascinated by the park's Antarctic beech trees, which begin to appear above the 1,000m (3,330-ft.) line. Like something from a medieval fairy tale, these mossy monarchs of the forest stand 20m (66 ft.) tall and measure up to 8m (26 ft.) in girth. They are survivors of a time when Australia and Antarctica belonged to the super-continent, Gondwana, when it was covered by wet, tropical rainforest. The species survived the last ice age, and the trees at Lamington are about 2,000 years old, with suckered off root systems about 8,000 years old. The trees are a 2½-hour walk from O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse (see below).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Car O'Reilly's is 37km (22 miles) from the town of Canungra. The road is very twisty, so take it slowly, allow yourself an hour from Canungra to reach O'Reilly's, and plan to arrive before dark. Binnaburra is 35km (21 miles) from Nerang via Beechmont, or 26km (15½ miles) from Canungra, on a similarly winding mountain road. From the Gold Coast go west to Nerang, where you can turn off to Binnaburra via Beechmont, or go on to Canungra where you will see the O'Reilly's and Binnaburra turnoffs. From Brisbane, follow the Pacific Highway south and take the Beenleigh/Mt. Tamborine exit to Mt. Tamborine. From there follow the signs to Canungra. Allow a good 2½ hours to get to either resort from Brisbane, and 90 minutes from the Gold Coast. Binnaburra sells unleaded fuel; O'Reilly's has emergency supplies only.

By Coach The Mountain Coach Company (☎ 07/5524 4249) does daily transfers to O'Reilly's from the Gold Coast, leaving the airport at 8am, picking up at hotels on the way, and arriving at O'Reilly's at 12:30pm. The fare is A\$50 (US\$33) round-trip. The return trip leaves O'Reilly's at 2:30pm, arriving at the airport by 5:30pm. **Allstate Scenic Tours** (☎ 07/3003 0700) makes a run from outside the Roma Street Transit Centre in Brisbane every

day except Saturday at 9:30am, arriving at O'Reilly's at 12:30pm. It costs A\$44 (US\$29) adults round-trip.

The Binnaburra resort runs a shuttle from the Gold Coast that costs A\$22 (US\$14) per adult and half price for kids 5 to 14, each way. It runs on demand, and should be booked when making accommodations bookings.

DAY TRIPS Companies running day tours from both Brisbane and the Gold Coast include **Australian Day Tours** (☎ 07/3236 4155). The Gold Coast Tourism Bureau can get you in touch with other operators; see "Visitor Information" in the "Gold Coast" section above.

VISITOR INFORMATION The best sources of hiking information are O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse and Binnaburra Mountain Lodge (see "Where to Stay & Dine" below for both); ask them to send you copies of their walking maps. There is a national parks information office at both properties. For detailed information on hiking and camping in the park, contact the **ranger** at Lamington National Park, Green Mountains section (which is at O'Reilly's), via Canungra, QLD 4211 (☎ 07/5544 0634).

WHERE TO STAY & DINE: WORTH A SPLURGE

Both these mountain top retreats have long and interesting histories. Both offer walking trails of a similar type and distance; guided walks, including nighttime wildlife-spotting trips; hearty food; and a restful, enjoyable experience. Look into the special-interest workshops both properties run throughout the year, which can be anything from gourmet weekends to mountain-jogging programs.

Binna Burra Mountain Lodge ★★ *Kids* Binna Burra is a postcard-perfect mountain lodge. The original cabins, built in 1935, are still in use today; they've been outfitted with modern comforts, but not 20th-century "inconveniences," such as telephones, televisions, radios, or clocks. All the accommodations have pine-paneled walls, floral bedcovers, heaters, and electric blankets. The most attractive and spacious are the mud-brick and weatherboard Acacia cabins, which have private bathrooms and the best views over the Numinbah Valley. There are two kinds of less-expensive Casuarina cabins—the nicest are the small and very cozy huts with a pitched ceiling, a washbasin, and a nice view into the forest and over the valley. Less atmospheric are the bunkroom-style rooms that sleep four to six people—good for families and groups of friends. Guests in Casuarina cabins share bathroom facilities, which include a Jacuzzi. Meals are served in the lovely stone-and-timber dining room. Seating is communal, so you get to meet other travelers. Free tea and coffee is on the boil all day. There is also a crafts shop, a natural history library, and conference rooms.

Of the 21 trails leading from the lodge, nine are short walks of less than 6km (3.75 miles). The 12 longer trails range from a 9km (5.5-mile) walk through "dry" rainforest to the 23km (14-mile) Border Trail to O'Reilly's. On Tuesday the resort buses hikers to O'Reilly's so they can spend the day walking back to Binna Burra. The lodge also conducts abseiling (rappelling) for anyone from beginners to advanced adventurers. Evening diversions might consist of parlor games, a weekly bush dance, or slide presentations on local natural history. Kids can entertain themselves in the excellent playground.

Beechmont via Canungra, QLD 4211. ☎ 1800/074 260 in Australia, or 07/5533 3622. Fax 07/5533 3747. www.BinnaBurralodge.com.au. 41 cabins, 22 with bathroom (shower only). A\$230–A\$292 (US\$150–US\$190) double for bed and breakfast only; A\$334–A\$396 (US\$217–US\$257) for all-inclusive meals and activities. Single supplement A\$11 (US\$7.15) per night; A\$32 (US\$21) B&B or A\$58 (US\$38) all-inclusive for children 5–16. Ask about packages. Minimum 2-night stay weekends, 3-night stay public holiday weekends, 4 nights Easter,

and 5 nights Christmas. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; free kids' club Sat and school vacations for kids 5–14; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* Minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse ★★ *Kids* Highlights of your stay will be the chance to hand-feed brilliantly colored rainforest birds every morning and the fact that the staff will remember you by name for your entire stay. Nestled high on a cleared plateau, the buildings are closed in on three sides by dense tangled rainforest and open to picturesque mountain views to the west. The rainforest begins right at the parking lot, from which 19 trails fan out through the bush. For those who don't want to venture too far, the **Treetop Walk** is just a few meters from the resort. You can walk the 15m (49-ft.) high suspension bridge through the forest canopy, and climb to the two tree-top observation decks 30m (98 ft.) above ground for unbelievable views. One of the nicest trails is the 7.5km (4.5-mile) round-trip to **Elabana Falls**, which takes about half a day. Staff runs half-day and full-day guided walks, and half-day four-wheel-drive bus trips. Every night there is a slide show on the area's wildlife or history. You may also enjoy spotlighting walks to see possums, glow-worms, and, in season, luminous fungi. Sometimes in summer there are cliff-top campfire nights with steaks cooked over the fire.

The timber-resort complex is inviting rather than grand, but up-market new suites and the refurbishment of older rooms have added a touch of luxury in the past year. The comfortable guest lounge has an open fire and is scattered with old-fashioned sofas, chairs, and an upright piano. The six rooms in the Tooloona block, which dates from the 1930s, have communal bathrooms and basic furniture. The recently refurbished motel-style Garden View rooms have en suite bathrooms and handcrafted maple furniture and some have small balconies. The 37 Mountain View rooms have the best views and also have en suite bathrooms. Seven are single rooms; the five family rooms in this block sleep up to five, and two rooms have wheelchair access. The newest, and most expensive, rooms are the three Canopy Suites, which are twice as large as any other rooms and have a king-size four-poster bed, separate sitting room, fireplace, spa, library, audio system, and bar. At meal times, the maitre d' assigns you to a table in the dining room, so you get to meet other guests. If you do not buy a meal package, buffet breakfast costs A\$24 (US\$14), lunch costs A\$26 (US\$17), and a three-course dinner is A\$45 (US\$24). Before dinner, guests head to the hexagonal timber bar, perched up high for great sunset views and half-price cocktails (5–6:30pm). Among other facilities are a cafe and gift shop, and free tea, coffee, and cookies all day.

Via Canungra, Lamington National Park Rd., Lamington National Park, QLD 4275. ☎ 1800/688 722 in Australia, or 07/5544 0644. Fax 07/5544 0638. www.oreillys.com.au. 70 units. A\$204–A\$483 (US\$133–US\$314) double; A\$618 (US\$402) canopy suites. Extra person A\$25 or A\$40 (US\$16 or US\$26) in Canopy Suites. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Free crib. Rates include all meals and activities. Minimum 2-night stay weekends, 3-night stay long weekends, 4-night stay Easter and Christmas. Ask about packages for stays of 2 nights or more. Meal plans A\$79 (US\$51) adults, A\$39 (US\$25) children 10–17, A\$20 (US\$13) children 4–9 for 3 meals per day; 2-meal packages available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; sauna; kids' club for kids over 5 on weekends and school vacations; game room; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* Fridge, coffeemaker. Canopy suites only: Minibar; Jacuzzi; stereo/CD player.

CAMPING

Binna Burra Campsite ★ Binna Burra Mountain Lodge's campsite is perched on the hill a few hundred meters from the main building. Permanent tents have screened windows, pine beds, table settings, and electric light. They have great valley views from a private veranda. Campers may pay to take part in the lodge activities and eat in the dining room if it's not full. The on-site store

sells basic take-out food and groceries that you can cook on the coin-operated gas barbecues (bring your own cutlery and crockery). You share shower blocks (and the showers are hot), and there's a public pay phone. If you want a campfire, buy wood before you arrive.

Beechmont via Canungra, QLD 4211. ☎ 1800/074 260 in Australia, or 07/5533 3622. Fax 07/5533 3747. www.BinnaBurrallodge.com.au. 8 powered campsites, 12 unpowered tent sites; 17 permanent tents (none with bathroom). Tent sites A\$10 (US\$6.50) adult, A\$7 (US\$4.55) seniors and students, A\$30 (US\$20) family of 5; powered site A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) extra per person per night. Permanent tents A\$40 (US\$26) for a 2-bed tent, A\$60 (US\$39) for a 4-bed tent. Half price for children 5–16. BYO linen and blankets. Ask about weekly discounts and midweek specials. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op laundry.

11 Outback Queensland

Spread over 3,000km (1,875 miles), the Outback is a heartstopping land of clear blue skies, burnished sunsets, rolling plains, rugged ranges, and endless vistas. Populated with colorful characters that could have walked off a movie set, the Outback is the heart and soul of Queensland. This is where the Aussie tradition of mateship was born, as pioneering cattlemen and their families battled the elements to make a go of it. The Queensland Outback is the birthplace of Australian legends like Waltzing Matilda. History comes alive when you get to places like the Burke River at Boulia, where explorers Burke and Wills filled their waterbags and modern-day travelers are invited to do the same, or at Lark Quarry, where dinosaurs once roamed.

The main centers of Queensland Outback life are the towns of Charleville, Barcaldine, Longreach, and Winton, and the mining town of Mt. Isa. They may be small, but they offer a completely different view of this vast state than you will get on the coast, and they are definitely worth the effort it takes to get to them.

LONGREACH

700km (437 miles) W of Rockhampton; 1,286km (804 miles) NW of Brisbane.

With a population of about 4,500, Longreach is the largest town in Queensland's Central West. One of the biggest surprises for first-time visitors to Longreach is that the town is set on the banks of a wide brown river, the Thomson. And after a hard day's traveling or sightseeing around Longreach, there's nothing more relaxing than a sunset cruise on the river or a campfire on its banks. This is bush ranger country, and wherever you go in this area, you'll hear the story of Captain Starlight, the cattle rustler who's become part of local folklore—it's one of those stories which gets better with each telling, and which has been immortalized in the classic Australian novel *Robbery Under Arms* by Rolfé Boldrewood. There's plenty to do in Longreach, and tour operators are on hand to take the difficulty out of the distances involved.

GETTING THERE By Car From Brisbane, Longreach is 1,286km (804 miles) northwest. Take the Warrego Highway west through Toowoomba and Roma, heading toward Charleville. About 90km (56 miles) before Charleville, head north to Augathella and join the Matilda Highway. From there it is about 320km (200 miles) to Barcaldine, and from there another 108km (67 miles) west to Longreach. From Rockhampton, the Capricorn Highway heads almost directly west through Emerald and Alpha for about 590km (369 miles) before joining the Matilda Highway.

By Plane Qantas (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies into historic Longreach Airport from Brisbane daily.

By Train **Queensland Rail Traveltrain** (© 13 22 32) runs the train *Spirit of the Outback* from Brisbane to Longreach via Rockhampton every Tuesday and Saturday, returning on Thursday and Monday. It's A\$163 (US\$106) for a seat from Brisbane or A\$211 to A\$315 (US\$137–US\$205) for a sleeper. Alternatively, you can join the train at Rockhampton at 4:30am on Wednesday or Sunday. The trip takes about 24½ hours from Brisbane, or 13½ hours from Rockhampton.

By Bus **McCafferty's Coaches** (© 13 14 99) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (© 13 20 30) run between Brisbane and Longreach daily. The trip takes 16 hours and costs A\$112 (US\$73).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Longreach Visitor Information Centre** is at Qantas Park, Longreach, QLD 4730 (© 07/4658 3555; fax 07/4658 3733). Another good source of information is the **Outback Queensland Tourism Authority** (© 1800 247 966 in Australia, or 07/3211 4877).

GETTING AROUND Rental-car companies **Avis** (©13 63 33 in Australia, or 07/4658 1799) and **Budget** (© 07/4658 2322) both have agents in Longreach.

Several tour companies offer tours in and around Longreach and to other Central West Outback towns. One of the best is Alan and Sue Smith's **Outback Aussie Tours** ★★ (© 1300 787 890 in Australia, or 07/4658 3000; www.outbackaussietours.com.au), which runs trips taking in Longreach, Ilfracombe, Winton, and Barcaldine, as well as the Lark Quarry dinosaur site. **Longreach Outback Travel Centre** (© 07/4658 1776; www.lotc.com.au) has information on a variety of tours.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame & Outback Heritage Centre ★★

This should be the first stop on any visit to Longreach. I could spend all day at the Hall of Fame, but try to allow at least 4 hours. A tribute to the pioneers who developed the Outback, the center honors explorers, stockmen, poets, and artists. Part museum, part memorial, part interactive display, this world-class attraction is educational, entertaining, and quite amazing. Exhibits are updated regularly and give a fascinating insight into the Aboriginal and European history of Australia, blending modern technology with artifacts and relics of a bygone age.

Ilfracombe Rd., Longreach. (© 07/4658 2166. Fax 07/4658 2495. www.outbackheritage.com.au. A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$17 (US\$11) seniors, A\$10 (US\$6.50) children 8–17, A\$45 (US\$29) family. Daily 9am–5pm except Christmas.

Longreach School of Distance Education Tours of this unique school system—also known as the School of the Air—will give you insight into the isolation of Outback families. You can watch a teacher conducting on-air lessons via two-way radio to students on far-flung stations. Hundreds of children in western Queensland take advantage of this form of education.

Sir James Walker Dr., Longreach. (© 07/4658 4222. A\$3 (US\$1.95) adults, A\$1 (US\$65¢) seniors and children. Guided tours at 9am and 10am on school days only.

Qantas Founders Outback Museum Anyone who's ever flown on Australia's first airline will be interested in this tribute to pioneer aviators. Longreach is the original home of Qantas, as the airline's operational base from 1922 to 1934, when Australia's first six aircraft were built here. During World War II, Longreach was used as a base by U.S. Flying Fortress bombers for their Pacific operations. The original hangar is now complemented by a A\$9 million (US\$5.8 million) world-class museum, with the main exhibit a full-size replica of an AVRO 504K,

the first type of aircraft operated by Qantas. Located at the airport, opposite the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, this sleek building, which resembles an aircraft hangar, contrasts perfectly with the original hangar.

Qantas hangar, Longreach Airport. ☎ 07/4658 3737. qfom@tpg.com.au. A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) seniors, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children 7–16, A\$30 (US\$20) family. Daily 9am–5pm except Christmas.

OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO

Thomson River cruises—usually at sunset—are run by two local companies, **Billabong Boat Cruises** (☎ 07/4658 1776) and **Yellowbelly Explorer** (☎ 07/4658 3000). A 3-hour cruise with **Yellowbelly Explorer** ★ includes pickup from Longreach accommodations and dinner, and costs A\$39 (US\$25) adults and A\$22 (US\$14) children. At the end of the night, you'll be entertained by some of the local talent, which could be bush poetry or a singalong.

Take a half-day tour to Oakley Station to experience life on a cattle and sheep property. The station is a 15-minute drive from town, so you won't be spending a lot of time getting there. Four generations of the Forrest family have farmed this land, with Brahmin cattle and merino sheep. The 3-hour tour includes afternoon tea with the Forrests, and costs A\$36 (US\$23) adults, A\$21 (US\$14) children, and can be booked through any of the tour companies or **Longreach Outback Travel Centre** (☎ 07/4658 1776).

A 30-minute drive from Longreach is the small town of **Ilfracombe**. Attractions include the folk museum, with its large collection of old vehicles, including a horse-drawn wool wagon, sulkies, cart, and farm machinery. The museum also has a turn-of-the-20th-century police cell and a collection of Aboriginal artifacts, historic photographs, and early pioneering silver and china.

Stop at the historic Wellshot Hotel in Ilfracombe for a cool drink. Named for the largest sheep station in the world in its heyday, the pub is a popular local watering hole.

WHERE TO STAY

Albert Park Motel The Albert Park is conveniently located just 200m (660 ft.) from the airport (and Qantas Founders Museum) and 500m (1600 ft.) from the Australian Stockmen's Hall of Fame. It's about 1.5km (just under a mile) to the center of town. The Oasis restaurant is open for dinner 7 days, and is usually open for breakfast in high season (Easter–Oct). The a la carte dinner menu offers large meals at reasonable prices. There are nonsmoking rooms, and hair dryers are provided on request.

Sir Hudson Fysh Dr., Longreach, QLD 4730. ☎ 1800/821 811 in Australia, or 07/4658 2411. Fax 07/4658 3181. 56 units (with shower only). A\$94 (US\$61) single; A\$105 (US\$68) double. Extra adult A\$12 (US\$7.80), extra child A\$6 (US\$3.90). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; shaded heated saltwater pool; Jacuzzi; children's wading pool; tour desk; room service (breakfast and dinner only); dry cleaning; guest laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, small fridge, minibar, coffeemaker, iron.

WINTON

175km (109 miles) NW of Longreach; 1500km (94 miles) NW of Brisbane; 470km (294 miles) E of Mt. Isa

Winton is best known as the place where Banjo Paterson wrote "Waltzing Matilda" in 1885, for which the nearby Combo Waterhole was the inspiration. The town has a population of 1,200 and most of its major attractions are linked to the song.

GETTING THERE & AROUND The nearest car hire is in Longreach. Roads are all sealed between Winton, Longreach, and Mt. Isa. **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30) have daily coach services between

On the Dinosaur Trail

Few people know that Steven Spielberg's inspiration for a scene for the blockbuster *Jurassic Park* was a fossil discovery in Outback Queensland . . . the stampeding footprints of 150 terrified coelurosaurs and ornithopods at Lark Quarry.

Lark Quarry is one of the most amazing fossil sites in the world, recording a dramatic moment in time 95 million years ago, when the hot, dusty area outside Winton was once a small prehistoric lake. A large flesh-eating carnosaur trapped around 150 smaller coelurosaurs and ornithopods at the lake edge, causing them to flee in panic.

It is the only surviving record of a dinosaur stampede on Earth. The trackways were undiscovered until 1962, and are now part of the Queensland Heritage Trails Network (see box p. 253). Recent multi-million-dollar conservation works include a protective building over the tracks to conserve the footprints by controlling the temperature, humidity, and moisture levels, and an elevated walkway for best viewing and photography of the tracks. A lookout offers panoramic views over the vast Lark Quarry environmental park. There are also interpretive displays, picnic tables, and toilets.

Lark Quarry is 110km (69 miles) southwest of Winton, on the unsealed Jundah Road, about a 2-hour drive. Before setting out, check road conditions and directions with Waltzing Matilda Centre (☎ 07/4657 1466). The best way to get to the site is by guided tour. **Diamantina Outback Tours** in Winton (☎ 07/4657 1309) offers full-day tours, departing Winton at 8am and returning around 4pm for A\$95 (US\$62) per person. **Outback Aussie Tours** in Longreach (☎ 1300 787 890 in Australia, or 07/4658 3000; www.outbackaussietours.com.au) runs a 12-hour day tour to Winton for A\$125 (US\$81) adults, A\$89 (US\$58) children 3 to 17 on Monday and Friday (Apr–Oct only). Groups of five or more can charter a flight from Winton to Lark Quarry with **Queensland Outback Tour Services** (☎ 07/4657 1340), for A\$110 (US\$72) per person.

For more information call the **Winton Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 1800/247 966 in Australia, or 07/4657 1466). Lark Quarry is open daily from 9am to 4pm. Admission is A\$9 (US\$5.85) adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) school-age children, and A\$22 (US\$14) per family.

Longreach and Mt. Isa, stopping at Winton. The trip takes more than 8 hours and costs A\$81 (US\$53). Coach connections from Longreach to Winton are also available to passengers on the *Spirit of the Outback* train (**Queensland Rail Traveltrain** ☎ 13 22 32).

VISITOR INFORMATION **Waltzing Matilda Centre** is at Elderslie Street, Winton (☎ 07/4657 1466; fax 07/4567 1886; www.matildacentre.com.au). Or try the **Outback Queensland Tourism Authority** (☎ 1800 247 966 in Australia, or 07/3211 4877) for information before you arrive. If you're planning to spend a few days here, buy a "Shin Plaster" pass to Winton's attractions for A\$15

(US\$9.75) adult or A\$40 (US\$26) family. For A\$22 (US\$14) adult or A\$50 (US\$33) family, it also covers entry to the Lark Quarry dinosaur tracks.

OTHER TOP ATTRACTIONS

Waltzing Matilda Centre Dedicated to Australia's most famous song, written by the Banjo Paterson in 1898 at Dagworth Station, near Winton, the center uses modern technology and interactive displays to celebrate the writer's life and times and the role his song has played in Australia's psyche. There's also an art gallery, local history museum, restaurant, and gift shop.

50 Elderslie St., Winton. ☎ 07/4657 1466. Fax 07/4567 1886. www.matildacentre.com.au. A\$14 (US\$9.10) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) seniors and children, A\$30 (US\$20) family. Daily 8.30am–5pm (until 4pm Dec–Feb); Good Friday 10am–4pm. Closed Christmas.

Combo Waterhole Conservation Park (☎ 07/4652 7333), believed to be the inspiration for Waltzing Matilda, is a short drive off the Matilda Highway, about 150km (94 miles) north of Winton. It is then a 40-minute walk from the parking lot to the waterhole.

WHERE TO STAY

Boulder Opal Motor Inn This is Winton's newest motel, a family-owned business which opened in 2000. All rooms have a queen size and a single bed, and two rooms are specially designed for people with disabilities. The licensed restaurant, Matrix, has an Outback theme, but that doesn't extend to the cuisine, which is more Mediterranean-inspired. It is open daily for breakfast and Monday to Saturday for dinner. The reception area has a great display of hand-crafted opal jewelry (the owners are also active in local opal mining). The motel is only 500m (1,600 ft.) from the Waltzing Matilda Centre.

16 Elderslie St., Winton. ☎ 07/4657 1211. Fax 07/4657 1331. www.jasons.com.au. 26 units (with shower only). A\$75 (US\$49) single; A\$86 (US\$56) double; A\$135 (US\$88) 2-bedroom unit. AE, DC, MC, V. Free undercover parking. Free airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; limited room service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, minifridge, coffeemaker.

MT. ISA

893km (558 miles)W of Townsville; 633km (395 miles) NW of Longreach

Mt. Isa is Queensland's largest provincial city west of the Great Dividing Range. The town was built around mining, and the population of 22,000 reflects that in the 50 different nationalities represented. The huge Mt. Isa Mine dominates the town. It is the world's largest single producer of copper, silver, lead, and zinc. A social highlight of the year is the annual **Mt. Isa Rodeo** (☎ 1800 763 361 in Australia or 07/4743 2706; www.isarodeo.com.au), held every August. It's the biggest rodeo in the southern hemisphere.

GETTING THERE By Car Mt. Isa is 893km (558 miles) west of Townsville on the Flinders Highway. From Longreach, take the Landsborough Highway northwest through Winton and on to Cloncurry. Mt. Isa is about 120km (75 miles) west of Cloncurry on the Barkly Highway. The total trip from Longreach is 633km (395 miles). Motorists should check all road conditions with local authorities before setting out.

By Train Queensland Rail Traveltrain (☎ 13 22 32) operates the *Inlander* train from Townsville to Mt. Isa every Sunday and Wednesday, returning on Monday and Friday. The 977km (610-mile) journey takes 22 hours and costs A\$110 (US\$72) per adult for a seat or A\$158 to A\$237 (US\$103–US\$154) for a sleeper.

By Bus **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia, or 07/3258 1800) both service Mt. Isa from Townsville. The trip takes about 12 hours and costs A\$119 (US\$77) one-way.

By Plane **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) serves Mt. Isa from Brisbane. **Macair** (book through Qantas) flies to Mt. Isa from Cairns and Townsville.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Mt. Isa Tourist Information Centre** is at the Riversleigh Fossil Museum, 19 Marian St., Mt. Isa, QLD 4825 (☎ 1300 659 660 in Australia, or 07/4749 1555; fax 07/4743 6296; www.riversleigh.qld.gov.au).

GETTING AROUND Car hire companies **Avis** (☎ 07/4743 3733) and **Budget** (☎ 13 27 27 or 07/4725 2344) both have offices in Mt. Isa.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Lawn Hill National Park Sheer red cliff walls, deep flowing green water, walking tracks, and Aboriginal sites are the features of this Outback oasis. World Heritage-listed Riversleigh is part of Lawn Hill's fossil section. **Campbells Tours and Travel** (☎ 1800 242 329 in Australia, or 07/4743 2006) has a 3-day tour from Mt. Isa for A\$550 (US\$358) adult, A\$330 (US\$215) children. You stay at a permanent camp under the paperbark trees at Gregory River with hot and cold showers and a great swimming and recreation area equipped with canoes. The guided tour takes you to Riversleigh's fossil fields the first day, followed by a full day in the national park bushwalking, visiting Aboriginal rock art, canoeing Lawn Hill Creek, and swimming in the natural spa. On the third day there's a visit to the limestone grottos and time for swimming, canoeing, or fishing before heading back to Mt. Isa.

About 500km (312 miles) northwest of Mt. Isa.

Mt. Isa Mine Tours Campbells Tours runs a 2-hour tour of the surface of the mine, which takes in open cut mines, shafts, smelters, and workshops. You don't get off the bus but it is quite interesting anyway.

☎ 1800/242 329 in Australia, or 07/4743 2006. A\$22 (US\$14) adults, half price for children. Tours run daily except Sun. Bookings essential.

Riversleigh Fossil Centre This interpretive center gives insight into life in the Riversleigh region some 25 million years ago when dinosaurs roamed. The fossil fields have given up some of their secrets, and dioramas re-create some of the ancient animal life, such as *Obdurodon*, an ancestral platypus, and the wonderfully named *Thingadonton*. In the fossil treatment laboratory, you can watch as fossils come to light for the first time in millions of years as a laboratory technician and palaeontologist carry out preparatory work on the fossils gathered from the Riversleigh site. Tours to this section are held every day on the hour and include a step-by-step explanation. It's a "must-see" for visitors to the center.

19 Marian St. ☎ 07/4749 1555. Fax 07/4743 6296. www.riversleigh.qld.gov.au. A\$5 (US\$3.25) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) seniors and children ages 5–17.

Royal Flying Doctor Base A 15-minute movie shows "a day in the life" of a flying doctor who covers 1.3 sq. km (500,000 sq. miles) of northwest Queensland. There's also a small museum and display area and a souvenir shop, and picnic and barbecue facilities are available in the shady gardens.

11 Barkley Hwy., Mt. Isa. ☎ 07/4743 2800. www.flyingdoctorqueensland.net. A\$2.50 (US\$1.65) adults, A\$0.50 (US\$3¢) children. Mon–Fri. 8:30am–4:30pm. Closed weekends, public holidays, and Queensland school holidays.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Mt. Isa has plenty of accommodations, from backpacker hostels and caravan parks to host farms and four-star hotels. Make sure your lodgings are air-conditioned because you'll need it.

Mercure Inn Burke & Wills This is Mt. Isa's best hotel and it's right in the heart of town, just a A\$11 (US\$7.15) taxi ride from the airport or A\$6 (US\$3.90) from the bus or train station. In this heat, you don't want to be far from anything, especially if you're walking. The hotel's Explorer's restaurant is among the best in town, and the adjoining cocktail bar is a pleasant place for a pre-dinner drink. The restaurant is open every day for breakfast, and for dinner Monday through Saturday.

Grace and Camooweal sts., Mt. Isa, QLD 4825. ☎ 1800/679 178 in Australia, or 07/4743 8000. Fax 07/4743 8424. www.accor-hotels.com.au. 53 units, all with bathroom (6 with shower only). A\$147–A\$192 (US\$96–US\$125) single or double per night. Free cribs. AE, D, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; nearby golf course and day/night tennis courts; Jacuzzi; room service (6–10am and 6–10pm); tour desk; coin-op laundry; laundry and same-day dry cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, VCR, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

The Red Centre

by Marc Llewellyn

The Red Centre is the landscape many of us conjure up when we think of the Outback—vast horizons, red sand as far as the eye can see, mysterious monoliths, cloudless blue sky, harsh sunlight, and the rhythmic twang of the didgeridoo. It's home to sprawling cattle ranches; ancient mountain ranges; "living fossil" palm trees that survived the Ice Age; cockatoos and kangaroos; red gorges; pretty water holes; and, Ayers Rock, now officially called by its Aboriginal name, Uluru. Aboriginal people have lived here for thousands of years, long before the Pyramids were a twinkle in a Pharaoh's eye, but the Centre is still largely unexplored by non-Aboriginal Australians. One highway cuts from Adelaide in the south to Darwin in the north, and a few roads and 4WD tracks make a lonely spider web across it; there are many areas where non-Aborigines have never set foot.

Alice Springs is the only big town in Central Australia. So let's get one

thing straight—Alice Springs and Uluru are *not* side by side. Uluru is 462km (286 miles) away. You can see it in a day from Alice, but it's an effort.

The Red Centre is more than just the Rock. Give yourself a few days to experience all there is—visiting the impressive Olgas (or Kata Tjuta by its Aboriginal name) near Uluru/Ayers Rock, walking the rim of Kings Canyon, riding a camel down a dry riverbed, poking around Aboriginal rock carvings, swimming in water holes, or staying at an Outback homestead. A stay in Alice Springs also gives you a better flavor for the Outback than Uluru. If you base yourself in Alice, it's easy to radiate out to less crowded but still beautiful attractions like Palm Valley, Ormiston Gorge, and Trephina Gorge Nature Park, each easily handled as a day trip. Too many visitors jet in, snap a photo of the Rock, and head home, only to miss the essence of the desert.

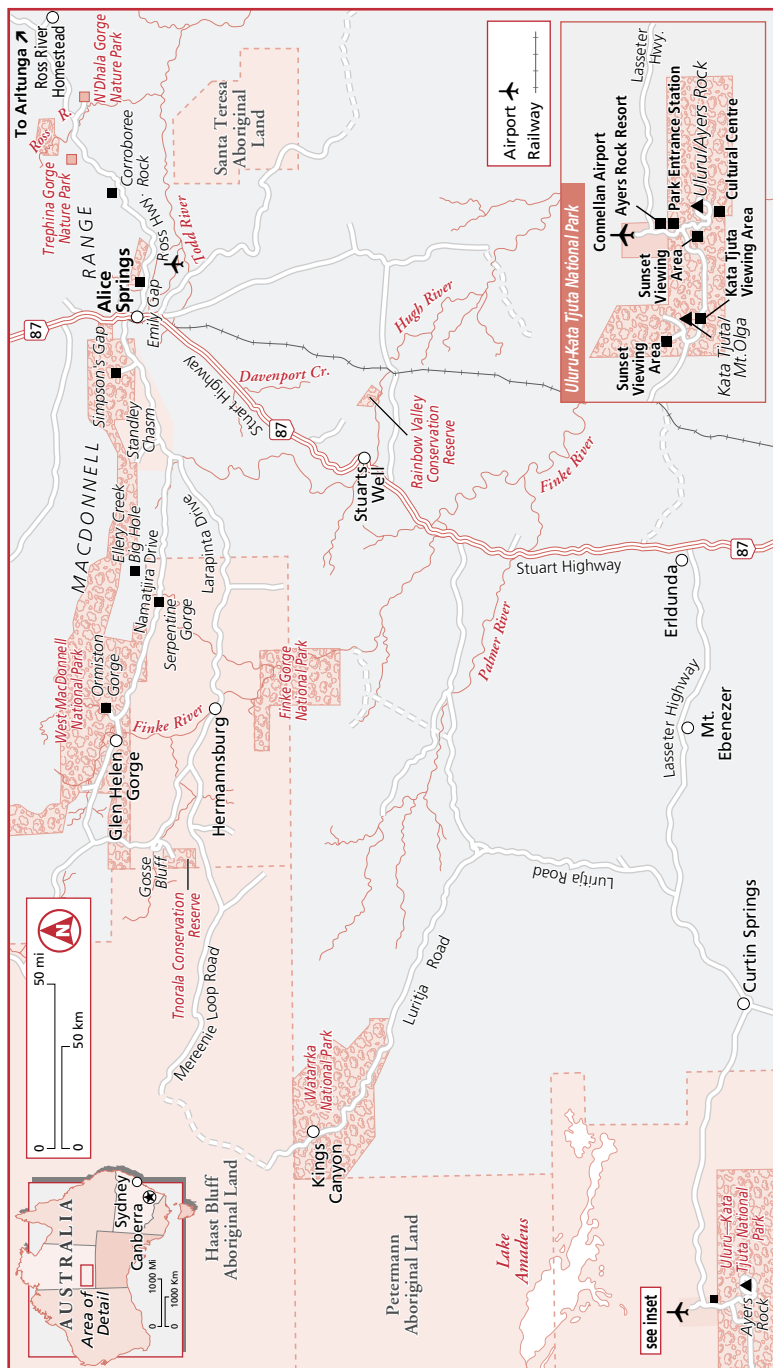
1 Exploring the Red Centre

VISITOR INFORMATION The Central Australian Tourism Industry Association (CATIA), 60 Gregory Terrace, Alice Springs, NT 0870 (☎ **08/8952 5800**; www.centralaustraliatourism.com), can send you a brochure pack. It is your best one-stop source of information.

Most of the Red Centre lies within the Northern Territory. The **Northern Territory Tourist Commission (NTTC)**, Tourism House, 43 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800 (☎ **13 61 10** in Australia, or 08/8999 3900; www.ntholidays.com), maintains a website for adventurous independent travelers (www.ozoutback.com). The commission publishes a helpful annual guide to Central Australia that details many hotels, tour operators, car-rental companies, and attractions, and operates a division that offers package deals on complete trips.

WHEN TO GO April/May and September/October have sunny days (coolish in May, hot in Oct). Winter (that's June–Aug) means mild temperatures with

The Red Centre



cold nights. Summer (Nov–Mar) is ferociously hot and best avoided. In summer, limit exertions to early morning and late afternoon, and choose air-conditioned accommodations. Rain is rare but can come at any time of year.

DRIVING TIPS The **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory (AANT)**, 79–81 Smith St., Darwin, NT 0800 (☎ **08/8981 3837**), offers emergency breakdown service to members of affiliated overseas automobile associations and dispenses maps and advice. It has no office in the Red Centre. For **road conditions**, call ☎ **1800/246 199** in Australia for a recorded report.

Only a handful of highways and arterial roads are sealed (paved) in the Northern Territory. A conventional two-wheel-drive car will get you to 95% of all you want to see, but consider renting a 4WD for complete freedom. All the big car-rental chains rent them. Some attractions are on unpaved roads good enough for a two-wheel-drive car, but your car-rental company will not insure a two-wheel-drive for driving on them.

Outside settled areas, the Territory has no speed limit, but before you hit the gas, consider the risk of hitting wild camels, kangaroos, and protected native wildlife. Locals stick to a comfortable 120kmph (75 mph) or less. Avoid driving at night, early morning, and late afternoon when 'roos feed; beware of cattle lying down on the warm bitumen at night. A white road sign bearing a black circle outline crossed by a diagonal black line indicates the point when speed restrictions no longer apply. Make sure you have a full tank of petrol before setting out.

Road trains (trucks hauling more than one container) and fatigue caused by driving long distances are two other major threats. For details on safe driving, review the tips in the “By Car” section of “Getting Around Australia” in chapter 2.

If you plan to “go bush” in remote regions not covered by this guide, you may need a permit to cross Aboriginal land from the relevant Aboriginal lands council. This can be a drawn-out bureaucratic affair taking weeks, so plan ahead. The Northern Territory Tourist Commission (see “Visitor Information” above) can put you in touch with the appropriate council. All good road maps mark Aboriginal lands clearly.

OTHER TRAVEL TIPS **Always carry drinking water.** When hiking, carry 4 liters (about a gallon) per person per day in winter, and a liter (¼ gal.) per person per hour in summer. Wear a broad-brimmed hat, high-factor sunscreen lotion, and insect repellent.

Bring warm clothing for chilly evenings in winter.

TOUR OPERATORS No end of coach, minicoach, and 4WD tour operators run tours taking in Alice Springs, Kings Canyon, and Uluru. They depart either Alice Springs or Uluru, offering accommodations ranging from spiffy resorts, comfortable motels, and basic cabins to shared bunkhouses, tents, or swags (sleeping bags) under the stars. Most pack the highlights into a 2- or 3-day trip, though leisurely trips of 6 days or more are available. Many offer one-way itineraries

Tips Buzz Off!

Uluru is notorious for plagues of flies in summer. Don't be embarrassed to cover your head with the fly nets sold in souvenir stores—you'll look like the Dreamtime Beekeeper from Outer Space, but there will be “no flies on you, mate,” an Aussie way of saying you are doing the right thing.

between Alice and the Rock (via Kings Canyon if you like), or vice versa, which will allow you to avoid backtracking.

Among the reputable companies are **AAT Kings** (☎ 1800/334 009 in Australia, or 03/9274 7422 for the Melbourne central reservations office; www.aatkings.com), which specializes in coach tours but also has 4WD camping itineraries; **Alice Springs Holidays** (☎ 08/8953 1411; www.alicespringsholidays.com.au), which does upscale soft-adventure tours for groups; **Sahara Outback Tours** (☎ 08/8953 0881; www.saharatours.com.au), which conducts camping safaris in small groups for all ages; and **Discovery Ecotours** (☎ 1800/803 174 in Australia, or 08/8956 2563; www.ecotours.com.au), which specializes in ecotours for groups. Coach operator **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia; www.greyhound.com.au) provides good-value, large bus tours. One of these is a 3-day tour from Alice Springs to Uluru, Kings Canyon, and the Olgas costing A\$279 (US\$181). A 2-day tour including Uluru and the Olgas costs A\$250 (US\$162).

Tailormade Tours (☎ 08/8952 1731) and **VIP Travel Australia** (☎ 1800/806 412 in Australia, or 08/8956 2388; www.vipaustalia.com.au) customize luxury tours in limos, minicoaches, and four-wheel-drives, and offer treats like desert barbecues and champagne tailgate dinners overlooking the Rock or the Olgas.

You can book Sahara Outback Tours and Tailormade Tours via **Alice Springs Tour Professionals** (☎ 08/8953 0666; www.alicetourprofessionals.com.au), a one-stop shop that represents a number of Alice Springs-based tour and sight-seeing companies.

Aboriginal Desert Discovery Tours (☎ 08/8952 3408; www.aboriginalart.com.au), owned by Alice Springs Aboriginal people, teams up its Aboriginal guides with Alice-based tour companies to offer tours with an Aboriginal slant.

2 Alice Springs

462km (286 miles) NE of Ayers Rock; 1,491km (924 miles) S of Darwin; 1,544km (957 miles) N of Adelaide; 2,954km (1,831 miles) NW of Sydney

"The Alice," as Australians fondly dub it, is the unofficial capital of Outback Australia. In the early 1870s, a handful of telegraph-station workers struggled nearly 1,600km (992 miles) north from Adelaide through the desert to settle by a small spring in what must have seemed like the end of the earth. Alice Springs, as the place was called, was just a few huts around a repeater station on the ambitious telegraph line that was to link Adelaide with Darwin and the rest of the world.

Today Alice is a city of 27,000 people, with supermarkets, banks, and the odd nightclub. It's a friendly, rambling, unsophisticated kind of place. No matter what direction you come from, you will soar for hours over a vast, flat landscape to get here. That's why folks are so surprised when they reach Alice Springs and see low but dramatic mountain ranges, rippling red in the sunshine. Many people excitedly mistake them for Uluru, but that baby is about 500km (310 miles) down the road. The hills that jut their craggy faces close by are the **MacDonnell Ranges**.

Many tourists visit Alice only to get to Uluru, but Alice has charms all its own, albeit mostly of a small-town kind. The red folds of the MacDonnell Ranges hide lovely gorges with shady picnic grounds. A planned 250km (155-mile) hiking trail is partly ready for your boots now. There is an old gold-rush town to poke around in, quirky little museums, wildlife parks, a couple of cattle stations (ranches) that welcome visitors, a couple of nice day trips out of town, and one of the world's top-10 desert golf courses. You could easily fill 2 or 3 days in the area.

This is the heart of the Aboriginal Arrernte people's country, and Alice is a rich source of tours, shops, and galleries for those interested in Aboriginal culture, art, or souvenirs. There is a sad side to this story. Not every Aborigine succeeds in splicing his or her ancient civilization with the 21st century, and the result is dislocated communities living in the riverbed with only alcohol for company.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies direct from Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin, Cairns, Broome, and Ayers Rock. Flights from most other cities connect via Sydney or Adelaide. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 80 in Australia; www.virginblue.com.au) flies to Alice Springs direct from Sydney, with connections from Adelaide, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, and Melbourne. The company offers heavily discounted prices if you book on the Net and well in advance. Prices start from around A\$199 (US\$165) one-way. **Airnorth** (☎ 1800/627 474 in Australia, or 08/8945 2866) does a "Centre Run" from Darwin via Katherine and Tennant Creek daily except Sunday.

The **Alice Springs Airport Shuttle** (☎ 1800/621 188 in the Northern Territory, or 08/8953 0310) meets all major flights (but not always those from small towns like Tennant Creek) and transfers you to your Alice hotel door for A\$10 (US\$6.50) one-way or A\$18 (US\$11.70) round-trip, per person. A taxi from the airport to town, a distance of 15km (9½ miles), is around A\$25 (US\$16).

By Train **The Ghan** train, named after Afghani camel-train drivers who carried supplies in the Red Centre 19th century, makes a 2-day trip from Sydney or Melbourne via Adelaide to Alice every week. The twice-weekly Adelaide–Alice stretch takes roughly 24 hours. It is treeless and empty, if fascinatingly so, so don't be concerned you'll miss it by overnighting on the train. The train has sleeper berths. For fares and schedules, call **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47 within Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au). *The Ghan* will extend its run to Darwin in 2004, with the completion of a new 1,410km (876-mile) rail link.

By Bus **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) runs from Adelaide and Darwin. It's about a 19½-hour trip from Adelaide, and the fare is around A\$168 (US\$109). The 21-hour trip from Darwin costs about A\$180 (US\$117). Greyhound does a daily 5¾-hour run from Uluru/Ayers Rock; the fare is around A\$71 (US\$46). It also does a daily trip from Kings Canyon for \$54 (US\$35).

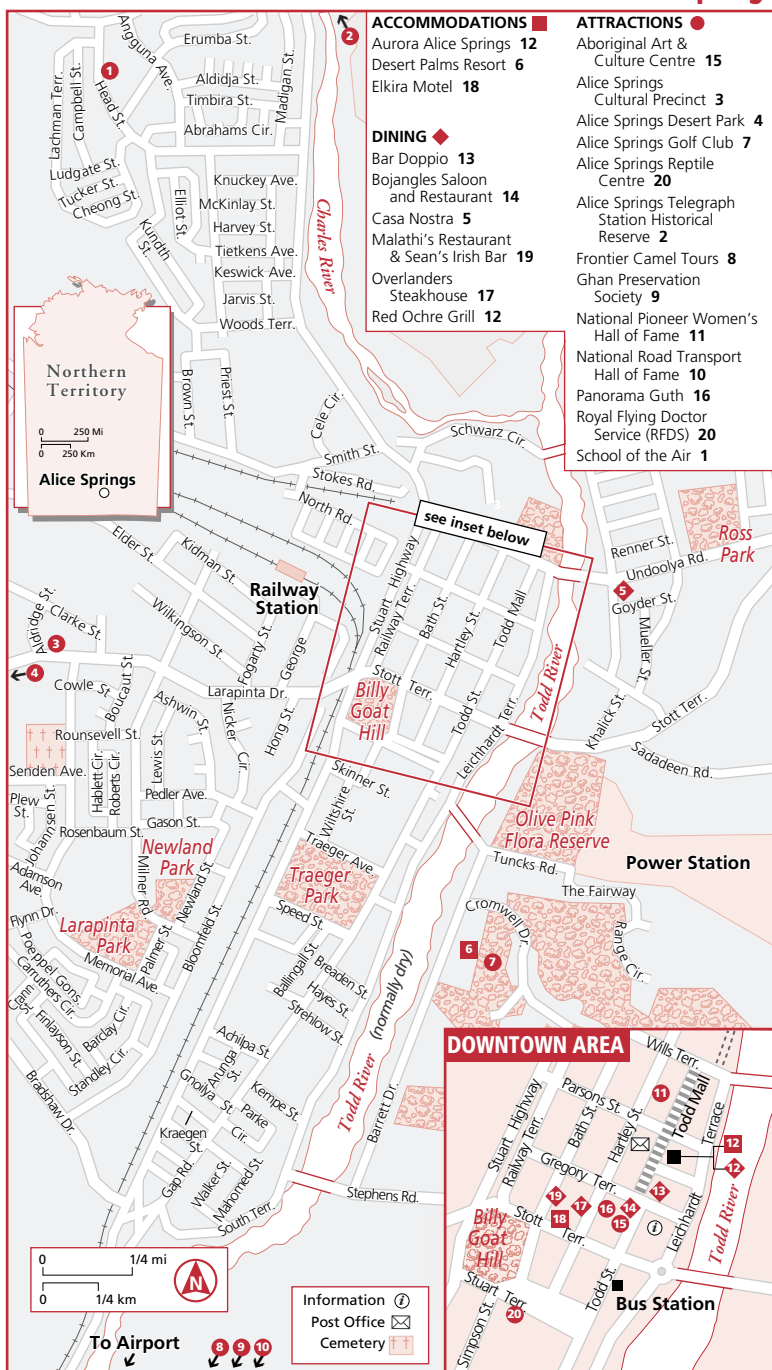
By Car Alice Springs is on the Stuart Highway linking Adelaide and Darwin. Allow a very long 2 or a more comfortable 3 days to drive from Adelaide, the same from Darwin. From Sydney, connect to the Stuart Highway via Broken Hill and Port Augusta north of Adelaide; from Cairns head south to Townsville, then west via the town of Mt. Isa to join the Stuart Highway at Tennant Creek. Both routes are long and dull. From Perth it is an even longer, duller drive across the Nullarbor Plain to connect with the Stuart Highway at Port Augusta.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Central Australian Tourism Industry Association (CATIA) Visitor Information Centre**, 60 Gregory Terrace, Alice Springs, NT 0870 (☎ 08/8952 5800; www.centralaustralian tourism.com), is the official

Tips **Safety in the Centre**

Alice is a safe place, but steer clear of dark streets and the riverbed at night, as some teenagers can make a nuisance of themselves.

Alice Springs



one-stop shop for bookings and touring information for the Red Centre, including Alice Springs, Kings Canyon, and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock). It also acts as the visitor center for the Parks & Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm and from 9am to 4pm weekends and public holidays. It also has a desk at the airport.

SPECIAL EVENTS The town hosts a couple of bizarre events. The **Camel Cup** camel race takes place on the second Saturday in July. In late September, folks from hundreds of kilometers come out to cheer at the **Henley-on-Todd Regatta**. They cheer on the owners of gaudily decorated, homemade bottomless “boats” as they race them on foot down the dry Todd River bed. Well, what else do you do on a river that flows only 3 days a year? See “Australia Calendar of Events” in chapter 2 for more details on this event.

GETTING AROUND Virtually all tours pick you up at your hotel.

If your itinerary traverses unpaved roads, as it may do in outlying areas from Alice, you will need to rent a 4WD, as regular cars will not be insured on an unpaved road surface. However, a regular car will get you to most attractions. **Aviss** (☎ 08/8953 5533), **Budget** (☎ 08/8952 8899), **EuropCar** (☎ 08/8955 5994), **Hertz** (☎ 08/8952 2644), local company **Outback Auto Rentals** (☎ 1800/652 133 in Australia, or 08/8953 5333), and **Thrifty** (☎ 08/8952 9999) all rent conventional and 4WD vehicles. You may get a better deal on car rental by going through the booking agent **The Outback Travel Shop** (☎ 08/8955 5288; www.outbacktravelshop.com.au) in Alice Springs, as it negotiates bulk rates with most Alice car-rental companies.

Hertz, Thrifty, and Outback Auto Rentals rent **camping kits** holding everything you need, including a tent, sleeping bags, and a gas stove. A kit will cost around A\$15 (US\$9.75) per person per day. Book them in advance. Camping gear usually only fits into 4WD vehicles, not sedans.

Many campervan rental outfits have Alice offices, including **Britz Campervan Rentals** (☎ 08/8952 8814), **Hertz Campervans** (☎ 08/8953 5333), **Kea Camper** (☎ 1800/252 555), and **Maui Rentals** (☎ 08/8952 8049). As an example of price, **Apollo Campers** (☎ 1800 777 779 in Australia; www.apollowcamper.com) rents two-to-three-berth vans for around \$100 (US\$65) a day, with pick-up and drop-off at several major centers. A four-wheel drive version costs between A\$165 and A\$220 (US\$107–US\$143) a day. This can work out significantly cheaper than staying in hotels and going on tours.

The best way to get around town without your own transport is aboard the **Alice Wanderer** bus (☎ 1800/722 111 in Australia, or 08/8952 2111). Taxi fares are exorbitant, presumably because there's only one main outfit in town, **Alice Springs Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08).

CITY LAYOUT **Todd Mall** is the heart of town. Most shops, businesses, and restaurants are here or within a few blocks' walk. Most hotels, the casino, the golf course, and many of the town's attractions are located a few kilometers outside of town. The dry Todd River “flows” through the city east of Todd Mall.

SEEING THE SIGHTS IN ALICE

Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre Set up by the Southern Arrernte Aboriginal people, this center houses a small, intriguing museum with exhibits on Aboriginal life. It displays a timeline of the Aboriginal view of history since “contact” (the arrival of Europeans). It's worth a visit if you're interested in indigenous cultures. It sells artifacts and art. Allow from 15 minutes to 1 hour.

86 Todd St. ☎ 08/8952 3408. Free Admission. Daily 8am–5pm.

Earning a Degree from Didgeridoo University

Fancy yourself a Louis Armstrong of the desert? Then Didgeridoo University, at the Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre, is the place for you.

Local Aboriginal Paul Ah Chee-Ngala set up his “campus” to satisfy an ever-growing demand from world travelers to master the didgeridoo’s evocative rhythms. In truth, the university is an alcove in the culture center, and the degree takes just 1 hour. Classes begin every day at 1pm and cost A\$12 (US\$7.50) adults, A\$5.50 (US\$3.25) kids (kids are free as part of the Centre’s half-day tour described in “Organized Tours” below). Paul guarantees you will make kangaroo hopping sounds on the darn thing within the hour. The trick is to breathe in and out at the same time, a technique known as “circular breathing.”

When buying a didgeridoo, keep in mind there is no such thing as a “good” or a “bad” one. The diameter, the wood used, and the unique surface of the instrument’s insides are what makes each one unique. The pitch of the instrument can vary from a high wail to a deep and somber drone; the shorter the instrument, the higher the pitch.

If you can’t take a “degree” in Alice, learn to play the thing in your own living room via an audio lesson on the center’s website, www.aboriginalart.com.au. The site sells didgeridoos, too.

Alice Springs Cultural Precinct At least one or two of the attractions here will probably pique your interest. All of them are within walking distance of each another. The **Museum of Central Australia** mostly shows local fossils, natural history, and meteorites. Some impressive Aboriginal and contemporary Aussie art is shown at the **Araluen Centre**, the town’s performing arts center; check out the “Honey Ant Dreaming” stained-glass window in its foyer. Aviation nuts may want to browse the old radios, aircraft, and wreckage in the **Aviation Museum**, which preserves the Territory’s aerial history. You can buy stylish crafts, and sometimes catch artists at work, in the Territory Craft gallery. You may want to amble among the outdoor sculptures, including the 15m (49-ft.) *Yeperenye Dreamtime Caterpillar*; or among the gravestones in the cemetery, where “Afghani” (they actually came from the part of the British Empire that is now Pakistan) camel herders are buried facing Mecca. There is a picnic area, but save your picnic for the Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve (below).

Larapinta Dr. at Memorial Ave., 2km (1¼ miles) south of town. ☎ 08/8951 1120. Incorporating the Museum of Central Australia, Araluen Centre (☎ 08/8951 1122 box office), Central Australian Aviation Museum, Territory Craft, and Memorial Cemetery. Admission (includes all attractions) A\$8 (US\$5.20) adults; A\$5 (US\$3.25) children 5–16, seniors, and students; A\$20 (US\$13) family. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas and Good Friday. Take a cab, Alice Wanderer bus, or Desert Park Transfers (see “Organized Tours” below).

Alice Springs Desert Park 🌵 By means of an easy 1.6km (1-mile) trail through three reconstructed natural habitats, this impressive wildlife and flora park shows you 120 or so of the animal species that live in the desert around Alice, but that you won’t spot too easily in the wild (including kangaroos you can walk amongst). Most of the creatures are small mammals (like the big-eared bilby), reptiles (cute thorny devil lizards), and birds. Don’t miss the excellent **Birds of Prey** 🦅🦅 show at 10am and 3:30pm. There’s a cafe, too. Allow 2 to 3 hours.

Larapinta Dr., 6km (3¾ miles) west of town. ☎ 08/8951 8788. Admission A\$18 (US\$12) adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) students and children 5–16, A\$40 (US\$26) family. Daily 7:30am–6pm (last suggested entry 4pm; 'roo and emu exhibit closes 4:30pm). Closed Christmas. **Desert Park Transfers** (☎ 08/8952 4667) provides round-trip transfers from anywhere in Alice for A\$30 (US\$20) adults, A\$25 (US\$16.50) students and seniors, A\$20 (US\$13) kids 5–16, A\$77 (US\$50) family. Includes park admission.

Alice Springs Reptile Centre *Kids* Kids can walk around with pythons or bearded dragons (lizards) on their shoulders, all day if they want, at this Aussie reptile park. The easy-going proprietor lifts up the cages' glass fronts for better photos, and lets kids hand-feed bugs to the animals at feeding time. Some 30 species are on display, including the world's deadliest snake—Australia's inland taipan—and big goannas. Allow an hour.

9 Stuart Terrace (opposite the Royal Flying Doctor Service). ☎ 08/8952 8900. Admission A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults, A\$4 (US\$2.60) children under 17, A\$20 (US\$13) family. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas and New Year's Day.

Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve ★ *Finds* Alice Springs began life as this charming telegraph repeater station in 1871, set by a pretty water hole amid red boulder-covered hills, sprawling gums full of parrots, and mercifully green lawns. An oasis in the harsh Alice landscape, it's a place tourists often overlook. Arm yourself with the free map, or join a free 45-minute tour, and wander around the old station master's residence; the telegraph office, with its Morse code machine tap-tapping away; the shoeing yard packed with blacksmith's equipment; and the stables, housing vintage buggies and saddlery. By the time you arrive, you may be able to "telegraph" e-mails to your friends from the on-site computer. May through October, "kitchen maids" in period dress serve scones (biscuits) and damper from the original wood-fired ovens. The park has pet camels, and sometimes orphaned kangaroo joeys. Allow a good hour, more to walk one of the several hiking trails leading from the extensive grounds. This is a lovely picnic spot. There is a gift shop and coffee and snacks for sale, too.

On the Stuart Hwy. 4km (2½ miles) north of town (beyond the School of the Air turnoff). ☎ 08/8952 3993. Free admission to picnic grounds and trails; station A\$6.60 adults, A\$4.95 (US\$3.10) seniors and students, A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) children 5–15. Daily 8am–5pm (picnic grounds, trails open until 9pm). Station closed Christmas; picnic grounds open 365 days a year. Take a cab or Alice Wanderer bus (see "Organized Tours" below) or the 4km (2½-mile) riverside pedestrian/bike track that starts near the corner of Wills Terrace and Undoolya Rd.

National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame With a collection of photographs, domestic items, and other memorabilia, this engrossing museum tells the stories of more than 100 Aussie women who were pioneers in their fields, be they Olympic gold medalists, priests, or pilots.

The Old Courthouse, 27 Hartley St. ☎ 08/8952 9406. www.pioneerwomen.com.au. Admission A\$3 (US\$1.95) adults, free for children under 15. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed mid-Dec to Feb 1.

Royal Flying Doctor Service Alice is a major base for this airborne medical service that treats people living and traveling in the vast Outback. An interesting 20-minute tour runs every half-hour, featuring a video and a talk in the communications room; allow another 30 minutes or so to browse the small museum. Some of the recorded conversations between doctors and patients are intriguing. There is a nice garden cafe and a gift shop.

8–10 Stuart Terrace (at end of Hartley St.). ☎ 08/8952 1129. www.flyingdoctor.net. Admission A\$6.00 (US\$3.90) adults, A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) children 6–15. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm (last tour departs 4pm); Sun and public holidays 1–5pm. Closed Christmas and New Year's Day.

School of the Air Sitting in on school lessons may not be your idea of a vacation, but this school is different—it broadcasts by radio to a 1,300,000-sq.-km (502,000-sq.-mile) “schoolroom” of 140 children on Outback stations. That’s as big as Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, and Japan combined—or twice the size of Texas. The attraction is to watch and listen in when classes are in session, but outside class hours you may hear taped classes, and browse the kids’ artwork, photos, videos, and many other displays in the well put together visitor gallery. Free 30-minute tours run throughout the day.

80 Head St. (2.5km/1½ miles from town). ☎ 08/8951 6834. Admission A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) seniors and children 5–16, A\$12 (US\$7.80) family. Mon–Sat and public holidays 8:30am–4:30pm; Sun 1:30–4:30pm. Closed Christmas, Boxing Day (Dec 26), and New Year’s Day. Bus: 3, or take the Alice Wanderer (see “Organized Tours” below).

ORGANIZED TOURS

AROUND TOWN & OUT IN THE DESERT The **Alice Wanderer** bus (☎ 1800/722 111 in Australia, or 08/8952 2111) does a running loop of town attractions every 70 minutes from 9am, with the last departure at 4pm. Hop on and off as you please, and enjoy the commentary from the driver. The bus departs daily from the south end of Todd Mall. Tickets are sold on board and cost A\$30 (US\$20) for adults, A\$25 (US\$16) for seniors and students, and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for kids 4 to 14. Call for a free pickup from your hotel.

The bus calls at most of the attractions above, plus the **National Road Transport Hall of Fame**; the **Ghan Preservation Society** (formerly the Old Ghan Museum), housing the original Ghan train that plied the Adelaide–Alice Springs line from 1929 to 1980; and **Panorama Guth**, an art gallery housing a 360-degree painting of central Australian landscapes by artist Henk Guth.

The company can also tack on a Desert Park tour for an extra A\$25 (US\$16.25), and also offers a tour to the rocky West MacDonnell Ranges.

Many Alice-based companies offer minicoach or 4WD day trips and extended tours not only of Alice, but also of outlying areas including the East or West Macs, Hermannsburg, and Finke Gorge National Park. Among the well-regarded ones are: **Discovery Ecotours** (☎ 08/8956 2563; www.ecotours.com.au); **Alice Springs Holidays** (☎ 1800/801 401 in Australia, or 08/8953 1411; www.alicespringsholidays.com.au); and **Alice Springs Tour Professionals** (☎ 1800/673 391 in Australia, or 08/8953 0666; www.alicetourprofessionals.com.au), a one-stop shopping place for a number of reliable tour operators and adventure outfitters. See also “Exploring the Red Centre” at the beginning of this chapter, for companies running tours throughout the area.

ABORIGINAL TOURS I recommend those offered by the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (see “Seeing the Sights in Alice” above). All their tours have Aboriginal guides. Their **half-day tour** 🚗 features an explanation of the Dream-time creation myth; a gentle bush tucker walk; a chance to throw a boomerang and spear; talks about tools and weapons over billy tea and damper; and a dance performance at which you can have a go yourself, and have your photo taken with the dancers. You may have seen these dancers performing in the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Threaded through all this is an ongoing discussion of Aboriginal culture, beliefs, family relationships, and a view of history both ancient and modern through Aboriginal eyes. You have a chance to buy art during the morning. The experience wraps up with a didgeridoo lesson at 1pm. The tour departs daily at 8am and costs A\$83 (US\$54) adults and A\$44 (US\$29) children under 12 (including hotel pickup).

CAMEL SAFARIS You might not associate camels with Australia, but the camel's ability to get by without water was key to opening up the arid inland parts of the country to European settlement in the 1800s. With the advent of cars, they were released into the wild, and today there are more than 200,000 roaming central Australia. Australia even exports them to the Middle East! **Frontier Camel Tours** (☎ 1800/806 499 in Australia, or 08/8953 0444; www.cameltours.com.au) runs a 1-hour **Camel Ramble** ⚡ down the dry Todd River bed. This is followed by a tasty three-course meal of kangaroo sausages, smoked camel (hopefully not the one you rode on), wattleseed beer bread, and seasonal "bush tucker" samples like peppergrass or native mistletoe, barramundi, or steak; and dessert, plus wine and beer. Dinner is served at the company's camel farm, where you can browse its camel museum and shop. With hotel transfers and dinner, it costs A\$100 (US\$65) for adults and A\$75 (US\$49) for kids 5 to 12. It departs daily at 4pm April through October, and at 5pm November through March, and gets back around 5½ hours later. Kids under 6 can join the ride if the cameleer on duty agrees. A breakfast ride costs A\$75 (US\$49) for adults and A\$45 (US\$92) for children, leaving at 6:30am and returning at 9:30am.

HOT-AIR BALLOON FLIGHTS Dawn balloon flights above the desert are popular in Central Australia. You have to get up 90 minutes before dawn, though. Several companies offer flights. **Outback Ballooning** (☎ 1800/809 790 in Australia, or 08/8952 8723; www.outbackballooning.com.au) is one of the most upscale. A 1-hour flight followed by champagne breakfast in the bush costs A\$290 (US\$188), with a 20% discount for kids under 17. A 30-minute breakfast flight costs A\$190 (US\$123). Kids under 6 are discouraged, because they cannot see over the basket. Don't make any other morning plans, as you probably won't get back to your hotel until close to noon.

ACTIVE PURSUITS

BIKING A gently undulating 17km (11-mile) **bike trail** weaves from John Flynn's Grave on Larapinta Drive, 7km (4½ miles) west of town, through the bushland and desert foothills of the MacDonnell Ranges to Simpson's Gap. **Centre Cycles** (☎ 08/8953 2966) on Lindsay Avenue at Undoolya Road rents bikes for around A\$10 (US\$6.50) for 4 hours (plus a A\$50/US\$33 refundable deposit). **Note:** Carry water, because the two taps en route are a long way apart. Bike in cooler months only.

BUSHWALKING The 250km (155-mile) **Larapinta Trail** winds west from Alice through the sparse red ranges, picturesque semi-desert scenery, and rich bird life of the **West MacDonnell National Park** (p. 382). Sections range from easy to hard. The shortest is 8km (5 miles), ranging up to several 23km to 29km (14- to 18-mile) stretches. Trail maps and information are dispensed by the **Parks & Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory** office in Alice Springs (☎ 08/8951 8211), or the **CATIA Visitor Centre** (see "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter). Camp facilities are simple at best on popular routes, non-existent on less traveled sections. **Warning:** Always carry drinking water. The trail may close in extremely hot summer periods.

Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing Tours (☎ 1800/66 9111 in Australia, or 08/8952 2111) runs transfers to road access points along the trail, where you can mostly pick up a choice of 1-, 2-, or 3-day hikes. Several outfitters run guided, supported hikes along trail sections.

GOLF The **Alice Springs Golf Club** 🏌️, 1km (just over ½ mile) from town on Cromwell Drive (☎ 08/8952 5440), boasts a Thomson-Wolveridge course rated among the world's top desert courses by touring pros. The course is open from sunup to sundown. For 9 holes you will pay A\$17 (US\$11), and 18 holes A\$22 (US\$14). Then there's A\$22 (US\$14) for clubs, and A\$30 (US\$20) for a cart, which many locals don't bother with. It's best to book a tee time.

SHOPPING AT THE SOURCE FOR ABORIGINAL ART

Alice Springs is the best place in Australia to buy **Aboriginal art & crafts** 🏺. You will find no shortage of stuff: linen and canvas paintings, didgeridoos, spears, clapping sticks, *coolamons* (a dish used by women to carry anything from water to babies), animal carvings, baskets, and jewelry, as well as books, CDs, and all kinds of non-Aboriginal merchandise printed with Aboriginal designs. Prices can soar into the thousands for large canvases by world-renowned painters, but you will find plenty of small works for under A\$250 (US\$163). Major artworks sell unmounted for ease of shipment, which most galleries arrange on your behalf. Store hours can vary with the seasons and the crowds, so it pays to check ahead.

See artists at work when you drop by **Jukurrpa Artists**, on Stott Terrace between Gap Road and Leichhardt Terrace (☎ 08/8953 1052). This Aboriginal women's cooperative studio/gallery sells the "pattern and dot" paintings of the Western Desert style, plus crafts such as carvings and jewelry, weapons and tools.

Aborigine-owned **Warumpi Arts**, 105 Gregory Terrace (☎ 08/8952 9066), sells wooden artifacts, seed necklaces, and canvas and linen paintings in the earth-hued designs of the Papunya people, who live 250km (155 miles) west of Alice. Another Aborigine-owned gallery, **Papunya Tula Artists**, 78 Todd St. (☎ 08/8952 4731), sells paintings on canvas and linen from Papunya and other artists living in the desert as far as 700km (434 miles) west of Alice Springs.

Several stores on Todd Mall sell affordable Aboriginal art and souvenirs. The biggest, the **Original Dreamtime Gallery**, 63 Todd Mall (☎ 08/8952 8861), stocks a huge selection, and packs, mails, and insures your purchases free of charge anywhere in the world. It also shows visiting exhibitions of Aboriginal art.

Arunta Art Gallery & Bookshop, 70 Todd St. (☎ 08/8952 1544), stocks a great range of books on Aboriginal art, language, and archaeology, as well as Australian history, geology, wildlife, and biographies.

If you're interested in investing in serious artwork, speak to Roslyn Premont, proprietor of **Gallery Gondwana**, 43 Todd Mall (☎ 08/8953 1577). She has written a book on desert art, and her gallery sells only top-notch works.

A big range of art, didgeridoos, artifacts, music, and books is sold by the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (see "Seeing the Sights in Alice" above) via its website at www.aboriginalart.com.au.

Today's Aboriginal bands mix ancient and hip new rhythms to create some wonderful sounds. For the country's biggest range of indigenous music, head to the **CAAMA** (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) 🏌️ store at 101 Todd St. (☎ 08/8952 9207). It also stocks books on Aboriginal art and issues; videos in PAL and NTSC format (on everything from how to fix your broken-down Ford the bushman's way, to Aboriginal people's memories of their first contact with "white man"); children's books with Aboriginal story lines; a line of Aboriginal-print fabrics, clothes, diaries, stationery, and greeting cards; Aboriginal artifacts and jewelry; and cute Yamba-the-Honey-Ant dolls, modeled after a kids' character on the local Aboriginal television station, Imparja.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

You may pay lower rates than those listed in the summer off season, December through March, and even as late as June. Peak season typically runs July through October or November.

As well as the more upmarket properties below, there are several backpacker resorts offering dorm rooms and doubles. Among the best is **Annie's Place**, 4 Traegar Ave., Alice Springs, NT 0870. (☎ **1800/359 089** in Australia, or 08/8952 1545). Dorm beds cost A\$17 (US\$11) here, and doubles A\$58 (US\$38). Another good one is **Elkes Alice Springs**, 39 Gap Rd., Alice Springs, NT 0870 (☎ **08/8952 8134**; www.elkesbackpackers.com.au/alice). Dorm beds cost A\$18 (US\$12), simple doubles A\$60 (US\$39), and doubles in motel room A\$75 (US\$49).

Aurora Alice Springs This pleasant hotel (formally The Territory Inn) is in the center of town. Rooms in the newer wing are your standard quality motel-style variety, all clean, large, and decorated nicely. Those in the original wing are small and a little dark; they have a pretty heritage theme with floral bedcovers and lace curtains. The courtyard has a barbecue, and the front desk loans hair dryers. The tiny pool and Jacuzzi are tucked away in a utilitarian corner, so this is not the place for chilling out poolside; stay here to be within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Room service is from the **Red Ochre Grill** (p. 382).

Leichhardt Terrace (backing on to Todd Mall), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ☎ **1800/089 644** in Australia, or 08/8950 6666. Fax 08/8952 7829. www.aurora-resorts.com.au. 108 units (all with shower only, one suite with Jacuzzi). A\$150–A\$170 (US\$98–US\$110) double. Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). Children under 14 stay free in parent's room using existing bedding. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Hotel provides transfers from airport A\$10 (US\$6.50) per person, round-trip. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; limited room service; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; barbecue area. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, minibar, iron, hair dryer (available on request).

Desert Palms Resort ★ *Value* Next to Lasseter's Casino (where the food can be awful) and the Alice Springs Golf Club (to which guests enjoy honorary membership), these cheery cabins set behind manicured palms and pink bougainvillea are one of the nicest places to stay in Alice. Don't be deterred by their poky prefab appearance; inside they are surprisingly large, well kept, and inviting, with a pine-pitched ceiling, a mini kitchen, a sliver of bathroom sporting white tiles and fittings, and a pert furnished front deck. Four rooms are suitable for travelers with disabilities. A sun deck and pool with its own little island is out front, and there's also a tennis court. The pleasant staff at the front desk loans hair dryers, processes your film, does laundry service, sells basic grocery and liquor supplies, and books your tours.

74 Barrett Dr. (1km¹/₂ mile from town), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ☎ **1800/678 037** in Australia, or 08/8952 5977. Fax 08/8953 4176. www.desertpalms.com.au. 80 units (all with shower only). A\$99 (US\$64) double. Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Parking in front of units. Airport shuttle. Free coach station/train station/airport shuttle twice daily; free resort-to-town shuttle 4 times daily. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; golf course nearby; 1/2-size tennis court; access to nearby health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; massage available by appointment; laundry; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker.

Elkira Motel The cheapest rooms in the heart of town—that are still decent, that is—are at this unpretentious, clean Best Western motel. Standard rooms are dated, with lots of wood and tile floors, and a fridge and shower. Two standard family rooms come with a double bed and three singles. The 42 deluxe rooms have a little more space, and nine have microwaves and some have queen-size beds. Nine family rooms are nicer still, and come with a kitchenette—and as

they cost the same as normal deluxe rooms are well worth asking for even if you're traveling as a couple. All deluxe family rooms and a few deluxe doubles have bathrooms. Ask for a room away from the road, as the traffic is noisy during the day. The seven budget rooms are also a little dated, but though small, are comfortable, and quiet. They come with a double bed, a TV, shower, fridge, and hair dryer. Look out for the friendly Doberman called Charlie.

65 Bath St. (opposite Kmart), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ☎ 1800/809 252 in Australia, or 08/8952 1222. Fax 08/8953 1370. www.elkira.com.au. 58 units (some with shower only, 2 with spa), 1 room suitable for travelers with disabilities. A\$70–A\$85 (US\$46–US\$55) budget doubles; A\$110–A\$120 (US\$72–US\$78) double. Extra adult A\$15 (US\$9.75); extra child under 3 A\$5 (US\$3.25). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; outdoor pool; nearby golf course; spa; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, fridge, coffee-maker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

Bar Doppio ★ EAST/WEST CAFE FARE If you're in need of a dose of cool—in terms of style *and* air-conditioning—this arcade cafe is the place to chill over good coffee and feast on cheap, wholesome food. Sacks of coffee beans are stacked all over, gypsy music plays, no tables and chairs match, and the staff doesn't care if you sit here all day. It's largely vegetarian, but fish and meat figure on the blackboard menu. Try lamb chermoula cutlets on Gabriella potatoes with rocket, red onion and tomato salad, chickpea curry, warm Turkish flatbread with dips, or spuds with hot toppings. Hot and cold breakfast choices stay on the menu until 11am. They do takeout. BYO.

2 and 3 Fan Arcade (off the southern end of Todd Mall). ☎ 08/8952 6525. Reservations accepted at dinner only. Main courses A\$7–A\$16 (US\$4.55–US\$10); sandwiches average A\$6 (US\$3.90). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 7:30am–5:30pm; Sat 7:30am–4:30pm; Sun 10am–4:30pm; dinner Fri–Sat only 6–9pm. Closed holidays and Christmas to New Year.

Bojangles Saloon and Restaurant ★ TEX-MEX/MIXED Swing open the saloon doors and enter a world of cowhide seats, thick wooden tables, assorted Western-style knickknacks, original American Civil War guns, and so on. The front bar is friendly and serves up good beers by the bottle or schooner, and reasonable food such as burgers, nachos, salads, and fish and chips. The restaurant out back has more gourmet offerings, but either way it's a great atmosphere. Aussie-style country and folk singers strum away in the evenings, and the bar staff is terrific.

80 Todd St. ☎ 08/8952 2873. Reservations not needed. Main courses A\$7–A\$18 (US\$4.55–US\$12) front bar; A\$12–A\$25 (US\$7.80–US\$16) restaurant. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–10pm.

Casa Nostra ★★ *Value* ITALIAN The only difference between this cheery homespun family eatery and every other Italian restaurant in the world is that this one has autographed photos of Tom Selleck pinned to the wall. Judging by his scrawled praise, Tom loved eating here (when on location in Alice filming *Quigley Down Under*) as much as the locals do. You've seen the red-checked tablecloths and the basket-clad chianti bottles before, but the food is surprisingly good. A long list of pastas (like the masterful carbonara), pizzas, and chicken and veal dishes are the main offerings. All meals can come as takeout. BYO.

Corner of Undoolya Rd. and Stuart Terrace. ☎ 08/8952 0549. Reservations strongly recommended. Main courses A\$11–A\$18 (US\$7.15–US\$12). MC, V. Mon–Sat 5–10pm. Closed Christmas to end of Jan.

Malathi's Restaurant & Sean's Irish Bar ASIAN/WESTERN Located in an unprepossessing building a couple of blocks from Todd Mall, Malathi's serves up an eclectic assortment of Asian dishes plus a few Aussie choices, such as

grain-fed steak. The Asian food is outstanding. I can recommend the lamb korma, a kind of mild curry. You might want to try the Lakshmi king prawns cooked in Indian flavors, or the Thai coconut curry. Vegetarians have some good choices. They do takeout, too. The bar serves cheap Irish stews, live bands play (sometimes), and there is always Guinness available. The restaurant has a wine list, but permits BYO wine at A\$5 (US\$3.25) corkage per bottle.

51 Bath St. (opposite Kmart). ☎ 08/8952 1858. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$15–A\$28 (US\$9.75–US\$18); many dishes under A\$21 (US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Restaurant Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm or later; bar daily 3:30–9:30pm.

Red Ochre Grill ✨ GOURMET BUSH TUCKER If you’ve never tried wal-laby mignons on a bed of native pasta and polenta cake with a native berry and red-wine cream sauce, or barramundi baked in paperbark with wild lime and coriander butter, here’s your chance. The chef at this upscale chain fuses native Aussie ingredients with dishes from around the world. Although it might seem a touristy formula, the food is mouthwatering. Dine in the contemporary interior fronting Todd Mall, or outside in the attractive courtyard.

Under the Territory Inn on Todd Mall. ☎ 08/8952 9614. Reservations recommended at dinner. Main courses A\$9–A\$21 (US\$5.80–US\$14) lunch; A\$15–A\$23 (US\$9.75–US\$15) dinner; A\$12.50–A\$16 (US\$8.10–US\$10) buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30am–10pm.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Overlanders Steakhouse ✨ STEAK/AUSSIE TUCKER This landmark on the Alice dining scene is famous for its “Drover’s Blowout” menu, which assaults the mega-hungry with soup and damper, then a platter of crocodile vol-au-vents, camel and kangaroo filet, and emu medallions—these are just the *appetizers*—followed by Scotch filet or barramundi, and dessert. There’s a regular menu with a 700g (1-lb., 10-oz.) steak, plus lots of lighter fare like oysters or spinach crepes. The barn-like interior is Outback through and through, from the rustic bar to the saddlebags hanging from the roof beams. An “Overlanders’ Table” seats solo diners together.

72 Hartley St. ☎ 08/8952 2159. Reservations required in peak season. Main courses A\$19–A\$26 (US\$12–US\$17); Drover’s Blowout A\$44 (US\$29). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

3 Road Trips from Alice Springs

The key attraction of a day trip into the MacDonnell Ranges is unspoiled natural scenery and few crowds. Many companies run coach or 4WD tours of a half day or a day, sometimes overnight, to the West and East Macs. Some of these appear in “Organized Tours” above. Expect to pay about A\$100 (US\$65) for a full-day trip.

THE WEST MACDONNELL RANGES ✨

WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK The 300km (186-mile) round-trip drive west from Alice Springs into West MacDonnell National Park is a stark but picturesque trip to a series of red gorges, semi-desert country, and the occasional peaceful swimming hole.

From Alice, take Larapinta Drive west for 18km (11 miles) to the 8km (5-mile) turnoff to **Simpson’s Gap**, a water hole lined with ghost gums. Black-footed rock wallabies hop out on the cliffs in the late afternoon (so you may want to time a visit here on your way back to Alice). There are a couple of short trails, including a 500m (.33-mile) Ghost Gum circuit, and a 17km (11-mile) round-trip trail to Bond Gap. Swimming is not permitted. The place has an information center/ranger station and free barbecues.

Road-Trip Tips for the East & West Macs

Facilities are scarce outside Alice, so bring food (a picnic perhaps, or meat to barbecue), drinking water, and a full gas tank. Leaded, unleaded, and diesel fuel is sold at Glen Helen Resort, Hermannsburg, and Ross River Resort. Wear walking shoes.

Many of the water holes dry up too much to be good for swimming—those at Ellery Creek, Ormiston Gorge, and Glen Helen are the most permanent. Being spring-fed, they can be intensely cold, so take only short dips to avoid cramping and hypothermia, don't swim alone, and be careful of underwater snags. Don't wear sunscreen because it pollutes drinking water for native animals.

Two-wheel-drive rental cars will not be insured on unsealed (unpaved) roads—that means the last few kilometers into Trephina Gorge Nature Park, and the 11km (7-mile) road into N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park, both in the East Macs. If you are prepared to risk it, you will probably get into Trephina in a two-wheel-drive car, but you will need a 4WD for N'Dhala and Arltunga. The West MacDonnell road is paved to Glen Helen Gorge; a few points of interest may require driving for short lengths on unpaved road. Before setting off, drop into the CATIA Visitor Information Centre (see "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter) for tips on road conditions, and for details on the free ranger talks, walks, and slide shows that take place in the West and East Macs April through October. Entry to all sights, parks, and reserves (except for Standley Chasm) is free.

Twenty-three kilometers (14 miles) farther down Larapinta Road, 9km (5½ miles) down a turnoff, is **Standley Chasm** (☎ 08/8956 7440). This rock cleft is only a few meters wide but 80m (262 ft.) high, reached by a 10-minute creek-side trail. Aim to be here at midday, when the walls glow orange in the overhead sun. A kiosk sells snacks and drinks. Admission is A\$6 (US\$3.90) for adults and A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for seniors and children 5 to 14. The Chasm is open from 8am to 6pm daily, with last entry at 5pm (closed Christmas).

Six kilometers (3¾ miles) past Standley Chasm, you can branch right onto Namatjira Drive, or carry on to Hermannsburg Historical Precinct (see below). Assuming you take Namatjira Drive, you'll head 42km (26 miles) on to picturesque **Ellery Creek Big Hole**. The spring-fed water is so nippy that the tourism authority warns swimmers to take a flotation device in case of cramping. A 3km (2-mile) walking trail explains the area's geological history.

Eleven kilometers (7 miles) farther along Namatjira Drive is **Serpentine Gorge**, where a trail leads up to a lookout for a lovely view of the ranges through the gorge walls. Another 12km (7½ miles) on are **ochre pits**, which Aboriginal people quarried for body paint and for decorating objects used in ceremonial performances. Twenty-six kilometers (16 miles) farther west, 8km (5 miles) from the main road, is **Ormiston Gorge and Pound** (☎ 08/8956 7799 for the ranger station/visitor center). This is a good spot to picnic, swim in the wide, deep pool below red cliffs, and walk a choice of trails, such as the 30-minute Ghost Gum Lookout trail or the easy 7km (4-mile) scenic loop (allow 3–4 hr.). The water is warm enough to swim

in the summer. You can camp here for A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) per adult, and A\$3.30 (US\$1.90) per child 5 to 15. The campground has no powered sites but does have hot showers, toilets, and free barbecues.

A bit further on is **Glen Helen Gorge**, where the Finke River cuts through the ranges, with more gorge swimming, a walking trail, guided hikes, and helicopter flights. Modest **Glen Helen Resort** (☎ 1800/896 110 in Australia, or 08/8956 7489; www.melanka.com.au/melanka_glenghelen/gh_index.html) has 25 motel rooms (A\$143/US\$93) double; bunkhouses for four (A\$19/US\$12 per person), and campgrounds (A\$9/US\$5.85 per person for a tent site, and A\$22/US\$14 double for a powered campsite); a restaurant serving three meals a day; a bar; and barbecues for which they sell meat packs.

HERMANNSBURG HISTORICAL PRECINCT An alternative to visiting the West Mac gorges is to stay on Larapinta Drive all 128km (79 miles) from Alice Springs to the old **Lutheran Mission** at the **Hermannsburg Historical Precinct** (☎ 08/8956 7402). Some maps will show this route as an unpaved road, but it is now paved. Settled by German missionaries in the 1870s, this is a cluster of restored farmhouse-style mission buildings. There are a museum, a gallery housing landscapes by Aussie artist Albert Namatjira, and tearooms serving apple strudel from an old German recipe. The Mission is open daily from 9am to 4pm (from 10am Nov–Mar). Admission to the precinct with tea or coffee is A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) for school-age kids, or A\$12 (US\$7.80) for a family, plus A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) per adult or A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) per child for a guided gallery tour, which departs every hour. The precinct is closed from December 24 to January 2 or 3, and on Good Friday.

FINKE GORGE NATIONAL PARK Just west of Hermannsburg is the turnoff to the 46,000-hectare (113,620-acre) **Finke Gorge National Park**, 16km (10 miles) to the south on an unpaved road. The park is most famous for **Palm Valley**, where groves of rare *Livistona mariae* cabbage palms have survived since central Australia was a jungle millions of years ago. You will need a 4WD to explore this park. Four walking trails between 1.5km (1 mile) and 5km (3 miles) take you among the palms or up to a lookout over cliffs; one is a signposted trail exploring Aboriginal culture. There is a campsite about 4km (2½ miles) from the palms; it has showers, toilets, and free barbecues. Collect your firewood outside the park. Camping is A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) for adults, A\$3.30 (US\$2.10) for kids 5 to 15. For information, call the CATIA Visitor Information Centre in Alice Springs before you leave, because there is no visitor center in the park. The ranger station (☎ 08/8956 7401) is for emergencies only.

THE EAST MACDONNELL RANGES

Not as many tourists tread the path on the Ross Highway into the East Macs, but if you do, you'll be rewarded with lush walking trails, fewer crowds, and traces of Aboriginal history. I even spotted wild camels on my visit. At the end of the drive, 86km (53 miles) from Alice, is the **Ross River Resort** (see "Where to Stay" below), where day-trippers are welcome. The homestead stages a boomerang-throwing and whip-cracking experience over billy tea and damper from 10am to noon daily for A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) per person, so consider heading there first, then dropping in on the attractions below as you return.

The first points of interest are **Emily Gap**, 10km (6 miles) from Alice, and **Jessie Gap**, 7km (4½ miles) on, a pretty picnic spot. You can cool off in the Emily Gap swimming hole if there is any water. Don't miss the "Caterpillar Dreaming" Aboriginal art on the wall, on your right as you walk through.

At **Corroboree Rock**, 37km (23 miles) farther on, you can make a short climb up this outcrop that was important to local Aborigines. The polished rock “seat” at the hole high up in it means Aboriginal people must have used this rock for eons.

Twenty-two kilometers (14 miles) on is the turnoff to **Trephina Gorge Nature Park**, an 18-sq.-km (7-sq.-mile) beauty spot with peaceful walking trails ranging from 45 minutes to 4½ hours. The last 5km (3 miles) of the 9km (5½-mile) road into the park are unpaved, but you can make it in a 2WD car.

N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park, 10km (6 miles) past Trephina Gorge Nature Park, just before you reach Ross River Resort, houses an “open-air art gallery” of rock carvings, or petroglyphs, left by the Eastern Arrernte Aboriginal people. An interesting 1.5km (1-mile) signposted trail explains the Dreamtime meanings of a few of the 6,000 rock carvings, hundreds or thousands of years old, that are thought to be in this eerily quiet gorge. A 4WD vehicle is a must to traverse the 11km (7-mile) access road.

The Ross Highway is paved all the way to Ross River Resort.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Ross River Resort This *dinky-di* (that’s Australian for “authentic”—as is *fair dinkum*), 100-year-old station offers both day visitors and overnight guests a condensed taste of Outback life. Overnight accommodations are rustic, roomy log cabins; there are also basic quad-share bunkhouses, with shared bathrooms, and shady campgrounds with a general store.

The whitewashed original homestead has been converted to a restaurant with Edwardian furniture, open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner at moderate prices. Entry to the homestead, its rustic restaurant and bar, the barbecue, four bush-walking trails, and kangaroo enclosure is free (get feed for them from the stables); so are the pool and Jacuzzi if you patronize the bar or restaurant. The resort ended up being closed for most of 2003—it was rented out to a “private guest”—but it should re-open sometime in 2004.

Ross Hwy., 86km (53 miles) east of Alice Springs (P.O. Box 3271), Alice Springs, NT 0871. ☎ 1800/241 711 in Australia, or 08/8956 9711. Fax 08/8956 9823. www.rossriverresort.com.au. 48 units, 30 with bathroom (shower only). A\$125 (US\$81) double; A\$150 (US\$98) family of 4; A\$33 (US\$21) bunkhouse quad-share with linen, A\$22 (US\$14) without linen. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Unpowered campsite A\$10 (US\$6.50) per adult; powered campsite A\$15 (US\$9.75) per adult. Lower rates for kids in bunkhouses and campgrounds. AE, DC, MC, V. Coach transfers from Alice Springs A\$110 (US\$72) per person, round-trip. Pets are not accepted except in campground if they are kept on a leash at all times. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small outdoor pool; Jacuzzi. *In room:* A/C, fridge, tea and coffeemaker, no phone.

4 Kings Canyon ★

Anyone who saw the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* will remember the stony plateau the transvestites climb to gaze over the plain below. You can stand on that same spot (wearing sequined underpants is optional) at **Kings Canyon** ★ in **Watarrka National Park** (☎ 08/8956 7460 for park headquarters). As the crow flies, it is 320km (198 miles) southwest of Alice Springs. The sandstone walls of the canyon drop about 100m (330 ft.) to rock pools and centuries-old gum trees. There is little to do except walk the dramatic canyon rim for a sense of the peaceful emptiness of the Australian Outback.

GETTING THERE No regular flights operate, but **Ayers Rock Scenic Flights** (☎ 08/8956 2345) does an aerial day trip from Ayers Rock Resort that incorporates a guided canyon walk at A\$425 (US\$276) per adult, A\$390 (US\$254) per child 3 to 12.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and coach tour company **AAT Kings** (☎ 08/8952 1700 in Alice Springs, or 08/8956 2171 in Ayers Rock) make daily transfers from Ayers Rock; Greyhound's fare is about A\$54 (US\$35) one-way.

Numerous **coach** and **4WD** tour outfits call at Kings Canyon from Alice Springs or Ayers Rock, with time allowed for the rim walk. See "Exploring the Red Centre" at the beginning of this chapter, for recommended companies.

With a 4WD, you can get to Kings Canyon from Alice Springs on the unpaved Mereenie Loop Road.

The regular route is the 480km (349-mile) trip from Alice Springs south via the Stuart Highway, then west onto the Lasseter Highway, then north and west on the Luritja Road. All three roads are paved. Uluru (Ayers Rock) is 306km (190 miles) to the south on a paved road; from Yulara, take the Lasseter Highway east for 125km (78 miles), then turn left onto Luritja Road for 168km (104 miles) to Kings Canyon Resort. The resort sells leaded and unleaded petrol and diesel.

Uluru Motorcycle Tours (☎ 08/8956 2019; www.ozemail.com.au/~uluru harleys) will take you there on a 1-day tour via Harley-Davidson from Ayers Rock Resort, with you as a passenger or driving.

GETTING AROUND **AAT Kings** provides a guided rim or creek-bed walk from Kings Canyon Resort, 7km (4½ miles) away, for A\$40 (US\$26) per adult, A\$20 (US\$13) kids under 15, round-trip. It departs daily at 6:15am October through March, and at 7am April through September. You can book this through AAT Kings or the resort.

EXPLORING THE PARK

The way to explore the canyon is on the 6km (3¾-mile) walk up the side (short but steep!) and around the rim. Even if you're in good shape, it's a strenuous 3- to 4-hour hike. It leads through a maze of rounded sandstone formations called the Lost City, across a bridge to a fern-fringed pocket of water holes called the Garden of Eden, and back along the other side through more sandstone rocks. There are lookout points en route. If you visit after the odd rainfall, the walls teem with waterfalls. In winter, don't set off too early, because sunlight doesn't light up the canyon walls to good effect until midmorning.

If you're not up to making the rim walk, take the shady 2.6km (1.5-mile) round-trip trail along the mostly dry **Kings Creek bed** on the canyon floor. It takes about an hour. Wear sturdy boots, because the ground can be rocky. This walk is all right for young kids and travelers in wheelchairs for the first 700m (½-mile).

Both walks are signposted. Avoid the rim walk in the middle of the day between September and May, when it's too hot.

You can also explore the park from an Aboriginal viewpoint with **Lilla Aboriginal Tours** (book through Kings Canyon Resort). Aboriginal guides take you on an easy 1km (just over .5-mile) walk to sacred caves and rock-painting sites. You learn about the artworks, hear the Dreamtime events that created the land around you, discover plant medicines and food, and have a go at throwing a spear and a boomerang. The tour lasts 1½ to 2 hours and departs at 9am and 4pm daily (closed mid-Dec to mid-Jan) from the Lilla community, 14km (8¾ miles) from Kings Canyon Resort. The resort does transfers for A\$20 (US\$13) per person, round-trip, or A\$30 (US\$20) for two of you. The tour costs A\$39 (US\$25) for adults, A\$33 (US\$21) for seniors and students, and A\$27 (US\$18) for kids ages 5 to 16.

Professional Helicopter Services (☎ 08/8956 7873; www.phs.com.au) makes 15-minute flights over the canyon for A\$90 (US\$59) per person.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Apart from campgrounds, the only place to stay in Watarrka National Park is at Kings Canyon Resort.

Kings Canyon Resort ★ This attractive, low-slung complex 7km (4½ miles) from Kings Canyon blends into its surroundings. All but four of the larger deluxe rooms were built in 1999 and have desert views from glass-enclosed Jacuzzis. The remaining rooms are typical hotel rooms, comfortable enough, with restful range views from the balcony; they were refurbished in 2001. The double/twin, quad, and family lodge rooms are adequate low-budget choices, with a communal kitchen and bathroom facilities. The resort has a well-stocked mini-mart where you can buy meat for the barbecues; a live band plays some nights. A ranger gives a slide show several nights a week. Internet access is available.

Luritja Rd., Watarrka National Park, NT 0872. ☎ 1800/817 622 in Australia, or 08/8956 7442. Fax 08/8956 7426. www.voyages.com.au. 164 units, 128 with bathroom (32 with Jacuzzis); 72 powered campsites and tent sites. High season (July–Nov) A\$330–A\$397 (US\$215–US\$258) hotel room double; low season (Dec–June) A\$277–A\$343 (US\$180–US\$223) hotel room double. Extra adult A\$27 (US\$18). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. High season A\$100 (US\$65) lodge room double; A\$168 (US\$109) quad-share; A\$185 (US\$120) family (to sleep 5). Low season A\$98 (US\$64) lodge room double; A\$163 (US\$106) quad-share; A\$178 (US\$116) family. No children in lodge rooms unless you book entire room. A\$28 (US\$18) tent sites double; A\$32 (US\$21) powered sites double. Extra person A\$11 (US\$7.15) adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) children 6–15 in powered campsite. Children under 16 dine free at breakfast and dinner buffets with an adult. Ask about packages in conjunction with Ayers Rock Resort and Alice Springs Resort. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; 2 bars; 2 outdoor pools; outdoor day/night tennis court; volleyball court; bike rental (from nearby gas station); tour desk; limited room service; guest laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge. Hotel only: TV w/pay movies, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

5 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas) ★

462km (286 miles) SW of Alice Springs; 1,934km (1,199 miles) S of Darwin; 1,571km (974 miles) N of Adelaide; 2,841km (1,761 miles) NW of Sydney

Uluru/Ayers Rock is the Australia tourism industry's pinup icon, a glamorous red stone that has probably been splashed on more posters than Cindy Crawford has been on magazine covers. Just why people trek from all over the world to gawk at it is a bit of a mystery. For its size? Hardly, nearby Mt. Conner is three times as big. For its shape? Probably not, when most folks agree the neighboring Kata Tjuta/Olgas are more picturesque. You can put its popularity down to the faint shiver up the spine and the indescribable sense of place it evokes in anyone who looks at it. Even Aussie bushmen reckon it's "got somethin' spiritual about it."

In 1985 the **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park** ★ was returned to its Aboriginal owners, the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people, known as the Anangu, who manage the property jointly with the Australian government. People used to speculate that the Rock was a meteorite, but we now know it was formed by sediments laid down 600 to 700 million years ago in an inland sea and thrust up above ground 348m (1,141 ft.) by geological forces. With a circumference of 9.4km (6 miles), the Rock is no pebble, especially because two-thirds of it is thought to be underground. On photos it looks like a big smooth blob. In the flesh, it's more interesting—dappled with holes and overhangs, and its sides draped with curtains of stone, creating little coves hiding water holes and Aboriginal rock art. It also changes color from pink to a deep wine red depending on the angle of the sun.

Don't think a visit to Uluru is just about snapping a few photos and going home. You can walk around the Rock, climb it (although the local Aborigines prefer you don't), fly over it, ride a camel to it, motorcycle around it on a Harley-Davidson, trek through the Olgas, eat in an outdoor restaurant, tour the night sky, and join Aboriginal people on guided walks.

Give yourself at least a day in the Uluru area; you could easily stay 2 or 3.

Isolation (and a lack of competition) makes things like accommodations, meals, and transfers expensive at Ayers Rock. A coach tour or 4WD camping safari is often the cheapest way to see the place. See "Exploring the Red Centre" at the beginning of this chapter, for recommended tour companies.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane Qantas (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies to Ayers Rock (Connellan) Airport direct from Sydney, Alice Springs, Perth, and Cairns. Flights from other ports go via Alice Springs. The airport is 6km (3¾ miles) from Ayers Rock Resort. Expect to pay around A\$115 (US\$75) one-way. A free shuttle ferries all resort guests, including campers, to their door.

By Bus Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) makes a daily trip from Alice Springs (trip time: 5½ hr.), dropping you to your hotel door at Ayers Rock Resort. The fare is around A\$71 (US\$46).

By Car Take the Stuart Highway south from Alice Springs 199km (123 miles), and turn right onto the Lasseter Highway for 244km (151 miles) to Ayers Rock Resort. The Rock itself is 18km (11 miles) farther on. (Everyone mistakes the flat-topped mesa they see en route for Ayers Rock; it's Mt. Conner.)

If you want to rent a car in Alice Springs and drop it at Ayers Rock, brace yourself for a one-way penalty. Only Avis, Hertz, and Thrifty have Uluru depots: Thrifty charges a one-way fee of around A\$110 (US\$72) for bookings under 3 days; Hertz charges A\$137 (US\$89) for bookings under 7 days; and Avis charges A\$137 (US\$89) for bookings of 2 days or less.

VISITOR INFORMATION For information before you leave, contact the **Central Australian Tourism Industry Association (CATIA)**, 60 Gregory Terrace, Alice Springs, NT 0870 (☎ 08/8952 5800; www.centraustralia tourism.com), or drop in to its **Visitor Information Centre** if you visit Alice Springs. One of the best online sources is Ayers Rock Resort's site (www.voyages.com.au).

The **Ayers Rock Resort Visitor Centre**, next to the Desert Gardens Hotel (☎ 08/8957 7377), has displays on the area's geology, wildlife, and Aboriginal heritage, plus a souvenir store. It's open daily from 8:30am to 7:30pm. You can book tours at the **tour desk** in every hotel at Ayers Rock Resort, or visit the **Ayers Rock Resort Tour & Information Centre** (☎ 08/8957 7324) at the shopping center in the resort complex. It dispenses information on and books tours as far afield as Kings Canyon and Alice Springs. It's open daily from 7:30am to 8:30pm.

One kilometer (just over ½ mile) from the base of the Rock is the **Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre** ★ (☎ 08/8956 3138), owned and run by the Anangu, the Aboriginal owners of Uluru. It uses eye-catching wall displays, frescoes, interactive recordings, and videos to tell about Aboriginal Dreamtime myths and laws. It's worth spending some time here to understand a little about Aboriginal culture. A National Park desk has information on ranger-guided activities and animal, plant, and bird-watching checklists; there is a cafe, a souvenir shop, and two

Aboriginal arts and crafts galleries. It opens daily from early in the morning to after sundown; exact hours vary from month to month.

PARK ENTRANCE FEES Entry to the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is A\$16 (US\$11) per adult, free for children under 16, valid for 3 days. The cost of the pass is included in many organized tours.

ETIQUETTE The Anangu ask you not to photograph sacred sites or Aboriginal people without permission, and to approach quietly and respectfully.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around the park is expensive. Ayers Rock Resort runs a **free shuttle** every 15 minutes or so around the resort complex from 10:30am to after midnight, but to get to the Rock or Kata Tjuta/the Olgas, you will need to take transfers, join a tour, or have your own wheels.

BY SHUTTLE **Uluru Express** (☎ 08/8956 2152; www.uluruexpress.com.au) provides a minibus shuttle from Ayers Rock Resort to and from the Rock about every 50 minutes from before sunrise to sundown, and several times a day to the Olgas. The normal shuttle costs A\$35 (US\$23) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for kids, while a sunrise trip costs A\$40 (US\$26) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for kids. To the Olgas it costs A\$50 (US\$33) for adults and A\$25 (US\$16) for children. A 3-day pass covering as many trips as you like to both sites costs A\$130 (US\$85) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for kids, while a combined Uluru and Olgas trip costs A\$55 (US\$36) for adults and A\$30 (US\$20) for kids. All fares are round-trip.

BY CAR If there are two of you, the easiest and cheapest way to get around is likely to be a rental car. All roads in the area are paved, so a 4WD is unnecessary. Expect to pay around A\$70 to A\$95 (US\$46–US\$62) per day for a medium-size car. Rates drop a little in low season. Most car-rental companies give you the first 100km (63 miles) free, and then charge A28¢ (US18¢) per kilometer after that. Take this into account, because the round-trip from the resort to the Olgas is just over 100km (63 miles), and that's without driving about 20km (½ mile) to the Rock and back. **Avis** (☎ 08/8956 2266), **Hertz** (☎ 08/8956 2244), and **Thrifty** (☎ 08/8956 2030) book 4WDs through their Darwin offices. All rent regular cars and 4WDs.

Booking agent, **The Outback Travel Shop** ★ (☎ 08/8955 5288; www.outbacktravelshop.com.au), in Alice Springs, often has better deals on car-rental rates than you'll get by booking direct.

BY ORGANIZED TOUR Several tour companies run a big range of daily sunrise and sunset viewings, circumnavigations of the Rock by coach or on foot, guided walks at the Rock or the Olgas, camel rides, observatory evenings, visits to the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, and innumerable permutations and combinations of all these. Some do “passes” containing the most popular activities. Virtually every company picks you up at your hotel. Among the most reputable are **Discovery Ecotours**, **AAT Kings**, **Tailormade Tours**, and **VIP Travel Australia** (see “Exploring the Red Centre” at the start of this chapter for details).

Tips Water, Water . . .

Water taps are scarce and kiosks non-existent in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Always carry your own drinking water when sightseeing.

ABORIGINAL TOURS Because **Anangu Tours** (☞ 08/8956 2123; www.anangutours.com.au) is owned and run by the Rock's Aboriginal owners, its tours give you firsthand insight into Aboriginal culture. Tours are in the Anangu language and translated by an interpreter. They are not cheap, but if you are going to spend money on just one tour, this group is a good choice.

The company does a **Kuniya** walk, where you visit the Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre and the Mutitjulu water hole at the base of the Rock, learn about bush foods, and see rock paintings, before watching the sunset. It departs daily at 2:30pm March through October, 3:30pm November through February. With hotel pick up it costs A\$84 (US\$55) for adults and A\$58 (US\$38) for children. Self-drive and it costs A\$52 (US\$34) for adults and A\$27 (US\$18) for kids.

For an Aboriginal insight into the Rock without paying for a tour, join the free **Mala Walk** (☞ see "Walking, Driving, or Busing Around It" below); it discusses Aboriginal culture and is often led by an Aboriginal park ranger.

DISCOVERING AYERS ROCK

AT SUNRISE & SUNSET Sunset is the peak time to catch the Rock's beauty, when oranges, peaches, pinks, reds, and then indigo and deep violet creep across its face as if it were a giant opal. Some days it's fiery; other days the colors are muted. A sunset-viewing parking lot is located on the Rock's western side. Plenty of sunset and sunrise tours operate from the resort. A typical sunset tour is that offered by **AAT Kings** (☞ 08/8956 2171), which departs 90 minutes before sunset, includes a free glass of wine with which to watch the show, and returns 20 minutes after sundown; the cost is A\$29 (US\$19) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children 4 to 14.

At sunrise the colors are less dramatic, but many folks enjoy the spectacle of the Rock unveiled by the dawn to bird song. You'll need an early start—most tours leave about 75 minutes before sunup.

CLIMBING IT Aborigines refer to tourists as *minga*—little ants—because that's what we look like crawling up Uluru. Climbing this thing is no picnic—there's sometimes a ferociously strong wind that can blow you right off, the walls are almost vertical in places so you have to hold onto a chain, and it can be freezing cold or insanely hot. Quite a few people have died from heart attacks, heat stress, or simply falling off; so if you're not in good shape, have breathing difficulties, heart trouble, or high or low blood pressure, or are just plain scared of heights, don't do it. The Rock is closed to climbers during bad weather; when temperatures exceed 97°F (36°C) (which they often do between Nov–Mar); and when wind speed exceeds 25 knots, so climb in the stillness of early morning. **Warning:** Wherever you go at Uluru and Kata Tjuta/the Olgas, bring lots of drinking water with you from the resort.

If that doesn't put you off, you'll be rewarded with views of the plain, Kata Tjuta/the Olgas, and Mt. Conner. The surface is rutted with ravines about 2.5m (8¼ ft.) deep, which demand scrambling. The climb takes at least 1 hour up for the fit, and 1 hour down. The less sure-footed should allow 3 to 4 hours all told.

Note: The Anangu do not like people climbing Uluru, because the climb follows the trail their ancestral Dreamtime Mala men took when they first came to Uluru. They allow people to climb but strongly prefer that they don't.

WALKING, DRIVING, OR BUSING AROUND IT The easy 9.4km (6-mile) **Base Walk** circumnavigating Uluru takes about 2 hours, but allow time to linger around the water holes, caves, folds, and overhangs that make up its walls.

Dinner in the Desert

Why sit in a restaurant when you can eat outside in the dust? You came to the Outback to be outside! Ayers Rock Resort's **Sounds of Silence dinner** 🦘 makes outside eating a fascinating event. In an outdoor clearing, you sip champagne and nibble canapés as the sun sets over the Rock to the strains of a didgeridoo—played by a white man (the excuse is that didgeridoos don't come from this part of the world, but from Arnhem Land)—though there seem to be plenty of local Aborigines who play. Hopefully, you've zeroed in on people you want to sit with by now, because you head to communal white-clothed, candlelit tables and a serve-yourself meal of kangaroo, and barramundi (a large freshwater fish). Last time I was here they served pretty poor pumpkin soup to begin, the main courses varied from bland to nice, and the Aussie wines were bad examples. However, after dinner, the lanterns fade, and you are left with stillness (apart from an occasional dingo looking for scraps). It is the first time some city folk have ever heard silence. Next, an astronomer points out the constellations of the Southern Hemisphere, and you have a chance to see the stars through telescopes. Sounds of Silence is held nightly, weather permitting, and costs A\$120 (US\$78) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for children under 15, including transfers from Ayers Rock Resort. It's mighty popular, so book 3 months ahead in peak season. Book through the Ayers Rock Resort office in Sydney (☎ 02/9339 1040 or 1300/139 889).

A shorter walk is the easy 1km (just over .5-mile) round-trip trail from the **Mutitjulu** parking lot to the pretty water hole near the Rock's base, where there is some rock art. The **Liru Track** is another easy trail; it runs 2km (1.25 miles) from the Cultural Centre to Uluru, where it links with the Base Walk.

Make time for the free daily 2km (1.25-mile) **Mala Walk** 🦘, where the ranger, who is often an Aborigine, explains the Dreamtime myths behind Uluru, talks about Aboriginal lifestyles and hunting techniques in days past, and explains the significance of the rock art and other sites you see along the way. The 90-minute trip leaves the Mala Walk sign at the base of the Uluru climb at 10am May through September, and at a cooler 8am October through April.

Before setting off on any walk, it's a good idea to arm yourself with the self-guided walking notes available for A\$1.10 (US70¢) from the Cultural Centre (see "Visitor Information" above).

A paved road runs around the Rock.

Most companies offer base tours. As an example, **Discovery Ecotours** (☎ 1800/803 174; www.discoveryecotours.com.au) conducts two guided base tours that give you an insight into natural history, rock art, and Dreamtime beliefs. Both arrive in time for sunrise: One is a 5-hour walk; the other is a 4-hour tour in a 4WD vehicle that incorporates short walks to the Rock base and a stop at the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre. Both include the park entry fee and breakfast, and cost A\$105 (US\$68) for adults and A\$70 (US\$46) for children 6 to 15. Admission is free for kids under 6, but their meals are not included. The 5-hour walk is not suited for kids under 10.

Tips Travel Tip

Most tourists do Uluru in the mornings and Kata Tjuta/the Olgas in the afternoon. Reverse the order (do the Valley of the Winds walk in the morning and Uluru in the afternoon), and you'll find both a little more silent and spiritual.

FLYING OVER IT Several companies do scenic flights by light aircraft or helicopter over Uluru and/or Kata Tjuta/the Olgas, nearby Mt. Conner, the vast white salt pan of Lake Amadeus, and as far as Kings Canyon. Helicopters don't land on top of the Rock, however. As a guide to the flights available, **Professional Helicopter Services** (☎ 08/8956 2003; www.phs.com.au) does a 12- to 15-minute flight over Uluru for A\$95 (US\$62) per adult, and a 25- to 30-minute flight for A\$190 (US\$124). Kids under 13 usually pay half-price (that depends more on their weight than their age). You can drive to the helicopter site on a Harley-Davidson for A\$50 (US\$33) one-way and A\$75 (US\$49) return.

MOTORCYCLING AROUND IT Harley-Davidson tours are available as sunrise or sunset rides, laps of the Rock, and various other Rock and/or Kata Tjuta/Olgas tours with time for the Olgas walks. A blast out to the Rock at sunset with **Uluru Motorcycle Tours** (☎ 08/8956 2019), along with a glass of champagne, will set you back A\$135 (US\$88). They drive the bike; you sit behind and hang on. Self-ride tours are available, too, at a hefty price.

VIEWING IT ON CAMELBACK They say a soul travels at the same pace as a camel; it's certainly a peaceful way to see the Rock. **Frontier Camel Tours** (☎ 1800/806 499 in Australia, or 08/8956 2444) makes daily forays aboard "ships of the desert" to view Uluru. Amble through red sand dunes with great views of the Rock, dismount to watch the sun rise or sink over it, and ride back to the depot for billy tea and beer bread in the morning, or champagne in the evening. The 1-hour rides depart Ayers Rock Resort 1 hour before sunrise, or 1½ hours before sunset, and cost A\$90 (US\$59) per person, including transfers from your hotel. Each day between 10:30am and midday, you can visit the camels free of charge and take a short ride for A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) for kids 6 to 12, or A\$25 (US\$16) for a family.

EXPLORING THE OLGAS

Although not everyone has heard of massive **Mt. Olga** 🗨 (or "the Olgas"), a sister monolith an easy 50km (31 miles) drive west of Uluru, many folks who have say she's lovelier and more mysterious, and I agree. Known to the Aborigines as Kata Tjuta or "many heads," the Olgas' 36 momentous red domes bulge out of the earth like turned clay on a potter's wheel. The tallest dome is actually 200m (656 ft.) higher than Ayers Rock. The Olgas are more important in Aboriginal Dreamtime legend than Uluru.

Two walking trails take you in among the domes: the 7.4km (4.5-mile) **Valley of the Winds** 🗨 walk, which is fairly challenging and takes 3 to 5 hours, and the 2.6km (1.5-mile) **Gorge walk**, which is easy and takes about an hour. The Valley of the Winds trail is the more rewarding in terms of scenery. Both have lookout points and shady stretches. The Valley of the Winds trail is closed when temperatures rise above 97°F (36°C).

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Ayers Rock Resort not only is in the township of Yulara—it is the township. Located about 30km (19 miles) from the Rock, outside the national park boundary, it is the only place to stay. It is an impressive, contemporary complex, built to a high standard, very efficiently run and attractive—all things you can end up paying an arm and a leg for. Because everyone either is a tourist or lives and works here, it has a village atmosphere—with a supermarket; a bank; a post office; a news agency; babysitting services; a medical center; a beauty salon; several gift, clothing, and souvenir shops; a place to buy beer; and a gas station.

You have a choice of seven places to stay within the complex, from hotel rooms and apartments to luxury and basic campsites. In keeping with this village feel, no matter where you stay, even in the campground, you are free to use all the pools, restaurants, and other facilities of every hostelry, except the rather glamorous Sails in the Desert pool, which is reserved for Sails guests.

Ayers Rock Resort, Alice Springs Resort, and Kings Canyon Resort are managed by **Voyages Hotels & Resorts**. You can book accommodations for all three properties through the central reservations office in Sydney (☎ **1300/139 889** in Australia, or 02/9339 1040; fax 02/9332 4555; www.voyages.com.au). Ask about packages for stays at one, two, or all three resorts. **Warning:** Shop around for prices on the Internet and with travel agencies. My experience is that people staying here have paid a whole range of prices.

High season is from July 1 to November 30. Book well ahead of then.

A tour desk, same-day dry-cleaning and laundry service, and babysitting are all available at each hostelry and campground.

As well as the dining options below, the resort's small shopping center has the pleasant **Gecko's Café**, which offers wood-fired pizzas, pastas, and sandwiches; a bakery; an ice-creamery; and takeout. Sails in the Desert, Desert Gardens, and the Outback Pioneer Hotel & Lodge can provide picnic hampers and breakfast backpacks. Kids under 15 dine free at any of the hotels' buffets in the company of an adult. It's a good idea to bring some wine with you, because the place has really got things sewn up, including prices.

Outback Pioneer Hotel and Lodge A happy, all-ages crowd congregates at this mid-range collection of hotel rooms, budget rooms, bunkrooms, and dorms. Thirty new rooms were added in 2002, offering clean, simple accommodation

Moments When You See the Southern Cross for the First Time . . .

Light pollution is extremely low out in the Red Centre, so the night sky is a dazzler. At the Ayers Rock Observatory, you can check out your zodiac constellation and take a 1-hour tour of the Southern Hemisphere heavens. (They're different from the Northern Hemisphere stars.)

To visit the observatory, you must join a tour with **Discovery Eco-tours** (formerly Uluru Experience) (☎ **1800/803 174** in Australia, or 08/8956 2563), which provides hotel pickup and a tour. Tours depart twice a night; times vary. It costs A\$30 (US\$20) for adults, A\$22 (US\$14) for children 6 to 15, and A\$63 (US\$41) for a family.

with private bathrooms, cheaper than the hotel rooms but more expensive than the existing budget rooms. The budget rooms have double beds and bunks, and shared bathroom and kitchen facilities. By the pool are plenty of lounge chairs, and there's also an Internet lounge. The **Bough House Restaurant** does buffets, and there is a dirt-cheap kiosk selling burger-style fare; but what seems like the entire resort gathers nightly at the great-value **Outback Pioneer Barbeque** 🍖🍷. This barn with big tables, lots of beer, and live music is the place to join the throngs throwing a kangaroo steak or emu sausage on the communal cook-it-yourself "barbie."

Yulara Dr., Yulara, NT 0872. ☎ **08/8957 7888**. Fax 08/8957 7615. 125 units, all with private bathroom; 12 budget rooms without bathroom; 30 budget rooms with bathroom; 32 quad-share bunkrooms, and two 40-bed single-sex dorms, none with bathroom. High season A\$383 (US\$249) double; A\$184 (US\$119) budget room with bathroom facilities; A\$162 (US\$105) budget room without bathroom facilities. Low season A\$350 (US\$227) double; A\$172 (US\$112) budget room with bathroom facilities; A\$152 (US\$99) budget room without bathroom facilities. Year-round A\$40 (US\$26) bunkroom bed, A\$32 (US\$21) dorm bed. No children under 16 in bunkhouses unless you book entire room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free airport shuttle. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C. Hotel and some budget rooms only: TV (w/pay movies in hotel), fridge. Hotel only: Minibar, hair dryer, iron. Phones in hotel rooms only.

Ayers Rock Campground Instead of red dust you get green lawns at this campground, which has barbecues, a playground, Internet access, and clean communal bathrooms and kitchen. If you don't want to camp but want to travel cheap, consider the cabins. They're clean, modern, and a great value; each has a kitchenette, dining furniture, a double bed, and four bunks. **Thrifty** (☎ **08/8956 2030**) at Uluru rents a complete camping kit with sleeping bags, tents, cooking equipment, and so on, to its customers for A\$36 (US\$23) per day for two people; book it ahead. **Hertz** (☎ **08/8956 2244**) rents camping gear if you rent a large 4WD for a week or more.

Yulara Dr., Yulara, NT 0872. ☎ **08/8956 2055**. Fax 08/8956 2260. 220 tent sites, 198 powered sites, 14 cabins, none with bathroom. A\$148 (US\$96) cabin for up to 6 people; A\$24 (US\$16) double tent site; A\$29 (US\$19) double; A\$35 (US\$23) family powered site. Extra adult A\$11 (US\$6.70), extra child 5–15 A\$5.50 (US\$3.60). Powered sites A\$15 (US\$9.75) for the first 2 people. Extra adult A\$11.50 (US\$7.50), extra child 6–15 A\$5.80 (US\$3.80). Family rate A\$40 (US\$26). Unpowered sites A\$12 (US\$8.20) for the first 2 people. Extra adult A\$11 (US\$7.15), extra child A\$5.80 (US\$3.80). Family rate A\$36 (US\$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Free airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; laundry; kiosk. *In room* (Cabins): A/C, TV, fridge, no phone.

The Top End

by Lee Mylne

The “Top End” is a last frontier; a vast sweep of barely inhabited country from Broome on the west coast to Arnhemland in the Northern Territory and eastern Queensland. Most of it is in the Northern Territory, and the term is also used to differentiate the northern part of the Territory from the “Red Centre.” It is a place of wild, rugged beauty and, sometimes, hardship.

The Northern Territory’s capital, Darwin, is a small city, rich, modern, and tropical. Katherine, to its south, is a farming town famous for a beautiful river gorge. Here you can drop by on an Aboriginal community, explore vast

cattle stations, canoe jungly rivers, and soak in natural thermal pools. To the east of Darwin and Katherine is World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park, home to wetlands, crocodiles, and millions of birds—one-third of the country’s bird species, in fact. Farther east is Arnhemland, a stretch of rocky escarpments and rivers owned by Aborigines and seen by few others.

Life in the Top End is different than elsewhere in Australia. Its slightly lawless image is one the locals enjoy. Isolation, the Wet Season, monsoons, predatory crocodiles, and other dangers make ‘em tough up here.

EXPLORING THE TERRITORY

Read “Exploring the Red Centre” at the start of chapter 7; it contains information on traveling the entire Northern Territory.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Northern Territory Tourist Commission (NTTC)**, Tourism House, 43 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800 (☎ **13 30 68** for trip-planning inquiries in Australia, or 08/8999 3900 for administration), can supply you with information on Darwin, Litchfield National Park, Kakadu National Park, Katherine, and other destinations in the Territory. As well as its main website, www.ntholidays.com, it maintains another tailored for international travelers, www.australiasoutback.com, and another, www.ntexplore.com, for the self-drive market. It publishes a helpful annual guide to the Top End that details many hotels, tour operators, rental-car companies, and attractions, and a separate fishing guide. The Commission operates a division called Territory Discoveries that offers package deals on complete trips.

The **Tourism Top End** information center in Darwin and **Katherine Region Tourist Association** (listed in the “Darwin” and “Katherine” sections of this chapter) can supply information about the entire Top End, not just their local regions.

WHEN TO GO The sanest time to visit the Top End is in the winter Dry Season (the Dry). Not a cloud will grace the sky, and temperatures will be comfortable, even hot in the middle of the day. The Dry runs roughly from late April to the end of October. It is high season, so book every tour, hotel, or campsite in advance. The Wet Season (the Wet) runs from November (sometimes as early as Oct) to March or April. While it does not rain 24 hours a day during the Wet, it comes down in

buckets, usually for an hour or two each day, mainly in the late afternoon or overnight. The land floods as far as the eye can see, the humidity is murderous, and the temperatures hit the high 80s°F (30s°C). The floods cut off many attractions, sometimes suddenly, and some tour companies shut up shop for the season. Cyclones may hit the coast during the Wet, with the same savagery as hurricanes hit Florida. Many people find the “build-up” to the Wet in October and November, when clouds gather but do not break, the toughest time to be there.

Having said all that, the Wet is a wonderful time to travel. Waterfalls become massive torrents, lightning storms crackle across the afternoon sky, the land turns green, cloud cover keeps the worst of the sun off, and crowds vanish. Keep your plans flexible to account for floods, take it real slow in the heat, and carry loads of drinking water, and you should be okay. Even if you normally camp, sleep in air-conditioned accommodations now. Book tours ahead, as most will operate on a reduced schedule.

GETTING AROUND The **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory (AANT)**, 79–81 Smith St., Darwin, NT 0800 (☎ **08/8981 3837**; www.aaa.asn.au), is a good source of maps and road advice. The **Northern Territory Tourist Commission's** site at www.ntexplore.com is also designed specifically for those setting out on a driving holiday.

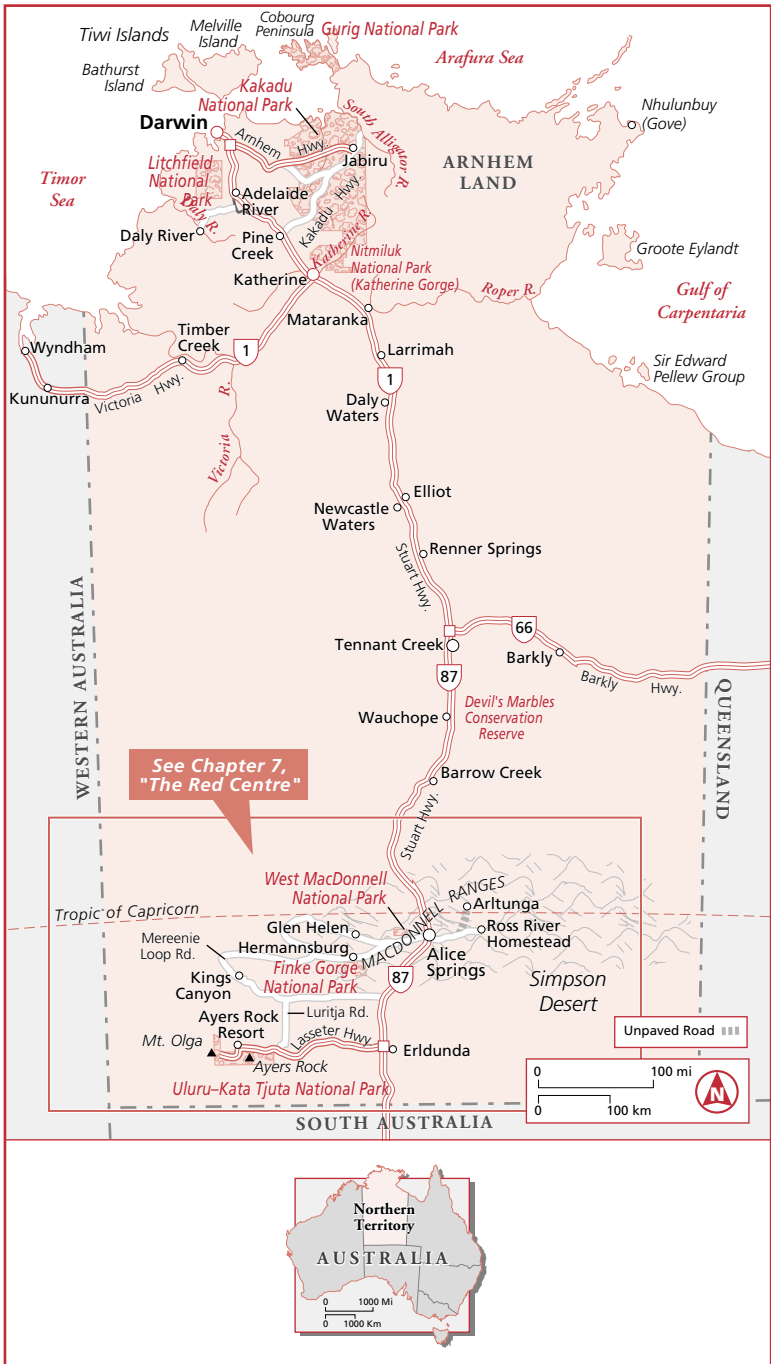
TRAVELING IN THE WET Some roads will be underwater throughout the Wet, while others can flood unexpectedly, leaving you cut off for hours, days, or even months. Flash floods pose dangers to unwary motorists. Don't cross a flooded road unless you know the water is shallow, the current gentle, and the road intact. Never wade into the water, as crocodiles may be present. If you're cut off, the only thing to do is wait, so travel with food and drinking water in remote parts. Check road conditions every day by calling the **Northern Territory Department of Transport & Works'** 24-hour recorded report on road conditions (☎ **1800/246 199** in Australia); dropping into or calling the AANT (see above) in Darwin during office hours; or tuning into the local radio stations as you drive. Local tour companies, tourist bureaus, and police stations should also be able to help. In the Kimberley, call the **Main Roads Western Australia** department (☎ **1800/013 314** in Australia) for a 24-hour recorded report.

TOUR OPERATORS Taking an organized tour can solve the hassles posed by distance, isolation, and the Wet floods in the Top End, and it will show you things you might not discover on your own. There is no shortage of companies running coach, mini-bus, and 4WD tours from Broome, Kununurra, Darwin, and even Alice Springs. A loop through Darwin, Litchfield National Park, Kakadu National Park, and Katherine is a popular triangle that shows you a lot in a short time.

Reputable companies include **AAT Kings** (☎ **1300/556 100** in Australia, or 08/8941 3844; www.aatkings.com); **Odyssey Safaris** (☎ **1800/891 190** or 08/8948 0091; www.odysaf.com.au); **Sahara Outback Tours** (☎ **1800/806 240** in Australia, or 08/8953 0881; www.saharatours.com.au); **Adventure Tours** (☎ **1300/654 604** in Australia, or 08/8309 2277; www.adventuretours.com.au); and **Billy Can Tours** (☎ **1800/813 484** in Australia, or 08/8981 9813; www.billycan.com.au).

Far Out Adventures ★★ (☎ **02/6557 6076** or 0427/152288; www.farout.com.au) does tailor-made 4WD safaris into Kakadu, Darwin, Arnhemland, Litchfield National Park, Katherine, the Kimberley, and more Top End regions. Proprietor/guide Mike Keighley will create a private adventure to suit your interests,

The Northern Territory



Croc Alert! (& Other Safety Tips)

Saltwater **crocodiles** are a serious threat in the sea, estuaries, lakes, wetlands, waterfall pools, and rivers of the Top End—even hundreds of kilometers inland. They may be called “saltwater” crocs, but they live in fresh water. Never jump in the water or stand on the bank unless you want to be lunch.

Always carry 4 liters (a gallon) of **drinking water** per person a day when walking (increase to 1 liter/ $\frac{1}{4}$ gal. per person per hour in summer). Wear a broad-brimmed hat, high-factor sunscreen lotion, and insect repellent containing DEET (Aerogard and RID brands both contain it) to protect against the dangerous Ross River Fever virus carried by mosquitoes.

Deadly **marine stingers** put a stop to ocean swimming in the Top End from October to April.

budget, and time restrictions. Accommodations can range from five-star hotels to “under the stars” in Aussie bush swags. Touring with Mike can involve hiking, fishing, meeting or camping with his Aboriginal mates, canoeing, exploring seldom-seen Aboriginal rock art, taking extras like scenic flights, and swimming under (croc-free) waterfalls. Mike is one of a select group of operators with Australia’s Advanced Eco Tour Accreditation and Savannah Guide status, and has a tremendous knowledge of the Top End’s geography, Aboriginal culture, and ecology. Fun and personal, his trips are accompanied by good wine (sometimes in locations like a bird-filled lagoon at sunset) and “bush gourmet” meals.

Lord’s Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris ★ (☎ 08/8979 2970; www.lords-safaris.com) is based in Jabiru and operates charter tours throughout Kakadu and Arnhemland. Owner Sab Lord was born on a buffalo station in Kakadu before it was a National Park, and has a strong rapport with local Aborigines. His small-group 4WD tours, which can be tailor-made, visit the Injalak Hill rock art sites in Arnhemland and the arts center at Oenpelli, and have exclusive access to the Minkinj Valley. Day tours to Arnhemland cost A\$165 (US\$107) adults, A\$130 (US\$85) children under 14, and operate May to November. They also do tours to Jim Jim and Twin Falls.

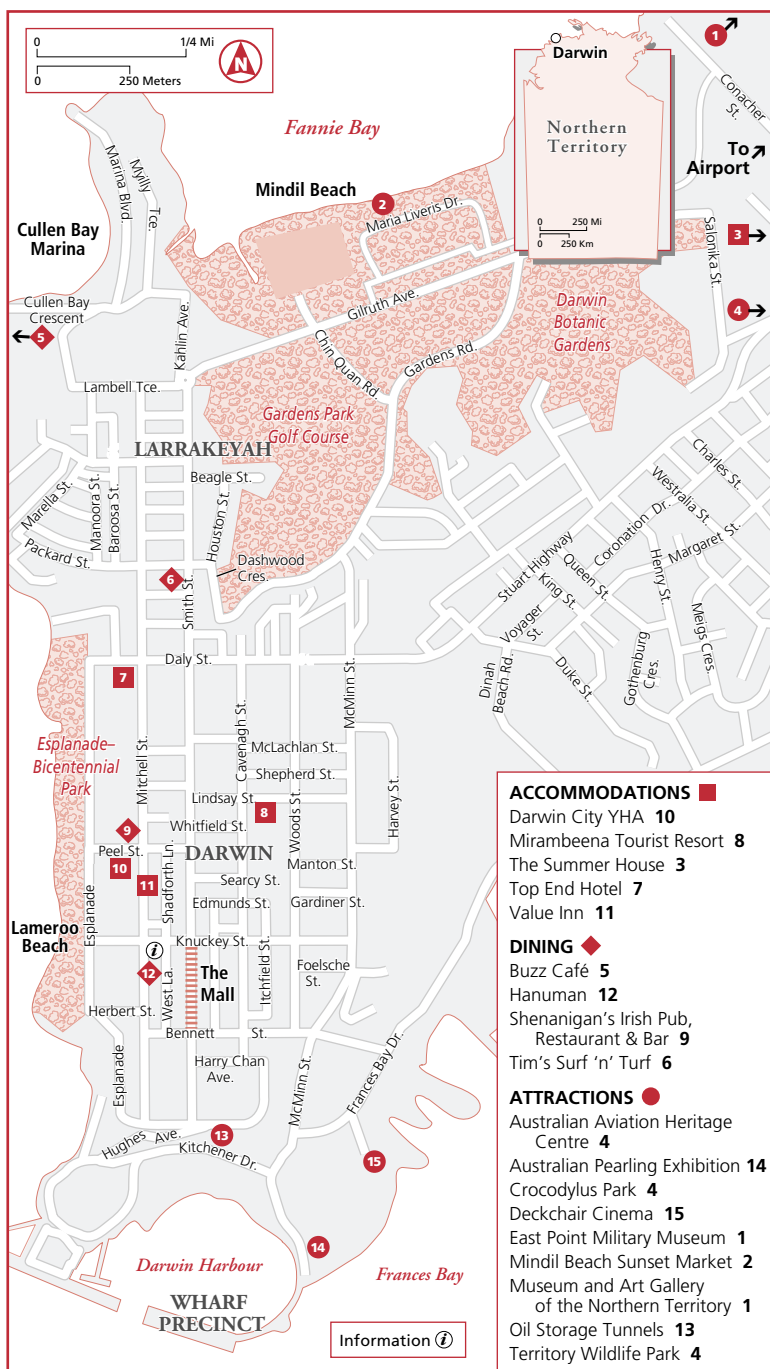
For details of tour operators running from Darwin to Broome, see “The Kimberley Region” section in chapter 9.

1 Darwin

1,489km (930 miles) N of Alice Springs

Named after the founder of the theory of evolution, Australia’s northernmost capital (pop. 97,750) has proud white civic buildings, pink bougainvillea, and a touch of Asian exoticism. It’s a modern tropical capital—most of it was rebuilt after Cyclone Tracy wiped out the city on Christmas Eve 1974. Don’t fuss about unpacking your jacket and tie here. Shorts and rubber thongs (flip-flops) will get you most places—even the official state invitations stipulate dress as “Territory Rig,” meaning long pants and a short-sleeved open-necked shirt for men.

Darwin is most commonly used as a gateway to Kakadu National Park, Katherine Gorge, and the Kimberley, and many Australians have never bothered



to visit it—or at least not for long. And that’s a real shame, because it is an attractive and interesting place. Give yourself a day or two to wander the pleasant streets and parklands, visit the wildlife attractions, and discover some of the city’s rich history. The wetland’s fishing is excellent by boat or helicopter, as is the shopping for Aboriginal art and the Top End’s South Sea pearls. An easy day trip away is the beautiful Litchfield National Park, one of the Territory’s best-kept secrets.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) serves Darwin daily from most state capitals; flights either are direct or connect in Alice Springs. Qantas also flies direct from Cairns. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia) flies direct to Darwin from Sydney and Brisbane, with connections from Adelaide, Canberra, Gold Coast, Melbourne, and Perth. **Airnorth** (☎ 1800/627 474 in Australia, or 08/8920 4001) flies from Alice Springs via Tennant Creek and Katherine, as well as from Broome in Western Australia and Cairns in Queensland. There are also direct flights to Darwin from Asia.

Darwin Airport Shuttle Services (☎ 1800/358 945 in the Northern Territory, or 08/8981 5066) meets every flight and delivers to any hotel between the airport and city for A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) one-way or A\$13 (US\$8.45) round-trip. Children 6 to 13 pay A\$4.50 (US\$2.90), or A\$8 (US\$5.20) round-trip. Bookings aren’t essential. A cab to the city is around A\$25 (US\$16). **Avis**, **Budget**, **Hertz**, and **Thrifty** have airport desks (see “Getting Around” below, for telephone numbers).

By Bus **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCafferty’s** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) both make a daily coach run from Alice Springs. The trip takes around 20 hours, and the fare is A\$194 (US\$126). Greyhound also has daily service from Broome via Kununurra and Katherine; this trip takes around 24 hours and costs A\$226 (US\$147). Both companies run from Cairns via Townsville and Tennant Creek, a 40-hour trip costing A\$265 (US\$172).

By Train From early 2004, the opening of the long-awaited Alice Springs–Darwin railway line will give the Top End its first rail link. Great Southern Railway’s **The Ghan** (☎ 13 21 47 in Australia; www.trainways.com.au) will run one weekly return journey between the two cities, leaving Alice Springs on Mondays at 4pm and arriving in Darwin about 24 hours later. The return trip leaves Darwin on Wednesdays at 10am. The adult one-way fare is A\$440 (US\$286) for a “daylighter” seat, and A\$1,390 (US\$904) or A\$1,740 (US\$1,131) for sleepers.

By Car Darwin is at the end of the **Stuart Highway**. Allow at least 2 very long days, 3 to be comfortable, to drive from Alice Springs (see “Getting There” in section 2 of chapter 7). The nearest road route from the east is the Barkly Highway, which connects with the Stuart Highway at Tennant Creek, 922km (576 miles) south. The nearest road from the west is the Victoria Highway, which joins the Stuart Highway at Katherine, 314km (196 miles) to the south.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Tourism Top End**, Knuckey Street at Mitchell Street, Darwin, NT 0800 (☎ 08/8936 2488; www.tourismtopend.com.au), is the place to go for maps, bookings, national park notes, and information on Darwin and other regions throughout the Northern Territory, including Arnhemland, Katherine, and Kakadu and Litchfield National Parks. It’s open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:45pm, Saturday from 9am to 2:45pm, and Sunday and public holidays from 10am to 1:45pm.

CITY LAYOUT The heart of the city is the **Smith Street pedestrian mall**. One street over is the lively **Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct**, full of backpacker lodges, cheap eateries, and souvenir stores. Two streets past that is the harbor-front **Esplanade**. In the Old Wharf precinct, near town, are a couple of tourist attractions, a jetty popular with local fishermen, and a working dock. Cullen Bay Marina is a “millionaire’s row” of restaurants, cafes, and expensive boats; it’s about a 25-minute walk northwest of town. A couple of kilometers northwest of the town center is Fannie Bay, where you’ll find the Botanic Gardens, sailing club, golf course, museum and art gallery, and casino.

GETTING AROUND For car and 4WD rentals, call **Avis** (☎ 08/8981 9922), **Budget** (☎ 08/8981 9800), **EuropCar** (☎ 08/8941 0300), **Hertz** (☎ 08/8941 0944), or **Thrifty** (☎ 08/8924 0000).

Darwinbus (☎ 08/8924 7666) is the local bus company. Its 1-day Tourcard allows unlimited travel on the network until midnight for A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults, A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) for kids 5 to 14. The city terminus is on Harry Chan Avenue (behind the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas buildings). Get timetables there, or from the Tourism Top End visitor center (see “Visitor Information” above).

The **Tour Tub bus** (☎ 08/8985 6322) does a loop of most city attractions and major hotels between 9am and 4pm daily. Hop on and off as you like all day for A\$25 (US\$16) for adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children ages 4 to 12. It departs the Knuckey Street end of Smith Street Mall, opposite Woolworths. The **Territory Shuttle** (☎ 08/8928 1155) is a minibus service that picks you up and drops you off anywhere in the Darwin area—hotels, attractions, shops, the wharf precincts, the ‘burbs, and so on. It will come by as promptly as it can when you call, or you can pre-book it. It runs daily, usually 24 hours Wednesday through Saturday. The fares are low; a trip within the downtown area or out as far as the MGM Grand casino and Mindil Beach Sunset Markets will set you back just A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) per person.

Darwin Day Tours (☎ 1800/811 633 in Australia, or 08/8924 1111) has a range of sightseeing tours.

Call **Darwin Radio Taxis** (☎ 131 008) for a cab. Taxi stands are at the Knuckey Street and Bennett Street ends of Smith Street Mall.

WHAT TO SEE & DO: CITY STROLLS, WORLD WAR II HISTORY, FISHING & MORE

Darwin’s ample parks, stunning harbor, and tropical clime make it a lovely city for strolling during the Dry. The Darwin Region Tourism Association (see “Visitor Information” above) has free maps of a Historical Stroll which takes you to 17 points of interest around town; the Esplanade makes a pleasantly short and shady saunter; and the **Darwin Botanic Gardens** (☎ 08/8981 1958), on Gardens Road 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) from town, has paths through palms, orchids, and lawns, and an Aboriginal plant use trail. Entry is free daily. Take bus no. 4 or 6.

The long but pleasant 5km (3-mile) trail along **Fannie Bay** from the MGM Grand hotel to the **East Point Military Museum** is worth doing. Keep a lookout for the 2,000 wild wallabies on the east side of Alec Fong Lim Drive near the museum.

Darwin has two wildlife parks worth visiting. At the **Territory Wildlife Park** (☎ 08/8988 7200), 61km (38 miles) south of Darwin, you can take a free shuttle or walk 6km (3.75 miles) of bush trails to see native Northern Territory wildlife in 12 natural habitats, such as bats, bilbies, birds in a walk-through

aviary, sawfish and stingrays in a walk-through aquarium, spiders, crocs, and kangaroos (but not koalas, as they don't live in the Territory). A program of animal talks runs throughout the day. The best is the birds of prey show, at 10am and 3pm. Go first thing to see the animals at their liveliest, and allow 4 hours to see everything, plus 45 minutes traveling time. Open daily from 8:30am to 6pm (last entry at 4pm), and closed Christmas. Admission is A\$18 (US\$12) for adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) for students and children 5 to 16, and A\$40 (US\$26) for a family. Take the Stuart Highway for 50km (31 miles) and turn right onto the Cox Peninsula Road for another 11km (7 miles). If you don't have your own wheels, the cheapest way to get there is aboard the **Rainbow Down the Track and Back** (☎ 08/8948 4248) bus service that runs direct to the park for A\$25 (US\$16) per person, round-trip, half price for kids under 5. It departs from the McCafferty's/Greyhound Pioneer coach terminal at 67–69 Mitchell St. (behind the Darwin YHA hostel). Call for schedule details.

In addition to housing a small crocodile museum, **Crocodylus Park** (☎ 08/8922 4500), a 15-minute drive from town at 815 McMillan's Rd., Berrimah, holds croc-feeding sessions and free, guided tours at 10am, noon, 2 and 3:30pm. It also doubles as Darwin's zoo, with exotic species including lions, Bengal tigers, and monkeys on display. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (closed Christmas). Admission is A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$18 (US\$12) for seniors, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children 4 to 15, and A\$57 (US\$37) for a family of four. Take bus no. 5 (Mon–Fri only) or the park shuttle bus (☎ 08/8928 1100) which costs A\$35 (US\$23) adults or A\$90 (US\$59) family for return transport from the city and park entry.

The **Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory** ♠♠, Conacher Street, Fannie Bay (☎ 08/8999 8201), also holds an attraction for crocodile fans—the preserved body of Sweetheart, a 5.1m (17-ft.) man-eating saltwater croc captured in Kakadu National Park. The museum and gallery have good sections on Aboriginal, Southeast Asian, and Pacific art and culture. Both gallery and museum are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and 10am to 5pm weekends and public holidays (closed Christmas, Boxing Day, New Year's Day, and Good Friday). The cafe has lovely bay views. Admission to permanent exhibits is free. Take bus no. 4 or 6.

Darwin was an Allied supply base during World War II. The **East Point Military Museum** ♠, East Point Road, East Point (☎ 08/8981 9702; www.epmm.com.au), housed in a WWII gun command post, plays a video of the 1943 Japanese bombing of Darwin and has fine displays of photos, memorabilia, artillery, armored vehicles, and weaponry. It is open daily 9:30am to 5pm (closed Christmas and Good Friday). Admission is A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) for seniors, A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children, and A\$28 (US\$18) for a family.

Tips The Darwin Shopping Scene

Darwin's best buys are Aboriginal art and crafts, pearls, opals, and diamonds.

For a great range of artworks and artifacts, check out **Raintree Aboriginal Fine Arts**, 20 Knuckey St. (☎ 08/8941 9933). The world's best South Sea pearls are farmed in Top End seas. Buy, or just drool in the window, at **Paspaley Pearls**, off Smith Street Mall in Bennett Street (☎ 08/8982 5515). **The World of Opal**, 44 Smith Street Mall (☎ 08/8981 8981), has a re-creation of an opal mine in their showroom.

Tips Where Can I Swim?

Crocodiles and stingers render Darwin's lovely turquoise seas a no-swim zone year-round. Locals sunbathe on **Casuarina Beach**, and swim within view of the sea in **Lake Alexander** on Alec Fong Lim Drive in East Point Reserve. It's that, or hit the hotel pool!

Military or aircraft buffs should not miss the **Australian Aviation Heritage Centre**, 557 Stuart Hwy., Winnellie (☎ 08/8947 2145). A B-52 bomber on loan from the United States is the prized exhibit, but the center also boasts a B-25 Mitchell bomber, Mirage and Sabre fighter jets, Japanese Zero fighter wreckage, and displays on World War II and Vietnam. It is open daily 9am to 5pm (closed Christmas and Good Friday). Admission is A\$11 (US\$7.15) for adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) for seniors and students, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children 6 to 12, and A\$28 (US\$18) for a family. Guided tours are at 10am, 2 and 4pm. It is 10 minutes from town; take the no. 5 or 8 bus. Empty **World War II oil storage tunnels** (☎ 08/8985 6333), on Kitchener Drive in the Wharf precinct, house a collection of black-and-white photographs of the war in Darwin, each lit up in the dark. It's a simple but haunting attraction worth a visit. Admission is A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) per person. The tunnels are closed December 10 to December 27. They open daily from 9am to 5pm May through September; October through April, hours are Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 2pm, weekends and holidays from 10am to 4pm.

On the Esplanade stands a monument to the destroyer **U.S.S. Robert E. Peary**, which went down in Darwin Harbour taking 88 lives.

For an insight into Darwin's pearling industry, visit the **Australian Pearling Exhibition** (☎ 08/8999 6573) on Kitchener Drive near the Wharf Precinct. It has displays following the industry from the days of the lugger and hard-hat diving to modern farming and culture techniques. It's open from 10am to 5pm daily, except Good Friday, Christmas, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day. Tickets cost A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) adults, A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) children ages 3 to 10, and A\$17 (US\$11) family of five. And if you've got an evening free, get out on the harbor with **Darwin Pearl Lugger Cruises** (☎ 08/8942 3131). For A\$46 (US\$30) adults (half price for kids), you can spend about 3 hours aboard the lugger *Kim*, built in 1953 and now restored to take up to 30 guests on sunset cruises, which leave Cullen Bay Marina daily at 5:15pm. They even throw in a free glass of bubbly and some nibbles, and you can buy more drinks.

The Top End's vast wetlands and warm oceans are close to fishing heaven. The big prey is barramundi. Loads of charter boats conduct jaunts from a morning to up to 10 days in the rivers and wetlands around Darwin, Kakadu National Park, and remote Arnhemland. The same company that runs Darwin's Tour Tub bus also runs the **Northern Territory Fishing Office** (☎ 08/8985 6333; www.ntfishingoffice.com.au), a booking agent for a number of fishing charter boats offering barramundi day trips and extended wetland safaris, reef fishing, light tackle sportfishing, fly-fishing, and estuary fishing. A day's barra fishing on wetlands near Darwin will cost you around A\$250 (US\$163) per person; for an extended barra safari, budget about A\$420 (US\$273) per person per day. If you simply want to cast a line in Darwin Harbour for trevally, queenfish, and barra, they will take you out for A\$75 (US\$49) per person for a half day, or A\$135 (US\$88) per person for a full day. They also rent skipper-yourself fishing boats

and tackle. Check out www.fishingtheterritory.com for detailed information on fishing tours, guides, and everything you need to know to make your arms ache from reeling 'em in!

WHERE TO STAY

Darwin's remoteness means accommodation is not all that cheap, especially from April to October, the peak travel in the Dry Season. From November to March, the Wet Season, hotels usually drop their rates.

Mirambeena Tourist Resort You're just a stone's throw from the city center at this modern hotel complex, where the tempting swimming pools, the Jacuzzis, and the treetop restaurant, all shaded by the leaves of a sprawling strangler fig, have a castaway island feel. All rooms were refurbished in 1998 to a high standard; each is a decent size and has some kind of garden or pool view. Town houses with kitchenettes are good for families, if you can handle sharing the compact bathroom with your kids.

64 Cavenagh St., Darwin, NT 0800. ☎ **1800/891 100** in Australia, or 08/8946 0111. Fax 08/8981 5116. www.mirambeena.com.au. 225 units (all with shower only). High season (Apr–Oct) A\$152–A\$195 (US\$99–US\$127) double; A\$230 (US\$150) town house (sleeps 4). Low season (Nov–Mar) A\$117–A\$148 (US\$76–US\$96) double; A\$180 (US\$117) town house. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). Children under 3 stay free. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking for limited cars, plus on-street parking. Bus: 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10. **Amenities:** Restaurant; poolside cafe; 2 bars; 2 outdoor pools (in a single complex); children's pool; exercise room; 2 Jacuzzis; bike rental; game room; minigolf; tour desk; secretarial services; limited room service; babysitting; laundry; same-day dry cleaning/laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, minibar (on request), fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

The Summer House ★★ *Finds* A groovy, stylish tropical hideaway is a rare thing in the rough-and-ready Territory, but that's what Jill Farrand has created in her home in this converted apartment block. The place is in a leafy suburb 3km (2 miles) from town, on the local bus route, or a A\$2 (US\$1.30) shuttle ride away. Two roomy suites sport white walls, trendy polished concrete floors, and wrought-iron furniture (one has giant Balinese armchairs and 3m/10-ft.-high exotic flower arrangements), while a third has a retro look. All have louvered windows to encourage a breeze, hip mosaic bathrooms, and one or two bedrooms, a living area, and a kitchenette. Jill delivers a nice continental breakfast. A Jacuzzi in the jungly garden is great for cooling off on hot nights. Gay and lesbian guests, and children, are welcome. No smoking indoors.

3 Quarry Crescent, Stuart Park (P.O. Box 104, Parap, NT 0820). ☎ **08/981 9992**. www.interbed.com.au/summerhouse.htm. 3 units (all shower only). A\$120 (US\$78) double; A\$160 (US\$104) 2-bedroom apt (sleeps 4). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 5, 6, 8, or 10. From the airport, take the Stuart Hwy. 5km (3 miles) to Stuart Park; turn left onto Woolner Rd., right onto Iliffe St., right onto Armidale St., and left onto Quarry Crescent. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV (apt only), kitchenette, hair dryer, iron, no phone.

Top End Hotel This two-story hotel has a quiet ambience, despite the trendy complex of bars, restaurant, sports-betting outlets, and a liquor store on one side. Most of the rooms face a rectangular saltwater pool surrounded by an inviting lawn, sun lounges, and tall palms rather than the bar complex. The front desk sells breakfast and dinner meat packs for you to cook up on the barbie. Rooms were renovated in 2000, and each is a good size, with quality fittings, and a furnished patio or balcony. You're just across the road from the Esplanade (where fish come in to shore at high tide to be hand-fed by visitors), close to restaurants, and a 1km (½-mile) stroll from Smith Street Mall.

Mitchell St. at Daly St., Darwin, NT 0801. ☎ **1800/626 151** in Australia, or 08/8981 6511. Fax 08/8941 1253. www.bestwestern.com.au/topend. 40 units (all with shower only). Dry Season A\$132 (US\$86) double. Wet

Season A\$115 (US\$75) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; outdoor pool; tour desk; room service; babysitting; laundry; same-day dry cleaning/laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, fridge, coffeemaker.

Value Inn (Value) The cheerful rooms at this neat little hotel in the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct are extremely compact but tidy, and have colorful modern fittings. Each room is just big enough to hold both a queen-size and a single bed, and a small writing table. The views aren't much, but you'll probably spend your time in the cafes along the street. Smith Street Mall and the Esplanade walking path are 2 blocks away. There is a public pay phone, cold drink and coffee vending machines, and an iron on each floor, and a very small garden pool off the parking lot.

50 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800. (C) 08/8981 4733. Fax 08/8981 4730. www.valueinn.com.au. 93 units (all with shower only). Dry Season A\$75–A\$89 (US\$49–US\$58) double. Wet Season A\$65–A\$69 (US\$42–\$45) double. No charge for extra person. AE, MC, V. Limited free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; tour desk; dry cleaning; laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, no phone.

SUPER-CHEAP SLEEPS

Darwin City YHA (Value) The single and double rooms at this upbeat backpacker hostel in the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct are basic, but the mattresses are firm, and the communal bathrooms are clean. Guests laze elbow-to-elbow around the pool; a second lofty sun deck and an open-air kitchen and dining area overlook the pool. The hostel also has TV rooms, a game room, Internet access, and barbecues. Reception is open 24 hours and has safes. Shanigan's Irish pub (see "Where to Dine" below) is in the complex, and coach terminals, cheap cafes, the Smith Street Mall, and the Esplanade are steps away. The air-conditioning is noisy and is turned on only between 7pm and 9am, so think twice about staying here in Darwin's horrifically hot summer.

69 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800. (C) 08/8981 3995. Fax 08/8981 6674. www.yha.com.au. 130 units, 2 with bathroom (shower only). A\$50 (US\$33) double without bathroom; A\$60–A\$65 (US\$39–US\$42) double with bathroom. A\$16–A\$17 (US\$10–US\$11) dorm bed. A\$12–A\$13 (US\$7.80–US\$8.45) children under 18. Linen A\$2 (US\$1.30) for length of stay. MC, V. Ample on-street parking. Bus: 4 or 5 (6 or 10 citybound only). Free airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; tour desk; bike rental; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C.

WHERE TO DINE

Cullen Bay Marina, a 25-minute walk from town or a short cab ride, is packed with trendy restaurants and cafes. If it's Thursday, don't even think about eating anywhere other than the **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (★), and on Saturdays head to the suburban **Parap Markets** for Asian goodies (see the box, "Cheap Eats & More!"). The cool crowd hangs at **Roma Bar**, 30 Cavenagh St. (C) 08/8981 6729), for good coffee and cheap nosh; it's open Monday through Friday from 7am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 8am to 2pm.

Hanuman (★★) CONTEMPORARY THAI/NONYA/TANDOORI Elegant black walls and a moody Eastern atmosphere make this city restaurant popular as a business-lunch venue by day and as a rendezvous for couples, families, and more business folk by night. You can rely on it to serve up interesting dishes such as roasted duck in a red curry of coconut, fresh pineapple, kaffir lime, and sweet basil, or fish baked whole in banana leaves, Melaccan-style, with ground galangal, hot chili, lemon grass, and kaffir lime leaves. There is also a separate tandoori menu. Service is prompt and friendly.

28 Mitchell St. (C) 08/8941 3500. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$17–A\$24 (US\$11–US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; daily 6:30–11pm.

Cheap Eats & More!

If it's Thursday, join the entire city (well, 8,000 locals) at the **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** ★ to feast at the 60 terrific (and cheap: Most dishes are A\$4–\$6/US\$2.60–\$3.90 a serve!) Asian food stalls, listen to live bands, wander 200 art and crafts stalls, and mingle with the masseurs, tarot card readers, and street performers. The action runs from 5 to 10pm in the Dry (May–Oct). A smaller market runs Sunday between June and September from 4 to 9pm. The markets' season changes from year to year, so if you're visiting Darwin on the seasonal cusp in April or September, check whether they have started or ended by calling the organizers (☎ 08/8981 3454). The beach is about a A\$7.50 (US\$4.85) cab ride from town, or take bus no. 4, or call the **Territory Shuttle** (☎ 08/8928 1155), which charges A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) per person from downtown. The Tour Tub's last run of the day at 4pm (see "Getting Around" earlier in the chapter) goes by the markets.

On Saturday mornings, head to suburban **Parap Markets** ★, which transform a small street into a corner of Asia. The focus is on food, and it's a favorite place for locals to have breakfast or brunch, choosing from southeast Asian soups, noodle dishes, and satays, washed down with fresh-squeezed tropical fruit drinks. The markets are only about a block long, on Parap Road, Parap (☎ 08/8948 2373).

Shenannigan's Irish Pub, Restaurant & Bar ★ IRISH PUB FARE Hearty Irish stews and braised beef and Guinness pies (plus the odd pint of Guinness itself) gets everyone in the mood for eating, talking, and dancing at this convivial bar/restaurant. A friendly mix of solo travelers, families, seniors, and backpackers eat and drink in atmospheric wooden booths, standing up at bar tables, or by the fire. As well as hearty meat dishes, there is lighter stuff like salmon salad or vegetarian brochettes, and nightly specials, such as chicken and chili pasta or poached barramundi in white-wine sauce with fries and salad. Live bands on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights.

69 Mitchell St. at Peel St. ☎ 08/8981 2100. Reservations recommended. Daily specials A\$9.50–A\$14 (US\$6.15–US\$9.10). Main courses A\$12–A\$24 (US\$7.80–US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Weekdays 10am–2am; from 11am weekends.

Tim's Surf 'n' Turf ★ *Value* STEAK/SEAFOOD Locals fairly bash down the door to get into this unpretentious restaurant under a cheap motel on the city fringe. The surroundings are not the attraction, so what is? Hearty, no-nonsense food cooked well, and served in portions big enough to feed an army. No namby-pamby steaks here—Tim's are monsters up to 1kg (2.2 lb.), over an inch thick, and grain-fed (a boon in Australia, where the beef is mostly grass-fed and a little chewy). Garlic prawns, crocodile schnitzel, lasagna, oysters, barbecued ribs, and roast of the day are typical menu items. There are meals for kids, who eat free before 6:30pm (one kid for every adult in the party). You'll get a complimentary port after dinner, and free ice cream for dessert.

In the Asti Motel, Smith St. at Packard Place. ☎ 08/8981 9979. Main courses A\$10–A\$21 (US\$6.50–US\$14); seafood platter for 2 A\$35 (US\$23); crocodile from A\$14 (US\$9.10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–9:30pm (except Christmas). Bus: 4 or 6; bus stop within 100m (328 ft.).

WORTH A SPLURGE

Buzz Café ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN This smart, busy waterfront cafe is as well known for its loo-with-a-view as it is for its terrific food and relaxed atmosphere. The men's bathroom just nudges out the women's for interest value—ladies, get a man to take you in there to see what I mean—everybody does! The food is flavorsome East-meets-West fare like jungle curry of chicken with snake beans and green peppercorns, or pan-fried barramundi on potato mash in a lemon butter sauce; the lamb shanks are so huge almost no one can finish them. Wash it down with a cocktail.

The Slipway, Cullen Bay Marina. ☎ 08/8941 1141. Reservations recommended in the Dry. Main courses A\$17–A\$30 (US\$11–US\$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2am; Sat–Sun 10:30am–2am (including brunch). Bus: 4 or 6.

DARWIN AFTER DARK

If it's Thursday, you are mad to be anywhere except the Mindil Beach Markets (described earlier). Ditto if it's Sunday evening and you're not at the free **Sunset Jazz** on the lawns at the MGM Grand Casino once a month from May to October. A good spot to catch Darwin's movie-set sunsets any night is the super-casual **Darwin Sailing Club**, Atkins Drive on Fannie Bay (☎ 08/8981 1700). Ask the manager to sign you in. A bistro serves affordable meals from noon to 2pm and from 6 to 9pm daily, and the bar is open from 10am until midnight, and until 2am Friday and Saturday.

Lie back in a deck chair at the **Deckchair Cinema** (☎ 08/8981 0700; www.deckchaircinema.com) to watch Aussie hits, foreign films, and cult classics under the stars. Movies are screened at 7:30pm Wednesday through Sunday in the Dry (Apr or May–Oct or Nov) with late sessions Friday and Saturday nights. It is on the beachfront opposite Parliament House on the Esplanade. Tickets are A\$12 (US\$7.80) adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children, and A\$30 (US\$20) family. There's also a bar!

Darwin Entertainment Centre, 93 Mitchell St. (☎ 08/8980 3366 administration, or 08/8980 3333 box office) is the city's main performing arts venue.

The gaming tables at the **MGM Grand Casino**, Gilruth Avenue, Mindil Beach (☎ 08/8943 8888), are in play Sunday through Thursday from noon until 4am, Friday and Saturday until 6am. Slot machines are in play 24 hours. The dress regulation is neat, but casual.

PUBS, CLUBS & LIVE MUSIC

The cafes and restaurants of Cullen Bay Marina are a good place to be, day or night, but especially for Dry Season sunsets. On most nights, **Shennannigan's Irish Pub**, 69 Mitchell St. at Peel Street (☎ 08/8981 2100), has that wonderful mix of live Irish music, dancing, blarney, and laughter called "craik," oiled by ample Guinness. When the U.S. Marines are in town, they head to **Rorke's Drift**, 46 Mitchell St. (☎ 08/8941 7171), an English-style pub and cafe, which offers karaoke on Wednesday nights, "male entertainers" (*read*: strippers) on Thursdays ("ladies night"), and live music most other nights. The stylish complex of pool bar, DJ, beer garden, grill, sports bar, and upscale restaurant that is the **Top End Hotel**, Mitchell Street at Daly Street (☎ 08/8981 6511), has something to suit just about everyone.

A SIDE TRIP TO LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK

120km (75 miles) S of Darwin

A 90-minute drive south of Darwin is a miniature Garden of Eden full of monsoonal forests, waterfalls, rocky sandstone escarpments, natural swimming holes,

and prehistoric cycads that look like they belong on the set of Jurassic Park. **Litchfield National Park** ★★ is much smaller (a mere 146,000 hectares/360,620 acres) and less famous than Kakadu, but is no less stunning.

The park's main attractions are the spring-fed swimming holes, like the magical plunge pool at **Florence Falls** ★★, 29km (18 miles) from the forest. It's a 15-minute hike down stairs to the water, so the easily accessible pool at **Wangi Falls** ★, 49km (30 miles) from the eastern entrance, gets more crowds. (It's a beautiful spot, surrounded by cliffs and forests with a lookout from the top.) More idyllic grottos are 4km (2½ miles) from Florence Falls at **Buley Rockhole**, a series of tiered rock pools and waterfalls. You can't swim at Tolmer Falls, but during the Wet when they're flowing, take the boardwalk about 400m (1,312 ft.) to the lookout and see the cascade against a backdrop of red cliffs.

There are a number of short walking trails through the park, too, such as the half-hour Shady Creek Circuit from Florence Falls up to the parking lot.

Parts of the park are also home to thousands of 2m (6½-ft.) high "magnetic" termite mounds, so called because they run north-south to escape the fierce midday heat. There is a display hut and a viewing point 17km (10½ miles) from the park's eastern entrance.

Note: Most of the park's swimming holes are regarded as crocodile-free; the same is *not* true of the Finnis and Reynolds rivers in the park, so no leaping into those!

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Darwin, head south for just over 86km (54 miles) on the Stuart Highway and follow the park turnoff on the right through the town of Batchelor for 34km (21 miles). A number of minibus and 4WD day trips run from Darwin. Katherine-based tour operator **Travel North** (☎ 1800/089 103 in Australia, or 08/8971 9999) runs a day tour to Litchfield that starts in Darwin and ends in Katherine, a convenient way to combine sightseeing and transport if you plan to visit both. It costs A\$139 (US\$90) adults and A\$114 (US\$74) children ages 5 to 15.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Parks & Wildlife Commission** district office in Batchelor on the corner of Nurdina Street and Pinaroo Crescent (☎ 08/8976 0282) has maps and information; most locations of interest have signboards. Entry is free.

GETTING AROUND Roads to most water holes in the park are paved, although a few areas are only accessible by 4WD. In the Wet Season (approximately Nov–Apr), some roads in the park may be closed, usually the 4WD ones, and the Wangi water hole may be off limits due to turbulence and strong currents. Check with the Parks & Wildlife Commission office before you leave Darwin during this time.

CAMPING There are basic campsites with toilets, showers, and wood-fired barbecues at Florence Falls and Wangi Falls, plus several other sites with fewer facilities throughout the park. You may collect firewood in the park, but not around the campgrounds. The camping fee is A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) for adults, A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) for kids under 16, and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for families. A kiosk at Wangi Falls sells basic supplies, but stock up on fuel and alcohol in Batchelor.

A SIDE TRIP TO THE TIWI ISLANDS

Separated from the northern mainland by a narrow strait are the Tiwi Islands, Bathurst and Melville. The Tiwi people have a separate culture from that of the

Aborigines, and one of the main reasons for visiting is to see first-hand their distinctive art style. **Tiwi Tours** (☎ 08/8924 1111) take small groups on 1- and 2-day tours to Bathurst Island which include visits to two art centers where you can watch artists at work and buy their paintings, carvings, silk-screen printing, and basketwork at “island prices”—usually up to a third cheaper than buying the same thing in Darwin. You will learn the history of the islands, have morning tea with some Tiwi women and see them making baskets, and visit a mock burial site. The 2-day tour includes overnight camping. There is no commercial accommodation on the island, and the 1-day tour probably satisfies most people’s curiosity. The 1-day tour costs A\$298 (US\$194) per person, and the 2-day tour is A\$564 (US\$367). Both include return light plane airfares from Darwin (it’s about a 30-min. flight) and meals.

2 Kakadu National Park ★★☆☆

257km (161 miles) E of Darwin

Kakadu National Park, a World Heritage area, is Australia’s largest national park, covering a massive 1,755,200 hectares (4,335,344 acres).

Cruising the lily-clad wetlands to spot crocodiles, swimming in exquisite natural water holes, hiking through spear grass and cycads, fishing for barramundi, soaring in a light aircraft over torrential waterfalls during the Wet, photographing the millions of birds and thousands of saltwater crocodiles that live here, flying over the somehow eerie red sandstone escarpment that juts 200m (650 ft.) above the floodplain, and admiring Aboriginal rock art sites—these activities are what draw people to Kakadu. Some 275 species of birds and 75 species of reptiles inhabit the park, making it one of the richest wildlife habitats in the country.

The name “Kakadu” comes from “Gagudju,” the group of languages spoken in the northern part of the park. It is thought that Aboriginal people have lived in this part of the world for 50,000 years. Today, Aborigines manage the park as its owners in conjunction with the Australian government. This is one of the few places in Australia where some Aborigines stick to a traditional lifestyle of hunting and living off the land. They keep away from prying eyes, but their culture is on display at a cultural center and at rock art sites. Kakadu and the vast wilds of Arnhemland to the east are the birthplace of the “x-ray” style of art for which Aboriginal artists are famous.

Kakadu is an ecological jewel. But be aware that the vast distances between points of interest in the park, and that sameness that infects so much Australian landscape, can detract from Kakadu’s appeal for some people.

There is a uranium mine within the park boundaries, which many believe threatens the park and its World Heritage listing. But don’t think the mine will impact on your experience of the place. It is a pinprick on Kakadu’s sweeping landscape.

JUST THE FACTS

VISITOR INFORMATION Both of the park’s entrances—the northern one on the Arnhem Highway used by visitors from Darwin and the southern on the Kakadu Highway for visitors from Katherine—hand out free visitor guides with maps, and in the Dry they issue a timetable of free guided ranger walks, talks, and slide shows taking place that week. Park headquarters is at the **Bowali Visitor Centre** (☎ 08/8938 1120) on the Kakadu Highway, 5km (3 miles) from Jabiru, 100km (63 miles) from the northern entry station, and 131km (82 miles) from the southern entry station. This attractive, environmentally friendly Outback-style

center shows 1-hour videos on the park's natural history and Aboriginal culture, stocks maps and free park notes, has a library and displays, and information officers are on hand. There is a gift shop and a cafe, open daily from 8am to 5pm.

You can also book tours and get information at the **Jabiru Travel Centre**, Shop 6, Tasman Plaza, Jabiru, NT 0886 (☎ **08/8979 25480**).

Before you arrive, you can find information on Kakadu, and book tours to it, at the Tourism Top End visitor information center in Darwin. You can also contact the **rangers** at Kakadu National Park (☎ **08/8938 1120**; www.ca.gov.au/parks/kakadu).

WHEN TO GO Kakadu has two distinct seasons—Wet and Dry. The Dry Season from May to October is overwhelmingly the best time to go, thanks to equable temperatures around 86°F (30°C) and sunny days. Many tours, park hotels, and even campsites are booked a year in advance; so don't travel without reservations. In the Wet Season, from November through April, floodwaters cover much of the park, some attractions are cut off unexpectedly, and the heat and humidity are extreme. Some tour companies do not run during the Wet, and ranger talks, walks, and slide shows are not offered. The upside of visiting during the Wet is that the crowds vanish, the brownish vegetation bursts into green, waterfalls swell from a trickle to a roar, and lightning storms are spectacular, especially in the very hot “build-up” to the season in October and November. The landscape can change dramatically from one day to the next as floodwaters rise and fall, so be prepared for surprises, both nice ones—like giant flocks of geese that are here today, gone tomorrow—and unwelcome ones, like blocked roads. Although it sometimes pours down all day, it is more common for the rain to fall in late afternoon storms and at night. Take it easy in the humidity and don't even think about camping in this heat—stay in air-conditioned accommodations.

GETTING THERE Follow the Stuart Highway 34km (21 miles) south of Darwin, and turn left onto the Arnhem Highway all the way to the park's northern entrance station. The trip takes 2½ to 3 hours. If you're coming from the south, turn off the Stuart Highway at Pine Creek onto the Kakadu Highway and follow the Kakadu Highway for 79km (49 miles) to the park's southern entrance station. **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ **13 20 30** in Australia) travels daily from Darwin stopping at Jabiru and Cooinda for A\$84 (US\$55) return trip.

A big range of coach, minibus, and 4WD tours and camping safaris taking an average of 1 to 3 days depart from Darwin every day. These are a good idea, because many of Kakadu's geological, ecological, and Aboriginal attractions only come to life with a guide, and the best water holes, lookouts, and wildlife viewing spots change dramatically from month to month, or even from day to day.

FEES & REGULATIONS The park entry fee of A\$16 (US\$10) per adult is valid for 14 days. Children 15 and under enter free.

TIPS FOR EXPLORING Kakadu is a big place—about 200km (125 miles) long by 100km (63 miles) wide—so plan to spend a couple of nights here. It is really too far and too big to see much in a day from Darwin.

Most attractions are accessible in a conventional vehicle on sealed (paved) roads, but a 4WD vehicle allows you to get to more falls, water holes, and campsites. **Thrifty** (☎ **08/8979 2552**) rents cars at the Mobil service station, Lakeside Drive, Jabiru; otherwise, rent a car in Darwin. If you 4WD it, always check the road conditions at the **Bowali Visitor Centre** (☎ **08/8938 1120**). In the Wet Season (late Nov to Apr), call daily to check floodwater levels on all roads, paved

Never Smile at a You-Know-What

The Aboriginal Gagudju people of the Top End have long worshipped a giant crocodile called Ginga, but the way white Australians go on about these reptilian relics of a primeval age, you'd think they worshipped them too. There is scarcely a soul in the Northern Territory who will not regale you with his or her personal croc story, and each one you hear will be more outrageous than the last.

Aussies may be good at pulling your leg with tall tales, but when they warn you not to swim in crocodile country, they are deadly serious. Crocodiles are good at pulling your leg, too—literally. To be sure you don't end up as lunch, here are some tips:

1. There are two kinds of crocs in Australia, the highly dangerous and enormously powerful saltwater or "estuarine" kind, and the "harmless" freshwater kind, which will only attack if threatened or accidentally stood on. Saltwater crocs can and do swim in the ocean, but they live in fresh water.
2. Don't swim in any waterway, swimming hole, or waterfall unless someone authoritative like a park ranger has specifically told you that it is safe. You can never be sure where crocodiles lurk from year to year because, every Wet Season, crocs head upriver to breed and spread out over a wide flooded area. As the floodwaters subside, they are trapped in whatever waterway they happen to be in at the time—so what was a safe swimming hole last Dry Season might not be croc-free this year.
3. Never stand on or walk along a riverbank; stand well back when fishing. A 20-foot croc can be 1 inch under the surface of that muddy water, yet remain invisible. They move so fast you won't see them until you're in their jaws.
4. Make camp and clean fish at least 25m (82 ft.) back from the bank.

And if you do come face-to-face with a crocodile? Everyone has different advice, but it all boils down to two things: Make your peace with God, or run!

and unpaved. The Bowali Visitor Centre, main attractions such as Nourlangie and Yellow Water Billabong, and the towns of Jabiru and Cooiinda, stay above the floodwaters year-round.

Facilities are limited in Kakadu. The only town of any size is **Jabiru** (pop. 1,455), a mining community where you can find a bank. The only other real settlements are accommodation houses (see "Where to Stay & Dine" later in the chapter).

SEEING THE HIGHLIGHTS EN ROUTE TO KAKADU

En route to the park, stop in at the **Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve** (☎ 08/8988 8009 is the ranger station), 25km (15½ miles) down the Arnhem Highway plus 10km (6 miles) off the highway. Here you'll get a close-up look at

geese, egrets, ibis, brolgas, and other wetland birds from boardwalks leading through monsoon forests to raised lookouts. Entry is free every day of the year.

Four kilometers (2½ miles) down the Arnhem Highway at Beatrice Hill, you may want to call in on the **Window on the Wetlands Visitor Centre** (☎ 08/8988 8188), a hilltop center with views across the Adelaide River floodplain and touchscreen information on the wetlands' ecology. It's free and open daily from 7:30am to 7:30pm.

Just past Beatrice Hill on the highway at the Adelaide River Bridge (look out for the statue of a grinning croc), you can join the **Original Jumping Crocodiles cruise** (☎ 1800/888 542 in Australia, or 08/8988 8144) aboard the *Adelaide River Queen* to watch wild crocodiles leap out of the water for hunks of meat dangled over the edge by the boat crew. It's an unabashed tourist trap, and not to my taste, but because crocs typically only move fast when they attack, it may be your only chance to witness their immense power and speed. The 90-minute cruise departs at 9 and 11am, and 1 and 3pm May through August, and 9 and 11am, and 2:30pm September through April (closed Dec 24–25). A free shuttle runs from Darwin twice a day. It costs A\$36 (US\$23) for adults, A\$29 (US\$19) for seniors, and A\$20 (US\$13) for children 5 to 15. The souvenir shop sells all things croc, including crocodile toilet seat covers!

TOP PARK ATTRACTIONS

WETLANDS CRUISES One of the biggest attractions in the park is **Yellow Water Billabong** (★ ★), a lush lake 50km (31 miles) south of the Bowali Visitor Centre at Cooinda (pop. 20). It's rich with freshwater mangroves, paperbarks, pandanus palms, water lilies, and marvelous swaths of thousands of birds gathering here to drink—sea eagles, honking magpie geese, kites, china blue kingfishers, and jacanas, called “Jesus birds” because they seem to walk on water as they step nimbly across the lily pads. This is also one of the best places to spot saltwater crocs. Cruises in canopied boats with a running commentary depart near Gagudju Lodge Cooinda six times a day from 6:45am in the Dry (Apr–Nov) and four times a day from 8:30am in the Wet (Dec–Mar). A 90-minute cruise costs A\$36 (US\$23) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children 2 to 14. A 2-hour cruise (available in the Dry only) costs A\$41 (US\$27) for adults and A\$17 (US\$11) for children. Book through **Gagudju Lodge Cooinda** (☎ 08/8979 0145). Even though it means spending the night in the park and getting up before dawn, the sunrise cruise is especially good, when the dawn silence is broken by an overture that builds to a full-blown orchestral performance, courtesy of the birds. In the Wet, when the billabong floods to join up with Jim Jim Creek and the South Alligator River, the bird life spreads far and wide and the crocs head upriver to breed, so don't expect wildlife viewing to be spectacular.

Another good cruise is the **Guluyambi East Alligator River Cruise** (☎ 1800/089 113 in Australia, or 08/8979 2411). The East Alligator River forms the border between Kakadu and isolated Arnhemland, and unlike the Yellow Water cruise, which focuses on crocs, birds, and plants, on this you will learn about Aboriginal myths, bush tucker, and hunting techniques. The cruise lasts 1 hour, starting at 9 and 11am, and 1 and 3pm daily May through October. A free shuttle will take you from the Border Store to the boat ramp. It costs A\$30 (US\$20) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children 4 to 14.

ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE There are as many as 5,000 art sites throughout the park, of which the Aboriginal owners make a few accessible to visitors. The two best are **Nourlangie Rock** and **Ubirr Rock** (★ ★ ★). Nourlangie,

Tips Glowing Attraction?

Not all of Kakadu's attractions are natural. Tours of the **Ranger Uranium Mine**, 13km (8 miles) east of the Bowali Visitor Centre, reveal how this extremely controversial material is extracted from a large open-cut mine and turned into yellowcake to fire nuclear power plants around the world. Ninety-minute tours depart daily May through October at 10:30am and 1:30pm and cost A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) kids ages 4 to 14. The tours depart by bus from Jabiru Airport, which is near the mine. Book through **Kakadu Tours** (☎ 1800/089 113 in Australia, or 08/8979 2411).

31km (19 miles) southeast of the Bowali Visitor Centre, features "x-ray" style paintings of animals and a vivid striped Dreamtime figure of Namarrgon, the "Lightning Man," alongside more recent depictions of a white man in cowboy boots, a rifle, and a sailing ship. You'll also find rock paintings at Nanguluwur, near Nourlangie, and at Ubirr Rock, which is worth the 250m (800 ft.) steep climb for the great views of the floodplain at sunset. Access to Ubirr can be limited in the Wet, but the views of afternoon fork lightning storms up here at that time are breathtaking. Unlike most sites in Kakadu, Ubirr is not open 24 hours—it opens at 8:30am April through November and at 2pm December through March, and closes at sunset. There is a 1.5km (1-mile) signposted trail past Nourlangie's paintings (short trails into the art sites shoot off it), an easy 1.7km (1-mile) trail from the parking lot into Nanguluwur, and a 1km (½-mile) circuit at Ubirr. Access to the sites is free.

Displays and videos of the bush tucker, Dreamtime creation myths, and lifestyles of the local Bininj Aborigines are on show at the **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** ★ (☎ 08/8979 0051) at Cooina. This building was built in the shape of a pig-nose turtle at the direction of the Aboriginal owners. There is also a quality gift shop selling items like didgeridoos, bark paintings by local artists, and baskets woven from pandanus fronds. The center is open daily from 9am to 5pm, and admission is free. It is connected to Gagudju Lodge Cooina and the Yellow Water Billabong by a 1km (½-mile) long trail.

SWIMMING, FISHING & BUSHWALKING

In the eastern section of the park rises a massive red sandstone escarpment that sets the stage for two magnificent waterfalls, **Jim Jim Falls** and **Twin Falls**. In the Dry, the volume of water may not be all that impressive, but their settings are magical. Both are accessible by 4WD only, and neither is open in the Wet. A 1km (.5-mile) walk over rocks and through rainforest leads to a deep green plunge pool at Jim Jim Falls, 103km (64 miles) from the Bowali Visitor Centre. The water is wrapped by an almost perfectly circular 150m (490-ft.) cliff. The road may be upgraded by the time you read this, but if not, allow 2 hours to drive the final 60 unpaved kilometers (37½ miles) off the highway. Due to floodwaters, Jim Jim Falls may not open until as late as June.

The falls descend into a natural pool edged by a sandy beach and surrounded by bush and high cliffs. **Kakadu Gorge and Waterfall Tours** ★ (book through Gagudju Lodge Cooina; ☎ 08/8979 0145) run an excellent small-group day trip for active people. You bushwalk into Jim Jim Falls for a swim and morning tea, 4WD through the bush, and then paddle a canoe to Twin Falls for lunch. Tours depart daily from Jabiru and Cooina May through November and cost

A\$135 (US\$88) for adults, A\$115 (US\$75) for kids 4 to 14 (no kids under 4 allowed). Book in advance for July, the busiest month. At press time, Twin Falls was closed indefinitely because of the suspected presence of a large saltwater crocodile, so treat these areas with extreme caution.

Remember the idyllic pool that Paul Hogan and Linda Koslowski plunged into in the movie *Crocodile Dundee*? That was **Gunlom Falls**, about 170km (106 miles) south of the Bowali Visitor Centre. A climb to the top of the falls rewards you with great views of southern Kakadu. Access is by 4WD and can be cut off in the Wet.

Kakadu's wetlands are brimful of barramundi, and there is nothing Territorians (inhabitants of the Northern Territories) like more than to hop in a tin dinghy barely big enough to resist a croc attack and go looking for them. **Kakadu Fishing Tours** (book through **Gagudju Lodge Cooinda**; ☎ 08/8979 0145) takes you fishing in a 5m (16½-ft.) sportfishing boat. Tours depart from Jabiru, 5km (3 miles) east of the Bowali Visitor Centre, and cost A\$120 (US\$78) per person for a half day (A\$190/US\$124 if there is only one of you) and A\$240 (US\$156) per person for a full day. They will pick you up from your Kakadu accommodation.

Wide-ranging bush and wetlands trails lead throughout the park, including many short strolls and six half- to full-day treks. Typical trails include a 600m (less than .5-mile) amble through the Manngarre Monsoon Forest near Ubirr Rock; an easy 3.8-kilometer (2-mile) circular walk at the Iligadjar Wetlands near the Bowali Visitor Centre; or a tough 12km (7.5-mile) trek through rugged sandstone country at Nourlangie Rock.

One of the best wetlands walks is at **Mamukala wetlands**, 29km (18 miles) from Jabiru. Countless thousands of magpie geese feed here, especially in the late Dry Season around October. An observation platform gives you a good view of them, and a sign explains the dramatic seasonal changes the wetlands undergo. Choose from a 1km (.5-mile) or 3km (2-mile) meander. The Bowali Visitor Centre sells hiking trail maps. There are also some challenging unmarked trails along creeks and gorges, for which you will need good navigational skills.

CAMPING

There are 16 national park campgrounds, all mostly near popular billabongs and wetlands, plus three commercial campgrounds attached to accommodation houses. Five of the national park campgrounds—at **Gunlom**, **Mardugal Billabong**, **Muirella Park** near Nourlangie Rock, and **Merl** in the northeast—have hot showers and toilets; a ranger visits these campgrounds daily to collect a nightly fee of A\$5.40 (US\$3.50) per person, free for kids under 16. The rest are free “bush camps” with no showers and only basic toilets, or none. Inquire at the park entry stations or at the Bowali Visitor Centre for a map marking them. To camp at undesignated campgrounds you will need a permit from the Bowali Visitor

Tips Croc Alert!

Though folk do swim at Jim Jim, Twin Falls, and other water holes, such as Gubara, Maguk, and Koolpin Gorge, do so at your own risk. Saltwater crocodiles have been known to slip through the traps rangers set alongside popular swimming holes. **Warning:** Never swim without checking with a ranger that the water hole is croc-free; if you are unsure, the only place rangers recommend you swim is the hotel pool.

Tips Bushwalking Tips

Try to plan your walk in the early morning or late afternoon, especially in the Wet, as the heat can dehydrate you quickly. If you want to camp at an undesignated campsite on an overnight walk, you will need a camping permit from the rangers at the Bowali Visitor Centre, which can take a week to arrange.

Centre. **Note:** These can take a week to process, so plan ahead. Bring a mosquito net, as mosquitoes here carry the potentially dangerous Ross River virus. RID and Aerogard are two brands that help protect against it.

You need a 4WD to reach some national park campgrounds, and most are closed in the Wet.

The best-equipped campsites are at **Gagudju Lodge Cooinda** (see “Where to Stay & Dine” below), which opens year-round. Campers are free to use all of the facilities here, although in extremely busy times, the pool may be available only to bungalow guests.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

There are few options to stay in Kakadu, and prices aren't cheap, especially in the high season (usually Apr 1–Nov 30).

Aurora Kakadu This property is near the northern entrance to the park. The downside is that it is the farthest accommodation from major attractions like Yellow Waters and Nourlangie, although many tour operators pick up here. The upside is that the resort's green lawns and tropical gardens adorned with wandering peacocks and goannas and chattering native birds are a wonderfully restful haven from the harsh surrounds of Kakadu outside. Don't yield to the temptation to dive into the lily-filled lagoon down the back—like every other waterway in Kakadu, it is home to saltwater crocs! A 3.6km (2-mile) nature trail winds from the hotel through monsoon forest and past a billabong. All but the end rooms of the neatly decorated motel-style accommodations have pitched timber ceilings, and all have restful views from a balcony or patio. Nonsmoking rooms are available, hair dryers are free at reception, and there are barbecues on the grounds. Keep an eye out for regular special deals on offer. There are also 60 unpowered campsites.

Arnhem Hwy., South Alligator (41km/24½ miles west of Bowali Visitor Centre), Kakadu National Park, NT 0886.  **1800/818 845** in Australia, or 08/8979 0166. Fax 08/8979 0147. www.aurora-resorts.com.au. 138 units. High season A\$197 (US\$128) double; low season A\$138 (US\$90) double. Additional person A\$31–A\$37 (US\$20–US\$24); children 5–14 50% discount. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; bar; shaded outdoor pool; day/night tennis court; Jacuzzi; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

Gagudju Lodge Cooinda This modest but pleasant lodge set among tropical gardens is at the departure point for Yellow Water Billabong cruises. Simply furnished tile-floor bungalows are big and comfortable, and there are also “budget rooms”—just bunk beds (four have double beds) in an air-conditioned corrugated iron demountable (portable cabin) with shared bathrooms. They rent on a “per bed” basis, so you may share with a stranger. The lodge is something of a town center, so there is a general store, gift shop, currency exchange, post office, fuel, and other useful facilities. Cook up a 'roo steak in the nightly do-it-yourself barbecue in the rustic and ultra-casual **Barra Bar & Bistro**, or go

for the bush tucker a la carte meals at lunch or dinner in **Mimi's** ★, which has a nice “bush-sophisticated” ambience. The Barra Bistro does full buffet breakfast and an all-day snack menu, with live entertainment in the Dry Season. Scenic flights take off from the lodge's airstrip, and the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre is a 15-minute walk away.

Kakadu Hwy. (50km/31 miles south of Bowali Visitor Centre), Jim Jim, NT 0886. ☎ **1800/500 401** in Australia, 800/835-7742 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/897 121 in the U.K., 1800/553 155 in Ireland, 0800/801 111 in New Zealand, or 08/8979 0145. Fax 08/8979 0148. www.sphc.com.au. 48 lodge units (all with shower only), 24 budget rooms, none with bathroom, 80 powered and 300 unpowered campsites. A\$198 (US\$129) lodge room double. Extra person A\$28 (US\$18). Children under 14 stay free. A\$31 (US\$20) budget room per bed. A\$13 (US\$8.45) per adult, powered campsite; A\$10 (US\$6.50) per adult, unpowered campsite. Children under 14 stay free in campsite. Rates in bungalows and budget rooms are often reduced in the Wet Season. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool; tour desk; laundry; babysitting. *In room* (lodge rooms only): A/C and ceiling fans, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryers (on request), iron, free cots and rollaway beds.

Kakadu Lodge & Caravan Park Within walking distance of Jabiru and 2km (1¼ mile) from the Bowali Visitor Centre, this lodge offers simple air-conditioned cabins with either private or share facilities. The 13 cabins sleep up to five and have their own kitchenette, while 32 lodge rooms sleep four and have a minifridge and self-serve tea and coffee, but you must use a communal bathroom and kitchen. There are barbecues in the attractive gardens. No smoking in cabins or bunkrooms. Or you can camp at one of the powered or non-powered caravan and camping sites.

Jabiru Dr., Kakadu National Park, NT 0886. ☎ **1800/811 154** in Australia, or 08/8979 2422. Fax 08/8979 2254. www.aurora-resorts.com.au. 45 units, 32 with no bathroom (13 with shower only), 186 powered and 100 unpowered campsites. High season A\$131–A\$192 (US\$85–US\$125) cabins; A\$121 (US\$79) lodge room; A\$20 (US\$13) unpowered campsite double; A\$25 (US\$16) powered campsite double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Coach station 100m (328 ft.). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV (cabins only), kitchenette (cabins only), fridge, coffeemaker.

3 Katherine

314km (196 miles) S of Darwin; 512km (320 miles) E of Kununurra; 1,177 (736 miles) N of Alice Springs

The key draw to the farming town of Katherine (pop. 11,000) is Katherine (Nitmiluk) Gorge. It's small by the standards of, say, the Grand Canyon, but its dramatic sheer orange walls dropping to a blue-green river make it an unexpected delight in the middle of the dry Arnhemland plateau that stretches to the horizon.

The gorge and its surrounding river ecosystem are located in the 292,008-hectare (721,260-acre) **Nitmiluk National Park** ★★☆☆. In the Dry, the gorge is a haven not just for cruisers but also for canoeists, who must dodge the odd “friendly” freshwater crocodile as they paddle between its walls. In the Wet, the gorge can become a torrent at times, and jet boating is sometimes the only way to tackle it. Hikers will find trails any time of year throughout the park. Farther afield are hot springs, water holes, uncrowded rivers to canoe, and Aboriginal communities where visitors can make dot paintings and find bush tucker.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Airnorth** (☎ **1800/627 474** in Australia, or 08/8920 4000) flies from Darwin, and from Alice Springs via Tennant Creek. It's a 50-minute trip from Darwin and a 3-hour flight from Alice.

McCafferty's (☎ **13 14 99** in Australia) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ **13 20 30** in Australia) stop in Katherine on their Darwin–Alice Springs routes, which both companies run twice a day. It's about a 4½-hour trip from Darwin, costing A\$52 (US\$34); from Alice it's about a 15-hour journey for which the fare is

A\$179 (US\$116). Greyhound also calls daily from Broome via Kununurra; a journey of about 19 hours costs A\$226 (US\$147).

From early 2004, visitors to Katherine can hop aboard *The Ghan* (see “Getting Around Australia” in chapter 2) in Adelaide or Alice Springs and hop off in Katherine. The train leaves Adelaide on Sundays at 5:15pm and Alice Springs on Mondays at 4pm. The trip from Alice takes about 16 hours and costs A\$480 (US\$312) for a daynighter seat or A\$1,760 to A\$2,200 (US\$1,144–US\$1,430) for a sleeper. Great Southern Railways (☎ 13 21 47 in Australia; www.trainways.com.au) can provide more details of connections from Sydney and Melbourne.

Katherine is on the Stuart Highway, which links Darwin and Alice Springs. From Alice Springs, allow a good 2 days to make the drive—see “Getting There” in section 2 of chapter 7. The Victoria Highway begins in Katherine and heads west to Kununurra. There is no direct route from the east.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Katherine Visitor Information Centre**, Lindsay Street at Katherine Terrace, Katherine, NT 0850 (☎ 1800/653 142 or 08/8972 2650; www.krta.com.au), has information on things to see—not only all around Katherine, but as far afield as Kakadu National Park and the Kimberley. It’s open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 6pm and weekends from 10am to 3pm in the Dry season; in the Wet it’s open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

The **Nitmiluk Visitor Centre**, Gorge Road, Katherine, NT 0850 (☎ 08/8972 1886), 32km (20 miles) from town, dispenses information on the Nitmiluk National Park and sells tickets for gorge cruises, which depart right outside. The ranger station is here also. The Centre has maps; displays on the park’s plant life, birds, geology and Aboriginal history; a gift shop; and a cafe. It’s open daily 7am to 7pm, sometimes closing a little earlier in the Wet. Entry to the Park is free.

GETTING AROUND **Budget** (☎ 08/8971 1333), **Hertz** (☎ 08/8971 1111), **Europcar** (☎ 08/8971 2777), and **Thrifty** (☎ 08/8972 3183) have outlets in Katherine.

Travel North (☎ 1800/089 103 in Australia, or 08/8971 9999) makes transfers from Katherine hotels to the cruise, canoe, and helicopter departure points at the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre four times a day. Round-trip fares are A\$20 (US\$13) for adults or A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children. Most Katherine activities and attractions can be booked through Travel North. The company runs many local tours and activities such as horseback cattle musters, visits to an old homestead, half-day trips to Mataranka Thermal Pools (see below), and tour packages of up to 5 days taking in Katherine, Darwin, Litchfield, and Kakadu National Parks, and outlying Aboriginal communities.

For personalized tours both off the beaten path and around town, contact **Far Out Adventures** ★ (☎ 0427 152288). See p. 396.

EXPLORING KATHERINE GORGE (NITMILUK NATIONAL PARK)

Cruising the gorge in an open-sided boat is the most popular way to appreciate its beauty. Katherine Gorge is actually a series of 13 gorges, but most cruises only ply the first two, as the second gorge is the most photogenic. **Travel North** (above) operates all cruises. Most people take the 2-hour cruise, which departs four times a day and costs A\$40 (US\$26) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children 5 to 15. There is also a 4-hour cruise at least once daily, although you will probably be satisfied with 2 hours, and an 8-hour cruise/hike safari to the fifth gorge (available from about May–Oct only). Wear sturdy shoes; because

each gorge is cut off from the next by rapids—all the cruises involve some walking along the bank to transfer to a boat in the next gorge.

In the Wet season, the cruises may not operate on days when the floodwaters really start to swirl. Instead, Travel North runs a jet boat those days as far as the third gorge. This 45-minute adventure costs A\$47 (US\$31) for adults and A\$34 (US\$22) for kids 5 to 15. Departure times vary with the floodwater conditions.

Cruising is nice, but in a canoe you can discover sandy banks and waterfalls, and get up close to the gorge walls, the birds, and those crocs (don't worry, they're the freshwater kind). The gorges are separated by rocks, so be prepared to carry your canoe quite often. Half-day canoe rental from Travel North is A\$31 (US\$20) for a single canoe and A\$47 (US\$31) for a double. Full-day rental is A\$43 (US\$28) for a single canoe and A\$65 (US\$42) for a double, or A\$86 (US\$56) single and A\$130 (US\$85) double if you want to camp out on the river bank overnight. There is a A\$20 (US\$13) refundable deposit on all canoe hire. Canoeing the gorge is popular, so book canoes ahead, especially in the Dry Season. Once the river gets too high for go-it-alone canoeing during the Wet, Travel North runs guided canoeing adventures instead. These last 4 hours and cost \$46 (US\$30) per person. In fact, guided paddles are a good idea any time of year as you will learn and see more. The most knowledgeable such company is **Gecko Canoeing** (☎ 1800/634 319 in Australia, or 08/8972 2224; www.geckocanoeing.com.au), whose tours are accredited for their ecotourism content. Gecko's founder, Martin "Snowy" Wohling, and three other Gecko guides, have Australia's elite "Savannah Guide" ecotour guide status. They do 3- to 5-day canoeing/camping safaris on the Katherine River, but also run a 1-day canoe safari at a cost of A\$178 (US\$116) per person. The company also runs canoeing and camping safaris (with any other activities you like thrown in such as mountain biking, rock climbing, wildlife photography, hiking, or fishing) of up to 18 days in little-explored wildernesses and river systems across the Top End. Their newest tour is on the Wilton River in East Arnhem Land. Tours only run between April and November, with departures on request, and can be tailored to your needs.

Some 100km (63 miles) of hiking trails crisscross Nitmiluk National Park, ranging in duration from 1 hour to the lookout to 5 days to Edith Falls (see below). Trails—through rocky sandstone-conglomerate terrain and forests, past water holes and along the gorge—depart the Nitmiluk National Park ranger station, located in the **Nitmiluk Visitor Centre** (☎ 08/8972 1886), where you can pick up trail maps. Overnight walks require a deposit of between A\$20 (US\$13) and A\$50 (US\$33) per person, payable at the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre.

One of the nicest spots in the Park is actually 42km (26 miles) north of Katherine, 20km (12½ miles) off the Stuart Highway. **Edith Falls** ♀ is a real Eden of natural (croc-free) swimming holes bordered by red cliffs, monsoonal forest, and pandanus trees. A 2.6km (1.5-mile) round-trip bushwalk from the Falls, which takes about 2 hours, incorporates a dip at the upper pool en route.

More than the gorge itself, the aerial views of the ravine-ridden **Arnhem Plateau**, which stretches uninhabited to the horizon, are arresting. **North Australian Helicopters** (☎ 1800/089 103 in Australia, or 08/8972 1253) does daily flights of 3, 8, and all 13 gorges for between A\$60 and A\$150 (US\$39–US\$98) per person, adult or child. Take at least an eight-gorge flight to get a sense of Australia's wild vastness. In the Wet it also makes flights from Katherine to see Jim Jim Falls in Kakadu National Park.

ABORIGINAL CULTURE TOURS, HOT SPRINGS & MORE

On a 1-day visit to the **Manyallaluk Aboriginal community** 🏠, a 90-minute drive southeast from Katherine, you chat with Aborigines about how they balance traditional ways with modern living; take a short bushwalk to look for native medicines and bush tucker like green ants (they're refreshing!); try lighting a fire with two sticks, weaving baskets, throwing spears, painting on bark, and playing a didgeridoo; take a dip in a natural water hole; and buy locally made Aboriginal art and artifacts at better prices than you may find elsewhere. Lunch is a barbecue featuring stuff like high-grade kangaroo filet, kangaroo tail, Scotch filet steak, or barramundi cooked on hot coals. Some visitors rush into these tours and expect the community to be a kind of Aboriginal Disney World theme park with a new attraction every 10 minutes, but that's not how it is. It's an unstructured experience (this is the community's home), so it's up to you to take part. A 1-day tour from Katherine costs A\$143 (US\$93) for adults and A\$79 (US\$51) for children 5 to 15, or A\$110 (US\$72) adults and A\$67 (US\$44) for kids if you drive yourself. There are basic camping facilities including tent sites and powered and unpowered sites. The last 35km (22 miles) of road is unsealed (unpaved), for which rental cars will be insured only if they are 4WD. The tour runs Monday through Friday in July and August, and Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from October to mid-December, but hours may be reduced, or the place may close, in the Wet. Call ahead before setting off no matter what the time of year, as sometimes the place closes for ceremonies or other cultural reasons. Call Manyallaluk—The Dreaming Place (☎ 08/8975 4727), or book through Travel North, above.

In the 500 million-year-old **Cutta Cutta Caves** (☎ 08/8972 1721), 29km (18 miles) south of Katherine off the Stuart Highway, you will see limestone stalagmites and stalactites and maybe glimpse the resident Orange Horseshoe and Ghost bats. You must take a 1-hour tour to see the caves; they depart six times a day from 9am and cost A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children 5 to 15.

One-hundred-and-ten kilometers (69 miles) south of Katherine on the Stuart Highway is the town of **Mataranka** (pop. 665), where you can soak at the **Mataranka Thermal Pools** 🏠. These manmade pools are fed by 93°F (34°C) spring water, which bubbles up from the earth at a rate of 16,495 liters (4123¾ gal.) per minute! It's a little paradise, surrounded by palms, pandanus, and a colony of flying foxes. The pools are open 24 hours, and admission is free. They are 7km (4 miles) along Homestead Road, which is off the highway 1.5km (1 mile) south of Mataranka township. The pools are within the grounds of **Mataranka Homestead Tourist Resort** (☎ 08/8975 4544), which is less a resort than a low-key collection of motel rooms, cabins, campgrounds, a restaurant or two, and a very casual bar. While you're here, inspect some re-created Aboriginal "gunyahs," or bark shelters, and a replica of the slab-hut Elsey Homestead. The homestead and pools lie within the 13,840-hectare (34,185-acre) **Elsey National Park**. A sealed road winds from the homestead along the banks of the Roper River, where there are swimming holes and walking trails, including a shaded 4km (2.5-mile) trail into **Mataranka Falls**. **Note:** Ask the homestead to direct you to croc-free swimming areas. The homestead sells handlines to fish for barramundi and rents canoes.

Back in town, you can soak your cares away at the pleasantly warm **Katherine Hot Springs**, under shady trees 3km (2 miles) from town on Riverbank Drive. Entry is free. At the **School of the Air**, Giles Street (☎ 08/8972 1833), you can

sit in on an 800,000-sq.-km (262,400-sq.-mile) “classroom” as children from the Outback do their lessons by radio. Forty-five minute tours begin on the hour from 9am up to and including 2pm (there’s no tour at noon). Tours also run during school holidays and public holidays minus the on-air classes. The school is open Monday through Friday 9am to 3pm from April until mid-December. Admission is A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults and A\$2 (US\$1.30) for school-age kids.

Mike Keighley of **Far Out Adventures** 🦘🦘 (☎ 0427/152288) runs upmarket tailor-made tours which include areas around Katherine such as the 5,000-sq.-km (1,930-sq.-mile or 1.2 million acres) Elsey Cattle Station, 140km (87 miles) southeast of Katherine, made famous as the setting of the Aussie book and film *We of the Never Never*. Meet children of the Mangarrayi Aborigines, sample bush tucker, learn a little bush medicine, and swim in a vine-clad natural “spa-pool” in the Roper River. Mike has been accepted as an honorary family member of the Mangarrayi people and is a mine of information about Aboriginal culture and the bush.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

The Nitmiluk National Park ranger station in the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre has maps of available “bush campsites” throughout the park. These are very basic sites—no showers, and no soaps or shampoos allowed because they pollute the river system, and simple pit toilets or none at all. Most are beside natural swimming holes. You must stop for a camping permit from the ranger station beforehand; the camping fee is A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) per person per night.

Travel North runs the **Nitmiluk Gorge Caravan Park** (☎ 1800/089 103 in Australia, or 08/8972 1253; fax 08/8972 3989) next to the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre, where wallabies often hop into the grounds. Fees are A\$8.50 (US\$5.50) per adult, A\$5 (US\$3.25) per child for a tent site, and A\$21 (US\$14) double for a powered site.

Knotts Crossing Resort At this low-key resort, you have a choice of huge, well-furnished motel rooms, some with kitchenettes, minibars, and in-room dataports and fax machines; cabins with a kitchenette inside and their own private bathrooms just outside the door; or campgrounds, all located among the tropical landscaping. The “village” rooms are a good penny-wise choice, built in 1998 and smartly furnished with a double bed and bunks, a kitchenette, and joint veranda facing a small private pool with a barbecue. Locals meet at the casual bar beside the pool, and Katie’s Bistro is one of the smartest places to eat in town.

Corner Giles and Cameron sts., Katherine, NT 0850. ☎ 1800/222 511 in Australia, or 08/8972 2511. Fax 08/8972 2628. www.knotscrossing.com.au. 123 units (some with shower only; cabins have adjacent private bathroom), 75 powered and unpowered campsites. A\$75 (US\$49) double cabin; A\$85 (US\$55) double “village” room; A\$120–A\$145 (US\$78–US\$94) double motel room; A\$135 (US\$88) family of 4, motel family room. Extra adult A\$10 (US\$6.50), extra child under 13 A\$5 (US\$3.25) cabin or village room; extra adult A\$10 (US\$6.50) motel room. Unpowered site A\$10 (US\$6.50) per person per night. Powered site A\$22 (US\$14) per night single or double. Extra adult A\$10 (US\$6.50), extra child A\$5 (US\$3.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Complimentary transfers from airport or bus stop. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor pools (1 large and attractive, 1 small); Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; self-service laundry; same-day dry cleaning/laundry service; free barbecue. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, no phone in cabins.

Perth & Western Australia

by Lee Mylne

Many international visitors—and for that matter, many east coast Australians—never make the trek to Western Australia. It's too far away, expensive to fly to, too big when you get there, they say. That is all true, especially the bit about it being big (it's 2.5 million sq. km, or 965,000 sq. miles) but don't dismiss a trip out of hand. Flights need not be expensive (if you're an international traveler flying on air pass coupons—see “Getting Around Australia” in chapter 2), and some of Australia's best snorkeling and diving, most historic towns, splendid scenery, and fantastic wine regions are here. Every spring (Sept–Nov Down Under) the state offers an unbelievable profusion of wildflowers almost everywhere. The capital, Perth, has great food, a fabulous outdoor life of biking and beaches, plenty of museums that are well worth a look, and a beautiful historic port called Fremantle.

The Southwest “hook” of the state, below Perth, is thought by many to be the loveliest part of Western Australia, and also the easiest region to visit outside Perth. Massive stands of karri and jarrah trees stretch to the sky, the surf is world-class, and the coastline wave-smashed and rugged. The Southwest's Margaret River region is responsible for turning out some of Australia's finest reds and whites.

Head east 644km (400 miles) inland from Perth and you strike what, in the 1890s, was the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth ever found in the world. The mining town of Kalgoorlie,

Australia's biggest gold producer, fuses 19th-century architecture with a zeal for pumping out near 57kg (2,000 oz.) of gold a day in the twenty-first century. If Australia has an iconic country town then Kalgoorlie is it.

Once you drive north of Perth past Geraldton on the Midwest coast, you know you're in the Outback. Red sands, scrubby trees, and spiky grass called spinifex are all you see for hundreds of miles. About 850km (531 miles) north of Perth is a special phenomenon: daily visits by wild dolphins to the shores of Monkey Mia. Another 872km (545 miles) on is one of Australia's best-kept secrets, a 260km (163-mile) coral reef called Ningaloo, stretching along the isolated Outback shore. It's a second Great Barrier Reef, barely discovered by world travelers or Aussies themselves. The reef is making a name for itself as a whale shark habitat, where you can swim with these mysterious 12m (40-ft.) fish-monsters every Aussie fall.

The rugged northwest portion of Western Australia is known as the Kimberley, where cattle farming, pearl farming, and tourism thrive in a rocky moonscape of red cliffs, waterfalls, rivers, sparse gums, and wetland lagoons. Here you can visit an over 400,000-hectare (1 million-acre) cattle station rich in Aboriginal rock-art sites, tour the world's largest diamond mine, cruise the lush Ord River to see hundreds of native birds, ride a camel on the beach, and shop for the world's biggest South Sea pearls.

EXPLORING THE STATE

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Western Australian Tourism Commission (WATC)** is the official source of information on the state. Its website (www.westernaustralia.net) provides a good overview, and you may find the **Australian Tourist Commission's** website (www.australia.com), or the Web pages of local tourism boards (found under "Visitor Information" in each regional section of this chapter) useful. Private company **Visit WA** (www.visitwa.com.au) offers an online tour-planning service.

Also contact the Western Australia **Visitor Centre** in Perth, which dispenses information about the state, and makes bookings. See section 1 of this chapter for information. The **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** has information on national and marine parks at www.calm.wa.gov.au.

WHEN TO GO Perth is blessed with long, dry summers and mild wet winters. You will want warm gear in the Southwest winters, but temperatures rarely hit the freezing point.

Much north of Perth, summer is hell, when temperatures can soar up to 120°F (50°C). Avoid these parts from December to March; February is worst. Winter (June–August) in the mid-, northern, and inland reaches of the state is pleasantly cool, sometimes even hot.

GETTING AROUND Before you plan a motoring tour of this state consider the distance—it's three times as big as Texas—and the mostly arid, flat, and monotonous countryside. The Southwest makes pretty motoring; elsewhere, fly, unless you want to count sheep in all those vast brown paddocks you will be whizzing through if you drive.

If you do hit the road, remember that Western Australia is largely devoid of people, gas stations (so keep the gas tank full), and emergency help. Road trains and wildlife pose a road threat more so here than in any other state, so avoid driving at night, dusk, and dawn—all prime animal feeding times. Read the "Road Conditions & Safety" in section 17 of chapter 2 before setting off.

The **Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia (RACWA)**, 228 Adelaide Terrace, Perth, WA 6000 (☎ 13 17 03; www.aaa.asn.au), is a good source of maps and motoring advice. For a recorded road-condition report, call **Main Roads Western Australia** (☎ 1800/013 314 in Australia).

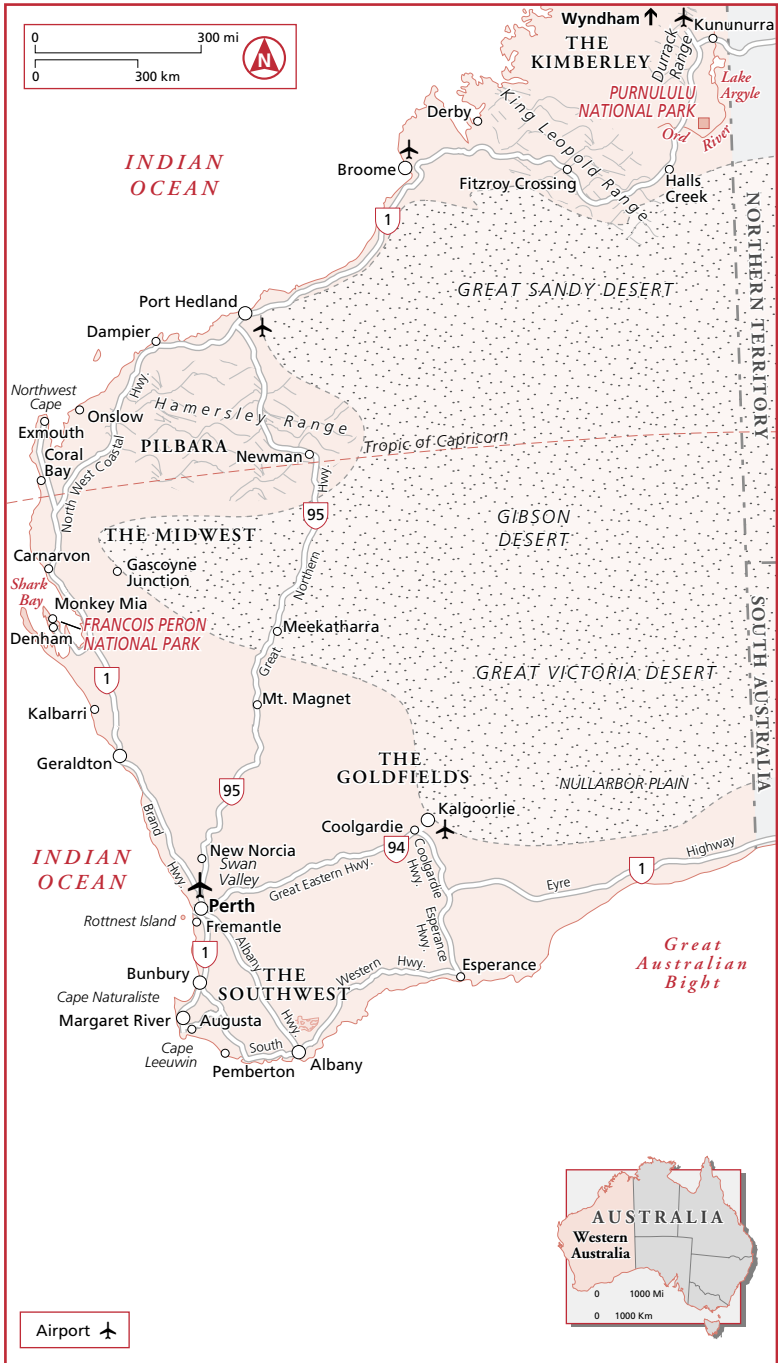
Skywest (☎ 1300/660 088 in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) is the state's major regional airline, with **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) also providing services to smaller centers.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) is the only interstate coach company serving Western Australia. It travels the highway from Adelaide over to Perth, then up the coast to Broome and across to Darwin; it also travels the remote inland Newman Highway calling at Outback mining towns.

The only train to Western Australia from outside the state is the **Indian Pacific** 🚂, from Sydney via Adelaide and Kalgoorlie to Perth (see "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2). Inside the state, long-distance trains run only in the southern third. They are operated by **WAGR** (☎ 13 10 53 in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2000; www.wagr.wa.gov.au) from Perth to Bunbury 2¼ hours south of Perth, Northam an hour or so eastward in the Avon Valley, and Kalgoorlie. WAGR also runs coach services to the Southwest and the southern coast.

Motorhomes are not necessary as motels are plentiful, but make good sense if you plan a long-distance tour. Australia's biggest motorhome outfit, **Britz**

Western Australia



Tip-Toeing Through the Wildflowers

Every year from August to mid-November, Mother Nature blesses just about the entire state of Western Australia with a carpet of 12,000 species of white, yellow, mauve, pink, red, and blue **wildflowers**.

This annual burgeoning is matched by an explosion of wildflower shows and festivals in country towns throughout the state, and coach and rail tour companies go into overdrive ferrying petal enthusiasts from all around Australia and the globe on wildflower tours. Conveniently, the blossoms cluster in the cooler southern half of the state, where you can easily explore them on day trips from Perth, or on longer jaunts of up to 5 days or so. September and October are usually the best months. The most popular route is what the tourism authority calls the **Everlasting Trail** running through sparsely populated country north of Perth. It follows the Great Northern Highway to Wubin, 272 km (170 miles) north of Perth, and on to the country town of Mullewa (another 222km/139 miles north), which puts on one of the state's best wildflower shows for a week every August. From here, head west 98km (61 miles) to Geraldton and 424km (265 miles) back to Perth down the Brand Highway for more floral sensations. This route has little of interest except flowers; instead, you can combine wildflower watching with wine tasting on a jaunt to the much prettier, less isolated Southwest (see "Margaret River & the Southwest: Wine Tasting & Underground Wonders" later in the chapter). If time is short, don't despair. You can see ample blossoms right in Perth at Kings Park & Botanic Garden, which conducts free guided walks through its 200 species during its 10-day Wildflower Festival every September or October. Because Australian flora is adapted to desert conditions, it tends to sprout on dry, sunny days following a rain shower. For this reason, the Western Australia Tourist Centre (see "Visitor Information" above) runs a Wildflower Desk during the season to keep you up on whatever hot spot is blooming brightest that week, and book you on one of the many coach, rail, or 4WD wildflower tours. Interstate buses and trains and hotels fill up in wildflower season, so book ahead.

Campervan Rentals, has an office in Perth (☎ 1800/331 454 in Australia, or 08/9478 3488).

TOUR OPERATORS **Australian Pinnacle Tours** (☎ 1800/999 069 in Australia, or 08/9417 5555; www.pinnacletours.com.au) specializes in coach tours around Perth and throughout the state. **Overland 4WD Safaris** (☎ 08/9524 7122; www.overland.com.au) runs 4WD safaris from Perth with an off-the-beaten-track bent.

Aerial tours make sense in WA. Look into the personalized or pre-set tours offered by **Complete Aviation Services** (☎ 1800/632 221 in Australia, or 08/9478 2749; www.casair.com.au) or **Kookaburra Air** (☎ 08/9354 1158; www.kookaburra.iinet.net.au). Their tours from Perth can take you throughout Western Australia, including the Kimberley, the Top End, and the Red Centre.

Landscape Expeditions 🌿🌿 is an excellent tour program run by the state **Conservation and Land Management Department (CALM)**. Bookings are handled by the University of Western Australia (☎ **08/9380 2433**; fax 08/9380 1066 for a free schedule; or check it out at www.calm.wa.gov.au). You'll be helping CALM scientists on research projects, such as monitoring endangered loggerhead turtles on Dirk Hartog Island, traveling through the evocative landscapes of the Gascoyne Region's rugged hinterland with an artist and a botanist, or sailing the remote islands of the Pilbara coast.

1 Perth

4,405km (2,753 miles) W of Sydney; 2,557km (1,598 miles) S of Broome

If you like Sydney, you'll probably like Perth. It has the same skyscrapers glinting in the sun, the same remarkably blue sky, the same outdoorsy vibrancy, and like Sydney, the ocean and glorious white beaches are just a bus ride from downtown. Perth likes to boast it gets more sunshine than any other city in Australia, some 300 days a year.

Perth has lots of fun stuff to do. Wander through the impressively restored historic warehouses, museums, and working docks of bustling Fremantle; stock up at the plentiful Aboriginal art and souvenir stores; eat at some of the country's best restaurants (no, they're not all in Sydney and Melbourne); go snorkeling and sea kayaking with wild sea lions; bushwalk through a 405-hectare (1,000-acre) park in the middle of the city; and pedal your bike to a great snorkeling spot on Rottnest Island, a miniature reef resort 19km (12 miles) offshore.

Perth also gives you several good choices of side trips: Wander the streets of historical York, drop in on the Benedictine monks in the Spanish Renaissance town of New Norcia, nip out to the Swan Valley vineyards 20 minutes from town, or spend a few days in Margaret River country, one of Australia's top wine regions.

PERTH ORIENTATION

ARRIVING By Plane **Qantas** (☎ **13 13 13** in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies at least once a day, if not more often, from all mainland state capitals, either direct or with mostly only one stop. **Airlink** (book through Qantas; www.qantas.com.au) flies direct from Alice Springs, and from Cairns via Ayers Rock. Airlink also flies from Broome and Darwin, and operates flights from many small towns within Western Australia. **Virgin Blue** (☎ **13 67 89** in Australia) flies direct from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Adelaide, with connections from other cities.

Perth International Airport is 20km (12½ miles) northeast of the city, and the domestic terminal is 8km (5 miles) closer. Both offer currency exchange, ATMs, showers, baby change rooms, lockers, Internet access, direct-dial accommodations boards, mailboxes (the newsstand sells stamps), and a limited range of tourist information. Mobile (cell) telephones can be rented at the international terminal. **Avis** (☎ **08/9277 1177** domestic terminal, 08/9477 1302 international terminal), **Budget** (☎ **08/9277 9277**), **EuropCar** (☎ **08/9237 4320**), **Hertz** (☎ **08/9479 4788**), and **Thrifty** (☎ **08/9464 7333**) have desks at both terminals.

Feature Tours runs the **airport-city shuttle** (☎ **1800/999 819** in Australia, or 08/9479 4131), which meets all international and interstate flights. It does not specifically meet intrastate flights. There is no need to book. City transfers from the international terminal cost A\$11 (US\$7.15) adults one-way; domestic terminal-city transfers are A\$9 (US\$5.85) one-way. Transfers between the domestic and international terminals are A\$5.50 (US\$3.55) for adults. The **Fremantle Airport**

Shuttle (☎ 1300/668 687 in Australia, or 08/9335 1614) operates regular services each day from the airport to hotels, or anywhere else in Fremantle you want to go; you must book in advance. The fare is A\$20 (US\$13) per person, but gets cheaper the bigger your group is—down to A\$10 (US\$6.50) per person for five or more people traveling together.

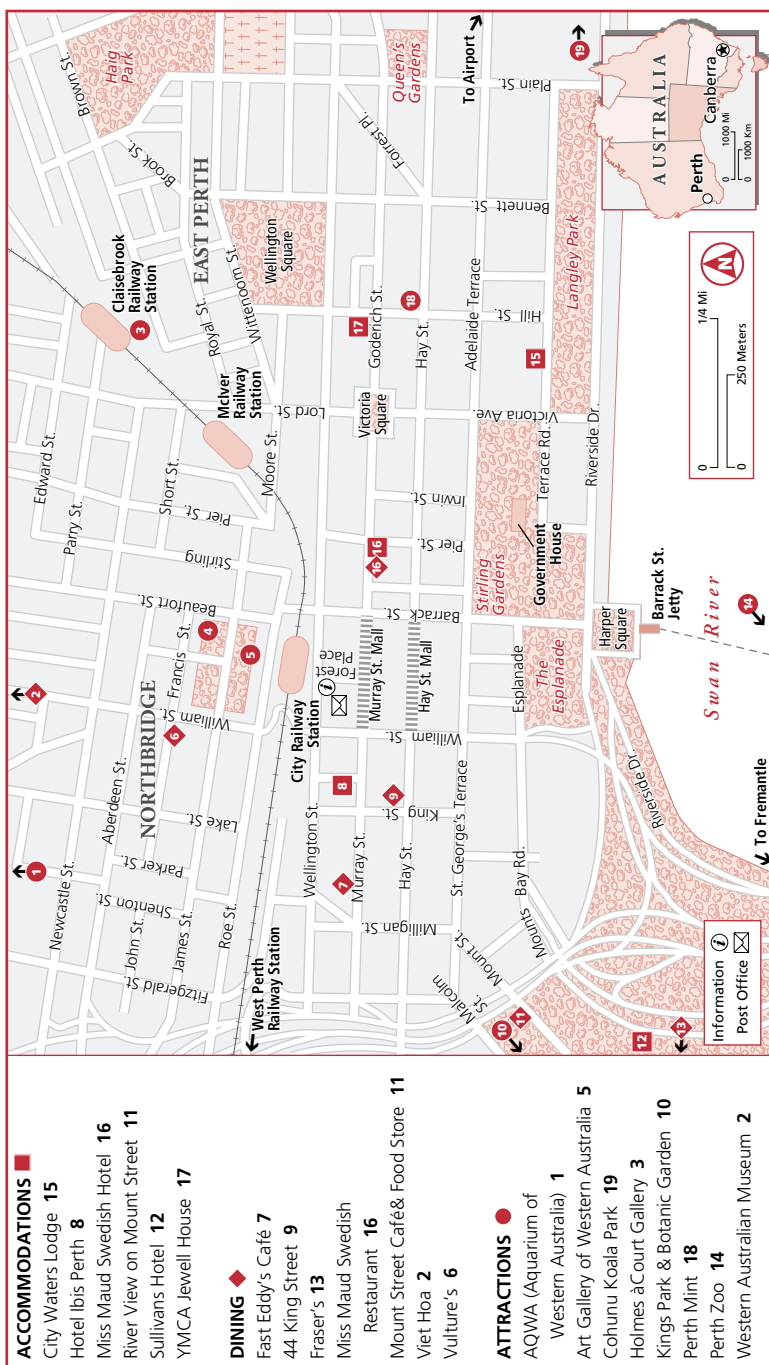
Public bus nos. 37 and 39 run to the city from the domestic terminal. No buses run from the international terminal. A taxi to the city is about A\$28 (US\$18) from the international terminal and A\$21 (US\$14) from the domestic terminal, including a A\$1 (US\$65¢) fee for picking up a taxi at the airport.

By Train The 3-day journey to Perth from Sydney via Broken Hill, Adelaide, and Kalgoorlie aboard the *Indian Pacific* 🚂, operated by Great Southern Railway (☎ 13 21 47 in Australia; www.trainways.com.au), is an experience in itself. The train runs twice a week each direction. The one-way fare ranges from A\$1,506 (US\$979) in first class with meals and en suite bathroom, to A\$1,250 (US\$813) in comfy second class (meals cost extra, and bathrooms are shared), down to A\$513 (US\$333) for the sit-up-all-the-way coach class (not a good idea). Connections are available from Melbourne on the *Overland* train. See “Getting Around Australia” in chapter 2, for contact details in Australia and abroad. The *Prospector* train makes the 7¼ hour trip from Kalgoorlie daily; call **WAGR** (☎ 13 10 53 in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2000). All long-distance trains pull into the East Perth Terminal, Summers Street off Lord Street, East Perth. A taxi to the city center costs about A\$10 (US\$6.50).

By Bus **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) runs daily from Sydney (58 hr.) to Adelaide and once a week from Adelaide to Perth, trip time about 34 hours. It also has service daily from Darwin via Kununurra and Broome (trip time: about 59 hr.). Traveling from Alice Springs requires a connection in Adelaide and takes about 53 hours. The Sydney–Perth fare is A\$397 (US\$258), Adelaide–Perth is A\$264 (US\$172), Darwin–Perth is A\$550 (US\$358), and Alice Springs–Perth is A\$441 (US\$287).

By Car There are only two road routes from interstate. The 2,423km (1,514-mile) route from Broome in the north follows the Great Northern Highway (not so great for road quality), the North West Coastal Highway (a decent enough two-lane affair), and the **Brand Highway** (pretty good). The 2,708km (1,693-mile) route from Adelaide includes hundreds of kilometers along some of the world’s straightest road on the treeless Nullarbor Plain. Arm yourself with an up-to-date road map before setting off on this route, and carry spare gas. It’s not a bad idea to contact the South Australian or Western Australian state auto clubs (listed under “Getting Around Australia” in chapter 2) for more advice on crossing the Nullarbor. Both routes cross mostly featureless and lonely semi-desert, sheep ranches, or wheat-fields most of the way, with very few towns en route. For that reason, I don’t recommend either!

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Western Australian Visitor Centre**, Albert Facey House, 469 Wellington St., WA 6000, on the corner of Forrest Place, Perth (☎ 1300/361 351 in Australia, or 08/9483 1111; www.westernaustralia.net), is the official visitor information source for Perth and the state. It’s open Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 6pm (5:30pm in winter May–July), Friday from 8:30am to 7pm (6pm in winter), Saturday from 8:30am to 12:30pm year-round, and closed Sundays. Another source of information and maps (plus a free booking service) is **Perth Tourist Lounge**, Level 2, Carillon



Arcade off 207 Murray Street Mall (☎ **08/9481 4400**), open Monday through Thursday from 9am to 5:30pm, Friday 9am to 9pm, Saturday 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from noon to 5pm.

For an untouristy lowdown on the city's restaurants, cultural life, shops, bars, nightlife, concerts, and the like, buy the excellent local glossy quarterly magazine **Scoop** (A\$8.90/US\$5.80; www.scoop.com.au), available in bigger newsagents.

CITY LAYOUT The city center is 19km (12 miles) upriver from the Indian Ocean, on the north bank of the Swan River. **Hay Street** and **Murray Street** are the two major thoroughfares, 1 block apart; both are bisected by pedestrian malls between William and Barrack streets. It helps to know that Adelaide Terrace and St. Georges Terrace are the same street. The name change occurs at Victoria Avenue.

MAPS Of the many free pocket guides to Perth at tour desks and in hotel lobbies, **Your Guide to Perth & Fremantle** has the best street map, because it shows one-way streets, public toilets and telephones, taxi stands, post offices, police stations, and street numbers as well as most attractions and hotels. The **Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia** (see "Exploring the State" at the beginning of this chapter) is a good source of maps to the entire state, as is **Map World**, 900 Hay St. (☎ **08/9322 5733**).

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

City Center The central business district (called the **CBD**) is home to shops and department stores connected by a honeycomb of shopping arcades. A good introduction to Perth's charms is to take in the views from the pedestrian/bike path that skirts the river along Riverside Drive. Within walking distance on the western edge of town is Kings Park & Botanic Garden.

Northbridge Just about all of Perth's nightclubs, and a good many of its cool restaurants, bars, and cafes are in this 5-block precinct just north of the railway line, within easy walking distance of the city center. James, Beaufort, Aberdeen, and Lake streets roughly bound it. What locals call the Cultural Centre—an umbrella term that means the Western Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the State Library, and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts—is here too. The free Blue CAT buses deliver you right into the heart of this buzzing precinct.

Subiaco This well-heeled suburb is on the other side of Kings Park from the city. Saturday morning wouldn't be Saturday morning for Perth's see-and-be-seen crowd without a stroll through "Subi's" cafes, markets, upscale boutiques, antiques shops, and art galleries. Intersecting Hay Street and Rokeby (pronounced *Rockerby*) Road are the main promenades. Take the train to Subiaco station.

Fremantle Not only is this Perth's working port, "Freo" is Perth's second city heart, and locals' favorite weekend spot to relax, eat, shop, and sail. A careful 1980s restoration of its Victorian warehouses saw it emerge as a marvelous living example of a 19th-century seaport—kind of like Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco without the stale commercial taint. Fremantle is 19km (12 miles) downriver on the mouth of the Swan. See "A Day Out in Fremantle" later in this chapter.

Scarborough Beach This is one of Perth's prize beaches, 12km (7½

miles) north of the city center. The district is a little tatty with that over-supply of cheap take-out food outlets that plague Aussie beaches, but if you like sun, sand, and surf, this is

the place to be. You will find supermarkets, bars, restaurants, shops, and surf gear rental stores here. Allow 15 to 20 minutes to get there by car, 35 minutes on the bus.

GETTING AROUND

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION **Transperth** (www.transperth.wa.gov.au) runs Perth's buses, trains, and ferries. For route, bus stop, and timetable information, call ☎ **13 62 13** in Western Australia, or drop into the Transperth InfoCentres at the Plaza Arcade off Hay Street Mall, the Perth Railway Station, the Wellington Street bus station, or the City Bus Port on Mounts Bay Road. You can transfer from bus to ferry to train on one ticket within its expiry time of 2 or 3 hours. Travel costs A\$1.90 (US\$1.20) in one zone (to Subiaco, for instance), and A\$2.90 (US\$1.90) in two, which gets you most places, including Fremantle. Non-West Australian seniors and students don't qualify for discounted fares; kids ages 5 to 14 do.

MultiRider passes give you 10 trips at a savings of 15%; they come in a range of prices good for various numbers of zones. A **DayRider** pass allows 1 day's unlimited travel after 9am on weekdays and all day on weekends and public holidays, and costs A\$7.30 (US\$4.75). A **FamilyRider** pass is valid for unlimited all day travel to any destination and back, for a group of seven people with a maximum of two adults. **FamilyRiders** are aimed at Perth families and so are valid only weekends, public holidays, after 9am weekdays, and during Western Australian school holidays, after 6pm year-round Monday through Thursday, and after 3pm Friday. They cost A\$7.30 (US\$4.75). Passes, collectively known as **FastCards**, are sold at newsagents and at Transperth InfoCentres. To use the passes, validate them in the machines located on board in the case of buses, and on the platform or wharf in the case of trains and ferries.

Buses and trains run from about 5:30am until about 11:30pm.

By Bus **The Wellington Street Bus Station**, located next to Perth Railway Station at Forrest Place, and the **City Bus Port** on the western edge of the city on Mounts Bay Road, are the two main depots. The vast majority of buses travel along St. Georges Terrace. **Note:** Drivers do not always stop unless you hail. Buy tickets from the driver. The best way to get around town is on the free **CAT (Central Area Transit)** buses that run a continual loop of the city and Northbridge. The **Red CAT** runs east-west every 5 minutes, Monday through Friday from

Value A Free Ride

A welcome freebie in Perth is the **Free Transit Zone (FTZ)**. You can travel free on trains and buses within this zone any hour, day and night. It is bounded by Kings Park Road, Fraser Avenue, Thomas Street, and Loftus Street in the west; Newcastle Street in the north; and the river in the south and east. Basically, this means you can travel to Kings Park, Northbridge, east to major sporting grounds, and anywhere in the city center for free. Signs mark the boundaries; ask the driver if you're unsure. FTZ boundaries for trains are City West station on the Fremantle line and Claisebrook on the Midland and Armadale lines.

6:50am to 6:20pm, and once every 35 minutes from 10am to 6:15pm weekends. The **Blue CAT** runs north-south as far north as Northbridge and south to Barrack Street Jetty every 7 minutes from 6:50am. The last Blue CAT service Monday through Thursday is at 6:20pm, and on Friday it continues every 15 minutes from 6:20pm until 1am Saturday morning. Saturday it runs from 8:30am to 1am (Sun morning) every 15 minutes, and Sunday every 15 minutes from 10am to 6:15pm. The **Yellow CAT** runs between East Perth and the city center every 10 minutes from 6:50am to 6:20pm weekdays and every 15 minutes 10am to 6:15pm weekends. There are no CAT services on public holidays. Look for the CAT bus stops. Transperth InfoCentres (see above) dispense free route maps.

The **Perth Tram Co.** tours (see “Whale-Watching Cruises, Tram Trips & Other Tours” later in this chapter) are a good way to get around, too.

By Train Trains are fast, clean, and safe. They start from about 5:30am and run every 15 minutes or even more often during the day, and every half-hour at night until midnight. NightRider trains depart Perth at 1 and 2am Friday and Saturday night (meaning Sat–Sun morning) December through March, stopping at all stations on all lines. All trains leave from Perth Railway Station opposite Forrest Place on Wellington Street. Buy your ticket before you board, at the vending machines on the platform.

By Ferry You will probably only use ferries to visit Perth Zoo. They run every half-hour or so, more often in peak hour, weekdays from 6:50am and weekends from 7:50am, until 7:15pm (9:15pm Fri–Sat in summer Sept–Apr) from the **Barrack Street Jetty to Mends Street** in South Perth. Buy tickets before you board from the machine on the wharf. The trip takes 7 minutes.

BY TAXI Perth's two taxi companies are **Swan Taxis** (☎ 13 13 30) and **Black & White Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08). Ranks are located at Perth Railway Station, and at both ends of Hay Street Mall.

BY CAR Perth's signposting is notorious for telling you where you have been, not where you are going—for example, some interstate highways are announced with insignificant signs more suited to a side street.

Wilson Parking's Central Park, 152-158 St. Georges Terrace between William and King Street (☎ 08/9226 3577), charges A\$2.90 (US\$1.90) per hour, and is open Monday through Friday 6:30am to 8pm (until midnight Fri), Saturday from 8am to 6:30pm, and Sunday from 8:30am to 6:30pm. The maximum charge is A\$5 (US\$3.25) between 5pm and midnight Friday, all day Saturday or Sunday.

The major car-rental companies are **Avis** (☎ 08/9325 7677), **Budget** (☎ 08/9480 3111), **EuropCar** (☎ 08/9226 0026), **Hertz** (☎ 08/9321 7777), and **Thrifty** (☎ 08/9464 7444). All except Hertz also have outlets in Fremantle. **ATC Rent-A-Car** (☎ 1800/999 888 in Australia, or 08/9325 1833) is a locally owned outfit with offices in Monkey Mia and Broome; it also rents camping kits. **Hawk Rent-A-Car** (☎ 08/9221 9688) is another local operator worth a try.

FAST FACTS: Perth

American Express The bureau at 645 Hay Street Mall (☎ 08/9221 0777) is open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm and Saturday 9am to noon.

Business Hours Banks open Monday through Thursday 9:30am to 4pm and until 5pm Friday. Shopping hours are usually 9am to 5:30pm Monday

through Friday (until 9pm on Thurs in the suburbs and Fremantle, and until 9pm Fri in the city), and 9am to 5pm on Saturday. On Sunday most major stores (but not all) open noon to 4pm or later in the city, and from noon to 6pm in Fremantle.

Currency Exchange Go to the American Express office (see above) or **Interforex**, Shop 24, London Court off Hay Street Mall (☎ 08/9325 7418), open daily 9am to 6pm, and until 9pm Friday. Interforex has a Fremantle bureau at the corner of William and Adelaide streets (☎ 08/9431 7022) open daily from 8am to 8pm.

Dentist **LifeCare Dental** (☎ 08/9221 2777) is on the Upper Walkway Level, Forrest Chase shopping complex, 425 Wellington St. opposite Perth Railway Station. Open daily 8am to 8pm, it can be reached after hours on ☎ 08/9383 1620.

Doctor **Central City Medical Centre** is on the Perth Railway Station concourse, 420 Wellington St. (☎ 08/9221 4747). It is open daily from 8am to 7pm.

Drugstores **Forrest Chase Pharmacy** (☎ 08/9221 1691), on the upper level of the Forrest Chase shopping center, 425 Wellington St. (near the dentist's office listed above) is open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 7pm (and until 9pm Fri), Saturday from 8:30am to 6pm, and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. **Shenton Pharmacy**, 214 Nicholson Rd., Subiaco (☎ 08/9381 1358 business and after hours), will deliver across Perth.

Embassies/Consulates The **United States Consulate-General** is at 16 St. Georges Terrace (☎ 08/9202 1224). The **Canadian Consulate** is at 267 St. Georges Terrace (☎ 08/9322 7930). The **British Consulate-General** is at 77 St. Georges Terrace (☎ 08/9224 4700). The **Irish Consulate-General** is at 10 Lilika Rd., City Beach (☎ 08/9385 8247).

Emergencies Dial ☎ 000 for fire, ambulance, or police in an emergency. This is a free call, and no coins are needed from a public phone.

Hospitals **Royal Perth Hospital** in the city center has a public casualty ward (☎ 08/9224 2244). Enter from Victoria Square, accessed from Murray Street.

Lost Property For lost property on public transport, call **Transperth** administration at ☎ 08/9326 2277. Check with the local police station closest to where the item was lost (central police operations ☎ 13 14 44 can give you the nearest station's telephone number).

Luggage Storage/Lockers The **Perth Tourist Lounge** (see "Visitor Information" earlier in the chapter) stores luggage, and there are baggage lockers at the international and domestic terminals at the airport.

Police Dial ☎ 000 in an emergency. **Central Police Station**, 1 Hay St., East Perth (☎ 08/9263 2300) and **Fremantle Police Station**, 45 Henderson St. (☎ 08/9430 1222), are open 24 hours. To be connected to the nearest station, dial ☎ 13 14 44.

Post Office The General Post Office on Forrest Place (☎ 13 13 18) is open Monday through Friday 8am to 5:30pm, Saturday 9am to 12:30pm, closed Sunday. There are also post offices at 26 and 66 St. Georges Terrace, at Cloisters Square at 863 Hay St., and in just about every suburb. Most post

offices open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm; some are also open Saturday mornings.

Safety Perth is safe, but steer clear of the back streets of Northbridge at night, as groups of teenage boys have been known to pick fights.

Time Zone Western Australian time (WST) is GMT plus 8 hours, and has no daylight savings. This means it is normally 2 hours behind Sydney and Melbourne, 3 from October to March when New South Wales and Victoria go to daylight savings. Call ☎ 1194 for the exact local time.

Weather Call ☎ 1196 for a recorded local weather forecast.

WHERE TO STAY

Perth has a surfeit of upscale hotels in the city center, so it's possible to get a good deal in an expensive lodging when the business travelers go home. Definitely ask about weekend deals. If you're not afraid to negotiate, you can strike a good deal on weeknights, too, if business is slow across town.

IN THE CITY CENTER

City Waters Lodge  Try to get an apartment on the end of this old, neatly maintained three-story block by the river, as they have parkland views. The fixtures in these apartments are a bit dated, especially in the kitchen and bathroom, but you get plenty of space, daily servicing, and the same brand of mattresses used by the city's five-star hotels. The four two-bedroom units have two TVs and two phones. All rooms received new beds, paint, and carpets in 1999. The hosts will carry your luggage, and order in continental breakfast from a nearby deli. City buses run along St. Georges Terrace a block away, and you're a 5-block walk from Hay Street Mall.

118 Terrace Rd. (between Victoria Ave. and Hill St.), Perth, WA 6000. ☎ 1800/999 030 in Australia, or 089325 1566. Fax 08/9221 2794. www.citywaters.com.au. 72 units. A\$78 (US\$51) double 1-bedroom apt; A\$115 (US\$75) 2-bedroom apt (sleeps 5). Weekly rates available. MC, V. Free parking. Blue CAT Stop 19 "Bar-rack Square." Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op self-service laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

Hotel Ibis Perth   Ibis is one of those reputable chain brands of the "four-star facilities at a three-star price" variety. Shops, cinemas, and Hay Street Mall are a block or two away from this hotel. The neat, no-frills rooms here were thoroughly renovated with funky colors and high-quality beds in 2001, and the lobby, restaurant, and bar were refurbished in 2003. The rooms are small, but a nice room in this location for this price can't be beaten.

334 Murray St. (between William and King sts.), Perth, WA 6000. ☎ 08/9322 2844; Accor, 1300/88 4400 in Australia, 1800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., or 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand. Fax 08/9321 6314. www.accorhotels.com.au. 192 units (all with shower only). A\$95 (US\$62) double. Extra person A\$27 (US\$18). Children under 13 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. AE, DC, MC, V. Discounted self-parking A\$9.90 (US\$6.45) at the nearby Queen St. parking lot. Bus: Red CAT Stop 15 "Murray St. Mall West"; Blue CAT Stop 17 "Hay St. Mall West." Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; babysitting; coin-op self-service laundry; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Miss Maud Swedish Hotel  About half the rooms in this homey hotel in the heart of town have been gutted and totally rebuilt in the past year. New furnishings include the Scandinavian colors of yellow and blue, while others have a crisp Nordic look of cream and pale blue. The front desk is staffed 24 hours. A

private sun deck is tucked away as a surprise up among the rooftops. The real Miss Maud, Maud Edmiston, wants guests to feel they are in a European family hotel like in her Swedish homeland, and she succeeds—in part due to the staff, who are more polite and on the ball than in most five-star hotels. A fabulous buffet breakfast is included at **Miss Maud Swedish Restaurant** downstairs (p. 436).

97 Murray St. (at Pier St.), Perth, WA 6000. ☎ 1800/998 022 in Australia, or 08/9325 3900. Fax 08/9221 3225. www.missmaud.com.au. 52 units (40 with shower only). A\$112–A\$150 (US\$73–US\$98) double. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Rates include smorgasbord breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Discounted parking A\$7 (US\$4.55) at the Kings Hotel parking lot 1 block away. Bus: Red CAT Stop 1 “Pier St.”; Blue CAT Stop 5 “Murray St. Mall East.” Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; takeout pastry shop; tour desk; limited room service; self-serve laundry; laundry/dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

River View on Mount Street ★ *Value* On a quiet leafy street a short walk from the city and Kings Park, these roomy studio apartments in a 1960s block were refurbished in 1999 with new kitchens and bathrooms, fresh carpets and curtains, and smart-looking fittings. The result is great style at a great price. Some have distant views of the river a few blocks away. Maid service is weekly. The helpful on-site managers loan hair dryers and irons. You can breakfast at the **Mount Street Café** downstairs (p. 436), which also sells prepared curries and deli items. No smoking.

42 Mount St., Perth, WA 6000. ☎ 08/9321 8963. Fax 08/9322 5956. www.riverview.au.com (not “riverview.com.au”). 50 units (all with shower only). A\$85–A\$95 (US\$55–US\$62) apt (some sleep up to 3). Weekly rates available. AE, MC, V. Limited free parking. Bus: Red CAT Stop 18 “QVI” (over the fwy. footbridge accessed from the corner of St. Georges Terrace and Milligan St.). Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Cafe; access to nearby golf course and health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; self-service laundry; laundry/same-day dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Sullivans Hotel *Finds* This family-owned hotel about 1.5km (1 mile) from town is popular with Europeans for its small-scale ambience. Despite being on the main road into the city, none of the rooms seem to be noisy. They’re simply furnished with laminate fittings, not glamorous but clean and roomy. Larger deluxe rooms come with desks, safes, and balconies with views over parkland and the freeway to the river. There are also two-bedroom apartments with kitchenettes. Out back is a pleasant little swimming pool with a sun deck and barbecue. Bikes are free, the restaurant is affordable, and the front desk has free 24-hour Internet access for guests. Some rooms have dataports. The Swan River is a stroll away, the city is a 10-minute walk, and Kings Park is a short, steep climb up the hill.

166 Mounts Bay Rd., Perth, WA 6000. ☎ 1800/999 294 in Australia, or 08/9321 8022. Fax 08/9481 6762. www.sullivans.com.au. 68 units (66 with shower only). A\$110–A\$130 (US\$72–US\$85) up to 4 people in room; A\$190 (US\$124) 2-bedroom apt. Ask about packages. Weekly rates available. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 71, 72, or 78 (the hotel is within the Free Transit Zone). Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; limited room service for meals and drinks (no delivery charge); babysitting; self-service laundry; same-day laundry/dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

SUPER-CHEAP SLEEPS

YMCA Jewell House You’ll love the prices and the river panorama from the south rooms in this 11-story one-time nurses’ quarters. Bathrooms are communal but clean. Rooms contain beds, a fan, self-serve tea and coffee, and linen and towels. Maid service is daily. There is 24-hour reception, currency exchange, TV, phone and Internet lounges, a wonderfully affordable cafe, and helpful staff. The Perth Mint is a block away, and Hay Street Mall is a 5-block stroll.

180 Goderich St., Perth, WA 6000. ☎ 1800/998 212 in Australia, or 08/9325 8488. Fax 08/9221 4694. www.ymcajewellhouse.com. 200 units, none with bathroom. A\$46 (US\$30) double; A\$75 (US\$49) family

room (sleeps 5). AE, DC, MC, V. Free off-street parking for 16 cars. Bus: Red CAT Stop 4 "Bennett Street." Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Cafe; tour desk; self-service laundry. *In room:* A/C, coffeemaker, no phone.

IN FREMANTLE

There's a perpetual holiday atmosphere in this picturesque port city. Although you are 19km (12 miles) from Perth's city center, public transport connections are good, so you can happily explore all of Perth from here—and most of top attractions are in Freo anyhow. There are good restaurants and a happening nightlife, too.

Danum House ★★ Hostess Christine Sherwin has created a welcoming haven in her beautiful Federation (ca. 1909) home, a walk from town. One room, decked out in heritage reds and greens, opens onto a cottage garden. The other very large room has an ornate mantle, floral wallpaper, long drapes, and that most colonial of furnishings, a daybed, as well as a real bed for sleeping. Both sport antiques, ornate ceiling roses and cornices, fireplaces, high ceilings and fans, and have a private entrance. Even the bathrooms (one en suite, one with private access) share the colonial decor. Christine serves a hearty breakfast, and you can relax in the comfy lounge over books, CDs, free coffee, and complimentary port and chocolates. Hair dryers and irons are available. No smoking.

6 Fothergill St. (at Bellevue Terrace), Fremantle, WA 6160. ☎ 08/9336 3735. Fax 08/9335 3414. www.staywa.net.au/ads/danum. 2 units (both with shower only). A\$90–A\$110 (US\$59–US\$72) double. Minimum 2-night stay. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Ample on-street parking. Bus: 105 from Perth. Train: Fremantle. Fremantle airport shuttle (see "Arriving: By Plane" earlier in this chapter). Children not permitted. *In room:* TV.

Fremantle Colonial Accommodation A stroll in any direction from this historic terrace guesthouse on Freo's main street brings you to a museum, a harbor, shops, and other attractions. All the rooms are decorated in colonial style—one has a blue-and-yellow liberty-print quilt and an ornate plaster ceiling rose, another has lace curtains and a fireplace. The clean bathrooms are tiled in dark green or maroon and white. Rooms vary in size but all have a table with cereals, tea and coffee, a kettle, a toaster, minifridge, and bathrobes. Your hostess, Val Wieland, delivers a breakfast of juice, milk, yogurt, fruit, and bread for toasting to your room by 6pm the night before. The in-room dining tables are quite small, as are the TVs, so this place is more for folks who just want somewhere to lay their heads at night, rather than a comfortable establishment in which to hang around for half the day. Two of the rooms can be used as a self-contained apartment with a kitchenette.

One block behind the guesthouse, Val has three limestone cottages perched on a hill overlooking the town. They were built in the 19th century as prison guards' and nurses' quarters. Val has restored the interiors to their original colors. Each has two pretty bedrooms with patchwork quilts, complimentary toiletries, fireplaces, antique furniture, and rag dolls or teddy bears in the corner. Each also has a large eat-in kitchen with a modern stove alongside the original wood-fired one, a sunroom, laundry facilities, a wooden porch out front, and a lovely stone courtyard out back with outdoor dining furniture. All have ceiling fans, one is air-conditioned, and one is fitted for travelers with disabilities.

215 High St., Fremantle, WA 6160. ☎ 08/9430 6568. Fax 08/9430 6405. www.fremantle.com/accom/colonial. 6 units in guesthouse, 2 with bathroom (shower only). 3 cottages, all with bathroom (1 with shower only). Guesthouse A\$88–A\$116 (US\$57–US\$75) single; A\$94–A\$121 (US\$61–US\$79) double. Extra person A\$17 (US\$11). Rates in guesthouse include continental breakfast. Cottages A\$154 (US\$100) double. Extra adult A\$22 (US\$14), extra child A\$11 (US\$7.15) (maximum total A\$198/US\$129 for 5 people). MC, V. Free parking. Train: Fremantle. Fremantle airport shuttle. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

GREAT DEALS ON DINING

Perth's restaurant scene bubbles over with terrific ethnic places that are kind to your wallet and a treat for your taste buds. If you can't find the kind of cuisine you want in Northbridge, it probably doesn't exist, for this restaurant mecca has Thai, Greek, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Italian, Chinese, and about every other kind of food you can think of. Don't forget that going **BYO** (Bring Your Own wine or beer) lessens the pain in your wallet. Some restaurants charge corkage fees, usually A\$1 or \$2 (US\$65¢–US\$1.30) per person, but sometimes as much as A\$4 (US\$2.60) per person.

For inexpensive pasta, a Turkish bread sandwich, or excellent coffee and cake, you can't beat Perth's homegrown **DOMÉ** chain of cafes. You will spot their dark green logo at Trinity Arcade between Hay Street Mall and St. Georges Terrace (☎ **08/9226 0210**); 149 James St., Northbridge (☎ **08/9328 8094**); 13 South Terrace, Fremantle (☎ **08/9336 3040**); 19 Napoleon St., Cottesloe (☎ **08/9383 1071**); 26 Rokeby Rd., Subiaco (☎ **08/9381 5664**); and on Rottnest Island (☎ **08/9292 5026**).

Western Australian law bans smoking in enclosed public spaces like restaurants.

IN THE CITY CENTER

Fast Eddy's Café **FAST FOOD** A hefty menu of steaks, burgers, sandwiches, soups, pancakes, sundaes, shakes, and full fry-up *brekkies* are served all hours at this popular chain. The interior is decked out with 1930s soap-powder posters and Coca-Cola advertisements. One side is table service; the same food minus the side-orders will cost you about half the already low prices at the Victorian-era-meets-1950s counter service diner and takeout section on the other side.

454 Murray St. (at Milligan St.). ☎ **08/9321 2552**. Main courses A\$5–A\$15 (US\$3.25–US\$9.75). MC, V. Daily 24 hr. Red CAT Stop 27 "Milligan St."

44 King Street ★★ **MODERN AUSTRALIAN** Socialites and hip corporate types adorn this sophisticated hangout, whose interior is a mix of industrial design and European cafe with dark timber tables, exposed air ducts, and windows looking onto the street. The open kitchen produces a daily changing menu of weird and wonderful choices such as Greek-style braised lamb shanks, or black risotto with squid and scallops and salsa verde. Not only does the menu helpfully list wine suggestions for each dish, but it also does taster-size glasses from around A\$3 to A\$8.50 (US\$1.95–US\$5.50) from a 200-strong wine list. Lots of folks drop in just for coffee, roasted on-site, and the famous cakes. All meals are available as takeout.

44 King St. ☎ **08/9321 4476**. Reservations not accepted. Grazing menu A\$3.50–A\$13 (US\$2.30–US\$8.45) breakfast, A\$19–A\$27 (US\$12–US\$18) lunch and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight. Bus: Red CAT Stop 28 "King St."; Blue CAT Stop 1 "Cloisters."

Fraser's ★★★ **Moments MODERN AUSTRALIAN/SEAFOOD** What a sensational view from this hilltop restaurant! The city skyscrapers and Swan River look so close you could almost reach out and touch them—and even better, the victuals match the vista. Executive chef Chris Taylor's sure hand with seafood, which composes about 70% of the long menu, has made the place a finalist in national "restaurant of the year" awards more than once. Seared Atlantic salmon with stir-fried Asian greens and lemon soy is typical. The duck is legendary. To maximize the view, ask for a seat on the terrace.

Fraser Ave. (near the Information Kiosk), Kings Park. ☎ **08/9481 7100**. Reservations required. Main courses A\$22–A\$45 (US\$14–US\$29); average A\$28 (US\$18). Five course degustation menu A\$70 (US\$45) per person.

AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–late; weekends 7:30am–late. Closed Good Friday. Ample free parking. Bus: 33 stops outside the Information Kiosk. Red CAT Stop 25 “Havelock St.” is 1 block to the north of the gates.

Miss Maud Swedish Restaurant  **INTERNATIONAL** “Good food and plenty of it” is the motto at Miss Maud’s homey establishment, and the crowds packing the place prove it works. Most diners skip the long a la carte menu and go straight for the smorgasbord. At breakfast, that means 50 dishes including pancakes cooked before your eyes. At lunch and dinner you can tuck into soup, 10 salads, a big range of seafood (including oysters at dinner), cold meats, roasts, hot vegetables, pasta, cheeses, European-style breads, half a dozen tortes, fruit, and ice cream—65 dishes in all. Service is fast and polite.

97 Murray St. at Pier St. (below Miss Maud Swedish Hotel). ☎ **08/9325 3900**. Reservations recommended. Smorgasbord breakfast A\$17 (US\$11) Mon–Sat, A\$18 (US\$12) Sun and public holidays; lunch A\$25 (US\$16) Mon–Sat, A\$26 (US\$17) Sun and public holidays; dinner A\$31 (US\$20) Sun–Fri, A\$35 (US\$23) Sat and public holidays. Cheaper smorgasbord prices for children 4–13. A la carte main courses, sandwiches, and light meals A\$5.75–A\$20 (US\$3.75–US\$13). Dine and leave by 7:15pm Mon–Sat for a A\$5 (US\$3.25) discount. AE, DC, MC, V. Open all day for coffee and cake. Meals daily 6:45–10am, noon–2:30pm, 5:30–7pm, and 7:15–10pm (until about 11:30pm weekends). Bus: Red CAT Stop 1 “Pier St.”; Blue CAT Stop 5 “Murray St. Mall East.”

Mount Street Café and Food Store  **MODERN AUSTRALIAN** Chef Toby Uhrich turns out yummy dine-in and takeout fare from this charming alfresco cafe on the edge of the central business district. Come for lunches like risotto with asparagus, chicken, roasted almonds, and Parmesan, or your choice of light snacks from the deli cabinet. Breakfasts are equally fresh and delicious. Dine inside at a few tables, or out on the shaded stone terrace. Drop by anytime for cakes and good coffee, but be prepared to fight the regulars for a table. BYO (corkage A\$2.50/US\$1.60).

Under the “River View on Mount Street” apts, 42 Mount St. ☎ **08/9485 1411**. Reservations recommended on weekends. Breakfast A\$5.80–A\$17 (US\$3.75–US\$11). Main courses A\$14–A\$21 (US\$9.10–US\$14). AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–5pm. Bus: Red CAT Stop 18 “QVI” (over the fwy, footbridge accessed from corner of St. Georges Terrace and Milligan St.).

IN NORTHBRIDGE

Viet Hoa **CHINESE/VIETNAMESE** With its tablecloths, fake plants, and airy dimensions, the Viet Hoa is a little more upscale than some similar cheap eateries around, and the servings are huge, so don’t over-order. The cold Vietnamese spring rolls remind you what fresh food is supposed to taste like. The fare is standard stir-fries, satays, and sweet-and-sour dishes. Licensed and BYO.

349 William St. ☎ **08/9328 2127**. Reservations recommended on Fri and Sat night. Most main courses A\$5–A\$14 (US\$3.25–US\$9.10). AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm. Train: Perth. Bus: Blue and Weekend CAT Stop 10 “Aberdeen St.”

Vulture’s Restaurant & Café  **ECLECTIC/MODERN AUSTRALIAN** This roomy, relaxed, and groovy coffee lounge-cum-restaurant has a knack of suiting all occasions and all folk, from couples doing a romantic dinner in the

Value Super-Cheap Eats in Northbridge

Bless the Hare Krishnas for their wonderful cheap restaurants dispensing delicious vegetarian nourishment. “Food for Life” at 200 William St., Northbridge (☎ **08/9227 1684**) serves an all-you-can-eat buffet for just A\$5 (US\$3.25) (A\$4/US\$2.60 for seniors and students) Monday through Friday from noon to 2:30pm.

Tips Java Joints

Don't leave Freo without a "short black" (that's an espresso) or a "flat white" (coffee with milk) at the port's "cappuccino strip" on South Terrace. On weekends this street bursts at the seams with locals flocking to alfresco Italian-style cafes serving good java and excellent foccacia, pasta, and pizza. **DOMÉ** and **Old Papa's** are two to look for.

street-side courtyard to teenage nightclubbers hanging out after a big night. The place is scattered with funky bric-a-brac from American Indian eagle totems to Balinese four-poster wedding beds—you can even sit inside them on cushions and eat at a low coffee table, instead of at the regular tables. The main courses are surprisingly sophisticated and skillfully cooked for such a casual joint—crispy skinned Exmouth Pink snapper, served with seafood, leek, and mushroom risotto, and finished with lemon hollandaise; or lamb loin stuffed with an apricot and sage farce, for example. There is also plenty of light stuff such as roast-chicken nachos or pastas. Fancy cocktails are a specialty, and there's a grazing menu after 10pm.

Francis St. at William St., Northbridge. ☎ **08/9227 9087**. Reservations recommended for dinner Fri–Sat. Main courses A\$15–A\$25 (US\$9.75–US\$16); dine-in or takeout sandwiches at lunch A\$6.60–A\$8.30 (US\$4.30–US\$5.40). Kids' menu A\$7 (US\$4.55). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–1am; Fri–Sat 11am–2am or later. Bus: Blue CAT Stop 9 "TAFE."

ON THE BEACH

The Blue Duck ★★  **Kids** INTERNATIONAL/PIZZAS For ocean views and a lively atmosphere, it's hard to beat this casual restaurant perched right over the sand. Although the interior lacks the balcony's panoramic position, it has an upbeat seaside ambience and is just as packed as the porch. The all-day menu (from noon) has lots of light choices like chargrilled chicken salad, as well as steaks, grilled fish, gourmet burgers, and wood-fired pizzas with creative toppings. The store is licensed to sell alcohol, but you can also BYO (bottled wine).

151 Marine Parade, North Cottesloe. ☎ **08/9385 2499**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$13–A\$27 (US\$8.50–US\$18), breakfast A\$3–A\$14 (US\$2–US\$9). Buffet breakfast Sat–Sun and holidays A\$15–A\$25 (US\$9.75–US\$16). Kids' menu A\$7–A\$9 (US\$4.55–US\$5.85). AE, DC, MC, V. Open Mon–Fri 6am–late (from 6:30am in winter); weekends and public holidays 7am–late. Bus: 71, 72, 73, or 883.

Indiana Tea House ★ **MODERN AUSTRALIAN** The colonial Asian trap-pings at this bathhouse-turned-restaurant on Cottesloe Beach (bamboo bird-cages, plaster lions, and palms) make me want to head for the tropical timber bar and order a Singapore Sling. Actually, the tasteful stucco building with bay windows and wooden floors is new—it just looks old. The menu mostly sticks to basics like rack of lamb or seafood dishes, with a couple of tasty vegetarian dishes thrown in. This place is just as popular with business folk cutting deals as it is with arty types browsing the papers over their cafe latte. Go in the daytime or at sunset to make the most of those ocean views.

99 Marine Parade (on Cottesloe Beach opposite Forrest St.), Cottesloe. ☎ **08/9385 5005**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$22–A\$48 (US\$14–US\$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 6pm–late. Bus: 71, 72, 73, or 883.

IN FREMANTLE

There's a Fremantle branch of **Fast Eddy's** (see above) at 13 Essex St. (☎ **08/9336 1671**) and another **Miss Maud Swedish Restaurant** (see above) at 33 South Terrace (☎ **08/9336 1599**)—the breakfast buffet is only available weekends, though.

La Pizzeria WOOD-FIRED PIZZA/SEAFOOD Freo has loads of restaurants, but this joint has an upbeat, easy ambience with its terrazzo tables, concrete and timber floor, and stainless-steel bar. Wood-fired pizzas come straight from the funky oven at the back, bearing toppings like grilled eggplant, roast capsicum, and mushrooms. Traditional pastas and seafood main courses get served up, too. It's licensed to serve alcohol but you can also BYO beer and wine.

95 Market St. ☎ **08/9430 6126**. Pizzas A\$13–A\$18 (US\$8.45–US\$12); main courses A\$16–A\$22 (US\$10–US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri–Sun noon–10.30pm. Train: Fremantle.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN PERTH

AQWA (Aquarium of Western Australia) *Kids* You won't catch performing dolphins at Sea World, but there's plenty to see here, including a moving walkway through an underwater tunnel of sharks, rays, turtles, and fish; a touch pool that even has a (small!) shark; and lots of aquariums that showcase the marine life of the Western Australian coast, including pretty leafy sea dragons, coral reefs, jellyfish, cuttlefish, sea snakes, crocodiles, and deadly stonefish that look remarkably like stones. Keepers feed the sharks and the touch-pool creatures daily, and a program of talks and movies on marine creatures is scheduled throughout the day. For A\$90 (US\$59) plus A\$30 (US\$20) for dive gear, qualified divers can dive with sharks. You may need to book this experience weeks in advance. Allow half a day here.

Sorrento Quay at Hillarys Boat Harbour, 91 Southside Dr., Hillarys. ☎ **08/9447 7500**. Admission A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$17 (US\$11) seniors and students, A\$13 (US\$8.45) children 4–14, free for children under 4; A\$58 (US\$38) for a family of 4. Daily 10am–5pm; Wed (Dec–Apr) 10am–9pm. Closed Christmas. Train and bus: Take Joondalup train line to Warwick, transfer to bus 423. By car, take Mitchell Fwy. 23km (14 miles) north, turn left into Hepburn Ave. and carry on to roundabout at entrance to Hillarys Boat Harbour; AQWA is at the western end of the harbour. Free parking.

Art Gallery of Western Australia Most outstanding among this state gallery's international and Australian works is the Aboriginal art collection, regarded as the finest in Australia. Free 1-hour tours of a particular collection run once or twice a day Tuesday through Friday and Sunday; call for times.

Roe St. and Beaufort St. (enter near the walkway opposite Perth Railway Station), Northbridge. ☎ **08/9492 6600** administration, or 08/9492 6622 recorded information line. Free admission. Entry fee may apply to special exhibitions. Daily 10am–5pm; from 1pm Anzac Day. Closed Christmas and Good Friday. Train: Perth. Bus: Blue CAT Stop 7 "Museum."

Cohunu Koala Park Not all states in Australia permit **koala cuddling**, but Western Australia does, and this large park set in bushland is a good place to try it. You can also feed 100 kangaroos, wallabies, and emus wandering in natural enclosures, see wombats and dingoes, walk through an aviary housing Aussie native birds, and see wild water birds on the ponds. The Caversham Wildlife Park in the Swan Valley (see "Side Trips from Perth" later in the chapter) has a bigger and more intriguing range of native species, but it does not allow koala cuddling.

Off Mills Rd. E., Gosnells (in the suburb of Martin on some maps). ☎ **08/9390 6090**. Admission A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) children 5–14. Koala-cuddling photos A\$15–A\$25 (US\$9.75–\$16), or A\$12 (US\$7.80) if you take the photo yourself. Daily 10am–5pm; koala photo sessions 10am–4pm. Closed Christmas. Train: Gosnells on Armadale line then a cab (about A\$15/US\$9.75). Bus: 219. By car: Take Riverside Dr. across Swan River onto Albany Hwy., follow for approx. 25km (16 miles) to Gosnells, turn left onto Tonkin Hwy. and right onto Mills Rd. E. (approx. 35-min. drive from city). A cab from the city is approx. A\$40 (US\$26).

Holmes à Court Gallery This glamorous riverside gallery offers rotating exhibitions from one of the country's most outstanding private art collections, that of Janet Holmes à Court, Australia's richest woman. Many of the works are

Aboriginal or by well-known Australian artists such as Sidney Nolan. The shop sells some impressive crafts pieces.

11 Brown St., East Perth. ☎ 08/9218 4540. Free admission. Thurs–Sun noon to 5pm. Closed public holidays. Train: Claisebrook.

Kings Park & Botanic Garden Smack against the city center and Swan River is this 400-hectare (988-acre) hilltop park of botanic gardens and bushland. You can inspect weird and wonderful Western Australian flora, get to know the solitude of the bush, and bike, hike, or drive an extensive network of roads and trails. Visiting the spring wildflower displays (which peak in Sept–Oct) is a highlight for many. On weekends close to special occasions such as Easter, St. Patrick's Day, or Anzac Day (Apr 25) the lemon-scented gums lining Fraser Avenue are illuminated. There are barbecue and picnic facilities, several extensive playgrounds, bikes for rent (behind the Visitor Information Centre), tearooms, and the incomparable Fraser's (p. 435). Pick up self-guiding maps from the Visitor Information Centre, or join one of the daily free, guided walks leaving from opposite the flower clock on Fraser Avenue. Walks depart 10am and 2pm and take 1½ hours, or 2 or 3 hours on bushwalks (May–Oct only). The **Perth Tram Co.** (☎ 08/9322 2006) runs 1-hour tours of the park and neighboring University of Western Australia in replica 1899 wooden trams. Tours depart daily from outside the Information Kiosk on Fraser Avenue at 11am, 12:15, 1:15 and 2:15pm. Tickets cost A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) for seniors, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children under 15, and A\$30 (US\$20) for families. Buy tickets on board. You can stop en route and rejoin a later tram if you like.

Fraser Ave. off Kings Park Rd. ☎ 08/9480 3659 information kiosk, or 08/9480 3600 administration. Free admission. Daily 24 hr. The Information Kiosk on Fraser Ave. inside the park is open daily from approx. 9:30am–4:30pm (closed Christmas). Hours can vary. Bus: 33 stops outside the Information Kiosk and extends into the park on Sat afternoon, and much of the day Sun and public holidays. Red CAT Stop 25 "Havelock St." is 1 block north of the gates.

Perth Mint ★ This lovely historic building—built in the 1890s to mint currency from the Kalgoorlie gold rush—produced the victors' gold medals in the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Bullion is still traded here. The key event is a gold pour demonstration (on the hour from 10am weekdays, and from 10am–noon inclusive on weekends). You can also see samples of the 2000 Olympics medals, engrave a medallion with your own message, handle a 11kg (400-oz.) gold bar, see gold coins being minted, and ogle the country's biggest collection of nuggets. A 30-minute free guided tour departs half an hour before every pour. A shop sells gold coins and nugget jewelry.

310 Hay St. at Hill St., East Perth. ☎ 08/9421 7277. Admission A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) adults, A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) seniors and students, A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) school-age children; shop admission free. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 9am–1pm. Closed Christmas, New Year's Day, Anzac Day, Good Friday. Red CAT Stop 10 "Perth Mint."

Perth Zoo *Kids* This is a good place to see kangaroos, koalas, numbats, wombats, quokkas, emus, echidnas (the Aussie answer to the porcupine), dingoes, snakes, frogs, and just about every other kind of Aussie wildlife, mostly housed

Moments **Picture Perfect**

For the only photo of Perth you'll need, snap the view over the city and river from the War Memorial in Kings Park—it's superb day or night.

in natural habitats, or in a walk-through aviary. There are plenty of exotic animals, too, including orangutans, Rothschild's giraffes, zebras, lions, rhinos, and elephants. Feeding demonstrations and talks run throughout the day. Koala cuddling is not permitted; for that, head to Cohunu Koala Park (p. 438).

20 Labouchere Rd., South Perth. ☎ **08/9474 3551** for recorded information, or 08/9474 0444 administration. Admission A\$14 (US\$9.10) adults, A\$7 (US\$4.55) children 4–15, A\$38 (US\$25) family of 4. Daily 9am–5pm. Ferry: Barrack St. Jetty to Mends St. Jetty, South Perth. Bus: 35. Ample free parking.

Western Australian Museum *Kids* Kids will like the dinosaur gallery, the drawers full of insects, the blue-whale skeleton on the well-stocked aquatic zoology floor, the “megamouth” shark preserved in a tank set in the ground in the courtyard, and assorted other examples of Australia's weird natural creatures. The main attraction for grown-ups is one of the best collections of Aboriginal artifacts and rare photographs in the country. Allow 90 minutes to see most highlights.

Francis St. at Beaufort St. (or enter off James St. Mall), Northbridge. ☎ **08/9427 2700**. Free admission (donation requested); fee may apply to temporary exhibitions. Daily 9:30am–5pm; Anzac Day and Boxing Day 1–5pm. Closed Christmas and Good Friday. Train: Perth. Bus: Blue CAT Stop 8 “Museum.”

HITTING THE BEACHES

Perth shares Sydney's good luck in having beaches in the metropolitan area—19 of them, in fact, along the 35km (22-mile) Sunset Coast from Cottesloe in the south to Quinns Rocks in the north. Mornings are best as a strong afternoon wind, known as the “Fremantle Doctor,” can be unpleasant, especially in summer. Always swim between the red and yellow flags, which denote a “safe swimming” zone.

A walk/cycle path runs along 15 beaches from Sorrento Beach in the north down to Port Beach on Fremantle's outskirts in the south. It veers inland for a few kilometers at Swanbourne, where it also cuts out for a few blocks; you should easily pick it up again.

On weekends and public holidays from the last Saturday in September to the last Sunday in April, bus no. 458 stops hourly during the day at most beaches from Fremantle to Hillarys. It operates in both directions. You can take a surfboard under 2m (6½ ft.) on the bus.

All beaches have ample parking. The three most popular are:

COTTESLOE This pretty crescent, graced by the Indiana Tea House restaurant (see “Dining” above), is Perth's most fashionable beach. It has safe swimming, a small surf break, and a kiosk. There are a couple of cafes nearby. Train: Cottesloe, then a walk of several hundred meters. Bus direct to the beach: 71, 72, 73, or 883.

SCARBOROUGH Biggest of them all, Scarborough's white sands stretch for kilometers from the base of the Hotel Rendezvous Observation City Perth. Swimming is generally safe, and surfers are always guaranteed a wave, although inexperienced swimmers should take a rain check when the surf is rough. The busy shopping precinct across the road means there's always somewhere to buy lunch and drinks. Bus: 400.

TRIGG Surfers like Trigg best for its consistent swells. It has a kiosk. Bus: 400 to Scarborough, then a 10-minute walk north.

A DAY OUT IN FREMANTLE

The heritage port precinct of **Fremantle**, 19km (12 miles) from downtown Perth on the mouth of the Swan River, is probably best known outside Australia as the

site of the 1987 America's Cup challenge. Just before that, the city embarked on a major restoration of its gracious but rundown warehouses and derelict Victorian buildings. Today "Freo" is a bustling district of 150 National Trust buildings, alfresco cafes, museums, galleries, pubs, markets, and shops in a well-preserved historical atmosphere. It's still a working port so you will see fishing boats unloading, and yachts gliding in and out of the harbor. The ambience is so authentic that locals make a beeline for the place every weekend, resulting in a hubbub of buzzing shoppers, market stall-holders, java drinkers, yachters, tourists, and fishermen. Allow a full day to take in even half the sights—and don't forget to knock back an ale or two on the veranda of one of the gorgeous old pubs.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Parking is plentiful, but driving can be a pain, as many of the streets are one-way. Most attractions are within walking distance, so take the train to Fremantle station and explore on foot (or hop on the free CAT bus; see below).

A nice way to get to the port and see Perth's suburbs at the same time is on cruises run by several companies once or twice a day from Barrack Street Jetty. See "Whale-Watching Cruises, Tram Trips & Other Tours" later in this chapter for cruise operators.

GETTING AROUND The silver Fremantle CAT bus makes a running loop of local attractions every 10 minutes Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 6pm, and on weekends and holidays from 10am to 6pm, except Christmas, Boxing Day (Dec 26) and Good Friday. It is free and departs from the train station.

Fremantle Trams (☎ 08/9339 8719)—an old tram carriage now on wheels, not tram tracks—conducts various tours of 45 or 90 minutes, departing 10 times a day from **Fremantle Town Hall** from 10am, with the last tour at 4pm. Tickets cost A\$10 and A\$15 (US\$6.50 and US\$9.75) adults, A\$9 and \$14 (US\$5.85 and US\$9.10) seniors; and children 15 and under ride free if traveling with two adults. The popular Friday night Ghostly Tour includes a fish and chips dinner and admission to a range of attractions, and costs A\$35 (US\$23) adults and A\$30 (US\$20) children under 15. You must book for Friday nights but not for other tours, and your ticket will include a range of discounts and bonuses at other Fremantle attractions.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Fremantle Tourist Bureau** is located in Town Hall, Kings Square at High Street, Fremantle, WA 6160 (☎ 08/9431 7878). It's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 5pm (until 4pm Sat in winter) and Sunday noon to 4:30pm. The best website is that of the Fremantle Council, www.fremantle.wa.gov.au.

SEEING THE SIGHTS IN FREMANTLE

You will want to explore some of Freo's excellent museums and other attractions below, but take time to stroll the streets and admire the 19th-century offices and warehouses, many now painted in rich historically accurate colors. As soon as you arrive, wander down to the docks—either **Victoria Quay**, where sailing craft come and go, or **Fishing Boat Harbour** off Mews Road, where the boats bring in their catches—to get a breath of salt air.

Freo's best **shopping** is arts and crafts, from hand-blown glass to Aboriginal art to alpaca-wool clothing. Worth a look are the assorted art, crafts, and souvenir stores on High Street west of the mall; those in the **E Shed markets** on Victoria Quay (open Fri–Sun only, and public holidays that fall on a Mon,

9am–6pm); and **Bannister Street CraftWorks**, 81–12 Bannister St. (☎ 08/9336 2035), an arts cooperative where you often spy the artists at work (Tues–Sun 11am–5:30pm; closed Mon). The 150 stalls at the **Fremantle Markets**, 74 South Terrace at Henderson Street (☎ 08/9335 2515), mostly sell cheap imported handicrafts, jewelry, housewares, and clothing, as well as inexpensive food. They're open Friday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday and any public holidays that fall on a Monday from 10am to 5pm.

Popular watering holes are the **Sail & Anchor**, 64 South Terrace (☎ 08/9335 8433), which brews its own Brass Monkey Stout; the **Norfolk**, 47 South Terrace at Norfolk Street (☎ 08/9335 5405); and the beautifully restored front bar and garden courtyard at **Phillimore's Café & Bar** at His Majesty's Hotel, on Phillimore Street at Mouat Street (☎ 08/9335 9596). The happening “cappuccino strip” on **South Terrace** is good for people-watching.

Fremantle Arts Centre Housed in a striking neo-Gothic 1860s building built by convicts, this center contains one of Western Australia's best contemporary arts-and-crafts galleries with a constantly changing array of works. A shop sells crafts from Western Australia, a bookstore stocks Australian art books and literature, and the courtyard cafe is the perfect place to hang out. Free concerts play on the lawn every Sunday and public holiday between October and April from 2 to 4pm.

1 Finnerty St. ☎ 08/9432 9555. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas, Boxing Day, Good Friday, and New Year's Day.

Fremantle History Museum ★ Housed in a convict-built former lunatic asylum next to the Fremantle Arts Centre, this small but densely packed museum uses lots of old photographs and personal possessions to paint a realistic picture of what life was like for Fremantle's first settlers, the Aborigines they displaced, and later generations. It has the dubious reputation of being the most haunted building in Australia.

1 Finnerty St. at Ord St. (part of the Fremantle Arts Centre, see above). ☎ 08/9430 7966. Free admission (donation requested). Sun–Fri 10:30am–4:30pm; Sat 1–5pm. Closed Christmas and Good Friday.

Fremantle Prison ★ This limestone jail, built in the 1850s to house 1,000 inmates by convicts who no doubt ended up inside it, was a maximum-security prison until 1991 and is four times as big as Alcatraz. Take the 75-minute tour, or guide yourself with an audio headset to see cells re-created in the style of past periods of the jail's history, bushranger (highwayman) Joe Moondyne's “escape-proof” cell, the gallows, the workshops, the chapel, the hospital, the jailers' houses, and cell walls featuring some wonderful artwork by the former inmates. An additional 45-minute tour visits the women's prison every hour, after the main tour and is included in the ticket price. You must book for the Wednesday- and Friday-night **candlelight tours** ★ which take 90 minutes.

1 The Terrace. ☎ 08/9336 9200. Free admission to prison precinct and visitor center. Tours A\$14 (US\$9.10) adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) seniors and students, A\$7.15 (US\$4.65) children 4–15, A\$39 (US\$25) families of 5; candlelight tours Wed and Fri A\$18 (US\$12) adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) seniors and students, A\$8.80 (US\$5.70) children, A\$47 (US\$31) families. Daily 10am–6pm. Main tours run every 30 min. from 10am; last tour 5pm. Women's prison tours run every hour from 11:30am; last tour 4:30pm. Candlelight tours Wed and Fri 7pm (winter) or 7:30pm (summer). Closed Christmas and Good Friday.

The Roundhouse This 12-sided jail is the oldest public building in the state (built around 1830). There are no displays or memorabilia, but it's worth a visit for history's sake, and for the sea views on the other side. The time cannon just

to its west, a replica of a gun salvaged from an 1878 wreck, is fired and a **time ball** dropped at 1pm daily, just as it was in the 1800s, from a deck overlooking the ocean. You might be that day's honorary gunner chosen from the crowd! The Roundhouse is a short walk from Fremantle train station.

10 Arthur Head (enter over the railway line from High St.). ☎ 08/9336 6897. Admission by gold coin donation, A\$1 or A\$2 (US\$65¢ or US\$1.30). Daily 10:30am–3:30pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

Shipwrecks Museum You will love the tales of old wrecks and displays of pieces of eight, glassware, cannon, and other deep-sea treasure recovered off the Western Australian coast. The museum is renowned for its work in maritime archaeology. Displays date from the 1600s, when Dutch explorers became the first Europeans to encounter Australia. One of the best displays is the appalling tale of the *Batavia*, wrecked north of Perth in 1629, where most of the survivors were massacred by a handful of mutineers.

Cliff Street. ☎ 08/9431 8444. Free admission. Daily 9:30am–5pm; from 1pm on Anzac Day and Boxing Day. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

Western Australian Maritime Museum ★★ This fascinating museum moved into a new home at the western end of Victoria Quay in December 2002. The museum looks at Fremantle's history and present-day operations as a port, signaling and piloting, navigation ancient and modern, current sailing technology, naval defense, sea trade, and Aboriginal maritime heritage. It also features historic or rare boats, including *Australia II* (the Aussie yacht that won the America's Cup), and you can also tour the HMAS *Ovens*, an Oberon class submarine, every half-hour from 10am daily. You can buy either a joint ticket for the museum and sub, or just for the sub. Museum staffer Elaine Berry leads a 90-minute **Maritime Precinct Walk** for A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for seniors and groups of 4 or more, and A\$3 (US\$1.95) for school-age kids; book by calling the museum ☎ 08/9431 8455, or Elaine at home (☎ 08/9336 1906) on weekends. Tours can be scheduled for a day and time to suit you.

Victoria Quay, Fremantle. ☎ 08/9335 8921. Admission A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$3 (US\$2) children 5–15, A\$5 (US\$3.25) concessions, A\$22 (US\$14) for family of 6. Entry to submarine only A\$8 (US\$5.20) adults, A\$3 (US\$2) children 5–15. Daily 9:30am–5pm; from 1pm on Anzac Day and Boxing Day. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

WHALE-WATCHING CRUISES, TRAM TRIPS & OTHER TOURS

Boat Torque Cruises (☎ 08/9430 5844), **Golden Sun Cruises** (☎ 08/9325 9916), and **Oceanic Cruises** (☎ 08/9325 1191) run an assortment of morning, afternoon, sunset, luncheon, dinner, half-, and full-day cruises on the Swan River, some as far as Fremantle, and to historic homes and vineyards in the Swan Valley. Oceanic Cruises does a lunch cruise to see wild sea lions at Carnac Island just off Fremantle. The cruise costs A\$79 (US\$51) adults, A\$69 (US\$45) ages 13 to 17, and A\$39 (US\$25) kids 4 to 12 from Perth, less from Fremantle. **Captain Cook Cruises** (☎ 08/9325 3341) also runs cruises on the Perth–Fremantle route, and does an Aboriginal cultural cruise that includes a guided bushland walk and costs A\$35 (US\$23) adults, A\$30 (US\$20) seniors and students, and A\$20 (US\$13) kids 4 to 14. Cruise with lunch is slightly more.

September through November, Perth's waters are alive with southern right and humpback **whales** returning from the north with their calves. To join a 2- or 3-hour jaunt to watch them, contact Boat Torque Cruises, Oceanic Cruises, or the **Rottneest Express ferry** (☎ 08/9335 6406), which does whale-watch trips between ferry runs. Departure days and times vary from year to year with every cruise operator, so check ahead. Prices range from A\$25 (US\$16) on the Rottneest

Express up to around A\$40 (US\$26) for the other companies, and about half price for kids. Most depart Fremantle; Boat Torque also does them from Hillary's Boat Harbour (near the AQWA aquarium; see "What to See & Do in Perth" earlier in this chapter). The company provides coach connections to Hillarys from Perth. The **Aquarium of Western Australia (AQWA)** runs whale-watching tours on Wednesdays, weekends, and public holidays during the season (Sept to early Dec) at 9am and 11:30am. Tours, limited to 12 people, are on board an ocean raft which gives "eye level" encounters with these magnificent mammals. The cost is A\$90 (US\$59) per person and includes admission to AQWA. Bookings are essential (☎ 08/9447 7500).

The **Perth Tram Co.** (☎ 08/9322 2006) makes a daily-guided loop of city attractions, the casino, and Kings Park in replica 1899 wooden trams; hop on and off as often as you wish. Tickets, which you buy on board, cost A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) for seniors, A\$7 (US\$4.55) for children 4 to 14, and A\$37 (US\$24) families. City-casino, city-Kings Park, and casino-Kings Park legs are also available. Join anywhere; the tram starts at 565 Hay St. at 9:40am and makes six 90-minute loops a day.

Feature Tours (☎ 1800/999 819 in Australia, or 08/9475 2900; www.ft.com.au) runs half- and full-day coach tours to attractions in and around Perth.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & SPECTATOR SPORTS

BIKING Bike tracks run along the Swan River, through Kings Park, and down to the beaches. There is a great 9.5-km (6-mile) track around Perth Water, the broad expanse of river in front of the CBD, that starts at the Swan River on Riverside Drive in the city and goes over the Causeway bridge, back along the other bank and over the bridge at the Narrows back to the city. The state Department of Transport's cycling division, **Bikewest**, publishes bike route maps to the city. They are available in bike shops, most newsagents, and at **Map World**, 900 Hay St. (☎ 08/9322 5733).

An hour's rental with **Koala Bike Hire**, in the parking lot behind Fraser's restaurant in Kings Park (☎ 08/9321 3061), is A\$5 (US\$3.25), or A\$16 (US\$10) for the day, which includes a helmet (required by law in WA), lock, and maps of Kings Park.

CANOEING, KAYAKING & WHITE-WATER RAFTING **Rivergods** (☎ 08/9259 0749; www.rivergods.com.au) runs canoeing, sea kayaking, and whitewater rafting adventures on the Swan and other rivers near Perth. The company's 1-day sea kayak trip to snorkel and swim with wild sea lions in the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, just south of Perth, gets rave reviews. You also see penguins being fed on Penguin Island. The cost for the day is A\$125 (US\$81). This trip runs daily from September to June.

FISHING Dhufish, pink snapper, cod, marlin, shark, tuna, and mahimahi run in the ocean off Perth. **Mills Charters** at Hillarys Boat Harbour, about 25km (15½ miles) north of the city center (☎ 08/9246 5334; www.millscharters.com.au), runs full-day deep sea fishing trips aboard a 70-foot cruiser for A\$100 (US\$65) per person weekdays and A\$110 (US\$72) on weekends and public holidays. That includes tackle and bait; BYO lunch and drinks. The company also runs game fishing day trips, for which you're looking at A\$295 (US\$192) per person weekdays or A\$310 (US\$202) weekends and holidays. Another great fishing spot is Rottneest Island (see "Side Trips from Perth" below). **Rottneest Malibu Diving** (☎ 08/9292 5111) rents tackle for beach and jetty fishing, and does fishing tours to the pick of the island's bays in winter months.

GOLF Convenient to the city is **Burswood Park Golf Course**, part of the Burswood International Resort Casino complex, across the Swan River from town on the Great Eastern Highway, Burswood (☎ 08/9362 7576 for the pro shop). Great city views, and wild black swans and pelicans make this a pretty course. A 9-hole round is just A\$14 (US\$9.10) weekdays and A\$17 (US\$11) weekends. A cart for 9 holes is A\$22 (US\$14), and club rental is A\$17 (US\$11). Even more scenic are the 27 championship fairways designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., at **Joondalup Resort**, Country Club Boulevard, Connolly, a 25km (15½-mile) drive north of Perth (☎ 08/9400 8811 pro shop); and **The Vines** in the Swan Valley (☎ 08/9297 3000 for the resort, or 08/9297 0777 for the pro shop), which has two 18-hole bushland courses. Joondalup was ranked No. 1 Resort Golf Course in Australia by *Golf Australia* magazine in 2003. Kangaroos often come onto both courses. Expect to pay between A\$35 and A\$55 (US\$23–US\$36) for 9 holes at either resort, and A\$90 (US\$59) at Joondalup on weekends.

SAILING The tallest Tall Ship in Australia, the lovely three-masted barquentine **STS Leeuwin II** (☎ 08/9430 4105; www.leeuwin.com), sails from B Shed at Victoria Quay, Fremantle, when it is not out on voyages around Australia. You may be one of up to 40 passengers, but you still get the chance to try your hand at sailing the way it used to be done. Day trips—usually on weekends—are from 10am to 3pm and cost A\$99 (US\$64) for adults and A\$55 (US\$36) for children under 12. The ship sometimes does 3- or 4-hour sails in the mornings, afternoons, and at sunset. Experienced sailors can sail on Wednesday afternoons in summer from about 3 to 5pm with members of the **Royal Perth Yacht Club**, Australia II Drive, Crawley (☎ 08/9389 1555; ask for the sailing administrator), if there is a place free aboard. It's not spinnaker sailing on Wednesdays, so the action is at an easy pace. All-white dress standards apply.

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING Rottnest Island's corals, reef fish, and limestone caverns, in 18m to 35m (59 ft.- to 128-ft.) visibility, are a gift from heaven to Perth divers and snorkelers. Contact **Rottnest Malibu Diving** (☎ 08/9292 5111) on Rottnest Island (see "Side Trips from Perth" below) to rent gear or join a dive trip. **Diving Ventures**, at 384 South Terrace, Fremantle (☎ 1800/655 330 in Australia, or 08/9430 5130; www.dventures.com.au/dv.shtml), also conducts dive day trips from Perth to Rottnest Island, and also off Dunsborough in the state's Southwest to the wreck of the HMAS *Swan*, a 113m (246-ft.) long destroyer which was scuttled for divers' pleasure a couple of years ago. This trip costs A\$160 (US\$104) with two dives, including all gear. The company also does 3-day live-aboard trips to Ningaloo Reef, and "introductory" dives for any adventurer without dive qualifications who wants to try the sport in the company of an instructor. It also rents scuba gear and conducts dive courses. It has a city outlet at 222 William St., Northbridge, in Perth (☎ 08/9228 2630).

SURFING You will find good surfing at many beaches, Scarborough and Trigg in particular. See the "Hitting the Beaches" section earlier in this chapter. Rottnest Island (see "Side Trips from Perth" below) also has good breaks. **Murray Smith Surf Centre**, Shop 14, Luna Maxi Mart, Scarborough (☎ 08/9245 2988), rents long boards for A\$20 (US\$13) for half a day or A\$30 (US\$20) for the day, plus a A\$100 (US\$65) refundable deposit. They also rent body boards.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL (AFL) Perth's Aussie Rules team, the **West Coast Eagles**, is based at Subiaco Oval, 171 Subiaco Rd., Subiaco (☎ 08/9381 1111). Book tickets through **Ticketmaster 7** (☎ 13 61 22 for bookings;

1902/29 1502 is a toll line for recorded events information). Three matches a year take place at the WACA cricket ground (see below). The season runs from March to August; most games play Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons.

CRICKET The Western Australian Cricket Association grounds, **Nelson Crescent**, East Perth (☎ 08/9265 7222), whose acronym WACA is pronounced “Whacker” by loving fans, is host to major matches over the November to March season. Games range from an afternoon to 5 days, and are played mostly by day, occasionally at night. Tickets cost as little as A\$8 (US\$5.20) for many lesser matches and go up to about A\$45 (US\$29) for the big matches. Book seats to international matches through **Ticketmaster 7** (☎ 13 61 22; 1902/291 502 is a toll line for recorded events information).

THE SHOPPING SCENE

Perth's city center is a major retail precinct. Most shops are located on the parallel Hay Street and Murray Street malls, located 1 block apart, and in the network of arcades running off them such as the Plaza, City, and Carillon City arcades. **London Court** off Hay Street Mall is a recreated Tudor street lined with one-off fashion, gift, and jewelry shops. Off Murray Street Mall on Forrest Place is the **Forrest Chase shopping center** housing the Myer department store and boutiques on two gallery levels. Add to your collection of international designer brands on posh **King Street**.

If you want to avoid the chains, skip the city center and spend half a day in **Subiaco** or “Subi,” where Hay Street and Rokeby Road are lined with smart boutiques, home accessories shops, art galleries, cafes, antiques shops, and markets. The Colonnade shopping center at 388 Hay Street showcases groovy young Aussie fashion designers in its Studio 388 section. Fremantle's shopping is mostly limited to a good selection of crafts, markets, and Aboriginal souvenirs.

Shops are open until 9pm on Friday in the city, and until 9pm on Thursday in Subiaco and Fremantle.

ABORIGINAL ART & CRAFTS

Creative Native, 32 King St. (☎ 08/9322 3398), stocks Perth's widest range of Aboriginal arts and crafts. Upstairs is a gallery selling original works by some renowned Aboriginal artists. There's another branch at 65 High St., Fremantle (☎ 08/9335 6995).

Indigenart, 115 Hay St., Subiaco (☎ 08/9388 2899), and 82 High St., Fremantle (☎ 08/9335 2911), stocks works on canvas, paper, and bark, as well as artifacts, textiles, pottery, didgeridoos, boomerangs, and sculpture, by world-famous and lesser-known Aboriginal artists from all over Australia.

JEWELRY

Western Australia is renowned for farming the world's best South Sea pearls off Broome, for Argyle diamonds mined in the Kimberley, and for being one of the world's biggest gold producers. **Kailis Australian Pearls**, corner of Marine Terrace and Collie Street, Fremantle (☎ 08/9336 3633), is part of the world's biggest pearling operations and sells South Sea pearl strands and gold jewelry.

Some of Perth's other leading jewelers, where you can buy opals, Argyle diamonds, and Broome pearls, are family-owned sister stores, **Costello's**, Shop 5–6, London Court (☎ 08/9325 8588), and **Swan Diamonds**, Shop 4, London Court (☎ 08/9325 8166); there is also **Linneys**, 37 Rokeby Rd., Subiaco (☎ 08/9382 4077).

Finds Desert Designs

Aboriginal artist **Jimmy Pike** grew up in Western Australia's Sandy Desert and was one of the first to start transferring his Dreamtime art and designs to fabrics, in 1981. He died in late 2002, but his commercial work lives on in the clothing and accessories—including cute children's gear—bearing his designs at the **Desert Designs** boutique at 114 High Street Mall, Fremantle (☎ 08/9430 4101). For paintings and limited-edition prints by Jimmy Pike and many other Aboriginal artists, visit the **Japingka Gallery**, 47 High St., Fremantle (☎ 08/9335 8265). It also stocks didgeridoos, artifacts, and stunning high-quality hand-tufted woolen floor rugs.

For opals to suit all budgets, head to **Quilpie Opals**, Shop 6, Piccadilly Arcade off Hay Street Mall (☎ 08/9321 8687).

PERTH AFTER DARK

Scoop, available at bigger newsagents for A\$8.90/US\$5.80 (www.scoop.com.au), is a good source of information on festivals and concerts, performing arts, classical music, exhibitions, and the like. Your best guide to dance clubs, rock concerts, gig listings, art-house cinemas, theater and art galleries is the free weekly **X-press** magazine available at pubs, cafes, and music venues every Thursday. The **West Australian** and **Sunday Times** newspapers publish a limited amount of entertainment information, including cinema guides.

Two major booking agents handle bookings to most of the city's major performing arts, entertainment, and sporting events: the performing arts-oriented **BOCS** (☎ 1800/193 300 in Australia, or 08/9484 1133; www.bocsticketing.com.au) and the sports- and family-entertainment-oriented **Ticketmaster 7** (☎ 136 109; www.ticketmaster7.com). Book opera, ballet, the orchestra, and the Black Swan Theatre Company (see below) through BOCS.

THE PERFORMING ARTS The **West Australian Opera** (☎ 08/9321 5869 administration, or 08/9265-0950 bookings) and **West Australian Ballet** (☎ 08/9481 0707 administration) usually perform at **His Majesty's Theatre**, 825 Hay St., a restored "grande dame" venue from the early 1900s. Perth's leading theatrical company, the **Black Swan Theatre Company** (☎ 08/9388 9388 administration), plays at theaters around town. The **West Australian Symphony Orchestra** (☎ 08/9326 0000) usually performs at the **Perth Concert Hall**, 5 St. Georges Terrace next to the Duxton Hotel. This hall has the best acoustics of any such venue in Australia; such acts as the London Philharmonic, comedian Billy Connolly, and legendary blues guitarist B. B. King have performed here.

The month-long **Perth International Arts Festival** (www.perthfestival.com.au; book through BOCS) showcases contemporary performing and visual arts every January, February, or March, with many events taking place outdoors. In summer, look for outdoor concerts or jazz at **Perth Zoo** (☎ 08/9474 3551 for recorded information, or 08/9474 0449 administration), movies at Perth's several outdoor cinemas, and open-air concerts, plays, and movies in **Kings Park** (☎ 08/9480 3600).

PUBS & DANCE CLUBS Northbridge houses most of city's lively pubs and dance clubs. Don't forget Freo has good pubs, too (see "A Day Out in Fremantle" earlier in this chapter). For a trendy take on the traditional corner pub, head

to **The Brass Monkey**, 209 William St. at James Street, Northbridge (☎ 08/9227 9596). Downstairs are several bars including a wine bar serving gourmet pizzas, and a beer garden. Wednesday through Saturday head upstairs to the Glasshouse for live entertainment, including the **Laugh Resort comedy club** from 8pm Wednesdays for a A\$10 (US\$6.50) cover. In Subiaco, suits flock to the “Subi,” also known as the **Subiaco Hotel**, 465 Hay St. at Rokeby Road, Subiaco (☎ 08/9381 3069), a popular historic pub with a stylish cafe, great cocktails, and live jazz on Wednesday and Saturday nights.

Metropolis Concert Club, 146 Roe St., Northbridge (☎ 08/9228 0500), is a huge complex of dance floors and bars over several levels. It’s open Friday from 9pm and Saturday from 8pm, until very late. If your dancing ‘til 6am days are over but you still know how to hit the dance floor, hit it at **Margeaux’s**, a nightclub popular with the over-30s crowd, located in the **Parmelia Hilton**, 14 Mill St. (☎ 08/9215 2000). It opens Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 9pm until 3:30am.

THE CASINO A 2,300-seat theater that hosts major international stars is located in the **Burswood International Resort Casino**, on the Great Eastern Highway just over the river (☎ 08/9362 7646 for information, or call BOCS for bookings—see above). Live bands, disco, cabaret performers, or karaoke play nightly in the Cabaret Nightclub free, and there are nine restaurants and six bars within the complex. On the main gaming floor are 88 tables and 1,300 computerized gaming machines. Some of the Casino’s most popular games include roulette, blackjack, and two-up. There’s also a VIP players’ room and a Keno Lounge. Except for Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Anzac Day, the casino is open 24 hours. Dress code is “neat and tidy” with smarter standards required after 7pm. The Casino is open to everyone over the age of 18. It’s about a A\$13 (US\$8.45) cab ride from the city, or you can take a train to Burswood station.

2 Side Trips from Perth

ROTTNEST ISLAND: GETTING FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE FISHES

19km (12 miles) W of Perth

The delightful wildlife reserve of **Rottnest Island** ★★ just off the Perth coast is like the city’s own Great Barrier Reef in miniature. Its jewel-bright turquoise waters, warm currents, rocky coves, and many sheltered beaches harbor coral reefs and 360 kinds of fish that make for fabulous snorkeling. You may spot humpback whales from September to December, and dolphins surfing the waves anytime. The island is also home to 10,000 quokkas, cute otter-like marsupials that reach up to your knees. A wonderful thing about Rottnest is that it’s car-free. Everyone gets around by bike (or bus, if you tire of pedaling). The island is 11km (7 miles) long and 4.5km (3 miles) across at its widest point.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Boat Torque Cruises** (☎ 08/9221 5888) and **Oceanic Cruises** (☎ 08/9325 1191) operate services at least three times a day from Perth (trip time: about 1 hr. 45 min.), and four to seven times a day from Fremantle (trip time: about 25 min.). The **Rottnest Express ferry** (☎ 08/9335 6406) runs four or five times a day from Fremantle only. Round-trip fares from Perth average about A\$60 (US\$39), or about A\$40 (US\$26) from Fremantle. Boat Torque and Oceanic pick you up free from most Perth and Fremantle hotels.

You pay about A\$5 (US\$3.25) more if you return on a later day. Most boat operators offer day-trip and accommodation packages, as well as straight transfers.

Kookaburra Air (☎ 08/9354 1158; www.kookaburra.iinet.net.au) and **Rottnest Air Taxi** (☎ 1800/500 006 in Western Australia, or 08/9292 5027; www.rottnest.de) provide aerial transfers. A round-trip trip in a four-seater aircraft (including the pilot) with Rottnest Air Taxi is A\$180 (US\$117) for the plane.

VISITOR INFORMATION Information is dispensed by the **Rottnest Island Visitor & Information Centre** (☎ 08/9372 9752), which is right at the end of the jetty on the island. The center is run by the **Rottnest Island Authority** (☎ 08/9432 9300; www.rottnest.wa.gov.au). The Perth Visitor Centre (see “Visitor Information” in the Perth section earlier in this chapter) also has information.

GETTING AROUND Ferries pull into the jetty in the main town, called Settlement, at Thomson Bay. **Rottnest Bike Hire** (☎ 08/9292 5105), next to the Rottnest Hotel near the jetty, rents 2,300 bikes in every size, speed, and type, as well as holders for everything from surfboards to babies. An 18-speed bike is A\$20 (US\$13) for a 24-hour day (plus a A\$25/US\$16 refundable deposit), including a helmet (compulsory in Oz) and lock. There is no need to book a bike. The yellow **Bayseeker** bus circumnavigates the island every half-hour, calling at 16 stops including all the best bays. An all-day ticket costs A\$7 (US\$4.55) for adults, A\$3.50 (US\$2.25) for children 4 to 12, and A\$17 (US\$11) for families of 4 (extra child A\$1.65/US\$1.05). Buy tickets on board.

A free bus runs regularly between the airport and four of the five small communities around the island—Thomson Bay Settlement, Geordie, Fay’s, and Longreach Bays. It does not run to the Basin, which is a 15-minute walk from the Settlement.

SNORKELING, DIVING, SURFING & FISHING

Most people come to Rottnest to snorkel, swim, surf, dive, or fish. As soon as you arrive, rent a bike and your preferred aquatic gear, and pedal around the coast until you come to a beach that suits you. (Don’t forget to carry drinking water and food, because the only shops are at Settlement.) The Basin, Little Parakeet Bay, Little Salmon Bay, and Parker Point are good snorkel spots. The visitor center sells maps to suggested **snorkel trails**. Surfers should try Cathedral Rocks or Strickland Bay. Fishermen will catch squid, salmon, and tailor, as well as all kinds of reef fish. The island’s dive shop, **Rottnest Malibu Diving** (☎ 08/9292 5111), near the jetty, rents snorkel gear, dive gear, wet suits, surfboards, body boards, aqua-bikes, and fishing tackle. The company conducts two daily trips to some of the 100-plus dive sites around Rottnest. Some feature limestone caverns and some of the island’s 14 shipwrecks. A shore or boat dive with all gear included is A\$60 (US\$39). If you have never dived before but want to try, a 1- to 2-hour

Tips Island Orientation Tours

Many first-time visitors take the **2-hour Island Bus Tour** because it is a good introduction to the bays and the island’s cultural and natural history—and because it includes a stop to see the quokkas. It costs A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$11 (US\$7.15) for kids 4 to 12, and A\$50 (US\$33) for families of four (extra child A\$5/US\$3.25). Departure times vary, but you can expect them to run twice a day, usually around 10:30am and 1:30pm. Buy tickets from the visitor center.

theory lesson followed by a boat dive is A\$200 (US\$130) including return transport from Perth.

FOR HISTORY BUFFS

Rottnest has quite a bit to offer history buffs, who may want to walk (45-min. trip), cycle, or take the train to the Oliver Hill 1930s gun emplacements, which has intact 9.2-inch guns and battery tunnels housing an engine room, a plotting room, and observation posts. You can explore the 1.5km (1-mile) heritage trail on your own (maps are at the visitor center), or take a guided 1-hour tour on the hour between 11am and 2pm inclusive. The train fare, which includes the tour except for the last trip of the day, costs A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults, A\$7.70 (US\$5) for children 4 to 12, and A\$39 (US\$25) for families of four (extra child A\$3.85/US\$2.50). It departs from the station near the visitor center hourly from 10:30am to 2:30pm.

Volunteer guides run several free 1-hour walking tours. One is a historical tour of architectural points of interest around Thomson Bay, many of which were built in the 19th century, such as the Governor's residence, the chapel, the octagonal prison, the small **museum** (☎08/9372 9753; open daily 11am–4pm), and the former Boys' Reformatory. Another heritage trail takes you to the memorial marking de Vlamingh, the Dutch explorer who named the island Rott Enest (Rat Nest) in 1696 when he mistook quokkas for rats. There are also quokka walks, an Aboriginal historical walk, and a walk to Bathurst lighthouse.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Call the **Rottnest Island Authority's accommodation booking service** (☎ 08/9432 9111; www.rottnest.wa.gov.au) to book one of its 250-plus holiday homes, apartments, cabins, historic cottages, or the campground. Don't expect anything new or upscale. Water and electricity restrictions mean no accommodation is air-conditioned. Accommodations during the Western Australian summer and Easter school vacation times are allotted on a ballot system, for which you must submit an application form (see the website or call 08/9432 9178). Book well in advance at any time because accommodations are limited.

Apart from the restaurants at the hotels listed below, the casual tearooms, and a couple of lackluster takeout joints, your only other dining option is the excellent DOME cafe at the jetty.

Shoulder season is usually April through May, and again September through November or December. Winter is June through August.

Allison Camping Area This is the island's only camping area, located at Thomson Bay, with unpowered tent sites. There is a shower and toilet block, and gas barbecues. Alcohol is not permitted, and a quiet time rule applies from 11pm to 7am.

c/o Rottnest Island Authority, E Shed, Victoria Quay, Fremantle, WA 6160. ☎ 08/9432 9111. Fax 08/9372 9715. www.rottnest.wa.gov.au. 50 tent sites. Tent site A\$6 (US\$3.90) per night.

Rottnest Hotel Plans are underway to add a 100-room hotel to this 1864 building near the jetty. Once the state governor's summer residence, the existing hotel is now the local pub where day-trippers gather in the sports bar or the large open-air beer garden to admire the ocean views over an ale or two. At press time, the building had pleasant, modern motel-style rooms, some with a small patio and sea views, but this may have all changed by the time you visit. The prices may have, too.

Bedford Ave., Rottnest Island, WA 6161. ☎ 08/9292 5011. Fax 08/9292 5188. rotnesthotel@axismgt.com.au. 18 units (all with shower only). Peak (Dec 21–Jan 31) A\$180–A\$200 (US\$117–US\$130) double; summer (Feb to mid-Apr and Sept–Dec) A\$140–A\$170 (US\$91–US\$111) double; autumn (Apr–May) A\$150–A\$170 (US\$98–US\$111) double; winter (June–Aug) A\$100–A\$120 (US\$65–\$78) double. Extra person A\$40 (US\$26). Crib A\$15 (US\$9.75). Rates include continental breakfast. Ask about mid-week packages in winter. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; beer garden; barbecue. *In room:* TV, fridge, no phone.

Rottnest Youth Hostel As well as dorm rooms, this 54-bed YHA/Hostelling International-property has private family rooms furnished simply with a double bed and double bunks. Located in Kingstown, 1.2km (less than a mile) from Thomson Bay, it is housed in 1936 barracks that were used by the Australian Army until 1984. It serves cheap meals, provides a barbecue, and has a TV/video room with 24-hour Internet access and a fireplace. Bookings essential. A free bus will pick you up when you arrive.

Kingstown Barracks, c/o Post Office, Rottnest Island, WA 6161. ☎ 08/9372 9780. Fax 08/9292 5141. 9 units, none with bathroom. A\$46 (US\$30) double, twin, or family. A\$20 (US\$13) per person in a 10-bed dorm. A\$11 (US\$7.15) child under 18. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant.

IN PURSUIT OF THE GRAPE IN THE SWAN VALLEY

20km (13 miles) NE of Perth

Twenty minutes from the city center of Perth is the Swan Valley, home to two of Australia's best wine labels. In all there are 30 or so wineries along with wildlife parks, antiques shops, a few arts and craft galleries, several good restaurants, and Australia's best golf resort. Some restaurants and wineries close Monday and Tuesday.

Lord Street from the Perth city center becomes Guildford Road and takes you to the historic Art Deco town of Guildford at the start of the Swan Valley. Drop into the **Guildford & Swan Valley Visitors Centre**, 111 James St., Guildford (near Meadow St.), WA 6055 (☎ 08/9379 9420; www.swanvalley.com.au). It's open daily from 9am to 4pm. Several companies (see "Whale-Watching Cruises, Tram Trips & Other Tours" above) run day tours and cruises from Perth.

TOURING THE WINERIES & OTHER THINGS TO DO

Most Swan wineries are small family-run affairs, but an exception is **Houghton Wines**, Dale Road, Middle Swan (☎ 08/9274 9540), Western Australia's oldest, biggest, and most venerable winery. The big-beamed timber cellar has old winemaking machinery on show, and there are beautiful picnic grounds (especially nice in Nov when mauve jacaranda trees blossom gloriously), a cafe, and an art gallery selling works by local artists. Open 10am–5pm daily except Good Friday and Christmas. The other big-name winery is **Sandalford Caversham Estate**, 3210 West Swan Rd., Caversham (☎ 08/9374 9300). You may want to take its 90-minute winery tour, which takes you along walkways over the hi-tech production areas. The A\$15 (US\$9.75) fee includes a tasting of premium wine and a wine-education kit. It runs three times daily. The winery also has a good gift shop, a pretty vine-covered casual dining area, and a pleasant restaurant. Both wineries' cellar doors are open daily for free tastings from 10am to 5pm.

If you have kids, call at the **Caversham Wildlife Park** (☎ 08/9274 2202). After a move in 2003 to a new site in Whiteman Park, West Swan, it has smart new homes for its collection of 200 species of mostly Western Australian wildlife. You can stroke koalas (but not hold them), cuddle wombats and joeys (baby kangaroos) sometimes, feed kangaroos, pet farm animals, and take a camel ride. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm, closed Christmas. Admission is A\$12 (US\$7.80) for

adults, A\$9 (US\$5.85) for seniors and students, and A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children 2 to 14.

Shoppers should browse the junk-shop strip on **James Street**, in Guildford (most shops are open daily), or visit **Woodbridge**, a beautifully restored 1883 manor house at Ford Street, in West Midland (☎ 08/9274 2432). The house is open daily (closed Wed) from 1 to 4pm; closed all July for maintenance, and Christmas, Boxing Day (Dec 26), and Good Friday. Admission is A\$3.85 (US\$2.50) for adults, A\$1.65 (US\$1.10) for seniors and school-age children, and A\$8.80 (US\$5.70) for a family. Its river-view tearooms open for lunch.

WHERE TO STAY

The Swan is too close to Perth to require an overnight stay, but you may want to treat yourself.

Worth a Splurge

Hansons Swan Valley ★★ *Finds* “At last!” some of you will cry as you step into the sleek entry hall—it’s a B&B that’s not hokey or drowning in chintz. Instead, these rooms have stark white walls and groovy furniture à la Philippe Starck. Most rooms have king-size beds; all have bathrobes and minibars stocked with cheeses, chocolates, and other goodies. Hair dryers and irons are available. Former advertising executives Jon and Selina Hanson built this house to create a slick B&B of the kind they would like to stay in themselves. It is set on a 10-hectare (25-acre) farm. It also has great breakfasts and dinners in the new restaurant. No smoking indoors.

60 Forest Rd., Henley Brook, WA 6055. ☎ 08/9296 3366. Fax 08/9296 3332. www.hansons.com.au. 10 units (6 with Jacuzzis and shower, 4 with shower only). A\$195–A\$290 (US\$127–US\$189) double. Rates include full breakfast. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Take West Swan Rd. to Henley Brook and turn right at Little River Winery into Forest Rd. Hansons is on the left at the end of the road. No children under 15. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor swimming pool; limited room service; in-room massage (with 2 hr. notice); laundry/dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

Lamont’s Winery, Restaurant & Gallery ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN

This highly regarded restaurant is housed in a rustic timber building at Lamont Winery. Full-flavored main courses such as chargrilled beef with field mushrooms, beetroot and walnut tapenade, and delicious desserts such as white chocolate parfait with poached stone fruit and almond biscotti, ensure lots of regulars make the drive from Perth. Marron, a local crustacean, is a specialty. An alfresco menu serves up casual fare like pizza or antipasto to eat outside at the farm tables on weekends. A gallery on the grounds shows Western Australian art and crafts.

85 Bisdee Rd. (off Moore Rd.), Millendon near Upper Swan. ☎ 08/9296 4485. Reservations recommended, especially for dinner. Main courses A\$29–A\$32 (US\$19–US\$21). Alfresco menu A\$8.80–A\$18 (US\$5.70–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 10am–5pm; open for dinner 1st Sat of month 6:30pm–late. Closed Christmas to New Year’s Day. Take the Great Northern Hwy. to Baskerville near Upper Swan, take a right onto Haddrill Rd. for 1.6km (1 mile), right onto Moore Rd. for 1km (just over ½ mile), and right onto Bisdee Rd.

YORK: TAKING A STEP BACK IN HISTORY

97km (60 miles) E of Perth

The state’s first inland settlement, this peaceful National Trust-classified village on the Avon River oozes charm from an unspoiled Victorian streetscape. There are lovely B&Bs, historic buildings of stone wrapped by wrought-iron lace verandas, art galleries, a rose garden, a medley of museums including one housing a

A\$30-million (US\$19½-million) display of vintage cars, and one of the state's finest jarrah furniture shops.

GETTING THERE From downtown Perth, take Lord Street, which becomes Guildford Road to Midland, where it becomes the Great Eastern Highway. Follow this for 32km (20 miles) to The Lakes, then take the York turnoff right onto the Great Southern Highway for 47km (29 miles). The drive takes about 75 minutes. **Westrail** (☎ 13 10 53 in Western Australia, 1800/099 150 from interstate, or 08/9326 2222) runs a daily coach service from Perth for A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$5.15 (US\$3.35) children under 16, one-way. Check ahead if you plan to travel on a public holiday or during Western Australian school vacations, as schedules sometimes change then. The **York Tourist Bureau** is within the Town Hall, 81 Avon Terrace at Joaquina Street, York, WA 6302 (☎ 08/9641 1301; fax 08/9641 1787; www.yorktouristbureau.com.au). It's open daily 9am to 5pm.

EXPLORING THE TOWN Wandering the streets is the best way to soak up the charm of York's old buildings, like the restored railway station, the Town Hall built in 1911, the library, the convent, old pubs like the York and the Castle, St. Patrick's church, the Uniting Church, the Holy Trinity Church with its stained-glass windows, the fire station, and the old hospital. Among the sights worth seeing is the **Old Gaol and Court House**, 132 Avon Terrace (☎ 08/9641 2072), housing a colonial-era courtroom still in use, cells, stables, and a trooper's cottage. It's open Monday through Friday 11am to 4pm, weekends and holidays from 10am to 4pm, although times can vary as the staff is volunteer; closed Christmas and Good Friday. Admission is A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults, A\$1.50 (US\$98¢) for seniors and children under 14, and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for families.

It's worth the short walk out of town to the excellent **Residency Museum**, Brook Street (☎ 08/9641 1751), for its displays of everything from prayer books, children's toys, needlework, and old kitchenware to antique furniture, farm tools, and other memorabilia of life in York in days gone by. It's open Tuesday through Thursday and holidays from 1 to 3pm, Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4pm, and also Monday through Friday from 1 to 3pm in school vacations (times vary as the staff are volunteers; closed Christmas and Good Friday). Admission is A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults and A\$1 (US\$65¢) for children ages 5 to 16.

If you visit on a weekend or public holiday in autumn or spring (usually Oct–Nov, and Apr–May), you can explore the evolution of the rose at the **Avon Valley Historical Rose Garden** (☎ 08/9641 1469), 2km (1¼ miles) out of town on Osnaburg Road. Admission is A\$4 (US\$2.60) adults, free for children under 15. Of the several special-interest museums in York, the **York Motor Museum**, 116–124 Avon Terrace (☎ 08/9641 1288), is the most spectacular. Among the 150 or so veteran, vintage, classic, and racing vehicles and motorcycles on display are the world's first car (an 1886 Benz), a 1904 Napier, and the Williams Formula 1 car in which Aussie Alan Jones won the world championship in 1980. The museum is open daily from 9:30am to 4pm. Admission is A\$6 (US\$3.90) for adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) for seniors, and A\$3 (US\$1.95) for children under 12.

Take a peek at the superb craftsmanship at **Jah-Roc the Mill Gallery** (☎ 08/9641 2522) in the wonderful Old Flour Mill on Broome Street, even if you can't afford tens of thousands of dollars for a dining table handcrafted from a single slab of recycled jarrah. Open daily from 10am to 5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Hillside Country Retreat ★ *Finds* The romantic rooms in this gracious historical homestead have all been refurbished in 2003 and by the time you arrive

a planned day spa and sauna may have opened. Each individually furnished room has a potbelly stove, and you get treated to fresh flowers in your room, complimentary port, sherry, chocolates, and a daily newspaper. You can choose between a room in the homestead or in the rustic mud-brick servants' quarters. Breakfast is served in the quaint tea house in the garden. No smoking indoors. Pets are welcome. Owners Andrew and Joy Savage also offer self-contained accommodation in a cottage called **Riverside** on York's Avon Terrace.

30 Forrest St., York, WA 6302. ☎ **08/9641 1065** or 0416/121 392. www.yorkwa.com.au/hillside. 4 units (all with shower only). A\$120 (US\$78) double. AE, MC, V. Rates include full breakfast. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool, tennis courts, golf course nearby. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

NEW NORCIA: A TOUCH OF EUROPE IN AUSTRALIA

132km (83 miles) N of Perth

It's the last thing you expect to see in the Australian bush—a Benedictine monastery town with European architecture, a fine museum, and a collection of Renaissance art—but New Norcia is no mirage. Boasting a population of 55 (when everyone's at home, that is), this pretty town and the surrounding 8,000-hectare (19,760-acre) farm were established in 1846 by Spanish Benedictine missionaries. Visitors can tour chapels with beautiful frescoes, marvel at one of the finest religious art collections in Australia, stock up on famous New Norcia nutcake straight from the monastery's 120-year-old wood-fired ovens, and attend prayers with the 18 monks who live here.

GETTING THERE New Norcia is an easy 2-hour drive from Perth. From downtown, take Lord Street, which becomes Guildford Road to Midland; here join the Great Northern Highway to New Norcia. Government rail organization **WAGR** (☎ **13 10 53** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2000) runs a coach service (there is no rail line) Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from Perth for A\$14 (US\$9.10) one-way. **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ **13 20 30** in Australia) coaches run from Perth on Friday only for A\$40 (US\$26). Coach schedules will probably require you to stay at least overnight, if not longer, in order to have time to see anything. Check ahead if you plan to travel on a public holiday or during Western Australian school vacations, because schedules sometimes change then. Day tours from Perth are available.

Conference groups can book the town solid, so reserve accommodations and tours in advance, especially in wildflower season from August to October. Write for information and book town tours at the **New Norcia Tourist Information Centre**, New Norcia, WA 6509 (☎ **08/9654 8056**; fax 08/9654 8124; www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au), in the Museum and Art Gallery, just off the highway behind St. Joseph's, beside the Trading Post and Roadhouse. Its hours are those of the museum and gallery (see below).

EXPLORING THE TOWN & MONASTERY

The New Norcia Tourist Information Centre's intriguing 2-hour walking tours are a must. Tickets cost A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults and A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) for children 12 to 17, free for younger children. Tours depart daily except Christmas at 11am and 1:30pm, and they allow time for you to attend prayers with the monks if you wish. The guide strolls you around some of the town's 27 National Trust—classified buildings and gives an insight into the monks' lifestyle. You will also see the frescoes in the old monastery chapel and in St. Ildephonsus's and St. Gertrude's colleges. Much of the monastery is closed to visitors, but the tour does show you the fruit gardens and a glimpse of the men-only courtyard. Heritage

walking-trail maps sold for A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) at the Tourist Information Centre include more buildings not visited on the tour, such as the octagonal apiary.

The **museum and art gallery** 🌟 is full of relics from the monks' past—old mechanical and musical instruments, artifacts from the days when New Norcia was an Aboriginal mission, gifts to the monks from the Queen of Spain, and an astounding collection of paintings by Spanish and Italian artists, dating back to the 1400s. Give yourself at least an hour here. The museum and gallery are open daily from 9:30am to 5pm August through October, and from 10am to 4:30pm November through July (closed Christmas). Admission is A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for adults, A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) for seniors and students, and A\$1 (US\$0.65) for children 6 to 12.

Apart from joining the monks for 15-minute prayers in the monastery chapel five times a day (noon and 2:30pm are the most convenient for day visitors), you can join them for Mass in the Holy Trinity Abbey Church Monday through Saturday at 7:30am and on Sunday at 9am, or at 5:30pm for vespers.

WHERE TO STAY

New Norcia Hotel When they thought a Spanish royal visit to New Norcia was imminent in 1926, the monks built this grandiose white hotel fit for, well, a king. Sadly, the royals never materialized, and the building was used as a hostel for parents of the children boarding at the town's colleges. In 1955, it became a hotel and subsequently fell into disrepair. Only the grand central staircase, soaring pressed-metal ceilings, and imposing Iberian facade hint at the splendor that was. Three years ago, new carpets, curtains, and beds were put in, but be prepared for rather grim rooms. Only one has an en suite bathroom, air-conditioning, and a TV. Still, it's rather nice to eat a meal at the rather dated bar or the charmingly faded Dining Room, and to sit on the veranda upstairs. The bar gets jumping on Friday and Saturday nights when local farmers come to town. This is the only place to stay in town. No smoking.

Great Northern Hwy., New Norcia, WA 6509. ☎ 08/9654 8034. Fax 08/9654 8011. hotel_nn@hotmail.com. 17 units, 1 only with bathroom. A\$77 (US\$50) double without bathroom; A\$90 (US\$59) double with bathroom. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Breakfast A\$11 (US\$7.15) continental or A\$18 (US\$12) cooked; half price for kids. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. **In room:** Fridge, coffeemaker, iron, no phone.

3 Margaret River & the Southwest: Wine Tasting & Underground Wonders

Margaret River 290km (181 miles) S of Perth

Say "Margaret River" to Australians and their eyes light up as they reply "great wine!" The area's 42 wineries nestle among statuesque forests of karri, the world's third-tallest tree. The wineries contribute only around 1% of Australia's wine output, yet they turn out some 10% of the country's top-notch premium wines. Not even most Aussies know about the Southwest's other drawing cards—like the spectacular surf breaks on the 130km (81-mile) coast from Cape Naturaliste in the north to Cape Leeuwin on the southwest tip of Australia; the coastal cliffs, perfect for abseiling (rappelling) and rock climbing; and the honeycomb of limestone caves filled with stalagmites and stalactites. Whales pass by June through December; wildflowers line the roads August through October; and wild birds, kangaroos, and shingle-backed lizards are everywhere. If you like hiking, pack your boots, because there are plenty of trails, from a 15-minute stroll around Margaret River township, to a 6-day **Cape-to-Cape trek** 🌟 along the sea cliffs. The Southwest is one of Australia's last great wildernesses.

Like wine regions the world over, the Southwest has its fair share of B&Bs, arts and crafts galleries, and some super restaurants. Plan to stay at least 2 days.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE It's a 3½-hour drive to Margaret River from Perth; take the inland South Western Highway (the quickest route) or the tad more scenic Old Coast Road to Bunbury, where you pick up the Bussell Highway to Margaret River.

Air Australia (☎ 08/9332 5011; www.airaustralia.net) operates charter flights from Perth's Jandakot airport and a Busselton-Margaret River air taxi service twice a day on weekdays for A\$140 (US\$91) per person one-way. **Leeuwin Estate** winery does charter flights from Perth. Contact the Fremantle office (☎ 08/9430 4099; www.leeuwinestate.com.au) for details.

Southwest Coachlines (☎ 1800/800 530 in Australia, or 08/9324 2333) runs a daily service, and two on weekends and public and Western Australian school holidays, to Margaret River from Perth for about A\$25 (US\$16). There is no train, but government rail organization **WAGR** (☎ 13 10 53 in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2000) runs a coach service from Perth, twice daily every day except Saturday. It takes over 5 hours, and on some services you transfer by local bus (which does not run Sun or public holidays) to a different coach in Bunbury. You could also connect to this coach service in Bunbury by taking WAGR's twice-daily *Australind* train from Perth to Bunbury—it shaves travel time down to a bit over 4½ hours. Fares are A\$28 (US\$18) with either mode. WAGR schedules can differ on a public holiday or during Western Australian school vacations.

VISITOR INFORMATION You will pass many wineries before you get to Margaret River township, but it's worth heading first to the **Margaret River Visitor Centre** to pick up a winery guide. It's at 100 Bussell Hwy. (at Tunbridge St.), Margaret River, WA 6285 (☎ 08/9757 2911; www.margaretriverwa.com). It is open daily from 9am to 5pm, closed Christmas.

GETTING AROUND Nine kilometers (5½ miles) past Busselton, which marks the start of the Southwest, the Bussell Highway makes a left and heads south among the wineries through **Vasse**, 25km (15½ miles) on through the village of **Cowaramup**, 11km (7 miles) farther through Margaret River proper, and 43km (27 miles) on to windswept **Cape Leeuwin** and the fishing port of **Augusta**.

Tips Special Events in the Southwest

Every February or March, **Leeuwin Estate Winery** (☎ 08/9430 4099; www.leeuwinestate.com.au) stages an **outdoor concert** ♫ starring some leading showbiz light (in 2003 it was K. D. Lang; past performers include Shirley Bassey, Julio Iglesias, and Diana Ross) and usually a major orchestra, attended by 6,000 picnicking guests. Tickets are A\$105 (US\$68). This is a big local event, so book months ahead.

The **Margaret River Wine Region Festival** (☎ 08/9759 9990; www.mrwinefest.org.au) runs over 4 days each November, with more than 40 wineries and restaurants taking part. Wine and food events for both the enthusiastic novice or the wine connoisseur are matched with jazz, blues, classic, and headline concert acts (usually in the vineyards), celebrity chef cooking classes, and tours of art studios, regional cheese farms, and olive groves.

Tips Taking Wine Home with You

The place to buy wine if you want to take it out of Australia is the **Margaret River Regional Wine Centre**, 9 Bussell Hwy., Cowaramup (☎ 08/9755 5501), because most wineries don't deliver internationally. It stocks about every local wine, does daily tastings of select vintages, sells maps, visitor guides, and winery guides, and has an expert staff to help with your purchase, and even tailor your day's foray. It is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 7pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm (closed Christmas, Good Friday, and sometimes New Year's Day). Order off its website at www.mrwines.com.

A car is close to essential. **Avis** (☎ 1800/679 880 within Australia for reservations in the Southwest, or 08/9757 3686) and **Hertz** (☎13 30 39 in Australia, or 08/9758 8331) have offices in Margaret River.

Margaret River Tours (☎ 0419/917 166) and **Milesaway Tours** (☎ 1800/818 102 in Australia, or 08/9754 2929) run sightseeing, adventure, and winery tours from Margaret River.

TOURING THE WINERIES

Fans of premium wines will have a field day in the Southwest. Cabernet sauvignon and merlot are the star reds, while chardonnay, semillon, and sauvignon blanc are the pick among whites. Most wineries offer free tastings daily from 10am to 4:30pm.

The "big three" are **Cape Mentelle**, 4km (2½ miles) west of Margaret River on Wallcliffe Road (☎ 08/9757 3266); **Leeuwin Estate** ⚡, Stevens Road, Margaret River (☎ 08/9430 4099); and **Vasse Felix**, Caves Road at Harman's Road South, Cowaramup (☎ 08/9756 5000). Leeuwin Estate has a towering reputation, especially for Chardonnay. It does winery tours three times a day. A relative newcomer, **Voyager Estate**, Stevens Road, Margaret River (☎ 08/9757 6354), has exquisite rose gardens around a South African Cape Dutch-style cellar, and does a highly drinkable shiraz grenache. Other labels to look for are Arlewood Estate, Cullen Wines, Evans & Tate, Fermoy Estate, Lenton Brae, Pierro, and Sandalford Wines.

WHAT ELSE: CAVES, BUSH TUCKER & MORE

Six of the Southwest's 350 or so limestone caves are open to the public, some with elaborate stalactite formations. Before or after you visit, call at **CaveWorks** eco-interpretive center at Lake Cave, Caves Road, 15km (9 miles) south of Margaret River's Wallcliffe Road (☎ 08/9757 7411), open daily except Christmas from 9am to 5pm. Entry is free if you tour Lake, Jewel, or Mammoth caves, or else A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults and A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children ages 4 to 15.

Lake Cave, right outside CaveWorks and 300 steps down an ancient sinkhole, contains a tranquil pond in which exquisite stalactites are reflected. Four kilometers (2½ miles) north along Caves Road is **Mammoth Cave**, where you can see the fossilized jaw of a baby *zygotaurus trilobus*, an extinct giant wombat. **Jewel Cave**, 8km (5 miles) north of Augusta on Caves Road, is the prettiest. Tours of Lake and Jewel and self-guided tours (using a CD audio system) of Mammoth cost A\$14 (US\$9.10) for adults and A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) for children 4 to 15. A 7-day Grand Pass to all three plus CaveWorks saves you money.

Mammoth is open from 9am to 5pm (last tour at 4pm); tours of Lake and Jewel run hourly from 9:30am to the last tour at 3:30pm. Sometimes extra tours are scheduled during school vacations. The caves are open every day except Christmas. Book tours through CaveWorks.

Calgardup and **Giants** caves, run by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), are a more challenging experience. The caves are not electrically lit and there are no guides. Visitors are equipped with helmets, lamps, and information, and allowed to spend as long as they like exploring.

Calgardup goes to a depth of 27m (81 ft.) and has boardwalks to help negotiate it. Highlights are the stream system that has trickled through the caves for 150,000 years and the tiny cave creatures that can sometimes be spotted in the water. Tree roots, mainly from the red gum (marri) trees growing overhead, dangle down and trail into the water. It will probably take you about 45 minutes to traverse the length of the cave. Calgardup Cave is on Caves Road, about a 12 minutes' drive south of Margaret River and 3 minutes north of Conto's Road turn-off. It is open daily from 9am to 4.15pm.

Giants Cave, 20 minutes South of Margaret River on Caves Road, is one of the largest and deepest caves on the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge. It is 575m (1725 ft.) long and about 86m (258 ft.) deep. Giants is a 'through-fare' cave—you enter and exit some distance apart. Some areas of Giants Cave are on the natural floor of the cave, while in other areas you will have to climb ladders and staircases to get through. This is a dark and challenging cave, so you need to be quite fit and at least over 6 years of age. Make sure you wear sturdy shoes or boots. Entry is from 9:30am–3:30pm school and public holidays, and some other times. Call the information center (see below) to find out.

Entry to Calgardup and Giants each costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) per adult, A\$5 (US\$3.25) per child under 16, or A\$30 (US\$20) family of 6 (includes helmets and torches). Buy your tickets at the National Park Information Centre (☎ **08/9757 7422**) at Calgardup Cave. It also has walking maps and information on camping sites and other activities in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.

Another "adventure cave" where you get down and dirty crawling on your hands and knees, in the protective clothing supplied, is offered at **Ngilgi Cave**, Caves Road, Yallingup (☎ **08/9755 2152**), for A\$40 (US\$26) for anyone over 15. It departs daily at 9:30am and takes about 3 hours. Book 24 hours ahead. Ngilgi's main chamber has translucent stalactite "shawls," which anyone can explore on a semi-guided tour. This costs A\$14 (US\$9.10) for adults and A\$8 (US\$5.20) for children 5 to 17, or A\$38 (US\$25) for a family, and runs half-hourly from 9:30am, with the last tour at 3:30pm (4pm during school vacations, 5pm during Christmas school vacations). Torchlight tours cost A\$14 (US\$9.10) adults and A\$9 (US\$5.85) children (minimum A\$80/US\$52 group). The cave opens every day except Christmas.

You can pick your own kiwifruit, raspberries, and other fruit at **The Berry Farm**, 222 Bessell Rd. outside Margaret River (☎ **08/9757 5054**), or buy attractively packaged sparkling, dessert, and port wines; jams; and vinegars. The farm is open daily 10am to 4:30pm (closed Christmas, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and Good Friday).

Try to make time for a tour offered by "**Bushtucker Woman**" **Helen Lee** ♀ (☎ **08/9757 1084** or 0419/91 1971; www.bushtuckertours.com). On one tour, she has you canoeing up the river, exploring a cave, and eating smoked emu, grub paté, and other Aboriginal delicacies on a river island. It runs daily from 10am to 2pm (no tour Tues and Thurs in winter), and costs A\$40

Moments Scenic Drives & a Spectacular View

The picturesque 106km (66-mile) north-south drive along Caves Road, the length of the Southwest from Busselton in the north, to Augusta on Cape Leeuwin in the south, is worth doing. Don't miss **Boranup Drive** , a scenic detour off Caves Road through towering karri trees—although your rental car is not insured on its unpaved surface! It departs Caves Road 6km (3¾ miles) south of Mammoth Cave and rejoins it after a 14km (8¾-mile) meander. Near Augusta, a sweeping ocean view—which sometimes even includes seals, whales, and dolphins—awaits those who climb to the top of Cape Leeuwin lighthouse. It is open every day except Christmas from 9am to 5pm. Tours are run every 45 minutes from 9am to 1pm, more often in school holidays. The stairs close at 3:45pm. Entry is A\$4 (US\$2.60) for adults and A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children under 16.

(US\$26) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for kids under 16. Her winery tour has an alternative bent incorporating short karri-forest walks, insights into organic winemaking, tastings of up to 40 wines at five wineries, a visit to Leeuwin Estate's herb garden, and a picnic lunch of bush tucker and local cheeses, hams, and dips. She'll teach you things like how vaporized peppermint oil from the native trees condenses on the grapes to create the distinctive flavor of Margaret River whites. The 5-hour tour departs daily at noon and costs A\$55 (US\$36) per person.

Surfing lessons  from four-time Western Australian professional surfing champion **Josh Palmateer** (☎ 08/9757 3850 or 0418/958 264) are a must! Two-hour lessons in the gentle waist-deep surf at Prevelly Park Beach, 9km (5½ miles) west of Margaret River, run daily and cost A\$80 (US\$52) per person, or A\$40 (US\$26) per person for two or more. Lessons run October through June. If you are already a Master of the Surf Universe, try legendary Smiths Beach or the Three Bears (Mama, Papa, and Baby) break at Yallingup, the double-barreled North Point at Gracetown, or the plentiful breaks at Prevelly Park. **Beach Life**, 117 Bussell Hwy., Margaret River (☎ 08/9757 2888), rents boards for A\$40 (US\$26) for 24 hours.

From June to December whales play just offshore along the coast. There is a **whale lookout** near the Cape Naturaliste lighthouse. Daily 3-hour whale-watching cruises with **Naturaliste Charters**  (☎ 08/9755 2276) depart June to September from Augusta. September to December, departures switch to Dunsborough, where humpbacks rest their calves. Expect to pay around A\$45 (US\$29) for adults and around A\$25 (US\$16) for children 4 to 12, free for children under 4.

Arts and craft galleries are thick on the ground in the Southwest. One of the most upscale is **Gunyulgup Galleries**, Gunyulgup Valley Drive near Yallingup (☎ 08/9755 2177), which has top-of-the-line jewelry, glass, ceramics, and artworks. Open daily 10am–5pm.

WHERE TO STAY

It's not the prettiest village in the Southwest, but Margaret River has necessities like banks, a supermarket, a few restaurants, and shops. The blink-and-you-miss-it hamlet of Cowaramup is closer to more wineries, and has a general store, a restaurant, and one or two interesting crafts shops. Vasse is a tiny settlement at

the northern edge of the Southwest. Some places may demand a minimum 2-night stay on weekends.

IN MARGARET RIVER

Rosewood Cottage This cozy B&B accommodates guests in English-style rooms with exposed roof beams, soft floral decor, and ceiling fans. The spacious two-bedroom apartment has a living area and kitchenette, set up for travelers with disabilities. Guests can rest up in winter by the fire in the sitting room equipped with CDs, a TV, and books, or out on the veranda overlooking the lovely garden in summer. Rosewood is famous for its homemade waffles and jams at breakfast, served in the country-style dining room. It is an easy stroll to the Margaret River main street from the house. No smoking indoors.

54 Wallcliffe Rd., Margaret River, WA 6285. ☎ 08/9757 2845. Fax 08/9757 3509. www.westnet.com.au/rosewoodcottage. 5 units (4 with shower only). A\$99–A\$105 (US\$64–US\$68) double with continental breakfast; A\$109–A\$179 (US\$71–US\$116) apt with continental breakfast. Ask about winter discounts. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk. *In room:* A/C (2 rooms only), kitchenette (apt only), coffeemaker, iron, no phone.

IN COWARAMUP

The Noble Grape English cottage gardens surround this B&B, recently built in a colonial style. Each well-maintained room is motel-like, but homey and welcoming with a modern bathroom, heating, ceiling fans, a comfy sitting area, and a small rear patio opening onto bird-filled trees. One caters to travelers with disabilities, and a family room sleeps 5. Although you're on the highway here, the rooms are quiet. Hair dryers are at reception. No smoking indoors.

Lot 18, Bussell Hwy., Cowaramup, WA 6284. ☎/fax 08/9755 5538. www.babs.com.au/noblegrape. 6 units (all with shower only). A\$99 (US\$64) double. Extra person A\$22 (US\$14). Rate includes continental breakfast. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Self-service laundry. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

IN VASSE

Newtown House Set in lavender and rose gardens nice for lazing in after a hard day's wine tasting, this National Trust-listed 1851 homestead has four pretty rooms with "contemporary country" decor, furnished with wrought-iron table and chairs, pine furniture, and cute touches like potpourri "dream sacks" on your pillow. All have ceiling fans. The fixings for a gourmet continental breakfast are sent up to your room the night before. Don't miss the excellent restaurant (see "Where to Dine" below). No smoking indoors.

Bussell Hwy. (9km/5½ miles past Busselton), Vasse, WA 6280. ☎/fax 08/9755 4485. 4 units (all with shower only). A\$138 (US\$90) double. Rate includes continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. The property is on the right just after the Bussell Hwy. turns left (south). Children not permitted. **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Many wineries also serve light meals, which can be accompanied by some of what you've sampled. Good restaurants attached to wineries include those at Vasse Felix, Amberley Estate, Driftwood Estate, and Brookland Valley Vineyard. Of these, **Leeuwin Estate**, Stevens Road, Margaret River (☎ 08/9430 4099), is probably the best. You can also stock up for a picnic at the supermarket in Margaret River. Cape Mentelle and Vasse Felix both have green shady **picnic areas** beside a brook.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Newtown House ★★ MODERN FRENCH/AUSTRALIAN The Southwest boasts some of the best restaurants in Australia, and this is one of them. Folks come from far and wide to savor chef Stephen Reagan's skill in preparing such

dishes as rare local venison with roast pears, beetroot, and red-wine glaze. Desserts are no letdown, either—caramel soufflé with lavender ice cream and hot caramel sauce is typical. Located in a historic homestead, the restaurant consists of two simple, intimate rooms with sisal matting and contemporary, boldly colored walls. Even better, it's BYO. Drop by for morning or afternoon tea, if you like.

737 Bussell Hwy. (9km/5½ miles past Busselton), Vasse. ☎ 08/9755 4485. Reservations recommended, especially at dinner. Main courses A\$20–A\$25 (US\$13–US\$16) lunch, A\$27–A\$32 (US\$18–US\$21) dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 10am–10:30pm or later.

The Valley Café ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Voted most popular Southwest cafe in 1998, 1999, and 2000, this pleasant place serves up stylish fare with views over the countryside. Lunch might be risotto with Augusta smoked chicken, sun-dried capsicum (bell pepper), and shaved Parmesan. Dinner might be cured Atlantic salmon with polenta, asparagus, and caramelized balsamic vinegar. Courses are “Medium” and “Large,” so you can eat light if you wish, or just come for coffee and cake. BYO.

Carters Rd. (near Caves Rd.), Margaret River. ☎ 08/9757 3225. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$18–A\$30 (US\$12–US\$20); average A\$24 (US\$16). AE, MC, V. Wed–Sun 10am–4pm; Fri–Sat (and Sun on 3-day weekends) 6–10pm.

4 The Goldfields

595km (372 miles) E of Perth

After Paddy Hannan struck gold in 1893, the wheatbelt town of Kalgoorlie found itself sitting on the “Golden Mile,” at the time the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth in the world. Today Kalgoorlie (pop. 33,000) is still an Outback boomtown, a mixture of yesteryear charm and 21st-century gold fever. The town is literally perched on the edge of the **Super Pit**, the world's biggest open-cut gold mine, currently 4.5km (3 miles) long, 1.5km (1 mile) wide, and 290m (951 ft.) deep. It yields around 20,000kg (680,000 oz.) of the yellow stuff every year—a mere 53kg (1,863 oz.) a day. An estimated 850,000kg (30 million oz.) is still in the ground. Hardly surprisingly, Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines, which operates the pit, is Australia's biggest gold producer.

Walking down the streets fronted with wrought-iron lace verandas is like stumbling onto a Western movie set. Countless bars still do the roaring trade they notched up in the 1890s, only now they serve gold mining executives from Adelaide and Perth.

Life on the Golden Mile is not so lively for everyone, however. Just down the road 39km (24 miles) is **Coolgardie** (pop. 1,400), another 1890s gold rush boomtown where the gold ran out in 1963. The town's semi-abandoned air is a sad foil to Kalgoorlie's brash energy, but much of her lovely architecture remains. The thing to do here is just wander the gracious streets for a pleasant nostalgia buzz.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Airlink** (book through Qantas ☎ 13 13 13 in Australia) flies to Kalgoorlie from Perth daily. **Skywest** (☎1300/660 088; www.skywest.com.au) flies daily from Perth, except Saturdays.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) makes the 8-hour trip once a week from Perth for A\$118 (US\$77). Greyhound's service from Adelaide also runs once a week, takes around 27 hours, and costs A\$264 (US\$172). **Goldrush Tours** (☎ 1800/620 440 in Australia, or 08/9021 2954) runs a 6¾-hour express coach service from Perth every day for A\$88 (US\$57).

Fun Fact **Streets of Gold**

In Kalgoorlie's young days, its streets were paved with a blackish spoil from the mining process called "tellurides." When someone realized tellurides contain up to 40% gold and 10% silver, those streets were ripped up in one big hurry. The city fathers had paved the streets with gold and didn't even know it!

Kalgoorlie is a stop on the 3-day **Indian Pacific** ★ train service, which runs between Sydney and Perth through Adelaide twice a week in both directions. Contact the **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47 in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au) for details. The **Prospector** train makes 10 trips a week from Perth to Kalgoorlie for A\$55 (US\$36). Call the government rail organization **WAGR** (☎ 13 10 53 in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2000).

From Perth, take the Great Eastern Highway. If you want to make the 2,182km (1,364-mile) journey on the Eyre Highway from Adelaide, which features the longest straight stretch of highway in the world on the mind-numbingly empty Nullarbor Plain, contact the South Australian or Western Australian state auto clubs listed under "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2 for advice. There are only a handful of small towns and gas stops en route.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Kalgoorlie-Boulder Tourist Centre**, 250 Hannan St., Kalgoorlie, WA 6430 (☎ 1800/001 880 in Australia, or 08/9021 1966; www.kalgoorlieandwagoldfields.com.au), dispenses information on Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, and outlying ghost towns and regions. Boulder is a suburb of Kalgoorlie. The center's walking-trail map to the town's architecture, which sells for a few dollars, is worth buying. The center is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm, and Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays from 9am to 5pm. The **Coolgardie Visitor Centre**, Bayley St., Coolgardie, WA 6429 (☎ 08/9026 6090), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND **Avis** (☎ 08/9021 1722), **Budget** (☎ 08/9093 2300), **Hertz** (☎ 08/9093 2211), and **Thrifty** (☎ 08/9021 4722) have offices in Kalgoorlie.

There are also coach, 4WD, and guided self-drive 2WD and 4WD bush tours of Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, and outlying ghost towns, and local tour operators will take you gold prospecting in outlying regions from half a day for up to several days.

TOURING A GOLD MINE & OTHER ADVENTURES

As you might guess, gold is a common thread running through many of the town's attractions. One of the best is the **Mining Hall of Fame** (☎ 08/9026 2700; www.mininghall.com), Broad Arrow Road, 6km (3¾ miles) north of the Tourist Centre on the Goldfields Highway. Opened in late 2001, it has five interactive galleries focusing on mining's modern high-tech face. Find out how prospecting is done, how the business of mining is conducted, go underground in an old mine, pan for gold, watch a gold pour, see a video in a re-created miner's tent, and pore over an extensive collection of mining memorabilia, machinery, and huts in a miners' village. It's open daily from 9am to 4:30pm, except Christmas, Boxing Day (Dec 26), and New Year's Day. Admission A\$12 (US\$7.80) adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) seniors and students, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children, and A\$35 (US\$23)

families for aboveground activities only; if you want to join the underground tour, too, the prices are A\$20 (US\$13) adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) for seniors and students, A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children, and A\$50 (US\$33) for a family. Underground tours and gold panning are run four times a day, more often in WA school holidays. Allow half a day to see everything. The complex is still a work-in-progress with new attractions, including a Chinese garden and more galleries to open during 2003.

The **WA Museum Kalgoorlie-Boulder**, 17 Hannan St. (☎ 08/9021 8533), is worth a look for the first 11kg (400-oz.) gold bar minted in town, nuggets and jewelry, and historical displays. It is open daily from 10am to 4:30pm, closed Christmas and Good Friday. Admission is free (donation requested). Tours are at 11am and 2:30pm. Allow an hour.

Don't leave town without seeing the **Super Pit open-cut mine**. There is a look-out platform at Outram Street in Boulder, off the Goldfields Highway (called the Eastern Bypass Rd. on some maps). It is open daily from 6am to 7pm, except when blasting closes it temporarily (check with the tourist center). Entry is free.

Another reminder of the days when miners spent their spare time trying for riches of another kind by indulging in two-up (a simple game involving betting on a penny landing heads or tails) can be found about 12km (7½ miles) north of Boulder on the Goldfields Highway. The original shanty that housed the **Bush Two-Up School** still stands, but if you want to try your hand, the only place to do it is at Sheffield's restaurant in the **Recreation Hotel**, 140 Burt St., Boulder (☎ 08/9093 3467), which runs two-up games on Wednesday and Sunday at 3pm. You must be 18 or over to play.

The **Royal Flying Doctor Service** (☎ 08/9093 7500) base at Kalgoorlie-Boulder Airport is open for visitors to browse memorabilia, see a video, and look over an aircraft if one is in. It is open Monday through Friday from 11am to 3pm. Admission is A\$2 (US\$1.30), free for children under 6. Allow 45 minutes.

Full-blood Aborigine Geoffrey Stokes of **Yamatji Bitja Aboriginal Bush Tours** ★ (☎ 08/9093 3745 or 0407/378 602) grew up the Aboriginal way in the bush. On his full-day 4WD tours, you'll forage for bush tucker, learn bushcraft, and do things like eat witchetty grubs, cook kangaroo over a fire, or track emus. Tours cost A\$80 (US\$52), half price for kids 4 to 12. Geoff also does twilight campfire evenings, and overnight or longer tours in the bush.

"Kalgoorlie's Most Unusual Attraction" award goes to **Langtrees 181**, 181 Hay St. (☎ 08/9026 2181), a working brothel styled into a sex industry museum in the heart of Kalgoorlie's (in)famous red-light district. For the most part housed in red and pink corrugated iron sheds festooned with colored lights, this neck of town is a popular drive-by spot among the blue-rinse bus-tour set, who get a kick out of returning the cheery waves of the workers standing in their doorways. Ninety-minute tours, fun rather than sleazy, of some of the 12 theme-rooms cost A\$25 (US\$16). Tours depart 1, 3, and 7pm daily.

EXPLORING COOLGARDIE

Wandering Coolgardie's quiet streets graced with historic facades is a pleasant stroll back in time. Signboards erected around the place, many with photos, detail what each site was like in the town's heyday at the turn of the last century. The **Goldfields Exhibition**, 62 Bayley St. (☎ 08/9026 6090), tells the town's story in an 1898 building once used as the mining warden's courthouse (the visitor center is also here). It has a huge bottle collection, too. Admission is by gold coin donation. It's open Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 3pm. The **Railway**

Station Museum (☎ 08/9026 6388) in Woodward Street, houses gold rush and transport memorabilia in the original 1896 station building and the engine, two carriages, and the guard's van of a turn-of-the-20th-century steam train. It's open daily (except Wed) 10am to 4pm (closed Christmas, Boxing Day, and Good Friday). Admission is by donation.

If you like period architecture and interiors, browse the restored National Trust-owned **Warden Finnerty's Residence** (☎ 08/9026 6028) on McKenzie Street off Hunt Street. It was built in 1895 for the mining warden. Opening hours vary, so call before you go. Admission is by gold coin donation.

The **Coolgardie Camel Farm**, 4km (2½ miles) west of Coolgardie on the Great Eastern Highway (☎ 08/9026 6159), leads rides through the bush on the mode of transport they used in the goldfields in the old days—camels. It only operates during school and public holidays.

WHERE TO STAY

Mercure Inn Overland Kalgoorlie This serviceable motel is on the highway about 2km (1¼ miles) from town, so you will need your own wheels or a cab to go exploring. Tours pick up from the door. The rooms are quiet, modern, clean, and a good size; family rooms have an extra bedroom and kitchenettes with stovetop and microwave, and there are also barbecue facilities if you feel inclined to cook for yourself.

Lower Hannan St., Kalgoorlie, WA 6430. ☎ 1300/66 6565 in Australia, 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 08/9021 1433. Fax 08/9021 1121. www.accorhotels.com.au. 89 units (with shower only). A\$117 (US\$76) double; A\$159 (US\$103) family. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room w/existing bedding. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (at dinner only); laundry service and coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV with free in-house movies, minibar, coffeemaker, kitchenette (family rooms only), iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Akudjura ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN The Italianate outdoor terrace under sailcloth and the timber floors, curved silver bar, and blond-wood furniture make this Kalgoorlie's first groovy restaurant. A bright, young staff provides snappy service from a long and stylish menu featuring items like chicken Caesar salad, smoked salmon fettuccine, kangaroo steak, and seafood dishes (yep, even in the desert) like Tasmanian salmon in a citrus and coriander dressing. Lighter fare is available outside meal hours.

418 Hannan St. (next to Hannan's View Motel). ☎ 08/9091 3311. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$13–A\$32 (US\$8.45–US\$21); lunch averages A\$13 (US\$8.45). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am to approx. 10pm.

5 The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea

The Midwest and Northwest coasts of Western Australia are treeless, riverless semi-desert, occupied by vast sheep stations and a handful of people. Temperatures soar to over 115°F (46°C) in summer, and the Outback sand burns orange in the blazing sun. But it's not the land you come here for—it's what's in the sea. Since the 1960s, a pod of **bottle-nosed dolphins** has been coming into shallow water at **Monkey Mia** ★, the World Heritage-listed Shark Bay Marine Park, to greet shore-bound humans. Their magical presence has generated worldwide publicity and drawn people from every corner of the globe.

Another 872km (545 miles) by road north on the Northwest Cape, adventure seekers from around the world come to snorkel with awesome whale sharks—measuring up to 18m (59 ft.) long—every fall (Mar to early June). The Cape's

parched shore and green waters hide an even more dazzling secret though—a second barrier reef 260km (163 miles) long and 2km (1¼ miles) wide called Ningaloo Marine Park. It protects 250 species of coral and 450 kinds of fish, dolphins, mantas, whales, and turtles in its 5,000 sq. km (1,640 sq. miles). Even the Great Barrier Reef can't beat **Ningaloo Reef's** ★ proximity to shore—just a step or two off the beach delivers you into a magical underwater garden. What is so amazing about the reef is not that it is here, but that so few people know about it—a mere 8,000 tourists visit each year. To you, that means beaches pretty much to yourself, seas boiling with marine life humans haven't scared away, unspoiled scenery, and a genuine sense of the frontier.

The Midwest and Northwest are lonely, remote, and really too hot to visit between November and March, when some tour operators close down on account of the heat. The best time to visit is April to October, when it is still warm enough to swim, though snorkelers might want a wetsuit from June through August. Both regions are too far south to get the Top End's Wet Season, so humidity is always low. Facilities are scarce and distances are immense in this neck of the woods, so be prepared.

SHARK BAY (MONKEY MIA)

853km (533 miles) N of Perth; 1,867km (1,167 miles) S of Broome

Monkey Mia's celebrity dolphins may not show on time—or at all—but they rarely pass up a visit. Apart from these delightful sea mammals, Shark Bay's waters heave with fish, dolphins, turtles, the world's biggest population of dugongs (10,000 at last count), manta rays, sea snakes, and, June through October, humpback whales. On the tip of the Peron Peninsula, which juts out into the Shark Bay Marine Park, is **Francois Peron National Park**. The park is home to many endangered species, white beaches composed entirely of shells, and "living fossils"—rock-like structures called stromatolites that are Earth's first life. The bay's only town is the one-time pearling town of **Denham** (pop. 500), 129km (80 miles) from the main coastal highway, which has a hotel or two, a bakery, a news agency, and a few fishing-charter and tour operators. There is no settlement, only the pleasant but basic Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort (p. 467).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Skywest (☎ 1300/660 088 in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) flies four times a week from Perth to Shark Bay Airport (also called Monkey Mia Airport), 18km (11 miles) from Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort. The fare is A\$362 (US\$235), cheaper for advance purchase tickets. The **Shark Bay Airport Bus** (☎ 08/9948 1358) meets every flight and transfers you to Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort (p. 467) for A\$7.70 (US\$5) per person one-way.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) travels daily from Perth and Broome. These services connect three times a week at the Overlander Roadhouse at the Shark Bay turnoff on the North West Coastal Highway. The trip from Perth costs A\$136 (US\$88) and takes about 15 hours. From Broome it costs A\$293 (US\$190) and takes about 24 hours through featureless landscape—not recommended. There is no train to Shark Bay.

The 9- to 10-hour drive from Perth is uninteresting and lonely. Beware of wildlife on the road and keep the gas tank full. Take the Brand Highway to Geraldton, 424km (265 miles) north of Perth, then the North West Coastal Highway for 280km (175 miles) to the Overlander Roadhouse. Turn left onto the Denham-Hamelin Road. Monkey Mia is 152km (95 miles) from the turnoff,

27km (17 miles) past Denham. If you want to break the journey, the **Mercure Inn Geraldton**, Brand Highway, Geraldton, WA 6530 (☎ 08/9921 2455), has smart, clean motel rooms. Rates are A\$131 (US\$85) double; specials are available most nights. In spring, consider the **Everlasting Trail** wildflower route to Geraldton, described in the introduction to this chapter.

Numerous coach, 4WD, and aerial tours run from Perth. **World Heritage Tours & Travel** (☎ 08/9581 5666; www.visitwa.com.au) offers a wide range.

Feature Tours does 24-hour “express” overnight coach tours from Perth. **Kookaburra Air and Complete Aviation Services** do aerial day trips and multi-day tours from Perth. These companies’ contact details appear in “Exploring the State” at the start of this chapter.

VISITOR INFORMATION Wide-ranging ecological information on Shark Bay Marine Park, Francois Peron National Park, and Hamelin Pool Marine Nature Reserve, as well as details on local tours, is available at the **Monkey Mia Visitor Centre** (☎ 08/9948 1366) within Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort (see “Where to Stay & Dine” below). Videos run throughout the day, and researchers (who are mostly from American universities) give free talks and slide shows most nights. The center is run by the state Department of Conservation and Land Management (www.calm.wa.gov.au). The official information outlet is the **Shark Bay Tourist Bureau** at 71 Knight Terrace, Denham, WA 6537 (☎ 08/9948 1253; www.sharkbay.asn.au), open daily from 8am to 5pm (until 6pm in winter), though you will probably find the Monkey Mia Visitor Centre just as helpful.

Admission to the Monkey Mia Reserve, in which Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort is located, is A\$6 (US\$3.90) for adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children 7 to 16, and A\$12 (US\$7.80) for a family. If you stay longer than 2 days and a night, you need a 4-week pass costing A\$9 (US\$5.85) for adults, A\$4 (US\$2.60) for kids, and A\$22 (US\$14) for a family.

There’s an **ATM** at The Heritage Resort, 73 Knight Terrace (at Durlacher St.), Denham (☎ 08/9948 1133), but banks are non-existent. A banking agency is located within the post office in Denham.

GETTING AROUND **Shark Bay Car Hire** (☎ 08/9948 1247) delivers cars and 4WDs to the airport and the resort from its Denham office. Several companies offer tours to all the main attractions.

MEETING THE DOLPHINS

At 7am guests at Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort are already gathering on the beach in quiet anticipation of the dolphins’ arrival. By 8am three or more dolphins usually show, and they come and go until the early afternoon. Because of the crowds the dolphins attract (about 40 people a session in low season, busloads in high season), a park ranger instructs everyone to line up knee-deep in the water as the playful swimmers cruise by your legs. You may not approach them or reach out to pat them (research shows dolphins veer away from people trying to pat them, anyhow), but they do come up to touch people of their own accord sometimes. Sometimes the dolphins even offer you a fish as a present! Feeding times are different each day so the dolphins won’t become dependent on the food. Once the crowd disperses, savvy swimmers dive into the water just up the beach outside the no-swimmers-allowed Dolphin Interaction Area, because the dolphins may head there after the “show.” Apart from the Monkey Mia Reserve entry fee, there is no charge to see the creatures.

A GREAT SEA-LIFE CRUISE, LIVING "FOSSILS" & MORE

Don't do what so many visitors do—see the dolphins, then shoot back to Perth. Stay to see Shark Bay's incredible marine life on the sailing catamaran *Shotover* ⚓ (☎ 1800/241 481 in Australia, or 08/9948 1481). During a 2½-hour dugong (manatee) cruise, you will see a huge range of creatures, possibly hammerhead sharks, a baby great white, sea snakes, turtles, dolphins, and dugongs. Every passenger is given polarized sunglasses, which help you spot underwater animals. Sometimes you see dozens of dugongs (though they leave the area from mid-May to Aug). The cruise departs 1pm daily from Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort and costs A\$54 (US\$35). The *Shotover* also does a fascinating 2-hour dolphin cruise every morning—worth doing even if you already saw the dolphins on the shore. It costs A\$49 (US\$32). Children 7 to 16 pay half price. The *Shotover* also does a daily 2-hour dolphin cruise at 10:30am (A\$39/US\$25) and a 90-minute sunset cruise (A\$44/US\$29).

On your way in or out of Monkey Mia, stop by the **Hamelin Pool Historic Telegraph Station** (☎ 08/9942 5905), 41km (25½ miles) from the highway turnoff. A small museum houses old equipment, farming tools, and historical odds and sods from the 19th-century days when Monkey Mia was a repeater station on a telegraph line. The A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) admission fee to the museum includes an explanation of the **stromatolites**, rocky formations about a foot high that were created by the planet's first oxygen-breathing cells—in other words, Earth's first life. You might want to skip the museum, but wander down to **Shell Beach** and have a look. You may find them something of an anticlimax, but following the signposted boardwalk over their tidal zone in Hamelin Pool (a shallow part of Shark Bay) proves them a little more interesting. The "sand" on the beach consists of millions of tiny white shells, which were quarried as bricks to build some of the local buildings. There is a cafe and gift store here, too.

You can explore the saltpans, dunes, coastal cliffs, walking trails and old home-stead in the nearby 52,500-hectare (129,675-acre) **Francois Peron National Park**, either alone (you will need a 4WD) or on a half- or full-day tour—although not everyone will appreciate the park's harsh scenery. You should easily spot wallabies, birds and emus, and turtles, dolphins, rays, dugongs and, in season, whales from the cliffs. Other activities in the region include half- and full-day sport fishing trips from Denham and a couple of pearl farm tours.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort Set right on the beach the dolphins visit, this oasis of green lawns and palms doubles as a town settlement. Most comfortable are the spacious air-conditioned motel rooms; safari tent "canvas condos" with carpeted floors, bathrooms, electricity, a fridge, and a kitchen/dining area separate from the bedroom (but no air-conditioning); and air-conditioned demountable "park homes" with cooking facilities. The pleasant open-sided all-day restaurant overlooks the sea. Most tours in the area depart from the resort. A 1.5km (1-mile) nature trail leads from the resort.

Monkey Mia Rd., Shark Bay (P.O. Box 119), Denham, WA 6537. ☎ 1800/653 611 in Australia, or 08/9948 1320. Fax 08/9948 1034. www.monkeymia.com.au. Tent sites: 58 powered sites; 10 on-site caravans; 6 "canvas condo" permanent tents to sleep 6; 13 park homes to sleep 6, none with bathroom; 72 motel rooms. A\$40–A\$55 (US\$26–US\$36) for 2–4 people sharing caravan rented from resort; A\$82 (US\$53) up to 4 people in canvas condo; A\$92 (US\$60) up to 4 people in park home; A\$163–A\$186 (US\$106–US\$121) double or triple motel room. Extra person A\$8.80–A\$11 (US\$5.70–US\$7.15). Linen A\$11 (US\$7.15) per person in park homes, canvas condos, and caravans for duration of stay. Lower rates Feb 1–Mar 31 (excluding Easter) and May 1–June 30 except in on-site vans. Weekly rates available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar;

takeout cafe; outdoor pool; 2 outdoor tennis courts; Jacuzzi (fed by naturally warm underground water); tour desk; self-service laundry; minimarket; volleyball court; snorkel gear. *In room:* Fridge, hair dryer (in motel rooms only), phone.

THE NORTHWEST CAPE

1,272km (795 miles) N of Perth; 1,567km (979 miles) S of Broome

Driving along the only road on the **Northwest Cape** is like driving through a surrealistic dream. Hundreds of tall red anthills march to the horizon, sheep and 'roos threaten to get under the wheels, and the sun beats down from a harsh sky. On the Cape's western shore is **Coral Bay**, a tiny cluster of dive shops, backpacker lodges, a low-key resort, and charter boats nestled on sand so white, water so blue, and ochre dust so orange you think the townsfolk computer-enhanced it. Stretching north of town are deserted sandy beaches edged by coral. On the Cape's east coast is **Exmouth** (pop. 3,500), born in 1967 as a support town to the nearby Harold E. Holt Naval Communications Station, a joint Australian/United States center. Whale shark diving, scuba diving, and snorkeling in Ningaloo Marine Park are the big activities, along with 4WD trips over the arid Cape Range National Park and surrounding sheep stations.

Exmouth and Coral Bay are 150km (94 miles) apart. Coral Bay is several degrees cooler than Exmouth and has divine diving, swimming, and snorkeling; a restaurant and takeout or two, and a bar; a small supermarket; and little else. Exmouth is hot, dusty, and charmless, but has more facilities, including a supermarket, an **ATM**, and an outdoor cinema. Most tours not having to do with the reef, such as 4WD safaris, leave from Exmouth. Both places have plenty of dive and snorkel companies. Wherever you stay, book ahead in whale shark season (Mar to early June).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Skywest** (☎ 1300/660 088 in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) flies daily from Perth, and **Northwest Regional Airlines** (☎ 1300/136 629 in Australia, or 08/9192 1369; www.northwestregional.com.au) flies from Broome. A shuttle bus meets every flight and takes you to your Exmouth hotel for A\$18 (US\$12) one-way. It does not take bookings. **Note:** Have the cash on you; there's no ATM at the airport. **Coral Bay Adventures** (☎ 08/9942 5955) makes transfers, on demand, from the airport to Coral Bay, approximately 120km (74 miles) away, for A\$85 (US\$55) adults and A\$41 (US\$27) children under 13, one-way.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30) operates three services a week from Perth (trip time: 18–20 hr.). The fare is A\$177 (US\$115) to both Coral Bay and Exmouth. Another option, which takes about the same time, is Greyhound's daily Perth–Broome service, which connects with a local service to Exmouth at the turnoff on the highway at Giralia in the wee hours of the morning. The Perth–Exmouth fare in that case is A\$184 (US\$120).

The 14-hour drive from Perth (plus rest stops) is through lonely country on a two-lane highway. Check to make sure your contract allows you to drive your rental car this far north of Perth. Wildlife will be thick on the ground, and gas stations thin. Take the Brand Highway to Geraldton, 424km (265 miles) north of Perth, then the North West Coastal Highway for 623km (389 miles) to Minilya gas station; the Exmouth turn-off is 7km (4 miles) north of here. Exmouth is a further 225km (141 miles) from the turnoff. Stay overnight at the Mercure Inn Geraldton, listed in "Getting There" under "Shark Bay (Monkey Mia)" above, or

in Carnarvon, which is the only town between Geraldton and Exmouth. Everything else that looks like a town on your map is just a gas station.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Exmouth Visitor Centre**, Murat Road, Exmouth, WA 6707 (☎ **1800/287 328** within Western Australia, or 08/9949 1176; www.exmouth-australia.com), is open daily from 8:30am to 5pm, or from 10am to 3pm on weekends November through March. The **Milyering Visitors Centre**, 52km (32¼ miles) northwest of Exmouth, is the Cape Range National Park's information center, run by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). It is open daily from 10am to 4pm but closes for lunch from 12:30 to 1:15pm. You can pick up a hiking-trail map of the park from CALM's office in Nimitz Street, Exmouth. **Coral Bay Adventures** runs a tour information and booking center in Robinson Street, Coral Bay, WA 6701 (☎ **08/9942 5955**; www.users.bigpond.com/coralbay).

The entry fee to the Cape Range National Park, payable at the Milyering Visitor Centre, is A\$9 (US\$5.85) per vehicle.

Note: There is only one ATM on the Cape, in Exmouth.

GETTING AROUND Tours and dive operators pick up from either Exmouth or Coral Bay accommodations, but usually not both. The roads to Exmouth and Coral Bay are paved, and so is the only road around the Cape's coast. To explore more widely, rent a 4WD. **Avis** (☎ **08/9949 2942**), **Budget** (☎ **08/9949 1534**), and local operator **Allens Car Hire** (☎ **08/9949 2403**) have offices in Exmouth; there is no car rental in Coral Bay.

Ningaloo Reef Bus (☎ **08/9949 1776**) runs from Exmouth hotels to various beaches around the cape, calling at the Milyering Visitors Centre en route. It runs every day except Thursday April through September, and Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday October through March. The round-trip fare to the snorkel beauty spot of Turquoise Bay is A\$22 (US\$14), including the park entry fee. Ask about the sea kayak-and-snorkeling day trip, or the overnight safari camp-out, offered by the bus's operator, Ningaloo Reef Retreat.

DIVING WITH WHALE SHARKS

"Diving" is not really a correct term for this activity, because it's by snorkeling that you get close to these leviathans. Whale sharks are sharks, not whales, and they are the world's biggest fish, reaching 12m to 18m (39 ft.–59 ft.) in length. Terrified? Don't be. Their gigantic size belies a gentle nature and slow swimming speed, and despite having a mouth big enough to swallow a boatload of snorkelers, they only eat plankton (which cannot possibly be confused with humans). Several boat operators take people out to swim alongside the fish when they appear late March through mid June. A trip with **Exmouth Diving Centre** (☎ **1800/655 156** in Australia, or 08/9949 1201; www.exmouthdiving.com.au) or its Coral Bay sister company, **Ningaloo Reef Dive** (☎ **08/9942 5824**; www.users.bigpond.com/ningaloo) costs A\$320 (US\$208) for snorkeling or A\$360 (US\$234) including a scuba dive, with all gear included. Shark protection regulations limit your boat to 10 snorkelers and a maximum 90 minutes with any one fish, but your boat is free to search for several fish in 1 day. Most boats stop at reefs for more snorkeling, and some incorporate optional scuba dives.

DIVING, SNORKELING, FISHING & FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVING

Scuba dive the unspoiled waters of the Cape and you will see marvelous reef formations, grouper, manta rays, angel fish, octopus, morays, potato cod—which you can hand feed—and other underwater marvels. Divers often spot humpback and

false killer whales, large sharks, dolphins, and turtles. Loads of dive companies in Exmouth and Coral Bay rent gear and run daily dive trips and learn-to-dive courses, including the two listed in “Diving with Whale Sharks” above. A 2-dive day trip costs between A\$125 and A\$160 (US\$81–US\$104) with all gear supplied. Live-aboard trips also run. Three great snorkeling spots are right off the shore at Coral Bay; **Bundegi Beach**, a short drive north of Exmouth; and at beautiful **Turquoise Bay** (✶ approximately 60km (37½ miles) from Exmouth on the cape’s western coast. Walk up the beach, wade in, and let the bay’s gentle current carry you back over the fish. In deeper offshore waters off Coral Bay you can snorkel with manta rays with a “wingspan” up to 7m (23 ft.). They are least common in August and September. Ningaloo Reef Dive (see above) runs a manta snorkel tour for A\$105 (US\$68), or A\$150 (US\$98) if you want to dive with the creatures. Snorkel gear from the numerous dive operators in either town rents for about A\$12 (US\$7.80) per day, and Ningaloo Reef Bus passengers use it for free on the day of travel! Tour companies run snorkel tours or glass-bottom boat rides from either town.

Reef fish, tuna, and Spanish mackerel are common catches in these waters, and black, blue, and striped marlin run outside the reef from September to January. Up to a dozen boats operate reef and game fishing day trips out of Exmouth and Coral Bay, and tackle and tin fishing dinghies are easily rented in either town.

Green and loggerhead turtles nest at night from November through February or March on the Cape’s beaches. Take a flashlight and look for them, or join one of the turtle watch tours. From August to November, boats run cruises from either town to spot humpback whales. Dugongs are a common sight for snorkelers and divers, too.

Because the Cape has few roads, and even fewer sights along the way, take an off-road 240km (149-mile) 4WD escapade with **Neil McLeod’s Ningaloo Safari Tours** (✶) (☎ 08/9949 1550; www.ningaloosafari.com). You will explore the arid limestone ridges of 50,581-hectare (124,935-acre) Cape Range National Park, snorkel Turquoise Bay, climb up a lighthouse, and cruise orange-walled Yardie Creek Gorge to spot rock wallabies—snacking on Neil’s mum’s fruitcake along the way. This full-day trip departs your Exmouth hotel at 7:30am and returns at 6pm. It costs A\$145 (US\$94) for adults and A\$105 (US\$68) for children under 13.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

In Exmouth

Potshot Hotel Resort The grounds are hot and dusty, but the building is in a modern complex. The cocktail bar around the pool is the only shady place in town to enjoy a drink, which explains its popularity with locals. The restaurant is scant on atmosphere but has a long menu, good food, and a nice wine list. There’s a seafood buffet on Friday and Saturday nights. The brick motel rooms are cool and spacious; the homestead rooms are smaller, older, and more basic. There are two-bedroom apartments, and across the road are newer three-bedroom apartments, some with Jacuzzis.

Murat Rd., Exmouth, WA 6707. ☎ 08/9949 1200. Fax 08/9949 1486. www.potshotresort.com. 97 units (all with shower only). A\$85 (US\$55) double homestead room; A\$118–A\$129 (US\$77–US\$84) resort studio room (sleeps 4); A\$139–A\$175 (US\$90–US\$114) 2-bedroom apt; A\$195–A\$205 (US\$127–US\$133) 3-bedroom apt. Maid service in apts A\$22–A\$33 (US\$14–US\$21) per day. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 4 bars; 3 small pools; self-service laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker; hair dryers and irons available at front desk; Homestead rooms have no phones.

In Coral Bay

Ningaloo Reef Resort *Finds* This low-rise complex of motel rooms, studios, and apartments stands out as the best place to stay among Coral Bay's profusion of backpacker hostels. Located on a blissfully green lawn with a pool overlooking the bay, the rooms are nothing fancy or new, but they're clean, with views toward the bay and the pool. The place has a nice communal air, thanks to the bar doubling as the local pub.

At the end of Robinson St., Coral Bay, WA 6701. ☎ **08/9942 5934**. Fax 08/9942 5953. www.coralbay.org/resort.htm. 34 units, all with bathroom (shower only). A\$138–A\$143 (US\$90–US\$93) double; A\$175–A\$285 (US\$114–US\$185) apt. Extra adult A\$11 (US\$7.15), extra child A\$5.50–A\$11 (US\$3.60–US\$7.15). Weekly rates available. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; self-service laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryers and irons (available at front desk), no phone.

6 The Kimberley: A Far-Flung Wilderness

Most Aussies would be hard put to name a single settlement, river, or mountain within the Kimberley, so rarely visited and sparsely inhabited is this wilderness. This is an ancient land of red, rocky plateaus stretching for thousands of kilometers, jungly ravines, endless bush, crocodile-infested wetlands, surreal-looking boob trees with trunks shaped like bottles, lily-filled rock pools, lonely island-strewn coastline, droughts in winter, and floods in summer. The dry, spreading scenery might call to mind Africa or India. In the Dry, the area's biggest river, the Fitzroy, is empty, but in the Wet, its swollen banks are second only to the Amazon in the volume of water that surges to the sea. Aqua and scarlet are two colors that will hit you in the eye in the Kimberley—a luminous aqua for the sea, and the fiery scarlet of the fine soil hereabouts called *pindan*. The area is famous for Wandjina-style Aboriginal rock art depicting people with circular hair-dos that look more than a little like beings from outer space. It is also known for another kind of rock art known as “Bradshaw figures,” stick-like representations of human forms, which may be the oldest art on earth. A mere 25,000 people live in the Kimberley's 420,000 sq. km (1,638,000 sq. miles). That's three times the size of England.

The unofficial capital of the East Kimberley is **Kununurra**. It's a small agricultural town that serves as the gateway to wildlife river cruises; the **Bungle Bungles** ★, a massive labyrinth of beehive-shaped rock formations; and to a 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) cattle station where you can hike, fish, and cruise palm-filled gorges by day and sleep in comfy permanent safari tents or glamorous homestead rooms by night. The main town in the West Kimberley is the Outback port of **Broome** ★ whose waters give up the world's biggest and best South Sea pearls. Linking Kununurra and Derby, near Broome, is the Gibb River Road, an isolated 4WD track through cattle-station country that is becoming popular with adventure travelers.

Off the West Kimberley coast lies a jigsaw puzzle of 10,000 or more barely inhabited islands, the **Bonaparte** ★ and **Buccaneer Archipelagos** ★, the last named in honor of the pirate's pirate, William Dampier, who sailed here in 1688. In fact, much of the appeal of this coastline lies in the knowledge that few Westerners have laid eyes on it since the first explorers of the 17th century.

EXPLORING THE KIMBERLEY

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Kimberley Tourism Association**, P.O. Box 554, Broome, WA 6725 (☎ **08/9193 6660**; www.kimberleytourism.com), supplies information on the entire region. The **Kununurra Visitor Centre** and

the **Broome Visitor Centre** (which appear later in this chapter) also handle inquiries on things to see and do across the entire Kimberley, and you can drop into their information offices once you arrive.

GETTING AROUND Enormous distances, high gas costs (often A\$1 per liter or more, equivalent to US\$2.45 per U.S. gal.), Wet Season floods, and very limited roads and other facilities can make traveling the Kimberley expensive and time-consuming. The place has lots of attractions that are so remote that only aerial tours or charter boats can reach them. Many more sights are accessible only on unpaved roads, for which your 2WD rental car is not insured and probably can't handle, so if you do not want to rely on tours, rent a 4WD. Allow for an average speed of 60kmph (38 mph) on the area's rough unsealed roads, and never exceed 80kmph (50 mph), as unexpected dips and smooth patches can take drivers by surprise. Most rental outfits will allow one-way rentals between Broome and Kununurra, or vice versa, at a ball-park surcharge of A\$350 to A\$550 (US\$228–US\$358). Review the "Road Conditions & Safety" and "Tips for Four-Wheel Drivers" in section 17 of chapter 2 before setting off. **Kimberley Camping & Outback Supplies**, Shop 1, 1642 Frederick St., Broome (☎ 08/9193 5909), sells and rents every piece of camping equipment you need, from tents and *mozzie* (mosquito) nets to cooking utensils. A complete set is around A\$50 (US\$33) per day for two people; weekly rates are available.

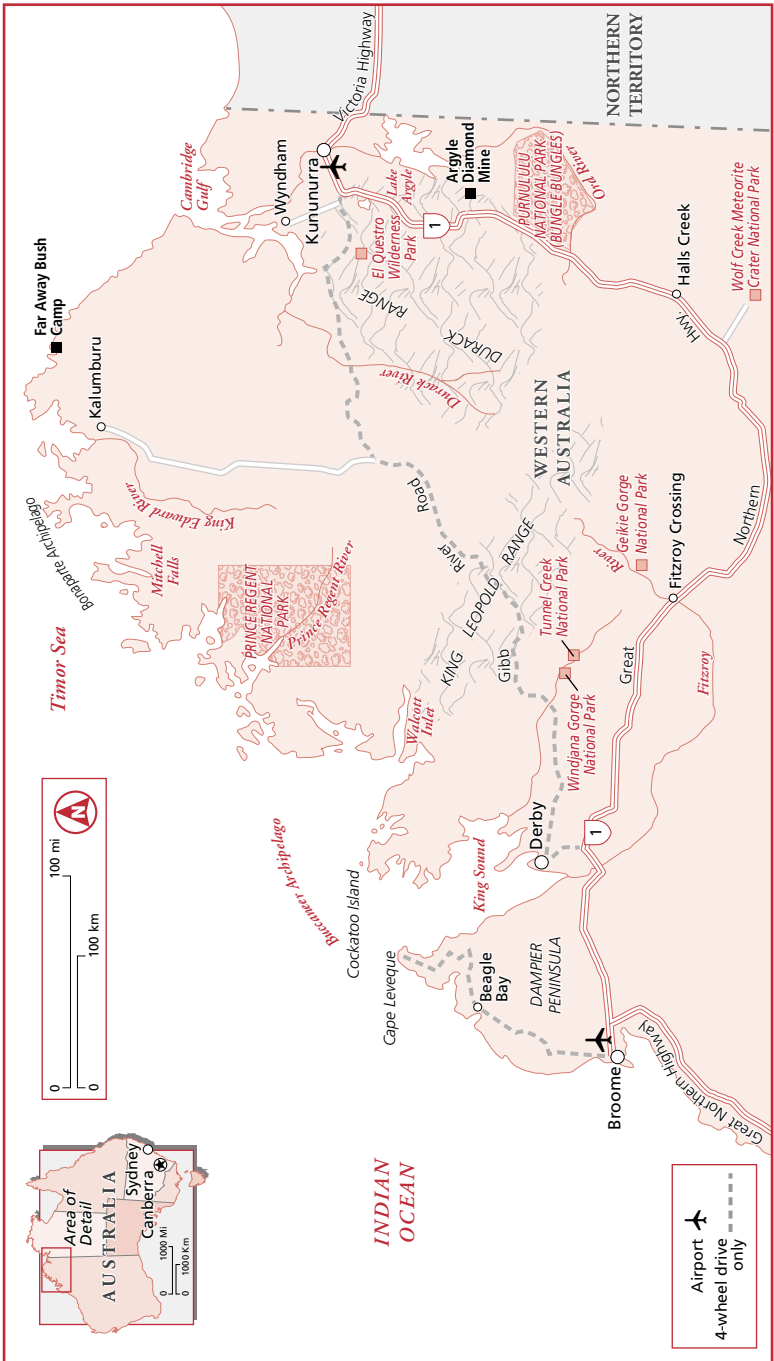
Taking a guided 4WD camping or accommodated safari is a neat way to sidestep the challenges of Kimberley travel. Safaris depart Broome, Kununurra, or Darwin, and last between 2 days and 2 weeks. A popular route is the cross-Kimberley journey between Broome and Kununurra, or vice versa. If you opt for this route, look for tours that traverse the adventurous **Gibb River Road**, rather than the less interesting highway via Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. Most safaris only run in the Dry Season from April/May to October/November. Respected operators include **East Kimberley Tours** (☎ 08/9168 2213; www.eastkimberleytours.com.au); **Kimberley Wilderness Adventures** (☎ 1800/804 005 in Australia, or 08/9192 5741; www.kimberleywilderness.com.au); **Adventure Tours** (☎ 1300/654 604 in Australia; www.adventuretours.com.au); and **Australian Pinnacle Tours** (☎ 1800/999 069 in Australia, or 08/9417 5555; www.pinnacle-tours.com.au).

Broome Aviation (☎ 1300/136 629 in Australia, or 08/9192 1369; www.broomeaviation.com) and **King Leopold Air** (☎ 08/9193 7155; www.kingleopoldair.com.au), based in Broome, and **Alligator Airways** (☎ 08/9168 1333; www.alligatorairways.com.au) and **Slingair Heliwork** (☎ 1800/095 500 in Australia, or 08/9169 1300; www.slingair.com.au), based in Kununurra, run a range of tours all over the Kimberley, lasting from a couple of hours to several days. Some involve sightseeing on the ground, hiking, 4WD trips, overnights at fishing camps, or calls into cattle stations.

BIRD-WATCHING & BUSHWALKING WITH CAMELS

More than one-third of Australia's bird species live in the Kimberley. The blue, green, yellow, and violet Gouldian finch, Nankeen night heron, tawny frogmouth, and hundreds more get "twitchers"—as locals affectionately dub bird-watchers—excited. The **Broome Bird Observatory** research station (☎ 08/9193 5600; fax 08/9192 3364), 25km (16 miles) out of town on Roebuck Bay, monitors the thousands of migratory wetlands birds that gather here from Siberia. It offers 2-1/2-hour tours from Broome of shorebird, mangrove, and bush species

The Kimberley Region



for A\$71 (US\$46) including transport from town, and has basic accommodations and camping facilities for real enthusiasts.

In the cooler Dry Season, bushwalking in this unspoiled environment is delightful. **Kimberley Bushwalks** (☎ 08/9191 7017; www.bushwalks.com) has hit on the neat idea of using camels to carry your gear (or you can ride them). It visits places inaccessible by car or boat from Broome, such as forested parts of the Fitzroy River, into the Great Sandy Desert sand-hills, through ancient springs and billabongs, and to the Ngyginah Aboriginal people in the purple Mt. Anderson ranges. Some treks are centered around themes like bird-watching, stargazing, or meditation. Costs are A\$220 (US\$143) per person per day, A\$180 (US\$117) for kids under 12. Treks last from 2 to 7 days.

KUNUNURRA

827km (517 miles) SW of Darwin; 1,032km (645 miles) E of Broome

Given the arid conditions in the Kimberley, it's quite a surprise to swoop over a field of sugar cane as you come in to land at Kununurra. This little town (pop. 5,000) is an agricultural center created by the damming of the Ord River to form Lake Argyle.

Kununurra itself (the name is Aboriginal for "Meeting of Big Waters") has little to spark your interest, but it is the gateway to several outstanding attractions. A cruise down the Ord River to see wild birds, dramatic cliffs, and crocs is a must. So is a flight over or a hike into the Bungle Bungles (Purnululu National Park), monumental orange domes of rock that look like giant beehives. The world's biggest diamond mine is not in South Africa but out in the rugged Kimberley wilds near Kununurra, and can be visited by air every day. The town is also a gateway to El Questro, a 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) cattle station where you can hike magnificent gorges, fish, cruise rivers, ride horses, and see some of Australia's most breathtaking Aboriginal art. It is open from April to early November, closed over summer due to the Wet Season.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Airnorth** (☎ 08/8945 2999; www.airnorth.com.au) flies to Kununurra from Darwin one or two times a day and from Broome once a day.

There is no train to Kununurra. **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) serves the town daily from Broome and daily from Darwin via Katherine. From Perth the trip takes about 34 hours; from Broome about 15 hours. The one-way fare from Perth is A\$468 (US\$304). From Darwin, the trip time is around 9 hours, and the fare is A\$129 (US\$84).

Kununurra is 512km (320 miles) west of Katherine on the Victoria Highway. The Great Northern Highway from Broome connects with the Victoria Highway 45km (28 miles) west of Kununurra. The Gibb River Road is an alternate 4WD scenic route from Derby near Broome (see "Driving the Gibb River Road" later in this chapter); it connects with the Great Northern Highway 53km (33 miles) west of town.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Kununurra Visitor Centre** is at Coolibah Drive, Kununurra, WA 6743 (☎ 08/9168 1177; kununurratb@bigpond.com). Its hours change with the season and it pays to call before dropping in, but it is usually open from 9am to 5pm daily from April to September, and from 9am to 5pm weekdays and 9am to noon Saturdays between October and March (closed Sun and public holidays during this time).

GETTING AROUND **Avis** (☎ 08/9169 1258), **Budget** (☎ 08/9168 2033), **Hertz** (☎ 08/9169 1424), and **Thrifty** (☎ 08/9169 1911) all rent 4WD vehicles, as does local company **Handy Rentals** (☎ 08/9169 1188).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

ON THE ORD RIVER Cruise outfits will offer you the option of cruising the Ord River or Lake Argyle, a massive man-made blue inland sea ringed by stony red cliffs and bigger than 19 Sydney Harbours, but go for the Ord. The Ord River is one of the most picturesque waterways in Australia, lined by red cliffs in parts, and teeming with all kinds of wetland birds and freshwater crocodiles. Jeff Haley of **Triple J. Tours** ★ (☎ 08/9168 2682; www.triplejtours.net.au) runs excellent cruises. There are several itineraries, and they vary from Dry Season to Wet, but the most popular starts with a 70km (43-mile) coach ride and commentary to Lake Argyle, a wander through a historic homestead, then the 55km (34-mile) cruise down the Ord back to Kununurra. The boat travels fast and is a bit noisy, but Jeff pulls in at numerous tranquil spots. This costs A\$140 (US\$91) for adults and A\$70 (US\$46) for children 4 to 15, including pickup from your hotel. It takes most of the day.

Big Waters Kimberley Canoe Safaris (☎ 1800/641 998 in Australia, or 08/9169 1998; www.adventure.kimberley.net.au) offers a popular 3-day self-guided canoeing/camping safari down the Grade 1 (that means “gentle”) Ord River in two-person Canadian canoes. It costs A\$145 (US\$94) per person. During the Wet Season you can do a 1-day tour for A\$45 (US\$29) per person.

A day on the river to fish for barramundi with Greg Harman's **Ultimate Adventures** (☎ 08/9168 2310; www.wn.com.au/ultimateadvent) costs around A\$230 (US\$150) per person, more if there is only one of you. Greg also does trips of up to 10 days to remote fishing camps.

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH Turning out 34 million carats a year—that's about eight tons of pure diamond, or one-third of total world output—the **Argyle Diamond Mine** is the only mine in the world to produce the rare pink diamond in commercial quantities, as well as champagne, cognac, yellow, green, and white rocks. During a 3½- to 4-hour visit, you will see rough and polished gems in the viewing room, see gems get extracted from the huge open-cut mine as long as safety conditions permit that day, and, if you like, buy some. For security reasons, you must join an aerial tour with **Belray Diamond Tours** (☎ 08/9168 1014), which you can also book through **Alligator Airways** (☎ 08/9168 1333; www.alligatorairways.com.au), or **Slingair Heliwork** (☎ 08/9169 1300). You can opt for a flight that covers the nearby Purnululu National Park (Bungle Bungle) and Lake Argyle as well, at a cost of A\$325 (US\$211). Belray Diamond Tours does a coach trip Thursday only June through September, which costs A\$180 (US\$117) per person, but it's a 2½-hour drive each way. Kids under 12 are not permitted on mine tours.

SPENDING THE DAY AT EL QUESTRO WILDERNESS PARK ★★ You do not have to stay at El Questro (see “Where to Stay” below) to enjoy the wonderful facilities. When Englishman Will Burrell bought this 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) cattle station (ranch) in 1991, he turned it into a kind of Outback holiday camp where anyone from international celebrities to humble 4WD enthusiasts could revel in its rugged beauty. Although it's a working farm, guests don't get involved in that side of things. Instead, they go barramundi fishing and heli-fishing in croc-infested wetlands and rivers, soak under palm trees in the thermal waters of Zebedee Springs (closed from noon daily), hike gorges, some

of which hide pockets of rainforest, take half-day 4WD fishing safaris, cruise tranquil Chamberlain Gorge, horseback ride across stony plains, photograph red rocky ranges, join rangers on bird-watching or “bush-tucker” tours, or explore a rich lode of Aboriginal rock paintings. It’s an unspoiled, primeval place.

El Questro is open from April 1 to early November (it closes in the Wet, Nov–Mar). It is 100km (60 miles) west of Kununurra by road (58km/36 miles on the sealed Great Northern Hwy. towards Wyndham, with the remainder on the graded gravel Gibb River Rd.). Visitors must purchase a 7-day Wilderness Park Permit to enter, which costs A\$13 (US\$8.45) per person; children under 12 enter free. Buy permits from El Questro’s office in Kununurra, on Banksia Street, where the staff will give you a map and point out all there is to see and do, or at the Station Township. The Township acts as a kind of headquarters—most tours and activities depart here, and it’s where you can buy road and other supplies and fuel, and rent 4WDs and camping gear. Consider renting a 4WD in Kununurra or at the Station Township. Transfers from the Homestead and Emma Gorge cost A\$60 (US\$39) per person to join tours and activities departing the Station Township, so while it is not crucial to have your own 4WD, it is less costly. Having your own vehicle also means you can explore independently.

The station runs 12-hour ranger-guided day trips from Kununurra which include the highlights of a Chamberlain Gorge cruise to see Aboriginal Wandjina rock art and soak in Zebedee Springs, plus a gorge walk, lunch at the Station Township restaurant, and 4WD transfers, for A\$145 (US\$94) per person. Ask staff to identify which swimming spots are croc-free, and don’t swim anywhere else!

You pay for most activities—between A\$60 (US\$39) for a 2-hour horseback ride to A\$565 (US\$367) for a half-day’s saltwater heli-fishing. Other typical prices are A\$42 (US\$27) for a gorge cruise, A\$75 (US\$49) for a 4-hour 4WD trip to watch the sun set over the Cockburn Range, or A\$175 (US\$114) for a half-day 4WD barramundi-fishing trip.

WHERE TO STAY

Apart from the prohibitively expensive upscale homestead, there are other accommodations options at the station, as described below.

4WD transfers for guests at El Questro coming from Kununurra cost A\$144 (US\$94) per adult round-trip to Emma Gorge only, or A\$180 (US\$117) to the Station Township. Children under 12 pay half price. If you are driving yourself, take the Great Northern Highway 58km (36 miles) from Kununurra toward Wyndham, then the (unsealed) Gibb River Road 25km (15½ miles) to Emma Gorge Resort (which is 2km/1¼ miles along an access road), or a further 27km (17 miles) to the station store.

Emma Gorge Resort ★★ This neatly kept oasis of cute permanent tents mounted on lush lawns under pandanus palms at the foot of the soaring red Cockburn Range is a great way to “camp” in the wilderness without sacrificing comfort. Although they are tents, accommodations are comfortable, with wooden floors, electric lights, fans, insect screens, nice firm beds with quilts, and torches (flashlights) for getting around at night. Those without bathrooms share clean and modern facilities. Reception stocks stuff like sunscreen and souvenirs, and lends hair dryers. The rustic restaurant serves up gourmet bush-tucker meals that would put many big-city restaurants to shame, and has a retractable roof for stargazing. Free to guests is access to a 1.5km (1 mile) trail along lush Emma Gorge to the natural swimming hole and trickling waterfall enclosed by 46m (150-ft.) cliffs. The Station Township is 27km (17 miles) away.

Gibb River Rd. (P.O. Box 909, Kununurra, WA 6743). Accor, ☎ **1300/656 565** in Australia, 1800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 08/9169 1777. Fax 08/9169 1383. www.elquestro.com.au. 45 tent cabins, 27 with bathroom (shower only). AE, DC, V. A\$133–A\$182 (US\$86–US\$118) double; A\$198 (US\$129) deluxe tent (sleeps 4). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; laundry.

Station Township Bungalows These basic but comfortable cabin-style rooms located by the store at the heart of Station Township are good for anyone without their own transportation, as tours depart from right outside. The nicest are the eight newest ones with balconies overlooking the Pentecost River. Two of the four original stone bungalows sleep six but are the same price. **The Steakhouse** restaurant and bar serves three meals a day of the steak and barramundi kind, and there is often live music around the campfire. A swimming hole is nearby. The front office loans hair dryers.

Gibb River Rd. (P.O. Box 909, Kununurra, WA 6743). Accor, ☎ **1300/656 565** in Australia, 1800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 08/9169 1777. Fax 08/9169 1383. www.elquestro.com.au. 12 bungalows (with shower only). A\$198 (US\$129) per bungalow (sleeps 4). AE, DC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; 4WD rental desk; laundry. *In room:* A/C, fridge, coffeemaker.

Station Township Riverside Camping In addition to the other El Questro options, there are two camping areas. **Black Cockatoo Riverside Camping** has 45 campsites near the station store, and there are another 28 more secluded riverside campsites within a 6km (3¾ miles) drive. Campers share shower facilities and a laundry, and use the bungalows' restaurant. No bookings are taken for campsites. **Note:** The Wilderness Park Permit fee is not included in the campground fee. For contact details see above.

Gibb River Rd. (P.O. Box 909, Kununurra, WA 6743). Accor, ☎ **1300/656 565** in Australia, 1800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 08/9169 1777. Fax 08/9169 1383. www.elquestro.com.au. A\$13 (US\$8.45) campsite per person. Children under 12 stay free. AE, DC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; laundry.

In Kununurra

Country Club Hotel Just down the road from the tourist bureau, this low-rise hotel is your best bet among Kununurra's modest choice of accommodations. Set in tropical gardens, it has a lovely shaded pool with sun lounges and a bar, and a couple of simple dining and bar venues. The rooms are nothing flashy, but they're neat and clean, with plenty of space. The front desk loans hair dryers.

47 Coolibah Dr., Kununurra, WA 6743. ☎ **1800/808 999** in Australia, or 08/9168 1024. Fax 08/9168 1189. www.countryclubhotel.com.au. 88 units, all with bathroom (8 with tub). Dry Season (Apr–Oct) A\$168 (US\$109) double; A\$222 (US\$144) 2-bedroom apt. Wet Season (Nov–Mar) A\$148 (US\$97) double; A\$191 (US\$124) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$24 (US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (1 casual grill, 1 Chinese); 3 bars; outdoor pool; tour desk; laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

PURNULULU (BUNGLE BUNGLES) NATIONAL PARK

Rising out of the landscape 250km (156 miles) south of Kununurra are thousands of enormous sandstone domes 200m to 300m (656 ft.–984 ft.) high called the **Bungle Bungles** ★★. Thought to be named either after “bundle bundle” grass or the bungle beetle, the Bungle Bungles get their distinctive orange and gray stripes from algae found in the permeable layers and mineral graining in non-permeable layers. The formations are 360 million years old.

The domes look spectacular from the air—and that's the only way to see them in the Wet, as the park is closed to ground traffic January 1 through March 31. As the waters subside (sometimes not until early June, and they may swell again

in late Oct), the soaring gorges and forested creeks at the base of the Bungle Bungles are accessible on foot. Highlights are the beehive-shaped walls of **Cathedral Gorge**, the rock pool at **Frog Hole Gorge**, and palm-filled **Echidna Chasm**. Keep an eye peeled for rainbow bee-eaters, flocks of budgerigars, rare nailtail wallabies, and euros, a kind of kangaroo.

There are two campgrounds with pit toilets, wood barbecues, and water (boil before drinking) but no showers and no telephones. The camping fee is A\$9 (US\$5.85) for adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) for kids under 16. Bring food and fuel with you. For information call the **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** (☎ 08/9168 4200) in Kununurra; there's a visitor center/ranger station (☎ 08/9168 7300) in the park.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND Most folks take a scenic flight over the park in a light aircraft from Kununurra offered by **Slingair Heliwork** (☎ 1800/095 500 in Australia, or 08/9169 1300) or **Alligator Airways** (☎ 1800/632 533 in Australia, or 08/9168 1333). The flight takes about 2 hours, incorporates a flight over Lake Argyle and the impressive Argyle Diamond Mine, and costs A\$190 (US\$124) per adult and A\$110 (US\$72) per child 3–12 years. Both companies also do combined air/hiking day trips, though they're pricey, starting at A\$445 (US\$289) per person. **East Kimberley Tours** (see "Getting Around" earlier in the Kimberley section) runs an array of 4WD and fly/4WD camping and hiking safaris into the park, including some 1-day "express" versions.

Road access is 4WD only. To explore by car, you will need at least 1 night to explore Purnululu's 3,000 sq. km (1,158 sq. miles); entry is A\$9 (US\$5.85) per vehicle. Take the Victoria Highway 45km (28 miles) west of Kununurra, turn left onto the Great Northern Highway for 201km (126 miles) to the park turnoff, and allow 2 hours to cover the final tough 53km (33 miles) from the highway to the park entrance. Turkey Creek, 53km (33 miles) north of the turnoff, is the nearest place for supplies.

Several companies offer 4WD hiking/camping safaris from Kununurra lasting 2 to 4 days. A 2-day adventure with **Bungle Bungles Adventure Tours** (☎ 1800/641 998 in Australia, or 08/9169 1998; fax 08/9168 3998) costs A\$290 (US\$189).

DRIVING THE GIBB RIVER ROAD

If you really want to discover the Outback, the Gibb River Road is for you. Traversing this sandy, rocky, unpaved 660km (413-mile) 4WD track that links the east and west Kimberley is fast becoming a "must-do" for seasoned adventure travelers. Populated only by stark red ranges, rivers that flood to the horizon in the Wet and vanish to dustbaths in the Dry, fern-fringed swimming holes and waterfalls, and huge cattle stations, it is a road for self-reliant folk who seek wilderness and know how to change a tire. Homesteads along the way offer activities such as barramundi fishing in lily-clad water holes, hikes through gorges, and aerial tours to remote Prince Regent Nature Reserve, King's Cascade, Mitchell Falls, the Horizontal Waterfalls, and other spots on the north Kimberley Coast. Some serve meals and have basic accommodations, ranging from campsites with hot showers to rooms at the homestead. You ain't in the lap of luxury, but after that road you'd hardly expect it. Getting there involves ribbed "corrugation" on the gravel, soft patches, and bumpy rocks that will limit your speed to 60kmph (37½ mph) or slower much of the way. It's possible to drive the road in 2 days or even one, but give yourself 3 to 5 days to do some sightseeing. **Note:** You can only count on the road being passable from May to October; much of it is under water in the Wet.

The road starts on the Great Northern Highway, 53km (33 miles) west of Kununurra. **El Questro Station** (see “Where to Stay” in the Kununurra section above) is the first stop, 33km (21 miles) along. It finishes in **Derby**, a small coastal town 221km (138 miles) northeast of Broome. The Great Northern Highway connects Derby with Broome. **Windjana Gorge and Tunnel Creek National Parks** (described in this chapter) are accessed off the road.

To drive the road in a rented 4WD, you will need written permission from your rental-car company. Carry cash (forget about ATMs out here, and traveler's checks are not always accepted), spare fuel, enough drinking water and food to last 3 or 4 days longer than you think you'll need, a tool kit, a tire puncture repair kit and a high lift jack, a spare tire, radiator hoses, a spare fan belt, and a first aid kit. Your rental-car company should provide all of this, except your supplies. If you want to stay in rooms rather than in the campground, book ahead. Even so, carry camping gear in case tire punctures, swollen creeks, or some other circumstance holds you up between homesteads. Some homesteads are private farms not open to the public, and their owners take a dim view of poorly prepared tourists begging them for water, fuel, or food. Swim only where the locals tell you, on account of crocodiles.

Before setting off, obtain a copy of the A\$3 (US\$1.95) *Gibb River And Kalumburu Road Travellers Guide*, published by the Derby Tourist Bureau and updated every year, that lists accommodations, the very few fuel stops, and other facilities along the way. It is available from the tourist bureaus in Kununurra and Broome, or you can order it in advance from the bureau (☎ 08/9191 1426; derbytb@comswest.net.au).

Plenty of 4WD safari tours operate on the road between Broome and Kununurra, and even from Darwin, taking between 5 and 10 days. See “Exploring the Kimberley” earlier in this chapter for companies to contact.

TUNNEL CREEK & WINDJANA GORGE NATIONAL PARKS

Windjana Gorge National Park is 240km (150 miles) east of Broome, 21km (13 miles) off the Gibb River Road. The 350 million-year-old walls of the gorge, which shoot straight up as high as 100m (328 ft.) above the sandy desert floor, are an old limestone barrier reef. A picturesque 7km (4-mile) round-trip trail winds through the gorge, revealing fossilized marine creatures from the Devonian period. This reef is part of a much larger barrier reef—comprising hundreds of coral patches, some a couple of kilometers across, other hundreds of kilometers wide—created when this part of Australia was an ocean floor. As the ocean subsided, those coral-building creatures kept on building their reefs higher. When the ocean floor pushed up above sea level, the reefs were left high and dry and became the **Napier Ranges**. The **Lennard River**, which carved Windjana Gorge, only flows in the Wet, but freshwater crocodiles, fruit bats, and birds are common year-round in and around the residual pools.

Thirty kilometers (19 miles) southeast of Windjana Gorge is **Tunnel Creek National Park**, where you can explore a cave tunneled by the river through the ancient limestone reef system. To reach it, you wade through the creek for 750m (about half a mile) in the dark. Before you leave Broome, ask your hotel to lend you a torch (flashlight) to reveal the tunnel's stalactites, fish, five bat species including rare ghost bats, and even the odd freshwater croc (the “friendly” sort). Wear shoes you can get wet, and expect the water to be cold!

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND You can include Windjana and Tunnel Creek on a Gibb River Road safari, or visit from Broome. Take the

Great Northern Highway east for 187km (117 miles), take a left onto the Derby Highway for 43km (27 miles) to Derby, then head east along the Gibb River Road. **Note:** The last 70km (44 miles) to Windjana, and from there to Tunnel Creek, is unpaved, so you will need a 4WD. Both parks are usually closed in the Wet from November or December to mid-April.

Camping at Windjana Gorge costs A\$9 (US\$5.85) for adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) for kids under 16. The campground has cold showers, toilets, barbecues and wood, and a public telephone, but no food or fuel. There is no camping, food, water, or ranger station in Tunnel Creek National Park. Neither park has an entry fee. Coach and 4WD day tours run from Broome.

For park information, and to check accessibility and road conditions outside May to September, call the state **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** in Broome (☎ 08/9192 1036).

GEIKIE GORGE NATIONAL PARK

Freshwater versions of saltwater beasts such as sharks, sawfish, and stingrays lurk in the Fitzroy River, which flows through Geikie Gorge (pronounced *Geekie*). Although strictly speaking, the gorge is part of an ancient Devonian reef, like Windjana Gorge and Tunnel Creek, its gold and grey 30m (98-ft.) walls were built not by coral but by algae. Like Windjana Gorge, its walls show primitive life forms that inhabited a time before reptiles and mammals were around. Today, pandanus palms, wild passion fruit, mangroves, and river gums line the banks, and freshwater crocodiles and all kinds of birds can be seen, especially in the Dry. If you spot a stream of water arching out of the river, that's an archer fish targeting an insect by spitting at it. There are moves afoot to dam the mighty Fitzroy, which makes sense to some farmers, but will wreak havoc on the ecology of fish and rare birds and flood Aboriginal cultural sites.

A great way to experience the park is on a **Darngku Heritage** boat tour (☎ 08/9191 5552 or 0417/907 009) with local Aboriginal guides. The half-day cruises take up to 12 people into areas usually not accessible to the public. Tours leave at 8:15am each day, returning at 1:30pm and include lunch. There is also a 3-hour walk and cruise, and plans for a fishing tour. Park rangers also run 90-minute cruises up to three times a day, depending on demand. Ranger cruises cost A\$18 (US\$12) for adults and A\$2 (US\$1.30) for school-age kids, and focus on the geology, wildlife, and history of the area. Check with the **ranger** (☎ 08/9191 5355) for times. Bookings are not needed. There are also two walking trails to explore, a 1-hour round-trip "reef" trail along the base of the gorge wall, and a 20-minute walk along the river bank to a fishing and swimming hole.

Cruises run April to October or November; the gorge is open but may be cut off by floods December to March. There are picnic facilities (buy food in Fitzroy Crossing), but no camping.

For other information call the **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** in Fitzroy Crossing (☎ 08/9191 5121) or in the Dry Season at the gorge (☎ 08/9191 5112).

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND Entry to the park is free. The gorge is 418km (261 miles) east of Broome, so be prepared for a long day. The road is paved all the way. Take care with the water level on the several concrete fords. The nearest town is **Fitzroy Crossing**, 18km (11 miles) before the entrance; contact the Fitzroy Crossing Tourist Bureau (☎ 08/9191 5355). No rangers are based in the park during the Wet. Coach and 4WD day tours are available from Broome.

BROOME

2,250km (1,406 miles) N of Perth; 1,859km (1,161 miles) SW of Darwin

Part rough Outback town, part glam seaside resort, the pearling port of **Broome** ★ (pop. 11,000) is a hybrid of Australia and Asia you won't see anywhere else. Chinese and Japanese pearl divers used to work the pearling luggers in this isolated little town in the old days, and as the Chinese settled here, they affixed their distinctive architecture to typical Australian buildings. The result is a main street so cute it could be a movie set, with neat rows of Australian corrugated iron stores wrapped by verandas and trimmed with Chinese peaked roofs.

The people are unique, too, because Anglo-Saxon/Irish Aussies and Chinese, Filipino, and Malaysian pearl workers often married Aboriginal women. The Japanese tended to return home, but not all of them made it as cyclones, the "bends," sharks, and crocodiles all took their toll—their legacy in the town is found in a divers' cemetery (see below).

For such a small and remote place, Broome is surprisingly sophisticated. Walk the streets of Chinatown and you will rub shoulders with Aussie tourists, itinerant workers, Asian food store proprietors, tough-as-nails cattle hands, and well-heeled visitors from Europe and America downing good coffee at the couple of trendy cafes. Broome's world-renowned South Sea pearls are still its bread and butter, but the old timber pearling luggers have been replaced with gleaming high-tech vessels equipped with helipads and stainless steel security doors.

To be honest, it's kind of hard to explain Broome's appeal. There is not much to do, but it's a nice place to be. You can shop for pearls, and it's a good base for exploring the Kimberley. But most people simply come to laze by the jade-green Indian Ocean on Cable Beach, ride camels along the sand as the sun plops into the sea, fish the bountiful seas, mosey around the art galleries and jewelry stores, and soak up the gorgeous reds, blues, and greens of the Kimberley coast.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Airlink** (book through Qantas ☎ 13 13 13 in Australia) flies direct from Perth, Ayers Rock, and Alice Springs. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia; www.virginblue.com.au) flies direct to Broome from Adelaide once a week on Saturdays. The trip to Broome from Sydney and other capitals is a lengthy affair via Perth or Alice Springs.

Greyhound Pioneer (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) has a daily service from Perth that takes around 30 hours. The fare is A\$295 (US\$192). Greyhound's daily service from Darwin via Katherine and Kununurra takes around 24 hours; the one-way fare is A\$255 (US\$166).

There is no train service to Broome.

Broome is 34km (21 miles) off the Great Northern Highway, which leads from Perth in the south, Kununurra to the east. The Gibb River Road is an alternate 4WD scenic route from Kununurra (see "Driving the Gibb River Road" above).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Broome Visitor Centre** is on the Great Northern Highway (locals call it the Broome Hwy.) at Bagot Street, Broome, WA 6725 (☎ 08/9192 2222; www.kimberleytourism.com). It's open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. On Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays, it opens from 9am to 4pm in the Dry (Apr–Sept), and from 9am to 1pm in the Wet (Oct–Mar).

Book accommodation and tours well ahead in the peak June to August season.

GETTING AROUND **ATC Rent A Car** (☎ 08/9193 7788); **Avis** (☎ 08/9193 5980), **Broome Car Rentals** (☎ 1800/676 725 in Australia, or 08/9192 2210), **Budget** (☎ 08/9193 5355), **Europcar** (☎ 08/9193 7788), and **Hertz** (☎ 08/9192 1428) all rent cars and 4WDs. Hertz rents car-top tents that affix to the larger 4WDs, and rents camping-gear kits. Among the campervan companies are **Apollo Motorhome Holidays** (☎ 08/9192 3087) and **Britz** (☎ 08/9192 2647).

The **Town Bus Service** (☎ 08/9193 6585) does an hourly loop of most attractions starting at 7:10am and finishing at 6:35pm daily, rising to half-hourly from June to mid-September. A single fare is A\$2.70 (US\$1.75), and a day pass is A\$8.50 (US\$5.50).

Broome Taxis (☎ 08/9192 1133) operates the airport shuttle; book ahead if you want a transfer to your hotel door. The other cab company in town is **Roe-buck Taxis** (☎ 1800/880 330).

Broome Day Tours (☎ 1800/801 068 in Australia, or 08/9192 1068) runs tours of the town and further afield to gorges and other natural attractions. **Over the Top Adventure Tours** (☎ 08/9192 5211) runs 4WD tours of 1 to 5 days to hard-to-get-to wilderness spots like the Dampier Peninsula.

WHAT TO SEE & DO: PEARLS, CAMEL RIDES, OUTDOOR MOVIES & MORE

When you arrive, head to Chinatown in the town center on Carnarvon Street and Dampier Terrace to get a feel for the town. It's not all that Chinese anymore, but most shops, cafes, and galleries are here. The Broome Visitor Centre gives out maps to a 2km (1¼-mile) trail taking in the town's historic buildings.

Probably the most popular Dry Season "activity" is lazing on the 22 glorious white sandy kilometers (14 miles) of **Cable Beach** ★★. The beach is 6km (3¾ miles) out of town; the town bus runs there regularly. A beach hut near Cable Beach Club Resort rents beach and watersports equipment. From November to April the water is off-limits due to marine stingers. Crocodiles, on the other hand, do not like surf so you should be safe swimming here. Make a point of being at the beach for at least one of the magnificently rosy sunsets in the Dry. A novel way to experience the beach is on camelback. A 1-hour ride with **Red Sun Camel Safaris** (☎ 08/9193 7423 or 0419/954 996) costs A\$35 (US\$23) adults and A\$20 (US\$13) kids 6 to 16. Kids under 6 pay A\$10 (US\$6.50), but they must ride with an adult.

Reigning four-time state surf champ **Josh Palmateer** (☎ 0418/958 264) gives 2-hour surf lessons on the beach from July to September for A\$80 (US\$52) per person, or A\$40 (US\$26) per person for 2 hours if there are two of you. He supplies the boards, wetsuits, and a guarantee you'll be standing by the end of the lesson!

Don't miss the **Pearl Luggers** ★★, 31 Dampier Terrace (☎ 08/9192 2059). A 75-minute session includes a look over two restored Broome pearling luggers, a browse through a small pearling museum, and a riveting and hilarious talk about pearl diving by former pearl divers, including Richard "Salty" Baillieu. Salty is so entertaining it's worth timing your visit for the days he's on duty. Admission is A\$17 (US\$11) adults, A\$15 (US\$9.75) seniors and students, A\$9 (US\$5.85) kids 8 to 17. The attraction opens daily from 9am to 5pm May through October, from 10am to 3:30pm November through April; tours run 9 and 11am, and 2pm in the Dry, and 11am and 2pm in the Wet. Closed Christmas.

A dinosaur footprint 120 million years old is on show at very low tide on the cliff at **Gantheaume Point**, 6km (3¾ miles) from town. The town authorities

Moments Stairway to the Moon

You've heard of a stairway to heaven? Well, Broome has a stairway to the moon. On the happy coincidence of a full moon and a low 10m tide (which happens about 3 consecutive nights a month Mar–Oct), nature treats the town to a special show as the light of the rising moon falls on the rippled sand and mudflats in Roebuck Bay, looking for all the world like a “staircase to the moon.” The best place to see it is from the cliff-top restaurant at the Mangrove Hotel (see “Where to Stay & Dine” below), or from the food and crafts markets held at Town Beach most staircase nights.

have set a plaster cast of it higher up on the rocks, so you can see it anytime. Take a picture of the point's palette of glowing red cliffs, white beach, and turquoise water.

You should also take a peek at the haunting **Japanese pearl divers' cemetery** on Port Drive. Entry is free.

During a tour of the **Willie Creek Pearl Farm** (☎ 08/9192 6000), 38km (24 miles) north of town, you will see the delicate process of an oyster getting “seeded” with a nucleus to form a pearl, learn about pearl farming, and learn what to look for when buying a pearl. You can also buy them in the showroom. The tour costs A\$25 (US\$16) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) children, and A\$65 (US\$42) for a family of four. The road to the farm is 4WD-only, and tides can cut it off; it is wise to take a coach tour, which will cost you A\$59 (US\$38) adults, A\$30 (US\$20) children, or A\$160 (US\$104) for a family of four, but take the worry out of it. They run daily April to September and every day except Tuesday and Saturday from October to March. You must book for the tour whether you self-drive or not.

The daily croc-feeding session is the best time to visit **Broome Crocodile Park**, next to Cable Beach Inter-Continental Resort, Cable Beach Rd. (☎ 08/9192 1489).

Several art galleries sell vivid oil and watercolor Kimberley landscapes and a small range of Aboriginal art. **Matso's**, 60 Hamersley St. (☎ 08/9193 5811), stocks the biggest range of European and Aboriginal paintings, sculpture, pottery, carvings, and books in an historic pearling master's house, and has a lovely veranda cafe and boutique brewery turning out unusual recipes like chili beer. It opens daily from 10am to 5pm, meals from 8am.

On Saturday from 8am to 1pm, browse the **markets** in the gardens of the colonial Courthouse at the corner of Frederick and Hamersley streets. It used to be the official station for the cable from Broome to Java. Don't bet the ranch on this tale being gospel, but locals like to tell you that when the British authorities packed up the building materials for the courthouse in Britain and addressed it to “The Kimberley,” they meant them to end up in the Kimberley, South Africa. Instead, the stuff arrived in the Kimberley, Australia. The town kept the building, and so can proudly lay claim to having Australia's only Zulu-proof courthouse.

A number of boats run sunset cruises on Roebuck Bay or off Cable Beach. Fishing for trevally, Spanish mackerel, barracuda, barramundi, queenfish, tuna, shark, sailfish, marlin, salmon (May–Aug), and reef fish is excellent around Broome; fly and sport fishing is also worth a try. Rent tackle and try your luck

from the deep-water jetty near **Town Beach** 2km (1¼ miles) south of town, or join one of the charter boats running day trips such as **FAD Game Fishing Charters** (☎ 08/9192 3998; www.fadcharters.com.au), for a day trip. Cyclones, rain, high winds, and strong tides can restrict fishing from December to March.

Australia's First Family of pearling, the Paspaleys, sell their wonderfully elegant jewelry at **Paspaley Pearls**, Carnarvon Street at Short Street (☎ 08/9192 2203). **Linneys** (☎ 08/9192 2430) and **Broome Pearls** (☎ 08/9192 2061) are other reputable jewelers nearby.

Don't leave without taking in a recent-release movie at the wonderful **Sun Pictures** outdoor cinema, Carnarvon Street near Short Street (☎ 08/9192 1077). Built in 1916, these are the oldest "picture gardens" in the world, where the audience sits in (saggy) canvas deckchairs. Films are even screened through the rain in the Wet. Tickets are A\$12 (US\$7.15). Open nightly except Christmas.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

As well as in-hotel dining, head over to the **Cable Beach Club Resort**, Cable Beach Road (☎ 1800/199 099 in Australia, or 08/9192 0400) for Broome's greatest range of menus. There's **The Club Restaurant** for elegant fine dining; the **Boardwalk Café** for snacks; all-day dining inside or on the terrace at the casual colonial-style **Lord Mac's**; and the poolside **Club Barbeque** on Wednesday and Thursday nights or **Walk in Wok** on Friday and Saturday nights for stir-fries. The last two both close in the Wet.

The Kimberley Klub ★ This stylish Outback-style lodge within walking distance of town might be aimed at the backpacker market, but all budget travelers will like its clean private rooms furnished simply with a double or twin beds and two bunks. You share the clean shower/toilet facilities, and can rent towels for A\$2 (US\$1.30) for the duration of your stay. The air-conditioning is coin-operated at A\$1 (US65¢) for 4 hours, although you are unlikely to need it in the Dry, thanks to some clever airflow work by the architects. The rooms are spartan (no TV, no tea and coffee, no fridge, no sink), but you will spend most of your time around the rock-lined pool and the large, rustic open-sided dining area. The crowd is friendly, so this is a great spot to socialize and meet other travelers. There's a TV lounge, Internet access, a small volleyball and badminton court, pool tables, table tennis, a book exchange/library, and a communal kitchen, and the staff organize activities such as quiz nights. You need to like loud music to stay here, but it's lights-out at 11pm, so everyone gets some sleep. Excellent value for the money.

62 Frederick St., Broome, WA 6725. ☎ 08/9192 3233. Fax 08/9192 3530. 50 quad-share dorm beds, 24 private units, A\$75 (US\$49) double. A\$23–A\$25 (US\$15–US\$16) dorm bed. AE, DC, MC, V. Free pickup from Greyhound Pioneer terminal. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C.

Mangrove Hotel ★ The best views in Broome are across Roebuck Bay from this modest but appealing cliff-top hotel a 5 minutes' walk from town. It's worth hightailing it back from sightseeing just to watch dusk fall over the bay from **The Tides** ★, a lovely outdoor restaurant, where tables and chairs are set out on the lawns under the palms and along the cliff edge. It's popular with locals for fresh, affordable food, and **Charters** restaurant inside is also one of Broome's best. There's no faulting the clean, well-kept, roomy deluxe rooms with sea views. Sixteen extra-large "Executive Suite" rooms, featuring dataports, were added in 2002; there are also three suites with kitchenettes, separate bedrooms,

and Jacuzzis; and two two-bedroom apartments. The pools and Jacuzzis are set in the lawns overlooking the bay. The town bus stops across the road.

120 Carnarvon St., Broome, WA 6725. ☎ **1800/094 818** in Australia, or 08/9192 1303. Fax 08/9193 5169. www.mangrovehotel.com.au. 70 units, all with bathroom (65 with shower only, 3 with Jacuzzi). High season (Apr–Sept) A\$165–A\$198 (US\$107–US\$129) double; A\$253–A\$275 (US\$164–US\$179) suite; A\$264 (US\$172) 2-bedroom apt. Low season (Oct–Mar) A\$143 (US\$93) double; A\$176–A\$253 (US\$114–US\$164) suite; A\$242 (US\$157) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$33 (US\$21). Children under 3 stay free. Ask about packages in the Wet Season. AE, DC, MC, V. Courtesy car from airport. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; 2 outdoor pools; 2 Jacuzzis; tour desk; secretarial services; limited room service; laundry; same-day dry cleaning/laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/movies, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

Adelaide & South Australia

by Marc Llewellyn

Adelaide (pop. 1 million) has a major advantage over the other state capitals in that it has Outback, vineyards, wetlands, animal sanctuaries, a major river, and mountain ranges virtually on its doorstep. Meals and lodgings are cheaper in Adelaide than in Sydney or Melbourne. If you plan to travel outside the city, then a trip to one of the wine-growing areas has to be on your itinerary. Of all the wine areas, the **Barossa Valley** ★ is the most interesting. Centered on Tanunda, the Barossa is known for its German architecture as well as its dozens of pretty hamlets, fine restaurants, and vineyards offering cellar-door tastings.

If you want to see animals instead of, or in addition to, grapes, you're in luck. You're likely to come across the odd kangaroo or wallaby near the main settlements, especially at dusk, or you could visit one of the area's wildlife reserves. Otherwise head out into the Outback or over to **Kangaroo Island**, without a doubt the best place in Australia to see concentrated

numbers of native animals in the wild.

Another place well worth visiting is the craggy **Flinders Ranges**, some 460km (285 miles) north of Adelaide. Though the scenery along the way is mostly unattractive grazing properties devoid of trees, the Flinders Ranges offer an incredible landscape of multi-colored rocks, rough-and-ready characters, and even camel treks in the semi-desert. On the other side of the mountains, the real Outback starts.

The **South Australian Outback** is serenely beautiful, with giant skies, wildflowers after the rains, red earth, and little water. Out here you'll find bizarre opal-mining towns, such as **Coober Pedy**, where summer temperatures can reach 122°F (50°C) and where most people live underground to escape the heat.

If you prefer your landscape with more moisture, head to the **Coorong**, a water-bird sanctuary rivaled only by Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory (see chapter 8).

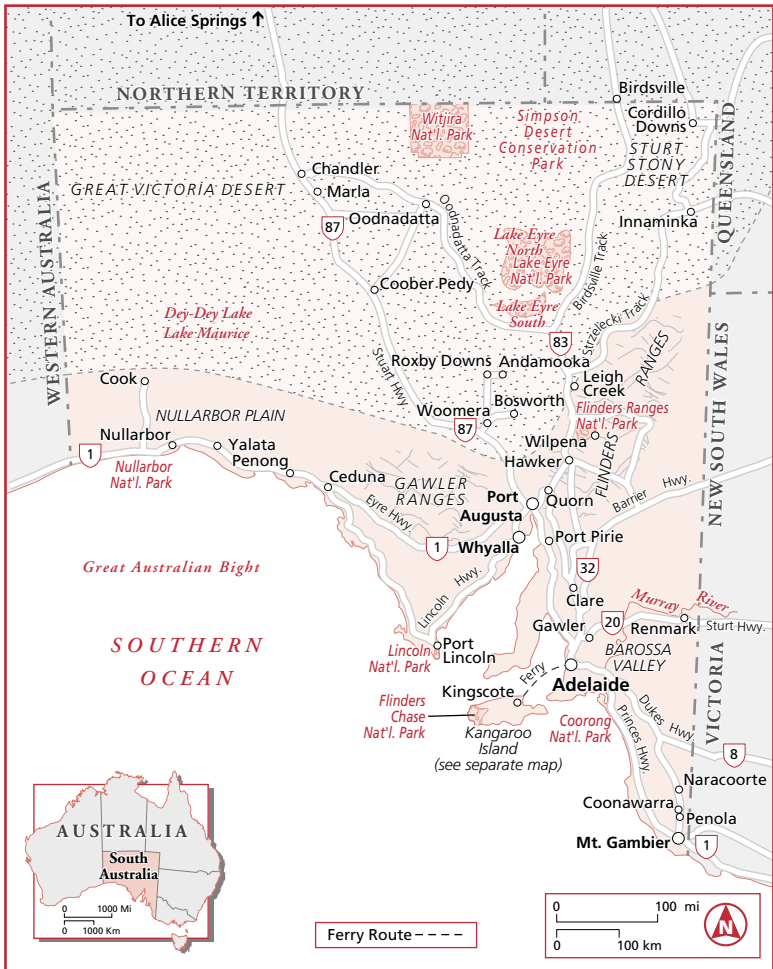
EXPLORING THE STATE

VISITOR INFORMATION The **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre**, 18 King William St., Adelaide, SA 5000 (☎ 1300/655 276 in Australia; fax 08/8303 2249; southaustralia.com), is the best place to collect information on Adelaide and South Australia. It's open weekdays from 8:30am to 5pm and weekends from 9am to 2pm. Also try www.southaustralia.com.

For general information about South Australia's national parks contact the **Department of Environment and Natural Resources Information Centre**, Australis House, 77 Grenfell St., Adelaide, SA 5000 (☎ 08/8204 1910). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND South Australia, at four times the size of the United Kingdom, has a lot of empty space between places of interest. The best way to

South Australia



see it is by car, though a limited rail service connects Adelaide with some areas. The Stuart Highway bisects the state from south to north; it runs from Adelaide through the industrial center of Port Augusta (gateway to the Flinders Ranges), and through Coober Pedy to Alice Springs in the Red Centre. The Eyre Highway travels westwards along the coastline and into Western Australia, while the Barrier Highway enters New South Wales just before the mining city of Broken Hill (see chapter 4). The Princes Highway takes you east to Melbourne. You should seek travel advice from the **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA)**, 41 Hindmarsh Square, Adelaide, SA 5000 (☎ 13 11 11 in South Australia only, or 08/8202 4500; www.raa.net), if you are planning to drive into the Outback regions. The RAA provides route maps and emergency breakdown service.

Both **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) and **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) operate bus service within South Australia. Within the state the largest operator is **Statliner** (☎ 08/8415 5555).

1 Adelaide

Adelaide has a reputation as a quieter place than some of the other state capitals and relishes in the peace of its parklands and surrounding vineyards. In many ways it's something of a throwback to the comfortable lifestyle of 1950s Australia—a lifestyle that the more progressive state capitals have left behind.

Numerous parks and gardens, wide tree-lined streets, the River Torrens running through its center, sidewalk cafes, colonial architecture, and the churches help make it a pleasant, open city, perfect for strolling or bicycling.

Though the immigrant population has added a cosmopolitan flair to the restaurant scene, Adelaide still has a feeling of old England about it. That's not surprising when you learn that Adelaide was the only capital settled by English free settlers rather than convicts, and that it attracted more after World War II, when Brits flocked here to work in the city's car and appliance factories.

But it was earlier immigrants, from Germany, who gave Adelaide and the surrounding area a romantic twist. Arriving as refugees from their religious-torn country in the 1830s, German immigrants brought with them their winemaking skills, and established wineries. Today, more than one-third of all Australian wine—including some of the world's best—comes from areas mostly within an hour's drive from Adelaide. As a result, Adelaidians of all socio-economic groups are more versed in wine than even the French and regularly compare vintages, wine-growing regions, and winemaking trends.

Any time of the year is a good time to visit Adelaide, though May through August can be chilly and January and February hot.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **Qantas** (© 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies to Adelaide from the other major state capitals. **Virgin Blue** (© 13 67 89 in Australia) flies direct from Melbourne with connections from other state capitals and some major towns. Check their Internet site for cheap deals. Adelaide International Airport is 5km (3 miles) west of the city center. Major car-rental companies (Avis, Budget, Hertz, and Thrifty) have desks in both the international and domestic terminals.

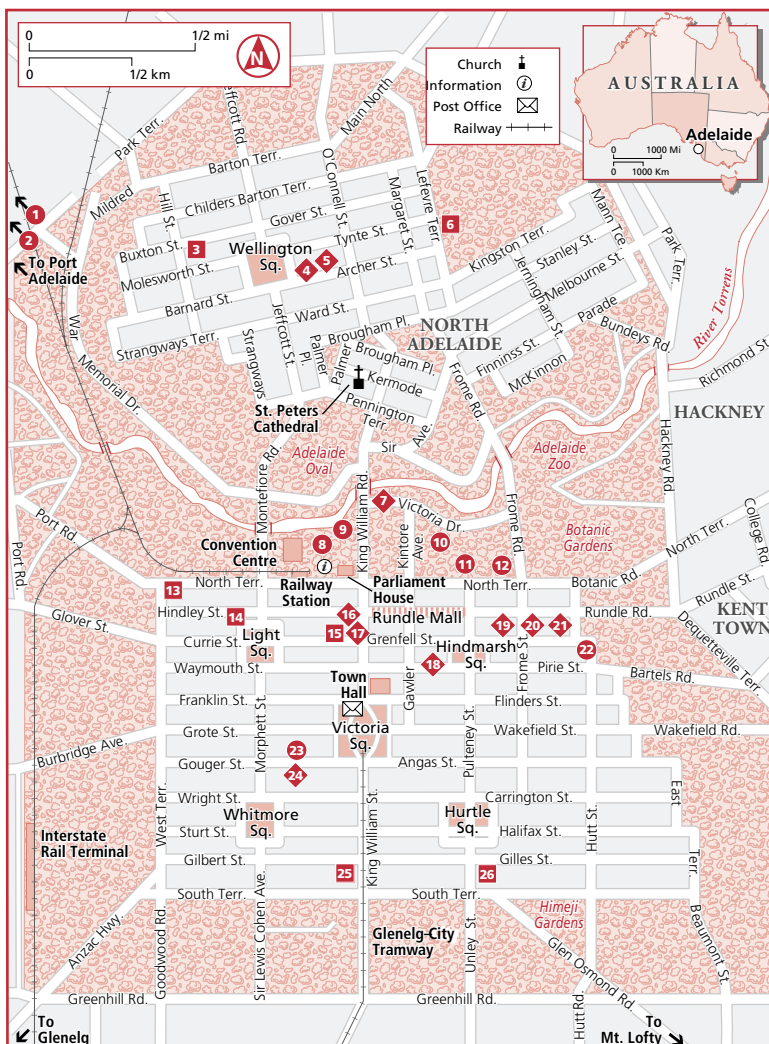
The **Skylink** (© 08/8332 0528; www.coachaust.com.au) connects the airport with major hotels and the rail and bus stations. On weekdays, buses leave the terminals at 30-minute intervals from 5:30am to 9:30pm, and on weekends and public holidays hourly (on the half-hour). Adult tickets are A\$7 (US\$4.55) one-way, A\$12 (US\$7.80) return. Children's tickets cost A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) each way.

By Taxi A taxi to the city will cost around A\$17 (US\$11).

By Train The **Keswick Interstate Rail Passenger Terminal**, located 2km (1¼ miles) west of the city center, is Adelaide's main railway station. The terminal has a small snack bar and a cafe.

Call **Great Southern Railways** (© 13 21 47 in Australia, or 08/8213 4530) for information and bookings for all trains described below, or check out the timetables and fares on their website (www.gsr.com.au).

One of the great trains of Australia, the **Indian Pacific** transports passengers from Sydney to Adelaide (trip time: 28 hr.) and from Perth to Adelaide (trip time: 36 hr.) twice a week on Monday and Thursday. Tickets from Sydney to Adelaide are A\$570 (US\$370) for adults and A\$445 (US\$289) for children in first class; A\$450 (US\$292) for adults and A\$325 (US\$211) for children in an economy sleeper; and A\$227 (US\$148) for adults and A\$109 (US\$71) for children in



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- City Centre Motel **15**
- City Park Motel **26**
- Moore's Brecknock Hotel **25**
- North Adelaide
- Heritage Group **3**
- Princes Lodge Motel **6**
- Saville Park Suites **13**
- The Townhouse **14**

DINING ◆

- Amalfi **20**
- Austral Hotel **19**
- Central Markets **23**
- Jasmin Indian Restaurant **18**
- Jolleys Boathouse
- Restaurant **7**
- The Manse **4**
- Matsuri **24**
- Mekong Thai **16**
- The Oxford **5**
- Rigoni's Bistro **17**
- Ruby's Café **21**

ATTRACTIONS ●

- Adelaide Casino **8**
- Adelaide Festival Centre **9**
- Art Gallery of South Australia **12**
- Central Markets **23**
- National Railway Museum **2**
- South Australian
- Maritime Museum **1**
- South Australian Museum **11**
- Tandanya Aboriginal
- Cultural Institute **22**
- The Migration Museum **10**

The Adelaide & Womadelaide Festivals

Adelaide is home to Australia's largest performing arts festival, the **Adelaide Festival**, which takes place over 3 weeks in March during even-numbered years. The festival includes literary and visual arts as well as dance, opera, classical music, jazz, cabaret, and comedy. The festival encompasses **Writers' Week** and the **Adelaide Fringe Festival**.

In February and March of odd-numbered years the 3-day **Womadelaide Festival** of world music takes place. Crowds of 60,000 or more turn up to watch Australian and international artists.

For more information on the Adelaide Festival check out the website at www.adelaidefestival.org.au, and for the Adelaide Fringe Festival visit www.adelaidefringe.com.au.

coach. From Perth to Adelaide it costs A\$1,190 (US\$773) for adults and A\$809 (US\$526) for children in first class; A\$960 (US\$624) for adults and A\$576 (US\$375) for children in an economy sleeper; and A\$309 (US\$200) for adults and A\$155 (US\$100) for children in coach.

The other legendary Australian train is ***The Ghan***, which runs from Adelaide and up to Alice Springs weekly November through April and twice a week May through October. Trip time from Alice Springs to Adelaide is 20 hours. From Alice Springs to Adelaide and vice versa it costs A\$850 (US\$552) for adults and A\$578 (US\$375) for children in first class; A\$680 (US\$442) for adults and A\$408 (US\$265) for children in an economy sleeper; and A\$215 (US\$140) for adults and A\$105 (US\$68) for children for an economy seat. The return (round-trip) fare for the trains above works out to either twice the single (one-way) fare, or just a few dollars cheaper. Full-time students with a recognized student card from any institution travel for child prices on all trains.

The ***Overland*** operates four weekly services: a daylight service from Adelaide to Melbourne and a return overnight service from Melbourne to Adelaide (trip time: 12 hr.). From Melbourne to Adelaide ticket prices are A\$175 (US\$114) for adults and A\$139 (US\$90) for children in first class, and A\$59 (US\$38) for adults and A\$42 (US\$27) for children in an economy seat. It's a little cheaper from Adelaide to Melbourne, and there are good discounts for return fares.

By Bus Intercity coaches terminate at the central bus station, 101 Franklin St. (© 08/8415 5533), near Morphett Street in the city center.

Adventurous types should consider traveling to Adelaide from Melbourne (or vice versa) on the **Wayward Bus**, operated by the Wayward Bus Touring Company, P.O. Box 7076, Adelaide, SA 5000 (© 1800/882 823 in Australia, or 08/8232 6646; www.waywardbus.com.au). These 21-seat buses make the trip in 3½ days via the Great Ocean Road; the fare is A\$310 (US\$201) with backpacker's accommodations and around A\$440 (US\$286) with motel accommodations. You spend around 3 hours a day on the bus, and the driver acts as your guide. A picnic or cafe lunch each day and entry to national parks are included. You can leave the trip and rejoin another later. Reservations are essential. Wayward Bus also runs a 4-day trip from Alice Springs to Adelaide, via Coober Pedy and the Flinders National Park (and vice versa) leaving twice weekly. This includes 2 nights camping and 2 nights in a bunkhouse. The trip costs A\$395

(US\$257) from Adelaide to Coober Pedy, and A\$770 (US\$500) from Adelaide to Alice Springs.

Another bus company, the **Nullabor Traveller** (P.O. Box 72, Glensside, SA 5065; ☎ **08/8364 0407**; www.the-traveller.com.au), takes adventurous travelers from Adelaide to Perth in 9 days across the Nullabor Plain. The tour includes a mixture of camping and pub accommodations and most meals. It costs A\$945 (US\$614) in summer, and A\$72 (US\$47) more in winter (with more accommodations instead of camping). The company offers a range of other tours, including a 6-day trip to Coober Pedy, Lake Eyre, and the Flinders Ranges for A\$550 (US\$357); a 2-day tour to Kangaroo Island for A\$310 (US\$201) in dorm rooms and A\$365 (US\$237) in a double; a full-day tour of the Barossa Valley for A\$49 (US\$32); and a 3½ day trip along the Great Ocean Road for A\$310 (US\$201) in a dorm and A\$440 (US\$286) in a double. See all these destinations later in this chapter.

By Car To drive from Sydney to Adelaide takes roughly 20 hours via the Hume and Sturt highways; from Melbourne it takes around 10 hours via the Great Ocean Road and Princess Highway; from Perth it takes 32 hours via the Great Eastern and Princess highways; and from Alice Springs it takes 15 hours of remote driving on the Stuart Highway. For more information on driving distances consult www.auinfo.com/distancecalc_process.asp.

VISITOR INFORMATION Go to the **South Australia Visitor & Travel Centre**, 18 King William St. (☎ **1300/655 276** in Australia, or 08/8303 2033; fax 08/8303 2249), for maps, travel advice, and hotel and tour bookings. It's open weekdays from 8:30am to 5pm, weekends from 9am to 2pm. There's an info booth on Rundle Mall (☎ **08/8203 7611**), open daily from 10am to 5pm.

CITY LAYOUT Adelaide is a simple city to get around in because of its grid-like pattern, planned down to each wide street and airy square by Colonel William Light in 1836. The city's official center is **Victoria Square**, where you'll find the Town Hall. Bisecting the city from south to north is the city's main thoroughfare, **King William Street**. Streets running perpendicular to King William Street change their names on either side, so that Franklin Street, for example, changes into Flinders Street. Of these cross streets, the most interesting are the restaurant strips of **Gouger Street** and **Rundle Street**, the latter running into the pedestrian-only shopping precinct of Rundle Mall. Another is **Hindley Street**, with its inexpensive restaurants and nightlife. On the banks of the River Torrens just north of the city center, you'll find the Riverbank Precinct, the home of the Festival Centre, the Convention Centre, and the Skycity Adelaide Casino. Bordering the city center on the north and south are **North Terrace**, which is lined with galleries and museums and leads to the Botanic Gardens, and **South Terrace**.

Value A Money-Saving Transit Pass

If you plan to get around the city via public transportation, it's a good idea to purchase a **Daytrip ticket**, which covers unlimited travel on buses, trams, and city trains within the metropolitan area for 1 day. The pass costs A\$5.70 (US\$3.65) for adults and A\$2.90 (US\$1.90) for children 5 to 15 and is available at most train stations, newsstands, and the **Passenger Transport Board Information Centre** (☎ **08/8210 1000**).

Follow King William Street south and you'll be chasing the tram to the beachside suburb of **Glenelg**; follow it north, and it crosses the River Torrens and flows into sophisticated **North Adelaide**, an area crammed with Victorian and Edwardian architecture. The main avenues in North Adelaide, **O'Connell** and **Melbourne streets**, are lined with restaurants, cafes, and bistros that offer the tastes of a multicultural city.

To the northwest of the city center is **Port Adelaide**, a seaport and the historic maritime heart of South Australia—home to some of the finest colonial buildings in the state, as well as good pubs and restaurants.

GETTING AROUND By Bus Adelaide's public bus network is divided into three zones, and fares are calculated according to the number of zones traveled. The city center is classed as Zone 1. The fare in Zone 1 is A\$1.80 (US\$1.20) from 9am to 3pm on weekdays and A\$3 (US\$1.95) most other times. You can buy tickets on board or at kiosks around the city. You can pick up free metro information and get timetable and destination information over the phone, or at the **Passenger Transport Board Information Centre** (☎ 08/8210 1000), on the corner of Currie and King William streets. It's open Monday through Saturday from 8am to 6pm and Sunday from 10:30am to 5:30pm.

The **CityLoop bus** (no. 99C) operates free bus service every 15 minutes (Mon–Thurs 8:30am–6pm, Fri to 9pm, and Sat to 5pm) around the city center, along North Terrace, East Terrace, Grenfell Street, Pulteney Street, Wakefield Street, Grote Street, Morphett Street, Light Square, Hindley Street, and West Terrace. Another free bus, the **Bee Line** (no. 99B), runs along North Terrace, down King William Street to Victoria Street. Routes are well signposted. All city free buses are wheelchair-accessible.

Bus nos. 181 and 182 run from the city to North Adelaide.

The **Adelaide Explorer bus** (☎ 08/8231 7172; www.adelaideexplorer.com.au) stops at 26 sights around town, including Glenelg, and costs A\$30 (US\$20) for adults, A\$19 (US\$13) for children, and A\$70 (US\$46) for families of four. The loop takes a leisurely 3 hours, with commentary, and you can get on and off when you want. The first bus departs from 38 King William St., on the corner of Rundle Mall (next to Haigh's Chocolates), at 9am. The company will pick you up from your hotel between 8 and 8:30am if you call ahead, and will drop you off at the airport (with your luggage) as part of the fare. Call or e-mail ahead. Buy tickets on the bus.

By Tram The **Glenelg Tram** runs between Victoria Square and the beachside suburb of Glenelg. Tickets are valid for 2 hours and cost A\$1.80 (US\$1.15) for adults and A90¢ (US58¢) for children 5 to 14 from 9am to 3pm, and A\$3 (US\$1.95) for adults and A\$1.30 (US85¢) for children at other times. The journey takes 29 minutes.

By Taxi & Car The major cab companies are **Yellow Cabs** (☎ 13 22 27 in South Australia only), **Suburban** (☎ 08/8211 8888), and **Amalgamated** (☎ 08/8223 3333). **Access Cabs** (☎ 1300/360 940 in South Australia only) offers wheelchair taxis.

Major car-rental companies are **Avis**, 136 North Terrace (☎ 08/8410 5727); **Budget**, 274 North Terrace (☎ 08/8223 1400); **Hertz**, 233 Morphett St. (☎ 08/8231 2856); and **Thrifty**, 296 Hindley St. (☎ 08/8211 8788).

The **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA)**, 41 Hindmarsh Sq. (☎ 13 11 11 in South Australia, or 08/8202 4500; www.raa.net), has route maps and provides emergency breakdown services.

FAST FACTS: Adelaide

American Express The Amex office, at 13 Grenfell St. (☎ 08/8202 1400), is open during normal business hours.

Business Hours Generally, banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm and Friday from 9:30am to 5pm. Stores are generally open Monday through Thursday from 9am to 5:30pm, Friday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

Currency Exchange Banks and hotels, the casino, and the Myer department store in Rundle Mall all cash traveler's checks. The **Thomas Cook** office is at 45 Grenfell St. (☎ 08/8212 3354).

Dentist Contact the **Australian Dental Association Emergency Information Service** (☎ 08/8272 8111), open weeknights from 5 to 9pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 9pm. It will put you in touch with a dentist. You can also contact the office of **Dr. Brook**, 231 North Terrace (☎ 08/8223 6988), available during normal business hours.

Doctor Contact the **Royal Adelaide Hospital**, on North Terrace (☎ 08/8222 4000). The **Travellers' Medical & Vaccination Centre**, 29 Gilbert Place (☎ 08/8212 7522), offers vaccinations and travel-related medicines.

Emergencies Dial ☎ 000 to call an ambulance, the fire department, or the police in an emergency.

Hospitals The **Royal Adelaide Hospital**, North Terrace (☎ 08/8222 4000), is located in the city center.

Hot Lines Call the **Crisis Care Centre** at ☎ 13 16 11; the **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA)** at ☎ 08/8202 4500; and the **Disability Information and Resource Centre** at ☎ 08/8223 7522.

Internet Access The **Ngapartji Multimedia Centre**, 211 Rundle St. (☎ 08/8232 0839), offers e-mail and Internet access Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 9pm, Friday and Saturday from 9am to 10pm, and Sunday from noon to 7pm. Other access points are on Hindley Street: **Talking Cents**, 53 Hindley St. (☎ 08/8212 1266), and **Café Boulevard**, 13 Hindley St. (☎ 08/8231 5734).

Lost Property If you've lost something on the street, contact the nearest police station. For items left on public transport contact the **Lost Property Office**, on the main concourse of the Adelaide Railway Station on North Terrace (☎ 08/8218 2552); it's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Luggage Storage/Lockers There are luggage lockers at Adelaide Airport in the domestic terminal. At the **Central Bus Station** on Franklin Street (☎ 08/8415 5533), luggage lockers cost A\$2 (US\$1.30) for 24 hours.

Pharmacies Called "chemist shops" in Australia. **Burden Chemists**, Shop 11, Southern Cross Arcade, King William St. (☎ 08/8231 4701), is open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 6pm, Friday from 8am to 8pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

Post Office The **General Post Office (GPO)**, 141 King William St., Adelaide, SA 5000 (☎ 08/8216 2222), is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm and Saturday from 8:30am to noon. General delivery mail (poste restante) can be collected Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm and Saturday 8:30 to noon.

Restrooms Public restrooms can be found at the Central Market Arcade, between Grote and Gouger streets, in both Hindmarsh and Victoria squares, and at James Place (off Rundle Mall).

Safety Adelaide is a safe city, though it's wise to avoid walking along the River Torrens and through side streets near Hindley Street after dark.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The **South Australia Visitor & Travel Centre** (see “Visitor Information” above) can supply info on B&Bs and homestays around the state. Satellite or cable TV is rare in South Australian hotels, though some provide pay-per-view movies.

IN THE CITY CENTER

City Central Motel This two-and-a-half-star motel is centrally placed near Rundle Mall, and though not in the least bit glamorous, it's perfectly fine for a few night's stay. Rooms are clean, simple, and smallish, and a set of bunks—as well as a double bed or twin beds—make them perfect for families on a budget. The communal balcony is a pleasant place to watch the world go by.

23 Hindley St., Adelaide SA 5000. ☎ 08/8231 4049. www.arta.com.au/ccentral.html. 12 units. A\$60 (US\$39) single; A\$66 (US\$43) double; A\$68 (US\$44) twin. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, toaster.

City Park Motel The rooms in this motel just outside the city center have modern furnishings and nice bathrooms with showers. Some rooms have private balconies. Also on the premises is a separate bathroom with a tub. The best room is no. 45. Downstairs there's a cocktail bar, nightclub, and bistro.

471 Pulteney St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ☎ 08/8223 1444. Fax 08/8223 1133. 18 units (nonsmoking rooms), 14 with bathroom (shower only). A\$55 (US\$36) double without bathroom; A\$75 (US\$49) double with bathroom; A\$110 (US\$72) deluxe double with balcony. Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited parking by arrangement. The tram to Glenelg stops around the corner, 3 streets up is a bus stop for the free City Loop bus. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; nightclub; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service 7am–10pm; dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

Moore's Brecknock Hotel Adelaide's original Irish pub, built in 1851, still attracts a lot of Irish who come here for the great selection of beer and reasonably priced home-style cooking—it reputedly serves Adelaide's best hamburgers. It's also very popular with American guests who use the hotel accommodations upstairs as a base from which to discover Kangaroo Island and other parts of the state. The Brecknock is about 4 blocks from Victoria Square and is run by Kerry Moore and his Canadian wife Tricia. There are live bands downstairs on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings, but the music finishes at 1am on Friday and Saturday, and 10pm on Sunday, so you shouldn't have too much trouble sleeping. Rooms are large and pleasantly done in old-world style. Each has a double and a single bed, and a sink, with the bathrooms down the hall.

Next door to Moore's is **Brecon Inn Backpackers** (☎ 08/8211 8985; www.breconinn.com.au), which is associated with the hotel. Dorm beds here are A\$20 (US\$13).

401 King William St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ☎ 08/8231 5467. Fax 08/8410 1968. www.brecknockhotel.com.au. 10 units, none with bathroom. A\$65 (US\$42) double; A\$85 (US\$55) triple. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. The Glenelg tram stops in front of the hotel. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, fax, fridge, coffeemaker, iron, safe.

Tips Plan Ahead

If you plan to be in town during the Adelaide Festival, make sure you book accommodations well in advance. The town can be packed during Christmas and New Year's, so it's wise to book well in advance then, too.

Saville Park Suites Adelaide ★ You can't miss this conglomerate of russet-red bricks just on the outskirts of the city center (about a 10-min. walk). Rooms are nice and spacious, if a bit formal, which is not surprising because the place is popular with business travelers. On the premises is the **Zipp Restaurant and Wine Bar**, where Tommy Chang serves up an innovative menu.

255 Hindley St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ☎ **1800/882 601** in Australia, or 08/8217 2500. Fax 08/8217 2519. www.savillesuites.com. 142 units. A\$146 (US\$95) studio; A\$167 (US\$109) 2-bedroom suite. Up to 2 people in studio and 4 in other units. Facilities for travelers with disabilities in some rooms. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A\$5/day (US\$3.25). **Amenities:** Restaurant; free access to nearby City Gym; outdoor spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (7–10am and 6–10:30pm); babysitting; laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; safe. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, VCR (on request), dataport, kitchen, minibar, fridge, coffee/teamaker, hair dryer, iron.

The Townhouse  *Value* The Townhouse is one of Adelaide's newest and nicest boutique hotels. It's a 10- to 15-minute walk from the center of town, 5 minutes from the casino, and near the nightclub and red-light district. Rooms are spacious, comfortable, modern, and clean.

164 Hindley St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ☎ **1800/888 241** in Australia, 800/624-3524 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/892 407 in the U.K., 0800/803 524 in New Zealand, or 08/8211 8255. Fax 08/8231 1179. www.barrontownhouse.com.au. 68 units. A\$135 (US\$88) single or twin share; A\$172 (US\$112) business double; A\$182 (US\$118) executive double. Check for Internet specials. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Lower rates in off-season and weekends. Ask about package deals. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; golf course nearby; access to nearby health club; sauna; concierge; room service; laundry/dry cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, DVD w/free movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

IN NORTH ADELAIDE

This suburb across the river is an interesting place with nice architecture and good restaurants. It's about a 10-minute bus ride from the city center.

Princes Lodge Motel One of the best motels in Adelaide, the Princes Lodge looks more like a large private home than your simple brick roadside structure. Rooms are nicely decorated and generally come with a double and a single bed. There are three family rooms available, one of which has a double and three singles, while another has six beds in one room. The motel is within walking distance of the restaurant strip on O'Connell Street, and a A\$6 (US\$3.90) taxi ride from the city center.

73 Levee Terrace, North Adelaide, 5006. ☎ **08/8267 5566**. Fax 08/8239 0787. princeslodge@senet.com.au. 21 units. A\$60 (US\$39) double with separate private bathroom; A\$70 (US\$46) double with attached bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 222 from Victoria Sq. (with pickups along King William St.). **Amenities:** Golf course nearby; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Worth a Splurge

North Adelaide Heritage Apartments and Cottages ★★ ★ *Finds* It's worth coming all the way to Adelaide just for the experience of staying in one of these out-of-this-world apartments, cottages, or suites. Each of the 21 properties in North Adelaide and Eastwood are fabulous. I recommend particularly

the former Friendly Meeting Chapel Hall, which was once the headquarters of the mouthwatering “Albert Lodge No. 6 of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity Friendly Society, and the Court Huntsman’s Pride No. 2478 of the Ancient Order of Foresters Friendly Society.” The structure resembles a small church, with a small, simple gabled hall of bluestone rubble trimmed with brick. Built in 1878, it’s stocked with period pieces and antiques and rounded off with a modern, fully stocked kitchen; a huge spa bath; a queen-size bed; and a CD player and TV.

Another standout place is the George Lowe Esquire unit. This huge 19th-century apartment is also stocked with antiques, has a huge four-poster bed, a separate bathroom, a lounge, and a full kitchen. Guests also have use of nice gardens. Owners Rodney and Regina Twiss have added all those little touches that make you feel at home, from magazines liberally piled up everywhere to bacon and eggs in the fridge. All properties are within easy walking distance of the main attractions in the area. The company also offers three apartments in the old North Adelaide Fire Station. The ground floor apartment in the Fire Station Inn even comes with a full-size, bright red, and very old, fire engine.

Office: 109 Glen Osmond Rd., Eastwood, SA 5063. ☎ **08/8272 1355**, or 0418/289 494 (mobile phone). Fax 08/8272 1355. www.adelaideheritage.com. 21 units. A\$145–A\$330 (US\$94–US\$215) double. Extra person A\$60–A\$85 (US\$39–US\$55). Children under 12 A\$30 (US\$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Golf/tennis courts nearby; spa; concierge; car-rental desk; free bus to city center; room service noon–10pm; massage; dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

IN GLENELG

I’d recommend without hesitation that anyone stay in Glenelg rather than in the city center. The journey to the city center by car or tram takes less than 30 minutes, and the airport is less than 10 minutes away. Add to this the sea, the lovely beach, the fun fair, the great shops, the good pub, and the nice accommodations, and you have a perfect place to ease up on your holiday.

Atlantic Tower Motor Inn If you’re looking for relatively inexpensive accommodations near the beach, this is your place. You can’t miss this tubular building not far from the sea, with its slowly revolving restaurant on the 12th floor. Rooms are simple, but bright, and have nice park views through large windows. Each room has a double and a single bed. The Deluxe rooms are a bit nicer and come with bathrooms rather than just showers. Suites have two rooms and excellent views; the most expensive have spa tubs. The gently turning **Rock Lobster Cafe** upstairs is open for lunch on Thursday, Friday, and Sunday (no lunch on Sat) and dinner every evening.

760 Anzac Hwy., Glenelg, SA 5045. ☎ **08/8294 1011**. Fax 08/8376 0964. www.atlantictower.citysearch.com.au. 27 units (20 with shower only). A\$90 (US\$59) double; A\$110 (US\$72) deluxe double; A\$155 (US\$101) suite. Extra person A\$12 (US\$7.80). Children under 15 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Hotel is 1 block from tram stop 20. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

With more than 600 restaurants, pubs, and cafes, Adelaide boasts more dining spots per capita than anywhere else in Australia. Many are clustered in areas such as Rundle Street in the city and Gouger Street and North Adelaide—where you’ll find almost every style of cuisine you can imagine. For cheap noodles, lak-sas, sushi, and cakes head to Adelaide’s popular **Central Markets** (☎ **08/8203 7494**), behind the Adelaide Hilton Hotel between Gouger and Grote streets.

Finds Something Different—Dining Tours

If you like good food and wine, but can't decide on just one restaurant, try one of **Graeme Andrews' tours** (☎ 08/8336 8333, or 0412/842 242 mobile; fax/message 08/8336 4075; www.food-fun-wine.com.au). He offers eight food and food-and-wine tours showcasing the Central Market, Chinatown, and Gouger Street restaurant precincts. Prices start from A\$28 (US\$18). Private tours are also available on request.

Because of South Australia's healthy wine industry, you'll find that many of the more expensive restaurants have extensive wine lists—though with spicier foods, it's probably wiser to stick with beer, or a fruity white in a pinch. Many Adelaide restaurants allow diners to bring their own wine (BYO), but most charge a steep corkage fee to open your bottle—A\$6 (US\$3.90) or so is not uncommon.

IN THE CITY CENTRE

Amalfi ITALIAN Come here for good Italian cooking at reasonable prices in a lively atmosphere. The pizzas are the best in Adelaide—though a little expensive—and good veal and pasta dishes are always on the menu. Be sure to check out the daily specials, where you can pick out a very good fish dish or two.

29 Frome St. (just off Rundle St.). ☎ 08/8223 1948. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$14–A\$17 (US\$8.80–US\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–11pm; Fri–Sat 5:30pm–midnight.

Austral Hotel MODERN AUSTRALIAN This large pub, with its dark timber and forest-colored wallpaper, is a pleasant place for a good-value pub meal. You can either eat at the bar, outside on the street, or in the dining room. The bistro serves burgers, fish and chips, pastas, laksas, and Thai curries. The restaurant is a bit more upscale and offers risotto, handmade crab ravioli, beef filets, chicken dishes, venison, paella, and baby octopus.

205 Rundle St. ☎ 08/8223 4660. www.theaustral.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$6.50–A\$14 (US\$4.20–US\$8.80) in bistro, A\$15–A\$22 (US\$9.70–US\$14) in restaurant. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sun 11pm–late. Metro station nearby.

Jasmin Indian Restaurant NORTH INDIAN Prices have crept up as this place has gotten more popular, but this family-run Adelaide institution a block south of Rundle Mall is still a good value—and it won the Restaurant Association's award for best Indian restaurant in 2000. Indian artifacts and signed cricket bats from visiting Indian teams decorate the walls. The atmosphere is comfortable yet busy, and the service is professional. The house special is the very hot beef vindaloo, but all the old favorites are here, too: tandoori chicken; butter chicken (a big seller here); lamb korma; and malabari beef with coconut cream, ginger, and garlic. Mop it all up with naan bread, and cool your palate with a side dish of raita. The *suji halwa* (a semolina pudding with nuts) is the best I've tasted. Smoking is not permitted.

31 Hindmarsh Sq. ☎ 08/8223 7837. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$19–A\$20 (US\$12–US\$13). Lunch banquet A\$27 (US\$18); dinner banquet A\$35 (US\$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2.30pm; Tues–Sat 5:30–10.30pm.

Jolleys Boathouse Restaurant ★ **MODERN AUSTRALIAN** Jolleys is on the banks of the River Torrens, with views of boats, ducks, and black swans. Business people rush for the three outside tables, but if you miss out, the bright

and airy interior, with its cream-colored tablecloths and directors' chairs, isn't too much of a letdown. You might start with the goat's curd ravioli with red pesto and chives. Moving on, you could tuck into the roasted duck with hazelnut risotto. (Close your eyes to the peaceful quacking out on the river if you can.) The banana and cardamom soufflé for dessert is wicked.

Jollies Lane. ☎ 08/8223 2891. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$21–A\$27 (US\$14–US\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–9:30pm.

Matsuri ★ JAPANESE I like the atmosphere in this very good Japanese restaurant on the popular Gouger Street restaurant strip. The food is prepared by Takaomi Kitamura, world-famous ice sculptor and sushi master. The sushi and sashimi dishes are some of the best in Australia. Monday night is “sushi festival night,” when sushi is half price. During happy hour Wednesday through Sunday, sushi is 30% off if you place your order before 7pm. (You can pre-order over the phone and eat later.) Promised too is a 10% discount if you show this Frommer's Guide. Other popular dishes include vegetarian and seafood tempura, *yose nobe* (a hot pot of vegetables, seafood, and chicken), and *chawan mushi* (a steamed custard dish). The service is friendly and considerate. Corkage fee is a steep A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) a bottle.

167 Gouger St. ☎ 08/8231 3494. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$8.60–A\$28 (US\$5.60–US\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Lunch: Fri noon–2pm; Dinner: Wed–Mon 5:30–10pm.

Mekong Thai THAI/MALAYSIAN/HALAL *Value* Though this place is not much to look at—with simple tables and chairs, some outside in a portico—it has a fiery reputation for good food among in-the-know locals. The food is spicy and authentic, and the portions are filling. It's also a vegetarian's paradise, with at least 16 meat-free mains on the ethnically varied menu. It's Adelaide's only fully halal (suitable for Muslims) restaurant.

68 Hindley St. ☎ 08/8231 2914. Main courses A\$11–A\$13 (US\$7–US\$8.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:15pm–late.

Rigoni's Bistro ITALIAN Located on a narrow lane west of King William Street, this traditional Italian trattoria is often packed at lunch, though less frantic in the evening. It's big and bright with high ceilings and russet quarry tiles. A long bar runs through the middle of the dining room; brass plates mark the stools of regular diners. The food is very traditional and quite good. The chalkboard menu often changes, but you are quite likely to find lasagna, veal in white wine, marinated fish, and various pasta dishes. There's also an extensive salad bar with a variety of antipasto and an outside dining area.

27 Leigh St. ☎ 08/8231 5160. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$15–A\$22 (US\$9.50–US\$14); antipasto bar (lunch only) A\$12–A\$14 (US\$7.50–US\$8.90). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 6:30–10pm; Sat 6:30–10pm.

Ruby's Café ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Situated in suitably unpretentious surroundings for a former market cafe catering to the local workers, Ruby's is an Adelaide institution. It still has its laminated tables and the “no spitting, no coarse language” sign behind the bar, despite being far more upmarket than that. Basically, you get a very good restaurant meal in an old cafe atmosphere at very good prices. Served up are filling curries and pasta dishes, hearty meals such as lamb shanks, and quite a few vegetarian options. For dessert I recommend the toffee pudding with toffee sauce. The menu changes every 6 weeks.

255b Rundle St. ☎ 08/8224 0365. Main courses A\$11–A\$20 (US\$7.15–US\$13). AE, MC, V. Daily 6:30–11:30pm; Sun 9am–5pm.

IN NORTH ADELAIDE

The Manse 🍷 SEAFOOD Swiss chef Bernhard Oehrli has a fine touch when it comes to seafood, and I recommend this place wholeheartedly. This cozy restaurant spreads out into several rooms, with log fires to keep you warm in winter and room to dine outside on sunnier days. As for the food, the scallops here are almost fresh enough to waddle off the warmed cucumber base and head for sea, while the rare tuna in Japanese-style tempura is so delicate it literally melts in your mouth. If you want something other than seafood, then you can't go wrong with a signature dish of venison with black pepper and a spiced beetroot glaze. For dessert try the warm chocolate gâteau or the rhubarb gratin with ice cream.

142 Tynte St., North Adelaide. ☎ 08/8267 4636. Reservations recommended. A\$30 (US\$20) for 2 courses. AE, DC, MC, V. Fri noon–3pm (set menu); Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm. Bus: 182, 224, 226, 228, or 229.

The Oxford 🍷 MODERN AUSTRALIAN This restaurant has won nearly twice as many gold medals for cooking as Mark Spitz won for swimming (7 golds in 1972 Olympic Games, by the way). The Oxford is praised for its creative, contemporary food in a range of mixed-up styles—sometimes too mixed in my opinion. It's big and busy and housed in a character-filled 1870s building. Inside you'll find crisp white tablecloths, a single page menu, and a stainless steel kitchen whipping up steam. The signature dishes are the red-roasted spatchcock (a small chicken) with water chestnut, chicken-and-cashew-nut spring roll, black-bean mayonnaise, and coconut broth; and the wonderful Caesar salad. Other favorites include jellyfish with Moroccan-spiced salsa, and poached prawns with natural oysters, served with wasabi, nori rolls, and soy dressing. The wine list is extensive.

101 O'Connell St., North Adelaide. ☎ 08/8267 2652. theoxfordhotel@ozemail.com.au. Reservations recommended, especially for lunch and dinner Fri and dinner Sat. Main courses A\$15–A\$21 (US\$9.40–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–2am; Fri–Sat 9am–3am. Bus: 182, 22, 224, 226, 228, or 229.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Adelaide is a very laid-back city. It's not jam-packed with tourist-oriented attractions like some of the larger state capitals, though the Migration Museum (see below) is easily one of the best museums in Australia. The best way to enjoy this pleasant city is to take things nice and easy. Take a walk beside the River Torrens, take the tram to the beachside suburb of Glenelg, and spend the evenings sipping wine and sampling some of the country's best alfresco dining.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Art Gallery of South Australia 🍷 Adelaide's premier public art gallery has a good range of local and overseas works and a fine Asian ceramics collection. Of particular interest are Charles Hall's *Proclamation of South Australia* 1836, Nicholas Chevalier's painting of the departure of explorers Burke and Wills from Melbourne; several examples of works by Australian painters Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, and Arthur Boyd; and some excellent contemporary art. The bookshop has an extensive collection of art publications. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

North Terrace. ☎ 08/8207 7000. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Guided tours Mon–Fri 11am and 2pm; Sat–Sun 11am and 3pm. Closed Christmas Day. Bus: City Loop.

The Migration Museum 🍷 *Finds* This tiny museum, dedicated to immigration and multiculturalism, is one of the most important and fascinating in Australia. With touching, personal displays, it tells the story of the waves of immigrants who have helped shape this multicultural society, from the boatloads of British convicts who came here in 1788 to the varying ethnic groups who have been trickling in over the past 2 centuries. Allow 1 hour.

82 Kintore Ave. ☎ **08/8207 7580**. Admission by donation. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 1–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas. Bus: Any to North Terrace.

The National Wine Centre of Australia ★ This architectural masterpiece concentrates on Australia's 53 wine regions. Interactive exhibits and displays allow you to blend your own virtual wine. The Tasting Gallery displays an extensive range of Australian wines, and the wine tasting packages allow you to taste some of the rarest vintages. A restaurant and bar overlook the Centre, which has its own vineyard. You can fit the Wine Centre in with a visit to the nearby Botanic Gardens.

Hackney Rd. (eastern end of Northern Terrace). ☎ **08/8222 9288**. wineaustralia.com.au. Admission A\$11 (US\$7.15) adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children under 18 (must be accompanied by an adult), A\$29 (US\$19) families. Wine tasting packages from A\$5–A\$20 (US\$3.25–US\$13). Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas Day. Limited parking on-site. Bus: Adelaide free bus, stop at Botanic Gardens.

South Australian Maritime Museum Over 150 years of maritime history are commemorated in this Port Adelaide museum. Most of the exhibits are in the 1850s Bond Store, but the museum also incorporates an 1863 lighthouse and three vessels moored alongside Wharf No. 1, just a short walk away. The fully rigged replica of the 16m (54-ft.) ketch *Active II* is very impressive. Allow 1½ hours. Port Adelaide is approximately 30 minutes from the city center by bus.

126 Lipson St., Port Adelaide. ☎ **08/8207 6255**. Admission A\$8.50 (US\$5.50) adults, A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) children, A\$22 (US\$14) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Bus: 151 or 153 from North Terrace in the city (opposite Parliament House) to Stop 40 (Port Adelaide). Train: Port Adelaide.

South Australian Museum ★ The star attraction of this interesting museum is the new Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery which opened in March 2000. On display is an extensive collection of utensils, spears, tools, bush medicine, food samples, photographs, and the like. Also within the museum is a sorry-looking collection of stuffed native animals (sadly also including a few extinct marsupials, including the Tasmanian Tiger); a good collection of Papua New Guinea artifacts; and excellent mineral and butterfly collections.

If you're interested in learning even more about the exhibits, take one of the Behind-the-Scenes Tours. The tours are conducted after museum hours and cost A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults. Allow 2 hours.

On North Terrace between the State Library and the Art Gallery. ☎ **08/8207 7500**. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute ★★ This place offers a great opportunity to experience Aboriginal life through Aboriginal eyes. Exhibits change regularly, but all give insight into Aboriginal art and cultural activities. At noon every day there's a didgeridoo performance. A shop sells Aboriginal art and books on Aboriginal culture, while a cafe on the premises serves up several bush tucker (native food) items. Allow 1 hour.

253 Grenfell St. ☎ **08/8224 3200**. Admission A\$4 (US\$2.60) adults, A\$3 (US\$1.95) children 13 and under, A\$10 (US\$6.50) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Bus: City Loop.

THE FLORA & THE FAUNA

Adelaide Zoo *Kids* To be honest, if you've experienced the wonderful Melbourne Zoo, or even Taronga Zoo in Sydney, it's probably not worth your while coming here. But if this is going to be your only chance to see a kangaroo in captivity, then plan a visit here. Of course, other Australian animals live at the zoo, too, and the nicely landscaped gardens and lack of crowds make it a pleasant place for an entertaining stroll. The zoo houses the only pygmy blue-tongue

lizard in captivity in Australia, a species thought to be extinct since the 1940s, until a specimen was discovered inside the belly of a dead snake. Allow 1 hour.

Frome Rd. ☎ 08/8267 3255. Admission A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Bus: 272 or 273 from Currie St. to bus stop 2 (5 min.).

Botanic Gardens You'll feel like you're at the heart of the city when you stroll through the huddles of office workers having picnic lunches on the lawns. Highlights include a broad avenue of Moreton Bay figs, duck ponds, giant water lilies, an Italianate garden, a palm house, and the Bicentennial Conservatory—a glass dome full of rainforest species. You might want to have lunch in the **Botanic Gardens Restaurant** (☎ 08/8223 3526) surrounded by bird song and lush vegetation, in the center of the park; it's open daily from 10am to 5pm.

North Terrace. ☎ 08/8222 9311. Free admission. Mon–Fri 8am–sundown; Sat–Sun 9am–sundown.

FOR TRAIN BUFFS

National Railway Museum This former Port Adelaide railway yard houses Australia's largest and finest collection of locomotive engines and rolling stock—with around 104 items on display including some 30 engines. Among the most impressive trains on show are the gigantic “Mountain” class engines, and so-called “Tea and Sugar” trains that once ran between railway camps in remote parts of the desert. Entrance includes a train ride. Allow 1½ hours.

Lipton St., North Adelaide. ☎ 08/8341 1690. Admission A\$9 (US\$5.85) adults, A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) children, A\$20 (US\$13) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Bus: 151 or 153 from North terrace, opposite Parliament House, to stop number 40 (approx. 30-min. journey).

ORGANIZED TOURS

Grayline Day Tours (☎ 1300/858 687 in Australia; www.grayline.com) operates a city sightseeing tour for A\$39 (US\$25) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for children. It operates from 9:30am to noon every day except Sunday. The bus can pick you up at your hotel. Grayline also does other tours taking in central Adelaide with either Hahndorf or Cleland Wildlife Park included, as well as tours to the Flinders ranges and Kangaroo Island.

ENJOYING THE GREAT OUTDOORS

BIKING Adelaide's parks and riverbanks are very popular with cyclists. Rent your bicycle from **Linear Park Hire** (☎ 018/844 588 mobile phone). The going rate is A\$15 to A\$20 (US\$9.75–US\$13) for 24 hours, including helmet, lock, and baby seat (if needed). **Recreation SA** (☎ 08/8226 7301) publishes a brochure showing Adelaide's bike routes. Pick one up at the **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre** (see “Visitor Information” earlier in chapter). **The Map Shop**, 6 Peel St. (☎ 08/8231 2033), is also a good source for maps.

HIKING & JOGGING The banks of the River Torrens are a good place for a jog. The truly fit and/or adventurous, might want to tackle the **Heysen Trail**, a spectacular 1,600km (992-mile) walk through bush, farmland, and rugged hill country that starts 80km (50 miles) south of Adelaide and goes to the Flinders Ranges by way of the Adelaide Hills and the Barossa Valley. For more information on the trail, visit the **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre** (see “Visitor Information” earlier in chapter).

GOLF The **City of Adelaide Golf Course** (☎ 08/8267 2171) is quite close to town and has two short 18-hole courses and a full-size championship course. Greens fees are A\$14 to A\$17 (US\$9.10–US\$11) weekdays and A\$17 to A\$19 (US\$11–US\$12) weekends, depending on the course, Monday through Friday,

plus A\$3 (US\$1.95) extra on weekends. Club rental is available. Ask about cheaper after 4pm prices.

TAKING IN AN AUSSIE RULES GAME & OTHER SPECTATOR SPORTS

CRICKET The **Adelaide Oval** (☎ 08/8300 3800), on the corner of War Memorial Drive and King William Street, is the venue for international matches during the summer season. The Institute Building, part of the State Library of S.A., displays the **Don Bradman Collection** ☎ 08/8207 7595. The cricket legend died in Adelaide in 2001.

FOOTBALL Unlike New South Wales, where Rugby League is the most popular winter sport, in Adelaide you'll find plenty of Australian Rules fanatics. Games are usually played on a Saturday at the **Adelaide Oval** (see above) or **Football Park** (☎ 08/8268 2088), on Turner Drive, West Lakes. The home teams are the Adelaide Crows and the Port Adelaide Power. Games are played February through October, with the finals held in September and October. Tickets must be purchased well in advance from **BASS** (☎ 13 12 46 in South Australia, or 08/8400 2205).

THE SHOPPING SCENE

Rundle Mall (between King Williams and Pulteney sts.) is Adelaide's main shopping street. This pedestrian-only thoroughfare is home to the big names in fashion.

Adelaide's Central Markets (☎ 08/8203 7494), behind the Adelaide Hilton Hotel between Gouger and Grote streets, make up the largest produce market in the Southern Hemisphere. They're a good place to shop for vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, and the like, although the markets are worth popping into even if you're not looking for picnic fixings. The markets, held in a warehouse-like structure, are open Tuesday from 7am to 5:30pm, Thursday from 9am to 5:30pm, Friday from 7am to 9pm, and Saturday from 7am to 3pm. **Market Adventures** (☎ 08/8336 8333, or mobile 0412/842 242; fax/message 08/8336 4075) runs behind-the-scenes tours of the markets every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:30am and 1:30pm, Friday at 10am and 2pm, and Saturday at 8:30am. Tours cost A\$35 (US\$23) for adults and A\$18 (US\$12) for children 3 to 11. Phone for directions.

The six-story **Myer Centre**, next door to the Myer department store, 22–38 Rundle Mall, has a Body Shop (on the ground floor), for beauty products; an Australian Geographic shop (on level 3), for top-quality Australianas; and Exotica (level 2), where you can find unusual futuristic gifts.

Just off Rundle Mall, at Shop no. 6 in the City Cross Arcade, is **L'Unique** (☎ 08/8231 0030), a good crafts shop selling South Australian pottery, jewelry, woodcraft, hand-blown glass, and original paintings.

Finds Shopping for Opals

South Australia is home to the world's largest sources of white opals. (The more expensive black opals generally come from Lightning Ridge in New South Wales.) There are plenty of places to buy around town, but **Opal Field Gems**, 33 King William St. (☎ 08/8212 5300), is one of the best. As a rule, you're not going to find any bargains, so just buy what you like (and can afford—good opals cost many thousands of dollars).

Elsewhere, the renowned **Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre**, in the Lions Art Centre, 19 Morphett St. (☎ 08/8410 0727), sells an excellent range of locally made ceramics, glass, furniture, and metal items. You can also watch the craftspeople at work here.

Head to the **R.M. Williams** shop on Gawler Place (☎ 08/8232 3611) for the best simple boots you're likely to find in Australia, as well as other Aussie fashion icons, including Akubra hats, moleskin pants, and Driza-bone coats.

ADELAIDE AFTER DARK

The *Adelaide Advertiser* lists all performances and exhibitions in its entertainment pages. The free tourist guide *Today in Adelaide*, available in most hotels, also has information. Tickets for theater and other entertainment events in Adelaide can be purchased from **BASS ticket outlets** at the following locations: Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, King William Road; Centre Pharmacy, 19 Central Market Arcade; Verandah Music, 182 Rundle St.; and on the 5th floor of the Myer department store, Rundle Mall. Call BASS at ☎ 13 12 46 in South Australia, or 08/8400 2205.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

The major concert hall in town is the **Adelaide Festival Centre**, King William Road (☎ 08/8216 8600 for general inquiries; 08/8400 2205 for box office). The Festival Centre encompasses three auditoriums: the 1,978-seat Festival Theatre, the 612-seat Playhouse, and the 350-seat Space Centre. This is the place in Adelaide to see opera, ballet, drama, orchestral concerts, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, plays, and experimental drama.

The complex also includes an outdoor amphitheater used for jazz, rock-and-roll, and country music concerts; an art gallery; a bistro; a piano bar; and the Silver Jubilee Organ, the world's largest transportable concert-hall organ (built in Austria to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee).

The **Adelaide Repertory Festival** presents a season of five productions a year, ranging from drama to comedy, at the **Arts Theatre**, 53 Angus St. (☎ 08/8221 5644). Playwrights Alan Ayckbourne and Terrence Rattigan are among the many who have had plays performed here. The theater, which is a short walk away from many hotels and restaurants, is also the home of the **Metropolitan Musical Theatre Company**, which presents two musical comedy productions a year. Tickets cost around A\$16 (US\$10) for adults and A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children.

Her Majesty's Theatre, 58 Grote St. (☎ 08/8216 8600), is a 1,000-seat venue opposite Central Markets that presents drama, comedy, musicals, dance, opera, and recitals. Tickets are generally A\$30 to A\$55 (US\$20–US\$36).

THE BAR & CLUB SCENE

Adelaide's nightlife ranges from twiddling your thumbs to nude lapdancers. For adult entertainment (clubs with the word "strip" in the name) head to **Hindley Street**—there are a few pubs there, but I wouldn't recommend them. For information on gay and lesbian options, pick up the *Adelaide Gay Times*.

Popular **Universal Wine Bar** at 285 Rundle St. (☎ 08/8232 5000) is a great place to start an evening, with great atmosphere and good wines by the glass.

As for all-age pubs, the locals will point you toward **The Austral**, 205 Rundle St. (☎ 08/8223 4660); **The Exeter**, 246 Rundle St. (☎ 08/8223 2623); **The Lion**, at the corner of Melbourne and Jerningham sts. (☎ 08/8367 0222); and the **British Hotel**, 58 Finnis St. (☎ 08/8267 2188), in North Adelaide, where you can cook your own steak on the courtyard barbecue. Also popular

with both visitors and locals alike is the **Earl of Aberdeen**, 316 Pulteney St., at Carrington Street (☎ 08/8223 6433), a colonial-style pub popular for after-work drinks. **The Port Dock**, 10 Todd St., Port Adelaide (☎ 08/8240 0187), was licensed as a pub in 1864 and has kept up with tradition ever since; it even brews four of its own beers and pumps them directly to its three bars with old English beer engines. Most pubs are open from 11am to midnight.

TRYING YOUR LUCK AT THE CASINO

Right next to the Adelaide Hyatt, and dwarfed by the old railway station it's situated in, is the **Adelaide Casino** (now officially called **SkyCity** to make it sound trendier), North Terrace (☎ 1800/888 711 in Australia, or 08/8212 2811). The casino has two floors of gaming tables and slot machines, as well as four bars and several dining options, including a fast-food station and the excellent Pullman buffet restaurant. The casino is open Sunday through Thursday from 10am to 4am and Friday and Saturday from 10am to 6am.

2 Side Trips from Adelaide

THE BAROSSA: ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRAPE 🍷

More than a quarter of Australia's wines, and a disproportionate number of top labels, originate in the Barossa and Eden valleys—collectively known as the **Barossa**. Beginning just 45km (28 miles) northeast of Adelaide and easily accessible, the area has had an enormous influence on the city's culture. In fact, Adelaideans of all socio-economic levels partake in more wine talk than the French. German settlers from Silesia, who came to escape religious persecution, first settled the area. They brought with them their culture, their food, and their vines. They built the Lutheran churches that dominate the Barossa's skyline. With the help of English aristocrats, the wine industry went from strength to strength. Today, there are over 50 wineries in this area that retains its German flavor.

The focal points of the area are **Angaston**, farthest away from Adelaide; **Nuriootpa**, the center of the rural services industry; and **Tanunda**, the nearest town to the city. Each has interesting architecture, crafts and antiques shops, and specialty food outlets. If you are adventurous, you might want to hire a bike in Adelaide and take it on the train to **Gawler**, and cycle through the Barossa. Other options are exploring the area by hot-air balloon, motorcycle, or limousine.

ESSENTIALS

WHEN TO GO The best times to visit the Barossa and other South Australian wine regions are in the spring (Sept–Oct), when it's not too hot and there are plenty of flowering trees and shrubs, and in the fall (Apr–May), when the leaves turn red. The main wine harvest is late summer/early autumn (Feb–Apr). The least crowded time is winter (June–Aug). Hotel prices can be more expensive on the weekend.

GETTING THERE If you have a car (by far the most flexible way to visit the Barossa), I recommend taking the scenic route from Adelaide. (The route doesn't have a specific name, but it's obvious on a map.) It takes about half an hour longer than the Main North Road through Gawler, but the trip is well worth it. Follow the signs to Birdwood, Springton, Mount Pleasant, and Angaston.

Public buses run infrequently to the major centers from Adelaide. There are no buses between wineries.

ORGANIZED TOURS FROM ADELAIDE Various companies run limited sightseeing tours. One of the best, **Grayline Day Tours** (☎ 1300/858 687;

So Much Wine, So Little Time

If you have the choice of exploring the Barossa or the Hunter Valley in New South Wales (see chapter 4), I recommend the **Barossa**, which despite being a little more touristy, has more to offer in history and architecture.

Another famous wine-producing region is the **Coonawarra**, 381km (236 miles) southeast of Adelaide and near the border with Victoria; it's particularly convenient if you're driving from Melbourne. The area is just 12km (7½ miles) long and 2km (just over 1 mile) wide, but the scenic countryside is crammed with historical villages and 16 wineries. The **Clare Valley**, 135km (84 miles) north of Adelaide, is another pretty area; it produces some outstanding examples of cool-climate wine. Finally, the **McLaren Vale**, south of Adelaide, offers some 42 vineries producing some of Australia's best aromatic white wines as well as shiraz.

www.grayline.com), offers a day trip visiting three wineries and other attractions every day. It costs A\$75 (US\$49) for adults and A\$37 (US\$24) for children, including a restaurant lunch. It also offers a daylong Grand Barossa Tour stopping off at two wineries, the Adelaide Hills, and Hahndorf. This costs A\$85 (US\$55) for adults and A\$50 (US\$33) for children, and heads out Monday through Wednesday and Friday in summer (Wed and Fri in winter). Both tours depart at 9am from the bus terminal at 101 Franklin St., Adelaide. Another option is the **Barossa Wine Train** (☎ 08/8212 7888), which departs from Adelaide Railway Station on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. There are a variety of day tour and overnight packages available. Another option is to do it in style in a vintage car with the **Mirror Image Vintage Touring Co** (☎ 08/8621 1400; www.mirror-image.com.au). Chevrolets, stretch limos, or Caravelles can be hired from an hour to 2 days with a chauffeur/guide.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Barossa Wine and Visitor Information Centre**, 66–68 Murray St., Tanunda, SA 5352 (☎ 08/8563 0600; www.barossa-region.org), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm. It's worth popping into the center's small audio-visual display for an introduction to the world of wine; entry is A\$2.75 (US\$1.80) for adults, free for children. You'll need an hour or so to look around.

Wines are often cheaper at the **Tanunda Cellars** bottleshop, or retail outlet, at 14 Murray St., Tanunda (☎ 08/8563 3544; tanundacellars@dove.com.au) than at the winery door. This historic 1858 stone shop also houses one of Australia's finest collections of vintage wines, so pop in if you appreciate classic wines.

TOURING THE WINERIES

With some 50 wineries offering free cellar-door tastings and/or daily tours charting the winemaking process, you won't be stuck for places to visit. All wineries are well signposted. Below are just a few of my favorite places, but don't be shy about just stopping whenever you come across a winery that takes your fancy.

Tip: Try a sparkling red. It may turn up noses elsewhere, and it takes some getting used to, but bearing in mind the world's wine industry now hangs on Australia's every wine offering, it may well be the great tipple of the future.

Orlando and Jacobs Creek Visitor Centre This large winery was established in 1847 and is the home of many award-winners. Its big seller is the Jacobs Creek brand, now sold worldwide. Premium wines include the Lawson Shiraz and the Jacaranda Ridge Cabernet, and new vintages of either will set you back at least A\$45 (US\$29) a bottle. There's a cafe and a picnic area with barbecues. The new Visitor Centre opened in May 2002.

Barossa Hwy., Rowland Flat. ☎ 08/8521 3000. Daily 10am–5pm.

Penfolds Australia's biggest wine producer churns out some 22.5 million liters (5.8 million U.S. gal.) from this one winery every year. Penfolds also owns other wineries all over the country. It all started when Dr. Christopher Rawson planted a few vines in 1844 to make wine for his patients. The winery now houses the largest oak barrel maturation cellars in the Southern Hemisphere.

Nuriootpa. ☎ 08/8568 9408. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm.

Rockford Most of the buildings here were constructed in 1984 out of recycled local materials, but you'd never know it. The wine is pressed between mid-March and the end of April, in the traditional way with machinery from the turn of the 20th century. It's a fascinating sight. Demand for Rockford wines, especially the Basket Pressed Shiraz, far exceeds supply.

Krondorf Rd., Tanunda. ☎ 08/8568 9408. Mon–Sat 11am–5pm.

Seppelts This National Trust–listed property was founded in 1857 by Joseph Seppelt, an immigrant from Silesia. The wine tour around the gardens and blue-stone buildings is considered one of the best in the world. Check out the family's Romanesque mausoleum on a nearby slope, skirted by planted roadside palms, built during the 1930s recession to keep winery workers employed.

Seppeltsfield. ☎ 08/8568 6200. Adults A\$7 (US\$4.55), children 5–16 A\$2 (US\$1.30). Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. Tours hourly Mon–Fri 11am–3pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am, 1:30, and 2:30pm.

Wolf Blass This winery's Germanic-style black-label vintages have an excellent international reputation, while its cheaper yellow-label vintages are the toast of many a Sydney dinner party. The Wolf Blass museum is worth a peek.

Sturt Hwy., Nuriootpa. ☎ 08/8568 7300. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–5pm.

Yalumba This winery was built in 1849, making it the oldest family-owned winemaking business in Australia. It's also huge. Look out for the sad-looking Himalayan bear in the corner of the large tasting room; following a run-in with a hunting rifle, it's been Yalumba's advertising gimmick. The winery's Signature Red Cabernet-Shiraz is among the best you'll ever taste.

Eden Valley Rd., Angaston. ☎ 08/8561 3200. www.yalumba.com.au. Mon–Fri 8:30am–5pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

There are plenty of standard motels and lots of interesting B&Bs throughout the Barossa, some with rooms for as little as A\$60 (US\$39). Weekends often find rooms are booked out and prices higher than weekdays. The **Barossa Wine and Visitor Information Centre** (see “Visitor Information” above) can provide information on additional accommodations choices and off-season deals.

Barossa Valley (SA) Tourist Park This peaceful place is back from the road and abuts a nature lake and wildlife reserve. The cabins are simple but come with just about everything you'll need for a pleasant stay. Cabins have a

combination of doubles, singles, and bunk beds. If you don't have your own linen you'll be charged A\$5 (US\$3.25) per single bed and A\$10 (US\$6.50) per double.

Penrice Rd., Nuriootpa 5355. ☎ **08/8562 1404**. Fax 08/85622 615. www.barossa-tourist-park.com.au. 27 cabins, 19 with bathroom. A\$36 (US\$23) double without bathroom; A\$45–A\$60 (US\$30–US\$39) double with bathroom. Family unit A\$65 (US\$42). Extra adult A\$5 (US\$3.25), extra child 3–15 A\$3 (US\$1.95). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Pool (nearby); 2 tennis courts; laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, coffeemaker, iron.

Worth a Splurge

The Hermitage of Marananga ★ This is far and away the best of the area's motels. The rooms are awkwardly shaped but have been recently renovated. Each has a small balcony. The main building is old-fashioned and bursting with character. It's also cool in the heat of summer. Outside there are fantastic views over the valley and to the ranges beyond. Good walks lead around the property, and at dusk you'll see plenty of kangaroos in the surrounding fields. The new apartment has a private balcony overlooking the vineyards, a separate bedroom, and a double sleeper sofa in the living room.

Corner of Seppeltsfield and Stonewell roads, Marananga, SA 5351. ☎ **08/8562 2722**. Fax 08/8562 3133. www.hermitageofmarananga.com.au. 11 units, including 1 apt. A\$230 (US\$150) double; A\$330 (US\$214) spa room; \$330 (US\$214) apt. Rates include breakfast and cost A\$100 (US\$65) more on Sat. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; tour desk; massage; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

The Barossa prides itself on its cuisine as well as its wine, so you'll find plenty of places of note to eat, many of them serving up traditional German foods in line with the area's heritage. If you're on a tight budget then a hot spot for either lunch or dinner is **Vintner's Bar & Grill**, Nuriootpa Road, Angaston (☎ **08/8564 2488**); the wine list here is six pages long! Try the bay leaf risotto with prawns or the roast veal rack with crisp polenta. Main courses cost A\$22 to A\$27 (US\$14–\$18). It's open for lunch daily and closed on Sunday for dinner. Another choice is **Salters**, Satram Winery, Nuriootpa Road, Angaston (☎ **08/8564 3344**); local produce is the specialty here, with mains such as slow-roasted baby pork, milk-fed lamb, and crisp-based pizzas. Mains are between A\$20 and A\$26 (US\$13–US\$17). It's open daily for lunch and Wednesday through Saturday from 6pm for dinner. You'll find perhaps the valley's best German-style bakery in Lyndoch, the **Lyndoch Bakery**, on the Barossa Highway (☎ **08/8524 4422**). Lunch here costs around A\$14 (US\$9). In Angaston you must stop off at **The Seasons of the Valley**, 6 Washington St. (☎ **08/8564 3688**). This restored 1840 homestead houses has cottage gardens and a sunny verandah as well as delicious meals from A\$15 to A\$18 (US\$9.50–\$11). It's open 10am to 5pm daily.

THE ADELAIDE HILLS

A 25-minute drive from Adelaide and visible even from the main shopping street, you'll find the tree-lined slopes and pretty valleys, orchards, vineyards, winding roads, and historic townships of the **Adelaide Hills**. You might want to walk part of the Heysen Trail (see "Enjoying the Great Outdoors" in the Adelaide section earlier in this chapter), browse through the shops in Hahndorf, stop in Melba's Chocolate Factory in Woodside, or visit Cleland Wildlife Park or Warrawong Sanctuary. Otherwise, it's a nice outing just to hit the road and drive. Should you decide to stay overnight, the area offers lots of cozy B&Bs.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The Adelaide Hills are 25 minutes from Adelaide by car via Greenhill and Glen Osmond roads. **Adelaide Sightseeing** (☎ 08/8231 4144; www.adelaidesightseeing.com.au) runs outings to the gorgeous town of Hahndorf (see below) as well as to Cleland Wildlife Park. An afternoon excursion to Hahndorf costs A\$43 (US\$28) for adults and A\$23 (US\$15) for children; the tour to Cleland costs A\$38 (US\$25) for adults and A\$23 (US\$15) for children, including park entry. Check their website to compare trips to the Barossa valley, Flinders Ranges, Great Ocean Road, and Kangaroo Island.

VISITOR INFORMATION Visitor information and bookings are available through the **Adelaide Hills Tourist Information Centre**, 41 Main St., Hahndorf, Adelaide, SA 5245 (☎ 08/8388 1185). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm. Otherwise, maps are available at the **South Australia Travel Centre** in Adelaide.

WOODSIDE: CHOCOLATE LOVERS UNITE!

Visitors come here for **Melba's Chocolate Factory**, Henry Street (☎ 08/8389 7868), where chocoholics will find a huge range of handmade chocolates. Melba's is part of Heritage Park, a complex that includes a wood turner, a cheese maker, a ceramics studio, a leather maker, and a crafts shop. It's open Monday through Friday from 10am to 4pm, and Saturday, Sunday, and holidays from noon to 5pm.

MYLOR: GETTING BACK TO NATURE

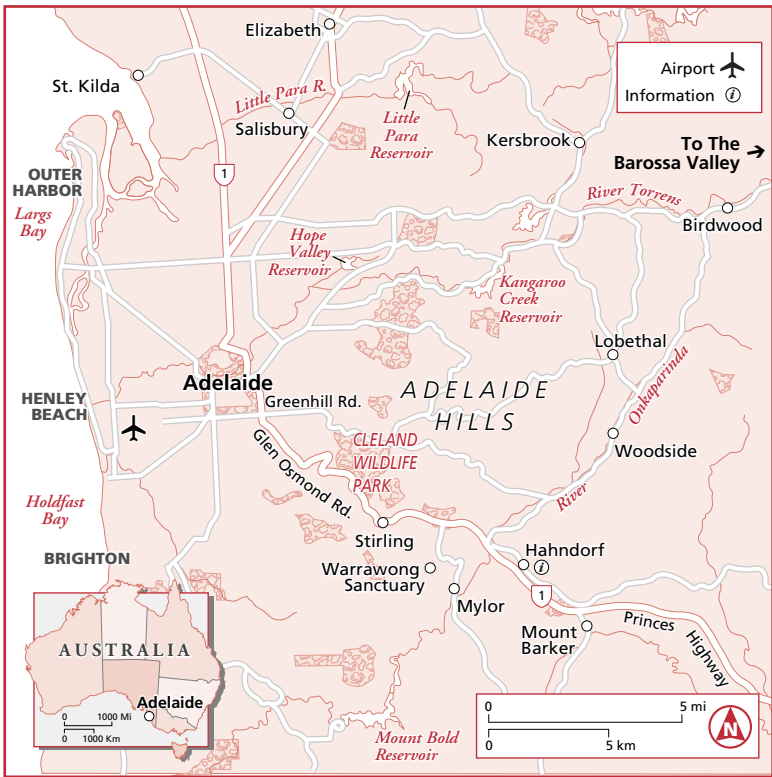
Mylor is located 25km (16 miles) southeast of Adelaide, and 10km (6 miles) south of Mt. Lofty via the town of Crafters. Here you'll find the **Warrawong Sanctuary**, Stock Road, Mylor (P.O. Box 1135), Stirling, SA 5152 (☎ 08/8370 9197; fax 08/8370 8332; www.efl.com.au). Unlike many other wildlife parks, the animals here are not kept in enclosed runs. Instead, park founder Dr. John Wamsley took a 14-hectare (35-acre) tract of farmland, replanted it with natural bush, fenced it off, and went around shooting the introduced rabbits, cats, dogs, and foxes that plague much of Australia. Then the good doctor took to reintroducing animals native to the site—such as kangaroos, various types of wallabies, bandicoots, beetongs, platypuses, possums, frogs, birds, and reptiles. They are all thriving, not only because he eliminated their unnatural predators, but also because he re-created waterways, rainforests, and blackwater ponds. The animals roam free, and you're guided through on 1½-hour dawn or sunset walks that cost A\$18 (US\$12) for adults and A\$12 (US\$7.80) for children. There's a restaurant on the premises, and you can even stay overnight in large cabins with bathrooms, wall-to-wall carpeting, and air-conditioning. The cabins cost A\$125 (US\$81) per person with both dawn and dusk tours, a two-course dinner, and breakfast.

Compared to **Cleland Wildlife Park** (see below), there is less variety of animals here (you won't find any koalas, for example), but it's more educational and you get the feeling that you're in the wild rather than in a zoo.

HAHANDORF: GERMAN HERITAGE, CRAFTS & MORE ★

This historic German-style village is one of South Australia's most popular tourist destinations. Lutherans fleeing religious persecution in eastern Prussia founded the town, which is 29km (18 miles) southeast of Adelaide, in 1839. They brought with them their winemaking skills, foods, and architectural inheritance, and put it all together here. Hahndorf still resembles a small German town in appearance and atmosphere, and is included on the World Heritage List as a Historical German Settlement. Walking around you'll see St. Paul's Lutheran Church, erected

Adelaide Hills



in 1890. The Wool Factory, L'Unique Fine Arts & Craft, and Bamfurlong Fine Crafts are worth checking out and are within walking distance of Main Street.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

One of the cheapest places to stay is the boarding room run by the **German Arms Hotel** (☎ 08/8388 7013; fax 08/8388 7529). Double rooms are basic but self-contained and cost A\$60 (US\$39). The German Arms Hotel ("hotel" in Australia can also mean "pub") is an atmospheric drinking hole dating from 1839. The food—or pub-grub—here is good and hearty and costs around A\$15 (US\$9.75) for lunch or dinner. There is a nice outdoor area for sunny days.

The Hahndorf Resort ★ This large resort has a variety of accommodations available, as well as approximately 80 caravan and tent sites. Here, too, are fully self-contained, air-conditioned cabins, and motel-style rooms with queen-size beds (some have an extra single) and a shower. The chalets look like they're straight out of Bavaria; each can accommodate from two to five people in either one or two bedrooms. Each has a full kitchen and an attached bathroom with shower. Some of them overlook a small lake. The spa chalets are larger and, of course, come with a spa bath. A few emus, kangaroos, and horses run around in an animal sanctuary.

145A Main St., Hahndorf, SA 5245. ☎ 08/8388 7921. Fax 08/8388 7282. www.hahndorfresort.com.au. 60 units. A\$61 (US\$40) cabin; A\$87 (US\$57) motel room; A\$98–A\$165 (US\$64–US\$107) chalet. Extra adult A\$11 (US\$7.15), extra child A\$5.50 (US\$3.60). AE, DC, MC, V. Amenities: Restaurant; outdoor swimming pool;

2 putting greens; half-size tennis court; small gym; bike rental; room service; laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, minibar, coffeemaker, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

If it's within your budget, or you really want to treat yourself, head to the **Bridge-water Mill**, Mt. Barker Road, Bridgewater (☎ 08/8339 3422). It's set in an impressive 1860s stone building with a terrace near a waterwheel, and serves some of the best-regarded food in the country. Try the duck with braised sour cherries. Mains cost A\$31 (US\$20) and a set three-course menu on Sunday is A\$68 (US\$44). It's open for lunch Thursday through Monday. While you're atop Mt. Lofty walk past the cafe and have lunch at **The Summit** restaurant (☎ 08/8339 2600). Look for the kangaroo filet with chili, lemon grass, and coconut sauce, and venison on rosemary polenta. Mains cost A\$22 to A\$26 (US\$14–US\$17). It's open for lunch Monday and Tuesday, and for dinner Wednesday through Sunday.

OAKBANK: A DAY AT THE RACES

The **Easter Oakbank Racing Carnival** is part of the Australia-wide “picnic races” that take place in small towns throughout the nation. The Oakbank horse races attract crowds in excess of 110,000 a day over the long Easter weekend. General admission is A\$10 (US\$6.50), plus another A\$5 (US\$3.25) for admission to the grandstand. The **Oakbank Racing Club** (☎ 08/8212 6279) is just off the main road; you can't miss it.

MT. LOFTY: VIEWS & 'ROOS

Visitors make the pilgrimage to the top of the 690m (2,263-ft.) **Mt. Lofty**, 16km (10 miles) southeast of Adelaide, for the panoramic views over Adelaide, the Adelaide plains, and the Mt. Lofty Ranges. There are several nice bushwalks from the top. The **Summit Café** here sells good sandwiches and cakes, and Devonshire tea for A\$8 (US\$5.20).

Almost at the top of Mt. Lofty, off Summit Road, is the **Cleland Wildlife Park** (☎ 08/8339 2444). Here you'll find all the usual Australian animals on offer—including the largest male red kangaroo I've ever seen. Though the park is not as good as similar wildlife parks in Australia, it does have a very good wetlands aviary. One of the drawbacks of Cleland is that it's got some unimaginative enclosures, notably the one for the Tasmanian devils. The park is open daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm. Visitors can meet at the Tasmanian devil enclosure at 2pm and join the animal feed run by following a tractor around the park as it drops off food.

Admission to Cleland is A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) for children 3 to 14, and A\$31 (US\$20) for families. Koala holding is allowed during the photo sessions held daily from 2 to 4pm daily (but not on very hot summer days); on Sunday and public holidays there's an additional session from 10am to noon. The privilege will cost you A\$12 (US\$7.80) per photo. A kiosk and restaurant are on the premises.

It's a bit of a hassle getting to either place by public transport. To get to the Mt. Lofty Lookout take bus no. 163 Monday through Friday, and no. 165 Saturday and Sunday from Currie Street in the city. Ask the driver to drop you off at “Crafters.” The trip takes 30 minutes. From there you'll need to take a short taxi ride to the top, so prearrange pick up with **Tony's Taxi's** at ☎ 08/8388 5988.

To get to Cleland take bus no. 822 from Currie Street and get off at bus stop 19b. There are only two services daily, at 10am and noon, Monday through Friday. Take the 10am bus and ask the bus driver for the exact return time. The trip to Cleland takes 40 minutes.

3 Kangaroo Island

110km (68 miles) South of Adelaide

There is nowhere better than Kangaroo Island to see Australian marsupials in the wild. Spend a few days here with the right guide and you can walk along a beach past a colony of sea lions; spot hundreds of New Zealand fur seals playing; creep through the bush on the trail of wallabies or kangaroos; spot sea eagles, black swans, sacred ibis, pelicans, little penguins, the rare glossy black cockatoo and other birds; come across goannas; pick out bunches of koalas hanging sleepily in the trees above your head; and, if you're lucky, see platypus, echidna, bandicoots, reclusive pygmy possums—the list goes on.

The secrets to Kangaroo Island's success are its perfect conditions; the most important of which is the fact that there are no introduced foxes or rabbits to take their toll on the native inhabitants or their environment. The island was also never colonized by the dingo—Australia's "native" dog—which was believed to have been introduced from Asia some 4,000 years ago. About one-third of the island is unspoiled national park, and there are plenty of wildlife corridors to give the animals a chance to move about the island, lessening the problems of inbreeding.

While the animals are what most people come to see, no one goes away without also being impressed by the scenery. Kangaroo Island has low mallee scrubland, dense eucalyptus forests, rugged coastal scenery, gorgeous beaches, caves, lagoons, and blackwater swamps. The effect of 150 years of European colonization has taken its toll, though. In South Australia as a whole some 27 mammal, five bird, one reptile, and 30 plant species have become extinct since the state was discovered by the English seafarer Matthew Flinders in 1802.

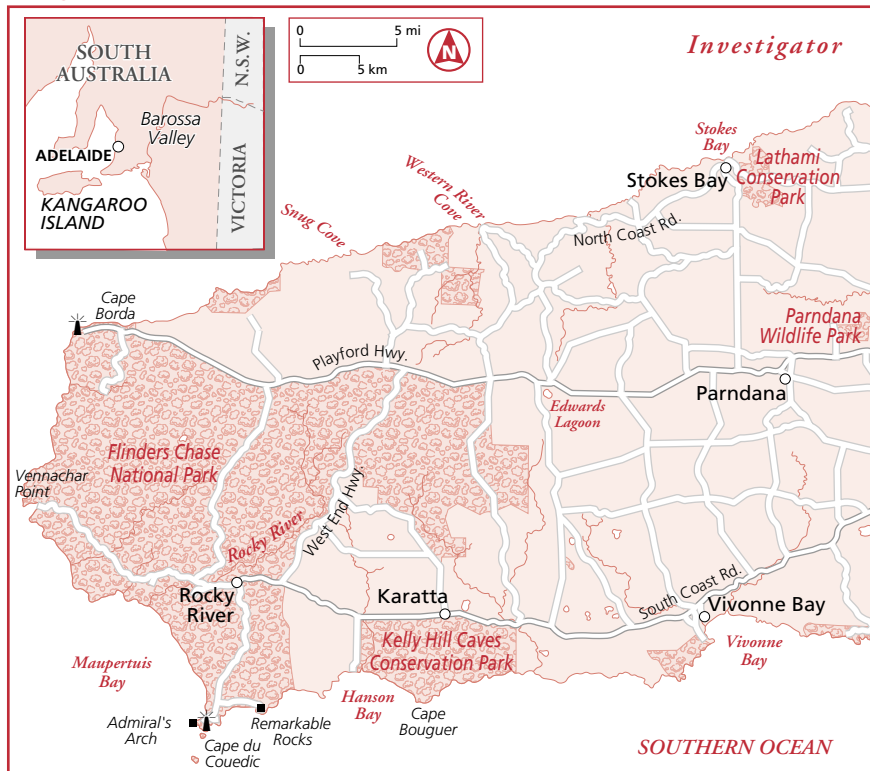
The island's history is a harsh one. Aborigines inhabited the island as early as 10,000 years ago but abandoned it for unexplained reasons. In the 19th century it was settled by pirates, mutineers, deserters from English, French, and American ships, and escaped convicts from the eastern colonies. Sealers also arrived and took a heavy toll on the seal and sea lion population—in just 1 year, 1803 to 1804, they managed to kill more than 20,000 of these animals. Between 1802 and 1836, Aboriginal women from both the mainland and Tasmania were kidnapped, brought to Kangaroo Island, and forced to work catching and skinning seals, kangaroos, and wallabies, and lugging salt from the salt mines.

In 1836, Kangaroo Island became the first place in South Australia to be officially settled. The state's capital was Kingscote, until it was abandoned a couple of years later in favor of Adelaide. In spite of its early settlement, Kangaroo Island had very few residents until after World War II, when returned soldiers set up farms here. Today, more than a million sheep are raised on the island. The island also acts as an official bee sanctuary to protect the genetic purity of the Ligurian bee, introduced in 1881, and it is believed to be the only place in the world where this strain of bee survives.

ISLAND ESSENTIALS

WHEN TO GO The best time to visit Kangaroo Island is between November and March (though you'll have difficulty finding accommodations over the Christmas school holiday period). July and August tend to be rainy, and winter can be cold (though often milder than on the mainland around Adelaide). Many companies offer 1-day trips to Kangaroo Island from Adelaide, but I would advise you to tailor your holiday to spend at least 2 days here, though 3 or even 5 would be better. There really is a lot to see, and you won't regret spending the extra time.

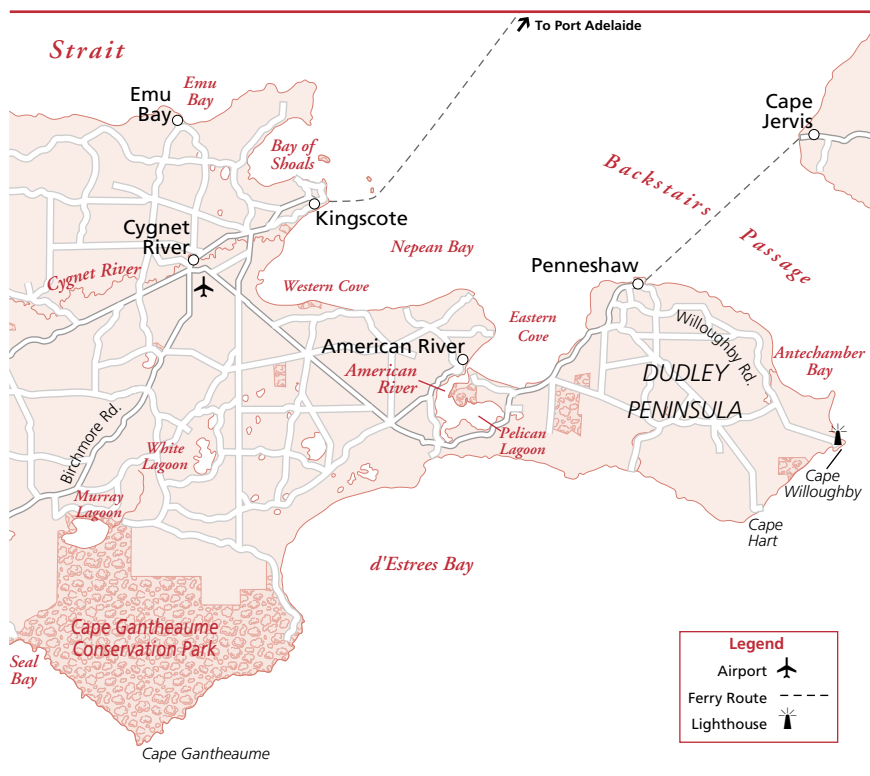
Kangaroo Island



GETTING THERE **Emu Airways** (☎ 08/8234 3711) is the only airline serving Kangaroo Island. Up to six daily departures ensure frequent service to the Island. **Regional Express** (☎ 13 17 13 in Australia; www.regionalexpress.com.au) also flies from Adelaide. Flights leave from the General Aviation Terminal, Kel Barclay Avenue, Adelaide. The General Aviation Terminal is about a 20-minute walk (or shorter taxi ride!) from the main airport terminal. The flight from Adelaide to Kangaroo Island usually takes about 25 minutes.

If you prefer to go by sea, **Kangaroo Island SeaLink** (☎ 13 13 01 in Australia, or 08/8202 8688; www.sealink.com.au) operates two oceangoing vehicle and passenger ferries four times daily (up to 10 times in peak periods) from Cape Jervis on the tip of the Fleurieu Peninsula on the mainland to Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island. The trip takes 40 minutes and costs A\$64 (US\$42) round-trip for adults, A\$32 (US\$21) for children 3 to 14, and A\$138 (US\$90) for cars. Connecting bus service from Adelaide to Cape Jervis is provided at an extra A\$36 (US\$23) for adults, and A\$18 (US\$12) for children round-trip. There are some cheaper off-peak prices, but check when booking. Count on 3 hours for the whole trip from Adelaide if you take the connecting bus. Bookings are essential.

SeaLink also runs a range of island tours, including the 2-day/1-night "K.I. coast to coast" which costs from A\$289 (US\$188) per person twin share. SeaLink also offers a wide range of accommodations, day tours, and adventure activities and offers Adelaide hotel pickups for selected tours.



VISITOR INFORMATION **Tourism Kangaroo Island**, The Gateway Information Centre, Howard Drive, Penneshaw (P.O. Box 336, Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island, SA 5222; ☎ 08/8553 1185; fax 08/8553 1255; www.tourkangarooisland.com.au), has plenty of maps and information and can assist visitors with accommodations and island tours information. For more information on the island's national parks, contact the **National Parks and Wildlife South Australia (NP & W SA)** office, 39 Dauncey St. (P.O. Box 39), Kingscote, SA 5223 (☎ 08/8553 2381; fax 08/8553 2531), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

In addition, hotel and motel staff generally carry a stack of tourist brochures and can point you in the right direction about where to go and what to see.

ISLAND LAYOUT Kangaroo Island is Australia's third largest island, at 156km (97 miles) long and 57km (35 miles) wide at its widest point. The distance across the narrowest point is only 2km (1¼ miles). Approximately 3,900 people live on the island. More than half live on the northeast coast in one of the three main towns: Kingscote (pop. 1,800), Penneshaw (pop. 250), and American River (pop. 200). The island's major attractions are located farther from the mainland: Flinders Chase National Park is in the far west, Latham Conservation Park is on the north coast, and Seal Bay and Kelly's Caves are on the south coast.

GETTING AROUND Apart from a twice daily SeaLink bus service which connects Kingscote, Penneshaw, and American River, there is no public transport on the island. An **Airport Shuttle Service** (☎ 1800/750 850) meets all

Tips An Island Bargain

I'd advise buying an **NP&WSA Island Pass** if you'll be exploring the island on your own for 3 days or more and visiting the National Park and attractions more than once. It costs A\$32 (US\$21) for adults, A\$23 (US\$15) for children, and A\$84 (US\$55) for families and includes guided tours of Seal Bay, Kelly Hill Caves, Cape Borda, and Cape Willoughby; also included is access to Flinders Chase National Park. The pass doesn't cover penguin tours or camping fees.

flights to Kangaroo Island and will take passengers to Kingscote, Emu Bay, and American River. Return transfers from your accommodation to the airport need to be booked. Kingscote shuttle costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults and A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children one-way. Emu Bay shuttle costs A\$17 (US\$11) for adults and A\$8 (US\$5.20) for children one-way. American River shuttle costs A\$33 (US\$21) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children one-way. The shuttle drops off to Kingscote first (approx. 15 min. from airport), then Emu Bay, then American River.

Major roads between Penneshaw, American River, Kingscote, and Parndana are paved, as is the road to Seal Bay and all major roads within Flinders Chase National Park. Most other roads are made of ironstone gravel, and can be very slippery if corners are approached too quickly. All roads are accessible by two-wheel-drive vehicles, but if you're bringing over a rental car from the mainland make sure your policy allows you to drive on Kangaroo Island's roads. Avoid driving at night—animals rarely fare best in a car collision.

Car-rental agencies on the island include **Budget** (☎ 08/8553 3133 or 08/8553 1034; fax 08/8553 2888), **Hertz & Kangaroo Island Rental Cars** (☎ 1800/088 296 in Australia, or 08/8553 2390; fax 08/8553 2878), and **Wheels over Kangaroo Island** (☎ 1800/750 850 in Australia, or 08/8553 3030; woki@ozemail.com.au). You can pick up cars at the airport or ferry terminals.

ORGANIZED TOURS If you want to keep expenses down, you can't go wrong with one of the tours organized by **Penneshaw Youth Hostel**, 43 North Terrace, Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island, SA 5222 (☎ 08/8553 1284; fax 08/8553 1295; www.ki-ferryconnections.com/yha_hostel/yha_hostel). The most popular includes an afternoon pickup from the main bus station in Adelaide, coach and ferry to the island, a penguin tour that evening, and dorm accommodation (you can pay a little extra to upgrade to a double room, but book ahead). The next day involves 10 hours of touring, taking in most of the main attractions. That evening you return to Adelaide. The tour costs A\$220 (US\$143).

Another option is with **Wayward Bus** ☎ 08/8410 8833; www.waywardbus.com.au) from Adelaide. Two-day trips depart Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday and cost A\$365 (US\$237) in hostel accommodation (you can upgrade for extra).

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The island is bigger than you might think, and you can spend a fair bit of time getting from one place of interest to the next. Of the many places to see on the island, **Flinders Chase National Park** ★ is one of the most important. First port of call should be the **Flinders Chase Visitors Centre**, at the entrance to the park (open daily 9am–5pm), where you can purchase park entry, view the interpretive display, dine at the licensed cafe, purchase souvenirs, and obtain Parks

information. It took 30 years of lobbying until reluctant politicians finally agreed to preserve this western region of the island in 1919. Today, it makes up around 17% of the island and is home to true wilderness, some beautiful coastal scenery, two old lighthouses, and plenty of animals. Bird-watchers have recorded at least 243 species of birds here. Koalas are so common that they're almost falling out of the trees. Platypus have been seen, but you'll probably need to make a special effort and sit next to a stream in the dark for a few hours for any chance of spotting one. The new Platypus Waterholes walk is a 2-hour return walk, great for all ages. The walk begins at the Flinders Chase Visitors Centre and has a shorter walk suitable for wheelchairs. This walk offers the best opportunity to see the elusive platypus. Kangaroos, wallabies, and brush-tailed possums, on the other hand, are so tame and numerous that the authorities were forced to erect a barrier around the Rocky River Campground to stop them from carrying away picnickers' sandwiches!

The most impressive coastal scenery can be found at **Cape du Couedic** at the southern tip of the park, where millions of years of crashing ocean have created curious structures—like the hollowed-out limestone promontory called Admiral's Arch and the aptly named Remarkable Rocks, where you'll see huge boulders balancing on top of a massive granite dome. At Admiral's Arch there is a colony of some 4,000 New Zealand fur seals that are easily spotted playing in the rock pools and resting on the rocks. During rough weather this place can be spectacular. Recently, the road from Rocky River Park Headquarters to Admiral's Arch and Remarkable Rocks was paved. A new parking lot and loop trail also has been developed at Remarkable Rocks. There's also a new road, parking lot, and trail system around the Cape du Couedic heritage lighthouse district.

You also shouldn't miss out on the unforgettable experience of walking through a colony of Australian sea lions at Seal Bay. The **Seal Bay Conservation Park** (☎ 08/8559 4207) was declared in 1972, and some 100,000 people visit it each year. Boardwalks have been built through the dunes to the beach to reduce the impact of so many feet. The colony consists of about 500 animals, but at any one time you might see up to 100 basking with their pups here. The rangers who supervise the area lead guided trips throughout the day, every 15 to 30 minutes from 9am to 4:15pm. If you come here without a coach group, you must join a tour. Tours cost A\$10.50 (US\$6.80) for adults and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children.

Latham Conservation Park, just to the east of Stokes Bay, is a wonderful place to see wallabies in the wild. Just dip in under the low canopy of casuarina pines and walk silently, keeping your eyes peeled, and you're almost certain to spot them. If you're fortunate you may even come across a very rare glossy cockatoo—it's big and black and feeds mainly on casuarina nuts.

Another interesting spot, especially for bird watchers, is **Murray Lagoon**, on the northern edge of Cape Gantheaume Conservation Park. It's the largest lagoon on the island and a habitat for thousands of water birds. Contact the NP & W SA (see "Visitor Information" above) for information on a ranger-guided Wetland Wade.

Tips Don't Feed the Animals, Please

Don't feed *any* native animals. Kangaroos and wallabies might beg, but they are lactose-intolerant and can go blind, or catch disease, from being fed human food.

Culling Koalas—A National Dilemma

Koalas are cute. They're fluffy, they're sleepy, and they're awesomely cuddly. The problem is they eat an awful lot. In the early 1920s, 18 koalas were introduced to Kangaroo Island. Over the years, without predators and disease, and with an abundant supply of eucalyptus trees, they have prospered. By 1996, there were an estimated 4,000 koalas, and their favorite trees were looking ragged. Some of the koalas were already suffering; some people even claimed the animals were starving to death.

The South Australian Government decided the only option was to shoot Australia's ambassador to the world. The public outcry was enormous; Japan even threatened to advise their citizens to boycott Down Under. But what could be done? Some scientists maintained that the koalas could not be relocated to the mainland because there were few places left to put them. Conservationists blamed Kangaroo Island's farmers for depleting the island of more than 50% of its vegetation. The koala is endangered—the smaller northern variety is threatened with extinction in New South Wales, and the larger subspecies in Victoria, which include the Kangaroo Island koalas, are also under threat. A compromise was reached; the koalas are to be trapped and neutered, a few thousand per year, until their numbers stabilize. A few conscientious farmers will plant more trees. Other farmers will, no doubt, continue to see the koalas as pests.

If you want to see little **penguins**—tiny animals that stand just 33cm (13 in.) tall—forget the touristy show at Phillip Island near Melbourne. On Kangaroo Island you get to see them in a natural environment at both Kingscote and Penneshaw. Tours are conducted nightly in Kingscote by the NP & W SA (see “Visitor Information” above) and cost A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for adults and A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children. Times of tours change seasonally, so call NP & W SA to confirm. Kingscote tours depart from the reception desk at the Ozone Seafront Hotel. Tours for the **Penneshaw Penguin Centre**, the largest penguin colony on the island, depart from the Interpretive Centre (adjacent to the beach and Lloyd Collins Reserve) twice per evening. Call the NP & W SA for times, as they can change. Tours cost A\$6 (US\$3.90) for adults and A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for kids, though children under 12 go free.

For a fabulous, though pricey, day **boat fishing** for everything from King George Whiting, trevally, and snapper to mullet and mackerel, contact **Kangaroo Island Fishing Charters** (☎ 08/8553 1328; www.kifishchart.com.au). A day out costs from A\$125 (US\$82), including lunch, a half-day trip costs A\$90 (US\$59), and you keep what you catch! **American River Fishing Charters** (☎ 0417/869 346) also runs trips.

Finally, Kangaroo Island is renowned for its fresh food, and across the island you'll see signs beckoning to you to come and have a taste of cheese, honey, wine, or such like. One place worth stopping off at is **Clifford's Honey Farm** (☎ 08/8553 8295), which is open daily from 9am to 5pm. The farm is the home of the protected Ligurian honeybee, found nowhere else on earth but on the island.

Island Pure Sheep Dairy (☎ 08/8553 9110) is another worthwhile stop. Tours and tastings are conducted at milking time (1–5pm). It's a great chance to sample delicious sheep's milk, yogurts, and mouthwatering haloumi cheese.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

There are a wide variety of places to choose from, from B&Bs to campgrounds. If you feel like sleeping in 1 of 40 self-contained cottages or coastal lodgings, then contact **Kangaroo Island Remote and Coastal Farm Accommodation** (☎ 08/8553 1233; fax 08/8553 1190; www.ki-ferryconnections.com). Standards vary and prices range from A\$65 to A\$100 (US\$42–US\$65) for each. The staff can also arrange lodgings in local farms, homes, and B&Bs for A\$60 to A\$110 (US\$39–US\$72) for a double with breakfast.

The NP & W SA also offers basic but comfortable lodgings for rent, including relatively isolated **lighthouse cottages** ★★ at Cape Willoughby, Cape Borda, and Cape du Couedic, from A\$21 to A\$37 (US\$14–US\$24) per adult per night—though the minimum charge per stay is between A\$49 and A\$110 (US\$32–US\$72) a cottage.

Another more traditional option is a caravan or cabin at the **Kingscote Nepean Bay Tourist Park** (☎ 08/8553 2394; fax 08/8553 2293; freebairn@kin.on.net). It's on the foreshore at a place called Brownlow, about 3km (5 miles) west of the town center. Caravans and cabins cost around A\$40 (US\$26).

If you're on a super-tight budget, head to the **Penneshaw Youth Hostel**, 43 North Terrace, Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island, SA 5222 (☎ 08/8553 1284; fax 08/8553 1295), with dorm beds for A\$22 (US\$14) and doubles for A\$72 (US\$47). It costs a few dollars less for YHA members.

Camping is allowed at designated sites around the Island and in National Parks for between A\$6 and A\$15 (US\$4–US\$9.75) a tent. There are many beach, river, and bush camping spots to choose from including the Rocky River site (the most expensive) within the Flinders Chase National Park.

IN & NEAR KINGSCOTE

Wisteria Lodge ★ All rooms at the modern and definitely unglamorous-looking Wisteria Lodge are standard motel-type, with exposed brick walls and gray carpets, boosted by ocean views over Nepean Bay. Deluxe rooms offer a spa bathtub and queen-size beds. Reservations are essential for the restaurant.

7 Cygnet Rd., Kingscote, SA 5223. ☎ 08/8553 2707. Fax 08/8553 2200. www.users.on.net/wisteria. Reservations can be made through Flag Inns (☎ 800/624-3524 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/892 407 in the U.K., 0800/803 524 in New Zealand, or 13 24 00 in Australia). 20 units. A\$140 (US\$91) double; A\$160 (US\$104) triple; A\$178 (US\$116) double spa room; A\$200 (US\$130) triple spa room. Extra adult A\$20–A\$22 (US\$13–US\$14), extra child 3–12 A\$15–A\$19 (US\$9.75–US\$12). Ask about money-saving packages (with transport to the island, transfers, meals, and day tours). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; half tennis court; spa; children's center; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited business center; room service (during meal times); laundry/dry cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

IN AMERICAN RIVER

Popular with fishermen and located 37km (23 miles) from Kingscote, American River lacks a beach but offers black swans on Pelican Lagoon. Wild wallabies abound, and egrets, magpies, and cockatoos offer early morning wake-up calls.

Casuarina Holiday Units These simple, country-style units are not flashy, but they offer a clean and cozy budget option. Each comes with a double bed, two singles, and an attached shower.

9 Ryberg Rd., American River, SA 5221. ☎/fax 08/8553 7020. 6 units. A\$60 (US\$39) double; A\$50 (US\$33) for more than 1 night. MC, V. **Amenities:** Children's playground; laundry; barbecue; fish-cleaning facilities. *In room:* TV.

Kangaroo Island Lodge ★ Though Kangaroo Island Lodge was built in 1801, renovations in late 1999 so overhauled the place that you would be hard pressed to find anything rustic remaining. What you have is a very nicely appointed property with pleasant, quiet motel-style rooms, a good pool, a spa and sauna, and a restaurant and bar (mains average A\$20/US\$13). The lodge looks over Pelican Lagoon (famous for its, well, pelicans), but it's a little too far away from it to make the water-view double rooms really worth the extra cost.

Scenic Rd., American River, SA 5221. ☎ 08/8553 7053. Fax 08/8553 7030. www.kilodge.com.au. 38 units. A\$165 (US\$107) water-view doubles; A\$135 (US\$88) poolside double. Extra person A\$24 (US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; unlit tennis court; game room; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (dinner only); coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (some rooms), fridge, hair dryer, iron.

IN PARNDANA

Developed by soldier-settlers after World War II, Parndana today is a rural service center situated a 25-minute drive from Seal Bay and Stokes Bay, and just around the corner from Parndana Wildlife Park, which has more than 50 aviaries with collections of native and other birds, some of them rare and protected.

OTHER PLACES

Hanson Bay Cabins ★ *Finds* Located on the southwest coast of the island on the South Coast Road, Hanson Bay Cabins are a row of four comfortable log cabins perched above a fabulous beach. The cabins each have a large picture window facing the southern ocean, and come with a full kitchen, a bathroom, two bedrooms (including a double bed and three singles in all), and a wood stove. Bring your own food and supplies from Kingscote, American River, or Penneshaw. The ocean can get really wild and dramatic around here with strong offshore winds whipping up the sand and spray. The cottages are near to most of the major attractions and so make a good base. Salmon are often caught off the beach.

Hanson Bay Company, P.O. Box 614, Kingscote, SA 5225. ☎ 08/8853 2603. Fax 08/8853 2673. hansbay@kin.net.au. 6 units. A\$132 (US\$86) cabin for 2. Extra adult A\$18 (US\$12), extra child A\$12 (US\$7.80). There's an A\$18 (US\$12) surcharge for staying only 1 night. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bike rental; free laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron (on request).

WHERE TO DINE

You'll find that most accommodations on Kangaroo Island provide meals for guests (at an additional cost, usually). In addition, most day tours around the island include lunch. You'll find a few cheap takeout booths scattered around the island at the most popular tourist spots. For lunch you could get sandwiches at Roger's Deli on Dauncey Street, behind the Ozone Hotel, in Kingscote.

IN PENNESHAW

Dolphin Rock Café FAST FOOD Plastic tables and chairs and budget meals are what's offered here. The budget meals, including individual pizzas, and french fries and gravy, are popular with backpackers. Also on offer are fish and chips, hamburgers, and chicken. Across the road, the fairy penguins come in at dusk.

43 North Terrace (next to the YHA). ☎ 08/8553 1284. Main courses A\$4–A\$12 (US\$2.60–US\$7.80). AE, MC, V. Winter Wed–Mon 7:30am–7:30pm; summer daily 7am–8:30pm.

ELSEWHERE

Cape Willoughby Café ★★ LOCAL PRODUCE This fabulous restaurant is perched on a cliff-top on the far eastern tip of the island, right next to Cape

Willoughby Lighthouse (an attraction in itself), and about 30km (19 miles) from Penneshaw. One wall is all glass, and there's a veranda outside with terrific ocean views. King George Whiting is a specialty, as are the desserts (the sticky date pudding is mouthwatering). Forty-five-minute tours of the lighthouse leave from the lighthouse office at 10, 11am, 12:30, and 2pm daily. They cost A\$6 (US\$3.90) for adults, A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children, and A\$17 (US\$11) for a family.

Cape Willoughby. ☎ 08/8553 1333. Reservations necessary. Main courses A\$20–A\$27 (US\$13–US\$18). MC, V. Open 10am–4pm for coffee and cakes; 12.30–2.30pm for lunch.

4 Outback South Australia

South Australia is the driest state in Australia. This is well borne out once you leave behind the parklands of Adelaide and head into the interior. The Outback is as harsh as it is beautiful. Much of it is made up of stony desert, salt pans, and sand hills, roamed by kangaroos and wild goats. After spring rains, though, the area can burst alive with wildflowers.

It was always difficult to travel through these parts, and even today there are only four main routes that traverse it. One of them, the **Birdsville Track**, is famed in Outback history as the trail along which stockmen once drove their herds of cattle south from Queensland. Another, the **Strzelecki Track**, runs through remote sand dune country to Innaminka and on to Coopers Creek. Both of these tracks cut through the “dog fence”—a 5,600km (3,472-mile) long barrier designed to keep dingoes out of the pastoral lands to the south.

If you follow the **Stuart Highway**, or the **Oodnadatta Track**, you'll pass the mining towns of Coober Pedy, Andamooka, and Mintabie, where people from all over the world have turned themselves loose in the maddening search for opal. Out here, too, are national parks, such as the daunting Simpson Desert Conservation Park, with its seemingly endless blood-red sand dunes and spinifex plains; and Lake Eyre National Park, with its dried-up salt pan that, during the rare event of a flood, is a temporary home to thousands of water birds.

THE FLINDERS RANGES NATIONAL PARK ★

460km (285 miles) N of Adelaide

The dramatic craggy peaks and ridges that make up the Flinders Ranges rise out of the South Australian desert. The colors of the rock vary from deep red to orange, with sedimentary lines visible as they run down the sides of cliffs. Much of the greenery around here is stunted arid land vegetation. Ever since the introduction of a devastating rabbit virus in 1996, and with the continued culling of hundreds of thousands of wild goats, shoots and saplings that for decades were nibbled away before they grew up have started to turn what was once bare land back into bush. The most remarkable attraction is **Wilpena Pound**, a natural circle of cliff faces that form a gigantic depression on top of a mountainous ledge. The wind whipping over the cliff edges can produce some exhilarating white-knuckle turbulence if you fly over it in a light aircraft. Kangaroos and

Tips An Outback Travel Warning

If you intend to drive through the Outback, take care. Distances between points of interest can be vast; water, petrol, food, and accommodations are far apart. Always travel with a good map and plenty of advice. If you plan to travel off-road, a 4WD vehicle is a must.

emus can sometimes be seen wandering around the park, but outside the park kangaroos are heavily culled.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By car, you can take Highway 1 out of Adelaide to Port Augusta (3½ hr.), then head east on Route 47 via Quorn and Hawker (another 45 min.). It's another hour to Wilpena Pound. Alternatively, take the scenic route (it doesn't have a specific name) through the Clare Valley (around 5 hr.): From Adelaide head to Gawler and then through the Clare Valley; follow signs to Gladstone, Melrose, Wilmington, and Quorn.

Premier Stateliner (☎ 08/8415 5555; www.premierstateliner.com.au) runs five buses every day from Adelaide to Port Augusta for A\$35 (US\$23) one-way. The company also runs buses to Wilpena Pound via Hawker and Quorn, leaving Adelaide at 8:30am on Wednesday and 11am on Friday. Fares each way are A\$44 (US\$29) to Quorn, A\$58 (US\$38) to Hawker, and A\$63 (US\$41) to Wilpena Pound. Buses return to Adelaide from Wilpena Pound at 11am on Thursday, 7:15pm on Friday (arriving in Adelaide at 5am), and 3:05pm on Sunday.

Heading Bush Adventures (☎ 1800/639 933 in Australia, or 08/8356 5501; www.headingbush.com) has great trips if you really want to get out and explore, including a 10-day tour to the Flinders Ranges, the Oodnatta Track, Coober Pedy, the Simpson Desert, Ayres Rock, the Olgas, Kings Canyon, and Aboriginal communities. This remarkable trip costs A\$1,200 (US\$780) or \$995 (US\$647) with a YHA card—which is less than A\$100 (US\$65) a day including meals and bush camping. It focuses on Aboriginal culture.

A budget four-wheel-drive option is with **Ozzie's Bush Track Tours** (☎ 08/8648 6562; www.aboutotours.com) out of Quorn. Half-day trips cost A\$58 (US\$38), full-day trips A\$116 (US\$76), and 3-day trips A\$360 (US\$234). The website has some interesting walking tracks listed if you want to stretch your legs—but take lots of water and tell someone where you are going!

VISITOR INFORMATION Before setting off, contact the **Flinders Ranges and Outback of South Australia Regional Tourism Association (FROSATA)** at P.O. Box 2083, Port Augusta, SA 5700 (☎ 1800/633 060 in Australia), for advice on roads and conditions. I strongly recommend a visit to the **Wadlata Outback Centre** at 41 Flinders Terrace, Port Augusta (☎ 08/8642 4511), an award-winning interactive museum and information center. The museum costs A\$7 (US\$4.55) for adults and A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children and is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm; Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm.

In Hawker, both the Mobil service station and the post office also act as information outlets.

GETTING AROUND **By Car** If you decide to explore on your own using a rental car, I recommend renting one in Adelaide before setting out.

By Camel **Kev's Kamel Kapers** (☎ 08/8648 4299, or 0419/839 288 mobile phone onboard camel) offers remarkable 2-hour sunset camel safaris for A\$25 (US\$16); half-day excursions for A\$50 (US\$33); and full-day safaris including a champagne lunch for A\$80 (US\$52) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for children under 16. Overnight camel treks are available, and on weekends and public holidays 15-minute rides cost just A\$5 (US\$3.25). The tours only run from March to the end of October and leave from Hawker (call beforehand for exact pickup spot). Kev is often unreachable, so check with the tourist association for his whereabouts.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Andu Lodge ★ This fabulous backpackers' lodge is one of the best in Australia. Situated in Quorn, in the central Flinders Ranges (42km/26 miles from Port Augusta), this upscale former hotel is air-conditioned in summer, heated in winter, and has nice clean rooms (dorms sleep six). There's also a nice TV room, a laundry, a computer for e-mailing, and a kitchen area. The hostel offers transfers from Port Augusta for A\$10 (US\$6.50) each way and runs a range of trips with an emphasis on Aboriginal culture and ecotourism. Guests can also rent mountain bikes. Quorn (pop. 1,300) was where the old *Ghan* railway used to start and finish, and where part of the movie *Gallipoli* was filmed. The town has four friendly pubs, all serving meals from A\$6.50 to A\$7.50 (US\$4.20–US\$4.90). The lodge also offers 1-, 2-, and 3-day tours of the Ranges.

12 First St., Quorn, SA 5043. ☎ 1800/639 933 in Australia, or 08/8648 6655. Fax 08/8648 6898. www.headingbush.com. 64 units. A\$50 (US\$33) double; A\$82 (US\$53) family room (sleeps 4); A\$29 (US\$19) twin. A\$24 (US\$16) dorm bed. Discounts for YHA members. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 3 per week, pickup from Port Augusta for A\$6 (US\$3.90). **Amenities:** Shared lounge with VCR; pushbike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms.

Prairie Hotel ★★ *Finds* If you are going to stay anywhere near the Flinders Ranges stay here. This tiny, tin-roofed, stonewalled pub offers a memorable experience and is well worth the dusty 89km (55-mile) drive north alongside the Ranges from Hawker on the A83. A new addition to the pub contains nice rooms, each with a queen-size bed and a shower. The older-style rooms are smaller and quaint. Three units have spa tubs. The bar out front is a great place to meet the locals and other travelers (who all shake their heads in wonder that this magnificent place is still so undiscovered). Meals here, prepared by "Flinders Feral Food," are top-notch—very nearly the best I've had in Australia. Among their specialties are kangaroo tail soup to start and a mixed grill of emu sausages, camel steak, and kangaroo as a main course. The owner's brother runs remarkable scenic flights over Wilpena Pound and out to the salt lakes. From here you could head to the township of William Creek for a side trip to see the giant salt lake, Lake Eyre, and then onwards west to Coober Pedy.

The Parachilna Overflow, opposite the hotel, is a budget option run by the same people. There are bunks, double and family rooms and cabins, set around a communal kitchen and small pool. Bunks cost A\$35 (US\$23); doubles A\$60 (US\$39); and self-catering cabins A\$80 (US\$52).

Corner of High St. and West Terrace, Parachilna, SA 5730. ☎ 08/8648 4844. Fax 08/8648 4606. www.prairiehotel.com.au. 12 units. A\$125–A\$170 (US\$81–US\$111) double; A\$225 (US\$146) double with spa bath. Extra person A\$35–A\$45 (US\$23–US\$29). Rates include light breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, minibar, coffeemaker.

Wilpena Pound Resort The nearest place to the Wilpena Pound itself, this partly refurbished resort almost monopolizes the overnight tourist market around here. Standard rooms are adequate and offer respite from the summer heat. The self-contained units come with a stovetop, a microwave, a basin, and cooking utensils. The resort also operates a campground. Campsites cost A\$22 (US\$14) per night for two people with power and A\$18 (US\$12) without power, and A\$4 (US\$2.60) for each extra person. There are some good walks around the area. Also on offer are half-hour scenic flights over the Ranges for A\$95 (US\$62) per person for two, or A\$80 (US\$52) per person for 20 minutes. They also operate 4WD tours of the area.

Wilpena Pound, SA 5434. ☎ 1800/805 802 in Australia, or 08/8648 0004. Fax 08/8648 0028. www.wilpenapound.com.au. 60 units. A\$115–A\$145 (US\$74–US\$94) motel double; A\$160–A\$170 (US\$104–US\$111)

self-contained units. Extra adult A\$22 (US\$14), extra child 2–14 A\$6.50 (US\$4.20). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; bistro; general store; pool; game room; tour desk; laundry service; 4WD tours; scenic flights; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (some rooms), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer (available at reception), iron (some rooms).

WHERE TO DINE

The **Old Ghan Restaurant** on Leigh Creek Road, Hawker (☎ 08/8648 4176) is open for lunch and dinner Wednesday through Sunday. The restaurant used to be a railway station on *The Ghan* railway line to Alice Springs before the line was shifted due to flooding. The food here is unexciting, but the homemade pies have a following. If you find yourself in Port Augusta, the area's main town, head to the **Standpipe Motor Inn** (☎ 08/8642 4033) for excellent Indian food. The rooms here are nice enough, and quiet, and cost A\$80 (US\$52) for a double.

COOBER PEDY 🌟

854km (529 miles) NW of Adelaide; 689km (427 miles) S of Alice Springs

Tourists come to this Outback opal-mining town for one thing: the people. More than 3,500 people, from 44 nations, work mainly underground here—the majority suffering from opal fever, which keeps you digging on the trail of the elusive shimmering rocks. Though some residents are secretive and keep to themselves, many others are colorful characters ready to stop for a chat and spin a few yarns.

Historically, Coober Pedy was a rough place, and it still has a certain Wild West air about it. The first opal was found here in 1915, but it wasn't until 1917 when the Trans Continental Railway was completed, that people began seriously digging for opals. Since then, they have mainly lived underground—not surprising when you encounter the heat, the dust, and the flies for yourself.

The town got its name from the Aboriginal words *kupa piti*, commonly thought to mean “white man's burrow.” Remnants of the holes left by early miners are everywhere, mostly in the form of bleached-white hills of waste called “mullock heaps.” It's rather discouraged for tourists to wander around the tailing sites on account that the locals get fed up when tourists fall down the mineshafts.

As for the town, there isn't much to look at, except a couple of underground churches, some casual restaurants, a handful of opal stores, and the necessary service-type businesses. In the center of town you'll find lots of outdoor buildings; the hotels and youth hostel have aboveground entrances but rooms below ground. These are all within stumbling distance of each other on the main street.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Regional Express** (☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies to Coober Pedy from Adelaide. It's a new airline and fares are fluctuating as we update this guide. Check the website for discounted fares and specials. **Greyhound-Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia) runs services from Adelaide to Coober Pedy for A\$76 (US\$50) for adults and A\$61 (US\$40) for children one-way. The trip takes about 12 hours. The bus from Alice Springs to Coober Pedy costs A\$75 (US\$49) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for children. Passengers bound for Ayres Rock transfer at Erolunda.

If you drive from Adelaide it will take you about 9 hours to reach Coober Pedy along the Stuart Highway. It will take you another 7 hours to drive the 700km (434 miles) to Alice Springs.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Coober Pedy Tourist Information Centre**, Hutchison Street, Coober Pedy, SA 5723 (☎ 08/8672 5298, or 1800/637 076 in Australia), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm (closed

Moments A Fabulous Four-Wheel-Drive Adventure

With a hired vehicle from Adelaide, it's a day's drive north through the **Clare Valley wine region** to the **Prairie Hotel** (see above). Stop off along the way for a traditional Aussie lunch at **Bluey Blundstone's Café** ☼ in Melrose (☎ 08/8666 2173). The next day it's a 3- to 4-hour drive to **William Creek**, an Outback town with a takeout restaurant, pub/hotel, satellite phone box, camping ground, and general store. **"Explore the Outback" Camel Safaris** (☎ 08/8672 3968; www.austcamel.com.au/explore) offers 4-day camel safaris across the desert from here (check their website for alternate ways to get to William Creek). Just 20km (12 miles) before you reach town is a turnoff to **Lake Eyre**, a giant salt lake which flooded in 2000, and again in 2001, and should hold water for a couple of years. **Wrightsair** offers 1-hour flights over Lake Eyre for A\$110 (US\$72) per person. Call ☎ 0418/336 748 (mobile). Camping beside the lake is a magical experience. The next day it's a 166km (103-mile) drive to **Coober Pedy** (see above), and then a 9-hour drive back to **Adelaide**.

holidays). A good website, www.opalcapitaloftheworld.com.au, gives a run down of other adventure operators in the area.

SEEING THE TOWN

Radeka's Downunder Motel (see below) runs half-day tours of the opal fields, including a visit to an underground mine. It costs A\$30 (US\$20) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for kids.

If you want to see parts of Australia that most Australians never see, join an honest-to-goodness **Mail Run** ☼ for a 12-hour journey out into the bush. Tours leave every Monday and Thursday from **Underground Books** (☎ 08/8672 5558) in Coober Pedy (yep, it's a bookshop underground) and travel along 600km (372 miles) of dirt roads to Oodnatta and William Creek cattle station, stopping off at five different stations along the route. It can get pretty hot and dusty outside (think endless horizons of flat lands), but it's relatively comfortable inside the air-conditioned 4WD, and you'll have the chance to see such wildlife as eagles, emus, and the ever-present kangaroos. Bring your own lunch, or buy it along the way. Tours cost around A\$120 (US\$78) for adults and A\$75 (US\$49) for children under 12, though kids might find the long trip difficult. This could easily be one of the most memorable experiences you have in Australia, for its up-close-and-personal look at life in the bush.

WHERE TO STAY

The Backpacker's Inn at Radeka's Downunder Motel ☼ Whereas all other "underground" rooms in Coober Pedy are actually built into the side of a hill, the centrally located hostel here is actually underground—some 6.5m (21 ft.) directly below the topside building, that is. This makes for nice all-year-round temperatures. Odd-looking dorms have no doors and are scooped out of the rock. They contain just four beds, though there are two large dorms sleeping up to 20 people. The twin rooms are simply furnished but pleasant. The motel rooms are quite comfortable and come with attached bathrooms with a

shower. Some have a kitchenette. Room no. 9 is huge, with a double and two sets of bunk beds. All motel rooms are dug out of the side of a hill. Radeka's also runs a good opal tour.

1 Oliver St., Coober Pedy, SA 5723. ☎ **08/8672 5223**. Fax 08/86725821. 150 units, 10 motel rooms. A\$52 (US\$34) double. A\$22 (US\$14) dorm beds. In motel: A\$90 (US\$59) double; A\$110 (US\$72) family suite. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar; TV and video room; pool table; kitchen/dining room; tour desk; coin-operated laundry service. *In room (motel only):* TV, coffeemaker.

WHERE TO DINE

The **Opal Inn** (☎ **08/8672 5054**) offers good-value counter meals of the typical pub-grub variety. Head to **Traces** (☎ **08/8672 5147**), the township's favorite Greek restaurant, for something a bit different.

5 The Coorong

Few places in the world attract as much wildfowl as the **Coorong**, one of Australia's most precious sanctuaries. The Coorong is made up of an area that includes the mouth of the Murray River, the huge Lake Alexandrina, the smaller Lake Albert, and a long, thin sand spit called the Younghusband Peninsula. A small, but by far the most scenic, part of this area is encompassed in the **Coorong National Park**. The area is under environmental threat due to pollutants coming south via the Murray River from farmlands to the north. It still manages to play host to large colonies of native and visiting birds, such as the Australian pelican, black swans, royal spoonbills, greenshanks, and the extremely rare hooded plover.

If it were possible to count all the birds here, you'd probably run out of steam after some 45,000 ducks, 5,000 black swans, 2,000 Cape Barren geese, and 122,000 waders. This last figure is even more significant when you consider it corresponds to a total South Australian population of waders standing at 200,000, and an overall Australian population of some 403,000.

Add to these figures the thousands of pelicans—with around 3,000 birds nesting here it's the largest permanent breeding colony in Australia—and gulls, terns, and cormorants, and you'll realize why the Coorong and Lower Murray Lakes form one of the most important water bird habitats in Australia.

The national park, which stands out starkly against the degraded farmland surrounding it, is also home to several species of marsupials, including wombats.

The best time to visit the Coorong is in December and January, when the lakes are full of migratory birds from overseas. However, plenty of birds can be spotted year-round. **Note:** Binoculars and patience are highly recommended.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The best way to visit the Coorong is by car, though a guided tour of the area is highly recommended once you arrive at either the main settlement of Goolwa on the western fringe of the waterways, or at Meningie, on the eastern boundary. From Adelaide follow the Princes Highway along the coast.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **River Murray Interpretive Centre**, The Wharf, Goolwa, SA 5214 (☎ **08/8555 1144**), has information on the area and can book accommodations. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND The best operator in the area is **Coorong Nature Tours** (☎ **08/8574 0037**, or 0428/714 793 mobile phone; www.lm.net.au/~coorongnat/), based in Narrung. The tours are run by David Dadd, a delightful, unassuming Cockney, who fell in love with the Coorong when he arrived at

the age of 11. He offers memorable 1-, 2-, and 3-day tours of the area, with pickup either in Meningie or Adelaide. Full-day tours cost A\$132 (US\$86) per person from Meningie or A\$185 (US\$120) per person from Adelaide. Reservations are essential.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

There are plenty of hotels, B&Bs, campgrounds, and caravan parks in Goolwa and along the main road that runs parallel to the national park. One of the ones I prefer is the **Goolwa Camping and Tourist Park**, 40 Castle Rd., Goolwa, SA 5214 (☎ 08/8555 2144). It has 70 caravans and a large area for tents. A two-berth van costs A\$25 (US\$16) a night, and a six-berth A\$35 (US\$23) for the first two people and A\$5 (US\$3.25) for an extra adult or A\$3 (US\$1.95) for an extra child. Bring your own bedding.

Graham's Castle Resort This former conference center is classified as a three-star backpacker's accommodation. Rooms are very basic with two single beds, heating, and a shower shared between two rooms. It's very popular with budget groups, so it could get noisy.

Corner of Castle and Bradford sts., Goolwa, SA 5214. ☎ 08/8555 3300, or 1800/243 303 in Australia. Fax 08/8555 3828. 22 units. A\$15 (US\$9.75) per person. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tennis court; tour desk; room service.

Poltalloch ★★ Located smack in the middle of nowhere on the eastern edge of the Coorong, Poltalloch is a working farm property—with plenty of cows, ducks, chickens, and dogs wandering about—that seems more like a village. The whole place is classified by the National Trust of South Australia, and history is evident everywhere, from the cottages once used by farmhands to the giant wooden shearing shed and other outbuildings crammed with relics from the past.

You can stay in a choice of five cottages on the property. The Shearer's Hut is a stone cottage that sleeps up to nine people; the Overseers stone cottage sleeps up to eight people; the Boundary Rider's Cottage is built of timber, iron, and stone, and sleeps five; and the Station Hand's Cottage sleeps four. The Shearer's Quarters is mainly for large groups and sleeps 12. All of the units are modern and comfortable inside and have their own kitchen facilities and barbecues. I stayed in the Station Hand's Cottage, once the home of Aboriginal workers. I loved the mix of rural feeling and modern conveniences.

There's a private beach if you want to swim in the lake, and guests have the use of a dinghy, a canoe, and a Ping-Pong table. Historical tours of the property cost A\$9 (US\$5.85) for adults, and A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children with a minimum charge of A\$27 (US\$18). Bookings are essential. Breakfast provisions are available for A\$13 (US\$8.45) per person. Coorong Nature Tours will pick you up from here for no extra charge. There's plenty of bird life all around.

Poltalloch. P.M.B.3, Narrung via Tailem Bend, SA 5260. ☎ 08/8574 0088. Fax 08/8574 0065. www.poltalloch.com.au. 3 units. A\$105–A\$175 (US\$68–US\$114) per cottage. Extra person A\$25 (US\$16). MC, V. **Amenities:** Tennis court; use of watersports equipment; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, fridge, coffee-maker, iron.

Melbourne

by Marc Llewellyn

Melbourne (pronounced *Mel-bun*), the capital of Victoria and Australia's second-largest city, with a population well over 3 million, is a cultural melting pot. For a start, more people of Greek descent live here than in any other city except Athens. Chinese, Italian, Vietnamese, and Lebanese immigrants have all left their mark. In fact, almost one-third of Melbournians were born overseas or have parents who were born overseas. With such a diverse population, and with trams rattling through the streets and a host of stately European architecture surrounding you, you could easily forget you're in Australia at all.

Melbourne has a reputation of being at the head of the pack when it comes to shopping, restaurants, fashion, music, nightlife, and cafe culture. It frequently beats out other state capitals in bids for major international concerts,

plays, exhibitions, and sporting events, such as the Formula One Grand Prix.

The city also revels in a healthy rivalry with its northern neighbor, Sydney, but it's interesting to note that almost every Melbournian adores their city—often described as the “most livable” in the world—whereas Sydneysiders are mostly half-hearted in their praise for their own abode.

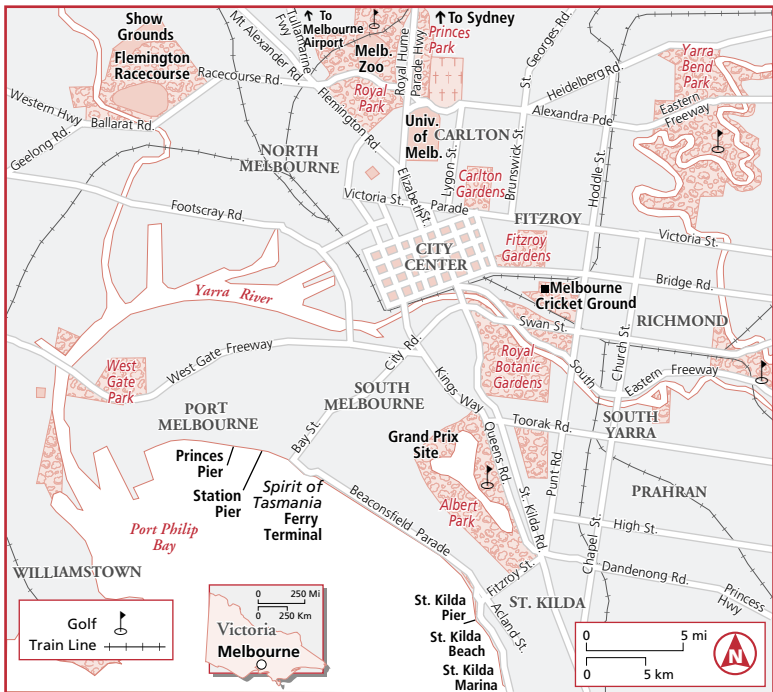
Melbourne's roots go back to the 1850s, when gold was found in the surrounding hills. British settlers took up residence and have since prided themselves on coming freely to their city, rather than having been forced here in convict chains. The city grew wealthy and remained largely a conservative bastion until World War II, when another wave of immigration, this time mainly from southern Europe, made it a more relaxed place.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING

BY PLANE Melbourne's main international and domestic airport is **Tullamarine Airport**, located 22km (14 miles) northwest of the city center. If you're traveling from Sydney, the flight will take you around 1 hour, 20 minutes. It's a 5-minute walk between the international and domestic terminals. Travelers' information desks are open on both levels of the international terminal building from 6am until the last flight. There are snack bars, a restaurant, currency-exchange facilities, and duty-free shops in the international terminal. There's also a post office, open daily from 9am to 5pm, but mailboxes and stamps from vending machines are available after hours. ATMs are available at both terminals. Showers are on the first floor of the international area. Baggage trolleys are free in the international baggage claim hall but cost A\$2 (US\$1.30) if hired in the parking lot, departure lounge, or the domestic terminal. Baggage lockers cost A\$4 to A\$8 (US\$2.60–US\$5.60) per day, depending on size. The **Hilton Melbourne Airport** is in walking distance from the terminals (☎ 03/9338 2322).

Greater Melbourne



Thrifty (☎ 1800/652 008 in Australia, or 03/9330 1522), **Budget** (☎ 13 27 27 in Australia), **Avis** (☎ 1800/225 533 in Australia, or 03/9338 1800), and **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39 in Australia or 03/9379 9955), **Delta Europcar** (☎ 1300/131390 in Australia, or 03/9417 2311) have airport rental desks. The Tullamarine freeway to and from the airport joins with the Citylink, an electronic toll-way system. Drivers need a CityLink pass. A 24 Hour pass costs A\$9.10 (US\$5.90). Check with your car-rental company.

Skybus (☎ 03/9335 2811; www.skybus.com.au) picks up passengers in front of the baggage claim area every 15 minutes from 6am to 12pm, and hourly from 12pm to 6am. The trip into the center takes around 35 minutes and costs A\$13 (US\$7.80) one-way for adults and A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children under 15. The service travels direct to Spencer Street Railway Station, where free shuttle buses transfer you to city hotels. When you want to return to the airport, book the Skybus service a few hours in advance and allow at least 40 minutes for traveling time. Buy tickets onboard, or from Skybus desks outside the baggage claim areas.

A taxi to the city center takes about 30 minutes and is expensive at around A\$45 to A\$50 (US\$29–US\$33).

An alternative is the **Super Shuttle**, a multi hire limousine service that departs approximately every 20 minutes from in front of the arrival terminal. Airport to city hotels costs A\$16 (US\$11). Bookings are not necessary from the airport, but from the city call ☎ 03/9338 4401.

BY TRAIN Interstate trains arrive at **Spencer Street Railway Station**, at Spencer and Little Collins streets (5 blocks from Swanston St. in the city center). Taxis and buses connect with the city. The **Sydney–Melbourne XPT** travels

between Australia's two largest cities daily; trip time is 10½ hours. The full economy fare, if booked on the day of travel, is A\$110 (US\$72), A\$66 (US\$43) if booked a week in advance, and A\$55 (US\$36) if booked 2 weeks in advance. The first-class fare is A\$154 (US\$100) on the day of travel, A\$92 (US\$60) a week in advance, and A\$77 (US\$50) 2 weeks in advance. A first-class sleeper costs \$231 (US\$150) booked on the day of travel, A\$169 (US\$110) a week in advance, and A\$154 (US\$100) 2 weeks in advance. Students presenting an ISIC international student card travel at "2 week in advance price" in all categories, even if booked on the day. Call **Countrylink** on ☎ 13 22 32, or access their website at www.countrylink.info.

The **Overland** provides daily service to and from Melbourne and Adelaide (trip time: 12 hr.). Fares are A\$57 (US\$37) in economy and A\$105 (US\$68) for a first-class sleeper. You can transport your car on the *Overland* for A\$168 (US\$110). Call Great Southern Railways at ☎ 13 21 47, or check their website at www.gsr.com.au.

Daylink services also connect Melbourne with Adelaide. This trip is by train from Melbourne to Bendigo, and bus from Bendigo to Adelaide. Total trip time is 11 hours, and the fare is A\$60 (US\$39) economy and A\$69 (US\$45) first-class.

The **Canberra Link** connects Melbourne with the nation's capital, and consists of a train journey from Melbourne to Wadonga, and a 3-hour bus trip from there to Canberra. The journey takes around 11 hours and costs A\$45 (US\$30) in economy, and A\$64 (US\$42) in first-class.

For train information and reservations for the **daylink** services to Adelaide and Canberra call **VLine** (☎ 13 61 96 in Australia; www.vlinepassenger.com.au).

BY BUS Several bus companies connect Melbourne with other capitals and regional areas of Victoria. Among the biggest are **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia; www.mccaffertys.com.au) and **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia, or 07/3258 1670; www.greyhound.com.au). Greyhound Pioneer buses and McCafferty's coaches depart and arrive at Melbourne's Transit Centre, at 58 Franklin St., 2 blocks north of the Spencer Street Railway Station. New arrivals can take a tram or taxi from the station to their hotel. **VLine buses** (☎ 13 61 96 in Australia), which travel all over Victoria, depart from the Spencer Street Bus Terminal.

BY CAR You can drive from Sydney to Melbourne along the Hume Highway (a straight trip of about 9½ hr.), though a much nicer route is via the coastal Princes Highway, for which you will need a minimum of 2 days, with stops. For information on all aspects of road travel in Victoria, contact the **Royal Automobile Club of Victoria** (☎ 03/9607 22 22, or visit www.racv.com.au).

VISITOR INFORMATION

The first stop on any visitor's itinerary should be the **Melbourne Visitor Centre**, Federation Square, Swanston Street and Flinders Street, VIC 3000 (☎ 03/9658 9658). The center, which opened in 2002, serves as a "one-stop-shop" for tourism information, accommodation and tour bookings, event ticketing, public transport information, and ticket sales. Also here are an ATM, self-help Internet terminals, and interactive multimedia providing information on Melbourne and Victoria. The center is open 7 days from 9am to 6pm. The **Melbourne Greeter Service** also operates from the Melbourne Visitor Centre. This service is available in 20 different languages and connects visitors to enthusiastic local volunteers who offer free one-on-one orientation tours of the city. Book at least 3 days in advance (☎ 03/9658 9658; greeter@melbourne.vic.gov.au).

You'll find some information services at **Information Victoria** 356 Collins St. (☎ 1300/366 356). Staffed information booths for Melbourne Visitors Centre are also found in Bourke Street Mall. Also look for Melbourne's City Ambassadors, roving the central city area, who are available to provide tourist information and directions.

Good websites on the city include <http://melbourne.citysearch.com.au/>, www.melbourne.vic.gov.au, and www.visitmelbourne.com.

CITY LAYOUT

Melbourne is situated on the Yarra River and stretches inland from Port Philip Bay, which lies to its south. Look at a map, and you'll see a distinct central oblong area surrounded by Flinders Street to the south, Latrobe Street to the north, Spring Street to the east, and Spencer Street to the west. Cutting north-to-south through its center are the two main shopping thoroughfares, Swanston Street and Elizabeth Street. A series of cross-streets, including Bourke Street Mall (a pedestrians-only shopping promenade), runs between these major thoroughfares. If you continue south along Swanston Street, and over the river, it turns into St. Kilda Road, which runs to the coast. The central area is surrounded by Melbourne's various urban "villages," including South Yarra, Richmond, Carlton, and Fitzroy. The seaside suburb of St. Kilda, known for its diverse selection of restaurants, is also positioned very near to the beach. If you've visited Sydney, you'll find Melbourne's city center to be smaller and far less congested with people and cars.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Melbourne is huge. At more than 6,110 sq. km (2,383 sq. miles), it's one of the biggest cities in the world. Below are the areas of most interest to visitors.

City Center Made up of a grid of streets north of the Yarra River, the city center is bordered to the south by Flinders Street and to the north by Latrobe Street. The eastern and western borders are Spring Street and Spencer Street, respectively. There's some good shopping, charming cafes, and in recent years an active nightlife has sprung up with the opening of a swath of funky bars and restaurants playing live and recorded music to suit all ages. The gateway to the city is Flinders Street Station, with its dome and clock tower and flanked by the stunning new Federation Square precinct.

Chinatown This colorful section of the city is centered on Little Bourke Street between Swanston and Exhibition streets. The area marks Australia's oldest permanent Chinese settlement, dating from the 1850s, when a few boardinghouses catered to Chinese prospectors lured

by gold rushes. Plenty of cheap restaurants crowd its alleyways. Tram: Any to the city.

Carlton North of the city center, Carlton is a rambling inner-city suburb famous for the Italian restaurants along Lygon Street with outdoor seating—though the quality of the food served is variable. It's the home of the University of Melbourne, so there's a healthy student scene. From Bourke Street Mall count on a 15-minute walk to reach the restaurant strip. Tram: 1 or 22 from Swanston Street.

Fitzroy A ruggedly Bohemian place, 2km (1¼ miles) north of the city center, Fitzroy is raw and funky, filled with students and artists and popular for people-watching. Fitzroy revolves around Brunswick Street, with its cheap restaurant scene, busy cafes, late-night bookshops, art galleries, and pubs. Around the

corner, on Johnston Street, is a growing Spanish quarter with tapas bars, Flamenco restaurants, and Spanish clubs. Tram: 11 from Collins Street.

Richmond One of Melbourne's earliest settlements is a multicultural quarter based around historic streets and back lanes. Victoria Street is reminiscent of Ho Chi Minh City, with Vietnamese sights, sounds, aromas, and restaurants everywhere. Bridge Road is a bustling cut-price fashion precinct. Tram: 48 or 75 from Flinders Street to Bridge Road; 70 from Batmans Avenue at Princes Bridge to Swan Street; 109 from Bourke Street to Victoria Street.

Southgate & Southbank This flashy entertainment district on the banks of the Yarra River opposite Flinders Street Station (linked by a pedestrian bridge) is home to the Crown Casino—Australia's largest gaming venue. Southbank has a myriad of themed restaurants, bars, cafes, nightclubs, cinemas, and designer shops. On the city side of the river is the new Melbourne Aquarium. All are a 10-minute stroll from Flinders Street Station. Tram: 8 from Swanston Street.

Docklands Near the city center, at the rear of the Spencer Street station, this old industrial docking area has become the biggest development in Melbourne. New Quay on the waterfront has a diverse range of restaurants, shops, and cinemas. To celebrate the dominance of the Australian Rules Football, Melbourne recently constructed a purpose-built 52,000 seat stadium, the Telstra Dome, to house their favorite game. Accessible by the free city circle tram.

St. Kilda Hip and Bohemian in a shabby-chic sort of way, this bayside suburb (6km/3¾ miles south of the city center) has Melbourne's highest concentration of restaurants, ranging from glitzy to cheap, as well as some

superb cake shops and delis. Historically it was Melbourne's red-light district. The Esplanade hugs a pleasant "beach" (with brown waters) and is the scene of a lively arts and crafts market on Sundays. Acland Street houses many restaurants. Check out Luna Park, one of the world's oldest fun parks, built in 1912, and take a ride on the historic wooden roller-coaster. Tram: 10 or 12 from Collins Street; 15 or 16 from Swanston Street; 96 from Bourke Street.

South Yarra/Prahan This posh part of town is crammed with chic boutiques, cinemas, nightclubs, and galleries. Chapel Street is famous for its well-heeled eateries and designer fashion houses, whilst Commercial Road is popular with the gay and lesbian community. Just off Chapel Street in Prahan is Greville Street, a Bohemian enclave featuring retro boutiques and music outlets. Every Sunday the Greville Street Market offers arts, crafts, old clothes, and jewelry from noon to 5pm. Tram: 8 or 72 from Swanston Street.

South Melbourne One of the city's oldest working-class districts, South Melbourne is known for its historic buildings, old-fashioned pubs and hotels, and markets. Tram: 12 from Collins Street; 1 from Swanston Street.

The River District The muddy-looking Yarra River runs southeast past the fabulous Botanic Gardens and nearby to other attractions such as the Victorian Arts Centre, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, and the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), all outlined later in this chapter. Birrarung Marr is the first new major parkland in Melbourne for over a 100 years.

Williamstown A lack of extensive development has left this outer waterfront suburb with a rich

architectural heritage centered on Ferguson Street and Nelson Place—both reminiscent of old England. On the Strand overlooking the sea are a

line of bistros and restaurants, and a World War II warship museum. Ferry: from Southgate, the World Trade Center, or St. Kilda Pier.

2 Getting Around

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Trams, trains, and buses are operated by several private companies including the National Bus Company, Yarra Trams, and Connex to name a few. Generally, both tourists and locals travel around the city and inner suburbs by tram.

BY TRAM Melbourne has the oldest tram network in the world. Trams are still an essential part of the city, and a major cultural icon. There are several hundred trams running over 325km (202 miles) of track. Instead of phasing this non-smoggy method of transport out, Melbourne is busily expanding the network.

Tram travel within the city and to all suburbs mentioned in this chapter costs A\$1.80 (US\$1.20) for adults, A90¢ (US52¢) for children for a single journey. Or you can buy a **2-Hour Metcard** good for unlimited transport on buses or trains for up to 2 hours. The 2-Hour Metcards cost A\$2.70 (US\$1.75) for adults and A\$1.50 (US\$1) for children. If you plan to pack an awful lot in then try the **Zone 1 Metcard Daily ticket**, which allows travel on all transport (trams and trains) within the city and close surrounding suburbs mentioned in this chapter from 5:30am to midnight (when transportation stops). It costs A\$5.20 for adults and A\$2.70 (US\$1.75) for children. **Metcard Weekly tickets** cost A\$23 (US\$15) for adults and A\$11.40 (US\$7.40) for children.

Buy single-trip and 2-hour tram tickets at ticket machines on trams, special ticket offices (such as at the tram terminal on Elizabeth St., near the corner of Flinders St.), at most newsagents, and at Metcard vending machines at many railway stations. A Metcard needs to be validated by the Metcard Validator machine on the tram, station platforms, or onboard buses before each journey; the only exception to this is the 2-hour Metcard ticket purchased from a vending machine on a tram, which is automatically validated starting from that journey only. Vending machines on trams only accept coins—but give change—whereas larger vending machines at train stations give change up to A\$10 (US\$6.50).

You can pick up a free route map from the Melbourne Visitors Centre, at Federation Square, or at the **Met Information Centre**, 103 Elizabeth St., at the corner of Collins Street (☎ **13 16 38** in Australia; www.victrip.com.au), which is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

The **City Circle Tram** is the best way to get around the center of Melbourne—and it's free. These burgundy-and-cream trams travel a circular route between all the major central attractions, and past shopping malls and arcades. The trams run in both directions every 10 minutes, between 10am and 6pm, except Good Friday and Christmas Day. City Circle Tram stops are marked with a burgundy sign.

Value Money-Saving Transit Pass

The **Getabout Travelcard**, which can be used by two adults and up to four children, is good for 1 day of travel on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays only. It costs A\$11 (US\$7). Buy it at newsagents.

Trams can be hailed at numbered green-and-gold tram-stop signs. To get off the tram, press the red button near handrails, or pull the cord above your head.

BY EXPLORER BUS

Melbourne Explorer Gray Line (☎ 1300/858 687) operates buses that pick up and drop off at 21 stops around the city, including the Melbourne Aquarium, Crown Casino, Queen Victoria Markets, Captain Cook's Cottage, Chinatown, Melbourne Zoo, and the Botanic Gardens, among others. There's full commentary on board. You can hop on and off during the day. A bus returns to each stop half-hourly. The first bus leaves Town Hall on Swanston Street at 9:30am and the last at 2:30pm. Tickets cost A\$32 (US\$21) for adults, A\$16 (US\$10) for children under 14. Buy from the driver or at the little tour booth outside Melbourne Town Hall.

BY TAXI

Cabs are plentiful in the city, but it may be difficult to hail one in the city center late Friday and Saturday nights. Taxi companies include **Silver Top** (☎ 13 10 08 or 03/9345 3455), **Embassy** (☎ 13 17 55 or 03/9277 3444), and **Black Cabs Combined** (☎ 13 22 27). A large, illuminated rooftop light shows a cab is free.

BY CAR

Driving in Melbourne is not always fun. Roads can be confusing, there are trams and aggressive drivers everywhere, and there is a strange rule about turning right from the left lane at major intersections in the downtown center (which leaves the left-hand lane free for oncoming trams and free for through traffic). Here, you must wait for the lights to turn amber before turning. Also, you must always stop behind a tram if it stops, as passengers usually step directly into the road. Add to this the general lack of parking spaces and expensive hotel valet-parking charges, and you'll know why it's better to get on a tram instead. For road rules pick up a copy of the Victorian Road Traffic handbook from bookshops, or from a Vic Roads office (☎ 13 11 71 in Australia for the nearest office).

Major car-rental companies include **Avis**, 400 Elizabeth St. (☎ 03/9663 6366); **Budget**, 398 Elizabeth St. (☎ 03/9203 4844); **Hertz**, 97 Franklin St. (☎ 03/9698 2555); **Delta Europcar**, 110 A'beckett St. (☎ 03/9600 9025); **Thrifty**, 390 Elizabeth St. (☎ 03/9663 5200); and **National**, corner Franklin and Elizabeth sts. (☎ 131045). Expect to pay from A\$40 (US\$26) a day for a small car.

FAST FACTS: Melbourne

American Express The main Amex office is at 235 Collins St. (☎ 03/9633 6333). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon.

Business Hours In general, stores are open Monday through Thursday 9am to 5:30pm, Friday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. The larger department stores stay open on Thursday till 6pm and Friday until 9pm. Banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm, and Friday from 9:30am to 5pm.

Camera Repair **Vintech Camera Repairs**, 5th Floor, 358 Lonsdale St. (☎ 03/9602 1820, or 0418-515 662 mobile), is well regarded.

Consulates The following English-speaking countries have consulates in Melbourne: **United States**, Level 6, 553 St. Kilda Rd. (☎ 03/9526 5900); **United Kingdom**, Level 17, 90 Collins St. (☎ 03/9650 4155); and **Canada**, 1st Floor, 123 Camberwell Rd., Hawthorn (☎ 03/9811 9999).

Dentist Call the **Dental Emergency Service** (☎ 03/9341 0222) for emergency referral to a local dentist.

Doctor The "casualty" department at the **Royal Melbourne Hospital**, Grattan Street, Parkville (☎ 03/9342 7000) responds to emergencies. The **Traveller's Medical & Vaccination Centre**, 2nd Floor, 393 Little Bourke St. (☎ 03/9602 5788), offers full vaccination and travel medical services.

Emergencies In an emergency, call ☎ 000 for police, ambulance, or the fire department.

Internet Access There are numerous Internet cafes along Elizabeth Street, between Flinders and La Trobe Street, and also around Flinders Lane, and Little Bourke Street in the Chinatown area. Most are open from early until well into the night.

Lost Property Contact the nearest police station, or call in at the Melbourne Town Hall, Swanston Street, City (☎ 03/9658 9774).

Pharmacies The **McGibbony & Beaumont Pharmacy** is in the Grand Hyatt hotel complex, 123 Collins St. (☎ 03/9650 1823). It's open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 6:30pm, Friday from 8am to 7pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 2:30pm, and Sunday from 9:30am to noon.

Post Office The well known **General Post Office (GPO)** at the corner of Bourke Street Mall and Elizabeth Street has closed and will be made into a new hotel. Postal services are now available at two nearby locations—De Bono Centre, 257 Collins St. or on the corner of Elizabeth and Little Bourke streets. Both are open Monday through Friday 8:30am to 5:00pm. Poste Restante hours are the same.

Safety St. Kilda might be coming up in the world, but it's still not wise if you are alone to walk there late at night. Parks and gardens can also be risky at night, as can the area around the King Street nightclubs.

Taxes Sales tax, where it exists, is included in the price, as is the 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST). There is no hotel tax as yet in Melbourne.

Telephones For Directory Assistance call ☎ 1223; for International Directory Assistance call ☎ 1225.

Weather Call ☎ 1196 for recorded weather information.

3 Accommodations You Can Afford

Melbourne is generally a little less expensive to stay in than Sydney, and getting a room is generally easy enough, especially on weekends, when business travelers are back home and discounts apply. You need to book well in advance, however, during the city's hallmark events (say, the weekend before the Melbourne Cup, and during the Grand Prix and the Ford Australia Open). Hostels in the St. Kilda area tend to fill up quickly in December and January.

Once considered dead after offices closed for the day, the city center has been rejuvenated in recent years, and you'll feel right in the heart of the action if you

stay here. Otherwise, the suburbs are all exciting satellites, with good street life, restaurants, and pubs—just a quick tram ride from the city center. (Transportation from the airport to the suburbs is a little more expensive and complicated than to the city center, however.)

If you arrive without booked accommodation contact either of the travelers' information desks (☎ **03/9297 1814**), located on both floors of the international terminal and open daily from 6am to last flight, or the **Best of Victoria Booking Service** at new Melbourne Visitor Centre at Federation Square (☎ **03/9650 3663**), Open weekdays 9am to 6pm and weekends 9am to 5pm.

IN THE CITY CENTER

Hotel Y All rooms at the Y are sparsely furnished and not overly large, and as such do not represent such great value. The most expensive doubles and triples have been refurbished recently and have a TV, a refrigerator, and air-conditioning. The one-bedroom apartment has a queen-size bed with en suite bathroom, and the lounge has a double pullout bed and a small kitchenette. A cafe on the premises serves breakfast, lunch, and light snacks. The Y welcomes both women and men. The hotel is situated right near the Queen Victoria Market and is a short tram ride down Elizabeth Street or a 10-minute walk from the city center.

YWCA Melbourne, 489 Elizabeth St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ☎ **03/9329 5188**. Fax 03/9329 1469. www.ywca.net. 60 units. A\$98–A\$120 (US\$64–US\$78) double; A\$109–A\$131 (US\$71–US\$85) triple; A\$185 (US\$120) apt (for 2 people). Extra person A\$17 (US\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. **Amenities:** Cafe; access to health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry; kitchen; TV room. *In room:* A/C (more expensive rooms only), phone, TV (more expensive rooms only), fridge, coffeemaker.

Ibis Melbourne ★ *Value* The good-value Ibis is right next door to the bus station and a short walk from the central shopping areas. The four-star rooms are spacious, immaculate, and bright. Apartments come with kitchenettes and tubs. All guests have free use of the pool, sauna, and spa just up the road at the historic Melbourne City Baths.

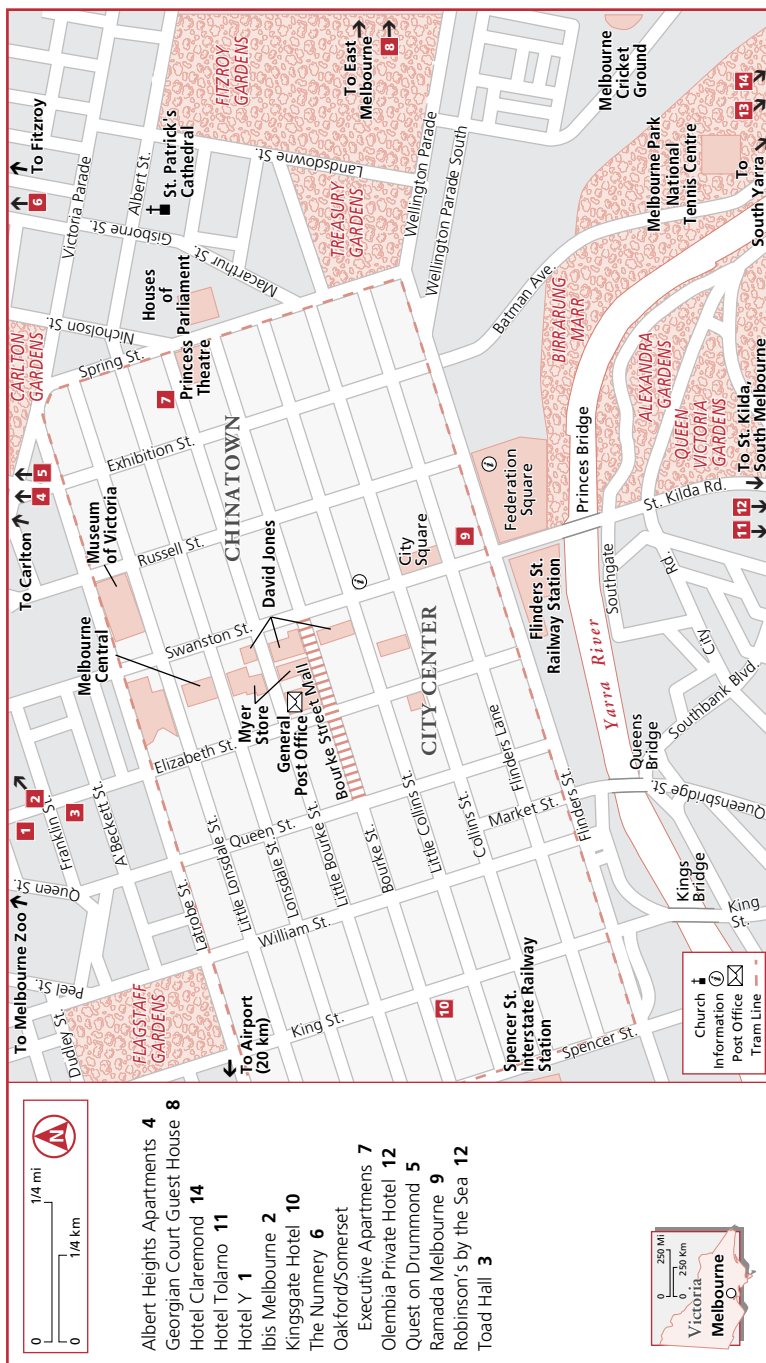
15–21 Therry St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ☎ **03/9639 2399**, or 1300/65 65 65 in Australia, 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/44 44 22 in New Zealand. Fax 03/9662 9263. www.accorhotel.com. 250 units (some with shower only). A\$109–A\$119 (US\$71–US\$77) double; A\$149–A\$169 (US\$97–US\$110) 1-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Ask about package deals. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A\$11 (US\$7).

Kingsgate Hotel Only a 10-minute walk from the city, this hotel is an interesting place: it feels like a basic B&B, though a total refurbishment—"to attract airline staff"—gave it a better look. From the outside, it resembles a terrace building, but inside it's a maze of corridors and rooms. The staff is very friendly. The least-expensive "economy" rooms are for backpackers only. They're dark and have two single beds and a hand basin; there's barely enough room to swing a backpack. Pricier "executive" rooms, however, are light, spacious, and have a double bed (or two twins) as well as en suite bathroom. A cooked breakfast costs A\$7 (US\$4.50) extra. The 15 or so deluxe quad rooms have a double bed and two singles.

131 King St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ☎ **03/9629 4171** or 1300/73 41 71. Fax 03/9629 7110. www.kingsgatehotel.com.au. 225 units, 104 with bathroom. A\$69–A\$99 (US\$23–US\$64) double; A\$89–A\$119 (US\$58–US\$77) triple; A\$139 (US\$90) deluxe quad. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A\$7 (US\$4.55) a day at Crown Casino, a 5-min. walk away. **Amenities:** Tour desk; executive-level rooms. *In room:* TV.

Oakford/Somerset Executive Apartments ★★ These serviced apartments, located inside an 1884 National Trust-listed building, are some of the best I've seen, and are a good alternative for travelers who like to cook their own food. The spacious apartments come with full kitchens, including a dishwasher. Those in the

Melbourne Accommodations



south block are older in style but still have contemporary furnishings. Those in the north block are new and a little more upscale; they're set farther back from the road, too. More than half the units have a tub, but specify when booking to make sure. Another option to consider is the well-placed **Oakford on Lygon** ★★, on Lygon Street (☎ **03/8341 4777**; about a 10 min. walk from the city center). The rooms here have no kitchen but offer great value, and I highly recommend them.

24 Little Bourke St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ☎ **1800/818 237** in Australia, or 03/9663 2888. Fax 03/9639 1537. www.oakford.com. 82 apts. A\$105–A\$115 (US\$68–\$75) studio; A\$125 (US\$81) 1-bedroom apt; A\$211–A\$145 (US\$137–US\$155) 2-bedroom apt; A\$226–A\$325 (US\$147–US\$211) split-level 3-bedroom apt. Extra person A\$22 (US\$14). Ask about weekend packages, corporate rates, and long-term stays. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A\$10–A\$20 (US\$6.50–US\$13). **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor pool; exercise room; spa; sauna; business center; room service (7am–10pm); dry-cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, kitchen, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Ramada Melbourne ★ Opened in 2003, this compact four-star hotel opposite the Flinders Street Railway Station offers light and comfortable rooms at a good price. It's quiet and pleasantly welcoming and is a short walk to the main shopping streets. It's also a stroll away from the new Federation Square, the Crown Casino Entertainment Complex, and the Southbank district. You can get some wonderful value packages here, including a weekend package for A\$145 (US\$94) per night with breakfast.

270 Flinders St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ☎ **1300/726 232** in Australia, or 03/9654 6888. Fax 03 9654 0368. www.ramadamelbourne.com.au. 179 units. A\$340 (US\$221) standard room; A\$350 (US\$227) with water views. Extra person A\$45 (US\$29). Check for packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A\$20 (US\$13). **Amenities:** Restaurant, bar; business center; 24-hr. room service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe, high-speed Internet.

Toad Hall ★ *Value* “It's one of the best in Australia” is what one well-traveled guest said of Toad Hall. I agree; this 1858 mansion is an excellent value. It's just down the road from Queen Victoria Market, Melbourne Central train/tram station, and only a few minutes' walk to the main shopping areas. Dorms are segregated by sex, with four to six bunk beds in each. Doubles and twins are small, but like the dorms, are clean and quite comfortable, with springy beds. I really liked the large communal kitchen, dining room, and outdoor courtyard.

441 Elizabeth St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ☎ **03/9600 9010**. Fax 03/9600 9013. www.Toadhall-hotel.com.au. 85 dorm beds in 16 rooms; 8 doubles, 4 with bathroom; 12 twin rooms, 2 with bathroom. A\$60 (US\$39) double/twin without bathroom; A\$90 (US\$58) double/twin with bathroom. A\$25 (US\$16) dorm bed. MC, V. Parking A\$6 (US\$3.90). **Amenities:** 3 TV lounges; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; roof garden. *In room:* Fridge, coffeemaker.

IN CARLTON

Albert Heights Executive Apartments ★ For good, moderately priced accommodations with cooking facilities to cut down on meal costs, you can't go wrong with the Albert Heights, a favorite of American travelers. It's in a nice area of Melbourne, a few minutes' walk from the city center. There are parks at each end of the street. Each self-contained unit in this brick building is large and attractive. If you want your own space, or are traveling with your family, you can use the sofa bed in the living room. Each unit comes with a full kitchen with a microwave (no conventional oven), dining area, and large bathroom.

83 Albert St., East Melbourne, VIC 3002. ☎ **1800/800 117** in Australia, or 03/9419 0955. Fax 03/9419 9517. www.albertheights.com.au. 34 units. A\$130 (US\$85) double. Extra adult A\$20 (US\$13), extra child A\$15 (US\$13). Ask about special deals. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 42 or 109; or a 10-min. walk to city. **Amenities:** Spa; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting; dry cleaning; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Georgian Court Guest House The comfortable Georgian Court's appearance hasn't changed much since it was built in 1910—and it still fits like a favorite shirt. The sitting and dining rooms both have high ceilings, and offer old-world atmosphere. The bedrooms, furnished with little more than plain pine furniture and a double bed, still have charm.

21 George St., East Melbourne, VIC 3002. ☎ 03/9419 6353. Fax 03/9416 0895. www.georgiancourt.aunz. com. 31 units, 21 with bathroom. A\$99 (US\$64) double without bathroom; A\$119 (US\$76) double with bathroom. A\$10–A\$20 (US\$6.50–US\$13) surcharge during busy periods, such as the Melbourne Grand Prix and other major sporting events. Extra adult A\$20 (US\$13), extra children under 15 A\$13 (US\$8.45). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 75 from Flinders St., or 48 from Spencer St. Georgian Court is behind the Hilton, a 15-min. walk from the city center. **Amenities:** Access to nearby health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Quest on Drummond Very nice and functional three-star self-catering apartments at a decent price are what you'll find at this good, semibudget option. All apartments are modern and clean, and come with a full kitchen. One-bedroom apartments also have a sofa bed. Breakfast packs are available on request, but no reception is on the premises (though the management is only a phone call and a 2-min. walk away). It's within walking distance of the city center.

371 Drummond St., Carlton, VIC 3053. ☎ 03/9486 1777. Fax 03/9482 2649. www.questapartments.com.au. 10 units. A\$121 (US\$79) studio apt; A\$132 (US\$86) 1-bedroom apt. AE, DC, MC, V. Off-street parking. Tram: 1 or 22 from Swanston St. **Amenities:** Access to nearby health club; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffemaker, iron.

IN FITZROY

The Nunnery ★ *Value* This former convent is an exceptionally good budget accommodation. Set in a terrace on the city's edge, the Nunnery is perfectly situated near the restaurant and nightlife scenes on Brunswick Street and Lygon Street, in nearby Carlton. Rooms vary in size from three-bed dorms to 12-bed rooms in former nuns' cells. Twin rooms come with either two singles or a set of bunks. All have basic furnishings and share bathrooms. Some second-floor rooms have good views over the neighboring Royal Exhibition Buildings and the city skyline. There's a large guest kitchen, a small courtyard where you can eat breakfast, Internet access, and a large sitting room filled with couches, a fireplace, and a TV. A new boutique wing, The Nunnery Guesthouse, has two doubles for A\$85 (US\$55), five family rooms, and a single for A\$65 (US\$42). These rooms are nicer than those in the main section but still have shared facilities.

116 Nicholson St., Fitzroy, Melbourne, VIC 3065. ☎ 1800/032 635 in Australia, or 03/9419 8637. Fax 03/9417 7736. www.bakpak.com/nunnery. 30 units, none with bathroom. A\$55 (US\$36) single; A\$65 (US\$42) double; A\$80 (US\$52) triple. A\$19–A\$25 (US\$12–US\$16) dorm bed. All nonsmoking rooms. MC, V. Off-street parking. Tram: 96 to East Brunswick (stop 13). **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; kitchen; lounge; coin-op laundry.

IN ST. KILDA

Hotel Tolarno ★ The quirky Hotel Tolarno is right in the middle of St. Kilda's cafe and restaurant strip, and a long stone's throw away from the beach. Rich red carpets bedeck the corridors throughout this 1950s-to-1960s retro-style building. Rooms vary, but all are modern and nice. The most popular rooms are in the front of the building and have balconies overlooking the main street. The more expensive of those come with a separate kitchen and lounge. Suites vary from one and two bedroom and don't have balconies, though some have Jacuzzis.

42 Fitzroy St., St. Kilda, Melbourne, VIC 3182. ☎ 1800/620 363 in Australia, or 03/9537 0200. Fax 03/9534 7800. www.hoteltolarno.com.au. 31 units. A\$115–A\$125 (US\$75–US\$81) standard double; A\$145–A\$165

(US\$94–US\$107) deluxe double; A\$145–A\$165 (US\$94–US\$107) balcony double; A\$180–A\$275 (US\$117–US\$179) suite (sleeps up to 4). Extra person A\$20 (US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. On-street parking. Tram: 16 from Swanston St.; 96 from Flinders St. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 4 lit tennis courts; bike rental; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry/dry cleaning service opposite hotel; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Olembia Private Hotel This sprawling Edwardian house, built in 1922, is set back from a busy St. Kilda street behind a leafy courtyard. It's popular with tourists, business travelers, and young families; everyone gets together for the frequent video nights, wine and cheese parties, and barbecues. The clean bedrooms are simply furnished, with little more than a double bed, or two singles, a desk, a hand basin, and a wardrobe. Guests share six bathrooms. There's a very comfortable sitting room, and a courtyard area with barbecues. The Olembia is near St. Kilda beach and the host of restaurants lining Acland Street.

96 Barkly St., St. Kilda, Melbourne, VIC 3182. ☎ 03/9537 1412. Fax 03/9537 1600. www.olembia.com.au. 23 units, none with bathroom. A\$48 (US\$31) single; A\$74 (US\$48) double. Dorm rooms A\$24 (US\$16). AE, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 96 from Bourke St. to stop 138. **Amenities:** Bike rental; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms.

Worth a Splurge

Robinson's by the Sea ★★ *Finds* For something special, Robinson's by the Sea fits the bill. Both the management and pet dog are incredibly friendly at this 1870s heritage B&B just across from the beach. They encourage an evening social scene, and downstairs you'll find a comfortable, antiques-filled living room, and a dining room. Four of the five bedrooms are upstairs. Each is unique. The Eastern Room has a four-poster queen-size bed and Indian and Chinese furniture, whereas the Rose Room is decorated with patterned flowers and pastel colors. The units all share three communal bathrooms, one with a tub and shower, a second with a shower, and the third with a Jacuzzi tub and shower. There are wood floorboards and fireplaces throughout.

335 Beaconsfield Parade, St. Kilda, Melbourne, VIC 3182. ☎ 03/9534 2683. Fax 03/9534 2683. www.robinsonsbysesea.com.au. 5 units, none with bathroom, and 2 self-contained studio units. A\$155–A\$195 (US\$100–US\$127) double; A\$95 (US\$62) studio units. Rates include cooked breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 112 to Cowderoy St., St. Kilda. **Amenities:** Health club nearby; bike rental; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

IN SOUTH YARRA

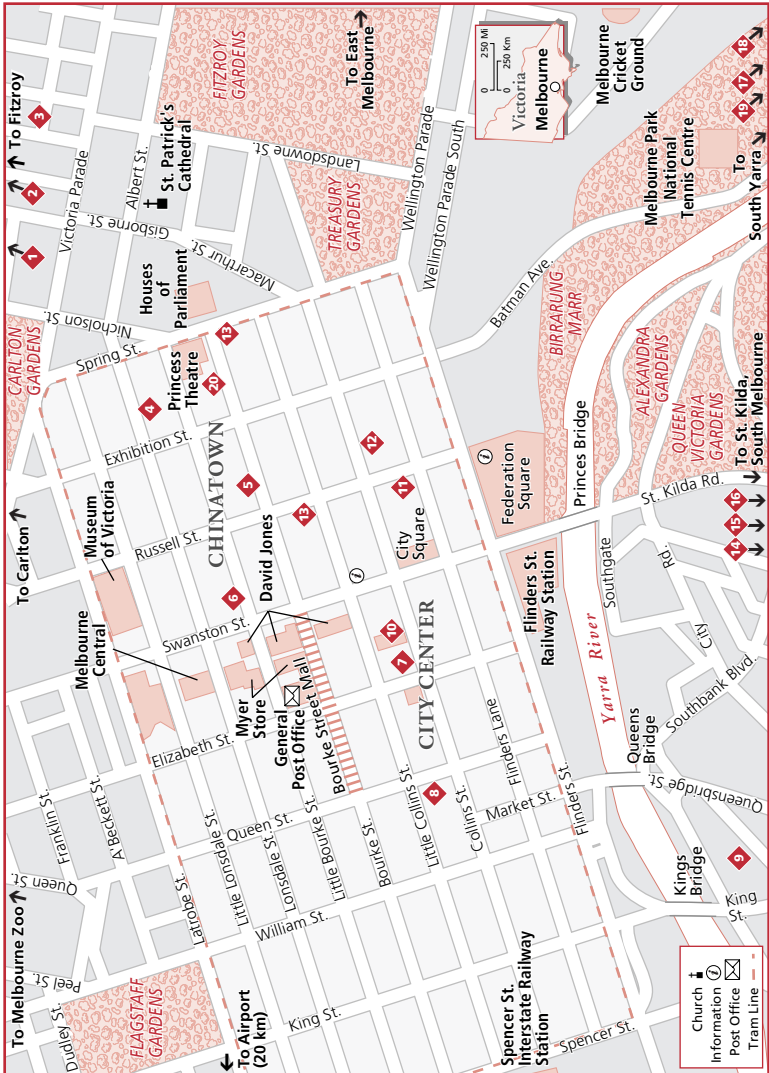
Hotel Claremont The high ceilings and the mosaic tiles in the lobby welcome visitors into the interior of this old-world hotel. It's an attractive place, though sparsely furnished. The two-star-rated rooms are comfortable enough, and each comes with either a double or a single bed. There is no elevator in this three-story building with 72 stairs, so it could be a bad choice for travelers with disabilities.

189 Toorak Rd., South Yarra, VIC 3141. ☎ 1300/301 630 in Australia or 03/9826 8000. Fax 03/9827 8652. www.hotelclaremont.com. 80 units, none with bathroom. A\$56 (US\$36) single; A\$68 (US\$44) double. Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). Children stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. On-street parking. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms, Internet. *In room:* TV.

4 Great Deals on Dining

Melbourne's ethnically diverse population ensures a healthy selection of international cooking styles. Chinatown, in the city center, is a fabulous hunting ground for Chinese, Malaysian, Thai, Indonesian, Japanese, and Vietnamese fare, often at bargain prices. Carlton has plenty of Italian cuisine, but the outdoor restaurants on Lygon Street are aimed at unsuspecting tourists, and can be overpriced and disappointing, so avoid them; Richmond is crammed with Greek

Melbourne Dining



0 1/4 mi
0 1/4 km

- Ah Mu **13**
- Bakka Bakery **3**
- Bamboo House **4**
- Brunetti **2**
- Café Segovia **7**
- Chinta Blues **14**
- Chocolate Buddha **9**
- Donovans **15**
- Flower Drum **5**
- Hopetoun Tearooms **10**
- Il Solito Posto **12**
- Irish Times **8**
- Kanpai **18**
- La Porchetta **16**
- Mario's **2**
- Nudel Bar **20**
- Shakahari **1**
- Sheni's Curries **11**
- Supper Inn **6**
- Tandoor Indian Restaurant **17**
- Yeah Maan **19**

and Vietnamese restaurants; and Fitzroy has cheap Asian, Turkish, Mediterranean, and vegetarian food. To see and be seen, head to Chapel Street or Toorak Road in South Yarra, or to St. Kilda and join the throng of Melbournians dining out along Fitzroy and Acland Streets. Most of the cheaper places in Melbourne are strictly BYO (bring-your-own wine or beer). Smoking is no longer possible in cafes and restaurants, so please think twice before offending both staff and fellow patrons.

IN THE CITY CENTER

ah mu MALAYSIAN Voted best Malaysian in 2002 and 2003 by *The Age Good Food Guide*, this restaurant continues to inspire. The cool and contemporary interiors enhance the menu of chef Allen Woo whose characteristic modern Asian cooking can lead to marinated fish grilled in banana leaf with citric sambal belachan or lightly floured king prawns seared in ginger flower syrup.

51 Bourke St. ☎ 03/9654 6800. www.ahmu.com. Reservations advisable Fri–Sat evenings. Main courses A\$18–A\$29 (US\$12–US\$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–10:30pm; daily 6–10:30pm.

Bamboo House ★ NORTHERN REGIONAL CHINESE/CANTONESE If Flower Drum (see below) is full (or breaks your budget), try this place, which is esteemed by both the Chinese community and local business big shots. The service here is a pleasure, and the food (especially the chicken with shallot sauce) is worth writing home about. The waiters are all eager to help you construct a feast from the myriad Cantonese and northern Chinese dishes. (Don't leave without a taste of the duck in plum sauce!) Other popular dishes include pan-fried dumplings, spring onion pancakes, and the signature dish, Szechwan smoked duck.

47 Little Bourke St. ☎ 03/9662 1565. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$20–A\$28 (US\$13–US\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 5:30–11pm; Sun 5:30–10pm.

Café Segovia ★★ *Finds* CAFE Café Segovia is one of the most atmospheric cafes in Australia, with a smoky, sensual interior reminiscent of Spain. Seating is also available outside in the arcade, but you'll have to come early at lunchtime to nab a chair. Typical cafe food is on offer, such as focaccias, cakes, and light meals. There is live music Thursday and Friday.

33 Block Arcade. ☎ 03/9650 2373. Main courses A\$8–A\$13 (US\$5.20–US\$8.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–11pm; Sat 8am–6pm; Sun 9am–5pm.

Chocolate Buddha NOODLES Located within the precinct of Federation Square, this place offers mostly organic produce, including some organic wines. Based mostly on Japanese inspired ramen, soba, and other noodles to which meat, chicken, or seafood is added, it's casual yet particularly satisfying dining. Food is creative, and the view across the square to the Yarra river and Southbank is a delight at dusk.

Federation Square, corner Flinders and Swanson sts. ☎ 03/9654 5688. Reservations not required. Main courses A\$13–\$17 (US\$8.45–US\$11). AE, MC, V. Daily Noon–10:30pm.

Hopetoun Tearooms ★ CAFE The first cup of coffee served in this Melbourne institution left the pot in 1892. It's very civilized, with green-and-white Regency wallpaper and marble tables. The cakes are tasty, the sandwiches and focaccias reasonably priced, and scones, croissants, and grilled food are also available.

Shops 1 and 2, Block Arcade, 280–282 Collins St., Melbourne. ☎/fax 03/9650 2777. Main courses A\$4.50–A\$8.50 (US\$2.90–US\$5.55); minimum charge A\$5 (US\$3.25) per person noon–2pm. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 8:30am–5pm; Fri 8:30am–6pm; Sat 10am–3:30pm. Closed Sun.

Il Solito Posto NORTHERN ITALIAN This below ground restaurant is split into two parts. The casual bistro has a blackboard menu offering good pastas, soups, and salads. Then there's the sharper and more upmarket trattoria, with its a la carte menu offering the likes of steak, fish, and veal dishes. The coffee is excellent.

Basement of 113 Collins St. (enter via George Parade). ☎ 03/9654 4466. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$15–A\$17 (US\$9.75–US\$11) in bistro, A\$25–A\$33 (US\$16–US\$21) in trattoria. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–1am; Sat 9am–1am; closed Sun. Closed late Dec to early Jan.

Irish Times IRISH/MODERN AUSTRALIAN An Irish bar more authentic than most, the Irish Times is a character-filled eating and drinking escape from the rush of the city outside. It serves up generous portions and Guinness on tap, and popular dishes include the warm chicken salad, mussels in a creamy broth, Caesar salad, and Irish dishes such as “boxty”—patties of mashed potato, leek, and onion with an accompanying tomato relish. There's a live band on Thursday and Friday evenings from 9:30pm and on Saturday from 10:30pm.

427 Little Collins St. ☎ 03/9642 1699. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$10–A\$25 (US\$6.50–US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5pm–midnight; Sat 5pm–3am.

Nudel Bar NOODLES A favorite with city slickers, the Nudel Bar serves up a variety of noodle dishes to the crowded tables and bar. Examples of what you might find here are cold spicy green tea noodles, and *mee goreng* (a noodle dish with peanuts and here, often chicken). Sticky rice pudding is a favorite for dessert.

76 Bourke St. ☎ 03/9662 9100. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat evenings. Main courses \$13–A\$18 (US\$8.40–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–10:30pm; Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 4–10:30pm.

Sheni's Curries SRI LANKAN This tiny, basic but very busy place (it seats 30) offers a range of excellent-value, authentic Sri Lankan curries. You can either dine here or take your lunch special to go. Choose between three vegetable dishes and a choice of meat and seafood dishes. All meals come with rice, three types of chutney, and a papadam. You can also buy extra items such as samosas and roti.

Shop 16, 161 Collins St. (on the corner of Flinders Lane and Russell St., opposite the entrance to the Grand Hyatt). ☎ 03/9654 3535. Lunch specials A\$5.50–A\$12 (US\$3.60–US\$7.80). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 11am–4pm.

Supper Inn CANTONESE Head here if you get the Chinese-food munchies late at night. It's a friendly place with a mixed crowd of locals and tourists chowing down on such dishes as steaming bowls of *congee* (a rice-based porridge), barbecued suckling pig, mud crab, or stuffed scallops. Everything here is the “real thing!”

15 Celestial Ave. ☎/fax 03/9663 4759. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$10–A\$15 (US\$6.50–US\$9.75). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30pm–2:30am.

Worth a Splurge

Flower Drum ★★★ CANTONESE Praise pours in from all quarters for this upscale restaurant situated just off Little Bourke Street, Chinatown's main drag. Take a slow elevator up to the restaurant, which has widely spaced tables (perfect for politicians and businesspeople to clinch their deals). Take note of the specials—the chefs are extremely creative and utilize the best ingredients they find in the markets each day. The signature dish here is the Peking duck, although the buttered garfish is my favorite. The king crab dumplings in soup is a great starter. You can also prearrange a banquet for two or more diners where you'll be served more unusual dishes, such as abalone, though for this a 1- or 2-day advance notice is required.

17 Market Lane. ☎ 03/9662 3655. Reservations required. Main courses A\$30–A\$45 (US\$20–US\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6–10pm; Sun 6–10:30pm.

CARLTON

Brunetti ★ TRATTORIA/PASTICCERIA A real Italian experience! You'll taste the best cakes, best gelato, and excellent coffee while gazing at the *trompe l'oeil* paintings and frescos on the walls. Also worth sampling is their very authentic range of dishes for lunch. This is the best thing this side of Rome!

198–204 Faraday St., Carlton. ☎ 03/9347 2801. Mains A\$12–A\$25 (US\$7.80–US\$16). Cafe dishes A\$3–A\$8 (US\$2–US\$5.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:am–10:30pm; Sat 8am–10:30pm. Tram: Any going north along Swanston St. towards Melbourne University.

A VEGETARIAN DELIGHT IN CARLTON

Shakahari VEGETARIAN Good vegetarian food isn't just a meal without meat; it's a creation in its own right. At Shakahari you are assured of a creative meal that's not at all bland. The large restaurant is quite low-key, and the service can be a bit inconsistent. The Sate Samsara (skewered, lightly fried vegetables and tofu pieces with a peanut dip) is a winner, as is the couscous, served in a vast earthenware pot. Also served up are curries, croquets, tempura avocado, and veggie burgers (on a plate with salad, not in a bun).

201–203 Faraday St., Carlton. ☎ 03/9347 3848. Main courses A\$14.50 (US\$9.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3:30pm; Sun–Thurs 6–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 6–10:30pm. Tram: Any tram going north along Swanston St. toward Melbourne University.

FITZROY

Mario's ITALIAN This place has ambience, groovy '60s decor, great coffee, and impeccable professional service. Breakfast is served all day as well as a varied range of pastas and cakes. The art on the wall, all by local artists, is always interesting and for sale too!

303 Brunswick St., Fitzroy. ☎ 03/9417 3343. Main courses A\$12–A\$18 (US\$7.80–US\$11.70). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:am–10:30pm; Sat 8am–10:30pm.

SEASIDE DINING IN ST. KILDA

Chinta Blues MALAYSIAN Head to this very popular eatery if you're looking for simple, satisfying food with a healthy touch of spice. The big sellers are the *laksa* (a spicy soup), the *mei goreng* (a noodle dish), the chicken curry, the *sambal* (a spicy condiment) spinach, and a chicken dish called "ayam blues." Lots of noodles, too. It's very busy, especially at lunch.

6 Acland St., St. Kilda. ☎ 03/9534 9233. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$10–A\$19 (US\$6.50–US\$12). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm; Mon–Wed 6–10pm; Thurs–Sat 6–10:45pm; Sun noon–9:45pm. Tram: 16 from Swanston St. or 96 from Bourke St.

La Porchetta Pizza Restaurant PIZZA *Value* This busy, large, very noisy pizza joint is a good value. There are some 22 different pizzas to choose from, with

Tips The Staff of Life

Babka Bakery. The enticing aroma of fresh bread is what attracts you to this Russian-style cafe-bakery run by a delightful gaggle of young women. Come for breakfast or a light lunch of eggs on fresh sourdough, quiches, tarts, and brioches. Or perhaps the homemade borscht? It's at 358 Brunswick St., Fitzroy ☎ 03/9416 0091.

the largest ranging in price from A\$6 to A\$7.80 (US\$4.20–US\$4.50) being just large enough to fill two. A range of pasta dishes costs from A\$6 to A\$9 (US\$4.20–US\$6.30). Chicken, seafood, veal, and steaks are also on the menu. The heart-pounding pace here means it's not for the faint-hearted.

80 Acland St., St. Kilda. ☎ 03/9534 1888. Main courses A\$5–A\$14 (US\$3.20–US\$9.10). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11am–2am. Tram: 16 from Swanston St. or 96 from Bourke St.

Worth a Splurge

Donovans ★★ MODERN MEDITERRANEAN Donovan's is so near the sea you expect the fish to jump through the door and onto the plate—and indeed, you do get extremely fresh seafood. The restaurant is all higgledy-piggledy and charming, with lots of cushions, a log fire, and the sound of jazz and breakers on the beach. The menu includes a mind-boggling array of dishes, many big enough for two. Chef Robert Castellani's trademarks include steamed mussels, linguini with seafood, and stuffed squid. The bar is perfect for watching the sun go down.

40 Jacka Blvd., St. Kilda. ☎ 03/9534 8221. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$23–A\$36 (US\$15–US\$23). Daily noon–10:30pm. AE, DC, MC, V. Tram: 12 from Collins St., 16 from Swanston St., 94 or 96 from Bourke St.

MORE ETHNIC EATS IN SOUTH YARRA

Kanpai JAPANESE You have to book early in the day to get a seat at this popular restaurant on the Chapel Street restaurant strip. The sushi and sashimi dishes are very fresh, and the miso soup is well worth plundering. There's also a good vegetarian selection as well.

569 Chapel St., South Yarra. ☎ 03/9827 4379. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$12–A\$34 (US\$7.80–US\$22); average price A\$12.50 (US\$8.10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Tram: 6, 8, or 72 from Swanston St.

Tandoor Indian Restaurant ★ INDIAN This basic Indian restaurant was far less crowded than many of the others on the Chapel Street strip when I last visited—all I can say is that the “in” crowd didn't know what they were missing. The curries here are rich and spicy, with the vegetarian paneer–butter masala and the cheese kofta being some of the best I've tasted in Australia. Some dishes, such as the crab masala curry, are truly inspirational. The main courses are quite large, so you'll probably not need a first course, but I highly recommend side dishes of naan bread (one per person) and a cucumber raita to cool the palate.

517 Chapel St., South Yarra. ☎ 03/9827 8247. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat night. Main courses A\$11–A\$22 (US\$7.15–US\$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri and Sun noon–2:30pm; daily 6–11pm. Tram: 6, 8, or 72 from Swanston St.

Yeah Maan ★ CARIBBEAN Is this the coolest restaurant in Australia or what? Calypso music wafts amid the homemade triangle-backed chairs, diners wait in the lounge or at the new bar for a table to become free, palm trees sway—and the food! Wow! The whole place is rockin', with seats almost continually occupied. The authentic Trinidadian goat curry is a must, as is the Barbados burrito. The Jamaican KFC (chicken marinated for 2 days in approximately 30 spices and then smoked), and the Jumbo–Jumbie cassava shoestring fries (cassava is similar to a potato) are very, very popular. An upstairs dining room has recently opened. The staff is ultra-friendly.

340 Punt Rd. (at Fawkner St.), South Yarra. ☎ 03/9820 2707. Licensed and BYO. Main courses A\$13–A\$19 (US\$8.45–US\$12). MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–11:30pm. Tram: 6, 8, or 72 from Swanston St.

5 Seeing the Sights

Melbourne's attractions may not have quite the fame as some of Sydney's, but visitors come here to experience the contrasts of old-world architecture and the exciting feel of a truly multicultural city.

If you'd like to see the city aboard a leisurely cruise, call **Melbourne River Cruises** (☎ 03/9614 1215 Mon–Fri, or 03/9650 2055 Sat–Sun). This company offers a 2½-hour round-trip cruise on the Yarra River costing A\$17 (US\$11) for adults, A\$8.80 (US\$5.70) for children ages 3 to 12, A\$13 (US\$8.45) concession, and A\$42 (US\$27) for a family.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Federation Square Touted as “Melbourne’s civic and cultural hub for the 21st century,” Federation Square is a conglomerate of attractions centered around wacky architecture and a large open piazza-type area cobbled with misshapen paving. Here you’ll find the National Gallery of Victoria, the Ian Potter Centre, the new Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), and the new one-stop Visitor Centre (see “Visitor Information” earlier in this chapter). The three-level National Gallery of Victoria building is huge and hosts the largest collection of Australian art in the country, including many works by Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, and Tom Roberts, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The Gallery is already a major focus for art festivals and special events. Numerous cafes and coffee shops operate throughout the precinct. The ACMI center includes two state-of-the-art cinemas, and large areas where visitors can access movies, videos, and digital media. It’s worth visiting the square though just to see the extraordinary architecture, made up of strangely reflective geometrical designs, and the very impressive glass atrium. Lots of events are planned for the square’s 450-seat amphitheater, including theatrical performances, and free concerts and other events will take place on the Plaza and along areas of the banks of the Yarra River.

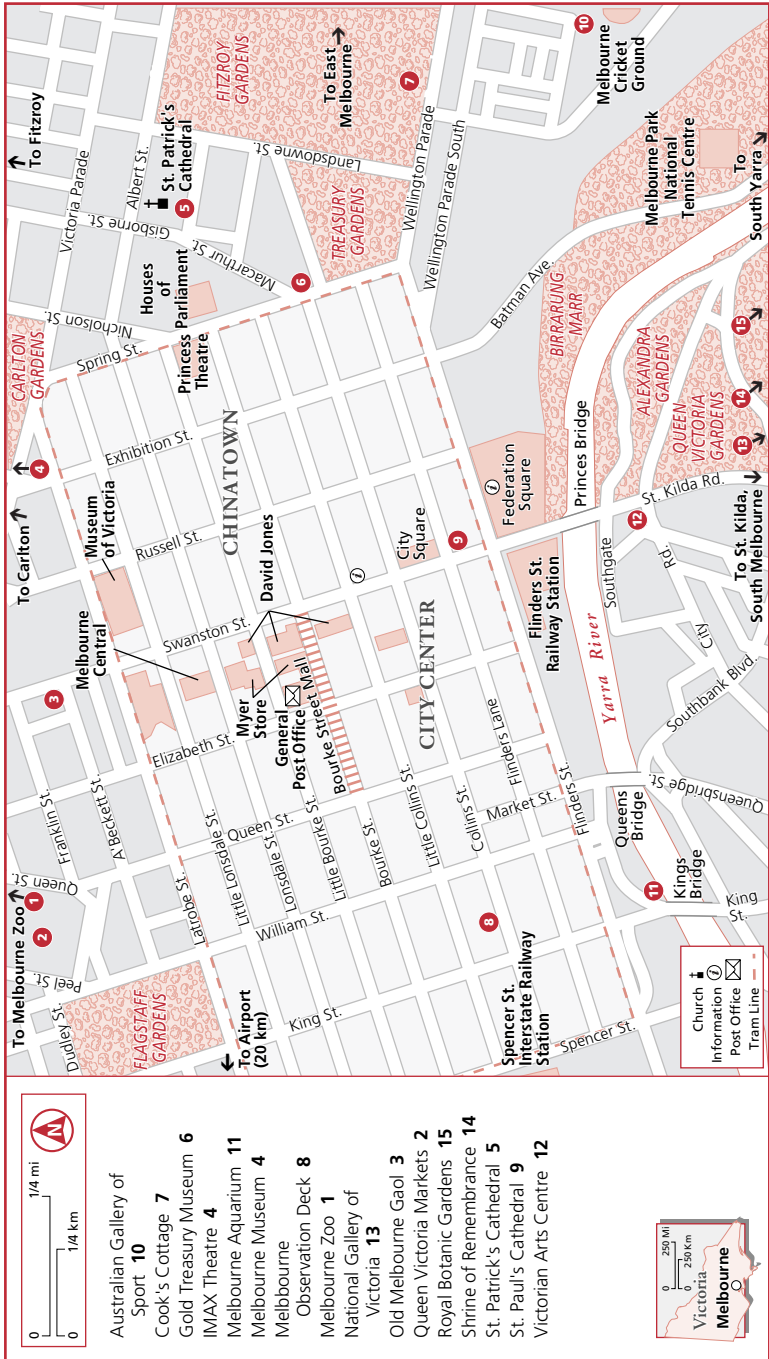
Runs north–south from Flinders St. to the Yarra River (to the left of the Flinders St. Railway Station). www.federationsquare.com.au. Outdoor spaces open 24 hr. Free entry (though charges for some special events and exhibitions). Tram: City Circle.

Gold Treasury Museum Designed by the architect J. J. Clarke (when he was only 19) and built in 1857, the Old Treasury Building is an imposing neoclassical sandstone building which once housed precious metal from the Ballarat and Bendigo gold rushes. The gold was stored in eight thick-walled vaults underground and protected by iron bars. The “Built on Gold” Exhibition within the vaults is a high-tech multimedia show featuring videos and displays showing how the gold was dug up, sold, transported, and housed. In the basement are the restored living quarters of a caretaker who lived there from 1916 to 1928. The ground floor is taken up by the “Melbourne: A City Built On Gold” display which shows how Melbourne was built using the profits from the gold

Tips A Few Sightseeing Suggestions

Much of Melbourne’s appeal comes from soaking up the atmosphere on a walk around the city. But if you have time to see only one major attraction, by all means make it the **Melbourne Zoo**. Other top-of-the-list sights include **Federation Square**, the **National Gallery of Victoria**, and the **Botanic Gardens**. If you have time, head to **Phillip Island** to see the fairy penguins.

Melbourne Attractions



rushes. A temporary exhibition gallery on the premises can feature anything from prints to gold-thread embroidery. Allow about an hour.

Old Treasury Building, Spring St. (top of Collins St.) ☎ 03/9651 2233. A\$7 (US\$4.55) adults, A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) children, A\$18 (US\$12) family. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; weekends and public holidays 10am–4pm. Bus: City Explorer.

IMAX Theatre *Kids* This eight-story movie screen rivals the world's largest screen at Sydney's Darling Harbour. Recent subjects have been outer space, the African Serengeti, and the deep oceans.

Melbourne Museum Complex, Rathdowne St., Carlton. ☎ 03/9663 5454. Admission from A\$14 (US\$9) adults, A\$9.95 (US\$6.50) children. Daily 10am–10pm. Tram: 1 or 22 from Swanston St.

Melbourne Aquarium *Overrated* Opened in early 2000, the Melbourne Aquarium stretches over three levels and features a Barrier Reef–type exhibit, some interesting jellyfish displays, and an enormous walk-through tank with larger fish, sharks, and rays. However, it's pretty disappointing compared to the ones in Sydney and doesn't live up to the hype. Allow 30 minutes.

Corner Queens Wharf Rd. and Kings St., opposite Crown Casino. ☎ 03/9620 0999. www.melbourneaquarium.com.au. Admission A\$21 (US\$13) adults, A\$11 (US\$7) children under 16, A\$49 (US\$32) family of 5. Daily 9:30am–6pm.

Melbourne Museum *Kids* This newly constructed museum is Australia's largest, and is located opposite the 19th-century Royal Exhibition Buildings. It houses interactive exhibits and science displays, Bunjikata, the award-winning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre, bits and pieces of social history, and other exhibits. Check out the brightly colored Children's Museum which will bring hours of enjoyment to the little ones.

Melbourne Museum Complex, Rathdowne St., Carlton. ☎ 13 11 02. Admission A\$15 (US\$9.75) adults, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children, A\$35 (US\$23) family. Daily 10am–6pm. Tram: 1 or 22 from Swanston St.

Melbourne Observation Desk From the observation deck on the 55th floor, near the top of the tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere, you get 360-degree views of the whole of Melbourne and beyond. See if you can spot the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and the Crown Casino. A 20-minute film costing A\$2 (US\$1.30) shows you what you're looking at, but you might as well just take a map up with you and figure it out for yourself. Of interest are the displays telling about life in Melbourne, past and present. There's a licensed cafe here, too. Allow 1 hour.

Rialto Building, 55th Floor, Collins St. (between William and King sts.). ☎ 03/9629 8222. Admission A\$11.80 (US\$7.70) adults, A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) children, A\$34 (US\$22) families. Daily 10am–11pm. Parking underneath. Tram: Any tram on Collins St.

Melbourne Zoo *Kids* This place is a must-see. Built in 1862, it's the oldest zoo in the world, and among the best. There are some 3,000 animals here, including the ever-popular kangaroos, wallabies, echidnas, koalas, wombats, and platypuses. Rather than being locked up in cages, most animals are set in almost natural surroundings or well-tended gardens. Don't miss the butterfly house, with its thousands of colorful butterflies flying around; the free-flight aviary; the lowland gorilla exhibit; and the tree-top monkey displays. Allow at least 1 hour if you just want to see the Australian natives and around 2½ hours for the whole zoo.

Elliott Ave., Parkville. ☎ 03/9285 9300. www.zoo.org.au. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$8.10 (US\$5.25) children under 14, A\$44 (US\$29) family. Daily 9am–5pm. Free guided tours daily. (Go to the Friends of the Zoo Office to arrange tours.) Free parking. Tram: 55 or 56 going north on William St. to Stop 25, 18, 19, or from Elizabeth St. to Stop 16 (then it's a short walk to your left following signposts). Train: Royal Park Station.

National Gallery of Australia: The Ian Potter Centre—Australian Art

This fascinating gallery featuring 20 rooms dedicated to Australian art was opened in 2002 in the heart of Federation Square. Some 20,000 art pieces are stored here but only around 800 are on display at any one time. Aboriginal art and colonial art collections are the centerpieces of the gallery, with more modern paintings on display, too. Temporary exhibitions come and go, and could include anything from ceramics to shoes. There are a couple of cafes here, too.

Federation Square. ☎ 03/8662 1555. Free admission. Mon-Thurs 10am–5pm; Fri 10am–9pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Bus: City Explorer.

Old Melbourne Gaol ★★ *Finds* I love this cramped former prison with its tiny cells and spooky collection of death masks and artifacts of 19th-century prison life. Some 135 hangings took place here, including that of notorious bandit (and Australian hero) Ned Kelly, in 1880. The scaffold where he was hung is still in place, and his gun, as well as a suit of armor used by a member of his gang, is on display. The jail closed in 1929. The profiles of former prisoners give a fabulous perspective of what it was like to be locked up here. Chilling night tours run every Sunday and Wednesday (call ahead and check the schedule); they cost A\$18 (US\$12) for adults and A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children (though the tour is not recommended for children under 12). Allow 1 hour or more.

Russell St. ☎ 03/9663 7228. Admission A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$6.60 (US\$4.30) children, A\$45 (US\$29) families. Daily 9:30am–4:30pm. Tram: City Circle tram to corner of Russell and Latrobe sts.

Queen Victoria Markets ★ The Queen Victoria Market is a Melbourne institution covering several blocks. There are hundreds of indoor and outdoor stalls where you can find anything from live rabbits to bargain-basement clothes. The markets can get cramped, and there's a lot of junk to sort through, but you'll get a real taste of Melbourne and its ethnic mix here. Look out for the interesting delicatessen section and cheap eateries. Allow at least an hour.

Two 2-hour tours of the market take in its food and heritage. The **Foodies Dream Tour** departs every Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 10am and costs A\$22 (US\$14) for adults and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children under 15, including sampling. Well known chefs give cooking classes for \$65 (US\$42) per session. Call ☎ 03/9320 5835 for reservations.

Between Peel, Victoria, Elizabeth, and Therry sts. on the northern edge of the city center. ☎ 03/9269 5835. www.qvm.com.au. Tues–Thurs 6am–2pm; Fri 6am–6pm; Sat 6am–3pm; Sun 9am–4pm. Tram: Any tram traveling north along William St. or Elizabeth St.

Rippon Lea House Museum & Historic Garden This grand Victorian house, 8km (5 miles) from the city center, is worth a visit to get a feel for old-money Melbourne. With dozens of rooms, Rippon Lea House was built by socialite Sir Frederick Thomas Sargood between 1868 and 1903; a pool and ballroom were added in the 1930s. Though the Romanesque architecture is interesting (note the stained glass and polychrome brickwork), the real attraction is the surrounding 5.3 hectares (13 acres) of landscaped gardens, which include a conservatory, a lake, a lookout tower, an orchard, and extensive flowerbeds and shrubbery. If you're here on a weekend, a public holiday, or during school vacations, you might like to drop into the tearoom, which is open from 11am to 4pm. Allow 2 hours.

192 Hotham St., Elsternwick. ☎ 03/9523 6095. Admission A\$9 (US\$5.85) adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) children 5–16, A\$20 (US\$13) families of up to 6. Daily 10am–5pm (house closes at 4:45pm). Daily guided tours of house every ½ hour 10:30am–4pm and tour of estate at 2pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas Day. Tram: 67 to

Stop 40, then walk up Hotham St. Bus: 216/219 from Bourke and Queen sts. in the city to Stop 4. Train: Sandringham Line from Flinders Street Station to Rippon Lea Station.

St. Patrick's Cathedral Though lacking the intricacy of design of St. Paul's, the Roman Catholic St. Patrick's is another interesting Gothic Revival construction with exceptional stained-glass windows. Built between 1858 and 1940 (consecrated in 1897), St. Patrick's was closely associated with immigrants from Ireland escaping the mid-19th-century potato famine. In the courtyard out front is a statue of the Irish patriot Daniel O'Connell. Allow 15 minutes.

Cathedral Place. ☎ 03/9662 2233. Mon–Fri 6:30am–6pm; Sat–Sun 7:15am–7:30pm.

St. Paul's Cathedral Built from 1880 to 1892 from the designs of William Butterfield, a famous English Gothic revival architect, the Anglican St. Paul's Cathedral is noteworthy for its highly-decorative interior and the English organ built by T. S. Lewis. Gold mosaics cover the walls, Victorian tessellated tiles adorn the floors, and there are intricate woodcarvings and stained-glass windows. The cathedral sports the second highest spire (at 98m/321 ft.) in the Anglican Communion. A boys' choir sings at 5:10pm Monday through Friday during school times, and twice on Sunday at 10:30am and 6pm. Outside is a statue of Matthew Flinders, the first sailor to navigate the Australian mainland between 1801 and 1803. Allow 15 minutes.

Flinders and Swanston sts. ☎ 03/9650 3791. Daily 7:30am–6pm. Services: Sun 8, 9, 10, 30am; Eucharist 6pm. Choral evensong Mon–Fri 7:45am, 12:15, and 5:10pm. Cathedral shop open 10am–4pm daily.

State Houses of Parliament Now the home of the Victorian Parliament, this imposing monument to Queen Victoria, situated at the top of a run of sandstone steps, was built in 1856. Between the time of the Australian Federation (1900–1927), it was used as the National Parliament. When the State Government is in session—generally on Tuesday afternoon and all day Wednesday and Thursday between March and July, and again between August and November—you can view the proceedings from the public gallery. However, you should ring ahead and check as sitting times do vary. During non-sitting times both the extremely opulent Upper House and the less ornate Lower House chambers are open to the public. Allow 30 minutes.

Spring St. ☎ 03/9651 8568 or 03/9651 8569. www.parliament.vic.gov.au. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm. Free guided tours 10, 11am, noon, and 2, 3, and 3:45pm on weekdays when parliament is not in session. Bookings advisable.

PARKS & GARDENS

Birrarung Marr, along the Yarra River and east of Federation Square on Batman Avenue (☎ 03/9658 9658; www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/parks) is Melbourne's first new major park in more than 100 years. *Birrarung* means “river of mists” in the Woiwurrung language of the Wurundjeri people who originally inhabited the area, while “Marr” equates with the side of the river. Wide, open spaces and large, sculptured terraces have been specially designed to host some of Melbourne's best events and festivals throughout the year, and the terraces give way to spectacular views of the City, Southbank, King's Domain, and the Yarra River.

The **Royal Botanic Gardens** (🌳🌳, 2km (1¼ miles) south of the city on Birdwood Avenue, off St. Kilda Road (☎ 03/9252 2300), are the best example in Australia and well worth a few hours of wandering. More than 40 hectares (99 acres) of gardens are lush and blooming with more than 12,000 plant species from all over the world. Don't miss a visit to the oldest part of the garden, the Tennyson Lawn, with its 120-year-old English elm trees. Other special corners include a fern

gully, camellia gardens, an herb garden, rainforests packed with fruit bats, and ponds full of ducks and black swans. You can either discover the gardens by wandering at your own pace, or you can take one of the free guided walks that leave the National Herbarium Building, F Gate, Sunday through Friday at 11am and noon. Bring snacks and your picnic blanket to “Shakespeare in the Park,” a popular summer event. Performances are in January and February, and tickets cost around A\$30 (US\$20). Call ☎ **03/9252 2300** for details. The gardens are open November through March from 7:30am to 8:30pm, in April, September, and October from 7:30am to 6pm, and May through August from 7:30am to 5:30pm. Admission is free. To get there, catch the tram on Route 8, traveling south, and get off at Stop 21. Allow 2 to 4 hours.

Nearby, in King's Domain, take a look at **Victoria's first Government House**, Latrobe's Cottage (☎ **03/9654 5528**). It was built in England and transported to Australia brick by brick in 1836. Admission is A\$2 (US\$1.30) per person. The cottage is open Monday, Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11am to 4pm. On the other side of Birdwood Avenue is the **Shrine of Remembrance**, a memorial to the servicemen lost in Australia's wars. It's designed so that at 11am on Remembrance Day (Nov 11), a beam of sunlight hits the Stone of Remembrance in the Inner Shrine. Note the eternal flame in the forecourt. King's Domain is Stop 12 on the Route 15 tram traveling south along St. Kilda Road.

In **Fitzroy Gardens**, off Wellington Parade, is **Cooks' Cottage** (☎ **03/9419 4677**), which was moved to Melbourne from Great Ayton, in Yorkshire, England, in 1934 to mark Victoria's centenary. The cottage was built by the parents of Captain Cook, and today provides the opportunity to learn about his voyages of discovery around the world. Inside, it's spartan and cramped, not unlike a ship's cabin. Admission is A\$3.70 (US\$2.40) for adults, A\$1.80 (US\$1.15) for children 5 to 15, and A\$8.80 (US\$5.70) for families of two adults and up to four children. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (until 5.30pm during summer). Also east of the central business district are the **Treasury Gardens**. Look for the memorial to John F. Kennedy near the lake. Treasury Gardens and Fitzroy Gardens can be reached by tram no. 75 travelling east along Flinders Street. Get off at Stop 14 for Treasury Gardens and Stop 14A for Fitzroy Gardens.

6 Enjoying the Great Outdoors or Catching an Aussie Rules Football Match

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

BALLOONING **Melbourne by Balloon**, Balloon Sunrise Office, 41 Dover St., Richmond (☎ **03/9427 7596**; fax 03/9427 7597), offers flights over the city plus a champagne breakfast once you've hit the ground again. Dawn flights cost A\$265 (US\$146) for adults, and A\$175 (US\$101) for children under 12 (but if they're under 1.2 meters [4 ft.] tall they won't be able to see over the basket). Advance reservations are essential.

BIKING Extensive bicycle paths wind through the city and suburbs. For details on the 20 most popular routes, pick up a copy of *Melbourne Bike Tours*, published by **Bicycle Victoria** (☎ **03/9328 3000**; fax 03/9328 2288; www.bv.com.au), available at most bookshops. Bicycle Victoria also runs several major cycling tours throughout the state every year.

Bike Now, 320 Toorak Rd., South Yarra (☎ **03/9826 6870**), rents bicycles for A\$15 (US\$9.75) for 2 hours, A\$20 (US\$13) for 4 hours, A\$30 (US\$20) for a full day, and A\$70 (US\$46) for a week. The shop is open Monday through

Friday from 9am to 7pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm. Take tram no. 8 to Toorak Road.

You can also rent a bike from **Hire a Bike** at St. Kilda Pier (☎ 03/9531 7403); non-Australians must show their passports.

GOLF One of the best public golf courses in Australia is **Yarra Bend**, Yarra Bend Road, Fairfield (☎ 03/9481 3729). Greens fees are about A\$15 (US\$9.75), and club rental is an extra A\$10 (US\$6.50) for a half set and A\$25 (US\$16) for a full set.

The exclusive **Royal Melbourne Golf Club**, in the suburb of Black Rock, 24km (15 miles) from the city center, is rated as one of the world's 10 best golf courses. It's open to members only, but if you belong to a top-notch golf club at home, you might be able to wheedle your way in.

For more information on golf in Victoria, contact the **Victorian Golf Association**, 15 Bardolph St., Burwood (☎ 03/9889 6731).

IN-LINE SKATING The promenade in St. Kilda is the most popular place to strap on a pair of skates. You can rent all you need at **Rock'n'Roll'n**, 11a Fitzroy St., St. Kilda (☎ 03/9525 3434). The first hour costs A\$8 (US\$5.20). Successive hours are less expensive.

TENNIS The venue for the Australian Open, the **Melbourne Park National Tennis Centre**, on Batman Avenue (☎ 03/9286 1244), is a great place to play tennis. When tournaments are not scheduled, its 22 outdoor courts and four indoor courts are open to the public. You can rent courts Monday through Friday from 7am to 11pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 6pm. Charges range from A\$14 to A\$30 (US\$9.10–US\$20) per hour, depending on the court and time of day (outdoor courts are cheapest). Show courts 1, 2, and 3 are also for rent at the same prices. Racquets are also available for A\$3 (US\$1.95).

SPECTATOR SPORTS

AVIATION The Australian International Air Show is held every 2 years in February, at the Avalon Airfield outside of Geelong. It's a world class event attracting 300,000 visitors over its 4-day duration. The next show will be in 2005. (☎ 03/5282 0500; www.airshow.net.au.)

CAR RACING The annual **Australian Formula One Grand Prix** takes place in early March. Call Ticketmaster (☎ 13 61 22 in Australia), or the Grand Prix Hotline (☎ 13 16 41 in Australia, or 03/9258 7100) for information on tickets, accommodations, and airfares. Also check out the Grand Prix's website at www.grandprix.com.au.

CRICKET From October through March, cricket's the name of the game in Melbourne. The **Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)**, Brunton Avenue, Yarra Park, Jolimont (☎ 03/9657 8879), once the main stadium for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, is perhaps Australia's most hallowed cricket field. The stadium can accommodate 97,500 people. For the uninitiated, "one-day" games are the ones to look out for; "Test" games take several days to complete. Buy tickets at the gate or in advance from Ticketmaster (☎ 13 61 00 in Australia; www.ticketmaster7.com).

Tours of the MCG and its museum leave every half-hour daily from 10am to 3pm. The Australian Gallery of Sport and the Olympic Museum are also at the MCG. The Olympic Museum traces the development of the modern Olympics with individual display sections for each city.

FOOTBALL Melbourne's number-one sport is **Australian Rules Football**—or simply, “the footy”—a skillful, often violent, ball game the likes of which you’ve never seen (unless you have ESPN). Melbourne sports 10 of the 16 Australian Football League (AFL) teams, with the others coming from Adelaide, Perth, Sydney, and Brisbane. The season starts on the third weekend in March and ends with the Grand Final on the last Saturday in September. The most accessible grounds are at The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)—take tram no. 75 along Wellington Parade, and the Optus Oval at Carlton (tram no. 19 from Elizabeth St.). Entrance tickets cost around A\$16 (US\$10) per person, or A\$30 (US\$20) for a family of four. For game information, call **AFL Headquarters** at ☎ **03/9643 1999**. Buy tickets at **Ticketmaster** (☎ **13 61 00** in Australia; www.ticketmaster7.com).

HORSE RACING The **Melbourne Cup**, on the first Tuesday in November, has been fought for by the best of Australia's thoroughbreds (and a few from overseas) since 1861. Melbourne society puts on a show when they dress up for the occasion, and the entire nation stops in its tracks to at least tune in on TV.

The city has four race tracks: **Flemington** (which holds the Melbourne Cup), on Epsom Road in Flemington (☎ **03/9371 7171**); **Moonee Valley**, on McPherson Street in Mooney Ponds (☎ **03/9373 2222**); **Caulfield**, on Station Street in Caulfield (☎ **03/9257 7200**); and **Sandown**, on Racecourse Drive in Springvale (☎ **03/9518 1300**). If you're staying in the city center, Flemington and Moonee Valley tracks are the easiest to get to. Take tram no. 57 from Flinders Street to reach the Flemington racetrack, and catch tram no. 59 from Elizabeth Street to travel to Moonee Valley.

TENNIS The **Australian Open**, one of the world's four Grand Slam events, is played during the last 2 weeks of January every year at the Melbourne Park National Tennis Center, on Batman Avenue (☎ **03/9286 1244**). Tickets for the Australian Open go on sale in mid-October and are available through **Ticketek** (☎ **03/9299 9079**) and also on the Open's website, www.ausopen.org. Guided tours of the center are offered from April through October, Wednesday through Friday, when events aren't scheduled. Tours cost A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults and A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) for children. To get there, take a train from the Flinders Street Station to Richmond Station and catch the special Tennis Center tram from there.

7 Shopping

Ask almost any Melbournian to help you plan your time in the city, and they'll advise you to shop 'til you drop. All Australia regards Melbourne as a shopping capital—it's got everything, from fashion houses to major department stores and unusual souvenir shops. If you're coming from Sydney, I say save your money until you get to Melbourne, and then indulge!

Start at the magnificent city arcades, such as the **Block Arcade** (running between Collins and Little Collins sts.), which has more than 30 shops, including the historic Hopetoun Tearooms (see section 4, “Great Deals on Dining”), and the Royal Arcade (stretching from Little Collins St. to the Bourke St. Mall). Then hit the courts and lanes around **Swanston Street** and the huge **Melbourne Central shopping complex** between Latrobe and Lonsdale streets.

Next, take your wallet as you fan out across the city, taking in **Chapel Street** in South Yarra, for its Australian fashions; and **The Jam Factory**, 500 Chapel St., South Yarra (☎ **03/9826 0537**), which is a series of buildings with a range of shops and food outlets, including a branch of the U.S.-based Borders, as well as 16 cinema screens. Get there on tram no. 8 or no. 72 from Swanston Street.

There's also **Toorak Road** in Toorak, for Gucci and other high-priced, high-fashion names; **Bridge Road** in Richmond for budget fashions; **Lygon Street** in Carlton for Italian fashion, footwear, and accessories; and **Brunswick Street** in Fitzroy for a more alternative scene.

Serious shoppers might like to contact **Shopping Spree Tours** (☎ 03/9596 6600), a company that takes you to all those exclusive and alternative shopping venues, manufacturers, and importers you wouldn't be likely to find by yourself. Tours depart Monday through Saturday at 8:30am and cost A\$60 (US\$39) per person including lunch and a visit to the Melbourne Observation Deck.

MELBOURNE SHOPPING FROM A TO Z

ABORIGINAL CRAFTS

The Aboriginal Gallery of the Dreaming This place stocks an extensive range of acrylic dot paintings and represents more than 120 artists. Boomerangs, didgeridoos, pottery, jewelry, bark paintings, prints, books, and music are also available. 73–77 Bourke St., Mall, City. ☎ 03/9650 3277.

Original & Authentic Aboriginal Art. Specializing in original artworks, traditional bark paintings, informative aboriginal art presentations, and aboriginal artists-in-residence programs. 90 Bourke St. ☎ 03/9663 5133 www.authaboriginalart.com.au.

CRAFTS

An interesting arts-and-crafts market is held on The Esplanade in St. Kilda on Sunday from 9am to 4pm. Take tram no. 16 from Swanston Street or no. 96 from Bourke Street.

The Australian Geographic Shop Head here for high-quality Australian, including crafts, books, and various gadgets. Shop 130, Melbourne Central, 300 Lonsdale St. ☎ 03/9639 2478 or Galleria Shopping Plaza, Little Collins St. ☎ 03/9670 5813.

DEPARTMENT STORES

David Jones Like Myer, its direct competition, David Jones (or DJ's as it's affectionately known) spans 2 blocks (separated into men's and women's stores) and offers similar goods. The men's fashions, in particular, leave a lot to be desired. 310 Bourke St. Mall, City. ☎ 03/9643 2222.

Myer The grand dame of Melbourne's department stores has 12 floors of household goods, perfume, jewelry, and fashions stretching over 2 blocks. It's one of the largest stores in the world. There's a good food section on the ground floor offering, among other things, good sushi. The clothes are better here than at David Jones and it has a good shoe shop next door. 314 Bourke St. Mall, City. ☎ 03/9661 1111.

FASHION

High-fashion boutiques also line the eastern stretch of Collins Street between the Grand Hyatt and the Hotel Sofitel, and Chapel Street in South Yarra. In addition, many thousands of retail shops and factory outlets are dotted around the city, many of them concentrated on Bridge Road near Punt Road and Swan Street near Church Street in Richmond. You'll be able to find designer clothes, many just last season's fashions, at a fraction of the original price.

Collins Street features most international labels and also shoe heaven **Miss Louise** (123 Collins St.; ☎ 03/9654 7730). Nearby Flinders Lane has earned style status with the likes of **Alice Euphemia** (241 Flinders Lane; ☎ 03/9650 4300) that stocks upcoming Australian and NZ designers, **Ivy Hopes** (inside Cathedral Arcade) and **Flinders Way**. Stop at **Aesop** (238 Flinders Lane; ☎ 03/9654 1331) for its aromatherapy creams and lotions; down the stairs, at 181 Flinders Lane, is

Death by Chocolate

If you love chocolate, sign up now for the **Chocolate Indulgence Walk** and the **Chocolates & Other Desserts Walk** by calling ☎ 03/9815 1228 or 04/1215 8017. The former takes you on a tasting tour of Cadbury's, Myer, New Zealand Natural Ice Creamery, Chocolate Box, and Darrell Lea, and finishes off over chocolate cake at a cafe. This 2-hour tour leaves every Saturday at 12:30pm and costs A\$25 (US\$16); children under 6 go free. The latter includes tasting plenty of ice creams and chocolates around town as you tour kitchens and talk to chefs. The tour finishes with afternoon tea at the Grand Hyatt. This tour leaves every Saturday at 2:30pm and also costs A\$25 (US\$16). A third tour has been recently added, the **Chocolate Brunch Walk**, during which you try coffee and pastries at some of Melbourne's grooviest cafes. This tour costs A\$22 (US\$14). Bookings are essential.

Christine (☎ 03/9654 2011), noted for its collection of accessories. Little Collins St. is another fashion rat run. Look for local fashion labels **Bettina Liano** (☎ 03/9654 1912), **Scanlan & Theodore** (☎ 03/9650 6195), and **Verve** (☎ 03/9639 5886).

Country Road Country Road is one of Australia's best-known names for men's and women's fashion. The cool, classic looks don't come cheap, but the quality is worth it. Country Road also sells designer cooking equipment and housewares. 252 Toorak Rd., and other sites, including Chapel St., South Yarra. ☎ 1800/801 911 in Australia, or 03/9824 0133.

R.M. Williams Head here for genuine Australian gear: boots, Driza-bone coats, and Akubra hats. In the Melbourne Central complex. ☎ 03/9663 7126.

Saba Australian designer Joseph Saba has several very vogue, very expensive boutiques for men and women in Melbourne, including one for each sex on Chapel Street (nos. 538 and 548) in South Yarra. This store caters to both men and women. 264 Collins St., City. ☎ 03/9654 3524.

Sam Bear Sam Bear is another good bet for Outback-style fashions: Driza-bone coats, Akubra bush hats, R.M. Williams boots and clothing, and Blundstone boots (my favorite). They also sell a solid range of camping equipment. 225 Russell St., City. ☎ 03/9663 2191.

Surf, Dive 'N Ski Australia As well as surfboards, boogie boards, and sunglasses, this store stocks a wide range of hip and happening beach wear, all at reasonable prices. All the big names in Australian surf wear can be found here, including Ripcurl, Quicksilver, and Billabong. The Jam Factory, Chapel St., South Yarra. ☎ 03/9826 4071.

Vegan Wares Instead of leather, Vegan Wares uses micro-fiber to create tough, stylish shoes, bags, and belts. It's not just for vegetarians; carnivores enjoy it, too! 78 Smith St., Collingwood. ☎ 03/9417 0230.

FOODSTUFFS

Haigh's Chocolates Indulge in some 50 types of Australia's best chocolate, from milk to dark to fruit flavored. I recommend the Sparkling Shiraz truffle if

you need a serious treat. Two locations: 26 Collins St. ☎ 03/9650 2114; and Shop 27, the Block Arcade, 282 Collins St. ☎ 03/9654 7673.

Melbourne Candy Kitchen If you have a sweet tooth, you're likely to spend a fortune at this traditional little candy shop that makes its goodies before your eyes. Rock candy is a specialty, and you can get your name (or the name of someone back home) spelled out in its center. Shop 20, Royal Arcade, City. ☎ 03/9663 5654.

JEWELRY

Altman & Cherny Even if you're not in the market to buy, it's worth coming here to check out "Olympic Australia," the largest precious-gem opal in the world. It was found in Coober Pedy in South Australia in 1956 and is valued at A\$2.5 million (US\$1.6 million). The store offers tax-free shopping for tourists armed with both a passport and an international airline ticket. 128 Exhibition St., near Little Collins St. ☎ 03/9650 9685.

Dinosaur Designs Dinosaur Designs is taking the jewelry design world by storm with its range of very artistic jewelry made out of resin. The shop has modern housewares as well. None of it's cheap, but the odd item won't break the bank. 562 Chapel St., South Yarra. ☎ 03/9827 2600.

e.g.etal Fresh innovative jewelry by 50 or so of Australia's leading and emerging designers. 185 Little Collins St., Melbourne ☎ 03/9663 4334.

8 Melbourne After Dark

Melbourne can be an exciting place once the sun has set. The pubs and bars are far better than those in Sydney. Friday and Saturday nights will see most pubs (of both the trendy and the down-to-earth variety) packed to the rafters, and at lunchtimes those that serve food are popular, too. To find out what's happening, check the entertainment guide in the *Age*, Melbourne's daily broadsheet, each Friday.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Melbourne is the most dynamic performing arts city in Australia. Its theaters offer the whole gamut from offbeat independent productions to large-scale musicals like you'd find on Broadway. The city is also the home of the most prestigious festivals, with the annual **Melbourne Fringe Festival** (the first 3 weeks in Oct) and the annual **Melbourne International Comedy Festival**, (from the end of Mar to roughly the end of Apr), attracting the best of Australian and international talent.

The Melbourne International Comedy Festival sees venues all over the city putting on performances, while the Fringe Festival sees the streets, pubs, theaters, and restaurants playing host to everyone from jugglers and fire-eaters to musicians and independent productions covering all art forms. Try to get tickets if you're in town during either festival, but keep in mind that hotels fill up fast at these times. For more information about these festivals consult their relevant websites (www.melbournefringe.org.au; www.comedyfestival.com.au).

Another good time to plan your visit is during the annual **Melbourne International Film Festival** (from mid-July to the end of the first week in Aug), when new releases, shorts, and avant-garde movies are shown at varying venues around the city. For details or to check schedules check the festival's website (www.melbournefilmfestival.com.au).

For information on upcoming theater productions and reviews check out www.stageleft.com.au, or the official government entertainment information site (www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/events), which has been designed to show "What's

Value Half-Price Tickets

Buy your tickets for entertainment events, including opera, dance, and drama, on the day of the performance from the **Half-Tix Desk** in the Melbourne Town Hall on Swanston Street (☎ 03/9650 9420). The booth is open Monday from 10am to 2pm, Tuesday through Thursday from 11am to 6pm, Friday from 11am to 6:30pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Tickets must be paid for in cash. Available shows are displayed on the booth door; note that you can't get show information over the phone.

On" in the theater world for up to 2 months in advance, as well as what's happening in dance, film, comedy, music, exhibitions, sports, and tours.

The best place to buy tickets for everything from theater to major sporting events, and to obtain details on schedules, is **Ticketmaster** (☎ 13 28 849 or 1800/062 849 in Australia, or 03/9299 9079; www.ticketmaster7.com).

THE HEART OF MELBOURNE'S CULTURAL LIFE

Victorian Arts Centre ★★ The spire atop the Theatre Building of the Victorian Arts Center, on the banks of the Yarra River, crowns the city's leading performing-arts complex. Beneath it, the State Theatre, the Playhouse, and the Fairfax present performances that are the focal point of Melbourne's cultural life.

The **State Theatre**, seating 2,079 on three levels, can accommodate elaborate stagings of opera, ballet, musicals, and more. The **Playhouse** is a smaller venue that often hosts the Melbourne Theatre Company. The **Fairfax** is more intimate still, and is often used for experimental theater or cabaret.

Adjacent to the Theatres Building is the **Melbourne Concert Hall**, home of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the State Orchestra of Victoria, and often host to visiting orchestras. Many international stars have graced this stage, which is known for its excellent acoustics.

One-hour guided tours of the Concert Hall and theaters run Monday through Saturday at noon and 2:30pm and Saturday at 10:30am and noon. They cost A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children, and A\$23 (US\$15) for families. Backstage tours on Sunday at 12:15pm cost A\$13.50 (US\$8.80). Children under 11 are not admitted. Call ☎ 03/9281 8000 between 9:30am and 5pm for information.

100 St. Kilda Rd. ☎ 03/9281 8000, or 1300/136 166 for ticket purchase. Fax 03/9281 8282. www.vicartscentre.com.au. Tickets priced between A\$20–A\$140 (US\$13–US\$91).

ADDITIONAL VENUES & THEATERS

Check the *Age* to see what productions are scheduled during your visit. Odds are that the leading shows will be produced in one of the following venues:

The Comedy Club The Comedy Club is a Melbourne institution. Come here to see local and international comedy acts, musicals, and special shows. Dinner and show Friday through Saturday A\$40 to A\$45 (US\$26–US\$29) depending on performer; show only Thursday through Saturday approximately A\$20 (US\$13). Level 1, 380 Lygon St., Carlton. ☎ 03/9348 1622.

Comedy Theatre The Comedy Theatre, with its ornate Spanish Rococo interior, manages to feel intimate even though it seats more than 1,000 people. Plays and musicals usually fill the bill, but dance companies and comedians also appear. 240 Exhibition St., City. ☎ 03/9299 9886 (or tickets can be purchased from Ticketek on 13 28 49).

The Forum Theatre The Forum hosts well-known bands and international comedians. Tables and chairs are set up in cabaret-style booths, from which you can order drinks and meals. 154 Flinders St., City. ☎ 03/9299 9886.

Her Majesty's Theatre A fire destroyed the original theater here, but the current structure still retains the original facade and the Art Deco interior added during a 1936 renovation. Musicals, such as the Australian premier of *Chicago*, frequent the boards. 219 Exhibition St., City. ☎ 03/9663 3211.

The Princess Theatre This huge facility hosts extravagant productions. The theater opened its doors in 1886, and it still retains a dramatic marble staircase and ornate plaster ceilings. 163 Spring St., City. ☎ 03/9663 3300.

The Regent Theatre Built in 1929, the Regent fell into disrepair, and its stage was dark for 25 years. Now, after a recent A\$35-million (US\$23-million) renovation, it's been restored to its former glory. Tickets are available in the United States through ATS Tours at ☎ 800/423-2880. The theater offers a range of dining packages. 191 Collins St., City. ☎ 03/9299 9800.

Sidney Myer Music Bowl This huge outdoor entertainment center is run under the auspices of the Victorian Arts Center Trust, and hosts opera, jazz, and ballet in the warmer months (and ice skating in the winter). It underwent extensive renovations in 2000. King's Domain, Alexandra Ave., City. ☎ 03/9281 8360.

CINEMAS

Most of the city cinemas are situated within 2 blocks of the intersection of Bourke and Russell streets. Tickets cost around between A\$9 and \$14 (US\$5.90–US\$9.10).

There are also some fine independent cinemas; one that stands out is the **Astor** (☎ 03 9510 1414), in a superb Art Nouveau building at 3 Chapel St., East St. Kilda, corner Chapel and Dandenong Road, showing well-chosen classic movies.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

Melbourne's nightclub scene used to be centered along King Street, and while this area is still known for large dance venues, the city is now awash with hidden bars and clubs each conceived in a unique way by their owners but all catering to the enjoyment of Melbournians and visitors alike. Those seeking will find! It's best just to follow the crowds or in some cases that couple slipping down a side lane and disappearing into a dimly lit entrance. Otherwise, the following options are more enduring in their appeal.

Bella Vista Social Club Owned by the team at Becco, BVSC is upstairs above this perennially favorite restaurant. Ultra modern in a micro-suede kind of way, this place jumps with a late night crowd of many splendorous hues—arty young things mingling with the suits, and all watching the goings on in the lane below via a large screen hookup. 11-25 Crossley St., Melbourne. ☎ 03/9663 3000.

Bennetts Lane Jazz Club Simply the best venue in Melbourne to listen to jazz, often exceptional and always varied. This back lane venue is a little hard to find but is everything you always imagined a jazz club to be and will always delight. The best international players seek it out. 25 Bennetts Lane, Melbourne. ☎ 03/9663 2856. www.bennettslane.com. Cover: A\$10 (US\$6.50).

Cicciolina Back Bar A softly lit and very alluring hideaway complete with plush leather booths and a fine range of cocktails. Add in a particularly attentive staff and you have one of the best little bars in the greater St. Kilda region. 130 Acland St. (enter from arcade), St. Kilda. ☎ 03/9525 3333.

Double Happiness This tiny but hugely atmospheric bar is detail at its best. The retro-Chinese theme, which would make Chairman Mao proud, attracts a hip crowd. Try the “Gang of Four” cocktail (mango, Vodka, Cointreau, lemon). 21 Liverpool St (off Bourke St.). ☎ 03/9650 4488. www.double-happiness.org.

Hi-Fi Bar & Ballroom Featuring lots of live music mostly of the hard rock and contemporary persuasion, and patronized by the younger set, this cavernous venue below ground features many visiting acts. 125 Swanson St., City. ☎ 03/9654 7617. Cover A\$20 (US\$13) Sat.

Honky Tonks Down a dark lane into a nondescript warehouse, up a flight of wooden stairs and you are transformed—before you a crowd of happy revelers enjoying some live but laid back jazz or a DJ weaving his magic on the turntables. The cocktail bar is buzzing and the view from the deep lounges across the Yarra to the botanical gardens beyond is surreal. Duckboard Place, Melbourne. ☎ 03/9662 4555.

KingPin Why not combine your two favorite pastimes—tenpin bowling and drinking! Experience the newly refurbished lanes and the new purple lounge which really mixes it up with cool live DJs and great cocktails. Situated in the Crown Casino complex, this venue is open 24-7, so happy days really are here again. 8 Whiteman St., Southbank. ☎ 03/9292 7009. Cover around A\$20 (US\$13) for bowling.

Melbourne Supper Club Upstairs above the very popular “European” cafe/restaurant, the Melbourne Supper Club is a perfect post-theater venue. Deep leather lounges and a giant circular window which looks directly onto the beautifully lit Parliament House buildings makes this bar a place to idle, smoke a cigar, or dwell over a bottle of your favorite wine. 161 Spring St., Melbourne. ☎ 03/9654 6300.

Misty Funk meets Barbarella in this ultra hip and arty venue—cool music, smooth cocktails mixed in with live combos and soulful DJs. One of the quintessential Melbourne bars, down a cobblestone lane. And it just gets better with time! 3-5 Hosier Lane, Melbourne. ☎ 03/9663 9202.

Revolver Mostly techno music, though bands play on weekends with dancing later. 229 Chapel St., Prahan. ☎ 03/9521 5985. Cover \$10 (US\$6.50) on weekends.

Tony Starrs Kitten Club Don't be put off by the name because this is one great place to go. A restaurant/bar on one level serves an ever-changing array of excellent tapas and more exotic fare. Upstairs at the Galaxy Lounge is where the action really is though. There's live entertainment most nights—ranging from the peculiar, to the animated, to just plain bizarre. One cannot fail to have a good time at the Kitten Club. Don't forget to visit the Love Lounge, which seems specially designed for Pepe Le Pew to seduce his lover, with floor to ceiling red fabric, heart-shaped lounges, and secluded booths. Open for lunch and dinner until 1am. 267 Little Collins St., Melbourne. ☎ 03/9650 2448. Cover A\$5 (US\$3.75) Sat.

WHERE TO SHARE A PINT

Something fun to do if you want to have a few drinks and meet a few people is to take one of the **City Pub Walks** (☎ 03/9384 0655 or 04/1208 5661). The 2½- to 3-hour walks stop off at a variety of interesting pubs and bars where you can sample the local brews (at your own expense). Tours leave from “under the clocks” at Flinders Street Station at 6:30pm Tuesday and Thursday.

Belgian Beer Café Bluestone Belgian beer culture in all its forms. In an old Art Deco building, it is extremely atmospheric and just the place to pretend that you really are in Brussels. Full-bodied Belgian brews dominate. While

downing a pint you must try the traditional streamed mussels. In warmer weather it's a delight to sit in the park-like garden outside. 557 St. Kilda Rd., Melbourne. ☎ 03/9529 2899.

Bridie O'Reillys Bridie O'Reillys is one of Melbourne's best Irish pubs, complete with traditional dark wood decor and good beer. The two-level pub has 19 different beers on tap (seven of them Irish). There is live Irish music every night from around 9pm. The place gets quite crowded on weekends. 62 Little Collins St. (just off Exhibition St.), City. ☎ 03/9650 0840.

The Cricketers Club Bar Locals come to this popular English-style pub in this five-star hotel to lift a glass surrounded by the relics of Australia's summer passion. Glass cases are packed full of cricket bats, pads, and stumps, whereas the plush green carpets and solid mahogany woodwork give the place a touch of class. In the Windsor Hotel, 103 Spring St., City. ☎ 03/9653 0653.

Jimmy Watson's Wine Bar While probably not the place where a "pint" is the go, Jimmy's is somewhat of an institution and is one of Melbourne's oldest wine bars. The bar itself is a cozy affair where all types of people chat and sample the vast range of wines available. In the attached dining area excellent food is expertly teamed with the perfect wine. Come to chat or simply read the paper. 333 Lygon St., Carlton. ☎ 03/9347 3985.

The Prince St. Kilda This pub is a legend among the locals. Though recently refurbished, it retains its original rough-at-the-edges appearance. Bands play most nights, some of them big names. 2 Acland St., St. Kilda. ☎ 03/9536 1100.

Windsor Castle Up Chapel Street and through Prahran is Windsor, "the new St. Kilda," and its best kept secret the Windsor Castle Hotel, resplendent in its new renovation and home for the local style-meisters. Serving some extremely good pub food which can be enjoyed in the sunny courtyard (DJ's and barbecue on weekends) or in the plush interior areas, this pub is a perfect weekend meeting place. Look for the giant pink elephants outside the pub. Albert and Upton sts., Windsor. ☎ 03/9525 0239.

The Young and Jacksons Hotel After a major renovation, Melbourne's oldest (and arguably most famous) pub is a new-found pleasure whether for a drink or a full dining experience in the stylish upstairs restaurant or bistro areas. Head upstairs to see the naked *Chloe*. The famous painting was brought to Melbourne for the Great Exhibition in 1880. The pub, which was built in 1853 and started selling beer in 1861, has a few years on *Chloe*, who was painted in Paris in 1875. She has a special place in the hearts of customers and has spawned hundreds of copies that have found their way to far-flung places. At the corner of Flinders and Swanston sts. ☎ 03/9650 3884.

THE CASINO

Crown Casino Australia's largest casino is a plush affair open 24 hours. You'll find all the usual roulette and blackjack tables and so on, as well as an array of gaming machines. Believe me, you can lose big here. There are some 25 restaurants and 40 bars on the premises. Clarendon St., Southbank (☎ 03/9292 6868).

While you're here, have lunch at the **Red Emperor**. Its Cantonese *yum cha* (tea lunch) is superb as is the service. There's a great view of the Yarra River. 3 Southgate Ave., upper level Southgate. (☎ 03/9699 4170). Yum cha items from A\$3.85–A\$8.80 (US\$2.50–US\$5.70). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm; Sun 11am–4pm.

9 Side Trips from Melbourne

DANDENONG RANGES

40km (25 miles) E of Melbourne

Melbournians traditionally do a “day in the Dandenongs” from time to time, topping off their getaway with Devonshire tea with scones and jam at one of the many cafes en route. Up in the cool, high country you’ll find native bush, famous gardens, the Dandenong Ranges National Park, historic attractions such as the Puffing Billy—a vintage steam train—and plenty of restaurants and cozy B&Bs. The Dandenong Ranges National Park is one of the state’s oldest, set aside in 1882 to protect its Mountain Ash forests and lush tree-fern gullies.

GETTING THERE To get to the area, take the Burwood Highway from Melbourne, then the Mt. Dandenong Tourist Road, which starts at Upper Fern-tree Gully and then winds its way through the villages of Sassafras, Olinda, Mount Dandenong, and Kalorama to Montrose. If you take a turnoff to Sherbrook, or extend your journey into a loop taking in Seville, Woori Yallock, Emerald, and Belgrave, you’ll see a fair slice of the local scenery.

Auswalk, P.O. Box 516, Jindabyne, NSW 2627 (☎ 02/6457 2220; fax 02/6457 2206; info@auswalk.com.au), offers 4-day/3-night, self-guided tours of the Dandenongs for two or more people, including accommodations, most meals, a ride on the Puffing Billy steam train (p. 560), national park entrance fees, vehicle transfers, and an itinerary and maps. The tour costs around A\$590 (US\$384) per person but could be a little cheaper depending on the season.

Parkwood Personalised Tours (☎ 03/5334 2428; www.oztour.com) runs personalized day and multi-day tours of the Yarra Valley as well as other places in Victoria, and the Great Ocean Road, staying at quaint B&B guesthouses or boutique hotels.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Dandenong Ranges & Knox Visitor Information Centre**, 1211 Burwood Hwy., Upper Fern-tree Gully, VIC 3156 (☎ 1800/645 505 in Australia, or 03/9758 7522; fax 03/9758 7533), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

NATURE WALKS

Most people come here to get out of the city for a pleasant bushwalk (hike), so in that way it’s the equivalent of Sydney’s Blue Mountains. Some of the better walks include the easy 2.5km (1.5-mile) stroll from the **Sherbrook Picnic Ground** through the forest, and along the **Kokoda Track Memorial Walk**, a challenging rainforest track from the Fern Tree Gully Picnic Ground up to One Tree Hill. Along the way are plaques commemorating Australian troops who fought and died in Papua New Guinea in World War II.

FOR GARDENING BUFFS

Bonsai Farm If you don’t like to crane your neck to look at trees, then visit this large display of petite bonsais. Some of them are many decades old and cost a pretty penny.

Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ☎ 03/9751 1150. Free admission. Wed–Sun 11am–5pm. Transportation: See William Ricketts Sanctuary below.

National Rhododendron Gardens From September through November, thousands of rhododendrons and azaleas burst into bloom in these magnificent gardens. There are 42 lovely hectares (104 acres) in all, with a 3km (1.75-mile) walking path leading past flowering exotics and native trees as well as great vistas

over the Yarra Valley. A tearoom is open every day during spring and on weekends at other times. Visitors flock here in summer for the glorious walks, and again in autumn when the leaves are turning.

The Georgian Rd., Olinda. ☎ **03/9751 1980**. Admission: Sept 1–Nov 30 A\$6.70 (US\$4.35) adults, A\$2.20 (US\$1.40) children 10–16, A\$13.50 (US\$8.80) family of 5; Dec 1–Aug 31 A\$5.60 (US\$3.60) adults, A\$2.20 (US\$1.40) children, A\$13.50 (US\$8.80) family. Daily 10am–4:30pm. Closed Christmas Day. Train to Croydon and then bus no. 688 to the gardens, or train to Belgrave and bus no. 694.

Tesselaar's Bulbs and Flowers There are literally tens of thousands of flowers on display here, putting on a flamboyantly colorful show in the spring (Sept–Oct). Expect to see a dazzling variety of tulips, daffodils, rhododendrons, azaleas, fuchsias, and ranunculi. Bulbs are on sale at discount prices at other times.

357 Monbulk Rd., Silvan. ☎ **03/9737 9811**. Admission during tulip festival (approx. Sept 12–Oct 11), A\$12 (US\$7.80) adults, children under 16 admitted free if accompanied by an adult; free for everyone rest of the year. During tulip festival daily 10am–5pm; rest of year Mon–Fri 8am–4:30pm, Sat–Sun 1–5pm. Take the train to Lilydale and then bus no. 679.

William Ricketts Sanctuary This wonderful garden, set in a forest of mountain ash, features clay figures representing the Aboriginal Dreamtime. The sculptures were created over the lifetime of sculptor William Ricketts, who died in 1993 at the age of 94. The garden encompasses fern gullies and waterfalls spread out over 13 hectares (32 acres), with the sculptures occupying .8 hectares (2 acres).

Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ☎ **03/9751 1300**. www.parkweb.vic.gov.au. Admission A\$5.20 (US\$3.40) adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) children 10–16, A\$12.50 (US\$8.15) families of 5. A\$4.20 (US\$2.75) concessions. Daily 10am–4:30pm. Closed Christmas and days of total fire ban. Train to Croydon then bus no. 688 to the sanctuary.

FOR TRAIN BUFFS

Puffing Billy Railway *(Kids)* For almost a century, Puffing Billy steam railway has been chugging over a 13km (8-mile) track from Belgrave to Emerald Lake. Passengers take trips on open carriages and are treated to lovely views as the train passes through forests and fern gullies and over a National Trust–classified wooden trestle bridge. Trips take around an hour each way. Trains leave at 10:30, 11:15am, noon, and 2:30pm on weekdays; and at 10:30, 11:45am, 1:30, and 3:15pm on Saturday and Sunday. A further stretch of track to Gembrook was opened in 1998. Daily trips to Gembrook take an extra 45 minutes and cost A\$25 (US\$16) for adults, A\$14 (\$9.10) for children, and A\$72 (US\$47) for families. Night trains also run on occasional Saturday nights.

Belgrave Station, Belgrave. ☎ **03/9754 6800** for 24-hr. recorded information. www.puffingbilly.com.au. Admission A\$18 (US\$12) adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) children 4–16, A\$51 (US\$33) families of 5. Operates daily except Christmas. Train from Flinders Street Station in Melbourne to Belgrave; the Puffing Billy station is a short walk away.

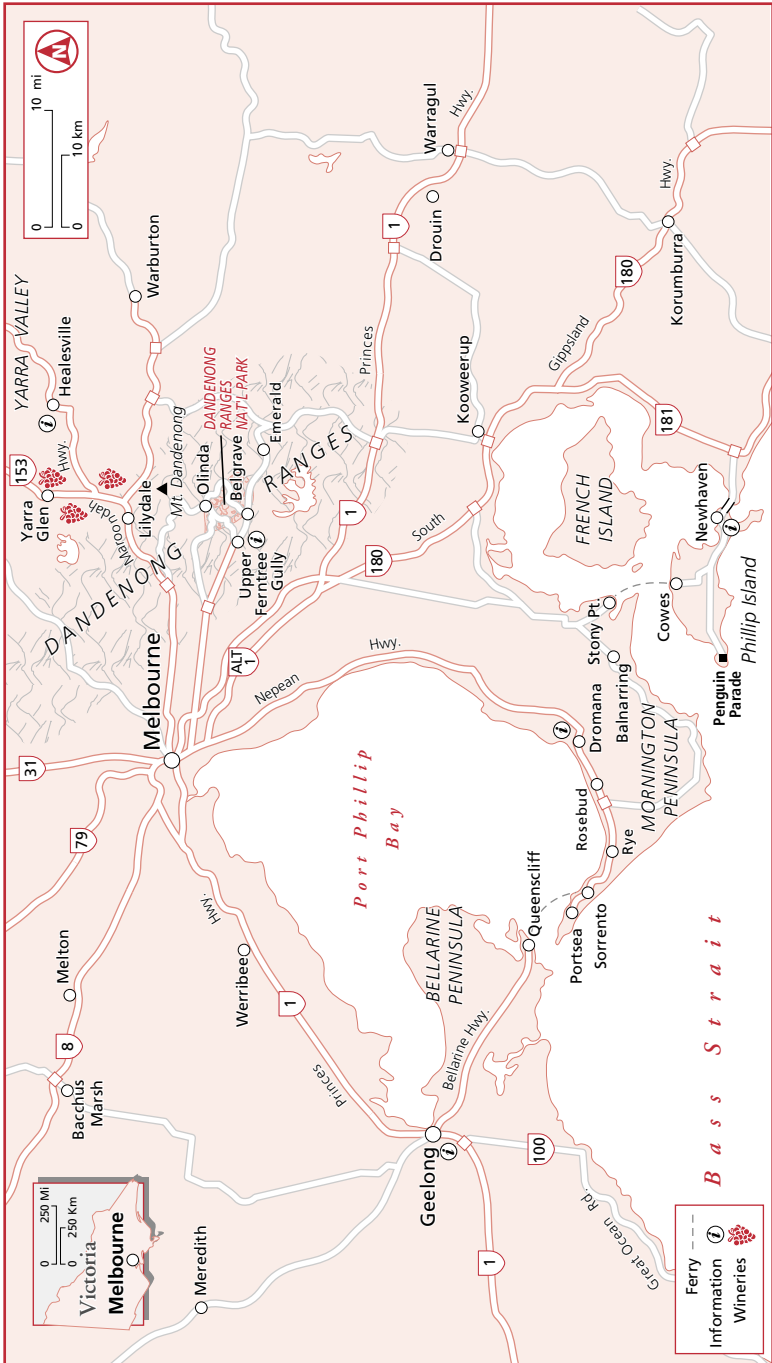
WHERE TO DINE

Churinga Café CAFE This is a nice place for a quick lunch or morning or afternoon tea. It has nice gardens and is just across from the William Ricketts Sanctuary. You can get everything here from curries to traditional British fare. Devonshire tea costs A\$6 (US\$3.90).

1381 Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ☎ **03/9751 1242**. Main courses A\$13–A\$14 (US\$8.45–US\$9.10). AE, DC, MC, V. Sat–Wed 10:30am–4:30pm.

Wild Oak Café MODERN AUSTRALIAN For good home cooking you can't beat this cozy cafe. The food includes the likes of chargrilled steak, smoked

Side Trips from Melbourne



Atlantic salmon risotto, linguini with prawns, and Cajun chicken. The restaurant has a few vegetarian selections and a roaring log fire in winter.

232 Ridge Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ☎ 03/9751 2033. Main courses A\$16–A\$19 (US\$10–US\$12). DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm.

YARRA VALLEY ★

61km (40 miles) E of Melbourne

The Yarra Valley is a wine-growing region east of Melbourne. It's dotted with villages, historic houses, gardens, crafts shops, antiques centers, and restaurants, as well as dozens of wineries. There are some good bushwalks around here and the Healesville Sanctuary is one of the best places in Australia to see native animals.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **McKenzie's Bus Lines** (☎ 03/9853 6264) operates a bus service from Lilydale Railway Station to Healesville. (Catch a train from Melbourne's Spencer Street Station to Lilydale; the trip takes about an hour.) Buses connect with trains roughly 12 times a day; call for exact connection times.

If you're driving, pick up a map of the area from the Royal Automotive Club of Victoria (☎ 03/9790 3333) in Melbourne. Maps here are free if you're a member of an auto club in your home country, but remember to bring along your membership card. Alternatively, you can pick up a map at the tourist office. Take the Maroondah Highway from Melbourne to Lilydale and on to Healesville. The trip takes around 1 hour and 15 minutes.

VISITOR INFORMATION Pick up details on attractions and lodging at the **Yarra Valley Visitor Information Centre**, Old Court House, Harker Street, Healesville, VIC 3777 (☎ 03/5962 2600; fax 03/5962 2040). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

EXPLORING THE VALLEY

There are three principal roads in the valley: the Melba Highway, Maroondah Highway, and Myers Creek Road, which together form a triangle. Within the triangle are three smaller roads, the Healesville–Yarra Glen Road, Old Healesville Road, and Chum Creek Road, which all access wineries. Most people start their tour of the Yarra Valley from Lilydale and take in several cellar-door tastings at vineyards along the route.

Balloon Aloft (☎ 1800/028 568 in Australia) offers dawn balloon rides over the wineries for A\$195 (US\$127) for adults and A\$130 (US\$85) for children over 8. The flight includes a champagne breakfast. **Peregrine Adventures** (☎ 03/9662 2800; www.peregrine.net.au) also has balloon flights over the valley, with free pickup from Adelaide for A\$195 (US\$127) on weekends and A\$175 (US\$114) on weekdays. Peregrine can also arrange accommodations.

Healesville Sanctuary ★ *Finds* Forget about seeing animals in cages—this preserve is a great place to spot native animals in almost natural surroundings. You can see wedge-tailed eagles, dingoes, koalas, wombats, reptiles, and more, all while strolling through the peppermint-scented gum forest, which rings with the chiming of bellbirds. Sir Colin McKenzie started the sanctuary in 1921 as a center to preserve endangered species and educate the public. There's a gift shop, a cafe serving light meals, and picnic grounds.

Badger Creek Rd., Healesville. ☎ 03/5957 2800. Fax 03/5957 2870. www.zoo.org.au. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) concession, A\$8.10 (US\$5.25) children, A\$44 (US\$29) family, up to 4 kids. Daily 9am–5pm. Train from Flinders Street Station to Lilydale, then bus no. 685 to the sanctuary.

NICE PLACES TO STAY & DINE

Melba Lodge ★ These stylish, modern accommodations opened in Yarra Glen, in the heart of the Yarra Valley wine region, in early 1999. Of the six luxurious bedrooms, four have queen-size beds, and two have king-size beds and a spa; all have private bathrooms. There's a comfortable lounge with an open fire, and a billiard room. The lodge is only a few minutes' walk from historic Yarra Glen, which has antiques shops and a crafts market. There are plenty of restaurants and wineries around, too. It's a short drive to the Healesville Sanctuary.

939 Melba Hwy., Yarra Glen, VIC 3775. ☎ 03/9730 1511. Fax 03/9730 1566. www.melbalodge.com.au. 8 units. A\$130 (US\$98) queen room; A\$190 (US\$117) king room. Rates include cooked breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; billiard room; spa; business center; massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Sanctuary House Motel Healesville This place is very handy for visiting the sanctuary and even better if you want to relax and sample some good Yarra Valley wine. Just 400m (1,312 ft.) from the Healesville Sanctuary, Sanctuary House is set in some 4 hectares (10 acres) of beautiful bushland. The rooms are motel-style, and were completely refurbished in 2001 and awarded a three-and-one-half-star rating. There is also a five-bedroom farmhouse nearby on 8 hectares (20 acres) featuring a pool and log fireplace that can be hired through the motel.

Badger Creek Rd. (P.O. Box 162 Healesville, VIC 3777). ☎ 03/5962 5148. Fax 03/5962 5392. www.sanctuaryhouse.com.au. 12 units. A\$80–A\$88 (US\$52–US\$57) double. There are also 2 self-contained units available at a higher rate and amenities to assist travelers with disabilities. MC, V. **Transportation:** See the Healesville Sanctuary above. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small pool; spa; sauna; game room; children's play area; massage; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, iron, shower.

PHILLIP ISLAND: PENGUINS ON PARADE ★

139km (86 miles) S of Melbourne

Phillip Island's **penguin parade**, which happens every evening at dusk, is one of Australia's most popular animal attractions. There are other (less crowded) places in Australia where watching homecoming penguins feels less staged—Kangaroo Island in South Australia comes to mind—but at least the little ones and their nesting holes are protected from the throngs by guides and boardwalks. Nevertheless, the commercialism of the Penguin Parade puts a lot of people off—busloads of tourists squashed into a sort of amphitheater is hardly being one with nature. Phillip Island also offers nice beaches, good bushwalking, fishing, and Seal Rocks. If you have the time, you could spend at least 2 days here.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Most visitors come to Phillip Island on a day trip from Melbourne and arrive in time for the Penguin Parade and dinner. Several tour companies run day trips. Among them are **Gray Line** (☎ 03/9663 4455), which operates penguin trips daily departing Melbourne at 1:30pm and returning at around 11:30pm. Tours cost A\$80 (US\$52) for adults and A\$40 (US\$26) for children. Gray Line also offers full-day trips including the Dandenong Ranges and a ride on the Puffing Billy Steam Train.

Down Under Day Tours (☎ 03/9650 2600) offers a similar half-day tour for A\$80 (US\$52) for adults and A\$40 (US\$26) for children; tours depart Melbourne at 1:30pm and return at 11:30pm. It also offers a daylong trip that combines a Melbourne sightseeing tour with the penguin tour for A\$106 (US\$69) for adults, and A\$53 (US\$34) for children, and a half-day combined Dandenong Ranges/Phillip Island tour costing A\$96 (US\$63) for adults and A\$48 (US\$31) for children.

An excellent budget option is a half-day trip with **Melbourne Sightseeing** (☎ 03/9663 3388). Tours depart Melbourne daily at 1:30pm and include visits to a cattle farm where you can hand-feed kangaroos, the Koala Conservation Centre, a seal colony, as well as the Penguin Parade. The coach returns to Melbourne at 10:30pm. The trip costs A\$75 (US\$49) for adults (A\$49/US\$32 with a YHA card) and A\$38 (US\$25) for children. For the same price, an express bus leaves Melbourne at 5:30pm (returning at 11pm) and travels directly to the Penguin Parade.

V/Line trains (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia, or 03/9619 5000) run in summer from Flinders Street Station to Phillip Island via Dandenong. The trip takes 2 hours and 15 minutes and costs A\$13 (US\$8.70).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Phillip Island Information Centre**, Phillip Island Tourist Road, Newhaven, VIC 3922 (☎ 1300/366 422 in Australia, or 03/5956 7447), is an attraction in itself, with interactive computer displays, relevant information, dioramas giving visitors a glimpse into the penguin's world, and a theaterette. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (to 6pm in the summer). www.phillipisland.net.au.

EXPLORING THE AREA

Visitors approach the island from the east, passing through the town of **Newhaven**. Just a little past Newhaven is the Phillip Island Information Centre.

The main town on the island, **Cowes** (pop. 2,400), is on the far north coast. It's worth taking a stroll along its Esplanade. The Penguin Parade is on the far southwest coast.

The west coast of the Summerland Peninsula ends in an interesting rock formation called **The Nobbies**. This strange-looking outcropping can be reached at low tide by a basalt causeway. You'll get some spectacular views of the coastline and two offshore islands from here. On the farthest of these islands is a population of up to **12,000 Australian fur seals**, the largest colony in Australia. (Bring your binoculars.) This area is also home to thousands of nesting silver gulls.

On the north coast you can explore **Rhyll Inlet**, an inter-tidal mangrove wetland, where you can see wading birds such as spoonbills, oystercatchers, herons, egrets, cormorants, and the rare bar-tailed godwit, and the whimbrel.

Birdwatchers will also love **Swan Lake**, another breeding habitat for wetland birds.

Elsewhere, walking trails lead through heath and pink granite to **Cape Woolamai**, the island's highest point, where there are fabulous coastal views. September through April the cape is home to thousands of short-tailed shearwaters, or muttonbirds, as they are sometimes called.

If you really want to see a bit of the island (instead of just seeing the parade and dashing off), consider taking one of the 15 different tours offered by **Mike Cleeland** and his **Island Nature Tours**, RMB 6080, Cowes, Phillip Island, VIC 3922 (☎ 03/5956 7883).

A pedestrian bridge is the only connection to **Churchill Island**, an islet where you can visit beautiful gardens and a villa situated 1km (½ mile) from Newhaven, open every day except Christmas. Admission is A\$7.70 (US\$5) adults, A\$3.70 (US\$2.40) children.

Koala Conservation Centre ★ Koalas were introduced to Phillip Island in the 1880s and at first they thrived in the predator-free environment. However, overpopulation, the introduction of foxes and dogs, and the clearing of land for farmland and roads, have all taken their toll. Though today you can still see a few koalas in the wild, the best place to find them is at this sanctuary, set up for

research and breeding purposes. Visitors can get quite close to them, especially on the elevated boardwalk, which lets you peek into their treetop homes. For the best viewing come around 4pm, when the ordinarily sleepy koalas are on the move.

At Fiveways, Phillip Island Tourist Road, Cowes ☎ **03/5952 1307**. A\$5.60 (US\$3.65) adults, A\$2.60 (US\$1.70) children under 16, A\$13.80 (US\$9) family (up to 4 kids). Daily 10am–5pm.

Phillip Island Penguin Reserve ★ *Kids* The Penguin Parade takes place every night of the year at dusk, when hundreds of little penguins appear at the water's edge, gather together in the shallows, and waddle up the beach toward their burrows in the dunes. They're the smallest of the world's 17 species of penguins, standing just 33cm (13 in.) high, and they're the only penguins that breed on the Australian mainland. Fences and viewing stands were erected in the 1960s to protect the nesting areas. Flash photography is banned because it scares the little guys. Wear a sweater or jacket, since it gets chilly after the sun goes down. A kiosk selling food opens an hour before the penguins turn up.

If you get to Phillip Island on your own and don't have a car, the **Penguin Parade Bus** (☎ **03/5952 1042** or 04/1736 0370) will pick you up from your hotel. The round-trip price is A\$19 (US\$12) for adults and A\$11 (US\$7.15) for children and includes a pre-booked ticket for the Penguin Parade.

Summerland Beach, Phillip Island Tourist Rd., Cowes. ☎ **03/5951 2800**. www.penguins.org.au. Admission A\$14 (US\$9.10) adults, A\$7 (US\$4.55) children 4–13, A\$35 (US\$23) families (up to 4 children). Visitor center opens daily at 10am; penguins arrive at sunset. Reservations for the Penguin Parade are essential in summer when tickets can be difficult to get, and on weekends and public holidays year-round.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The **Amaroo Park YHA**, 97 Church St., Cowes (☎ **03/5952 2548**; fax 03/5952 3620; www.yha.com.au) has campsites and dorms beds for A\$12 (US\$7.80), doubles for \$45 (US\$29), family rooms with shared bathroom for A\$61 (US\$40), family rooms with bathroom for A\$79 (US\$51), and cabins, also for A\$79 (US\$51). Ask about packages.

Penguin Hill Country House B&B This private home with views over sheep paddocks to Bass Strait is within walking distance of the Penguin Parade. Each room has good views and is stocked with antiques (as is much of the house) and queen-size beds. Two have an attached bathroom with shower, and the third has a private bathroom across the hall. There's a TV and a phone in the cozy lounge. The hosts can pick you up from Cowes.

At Backbeach and Ventnor roads. (RMB 1093, Cowes, Phillip Island, VIC 3922). ☎/fax **03/5956 8777**. 3 units. A\$130 (US\$85) double. Rates include cooked breakfast. AE, MC, V. Not suitable for children. **Amenities:** TV lounge; tour desk; business center; room service (7am–11pm); coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fax, hair dryer, iron.

Worth a Splurge

Rothsaye on Lovers Walk ★★ The penguins are just down the road, and the beach is right on the doorstep—who could ask for anything more? The two suites here are adjacent to the owner's home, and the one-bedroom cottage is set slightly apart. All rooms come with antiques and king-size beds. You also get a fruit basket, free fishing gear, beach chairs and umbrellas, magazines, and fresh flowers. Lovers Walk, a romantic floodlit path, leads from the doorstep to the center of Cowes. The owners also have a new beachside property nearby called **Abaleigh on Lovers Walk**. The two gorgeous apartments here come with a kitchen, barbecue, and good water views. They cost A\$215 (US\$140) a night.

2 Roy Ct., Cowes 3922. ☎/fax **03/5952 2691**. www.rothsaye.com. 4 suites, 1 cottage. A\$140–A\$190 (US\$91–US\$124) suite; A\$130–A\$170 (US\$85–US\$111) cottage. Breakfast is included. MC, V. Children not

allowed. **Amenities:** Golf course nearby; tour desk; laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (portable), TV/VCR, kitchen, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

AROUND PORT PHILLIP BAY

West of Melbourne, the Princes Freeway (or M1) heads toward Geelong via a bypass at Werribee. To the east of Melbourne, the Nepean Highway travels along the coast to the Mornington Peninsula as far as Portsea. If you have time to stay the night, you can combine the two options, heading first down to the Mornington Peninsula and then taking the car and passenger ferry from Sorrento to Queenscliff.

WERRIBEE

This small country town is 32km (20 miles) southwest of Melbourne, a 30-minute drive along the Princes Freeway. Trains run from Melbourne to Werribee station; a taxi from the station to the zoo will cost around A\$5 (US\$3.25).

The Mansion at Werribee Park Known as “the palace in the paddock,” this 60-room Italianate mansion was built in 1877. It was quite the extravagant project in its day. In addition to touring the house, you may stroll around the grounds and have a picnic; it’s surrounded by 132 hectares (326 acres) of bushland fronting the Werribee River. You can also pre-arrange to take one of the popular carriage rides that make their way through the property. Allow 1 to 2 hours. The afternoon tea is great.

K Rd., Werribee. ☎ **13 19 63** in Australia, or 03/9741 2444. www.visitvictoria.com/mansions. Free admission park and picnic grounds; admission to mansion A\$10.60 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$5.40 (US\$3.40) children 5–15, A\$27.50 (US\$18) families. Nov–Mar daily 10am–5pm; Apr–Oct daily 10am–4pm. Closed Christmas.

Victoria’s Open Range Zoo at Werribee From inside your zebra-striped safari bus you can almost touch the animals (mainly African) that wander almost freely over the plains—no depressing cages here. This high-caliber open-air zoo is closely associated with the Melbourne Zoo. There is also a walk-through section featuring African cats, including cheetahs, and monkeys. The safari-bus tour takes 50 minutes.

K Rd., Werribee. ☎ **03/9731 9600**. www.zoo.org.au. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$7.80 (US\$5.05) children, A\$43 (US\$28) families. Daily 9am–5pm (the entrance gate closes at 3:30pm). Safari tours hourly 10am–3pm.

Victoria

by Marc Llewellyn

Australia's southernmost mainland state is astoundingly diverse. Within its boundaries are 35 national parks, encompassing every possible terrain, from rainforest and mountain ranges to sun-baked Outback desert and a coast where waves crash dramatically onto rugged sandstone outcroppings.

Melbourne (see chapter 11) may be this rugged state's heart, but the mighty Murray River, which separates Victoria from New South Wales, is its lifeblood, providing irrigation for vast tracks of semi-desert land.

Most visitors to Victoria start out by exploring Melbourne's cosmopolitan streets, and then visit a few local wineries, before heading for the gold fields around the historic city of Ballarat. Lots of them only experience a fraction of Victoria, but this wonderful and not

overly touristed region is worth a closer look.

Visitors with more time might head inland to the mountains (perhaps for skiing or bushwalking at Mt. Hotham or Falls Creek), or seek out the wilderness of Snowy River National Park. Others head to the Outback, to the Grampians National Park, and Mildura through open deserts, past pink lakes and red sand dunes.

Lots of options await, and because much of it is out in the country, you'll find prices for accommodations very affordable. Whatever itinerary you choose, you're sure to find adventure and dramatic scenery.

See "Side Trips from Melbourne" in chapter 11, for information on the Dandenong Ranges, Yarra Valley, Phillip Island, and the Mornington Peninsula.

EXPLORING THE STATE

VISITOR INFORMATION Pick up brochures and maps at the Victoria Visitor Information Centre (see chapter 11, "Melbourne"), or call the **Victoria Tourism Information Service** (☎ 13 28 42) from anywhere in Australia to talk to a consultant about your plans. The service, open daily from 8am to 6pm, will also send out brochures. If you need information along the way, look for blue road signs with a white or yellow information symbol.

GETTING THERE **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96 in Victoria, or 13 22 32 in New South Wales) runs a limited network of trains to various places in Victoria, continuing trips to most major centers with connecting buses. Several bus companies connect Melbourne with regional areas of Victoria; the biggest operator is **McCafferty's** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia, or 03/9670 2533).

1 Ballarat: Gold-Rush City ★★

113km (70 miles) W of Melbourne

Ballarat, Victoria's largest inland city (pop. 90,000), is all about gold. In 1851, two prospectors found gold nuggets scattered on the ground at a place known

as, ironically, Poverty Point. Within a year, 20,000 people had drifted into the area, and Australia's El Dorado gold rush had begun.

In 1858, the second-largest chunk of gold discovered in Australia (the Welcome Nugget) was found, but by the early 1860s, most of the easily obtainable yellow metal was gone. Larger operators continued digging until 1918, and by then Ballarat had developed enough industry to survive without mining.

Today, you can still see the gold rush's effects in the impressive buildings, built from the miners' fortunes, lining Ballarat's streets. If you're interested in another former mining town, head 1½ hours north to Bendigo, a small city filled with elaborate public buildings constructed with the gains from the gold rush.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Melbourne, Ballarat is a 1½-hour drive via the Great Western Highway. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96 in Victoria, or 13 22 32 in New South Wales) runs trains between the cities every day, and the trip takes less than 2 hours. The one-way fare is approximately A\$17 (US\$11) for adults and A\$9 (US\$5.85) for children. Ask about family-saver fares. A public bus connects the Ballarat train station with the town center.

Several companies offer day trips from Melbourne. **Melbourne Sightseeing** (☎ 03/9663 3388) offers one of the most affordable choices, a full-day tour that costs A\$98 (US\$64) for adults and A\$49 (US\$32) for children.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Ballarat Visitor Information Centre** at 39 Sturt St. (at the corner of Albert St.), Ballarat, VIC 3350 (☎ 1800/648 450 in Australia, or 03/5320 5741; www.ballarat.com), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Ballarat contains many reminders of the gold-rush era, but it all really comes to life in the colonial-era re-creation on Sovereign Hill.

Ballarat Fine Art Gallery After you've learned the story of the Eureka Uprising (see below), you may find it moving to come here and see the original Eureka flag. This provincial gallery also houses a large collection of Australian art, including works by Sydney Nolan, Fred Williams, and Russell Drysdale. Look out for Tom Roberts' *Charcoal Burners* and Phillip Fox's *Love Story*.

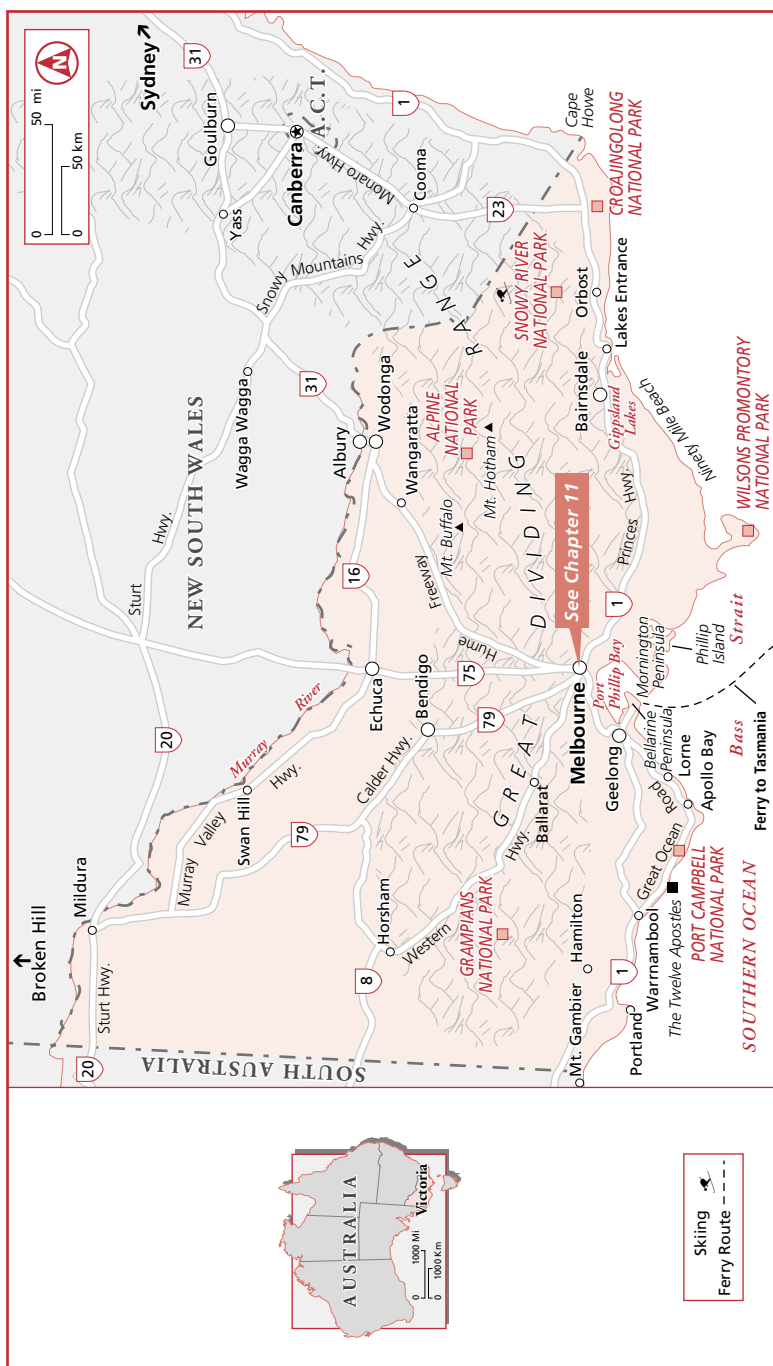
40 Lydiard St. N., Ballarat. ☎ 03/5320 5858. Admission A\$4 (US\$2.60) adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) students, free for children under 16. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

Blood on the Southern Cross ★ This 80-minute show re-creates the Eureka Uprising, one of the most important events in Australia's history, in a breathtaking light-and-sound show that covers Sovereign Hill's 25 hectares (62 acres). Bring something warm to wear, because it can get chilly at night.

After gold was discovered, the government devised a system of gold licenses, charging miners a monthly fee, even if they came up empty-handed. The miners had to buy a new license every month, and corrupt gold field police (many of whom were former convicts) instituted a vicious campaign to extract the money.

When license checks intensified in 1854, even though most of the surface gold was gone, resentment flared, and prospectors began demanding political reforms, such as the right to vote, parliamentary elections, and secret ballots.

The situation exploded when the Eureka Hotel's owner murdered a miner but was set free by the government. The hotel was burned down in revenge, and more than 20,000 prospectors joined together, burned their licenses in a huge bonfire, and built a stockade over which they raised a flag.



Troops arrived at the “Eureka Stockade” the following month, but by then only 150 miners remained behind its walls. The stockade was attacked at dawn, and in the 15-minute skirmish, 24 miners were killed and 30 wounded. The civil uprising forced the government to act: The licenses were replaced with “miners’ rights” and cheaper fees, and the vote was introduced to Victoria.

At Sovereign Hill, Bradshaw St. ☎ **03/5333 5777**. www.sovereignhill.com.au. Reservations required. Admission A\$30 (US\$20) adults, A\$16 (US\$10) children 5–15, A\$84 (US\$55) family. Other packages include daytime entry to Sovereign Hill: A\$51 (US\$33) adults, A\$26 (US\$17) children, A\$140 (US\$91) families. Call ahead for information about other packages. 2 shows nightly Mon–Sat (times vary seasonally). Closed early Aug.

Eureka Stockade Centre You can’t miss this building with its huge sail, signifying the flag of the Southern Cross, which was raised above the original miners’ stockade. Relive the action of the battle through multimedia displays. The Contemplation Room, where you are asked to think about Australian history while listening to a trickling water soundscape, is a bit too hokey for me.

Eureka St. ☎ **03/5333 1854**. Admission A\$8 (US\$5.20) adults, A\$4 (US\$2.60) children, A\$22 (US\$14) families of 6. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas and Mon except public holidays.

The Gold Museum This interesting museum houses a large collection of gold nuggets found at Ballarat, as well as alluvial deposits, gold ornaments, and coins. There are also gallery displays relating to the history of gold mining in the area. One hour should be enough to take in the museum.

Bradshaw St. (opposite Sovereign Hill), Ballarat. ☎ **03/5337 1107**. Admission included with Sovereign Hill ticket; otherwise, A\$6.30 (US\$4) adults, A\$3.10 (US\$1.95) children. Daily 10am–5:30pm.

Sovereign Hill ★★ *Kids* Australia’s best outdoor museum transports you back to the 1850s and the heady days of the gold rush. More than 40 stone-and-wood reproduction buildings, including shops and businesses on Main Street, sit on this 25-hectare (62-acre) former gold-mining site. There are also tent camps around the diggings on the lowest part of the site, which would have been the outskirts of town. There is lots to see and do, so expect to spend at least 4 hours.

The Township bustles with actors in period costumes going about their daily business. In addition to seeing how miners and their families lived, visitors can pan for real gold, watch lessons in Victorian classrooms, ride in horse-drawn carriages, and watch potters, blacksmiths, and tanners make their wares.

On top of Sovereign Hill are the mineshafts and their pithead equipment. The fascinating tour of a typical underground gold mine takes around 45 minutes.

The Voyage to Discovery museum has various artifacts from the gold rush, dioramas of mining scenes, and interactive computer displays.

A restaurant and several cafes, coffee shops, and souvenir stores can be found around the site.

Bradshaw St. ☎ **03/5331 1944**. www.sovereignhill.com.au. Admission (including mine tour and admission to Gold Museum) A\$27 (US\$18) adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) children 5–15, A\$70 (US\$46) families (2 adults and up to 4 children), free for children under 5. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Bus: From Ballarat catch the Buninyong bus.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The cheapest place to stay in town is the pleasantly quaint **Sovereign Hill Lodge YHA** (☎ **03/5333 3409**; www.yha.com.au), part of the re-created Goldmining Township. Dorms cost A\$19 (US\$12), twins with shared bathroom cost A\$48 (US\$31), and twins with private bathroom cost A\$55 (US\$36).

The Ansonia ★ This boutique hotel in a restored Victorian building sports a glass atrium that runs the length of the property and is filled with plants and

wicker chairs. Studio rooms are simply but comfortably furnished, and have nice polished floorboards. The executive doubles are larger and a little plusher. The two family rooms can sleep four people in two bedrooms. There is a comfortable library and sitting room with an open fire and tea- and coffeemaking facilities, and plenty of flowers and art everywhere. Smoking is not allowed on the property.

32 Lydiard St. S., Ballarat 3350. ☎ 03/5332 4678. Fax 03/5332 4698. www.ballarat.com/ansoniam.htm. 20 units. A\$135 (US\$88) double; A\$150 (US\$98) executive double; A\$175 (US\$114) suite; A\$215 (US\$140) family room; A\$210 (US\$137) apt. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tour desk; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

Ballarat Goldfields Holiday Park ★ This very nice tourist park is a good option if you are staying around here for a couple of days. There are plenty of campsites and places to park your motorhome/campervan, lots of pleasant wooden cabins, green spaces, and shade. The pool's very nice, too. The park is a stroll to the main street, and a short drive to the main attractions.

108 Clayton St., Ballarat 3350. ☎ 1800/632 237 in Australia, or 03/5332 7888. www.ballaratgoldfields.com.au. A\$20–A\$22 (US\$13–US\$14) campsite (motorhome/caravan/tent); A\$56–A\$66 (US\$36–US\$43) cottage shared bathroom; A\$66–A\$80 (US\$43–US\$52) cottage with bathroom; A\$76–A\$90 (US\$49–US\$58) 1-bedroom villa; A\$92–A\$105 (US\$60–US\$68) 2-bedroom cottage. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; tennis court; Jacuzzi; children's playground; barbecues; TV and game rooms; indoor Camp Kitchen; fax facilities; Internet kiosk. *In room:* A/C, TV, cooking facilities.

The Sovereign Hill Lodge The colonial-style wooden buildings adjacent to the Sovereign Hill were built to resemble an 1850s Government Camp that was used to control (and tax) the mine fields. The residence building has rooms with queen-size beds and a set of single bunks, and the Offices building has heritage rooms with four-poster beds and Baltic pine furnishings, some with Jacuzzis. There are eight double rooms in the Superintendent's house, while the Barracks houses dorm rooms that sleep up to eight people. There's a bar, 24-hour reception, and a game room. Guests get a 10% discount off entry to Sovereign Hill.

Magpie St., Ballarat, VIC 3350. ☎ 03/5333 3409. Fax 03/5333 5861. www.sovereignhill.com.au. 37 units. A\$126 (US\$82) double; A\$138 (US\$90) heritage room. A\$32–A\$55 (US\$36–US\$21) dorm rooms. Extra person A\$14 (US\$9.10). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; spa (in heritage room); babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, iron.

WHERE TO DINE

Lake Pavilion Restaurant Café INTERNATIONAL I like this restaurant across from the Botanical Gardens and on the shores of Lake Wendouree. The Lake Pavilion was constructed in 1890 and still has that old-world atmosphere, with polished floorboards and high ceilings. You can eat either indoors or outside, but either way you have some good views across the gardens and the lake. The menu includes pizzas, focaccia sandwiches, various pasta dishes, salads, steaks, and seafood. It's licensed, but you can also bring your own wine. A kiosk adjacent to the restaurant sells cheap snacks.

Wendouree Parade (across from the Botanical Gardens). ☎ 03/5334 1811. Main courses around A\$11 (US\$7.15). AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–6pm. Bus: 15 Mon–Sat.

Robin Hood Family Bistro BISTRO The Robin Hood is located in a big old pub—not exactly a place where you'd expect to find a bistro catering to healthy eating. The bistro, though, is a past winner of the Real Meal Award, handed out by the Australian Hoteliers Association and aimed at promoting healthier pub food. Everything here is made with low-fat/low-cholesterol ingredients. On the menu you'll find steak-and-kidney pie, beef curry, and several types of steak. Not

healthy so far, perhaps, but there's an extensive salad bar, and all main courses come with a healthy dollop of vegetables.

33 Peel St. N. ☎ **03/5331 3348**. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat. Main courses A\$8–A\$20 (US\$5.20–US\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–8pm.

2 The Great Ocean Road: One of the World's Most Scenic Drives ★★

Geelong: 75km (47 miles) SW of Melbourne; Torquay: 94km (58 miles) SW of Melbourne; Port Campbell National Park: 285km (177 miles) SW of Melbourne; Peterborough: 200km (124 miles) SW of Melbourne

The Great Ocean Road—which hugs the coast from Torquay, and onwards through Anglesea, Lorne, Apollo Bay, and Port Campbell, until it ends at Peterborough—is one of Australia's most spectacular drives. The scenery along the 106km (66-mile) route includes huge cliffs, ocean vistas, beaches, rainforests, and some incredible rock formations. The settlements along the highway are small, but they offer a number of accommodations choices.

The best way to travel along the Great Ocean Road is to drive yourself at a leisurely pace, stopping off wherever your fancy takes you. The main attractions are in the coastal Port Campbell National Park, so don't be surprised if you're not overly impressed until you get there. If you are traveling on to Adelaide, you could stop off for 1 night along the Great Ocean Road, and spend another night in the Coorong in South Australia (see section 5, "The Coorong" in chapter 10).

ESSENTIALS

ORGANIZED TOURS **Melbourne Sightseeing** (☎ **03/9663 3388**) offers a bus trip featuring the highlights of the Great Ocean Road. Buses leave from Melbourne daily at 8:15am and return at 8:30pm—a journey I wouldn't like to attempt in a day. Tours cost A\$97 (US\$63) for adults—A\$54 (US\$35) if you have a YHA card—and A\$49 (US\$32) for children. The trip can be stretched out over 2 days with overnight accommodations; the price for the overnight trip ranges between A\$136 and A\$170 (US\$88–US\$111) depending on where you stay. **Grayline Sightseeing Tours** (☎ **03/9663 4455**) also has daily trips that cost A\$102 (US\$66) for adults and A\$51 (US\$33) for children.

Another option worth considering is a 2-day excursion with **Let's Go Bush Tours** (☎ **03/9662 3969**), which departs Melbourne every Wednesday and Saturday. The trip is less rushed than others, and you get to stay in the company's own house situated on the highest point of the Great Ocean Road. The trip costs A\$99 (US\$64), including dinner, breakfast, and accommodations.

Wild-Life Tours (☎ **1300/650 288** or 03/9747 1882; www.wildlifetours.com.au) offers a 3-day Great Ocean Road tour from Melbourne, including a visit to The Grampians, for A\$135 (US\$88). The company also offers a 2-day trip from Melbourne to Adelaide along the Great Ocean Road for A\$129 (US\$84) one-way. Prices do not include accommodations or food. Inquire about discounts.

V/Line (☎ **13 61 96** in Victoria, or 03/9619 5000) runs a combined train/coach Coast Link service to Warrnambool, via Geelong, Lorne, Apollo Bay, and Port Campbell. The train leaves Melbourne daily at 8:50am, 12:40, and 6:08pm—but check before turning up—and then you transfer onto a bus at Geelong. The bus tours the Great Ocean Road, stopping off at lookout points (and for lunch) and then carries on to Warrnambool. The round-trip costs A\$80 (US\$52) for adults and A\$39 (US\$23) for children. Ask about family-saver fares.

VISITOR INFORMATION Most places along the route have their own information centers. If you're coming from Melbourne, stop at the **Geelong & Great Ocean Road Visitors Centre**, Stead Park, Princess Highway, Geelong, VIC 3220 (☎/fax 03/5275 5797; www.greatoceanrd.org.au). You can book accommodations here, which you should do in advance, especially in summer. There's also a **visitor center** at the National Wool Museum, 26 Moorabool St., Geelong (☎ 1800/620 888 in Australia, or 03/5222 2900).

Along the route, the **Port Campbell Visitor Information Centre**, at Port Campbell National Park, Morris Street, Port Campbell, VIC 3269 (☎ 03/5598 6382), is also a good place to pick up brochures. It has some interesting displays and an audio-visual show of the area, and also acts as a hotel booking service for the area. It's open from 9am to 5pm daily.

If you're approaching from the north, visit the **Camperdown Visitor Information Centre**, "Court House," Manifold Street, Princes Highway, Camperdown (☎ 03/5593 3390). It's open Monday through Friday from 9:30am to 5pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 4pm, and Sunday from 11am to 4pm.

EXPLORING THE COASTAL ROAD

Along the route you might want to stop off at Torquay, a township dedicated to surfing. The main surf beach here is much nicer than the one farther down the coast in Lorne. While in Torquay, check out **Surfworld Museum**, Surfcity Plaza, Beach Road, West Torquay (☎ 03/5261 4606), which has interactive exhibits dealing with surfboard design and surfing history, and video of the world's best surfers. Admission is A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for adults, A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children, and A\$18 (US\$11) for families. Bells Beach, just down the road, is world-famous in surfing circles for its perfect waves.

Lorne has some nice boutiques and is a good place to stop off for lunch or stay the night. The stretch from **Lorne to Apollo Bay** is one of the most spectacular sections of the route, as the road narrows and twists and turns along a cliff edge with the ocean on the other side. Apollo Bay is a pleasant town that was once a whaling station. It has good sandy beaches and is more low-key than Lorne.

Next, you come to the **Angahook-Lorne State Park**, which protects most of the coastal section of the Otway Ranges from Aireys Inlet, south of Anglesea, to Kennett River. It has plenty of well-marked rainforest walks and picnic areas at Shelly Beach, Elliot River, and Blanket Bay. There's plenty of wildlife around.

About 13km (8 miles) past Apollo Bay, just off the main road, you can take a stroll through the rainforest on the **Maits Rest Rainforest Boardwalk**. A little farther along the main road, an unpaved road leads north past Hopetoun Falls and Beauchamp Falls to the settlement of **Beech Forest**. Seven kilometers (4½ miles) farther along the main road another unpaved road heads off south for 15km (9½ miles) to a windswept headland and the **Cape Otway Lighthouse**. Built by convicts in 1848, the 100m (328-ft.) tall lighthouse is open to tourists daily. Admission is A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for adults and A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) for children. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. Ask about guided tours.

Back on the main road again, your route heads inland through an area known as Horden Vale, before running to the sea at Glenaire—there's good **surfing and camping at Johanna**, 6km (3¾ miles) north of here. Then the Great Ocean Road heads north again to Lavers Hill, a former timber town. Five kilometers (3 miles) southwest of Lavers Hill is the small **Melba Gully State Park**, where you can spot glowworms at night and walk along routes of rainforest ferns. Keep an eye out for one of the last giant gum trees that escaped the

loggers—it's some 27m (88 ft.) in circumference and is estimated to be more than 300 years old.

The next place of note is Moonlight Head, which marks the start of the “**Shipwreck Coast**”—a 120km (74-mile) stretch of coastline running to Port Fairy that claimed more than 80 ships in only 40 years at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

Just past Princetown starts the biggest attraction of the trip, **Port Campbell National Park** ★★. With its sheer cliffs and coastal rock sculptures, it's one of the most immediately recognizable images of natural Australia. You can't miss the **Twelve Apostles**, a series of rock pillars standing in the foam just offshore. Other attractions are the **Blowhole**, which throws up huge sprays of water; the **Grotto**, a rock formation intricately carved by the waves; **London Bridge**, which looked quite like the real thing until the center crashed into the sea in 1990 (leaving a bunch of tourists stranded on the wrong end); and the **Loch Ard Gorge**. **Port Fairy**, a lovely fishing town once known as Belfast by Irish immigrants who settled here to escape the potato famine, is also on the Shipwreck Coast.

Not far past the town of Peterborough, the Great Ocean Road heads inland to Warrnambool to eventually join the Princes Highway heading toward Adelaide.

WHERE TO STAY ALONG THE WAY

The **Great Ocean Road Accommodation Centre**, 136 Mountjoy Parade, Lorne, VIC 3232 (☎ 03/5289 1800), rents out cottages and units along the route.

IN LORNE

Lorne is a good option for a night's rest. Though the beach is nothing special it's a great place to learn to surf. There are plenty of restaurants, and lots of boutiques.

Great Ocean Road Cottages *(Kids)* This complex has it all, although with so many people around (and quite a few children), it can be a little noisy in summer. There's a set of self-contained cottages, set away from each other in a quiet patch of bushland, about a 5-minute walk from the town center. Each cottage is a two-story wooden hut with a double bed, two twin beds, and a pullout mattress. There's also a bathroom and a full kitchen. Just down the road is **Waverley House**, a historic mansion that has been divided into seven apartments. All of them are nice, but they vary enormously in size and furnishing.

Also on the property is **Great Ocean Road Backpackers**, which offers dorm-style accommodations for A\$18 (US\$12) for YHA members and A\$21 (US\$13) for non-members. They also have a few family rooms. (Discounts apply to all backpacker beds for YHA members.)

10 Erskine Ave. (P.O. Box 60), Lorne, VIC 3232. ☎ 03/5289 1070. Fax 03/5289 2508. greatoceanrdocotts@iprimus.com.au. 10 cottages, 7 apts, dorms sleeping 40. A\$130 (US\$85) double off-season; A\$220 (US\$143) double peak season; A\$145–A\$220 (US\$94–US\$143) apts. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Spa; free bike rental; free laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (cottages only), TV/VCR, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

IN APOLLO BAY

Bayside Gardens Opposite the beach, with good ocean views from the front rooms, Bayside Gardens is a pleasant place to stay—and you can save money on meals by cooking in your own kitchen. The units all have a separate bedroom with a double bed, a lounge area, kitchen, and attached bathroom with shower. Rooms at the front can be noisy if you're not used to living beside an ocean. There are wood fires in some of the units, and all rooms have central heating. Fry your fish on barbecues scattered around the grounds. It's a 10-minute walk to town.

219 Great Ocean Rd., Apollo Bay, VIC 3233. ☎/fax 03/5237 6248. baysidegardens@iprimus.com.au. 10 units. A\$70–A\$110 (US\$46–US\$72) 1- and 2-bedroom apts. Higher rates apply Christmas, Jan, Easter, and public holidays. Minimum 1-week stay in Jan (A\$980/US\$637 per week). MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge.

IN PORT CAMPBELL

Macka's Farm ★ *Finds Kids* This working farm is inland from the Twelve Apostles. (Continue on from the Twelve Apostles for 2km/1¼ miles and turn off at the sign for Macka's farm—it's another 4km/2½ miles inland from there.) The units all have kitchens, so you can cook your own feast. Otherwise, you can order meals by prior arrangement outside peak season, or visit one of the nearby restaurants. Rooms sleep between six and eight in a mixture of singles and doubles. There's no TV—but who needs it when there are lots of pigs, cows, ducks, and chickens running around? Overall, it's a great farm experience.

RSD 2305 Princetown Rd., Princetown, VIC 3269. ☎ 03/5598 8261. Fax 03/5598 8201. www.mackasfarm.com.au. 3 units. A\$94–A\$110 (US\$61–US\$72) double, depending on season. Extra person A\$28 (US\$18). MC, V. *In room:* Kitchen, fridge, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE IN LORNE

Arab Restaurant ★ INTERNATIONAL This popular bistro serves some of the best food along this part of the coast. The house specialty is chicken Kiev, but you can also tuck into dishes such as the fish of the day or chicken schnitzel. The apple crumble is delicious.

Mount Joy Parade. ☎ 03/5289 1435. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$11–A\$19 (US\$6.80–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 9am–9pm; Sat 8am–11pm; Sun 7:30am–10pm. Closed Christmas.

Marks ★ INTERNATIONAL Lorne's best restaurant is a classy joint with simple wooden chairs and tables set in an elegant fashion in a cool, yellow-walled interior. Dishes include fried calamari salad, spicy octopus, risotto, and the oven-baked vine-wrapped goat cheese and macadamia nut parcel on eggplant paté with red capsicum purée. The bar is open for coffee and drinks all day.

Mount Joy Parade. ☎ 03/5289 2787. Main courses A\$12–A\$23 (US\$7.80–US\$15). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm (Sat–Sun only in winter) and 6–9pm (year-round). Closed in May.

Ozone Milk Bar *Value* AUSTRALIAN MILK BAR An Ozzie icon, a milk bar is a kind of downmarket cafe that sells everything from shakes and pies to newspapers. This one sells good pies and quiche, a veggie burger I wouldn't recommend, chicken-fillet burgers, cookies, ice cream, and small homemade cakes. The milkshakes are particularly good. You can sit inside or around three tables outside. There's a Thai place next door, but it's very unwelcoming.

Mount Joy Parade. ☎ 03/5289 1780. Menu items A\$1.80–A\$4 (US\$1.20–US\$2.60). No credit cards. Daily 7am–6pm (to 11pm Christmas to end of Jan).

3 The Murray River ★

Mildura: 544km (337 miles) NW of Melbourne; Albury-Wadonga: 305km (189 miles) N of Melbourne; Echuca: 210km (130 miles) N of Melbourne

The Murray is Australia's version of the Mississippi River. Though it's a rushing torrent of white water at its source in the Snowy Mountains, it becomes slow moving and muddy brown by the time it becomes the meandering border between Victoria and New South Wales. The Darling River, which starts off in Queensland, feeds the Murray; together they make Australia's longest river.

Aborigines once used the Murray as a source of food and transportation, and later the water was plied by paddle steamers, laden with wool and crops from the

land it helped irrigate. In 1842, the Murray was “discovered” by explorers Hamilton Hume and William Howell on the first overland trek from Sydney to Port Phillip, near Melbourne. As Hume later wrote, on their trek the explorers “suddenly arrived at the bank of a very fine river—at least 60m (200 ft.) wide, apparently deep, the bank being 2.4m or 2.7m (8 ft. or 9 ft.) above the level, which is overflowed at the time of flood . . . In the solid wood of a healthy tree I carved my name.” You can still see the carved initials on a tree standing by the riverbank in Albury, on the border between the two states.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Most visitors cross the river during an overland drive between cities. There are two routes to get to the Murray from Melbourne: Either take the Calder Highway to Mildura, which is a 6-hour drive, or take the 2½-hour route down the Midland Highway to Echuca. Traveling from Melbourne to Mildura is only practical if you’re continuing on to Broken Hill, which is 297km (184 miles) north of Mildura. Those in a hurry to get to and from Sydney can travel via the river-straddling twin towns of Albury-Wodonga on the Hume Highway (about a 12-hr. trip with short stops).

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96 in Victoria, or 03/9619 5000) runs regular train services to Mildura, Echuca, and Albury-Wodonga.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Echuca and Moama and District Visitor Information Centre**, 2 Heygarth St., Echuca, VIC 3564 (☎ 1800/804 446 or 03/5480 7555; fax 03/5482 6413; www.echucamoama.com), has plenty of maps and information about accommodations and river cruises. It’s open daily from 9am to 5pm. The **Mildura Visitor Information & Booking Centre**, 180–190 Deakin Ave., Mildura, VIC 3502 (☎ 1800/039 043 or 03/5021 4424; fax 03/5021 1836; www.milduratourism.com; tourism@mildura.vic.gov.au), offers similar services. It’s open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm and weekends from 9am to 5pm. If you’re passing through Albury, contact the **Gateway Visitors Information Centre**, Gateway Village, Lincoln Causeway, Wadonga, VIC 3690 (☎ 1800/800 743 or 02/6041 3875; fax 02/6021 0322), open daily from 9am to 5pm.

RIVER CRUISES & OTHER FUN STUFF

IN MILDURA Mildura is one of Australia’s most important fruit-growing areas. There was a time, however, when this was just semi-arid, red dust country. The area bloomed due to a little ingenuity and, of course, the Murray. The original irrigation system consisted of two English water pumps and the manual labor of hundreds of immigrants, who were put to work clearing the scrub and digging channels through the new fields. Today, the hungry land soaks up the water.

Several paddle steamers leave from Mildura wharf. One of the nicest boats is the **PS Melbourne** (☎ 03/5023 2200; fax 03/5021 3017), which was built in 1912 and is still powered by steam. It offers 2-hour trips leaving at 10:50am and 1:50pm. The fare is A\$18.50 (US\$12) for adults and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for children (free for children under 5).

The *PS Melbourne*’s sister ship, the **Rothbury**, was built in 1881, but its steam-driven engine has been replaced by a conventional engine. It churns out a winery cruise every Thursday from 10:30am to 3:30pm, stopping off at a winery for tastings and a barbecue lunch. The trip costs A\$42 (US\$27) for adults and A\$20 (US\$13) for children. The *Rothbury* has evening dinner cruises every Thursday from 7 to 10pm for A\$40 (US\$26) for adults and A\$18 (US\$12) for

children. You can also take the paddleboat to the Golden River Zoo (see below) during school holiday periods leaving Mildura Wharf at 9:50am on Wednesday morning (returning at 3pm). The trip costs A\$32 (US\$21) for adults and A\$16 (US\$10) for children 5 to 14, including zoo entry.

On dry land, the **Golden River Zoo**, Flora Avenue, Mildura (☎ 03/5023 5540; www.goldenriverzoo.com.au), is a pleasant place to see native animals. The zoo fronts onto the river 4km (2½ miles) from the city center down 11th Street. The animals here virtually follow you around (on the lookout for food) as you walk through their large enclosures. Admission is A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults and A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children, including a free barbecue lunch at noon and a free tractor-train ride down to the river at 1:30pm and an animal show. The zoo is open daily, except Christmas Day, from 10am to 5pm.

IN ECHUCA In Echuca, another paddle steamer is the *Emmylou* (☎ 03/5480 2237; fax 03/5480 2927; www.emmylou.com.au). A 2-day/2-night cruise leaves the Port of Echuca Wednesday at 6pm and returns at noon on Friday (check sailings beforehand). The cruise includes a visit to the Barmah, an area famous for its wetlands and the largest red gum trees in the world, or depending on river levels, a stop at Perricoota Station. The trip costs A\$415 to A\$435 (US\$270–US\$283) per person, depending on cabin. Children 4 to 14 receive a 25% discount. An overnight trip leaves on Saturday at 6pm and returns at 10am on Sunday. It costs A\$195 to A\$210 (US\$127–US\$137) per person including breakfast; dinner is extra. The *Emmylou* also offers day trips costing A\$15 (US\$9.75) for adults and A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) for kids for 1 hour, and A\$18 (US\$12) for adults and A\$9 (US\$5.90) for kids for 1½ hours.

The **Port of Echuca** (☎ 03/5482 4248; www.portofechuca.org.au) is definitely worth a look. The three-level red gum wharf was built in 1865 and is still used by paddle steamers. The Port owns the PS *Adelaide*, the oldest operating wooden-hulled paddle steamer in the world (1866), the PS *Pevensey* (1911), and the PS *Alexander Arbuthnot* (1923). One-hour cruises on the latter two are offered daily at 10:15, 11:30am, 1, 2:15, and 3:30pm for A\$15 (US\$9.90) for adults and A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for children. You can take a look around the wharf on a guided tour, priced at A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults and A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) for children. Ask about combined and family prices. Outside the Port, in the Echuca Port Precinct, there are various things to do, including carriage rides and old penny arcade machines in Sharpes Magic Movies, in an old riverboat warehouse.

TRIPS INTO THE OUTBACK If you want to get out into the Outback, then trips from Mildura with **Mallee Outback Experiences**, P.O. Box 82, Nichols Point, VIC 3501 (☎/fax 03/5021 1621, or 0418/521 0030), are worth the effort. The company offers two trips. The first goes to **Mungo National Park** ★, famous for its red sand dunes and shifting sands; I highly recommend you go and see. The second is to **Hattah National Park**, which has some gorgeous river plains, Murray River lakes, pine forests, and more mallee scrub. The Mungo trip leaves every Wednesday and Saturday, and the Hattah National Park trip every Friday. All trips cost A\$55 (US\$36) for adults, A\$33 (US\$21) for children, and A\$132 (US\$86) for a family of five.

You can get to these two national parks on your own, but it's best to have a 4WD vehicle—even better if you go with an experienced guide. Mungo National Park is a unique, arid region 110km (68 miles) northeast of Mildura, off the Sturt Highway. People come here to see the **Walls of China**, a moon-scape of intricately weathered red sand. The walls edge onto Lake Mungo, a

huge freshwater lake during the last Ice Age that is now dry. A 60km (37 mile) driving tour starting at the visitor center at the park's entrance takes you across the lake bed to the Walls of China. There are several short walks leading off from the campsites at the park entrance. Call the **National Parks & Wildlife Service NSW** (☎ 1300/361 967 in Australia) for more information on Mungo. Just outside the park, the **Mungo Lodge** (☎ 03/5029 7297; www.mungolodge.com.au) offers affordable motel accommodation and a casual restaurant.

WHERE TO STAY IN MILDURA

Mildura Grand Hotel ★★☆☆ This huge 19th-century hotel is right in the center of Mildura, overlooking the Murray River. Double rooms are comfortable, and many were refurbished in 2002. Suites are bigger, and some have balconies and garden views. State suites are plush and come with a king-size bed. The Presidential suite (the most expensive) is Art Deco inspired, with a large marble bathroom and spa. This place is now very famous for Stefano's, the restaurant of celeb chef Stefano di Pietri. Voted Best Restaurant in 2002, the place offers a set menu of five to six courses for A\$66 (US\$43), featuring the best local produce.

Seventh St., Mildura, VIC 3500. ☎ 1800/034 228 in Australia, or 03/5023 0511. Fax 03/5022 1801. www.milduragrand.com. 102 units. A\$110–A\$143 (US\$72–US\$93) grand room double; A\$176–A\$462 (US\$114–US\$300) suite. Rates include breakfast. Extra person A\$22 (US\$14). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; large outdoor pool; golf course nearby; access to nearby health club, spa, sauna; 24-hr. concierge; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

IN ECHUCA

Echuca Gardens B&B and YHA There are evening gatherings around the piano at this popular two-story log cabin B&B, as well as a pretty neat Jacuzzi in the front yard surrounded by murals and landscaped water gardens. Rooms are decorated in native flower themes, and all have balconies. Two rooms have showers in the bathroom, and another has a shower on the second floor. It's a short stroll from the B&B to either the river or a state forest. The YHA has a basic twin room inside and three tent-like cabins outside, one with a double bed and the other with two singles. There are also three basic dorm rooms with beds going for A\$18 (US\$12) for YHA members and A\$22 (US\$14) for non-members.

103 Mitchell St., Echuca, VIC 3564. ☎ 03/5480 6522, or 0419/881 054. Fax 03/5482 6951. www.echucagardens.com. 6 units (3 in B&B and 3 in hostel). A\$150 (US\$98) B&B room weekends, A\$120 (US\$78) weekdays. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Spa; sauna; bike rental; tour desk; massage; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

IN ALBURY

Hume Country Golf Club Motor Inn This is a good place to stop if you're making the trip north to Sydney. Just on the New South Wales side of the border, this motor inn has typical motel rooms and two large family rooms, one sleeping five, the other seven. Suites are also large and come with a Jacuzzi. All rooms overlook the 27-hole golf course, where a round of golf costs A\$20 (US\$13).

736 Logan Rd., Albury, NSW 2640. ☎ 02/6025 8233. Fax 02/6040 4999. humegolfmotel@primus.com.au. 25 units. A\$82 (US\$53) double; A\$90 (US\$59) family room; A\$115 (US\$75) suite. Extra person A\$10 (US\$6.50). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; golf course on the premises; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

4 The Southeast Coast

The Princes Highway wanders down the coast from Sydney just past Eden, then darts across into Victoria, passing through the logging town of Orbost, and then dipping down toward Lakes Entrance. The highway continues to the southwest, swooping in an arch to Melbourne.

This region's most interesting sights are Wilsons Promontory National Park, and—to a lesser extent—the Snowy River National Park.

WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK

200km (124 miles) SE of Melbourne

"The Prom," as it's called, is Victoria's best-loved national park. Dipping down into Bass Strait, the park—named after a prominent London businessman—marks the southernmost point on Australia's mainland. It's thought to have been joined once to Tasmania by a land bridge. The best time to visit the park is from late September to early December, when all the bush flowers are in bloom.

Visitors come here for the spectacular granite mountains, the thick forests and vast plains, and some of the country's best beaches. Wildlife abounds in the park, including plenty of koalas, kangaroos, wallabies, possums, echidnas, wombats, and emus. You can hand-feed crimson rosellas at the capital of the Prom, Tidal River, but you'll find little more here than the national park's **Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 1800/350 552 in Australia, or 03/5680 9555) and camping and caravan grounds. There are plenty of trails leading off into the mountains: Following the longer trails can turn into a 2- or 3-day excursion, though shorter day hikes are possible. One of the best trails is the 1-hour Mt. Oberon walk, which starts from the Mt. Oberon parking lot and offers superb views. Visitors also rave about the Squeaky Beach Nature Walk, a 1½-hour walk from Tidal River to the next bay and back.

There are some 30 beaches, some of which are easily accessible. Norman's Beach in Tidal River is the most popular, and it's the only one recommended for swimming. No snorkeling or lifeguards are at these beaches, but they're gorgeous.

ENTRY FEES Park entry costs A\$9 (US\$5.90) for cars, which you pay at the park entrance gate, 30km (19 miles) north of Tidal River. The gate is open 24 hours, but if you arrive late and the collection station is closed, pay the following morning at Tidal River.

GETTING THERE From Melbourne, take the South Gippsland Highway (B440), turning south at Meeniyan and again at Fish Creek or Foster. The route is clearly posted with signs. Tidal River is 30km (19 miles) inside the park boundary.

There's no public transportation to the park. You can, however, take the V/Line bus from Melbourne to Foster (fare: A\$21/US\$14), which is 60km (37 miles) north of the park. In Foster, you can stay at the **Foster Backpackers Hostel**, 17 Pioneer St., Foster, VIC 3960 (☎ 03/5682 2614). It's basically a private home with a few spare rooms; the two doubles cost A\$44 (US\$29), and dorm beds go for A\$19 (US\$12). There are also 2 fully self-contained apartments for \$55 (US\$36). The owner offers daily transport to Tidal River for A\$22 (US\$14) each way; the trip takes around 45 minutes.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The national park's Tourist Information Center operates 17 self-contained cabins costing A\$119 to A\$130 (US\$77–US\$84) a night for two, depending on season.

They can accommodate up to six people; each extra adult costs A\$17 (US\$11) and child A\$11 (US\$7.15). In addition, five “Lorikeet” units cost A\$58 to A\$93 (US\$38–US\$60) a night for two and A\$94 to A\$134 (US\$61–US\$87) for three or four (higher prices in summer). For bookings call ☎ 03/5680 9500 or fax 03/568 09516.

Waratah Park Country House If you don’t feel like roughing it, this is the only place within the park that will do. Rooms, with king-size beds and double spas, offer stunning views over Wilsons Promontory and a dozen or so islands. The food here is excellent, too. The hotel is also next to the new Cape Liptrap Coastal Park, home to some 120 species of birds.

It’s a friendly place, and the hosts will sit down with you and go through the things you want to do in the area. A V/Line coach operates from Melbourne to Fish Creek (about 10 min. away), and the owner will pick you up at the station.

Thomson Rd., Waratah Bay, VIC 3959. ☎ 03/5683 2575. Fax 03/5683 2275. www.wpe.com.au. 6 units. A\$78 (US\$51) including breakfast; A\$115 (US\$75) Sun–Thurs including 4-course dinner and breakfast; A\$280 (US\$182) for weekend package including 2 nights’ lodgings, 2 breakfasts, and two 4-course dinners. All rates are per person. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; babysitting (dinnertime only); nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

5 The High Country

Victoria’s High Country is made up of the hills and mountains of the Great Dividing Range, which runs from Queensland, through New South Wales, to just before Ballarat, where it drops away and reappears in the mountains of the Grampians, in the western part of Victoria. The range separates inland Australia from the greener coastal belt. The highest mountain in the Victorian segment of the range is Mt. Bogong, which at just 1,988m (6,521 ft.) is minuscule by world mountain standards.

The main attractions of the High Country are its natural features, which include moorland and typical mountainous alpine scenery. It’s also popular for its outdoor activities, including hiking, canoeing, white-water rafting, mountain bike riding, and rock climbing. The High Country is also the home of the Victorian ski fields, based around Mt. Buller, Mt. Stirling, Falls Creek, Mt. Buffalo, and Mt. Hotham. If you plan to go walking here make sure you have plenty of water and sunscreen, as well as a tent and a good-quality sleeping bag. As in any alpine region temperatures can plummet dramatically. In summer, days can be very hot, and nights very cold.

SNOWY RIVER NATIONAL PARK ★

390km (242 miles) NE of Melbourne

The Snowy River National Park, with its lovely river scenery and magnificent gorges, protects Victoria’s largest forest wilderness areas. The Snowy River was once a torrent worthy of Banjo Patterson’s famous poem, but since Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric came along and erected a series of dams, it’s become a mere trickle of its former self.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND There are two main access roads to the park, the Gelantipy Road from Buchan and the Bonang Freeway from the logging township of Orbost. MacKillop’s Road (also known as Deddick River Rd.) runs across the park’s northern border from Bonang to a little south of Wulgulmerang. Around MacKillop’s Bridge, along MacKillop’s Road, is some spectacular scenery, and the park’s best campgrounds, set beside some

nice swimming holes and sandy river beaches. The Barry Way leads through the main township of Buchan, where you'll find some of Australia's best caves.

VISITOR INFORMATION The main place to get information on Snowy River National Park and Alpine National Park is the **Buchan Caves Information Centre**, in the Buchan Caves complex (Buchan Caves, VIC 3083). It's open daily from 9am to 4pm (closed Christmas). Or call **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63 in Victoria, or 03/5155 9264).

EXPLORING THE BUCHAN CAVES

The **Buchan Caves** ★ (☎ 03/5155 9264) are set in a scenic valley that is particularly beautiful in autumn, when all the European trees are losing their leaves. Tourists can visit the Royal and Fairy caves (which are quite similar), with their fabulous stalactites and stalagmites. There are several tours daily: April to September at 11am, 1, and 3pm; October to March at 10 and 11:15am, 1, 2:15, and 3:30pm. Entry to one cave costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children ages 5 to 16, and A\$25 (US\$16) for families of five.

To reach the caves from the Princes Highway, turn off at Nowa Nowa (it's well-signposted), or if you're coming south from Jindabyne in New South Wales (see chapter 4) follow the Barry Way, which runs alongside the Snowy River.

Want to feel like the Man from Snowy River? **Snowy Mountain Rider Tours**, Karoonda Park, Gelantipy (☎ 03/5155 0220; fax 03/5155 0308), offers half-day horseback rides in the Snowy River National Park for A\$60 (US\$39), and full-day tours for A\$120 (US\$78) including lunch. Four-day trips including camping and all meals costs A\$520 (US\$338). The company also arranges rafting on Snowy River for A\$120 (US\$78) a day including lunch.

ALPINE NATIONAL PARK ★★

333km (206 miles) NE of Melbourne, 670km (415 miles) SW of Sydney

Victoria's largest national park at 646,000 hectares (1,595,620 acres), the Alpine National Park connects the High Country areas of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The park's scenery is spectacular, encompassing most of the state's highest mountains, wild rivers, impressive escarpments, forests, and high plains. Much of the park was devastated by horrific bushfires in December 2002, but at the time of writing it was recovering quickly. The flora is diverse; in all, some 1,100 plant species have been recorded within the park's boundaries, including 12 not found anywhere else. Walking here is particularly good in spring and summer, when the Bogong High Plains are covered in a carpet of wildflowers. Other impressive walking trails include the 5.7km (3.5-mile) route through Bryce Gorge to The Bluff, a 200m (356-ft.) high rocky escarpment with panoramic views. Of the numerous other walking tracks in the park, the most well known is the Alpine Walking Track, which bisects the park for 400km (248 miles) from Walhalla to the township of Tom Groggin, on the New South Wales border. There are plenty of access roads into the park, though some close in winter.

If you are a keen walker, you could strap on your boots and see the area by foot. **Ecotrek** (☎ 08/8383 7198; ecotrek@ozemail.com.au) offers an 8-day Bogong Alpine Traverse trek, including 4 nights camping and 3 nights in ski lodges. You carry your own pack, but the pain is worth it for the incredible panoramic views of peaks, plains, and forested valleys. The trek costs A\$1,150 (US\$748), including round-trip transport to Melbourne. The company also offers a 5-day trek that

involves camping and day walks through extremely rugged country. It costs A\$630 (US\$410), including round-trip transport to Melbourne.

Horse treks are another option for seeing the area. One of the best operators is **Stoney's Bluff & Beyond Rides** (☎ 03/5775 2212; www.stoneys.com.au).

GETTING THERE The Alpine National Park can be accessed by several routes from Melbourne, including the Great Alpine Road (B500), the Kiewa Valley Highway (C531), and the Lincoln Road from Heyfield. Get to The Bluff from Mansfield along the Maroodah Highway.

HITTING THE SLOPES: THE HIGH COUNTRY SKI RESORTS

Most of the **Victoria's ski areas** ⚡ are in, or on the edge of, the Alpine National Park (see above). The ski season in the Victorian High Country lasts June through October, with July and August being the most popular months.

MT. HOTHAM

373km (231 miles) NE of Melbourne

Mt. Hotham (1,750m/5,740 ft.) is an intimate ski resort significantly smaller than those at Falls Creek (see below). There are eight lifts offering runs from beginner to advanced. It also offers some good off-piste (off-trail) cross-country skiing, including a route across the Bogong High Plains to Falls Creek. Some of the lifts are quite far apart, although there's a free "zoo cart" and bus transport system in winter along the main road. Resort entry costs A\$20 (US\$13) per car for a day, payable at the resort entry gates, or at the Mount Hotham Resort Management office (see "Visitor Information" below). Ski tickets are available from Mount Hotham Skiing Company (☎ 03/5759 4444). Full-day lift tickets cost between A\$59 and A\$72 (US\$38–US\$47) for adults and A\$33 and A\$39 (US\$21–US\$25) for children, depending on time of season. Combined lift and ski-lesson tickets are also available.

GETTING THERE From Melbourne, take the Hume Highway via Harrietteville, or the Princes Highway via Omeo. The trip takes around 5½ hours (the trip is slightly quicker on the Hume Hwy.). Fly to Mt. Hotham Airport from Melbourne and Sydney with **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13).

Trekset Mount Hotham Snow Service (☎ 03/9370 9055) runs buses to Mt. Hotham daily during the ski season departing Melbourne's Spencer Street Coach Terminal at 9am. The trip takes 6 hours and costs A\$70 (US\$46) one-way or A\$105 (US\$68) round-trip. You need to book in advance.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Mount Hotham Resort Management**, Great Alpine Road, Mt. Hotham, VIC 3699 (☎ 03/5759 3550), is as close as you'll come to an information office. It has plenty of brochures. It's open daily from 8am to 5pm during ski season, and Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm at other times.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The **Mt. Hotham Accommodation Service** (☎ 1800/032 061; www.mthothamaccommodation.com.au) can book rooms and advise you on special deals during both off-peak and peak periods, including flights. Another option is **Falls Creek Reservations Centre** (☎ 1800/453 525 in Australia). The general Mt. Hotham web page is www.mthotham.com.au. During the ski season, most places will want you to book for an entire week. Accommodations in the alpine regions is much cheaper outside the ski season (roughly June to the end of Sept), and the popular Christmas/January period.

FALLS CREEK

375km (233 miles) NE of Melbourne

One of Victoria's best ski resorts, and my favorite, Falls Creek is situated on the edge of the Bogong High Plains overlooking the Kiewa Valley. This compact alpine village is the only one in Australia where you can ski from your lodge to the lifts and back again from the ski slopes. The nightlife is also very good in the ski season, with plenty of party options as well as a range of walk-in lodge restaurants.

The ski fields are split into two parts, the Village Bowl and Sun Valley, with 17 lifts covering more than 90 trails. There are plenty of intermediate and advanced runs, as well as a sprinkling for beginners. You'll also find some of Australia's best cross-country skiing here; Australia's major cross-country skiing event, the Kangaroo Hoppet, is held here on the last Saturday in August every year. Entry to the resort costs A\$6 (US\$3.90). Full-day lift tickets cost from A\$59 to A\$75 (US\$38–\$49) for adults and A\$33 to A\$39 (US\$21–\$25) for children, depending on the time you ski. (July 31–Aug 31 is the most expensive time, and June and after mid-Sept is the cheapest.) Combined lift and ski lesson tickets are also available. Call the **Falls Creek Ski Lifts** (☎ 03/5758 3280) for details. The ski lifts can also organize accommodations options.

Falls Creek is also a pleasant place to visit in summer, when you can go bushwalking, horseback riding, and trout fishing. **Angling Expeditions** (☎/fax 03/5754 1466) is the best option for fly-fishing for trout in the alpine area during spring, summer, and fall. Trips last from 3 hours to all day and are suitable for everyone from beginners to experts. Overnight trips are also available. Horseback riding operators include **Falls Creek Trail Rides** (☎ 03/5758 3655) and **Bogong Horseback Adventures** (☎ 03/5754 4849).

GETTING THERE **Pyles Coaches** (☎ 03/5754 4024) runs buses to the ski resort from Melbourne every day during the ski season (from the end of June to the end of Sept), departing Melbourne at 9am and Falls Creek at 5pm. The round-trip fare is A\$100 (US\$65) for adults and A\$75 (US\$49) for children and includes the resort entrance fee. The company also runs shuttle buses to and from Albury just over the border in New South Wales (accessible by train from Sydney), and between Mt. Beauty and Falls Creek. Bookings are essential.

If you're driving from Melbourne take the Hume Highway to Wangaratta, and then through Myrtleford and Mt. Beauty to Falls Creek. The trip takes around 4½ hours. From Sydney take the Hume Highway to Albury-Wodonga and follow the signs to Mt. Beauty and the snowfields. If you arrive in the ski season, a resort worker will direct you to a parking lot, and bring you back to the resort entrance, from where you can take a caterpillar-tracked "troop-carrier" to your hotel, or attempt the short but (probably) slippery walk yourself.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Falls Creek Information Centre**, 1 Bogong High Plains Rd., Falls Creek, VIC 3649 (☎ 03/5758 3490), is open daily from 8am to 5pm. Buy lift tickets in the booth next door, between mid-June and October.

Where to Stay & Dine

Falls Creek is a year-round resort, with a good range of accommodations available, though it tends to fill up fast during the ski season. As you might expect room rates are much higher during the ski season. The **Falls Creek Reservation Centre** (☎ 1800/453 525 in Australia, or 03/5758 3100; fax 03/5758 3337; www.fallscreek.net) can tell you what deals are on offer and can book rooms for you. The cheapest winter option is the very basic **Frying Pan Inn**, P.O. Box 55,

Falls Creek, VIC 3699 (☎ 03/5758 3390; fax 03/5758 3416), right in the village next to the ski lifts. Bunks in four- or six-bed rooms cost A\$58 (US\$38) per night Sunday through Thursday, and A\$68 (US\$44) Friday through Saturday, in the ski season. Packages are available.

If you fancy a self-contained apartment or freestanding chalet, try the **Frueauf Village** complex (☎ 03/9593 6125; www.fvfalls.com.au). These 28 properties were built in 2001 and 2002. In peak season they work out at about A\$100 (US\$65) per person per night for two or more.

Feathertop Alpine Lodge ★ *Finds* I really like this pleasant old-fashioned ski lodge nestled among the gum trees. Hosts Pip and Mark Whittaker have made it into one of the friendliest getaways in the mountains, and its relatively small size makes it easy to get to know a few of the other guests. Rooms are functional yet cozy, and sleep two to four people. All have showers attached. The lounge room is large and comfortable with good views, a well-stocked bar, and a library.

Parallel St. (P.O. Box 259), Falls Creek, VIC 3699. ☎ 03/5758 3232. Fax 03/5758 3514. www.ski.com.au/feathertop. 10 units. Winter A\$95–A\$185 (US\$62–US\$120); summer A\$70 (US\$46). Rates are per person and include dinner and breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; golf course nearby; 4 tennis courts (summer); health club nearby; children's center; tour/activities counter; business center on request; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Robes.

Summit Ridge Alpine Lodge ★ Summit Ridge is a four-and-a-half star property made from local rock and timber. It caters to discerning guests. All rooms are quite nice, if a little stark. The mezzanine suites are split-level with the bedroom upstairs; they have king-size beds and an attached bathroom with tub. There's a lounge and dining room on the ground floor and a library on the second. If the mist holds off there are some fine valley views. The hosts pay a lot of attention to detail, and the homemade bread is worth an early rise. The restaurant excels in fine dining. The owner can take you on early-morning ski runs.

Schuss St., Falls Creek, VIC 3699. ☎ 03/5758 3800. Fax 03/5758 3833. sunridge@falls.creek.albury.net.au. Winter A\$140–A\$230 (US\$88–US\$150) queen room per person. Summer A\$110 (US\$72) per person. Children 5–14 25% off adult rate. Rates include breakfast and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Children under 5 not allowed. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; exercise room; sauna; spa; in-room massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

MT. BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK ★★

350km (217 miles) NE of Melbourne

Based around Mt. Buffalo, this is the oldest national park in the Victorian High Country, declared in 1898. The scenery is spectacular, with huge granite outcrops and plenty of waterfalls. As you ascend the mountain you pass through dramatic vegetation changes, from tall snow gum forests to subalpine grasslands. In summer, carpets of silver snow daisies, royal bluebells, and yellow Billy Buton flowers bloom on the plateau. Animals and birds here include wallabies and wombats, cockatoos, lyrebirds, and mobs of crimson rosellas, which congregate around the campsite at Lake Catani (popular for swimming and canoeing). Other popular sports around and about include advanced hang gliding and some very serious rock climbing. There are also more than 90km (56 miles) of walking trails. The area is regenerating after bushfires in late 2002.

Mt. Buffalo is also home to Victoria's smallest ski resort, with just five lifts, and a vertical drop of 157m (515 ft.). There are also 11km (6¾ miles) of marked cross-country ski trails.

ENTRY FEES & LIFT TICKETS Entry to Mt. Buffalo ski resort is A\$20 (US\$13) per car. Full-day lift tickets cost around A\$39 (US\$25) for adults, A\$25

(US\$16) for children under 15, and A\$15 (US\$9.75) for children under 8. Combination lift and ski lesson packages are available. Buy lift tickets at the park offices (☎ 13 19 63 in Victoria, or 03/5756 2328) from 9am to 3pm.

GETTING THERE From Melbourne take the Hume Freeway (M31) to Wangaratta, then follow the Great Alpine Road to Porepunkah. From there follow the Mount Buffalo Tourist Road.

VISITOR INFORMATION The nearest visitor information center is in the town of Bright. Find the **Bright Visitor Information Centre** at 119 Gavan Street, Bright, VIC 3741 (☎ 03/5755 2275).

WHERE TO STAY

You can camp in the park, especially at Lake Catani camping ground, but you need a permit from the Parks Victoria ranger at the National Park entrance booth. Camping costs A\$12–A\$17 (US\$8–US\$11) depending on season. The **Mt. Buffalo Lodge** (☎ 1800/037 038 in Australia, or 03/5755 1988) has units from A\$140 to A\$180 (US\$91–US\$117) in the ski season, and around half that price in the low season.

Worth a Splurge

Mt. Buffalo Chalet ★★ *Finds* This rambling mountain guesthouse was built in 1910 and retains a wonderful old-world feel. Standard rooms are small with a comfortable bed and share a bathroom with others; Classic rooms are small but have their own bathroom. Heritage rooms are larger, have a nice old-time feel about them, and some have good views (ask for the View Heritage rooms); Tower rooms have excellent National Park views and are popular with honeymooners; Treetops rooms also have great views and are set apart from the main building. They also have a kitchenette and a separate lounge, which makes them good for small families. There's a large lounge room and a billiards room, both with open fireplaces. Meals are available for both guests and visitors. The associated **Mt. Buffalo Wilderness Lodge** also has units, costing from A\$140 to A\$180 (US\$91–US\$117) in the ski season, and around half that price in the low season.

Mt. Buffalo National Park, VIC 3740. ☎ 1800/037 038 in Australia, or 03/5755 1500. Fax 03/5755 1892. www.mtbuffalo chalet.com.au. 97 units, 72 with bathroom (some with shower only). A\$100–A\$150 (US\$65–US\$97) standard room without bathroom; A\$140–A\$200 (US\$91–US\$130) Classic room with bathroom; A\$190–A\$300 (US\$123–US\$195) Heritage view room with bathroom; A\$210–A\$320 (US\$136–US\$208) Tower; A\$240–A\$350 (US\$156–US\$227) Treetops with balcony. Rates include park entry. Highest rates Christmas to mid-Jan and Easter weekend, lowest rates in summer. Children rates 50% less. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 grass tennis courts; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; canoe rental; bike rental; kids' club on weekends.

6 The Northwest: Grampians National Park

260km (161 miles) NW of Melbourne

One of Victoria's most popular attractions, the rugged **Grampians National Park** rises some 1,000m (3,280 ft.) from the plains, appearing from the distance like some kind of monumental island. The park, which is an ecological meeting place of Victoria's western volcanic plains and the forested Great Dividing Range, contains one-third of all the wildflowers native to Victoria and most of the surviving Aboriginal rock art in southeastern Australia. Almost 200 species of birds, 35 different species of mammals, 28 species of reptiles, 11 species of amphibians, and 6 species of freshwater fish have been discovered here. Kangaroos, koalas, emus, gliders, and echidnas can be easily spotted.

There are some awesome sites in the Grampians, including Reeds Lookout and The Balconies, which are both accessible by road, and the Wonderland Range, which offers walking tracks leading past striking rock formations and massive cliffs to waterfalls and more spectacular lookouts.

The main town in the Grampians is Halls Gap, which is situated in a valley between the southern tip of the Mt. Difficult Range and the northern tip of the Mt. William Range. It's a good place to stock up on supplies. The Wonderland Range, with its stunning scenery, is close to Halls Gap, too. There are plenty of short strolls and longer bushwalks available.

A must-do stop on the park is the **Brambuk Aboriginal Living Cultural Centre** (☎ 03/5356 4452), adjacent to the park visitor center (see below). It offers an excellent introduction to the area's Aboriginal history and accessible rock-art sites. A 15-minute movie highlighting the local Aboriginal history costs A\$4.40 (US\$2.60) for adults and A\$2.50 (US\$1.60) for children. Otherwise, entrance to the center is free. The center is open daily from 10am to 5pm.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By car, the park is accessed from the Western Highway at Ararat, Stawell (pronounced "Storl"), or Horsham. Alternatively, you can access the southern entrance from the Glenelg Highway at Dunkeld. The western areas of the park are reached from the Henty Highway (A200).

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96 in Victoria, or 03/9619 5000) has daily train and bus service to Halls Gap from Melbourne. (The train goes to Stawell, and a bus takes you to your destination.) The trip takes around 4 hours.

GETTING AROUND Paved roads include the **Grampians Tourist Road**, which cuts through the park from Dunkeld to Halls Gap; the **Mt. Victory Road** from Halls Gap to Wartook; and the **Roses Gap Road**, which runs from Wartook across to Dadswells Bridge on the Western Highway. Many other roads in the park are unpaved, but most are passable with a two-wheel-drive car.

Grampians National Park Tours (☎ 03/5356 6221) offers all-day, 4WD tours of the park, stopping off at Aboriginal rock-art sites, waterfalls, and lookouts. There's not much walking involved, but you certainly get the chance to spot native animals and ferret around among the native flora. The tour includes lunch and morning and afternoon tea, and costs A\$75 (US\$49).

Auswalk, P.O. Box 516, Jindabyne, NSW 2627 (☎ 02/6457 2220; fax 02/6457 2206; monica@auswalk.com.au), organizes self-guided tours through the park. A 6-night tour for two or more people costs A\$1,090 (US\$708) per person including accommodations, most meals, national-park fees, some vehicle transfers, a half-day 4WD tour, an itinerary, and maps.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Grampians National Park Visitor Centre**, at Grampians Road, Halls Gap, VIC 3381 (☎ 03/5356 4379), is open daily from 9am to 5pm. The center, located 2.5km (1½ miles) south of Halls Gap, has plenty of maps and brochures, and the rangers can advise you on walking trails and camping spots.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

You can hire a caravan or a cabin for the night at **Halls Gap Caravan Park** (☎ 03/5356 4251). Caravans cost A\$40 to A\$45 (US\$26–US\$29) and cabins are A\$50 to A\$62 (US\$32–US\$40), depending on season. They also offer self-contained units from A\$62 to A\$99 (US\$40–US\$64), and log cabins from A\$127 to A\$138 (US\$82–US\$90). Another option is the **Halls Gap Lakeside Caravan**

Park (☎ 03/5356 4281), which is 5km (3 miles) from town on the shores of Lake Bellfield. Cabins cost A\$45 to A\$95 (US\$29–US\$62) depending on rooms and season.

The Mountain Grand Guesthouse This old-fashioned guesthouse has been brought up to a comfortable three-and-a-half star standard. These days it's promoting itself as a business retreat, and as such tourists who turn up get all the benefits of those added corporate extras, such as exceptional service. The Balconies Restaurant overlooks the garden and valley. The owner is a keen musician, and every Saturday night professional musicians provide music to dine by. Later, they move downstairs to the Limelight Cafe/Bar and play till late.

The guesthouse offers a 2-day getaway package costing A\$218 (US\$142) for two, with a Devonshire Tea, a three-course dinner, a buffet breakfast, and a gourmet picnic lunch, and champagne and chocolates thrown in.

Some rooms are quite small, but furnished with country-style furniture and double beds. All have an en suite bathroom. There are also larger rooms, some of which have a spa. There are several lounge rooms and "conversation nooks," all with TVs and dataports. Children are not allowed.

Main Rd., Town center, Halls Gap, Grampians ☎ 03/5356 4232. Fax 03/5356 4254. .www.mountaingrand.com.au. 13 units. A\$109 (US\$71) double (minimum 2-nights on weekend). Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No children. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; free laundry. *In room:* A/C, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

Canberra

by Marc Llewellyn

If you mention you're heading to Canberra (pronounced *Can-bra*, with very open vowels), most Australians will raise an eyebrow and say, "Why bother?" Even many Canberrans will admit that it's a great place to live but they wouldn't want to visit.

So what is it about Canberra that draws so much lackluster comment? Simply put, Australians aren't used to having things so nice and ordered. In many ways, Canberra is like Washington, D.C., or any town that was a planned community from the start. Some see its virtues as bland: The roads are wide and in good order, the buildings are modern, and the suburbs are pleasant and leafy. Canberra is also the seat of government and the home of thousands of civil servants—enough to make almost any freethinking, individualist Aussie shudder.

But to me, Canberra's differences are the very things that make it special. The streets aren't clogged with traffic, and there are plenty of opportunities for safe biking—try that in almost any other city center, and you'll be dusting the sides of cars and pushed onto the sidewalks in no time. There are plenty of open spaces, parklands, and monuments, and there is an awful lot to see and do—from museum and gallery

hopping to ballooning with a champagne glass in your hand, to boating on Lake Burley Griffin. You can pack a lot into a few days' visit.

Canberra was born after the Commonwealth of Australia was created in 1901. Melbourne and Sydney, even then jockeying for preeminence, each put in their bid to become the federal capital. In the end, Australian leaders decided to follow the example of their U.S. counterparts by creating a federal district; in 1908 they chose an undeveloped area between the two cities.

Designing the new capital fell to Chicago landscape architect Walter Burley Griffin, a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright. The city he mapped out was christened Canberra (a local Aboriginal word meaning "meeting place"), and by 1927, the first meeting of parliament took place. The business of government was underway.

Originally the land that became Canberra was predominantly grass plains. Over the years millions of trees have been planted in and around the city—lending it the nickname "the bush capital." Unfortunately, massive bushfires in January 2003 destroyed much of the surrounding forest and more than 500 homes in the suburbs.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING

BY PLANE **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) runs frequent daily services to Canberra. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) also connects Canberra to Sydney, and offers discount Web fares.



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- The Brassey of Canberra **20**
- City Walk Hotel **8**
- Forrest Inn Apartments **24**
- Kingston Court Apartments **21**
- University House **4**
- Victor Lodge **22**

DINING ◆

- Juniperberry **17**
- Lemon Grass **6**
- Little Saigon **7**
- The Palette Café **26**
- Portia's Place **23**
- Tosolini's **9**
- The Tryst **25**

ATTRACTIONS ●

- Australian Institute of Sport **3**
- Australian National Botanic Gardens **2**
- Australian War Memorial **11**
- Casino Canberra **10**
- High Court of Australia **15**
- National Capital Exhibition **12**
- National Library of Australia **13**
- National Gallery of Australia **16**
- National Museum of Australia **5**
- Old Parliament House **18**
- Parliament House **19**
- Questacon **14**
- Telstra Tower **1**

The Canberra Airport is about 10 minutes from the city center. Car-rental desks can be found there, as well as a currency exchange, a bar, and a bistro. Stamps are sold at the newsagent (newsstand), and a mailbox is provided for cards and letters. The airport lacks lockers, showers, and a post office.

The **Airliner Bus** (☎ 02/6299 3722) operates a 20-minute shuttle between the Central Business District and the airport Monday to Friday, leaving hourly. They charge A\$5 (US\$3.25) per person one-way.

BY TRAIN A nice way to see the countryside while you're in Australia is to take the train. **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32 in Australia; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) runs three Canberra Xplorer trains daily between Sydney and Canberra. The 4-hour trip costs around A\$70 (US\$46) in first class and A\$50 (US\$33) in economy; children are charged half price, and a return trip costs double. Many people make use of Countrylink transport/hotel packages (call **Countrylink Holidays** at ☎ 13 28 29), which can save you quite a bit. There's a range of hotels to choose from in Canberra for between A\$90 and A\$190 (US\$59–US\$124) a night for a couple, and if you book in advance (they recommend 2 weeks), you can save up to 40% on the fare (through a Rail Escape package), too. Find the Countrylink office at Wynyard CityRail station in Sydney.

From Melbourne, the **Canberra Link**, run by **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96 in Australia), involves a 5-hour bus trip and a 3½-hour train trip. It costs A\$55 (US\$36) for adults and A\$34 (US\$22) for children and students.

Canberra Railway Station (☎ 02/6239 6707) is on Wentworth Avenue, Kingston, about 5km (3 miles) southeast of the city center. Coaches connect the railway station to the center.

BY BUS **Greyhound Pioneer** (☎ 13 20 30 in Australia; www.greyhound.com.au) does six runs a day from Sydney to Canberra. Tickets cost A\$35 (US\$23) for adults, A\$32 (US\$21) for students with ISAC (International Student Activity Card), and A\$28 (US\$18) for children 3 to 14; the trip takes 4 to 4½ hours.

From Melbourne, tickets to Canberra cost A\$56 (US\$36) for adults, A\$50 (US\$33) for students, and A\$45 (US\$29) for children. (Advanced purchase fares can save you up to 35%.)

Murrays Australia (☎ 13 22 51 in Australia) runs three services a day from Sydney to Canberra for A\$35 (US\$23) for adults and A\$19 (US\$12) for children. Ask for YHA member discounts. Several sightseeing companies in Sydney, including **AAT King's**, **Murrays**, and **Australia Pacific Tours**, offer day trips to Canberra as well.

Interstate buses arrive at **Jolimont Tourist Centre**, at the corner of Northbourne Avenue and Alinga Street, in Canberra City.

BY CAR The ACT (Australian Capital Territory) is surrounded by New South Wales. Sydney is 306km (190 miles) northeast, and Melbourne is 651km (404 miles) southwest of Canberra. In late 2001 the traveling time to Canberra was cut significantly following the opening of an extension to the M5 motorway that linked with the Eastern Distributor near Sydney Airport. (Turn right before you reach the airport and follow the signs to Wollongong, then the M5.) Now the drive takes between 3 and 3½ hours. From Melbourne, take the Hume Highway to Yass, switch to the Barton Highway; the trip will take about 8 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Canberra Visitors' Centre**, 330 Northbourne Ave., Dickson, ACT 2600 (☎ 02/6205 0044, or 1300/554 114 in Australia), dispenses information and

books accommodations. The office is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm. The official government website (www.visitcanberra.com.au) is worth checking out.

SPECIAL EVENTS A host of free events—from concerts to competitions—is part of the annual **Canberra National Multicultural Festival** held in the first 3 weeks of March. The fun includes Canberra Day (a local public holiday—always the third Mon in Mar), a hot-air balloon fiesta, fireworks displays, food and wine promotions, plenty of music, and a large range of activities organized by Australia's ethnic mix. Visitors could find it a little more difficult to book accommodations during this time, but you should always be able to find something. There are many other major events including the flower show **Floriade**, the Subaru Rally of Canberra, the Canberra 400 V8 Supercars meeting, and the National Folk Festival. Check dates at www.visitcanberra.com.au.

CITY LAYOUT

The first thing that strikes a visitor to Canberra is its park-like feel (amazing, because there was barely a tree on the original site). Half a dozen avenues radiate from **Capital Hill**, where the Parliament House stands. Each of these broad, tree-shaded streets leads to a traffic circle, from which yet more streets emanate. Around each hub, the streets form a pattern of concentric circles—not the easiest layout for visitors trying to find their way.

Another of Canberra's most notable features is **Lake Burley Griffin**, a man-made lake created by damming the Molonglo River. The centerpiece of the lake is the **Captain Cook Memorial Jet**, a spire of water that reaches 147m (482 ft.) into the air. Wedged between Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue is the suburb of **Parkes**, also known as the National Triangle. Here you'll find many of the city's most impressive attractions, such as the National Gallery of Australia, the High Court of Australia, and Questacon—the National Science and Technology Center. (All sites here can be accessed via www.nationaltriangle.com.au/tri.)

Canberra's main shopping district is on the other side of the lake, centered around Northbourne Avenue, one of the city's main thoroughfares. Officially labeled Canberra City, this area is more commonly known as "**Civic**." North-east of Civic is **Mount Ainslie**, with the Australian War Memorial at its foot; from its summit there are spectacular views of the city and beyond. Another good lookout point is from the top of the **Telstra Tower** on Black Mountain, reached by Black Mountain Drive. Many of the embassies and consulates are concentrated in the suburb of **Yarralumla**, east of Capital Hill, while most of the other suburbs are filled with pleasant homes and small retail areas.

2 Getting Around

BY CAR **Advantage Car Rentals** (☎ 02/6257 6888, or 1800/504 460 in Australia) has cars from A\$35 (US\$23) per day, including 200km (124 miles) per day. **Budget** (☎ 02/6257 1305), **Hertz** (☎ 02/6249 6211), **Thrifty** (☎ 1300/367 227), **Avis** (☎ 02/6249 6088), and **Delta Europcar** (☎ 13 13 90) have desks at the airport.

If you rent your own wheels, you might follow one or more of the six tourist drives marked with signs; pick up details from the Canberra Visitors' Centre.

BY TAXI Canberra's only taxi company is **Canberra Cabs** (☎ 13 22 27).

BY BUS Canberra's bus system is coordinated by **ACTION** (☎ 02/6207 7611; www.action.act.gov.au). The central bus terminal is on Alinga Street, in Civic.

Single tickets cost A\$2.40 (US\$1.55) for adults and A\$1.30 (US\$0.85) for children 5 to 15.

Weekly tickets cost A\$23.50 (US\$15), and 10 ride tickets cost A\$21 (US\$14). Children travel for around half price. Purchase all tickets on the bus or from most newsagents and ACTION interchanges.

For timetable information, call ACTION from Monday through Saturday 7am to 9pm, and Sunday from 8am to 6pm. Pick up bus route maps at bus interchanges, newsagents, and the Canberra Visitors' Centre.

Canberra City Sightseeing Tours (☎ 02/6257 3423) has double-decker buses, which pull in at 11 attractions around the city. Visitors can get off and on when they like. An all-day ticket costs A\$25 (US\$16) for adults and A\$13 (US\$8) for children.

BY BICYCLE Canberra is unique in Australia for its extensive system of cycle tracks—some 120km (74 miles) of them—which makes sightseeing on two wheels a very pleasurable experience. See “Outdoor Pursuits,” later in this chapter, for details on bike rental.

FAST FACTS: Canberra

American Express The office at **Centerpoint**, Shop 1, 185 City Walk (at the corner of Petrie Plaza), Civic (☎ 02/6247 2333), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon.

Business Hours Banks are generally open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm and Friday from 9:30am to 5pm. Stores and offices are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm. Many shops, particularly in the large malls, stay open weekends and until 9pm Fridays.

Climate The best time to visit Canberra is in spring (Sept–Nov) or autumn (Mar–May). Summers are hot, and winters are cool and crisp.

Currency Exchange Cash traveler's checks at banks, at **American Express** (above), or at **Thomas Cook**, at the Petrie Plaza entrance of the Canberra Centre (☎ 02/6257 2222), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9:30am to 12:30pm.

Dentist Canberra lacks a dental emergency referral service. A reputable dentist in town is **Lachland B. Lewis**, Level 3, 40 Allara St., Civic (☎ 02/6257 2777, and for emergency calls only 02/6295 9495 on weekends).

Doctor The **Capital Medical Centre**, 2 Mort St., Civic (☎ 02/6257 3766), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. A standard consultation costs A\$30 (US\$20). The **Travellers' Medical & Vaccination Centre**, Level 5, 8–10 Hobart Place, Civic (☎ 02/6257 7154), offers vaccinations and travel medicines. Standard consultations cost from A\$40 (US\$26).

E-mail The **National Library**, Parkes Place, Parkes (☎ 02/6262 1111), has e-mail facilities available Monday through Thursday 9am to 5pm. Internet accessibility is largely available in Canberra, from Internet cafes to Web points to local libraries. A full listing can be obtained from the Canberra Visitors' Centre.

Embassies/Consulates The **British High Commission** (consular section) is on the 10th floor of SAP Building, corner of Bunda and Akuna streets, Canberra City. (☎ 02/6270 6666). The **Canadian High Commission** is at

Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla (☎ 02/6270 4000); the **U.S. Embassy** is found at Moonah Place, Yarralumla (☎ 02/6214 5600); and the **New Zealand High Commission** is at Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla (☎ 02/6270 4211).

Emergencies Call ☎ 000 for an ambulance, the police, or the fire department.

Eyeglasses For repairs, glasses, and contact lenses try **OPSM Express**, shop 5, Lower Ground Floor, The Canberra Centre, Civic (☎ 02/6249 7344). It's open Monday through Thursday 9am to 5:30pm, Friday 9am to 9pm, and Saturday 9am to 4pm.

Hospitals For medical attention, go to the **Canberra Hospital**, Yamba Drive, Garran (☎ 02/6244 2222), or call the **Accident & Emergency Department** at ☎ 02/6244 2324 (24 hr.).

Hot Lines In Canberra you have access to the **Rape Crisis Centre** (☎ 02/6247 2525); **Drug/Alcohol Crisis Line** (☎ 02/6205 4545, 24 hr.); **Lifeline Crisis Counselling** (☎ 13 11 14); **Salvation Army Counselling Service** (☎ 02/9331 6000); **Poison Information Centre** (☎ 02/6285 2852); and **National Roads & Motorists Association (NRMA)** (☎ 13 21 32).

Pharmacies The **Canberra Centre Pharmacy**, Civic (☎ 02/6249 8074), is open during general shopping hours. A number of after-hours pharmacies are listed in the Canberra Yellow Pages.

Photographic Needs **Fletchers Photographics**, Shop 2, 38 Akuna St., Civic (☎ 02/6247 8460), is the best place to buy camera gear and films. They also repair cameras and sell secondhand equipment.

Post Office The **Canberra GPO**, 53–73 Alinga St., Civic (☎ 02/6209 1680), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm. The Poste Restante address is c/o Canberra GPO, ACT 2601.

Restrooms Found near the city bus exchange, City Hall, and London Circuit.

3 Accommodations You Can Afford

Canberra has a good scattering of places to stay, and generally accommodations are much cheaper than in most other state capitals. Many people travel to Canberra during the week, so many hotels offer cheaper weekend rates to put heads on beds. You should always ask about special deals. The rates given below are rack rates, or what the hotels hope they'll get on a good day—you can often get a room for less. The Canberra Visitors' Centre (☎ 1300/554 114 in Australia) can also provide you information about accommodations options.

The Brassey of Canberra ★ Rooms in this 1927 Heritage-listed building, formerly a boardinghouse for visiting government officials, are large, quiet, and somewhat plush. The garden bar and piano lounge are popular. Other good points include its proximity to Parliament House and other major attractions, and the hearty breakfasts. The hotel underwent extensive renovations in early 2000, which included the remodeling of many of the doubles into larger heritage rooms.

Belmore Gardens, Barton, ACT 2600. ☎ 1800/659 191 in Australia, or 02/6273 3766. Fax 02/6273 2791. www.brassey.net.au. 81 units. A\$132 (US\$86) double; A\$165 (US\$107) double family room; A\$141 (US\$92) heritage double; A\$187 (US\$122) heritage family room. Rates include full breakfast. Check for specials. AE,

DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 36 (get off outside the National Press Club). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

City Walk Hotel You can hardly get closer to the city center than at this former YWCA-turned-budget-travel hotel. Being right near the Jolimont Tourist Centre bus interchange, it picks up a lot of business from backpackers and budget travelers arriving by bus. The rooms are pretty basic, but clean. The hotel was completely refurbished in 2003. There are five double rooms with shared bathrooms, and three of these also have two extra single beds. One room (no. 204) has air-conditioning. Family rooms sleep up to 10 people, all in one room. The hotel has a bunch of communal facilities for the weary traveler, including a kitchen, telephone, tea- and coffeemakers, and a lounge area with TV and VCR.

2 Mort St., Civic, ACT 2601. ☎ **1800/600 124** in Australia, or 02/6257 0124. Fax 02/6257 0116. www.citywalkhotel.com.au. 55 units, 18 with bathroom (shower only). A\$60 (US\$39) double without bathroom; A\$70 (US\$46) double with bathroom; A\$95–A\$125 (US\$62–US\$81) family room. A\$22–A\$24 (US\$14–US\$16) dorm bed. Extra adult A\$12 (US\$7.80); extra child stays free. MC, V. **Amenities:** Internet cafe; laundry. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

Forrest Inn and Apartments The Forrest Inn is far from fancy, but it's close to the Manuka shops and restaurants and Parliament House. The outside of this 1960s property looks tacky, but the interior has been recently refurbished. The motel-style rooms are small and colorless, but clean; the apartments are nicer and have full-size kitchens, so for the same price I'd go for one of these. Two-bedroom apartments are perfect for families, and even the one-bedroom apartments have a single bed in the living room.

30 National Circuit, Forrest, ACT 2603. ☎ **1800/676 372** in Australia, or 02/6295 3433. Fax 02/6295 2119. www.forrestinn.com.au. 102 units. A\$110 (US\$72) motel room; A\$150 (US\$98) 1-bedroom apt; A\$175 (US\$114) 2-bedroom apt. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 39 (get off at the Rydges Hotel). *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

Kingston Court Apartments ★ Situated about 1km (½ mile) from the Parliamentary Triangle and 6km (3¾ miles) from Civic, this apartment complex is a good option if you're looking for the comforts of home. The apartments are modern and spacious and come with a full kitchen, washer and dryer, a balcony, and a courtyard. The rooms underwent a full renovation in 2000.

4 Tench St., Kingston, ACT 2604. ☎ **1800/655 754** in Australia, or 02/6295 2244. Fax 02/6295 5300. www.kingstonterrace.com.au. 36 units. A\$160 (US\$104) apt for 2. Extra adult A\$20 (US\$13); extra child A\$10 (US\$3.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 38. **Amenities:** Small pool; half-size tennis court; in-room laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, dataport, kitchen, minibar, fridge, iron, hair dryer.

University House ★ University House, situated less than 2km (1¼ miles) from the city center, offers a pleasant alternative to run-of-the-mill hotels in a similar price bracket. Large twin rooms come with two single beds; suites have a sitting room and a queen-size bed; the one-bedroom apartments have a bedroom with a queen-size bed, a sitting room, and a kitchenette; and the two-bedroom apartments are huge, with two large bedrooms, a dining room, a lounge room, and a full kitchen. All units have bathrooms with a shower and a tub.

The hotel at the Australian National University, Balmain Crescent, Acton (G.P.O. Box 1535, Canberra, ACT 2601). ☎ **1800/814 864** in Australia, or 02/6249 5211. Fax 02/6249 5252. www.anu.edu.au/unihouse. 104 units. A\$124 (US\$81) twin; A\$126–A\$149 (US\$82–US\$97) suite; A\$136 (US\$88) 1-bedroom apt; A\$190 (US\$124) 2-bedroom apt. Ask about packages, especially during low season. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. Bus: 34. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; tennis court; access to nearby health club; bike rentals; car-rental desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Victor Lodge *Value* Backpackers, parliamentary staff, and budget travelers frequent this friendly place, situated right next to Kingston shops and about a 15-minute drive from the city center. Rooms vary from dorms with three, four, or five beds, to modern, simple doubles. There are communal showers and toilets and a courtyard. The staff picks up guests from the train and bus stations daily and drops off guests in town every morning. It's a nice place overall, but you'll have to decide whether or not you want to put up with the short trek into the city.

The owners also own the reasonable **Best Western** motel next door, which has standby rates of A\$89 (US\$58) for a double. Apparently, long-suffering parents often dump their teenage kids at the lodge and live it up at the motel.

29 Dawes St., Kingston, ACT 2604. ☎ 02/6295 7777. Fax 02/6295 2466. www.victorlodge.com.au. 29 units, none with bathroom. A\$59 (US\$38) double; A\$23 (US\$15) dorm bed. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 38, 39, or 50. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry; TV room; non-smoking rooms; Internet facilities. *In room:* A/C, TV, iron, fan, wash basin.

4 Where to Dine

Lemon Grass *THAI* This is perhaps one of Australia's best Thai restaurants, and is well worth the visit if you are seeking some spice in your life. There are plenty of vegetarian dishes and lots of seafood. Try any red curry, or the *Tom Yum* soups. The food and the service are consistently good and the prices shouldn't break the bank.

Melbourne Building, 65 London Circuit, Civic. ☎ 02/6247 2779. Main courses A\$14–A\$17 (US\$9–US\$11). AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6–10:30pm.

Little Saigon *Value VIETNAMESE* This spacious restaurant has minimalist decor and floor-to-ceiling windows offering views of the city center. Tables are set up on either side of an indoor pond, and there's a bar in the back of the restaurant. The menu is vast, with lots of noodle dishes as well as spicy seafood, duck, chicken, pork, beef, and lamb. The top seller is the lemon grass and chili chicken.

Alinga St. and Northbourne Ave., Civic. ☎ 02/6230 5003. Main courses A\$12–A\$15 (US\$7.80–US\$9.75). Daily 10am–3pm and 5–10:30pm.

The Palette Café *CAFE/MODERN AUSTRALIAN* This is a great choice for lunch, especially because it's in the same building as Canberra's largest private art gallery. You can either eat inside, surrounded by artwork, or claim a table outside in the sunny courtyard. Standout dishes include grilled asparagus spears with Japanese scallops and almond hollandaise, and the chili-salted baby octopus. The Caesar salads are particularly good, as are the field mushrooms with a sauce of soy, Japanese rice wine, honey, and coriander. The etchings, paintings, and sculptures on display are of high quality and are reasonably priced.

Beaver Gallery, 81 Denison St., Deakin. ☎ 02/6282 8416. Main courses A\$12–A\$18 (US\$7.80–US\$12). AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–5pm.

Portia's Place *CANTONESE/MALAYSIAN/PEKING* A small restaurant serving up excellent traditional cookery, Portia's Place often fills up early and does a roaring lunchtime trade. The best things on the menu are the lamb ribs in *shang tung* sauce, the King Island filet steak in pepper sauce, the flaming pork (brought to your table wrapped in foil and bursting with flames), and the Queensland trout stir-fried with snow peas.

11 Kennedy St., Kingston. ☎ 02/6239 7970. Main courses A\$9.80–A\$19 (US\$6.40–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Sun–Wed 5–10pm; Thurs–Sat 5–10:30pm.

Tosolini's ★ CAFE/MODERN AUSTRALIAN Because it's situated right next to the busy central bus terminal and close to the major shopping areas, Tosolini's really pulls in the passing crowd. You can sit out on the sidewalk terrace and watch the world go by. The eggs Benedict (A\$7.50/US\$4.90) served here at breakfast could be the best you've ever eaten. Lunchtime fare is almost as good. Both the battered flathead and the pan-fried broad bill (both are local fish) are tasty, but Tosolini's really made its name with its pastas and focaccias.

Corner of London Circuit at East Row, Civic. ☎ 02/6247 4317. Main courses A\$15–A\$18 (US\$9.75–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–5pm (Tues–Sat until 10:30pm).

The Tryst ★★ Finds MODERN AUSTRALIAN The personal touches and service shine through at The Tryst, and the food is consistently delicious. The restaurant is tastefully decorated in an upscale cafe style, with the kitchen staff on show as they rustle up some of the capital's best tucker. It's relaxed, feeling more communal than intimate on busy nights. My favorite dish is the Atlantic salmon served with beurre blanc sauce and potatoes, but other popular dishes include the eye filet steak, and the pumpkin risotto. If you have room left for dessert, don't miss out on the sticky date pudding served with hot butterscotch sauce, pralines, and ice cream—it's as good as it sounds. Otherwise, the long list of daily specials that complement the extensive menu could keep you busy for weeks.

Bougainville St., Manuka. ☎ 02/6239 4422. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$15–A\$23 (US\$9.75–US\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Juniperberry ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN It sits on a lake edged with rushes and sculptures, full of goldfish. Add smoke machines (they call it a fog sculpture) on the far bank to send mysterious white eddies across the lake's surface toward your lakeside table, and you have a charming fantasy world in which to dine. The menu is small, with only a choice of six first courses, mains, and desserts. Mains could include duck legs on figs, Atlantic salmon on polenta, a vegetarian option, and beef filet. The 33-colors Sambucca, a jelly pannacotta and ice cream, is a favorite.

Juniperberry Restaurant in the Sculpture Garden of the National Gallery of Australia, Parkes. ☎ 02/6240 6665. Reservations recommended. Main courses at lunch A\$23 (US\$15); fixed-price dinner A\$38 (US\$25) 2 courses, A\$48 (US\$31) 3 courses. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Thurs–Sat 6:30–9:30pm except for winter (June–Oct) opened for lunch only.

5 Seeing the Sights

Australian Institute of Sport This institution provides first-class training and facilities for Australia's elite athletes. Tours, led by one of the institute's athletes, include visits to the gymnasium, basketball courts, and Olympic swimming pool to see training in progress. There is also a fascinating interactive sports display where visitors can test their sporting skills.

Leverrier Crescent, Bruce. ☎ 02/6214 1444. Admission A\$12 (US\$7.80) adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children, A\$33 (US\$21) families. Tours leave the AIS shop Mon–Fri at 11:30am and 2:30pm; Sat–Sun at 10, 10:20, 11:30am, 1, and 2:30pm. Bus: 80 from City Center.

Australian War Memorial ★★ This monument to Australian troops who gave their lives for their country is truly moving and well worth a visit. Artifacts and displays tell the story of Australia's conflicts abroad. You won't soon forget the exhibition on Gallipoli, the bloody World War I battle in which so many Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) servicemen were slaughtered.

Finds Up, Up & Away

Balloon Aloft (☎ 02/4938 1955; www.balloonaloft.com.au) offers fabulous 45-minute sunrise flights over Canberra Monday through Friday for A\$210 (US\$136) for adults and A\$120 (US\$78) for children 6 to 12, including a champagne breakfast on touchdown. On weekends an hour-long trip costs A\$250 (US\$162) for adults and A\$150 (US\$97) for children. Breakfast costs A\$25 (US\$16) for adults and A\$16 (US\$10) for kids.

Dawn Drifters (☎ 02/6285 4450; fax 02/6281 5315; www.dawn-drifters.com.au) will also send you soaring. One-hour flights are A\$185 (US\$120) for adults Monday through Friday; A\$215 (US\$140) on weekends and holidays. Champagne breakfast is A\$20 (US\$13) extra. Children go for 40% of the adult price. Breakfast is A\$15 (US\$9.75) extra.

The Hall of Memory is the focus of the memorial, where the body of the Unknown Soldier lies entombed. (His remains were brought back from a World War I battlefield in 1993.) The Memorial also holds one of the largest collections of Australian art in the world, including works by Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, and Grace Cossington-Smith. Recently added exhibits include a film showing the surrender of Singapore, projected onto the actual table on which the surrender was signed, and a simulated ride aboard an original Lancaster bomber. ANZAC Hall and Bradbury Aircraft Hall are recent additions to the Memorial, housing significant aircraft and large pieces of war memorabilia.

At the head of Anzac Parade on Limestone Ave. ☎ 02/6243 4211. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm (when the Last Post is played). Closed Christmas. Guided tours at 10, 10:30, 11am, 1:30, and 2pm. Bus: 33 or 40.

Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex ★ This information center, which stands beside huge tracking dishes, is a must for anyone interested in space. There are plenty of models, audio-visual recordings, and displays, including a space suit, space food, and archive film footage of the Apollo moon landings. The complex is still active, tracking and recording results from the Mars Pathfinder, *Voyager 1* and 2, and the Cassini, Soho, Galileo, and Ulysses space exploration projects, as well as providing a link with NASA spacecraft. This is a great stopoff on the way back from the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (see below).

Tidbinbilla, 39km (24 miles) southwest of Civic. ☎ 02/6201 7880. www.cdsc.nasa.gov. Free admission. Summer daily 9am–8pm; rest of year daily 9am–5pm. No public bus service, but several tour companies offer programs that include the complex.

High Court of Australia The High Court, an impressive concrete-and-glass building that overlooks Lake Burley Griffin and stands next to the National Gallery of Australia, was opened by Elizabeth II in 1980. It is home to the highest court in Australia's judicial system and contains three courtrooms, a video display, and a huge seven-story-high public hall. When the court is in session, visitors can observe the proceedings from the public gallery. Call or e-mail for session details.

Overlooking Lake Burley Griffin, Parkes Place. ☎ 02/6270 6346. www.hcourt.gov.au. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9:45am–4:30pm. Closed public holidays. Bus: 34.

National Capital Exhibition If you want to find out more about Canberra's beginnings—and get a memorable view of Lake Burley Griffin, the Captain Cook Memorial Water Jet, and the Carillon in the bargain—then head here.

The displays are well done, and there's a film that provides an overview of the city's design.

On the lakeshore at Regatta Point in Commonwealth Park. ☎ 02/6257 1068. Free admission. Daily 9am–6pm (5pm in winter).

National Gallery of Australia Linked to the High Court by a pedestrian bridge, the National Gallery showcases both Australian and international art. The permanent collection and traveling exhibitions are displayed in 11 separate galleries. You'll find paintings by big names such as Claude Monet and Jackson Pollock, and Australian painters Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder, Tom Roberts, and Albert Tucker. The exhibition of Tiwi islander burial poles in the foyer is also interesting (the Tiwi Islands include Melville and Bathurst islands off Darwin), and there's a large collection of Aboriginal bark paintings from central Australia. A sculpture garden surrounding the gallery has 24 sculptures and is always open to the public.

Parkes Place. ☎ 02/6240 6502. www.nga.gov.au. Free admission (except for major touring exhibitions). Daily 10am–5pm, closed Christmas. Guided tours daily at 11am and 2pm; free tour focusing on Aboriginal art Thurs and Sun at 11am. Bus: 36 or 39 from Old Parliament House, or 34 from Parkes Place in front of the High Court.

National Museum of Australia This, the first official all-encompassing museum dedicated to the nation of Australia, opened in 2001 to rave reviews. Using state-of-the-art technology and hands-on exhibits, the museum is based on three main themes: Australian society and its history since 1788; the interaction of people with the Australian environment; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. In reality it doesn't so much rely on actual historic objects to tell the stories of Australia but on images and sound. Allow a couple of hours if it grabs you, and 30 minutes to rush around baffled if it doesn't.

Acton Peninsula (about 5km/3 miles from the city center). ☎ 1800/026 132 in Australia, or 02/6208 5000. www.nma.gov.au. Free admission (fees for special exhibitions). Daily 9am–5pm.

Old Parliament House The seat of government from 1927 to 1988, the Old Parliament House is now home to exhibitions from the National Museum and the Australian Archives. The National Portrait Gallery is also here, and outside on the lawn is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, which was set up in 1972 in a bid to persuade the authorities to recognize the land ownership claims of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The red, black, and yellow Aboriginal flag first came to prominence here. Interestingly, the Australian Heritage Commission now recognizes the campsite as a place of special cultural significance.

On King George Terrace, midway between the new Parliament House (see below) and the lake. ☎ 02/6270 8222. www.oldparliamenthouse.gov.au. Admission A\$2 (US\$1.30) adults, A\$1 (US\$65¢) children, A\$5 (US\$3.25) family. Daily 9am–5pm. Bus: 39.

Parliament House Conceived by American architect Walter Burley Griffin in 1912, but only built in 1988, Canberra's centerpoint was designed to blend organically into its setting at the top of Capital Hill; only a national flag supported by a giant four-footed flag pole rises above the peak of the hill. In good weather, picnickers crowd the grass that covers the roof, where the view is spectacular. Inside are more than 3,000 works of Australian arts and crafts, and extensive areas of the building are open to the general public. Look for a mosaic by Michael Tjakamarra Nelson entitled *Meeting Place*, which represents a gathering of Aboriginal tribes; it can be found just inside the main entrance. There's also a 20m (66-ft.) long tapestry by Arthur Boyd in the Great Hall on the first floor and one of the four known versions of the Magna Carta

in the Great Hall beneath the flag pole. Free 50-minute guided tours are offered throughout the day.

Parliament is usually in session Monday through Thursday between mid-February and late June, and mid-August to mid-December. Both the Lower House—the House of Representatives (where the prime minister sits)—and the Upper House—the Senate—have public viewing galleries. The best time to see the action is during Question Time, which starts at 2pm in the Lower House. If you turn up early, you might get a seat; otherwise, make reservations for gallery tickets via the **sergeant-at-arms** (☎ 02/6277 4889), at least a day in advance. Free tours of the building go for 45 minutes and start at 9am (then follow every 30 min.).

Capital Hill. ☎ 02/6277 5399. Free admission. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Bus: 39.

Questacon—The National Science and Technology Centre *Kids* Questacon offers some 200 hands-on exhibits that can keep you and your inner child occupied for hours. Exhibits are clustered into six galleries, each representing a different aspect of science. The artificial earthquake is a big attraction. The center is great for kids, but give it a miss if you've already visited the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (see chapter 3).

King Edward Terrace, Parkes. ☎ 02/6270 2800. Admission A\$10 (US\$6.50) adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) children, A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) students, A\$28 (US\$18) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas. Bus: 34.

Telstra Tower The tower, which rises 195m (640 ft.) above the summit of Black Mountain, has both open-air and enclosed viewing galleries that provide magnificent 360-degree views over Canberra and the surrounding countryside. Those who dine in the pricey, revolving **Tower Restaurant** (☎ 02/6248 7096) are thoughtfully entitled to a refund of their admission charge.

Black Mountain Dr. ☎ 02/6248 1911. Admission A\$3.30 (US\$2.15) adults, A\$1.10 (US\$0.70) children. Daily 9am–10pm. No bus service.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve *Moments* This is a great place to see native animals such as kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, platypuses, and birds in their natural environment. Unlike other wildlife parks around the country, this one has plenty of space, so sometimes you'll have to look hard to spot the animals. (On a recent quick visit, I saw a few birds and not much else, but on previous visits I've been almost stomped on by kangaroos.) A guide is available from the visitor center. **Go Bush Tours** (☎ 02/6231 3023; www.gobushtours.com.au) runs tours to the reserve as well as the neighboring Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex for A\$66 (US\$43). This includes morning tea and lunch.

Tidbinbilla. Paddys River Rd., RMB 141 via Tharwa, ACT 2620. ☎ 02/6205 1233. Fax 02/6205 1232. www.environment.act.gov.au. Admission A\$9 (US\$5.85) per vehicle. Daily 9am–6pm (8pm in summer). Visitor center Mon–Fri 9am–4:30pm; Sat–Sun 9am–5:30pm. No public bus service, but several tour companies offer programs that include the reserve.

BOTANIC GARDENS & A NEARBY NATIONAL PARK

The **Australian National Botanic Gardens** *✦*, Clunies Ross Street, Black Mountain, Acton (☎ 02/6250 9540), are home to the best collection of Australian native plants anywhere. The gardens are situated on 51 hectares (126 acres) on the lower slopes of Black Mountain and feature a Eucalyptus Lawn containing more than 600 species of eucalyptus, a rainforest area, a Tasmanian alpine garden, and self-guided walking tracks. Free guided tours depart from the visitor center at 11am on weekdays and 11am and 2pm on weekends. The gardens are open daily from 9am to 5pm (to 8pm in summer). The visitor center is open daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm. There's no bus service to the gardens.

The **Namadgi National Park** (🦘) covers almost half of the Australian Capital Territory. Parts of the park, which has rolling plateaus, good trout-fishing streams, and dense forest, are just 30km (19 miles) from Canberra. Marked hiking tracks can be found throughout the park. Spring is the best time to visit for the prolific display of bush flowers. In the past, sections of the park were cleared for sheep grazing, but these days the pastures are popular with hundreds of gray kangaroos. (They're easiest to spot in the early morning and late afternoon.) At Yankee Hat, off the Nass/Boboyan Road, is an Aboriginal rock-art site. The **Namadgi Visitors Center** (☎ 02/6207 2900), on the Nass/Boboyan Road, 3km (1¾ miles) south of the township of Tharwa, has maps and information on walking trails.

6 Outdoor Pursuits

BIKING With 120km (74 miles) of bike paths, Canberra is made for exploring on two wheels. Rent a bike from **Mr. Spoke's Bike Hire** on Barrine Drive near the ferry terminal in Acton (☎ 02/6257 1188). Bikes for adults cost A\$10 (US\$6.50) for the first hour and A\$9 (US\$5.85) for each hour afterward; rates are A\$9 (US\$5.85) for kids, going down to A\$8 (US\$5.20) for each subsequent hour.

BOATING **Burley Griffin Boat Hire**, on Barrine Drive near the ferry terminal in Acton (☎ 02/6249 6861), rents paddle boats for A\$20 (US\$13) per hour and canoes for A\$14 (US\$9.10) per hour. **Row 'n' Ride**, near the MacDermott Place Boat Ramp, Belconnen (☎ 02/6254 7838), is open on weekends and school and public holidays and offers canoes from A\$9 (US\$5.85) per hour, kayaks for A\$10 (US\$6.50) per hour, and mountain bikes for A\$9 (US\$5.85) per hour.

GLIDING The **Canberra Gliding Club** (☎ 02/6257 1494 or 02/6452 3994) offers joy flights and trial instructional flights on weekends and public holidays from the Bunyan Airfield. Flights cost A\$60 (US\$39).

SWIMMING The indoor heated pool at the **Australian Institute of Sport** (☎ 02/6214 1281), on Leverrier Crescent in Bruce, a short drive northwest of Civic, is open to the public at certain times during the day (call ahead to check schedules). Adults pay A\$4 (US\$2.60) to swim, and children pay A\$2 (US\$1.30). It's compulsory to wear swimming caps, which can be bought there for A\$2.50 (US\$1.60). It costs A\$6 (US\$3.90) to use the pool, spa, and sauna.

TENNIS The **National Tennis and Squash Centre**, Federal Highway, Lyneham (☎ 02/6247 0929), has squash courts available for A\$12 to A\$16 (US\$7.80–US\$10) per hour, depending on when you want to play. Tennis courts can be booked for A\$9.50 to A\$15 (US\$6.20–US\$9.75). The Australian Institute of Sport (above) also rents courts.

7 Canberra After Dark

The “**Times Out**” section in Thursday's *Canberra Times* has listings on what's on offer around town.

Of the pubs in town, the best in the city center are the British-style **Wig & Pen**, on the corner of Limestone and Alinga Street (☎ 02/6248 0171); the popular **Moosehead's Pub**, at 105 London Circuit in the south of the city (☎ 02/6257 6496); the **Phoenix**, at 21 East Row (☎ 02/6247 1606), which has live music upstairs for a cover charge; and **P.J. O'Reileys** (☎ 02/6230 4752) on the corner of West Row and Alinga Street, an authentic-style Irish pub. King O'Malleys (☎ 02/6257 0111), on Mort Street, is another popular Irish pub in the city.

A good nightclub for the young at heart is the American-style **Bobby McGee's Entertainment Lounge** in the Rydges Canberra Hotel on London Circuit (☎ 02/6257 7999). It's open Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Entry varies from between A\$3 (US\$1.95) and A\$7 (US\$4.55).

If you're looking to roll some dice, the **Casino Canberra**, in Glebe Park, 21 Binara St., Civic (☎ 1800/806 833 in Australia, or 02/6257 7074), is a small, older-style casino offering all the usual casino games from noon to 6am. Dress regulations prohibit leisurewear, running shoes, and denim, but overall it's a casual place to lose some money.

Tasmania

by Marc Llewellyn

The name “Tasmania” suggests an unspoiled place, with vast stretches of wilderness roamed by strange creatures like the Tasmanian devil. Many mainland residents still half-jokingly refer to their “country cousins” on this island as rednecks. In truth, most Tasmanians are hospitable and friendly people, lacking the harsh edge that big cities can foster. Most also care passionately for the environment, decrying the belief that anything that moves deserves a bullet and anything that stands still needs chopping down.

Visitors to Tasmania are surprised by its size, though compared to the rest of Australia the distances are certainly more manageable. Dense rainforests, mountain peaks, alpine meadows, great lakes, eucalyptus stands, and fertile stretches of farmland are all easily accessible, but you should be prepared for several hours of concentrated driving to get you between the main attractions. Among Tasmania’s chief attractions is its natural environment. More than 20% of the island has been declared a World Heritage area, and nearly a third of the

island is protected within its 14 national parks.

Tasmania’s other main draw is its history. Remains of the Aboriginal people that lived here for tens of thousands of years are evident in isolated rock paintings, engraving, stories, and the aura of spirituality that still holds tight in places where modern civilization has not yet reached.

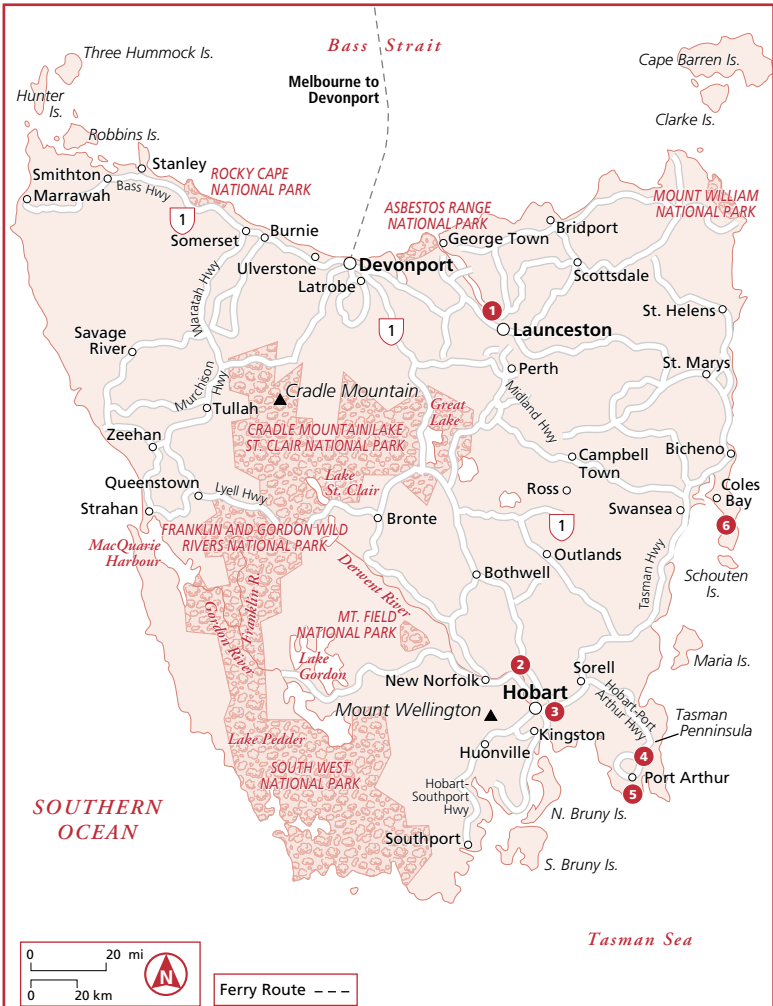
Europeans discovered Tasmania (or Van Diemen’s Land, as it was once known) in 1642, when the seafarer Abel Tasman set anchor off its southwest coast, although it wasn’t identified as an island until 1798. Tasmania made its mark as a dumping ground for convicts, who were more often than not transported for petty crimes in their homeland. The brutal system of control, still evident in the ruins at Port Arthur and elsewhere, spilled over into persecution of the native population. The last full-blooded Tasmanian Aborigine died in 1876, 15 years after the last convict transportation. Most had already died of disease and maltreatment at the hands of the settlers.

EXPLORING TASMANIA

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Tasmanian Travel and Information Centre** at 80 Elizabeth St. (corner of Davey St.), Hobart, TAS 7000 (☎ **1300/655 145** in Australia) operates visitor centers located in more than 30 towns throughout the state. It can arrange travel passes, ferry and bus tickets, car rental, cruises, and accommodations. For more information also check Tourism Tasmania’s website: www.discovertasmania.com.au.

Pick up a copy of *Travelways*, Tourism Tasmania’s tourist tabloid, for details on transportation, accommodations, restaurants, and attractions around Tasmania.

WHEN TO GO The best time to visit Tasmania is between October and April, when the weather is at its best. By May nights are getting cold, the days



- Bonorong Park Wildlife Centre **2**
- Cataract Gorge **1**
- Freycinet National Park **6**
- Port Arthur Penal Settlement Ruins **5**
- Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens **3**
- Tasmanian Devil Park Wildlife Rescue Centre **4**

are getting shorter and the deciduous trees are starting to turn golden. Winters (June–Aug), especially in the high country, can be quite harsh—though that’s the best time to curl up in front of a blazing fire. The east coast is generally milder than the west coast, which is buffeted by the “Roaring 40s”—the winds that blow across the ocean and the 40° meridian, from as far away as Argentina.

The busy season for tourism here runs December through February, as well as during public holiday and school holiday periods. Unlike the rest of Australia, Tasmanian schools have three terms. Term dates are from the second week in February to the last week in May; the third week in June to the first week in September; and the fourth week in September to the first week in December.

GETTING THERE The quickest way to get to Tasmania is by air. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies from the mainland to Hobart and Launceston. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia; www.virginblue.com.au) offers discounted trips from Melbourne, with connections from other capitals, if you book early from their website. **Regional Express** (☎ 13 17 13 in Australia; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies from Melbourne to Devonport and Burnie in the State’s north.

In September 2002, two new high-speed ferry services replaced the Devil Cat and the old *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry that plied the waters between Melbourne and Tasmania for years. The new car ferries—the *Spirit of Tasmania I* and *II*—are each capable of carrying 1,400 passengers as well as cars. They make the crossing from Melbourne’s Station Pier to Tasmania’s Devonport (on the north coast) in around 10 hours. The ferries leave both Melbourne and Devonport at 9pm and arrive at around 7am. From roughly December 20 to April 27, there’s also day service on weekends, leaving both ports at 9am and arriving at 7pm. Prices are based on “shoulder” and “peak” times: The shoulder seasons run from roughly August 31 to December 6, and from January 27 to April 27. A one-way seat costs between A\$99 and A\$135 (US\$65–US\$88) for adults, and A\$75 and A\$99 (US\$49–US\$65) for children. Three-to-four berth cabins cost from A\$187 to A\$234 (US\$121–US\$152) for adults and A\$91 to A\$105 (US\$59–US\$68) for kids depending on the season and if you have a porthole. Twin cabins cost from A\$200 to A\$261 (US\$130–US\$169) for adults and A\$101 to A\$132 (US\$66–US\$86) for children. Deluxe cabins cost A\$283 to A\$369 (US\$184–US\$240) for adults and children alike. **Tasmanian Redline Coaches** (☎ 03/6336 1446) connects with each ferry and transfers passengers to Launceston, and on to Hobart. Cars cost A\$55 (US\$36) from December 6 to January 25, and are free to transport at other times.

Make reservations through **TT-Line** (☎ 03/9206 6211; www.spiritoftasmania.com.au). Special offers are regularly available.

McCafferty’s (☎ 13 14 99 in Australia) can organize coach travel from the eastern mainland states, with transfers to Tasmania by ferry.

Tips Tasmania’s Tricky Roads

Driving in Tasmania can be dangerous; there are more accidents involving tourists on Tasmania’s roads than anywhere else in Australia. Many roads are narrow and bends can be tight, especially in the mountainous inland regions—where you may also come across black ice early in the morning or at anytime in winter. Marsupials are also common around dusk, and swerving to avoid them has caused countless crashes.

Tips National Park Entry Fees

A **Tassie Holiday Pass** costs A\$33 (US\$21) and allows entry for a car and passengers to Tasmania's national parks for 2 months. Pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and coach passengers pay A\$13.50 (US\$8.80) for 2 months. Occasional users can buy a 24-hour pass for A\$10 (US\$6.50) per car, while walkers, cyclists, motorcyclists, and coach passengers pay \$3.50 (US\$2.30) per day. Passes are available at all major parks and Tasmanian Visitor Information Centres. For more information, contact the **Parks and Wildlife Service** at ☎ 03/6233 8203. Look up the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service's website (www.parks.tas.gov.au) for information on Tasmania's national parks.

GETTING AROUND The regional airline **Tasair** (☎ 03/6248 5088; www.tasair.com.au) flies to some settlements in Tasmania. **Par Avion** (☎ 03/6248 5390; www.paravion.com.au) concentrates on the southwest World Heritage areas of the state and also operates wonderful sightseeing tours. A 2½-hour southwest wilderness flight, for example, costs A\$176 (US\$114).

Statewide coach services are provided by **Tasmanian Redline Coaches** (☎ 03/6336 1446; www.redlinecoaches.com.au), and **Tassielink** (☎ 03/6272 6611, or 1300/300 520 in Australia; www.tigerline.com.au). Associated with Tassielink are **Tigerline Coaches** (contactable by same phone and website), which offers a series of coach tours to major places of interest. **Hobart Coaches** (☎ 1800/030 620 in Australia, or 03/6234 4077) runs trips around the Hobart area.

The cheapest way to get around by coach is to buy a travel pass.

The **Tassie Link Explorer Pass**, which can be used on all Tassielink routes, comes in four categories: A 7-day pass good for travel within 15 days is A\$160 (US\$104); a 10-day pass good for travel in 15 days is A\$190 (US\$124); a 14-day pass good for travel within 20 days is A\$220 (US\$143); a 21-day pass valid for travel in 30 days is A\$265 (US\$172).

Driving a car from Devonport on the north coast to Hobart on the south coast takes less than 4 hours. From Hobart to Strahan on the west coast also takes around 4 hours, while the journey from Launceston to Hobart takes about 2 hours. Rental cars cost around A\$70 (US\$46) a day in summer, and around A\$50 a day (for multi-day hire) at other times. The **Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania (RACT)**, at Murray and Patrick streets in Hobart (☎ 13 27 22 in Australia), can supply you with touring maps.

TOUR OPERATORS Dozens of operators run organized hiking, horse trekking, sailing, caving, fishing, bushwalking, diving, cycling, rafting, climbing, kayaking, or canoeing trips in Tasmania. For a full listing, see the "Outdoor Adventure" section of *Travelways*, the Tasmanian tourist board's publication (see "Visitor Information" above).

One of the best operators is **Tasmania Adventure Tours** (☎ 1300/654 604 in Australia; or 038/8309 2277; www.adventuretours.com.au). They offer a 3-day East Coast Explorer tour from Devonport, taking in Launceston, Freycinet National Park, and Port Arthur, before finishing in Hobart. The tour costs between A\$375 and A\$495 (US\$144–US\$322) depending on accommodation. Their 6-day Taste of Tasmania Tour starts off in Devonport, takes in all the attractions in their other two tours, and ends up in Hobart. This tour costs A\$720 to A\$950 (US\$468–US\$617). Call for departure days.

Peregrine Adventures (☎ 03/9662 2800; www.peregrine.net.au) runs rafting tours of the Franklin River, which carves its way through some of the most beautiful, rugged, and inaccessible wilderness in the world. Another good operator is the **Roaring 40's Ocean Kayaking Company** (☎ 1800/653 712 in Australia; www.roaring40skayaking.com.au); both companies offer paddling expeditions lasting from 1 to 11 days. **Tasmanian Expeditions**, based in Launceston (☎ 1800/030 230 in Australia, or 03/6267 5000; www.tasmanianexpeditions.com.au), runs a whole range of cycling, trekking, and rafting trips around the country, some starting or finishing in Hobart.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES Planning my first trip to Tasmania, I'd pack my walking boots, raincoat, and shorts, and head off first to either **Launceston** or **Hobart**, the island's two main cities. I'd take in **Freycinet National Park** for its wonderful scenery and abundant wildlife, stop in at **Port Arthur** for its beautiful setting and disturbing convict past, and head to the central highlands for a stomp around **Cradle Mountain**. If I had more time, I'd drive to **Strahan** on the far west coast to discover the southwest wilderness, take some time off to go trout fishing in the central lakes, and head off to the quaint coastal towns of the north.

1 Hobart

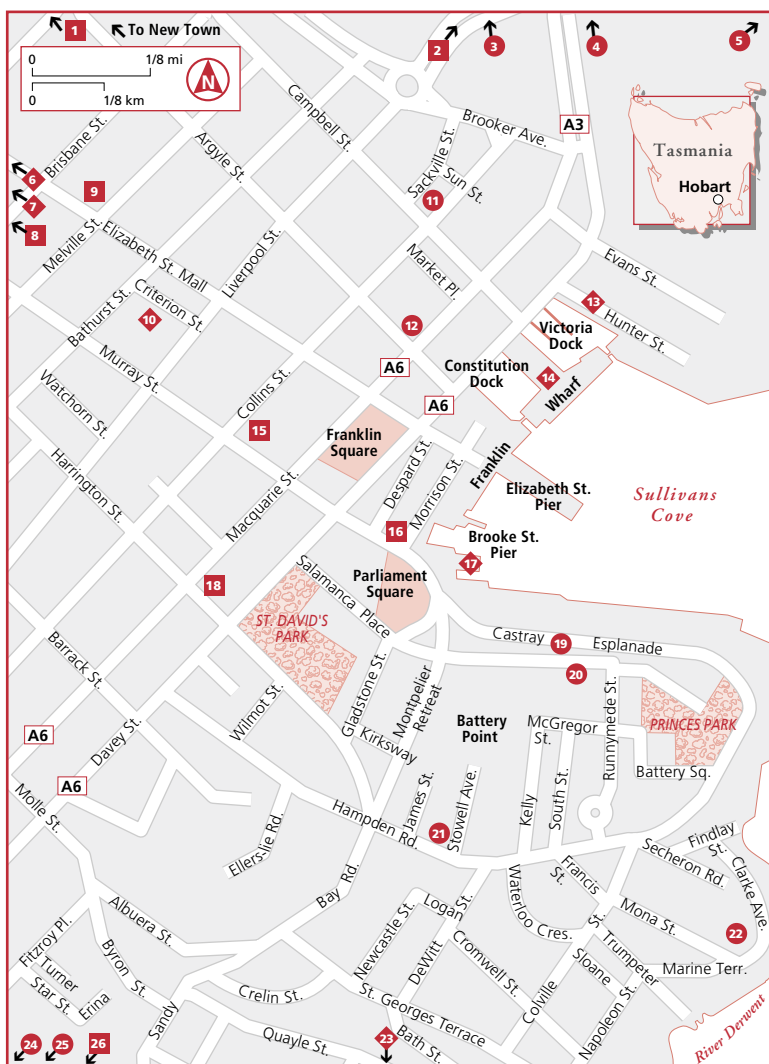
198km (123 miles) S of Launceston

Tasmania's capital (pop. 129,000), second in age only to Sydney, is an appealing place worth visiting for a few days. Hobart's main features are its wonderful harbor and the colonial cottages that line the narrow lanes of **Battery Point**. As with Sydney, Hobart's harbor is the city's focal point, attracting yachts from all over the world. Down by the waterfront, picturesque **Salamanca Place** bursts with galleries, pubs, cafes, and an excellent market on Saturdays. Europeans settled in Hobart in 1804, a year after Tasmania's first colony was set up at Risdon (10km/6¼ miles up the Derwent River). Hobart, the most southerly Australian state capital, is closer to the Antarctic coast than it is to Perth in Western Australia, and has long been regarded by navigators, whalers, and explorers as the gateway to the south. One of these was Roald Amundsen, who anchored his vessel in the River Derwent off Long Point, Sandy Bay, rowed ashore, and telegraphed the King of Norway to inform him that he'd reached the South Pole before the ill-fated Robert Falcon Scott.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89 in Australia) carry passengers from the mainland. The trip from the airport to the city center takes about 20 minutes and costs about A\$25 (US\$16) by taxi. The **Airporter Bus** (☎ 0419/382 240) meets planes and drops off at hotels in the city and further afield.

Car and camper rental offices at the airport include **Hertz** (☎ 03/6237 1155), **Advance** (☎ 1800/030 118 in Australia; www.advancecars.com.au), **Avis** (☎ 03/6248 5424), **Budget** (☎ 1300/362 848 in Australia, or 03/6248 5333), and **Thrifty** (☎ 1800/030 730 in Australia, or 03/6234 1341). Cars cost around A\$55 (US\$36) for 1 day, A\$50 (US\$32) per day for 2 days, A\$45 (US\$29) per day for 4 days, and A\$40 (US\$26) per day for a week or more. You might find even better bargains in town with lower-priced rental companies such as **Lo-Cost Auto Rent** (☎ 1800/030 023 in Australia, or 03/6231 0550) and **Range Rent-a-Bug** (☎ 03/6231 0300).



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Adelphi Court YHA Hostel **1**
- Black Prince **9**
- Central City Backpackers **15**
- Customs House Hotel **16**
- The Lodge on Elizabeth **5**
- Macquarie Manor **18**
- Wellington Lodge **2**
- Woolmers Inn **26**

DINING ◆

- Cumquat on Criterion **10**

Drunk Admiral Restaurant **13**

- Mit Zitron **6**
- The Point Revolving Restaurant **23**
- Sisco's on the Pier **17**
- Vanidol's Asian Cuisine **7**

ATTRACTIONS ●

- Antarctic Adventure **20**
- Bonorong Park Wildlife Centre **5**
- Cadbury Chocolate Factory **3**
- Cascade Brewery & Gardens **25**

Female Factory Historic Site and Island Produce

- Fudge Factory **24**
- Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens **4**
- Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery **12**
- Narryna Van Diemen's Land Folk Museum **21**
- Maritime Museum of Tasmania **22**
- Salamanca Market **19**
- Theatre Royal **11**

Tips Staying Connected

It's relatively hard to find public access to the Internet in Hobart, but you can try **Drifters Internet Café**, Shop 9/33 Salamanca Place, Hobart (in Salamanca Galleria) (☎ 03/6224 3244). The cafe charges A\$5 (US\$3.25) per half-hour.

VISITOR INFORMATION Information is available from the **Tasmanian Travel and Information Centre**, at 80 Elizabeth St. (corner of Davey St.), Hobart, TAS 7000 (☎ 03/6230 8233). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:15pm, Saturday and public holidays from 9am to 4pm, and Sunday from 9am to 1pm (9am–4pm Dec–Apr). You can pick up information on the State's National Parks at the **Lands Information Bureau**, 134 Macquarie St. (☎ 03/6233 8011).

CITY LAYOUT Hobart straddles the Derwent River on the south coast of Tasmania. **Salamanca Place** and nearby **Battery Point** abut Sullivan's Cove, home to hundreds of yachts. The row of sandstone warehouses that dominate Salamanca Place date back to the city's importance as a whaling base in the 1830s. Behind Princes Wharf, Battery Point is the city's historic district, which in colonial times was the home of sailors, fishermen, whalers, coopers, merchants, shipwrights, and master mariners. The open ocean is about 50km (31 miles) farther down the river, though the Derwent empties out into Storm Bay, just 20km (12 miles) downstream. The central business district is on the west side of the water, with the main thoroughfares—Campbell, Argyle, Elizabeth, Murray, and Harrington streets—sloping down to the busy harbor. The Tasman Bridge and regular passenger ferries reach across the Derwent River. Set back from the city, but overlooking it, is the 1,270m (4,166-ft.) tall **Mount Wellington**.

GETTING AROUND Central Hobart is very small, and most of the attractions are in easy walking distance. **Metro Tasmania** (☎ 03/6233 4232 or 13 22 01; www.metrotas.com.au) operates a system of public metro buses throughout the city and suburban areas. Single tickets cost from A\$1.40 to A\$3.20 (US\$1¢–US\$2.10) depending on how far you're going. Day Tripper tickets can be used between 9am and 4:30pm and after 6pm during the week and all day on weekends; they cost A\$3.60 (US\$2.35). Purchase tickets from bus drivers. If you plan on busing about, stop off at the Metro Shop situated in the General Post Office building on the corner of Elizabeth and Macquarie streets and pick up a timetable, brochures, and sightseeing information.

The **Roche-O'May ferry company** (☎ 03/6223 1914; www.ontas.com.au/cartela) operates morning and afternoon tea cruises, and lunch and dinner cruises on the *Cartela*, a wooden-hulled, former steam-powered ferry built in Hobart in 1912. One-hour afternoon coffee cruises cost A\$12 (US\$7.80), 2-hour afternoon cruises cost A\$16 (US\$10), and lunch and dinner cruises A\$24 (US\$16). Call ahead for departure times. The company also runs a ferry service on the *Wanderer*, with coffee and tea and full commentary. It stops at the Wrest Point Casino, the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Sullivan's Cove, and the old suburb of Belle Reeve. These ferries leave Brooke Street Pier on Franklin Wharf at 10:30am, noon, 1:30, and 3pm. The 1½-hour cruise costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) for adults, A\$5 (US\$3.25) for children, and A\$25 (US\$16) for a family.

Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline (1300/653 633 in Australia, or 03/6272 6611) offers a range of sightseeing tours of Hobart and its surrounds.

SPECIAL EVENTS The **Sydney-to-Hobart Yacht Race**, starting in Sydney on December 26, fills the Constitution Dock Marina and harbor area close to overflowing with spectators and partygoers when the ships turn up in Tasmania. The race takes anywhere from 2 to 4 days, and the sailors and fans stay on to celebrate New Year's Eve. Food and wine lovers indulge themselves after the race during the 2-month-long **Hobart Summer Festival**, which starts on December 28.

EXPLORING THE CITY & ENVIRONS

Simply strolling around the harbor and popping into the shops at Salamanca Place can keep you nicely occupied.

Also take a look around Battery Point, an area chock-full of colonial stone cottages. The area gets its name from a battery of guns set up on the promontory in 1818 to defend the town against potential invaders (particularly the French). Today, there are plenty of tearooms, antiques shops, cozy restaurants, and atmospheric pubs interspersed between grand dwellings. One of the houses worth looking into is **Narryna Van Diemen's Land Folk Museum**, 103 Hampden Rd. (☎ 03/6234 2791), which depicts the life of upper-class pioneers. It's open Tuesday through Friday from 10:30am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 5pm (closed July). Admission is A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults and A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children. Also in this area is the **Maritime Museum of Tasmania**, 16 Argyle St. (☎ 03/6234 1427), one of the best museums of its type in Australia. It's open daily from 10am to 5pm, and admission is A\$7 (US\$4.55) for adults, A\$4 (US\$2.60) for children 4 to 16, and A\$16 (US\$10.40) for a family.

The National Trust (☎ 03/6223 7570) offers a 3-hour **Battery Point Heritage Walk** leaving at 9:30am every Saturday from the wishing well in Franklin Square. It costs A\$11 (US\$7.15) for adults and A\$3 (US\$1.95) for children 6 to 16 and includes morning tea.

For magnificent views over Hobart and across a fair-size chunk of Tasmania, drive to **The Pinnacle** on top of Mount Wellington, about 40 minutes from the city center. Take a warm coat, though; the wind in this alpine area can bite. An extensive network of walking trails offers good hiking. Pick up a copy of *Mt. Wellington Day Walk Map and Notes* from the Department of Environment **Tasmap Centre**, at the Lands Building, 134 Macquarie St. (☎ 03/6233 3382).

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Antarctic Adventure ★ *Kids* Hobart is the last port of call for expeditions to Antarctica. You can experience the cold continent yourself at this highly recommended attraction. It doesn't look like much at first, but I promise you'll be sucked in. You can experience an Antarctic blizzard, climb all over heavy machinery, experience a downhill ski simulator (I'm not sure how that fits in), and get computer access to Antarctic weather conditions and communications. The photos and other displays are also interesting. The irresistible stuffed huskies in the souvenir shop will take a hefty bite out of your wallet. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

Salamanca Sq. ☎ 03/6220 8220. Admission A\$16 (US\$10) adults, A\$13 (US\$8.45) students, A\$8 (US\$5.20) children 4–13, A\$40 (US\$26) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Christmas.

Bonorong Park Wildlife Centre *Kids* I don't think I've ever seen so many wallabies in one place as I saw here—they were hopping all over the place. There are lots of other native animals around, too, including snakes, koalas, Tasmanian devils, and wombats. The Bush Tucker shed serves lunch, billy tea (basically tea brewed up in a metal pot with a gum leaf thrown in), and damper (Australian-style campfire bread). Koala cuddling isn't allowed in Tasmania, but if

you're around at feeding times it's possible to stroke one—they're not as shy as you might think. Feeding times are 12:30 and 3pm daily. The park is on the side of a steep hill, so travelers in wheelchairs are likely to fare badly. Allow 1 hour.

Briggs Rd., Brighton. ☎ **03/6268 1184**. Admission A\$11 (US\$7.15) adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) children under 15. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas Day. Bus to Glenorchy from the central bus terminal in Hobart (about 10 min.), then take bus 125 or 126 to the park. Drive north on route 1 to Brighton; it's about 25 min. north of Hobart and well signposted.

Cadbury Chocolate Factory Eat chocolates until they make you sick on this Willy Wonka–type trip. Book well ahead, because chocolate tours are very popular. Keep in mind you'll need to climb lots of stairs inside the factory. You can visit the factory on a ferry tour (details below), or go through **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (☎ **1300/653 633** or 03/6272 6611), which runs half-day coach tours out of Hobart Monday through Friday from 9:30am. These cost A\$35 (US\$23) for adults, A\$12 (US\$7.80) for children, and A\$99 (US\$65) for a family.

Claremont, 16km (10 miles) north of Hobart. ☎ **1800/627 367** in Australia, or 03/6249 0333. Tours A\$12.50 (US\$8) adults, A\$6.50 (US\$4.20) children, A\$32 (US\$21) families. Tours Mon–Fri 9, 9:30, 10, 10:30, 11am, noon, and 1 and 1.30pm.

Cascade Brewery Tours Cascade Premium is one of the best beers in the country, in my opinion. To see how this heady amber nectar is produced, head to Australia's oldest brewery and tag along on a fascinating 2-hour tour, which includes a stroll through the grand old Woodstock Gardens behind the factory. There are lots of stairs involved.

Cascade Rd. ☎ **03/6221 8300**. Tours A\$11 (US\$7.15) adults, A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) children 5–12. Mon–Fri 9:30am and 1pm. Closed public holidays. Reservations required. Bus: 44, 46, or 49; get off at stop 18.

Female Factory Historic Site and Island Produce Fudge Factory ★ *(Finds*

This is an interesting stopover if you're visiting the Cascade Brewery or Mount Wellington. Not only do you get a trip around a successful fudge-making factory, but a guided tour around the remains of the women's prison next door. The tales told here will make the hairs on your neck stand on end—like the fact that 17 out of every 20 children born within the walls of the institution died soon after birth, and that women who died were tossed into an unmarked mass grave. All the proceeds of the tour go into preserving the prison. Allow 1½ hours.

Female Factory Historic Site and Island Produce Fudge Factory, 16 Degraives St., South Hobart. ☎ **03/6223 1559**. Fax 03/6223 1556. www.femalefactory.com.au. Tours A\$9 (US\$5.90) adults, A\$7 (US\$4.50) concession, A\$4.50 (US\$3) children, A\$25 (US\$16) family. MC, V. Tours Easter Tues–Dec 24 Mon–Fri 9:30am (closed weekends and public holidays); Dec 26–Easter Monday Mon–Fri 9:30am and 2pm and weekends and public holidays 9:30am. Bus 43, 44, 46, or 49 from GPO to South Hobart and Cascade Rd. Get off at stop 14.

Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens ★ Established in 1818, these gardens are known for English-style plant and tree layouts—including a great conifer collection—a superb Japanese garden (better than some I've seen in Kyoto, Japan), and colorful seasonal blooming plants. The peaceful atmosphere is disturbed somewhat by a nearby busy road. A restaurant provides lunch and teas. To walk here from the city center, partly along a pleasant country lane known as Soldier's Walk, takes around 40 minutes—but it's badly signposted. (When you come to a shelter and plaque with a missing YOU-ARE-HERE marker, turn right—the gardens are walled and there's an obvious entrance gate.)

On the Queens Domain near Government House. ☎ **03/6234 6299**. Admission free to Botanical Shop and Botanical Discovery Center; conservatory A\$2 (US\$1.30) donation. Daily 8am–6:30pm (until 5pm in winter). Bus: 17.

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 🌟 Come here to find out more about Tasmania's Aboriginal heritage, its history since settlement, and the island's wildlife. Traveling art exhibitions are mounted from time to time, but always on display are the paintings of the colonial era. The art gallery has a particularly impressive collection of paintings by Tom Roberts and by several convict artists. The pride of the entire collection, though, is *The Conciliation by Benjamin Dutereau*, the second-most painting of historical significance in Australia, after Tom Roberts's *Shearing of the Rams*, which you can see in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

40 Macquarie St. ☎ 03/6211 4177. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm.

ORGANIZED TOURS

You'll get a good introduction to the city on the daily **Hobart Historic Walk** (☎ 03/6225 4806), a 2-hour leisurely stroll through historic Sullivan's Cove and Battery Point. Tours start daily at 10am from September through May and on request from June through August and cost A\$17 (US\$11) for adults, free for children under 12. The tour requires a minimum of six people for a walk to go ahead; group discounts are provided.

Several companies run boat tours of the harbor. **Captain Fells Ferries** (☎ 03/6223 5893) offers a range of morning tea, lunch, afternoon, and dinner cruises. The company also runs Cadbury Factory Tours, which include coach transfers, a tour of the factory, a harbor cruise, and two-course lunch for A\$32 (US\$21) for adults and A\$18 (US\$12) for children; these leave Monday through Thursday at 9:45am. Cruises depart from Franklin Wharf behind the wooden cruise-sales booths beside Elizabeth Street Wharf at the bottom of Elizabeth Street.

The Cruise Company (☎ 03/6234 9294) operates river trips along the Derwent to the Cadbury Chocolate Factory. Cruises depart Monday through Friday at 10am, returning at 2:30pm, and cost A\$33 (US\$21) for adults, A\$16 (US\$10) for children 5 to 15, and A\$93 (US\$60) for a family, including entry and a guided tour of the factory; free for children under 5. The boat leaves from Brooke Street Pier. Also of interest is the company's 2-hour Ironpot Cruise (to the lighthouse of that name at the mouth of the Derwent). The scenic tour of the river leaves Brooke Street Pier every Saturday at 2pm and costs A\$20 (US\$13) for adults; free for children under 15.

THE SHOPPING SCENE

If you are in Hobart on a Saturday, don't miss the **Salamanca Market** 🌟🌟, in Salamanca Place—it's one of the best markets in Australia. Some 200 stalls offer everything from fruit and vegetables to crafts made from pottery, glass, and native woods. The market is open from 8:30am to 3pm.

Salamanca Place itself has plenty of crafts and souvenir shops that are worth exploring, though you pay for the privilege of buying in such a fashionable area.

Value Booking Accommodations Online

Just like everywhere else, you can save money in Tasmania by booking rooms online. **Asia Travel** (<http://asiatravel.com/australia.html>) offers substantial savings on some of the properties below if you book online. At the time of writing these included the Hotel Grand Chancellor in Hobart, the Colonial Motor Inn in Launceston, Freycinet Lodge, and Cradle Mountain Lodge.

The best bookshop in town is a beauty and sells a large range of new and secondhand books, many relating to Tasmania. Find the **Hobart Bookshop** at 22 Salamanca Square (☎ 03/6223 1803). For great chocolate and the best licorice, head to **Darrell Lea**, shop 36 in the Cat & Fiddle Arcade between Collins and Liverpool streets. There are plenty of other interesting shops here, too.

Store hours are Monday through Thursday from 9am to 6pm, Friday from 9am to 9pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon (though some open all day).

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Hobart has some of the best hotels, guesthouses, and B&Bs in Australia. For something different, you can stay with a Tasmanian family either in town or at a farm in the country or arrange accommodations in one of the many boutique bed-and-breakfasts found throughout Tasmania. Contact **Heritage Tasmania Pty Ltd.**, P.O. Box 780, Sandy Bay, TAS 7005 (☎ 03/6233 5511; fax 03/6233 5510). Nightly bed-and-breakfast rates range from about A\$60 to around A\$160 (US\$39–US\$104) for a double. There are 20 **YHA youth hostels** in Tasmania, including ones in Devonport (☎ 03/6424 5696), Bicheno (☎ 03/6375 1293), Coles Bay (☎ 03/6257 0115), Mt. Field National Park (☎ 03/6288 1369), Stanley (☎ 03/6458 1266), and Strahan (☎ 03/6471 7255). Most have dorms as well as inexpensive double rooms. The State office is located at 28 Critereon St., Hobart (☎ 03/6234 9617).

Adelphi Court YHA Hostel The Adelphi is a typical clean and friendly Australian youth hostel. All dorm rooms sleep four people. There is a communal kitchen, a dining room serving breakfast, and a barbecue area. It's situated 3km (less than 2 miles) from the city center, but is quite close to the North Hobart cafe and restaurant strip.

17 Stoke St., New Town (YHA Tasmania, G.P.O. Box 174), Hobart, TAS 7001. ☎ 03/6228 4829. Fax 03/6278 2047. www.yha.com.au. 9 dorms, 16 doubles, 2 with bathroom. A\$56 (US\$36) per person twin/double without bathroom; A\$65 (US\$42) double with bathroom. A\$20 (US\$13) dorm bed. Non-YHA members pay A\$3.50 (US\$2.30) per person extra. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 15 from stop H in Argyle St. to stop no. 8, or any bus from stop E at Elizabeth St. Mall to bus stop no. 13. **Amenities:** Game and TV room; tour-booking desk; barbecue area; common kitchen and laundry facilities; nonsmoking rooms.

Black Prince If you're looking for someplace centrally located, clean, and unfussy, then try the Black Prince, an American-influenced pub with a 1950s bent. All rooms come with a shower and a bathtub. Room no. 8 is the landlord's favorite here, because "it's nearer to the stairs so you don't have to walk too far" (presumably beneficial when you've had a few beers). Downstairs, the American-style bar called Joe's Garage is popular, especially on weekends. The American-influenced restaurant serves up budget-priced steaks and chicken dishes. Lunch is offered Monday through Friday, and dinner Monday through Saturday.

145 Elizabeth St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ 03/6234 3501. Fax 03/6234 3502. 10 units. A\$70 (US\$46) double, including breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker.

Central City Backpackers This place is typical of backpacker-type accommodations—cheap and cheerful, a little frayed around the edges, but right in the heart of things. The central shopping district is right outside the door, and it's only a short walk to the harbor.

138 Collins St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ 1800/811 507 in Australia, or 03/6224 2404. Fax 03/6224 2316. www.centralbackpackers.com.au. 80 units. A\$22 (US\$14) twin per person; A\$44 (US\$29) double. A\$18 (US\$12) dorm bed. Cash or traveler's checks only. 2-min. walk from central bus terminal. **Amenities:** Bar (open in summer); tour desk, e-mail and Internet access; pool table; kitchen; dining room; laundry facilities.

Customs House Hotel You won't find a better value than the rooms above this historic sandstone pub overlooking the waterfront. Built in 1846, the property offers simple, colonial-style rooms, without luxuries such as a TV and telephone. Four have water views overlooking the old sailing ship the *May Queen*, which used to carry wood up the Derwent River. Other rooms look across Parliament House. Guests make the best of a shared TV room. Downstairs, a friendly public bar overlooks the water, and at the back of the building is a popular seafood restaurant known for its scallops.

1 Murray St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ 03/6234 6645. Fax 03/6223 8750. www.customhousehotel.com. 13 units, 2 with bathroom. A\$75 (US\$49) double without bathroom; A\$80 (US\$52) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; communal kitchenette with fridge; dry cleaning.

The Lodge on Elizabeth ★ The Lodge on Elizabeth is located in the second-oldest building in Tasmania, with some parts of it dating back to 1810. Originally a gentleman's residence, it later became the first private boy's school in Tasmania. It's well situated just a 12-minute walk from Salamanca Place and is surrounded by restaurants. All rooms are decorated with antiques, and many are quite romantic, with four-poster beds. Standard rooms have just a shower, whereas the deluxe rooms come with more antiques and a large granite bathroom with a tub. Complimentary drinks are served in the communal living room in the evenings, and a good continental breakfast buffet goes for A\$12 (US\$7.80).

249 Elizabeth St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ 03/6231 3830. Fax 03/6234 2566. www.thelodge.com.au. 13 units. A\$135 (US\$88) standard double; A\$149 (US\$97) deluxe double (with Jacuzzi). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; laundry facilities; dry cleaning, nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Macquarie Manor ★★ As soon as you walk into this classically colonial-style manor you'll know you want to stay. Macquarie Manor was built in 1875 as a doctor's surgery and residence. Extra rooms were added in 1950. Thick carpets and double-glazed windows keep the place very quiet, even though the Manor is on the main road. Rooms, which vary enormously, are comfortable and elegantly furnished. One room is suitable for people with disabilities. The staff is very friendly and will be happy to escort you around the premises in search of your favorite room. Check out the delightful dining room, and the drawing room complete with old couches and a grand piano. Parking is just to the left down the side of the main building. Smoking is not permitted.

172 Macquarie St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ 1800/243 044 in Australia, or 03/6224 4999. Fax 03/6224 4333. www.macmanor.com.au. 18 units (most with shower only). A\$160 (US\$104) Heritage room; A\$190 (US\$124) Heritage suite; A\$210 (US\$137) Macquarie suite. Extra adult A\$33 (US\$21), extra child A\$17 (US\$11). Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. 2 blocks from central bus terminal. **Amenities:** Tour desk; dry cleaning service. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Wellington Lodge This charming four-star Victorian-style town house (ca. 1885) is just a 10-minute walk (through Hobart's Rose Garden) from the main shopping area and Salamanca Place. Expect wooden floorboards, a country feel, and period antiques. Complimentary port is served every evening in the guest lounge. Smoking is not permitted.

7 Scott St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ 03/6231 0614. Fax 03/6234 1551. www.wwt.com.au/wellingtonlodge. 4 units. A\$100–A\$120 (US\$65–US\$78) double. Extra person A\$30 (US\$20). Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Free off-street parking. The airport bus will drop you off here, as will any bus to the Aquatic Center. Children under 11 not accepted. *In room:* TV, fridge, hair dryer.

Woolmers Inn Situated 2km (1¼ miles) south of the city, Woolmers Inn offers cozy one- or two-bedroom units with fully equipped kitchens. One unit is suitable for travelers with disabilities. The inn is in Sandy Bay, Hobart's main suburb; it's halfway between the casino and the city (within walking distance of Salamanca Place) and features a "golden mile" of boutique shopping. The inn was upgraded throughout 1999.

123–127 Sandy Bay Rd., Hobart, TAS 7000. ☎ **1800/030 780** in Australia, or 03/6223 7355. Fax 03/6223 1981. woolmersinn@bigpond.com.au. 36 units. A\$121 (US\$79) 1-bedroom apt; A\$149 (US\$97) 2-bedroom apt. Rates 10% higher from mid-Dec to end of Jan, and cheaper in winter. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: Catch the Sandy Bay (no number) bus from Elizabeth St. Mall on Elizabeth St. **Amenities:** Tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV/VCR, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, telephone.

WHERE TO DINE

Tasmania is known for its fresh seafood, including oysters, crab, crayfish, salmon, and trout. Once cheap, in recent years prices have crept up to match or even surpass those on the mainland. Generally, though, the food is of a good quality.

Cumquat on Criterion ★ *Value* MIXED ASIAN/AUSTRALIAN This cafe is an excellent breakfast venue, offering everything from egg on toast to traditional porridge with brown sugar. On the menu for lunch and dinner you could find Thai beef curry, laksa, a daily risotto, and chermoula-marinated fish. The desserts can be great. Vegetarians, vegans, and those on a gluten-free diet are very well catered for, as are your average carnivores.

10 Criterion St. ☎ **03/6234 5858**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$7.50–A\$15 (US\$4.90–US\$9.75). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 8am–6pm.

Drunken Admiral Restaurant ★ SEAFOOD The Drunken Admiral, opposite the Hotel Grand Chancellor on the waterfront, is an extremely popular spot with tourists, and can get raucous on busy evenings. The main attraction is its famous seafood chowder, swimming with anything that was on sale at the docks that morning. The large Yachties seafood grill is a full plate of squid, scallops, fish, mussels, and prawns, but there are plenty of simpler fish dishes on the menu, too. Otherwise splash out on Sperm Whale Sally's Shellfish Platter, or perhaps Captain Nimrod's Depth Charge Platter. The salad bar is spread in a sailing dingy and can be raided as often as you want, but it's rather uninteresting, so you'll probably be content with just one dip.

17–19 Hunter St. ☎ **03/6234 1903**. Reservations required. Main courses A\$14–A\$23 (US\$8.80–US\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

Mit Zitron ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Chef and owner Chris Jackman has earned quite a reputation in Tasmania. His twice-cooked eggs with chili-palm sugar are a huge seller, while the hot smoked blue-eye cod with ginger and wok-fried greens, and the chicken and mushroom sausages with wide noodles, spinach, and anchovy sauce are sensational. The informal restaurant, which is basically an old shop, has bright yellow citrus walls and wooden floors and furniture. You can also drop in for coffee and cake.

333 Elizabeth St., North Hobart. ☎ **03/6234 8113**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$16–A\$17 (US\$10–US\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–2pm; Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

The Point Revolving Restaurant TASMANIAN/AUSTRALIAN This revolving restaurant on the 17th floor of the Wrest Point Hotel Casino is known for its spectacular harbor and mountain views. Criticism of its consistency has led to a complete review of its cuisine over the last couple of years, but fortunately its specialties—prawns flambé in a curry sauce and the Caesar salad—have remained

through regular menu upgrades. The crêpes Suzette dessert is also wonderful. The service is friendly and relaxed, and the place is packed on weekends.

In the Wrest Point Hotel Casino, 410 Sandy Bay Rd. ☎ **03/6225 0112**. Reservations recommended. Main courses from A\$12 (US\$7.50) at lunch, from A\$17 (US\$11) at dinner. Fixed-price 3-course lunch menu A\$26 (US\$17); fixed-price 3-course dinner menu A\$43 (US\$28) Fri–Sat, A\$34 (US\$22) Sun–Thurs. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

Sisco's on the Pier SPANISH/MEDITERRANEAN/INTERNATIONAL Sisco's has undergone a transformation from a typical Spanish eatery with roving guitar players to a more upmarket international affair in recent years. Today it's known for its paella, Morton Bay bugs (a kind of small crayfish) with chocolate, garlic prawns with squid-ink spaghetti, and chargrilled octopus. The restaurant is light and bright with a large outdoor balcony.

Upper Level, Murray St., Pier. ☎ **03/6223 2059**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$17–A\$18 (US\$11–US\$12). AE, DC, MC V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 6pm–12am.

Vanidol's Asian Cuisine ASIAN Another restaurant very popular with both locals and tourists, Vanidol's serves up a variety of Thai, Indonesian, and Indian dishes. The beef salad with basil, chile, and mint is very good, as are the barbecue prawns served with a sweet tamarind sauce. The fish cooked in a light red curry sauce is another specialty. Smoking is not permitted between 6 and 9pm.

353 Elizabeth St., North Hobart. ☎ **03/6234 9307**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$13–A\$18 (US\$8.45–US\$12). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6 to around 11pm.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Mures Upper Deck ★ SEAFOOD This large and bustling waterfront restaurant offers great views of bobbing yachts as well as very fine seafood caught on the owner's very own fishing boats. I recommend starting with a bowl of potato soup, or the signature Mures Oysters topped with smoked salmon, sour cream, and salmon caviar. The most popular main courses are the blue-eye filet Martinique—a Creole-inspired sweet fish curry with coconut cream and banana sauce—or the giant seafood platter for two. The best summer dessert on the menu is the restaurant's famous summer pudding, which almost bursts with berries. In winter, come here if only for the Granny Leatherwood Pudding—made of apples and Australian leatherwood honey and served with cinnamon ice cream. The complex also includes **Lower Deck**, a very popular self-service family restaurant where you can dine very well for under A\$15 (US\$9.75).

Between Victoria and Constitution Docks, Hobart. ☎ **03/6231 2121**. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$19–A\$25 (US\$13–US\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10pm.

HOBART AFTER DARK

Built in 1837, the 747-seat **Theatre Royal**, 29 Campbell St. (☎ **03/6233 2299**), is the oldest remaining live theater in the country. It's known for its excellent acoustics and its classical Victorian decor. Ticket prices vary depending on the performance, but A\$25 (US\$16) is average.

If theater's not your thing, you may be interested in the **Hobart Historic Pub Tour** (☎ **03/6225 4806**), which traces the city's development through hotel drinking holes—an important part of life in Hobart early last century. The 2-hour tour takes in four pubs; visitors enjoy a drink in each as guides give an account of the building's place in Hobart's drinking history. Tours depart Sunday through Thursday at 5pm, and cost A\$35 (US\$23), including a drink at each pub.

Opened in 1829 as a tavern and a brothel frequented by whalers, **Knopwood's Retreat**, 39 Salamanca Place (☎ **03/6223 5808**), is still a raucous place

to be on Friday and Saturday evenings, when crowds cram the historic interior and spill out onto the streets. Light lunches are popular throughout the week, and occasionally you'll find jazz or blues on the menu.

My favorite drinking hole in Hobart is **Irish Murphy's**, 21 Salamanca Place (☎ 03/6223 1119), an atmospheric pub with stone walls and lots of dark wood. Local bands play Friday and Saturday evenings.

If you want to tempt Lady Luck, head to the **Wrest Point Casino**, in the Wrest Point Hotel, 410 Sandy Bay Rd. (☎ 03/6225 0112), Australia's first legal gambling club. Smart, casual attire required (collared shirts for men).

A SIDE TRIP TO MOUNT FIELD NATIONAL PARK

80km (50 miles) NW of Hobart

Mount Field National Park ★ is one of the prettiest in Tasmania. It was proclaimed a national park in 1916 to protect a plateau dominated by dolerite-capped mountains and dramatic glaciated valleys. Mount Field West is the highest point at 1,417m (4,647 ft.), and in the central and western regions of the park in particular, there are examples of lakes and tarns formed in the Ice Age of 30,000 years ago. The most mountainous regions support alpine moorlands of cushion plants, pineapple and sword grass, waratahs, and giant pandani. You can get a good look at these changing environments on a 16km (10-mile) drive from the park entrance to Lake Dobson along an unpaved and often highly rutted road, which is not suitable for conventional vehicles in winter or after heavy rain.

Bennett's and rufous wallabies are common, as are wombats, barred bandicoots, Tasmanian devils, and quolls. Platypuses inhabit the lakes. Birds common to the park include black cockatoos, olive whistlers, green rosellas, honeyeaters, currawongs, wedge-tailed eagles, and lyrebirds, which were introduced from Victoria in the 1930s. Also here are rare native hens, yellow wattlebirds, and dusky robins.

There are many walking trails in the park, including one to Tasmania's most photographed waterfalls, the spectacular 45m (148-ft.) **Russell Falls**, near the park's entrance. The walk to the falls along a paved, wheelchair-accessible track takes 15 minutes and passes ferns and forests, with some of Tasmania's tallest trees, mighty swamp gums up to 85m (280 ft.) high.

GETTING THERE **Tassielink** (☎ 03/6272 6611, or 1300/300 520 in Australia; www.tigerline.com.au) offers a daily service from December through March for A\$35 (US\$23) one-way. A day tour with the same company, leaving Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, costs A\$110 (US\$71) for adults and A\$75 (US\$49) for kids. By car, take the Lyall Highway from Hobart to the Gordon River and follow the signs after the township of Westerway.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

National Park Hotel Located 300m (984 ft.) inside the park, this typical one-story Aussie hotel has basic rooms, some with a sink. There's a TV in the lounge bar. The hotel can book horseback-riding expeditions within the park.

2366 Gordon River Rd., National Park, TAS 7140. ☎ 03/6288 1103. 7 units, none with bathroom. A\$60 (US\$39) double. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; golf course nearby.

Russell Falls Holiday Cottages These cottages are right at the entrance to the park in a rural setting with rolling fields. Each is spacious and comfortable, with an attached toilet and shower, as well as a lounge and dining room.

Lake Dobson Rd., National Park, TAS 7140. ☎ 03/6288 1198. 4 units. A\$77 (US\$50) for 2 people. Extra adult A\$13 (US\$8.45), extra child under 16 A\$8 (US\$5.20). MC, V. **In room:** Gas heat, TV, kitchen, fridge, iron.

2 Port Arthur: Discovering Tasmania's Convict Heritage ★

102km (63 miles) SE of Hobart

Port Arthur, on the Tasman Peninsula, is one of Australia's prettiest harbors and houses the extensive remains of Tasmania's largest penal colony—essentially Australia's version of Devil's Island. It's the state's number-one tourist destination, and you really should plan to spend at least a whole day in this incredibly picturesque, yet haunting, place.

From 1830 to 1877, Port Arthur was one of the harshest institutions of its type anywhere in the world. It was built to house the settlement's most notorious prisoners, often prisoners who had escaped into the bush from lesser institutions. Nearly 13,000 convicts found their way here, and nearly 2,000 died while incarcerated. Port Arthur is connected to the rest of Tasmania by a strip of land called Eaglehawk Neck. Guards and dogs kept watch over this narrow path, while the authorities circulated rumors that the waters around the peninsula were shark-infested. Only a few convicts ever managed to escape, and most of those either perished in the bush or were tracked down and hanged. Look out for the blow-hole and other coastal formations, including Tasman's Arch, Devil's Kitchen, and the Tessellated Pavement, as you pass through Eaglehawk Neck.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Port Arthur is a 1½-hour drive from Hobart via the Lyell and Arthur highways. **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (☎ 1300/653 633 or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs trips from Hobart to the former penal settlement on Tuesday, Wednesday (in summer only), Thursday, Friday, and Sunday. Tours cost A\$60 (US\$39) for adults and A\$38 (US\$25) for children 4 to 16; free for children under 4. Another option also takes in Bushmills Pioneer Settlement, a sawmill with old buildings, which features a narrow-gauge steam railway. It's near Port Arthur. This tour costs A\$70 (US\$45) for adults and A\$60 (US\$39) for children 4 to 16. Tours depart from 199 Collins St. at 9am and return around 5:30pm. Both trips include a guided tour of the Port Arthur site.

EXPLORING THE SITE

The **Port Arthur Historic Site** ★★ (☎ 03/6251 2310; www.portarthur.org.au) is large and scattered, with some thirty 19th-century buildings. (Most of the main ones were damaged during bushfires in 1877, shortly after the property ceased to be a penal institution.) You can tour the remains of the church, guard tower, model prison, and several other buildings. It's best to tour the area with a guide, who can describe what the buildings were originally used for. Don't miss the fascinating museum in the old lunatic asylum, which has a scale model of the prison complex, as well as leg irons and chains.

The site is open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is A\$22 (US\$14) for adults, A\$10 (US\$6.50) for children 4 to 12, and A\$48 (US\$31) for a family. The admission price is good for 2 consecutive days and includes a walking tour and a boat cruise around the harbor, which leaves eight times daily in summer. There is also a separate cruise to the **Isle of the Dead** off the coast of Port Arthur twice a day; some 1,769 convicts and 180 free settlers were buried here, mostly in mass graves with no headstones. The cruise costs an extra A\$5 (US\$3.25) per person.

A new visitor center opened in January 1999. The main feature is a fabulous **Interpretive Gallery**, which takes visitors through the process of sentencing in England to transportation to Van Dieman's Land. The gallery contains a courtroom, a

Finds Something Spooky

The **Ghost Tours of Port Arthur** ★ leave nightly by lantern at 6:30, 8:30, and 9:30pm (only 8:30pm during winter months) and cost A\$14 (US\$9) for adults and A\$8.60 (US\$5.60) for children. You can purchase a Family ticket, costing A\$36 (US\$24), which includes two adults and up to six children. Reservations are essential; call ☎ 1800/659 101 in Australia.

section of a transport ship's hull, a blacksmith's shop, a lunatic asylum, and more. Allow between 3 and 4 hours to explore the site and the gallery.

EN ROUTE TO PORT ARTHUR

On the way to Port Arthur, you might want to stop off at the historic village of Richmond and at the Tasmanian Devil Park Wildlife Rescue Centre.

Richmond is just 26km (16 miles) northeast of Hobart and is the site of the country's oldest bridge (1823), the best-preserved convict jail in Australia (1825), and several old churches, including St. John's Church (1836)—the oldest Catholic church in the country. Richmond also has plenty of tearooms, crafts shops, galleries, and antiques stores.

Eighty kilometers (50 miles) from Hobart is the **Tasmanian Devil Park Wildlife Rescue Centre**, Port Arthur Highway, Taranna (☎ 03/6250 3230; fax 03/6230 3406), which houses orphaned or injured native animals, including Tasmanian devils, quolls, kangaroos, eagles, and owls. The park is open daily from 9am to 5pm. Admission is A\$12 (US\$7.80) for adults, A\$6 (US\$3.90) for children, and A\$30 (US\$20) for a family. Tasmanian devils are fed daily at 10 and 11am, and 5pm. The adjoining **World Tiger Snake Centre**, a unique medical research project, contains some 1,500 highly venomous snakes.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

If you are sticking to a tight budget, then there are a couple of options you might consider. The **Port Arthur Caravan & Cabin Park**, Garden Point, Port Arthur 7182 (☎ 03/6250 2340; www.portarthurcaravan-cabinpark.com.au), is 1km (less than ½ mile) before Port Arthur. Campsites cost A\$15 (US\$9.75), dorm beds are A\$14 (US\$9.10), and simple but very adequate cabins A\$75 to A\$85 (US\$49–US\$55). A walking track leads from the caravan park to the historic site. The **Roseview Youth Hostel**, Champ St., Port Arthur (☎ 03/6250 2311; www.yha.com.au), is on the edge of the Port Arthur site (continue 500m/1,600 ft. past the Port Arthur turnoff and turn left into Safety Cove Rd.). Dorm beds here cost A\$18 (US\$12) in six-person rooms; the one double room and another twin room cost A\$42 (US\$27); and the two family rooms cost A\$57 (US\$37).

The **Port Café** and **Felons restaurant** (☎ 03/6251 2371 for both) are both in the Visitor Centre at the historic site. The café serves snacks and basic meals, and Felons is more upmarket, with some good seafood dishes for dinner. Mains here cost A\$18 to A\$22 (US\$12–US\$14).

Port Arthur Motor Inn If you decide to stop over rather than drive all the way back to Hobart (remember marsupials get killed all the time on the roads at night—and they can do a lot of damage to a rental car), then this three-and-a-half star motor inn is a good choice. The rooms are attractive and overlook the historic site. A range of packages are available, including a room with dinner, breakfast, and the ghost tour for A\$99 (US\$65) per person, or a room, 2-day's

entrance to the Port Arthur site, the ghost tour, and breakfast for A\$103 (US\$67) per person. The restaurant here, called the **Commandants Table**, is open nightly for dinner (to people not staying here, too). Mains cost A\$15 to A\$22 (US\$9.75–US\$14).

Port Arthur Historic Site, Arthur Hwy., Port Arthur, TAS 7182. ☎ 1800/030 747 in Australia, or 03/6250 2101. Fax 03/6250 2417. www.portarthur-inn.com.au. 35 units. A\$99 (US\$72) double. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Children 11 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: Hobart Coaches run from Hobart on weekdays. **Amenities:** Restaurant; kids' playground; coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, iron.

3 Freycinet National Park ★★

206km (128miles) NE of Hobart; 214km (133 miles) SW of Launceston

If you only have time to visit one place in Tasmania, make sure it's **Freycinet National Park**. The Freycinet Peninsula hangs down off the eastern coast of Tasmania. It's a place of craggy pink granite peaks, spectacular white beaches, wetlands, heathlands, coastal dunes, and dry eucalyptus forests. This is the place to come to spot sea eagles, wallabies, seals, pods of dolphins, and humpback and southern right whales during their migration to and from the warmer waters of northern New South Wales from May through August. The township of **Coles Bay** is the main staging post, and there are many **bushwalks** in the area. The **Moulting Lagoon Game Reserve**—an important breeding ground for black swans and wild ducks—is signposted along the highway into Coles Bay from Bicheno. Some 10,000 black swans inhabit the lake, so it's very rare not to see them. Six kilometers (3¾ miles) outside town and inside the national park is the **Cape Tourville Lighthouse**, with extensive views north and south along the coast and across several of the small islands in the Tasman Ocean.

The spectacular **Wineglass Bay** ★★, named as one of the world's top 10 beaches by *Outside* magazine, is a lovely spot for a walk.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Tasmanian Redline Coaches** (☎ 03/6336 1446) runs between Launceston (112 George St.) Monday through Friday, and take less than 3 hours. Buses usually leave in the afternoon, but call for details as times change. From Bicheno catch a local bus run by **Bicheno Coach Services** (☎ 03/6257 0293, or 0419/570 293). Tickets cost A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) each way. Buses meet every coach from Launceston, but you need to book in advance. There are no direct buses from Hobart. **Tassielink** (☎ 1300/300 520 in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs buses from Launceston to Bicheno on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday leaving at 8:30am. **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (☎ 1300/653 633 or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) offers a day trip to Freycinet with an optional walking trip to Wineglass Bay (see below) from Hobart in summer only, on Friday and Sunday. It costs A\$59 (US\$38) for adults and A\$40 (US\$26) for children. Car entry to the park costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) per day.

From Hobart it's about a 3-hour drive to the park.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Visitor Information Centre**, on the Tasman Highway, Bicheno, TAS 7215 (☎ 03/6375 1333; fax 03/6375 1533), can arrange tour bookings. Otherwise, the **Tasmanian Travel and Information Centre** at 80 Elizabeth St. (corner of Davey St.), Hobart, TAS 7000 (☎ 03/6230 8383) can supply you with maps and details. Daily entry to the park costs A\$9 (US\$5.85) per vehicle.

EXPLORING THE PARK

If you only have time to do one walk, then head out from Freycinet Lodge on the 30-minute uphill hike past spectacularly beautiful pink granite outcrops to **Wineglass Bay Lookout** for breathtaking views. You can then head down to Wineglass Bay itself and back up again. The walk takes around 2½ hours. A longer walk takes you along the length of **Hazards Beach**, where you'll find plenty of shell middens—seashell refuge heaps—left behind by the Aborigines who once lived here. This walk takes 6 hours.

Tasmanian Expeditions (☎ 1800/030 230 in Australia, or 03/6334 3477; fax 03/6334 3463; www.tas-ex.com) offers a 3-day trip from Launceston and back that includes 2 nights in cabins at Coles Bay. The trip includes guided walks to Wineglass Bay and Mt. Amor. It costs A\$540 (US\$351) and departs Wednesday year-around. The company also offers 6- and 12-night walking, rafting, and cycling trips.

Not to be missed is a trip aboard Freycinet Sea Charter's vessel *Kahala* (☎ 03/6257 0355; fax 03/6375 1461), which offers whale-watching between June and September, bay and game fishing, dolphin watching, diving, scenic and marine wildlife cruises, and sunset cruises. Half-day cruises cost A\$60 (US\$39) per person with a minimum of four adults onboard. Full-day cruises cost A\$100 (US\$65) per person.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Camping is available in the park itself for A\$10 (US\$6.50) a tent, though water is scarce. For inquiries, call the **Parks and Wildlife Service** (☎ 03/6257 0107). Budget options include the **Iluka Holiday Centre**, Coles Bay Esplanade (☎ 03/6257 0115; www.ilukaholidaycentre.com.au). Dorms in the **YHA** on the site cost A\$18.50 (US\$12); campsites cost A\$20 (US\$13); caravans A\$60 (US\$39) for two people; two-bedroom cabins A\$75 (US\$49); and self-contained two-bedroom units overlooking Muir's Beach & Great Oyster Bay cost A\$110 (US\$72) per night.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Freycinet Lodge ★★ I can't praise this eco-friendly lodge enough. Comfortable one- and two-room cabins are spread unobtrusively through the bush and connected by raised walking tracks. Each has a balcony, and the more expensive ones have a huge spa tub. (The deluxe cabins are newly furnished, and some have water views.) Twenty cabins have their own kitchen. The main part of the lodge houses a lounge room and a truly excellent restaurant that sweeps out onto a veranda overlooking the limpid green waters of Great Oyster Bay. The lodge is right next to the white sands of Hazards Beach, and from here it's an easy stroll to the start of the Wineglass Bay walk.

Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay 7215. ☎ 03/6257 0101. Fax 03/6257 0278. www.freycinetlodge.com.au. 60 units. A\$190 (US\$124) standard cabin; A\$225 (US\$146) spa cabin; A\$255 (US\$166) deluxe spa cabin. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; golf course nearby; tennis court; bike rental; activities desk; coin-op laundry; e-mail kiosk; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

HOBBART TO LAUNCESTON: THE "HERITAGE HIGHWAY"

By the 1820s several garrison towns had been built between Launceston and Hobart, and by the middle of the 19th century convict labor had produced what was considered to be the finest highway of its time in Australia. Today, many of the towns along the route harbor magnificent examples of Georgian and Victorian architecture. It takes about 2 hours to drive between Launceston and Hobart

on the “Heritage Highway” (officially known as the A1, or the Midland Highway), but you really need 2 days to fully explore.

ROSS ★

121km (75 miles) N of Hobart; 78km (48 miles) S of Launceston

One of Tasmania's best preserved historic villages, picturesque Ross was established as a garrison town in 1812 on a strategically important crossing point on the Macquarie River. **Ross Bridge**, the third oldest in Australia, was built in 1836 to replace an earlier one made of logs. The bridge is decorated with Celtic symbols, animals, and faces of notable people of the time. It is lit up at night, and there are good views of it from a dirt track that runs along the river's north bank.

The town's **main crossroads** is edged by four historic buildings, humorously known as “temptation” (represented by the Man-o'-Ross Hotel), “salvation” (the Catholic church), “recreation” (the town hall), and “damnation” (the old jail). The **Ross Female Factory**, built in the early 1840s, consists of ruins, a few interpretive signs, and a model of the original site and buildings inside the original Overseer's Cottage. Entry is free. Women convicts were imprisoned here from 1847 to 1854.

At the **Tasmanian Wool Centre** and tourist information center on Church Street (☎ 03/6381 5466), there is an exhibition detailing the growth of the region and the wool industry since settlement. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (until 6pm Jan–Mar), and entry costs A\$4 (US\$2.60) for adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) for children, and A\$10 (US\$6.50) for a family.

Where to Stay & Dine

Colonial Cottages of Ross ★ To feel the part, why not stay in one of these delightful three-and-a-half star historic cottages. Apple Dumpling Cottage (ca. 1880) is a two-bedroom wooden cottage, sleeping four, with impressive sandstone fireplaces set on the edge of the village in a rural setting. The spacious Church Mouse Cottage (ca. 1840), set in an old Sunday School, sleeps just two. Captain Samuel's Cottage (ca. 1830) accommodates six people in three bedrooms, with two double and two single beds. Finally, Hudson Cottage (ca. 1850) sleeps four. All cottages have modern bathrooms and kitchen facilities.

12 Church St., Ross, Tasmania 7209. ☎ 03/6381 5354. Fax 03/6381 5408. mjohnson@southcom.com.au. 4 units. A\$138–A\$156 (US\$90–US\$101) for 2 (depending on cottage and season). Extra person A\$25–A\$33 (US\$13–US\$21). MC, V. *In room:* TV, kitchen.

The Ross Village Bakery and Inn This coaching inn, built in 1832, offers four homely rooms done in old English style. One room has a double bed, another a double and two singles. The third is a double, which opens up onto a fourth room that has two singles (suitable as a family room). A separate lounge has a TV and free tea, coffee, sherry, and cakes. The bakery on the premises is an excellent place for lunch, serving things like filled baked potatoes and some of the best pies in Australia, baked in a wood-fired oven dating from 1860.

15 Church St., Ross, Tasmania 7209. ☎ 03/6381 5246. Fax 03/6381 5360. www.rossbakery.com.au. 4 units. A\$110 (US\$72). AE, MC, V. *In room:* Hair dryer.

4 Launceston ★

198km (123 miles) N of Hobart

Tasmania's second largest city is Australia's third oldest after Sydney and Hobart. Situated at the head of the Tamar River, 50km (31 miles) inland from the state's north coast, and surrounded by delightful undulating farmland, **Launceston** is

The Plight of Taz

Made famous throughout the world by the rambunctious, spinning Warner Brothers cartoon character Taz, the Tasmanian Devil is being struck down by a mysterious cancer. The illness, which was first noticed in the northeast of the island in 1996, has wiped out up to 85% of the animals in parts of the island, and is rapidly spreading westward.

There were between 150,000 and 200,000 Tasmanian Devils on the island before the cancer first appeared, and wildlife officials believe up to two-thirds of the population will have died out by 2006. It's thought that the disease will only be stopped when populations of Tassie Devils are so small and remote from each other that the cancer ceases to remain viable.

The lack of Tasmanian Devils could make it easier for foxes to colonize the island. European red foxes, which have devastated native wildlife on the Australian mainland, have turned up on Tasmania in recent years. It is believed that deranged pro-hunting activists introduced them, while indecisiveness on the part of the Tasmanian State Government has meant that their numbers have increased. If foxes gain a strong foothold on the island, which they look likely to do, Tasmania could be faced with an epidemic of extinctions.

a pleasant city crammed with elegant Victorian and Georgian architecture and plenty of remnants from convict days. Unfortunately, shortsighted local and state governments are gradually overseeing the chipping away of its great architectural heritage in favor of the usual parking garages and ugly concrete monoliths. However, Launceston (pop. 104,000) is still one of Australia's most beautiful cities and has plenty of delightful parks and churches. It's also well placed as the gateway to the wineries of the Tamar Valley, the highlands and alpine lakes of the north, and the stunning beaches to the east.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au) flies to Launceston from Melbourne and Sydney. The Airport Shuttle drops off at city hotels from 8:45am to 5pm daily. It costs A\$10 (US\$6.50) one-way.

Tasmanian Redline Coaches (☎ 03/6336 1446; www.redlinecoaches.com.au) depart Hobart for Launceston several times daily (trip time: around 2 hr., 40 min.). The one-way fare is A\$24.70 (US\$16). Launceston is 1½ hours from Devonport if you plan to take a ferry from Melbourne across Bass Strait to Devonport. The bus ride from Devonport to Launceston costs around A\$17 (US\$11).

The drive from Hobart to Launceston takes just over 2 hours on Highway 1.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Gateway Tasmania Travel Centre** on the corner of St. John and Paterson streets, TAS 7250 (☎ 03/6336 3133; fax 03/6336 3118; gateway.tas@microtech.com.au) is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 9am to 3pm, and Sunday and holidays from 9am to noon.

CITY LAYOUT The main pedestrian shopping mall, Brisbane Street, along with St. John and Charles streets on either side, forms the heart of the central

area. The Victorian-Italianate Town Hall is 2 blocks north on Civic Square, and opposite the red brick Post Office building dating from 1889. The Tamar River slips quietly past the city's northern edge and is crossed at two points by Charles Bridge and Tamar Street. City Park, to the northeast of the central business district, is a nice place for a stroll.

EXPLORING THE CITY & ENVIRONS

Launceston is easily explored by foot. A must for any visitor is a stroll with **Launceston Historic Walks** (★) (☎ 03/6331 3679; harris.m@bigpond.com), which leave from the Gateway Tasmania Travel Centre Monday through Friday at 9:45am. (Weekend walks can also be arranged.) The hour-long walk gives a fascinating insight into Launceston's history and costs A\$10 (US\$6.50). **City Sights** (☎ 03/6336 3122), on the corner of St. John and Paterson streets, runs city tours daily by replica tram. Tours cost A\$23 (US\$15) for adults and A\$16 (US\$10) for children under 16. Otherwise, **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tiger-line** (☎ 1300/653 633 or 03/6272 6611) operates a half-day coach tour of the city, plus a boat cruise, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30am. It costs A\$39 (US\$25) for adults and A\$23 (US\$15) for children.

A must see is **Cataract Gorge** (★), the result of violent earthquakes that rattled Tasmania some 40 million years ago. It's a wonderfully scenic area just 10 minutes from Launceston. The South Esk River flows through the gorge and collects in a small lake traversed by a striking yellow suspension bridge and the longest single span chair lift in the world. The **chair lift** (☎ 03/6331 5915) is open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (except June 23–Aug 11, when it operates on Sat–Sun only), and costs A\$5 (US\$3.25) for adults and A\$3 (US\$1.95) for children under 16. Outdoor concerts are sometimes held on the lake bank. The hike to the Duck Reach Power Station takes about 45 minutes. Take good footwear and a raincoat. Other walks in the area are shorter and easier. The **Gorge Restaurant** (☎ 03/6331 3330) and the kiosk next door serve meals with glorious views from the outdoor tables.

Tamar River Cruises (☎ 03/6334 9900) offers lunch, afternoon, and evening buffet dinner cruises up the Tamar River from Home Point Wharf in Launceston.

Mountain biking is popular in this area. Contact **Tasmanian Expeditions** (☎ 1800/030 230 in Australia, or 03/6334 3477) for information on its 4- to 7-day trips along the east coast in summer. You can **rent bicycles** from the youth hostel at 36 Thistle St. (☎ 03/6344 9779) for A\$11 (US\$7.15) per day for a touring bike or A\$18 (US\$12) per day for a mountain bike. (Also hire bush-walking equipment, including boots, tents, sleeping bags, and stoves.)

The **Trevallyn State Recreation Area**, on the outskirts of Launceston off Reatta Road, is a man-made lake surrounded by a beautiful wildlife reserve with several walking tracks. There are barbecue facilities, picnic areas, and a beach.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Aquarius Roman Baths Adorned with gold, Italian marble, and works of art, this remarkable Romanesque structure is worth visiting just for the architectural experience. Indulge in warm, hot, and cold water baths; visit the steam room; or get a massage or a beauty makeover.

127 George St. ☎ 03/6331 2255. Admission to baths and hot rooms A\$20 (US\$13) for 1, A\$33 (US\$21) for 2. Treatments extra. Mon–Fri 8:30am–9pm; Sat–Sun 9am–6pm.

The Old Umbrella Shop Built in the 1860s, this unique shop is the last genuine period store in Tasmania and has been operated by the same family since

the turn of the 20th century. Umbrellas spanning the last 100 years are on display, while modern “brollies” and souvenirs are for sale. Allow 15 minutes.

60 George St. ☎ 03/6331 9248. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat 9am–noon.

The Penny Royal World & Gunpowder Mill This amusement park, with its sailboat, barges and trams, and historic gunpowder mills, is large enough to occupy an entire day. Admission also includes a tram ride and a trip up Cataract Gorge and the Tamar River on the paddle steamer MV *Lady Stelfox*.

Off Bridge Rd. ☎ 03/6331 6699. Admission A\$18.00 (US\$12) adults, A\$7.50 (US\$4.90) children. Family of 2 adults and up to 6 children A\$45.00 (US\$30). Daily 9am–4:30pm. Closed Christmas.

The Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery Opened in honor of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1891, this museum houses a large collection of stuffed wildlife, including the extinct Tasmanian tiger, or thylacine. There are also temporary exhibits and historical items on display. Allow an hour.

2 Wellington St. ☎ 03/6323 3777. Free admission for those under 18 and Launceston residents; otherwise, A\$10 (US\$6.50). Daily 10am–5pm, except Christmas.

Waverley Woollen Mills Established in 1874 on a site 5km (3 miles) north-east of town, this business still uses a waterwheel to turn the looms that help make woollen blankets and rugs. Tours show how the process works. Everything from woollen hats to ties is sold on the premises. Allow an hour.

Waverley Rd. ☎ 03/6339 1106. Tours A\$4 (US\$2.60) adults, A\$2 (US\$1.30) children, A\$12 (US\$7.80) families. Tours daily 9am–4pm (there’s usually a 20-min. wait).

York Town Square Market If you’re in Launceston on a Sunday, try to visit the York Town Square Market. This marketplace specializes in crafts items, many turned from local wood. It’s a pleasant place to spend a sunny Sunday afternoon.

The rear of the Launceston International Hotel. No phone. Sun 9am–5pm.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

One of the best places for budget conscious travelers is the upbeat and very clean **YHA Metro Backpackers**, 16 Brisbane St., Launceston (☎ 03/6334 4505; www.backpackersmetro.com.au). Bunks in four- to eight-bed dorms cost A\$23 (US\$15); double rooms with shared bathroom cost A\$55 (US\$36); and a family room with bathroom costs A\$95 (US\$62).

Hillview House The rooms at this restored farmhouse are nothing fancy, but are quite comfortable. They come with a double bed and a shower. The family room has an extra single bed; it’s the nicest room and has the best views. The hotel overlooks the city, and the large veranda and colonial dining room both have extensive views over the city and the Tamar River.

193 George St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ☎ 03/6331 7388. Fax 03/6331 7388. 9 units. A\$90 (US\$59) double; A\$105 (US\$68) family room for 3. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Laundry facilities. *In room:* TV.

Hotel Tasmania Situated in the heart of town, this budget hotel offers simple rooms with modern furnishings and attached showers. Downstairs there’s a saloon-style bar with a cowboy theme which hosts live music Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. The popular **UNI nightclub** also kicks off late on Wednesday, and it’s free for students before 11pm.

191 Charles St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ☎ 03/6331 7355. Fax 03/6331 2414. www.saloon.com.au. 25 units. A\$64 (US\$42) double. Extra person A\$19 (US\$12). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free on-street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

Innkeepers Colonial Motor Inn Those who desire tried-and-true motel lodging will feel at home at the Colonial, a place that combines old-world ambience with modern facilities. The rooms are large and have attractive furnishings. The Old Grammar School next door has been incorporated into the complex, with the **Quill and Cane Restaurant** operating in what once was a schoolroom, and **Three Steps On George**, Launceston's liveliest nightspot, making use of the former boys' gym. Rooms are fairly standard and attract a large corporate clientele.

31 Elizabeth St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ☎ 03/6331 6588. Fax 03/6334 2765. www.colonialinn.com.au. 63 units. A\$145 (US\$78) double; A\$195 (US\$127) suite. Extra person A\$15 (US\$9.75). Lower weekend rates. Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; tour desk; room service; laundry facilities. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Waratah on York ★★ The Waratah on York is a carefully renovated Victorian mansion, built in 1862 for Alexander Webster, an ironmonger by trade and mayor of Launceston in the 1860s and 1870s. The current owners have spent considerable time and energy restoring the property to its former glory. Some of the original features—pressed brass ceiling roses and a staircase with a cast-iron balustrade—remain, while others have been faithfully re-created. Of the nine rooms, six come with a spa tub, one with a balcony, and another with a sunroom. All have high ceilings and ornate (but non-functional) fireplaces. The executive rooms have four-poster beds and sweeping views down upon the Tamar River.

12 York St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ☎ 03/6331 2081. Fax 03/6331 9200. www.waratahonyork.com.au. 9 units. A\$156 (US\$96) standard double; A\$176 (US\$109) spa room; A\$208 (US\$130) executive spa suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge with fireplace; tour desk; business facilities; massage; laundry; same day dry cleaning; all nonsmoking hotel. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Alice's Cottages & Spa Hideaways ★★ I highly recommend these two delightful cottages. Alice's Place, which sleeps two, was made entirely from bits and pieces of razed historic buildings. Ivy Cottage, on the other hand, is a restored Georgian house (ca. 1831). Both places are furnished with antiques and fascinating period bric-a-brac. Kitchens are fully equipped, and both units have large spa baths. Guests come and go as they please and stay here on their own. (Check in at the reception at 129 Balfour St.) Both cottages share the same garden. Also available for rent are five other cottages in a colonial Australian theme (some sleeping four), called **Alice's Hideaways**; and four cute cottages collectively known as **The Shambles**. A recent addition is **Aphrodites Delux Spa**, a very large and regal setup with a formal dining room.

129 Balfour St., TAS 7250. ☎ 03/6334 2231. Fax 03/6334 2696. www.alicescottages.com.au. 11 units. A\$197 (US\$125) Alice's Place or Ivy Cottage, for 1 or 2 people; A\$160 (US\$102) Shambles cottages; A\$230 (US\$143) Aphrodites (2-night minimum stay); A\$197 (US\$128) Bonnie Doon, Captain Stirlings, Camelot, and French Boudoir. Extra person A\$55 (US\$36). Rates include breakfast ingredients left in your fridge. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, laundry facilities.

WHERE TO DINE

You'll find most places to eat in Launceston don't have a fixed closing time; rather they close up shop when the last customer has been served and has eaten.

Konditorei Cafe Manfred PATISSERIE This German patisserie has recently moved to larger premises to keep up with demand for its sensational cakes and breads. It's also added an à la carte restaurant serving up the likes of pastas and steaks. Light meals include croissants, salads, and cakes. You can eat in or outside.

106 George St. ☎ 03/6334 2490. Light meals A\$4–A\$5 (US\$2.60–US\$3.25); main courses A\$9–A\$18 (US\$5.85–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 9am–5:30pm; Sat 8:30am–4pm.

O’Keefe’s Hotel ASIAN/TASMANIAN This pub-based eatery earns high praise for its variety of well-prepared dishes. You can choose between such delicacies as Thai curry and laksa; seafood dishes such as scallops, prawns, and sushi; and plenty of pastas and grills. There’s also a range of good salads.

124 George St. ☎ 03/6331 4015. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$11–A\$25 (US\$7–US\$16). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am.

Shrimps ★ SEAFOOD Shrimps offers the best selection of seafood in Launceston. Built in 1824 by convict labor, it has a classic Georgian exterior. Tables are small and well spaced, and the best meals are off the blackboard menu, which generally includes at least eight fish dishes. Usually available are wonderful Tasmanian mussels, whitebait, Thai-style fishcakes, and freshly split oysters. Everything is very fresh and seasonal.

72 George St. (at the corner of Paterson St.). ☎ 03/6334 0584. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$14–A\$19 (US\$9.10–US\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 6:30–10pm.

Star Bar Cafe ★ MEDITERRANEAN Many consider this Tasmania’s best bistro. It offers a range of dishes, such as mee goreng, beetroot, and quail risotto; grilled octopus, steaks, and chicken livers; and pizzas and breads cooked in the wood-fired oven. In winter, guests congregate around a large open fire.

113 Charles St. ☎ 03/6331 9659. Reservations recommended. Main courses A\$12–A\$20 (US\$6.80–US\$11). AE, MC, V. Mon–Wed 11am–11pm; Thurs–Sat 11am–midnight; Sun noon–10pm.

A CAFE

Croplines Coffee Bar ★ *(Finds)* If you crave good coffee, bypass every other place in Launceston and head here. It’s a bit hard to find, and you may have to ask for directions, but basically it’s behind the old Brisbane Arcade. The owners are dedicated to coffee, grinding their beans on the premises daily. If coffee’s not your cup of tea, then try the hot chocolate—it’s the best I’ve tasted.

Brisbane Court, off Brisbane St. ☎ 03/6331 4023. Coffees and teas A\$1.60–A\$2.40 (US\$1–US\$1.60). Cakes under A\$2 (US\$1.30). AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–5:30pm.

WORTH A SPLURGE

Fee & Me Restaurant ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN What is perhaps Launceston’s best restaurant is found in a grand old mansion. The menu is structured so that diners choose a selection from five categories, each one moving from light to rich. An extensive wine list has been designed to complement selections for each course. A five-course meal could go something like this: Tasmanian smoked salmon with salad, capers, and a soft poached egg; followed by chili oysters with a coconut sauce and vermicelli noodles; then ricotta and goat cheese gnocchi with creamed tomato and red capsicum; followed by Asian-style duck on bok choy with a citrus sauce; topped off with a coffee and chicory soufflé. The dishes change frequently, so you never know what you might find.

Corner of Charles and Frederick sts. ☎ 03/6331 3195. Reservations recommended. A\$42 (US\$27) for 3 courses, A\$48 (US\$31) for 4 courses, A\$50 (US\$33) for 5 courses. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10:30pm.

5 Cradle Mountain & Lake St. Clair National Park ★★

85km (53 miles) S of Devonport; 175km (109 miles) NW of Hobart

The national park and World Heritage area that encompasses both Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair is one of the most spectacular regions in Australia and, after

Hobart and Port Arthur, the most visited place in Tasmania. The 1,545m (5,068-ft.) mountain dominates the north part of the island, and the long, deep lake is to its south. Between them lie more steep slopes, button grass plains, majestic alpine forests, dozens of lakes filled with trout, and several rivers. **Mount Ossa**, in the center of the park, is Tasmania's highest point at 1,617m (5,304 ft.). The **Overland Track** (see "Hiking the Overland Track" below) links Cradle Mountain with Lake St. Clair and is the best known of Australia's walking trails. Another option in the area is a visit to the **Walls of Jerusalem National Park**, a high alpine area with spectacular granite walls, small lakes, and old-growth forest.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Tassielink** (☎ 1300/300 520 in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs buses to Cradle Mountain from Hobart, Launceston, Devonport, and Strahan. A special summer Overland Track service (provided by Tassielink) drops off passengers at the beginning of the walk (Lake St Clair) and picks them up at Cradle Mountain. From Launceston this costs A\$99 (US\$65) one-way for adults and A\$89 (US\$58) for students. From Hobart it costs A\$90 (US\$58) for adults and A\$81 (US\$53) for students. Another option is Launceston to Lake St Clair and then Cradle Mountain to Hobart, for A\$70 (US\$45) for adults and A\$63 (US\$41) for students. Check the website for departure times as they do change. The company also runs a day tour from Launceston, including short walks, for A\$89 (US\$58) for adults and A\$55 (US\$36) for children.

Maxwells Cradle Mountain–Lake St. Clair Charter Bus and Taxi Service (☎/fax 03/6492 1431) runs buses from Devonport and Launceston to Cradle Mountain from A\$35 (US\$23), depending on how many people are onboard. The buses also travel to other areas nearby, such as the Walls of Jerusalem and Lake St. Clair. Buses also run from the Cradle Mountain campground to the start of the Overland Track.

Motorists enter the park via the Lyall Highway from Hobart, via Deloraine or Poatina from Launceston, and via Sheffield or Wilmot from Devonport. Both Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair are well signposted.

VISITOR INFORMATION The park headquarters, **Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre** (☎ 03/6492 1133; fax 03/6492 1120; www.parks.tas.gov.au), on the northern edge of the park outside Cradle Mountain Lodge, offers the best information on walks and treks. It's open 8am to 5pm (6pm in summer) daily.

EXPLORING THE PARK

Cradle Mountain Lodge (see "Where to Stay & Dine" below) runs a daily program of guided walks, abseiling (rappelling), rock climbing, and trout-fishing excursions for lodge guests. There are also plenty of trails that can be attempted by people equipped with directions from the staff at the park headquarters (see "Visitor Information," above). Be warned, though, that the weather changes quickly in the high country; so go prepared with wet-weather gear and always tell someone where you are headed. Of the shorter walks, the stroll to Pencil Pines and the 5km (3-mile) walk to Dove Lake are the most pleasant. Between June and October it's sometimes possible to cross-country ski in the park.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Cradle Mountain Lodge ★★ If you like luxury with your rainforests, then this award-winning lodge is the place for you. Cradle Mountain Lodge is marvelous. Just minutes from your bed are the giant buttresses of 1,500-year-old

Moments Hiking the Overland Track

The best-known hiking trail in Australia is the **Overland Track** ★★, an 85km (53-mile) route between Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair. The trek takes from 5 to 10 days and goes through high alpine plateaus, button grass plains, heathland, and rainforests, and passes glacial lakes, ice-carved crags, and waterfalls. The trek gives you a good look at the beauty of Tasmania's pristine wilderness, and although the first day is quite tough, you soon get into the rhythm. After climbing to Pelion Gap, the track gradually descends southwards toward the towering myrtle forests on the shores of Lake St Clair. There are many rewarding side trips, including the 1-day ascent of Mt. Ossa (1,617m/5,304 ft.), Tasmania's highest peak.

Several companies offer guided walks of the Overland Track from October through April, although simple public huts, on a first-come, first-served basis, and camping areas are available for those who wish to do it solo. Every summer up to 200 people a day start the trek. Most trekking companies employ at least two guides who carry tents and cooking gear, while you carry your sleeping bag, lunch, and personal belongings. Wet-weather gear is essential as heavy downpours can be frequent, and make sure your boots are well worn in to avoid blisters.

Tasmanian Expeditions (☎ 1800/030 230 in Australia, or 03/6334 3477; www.tas.ex.com) offers 3-day walking tours around Cradle Mountain, staying at Waldheim Cabins. The tours depart from Launceston and cost A\$595 (US\$387), all-inclusive. Trips leave every Sunday and Wednesday between November and April, with extra trips from Christmas to the end of January. The company also offers a full 8-day trek on the Overland Track for A\$1,395 (US\$906), all-inclusive, from Launceston (wet-weather gear costs A\$55/US\$36 extra to rent). These trips depart every Saturday between November and April, with extra trips from late December to the end of January. Another trip, a 6-day Cradle Mountain and Walls of Jerusalem National Park trip, includes 3 nights of wilderness camping and 3 nights in a cabin. It costs A\$1,170 (US\$760) and leaves every Sunday between October and April. Many people have reported this trek to be the highlight of their trip to Australia.

Craclair Tours (☎/fax 03/6424 7833; www.craclairtours.com.au) also offers a quality 8-day Overland Track tour, including 5 nights of camping, between October and mid-April (leaving every Sun and Wed) for A\$1,440 (US\$705).

For an organized trek in this area, I recommend **Cradle Mountain Huts**, P.O. Box 1879, Launceston, TAS 7250 (☎ 03/6331 2006; fax 03/6331 5525; cradle@tassie.net.au). Six-day walks cost A\$1,895 (US\$1,231); rates are all-inclusive and include transfers to and from Launceston. Children under 12 are not permitted. The huts are fully equipped, heated, and quite comfortable, with showers, a main living area, and a full kitchen. You get a good three-course meal every night. The treks leave every day between Christmas Day and early February, and around five times a week between November and April.

trees, moss forests, mountain ridges, limpid pools and lakes, and hoards of scampering marsupials. The cabins are comfortable, the food excellent, the staff friendly, and the open fireplaces well worth cuddling up in front of for a couple of days. Each modern wood cabin has a pot-bellied stove as well as an electric heater for chilly evenings, a shower, and a small kitchen. There are no telephones or TV in the rooms—but who needs them? Spa cabins come with carpets, a spa tub, and a balcony offering a variety of views. Some have a separate bedroom. Two cabins have limited facilities for travelers with disabilities. Guests have the use of the casual, comfortable main lodge where almost every room has a log fire.

G.P.O. Box 478, Sydney, NSW 2001. ☎ 13 24 69 in Australia, 800/225-9849 in the U.S., 0171/805 3875 in the U.K., or 03/6492 1303. Fax 02/9299 2477. www.poresorts.com.au. 96 units. A\$230 (US\$150) Pencil Pine cabin; A\$290 (US\$188) spa cabin; A\$360 (US\$234) spa suite. Extra person A\$58 (US\$38). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. Ask about special winter packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Cafe; 2 bars; laundry facilities. *In room:* Kitchenette.

Waldheim Cabins If you want a real wilderness experience, then head for these cabins run by the Parks and Wildlife Service and located 5km (3 miles) from Cradle Mountain Lodge. Nestled between button grass plains and temperate rainforest, they are simple and affordable and offer good access to plenty of walking tracks. Each cabin is equipped with heating, single bunk beds, basic cooking utensils, crockery, cutlery, and a gas stove. They are serviced by two composting toilets and showers. Generated power is provided for lighting between 6 and 11pm only. Stores and fuel can be bought at Cradle Mountain Lodge. Bring your own bed linen and toiletries.

Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre, P.O. Box 20, Sheffield, TAS 7306. ☎ 03/6492 1110. Fax 03/6492 1120. Cradle@dpiwe.tas.gov.au. Minimum cabin charge A\$70 (US\$46) for 2 adults. Extra adult A\$25 (US\$16); extra child 6–16 A\$9.90 (US\$6.45). Children under 6 stay free. Linen is provided for A\$5.50 (US\$3.60) per person. MC, V. Collect cabin keys from the National Park Visitor Centre, just inside the boundary of the national park, between 8am–5:30pm daily.

LAKE ST. CLAIR ★

Australia's deepest natural freshwater lake is a narrow, 15km (9½-mile) long waterway, enclosed within the Cradle Mountain–Lake St. Clair National Park. On the lake's southern edge is **Cynthia Bay**, site of an informative ranger station where you must register if you're attempting the Overland Track from this end, as well as a restaurant, cabin accommodations, and a backpackers' hostel (the latter operated by **Lakeside St. Clair Wilderness Holidays**, Cynthia Bay ☎ 03/6289 1137; www.tasadventures.com/lakeside). Campsites here cost A\$12 (US\$7.80); dorm beds A\$25 (US\$16); cabins from A\$60 to A\$110 (US\$39–US\$72) November to May; and exclusive Alpine Lodges from A\$132 to \$184 (US\$86–US\$120) depending on season. National park rangers run several tours between Boxing Day and the end of February, including spotlighting tours and guided walks around the area. Call for details at ☎ 03/6289 1172.

6 The West Coast

296km (184 miles) NW of Hobart; 245km (152 miles) SW of Devonport

Tasmania's west coast is wild and mountainous with a scattering of mining and logging towns and plenty of wilderness. The pristine Franklin and Gordon rivers tumble through World Heritage areas once contested by loggers, politicians, and environmentalists, whereas the bare, poisoned hills that make up the eerily beautiful "moonscape" of Queenstown show the results of mining and industrial activity. **Strahan** ★ (pronounced "Strawn"), the only town of any

size in the area, is the starting point for cruises up the Gordon River and into the rainforest.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Tassielink** (☎ 1300/300 520 in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs coaches between Strahan and Launceston, Devonport, and Cradle Mountain every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday (and also Fri and Sun to and from Hobart). These days tend to fluctuate so check the website. The trip from Launceston takes over 8 hours. The drive from Hobart to Strahan takes about 4½ hours without stops. From Devonport, allow 3½ hours. Although the roads are good, they twist and turn and are particularly hazardous at night when marsupial animals come out to feed. The cheapest way to travel between these places is via bus with a **Tassie Wilderness Pass**.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Strahan Visitors Centre**, on The Esplanade (☎ 03/6471 7622; fax 03/6471 7533), is open daily from 10am to 6pm in winter and to 8pm in spring and summer. It has good information on local activities. A good website of the area is www.westcoasttourism.com.au.

CRUISING THE RIVERS & OTHER ADVENTURES

Gordon River Cruises (☎ 03/6471 7187) offers a half-day trip daily at 9am, an afternoon cruise sailing at 2pm in the first 3 weeks of January, and a full-day trip from October 1 to the end of May. Cruises take passengers across Macquarie Harbour and up the Gordon River past historic **Sarah Island**, where convicts—working in horrendous conditions—were once used to log valuable Huon pine. A stop is made at **Heritage Landing**, where you can get a taste of the rainforest on a half-hour walk. The full-day cruise in the high season (Oct–May) includes lunch and a guided tour through the convict ruins on Sarah Island. Cruises depart from the Main Wharf on The Esplanade, in the town center. The full-day cruises cost A\$55 (US\$36) for an internal seat, A\$75 (US\$49) for a window recliner, and A\$129 (US\$84) for a seat upstairs with the captain and a meal.

World Heritage Cruises (☎ 03/6471 7174; www.worldheritagecruises.com.au) offers daily cruises year-round, leaving Strahan Wharf at 9am and returning at 3:30pm. The company's MV *Wanderer III* stops at Sarah Island, Heritage Landing, and the salmon and trout farm at Liberty Point. Meals and drinks are available on board. The cruises cost A\$55 (US\$36) for adults, A\$25 (US\$16) for children 5 to 14 (free for children under 5), and A\$150 (US\$98) for a family of five. It also offers a half-day cruise between October 1 and April 31 starting at 9am and returning at 2pm. (It doesn't stop at Sarah Island.) This costs A\$50 (US\$33) for adults, A\$22 (US\$14) for children, and A\$130 (US\$85) for a family.

West Coast Yacht Charters (☎ 03/6471 7422) runs fishing trips from 9am to noon for A\$40 (US\$26) negotiable, with gear, bait, and morning tea included; crayfish dinner and fishing cruises from 6 to 8:30pm for A\$50 (US\$33); and 2-day, 2-night sailing cruises for A\$320 (US\$208) all-inclusive.

Although cruises are the main attraction in the area, you can also enjoy jet-boat rides, sightseeing in a seaplane that lands on the Gordon River, helicopter flights, and 4WD tours.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Budget options in Strahan include the **Strahan Youth Hostel**, 43 Harvey St., Strahan (☎ 03/6471 7255; www.yha.com.au; bookings: Box 151 Post Office, Strahan 7468). This basic but nicely situated YHA, a short walk away from town, has dorm beds for A\$20 (US\$13); twins for A\$44 (US\$29); doubles for

Moments Dune Buggy Rides

What's more fun than scooting across the sand in a dune buggy? **Four-Wheelers** (☎ 03/6471 7622, or 0419/508 175) offers 40-minute rides across the **Henty Sand Dunes** ★, about 10 minutes north of Strahan. Trips cost A\$35 (US\$23) for one adult and A\$60 (US\$39) for two. Longer trips are offered outside the summer months.

\$50 (US\$33); family rooms for A\$72 (US\$47); and two-bedroom units for A\$75 (US\$49). Another reasonable place is the **Strahan Caravan & Tourist Park**, Innes Street, Strahan (☎ 03/6471 7239; fax 03/6471 7692). Campsites here cost A\$15 (US\$9.75) for two people, and well-equipped wooden double cabins cost A\$65–A\$80 (US\$42–US\$52). There's a children's playground and barbecue facilities. More upmarket is **Strahan Village** (☎ 1800/628 286 in Australia, or 03/6471 7191; fax 03/6471 7389; www.strahanvillage.com.au). It's set on the waterfront and a hilltop overlooking Macquarie Harbour. Pleasant rooms in the Village Motor Inn here cost between A\$99 and A\$129 (US\$65–US\$84), depending on season; and cottages and terraces suitable for families cost from A\$149 to A\$172 (US\$97–US\$112).

Gordon Gateway Chalets These modern self-contained units are on a hill with good views of the harbor and Strahan township. Each has cooking facilities, so you can save on meal costs. The two-bedroom suites have a bathtub, and the studios have just a shower. Breakfast is provided on request. Guests have the use of a self-service laundry, a barbecue area, and a children's playground. One unit has facilities for travelers with disabilities.

Grining St., Strahan, TAS 7468. ☎ 03/6471 7165. Fax 03/6471 7588. www.gordongateway.com.au. 19 units. A\$100–A\$130 (US\$65–US\$104) studio; A\$185–A\$230 (US\$120–US\$127) suite. Discounts in winter. MC, V. **Amenities:** Children's playground; tour desk; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; barbecues; non-smoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

STANLEY

140km (87 miles) W of Devonport; 430km (267 miles) NW of Hobart

Among the least-known areas of Tasmania, the coastline east of Devonport can throw up some surprises. Not least of them is “The Nut,” a kind of miniature Ayers Rock rising out from the sea and towering above the township of Stanley. The Nut is the remains of a volcanic plug that forced its way through a crack in the earth's crust some 12 million years ago. You can walk to the top or, if you're brave, take a chair lift up for A\$7 (US\$4.55) for adults, A\$4.50 (US\$2.90) for children. **Warning:** Don't attempt riding the chair lift back down again if you're afraid of heights—the descent is incredibly steep and there's no getting off! There's a small buggy up top that will take you on a tour of The Nut for A\$6 (US\$3.90); free for children under 10.

ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The Old Cable Station ★ Darryl Stafford, an ex-logger, and his wife Heather have turned the former exchange building for the telephone line coming over from the mainland into a cozy B&B. The rooms are nice and comfortable; there are TVs in two rooms, but you'll probably spend all your time in the lounge chatting around the fire anyway. Darryl is as Aussie as you can get and will keep you entranced for hours with his stories. Seal cruises are offered daily, weather

permitting, for A\$30 (US\$20). Home-cooked dinners are served daily in the restaurant.

West Beach Rd., Stanley, TAS 7331. ☎ 03/6458 1312. Fax. 03/6458 2009. www.users.bigpond.com/staffordseals. 4 units. A\$95 (US\$62) double; A\$125–A\$135 (US\$81–US\$88) spa suite. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; tour desk; laundry service. *In room:* TV (in 2 rooms), kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Hursey Seafoods SEAFOOD There are plenty of people around who rate this little place as having the best seafood in Australia. Downstairs it's a casual cafe, where you choose what you want from fish tanks, while upstairs it's a more formal restaurant. An unusual specialty is muttonbird (shearwater), an oily seabird that you either like seeing flying around or like seeing on your plate. You can't have it both ways.

2 Alexander Terrace, Stanley. ☎ 03/6458 1103. Main course, cafe A\$10 (US\$6.50), restaurant A\$18 (US\$9.75). MC, V. Takeout/cafe 9am–6pm; restaurant 6–10pm.

Appendix: Australia in Depth

by Marc Llewellyn

The land “Down Under” is a modern nation coming to terms with its identity. The umbilical cord with Mother England has been cut, and the nation is still trying to find its position within Asia.

One thing it realized early on was the importance of tourism to its economy. Millions flock here every year. You’ll find Australians to be helpful and friendly, and services, tours, and food and drink to rival any in the world. Factor in the landscape, the native Australian culture, the sunshine, the animals, and some of the world’s best cities, and you’ve got a destination that’s fascinating, accessible, and full of amazing diversity and variety.

1 Australia’s Natural World

THE LAND OF THE NEVER-NEVER

People who have never visited Australia wonder why such a huge country has a population of just 19 million people. The truth is, Australia can barely support that many. About 90% of those 19 million people live on only 2.6% of the continent. Climatic and physical land conditions ensure that the only relatively decent rainfall occurs along a thin strip of land around Australia’s coast. The vast majority of Australia is harsh Outback, characterized by salt bush plains, arid brown crags, shifting sand deserts, and salt lake country. People survive where they can in this great arid land because of one thing—the Great Artesian Basin. This saucer-shaped geological formation comprises about one-fifth of Australia’s landmass, stretching over much of inland New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and the Northern Territory. Beneath it are massive underground water supplies stored during Jurassic and Cretaceous times (some 66–208 million years ago), when the area was much like the Amazon basin is today. Bore holes bring water to the surface and allow sheep, cattle, and humans a respite from the dryness.

The Queensland coast is blessed with one of the greatest natural attractions in the world. The **Great Barrier Reef** stretches some 2,000km (1,240 miles) from off Gladstone in Queensland, to the Gulf of Papua, near New Guinea. It’s relatively new, not more than 8,000 years old, though many fear that rising sea-water, caused by global warming, will cause its demise. As it is, the non-native Crown of Thorns starfish and a bleaching process believed to be the result of excessive nutrients flowing into the sea from Australia’s farming land, is already causing significant damage. The reef is covered in chapter 6.

AUSTRALIA’S FAUNA

NATIVE ANIMALS Australia’s isolation from the rest of the world over millions of years has led to the evolution of forms of life found nowhere else. Probably the strangest of all is the **platypus**. This monotreme, or egg-laying marsupial, has webbed feet, a duck-like bill, and a tail like a beaver’s. It lays eggs, and the young suckle from their mother. When a specimen was first brought back to Europe, skeptical scientists insisted it was a fake—a concoction of several different

animals sewn together. You will probably never see this shy, nocturnal creature in the wild, though there are a few at Sydney's Taronga Zoo.

Another strange one is the **koala**. This fluffy marsupial eats virtually indigestible gum leaves and sleeps about 20 hours a day. There's just one species, though those found in Victoria are substantially larger than their brethren in more northern climes. Australia is also famous for **kangaroos**. There are 45 different kinds of kangaroos and wallabies, ranging in scale from small rat-size kangaroos to the man-size red kangaroos.

The animal you're most likely to come across in your trip is the **possum**, named by Captain James Cook after the North American "opossum," which he thought they resembled. (In fact, they are from an entirely different family of the animal kingdom.) The brush-tailed possum is commonly found in suburban gardens, including those in Sydney. Then there's the **wombat**. There are four species of this bulky burrower in Australia, but the most frequently found is the common wombat. You might come across the smaller hairy-nosed wombat in South Australia and Western Australia.

The **dingo**, thought by many to be a native of Australia, was in fact introduced—probably by Aborigines. They vary in color from yellow to a russet red, and are heavily persecuted by farmers. Commonly seen **birds** include the fairy penguin along the coast, black swans, parrots and cockatoos, and honeyeaters. **Tasmanian devils** can be found in (you guessed it) the island/state of Tasmania.

DANGEROUS NATIVES **Snakes** are common throughout Australia, but you will rarely see one. The most dangerous land snake is the taipan, which hides in the grasslands in northern Australia—one bite contains enough venom to kill up to 200 sheep. If by the remotest chance you are bitten, you must immediately demobilize the limb, wrapping it quite tightly (but not tight enough to restrict the blood flow) with a cloth or bandage, and head to the nearest hospital where antivenin should be available.

There are two types of **crocodile** in Australia: the harmless freshwater croc which grows to 3m (10 ft.); and the dangerous estuarine (or saltwater) crocodile, which reaches 5m to 7m (16 ft.–23 ft.). Freshwater crocs eat fish; estuarine crocs aren't so picky. *Never* swim in, or stand on the bank of, any river, swamp, or pool in northern Australia unless you know *for certain* it's croc-free.

Spiders are common all over Australia, with the funnel web spider and the red-back spider being the most aggressive. Funnel webs live in holes in the ground (they spin their webs around a hole's entrance) and stand on their back legs when they're about to attack. Red-backs have a habit of resting under toilet seats and in boots (car trunks), generally outside the main cities. Caution is a good policy.

If you go bushwalking, check your body carefully. **Ticks** are common, especially in eastern Australia, and can cause severe itching and fever. If you find one on you, dab it with methylated spirits or another noxious chemical. Wait a while and pull it out gently with tweezers, taking care not to leave the head behind.

Fish to avoid are stingrays, porcupine fish, stonefish, lionfish, and puffer fish. Never touch an **octopus** if it has blue rings on it, or a cone shell, and be wary of the painful and sometimes deadly tentacles of the box **jellyfish** along the northern Queensland coast in summer. If you happen to brush past one of these creatures, pour vinegar over the affected site immediately—local councils leave bottles of vinegar on the beach for this purpose. Vinegar deactivates the stinging cells that haven't already affected you, but doesn't affect the ones that already have.

In Sydney, you might come across "stingers" or "blue bottles" as they are also called. These long-tentacled blue jellyfish can inflict a very nasty stinging burn

that can last for hours. Sometimes you'll see warning signs on patrolled beaches. The best remedy if you are severely stung is to wash the affected water with fresh water and have a very hot bath or shower.

2 The People of Oz

It's generally considered that more races of people live in Australia at the present time than anywhere else in the world, including North America. Heavy immigration has led to people from some 165 nations making the country their home. In general, relations between the different ethnic groups have been peaceful. Today Australia is an example of a multicultural society, despite an increasingly vocal minority that believes that Australia has come too far in welcoming people from races other than their own.

THE ABORIGINES When Captain James Cook landed at Botany Bay in 1770 determined to claim the land for the British Empire, at least 300,000 Aborigines were already on the continent. Whether you believe a version of history that suggests the Aboriginal people were descendants of migrants from Indonesia to the north, or the Aboriginal belief that they have occupied Australia since the beginning of time, there is scientific evidence that people were walking the continent at least 120,000 years ago.

At the time of the white "invasion" of their lands, there were at least 600 different, largely nomadic tribal communities, each linked to their ancestral land by "**sacred sites**" (certain features of the land, such as hills or rock formations). They were hunter-gatherers, spending about 20 hours a week harvesting the resources of the land, rivers, and the ocean. The rest of the time was taken up by a complex social and belief system, as well as by life's practicalities, such as making utensils, weapons, and musical instruments such as didgeridoos and clapsticks.

The basis of Aboriginal spirituality rests in the **Dreamtime** stories, in which everything—land, stars, mountains, the moon, the sun, the oceans, water holes, animals, and humans—was created by spirits. Much Aboriginal art is related to their land and the sacred sites that are home to the Dreamtime spirits. Some Aboriginal groups believe these spirits came in giant human form, others believed they were animals, still more that they were huge snakes. According to Aboriginal custom, individuals can draw on the power of the Dreamtime spirits by re-enacting various stories and practicing certain ceremonies.

Aboriginal groups had encountered people from other lands before the British arrived. Dutch records from 1451 show that the Macassans, from islands now belonging to Indonesia, had a long relationship trading Dutch glass, smoking pipes, and alcohol for edible sea slugs from Australia's northern coastal waters, which they sold to the Chinese in the Canton markets. Dutch, Portuguese, French, and Chinese vessels also encountered Australia—in fact, the Dutch fashion for pointy beards caught on through northern Australia long before the 1770 invasion.

When the British came, bringing their **diseases** with them, coastal communities were virtually wiped out by smallpox. Even as late as the 1950s, large numbers of Aborigines in remote regions of South Australia and the Northern Territory succumbed to deadly influenza and measles outbreaks.

Though relationships between the settlers and local Aborigines were initially peaceful, conflicts over land and food soon led to skirmishes in which Aborigines were massacred and settlers and convicts attacked—Governor Phillip was speared in the back by an Aborigine in 1790.

Within a few years, some 10,000 Aborigines and 1,000 Europeans had been killed in Queensland alone, while in Tasmania, a campaign to rid the island entirely of local Aborigines was ultimately successful, with the last full-blooded Tasmanian Aborigine dying in 1876. By the start of the 20th century, the Aboriginal people were considered a dying race. Most left alive lived in government-owned reserves or Church-controlled missions.

Massacres of Aborigines continued to go largely or wholly unpunished into the 1920s, by which time it became official government policy to remove light-skinned Aboriginal children from their families and to forcibly sterilize young women. Many children of the “stolen generation” were brought up in white foster homes or church refuges and never reunited with their biological families—many with living parents were told that their parents were dead.

Today, there are some 283,000 Aborigines living in Australia, and in general a great divide still exists between them and the rest of the population. Aboriginal life expectancy is 20 years lower than that of other Australians, with overall death rates between two and four times higher. A far higher percentage of Aboriginal people than other Australians fill the prisons, and despite a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Aborigines continue to die while incarcerated.

A landmark in Aboriginal affairs occurred in 1992 when the High Court determined that Australia was not an empty land (*terra nullius*) as it been seen officially since the British invasion. The “**Mabo**” decision resulted in the **1993 Native Title Act**, which allowed Aboriginal groups, and the ethnically distinct people living in the Torres Strait islands off northern Queensland, to claim government-owned land if they could prove continual association with it since 1788. The later “**Wik**” decision determined that Aborigines could make claims on Government land leased to agriculturists. The federal government, led by the right-leaning Prime Minister John Howard, curtailed these rights following pressure from farming and mining interests.

Issues currently facing the Aboriginal population include harsh mandatory sentencing laws (enacted in Western Australia and the Northern Territory state governments in 1996 and 1997, respectively), which came to international attention in 2000. The Aboriginal community believes such laws specifically target them. When a 15-year-old Aboriginal boy allegedly committed suicide less than a week before he was due to be released from a Northern Territory prison in early 2000, and a 21-year-old Aboriginal youth was imprisoned for a year for stealing A\$23 (US\$15) worth of fruit cordial and biscuits, Aboriginal people protested, activists of all colors demonstrated, and even the United Nations weighed in with criticism.

Added to this was the simmering issue of the federal government’s decision not to apologize to the Aboriginal people for the “stolen generation.” In March 2000, a government-sponsored report stated there was never a “stolen generation,” and according to respected researchers on both sides of the fence, went on to markedly underestimate the number of people personally affected.

Prior to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, a popular movement involving people of all colors and classes called for reconciliation and an apology to the Aboriginal people. In Sydney, an estimated 250,000 people marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Liberal (read “conservative”) Government refused to bow to public pressure. Despite threats of boycotts and rallies during the Olympics, the Games passed without major disturbance, and a worldwide audience watched as Aboriginal runner Cathy Freeman lit the Olympic cauldron.

THE REST OF AUSTRALIA “White” Australia was always used to distinguish the Anglo-Saxon population from that of the Aboriginal population. These days, though, a walk through any of the major cities will show that things have changed dramatically. About 100,000 people immigrate to Australia each year. Of these, approximately 12% were born in the U.K. or Ireland, 11% in New Zealand, and more than 21% are from China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, or the Philippines. Waves of immigration have brought in millions of people since the end of World War II. At the last census in 1996, more than a quarter of a million Australian residents were born in Italy, for example, some 186,000 in the former Yugoslavia, 144,000 in Greece, 118,000 in Germany, and 103,000 in China. So what’s the typical Australian like? Well, he’s hardly Crocodile Dundee.

3 Australian History 101

IN THE BEGINNING In the beginning there was the **Dreamtime**—at least according to the Aborigines of Australia. Between then and now, perhaps, the supercontinent referred to as **Pangaea** split into two huge continents called **Laurasia** and **Gondwanaland**. Over millions of years, continental drift carried the land masses apart. Laurasia broke up and formed North America, Europe, and most of Asia. Meanwhile, Gondwanaland divided into South America, Africa, India, Australia and New Guinea, and Antarctica. **Giant marsupials** evolved to roam the continent of Australia: among them were a plant-eating animal that looked like a wombat the size of a rhinoceros; a giant squashed-face kangaroo standing 3m (10 ft.) high; and a flightless bird the same size as an emu, but four times heavier. The last of these giant marsupials are believed to have died out some 40,000 years ago, possibly helped towards extinction by Aborigines.

EARLY EXPLORERS The existence of Australia had been in the minds of Europeans since the Greek astronomer Ptolemy drew a map of the world in about A.D. 150 showing a large land mass in the south, which he believed had to be there to balance out the land in the northern hemisphere. He called it *Terra Australis Incognita*—the unknown southland.

Evidence suggests Portuguese ships reached Australia as early as 1536 and

Dateline

- **120,000 B.C.** Evidence suggests Aborigines living in Australia.
- **60,000 B.C.** Aborigines living in Arnhem Land in the far north fashion stone tools.
- **24,500 B.C.** The world’s oldest known ritual cremation takes place at Lake Mungo.
- **1606** Dutch explorer Willem Jansz lands on far north coast of Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania).
- **1622** First English ship to reach Australia wrecks on the west coast.
- **1642** Abel Tasman charts the Tasmanian coast.
- **1770** Capt. James Cook lands at Botany Bay.
- **1787** Capt. Arthur Phillip’s First Fleet leaves England with convicts aboard.
- **1788** Captain Phillip raises British flag at Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour).
- **1788–1868** Convicts are transported from England to the colony of Australia.
- **1793** The first free settlers arrive.
- **1830** Governor Arthur lines up 5,000 settlers across Van Diemen’s Land to walk the length of the island to capture and rid it of all Aborigines.
- **1850** Gold discovered in Bathurst, New South Wales.
- **1852** Gold rush begins in Ballarat, Victoria.
- **1853** The last convict arrives in Van Diemen’s Land and to celebrate, the colony is renamed Tasmania after Abel Tasman.

continues

even charted part of its coastline. In 1606 William Jansz was sent by the Dutch East India Company to open up a new route to the Spice Islands, and to find New Guinea, which was supposed to be rich in gold. He landed on the north coast of Queensland and fought with local Aborigines. Between 1616 and 1640, many more Dutch ships made contact with Australia as they hugged the west coast of what they called "New Holland," after sailing with the *westerlies* (west winds) from the Cape of Good Hope.

In 1642, the Dutch East India Company, through the Governor General of the Indies, Anthony Van Diemen, sent Abel Tasman to search out and map the great south land. During two voyages, he charted the northern Australian coastline and discovered Tasmania, which he named Van Diemen's Land.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH

In 1697, English pirate William Dampier published a book about his adventures. In it, he mentions Shark Beach on the northwest coast of Australia as the place his pirate ship made its repairs after robbing ships on the Pacific Ocean. Sent to further explore by England's King William III, Dampier returned and found little to recommend.

Captain James Cook turned up in 1770 and charted the east coast in his ship HMS *Endeavor*. He claimed it for Britain and named it New South Wales, probably as a favor to Thomas Pennant, a Welsh patriot and botanist who was a friend of the *Endeavour's* botanist, Joseph Banks. On April 29, Cook landed at Botany Bay, which he named after the discovery of scores of plants hitherto unknown to science. Turning northwards, Cook passed an entrance to a possible harbor where he noted there appeared to be safe anchorage. He named it Port Jackson after the Secretary to the Admiralty, George Jackson, but didn't explore it much. Back in Britain, King George III was

- **1860** The white population of Australia reaches more than one million.
- **1875** Silver found at Broken Hill, New South Wales.
- **1889** Australian troops fight in the Boer War in South Africa.
- **1895** Banjo Patterson's *The Man from Snowy River* published.
- **1901** The six states join together to become the Commonwealth of Australia.
- **1902** Women gain the right to vote.
- **1911** Australian (non-Aboriginal) population reaches 4,455,005.
- **1915** Australian and New Zealand troops massacred at Gallipoli.
- **1927** The federal capital is moved from Melbourne to Canberra.
- **1931** The first airmail letters are delivered to England by Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm.
- **1931** The Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve is proclaimed.
- **1932** Sydney Harbour Bridge opens.
- **1942** Darwin bombed; Japanese mini-submarines found in Sydney Harbour.
- **1953** British nuclear tests at Emu in South Australia lead to a radioactive cloud that kills and injures many Aborigines.
- **1956** Olympic Games held in Melbourne.
- **1957** British atomic tests conducted at Maralinga, South Australia. Aborigines again affected by radiation.
- **1962** Commonwealth government gives Aborigines the right to vote.
- **1967** Aborigines granted Australian citizenship and are counted in census.
- **1968** Australia's population passes 12 million following heavy immigration.
- **1971** The black, red, and yellow Aboriginal flag flown for the first time.
- **1973** Sydney Opera House completed.
- **1976** The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act gives some land back to native people.
- **1983** Ayers Rock given back to local Aborigines, who rename it Uluru.
- **1983** Australia wins the Americas Cup, ending 112 years of American domination of the event.

convinced Australia could make a good colony. It would also reduce Britain's overflowing prison population, as England could no longer transport convicts to the United States of America following the War of Independence.

The First Fleet left England in May 1787, made up of 11 store and transport ships (none of them was bigger than the passenger ferries that ply modern-day Sydney Harbour from Circular Quay to Manly) led by Arthur Phillip. Aboard were 1,480 people, including 759 convicts. Phillip's flagship, *The Supply*, reached Botany Bay in January 1788, but Phillip decided the soil was poor and the surroundings too swampy. On January 26, now celebrated as Australia Day, he settled for Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) instead.

SETTLING DOWN The convicts were immediately put to work clearing land, planting crops, and constructing buildings. The early food harvests were failures, and by early 1790, the fledgling colony was facing starvation.

Phillip decided to give some convicts pardons for good behavior and service, and even grant small land parcels to those who were really industrious. In 1795, coal was discovered; in 1810 Governor Macquarie began extensive city building projects; and in 1813 the explorers Blaxland, Wentworth, and Lawson forged a passage over the Blue Mountains to the fertile plains beyond.

When gold was discovered in Victoria in 1852, and in Western Australia 12 years later, hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Europe, America, and China flooded into the country in search of their fortunes. By 1860, more than a million non-Aboriginal people were living in Australia.

The last 10,000 convicts were transported to Western Australia between 1850 and 1868, bringing the total shipped out to Australia to 168,000.

FEDERATION & THE GREAT WARS On January 1, 1901, the six states that made up Australia proclaimed themselves to be part of one nation, and the Commonwealth of Australia was formed. In the same ceremony, the first Governor General was sworn in as the representative of the Queen, who remained head of state. In 1914, Australia joined the Mother Country in war. In April the following year, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) formed

- **1986** Queen Elizabeth II severs the Australian Constitution from Great Britain's.
- **1988** Aborigines demonstrate as Australia celebrates its Bicentennial with a re-enactment of the First Fleet's entry into Sydney Harbour.
- **1991** Australia's population reaches 17 million.
- **1993** Sydney chosen as the site of 2000 Olympics.
- **1994** High Court *Mabo* decision overturns the principle of *terra nullius*, which suggested Australia was unoccupied at time of white settlement.
- **1995** Australians protest as France explodes nuclear weapons in the South Pacific.
- **1996** High Court hands down *Wik* decision, which allows Aborigines the right to claim some Commonwealth land.
- **1998** The right-wing One Nation Party holds the balance of power in Queensland elections on an anti-immigration and anti-Aboriginal platform.
- **2000** A 10% Goods and Services tax becomes part of everyday life in Australia.
- **2000** Sydney Olympics held.
- **2001–2002** Massive bushfires start on Christmas Day in NSW and rage through much of January. Massive areas of bushland and national parks destroyed.
- **2003** Bushfires again ravage much of NSW and Victoria. Hundreds of homes are burnt to the ground in the capital city, Canberra. The country faces a severe drought.

a beachhead on the peninsula of Gallipoli in Turkey. The Turkish troops had been warned, and 8 months of fighting ended with 8,587 Australian dead and more than 19,000 wounded.

Australians fought in World War II in North Africa, Greece, and the Middle East. In March 1942, Japanese aircraft bombed Broome in Western Australia and Darwin in the Northern Territory. In May 1942, Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour and torpedoed a ferry before being destroyed. Later that year, Australian volunteers fought an incredibly brave retreat through the jungles of Papua New Guinea on the Kokoda Trail against superior Japanese forces. Australian troops fought alongside Americans in subsequent wars in Korea and Vietnam and sent military support to the Persian Gulf conflicts.

RECENT TIMES Following World War II, mass immigration to Australia, primarily from Europe, boosted the population. In 1974 the left-of-center Whitlam government put an end to the White Australia policy that had largely restricted black and Asian immigration since 1901. In 1986 the official umbilical cord to Britain was cut when the Australian Constitution was separated from that of its motherland. Australia had begun the march to complete independence.

In 1992 the High Court handed down the “Mabo” decision that ruled that Aborigines had a right to claim government-owned land if they could prove a continued connection with it. The following year, huge crowds filled Sydney’s Circular Quay to hear that the city had been granted the 2000 Olympic Games.

The Olympic city built new venues (some of which were temporary, others now used as arenas for professional and amateur sports). A new expressway and train link were built to connect the spruced-up airport to the city center, and Sydney welcomed thousands of international visitors to the 2-week extravaganza starting in September 2000. The Games put medal-winning Australian athletes Cathy Freeman and swimmer Ian Thorpe in the spotlight, and spurred a new wave of interest and tourism in the Land Down Under.

4 Aussie Eats & Drinks

THE EATS

It took a long time for the average Australian to realize there is more to food than English-style sausage and mashed potatoes, “meat and three veg,” and a Sunday roast. It wasn’t long ago that spaghetti was something foreigners ate, and zucchini and eggplant were considered exotic. Then came mass immigration, and all sorts of foods that people had only read about in *National Geographic*.

The first big wave of Italian immigrants in the 1950s caused a national scandal. The great Aussie dream was to have a ¼-acre block of land with a Hills Hoist (a circular revolving clothesline) in the backyard. When Italians started hanging their freshly made pasta out to dry on this Aussie icon, it caused an uproar, and some clamored for the new arrivals to be shipped back. As Australia matured, Southern European cuisine became increasingly popular, until olive oil was sizzling in frying pans the way only lard had previously done.

In the 1980s, waves of Asian immigrants hit Australia’s shores. Suddenly, everyone was cooking with woks. These days, this fusion of flavors and styles has melded into what’s now commonly referred to as “Modern Australian”—a distinctive cuisine blending the spices of the East with the flavors of the West.

THE DRINKS

THE AMBER NECTAR The great Aussie drink is a “*tinny*” (a can) of beer. Barbecues would not be the same without a case of tinnies, or “*stubbies*” (small

bottles). In the hotter parts of the country, you may be offered a polystyrene cup in which to place your beer bottle or can to keep it cool.

Australian beers vary considerably in quality, but, of course, there's no accounting for tastes. Among the most popular are Victoria Bitter (known as "VB"), XXXX (pronounced "four ex"), Fosters, and various brews produced by the Tooheys company. All are popular in cans, bottles, or on tap (draft). My favorite beer is Cascade, a German-style beer that you will usually find only in a bottle. It's light in color, strong in taste, and made from Tasmanian water straight off a mountain. If you want to get plastered, try Coopers—it's rather cloudy in looks, very strong, and usually ends up causing a terrific hangover. Most Australian beers range from 4.8% to 5.2% alcohol.

In New South Wales, beer is served by the glass in a "schooner" and a smaller "midi"—though in a few places it's also sold in British measurements, by pints and half pints. In Victoria you should ask for a "pot," or the less copious "glass." In South Australia a "schooner" is the size of a NSW "midi," and in Western Australia a "midi" is the same size as a New South Wales midi, but a glass about half its size is called a "pony." Confused? My advice is to gesture with your hands like a local to show whether you want a small glass or a larger one.

By the way, you have to be 18 to buy alcohol.

THE VINO Australian winemaking has come a long way since the first grape vines were brought to Australia on the First Fleet in 1788. These days, more than 550 major companies and small winemakers produce wine commercially in Australia. Vintages from Down Under consistently beat competitors from other wine-producing nations in major international shows. The demand for Australian wine overseas has increased so dramatically in the past few years that domestic prices have risen, and new vineyards are being planted at a frantic pace.

Australian wines are generally named after the grape varieties from which they are made. Of the white wines, both the fruity chardonnay and Riesling varieties; the "herbaceous," or "grassy" sauvignon blanc; and the dry semillon are big favorites. Of the reds, the dry cabernet sauvignon, the fruity merlot, the burgundy-type pinot noir, and the big and bold shiraz come out tops.

The best recent vintages are 1988 and 2002. The 2003 vintage also promises to be a cracker, with low rainfall meaning smaller, and more intensely flavored grapes.

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