

Gold Coast



The shimmering ribbon of high rises, theme parks and intensive tourist developments stretching nearly 40km along the beachfront from the tip of South Stradbroke Island to the New South Wales border reflects the insidious glitzy makeover of the once sleepy surfing beaches of the Gold Coast. As the 'bling' capital of Queensland, the Gold Coast offers its four million annual visitors nonstop recreational action and a host of ways to fritter away time and money. But the brash commercialism and relentless pace won't appeal to everyone.

The nerve centre is Surfers Paradise, which, depending on your viewpoint, is either the heart of the action or the place you'll most want to avoid. To escape the crowds and hype of the epicentre you won't need to head far: beach-chic cafés and swish restaurants can be found in Broadbeach and Burleigh Heads, and the laid-back surfer ethos in Coolangatta.

The beaches, the original drawcard, are spectacular and there's excellent surfing at Currumbin, Burleigh Heads, Kirra and Duranbah. While many are drawn by the surf and sun, there's a stunning subtropical, rainforested hinterland less than 30km from the beachfront high rises. The cool mountain landscape has rainforest walks, waterfalls and cosy retreats in Lamington and Springbrook National Parks and the quaint hill-top village of Tamborine Mountain.

GOLD COAST

GOLD COAST

HIGHLIGHTS

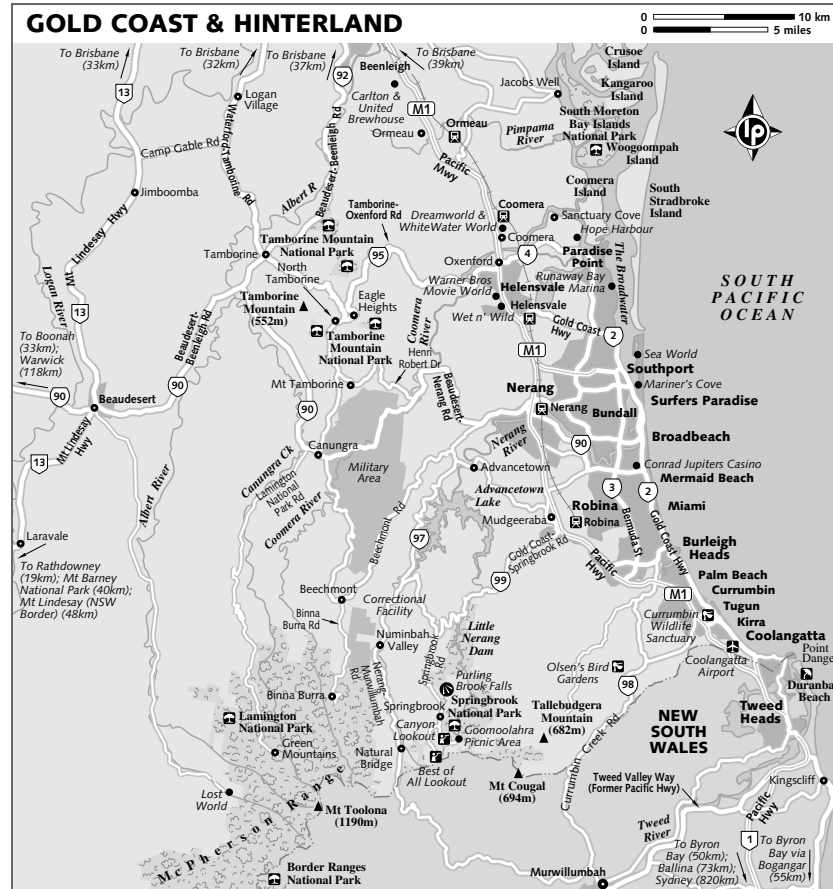
- Pumping into party overdrive in heady **Surfers Paradise** (p295)
- Waxing it up and barrelling down the huge right-hander at **Burleigh Heads** (p292)
- Bushwalking through deep gorges and towering rainforests in **Springbrook National Park** (p304) and **Lamington National Park** (p306)
- Chilling out on a looong uncrowded beach on **South Stradbroke Island** (p303)
- Joining the après-beach scene at a snazzy café in **Broadbeach** (p294)
- Getting tossed, rolled, wild and wet at the Gold Coast **theme parks** (p303)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07

■ www.verygc.com

■ www.goldcoastguide.com



Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Gold Coast Airport** (code: OOL; Coolangatta Airport ☎ 5589 1100; www.goldcoastairport.com.au) at Coolangatta is 25km south of Surfers Paradise. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com) flies from Sydney (1½ hours) and Melbourne (two hours). **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com) also fly from Sydney and Melbourne. **Tiger Airways** (☎ 03 9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com) has flights from Melbourne.

BUS

Long-distance buses stop at the bus transit centres in Southport, Surfers Paradise and Coolangatta. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) has frequent services

to/from Brisbane (\$20, 1½ hours), Byron Bay (\$30, 2½ hours) and Sydney (\$154, 15 hours). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) serves the same routes and is less expensive. **Kirklands** (☎ 02-6686 5254; www.kirklands.com.au) travels to Surfers Paradise from Byron Bay (\$28) and Brisbane (\$16), stopping at most Gold Coast towns along the way.

Coachtrans (☎ 3358 9700; www.coachtrans.com.au) runs the Airporter direct services from Brisbane airport (one way \$39) to anywhere on the Gold Coast and has services from Brisbane City to Surfers (\$28, 1½ hours) or to the theme parks.

TRAIN

Citytrain services link Brisbane to Helensvale station (\$8.40, one hour), Nerang (\$9.40, 1¼

hours) and Robina (\$11, 1½ hours) roughly every half-hour. **Surfside Buses** (☎ 13 12 30; www.transinfo.qld.gov.au) runs regular shuttles from the train stations down to Surfers (\$3 to \$4) and beyond, and to the theme parks.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Coachtrans (☎ 3358 9700; www.coachtrans.com.au) operates a shuttle between Tweed Heads and Brisbane, with stops along the way, including Dreamworld, Movie World and Wet'n'Wild. **Aerobus** (☎ 1300 664 700; www.aerobus.net; one-way tickets \$35) has transfers from Brisbane airport to Gold Coast accommodation.

Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle (☎ 1300 655 655, 5574 5111; www.gcshuttle.com.au; adult/child/family \$18/9/45) meets every flight into Coolangatta Airport and operates door-to-door transfers to most Gold Coast accommodation. It also offers a Freedom Pass, which includes return transfers to your accommodation plus unlimited theme-park transfers and unlimited Surfside Buses travel from \$58/29/145 per adult/child/family for three days.

A number of private operators offer transfers for the two-hour trip to/from Byron Bay, including **Airport Transfers Byron Bay** (☎ 02-6620 9200; www.airporttransfersbyronbay.com; adult/child \$36/18) and **Coolangatta Byron Bay Airporter** (☎ 0414-608 660; www.byronbayairporttransfers.com.au; per person \$35).

BUS

Surfside Buses (☎ 13 12 30; www.transinfo.qld.gov.au) runs a frequent service up and down the Gold Coast Hwy from Tweed Heads, stopping at Dreamworld, Sanctuary Cove and Paradise Point. You can buy individual fares or get an Ezy Pass for three day's unlimited travel (\$26), or a weekly pass (\$45).

TAXI

Ring ☎ 13 10 08 for services on the Gold Coast.

COOLANGATTA

☎ 07 / pop 4870

Coolangatta is a laid-back seaside resort proud of its good surf beaches and tight community. Despite a few attempts at a makeover the town retains a 1980s summer-holiday feel and this is its greatest charm. If you want to bypass the glam and party scene of Surfers, catch a few waves and kick back on the beach, you've found the spot. There are good views down

the coast from Point Danger, the headland at the end of the state line. A somewhat arbitrary border divides Coolangatta from its twin of Tweed Heads (p280) in NSW.

Information

3W Café (☎ 5599 4536; Shop 2 Griffith Plaza; per 15min \$2, wi-fi rate per day \$6; ☎ 6.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) Cool café with internet.

Coolangatta visitor's centre (☎ 5569 3380; Shop 22, Showcase on the Beach, Griffith St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun)

Post office (☎ 13 13 18) Coolangatta (cnr Griffith St & Marine Pde); Tweed Heads (Tweed Mall)

Activities

The most difficult surf break here is Point Danger, but Kirra Point often goes off and there are gentler breaks at Greenmount Beach and Rainbow Bay. **Quigsi** (☎ 5599 1731; 87 Griffith St) hires out surfboards (\$30 per day) and bikes (\$30 per day). For surfboard repairs, see **Retro Groove** (☎ 5599 3952; 4/33 McLean St), a cool surf shop which also rents boards for \$30 per day.

Former professional surfer and Australian surfing team coach Dave Davidson of **Gold Coast Surf Coaching** (☎ 0417-191 629) promises to get you up and surfing in your first lesson.

Accelerate Water Sports (☎ 5536 4074; www.acceleratesport.com.au; Shop 7, Showcase on the Beach, Griffith St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) offers kite-boarding lessons (\$89), wake-boarding and water-skiing lessons (\$220; minimum three people), and diving courses.

Tandem Skydive (☎ 5599 1920; Coolangatta Airport) offers tandem jumps from 3050m (\$280) to 4270m (\$325).

Tours

Catch-A-Crab (☎ 5599 9972; www.catchacrab.com.au; adult/child \$55/36) Has great half-day tours along the Terranora Inlet of the Tweed River. The cruise involves mud-crab catching, fishing, pelican feeding and, if the tides permit, yabbie hunting. Lunch is extra.

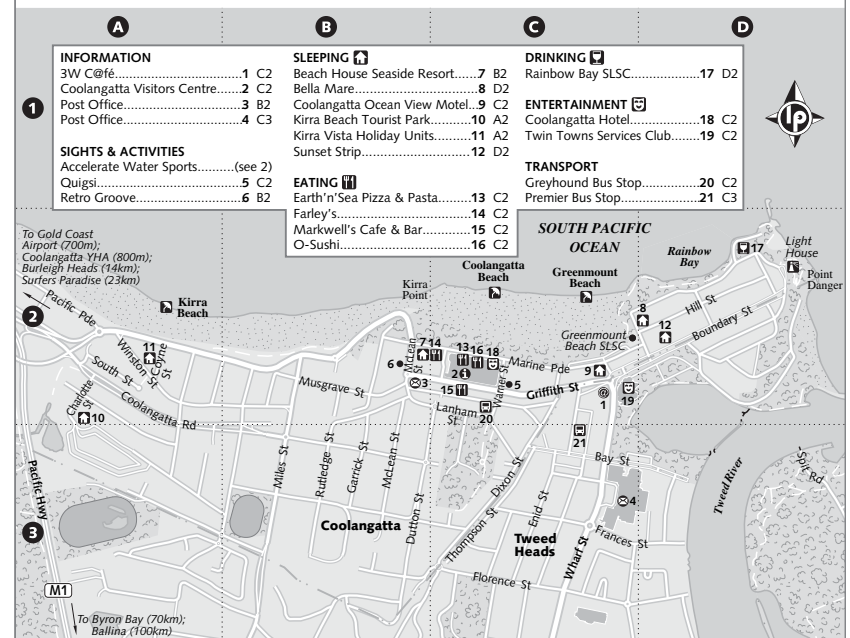
Rainforest Cruises (☎ 5536 8800; www.goldcoastcruising.com) Has three cruise options ranging from crab catching to surf n' turf lunches on rainforest cruises along the Tweed River. Cruises start from \$32 for two hours.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Coolangatta YHA (☎ 5536 7644; www.coolangattayha.com; 230 Coolangatta Rd, Billina; incl breakfast dm \$23-28, s/d \$33/54; ☎ ☎) A looing haul from the bustle,

COOLANGATTA & TWEED HEADS



this well-equipped YHA is favoured by surf junkies (of all vintages) who overdose on the excellent breaks across the road. You can also hire boards (\$25 per day) and bikes. Courtesy transfers from Coolangatta are available.

Kirra Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7744; www.gctp.com.au/kirra; Charlotte St, Kirra; unpowered sites \$25-29, powered sites \$27-34, cabins from \$104; ☎ ☎) This large park has plenty of trees and a well-stocked open-air camp kitchen. The modern self-contained cabins are good value. There's also a TV room, BBQs and volleyball and basketball courts. Rates are for two people.

Sunset Strip (☎ 5599 5517; www.sunsetstrip.com.au; 199 Boundary St, Coolangatta; s/d/t/q per person \$55/35/35/33, self-contained units from \$285, minimum 3 nights; ☎) There's not much ambience but backpackers will be happy enough with this budget accommodation close to the river and to the beaches. There's a TV lounge and a large, clean kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Coolangatta Ocean View Motel (☎ 5536 8722; oceanviewmotel@bigpond.com; cnr Marine Pde & Clark St, Coolangatta; \$105; ☎) The facilities are fairly

minimal in this small motel but it's all about the location – across the road from Greenmount Beach and close to the Twin Towns Services Club.

Kirra Vista Holiday Units (☎ 5536 7375; www.kirravista.com.au; 12-14 Musgrave St, Kirra; d \$125; ☎) These self-contained units are looking a bit worn and tired but the owners are friendly and all rooms have ocean views.

Bella Mare (☎ 5599 2755; www.bellamare.com.au; 5 Hill St, Coolangatta; r from \$140, 2-bedroom/3-bedroom villas from \$175/215, minimum 3 night stay; ☎ ☎) Adding just a hint of the Mediterranean to Coolangatta, these fancy beachside apartments are set in cool landscaped gardens. All apartments and villas are fully self-contained with private patios or balconies, and it's only 50m to the beach.

Beach House Seaside Resort (☎ 5595 7599; www.classicholidayclub.com.au; 52 Marine Pde, Coolangatta; s/d from \$150/180; ☎) Although it belongs to a holiday club, this apartment complex often has rooms available to nonmembers. The décor is fairly generic, but the units are fully self-contained and sleep up to six people. Also within the complex is a gym, spa and sauna.

Eating & Drinking

O-Sushi (☎ 5563 5455; 66-80 Marine Pde; sushi rolls from \$2.50, mains \$8-13; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Boasting Japanese chefs and authentic Japanese cuisine, this perky sushi bar is about as stylish as a sushi bar can get. Try the *kushi-yaki* (traditional Japanese grill). Sit outdoors for beach views.

Markwell's Café & Bar (☎ 5536 4544; 64 Griffith St; mains \$12-30; 🍷 breakfast & lunch; 📺; wi-fi) With free wireless internet, this has to be your (all day) breakfast choice. It's licensed, and dishes up salads, sandwiches, and a tempting range of seafood such as coconut prawns dipped in beer batter.

Earth'n'Sea Pizza & Pasta (☎ 5536 3477; Marine Pde; mains \$14-27; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A hot summer night, a balmy sea breeze, a cold beer and a sizzling pizza – what better way to top off a day at the beach? Voted Best Pizza Restaurant on the Gold Coast, it has 21 gourmet pizzas on offer – you can't go wrong.

Farley's (☎ 5536 7615; Beach House Arcade, Marine Pde; mains \$17-30; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) From gourmet sandwiches to Mod Oz creations such as Moreton Bay bugs with bok choy and basil pesto, Farley's (opposite the beach) will satisfy your après-surf cravings.

Rainbow Bay SLSC (☎ 5536 6390; www.rainbowbayslsc.com; 2 Snapper Rocks Rd) is popular with surfers.

Entertainment

Coolangatta Hotel (☎ 5536 9311; cnr Marine Pde & Warner St) One of the hottest spots on the Gold Coast, the 'Cooly' has legendary Sunday sessions, and the Balcony nightclub attracts some of the biggest acts in the music industry.

Twin Towns Services Club (☎ 5536 1977; Wharf St, Tweed Heads) Has family-oriented shows and regular free movies.

Getting There & Away

The **Greyhound** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) bus stop is in Warner St while **Premier** (☎ 1334 10; www.premiers.com.au) coaches stop in Bay St. See p289 for further information.

BURLEIGH HEADS & CURRUMBIN

☎ 07 / pop 7610 & 2650

In the chilled-out surfer town of Burleigh Heads, cheery cafés and beachfront restaurants overlook a gorgeous stretch of white sand and a beautiful, tiny national park on the rocky headland. Burleigh is legendary among surfers for the spectacular barrel of

its right-hand break off the headland. The strong rip and jagged rocks make this one for experienced surfers only.

Learner surfers should head to Currumbin Alley, 6km south of Burleigh. Currumbin is a sleepy little town, and a great spot for a relaxing family holiday, especially as the kids can swim in the calm waters of Currumbin Creek.

Information

QPWS Information Centre (QPWS) (☎ 5535 3032; 1711 Gold Coast Hwy; 🍷 9.30am-4pm Mon & Wed, 9am-3pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) is at the northern end of Tallebudgera Creek.

Sights

Burleigh Heads National Park is crisscrossed with a number of walking tracks. Look out for the basalt columns poking through the forest – they hold considerable cultural significance to the local Kombumerri people.

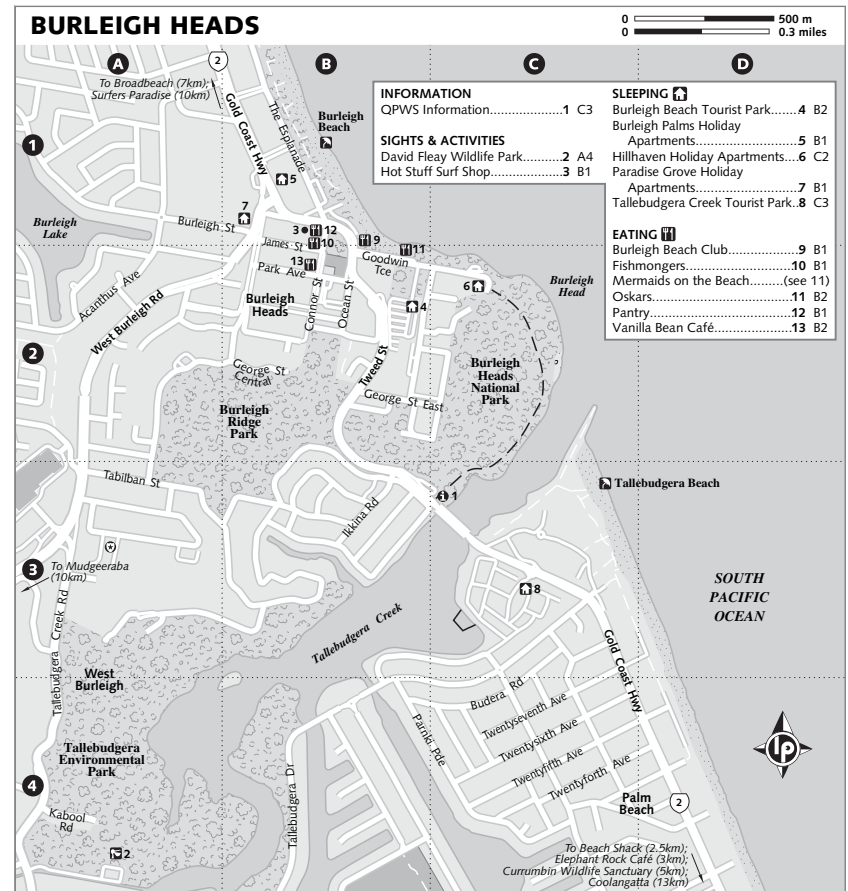
Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary (☎ 5534 1266; www.cws.org.au; Gold Coast Hwy, Currumbin; adult/child \$32/21; 🍷 8am-5pm) showcases Australian native animals in natural bush and rainforest habitats. Tree kangaroos, koalas, emus, wombats and other cute-and-furries are joined daily by flocks of brilliantly coloured rainbow lorikeets. There are informative and interactive shows throughout the day (did you know the scrub python can swallow four times the size of its head?), and there is also an Aboriginal dance show. Try to see the sanctuary on a Wildnight Tour (adult/child \$49/27), when the native nocturnal animals go about their business.

David Fleay Wildlife Park (☎ 5576 2411; West Burleigh Rd; adult/child/senior/family \$15.40/7.20/10.30/39.10; 🍷 9am-5pm) is run with the help of the QPWS. With 4km of walking tracks through mangroves and rainforest and plenty of informative shows throughout the day, it's an excellent opportunity to experience Australian fauna. The platypus was first bred in captivity here and the park still runs a research and breeding programme for rare and endangered species.

Activities

The right-hand point break at Burleigh Heads is the best wave here, but it's usually crowded with pro surfers. There are plenty of other waves to practise on along the beach.

Surfing Services Australia (☎ 5535 5557; www.surfingservices.com.au; adult/child \$30/20) holds surfing lessons at Currumbin Alley every weekend at



8am and 10.30am. Meet on the grass opposite the lifeguard tower.

The **Hot Stuff Surf Shop** (☎ 5535 6899; 1706 Gold Coast Hwy) rents out surfboards for \$20/30 per half-/full day.

Sleeping

Burleigh Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7755; www.gctp.com.au/burly; Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; unpowered/powered sites \$24/26, cabins \$115; 🍷 📺) This council-run park is snug, so get in quick to bag a shady site. The good news is that you can stumble to the beach and there's a saltwater pool just across the road. Rates are for two people.

Tallebudgera Creek Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7700; www.gctp.com.au/tally; 1544 Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads; unpowered/powered sites \$29/32, cabins \$125-167;

🍷 📺) This sprawling park is colossal but it's well laid out with its own road system and sits right on the banks of Tallebudgera Creek. Rates are for two people.

Burleigh Palms Holiday Apartments (☎ 5576 3955; www.burleighpalms.com; 1849 Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads; 1-bedroom apt per night/week from \$120/490, 2-bedroom apt from \$140/600; 🍷 📺) Even though they're on the highway these large and comfortable self-contained units, so close to the beach, are solid value. The owner is a mine of information and is happy to recommend places to visit and organise tours.

our pick Hillhaven Holiday Apartments (☎ 5535 1055; www.hillhaven.com.au; 2 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; d per night \$160, minimum 3 night stay) These opulent apartments perch high on the headland

adjacent to the national park have a grand view of Burleigh Heads. There's no through traffic so it's ultraquiet yet only 150m to the beach and café scene. The friendly owners can arrange baby-sitting, airport transfers and tours.

Paradise Grove Holiday Apartments (☎ 5576 3833; www.paradisegrove.com.au; 7 West Burleigh Rd, Burleigh Heads; 2-bedroom apt per week from \$900; 🏠 🚗) Set on 2.4 hectares of landscaped gardens only 100m from the beach, these apartments are close to everything. There are two pools, a tennis court, and the ground floor apartments have a private courtyard. Apartments down the back are quieter; be sure to specify if you want air-conditioning. There's a minimum three-night stay; seven nights in peak season.

Eating

Pantry (☎ 5576 2818; 15 Connor St, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$8-16; 🍷 6am-4.30pm) A looong breakfast menu greets the cappuccino set at this gathering point. For lunch you can tuck into tasty burgers, wraps, melts and salads. Sit alfresco under umbrellas for a spot of people-watching.

Fishmongers (☎ 5535 2927; 9 James St, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$8-17; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This fishmonger-cum-restaurant is the business. Select your seafood bites from the display and eat them hot down by the beach. Or sit down at a table in the unpretentious restaurant where you can satisfy your heart and hips with the Healthy Heart special – grilled fish, salad and a glass of wine for \$13.90.

Vanilla Bean Café (☎ 5576 4707; 31 Connor St, Burleigh Heads; mains \$9-14; 🍷 6am-4pm) This busy modern café opposite the Bowls Club dishes up gourmet salads, focaccias, burgers, grills and nachos. Its freshly made cool juices are a great way to start the surf-day.

Burleigh Beach Club (☎ 5520 2972; cnr Goodwin Tce & Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$10-25; 🍷 breakfast Wed-Sun, lunch & dinner daily) The fantastic ocean views at this club, sitting directly above the beach, are hard to beat. The fare is typical bistro but it's all tasty and the portions are huge.

Elephant Rock Café (☎ 5598 2133; 776 Pacific Pde, Currumbin; mains \$16-30; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Opposite the beach, this cool café specialising in Mod Oz and 'gourmet vegetarian' cuisine (gluten sufferers will want to head here) morphs from beach-chic by day to ultrachic at night.

our pick Mermaids on the Beach (☎ 5520 1177; 31 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; mains \$23-36; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another gem directly on the beach: the beautiful white sands of Burleigh

Heads spread out from your feet down to the waters edge. An interesting Mediterranean menu produces dishes such as Moreton Bay bugs with chilli parsley black linguine, anchovy crumbs and rocket pesto. Outside of meal hours this is a snappy beach bar with live music and a theme every night.

Oskars (☎ 5576 3722; 43 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$25-34; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This elegant restaurant (right on the beach) constantly lands a coveted place on best-dining lists from all quarters. Against elevated, sweeping views of the coastline you'll dine on a changing selection of seafood, but expect something along the lines of Yamba prawn and Moreton Bay bug tempura with mesclun greens and sweet chilli jam.

BROADBEACH

☎ 07 / pop 3780

Boutique shops and fashionable cafés line the Broadbeach streets while open stretches of green parkland separate the fine sandy beach from the esplanade. This is where Gold Coast locals wine and dine, and for a taste of the stylish beach-and-sun lifestyle it's exquisite.

Shopholics will find two of the coast's major shopping centres (Oasis and Pacific Fair) within easy reach of the beach. Broadbeach is also a good alternative to Surfers if you want a peaceful night's sleep.

Sights & Activities

Broadbeach's main claim to fame is the temple to Mammon that is **Conrad Jupiters Casino** (☎ 5592 8100; www.conrad.com.au; Gold Coast Hwy; admission free; 🍷 24hr). The first legal casino in Queensland, it features the usual wallet-lightening exercises for the hopelessly optimistic. Also here is **Jupiters Theatre** (☎ 1800 074 144), with live music and glamorous dinner shows. The casino complex is connected to the Oasis Shopping Centre by a short monorail.

For the ghoulishly inclined, **Dracula's Theatre Restaurant** (☎ 5575 1000; www.draculas.com.au; 1 Hooker Blvd; dinner & show midweek/weekend \$74/79) entertains with a vampirish cabaret act and fetishly dressed wait-staff while you sink your fangs into fiendish-sounding dishes including the restaurant's signature diabolical and delicious Death by Chocolate.

Sleeping

Hi-Ho Beach Apartments (☎ 5538 2777; www.hihobeach.com; 2 Queensland Ave; 1-/2-bedroom apt \$130/160; 🏠) A great choice, close to the beach and Broadbeach's

café scene. Apartments are bright and airy with a favourable northeasterly aspect.

Wave (☎ 5555 9200; www.thewavesresort.com.au; 89-91 Surf Parade; r \$269-750, minimum 3 night stay; 🏠 🚗) You can't miss this spectacular high rise with its wave-inspired design towering over Broadbeach's glam central. These luxury apartments make full use of the coast's spectacular views, especially from the sky pool on the 34th floor.

Eating

Broadbeach's culinary scene is a class above Surfers'.

Manolas Brothers Deli (☎ 5538 8223; 19 Albert Ave; dishes \$8-25; 🍷 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Cosmopolitan delicacies fill every nook and cranny on the ceiling-high shelves in this sumptuous gourmet deli-café. Park yourself at the massively long wooden table to better salivate over the juicy olives, antipasti, imported cheeses and decadent homemade cakes and biscuits. Health freaks will love the salads and juices.

Champagne Brasserie (☎ 5538 3877; 2 Queensland Ave; mains \$20-35; 🍷 lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) This lively, unassuming restaurant could have been plucked from a French village. Quail, grain-fed beef and barramundi are worked into tantalizing taste sensations but don't forget to leave room for the crepe zuzette.

Koi (☎ 5570 3060; Wave Bldg, cnr Surf Parade & Albert Ave; mains \$24-40; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) For serious people-watching, morning lattes or sunset cocktails, this cruisy café and lounge bar is the happening place. Gourmet pizzas and tapas rub shoulders with an interesting contemporary menu including crocodile tail and kangaroo loin. Live music on Sunday afternoons draw the après-beach crowd.

Moo Moo (☎ 5539 9952; Broadbeach on the Park, 2685 Gold Coast Hwy; mains \$30-60; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Vegetarians steer clear, this is the mecca for serious carnivores. Moo Moo's signature dish is a 1kg Wagyu rump steak rubbed with spices, char-grilled until smoky then roasted, and carved at the table. Beef connoisseurs will drool over the Master Kobe rib fillet, a luxury beef produced from a long period of grain feeding of Wagyu beef.

SURFERS PARADISE

☎ 07 / pop 18,510

Sprouting out of the commercial heart of the Gold Coast is the signature high-rise settlement of Surfers Paradise. Here the pace is

giddy and frenetic, a brash pleasure dome of nightclubs, shopping and relentless entertainment. Surfers is the acknowledged party hub of the Gold Coast, happily catering to all demographics, from 40-somethings getting squiffy on martinis, to Gen Ys dropping pills on the dance floor and schoolies cutting loose on the beach. With so much bling and glitz in your face, be prepared to part with your cash. About the only time you won't is if one of the famous 'meter maids' – pretty young things in gold-lamé bikinis – feeds your expired parking meter.

The density of towering high rises shades the beach from midafternoon so if you're after a suntan or a relaxing beach holiday, head further south.

Orientation

The main thoroughfare, Cavill Ave, runs down to the seafront, ending in a pedestrian mall. Orchid Ave, one block back from The Esplanade, is the nightclub and bar strip. The Gold Coast Hwy splits either side of Surfers, with Surfers Paradise Blvd taking southbound traffic and Remembrance Dr, which then becomes Ferny Ave, taking northbound traffic.

Although Cavill Mall is the recognized centre of Surfers, a new upmarket shopping precinct Circle on Cavill (bounded by Ferny Ave, Cavill Ave and Surfers Paradise Blvd) promotes itself as the 'new heart of Surfers Paradise'.

Information

Email Centre (☎ 5538 7500; Orchid Ave; 🍷 9am-10pm)

Gold Coast Tourism Bureau (☎ 5538 4419; Cavill Ave Mall; 🍷 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) Information booth; also sells theme-park tickets.

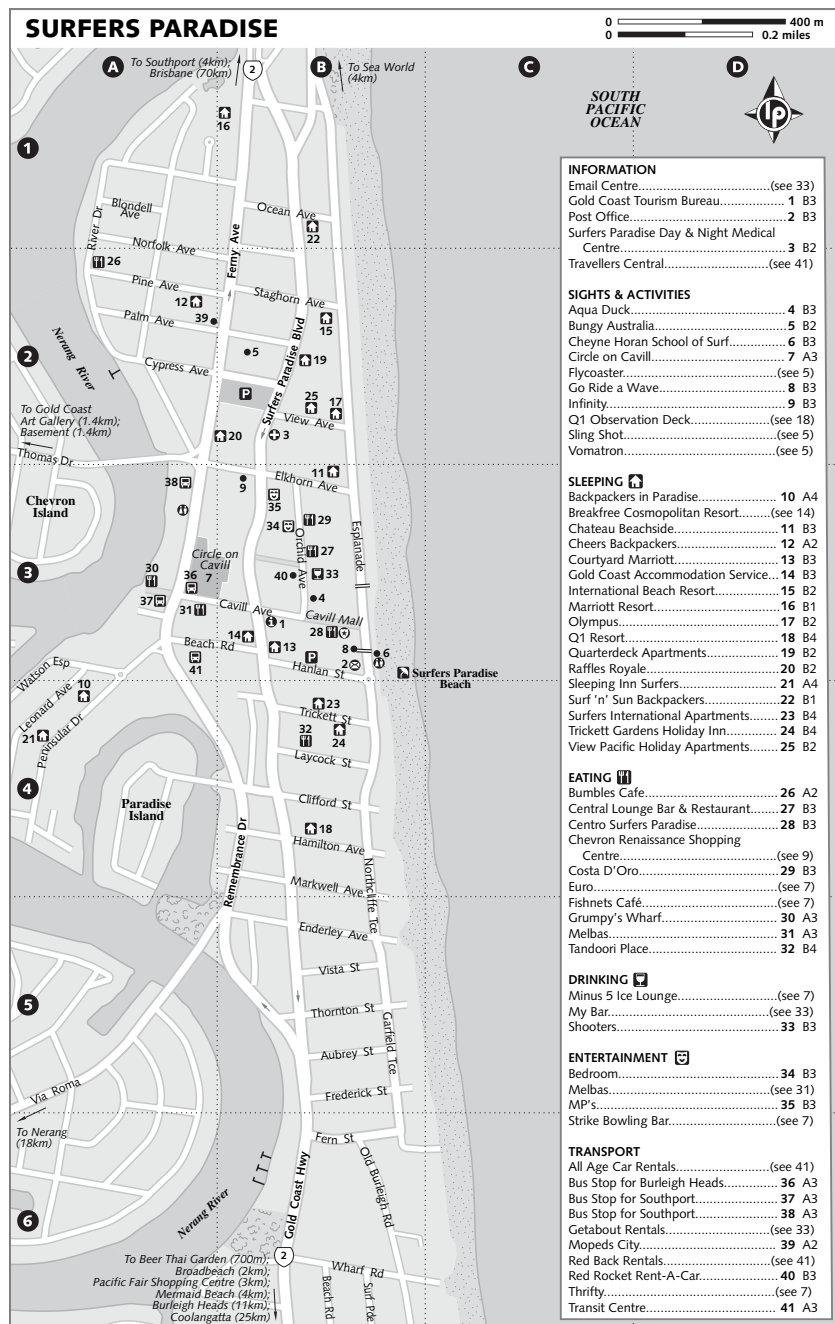
Post office (☎ 13 13 18; Shop 165, Centro Surfers Paradise, Cavill Ave Mall; 🍷 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Surfers Paradise Day & Night Medical Centre (☎ 5592 2299; 3221 Surfers Paradise Blvd; 🍷 7am-11pm) Pharmacy attached.

Travellers Central (☎ 1800 359 830, 5538 3274; www.stayoz.com.au; Surfers Paradise Transit Centre, cnr Beach & Cambridge Rds; 🍷 9am-7pm) This extremely friendly and helpful information desk can help with accommodation and tours for travellers of all budget ranges.

Sights

Surfers' sights are usually spread across beach towels but for a spectacular 360-degree panorama of the Gold Coast and hinterland zip up



SCHOOLIES ON THE LOOSE

Every year in November, hundreds of teenagers flock to Surfers Paradise to celebrate the end of their high-school education in a month-long party that's become known as 'schoolies week'.

Schoolies week started in the early '90s and quickly gained popularity – and notoriety – as an anything-goes party, with drunk and drug-addled teens a common sight in the streets and pubs of Surfers. Although the local authorities have stepped in to regulate the excesses – organising plenty of free entertainment, sections of the beach devoted to drug- and alcohol-free parties, and accessible emergency and counselling services – unruly behaviour is still the norm. Avoid schoolies week if possible (unless you've just finished school!).

For more information visit www.schoolies.com.

to the **Q1 observation deck** (☎ 5630 4525; Hamilton Ave; adult/child/family \$17.50/10/45; ☎ 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, 9am-midnight Fri & Sat). On a clear day you can see north to Brisbane and south to Byron Bay. Wander around the glass-enclosed deck and you'll learn other interesting tidbits, like the Q1 is the world's 20th tallest building, the arc lights illuminating the spine can be seen 200km away, and it takes 43 seconds to reach the observation deck on the 77th floor. There's a café and comfy lounge chairs so there's no need to hurry back to earth.

For a spot of culture, the **Gold Coast Art Gallery** (☎ 5581 6567; www.gcac.com.au; Gold Coast Arts Centre, 135 Bundall Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun), about 1.5km inland, has an excellent permanent collection featuring many of Australia's finest artists.

The kiddies will like **Infinity** (☎ 5538 2988; www.infinitygc.com.au; Chevron Renaissance, cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Elkhorn Ave; adult/child/family \$23.90/15.90/67.90; ☎ 10am-10pm), a walk-through maze cleverly disguised by an elaborate sound and light show.

Activities

You won't be bored in Surfers. Apart from swimming at the beach it's action all the way.

SURFING & KAYAKING

Behind the seemingly impenetrable wall of high rises, the beach here has enough swell to give beginners a feel for the craft of surfing. Surf schools charge between \$40 and \$50 for a two-hour lesson.

Brad Holmes Surf Coaching (☎ 5539 4068, 0418-757 539; www.bradholmessurfcoaching.com; 90min lessons \$75) Also caters to disabled surfers.

Cheyne Horan School of Surf (☎ 1800 227 873, 0403-080 484; www.cheynehoran.com.au; 1hr lessons \$45) World Champion surfer Cheyne Horan offers excellent tuition.

Go Ride a Wave (☎ 1800 787 337, 5526 7077; www.gorideawave.com.au; Cavill Ave Mall; surfing/kayaking 2hr

lessons from \$55; ☎ 9am-5pm) Also rents out surfboards and kayaks.

Splash Safaris Sea Kayaking (☎ 0407-741 748; www.kayakingaustralia.com.au; tours \$59-75) Kayak tours from introductory courses to five-hour safaris include snorkelling, dolphin searching, bushwalking and lunch.

AIRBORNE ACTIVITIES

Both **Balloon Down Under** (☎ 5593 8400; www.balloonunder.com.au; 1hr flights adult/child \$295/200) and **Balloon Aloft** (☎ 5578 2244; www.balloonaloft.net; 1hr flights adult/child \$295/200) offer early morning flights over the Gold Coast hinterland, including transfers, and ending with a hot breakfast.

ADRENALINE ACTION

Experience the Broadwater with spins, slides and speed! **Jetboat Extreme** (☎ 5538 8890; www.jetboatextreme.com.au; 1hr rides adult/child \$50/35) propels you across the water in a turbo charged, twin-jet-powered, custom-built jetboat.

Almost a rite of passage in Surfers is betting your life on the strength of a giant rubber band at **Bungy Australia** (☎ 5570 4833; cnr Cypress & Ferny Aves; jumps from \$99). On the same block, **Flycoaster** (☎ 5539 0474; www.flycoaster.com; rides \$39) swings you like a pendulum after you've been released from a hoist 34m up, **Sling Shot** (☎ 5570 2700; rides \$30) catapults you into the air at around 160km/h, and **Vomatron** (☎ 5570 200; rides \$30) whisks you around in a giant arc at about 120kph. All are open from 10am to 10pm daily from August to April. From May to July opening hours are 2pm to 10pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 10pm Saturday and Sunday.

WHALE-WATCHING

Between June and November, **Whales in Paradise** (☎ 3880 4455; www.whalesinparadise.com; adult/child \$85/50) leaves central Surfers for 3½ hours of whale-watching action.

INDYCAR FEVER

Since 1991 Surfers Paradise has been 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, with drivers who push them up to speeds of more than 300km/h. The champ cars are the main attraction, but plenty of folk come to see Ford and Holden battle out their famous rivalry in the V8 Supercars.

Over the entire four days, when the tracks aren't screeching with races or practice sessions, you can catch motorcycle stunt shows and spectacular air shows. There are also plenty of opportunities to meet the masters for autograph sessions, and revheads can shell out \$22 and take a tour through either the Champ Car Pit Lanes or a V8 Supercar Pit Lane.

On a good year, around a quarter of a million spectators descend for the festival. Surfers is fairly over the top at the best of times, but IndyCar gives the town a chance to *really* let its hair down.

General admission charges to the races ranges from \$40 to \$105 per day at the gate, cheaper if you book. Four-day grandstand seating is between \$235 and \$570. For more information call ☎ 1800 300 055 or check www.indy.com.au.

HORSE RIDING

Numinbah Valley Adventure Trails (☎ 5533 4137; www.numinbahtrails.com), 30km south of Nerang, and **Gumnuts Horseriding** (☎ 5543 0191; Biddaddaba Creek Rd, Canungra) offer half-day rides from around \$70, including pick-ups from the coast.

Tours

A kitschy way to explore Surfers is on the **Aqua Duck** (☎ 5538 3825; 7A Orchid Ave; adult/child \$32/26), a semi-aquatic bus (or a boat on wheels) that moves effortlessly from the road to the river and back again.

You can also access the Gold Coast hinterland with a number of tour operators from Surfers Paradise. See p304 for more information.

Festivals & Events

Big Day Out (www.bigdayout.com) Huge international music festival in late January.

Quicksilver Pro-Surfing Competition Some of the world's best surfers ride the waves in mid-March.

Surf Life-Saving Championships Also in mid-March, expect to see some stupidly fit people running about wearing very little.

Gold Coast International Marathon Run in July.

IndyCar October; see the boxed text, above.

Coolangatta Gold The Ironman of Surf Lifesaving, held in October.

Schoolies week November; see boxed text p297.

Sleeping

The **Gold Coast Accommodation Service** (☎ 5592 0067; www.goldcoastaccommodationservice.com; Shop 1, 1 Beach Rd) can arrange and book accommodation.

BUDGET

Surfers has several decent hostels, all of which offer vouchers for the nightclubs in town.

Cheers Backpackers (☎ 1800 639 539, 5531 6539; www.cheersbackpackers.com.au; 8 Pine Ave; dm/d \$24/56; ☎ ☎) Amid the friendly blur of theme nights, karaoke, pool comps, pub crawls, happy hours and BBQs, you'll also find adequate rooms and good facilities. Cheers is undeniably a party hostel, and a short walk to the clubs

Surf 'n' Sun Backpackers (☎ 1800 678 194, 5592 2363; www.surfnun-sun-goldcoast.com; 3323 Surfers Paradise Blvd; dm/d \$24/60; ☎) A very friendly family-run business that rivals Cheers as party central, this hostel is the best option for Surfers' beach and bars.

Backpackers in Paradise (☎ 5538 4344; www.backpackersinparadise.com; 40 Peninsular Dr; dm/d \$26/65; ☎ ☎) Aspiring party hostel with basic dorms and en suites.

Sleeping Inn Surfers (☎ 1800 817 832, 5592 4455; www.sleepinginn.com.au; 26 Peninsular Dr; dm \$26, d with/without bathroom \$76/66; ☎ ☎) This converted motel has modern facilities and a wide choice of rooms but needs a few more bathrooms. A quieter option is the shared apartments nearby. You can watch movies in the pool or in Priscilla (the orange bus out the back).

MIDRANGE

Surfers is riddled with self-contained units. In peak season, rates skyrocket by up to 100% and there's usually a two- or three-night minimum stay. High-season rates are quoted.

International Beach Resort (☎ 1800 657 471, 5539 0099; www.internationalresort.com.au; 84 The Esplanade; apt

\$120-165; ☎ ☎) Another seafront high rise, this place is just across from the beach, and has good studios and one- and two-bedroom units. The café downstairs is open for breakfast, lunch and cocktails.

Olympus (☎ 5538 7288; www.olympusapartments.com.au; 62 The Esplanade; d \$130-180; ☎ ☎) Just 200m north of Elkhorn Ave and opposite the beach, this high-rise block has well-kept, spacious apartments with one or two bedrooms.

Quarterdeck Apartments (☎ 1800 635 235, 5592 2200; 3263 Surfers Paradise Blvd; 1-bedroom apt from \$134; ☎) Comfortable one-bedroom apartments but air-con is extra.

Trickett Gardens Holiday Inn (☎ 5539 0988; www.trickettgardens.com.au; 24-30 Trickett St; d \$140; ☎ ☎) This friendly low-rise block is great for families, with a central location and well-equipped, self-contained units. It's so tranquil it's hard to believe you're close to Surfers' frantic action.

Breakfree Cosmopolitan Resort (☎ 5570 2311; www.breakfree.com.au; cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Beach Rd; r from \$143; ☎ ☎) Set back from the beach a tad but still very central, this complex contains 55 privately owned, self-contained apartments, each uniquely furnished by the owners. There's also a BBQ area, spa and sauna, but it can be noisy at night.

View Pacific Holiday Apartments (☎ 5570 3788; www.viewpacific.com; 5 View Ave; 1-2-bedroom apt \$150/155; ☎ ☎) The self-contained units in this wee complex are spacious and offer good value. All contain life's necessities such as washers and dryers (but only some have air-con), and balconies get glimpses of the beach between the surrounding buildings.

Surfers International Apartments (☎ 1800 891 299, 5579 1299; www.surfers-international.com.au; 7-9 Trickett St; 1-2-bedroom apt from \$150/190; ☎) This high rise, just off the beach, has plush apartments bathed in classy blue hues. Each contains a modern kitchen, sizable bedrooms and full ocean views. The complex comes with a small gym and poolside BBQ. This is a good option, close to everything.

TOP END

Raffles Royale (☎ 5538 0099; www.afflesroyale.com.au; 69 Ferny Ave; r from \$165; ☎) An unobtrusive, low-rise block with bright and cheerful self-contained units.

Chateau Beachside (☎ 5538 1022; www.chateaubeachside.com.au; cnr Elkhorn Ave & The Esplanade; d/studio/1-bedroom apt \$165/180/195; ☎ ☎) Right in the heart

of Surfers, this seaside complex has comfortable, spacious units with excellent views.

Courtyard Marriott (☎ 1800 074 317, 5579 3499; www.marriott.com; cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Hanlan St; d/ste from \$165/235; ☎ ☎ ☎; wi-fi) Right in the centre of Surfers, this plush top-end hotel is attached to the Centro Shopping Complex. The top-price suites have spa baths.

Q1 Resort (☎ 1300 792 008, 5630 4500; www.q1.com.au; Hamilton Ave; 1-2-/3-bedroom apt from \$284/444/654; ☎ ☎ ☎) Spend a night in the world's tallest residential tower. This stylish 80-storey resort is a modern mix of metal, glass and fabulous wrap-around views. There's a lagoon-style pool, a fitness centre and a day spa.

Marriott Resort (☎ 5592 9800; www.marriott.com; 158 Ferny Ave; d/ste from \$315/575; ☎ ☎ ☎) Just north of the centre, this resort is ridiculously sumptuous, from the sandstone-floored foyer with punka-style fans to the lagoon-style pool, complete with artificial white-sand beaches and waterfall.

Eating

Self-caterers will find supermarkets in **Centro Surfers Paradise** (Cavill Ave Mall), **Chevron Renaissance Shopping Centre** (cnr Elkhorn Ave & Gold Coast Hwy) and **Circle on Cavill** (cnr Cavill & Ferny Ave).

BUDGET

Fishnets Café (☎ 5538 2280; Circle on Cavill, 3/38 Surfers Paradise Blvd; dishes \$7-13; ☎) lunch & dinner) Forget the paper plates and plastic cutlery, the fish and chips, octopus salad and fresh fish fillets at this outdoor eatery in the heart of the Circle are excellent value.

our pick Bumbles Café (☎ 5538 6668; 21 River Dr; dishes \$11-18; ☎) 7am-4pm) One of the few tranquil spots in Surfers, this cute café is located in a quiet nook opposite the Nerang River. The menu isn't extensive and the service a bit slow but the food is well worth the wait. For a light lunch try the roasted vegetables with feta and cashew nut pesto.

MIDRANGE

Central Lounge Bar & Restaurant (☎ 5592 3228; 27 Orchid Ave; mains lunch \$11-20, dinner \$20-32; ☎) lunch & dinner) Rubbing shoulders with Costa D'oro, this modern restaurant and lounge bar is a cool place to indulge in a long lunch. Tables and chairs spill into the centre of the mall so passers-by can watch you having a good time. Salads, steaks and beer-battered fish and chips are on offer. The resident DJ creates a fusion

of cool tunes to smooth you into the weekend club scene.

Euro (☎ 5538 1996; Circle on Cavill, Surfers Paradise Blvd; mains \$13-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dine alfresco in the heart of the Circle with a prime view of the big screen. The gentle splash of the fountain masks the outer-Circle traffic noise. The Mediterranean salad or steak sandwich is a good choice before a night of clubbing.

Beer Thai Garden (☎ 5538 0110; cnr Chelsea Ave & Gold Coast Hwy; mains \$13-21; ☎ dinner) Reputed to dish up the best Pad Thai on the coast, this lovely restaurant brims with atmosphere. Two glitzy elephants flank the entrance, and soft lighting makes the most of the outdoor Thai garden bar. Good value and easy on the pocket. It's south down the Gold Coast Hwy.

Tandoori Place (☎ 5538 0808; Aegean Resort, Laycock St; mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) An Indian restaurant that boasts a swag of awards and is highly recommended by locals has to be a winner. On the extensive menu you'll find seafood, poultry, lamb, beef and hot, hot, *hot* vindaloo roo. Vegetarians are also spoiled for choice.

Costa D'oro (☎ 5538 5203; 27 Orchid Ave; mains \$17-29; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Italian village setting painted into the backdrop of this popular restaurant goes nicely with the authentic, if not predictable, pasta, pizzas, salads and mains. It's in a good people-watching possie and if you have a late lunch (or early dinner) between 3pm and 7pm you get 40% off your meal.

TOP END

Melbas (☎ 5592 6922; 46 Cavill Ave; mains \$25-38; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Melbas' revolutionary menu dishes up such surprises as vanilla-roasted duck breast with creamy polenta. Steak and fish feature prominently but unfortunately vegetarian options are limited. Upstairs, Club Melbas is a popular drinking hole.

Grumpy's Wharf (☎ 5531 6177; Tiki Village, Cavill Ave; mains \$27-38; ☎ dinner) Right on the water, Grumpy's is a secluded and tranquil retreat serving fine seafood with Asian and Mediterranean touches.

Drinking

Basement (☎ 5588 4000; Gold Coast Arts Centre, 135 Bundall Rd) In the same building as the art gallery (p297), this bar hosts touring performers who excel in jazz, blues and folk. Regular Saturday night sessions specialise in blues, roots and world music courtesy of the resident band.

Minus 5 Ice Lounge (☎ 5527 5571; Circle on Cavill, Cavill Ave; 30min adult/child \$30/15; ☎ 11am-midnight) The coolest bar in town – literally. At minus 5°C, everything in the bar is made of ice, including the seats, walls, bar and even your glass. You'll need more than one vodka to warm your innards.

My Bar (☎ 5592 1144; 15 Orchid Ave) In the mega-complex housing Shooters, this new bar is a seductive chill zone. Curtained booths, towering candle-holders, softly lit glass-topped tables and House music create a class venue.

Shooters (☎ 5592 1144; 15 Orchid Ave) This Wild West American saloon bar is where Big Brother evictees immediately come to drown their sorrows. The décor is spot-on so you know there's got to be a cowboy somewhere among the pool tables, big-screen videos, DJs and live acts.

Entertainment

Orchid Ave is Surfers' main bar and nightclub strip. Cover charges are usually between \$10 and \$20 and Wednesday and Saturday are generally the big party nights.

Take the hassle out of your big night out with **Wicked Club Crawl** (☎ 5580 8422; www.wickedclubcrawl.com.au; tickets \$40). Every Wednesday and Saturday the Wicked team organise a club crawl to five nightclubs (including free entry for the rest of the week), a free drink and pizza at each venue, party games and loads of fun.

Backpackers Big Night Out (www.goldcoastbackpackers.net; tickets \$30) hosts a similar club crawl on Wednesdays and Saturdays, exclusively for backpackers. A party bus picks you up from your hostel and that's when the party begins. Tickets are available only through Gold Coast Association hostels and get you free entry into four nightclubs, a free drink and pizza at each venue, and other goodies.

Bedroom (☎ 5592 0088; 26 Orchid Ave) One of the hottest clubs in town brings upmarket funk to the Gold Coast. Softly lit double beds along the walls make this a seriously sexy venue. Throw in high-tech mood lighting, plasma screens in the dance floor, and pumping acoustics and you know you're in for a good time. But before you get too comfy, remember the rules: no smoking, no pillow fights and no jumping on the bed.

Strike Bowling Bar (☎ 1300 787 453; Circle on Cavill, Cavill Ave) Retro meets the future in this hip bowling bar. Forget daggy, when bowling fuses with disco lighting, pumping music and cool cocktails, the effect is striking.

Melbas (☎ 5538 7411; 46 Cavill Ave) Upstairs from the restaurant, Melba's nightclub is a local haunt and gets packed quickly. Aspiring pole-dancers can gyrate to their heart's content.

MP's (☎ 5526 2337; Forum Arcade, 26 Orchid Ave) This popular gay club has cheap drinks and drag shows on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. On Friday and Saturday it fills with a happy, mixed crowd soaking up a generic nightclub atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

The transit centre is on the corner of Beach and Cambridge Rds. All the major bus companies have desks here. For more information on buses and trains, see p289.

Getting Around

Car hire costs around \$30 to \$50 per day. Some of the many operators:

All Age Car Rentals (☎ 5570 1200, 0418-766 880; Transit Centre, cnr Beach & Cambridge Rds)

Getabout Rentals (☎ 5504 6517; Shop 9, The Mark, Orchid Ave) Also rents scooters and bikes and organises motorcycle tours of the Broadwater area (from \$50 for 30 minutes to \$260 per half-day).

Red Back Rentals (☎ 5592 1655; Transit Centre, cnr Beach & Cambridge Rds)

Red Rocket Rent-A-Car (☎ 1800 673 682, 5538 9074; Centre Arcade, 16 Orchid Ave) Also rents scooters (per day \$30) and bicycles (per day \$12).

Mopeds City (☎ 5592 5878; 103 Ferny Ave) hires out brand new mopeds (per hour/day \$30/70).

SOUTHPORT & MAIN BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 24,100

Sheltered from the ocean by a long sandbar, known as the Spit, and the Broadwater estuary, Southport is a relatively quiet residential enclave 4km north of Surfers Paradise. There's not much to do here and it's a long way from the beach but it can be a good base if you want to escape the nonstop frenzy of Surfers.

Main Beach, just south of Southport, marks the gateway to the Spit and the high-rise tourist developments. The Spit runs 3km north, dividing the Broadwater from the South Pacific Ocean. The ocean side of the Spit is relatively untouched, backed by a long strip of natural bushland, and has excellent beaches and surf. At the southern end of the Spit is the Sea World theme park, while the upmarket shopping complex of Marina Mirage is near Mariner's Cove and the marina, the depar-

ture point for cruises and other water-based activities.

Activities

Mariner's Cove is the place to book all water activities. The easiest way to sift through the plethora of operators is to book at the **Mariner's Cove Tourism Information & Booking Centre** (☎ 5571 1711; Mariner's Cove; ☎ 9am-5pm). Some recommended activities include:

Australian Kayaking Adventures (☎ 0412-940 135; www.australiankayakingadventures.com.au; 3hr/half-day tours to South Stradbroke Island \$55/75) Includes breakfast on the beach.

Australian Whale Watching (☎ 1300 422 784; www.australianwhalewatching.com.au; adult/child \$85/50) Three-hour whale-watching cruise between June and November.

Gold Coast Helitours (☎ 5591 8457; www.goldcoasthelitours.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina) Flights range from five minutes (adult/child \$44/33) up to 30 minutes (\$203/115). The only company to offer tandem skydiving out of a helicopter at 3050m.

Queensland Scuba Diving Company (☎ 5526 7722; www.queenslandscubadive.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina; dives from \$99)

Paradise Jet Boating (☎ 1300 538 2628; Mariner's Cove Marina; 45min rides \$60) Serious speed, spins and beach-blasting on a jet-boat reaching 85km/h.

Tall Ship (☎ 5532 2444; www.tallship.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina; full day cruises adult/child/senior/family from \$99/59/89/269) Cruises to South Stradbroke Island on yachts dressed up to look like tall ships. Half-day cruises also available. Combine parasailing with a tall ship experience for \$50. Also has whale-watching cruises.

Skydive Queensland (☎ 5528 2777; www.skydiveqld.com.au; Mariner's Cove) Tandem jumps from 3050m (\$280) to 4270m (\$325).

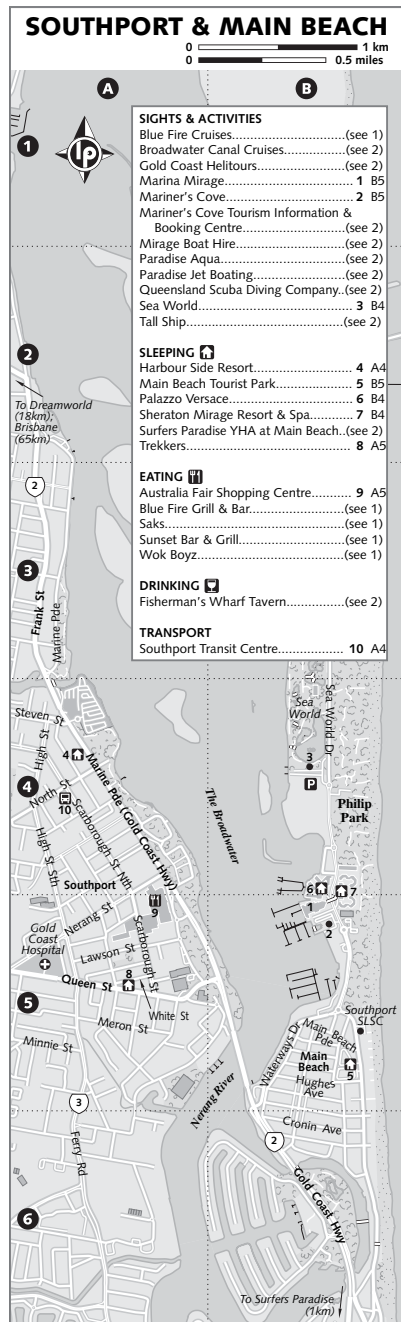
Tours

Blue Fire Cruises (☎ 5557 8888; www.bluefirecruises.com.au; Marina Mirage) Offers dinner and cabaret cruises (adult/child from \$75/55), South Stradbroke Island day cruises (from \$75/55) including morning tea, lunch, boom netting and ski boarding, and a whale-watching cruise (adult/child \$75/40) from April to November.

Broadwater Canal Cruises (☎ 0410-403 020; adult/child \$32/15) Offers cruises to Tiki Village Wharf in Surfers Paradise. Cruises depart Mariner's Cove at 10.30am, 2pm and 4.30pm and the two-hour tour includes a buffet-style Devonshire tea.

Sleeping

Surfers Paradise YHA at Main Beach (☎ 5571 1776; www.yha.com.au/hostels; 70 Sea World Dr, Main Beach; dm/d & tw \$24/66; ☎) In a great position overlooking



the marina, here you only have to drop over the balcony to access the plethora of water sports, cruises and tours on offer. BBQ nights are every Tuesday and Friday and the hostel is within staggering distance of the Fisherman's Wharf Tavern.

Trekkers (☎ 1800 100 004, 5591 5616; www.trekkersbackpackers.com.au; 22 White St, Southport; dm/d & tw \$26, \$68; 📶 🚶 🚰) You could bottle the friendly vibes of this beautiful Queenslander and make a mint. Some of the themed doubles have bathrooms and TVs. The communal areas are spotless and homy and the garden is a mini oasis.

Main Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7722; www.gctp.com.au/main; Main Beach Pde, Main Beach; unpowered/powered sites from \$29/32, cabins from \$129-205; 📶 🚶 🚰) Just across the road from the beach, this caravan park is a favourite with families. It's a tight fit between sites but the facilities are good. Rates are for two people.

Harbour Side Resort (☎ 5591 6666; www.harbourresort.com.au; 132 Marine Pde, Southport; studio \$100, 1-2-bedroom apt \$130/170; 📶 🚶 🚰) Disregard the overwhelming brick façade and busy road; within this sprawling property you'll find pastel-hued units with oodles of room. The kitchens are well equipped and the complex also has a laundry and tennis courts. In high season there's a minimum five-night stay.

Sheraton Mirage Resort & Spa (☎ 1800 073 535, 5591 1488; www.sheraton.com/goldcoast; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; d from \$275, ste \$500-650; 📶 🚶 🚰; wi-fi) If you must have direct beach access this is the only five-star resort on the coast that will do. The rooms are classy and spacious and there's a gym, tennis courts, two restaurants, three bars and a beautiful lagoon-style pool. Spa aficionados will get their fix at the Golden Door Spa & Health Club here.

our pick Palazzo Versace (☎ 1800 098 000, 5509 8000; www.palazzoversace.com; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; d \$480-585, ste/condos from \$685/1300; 📶 🚶 🚰; wi-fi) The Palazzo is quite simply pure extravagance, from the sumptuous rooms to the equally indulgent restaurants and bars. Everything from the pool furniture to the buttons on the staff uniforms has Donatella Versace's glamorous mark on it.

Eating

The cheapest place to eat is the food court in the Australia Fair Shopping Centre.

Sunset Bar & Grill (☎ 5528 2622; Marina Mirage, Main Beach; dishes \$5-17; 🍷 7am-6pm) If your wallet has taken a beating at the exclusive boutiques in

GOLD COAST THEME PARKS

Test your lung capacity (or better yet, the kids') on the thrilling rides and swirling action at the five American-style theme parks just north of Surfers. Discount tickets are sold in most of the tourist offices on the Gold Coast; the 3 Park Super Pass (adult/child \$177/115) covers entry to Sea World, Movie World and Wet'n'Wild.

Dreamworld (Map p289; ☎ 5588 1111; www.dreamworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Coomera; adult/child \$66/43; 🍷 10am-5pm) Skip breakfast if you plan on tackling the Big 6 Thrill Rides, which include the Claw, a giant pendulum that swings you nine storeys high at 75km/h, and the Giant Drop, a terminal-velocity machine where you free fall from 38 storeys. It's not all rides, though: there's an interactive tiger show and an IMAX theatre. A two-day world pass (adult/child \$102/68) lets you jump between Dreamworld and WhiteWater World as often as you like.

WhiteWaterWorld (Map p289; ☎ 5588 1111; www.whitewaterworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Coomera; adult/child \$43/29; 🍷 10am-5pm) A new addition next door to Dreamworld, this aquatic theme park is the place to take the kids on a hot summer day. There's the Hydrocoaster (a rollercoaster on water), and the Green Room, where you'll spin in a tube through a tunnel then drop 15m down a green water funnel. Get caught in The Rip or splash around in the surging swells in the Cave of Waves.

Sea World (Map p302; ☎ 5588 2222, show times 5588 2205; www.seaworld.com.au; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; adult/child \$66/43; 🍷 10am-5pm) See Australia's only polar bears in this aquatic park, along with dugongs, sharks and performing seals and dolphins. There are dizzying rides, of course, but for a unique hands-on experience book an Animal Adventure with a marine-mammal trainer.

Warner Bros Movie World (Map p289; ☎ 5573 8485; www.movieworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child \$66/43; 🍷 10am-5pm) 'Hollywood on the Gold Coast' boasts more movie-themed rides than movie-set action but the kids will love meeting their favourite movie legends and Loony Tunes characters.

Wet'n'Wild (Map p289; ☎ 5573 2255; www.wetnwild.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child \$45/29; 🍷 10am-5pm Feb-Apr & Sep-Dec, 10am-4pm May-Aug, 10am-9pm 27 Dec-25 Jan) If the beach is too sedate, this colossal water-sports park offers plenty of creative ways to get wet. You can launch from a 15m-high platform in a tube and blast down a 40m tunnel, or swirl through the Black Hole, or zoom down Mammoth Falls in a big rubber ring. If all that sounds too energetic, catch a movie in a tube at the Dive'n'Movies.

the mall, you'll be glad to find this little place right on the water. Steaks, burgers and seafood dishes are all reasonably priced and all sandwiches are only \$5.

Wok Boyz (☎ 5591 6808; Marina Mirage, Main Beach; dishes \$14; 🍷 lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) If the towering, tasty bowls of noodles don't lure you to this tiny noodle bar, maybe the fact that Jessica Alba ate here will.

Blue Fire Grill & Bar (☎ 5557 8877; Marina Mirage, Main Beach; mains \$28-42; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Fancy something totally unexpected? Then try the *churrascaria*. This Brazilian method of flame-grilling and serving meats, chicken and fish (carved at your table) is a theatrical and gastronomic treat. Otherwise the Mediterranean menu will be sure to please as will the stylish décor and water views.

Saks (☎ 5591 2755; Marina Mirage, 74 Sea World Dr, Main Beach; mains \$30-50; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This smart, salubrious bar and restaurant lures cultured palettes with a brief but sophisticated menu

boasting dishes such as char-grilled eye fillet topped with Moreton Bay bugs, scallops and king prawns. Tall glass windows offer uninterrupted views of the marina.

Drinking

Fisherman's Wharf Tavern (☎ 5571 0566; Mariner's Cove, Main Beach) The famous Sunday Sessions at this styled-up tavern kick off at 3pm with live music on the deck overlooking the Broadwater.

Getting There & Away

Coaches stop at the Southport Transit Centre on Scarborough St, between North and Railway Sts. Catch local Surfside buses from outside the Australia Fair Shopping Centre on Scarborough St.

SOUTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

This narrow, 20km-long sand island is largely undeveloped, and a tranquil contrast to the mainland sprawl of the Gold Coast tourist

strip. At the northern end, the narrow channel separating it from North Stradbroke Island is popular for fishing, while at the southern end the tip of the Spit is only 200m away. There are two resorts, a camping ground and plenty of bush, sand and sea to satisfy anglers, surfers, bushwalkers and kayakers. Cars aren't permitted on the island so you'll have to walk or cycle to get around.

The **Couran Cove Island Resort** (☎ 1800 268 726, 5509 3000; www.couran.com; d from \$241; ♿ ♿) is an exclusive luxury resort with all guests' rooms perched on the water's edge. There are four restaurants to choose from, a day spa, a private marina and guided nature walks. Rates don't include ferry transfers (adult/child \$47/25 return) from Hope Harbour at the northern end of the Gold Coast. Ferries leave at 10.30am, 2pm, 4pm and 6pm and return at 9am, noon, 3pm, 5pm and 7pm.

For something less extravagant, you can head to the **Couran Point Island Beach Resort** (☎ 5501 3555; www.couranpoint.com.au; d incl breakfast from \$200; ♿), which has colourful and comfortable hotel rooms, and slightly larger units with kitchenettes. All rates include a continental breakfast and use of nonmotorized facilities but do not include ferry transfers (adult/child \$25/20 one way). Day-trippers can access the resort facilities (adult/child/family \$65/30/170 includes BBQ lunch). The ferry leaves Marina Mirage daily at 10am and returns at 4pm.

GOLD COAST HINTERLAND

Inland from the surf, sand, and half-naked bods on the Gold Coast beaches, the densely forested and unspoiled mountains of the McPherson Range feel like a million miles away. The range forms a natural barrier between the eastern coastline and the rolling green hills of the Darling Downs, and the national parks here are a subtropical paradise of rainforests, waterfalls, numerous walking tracks, panoramic lookouts and amazing wildlife.

Tours

The only way to access the hinterland without your own wheels is on a tour.

4X4 Hinterland Tours (☎ 1800 604 425, 0429-604 425; www.4x4hinterlandtours.com.au; day tours adult/child \$125/60) Specialises in small-group 4WD ecotours.

Australian Day Tours (☎ 1300 363 436; www.daytours.com.au; day tours adult/child \$79/44, 2-day tours \$350/145). Tours travel via Mt Tamborine and Canungra to O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse in Lamington National Park, where you'll stay on the two-day tour.

Bushwacker Ecotours (☎ 3720 9020; www.bushwacker-ecotours.com.au; day trips adult/child \$115/95) Has an extensive array of ecotours to the hinterland including a two-day tour (adult/child \$239/199) with an overnight jungle camp.

SPRINGBROOK NATIONAL PARK

An excellent winding drive up from the Gold Coast beaches takes you into a *Jurassic Park* ecosystem of lush subtropical rainforests where closed canopies high overhead protect an amazing array of endangered and protected flora and fauna. The 3425-hectare **Springbrook National Park** consists of three reserves: Springbrook Plateau, Mt Cougal and Natural Bridge.

Like the rest of the McPherson Range, the Springbrook area is a remnant of the huge shield volcano that dominated the region 23 million years ago. From Best of All Lookout (reached via Lyrebird Ridge Rd; see opposite) you can see the once buried volcanic plug, Mt Warning (1156m), in NSW. The southern cliffs of Springbrook and Lamington continue into NSW arcing around in a giant circle, outlining the rim of the ancient volcanic crater.

The park is a mix of subtropical warm and cool temperate rainforest and open eucalypt forest. Hikers will want to make full use of the extensive walking tracks showcasing the weird world of strangler figs, vines, epiphytes, glow-in-the-dark mushrooms and worms, colourful wildlife and spectacular waterfalls and gorges. But be prepared, at 900m the national park can be up to 5°C cooler than the lowlands.

Each section of the park is reached by a long access road, and there are no shortcuts between the sections, so make sure you get on the right road. Coming from Nerang, take Springbrook Rd for the Springbrook section and the Nerang-Murwillumbah Rd for the Natural Bridge section. Take the Currumbin Creek Rd from Currumbin for Mt Cougal.

There's a **ranger's office** (☎ 5533 5147; 87 Carrick Rd; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) at Springbrook where you can pick up a copy of the national park's walking tracks.

Springbrook Plateau

The village of Springbrook is balanced right on the edge of the plateau, with numerous

waterfalls tumbling down to the coastal plain below. The 'town' is actually a series of properties stretched along a winding road. Understandably, lookouts are the big attraction here, and there are several places where you can get the giddy thrill of leaning right out over the edge.

At **Gwongorella Picnic Area**, just off Springbrook Rd, the lovely **Purling Brook Falls** drop 109m into the rainforest. There are two easily accessed lookouts with views of the lush canopy and towering falls, and a number of walking trails including a 6km-return walk to Waringa Pool, a beautiful swimming hole.

The national park **information centre** is at the end of Old School Rd. A little further south **Canyon Lookout** affords jagged views through the valley all the way to the coast. This is also the start of a 4km circuit walk to **Twin Falls** and the 17km **Warrie Circuit**.

At the end of Springbrook Rd, the pleasant **Goomoolahra Picnic Area** has BBQs beside a small creek. A little further on, there's a great lookout point beside the falls with views across the plateau and all the way back to the coast.

True to its name, the **Best of All Lookout** offers spectacular views from the southern edge of the plateau to the flats below. The 350m trail from the car park to the lookout takes you past a clump of mighty Antarctic beech trees. Take

time to admire the gnarled and twisted roots of these ancient giants. You'll only find them around here and in northern NSW.

There's only one camping ground at Springbrook, the **Settlement Camp Ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Carrick's Rd; camp sites per person \$4.50), a rather uninspiring camping ground devoid of trees and showers but it does have toilets and electric BBQs.

Most guesthouses are along or signposted off Springbrook Rd.

Across the road from Canyon Lookout, **Rosellas at Canyon Lookout** (☎ 5533 5120; 8 Canyon Pde; s/d incl breakfast from \$80/95) is a friendly family-run guesthouse. The three en suite rooms are clean and basic with TVs and bar fridges. There's a lovely **restaurant** (dishes \$10-20; ☎ 9am-4pm Fri & Sun, to late Sat), and a smattering of local crafts for sale.

Set on 10 hectares of landscaped gardens is the stately Tudor-style **Springbrook Mountain Manor** (☎ 5533 5344; www.springbrookmountainmanor.com.au; 2814 Springbrook Rd; s/d incl breakfast from \$155/210). The rooms are heavy with brocade and period furniture and there's even a bridal suite. The restaurant (open for lunch and dinner) offers fine dining with five-star service.

Springbrook Mountain Chalets (☎ 5533 5205; sm chalets.com.au; 2058 Springbrook Rd; midweek/week end from \$170/250) has stylish wooden chalets peppered throughout a thick plot of bush. Cathedral

DETOUR: TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN

A mountaintop rainforest community just 45km inland from the Gold Coast beaches, Tamborine Mountain has cornered the chocolate, fudge, and craft cottage industries in a big way. Of the three satellite suburbs (Eagle Heights, North Tamborine and Mt Tamborine), **Gallery Walk** in Eagle Heights is the place to stock up on homemade jams and all things artsy-craftsy but wherever you are on Tamborine Mountain a Devonshire tea is never too far away.

As well as housing a bevy of creative artists and musicians, Tamborine Mountain is home to Queensland's oldest national park. The **Tamborine Mountain National Park** is actually 13 sections of land that stretch across the 8km plateau, offering tumbling cascades and great views of the Gold Coast. Most of the national parks surround North Tamborine and some of the best spots are **Witches Falls, Curtis Falls, Cedar Creek Falls** and **Cameron Falls**.

To get to Tamborine Mountain, turn off the Pacific Hwy at Oxenford or Nerang. The **visitor information centre** (☎ 5545 3200; Doughty Park; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) is located in North Tamborine. This is part of the **Rainforest Way**, the scenic route that includes 14 Unesco-recognized parks in Queensland and NSW (see p284).

There are plenty of romantic weekend hideaways in the rainforest including **Songbirds Rainforest Retreat** (☎ 5545 2563; www.songbirds.com.au; Tamborine Mountain Rd, North Tamborine; villas per night from \$425). Each of the six luxurious Southeast Asian-inspired villas has a double spa bath with rainforest views, and you can book private massage, meditation or yoga sessions. If you're not staying the night, have lunch at the **St Bernards Hotel** (☎ 5545 1177; 101 Alpine Tce, Tamborine; mains \$16-28; ☎ lunch & dinner), a rustic old mountain pub with a large deck that has commanding views of the gorge.

ceilings, large glass doors, spa baths and pot-belly stoves add up to an intimate weekend.

our pick Hidden in the magical misty woods are the A-frame red-cedar cottages of the **Mouses House** (☎ 5533 5192; www.mouseshouse.com.au; 2807 Springbrook Rd; 2 nights from \$385). Soft lighting along rainforest boardwalks leads to 11 enchanted chalets, each with a double spa and wood fire. These ultraprivate fairytale cottages are the ultimate romantic mountain hideaway. Breakfast, lunch and dinner hampers are available on request.

Right by the car park for Purling Brook Falls, **Rainforest Retreat** (☎ 5533 5335; 33 Forestry Rd; dishes \$7-14; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a simple tearoom with healthy salads and light meals.

Springbrook Homestead (☎ 5533 5200; 2319 Springbrook Rd; mains \$10-29; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Fri) serves ploughman's lunches, soup and damper, and chunky rump pies. You can pick up a walking map here and work out your route over a beer.

LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK

Australia's largest remnant of subtropical rainforest covers the deep valleys and steep cliffs of the McPherson Range, reaching elevations of 1100m on the Lamington Plateau. The 200-sq-km Lamington National Park is a Unesco World Heritage site and has over 160km of walking trails.

The two most popular and accessible sections of the park are **Binna Burra** and **Green Mountains**, both reached via Canungra. Binna Burra can also be reached from Nerang. Both roads twist and snake their way up the mountain, cutting through encroaching forest and open grazing land. It's a spectacular drive, particularly along the Green Mountain Rd, and well worth the effort.

At Green Mountains, be sure to walk the excellent **tree-top canopy walk** along a series of rope-and-plank suspension bridges 15m above the ground. Serious hikers can tackle the 24km **Border Trail** that links the two sections of the park. Walking trail guides are available from the **ranger stations** (Binna Burra ☎ 5533 3584; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Sat & Sun; Green Mountains ☎ 5544 0634; ☎ 9-11am & 1-3.30pm Mon-Fri).

Binna Burra Mountain Lodge (☎ 1300 246 622, 5533 3622; www.binnaburrallodge.com.au; Binna Burra Rd, Beechmont; unpowered/powered sites \$24/27, safari tents from \$55, d incl breakfast with/without bathroom \$250/150) is an excellent mountain retreat with rustic log cabins and camp sites surrounded by forest. **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** (☎ 1800 688 722, 5544 0644; www.oreillys.com.au; Lamington National Park Rd; guesthouse s/d from \$155/265, 1-/2-bedroom villas from \$310/360) at Green Mountains was built in 1926. The guesthouse is looking dated and faded but still manages to retain its old-world rustic charm – and sensational views.