

Queensland



Occupying Australia's northeastern corner, this vast state is awash with dazzling landscapes, vibrant cities and 300 days of sunshine a year. It's also home to some of the country's most notable highlights, from the golden beaches of the Sunshine Coast and the luminous green of the Daintree rainforest to the clear blue waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

It hides some of the country's lesser-known treasures, delivering wow-factor with gusto. You only have to peel back the postcard to find corners seemingly untouched by other visitors – spectacular national parks with tumbling waterfalls, white sandy beaches fringed by kaleidoscopic coral, vibrant and unique Aboriginal festivals and jaw-dropping sunsets.

Brisbane will delight city slickers with its lively, cosmopolitan atmosphere and, in the north, Cairns is a travellers' mecca. Between the two are strings of towns and islands, each with its own flavour but all brimming with Queenslander hospitality.

For the active traveller there are oodles of opportunities for white-water rafting, scuba diving, snorkelling, bushwalking, horse riding, surfing, bungee jumping, abseiling... The state is also home to more tours accredited under the national eco certification scheme than any other, so you can safely explore, rather than exploit, this beautiful state.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Scale Brisbane's **Story Bridge** (p307), one of only three licensed bridge climbs in the world
- Set up tent in the jaw-dropping environs of **Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park** (p420) in the Gulf Savannah
- Chill with a kangaroo or cuddle a koala at the hands-on and fabulously eco-friendly **Australia Zoo** (p341), home of the late Steve Irwin
- Walk along the **North Gorge Headlands** (p323) on North Stradbroke Island and spot dolphins, manta rays, turtles and whales swimming below you
- Swim under moonlight at **Lake Eacham** (p443) near Yungaburra
- Pitch a tent in the rainforests of **Lamington National Park** (p338) and walk the 21km Border Track between Queensland and New South Wales
- Sail the azure seas around the **Whitsunday Islands** (p394), stopping to snorkel off the Great Barrier Reef
- Listen to Nugal-warra elder Willie Gordon's stories at his ancestral rock-art sites near **Hopevale** (p457), just outside of Cooktown



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07 ■ POPULATION: 4.053 MILLION ■ AREA: 1,727,000 SQ KM

HISTORY

Europeans first arrived in Queensland in the 1600s with Dutch, Portuguese and French navigators exploring the northeastern region, and then in 1770 Captain James Cook took possession of the east coast. By 1825, the area that is modern-day Brisbane's central business district (CBD) was established as a penal colony for the more intractable convicts. Despite fierce Aboriginal resistance, the area was later settled (Queensland's early white settlers indulged in one of the greatest land grabs of all time) and in 1859 the state became a separate colony independent of New South Wales (NSW). Since that time, Queensland has experienced dynamic growth and progress, aided by the discovery of gold and other minerals in the 1860s and '70s, and successful sugar-cane production. Today it is the fastest-growing state in Australia.

Aboriginal People

By the turn of the 19th century, the Aboriginal peoples who had survived the bloody settlement of Queensland had been comprehensively run off their lands, and the white authorities had set up ever-shrinking reserves to contain the survivors. A few of these were run according to well-meaning, if misguided, missionary ideals, but the majority were strife-ridden places where people from different areas and cultures were thrown unhappily together as virtual prisoners.

It wasn't until the 1980s that control of the reserves was transferred to their residents and

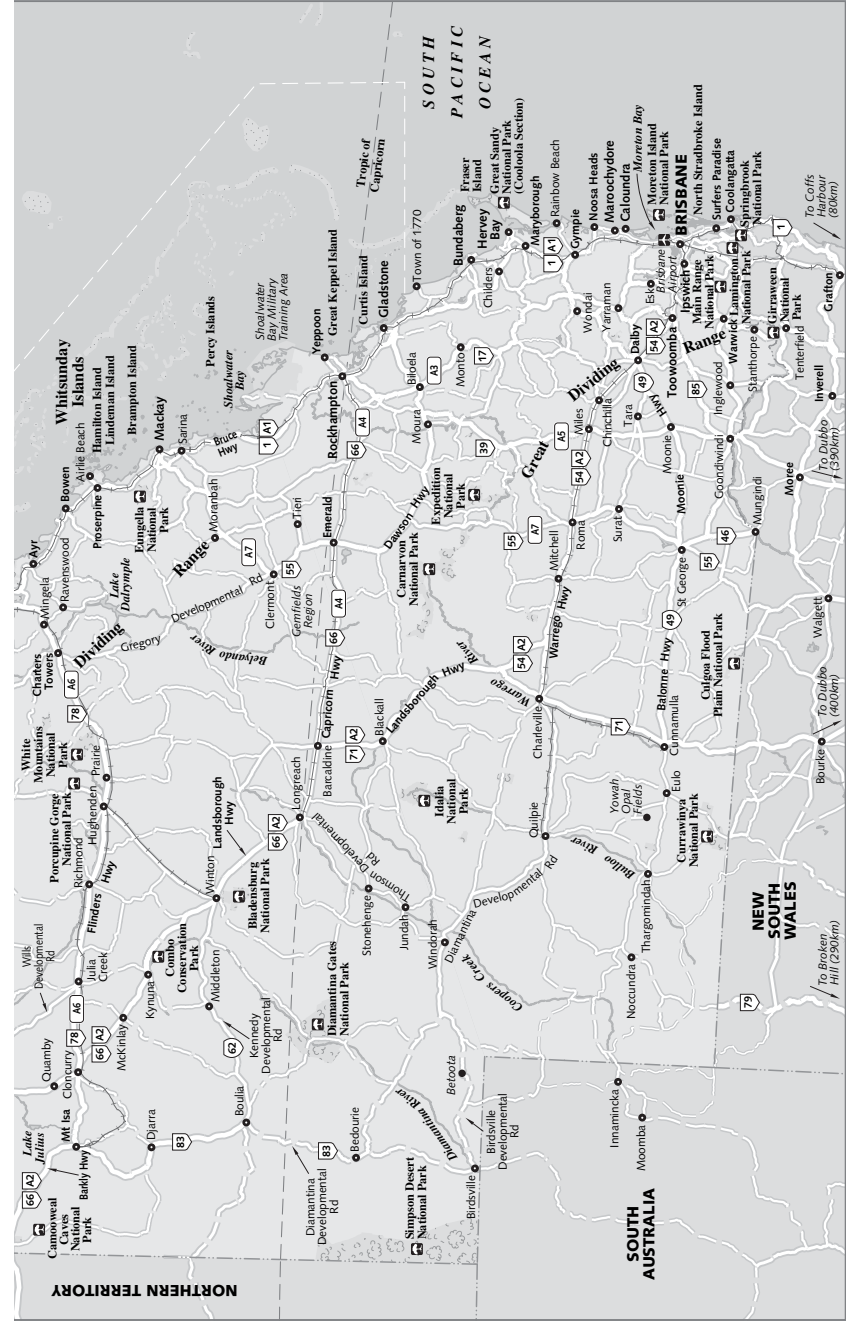
the reserves became known as 'communities'. However, these freehold grants, known as Deeds of Grant in Trust, are subject to a right of access for prospecting, exploration or mining.

Over the last few years there has been a tremendous surge in interest in Aboriginal Australia from local and international visitors, which has led to increased government funding for Indigenous tourism initiatives. As such, today there are great opportunities for contact with Aborigines. In addition to the beautiful rock-art sites at various locations, you can encounter living Aboriginal culture at the Yarrabah community south of Cairns, and the Hopevale community north of Cooktown. There are Aborigine-led tours at Mossman Gorge, Malanda Falls and around Kuranda. The Gab Titui Culture Centre (see p461) on Thursday Island is a unique development by Torres Straits communities, and at the Tjapukai Cultural Park (p425) near Cairns, an award-winning Aboriginal dance group performs most days for tourists. There are even opportunities to attend workshops in Brisbane with Aboriginal artists, and the annual Dreaming festival, held as part of the Woodford Folk Festival (p350), is a colourful showcase of Indigenous arts from across the country.

Perhaps the most exciting event, however, is the Laura Festival held every second year in June on the Cape York Peninsula – see the boxed text, p463.

QUEENSLAND FACTS

- Eat** Moreton Bay bugs, prawns, mud crabs and barramundi (especially at Lake Tinaroo), Rockhampton steak, mangoes, bananas and macadamia nuts
- Drink** Pots of XXXX beer, Bundaberg Rum, Granite Belt wines and Mt Tamborine schnapps
- Read** Stephen Vagg's *The Quarter-Life Crisis*, John Birmingham's *He Died with a Felafel in His Hand* and Thea Astley's *Drylands*
- Listen to** Regurgitator's *Mish Mash*, Bernard Fanning's *Tea & Sympathy*, The Veronicas' *The Secret Life of the Veronicas* and Pete Murray's *See the Sun*
- Watch** *Radiance* (1998), *Cane Toads* (1988), *The Phantom* (1996), *Dead Calm* (1989) and *Finding Nemo* (2003)
- Avoid** Surfers Paradise during Schoolies Week, cane toads, sunburn, stingers and crocs
- Locals' nickname** Cane toads, Banana Benders
- Swim at** Fraser Island's Lakes McKenzie and Wabby (p363), Sunshine Coast's Peregian (p343) and Noosa (p344) beaches, Great Keppel Island (p373) and along the Great Barrier Reef
- Best festivals** Biennial Laura Festival (p463) held in June, Woodford Folk Festival (p350) at the end of December, and Brisbane's Riverfestival and National Festival of Beers (p311) in mid-September
- Tackiest tourist attraction** Big Gumboot (p412)



GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

Queensland is dominated by the coast, and it's no surprise that most of the settlements and tourist attractions are concentrated along the narrow coastal strip. The coast has some amazing natural features such as the Great Barrier Reef, verdant rainforests and dramatic mountain ranges.

Inland is the Great Dividing Range, which comes close to the coast of Queensland before slicing its way down into NSW and Victoria, and the tablelands – fertile areas of flat agricultural land that run to the west. Finally, there's the barren outback, which fades into the Northern Territory (NT).

In the far northern Gulf Country and Cape York Peninsula there are huge empty regions cut by countless dry riverbeds, which can become swollen torrents in the wet season. During this time, the network of waterways sometimes brings road transport to a complete halt.

Queensland seasons are more a case of hot and wet or cool and dry than of summer and winter. November/December to April/May is the wetter, hotter half of the year, while the real Wet, particularly affecting northern coastal areas, is January to March. This is also the season for tropical cyclones and, if one hits, the Bruce Hwy can be blocked by the ensuing floods (see the boxed text, p417).

In the south, Brisbane and Rockhampton get about 450mm of rain from January to

March, and temperatures in Brisbane rarely drop below 20°C. Queensland doesn't really experience 'cold weather', except inland or upland at night from about May to September. Inland, of course, there's also a lot less rain than near the coast.

INFORMATION

There are official tourist offices in almost every city and town in Queensland so you're never far from a helping hand. **Tourism Queensland** (☎ 13 88 33; www.tq.com.au) is the government-run body responsible for promoting Queensland interstate and overseas. Its **Queensland Travel** (☎ 13 88 33; www.queenslandtravel.com) offices are located in state capitals and act as booking offices for accommodation, tours and holidays. **Tourism Queensland** (www.accessiblequeensland.com) is a decent source of information for visitors with disabilities. **Queensland Holidays** (www.queenslandholidays.com.au) is aimed solely at tourists and a great resource for planning your trip.

Families with young children can check out the **Bub Hub** (www.bubhub.com.au) website, which lists everything from clinic contacts and locations to prenatal care to activities for newborns and toddlers, or call the **Child Care Information Service** (☎ 1800 637 711, 3224 4225).

For travelling safe in Queensland check out www.police.qld.gov.au/toursafe. For those travellers heading up to Far North Queensland www.safetraveltnq.com.au is helpful if you're planning on exploring the area by 4WD.

SOUTH SEA ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS

Another people that played an important, if not tragic, part in shaping Queensland's history are the South Sea Islander Australians who were brought over between 1863 and 1904 to provide cheap labour on the sugar-cane plantations. Many of them were kidnapped, or 'blackbirded', from their islands and were forced to work in virtual slave-like conditions once they arrived.

'In many ways our grandfathers were the foundation of the sugar-cane industry,' says John Pene-Fonmosa whose grandfather was blackbirded after leaving his island home of Rotunma for Fiji. 'They cleared the fields, cut the cane and crushed it. They were the pillars of the industry.'

These people were termed 'kanakas', the Polynesian word for man, which took on derogatory connotations when hijacked by Europeans. In total, an estimated 60,000 islanders were shipped to Australia, but as unions began to call for white-only labour, many were sent home.

'Of course, some got a taste for the Western lifestyle and didn't want to leave so they ran away,' says John, who is from the Bunjalong tribal area, south of Brisbane, where most of the community are a mix of the Bunjalong Aboriginal Nation and the South Sea Islanders. 'And for some, if the captain of the ship hadn't properly logged where each individual was from, they couldn't even get home.'

Many who remained experienced unemployment, racism and government neglect, and it wasn't until 1994 that the Federal Government recognised Australian South Sea Islanders as a distinct cultural group. It took another five years for the Queensland government to do the same.

For comprehensive information about the state, it's worth picking up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Queensland & the Great Barrier Reef* guidebook.

Some other useful contacts are the **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service** (QPWS; ☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) and **Royal Automobile Club of Queensland** (RACQ; ☎ 13 19 05; www.racq.com.au).

NATIONAL PARKS

There are some 220 national parks and state forests dotted around Queensland, and while some comprise only a single hill or lake, others are major wilderness areas. Many islands, expanses of water and stretches of coast are national parks.

Three of the most spectacular national parks inland are: Lamington (p337), on the forested rim of an ancient volcano on the NSW border; Carnarvon (p375), with its 30km gorge southwest of Rockhampton; and, near Mackay, rainforested Eungella (p387) swarms with wildlife.

On the coast, the Great Sandy National Park (p350) is a mesmerising tangle of mangroves, rivers and forest; and, of course, there's the jewel in Queensland's crown – the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (see the boxed text, p390).

The **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service** (QPWS; ☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) publishes a comprehensive free guide, *Queensland's Parks & Forests*, which has details on more than 160 of the parks. And, if you're keen to do more than just take photographs, the QPWS also runs volunteer programs in many of the national parks; check its website for details.

ACTIVITIES

Extreme Sports

Queensland has its fair share of activities to satisfy thrill-seekers. Bungee jumping and similar adrenaline-charged rides can be found at major tourist stops, such as Surfers Paradise, Airlie Beach and Cairns. If you need something a tad more heart-stopping, then there are ample opportunities for parachuting and skydiving. Two of the best spots to jump out of a plane are Caloundra (p340) and Mission Beach (p413).

Bushwalking

The bigger national parks have kilometres of marked walking tracks and there are excellent bushwalking opportunities in many parts of the state and national parks, and state

forests year-round. Among the favourites are: Lamington (p337); Carnarvon (p375); Hinchinbrook Island's Thorsborne Trail (p411); Wooroonooran (p416), which contains Queensland's highest peak, Mt Bartle Frere (1657m); and the traditional walking trails of the Jirrbal and Ma-mu Aboriginal people in the Misty Mountain Trails.

The Queensland government has also developed the Great Walks of Queensland: six tracks designed to allow walkers to experience rainforests and bushlands without disturbing the ecosystem. They include the Whitsundays, Sunshine Coast Hinterland, Mackay Highlands, Fraser Island, Gold Coast Hinterland and the Wet Tropics (tropical North Queensland). Contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) for more information. **Queensland Walks** (www.queenslandwalks.com.au) is a helpful website set up by Tourism Queensland.

There are bushwalking clubs around the state and Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* includes four long-distance walks in Queensland, which range from two to five days in length.

Camping

There are some stunning spots to pitch a tent in Queensland and many of the state and national parks have camping grounds with toilets, showers and sometimes even an electric barbecue.

Among those recommended are the QPWS camping ground on Snapper Island (p452), the shaded beach sites on Noah Beach (p454), the natural setting of Quamby Falls (p338), and Binna Burra Campsite (p338), which has permanent safari-style tents within a rainforest setting.

There are often privately run camping grounds, motels and lodges on the park fringes.

In order to camp anywhere in a national park you will need a permit. You can self-register at a handful of sites, but for the vast majority you will need to purchase a permit in advance, either by calling QPWS or booking online. Camping in national parks and state forests costs \$4.50/18 per person/family per night. Popular parks fill up at holiday times, so it pays to book well in advance.

For avid campers, the QPWS publishes a handy book, *Camping in Queensland* (\$12.95), which features more than 280 camping grounds.

Diving & Snorkelling

The Queensland coast is an Aladdin's cave of spectacular dive sites and there are dozens of operators vying to teach you or provide you with the ultimate dive safari. Learning here is fairly inexpensive – a four- or five-day PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) course costs anything from \$300 to \$700 – and you usually do a good part of your learning in the warm waters of the Great Barrier Reef itself.

Almost every major town along the coast has one or more dive schools (the three most popular places are Airlie Beach, Cairns and Townsville), but standards vary from place to place and course to course. Good instructors move around from company to company, so ask around to see which company is currently well regarded.

When choosing a course, look at how much of your open-water experience will be out on the reef. Many budget courses only offer shore dives, which are frequently less interesting, whereas the more expensive options can include two days aboard a boat and reef dives. Normally you have to show you can tread water for 10 minutes and swim 200m before you can start a course. Most schools require a medical, which usually costs extra (around \$50).

While school standards are generally high, each year a number of newly certified divers are stricken with 'the bends' and end up in the decompression chamber in Townsville. This potentially fatal condition is caused by bubbles of nitrogen that form in the blood

when divers ascend too quickly to the surface – always ascend slowly and, on dives over 9m in depth, take a rest stop en route to the surface.

For divers, trips and equipment hire are available just about everywhere. You'll need evidence of your qualifications, and some places may also ask to see your diving log book. You can snorkel just about everywhere, too. There are coral reefs off some mainland beaches and around several of the islands, and many day trips out to the Great Barrier Reef provide snorkelling gear free.

During the Wet (usually January to March), floods can wash a lot of mud out into the ocean, and visibility for divers and snorkellers is sometimes affected.

Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkelling Australia's Great Barrier Reef* is an excellent guide to all the dives available on the reef.

Sailing & Fishing

Sailing enthusiasts will find plenty of places with boats and/or sailboards for hire, both along the coast and inland. Manly (near Brisbane), Airlie Beach and the Whitsunday Islands are probably the biggest centres and you can indulge in almost any type of boating or sailing. The Great Barrier Reef has traditionally been a popular fishing ground, but a recent overhaul of the zoning laws has tightened the area that can be fished. For comprehensive information on where and when you can fish, contact the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority** (☎ 4750 0700; www.gbrmpa.gov.au), based at Reef HQ (p399) in

Townsville. The Whitsundays, with their plentiful bays and relatively calm waters, are particularly popular for sailing; day trips start at \$80 and multiple-day trips from \$350. Bareboat charters (sailing yourself) are also possible – see the boxed text, p394, for more information.

Fishing is one of Queensland's most popular sports and you can hire fishing gear and/or boats in many places. Karumba, Cooktown and North Stradbroke Island are some good spots.

Surfing

There are some fantastic breaks along Queensland's southeastern coast, most notably at Coolangatta (p336), Burleigh Heads (p335), Surfers Paradise (p330), Noosa (p344) and Town of 1770 (p369). Surf shops in these areas generally offer board hire, or you can buy cheap secondhands. If you've never hit the surf before, it's a good idea to have a lesson or two.

Swimming

North of Fraser Island the beaches are sheltered by the Great Barrier Reef, so they're great for swimming, and the clear, sheltered waters are justly deserving of their reputation. There is also a fantastic abundance of good freshwater swimming spots around the state. Box jellyfish are a serious problem from Rockhampton north between October and April; see the boxed text, p372, for more information. Be careful of estuarine crocs swimming in the coastal waters north of Rockhampton and their freshwater cousins living in the rivers and swamps of Cape Tribulation.

White-Water Rafting & Canoeing

The Tully and North Johnstone Rivers between Townsville and Cairns are the big ones for white-water rafting. You can do day trips for around \$150.

Sea-kayaking is also a popular option, with various trips running from Cairns, Mission Beach, Cape Tribulation, Noosa and Maroochydore.

Coastal Queensland is full of waterways and lakes you can explore, so there's never a shortage of canoeing territory. You can rent canoes or join canoe tours in several places including Noosa, Surfers Paradise, Townsville and Cairns.

TOURS

Queensland has more tours and activities accredited by the national **eco-certification scheme** (www.ecotourism.org.au) than any other state and many are listed throughout this chapter. However, many nonaccredited tour operators have jumped on the eco bandwagon of late, and they're not always what they seem. It's worth asking what their eco-policies are before signing up.

There are all sorts of tours offered around Queensland, although most of them concentrate on a small area. Many are connected with a particular activity (eg bushwalking or horse riding) or area (eg 4WD tours to Cape York). There are also thousands of brochures in hostels, hotels and tourist information offices. Although choosing one can often be a hit-and-miss affair, you'll find some of the best the state has to offer mentioned throughout the chapter.

Good online resources for tours include www.queenslandholidays.com.au and www.queenslandtravel.com.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Most travellers will arrive in Queensland from NSW, and while your car or bus can legally be inspected crossing the border, it hardly ever happens. You probably won't even notice that you've passed from one state to the other. Brisbane (p320) is the main port of call for flights into Queensland and is the main international airport for the state, but Cairns and the Gold Coast airports also receive international flights. For more information, see the Transport chapter (p1020).

Air

The three national carriers, **Qantas Airways** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au), fly to Queensland's major cities. There are also smaller airlines, including charter flights, operating up and down the coast, across the Cape York Peninsula and into the outback.

Alliance Airlines (☎ 3212 1212; www.allianceairlines.com.au) Charter flights between Brisbane, Mt Isa, Townsville and Cairns.

Macair (☎ 13 13 13; www.macair.com.au) The major outback carrier.

Sunshine Express (☎ 13 13 13; www.sunshineexpress.com.au) Charter flights from Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast, Maryborough and Hervey Bay.

DIVING IN QUEENSLAND – FIVE OF THE BEST

- **Green Island** (p435) The entirety of Green Island is national park, and made up of dense rainforest. The reefs surrounding it are considered to be among the most beautiful off any island, and the diving and snorkelling are quite spectacular.
- **Heron Island** (p368) This exclusive and tranquil coral cay sits amid a huge spread of reef. You can step straight off the beach and join a crowd of colourful fish here.
- **Lady Elliot Island** (p367) The most southerly of the Great Barrier Reef islands, and also a coral cay. It's home to 19 highly regarded dive sites, so it's hard to know where to begin.
- **Lizard Island** (p459) Remote and rugged, Lizard Island boasts what are arguably Australia's best-known dive sites – Cod Hole, famous for its resident giant and docile potato cod, and Pixie Bommie.
- **HMAS Brisbane** (p343) This recently sunk, old Australian warship is the hottest new dive spot in Queensland. Easily accessible off the Sunshine Coast, it has a flourishing artificial reef teeming with marine life.

RIBBIT

Queenslanders have several nicknames, but perhaps the most curious one is 'cane toad', after the amphibious critters that were introduced to Australia in 1935 in an attempt to control the native cane beetle. These creatures are not a pretty sight: dry and warty skin, heavy-ridged eyes and poisonous glands across their backs would make any girl looking for her prince run a mile. But fairytales aside, the cane toads have proved to be absolutely useless; they ignored the pesky cane grub and instead focused on reproducing. From an original batch of just 101 toads, there are now over 200 million of these long-legged creatures hopping around Australia – an invasion that has seen the populations of native snakes and goanna lizards decline. Indeed, the problem has got so bad that a millionaire pub owner has introduced a beer-for-a-bag-of-toads bounty that's even got the support of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). But it seems that not everyone hates them; Queensland's representative rugby league team has chosen the cane toad as their unofficial mascot and they have even been listed by the National Trust of Queensland as a state icon. Warts and all.

Boat

In the past travellers have managed to travel along the coast or even over to Papua New Guinea or Darwin by crewing on the numerous yachts and cruisers that sail Queensland waters. It's still possible to do, but it's not easy. Ask at harbours, marinas or sailing clubs. Manly (near Brisbane), Airlie Beach, Townsville and Cairns are good places to try. You'll normally have to contribute some money for your passage.

Bus

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au), the largest bus company in Australia, offers comprehensive coverage of Queensland and all the major tourist destinations, as well as excellent interstate connections.

The busiest route is up the coast on the Bruce Hwy from Brisbane to Cairns – there are various passes that cover this route, allowing multiple stops along all or part of the coast. Most passes involve interstate travel and attract a 10% discount for members of YHA, VIP, Nomads and other approved organisations, as well as card-carrying seniors/pensioners. Useful passes for Queensland include the 'Mini Travellers Pass', which gives you 45 days to travel from Sydney to Cairns for \$327. The 'Central Coaster' pass is valid for 90 days and allows you to travel between Sydney and Brisbane for \$173 and the 'Queenslander' pass allows travel between Brisbane and Cairns via the Inland Rd (\$398, valid for 183 days). There are also several passes that include outback destinations en route to the NT. Check the Greyhound

Australia website for more details. See the Transport chapter (p1027) for more information on interstate bus passes.

Premier Motor Service (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) also covers the route between Sydney, Brisbane and Cairns, with fewer services than Greyhound, but often slightly cheaper fares.

Car

The roads in Queensland are in good condition, particularly along the coast and main thoroughfares in the hinterland and outback. However, they can often turn into badly maintained sealed roads or dirt tracks in the more remote areas of the state. Note that driving in Queensland is a leisurely affair with locals sometimes not even making the speed limit.

For car hire information see individual destinations.

Train

Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32, 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au) operates seven services in total throughout Queensland. The main railway line is the Brisbane to Cairns run, which is serviced by the *Tilt Train*, a high-speed connection that operates three times weekly, and the *Sunlander*, a more leisurely option with four services weekly. There are also inland services from Brisbane to Charleville, Brisbane to Longreach and Charleville, and from Townsville to Mt Isa, plus a more regular *Tilt Train* service between Brisbane and Rockhampton. More detail is listed under the relevant destinations.

BRISBANE

☎ 07 / pop 1.8 million

It may be Australia's third-largest city, but for the longest time Brisbane was seen as something of a poor cousin to Sydney and Melbourne: a sleepy country town hiding behind a big city façade. In recent years, however, Brisbane has stirred from its slumber and is casually emerging as one of the most desirable places to live in Australia with an estimated 1000 people packing their bags and moving up here every week.

Of course locals have always known that Brissie offers the perfect lifestyle and it doesn't take visitors long to understand why. Despite the transformation into a sleek, cosmopolitan city complete with world-class art galleries, a booming live music scene and a fabulous café culture, Brisbane still retains the laid-back, easy attitude of a small community.

No doubt the lazy subtropical climate, gently curving Brisbane River and rich cultural flavours of its many neighbourhoods also have something to do with its appeal. But mostly people love Brisbane because it's a ritzy city with a down-to-earth attitude and home to some of the friendliest locals in Oz.

HISTORY

The first settlement here was established at Redcliffe on Moreton Bay in 1824 – a penal colony for difficult convicts from the Botany Bay colony in NSW. After struggling with inadequate water supplies and hostile Aboriginal groups, the colony was relocated to safer territory on the banks of the Brisbane River, before the whole colony idea was abandoned in 1839.

Moreton Bay was thrown open to free settlers in 1842, an action that marked the beginning of Brisbane's rise to prominence and the beginning of the end for the region's Aboriginal peoples.

ORIENTATION

Brisbane's city centre or CBD is bound by a U-shaped loop of the Brisbane River. The action is centred on pedestrianised Queen St Mall, which runs down to the former Treasury Building (now a casino) and Victoria Bridge to South Bank.

Across Victoria Bridge is South Brisbane and the South Bank Parklands. Further south

is the West End. Ann St runs northeast of the CBD into hip Fortitude Valley, and the Story Bridge connects 'the Valley' with Kangaroo Point.

The Roma St Transit Centre, where you'll arrive if you're coming by bus, train or airport shuttle, is on Roma St, about 500m west of the CBD.

Brisbane airport is about 15km northeast of the city. There are shuttles to and from the city (see p322).

Maps

You can pick up a free map with detail of the CBD from one of the visitors centres, but for more comprehensive city coverage get a copy of *Brisbane Compact Map* (\$6.95) or *Brisbane & Region* (\$7.95), both by Hema Maps. Other good options include *Brisbane Suburban Map* by UBD (\$7.95) and Gregory's *Brisbane Street Directory* (\$29.95).

The definitive guide to Brisbane's streets is UBD's *Brisbane Street Directory* (known locally as 'Refidex'; \$34.95), which includes maps of the Gold and Sunshine Coasts.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Archives Fine Books (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 0491; 38 & 40 Charlotte St, Brisbane) Houses a reputed one million secondhand books.

Avid Bookshop & Café (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3846 3422; 193 Boundary St, West End) Vibrant store specialising in quality fiction and non-fiction.

Borders Bookstore (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3210 1220; 162 Albert St, Brisbane) Sizable branch of this reliable chain.

Folio Books (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 1368; www.foliobooks.com.au; 80 Albert St, Brisbane) Well-stocked smaller bookshop.

World Wide Maps & Guides (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 4330; Shop 30, Anzac Square Arcade, 267 Edward St, Brisbane) Comprehensive range of travel guides and maps.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 000)

Fire (☎ 000)

Line (☎ 13 11 14)

Police (☎ 000) city centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3258 2582; 46 Charlotte St); Fortitude Valley (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3131 1055; cnr Brookes & Wickham Sts); headquarters (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3364 6464; 200 Roma St)

RACQ (☎ 13 19 05) city centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3872 8465; GPO Bldg, 261-285 Queen St); Fortitude Valley (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3872 8429; 300 St Pauls Tce) Roadside service.

Internet Access

Internet cafés are a dime a dozen in Brisbane and most backpacker hostels offer internet access. Rates generally range from \$4 to \$6 per hour.

Global Gossip city centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3229 4033; 290 Edward St; ☎ 8am-midnight); Fortitude Valley (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3666 0800; 312 Brunswick St; ☎ 8am-midnight) Plenty of terminals and cheap-call phone booths.

Internet City (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3003 1221; Level 4, 132 Albert St; ☎ 24hr) Cheap broadband access.

Internet Resources

www.brisbane247.com Comprehensive up-to-the-minute entertainment guide.

www.brisbane-australia.com General visitor information.

www.brisbane.citysearch.com.au Good for the latest information on dining, drinking and dancing venues.

www.ourbrisbane.com Extensive online city guide.

Media

Brisbane Magazine Monthly glossy magazine exploring fashion, art and culture, dining and more.

Rave (www.ravemag.com.au) Weekly street magazine with music news, tour and gig guide.

This Week in Brisbane & South-East Queensland Available from the visitor information centre; good for cultural events.

Time Off (www.timeoff.com.au) Free weekly mag listing Brisbane's gigs.

Medical Services

Brisbane Sexual Health Clinic (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3837 5611; 1st fl, 270 Roma St, Brisbane; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 8.30am-noon Wed, 10am-4.30pm Thu) Walk-in clinic.

Day & Night Pharmacy (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 4585; Queen St Mall, 141 Queen St, Brisbane; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Thu, 7am-9.30pm Fri, 8am-9pm Sat, 8.30am-5.30pm Sun)

Queensland Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline (☎ 1800 010 120; ☎ 24hr)

Royal Brisbane Hospital (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3636 8111; cnr Butterfield St & Bowen Bridge Rd, Herston; ☎ 24hr switchboard & casualty ward)

Travel Clinic (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3211 3611, after hours 0412 452 400; 1st fl, 245 Albert St, Brisbane; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-6pm Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun)

Travellers' Medical & Vaccination Centre (TMVC; Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 9066; 5th fl, 247 Adelaide St, Brisbane; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon & Fri, 8am-7pm Tue, 8am-9pm Wed, 8am-4.30pm Thu, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Vaccinations and medical advice for travellers.

Money

There are foreign-exchange bureaus in the domestic and international terminals at Brisbane airport, as well as ATMs that take most international credit cards. Most banks have exchange bureaus and ATMs.

Amex (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1300 139 060; 260 Queen St, Brisbane) Located within the Westpac bank.

Interforex Brisbane (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 501 020, 3221 3562; Shop 255, Wintergarden Centre, Queen St Mall, Brisbane)

Travelx city centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 9422; Bowman House, 276 Edward St, Brisbane); city centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3210 6325; Shop 149F, Queen St Mall, Brisbane)

Post

Australia Post (☎ 13 13 18) GPO (Map pp300-1; 261 Queen St, Brisbane; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri); Wintergarden Centre (Map pp300-1; Post Shop, 2nd fl, Wintergarden Centre, Queen St Mall, Brisbane; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Brisbane visitor information centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3006 6200; cnr Albert & Queen Sts, Brisbane; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 5pm Sat, 9.30am-4.30pm Sun) Great one-stop information counter for all the things you'll need to know about Brisbane.

Brisbane Visitors Accommodation Service (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3236 2020; 3rd fl, Roma St Transit Centre, Roma St, Brisbane; ☎ 7am-6.30pm) Privately run outfit specialising in backpacker travel, tours and accommodation in much of Queensland.

Naturally Queensland (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3227 8185; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 160 Ann St, Brisbane; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) The Environment Protection Agency's (EPA) information centre provides maps, brochures and camping permits for Queensland's national parks and state forests.

South Bank visitor information centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3867 2051; Stanley Street Plaza, South Bank Parklands; ☎ 9am-5pm) Information on South Bank activities and the place to buy tickets for major entertainment events.

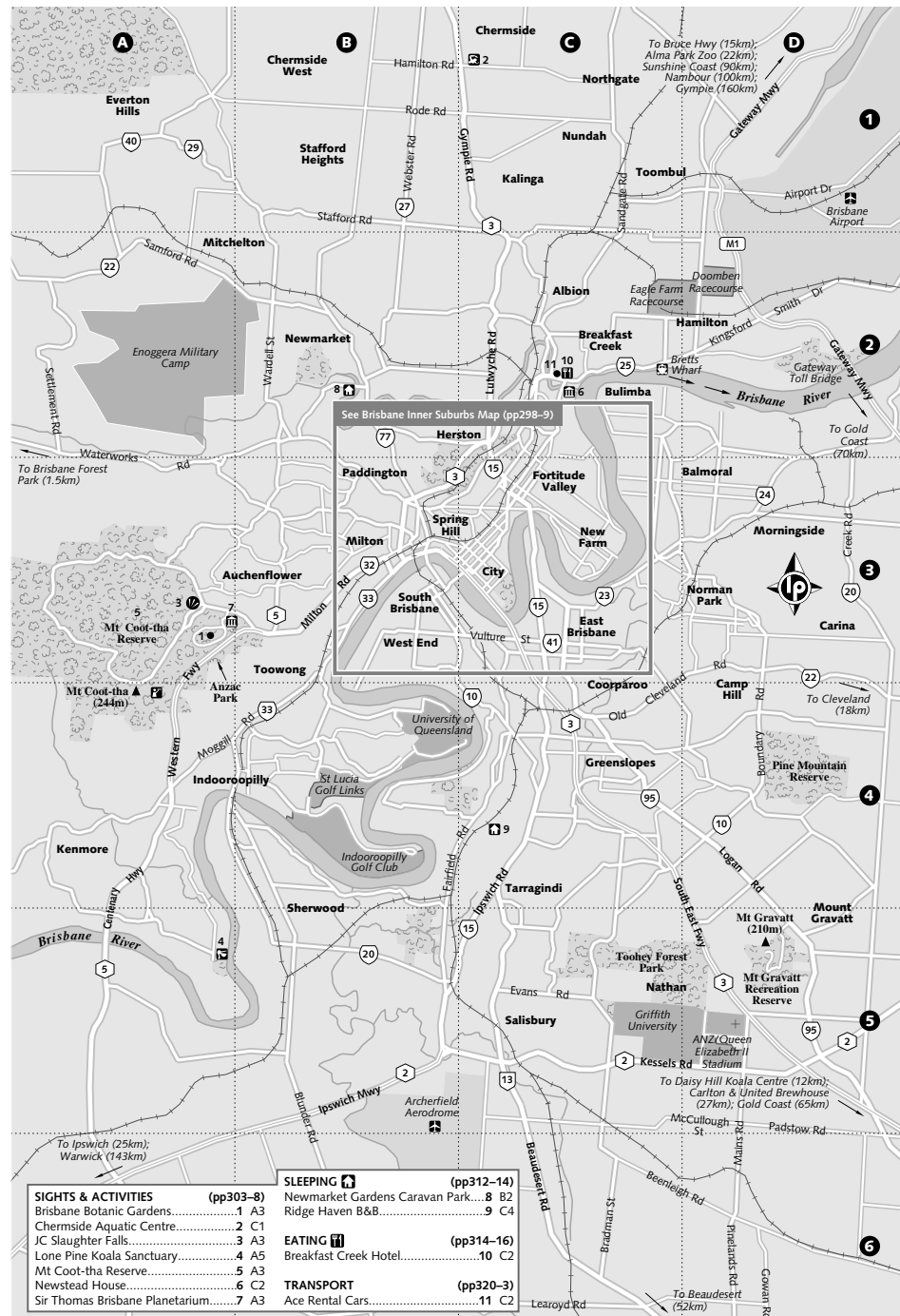
Travel Agencies

STA Travel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 3722; www.statravel.com; Shop G11, Queen Adelaide Bldg, 59 Adelaide St, Brisbane)

Traifinders (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1300 780 212, 3229 0887; www.traifinders.com.au; 101 Adelaide St, Brisbane)

YHA Membership & Travel office (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3236 1680; 450 George St, Brisbane) Tours, YHA membership and YHA hostel bookings.

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Most of Brisbane's major historical sights are in, or near, the city centre (also called the CBD) and the city's arts hub, South Bank, sits a short ferry ride across the river. Fortitude Valley and neighbouring New Farm are popular with locals for their culture, cafés, bars and live music venues, and the West End for its upmarket bohemian vibe. The freebie brochure **Brisbane's Living Heritage** (www.brisbanelivingheritage.com), available from the visitor information centres, highlights many of the sights Brisbane has to offer.

Brisbane City Hall & Museum of Brisbane

The foundation stone for the **City Hall** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3403 8888; btwn Ann & Adelaide Sts, Brisbane; admission free; ♿ lift & viewing tower 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat & Sun) was laid in 1920 but it took a further 10 years to complete the sandstone edifice. The four clock faces on each side of the tower are the largest in Australia and, until the Sydney Opera House was completed in 1971, Brisbane's City Hall was the most expensive building in the country. Although it is no longer the tallest building in the city, the lofty clock tower still has an observation platform that affords great city views.

On the ground floor and basement, the **Museum of Brisbane** (admission free; ♿ 10am-5pm) has both permanent and changing exhibitions exploring the city's culture and heritage. Brisbane's past is played out in the multimedia **Memory Theatre**, which screens short film clips of the city and its people. A second wing features temporary exhibits showcasing art, crafts and photography by local and international artists. There are free guided tours of the museum on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 11am.

Footsteps Gallery

Housed within the old School of Arts, a short walk east of King George Sq, is the **Footsteps Gallery** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3229 1879; 166 Ann St, Brisbane; admission free; ♿ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) that was established to support emerging artists from the Aboriginal and Torres Straits communities. The building was originally known as the Servants Home, as it provided accommodation for single adult females awaiting employment as domestic maids, but it became an art school in 1849. Today it hosts monthly exhibi-

tions of indigenous art and there are plans to introduce cultural performances, storytelling evenings and bush-tucker tastings.

Former Treasury Building

The most grand and impressive of Brisbane's historical architecture is the former **Treasury Building** (Map pp300-1) that sits near Victoria Bridge. Once regarded as a symbol of self-government (the proclamation of the federation of the Australian Commonwealth was read from a balcony here) and a focal point for patriotic displays, the building now houses entertainment of a different kind – a 24-hour casino. In the block southeast of the casino is the equally magnificent former **Land Administration Building**, which has been transformed into a luxury five-star hotel, the Conrad Treasury (p314).

Commissariat Stores Building

To the south of the Treasury Building is the **Commissariat Stores Building** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 4198; 115 William St, Brisbane; adult/child \$4/2; ♿ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) of which the first two floors were constructed entirely by convict labour in 1829. Now a museum, the guided tours offer a thorough insight into Brisbane's gruesome penal history; the jar of convict fingertips is guaranteed to leave some feeling queasy.

Parliament House

Dating from 1868 and with a roof clad in Mt Isa copper is **Parliament House** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3406 7381; cnr Alice & George Sts, Brisbane; admission free; ♿ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) where you can watch politicians battle it out from the public balcony on sitting days. Free tours leave on demand between 9am and 4.15pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 2pm weekends, unless Parliament is sitting. Traditional high tea (\$32 per person) is served on the first Friday of the month in the aptly named Strangers Dining Room between 10am and noon. Bookings are essential.

QUT Art Museum

The small but impressive **QUT Art Museum** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3864 5370; 2 George St, Brisbane; admission free; ♿ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, until 8pm Wed, noon-4pm Sat & Sun) is set within the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) campus, and has developed a reputation for well-designed and thought-provoking contemporary art displays. Past exhibitions have included a taxidermy-inspired sequined squirrel.

City Botanic Gardens

Brisbane's many parks offer islands of leafy respite for city-dwellers and the spacious **City Botanic Gardens** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3403 0666; Albert St, Brisbane; admission free; 🕒 24hr, free guided tours 11am & 1pm Mon-Sat) are especially popular. Set alongside a curve in the Brisbane River, the gardens form Brisbane's oldest park and are filled with walking trails, green lawns, bamboo gardens, bunya pines, macadamia trees and Moreton Bay figs. The pretty **Mangrove Boardwalk**, a wooden walkway skirting the riverbank on the eastern rim, is lit up until midnight, affording good opportunities to spot possums.

Old Windmill & Observatory

In Wickham Park, near Central Station, stands the **Old Windmill & Observatory** (Map pp300-1; Wickham Tce) that was first constructed as a mill for grinding corn. Built in 1828 it's just a fraction older than the Commissariat Stores, making it the oldest surviving building in Brisbane. It is closed to the public.

Queensland Cultural Centre

Brisbane's art scene is thriving and the vast Queensland Cultural Centre forms the city's cultural backbone.

The most recent addition to this group of buildings is the world-class **Queensland Gallery of Modern Art** (GoMA; Map pp300-1; ☎ 3840 7303; www.qag.qld.gov.au; Stanley Place, South Brisbane; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun), part of a \$300 million redevelopment of the precinct. It opened in early December 2006 and is the nation's largest modern art gallery, focusing on art, including cinematic and multimedia, from the last 30 years. The 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art formed the main attraction for the triumphant opening, alongside impressive permanent collections of contemporary Australian, indigenous Australian, Asian, Pacific and international works.

Standing beside GoMA is the newly refurbished **State Library of Queensland** (Map pp300-1) and the **Queensland Art Gallery** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3840 7555; Stanley Place, South Brisbane; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun). The permanent and visiting exhibitions here reflect pre-1970 Australian, Asian and international art. There are some particularly enjoyable permanent collections that include Australian masterpieces by the likes of Brett Whiteley and Sidney Nolan, and the newly opened

Fairweather Room that displays paintings by Queensland artist Ian Fairweather.

Adjacent to the gallery is the **Queensland Museum** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3840 7555; www.southbank.qm.qld.gov.au; cnr Grey & Melbourne Sts, South Brisbane; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) that houses a diverse range of displays including the Discover Queensland exhibition and the Museum Zoo, which houses over 700 prehistoric and modern animals from dung beetles to dinosaurs. Upstairs, there's a sobering display on Australia's endangered species and on the 4th floor is the museum's impressive Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Cultures Centre. Within the museum is the very fun **Sciencentre** (www.southbank.qm.qld.gov.au/sciencentre; adult/child/family \$10/8/29), a hands-on science exhibit with over 100 interactive displays that will keep you occupied for hours, no matter how old you are.

South Bank Parklands

On the banks of the Brisbane River, these vibrant **parklands** (Map pp300-1; admission free; 🕒 dawn-dusk) offer 17 hectares of green spaces, picnic areas, blooming arbours, cafés and restaurants, tropical gardens and walkways.

At the heart of the gardens is **Streets Beach**, an artificial subtropical swimming hole that ambles its way through the park before opening up into a vast lagoon. Behind the beach, running parallel to the parklands, is **Little Stanley Street**, a lively strip of gourmet eateries, boutique shops and cool bars.

The **Suncorp Piazza** is an outdoor theatre that screens free international sporting events, free movies during the school holidays and short films during festival periods. It also acts as a concert venue and a place for impromptu performances by street artists. Free swing dancing classes are held here from 6.30pm on the last Saturday of every month.

To get here jump on a CityCat or Inner City Ferry (there are three jetties along the riverbank) or walk across the **Goodwill Bridge** that links South Bank to the City Botanic Gardens. Buses and trains also run here from Roma St or Central Stations.

Maritime Museum

Naval enthusiasts will enjoy this **museum** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3844 5361; Sidon St, South Brisbane; adult/child/family \$7/4/16; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm, last entry 3.30pm), which is filled with ship models, engines and vessels that reflect Queensland's maritime

history. One highlight is the gigantic HMAS *Diamantina*, a restored WWII frigate that you can clamber aboard and explore.

Mt Coot-tha Reserve

Roughly 7km southwest of the city centre is Mt Coot-tha Reserve (Map p297), an expansive bush and parkland area peppered with picnic spots and walking trails. The name derives from the indigenous term *ku-ta* meaning honey, as this is where local Aboriginal people would come to collect the rich nectar produced by the native stingless bee.

The lookout at the top of the mountain brings spectacular views and on a clear day you can see all the way to Moreton Bay in the east and the Glass House Mountains to the west. The lookout is accessed via Sir Samuel Griffith Dr and has wheelchair access.

Just north of the road to the lookout is the turn-off to **JC Slaughter Falls** (3.4km) reached by a short walking track. Also here is a 1.8km **Aboriginal Art Trail**. If you have a car, or are an ambitious cyclist, then it's worth trailing the road around the reserve for some very pretty vistas.

At the foot of the mountain are the lush **Brisbane Botanic Gardens** (☎ 3403 2535; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Sep-Mar, 8am-5pm Apr-Aug, free guided walks 11am & 1pm Mon-Sat) that extend for 52 hectares and include over 20,000 species of plants. It's a wonderful spot for a picnic or ideal for simply wandering through the many gardens. Highlights include the Fragrant Plant and Herb Garden where visitors are encouraged to touch the herbs to release their natural fragrance.

At the entrance to the gardens is the **Sir Thomas Brisbane Planetarium** (☎ 3403 2578; 🕒 2.30am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 11am-8.15pm Sat, to 4.15pm Sun), the largest planetarium in Australia and a wonderland for budding Neil Armstrongs. The observatory has a variety of telescopes and one of the resident astronomers can help pinpoint stars and intergalactic beings. There are also regular shows inside the **Cosmic Skydome** (adult/child/family \$12/7/32) that journey into outer space and are narrated by the likes of Tom Hanks.

Bus 471 (\$3, 30 minutes, hourly) runs from Adelaide St, opposite King George Sq and stops at the Botanic Gardens before continuing on to the lookout at Mt Coot-tha. The last bus returning to the city leaves at 3.50pm on weekdays and 5pm on weekends.

Brisbane Forest Park

West of Brisbane lies the D'Aguiar Range, a succession of protected areas that includes Brisbane Forest Park (Map p324). Hidden within this 28,500-hectare natural bushland are remote gorges, expanses of subtropical rainforest and scribbly-gum woodland. The bird life is also prolific and Brisbanites come here by the dozen to take advantage of this natural playground just 12km from the city centre. There are numerous walking trails varying in length and degree of difficulty. The 1.5km Egernia Circuit at Jolly's Lookout is an enjoyable morning walk for keen ornithologists, and the 4km Thylogale Track winds its way leisurely through eucalypt forest and rainforest to Boombana.

The **Brisbane Forest Park information centre** (☎ 1300 723 684; 60 Mt Nebo Rd; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, from 9am Sat & Sun) sits at the park entrance and has information about **bush camping** (per person/family \$5/18) and maps of walking trails, but it does not sell camping permits. If you plan to camp then you must get your permit through the **EPA** (☎ 131 304; www.epa.qld.gov.au) before arrival.

To get here catch bus 385 (\$4, 30 minutes) from the corner of Albert and Adelaide Sts. The bus stops near the visitors centre and the last departure back to the city is at 4.55pm. The actual walking trails are a fair distance from the visitors centre, so if you're planning on attacking them it's best to have your own transport.

Inner North

Fortitude Valley has long been Brisbane's 'edgy' neighbourhood. For years it was home to pimps, prostitutes and junkies and later musicians as the city's live music scene began to take hold. These days it's an eclectic mix of the down and out and upwardly mobile, the yuppies' backyard and clubbers' playground. The heart of the Valley is the **Brunswick St Mall** (Map pp300-1), a pedestrianised strip where coffee shops thrive by day and bars buzz at night. On Saturday mornings bleary-eyed shoppers congregate for the **Brunswick St Markets**.

At the Wickham St end of the mall is **McWhirter's Marketplace** (Map pp300-1), a Brisbane landmark with an impressive Art Deco corner façade.

Running parallel to the Brunswick St Mall is Brisbane's **Chinatown** (Map pp300-1; Duncan St,

Fortitude Valley), a compact but lively strip of restaurants, massage therapists, herbalists and acupuncture businesses.

Southwest of the Valley, **St John's Cathedral** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3835 2248; 373 Ann St, Brisbane; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) is a fine example of 19th-century Gothic Revival architecture. Inside, look for the beautiful hand-stitched cushions that depict Queensland flora and fauna; there are 400 in total.

New Farm, just east of the Valley along Brunswick St, is the latest neighbourhood to undergo gentrification and is now bursting with coffee shops, wine bars and restaurants. At weekends, all action centres on **New Farm Park** (Map pp298-9), a lovely, open parkland with playgrounds and picnic areas.

The inner north is home to a vibrant arts community and there are clusters of private galleries and exhibition spaces throughout the area. On the eastern fringes of New Farm Park stands the **Brisbane Powerhouse** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 8600; 119 Lamington St, New Farm), a contemporary arts and performance space that also hosts exhibitions. The **Institute of Modern Art** (☎ 3252 5750; www.ima.org.au; 420 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, until 8pm Thu) is a non-commercial gallery with regular showings by local names. Slightly further north is the excellent **Fireworks Gallery** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3216 1250; 11 Stratton St, Newstead; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm Sat), a commercial space dedicated to contemporary Aboriginal art.

Newstead House

North of the centre, occupying a beautiful spot above the Brisbane River, is the city's oldest domestic dwelling, picturesque **Newstead House** (☎ 3216 1846; Breakfast Creek Rd, Newstead; adult/child/family \$5/4/12; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun). Built in 1846, the house is now a museum and the rooms are decorated with Victorian furnishings, antiques and period displays that, according to staff, occasionally move around of their own accord.

Wildlife Sanctuaries

LONE PINE KOALA SANCTUARY

Established in 1927, this **wildlife sanctuary** (Map p297; ☎ 3378 1366; Jesmond Rd, Fig Tree Pocket; adult/child/family \$20/15/52; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), 11km southwest of Brisbane, is the world's first and largest koala sanctuary. Although there were only two koalas when the parklands first opened, today there are over 130 of the cute, fuzzy

creatures plus dozens of other animals to see, snap, hold and feed.

The most enjoyable way to get here is with **Mirimar Cruises** (☎ 1300 729 742; adult/child/family incl park entry \$48/27/135) that depart daily from North Quay, next to Victoria Bridge at 10am, returning from Lone Pine at 1.30pm.

Alternatively, express bus 430 (\$3, 35 minutes) leaves hourly from stop 116A on George St between 8.45am and 3.40pm daily.

ALMA PARK ZOO

Brisbane's tropical **zoo** (☎ 3204 6566; Alma Rd, Dakabin; adult/child/family \$26/17/62; ☎ 9am-5pm, last entry 4pm) lies 28km north of the city centre off the Bruce Hwy (exit Boundary Rd) and is home to a large number of exotic and Australian animals. Native mammals include koalas, kangaroos, possums and dingoes while the baboons, leopards and Malaysian sun bears hail from foreign shores. You can touch and feed many of the animals – feeding times are between 11am and 2.30pm and cost \$3 per animal.

The zoo train (on the Caboolture line) runs from Roma St Transit Centre departing daily at 9am (\$6, 45 minutes) and connects with the free zoo bus at Dakabin station. The bus departs the zoo at 1.30pm daily to connect with the 1.47pm service from Dakabin back to the city.

DAISY HILL KOALA CENTRE

Koalas are a threatened species in the south-east Queensland bioregion, an area that includes Daisy Hill, so it's only fitting that a **centre** (☎ 3299 1032; Daisy Hill Rd, Daisy Hill Forest Reserve; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm) dedicated to koala conservation be located here, roughly 25km southeast of Brisbane. You'll see a number of fat and happy-looking bears at the centre, but the surrounding area provides plenty of opportunity to spot them in the wild. Within the centre there are a number of kid-friendly displays that explain how the koala's natural habitat is being threatened. During the school holidays there are QPWS-run Go Bush programmes, which include guided bushwalking, night tours and wildlife shows. Booking is essential.

Getting here via public transport is not easy. Catch the Logan City bus 555 and change at the Hyperdome for buses 573 or 575; it's a 1.5km walk from where the bus drops you off to the entrance. You can also visit the centre with Araucaria Ecotours (p311).

ACTIVITIES

With more sunny days than Florida and warmer winter temperatures than the Bahamas, it's no wonder that Brisbane residents spend most of their time outside. At any time of day you'll see people running, cycling, walking or in-line skating their way through the city. The abundance of parks, walkways and oodles of river-based activities make it hard to resist the lure of the great (urban) outdoors.

Aboriginal Workshops

Learn about Australian indigenous culture and craft techniques with a workshop at the **Basement** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 806 225, 3236 1700; www.indigenousgallery.com.au; 376 George St; from \$29-89; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri). Run by traditional Aboriginal artists, it's a unique opportunity to paint your own canvas or didgeridoo and learn about this ancient culture. Similar workshops are held at **Indidge-n-Arts** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 1800 893 896, 3846 0455; 270 Montague Rd, West End; from \$20-89; ☎ 9am-5pm) where you can also learn traditional weaving and jewellery-making techniques. Both venues also have an art gallery with proceeds returning directly to the artist.

Bowls

Lawn bowls has shed its traditional cucumber sandwiches and ancient men in white suits image and become the Sunday afternoon activity of choice for Brisbane's young and old. Leading the charge is the **Merthyr Bowls Club** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 1291; Oxlade Dr, New Farm; per person from \$20), on the banks of the Brisbane River. It's packed at weekends with punters trying to bowl in a straight line after a snag and a stubby courtesy of the cheap Sunday arvo barbecue.

Bridge Climb

Only the third licensed bridge climb experience in the world (the other two being Sydney and Auckland), the **Story Bridge Climb** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1300 254 627; www.storybridgeadventureclimb.com.au; 170 Main St, Kangaroo Point; adult/child from \$110/83) offers breathtaking views of the city. The 900m climb takes place on the southern half of the bridge and reaches heights of 80m above the Brisbane River. Tours last 2½ hours and bookings are essential. Prices differ according to time of day with twilight tours being the most expensive.

Cycling

There are more than 500km of bikeways across Brisbane city and many of them run alongside the river. Pick up a copy of the city council's *Brisbane Bicycle Experience Guide* booklet from visitor information centres.

Bicycles are allowed on Citytrains, except on weekdays during peak hours (7am to 9.30am going into the CBD and 3pm to 6.30pm heading out of the CBD). You can take bikes on CityCats and ferries for free.

Brisbane bike rentals:

Brisbane Bicycle Sales (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3229 2433; 87 Albert St, Brisbane; per day \$20; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

Riders Cyclery (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3846 6200; Shop 9, Little Stanley St, South Bank; per hr \$12, half/full day \$20/30; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

Valet Cycle Hire (Map pp300-1; ☎ 0408 003 198; www.valetcyclehire.com; Alice St entrance, City Botanic Gardens; per half/full day \$30/40) All kinds of bikes including tandems and children's can be delivered to your door for a minimal charge.

In-line Skating

For an alternative tour of the city, hook up with **Planet Inline** (☎ 3217 3571; www.planetinline.com), which organises Wednesday night skate tours starting at 7.15pm from the top of the Goodwill Bridge (\$15). It also runs a Saturday morning breakfast club tour (\$15), and Sunday afternoon tours that differ each week and last about three hours (\$15).

You can hire skates and equipment from **Skatebiz** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3220 0157; www.skatebiz.com.au; 101 Albert St, Brisbane; per 2/24hr \$12.50/20; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 9pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun).

Riverlife Adventure Centre

This newly opened **centre** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3891 5766; www.riverlife.com.au; Naval Stores, River Tce, Kangaroo Point; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon, 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) offers a wealth of river and land-based activities. Group kayaking lessons and night kayaking trips along the Brisbane River are held daily, or you can hire your own. It also holds in-line skating classes at 9.30am for intermediate and advanced skaters, and at 10.30am for beginners (\$29 per person) on weekends. On Thursday at noon you can participate in traditional Aboriginal song and dance performances (adult/child \$39/25) with descendants of the Nunukul, Yuggera, Yugimber and Nugi tribes. Performances (\$59 per person)

are also held on Saturday at 7pm; bookings are essential.

To get here catch the ferry to the Thornton St ferry terminal and follow the signs south along the river for 380m.

Rock Climbing

The **Kangaroo Point Cliffs** (Map pp300–1) on the southern banks of the Brisbane River offer an excellent outdoor climbing venue that's extremely popular with local scramblers. The pink volcanic cliffs are reputedly 200 million years old and when floodlit at night they form a spectacular backdrop to the City Botanic Gardens.

Several operators offer climbing and abseiling instruction in this area. The **Riverlife Adventure Centre** (☎ 3891 5766; www.riverlife.com.au; Naval Stores, River Tce, Kangaroo Point; day/night \$29/39) is ideally located to provide lessons. **Torre Outdoor Adventures** (☎ 3870 3223; www.torremountaincraft.com.au; climbing \$25), runs a rock-climbing club and meets at the base of the cliffs every Wednesday night at 6pm.

Other operators:

Urban Climb (Map pp298–9; ☎ 3844 2544; www.urbanclimb.com; Unit 2, 220 Montague Rd, West End; adult/child/family \$16/14/80; ☎ noon–10pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) Large indoor climbing wall.

Worth Wild Rock Climbing (☎ 1800 689 453; www.worthwild.com.au; group instruction per person \$75) Runs abseiling trips to the Glass House Mountains and an introduction to abseiling every Saturday at Kangaroo Point from 8.30am to 11am.

Swimming

Streets Beach (p304) is a pretty manmade beach on the banks of the Brisbane River. It gets very busy at weekends and on public holidays.

Other recommended swimming centres:

Centenary Aquatic Centre (Map pp300–1; ☎ 3831 7665; 400 Gregory Tce, Spring Hill; adult/child \$5/4; ☎ 5.30am–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 6am–6pm Sat & Sun) An Olympic-sized lap pool, kids' pool and diving pool with high tower.

Chermside Aquatic Centre (☎ 3359 6134; 375 Hamilton Rd, Chermside; adult/child/family \$10/8/28; ☎ 7am–5pm Sat & Sun, 10am–5pm daily during school holidays) Waterpark with slides, tube rides and an indoor swimming pool.

Ithaca Swimming Pool (Map pp298–9; ☎ 3369 2624; 131 Caxton St, Paddington; adult/child \$4/3; ☎ 5.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat & Sun) Quiet 25m outdoor pool.

Other Activities

Weary bodies can rebalance their yin and their yang with **tai chi** classes (free) held every Sunday morning at 9.30am in the Chinatown Mall (p297), and at 8am on Saturdays in New Farm Park (\$5 per person).

Thrill-seekers can take to the skies over Brisbane from \$270 with any of the following companies:

Antique Airways (☎ 3204 1933; www.users.bigpond.com/antiqueairways) Enjoy the rush of flying in the open cockpit of a 1940s Tiger Moth plane.

Brisbane Skydiving Centre (☎ 5464 6111; www.brisbaneskydive.com.au) Tandem and solo skydiving.

Fly Me to the Moon (☎ 3423 0400; www.flymetothemoon.com.au) Balloon flights over Brisbane.

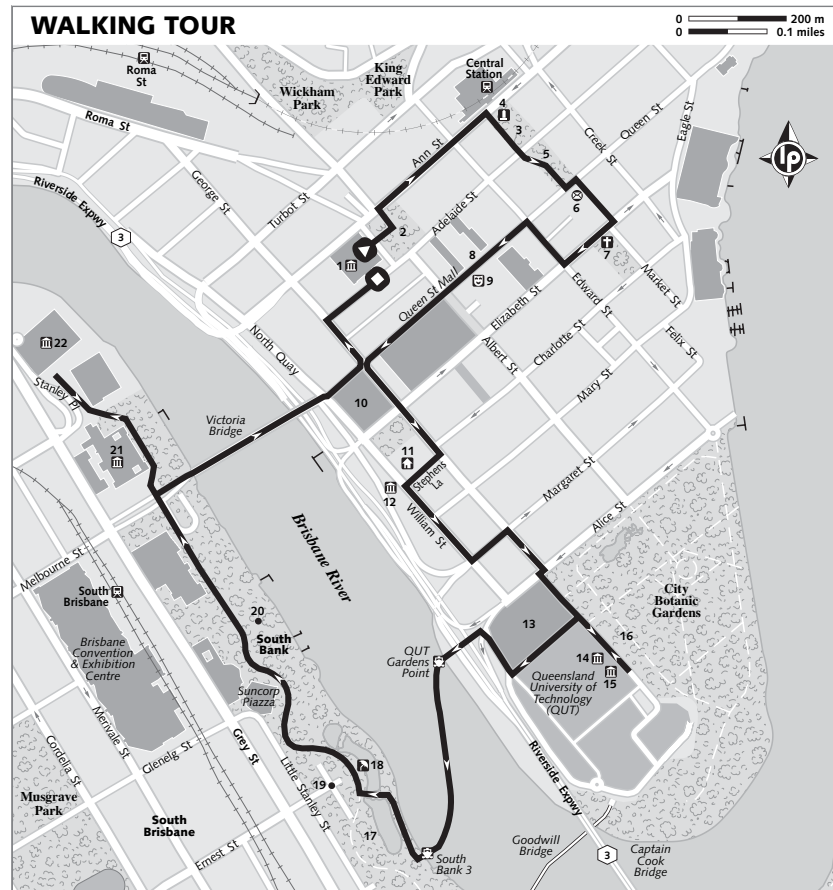
Skydive Ramblers (☎ 5423 1159; www.ramblers.com.au) Tandem and solo skydiving.

WALKING TOUR

The size and relatively flat landscape of the city centre makes it extremely walker-friendly, and strolling the sights is the best way to immerse yourself in the city. The city council produces the free *Experience Guide*, which suggests good itineraries. The following 5km to 6km walk takes anything from a couple of hours to a full day.

Start your expedition at the imposing classical-style **Brisbane City Hall** (1; p303), where you can buff up on the city's history and soak in the spectacular views from the top of the bell tower. Walk through the statues and lawns of **King George Sq** (2), head up Ann St and cross Edward St into **Anzac Sq** (3), where touch-and-tell interactive displays recall the significance of the park. At the northwestern end of the park the **Shrine of Remembrance** (4) is a Greek Revivalist cenotaph where an eternal flame burns in remembrance of Australian soldiers who died in WWI.

Head over the pedestrian bridge at the eastern corner of the square, which connects Anzac Sq to **Post Office Sq** (5). Continue heading southeast, across Queen St, to Brisbane's magnificent, historic **GPO** (6), which is still in use. Walk down the small alley that skirts the eastern side of the post office through to Elizabeth St. Cross the road and explore the beautiful **St Stephen's Cathedral** (7) and the adjoining **St Stephen's Chapel**. Built in 1850, the chapel is Brisbane's oldest church and was designed by English architect Augustus Pugin, who designed London's Houses of Parliament. The cathedral was built in 1874.



From the cathedral, head southwest down Elizabeth St, then turn right onto Edward St and left into the **Queen St Mall** (8). This busy pedestrian mall is the commercial centre of Brisbane, and is lined with fine façades dating back to Australia's Federation, including the glorious frontage of the old **Hoyts Regent Theatre** (9).

Walk the length of Queen St Mall until you reach George St. Diagonally opposite you'll

see the unmistakable Italian-Renaissance **former Treasury Building** (10; p303), now housing a casino. Turn left onto George St and you'll pass another building from the same era, the **Land Administration Building** (11; p303), now the Conrad Treasury hotel. Take the small alley just south of the hotel (Stephens Lane) onto William St and head right, passing the historic **Commissariat Stores Building** (12; p303).

Continue down William St, turn left up Margaret St and right onto George St. Cross Alice St to take in the splendour of Queensland's regal copper-topped **Parliament House** (13; p303). Further south is the impressive **QUT Art Museum** (14; p303) and the **Old Government House** (15), built in 1860. From here you can stroll through the **City Botanic Gardens** (16; p304)

WALK FACTS

Start/finish Brisbane City Hall

Distance 5km to 6km

Duration two to five hours

and take the weight off your feet for a while under a magnificent Moreton Bay fig.

Once rested, head back through the QUT campus toward the river and catch a ferry from QUT Gardens Point ferry stop to South Bank 3. This will land you at the southern end of the **South Bank Parklands** (17; p304). Meander north along the modernist walkway, past **Streets Beach** (18; p304) and **Stanley St Plaza** (19). Just beyond here, tucked away among the trees, is an ornate wooden **Nepalese Pagoda** (20), built during Brisbane 1988 Expo. Past the Queensland Cultural Centre, be sure to pop into the **Queensland Museum** (21; p304) and the **Queensland Gallery of Modern Art** (22; p304).

Once you've exhausted these, cross the Victoria Bridge back into the CBD, back past the former Treasury Building, turning left onto George St. Turn right onto Adelaide St and one block will land you back at your starting point at the Brisbane City Hall.

BRISBANE FOR CHILDREN

There's lots to keep the little ones busy in Brisbane, particularly during the school holiday periods. The newly opened **Queensland Gallery of Modern Art** (p304) has a fantastic Children's Art Centre that offers hands-on activities, workshops and performances. There are also artist-run programmes that introduce children to some of the exhibitions.

Hands on Art (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3844 4589; www.hansonart.org.au; Boardwalk Riverkids Arts Centre, South Bank Parklands; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri during school holidays, 10am-5pm Wed-Fri during term time), at the southern end of the South Bank Parklands, is another opportunity for kids to explore their creativity, or at least get mucky with paint and clay. Bookings are essential.

The **Queensland Museum** (p304) runs entertaining educational activities during the school holidays and the Science Centre provides mind-boggling fun all year round.

The **South Bank Parklands** (p304) have a smattering of playgrounds for kids to slide, swing and climb on. Streets Beach is also located here with a shallow paddling pool for really small tots. In the **Roma Street Parkland** (Map pp300-1) there are free guided walks for parents and under fives every Wednesday from 10am.

The river is a big draw and a cruise to the **Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary** (p306), where nippers can hold these cute animals, is guaranteed to win parents brownie points.

Intergalactic shows and exhibits at the **Sir Thomas Brisbane Planetarium** (p305) will take kids on adventures to the final frontier.

The **Brisbane City Council** (www.brisbane.qld.gov.au) runs Chill Out, a programme of activities for 10 to 17 year olds during the school holidays.

The free monthly booklet **Brisbane's Child** (www.brisbaneschild.com.au) has information about Brisbane for parents.

For child-care listings see <http://directory.ourbrisbane.com/directory/categories/63.html> or contact the **Child Care Information Service** (☎ 1800 637 711, 3224 4225; Level 4, 111 George St, Brisbane).

TOURS

Brewery Tours

Finding it hard to choose between a bottle of VB or a pot of XXXX? These hugely popular guided brewery tours come with free samples, so they should help you make up your mind. Bookings for both tours are essential and you must wear closed shoes.

Carlton & United Brewhouse (☎ 3826 5858; www.carltonbrewhouse.com.au; cnr Darlington Dr & Pacific Hwy, Yatala; adult/child \$18/10; ☎ tours 10am, noon & 2pm Mon-Fri, noon & 2pm Sun) This complex, 40km south of the city centre on the way to the Gold Coast, is one of the largest breweries in Queensland and pumps out around three million bottles of the good stuff a day.

Castlemaine-Perkins XXXX Brewery (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3361 7597; www.xxxx.com.au; cnr Black & Paten Sts, Milton; adult/child \$18/10; ☎ tours hourly 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, also 6pm Wed) Tours of the XXXX Ale House include four ales to quench your thirst (over 18s only) and conveniently finishes in the house bar, so be sure to leave the car at home. The brewery is a 20-minute walk west from the Roma St Transit Centre or you can take the Citytrain to Milton station.

City Tours

Artours (☎ 3899 3686; www.artours.coaus.com; adult/child from \$45/15; ☎ 9.15am & 1.15pm Tue-Sat) Focuses on Brisbane and southeast Queensland's art scene. Typical half-day tours take in five to six galleries; full-day tours can include wineries and craft villages.

Australian Day Tours (☎ 3899 3686; www.daytours.com.au; adult/child from \$48/29; ☎ 9.15am) Operates half-day 'City Sights' tours around Brisbane.

Brisbane Lights Tours (☎ 3489 6444; adult/child \$60/35) Witness the bright lights of Brisbane on this tour that takes you around the city and up to Mt Coot-tha Lookout for dinner or refreshments and includes a CityCat cruise.

City Sights bus tour (Map pp300-1; ☎ 13 12 30; adult/child day ticket \$22/16; ☎ 9am-3.45pm, every 45min) Hop-on, hop-off bus departs from the GPO and shuttles around 19 of the city's major landmarks. Day tickets can be bought on the bus. The same ticket covers you for unlimited use of conventional city bus and ferry services.

Ghost Tours (☎ 3344 7265; www.ghost-tours.com.au; adult/child from \$45/23) Spooky tours of Brisbane's bloody and haunted heritage led by horror historian Jack Sim.

River Cruises

A boat trip along the Brisbane River is a lovely, leisurely way to see the city.

Kookaburra River Queens (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 1300; www.kookaburriverqueens.com; lunch/dinner cruise per person \$48/65) Enjoy a buffet lunch (two hours) or an evening meal (2½ hours) on a white wooden paddle steamer as it coasts lazily up and down the river. Cruises depart from Eagle St Pier, on the eastern side of the city. Boarding for the lunch cruise is at noon daily and at 7pm Monday to Thursday for the dinner cruise. On Sunday and public holidays the evening cruise departs at 6.30pm.

Mirimar Cruises (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1300 729 742; www.mirimar.com; Queens Wharf Rd, North Quay; 1½hr cruise per adult/child/family \$23/10/70, wildlife cruise \$48/27/135) The Mirimar transports passengers to the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary (see p306) departing from North Quay daily at 9.30am.

River City Cruises (Map pp300-1; ☎ 0428-278 473; www.rivercitycruises.com.au; South Bank Parklands Cruise Terminal Jetty A; adult/child/family \$25/15/60; ☎ 10.30am & 12.30pm) An informative and sometimes amusing commentary accompanies these 1½-hour cruises.

Hinterland Tours

Araucaria Ecotours (☎ 5544 1283; www.learnaboutwildlife.com; adult/child from \$88/58) Eco-certified naturalist-led tours that range from 'Bushwalking in Brisbane' to three-day wilderness tours (from \$396) in the Mt Barney National Park area. It also offers a budget camping weekend (\$132).

Aries Tours (☎ 5594 9933; www.ariestours.com; adult/child from \$130/65) Another eco-certified operation offering a host of tours, including the glow-worm tour, night safari tour and eco-friendly wine-making tour, departing from Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Boots A'Walkin' (☎ 3398 2404; www.bootsawalkin.com.au) Bushwalking day tours (\$60 per person) in the Lamington National Park area or five-day packages (\$890) exploring Mt Barney National Park.

Bushwacker Ecotours (☎ 1300 559 355, 3871 0057; www.bushwacker-ecotours.com.au; adult/child from \$109/89) Day tours and overnight trips to Lamington and Springbrook National Parks led by 'eco-guides'.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The visitor information centre can advise you on festivals and events in Brisbane or check out www.ourbrisbane.com/whatson. The city's major events are listed here.

January

Cockroach Races (www.cockroachraces.com.au) This quirky event has been held at the Story Bridge Hotel (see p317) on Australia Day, 26 January, for the last 26 years and attracts up to 7000 visitors.

February

Chinese New Year Firecrackers, dancing dragons and Chinese feasts mark this festival, which is especially popular in Fortitude Valley.

Tropfest (www.tropfest.com) Nationwide short-film festival telecast live at the SunCorp Piazza at South Bank.

April

Queensland Winter Racing Carnival (www.queenslandracing.com.au) From late April to late July there are major horse-race meetings each weekend at both Doomben and Eagle Farm Racecourses, including the Brisbane Cup in mid-May.

June

Brisbane Pride Festival (www.pridebrisbane.org.au) Brisbane's fabulously outrageous annual gay and lesbian celebration held over three weeks.

Out of the Box (www.outoftheboxfestival.com.au) Biennial festival of art for kids aged three to eight. Held on even-numbered years.

July

Brisbane International Film Festival (www.biff.com.au) Ten days of quality films in July.

Queensland Music Festival (www.queenslandmusicfestival.com.au) A state-wide celebration of world music held over two weeks in July on odd-numbered years.

August

'Ekka' Royal National Agricultural Show (www.ekka.com.au) Queensland's largest annual event, the Ekka is one of the top three agricultural shows in Australia and celebrates the state's lifestyle, industry and heritage.

September

Brisbane Riverfestival (www.riverfestival.com.au) Brisbane's major festival of the arts, with buskers, performances, music and concerts held over 10 days.

National Festival of Beers (www.nfb.com.au) Another Story Bridge Hotel (see p317) classic, this lively event runs for three days in mid-September.

Valley Fiesta (www.valleyfiesta.com.au) Brisbane's biggest free festival of music and the arts held over three days in Fortitude Valley.

October

Livid (www.livid.com.au) Annual one-day alternative rock festival.

December

Christmas Festival (www.south-bank.net.au) Three days of festive cheer held during the week before Christmas at South Bank.

SLEEPING

Brisbane has accommodation options to suit all tastes and budgets. The city centre offers mainly expensive options, but there is a broad variety within walking distance or with good public-transport connections.

The inner suburbs have their own distinct flavours. Spring Hill, just north of the city centre, is quiet and unassuming whereas Fortitude Valley, home to Brisbane's best nightlife, never sleeps. New Farm, southeast beyond the Valley, is a mix of peaceful suburbia and the upwardly mobile. West of the city, Petrie Terrace and Paddington are busy with upmarket bohemian cafés and boutique shops. And the West End, south of the river, has an air of nonchalant cool about it.

The main motel drags are Wickham St (Fortitude Valley) and Gregory Tce (Spring Hill), on the northern edge of the city, and Main St (Kangaroo Point), which is also the link road to the southern Gold Coast Hwy.

The Brisbane Visitors Accommodation Service (p296) has a free booking service, and brochures and information on hostels and other budget options in Brisbane and up and down the coast.

Budget

APARTMENTS

Dorchester Self-Contained Units (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3831 2967; www.dorchesterinn.com.au; 484 Upper Edward St, Spring Hill; s/d/tr \$75/85/100; (P) (☎)) The rooms here are basic but functional and more than adequate if you're looking for no-frills accommodation. What's more, your hosts are simply charming and more than make up for the otherwise sterile atmosphere.

Kangaroo Point Apartments (Map pp298-9; ☎ 1800 676 855, 3391 6855; www.kangaroooint.com; 819 Main St, Kangaroo Point; apt per night/week from \$88/450; (P) (☎)) There's a big difference between

the 3½- and 4½-star units at this modern complex. Choose the cheaper option and you'll get an older-style apartment with basic facilities. Pay a bit more however, and you'll be rewarded with a chi-chi pad packed with mod cons.

B&BS

Annie's Shandon Inn (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3831 8684; 405 Upper Edward St, Spring Hill; s \$55, d & tw \$65-75) Part country-kitchen, part heritage-kitsch, this pale pink and baby blue B&B is a gloriously kooky place somewhat reminiscent of staying with a mad great aunt. It's also very good value for money.

HOSTELS

Somewhere to Stay (Map pp298-9; ☎ 1800 812 398, 3846 2858; www.somewheretostay.com.au; 47 Brighton Rd, West End; dm \$19-25, s from \$36, tw & d \$47-67; (P) (☎)) This enormous white Queenslander, fringed by palm trees, is gloriously cool in the summer months. Set on a hill, most rooms come with large, private balconies and awesome cityscape views. Rooms are simple but clean and the vibe very casual.

Brisbane Backpackers Resort (Map pp298-9; ☎ 1800 626 452, 3844 9956; www.brisbanebackpackers.com.au; 110 Vulture St, West End; dm \$21-27, tw & d \$67-71; (P) (☎)) Folks rave about this cavernous hostel that can sleep over two hundred people. TVs, en suite bathrooms and private balconies are just some of the perks; the others include a large swimming pool and free car parking. It's also brilliantly placed for South Bank.

our pick Yellow Submarine (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3211 3424; www.yellowsubmarinebackpackers.com; 66 Quay St, Petrie Tce; dm \$23-25, tw/d \$54/60; (P) (☎)) This delightful hostel is set within a ramshackle historical home and what it might lack in modern gadgets (ie air-con) it more than makes up for in character. Creaky staircases, winding corridors and large bedrooms all add to the homely feel of the place. The lovely Judy can also help you find work.

Banana Benders Backpackers (Map pp298-9; ☎ 1800 241 157, 3367 1157; www.bananabenders.com; 118 Petrie Tce, Petrie Tce; dm \$24-27, tw & d \$60, 1-bedroom apt from \$350; (P) (☎)) A cheery old-school hostel with a breezy balcony perfect for cocktail hour. The dorms are plenty big enough and the communal bathrooms squeaky clean. There's a job club here and the hostel is also a WWOOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) agent.

Bunk Backpackers (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 682 865; www.bunkbrisbane.com.au; cnr Ann & Gipps Sts, Fortitude Valley; dm \$25-28, s \$70, d & tw \$85, loft apt from \$125; (P) (☎)) The city's slickest hostel can be found in this imposing tower located smack bang in the middle of Brissie's nightlife. Wooden floors, high ceilings and en suites make it feel more boutique than backpacker and the swanky bar is full every night with trendy types out on the razzle.

Palace Backpackers (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 676 340, 3211 2433; www.palacebackpackers.com.au; cnr Ann & Edward Sts, Brisbane; dm \$25-30, s \$45-89, tw \$32.50-37.50, d \$65-89; (P) (☎)) The only hostel in the city, the Palace is a popular spot for folks just passing through Brisbane. There's a whiff of faded grandeur to the place but it's very friendly and manages to keep the party atmosphere going year-round.

More budget options:

Cloud 9 (Map pp298-9; ☎ 1800 256 839, 3236 2300; www.cloud9backpackers.com.au; 350 Upper Roma St, Petrie Tce; dm \$17-25, s \$65-67, tw \$69-71; (P) (☎)) Newly designed, modern hostel; some of the larger dorms lack windows.

Tinbilly (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 446 646, 3238 5888; www.tinbilly.com; 462 George St, Brisbane; dm \$25-28, tw & d \$89; (P) (☎)) Brightly coloured hostel with excellent job club.

Aussie Way Hostel (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 0711; <http://users.bigpond.net.au/aussieway>; 34 Cricket St, Petrie Tce; dm/s/d \$26/45/62; (P) (☎)) Quirky hostel in an old colonial home.

HOTELS

Bowen Terrace (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 6860; www.bowenterraceaccommodation.com; 365 Bowen Tce, New Farm; s/tr \$36/66, d \$46-58; (P) (☎)) Originally built in 1914, this old home has been restored to perfection by the friendly owners who acquired the property just two years ago. Polished floorboards, spacious bedrooms and newly fitted bathrooms make this a backpacker bargain.

Kookaburra Inn (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 733 533, 3832 1303; www.kookaburra-inn.com.au; 41 Phillips St, Spring Hill; s/d \$40/60) A private hotel since 1932, this deceptively spacious homestay still retains some of the original period features. The 19 rooms all come with ceiling fans and a fridge and the shaded garden is lovely.

Acacia Inner-City Inn (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3832 1663; fax 3832 2591; 413 Upper Edward St, Petrie Tce; s/d incl breakfast \$60/75; (P) (☎)) The singles here are very snug and the imposing '70s-inspired bedspreads don't help to make them feel bigger. The doubles, however, are much roomier and the

bed linen easier to ignore. All rooms come with TV and bar fridge.

Midrange

APARTMENTS

Dahl Court Apartments (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3830 3400; www.dahlcourt.com.au; 45 Phillips St, Spring Hill; s & d \$110, f apt \$130, 1-/2-bedroom town house \$135/145; (P) (☎)) These elegant self-contained apartments tucked away in a leafy corner of Spring Hill are easily the best in town. Tastefully decorated with modern kitchen appliances and designer bathrooms, they offer incredible value for money. For a private balcony or courtyard, upgrade to one of the town houses.

Central Brunswick Apartments (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 1411; www.centralbrunswickhotel.com.au; 455 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley; r \$120-140; (P) (☎)) Perfect for business types (or those with aspirations to be), these modern serviced apartments scream practicality. Everything you could possibly need is on hand from laundry facilities to the on-site gym; even babysitting services can be arranged.

B&BS

Eton B&B (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3511 6685; www.eton.com.au; 436 Upper Roma St, Petrie Tce; s \$95, d & tw \$110-130, 1-bedroom apt per week \$490; (P) (☎)) This lovingly restored colonial home, near Brisbane's transport hub, offers six elegant bedrooms (five with en suites) all decorated in heritage style. A breezy courtyard garden at the back of the house is a lovely place to have breakfast.

Fern Cottage (Map p290-1; ☎ 3511 6685; www.ferncottage.net.au; 89 Fernberg Rd, Paddington; s/d from \$105/\$130; (P) (☎)) This stylish B&B, housed within a charming Queenslander home, offers a range of pretty bedrooms with individual outdoor patios. Added extras such as the fluffy bathrobes and luxury skin-care products are winning touches.

Also recommended:

Willahra House (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3254 3485; 268 Harcourt St, New Farm; s \$90-120, d \$110-135; (P) (☎)) Queenslander home with open balconies and pleasant rooms.

Ridge Haven B&B (☎ 3391 7702; 374 Annerley Rd, Annerley; s \$120-140, d \$130-150; (P) (☎)) South of the city, a gorgeous Victorian home filled with character.

HOTELS & MOTELS

Soho Motel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3831 7722; www.sohomotel.com.au; 333 Wickham Tce, Spring Hill; s from \$89, tw & d from \$98; (P) (☎)) Compact and nearly bijou, the rooms at this brownstone-esque

motel are a good option for shorter stays. The private balconies aren't large but they do offer pleasing views over Wickham Park.

Il Mondo (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3392 0111; www.ilmondo.com.au; 23-25 Rotherham St, Kangaroo Point; r \$99-135, apt \$135-495; (P) (♿) (♿)) Although somewhat impersonal, the rooms and self-contained units here have been tastefully decorated with contemporary furniture and bold lashings of colour. The higher-end apartments come with river views.

Inchcolm Hotel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3226 8888; www.inchcolmhôtel.com.au; 73 Wickham Tce, Spring Hill; r from \$140; (P) (♿) (♿)) Who would have thought that a block of medical offices could be transformed into a boutique hotel? There's little to remind you of the building's clinical past but there are some lovely period features, original art works and an awesome rooftop swimming pool.

Also recommended:

Paramount Motel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 636 772, 3393 1444; www.paramountmotel.com.au; 649 Main St, Kangaroo Point; s/d/tr \$80/90/105; (P) (♿) (♿)) Well-maintained rooms popular with business folk and families.

Best Western Gregory Terrace (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3832 1769; http://gregoryterrace.bestwestern.com.au; 397 Gregory Tce, Spring Hill; r/f from \$128/144; (P) (♿) (♿)) Simple, clean accommodation with good family rooms.

Top End

Quay West Suites Brisbane (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 672 726, 3853 6000; reservations@qwsb.mirvac.com.au; 132 Alice St, Brisbane; apt from \$205; (P) (♿) (♿)) Most of the apartments here are privately owned and have been finished to a high standard. They come with polished furniture, well-equipped kitchens and a private balcony. Those with views over the City Botanic Gardens are especially sought after.

Conrad Treasury (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 506 889, 3306 8888; www.conradtreasury.com.au; 130 William St, Brisbane; r from \$295; (P) (♿)) This beautiful building once housed the Land Administration offices and has been carefully restored to its former opulent grandeur. The individually designed rooms are impressive and boast polished wood and marble, rich furnishings and beds you could get lost in.

Also recommended:

Rydges South Bank Brisbane (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1300 857 922, 9261 4929; reservations_rydges@rydges.com; 9 Glenelg St, South Bank; r from \$235; (P) (♿) (♿)) Understated yet elegant accommodation perfectly situated for art aficionados.

Stamford Plaza Brisbane (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 1999; www.stamford.com.au/spb; cnr Edward & Margaret

Sts, Brisbane; r from \$299; (P) (♿) (♿)) Luxury rooms that benefit from lots of space, excellent views and regular deals.

Camping & Caravanning

Newmarket Gardens Caravan Park (Map p297; ☎ 3356 1458; www.newmarketgardens.com.au; 199 Ashgrove Ave, Ashgrove; powered sites \$25-27, unpowered sites \$24-25, caravans \$42, cabins \$76-96; (P) (♿) (♿)) Just 4km north of the city centre, this is a pretty park although it lacks good tree coverage. The facilities are top notch and include clean bathrooms, barbecues and TVs, plus linen hire. The cabins are simple yet functional and some are wheelchair friendly. Buses to the city centre stop right outside.

EATING

The more swanky (and pricey) dining options can be found in the CBD. Fortitude Valley and New Farm offer a range of eateries from cheap pizza to ethnic eats while the West End boasts some of Brisbane's most delicious breakfast institutions. Try Petrie Terrace and Paddington for arty and organic cafés. Most of the cafés in the CBD are closed at weekends.

City Centre

Govindas (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3210 0255; 1st fl, 99 Elizabeth St; Sun feast \$5, all you can eat \$9; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri, Sun feast from 5pm) For knock-your-socks-off vegetarian curry at traveller-friendly prices try this Hare Krishna eatery that also serves snacks, salads and stews.

Java Coast Café (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3211 3040; 340 George St; dishes \$6-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) This is the perfect place for that morning caffeine kick, and for enormous muffins, fresh fruit salads and simple lunches. Enjoy it all in the sun-filled garden.

Metro Café (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 3181; 83 Albert St; dishes \$6-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) A small, no-nonsense diner serving up generous breakfasts and piping hot coffee for busy folk on the go, as well as burgers, soups and sandwiches for lunch.

Verve Café (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 5691; 109 Edward St; mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) You'll find a cool, arty crowd hanging out at this underground bar-café-restaurant that creates very good modern Italian food accompanied by some fine wines. On Thursday there is live music and a DJ spins tunes at the weekend.

Customs House Brasserie (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3365 8921; 399 Queen St; mains \$20-27; ☎ breakfast Sun, lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) If you're only going to splash

out once while in town, do it here, where the river view is so good that you won't even notice what's on the menu. So take it from us, the seared scallops with lime and pink peppercorn butter sauce, and the roast lamb loin with caramelised beetroot, are simply divine.

Ecco (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3831 8344; 100 Boundary St; mains from \$30; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) This modern Australian bistro, set within a converted tea warehouse near the Story Bridge, has won dozens of awards for its innovative cuisine. If you know your porcins from your truffles and your purees from your consommés, then you're guaranteed to love this place.

You'll find **food courts** (Map pp300-1; dishes \$5-8; ☎ 9am-5pm) serving up global fare such as sushi, stir-fries and sandwiches on the ground floor of the Wintergarden Centre and also on Level E of the Myer Centre.

Fortitude Valley & New Farm

New York Slice (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3252 0888; 360 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley; mains \$4-8; ☎ lunch Fri & Sat, dinner daily) These enormous slices of tasty pizza are perfect for everyone from budget-conscious travellers to clubbers on their way home in the early hours of the morning.

Wok On Inn (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3254 2546; 728 Brunswick St, New Farm; dishes around \$8; ☎ lunch & dinner) Steaming plates of noodles plus satays and soups are served up at this simple eatery.

BurgerUrge (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3254 1655; 542 Brunswick St, New Farm; dishes \$8-12; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner daily) This burger bar might be small but it makes a monster beef patty. There are also Portobello mushroom, chicken and lamb burgers on the menu.

Little Larder (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 2024; 76 Moray St, New Farm; dishes \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) It's worth searching out this lovely café, and not just because it makes damn fine coffee. Try the thick French toast or pesto scrambled eggs and you'll soon understand what all the *real* fuss is about.

Continental Café (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3254 0377; 21 Barker St, New Farm; dishes \$10-20; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch & dinner daily) Another popular weekend breakfast haunt is this Parisian-themed café. It also sees diners queuing up mid-week hungry for a piece of nostalgia from the 'Continental Classics' menu.

Tibetan Kitchen (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3358 5906; 454 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley; mains \$15-22; ☎ dinner) Traditional Tibetan, Sherpa and Nepalese food is dished up here in this colourful restaurant

that's especially good value for large groups. Pick up your grog from the bottle shop across the road.

Mecca Bah (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3252 5299; 1000 Ann St, Fortitude Valley; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can't book at this swanky Middle Eastern-themed restaurant, but that's OK because they serve great cocktails while you wait. If you're with friends then choose a pile of dishes to share: the Lebanese sausages and chickpea-battered mussels are particularly yummy, as are the lamb pizzas.

Vespa Pizza (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 4100; 148 Merthyr Rd, New Farm; mains \$18-20; ☎ dinner) Perfect for the more discerning pizza lover is this trendy joint that prides itself on its original toppings. Never tried a sesame chicken, yoghurt and mango chutney pizza before? You have now.

Watt (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 5464; River Tce, Brisbane Powerhouse, 119 Lamington St, New Farm; dishes \$20-36; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The riverside setting near New Farm Park makes this the perfect place for a leisurely breakfast, lunch or dinner. The menu is modern but with Asian, Middle Eastern and European influences and the desserts – especially the sticky black rice with grilled banana and coconut ice cream – are to die for.

For fresh fruit and veggies there's a great produce market inside **McWhirter's Marketplace** (Map pp300-1; cnr Brunswick & Wickham Sts) in the Valley.

Also recommended:

Fatboy's Café (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3252 3789; 323 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley; mains \$4-16) Reputedly home to Brisbane's best hangover-curing breakfast.

Thai Wi-Rat (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3257 0884; Shop 48, Duncan St, Fortitude Valley; dishes \$10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Recommended for its rich curries, spicy Thai salads and tangy noodles.

South Bank

Café San Marco (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3846 4334; South Bank Parklands; mains \$17-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This place by the river has an interesting menu that includes everything from Hervey Bay scallops to marinated dolmades. It's a friendly spot and there are some good kid-friendly options.

There's a small outdoor **food court** (Map pp300-1; South Bank Parklands), where you can pick up a cheapie lunch (\$10 and under).

West End

Happy Days (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3844 5444; 70 Boundary St; dishes \$6-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) This no-nonsense hole-in-the-wall serves up steaming Vietnamese

and Chinese dishes in record time. There's the usual range of stir-fried rice and noodles, and lots of veggie options.

Three Monkeys Coffee House (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3844 6045; 58 Mollison St; dishes \$6-18) Hugely popular is this cosy coffee den filled with comfy chairs and cushions. The coffee and spicy chai come in soup bowls and the cakes are delicious.

our pick Gunshop Café (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3844 2241; 53 Mollison St; dishes \$8-26; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, breakfast & lunch Sun) The exposed brick walls, '60s-inspired swirl cushions and wicker lampshades that sparkle like disco balls give this place an upmarket retro feel. But cool décor aside, the food here is phenomenal. There's always something quirky on the menu – such as the smoked salmon with green ants when we visited – and the breakfasts are so good they've won awards.

Jazzy Cat Café (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3846 2544; 56 Mollison St; mains \$10-20; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch & dinner daily) This pretty Queenslander home has been transformed into a funky café with a reputation for a great veggie breakfast. The lunch and dinner menus are just as popular and you can bring your own booze.

Mondo Organics (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3844 1132; 166 Hardgrave Rd; dishes \$16-34; ☎ lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) A beautifully designed space encompassing dark woods, crisp white linens and stone flooring, it serves as the stage for mouth-watering, innovative dishes created using entirely organic produce. It also runs a cooking school for those who really love the food.

Tukka (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3846 6333; 145b Boundary St; mains \$24-30; ☎ lunch Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) One of Brisbane's most famous speciality restaurants, Tukka prides itself on delivering 'new wave' Australian. If you fancy dining on emu fillet, seared Tasmanian wallaby or kangaroo *carpaccio* then this is the place to come.

Woolloongabba

Ben's Vietnamese & Chinese Restaurant (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3391 3233; 1st fl, 14 Annetley Rd; dishes \$16-23; ☎ lunch & dinner) There's a reason why people flock to this Asian diner at weekends and it's not just for the food. Up to 300 people come here on Friday and Saturday nights drawn by a shared love of spring rolls and karaoke. Everyone – and we mean *everyone* – gets up to sing.

Paddington

Pandemonium Café (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 4420; 215 Given Tce; dishes \$7-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This is a

fun '70s-style café filled with op-shop tables, battered vinyl sofas and crocheted cushions. Breakfast is served all day but there are also comfort foods such as sandwiches, burgers and bangers and mash.

Sassafras (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 0600; 88 Latrobe Tce; dishes \$10-20; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A sunny café with a hippy flavour, this place buzzes at weekends. Try the Dr Seuss-inspired green eggs and ham or any of the beatnik favourites such as scrambled tofu or chickpea and fennel cakes.

Kookaburra Café (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 2400; 280 Given Tce; meals \$12-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's the enormous pizzas that draw folk here; that and the gourmet sandwiches, spag bol and old-school trifle. Take it away or dine in the cheery outdoor courtyard.

The bistros at the **Caxton Hotel** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 5544; 38 Caxton St; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) and the **Paddo Tavern** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 0044; 186 Given Tce; mains \$8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) serve good pub grub.

Breakfast Creek

Breakfast Creek Hotel (Map p297; ☎ 3262 5988; 2 Kingsford Smith Dr; dishes \$13-17, steaks \$20-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Undoubtedly the most famous watering hole in Brisbane, this beautiful building is a local institution. It's been serving up juicy steaks for hungry carnivores since 1969 and prides itself on being one of the few pubs left in Australia to serve beer 'off the wood' (from wooden casks).

Self-Catering

There's a **Coles Express** (Map pp300-1; Queen St) and a **Woolworths** (Map pp300-1; Edward St) in the city centre. In Fortitude Valley, there's a **Foodworks** (Map pp300-1; Brunswick St Station Mall) as you exit the train station, and a great produce market inside **McWhirter's Marketplace** (Map pp300-1; cnr Brunswick & Wickham Sts).

DRINKING

The Valley has been Brisbane's nightlife mecca for decades and is crowded with busy bars, super clubs and live music venues. Another spot gaining Saturday night credibility is the West End. Drinking spots within the city centre cater mainly to suits and get busier as the weekend draws near, but at weekends the centre is empty.

Bowery (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3252 0202; 676 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) The Bowery is reputed to be the best cocktail bar in town and rightly so – the

bartenders take their spirits very seriously here. Fancy a whisky? There are so many to choose from that they're listed by region. Live jazz plays during the week.

Belgian Beer Café (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 0199; cnr Edward & Mary Sts, Brisbane) Explore Belgium's finest contribution to world development here in this brassy, beer-centric pub. There are 30 Belgian nectars to sample with Hoegaarden, Leffe Blonde and others on tap. For something a little stronger try one of the 'abbey' beers that were created by monks in the early 18th century.

Alibi Room (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3358 6133; 720 Brunswick St, New Farm) The wonderfully wacky Alibi Room looks like it was designed by Hunter S Thompson. Once you see the Hawaiian trinkets, pop-culture curios and in-house waterfall, you'll understand what we mean.

Dooleys (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3252 4344; 394 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley) Dooleys is a good old-fashioned Irish pub without the theme bar gimmicks. It's great fun, especially on karaoke night when the place goes wild.

Pavilion (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3844 6272; 123 Boundary St, West End) With a bar, café, bistro and cavernous pool hall, there's something to amuse everyone here. It's especially popular with the 20- to 30-something crowd.

Lychee Lounge (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3864 0544; 2/94 Boundary St, West End) Another fabulous cocktail bar favoured by the well-dressed, this chi-chi joint is especially popular on Sundays. Folk come here in the hope that the mixologists' magic will carry them through to closing time, and it generally does.

GPO (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3252 1322; 740 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) The dressed up old Valley post office is somewhat down at heel but still pulls in a gay-friendly, good-looking crowd that likes to party into the wee hours. DJs play at the weekend and the dance floor gets hot and sweaty.

Caxton Hotel (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 5544; 38 Caxton St, Petrie Tce) One of Brisbane's oldest licensed premises, the Caxton is still a crowd pleaser and buzzes on Friday and Saturday nights. It's home to the Queensland Reds rugby team so expect lots of sport on the TVs.

Sportsman's Hotel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3831 2892; 130 Leichhardt St, Spring Hill) Another popular gay venue, this no-frills pub has nightly shows, karaoke, dancing, pool tables and a lively, friendly atmosphere.

Other places to wet your whistle:

Kitty O'Sheas (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3368 1933; 25 Caxton St, Petrie Tce) Any hint of pretensions are left at the door of this atmospheric pub that serves up pints of the good stuff – Guinness and Kilkenny. There's live music at the weekends.

Story Bridge Hotel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3391 2266; 200 Main St, Kangaroo Point) There are three lively bars set within this beautiful old pub, including a beer garden.

Down Under Bar & Grill (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3211 9277; cnr Ann & Edward Sts, Brisbane) This backpacker haunt, located under the Palace Backpackers, has nightly drinking games and dancing on tables.

ENTERTAINMENT

Brisbane has a thriving performing arts scene and nationally renowned clubs. It's also threatening to rob Melbourne of its title as Australia's rock capital, owing to a growing live music scene and an increasing number of local acts making waves overseas.

For details of what's on, pick up one of the free entertainment papers *Time Off* (www.timeoff.com.au), *Rave* (www.ravemag.com.au) and *Scene* (www.sceneonline.com.au). The fortnightly *Q news* (www.qnews.com.au) covers events on the gay and lesbian scene and *Queensland Pride* takes in the whole of the state. Another good source of information is www.brisbane247.com.

The *Courier-Mail* has daily arts and entertainment listings and a comprehensive 'What's On In Town' section in each Thursday's newspaper.

Ticketek (☎ 13 19 31; <http://premier.ticketek.com.au>) is a centralised phone-booking agency that handles bookings for many of the major events, sports and performances. You can pick up tickets from the **Ticketek booth** (Map pp300-1; Elizabeth St), at the back of the Myer Centre, or at the **South Bank visitor information centre** (Map pp300-1; 3867 2051; Stanley Street Plaza, South Bank Parklands).

Nightclubs

Brisbane's major clubs are in the Valley. Be aware that there's been an increased police presence of late with drug-sniffer dogs targeting clubbers queuing to get inside. Clubs are generally open Thursday to Sunday night and charge \$8 to \$15 entry unless a big-name DJ is playing, when tickets skyrocket. Photo ID is an absolute and remember that some places are sticklers for dress codes.

Family (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 5000; 8 McLachlan St, Fortitude Valley) Family is something of an

institution in Brisbane and goes off without fail every weekend. It's an enormous space with four levels, three different sounds, an ice bar and funky genie bottle-shaped booths. It's twice been voted Australia's best club and has seen major international DJs such as Roger Sanchez and Carl Cox grace the decks.

Alhambra Lounge (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3216 0226; 12 McLachlan St, Fortitude Valley) Next door to Family, this place caters to clubbers who have outgrown their glow sticks. Themed around a Spanish castle, the dark red interiors are filled with sofas and private booths and the music is very, very funky.

Empire (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 1216; 339 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley) Another hugely popular place, the emphasis at this multilevel club is less on swanky décor and more on jumping around and having a good time – in a nonchalant kind of way of course. The downstairs Corner Bar is a lively place to start your evening.

Uber (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3846 6680; 100 Boundary St, West End) Brisbane's newest club is a super-stylish affair filled with super-stylish people. The design is pure glamour with copper, stainless steel and dark wood making it feel more like a boutique hotel than a nightclub. The music changes nightly but the weekends are dedicated to pure main-room house music.

The Beat Mega Club (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 2661; 677 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) Five dance floors, six bars and hardcore techno equals the perfect place for dance junkies who like their beats hard. It's also popular with the gay and lesbian crowd and there are regular drag performances and nightly shows.

Wickham Hotel (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 1301; 308 Wickham St, Fortitude Valley) This is the most popular gay and lesbian venue in town, with nightly shenanigans including pole dancing lessons and best butt competitions. From Thursday night onwards the music and crowd are fabulous and debauched.

Cinemas

Both the **Dendy Cinema** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3211 3244; 346 George St, Brisbane) and **Palace Centro** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 4488; 39 James St, Fortitude Valley) play good art-house films. The cheapest cinema for mainstream flicks is **South Bank Cinema** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3846 5188; cnr Grey & Ernest Sts, South Bank).

Catch an outdoor flick at the **Brisbane Powerhouse** (Map pp298-9; www.brisbanepowerhouse.org; 119 Lamington St, New Farm) during the sum-

mer months courtesy of the **Moonlight Cinema** (☎ 1300 551 908; www.moonlight.com.au).

Mainstream cinemas on Queen St Mall: **Birch, Carroll & Coyle** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3027 9999; Level 3, Myer Centre, Queen St Mall, Brisbane) Mainstream blockbusters.

Hoys Regent Theatre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3027 9999; 167 Queen St, Brisbane) A lovely old cinema worth visiting for the building alone.

Theatre

South Bank is home to the majority of Brisbane's theatre venues, but there are a couple of theatrical heavyweights in New Farm and Fortitude Valley. The Queensland Cultural Centre has a 24-hour **phone line** (☎ 13 62 46) that handles bookings for events at South Bank theatres and other venues and events nationally.

Queensland Performing Arts Centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3840 7444; www.qpac.com.au; cnr Grey & Melbourne Sts, South Bank; (P)) There's something for everyone at this centre that has four venues and a packed calendar. Choose from international comedy acts, blockbuster musicals, dance, orchestral performances or an evening at the theatre.

Brisbane Powerhouse (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 8622, box office 3358 8600; www.brisbanepowerhouse.org; 119 Lamington St, New Farm; (P) (♿)) Brisbane's most dynamic arts venue once powered the largest tram network in the southern hemisphere and the industrial textures, complete with graffitied walls, remain today. Live music, edgy comedy and risqué theatre are performed within this unique space.

Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3872 9000; www.jwcca.qld.gov.au; 420 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley) A creative space dedicated to showcasing contemporary dance and music, indigenous theatre, youth arts, circus and visual arts.

Queensland Conservatorium (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3735 6241; 16 Russell St, South Bank) South of the Performing Arts Centre at South Bank, this conservatorium presents around 200 performances a year including jazz, classical and opera. It acts as a showcase for the talent of attending students.

La Boite Theatre Company (Map pp298-9; ☎ 13 62 46; www.laboite.com.au; Roundhouse Theatre, 6-8 Musk Ave, Kelvin Grove) A contemporary theatre company that produces intimate plays with a strong focus on works by Queensland playwrights.

Also recommended:

QUT Gardens Theatre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3138 4455; Queensland University of Technology, 2 George St, Brisbane; (P)) Touring productions plus shows from the university's performing companies.

Brisbane Arts Theatre (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3369 2344; 210 Petrie Tce, Petrie Tce) An eclectic range of live theatre ranging from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to the more saucy *Steaming*.

Live Music

In 2006 Brisbane was named by a US music industry magazine as one of its five international music hot spots, but all good musos know that the city has been producing influential acts for decades now. The '70s punk band The Saints, seminal indie rock outfit The Go-Betweens and pop duo Savage Garden call Brisbane home and even the Bee Gees spent some of their formative years here. More recently, rockers Powderfinger, hip hop outfit Butterfingers and pop princesses The Veronicas have all achieved national (and some international) success. Cover charges start at about \$6 for local acts and go up from there.

Zoo (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3854 1381; 711 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) A grungy institution that has been going for aeons, it is one of the best places to see great live music without paying top dollar. The acts range from hip hop, rock and dub to acoustic, folk and reggae, and the justifiably popular Jazz on a Sunday Vibe.

Ric's Café (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3854 1772; 321 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley) This is a great place to check out some local acts and it's where a lot of bands get their first break. You'll hear everything from pure rock to an experimental three-piece. Upstairs is a small club with DJs.

Troubadour (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3252 2626; Level 2, 322 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley) The Troubadour is an intimate, boutique venue that sees numerous local, interstate and international acts perform, including a lot of solo artists.

Tongue & Groove (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3846 0334; 63 Hardgrave Rd, West End) This cool but unpretentious subterranean bar boasts an eclectic line-up of music including blues, jazz and funk. You'll even hear killer dance beats at times. Top billing is given to local bands and performers.

Tivoli (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3852 1711; 52 Costin St, Fortitude Valley) This old Art Deco building hosts national and international bands such as Gomez and Damien Rice, as well as a smattering of comedy acts.

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3308 3000; cnr Merivale & Glenelg Sts, South Bank; (P)) Brisbane's largest multifunctional entertainment complex hosts everything from *Little Britain Live* to international motor shows.

More music venues:

Brisbane Powerhouse (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3358 8600; 119 Lamington St, New Farm) Has live music on Sunday afternoons.

Brisbane Jazz Club (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3391 2006; 1 Annie St, Kangaroo Point; cover \$8-12) Big band, swing and contemporary jazz get folk hopping. Free dance classes are held on the first Friday of every month from 6pm.

Rev (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 3373; 25 Warner St, Fortitude Valley) Smallish venue with a spotlight on the indie music scene.

Sport

Nothing marks the start of summer quite like the thwack of leather on willow and you can catch interstate and international (test) cricket matches at the **Gabba** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3008 6166; www.thegabba.org.au; Vulture St, Woolloongabba) between October and March.

During the other half of the year rugby league is the big spectator sport. The Brisbane Broncos play home games at **Suncorp Stadium** (Map pp298-9; ☎ 3331 5000; www.suncorpsstadium.com.au; Castlemaine St, Milton), which also hosts international tests and fiercely contested State of Origin matches against NSW every year.

Also calling Suncorp home are the Queensland Reds, the state's rugby union team that contests the Super 14 competition against provincial sides from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa between January and May.

The Brisbane Lions are the big Australian Football League (AFL) team here and they've been whooping major southern butt, winning the flag in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Watch them in action at a home game at the Gabba between March and September.

SHOPPING

Everything else in Brisbane might be thriving but the same can't be said for its shopping. Mostly on offer are large chain stores, generic malls and lots of tourist tat; the majority of which can be found around the Queen St Mall in the CBD. That said, there are a few gems if you're willing to search them out.

Australian Indigenous Tribal Galleries (The Basement; Map pp300-1; ☎ 3236 1700; 376 George St, Brisbane) A lot of the art here has been painted on site

by local emerging and established indigenous artists. The other works come with a certificate of authenticity and the money goes straight back to the artist.

Blonde Venus (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3216 1735; 707 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) For designer duds head to this boutique that stocks Australian labels Zimmerman, Akira and Morrissey. It also holds a good range of up-and-coming designers.

CQStore (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3215 0808; 381 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) One-off and obscure pieces made by Queensland and Australian designers. Everything from collectable homewares and wearable accessories to ceramics and jewellery are housed in one creative wonderland.

Dogstar (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3852 2555; 713 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) Originally from Japan but brought up in Brisbane, this designer has been instrumental in shaping the local fashion industry. Her collections are based on a distinct structured look, with more than a hint of oriental influence, and incorporate beautiful fabrics such as silk and linen.

Emporium (Map pp298-9; 1000 Ann St, Fortitude Valley) This is Brisbane's newest retail outlet and it's brimming with boutique shops, gourmet delis and eateries. Noosa Longboards stocks some classic surf prints as well as beach wear and Timbuktu to Kathmandu sells ethnic and contemporary jewellery.

Globe Trekker (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3221 4476; 140 Albert St) Good selection of outdoor gear including shoes, backpacks, maps and camping equipment.

Museum of Brisbane Store (Map pp300-1; ☎ 3403 4355; Museum of Brisbane, ground fl, City Hall, King George Sq; ☎ 10am-5pm) The museum's in-house shop is a fabulous showcase for local artists and you can pick up unique jewellery pieces, ceramics, children's gifts and more.

Markets

Brisbane's markets are excellent and there are plenty of them to explore.

Brunswick St Markets (Map pp300-1; Brunswick St Mall, Fortitude Valley; ☎ 8am-4pm Sat & Sun) These come to life at the weekend and are bursting with young, cutting-edge fashion designers. It's also good for one-of-a-kind accessories and jewellery.

South Bank Lifestyles Market (Map pp300-1; South Bank Parklands; ☎ 5-10.30pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) This tourist market is full of boomerangs, stuffed kangaroos, tarot readers and opal traders.

Green Flea Community Market (Map pp298-9; Davies Park, cnr Montague Rd & Jane St, West End; ☎ 6am-2pm Sat) A delightfully hippy market where organic foods, gourmet stalls, herbs and flowers jostle for space with secondhand clothing, bric-a-brac and buskers.

Powerhouse Farmers Market (Map pp298-9; Brisbane Powerhouse, 119 Lamington St, New Farm; ☎ 6am-noon, 2nd & 4th Sat of the month) Sells fresh farm produce, artisan products, meat, fish, cheese and more. It's got an excellent reputation and is always busy.

Other popular tourist options include the **Riverside Centre Market** (Map pp300-1; Riverside Centre, Brisbane; ☎ 7am-4pm Sun) and the **Eagle St Pier Art & Craft Market** (Map pp300-1; Eagle St Pier, Brisbane; ☎ 8am-3pm Sun), which house over 150 craft stalls, including glassware, metal work, photography and homemade jams.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Brisbane's main airport (Map p297) is about 16km northeast of the city centre at Eagle Farm and has separate international and domestic terminals about 2km apart, linked by the **Airtrain** (☎ 3215 5000; www.airtrain.com.au; per person \$4; ☎ every 15min, 6am-7.30pm). It's well serviced and there are frequent flights to Asia, Europe, Pacific Islands, North America, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. See p1020 for details of international airlines that service Brisbane.

Domestic airlines servicing Brisbane include **Qantas** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au; 247 Adelaide St, Brisbane; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au), **Macair** (☎ 1800 622 247; www.macair.com.au) and **Sunshine Express** (☎ 13 13 13; www.sunshineexpress.com.au).

Bus

Brisbane's main terminus and booking office for all long-distance buses and trains is the **Roma Street Transit Centre** (Map pp300-1; Roma St, Brisbane), about 500m west of the city centre. The centre has an accommodation booking service and a backpackers employment service.

You'll find booking desks for the bus companies on the third level of the centre. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99, 3236 3035; www.greyhound.com.au) is the main company on the Sydney-Brisbane run (\$116, 16 hours), but **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) often has cheaper deals on this route.

You can also travel between Brisbane and Melbourne (\$170, 24 to 28 hours) or Adelaide (\$250, 40 hours), although competitive airfares may enable you to fly for the same price or less.

Destination	Price (\$)	Duration (hr)
Airlie Beach	155	18
Bundaberg	65	7
Cairns	230	30
Hervey Bay	50	5½
Longreach	110	17
Mackay	140	16
Mt Isa	185	26
Noosa Heads	27	2½
Rockhampton	95	11½
Surfers Paradise	18	1½
Townsville	200	23

Car & Motorcycle

There are five major routes into and out of the Brisbane metropolitan area, numbered from M1 to M5. The major north-south route, the M1, connects the Pacific Hwy in the south with the Bruce Hwy in the north, but things get a bit confusing as you enter the city.

Coming from the Gold Coast, the Pacific Hwy splits into two at Eight Mile Plains. From here, the South East Freeway (M3) runs right into the centre, skirting along the riverfront on the western side of the CBD, before emerging on the far side as the Gympie Arterial Rd.

If you're just passing through, take the Gateway Motorway (M1) at Eight Mile Plains, which bypasses the city centre to the east and crosses the Brisbane River at the Gateway Bridge (\$3 toll). From either direction, the Eagle Farm exit on the northern side of the bridge provides a quick route to Fortitude Valley and the city centre. Just north is the turn-off to Brisbane airport. The Gateway Motorway and Gympie Arterial Rd meet in Bald Hills, just south of the Pine River, and merge to form the Bruce Hwy.

Heading inland, the Ipswich Motorway (M2) branches off the M1 south of the centre, and crosses the M3 before snaking off southwest to Ipswich and the Darling Downs. For a quick route from the city, pick up Milton Rd at the northwestern tip of the CBD and follow it out to the M5, which runs south to meet the Ipswich Motorway at Wacol (this is also the way to Mt Coot-tha Reserve).

HIRE

All of the major companies – **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39), **Avis** (☎ 13 63 33), **Budget** (☎ 1300 362 848), **Europcar** (☎ 1300 131 390) and **Thrifty** (☎ 1300 367 227) – have offices at the Brisbane airport terminals and throughout the city.

There are also several smaller companies in Brisbane, which advertise cheaper deals:

Abel Rent A Car (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 131 429, 3236 1225; www.abel.com.au; ground fl, Roma St Transit Centre, Brisbane)

Ace Rental Cars (Map p297; ☎ 1800 620 408, 3862 2158; www.acerentals.com.au; 35 Sandgate Rd, Albion)

Integra Network Car & Truck Rentals (Map pp300-1; ☎ 1800 067 414, 3620 3200; www.abcingtegra.com.au; 398 St Pauls Tce, Fortitude Valley)

Train

The Roma St Transit Centre is Brisbane's main station for long-distance trains. For any information and reservations, call into the **Queensland Rail Travel Centre** (☎ 13 16 17; www.qr.com.au; Central Station Map pp300-1; ☎ 3235 1323; Ground fl, Central Station, 305 Edward St, Brisbane; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri; Roma St Transit Centre Map pp300-1; ☎ 3235 1331; Roma St, Brisbane; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri). It is also possible to make reservations online or over the phone.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au; economy/1st class/sleeper \$125/165/255) has a daily XPT (express passenger train) service between Sydney and Brisbane. The northbound service runs overnight, and the southbound service runs during the day. Each takes 14 hours.

Services within Queensland:

Spirit of the Outback Brisbane to Longreach via Rockhampton twice weekly (economy seat/economy sleeper/1st-class sleeper \$185/240/370, 26 hours).

Sunlander Brisbane to Cairns via Townsville (economy seat/economy sleeper/1st-class sleeper/Queenslander class \$205/265/410/725, 30 hours). The exclusive Queensland class includes restaurant meals and historical commentary.

Tilt Train Brisbane to Cairns (business seat only \$305, 25 hours) and Brisbane to Rockhampton (economy seat/business seat \$100/150, eight hours).

Westlander Brisbane to Charleville via Roma (economy seat/economy sleeper/1st-class sleeper \$100/160/240, 17 hours).

Concessions are available for children under 16 years, students with a valid ISIC card and senior citizens.

GETTING AROUND

Brisbane has one of the best public transport networks in Australia. Information on bus, train and ferry routes and connections can be obtained from the **Trans-Info Service** (☎ 13 12 30; www.transinfo.qld.gov.au; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon-Thu, 24hr 6am Fri to 9pm Sun).

Bus and ferry information is available at the Brisbane Visitor Information Centre (p296), the information centre at the **Queen St Mall bus station** (Map pp300-1; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-8pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) and the Queensland Rail Travel Centres (p321).

Fares on buses, trains and ferries operate on a zone system. There are 23 zones in total, but the city centre and most of the inner-city suburbs fall within Zone 1, which translates into a single fare of \$2.20/1.10 per adult/child.

If you're going to be using public transport more than once on any single day, it's worth getting a **daily ticket** (per adult/child zone 1 \$4.40/2.20, zone 2 \$5.20/2.60, zone 3 \$6/3), which allows you unlimited transport on all buses, trains and ferries.

You can also purchase **off-peak daily tickets** (per adult/child zone 1 \$3.30/1.70, zone 2 \$3.90/2, zone 3 \$4.50/2.30), which allow unlimited transport but only between 9am and 3.30pm and after 7pm from Monday to Friday, and all weekend.

A **Ten Trip Saver** (per adult/child zone 1 \$17.60/8.80, zone 2 \$20.80/10.40, zone 3 \$24/12) gives you 10 trips for the price of eight and is also valid on all buses, trains and ferries.

To/From the Airport

The easiest way to get to and from the airport is the **Airtrain** (☎ 3216 3308; www.airtrain.com.au; per adult/child \$12.50/6; ☎ every 15min, 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 6am-7.30pm Sat & Sun), which runs between the airport and the Roma St Transit Centre and Central Station. There are also half-hourly services to the airport from Gold Coast Citytrain stops. **Coachtrans** (☎ 3238 4700; www.coachtrans.com.au) runs the half-hourly **Skytrans** (per adult/child to city \$9/6, to city accommodation \$11/7, to Gold Coast accommodation \$35/18; ☎ 5.45am-10pm) shuttle bus between the airport, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. A taxi into the centre from the airport will cost around \$30.

Taxi

Brisbane's nippy blue CityCat catamarans run every 20 to 30 minutes, between 5.50am and 10.30pm, from the University of Queensland in the southwest to Bretts Wharf in the north-

east, and back. Stops along the way include North Quay (for the Queen St Mall), South Bank, Riverside (for the CBD) and New Farm Park. The CityCats are wheelchair accessible at the University of Queensland, Guyatt Park, North Quay, South Bank 1 and 2, and Hawthorne.

Also useful are the Inner City Ferries, which zigzag back and forth across the river between North Quay, near the Victoria Bridge, and Mowbray Park. Services start at 6am and run till about 11pm. There are also several cross-river ferries; most useful is the Eagle St Pier to Thornton St (Kangaroo Point) service.

Like all public transport, fares are based on zones. Most stops you'll need will be city-based and will therefore cost \$2.20/1.10 per adult/child for one trip.

Bus

The Loop, a free bus service that circles the city area – stopping at QUT, Queen St Mall, City Botanic Gardens, Central Station and Riverside – runs every 10 minutes on weekdays between 7am and 6pm.

The main stop for local buses is in the underground Queen St Mall bus station (Map pp300-1), where there's an information centre. You can also pick up many buses from the colour-coded stops along Adelaide St, between George and Edward Sts.

Buses run every 10 to 20 minutes Monday to Friday, from 5am till about 6pm, and with the same frequency on Saturday morning (starting at 6am). Services are less frequent at other times, and cease at 9pm Sunday and midnight on other days.

Car & Motorcycle

There is free two-hour parking on many streets in the CBD and in the inner suburbs, but the major thoroughfares become clearways (ie parking is prohibited) during the morning and afternoon peak hours. If you do park in the street, pay close attention to the times on the parking signs, as Brisbane's parking inspectors take no prisoners. Parking is cheaper around the South Bank than the city centre but is free in the CBD during the evening.

Taxi

It's easy to find a cab in Brisbane, particularly around the city centre, and there are taxi ranks at the transit centre and at the top end of Edward St, by the junction with Adelaide St.

The two major taxi companies here are **Black & White** (☎ 13 10 08) and **Yellow Cab Co** (☎ 13 19 24).

Train

The fast Citytrain network has seven lines, which run as far as Gympie North in the north (for the Sunshine Coast) and Robina in the south (for the Gold Coast). All trains go through Roma St, Central and Brunswick St Stations.

MORETON BAY

The clear waters of Moreton Bay stretch 125km from Caloundra to the Gold Coast and are sprinkled with some 365 islands – one for every day of the year. The bay is separated from the Pacific Ocean by four sand islands: Moreton Island and Bribie Island to the north, and North and South Stradbroke Islands towards the south. It's a beautiful area that's home to some of Queensland's highlights and a great diversity of marine life, including the increasingly rare dugong. The two most visited islands are Moreton Island, where folk head to feed the dolphins, dive colourful wrecks and indulge in 4WD adventures, and North Stradbroke Island, which is home to some good surf, stunning beaches and designer holiday homes.

Tours

Humpback whales are a regular sight in the bay between June and November when they migrate from Antarctica to their calving grounds near the Great Barrier Reef.

Dolphin Wild (☎ 07-3880 4444; www.dolphinwild.com.au; per adult/child/family incl lunch \$99/55/259)

Departing from Redcliffe, 35km north of Brisbane, these full-day cruises come with commentary from the resident naturalist and guided snorkel tours (adult/child \$20/10) around the Tangalooma wrecks or Flinders Reef.

Manly Eco Cruises (☎ 07-3396 9400; www.manlyeco.com.au; per adult/child \$99/44) Ride in the boom nets, enjoy free canoe rides or sit back on the MV *Getaway* and spot for marine life. The two-hour Sunday barbecue breakfast tour is especially popular (adult/child \$35/17).

Moreton Bay Escapes (☎ 1300 559 355; www.moretonbayescapes.com.au; per adult/child/family incl lunch \$129/109/319) A jam-packed day tour of Moreton Island by an eco-certified operator that includes a luxury cruise, 4WD adventure, sand boarding and tobogganing, swimming and a picnic lunch.

NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

☎ 07 / pop 3500

Affectionately referred to as 'Straddie' by locals, this picturesque island is the most popular in the Bay area and has become an increasingly desirable postcode for weekend Queenslanders looking for a holiday home. Just a hop, step and 30-minute ferry ride from Cleveland, 30km southeast of Brisbane, it makes for a convenient and utterly delightful getaway.

The eastern side of the island is fringed by white sandy beaches and turquoise waters and the rocky outcrop to the north is a regular spot for sighting dolphins, turtles and manta rays. Between June and November, hundreds of humpback whales can also be seen here.

The middle of the island is peppered with freshwater lakes and waterways, and the southeastern coast is a haven for 4WD drivers. There are ample opportunities for swimming, surfing, snorkelling and fishing, and there are also some decent bushwalking trails.

There are three main settlements on the island that are all grouped towards the northern end. **Point Lookout** is on the surf side and is the major tourist destination, while **Dunwich**, on the western coast, is where the ferries dock. The southern part of the island is closed to visitors because of sand mining.

Although quiet most of the year, the population swells by nearly five times during school holidays so if you are planning a trip then, you will need to book accommodation well in advance.

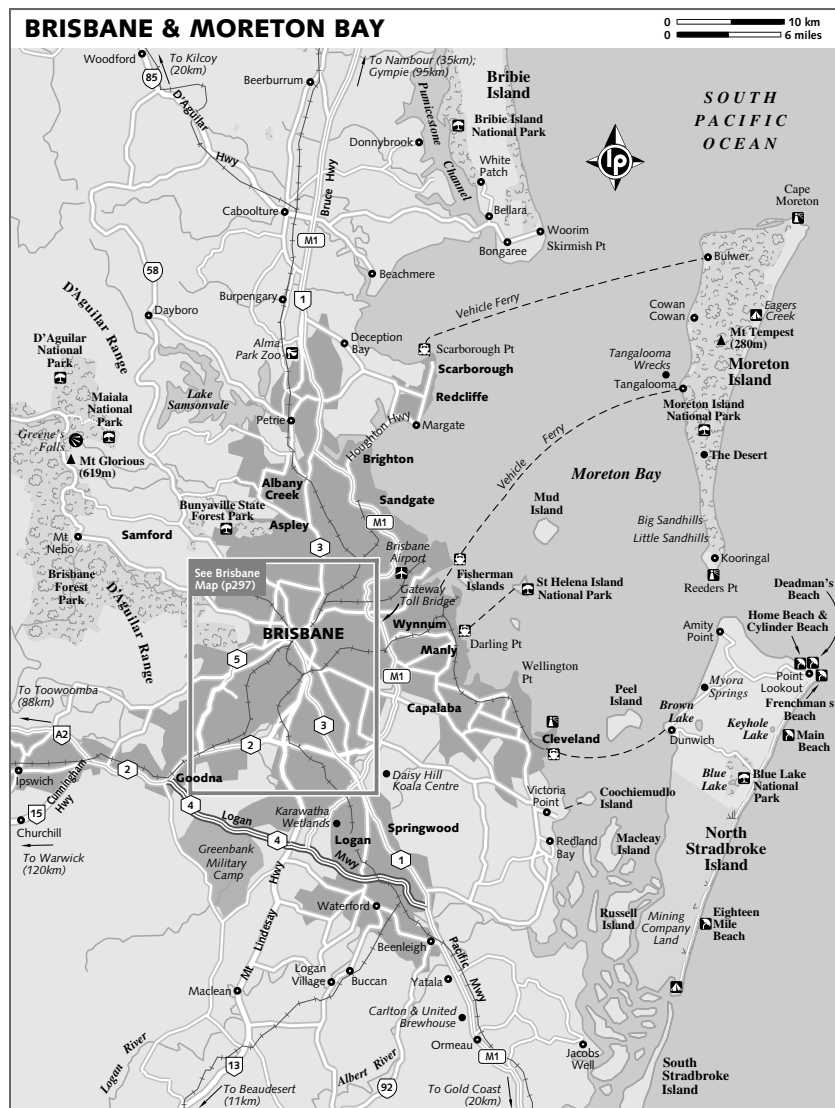
The **Stradbroke Island Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 3409 9555; www.stradbroketourism.com; Junner St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is 200m from the ferry terminal in Dunwich.

Those with a 4WD will need to obtain a permit (\$33) from **Stradbroke Tourism** (☎ 3409 9555).

Sights

At Dunwich you can get a feel for the island's history. The **Dunwich Museum** (☎ 3409 9699; 15-17 Welsby St; adult/child \$3.30/1; ☎ 10am-2pm Wed & Sat) has a small but comprehensive display of life on the island. To explore the island's Aboriginal history, book onto the **Goompi Trail Tour** (☎ 3409 9555; \$8.50) an 1½-hour walk led by local Aboriginal guide.

At Point Lookout, the breathtaking **North Gorge Headlands Walk** is a must. A wooden boardwalk skirts the rocky outcrops and you can spot turtles and manta rays bobbing and gliding in the waters below you.



The eastern beach, known as **Eighteen Mile Beach**, is open to 4WD vehicles and campers. Freshwater lakes make for a refreshing swim and there are two accessible by 4WD. The aptly named **Brown Lake** is the colour of stewed tea owing to the native tea trees that line the waters, and you can float in the clear waters of **Keyhole Lake** while listening to the surf that

lays just metres away. **Blue Lake** is closed to vehicles but the 2.4km stroll through the forest to reach it is worth it.

Activities

Swimming, surfing and fishing are the main pastimes on Straddie. Cylinder Beach is patrolled and great for **swimming**; Frenchman's

Beach and Deadman's Beach are peaceful secluded spots and Amity Point and Dunwich offer calm waters.

Main Beach is where **surfers** and bodyboarders head for big swells that can reach up to 8ft.

Watersports gear can be hired from various places; kayak hire per hour/day is around \$20/50, surfboards \$15/40 and bodyboards \$10/30.

Straddie Adventures (☎ 3409 8414; 112 East Coast Rd) offers sea-kayaking trips (including snorkelling stops, \$35) around Straddie, and sandboarding (\$25).

Anglers can hire fishing gear from **Dunwich Sports & Hobbies** (☎ 3409 9252; 18 Bingle Rd).

Manta Lodge & Scuba Centre (☎ 3409 8888; www.stradbrokeislandscuba.com.au; 1 East Coast Rd) based at the Manta Lodge YHA (below), offers snorkelling (adult/child \$80/60) inclusive of a two-hour boat trip and all the gear. Open-water dive courses cost \$420.

Tours

Stradbroke Island Beach Tours (☎ 3824 6247; www.stradbrocketours.com.au; adult/child \$79/70) Offers a range of day trips with the option of departing from Brisbane or the Gold Coast for an additional fee. Tours include lunch.

Straddie Kingfisher Tours (☎ 3409 9502; www.straddiekingfishertours.com.au; adult/child \$69/49) Run by the very knowledgeable and affable Dave, these eco-tourism based tours last a full day and include a barbecue lunch. He also runs tours to Moreton Island.

Sleeping

Point Lookout Backpackers Beach House (☎ 3409 8679; www.pointlookoutbeachhouse.com.au; 76 Mooloolaba Rd; dm/d \$20/45) Ideally located near the surf, this renovated 1950s beach house has a friendly, laid-back vibe. The hostel also has an active environmental policy so you can kick back in the funky wreck room knowing that you're also helping to save the world.

Manta Lodge YHA (☎ 3409 8888; www.stradbrokeislandscuba.com.au; 1 East Coast Rd; dm \$27, tw & d \$60) This purpose-built hostel is next door to Home Beach and boasts a well-equipped kitchen, comfy lounge area and decent rooms. The dive school is run out of here and guests can also hire bikes and use the surf and boogie boards. It's a bit of a trek from here to the restaurants and shops.

Domain Stradbroke Resort (☎ 3415 0000; www.stradbokedomain.com; 43-47 East Coast Rd; cabins from

\$145; ☎ ☎ ☎) These self-contained modern beach 'shacks' are some of the most stylish on the island. Open-plan living, designer furniture and all the mod cons you could ever need make this a great high-end option.

Whale Watch Resort (☎ 1800 450 004, 3409 8555; www.whalewatchresort.com.au; Samarinda Dr; r per 2/5 nights from \$296/700; ☎ ☎ ☎) If you're hankering for an island holiday home but can't quite find the cash, then this is your next best option. These sublime apartments hide generous interiors with three bedrooms, two bathrooms and spacious lounges. Even better are the uninterrupted ocean views from a private wooden deck.

Holiday homes can be good value if you're planning on staying for a while, especially outside the holiday season. Rentals start at \$220 per night and you can get some good deals for multi-day stays:

Dolphin Holiday Accommodation (☎ 3409 8455; www.straddie.info; 1 Endeavour St)

Raine & Horne (☎ 3409 8213; www.stradbrokeislandrealstate.com; Shop 3 Kennedy Dr)

Ray White (☎ 3409 8255; www.raywhitestraddie.com; Mintee St)

The six camping grounds on the island are run by **Stradbroke Caravan and Camping** (☎ 1300 551 253; unpowered/powerd/foreshore sites from \$25/30/10.50) and should be booked well in advance. One of the most popular sites is the shady beach-front camp site right on Cylinder Beach, while the Adder Rock and Thankful Rest Camping Areas both overlook pretty Home Beach. In general, if you manage to secure a spot in a camping ground around Point Lookout, you won't be disappointed.

Eating

There are a couple of general stores selling groceries in Point Lookout, but it's worth bringing basic supplies. Note that few places are open to eat later than 8pm.

Gelati With A View (☎ 3415 3222; 19 Mooloolaba Rd; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This quirky coffee shop-cum-ice cream parlour is the place to come to for Brazilian blend coffee, fresh fruit juices and proper Italian gelati.

Fishes at the Point (☎ 3415 3444; Point Lookout; mains \$8.50-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can't beat fish and chips when you're on a beach holiday and this is the place to indulge those childhood fantasies. If you've outgrown the newspaper wrapping then opt for a dozen fresh oysters instead.

Stonefish Cafe Bar & Restaurant (☎ 3409 8549; cnr Mooloolomba Rd & Mintee St; mains \$12-25; ☺ breakfast & lunch) The location overlooking Frenchman's Beach is just one reason this place is a local favourite. The other drawback is the menu, which offers scrummy breakfasts (including freshly squeezed juices) and innovative Mod Oz options for lunch.

Domain Cafe (☎ 3415 0090; 43-47 East Coast Rd; mains \$18-30) Recently opened, this alfresco option is ideal for those with a penchant for more upmarket dining. Excellent seafood dishes, a respectable wine list and amazing chocolate brownies are just a few of the treats on offer.

Getting There & Away

The gateway to North Stradbroke Island is the seaside town of Cleveland. Regular city train services run from Central or Roma St Stations in Brisbane to Cleveland station (\$4.40, one hour), from where you can get a bus (free if you show your train ticket) to the ferry terminal.

Stradbroke Ferries (☎ 3286 2666) runs a water taxi to Dunwich almost every hour from about 6am to 6pm (adult/child \$17/10 return, 30 minutes). It also has a slightly less frequent vehicle ferry (\$112 return per vehicle, including passengers, 45 minutes) from 5.30am to 6.30pm.

The **Stradbroke Flyer** (☎ 3821 3821; www.flyer.com.au) also runs an almost-hourly catamaran service from Cleveland to One Mile Jetty (adult/child \$16/10 return, 45 minutes), 1.5km north of central Dunwich.

Getting Around

Local buses (☎ 3409 7151) meet the ferries at Dunwich and One Mile Jetty and run across to Point Lookout (\$9.50 return). Remember to tell the driver where you want to get off. The last bus to Dunwich leaves Point Lookout around 6pm. There's also the **Stradbroke Cab Service** (☎ 0408 193 685), which charges \$35 from Dunwich to Point Lookout.

MORETON ISLAND

☎ 07

North of Stradbroke, Moreton Island is a natural wonderland teeming with miles of sandy beaches, freshwater lagoons, rampant wildflowers and prolific birdlife. There is also evidence of the island's rich history from the ancient shell middens of early Aboriginal set-

tlers to the fortifications leftover from military occupation in 1938. The island was also the site of Queensland's first and only whaling station, which operated between 1952 and 1962.

Apart from a few rocky headlands, it's all sand and approximately 95% of the island is national park. **Mt Tempest**, the highest coastal sand hill in the world, is well worth a trek up – all 280m of it. At the northern tip is the **Cape Moreton Lighthouse**. Built in 1857, it's the oldest operating lighthouse in Queensland, and is the place to come for an impressive 360-degree view of the island. Near the lighthouse is the **Moreton Island National Park information centre** (☎ 3408 2710) where you can buy QPWS maps. These are also available from the vehicle ferry offices.

Centrally located off the western coast are the **Tangalooma Wrecks**, which provide good snorkelling and diving. Also here is the **Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort**, an upmarket hotel situated at the old whaling station; you can still see the flensing deck almost in its original condition. The resort's main attraction is the **wild dolphin feeding**, which takes place every evening around sunset. Between five and nine dolphins swim in from the ocean to take fish from the hands of volunteer feeders, but you need to be a guest at the resort to be involved.

The only other settlements on the island are also on the west coast. **Bulwer** sits near the northwestern tip, **Cowan Cowan** between Bulwer and Tangalooma, and **Kooringal** is near the southern tip. There are shops at Kooringal and Bulwer but they're pricey, so bring what you can from the mainland.

You won't find any paved roads on Moreton Island, but 4WDs can travel along the beaches and a few cross-island tracks – seek local advice about tides and creek crossings. Vehicle permits for the island cost \$35 and are available through the ferry operators or from the Naturally Queensland information centre in Brisbane (p296). Note it's worth booking your ferry ticket (bookings are mandatory if you want to take a vehicle across) before buying the permit, as barge services to the island are limited (see opposite for operators).

If you don't have a car, the only way to get around the island is on foot. Fortunately, there are lots of good walking trails and de-commissioned 4WD roads.

Tours

Moreton Bay Escapes (☎ 1300 559 355; www.moretonbayescapes.com.au; adult/child incl lunch \$129/109) Eco-certified outfit offering daily 4WD adventure trips.

Sunrover Expeditions (☎ 1800 353 717, 3880 0719; www.sunrover.com.au; 1-2/-3-day tours per person from \$120/195/295, plus \$10 national park entrance fee) Eco-tours run as day trips or camping safaris departing from Brisbane's Roma St Transit Centre.

Sleeping

Bulwer Cabins (☎ 3203 6399; www.moreton-island.com; cabins from \$95) These modest, self-contained units sleep up to six, and there are two dormitory-style cabins for large groups. You must provide your own linen.

Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort (☎ 1300 652 250, 3268 6333; www.tangalooma.com; r from \$250; ☺ ☎) There's a huge range of ritzy rooms here and you get to feed the dolphins. It also runs a daily 'Eco Kids' programme. Rates do not include transfer costs.

There are nine **QPWS camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18), including four on the beach. Those sites not on the beach have water, toilets and cold showers. Camping permits must be obtained prior to arriving on the island as there is no self-registration on site. These can be obtained from Naturally Queensland (p296) in Brisbane or from a barge operator.

Getting There & Around

The **Tangalooma Flyer** (☎ 3268 6333; www.tangalooma.com/tangalooma/transport; return adult/child \$60/30; ☺ 8am, 10am & 5pm daily, plus 1pm Mon, Sat & Sun) is the resort's fast catamaran. It departs from Holt St, off Kingsford Smith Dr (in Eagle Farm, Brisbane). A bus (\$5) departs Brisbane's Roma St at 9am to catch the 10am boat. Bookings are essential.

The **Moreton Venture** (☎ 3909 3333; www.moretonventure.com.au; return adult/child/vehicle plus 2 passengers \$45/30/165; ☺ 8.30am daily, plus 6.30pm Fri & 2.30pm Sun) ferry leaves from Howard Smith Dr, Lyton, at the Port of Brisbane.

The **Combie Trader** (☎ 3203 6399; www.moreton-island.com/how.html; return adult/child/vehicle plus 2 passengers \$40/30/165; ☺ 8am & 1pm Mon, 8am Wed & Thu, 8am, 1pm & 7pm Fri, 8am & 1pm Sat, 10.30am & 3.30pm Sun) sails between Scarborough, on the Redcliffe Peninsula, and Bulwer and takes about two hours. Saturday morning crossings are slightly cheaper for pedestrians.

There is no 4WD hire on the island unless you are a guest at the Tangalooma Resort.

BRIBIE ISLAND

☎ 07

This slender sand island at the northern end of Moreton Bay is popular with young families, retirees and those with a cool million or three to spend on a waterfront property. It's far more developed than Straddie or Moreton Island but the **national park** on the north-western coast has some beautifully remote **QPWS camping areas** (4WD access only, per person/family \$4.50/18).

There is no 4WD hire on the island and **4WD permits** (per week/year \$33/103) should be purchased from the **Bongaree Caravan Park** (☎ 3408 1054; Welsby Pde) as soon as you arrive. There's a **ranger station** (☎ 3408 8451) at White Patch on the southeastern fringes of the park, and you can pick up 4WD maps (\$8) and other information at the friendly **Bribie Island information centre** (☎ 3408 8300; www.bribie.com.au; Benabrow Ave, Bellara; ☺ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun).

If you're not camping then the **Inn Bongaree** (☎ 3410 1718; www.innbongaree.com.au; 25 Second Ave, Bongaree; s/d/tr \$40/50/60) is a great budget option in a welcoming setting.

There are restaurants aplenty on the island but for proper Aussie tucker try the **Bribie Island RSL** (☎ 3400 1300; 99 Toorbul St, Bongaree; mains \$8-18; ☺ lunch & dinner).

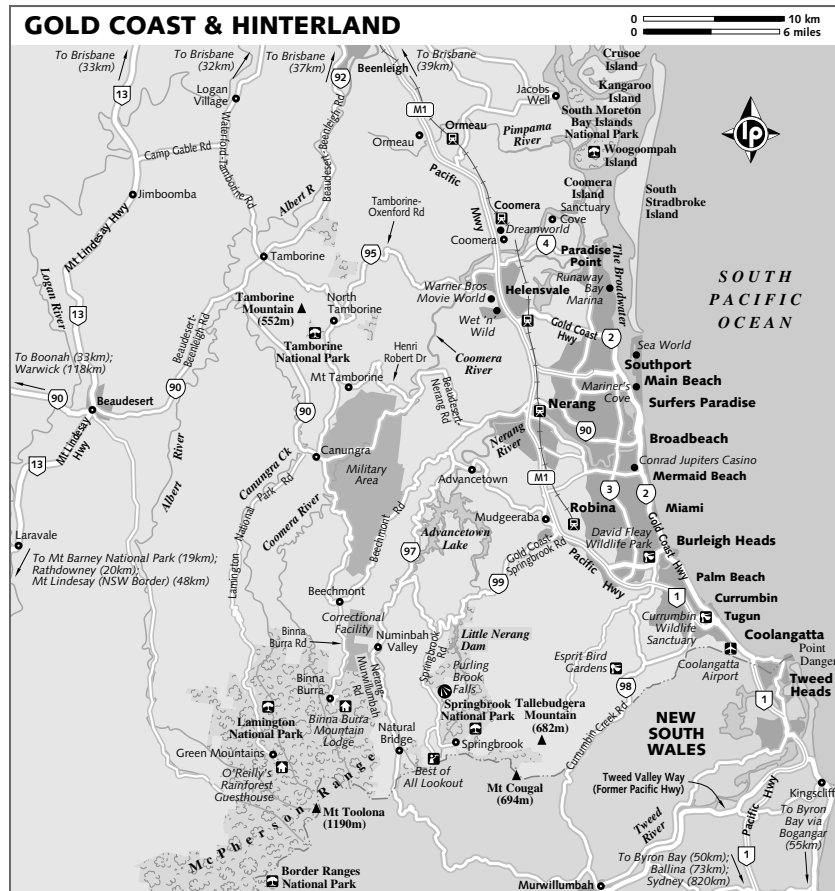
There are frequent Citytrain services between Brisbane and Caboolture. A Trainlink bus runs between the station and Bribie Island.

GOLD COAST

☎ 07 / pop 496,543

The neon lights of the Gold Coast have more in common with the glitz and glamour of Miami or the hedonistic pastimes of Las Vegas than they do Australia. But somehow this heady mix of high-rise apartment blocks, airport-sized shopping malls and million-dollar theme parks feels at home here. While there's no denying that this 35km strip of golden sand is the most aggressively developed patch in Australia, it's also one of the most popular holiday destinations and receives more than two million visitors every year. So it must be doing something right.

The shared appeal is the sand, surf and nightlife, but there's more to the Gold Coast than just the beach. Coolangatta and Burleigh Heads have some excellent surfing breaks



and there are also laid-back neighbourhoods favoured by families. Beyond the high-rises stands the Gold Coast Hinterland, a densely forested region home to two of Queensland's best national parks: Lamington and Springbrook. And then there's Surfers Paradise, which is both the epitome of the Gold Coast and the exception to the rule. It's brash and it's tacky but that's exactly what people love about it.

Dangers & Annoyances

Car theft is a major problem all the way along the Gold Coast – park in well-lit areas and don't leave valuables in your vehicle.

Between mid-November and mid-December tens of thousands of school leavers descend on

the Gold Coast for Schoolies Week, a month-long party that's great fun for those celebrating but can be hell for everyone else.

Getting There & Around

The Gold Coast airport is based in Coolangatta and is serviced by **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38).

The **Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle** (☎ 1300 655 655, 5574 5111; www.gsshuttle.com.au; one way per adult/child/family \$17/9/43) will meet your flight and drop you at most Gold Coast accommodation.

Citytrain services link Brisbane to Helensvale station (\$8.10, one hour), Nerang station (\$9, 70 minutes) and Robina station (\$10.60, 75 minutes) roughly every half hour. **Surfside Buslines** (☎ 13 12 30, 5571 6555; www.surfside.com.au)

runs regular shuttles from the train stations down to Surfers (\$3 to \$4) and beyond, and to the theme parks. You can buy individual fares or get an Ezy Pass (\$12) for a day's unlimited travel, or a weekly pass (\$45).

Coachtrans (☎ 1300 664 700, 3358 9700; www.coachtrans.com.au) runs transfers between Brisbane airport and most Gold Coast accommodation (one way adult/child \$35/18). It also offers the Gold Coast Super Pass, which includes return airport transfers, unlimited coach transfers between Gold Coast accommodation and theme parks, and unlimited use of the Surfside bus network (three-day adult/child \$107/54).

SOUTHPORT & MAIN BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 25,731

Sheltered from the ocean by a long sand bar known as the Spit, Southport is the northern gateway to the Gold Coast. It's generally regarded as the region's business district but the leafy streets, quiet residential blocks and lack of business suits lends a relaxed feel to the neighbourhood. It's far more sedate than Surfers Paradise and this is reflected in the accommodation and dining options on offer. Immediately southeast is Main Beach, where tourist developments begin in earnest and the golden sand stretches for miles. From here, the Spit runs 3km north, dividing the Broadwater from the South Pacific Ocean.

There are ATMs dotted along Scarborough St and the **Gold Coast Hospital** (☎ 5519 8211; 108 Nerang St, Southport) is here.

Sights & Activities

The ocean side of the spit, which extends north from Main Beach, is home to uncrowded beaches and excellent surf. From here you can see across the channel to South Stradbroke Island and it's a popular fishing spot. A fig tree opposite the entrance to **Seaworld** (right) marks the start of the **Federation Walk**, a pretty 3.7km trail that winds its way through patches of littoral rainforest and down to the Gold Coast Oceanway.

Near the start of the walk is the upmarket shopping and dining complex **Marina Mirage**; a **farmers market** is held here on the first and third Saturday of each month.

A number of cruises depart from the marinas at Main Beach to explore the Gold Coast waterways. **Wyndham Cruises** (☎ 5539 9299; www.wyndhamcruises.com.au; per adult/child/family \$39/20/98;

☎ 10am & 2.30pm) operates two-hour cruises up to and around the Broadwater, including morning or afternoon tea. **Tallship Cruises** (☎ 5532 2444; www.tallship.com.au; adult/child/family \$99/69/269; ☎ 9am) runs day trips from Mariner's Cove to McLarens Landing Resort on South Stradbroke Island. Lunch is included.

At the **Mariner's Cove Booking Office** (☎ 5571 1711; ☎ 9am-5pm), near Marina Mirage, you can arrange most water activities:

Jet Ski Safaris (☎ 5526 3111; www.jetskisafaris.com.au; from \$70) Half-hour spins or two-hour trips through untamed mangroves and flood plains.

Kayaking & Snorkelling Adventures (☎ 0412-940 135; www.australiankayakingadventures.com.au; per person incl breakfast \$45-65) Runs dolphin tours and half-day trips to South Stradbroke Island.

Wahoo Fishing Adventures (☎ 5597 3180; www.wahooharters.com.au; half-/full day per person \$100/150; ☎ 6am) Fishing trips for singles and groups, plus deep-sea and reef fishing.

THEME PARKS

If you like theme parks then you will love the Gold Coast as it's home to the biggest, brash-est and best American-style theme parks in Australia. Discount tickets are sold in most tourist offices and there are deals that get you into more than one park. The **Fun Pass** (adult/child \$135/86) allows one single day entry into Movie World, Sea World and Wet 'n' Wild over a five-day period.

Dreamworld (☎ 5588 1111; www.dreamworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Coomera; adult/child \$64/42; ☎ 10am-5pm) Home to the Big Five Thrill Rides, including the aptly named Giant Drop and Tower of Terror.

Sea World (☎ 5588 2222, show times 5588 2205; www.seaworld.com.au; Sea World Dr, The Spit, Main Beach; adult/child \$64/42; ☎ 10am-5pm) Sharks, polar bears, dugongs and dolphins plus rollercoasters and flume rides.

Warner Bros Movie World (☎ 5573 8485; www.movieworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child \$64/42; ☎ 10am-5pm) Movie-themed shows, rides and attractions including the kid-favourite Looney Tunes Village.

Wet 'n' Wild (☎ 5573 2255; www.wetnwild.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child \$42/28; ☎ 10am-5pm Feb-Apr & Sep-Dec, 10am-4pm May-Aug, 10am-9pm 27 Dec-26 Jan) Whirlpools, slippery slides, white-water rapids, tube rides and the newly opened Extreme H2O Zone.

WhiteWater World (☎ 1800 073 300, 5588 1111; www.whitewaterworld.com.au; Dreamworld Parkway, Coomera; adult/child \$42/28; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm) Newly opened with more pipelines, wave caves and water cannons to thrill and delight.

Sleeping & Eating

Aquarius (☎ 1800 229 955, 5527 1300; www.aquariusbackpackers.com.au; 44 Queen St, Southport; dm \$25, d & tw \$60; ☑ ☒ ☓) This modern, purpose-built hostel is a lively, colourful place with decent-sized rooms, spotless communal bathrooms and an enormous swimming pool. There's also a great on-site bar.

Trekkers (☎ 1800 100 004, 5591 5616; www.trekkersbackpackers.com.au; 22 White St, Southport; dm \$25, d & tw \$62; ☑ ☒ ☓) Set within an old Queensland home, this low-key hostel oozes charm and friendly vibes. It's one of the oldest on the coast and still comes highly recommended by travellers.

Main Beach Tourist Park (☎ 1800 444 474, 5581 7722; www.gctp.com.au/main; Main Beach Pde; unpowered/powered sites from \$28/30, cabins from \$125; ☑ ☒ ☓) You can literally hear the surf from your sleeping bag at this pleasant camping ground located smack bang opposite Main Beach. It's a friendly place and cheap – so you'll have more money to spend on cocktails in Surfers. Book early to ensure you get a shaded site.

The Sand Pumping Jetty & Kiosk (☎ 5591 6970; Seaworld Dr, The Spit, Main Beach; meals from \$10; ☒ ☓ breakfast & lunch) For mouth-watering Queensland crab sandwiches check out this cheery café at the tip of the Spit.

C Espresso bar (☎ 5591 6377; 56 Scarborough St, Southport; mains from \$12; ☒ ☓ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This fabulous new coffee shop and restaurant satisfies health nuts and fry-up fiends at breakfast and offers everything from burgers to grilled marlin at lunch. Oh, and the coffee is perfect.

Also recommended:

Australian Outback Spectacular (☎ 13 33 86, 5519 6200; www.outbackspectacular.com.au; Entertainment Rd, Oxenford; adult/child \$95/65; ☒ ☓ from 6.15pm Tue-Sun) Newly opened extravaganza that includes a three-course Aussie barbecue dinner.

Harbour Side Resort (☎ 5591 6666; www.harboursideresort.com.au; 132 Marine Pde, Southport; apt from \$99; ☑ ☒ ☓) Large, functional apartments good for families.

Peter's Fish Market (☎ 5591 7747; 120 Sea World Dr, Main Beach; meals \$10; ☒ ☓ 9am-6pm) Freshly caught seafood grilled, baked or fried as you wait.

SURFERS PARADISE & BROADBEACH

☎ 07 / pop 24,663

Many locals reckon that if Surfers Paradise were a person, it would be Paris Hilton: flashy, trashy, always up for a party and big on style and self-promotion. It's the undisputed core

of the Gold Coast's revelry and excites with a heady mix of restaurants, bars, nightclubs, surf, sun and other less salubrious shenanigans.

For backpackers, Surfers is *the* place to party in Queensland, and hostel staff do their best to ensure the place goes off every night of the week. At Broadbeach, a few kilometres down the road, things shift down a gear and you'll find more space, less noise and some great dining options.

Orientation & Information

The main drag in Surfers is Cavill Ave, the beach end of which is pedestrianised. Orchid Ave, one block in from the Esplanade, is the nightclub and bar strip. The following are all based in Surfers Paradise.

Backpacker Tour Desk (☎ 1800 359 830, 5592 2911; Transit Centre) Helpful accommodation booking service for backpackers.

Email Centre (☎ 5538 7500; Orchid Ave; per hr \$4; ☒ ☓ 9am-11pm) Internet access.

Gold Coast Accommodation Service (☎ 5592 0067; www.goldcoastaccommodationservice.com; Shop 1, 1 Beach Rd) Accommodation booking service.

Gold Coast Tourism Bureau (☎ 5538 4419; www.goldcoasttourism.com.au; Cavill Ave Mall; ☒ ☓ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) Helpful information booth and website.

Surfers Paradise Day & Night Surgery (☎ 5592 2299; 3221 Gold Coast Hwy; ☒ ☓ 7am-10pm) Medical centre and pharmacy.

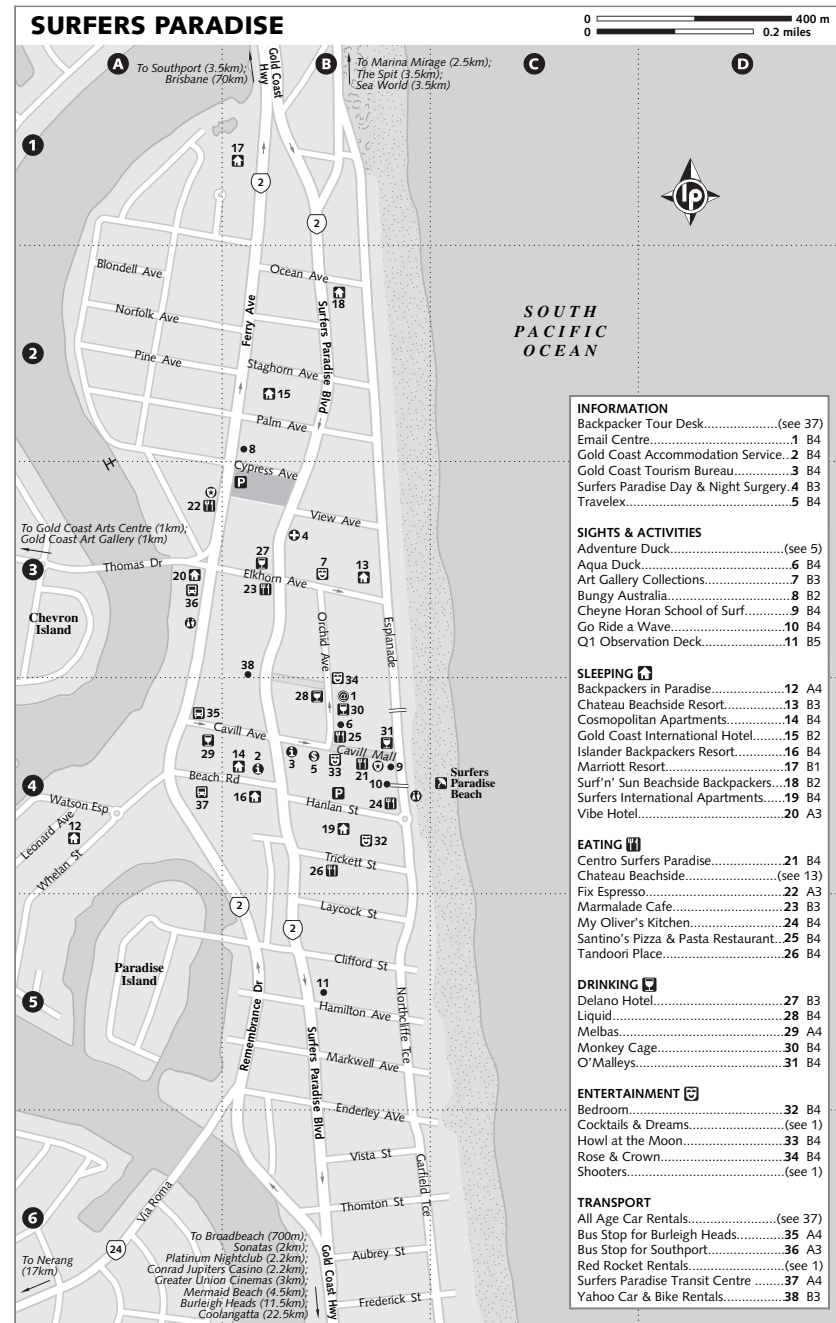
Travellex (☎ 5531 7770; Shop 205, Paradise Centre, 20 Cavill Ave; ☒ ☓ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) Foreign currency exchange.

Sights

Surfers is mostly about getting tanned and getting tanked and there's a permanent good-time vibe in the air. That said, there are a couple of cerebral attractions. The excellent **Gold Coast Art Gallery** (☎ 5581 6567; 135 Bundall Rd, Surfers Paradise; ☒ ☓ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) features two main galleries displaying works by established Australian and international artists. Of particular interest is the annual showcase by students from the Queensland College of Art.

Within Surfers itself is the eclectic **Art Gallery Collections** (☎ 5538 3724; Piazza on the Boulevard, Elkhorn Ave; ☒ ☓ 10.30am-6.30pm), a gallery-cum-wine bar that shows contemporary art and sculpture.

For perspective of a different kind, take a trip in one of the world's fastest elevators to the **Q1 Observation Deck** (☎ 5630 4700; Hamilton Ave,



INDYCAR

Since 1991 Surfers Paradise has played host to what has been dubbed Queensland's biggest party – the Australian leg of the IndyCar series (the US equivalent of Formula One motor racing). Each October, the main streets of central Surfers are transformed into a temporary race circuit, around which hurtle some of the world's fastest cars – their drivers push them up to speeds of more than 300km/h.

On a good year around a quarter of a million spectators descend on Surfers for the race and the three-day carnival that precedes it. Surfers is fairly over the top at the best of times, but IndyCar gives the town a chance to *really* let its hair down. It's a great time to be there, or a great time to be anywhere else, depending on how you feel about the place.

General admission charges to the races range from \$33 to \$93 per day at the gate (cheaper if you book). Four-day grandstand seating is between \$228 and \$663. For details call ☎ 1800 300 055 or check www.indy.com.au.

Surfers Paradise; adult/child/family \$17.50/10/45; (🚗) 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, 9am-midnight Fri & Sat) that soars 322.5m above sea level. There's a cinema on level 78 and a Skybar on level 77.

Activities

BALLOONING & SKYDIVING

For a unique look at the Gold Coast, throw yourself out of a plane with **Skydive Queensland** (☎ 1300 767 790, 5546 2877; www.skydiveqld.com.au; per person \$265-325) or a helicopter with **Gold Coast Helitours** (☎ 5591 8457; www.goldcoasthelitours.com.au; per person \$400) both of which offer tandem jumps from 10,000ft to 14,000ft. If free falling's not your cup of tea, take a more leisurely hot-air balloon ride with **Balloon Aloft** (☎ 5578 2244; www.balloonaloft.net; 1hr flight per adult/child \$285/200) or **Balloon Down Under** (☎ 5593 8400; www.balloondownunder.com; 1hr flight per adult/child \$285/200). Both offer early morning flights over the Gold Coast Hinterland, ending with a champagne buffet breakfast.

BUNGEE JUMPING

Easily one of the most popular pastimes in Surfers is finding out how good you are at keeping your breakfast down. Traditionalists may opt for flinging themselves off a 14-storey tower with **Bungy Australia** (☎ 5570 4833; cnr Cypress & Ferny Aves; jumps from \$100), but there are myriad other rides here that spin, twist, swing, drop and otherwise propel you at hundreds of kilometres an hour.

HORSE RIDING

Gumnuts Farm & Horseriding Resort (☎ 5543 0191; www.gumnutsfarm.com.au; 2hr rides adult/child from \$65/45) and **Numinbah Valley Adventure Trails** (☎ 5533 4137; www.numinbahtrails.com; 3hr treks adult/child from

\$88/60) offer horse-riding tours through the hinterland and cater for complete beginners to experienced equestrians.

SURFING

It's not called Surfers Paradise for nothing and the swell here is just the right size to get beginners thinking they could be the next Kelly Slater. There are dozens of surf schools and they all charge between \$40 and \$75 for a two-hour lesson. Most places hire out boards and wetsuits for between \$15 and \$25.

Brad Holmes Surf Coaching (☎ 5539 4068, 0418-757 539; www.bradholmessurfcoaching.com) One-on-one or group tuition and also caters to travellers with disabilities.

Cheyne Horan School of Surf (☎ 1800 227 873, 0403-080 484; www.cheynehoran.com.au; ☎ lessons at 10am & 2pm) Excellent two-hour lessons for beginners held daily by a former World Champion surfer.

Go Ride A Wave (☎ 1300 132 441; www.gorideaway.com.au; Shop 189 Centro Centre, Cavill Ave, Surfers Paradise) Also offers girl-only group lessons.

Kitesurf Gold Coast (☎ 0405-197 870; www.kitesurfgoldcoast.com; per person from \$220) Three-hour lessons for complete beginners right the way through to master wave riders.

Tours

Explore Surfers by land and water without getting your feet wet.

Adventure Duck (☎ 5557 8869; www.adventureduck.com; Paradise Centre, Cavill Mall, Surfers Paradise; adult/child \$32/28) Tours depart regularly between 8.30am and 5pm.

Aqua Duck (☎ 5539 0222; www.aquaduck.com.au; 7a, Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise; adult/child/family \$32/26/89) Tours depart every 1¼ hours between 10am and 5.30pm.

Festivals & Events

IndyCar Surfers Paradise's biggest motor-racing party held in October (see boxed text, opposite).

Quicksilver & Roxy Pro-Surfing Competition From late February to mid-March some of the world's best surfers compete for big waves and big prize money.

Schoolies Week Month-long alcohol-fuelled party held by school-leavers from mid-November to mid-December. The first week sees organised events.

Surf Life-Saving Championships Held over a week in early March.

Wintersun Festival Ten days of rock 'n' roll nostalgia in Coolangatta with bands, dance competitions and hot rods.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Backpackers in Paradise (☎ 1800 268 621, 5538 4344; www.backpackersinparadise.com; 40 Whelan St, Surfers Paradise; dm from \$17, d & tw \$58, 1-bedroom apt \$66; 📶 🚰) This hostel is a fun choice. There's a huge range of rooms on offer from the impossibly large 20-bed dorm through to cosy doubles. There are colourful murals everywhere, including a Jules Verne-inspired underwater scene in the bar-cum-cinema area.

Surf 'n' Sun Beachside Backpackers (☎ 1800 678 194; 5592 2363; www.surfsun-goldcoast.com; 3323 Surfers Paradise Blvd, Surfers Paradise; dm \$25, d & apt from \$68; 📶 🚰) This place is the epitome of Surfers Paradise wrapped up in one big bundle of backpacker heaven. Lively, friendly and staff that like to party ensure rooms get booked up well in advance. Try to get one of the new apartments – they're awesome.

Islander Backpackers Resort (☎ 5538 8000; www.islander.com.au; cnr Beach Rd & Surfers Paradise Blvd, Surfers Paradise; dm \$28, d & tw \$85; 📶 🚰) Undoubtedly the most conveniently located of backpacker options; this faded pink high-rise could do with a good lick of paint outside and in. While there's no denying that the rooms are clean, they're pricey and you're kind of left feeling you've been short-changed.

Midrange

Cosmopolitan Apartments (☎ 1300 553 800, 5570 2311; 3142 Gold Coast Hwy, Surfers Paradise; apt from \$95; 📶 🚰) The apartments here are all privately owned and, as such, vary in standard and décor. Book well enough in advance however, and the friendly ladies on reception will try to accommodate your requests, be that ocean view, air-con or newly renovated unit.

Vibe Hotel (☎ 5539 0444; www.vibehotels.com.au; 42 Ferny Ave, Surfers Paradise; d/tr/ste from \$125/169/385;

📶 🚰 🚰) Vibe is a breath of fresh, modern air in a strip packed with seaside-themed apartments. Bold designs, crisp white linens and mod cons make it feel more boutique than high-rise.

Surfers International Apartments (☎ 1800 891 299; 5579 1299; www.surfers-international.com.au; 7-9 Trickett St, Surfers Paradise; 1-/2-bedroom apt from \$150/190; 📶 🚰 🚰) Although the one-bedroom units are very small, the two-bed options are literally double in size and represent a good deal. They don't look new but they're very comfy.

Other recommendations:

Chateau Beachside Resort (☎ 1800 807 336, 5538 1022; www.chateaubeachside.com.au; cnr Elkhorn Ave & the Esplanade, Surfers Paradise; d/1-bedroom apt from \$145/165; 📶 🚰 🚰) Somewhat tired apartments but with cheery staff and ocean views.

Gold Coast International Hotel (☎ 1800 074 020, 5584 1200; www.gci.com.au; 7 Staghorn Ave, Surfers Paradise; d from \$155; 📶 🚰 🚰) Recently refurbished, high-standard rooms with hinterland or ocean views.

TOP END

Marriott Resort (☎ 5592 9800; www.marriott.com; /ools; 158 Ferny Ave, Surfers Paradise; d/ste from \$255/440; 📶 🚰 🚰) Five-star luxury with all the trimmings you might expect plus one or two surprises – such as the resort's very own private beach and saltwater lagoon that hides two waterfalls, an artificial coral reef, rock grottoes, waterslides and 500 fish.

Eating

Surfers' many eateries generally offer quantity over quality, but there are a few gems.

Fix Espresso (☎ 5504 5332; Shop G4, 64 Ferny Ave, Surfers Paradise; mains \$5-10; ☎ 7.30am-3pm) This little place is a great grab-and-go option. There are daily coffee and muffin specials and the toasted Turkish sandwiches are cheap and tasty.

My Oliver's Kitchen (☎ 5553 1904; cnr Hanlan St & the Esplanade, Surfers Paradise; mains \$8-15) Pukka pub grub, such as steak and chips, is served up in this friendly restaurant. Lunch specials run between 11.30am and 3.30pm with nothing on the menu over \$9 while the Sunday roast is equally wallet-friendly at \$12.90.

Marmalade Café (☎ 5504 7353; Shop 36, Chevron Renaissance, 3240 Surfers Paradise Blvd, Surfers Paradise; mains \$10-15; ☎ 6.30am-6pm) A Moroccan-inspired menu and cosy interior make this an unusual, but very welcome, addition to Surfers' cuisine scene. Highlights include spicy lamb salads,

heartly *tagine* and delicious breakfast pancakes made with cardamom and spiced bananas.

Sonatas (☎ 5526 9904; cnr Surf Pde & Queensland Ave, Broadbeach; mains \$15-25) The creative menu pulls in the punters at this breezy café. Speciality dishes include Cajun barramundi and Corona-battered fish and chips, but there's also a good range of fresh salads and sandwiches.

Tandoori Place (☎ 5592 1004; 9 Trickett St, Surfers Paradise; mains \$16-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This award-winning restaurant is the place to come if you fancy trying kangaroo korma or knock-you-socks-off vindaloo roo. It also serves traditional Indian curries and *tandoors* (clay ovens). Evening bookings are essential and takeaway is available.

For cheap and cheerful Italian try **Santino's Pizza & Pasta Restaurant** (☎ 5527 5273; 3 Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise; meals \$10-15) or **Chateau Beachside** (☎ 5526 9994; cnr Elkhorn Ave & the Esplanade, Surfers Paradise; meals \$6-10), which also dishes up good burgers and an all-you-can-eat \$10 breakfast. There's a supermarket in **Centro Surfers Paradise** (Cavill Mall, Surfers Paradise).

Drinking

O'Malleys (☎ 5570 4075; Level 1, 1 Cavill Ave, Surfers Paradise) Things kick off early at this Irish-themed pub and go on until the early hours. It's a lively, rowdy, anything-goes kind of place and the \$8 jugs are a steal for cash-strapped travellers.

The Monkey Cage (Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise) The all-female staff are dressed in two-sizes-too-small zoo keeper uniforms here at this strangely popular backpacker watering hole; could it be the daily drink promotions?

Liquid (☎ 5538 0111; Shop 1, 20 Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise) For something a little bit more upmarket try this slick bar that's a head-spinning medley of neon lights, trendy patrons, funky tunes and potent cocktails.

The Delano Hotel (☎ 5539 0344; 3282 Gold Coast Hwy, Surfers Paradise) By day an older crowd props up the bar here, but come evening they're replaced by a lively, young crowd who pour through the doors in search of the 'Latin Fire' Tuesday, 'Champers' Thursday or karaoke Sunday.

Entertainment

The majority of Surfers' nightlife is centred on or around Orchid Ave. Wednesday and Saturday nights sees the 'Backpackers Club Crawl', a rowdy affair organised by a number of the local hostels. For a mere \$25 you get entry

into four clubs, a fistful of drinks vouchers and a guaranteed hangover. Otherwise, cover charges are roughly \$10 and remember that photo ID is mandatory.

Shooters (☎ 5592 1144; The Mark Complex, Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise) Within this wild west saloon bar you'll find a cigar lounge, sports bar, pool tables and dance floors playing the latest Top 40 tunes. But the big ol' icing on the pecan pie are the Wild Coyote-style bar-top dancers – yeeeah indeed.

Rose & Crown (☎ 5531 5425; Raptis Plaza, Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise) Something of a Gold Coast institution, this enormous drinking and dancing den has been pulling in the punters for aeons. There are four areas to choose from ranging from the sophisticated lounge to the crowded, sweaty dance floor.

Howl at the Moon (☎ 5527 5522; Shop 7, Level 1, Centro Surfers Paradise) This hilarious 'duelling piano sing-a-long bar' is brilliant. Talented pianists belt out everything from show tunes and commercial jingles to rap and blues and encourage the audience to howl along.

Melbas (☎ 5538 7411; 46 Cavill Ave, Surfers Paradise) Prepare to glam up if you're heading to Melbas. It's a favourite with the beautiful, and wannabe beautiful, people and is *the* place to be seen. Fortunately it also happens to have excellent DJs and cocktails.

Cocktails & Dreams (☎ 5592 1955; Level 1, The Mark Complex, Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise) One of Surfers' oldest clubs, this has heard many a chart song come and go. It's popular for cheesy dance tunes, cheap drinks and pashing on the dance floor.

The Bedroom (☎ 5592 0088; 26 Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise) Boasting one of Surfers' best sound systems is this slick club that blasts R&B and techno until the early hours. Recline on one of the many queen-sized beds or shake your booty with the 'in' crowd.

Gold Coast Arts Centre (☎ 5581 6500; 135 Bundall Rd, Surfers Paradise) This is attached to the Gold Coast Art Gallery (p330) and hosts theatrical productions. For comedy and live jazz check out the Basement, which is on site. There is also a cinema here that showcases arthouse movies.

More entertainment:

Conrad Jupiters Casino (☎ 5592 8100; www.conrad.com.au; Gold Coast Hwy, Broadbeach; admission free; ☎ 24hr)

Greater Union Cinemas (☎ 5575 3355; Pacific Fair Shopping Centre, cnr Hooker Blvd & Gold Coast Hwy, Broadbeach)

Jupiters Theatre (☎ 1800 074 144) Also at the casino, there's live music and glamorous dinner shows.

Platinum Nightclub (☎ 5592 4433; 19 Victoria Ave, Broadbeach Mall) Local and international DJs.

Getting There & Around

Long-distance buses stop at the **Surfers Paradise Transit Centre** (Beach Rd). **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946 863, 5531 6677), **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) and **Kirklands** (☎ 1300 367 077) have frequent services to/from Brisbane (\$18, 1½ hours).

Local car-rental outfits that consistently offer good deals include **All Age Car Rentals** (☎ 5570 1200, 5527 6044; Surfers Paradise Transit Centre; per day from \$19), **Yahoo Car & Bike Rental** (☎ 5592 0277; 3024 Gold Coast Hwy, Surfers Paradise; per day from \$25) and **Red Rocket Rentals** (☎ 5538 9074; Shop 19, The Centre Arcade, 16 Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise; per day from \$29). Insurance costs extra.

The major taxi companies servicing the area are **Regent Taxis** (☎ 13 62 94), **Gold Coast Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08) and **Silver Service Taxis** (☎ 13 31 00).

See Getting There & Around (p328) for more transport information.

BURLEIGH HEADS

☎ 07 / pop 8270

Burleigh Heads has the best of both worlds. It's one of the nicest bathing beaches on the Gold Coast and is also legendary for surfers. When the southeasterly blows it provides a long and barrelling right-hand break that has experienced surfers paddling furiously to catch a ride. Beginners should steer clear, however, as the point to the south is lined with black rocks and the rip is vicious.

The town itself is laid-back and there's little activity here other than what goes on in the water. You can get national park information from the **QPWS Information Centre** (☎ 5535 3032; 1711 Gold Coast Hwy; ☎ 9am-4pm).

Sights & Activities

The **Burleigh Heads National Park** is a small but diverse forest reserve with several graded walking trails around the rocky headland. The natural rock slides and water cascades at the **Currumbin Rock Pools** are wonderful in the summer months.

Within the vicinity are two wildlife sanctuaries. There are some wonderfully weird animals at the **Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary** (☎ 1300 886 511, 5534 0803; www.cws.org.au; Gold Coast Hwy, Currumbin; adult/child \$29.50/19.50; ☎ 8am-5pm),

such as the long-nosed potoroo and the land mullet, and there are also lots of cute koalas and wombats to coo over. The **Wildnight Tour** (adult/child \$49/27) at 7pm is an excellent two-hour tour by torchlight. To get here catch Surfside Bus 1 or 1A in either direction.

Opened by the doctor who first succeeded in breeding platypuses, the **David Fleay Wildlife Park** (☎ 5576 2411; West Burleigh Rd; adult/child/senior/family \$15.40/7.20/10.30/39.10; ☎ 9am-5pm) is an important breeding centre for the duck-billed creatures. It's also home to many other native Australian animals and places a strong emphasis on education and conservation.

The **Hot Stuff Surf Shop** (☎ 5535 6899; 1969 Gold Coast Hwy) rents out surfboards per half/full day for \$20/30.

Sleeping & Eating

Burleigh Gardens Holiday Apartments (☎ 5576 3955; www.burleighgardens.com; 1849 Gold Coast Hwy; 1-bedroom apt per night/week from \$90/460, 2-bedroom apt from \$100/550; ☎ P) These comfortable self-contained units near the beach are a winner with families. The units are large, tastefully decorated and contain all the facilities you might need for a longer stay.

Hillhaven Holiday Apartments (☎ 5535 1055; www.hillhaven.com.au; 2 Goodwin Tce; r per week from \$660; ☎ P ☎ ☎ ☎) Splash out on a higher-end apartment here and you won't be disappointed; there's plush modern décor, refurbished bathrooms and balconies to rival the size of the unit itself.

Burleigh Beach Club (☎ 5520 2972; cnr Goodwin Tce & Gold Coast Hwy; dishes \$10-20) This place dishes up tasty grub in family-friendly surroundings with unobstructed ocean views. Wedges, nachos, burgers and other non-nonsense meals make up the bulk of the menu, but there are regular chef's specials on offer as well.

Oskars (☎ 5576 3722; 43 Goodwin Tce; dishes \$19-40; ☎ lunch & dinner) A perennial favourite with restaurant critics and gourmets alike, this lovely restaurant is one of the Gold Coast's finest. Seafood is the order of the day here and you can expect something along the lines of Queensland mud crab steamed with coriander, chilli, lemongrass and coconut cream.

Also recommended: **Burleigh Beach Tourist Park** (☎ 5581 7755; www.gtcp.com.au/burly; Goodwin Tce; unpowered/powerd sites \$24/26, cabins \$125; ☎) Cosy council-run park ideally placed for the beach.

Meeting Ground Organic Café & Deli (☎ 5576 3933; 1863 Gold Coast Hwy, cnr First Ave; dishes \$7-15) An arty café serving excellent wood-fired pizzas plus a whole lot more.

COOLANGATTA

☎ 07 / pop 5029

There's a lovely, lazy feel to this little surf resort and although the high-rises are slowly creeping in, most of the town seems blissfully trapped in a bygone era. It's an especially fantastic spot for experienced surfers. There are some good views down the coast from **Point Danger**, the headlands at the end of the state line.

On the main shopping drag is the **Coolangatta visitors centre** (☎ 1300 309 440; info@verygc.com; Shop 14b, cnr Griffith & Warner Sts; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), which can provide local info. You can get online at the **Coolangatta Internet Cafe** (☎ 5599 2001; Warner St; per hr \$6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun).

Snapper Rocks, Rainbow Bay and Greenmount Point are renowned for their excellent surf; it's more than 1500m of right, sandbar point breaks and as such gets very, very crowded. Around the corner, south of Snapper Rocks and Point Danger, lies the beach break of Duranbah, which throws up short tube sections and ramps. There are a small selection of boards available to rent from \$30 per day from **Retro Groove** (☎ 5599 3952; 4/33 McLean St) or **Walkin' On Water Surf School** (☎ 5534 1886; www.walkinonwater.com), which also offers lessons to surfers of all levels.

Sleeping & Eating

Aries Holiday Apartments (☎ 5536 2711; 82 Marine Pde; apt from \$80; ☎) Opposite the beach, these self-contained apartments are a bit tired but, given their size, they represent good value for money. All units come with two bedrooms, two bathrooms and big, breezy balconies.

Bella Mare (☎ 5599 2755; www.bellamare.com.au; cnr Hill & Boundary Sts; r per 3 nights/week from \$405/665, villas per 2 nights/week from \$360/805; ☎) This pretty apartment block has spacious apartments built around a saltwater swimming pool. The interiors are modern, fresh, and filled with all the essentials such as cable TV.

Beaches Grill & Coffee Bar (☎ 5536 9311; Coolangatta Hotel, cnr Marine Pde & Warner St; mains \$12-18) There's a meal deal every night of the week at this cheap and cheerful place starting with 'Barra-Munday' and ending with the \$10 burger deal on Sunday. The adjacent bar is Coolangatta's drinking hub.

Markwell Café & Bar (☎ 5536 4544; 64 Griffith St; mains \$10-30) Coconut prawns dipped in beer batter and served with curry mayonnaise might not sound appetising, but take it from us – it's delicious. As is the Fisherman's Hot Plate, a tower of golden fried prawns, sea scallops, calamari and freshly caught fish.

Also recommended: **Coolangatta YHA** (☎ 5536 7644; www.coolangattayha.com; 230 Coolangatta Rd, Billinga; dm \$22-24, d \$52; ☎) Basic, well-maintained hostel. Breakfast and courtesy transfers from Coolangatta and Surfers are included.

Kirra Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7744; www.gctpc.com.au/kirra; Charlotte St, Kirra; unpowered/powerd sites \$24/26, cabins from \$45; ☎) Sprawling park with grassy sites but not many trees. Good wheelchair access and excellent-value cabins.

GOLD COAST HINTERLAND

Only a short drive inland from Coolangatta lies the spectacular Gold Coast Hinterland, an area frequently overlooked by visitors as they hare up and down the highways. Those who venture away from the coastline, however, are rarely disappointed. The dramatic landscape wrapped around the McPherson Range, which stretches back 60km to the NSW border, is rich with national parks and mountain air. This unspoilt environment is a medley of rural plantations, vineyards, thickly forested valleys, enchanting bushwalking trails and pristine mountain pools. Easily accessible by car, the area is the perfect antidote to the cacophony of the coast. Expect a lot of rain in the mountains from December to March, and in winter the nights can be cold.

Tours

If you don't have your own wheels then the only way to access the Gold Coast Hinterland is on a tour.

4X4 Hinterland Tours (☎ 07-6680 5466, 0429-604 425; www.4x4hinterlandtours.com.au; adult/child from \$125/60) Offers small group 4WD eco-tours to either Springbrook, Mt Tamborine or Lamington National Parks, including a trip to O'Reilly's Guesthouse (p338).

Bushwacker Ecotours (☎ 1300 559 355, 07-3871 0057; www.bushwacker-ecotours.com.au; adult/child from \$109/89) An array of eco-tours including day-long bushwalks and overnight rainforest jungle camps.

Scenic Hinterland Day Tours (☎ 07-5531 5536, 5538 2899; www.hinterlandtours.com.au; adult/child from \$52/32) Operates eco-tours exploring Lamington, Springbrook and Mt Tamborine, tour groups tend to be large.

Southern Cross 4WD Tours (☎ 1800 067 367, 07-5574 5041; www.sc4wd.com.au; tours adult/child from \$80/45) Specialises in larger 4WD eco-day tours to Mt Tamborine and a local winery, and a wilderness tour of Lamington. Lamington National Park, via Mt Tamborine, with jump-out stops along the way.

See p311 for hinterland tours departing from Brisbane.

TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN

Just 45km northwest of the Gold Coast stands Tamborine Mountain (552m), and at 525m above sea level lies the Tamborine plateau. This area, and the 13 separate reserves strewn around the surrounding foothills, makes up Tamborine National Park. There are gorges, cascading falls including **Witches Falls**, **Cameron Falls** and **Curtis Falls**, and walking trails to various scenic lookouts. Near North Tamborine, the 3.2km **Cedar Creek Circuit** is one of the most enjoyable walks in the area, leading you past gently tumbling falls, rock pools and open and dry rainforests.

The area is far more developed than Lamington or Springbrook and there are a number of settlements scattered around the plateau. These tend to be cutesy heritage communities set up for the benefit of tour groups.

The **visitor information centre** (☎ 07-5545 3200; Doughty Park, Main Western Rd; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm Sun-Fri, 9.30am-3.30pm Sat) at North Tamborine has plenty of brochures and information on wineries in the area.

The award-winning **Tamborine Mountain Distillery** (☎ 07-5545 3452; 87-91 Beacon Rd, North Tamborine; ☎ 10am-3pm Wed-Sun) is a boutique distiller that manufactures its own schnapps, liqueurs and other spirits from organically grown fruits.

Every Sunday there is a **Farmers Market** (Mt Tamborine Showground, Main Western Rd; ☎ 8am-noon) where you can buy yummy local produce.

SPRINGBROOK NATIONAL PARK

West of the Gold Coast, this 900m-high plateau dominates the skyline. Like the rest of the McPherson Range, it is remnant of a huge volcano that once centred on Mt Warning in NSW and erupted more than 20 million years ago.

The park is divided into three reserves, **Springbrook Plateau**, **Natural Bridge** and **Mt Cougal**, each with their own features and charms. The rugged landscape is shaped by gorges, cliffs and waterfalls and the vegetation is cool-temperate rainforest and eucalypt forest with closed canopy vines, strangler figs, palms and epiphytes. There are some excellent walking trails in all three sections, but particularly around the Springbrook Plateau.

The village of Springbrook itself is balanced right on the edge of the plateau and there are several places where you can get the giddy thrill of leaning right out over the edge, including Purling Brook Falls, Canyon Lookout and Best of All Lookout. The pathway to Best of All Lookout is home to several ancient Antarctic beech trees.

The beautiful **Natural Bridge section**, off the Nerang-Murwillumbah road, has a 1km walking circuit leading to a rock arch spanning a water-formed cave, which is home to a huge colony of glow-worms.

The **ranger's office and information centre** (☎ 07-5533 5147; 87 Carrick's Rd; ☎ variable hours) at Springbrook provides copies of a walking track leaflet for all three sections. You can pitch a tent at the newly established **Settlement Campground** (sites per person/family \$4.50/18), which has 11 sites including four for caravans. There is no shade or showers here, but there is an electric barbecue. You need to book in advance through **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au).

English Gardens (☎ 07-5533 5244; 2832 Springbrook Rd; \$159-189) has two quaint cottages set amid a sprawling English-cum-Australian garden. There's also a small **café** (mains \$4-11; ☎ breakfast & lunch).

LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK

West of Springbrook, this 200-sq-km park covers much of the McPherson Range and adjoins the Border Ranges National Park in NSW. It's a landscape characterised by rugged mountain scenery, subtropical rainforests, fern gullies, wildflower heaths and some of Queensland's best bushwalking trails.

The wildlife is equally varied, and commonly seen animals include satin and regent bowerbirds, and pademelons (a type of small wallaby). It is also home to rare and threatened species such as the coxens fig parrot and eastern bristlebird.

Suncoast Pacific (www.suncoastpacific.com.au; Brisbane ☎ 07-3236 1901; Caloundra ☎ 07-5491 2555; Maroochydhore ☎ 07-5443 1011) runs between Brisbane's Roma St Transit Centre, its airport and to points along the Sunshine Coast. One-way trips from Brisbane include Caloundra (\$30, two hours), Maroochydhore (\$30, two hours) and Noosa (\$30, three hours).

The blue minibuses run by **Sunbus** (☎ 5492 8700) buzz frequently between Caloundra and Noosa (\$6, 1½ hours), stopping along the way. Sunbus also has regular buses from Noosa to the train station at Nambour on the Bruce Hwy (\$5, one hour), via Eumundi and Yandina.

Henry's (☎ 5474 0199), **Noosa Transfers & Charters** (☎ 5449 9782; noosatransfers@powerup.com.au) and **Col's Airport Shuttle** (☎ 5450 5933; www.airshuttle.com.au) offer transfers from Maroochydhore airport and Brisbane to Sunshine Coast locations. The cost per adult/child is around \$45/25.

TRAIN

Citytrain has services from Nambour to Brisbane (\$11.60, two hours). Trains also go to Beerwah (\$7.60, 1½ hours), near Australia Zoo.

GLASS HOUSE MOUNTAINS

☎ 07 / pop 660

The Disney-esque Glass House Mountains are 16 volcanic crags that emerge sporadically from the humid green surroundings, *Jurassic Park*-style, and comprise a fragmented national park. The mountains have held supreme spiritual significance to the local Aboriginal people, and the story of their creation is important to this day. Towering to over 500m, with sheer rocky sides, the distinct look of the mountains is the result of millions of years of erosion.

Reach the Glass House Mountains National Park via a series of sealed and unsealed roads off Steve Irwin Drive (formerly Glass House Mountains Rd). Coming from the Bruce Hwy, take the Landsborough exit.

There are hikes for all fitness levels. Grab a map from the **QPWS Office** (☎ 5494 3983; 61 Bunya St; ☎ 7am-3.30pm) in Maleny. Start your day with a drive to the **Glass House Mountains lookout**. The sheltered fire tower provides a platform to view the peaks and Sunshine Coast beaches. The **lookout circuit** (800m) is a short walking track that leads through open scribbly gum forest, down a wet gully before circling back. It can be quite steep at times.

For something more intense, check out the 1.4km (return) hike to the summit of **Mt Ngungun** (253m). It has impressive views of the four major peaks and a bit of challenging hiking – keep the kids close as the steep trail passes close to the cliff line and can be slippery.

Bouldering fanatics can catch a thrill summing **Tibrogargan** (3km return) and **Beerwah** (2.6km return); both hikes require some free base scrambles up loose rock.

CALOUNDRA

☎ 07 / pop 92,300

Caloundra is a cathartic spot to base your Sunshine Coast odyssey. Sunny and classy with azure water and sweeping Glass House Mountain vistas, it is set along a curvaceous shoreline with seven lovely surf beaches. Caloundra is the kind of easy-on-the-eyes quiet family resort emitting the kind of deep sleepy seaside vibe that entices you to stay well beyond your intended checkout. Which isn't a bad thing, as there is plenty to keep you entertained, and in shape, at the Sunshine Coast's southern most beach.

Check out **Bulcock Beach** near the main street for sunbathing, surfing and windsurfing. You can also catch waves at the hot, but still friendly, **King's Beach**, while **Dicky, Moffat, Currimundi, Wurtulla** and **Buddina Beaches** at the northern end of Caloundra's coastline are also worth visiting. Learners can head to **North Caloundra Surf School** (☎ 0422-332 730; 2hr lesson from \$60), which comes well recommended. **Beach Beat** (☎ 5491 4711; 112 Burcock St; surf/body boards per day \$35/25; ☎ 9am-5pm) is just one of a few places to rent boards.

Caloundra is a very popular spot for skydiving and **Sunshine Coast Skydivers** (☎ 5437 0211; Caloundra Aerodrome; tandem jumps from \$180) offers 65 seconds of free fall from 15,000 feet over the azure South Pacific. It's a high all right. (Hint: only jump on a fair weather day when the winds aren't too high, unless you like being rocked around and have a strong stomach.)

Sleeping

Caloundra City Backpackers (☎ 5499 7655; www.caloundracitybackpackers.com.au; 84 Omrah Rd; dm/tw/d \$22/45/55) Overall this is a functional and ultra-clean, if slightly sterile looking (think white on white), place. The doubles have en suites and TVs, but book ahead as there are only four. It is consistently popular.

A YANK'S EYE VIEW OF AUSTRALIA ZOO *Becca Blond*

I have seen some amazing things authoring books for Lonely Planet these last few years (eg safaris in South Africa, diving off Bora Bora) but I can honestly say that my trip to the **Australia Zoo** (☎ 5494 1134; www.australiazoo.com.au; Steve Irwin Dr, Beerwah; adult/child/family \$49/29/146; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) made my world's 'top ten list'.

When my editors at Lonely Planet encouraged me to visit the Australia Zoo ('to see all the animals') I privately shuddered. Normally I don't like to see animals in cages. But the Australia Zoo is nothing like a typical zoo. The animals aren't in cages; instead, they roam through semi-natural habitats spread over acres, many of which you can walk directly through. Push through a big metal gate and suddenly you'll find yourself in kangaroo country. Irwin's 'roos are used to people and extremely friendly.

Other zoo highlights include the slightly cheesy shows at the 'Crocozeum', which do a good job pitching conservation in a lively and engaging manner. (On a side note, all the zoo's crocodile actors are problem crocs that have been rescued from populated areas.)

The Australia Zoo was the life's work, and great love, of charismatic conservationist Steve Irwin. Visiting the zoo less than a year after the Crocodile Hunter's death, it was obvious how much his presence was still very much around. I was blown away by the sheer number of personal tributes to everyone's favourite wildlife warrior lining the railings around the show arena.

Despite Irwin's untimely death, his family plans to carry on the Croc Hunter's legacy of animal conservation and education. Before he died, Irwin envisioned the 121-hectare site as a world zoo, and plans to expand it are underway. A new elephant exhibit opened in 2007, and the African animal extravaganza known as Madagascar Island is not far behind.

Profits from zoo admissions directly help endangered species and fund an on-site wildlife hospital. There are free transfers between the zoo and Noosa Heads, Coolum, Maroochydhore, Alexandra Headlands, Mooloolaba and Caloundra; ring ☎ 5436 2000 to book.

Belaire Place (☎ 5491 8688; www.belaireplace.com; 34 Minchinton St; r from \$120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Spacious, sparkling and sunny four-star apartments overlooking Bulcock Beach at unbeatable prices are the hallmark of Belaire. Abodes feature bright and modern interiors with kitchens, balconies big enough to park a truck on, and ocean or mountain views from plate-glass windows. A saltwater swimming pool and on-site gym are icing on the cake.

La Promenade (☎ 5499 7133; www.lapromenade.com.au; 4 Tay Ave; r from \$130; ☎ ☎ ☎) These waterfront units are upmarket and chic, with romantic mosquito nets covering the beds, terracotta tile floors and spa baths in every room. The rooftop family-sized spa is definitely a bonus, especially for stargazing at night. If you're feeling lazy, the boardwalk café overlooking the water isn't a bad place to pass the evening. La Promenade is near Bulcock Beach. The low season rate of \$130 is a steal.

Eating

Dicky Beach Surf Club (☎ 5491 6078; Coochin St; mains \$12; ☎ lunch & dinner) This club's Wreck Restaurant dishes up big portions that are easy on the wallet. This is a really solid deal if you're

on a low budget. The club allows visitors in free, though you have to sign in.

Above Board (☎ 5491 6388; Shop 8, the Esplanade; mains \$14-30) A sophisticated menu and relaxed vibe greet you at this subtly trendy eatery. You can rock up in jeans and dine on mahi mahi fillets with macadamia pesto dressing, or pistachio-stuffed pork fillets sitting on a wine-glazed mash. Brekkie and lunch are simpler.

Buses stop at Comma Tce. Look for the terminal one block back from Bulcock Beach. **Sunbus** (☎ 5492 8700) runs shuttles to Noosa (\$6.20, 1½ hours) that stop in Maroochydhore (\$3.80, 50 minutes).

MAROOCHY

☎ 07 / pop 46,617

If you're asking around about Sunshine Coast surf spots, you'll likely hear Maroochydhore, Alexandra Headland and Mooloolaba mentioned. It's a bit confusing, but these popular beaches, along with neighbouring Cotton Tree, make up the conglomeration of suburbs officially referred to as Maroochy. Each beach has its own style, but all feature a strip of cafés and shops lining a main street running parallel to the beach. This is the most developed

LOCAL TRIVIA

Did you know Maroochy is actually a deviation of the local Aboriginal word, *murukutchi-da*, which translates to 'the home of the black swan'? Although black swans can sometimes be seen floating along one of Maroochy's waterways, these days it's more likely that you'll spot a pelican.

patch of the Sunshine Coast and is becoming permanent residence to more and more Australians each year. The downside of all this migration is a growing suburban sprawl. Inland suburbs like Buderim still feature quiet roundabouts and shopfronts looking like they date from the 1950s.

Book ahead if you arrive during the summer school holidays (Christmas through as late as the third week of January).

Information

Maroochy Tourism Information Booths Mooloolaba (☎ 5478 2233; www.discovermaroochy.com.au, www.tourismshinecoast.com.au; cnr Brisbane Rd & First Ave, Mooloolaba; ☎ 9am-5pm); Maroochyore airport (☎ 5448 9088; Friendship Dr, Maroochy; ☎ 9.30am-3pm)

Maroochy Visitors Centre (☎ 1800 882 032, 5479 1566; www.maroochytourism.com; cnr Sixth Ave & Melrose St, Maroochyore; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) Super-helpful with free accommodation booking service.

Sights & Activities

In the last decade Mooloolaba has melded itself into one of Queensland's best all-round beach destinations. Its beautiful, long sandy beaches, consistent surf and loads of rental houses have long made it a favourite with families, but recently Mooloolaba has become hip with the cool crowd as well. Singles, surfers and trendsetters all mingle, Noosa-style, in the street-side cafés and modern shops by day, then retire for cocktails at a trendy lounge après-sunset.

Get up close and personal with more than 25,000 whacky but wonderful sea creatures at **Underwater World** (☎ 5444 8488; The Wharf, Mooloolaba; adult/child/family \$23/13/60; ☎ 9am-6pm), Queensland's largest oceanarium. Swimming with the seals is a highlight for many guests – although

beware these slippery mammals like to give out lots of kisses!

There are numerous good surf breaks along the strip – including riding to the left or right of the surf patrol at the main beaches of Mooloolaba, Alexandra Heads and Maroochyore. Pin Cushion, near the mouth of the Maroochy River, is probably the best. It is particularly good in winter thanks to the southerly swells and southwesterly winds. Its lure in summer is fewer numbers; most visitors head to the more easily accessed Maroochy and Memorial Ave.

If you want to dance the waves like a pro, check out **Robbie Sherwell's XL Surfing Academy** (☎ 5478 1337; 63 Oloway Cres, Alexandra Headlands; per person \$20; ☎ 9.30am Mon-Fri, 7.30am Sat) to get your grooves down with a one-hour lesson. Rent boards from **Beach Beat** (☎ 5443 2777; 164 Alexandra Pde, Alexandra Headland; surf/body boards per day \$35/25; ☎ 9am-5pm).

Sleeping

Cotton Tree Beachouse Backpackers (☎ 5443 1755; www.cottontreebackpackers.com; 15 the Esplanade, Cotton Tree; dm/s/d \$22/44/50) Virtually on the beach and sheltered by foliage, Cotton Tree gets great reviews from past guests. Perks include a spa and free use of kayaks and boogie boards. Check out the sunset from the large veranda. A lack of air-con is one drawback when it's hot.

Heritage Motor Inn (☎ 5443 7355; heritagemotorinn@hotmail.com; 69 Sixth Ave, Mooloolaba; r \$85-95; ☎) Muscle past the kitsch exterior – as far motels go this one's a winner. The spacious rooms are cool, bright and spotless. The hosts are super-friendly and if a spot of rain dampens your beach plans there are free in-house movies. It is wheelchair friendly.

Coral Sea Apartments (☎ 5479 2999; www.coralsea-apartments.com; 35-37 Sixth Ave, Maroochyore; apt 2 nights from \$385; ☎) These yawning two- and three-bedroom apartments, with large balconies, occupy a lovely spot close to Maroochy Surf Life Saving Club and the beach. Inside you'll find tasteful décor and extra goodies such as dishwashers, wide-screen TVs and videos. During the off season it's possible to rent apartments for \$150 per night and there are often great midweek specials – three nights for \$340.

The Duporth Riverside (☎ 1300 766 014; www.theduporth.com.au; 6 Wharf St, Maroochyore; apt 2 nights from \$400; ☎) This ultra-modern luxury apartment building looks like it should be part

of a Hollywood set: creamy leather couches are paired with a red American Indian-style floor rug, balconies come with glass tables and deck chairs and overlook the river, and there are spa baths, lots of light, and ocean and river views from the windows. Outdoor amenities include a fabulous infinity pool, a gym and steam rooms. During the Christmas holidays expect prices to nearly quadruple for the two- and three-bedroom apartments.

Eating

Crackd Pepper (☎ 5452 6700; Shop 1, Mooloolaba International, cnr Venning St & the Esplanade, Mooloolaba; mains \$10-20) Sophisticated café fare is served at this popular restaurant where most diners choose to partake in the copious outdoor seating facing Mooloolaba's main promenade. It's good for people-watching.

Hot Papis (☎ 5444 4441; Shop 3/11 the Esplanade, Mooloolaba; mains \$15-24) This breezy street-side eatery exudes effortless style; the atmosphere is cool but the seafood-dominated menu positively sizzles with items such as red curry of Moreton Bay bugs, black-lip mussels, tiger prawns and barramundi. You better leave room for dessert.

Earth (☎ 5477 7100; Level 1, Mooloolaba International, cnr Venning St & the Esplanade, Mooloolaba; mains \$26-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Heaven would be more apropos – this chic restaurant has 90-degree ocean

views, flawless service and sublime cuisine. All in all, it's an immaculate ingestion. Expect creations like blue-swimmer crab risotto or twice-cooked pork curry with Thai basil and chilli. The wine list is suitably divine.

Also recommended:

Sunshine Plaza (Horton Pde, Maroochyore; meals \$5-8) Takeaway and supermarket.

Raw Energy (☎ 5446 1444; Shop 3, the Esplanade, Mooloolaba; dishes \$6-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Vegetarian fare, fresh juice and smoothies.

Getting There & Away

Long-distance buses stop at the **Suncoast Pacific bus terminal** (☎ 5443 1011; First Ave, Maroochyore), just off Aerodrome Rd.

AROUND MAROOCHY

There's little in the way of industry, but if the winds are blowing right there's a lot in the way of waves at **Coolum** and **Peregrin Beaches**, both favourites with local surfers when there's good swell. The coastal views from **Point Perry** are delicious, and there's also the chance to climb **Mt Coolum** for bird's-eye vistas. Get details at the **visitor information office** (David Low Way; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) – look for it off the main drag from Maroochy towards Coolum and Peregrin.

On Peregrin Beach, the best sleeping bet is the crisp, clean and spacious **Pacific Blue Apartments** (☎ 5448 3611; www.pacificblueapartments.com.au;

ECO-FRIENDLY DIVING – EXPLORING THE HMAS BRISBANE

The hottest new dive spot in Australia isn't on the Great Barrier Reef. In fact, it's not even around a natural reef at all – it's a ship that's been deliberately sunk off the Mooloolaba coast. And ever since the decommissioned warship *HMAS Brisbane* (which served in the Vietnam and Gulf wars) took its fateful 27m plunge to the bottom of the ocean in July 2005, it's become the must-do activity whether you're visiting or living on the Sunshine Coast. Local dive shops have seen a major boom in business since the sinking of the ship – attracting about 800 divers each month to their shores. By the end of 2006 around 5000 people had experienced the phenomenon.

So what's so great about a sunken ship? Well, it's not just the ship that's cool, it's also the amazing artificial reef that surrounds it. The reef surprised everyone when it grew prolifically and quickly became home to a wild variety of marine species – from bat fish to coral trout, and turtles to starfish. Plus, the ship appears to be perfectly positioned. It is protected from swell that affects area reefs and the water is a clear deep blue.

Wreck diving is the eco-friendly way to go in these times of rising water temperatures and destruction of living coral ecosystems from pollution, boat anchors and too much human contact. Diving through a ship wreck is a super cool and slightly spooky experience, allowing you to explore the deep below without threatening the environment.

You must have dive certification to dive the *HMAS Brisbane*. **Sunreef Dive Centre** (☎ 5444 5656; www.sunreef.com.au; 110 Brisbane Rd, Mooloolaba) and **Scuba World** (☎ 5444 8595; www.scubaworld.com.au; The Wharf, Mooloolaba) both make the 20-minute journey out to the wreck. A half-day trip, which includes two dives, costs around \$120.

236 David Low Way, Peregrin Beach; apt \$90-160; 📞). Digs have lots of windows and tasteful wicker furniture. A location near the pub and the beach is a bonus.

A convivial dinner spot, **Castro's Bar & Restaurant** (📞 07-5471 7555; cnr Frank St & Beach Rd, Coolumb; mains \$15-25; 🍷 dinner) isn't exactly Fidel-approved revolutionary with its menu, but it does serve delicious wood-fired pizzas alongside creative salads, risottos, pastas and mains. Radicals of all ages are welcome.

NOOSA

📞 07 / pop 34,539

And then there was Noosa... Like many visitors, you may fall hard for this little beach resort scattered around the crystalline waters of Noosa Sound. It delivers fine surf, fine sun, fine food and comfortable beds. Although a surf atmosphere predominates – there are breaks for all levels, from the beginner waves at Noosa Spit meant for big foam boards to the harsher reality of the brutal beach dump at Sunshine Beach – Noosa also has a snooty side. Trendy Hastings St could be the main shopping district in Cannes, with its Mediterranean ambience, leafy pavement cafés and shops offering a blend of surfer chic and haute couture.

Experience Noosa's grungier side by exploring Noosa Junction and Sunshine Beach. Both are refreshingly down to earth and filled with vintage shops (where you can sometimes find designer duds for just dollars); cafés selling cheap brekkies, thick, healthy smoothies and freshly squeezed juices; secondhand bookshops; and surf shops where you can find a bargain on used board.

The area north of Noosa River is preserved as the Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy National Park, a haven for 4WD driving, hiking and kayaking.

Orientation

Encompassing a group of communities around the mouth of the Noosa River, Noosa has more roundabouts than any other Queensland town – over 100 at last count. It is very easy to get lost, so it's best to carry a map if you're driving, until you get used to the place!

Most action focuses on Noosa Heads, home of trendy Hasting St, and the access point for the main surf beach. If you want to surf the beginner breaks, or sunbathe with fewer people, drive to the far western end of Hasting St and

continue through a number of roundabouts until you can drive no further. Park here and go round the point to the surf patrolled beach to the right. This area, known as Noosa Spit, can also be reached via a footpath from the far west end of Hastings St; follow the signs.

Most of the accommodation options are a few minutes' drive from Noosa Heads along the mouth of the Noosa River in Noosaville or Tewantin. You'll also find restaurants clustered along Gympie Tce and Gibson Rd, the two main drags through Noosaville.

Uphill from Noosa Heads is Noosa Junction, which is the administrative centre of town – look for the post office, supermarket and cinema here. There is also a backpackers and a number of places to eat, shop and drink. Over on the east coast from Noosa headland is the peaceful resort of Sunshine Beach. It has a few restaurants, shops and holiday apartments to let by the week.

Information

You will find ATMs and banks in Noosa Junction.

Adventure Travel Bugs (📞 1800 666 720, 5474 8530; 9 Sunshine Beach Rd, Noosa Junction; per hr \$2; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun) Internet access and super-friendly budget tours and ticket booking service.

Noosa Visitor Information Centre (📞 1800 448 833, 5447 4988; www.tourismnoosa.com.au; Hastings St; 🕒 9am-5pm) A helpful service.

Post office (📞 5473 8591; 91 Noosa Dr)

QPWS centre (📞 5447 3243; 🕒 9am-3pm) Located at main entrance to Noosa National Park, 2km southwest of town.

Sights

Noosa is the perfect town to stroll around. There is nothing historical to see, but it has enough shops filled with apple- and caramel-coloured dresses, musty old books and row after row of surfboards to entertain both sexes for hours. If you want to go upmarket, try **Hastings St** (stop for a coffee at one of the pavement cafés) in Noosa Heads. Here you'll also find **Noosa Main Beach** and the main entrance to **Noosa National Park** (📞 5447 3243; 🕒 9am-3pm). The 2km-long park has fine walks, great coastal scenery and a string of popular bays for surfing on the northern side. **Sunshine Beach** is perfect for walking – keep the kids occupied counting the number of bluebottles washed up on the beach. **Alexandria Bay**, on the eastern side of

the national park, has the best sand and is also an informal nudist beach.

Activities

Surfing lessons are big business in Noosa; see the boxed text, p348, for details.

The Noosa River is excellent for canoeing, and it's possible to follow it up through Lakes Cooroibah and Cootharaba, and through the Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy National Park to just south of Rainbow Beach Rd. **Ocean & River Kayak Tours** (📞 0418-787 577; www.noosakayaktours.com) offers two-hour sea-kayaking tours (\$6) that stop for snorkelling in Laguna Bay – if you're lucky, you'll see turtles and dolphins. Look for them in a parking lot behind Hastings Street.

For the hard-core paddler, **Peterpan Adventure Travel** (📞 1800 777 115; www.peterpans.com; Shop 3, 75 Noosa Dr, Noosa Junction; per person \$130) offers three-day canoe tours into the national park, including tents and equipment.

Tours

A number of operators offer trips from Noosa to Fraser Island. All include the major Fraser Island highlights such as Lake MacKenzie and Seventy Five Mile Beach. Most hotels can book these day tours. The following are recommended:

Fraser Island Excursions (📞 5449 0393; www.fraserislandexcursions.com.au; tours \$160) Small day tours take place in comfortable 4WD minibuses – much preferred to the giant 40-seaters some companies use. Tours include a gourmet lunch and get a good reception from readers.

Fraser Island Adventure Tours (📞 5444 6957; www.fraserislandadventuretours.com.au; adult/child \$145/105) An industry award-winner for its day tours. These trips also use the smaller 4WD minibuses and include a barbecue lunch.

Sleeping

The vast majority of accommodation is in self-contained units, although there are several backpacker hostels and caravan parks. With the exception of the last two, accommodation prices may rise by 50% during school holidays and 100% in the December to January peak season.

BUDGET

Despite its rep as a luxury resort, Noosa has a surprising number of budget abodes. In the high season these are snapped up fast, so do your legwork in advance and book online.

YHA Halse Lodge (📞 1800 242 567, 5447 3377; www.halselodge.com.au; 2 Halse Lane, Noosa Heads; dm/d \$27/70; 📞) This place is perpetually fully booked, so get online and grab a room way in advance if you plan on sleeping its hallowed dorms. Elevated from Hastings St by a steep driveway, this 100-year-old Queenslander has a kind of Old South USA charm – think big, white porches and lots of wide open spaces and circling ceiling fans. The dorms and kitchen are a tad cramped, but the bar is a hive of social activity. The place is just across from the bus stop and offers guests free use of surf and boogie boards.

Koala Beach Resort (📞 1800 357 457, 5447 3355; www.koala-backpackers.com; 44 Noosa Dr, Noosa Junction; dm \$27, tw & d \$70; 📞) Part of the immensely popular Koala chain, it gives a lot of bang for your buck: huge dorms, good facilities and plenty of party action. It's in the heart of Noosa Junction, which makes it a good base for accessing Sunshine Beach, and has eating options just outside the door.

Sandy Court Holiday Units (📞 5449 7225; fax 54 73 0397; 30 James St, Noosaville; units from \$75; 📞) Down a quiet residential street, these mini houses with full kitchen, living room and one or two bedrooms are unbeatable value, as long as you can live without air-con. Although the friendly owner graciously supplies a herd of whirling stand-up fans, it can still get hot. Space-wise it's a great deal – forget about fighting with your mate over sleeping versus TV! The décor is nothing fancy, but everything is very clean.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Accommodation on Hastings St can be ridiculously expensive, but the tariffs drop markedly along Gympie Tce, the riverside main road through Noosaville. For private units to rent, call **Accom Noosa** (📞 1800 072 078; www.accomnoosa.com.au; Shop 5, Fairshore Apartments, Hastings St, Noosa Heads). There's often a three-night minimum stay for these.

our pick **Anchor Motel Noosa** (📞 5449 8055; www.anchormotelnoosa.com; cnr Anchor St & Weyba Rd, Noosaville; r from \$100; 📞) At our favourite place to stay in Noosa, the owners have spent lots of time turning this place into a boutique motel. It offers unique furnishings, like porthole windows and blue-sailor striped comforters, cool tile floors and a Scandinavian-style table set (all brand new). The small pool has a real Jacuzzi with jets and a tasteful faux-rock design. Plus

NOOSA

INFORMATION		EATING 🍴		Sunshine Foodstore.....29 E4	
Adventure Travel Bugs.....1 F4		Aroma's Noosa.....19 F2		Trattoria Ma Mensa.....30 F2	
Noosa Visitor Information		Berardo's.....20 F2			
Centre.....2 F2		Bistro C.....21 F2		DRINKING 🍷	
Post Office.....3 F4		Café Le Monde.....(see 20)		Cato's.....31 F2	
		Canteen.....22 F4		Koala Bar.....(see 13)	
		Coles		Reef Bar.....32 F3	
		Supermarket.....23 F4		Zachary's.....33 F2	
		Fusions.....24 B3			
		Gustlo.....25 B3		ENTERTAINMENT 🎬	
		Lazuli Blue Café.....26 F4		Noosa 5 Cinemas.....34 F4	
		Lindoni's.....27 F2			
		Seawater Café.....(see 5)		TRANSPORT	
		Sierra.....28 F2		Long-Distance Bus Stop...35 F2	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES					
Merrick's Learn to Surf					
(Meeting Point).....(see 9)					
Noosa Longboards.....4 F2					
Noosa Longboards.....5 A3					
Noosa Surf Lessons.....(see 9)					
Ocean & River Kayak Tours					
(Meeting Point).....6 C2					
Peter Pan Adventure Travel.....7 F4					
OPWS Centre.....8 D2					
Wavesense (Meeting Point).....9 C2					
SLEEPING 🛏					
Accom Noosa.....10 F2					
Anchor Motel Noosa.....11 C4					
Emerald.....12 F2					
Koala Beach Resort.....13 F4					
Noosa Parade Holiday Inn.....14 C3					
Noosa Village Motel.....15 F2					
Sandy Court Holiday Units.....16 B4					
Sheraton Noosa Resort.....17 F2					
YHA Halse Lodge.....18 F3					

To Tewantin (1km); Bougainvillea Holiday Park (2km); Ferry to North Shore (3km)

To Noosa Valley Winery (8.6h; 34km); Eumundi (15km)

To Lake Weyba (1km)

To Maroochydore Airport (35h; Maroochydore (40k

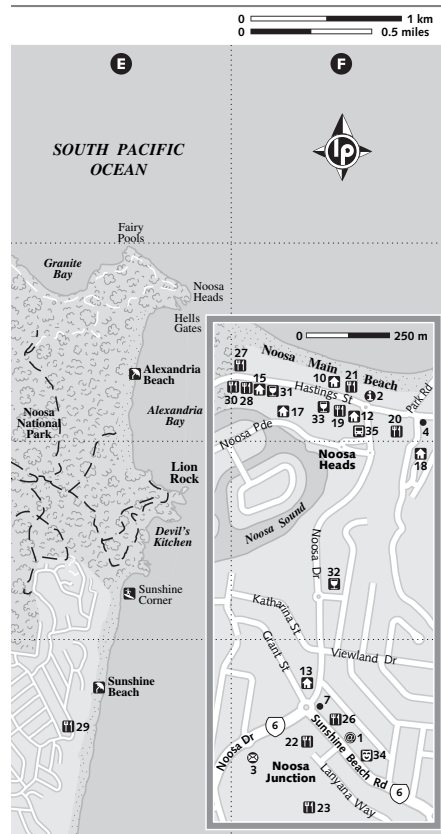
the Anchor Motel is centrally located between Hastings St and Noosa Junction.

Noosa Village Motel (☎ 5447 5800; www.noosavillage.com; 10 Hastings St; r from \$120; 🚻) Good-value accommodation on Hastings St – need we say more? This cheery cinderblock motel with bright yellow and blue paint is right in the thick of things, just a few minutes' walk in either direction to the beach. It gets good remarks from guests for cleanliness, friendliness and location. Rooms are big boxy affairs with one wall devoted to windows. The place organises all sorts of tours, including trips to Fraser Island.

Sheraton Noosa Resort (☎ 5449 4888; www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton; 14-16 Hastings St, Noosa Heads; r \$240-425; 🚻 🍷) Elegance is personified in this five-star hotel's tastefully coordinated rooms, containing suede fabrics, fabulous

beds, balconies, kitchenettes and spas. The Sheraton also has four bars, three restaurants, and a gym, sauna and spa. There are some great deals if you book online. It's wheelchair friendly.

Emerald (☎ 1800 803 899, 5449 6100; www.emeraldnoosa.com.au; 42 Hastings St, Noosa Heads; r \$240-460; 🚻 🍷) The Emerald's stylish, angular architecture makes it look like a piece of modern art. Inside, this hip place has indulgent rooms bathed in ethereal white and sunlight. Expect clean and crisp edges and exquisite furnishings. All of the rooms are self-contained and the mod cons are so lovely you'll miss them when you leave. The location, right on Hastings St, is also perfect. At night the attached restaurant, Rococo (mains \$20 to \$35), serves lots of seafood, has a big wine list and showcases live music.



NOOSA HEADS & HASTINGS ST

Hastings St and the Noosa Head area is where to head for sophisticated dining.

Aroma's Noosa (☎ 5474 9788; 32 Hastings St; mains \$10-20) Dine alfresco at this Parisian-style café serving all sorts of coffee drinks, big breakfasts (we liked the yoghurt and fresh fruit for \$10) and lunches that include the essential S's – salads, seafood and sandwiches. There's also a kiddie menu and a gelato bar, perfect for bribing the babies with. After dinner, Aroma's turns into a trendy wine bar.

Trattoria Ma Mensa (☎ 5449 2328; 6 Hastings St; mains \$15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Dining under the Trattoria's shady canopy, set behind a thin perimeter of greenery, almost feels like Italy. And after dipping into the food you'll likely believe you've arrived. The menu is short and sweet, with a choice of five or six pastas, as well as a small but carefully thought-out list of poultry, steak and seafood. The wine list, both Australian and imported, is longer than the menu. Overall Trattoria is an intimate place for an almost genuine Italian dining experience.

our pick Café Le Monde (☎ 5449 2366; Hastings St; mains \$17-28) And then there was Café Le Monde... We liked the place so much we returned twice (a rare treat for a travel writer!). Order mussels – they are divine, cooked in a light wine, cream and garlic sauce. If you're a dining with a partner, the mussels pair perfectly with vegetarian fettuccine. Otherwise, there's not a fussy palate or dietary need that isn't catered for on the enormous menu. The large, open-air patio buzzes with diners digging into burgers, seared tuna steaks and curries. Some nights the place rocks out with live music.

Bistro C (☎ 5447 2855; On the Beach Arcade, Hastings St; mains \$18-26) Famous for its quirky people sculptures, this boisterous bistro is pure yuppie. The egg-fried calamari with chilli, lime and coriander dip is legendary and you get to wine and dine in a wonderful location overlooking Noosa Main Beach. This place serves food between meals, which is rare in these parts.

Berardo's (☎ 07-5447 5666; Hastings St, Noosa Heads; mains \$26-33; 🍷 dinner) Beautiful Berardo's is culinary utopia, from the sun-dappled setting swimming in elegance to the heavenly food. Delicate dishes such as spiced local seafood hotpot with saffron and tomato, or grilled eye fillet steak with horseradish and thyme *galette* and balsamic *jus*, will lull you into a

Also recommended is **Noosa Parade Holiday Inn** (☎ 5447 4177; www.noosaparadeholidayinn.com; 51 Noosa Pde, Noosa Heads; r \$120; 🚻 🍷). It offers all the bland comforts, and reliable good quality, of a midrange chain hotel.

CAMPING

Bougainvillea Holiday Park (☎ 1800 041 444, 5447 1712; jsjs@optusnet.com.au; 141 Cooroy-Noosa Rd, Tewantin; unpowered/powerd sites from \$30/34, cabins \$65-120; 🚻 🍷) Neat as a pin, this is the choicest camping option in the Noosa area. The facilities are spotless, there's an on-site café and petrol station, and disabled travellers have ample facilities.

Eating

Noosa has no shortage of restaurants – from casual pavement cafés to high-end gourmet meals.

DIARY OF A SURF VIRGIN – RIDING NOOSA *Becca Blond*

Today I am supposed to learn how to surf. I'm pretty stoked, although I have to admit this has more to do with getting to wear the cool cerulean blue Billabong rashie that I bought down the street than excitement over thrusting myself face first into a 3m wave.

Surfing proves easier and harder than I expected. If I had been on one of the foam beginner boards (take it from a surf virgin, don't try to be macho and ride your fiancé's advanced board just because you think it looks better with your 5ft frame), I might actually have stood up. As it was, the baby waves Noosa Spit was throwing turned out to be perfect for body boarding – just catching a wave on my stomach was a rush, but due to the board's slim size it was seriously fast and I had serious trouble getting up from my knees before the ride was over.

With a string of fine breaks around an unspoilt national park, Noosa is a fine place to catch a wave. The best year-round break is probably Sunshine Corner, at the northern end of Sunshine Beach, though it has a brutal beach dump. The point breaks (First Point to Granite Bay) around the headland only perform during the summer, but when they do, expect wild conditions and good walls at Boiling Point and Tea Tree, on the northern coast of the headland. Noosa Spit, on the far end of Hastings St, has gentle breaks that are heavenly for the novice – unlike at Sunshine Beach, riders are protected from open water so the rips tend to be less intense.

It seems someone is always learning how to surf at the Spit, and there are a number of schools based here. Options include **Wavesense** (☎ 07-5474 9076, 1800 249 076; www.wavesense.com.au), **Noosa Surf Lessons** (☎ 0412-330 850; www.noosasurflessons.com.au) and **Merrick's Learn to Surf** (☎ 0418-787 577; www.learn2osurf.com.au). Two-hour group lessons on long boards cost around \$55 and generally go out twice per day (9am and 1.30pm).

If you just want to hire equipment, **Noosa Longboards** (www.noosalongboards.com; Noosa Heads ☎ 07-5447 2828; 64 Hastings St; Noosaville ☎ 07-5474 2722; 187 Gympie Tce) has boards for \$35/50 per half/full day. You can also grab a boogie board here (\$15/20).

divine coma. Fingers dancing across the keys of a grand piano in the centre of the restaurant will keep you awake though.

Also recommended:

Londini's (☎ 5447 5111; Hastings St, Noosa Heads; mains \$20-30; ☎ dinner) Australian-style Italian.

Sierra (☎ 5447 4800; 10 Hastings St, Noosa Heads; mains \$15-25) Hot little pavement café with live music.

NOOSAVILLE

If you're staying in Noosaville, check out the strip along Gibson St – it's the neighbourhood's restaurant row and is lively until about 9.30pm at night. Many places here are BYO, so stock up on wine and beer beforehand.

Seawater Café (☎ 5449 7215; 197 Gympie Tce, Noosaville; meals \$8-20) Noosa's exclusive air hits planet Earth at this kitsch and colourful restaurant, which dishes out excellent seafood in simple surroundings. Amid a painted sea of mermaids and other sea paraphernalia you can also dig into meal-sized sandwiches or the bargain nightly roast.

Fusions (☎ 5474 1699; 271 Gympie Tce, Noosaville; mains \$15-20) Catching plenty of beach breeze through the wide open doorways, families, couples, locals and tourists sit on Fusions'

high-backed Balinese chairs inside or at the oversized tables outside. Gourmet sandwiches, wood-fired pizzas and spruced-up café fare graces the menu.

Gusto (☎ 05449 7144; 257 Gympie Tce, Noosaville; mains \$17-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Gusto trumps Noosa's classy competition with effortless style, superior service and breezy water-views. The Mod Oz menu offers Hervey Bay scallops, opulent bangers and mash, Mooloolaba prawns or melt-in-your-mouth cuttlefish, all marinated, cooked and served with passion.

NOOSA JUNCTION & SUNSHINE BEACH

Eating options in Noosa Junction tend to be casual budget-focused affairs, with predominately self-catering supermarkets, take-away stands and relaxed cafés specialising in smoothies. Sunshine Beach has just one small strip of restaurants on Duke St, right above the beach.

Sunshine Foodstore (☎ 5474 5611; 46 Duke St, Sunshine Beach; dishes \$6-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Local sun-and-coffee addicts tackle newspapers daily at the outdoor wooden benches of this ambient café. It's not just the fix and sunshine they come for though; brekkies here consist

of eggs any way with fresh pesto and vegies, while for lunch you can savour gargantuan ciabattas.

Canteen (☎ 5447 5400; 4-6 Sunshine Beach Rd, Noosa Junction; dishes \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch; ☎) A fantastic spot for breakfast, the cuisine is unusually inventive (think bacon mini-tartlets with eggs) for this meal. The sassy café does a fresh and tasty lunch menu that includes herb-infused gourmet sandwiches, salads and veggie options, along with espresso drinks and fresh fruit juices. It also offers customers 30 minutes of free internet.

Lazuli Blue Café (☎ 5448 0055; 9 Sunshine Beach Rd, Noosa Junction; meals \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Slow and lazy eating is mandatory at this relaxed café that's long been a favourite smoothie joint for locals. Colossal fresh juices and smoothies are the speciality. The lunch Turkish toasties, salads and overstuffed sandwiches are better than the egg items on the breakfast menu. The owners are clued into the local theatre scene.

Coles Supermarket (Noosa Fair Shopping Centre, Lanya Way, Noosa Junction) Self-caters should head here.

Drinking & Entertainment

Both Sierra (opposite) and Café Le Monde (p347) have live music some nights.

Zachary's (☎ 5447 3211; 30 Hastings St, Noosa Heads) This is a shabby-chic, second-storey 'gourmet pizza bar' with velvet day-bed seats and Aussie sports memorabilia framed on the walls. Dark red walls, dim lighting and ambient beats swirl about trendy young things. Most people come for the drinks and ambience.

Koala Bar (☎ 5447 3355; 44 Noosa Dr, Noosa Junction) Noosa's backpackers and other free spirits start their nightly revelry at this popular hostel bar. Live rock fills every crevice several nights a week; when it doesn't, the place hums to the harmony of beer jugs and beery banter.

Reef Bar (☎ 5447 4477; 9 Noosa Dr, Noosaville) A little bit of country on the coast, the Reef Bar is a cruisy watering hole with a strong local feel. You've every chance of grasping the secrets of Aussie Rules football, while listening to Australian rock or dancing to doof-doof.

Cato's (☎ 5449 4888; 12-14 Hastings St, Noosa Heads) The air stays cool in this modern bar thanks to high ceilings and whirling fans. The design is also cool, with flat screen TVs and a minimalist look. Unfortunately the same cool factor cannot be applied to the wicker chairs, which tend to be a bit uncomfortable. It's a cool spot

to sip cocktails at night, nonetheless, when the beautiful people come out to mingle.

Noosa 5 Cinemas (☎ 1300 366 339; 29 Sunshine Beach Rd, Noosa Junction) This plush, comfortable cinema screens the latest blockbusters.

Getting There & Around

Long-distance buses stop at the bus stop near the corner of Noosa Dr and Noosa Pde; see p339 for fares. All hostels have courtesy pick-ups, except Halse Lodge, which is only 100m away.

Sunbus has frequent services between Maroochydore and Noosa (\$4.40, one hour), and links Noosa Heads, Noosaville, Noosa Junction etc. Between 26 December and 10 January, and over Easter, there are free shuttle buses every 10 to 15 minutes stopping frequently between Noosa Junction and Tewantin.

Riverlight Ferry (☎ 5449 8442; one way per adult/child/family \$9.50/4/25, day pass \$13.50/5/35) operates ferries between Noosa Heads and Tewantin, six to 10 times a day.

The **Other Car Rental Company** (☎ 5447 2831; www.noosacarrental.com; per day from \$45) delivers cars and 4WDs to your door.

COOLOOLA COAST

Stretching north from Noosa to Rainbow Beach, the Cooloola Coast is a 50km strip of long sandy beaches, backed by the Cooloola Section of the Great Sandy National Park. Remote, undeveloped and a good place for spotting kangaroos, it nevertheless attracts crowds at peak times.

With a 4WD you can drive up the beach at low tide to Rainbow Beach, passing the Teewah Coloured Sands and the wreck of the *Cherry Venture*, swept ashore in 1973.

Lake Cooroibah

About 2km north of Tewantin, the Noosa River widens out into Lake Cooroibah, which is backed by some fabulous bushland. Sleeping here is a great alternative to staying in Noosa – especially if you dig native wildlife and are looking for a more natural slumbering environment.

From the end of Moorindil St in Tewantin, you can take the **Noosa North Shore Ferry** (☎ 07-5447 1321; one way per pedestrian/car \$1/5; ☎ 6am-10.30pm Sun-Thu, 5am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) up to the lake in a conventional vehicle and camp along sections of the beach.

Camel Safaris (☎ 07-5442 4402; www.camelcompany.com.au; Beach Rd, Noosa North Shore; 1hr ride per adult/child \$50/40, 2hr ride \$70/55) operates glorious camel treks up the beach and through the bush. If you're in the market for a camel of your own, talk to the owners about how to purchase one here. We're not sure about how you'll get it home.

If you want to go bush, head to **Gagaju Backpackers** (☎ 1300 302 271, 07-5474 3522; www.travoholic.com/gagaju; 118 Johns Dr, Tewantin; unpowered sites \$10, dm \$15), a riverside eco-wilderness camp with basic dorms constructed out of recycled timber. Activities include canoeing, mountain biking and bushwalking. Nightly campfires add to the natural ambience. A courtesy shuttle runs to and from Noosa twice a day.

Set over a sprawling park, **Noosa North Shore Retreat** (☎ 07-5447 1706; www.noosanorthshore.com.au; Beach Rd; unpowered/powerd sites from \$14/19.50, r from \$120; ♿ ♿) is backed by bush and a great spot for wildlife spotting, canoeing, bushwalking...or relaxing. Choose from camping or motel rooms. There's also a **pub** (mains \$8-15; ☺ lunch & dinner) and small shop.

Lake Cootharaba

North of Lake Coorobah is the gorgeous Lake Cootharaba, which measures about 5km across and 10km in length. It's reached by driving northwest of Tewantin. **Boreen Point** is a relaxed little community with several places to stay and eat. The lake is the gateway to the Noosa Everglades.

From Boreen Point, an unsealed road leads another 5km up to **Elanda Point**, where there's a **ranger's station** (☎ 07-5485 3245; Elanda; ☺ 7am-4pm), and the headquarters of the **Elanda Point Canoe Company** (☎ 1800 226 637, 07-5485 3165; www.elanda.com.au/noosa; Elanda Point; trips from \$120). It runs one- and two-night unguided canoeing and camping safaris, which include a boat, camping and cooking gear and transport.

The much-loved **Apollonian Hotel** (☎ 5485 3100; www.apollonianhotel.com; Laguna St, Boreen Point; dm/d without bathroom \$25/45, mains \$12; ☺ lunch & dinner) is a gorgeous old pub with sturdy timber walls, shady verandas and a beautifully preserved interior. Rooms are in the Queenslander out back. A few retired horses nosh grass on the grounds, adding to its quirky country charm. The pub grub is tasty.

Great Sandy National Park (Cooloola)

Kayaking or tearing it up with a 4WD is what to do in this 54,000-hectare national park east

and north of the lakes. A varied wilderness of mangroves, forest and heathland that is traversed by the Noosa River, it is fun to explore with a jeep (available in Noosa) and drive through the park all the way to Rainbow Beach (see p355). There are some fantastic walking trails starting from Elanda Point on the shore of Lake Cootharaba, including the 46km Cooloola Wilderness Trail to Rainbow Beach and a 7km trail to the **QPWS information centre** (☎ 07-5449 7364; ☺ 7am-4pm) at Kinaba Island.

The park contains about 15 **QPWS camping grounds** (sites per person/family \$4/16), including Fig Tree Point at Lake Cootharaba's northern edge; Harry's Hut, 4km further up the river; and Freshwater, about 6km south of Double Island Point on the beach. You must purchase permits for all camping grounds along the river at Elanda **ranger's station** (☎ 07-5485 3245; Elanda; ☺ 7am-4pm). You can purchase permits for Harry's Hut, Fig Tree Point, Freshwater and all beach camping at the **QPWS Great Sandy Information Centre** (☎ 07-5449 7792; 240 Moorindil St, Tewantin; ☺ 7am-4pm), which can also provide information on park access, tide times and fire bans within the park. Apart from Harry's Hut and Freshwater, all sites are accessible by hiking or river only.

SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

There are organised tours of this region, but with your own transport you can better explore the appealing landscape between villages.

Locals and visitors flock to the **Eumundi markets** (☺ 8am-2pm Wed, 6am-2pm Sat), where you'll find everything from homemade cheese graters to aromatic sneeze abators, plus clothing, food and music in the 200-plus stalls. Sunbus 631 and 630 (\$4, one hour, roughly hourly) will take you here from Noosa Heads.

Inland from Nambour, the Blackall Range creates a scenic hinterland with appealing national parks and rather chintzy rustic villages. The scenic Mapleton-Maleny road runs along the ridge of the range, past rainforests at **Mapleton Falls National Park**, 4km northwest of Mapleton, and **Kondalilla National Park**, 3km northwest of Montville. Both Mapleton and Kondalilla waterfalls plunge more than 80m, and their lookouts offer wonderful forest views.

Midway between Mapleton and Maleny is **Montville**, where many residents bring visiting

friends on weekends to browse some fabulous (and other rather dinky) potteries and craft shops before partaking in an afternoon pub meal. Ask the **information centre** (☎ 07-5478 5544; 168 Main St; ☺ 10am-4pm) about accommodation.

The **Woodford Folk Festival**, held annually during the five days leading up to New Year's Eve, is the closest Australia has to Woodstock. Woodford is situated southwest of Maleny.

DARLING DOWNS

Wine-tasting trips are the main reason to explore Darling Downs, the area west of the Great Dividing Range in southern Queensland. A swathe of rolling plains and endless blue horizons, the farmland is certainly pastoral, but if there isn't a vineyard on the corner, there isn't much to go out of your way for. Spend a day with glass in hand touring the scenic Granite Belt vineyards, Queensland's most promising wine-growing district, and then walk it off amid the dramatic bush landscapes of Girraween and Sundown National Parks.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) has connections from Brisbane to Toowoomba (\$15, two hours), Miles (\$49, 5½ hours), Roma (\$61, eight hours) and Stanthorpe (\$56, 4½ hours).

Crisps' Coaches (☎ 07-4661 8333; www.crisps.com.au) is the biggest local operator, offering services from Brisbane to Goondiwindi (\$50, 5¼ hours) and Stanthorpe (\$45, 3½ hours).

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722) *Westlander* runs twice weekly from Brisbane to Charleville (economy seat/sleeper \$100/160, 17 hours) on Tuesday and Thursday, returning on Wednesday and Friday, stopping in Toowoomba (economy seat/sleeper \$30/86, four hours) and Roma (economy seat/sleeper \$65/120, 11 hours).

STANTHORPE & THE GRANITE BELT

Warwick, 162km southwest of Brisbane, is Queensland's second-oldest town, but of little interest to travellers. The area just to its south, however, has a thriving wine industry. The Granite Belt is an elevated plateau of the Great Dividing Range and this 'high country' is renowned for its 40-plus boutique wineries.

The attractive highland town of Stanthorpe is most famous for being cold – it sits at an altitude of 915m and is one of the few places in the state that gets snow – and even celebrates its chilly climate with an annual **Braas Monkey Festival** every July. From October to mid-June (provided there's been plenty of rainfall in the year) Stanthorpe's fruit-picking and vineyard working opportunities lure plenty of backpackers – see the boxed text, p353. To get hooked up with work, try heading to **Oz Jobs** (☎ 07-4681 3746; cnr Railway & Rogers Sts, Stanthorpe), which does placements on farms and vineyards.

Sleeping

Backpackers of Queensland (☎ 0429-810 998; www.backpackersofqueensland.com.au; 80 High St; per week \$130) One of two Stanthorpe hostels arranging farm work, Backpackers of Queensland is aewish place offering clean, five-bed dorms with en suite bathrooms. During the May to September harvest season a one-week minimum stay is required. The hostel gets mixed reviews from backpackers. Some love it, praising the big \$5 home-cooked dinners and en suite dorms. Others complain that the owners are unwelcoming. It's best to visit before deciding.

Happy Valley (☎ 07-4681 3250; www.happyvalleyretreat.com; Glenlyon Drive; r \$88-150) Set amid dense bush with granite outcrops, this fine resort offers 20 luxury timber cabins, all with their own bathrooms and wood fires spread out over dozens of secluded acres. The theme is back to nature – there are no TVs or phones in the cabins. The on-site Homestead restaurant serves country breakfasts daily, and lunch on the weekends.

Escape on Tully (☎ 07-4683 7000; www.escapeontully.com; 934 Mt Tully Rd; d \$100-120) Take the name literally – this B&B is an amazing weekend retreat for couples or groups. Everyone enjoys the sunny north-facing deck and gorgeous views. Despite absolute privacy, it's only 10 minutes into town and to the nearby wineries.

Camping options:

Blue Topaz Caravan Park (☎ 07-4683 5279; New England Hwy, Severnlea; powered sites \$15, cabins \$50) Good for families; pets are welcome.

Top of the Town Caravan Village (☎ 07-4681 4888; fax 07-4681 4222; 10 High St; powered sites \$18, dm \$20, cabins from \$72; ♿ ♿) Popular with seasonal workers wanting a hostel alternative.

Eating

Anna's Restaurant (☎ 07-4681 1265; cnr Wallangarra Rd & O'Mara Tce; dishes \$9-17; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) This family-run, Italian BYO restaurant is inside a cosy Queenslander. It is famous locally for the weekend buffets (adult/child \$28/14) where you can gorge yourself on antipasto platters, hearty pasta and a vast array of veal, poultry and seafood dishes.

Cooks, Gluttons & Gourmets (☎ 07-4681 2377; 137a High St; mains \$12-24; ☎ dinner) A warm, casual vibe and a creative menu make this Mod Oz eatery a winner. The food is fine dining: a towering plate of Atlantic salmon and prawns comes served on handmade *pappardelle*, and the tea-smoked kangaroo fillet is tender and delicious.

TOOWOOMBA

☎ 07 / pop 94,759

The air feels a bit crisper in Toowoomba, Queensland's largest inland city, which sits on the edge of the Great Dividing Range and offers breathtaking views of the Lockyer Valley, 700m below. Toowoomba is a renowned garden city and the birthplace of that archetypal Aussie cake, the lamington. The town centre is graced with some stately buildings.

Information

Coffee On Line (☎ 4639 4686; 12 Russell St; per hr \$6; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-7pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Internet access.

QPWS (☎ 4639 4599; 158 Hume St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Toowoomba Visitor Information Centre (☎ 4639 3797; www.toowoomba.qld.gov.au; 86 James St; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Sights & Activities

The inspiring and ever-expanding **Cobb & Co Museum** (☎ 4639 1971; 27 Lindsay St; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 10am-4pm) is more than a collection of carriages and traps from the horse-drawn age; it's also a showcase for Toowoomba's indigenous and multicultural communities, and includes a children's play area. **Queen's Park** (cnr Lindsay & Campbell Sts) houses the botanic gardens, although some might prefer the beautiful **Ju Raku En Japanese Garden** (☎ 4631 2627; West St; ☎ 7am-dusk), with its 3km of walking trails, waterfalls and streams.

Sleeping & Eating

Toowoomba's accommodation can fill surprisingly fast and it's best to book ahead,

especially during September's Carnival of Flowers festival.

A Raceview Motor Inn (☎ 4634 6777; 52 Hursley Rd; r from \$65; ☎ ☎) This motel across the street from the Clifford Park Racetrack offers solid rooms – some with track views so good you can see the horses. Families and groups will appreciate the self-contained units with bunks sleeping up to six, and the saltwater swimming pool. One of your better budget bets.

Vacy Hall (☎ 4639 2055; www.vacyhall.com.au; 135 Russell St; r \$100-200) Just uphill from the town centre, this magnificent 1880s mansion offers 12 heritage-style rooms of the highest standard. The priciest digs come with working fireplaces and huge verandas, making for a romantic evening. The extensive grounds are worth a stroll.

Spotted Cow (☎ 4632 4393; cnr Ruthven & Campbell Sts; mains \$12-20; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch & dinner daily) This Toowoomba institution is the place to come for upmarket pub grub served in the cosy dining room of a restored old hotel. It's famous for its steaks – we'll be awfully impressed if you get through a 700g Kimberley Red T-bone! There's a fantastic wine list of Aussie labels and warm country service.

GPO Café & Bar (☎ 4659 9240; 1/140 Margaret St; mains \$15-25; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Slick and modern with a stainless-steel bar and airy dining room, GPO's surrounds reflect the kind of food served: big on flavour and very inner city. Corn, crab and chilli chowder comes with a polenta muffin, or try a gourmet burger. Grab a coffee in the morning or a brew come dark.

TOOWOOMBA TO ROMA

Check out the rustic buildings, antique tractors, farm machinery and other period displays at the historic and excellent 147-plus-year-old **Jondaryan Woolshed Complex** (☎ 07-4692 2229; www.jondaryanwoolshed.com; Evanslea Rd; adult/child self-guided \$9/5, guided \$13/8; ☎ 9am-4pm, tours 1pm Wed-Fri, 10.30am & 1pm Sat, Sun & school holidays) located around 45km west of Toowoomba. There are daily blacksmithing and shearing demonstrations – check the website for times. To really get into the pioneering spirit, try spending a night in the shearer's quarters (adult/child \$12/6) or cabins (up to 4 people \$36). Or you can pseudo-camp in pre-erected safari tents (\$16 per person), which come complete with mattress. There's also a country music festival held here on the third weekend in March that showcases amateur talent.

FRUIT PICKING DOWN IN QUEENSLAND

There is fruit and vegetable picking work aplenty in Stanthorpe, Childers (p365) and Bundaberg (p365), and during harvests these towns attract backpackers by the bucket load hoping to pick tomatoes in exchange for a bit of cash and, even better, a second holidaymaker visa.

Here's the scoop. If you have a valid Australian work visa and do three months of harvest work, you are entitled to another year-long working visa. It sounds great, and if you can stomach the work, it is great. But before you just show up at a farm, here are a few things you should know.

Farm work can be brutal. You'll be expected to work seven days a week, and get up insanely early when it's still cold and dark – 4am anyone? It takes about three days to get used to the physical aspects of harvest work. Be prepared for a few grumpy, achy first days. Stick with it though, because after day four your body should begin to adjust to the odd angles it's being placed in and life gets easier. In the meantime, grab some tiger balm to cool soreness, make sure to drink lots of water, get plenty of sleep and always stretch out your back, arms and legs when you finish working. (Hint: yoga works well. If you don't know basic moves, ask around at your hostel where someone surely will.)

Besides being physically challenging, harvest work can take an emotional toll as well. Most backpackers who choose to do harvest work also choose to stay in atypical hostels known throughout Australia as 'working backpackers'. This special brand of hostel feels a bit more like boarding school than summer camp, and you can expect management to enforce some stringent rules when it comes to noise and drinking. Most places only allow you to consume alcohol purchased on the premises – some hostels have on-site bars – and if you're caught sneaking booze in, you just might lose your job.

'You can bring as much booze as you like in as long as it's already in your belly,' Lindsay, the manager at the Palace Backpackers in Childers, told us. 'You're meant to be sleeping at night so you can work in the morning.'

It's probably best to do a bit of research on the town you choose to work in before showing up. Some towns, like Stanthorpe, are basically one-stoplight villages with little to do as far as nightlife goes. If you're only coming to work, this is fine, but if you're also looking for a bit of atmosphere, it's probably best to head to Bundy.

In exchange for putting up with these rules, backpackers staying at these places are usually hooked up with farm work directly through the hostel, which also provides transport to and from the harvest site each day. This is a major plus, as there is no public transport to the farms. Being connected to a hostel can also be helpful if you end up having a problem with your farm boss – many backpackers complain about unfair, and even insulting, treatment from the farmers. Be warned, racism is not extinct on farms, and we were told by a manager at a hostel in Bundy that some farmers won't hire Asians, while others have a problem with blacks.

We hate to have to even bring the subject up, but to avoid a hostile situation it's best to talk to the hostel management before signing up for work if you have any concerns. Managers may be strict when it comes to partying, but we found many, especially the crew at the Cell Block Backpackers in Bundy (see p366), to be very sensitive to backpackers' feelings and needs.

A further 167km west on the main street in Miles is **Dogwood Crossing** (☎ 07-4627 2455; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), a \$1.6 million community project that combines visual arts, social history and literature into a museum, gallery, library and multimedia resource centre. You can bed down in a refurbished, underground bunker at **Possum Park** (☎ 07-4627 1651; Leichhardt Hwy; s/d \$55/60), where munitions were stored during WWII as part of Australia's prepared last line of defence against the advancing Japanese.

ROMA

☎ 07 / pop 5436

An early Queensland settlement, and now the centre of a sheep and cattle-raising district, Roma also has some curious small industries. There's enough oil in the area to support a small refinery, but the gas deposits are even larger and Roma contributes to Brisbane's supply through a 450km pipeline.

The major landmark is the **Big Rig Complex** (☎ 4622 4355; www.thebigrig.com.au; Warrego Hwy; adult/child \$14/9, combined entry & night show \$25/15; ☎ 9am-5pm,

GRANITE BELT WINERIES

The cluster of vineyards scattered around the elevated plateau of the Great Dividing Range constitutes Queensland's best-known wine district. Moseying from one winery to the next amid some spectacular scenery is a must for visitors to the area.

Grapes were first grown in the district in the 19th century, but the wine industry really took off during WWII when Italian immigrants were brought into the countryside to work on farms (at the time, Australia was at war with Italy). These forced émigrés flourished, and there are now some 40 wineries dotted around the New England Hwy between Cottonvale and Wallangarra.

The area doesn't have a particular speciality, but Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon are popular regional red styles, and Semillon, Verdelho and Chardonnay the best white varieties.

Heading south from Stanthorpe, the following list includes just a few of the more highly regarded vineyards in the area. All have lovely tasting areas and many run cellar tours.

Lucas Estate (☎ 07-4683 6365; Donges Rd, Severnlea; ☎ 10am-5pm)

Mountview (☎ 07-4683 4316; Mt Stirling Rd, Glen Aplin; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Fri-Sun)

Ballandean Estate (☎ 07-4684 1226; Sundown Rd, Ballandean; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Symphony Hill Wines (☎ 07-4684 1388; 2017 Eukeky Rd, Ballandean; ☎ 10am-5pm)

Pyramids Rd Wines (☎ 07-4684 5151; Pyramids Rd, Wyberba; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun)

Bald Mountain Winery (☎ 07-4684 3186; Hickling Lane, Wallangarra; ☎ 10am-5pm)

If you would rather not drive yourself, **Grape Escape** (☎ 1300 36 1150; www.grapeescape.com.au; per person \$60) operates tours to five wineries, including lunch, from Stanthorpe.

night show 7pm), a museum of oil and gas exploration centred on the old, steam-operated oil rig at the eastern edge of town. There's also a nightly sound and light show. The **visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 222 399; Warrego Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) can help with accommodation if you're stopping en route to the Carnarvon Gorge (p375).

FRASER COAST

Australia breaks another world record in the large and enigmatic category with Fraser Island. Off the sparsely populated pistachio-coloured Fraser Coast, you'll find the area's tourism ace. Not only is this one of the most interactive nature experiences on the planet, but it's also the world's largest sand island. Backpackers and flashpackers alike flock to this Queensland must-see to experience its unique ecosystem, vibrant colours and almost mystical air. Spend a night camping under the stars (or perhaps wishing upon them from a five-star hotel room window), experience the heart-racing thrill of driving a 4WD across a shifting tidal sandbar, or bushwalk to a luminous blue lake.

Mellow Hervey Bay is the major access point for Fraser Island, and a good whale-watching spot from July to October. The mammals chill out in the bay for a while before trekking south to summer in Antarctica. Rainbow Beach,

which has trippy sand and surf, is a second Fraser Island jumping-off point.

The northern coast is a land of rum, coral and sugar cane. Bundaberg, the largest town in the area, is home to Australia's favourite distillery, which churns out a wicked, intoxicating, hangover-inducing rum by the same name – you'll either love it or puke it up!

GYMPIE

☎ 07 / pop 11,100

If you show up in Noosa without reservations during school holidays, Gympie, about 80km to the northwest, just might save your arse in the sleeping department. The peaceful little town has a handful of motels and caravan parks – one even has four stars – on and just off the main drag (the Bruce Hwy). These cost between \$60 and \$120.

Gympie played an important role in Queensland's history, thanks to its once rich gold deposits. Most mining stopped in the 1920s. The principal reminder of Gympie's illustrious past is the **Gympie Gold Mining & Historical Museum** (☎ 5482 3995; 215 Brisbane Rd; adult/child/family \$8.80/4.40/24; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), which holds a diverse collection of mining equipment and steam engines. There's also a week-long **Gold Rush Festival** every October.

For sleeping, the **Gympie Muster Inn** (☎ 5482 8666; 21 Wickham St; d \$100; ☎), which has big rooms with

light décor and plump settees, along with cable TV, makes a good overnight resting spot.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 1499) serves Gympie from Noosa (\$17, two hours, three daily) and Hervey Bay (\$22, 1½ hours, frequent). All long distance coaches stop at the Gympie Transit Centre. You'll also find buses to Rainbow Beach (\$15.50, 1¾ hours, three daily weekdays) depart from here.

RAINBOW BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 1100

Backed by a spectacular set of multicoloured sand cliffs (72 shades in all), the small beach town greets weary travellers like the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Although there are plans for major development, including a shopping mall and swanky holiday rentals, for now Rainbow Beach is really just a single pandanus tree-lined main street running into a long golden beach backed by an aquamarine sea. If you have a 4WD you can traverse the entire length of the beach, which is especially appealing to surfers wanting to ride Double Island Point 13km to the south.

When we visited a major expansion was planned for the beachfront. When complete it will include the renovated Rainbow Beach Hotel, along with holiday rentals, luxury apartments, shops and bars. City planners are counting on the project to boost tourism.

Activities

Without a 4WD, beach options are limited to the patrolled surf beach at the end of town. For those not wishing to hire a 4WD (right), **Surf & Sand Safaris** (☎ 5486 3131; www.surfandsandsafaris.com.au; per adult/child \$80/40) runs half-day 4WD tours south down the beach, taking in the lighthouse at Double Island Point and the *Cherry Venture*, a freighter that ran aground here in 1973.

Paragliding above the Carlo Sandblow, a 120m-high dune where the national championships are held every January, is an unforgettable experience. **Rainbow Paragliding** (☎ 5486 3048; www.paraglidingrainbow.com; around \$175) offers tandem glides for those with the gumption.

The best **surfing** is at Double Island Point, 13km to the south. You'll need a 4WD to reach it, but there are good breaks on either side.

Sleeping

Dingo's Backpacker's Resort (☎ 1800 111 126, 5486 8200; www.dingosatrainbow.com; 3 Spectrum Ave; dm/d \$20/60; ☎) Cheery Dingo's offers

intimate dorms with sinks and a handful of en suite doubles. The family room (\$80) sleeps four and also works for packs of mates. We dug the cool (and we mean both versions) lounge with comfy chairs and lots of fans to stir the air. The festive bar serves cheap meals (\$4 spaghetti dinners anyone?), a nightly happy hour and theme parties.

Fraser on Rainbow YHA (☎ 1800 100 170, 5486 8885; bookings@frasersonrainbow.com; 18 Spectrum St; dm/d from \$20/58; ☎) Housed in a converted motel, this hostel offers roomy dorms with fabulously comfy beds. Locals join travellers at the sprawling outdoor bar at night, which is a fun place to hang out and meet people, but not so loud it stops you from getting a good night's sleep. Fraser's arranges self-catering backpacker tours to Fraser Island.

Rainbow Sands Holiday Units (☎ 5486 3400; 42-46 Rainbow Beach Rd; d \$80-100; ☎) This low-rise, palm-fronted complex has neat and appealing motel rooms with poolside glass doors and bar fridges, and self-contained units with full laundries for comfortable longer stays. The owners are utterly genuine and helpful.

Rainbow Shores Resort (☎ 5486 3999; www.rainbowshores.com.au; 12 Rainbow Shores Dr; r from \$120; ☎) If you like a little luxury with your beach, you'll hit the jackpot at this sprawling resort. Accommodation options include standard holiday units, funky three-bedroom beach houses and polished split-level villas. On site is a nine-hole golf course, barbecues and children's playground on the edge of the bush.

Getting There & Around

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 1499) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have daily services from Brisbane (\$38, 5½ hours).

With a 4WD it's possible to drive south along the beach to Noosa or head for Fraser Island. **Aussie Adventure 4WD Hire** (☎ 5486 3599; 4/54 Rainbow Beach Rd) offers 4WD vehicle hire from \$125 to \$200 per day. For ferry details, see p365.

MARYBOROUGH

☎ 07 / pop 20,521

The birthplace of *Mary Poppins* author PL Travers, the Maryborough of the 21st century looks much as it did when Travers was alive. It is one of Queensland's oldest cities and also promotes itself as the 'start of Australia's happiest region'. The small country town is certainly charming; its streets brim with

FOLLOWING THE MARY POPPINS TRAIL

Have you ever dreamed of paying homage to the world's first super nanny? If so, fulfil your Mary Poppins fantasy in Maryborough, the birthplace of the flying babysitter's creator PL Travers in 1899.

Start your journey at the **Mary Poppins statue** on Richmond Street, where you can have your photo taken outside the house where Travers was born. Next up is **Town Hall Green** (cnr Kent & Adelaide Sts) where 10 Mary Poppins characters are etched on brick plinths. Bring a pencil and paper to take your own etching.

Finally, if your name happens to be Mary, Maryborough has a gimmick for that, too. Inside the **Maryborough visitor information centre** (below), you'll find the home base of the Proud Marys, an association – we're not kidding here – for women all over the world whose name is Mary or some derivative of it (Mary Catherine, Marias and Marguerites are all welcome). The visitors centre has displays on notable Marys throughout history and (just in case you haven't had enough) murals featuring characters from the Mary Poppins series.

exquisitely maintained timber Queenslanders, which are an attraction unto themselves.

The excellent **Maryborough visitor information centre** (☎ 4121 4111; City Hall, Kent St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is staffed by knowledgeable locals.

Junk browsers will love the National Trust-classified **Brennan & Geraghty's Store** (☎ 4121 2250; 64 Lennox St; adult/child/family \$5/3.50/12; ☎ 10am-3pm), which traded for 100 years before becoming a museum. It's filled with tins, bottles and packets, including early Vegemite jars and curry powder from the 1890s, all crammed onto the ceiling-high shelves.

The **Portside Centre & Heritage Museum** (☎ 4190 5730; www.maryborough.qld.gov.au; 101 Wharf St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun) in the historic port area has interactive displays on Maryborough's history. The **Bond Store Museum** here focuses entirely on the town's lucrative role in the 19th-century booze trade – quite different from your usual museum fare.

Try to visit Maryborough on the last weekend of the month when the town throws a weekend long party. The action begins Friday night with **Portside Moonlight Movies** (admission free). An outdoor screen is set up in a park on the shore of the Mary River near the port. Films are screened just after dark, but entertainment starts at 5pm. Arrive early to stake your claim on the grass – bring a blanket and an esky for drinks and snacks. Each month has a different theme. September is Mary Poppins month; April is dedicated to military flicks.

On Saturday evening you can partake in a progressive three-course dinner at historic restaurants and private homes, where you will learn the stories of Maryborough's ghostly

past, in between touring the towns haunted spots. **Ghostly Tour and Tales of the Port of Maryborough** (☎ 4121 4111; tour & dinner \$65) offers the five-hour tours on the last Saturday of each month. Tours depart from the visitor information centre in City Hall at dusk. The lore is pretty meaty and includes tales of love, betrayal, tragedy, murder and, of course, voices speaking from the grave. Bookings are essential.

Before heading out on Sunday, you'll want to do **Sunday in the Park**, which includes a brass band concert, food vendors and river cruises on the *Mary Ann*, a full-sized replica of Queensland's first steam locomotive built in Maryborough in 1873. It takes passengers along the river through Queens Park and the Mary River Parklands. Kids will dig the many miniature steam engines that run on a circuit around Queens Park. The event runs from 9am to 1pm.

Ambling through the 1920s-influenced corridors of the lovely **Royal Centrepoint Motel** (☎ 4121 2241; 326 Kent St; r \$65; 🍷) makes you feel like you've stepped into Fred Astaire's shoes. The style is quite reflected in the standard (though spotless) rooms, but perks like video players and friendly hosts make up the slack.

The **Federal Hotel** (☎ 4122 4711; 270 Kent St; mains \$8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) is the kind of impeccably restored old Queenslanders Maryborough is famous for. The country pub is perfect for a quiet afternoon drink away from the bright Australian sun. The interior is surprisingly eccentric and modern with galvanised steel, painted cow skulls and pop art. Still, despite the modern touches, it still feels like the kind of rich, old-style country pub you want to curl

up in and get to know. Bistro food is served inside and out.

Maryborough's train station, Maryborough West, is 7km west of town on Lennox Street. Here you'll find trains to Brisbane (\$60, five hours, at least four weekly). The main bus station for long haul trips north or south is next to the train station, but a shuttle connects both stations with town.

If you just need to get to Hervey Bay (\$7, 1½ hours), catch one of the frequently departing **Wide Bay Transit** (☎ 4121 3719) buses from outside City Hall on Kent Street.

HERVEY BAY

☎ 07 / pop 52,000

As the main jumping-off point for Fraser Island, Hervey Bay emits an energetic, youthful vibe. It's usually packed with backpackers starting or returning from self-drive safaris or day trips in trucks that look equipped to traverse the moon. At night the bars and restaurants are filled with enthusiastic 20- and 30-somethings comparing war stories about dingo spotting and sand traps while simultaneously dipping sushi into soy sauce and proudly scratching angry red mozzie bites (proof they've really 'done the island').

Hervey Bay is more than just another entrance to Fraser Island, however. Set on an idyllic 10km stretch of golden sand, the town is populated not only by affable locals, but also by magnificent humpback whales. This spectacular sight, complemented by sublime swimming, fishing and other water-related activities, lures Queensland families by the campervan-load. It seems many have been coming for so long they've not bothered to leave and the town has a healthy percentage of retirees among its permanent population.

Information

There is only one official tourist office, which is a fair way from the centre, but numerous booking agents in town also give out tourist information.

Adventure Travel Centre (☎ 1800 554 400, 4125 9288; 410 the Esplanade, Torquay; per hr \$4; ☎ 7am-10pm) Internet access and booking agent.

Hervey Bay Tourism & Development Bureau (☎ 1800 811 728; www.herveybaytourism.com.au; cnr Urraween & Maryborough Rds; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun)

Post office (☎ 4125 1101; 414 The Esplanade, Torquay)

Sights & Activities

Run by the Korrawinga Aboriginal Community, the **Scrub Hill Community Farm** (☎ 4124 6908; Scrub Hill Rd; tours per adult/child/family \$16.50/5.50/33; ☎ by appointment) produces organic vegetables, tea tree oil and excellent artworks, including didgeridoos. The guided tours (call ahead to arrange) demonstrate how the farm operates.

Tours

FRASER ISLAND

Hervey Bay offers plenty of self-drive and guided backpacker tours to Fraser Island. Below are a few recommended options:

A1 Fraser Roving (☎ 1800 989 811, 4125 6386; www.fraserroving.com.au; trips \$135) Organises backpackers into groups for self-drive safaris to Fraser Island. The price includes the hire of a 4WD vehicle for two nights, an intro lecture on driving it, camping equipment and park permits. Cheaper stand-by rates are usually available.

Colonial Log Cabins (☎ 1800 818 280, 4125 1844; www.coloniallogcabins.com; trips from \$279) Runs overnight guided safaris to Fraser Island. The price includes two nights in the dorms at its Hervey Bay hostel and one night's dorm accommodation on Fraser Island. Colonial's travel company also offers a two-night safari for \$379. Ask about stand-by rates.

Koala Adventures (☎ 1800 354 535, 4125 3601; www.koalaadventures.com; 408 the Esplanade, Torquay; trips from \$135) At Koala Backpackers, it offers the same style self-drive safari package as A1 Fraser Roving and the same stand-by rates.

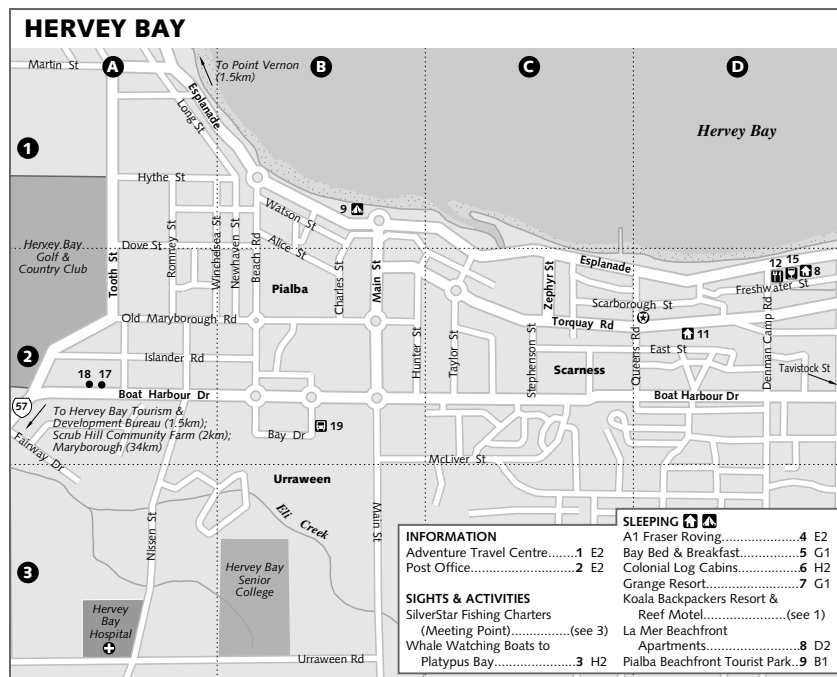
WHALE WATCHING

Between mid-July and late October, whale-watching tours operate out of Hervey Bay daily – weather permitting. Sightings are guaranteed from 1 August to 1 November, when you get a free subsequent trip if the whales don't show.

The boats cruise from the Urangan Harbour out to Platypus Bay and then zip around from pod to pod to find the most active whales. Most vessels offer half-day (four-hour) tours that include lunch and cost from \$100 for adults and \$70 for children. The larger boats run six-hour day trips and the amenities are better, but they take around two hours to reach Platypus Bay. Among the many available tours:

MV Tasman Venture (☎ 1800 620 322; www.tasmanventure.com.au; ☎ 8.30am & 1.30pm) Takes a maximum of 80 passengers and has underwater microphones and viewing windows.

Spirit of Hervey Bay (☎ 1800 642 544, 4125 5131; www.spiritofherveybay.com; ☎ 8.30am & 1.30pm)



A large vessel with underwater viewing rooms; takes a maximum of 150 passengers.

FISHING

The fishing in and around Hervey Bay is excellent and numerous vessels operate fishing safaris.

SilverStar Fishing Charters (☎ 4128 9778; silverstar_fishing@bigpond.com; full day per person around \$150) Offers calm-water fishing trips that run for around eight hours. These also leave from Urangan Harbour.

Sleeping

Try strolling down the Esplanade if the following places are full (or don't look appealing) – it's chock full of midrange motels.

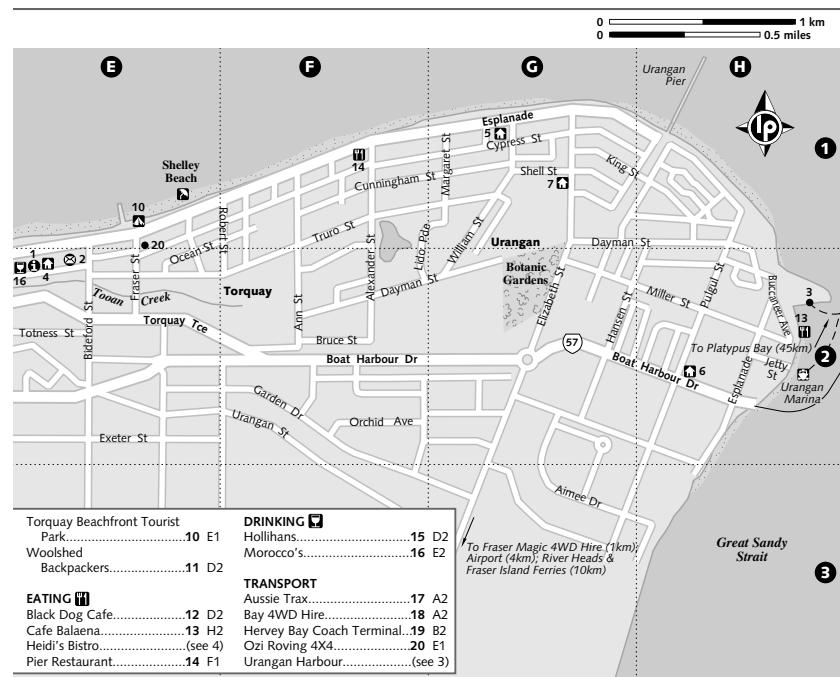
BUDGET

Most Hervey Bay hostels do pick-ups from the main bus stop, and organise trips to Fraser Island. This is just a sample of backpackers in Hervey Bay.

our pick Woolshed Backpackers (☎ 4124 0677; www.woolshedbackpackers.com; 181 Torquay Rd, Scarness; dm \$18-20, cabins \$44-75; 🧺) Clean, simple, quiet and private, Woolshed is a great choice if

you want to escape the hostel party circuit. It doesn't have a bar, although the helpful owners will point you in the right direction. The rustic farm-style cabins have tiled floors and the wooden dorms are full of character and kitted with outback touches like old lanterns, Aboriginal photographs and miscellaneous horse and leather goods. The 12 cabins are on woody property and you can grab DVDs from the library to watch on your in-room player. The four-bed luxury dorms are well worth the extra \$2 as they come with air-con, TV, DVD player and non-bunked twins!

Koala Backpackers Resort & Reef Motel (☎ 1800 354 535, 4125 3601; www.koalaadventures.com; 408 the Esplanade, Torquay; dm \$20, d \$55-70; 🧺 📺 📺) Choose from backpacker doubles and dorms (both with shared bathrooms) in character-packed old Queenslanders by the pool or quieter en suite motel rooms that provide the privacy and amenities of a hotel without sacrificing the backpacker vibe. The sprawling complex covers almost a hectare and resembles a resort for budget travellers. The pool area is party central, with tonnes of atmosphere. Koala Adventures, which does bookings for



adventure activities as well as Fraser Island tours, is also here.

A1 Fraser Roving (☎ 1800 989 811, 4125 6386; www.fraserroving.com.au; 412 the Esplanade, Torquay; dm/d \$20/58; 🧺 📺 📺) Fraser Roving has earned its place on the backpacker grapevine thanks to utterly genuine owners, spartan but spotless dorms, an atmospheric bar and a location right in the heart of town. The place has a party vibe, but if you're after a quiet night there's plenty of space to buffer the noise. Check out the attached Heidi's Bistro (mains \$5 to \$13), which has cheap backpacker grub and does an all-you-can-eat Mexican night (\$10) twice a week. There are good wheelchair facilities.

Colonial Log Cabins (☎ 1800 818 280, 4125 1844; www.coloniallogcabins.com; 820 Boat Harbour Dr, Urangan; dm \$25, d & tw from \$48, cabins from \$80; 🧺 📺 📺) Dorms, cabins and villas at this excellent YHA place are scattered throughout a tranquil pocket of bush in the burbs, complete with entertaining possums and parrots. The four-bed, single-sex dorms are spotless, and friends can share a room without having to share a bed. There's a good atmosphere, thanks to a convivial bar and large swimming area.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Bay Bed & Breakfast (☎ 4125 6919; www.hervey.com.au/baybedandbreakfast; 180 Cypress St, Urangan; s \$70, d \$110-125; 🧺) Guests at this modern and comfortable B&B occupy cool rooms in a secluded annex out the back (most share bathrooms). There's also a stylish share lounge, couches to sink into, a guests' fridge, tea and coffee facilities and a lagoon-style saltwater pool outside. If you don't like kids, this is the spot for you – children under 16 are not welcome.

La Mer Beachfront Apartments (☎ 1800 100 181, 4128 3494; www.lamer.com.au; 396 the Esplanade, Torquay; r per night/week \$125/600; 🧺 📺 📺) Plenty of holiday units use the word luxury with creative licence, but La Mer comes up with the goods. Behind the generic façade are fresh and modern apartments with open plans and spunky new mod cons including full laundries, DVDs, cable TV and even coffee plungers!

Grange Resort (☎ 4125 2002; www.thegrange-hervey.com.au; cnr Elizabeth & Shell Sts, Urangan; r \$170-250; 🧺 📺 📺) Reminiscent of a stylish desert resort, this newish complex is home to fancy split-level condos filled with life's little luxuries. Glossy kitchens and bathrooms, plump couches,

NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND: EXPLORING FRASER

The surfeit of sand and the lack of paved roads mean that only 4WD vehicles can negotiate the island. For most travellers, transport comes down to three options: organised tours, self-drive tours and 4WD hire.

Organised Tours

Package tours leave from Hervey Bay, Rainbow Beach and Noosa and typically cover rainforests, Eli Creek, Lakes McKenzie and Wabby, the coloured Pinnacles and the *Maheno* shipwreck.

Advantages: Tours can be booked at the last minute, you don't have to cook, drive...or think, and you can jump on at Hervey Bay and return to Rainbow Beach or Noosa, or vice versa. You gain a much greater understanding of the island's ecology from the commentary.

Disadvantages: During peak season you could share the experience with 40 others.

We've listed a few companies below (for options based in Hervey Bay, see p357):

- **Footprints on Fraser** (☎ 1300 765 636; www.footprints Fraser.com.au; 4-/5-day walk \$1250/1670) Get up close and personal with Fraser's unique environment when you walk the island with Footprints. The company runs four- and five-day guided walking tours that take in lake, dune and rainforest hikes.
- **Fraser Experience** (☎ 1800 689 819, 07-4124 4244; www.safari4wdhire.com.au; 2-day tours \$245) Small groups and more freedom regarding the itinerary.
- **Fraser Island Company** (☎ 1800 063 933, 07-4125 3933; day tour adult/child from \$155/100, 2-day tours from \$245/185) Range of tours available, from small groups to coaches.
- **Fraser Venture** (☎ 1800 249 122, 07-4125 4444, www.safari4wdhire.com.au; day tour adult/child from \$105/55, 2-/3-day tours from \$265/\$355) Lively drivers and sizable coaches on strict schedules.
- **Kingfisher Bay Tours** (☎ 1800 072 555, 07-4120 3353; www.kingfisherbay.com; Fraser Island; day tours adult/child \$165/105, 2-/3-day adventure tours from \$275/355) Ranger-guided day tours in 4WDs, plus multiday adventure tours targeted at 18 to 35 year olds.
- **Sand Island Safaris** (☎ 1800 246 911; 3-day tours from \$360) Well-regarded small group tours.

Self-drive Backpacker Tours

Hostels in Hervey Bay organise guests into groups of about nine per vehicle to drive their own convoy to the island and camp out, usually for two nights and three days. Some instruction about driving 4WD vehicles is given and drivers are nominated. Unfortunately, there have been complaints about dodgy vehicle-damage claims upon return, which can be quite costly. Booking through a local hostel reduces the risk of this. Either way, check your vehicle beforehand.

Advantages: Cheap! You get to choose when and how you see everything and if your group is good, even getting rained on is fun.

Disadvantages: If your group doesn't get along it's a loooong three days. Inexperienced drivers get bogged in sand all the time, although if it's not serious this can be part of the fun.

Rates hover around \$165 and exclude food and fuel (usually \$40 to \$60).

See Tours, p357, for operators.

4WD Vehicle Hire

Hire companies lease out 4WD vehicles in Hervey Bay, Rainbow Beach and on the island itself. A driving instruction video will usually be shown, but when planning your trip, reckon on covering 20km an hour on the inland tracks and 40km an hour on the eastern beach. Most companies will help arrange ferries and permits and hire camping gear.

Advantages: Complete freedom to roam the island, and escape the crowds.

Disadvantages: Having to drive in conditions where even experienced drivers often have difficulties, and being responsible for any vehicle damage.

Rates for multiday rentals start at around \$125 per day for a Suzuki Sierra and go up to \$185 for a Landcruiser. If you want to hire on the island, **Kingfisher Bay 4WD Hire** (☎ 07-4120 3366) has a medium-sized fleet, from Suzuki Sierras to Landcruisers; all at \$195 per day. Also see Getting Around in the Hervey Bay (p360) and Rainbow Beach (p355) sections for rental companies.

As European settlers awoke to the value of Fraser's timber, that same tribe of Aborigines was unfortunately displaced (although not without a fight) and tracts of rainforest were cleared in the search for turpentine (satiny), a waterproof wood prized by shipbuilders. The island was also mined for its mineral sand for many years.

In the late 20th century the focus shifted from exploitation towards protection. Sand mining ceased in 1975 and logging stopped in 1991, after the island was brought under the auspices of the QPWS, as part of the Great Sandy National Park. In 1993 native title was recognised and the island was listed as a World Heritage area.

Information

General supplies and expensive fuel are available from stores at Cathedral Beach, Eurong, Kingfisher Bay, Happy Valley and Orchid Beach.

There are several ranger stations on the island:

Central Station (☎ 07-4127 9191; ☎ 10am-noon)

Dundubara (☎ 07-4127 9138; ☎ 8-9am)

Eurong (☎ 07-4127 9128; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm Mon, 8am-3.30pm Tue-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri)

Waddy Point (☎ 07-4127 9190; ☎ 7am-8am & 4-4.30pm)

There are tow truck services at **Eurong** (☎ 07-4127 9188) and **Yidney Rocks** (☎ 07-4127 9167).

PERMITS

You'll need a permit for vehicles (\$34) and camping (per person/family \$4/16), and these must be purchased before you arrive; contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au) or purchase them from the following:

Bundaberg QPWS Office (☎ 07-4131 1600; 46 Quay St, Bundaberg)

Naturally Queensland (Map pp300-1; ☎ 07-3227 7111; 160 Ann St, Brisbane; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

QPWS Great Sandy Information Centre (☎ 07-5449 7792; 240 Moorindil St, Tewantin; ☎ 7am-4pm) Just inland from Noosa Heads.

Rainbow Beach QPWS Office (☎ 07-5486 3160; Rainbow Beach Rd; ☎ 7am-4pm)

River Heads QPWS kiosk (☎ 4125 8485; ☎ 6.15-11.15am & 2-3.30pm) One of the ferry departure points; see p365.

Permits aren't required for the private camping grounds or resorts.

Sights & Activities

If you're doing a self-drive safari or renting a 4WD, the following route will give you a good feel for the island's varied ecosystems.

From Fraser's southern tip, vehicles should use the high-tide access track between Hook Point and **Dilli Village**, rather than the beach. From here on, the eastern beach is the main thoroughfare. A short drive north of Dilli will take you to the resort at **Eurong**, the start of the inland track across to Central Station and Wanggoolba Creek (for the ferry to River Heads).

In the middle of the island is **Central Station**, the starting point for numerous walking trails. Signposted tracks head to the beautiful **Lakes McKenzie, Jennings, Birrabeen and Boomanjin**. Like many of Fraser's lakes, these are 'perched', formed by water accumulating on top of a thin impermeable layer of decaying twigs and leaves. They also join Iceland's famous Blue Lagoon as open-air beauty salons, where you can exfoliate your skin with the mineral sand and soften your hair in the clear water. Lake McKenzie is possibly the most spectacular, but Lake Birrabeen is also amazing, and usually less crowded.

About 4km north of Eurong along the beach is a signposted walking trail to **Lake Wabby**. An easier route is from the lookout on the inland track. Wabby is surrounded on three sides by eucalypt forest, while the fourth side is a massive sandblow, which is encroaching on the lake at a rate of about 3m a year. The lake is deceptively shallow and diving is dangerous – in the last decade several people have been paralysed by doing so. You can often find turtles and huge catfish under the trees in the eastern corner of the lake.

Driving north along the beach you'll pass **Happy Valley**, with many places to stay, and **Eli Creek**. After rainfall this becomes a fast-moving, crystal-clear waterway that will carry you effortlessly downstream. About 2km from Eli Creek is the wreck of the *Maheno*, a passenger liner that was blown ashore by a cyclone in 1935 while being towed to a Japanese scrap yard.

Roughly 5km north of the *Maheno* you'll find the **Pinnacles** (a section of coloured sand cliffs) and, about 10km beyond, **Dundubara**. Then there's a 20km stretch of beach before you come to the rock outcrop of **Indian Head**, the best vantage point on the island. Sharks,

manta rays, dolphins and (during the migration season) whales can often be spotted from the top of the headland.

From Indian Head the trail branches inland, passing the **Champagne Pools**, the only safe spot on the island for saltwater swimming. This inland road leads back to **Waddy Point** and **Orchid Beach**, the last settlement on the island. Many tracks north of this are closed for environmental protection. The 30km of beach up to **Sandy Cape**, the northern tip, with its lighthouse, is off-limits to hire vehicles. The beach from Sandy Cape to Rooney Point is closed to all vehicles, as is the road from Orchid Beach to Platypus Bay.

Sleeping & Eating

Fraser Island has a handful of places where you can spend the night, although camping under the stars (despite the annoying number of mosquitoes and flies) is a highlight of most trips. If you are camping or self-catering come well prepared food-wise, as supplies are limited and costly.

Hotels

Eurong Beach Resort (☎ 07-4127 9122; www.fraser-is.com; Eurong; r \$120-190; ♿ ♻️) Cheerful Eurong is the main resort on the east coast. The cheapest digs are in simple motel rooms and units, climbing in price to comfortable apartments and A-frame chalets. There's also a restaurant (mains \$15 to \$30), lagoon-style pool and the popular Beach Bar.

Fraser Island Wilderness Retreat (☎ 07-4127 9144; www.fraserislandco.com.au; Happy Valley; d & tr from \$150, f from \$200; ♻️) A small resort comprising a series of self-contained, timber lodges pocketed in

tropical foliage. There's a rustic edge to them but they're a good, comfortable, midrange option. On site is a restaurant (mains \$12 to \$24) and shop.

Fraser Island Beachhouses (☎ 1800 626 230, 07-4127 9205; www.fraserislandbeachhouses.com.au; Eurong Second Valley; d per 2 nights \$250-350, f per 2 nights from \$420; ♻️) This complex contains sunny, self-contained units kitted out with polished wood, cable TVs and ocean views. Rates start with studios and climb to \$600 (per two nights) for six-bed beachfront houses. Low season attracts a two-night minimum stay and high season five nights.

Kingfisher Bay Resort (☎ 1800 072 555, 07-4120 3333; www.kingfisherbay.com; Kingfisher Bay; r from \$300; ♿ ♻️) This elegant eco-resort has smart hotel rooms, sophisticated two- and three-bedroom timber villas (three-night minimum from \$820), restaurants, bars and shops.

CAMPING

The best **QPWS camping grounds** (sites per person/family \$4/16), with coin-operated hot showers, toilets and barbecues, are at Waddy Point, Dundubara and Central Station. Campers with vehicles can also use the more basic grounds at Lake Boomanjin, Lake Allom and, on the western coast, Ungowa and Wathumba. There is also a hikers-only camping ground at Lake McKenzie. Camping is permitted on designated stretches of the eastern beach (you also need a permit for these). Fires are prohibited except in communal fire rings at Waddy Point and Dundubara; you need to bring your own untreated, milled timber.

Fraser at Cathedral Beach (☎ 07-4127 9177; www.fraserislandco.com.au; Cathedral Beach; unpowered/powerd

sites \$18/28, cabins from \$110) is a spacious private park with abundant grassy sites and excellent facilities.

Getting There & Away

Vehicle ferries connect Fraser Island with River Heads, about 10km south of Hervey Bay, or Inskip Point, near Rainbow Beach.

Fraser Venture (☎ 07-4125 4444; pedestrian/vehicle & 4 passengers return \$22/130) makes the 30-minute crossing from River Heads to Wanggoolba Creek on the western coast of Fraser Island. It departs daily from River Heads at 9am, 10.15am and 3.30pm, returning at 9.30am, 2.30pm and 4pm. On Saturday there's an additional 7am service, which returns at 7.30am. This company also operates the **Fraser Dawn Vehicular Ferry** (pedestrian/vehicle & 4 passengers return \$22/130) from the Urangan marina in Hervey Bay to Moon Point on Fraser Island.

Kingfisher Vehicular Ferry (☎ 1800 072 555, 07-4120 3333; pedestrian/vehicle & 4 passengers return \$22/130) does the 45-minute crossing from River Heads to Kingfisher Bay, departing at 7.15am, 11am and 2.30pm, and returning at 8.30am, 1.30pm and 4pm.

Coming from Rainbow Beach, **Rainbow Venture** (☎ 07-5486 3227) and **Manta Ray** (☎ 0418-872 599) both make the 15-minute crossing from Inskip Point to Hook Point on Fraser Island continuously from about 7am to 5.30pm. Both cost \$75 return for a vehicle and four passengers.

Air Fraser Island (☎ 07-4125 3600) flies out of Hervey Bay airport and lands on the island's eastern beach.

CHILDERS

☎ 07 / pop 1500

This is a slightly faded old sugar-cane town with lattice-trimmed buildings that maintain a country charm reminiscent of a bygone era. Unless you're a backpacker coming here to work, it's probably not worth more than a stroll and a stop at the famous ice-cream factory, **Mammino** (☎ 4126 2880; 115 Lucketts Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm), on your way north. The company is just outside Childers; as you head along the Bruce Hwy to Bundaberg turn left towards Woodgate.

Sadly, Childers is most infamous for a devastating fire at the Palace Backpackers Hostel in June 2000, in which 15 backpackers died. There is now a beautiful memorial, with extremely moving dedications to those who perished, at the **Childers Palace Memorial Art Gallery**

and **Information Centre** (☎ 4126 3886; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun), where you'll also find a good gallery. The hostel re-opened in 2004 on a spot just behind the original.

The new **Childers Backpackers Palace** (☎ 4126 2244; www.childersbackpackers.com; Churchill St; dm/d \$25/60, per week \$150/170; ♻️) is part working hostel, part motel. It's a stylish-looking joint with bright paint and a pseudo-industrial theme. Backpackers and hotel guests are kept completely segregated, and dorm dwellers are not allowed to bring booze onto the grounds (motel guests are free to do as they please). Speaking of the motel, it's a fabulous deal. The rooms are much funkier than your average roadside sleeping establishment, with walls painted red, thick (read: not scratchy) doonas and ultra-modern baths. Everything is brand new as the motel section only opened in late 2006.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) both stop at the Shell service station just north of town and have daily services to/from Brisbane (\$75, eight hours), Hervey Bay (\$20, one hour) and Bundaberg (\$20, 1¼ hours).

BUNDABERG

☎ 07 / pop 55,464

Home to a rum-guzzling polar bear, a turtle maternity ward (of sorts) and a motley crew of migrant backpackers, Bundaberg is a country town that feels oh-so two centuries ago. Aside from the odd aesthetic alteration, Bundy, as it's affectionately known, has remained relatively unaltered since birth. Sitting at the edge of a coral-fringed coast, amid fields of waving sugar cane, the town's main strip is embellished with wide streets, stoic old Queenslanders and swaying palms.

People come to Bundy for two reasons: either to pick fruit at nearby orchids or to drink rum. Australia's favourite sugar-cane liquor is distilled here. You can tour the facilities, meet the company spokesperson (a powdery white, life-sized polar bear) and try a few shooters of the potent stuff (beware of drinking too much – the hangover is beyond brutal).

Information

Bundaberg visitors centre (☎ 1800 308 888; www.bundabergregion.info; 186 Bourbong St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun)

Cosy Corner Internet Cafe (☎ 4153 5999; Barolin St; per hr \$4; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Internet access.

DEADLY DINGOES

It's hard not to feel sorry for Lindy Chamberlain. If Australia had known in 1980 what it does now, perhaps her cry that 'A dingo's got my baby' would have been taken seriously and the Mt Isa mother might not have been convicted for murder in Darwin. Tragically, it took another death, of a nine-year-old Brisbane boy on Fraser Island in 2001, before the debate over whether Australia's native dogs are dangerous to humans was settled conclusively.

That fatal mauling at Waddy Point was the worst in an increasing number of attacks on Fraser in the preceding years. In response, around 30 of Fraser Island's estimated 160 dingoes were culled on the orders of the Queensland government, drawing condemnation from indigenous Australians and environmental groups. The saddest fact is that this event, and the growing aggressiveness of the animals, results from tourists hand-feeding or harassing the dingoes over the years.

There is now a minimum fine of \$225 (and a maximum one of \$3000!) for feeding dingoes or leaving food where it may attract them to camping grounds. The QPWS provides a leaflet on being 'Dingo Smart' in its Fraser Island information pack.

TALKING TURTLE

You almost expect to hear the hushed commentary of wildlife programme-maker David Attenborough during the egg-laying and hatching at Mon Repos, Australia's most accessible turtle rookery. But on this beach, 15km northeast of Bundaberg, it's no disappointment to be accompanied instead by the knowledgeable staff from the **EPA visitors centre** (☎ 07-4159 1652; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri). From November to late March, when loggerhead and other marine turtles drag themselves up the beach to lay their eggs, and young then emerge, the office organises ranger-guided **toours** (adult/child/family \$8/5/16; 🕒 7pm-midnight). Bookings are mandatory through the Bundaberg visitors centre (p365). Alternatively, go with the highly recommended **Footprints Adventures** (☎ 07-4152 3659; www.footprintsadventures.com.au; adult/child incl transfers \$42/21). Make sure you bring warm clothing, rain protection and insect repellent.

bommies (submerged rock) and blowholes. Lady Elliot is also a good choice if you suffer from seasickness – it's reached by light plane (hopefully you're not also a nervous flier).

When it comes to sleeping, Lady Elliot can seem less than fabulous, however. Your only option, the **Lady Elliot Island Resort** (☎ 1800 072 200; www.ladyelliott.com.au; r \$122-264), is basically a one-star resort with five-star prices. Although the rate is partly justified by the amazing underwater scenery at your doorstep, it's still overpriced. Try to book online as Lady Elliot often has good-value tailored specials inclusive of airfare; some packages even include meals and diving. Digs are either basic 'eco huts' (really just cabins with bunks) or simple but vibrantly coloured motel-style units along with two bedroom self-contained suites.

Scenic Air (book through the resort) flies guests in from Bundaberg, Hervey Bay and nearly every other beach town with an airport between the Gold Coast and Gladstone. Return prices start at \$175 for adults. Again, it's best to try to book air and hotel rates together online.

Lady Musgrave Island

Warning: this uninhabited cay is so visually orgasmic it may encourage fits of spontaneous hedonism. The 15-hectare impostor Garden of Eden is a national park about 100km north of Bundaberg. Lady Musgrave's aqua lagoon is a popular destination for coral-spotting day-trippers, and a desert island camp for those on diving and snorkelling retreats – everyone from backpackers to grandparents are welcome. The island also has a dense canopy of pisonia forest, which brims with terns, shearwaters and white-capped noddies during nesting season. The birds nest from October to April, and green turtles nest from November to February.

A **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4/16) lies on the island's west side, with bush toilets and little else. Campers need a permit and must be totally self-sufficient, even bringing their own water. Numbers are limited to 40 at any one time, so apply well ahead for a permit at the Gladstone **QPWS office** (☎ 07-4971 6500; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 136 Goondoon St). Still, if you can tough it out, this is a fabulous place to just forget civilisation for a day or two.

1770 Great Barrier Reef Cruise operates great day trips from the Town of 1770; see opposite for more information.

Heron & Wilson Islands

With the underwater reef world accessible directly from the beach, Heron Island is famed for superb scuba diving and snorkelling, although you'll need a fair amount of cash to visit. A true coral cay, it is densely vegetated with pisonia trees and surrounded by 24 sq km of reef. There's a resort and research station on the northeastern third of the island; the remainder is national park.

Heron Island Resort (☎ 07-4972 9055; 1800 737 678; www.heronisland.com; s/d from \$350/480) covers the northeastern third of the island. Its comfortable accommodation is suited to families and couples – the Point Suites have the best views. Prices include all meals, but guests will pay \$180/90 per adult/child for launch transfer, or \$495/248 for helicopter transfer. Both are from Gladstone.

Wilson Island (www.wilsonisland.com; 5-night s/d from \$2600/4000), also part of a national park, is an expensive wilderness retreat with permanent tents. There are excellent beaches and superb snorkelling and all guests buy combined Wilson-Heron packages of two nights on Heron and three on Wilson, with all meals included.

AGNES WATER & TOWN OF 1770

The twin coastal towns of Agnes Water and Town of 1770 are among Queensland's most appealing seaside destinations and the perfect place to surf away from the crowds. Neither is large enough to even really be considered a town. Agnes Water boasts a few shops clustered around the corner of Captain Cook and Round Hill Drs, along with holiday homes, villa rentals and a few B&Bs. Surrounded by national parks, and a healthy distance from the beaten track, Agnes is Queensland's most northerly surf beach and its refreshing lack of crowds makes it a great place to ride. The Town of 1770, 5km south of Agnes Water, is even more laid-back than its sibling (it basically consists of a marina!). It gets its name from the year Captain Cook first set foot upon its shores.

For area info, head to the **Agnes Water Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 07-49 74 7002; Rural Transaction Centre, Round Hill Rd).

Activities

Agnes Water is Queensland's northernmost **surf beach**. A surf life-saving club patrols the main beach. There are often good breaks along the 5km coast that are good for learning. Originally known as a long board break (translation: for beginners), everyone knows that when there's swell, the coast here is anyone's wave. Experienced riders will like Agnes Point. When it's going off it's a gnarly ride.

Reef 2 Beach Surf School (☎ 07-4974 9072; www.reef2beachsurf.com) can teach you how to ride. There are daily one-hour lessons at 10am. Just show up in front of the surf shop to join. Lessons cost just \$20 per person for four or more students. The school was moving when we visited, so check out its website or give them a ring if you need more info. Otherwise, you'll be able to recognise them on the main beach – look for the group with matching yellow sun shirts. The shop also rents boards and sells all the surf gear you could need.

Tours

If you really need to get away from it all, try the unspoilt Fitzroy Reef Lagoon, a stunning coral outcrop on the Great Barrier Reef.

Recommended tour operator:
1770 Great Barrier Reef Cruises (☎ 07-4974 9077; www.spiritof1770.com.au; Captain Cook Dr; adult/child incl lunch \$145/70 plus \$5 per person environment tax) Has excellent day trips to Lady Musgrave Island including

snorkelling and fishing gear. Cruises depart the Town of 1770 marina. Island camping transfers are also available for \$240 per person (\$260 in school holidays).

Sleeping & Eating

Mango Tree Motel (☎ 4974 9132; 7 Agnes St; r from \$100; 🍷) Families and groups of holidaying friends dig this good-value motel, just 100m from the beach. Its large self-contained rooms (sleeping up to six per room) book out quickly. There's also a licensed restaurant and the option of continental breakfast with the room rate.

our pick Sandcastles 1770 Motel & Resort (☎ 07-4974 9428; www.sandcastles1770.com.au; 1 Grahame Colyer Dr, Agnes Water; r & units \$125-465; 🍷 📺 📺) The boutique motel rooms at this brand-new place are an awesome deal! These modern, architecturally stimulating affairs sleep up to four, have 6m-high sloping ceilings, kitchenettes and cheap furniture that's jazzed up enough to be cool. If you want to stay longer, or have a bigger group, Sandcastles also rents out beach houses. These are just as stylish and funky. Price depends on size and season. Sandcastles is just a few minutes' walk from the surf beach at Agnes Water, has a saltwater swimming pool and a popular restaurant and bar at dinner. A different on-site café serves breakfast and lunch – try the iced coffees and fresh juices.

Beach Shacks (☎ 07-4974 9463; www.1770beachshacks.com; 578 Captain Cook Dr, Town of 1770; d from \$150) These delightful Balinese-inspired units are hardly shacks: they're gorgeous, very private affairs decorated in timber, cane and bamboo; offer grand views; and are just minutes' walk from the water. An on-site bar and restaurant and a fully stocked guest kitchen give you eating options.

Kahuna's (☎ 07-4974 9428; 1 Grahame Colyer Dr, Agnes Water; mains \$10-26; 🍷 dinner) Attached to Sandcastles, this self-service eatery – order at the counter, they'll deliver the food – is popular with hotel guests and locals alike. Sit outside on the breezy patio and share a bottle of Australian red, Moreton Bay bugs and a delicious (huge and cheap) pizza. The servers are friendly, and also accommodating to menu changes and special requests. There's a full bar.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) has one daily bus from Bundaberg (\$26, 1½ hours). Other buses are met at Fingerboard Rd by a local **shuttle service** ('Macca'; ☎ 07-4974 7540; \$19).

ROCKHAMPTON

☎ 07 / pop 66,567

With pig dogs, Bundaberg Rum, utes, graceful old buildings, lots of beef and country music, 'Rocky' defines true-blue small-town Oz. The town proclaims itself to be the country's beef capital, and larger-than-life figurines of cattle greet the visitor at nearly every turn. There are more than two million cows within a 250km radius of the city – and believe us, their shit smells.

These days central Queensland's administrative and commercial hub is looking a bit sad, however. Abandoned buildings mix with the graceful old Queenslanders lining super-wide streets and there aren't as many eating choices as there used to be. Queensland's largest river, the mighty Fitzroy, flows through Rockhampton's heart, but check before roaming the banks – a 12m crocodile was photographed lounging here on numerous occasions in 2007!

Visit the **Rockhampton Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 4922 5339; 208 Quay St; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sun), a helpful office in the beautiful former Customs House.

Sights

The excellent **Rockhampton City Art Gallery** (☎ 4936 8248; 62 Victoria Pde; admission free; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun) boasts an impressive collection of Australian paintings, including works by Sir Russell Drysdale, Sir Sidney Nolan and Albert Namatjira. The permanent collection is supplemented by

innovative temporary exhibitions, for which there are varying admission charges.

About 6.5km north of the centre, the **Dreamtime Cultural Centre** (☎ 4936 1655; Bruce Hwy; adult/child \$13/6; ☎ 10am–3.30pm Mon–Fri, tours 10.30am & 1pm) is a rewarding indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander heritage display centre providing a fascinating insight into local indigenous history. The recommended 90-minute tours include boomerang throwing.

Rockhampton's wonderful **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 4922 1654; Spencer St; admission free; ☎ 6am–6pm, zoo feeding 2.30–3.30pm) are a beautifully landscaped oasis of Japanese gardens, lagoons and immaculate lawns. There is good access for those with disabilities, a kiosk, an attractive picnic area and a small zoo with koalas and a walk-through aviary.

Sleeping & Eating

Following are just a few sleeping options; there are many more. Many places have attached restaurants.

O'Dowd's Motel (☎ 4927 0344; 100 William St; r from \$60) Popular with the backpacking crowd, it has basic motel rooms above the pub with shared bathrooms. The \$10 menu (served at lunch and dinner) is a good bet for poor, hungry travellers. You can choose from around 10 options including chilli, calamari, salad and even rump steak – portions are filling and generally big enough for two. The outback-style, dark, wooden saloon also does a variety of evening entertainment from live music to

karaoke. The elegant dining room has a terrace overlooking the river.

Rockhampton Palms Motor Inn (☎ 4922 6577; 55 George St; s/d \$87/97; ♿ ♿) Very reasonably priced for a four-star hotel, the Palms offers 21 ground-floor upmarket rooms with good handicapped access. Austar on the tube and a fridge to chill your beer in makes hanging out in your room a comfortable evening activity. Guests can dine across the street at the Rockhampton Leagues Club, where there is a cheap all-you-can-eat buffet (\$10 to \$15) and drinks (\$3 for wine) along with the requisite poker machines – very convenient for budget travellers splashing out on a motel and needing to eat cheaply.

Coffee House (☎ 4927 5722; www.coffeehouse.com.au; 51 William St; r from 110; ♿ ♿) Popular with the business traveller, the Coffee House features beautifully appointed motel rooms, self-contained apartments and spa suites in central Rocky. The on-site restaurant (mains \$10 to \$25) manages a relaxed vibe despite a perennial buzz from ever-occupied tables. It is a popular and stylish café-cum-restaurant-cum-wine bar that people flock to for big breakfasts and excellent coffee in the morning. Local seafood and beef mains, plus an extensive wine menu, are served at lunch and dinner.

Country Comfort Rockhampton (☎ 4927 9933; fax 4927 1615; 86 Victoria Pde; d \$115–180; ♿ ♿ ♿) Country Comfort boasts big rooms with views and excellent service. There are luxurious penthouses and family rooms available and downstairs you'll find a stylish restaurant and bar.

Bush Inn Bar & Grill (Criterion Hotel; ☎ 4922 1225; 150 Quay St; dishes \$10–20; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Bush Inn, in the crumbling but super-atmospheric old Criterion Hotel, serves some of the best pub food in town and is very popular with locals. There are huge steaks, slabs of barramundi, chicken dishes and pizzas on the menu.

Drinking & Entertainment

Great Western Hotel (☎ 4922 1862; 39 Stanley St; admission \$9) Looking like a spaghetti western film set, Lee Kernaghan's pub is a haven for cowboys and gals. DJs and occasional live acts feature on Friday nights, but the best entertainment is watching poor brave fools try to ride bucking bulls and broncos in the bullring every Wednesday.

Criterion Hotel (☎ 4922 1225; 150 Quay St) Easily Rockhampton's favourite pub, the Criterion

resonates with a good-time feel in its front bar and in the Bush Inn Bar & Grill. There's live music Wednesday to Saturday nights.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Rockhampton is serviced by **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13).

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have regular coach services along the Bruce Hwy, and the Rocky terminus for both carriers is at the **Mobil roadhouse** (91 George St). There are regular services to and from Mackay (\$55, four hours), Brisbane (\$95, 11½ hours) and Cairns (\$135, 16 hours).

Young's Bus Service (☎ 4922 3813) operates several services to Yeppoon, including a loop that includes Rosslyn Bay (\$8). Young's also has buses to Mt Morgan, Monday to Friday. Buses depart from the Kern Arcade in Bolsover St.

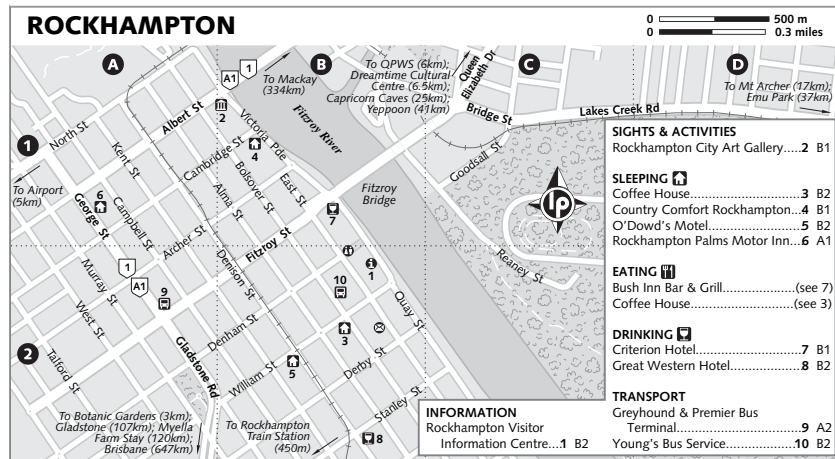
TRAIN

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722, 4932 0453) *Tilt Train* and *Sunlander* connect Rockhampton with Brisbane (from \$95) and Cairns (\$220). The journey takes seven to eleven hours, depending on which service you take. The *Spirit of the Outback* also connects Rockhampton with Brisbane (economy seat/sleeper \$95/150, 10 hours) and Longreach (economy seat/sleeper \$105/155, 10 to 11 hours) twice weekly. The train station is 450m southwest of the city centre.

AROUND ROCKHAMPTON

The two most compelling reasons to visit the Rockhampton area are outside of town. The first, 23km north in the Berserker Range, is **Capricorn Caves** (☎ 07-4934 2883; www.capricorncaves.com.au; Caves Rd; adult/child \$16/8; ☎ 9am–4pm). This is a series of limestone caves and passages that are particularly spectacular during the summer solstice (1 December to 14 January), when the sun beams vertical light through the roof of the Belfry Cave. The informative one-hour set, Lee Kernaghan's pub is a haven for cowboys and gals. DJs and occasional live acts feature on Friday nights, but the best entertainment is watching poor brave fools try to ride bucking bulls and broncos in the bullring every Wednesday.

There are a slew of unique activities to partake in at **Myella Farm Stay** (☎ 07-4998 1290;



STINGERS

It mightn't look or feel pretty, but unless you stay out of the water a 'stinger suit' is your only real protection against Queensland's lethal jellyfish (and harmful UV rays!). There are two to be aware of: the rare and tiny (1cm to 2cm across) irukandji and the box jellyfish, also known as the sea wasp or stinger. They're found in coastal waters north of Rockhampton (occasionally further south) from around October to April, although the danger period can vary.

If someone has been stung, call an ambulance or get a lifeguard (artificial respiration may be required), douse the stings with vinegar (available on many beaches or from nearby houses) and seek medical aid.

Swim only at patrolled beaches between the red and yellow flags. Lifeguards and lifesavers monitor the water throughout the day at every patrolled beach. Thanks to this method there's been a 75% reduction in stings in the past several years. Some coastal resorts erect stinger-resistant nets that provide small areas for safe swimming (although Surf Lifesaving Queensland recommend wearing stinger suits even within these enclosures in the unlikely event irukandji fit through the nets); otherwise stay out of the sea when the sea wasps are around. When snorkelling, visit a sports shop for a stinger suit and (unlike one of our to-remain-nameless authors) wear it with the zip down the *front*.

www.myella.com; Baralaba Rd; 1/2 nights incl meals & activities \$180/260, day trips \$80), a must for anyone wanting to experience life on a working station. The 1040-hectare beef property 120km southwest of Rockhampton offers an all-inclusive package that includes bush explorations by horseback, motorcycle or 4WD, and all meals. The kids will dig learning how to lasso, while animal lovers will want to learn more about the on-site kangaroo rehab centre that cares for orphaned joeys. You can also visit just for the day – the price includes meals and activities. Ring for directions or to arrange a pick-up.

YEPPOON

☎ 07 / pop 11,280

The gateway to Great Keppel Island, Yeppoon is an attractive seaside village with pleasant beaches giving way in the north to rainforest around Byfield. Travelling south, you pass Rosslyn Bay, the departure point for Great Keppel, before wending your way along scenic coastline.

For area info, head to **Capricorn Coast Information Centre** (☎ 1800 675 785, 4939 4888; www.capricorncoast.com.au; Scenic Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm).

Sleeping

Tropical Nights Motel (☎ 4939 1914; 34 Anzac Parade; d \$80; ☎ ☎) Tropical Nights is the best budget bet in Yeppoon. Run by an exuberant couple, it offers decently firm beds, a fridge that gets really cold and TVs with DVD players. The cinderblock walls are painted a soothing baby

blue. It's located just across from the sailing clubs and the main beach.

Yeppoon Surfside Motel (☎ 4939 1272; 1 Anzac Parade; d \$90; ☎ ☎) It is hard to miss this lime-green and galvanised steel motel at the beginning of Yeppoon's main beach road. It's a smart, modern affair with nicer than expected boutique-style rooms – you get tile floors, area rugs and the ubiquitous floral motel bedspread. TVs come with Austar and you can order breakfast in your room for an extra charge. The beach is just across the street.

Rydgas Capricorn Resort (☎ 1800 075 902, 4925 2525; www.capricornresort.com; Farnborough Rd; r from \$130; ☎ ☎) This large and lavish golf resort about 8km north of Yeppoon has rooms ranging from standard hotel digs to plush self-contained apartments. There's also a gym, several bars and restaurants, and immaculate golf courses. It can have absurdly low rates if you check online.

Beachside Caravan Park (☎ 4939 3738; Farnborough Rd; unpaved/power sites \$20/23) A basic and neat park north of the town centre.

Getting There & Away

Young's Bus Service (☎ 4922 3813) operates a loop service from Rockhampton to Yeppoon, Rosslyn Bay, Emu Park and back (\$8 one way, daily).

GREAT KEPPEL ISLAND

Gorgeous Great Keppel Island boasts 18km of fine white beaches, rivalling any of Queensland's beautiful Whitsunday isles, and sits just

13km from the mainland. Around 90% of its 14 sq km is natural bushland. There's a wide range of activities and entertainment to keep you busy, but you can also find patches of overwhelming quiet. Backpackers looking for a cheap, semi-developed, flawlessly beautiful getaway are very happy here.

Sights & Activities

The tips of air-tubes bobbing above the surrounding waters are testament to the popularity of **snorkelling** here. Visitors usually start out investigating **Shelving Beach**, becoming progressively more and more adventurous as they hike to **Monkey Beach** and **Clam Bay**. The coral here is OK (and you will see marine life), but it's better around **Middle** and **Halfway Islands** (see p374).

There are several bushwalking tracks from **Fisherman's Beach**, the main beach. The longest, and perhaps the most difficult, leads to the 2.5m 'lighthouse' near **Bald Rock Point** on the far side of the island (about three hours return).

With 18km of white-sand beaches, you don't need to go far for a swim. **Fisherman's Beach**, where the ferries come in, rarely gets crowded, and it's even quieter just round the corner at **Putney Beach**.

The **Beach Shed** (☎ 07-4925 0624; Putney Beach) is just one of a few places hiring sailboards, catamarans, motorboats and snorkelling gear. They can also take you water-skiing, parasailing or camel-riding.

The **Great Keppel Island Dive Centre** (☎ 07-4939 5022; www.keppeldiver.com; Putney Beach) on Putney Beach offers introductory dives with gear supplied for \$100, or two qualified boat dives for \$130.

Tours

Freedom Fast Cats (☎ 1800 336 244; Rosslyn Bay marina; adult/child \$65/36) Operates a coral cruise to the best location of the day (depending on tides and weather), which includes viewing through a glass-bottomed boat and fish feeding. There are also afternoon and full-day cruises.

Keppel Tourist Services (☎ 07-4933 6744; Rosslyn Bay marina; adult/child \$55/30; ☎) departs at 9.15am & 2pm) Operates morning and afternoon coral cruises, which visit the Middle Island Underwater Observatory.

Sleeping

Mercure Resort Great Keppel Island (☎ 1800 245 658; www.greatkeppelresort.com.au; r from \$145; ☎ ☎ ☎) Catering for children, families, couples and

other mature travellers (it's still trying to shed its reputation as an 18- to 30-something party venue), this resort boasts upmarket rooms sleeping up to four, a children's club and a gamut of facilities including bars, restaurants and a nightclub. There are tennis and squash courts, a golf course and water sports from snorkelling to skiing on offer. More than 40 of the activities are available free to guests. The resort offers a range of package deals to make longer stays cheaper, and two meals are included in the tariff. It's popular with Australians on holiday.

Great Keppel Island Holiday Village (☎ 07-4939 8655; www.gkiholidayvillage.com.au; s/d tents \$40/60, dm \$27, cabins \$100) This YHA-affiliated resort caters to everyone with various types of accommodation (including four- and six-bed dorms and cabins that sleep four). It's friendly and relaxed and has good communal facilities.

Eating & Drinking

Splash is the bar in the Mercure Resort Great Keppel Island day-trippers' area. It's the place to party, with pool tables, a dance floor and live music. Resort guests can party into the night at **Salt** (admission \$5; ☎ late Mon-Sat) nightclub. If patronage in the resort is down, Splash will party on and Salt won't open.

Keppel Haven Bar & Bistro (☎ 07-4933 6744; dishes \$7-25) Good-value specials at this pleasant, breezy eatery include a glass of beer. The à la carte menu offers tortillas, fish burgers, stir-fries and steaks, and you can consume your dinner with sunset views.

Island Pizza (☎ 07-4939 4699; the Esplanade; dishes \$6-30; ☎) dinner Tue-Sun, lunch Sat & Sun) This is a friendly place priding itself on a unique healthy pizza recipe with plenty of toppings. The pizzas are rather pricey but still tempting. Also available are hot dogs and pastas.

The kiosks at Keppel Haven and Great Keppel Island Holiday Village have a few essentials, but if you want to cook bring your own supplies.

Getting There & Away

Ferries for Great Keppel leave from Rosslyn Bay Harbour, about 7km south of Yeppoon. If you have booked accommodation, check that someone will meet you on the beach to help with your luggage.

Keppel Tourist Services (☎ 07-4933 6744; adult/child/family return \$32/16/80) operates ferries to the island, departing at 7.30am, 9.15am, 11.30am

and 3.30pm, and returning at 8.15am, 2pm and 4.30pm. Keppel Tourist Services and **Rothery's Coaches** (☎ 07-4922 4320) run a daily bus service from Rockhampton to Rosslyn Bay, picking up from the airport (one way/return \$15/30) or accommodation in Rockhampton (\$8.25/16) by arrangement.

Freedom Fast Cats (☎ 1800 336 244, 07-4933 6244; family/adult/child return \$82/36/20) departs Rosslyn Bay at 9am, 11.30am and 3pm, returning at 10am, 2pm and 4pm.

OTHER KEPPEL BAY ISLANDS

Although you can make day trips to the fringing coral reefs of **Middle** or **Halfway Islands** from Great Keppel Island (ask your accommodation or at Great Keppel Island Holiday Village), you can also **camp** (per person/family \$8/20) on several national park islands, including **Middle**, **North Keppel** and **Miall Islands**. You'll need all your own supplies, including water. The **QPWS** (www.epa.qld.gov.au; Rockhampton ☎ 07-4936 0511; Rosslyn Bay ☎ 07-4933 6608) has information and permits.

Tiny, privately owned **Pumpkin Island** (☎ 07-4939 2431; sites/cabins \$20/175), just south of North Keppel, has five simple, cosy cabins with water, solar power, kitchen and bathroom; bring food and linen.

Funtastic Cruises (☎ 0438-909 502) can organise camping drop-offs from Rosslyn Bay to the islands. For Pumpkin Island it costs \$185 return per person, and gets cheaper per person for larger groups.

CAPRICORN HINTERLAND

According to the official road-numbering system, the Capricorn Hwy running inland from Rockhampton is Australia's very own Route 66, so get your kicks by heading for the Blackdown Tableland National Park or the even more spectacular Carnarvon National Park. Alternatively, some 270km west of the coast at Emerald, you'll find yourself on the doorstep of central Queensland's gem fields. It is best to visit in the cooler months between April and November.

Blackdown Tableland National Park

The Blackdown Tableland is a spectacular 600m sandstone plateau that rises suddenly out of the flat plains of central Queensland. This impressive national park features stunning panoramas, waterfalls, great bushwalks and Aboriginal rock art, plus some unique wildlife and plant spe-

cies. The turn-off to the Blackdown Tableland is 11km west of Dingo and 35km east of the coal-mining centre of Blackwater. The 23km gravel road, which begins at the base of the tableland, isn't suitable for caravans and can be unsafe in wet weather – the first 8km stretch is steep, winding and often slippery. At the top you'll come to the breathtaking **Horseshoe Lookout**, with picnic tables, barbecues and toilets. There's a walking trail to **Two Mile Falls** (2km) starting here.

The picturesque **South Mimosa Creek camping ground** (☎ Dingo rangers 4986 1964; per person/family \$8/20) is a self-registration camping area about 6km on from Horseshoe Lookout. It has pit toilets and fireplaces – you'll need water, firewood and/or a fuel stove. Bookings are advised.

Gem Fields

The lure of the gem fields is like the lady-luck pull of Queensland's ubiquitous pokies. In the fields west of **Emerald**, you'll hear numerous tales of fossickers unearthing sapphires, rubies or zircons worth squillions, just minutes after drifting into town. Many of these stories are even true, as the gem fields around **Anakie**, **Sapphire**, **Rubyvale** and **Willows** are the world's largest of their kind and renowned for large, rare sapphires.

To go fossicking you need a **licence** (adult/family \$7/10) from the Emerald Courthouse or one of the gem fields' general stores or post offices. If you just wish to dabble, you can buy a bucket of 'wash' (mine dirt in water) from one of the fossicking parks and hand-sieve and wash it.

In **Anakie**, 42km west of Emerald, the **Gem-fields Information Centre** (☎ 07-4985 4525; 1 Anakie Rd) has maps of the fields and fossicking licences. It also hires out fossicking equipment.

Another 18km on lies **Rubyvale**, the main town on the fields, and 2km further than that is the excellent **Miners Heritage Walk-in Mine** (☎ 07-4985 4444; Heritage Rd; adult/child \$9.50/3; ☎ 9am-5pm), which has informative 20-minute underground tours throughout the day in which you descend into a maze of tunnels 18m beneath the surface.

Rubyvale Holiday Units (☎ 07-4985 4518; www.rubyvaleholiday.com.au; 35 Heritage Rd, Rubyvale; d \$70-120; ☎ ☎) has spacious motel and self-contained units, about 1km north of Rubyvale.

There are caravan-camping parks at **Anakie**, **Rubyvale** and **Willows Gemfields**.

Carnarvon National Park

Carved out over millions of years by a creek running through sandstone, this rugged national park features dramatic scenery and numerous Aboriginal rock paintings and carvings. **Carnarvon Gorge** is an amazing oasis, with river oaks, flooded gums, cabbage palms, moss gardens, deep pools and platypuses in the creek. Standing on the valley floor, the sheer 200m rock walls towering above are simply humbling.

For most people, Carnarvon Gorge is the Carnarvon National Park, because the other sections – including **Mt Moffatt**, **Ka Ka Mundi** and **Salvator Rosa** – are quite inaccessible.

Coming from Rolleston the road is bitumen for 70km and unsealed for 25km. From Roma via Injune and Wyseby homestead, the road is good bitumen for about 215km then unsealed and fairly rough for the last 30km. After heavy rain, both these roads can become impassable.

The entrance road leads to an **information centre** (☎ 4984 4505; ☎ 8-10am & 3-5pm) and scenic picnic ground. The main walking track also starts here, following Carnarvon Creek through the gorge, with detours to various points of interest. These include the **Moss Garden** (3.6km from the picnic area), **Ward's Canyon** (4.8km), the **Art Gallery** (5.6km) and **Cathedral Cave** (9.3km). Allow at least a whole day for a visit. Basic groceries and ice are available at Takarakka Bush Resort (see below).

You cannot drive from Carnarvon Gorge to other sections of the park, although you can reach beautiful **Mt Moffatt** via an unsealed road from Injune (4WD necessary).

SLEEPING

It's best to book several months ahead, especially from April to October.

Takarakka Bush Resort (☎ 07-4984 4535; www.takarakka.com.au; Wyseby Rd; unpowered/powered sites \$24/30, cabins \$80) About 5km from the picnic ground, this picturesque bush oasis has an open camping area and a ring of simply furnished, elevated canvas cabins (BYO linen) with private verandas. The facilities are good and the reception-shop sells drinks, groceries, ice and petrol.

Bookings are required for both camping options:

Carnarvon Gorge Visitor Area & Big Bend Camping Ground (☎ 13 13 04, 07-4984 4505; www.epa.qld

.gov.au; sites per person/family \$4/16) Isolated camping ground 10km walk up the gorge.

Mt Moffatt Camping Ground (☎ 07-4626 3581; www.epa.qld.gov.au; sites per person/family \$4/16) Campers need to be self-sufficient and have a 4WD.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CQ Travel Link (Emerald Coaches; ☎ 07-4982 1399; Old Railway Station, Clermont St, Emerald), provides transfers to/from the park and Emerald for \$110 one way.

OUTBACK

There's adventure aplenty waiting for you in Queensland's giant back yard. In this parched and sunburnt country, a place where the smouldering sky is so big it bumps up against the ancient ochre terra firma, the Wild West has yet to be won. Heading away from the coast across the Great Dividing Range, the legendary outback is Australia's last great frontier. Exuding a restless, untamed energy, the heart of the country is at once remote, remorseless and magnificent.

Although sparsely settled, the outback is well serviced by major roads, namely the Overlander's Way (Flinders and Barkly Hwys) and the Matilda Hwy (Landsborough Hwy and Burke Developmental Rd). Once you turn off these major arteries, however, road conditions deteriorate rapidly, services are remote and you need to be fully self-sufficient, carrying spare parts, fuel and water. Also do some planning research as some sights and accommodation options (in particular the outback stations) close from November to March, the outback's hottest period.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Qantas and **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) fly from Brisbane to Barcaldine, Blackall, Charleville, Longreach and Mt Isa. **Macair** (☎ 13 13 23) also flies between Brisbane and various outback destinations, including Birdsville via Charleville, Quilpie and Windorah. It also connects Mt Isa to Cairns.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) connects Mt Isa to Townsville (\$125, 11 to 12 hours) and Brisbane (\$185, 26 hours). From Mt Isa, buses continue to Three Ways in the NT.

Emerald Coaches (☎ 1800 428 737; www.emeraldcoaches.com.au) makes the run from Rockhampton to Longreach at least twice weekly. Check the web address for details on more destinations.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (☎ 1300 131 722) has three trains servicing the outback, all running twice weekly. The *Spirit of the Outback* runs from Brisbane on to Longreach (economy seat/sleeper \$185/240, 26 hours) via Rockhampton, with connecting bus services to Winton. The *Westlander* has services from Brisbane to Charleville (economy seat/sleeper \$100/160, 17 hours), with connecting bus services to Cunnamulla and Quilpie; and the *Inlander* runs from Townsville on to Mt Isa (economy seat/sleeper \$130/185, 21 hours).

CHARTERS TOWERS TO CLONCURRY

Stretching a very long 775km from Townsville out to Cloncurry, the Flinders Hwy is the major route across the top of outback Queensland. The terrain is, for the most part, relentlessly flat, although there are a few points of interest along the way to break the monotony. The highway was originally a Cobb & Co coach run, and along its length are small towns established as coach stopovers. At **Prairie**, 200km west of Charters Towers, the friendly **Prairie Hotel** (☎ 07-4741 5121; Flinders Hwy; r from \$40; 🍷) is filled with atmosphere and memorabilia, and even has a resident ghost. You can sleep, eat and drink here.

The **Porcupine Gorge National Park** (☎ 07-4741 1113; camping per person/family \$6/18) is an oasis in the dry country north of Hughenden. The best spot to go to is **Pyramid Lookout**, about 70km north of Hughenden. You can camp here and it's an easy 30-minute walk into the gorge, with some fine rock formations and a permanently running creek. The venerable **Grand Hotel** (☎ 07-4741 1588; 25 Gray St, Hughenden; r from \$30; 🍷) has well-worn, suitably priced pub rooms and good counter meals.

Julia Creek, 144km further on, is a nowhere outback town with a smattering of motels and a caravan park. From Julia Creek, the sealed Wills Developmental Rd heads north to Normanton (432km), Karumba (494km) and Burketown (467km). See the Gulf Savannah section (p417) for more information on these towns.

CLONCURRY

☎ 07 / pop 5200

The birthplace of the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) and the spot where Qantas Airlines was conceived (check out the original aircraft hanger standing at Cloncurry Shire Airport), Cloncurry has earned a mention in Australia's flying history. Once the largest producer of copper in the 19th-century British Empire, the Curry of this century is a pastoral centre with a knack for breaking national weather records. Australia's highest recorded temperature in the shade, 53.1°C, was measured here in 1889.

John Flynn Place (☎ 4742 1251; Daintree St; adult/child \$9.50/5; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) commemorates Flynn's work in setting up the invaluable Royal Flying Doctor Service. The building incorporates an art gallery, cultural centre and theatre.

For sleeping try the historic **Wagon Wheel Motel** (☎ 4742 1866; 54 Ramsay St; s/d from \$54/65; 🍷 🍷), which is clean, comfortable and fairly priced. There's also the upmarket (despite being built from rammed red earth) **Gidgee Inn** (☎ 4742 1599; www.gidgeein.com.au; d/tw \$123/115; 🍷 🍷) and the tidy **Gilbert Park Tourist Village** (☎ 4742 2300; unpowered/powered sites \$16/20, cabins \$69-74).

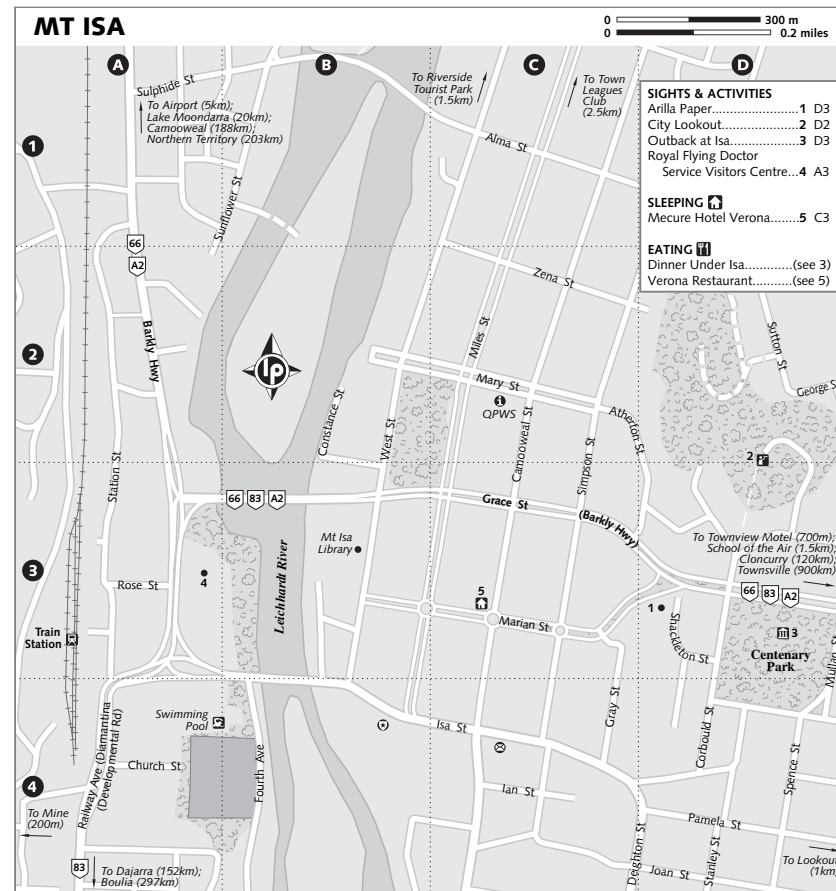
MT ISA

☎ 07 / pop 22,600

If you want a taste of life in 'big town' outback Queensland, Mt Isa has all the rough-around-the-edges cowboy flavour adventurous travellers crave. Plus it's about as authentic as the outback gets. Locals stroll across the pedestrian crossings with absolute certainty that the cars will stop for them, and honking horns are usually from drivers waving hello.

At 121km west of Cloncurry, 'the Isa' is a long way from anywhere. Once you arrive, however, you're bound to be impressed by the beauty: stark red ridges meet cerulean skies, and bump up against olive-green clumps of spinifex.

Mt Isa owes its prosperity to immensely rich underground lead, zinc, silver and copper ore bodies west of the city. The mine's job opportunities have attracted people from about 50 different ethnic groups, most of whom are men (there are supposedly three males to every female!). The sandy Leichhardt River divides 'townside' from 'mineside', and home from work.



Orientation & Information

Barkly Hwy, which becomes Marian St, is the main entry road. The city centre is in the area between Grace and Isa Sts, and West and Simpson Sts. **Mt Isa Airport** (☎ 4743 4598; Barkly Hwy) is roughly 5km from the town centre; a taxi to town costs around \$17. Head to Outback at Isa (below) for tourist information.

Sights & Activities

Coastal Queenslanders will tell you there's only one reason to make the 1200km plus trek to Mt Isa, and it is to visit the Australian tourism award-winning **Outback at Isa** (☎ 1300 659 660, 4749 1555; www.outbackatisa.com.au; 19 Marian St; 🕒 8.30am-5pm). Ancient history comes alive at this museum, which is a one-stop educational

stop for Queensland's outback history, from pioneering to mining to local cultures. Get kitted out in fair-dinkum mining attire and head lamps at the **Hard Times Mine** (adult/child \$45/26). You descend a purpose-built mine complete with fuming, roaring and rattling machinery. The fascinating **Riversleigh Fossil Centre** (adult/child \$10/6.50) is also here. It features a re-creation of Australia's prehistoric fauna, and actual fossils. The centre also houses the **Isa Experience Gallery** and **Outback Park** (adult/child \$10/6.50), showcasing the natural, indigenous and mining heritage of Mt Isa. There's a good-value, two-day **Discovery Tour Pass** (adult/child \$55/33), which combines all the attractions.

Paper is handcrafted from native plants such as spinifex at **Arilla Paper** (☎ 4743 0084;

www.arillapaper.com; cnr Shackleton & Marian Sts), an indigenous women's cooperative. There's a shop and gallery displaying the interesting products.

Check out Mt Isa's kick-arse sunset at the **City Lookout**, off Hilary St. It has spectacular views of the mine and town.

The **Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitors Centre** (☎ 4743 2800; Barkly Hwy; admission \$2.50 donation; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) and the **School of the Air** (☎ 4744 9100; Kalkadoon High School, Abel Smith Pde; admission \$2 donation; ☎ tours 9am & 10am Mon-Fri during school term) provide fascinating glimpses into how the needs of remote communities are attended to.

Cowboys and girls will want to visit the Isa the second weekend in August when Australia's largest **rodeo** (www.isarodeo.com.au) is held.

Sleeping & Eating

Townview Motel (☎ 4743 3328; fax 4749 0409; cnr Marian & Kookaburra Sts; r \$70-150; ☎ ☎) This motel is a good choice for its variety of rooms, from budget to spacious spa suites. You need not leave to eat. The Abyssinia Café is an excellent choice even if you're not sleeping here. Its very global menu boasts Ethiopian, Indian, Mexican and other far-and-away flavoured dishes. It's earned a solid reputation around town for authentic meals and modest bills. It is open for lunch and dinner (mains \$18 to \$27).

Mercure Hotel Verona (☎ 4743 3024; www.mercure.com.au; cnr Marian & Camooweal Sts; r from \$159; ☎ ☎) Book online (or show up on the weekend when rates drop to less than \$100) to score a deal at this corporate hotel with a 4½-star rating. Big, well-decked rooms offer great views of the mine. The excellent on-site Verona Restaurant (mains from \$24) is a choice culinary splurge. The inventive menu has an international spin, featuring good seafood and Italian cuisine. The atmosphere is a cross between elegant and functional, but the service is pure class.

Dinner Under Isa (☎ 1300 659 660; 19 Marian St; 3-course meal \$69; ☎ 5-8.30pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat) Don a hard hat, safety specs and head lamp and enjoy a three-course dinner in the crib room of the Hard Times mine. Mine tour and tall stories are included. The mine is licensed.

Getting There & Around

Macair (☎ 13 13 23) connects Mt Isa with Birdsville, Charleville and Normanton. See p375 for more flight information.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) has regular services to Townsville (\$129, 11½ hours),

Longreach (\$95, 8½ hours) and Brisbane (\$185, 26 hours).

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722) *Inlander* runs between Mt Isa and Townsville (see p376 for more information).

The following car-hire firms have desks at the airport: **Avis** (☎ 4743 3733), **Hertz** (☎ 4743 4142) and **Thrifty** (☎ 4743 2911). For a taxi, call ☎ 4743 2333.

MT ISA TO CHARLEVILLE

The shortest route to Longreach from Mt Isa means heading east along Barkly Hwy to the Landsborough Hwy, 14km east of Cloncurry. Here the Landsborough heads southeast, passing through McKinlay (91km), Kynuna (168km), Winton (339km) and eventually hitting Longreach (516km), Barcardine (621km) and Charleville (1020km).

McKinlay is a tiny settlement that would have been doomed to eternal insignificance had it not been used as a location in the amazingly successful movie *Crocodile Dundee*.

The **Walkabout Creek Hotel** (☎ 07-746 8424; Landsborough Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites \$23/25, s/d \$55/60; ☎ ☎) has film memorabilia and all the charm of a movie set. There are small and basic motel units a block west of the pub, or there's a camping ground out the back.

In **Kynuna**, there's a lot to like about the historic little **Blue Heeler Hotel** (☎ 07-476 8650; Landsborough Hwy, Kynuna; sites \$10, r \$45-75; ☎ ☎), from its walls covered with scrawled messages and signatures to its unquestionably essential surf life-saving club. Accommodation ranges from pub rooms to spotless motel units, and camp sites. The nearest beach may be almost 1000km away, but each April the Blue Heeler hosts a surf life-saving carnival.

The signposted turn-off to the waterholes of **Combo Conservation Park**, which Banjo Paterson is said to have visited in 1895 before he wrote 'Waltzing Matilda', is off the highway about 12km east of Kynuna.

Winton

☎ 07 / pop 3100

Something of an outback adventure theme park, Winton is heavy on the heritage and is sort of the Aussie version of visiting Tombstone, Arizona – delivering the cheesy but quintessential Wild West experience harking back to the pioneer days. Winton is a cattle- and sheep-raising centre. In the last decade its population has tripled!

Winton's biggest attraction is the **Waltzing Matilda Centre** (☎ 4657 1466; www.matildacentre.com.au; 50 Elderslie St; adult/child \$14/12; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), which doubles as the visitors centre. Here you can also pick up the Shin Plaster pass, which covers entry to the town's attractions for \$15 per person. There are a surprising number of exhibits here for a museum devoted to a song, including an indoor billabong complete with a squatter, troopers and a jolly swagman; a hologram display oozing cringe-inducing nationalism; and the **Jolly Swagman statue**, a tribute to the unknown swagmen who lie in unmarked graves in the area. The centre also houses the **Qantilla Pioneer Place**, which has a huge range of fascinating artefacts and displays on the founding of Qantas.

The **Royal Theatre** (☎ 4657 1296; 73 Elderslie St; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ screenings at 8pm Wed Apr-Sep), at the rear of the Wookatook Gift & Gem, is a wonderful open-air theatre with canvas-slung chairs, corrugated tin walls and a star-studded ceiling. It has a small museum in the projection room (admission \$2) and screens old classics.

Arno's Wall (Vindex St), behind the North Gregory Hotel, is Winton's quirkiest attraction – a 70m-long work-in-progress, featuring a huge range of household items, from televisions to motorcycles, ensnared in the mortar.

The annual **Bush Poetry Festival**, in July, attracts entrants from all over Australia, but Winton's major festival is the five-day **Outback Festival**, held every odd year during the September school holidays.

To nod off for the night, try heading to the **North Gregory Hotel** (☎ 1800 801 611, 4657 1375; 67 Elderslie St; dm \$22, s/d \$60/70, without bathroom \$33/44; ☎ ☎), a big, friendly country pub where 'Waltzing Matilda' allegedly was first performed on 6 April 1895, although the original building burnt down in 1900. It has dozens of comfortable, old-fashioned rooms upstairs, with clean shared facilities. There's also an excellent bistro (mains \$10 to \$20).

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) connects Winton with Brisbane (\$136, 19½ hours), Mt Isa (\$81, six hours) and Longreach (\$31, three hours).

Longreach

☎ 07 / pop 6200

This prosperous outback town was the home of Qantas early last century, but these days it's equally famous for the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame & Outback Heritage Centre, one

of outback Queensland's biggest attractions. Longreach's human population is vastly outnumbered by more than a million sheep, and there's a fair few cattle, too.

The **Visitors Information Centre** (☎ 4658 3555; 99 Eagle St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) is helpful.

SIGHTS

The excellent **Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame & Outback Heritage Centre** (☎ 4658 2166; www.outbackheritage.com.au; Landsborough Hwy; adult/child/family \$22.50/12/47; ☎ 9am-5pm) is housed in a beautifully conceived building, 2km east of town towards Barcardine. It was built as a tribute to the early explorers and stockmen, but now also encompasses several themed galleries covering Aboriginal culture, European exploration and pioneering settlers. Admission is valid for two days.

The **Qantas Founders Outback Museum** (☎ 4658 3737; www.qfom.com.au; Landsborough Hwy; adult/child/family \$18/10/40; ☎ 9am-5pm) houses a life-size replica of an Avro 504K, the first aircraft owned by the fledgling airline. Interactive multimedia and working displays tell the history of Qantas. Next door, the original 1921 Qantas hangar houses a mint-condition DH-61. Towering over everything is a bright and shiny **747-200B Jumbo** (adult/child/family \$14/8/27), which can be toured at additional cost.

TOURS

Longreach Outback Travel Centre (☎ 4658 1776; 115a Eagle St) Has a variety of tours, including a Longreach Lookabout tour (adult/child \$145/128) that takes in the town's sites and ends with a dinner cruise on the Thomson River.

Outback Aussie Tours (☎ 1300 787 890; 18 Swan St) Offers tours including a combined Winton day tour (adult/child \$150/80) that includes Carisbrooke Station and Lark Quarry.

SLEEPING & EATING

Old Time Cottage (☎ 4658 1550; fax 4658 3733; 158 Crane St; d \$85, per additional person \$10; ☎ ☎) A great choice for groups and families, this quaint little corrugated-iron cottage is set in an attractive garden. Fully furnished, the self-contained cottage sleeps up to five people.

Albert Park Motor Inn (☎ 1800 812 811, 4658 2411; Sir Hudson Fysh Memorial Dr; r from \$100; ☎ ☎) On the highway east of the centre, this good motel has spacious, four-star, well-appointed rooms, as well as pools and a spa. The motel's Oasis Restaurant (mains \$15 to \$30) has an elegant dining room and varied menu.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) connects Longreach with Winton (\$31, three hours), Brisbane (\$110, 17 hours) and Mt Isa (\$95, 8½ hours). Buses stop behind the **Longreach Outback Travel Centre** (☎ 4658 1776; 115a Eagle St).

Emerald Coaches (☎ 1800 28737, 4982 4444; www.emeraldcoaches.com.au) makes the twice-weekly run travelling to and from Rockhampton (\$84, 9½ hours). Buses stop at Outback Aussie Tours (p379).

Barcardine

☎ 07 / pop 1500

Barcardine (bar-call-din), at the junction of the Landsborough and Capricorn Hwys 108km east of Longreach, gained a place in Australian history in 1891 when it became the headquarters of a major shearers' strike. The confrontation led to the formation of the Australian Workers' Party, now the Australian Labor Party. The **Tree of Knowledge**, a ghost gum near the train station, was the organisers' meeting place and now stands as a monument to workers and their rights.

The **Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 4651 1724; Oak St) is next to the train station. The excellent **Australian Workers Heritage Centre** (☎ 4651 2422; www.australianworkersheritagecentre.com.au; Ash St; adult/child \$12/9; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) was built to commemorate the role of workers in forming Australian social, political and industrial movements. Set in landscaped gardens, the centre includes the Australian Bicentennial Theatre with displays tracing the history of the shearers' strike, as well as a schoolhouse, hospital and powerhouse.

A bit south of town, the **Ironbark Inn** (☎ 4651 2311; 115 Oak St; r from \$65; ☎) has clean, comfortable rooms set in native gardens. Its best feature, though, is the **3Ls Bar & Bistro** (mains \$15-20), a rustic open shed with wooden bench tables and stockmen's ropes and branding irons on the walls. It serves large steaks, pork chops and barramundi.

Barcardine's iconic iron-roofed, wooden-veranda pubs line Oak St and make a great display.

CHARLEVILLE

☎ 07 / pop 3500

In outback terms, Charleville is a veritable city and an oasis. It sits on the Warrego River, 760km west of Brisbane. The town was an

important centre for early explorers – Cobb & Co had their largest coach-making factory based here

The **Cosmos Centre** (☎ 4654 7771; www.cosmoscentre.com; adult/child/family \$17/11/39; ☎ 10am-6pm, night observatory variable hours) is 2km south of the centre, off Airport Dr. Here you can tour the night sky through high-powered telescopes with an expert guide. The 90-minute sessions start soon after sunset.

Southeast of the visitors centre, the **QPWS** (☎ 4654 1255; 1 Park St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) runs a captive breeding programme for endangered native species. You can see yellow-footed rock wallabies here, but best is the **Bilby Show** (Racecourse Complex, Partridge St; admission \$5; ☎ 6-7pm Sun, Mon, Wed & Fri Apr-Sep), which provides a fascinating insight into this rare nocturnal marsupial.

Dominating one of Charleville's main intersections, **Hotel Coronas** (☎ 4654 1022; 33 Wills St; r \$35-75; ☎) is a gracious old country pub. The magnificent preserved interior includes a huge public bar, leadlight windows, open fires and heritage rooms – try to grab one of these, as they are less bland than the on-site motel rooms. For lunch or dinner choose from the elegant dining room (mains \$15 to \$20) or the bar (mains \$9).

THE CHANNEL COUNTRY

It is tough country out in the remote and sparsely populated southwestern corner of Queensland, which borders the NT, South Australia (SA) and NSW. Rain hardly ever blesses this unforgiving area that takes its name from the myriad of channels crisscrossing it, but water from the summer monsoons further north pours in along the Georgina, Hamilton and Diamantina Rivers and Cooper Creek. The summer heat is unbearable, so a visit is best made in winter (May to September).

GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are no train or bus services in the remote and wild Channel Country. Please don't drive around here unless you know what you're doing. This is the sort of country where roads disappear, tracks look the same and it is very, very easy to get lost. In fact, it's required that you write your name, destination and expected date of arrival on a blackboard at the station where you start, so search and rescue services can come looking if you don't show up within a few days. Some roads from the

east and north to the fringes of the Channel Country are sealed, but between October and May even these can be cut off when dirt roads become quagmires. Visiting this area requires a sturdy vehicle (a 4WD if you want to get off the beaten track) with decent clearance. Always carry plenty of drinking water and petrol.

The main road through this area is the Diamantina Developmental Rd. It runs south from Mt Isa through Boulia to Bedourie, then east through Windorah and Quilpie to Charleville. It's a long and lonely 1340km, about two-thirds of which is sealed. Watch for kangaroos and wild camels on the roads, especially at the end of the day when the pavement is warm and inviting.

Mt Isa to Birdsville

It's around 300km of sealed road from Mt Isa south to Boulia, and the only facilities along the route are at **Dajarra**, which has a pub and a roadhouse.

BOULIA

☎ 07 / pop 300

The last outpost before heading into the mighty Simpson Desert, Boulia is a worthy diversion. Boulia is not only the last stop on the world's longest mail run – Australia Post's 3000km line between Port Augusta in South Australia and Boulia – it is also the self-proclaimed 'capital' of the Channel Country.

As if that weren't enough for a small town, Boulia also boasts a mysterious supernatural phenomenon known as the Min Min Light (an 'earthbound UFO' resembling car headlights that hovers a metre or so above the ground before vanishing and reappearing elsewhere). The **Min Min Encounter** (☎ 4746 3386; Herbert St; adult/child \$11/7.70; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) features sophisticated gadgetry, creative sets and eerie lighting in its hourly show, which attempts to convert the nonbelievers. The centre is well worth a visit, and it doubles as the town's tourist information centre.

If Boulia had a theme song surely it would be *Moonstones on the Soles of your Shoes* (sung to the tune of Paul Simon's *Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes*). While in Boulia you must pick up one of its famous moonstones as a souvenir – they are sold all over town. These beautiful stones have pyrite crystal centres that came from the bed of an inland sea that dried up in the area about 100 million years ago.

Boulia also lays claim to Australia's premier **camel racing** event held in mid-July.

The modern, spacious **Desert Sands Motel** (☎ 4746 3000; fax 4746 3040; Herbert St; s/d \$80/90; ☎) is the town's most indulgent accommodation option. The units come with tea- and coffee-making facilities.

The sealed Kennedy Developmental Rd runs east from Boulia, 369km to Winton. The **Middleton Hotel** (☎ /fax 4657 3980; Kennedy Developmental Rd; s/d \$45/55), 168km before Winton, is the only fuel stop en route. It serves meals daily and you can rent out simple dongas (small, transportable buildings widely used in the outback) without bathrooms.

BEDOURIE

☎ 07 / pop 120

From Boulia it's 200km of mainly unsealed road south to Bedourie, the administrative centre for the huge Diamantina Shire Council.

There's a caravan park and comfortable motel units at the **Simpson Desert Oasis** (☎ 4746 1291; fax 4746 1208; Herbert St; unpowered/power sites \$12/18, d \$100; ☎), which incorporates a fuel stop, supermarket and restaurant. The **Royal Hotel** (☎ 4746 1201; fax 4746 1101; Herbert St; s/d \$65/75; ☎), a charming adobe brick building built in 1880, has two motel units out the back.

Birdsville

☎ 07 / pop 120

Queensland's most remote settlement has novelty value on this merit alone, but for brownie points visit during September for one of Australia's most famous – and perhaps booziest – races. The big event is the annual **Birdsville Cup** horse races held the first weekend in September. It attracts up to 6500 racing and boozing enthusiasts from all over Australia – some years there are upwards of 300 aeroplanes parked in the dust outside Birdsville's only pub, which trucks in tens of thousands of cans of beer for the weekend carnival!

Don't miss the **Birdsville Working Museum** (☎ 4656 3259; Macdonald St; adult/child \$7/5; ☎ 8am-5pm Apr-Oct, tours at 9am, 11am & 3pm). Inside this big tin shed is one of the most impressive private museums in Australia, with a fascinating collection of droving gear, shearing equipment, wool presses, road signs and much more.

Another highlight is the **Blue Poles Gallery & Caravanserai Cafe** (☎ 4656 3099; www.birdsvillstudio.com.au; Graham St; mains \$17; ☎ 9am-6pm Sun-Thu, 9am-10pm

Fri, Sat & school holidays Apr–Nov), where you can inspect and buy outback art by exceptional local artist Wolfgang John and enjoy a good meal.

Dating back to 1884, the iconic **Birdsville Hotel** (☎ 4656 3244; www.theoutback.com.au; Adelaide St; r\$85–110; ♿) faces resolutely into the Simpson Desert, and is one of the most famous pubs in the country. Tastefully renovated, it has modern motel-style units out the back, and a good restaurant (mains \$15 to \$20) for lunch and dinner. Friday nights are busy thanks to happy hour and the weekly 'chook raffle'.

Birdsville Track

Driving the desolate 517km Birdsville Track is a wild adventure taking you to the ends of the earth. You don't need a 4WD to tackle one of Australia's favourite outback driving routes, as the track is smooth dirt. Still, this is hard, hard country out here, and if you're planning on making the trek south to Maree in South Australia you'll need a reliable vehicle and plenty of extra water, fuel and spare parts. If you're ready, you are in for the trip of a lifetime. At night, alone in the wilderness between the Simpson Desert to the west and Stuart's Stony Desert to the east, the stars in the velvet sky hang so low that it feels you could almost touch them.

The first stretch from Birdsville has two routes, but only the longer, more easterly Outside Track is open these days. It crosses sandy country at the edge of the desert. The trip can be done in two days from Birdsville with an overnight stop in Mungleranie station (population three), where you'll find fuel, food and a hotel to rest your throbbing head. The station is a lonely 313km from Birdsville.

Before heading out check in at the **Wirrarrri Centre** (☎ 07-4656 3300; www.diamantina.qld.gov.au; Billabong Blvd; ☎ 8.30am–6pm Mar–Oct, 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri Nov–Feb; ♿); you can send your mum a quick email, check on road conditions and let the staff know your expected arrival time in Maree – so they can send someone looking if you don't show up.

Simpson Desert National Park

The waterless Simpson Desert occupies a massive 200,000 sq km of central Australia, and stretches across the Queensland, NT and SA borders. The Queensland section, in the state's far southwestern corner, is protected as the 10,000-sq-km Simpson Desert National

Park, and is a remote, arid landscape of more than a thousand red sand dunes, spinifex and canegrass. This is the world's toughest ranching country. The land is so unyielding that the ranches have to be enormous to support themselves – one such place is estimated to be the size of Belgium.

Conventional cars can tackle the Birdsville Track reasonably easily, but the Simpson requires a 4WD and far more preparation. Crossings should only be tackled by parties of at least two 4WD vehicles, equipped with suitable communications to call for help if necessary. Alternatively, you can hire a satellite phone from **Birdsville police** (☎ 07-4656 3220) for \$23 per day, which can be returned to **Maree police** (☎ 08-8675 8346) in SA. Permits are required to traverse the park, and are available from the Birdsville **QPWS office** (☎ 07-4652 7333; cnr Billabong Blvd & Jardine St) or from the town's petrol stations. You will need to write your anticipated route and arrival time at your destination on the police blackboard, so help can be sent if you get lost – this is very, very rough country and should not be attempted by anyone without lots of outback driving experience.

For the park's SA sections, you need a separate permit, available through the **South Australian National Parks & Wildlife Service** (☎ 1800 816 078).

Birdsville to Charleville

The Birdsville Developmental Rd heads east from Birdsville, meeting the Diamantina Developmental Rd after 277km of rough gravel and sand. **Betoota** is the sole 'town' between Birdsville and Windorah, but there are no facilities so motorists have to carry enough fuel to cover the 395km distance.

Windorah is either very dry or very wet. The town's general store sells fuel and groceries. The **Western Star Hotel** (☎ 07-4656 3166; 15 Albert St; s/d pub rooms \$35/50, motel units \$85/95; ♿) has good pub rooms and motel units.

Quilpie is an opal-mining town and the railhead from which cattle are transported to the coast. It has a good range of facilities, including two pubs, a motel, a caravan park and several petrol stations. From here it's another 210km to Charleville.

South of Quilpie and west of Cunnamulla are the remote **Yowah Opal Fields** and the town of **Eulo**, which co-hosts the **World Lizard Racing Championships** with Cunnamulla in late August. **Thargomindah**, 130km west of Eulo, has a couple of motels and a guesthouse. **Noccundra**, another

145km further west, was once a busy little community. It now has just one hotel supplying basic accommodation, meals and fuel. If you have a 4WD you can continue west to Innamincka, in SA, on the Strzelecki Track, via the site of the famous **Dig Tree**, where Burke and Wills camped in their ill-fated 1860–61 expedition.

WHITSUNDAY COAST

The Whitsunday Coast is Australia's Tahiti – a hedonistic tropical playground where you can sail glossy azure seas, camp on pearly white beaches under a blanket of southern constellations and snorkel in the brilliantly clear turquoise water belonging to the Great Barrier Reef National Marine Park. Yes, the Whitsundays are a dreamy place with few flaws – bouts of stormy weather are about the worst we can think of.

Although the Whitsunday Islands steal the show, there are plenty of alternatives to sailing, swimming, snorkelling and sun-soaking along this stretch of coast. A healthy spread of national parks in the area provides tremendous opportunities for bushwalking, camping and platypus spotting. Then there's the partying: Airlie Beach is the gateway to the islands and chocked with restaurants, bars, clubs and heady good times.

MACKAY

☎ 07 / pop 80,000

The largest metropolitan area in the Whitsundays region is a lush, palm-lined city with streets that hum with a relaxed café and bar scene. Across the Pioneer River the constantly transforming marina has added a new dimension to the city, with a bevy of stylish residential, tourism and dining developments.

Mackay itself will likely bore you after a night, but the attractions to the west of town are phenomenal. The place is an excellent base for visiting Eungella National Park with its famous platypuses and the wilds of Finch Hatton Gorge.

Orientation & Information

The blue Pioneer River winds its way through Mackay with the town settled on its southern side. Victoria St is the main strip.

Mackay Visitor Information Centre (☎ 4952 2677; www.mackayregion.com; 320 Nebo Rd; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–

Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sun) is about 3km south of the centre, and there's also a **QPWS office** (☎ 4944 7800; fax 4944 7811; cnr Wood & River Sts).

Sights

Artspace Mackay (☎ 4957 1775; www.artspacemackay.com.au; admission free; Gordon St; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) is an excellent contemporary gallery, showcasing local and visiting works. Enquire about current events and activities or just browse the art before grazing at **foodspace** (☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sun), the in-house licensed café.

Mackay's centre is littered with some fine Art Deco buildings. Look up when you wander the streets as most of the façades are at their finest on the second storey. Noteworthy examples include the **Mackay Townhouse Motel** and the **Australian Hotel**, both on Victoria Street, and the **Ambassador Hotel** on Sydney Street. Pick up the free *Art Deco Mackay* leaflet from various hotels and restaurants around town.

Mackay's best beaches, **Blacks Beach**, **Eimeo** and **Bucasia**, are about 16km north of town.

Illawong Fauna Sanctuary (☎ 4959 1777; adult/child \$16/10, half-day tours \$60; ☎ 9am–6.30pm) is a sanctuary for sick animals and an excellent opportunity to witness native wildlife. Crocodile feeding is at 2.30pm (not to be missed), and koalas are fed at 5.15pm. It's about 43km west of Mackay, but tours include transfers. There's also the option of dinner, bed and breakfast at the sanctuary's **homestay** (per person \$60; ♿).

Tours

Beyond Mackay's sugar-cane sea there are superb rainforest experiences and opportunities for platypus spotting.

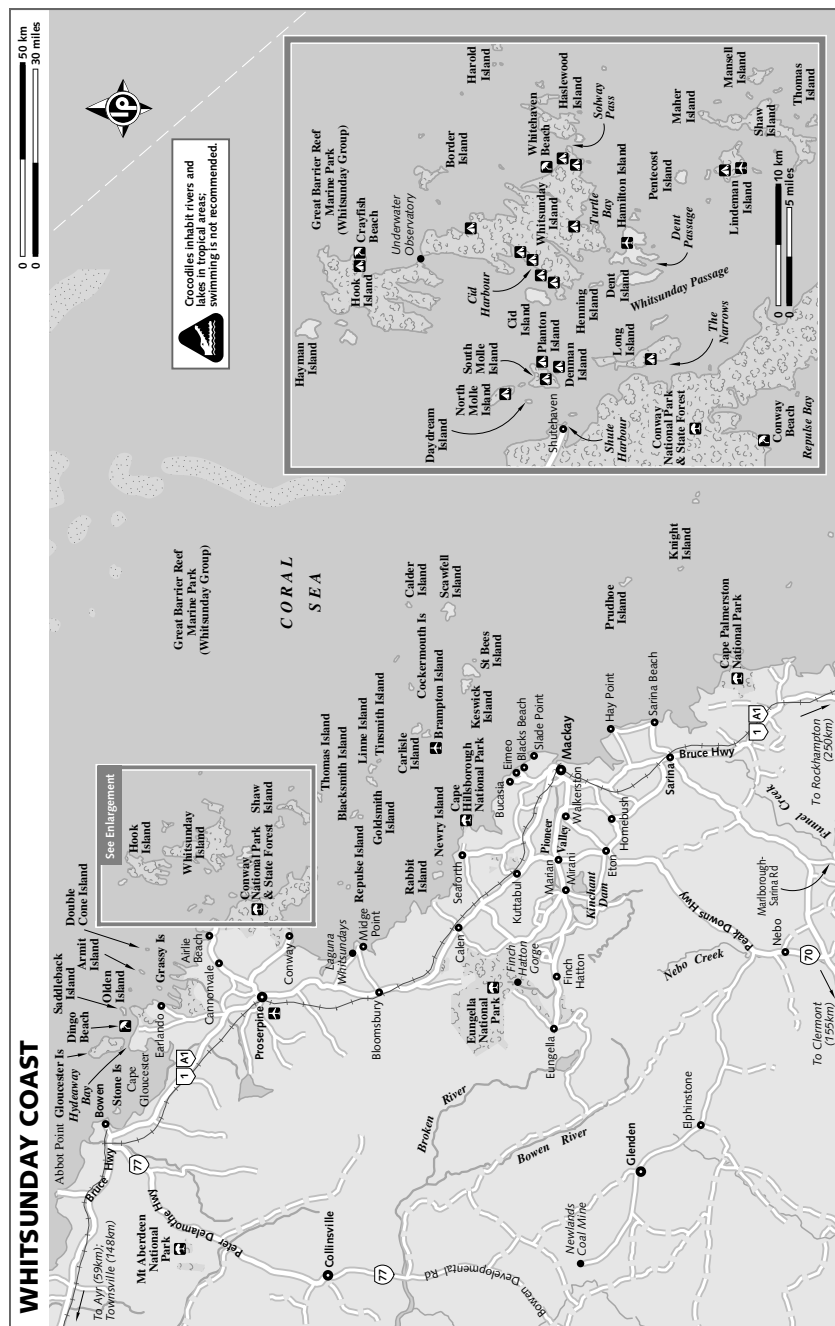
Jungle Johno Tours (☎ 4951 3728; larrikin@mackay.net.au; adult/child/YHA member \$75/40/70) Runs recommended day trips to Eungella National Park, including pick-up, morning tea and lunch.

Reeforest Adventure Tours (☎ 1800 500 353; www.reeforest.com; adult/child/family incl lunch \$75/65/225) Explores Finch Hatton Gorge and visits the platypuses of Broken River.

Scenic Flights (Aviation Training & Transport; ☎ 4951 4300; Casey Ave) Half-hour flights from \$75 per person.

Sleeping BUDGET

Gecko's Rest (☎ 4944 1230; www.geckosrest.com.au; 34 Sydney St; dm/d \$21/48; ♿ ♿) In a cool old 1920s building on the main drag, Gecko's has a funky



paint job, huge communal kitchen and a great rooftop deck. The lack of private bathrooms in the doubles is made up for by big showers with private changing areas in the clean communal bathrooms. Other pluses are a game room, a TV lounge and central air-con cool enough to take the heat out of the steamiest day. All dorms are spacious, but ask for one with a king single bed. These are the same price, but the beds are larger and not bunked.

Larrikin Lodge (☎ 4951 3728; fax 4957 2978; 32 Peel St; dm/tw/f \$21/46/72; ☎ 7am-2pm & 5-8.30pm) If Gecko's is full, this small YHA-associated hostel in an airy, high-ceilinged timber house is another good choice. It is clean, quiet and friendly. The owners operate Jungle Johnno tours (p383) and will pick you up from the bus terminal if you ring during office hours.

Ambassador Hotel (☎ 4953 3233; www.ambassadorhotel.net.au; 2 Sydney St; r \$45-65; ☎) Right in the centre, this historic landmark is the best midrange option in Mackay. The rooms are bare-bones, but excellent value and the beds are pretty comfortable. They vary in price depending on whether or not you want a full en suite or just a shower. It is quite a good deal, especially if you don't feel like sleeping at the backpackers and want access to the extremely slick and comfortable Bridge's bar and restaurant downstairs.

Ocean International (☎ 1800 635 104, 4957 2044; www.ocean-international.com.au; 1 Bridge Rd, Illawong Beach; d \$150-250; ☎) If you are willing to stay a bit out of town, this place is excellent value and chock full of amenities. On the beach, close to the airport and only 3km south of the centre, the four-star complex overlooks Sandringham Bay and the Coral Sea. There's an excellent restaurant and cocktail bar, a spa and sauna, a business centre, and harbour or airport transfer service.

Eating

Mackay has options in the city centre and also at its marina just over the harbour bridge – though you'll need a car to get there.

Bridge's Restaurant (Ambassador Hotel; ☎ 4953 3233; 2 Sydney St; lunch \$7-13, dinner \$12-29; ☎) This super-slick restaurant-bar inside the Ambassador Hotel has got soul. Not only is it quite comfortable (cosy booths and overstuffed couches), but it also showcases live jazz. The gourmet fusion menu includes fancy finger food like camembert-and-prosciutto-stuffed Moreton Bay bugs,

juicy steaks and vegetarian options. The budget conscious should stop by at lunch. The same mains are served for about half the price and you can also order off the \$7 home-style lunch menu (think meatloaf, corned beef and Indian chicken).

Angelo's on the Marina (☎ 4955 5600; Mackay Marina, Mulherin Dr; mains \$9-25) Head to Angela's to start your day. This big, airy, boxy restaurant has large windows overlooking the marina, as well as alfresco seating in the grass, and offers lots of hearty brekkies. At lunch and dinner choose from an extensive range of pasta and a mouth-watering Mediterranean menu. It's fully licensed, very lively after dark and there's a free courtesy bus for parties of six or more people, so join a group and enjoy. *Alla tua salute!*

Sorbello's (☎ 4957 8300; 1668 Victoria St; mains \$10-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) A long-established Italian restaurant drawing a steady crowd of hungry diners to its casual city location. There is a giant selection of reasonably priced pasta and pizzas, as well as many cakes and ice creams to choose from at the front counter.

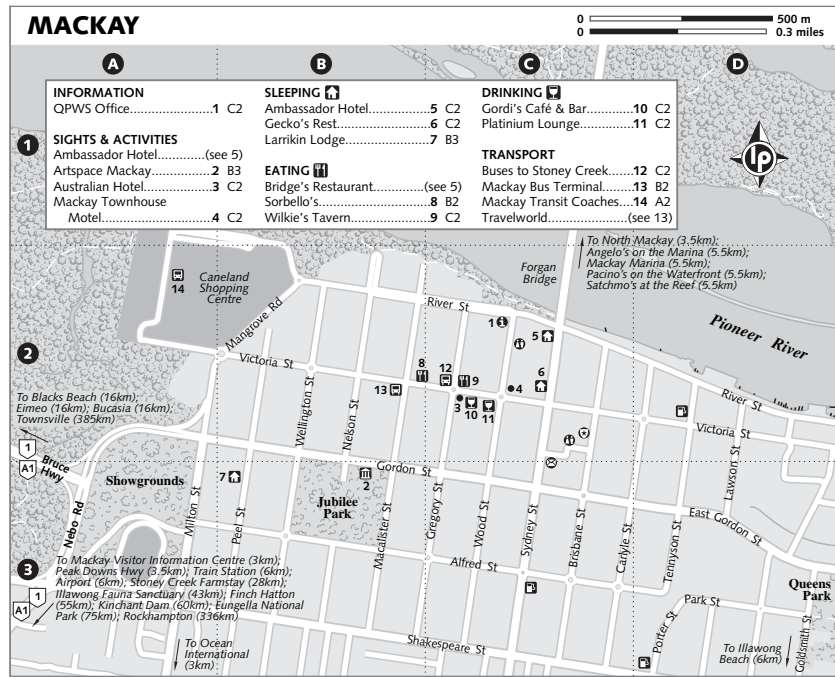
Wilkie's Tavern (☎ 4957 2241; cnr Victoria & Gregory Sts; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Recently renovated Wilkie's is quite a posh restaurant and lounge. Eat inside the lounge with dark red walls or on the breezy balcony – although it can sound like an aviary up here with all the parrots chirping from nearby trees. A small but solid menu offers fresh fish, oysters and meats as well as a large selection of starters – ask nicely and the chef may be able to turn these into a main meal.

Pacino's on the Waterfront (☎ 4957 8131; Mackay Harbour, Mulherin Dr; mains \$15-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This romantic Mediterranean restaurant and bar is nestled among the warehouses of the harbour and sports a breezy alfresco deck overlooking the water. Seafood is the main fare, served in abundant and tasty quantities, but pasta and pizza are also prevalent.

Drinking & Entertainment

Gordi's Café & Bar (☎ 4951 2611; 85 Victoria St) It may be a café by day, but the open windows facing Mackay's main drag provide the perfect vantage point to enjoy a cold beer. Things get busier once evening kicks in with live music and DJs upstairs (entry \$5).

Satchmo's at the Reef (☎ 4955 6055; Mulherin Dr, Mackay Harbour) Classy Satchmo's dishes up wine, tapas and style, but lends itself to a relaxed



crowd. Boaters join other locals and tourists here and live music is a regular feature on Sunday afternoon.

Platinum Lounge (☎ 4957 2220; 83 Victoria St) On the 1st floor above the corner of Victoria and Wood Sts, the Platinum Lounge is a good place to unwind and to converse without shouting. Wednesday and Thursday nights are karaoke nights.

Getting There & Away

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) all service Mackay. Flights include Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville and Sydney. The airport is 5km south of the city centre.

Travelworld (☎ 4944 2144; roseh@mktyworld.com.au; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7am-4pm Sat) handles all transport arrangements and is located at the **Mackay Bus Terminal** (cnr Victoria & Macallister Sts), where a 24-hour café also sells bus tickets. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) connect Mackay with Cairns (\$119, 12 hours), Townsville (\$69, six hours), Airlie Beach (\$29, two hours) and Brisbane (\$139, 16 hours).

Queensland Rail (☎ 1300 131 722) *Tilt Train* connects Mackay with Brisbane (\$220, 12½ hours), Townsville (\$105, 5½ hours) and Cairns (\$175, 12 hours). The slower *Sunlander* does the same: Brisbane (economy seat/sleeper \$150/205, 17 hours), Townsville (economy seat/sleeper \$125/125, 6½ hours) and Cairns (\$155/175, 12½ hours). The train station is at Paget, 5km south of the city centre.

Getting Around

Avis (☎ 4951 1266), **Budget** (☎ 4951 1400) and **Hertz** (☎ 4951 3334) have counters at the airport.

Mackay Transit Coaches (☎ 4957 3330) operates local buses from two bus stops in town: at the back of Canelands Shopping Centre, and from the corner of Victoria and Gregory Sts. The visitor information centres have timetables.

For a taxi, call **Mackay Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08). Trips to the airport, marina or train station cost about \$20.

AROUND MACKAY

You're missing a great country Queensland experience if you don't spend at least a couple of days enjoying the sights west of Mackay.

Pioneer Valley

The Eungella Rd takes you through fertile Pioneer Valley to Marian, where you can turn off to **Kinchant Dam** and the fishing fraternity's **Kinchant Waters Leisure Resort** (☎ 07-4954 1453; unpowered/powered sites \$10/24, cabins \$75). This super-casual resort is ideal for families, with canoes and aqua bikes for hire and oodles of room. To get here, head out of Mackay 10km on the Peak Downs Hwy to the Eungella Rd turn-off then drive 29km along the Eungella Rd to Marian, take the Eton turn-off, driving 10km to North Eton. Turn right at Kinchant Dam Rd by the large chimney. It's 8km to the dam.

Next stop is **Finch Hatton Gorge**. The turn-off is 1.5km before the township of Finch Hatton. It is 9km into the gorge and the last 3km are on good, unsealed roads, but after heavy rain creek crossings make access difficult or impossible. Here you can try **Forest Flying** (☎ 07-4958 3359; www.forestflying.com; rides \$45). Flyers whiz around the rainforest canopy sitting in a harness attached to a 340m-long cable. Keep your eyes peeled for rainforest critters as you brush through palm leaves and swing by the fruit-bat colony (August to May). Definitely book ahead.

More tranquil pursuits at the gorge include a 1.6km rainforest walk to a fantastic swimming hole beneath **Araluen Falls**, or a 2.6km walking trail to the **Wheel of Fire Falls**, and picnics at the car park. You can stay at **Finch Hatton Gorge Cabins** (☎ 07-4958 3281; sites per person \$8, dm/d \$15/80; ☎), set in enchanting subtropical surroundings with a nearby creek.

A further 20km and you reach beautiful **Eungella National Park** (*young-gulla*), meaning 'land of clouds'. Eungella has the oldest and longest stretch of subtropical rainforest in Australia and has been cut off from other rainforest areas for roughly 30,000 years. It breeds weird beasties that exist nowhere else, such as the Eungella gastric brooding frog, which incubates its eggs in its stomach and gives birth by spitting out the tadpoles!

There are excellent rainforest walks signposted on the 5km road between Eungella township and Broken River, but it's the shy platypus you'll hope to see. They live at pretty **Broken River**. You can be fairly sure of seeing platypuses most days from the viewing platform near the bridge. The best times are immediately after dawn and at dusk, but you must be patient, still and silent. Rangers lead

night walks that reveal the park's party animals; ask at the QPWS office.

Broken River Mountain Retreat (☎ 07-4958 4528; fax 4958 4564; d \$80-125; ☎) has a range of lovely cedar cabins, a wood-finished lounge and the Platypus Lodge Restaurant & Bar (mains \$20 to \$25). There's also the lovely **QPWS Fern Flat Camping Ground** (per person/family \$4/16), run on a first-come, first-served basis, near the **QPWS office** (☎ 07-4958 4552; ☎ 8am-4pm) and kiosk.

Buses don't cover Finch Hatton or Eungella. Hire a car; you won't be sorry.

AIRLIE BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 5000

The gateway to the Whitsunday Islands, Airlie defies its relatively small size by humming constantly to the tune of a party somewhere. Days simmer with buzzing beer gardens before bubbling into jumping festivities in the glut of bars, clubs, pubs and cafés. Backpackers tripping into town to embark on the mandatory Whitsunday cruise make the most of it, but yachties and local holidaymakers also congregate here. All this activity takes place on the main drag, Shute Harbour Rd. Airlie boasts an excellent range of accommodation, and a glorious artificial lagoon, right on the foreshore.

Information

Internet Centre (346 Shute Harbour Rd; per hr \$2.50) Internet access.

QPWS (☎ 4946 7022; fax 4946 7023; cnr Shute Harbour & Mandalay Rds; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) It has lots of island camping info.

Whitsunday Bookings (☎ 4948 2201; www.whitsundaybookings.com.au; Shop 1, 346 Shute Harbour Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm) Run by the effusive Tina, this is the best travel agency in Airlie, and where to head for unbiased advice on sailing, snorkelling and camping the Whitsundays and Great Barrier Reef. Tina will explain the different boats in fabulous detail, allowing you to really figure out what type of trip you want to take, and won't book you on a sail if the weather looks shoddy.

Whitsunday Visitor Information Centre (☎ 1800 801 252; www.whitsundaytourism.com; Bruce Hwy, Proserpine; ☎ 10am-6pm)

Activities

Sailing opportunities are plentiful (see p394 for details), but most trips visit a fringing reef rather than the main Great Barrier Reef as this is quite far offshore from Airlie. If you have your heart set on snorkelling along the

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Larger than the Great Wall of China and the only living thing visible from space, the Great Barrier Reef is one of the seven wonders of the natural world. The spectacular kaleidoscope of colour stretches along the Queensland seaboard from south of the tropic of Capricorn to Torres Strait, south of New Guinea. It's the planet's biggest reef system, where 2900 separate reefs form an outer ribbon parallel to the coast. One BBC TV programme rated it second only to the Grand Canyon on a list of 50 Places To See Before You Die. Did we mention it's pretty ace?

At a Glance

Length: 2300km, from north of Bundaberg to Torres Strait

Width: 80km at its broadest

Distance from shore: 300km in the south, 30km in the north

Age: estimated between 600,000 and 18 million years old (contentious)

From Little Polyps, Mighty Reefs Grow

An industrious family of tiny animals, the coral polyp is responsible for creating the Great Barrier Reef and other reefs. All corals are primitive hollow sacs with tentacles on the top, but it is the hard corals that are the architects and builders. These corals excrete a small amount of limestone as an outer skeleton that protects and supports their soft bodies. As polyps die and new ones grow on top, their billions of skeletons cement together into an ever-growing natural bulwark.

Different polyps form varying structures, from staghorn and brain patterns to flat plate or table corals. However, they all need sunlight, so few grow deeper than 30m below the surface. The coral's skeletons are white, while the reef's kaleidoscopic colours come from the living polyps.

One of the most spectacular sights on the Great Barrier Reef occurs for a few nights after a full moon in late spring or early summer, when vast numbers of corals spawn. With tiny bundles of sperm and eggs visible to the naked eye, the event resembles a gigantic underwater snowstorm.

Did You Know?

Marine environments, including coral reefs, demonstrate the greatest biodiversity of any ecosystems on earth – much more so than rainforests. The Great Barrier Reef is home to marine mammals such as whales, dolphins and dugongs (sea cows). With new varieties still being found, its flora and fauna also includes:

- 1500 species of fish
- 400 types of coral
- 4000 breeds of clams and other molluscs
- 800 echinoderms, including sea cucumbers
- 500 varieties of seaweed
- 200 bird species
- 1500 different sponges
- six types of turtle.

Sorting the Reef from the Cays

Reefs fall into three categories: barrier or ribbon reefs, platform reefs and fringing reefs.

The barrier reef proper lies on the outer, seaward edge of the reef system, lining the edge of the continental shelf in an often-unbroken formation.

Platform reefs grow on the land side of these barrier reefs and often support coral cay islands. These occur when the reef grows above sea level; dead coral is ground down by water action to form sand, and sometimes vegetation takes root. Many famous islands – eg Green Island near Cairns, Heron Island off Gladstone and Lady Musgrave Island north of Bundaberg – are coral cays.

Closer to shore you'll find fringing reefs surrounding the hillier, continental islands. Great Keppel, most of the Whitsundays, Hinchinbrook and Dunk, for example, were once the peaks of mainland coastal ranges, but rising sea levels submerged most of these mountains, leaving only the tips exposed. Today these are good places to spot coral close to the beach. Fringing reefs also border the mainland in places, such as near Bundaberg.

Taking the Temperature of the Barrier Reef

I hear the Great Barrier Reef has been under threat lately. What's the story? Coral polyps need a water temperature of 17.5 to 28°C to grow and can't tolerate too much sediment. There are three main threats to the reef: land-based pollutants, over-fishing and global warming. Global warming causes parts of the world's oceans to overheat, and the rise in temperature bleaches the reef. As the brightly coloured living polyps die, only the white skeletons remain. Pollution has also poisoned some coral, plus some questions persist about the long-term effects of crown-of-thorns starfish.

Some environmentalists and scientists predict that under current conditions, coral cover within the reef may be reduced to less than 5% by 2050. Because all the living organisms in the reef are symbiotic, the diverse ecosystem we see today may be gone forever.

What's being done? Fortunately it's not all doom and gloom. In July 2004, the Australian Government introduced new laws that increased 'no-take' zones, where it is forbidden to remove animal or plant life (eg no fishing), to 33.33% of the reef (it was previously only 4.5%). The Queensland Government also unveiled the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park, a state park encompassing the actual coastline from just north of Bundaberg to the tip of Cape York – a total of 3600km. And collectively the Federal and Queensland governments have launched a Reef Water Quality Protection Plan in an effort to deal with land-based pollutants. Although it will be several years before the success of these plans can be measured, they are certainly a huge step towards tackling the human-induced threats to the reef. On a micro level, the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority** (☎ 07-4750 0700; Reef HQ bldg, 2-68 Flinders St East, Townsville) looks after the welfare of most of the reef. It monitors bleaching and other problems and works to enforce the reef's 'no-take' zones.

Is there any way I can help? Sure. Take all litter with you, even biodegradable material like apple cores. Admire, but don't touch or harass, marine animals and be aware that if you touch or walk on coral you'll damage it (it can also create some very nasty cuts).

What's the best way to see some coral? Obviously, snorkelling and diving will get you up close and personal. However, you can also view fish and coral from a glass-bottomed boat, a semi-submersible boat or an 'underwater observatory'. Tour operators are listed throughout this book. You can also ask the Marine Park Authority for advice, or visit its Reef HQ aquarium in Townsville (p399) to see a living coral reef without leaving dry land.

And what wildlife can I realistically hope to see? Apart from all the psychedelically patterned tropical fish, there's the chance to swim with manta rays, squid, turtles and more.

Any creatures to beware of? There's nothing to be too alarmed about, but make sure you avoid scorpion fish, stonefish and jellyfish (see the boxed text, p372). No reef shark has ever attacked a diver, and while sea snakes are venomous, their fangs are at the back of their mouths, making them of little threat to humans.

Well, that's reassuring and it all sounds quite wonderful, so where do I go? It's said you could dive here every day of your life and still not see the entire Great Barrier Reef. Individual areas vary from time to time, depending on the weather or any recent damage, but places to start include:

- Cairns – the most common choice, so rather over-trafficked (p425)
- Cape Tribulation – a couple of small operators have started capitalising on close proximity to the reef; a good launching pad for those wanting to experience snorkelling trips without the hordes (p451)
- Fitzroy Reef Lagoon – untouched for years, tourist numbers are still limited (p369)
- Heron Island – popular diving resort where it's wise to book ahead (p368)
- Lady Elliot Island – shipwrecks and gorgeous coral (p367)
- Lizard Island – superb diving at the Cod Hole (p459)
- Port Douglas – gateway to the Low Isles and the Agincourt Reefs (p447)
- *Yongala* shipwreck – one of Australia's best, off Townsville (p400).

For more information, see Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkelling Australia's Great Barrier Reef*.

to guarantee a restful sleep. The owners are friendly and full of local tips.

Airlie Waterfront B&B (☎ 4946 7631; www.airliewaterfrontbnb.com.au; cnr Broadwater Ave & Mazlin St; r from \$239; 🏠) Superbly presented and opulently furnished with antiques, this is a lovely relaxing selection still close to all the action. Unwind in one of two double rooms that feature their own private spas.

Also recommended:

Airlie Beach Motor Lodge (☎ 1800 810 925, 4946 6418; www.airliebeachmotorlodge.com.au; 6 Lamond St; d from \$116; 🏠 🚗 🚰) A quiet motel just a short walk from Shute Harbour Rd.

Whitehaven Beachfront Holiday Units (☎ 4946 5710; whitehavenunits@wilpat.com.au; 285 Shute Harbour Rd; r from \$120; 🏠) Clean and cosy, centrally located self-contained studio apartments with beachfront and lagoon access.

CAMPING

Island Gateway Holiday Resort (☎ 4946 6228; www.islandgateway.com.au; Shute Harbour Rd, Jubilee Pocket; unpowered/power sites \$24/30, cabins \$65-135; 🏠 🚗 🚰) has shady sites and cabins 1.5km from town, while **Flametree Tourist Village** (☎ 4946 9388; www.flametreevillage.com.au; Shute Harbour Rd; unpowered/power sites \$19/25, cabins from \$66; 🏠 🚗 🚰) is in a lovely, bird-filled ecological sanctuary, bordering a national park.

Eating

Some of Airlie's best eateries are tucked into hotels and B&Bs. The following are just a sampling; browse Shute Harbour Rd and the streets around it for dozens more.

Extreme Bean Espresso Bar (☎ 4948 2283; 346 Shute Harbour Rd; coffee \$4-5, mains \$8-15; 🍳 breakfast & lunch) Airlie's favourite coffee shop serves the bean any way you please, although our favourite is the frappé, which comes in a variety of flavours including a yummy vanilla. If you're in the mood for food, try the eggs Benedict (part of an all-day big breakfast) or one of the specials scrawled on the blackboard – everything is made with local produce and herbs. You can grab a current newspaper from the rack and dine in, or order your drink and muffin to go.

Village Deli (☎ 4964 1121; 351 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$10-15; 🍳 8am-5.30pm) Our favourite deli in Airlie serves delicious overstuffed sandwiches, mixed salads, fabulous coffee (and equally great chai) and some kick-arse light meals (like perfectly grilled barramundi that tastes beyond heavenly) in casual alfresco

(but covered) café environs. Come early as the place is popular enough to run out of many options early on – everything is freshly made each day. Takeaway provisions and picnic boxes are a speciality.

Déjà Vue (☎ 4948 4309; Waters Edge Resort, 4 Golden Orchid Dr; lunch \$15-25, dinner \$25-40; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This perennial favourite recently moved to a gorgeous hill-top location at the swanky Water's Edge Resort. In an airy Polynesian-style thatched building with a romantic (and nearly always full) patio overlooking an infinity pool, the new Déjà Vue is cooler than ever. The menu promises modern interpretations of Thai, Mediterranean, Indian and others, and the execution and presentation is faultless. The warm Indian lamb rubbed in dry spices is sensational. Book ahead for alfresco dinner dining amid tiki torches, candles and faraway ocean views. Sunday brunch is a must. The eight-course meal (just \$31.50) starts at noon and is accompanied by live music and champagne – it's spread out over a few hours to give your belly time to rest.

Capers at the Beach Bar & Grill (☎ 4964 1777; Airlie Beachfront Hotel, the Esplanade; mains \$15-30) Matthew McConnaghey and Kate Hudson put this place on the global map in 2007 when they spent a boozy day eating and partying at the hotel lounge and grill. It's a big boxy room that's at once informal and formal – think plump couches around tables with white linen. The patio has water views. The menu features lots of fresh seafood along with steaks, cheese and a mouth-watering array of desserts. It's won its share of local awards for food and service.

Our pick OnAqua Restaurant & Bar (☎ 4948 2782; Waterfront Whitsunday B&B, 438 Shute Harbour Rd; mains \$20-30; 🍷 lunch & dinner) By candlelight, murmurs of conversations resolve into a soothing chant as tastebuds tango at this small and intimate restaurant overlooking a sapphire-blue pool and the Coral Sea beyond. To describe the menu here as simply food is an injustice. This is gastro *par excellence*, a multidish journey through modern Australian cuisine. Service is efficiently attentive but unobtrusive – just enough space between courses to pause for savouring and superlatives. OnAqua oozes taste in more ways than one but is not pretentious.

Armada Lounge Bar (☎ 4948 1600; 350 Shute Harbour Rd; 🍷 from 6pm) You can dine upstairs and outdoors under a rippling canopy at smooth and classy Armada, a big city lounge with loads of

sophisticated drinks as well as sublime meals to wash them down. There is a sultry, stylish mix of Japanese and Balinese décor, and dim lighting sets a romantic vibe. Food is well presented and flavour packed, and the menu offers everything from kangaroo to barramundi to plenty of options for vegetarians.

Also recommended:

Airlie Supermarket (277 Shute Harbour Rd) For self-caterers.

Cappa's Cake & Ale (☎ 4946 5033; Pavilion Arcade; mains \$6-20) Tucked in alley behind Shute Harbour Rd in central Airlie, it has heaps of breakfast options, real bagels and great sandwiches and cocktails.

Drinking & Entertainment

Airlie has no shortage of places to cut loose. Besides the places listed below, the backpacker crowd gravitates towards mega-bars Morocco and Beaches, both on Shute Harbour Rd.

Mama Africa's (☎ 4948 0438; 263 Shute Harbour Rd) It's a shame this club, next to Panache on the Beach restaurant, doesn't open earlier; it's such a cool spot to just chill out. With its zebra-striped floor, tribal motifs, kick-back lounge chairs and a vibe that taps straight into your pulse, it's no wonder Mama's rocks.

Paddy Shenanigans (☎ 4946 5055; 366 Shute Harbour Rd) Another favourite on the backpacker party circuit, Paddy Shenanigans serves drunken revellers well into the night. Another heartthrob Matthew McConnaghey had his own shenanigans here in 2007 when he spent a night dirty dancing with other travellers (he was in town filming the adventure flick *Fool's Gold*).

Magnum's (☎ 4946 6266; Shute Harbour Rd) Attached to the hostel, this sizable pub offers punters a sea of outdoor seating at which they happily consume vast amounts of alcohol. The crowd is generally young and spirited and it's a great place to meet other travellers.

Getting There & Around

The closest major airports are at Proserpine and on Hamilton Island. The small **Whitsunday airport** (☎ 4946 9933) is about 6km southeast of town; see right for flight details.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have bus connections to Brisbane (\$155, 18 hours), Mackay (\$29, 2½ hours), Townsville (\$54, five hours) and Cairns (\$95, 11 hours). **Con-X-ion** (☎ 1300 308 718; www.con-x-ion.com; adult/child one way \$50/26) connects Mackay airport and Mackay bus terminal with

Airlie Beach twice a day. The long-distance bus terminal is just off the Esplanade.

Locally, **Whitsunday Transit** (☎ 4946 1800) connects Proserpine (Proserpine Airport), Cannonvale, Abel Point, Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. Buses operate from 6am to 10.30pm and stop along Shute Harbour Rd.

There are car rental companies are along Shute Harbour Rd. Try **Airlie Beach Budget Autos** (☎ 4948 0300; 285 Shute Harbour Rd).

WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS

Nearly every outdoor-loving Australian dreams of soaking up the rays and reef from the deck of a yacht cruising the Whitsundays' aqua waters; luckily there are about 60 companies, along with a number of private charters, ready to make your dream come true (see p394). The blue-green waterways surrounding these islands are part of a marine park and fall within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area that stretches from Cape York in the north to Bundaberg in the south. We're all responsible for preserving this natural wonderland for generations to enjoy, so you may kiss the fish if you can catch them, but don't feed them, and please don't pet the coral.

The Whitsundays is a drowned landscape – these continental islands are the tips of mountains fringed with coral. The Great Barrier Reef is at least 60km from the mainland. There are more than 90 islands, most of which are uninhabited.

All but four of the islands are predominantly or completely national park, but most visitors come to stay at the resorts scattered throughout the archipelago, where cheap package holidays can be booked in advance.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Jetstar (☎ 13 15 38) connects Hamilton Island with Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) flies there from Cairns.

Hamilton and Lindeman islands have airports. **Island Air Taxis** (☎ 4946 9933; Shute Harbour Rd; 🍷 7.45am-5.30pm) offers flights to both Hamilton and Lindeman Islands (\$60 one way per adult from Airlie Beach). **Air Whitsunday Seaplanes** (☎ 4946 9111) flies from Airlie Beach to Daydream, Long and South Molle Islands for \$450 per flight. You can also fly direct to Hamilton Island from Brisbane, Cairns, Sydney and Melbourne – it is also one of the airport options available with the Aussie Airpass from Qantas, which makes getting to the Whitsundays'

SAILING THE WHITSUNDAYS

When the weather is cooperating, sailing in the Whitsundays can be about as dreamy as it gets. What is not so dreamy is figuring out which boat to sail. There is a bamboozling array of sailing tours that supply professional crews and catering. Walk down Airlie's main drag and you'll be assaulted by signed specials: 'Two-night sailing trips just \$179, includes free dive!' Don't book the first thing you see, however. It's better to spend a little time with an unbiased travel agency and figure out what kind of boat best fits your needs and budgets. In this industry, the adage 'you get what you pay for' fits like a glove and price is usually a good indication of quality. Cheaper companies generally have crowded boats, bland food and cramped quarters. Unfortunately no matter what price bracket you go with, bed bugs can be a reality.

The usual package is three days/two nights – really just two days as trips depart in the afternoon of the first day and return early on the third.

Most companies offer a considerably lower stand-by rate for last minute bookings, so it's actually best not to book ahead unless you have your heart set on a particular boat and date.

Be sure to check the weather before you commit. An honest travel agency shouldn't book you on a trip if they know it's going to rain for days, but it's best to do your own research just in case. This author spent three miserable rainy days on a ship because she didn't take her own advice. In the summer it is common to get two or three good days followed by an afternoon of thunderstorms and rain through the night (although it usually clears by the morning). If a storm system settles over the islands, however, rain can last for days.

There are nearly 60 sailing operators in Airlie Beach alone, but only six actually visit the Great Barrier Reef itself. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as most vessels follow the fringing reef and Whitsunday Islands hopping route, which is pretty spectacular in its own right. Plus snorkelling along the fringing reef is as good, if not better (the fish are confined to a smaller space), than the real thing. Divers not able to visit the main reef elsewhere may want to book one of the trips visiting Bait Reef – you just can't match the Great Barrier Reef's coral and tunnels. Reaching Bait Reef requires 1½ hours of sailing across open water, which can make for really rough going if the winds are blowing. Definitely take seasickness tablets. Boats won't make the trip if it's too windy, so even booking a vessel that travels out to the main reef isn't a 100% guarantee that you'll get there.

Once you've figured out what boat you'd like to sail on, you'll need to book through a travel agency like **Whitsunday Bookings** (☎ 4948 2201; www.whitsundaybookings.com.au; Shop 1, 346 Shute Harbour Rd) or a management company like **Oz Adventure Sailing** (☎ 1800 359 554; www.aussiesailing.com.au). Both can sell berths on most vessels and will offer the same stand-by rates.

Expect to pay about \$50 more than the prices quoted below on reef taxes and required stinger suit rentals.

- **Avatar** (2-night trips \$380-459) This 18m beauty carries 26 passengers and has huge amounts of deck space for sunbathing. The only negative is sleeping can be a bit tight. The Avatar has a reputation as an upmarket singles boat that's lots of fun. Choose from a shared berth or camping ashore one of the Whitsunday islands – tents provided.
- **Pride of Airlie** (2-night trips \$300) The original party boat, the *Pride of Airlie* is still exactly that: a raucous booze cruise popular with young backpackers. It carries 70 people and is good if you want to party but suffer from seasickness – both nights are spent on land, you sleep in dorms at a hostel on South Molle Island.
- **Tallarook 3** (2-night trips from \$179) This boat company has the monopoly on cheap backpacker sailing trips, which is why we mention them, but we've gotten numerous complaints about the quality of the trips – overcrowded in a small boat. Unless you are on a super-tight budget it's best to upgrade to a better ship.
- **Tall Ship Defender** (www.australiantallships.com; overnight trips up to \$300) Trips are for one night, but they depart at 9.30am and don't return until 4.30pm the following day so you actually get nearly as much sailing as the two-night trips. With prices often hovering around \$279, the Tall Ship is nearly as cheap as the *Tallarook* and much better quality. Built in 1896, the 35m-long Tall Ship carries just 27 passengers and has lots of space.

super-convenient when you are on a tight schedule.

Fantasea Ferries (☎ 07-4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au) has return fares to Hamilton Island or Daydream Island (adult/child \$60/30), and Long Island or South Molle Island (\$44/22) via high-speed catamaran – you can buy tickets at the airport. Ferries depart from the pier at 11 Shute Harbour Rd. Tickets can be purchased at the airport on Hamilton Island, resorts or directly from the pier on the mainland at Airlie Beach. Think about not flying into Hamilton Island if you are planning on staying at Airlie Beach as it will add another \$120 on to your ticket price to get from the airport and back via the ferry, which is your only option to get to the mainland.

Long Island

There's good rainforest here – the island is nearly all national park – with 13km of walking tracks and some fine lookouts. The island is about 11km long and not much more than 1.5km wide, but it's big enough to house three resorts and a **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4/16) in seclusion.

Peppers Palm Bay (☎ 1800 095 025, 07-4946 9233; www.peppers.com.au/palmbay; d \$380-680; ☎ ☎) is a peaceful, boutique resort that's devoid of pesky distractions such as TV and telephones, and consists of indulgent Thai-style cabins, smuggled onto the shore of idyllic Palm Bay. Rates include a sumptuous breakfast hamper. Check for standby rates.

The slightly cheaper option is the well-used **Club Croc** (☎ 1800 075 125, 07-4946 9400; www.dubcroc.com.au; d incl all meals \$240-368; ☎ ☎), which has fairly austere rooms that cater to couples and families.

South Molle Island

The largest of the Molle group at 4 sq km, South Molle is virtually joined to Mid Molle and North Molle Islands. It has long stretches of beach, is known for its spectacular bird life and is crisscrossed by 15km of wonderful walking tracks. The highest point is Mt Jeffreys (198m), but the climb up Spion Kop is also worthwhile. South Molle is mainly part of a national park and there's a **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4/16) in the north, where the boats come in.

Popular with families, **South Molle Island Resort** (☎ 1800 075 080, 07-4946 9433; www.southmolleisland.com.au; d with/without meals from \$360/260; ☎ ☎)

has spectacular views and children are well catered for. At high tide the jetty is one of the prettiest around.

Hook Island

The second-largest of the Whitsundays at 53 sq km, Hook Island is mainly national park and blessed with great beaches and camping grounds. It also boasts some of the best diving and snorkelling locations in the Whitsundays. **Crayfish Beach** (sites per person \$4.50) is a gorgeous camping spot with just 12 secluded sites. Bookings are essential through QPWS.

Hook Island Wilderness Resort (☎ 07-4946 9380; www.hookislandresort.com; sites per person \$25, dm \$20-35, d with/without bathroom \$130/90; ☎ ☎) is basic, but it's also the cheapest resort in the Whitsundays. The simple units have tiny bathrooms and there's a licensed restaurant (mains \$14 to \$18) that serves seafood, steak and pasta.

Whitsunday Island

Whitsunday Island is food for the soul. The largest of the Whitsundays, this island covers 109 sq km and rises to 438m at Whitsunday Peak. On its southeast coast, 6km-long Whitehaven Beach is the longest and finest beach in the group (some say in the country), with good snorkelling off its southern end. *Everyone* day-trips to Whitehaven Beach, but it's magic to linger overnight.

Perhaps the most celebrated view of all the Whitsundays comes from here – looking up from Hill Inlet on Tongue Point down towards pristine Whitehaven Beach.

There are **QPWS camping grounds** (per person/family \$4/16) at Dugong, Sawmill, Nari's and Joe's Beaches in the west, and at Turtle Bay and Chance Bay in the south; at the southern end of Whitehaven Beach; and Peter Bay in the north.

Daydream Island

Tiny Daydream Island, about 1km long and 500m wide, is the nearest island resort to Shute Harbour. It's a popular day-trip destination, with a wide range of water-sports gear available for hire (free for resort guests); water-skiing is also big here.

Daydream Island Resort & Spa (☎ 1800 075 040, 07-4948 8488; www.daydream.net.au; 6-night packages \$690; ☎ ☎) is surrounded by beautifully landscaped tropical gardens with a fish-filled lagoon running through it. This large resort also has tennis courts, a gym, catamarans,

SLEEPING UNDER THE STARS: CAMPING ON THE WHITSUNDAYS

Do you want to get stranded on a real tropical desert island, *Survivor*-style? Go camping. Starry nights, sandy beaches, solitude – it's a fabulous way to experience the Whitsundays. To camp you will need to be fully self-sufficient and leave behind only footprints.

To organise your trip, visit the excellent QPWS office (p387) for **permits** (per person/family \$4/16) and advice. If you want to book transport and camping together (ie a boat that will drop you off and pick you up) then head to **Whitsunday Bookings** (☎ 07-4948 2201; www.whitsundaybookings.com) or ring **Island Camping Connections** (☎ 07-4946 5255).

Most people stay around three nights, so we've quoted prices for this length. These rates include any necessary park permits and return transport. Make sure you research where you are going to stay and for how long – you will be pretty much stuck where you are dropped off. Note that camping grounds are occasionally closed to minimise the impact on the environment.

Options include the following:

- **Whitehaven Beach** (per person \$120) This long white beach backed by turquoise water is picture perfect, which is why you'll have to share it with hundreds of other tourists by day. Still, it's big enough to find a little solitude. Camping is on the southern tip.
- **Crayfish Beach** (per person \$150) In Osprey Bay off Hook Island this is a fabulous place to camp if snorkelling is on your agenda – there is good fringing reef just offshore that's really protected from currents. No commercial day trips visit this nook in the Whitsundays, so it is as quiet as it gets.
- **North Molle, South Molle, Planton Island and Denman Island** (per person \$45) These QPWS camping grounds provide a Robinson Crusoe-type experience away from everyone – you can pretty much run around naked and no-one will notice as the each camping ground only accommodates four people. You will need to pay an extra \$4 per person per night in park fees to stay on these islands.

windsurfers and three swimming pools. There are five grades of accommodation and most package deals include a buffet breakfast. There's also a kids' club.

Hamilton Island

Hamilton Island Resort (☎ 1800 075 110, 07-4946 9999; www.hamiltonisland.com.au; d \$265-550) runs this island, the busiest in the Whitsundays. It's more like a town than a resort and the heavy development isn't everyone's cup of tea. It does, however, provide an airport, marina, restaurants, bars, shops and a huge range of accommodation and activities. Self-catering is an option here and children will be well catered for.

Hamilton is an appealing day trip from Shute Harbour, and you can use some of the resort's facilities – see p393 for transport details.

Lindeman Island

It's a bit of a hike to southerly Lindeman (which is mostly national park), but the rewards are lots of secluded bays and 20km of impressive walking trails. Tremendous

numbers of grass trees make striking photographs and the view from Mt Oldfield (210m) is grand.

Club Med Resort (☎ 1800 258 2633, 07-4946 9333; www.clubmed.com; packages per person per night \$215-310; ☎ ☎) is a popular and very fun option. It has its own launch that connects with flights from the airport at Hamilton Island.

There is also a **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4/16).

BOWEN

☎ 07 / pop 11,505

Bowen has some gorgeous beaches, including the popular Horseshoe and Rose Bays. The only hotel in town is the upmarket **Rose Bay Resort** (☎ 4786 2402; www.rosebayresort.com.au; 2 Pandanus St, Rose Bay; apt \$130-185; ☎ ☎). It offers well-appointed (they are nicer inside than out) studio, one- and two-bedroom beachfront apartments with good swimming, snorkelling and fishing in the gorgeous coral sea right at your doorstep.

For dining try the locally recommended **Three Sixty on the Hill** (☎ 4786 6360; Margaret Reynolds Dr; mains \$8-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) at the top of

Flagstaff hill. It serves delicious fresh food with stunning 360-degree views.

Long-distance buses stop outside **Bowen Travel** (☎ 4786 2835; 40 Williams St). **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 1499) has services to/from Rockhampton (\$97, eight hours), Airlie Beach (\$29, 1½ hours) and Townsville (\$45, three hours).

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722) *Sunlander* and *Tilt Train* stop at Bootooloo Siding, 3km south of the centre. For an economy sleeper/seat on the *Sunlander*, the fare from Brisbane is \$260/160.

NORTH COAST

The outback meets the tropics on Queensland's North Coast. Townsville, the state's second-largest city, is a relaxed place with a waterfront café scene and an affable population. Offshore sits exquisite and accessible Magnetic Island, with unpopulated beaches and excellent bushwalking. The waters between its forested bulk and the mainland teem with fish and coral that form part of the Great Barrier Reef. Little islands abound; some uninhabited, some sacred (such as Magnetic Island to the Wulgurukaba Aboriginal people) and many are at least partly national park.

As you leave the coast and head towards the interior, the terrain becomes sunburnt and immense. The overwhelming dry is compensated for by the mountains of the Great Dividing Range, which run parallel with the coast and form part of the precious World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics Area.

The North Coast is a prime holiday stretch so inevitably accommodation prices escalate during tourist high season (June to October); expect prices quoted here to spike.

TOWNSVILLE

☎ 07 / pop 160,000

Neat Queenslanders – both houses and residents – inhabit this upwardly mobile city straddling the coast and the outback. Even with its sprinkling of cosmopolitan cafés and boutiques, Townsville still feels like a big country town surrounded by pink hills from which sky-high sunsets plunge into a scaled-down Riviera dotted with water craft. Locals scoot around on mopeds while travellers navigate their mobile motor homes around the orderly streetscapes. The population is also boosted by a large contingent of students

and army corps, being one of the largest army bases in the country. A shyer version of Cairns with its sweeping waterfront esplanade, decent museums and thriving nightlife, Townsville is also the jumping-off point to the *Yongala* shipwreck, one of Australia's top dive sites.

Orientation

Red-rock Castle Hill (290m) presides over Townsville. Ross Creek winds about the city centre, which lies on the north side of the creek over the Dean St Bridge and pedestrian-only Victoria Bridge. The city centre is easy to get around on foot.

Flinders St Mall, the shopping precinct, stretches to the left from the northern side of Dean Bridge, towards the train station. To the right of the bridge is Flinders St East, lined with many of the town's oldest buildings, plus eateries and nightclubs. Across Ross Creek, Palmer St has a movie-set feel with cafés, bars and hotels. Magnetic Island departures take off from the Breakwater terminal on Sir Leslie Thiess Dr, a taxi and bus hub.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Jim's Book Exchange (☎ 4771 6020; Post Office Plaza, Flinders St Mall; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sun, closed Sat) Piled high with reading possibilities.

Mary Who? Bookshop (☎ 4771 3824; 414 Flinders St Mall) Good travel section and Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) books and music.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Den (☎ 4721 4500; 265 Flinders St Mall; per hr \$4; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Townsville City Library (☎ 4727 9666; 280 Flinders St Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) Free internet access; one hour sessions begin on the hour.

POST

Australia Post (Post Office Plaza, Shop 1, Sturt St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Flinders Mall visitor information centre (☎ 4721 3660; www.townsvilleonline.com.au; Flinders St Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) General information and diving and reef tours.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (☎ 4750 0700; www.gbrmpa.gov.au; Reef HQ, 2-68 Flinders St East; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) Detailed and technical information on the Reef.

QPWS (☎ 4722 5224; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Old Quarantine Station, Cape Pallarenda; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri)

TOWNSVILLE

INFORMATION

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Flinders Mall Visitor Information Centre.....2 C5
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.....(see 10)
Internet Den.....3 C5
Jim's Book Exchange.....4 B5
Mary Who? Bookshop.....5 B5
Townsville & North Queensland Visitor Information Centre.....6 D5
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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Betty Blue & the Lemon Tart.....26 B5
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Avis.....(see 38)
Breakwater Terminal.....45 D4
Long Distance Bus Station.....(see 45)
Magnetic Island Car Ferry.....46 D4
Queensland Rail Travel Centre.....47 B6

Scale: 0 to 500m / 0 to 0.3 miles

Map Labels: Cleveland Bay, Townsville Harbour, Strand Park, Queens Park, Queens Gardens, Marina, Castle Hill Lookout, Dean Park, Woodstock Trail Rides, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Ayer (82km), Mackay (395km), To Europcar (4km), Hertz (4km), Thrifty (4km), Anderson Park (6km), Woodstock Trail Rides (40km), Australian Institute of Marine Science (50km), Ayer (82km), Charters Towers (122km), Cairns (349km), Mackay (395km).

Townsville & North Queensland Visitor Information Centre (☎ 1800 801 902, 4721 1116; www.townsvilleonline.com.au; 70-102 Flinders St East; ☎ 9am-5pm) The ladies in pink provide information and free maps.

Sights

REEF HQ

This outstanding living coral reef aquarium (☎ 4750 0800; www.reefhq.org.au; Flinders St East; adult/child/concession \$21.50/10.50/16.50, family \$32-54; ☎ 9.30am-5pm, guided tours every 30min) showcases many of the creatures and corals that inhabit the Great Barrier Reef. Every part of the aquarium recreates a part of the reef: in the massive central tank a dense population of vivid fish, sharks (including the likes of 'Cuddles'), sawfish and rays dart across one another. Don't miss the new turtle rehabilitation centre on a guided tour (strapped-on footwear required), or the opportunity to see the resident blue-eyed white turtle. The **imax cinema** (☎ 4721 1481; Flinders St East; adult/child/concession \$13/8/11; ☎ 1st show 10.45am, last show 2.45pm) is next door.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Strand**, northwest of town, is a zealously nurtured beachfront esplanade with a marina, cafés, grassy parks, a playground (complete with water bazookas and pull-cord water jets) and a stinger enclosure. Elderly citizens gather around picnic tables, indigenous folk shade-nap by fig trees and languid storks bathe in the fountains. At the northeast tip is the **rock pool** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), an enormous artificial swimming pool with a stinger-free enclosure surrounded by lawns and sandy beaches.

The **Museum of Tropical Queensland** (☎ 4726 0600; www.mtq.qld.gov.au; Flinders St East; adult/child/concession \$12/7/8; ☎ 9am-5pm) houses a replica of the HMS *Pandora* (which was shipwrecked in 1791 off the nearby coast), a 1:24 scale model that took 7000 painstaking hours to complete, and the biggest collection of Great Barrier Reef hard corals anywhere, including the approaching-antiquity bombie coral. Colourful statues of larger-than-life pioneers provide a laugh. Artefacts from the *Yongala* (now a dive site; see p400) can be seen at the **Maritime Museum of Townsville** (☎ 4721 5251; www.townsvillemaritimemuseum.org.au; 42-68 Palmer St; adult/concession/family \$5/4/12; ☎ 10am-4pm).

The **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre** (☎ 4772 7679; tccperfbigpond.net.au; 2-68 Flinders St East; performances adult/child/concession/family

\$12/7/9/30; ☎ 9am-5pm) features dance, music and storytelling performances from Monday to Friday (11am to noon) and an indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander gallery. Hours vary on weekends.

Pop into the **Perc Tucker Regional Gallery** (☎ 4727 9011; ptrg@townsville.qld.gov.au; cnr Denham St & Flinders St Mall; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun). Housed in a heritage building, it focuses mainly on contemporary Queensland artists.

If you're feeling energetic, the panoramic views from the top of **Castle Hill** are worth the 2km scramble to the summit; the path to the top begins at the corner of Wills and Victoria Sts.

The **Billabong Sanctuary** (☎ 4778 8344; www.billabongsanctuary.com.au; Bruce Hwy; adult/child \$26/15; ☎ 8am-5pm), 17km south of Townsville, is a 10-hectare wildlife park containing Australian native animals and birds. There are barbecue areas, a swimming pool and a kiosk in the park, and various shows (hold-a-koala/wombat/python; \$10) are held throughout the day.

If you fancy a lazy picnic, head to the ornamental **Queens Gardens** (cnr Gregory & Paxton Sts) at the base of Castle Hill, or **Anderson Park** (Gulliver St, Mundingburra), with plants and palms from northern Queensland and Cape York Peninsula.

About 35km southeast of Townsville on the Bruce Hwy is the turn-off to the **Australian Institute of Marine Science** (AIMS; ☎ 4753 4444; www.aims.gov.au), a fascinating marine-research facility on Cape Ferguson that conducts free, two-hour tours at 10am on Friday (book ahead).

Activities

The **Tobruk Pool** (☎ 4772-6550; the Strand; ☎ 5.30am-8pm Mon-Thu, 5.30am-6.30pm Fri, 7am-6pm Sat, 8am-6pm Sun Sep-Apr, reduced hours May-Aug), a training hub for the 1952 and 1964 Olympic swim teams, has shaded swimming areas, a poolside kiosk serving athlete-worthy eats, and a B&W photograph display of the chlorine champions.

City slickers looking for that quintessential country experience can go horseback on a cattle muster at **Woodstock Trail Rides** (☎ 4778 8888; www.woodstocktrailrides.com.au; Flinders Hwy; per person incl lunch \$120). For one day on horseback you can help move 'em in and brand their hides, eat a camp-cooked lunch and down a cold beer at day's end; the price includes transfer from

QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND

Townsville. Trail rides and an overnight bush camp are also possible.

For adrenalin junkies, **Coral Sea Skydivers** (☎ 4772 4889; www.coralseaskydivers.com.au; 181 Flinders St East; tandem from \$315) will have you disembarking sky-high. The tandem jump requires no prior knowledge; just a lot of guts (but not too much: there's a weight limit of 95kg).

DIVING

Apart from the Great Barrier Reef, the big attraction for divers is the stunning and spooky *Yongala* shipwreck. There are several dive companies, most offering *Yongala* options, but you need to have an open-water certificate to see it. Dive companies are only as good as their staff, who change frequently in this business. Ask other travellers for current recommendations. **Ocean Dive** (☎ 4721 4233; www.oceandive.com.au; 252 Walker St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) sells dive paraphernalia.

Reputable PADI courses:

Adrenalin Dive (☎ 4724 0600; www.adrenalinedive.com.au; 121 Flinders St East; from \$179) *Yongala* day trips including two dives. Also runs diving certification courses.

Pro Dive (☎ 1300 131 760, 4721 1760; www.prodivetownsville.com.au; 14 Plume St, South Townsville; from \$775) Three-night live-aboard departing every Tuesday and Friday night.

SunSea Dive (☎ 1800 447 333, 4772 7711; www.sunseacruises.com.au; adult/child \$139/84) Day trips to John Brewer reef leave on Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

Tours

Sunferries (☎ 4771 3855; www.sunferries.com.au; Sir Leslie Thiess Dr; per person from \$145) operates day trips to the Great Barrier Reef. A certified or introductory dive costs an additional \$70.

Sleeping BUDGET

Reef Lodge Backpackers (☎ 4721 1112; www.reefodge.com.au; 4 Wickham St; dm \$18-20, d with/without bathroom \$68/50; ☎ ☎ ☎) With its mellow atmosphere, beaut murals, cheery bed covers and outdoor nooks, Reef Lodge leads the hostel pack here. Space is at a premium in the two-tier complex overlooking a courtyard but with a book exchange, a laundry, bike hire (\$9 a day) and a traveller noticeboard, you're well catered for.

Civic Guest House (☎ 1800 646 619, 4771 5381; www.civicguesthouse.com; 262 Walker St; dm \$22, d/tw

\$70/75, s without bathroom \$45-50, d without bathroom \$50-55; ☎ ☎ ☎) Behind the quintessentially Queensland frontage complete with palms is this spick-and-span converted home-cum-hostel. Easy-going and sedate, the Civic hosts a free barbecue for guests on Friday night.

Great Northern Hotel (☎ 4771 6191; fax 4771 6190; 496 Flinders St; s/d \$35/55; ☎ ☎) Good value and central, this authentic old timer could tell a few tales. It's all dark panelling and luxe wallpaper in the foyer, while open vents in the rooms allow for free-flowing circulation (hope you don't have loud roommates). The best rooms open out on to the broad encircling veranda. The pub downstairs dishes out healthy doses of Queensland culture.

ourpick Coral Lodge (☎ 1800 614 613, 4771 5512; www.coralodge.com.au; 32 Hale St; s/d \$60/75, units s \$75, d & tw \$90; ☎ ☎ ☎) The current owner-operators of this B&B, established in the 1930s and still going strong, pride themselves on retaining the folksy atmosphere. Upstairs units have kitchens and one affords a sea view. Downstairs, budget rooms boast high beds and share a fully equipped kitchen, or you can barbecue outside under the mango tree.

MIDRANGE

Strand Motel (☎ 4772 1977; www.strandmotel.com.au; 51 the Strand; s/d \$70/80) Pokey but affordable rooms with house-proud cleanliness are opposite the watery esplanade, making them particularly good value.

Ibis (☎ 4753 2000; www.ibishotels.com.au; 12-14 Palmer St; d \$99-139; ☎ ☎ ☎) 'All shiny and new' as one incoming guest remarked, Ibis is the newest kid on the block with efficient rooms, thin TVs, indigenous prints, come-hither beds and a ground-floor café, Sugatarain. Maximum occupancy of two people per room suits couples.

Historic Yongala Lodge Motel (☎ 4772 4633; www.historicyongala.com.au; 11 Fryer St; r \$99-154, meals \$18.50-30; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ ☎ ☎) A lovely two-storey timber lodging from the 1880s with a restaurant, comfortable motel rooms and self-contained units at the rear.

City Oasis Inn (☎ 4771 6048; www.cityoasis.com.au; 143 Wills St; r \$101-175; ☎ ☎ ☎) Well managed and spotlessly clean, this inner-city resort has motel units, self-contained apartments with loft bedrooms, and executive suites – basically a room to suit everyone. The grassy grounds and frog's nook pool makes it ideal for families.

Strand Park Hotel (☎ 4750 7888; www.strandparkhotel.com.au; 59-60 the Strand; r \$120-185; ☎ ☎ ☎) Self-contained units in this waterfront complex range from standard on the ground floor to superior and deluxe rooms with ocean views, balconies and perhaps a spa.

Quest Townsville (☎ 4772 6477; www.questtownsville.com.au; 30-34 Palmer St; apt \$135-250; ☎ ☎ ☎) Lacking personality but bristling with cleanliness, this high-rise complex hosts mostly business travellers who like the gym and valet dry-cleaning. Self-contained rooms are serviced daily and have balconies. Families are also catered for with one- and two-bedroom apartments, and a babysitting service.

TOP END

Mariners North (☎ 4722 0777; www.marinersnorth.com.au; 7 Mariners Dr; apt from \$165; ☎ ☎ ☎) Perched on the marina like a stack of cards, this soaring complex overlooks Cleveland Bay. The sizable two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments have fully equipped kitchens (pick your own herbs), DVD players, laundries and water views. Guests have free rein over the complex's tennis court, saltwater pool and barbecue facilities.

CAMPING

Rowes Bay Caravan Park (☎ 4771 3576; fax 4724 2017; Heatley Pde, Rowes Bay; unpowered/powerd sites \$17.50/23, cabins \$55-79; ☎) Leafy camping ground 3km from Townsville's CBD.

Eating

ourpick Betty Blue & the Lemon Tart (☎ 4724 2554; 254 Sturt St; meals \$7-9; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Boasting just-baked muffins, fetta-and-pine-nut tart and its smooth-as-silk namesake, this is as funky as Townsville gets. And hipness demands oriental-inspired crockery and a communal table. The same crew are behind the Kanteen (95 Denham St), specialising in quick gourmet bites.

Ladah (☎ 4724 0402; cnr Sturt & Stanley Sts; lunch \$8-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri & Sun) Plant yourself on a chocolate- and cream-coloured cube at this groovy, always chatty, café. Tuck into savoury mince on toast and other inventive breakfasts, fresh lunches and guilty pleasures to accompany good coffee.

Naked Fish (☎ 4724 4623; 60 the Strand; mains \$17-25; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Snookering prime position, a sea of green-blue walls and a starry ceiling and ocean-inspired menu keep the

punters coming. Seafood melds with Cajun, Moroccan, tempura and other influences on the extensive menu and you can dine outside beneath a magnificent, giant fig tree. Limited vegetarian options.

Cactus Jacks (☎ 4721 1478; 21 Palmer St; meals \$7-18; ☎ dinner) Lively locals devouring nachos, the hum of margaritas whizzing in blenders and a Tex Mex bric-a-brac interior make this a popular spot.

C Bar (☎ 4724 0333; Gregory St Headland; mains \$18.50-24.50) Sleekness and million-dollar views make for the ideal eating sojourn. Wake up to apple and cinnamon pancakes or linger over crispy duck with *verjuice* when sunset falls. Grazing encouraged.

ourpick White Blue (☎ 4724 4498; 13 Palmer St; mains \$25-29; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) If the contemporary Greek menu doesn't lure you in, the sparkle of the Basazza mosaics and Olympic-torch-inspired lighting will. A touch Miami, this place is big on portions. Greek Island images will have you dreaming of going adrift – thankfully Magnetic Island isn't far away. An adjoining coral-stone bar with marshmallow cube seating is the perfect place to let the games begin.

Scirocco (☎ 4724 4508; 61 Palmer St; mains \$26-36; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Thailand meets the Aegean at this inviting à la carte restaurant mixing up cuisines with finesse. Watch kitchen staff cook up feasts of mud crab and vodka-flamed linguine or drool-worthy chocolate pudding with honeycomb custard. Vegetarians and even gluten-free foodies have a dedicated menu.

Also recommended:

Cafe Bambini (☎ 4724 5188; 101 Sturt St; light meals \$6-7; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Groovy tunes blowing in the wind, 'real' coffee, and Greek yoghurt and muesli to go-go make this a happening morning pit stop.

Chilli Jam Noodle Bar (☎ 4721 5199; 211 Flinders St East; meals \$11-16; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Spunky eat-in or takeaway. Try the flat noodles dishes.

Drinking

Watermark (☎ 4724 4281; 72-74 the Strand; ☎ noon-midnight) A sleek bar where Townsville's up-and-coming drink. Live music on Sundays from 4pm.

Heritage Bar & Grill (☎ 4771 2799; 137 Flinders St; ☎ Tue-Sat) Quaff a mellow red in wine cellar-style surrounds at this cool cavern for the after-work crowd, which lingers on well into the night.

Brewery (☎ 4724 9999; www.townsvillebrewery.com.au; 242 Flinders St; mains \$14-18; 🍷 from 11am) A sports bar, nightclub, bistro and brewery in a gorgeous old post-office building. Beer connoisseurs should definitely try one the Brewery's own: the Ned's Red Ale, Kilt Lifter or perhaps even a chilli beer infused with jalapenos! Live music rocks on every Saturday night.

Seaview (☎ 4771 5005; cnr the Strand & Gregory St; meals \$14-\$36; 10am-1am Sun-Thu, 10am-5am Fri & Sat) It seems the entire population jams into the concrete courtyard at the monstrous Seaview on a Sunday, when local bands thrash it out, competitive spirit works the pool tables and wood-fired pizzas work the room.

You can't miss the spotted gaudiness of the **Mad Cow Tavern** (☎ 4771 5727; 129 Flinders St East; 🍷 Thu-Sun) or the ubiquitous Irish flavour of **Molly Malones** (☎ 4771 3428; 87 Flinders St East; 10am-3am Sun-Thu, 10am-5am Fri & Sat). Or try the **Criterion Hotel** (☎ 4721 5777; 10 the Strand), plastered with the ubiquitous XXXX beer signage, the 'Cri' lives up to its party reputation.

Entertainment

Bank Lounge Bar (☎ 4771 6148; 169 Flinders St East; admission after 10pm \$5) This slinky club, housed inside a superbly restored old bank building, is Townsville's hottest nightspot. Linger at the marble bar or lounge in the padded chill zone. The beat is house and dance.

Level One (☎ 4724 2999; 242 Flinders St East) The nightclub upstairs at this multifunctional Brewery features resident DJs on Friday and Saturday nights, who spin dance and progressive house as well as beats and breaks to bust a move to.

Other recommendations:

BC Cinemas (☎ 4771 4101; cnr Sturt & Blackwood Sts) Mainstream films.

Jupiters Casino (☎ 4722 2333; Sir Leslie Thiess Dr) Basics: pokies, roulette, blackjack.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89), **Alliance Airlines** (☎ 3212 1212), **Macair** (☎ 1800 622 247), **Jet Star** (☎ 13 15 38) and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13) – and its subsidiaries – all service Townsville.

BUS

The **long-distance bus station** (Sir Leslie Thiess Dr; lockers per day from \$4) is at Breakwater Terminal. Here you'll find **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300

4739 46863, 4772 5100; 🗓 6.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 6.30am-4pm Sat & Sun).

Destination	Price (\$)	Duration (hr)
Airlie Beach	54	5
Brisbane	200	23
Cairns	62	6
Charters Towers	31	1½
Mackay	69	6
Mission Beach	48	4
Rockhampton	111	12

In Plume Street, at the former transit centre, you'll find an agent for **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) with a daily 2pm Townsville-to-Cairns service (adult \$50, six hours) and **Douglas Coaches** (☎ 4787 1830) connecting Townsville to Charters Towers (adult/student \$22/17) at 4pm Monday to Friday.

TRAIN

The train station and **Queensland Rail Travel Centre** (☎ 4772 8358; 502 Flinders St; 🗓 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-4.30pm Sat, 8.30am-4.15pm Sun) are about 500m south of the centre.

The *Sunlander* connects Townsville with Brisbane (economy seat/sleeper \$175/231, 24 hours), Rockhampton (economy seat \$116, 11 hours) and Cairns (economy seat \$62, 7½ hours). The more luxurious *Queenslander* class, which includes a sleeper and meals, is available on two services per week. The business class *Tilt Train* also connects Townsville with Brisbane (economy seat \$256, 19 hours) and Cairns (economy seat \$90, six hours) twice a week.

The *Inlander* heads from Townsville to Mt Isa on Thursday and Sunday at 12.30pm (economy seat/sleeper \$118/174).

Getting Around

Townsville airport is 5km northwest of the city at Garbutt. A taxi to the centre costs \$20, or else **Abacus Tours** (☎ 4775 5544; one way/return \$8/14) runs a shuttle to/from the CBD for all Jetstar, Qantas and Virgin flights; it departs from the ferry terminal precinct on Sir Leslie Thiess Dr.

Sunbus (☎ 4725 8482; www.sunbus.com.au) runs local bus services around Townsville. Route maps and timetables are available at the visitor information centres and Breakwater Terminal.

Car-rental agencies in Townsville include **Avis** (☎ 1300 137 498, 4721 2688; www.avis.com.au; 81 Flinders St), **Europcar** (☎ 1300 131 390, 4762 7050, 4760

1380; www.europcar.com.au; 305 Ingham Rd, Garbutt), **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 30, 4775 5950; www.hertz.com; Stinson Ave, Garbutt) and **Thrifty** (☎ 4725 4600; www.thrifty.com.au; 289 Ingham Rd, Garbutt). The last three also have offices at Townsville airport.

Taxis congregate outside Breakwater Terminal, or call **Townsville Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08, 4778 9500).

MAGNETIC ISLAND

☎ 07 / pop 3278

Magnetic Island, or simply 'Maggie', is shrouded by smooth grey boulders dipping into the sea. Half the island is national park and a haven for rock wallabies, bats and brushtail possums. Bird life bursts out of the bush, and it's the largest natural koala sanctuary in Queensland (some say Australia), so spotting fuzzy grey bums in the foliage is a mandatory pursuit. A good network of trails makes for some spectacular bushwalking and the surrounding waters are also part of the precious Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Local buses, named the likes of 'Sassy Sarina', swerve from one cosy cove to another. Folk crossing the ferry to their fibro shacks and architecturally designed holiday retreats love cracking a 'tinnie' on the ferry at dusk – leaving their worries behind on the mainland. Developers are daring to dream too, if the island's modern Magnetic Harbour is anything to go by. Magnetic Island might just boom – but we hope not too soon, too fast.

Orientation & Information

Magnetic Island is only 8km from Townsville and roughly triangular in shape. A sealed road follows the east coast for 10km from Picnic Bay, on the island's southern point, to Horseshoe Bay in the north. There's a rough 8km track along the west coast leading from Picnic Bay to a wonderfully secluded beach at West Point. All passenger ferries dock at Nelly Bay.

For information pop into the mainland's **Townsville & North Queensland Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 1800 801 902, 4721 1116; www.townsvilleonline.com.au; 70-102 Flinders St East; 🗓 9am-5pm). There's a **QPWS office** (☎ 4778 5378; 22 Hurst St; 🗓 8am-4pm) at Picnic Bay.

At Nelly Bay's Harbourside Plaza, **Australia Post** (☎ 4778 5118; Shop 2, 98-100 Sooning St) does foreign currency exchange and credit-card cash advances.

Some hostels offer internet access.

Sights

PICNIC BAY

Perhaps it's the twinkling night views of Townsville that draw families and couples to Picnic Bay. The shagadelic mall along the waterfront has a handful of eateries and is a favourite hang-out for that elegant, curious bird: the curlew. There's a stinger-free enclosure here and you can hire snorkelling gear.

To the west of town is **Cockle Bay**, with the wreck of HMS *City of Adelaide*, and secluded **West Point**. Heading east around the coast is **Rocky Bay**, where there's a short, steep walk down to its beautiful beach. A popular nine-hole golf course, the **Magnetic Island Country Club** (☎ 4778 5188; Hurst St, Picnic Bay; 🗓 from 8am) is open to the public.

NELLY BAY

Sunferries disgorges all passengers at Nelly Bay offering the opportunity to shop and gawk as the enormous Magnetic Harbour development takes shape with the marina, public boat ramp and residential developments opening in stages over the coming years. Magnetic Harbour has transformed Nelly into something of a hub for the island – hopefully it will stay a low-key one.

ARCADIA

Arcadia village has the lovely **Alma Bay** cove. There's plenty of shade, picnic tables and a kids' playground here. The main beach, **Geoffrey Bay**, is less appealing but has a reef at its southern end (QPWS discourages reef walking at low tide). Arcadia has places to stay, and a few shops and eateries.

RADICAL BAY & THE FORTS

Townsville was a supply base for the Pacific region during WWII, and the **forts** were designed to protect the town from naval attack. The only ammunition they provide now is for your camera – great panoramic views. You can walk to the forts from the junction of Radical and Horseshoe Bay Rds, about 2km north of Alma Bay, or head north to Radical Bay via the rough vehicle track that has walking tracks leading to secluded Arthur and Florence Bays (great for snorkelling) and the old **searchlight station** on the headland between the two.

From Radical Bay you can walk across the headland to beautiful **Balding Bay** (an unofficial nude bathing beach) and Horseshoe Bay.

MAGNETIC ISLAND

INFORMATION

Australia Post.....(see 25)	Base.....12 C3	Café Africa.....(see 31)
QPWS Office.....1 C3	Bungalow Bay Koala Village.....13 D2	Calypso.....(see 30)
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	First National Real Estate.....14 D3	Fat Possum Café.....(see 28)
Bluey's Horseshoe Ranch.....2 C2	Magnetic Island Holiday Units.....15 C4	Foodworks.....(see 28)
Bush Tucker Brunch with the Koalas.....(see 13)	Magnetic Island Tropical Resort.....16 C3	Le Paradis.....25 C3
Forts.....3 D2	Magnum's.....17 D2	Man Friday.....26 C3
Magnetic Island Country Club.....4 B4	Marshall's B&B.....18 D2	Marlin Bar.....27 C1
Magnetic Island Sea Kayaks.....5 C1	New Friends B&B.....19 D2	Pizza Tonite.....28 C3
Market.....6 D2	Pure Magnetic.....20 C3	Sandbar.....(see 27)
Pleasure Divers.....7 D3	Segara Villas.....21 C3	Shaws on The Shore.....(see 24)
Searchlight Station.....8 D2	Shaws on The Shore.....(see 24)	Swenson's.....(see 13)
Vonnie van Bemmel's Art Studio.....(see 6)	Travellers Hideaway.....22 C4	Wicked McNasty's.....29 C1
Wreck of HMS City of Adelaide.....9 B3	Tropical Palms Inn.....23 C4	SHOPPING
SLEEPING	EATING	Arcadia Shopping Centre.....30 C3
About Town Real Estate.....10 D3	Aly's Chinese Restaurant.....(see 31)	Picnic Bay Mall.....31 C4
Arcadia Beach Guesthouse.....11 D3	Banister's Seafood.....(see 30)	TRANSPORT
	Barefoot.....24 C1	Moke Magnetic.....32 C3
	Bells Harbour Bakery.....(see 25)	Tropical Topless Car Rentals.....(see 31)

HORSESHOE BAY

Horseshoe Bay, on the north coast of the island, seems to attract a young crowd and couples. It has a few shops, accommodation and a long stretch of beach that has water-sports gear for hire and a stinger-free enclosure. There are walks to the northeast to Balding and Radical Bays for great swimming.

Activities

The QPWS publishes a leaflet on the island's 36km of excellent **bushwalking** tracks (see also www.queenslandwalks.com.au). Walks include: Nelly Bay to Arcadia (5km one way, three hours); Picnic Bay to West Point (16km return, four hours, no bus access); Horseshoe Bay to Florence Bay (2.5km, one hour); and

the Fort Walk (4km, 1½ hours), a circuit walk with spectacular views near the Radical Bay turn-off. You can catch the bus back at the end of most of these.

Dive companies on Magnetic Island offer plenty of underwater action with certificate courses, and wreck and night dives. Try **Pleasure Divers** (☎ 1800 797 797, 4778 5788; www.magnetic-island.com.au/plsr-divers; 10 Marine Pde, Arcadia; open-water course per person \$300).

Bush tucker brunch with the koalas (☎ 4778 5577; www.bungalowbay.com.au; adult/child/family \$25/12.50/70; ☎ 8.30-10am, Sun, Wed & Fri), at Bungalow Bay Koala Village, is your chance to fill up on a mammoth breakfast of billy tea, bush-style hash browns with eggs and guava champagne while meeting furry friends. There's also a wildlife show and bushwalk each day at 10am, noon and 2.30pm.

Pick up a shell mobile or some local jam at Arcadia's low-key **market** (RSL, cnr Mimar Cres & Hayles Ave), which takes place each Friday from 5.30pm to 8pm, plus Saturday from mid-April to early October. Across the road, **Vonnie van Bemmel's art studio** (☎ 4758 1299; cnr Hayles Ave & Appian Way; ☎ daily) shows off the island in oil paints.

Tours

Barnade Bill (☎ 4758 1837, 0438-165 581; from \$50) Bill knows the sea like the bristles on his beard; all gear is included on this two-hour fishing/snorkelling tour out of Horseshoe Bay.

Bluey's Horseshoe Ranch (☎ 4778 5109; www.blueys-horseranch.com; 38 Gifford St, Horseshoe Bay; rides \$80; ☎ 9am & 3pm daily) Offers two-hour rides taking you from bush to beach, where you can swim with your horse.

Jazza Sailing Tours (☎ 4778 5530; www.jazza.com.au; \$95) Snorkelling day trip on a 13m yacht that includes boom netting, seafood lunch and afternoon jam session.

Magnetic Island Sea Kayaks (☎ 4778 5424; www.seakayak.com.au; 93 Horseshoe Bay Rd; tours from \$60)

Four-hour eco-certified tours departing Horseshoe Bay paddling over to Balding Bay and back. Includes breakfast.

Reef EcoTours (☎ 0419-712 579; www.reefecotours.com; adult/child/family \$65/55/200) Offers a one-hour guided snorkel that's suitable for families.

Tropicana Tours (☎ 4758 1800; www.tropicana-tours.com.au; tours \$132) Operates excellent off-the-track day tours in a s-t-r-e-t-c-h 4WD.

Sleeping

Rates for a bed on Maggie increase during high season. If you're staying more than a few days, **First National Real Estate** (☎ 4778 5077;

www.magneticislandfn.com.au; 21 Marine Pde, Arcadia) and **About Town Real Estate** (☎ 4778 5570; www.magneticislandrealestate.com; Shop 4/5 Bright Ave, Arcadia) manage apartments and houses ranging in price from \$85 to \$200 per night. Accommodation seems to change with the wind on the island so the best bet is to call ahead rather than taking your chances showing up.

PICNIC BAY

Magnetic Island Holiday Units (☎ 4778 5246; 16 Yule St; d from \$120; ☎ ☎) These tightly spaced self-contained units have been renovated recently. Two-bedroom units, available for \$140, accommodate up to six people.

You can also bed down at the basic **Travellers Hideaway** (☎ 1800 000 290, 4778 5314; www.travellersbackpackers.com; 32 Picnic St; dm \$15, d from \$40; ☎ ☎ ☎) hostel, or take one of the semi-self-contained motel rooms at **Tropical Palms Inn** (☎ 4778 5076; tropicalpalmsinn@hotmail.com; 34 Picnic St; s/d/f \$85/92/105; ☎ ☎ ☎).

NELLY BAY

Base (☎ 1800 242 273, 4778 5777; www.basebackpackers.com; 1 Nelly Bay Rd; unpowered sites per person \$12, dm \$27, d \$62-95, without bathroom \$110; ☎ ☎) If you're keen to party or simply navel gaze, this sprawling 'flashpacker' franchise sits on prime real estate. Bunk-up or ask for a beachfront A-frame, where the Coral Sea laps below. The beachfront decking and dining area is abuzz and there's a dive school on site.

Magnetic Island Tropical Resort (☎ 1800 069 122, 4778 5955; www.magneticislandtropicalresort.com; 56 Yates St; d from \$85; ☎ ☎ ☎) Five minutes' walk from the water's edge in a quiet street, these good value A-frame cabins with en suites encircle large bird-filled gardens. There are also lawn tennis courts and a seafood-and-steak restaurant.

our pick Segara Villas (☎ 4778 5151; www.segara.net; 20 Mango Parkway; d \$160-200; ☎ ☎) These outstanding, creatively furnished villas are enveloped by a Balinese-style garden. The B&B poolside villa has a private garden shower, while deluxe villas are replete with polished floors, suede lounges and gorgeous patios. Two standard villas are far from ordinary. A serene treat for couples.

Pure Magnetic (☎ 4778 5955; 9 the Esplanade; town houses from \$260) Flash two-bedroom, two-bathroom A-frame-cum-townhouses with Balinese furniture and the latest in self-contained accessories.

ARCADIA

Magnum's (☎ 1800 663 666, 4778 5177; www.magnums.com.au; 7 Marine Pde, Arcadia; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/19, dm \$16-19, d \$49; ☺ ☑ ☒) Short on charm but big on the hands-in-the-air party vibe, this backpackers has a bistro, bar and toad racing (8.15pm Wednesday).

our pick **Arcadia Beach Guesthouse** (☎ 4778 5668; www.arcadiabeachguesthouse.com.au; 27 Marine Pde; s/d from \$25/70) This affable place has a beachfront location to make you swoon. There's a range of accommodation from B&B rooms to budget safari tents. A bamboo under-croft area downstairs and the cool canopy of an acacia tree out the back are ideal chill-out spots. Ring ahead to get picked up from the ferry in the Rolls Royce!

Marshall's B&B (☎ 4778 5112; 3-5 Endeavour Rd; s/d \$55/75) Marshall's friendly hosts have four basic rooms. You are welcome to use the lounge room and pleasant bird-filled garden with outdoor seating. Courtesy pick-up from ferry.

HORSESHOE BAY

Bungalow Bay Koala Village (☎ 1800 285 577, 4778 5577; www.bungalowbay.com.au; 40 Horseshoe Bay Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25, dm \$22, d & tw with/without bathroom \$75/55; ☺ ☑ ☒) This is the best large-scale budget accommodation on the island, offering a get-back-to-nature bush setting with camp sites, timber bungalows, self-contained units and a gumtree-shaded saltwater pool. Friendly staff and plenty of chatty birds.

New Friends B&B (☎ 4758 1220; 48b Horseshoe Bay Rd; s/d \$95/110; ☺ ☑ ☒) French door-fronted rooms with their own bathrooms are immaculate and nestled in the main house, which makes for some friendly, communal living. The fabulous garden is backed by jungle palms and breakfast is a tropical spread at a snazzy gumtree table.

Shaws on the Shore (☎ 4758 1911; www.shawsonthesore.com.au; 7 Pacific Dr; d from \$145) A sprightly three-storey complex with one- to three-bedroom self-contained apartments with water-facing balconies.

Eating

Each of Maggie's villages has its dining hub, with Horseshoe Bay the most diverse.

PICNIC BAY

As well as the following places, there's a slew of takeaway options.

Café Africa (☎ 4758 1119; Picnic Bay Mall; dishes \$7.50-12; ☺) breakfast & lunch) Tuck into all-day breakfasts and crepes at this stripy café.

Alby's Chinese Restaurant (☎ 4778 5706; 6 Picnic Bay Arcade; dishes \$4-16; ☺) lunch & dinner) Smiley host, Albert Chan, dishes up a full Chinese spread including king prawns with chilli sauce at this BYO eatery.

NELLY BAY

Fat Possum Café (☎ 4778 5409; 55 Sooning St; dishes \$5-10; ☺) breakfast & lunch; ☑) An Irishman is at the helm of this relaxed café making an assortment of healthy burgers, wraps and zesty pies, and some of the best coffee on the island.

Man Friday (☎ 4778 5658; Warboys St; meals \$13.50-29.50; ☺) dinner) You're a long way from Mexico but this converted beach shack delivers a mean serve of nachos. Little amigos are catered for and BYO is accepted.

Le Paradis (☎ 4778 5044; cnr Mandalay Av & Sooning St; mains \$20.50-31.50; ☺) lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) This à la carte, BYO restaurant offers a range of French-inspired eats; the three course menu (\$28) is particularly good value before 7pm (arrive at 5.30pm).

More options:

Bells Harbour Bakery (☎ 4758 1870; Shop 4, 98-100 Sooning St, Harbourside Plaza) Famed for its vegetarian pasties.

Pizza Tonite (☎ 4758 1400; 53 Sooning St; pizzas \$9-25; ☺) dinner Tue-Sun) Yep – they do pizza, plus burgers and lasagne. Takeaway available.

ARCADIA

Banister's Seafood (☎ 4778 5700; 22 McCabe Cres; mains \$5-22; ☺) lunch & dinner) For finger-lickin' fish and chips, this is a good albeit slow takeaway (who is in a rush anyway?).

Calyppo (☎ 4778 5511; 22 McCabe Cres; meals \$6.50-15; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) This is a palm-shaded neo-hippy café with outdoor umbrellas and wind chimes, serving mango pancakes and braised tofu with bok choy.

HORSESHOE BAY

Marlin Bar (☎ 4758 1588; 3 Pacific Dr; mains \$10-20; ☺) lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) This lively waterfront pub does decent pasta dishes and serves more meat than you could poke a cattle prod at. Grab a number and a window seat; your food will find you when it's ready.

Barefoot (☎ 4758 1170; 5 Pacific Dr; meals \$10.50-30; ☺) lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) Wine, dine and admire the works of local artists at Horseshoe Bay's

most upmarket of eateries. There's a shady deck area at the rear but we don't blame you for wanting to be perched near the waterfront.

Sandbar (☎ 4778 5477; Pacific Dr; mains \$14-28; ☺) dinner Wed-Sun, lunch Sat & Sun) Catch the sea breeze at this licensed café-restaurant or grab a cushioned corner and relish Penang-style curry and sushi platters.

Also recommended:

Wicked McNasty's (☎ 4778 5861; Pacific Dr; meals \$7-10) A popular no-frills breakfast hangout.

Swenson's (☎ 4778 5577; 40 Horseshoe Bay Rd; meals \$17-25) At Bungalow Bay Koala Village, this place offers deck dining, \$10 made-for-one pizzas, plus sumptuous yellow lentil curry.

Getting There & Away

Sunferries (☎ 4771 3855; www.sunferries.com.au; return per person \$26; ☺) 6.45am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) operates a frequent passenger ferry from the Breakwater terminal on Sir Leslie Thiess Dr in Townsville (no forward bookings required; be there 30 minutes ahead of departure). There is car parking here (\$5 per day).

The **Magnetic Island Car Ferry** (☎ 4772 5422; Ross St, South Townsville; ☺) from Magnetic Island 5.20am-6.55pm Mon-Fri, 7.10am-6.55pm Sat & Sun) does the crossing eight times each weekday and seven times on Saturday and Sunday from the south side of Ross Creek. It costs \$144 (return) for a car and three passengers and \$22 (return) for a passenger only. The ferry docks at Magnetic Harbour in Nelly Bay.

Getting Around

Magnetic Island is ideal for cycling. Most places to stay rent bikes for around \$15 a day. Otherwise **Magnetic Island Bike Hire** (☎ 0425-244 193; www.islandbike.com.au) charges the same, with free delivery.

The **Magnetic Island Bus Service** (☎ 4778 5130; fares \$2-4, day pass \$11) ploughs between Picnic Bay and Horseshoe Bay at least 14 times per day, meeting all ferries and stopping at, or near, all accommodation.

Mokes and scooters are also popular options. Expect to pay around \$45 per day, plus extras such as petrol and a per-kilometre fee, for a nifty little Moke (mini open-air vehicle) from either **Moke Magnetic** (☎ 4778 5377; www.mokemagnetic.com; 112 Sooning St, Nelly Bay) or **Tropical Topless Car Rentals** (☎ 4758 1111; 138 Sooning St, Nelly Bay; hire per day from \$60)

For a cab, call **Magnetic Island Taxi** (☎ 13 1008).

NORTH COAST HINTERLAND

Just a couple of days' drive and you can swelter in Australia's famed outback. The Flinders Hwy heads 800km due west from Townsville to Cloncurry.

Ravenswood

☎ 07 / pop 100

At Mingela, 88km from Townsville, think about making the 40km detour to Ravenswood, an unassuming National Trust-listed town. Remnants of the town's mining past – brick furnaces, old mills and mine materials – fill the vista of sunbaked hills, sparse plains and all-consuming sky. Hop on a stool at one of the pubs and chat over a beer; most miners are happy to welcome a fresh face.

Then visit the old **post office** and **mining & historical museum** (☎ 4770 2047; adult/child \$2.20/1.10; ☺) 11am-1pm), housed in the restored courthouse (unpowered sites \$10) is a sun-battered football field; stays are limited to one week.

The Thorps building in the main street houses a **pottery shop** (☎ 4770 2507) with curious finds. If you're in town on the weekend, soak up the heritage on a 30-minute **horse drawn wagon ride** (☎ 4770 2562, 0429-172 755; per person \$5; ☺) 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) – a kitsch but fun diversion.

You can sleep over at the **Imperial Hotel** (☎ 4770 2131; Macrossan St; s/tw/d \$35/45/50), an old-world gem, or the **Railway Hotel** (☎ 4770 2144; Barton St; s/tw/d \$35/45/55). The council **camping ground** (unpowered sites \$10) is a sun-battered football field; stays are limited to one week.

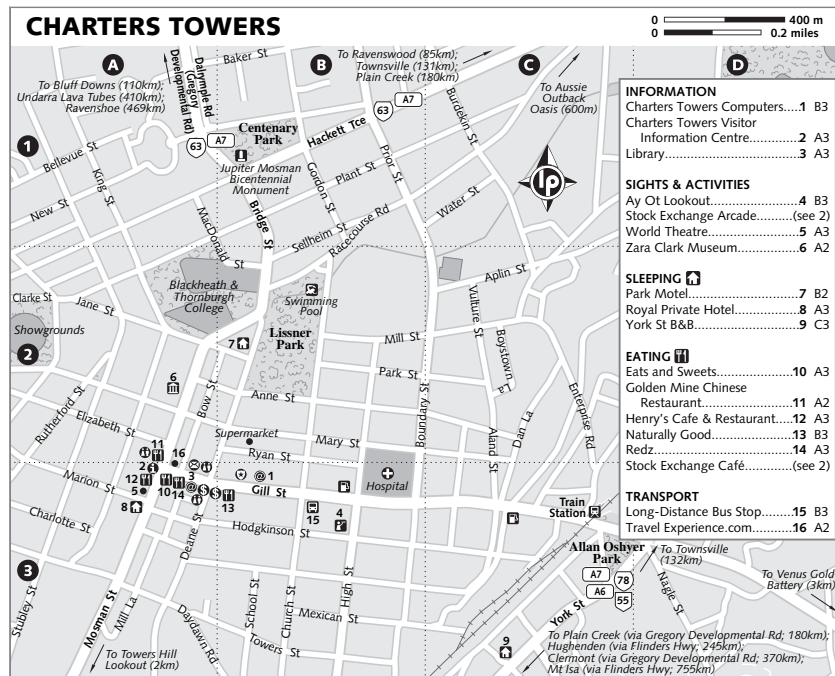
Charters Towers

☎ 07 / pop 8847

The gold rush is over, but the locals getting around in 'New York, London, *Charters Towers*, Paris' T-shirts don't seem to know it. Indeed, Charters Towers thrives in isolation 130km inland from Townsville. Its main industries are cattle and mining, with modern processes renewing a gold revival since the 1980s.

Its living history can be seen in its imposing public buildings, and friendly locals are keen to regale you with tales of the past. During the 19th century locals used to have to pinch themselves at their new-found wealth; some of that optimism still lives on as strapping young men in cowboy boots court local girls in halter tops at the town's socials.

The gleam of gold was first spotted in 1871 in a creek bed at the foot of Towers Hill by



an Aboriginal boy, Jupiter Mosman. Within a few years the surrounding area was peppered with diggings and a large town had grown. In its heyday, around the end of the 19th century, Charters Towers was known as 'the World' for its wealth and diversity. It had almost 100 mines, a population of 30,000, a stock exchange and 25 pubs.

INFORMATION

Charters Towers Computers (☎ 4787 2988; 59 Gill St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat; per 10min \$1) has internet access. Otherwise, try the **library** (Gill St). **Charters Towers visitor information centre** (☎ 4752 0314; www.charterstowers.qld.gov.au; 74 Mosman St; ☎ 9am-5pm; 📄) is at the top of Gill St and runs a number of tours.

SIGHTS

A stroll down Gill and Mosman Sts will present many of Charters Towers' historically significant buildings. Near the corner is the picturesque **Stock Exchange Arcade** built in 1887 and now lined with shops; the 'Calling of the Card' audio presentation runs seven times a day.

A wonderful place to escape in time is the **Zara Clark Museum** (☎ 4787 4661; 36 Mosman St; adult/child \$4.50/2.20; ☎ 10am-3pm). Memorabilia, from old photos and farming equipment to period costumes and military items, is fascinating.

The original Australia Bank of Commerce building, built in 1891, now houses the **World Theatre** (82 Mosman St). It comprises a theatre, cinema, gift shop and restaurant.

You'll need the free cuppa to recover from the caretaker's ghost stories at **Ay Ot Lookout** (☎ 4787 2799; cnr High & Hodgkinson Sts; admission \$5; ☎ 8am-3pm). The timber building is one of many around town built using a method known as 'balloon framing', where the walls lack external cladding, and so do not have a cavity that can lead to vermin problems. It's said to be haunted by its former owner and a mysterious young woman.

The **Venus Gold Battery** (☎ 4752 0314; Millchester Rd; admission \$12; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), where gold-bearing ore was crushed and ground from 1872 until as recently as 1973, is the largest preserved battery in Australia. An imaginative presentation tells the story of this huge relic.

Towers Hill Lookout, the site where gold was first discovered, has inspiring views over the plain. There are interpretive panels, as well as an open-air theatre screening the *Ghosts of Gold* each evening at around 7pm (\$7, 20 minutes).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Ten Days in the Towers (www.charterstowerscountrymusic.com), held in early May, and claiming to be the largest amateur gathering in the country, features line dancing, bush poetry, busking and boot scootin'! Close to 200 cricket teams descend on Charters Towers to play for the **Goldfield Ashes** every Australia Day weekend (late January).

SLEEPING

Royal Private Hotel (☎ 4787 8688; 100 Mossman St; s/d without bathroom \$28/38, d with bathroom \$75-85; 📄) Built in 1888 and re-opened in late 2004, this central place has a colonial ambience with its exposed floorboards and wooden furniture. The budget rooms are modest but safe; try to get one off the wrought-iron balcony. There's a guest kitchen and comfy TV room.

York St B&B (☎ 4787 1028, 0400-769 313; 58 York St; s/d \$75/90; 📄 📄 📄) York's heritage-themed rooms in this 1880s house evoke another era. Sit outside on the balcony with the friendly cat and wonder where the day went. At the property's rear is a wing of basic dorms with kitchen facilities and air-con, though a blokey atmosphere prevails. Dorm beds are \$19 and there are some singles and doubles available. Call ☎ 4787 1998 for more information.

Park Motel (☎ 4787 1022; admin@parkmotel.com.au; 1 Mosman St; s/d \$80/90; 📄 📄 📄) The guest rooms upstairs at this historic building have loads of character, high ceilings and a resident ghost that sees the cleaners fix rooms 28, 29 and 30 *in pairs*. Downstairs is a cosy, deep-pink bar and quaint bistro, Lissners (mains \$14 to \$30), which opens every evening. There are also light motel rooms out the back.

Bluff Downs (☎ 4770 4084; www.bluffdowns.com.au; unpowered sites \$20, dm \$20, per person incl activities \$145, cottages per person/double from \$45/90; 📄 📄 📄) A hospitable farmstay two hours' drive north of Charters Towers with swimming holes, fossil fossicking and wildlife aplenty. Gracious double accommodation includes meals. Ring ahead.

Aussie Outback Oasis (☎ 1800 812 417, 4787 8722; ausback@bigpond.net.au; 76 Dr George Ellis Dr; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25, cabins \$90-98; 📄 📄) A well-maintained 4-hectare park with self-contained

cabins sleeping up to four people, plus shaded slab sites and camp kitchen. Swim off the Charter's dust in the landscaped pool.

EATING

Stock Exchange Cafe (☎ 4787 7954; Mosman St; mains \$7-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat May-Jan) Mining agents used to frequent the charmingly restored arcade that houses this café, but its gingham-curtained and black-and-white tiled interior is now better suited to the café latte set. Stop in for a baked potato, lasagne or the all-day 'big bush' breakfast.

Redz (☎ 4787 8044; 32 Gill St; dishes around \$8; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Fruit shakes, salads and sushi can be found at this health-conscious café with a funky coffee-bean counter.

Henry's Cafe & Restaurant (☎ 4787 4333; 82 Mosman St; mains \$18-29; ☎ lunch & dinner) A big classy restaurant with hearty fare like lamb shanks drizzled with red wine. And to top it off: terrific pavlova. Live music every Friday and Saturday night ensures Henry's unflinching popularity.

More options:

Eats and Sweets (☎ 4787 2667; 14 Gill St; meals \$5-8.50) Good-looking carrot cake and a cappuccino fix are perfect pick-me-ups on a road trip through town.

Golden Mine Chinese Restaurant (☎ 4787 7609; 64-66 Mosman St; meals \$7-17; ☎ lunch Wed-Fri, dinner daily) All-you-can-eat smorgasbord (lunch/dinner \$8/10) with no fewer than 24 dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 4739 46863) has a daily service from Townsville to Charters Towers (\$31, 1½ hours) continuing on to the NT. Buses arrive and depart outside the Catholic church on Gill St.

The train station is on Enterprise Rd, 1.5km east of the centre. The *Inlander* runs from Townsville to Charters Towers on Sunday and Thursday (adult/child economy seat \$24.20/\$12.10, three hours).

Travel Experience.com (☎ 4787 2622; 13 Gill St) handles travel tickets.

TOWNSVILLE TO MISSION BEACH Paluma Range National Park

Don't miss the scenic Mt Spec-Big Crystal Creek section of this national park. It straddles the 1km-plus Paluma Range west of the Bruce Hwy and has Australia's most southerly pocket of tropical rainforest, with wonderful coastal views. It's about 62km north of Townsville.

Take the northern access route to **Big Crystal Creek**, via the 4km road, 2km north of Mt Spec Rd. Here goannas scamper away from your approaching footsteps as you walk the few hundred metres from the picnic area to the popular Paradise Waterhole. There's a self-registration **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4.50/18) with toilets, gas barbecues and water (treat before drinking).

The southern access route, Mt Spec Rd is a dramatic narrow road with lose-your-lunch twists (unsuitable for caravans) that weaves its way up the mountains to the village of Paluma. After 7km you will come to **Little Crystal Creek**, a great swimming spot with waterfalls, a couple of deep rock pools and a small picnic area. You'll also pass **McClelland's Lookout**, with three good walking trails.

The **Jourama Falls** area of the park is 6km along good unsealed road off the highway. The signpost is 90km north of Townsville (25km south of Ingham). Waterview Creek is walking distance from the falls (600m) and has good swimming holes with loads of cute turtles, lookouts, a picnic area and a self-registration **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4.50/18) with barbecues. Look out for nocturnal brown bandicoots and Ulysses butterflies.

Accommodation is available at **Paluma Dreaming** (☎ 07-4770 8616; d incl cooked breakfast \$80) in rainforest-fringed motel-style rooms run by a friendly husband and wife team (elephants welcome on Sunday afternoons apparently!) and at the delightful, adults-only **Forest Mist Cottage B&B** (☎ 07-4770 8578; d incl breakfast \$85) with one cosy room with its own rainforest balcony, complete with singing whip birds. **Rainforest Inn** (☎ 07-4770 8688; www.rainforestinnpaluma.com; d from \$145; 🍷) has spacious new motel-style accommodation and a licensed restaurant. Stand-by rates (\$125) are available.

On the road to Ingham, **Crystal Creek Caravan Park** (☎ 07-4770 8140; Spiegelhauer Rd, Mutarnee; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25, on-site vans/cabins \$40/55) sits in the heart of fruit-growing country.

Make sure you stop at **Frosty Mango** (☎ 07-4770 8184; www.frostymango.com.au; Bruce Hwy; light meals \$5-10; ☎ 9am-5pm) at Mutarnee. It's a roadside ice-creamery serving 33 flavours including jaboticaba (a tree grape) and mango, of course.

Ingham & Around

The clock stopped around 1950 in mellow Ingham. You'll want to stop here for directions to spectacular **Wallaman Falls**, which lie

within Girringun National Park, 50km west of town. The falls have the longest single drop of any in Australia at 278m. It's a dazzling sight in the Wet season. There's a self-registration **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4.50/18) with shower facilities and a swimming hole nearby. **Tyto wetlands**, named after the Eastern Grass Owl (*Tyto Capensis*), is home to over 160 bird species plus reptiles, mammals and insects, and is fast gaining a reputation among the international bird-watching community. For information about Wallaman Falls and the Tyto wetlands, pop into the **Tyto Wetlands information centre** (☎ 07-4776 5211; www.hinchinbrooknq.com.au; cnr Townsville Rd & Bruce Hwy; ☎ 8.45am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) or the **QPWS office** (☎ 07-4777 2822; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Halifax & Bemerside Rd, Ingham; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri).

With nearly 60% of Ingham residents of Italian descent, it's no wonder the **Australian-Italian Festival** (www.australianitalianfestival.com.au), held in mid-May, is touted as the town's most happening occasion.

Decent coffee (\$3.50) can be found at **Café Fiorellis** (☎ 4776 2172; 5-7 Lannercrest St). And if staying over, put the oh-so *Great Gatsby* **Nooria Heritage Resort** (☎ 4776 1100; www.hotelnooria.com.au; 5-9 Warren St; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/22, dm \$22, s \$55-119, d \$59-149; ☎ lunch & dinner; 🍷) at the top of your list. A 1920s boarding house, with parquet floors, Florentine glass and frescos, it oozes Art Deco style. The Ceylon tea room is made for Sunday high teas (\$24.50 per person; bookings essential) and every evening there are tapas in the stunning arch-windowed bar. Meals available (\$16.50 to \$22.50).

Between Ingham and Cardwell, the Bruce Hwy briefly climbs high above the coast with tremendous views over the winding, mangrove-lined waterways known as the Everglades, which separate Hinchinbrook Island from the coast.

Lucinda, a port town 24km from Ingham, is the access point for the southern end of Hinchinbrook Island. It's worth coming down here just to see the 6km-long jetty used for shipping sugar.

Cardwell

☎ 07 / pop 11,410

The idling seaside holiday town of Cardwell is one of north Queensland's oldest towns (established in 1864), yet there's surprisingly little to it. The Port Hinchinbrook marina, 2km south of town, is the departure point

CAMPERVANS

Who *isn't* driving a campervan on Queensland's North Coast and Far North Queensland roads?

Self-contained freedom on four wheels is certainly the transport mode of choice for those travelling as couples or in groups. It is a hefty initial outlay, but many find it more economical in the long run – although you will have to pay extra to stay at camping grounds in these parts. There are some unsealed roads, such as those that access Wallaman Falls (opposite). There are also some seriously winding roads – in the Atherton Tableland there's around 280 bends in the Gilles Hwy between Yungaburra (p442) and Gordonvale. However, getting around is mostly a cinch and allows flexibility to pull into those roadside stalls brimming with tropical fruit plus call into a multitude of waterfalls and state parks.

Taking campervans for extended periods can limit your island-hopping (eg it's \$144 return on the car ferry between Townsville and Magnetic Island) but there's something innately carefree about travelling the roads with the windows down.

The **Queensland 2007 Caravan Parks & Touring Accommodation Directory** (www.caravanql.com.au) is a handy and free dashboard companion guide; it's available at most visitor information centres in the region.

for Hinchinbrook Island and may awaken this beachside stretch in years to come. For travellers with wheels, there are a bunch of great forest drives, picnic spots and walks with swimming holes in the area, including the **Cardwell Forest Drive**, a 26km round trip.

The **QPWS Rainforest & Reef Information Centre** (☎ 4066 8601; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 142 Victoria St; ☎ 8am-4.30pm), beside the main jetty, has a great rainforest interpretive display and information on Hinchinbrook Island and the drives.

SEASONAL WORK

Cardwell Backpackers Hostel (☎ 4066 8014; cardwellbackpackers@bigpond.com; 178 Bowen St; dm \$19-20; 🍷 🍷) is a busy beehive for seasonal farm workers. The managers will find work for any international guest who stays here, providing they have a valid work permit and tax file number.

SLEEPING

Kookaburra Holiday Park (☎ 4066 8648; www.kookaburraholidaypark.com.au; 175 Bruce Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/20, d \$40-95; 🍷 🍷) Set in attractive tropical grounds, this enormous holiday village almost outsizes Cardwell itself. There's a wide range of accommodation.

Hinchinbrook YHA (unpowered sites s/d \$11/18, dm/s/d \$18/35/40; 🍷 🍷) Out the back of the Kookaburra Holiday Park is this happy backpackers with access to the park's fabulous facilities.

our pick **Mudbrick Manor** (☎ 4066 2299; www.mudbrickmanor.com.au; Lot 13, Stony Creek Rd; s/d incl breakfast \$90/120; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The 'welcome' sign at this mud-brick homestead has genuine intent. There's a rustic communal area with a pianola

and accordion for the musically inclined or a heap of novels to peruse. Spend lazy days on the veranda overlooking the sprawling paved courtyard or cooling off in the saltwater pool. Ask about the three-course dinners (\$30 for three courses).

Cardwell's main street options aren't all together alluring so consider going to the marina's **Portside Bar & Grill** (☎ 4066 4007; mains \$15.50-28.90) and watch the yachties prepare their pleasure crafts while you nibble on salt-and-pepper squid salad. To get there, follow the signs to the ferry office. Alternatively, **Muddy's** (☎ 4066 8133; cnr Richard & Victoria St; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) does steaks and even crab and prawn sandwiches. You can't miss 'Rocky', the big crab out the front.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

All buses between Townsville and Cairns stop at Cardwell: on the *Sunlander* from Townsville it costs \$37.40 (two hours), from Cairns \$37.40 (three hours). Cardwell is also on the Brisbane to Cairns train line; contact **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722) for details.

Hinchinbrook Island National Park

Lucky you, if you have time to explore this stunning and unspoiled wilderness. Hinchinbrook's granite mountains rise dramatically from the sea. The mainland side is thick with lush tropical forest, while long, sandy beaches and tangled mangroves curve round its eastern shores. All 399 sq km of the island is national park, and rugged Mt Bowen (1121m) is its highest peak. There's plenty of

wildlife, especially pretty-faced wallabies and the iridescent-blue Ulysses butterfly.

Hinchinbrook is well known to bushwalkers and naturalists. Walking opportunities here are outstanding; however, some trails may close between November and March due to adverse weather.

The highlight is the **Thorsborne Trail**, a 32km track from Ramsay Bay to Zoe Bay (with its stunning waterfall), and on to George Point at the southern tip. It's a three- to five-day walk, although you can walk shorter sections. This is the real bush experience, however. You'll need to draw water from creeks as you go (all water should be chemically purified or boiled before drinking), keep your food out of reach of the native bush rats, and keep an eye out for estuarine crocodiles in the mangroves. Take plenty of insect repellent.

Along the Thorsborne Trail there are six **QPWS camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18), plus the two at Macushla Bay and the Haven in the north. A limit of 40 people on the main trail at any one time necessitates booking ahead (up to one year for school holidays). The largest group size allowed is six people. Pick up the Thorsborne Trail and Hinchinbrook leaflets from the QPWS Rainforest & Reef Information Centre (p411) in Cardwell, or visit www.queenslandwalks.com.au for more information. To purchase your permits and book a place, call **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au).

Hinchinbrook Island Wilderness Lodge (☎ 1800 777 021, 07-4066 8270; www.hinchinbrooklodge.com.au; d \$185-350; 🏠) is built into a steep hillside on the island's north affording nearly all rooms ocean views. Choose from self-contained beach houses or stylish, elevated tree houses. Use of the resort's canoes, surf-skis and snorkelling gear is included.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Hinchinbrook Island Ferries (☎ 07-4066 8270; www.hinchinbrookferries.com.au) has a daily service from May to October and three services a week from November until the end of January. There is no ferry service in February and March. Boats depart from Cardwell's Port Hinchinbrook Marina and dock at the Hinchinbrook Resort. The journey costs from \$90 return (including lunch). If you're walking the Thorsborne Trail a one-way transfer costs \$66. Walkers usually pick up the **Hinchinbrook Wilderness Safaris** (☎ 07-4777 8307; www.hinchinbrookwildernesssafaris.com.au; one way/return \$46/57) service at the southern end.

Tully

☎ 07 / pop 3400

Tully carries the reputation as the wettest place in Australia. It holds the record for the highest annual rainfall in a populated area of Australia – which it 'won' in 1950 when it received 7.9m. (It's no coincidence that the **Big Gumboot** at the entrance to town is also 7.9m tall.) The big excitement here, though, is spending five frothy hours **white-water rafting** its wild river. Walkers also have good reason to stop here, with 150km of tracks, while other travellers come to pick bananas and cool off after work at **Tully Gorge** or **Alligators Nest** swimming hole, which despite the name is safe to swim in, unlike the coastal rivers in this region.

Rafting day trips on the Tully River with **Raging Thunder Adventures** (☎ 4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au/rafting.asp) or **R'n'R White Water Rafting** (☎ 4041 9444; www.raft.com.au) cost between \$145 and \$175 and include barbecue lunch and transfers from Mission Beach, Cairns or Port Douglas.

There are good walking opportunities in the **Tully State forests**, located 40km from Tully along Cardstone Rd. There are picnic facilities, as well as river access for swimming at Tully Gorge. It's also popular with kayakers, and the gentle burble of the Tully River can turn to rapids when the hydro-electricity company opens its floodgates. The **Tully visitor information centre** (☎ 4068 2288; www.tropicalaustralia.com.au; Bruce Hwy; sugar-mill tours adult/child \$12/8; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun) has a map of all walking trails and free coffee. It also books 1½-hour tours of Tully's sugar mill held on Saturday and Sunday at 11am and 1.30pm; children must be over seven years to do the tour.

Sleeping options include the high-density **Banana Barracks** (☎ 4068 0455; www.bananabarracks.com; 50 Butler St; dm \$20-22, s/d \$50/52; 🏠) hostel aimed at 'working backpackers', with a busy after-work Rafters bar and budget bistro meals, or **Green Way Caravan Park** (☎ 4068 2055; Murray St; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/20, cabins with/without bathroom \$66/50; 🏠) with cabins, camp sites and a communal kitchen.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 4739 46863) calls into Tully on the Brisbane-Cairns route with six services daily stopping at Tully's Banyan Park before reaching Mission Beach 25 minutes later. **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have one daily service to Tully on the same route.

MISSION BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 2985

The 14km coastal stretch of Mission Beach – including Wongaling and South Mission Beaches in the south, Mission Beach in the middle, and Bingil Bay and beautiful Garners Beach in the north – lures many beach and rainforest pilgrims, not to mention southern state escapees seeking an endless summer, and a café latte within arm's length.

There's plenty of accommodation options. Mission Beach, fast becoming the busiest pit stop between Townsville and Cairns, is at the crossroads – it is a place divided by development. Meanwhile, Mission Beach's signature species, the endangered southern cassowary (p414) (seemingly part emu, part aging rocker with attitude, and a black wiry wig to prove it) lobs around reminding everyone why they came here in the first place.

Dunk Island, resembling a sleeping woman 4.5km offshore, is home to a ritzy resort. This gorgeous island park offers 'peace and plenty' (according to the area's indigenous people), or at least the option of a day pass to the über-deluxe resort's pool and restaurant.

To avoid an unexpected meeting with a croc or stinger, don't swim in any of Mission Beach's beach creeks – stick to the swimming enclosures provided.

Information

Mission Beach Information Station (☎ 4068 8699; www.missionbeachinfo.com; Shop 4, Wongaling Shopping Centre; 🕒 9am-7pm; 🏠) provides information and books tours and transport, while volunteers at the **Wet Tropics Environment Centre** (☎ 4068 7197; www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au; Porters Promenade, Mission Beach) can inform you about the area's World Heritage sites.

Sights & Activities

Mission Beach has plenty of activities on offer, from near-death experiences to more sedate options. Paddle over to Dunk Island for the day with eco-friendly **Coral Sea Kayaking** (☎ 4068 9154, 0419-782 453; www.coralseakayaking.com; half/full-day tours \$60/93) or simply bob around the coastline for half a day; either way you'll fill your head with new-found knowledge about the environs. Trips depart from South Mission Beach.

Mission Beach is one of the most popular spots in Queensland to skydive; **Jump the Beach** (☎ 1800 444 568, 4031 1822; www.jumpthebeach.com;

14,000ft tandem jump from \$280) uses the sand of Mission Beach to cushion your landing.

Quick Cat (☎ 1800 654 242, 4068 7289; www.quickcatcruises.com.au; reef trip adult/child \$155/78) operates day cruises to the outer reef, including a 45-minute stop at Dunk Island, snorkelling, lunch and a glass-bottom boat jaunt.

Experienced divers should try **Calypso Dive** (☎ 4068 8432; www.calypsodive.com; per person from \$160), which runs diving cruises to the *Lady Bowen* wreck (maximum 18 passengers).

Rainforest walks around Mission Beach can get exciting if you meet a cassowary. And if you fancy meeting an environmental menace, the wild boar, then the **Big Pig Shindig** (☎ 4068 8732; www.boarbusters.com.au; tours \$90; 🕒 tours at 10am Tue, Thu & Sat), which involves a hunt for the feral pig and then a pork chop lunch, is probably one of the most unlikely tours you'll ever encounter. We're assured it's environmentally friendly.

A **mountain bike** meander is possible through the Licuala and Tam O'Shanter state forests and takes around two hours. The folk at the Mission Beach Information Station at Wongaling Shopping Centre can offer directions for the self-guided loop tour. **Le Tour Bikes** (☎ 4068 9553; Shop 4, Wongaling Shopping Centre) hires out bikes for \$25 a day.

Sleeping BUDGET

Absolute Backpackers (☎ 1800 688 316, 4068 8317; 28 Wongaling Beach Rd; dm/d/tw \$19/45/40; 🏠 🏠) Recently refurbished, this two-storey hostel is close to the Greyhound bus stop. It's nothing fancy but, like its vodka namesake, the emphasis is on mingling. Beds are comfortable, according to one backpacker.

Scotty's Mission Beach House (☎ 1800 665 567, 4068 8676; www.scottysbeachhouse.com.au; 167 Reid Rd, Wongaling Beach; dm \$20-22, d \$47-57; 🏠 🏠 🏠) At the rear of the Hamptons-esque bar and grill, the vibe here is fun and relaxed, and the pace is lazy. Expect tiled rooms around a busy pool, a messy kitchen and, in a stroke of hostel genius, single eggs and slices of bread for sale.

Treehouse (☎ 4068 7137; www.yha.com.au; Frizelle Rd, Bingil Bay; unpowered sites per person \$12, dm/d/tw \$22/55/55; 🏠) Off Bingil Bay Rd, this eco hostel was hit hard by Cyclone Larry in March 2006 but the hard-working operators have done a remarkable job restoring the split-level timber enclave, which is fringed by rainforest. A generous balcony is dotted with heavy wooden tables, banana lounges surround the

THE CASSOWARY'S PRECIOUS POO

The flightless cassowary is as tall as a grown man, has three toes, a blue-and-purple head, red wattles (fleshy lobes hanging from its neck), a helmet-like horn and unusual black feathers, which look more like ratty hair. Traditional gender roles are reversed with the male bird incubating the egg and rearing the chicks alone. The Australian cassowary is also known as the southern cassowary, though it's only found in the north of Queensland. It begins to make sense when you realise that other species are found in Papua New Guinea – to the north of Australia.

The cassowary is considered a vital link in the rainforest ecosystem. It is the only animal capable of dispersing the seeds of more than 70 species of trees whose fruits are too large for other rainforest animals to digest and pass. Cassowaries swallow fruit whole and excrete the fruit's seed intact in large piles of dung, which acts as fertiliser encouraging growth of the seed. Without this process, the rainforest as we know it would look very different.

The cassowary is an endangered species; its biggest threat is loss of habitat, and eggs and chicks are vulnerable to dogs and wild pigs. A number of birds are also hit by cars: heed road signs warning drivers to be cassowary-aware. You're most likely to see cassowaries around Mission Beach and the Cape Tribulation section of the Daintree National Park. They can be aggressive, particularly if they have chicks. If you feel threatened, do not run; instead give the bird right-of-way and try to keep something solid between you and it – preferably a tree.

saltwater pool and a resident Labrador makes for a laid-back place. Treehouse is a YHA-affiliated hostel with a free shuttle bus to Porters Promenade at selected times.

MIDRANGE

ourpick Sanctuary Retreat (☎ 4088 6064, 1800 777 012; www.sanctuaryretreat.com.au; Holt Rd, Bingil Bay; huts s/d \$32.50/65, cabins \$148; ☎ ☎ ☎) This eco-accredited lodge is perched on 20 hectares of rainforest overlooking the Coral Sea. There's an Iyengar yoga studio (\$10 a class), massage room and whole-food restaurant (mains \$13.50 to \$23.50). Sleep in a minimalist mosquito mesh hut or one of the more sophisticated cabins with ocean views from the shower, tree-top balcony and polished floorboards. The earthy owner operators get to know everyone on a first-name basis, including 'Barbara', the hang-about cassowary.

Rainforest Motel (☎ 4068 7556; www.missionbeachrainforestmotel.com; 9 Endeavour Ave, Mission Beach; s/d \$85/89; ☎ ☎) Sleep to the sounds of the trickling waterfall in these spruced-up rooms.

Hibiscus Lodge B&B (☎ 4068 9096; www.hibiscuslodge.com.au; 5 Kurrajong Close, Wongaling Beach; s/d \$85/110; ☎ ☎) This tidy B&B has three rooms, each with a private bathroom and DVD player, in a modern home. There's a beautifully shaded pool and a lush lawn made for croquet before retiring with a complimentary drink. Rates include a cooked breakfast (changes daily).

Onna Mission (☎ 4068 9920, 0438-689 920; 27 Banfield Pde, Wongaling Beach; d \$130) Dunk Island hovers in

the view of this apartment making it appear within swimming distance. Onna Mission is a spacious aquamarine- and honeycomb-colored pad with a huge kitchen.

Mission Beach Ecovillage (☎ 4068 7534; www.ecovillage.com.au; Clump Point Rd, Mission Beach; units \$162-178; ☎ ☎) The 17 units are mostly self-contained with pine walls, slat blinds, tiles throughout and fans spinning at full throttle. Deluxe versions have their own pond and spa but no kitchen, so you're off the hook with cooking. Loads of palm trees, an emerald free-form pool and beach access mean this property lives up to its Far North Queensland credentials.

TOP END

Coco Loco (☎ 4068 7637; www.cocolocomissionbeach.com; 73 Holt Rd; d \$170; ☎) Oh-so Santa Fe, this place is made for couples who want to live like reclusive rock stars for a couple of days (two-night minimum stay). Terracotta hues and organic curves define the self-contained residence with an aluminium kitchen, pebble beachfront terrace and track down to Brooks Beach.

CAMPING

Dunk Island View Caravan Park (☎ 4068 8248; www.dunkislandviewcaravanpark.com; Webb Rd, Wongaling Beach; unpowered/power sites \$17/22, units \$65-110; ☎) The beach is a leisurely hop, skip and jump away from your site. Guest laundry, kitchen and shop.

Also recommended:

Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village (☎ 1800 008 129, 4068 8129; big4bccv@bigpond.com.au; Kennedy Esplanade, South Mission Beach; unpowered/power sites \$29/31, d cabins \$50-120; ☎ ☎) Hawaiian shirt-clad caretakers are busy priming the beachfront cabins and sites. Ideal for families.

Mission Beach Caravan Park (Porters Promenade; unpowered/power sites \$12/15) Council-run park; no advance bookings.

Eating

Shrubbery Taverna (☎ 4068 7803; David St; mains \$17-20; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner daily) A firm favourite with the locals (especially after Sunday siestas), this inviting place is tucked behind a garden and shares its sandy position with the beach. The menu isn't extensive but has Mediterranean delights like *arancini* or Spanish mackerel.

Friends (☎ 4068 7107; Porters Promenade, Mission Beach; mains \$18.50-29.50; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) As sundown comes, the citronella candles are lit and the balcony tables glow. Attentive staff cruise the low-key surrounds, serving Indian fish curry and sautéed prawns.

The Greek Tavern (☎ 4068 8177; 1 Banfield Pde, Wongaling Beach; mains \$20.50-28.50) This timber beach restaurant maximises every inch of its view. Dabble in *meze* or go straight to the Mediterranean mains.

Blarney's (☎ 4068 8472; 10 Wongaling Beach Rd, Wongaling; mains \$27-32.95; ☎ lunch Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Paper gums surround this summery restaurant. The Mod Oz menu includes oysters, roast duck or a steak-and-tiger-prawn combo (aka surf 'n' turf).

Also recommended:

Coconutz (☎ 4068 7397; cnr David St & Porters Promenade; meals \$10-\$22) A lively gathering spot for perky locals.

Oceania (☎ 4088 6222; Porters Promenade; mains \$21-28) This bar and grill gets consistently good reports.

Piccolo's (☎ 4068 7008; David St; meals \$10.80-18.50; ☎ from 3pm Tue-Sun) A local says they do the best pizzas outside of Naples.

Self-caterers can find supermarkets at Mission Beach and Wongaling.

Getting There & Around

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 GREYHOUND, 1300 4739 46863) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) buses stop at Wongaling Shopping Village in Wongaling Beach. Average one-way fares are \$29 to Cairns (two hours) and \$48 to Townsville (four hours).

Trans North (☎ 4068 7400, 0419-745 875; www.transnorthbus.com; from \$3; ☎ Mon-Sat) runs local buses almost every hour (except from 12.30pm to 3.30pm) between Bingil Bay and South Mission Beach until 5.30pm; the visitors centre has timetables. For a cab, call **Mission Beach Maxi Cab** (☎ 0428-689 366).

DUNK ISLAND

Dunk Island is an easy day trip from Mission Beach. It's just 4.5km off the coast and blessed with nearly 150 species of bird life and exotic butterflies in season.

Rainforest walks here will revive the spirit. From the top of 271m-Mt Kootaloo (5.6km), entrances to the Hinchinbrook Channel fan before you, or there's the rewarding but difficult island circuit (9.2km) that passes by secluded beaches. You can also check out the alternative lifestyle of **Bruce Arthur's Artists Colony** (admission \$4; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon & Thu).

Day-trippers can purchase a **Resort Experience Pass** (adult/child \$40/20) from the Watersports Centre just south of the jetty, which entitles you to lunch, pool access and an hour's use of a paddle ski. Basic food and beverages are sold at the nearby licensed café.

The newly revamped **Voyages Dunk Island** (☎ 07-4068 8199, 1300 134 044; www.voyages.com.au; s/d from \$158/294; ☎ ☎) sits on palm-fringed Brammo Bay and has rooms ranging from pretty nice to pretty superb. Think split-level accommodation, a huge bed, a Balinese spa, a golf course and personal access to the beach. Kids, meanwhile, have access to a dedicated club. Tariffs include breakfast.

The **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 07-4068 8199; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) has nine sites with good amenities by the resort's water-sports office.

Getting There & Away

Macair (☎ 13 13 13) has regular flights to/from Cairns (\$190). **Mission Beach Dunk Island Connections** (☎ 07-4059 2709; www.missionbeachdunkconnections.com.au) does combination bus and boat transfers to Dunk from Cairns (\$64, 2½ hours) and Port Douglas (\$94, 3¾ hours).

Return ferry trips (including snorkelling) from Mission Beach cost about \$24/48 per child/adult with **Dunk Island Express Water Taxi** (☎ 07-4068 8310; Banfield Pde, Wongaling) and **Dunk Island Ferry & Cruises** (☎ 07-4068 7289; www.dunkferry.com.au; Clump Point), which also operates a Great Barrier Reef trip (adult/child \$155/78).

You can also get here with Quick Cat or Coral Sea Kayaking; see p413.

MISSION BEACH TO CAIRNS

The scenery from Mission Beach to Cairns is wonderfully fertile. North of El Arish, you can leave the Bruce Hwy and take an alternative route to Innisfail via quaint Silkwood and Mena Creek, buried in sugar cane about 20km southwest of Innisfail.

At Mena Creek, eco-certified **Paronella Park** (☎ 07-4065 3225; www.paronellapark.com.au; Japoonvale Rd; entry plus tour adult/child/student \$26/13/23.50; 🕒 9am-7.30pm, night tour at 6.20pm) is a rambling garden with the enchanting ruins of a Spanish-style castle hand-built in the 1930s. Floods, fire and the moist tropics have rendered these mossy remains almost medieval. Tours, featuring indigenous dancing, run regularly and there's a caravan park attached (unpowered/powerd sites \$22/24).

If you want to know more about sugar processing, steam trains and the slave-labour heritage of the industry, pop by the **Australian Sugar Industry Museum** (☎ 07-4063 2656; Bruce Hwy; adult/child/family \$8/6/22; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun May-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun Nov-Apr) at Mourilyan, 7km south of Innisfail.

Innisfail

☎ 07 / pop 10,000

A prosperous farming town bathed in sunlight and draped with banana plantations, Innisfail is perched by the wide Johnstone River. The town has a surprising array of fine architecture thanks to cyclone reconstruction at the fever pitch of the sleek 1920s and '30s Art Deco movement. Fast forward 88 years and the town was in repair mode again following Cyclone Larry's devastating blow in March 2006.

The **visitor information centre** (☎ 4063 2655; Bruce Hwy; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun), 8km south of town, has a town-walk brochure.

Johnstone River Crocodile Farm (☎ 4061 1121; www.crocfarm.com; Flying Fish Point Rd; adult/child \$18/9; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm, feeding times 11am & 3pm) breeds thousands of crocodiles that are recycled as handbags and steak. Tours run frequently (from 9.30am) where you can watch one of the guides sit on one-tonne Gregory – the farm's fattest reptile.

Neat and tidy **Barrier Reef Motel** (☎ 4061 4988; www.barrierreefmotel.com.au; Bruce Hwy; s/d \$84/94; 🚰 🚿 🛏) has small rooms and a restaurant.

The town's hostels cater to banana plantation workers and travellers, including quirky **Codge Lodge** (☎ 4061 8055; 63 Rankin St; dm \$25, s/t \$40/60; 🚰 🚿 🛏), a superb and clean home overlooking the river with an outboard motor doubling as a post box.

Flying Fish Point Beachfront B&B (☎ 4061 8934; www.beachfrontbnb.com.au; 3 Alice St, Flying Fish Point; s/d \$100/140; 🚰 🚿 🛏) is a secluded nook with water views from every angle. With its yin and yang garden, you'll feel very Zen, and no doubt a whole lot further than just 7km from Innisfail. Nearby, vibrant **Flying Fish Point Van Park** (☎ 4061 3131; www.ffpvanpark.com.au; 39 Elizabeth St; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/24, cabins from \$75) is within easy access to an excellent fishing haunt where the Johnstone River meets the sea.

Jagad's (☎ 4061 1480; 49 Edith St; meals \$5-10.50; 🍳 breakfast & lunch) does affordable hot and cold meals and the air-con surrounds attract lunching locals in droves. There's also a juice bar attached. Soak up the blue of the Johnstone River at the **Imperial Tavern** (☎ 4061 1400; nr Grace St & Fitzgerald Esplanade), a popular after-work haunt.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 4739 46863; www.greyhound.com.au) calls into Innisfail on the Brisbane-Cairns route with six services daily stopping at King George St. **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have one daily service to Innisfail on the same route.

From Innisfail the Palmerston Hwy winds west up to the magical Atherton Tablelands, passing through the rainforest of **Palmerston (Wooroonoan National Park)**, which has creeks, waterfalls, scenic walking tracks and a self-registration **camping ground** (per person/family \$4.50/18) at Henrietta Creek, just off the road.

Australia's ancient landscape may not boast Himalayan highs, but Queensland's highest peak, Mt Bartle Frere (1657m), is definitely a challenging climb. Sitting inside Wooroonoan National Park, it falls within the dramatic Bellenden Ker range, which skirts the Bruce Hwy between Innisfail and Cairns. Experienced walkers can embark on the **Mt Bartle Frere Summit Track** (15km, two days return), which leads from the Josephine Falls car park to the summit. There's also an alternative 10km (eight-hour) return walk to Broken Nose. It's best that you don't walk alone and always let someone know before you go. Pick up a trail guide from the nearest visitors centre or contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04;

WHEN LARRY SHOWED UP

It was a typical Sunday in Innisfail on 19 March 2006. Families frolicked at waterfalls, communities gathered at festivals and farmers irrigated their crops. But by the following Monday morning, Cyclone Larry, a Category Four storm, had ripped the façades and roofs off buildings, battered neighbourhoods, stripped rainforests and flattened fields at its ferocious 290km/h pace.

Unbelievably, no-one died due to the speedy cyclone preparedness alerts, and sheer good fortune. But the clean up would be massive: estimates suggest 15 years' worth of green vegetation growth and 350,000 cubic metres of mangled steel, household glass and remnant infrastructure were disposed of. In Innisfail shire alone, 300 homes were uninhabitable after Cyclone Larry came knocking.

Cyclone Larry also devastated the wider area between Cardwell and Cairns. Wildlife habitat corridors were affected. The cyclone left some areas of rainforest extensively damaged and the canopy destroyed. Increased light on the forest floor allowed invasive flora to intrude, thus changing the biological make-up in key habitats.

The reality hit home with Australians elsewhere when bananas became scarce and prohibitively expensive: indeed 80% of Australia's banana crop was lost in what was the most damaging storm to hit the nation's shores in 30 years.

With climate change and the threat of more frequent cyclones in years to come, Far North Queensland's residents and leaders are under no illusions that living in paradise can come with a price. At the time of writing, Mission Beach tourism operators recalled horror damage bills but were proud of their clean-up achievements – and deservedly so. Innisfail was still being repaired but amazing progress had been made. People have always stopped to chat with one another here in what has been described as a 'real town' by one local. In some ways, the 2006 cyclone galvanised this growing community even more. And the influx of builders who came to help with repairs – well, some of them are staying on too.

www.epa.qld.gov.au, www.queenslandwalks.com.au). Self-registration **camping** (per person/family \$4.50/18) is permitted along the trail.

GULF SAVANNAH

This is fair dinkum country, far beyond the squared pavements of the coastal cities; so remote, so devoid of the clamours of urban society that the weight of the sky falls heavily on the eyes and you can almost hear the bark peeling off the trees. In essence, you become part of the minimalist landscape. The small former mining towns out here have little more than a pub and a few houses, but the landscapes are incomparable – sweeping grass plains, scrubby forest and intricate networks of seasonal rivers and tidal creeks that drain into the Gulf of Carpentaria. There are just two seasons that define Savannah life: the Wet (December to April) and the Dry (May to November).

Savannah 'stock' are laconic and generous people who don't hesitate to wave to travellers driving around with self-sufficiency on their towbars. Indeed, driving is the best way

to see the Gulf Savannah but don't expect a gentle meander through the suburbs – during the Wet, dirt roads turn to muck and sealed roads can be flooded, and mobile phone service is unreliable at best. This is Australia's quintessential outback, a true frontier, which also just happens to have some of the planet's best fishing and enviable weather for six months of the year. For more information visit www.savannahway.com.au

Getting There & Around

AIR

Macair (☎ 13 13 13) has services travelling between Cairns and Normanton, Burketown and Mornington Island; and between Mt Isa and Normanton and Burketown.

BUS

Transnorth (☎ 1300 4739 46863, 07-4036 9250; www.transnorthbus.com) runs a service from Cairns to Karumba via the Tablelands and onto Mt Surprise, Georgetown, Croydon, Blackbull and Normanton. This service departs Cairns on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6.30am, arriving in Karumba at 6.15pm. The Karumba

to Cairns service operates on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday departing at 6.30am and arriving at Cairns at 6.15pm.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There are two main roads into the Gulf region. The Savannah Way (or Gulf Developmental Rd) takes you from the Kennedy Hwy, south of the Atherton Tablelands, across to Normanton on 450km of sealed road. The Burke Developmental Rd (Matilda Hwy) runs north from Cloncurry to Normanton (378km sealed) via the Burke & Wills Roadhouse, but it's mostly single-lane traffic and driving requires good concentration. Road trains (the length of 10 cars) have right of way – that means you pull on to the shoulder of the road and, if necessary, stop. Pick up a copy of outback *Queensland: Survive the Drive* (www.mainroads.qld.gov.au) at visitor information centres for more information.

Other Savannah roads are unsealed so seek advice on road conditions, fuel stops and what to carry with you (plenty of water!). The **RACQ** (☎ 1300 130 595; www.racq.com.au; cnr Mulgrave Rd & Aplin St) in Cairns is an excellent source of information.

TRAIN

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722) *Gulflander* connects Normanton and Croydon (economy seat \$58, 3½ hours) each Wednesday at 8.30am (arriving in Croydon at 1.30pm) and returns every Thursday at the same time. This service operates from early February to early December (weather permitting).

The historic *Savannahlander* conducts four-day **tours** (☎ 07-4036 9250, 07-4036 9341; www.savannahlander.com.au) along its traditional route from Cairns to Forsyth between March and mid-December (weather permitting) with coach connections to Chillagoe, Undara Lava Tubes and Cobbold Gorge. Rates vary depending on the accommodation and tours you book, so call for details.

THE SAVANNAH WAY Undara Volcanic National Park

The massive Undara lava tubes – the world's longest molten-rock tunnels, running up to 160km underground – are one of inland Queensland's most fascinating natural attractions. They were formed around 190,000 years ago following a three-month eruption of a single shield volcano. The massive lava flows

drained towards the sea, following the routes of ancient river beds, and while the surface of the lava cooled and hardened, hot lava continued to race through the centre of the flows, eventually leaving enormous basalt tubes.

You may only visit the tubes with **Savannah Guides** (☎ 08-8985 3890; www.savannah-guides.com.au), which runs full-day tours (adult/child including lunch \$100/50), half-day tours (\$65/35) and two-hour introductory tours (\$35/17) from the lodge.

Sitting 275km west of Cairns, the facilities for campers are excellent at **Undara Experience** (☎ 1800 990 992, 07-4097 1411; www.undara.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/24, f tents \$60, dm/s/d \$25/100/150; 🚻), but the railway carriages (adult/child \$75/38) are a beautifully restored (but sometimes hot) sleeping variation (ask about the meal packages). Bush breakfasts are outdoors with billy tea and birdsong. The bistro serves lunch and dinner, but self-caterers must bring all supplies. Two-hour tours run year-round, several times daily (adult/child \$38/20).

Undara to Croydon

The side trips to tiny towns are what make this stretch across the Savannah woodland so memorable. Mt Surprise is 319km southwest of Cairns and 393km east of Normanton on the Gulf Development Rd; here you'll find the region's oldest building, the **Old Post Office Museum** (☎ 07-4062 3126; adult/child \$2/50c), which has a small and quirky display of local history items. This is also a centre for gem fossicking, and local businesses can give you tips, tools and a licence to dig for the semi-precious stones. Accommodation options include two caravan parks and the **Mt Surprise Hotel** (☎ 07-4062 3118; s/d \$30/50; mains \$13-15; 🍷 lunch & dinner). **Bedrock Village Caravan Park** (☎ 07-4062 3193; www.bedrockvillage.com.au; Garnet St, Mt Surprise; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/22, s \$32, cabins \$58-78; 🚻 🚿) has excellent self-contained accommodation and sites set on 3.6 hectares of bush. Daily tours (\$110) to the Undara Lava Tubes, departing Bedrock at 7.30am, are run by an accredited Savannah guide.

You can take the 150km **Explorers' Loop** southwest from Mt Surprise to the old gold-mining townships of **Einasleigh** and **Forsyth**. Spectacular **Cobbold Gorge** is 45km south of Forsyth, but can only be explored on a guided day with **Cobbold Gorge Tours** (☎ 1800 669 922, 07-4062 5470; www.cobboldgorge.com.au; day tours

adult/child \$110/55), which also provides accommodation at **Cobbold Village** (unpowered/powerd sites \$13/22, s/d cabins \$60/80; 🚻 🚿). Tours include a boat cruise, agate fossicking, croc spotting, a barbecue lunch and swimming.

The loop finishes at **Georgetown** (population 300), back on the Savannah Way. There are several places to stay, two supermarkets, a good bakery, a public swimming pool (free entry), fuel, and mechanical and tyre repairs. There's internet access at the **Terrestrial Centre** (☎ 07-4062 1485; www.etheridge.qld.gov.au; Low St; adult/child/concession \$10/3/8; 🍷 8am-5pm Apr-Sep, 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar; 🚻), which also has information on Mt Surprise, Einasleigh and Forsyth. Internet access is \$4 an hour.

Croydon

☎ 07 / pop 295

For a while there in the 1880s, everything you touched turned to gold in Croydon. Once the 'Vegas' of the Gulf Savannah, it was crammed with bars and 8000 budding millionaires but the riches ran dry towards the end of WWI and the town became a shadow of its former self.

Croydon's information centre (☎ 4745 6125; cnr Samwell & Aldridge Sts; 🍷 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar; 🚻), museum, craft shop and internet café (\$2.50 per 30 minutes) are housed in the historic police station alongside several other restored buildings. The centre conducts one-hour **walk-tours** (☎ 4745 6125; adult/child \$5.50/free; 🍷 tours at 8am, 10am, 2pm & 4pm).

You can sleep on the veranda at the **Club Hotel** (☎ 4745 6184; cnr Brown & Sircom Sts; s \$40, d \$50-75; 🚻 🚿). It's a corrugated-iron pub with heaps of character, basic rooms and meals and, bless them, a pool!

Normanton

☎ 07 / pop 2500

You've hit the 'big smoke' at Normanton, a bustling centre with a handful of **historic buildings**, including the *Gulflander's* classic Victorian-era train station. The town was established on Norman River as a port for the Cloncurry copper fields before becoming Croydon's gold-rush port. June is an excellent time to stop and enjoy the area's biggest social event, the **Normanton Rodeo & Gymkhana**. Otherwise, croc spotting, cloud watching, barramundi fishing and a beer at the **Purple Pub** (☎ 4745 1324; cnr Landsborough & Brown Sts) are big pastimes. The historic Burns Philip & Co

Ltd store houses the **visitor information centre and library** (☎ 4745 1065; cnr Caroline & Landsborough Sts; 🍷 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Tue, 9am-2pm Sat; 🚻) with internet access (\$2 per 30 minutes).

The **Normanton Tourist Park** (☎ 4745 1121; 14 Brown St; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/22, dm \$25, cabins \$78; 🚻 🚿) is a very pleasant park with excellent cabins, some of which have bathrooms, and a huge shaded swimming pool and artesian spa.

More accommodation: **Albion Hotel** (☎ 4745 1218; Haig St; s/d \$55/60; 🚻) Motel-style rooms and counter meals. **Gulfland Motel & Caravan Park** (☎ 4745 1290; 11 Landsborough St; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/20, s/d \$80/90; 🚻 🚿) Has a licenced restaurant.

Karumba

☎ 07 / pop 1350

Karumba may be a remote fishing village, but more and more travellers come here to watch dreamy sunsets melt into the Arafura Sea over seafood platters. It's on the Gulf of Carpentaria, 79km from Normanton by a good, sealed, dual-carriageway road. Karumba is part of Aussie fishing folklore among blokey types who keep company with barramundi and saltwater crocodiles, or dabble in prawn fishing. Grey nomads escaping chilly winters in the southern states also make a beeline to this no-frills town fringed by wetlands – their caravan park chatter competes with the flocks brolgas and cyrus cranes flying overhead.

There's a great bakery in town and a mobile grocery truck does the rounds for self-caterers, but you'll end up at the legendary **Sunset Tavern** (☎ 4745 9183; the Esplanade, Karumba Point; mains \$11-25; 🍷 10am-midnight), which serves excellent meals outdoors.

Accommodation options include **Savannah Shores** (☎ 4745 9126; the Esplanade Point; s/d \$65/71; 🚻 🚿), with good self-contained cabins on the foreshore, and **Gulf Country Van Park** (☎ /fax 4745 9148; cnr Yappar St & Massey Dr; unpowered/powerd sites \$19/22, s/d \$40/60; 🚻), a shady park with good amenities.

NORMANTON TO CLONCURRY

You'll enjoy this beautiful stretch of savannah land and red-rock country on the Matilda Hwy. Everyone stops at the **Burke & Wills Roadhouse** (☎ 07-4742 5909; unpowered/powerd sites \$14/18, s/d/tr \$45/55/75; 🍷 7am-10pm; 🚻) halfway to Cloncurry, for tucker and fuel, and then pop into the **Quamby Hotel** (☎ 07-4742 5952; r \$25; 🚻),

further on, for a cleansing beer. The hotel has one room and meals (\$10 to \$12) are served if weary travellers scream loudly enough.

See p376 for information about sleeping and eating options in Cloncurry.

NORMANTON TO NORTHERN TERRITORY

While driving the unsealed, isolated, dusty stretch from Normanton to the NT, keep in mind that mad, ill-equipped explorers such as the doomed Burke and Wills *walked* twice these distances in summer. You can visit **Camp 119**, the northernmost camp of their wretched 1861 expedition. It's signposted 37km west of Normanton.

If you make it to **Burketown**, give yourself a clap. European settlers were no match for this feisty place and died in droves; check out the cemetery. These days, it's a favourite hang-out for cattle and travellers who have read Nevil Shute's *A Town Like Alice*, part of which is set here. From late September to early November you can see the extraordinary natural phenomenon known as 'Morning Glory': incredible tubular cloud formations extending the full length of the horizon that roll in from the Gulf of Carpentaria in early morning. It only occurs here and in the Gulf of Mexico.

Locals at the 130-year-old **Burketown Pub** (☎ 07-4745 5104; Beames St; dm/s/d \$10/38/55, units \$79-100; ♿) like a fresh face and a chat.

The **Doomadgee Aboriginal Community** (☎ 07-4745 8188), 93km west of Burketown, has a retail area and welcomes visitors, but village access is at the discretion of the community council. Further along is **Hell's Gate**, the last outpost of police protection for settlers heading north to Katherine in pioneer times. It was the scene of many ambushes as indigenous Australians tried to stop their lands being overrun.

BURKETOWN TO CAMOOEWAL

You may not have planned a stop at **Gregory Downs**, but chances are you'll find the pristine Gregory River, its banks covered in luxuriant, ancient rainforest, too beautiful to pass by. It's 117km south of Burketown on the sealed Wills Developmental Rd, which becomes the Gregory Downs Camooewal Rd. Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park is a two-hour drive inland from here on a mostly well-graded, unsealed road.

The friendly **Gregory Downs Hotel** (☎ 07-4748 5566; gregorydownshotel@bigpond.com; s/d \$75/85; ♿), at

the main turn-off to Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park, has motel-style units and fuel. It's possible to camp free on the riverbank, but there are no amenities.

Billy Hangers General Store (☎ 07-4748 5540; ☎ 8am-6pm Jun-Oct), opposite the pub, is crammed with goodies.

Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park

In arid country some 100km west of Gregory Downs lies this prehistoric oasis of gorges, ancient rainforest, crystal-clear green waters, creeks and tropical vegetation that indigenous Australians have enjoyed for perhaps 30,000 years. Remains of their paintings and camp sites are everywhere, and you can visit two rock-art sites.

In the southern part of the park is the World Heritage-listed **Riversleigh Fossil Field**. Some of the fossils are up to 25 million years old and include everything from giant snakes to carnivorous kangaroos.

Boodjamulla has 20km of walking tracks and an excellent national-park **camping ground** (☎ 13 13 04, 07-4748 5572; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) with tables, toilets and showers. You must book well in advance with the park rangers (April to September). Paddling up the creek gives a wondrous perspective of the gorge and swimming near the waterfalls is heavenly. Hire canoes from Adels Grove.

Adels Grove (☎ 07-4748 5502; www.adelsgrove.com.au; unpowered sites \$20, family \$22, s/d \$95/160) eco-sensitive tourist park is 10km east of the Lawn Hill entrance, set in lush surrounds by the park's creek. In addition to camp sites, there are permanent tents with beds and linen. Rates at these include dinner and breakfast. Fuel, basic groceries and tent hire are also available.

Kingfisher Camp (☎ 07-4745 8212; www.kingfisherresort.com.au; unpowered sites \$16) is 142km north from Boodjamulla and 33km from Bowthorn Station Homestead. It has 30 grassy camp sites maintained by caretakers; all drinking water here must be boiled. Half-day boat hire is \$50.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The national park is 100km west of Gregory Downs, although the easiest route for 2WD vehicles is to come via the Burke & Wills Roadhouse. If you're coming from Mt Isa, the last 230km after you leave the Barkley Hwy are unsealed and often impassable after rain, and a 4WD vehicle is necessary.

Campbell's Tours & Travel (☎ 07-4743 2006; www.campbellstravel.com.au) in Mt Isa does a three-day safari (adult/child \$660/330) out to Boodjamulla and Riversleigh on Tuesday and Friday (April to October), with accommodation and meals provided at Adels Grove.

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

Tropical, wild and rugged, Queensland's Far North proves the theory that size doesn't matter. Although small geographically, this stunning destination contains the richest pockets of biodiversity in Australia, if not the world. The dense and ancient rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area coat the landscape, spilling out onto gorgeous beaches. Offshore lies the majestic Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which is threatened by climate change and the effects of coral bleaching. The highland region of the Atherton Tablelands forms a leafy backdrop to the coast, concealing volcanic crater lakes, waterfalls and giant strangled fig trees. Heading north is historic Cooktown, beyond which lie the dusty isolation of Cape York and the very tip of Australia, Cape York Peninsula.

Locals speak reverently about their region and will look at you with undisguised pity if you're from 'down south', which could mean only as far as Townsville. Many conform to the stereotype of the 'real' Australian: a

singlet-wearing tough guy in an Akubra hat, whose idea of dressing up is to change into a newer pair of thongs. Common to most, however, is a genuine respect for their fragile environment, where human impact is closely checked.

Far North Queensland is one of Australia's leading tourism hot spots and accommodation prices tend to spike during peak tourism (June to October); expect some prices quoted here to rise by up to 30% during these months.

CAIRNS

☎ 07 / pop 120,483

Boasting an infectious energy and a lush tropical setting, Cairns is unashamedly a tourist town, and its popularity is global. On Cairns' foreshore, Korean bird-watchers swivel 15cm lenses, local ladies aqua dance at the *very public* lagoon pool, Islander families share picnics and fitness types jog along the Esplanade where pelicans cavort on mudflats. Overhead, planes take off with amazing frequency, and yet the straw-sucking sound of geckos still lingers in the air. But mostly crowds come to visit the Great Barrier Reef, which sits offshore and shapes the city's character. It's one of the world's most popular diving sites and the number of tour/dive/snorkel/cruise operators operating here is mind-boggling. Cairns can offer you bungee jumping before breakfast, as well as tours to the Atherton Tablelands, Port Douglas and beyond. In between all this fun, you'll discover it's a popular place to hook up with fellow travellers.

Old-timers go misty-eyed when they talk about 'old Cairns' and lament it's 'getting too big for its boots' but the satellite suburbs that surround the tourism inner sanctum continue to grow, and each week at least 50 new residents arrive in Cairns, each chasing a dream.

Orientation

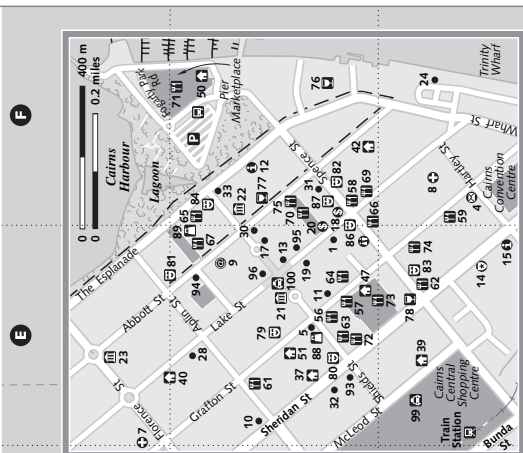
Cairns' CBD sits between the Esplanade and McLeod St, and Wharf and Aplin Sts. Reef Fleet terminal is the main departure point for reef trips. Cairns' train station is hidden inside the Cairns Central Shopping Centre on McLeod St. Local buses (Sunbus) leave from the Lake St Transit Centre. Greyhound and other regional buses leave from Pier Marketplace car park on Fogarty Park Rd near the iconic Lagoon.

THE COST OF PRICELESSNESS

Reports have suggested that, at the current rate of global warming, the Great Barrier Reef will suffer coral bleaching due to warmer, more acidic waters. With the Great Barrier Reef contributing \$5.8 billion in tourism dollars and sustaining the equivalent of 63,000 full-time jobs, this has serious economic and social implications for Australia. Indeed, saving the reef from coral bleaching, and sediment from river run-off, which hinders photosynthesis, has become a call to arms for the scientific, corporate and wider community. But it surely is a global responsibility to protect this environmental showcase, the largest and most pristine reef in the world.



CAIRNS



- A** To Northern Beaches (46km)
All Hackett Bungee & Minion (16km)
Tropical Cultural Park (16km)
Crystal Cascades (21km)
Plecker Gardens (21km)
Massman (123km)
Cape Trillick (138km)
- B** To Royal Automobile Club
Bassett-Cameron Park
Resort (65km)
Cairns-Cocoran-Cavan
Resort (65km)
Townsville (350km)
- C** To Malgrove
Cairns Airport (6km)
- D** Trinity Bay
- E** Cairns Harbour
- F** Trinity Wharf

- INFORMATION**
- Abells Chart & Map Centre... 1 E2
 - Acom Cairns... 2 D5
 - Angus & Robertson... 3 D5
 - Australia Post... 4 F3
 - Bookshelf... 5 E2
 - Cairns Base Hospital... 6 D4
 - Cairns City 24 Hour Medical Centre... 7 E1
 - Cairns Museum... (see 21)
 - Cairns Travel Clinic... 8 F3
 - Call Station... 9 E2
 - Destination Cairns... 10 E2
 - Exchange Bookshop... 11 E2
 - Gateway Discovery Centre... 12 F2
 - Global Gossip... (see 9)
 - Inbox C@re... (see 9)
 - Peterpan Adventure Travel... 13 E2
 - Police Station... 14 E2
 - RACV... 15 D5
 - STV Travel... 17 E2
 - Thomas Cook... 18 F2
 - Trailfinders... 19 E2
 - Travelx... 20 E2

- SLEEPING**
- Mike Ball Dive Expeditions... 28 E2
 - Muddy's Playground... 29 D4
 - Pro-Dive... 30 E2
 - Reef Teach... 31 F2
 - Skydive Cairns... 32 E2
 - Tusi Dive... 33 F2
 - Asian Foods Australia... 56 E2
 - Brethren Cafe... 57 E2
 - Cherry Blossom... 58 E2
 - Coffee Shop... 59 E2
 - Edgemoor... 60 D4
 - Fudge Organics... 61 E2
 - Gaura Nails... 62 E3
 - La Fruiteuse... 63 E3
 - Lilliput... 64 E2
 - Mangosini's... 65 F2
 - Cairns International... 41 B4
 - Cairns Sharehouse... 43 C5
 - Discovery Resort... 44 D4
 - Figtree Lodge... 45 C4
 - Floriana... 46 D3
 - Gilligan's... 47 E2
 - Ryan's Rest... 48 D5
 - Serpent... 49 C2
 - Shangri-La... 50 F2
 - Shooting Star... 51 E2

- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- Cairns Dive Centre... (see 94)
 - Cairns Museum... 21 E2
 - Cairns Regional Gallery... 22 F2
 - Centre of Contemporary Arts... 23 F1
 - Coral Sea Diving Company... 24 E3
 - Deep Sea Divers Den... 25 C5
 - Down Under Dive... 26 D5
 - Explorer Ventures/Nimrod... 27 D5

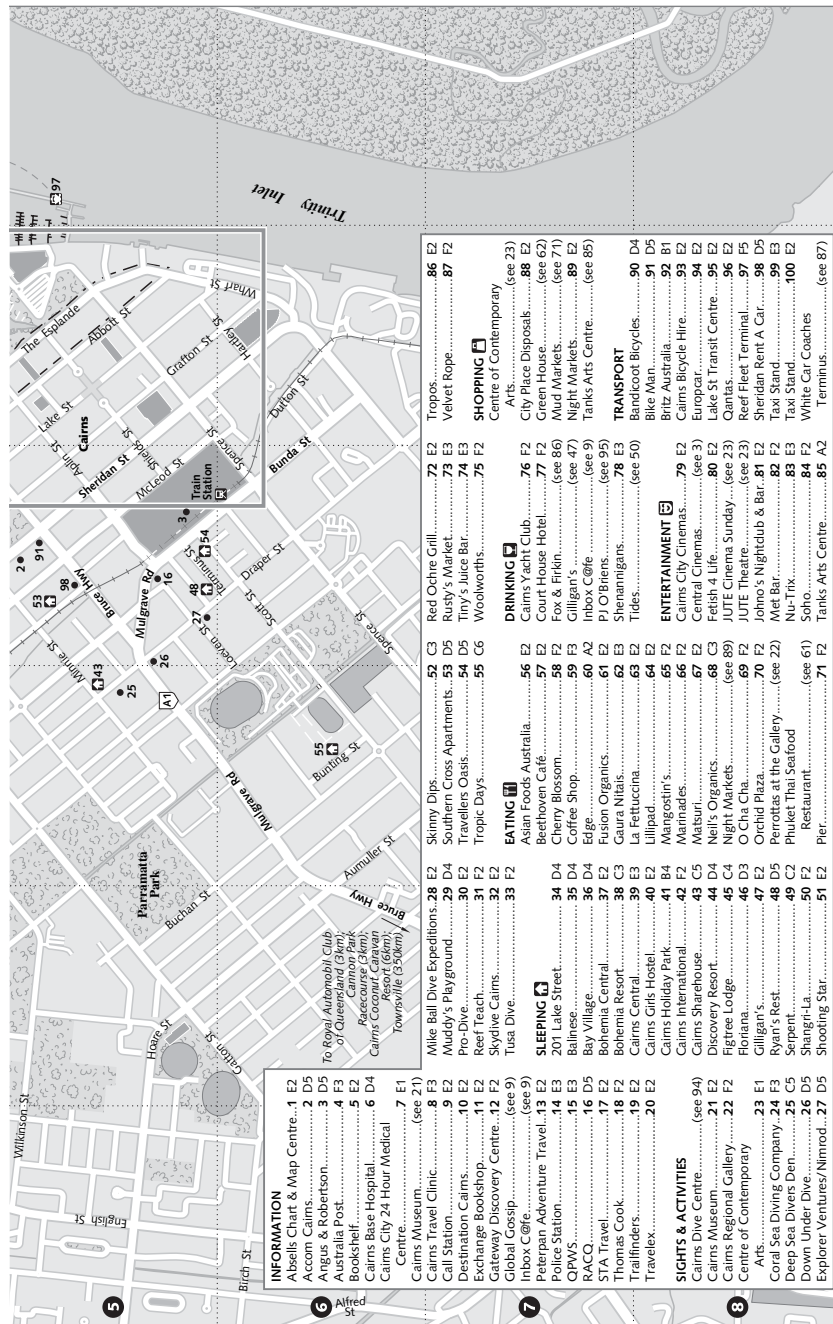
- EATING**
- Skippy Dips... 52 C3
 - Southern Cross Apartments... 53 D5
 - Travellers Oasis... 54 D5
 - Tropic Days... 55 C6
 - Woolworths... 75 F2

- DRINKING**
- Cairns Yacht Club... 76 F2
 - Court House Hotel... 77 F2
 - Pink & Puffin... (see 85)
 - Nigger's... (see 85)
 - PI O'Brien's... (see 9)
 - Shenanigans... (78 E3)
 - Tides... (see 50)

- ENTERTAINMENT**
- Cairns City Cinemas... 79 E2
 - Central Cinemas... (see 3)
 - Fetish 4 Life... 80 E2
 - JUTE Cinema Sunday... (see 23)
 - JUTE Theatre... (see 23)
 - John's Nightclub & Bar... 81 E2
 - Met Bar... 82 F2
 - Nu-Tix... 83 E2
 - Soho... (see 61)
 - Tanks Arts Centre... 85 A2

- TRANSPORT**
- Bendicoot Bicycles... 90 D4
 - Britz Man... 91 D5
 - Cairns Bicycle Hire... 92 B1
 - Europcar... 94 E2
 - Lake St Transit Centre... 95 E2
 - Qantas... 96 F5
 - Reef Fleet Terminal... 97 F5
 - Sheridan Rent A Car... 98 D5
 - Taxi Stand... 99 E3
 - White Car Coaches... 100 E2
 - Terminus... (see 87)

- SHOPPING**
- Centre of Contemporary Arts... (see 23)
 - City Place Disposals... 88 E2
 - Green House... (see 62)
 - Midnight Markets... (see 71)
 - Night Markets... 89 E2
 - Tanks Arts Centre... (see 85)



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 - Midnight Markets... (see 71)
 - Night Markets... 89 E2
 - Tanks Arts Centre... (see 85)

Information**BOOKSHOPS**

Absells Chart & Map Centre (☎ 4041 2699; Andrejic Arcade, 55 Lake St) Extensive range of topographic, nautical and area maps.

Angus & Robertson (☎ 4041 0591; Shop 141, Cairns Central Shopping Centre, McLeod St) Large chain store.

Bookshelf (☎ 4051 8569; 95 Grafton St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat) Secondhand books. Proceeds go to a women's shelter.

Cairns Museum (☎ 4051 5582; cnr Lake & Shields Sts) Books on the region's history, as well as local authors' works.

Exchange Bookshop (☎ 4051 1443; www.exchangebookshop.com; 78 Grafton St) New, secondhand and foreign language books.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance, Fire & Police (☎ 000; ☎ 24hr)

Police Station (☎ 4030 7000; Sheridan St)

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access costs from \$2 to \$5 per hour and is available at most hostels and hotels.

Call Station (☎ 4052 1572; 123 Abbott St)

Global Gossip (☎ 4031 6411; www.globalgossip.com; 125 Abbott St)

Inbox Cafe (☎ 4041 4677; www.inboxcafe.com.au; 119 Abbott St)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Cairns Base Hospital (☎ 4050 6333; the Esplanade) Has 24-hour emergency service.

Cairns City 24 Hour Medical Centre (☎ 4052 1119; cnr Florence & Grafton Sts)

Cairns Travel Clinic (☎ 4041 1699; ctimed@iig.com.au; 15 Lake St)

MONEY

Most of the major banks have branches with ATMs and foreign exchange.

Thomas Cook (☎ 4031 3040; 13 Spence St)

Travellex (☎ 1800 720 197; 50 Lake St)

POST

Australia Post (☎ 13 13 18; www.auspost.com; 13 Grafton St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are dozens of privately run 'information centres' (these are basically tour-booking agencies), but the following offer unbiased information:

Gateway Discovery Centre (☎ 4051 3588; www.tropicalaustralia.com.au; 51 the Esplanade; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) Government run.

SEASONAL WORK

Cairns is one of the most popular places on the East Coast to pick up casual work in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Those bilingual in Japanese, Korean and German can pick up tour/translating work. And, of course, Cairns is a magnet for dive instructors and the like.

For those planning to stick around in Cairns for a month or more to work, dive or study, **Cairns Sharehouse** (☎ 4041 1875; 53 Minnie St; www.cairns-sharehouse.com; \$perweek \$100-150, tw & d per person, per week \$90-130; ☎ ☎) is a good option. Three weeks' rent is required up front.

QPWS (☎ 4046 6600; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 5b Sheridan St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) National park information and permits.

Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ); ☎ 1300 130 595; www.racq.com.au; cnr Mulgrave Rd & Aplin St) Maps and information on road conditions up to Cape York. Also has a 24-hour road-report service.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Peterpan Adventure Travel (☎ 1800 632 632; www.peterpan.com.au; Level 1, 90-92 Lake St) Also has internet access (\$2 per hour).

STA Travel (☎ 4031 4199; 9 Shields St)

Traifinders (☎ 1300 651 900, 4041 1199; www.traifinders.com.au; Hides Corner, Lake St)

Travstar.com (☎ 1300 554 636, 4041 3409; www.travstar.com) Local online travel agency specialising in the region.

Sights

The undisputed highlight of the **Cairns Fore-shore Promenade** is the 4800-sq-m saltwater swimming lagoon, a feat in landscape architecture bringing the beach-cum-swimming experience to the heart of the city. Sun-smart families mix it up with backpackers going a darker shade of brown. Fitness enthusiasts blade, cycle or just walk the 3km Esplanade Walking Trail, and travellers meander lazily up and down the Esplanade, popping into restaurants and shops until the wee hours.

Flecker Botanic Gardens (☎ 4044 3398; Collins Ave, Edge Hill; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), northwest of the city centre, are dominated by the magnificent rainforest, but there are also plots of bush-tucker plants and the Gondwanan Evolutionary Trail, which

begins the 415-million-year heritage of tropical plants from blue-green algae (Quaternary) and reaches its standing ovation in the Age of Angiosperms (now). Hour-long **guided walks** (adult/child under 14yr \$11.50/free; ☎ tours at 1pm Mon-Fri) through the gardens are available. There's a licensed café dripping in foliage.

Opposite the gardens the **Rainforest Boardwalk** leads to **Saltwater Creek** and **Centenary Lakes**. For more serious walkers, the trails throughout **Mt Whitfield Conservation Park** have several lookouts offering views of Cairns and Trinity Inlet, and there is a terrific **mangrove boardwalk** on Airport Ave, 200m before the airport.

Owned and run by indigenous Australians, the terrific **Tjapukai Cultural Park** (☎ 4042 9999; www.tjapukai.com.au; Kamerunga Rd, Carevonica; adult/child/family \$31/15.50/72.50, incl transfers \$52.50/26.25/131.25; ☎ 9am-5pm) combines interesting aspects of indigenous culture with show biz. It includes the Creation Theatre, which tells the story of creation using giant holograms and actors; there's also a Dance Theatre, and boomerang- and spear-throwing demonstrations (have a go!). The shop has authentic work from across the country.

Cairns Regional Gallery (☎ 4046 4800; www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au; cnr Abbott & Shields Sts; adult/child under 16yr \$5/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun), in a gorgeous heritage building, is worth a wander. Exhibitions reflect the consciousness of the region, with an emphasis on indigenous art.

The **Cairns Museum** (☎ 4051 5582; www.cairnsmuseum.org.au; cnr Lake & Shields Sts; adult/child/family \$5/2/12; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) is housed in the former School of Arts Building. While it won't blow you away, there are some interesting historical displays of Cairns and its surrounds.

Take your knowledge of the reef's life to greater depths at **Reef Teach** (☎ 4031 7794; 14 Spence St; adult/child \$13/7; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, show 6.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat). The madcap lecturer *talksveryfast*, and will explain how to identify specific types of coral and fish, and, more importantly, how to treat the reef with respect.

The **Centre of Contemporary Arts** (☎ 4050 9494; www.kickarts.org.au; 96 Abbott St; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) has two gallery levels showcasing Queensland's hottest visual artists. Admission is free.

About 20km from Cairns, the **Crystal Cascades** are a series of beautiful waterfalls and pools. Avoid jumping off the rock cliffs here. The area is accessed by a 1.2km (30 minutes) pathway (suitable for wheelchairs).

For markets, see Shopping (p432).

Activities**DIVING & SNORKELLING**

Cairns is the undisputed scuba-diving mecca of the Great Barrier Reef and a popular place to attain PADI open-water certification. There's a plethora of courses on offer, from budget four-day courses that combine pool training and reef dives (around \$380), to four-day open-water courses (\$480). Five-day courses (\$540 to \$695) include two days' pool theory and three days' living aboard a boat, and are generally more rewarding. Find out whether prices include a medical check (around \$50), daily reef tax (\$5), passport photos (around \$8), plus environmental management charges (around \$10).

A selection of reputable schools:

Cairns Dive Centre (☎ 4051 0294; www.cairnsdive.com.au; 121 Abbott St; ☎ 8am-7pm)

Deep Sea Divers Den (☎ 4046 7333; 319 Draper St; ☎ 6am-6pm)

Down Under Dive (☎ 1800 079 099, 4052 8300; www.downunderdive.com.au; 287 Draper St; ☎ 7am-7pm) Multilingual instructors.

Pro-Dive (☎ 4031 5255; www.prodrive-cairns.com.au; 116 Spence St; ☎ 9am-9pm) Multilingual instructors.

Tusa Dive (☎ 4031 1028; www.tusadive.com; cnr Shields St & the Esplanade; ☎ 8am-6pm)

More comprehensive reef trips last one to 11 days and cost roughly \$200 to \$3700. Live-aboard trips explore the outer and northern reefs, including Cod Hole, Homes Reef and Osprey Reef.

Operators specialising in trips for certified divers:

Coral Sea Diving Company (☎ 4041 2024; ☎ 9am-5pm) Shark feeding offered.

Explorer Ventures/Nimrod (☎ 4031 5566; www.explorerverventures.com; 206 Draper St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Extended itineraries for far northern reefs.

Mike Ball Dive Expeditions (☎ 4053 0500; www.mikeball.com; 143 Lake St; ☎ 8am-6pm) Three- to seven-night fly-dive trips, plus open-water dive courses (\$325).

Reef Encounter (☎ 1800 815 811, 4051 5777; www.reeftrip.com; trips from \$220) Live-aboard operator, plus open-water learn-to-dive courses (from \$695).

SeaQuest (☎ 1800 612 223, 4046 7333; www.diversden.com.au; live-aboard dive trips \$330-570, snorkelling trips \$120-480) Live-aboard trips depart daily; learn-to-dive courses from \$435. Japanese and German tuition available.

Taka (☎ 4051 8722; www.takadive.com.au; trips \$900-1500) Live-aboard trips to the Cod Hole, Osprey and coral and clam gardens. Underwater photography courses (\$200), and dive-hards can opt for a 24-dive package.

CAIRNS REGION IN...

Two Days

The agenda for day one is to get as far away from the city as possible – on a cruise to the **Great Barrier Reef** (opposite). Immerse yourself in the vivid depths and snorkel or dive. If you don't want to get wet, take a cruise with a glass-bottom boat so you can still get nose to nose with the gorgeous marine life and colourful coral.

Once the main event is taken care of, dabble around Cairns on day two. Sun up, splash about and flash some skin on the **Cairns Foreshore Promenade's swimming lagoon** (p424). Grab an alfresco bite at **Perrottas** (p430) and then potter through the adjoining **Cairns Regional Gallery** (p425). Drink up a view and a summery aperitif at hip bar **Tides** (p431), before waltzing over to **Red Ochre Grill** (p430) to wrap your taste buds around some native flavours.

Four Days

On day three, head out early for a morning at the **Flecker Botanic Gardens** (p424), where you can take a guided tour and explore the Gondwanan Evolutionary Trail. Save the afternoon for a cultural experience at the **Tjapukai Cultural Park** (p425). Learn about the local indigenous people and witness some traditional dancing. Shuttle-bus transfers leave Cairns hourly, picking up guests from their accommodation. Sunbus 1 and 1A go past Tjapukai as well. These leave from the same spot as all the Sunbus services. Then, head back to your accommodation, freshen up and then hit the **night markets** (p432) for some shopping. Join the assortment of locals and travellers at the capacious outdoor bar at **Gilligan's** (p431). Grab a bar snack there, or for something more substantial of the Japanese variety head to **Cherry Blossom** (p430).

On day four take in a tour of some of Cairns' surrounding sights. Catch the **Scenic Railway** (p440) to Kuranda, walk into a flurry of winged beauties at the **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** (p438) and get a bird's-eye rainforest view on the way back by returning on the **Skyrail** (p440). Alternatively, take an **eco-accredited tour** (opposite) to the Atherton Tablelands or Cape Tribulation and the magical Daintree rainforest.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING

There's thrilling white-water rafting down the Barron, Tully, Russell and North Johnstone Rivers. For tours leaving Cairns, expect to pay about \$155 for a full day to Tully, \$98 for a half day to the Barron River, \$1400 for a four-day trip to North Johnstone and \$130 for a full-day trip to Russell. Check whether wetsuit hire (around \$10) and national-park fees (\$6) are included.

The major rafting companies in Cairns: **Foaming Fury** (☎ 4031 3460; www.foamingfury.com.au) **Raging Thunder** (☎ 4030 7990; www.ragingthunder.com.au) **R'n'R** (☎ 4051 4055; www.raft.com.au)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

AJ Hackett Bungee & Minjin (☎ 4057 7188; bungee \$110-140, s/tw/tr minjin swing per person \$80/59/39, bungee & minjin swing \$140; ☎ 10am-5pm) Swing from the trees on the minjin (a harness swing).

Fishing Cairns (☎ 4041 1169; www.fishingcairns.com.au) Catch flathead, cod and salmon by river fishing (day trip \$170) or deep-sea reef fishing (day trip \$185).

Hot Air Ballooning (☎ 4039 9900; www.hotair.com.au; adult/child incl breakfast \$200/124)

Skydive Cairns (☎ 4031 5466; www.skydivercairns.com.au; 59 Sheridan St; tandem jumps from 10,000ft \$219)

Tandem Cairns (☎ 4041 7726; www.tandemcairns.com.au; jumps from 10,000ft \$219)

Cairns for Kids

Muddy's playground (the Esplanade) is suitable for all ages, with climbing nets, water-play and storytelling areas, as well as your classic slides and swings. It's between Minnie and Upward Sts. Also on the Esplanade, the **Lagoon** (☎ 6am-10pm Oct-Mar, 7am-9pm Apr-Sep) is popular with kids and is patrolled all day. During school holidays Cairns Regional Gallery (p425) runs theme-based workshops for children aged between six and 12.

Tours

Guided by horticulturalists, **Cairns Discovery Tours** (☎ 4053 5259; www.cairnsdiscoverytours.com; adult/child/family \$50/29/160; ☎ 12.45-6.30pm) will take you by bus through Cairns, including

stops at Flecker Botanic Gardens, the Royal Flying Doctors base and Palm Cove.

Visit Kuranda with **Down Under Tours** (☎ 4035 5566, 1300 858 099; res@downundertours.com; day trips from \$120). Day trips feature Kuranda Scenic Railway and Skyrail; add-ons include local attractions such as Tjapukai Cultural Park and Cairns Tropical Zoo.

For an inland adventure, **Undara Experience** (☎ 1800 990 992, 4097 1900; www.undara.com.au; 2-day tour adult/child \$430/220; ☎ daily Jun-Aug, Wed & Fri Apr-May & Sep-Mar) has coach trips to the Undara Lava Tubes.

GREAT BARRIER REEF & ISLANDS

Reef tours usually include lunch, snorkelling gear (with dives an optional extra) and transfers. The cheapest tours start at around \$80, but it's well worth spending more money for fewer passengers and a more secluded spot on the reef. An additional reef tax of \$5 per person applies.

Different sections of the reef tend to be better suited for certain activities, whether it's snorkelling, or certified or introductory diving so it pays to first determine what you're after. Rates quoted here are mostly for snorkelling. Also see the boxed text, p390.

Falla (☎ 4041 2001; adult/child/family \$79/49/230; dive from \$50) Sail to two reef sites in a classic pearl lugger.

Passions of Paradise (☎ 1800 111 346, 4050 0676; www.passions.com.au; adult/child/family \$109/65/295)

Award-winning trips to Breaking Patches and Michaelmas Cay. Takes a maximum of 80.

Reef Magic (☎ 1300 666 700, 4031 1588; www.reefmagiccruises.com; adult/child/family \$165/85/415) Go to Moore Reef, one of the best outer reef sites. Observatory, fish feeding and stable platform suit those prone to seasickness.

Silverswift (☎ 4044 9944; www.quicksilver-cruises.com; adult/child \$136/108; certified scuba dives incl gear from \$188) Catamaran visiting two outer reef sites. Recommended.

Seastar (☎ 4041 6218, 4033 0333; www.seastarcruises.com.au; adult/child \$80/60, dives from \$120) Affordable trips, including reef charge, to Michaelmas Cay and Hastings Reef.

SeaQuest (☎ 1800 612 223, 4046 7333; www.diversden.com.au; adult/child/family from \$85/50/250) Trips depart daily.

You can see the reef from a different view with **Down Under Helicopters** (☎ 4034 9000; www.downunderheli.com; from \$235) on fly-cruise packages.

DAINTREE RIVER & CAPE TRIBULATION

Cape Tribulation is one of the most popular day-trip destinations from Cairns. Tour operators push the 'safari' angle, but the road is sealed (ie suitable for a conventional vehicle) until just before the Cape Tribulation Beach House.

Back Country Bliss Adventures (☎ 0420-101 757; www.backcountryblissadventures.com.au; Bloomfield Falls trip \$160) Funky outfit with various 4WD tours plus mountain biking, bushwalking and river-drift snorkelling trips.

Billy Tea Bush Safaris (☎ 4032 0077; www.billytea.com.au; day trip adult/child \$145/95; ☎ 7.10am-6.30pm) Long-standing eco tours.

Cape Trib Connections (☎ 4041 7447; www.capetribconnections.com; day trip \$114; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat) Mossman Gorge, Cape Tribulation and Port Douglas.

Down Under Tours (☎ 1300 858 099, 4035 5566; res@downundertours.com; day trips adult/child \$153/77) Eco-certified tours taking in highlights of the Atherton Tablelands, Mossman Gorge, Clohesy River, Daintree River and Cape Tribulation.

ATHERTON TABLELANDS

Bandicoot Bicycle Tours (☎ 4055 0155; www.bandicootbicycles.com; full day \$110; ☎ Mon-Fri, Sat & Sun minimum 5 people) Bike tours to waterfalls and swimming holes.

Food Trail Tours (☎ 4041 1522; www.foodtrailtours.com.au; adult/child/family incl lunch \$129/65/375; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Graze on macadamias, tropical-fruit wine, ice cream and coffee.

Northern Exposure Eco Tours (☎ 4058 0268; www.northernexperience.com.au; adult/child from \$95/85) Paronella Park plus Yungaburra's famous fig tree, Lake Barrine and the Babina Boulders. Lunch is not included.

On the Wallaby (☎ 1800 123 311, 4095 2031; www.onthewallaby.com; day/overnight tours \$95/165) Activity-based tours.

Uncle Brian's Tours (☎ 4050 0615; adult/child \$99/69; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat) Babinda, Josephine Falls and Lake Eacham.

Wooroonooran Safaris (☎ 1300 661 113, 4051 5512; www.wooroonooran-safaris.com.au; forest tour adult/child \$150/115, trek adult/child from \$100/80) Eco-certified tour to World Heritage-listed Wooroonooran National Park plus one-day rainforest trek tour. Tours possible in seven languages. Maximum of 12 people.

COOKTOWN & CAPE YORK

Adventure North (☎ 4051 0578; www.adventurenorthaustralia.com; tours \$430-640) Two-day journey to Cooktown incorporating the best indigenous tours. Budget, midrange and top-end accommodation available. Return flights an option.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF SOUVENIR

If you're looking to do more than simply soak up the sun on your travels then there are a number of ways you can leave your mark on the environment – in a good way. The **Tolga Bat Hospital** (www.tolgabathospital.org), located just outside Atherton near Cairns, is always looking for volunteers to help look after the hundreds of bats that they rescue, rehabilitate and release every year. The winged critters are surprisingly cute and work might include feeding the 'bubs' or looking after orphaned flying foxes.

If bats aren't your thing, consider planting a tree as part of an ambitious conservation project by the **Australian Rainforest Foundation** (www.arf.net.au). Fifty-five bucks sees your very own tree planted along a 250km 'green corridor' between Cairns and Cardwell. This strip will become a protected wildlife area and will hopefully ensure that all rainforest wildlife, but in particular the endangered cassowary, will have a safe area in which to flourish.

Oz Tours (☎ 1800 079 006, 4055 9535; www.oztours.com.au) Purpose-built 4WDs travel to Cape York and the Gulf Savannah in comfort. Cargo-ship voyages between Cairns and Cape York (six days from \$1410). Has advanced eco-certification.

Wilderness Challenge (☎ 4055 4488; www.wilderness-challenge.com.au); 2-day tours adult/child from \$365/335; ☺ Mon, Wed & Fri, Jun–Nov, Mon & Wed Dec–May) Two- and three-day 4WD tours that head to Cooktown via the inland road and return via the Bloomfield Track (coastal route). New three-day tours go to rock-art site, Jowalbinna, near Laura.

GULF SAVANNAH

Oz Tours (☎ 1800 079 006, 07-4055 9535; www.oztours.com.au); per person from \$1870) Six- to seven-day tours taking in Undara and Georgetown among other sights, or nine day expeditions stopping off at Burketown and Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park.

Sleeping

Accommodation agencies have up-to-date listings and can assist in locating suitable accommodation. The **Destination Cairns** (☎ 1800 807 730, 4051 4066; www.accomcentre.com.au; cnr Sheridan & Alpin Sts) has wheelchair access and tourist information. **Accom Cairns** (☎ 1800 079 031; www.accomcairns.com.au; 127 Sheridan St) gives advice on midrange, top-end and short-term rental options.

Tariffs at many of the hostels include a free dinner in town but don't expect Michelin-star dining. The area behind the Cairns Central Shopping Centre between Terminus and Scott Sts is becoming a burgeoning backpacker hub with a couple of hostels and budget cafés.

BUDGET

Serpent (☎ 1800 737 736, 4040 7777; www.serpenthostel.com); 341 Lake St; dm \$14-22, d & tw from \$52; (P) (Q) (R)

A Nomads hostel, the spacious Serpent is a reliable option for those who want to be away from the downtown hustle and bustle. Has good facilities and a tour desk.

Cairns Girls Hostel (☎ 1800 011 950, 4051 2016; www.cairnsirlsghostel.com.au; 147 Lake St; dm/tw \$18/44; (P) (Q) (R)) Sorry fellas, this female-only hostel is one of the best in town. In a two-storey house tucked behind a shopping strip, ladies enjoy two large refurbished communal kitchen and lounge areas. You'll be a name not a number here.

Bohemia Central (☎ 1800 558 589, 4052 1818; www.bohemiacentral.com.au; 100 Sheridan St; dm \$21-25, s/d \$49/69; (P) (Q) (R)) Housed in a heritage hotel with a wide veranda, Bohemia Central is a maze of bright, scrupulously clean, floor-boarded rooms and four- or six-share dorms. Has some of the nicest hostel staff you'll encounter and a groovy café downstairs. There's free pick-up.

Cairns Central (☎ 4051 0772; cairns_central@yhaqlld.org; 20-26 McLeod St; dm \$23-26, d & tw with/without bathroom \$72/58; (R)) A comfortable YHA with lots of communal areas, modern facilities and a relaxed mood. It's a good choice for solo women travellers, and those travelling with kiddies can take advantage of affordable family rooms.

Travellers Oasis (☎ 1800 621 353, 4052 1377; www.travoasis.com.au; 8 Scott St; dm/s/d \$24/40/52; (Q) (R) (S)) A freshly spruced timber house with lots of double rooms, it offers friendliness and courtesy pick-up. A sign here reads 'on this site in 1897 nothing happened' and things haven't changed much with travellers generally whiling the hours away.

Tropic Days (☎ 4041 1521; www.tropicrodays.com.au; 28 Bunting St; dm/d \$24/52; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Sibling to Travellers Oasis, this is a 10-minute walk away up Scott Street but similar in its chill factor

with lots of hammocks. Tasteful double rooms come with fridge, TV and air-con. The hostel does free bus runs downtown. Monday nights are \$10 croc barbecue affairs – an absolute bargain.

Gilligan's (☎ 4041 6566; www.gilligansbackpackers.com.au; 57-89 Grafton St; dm \$27-30, d & tw \$130; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Are you a five-star backpacker? This slick resort-style complex, with its own beauty salon, artificial beach, tour desk and branded water, will suit those wanting it all. Modern dorms and doubles are hotel-style rooms, with en suite, fridge and TV. Its internet café doubles as a pizzeria, the 1000-capacity beer hall serves meals day and night, and the gaming room and swimming pool are licensed.

Ryan's Rest (☎ 4051 4734; www.ryanrest.com.au; 18 Terminus St; s with/without air-con \$42/38, d \$50/54, tw per person from \$38). A classic Queenslander (think slat windows, palm tree entrance and floor-boarded hallways) suiting the penny conscious. There are share kitchens, outdoor tables and a restful scene. Three flats are available for \$150 a week (one-month minimum stay).

Pickup Floriana (☎ 4051 7886; floriacairnsinfo.com; 183 the Esplanade; s \$75, d & tw \$85-105; (Q) (R)) Oozing charm, the charismatic Floriana guesthouse is caught in a 1960s time warp but that's why we love it. The matriarch is piano-playing Maggie and she's a wealth of information about Cairns. Garden gnomes point to a sweeping staircase that's fit for a debutante, and leads guests to personalised rooms and self-contained flats; some have balconies with views out to sea. The communal kitchen area is within cooee of the pool.

MIDRANGE

Discovery Resort (☎ 1800 672 753, 4044 9777; www.discoveryresort.com.au; 183-185 Lake St; d \$89-99, f \$160; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) This sparkling new midranger has excellent stand-by rates and, while not overflowing with atmosphere, it's central to Cairns' hot spots. Features two saltwater pools and a licensed Italian restaurant, Toscanis.

Balinese (☎ 1800 023 331, 4051 9922; www.balinese.com.au; 215 Lake St; s, tw & d \$100; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Authentic wood furnishings and ceramic pieces at this intimate motel stay true to its moniker. There's a communal kitchen, laundry, peep-hole-sized pool and internet access. Room rates include a basic breakfast and return airport transfers (7am to 7pm).

Figtree Lodge (☎ 4041 0000; www.figtreelodge.com.au; 253 Sheridan St; r \$110-150, apt \$120-160; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Managing to remain calm despite being on busy Sheridan St, Figtree's rooms might not have the biggest windows but the colossal beds make up for this. Apartments include additional cooking facilities. Find yourself by the lush pool or raising your glass at the Irish bar and restaurant on the premises.

Skinny Dips (☎ 4051 4644; www.skinnydips.com.au; 18-24 James St; s \$126, d & tw \$174; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Catering to the 'discerning gay traveller', this hotel centres on an aqua pool and glam bar serving pink drinks. Standard rooms have large beds, fridge, en suite and gay photography on the wall. The superior rooms go up a notch with bathrobes and better views. There's also free internet access, in-house DVDs, plus gym and sauna. Rates include breakfast.

Bay Village (☎ 4051 4622; www.bayvillage.com.au; cnr Lake & Gattton Sts; r/apt \$145/165; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Fool-proof rooms overlooking a shady courtyard and pool, and a romantic Balinese-inspired restaurant, make Bay Village extremely popular with holiday hedonists. Extra-polite staff and tour desk.

More midrange options:
Bohemia Resort (☎ 1800 155 353, 4041 7290; www.bohemioresort.com.au; 231 McLeod St; dm \$23, s \$59, d/tw with/without bathroom \$75/59; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) Caters to a new breed of hippies seeking comfort, in tall adjoining buildings composed of hotel style and family rooms that are cleaned daily. Dorms are bunk-free zones. There's a tranquil pool and all en suite rooms have a balcony.

Shooting Star (☎ 4047 7200; www.shootingstarapartments.com.au; 117 Grafton St; r from \$90; (Q) (R) (S) (P)) Bright studio-style, self-contained apartments are great value. It's a good spot for couples and families.

Southern Cross Apartments (☎ 4031 4000; www.southerncrossapartments.com; 5-7 Water St; d \$93-283) Modern, family-friendly accommodation with balconies, although it's near Cairns Central Shopping Centre. Ask for a room overlooking the pool to compensate.

TOP END

Shangri-La (☎ 4031 1411; www.shangri-la.com; Pierpoint Rd; d from \$228-402; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) This hotel evokes serious take-me-here fantasies with its plush but understated suites, Oriental-style and sterling service. Rooms either have a city, bay, pool or knock-out harbour view. And for serious decadence, don't go past the horizon lounge rooms.

201 Lake Street (☎ 1800 628 929, 4053 0100; www.201lakestreet.com.au; 201 Lake St; r/aprt from \$190/270; (P) (♿) (♿)) Lifted from the pages of a trendy magazine, this new apartment complex has a stellar pool and a whiff of exclusivity. Grecian white predominates and guests can choose from a smooth hotel room or contemporary apartments with an entertainment area, a plasma-screen TV and a balcony. Fit for the fashionista seeking luxe time-out.

Cairns International (☎ 4031 1300; www.cairnsinternational.com.au; 17 Abbott St; r \$280-600; (P) (♿) (♿)) A classic 1980s hotel with 16 floors, Cairns International is something like the giant cod on the accommodation reef – impressive in its age and emanating stately grace.

CAMPING

Cairns Holiday Park (☎ 1800 259 977, 4051 1467; www.cairnscamping.com.au; 12-30 Little St; unpowered/power sites \$22/29, cabins \$48; (P) (♿) (♿)) More central than most, this is particularly good value. Choose from shady sites or cabins with air-con and separate share bathrooms. There's also a camp kitchen, free wireless internet and a TV room.

Also recommended is **Cairns Coconut Caravan Resort** (☎ 4054 6644; www.coconut.com.au; cnr Bruce Hwy & Anderson Rd; unpowered/power sites \$32/34, cabins from \$65; (P) (♿) (♿)), 5km southwest of town.

Eating

Cairns' multicultural visitors have brought a global influence to the city's eateries. Restaurants and cafés are spread throughout town, though many cluster together along the Esplanade to take advantage of the waterfront (you may pay extra for the privilege; check out dinner deals before 7pm).

RESTAURANTS

For such a megawatt destination, Cairns' restaurant scene doesn't turn heads. Still there are some reliable options.

Perrottas at the Gallery (☎ 4046 4800; cnr Abbott & Shields Sts; mains \$14-32) With its fan-cooled balcony, this sophisticated yet breezy place is a big hit with Cairns' chic crowd who savour goat curd and basil oil bruschetta between dips into their newspapers.

Pier (☎ 4031 4677; Pier Complex, Pier Point Rd; mains around \$18; (♿) lunch & dinner) For instant popularity, just add water. On the marina and waterfront, Pier is a pacey bar and grill. Punters love to watch their ice moving through the Perspex pipe above the bar and kicking back on the

deck area. There's a smattering of mains, such as wok noodles any which way, a few pastas, and nibbles. Wood-fired pizzas are available until late, as is dessert: hazelnut-chocolate spread, marshmallows and coffee ice cream anyone?

Cherry Blossom (☎ 4052 1050; cnr Spence & Lake Sts; mains \$17.50-35; (♿) lunch Wed-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) *Teppanyaki* reigns supreme at this upstairs Japanese restaurant reminiscent of an *Iron Chef* cook-off, with two chefs working at opposite ends of the restaurant floor. Among the authentic dishes you'll find item No 15: 'Aussie Animals – crocodile *karaage*, kangaroo *tsukadami* and emu *kushiyaki* in a cheese basket'. Has good lunch specials.

Magostini's (☎ 4031 9888; 65 the Esplanade; meals \$24-36; (♿) lunch & dinner) Opposite the lagoon development, this terrace enclave is a touch Noosa-esque. The 'Crocodile's Nest' gets our vote for curiosity's sake alone.

Red Ochre Grill (☎ 4051 0100; 43 Shields St; mains \$26-30; (♿) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Red Ochre's inventive menu utilises native Australian ingredients and local produce, artfully prepared to pioneer its own culinary genre. There are the animals (croc, roo and emu) and even Aussie flora – native peach chutneys etc – appears on the menu. The Taste of Australia platter (\$60 per person) is a crowd-pleaser and finishes with wattleseed pavlova (bravo!).

For authentic international fare head to **Marinades** (☎ 4041 1422; 43 Spence St; mains around \$16; (♿) lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun), which dishes up delicious Indian cuisine; **La Fettuccina** (☎ 4031 5959; 43 Shields St; mains around \$18; (♿) dinner) for saucy homemade pastas; or **Phuket Thai Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 4031 0777; 3/135 Grafton St; dishes \$15-20; (♿) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) for excellent Thai cuisine.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Beethoven Café (☎ 4051 0292; 105 Grafton St; dishes \$4.20-8; (♿) breakfast Mon-Sat, lunch Mon-Fri) Make like Augustus Gloop and squeeze in a slab of cheesecake or wicked-looking tiramisu after you've downed a Scandinavian rye sandwich. Savoury combos include *Buendnerfleisch* (air-dried beef, Swiss cheese and gherkin).

Lillipad (☎ 4051 9565; 72 Grafton St; dishes \$10-14; (♿) breakfast & lunch) Walk down the long, narrow seating area of Lillipad, and meet the maker of your fabulously big breakfast. There's love in your Full Monty fry-up, your panini and your salad. Vegetarians are spoilt for choice here.

our pick Fusion Organics (☎ 4051 1388; cnr Grafton & Aplin Sts; dishes \$7.90-10; (♿) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Too much partying? Some zesty food, an 'immuniser' juice or sublime Genovese coffee might help your path to restoration. Flavour-some quiches, frittata and filled breads plus dairy-free and allergy-free options.

Gaura Nitais (☎ 4031 2255; 55 Spence St; meals \$7.90-10; (♿) dinner till 8pm) The Hare Krishnas know how to make a good vegetarian curry and the 'buffet of goodness' is no exception. It's decked out with Hindu art and mosaic tables, or grab some takeaway and head to Cairns Harbour.

Quick and healthy eats can be found at **Edge** (☎ 4053 2966; 1/138 Collins Ave, Edge Hill; dishes \$5-15; (♿) breakfast & lunch), up the road from the Botanic Gardens, or **Tiny's Juice Bar** (☎ 4031 4331; 45 Grafton St; meals \$6.30-10; (♿) breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri). There are lunchtime food courts at **Orchid Plaza** (Abbott St) and at the **Night Markets** (the Esplanade).

Also recommended:

Matsuri (☎ 4031 0271; 62 Abbot St) Authentic Japanese food, according to one discerning local. Behind the night market on the Esplanade

O Cha Cha (☎ 4051 7055; Palm Court, 34 Lake St; meals \$10-15; (♿) lunch Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) Casual upstairs Japanese eatery.

The Coffee Shop (25 Grafton St) Good-looking lattes.

SELF-CATERING

There's a **Woolworths** (Abbott St; (♿) 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5.30pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun), plus at least two supermarkets in Cairns Central Shopping Centre. At **Rusty's Market** (Grafton St, btwn Shields & Spence Sts; (♿) 6am-6pm Fri, 6am-3pm Sat & 6am-2pm Sun) multi-ethnic stall holders have tropical fruits piled high plus herbs, honey and pick-me-up samosas.

Niche self-catering options:

Asian Foods Australia (☎ 4052 1510; 101-5 Grafton St) Asian goods.

Neil's Organics (☎ 4051 5688; cnr James & McLeod Sts) Organic fruit, veg and other produce.

Drinking

The range and number of places to drink in Cairns is intoxicating. Most offer food, alcohol and some form of entertainment. The *Cairns Post* publishes *Time Out* with listings and reviews.

our pick Tides (☎ 4052 7670; Shangri La Hotel, Pier-point Rd) A magnet for Cairns' bold and beautiful (and yachting and reef workers who often fall into that clique too), this bar offers style,

tapas, happy hour from 5.30pm and an ocean breeze to caress.

Court House Hotel (☎ 4031 4166; 38 Abbott St) Balance the scales of justice, or at least your drinks, at this regal pub with a front lawn made for enjoying afternoon ales. A spacious courtyard encircles the main room, with a well-stocked bar at its centre. A mixed crew – generally suave and clean-cut – gathers here.

Gilligan's (☎ 4041 6566; 57-89 Grafton St) You're guaranteed a crowd here, as the 500-odd backpackers staying in this resort complex (p428) work up a thirst; it's also popular with locals. There are regular club nights, as well as special live music events.

Shenannigans (☎ 4051 2490; 48 Spence St) Retreat from the sun to the dark comforts of this Irish-themed pub, with a few too many televisions. There's also a rowdy beer garden and outdoor bistro. From Thursday to Saturday night, a band plays to a standing-room-only crowd before a DJ moves in for boogie business.

PJ O'Guinn (☎ 4031 5333; 87 Lake St) There are 'Thank Guinness it's Friday' nights, and Wednesday's entertainment is dancing girls: not that you would see girls in bikinis dancing on the bar in Dublin.

Other drinking options:

Cairns Yacht Club (☎ 4031 2750; Pier Point) One for the tanned, boat-shoe crowd and Cairns' loyalists, the club's relocation to this new spot on the wharf has been the talk of the town.

Fox & Firkin (☎ 4031 5305; cnr Spence & Lake Sts) Relaxed pub popular with backpackers.

Inbox Cafe (☎ 4041 4677; 119 Abbott St) Run by dreadlocked locals in loose pants, the vibe is r-e-l-a-x-e-d and funky bands play when they feel like it.

Entertainment

If you want to move things up a gear, head to one of Cairns' innumerable clubs. Most open around 10pm and close between 5am and 6am. Cover charges are from \$5 to \$10. Check out the entertainment guide *Gateway* for the latest happenings. **Fetish 4 Life** (☎ 4041 4161; 54 Shields St; (♿) 10am-6pm Mon-Sun Apr-Dec, Mon-Sat Jan-Mar), a funky clothes shop, sells tickets to dance events, gigs and raves plus party paraphernalia such as fire sticks.

Velvet Rope (☎ 4031 3383; downstairs, Cairns Casino, 28 Spence St) Velvet Rope is a thumping, hard venue featuring respected local and touring DJs. A second room plays funk and hip-hop. Freakquency on Friday is always popular.

Johno's Nightclub & Bar (☎ 4051 8770; cnr Abbott & Aplin Sts) Live blues and rock are the go every night at this huge venue, where a hang-glider is suspended from the roof. The World-Famous Gong Show is free every Sunday, cane toad races with a safari-clad comic take place Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and chipper bar staff call you 'darlin' and 'bloke'.

Soho (☎ 4051 2666; cnr the Esplanade & Shields St) This funky spot features resident DJs, as well as touring local and national turntableists. Hard trance on Friday nights suits the glow-torch posse.

Tropos (☎ 4031 2530; cnr Spence & Lake Sts) Wear something short, tight and asymmetrical. A young, high-energy crowd drinks cocktails with names like 'attitude improvement' on an enormous balcony with pool tables.

Nu-Trix (☎ 4051 8223; 53 Spence St) Drag shows are a feature at Cairns' only gay venue. The shiny metal-clad exterior acts as armour against the morning sun, keeping things dark and doofing until late.

Met Bar (☎ 4041 0277; 1/15 Spence St) Nearly every city in the Western world may have a place going by the same name but they won't all host the once-a-month gay spectacular aptly named Visions.

You can catch a mainstream flick at **Cairns City Cinemas** (☎ 4031 1077; 108 Grafton St) or **Central Cinemas** (☎ 4052 1166; Cairns Central Shopping Centre). **JUTE Cinema Sunday** (☎ 4050 9450; www.endcredits.org.au; 96 Abbott St; ☎ 4pm 1st & 3rd Sun each month) at the Centre of Contemporary Arts caters for art-house film buffs. Catch a play by a local playwright and mingle with Cairns' arty set at the Jelly Babes Bar at **JUTE Theatre** (☎ 4050 9444; www.jute.com.au; 96 Abbott St), also at the Centre of Contemporary Arts.

The Tanks Arts Centre (☎ 4032 6600; www.tankartcentre.com; 46 Collins Ave, Edge Hill) hosts some of the country's finest musicians at these de-commissioned navy tanks that now serve as post-modern performance spaces. Check out the programme for the latest in jazz-art-film events.

Shopping

Every second shop in Cairns seems to sell opals, Coogi, Ken Done and made-in-Korea didgeridoos and boomerangs. For an authentic termite-made didgeridoo and other Aboriginal items, your best bet is Tjapukai Cultural Park (p425).

Green House (☎ 4031 8787; 55 Spence St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Antique wall plaques, wooden toys and groovy resin jewellery can be found here.

Centre of Contemporary Arts (☎ 4050 9496; 96 Abbott Street; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) It's all style at this shop, arguably the best place in town to pick up the latest in art objects and Torres Strait Islander etchings.

Tanks Arts Centre (☎ 4032 6600; 46 Collins Ave, Edge Hill) Hosts markets on the last Sunday of the month where you'll find everything from Samoan baskets to woodworkers, protest petitions and crystal key rings.

City Place Disposals (☎ 4051 6040; cnr Grafton & Shields Sts) Has cheap camping and outdoor gear on offer, or you can sell your own. There's tent rental from \$8.

Head to the **night markets** (the Esplanade; ☎ 4.30-11pm) and **Mud Markets** (Pier Marketplace; ☎ Sat morning) for the mandatory 'Cairns Australia' T-shirt, or if you need your name on a grain of rice.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13, 4050 4000; www.qantas.com.au; cnr Lake & Shields Sts), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) all service Cairns, with flights to/from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Darwin (and via Alice Springs) and Townsville.

Macair (☎ 13 13 13) flies to Mt Isa. **Hinterland Aviation** (☎ 1300 134044, 4035 9323; travel@voyages.com.au) flies to Lizard Island and Dunk Island.

BUS

John's Kuranda Bus (☎ 0418-772 953; tickets \$2) runs between Cairns and Kuranda at least twice per day, and up to five times Wednesday to Friday. Buses depart from Cairns' Lake St Transit Centre. **Kuranda Shuttle** (☎ 0402-032 085; tickets \$2) departs Lake St Transit Mall roughly every two hours from 10am to 3pm, and Kuranda (Therwine St) at 10am, 12.15pm, 2pm and 3.45pm (the latter service does not operate on Saturday). **Whitecar Coaches** (☎ 4091 1855; www.whitecarcoaches.com; tickets \$4) has five departures on weekdays, 9.30am and 1pm departures on Saturday and a 1pm departure on Sunday from outside Shenannigans, City Mall. Whitecar also has departures from Cairns to the Atherton Tablelands including Mareeba, Atherton, Herberton and Ravenshoe (and Chillagoe with a separate connection). Check

its website for weekday and weekend services and prices.

Long-distance buses now arrive and depart at Pier Marketplace car park, on Fogarty Park Rd near the Lagoon on Cairns' Esplanade.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 4739 46863; www.greyhound.com.au) connects Cairns with Brisbane (\$234, 30 hours), Rockhampton (\$164, 18 hours), Airlie Beach (\$95, 11 hours) and Townsville (\$62, six hours).

Premier Motor Service (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) has buses to/from Innisfail (\$16, 1½ hours), Mission Beach (\$16, two hours), Tully (\$23, 2½ hours), Ingham (\$30, four hours) and Townsville (\$50, 5½ hours).

Sun Palm Express (☎ 4032 4999; www.sunpalmtransport.com) connects Cairns with Port Douglas (\$30, 1½ hours), Mossman (\$40, 1¾ hours) and Cape Tribulation (\$65, 3¼ hours, three daily services).

Coral Reef Coaches (☎ 4098 2600; www.coralreefcoaches.com.au) also runs a daily service from Cairns to Cape Tribulation (\$40, four hours) stopping in Port Douglas (\$28, 1¼ hours) and Mossman (\$25, two hours).

Foaming Fury (☎ 1800 801 540, 4031 3460; www.foamingfury.com.au; one way \$20, half-day return \$40) operates a Port Douglas shuttle.

Country Road Coach Lines (☎ 4045 2794; www.countryroadcoachlines.com.au; adult/child \$72/36) runs a Cairns-to-Cooktown inland service on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday (departing at 7am, arriving at 12.15pm). A coastal service operates on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (departing at 7am, arriving at 2pm). Courtesy pick-ups are available.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Hiring a car or motorcycle is the best way to travel around Far North Queensland. Most companies restrict the driving of conventional vehicles to sealed roads; if you want to travel to Cooktown via the Bloomfield Track (the coastal route), hire a 4WD.

There's a mind-numbing number of rental companies in Cairns:

Britz Australia (☎ 4032 2611; www.britz.com.au; 411 Sheridan St) Hires out campervans.

Europcar (☎ 4051 4600; www.deltaeuropcar.com.au; 135 Abbott St) With an airport desk.

Sheridan Rent a Car (☎ 4051 3942; owners@top.net.au; 36 Water St)

Thrifty (☎ 1300 367 277; www.thrifty.com.au; Cairns International Airport)

TRAIN

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722, 4036 9333; www.traveltrain.com.au; Cairns Central Shopping Centre, Bunda St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.45-10am Sat) *Tilt Train* runs between Cairns and Brisbane (\$305, 25 hours), as does the *Sunlander* (economy seat/sleeper \$207/265, 31 hours).

See p440 for information on travelling to Kuranda.

Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is about 7km from central Cairns. **Australia Coach** (☎ 4048 8355; adult/child \$8/4) meets all incoming flights and runs a shuttle bus to the CBD. **Sun Palm** (www.sunpalmtransport.com) has airport services from Cairns city to the airport from 4am to 7pm. Airport transfers can also be booked to Cairns' northern beaches (\$16), Palm Cove (\$16), Port Douglas (\$30), Mossman (\$40) and Cape Tribulation (\$65, three services daily). A taxi will set you back about \$15.

BICYCLE

You can hire bicycles from the following: **Bandicoot Bicycles** (☎ 4041 0155; www.bandicootbicycles.com; 153 Sheridan St; per day \$18)

Bike Man (☎ 4041 5566; www.bikeman.com.au; 99 Sheridan St; per week \$40)

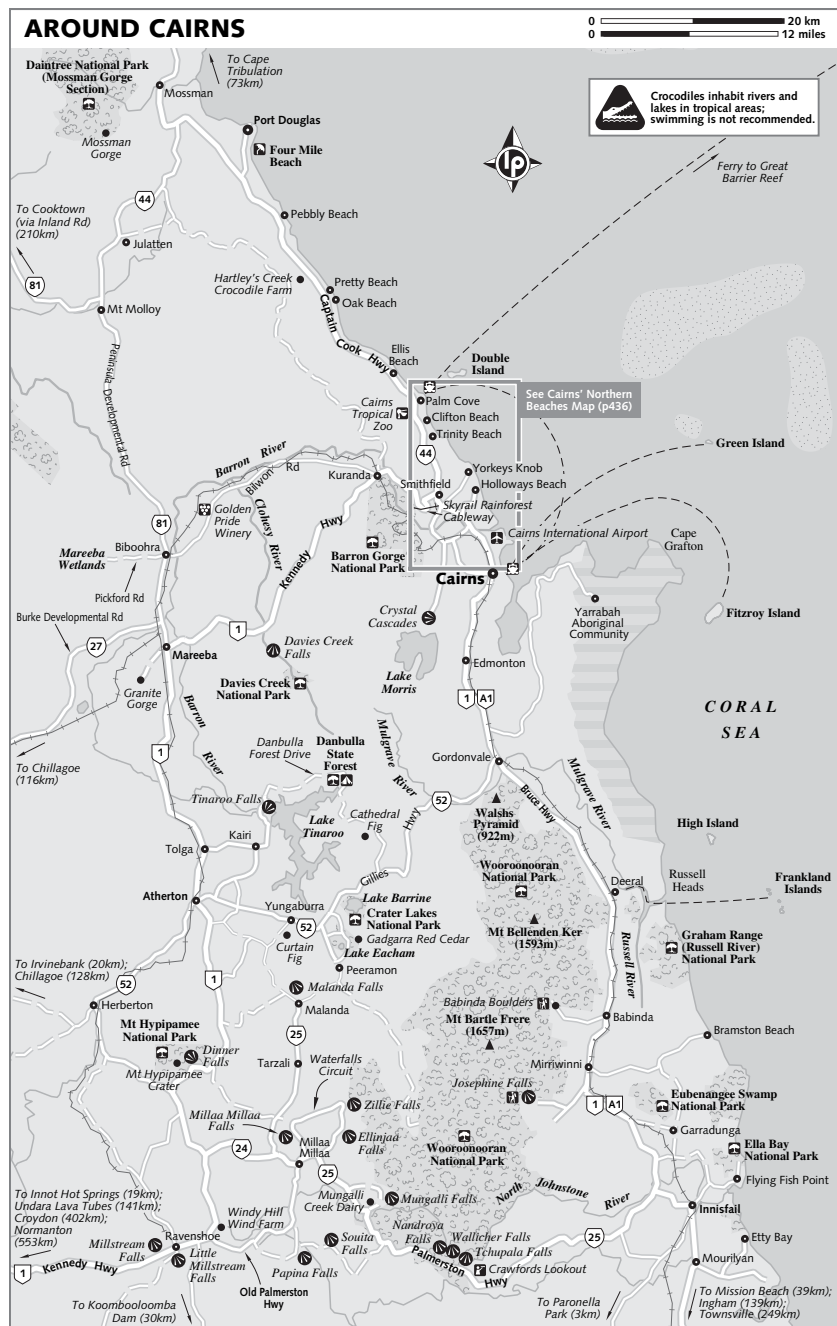
Cairns Bicycle Hire (☎ 4031 3444, 0418-783 903; 47 Shields St; per day/week \$12/40) Groovy bikes and scooters.

BUS

Sunbus (☎ 4057 7411; www.sunbus.com.au) runs regular services in and around Cairns, which leave from the Lake St Transit Centre, where schedules for most routes are posted. Buses run from early morning to late evening. Useful destinations include: Edge Hill (buses 6, 6a and 7), Flecker Botanic Gardens (bus 7), Machans Beach (bus 7), Holloways Beach (buses 1c, 1d and 1h), Yorkeys Knob (buses 1c, 1d and 1h), Trinity Beach (buses 2 and 2a), Clifton Beach (buses 1 and 2a) and Palm Cove (buses 1 and 2a). All are served by the (almost) 24-hour night service (N) on Friday and Saturday.

TAXI

Black & White Taxis (☎ 4048 8333, 13 10 08) has ranks throughout the city, including on Abbott St and at Cairns Central Shopping Centre.



ISLANDS OFF CAIRNS

Green Island, Fitzroy Island and Frankland Islands National Park are popular day trips. All the islands are great for snorkelling. Ferries depart from the Reef Fleet terminal in Cairns; see individual islands for departure/arrival times.

Green Island

Spiritually significant to the Gungandji Aboriginal people, this small coral cay has a rainforested interior with interpretive walks, hemmed by stunning beach and snorkelling just offshore making it a popular choice with families. A luxury resort dominates it and the resort has a separate section for day-trippers. From the shore, you can spot reef sharks, turtles and schools of tiny fish. A gentle rainforest walk is 350m and well signposted.

Marineland Melanesia (☎ 07-4051 4032; www.marinelandgreenisland.com; adult/child/family \$12.50/5.50/31) has an aquarium with fish, turtles and stingrays. Crocodiles are in show mode at 10.30am and 1.45pm daily. There's also a collection of Melanesian artefacts.

The luxurious **Green Island Resort** (☎ 07-4031 3300; www.greenislandresort.com.au; r \$495-595; ♿) has stylish split-level rooms, each with a private balcony. Two styles of room are available: the larger room sleeps up to four, or you can have one all to yourself and shuffle around in your complimentary slippers and bathrobe.

Great Adventures (☎ 07-4051 0455; www.greatadventures.com.au; 1 Wharf St, Cairns) has regular catamaran services to Green Island (\$56), departing Cairns at 8.30am, 10.30am and 1pm and returning at noon, 2.30pm and 4.30pm. **Big Cat** (☎ 07-4051 0444; www.bigcat-cruises.com.au; tours from \$58) also runs half- and full-day tours, which depart Cairns at 9am and 1.15pm. Prices include the use of snorkelling gear. **Ocean Free** (☎ 07-4053 5888; www.oceanfree.com.au; adult/child/family schooner trips \$109/70/322, cruiser trips \$165/80/441) operate a boutique schooner to Green Island and Pinnacle Reef, and a cruiser to Upolu Cay.

Fitzroy Island National Park

A steep mountain-top peeping from the sea, Fitzroy Island has coral-littered beaches and great walking opportunities. In winter (June to August), you can spot humpback whales from the lighthouse. While there is no longer resort accommodation, day-trippers can still use its facilities including a swimming pool, bar and kiosk, and hire water-sports equip-

ment and fishing rods. The most popular snorkelling spot is around the rocks at **Nudey Beach** (1.2km from these facilities).

There are a number of walks, which vary in difficulty. The 20-minute **Secret Garden Walk**, with major skinks basking on rocks, is a leisurely stroll, whereas the **Lighthouse & Summit Trail** is a steep, two-hour climb.

Fitzroy Island Ferries (☎ 07-4030 7907; Reef Fleet terminal, Cairns; adult/child/family return \$42/21/\$105) departs Cairns at 8.30am, 10.30am and 4pm, returning at 9.30am, 3pm and 5pm. Full- and half-day tours, including lunch and transfers, are also available.

Raging Thunder (☎ 07-4030 7907; www.fitzroyisland.com.au; Reef Fleet terminal, Cairns; adult/child/family ferry return \$42/21/105, half-day trip \$65/32/183, full-day trip \$71/37/198) operates ferry transfers to Fitzroy Island at 8.30am and 12.30pm (and 10.30am during the high season), returning at 3pm and 5pm, as well as a half-day trip that departs Cairns at 10.30am and returns at 3pm or 5pm, and a full-day trip that departs Cairns at 8.30am, returning at 5pm. Transfers from Cairns' northern beaches can be arranged for the latter for an additional fee.

Frankland Islands National Park

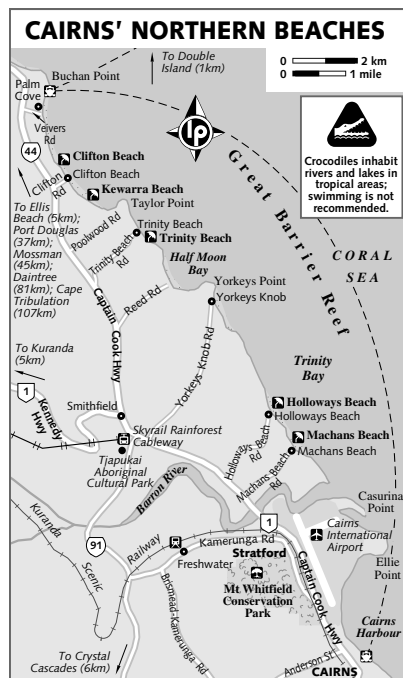
A group of five islands surrounded by coral, the Frankland Islands have gorgeous, sandy beaches and offer a splendid day's snorkelling. Camping is allowed in the national park, and permits are available from Cairns **QPWS** (☎ 07-4046 6600; www.epa.qld.gov.au; 5b Sheridan St, Cairns; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri), but you'll need to be fully self-sufficient.

Frankland Islands Cruise & Dive (☎ 07-4031 6300; www.franklandislands.com.au; adult/child cruise & lunch only \$110/70, full-day tour \$140/80, adult tour & transfer \$200) runs excellent day tours, which include a cruise down the Mulgrave River. Additionally, transfers can be arranged for campers who are heading to Russell Island and have the necessary QPWS permits.

CAIRNS' NORTHERN BEACHES

☎ 07 / pop 19,857

A string of communities cling to their own patch of beach on the 26km stretch of coast north of Cairns. The following beaches, listed in order from Cairns north, all have stinger-free nets in summer. If you're travelling by car, turn-offs from the highway are well signposted. Sunbus (p433) runs regular services from Cairns.



Holloways Beach

The Coral Sea meets a rough ribbon of sand at a suitable depth for swimming at the tad suburban Holloways Beach.

Just back from the sand, **Strait on the Beach** (☎ 4055 9616; 100 Oleander St; meals \$6-16; ☺ breakfast & lunch) is transformed from what would otherwise be a standard takeaway shop and café by an exceptional setting. Eat vegetarian nachos, burgers and green curries under a coconut rotunda and sit back in cruise control.

Yorkeys Knob

Yorkeys is a low-key place with a long white-sand beach that's popular with kite surfers, and has the impressive **Yorkeys' Knob Boating Club** (☎ 4055 7711; 25-29 Buckley St; meals \$13.90-29.50; ☺ lunch & dinner) with a winning location and a range of 'heavy tackle' (aka Cajun chicken) and 'light tackle' (such as oysters). If you're driving, take a spin to the top of the knob, where the views are spectacular.

The clean, no-frills vintage villas at **Villa Marine** (☎ 4055 7158; www.villamarine.com.au; r from \$79; ☎ ☺ ☹) overlook a pool with a grassy garden attracting bird life. The helpful man-

ager can arrange tours and there are regular bus services (adult \$4.10) into Cairns.

York Beachfront Apartments (☎ 4055 8733; www.yorkapartments.com.au; 61-3 Sims Esplanade; r \$120; ☎ ☺ ☹) is a mid-sized complex with good self-contained apartments. Sliding doors open on to private balconies and sea views.

Trinity Beach

Thriving Trinity Beach is one of Cairns' prettiest beaches. High-rise accommodation is bumper to bumper but it's still a popular place for Cairns' city folk who want to enjoy some beachy R&R away from Cairns' hum.

Set on a bushy block, **Trinity Hideaway B&B** (☎ 4057 8972; 56 Jamieson St; s/d \$75/90) is a modern set-up catering to fans of the B&B experience. Courtesy pick-up is available.

Trinity Beach Club (☎ 4055 6776; www.trinitybeachclub.com.au; 19-23 Trinity Beach Rd; r \$125; ☎ ☺ ☹), run by an attentive husband and wife team, and a cute beagle, is a polished midrange option with landscaped garden, modern self-contained apartments with balconies and lifts for the lazy.

Beyond the shopping centre façade, **Roydon** (☎ 4057 6512; www.roydon.com.au; 83-87 Vasey Esplanade; r \$145-345; ☎ ☺ ☹) has huge two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments, each with a serious balcony and living area.

The Chardonnay set spills onto the curb side of stellar beachfront diner **L'Unico Trattoria** (☎ 4057 8855; 75 Vasey St; mains \$16.50-39.50; ☺ lunch & dinner). Share a gourmet pizza on the balcony.

The beachside BYO **Atlantis** (☎ 4057 8550; 47 Vasey Esplanade; mains \$24-29.50; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) restaurant keeps them coming with innovative food such as macadamia nut-crusted tuna coupled with papaya fondue, and tandoori prawn skewers with date tartar (yum).

Clifton Beach

Local and leisurely, Clifton Beach is an unassuming spot for those seeking quiet respite.

Backed by green hills, the self-contained accommodation at **Clifton Palms** (☎ 4055 3839; www.cliftonpalms.com.au; 35-41 Upolu Esplanade; cabins/r/units from \$69/90/168; ☎ ☺ ☹) ranges from one to four bedrooms, making it suited to families.

Contemporary B&B **Clifton Beach Retreat** (☎ 4059 0452, 0407-168 116; www.cliftonbeachretreat.com.au; s/d \$90) does beach chic in peaceful surrounds with a saltwater pool and barbecue area. Fresh rooms come with a fridge and private balconies.

The York (☎ 4055 8733; www.yorkapartments.com.au; 61-63 Sims Esplanade; apt from \$135; ☎ ☺ ☹) has spotless self-contained apartments with patios or balconies – the higher you go, the better the view. The pool is ideal for lap swimming, while friendly management presides over **Argosy** (☎ 4055 3333; www.argosycairns.com; apt from \$165; ☎ ☺ ☹), where there are roomy self-contained apartments with lipstick palms out the front and kangaroos feeding out the back. Ask for an apartment on the side with wrap-around water views.

Clifton Capers Bar & Grill (☎ 4059 2311; 14 Clifton Rd; mains around \$16.50; ☺ dinner Thu-Tue, lunch Sun) is a pleasant place with a large à la carte menu and a crowded collection of paintings. Self-caterers can frequent the supermarket at **Clifton Village Shopping Centre** (Captain Cook Hwy).

Palm Cove

The glamourpuss of Cairns' northern beaches, pouty Palm Cove encourages idleness and indulgence. Waves lap the idyllic tropical beach shore, palm trees rustle gently and a host of sprawling international resorts offer everything from massage to marriage. Don't expect isolation though; this spot teems with boutique spa hotels and expensive eateries.

From the Captain Cook Hwy, turn off at Veivers Rd and follow it to Williams Esplanade, which extends the length of the beach as far as the jetty. At the **Village Shopping Centre** (113 Williams Esplanade) there's a post office, newsagent, moneychanger and internet access. The **Information Station** (☎ 4059 8700; holiday@coralhorizons.com.au; 137 Williams Esplanade) can help out with accommodation and car bookings.

Beach strolls, leisurely swims and facials will be your chief pursuits, but if you need more stimuli head to **Cairns Tropical Zoo** (☎ 4055 3669; www.cairnstropicalzoo.com; Captain Cook Hwy; adult/child \$28/14; ☺ 8.30am-5pm). It has crocodile shows (11.30am and 3pm) and a koala photo session at 2.30pm.

SLEEPING

Most of Palm Cove's accommodation is pricey. There's a lot of development going on, so ask whether you'll get construction noise with your check-in.

Palm Cove Accommodation (☎ 4055 3797, 0416-768 786; 19 Veivers Rd; s/d \$65) Amid the five-star spankiness, Palm Cove is the last bastion of budget accommodation and it's mighty relaxed. Next door to the beautician's, there's

three rooms only, which are all bright and airy. An absolute bargain.

Silvester Palms (☎ 4055 3831; www.silvesterpalms.com; 32 Veivers Rd; d \$80-140; ☺ ☹) A humble two-storey block of self-contained apartments with whimsical Australiana paintings on its exterior. The communal barbecue area and fenced swimming pool make Silvester a fitting family option.

Melaleuca Resort (☎ 4055 3222; www.melaleucaresort.com.au; 85-93 Williams Esplanade; r \$161; ☺ ☹) This is a verdant resort, with 24 self-contained waterfront apartments. Each has its own kitchen, balcony and laundry facilities.

Outrigger Beach Club & Spa (☎ 1800 134 444, 4059 9200; www.outrigger.com.au; 123 Williams Esplanade; r \$295-1045) The mother-of-pearl reception gleams, the staff smile and blissed-out spa patrons waft around this stately resort with two pools, over 200 rooms, a tennis court and a gym.

Angsana Resort & Spa (☎ 4055 3000; www.angsana.com; 1 Veivers Rd; r from \$415; ☺ ☹) Popular with wedding parties, there are one-, two- and three-bedroom self-contained suites (some split level) with cushioned lounges and silk wall hangings. If you're lucky, you'll get a room with a private pool. The spa's signature treatment: a straight-up massage.

Sea Temple (☎ 1800 010 241; www.seatemple.com.au; Triton St; studios \$460, apt from \$580) Oh-so-chic Sea Temple revolves around a tranquil pool area, and sandstone wings detour guests to East-meets-West rooms with customised toiletries and sleek furnishings.

Also recommended is **Villa Paradiso** (☎ 1800 683 773, 4059 8800; www.villaparisado.com.au; 111-113 Williams Esplanade; r from \$240; ☺ ☹), which has Mediterranean-themed apartments, while **Palm Cove Camping Ground** (☎ 4055 3824; 149 Williams Esplanade; unpowered/power sites \$20/15) is a small beachfront park.

EATING

CSLC (☎ 4059 1244; Cedar Rd; meals \$10-20; ☺ dinner daily high season, Thu-Sun low season) This locals' haunt serves decent pub grub in its fabulous garden bar. CSLC has a strict dress code: 'thongs or shoes must be worn at all times'.

Nu Nu (☎ 4059 1880; 123 Williams Esplanade; mains \$16-37) Applauded by gourmet magazines, this breezy restaurant sources the best in produce and patrons. Dinner might consist of smoked fish with pomelo *miang* and papaya relish, whereas breakfasts will have your tastebuds shouting out for fine food all day long.

Far Horizons (☎ 4055 3000; www.angsana.com; cnr Veivers Rd & the Esplanade; meals \$26-75; ☎ dinner) has chi-chi beachfront dining at the luxe Angsana Resort and Spa, while there's always a crowd at **Cocky's at the Cove** (☎ 4059 1691; Veivers Rd; dishes \$4.50-11.50; ☎ breakfast & lunch), which serves great breakfasts and sandwiches, or **Il Forno Pizzeria** (☎ 4059 1666; Paradise Village; pizzas \$15-17; ☎ dinner) for scrummy thin-crust pizzas.

Self-caterers should head over to **Palm Cove Supermarket** (☎ 4059 0244; Paradise Village; ☎ 7.30am-7pm).

Ellis Beach

Round the headland past Palm Cove, Ellis Beach is an absolute stunner, with a long sheltered bay. The best bit? It's not drowning in development.

Ellis Beach Oceanfront Bungalows (☎ 1800 637 036, 4055 3538; www.ellisbeachbungalows.com; Captain Cook Hwy; unpowered sites \$26, powered sites \$30-36, cabins \$80, bungalows \$155-180) is a stand-out park, conveniently located right on the beach. Imagine yourself a castaway in the cabins with private balcony.

Across the road is **Ellis Beach Bar & Grill** (☎ 4055 3534; Captain Cook Hwy; meals \$4.50-19.90), which pumps out tasty burgers, old-fashioned milkshakes, homemade scones and lasagne, and has live music each Sunday during the high season. For a quiet ale, try the **SLSC** (☎ 4055 3695; Captain Cook Hwy). About 20 minutes' drive from Ellis Beach is **Hartley's Creek Crocodile Farm** (☎ 4055 3576; www.crocodileadventures.com; adult/child \$28/14; ☎ 8.30am-5pm). Visit at crocodile-feeding time – around 11am.

KURANDA

☎ 07 / pop 2000

With its close proximity to Cairns, Kuranda keeps 'em coming on whistle-stop tours that are greeted by his-and-her safari suits, koala key rings and other B-grade merchandise. But it's the journey that counts, and certainly the Skyrail and/or scenic railway trips redeem this destination from mediocrity. Around 3.30pm, the theme-park atmosphere evaporates, the indigenous population reclaims the streets and you can appreciate the enchanting rainforest that made it so popular in the first place.

The **Kuranda visitor information centre** (☎ 4093 9311; www.kuranda.org; ☎ 10am-4pm) is located in Centenary Park.

Sights & Activities

Kuranda's markets remain ever popular. The original **Kuranda Markets** (☎ 4093 8772; 7 Therwine St; ☎ 9am-3pm Wed-Fri & Sun), once famous for genuine art and craft products, are supplemented by the **Heritage Markets** (☎ 4093 8060; www.kurandaline.com.au/market; Rob Veivers Dr; ☎ 9am-3pm). Between them you'll find souvenirs such as ceramics, emu oil, jewellery, food and figurines made from pistachio nuts. For genuine artistry, try the **Kuranda Arts Co-op** (☎ 4093 9026; www.artskuranda.asn.au; Kuranda Settlement Village, 12 Rob Veivers Dr; ☎ 10am-4pm).

Behind the train station, **Kuranda Rainforest Tours** (☎ 4093 7476; adult/child \$14/7; ☎ hourly 10.30am-2.30pm) runs sedate 45-minute cruises along the Barron River. Check opening times during the Wet (October to March).

There are several signed walks in the markets, and a short walking track through **Jumrum Creek Environmental Park**, which is off Barron Falls Rd, and has a big population of fruit bats.

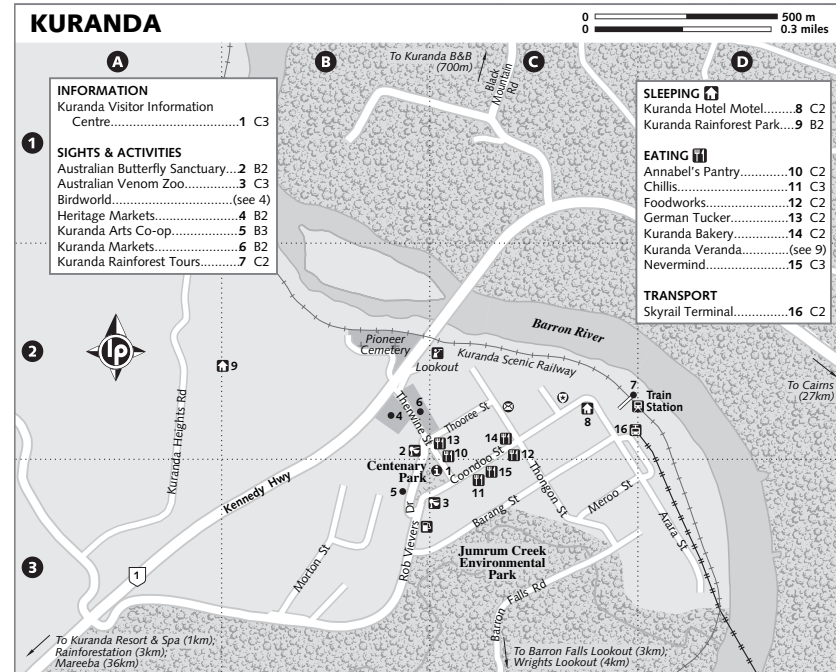
Further down, Barron Falls Rd divides: the left fork takes you to a **lookout** (that's wheelchair accessible) over the Barron Falls, while further along the right fork brings you to **Wrights Lookout**, which looks down at Barron Gorge National Park.

There's loads of 'wildlife' in Kuranda – albeit in zoos. **Rainforestation** (☎ 4093 9033; www.rainforest.com.au; Kennedy Hwy; adult/child \$36/18; ☎ 8.30am-4pm) is an enormous tourist park with a wildlife section, river cruises and an Aboriginal show.

The **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** (☎ 4093 7575; www.australianbutterflies.com; 8 Rob Veivers Dr; adult/child \$14/7.50; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a butterfly aviary. Next door, **Birdworld** (☎ 4093 9188; www.birdworldkuranda.com; Heritage Markets; adult/child \$14/7; ☎ 9am-4pm), displays native and exotic birds. With live venom extraction demonstrations by a 'bio-prospector' and a resident deadly, the funnel web spider, the **Australian Venom Zoo** (☎ 4093 8905; 8 Coondoo St; adult/child \$16/10; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a no-go zone for an arachnophobe.

Sleeping

Kuranda Rainforest Park (☎ 4093 7316; www.kurandarainforestpark.com.au; 88 Kuranda Heights Rd; unpowered/ powered sites \$19/22, s/d without bathroom \$20/40, units from \$85; ☎ ☎) This rustic park, set on a rainforest block, has a good range of affordable accommodation. The restaurant, Kuranda Veranda (opposite), is a surprisingly classy find amid the greenery. The park is a 10-minute walk from town.



Kuranda B&B (☎ 4093 7151; kurandabed@tpgi.com.au; 28 Black Mountain Rd; s/d \$90/130; ☎ ☎) Only the sounds of nature rouse guests from their slumber at these spacious and light rooms situated off a wide veranda. Soak up garden splendour in the breakfast and reading area. This excellent B&B is 20 minutes' walk from town. Rates include breakfast.

Kuranda Resort & Spa (☎ 4093 7556; www.kurandarresortandspa.com; 3 Green Hills Rd; r \$119-200; ☎ ☎) Showing signs of age, this former beauty feels like a school camp in parts and yet has a policy of no children under 14 years of age. All is redeemed by the pool area and some lovely trimmings (day beds, sound systems and modernist bush tables) in a couple of the better rooms.

Also recommended is **Kuranda Hotel Motel** (☎ 4093 7206; cnr Arara & Coondoo St; s/d \$45/46) Stay with the region's rogues and celebrities (all their pictures at least) at this 'fair dinkum' pub, which offers budget rooms.

Eating

Annabel's Pantry (☎ 4093 7605; Therwine St; pies \$3.40-4.50; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Offering more varieties

of pie than there are letters in the alphabet, Annabel's has come up with some creative fillings, such as the (roo-filled) Matilda.

Nevermind (☎ 4093 8448; 24 Coondoo St; meals \$8-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) The hippest place on the stretch whipping up smoothies, stirring soups and padding out Turkish pides.

Kuranda Veranda (☎ 4093 7316; Kuranda Rainforest Park, 88 Kuranda Heights Rd; meals \$18.50-28.50; ☎ brunch Sun, dinner daily) This restaurant has impeccable service and an unobstructed rainforest view. It's all enhanced by the Thai linen, jazzy tunes and the fact that the food – ranging from gusty jungle curries to delicious dips – is tasty. After Sunday's yum cha brunch (\$15 per person) there's live music.

There's a Foodworks supermarket on Coondoo Street. Also recommended:

Kuranda Bakery (☎ 4093 8005; cnr Coondoo & Thongon Sts; ☎ breakfast & lunch) For a snack on the go, there's preservative-free pastries and camel with mango pies.

Chillis (☎ 4093 8483; Shop 5, 24 Coondoo St; meals \$5-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Pizzas, pastas, curries and \$5 coffee-and-cake deals.

German Tucker (☎ 4057 9688; Therwine St; dishes \$5-14; ☎ lunch) Fat Kransky sausages.

Getting There & Away

Kuranda Scenic Railway (☎ 1800 620 324, 4036 9288; www.traveltrain.com.au; adult/child/concession \$35/17.50/25) winds 34km from Cairns to Kuranda through picturesque mountains and no fewer than 15 tunnels. The trip takes 1¼ hours and trains depart from Cairns at 8.30am and 9.30am Sunday to Friday, returning from pretty Kuranda station at 2pm and 3.30pm Sunday to Friday.

At 7.5km long, **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway** (☎ 4038 1555; www.skyrail.com.au; adult/child/family \$39/19.50/97.50; ☎ 8.15am-5.15pm) is one of the world's longest gondola cableways and gives a bird's-eye view over the expansive rainforest. It runs from the corner of Cairns Western Arterial Rd and the Cook Hwy in Smithfield, a northern suburb of Cairns, to Kuranda (Arara St), taking 90 minutes. It includes two stops along the way and features boardwalks that have interpretive panels and passes Barron Falls (which is reduced to a small stream in the Dry season). The last departure from Cairns and Kuranda is at 3.30pm; transfers to/from the terminal (15 minutes' drive north of Cairns) and combination (Scenic Railway and Skyrail) deals are also available. As space is limited, only daypacks are allowed on board the Skyrail. The Skyrail has advanced eco-certification status.

For information on bus services to/from Cairns, see p432.

ATHERTON TABLELANDS

Tropical green gives way to heaven-sent countryside as one moves through the sensuous Tablelands, inland from the coast between Innisfail and Cairns, and the site of the continent's most recent volcanic activity, some 10,000 years ago. With an altitude of more than 1000m in places, the Tablelands offers some of the best self-drive terrain around, but the trick is not to rush it – this is slow travel at its best and a couple of days exploring the Tablelands' waterfalls, lakes and national parks is seriously relaxing.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Hire car is the ideal way to get around as there are so many stops over short distances, but **Whitecar Coaches** (☎ 07-4091 1855; www.whitecarcoaches.com) has up to four services a day to Mareeba (\$16.80, one hour) and Atherton (\$22, 1¼ hours) from Cairns, with a Saturday morning and afternoon service (only one

service on Sunday and public holidays). On weekdays there are also onward connections to Herberton (\$28, two hours) and Ravenshoe (\$31, 2½ hours).

If you're travelling by car, be careful driving from Mareeba to Cairns as there are no fences and the Brahmin cattle certainly don't expect to move out of your way.

Mareeba

☎ 07 / pop 10,920

Mareeba, the rough diamond of the Tablelands, is where the rainforest meets the outback. It's a great place to pick up seasonal work, and it has a few attractions. If you're around in mid-July, don the RM Williams boots and be sure to see the **Mareeba Rodeo** at Kerribee Park.

First stop is the **Mareeba Heritage Museum & Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 4092 5674; www.mareebaheritagecentre.com.au; Centenary Park, 345 Byrnes St; museum adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm), which has displays on the area's past and present commercial industries, as well as its natural surrounds.

Mareeba Wetlands (☎ 4093 2514; www.mareeba.wetlands.com; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Apr-Dec) is a 20-sq-km bird-lover's extravaganza and you might also see other animals such as kangaroos and freshwater crocs. Boat tours cost \$8 for an hour-long trip. To reach the wetlands, take the Pickford Rd turn-off from Bibbohra, 7km north of Mareeba on a gravel road.

Granite Gorge (www.granitegorge.com.au; admission \$5) offers waterfalls, walking trails around huge granite formations, rock-wallaby feeding and a camping ground with kitchen, laundry and bathroom block (unpowered/powering sites \$5/7). To reach it, follow Chewko Rd out of Mareeba for 7km; there's a turn-off to your right from there.

Coffee aficionados will love **Coffee Works** (☎ 4092 4101; www.arabicas.com.au; 136 Mason St; tours \$12; ☎ 9am-4pm). For a stiffer drop, **Golden Pride Winery** (☎ 4093 2750; www.goldendrop.com.au; Bilwon Rd, Bilwon; ☎ 8am-6.30pm) offers tastings of its sweet mango wine. Head north on the road to Mount Molloy for 11km and turn right at Bilwon Rd. It's another 2km to the winery.

SLEEPING & EATING

Jackaroo Motel (☎ 4092 2677; www.jackaroomotel.com; 340 Byrnes St; r \$85; ☎ ☎) Perhaps a bit tidy for a real jackaroo but those seeking comfort will appreciate the ultra-clean rooms.

Nastasi's (☎ 4092 2321; 10 Byrnes St; meals \$4-8.50; ☎) If it's fried, they've got it: dim sims, fish and chips, eggs and bacon, and burgers sizzle out the door.

More sleeping options:

Mareeba Motor Inn (☎ 4092 2451; Kennedy Hwy; s/d \$80/100; ☎ ☎ ☎) Immaculate and functional rooms with a licensed restaurant.

Riverside Caravan Park (☎ 4092 2309; 13 Egan St; unpowered/powering sites \$11/14) Stunning poinciana trees surround this ground on the Barron River.

Chillagoe

☎ 07 / pop 231

Chillagoe's population is small, unless you count the number of termites that inhabit the rich ochre mounds dotting its arid landscape. Around town – which consists of a pub, supermarket and petrol station – are impressive 400-million-year-old limestone caves, rock pinnacles, ancient coral reefs, Aboriginal rock art and ruins of early-20th-century smelters. It's 140km west of Mareeba (18km of unsealed road) and close enough to make a day trip from Cairns, but an overnight stay is preferable.

The **Hub** (☎ 4094 7111; Queen St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) is the visitors centre, and it's here that you can book **QPWS cave tours** (\$11-13.75) of the stunning Donna (9am), Trezkinn (11am) and Royal Arch (1.30pm) limestone caves.

Fully self-contained **Chillagoe Cabins** (☎ 4094 7206; www.chillagoe.com; Queen St; s/d \$95/125; ☎ ☎) are modelled on rustic miners' huts. There's also a restaurant on the premises. The friendly owners are animal carers and you may be able to pat a kangaroo in their care. Alternatively, there's the **Chillagoe Observatory & Eco-Lodge** (☎ 4094 7155; info@coel.com.au; Hospital Ave; unpowered & powered sites \$16, s/tw \$30/55, d \$55-70; ☎ ☎), with a range of cabins and a communal area with meals.

The portions are enormous at the **Post Office Hotel** (☎ 4094 7119; 37 Queen St; meals \$10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner), which sports colourful graffiti from skirting board to ceiling, and a solid, marble bar.

Chillagoe can be reached from Mareeba with the **Chillagoe Bus Service** (☎ 4094 7155; one way/return adult \$33/66, child \$16.50/33), which departs from Chillagoe post office at 7.30am Monday, Wednesday and Friday and returns from Mareeba train station at 1pm on Monday and Friday, or 11.30am on Wednesday.

Atherton

☎ 07 / pop 8964

'Capital' of the Tablelands, Atherton is a prosperous town that defines this farming and tourist region with its beguiling people. It's also a handy place to regroup. **The Atherton Tableland Information Centre** (☎ 4091 4222; www.athertontablelands.com.au; cnr Main Rd & Silo Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) has useful information including self-drive itineraries, Queensland-wide booking facilities and seasonal work updates. **Washouse Internet café** (☎ 4091 2619; 1 Robert St; per hr \$5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has internet access, or try the **Atherton Library** (☎ 4091 2229; Robert St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat).

As you approach Atherton from Herberton in the southwest, the fabulous **Hou Wang Temple** (☎ 4091 6945; 86 Herberton Rd; adult/child/concession/family \$7.50/2.50/6/17.50; ☎ 10am-4pm) is testament to the Chinese migrants who flocked to the area to search for gold in the late 1800s, and is the only Chinese temple in Australia built of corrugated iron. At the same location, **Atherton Birds of Prey** (☎ 4091 6945; www.birdsofprey.com.au; 86 Herberton Rd; adult/child/student/family \$13/6.50/10/34; ☎ shows at 11am & 2pm Wed-Sun) presents entertaining shows with trained falcons, wedge-tailed eagles and owls.

The **Crystal Caves** (☎ 4091 2365; www.crystalcaves.com.au; 69 Main St; adult/child \$12.50/6; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is a mineralogical museum in an artificial grotto that winds for a block under Atherton's streets, and houses rose-quartz boulders, dazzling blue topaz and assorted fossils. You must wear a hard hat, and the last 'miners' need to be there one hour before closing.

Aromatic coffee and delectable bacon-and-cheese puffs lure the hungry to **Gallery 5** (☎ 4091 5577; Main St; meals around \$7.50; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat). Self-caterers can go to the **IGA supermarket** (Main St; ☎ 7am-8pm).

Many travellers stick around Atherton to find work and most end up at the family-run **Atherton Travellers Lodge** (☎ 4091 3552; www.athertontravellerslodge.com.au; 37 Alice St; dm/s/f \$20/36/65, d & tw \$45; ☎ ☎), which has a home-away-from-home vibe and excellent facilities including a fitted-out kitchen, laundry, pool table and gym.

Woodlands Tourist Park (☎ 1800 041 441, www.woodlandscp.com.au; 141 Herberton Rd; unpowered/powering sites \$17/27, cabins from \$69, villas from \$88; ☎ ☎) is a shipshape park with a come-hither pool.

Lake Tinaroo

☎ 07

Picturesque Lake Tinaroo, or 'barramundi heaven', is a recreational magnet for families and fisherfolk. The enormous artificial lake and dam were originally created for the Barron River hydroelectric power scheme. **Tinaroo Falls**, at the northwestern corner of the lake, is the main settlement.

Near the Lake Tinaroo turn-off, **Tolga Woodworks Gallery & Cafe** (☎ 4095 4488; Kennedy Hwy, Tolga; meals \$6-13; ☎ 9am-5pm) has lots of tasteful objects of desire and gourmet meals: linger over a savoury muffin or white-chocolate cheesecake.

Optimising lake views, **Lake Tinaroo Terraces** (☎ 4095 8555; www.laketinarooterraces.com.au; Church St; r \$79-135; ☎) presents clean and modern rooms and self-contained two-storey terraces with two bedrooms. All are superb value. Boat hire (half/full day \$85/65) is available.

Hedged by Cyprus pines, **Lake Tinaroo Holiday Park** (☎ 4095 8232; www.ltholidaypark.com.au; Dam Rd; unpowered/power sites \$20/26, cabins \$80, units \$90-115) is right by the lake and a dream come true for fisherfolk. Canoe hire (half/full day \$25/40) is available. BYO linen.

From the dam, the unsealed 4WD-only Danbulla Forest Drive winds through the **Danbulla State Forest** beside the lake, finally emerging on the Gillies Hwy 4km northeast of Lake Barrine. The road passes several spectacular self-registration lakeside **QPWS camping grounds** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18).

There's a volcanic crater at **Mobo Creek**, and 6km from the Gillies Hwy a short walk takes you down to the **Cathedral Fig**, a gigantic strangler fig tree.

Yungaburra

☎ 07 / pop 1734

The belle of the Tablelands, this former timber mill town clings to a series of hills and has fostered a quaint village atmosphere with pretty 20th-century architecture and affable locals. Now top-notch restaurants, superb accommodation, natural wonders and a knock-out day spa have seen the tourism Richter-scale soar in this sweet-as-a-chocolate-box town, but Yungaburra still manages to keep its misty ambience and friendly feel, so (like us) you may end up lingering longer than expected.

Yungaburra Information Centre (☎ 4095 2416; 21 Cedar St; per 30min \$2.50) has internet access.

The **Yungaburra Folk Festival** (www.yungaburrafolkfestival.org) is a fabulous community event held annually in late October. It features music, workshops, poetry readings and kids' activities. The **Yungaburra Markets** (☎ 4095 2111; Gillies Hwy; ☎ 7am-noon) are held in town on the fourth Saturday of every month; at this time the town is besieged by avid craft and food shoppers. The magnificent 500-year-old **Curtain Fig** is a must-see. Looking like a *Lord of the Rings* prop, it has aerial roots that hang down to create a feathery curtain. A wheelchair-accessible viewing platform encircles the tree.

Bookish types will love **Spencer & Murphy Booksellers** (☎ 4095 2123; www.spencerandmurphybooksellers.com.au; 9 Cedar St; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), a haven laden with new and secondhand books. The chatty owner is a hunter and collector of rare and antiquarian books, including the works of Australian writer, Ion L Idriess. While you're at it, grab a coffee.

SLEEPING

On the Wallaby (☎ 4095 2031; www.onthewallaby.com; 34 Eacham Rd; unpowered sites \$20, dm/d \$20/50; tours from \$25) With its comfy dorms and doubles, timber interiors and nightly barbecues (\$8 per person), this earthy place is one of Far North Queensland's best hostels. There's a plethora of excellent nature-based tours, free pick-ups from Atherton and one-way transfers from Cairns (\$25 per person).

Gables B&B (☎ 4095 2373; 5 Eacham Rd; s \$65, d w/without breakfast \$80/70) This historic Queenslander with shutter windows and friendly hosts has two rooms, including one with a spa and the other with a kitchen, and en suites. Breakfast consists of bread and fruit.

Kookaburra Lodge (☎ 4095 3222; www.kookaburra-lodge.com; cnr Oak St & Eacham Rd; s, d & tw \$80; ☎) Amid a tropical garden, Kookaburra has stylish rooms with shady patios fanning out around the pale-blue pool. There are big soft couches to sink into in the communal lounge room.

Willows Lodge (☎ 4095 3449; www.williamsllodge.com; Cedar St; r \$130-200; ☎) An immaculate restoration of a home with a firm foot in the town's history. Rooms here have spas, CD players and coffee plungers. A fireplace to get cosy by, and knock-out views across the hills from a classic veranda make this a fine option. Rates are cheapest Sunday to Thursday.

Yungaburra Mountain Spa & Retreat (☎ 4095 2511; www.yungaburraspa.com.au; 22 Gillies Hwy; villas from \$185)

Intimate new villas designed for discerning couples with king-size beds, private courtyards, sleek sound systems and double spas. Reinvent yourself with hydro oxygen and his-and-her treatments (\$65 to \$385) at the day spa. This whole den of decadence is understated yet indulgent. Ask about special deals.

Allumbah Pocket Cottages (☎ 4095 3023; www.allumbahpocketcottages.com.au; 24-26 Gillies Hwy; cottages \$207; ☎) Old cottages modernised into self-contained abodes with timber flooring and private balconies. Breakfast is included.

EATING

Cedars Coffee Shop (☎ 4095 3913; Lot 5, Cedar St; meals \$6-10; ☎) *Very Cider House Rules*, Cedars is all cuteness and comfort. Nestle in the garden courtyard with a toasty focaccia or plunge your fork into a slice of 'bananas in Bahamas' cake.

Eden House (☎ 4095 3355; 20 Gillies Hwy; mains \$26-29; ☎) dinner Fri-Mon) Fragrant gardenia greets diners at this early 19th-century house-cum-restaurant where the emphasis is on matching food and wine. Tequila prawns, followed by *crème brûlée* with marinated strawberries and coconut *tuile* make for a memorable meal.

our pick Flynn's (☎ 4095 2235; 17 Eacham Rd; mains \$27-30; ☎) dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sat & Sun) A Kiwi culinary maestro prepares authentic French and Italian dishes with soul, attracting diners from far and wide. Whether eating slow-roasted duck or linguine with prawns, the emphasis is on savouring every morsel. You can dine streetside or on the terrace out the back. There are boutique beers and fine Australian wine aplenty to complement the *carte du jour* menu. Reservations are recommended.

Nick's Restaurant (☎ 4095 3330; 33 Gillies Hwy; ☎) lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Much-loved Swiss-Italian food is the go here.

Crater Lakes National Park & Around

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, the two mirror-like volcanic lakes of Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine, off the Gillies Hwy east of Yungaburra, are beautiful swimming and picnicking spots encircled by **rainforest walking tracks**. Both lakes are national parks, but camping is not allowed.

LAKE EACHAM

The crystal-clear waters of Lake Eacham are great for swimming and spotting turtles. The secluded area echoes with the call of whip

birds cracking in lush rainforest, and there are some sensational picnic spots. Stop in at the rangers station for information on the area or to gawk at the native python. You'll find it 4km from Yungaburra.

Bird-lovers flock to **Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodge** (☎ 07-4095 3754; www.rainforest-australia.com; Eacham Close; r \$130; ☎) which is embedded in the national park. There are tired-looking self-contained cabins, and landing platforms about the place for visiting birds – all of which enjoy celebrity status (some 42 wildlife documentaries have been made here) – and 1.3km of walking tracks on the property.

At **Crater Lakes Rainforest Cottages** (☎ 07-4095 2322; www.craterlakes.com.au; Eacham Close, off Lakes Dr; d incl breakfast \$210; ☎) Timber cabins have their own patch of rainforest where you can watch pademelton wallabies and musky rat kangaroos. Inside alluring interiors are fit for a princess (or a wildlife junkie!) and come with wood-burner heating, spa baths, fully fitted kitchens and a breakfast hamper for your first morning – rooms drop in price on the second night.

Lake Eacham Tourist Park (☎ 07-4095 3730; www.lakeeachamtouristpark.com; 71 Lakes Dr; unpowered/power sites \$16/19, cabins \$72-80), less than 2km down the Malanda road from Lake Eacham, is a rambling park with a camp kitchen.

LAKE BARRINE

There's a 5km track around this crater lake formed by volcanic explosions. It's 18km east of Atherton via the Gillies Hwy.

Spoil yourself with a Devonshire tea at **Lake Barrine Rainforest Cruise & Tea House** (☎ 07-4095 3847; Gillies Hwy; meals \$6-14; ☎) breakfast & lunch) and spot water dragons and tortoises on the 40-minute **cruise** (adult/child \$14/7; ☎) cruises at 10.15am, 11.30am, 1.30pm, 2.30pm & 3.30pm).

Malanda

☎ 07 / pop 1530

Part of the waterfall circuit, Malanda is about 15km south of Lake Eacham and has the nation's longest continually running picture theatre, the **Majestic** (established 1927) but remains Yungaburra's country-bumpkin cousin. The **Malanda Falls Visitors Centre** (☎ 4096 6957; Atherton Rd; ☎) 9.30am-4.30pm) has thoughtful displays on the area's human and geological history, and runs guided **rainforest walks** (adult/student/child \$10/7/4) led by members of the Ngadjonji community on Thursday and Friday between

9am and 2pm and on the weekend between 9am and noon.

Along the Atherton road, on the outskirts of town, are **Malanda Falls**, where saw-shelled turtles and red-legged pademelons can be seen.

On the Millaa Millaa Rd, 10km from Malanda, is the tiny village of **Tarzali**, which offers some accommodation options.

Boutique eco-accommodation doesn't get much better than **Fur 'n' Feathers** (☎ 4096 5364; www.rainforesttreehouses.com.au; Hogan Rd, Tarzali via Malanda; units/treehouses/family houses from \$190/305/415; ♻️). Seven all-timber pole houses are set in a stunning and pristine patch of old-growth rainforest. The private riverfront treehouses are self-contained and perfect for spotting wildlife. From the customised bed covers to handmade soaps, spas wedged into rainforest views and recline-in-me lounges, *everything* has been thought of. Children – recipients of wildlife spotting certificates – are welcome.

Malanda Lodge Motel (☎ 4096 5555; www.malandalodgemotel.com.au; Millaa Millaa Rd; s/d \$83/95; ♻️) is a bit dated but remains a popular wedding venue. If it feels as though the solid brick walls of your room are closing in, escape to the grassy gardens or the lovely refuge of the pool.

Tree Kangaroo Café (☎ 4096 6658; Atherton Rd; meals \$4-10; ☺ breakfast & dinner; ♻️) is next door to the Environmental Centre and serves stopgap food.

Millaa Millaa & the Waterfall Circuit

The 16km 'waterfall circuit' near this small town, 24km south of Malanda and home to a Kauri pine tree estimated to be 1000 years old, passes some of the most picturesque falls on the Tablelands. Enter the circuit by taking Theresa Creek Rd, 1km east of Millaa Millaa on Palmerston Hwy. **Millaa Millaa Falls**, the largest of the falls, are a perfect sheet of water dropping over a fern-fringed escarpment. These are the most spectacular and have the best swimming hole. Continuing round the circuit, you reach **Zillie Falls** and then the pick of the lot, **Ellinjaa Falls**, before returning to the Palmerston Hwy just 2.5km out of Millaa Millaa. A further 5.5km down the Palmerston Hwy there's a turn-off to **Mungalli Falls**, 5km off the highway.

At **Mungalli Creek Dairy** (☎ 07-4097 2232; www.mungalliecreekfarmhouse.com.au; 254 Brooks Rd; meals \$6-12; ☺ 10am-4pm) you can relish boutique biodynamic dairy products including chai

yoghurt, cheese and sinfully rich cheesecake and, while you're at it, check out the cheese-making room. Samples are offered.

Whether its hand milking a cow or feeding an infant goat a bottle, there's plenty of rosy-cheeked relaxation to be had at **Acton Ridge Farmstay** (☎ 07-4097 2293; www.actonridgefarmstay.com; 122 Nash Rd; per adult \$125), an 81-hectare working farm welcoming guests. There's a unit that's ideal for families and rooms in the farm house with shared bathroom. Rates include all meals.

Dairy folk and waterfall seekers gather at the **Falls Tea House** (☎ 07-4097 2237; www.fallsteahouse.com.au; Palmerston Hwy; s \$65-95, d with/without bathroom \$150/110, meals \$8-14; ☺ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed) overlooking the rolling Tablelands hills. You might try homemade pasta, curry or sandwiches made from home-baked bread. The 'dairyman's lunch' (\$12) is a signature dish. B&B rooms are individually furnished with period fixtures and fittings. It's on the turn-off to Millaa Millaa Falls.

There are cabins at **Millaa Millaa Tourist Park** (☎ 4097 2290; www.millaapark.com; 86 Malanda Rd; unpowered/power sites \$17/22, d \$30-75; ♻️) and you can camp at Henrietta Creek between Milla Millaa and Innisfail.

Herberton

☎ 07 / pop 969

Peaceful Herberton is nestled in the crease of one of the area's rolling hills. It is a historic tin-mining town and many of its original buildings are still intact.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 4096 2244; Great Northern Mining Centre, Jack's Rd) is located on the site of an old mine.

Herberton Heritage Cottage B&B (☎ 4096 2032; www.herbertoncottage.com; 2 Perkins St; s/d \$170/180; ♻️) has ladylike namesake rooms and is the best option in town. Expect lots of polished wood surfaces, potbelly heating and high comfy beds.

There are basic motel-style rooms (single/double \$25/50) available at the **Australian Hotel** (☎ 4096 2263; 44 Grace St; mains \$12-16; ☺ lunch & dinner), while **Wild River Caravan Park** (☎ 4096 2121; 23 Holdcroft Dr; unpowered/power sites \$10/15, cabins \$70) is on the edge of town, with an attractive aspect and a BYO restaurant (meals \$12.50 to \$18).

Mt Hypipamee National Park

Between Atherton and Ravenshoe, the Kennedy Hwy passes the eerie, and hard to pronounce, **Mt Hypipamee crater**, which could

be a scene from a sci-fi film and certainly adds some vertigo to the itinerary. It's a scenic 800m (return) walk from the picnic area, past **Dinner Falls**, to this narrow, 138m-deep crater with its moody-looking lake far below.

Ravenshoe

☎ 07 / pop 846

With an altitude of 920m, Ravenshoe is the highest town in Queensland. **Ravenshoe Visitor Centre** (☎ 4097 7700; www.ravenshoevisitorcentre.com.au; 24 Moore St; ☺ 9am-4pm) has maps and is home to the **Nganyaji Interpretive Centre**, which explains the Jirrbal people's traditional lifestyle.

Windy Hill Wind Farm is Australia's largest wind farm, with 20 wind turbines producing a clean, green energy supply. Public viewing access is available 24 hours a day, with views of the quiet energy source. Windy Hill can be reached from either the Kennedy Hwy, from Ravenshoe, or from Millaa Millaa, along the scenic Old Palmerston Hwy.

Little Millstream Falls are 2km south of Ravenshoe on the Tully Gorge Rd, and **Tully Falls** are 24km south. About 6km past Ravenshoe and 1km off the road are the 13m-high **Millstream Falls** (no swimming), said to be the widest in Australia during full flood.

Kennedy Hwy

About 32km west of Ravenshoe is the small township of **Innot Hot Springs**, where a hot spring heats up the cool waters of the town's creek. You can 'take the waters' at **Innot Hot Springs Village** (☎/fax 07-4097 0136; unpowered/power sites \$18/22, budget s/d \$40/55, cabins s/d \$75/90; ♻️). Paying guests have free use of the park's seven **thermal pools** (nonguests adult/child \$6/5; ☺ 8am-6pm). Nearby, the **Hot Springs Hotel** (☎ 07-4097 0203; meals \$10.90-19.90; ☺ dinner, lunch by appointment) is lauded as offering 'a good feed' – that's bangers 'n' mash and mixed grill-style fare.

PORT DOUGLAS

☎ 07 / pop 5867

Fetching Port Douglas, or 'Port Dougie' as it's known, has long been submerged in the southern consciousness as a sun-drenched place to flee winters. Enter luxury townhouses for baby-boomer retirees and Sydneysider-friendly menus. The low-rise town sits at the end of Davidson St with its line-up of palm trees like the svelte beauties – all sequin kaftans, hoop earrings and thin slides – who saunter between the main street's cafés and

bars. One backpacker bemoaned there's not a whole lot to do 'unless you have a lot of money' and it's true the town dances to the beat of flash restaurants and retail. But it is a great base to tour the Low Isles, Great Barrier Reef, Mossman Gorge, Atherton Tablelands and Cape Tribulation.

Orientation & Information

From the Captain Cook Hwy it's 6km along a low spit of land to Port Douglas. Davidson St, the main entry road, ends at a T-intersection with Macrossan St. To the left is the town centre with most of the shops and restaurants; the beach is to the right.

Port Douglas **visitor information centre** (☎ 4099 5599; www.tourismportdouglas.com.au; 23 Macrossan St; ☺ 8am-6.30pm) has maps, and there's internet access at **Uptown** (☎ 4099 5568; www.uptown.com.au; 48 Macrossan St; per 30min \$5).

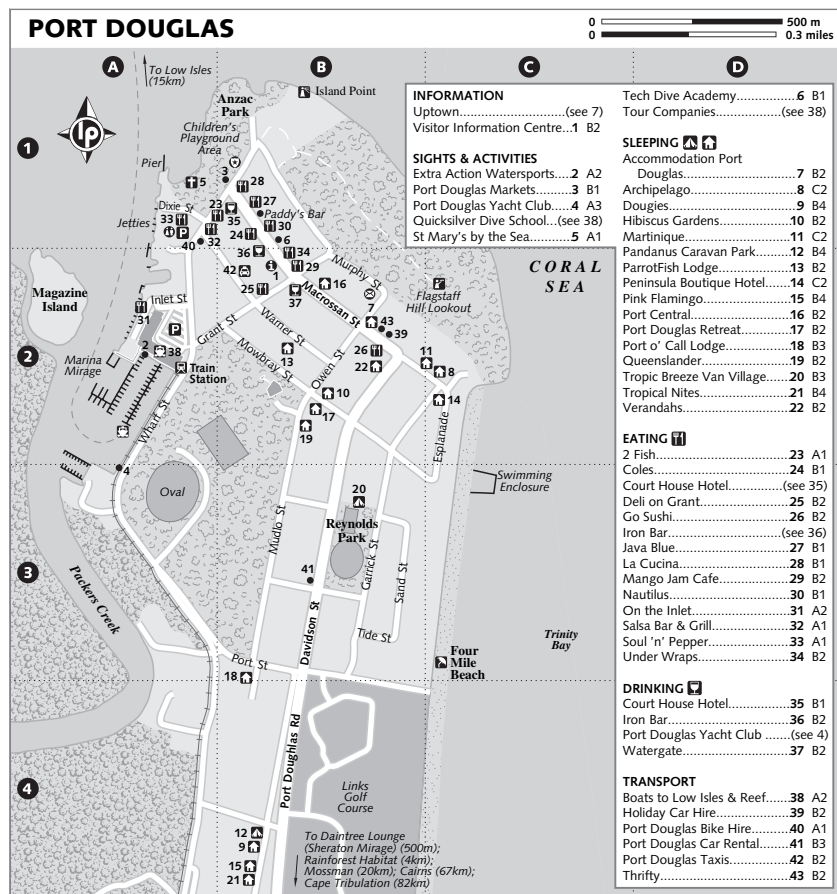
Sights & Activities

You're likely to put in at least a few hours or days on the gorgeous **Four Mile Beach**: a band of white sand backed by palms that stretches as far as your squinting eyes can see. You can hire a jet ski with **Extra Action Watersports** (☎ 4099 3175; xtraactionwater@optusnet.com.au; per 30min \$85) or go on its two-hour Reef Sprinter reef-snorkelling trip (adult/child \$100/80). Otherwise you can just lie on the beach for hours – the Munch buggy plies the length of the beach selling ice creams and snacks.

The excellent **Rainforest Habitat** (☎ 4099 3235; www.rainforesthabitat.com.au; Port Douglas Rd; adult/child/student \$29/14.50/26.10; ☺ 8am-5pm) is a wildlife sanctuary showcasing native animals in enclosures that closely mimic their natural environment. Koalas, kangaroos, crocs and tree kangaroos reside here alongside parrots, wading birds, cassowaries, the world's only pair of breeding jabiru in captivity and an unusually vocal lorikeet renowned for its 13 different calls. You can dine with winged companions at **Breakfast with the Birds** (incl admission \$39/19.50; ☺ 8-10.30am) or **Lunch with the Lorikeets** (incl admission \$39/19.50; ☺ noon-2pm).

The **Port Douglas Markets** (Anzac Park; ☺ 8.30am-1.30pm Sun), at the bottom of Macrossan St, make for a leisurely Sunday morning with aura readings, local arts and even old fashioned ice-cups.

St Mary's by the Sea (Anzac Park) is a tiny non-denominational white-timber chapel that was built in 1911 and a nominee for prettiest



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church in the Land of Oz (hence the two-year wait for wedding ceremonies).

Ever dreamed of sailing on a yacht? Well, the benevolent folk at the **Port Douglas Yacht Club** (☎ 4099 4386; www.portdouglasyachtclub.com.au; Wharf St) run sunset sessions each Wednesday, a fun and free way to get a taste of boating life on a 1½-hour tour. Register at the Yacht Club at 4pm; boats leave at 5pm (BYO drinks).

Several companies offer a PADI open-water certification as well as advanced dive certificates. **Tech Dive Academy** (☎ 4099 6880; www.tech-dive-academy.com; 1/18 Macrossan St; 4-day courses \$695) provide instruction with four to six per class. **Quicksilver Dive School** (☎ 4099 5050; www.quicksilverdive.com.au; Marina Mirage; 4-day courses \$550) holds two days of its training course

in Palm Cove; transfers from Port Douglas are included.

Tours

LOW ISLES TRIPS

There are several cruises to the Low Isles, a small coral cay surrounded by a lagoon and topped by a lighthouse. It offers good snorkelling and the chance to see turtle nesting grounds.

Sailaway (☎ 4099 4772; www.sailawayportdouglas.com; adult/child \$140/85) Great for families. A maximum of 27 passengers.

Shaolin (☎ 4099 1231; www.shaolinportdouglas.com; adult/child \$140/85) A refitted Chinese junk, the *Shaolin* has snorkelling cruises (maximum 23). Sails from noon to 6.30pm.

Wavedancer (☎ 4087 2100; www.quicksilver-cruises.com; adult/child from \$132/66) Recommended.

SV Malaita (☎ 0407-130 648; www.malaita.com.au) These trips get positive feedback. Try for a trip on Monday, Wednesday or Friday for island snorkelling.

FISHING & SAILING

Reef, river and land-based fishing charters operate regularly out of Port Douglas. Prices range from \$90 for a half-day group tour on the Daintree River to anywhere between \$2500 and \$7000 per day on the mother ship. **Fishing Port Douglas** (☎ 4098 5354; www.fishingportdouglas.com.au) has details. **Out 'n' About** (☎ 4098 5204; outandaboutfishing@bigpond.com; tours from \$90) specialises in estuary and reef fishing trips.

REEF TRIPS

The unrelenting surge of visitors to the reef off Port Douglas has impacted on its general condition, and although you'll still see colourful corals and marine life, it has become patchy in parts. Reef trips generally include reef tax, snorkelling and transfers from your accommodation, plus lunch and refreshments. Add around \$200/\$180 for an introductory/certified dive. Think about what you want out of your reef outing and then consider these recommended operators:

Aristocat (☎ 4099 4727; www.aristocat.com.au; adult/child \$150/100) James Bond would approve. Maximum 45 passengers.

Haba (☎ 4098 5000; www.habaddive.com.au; adult/child \$155/95) Carries a glass-bottom boat and ventures to two sites. Maximum 80 passengers.

Poseidon (☎ 1800 085 674; www.poseidon-cruises.com.au; adult/child \$155/120) Fast day suiting divers. Family-run.

Quicksilver (☎ 4087 2100; www.quicksilver-cruises.com; adult/child \$195/100) The giant *Wavepiercer*, which takes over 400, visits the outer reef. Helmet diving available. Family and wheelchair friendly.

Silver Series (☎ 4087 2100; www.silverseries.com.au; adult/child \$150/110) The Silversonic trip gets great feedback.

Synergy 2 (☎ 4050 0675; www.synergyreef.com.au; adult/child \$235/165) Outer reef tours and limo transfers on this upmarket tour. Maximum of 12 passengers.

Tallarook (☎ 4099 4990; www.tallarooksail.com; adult/child \$150/90) Sails to Tongue Reef in just under two hours (maximum 25).

Under Sea Explorer (☎ 1800 648 877; www.undersea.com.au; Shop 4, Princes Wharf; trips from \$1900) Marine research vessel with live-aboard six- to nine-day trips to

Cod Hole and Osprey Reef; departing weekly from Port Douglas.

Wavelength (☎ 4099 5031; www.wavelength.com.au; adult/child \$165/115) Snorkelling cruise only (maximum 30) to three gorgeous outer reef sites. Good crew.

OTHER TOURS

There are numerous operators offering day trips to Cape Tribulation, some via Mossman Gorge. Many of the tours out of Cairns also do pick-ups from Port Douglas.

BTS Tours (☎ 4099 5665; adult/child/family return \$50/26/139) Tours to Mossman Gorge and the Daintree River.

Reef & Rainforest Connections (☎ 4099 5333; www.reefandrainforest.com.au; adult/child from \$105/55) A range of day-long ecotours including Cape Trib and Bloomfield Falls, Kuranda and Mossman Gorge.

Wind Swell (☎ 0427-498 042, 4098 2167; Barrier St; from \$99) Kitesurfing for beginners to high flyers.

Sleeping

Low-season rates are quoted here; stand-by rates are available in some instances so inquire, and negotiate.

Accommodation Port Douglas (☎ 4099 5355; www.accomportdouglas.com.au; 1/48 Macrossan St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is an agent for many holiday rentals.

BUDGET

Dougies (☎ 1800 996 200, 4099 6200; www.dougies.com.au; 111 Davidson St; dm \$25, d & tw \$70, 'style' tents per person \$20, unpowered sites \$24; ☎ ☎ ☎) The sandy-foot crowd can be found at Dougies. It's a popular place with easy-going staff. Dorms have pine bunks and lockers, and it's a popular place to pitch a tent. Free transfers are available from Cairns between 10.30am and 11am on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Parrotfish Lodge (☎ 1800 995 011, 4099 5011; www.parrotfishlodge.com; 37-39 Warner St; dm \$28-30, d & tw with/without bathroom \$95/85; ☎ ☎ ☎) This split-level, purpose-built hostel is modern and beachy with vibrant blue swirling floors, mural-sized contemporary art, and a chatty bar and bistro with occasional live music. The saltwater pool is made for morning laps or an afternoon submerge.

Also recommended:

Port o' Call Lodge (☎ 1800 892 800, 4099 5422; www.portocall.com.au; cnr Port St & Craven Close; dm \$25-30, d \$69-110; ☎ ☎ ☎) Large YHA hostel with a range of rooms, plus a bar and bistro. Free courtesy coach to/from Cairns (Monday to Saturday) with stays of two or more nights.

Port Central (☎ 4099 4488; r from \$59; 🚿) Blink and you'll miss it, but it's central and hotel-style rooms have bathrooms and fridge.

MIDRANGE

The Queenslander (☎ 4099 5199; www.queenslander.com.au; 8-10 Mudlo St; d apt \$105, d unit from \$116; 🚿 🚿) Quiet and friendly, the Queenslander's bedrooms open onto balconies and there's separate bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms fitted with cane furniture in each unit. The owner-operator family can book tours.

Archipelago (☎ 4099 5387; www.archipelago.com.au; 72 Macrossan St; d from \$113; 🚿 🚿 📺) Very near the beach, this complex has 12 self-contained rooms spread over three levels. The upper rooms have 'filtered' views to the beach – through trees and other properties. Rooms are plain with dashes of colour, balconies and cane furniture.

ourpick Pink Flamingo (☎ 4099 6622; www.pinkflamingo.com.au; 115 Davidson St; studio r from \$125, villas from \$185; 🚿 🚿) Gay-owned and -operated, the cheeky Pink Flamingo welcomes open-minded adults. Garden walkways separate seductive self-contained villas with private courtyards and outdoors baths. Cheaper studios are more motel-style with sail-topped patios and candelabras. It's bold and colourful with a BYO poolside bar and bike rental (\$10 daily). A 'shagged' sign on your door might be the fitting end to an arduous day of holidaying.

Port Douglas Retreat (☎ 4099 5053; www.portdouglasretreat.com.au; 31-33 Mowbray St; r from \$129) Newly refurbished self-contained rooms with wicker bed heads, contemporary sleekness and courtyard dining make this a good-value option. The 20m pool is lit by gas lights at night and guests are welcome to use the big barbecue.

Tropical Nites (☎ 4099 5666; www.tropicalnites.com.au; 119 Davidson St; townhouse from \$135; 🚿 🚿) These 12 townhouses are perfect for those wanting to stretch their legs; each sleeps up to three couples. A contemporary look is achieved with granite benchtops and stainless-steel appliances in the kitchen. A lovely Yorkshire couple presides over this spick-and-span operation, making it an excellent choice.

Martinique (☎ 4099 6222; www.martinique.com.au; 66 Macrossan St; r from \$150; 🚿 🚿) This terracotta-coloured block contains lovely one-bedroom apartments, each with small kitchen, cable TV and private balcony. On the main street and

close to the beach, it has laundry facilities and landscaped gardens.

Hibiscus Gardens (☎ 4099 5315; www.hibiscusportdouglas.com.au; cnr Mowbray & Owen Sts; r from \$180; 🚿 🚿 🚿) This good-looking resort does tasteful rooms with Indonesian furniture and bright cushions. Studio rooms face the rear garden while one bedroom rooms overlook the pool lined with turtle sculptures and the occasional Buddha. The on-site spa specialises in indigenous healing techniques and products.

TOP END

Verandahs (☎ 4099 6650; www.verandahsportdouglas.com.au; 7 Davidson St; r \$150-295; 🚿 🚿) These two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments come replete with stainless-steel kitchens, polished floorboards, behind-the-scenes laundry and barbecues on the balconies. Apartments are serviced daily.

Peninsula Boutique Hotel (☎ 4099 9100; www.peninsulahotel.com.au; 9-13 Esplanade; s/d from \$300/340; 🚿 🚿 🚿) Private and luxurious, this 34-room hotel is geared mainly towards couples and newlyweds. Expect modern self-contained apartments across from Four Mile Beach and a superb pool. Rates include buffet breakfast and airport transfers.

CAMPING

Tropic Breeze Van Village (☎/fax 4099 5299; 24 Davidson St; unpowered sites \$26, powered sites \$28-30, on-site cabins from \$75; 🚿) Central and close to the beach with shady tent sites, spotless shared bathrooms, a camp kitchen and lots of wiry fig trees.

Pandanus Caravan Park (☎ 4099 5944; 97-107 Davidson St; unpowered/power sites \$22/27, cabins from \$62; 🚿) Expansive park with timber cabins.

Eating

ourpick 2 Fish (☎ 4099 6350; 7/20 Wharf St; mains \$21-35; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Fish and chips just got a whole lot classier at this sassy seafood eatery. Think wasabi oysters, or crispy fried mud crab with sticky black rice – washed down with a chilled white wine. Match your favourite fish, perhaps coral trout or red emperor, with one of six methods of preparation. A selection of meat dishes is also available.

Soul 'n' Pepper (☎ 4099 4499; 2 Dixie St; meals \$14-28; 🍷 lunch Mon-Sat, breakfast & dinner daily) A fitting haunt for pirates, this weather-beaten outdoor café is the place to come for breakfast. In the afternoon, the menu shifts to seafood risottos and the like.

Salsa Bar & Grill (☎ 4099 4922; 26 Wharf St; meals \$14-33; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This white weather-board offers umbrella dining to the soothing sounds of a water feature. Menu items such as passionfruit and palm sugar-cured trout make the most of regional produce.

Mango Jam Cafe (☎ 4099 4611; 24 Macrossan St; mains \$12-21) Large licensed family restaurant serves all your casual favourites, such as roast chicken and crumbed calamari. The speciality is gourmet wood-fired pizza, which can be delivered to your accommodation.

On the Inlet (☎ 4099 5255; 3 Inlet St; mains around \$25; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This excellent seafood restaurant has tables spread along a sprawling deck. Your attentive waiter will recommend a wine to match your yellowfin tuna crusted in vermicelli, or salmon stacked with prawn and avocado. The pre-dinner deal (3.30pm to 5.30pm) gets you a bucket of prawns and a drink for \$18 or oyster shooters for \$5, plus a proper-feeding session at 5.15pm.

La Cucina (☎ 4099 6100; cnr Wharf & Macrossan Sts; mains \$28-38) Putting the 'c' back into classic Italian cuisine, La Cucina is poised beautifully in front of Anzac Park and serves pastas and risottos, pared back to just a few perfectly balanced ingredients. The coffee is deftly prepared, and the desserts are positively inspired. Next door, La Cucina does its take on pizzas (that's 'hawaiiana' pizza) and tapas.

Nautilus (☎ 4099 5330; 17 Murphy St; mains \$37-40; 🍷 dinner) Be seated in chairs fit for Pacific Island royalty at this ultimate 'event restaurant'. Whether it's French seafood broth or wild barramundi, the experience is about just being in the flame-lit rainforest surrounds. Don't miss the jackfruit brûlée.

There are good counter meals on offer at the **Iron Bar** (☎ 4099 4776; 5 Macrossan St; meals \$8.90-26.90; 🍷 lunch & dinner) and, a notch above, the **Court House Hotel** (meals \$15-23.50; 🍷 lunch & dinner). Self-caterers can head to **Coles** (Port Village, Macrossan St; 🍷 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5.30pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun).

Café options:

Deli on Grant (☎ 4099 5852; 11 Grant St; meals \$8-12; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Unleash the gourmand in you with a range of boutique produce, baguettes and pre-cooked homemade meals to take away. The Deli also does picnic hampers, with three hours' notice.

Go Sushi (☎ 4099 4336; cnr Macrossan & Davidson Sts; 🍷 lunch) Health-on-the-go.

Java Blue (☎ 4099 5814; Shop 3, 2 Macrossan St; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Café-goers sit outside with

newspapers awaiting luscious smoothies, Caesar salads and chock-a-block focaccias.

Under Wraps (☎ 4099 5972; 22 Macrossan St; dishes \$5.90-8.90; 🍷 lunch Wed-Sun) Gourmet sandwiches, wraps, soups and smoothies.

Drinking

ourpick Port Douglas Yacht Club (☎ 4099 4386; Wharf St) With some of the cheapest drinks in town, drinking up the views of Dixon's Inlet at this chilled place is easy. It's a popular hang-out for backpackers on Wednesday nights. There's live music every Sunday from 5pm to 9pm and Australian bistro fare, plus curries, every night.

Watergate (☎ 4099 6665; cnr Grant & Macrossan Sts) Watergate is all bronze and shimmer, attracting Port's trendsetters, who loll around on the chocolate couches and flitter to the long bar for cocktail ensembles.

Court House Hotel (☎ 4099 5181; cnr Macrossan & Wharf Sts) Commanding a corner location, this pub has a pleasant open-air courtyard populated by low-key drinkers and the turned-up-collar brigade. Cover bands entertain the crowd on weekends.

Iron Bar (☎ 4099 4776; 5 Macrossan St) The atmosphere here is so convivial that nobody seems to notice the place looks like a country woolshed – in fact it was good enough for a certain Hollywood A-lister who filmed a movie in town in 2006. Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday nights hop to cane-toad races.

Getting There & Away

For information on getting to/from Cairns, see p432. About every 15 minutes, buses ply Macrossan St and there's a bus stop of sorts outside Paddy's Bar. Buses also pick people up at the Marina too.

Coral Reef Coaches (☎ 4098 2600; www.coralreefcoaches.com.au) connects Port Douglas with Mossman (\$5, 20 minutes), Cow Bay (\$22, two hours), Daintree Village (on request, two hours), Cape Tribulation (\$30, 2½ hours) and Cairns (\$20, 1¼ hours).

Sun Palm (☎ 4084 2626; www.sunpalmtransport.com) runs daily services from Port Douglas to Cairns (\$30, 1½ hours). Services to Mossman (\$10, 20 minutes) and Cape Tribulation (\$35, three hours) depart from Port Douglas at 8.30am, 12.30pm and 4.30pm.

Port Douglas BTS Bus (☎ 4099 5665; www.portdouglasbus.com) has three return services a day to Mossman Gorge (adult/child \$16/8) and two return

services a day to the Daintree River, including a one-hour cruise (adult/child \$40/20).

Getting Around

Airport Connections (☎ 4099 5950; www.tnqshuttle.com; one way \$26.50; 🕒 3.30am-4.30pm) runs an hourly shuttle-bus service to/from Cairns airport, as does **Sun Palm** (☎ 4084 2626; www.sunpalmtransport.com; adult \$30), though less frequently.

Pedalling around compact 'Dougie' is a sensible transport method. Hire bikes from **Port Douglas Bike Hire** (☎ 4099 5799; www.portdouglasbikeshire.com; cnr Warner & Wharf Sts; per day from \$18; 🕒 9am-5pm). The staff here can give you directions for a 12km round trip along bike paths.

Port Douglas Taxis (☎ 4099 5345; 45 Warner St) offers 24-hour service.

Port Douglas is one of the last places you can hire a 4WD before Cooktown:

Holiday Car Hire (☎ 4099 4999; 54 Macrossan St;

🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun)

Port Douglas Car Rental (☎ 4099 4988; 81 Davidson St; 🕒 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat & Sun)

Thrifty (☎ 4099 5555; www.thrifty.com; 50 Macrossan St; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun)

MOSSMAN

☎ 07 / pop 1941

Shadowed by Mt Demi, this quiet town is the eye of the surrounding tourist storm. Day-trippers staying in Cairns and Port Douglas come to snap a Kodak moment of the gorge, but you shouldn't miss the stand of 80-year-old rain trees behind the rail tracks. The Kuku-Yalanji people are the traditional owners of the stunning **Mossman Gorge**. There are some crystal-clear swimming holes, which can be treacherous after heavy rain, and a superb 2.4km **walking trail**.

Mossman QPWS (☎ 4098 2188; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Demi View Plaza, 1 Front St; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), near the main turn-off to the gorge, has maps and information.

Excellent walks are led by Aboriginal guides and run by **Kuku-Yalanji Dreamtime Walks** (☎ 4098 2595; www.yalanji.com.au; adult/child/family \$25/14.50/65; 🕒 ar 9am, 11am, 1pm & 3pm Mon-Sat). It also offers two-hour night fish-spearing tours (maximum three people; \$150) at 7.30pm, and informative beach walks departing at 9.30am and 1.30pm (adult/child \$75/45). Transfers from Port Douglas are available (\$25 per person).

Perhaps more appropriately called the nude cockatoo, part of the **White Cockatoo** (☎ 4098

2222; www.thewhitecockatoo.com; 9 Alchera Dr; s & d cabins \$80-120; 🕒 🗺) operates as a nudist resort from 1 October to 1 May, and nude tours of the Reef and Daintree can also be arranged. Its spacious self-contained timber cabins can sleep up to five.

Mossman Gorge B&B (☎ 4098 2497; www.bnbmq.com.au/mossgorge; Lot 15, Gorge View Cres; s \$80-90, d \$95-115; 🕒 🗺) is a stunning B&B set on the upper floor of a timber home with a lavish balcony from which to view the national park. Mosquito netting is draped over the beds and the guest lounge is enticing. Rates include a huge breakfast of muffins, croissants and fruits.

For frozen yogurt, wraps and toasted sandwiches try **Tropical Boost** (☎ 4098 1089; 10 Front St; dishes \$7-9; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat). Visit **Goodies Cafe** (☎ 4098 1118; 33 Front St; mains around \$10; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) for a health-fest of homemade meals from organic produce.

Getting There & Around

Coral Reef Coaches (☎ 4098 2800; www.coralreefcoaches.com.au) stops in Mossman from Cairns (\$30, two hours) and from Port Douglas (\$8, 30 minutes).

Sun Palm (☎ 4084 2626; www.sunpalmtransport.com) runs regular bus services between Mossman and Cairns (\$36, two hours), and Port Douglas (\$10, 20 minutes).

DAINTREE VILLAGE

Surrounded by pockets of untouched rainforest, Daintree Village is the sedate tourist-centric hub of the coastal lowland area between the Daintree and Bloomfield Rivers – and also known as the Daintree Coast. The small main street has a sprinkling of shops, places to eat and tour options to launch visitors into the spectacular Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Daintree Village (www.daintreevillage.asn.au) has a number of small tour operators:

Bruce Belcher's Daintree River Cruises (☎ 07-4098 7717; www.daintreerivercruise.com; adult/child \$20/10; 🕒 8.15am-4pm) Seven tours daily; 3km north of the Cape Tribulation ferry turn-off.

Chris Dahlberg's Specialised River Tours (☎ 07-4098 7997; www.daintreerivertours.com.au; Daintree Village; 2hr tours adult/child \$55/35; 🕒 tours at 6.30am Apr-Oct, 6am Nov-Jan) Specialises in bird-watching.

Dan Irby's Mangrove Adventures (☎ 4090 7017; www.mangroveadventures.com.au; tours from \$50) Pick a sunrise, day or sunset tour. Open-air shallow boat with swivel seats for optimum bird-watching.

Mangrove Man Tours (☎ 07-4098 2066; www.mangrovetours.com.au; cruises from \$45) Mossman River bird-watching, natural history and ecosystem information.

Wild Wings & Swampy Things (☎ 07-4098 6155; barbara@wildwings.com.au; tours \$30) Recommended.

Sleeping & Eating

Kenadon Homestead Cabins (☎ 07-4098 6142; www.daintreecabins.com; Dagmar St; s/d incl breakfast \$80/100; 🕒 🗺) Set on the fringe of a 160-hectare cattle farm, this friendly family-owned property offers self-contained cabins, which are a good size for families and groups. Clustered together near the playful pool, the cabins face out to the vast pastures.

Red Mill House (☎ 07-4098 6233; www.redmillhouse.com.au; Stewart St; s/d \$120/160; 🕒 🗺) With a range of birds and frogs regularly stopping by, this excellent B&B plays host to more than just paying guests. The eclectic rooms are well appointed (with bathrooms), and there's a welcoming communal lounge. Families can be accommodated. Fully cooked breakfasts (aka 'cholesterol packs') are included.

Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa (☎ 1800 808 010, 07-4098 6100; www.daintree-ecolodge.com.au; 20 Daintree Rd; s/d from \$510/550; 🕒 🗺) Plush, comfortable beds are the centrepiece of these boutique stilt villas with micro-screened balconies, corner spas and in-house movies. The bathrooms are a bit of a letdown; nevertheless, you'll be swooning in rainforest remedies at the *crème de la crème* spa. Within the complex is Julaymba (mains \$28 to \$39), which serves Australasian 'spa cuisine' including kangaroo and wattleseed risotto, and reef fish cakes. Transfers from Port Douglas and Cairns are available.

Daintree Riverview Caravan Park (☎ 07-4098 6119; www.daintreeriverview.com; cnr Dagmar & Stewart St; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/24, cabins \$77) Caters for budget travellers and has boat hire (half-/full day \$55/99).

Papaya (☎ 07-4098 6173; Stewart St; mains \$17.50-24; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Snappy bar and bistro serves a range of standard favourites, such as fish and chips and beef pies in arty surroundings. Lock your lips around sugarcane prawns or some crocodile won tons.

Two casual eateries serving tasty fare are **Ellenor's Place** (☎ 07-4098 6146; Stewart St; light meals \$5-10, mains \$13.50-28.50) and the charming **Daintree Tea House Restaurant** (☎ /fax 07-4098 6161; Daintree Rd; meals from \$14; 🕒 lunch).

AROUND CAPE TRIBULATION

Some places take your breath away – Cape Tribulation, one of the few places in the world where the tropical rainforest meets the sea, is one of them. Coming here across the cable ferry, you'll feel like you're entering the set of *Jurassic Park* with impenetrable rainforest, swollen river banks and layers of mountains. There's talk of a bridge but it just wouldn't be the same. A snakey road slitters through the greenery past enchanting swimming holes, beaches made silver with mica, and a maze of bushwalks. There's next to no mobile-phone coverage here and the rainforest-dwelling population wouldn't want it any other way.

About 11km before Daintree Village and 24km from Mossman is the turn-off to the **Daintree River cable ferry** (car/motorcycle/bicycle & pedestrian \$16/7/2; 🕒 6am-midnight), which runs every 15 minutes and takes two minutes to cross the river into the Cape Tribulation area. After crossing the river it's another 34km by sealed road to Cape Tribulation. The indigenous Kuku-Yalanji people called the area Kulki, but the name Cape Tribulation was given by Captain Cook after his ship ran aground on Endeavour Reef.

Part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, the region from Daintree River north to Cape Tribulation is famed for its ancient rainforest and the rugged mountains of **Thornton Peak** (1375m) and **Mt Sorrow** (770m).

Electricity is powered by generators in this area; few places have air-con and not everywhere has 24-hour power. Cape Trib is one of the most popular day trips from Port Douglas and Cairns, and accommodation is booked solid in peak periods.

You can get fuel and supplies at Rainforest Village (p452), 16km from the ferry on Cape Tribulation Rd, or Mason's Store (p455), but self-caterers are better off coming prepared. Coral Reef Coaches and Sun Palm Express run daily bus services from Cairns to Cape Tribulation (see p432). For information on organised trips to the area, see Tours in the Cairns (p427) and Port Douglas (p447) sections.

A couple of operators offer trips out to the Great Barrier Reef from Cape Tribulation. **Rumrunner** (☎ 1300 556 332; www.rumrunner.com.au; tours adult/child \$120/90) have an excellent day trip to the Mackay and Undine reefs (maximum 44 people).

The following sections chart a route from the Daintree River to Cape Tribulation.

Cape Kimberley

Cape Kimberley Rd, 8km beyond the Daintree River crossing, leads to **Cape Kimberley Beach**, a beautiful quiet beach with **Snapper Island** just offshore, and backed with tropical bush that offers shade. The small island is a national park, with a fringing reef. Access to the island is by private boat; **Crocodylus Village** (below) takes a sea-kayaking tour there. You'll need to obtain a permit for the **QPWS camping ground** (☎ 07-4098 2188; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) on the southwest side of Snapper Island, where there's a toilet and picnic tables. Take a fuel stove, as fires are not permitted here.

At the beach is **Koala Beach Resort** (☎ 1800 466 444, 07-4090 7500; www.koala-backpackers.com; Cape Kimberley; unpowered/powerd sites \$10/13, dm \$18-25, d \$50-125; ♿ ♻️), a huge family-friendly camping ground with secluded sites, small cabins, a bar and restaurant (meals \$6 to \$13).

Cow Bay

Cow Bay is simply beautiful. Trees provide beach shade, and you can fish or just lie down and chill out – it doesn't get more relaxing than this.

Before the turn-off to the Jindalba Boardwalk is the **Walu Wugirriga (Alexandra Range) lookout**, which has an information board and marvellous views over the Alexandra Range.

The **Daintree Discovery Centre** (☎ 07-4098 9171; www.daintree-rec.com.au; adult/child/concession/family \$25/10/20/58, audio hire \$5; ♿ 8.30am-5pm) is a rainforest interpretive centre with advanced credentials. Its aerial walkway traverses the forest floor to a 23m viewing tower. Visitors are encouraged to use an audio guide, available in six languages. There are some short walks with interpretive panels and a small theatre runs films on the hippest of talking points – conservation. **Jindalba Boardwalk** weaves through the rainforest behind the centre. You can have your entry ticket validated for seven days.

SLEEPING & EATING

Crocodylus Village (☎ 07-4098 9166; www.crocodylus capetrib.com; Buchanan Creek Rd; dm/d \$23/75; ♻️ ♻️) This YHA hostel has a spread of large, safari-style tents that merge with the surrounding trees. There's a restaurant and bar, as well as a range of activities, including excellent two-day sea-kayaking tours to Snapper Island (\$200).

our pick **Epiphyte B&B** (☎ 07-4098 9039; www.rainforestbb.com; 22 Silkwood Rd; s/d/tr/cabins \$50/75/90/140)

This neo-hippy B&B has individually styled rooms of varying size, each with slate-floored bathrooms. The veranda is festooned with hammocks and there's a bed made for star gazing. A private new cabin with a sunken bathroom is ideal for couples.

Prema Shanti (☎ 07-4098 9006; www.premashanti.com; 183 Turpentine Rd; per person tw share \$70, cabins \$110) If a spiritual retreat in the heart of the rainforest sounds like a piece of nirvana then this yoga and meditation retreat comes close. Accommodation is beneath the split-level timber temple. A daily rate includes daily yoga and meditation, breakfast and dinner. Meditation is compulsory and bookings essential.

Daintree Wilderness Lodge (☎ 07-4098 9105; www.daintreewildernesslodge.com.au; 83 Cape Tribulation Rd, Noah Creek; rind breakfast \$250; ♻️) Seven timber eco-cabins are separated by rainforest and connected by boardwalks on this 12-hectare property. Each has a ceiling window to watch the rainforest canopy. Meals are available (\$28 to \$38).

Daintree Ice Cream Company (☎ 07-4098 9114; Cape Tribulation Rd; ice cream \$5; ♿ 11am-5pm) This might just be the most scenic ice creamery anywhere: taste a range of exotic flavours such as macadamia, mango and black sapota, a native fruit that tastes like chocolate pudding (divine!).

Floravilla (☎ 07-4098 9100; Cape Tribulation Rd; mains \$12.50-28; ♿ breakfast & lunch) Country-style breakfasts, quick-fried calamari and good vegetarian eats make this series of thatched huts, dotted around a garden, very popular. There's also the tiny Floravilla gallery.

More eating and sleeping options:

Fan Palm Boardwalk Cafe (☎ 07-4098 9119; Cow Bay; mains \$8-16) Open-air licensed café.

Rainforest Village (☎ 07-4098 9015; www.rainforestvillage.com.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25) Camp sites on a grassy slope behind the petrol station and general store (open 7am to 7pm). Clean utilities block.

Cooper Creek

Cooper Creek Wilderness Cruises (☎ 07-4098 9126; www.ccwild.com; adult/child \$35/25) offers day (at 9am and 2pm) and night (at 8pm) guided interpretive rainforest walks.

In a relaxed rainforest setting, **Daintree Deep Forest Lodge** (☎ 07-4098 9162; www.daintreedeeppforestlodge.com.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; r \$130-150) has a homestead with self-contained studio units and a one-bedroom unit that sleeps up to five. Each has a veranda with a barbecue for alfresco cooking.

WORLD HERITAGE LISTING – WHAT DOES IT GUARANTEE?

Far North Queensland's Wet Tropics area has amazing pockets of biodiversity. The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area stretches from Townsville to Cooktown and covers 894,420 hectares of coastal zones and hinterland, diverse swamp and mangrove-forest habitats, eucalypt woodlands and tropical rainforest. It covers only 0.01% of Australia's surface area, but has:

- 36% of all the mammal species
- 50% of the bird species
- around 60% of the butterfly species
- 65% of the fern species.

Yep – wow!

Daintree National Park: Then & Now

The greater Daintree rainforest is protected as part of Daintree National Park. The Daintree area has a controversial history. In 1983 the Bloomfield Track was bulldozed through sensitive lowland rainforest from Cape Tribulation to the Bloomfield River, attracting international attention to the fight to save the lowland rainforests. The conservationists lost that battle, but the publicity generated by the blockade indirectly led to the federal government's moves in 1987 to nominate Queensland's wet tropical rainforests for World Heritage listing. Despite strenuous resistance by the Queensland timber industry and state government, the area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988 and one of the key outcomes was a total ban on commercial logging in the area.

That may not be enough, however. The Cow Bay area that many travellers visit, an area of unique and threatened plant species, is a 1000-block real estate subdivision on freehold private land – look around and you'll see 'for sale' signs aplenty. World Heritage listing, unfortunately, doesn't affect land ownership rights or control.

In 1994, the Daintree Rescue Program, a state and federal government buy-back scheme, attempted to consolidate and increase public land ownership in the area, lowering the threat of land clearing and associated species extinction. They spent \$23 million re-purchasing large properties, adding them to the Daintree National Park and installing visitor interpretation facilities such as Maardja and Dubuji boardwalks. Sealing the road to Cape Tribulation opened the area to rapid settlement activating attempts to buy back freehold blocks to reduce settlement pressures. Twelve years on, the Queensland government had purchased over 400 freehold properties, the federal government had purchased 18 properties and local conservationists had acquired five. Coupled with stringent development controls, it looks as though the adage of *Paradise Lost* is being reversed by local and state efforts, and the Daintree just could be paradise regained. Still, with increased population comes invasive species such as the Singapore daisy, coconut trees and heliconias, which, if not controlled, could infringe on the near-pristine forests.

Check out www.austrop.org.au for more information.

What can I do?

When visiting this impossibly beautiful part of the world, *leave only footsteps behind*. That's as easy as taking your rubbish with you, sticking to the designated trails and driving slowly to avoid hitting wildlife. When travelling, consider the following questions to try to minimise your 'environmental footprint':

- Does the tour I'm going on have eco-certification (www.ecotourism.org.au)?
- Are tour participants encouraged to take their rubbish with them when visiting World Heritage sites?
- Am I using natural, chemical-free toiletries while travelling?
- Are there any volunteer opportunities for me to assist with cleaning up beaches or wildlife monitoring etc?
- Is there a not-for-profit environment group I can donate to (eg Austrop, the Wilderness Society or the Australian Conservation Foundation)?
- Is my accommodation choice encouraging guests to recycle rubbish and reduce water consumption?

Thornton Beach

Just a short stroll from Thornton Beach, the open-air and licensed **Café on Sea** (☎ 07-4098 9718; Thornton Beach; meals \$10-20) is very Café del Mar and serves delicious fish burgers, char-grilled prawn salads, milkshakes and cute mini bottles of sparkling white to celebrate your prime beach posse. Across the road, **Thornton Beach Bungalows** (☎ 4098 9252; www.thorntonbeach.com; Cape Tribulation Rd; d \$95) are small and tidy but no doubt you'll be spending most of your time on the balcony.

Noah Beach

Marrdja Botanical Walk is a stunning interpretive boardwalk that follows the creek through the rainforest and mangroves to a lookout over Noah Creek.

Noah Beach Camping Area (☎ 07-4098 0052; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18) is a QPWS self-registration camping ground set 100m back from the beach. Big red-trunk trees provide shade for 16 sites.

CAPE TRIBULATION

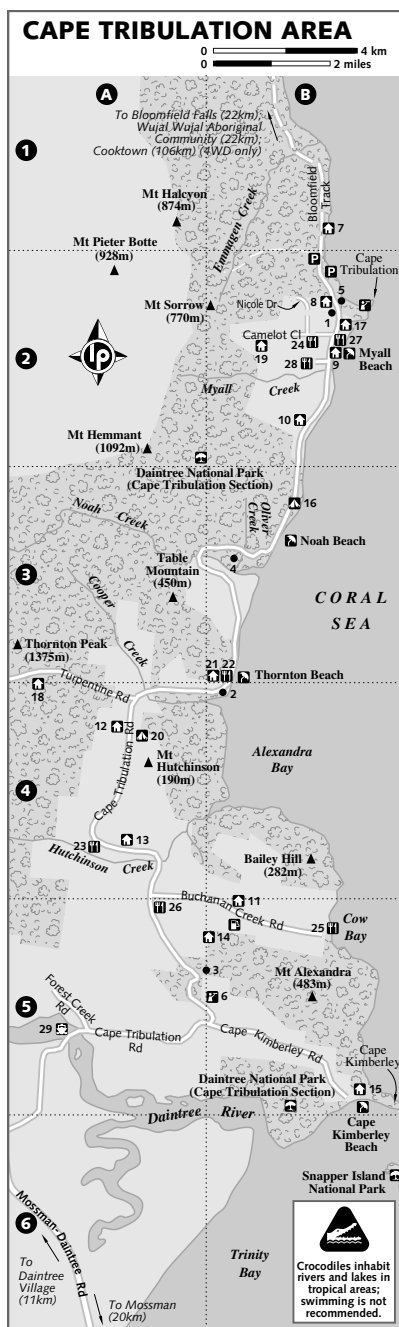
Volunteers from Austrop, a local conservation organisation, run the **Bat House** (☎ 07-4098 0063; www.austrop.org.au; Cape Tribulation Rd; admission \$2; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun), a nursery for fruit bats; there's always one looking to make a new friend.

Jungle Adventures (☎ 07-4098 0090; www.jungle surfingcanopytours.com; tours \$25-28) runs excellent and informative night and day walks.

Cape Tribulation Horse Rides (☎ 1800 111 124, 07-4098 0030; tours \$94; ☎ 8am & 1.30pm) offer leisurely horseback strolls through rainforest and paddock trails. Or trade a saddle for a flying-fox harness with **Jungle Surfing Canopy Tours** (☎ 07-4098 0090; www.jungleadventurescapetrib.com.au; adult \$75).

Sleeping & Eating

PK's Jungle Village (☎ 1800 232 333, 07-4098 0040; www.pksjunglevillage.com; unpowered sites per person \$10, dm/s \$22/44, d \$66-110; ☎ ☎ ☎) PK's has an infamous party reputation and because its Jungle Bar literally goes bananas, it's either your gig or not. Dorms have eight beds with spongy mattresses, and air-conditioned rooms with bathrooms are available. There's also a restaurant (mains \$15 to \$20) and a communal kitchen. Salsa classes, volleyball and a tour desk make sure that everyone is occupied.



Cape Trib Beach House (☎ 1800 111 124, 07-4098 0030; www.capetribbeach.com.au; dm \$25, r \$79-189, apt \$249; ☎ ☎ ☎) Choose from earthy dorms with slat windows or pleasant A-frames. The complex includes a small communal kitchen, and restaurant-bar (mains \$15 to \$20) with winged canvas roofing. The whole lot is right on the beach. Ideal for travellers who want to restore their zen.

Rainforest Hideaway (☎ 07-4098 0108; www.rainforesthideaway.com; 19 Camelot Close; r incl breakfast \$85-120) Extremely private and suitable for everyone, this is a likeable place with driftwood mobiles, eclectic wooden furniture and irreverent hotel signs. If you arrive unannounced, check the blackboard for vacancies and head to the beach, where you'll probably find the manager.

Cape Trib Farmstay (☎ 07-4098 0042; www.capetribfarmstay.com; Cape Tribulation Rd; d with/without breakfast \$88/110; ☎ ☎) Five timber cabins with verandas and smart bed linen are set amid the rambutan and mangosteen plantations forging privacy with joyous views. Double accommodation is also available in the farmhouse with visits from the cuddly blue heeler, Buttons. Not

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TRANSPORT

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surprisingly, an exotic fruits basket awaits for breakfast. Seasonal fruit-pickers (with work permits; call ahead for opportunities) are welcome from January to May.

Cape Tribulation Camping (☎ 07-4098 0077; www.capetribcamping.com.au; unpowered sites \$22-24, powered sites \$28-30, s/d \$35/55) With its beach frontage, this well-maintained park pays homage to the sea and the forest. Half-day sea kayaking tours are available from \$40; sea kayaking hire is from \$15 per hour.

Dragonfly Gallery Cafe (☎ 07-4098 0121; Lot 9, Camelot Close; mains \$15-28.50; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) This licensed café is in a timber pole-house with beautiful garden views. Internet access is available upstairs in the loft; you can peruse local art or grab a beer in a stubby holder.

Self-caterers can stock up at **IGA Express** (☎ 7am-8pm), which has an ATM plus a pharmacy next door, and **Mason's Store** (☎ 07-4098 0070; Cape Tribulation Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm) is a one-stop supply shop that sells takeaway food and runs tours.

Getting There & Away

Sun Palm (☎ 4084 2626; www.sunpalmtransport.com) runs buses from Cairns to Cooktown, via Cape Tribulation, Tuesday to Sunday. Services depart Cairns at 2.30pm Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and at 1.15pm Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

In addition to offering services to Cooktown, the Sunbus service to Cape Tribulation operates two to three times daily (depending on passenger numbers; \$65 per person) and this service goes via Palm Cove and Port Douglas from Cairns.

CAPE TRIBULATION TO COOKTOWN

North of Cape Tribulation, the spectacular **Bloomfield Track** is 4WD only, and continues through the forest to the Wujal Wujal Aboriginal community on the far side of the Bloomfield River crossing. Some steep sections of the Bloomfield Track may be impassable after heavy rain; check road conditions at Mason's Store (above) before heading off.

A must-see along the way is **Bloomfield Falls** (after crossing the Bloomfield River turn left; the car park is 1km from here). North from Wujal Wujal the track heads for 46km through the tiny settlements of **Ayton (Bloomfield)**, **Rossville** and **Helenvale** to meet the sealed Cooktown Developmental Rd, 28km south of Cooktown.

The **Lion's Den Hotel** (☎ 07-4060 3911; www.lionsdenhotel.com.au; Helensvale; unpowered sites \$16, dm/d \$25/50; 🍷) is a well-known watering hole that has graffiti-covered corrugated-iron walls and a slab-timber bar. You can pitch a tent or sleep in a safari-style cabin (\$66). Fuel is available.

COOKTOWN

☎ 07 / pop 2000

The springboard to the untamed Cape York Peninsula, Queensland's sleepest port town sits at the mouth of the croc-infested Endeavour River. The townsfolk who plough Cooktown's main thoroughfare, Charlotte St, in dusty 4WDs with 'easy does it' bumper stickers but are not afraid of hard work, and equally not shy of a 'smoko' – say from October to June.

Things boomed quickly back in the late 1880s transforming the hamlet into a thriving hub of 4000 (twice the current population). Cooktown is now enjoying something of a resurgence courtesy of the Cooktown Development Rd getting sealed in March 2006, making it accessible in the Wet – good news for game fishers from San Francisco to Tokyo who rent 'millionaire's fleet' boats in the hope of snaring a legendary black marlin offshore. Apart from top-notch fishing and reef access, this small town with a big heart offers personalised tours, wetlands ripe for bird-watching and long, lonely beaches.

Cooktown can claim to be Queensland's first nonindigenous settlement, however transient. From June to August 1770, Captain Cook beached his barque *Endeavour* here, during which time the expedition's chief naturalist, Joseph Banks, collected 186 species of Australian plants from the banks of the Endeavour River and wrote the first European description of a kangaroo.

Race relations in the area turned sour a century later when Cooktown was founded as the unruly port for the Palmer River gold rush (1873–83), where fortunes were made – and drunk – swiftly. Battle Camp, about 60km inland from Cooktown, was the site of a major battle between Europeans and Aborigines.

Information

ANZ bank (☎ 4069 6522; 115 Charlotte St)

Cooktown Library (☎ 4069 5009; Helen St; 📖) Internet access.

Cooktown QPWS (☎ 4069 5777; Webber Esplanade; 🕒 8am–3pm Mon–Fri) Closes for lunch.

Cooktown Booking Centre (☎ 4069 5381; www.cooktownbookings.com.au; 132 Charlotte St; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) Tours, accommodation and transport bookings.

Nature's Powerhouse (☎ 4069 6004; www.naturespowerhouse.info; Walker St; 🕒 9am–5pm) Info centre.

Sights

Cooktown hibernates during winter (locals call it 'the dead season'), and many attractions and tours close or have reduced hours.

Nature's Powerhouse (☎ 4069 6004; www.naturespowerhouse.info; Walker St; adult/child \$3/free; 🕒 9am–5pm) is an environment interpretive centre in the **Botanic Gardens**, with two excellent galleries, a great book shop and a café (p458).

The **Charlie Tanner Gallery** (Charlie was Cooktown's 'snake man') has fantastic displays about snakes, termite mounds, crocodiles, 'only on the Cape' wildlife (the bare-backed fruit bat will give you nightmares) and incredible stories from taipan snake-bite survivors.

The **Vera Scarth-Johnson Gallery** displays a collection of intricate, beautiful botanical illustrations of the region's native plants. There are **walking trails** that lead from the gardens to the **beaches** at Cherry Tree and Finch Bays.

Housed in the imposing 1880s St Mary's Convent, the **James Cook Historical Museum** (☎ 4069 5386; jcmuseum@ecn.net.au; cnr Helen & Furneaux Sts; adult/child \$7.50/2; 🕒 9.30am–4pm) explores Cooktown's intriguing past. From a traditional outrigger canoe to the *Endeavour's* massive anchor, there's a host of interesting displays.

Grassy Hill lookout (162m) has spectacular 360-degree views, and its 1.5km walking trail (45 minutes) leads from the summit down to the beach at Cherry Tree Bay.

Charlotte St and Bicentennial Park have a number of interesting monuments, including the much-photographed bronze **Captain Cook statue**.

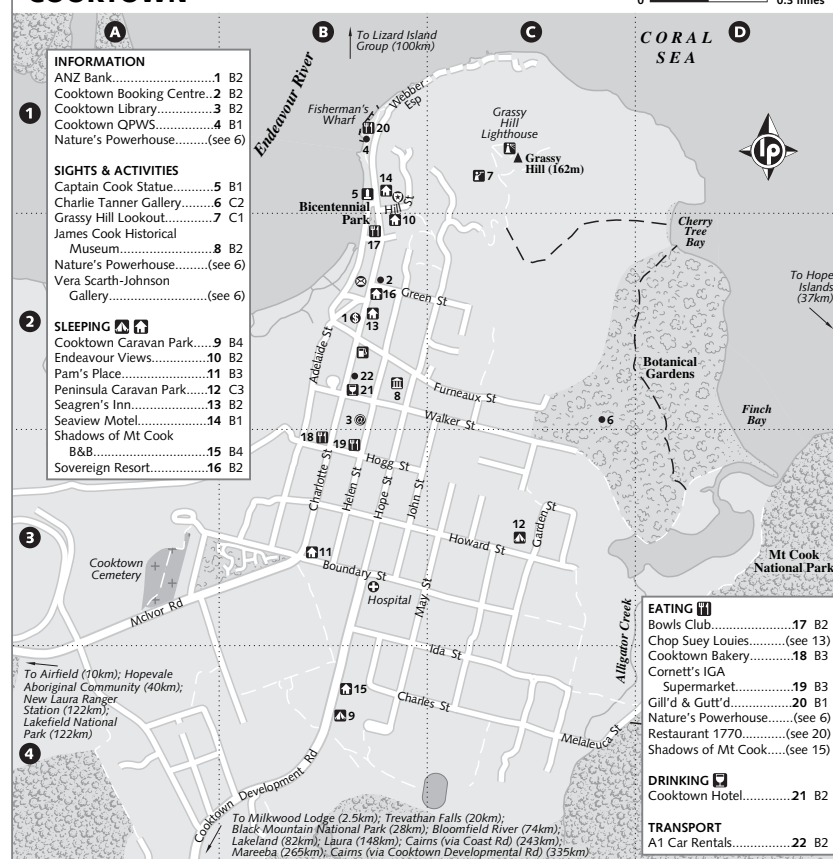
Tours

Limited tours operate from November until at least April.

Ahoy Plane Sailing Seaplanes (☎ 4069 5232; www.marineair.com.au; flights \$140–350) Scenic reef flights and a Lizard Island tour (adult \$350).

Barts Bush Adventures (☎ 4069 6229; www.bartsbushadventures.com.au; tours adult/child \$165/85; camping safaris per day from \$250) A range of Cape York tours, including some to Coloured Sands, Elim Beach, Lakeland, Laura and the Bloomfield track. Accredited Savannah guides.

COOKTOWN



Catch-a-Crab (☎ 4069 6289; cookcac@bigpond.net.au; per person from \$75) Nicko's four-hour crab-catching tours of the Endeavour and Annan Rivers are great for kids (who get a discounted price).

Cooktown Cruises (☎ 4069 5712; cooktowncruises@msn.com.au; adult/child \$30/18) Two-hour scenic Endeavour River cruises and boat hire (from \$25 per hour).

Cooktown Tours (☎ 4069 5406; www.cooktowntours.com; 🕒 9am) Offers 1½-hour town tours (adult/child \$25/15) and half-day trips to Black Mountain (\$55/25).

Gone Fishing (☎ 4069 5980; www.fishingcooktown.com; 4hr tours from \$100) River fishing tours.

Guurrbi Tours (☎ 4069 6259; www.guurrbitours.com; 2hr/4hr tours \$90/115, self-drives \$60/80; 🕒 Mon–Sat) Memorable tours to Hopevale, outside Cooktown, by Nugal-warra elder, Wilfred (Willie) Gordon, including a number of rock-art sites and an emphasis on indigenous

philosophy, stories and dreaming. These tours win high praise from travellers who frequently describe them as 'the best thing I've done in Australia', 'remarkable' and 'inspirational'. The consensus: don't leave Cooktown without doing Willie's tour! Book at Pam's Place (below).

Maaramaka Tours (☎ 4069 5381; 2hr tours adult/child \$40/30, walking tours \$80/45) Feast your mind and your palate on bush tucker at a property outside Hopevale. Book at the Cooktown Booking Centre; self-drive.

Sleeping

Pam's Place (☎ 4069 5166; www.cooktownhostel.com; cnr Charlotte & Boundary Sts; dm/s \$27/50, d \$55–95; 🍷 📖) A popular base for seasonal workers and travellers, this comfortable YHA-affiliated hostel has a leafy garden with barbecue and an assortment of neurotic parrots. There are

also four new self-contained units (\$100 for two people). All facilities are very good, and management can provide loads of useful information about the area.

Seagren's Inn (☎ 4069 5357; seagrens-inn@bigpond.com; Charlotte St; s/d \$75/85; 🍷 🍷) Above Chop Suey Louies' restaurant, the rooms here have outdated appeal with '80s pictures, lots of wood and high puffy beds. There are river views from the balcony.

Endeavour Views (☎ 4069 5381; www.cooktownbookings.com.au; cnr Charlotte & Hill Sts; cabins \$88-98) Although they could be mistaken for garden sheds from the road, these five corrugated cabins, linked by a modest boardwalk, are a comfy choice. Each has a fridge and a balcony made private with a canvas cover. Families will like the self-contained unit (\$130 to \$150).

Milkwood Lodge (☎ 4069 5007; www.milkwoodlodge.com; Annan Rd; s/d \$100/120; 🍷 🍷) About 2.5km south of the centre of town, these six breezy self-contained timber-pole cabins, run by a Dutch owner-operator, have bushland spilling between them, and tranquil views. Cabins are spacious and split-level.

Shadows of Mt Cook B&B (☎ 4069 5584; cnr Hope & Burkitt Sts; rind breakfast \$110; 🍷) Nonchalant hosts have two fresh rooms with Aboriginal prints and top-notch bathrooms; they are close to the adjoining restaurant (right) so some noise may carry.

Sovereign Resort (☎ 4069 5400; www.sovereign-resort.com.au; cnr Charlotte & Green Sts; d \$165; 🍷 🍷) A well-equipped swish resort – you could sleep, eat and drink here without experiencing a smidge of Cooktown. Room prices start with standard studio-style rooms and increase to two-bedroom apartments.

Seaview Motel (☎ 4069 5377; seaviewmotel@bigpond.com; 178 Charlotte St; s/d from \$80/90; 🍷 🍷) Low-rise motel popular with fisher folk who plot their next day's fishing while taking dress-circle seats for one of Far North Queensland's best sunsets. A self-contained townhouse is available for \$170.

Also recommended:

Cooktown Caravan Park (☎ 4069 5536; www.cooktowncaravanpark.com; 14-16 Hope St; unpowered/power sites \$20/25, on-site vans \$45) A small and friendly park set on a gorgeous bush block with wood-burning barbecues.

Peninsula Caravan Park (☎ 4069 5107; fax 4069 5255; 64 Howard St; unpowered/power sites \$20/24, cabins \$70-90) Lovely setting.

Eating & Drinking

Ourpick Nature's Powerhouse (☎ 4069 6004; Walker St; meals \$12-15; 🍷 lunch) This undercover café serves up wholesome food for lunch, and snacks thereabouts. The menu changes daily but stomach-padders such as pumpkin tarts, Caesar salads and homemade cakes – and liquorice basil soda – ensure this is a local favourite.

Chop Suey Louies (☎ 4069 5357; Charlotte St; mains \$15-27; 🍷 lunch & dinner Apr-Sep) With Cooktown's Chinese heritage, it's only fitting that their should be a Chinese restaurant in town. Chow down on chow mein noodles, sweet-and-sour combinations plus mud-crab soups.

Bowls Club (☎ 4069 6173; Charlotte St; mains \$17-21; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Sign yourself in at the door, and join the club for the night. Apart from the enormous surf-and-turf tucker, you're able to visit the salad bar as often as you like and natter with the Cooktown regulars. On weekends you might just win the meat-tray raffle.

Gill'd & Gutt'd (☎ 4069 5863; Fisherman's Wharf, Webber Esplanade; meals \$8-17; 🍷 lunch, dinner to 7.30pm) This mighty takeaway dishes up fish and chips in old-school paper parcels. The fare is spectacular: barramundi or Spanish mackerel, crab sticks or coral trout.

Shadows of Mt Cook (☎ 4069 5584; cnr Hope & Burkitt Sts; mains \$22-25; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sat) A bit of Bali in a frontier town may seem a tad unlikely but this restaurant draws praise for its pan-fried chicken breast with mango and chilli sauce, crumbed camembert and roast duck. Book ahead.

Restaurant 1770 (☎ 4069 5440; 7 Webber Esplanade; mains \$22-29; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The views alone make this Cooktown's answer to fine dining, specialising in seafood.

Cooktown Hotel (☎ 4069 5308; Charlotte St; mains \$8.50-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Known as the Top Pub, this large hotel has character on tap and makes a pleasant place to prop for a while. There are pool tables, a beer garden and basic counter meals are also available. Bands play on Friday nights.

Grab supplies from **Cornett's IGA supermarket** (☎ 4069 5633; cnr Helen & Hogg Sts; 🍷 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-7pm Thu, 8.30am-5pm Sun) and **Cooktown Bakery** (☎ 4069 5612; cnr Hogg & Charlotte Sts; 🍷 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat & Sun).

Getting There & Around

Cooktown's airfield is 10km west of town along McIvor Rd. **Skytrans** (☎ 1800 818 405, 4064

2462; www.skytrans.com.au) flies up to three times a day between Cooktown and Cairns (adult/child \$110/55, 45 minutes).

Country Road Coach Lines (☎ 4045 2794; www.countryroadcoachlines.com.au; adult/child \$72/36) runs a Cooktown to Cairns inland service on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday (departing at 2.30pm and arriving in Cairns at 7.15pm). A coastal service operates on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (departing Cooktown at 7am, arriving at 2pm). Courtesy pick-ups are available and drop-offs to Cairns airport can be arranged.

A1 Car Rentals (☎ 1300 301 175, 4069 5500; www.a1carrentalscairns.com.au; 112 Charlotte St) Small, medium and large cars for hire plus 4WDs, which are ideal for Cooktown's surrounds. Bookings can be made seven days a week, 24 hours.

For a taxi call ☎ 4069 5387.

LIZARD ISLAND

☎ 07 / pop 280

Lizard Island, the furthest north of the Great Barrier Reef resort islands, is about 100km from Cooktown. The continental island has dry, rocky and mountainous terrain, and 20-odd superb beaches, which are nothing short of sensational, attracting A-listers wanting to escape the paparazzi's glare, nature enthusiasts and serious divers alike.

Jigurru (Lizard Island) has long been a sacred place for the Dingaal Aboriginal people. There are also good bushwalks to **Cook's Look** (368m). Its beaches range from long stretches of white sand to idyllic little rocky bays. The water is crystal clear and magnificent coral surrounds the island – snorkelling here is sensational. There are good dives right off the island, and the outer reef is less than 20km away, including what is probably Australia's best-known dive, the **Cod Hole**.

Diving tours here can be arranged through **Diving Cairns** (☎ 07-4041 7536; www.divingcairns.com.au) and Lizard Island Resort (right). The rates are determined by the number of passengers and days required.

Accommodation options are extreme on Lizard Island – it's either camping or five-star luxury.

The **camping ground** (per person/family \$4.50/18) is at the northern end of Watson's Bay and caters for up to 20 campers; contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04, 07-4069 5777; www.epa.qld.gov.au) in Cooktown or go online to obtain a permit. Campers must be totally self-sufficient, but there are toilets, tables and gas barbecues. Untreated water is

available from a pump 250m from the site; boil the water for five minutes before drinking.

Expect isolation, spa treatments, an enviable location and no children at **Lizard Island Resort** (☎ 1800 737 678, 4060 3999; www.lizardisland.com.au; Anchor Bay; d from \$792; 🍷 🍷). Rates include all meals.

Hinterland flies to Lizard Island from Cairns (one way from \$129, one hour) up to twice a day, and **Ahoy Plane Sailing Seaplanes** (p456) has day tours (from \$140) from Cooktown.

CAIRNS TO COOKTOWN – THE INLAND ROAD

It's 332km (about 4½ hours' drive) from Cairns to Cooktown via this stoic and arid route. You can either access the Mulligan Hwy from Mareeba, or via the turn-off just before Mossman. The road travels past rugged ironbarks and cattle-trodden land before joining the Cooktown Developmental Rd at Lakeland. From here it's another 80km to Cooktown.

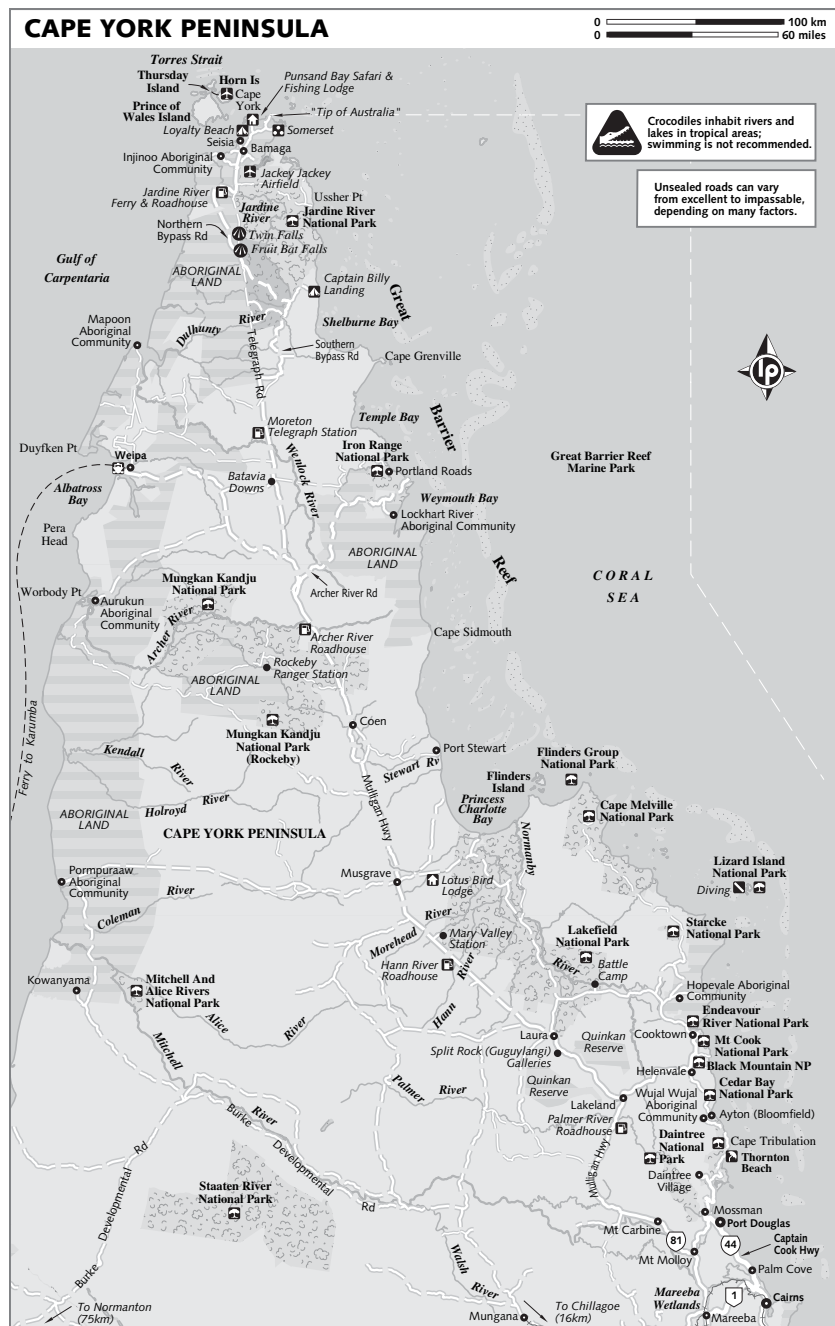
The historical town of **Mt Molloy** marks the start of the Mulligan Hwy. **The National Hotel** (☎ 07-4094 1133; Main St; s/d \$30/60, mains \$12-19; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a welcoming local where you can wear your work boots to lunch.

The Palmer River gold rush (1873–83) occurred about 70km to the west, throwing up boom towns Palmerville and Maytown; little of either remain today. You can buy horrendously expensive fuel and snacks at the **Palmer River roadhouse** (☎ 07-4060 2020; 🍷 7.30am-9pm).

South of Cooktown the road travels through the sinister-looking rock piles of **Black Mountain National Park** – a range of hills formed 260 million years ago and made up of thousands of granite boulders. Local Aboriginal people call it Kalcajagga, or 'place of the spears', and it's home to unique species of frog, skink and gecko.

CAPE YORK PENINSULA

The overland pilgrimage to Cape York Peninsula – the tip of Australia – is simply one of the greatest 4WD routes on the continent. This is one of the most untamed, primeval and lonesome areas of Australia, where clouds of red dust signal approaching vehicles and you'll drive many kilometres on corrugated roads to reach the next 'town', usually an isolated roadhouse. While reaching the tip is an exhilarating effort, many of the highlights of



this journey are found in the changing landscapes of the seasons and the detours, planned and unexpected. Along the way you'll encounter big crocs, vehicle- and character-testing roads, tropical rainforests and wetlands to rival Kakadu with their rich bird life.

If you're driving to the top, you'll need preparation and a 4WD. The ideal set-up is to go in companion vehicles: two 4WDs travelling together so one can haul the other out of trouble if necessary. The HEMA maps *Cape York and Lakefield National Park*, and the RACQ (www.racq.com.au) maps *Cairns/Townsville and Cape York Peninsula* are the best. Of the numerous books about the peninsula, Ron and Viv Moon's *Cape York - an Adventurer's Guide* is the most comprehensive. Linda Rowe's *Paradise Found: A Cape York Adventure* is an entertaining yarn. Lonely Planet's *Queensland & the Great Barrier Reef* guide is also good. Don't expect mobile-phone coverage while travelling in the cape's unspoilt frontiers.

Information & Permits

The RACQ and QPWS offices in Cairns (p424) and Cooktown (p456) have a wealth of information and are recommended starting points for planning your itinerary and to obtain permits. Once north of the Dulhunty River you will need a permit to camp on Aboriginal land, which in effect is nearly all the land north of the river. The Injino people are the traditional custodians of much of this land. The Injino Community, which runs the ferry across the Jardine River, includes a camping permit in the ferry fee.

Travelling across indigenous Australian land elsewhere on the cape may require an additional permit from the relevant community council. **The Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation** (www.balkanu.com.au) website lists contact details for all the Cape York Aboriginal communities.

Tours

There are countless tour operators that run trips to the Cape. Tours last from six to 14 days and take five to 12 passengers. Cairns is the main starting point for tours, which generally run between April and December, but dates may be affected by an early or late wet season. Cooktown also offers tours to the 'Cape'. Most tours visit Laura, the Split Rock galleries, Lakefield National Park, Coen,

Weipa, the Elliot River System (including Twin Falls), Bamaga, Somerset and Cape York itself; Thursday Island is usually an optional extra. Each tour has its own speciality (check with operators), but many offer different combinations of land, air and sea travel, and camping or motel-style accommodation. Prices include meals, twin share accommodation (often with a singles' supplement for those requiring solo accommodation) and fares from Cairns.

Barts Bush Adventures (☎ 07-4069 6229; www.bartsbushadventures.com.au; camping safaris per day from \$250) A range of Cape York tours from Cooktown.

Billy Tea Bush Safaris (☎ 07-4032 0077; www.billytea.com.au; 9-day fly-drive tours \$2550, 13-day cruise-drive \$2700, 14-day overland tours \$2650) A good range of eco-certified tours.

Daintree Air Services (☎ 1800 246 206, 07-4034 9300; www.daintreeair.com.au; day tours \$990) Flight tours depart Cairns Airport at 7.30am on Wednesday.

Exploring Oz Safaris (☎ 1300 888 112, 07-4057 7905; www.exploring-oz.com.au; 6-day overland tours \$850-1000) Takes in Musgrave Station, Coen, Wenlock River, Loyalty Beach, the Tip and Twin Falls. Additional fuel levy applies.

Heritage 4WD Tours (☎ 1800 775 533, 07-4054 7750; www.heritagetours.com.au; 6-day fly-drive tours \$1095, 7-14 day cruise-drive-fly tours from \$2395) Numerous tours and accommodation options including 'swag' stays.

Oz Tours Safaris (☎ 1800 079 006, 07-4055 9535; www.oztours.com.au; 7-day fly-drive tours low/high season \$1695/1795, 12-day overland tours low/high season \$2320/2480) Advanced eco-tourism accredited tours with numerous combinations.

Getting There & Away

AIR

QantasLink (☎ 13 13 13) flies twice daily from Cairns to Horn Island and Weipa.

Regional Pacific Airlines (☎ 1300 797 667, 07-4040 1400) flies from Cairns to Bamaga on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

Skytrans (☎ 1800 818 405; www.skytrans.com.au) flies from Cairns to Coen and Yorke Island, and offers a charter service.

BOAT

MV Trinity Bay (☎ 1800 424 422, 07-4035 1234; www.sea.swift.com.au) is a weekly cargo ferry that departs Cairns every Friday and reaches Thursday Island on Sunday and Bamaga on Monday morning. The five-day return trip costs from \$970 per person (twin share) including meals.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Trevathan Falls is a hidden treasure, with a safe, secluded swimming hole under the forest canopy. From Cooktown head south, turning left at Mt Amos Rd. After about 9km you'll see a track to your right; take it for about 1km until you reach a fork. Turn right for about 2km until you reach a gate. Four-wheel-drive access is recommended. Don't go through the gate; instead turn left, which will take you to the falls. Take a picnic and your swimming costume. It's divine.

CAR

May to November is the best time to access the cape, but conditions fluctuate according to when the Wet arrives, which is when rivers become impassable. If you're planning to head up outside these months, check road conditions with the RACQ. If you run into difficulty, contact the local police:

Bamaga (☎ 07-4069 3156)

Coen (☎ 07-4060 1150)

Cooktown (☎ 07-4069 5320)

Lakeland (☎ 07-4060 3244)

Lochhart River Community (☎ 07-4060 7120)

Weipa (☎ 07-4069 9119)

Local police can also advise about alcohol restrictions that apply throughout Cape York but vary from place to place.

Even as late as June and July the rivers are fast flowing, have steep banks and frequently alter course. The Great Dividing Range runs up the spine of the peninsula, and rivers run east and west from it. Although the rivers in the south of the peninsula flow only in the Wet, those further north flow year-round.

For details on 4WD rental, see the Cairns (p433) and Cooktown (p458) sections.

LAKELAND & LAURA

The Peninsula Developmental Rd turns off the Cairns-Cooktown Mulligan Hwy at Lakeland. Facilities here include a general store for stocking up with food, petrol and diesel, a small caravan park and a hotel-motel. From Lakeland it's 734km to Bamaga, almost at the top of the peninsula. The first stretch to Laura is not too bad, just some corrugation, potholes, grids and causeways – the creek crossings are bridged (although they flood in the Wet).

About 50km from Lakeland is the turn-off to **Split Rock (Guguylangi) Galleries** (Split Rock/entire trail \$5/10). Pay in the honesty box; no photography is allowed. The galleries contain the best surviving examples of Quinkan rock painting, one of the most distinctive styles of Aboriginal art, and depictions here date back approximately 14,000 years. No-one has been able to fully interpret these paintings, as the tribe who painted them were all massacred or killed by disease during the 1873 gold rush. For more information, visit the **Quinkan Regional Cultural Centre** (☎ 07-4060 3457) in Laura.

Laura

This town, 12km north of Split Rock, has a general store with food and fuel, a place for minor mechanical repairs, a post office and Commonwealth Bank agency, and an airstrip.

The **Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival** is the major event here, bringing together Aboriginal peoples from all over Cape York and other parts of Australia for three days. The festival is held in June of odd-numbered years.

The historic **Quinkan Hotel** (☎ /fax 07-4060 3255; Lot 3, Terminus St; unpowered/powerd sites \$12/20, dm/s \$15/40) offers accommodation.

Reopened in April 2007, **Jowalbinna Rock Art Safari Camp** (4035 4488, 4060 3435; www.jowalbinna.com.au; unpowered sites \$16; tw share cabins s/d \$115/170, meals \$12-25), north of Laura, Jowalbinna is 36km off the Peninsula Development Rd and accessed via Olive Vale Station. Self-drive visitors are welcome to visit the Quinkan Rock Art on half-day rock-art tours (adult/child \$55/27.50), and two-hour rock-art tours (\$35/17.50) are also offered.

Lakefield National Park

The main turn-off to Lakefield National Park is a 45-minute drive north of Laura.

Lakefield National Park is the second-largest national park in Queensland, and the most accessible on Cape York Peninsula. The park is best known for its **wetlands** and prolific **bird life**. The extensive river system drains into Princess Charlotte Bay on its northern perimeter. This is the only national park on the peninsula where fishing is permitted.

There's a good **QPWS camping ground** (per person/family \$4.50/18), with showers and toilets, at Kalpowar Crossing. Contact **New Laura QPWS** (☎ 07-4060 3260; www.epa.qld.gov.au) or the **Lakefield QPWS** (☎ 07-4060 3271; www.epa.qld.gov.au), further north in the park, to arrange camping permits.

THE LAURA FESTIVAL

Every two years, approximately 20 Aboriginal communities from the Cape York region gather 15km outside the tiny town of Laura for three days of song, dance and celebration. The area has been used as a traditional meeting space for thousands of years, but this particular biennial event is known as the Laura Festival, and 2007 marked its 17th birthday.

'It's an intimate and true insight into Aboriginal Australia and the rich culture of the Cape York region, which dates back 60,000 years,' says Jeremy Gaia, Festival Director since 2003. 'It's about keeping those cultures alive.'

Held on odd-numbered years, the colourful festival celebrates all elements of indigenous culture. There are storytelling sessions, traditional song performances, didgeridoo competitions, weaving workshops and even boomerang and spear throwing. The big draw card, however, is the dancing.

'That's the core business of the whole festival,' says Gaia. 'You'll never see these dances or hear these songs anywhere else in the world.'

The festival ground itself is surrounded by dozens of Aboriginal art sites famous for their giant figures known as Quinkans, and for a small fee a local can show you around.

'We strongly encourage people to employ a local guide,' says Gaia. 'Because in most remote communities unemployment is at 90%.'

This is the other aim of the festival: to empower local communities, not just by boosting self-esteem and cultural pride, but also through the power of the dollar.

'In the mornings we run seminars for Aborigines who want to develop business ideas,' says Gaia. 'We advise on how to start your own business, how to apply for funding, that kind of thing. And we encourage people to sell their stuff at the festival.'

In the past, up to 10,000 visitors have made the pilgrimage to witness what is thought to be the longest-running and largest outdoor festival in Australia. These days, however, tickets are capped at 5000, and one-fifth of those are designated for the performers. It's also important to note that the Laura Festival is a drug- and alcohol-free event and photography is not allowed during the dance performances.

As Gaia puts it: 'It's a fair dinkum look at Aboriginal culture,' so you'd better buy your tickets early.

Getting There & Away

Tickets usually go on sale three months before the event and can be purchased via the **Quinkan & Regional Cultural Centre** (☎ 07-4060 3457; www.quinkancc.com.au; adult/concession/child \$50/30/free) or at the gate. Tickets include a fee for the on-site camping ground, but as there are only 1000 sites available, these sell out quickly. The town of Laura has a camping and caravan site.

About 26km before Musgrave is the resort **Lotus Bird Lodge** (☎ /fax 07-4060 3400, 4060 3480; www.lotusbird.com.au; r incl meals & tours \$245), which is open from around mid-May until the end of November.

Princess Charlotte Bay, which includes the coastal section of Lakefield National Park, is the site of some of Australia's biggest **rock-art galleries**. Unfortunately, the bay is extremely hard to reach except from the sea.

LAURA TO ARCHER RIVER ROADHOUSE

North from Laura, the roads deteriorate further. At the 75km mark, there's the Hann River crossing and **Hann River Roadhouse** (☎ 07-

4060 3242; Peninsula Developmental Rd; powered sites \$12, s/d \$25/50), a pit-stop selling food (mains \$10 to \$15), petrol and, of course, cold beers.

About 20km from here is the turn-off for the 6km drive east to **Mary Valley Station** (☎ 07-4060 3254; www.capeyorkfrontier.com; unpowered sites \$17, d & tr \$88), a cattle property offering camping, homestead rooms and meals, and is well suited to families on safari. It's also home to one of the largest colonies of little red flying foxes in the southern hemisphere (an amazing sight when they take to air in the late evening) and a resident horse that devours Vegemite on toast.

Another 62km on is **Musgrave**, with its historic Musgrave Telegraph Station, built in 1887, and **Musgrave Roadhouse** (☎ /fax 07-4060

3229; unpowered sites \$16, s/t \$55/70), which serves food (meals \$7 to \$20).

Coen, 108km north of Musgrave, has a pub, two general stores, a hospital, a school and a police station; you can get mechanical repairs done here. Coen has an airstrip and a race-course, where **picnic races** are held in August. **Exchange Hotel** (☎ 07-4060 1133; 🍷 breakfast & dinner) has pub rooms (single/double from \$55/70).

The Archer River crossing, 65km north of Coen, used to be a real terror, but now, with its concrete causeway, is quite easy. **Archer River Roadhouse** (☎/fax 07-4060 3266; unpowered sites \$16, s/d/tr/f \$55/70/90/120; 🕒 7.30am-10pm), on the banks of the Archer River, is a great place to stop and enjoy a cold beer and the famous Archer Burger (meals \$12 to \$20).

If you're after a breezy holiday house, **Portland House** (☎ 07-4060 7193, 0428-591 717; www.portlandhouse.com.au), 145km from the Archer River Roadhouse near the Lockhart River Aboriginal Community, is a real find with self-contained comforts for those who want to savour Cape York livin'.

Northern National Parks

Three national parks can be reached from the main track north of Coen. To stay at them you must be totally self-sufficient. Only about 3km north of Coen, before the Archer River Roadhouse, you can turn west to the remote **Mungkan Kandju National Park**. Contact the friendly **Coen QPWS** (☎ 07-4060 1137; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) for more information.

Roughly 21km north of the Archer River Roadhouse, a turn-off leads 135km through the **Iron Range National Park** to the tiny coastal settlement of Portland Roads. Although still pretty rough, this track has been improved. Register with the **ranger** (☎ 07-4060 7170) on arrival; camping is permitted at designated sites. The national park has Australia's largest area of lowland rainforest, with some animals that are found no further south in Australia.

The region's other park, Jardine River National Park, is much further to the north (see right).

WEIPA

☎ 07 / pop 2502

Weipa is a bauxite-mining town of red dirt, coconut palms and intermittent danger signs. The mine here works the world's largest deposits of bauxite (the ore from which aluminium is processed).

Weipa Camping Ground (☎ 4069 7871; www.fishingcairns.com.au/page13-7c.html; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/23, cabins from \$75; 🚻) operates as the town's informal tourist office, books mine and fishing tours, and provides permits for nearby camp sites. It's a relaxed camping ground by the waterfront, close to the shops, and has facilities for people with disabilities.

Weipa Rent a Car (☎ 4069 7311; info@weiparentacar.com.au) hires out 4WDs.

Can't leave Cape York without luring a barramundi? **Aurukun Fishing Charters** (☎ 0407-575 618; www.aurukunfishingcharters.com; tours per day \$495), based 100km south of Weipa, offers excellent fully guided fishing tours on lagoons, wetlands, reefs and the beach. Rates include meals and accommodation.

NORTH TO THE JARDINE

After Batavia Downs there are almost 200km of rough road and numerous river crossings (the Dulhunty being the major one) before you reach the **Jardine River Ferry & Roadhouse** (☎ 07-4069 1369; unpowered sites \$10; 🕒 8am-5pm), which offers camping with shower blocks and barbecue facilities and petrol (diesel fuel and unleaded). From the Wenlock River there are two possible routes to the Jardine ferry: the more direct but rougher old route (Telegraph Rd, 155km), and the longer but quicker bypass roads (193km), which branch off the old route about 40km north of the Wenlock River. Don't miss **Twin Falls**, one of the most popular camping and swimming spots on the Cape; there's a signpost off the main road about 90km before the roadhouse.

The river crossing, run by the Injinoo Community Council, operates during the Dry only (\$88 return, plus \$10 for trailers). The fee includes a permit for bush camping in designated areas north of the river.

Stretching east to the coast from the main track is the impenetrable country of **Jardine River National Park**. It includes the headwaters of the Jardine and Escape Rivers, where explorer Edmund Kennedy was killed by Aborigines in 1848. The Jardine River spills more fresh water into the sea than any other river in Australia.

John Charlton's Cape York Adventures (☎ 07-4069 3302; www.capeyorkadventures.com.au; charter service from \$385) operates out of Bamaga and offers customised fishing and adventure trips. Six-day packages including accommodation (twin share) and five days of activities cost between \$2640 and \$3000 per person.

THE TIP

The first settlement north of the Jardine River is Bamaga, home to Cape York Peninsula's largest Torres Strait Islander community. There's a post office (and Commonwealth Bank agency), a hospital, a supermarket, a bakery, a mechanic and some places to stay.

Resort Bamaga (☎ 07-4069 3050; www.resortbamaga.com.au; r/\$180-225; 🚻 🚿) is the only four-star accommodation on the Cape. If you need some luxury, then this is the place (mains \$20 to \$30). There's 4WD hire available (\$185 per day).

Seisia, on the coast 5km northwest, has the central **Seisia Resort & Campground** (☎ 1800 653 243, 07-4069 3243; www.fishingcairns.com.au/page13-7d.html; unpowered sites per person \$8, s/d self-contained units & lodge from \$66/106).

Northeast of Bamaga, off the Cape York track and about 11km southeast of Cape York, is Somerset. Established in 1863 as a haven for shipwrecked sailors, it was meant to serve as a signal to the rest of the world that this was British territory. The aim was for it to become a major trading centre, but trading functions were moved to Thursday Island in 1879. There's nothing much left now except lovely views.

On the western side of the Tip is the scenic **Punsand Bay Camping Resort** (☎ 07-4069 1722; fax 07-4069 1403; unpowered sites per person \$10, on-site tents per person from \$55, air-con cabins per person from \$95; 🚻). This place is very well set up and it runs 4WD tours.

You can also try the **Loyalty Beach Campground & Fishing Lodge** (☎ 07-4069 3372; www.loyaltybeach.com).

THURSDAY ISLAND & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS

The Torres Strait Islands have been a part of Queensland since 1879, the best known of them being **Thursday Island** (or TI as it's known locally). The 70 other islands are sprinkled from Cape York in the south to almost Papua New Guinea in the north. **Erub** (Darnley Island as it is also known) is in the eastern group, and is of volcanic origin. It's another important island in the region as it has come into the spotlight as a campaigner for equal recognition of Torres Strait Islanders' rights.

Torres Strait Islanders came from Melanesia and Polynesia about 2000 years ago, bringing with them a more material culture than that of mainland Aboriginal people.

It was a claim by Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo to traditional ownership of Murray Island that led to the High Court handing down its groundbreaking Mabo ruling. The court's decision in turn became the basis for the Federal government's 1993 Native Title legislation; see the boxed text, p40.

Thursday Island is hilly and just over 3 sq km. It was once a major pearling centre, and the cemeteries tell the hard tale of that dangerous occupation. Some pearls are still produced here from seeded 'culture farms'. The island is a friendly, easy-going place, and its main appeal is its cultural mix – Asians, Europeans and Pacific Islanders have all contributed to its history.

The **Peddells Ferry Island Tourist Bureau** (☎ 07-4069 1551; www.peddellsferry.com.au; Engineers Wharf; 🕒 8.30am-5pm, to noon Sat) will tell you everything you need to know.

Sights & Activities

There are fascinating reminders of Thursday Island's rich history about town. The **All Souls Quetta Memorial Church** was built in 1893 in memory of the shipwreck of the Quetta, which struck an uncharted reef in the Adolphus Channel in 1890, with 133 lives lost.

The Japanese section of the town's cemetery is crowded with hundreds of graves of pearl divers who died from decompression sickness. The **Japanese Pearl Memorial** is dedicated to them. **Green Hill Fort**, on the western side of town, was built in 1893, when there were fears of a Russian invasion.

The **Gab Titui Cultural Centre** (www.tsra.gov.au) offers visitors a window to the rich cultural history and diversity of the Torres Strait. Located on the TI waterfront, this award-winning centre features a gallery for historical artefacts, exhibitions by local artists, community cultural events and a popular café and restaurant.

Situated on Horn Island, a short ferry trip from TI, the Gateway Torres Strait Resort (see p466) features a Heritage Museum and offers local tours.

Sleeping & Eating

Jardine Motel (☎ 07-4069 1555; www.jardinemotel.com.au; cnr Normanby St & Victoria Pde; s/d \$165/185; 🚻 🚿 🍷) has four-star deluxe accommodation, and the budget **Jardine Lodge** (s/d \$120/140, without bathroom \$100/120) has full use of the motel facilities.

Other options include:

Gateway Torres Strait Resort (☎ 07-40692222; www.torresstrait.com.au; Horn Island; s/d/tr \$128/\$148/\$167) Offers a range of accommodation options.

Grand Hotel (☎ 07-4069 1557; www.grandhotelti.com.au; 6 Victoria Pde; s/d from \$130/150) Ocean views. Malu Paru à la carte restaurant and pub counter meals.

Federal Hotel (☎ 07-4069 1569; www.federalhotelti.com.au; Victoria Pde; s/d incl cooked breakfast \$120/140, s/d with shared bathroom \$50/80; ♿) Classic Queenslander, with motel and pub rooms, harbour views and counter meals

Rainbow Motel (☎ 07-4069 2460; fax 07-4069 2714; Douglas St; s/d \$77/99) Clean, with the best burger bar.

Getting There & Around

QantasLink (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) flies daily from Cairns to Thursday Island (from \$480 return). The airport is on Horn Island. **Aero**

Tropics (☎ 1300 656 110, 07-4040 1222; www.aero-tropics.com.au) and **Regional Pacific Airlines** (☎ 1300 797 667, 07-4040 1400; www.regionalpacific.com.au) fly weekdays from Cairns to Bamaga (from \$280 one way).

There are regular ferry services between Seisia and Thursday Island (one way/return \$47/94, one hour) run by **Peddells Ferry Service** (☎ 07-4069 1551; www.peddellsferry.com.au; Engineers Jetty, Thursday Island).

McDonald Ferry Service (☎ 1300 664 875, 07-4058 1344) operates between Thursday Island and Horn Island. The ferries run roughly hourly between 6am and 6pm (\$9 one way, 15 minutes). Ferry and airport transfers are \$16. **Rebel Marine** (☎ 07-4069 1586) operates a water taxi and bus service between TI and the Horn Island Airport connecting with all QantasLink flights (\$20).