

GOLDFIELDS & GRAMPIANS

Gold, gold, gold. Over a third of the world's gold has come out of Victoria. So how come all the locals aren't rich? Share a little of the rewards by heading to one of the state's most interesting areas, the goldfields region. Gold fever informed the area's history, and everywhere you go are reminders of the rich heritage of the gold rush days: grand, classic Victorian buildings; boulevards wide enough to turn a bullock team in; imposing banks with bushranger-proof vaults and fortified yards alongside for the wagons; old mining sites; fascinating museums and cemeteries. Fabulous attractions are linked to the era. Sovereign Hill, in Ballarat, is one of Australia's most popular tourist spots; Bendigo has the famous Chinese dragons, Old Loong and Sun Loong; Castlemaine is surrounded by charming, historic hamlets. Up around Moliagul it's called the 'Golden Triangle' because so many nuggets were found, big ones too, including the Welcome Stranger, the largest alluvial nugget ever found in the world.

Daylesford and Hepburn Springs, in the scenic central highlands, are famous for their mineral spas. Along with the healing waters are masseurs and naturopaths, gardens and craft shops, restored guesthouses and cottages, and great eateries.

This blend of quaint townships and grand regional centres sprawls across dramatically contrasting landscapes, from pretty countryside and green forests to red earth and granite country. The Grampians, an adventurer's paradise, stand majestically over the idyllic Wartook Valley and cute, touristy Dunkeld. Further north amidst the expanses of wheat and sheep properties are the wide open spaces of the Little Desert.

Go exploring, go bike touring, horse riding, prospecting. Bush-walkers will find trails everywhere and never too far from a musty old pub, rose garden café, olive farm or winery. Whatever you want is what you'll find.

PROSPECTING

The old diggers dug up most of the gold, but even today significant nuggets are unearthed. This adds a whole new dimension to walking in the bush! First check out all the major gold-rush centres – there's a well-signposted Goldfields Tourist Route; get a route map from any visitors centre. Join other prospectors on the alluvial goldfields of [Maryborough](#) (p266). Buy a gold-panning kit at [Castlemaine](#) visitors centre and go splash around at nearby [Forest Creek Historic Gold Diggings](#) (p258). Carmen's Tunnel, out of [Maldon](#) (p265), never produced much gold, so that may be a good place to start. Or get some help, on a tour with one of the adventure companies that guarantees you will find gold. If all else fails, try to pick up a little gold dust at [Sovereign Hill](#) (opposite) in [Ballarat](#) and experience the Eureka spirit of the times when the miners struggled against injustice. Then see goldmining 500m underground at Central Deborah Goldmine in [Bendigo](#) (p255).

LUXURIATING

This area is rich in produce and services to keep your senses glowing with gratitude. [Daylesford](#) and [Hepburn Springs](#) (p259) have been famous for their spa baths and body treat-

ments since the 1800s, when wealthy city slickers came up from Melbourne to relax. Nowadays there are also olive farms, wineries, trout farms, lavender farms, produce stores with bottles of healthy goodies, and chocolate outlets where you can watch the production of the little nuggets. Then, when you've been totally massaged and eaten sufficient lavender ice cream, take a stroll through one of the magnificent botanic gardens, like Baron Ferdinand von Mueller's work of art in [Kyneton](#) (p262), or the very old Botanic Gardens (p264) in [Castlemaine](#), which has National Trust-registered trees.

ADVENTURE SPORTS

The [Grampians](#) are renowned for spectacular scenery and kilometres of walks throughout, but the rock climbing and abseiling in the area are thrilling. You'll find adventure companies (p266) ready to give you a wild and wonderful time. While you're enjoying the great outdoors, head north to the [Little Desert National Park](#) (p271) for a totally grounding holiday. Then hop on a horse for a ride through bush and desert, along creeks and past lagoons at any horse riding centre from [Wartook Valley](#) (p271) to [Daylesford](#) and up to [Bendigo](#).

GENEALOGY

Many aspects of Australia's history are brought alive in the region's historic towns, museums and sites, but the goldfields provide another rich resource for anyone tracing a family history. Each weekend, there's an exodus of people from Melbourne to the area's cemeteries (p264) and associated historic societies. The Goldfields Historical Chinese Cemetery in [Bendigo](#) is a moving place to visit, even if you're not looking for ancestors. The Pennyweight Children's Cemetery in [Castlemaine](#) will leave a memory of the sad and impossibly difficult years the pioneers struggled through. The mausoleum at [Maryborough](#) gives further insights into the past, as do the gravestones in the cemetery at [Maldon](#), where ghosts still linger.

BALLARAT

pop 78,300

The area around here was known to the local Koories as 'Ballaarat', meaning 'resting place'. When gold was discovered in August 1851, thousands of diggers flooded in, forming a shanty town of tents and huts. Ballarat's alluvial goldfields were the tip of the golden iceberg, and when deep shaft mines were sunk they struck incredibly rich quartz reefs. About 28 percent of Victoria's gold came from Ballarat.

The original town of canvas and bark was replaced with a wealth of gracious Victorian-era buildings. The main drag, impressive [Sturt St](#), had to be three chains wide (60m) to allow for the turning circle of bullock wagons. [Lydiard St](#) is a historic precinct with some of the finest examples of Victorian architecture, reminding us of how prosperous the town was, and

still is. The [Camp St](#) arts precinct buzzes with student activity and includes a public open space for the performing arts. The jewel in this historic and architecturally intriguing precinct is [Ballarat Fine Art Gallery](#) (☎ 5320 5858; www.balgal.com; 40 Lydiard St Nth; adult/child \$5/free; 🕒 9am-5pm) which houses a wonderful collection of early colonial paintings, works from noted Australian artists (including Tom Roberts, Sir Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale and Fred Williams) and contemporary works. A section is devoted to the Lindsay family who lived in nearby Creswick.

Allow at least half a day to visit [Sovereign Hill](#) (☎ 5331 1944; www.sovereignhill.com.au; Maggie St; adult/child/family \$35/16/90; 🕒 10am-5pm), a fascinating re-creation of an 1860s gold-mining township. The site was mined in the gold-rush era and much of the equipment is original, as is the mine shaft. There are above-ground and underground diggings. You can pan for gold in the stream – maybe you'll find a speck or two – and watch an hourly gold pour. The main street is a living history museum with people performing their chores dressed in costumes of the time. Several places offer food, from pies at the Hope Bakery to a three-course lunch at the United States Hotel. Sovereign Hill opens again at night for the impressive sound-and-light show [Blood on the Southern Cross](#) (☎ 5333 5777; ticket combined with Sovereign Hill admission adult/child/family \$74/36/196; 🕒 summer 9.15 & 10.30pm, winter 6.45 & 8pm), a simulation of the Eureka Stockade battle. Bookings are essential (and check the show times).

Your ticket also gets you into the nearby [Gold Museum](#) (☎ 5331 1944; Maggie St; adult/child \$9/4.50; 🕒 9.30am-5.20pm) which sits on a mullock heap from an old mine. There's imaginative displays and samples from all the old mining

TRANSPORT: BALLARAT

Distance from Melbourne 116km

Direction Northwest

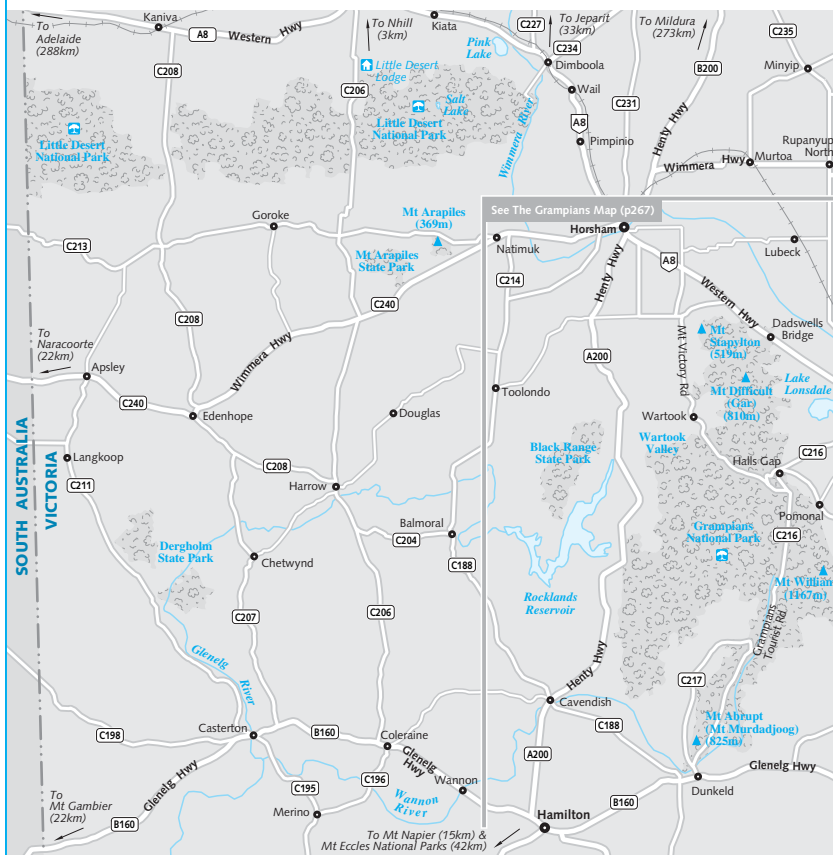
Travel time 1½ hours

Bus Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has Adelaide-to-Melbourne buses that stop at Ballarat (departs Adelaide 8pm; adult/child \$72/51, 8½ hours) if you ask the driver. Airport Shuttlebus (☎ 5333 4181; www.airportshuttlebus.com.au) goes direct from Melbourne Airport to Ballarat train station (return \$45, 1½ hours, seven times daily).

Car Ballarat is a smooth drive up the Western Hwy from Melbourne.

Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs between Melbourne (Southern Cross station) and Ballarat (return \$20, 1½ hours, 21 daily).

GOLDFIELDS & THE GRAMPIANS



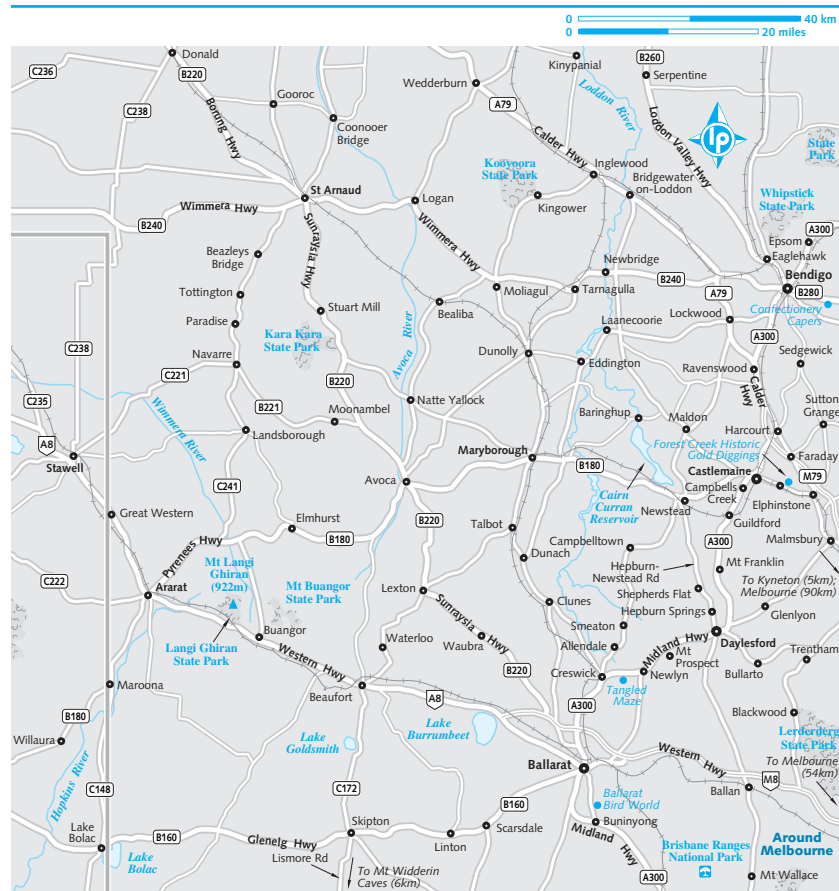
areas, as well as gold nuggets, coins and a display on the Eureka Rebellion.

On the site of the rebellion is the **Eureka Centre** (☎ 5333 1854; www.eurekaballarat.com; cnr Eureka & Rodier Sts; adult/child/family \$8/4/22; ☹ 9am-5pm) – look out for the huge Eureka sail. Connect with Australia’s fighting spirit through multimedia galleries simulating the battle, then move into the ‘contemplation space’ to be soothed by the sound of running water.

Beautiful and serene, Ballarat’s **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 5320 5135; www.ballarat.com/botanicgardens; Wendouree Pde; admission free; ☹ sunrise-sunset) were first planted in 1858. Stroll through the 40 hectares of immaculately maintained rose gardens, wide lawns and colourful conservatory. Visit the cottage of poet Adam Lindsay Gordon or walk along the Prime Ministers’ Avenue, a collection

of bronze portraits. A **Tourist Tramway** (☎ 5334 1580; www.btm.org.au; rides adult/child \$3/1.50; ☹ noon-5pm Sat & Sun) operates around the gardens, departing from the Tram Museum. Across Wendouree Pde is a fantastic, wooden **Adventure Playground**. Drive slowly: the swans step gracefully over the road at unexpected moments.

Don’t miss the attractive **Ballarat Wildlife Park** (☎ 5333 5933; www.wildlifepark.com.au; cnr York & Fussell Sts; adult/child/family \$20/13/60; ☹ 9am-5.30pm, tour 11am) where you walk among sweet little King Island wallabies in a tranquil park. Happily, the crocodiles are in a compound. Other native species include Tasmanian devils, emus, quokkas, snakes, eagles and a giant tortoise. Weekend programs include a koala show, wombat show and crocodile-feeding. If you like them with feathers, go to **Ballarat Bird World**



(☎ 5341 3843; www.ballaratbirdworld.com.au; 408 Eddy Ave; adult/child/family \$10/6/30; ☹ 10am-5pm), where 40 different types of birds hang out in peaceful gardens with ponds and waterfalls.

Equally peaceful is the charming space of **Kirrit Barreet** (☎ 5332 2755; www.aboriginalballarat.com.au; 403 Main Rd; admission free, tours \$5; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun, tours 11am & 3pm), a place of creation where you’ll find work by distinguished artists who also conduct workshops.

Despite its notoriously hardy climate, Ballarat has four large outdoor pools. The heated **Eureka Swimming Centre** (☎ 5331 2820; cnr Stawell & Eureka Sts; ☹ 1-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat & Sun) has a giant water slide and minigolf. The indoor **Ballarat Aquatic Centre** (☎ 5334 2499; Gillies St Nth; adult/child/family \$5/3/12; ☹ 6am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun) has several pools and a gym.

Lake Wendouree, a large artificial lake, is a focal point for the town. Old timber boatsheds spread along the shore, and when there’s water in the lake you’ll often see rowing boats being stroked across. The jogging track around the lake is also popular. In early 2008, the lake was scarily dry; hopefully the drought will have broken by the time you read this.

So you think minigolf is kid’s stuff? Not at this place. **Gold Rush Mini Golf** (☎ 5334 8150; www.goldrushgolf.com.au; Western Hwy, Warrenheip; 1/2 rounds adult \$12/16, child \$7/11, family \$32/48; ☹ 10am-8pm, to 10pm Fri & Sat) has two 18-hole courses with cute themes (in case your game’s too bad to watch). There’s arcade games, a barbecue and café as well.

Pick up the brochures *Eureka Trails and Tracks & Trails* from the visitors centre. They walk you through interesting parts of Ballarat,

BALLARAT

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1 Avenue of Ashburton
Princess of Wales Park
Lake Wendouree
Wendouree Pde
Sturt St
Cullins St Nth
Cullins St

2 To Ballarat (95 km)
Stawell (12.2 km)
Horsham (88 km)
Avalaide (6.4 km)

3 To Zangfield Maze (40 km)
To Longford (100 km)
To Camp (64 km)
Davyesford (46 km)
Castlemaine (83 km)
Bendigo (72 km)

4 To Ballarat University (6 km)
Ballarat Bird World (6 km)
Buninyong (10 km)
Geelong (96 km)

500 m
0 0.5 miles

following historical, nature, cultural, literary, sculpture and many other themed trails. Another brochure, *Parks & Gardens*, gives you info on all local gardens and which ones have barbecue facilities and playgrounds. Or be collected for a 90-minute **Heritage & History Sight Seeing Tour** (☎ 1800 626 666; www.Go2000.com.au; tours \$20) in a small bus.

INFORMATION

Ballarat visitors centre (☎ 1800 446 633, 5320 5741; www.visitballarat.com.au; Eureka Centre, cnr Eureka & Rodier Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm) Stacks of info about sights and activities, right beside absorbing Eureka displays and galleries. Ask here about all your accommodation options, or browse www.ballarat.com.

Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) (☎ 5332 1946; www.racv.com.au; 20 Doveton St Nth) Has an information section and accommodation-booking service.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Open Road Cycling (www.visitballarat.com.au) Five days of time trials and road races over a 10.2km circuit; held in early January.

Organs of the Ballarat Goldfields (www.ballarat.com/organs) A week of recitals and musical celebrations held outdoors or in grand cathedrals and churches; occurs in mid-January.

Arts in the Park (www.ballarat.vic.gov.au) Free music on the foreshore of Lake Wendouree every Sunday from early January to late February.

Begonia Festival (www.ballaratbegoniafestival.com) This 100-year-old festival, held in early March, includes sensational floral displays, a street parade, fireworks, art shows and music.

Heritage Weekend (www.ballaratheritageweekend.com) Free entry to heritage sites in mid-May.

Ballarat Antique Fair (www.ballarataniquefair.com.au) Three days in mid-March, 95 exhibitors and antiques, buyers and sellers from all over Australia.

Australian Cycling Grand Prix (www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/calendar/events_ballarat.asp) Time trials and road race events for the national championships; held in August.

Royal South St Eisteddfod (www.visitballarat.com.au) If you learnt music as a child, you were probably dragged off to Australia's oldest eisteddfod; held September or October.

EATING

There are interesting eating options in the city. The cafés along the **400 Block** (Sturt St) from **L'Espresso**

(☎ 5333 1789; 417 Sturt St; mains \$11-18.50; ☎ 7am-6pm, to 11pm Fri & Sat) up to **Golden City Cafe** (☎ 5331 6211; 427 Sturt St; mains \$16-28; ☎ 8am-11pm) spill their tables out all day, along with the aroma of coffee.

Café Bibò (☎ 5331 1255; 205 Sturt St; mains \$11-27; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Bibò is a retro café lined with copies of 1960s *Women's Weekly* and shelves holding regulars' coffee cups.

Dino's on Sturt (☎ 5332 9711; 212 Sturt St; mains \$14-28; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Across the road from Bibò, Dino's is welcoming, child-friendly and sophisticated, with a menu that you'll love.

Tozers (☎ 5338 8908; 32 Lydiard St Sth; mains \$27-33; ☎ breakfast daily, lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) For fine dining, Tozers has fabulous food. Since it moved into Quest Ansonia, it opens for breakfast as well. What a way to start the day!

Restauranté day Uday (☎ 5331 6655; 7 Wainwright St; mains \$21-31; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Come to this pretty converted cottage and enjoy the intoxicating aromas, or collect takeaway – Indian, Thai or Italian.

Olive Grove (☎ 5331 4455; 1303 Sturt St; pies \$9; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Up towards the lake is this fantastic deli, full of gourmet delights, including pies, focaccias, cakes and cheeses.

Boatshed Restaurant (☎ 5333 5533; Lake Wendouree; mains \$18-27; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Sit on the deck over the lake or stay inside with the open fire and armchairs. Either way there's a busy atmosphere, excellent coffee and an exciting menu.

Pipers by the Lake (☎ 5334 1811; Lake Wendouree; mains \$18-25; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This 1890 Lakeside Lodge was designed by WH Piper. Huge windows look out over the lake where swans and ducks stick their bottoms up and look for water. The \$15 lunch-with-a-drink deal is good value.

ENTERTAINMENT

With its large student population, Ballarat has a lively nightlife. You can club till 5am, but you cannot enter a venue after 3am.

Irish Murphy's (☎ 5331 4091; 36 Sturt St; ☎ to 3am Wed-Sun) An atmospheric place; the live music draws people of all ages and there's plenty of Guinness on tap.

Haida (☎ 5331 5346; www.haida.com.au; 12 Camp St; ☎ 5pm-late Wed-Sun) Around the corner from Irish Murphy's, Haida is a fresh new space with day beds, fireplaces, a barbecue and totally cocky cocktails.

Lake View Hotel (☎ 5331 4592; www.thelakeview.com.au; 22 Wendouree Pde; ☎ 7am-midnight) With its

modern spaces in a truly gorgeous old pub, this venue has a buzzy atmosphere and great views over the lake.

Her Majesty's Theatre (☎ 5333 5800; www.hermaj.com; 17 Lydiard St Sth) Ballarat's main venue for the performing arts is a wonderful building. Ring to find out what's on while you're in town.

Regent Multiplex Cinema (☎ 5331 1399; www.regentmultiplex.com.au/ballarat; 49 Lydiard St Nth; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm) Ballarat's main cinema complex.

SLEEPING

Ballarat's grand old pubs, B&Bs and cottages all offer gracious accommodation, and there are many motels and holiday resorts, all with budget through to luxury units. Accommodation is scarce in September/October, when the Royal South St Eisteddfod takes place.

Eastern Station Guesthouse (☎ 5338 8722; www.ballarat.com/easternstation.htm; 81 Humffray St Nth; s/d/f \$35/60/80) Built in 1862, this guest house opens as a corner pub on weekends. In the meantime, there's fresh and spacious rooms, a grand kitchen opening onto a deck and two large games and TV rooms.

George Hotel (☎ 5333 4866; www.georgehotelballarat.com.au; 27 Lydiard St Nth; ☎) This gorgeous pub in historic Lydiard St was rebuilt in 1902 with towering ceilings and sweeping walnut staircases. It was due to reopen late 2008, so check the 'newly renovated' rates as they're bound to be reasonable.

Montrose of Ballarat (☎ 0429-439 448; www.montroseofballarat.com.au; 111 Eureka St; cottages from \$190; ☎) For a 'golden era' experience this bluestone cottage is classified by the National Trust, but offers total luxury as well.

Quest Ansonia (☎ 5332 4678; www.ballarat.com/ansoniah.htm; 32 Lydiard St Sth; d from \$149; ☎) An upmarket retreat, this place exudes calm with its minimalist design, polished cement floors and light-filled atrium. Rooms range from studio apartments for two to family suites.

Sovereign Hill Accommodation (☎ 5337 1159; www.sovereignhill.com.au; Magpie St) You can choose from several spots, inside and outside Sovereign Hill. There's the little **YHA Cottage** (dm/s/tw \$22/34/60) set in the pine forest – it's quietly fantastic. Up the hill, the **Lodge B&B** (s/d/f \$115/135/165) has gorgeous heritage rooms around a cosy guest lounge with fireplace and bar, along with some dorm rooms for large groups (\$22 per person). There are also **motel rooms** (s/d/f \$115/135/165) out the back, or go over the fence and stay in the 1850s township at **Steinfeld's**.

The rates are all the same as above; facilities are good (and often fully booked) and there are often packages and specials.

BENDIGO

pop 76,000

Beautiful, glorious Bendigo – centre of the fantastically rich Bendigo Diggings, which covered more than 360 sq km. It looks solid, imposing and extravagant, the impressive Victorian architecture a testimony to gold. When the precious blobs were discovered at Ravenswood in 1851, diggers converged on the area. When they ran out of surface gold they turned their pans and cradles to Bendigo Creek. It is said the maids at the Shamrock Hotel mopped the floor every night to collect the gold dust brought in on the drinkers' boots. Yep, this is gold territory.

The arrival of thousands of Chinese miners in 1854 had a lasting effect on the town, despite the racial tensions that surfaced. Reminders of the Chinese diggers can be seen everywhere.

In the 1860s the scene changed again as independent miners were outclassed by the powerful mining companies, with their heavy machinery. The companies poured money into the town and some 35 quartz reefs were found. The ground underneath Bendigo is still honeycombed with mine shafts. Work was halted in the mid-1950s but Bendigo Mining is about to recommence extracting the high-grade mineralisation.

Bendigo is still prosperous, and you'll find an interesting collection of mines, museums and historic buildings, one of the best regional

TRANSPORT: BENDIGO

Distance from Melbourne 148km

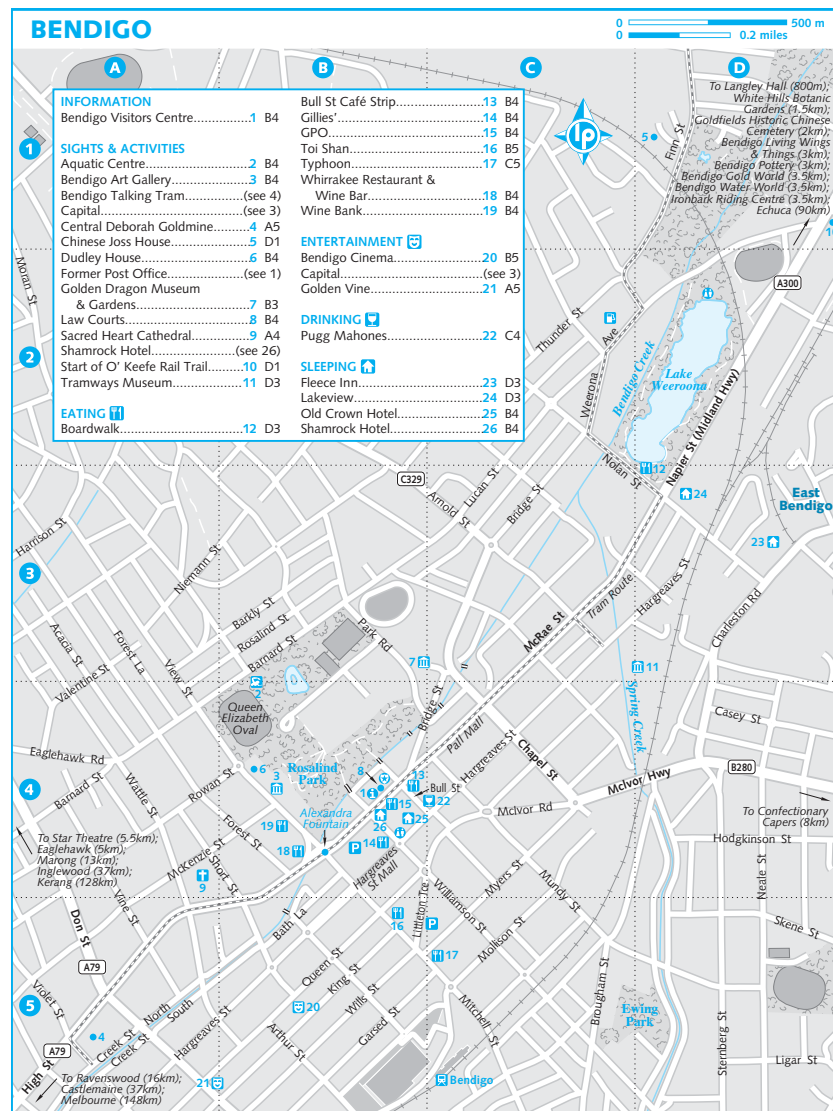
Direction Northwest

Travel time 1½ hours

Bus Bendigo Airport Service (☎ 5439 4044; www.bendigoairportsservice.com.au) runs direct to Melbourne Airport (return \$65, two hours, three daily). Bookings essential.

Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs between Melbourne (Southern Cross station) and Bendigo (return \$30, two hours, 16 daily).

Car Bendigo is a pleasant drive up the Calder Hwy from Melbourne.



art galleries in Australia, plus some great wineries in the surrounding district.

The city's impressive buildings are first seen in Pall Mall as a splendid trio: the **Shamrock Hotel**, **Law Courts** and former **Post Office**, which is now the visitors centre, with a permanent exhibition commemorating the city and its role in Federation. Wander inside all three – the interiors are just as elaborate as the exteriors.

View St is a historic streetscape with some fine buildings, including the **Capital**, which houses the Bendigo Art Gallery, and **Dudley House**, classified by the National Trust.

For a very deep experience, go down the 500m-deep **Central Deborah Goldmine** (☎ 5443 8322; www.central-deborah.com; 76 Violet St; adult/child/family \$19/10/49; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) with a geologist. Worked on 17 levels, about 1000kg of gold has been removed. After donning hard hats and lights,

you're taken down the shaft to inspect the operations, complete with drilling demonstrations. Other packages are available, including a very fast drop in a mining cage (for the young of heart). If you pay \$29/16/75 per adult/child/family, you get the mine tour plus a ride on the **Bendigo Talking Tram** (☎ 5443 8322; www.bendigotramways.com; 76 Violet St; adult/child/family \$13/8/37; 🕒 9.30am-3.30pm) from the mine, through the city, out to the **Tramways Museum** (☎ 5442 2821; 1 Tramways Rd; admission free with tram ticket; 🕒 10am-5pm).

You can get off at the **Chinese Joss House** (☎ 5442 1685; Finn St, North Bendigo; adult/child \$3/1; 🕒 11am-4pm Wed, Sat & Sun) and catch a later tram back; this is a practising joss house (a temple where idols are worshipped). Painted red, the traditional colour for strength, its entrance is guarded by a pair of *kylin* – mythical guardian beasts. Exhibits include figures representing the Chinese solar cycle, commemorative tablets to the deceased, paintings and Chinese lanterns.

Construction of the massive **Sacred Heart Cathedral** (www.sand.catholic.org.au/cathedral; cnr Wattle & High Sts; 🕒 7.30am-3.30pm) began in the 19th century and was completed in 2001 with the installation of bells from Italy in the belfry. Inside, there's a magnificently carved bishop's chair, some beautiful stained-glass windows and wooden angels jutting out of the ceiling arches. The pews are made from Australian blackwood and the marble is Italian.

The **Bendigo Art Gallery** (☎ 5443 4991; www.bendigoartgallery.com.au; 42 View St; admission by donation; 🕒 10am-5pm, tours 2pm) is a most special place. Its permanent collection includes outstanding colonial and contemporary Australian art, such as work by Charles Blackman, Fred Williams, Rupert Bunny and Lloyd Rees; the annual temporary exhibitions are cutting edge.

Walk through a huge wooden door into an awesome chamber filled with dragons. It's the **Golden Dragon Museum & Gardens** (☎ 5441 5044; www.goldendragonmuseum.org; Bridge St; adult/child/family \$8/4/20; 🕒 9.30am-5pm), and its glorious dragons include the Imperial Dragons Old Loong (the oldest in the world) and Sun Loong (the longest in the world – it just keeps on going). Old Loong arrived in 1892 to feature in the Easter Procession. Sun Loong took over in 1970 when Old Loong retired. The museum also displays amazing Chinese heritage items and costumes. Outside, the classical Chinese gardens have bridges, water features and ornamental shrubs. The tearoom serves simple, Chinese-style dishes.

Rosalind Park (north of Pall Mall) is a lovely, spacious place, with lawns, big old trees, fernery

and the fabulous **Cascades Fountain**, which was excavated after being buried for 120 years. Climb to the top of the **lookout tower** for sensational 360-degree views, or if you love roses, wander through the **Conservatory Gardens**.

The **White Hills Botanic Gardens** (Midland Hwy, White Hills; 🕒 7.30am-sunset), 2km north of town, features many exotic and rare plant species, a small fauna park, aviary, and barbecue facilities.

It's fun, fun, fun at **Confectionery Capers** (☎ 5449 3111, 0429-409 773; www.confectionerycapers.com; 1028 McIvor Hwy, Junortown; adult/child/family \$6/4/16; 🕒 10am-5pm). No lollies here (8km southeast of town), just an amazing display of whirls, whizzes and word plays: Barbie dolls in a line? A tree in a toilet? You have to go there for it all to make sense...

Bendigo has four big blue outdoor swimming pools – the **Aquatic Centre** (☎ 5443 6151; 191 Barnard St; adult/child \$4/3; 🕒 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun, closed Jun-Aug) is the closest to the centre of town. There are also ice-skating rinks, an outdoor skating park, an indoor go-kart track, rock climbing and golf courses – ask at the visitors centre for details.

About 4km north of the town centre is the **Ironbark Complex** (Watson St), with three major activities: **Ironbark Riding Centre** (☎ 5448 3344; www.bwc.com.au/ironbark; rides 1/2hr \$35/65; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) organises various horse rides including the Great Australian Pub Ride to Allies Hotel in Myers Flat (with lunch \$75); **Bendigo Gold World** (☎ 5448 4140; www.bendigogold.com.au; half-day \$170; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) has fossicking and detecting tours into the bush with metal detectors, or gold panning at the **Mobile Gold-panning Centre** (per hr \$12); and **Bendigo Water World** (☎ 5448 4140; www.bendigowaterworld.com.au; admission \$3, with slides \$8, family day pass \$65; 🕒 4-7pm Mon-Wed, 4-9pm Thu-Fri, 10.30am-9pm Sat, 10.30am-7pm Sun) where a giant slide zaps you into a pool.

The **O'Keefe Rail Trail**, a hike-or-bike trail along a disused railway line, starts near the corner of Midland Hwy and Baden St. Pant and push through bushland for 19km to Axedale – allow three/5½ hours to ride/walk one way.

Bendigo Pottery (☎ 5448 4404; www.bendigopottery.com.au; Midland Hwy, Epsom; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm) is the oldest pottery works in Australia. It was founded in 1857 and is classified by the National Trust. The historic kilns are still used; watch potters at work or throw a pot yourself. Also on site is **Bendigo Living Wings & Things** (☎ 5448 3051; adult/child/family \$7/4.50/18), where you walk among butterflies, native birds, dingoes and wallabies, or look at reptiles behind glass.

INFORMATION

Bendigo visitors centre (☎ 1800 813 153, 5444 4445; www.bendigotourism.com; 51 Pall Mall; 🕒 9am-5pm) In the historic former post office, offering an accommodation booking service. Ask for the *Daily fun tours!* brochure. For themed city tours see www.snapshotsofbendigo.com.au.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Easter Festival (www.bendigoeasterfestival.org.au) Bendigo's major festival, held in March or April, attracts thousands with its carnival atmosphere and colourful and noisy procession of Chinese dragons.

Bendigo Cup (www.racingvictoria.net.au/vrcr/bendigo) Part of the Spring Racing Carnival; held in November.

Swap Meet (www.bendigowrap.com.au) For enthusiasts in search of that elusive vintage-car spare part. It's so popular that accommodation is at a premium. Held in November.

EATING

You'll find an interesting range of cafés, pubs and restaurants here. There's the Bull St café strip, or try out the charming spots along View St.

Gillies' (☎ 5443 4965; Hargreaves St Mall; pies \$3.50; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) A Bendigo institution, you queue at the little window, order one of their pies, then sit in the mall to eat it.

Toi Shan (☎ 5443 5811; 67 Mitchell St; mains \$12-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Toi Shan had been owned and operated by the same family since 1892. Fortunately the new owners are carrying on the traditional cooking methods and everyone approves.

Whirrakee Restaurant & Wine Bar (☎ 5441 5557; 17 View Point; mains \$13-28; 🕒 dinner Tue-Sat) In the 1908 Royal Bank, there's live music in the gold-weighting room on Friday night. Upstairs, the surroundings and the food are exquisite.

Wine Bank (☎ 5444 4655; 45 View St; mains \$14-20; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Musicians pop in to play any time, the aged bottles soar up the walls and the eating areas are intimate.

Typhoon (☎ 5443 3111; cnr Myers & Mitchell Sts; mains \$14-16; 🕒 dinner) You'll be straight back for more from this metal-and-glass contemporary place serving food with Southeast Asian influences.

GPO (☎ 5443 9777; Pall Mall; mains \$14-28; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A splendid, spacious renovation of an old post office, with a courtyard, water feature, big couches for people-watching and a top menu.

Boardwalk (☎ 5443 9855; Nolan St; mains \$18-29; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) On the shores of Lake Weeroona; watch the moorhens on the lake as you sip your coffee. At night the city lights flicker gold off the water.

Bendigo ninesevenix (☎ 5443 8255; www.bendigoninesevenix.com.au; set meal \$89; 🕒 dinner Sat) On Saturday night a 1952 Melbourne W-class tram becomes a restaurant, but first there's a 6.30pm pre-dinner drink at the Wine Bank (see above).

ENTERTAINMENT

Pugg Mahones (☎ 5443 4916; 224 Hargreaves St; 🕒 10.30am-late Mon-Sat) With Guinness (and many other beers) on tap, Puggs has a thickly welcoming atmosphere, a beer garden and live music every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night till 3am.

Golden Vine (☎ 5443 6063; 135 King St; 🕒 noon-1am, noon-11pm Sun) One of the best venues, the Vine has popular jam sessions on Tuesday and top bands playing on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

Capital (☎ 5441 5344; www.bendigo.vic.gov.au; 50 View St) In the beautifully restored Capital Theatre, this is the main venue for the performing arts, with hundreds of performances and exhibitions each year.

Bendigo Cinema (☎ 5442 1666; www.bendigocinemas.com.au; 107 Queen St; adult/child \$13/10) This cinema shows mainstream Hollywood films in lovely surroundings several times a day.

Star Theatre (☎ 5446 2025; www.starcinema.org.au; Eaglehawk Town Hall; adult/child \$13/7; 🕒 from 1.30pm) Watch a flick with a drink in decadent arm-chair comfort.

SLEEPING

Fleece Inn (☎ 5443 3086; www.thefleeceinn.com.au; 139 Charlestown Rd; B&B dm/s/d \$33/44/74; 🕒) It's looking good! A 145-year-old pub turned accommodation only and sparkling. There's a new breakfast room, spacious bathrooms, wide balcony and a back courtyard with barbecues and games room. Swish up the original timber staircase to the smart upstairs bedrooms and lounges.

Old Crown Hotel (☎ 5441 6888, 0408-899 560; 238 Hargreaves St; s/d \$40/70) This place is great because it's right in the middle of everything. It has little old pub rooms with shared bathrooms and a TV lounge.

Shamrock Hotel (☎ 5443 0333; www.shamrockbendigo.com.au; cnr Pall Mall & Williamson St; r/ste from \$110/195; 🕒) No matter which of the rooms and suites you choose here, you'll feel pampered. Sit out

on the grand balcony and lord it over the street, or swan about like one of the famous guests who've been here before you.

Langley Hall (☎ 5443 3693; www.innhouse.com.au /langleyhall.html; 484 Napier St; B&B \$/d from \$120/185; 🏠) Built in 1904 for the first bishop of Bendigo, Langley Hall offers unfussy opulence: magnificent suites, expansive verandas, parlour, drawing room and billiard room. Or wander across the lawns to the fountain.

Lakeview (☎ 5445 5300; www.lakeviewresort.com.au; 286 Napier St; B&B d/f/spa room from \$130/160/175; 🏠 🚿) You've got Lake Weeroona across the road, spacious units around the central courtyard, shaded pool, piazza, and Quills, a fine-dining restaurant with a fab reputation.

Two new services offer stunning maisonettes, suites and apartments in the heart of the city (maisonette/ste/house from \$100/160/180):

Allawah Bendigo (☎ 5444 4655; www.allawahbendigo.com)

Bendigo Holiday Accommodation (☎ 5439 3588; www.bendigoholidayaccommodation.com)

GOLDFIELDS TOWNS

Ballarat and Bendigo are big and splendid, but the rest of central Victoria is dotted with former gold-mining communities with enchanting relics of the past and surprisingly modern wine and food. The world's largest alluvial nugget, the 72kg Welcome Stranger, was found in Moliagul in 1869 by John Deason and Richard Oates, who hid it for two days before concealing it in a wagon and taking it to **Dunolly**, where it was cut into pieces because it was too big to fit on the scales! See a replica of Welcome Stranger and the anvil it was cut up

on at Dunolly's **Goldfields Historical Museum** (☎ 5468 1405; admission free; Broadway; 🕒 1.30-4.30pm Sat & Sun).

Chewton (www.chewton.net) is a charming and historic township, with some interesting antique and bric-a-brac shops and a very sweet town hall. Towards **Castlemaine** is **Forest Creek Historic Gold Diggings** (☎ 5470 6200, 5471 1795; info@parks.vic.gov.au; Pyrenees Hwy), a section of an 1850s diggings. Take a self-guided tour and pan in the old sluicing dam (just in case you think the old-timers left anything behind). It might be a good idea to first check out how to do it at www.finders.com.au/gold-pages, or contact **Golden Triangle Tours** (☎ 0429-024834; www.goldentriangletours.com.au), who guarantee you'll find gold.

Creswick, just minutes from Ballarat and another old gold-mining town, hosts the fun **Forestry Fiesta** (www.creswickforestryfiesta.com) in late October. Lose yourself amidst climbing plants and delightful perfumed pathways at the botanical **Tangled Maze** (☎ 5345 2847; www.ballarat.com/tangledmaze.htm; cnr Midland Hwy & Smokeytown Rd, Creswick; adult/child/family \$8.50/7.50/30; 🕒 10am-5.30pm). There's 18 holes of minigolf in its landscaped setting between the café, bocce green, nursery and mystery maze puzzles. Alternatively, head north to **Smeaton** and the **Tuki Trout Fishing Complex** (☎ 5345 6233; www.tuki.com.au; Stoney Rises, Smeaton; adult/child \$8/4, rod \$5, family with rods \$30; 🕒 11am-6pm), catch a fish, and have it barbecued and served in the shearing-shed restaurant.

Arrive in quaint, quiet **Talbot** at night and visit the **Talbot Observatory** (☎ 5463 2029; www.talbottourism.org; 9 Camp St; adult/child \$5/2.50; 🕒 dusk Fri-Sun). You'll not only see the rings of Saturn and learn about Brown Dwarfs, but you can also join in a 'star-b-que'. Ring to inquire or to arrange your own times.

VICTORIA'S GOLD RUSH

When gold was discovered in New South Wales in May 1851, a reward was offered to anyone who could find gold within 300km of Melbourne. By June, a significant discovery was made at Clunes, a charming little town 32km north of Ballarat, and prospectors headed to Central Victoria.

Over the next few months, fresh gold finds were made almost weekly around Victoria. Then in September 1851 the greatest gold discovery ever known was made at Moliagul, followed by others at Ballarat, Bendigo, Mt Alexander and many more.

By the end of 1851 hopeful miners were coming from England, Ireland, Europe, China and the failing goldfields of California across the Pacific. During 1852 about 1800 people a week arrived in Melbourne ready to head north.

While the gold rush had its tragic side (including epidemics that swept through the camps), plus its share of rogues (including bushrangers who attacked the gold shipments), it ushered in a fantastic era of growth and prosperity for Victoria. Within 12 years, the population had increased from 77,000 to 540,000. Mining companies invested heavily in the region, the development of roads and railways accelerated, and huge shanty towns were replaced by Victoria's modern provincial cities, most notably Ballarat, Bendigo and Castlemaine, which reached the height of their splendour in the 1880s.

TRANSPORT: GOLDFIELDS TOWNS

Distance from Melbourne Castlemaine 120km, Maryborough 165km, Kyneton 80km

Direction North-northwest

Travel times Castlemaine 1½ hours, Maryborough two hours, Kyneton one hour

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) trains run between Melbourne (Southern Cross station) and Castlemaine (return \$22, 1½ hours, 15 daily) and Kyneton (return \$17, 1¼ hours, 16 daily). V/Line train/bus services run from Melbourne to Maryborough (\$32, three hours, seven daily) via Geelong, Ballarat or Castlemaine; and Daylesford (\$18, two hours, four daily) via Woodend or Ballarat. A free shuttle bus runs from Daylesford visitors centre to Hepburn Springs (four daily on weekdays). Castlemaine Bus Lines (☎ 5472 1455; www.castlemainebuslines.com.au) runs to/from Maldon (\$6, 20 minutes, weekdays only). Bendigo Airport Service (☎ 5439 4044; www.bendigoairport.com.au) runs direct from Melbourne Airport to Castlemaine (return \$65, 1½ hours, three daily) and Kyneton (return \$55, one hour); bookings essential.

Car Maryborough is an easy drive up the Western Hwy from Melbourne, turning off to Creswick and on to Maryborough. Kyneton is on the Calder Hwy a little further north; Castlemaine is just off the Calder Hwy.

Mt Franklin, 10km north of **Daylesford**, is an extinct volcanic crater. Walking trails take you through lush vegetation, a beautiful picnic area and a lookout. But wait, forget the walk because (oh joy!) the **Chocolate Mill** (☎ 5476 4208; www.chocmill.com.au; 5451 Midland Hwy, Mt Franklin; 🕒 10am-4.45pm Tue-Sun; talks 11am & 2pm) lets you see the little dollops being made, lets you buy as many as you want and serves the ultimate hot chocolate.

Just north of **Hepburn Springs** at **Shepherds Flat** are two interesting spots. **Cricket Willow** (☎ 5476 4277; www.cricketwillow.com.au; 355 Hepburn-Newstead Rd; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Sat-Sun) was where the Oz cricket bat was developed. Tour the workshop, willow tree nursery and museum, or improve your bowling. Across the road, **Lavandula** (☎ 5476 4393; www.lavandula.com.au; 350 Hepburn-Newstead Rd; adult/child \$3.50/1; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Sep-mid-Jul) is a Swiss-Italian farm and stone cottage where you can meet the farm animals, check out the gardens and produce, wander between lavender bushes and enjoy lunch in the Ticinese grotto.

DAYLESFORD & HEPBURN SPRINGS

pop 3600

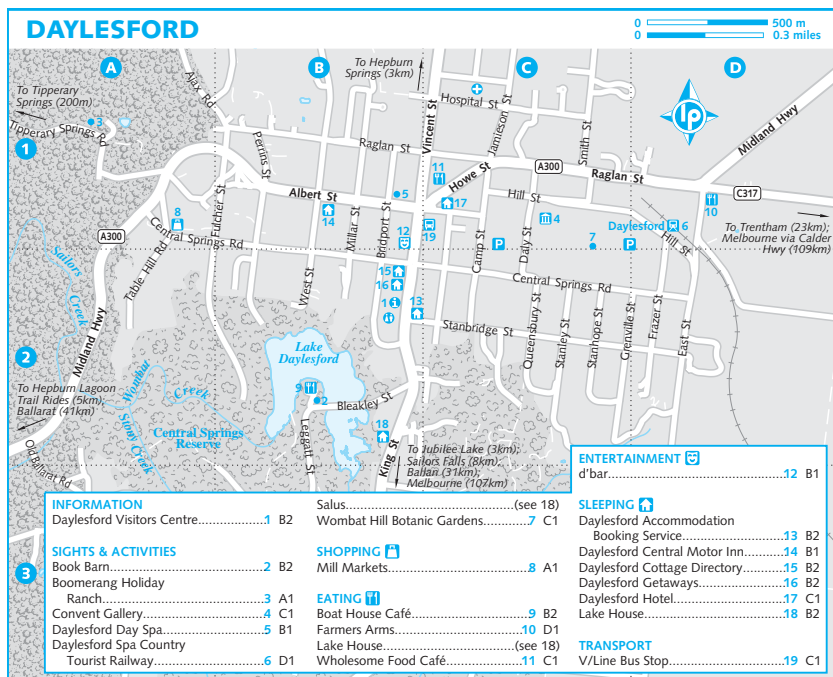
Set among the scenic hills, lakes and forests of the Central Highlands, delightful **Daylesford** and **Hepburn Springs** together form the 'spa centre of Victoria'. The health-giving properties of the area's mineral springs were first claimed back in the 1870s, attracting droves of fashionable Melburnians, the spas and relaxed scenic environment rejuvenating even the most stressed-out 19th-century city-dweller. The well-preserved and restored buildings

show the prosperity of these towns, as well as the lasting influence of the many Swiss-Italian miners who came to work the tunnel mines in the surrounding hills.

These days both towns are popular centres that boast everything you need to promote health and well-being, including fabulous foodie places. The local population is an interesting blend of alternative-lifestylers and old-timers; there's also a thriving gay and lesbian scene here.

Daylesford sits above pretty **Lake Daylesford**, a popular fishing and picnicking area; boats and kayaks are available for hire. Or hire canoes at **Jubilee Lake**, about 3km southeast of town, another pretty picnic spot.

Back in town, Vincent St is the major café strip. It turns into Hepburn Rd, which goes straight to the original spa resort. Daylesford's popular attraction, the **Convent Gallery** (☎ 5348 3211; www.conventgallery.com.au; cnr Hill & Daly Sts; admission \$4.50; 🕒 10am-6pm), is a massive 19th-century convent brilliantly converted into a craft and art gallery with soaring ceilings, grand archways, winding staircases and magnificent gardens. The gallery is on Wombat Hill and has an elegant café at the entrance. Also up on the hill is **Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens** (Central Springs Rd, Daylesford), with a picnic area and lookout tower from where you can get fine views of the countryside. Then take off into those hills on an old railway trolley or restored train: **Daylesford Spa Country Tourist Railway** (☎ 5348 1759; www.dsccr.com.au; Daylesford train station; rides adult/child/family \$8/6/20; 🕒 10am-2.45pm Sun) operates one-hour rides up to Bullarto. It's a buzz, but for extra sparkle go on the first Saturday of the month when the **Silver Streak Champagne Train Journey** (☎ 5348 3622; adult \$22; 🕒 5.30pm) indulges



you with champagne and finger food served on board.

Daylesford and Hepburn Springs are all about health, relaxation and the inner-self (see boxed text, [opposite](#)). You'll find traditional massage, reiki, shiatsu, spiritual healing, tarot readings and all sorts of other services. Or treat yourself on long or short [walking trails](#) to and from places like [Sailors Falls](#), [Tipperary Springs](#) and the [Central Springs Reserve](#); the visitors centre has maps and walking guides.

Horse-lovers will find interesting trails signposted throughout the region, including the [Major Mitchell Trail](#). Or head to the [Boomerang Holiday Ranch](#) (☎ 5348 2525; http://users.netconnect.com.au/~b_ranch/intro.htm; Ranch Rd, Daylesford; 1hr rides adult/child \$35/30), which runs leisurely trail rides in the state forest. Ten minutes from town, between a picturesque lagoon and the Wombat Forest, is [Hepburn Lagoon Trail Rides](#) (☎ 5345 7267; www.hepburnlagoonrides.com.au; 60 Telegraph Rd, Mount Prospect; 2hr lagoon/3hr wombat/5hr historic pub lunch rides \$80/100/150). Forget your sore bottom and enjoy the gourmet treat you'll be given on your return.

Book lovers must check out [Book Barn](#) (☎ 5348 3048; notlob@netconnect.com.au; cnr Leggatt & Bleakley Sts,

Daylesford; ☎ 11am-5.30pm), which has an unbelievable range of quality secondhand books.

If you feel like dancing, [d'bar](#) (☎ 5348 2982, 0417-544 035; 1st fl, 74 Vincent St, Daylesford; ☎ 8pm-1am Fri, 10pm-1am Sat), a lounge, club and bar, is a local favourite. The DJ plays dance music and R&B on Saturday, while the dinner crowd can listen to live jazz on Friday. For an old Aussie pub experience go out to the [Old Hepburn Hotel](#) (☎ 5348 2207; 236 Main Rd, Hepburn Springs). There's live music on Saturday from 9pm and Sunday from 4pm. For true suffering, there's karaoke on Friday.

The [Palais](#) (☎ 5348 4849; www.thepalais.com.au; 111 Main Rd, Hepburn Springs; mains \$15-25; ☎ dinner Thu-Sun), an atmospheric 1920s theatre, is now a restaurant, café and cocktail bar with lush lounge chairs and a pool table. Performance nights include well-known bands, or there are locals' nights when meals are \$10.

For a grand night, catch a movie at the [Grande](#) (☎ 5348 8500; www.thegrande.com.au; 1-3 Church Ave, Hepburn Springs; movie with snack/meal \$15/29; ☎ Wed & Sun). Classic, art-house or modern, it doesn't matter: it'll be a special experience in this 1920s cinema.

For shopaholics, the [Mill Markets](#) (☎ 5348 4332; www.millmarkets.com.au; 105 Central Springs Rd, Daylesford;

☎ 10am-6pm) is a playground of antiques and collectables.

Information

[Daylesford visitors centre](#) (☎ 5321 6123; www.visitdaylesford.com; 98 Vincent St, Daylesford; ☎ 9am-5pm) A cheery place, with stacks of information. It boasts a powerful search engine which will give you all your accommodation options, but doesn't handle bookings.

Eating

These two towns are walk-in gourmet treats. Vincent St in Daylesford has a great range of food joints, and when you've tried them all, go around the side streets for more, or head to the lake. Daylesford is the setting for two (yes two) of Victoria's handful of Michelin-starred restaurants: the Lake House and Farmers Arms.

[Wholesome Food Cafe](#) (☎ 5348 1030; 11 Howe St, Daylesford; mains \$10-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) This tiny place produces homemade comfort food, gluten-free and highly praised.

[Boat House Café](#) (☎ 5348 1387; 1 Leggatt St; mains \$16-24) In an old boatshed with views of ducks and swans.

[Lake House](#) (☎ 5348 3329; www.lakehouse.com.au; King St, Daylesford; mains \$36-38; ☎ breakfast, lunch &

dinner) Glorious dining room, picture windows showing Lake Daylesford, food to dream about and impressive service. An express lunch on the deck costs \$35 for two courses and wine.

[Farmers Arms](#) (☎ 5348 2091; www.farmersarms.com.au; 1 East St, Daylesford; mains \$26-36; ☎ dinner nightly, lunch Sat & Sun) Modern and classical meld tastefully here, both in the surroundings and the food.

Sleeping

This is tourist heaven, so many places charge more on weekends and stipulate a two-night stay. Budget accommodation is limited, so book ahead.

[Daylesford Wildwood Youth Hostel](#) (☎ 5348 4435; www.mooltan.com.au/www/wildwood.htm; 42 Main Rd, Hepburn Springs; dm/s/d from \$27/40/48) In a charming cottage with a grand lounge room, you'd never know it was a youth hostel (except for the members discount). Some rooms have grand bathtubs and garden views.

[Continental House](#) (☎ 5348 2005; www.continentalhouse.com.au; 9 Lone Pine Ave, Hepburn Springs; dm/s/d \$30/40/70) This rambling, timber guesthouse has a laid-back alternative vibe, a superb veranda with views over the hills and a music room. BYO linen. Concession rates available.

TAKING TO THE WATERS

Communities have always enjoyed bathing in sensual ways – consider the gorgeous bathhouse ruins in Pompeii and Ephesus – so why break the tradition? Simply come to Daylesford and Hepburn Springs, and enter a world of calm and sensual indulgence. Wrap yourself in a fluffy white dressing gown, slip your feet into a hydrotherapy sandals, sit back and relax. You're about to be bubbled and scrubbed, oiled and steamed – your every whim attended to before you've even thought of it.

At [Salus](#) (☎ 5348 3329; www.lakehouse.com.au; King St, Daylesford) the magic starts as you walk through a small rainforest to your exotic jasmine flower bath in a cedar-lined tree house overlooking the lake.

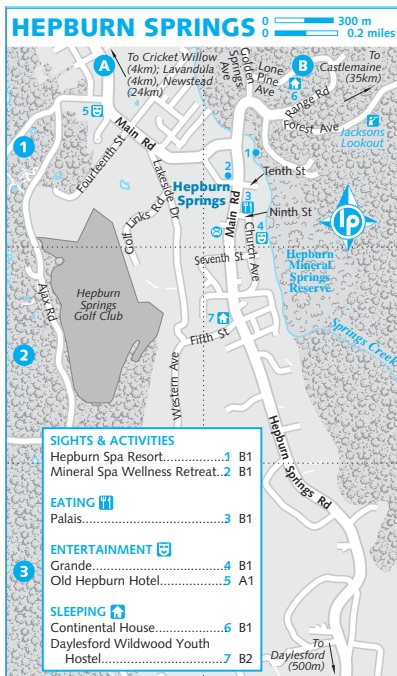
[Daylesford Day Spa](#) (☎ 5348 2331; www.daylesforddayspa.com.au; 25 Albert St, Daylesford) might start you off with a vitamin-rich mud coat and steam in a Neogi cocoon.

Or try [Mineral Spa Wellness Retreat](#) (☎ 5348 2100; www.mineralspa.com.au; Peppers Springs Retreat, 124 Main Rd, Hepburn Springs), where you can have an algae gel wrap, based on an ancient Chinese treatment, then move into the lavender steam room.

The [Hepburn Spa Resort](#) (☎ 5348 2034; www.hepburnspa.com.au; Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve, Hepburn Springs), where it all began in 1896, has been revamped and was due to reopen by the end of 2008. It will have plunge pools, floatation tanks, saunas, a swimming pool, salt pool and aero spa – every way of taking to the waters. Contact the resort for opening times.

The waters in the underground cavities of the area have been absorbing minerals and carbon dioxide for a million years. They're as pure as can be. Take a container and fill it at the public springs in the parks. After a drink, you'll sparkle both inside and out.

There are other boutique providers, and taking to the waters doesn't cost too much. Start with an outdoor sundeck hot tub (\$15 per hour), graduate to a treatment (from \$85 per hour) then extend your holiday so you can try them all. Enjoy!



On Saturday a vegan buffet dinner is served (\$15).

Daylesford Hotel (☎ 5348 2335; mev31112@bigpond.net.au; cnr Albert & Howe Sts, Daylesford; r from \$66) This old pub has small rooms upstairs that are prettily painted. Bathrooms are tiny but crisp, and there's a cosy guest TV room. The balcony is fantastic.

Daylesford Central Motor Inn (☎ 5348 2029; www.daylesfordcentralmotorinn.com; 54 Albert St, Daylesford; s/d/f from \$75/85/120; 🚰) Just an easy stroll from everything, the inn is comfortable and pretty.

Lake House (☎ 5348 3329; www.lakehouse.com.au; King St; B&B d from \$320; 🚰) You can't talk about Daylesford without mentioning the Lake House, set in rambling gardens with bridges, waterfalls and every service.

There are so many charming guesthouses, cottages and B&Bs that are bookable through agencies:

Daylesford Accommodation Booking Service (DABS; ☎ 5348 1448; www.dabs.com.au; 94 Vincent St, Daylesford)

Daylesford Cottage Directory (☎ 5348 1255; www.thespacountryholidayshop.com.au; 86 Vincent St, Daylesford)

Daylesford Getaways (☎ 5348 4422; www.dayget.com.au; 123 Vincent St, Daylesford)

KYNETON

pop 4300

Finding nuggets wasn't the only way to prosper during the gold rush. Kyneton was the main coach stop between Melbourne and Bendigo, and the centre for the farmers who were supplying the diggings with fresh produce. Piper St is a historic precinct lined with buildings made of local bluestone that are now tearooms, antique shops, museums and restaurants. There's a major street party here in November to start off **Budburst** (☎ 1800 244 711; www.budburst.com), a wine and food festival hosted throughout the region over several days. The old bank building (1855) is now **Kyneton Historical Museum** (☎ 5422 1228; 67 Piper St; adult/child \$3/1; 🕒 11am-4pm Fri-Sun) housing a display of local history items – the upper floor is furnished in period style.

Kyneton Fine China & Wattle Ceramics (☎ 5422 3337; www.wattleceramics.com.au; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) has a studio gallery where you can see artists at work or buy fine bone-china figurines and flowers.

Kyneton is famous for its daffodils. The annual **Kyneton Daffodil & Arts Festival** (www.kynetondaffodilarts.org.au) is held each September, with 10 days of gala evenings, markets, concerts, fairs, art shows and, of course, flower shows.

Don't miss the **Botanic Gardens** (Clowes St), beside the Campaspe River, that Baron Ferdinand von Mueller established in the 1860s.

Information

Kyneton visitors centre (☎ 5422 6110; 127 High St; 🕒 9am-5pm) Situated just off High St, on the southeastern outskirts of town. Ask for the brochures *Town Walks*, *Self Drive Tour* and *Campaspe River Walk*. You'll discover heaps here, including a barbecue area and rotunda at the start of the river walk.

Eating & Sleeping

The café scene in Kyneton will totally delight you and keep you eating out for days.

Glamorous one-hat **Royal George** (☎ 5422 1390; www.royalgeorge.com.au; 24 Piper St; mains \$27-32; 🕒 lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Wed-Sat) is a great addition to the town. Check out the stylish Rockville accommodation upstairs.

Kyneton and the surrounding areas are dotted with B&Bs and self-contained cottages, each one more elegant, peaceful and luxurious than the last. Check out www.travelvictoria.com.au/kyneton, or the staff at the visitors centre can give you the details.

CASTLEMAINE

pop 7250

Kick back and relax – you're in Castlemaine, a town where artists live amidst splendid architecture and gardens. Besides, this is where (surprise, surprise) Castlemaine XXXX beer-brewing company (now based in Queensland) and Castlemaine Rock, a hard-boiled lolly dating back to the gold rush days, began. It's also the 'Street Rod Centre of Australia', where hotrods have been built since 1962.

Farmers first moved into the district in the 1830s. But that all changed when gold was discovered at Specimen Gully in 1851. The Mt Alexander Diggings had 30,000 diggers working there and Castlemaine became the thriving marketplace for the goldfields. The town's importance waned as the surface gold was exhausted by the 1860s but, fortunately, the centre of town was well established by then and remains relatively intact.

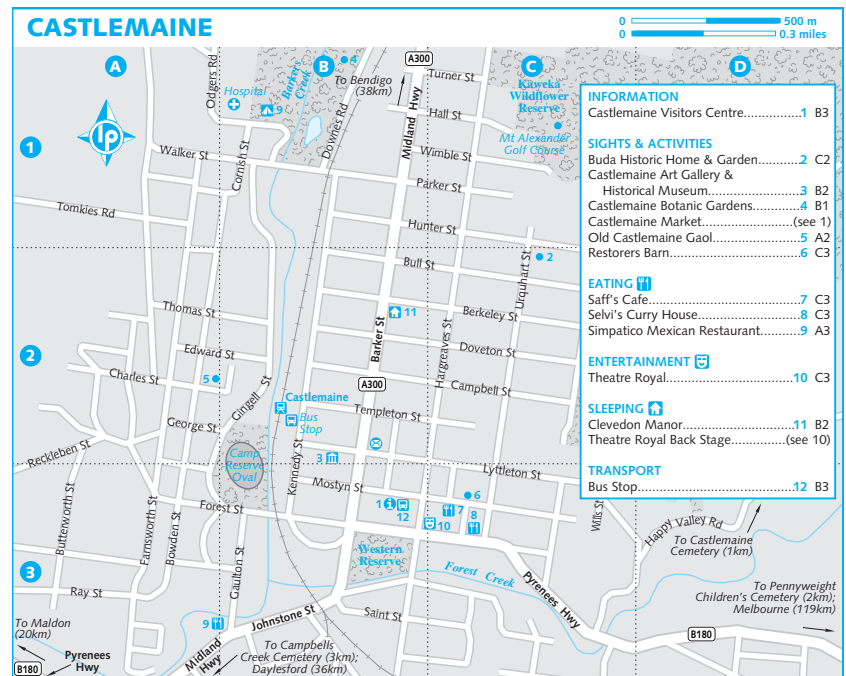
A superb Art Deco building houses the **Castlemaine Art Gallery & Historical Museum** (☎ 5472 2292; www.castlemainegallery.com; 14 Lytton St; adult/student/family \$4/2/8; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun), which features colonial and contemporary Australian art, including work by well-known

Australian artists such as Frederick McCubbin and Russell Drysdale. The museum, in the basement, provides an insight into local history, with costumes, china and gold mining relics.

At **Buda Historic Home & Garden** (☎ 5472 1032; www.budacastlemaine.org; cnr Hunter & Urquhart Sts; adult/child/family \$9/4/20; 🕒 noon-5pm Wed-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) there's an interesting mix of architectural styles: the original Indian-villa influence, and later Edwardian-style extensions dating from 1861. Home to a Hungarian silversmith and his family for 120 years, the house has permanent displays of the family's extensive art and craft collections, furnishings and personal belongings.

The imposing sandstone building of **Old Castlemaine Gaol** (☎ 5470 5311; www.oldcastlemainegaol.com.au; cnr Bowden & Charles Sts; adult/child \$11/5; cafe 🕒 11am-3pm Mon-Fri) looks down on the town, with panoramic views from the car park. Arrange a tour at the café and soak up the eerie atmosphere.

An institution in itself, the **Restorers Barn** (☎ 5470 5669; www.restorersbarn.com.au; 129-133 Mostyn St; 🕒 10am-5.30pm) is chock-full of interesting bric-a-brac and collectables.



LOOKING FOR ...

The cemeteries in central Victoria provide people with a chance to trace their past.

- **Castlemaine Cemetery** (Colles Rd, Castlemaine) brings researchers most weekends.
- **Campbells Creek Cemetery** (Cemetery Rd, Campbells Creek) has many old gravestones.
- **Goldfields Historical Chinese Cemetery** (Holdsworth Rd, Bendigo) is the oldest and most significant one in Australia, with a prayer oven where paper money for the spirits of the dead was burnt.
- **Pennyweight Children's Cemetery** (Chewton) is a small cluster of tiny graves of children who died during the gold-rush years.
- **Maryborough Cemetery** (Argyle St, Maryborough) has an old mausoleum and Chinese section.
- **Maldon Cemetery** (Nuggetty Rd, Maldon) has very old gravestones, and there's a whisper of ghosts.

Historic **Theatre Royal** (☎ 5472 1196; www.theatre.royal.info; 30 Hargreaves St; ☎ from 1.30pm daily, to 3am Fri & Sat) is a cinema with a difference. Patrons can dine while the movie is showing, then don their clubbing gear afterwards. There's a small bar, live bands, performances and functions. Check the program on the website.

When you've seen enough buildings, go to majestic **Castlemaine Botanic Gardens** (cnr Downes Rd & Walker St), amongst the oldest in Victoria, which strikes a perfect balance between sculpture and wilderness among awe-inspiring National Trust-registered trees. Electric barbecues are available, along with a children's plastic playground.

Information

Accommodation Booking Service (☎ 1800 171 888; free) Bookings essential during festival times.

Castlemaine visitors centre (☎ 5470 6200; www.maldoncastlemaine.com; Mostyn St; ☎ 9am-5pm) In the magnificent old Castlemaine Market, the town's original market building fronted with a classical Roman-basilica façade with a statue of Ceres, the Roman goddess of the harvest, on top. Ask about historic town walks, vehicle tours and buy yourself a gold-panning kit for \$8.

Festivals & Events

Browse through the calendar at www.maldoncastlemaine.com for all the events in the shire.

State Festival (www.castlemainefestival.com.au) One of Victoria's leading arts events, featuring theatre, music, art and dance; held in April in odd-numbered years.

Festival of Gardens (www.3.visitvictoria.com) Over 50 locals open their properties to the public; held in November in odd-numbered years

Eating & Sleeping

There are many neat eating places spread around town.

Saff's Cafe (☎ 5470 6722; 64 Mostyn St; mains \$14-24; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) A fun place with friendly people, local artwork on the walls, the best coffee in town and an interesting menu.

Selvi's Curry House (☎ 5470 5345; 81 Forest St; mains \$15-21; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun) Set in the lovely 1850s Globe Hotel with its superb garden courtyard. Bookings essential.

Simpatico Mexican Restaurant (☎ 5472 5222, 0448-695 162; 32 Johnstone St; mains \$13-26; ☎ dinner) Fab family-friendly Mexican, with delicious meals and fun music. You'll love it even if you don't love Mexican. The courtyard Cactus Bar opens till 1am and has live music Friday and Saturday.

There's stacks of accommodation around town. Try these glorious options:

Clevedon Manor (☎ 5472 5212; clevedon@netcon.net.au; 260 Barker St; s/d from \$70/100) Nestled among the antiques.

Theatre Royal Back Stage (☎ 5472 1196; www.theatre.royal.info; 30 Hargreaves St; B&B d \$195) In bed with the stars, where rates include as many movies as are screening.

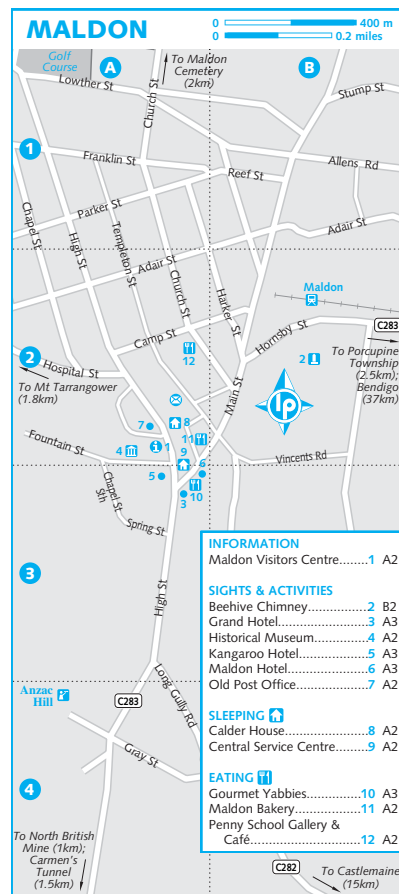
MALDON

pop 1200

The whole of Maldon is a well-preserved relic of the gold-rush era, with many fine buildings constructed from local stone. The population is a scant reminder of the 20,000 who used to work the local goldfields.

In 1966 the National Trust named Maldon Australia's first 'notable town', an honour given only to towns where the historic architecture is intact and valuable. In fact Maldon is so important in the history of Victoria that special planning regulations were implemented to preserve it for posterity.

All along High St are fascinating places: the **Maldon, Kangaroo and Grand Hotels**; the old marketplace that's now the **Historical Museum** (☎ 5474 1633; oldstyle@aapt.net.au; ☎ 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun); and the **Old Post Office** (95 High St), built in 1870, that was the childhood home of Henry



Handel Richardson. She (yes, she!) writes about it in her autobiography, *Myself When Young* (1950). On Main St, the **Maldon Bakery** (☎ 5475 2519; 51 Main St; pies from \$3.30; ☎ 7am-4pm) uses the original oven at the site of a bakery which opened around 1854.

You'll soon notice the 24m-high **Beehive Chimney**, just east of Main St, and it's worth taking the short trip south along High St to the **North British Mine**. Keep going south to **Carmen's Tunnel** (☎ 5475 2656; carmanstunnel@maldon.vicmail.net; off Parkin's Reef Rd; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ tours 1.30, 2.30 & 3.30pm Sat & Sun). The 570m-long tunnel, excavated in the 1880s, took two years to dig, yet produced only \$300 worth of gold.

Maldon train station was built in 1884. Harry Potter types can go by steam with the **Victorian Goldfields Railway** (☎ 5470 6658, 5475 2966; www.vgr.com

.au; return rides adult/child/family \$27/13/60; ☎ rides 10.30am, 1 & 3pm Wed & Sun) along the original track through the Muckleford Forest to Castlemaine. For a little extra, go first class (adult/child/family \$40/23/93, Sunday only) in an oak-lined viewing carriage. Magical!

Porcupine Township (☎ 5475 1000; www.porcupine.township.com.au; cnr Bendigo & Allens Rds; adult/child/family \$9/56/25; ☎ 10am-5pm) is a quaint, recreated gold-mining village (1835 to 1851) with old slab buildings, built on the site of the original township.

Information

Maldon visitors centre (☎ 5475 2569; www.maldon.castlemaine.com; 95 High St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Has internet access. Pick up the *Information Guide and Historic Town Walk* brochure, which guides you past some of the most historic buildings, or the *Taste of Gold food and wine trail* pamphlet (if you dare).

Festivals & Events

Twilight Food & Wine Festival (www.tasteofgold.com) Fine food, lanterns, live music and wine tasting in early January. Arrive by steam train: www.vgr.com.au.

Maldon Easter Fair (www.maldon.org.au/EasterFair) Held March or April.

Maldon Folk Festival (www.maldonfolkfestival.com) Maldon's main event, held in early November, is this fun festival, featuring a wide variety of world music.

Eating & Sleeping

Lots of cafés and tearooms line Main St, each with an interesting feature.

Gourmet Yabbies (☎ 0419-102 723; 44 Main St; meals \$7-12; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun) Features yummy yabby pies. Yabbies are farmed in the area.

Penny School Gallery & Café (☎ 5475 1911; www.penny.schoolgallery.com.au; 11 Church St; mains \$20-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Fri-Sun) Exhibitions of well-known artists' work look splendid against the original old school walls, with wood-lined ceilings.

Central Service Centre (☎ 5475 2216, 0418-166 353; cnr Main & High Sts; s/d \$50/85; ☎) For a bed in the centre of town, head to the petrol station. Don't worry, you're not bedded between oil drums, but in sweet cottagey rooms with views of the main street through the lace curtains.

Calder House (☎ 5475 2912; www.calderhouse.com.au; 44 High St; s/d from \$90/110) If you're in the mood for grand, you'll step back in time at this formal yet very inviting place.

There are plenty of self-contained cottages and charming B&Bs in restored buildings around town. Many are managed by these services:

Heritage Cottages of Maldon (☎ 5475 1094; www.heritagecottages.com.au; 41 High St).

Mount Alexander Accommodation Booking Service (☎ 1800 171 888, 5470 5866; www.maldoncastlemaine.com)

MARYBOROUGH

pop 7700

The district around Charlotte Plains was already an established sheep run, owned by the Simson brothers, when gold was discovered at White Hills in 1853 and Four Mile Flat in 1854. A police camp established at the diggings was named Maryborough. By the time gold mining had stopped being economical, Maryborough had developed a strong manufacturing base. Its alluvial goldfields still attract prospectors.

The town boasts plenty of impressive Victorian-era buildings, but **Maryborough Railway Station** (38 Victoria St; ☎ 10am-5pm, till 11pm Thu & Fri, closed Tue) leaves them all for dead. Built in 1892, the magnificent and inordinately large station was described by Mark Twain as 'a train station with a town attached'. Now, with a grand renovation, it houses a mammoth antique emporium, a regional wine centre and a café that specialises in savoury and sweet crepes (\$12 to \$14). Dinner and live music Thursday and Friday.

Built in the 1894, **Worsley Cottage** (☎ 5461 2800; www.vicnet.net.au/~mbhs; 3 Palmerston St; adult/child \$3/free; ☎ 10am-noon Tue & Thu, 2-4pm Sun) is the local historical society museum. Every room is furnished with pieces from the times, often donated by local people, and there's a large photographic collection. Records held here are used in family history research.

Maryborough Paramount Theatre (☎ 5460 5434; www.yourmovies.com.au; 56 Nolan St; adult/child \$13/9; ☎ 10.30am-9pm) screens the latest movies.

Information

Maryborough visitors centre (☎ 1800 356 511, 5460 4511; www.visitmaryborough.com.au; cnr Alma & Nolan Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm) Loads of helpful maps and friendly staff.

Festivals & Events

Highland Gathering (www.maryboroughhighlandsociety.com) Have a fling at Maryborough's Scottish festival, with races, stalls etc, held every New Year's Day since 1857.

Great Pacific Bike Ride (☎ 5461 0621) An endurance ride for veterans; held at Easter.

Energy Breakthrough Festival (www.racvenergybreakthrough.net) Focusing on alternative energy sources, school groups bring their inventive vehicles for the 24-hour and 16-hour (for juniors) RACV Energy Breakthrough grand prix; held late November.

Eating & Sleeping

High St is the foodie area, with cafés, restaurants, bakeries, takeaways, pubs and clubs.

Legenz Café Wine Bar (☎ 5460 4033; 190 High St; mains \$12-21; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Wed, dinner Thu & Fri) This will help you hit the spot.

There's lashings of accommodation in the district. Contact Maryborough visitors centre or browse its website (www.visitmaryborough.com.au).

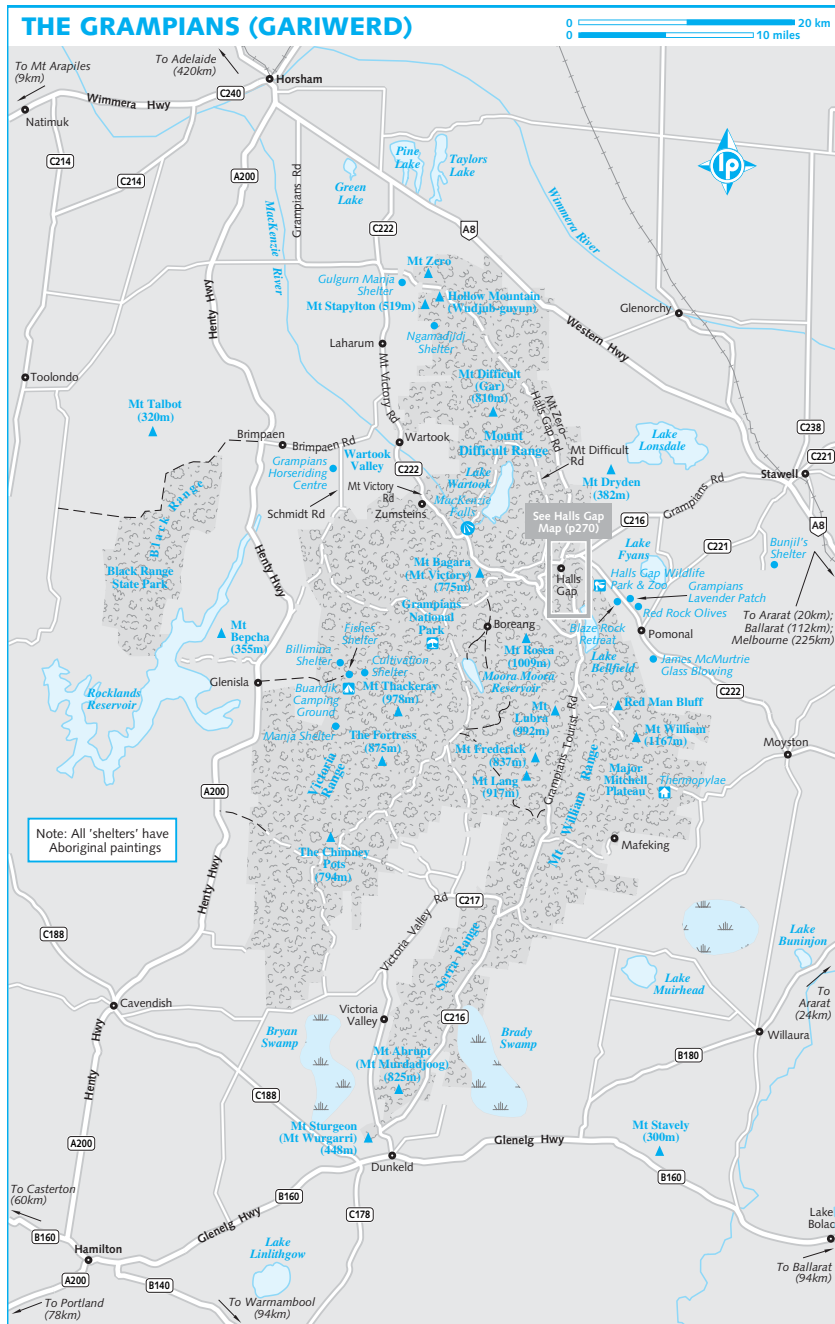
GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK (GARIWERD)

The Grampians are one of Victoria's most outstanding natural features and a wonderland of flora and fauna. Major Thomas Mitchell named the ranges the Grampians after the mountains in Scotland. In 1836 he eloquently described them as:

...a noble range of mountains, rising in the south to a stupendous height, and presenting as bold and picturesque an outline as a painter ever imagined.

It's really something to be surrounded by these spectacular shapes. Other attractions include an incredibly rich diversity of wild-life and plant species, glorious wild-flower displays, unique and unusual rock formations, Aboriginal rock art, fine bushwalking, an extensive network of creeks, streams, cascades and waterfalls (after rain!), and excellent abseiling and rock climbing.

Over 900 species of native trees, shrubs and wild flowers have been recorded here, with everything from fern gullies to red-gum forests. There are almost 200 species of bird, 35 different mammals, 28 reptiles, 11 species of amphibian and six types of freshwater fish; so you never know what you might see in your wanderings. It's worth visiting at any time of year, but it's best in spring when the wild flowers (including 20 species that don't exist



TRANSPORT: GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK (GARIWERD)

Distance from Melbourne Halls Gap 260km

Direction Northwest

Travel times Halls Gap 2½ hours

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs a train/bus service between Melbourne (Southern Cross station) and Halls Gap (return \$57, four hours, one daily) with connections at Ballarat and Stawell.

Car Take the Western Hwy past Ballarat to Ararat, then the scenic country road through Pomonal. It may be quicker to go to Stawell, then west to Halls Gap. A beautiful route is to head west to Dunkeld (from north Ballarat) then enjoy a dramatic entry into the ranges on Grampians Tourist Rd.

anywhere else in the world) are at their peak. Sadly, bushfires recently destroyed some areas, so ask Parks Victoria which roads, walks or camping grounds are open, as recovery continues. Years of very low rainfall means water is limited; you need to take your own supplies of water to picnic and camping grounds (and drinking water on walks, of course).

The four greatest mountain ranges are the **Mt Difficult Ranges** in the north, **Mt William Ranges** in the east, **Serra Ranges** in the southeast and **Victoria Ranges** in the southwest. They spread from Ararat to the Wartook Valley and from Dunkeld up almost to Horsham. **Halls Gap** lies in the Fyans Valley. The smaller **Wonderland Range**, close to Halls Gap, has some of the most splendid and accessible outlooks, scenic drives, picnic grounds and gum-scented walks, such as to the Pinnacle or to Silverband Falls.

There are more than 150km of well-marked **walking tracks**, ranging from half-hour strolls to overnight treks through difficult terrain. The walks all start from the various car parks, picnic grounds and camping areas. Wear appropriate footwear, take a hat and sunscreen, always carry water and let someone know where you're going (preferably the Parks Victoria rangers).

An extensive collection of **Aboriginal Rock Art** includes the site in Bunjil's Shelter, near Stawell, one of Victoria's most sacred indigenous sites. These paintings, in protected rock overhangs, are mostly hand prints, animal tracks and stick figures. They indicate the esteem in which these mountains are held by local indigenous communities, whose name for the region is Gariwerd.

Zumstein Reserve in the Western Grampians is named after Walter Zumstein, a beekeeper and naturalist who settled in the area in 1910 and developed it into a wildlife reserve. There are picnic facilities, free electric barbecues and a walking track that takes you to the base of the spectacular **MacKenzie Falls**.

Mt Stapyton and **Hollow Mountain** in the north are renowned as abseiling and rock climbing spots. Along the way there are walks to Briggs Bluff and the ruins of Heatherlie Quarry (origin of the sandstone in many of Melbourne's Victorian-era buildings), and there are several sites with Koorie rock paintings, canoe trees and middens.

The Grampians and Mt Arapiles region are the best in Victoria for rock climbing and abseiling, set up for people of any age. Member companies of the **Australian Climbing Instructors Association** (ACIA; ☎ 5387 1332; www.acia.com.au) offer everything from basic instruction to advanced guided climbs.

Hangin' Out (☎ 5356 4535, 0407-684 831; www.hanginout.com.au; rock climbing from \$65) will get you onto the cliff faces with Earl, who gives a lively interpretation of the surrounding country as you go. His adventure walk (full day \$125) includes rock climbs and abseils – an exhilarating Grampians experience.

The **Grampians Mountain Adventure Company** (GMAC; ☎ 5383 9218, 0427-747 047; www.grampiansadventure.com.au; half-day from \$60) tailors a rock climbing or abseiling adventure to suit you.

Bush walk, abseil, go wildlife-spotting and mountain biking with **Absolute Outdoors Australia** (☎ 5356 4556; www.absoluteoutdoors.com.au; Shop 4, Stony Ck, Halls Gap). Most activities cost \$35 for beginners, more for things like canoeing (\$40) and rock climbing (\$65). Motorcycles aren't permitted in the park.

Grampians Personalised Tours & Adventures (☎ 5356 4654, 0429-954 686; www.grampiantours.com; tours/walks from \$59/15) has a range of 4WD tours (with off-road options), adventures (half-day abseiling \$69) and discovery walks (full day/night \$125/15). Tours include stop-offs at picturesque locations.

Stawell Aviation Services (☎ 5357 3234; www.stawellaviation.com.au; per 3 people \$180) offers thrilling 40-minute joy flights over the ranges.

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63, 5361 4000; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Brambuk – the National Park & Cultural Centre, Halls Gap; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) Has an office in Halls Gap. There are

YUM IN YOUR TUM

As you wander through the townships of the region, check out the displays of local produce prepared by the **Grampians Produce Group** (www.grampiansproduce.com.au). There are jars of preserves, lavender honey, tea, olives, olive-oil products and chutneys. But best of all are the green eggs!

plenty of maps and brochures, and the rangers can advise you about where to go, where to camp and what you might see. They also issue camping permits and fishing permits (\$12) required for fishing in local streams.

CAMPING

Parks Victoria maintains more than 10 **camp sites** (☎ 5356 4381; camp sites per vehicle or 6 people \$12.50), with toilets, picnic tables and fireplaces (BYO water). Permits are required; you can register and pay at the office. Bush camping is permitted, except in the Wonderland Range area, around Lake Wartook and in parts of the Serra, Mt William and Victoria Ranges. Other areas, including Rosea camping ground and sites on the Major Mitchell Plateau, have recently closed due to bushfire damage – check with the rangers about what's off limits.

Pay close attention to fire restrictions – apart from the damage you could do to yourself and the bush, you can be jailed for lighting *any* fire, including fuel stoves, on days of total fire ban. For more information see p355.

If you like your camping luxurious, **Parkgate Resort** (☎ 1800 810 781, 5356 4215; www.grampians.com; Grampians Tourist Rd, Halls Gap; sites per 2 people from \$32, cabins/cottages d from \$75/105; ☎ ☎) is fabulous. It has everything for the kids, including a jumping pillow and playground. For adults there are tennis courts, a camp kitchen, games and lounge rooms and free barbecues.

HALLS GAP

pop 7700

This small township in the heart of the Grampians is a popular base. It has some shops, adventure activity offices, restaurants, cafés and a wide range of accommodation. The Halls Gap general store and post office has an ATM and Eftpos.

You'll be drawn to the amazing buildings of **Brambuk – the National Park & Cultural Centre** (☎ 5361 4000; www.brambuk.com.au; Grampians Tourist Rd; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), 2.5km south of Halls Gap.

The Cultural Centre (the back building) is run by five Koorie communities. Its flowing orange roof represents the open wings of the cockatoo; the curved seat is the caring embrace of Bunjil, the creator spirit; the ramp is the eel dreaming. The ceiling of the **Gariwerd Dreaming Theatre** (adult/child \$5/3) represents the southern right whale (totem of the Gundjimarra people). Here you can see Dreamtime stories of Gariwerd and informative films about the region. Displays in the centre of Koorie art, clothes, weapons and tools help raise visitors' awareness of their history. Also on offer are Koorie music and dance, a bush-tucker walk (adults \$6), boomerang throwing (adult/family \$4/10), painting (boomerang/message stone \$7/3), and holiday programs. Planted outside are native plants used for food and medicine. A two-hour **rock art tour** (adult/child \$25/10) to Bunjil's Shelter leaves at 9.30am; bookings essential.

The roof of the front building represents eel-fishing nets. There's an information desk here and a Parks Victoria office (*opposite*), plus interesting educational displays covering the natural features and the history of the Grampians, a souvenir shop and **Brambuk Bush Tucker Café** (meals \$8-19; ☎ 9am-4pm) that spills out onto a lovely deck overlooking the gardens.

Keep on towards Lake Bellfield to the world-class **Grampians Adventure Golf** (☎ 5356 4664; www.grampiansadventuregolf.com.au; Grampians Tourist Rd; adult/child/family \$12/9/38; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon). This is not to be missed – a hectare of 18-hole minigolf with fairways such as 'Grand Canyon' where you squeeze down between bushes. There's a licensed café (lunch around \$7) in which to recover after your kids have trounced you.

Information

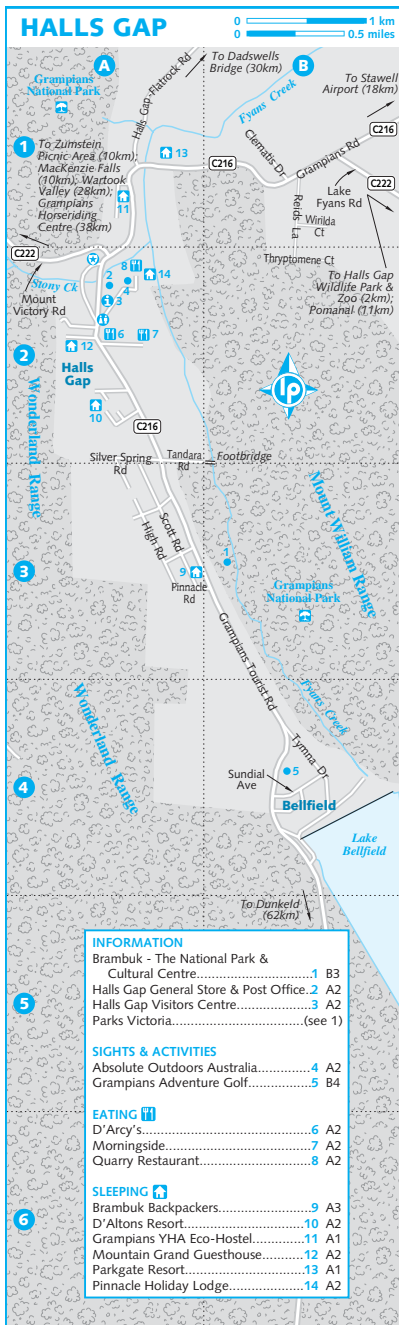
Accommodation Booking Service (☎ 1800 065 599; free) Rates vary with season.

Halls Gap visitors centre (☎ 1800 065 599, 5356 4616; www.grampianstravel.com, www.visithallsgap.com.au; Centenary Hall, Grampians Tourist Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) The staff here are great, and can book tours, accommodation and activities for you.

Parks Victoria (*opposite*)

Festivals & Events

Halls Gap is the focal point for local festivities: **Grampians Jazz Festival** (www.grampiansjazzfestival.com.au) Held in early February.



Grampians Gourmet Weekend (www.grampiansgreatescape.com.au) On the first weekend in May.

Halls Gap Wildflower Exhibition (www.visithallsgap.com.au) Held in October.

Halls Gap Film Festival (☎ 5356 4616) Held in November.

Eating

Eateries are mostly along Grampians Tourist Rd and beside the boardwalk along pretty Stony Creek, where the bakery makes the best vanilla slices ever, and the fudge factory can bring your diet undone.

Morningside (☎ 5356 4222; Grampians Tourist Rd; continental/cooked \$10/14; ☺ breakfast) A quiet spot, perfect for early morning coffee and a heap of breakfast bacon.

Quarry Restaurant (☎ 5356 4858; Stony Ck; mains \$18-32; ☺ breakfast & dinner daily, lunch Fri-Mon) It's in a good position to watch the creek gurgling past, except the creek's been dry for a while. Never mind - there's a lovely casual atmosphere and good food.

D'Arcy's (☎ 5356 4344; Grampians Tourist Rd; mains \$20-33; ☺ dinner) An elegant burgundy-and-white restaurant, D'Arcy's has a good reputation, an interesting menu and a wide range of wines from the Grampians and Pyrenees wineries.

Sleeping

There are several backpacker places in town, all shiny, clean and welcoming.

Brambuk Backpackers (☎ 5356 4250; www.brambuk.com.au; Grampians Tourist Rd; B&B dm/d/family from \$19/55/80; ☑) Across from the cultural centre, and recently redecorated to give a sense of nature and Koorie art. Rooms all have en suites and the lounge is utterly comfortable.

Grampians YHA Eco-Hostel (☎ 5356 4544; www.yha.com.au; cnr Grampians Tourist Rd & Buckler St; dm/s/d/f \$23/52/57/77) Designed to use less power and water, with lots of light, views, interesting spaces and a very smart kitchen. Keep an eye on the kitchen bench: your host puts out freshly-laid eggs and other eco-goodies for free.

Mountain Grand Guesthouse (☎ 5356 4232; www.mountaingrand.com; Grampians Tourist Rd; B&B s/d \$98/128) It's a gracious, old-fashioned timber guesthouse, peaceful and friendly, with welcoming guest lounges. Bedrooms are fresh and colourful, with their own spacious bathrooms. Ask about dinner and getaway packages; the restaurant is grand.

Pinnacle Holiday Lodge (☎ 5356 4249; www.pinnacleholiday.com.au; 21-45 Heath St; d \$92-151; ☑) Right in the centre of Halls Gap, this gorgeous property sits stylishly behind the Stony Creek shops. It has everything: indoor pool, tennis courts and spacious modern units including self-contained units and two-bedroom family units (from \$142 for four people).

D'Alton's Resort (☎ 5356 4666; www.daltonresort.com.au; 48 Glen St; studio/deluxe cottages from \$100/140) These delightful timber cottages, with their little verandas, spread up the hill between the gums and kangaroos. They have cosy fires and big lounge chairs.

AROUND HALLS GAP

Southeast of Halls Gap on Pomonal Rd, set in natural bush, is the **Halls Gap Wildlife Park & Zoo** (☎ 5356 4668; www.hallsgapwildlife.com; Pomonal Rd; adult/child/family \$12/6/30; ☺ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon). Wallabies, grey kangaroos, deer and peacocks get up close and personal - very interested in having you feed them (all tickly on your fingers). Animals like wombats, possums and spider monkeys are behind barriers. There are free tours of the property (book ahead), a kiosk and playground.

Further down the Ararat-Halls Gap road there's a lot of pampering happening. **Blaze Rock Retreat** (☎ 5356 6171; www.blazerock.com.au; 3757 Ararat-Halls Gap Rd; treatments from \$45) will treat your body. Take a Tasmanian peat mud bath (30 minutes \$75) or have a hot rock massage (90 minutes \$120).

Across the road, Jocelyn at **Grampians Lavender Patch** (☎ 5356 6285; www.glp.net.au; 3616 Ararat-Halls Gap Rd; ☺ 10am-5pm Sep-May) will feed you lavender ice cream. Sample the honeys, jams and jellies then look around the farm.

Next door, **Red Rock Olives** (☎ 0401-700 868; www.redrockolives.com.au; cnr Ararat-Halls Gap Rd & Tunnel Rd; ☺ 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) has olive products to sample and buy, or just wander around the olive groves.

Just past Pomonal is **James McMurtrie Glass Blowing** (☎ 0427-949 921; www.jamesmcmurtrie.com.au; 163 Springwood Hill Rd; ☺ 10am-4pm most days). See glassware being formed and admire or buy the artistic pieces.

Lush **Wartook Valley** runs down the Grampians' western foothills: enjoy spectacular views of the mountains as you travel through. The unsealed roads and tracks lead past little creeks, thundering (well, tinkling) waterfalls and idyllic picnic spots. The **Grampians Horseriding**

Centre (☎ 5383 9255; www.grampianshorseriding.com.au; 430 Schmidt Rd, Brimpaen, Wartook Valley; 2hr rides \$65; ☺ 10am & 2pm) will give you a horse riding adventure around a grand property with sweeping views, lakes and wandering bush tracks. Ask about the elegant accommodation.

Down south, the Grampians Tourist Rd from **Dunkeld** gives you a glorious passage into the Grampians; the cliffs and sky opening up as you pass between Mt Abrupt and Mt Sturgeon. Dunkeld has a good hotel, café scene, craft shops and many accommodation options. The town was established in the 1860s, but much of it was destroyed by bushfires in 1944. The bright **Historical Society Museum** (cnr Wills & Templeton Sts, Dunkeld; admission \$2; ☺ 1-5pm Sun) in an old bluestone church has a local history collection, including Aboriginal artefacts and old photographs. The **Dunkeld visitors centre** (☎ 5577 2558; www.sthgrampians.vic.gov.au; Parker St, Dunkeld; ☺ 9am-5pm) has useful information.

LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

If you're expecting rolling sand dunes, you are in for a surprise: the soil here is sandy, but the park is rich in flora and fauna that thrive in the dry environment. There are over 670 indigenous plant species here, and in spring and early summer the landscape is transformed into a colourful wonderland of wildflowers. Over 220 species of birds have been recorded here, and you may also see possums, kangaroos and reptiles such as bearded dragons and stumpy-tailed lizards. The best-known resident is the mallee fowl, an industrious bird that can be seen in an aviary at the Little Desert Lodge.

The park covers a huge 132,000 hectares, and the vegetation varies substantially due to the different soil types, climate and rainfall in each of its three blocks (central, eastern and western). The rainfall often reaches 600mm per year, but summers are dry and very hot.

In the late 1960s the state government announced a controversial plan to clear the area for agriculture. Conservationists and environmentalists protested, and the Little Desert became a major conservation issue. Finally, it was declared a national park and was expanded to its present size in 1986.

The Nhill road into the park is sealed and the road from Dimboola is gravel, but in the park the tracks are mostly sand - only suitable

TRANSPORT: LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

Distance from Melbourne Dimboola 360km, Nhill 398km

Direction Northwest

Travel times Dimboola 3¾ hours, Nhill four hours

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) services start with trains between Melbourne (Southern Cross station) and Geelong/Ballarat or Bendigo, then coach direct or via Ararat or Horsham: to Dimboola (return \$58, four to seven hours, five daily); to Nhill (\$60; 4½ to eight hours, five daily). Times depend on route and changeovers. The *Overland* train will stop, by request when you buy your ticket, at Dimboola at about 2.30am.

Car Dimboola and Nhill are a leisurely drive up the Western Hwy from Melbourne, past Ballarat. They offer easy access to the park.

for 4WD vehicles or walking. Some are closed to 4WDs in the wet season (July to October).

If you want a brief introduction to the park there are several well-signposted walks: south of Dimboola is the **Pomponderoo Hill Nature Walk**, south of Nhill is the **Stringybark Nature Walk** and south of Kiata is the **Sanctuary Nature Walk**. Other longer walks leave from the camping ground south of Kiata, including a 12km trek south to the Salt Lake. Always carry water and notify the rangers at **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5389 1204) before you set out. The rangers will also give you advice on where to go and what to look for at different times of the year.

There's **camping grounds** (camp sites per 2 people \$12) with drinking water, toilets, picnic tables and fireplaces. Or you can **bush camp** in the central and western blocks; see the rangers first.

A welcoming retreat on the northern edge of the desert, **Little Desert Lodge** (☎ 5391 5232; www

.littledesertlodge.com.au; B&B s/d \$90/115; 🏠) is run by Whimpey Reichelt (one of Victoria's 'living treasures'). It includes a camping ground (powered site \$18.50), bunk rooms (bed \$20, BYO linen), restaurant open for all meals (set dinner \$25), barbecue and mallee fowl aviary (tours adult/child \$10/5). Whimpey takes visitors on 4WD tours (½-¾-day \$50/75) and evening spotlight walks.

INFORMATION

Wail Park Office (☎ 5389 1204; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Nursery Rd, Dimboola) Off the Western Hwy south of Dimboola.

GATEWAY TOWNS

The delightful town of **Nhill**, 16km north of the Little Desert Lodge, is an interesting place

to base yourself. Producing ducks for Victorian gourmet experiences is the town's big industry. It's also a wheat industry centre – you'll see huge grain silos and flour mills around town. **Nhill visitors centre** (☎ 5391 3086; www.hindmarsh.vic.gov.au; Victoria St; ☎ 9am-5pm; 🏠) is by the rotunda. The Nhill-Harrow Rd heads south through the centre of the Little Desert National Park.

On the eastern edge of the Little Desert, beside the Wimmera River, **Dimboola** offers another base that's got loads to offer. **Riverside Host Farm** (☎ 5389 1550; www.visitvictoria.com/riversidehostfarm; 150 Riverside Rd; unpowered sites \$18; cabins from s/d \$55/77; 🏠) is a working farm that spreads along the riverbank. When the river is flowing you can take a boat tour from here into the Little Desert (per person \$8 an hour) or paddle the farm's canoes. Just out of town towards the park is **Pomponderoo Bush Retreat** (☎ 5389 1957, 0419-824 618; www.pomponderoobushretreat.com; 345 Horseshoe Bend Rd; d/tr from \$110/125; 🏠 🏠), very natural but with all the luxuries in timber cottages. The owners also run tours into the desert (per person \$20) and are busy producing Pomponderoo Boosh

Produce like wattle-seed coffee from their native food forest.

Horsham, first settled in 1841, makes a good base for exploring local national and state parks. The main shopping strip has postal and banking facilities, supermarkets and plenty of other shops and eateries. **Horsham visitors centre** (☎ 1800 633 218, 5382 1832; www.grampianslittledesert.com.au; 20 O'Callaghan's Pde; ☎ 9am-5pm) has information on the surrounding areas.

While you're in town, visit the **Horsham Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 5362 2888; www.horshamartgallery; 80 Wilson St; adult/child \$2/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun), which houses the Mack Jost Collection of significant Australian artists, including works by Rupert Bunny, Sir Sidney Nolan, John Olsen and Charles Blackman. Horsham's **Botanic Gardens** (Firebrace St) were established in the 1870s and designed by the curator of Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens, William Guilfoyle. The **Wool Factory** (☎ 5382 0333; 134 Golf Course Rd; tours adult/child \$5/1.50; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm, tours 10.15am, 11am, 1.30pm & 2.30pm) produces ultrafine Merino wool; there's a walk-through sheep shed and shop where you can buy wool products.

A RARE OLD BIRD

The rare mallee fowl is one of Australia's most fascinating birds. The mature birds are about the size of a small turkey, with wings and backs patterned in black, white and brown, which helps to camouflage them in the mallee scrub. They can fly short distances if necessary. Until the establishment of the Mallee's national parks, the mallee fowl was threatened with extinction.

The life cycle of the mallee fowl is an amazing story of survival and adaptation. It is the only one of the world's 19 mound-building birds that lives in an arid area, and it has developed incredibly sophisticated incubation methods to maintain its egg mounds at stable temperatures until the eggs hatch.

The male bird spends up to 11 months preparing the mound for the eggs. First he digs a hole, or opens up an old mound, fills it with leaves, bark and twigs, and covers the lot with sand to create the main egg chamber. When the mound has been saturated by rain so the organic material starts to decompose, he covers it all with more sand – by now it can be up to 1m high and 5m in diameter – and tests the core temperature daily by sticking his beak inside. Once the temperature is stable at 33°C, he lets the female know that she can start laying her eggs.

The female lays between 15 and 20 eggs, which hatch at various stages over spring and summer. The male continues to check the mound temperature daily, and if it varies from 33°C he adjusts it by covering the mound or removing sand.

After hatching, the chicks dig their way up to the surface, can run within a few hours and fly on their first day out. However, the mortality rate is very high. The parents don't recognise or help their own young and, while an average pair of mallee fowl will produce around 90 chicks in their lifetimes, only a few will survive to reproduce.

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