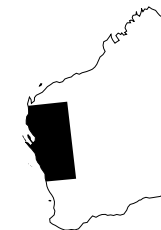


Central West Coast



The sunny Central West Coast extends north from the seaside fishing towns of Dongara-Port Denison on the Batavia Coast through splendid Shark Bay to the fertile Carnarvon and arid Gascoyne region. It's an enormous area incorporating scenery as varied as rugged coastline, rolling green country, craggy bushland and tropical plantations.

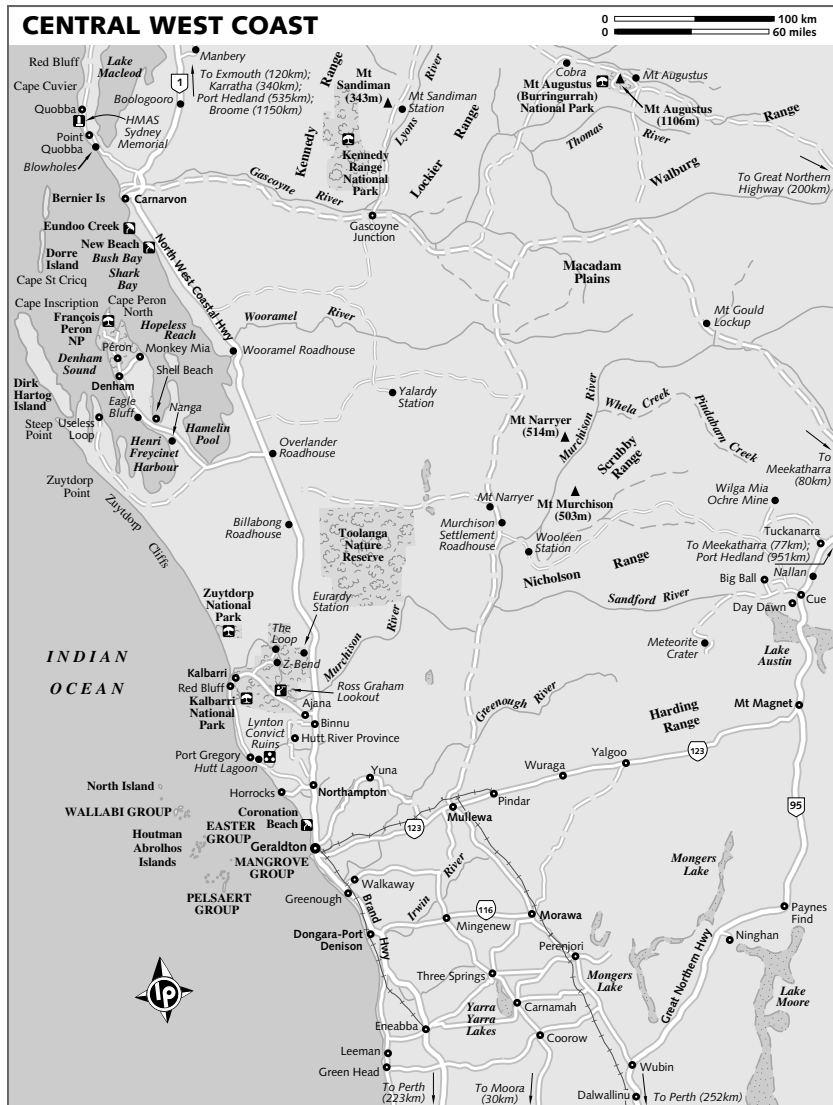
The windswept Batavia Coast and fishing town of Geraldton is beloved by windsurfers and anglers, while sun-worshippers are happier heading to the beaches of Monkey Mia or Kalbarri, which has the added attraction of a stunning national park surrounding it (think deep river gorges and steep sea cliffs, awash with wonderful wildflowers in spring).

Shark Bay's World Heritage listing recognises its unique natural conditions – pristine turquoise waters, submerged sea-grass meadows and prolific marine life and wildlife. And it really is a special place. Famous for Monkey Mia's visiting dolphins and its large dugong population, and, more significantly for geologists, its ancient stromatolites, the area also has a rich Aboriginal history and culture that's equally as precious. It's now even more accessible to travellers through wonderful indigenous tourism initiatives, and bush walks like *Wula Guda Nyinda* – it means 'you come this way'. So, what are you waiting for?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Canoe the golden gorges of the Murchison River at **Kalbarri National Park** (p190)
- Crunch over millions of metres-deep miniature cockle shells at **Shell Beach** (p193)
- Learn to love bush tucker and animal tracking on a **Wula Guda Nyinda walk** (p196) around Monkey Mia
- Spot dolphins, dugongs, turtles and rays on a **Monkey Mia cruise** (p196)
- Shudder at tales of shipwrecks at Geraldton's **Western Australian Museum** (p63)
- Sense the pioneering spirit at windswept **Central Greenough Historic Settlement** (p185), Greenough
- Tick off architectural miracles on **Hawes' Holy Heritage Trail** (p188), Geraldton
- Untangle cultural complexities at Denham's cutting-edge **Shark Bay World Heritage Discovery Centre** (p194)





BATAVIA COAST

The coastline from Dongara-Port Denison to Kalbarri has a rich history. Reminders of early European contact with Australia are prominent features, from the shipwrecks littering the coast, with the calamitous story of

the *Batavia* recounted at Geraldton's riveting museum, to the slice of 19th century pioneering life preserved in charming Greenough.

DONGARA-PORT DENISON

☎ 08 / pop 3000

The tranquil seaside towns of Dongara and Port Denison, 359km from Perth, are treas-

ured for their pristine beaches and laid-back atmosphere. Dongara's main street, Moreton Tce, is shaded by century-old fig trees, which set this old town apart from its sibling. There are superlative beaches for swimming, surfing, fishing and strolling, such as South Beach, Seaspray Beach and Surf Beach.

Information

Moreton Tce has several banks with ATMs. **Telecentre** (☎ 9927 2111; 11 Moreton Tce; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Internet.

Visitors centre (☎ 9927 1404; www.irwin.wa.gov.au/tourism; 9 Waldeck St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) In Dongara's old post office.

Sights & Activities

Pick up the *Walk Dongara-Denison* brochure from the visitors centre and choose from 12 historic or nature-based rambles. Wildlife lovers should amble the **Irwin River Nature Trail** for black swans, pelicans and cormorants.

Wonderful historic buildings include restored **Russ Cottage** (Point Leander Dr; adult/child \$2.50/50; ☎ 10am-noon Sun), built in the late 1860s, with a kitchen floor made from compacted anthills, and the sandstone **Royal Steam Flour Mill** (Brand Hwy). Its steam engines ground wheat from surrounding farms between 1894 and 1935. In the old police station, the cells of the **Irwin District Museum** (☎ 9927 1404; admission \$2.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) hold interesting historical displays.

Denison Beach Marina brims with boats that haul crayfish, the towns' livelihood. Join the free 2pm tours of the bustling **Live Lobster Logistics Centre** in season (November to January) and enjoy the gorgeous views from the **Fisherman's Lookout Obelisk** at Port Denison.

Sleeping

Dongara Denison Tourist Park (☎ 9927 1210; www.dongaratouristpark.com.au; 8 George St, Port Denison; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/27, on-site vans \$65, chalets \$150) Backing on to beautiful South Beach, this verdant park in natural bushland has a good campers kitchen, free barbecues and a lush pergola dining area. The swish fully equipped chalets are ideal for families.

Midcoast Dongara Backpackers (☎ 9927 1581; dongarabackpack@westnet.com.au; 32 Waldeck St, Dongara; dm/s/d \$20/30/50; train s/d/carriage \$20/50/90) The highlight of this friendly, relaxed hostel, with pleasant gardens, is the opportunity to stay in an atmospheric 1906 train carriage (which sleeps

eight) – it's very cool! And a great deal cooler if a group of friends rent the whole thing.

Dongara Denison Beach Holiday Park (☎ 9927 1131; www.dbeachholidaypark.com; 250 Ocean Drive, Port Denison; unpowered/powerd sites \$30/35, on-site vans \$80, chalets \$135) Waterfront chalets have splendid sea views of the beach just a few steps away, but equally as impressive are the van sites with ensuite with power/TV sockets, private bathrooms and storage! Discounts midweek.

Lazy Lobster (☎ 9927 2177; lazylobster@bigpond.com.au; 45 Hampton St, Port Denison; d units \$80, chalets \$90; ☎) A home away from home, these comfy units and chalets are fully self-contained although their suburban street location is rather uninspiring.

Port Denison Holiday Units (☎ 9927 2544; 14 Carnarvon St, Port Denison; d \$90; ☎) These spotless spacious units are just a block from the beach; ask for a room at the back with marina views.

our pick Priory Lodge (☎ 9927 1090; priory@dodo.com.au; 11 St Dominics Rd, Dongara; d/f \$70/90; ☎) The Priory Lodge started life as a hotel in 1881, before being bought by the Dominican sisters in 1890 to serve as a nunnery and, from 1928, a ladies college. It boasts charming period furniture, polished floorboards, wonderful old black-and-white photos and wide verandas. Add to that a swimming pool, leafy grounds, and a charming restaurant. The atmospheric bar hosts regular live music, traditional roast dinners are served on Sundays, and Friday and Saturday are pizza nights. Did we mention the outback-style wood-fire pizza oven?

Eating

Coffee Tree Book Café (☎ 9927 1400; 8 Moreton Tce, Dongara; light meals \$6-16; ☎ 8am-5pm) Enjoy delicious sandwiches, salads and cakes as you browse a book under the shade of a Moreton Bay fig tree at this delightful secondhand bookshop-cum-café.

Dongara Hotel Motel (☎ 9927 1023; 12 Moreton Tce, Dongara; mains \$11-24; ☎ 11am-2pm & 6-9pm) The lacklustre dining room at Dongara's oldest pub (1867) serves up hearty portions of counter meal standards, from steak and chips to seafood baskets, and crayfish in season.

Toko's (☎ 9927 1497; 38 Moreton Tce, Dongara; mains \$16-25; ☎ Wed-Sun) This rustic corner BYO restaurant does great global standards for lunch and dinner, from Asian snacks (samosas, tempuras etc) to Italian pastas, plus seasonal seafood. Try the local farmed marron with honey, chilli and ginger sauce (\$14.50).

Southerleys (☎ 9927 2207; Point Leander Dr, Port Denison; mains \$17-28; ☎ noon-2pm & 6pm-late) Soak up the rays on the sun terrace while you enjoy fresh seafood at this casual seafront bistro. Licensed and BYO.

There's a supermarket and takeaways on Moreton Tce and a good bakery on Waldeck St in Dongara, while a coffee shop, bakery,

liquor shop and general store make up the **Port Store** (52 Point Leander Dr) in Port Denison.

Getting There & Around

Dongara-Port Denison is accessible via the Brand Hwy (National Hwy 1) or the Indian Ocean Drive from Cervantes, or via the Midlands Rd (State Hwy 116).

Daily **Greyhound** (☎ 13 20 30) buses to Broome (\$293, 15 hours) and Perth (\$44, six hours) stop at the visitors centre. **Transwa** (☎ 1300 6622 05; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) goes to Perth (\$44, six hours) from the visitors centre.

GREENOUGH

☎ 08 / pop 100

Historic, windswept Greenough was once an active administrative centre in its 1860s heyday. Its traditional stone buildings have been preserved at the charming **Central Greenough Historic Settlement** (☎ 9926 1084; Brand Hwy; adult/child/family \$5/2.50/12; ☎ 9am-4pm), which also serves as a visitors centre. Buy the *Greenough Walkaway Heritage Trail* booklet (\$4) to get the most out of your meander around the atmospheric hamlet. Allow an hour to explore the renovated old schoolhouse, jail, courthouse, police station, churches and cottages. Don't miss the wonderful exhibition in the community hall using video, photos and historic documents to share fascinating stories about everyday life in Greenough. The visitors centre has a stylish café serving light meals and delicious cakes, selling local products from beeswax candles to handmade soaps, and housing a slick interpretative display.

The **Pioneer Museum** (☎ 9926 1058; Phillips Rd; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 10am-4pm) recreates a day in the life of an 1880s homestead with kitsch displays featuring mannequins representing the Maley family, the original owners.

Hampton Arms Inn (☎ 9926 1057; hamptonarms@westnet.com.au; Company Rd; s/d \$65/85) is a classic Aussie inn (1863) with delightfully old-fashioned rooms, a cluttered bookshop crammed with rare and out-of-print books, a quaint restaurant (mains \$21 to \$32), and one of those old bars you don't want to leave.

Transwa (☎ 1300 6622 05; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) services on the Kalbarri-Geraldton route stop at Greenough on the Brand Hwy daily.

GERALDTON

☎ 08 / pop 19,054

Capital of the Midwest, Geraldton has a unique ambiance that we attribute to its odd combination of architecture – classic 19th century pubs, a European-influenced cathedral, faded 1950s rural vernacular, and sleek contemporary design. Ultimately, though, it still feels like a seaside holiday town, especially when you spot the candy-striped light-

house, set your eyes on the catch of the day, wander the windswept beaches – a paradise for wind- and kite-surfers – and breathe in that salty sea air.

Information

There are several banks with ATMs along the main street, Marine Tce.

Book Tree (176 Marine Tce; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Scour the floor-to-ceiling shelves of preloved books for some road-reading.

Cup of Life Book Café (☎ 9965 5088; Marine Tce Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Good selection of books, kids' playpen, café and internet terminals.

Geraldton Regional Hospital (☎ 9956 2222; Shenton St; ☎ 24hr) Emergency facilities.

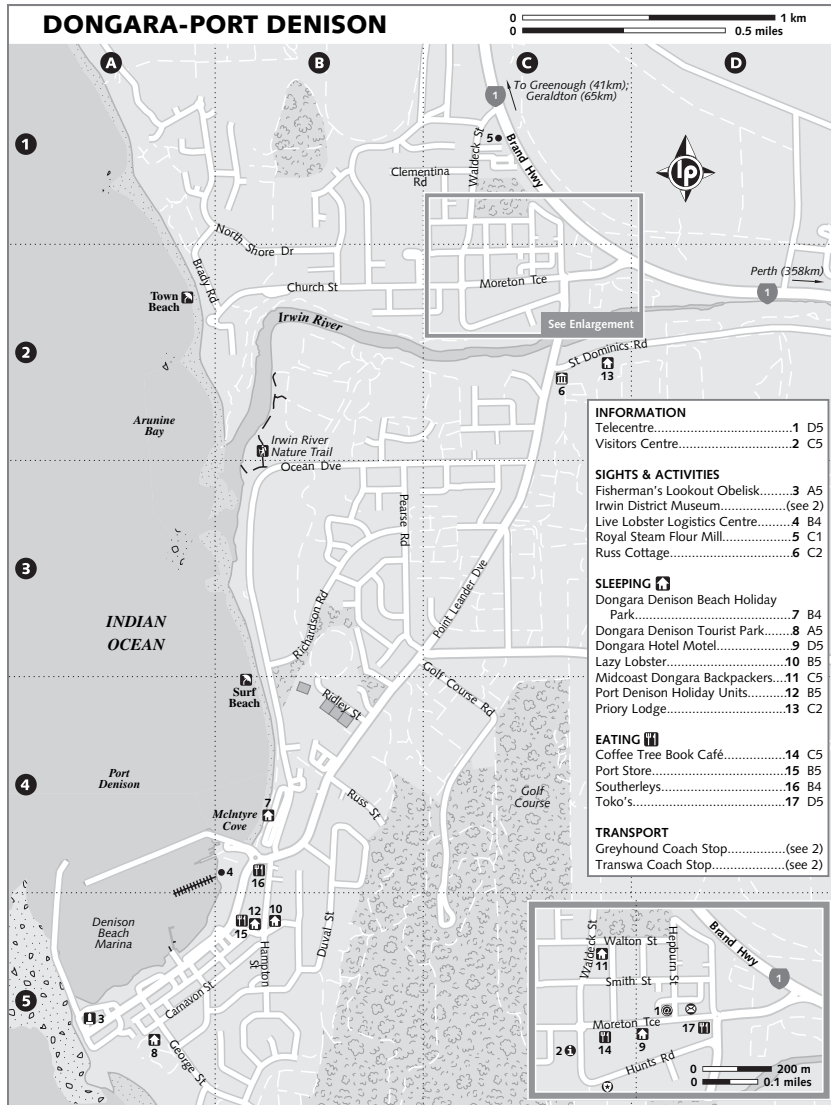
Visitors centre (☎ 9921 3999; www.geraldtontourist.com.au; Bill Sewell Complex, Chapman Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) There's lots of great info here and the helpful staff will book accommodation, tours and transport. Make sure you pick up some self-drive tours and a *Walk-It Geraldton-Greenough* brochure with 24 walks you can do!

Sights & Activities

The slick regional **Western Australian Museum** (☎ 9921 5080; www.museum.wa.gov.au; 1 Museum Pl; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm) is unmissable. Its Midwest Gallery has engaging displays on the area's indigenous, pioneer, natural, social and economic history, while the wonderful Shipwreck Gallery documents the tragic story of the *Batavia*. The museum shop has an excellent range of books on Australian history and society, Aboriginal culture and history, Aussie literature, fantastic kids books and quality souvenirs.

The elaborate **Cathedral of St Francis Xavier** (Cathedral Ave) is the finest example of the architectural achievements of the multiskilled Monsignor Hawes (see the boxed text, p188). Construction began in 1916, but the plans were so grandiose for what was essentially a country-town church, that it wasn't completed until 1938. Its most striking features include imposing twin towers with arched openings, a central dome, Romanesque columns and boldly striped walls.

Geraldton Regional Art Gallery (☎ 9964 7170; 24 Chapman Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) has an excellent permanent collection, including paintings by Norman Lindsay and Elizabeth Durack, provocative contemporary work and engaging changing exhibitions.



Yamatji Cultural Trails (☎ 9956 1126; www.yamatji-culturaltrail.com.au) will open your eyes to the customs, traditional practices, history and contemporary issues affecting the Mid West indigenous Yamatji people through tours to significant sites around Geraldton. You get to sleep under the stars and hear Dreamtime stories on the 2½-day tour.

If you want to take a bit of Yamatji culture home with you, check out the **Marra Indigenous Art & Design shop** (☎ 9965 3440; www.marra.com.au; Bill Sewell Complex, Chapman Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which sells vibrant paintings, woven bowls, wooden artefacts, didgeridoos, beaded necklaces and CDs.

Old Geraldton Gaol Craft Centre (☎ 9921 1614; Bill Sewell Complex, Chapman Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm)

has local crafts for sale, but more compelling are the gloomy cells that housed prisoners from 1858 to 1986, and the historic documents detailing their grim circumstances.

At **Fisherman's Wharf** (☎ 9921 3999; Geraldton Harbour; tours adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 9.30am Mon-Fri Nov-Jun) you can do a tour following the lobsters' journey from fishing boat to restaurant table and buy fresh seafood from the market.

The striking monument on the hill overlooking Geraldton is the **HMAS Sydney Memorial** (sign-posted from George St), commemorating the 1941 loss of the ship and its 645 men after a skirmish with a German ship. Up close you'll see the dome is made up of flying birds and the bizarre figure is that of a woman looking out to sea.

Sleeping BUDGET

Batavia Backpackers (☎ 9964 3001; Bill Sewell Complex, Chapman Rd; dm/s/d \$18/22/38; ☎) While it can't compete with Foreshore, its location in a beautiful building behind the visitors centre makes it a convenient choice if you're arriving by bus, although its reception hours are limited: 8.30am to 11.30am, and 3pm to 7pm.

Foreshore Backpackers (☎ 9921 3275; 172 Marine Tce; dm/s/d/t \$22/30/50/50; ☎) The charm of this elegant old building with its high ceilings and wooden floors, and the manager's thoughtful touches, such as a lovely old water jug or flowers on the sideboard, are appealing. But then there's the central location, great sea views, budget tours, a barbecue area, hammocks, big kitchen, and a games room with pool tables and a groovy first-class bar from a Virgin plane!

Belair Gardens Tourist Park (☎ 9921 1997; www.belairbig4geraldton.com.au; Willcock Dr; unpowered/powered sites \$19/23, cabins \$55; ☎) By the lighthouse and

across from Point Moore beach, this shady park has great facilities, including campers kitchen, barbecue area and tennis court.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

African Reef Resort (☎ 9964 5566; www.africanreef.com.au; 5 Broadhead Ave; s/d from \$95/115; ☎) If you have a car, this beautiful Tarcoola Beach location just a five minutes drive into town won't bother you at all. Especially when you see the sweeping coastal vistas! The self-contained rooms are the best bet – ask for ocean views.

Batavia Motor Inne (☎ 1800 014 628, 9921 3500; 54 Fitzgerald St; d \$98, self-contained r \$110; ☎) A typical Aussie motel, the Batavia has spacious, clean, comfortable rooms with tea and coffee facilities and TV, and self-contained rooms with kitchens.

Ocean Centre Hotel (☎ 9921 7777; www.oceancentre-hotel.com.au; cnr Foreshore Dr & Cathedral Ave; standard/deluxe/deluxe with view \$110/120/150; ☎) The spacious rooms, sunset views from the balcony, convenient central location, and high-speed in-room internet (although it costs), go some way in making up for the curt service.

Eating

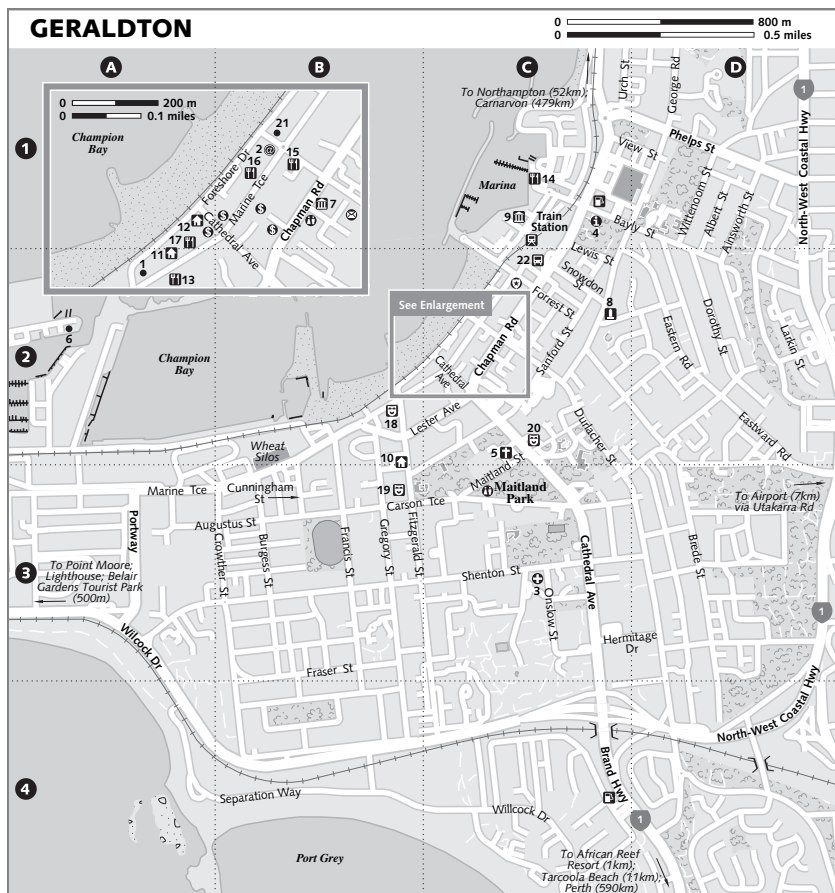
Geraldton has myriad takeaways, coffee lounges, bakeries, supermarkets, and of course, a great fish market!

Go Health Lunch Bar (☎ 9965 5200; 122 Marine Tce; light meals \$5-13; ☎) Fresh juices and smoothies, excellent espresso and healthy sandwiches and light meals are served over the cool corrugated iron counter of this friendly café.

Bellavista (☎ 9964 2681; cnr Marine Tce & Cathedral Ave; meals \$7-19 ☎ 10am-9pm Tue-Sat) Former Melbourne John Todaro brings some badly needed city style and authentic Italian – filling focaccias, delicious risottos, and handmade pasta (try the prawn linguini) – to Geraldton. Todaro has a passion for local art, environment and politics; check out the changing exhibitions on the walls.

Tanti's (☎ 9964 2311; 174 Marine Tce; mains \$8-20; ☎ lunch Wed-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) This casual BYO restaurant is packed every night with regulars who keep returning for its tasty Thai favourites. Takeaway also available.

Topolinis Caffe (☎ 9964 5866; 158 Marine Tce; mains \$11-30; ☎ 8.30am-late) The home-style Italian at this relaxed licensed eatery keeps the locals happy. The \$26 dinner and movie deal and half-price pasta on Monday are popular.



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HAWES' HOLY HERITAGE TRAIL

The architect and priest Monsignor John Hawes is a distinctive and enigmatic figure in the region's history. Born in Surrey, England in 1876, Hawes showed a love of architecture at an early age, later studying it and becoming intrigued by the Arts and Crafts Movement, which eschewed the complexities of Victorian style for a more organic simplicity – ideas which later served Hawes well.

On the cusp of a successful career in 1901, Hawes converted to the Anglican faith, became ordained in 1903, and was called to the Bahamas where he utilised his architectural skills in rebuilding storm-damaged churches. Another dramatic conversion to Catholicism saw Hawes ordained as a Catholic priest a couple of years later. While studying in Rome, Hawes met the Bishop of Geraldton and arrived in Australia in 1915 to work as the Murchison goldfields pastor. Working tirelessly for the next 24 years as a parish priest at Mullewa and Greenough, he also designed 24 buildings – 16 of which were realised.

His notable buildings include the **Church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and Priest House** in Mullewa (p177), the **Church of the Holy Cross** in Morawa (p176), the **Church of St Joseph** in Perenjori (p176), and the imposing **Cathedral of St Francis Xavier** in Geraldton (p185). Working on these was often a struggle for Hawes as skilled labour and materials were hard to come by, so in many instances the tenacious man did much of the building himself.

Hawes was never completely at home in Australia and harboured a yearning to return to the Bahamas. Under the pretext of taking a sabbatical in Europe, Hawes left Australia in 1939 and headed for the Bahamas where he lived on the remote island of Cat. Hawes lived as a virtual recluse until he was moved to a hospital in Miami where he died in 1956. His body was taken back to his final construction – the tomb he had built on Cat Island.

The *Monsignor Hawes Heritage Trail* pamphlet (\$5) is available from the visitors centre in Geraldton.

Freemasons Hotel (☎ 9964 3467; cnr Marine Tce & Durlacher St; meals \$12-32; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) This classic old Aussie pub has a modern brasserie with seafood, steak and Asian dishes. Only opt for the sizzling stone slabs if you're prepared to cook your own food but eat it the chef's way – we weren't allowed to add extra oil to our burning food when we asked!

Conversations by Indigo (☎ 9965 0800; Bayly St, Batavia Coast Marina; mains \$14-32; ☎ 10am-late Mon-Sat, 8am-late Sun) In a stunning contemporary building overlooking the new marina, this is Geraldton's best restaurant with an inventive global menu and a great selection of WA wines. The Indigo Oysters in chilli, coriander and lime-spiked vodka are sublime.

Entertainment

Freemasons is a favourite drinking spot with regular live music and occasional DJs and dance nights.

Nitey (☎ 9921 1400; 60 Fitzgerald St; ☎ Thu-Sat) A popular red-walled club that sees locals lining up until late to boogie away. Get here before 3am, as there's no entry between then and 5am closing.

Geraldton 4 Cinemas (☎ 9965 0568; cnr Marine Tce & Fitzgerald St; adult/child \$12/8) Head here for the latest flicks.

Queens Park Theatre (☎ 9956 6662; cnr Cathedral Ave & Maitland St) Stages theatre, comedy, concerts and films.

Getting There & Around

SkyWest (☎ 1300 66 00 88) has flights to and from Perth daily, as well as regular flights to Carnarvon, Denham (for Monkey Mia), Exmouth and Karratha.

Greyhound (☎ 13 20 30) buses run from the Bill Sewell Complex to Perth daily (\$54, 6½ hours), as well as Broome (\$284, 22 hours) and all points in between. **Transwa** (☎ 1300 6622 05; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) also goes daily to Perth (\$50, six hours) and three times weekly to Kalbarri (\$22, 2½ hours).

Geraldton Bus Service (☎ 9923 1100) operates eight routes to local suburbs (all-day ticket \$2.50). **Bike Force** (☎ 9921 3279; 54 Marine Tce) hires bikes for \$15/70 per day/week.

HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ISLANDS

Better known as 'the Abrolhos', this archipelago of 122 coral islands is about 60km off

the coast of Geraldton. While they're home to sea lion colonies, a host of sea birds, golden orb spiders, carpet pythons and the Tammar wallaby, much of the beauty of the Abrolhos lies beneath the water. Here *Acropora* corals abound and, thanks to the warm Leeuwin Current, a rare and spectacular mix of tropical and temperate fish species thrives.

The beautiful but treacherous reefs surrounding the islands have claimed many ships over the years, including the ill-fated *Batavia* (see the boxed text, below).

As the islands are protected and there are no tourist facilities, you can't stay overnight. Only licensed crayfishing families are permitted to shack up on the islands in season (March to June). But you can go on bush walks and picnics, fly over, dive, snorkel, surf or fish the Abrolhos. A number of boats and light planes leave from Geraldton.

Flights are not only faster and more fun, they generally work out cheaper, at around \$200 per person. Try **Geraldton Air Charters** (☎ 9923 3434; www.geraldtonaircharter.com.au) or **Shine Aviation Services** (☎ 9923 3600; www.abrolhos.com.au). **Abrolhos Odyssey Charters** (☎ 0428 382 505; www.abrolhoscharters.com.au) runs popular fishing, diving and snorkelling trips.

Get the excellent *Houtman Abrolhos Islands Visitors Guide* from Geraldton's visitors centre.

NORTHAMPTON

☎ 08 / pop 780

This charming National Trust–classified town was established to exploit lead and copper deposits discovered in 1848. Its historic stone architecture is splendid – grand buildings with big verandas and quaint stores with corrugated tin awnings. It's worth calling in if you're around during the annual **Airing of the Quilts** in October, when Northampton's heritage buildings are draped with beautiful patchwork bed covers.

Pick up a free *Heritage Walk* pamphlet from the **visitors centre** (☎ 9934 1488; www.northamptonwa.com.au; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) in the old police station on Hampton Rd (the highway). Check out **Chiverton House** (☎ 0428 866 596; Hampton Rd; admission \$2; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Fri-Mon), an early mining cottage dating to 1896, which has been converted into a fascinating pioneer museum.

The stately **Old Convent** (☎ 9934 1692; 61 Hampton Rd; dm/s/d \$17/22/48) is a wonderful stone building designed by Monsignor Hawes (see the boxed text, opposite), converted to backpacker accommodation. Next door, the striking **St Mary's Church** (Hawes again) is a dignified structure made from weathered stone.

The town's pubs serve hearty country meals. The **Miners Arms** (☎ 9934 1281; Hampton Rd; r \$80) is the most comfortable. If you are

SHIPWRECKS AND SURVIVORS

Early in the morning on 4 June 1629, the Dutch East India Company's ship, the *Batavia*, ran aground on an Abrolhos Islands reef off the coast of Terra Australis Incognita, as Australia was known to them. The ship was taking the fastest route to Batavia (Jakarta) in Java – heading due east once around the Cape of Good Hope and then along the Western Australian coast to Indonesia. Quite often these ships were caught in storms or misjudged the depth of the reefs close to the Australian coast earning this stretch of coastline the name Shipwreck Coast.

The captain of the *Batavia*, Francis Pelsaert, sailed a boat to the Dutch East India Company's base at Batavia to get help and supplies. While his back was turned, a gruesome mutiny took place and on the captain's return, he executed all those involved apart from two young men who were left ashore, becoming perhaps the first white men on Australian soil.

Another notable wreck was the *Zuytdorp*, which ran aground beneath the towering cliffs about 65km north of Kalbarri in 1712. Wine bottles, other relics and the remains of fires have been found on the cliff top, and the discovery of the extremely rare Ellis van Creveld syndrome (rife in Holland at the time the ship ran aground) in Aboriginal children suggests that *Zuytdorp* survivors lasted long enough to introduce the gene to Australia.

For more on the Dutch connection to Australia, see the History chapter. The remains of the *Batavia* and other wrecks can be seen at the Western Australian Museum in Geraldton (p185) and in the Fremantle Shipwreck Galleries (p81).

Batavia Coast Dive Academy (☎ 9921 4229; www.bataviacoastdive.com) offers tours diving to a more recent shipwreck, the *South Tomi*, sunk off the Geraldton coast in 2004.

camping or caravanning, try **Northampton Caravan Park** (☎ 9934 1202; Hampton Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$17/22).

Greyhound (☎ 13 20 30) stops at the Miners Arms Hotel daily (Perth to Northampton \$77, eight hours).

NORTHAMPTON TO KALBARRI

From Northampton take the scenic coastal road if you're heading to Kalbarri. Otherwise, continue north along Hwy 1.

About 4km off the highway you reach the turn-off for the tiny coastal town of **Horrocks** (19km west), with a sheltered beach and good fishing. The pleasant **caravan park** (☎ 9934 3039; unpowered/powerd sites d \$17/21) backs onto the beach.

The atmospheric convict settlement of **Lyn-ton** – with its stone homestead, flourmill and stables – is worth a brief visit.

The **Pink Lake** is an algae-filled blue lake with pale pink tones, caused by a naturally occurring beta-carotene; it's farmed for use as a Vitamin A supplement and colouring agent. **Port Gregory** (47km from Northampton) is a relaxed village with a beautiful beach and wooden jetty that's perfect for fishing holidays and family retreats. Pitch a tent or camp your van at the laid-back **caravan park** (☎ 9935 1052; unpowered/powerd sites d \$20/22, on-site vans \$50, cabins shared/ensuite \$65/85).

Hutt River Province (see p192) is accessible from Ogilvie Rd; look for the blue signs.

KALBARRI

☎ 08 / pop 2000

Picturesque Kalbarri is a perennially popular seaside spot that changes personality overnight with the coming of the school holidays. One day the locals will be wandering down to the empty windswept beaches with surfboards or fishing rods in hand, the next they'll find themselves confronted with a sea of lurid fluorescent plastic and a flood of Perth families on bike and foot, in garish sun-protection gear with boogie boards under their arms.

At the mouth of the Murchison River, Kalbarri's proximity to the dramatic coastline and the surrounding national park means plenty of beach and bush leisure opportunities.

Information

There are ATMs at the shopping centres on Grey and Porter streets.

Kalbarri Café (☎ 9937 1045) For internet.

Visitors centre (☎ 1800 639 468, 9937 1104; www.kalbarriwa.com; Grey St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Has lots of info on the national park and activities around town and can book accommodation and tours.

Sights & Activities

KALBARRI NATIONAL PARK

This ruggedly beautiful **national park** (per car \$9) with its magnificent river red gums and Tumblagooda sandstone contains over 1000 sq km of gorgeous bushland, stunning river gorges and magnificent coastal cliffs. There's myriad wildlife, including 200 species of birds, and spectacular wildflowers, including banksias, grevilleas and kangaroos paw, between July and November.

To get to the river gorges from Kalbarri, head 11km east along Ajana Kalbarri Rd to the turn-off, and follow the 20km stretch of dirt to the gorges. A number of lookouts provide superb gorge vistas: at **The Loop** (400m from the car park), there's a natural rock arch, **nature's window**, framing the view upstream (and an 8km walk for the more adventurous); from **Z-Bend** (500m from car park) the gorge plunges 150m to the river below; at **Hawk's Head** there are great views from the picnic grounds; and from **Ross Graham** you can access the river.

The park extends south of Kalbarri to a string of rugged coastal cliff faces, including **Red Bluff**, **Rainbow Valley**, **Pot Alley**, **Eagle Gorge** and **Natural Bridge**. A walking/cycling path from town goes as far as Red Bluff (5.5km) passing **Jakes**, an excellent surf break. From the cliff tops you may spot humpback whales (August to November) and dolphins (year-round).

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pelican Feeding (☎ 9937 1104; Grey St waterfront near boat hire; free; ☎ 8.45am), Kalbarri's most popular attraction, proves that sometimes the simplest things in life are the sweetest.

Rainbow Jungle (☎ 9937 1248; Red Bluff Rd; adult/child \$11.50/4.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) is a beautiful bird habitat and breeding centre set in luxuriant tropical gardens about 4km south of Kalbarri. It has Australia's largest free flight aviary providing a chance to see astonishingly colourful parrots, lorikeets and cockatoos, including endangered species, in action.

At **Kalbarri Wildflower Centre** (☎ 9937 1229; off Ajana Kalbarri Rd; adult/child \$4/free; ☎ 9am-5pm) you

can amble along a wonderful nature and wildflower trail (1.8km) that winds its way through native plants and flowers labelled for identification.

Kalbarri Boat Hire (☎ 9937 1245; www.kalbarriboat hire.com; per hr \$10-50), on the foreshore, hires out kayaks, canoes, surf cats, paddle bikes/boats, barracuda bikes and powerboats to explore the Murchison River.

Other activities include **fishing, surfing, sand-boarding, abseiling, charters, horse-riding and camel rides**; see the visitors centre for more details.

Tours

The visitors centre has full details and takes bookings.

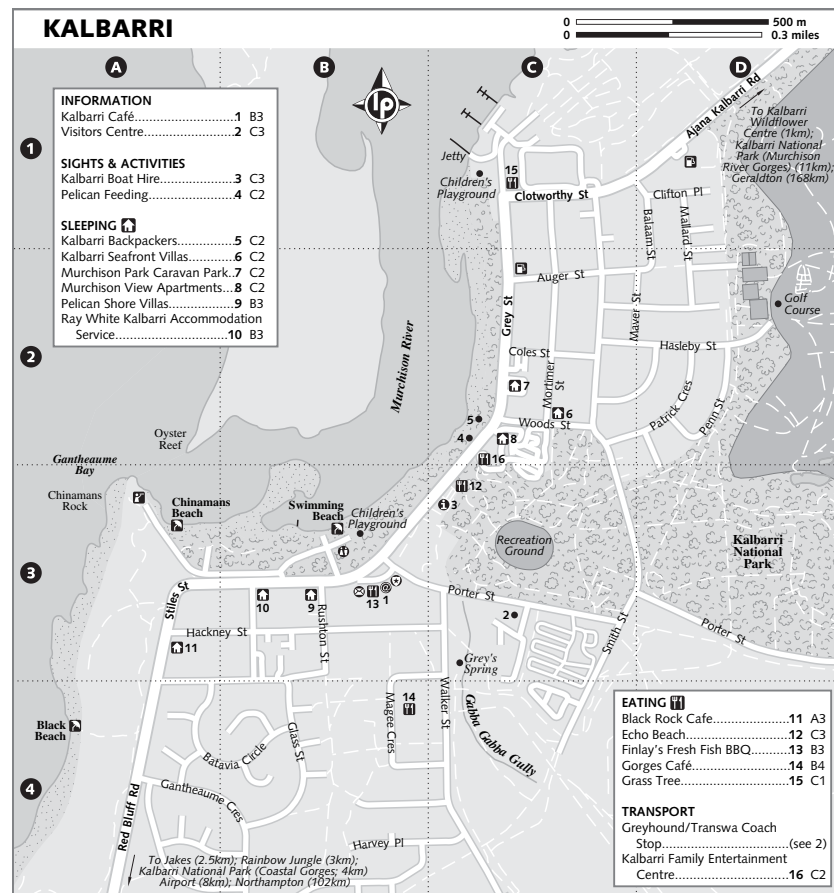
Kalbarri Adventure Tours (☎ 9937 1677; www.kalbarritours.com.au; adult/child \$65/50) Runs popular daily trips combining 8km of active hiking and 6km scenic canoeing in the national park.

Kalbarri Air Charter (☎ 9937 1130; Grey St; 20min flights adult/child from \$45/30) Offers scenic flights over the Murchison River gorges and coastal cliffs.

Kalbarri Boat Hire (☎ 9937 1245; www.kalbarriboat hire.com; adult/child \$60/40) Does four-hour breakfast and lunch canoe safaris on the Murchison River.

Kalbarri Safari Tours (☎ 9937 1011; www.kalbarri safaritours.com.au; per hr \$59-75) Operates 'ocean and outback' quad bike, canoe and 4WD safaris.

Kalbarri Scenic Tours (☎ 9937 1161; www.kalbarri coachtours.com.au; adult/child/concession \$45/22/40) Runs daily national park, heritage and Hutt River Province coach tours.



Kalbarri Wilderness Cruises (☎ 9937 1104; cruises \$30) Runs popular cruises down the Murchison River to The Loop and Z-Bend.

Sleeping

Kalbarri has lots of accommodation, but it's often full during school holidays – avoid this period if you can; otherwise, book well ahead. The visitors centre has a long list of places they can book on your behalf.

BUDGET

Murchison View Apartments (☎ 9937 1096; cnr Grey & Ruston Sts; 2-bedroom units from \$145; 🏠 🚿) These spacious fully self-contained apartments (with DVD/CD players, fridge/freezer, stove etc) opposite the waterfront have balconies, perfect for kicking back after a day down at the beach.

Kalbarri Backpackers (☎ 9937 1430; www.yha.com.au; cnr Woods & Mortimer Sts; dm \$20-22, s/d \$28/56; 🏠 🚿) While the atmosphere is uninspiring, the facilities are good (decent pool and barbecue) and the location is excellent. There's a range of tours on offer and bikes for guests to hire (\$10 per day).

Murchison Park Caravan Park (☎ 9937 1005; cnr Woods & Grey Sts; unpowered/power sites \$20/24, air-con cabins \$75; 🚿) With its grassy, shaded sites and great facilities, this central, family-owned caravan park opposite Kalbarri's waterfront

is the best place to pitch your tent or park your van.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Kalbarri Seafront Villas (☎ 9937 1025; www.kalbarri-seafrontvillas.com.au; 108 Grey St; 1-/2-bedroom units from \$155/175; 🏠 🚿) These spacious, clean units overlooking the waterfront come with television, DVD players and microwaves.

Pelican Shore Villas (☎ 9937 1708; pelicanshores@westnet.com.au; cnr Grey & Kaiber Sts; 2-/3-bedroom front villa from \$185/205; 🏠 🚿) These stylish contemporary designed units are the best in town, with all mod cons (including DVD, microwave, private laundry), floor-to-ceiling windows and big balconies overlooking the sea.

Ray White Kalbarri Accommodation Service (☎ 1800 777 776; www.kalbarriaccommodation.com.au; Kalbarri Arcade, 44 Grey St; accommodation per week from \$290-1200) Has a wide range of self-contained apartments and houses, from fibro cottages to contemporary designer apartments.

Eating

There are supermarkets and takeaways at the shopping centres.

Gorges Café (☎ 9937 1200; Marina Complex, Grey St; meals \$5-14; 🍷 8am-4pm Wed-Mon) Catch up on your magazine reading at this bright BYO café, serving sandwiches, light meals, and cakes. It has a funky, laid-back feel to it.

Black Rock Cafe (☎ 9937 1062; 80 Grey St; meals \$10-28; 🍷 7am-late) This casual licensed eatery, with sunny outdoor seating overlooking the sea, keeps the crowds coming back with great gourmet breakfasts and lunches and a creative global fusion menu in the evening.

Grass Tree (☎ 9937 2288; 94-96 Grey St; mains \$10-\$30; 🍷 9am-late Thu-Tue) While this licensed café-restaurant opposite the waterfront serves delicious breakfasts and light lunches, dinner is what it does best – expect innovative Asian-inspired global fusion using the freshest local produce.

Finlay's Fresh Fish BBQ (Magee Cres; mains \$12-20; 🍷 5.30-8.30pm Tue-Sun) In a former fish factory, this big tin shed of a BYO eatery prides itself on offering 'no service, no corkage, no glasses, no frills' – just big servings of abuse (don't fear if the cook yells at you, it's part of the fun of the place) alongside huge portions of home-style barbecued seafood and steaks. You can also sing for your supper and they'll feed you in return. Seriously.

our pick **Echo Beach** (☎ 9937 1033; Upstairs, Porter St; mains \$17-34; 🍷 8am-late) This stylish restaurant with a cool jazz soundtrack makes a refreshing change from the usual uninspiring country eateries. Its Mod-Oz cuisine is delicious and wine list eclectic. Try the outback tasting plate (barbecue kangaroo skewers, tempura crocodile, smoked rabbit, Murchison goat cutlets and bush tomato relish!) followed by Carnarvon tiger prawns and Kalbarri dhufish.

Getting There & Around

Buses stop/depart from the visitors centre. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 20 30) buses head to Perth (\$108, 11 hours), Exmouth (\$163, 10½ hours) and Broome (\$294, 24½ hours), while **Transwa** (☎ 1300 6622 05; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) services Perth several days a week (\$63, 7 hours).

Kalbarri Auto Centre (☎ 9937 1290) rents 4WDs and sedans from \$40 a day and picks up and delivers to your door, while **Kalbarri Family Entertainment Centre** (☎ 9937 1105; 30 Porter St) rents bikes from \$15 per day.

SHARK BAY

World Heritage-listed Shark Bay incorporates two stunning peninsulas running parallel to the mainland and surrounded by a rich marine park. It's an outstanding example of an ongoing geological process (the shaping of

its seabed by seagrass); a unique natural phenomena (its hypersaline marine waters); a fantastic example of a major stage in earth's evolutionary history (the Stromatolites of Hamelin Pool; see p194); and it has important habitats where threatened animal species survive (Shark Bay's peninsulas and islands; see p195). What makes a visit to Shark Bay so satisfying is that you can experience all of these extraordinary features.

Shark Bay also has a rich history and culture. Originally inhabited by the Malgana, Nhandu and Inggarda peoples who depended on both the sea and bush for their subsistence, Shark Bay offers opportunities for visitors to take indigenous cultural tours to learn about the land from their perspective. The local people were probably the first indigenous Australians to encounter Europeans – Shark Bay was the site of the first recorded landing by a European on Australian soil. In 1616, Dutch explorer Dirk Hartog anchored at the island that now bears his name, just off Denham, Shark Bay's main town.

OVERLANDER ROADHOUSE TO DENHAM

Leaving the highway just after the Overlander Roadhouse, the first turn-off (about 27km along) takes you to **Hamelin Pool**, a marine reserve containing the world's best-known colony of **stromatolites**. These brown rocklike formations are made up of modest microbes almost identical to organisms that existed 1900 million years ago and evolved into more complex life. They're extremely fragile, so there's a boardwalk (with information panels) that allows no-impact viewing; visit at low tide.

The nearby 1884 **Postmasters Residence & Telegraph Office** (☎ 9942 5905; 🍷 9am-4pm) served as a telephone exchange until 1977. This unassuming little outpost was also unwittingly responsible for transmitting messages from NASA's own Gemini space-mission craft in 1964 after communications between the tracking station and Carnarvon's dish went down. It now serves delicious Devonshire teas (tea, scones and jam) and has displays on the stromatolites.

The miniature cockleshells that cover the extraordinary **Shell Beach**, 50km from Hamelin, are 10m deep in places. These shells are peculiar to Shark Bay and cement together after rain, making sturdy white bricks – look out for them in Denham.

PRINCE LEONARD'S LAND

If you thought Australia was an island nation, you would be incorrect. Down a dusty, dirt road, 75km northwest of Northampton, lies the **Principality of Hutt River** (☎ 9936 6035; www.huttriver.net), Australia's 'second largest country'. It was formed when farmer Leonard Casley, appalled by new government quotas on wheat production, seceded from the Commonwealth of Australia on 21 April 1970.

While the Western Australian (WA) government tried to overturn the secession, HRH Prince Leonard had done his constitutional homework – more than 30 years later the Prince and his Princess Shirley remain the monarchs of the only principality in the world declared without bloodshed. With four sons, three daughters, 24 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren, the family tree would suggest that the principality's borders will not be compromised anytime soon. Asked if he ever envisioned a palace coup by his heirs, the now elderly Prince, who has retained his wonderfully deadpan sense of humour, replied, 'They consider it, but then they think about the work involved and change their minds before I get back to the farm.'

And the work involved in running your own principality is endless. There are visitors' passports to be stamped, naturalisation services to conduct (the principality has around 13,000 citizens worldwide with a five-year passport costing \$300), and a post office and gift shop to run – all of this in addition to running sheep and other interests on the property.

Despite his busy schedule, HRH Prince Leonard takes time out for the little people – loyal subjects and visitors are welcome to call on the residence. Phone ahead to ensure that one of the royals is at home – royalty with a delicious sense of the absurdity of it all!

SEAGRASS AND STROMATOLITES

Below the surface of the crystal-clear waters of sensational Shark Bay sits the world's largest seagrass meadow. Differing from seaweed, which doesn't flower or have roots, seagrass meadows create their own ecosystem, providing a nursery for small fish, prawns and a gigantic grazing ground for 10% of the world's dugong population. Seagrass also restricts swell and tidal movements, increasing sedimentation, which in turn has contributed to the heavily salty and protected environment required for the development of rare marine features, such as stromatolites.

These single-celled 'rock layers' are the oldest form of life on earth and are often called 'living fossils'. Discovered by scientists in 1956, the stromatolites colony at Hamelin Pool is the first living example found in the world and is relatively young, estimated to be 3000 years old. The hypersalinity and stillness of the water here is rare, meaning that competitors and predators for the microbes that create stromatolites can't survive.

At the next turn-off, **Nanga Bay Resort** (☎ 9948 3992; nangabay@wn.com.au; unpowered/poweredsites \$15/23, dm \$20, d cabins \$63, d motel \$125; ♿ ♿), catering mainly to families and grey nomads, is a ranch-like place with a range of sleeps, from motel units to fisherman's huts. Facilities include tennis courts, a shop, and rustic bar and restaurant. You'll need your own wheels.

From **Eagle Bluff**, there are spectacular cliff-top views, wonderful birdlife (yes, eagles), and sharks swimming in the clear waters below.

DENHAM

☎ 08 / pop 1140

Australia's most westerly town, laid-back Denham, with its crystal-clear water and charming beachfront, makes a decent base for visiting the marine park, nearby François Peron National Park, and Monkey Mia, 26km away. Originally established as a pearling town, Denham's streets were once paved with pearl shell. All you'll see is bitumen these days, but some shell-brick buildings still stand.

Almost all visitor facilities are on the main thoroughfare, Knight Tce. The accredited visitors centre is the privately run **Denham & Monkey Mia visitors centre** (☎ 9948 1773; sharkbayvisitor@bigpond.com.au; 29 Knight Tce; ♿ 8am-5pm; ♿), which can book accommodation and tours, and organise car rental. **DEC** (☎ 9948 1208; Knight Tce; ♿ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) has plenty of information on the World Heritage area and national park. There's a post office on Knight Tce and an ATM at Heritage Resort.

Sights & Activities

In a striking contemporary building, this slick cutting-edge **Shark Bay World Heritage Discovery Centre** (☎ 9948 1590; www.sharkbayinterpretivecentre

.com.au; 53 Knight Tce; adult/concession \$10/8; ♿ 9am-6pm) – one of Western Australia's best – has compelling exhibitions on Shark Bay's natural environment, its indigenous people and the many explorers who've ventured here.

On the way into town, **Ocean Park** (☎ 9948 1765; www.oceanpark.com.au; Shark Bay Rd; adult/child \$10/5; ♿ 10am-4pm) is a locally run aquaculture farm featuring an artificial lagoon stocked with sharks, turtles, stingrays and fish.

Tours

Mac Attack (☎ 0419 925 692; www.sportfish.com.au; adult/child \$150/100) Runs full-day fishing safaris, along with whale-watching and sightseeing trips

Majestic Tours (☎ 9948 1627; www.ozpal.com/majestic; per person \$60-135) Has full-day 4WD tours, including François Peron National Park and Shell Beach.

Power Dive (☎ 9948 1905; www.divefun.com.au; per person \$70) Offers snorkelling and diving safaris in François Peron National Park.

Shark Bay Coaches & Tours (☎ 9948 1081; www.sbcoaches.com; per person \$70) Full-day tours to key sights.

Sleeping & Eating

Denham has accommodation for all budgets and long-stay/off-season discounts. There is a supermarket, a bakery, café and takeaways on Knight Tce.

Bay Lodge (☎ 1800 812 780, 9948 1278; baylodge@wn.com.au; 95 Knight Tce; dm \$20-22; ♿ ♿) Every room at this YHA hostel has its own ensuite, kitchen, living and dining facilities with TV/DVD. The owners will also spoil you, taking you on complimentary 4WD fishing, swimming and wildlife-spotting tours, and holding bush barbecue nights. They also provide a daily shuttle bus to Monkey Mia.

Seaside Tourist Village (☎ 1300 133 733, 9948 1242; www.sharkbayfun.com; Knight Tce; unpowered/poweredsites

\$22/26, d cabins \$60, 1-/2-bedroom chalets \$99/115; ♿) Seaside Tourist Village is a great big beachside park with good facilities, including barbecues, and self-contained chalets with verandas overlooking the sea.

Denham Villas (☎ 9948 1264; www.denhamvillas.com; 4 Durlacher St; villas \$95-150; ♿) These spacious fully self-contained villas (with proper kitchen and laundry) are excellent value and ideal for families.

Oceanside Village (☎ 1800 680 600, 9948 3003; www.oceanside.com.au; 117 Knight Tce; chalets \$120-160; ♿) Lego-land may come to mind when you see these identical little white-and-blue houses, but they're actually rather swish – some even have spas. The best are on stilts on the hillside with great views of the sea.

Shark Bay Hotel (☎ 9948 1203; 43 Knight Tce; mains \$12-26) While this typical Aussie pub bistro is nothing flash, it's a great spot to eat a hearty counter meal, get to know some locals and play a few rounds of pool.

ourpick Old Pearler Restaurant (☎ 9948 1373; Knight Tce; meals \$12-39) Built from seashell bricks, this splendid stone building houses one of Western Australia's most atmospheric old restaurants. Its cosy interior, with fireplace, rustic wooden furniture, and candlesticks on the walls, is the perfect place to feast on hearty Australian favourites like steak Dianne and crayfish mornay.

RETURN TO EDEN

When French naturalist François Péron visited the shores of Shark Bay in 1801 and 1803, he recorded the presence of over 20 species of land mammals living in the harsh climate of the region. Just some 200 years later, less than one third of the mammals remained. With the environment degraded by decades of poor farming practices and infested with feral foxes, cats, goats and rabbits, the future of the natural species of mammals found in this area appeared in doubt. Today, however, the area is the subject of Australia's largest and most ambitious ecosystem regeneration programme: Project Eden.

Established in 1995, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) project is attempting to eradicate feral animals, re-establish populations of endemic species, and develop techniques that can be applied to other degraded arid zones in Australia. The key has been the isolation of the peninsula from mainland Australia with a 3.4km fence at the isthmus as well as baiting, preventing feral species from repopulating. The eradication of foxes from the area has been successful and the feral cat population has been significantly reduced.

A breeding centre in François Peron National Park has collected breeding pairs of rare marsupials from the offshore Dorre and Bernier islands, and zoos and rehabilitation centres across Australia. The reintroduction of three locally extinct species has been successful: woylies, bilbies and mallee fowls are now surviving in the area. However feral cat predation has halted the reintroduction of rufous-hare wallabies and banded-hare wallabies. Still, as one prominent local Aborigine put it to us, 'the country is beginning to heal itself'. With a little help from its friends of course.

To learn more, visit www.sharkbay.org.

Getting There & Away

Skywest (☎ 1300 660 088) has flights from Geraldton and Carnarvon, linking to Perth, Exmouth and Karratha.

Daily shuttle buses (\$30, 1½ hours) from Denham and Monkey Mia connect with the north- and south-bound **Greyhound** (☎ 13 20 30) services at the Overlander Roadhouse on the main highway (Denham to Carnarvon (\$79, 5½ hours)).

Bay Lodge (☎ 9948 1278) runs a daily shuttle bus to Monkey Mia (return for nonguests \$16) that leaves from the Shell service station on Knight Tce at 7.45am, returning from Monkey Mia at 4.30pm; bookings essential.

FRANÇOIS PERON NATIONAL PARK

Renowned for its dramatic golden cliffs, pristine white-sand beaches, salt lakes, and rare marsupial species, this **national park** (per bus passenger/car \$4/9), 4km from Denham on the Monkey Mia Rd, will reward those with 4WD vehicles and an adventurous spirit. There's a visitors centre at the old Peron Homestead, 6km from the main road, where a former artesian bore has been converted to a soothing 35°C **hot tub**, a novel spot for a sunset soak. There are **camp sites** (\$9) with limited facilities at Big Lagoon, Gregories, Bottle Bay and Herald Bight. If you don't have your own wheels, take a tour to the park (see opposite).

MONKEY MIA

📞 08

World-famous for the wild dolphins that turn up in the shallow water for feeding each day, the beach resort of **Monkey Mia** (entrance adult/child/family \$6/2/12), 26km northeast of Denham, now tops many travellers' list of things to do. It's now so popular that the morning feeding session (around 7.45am) is a bit of a circus and it's hard to get close to the action; hang around after everyone leaves until the second feeding for a more satisfying experience.

Interaction with the dolphins is carefully managed to minimise impact so observe the rules of behaviour outlined in the entry brochure; don't touch the dolphins as they can contract viruses from humans, and always follow the ranger's instructions. There's a swimming area next to the interaction zone. If a dolphin joins you, let them swim around you while you stay still but never chase or approach them as it may stress them, particularly if they're with calves.

The **DEC Dolphin Information Centre** (📞 9948 1366; 🕒 7.30am-4pm) has lots of info, shows videos and hosts presentations. There are great books for sale in the shop and you can also buy tour tickets here.

You can also volunteer to work full-time with the dolphins for up to two weeks; you'll need to arrange this well in advance of your trip as it's understandably popular. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Alison True (📞 9948 1366; alison.true@dec.wa.gov.au).

Tours

Take an eight-minute boat ride from Monkey Mia jetty across to the floating **Blue Lagoon Pearl Farm** (📞 9948 1325; www.bluelagoon.com.au; 1hr tours adult/child \$20/10; 🕒 11am) to learn how the beautiful black pearls are cultured.

Wildsights (📞 1800 241 481, 9948 1481; www.monkeymiawildsights.com.au; 1-2½ hr tours \$39-64; 🕒 9am, 10.30am & 1pm) runs wonderful wildlife-spotting cruises on the *Shotover* catamaran. You'll get to see dugongs, dolphins, loggerhead turtles, sea snakes and perhaps even tiger sharks. The **Aristocat II** (📞 9948 1446) offers similar trips at similar prices.

Local Aboriginal guide Darren 'Capes' Capewell leads the excellent **Wula Guda Nyinda Aboriginal Cultural Tours** (📞 0429 708 847, 9948 1320; www.monkeymia.com.au; adult/child day tour \$35/18, night tour \$25/10; 🕒 9am, 4.30pm, 8.30pm). You'll learn 'how to let the bush talk to you' (see opposite),

some local Malgana language, how to identify bush tucker and native medicine, and how to read animal tracks and tell the size of an animal from their droppings. The evening 'Dreaming' walks are magical.

Sleeping & Eating

Monkey Mia is a resort and not a town, so eating and sleeping options are limited to the Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort. Self-catering is a good option.

Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort (📞 1800 653 611, 9948 1320; www.monkeymia.com.au; tent sites \$11, van sites beach/beach \$27/32, garden units \$205, beachfront villas \$275) This leafy resort offers a range of accommodation from great-value tent and van sites to top-end villas within splashing distance of the beach. The facilities are good and the beach is a short stroll away.

Dolphin Lodge (dm \$24-28, d shared ensuite \$62, park homes \$109) The Resort's newest beachfront accommodation is suffering an identity crisis with more expensive seafront motel rooms (beachside dolphin units) sharing walls with backpacker dorms. (We know who has the better deal!) There's an excellent communal kitchen, lots of outdoor seating, internet kiosks and a laundry.

Bough Shed Restaurant (📞 9948 1171; meals \$6-34; 🕒 7am-8pm) While there are no surprises on the menu at this waterfront eatery, with the ubiquitous salt and pepper prawns (\$18) and seafood platters (\$110), we will hand it to them for inventing a creative new name for surf 'n' turf: 'pond and paddock', a huge Kimberley rib steak with Pemberton marron.

Monkey Bar (📞 9948 1320; meals \$7-18; 🕒 8am-late) This casual bar at the Dolphin Lodge serves good-sized counter meals and snacks, and it's a popular spot for a round of pool and a few drinks.

Getting There & Away

The only public transport to Monkey Mia from Denham is the Bay Lodge shuttle (see p195). It means you'll have to spend a full day here, but that's no hardship if you do a tour or two or simply bring a towel and book.

THE GASCOYNE

Despite taking its name from the 760km Gascoyne River – which, together with the Lyons River, has a catchment area of nearly 70,000 sq

MALGANA COUNTRY Terry Carter

You could see Darren 'Capes' Capewell as a one-man Aboriginal Embassy in Monkey Mia. Except this is his country, his local area – Malgana country. A fit, handsome, thirty-something ex-Aussie Rules player of considerable note, Capes has run his own cultural walks, Wula Guda Nyinda (you come this way) here since late 2004.

While other visitors wait for the dolphins to turn up for breakfast, we take Capes' morning walk, Buna (daytime) Dreaming. Before heading off, Capes entertains some young travellers with his didgeridoo playing. Soon he has a young Japanese girl amusingly acting out the movements of the animals that he's sounding out on the didgeridoo. And our walk turns out to be no less engaging.

'Today you mob are Malgana people', says Capes as he proceeds to take us on a fascinating and information-overload-inducing walk covering Malgana language, 'respect for country', bush tucker, bush medicine, bush survival, tracking and local history. I take an instant liking to the tiny edible berries that grow on what locals call the 'Charlie tree', named after a tribe member who used to enjoy taking naps under them. The berries are sweet and juicy and it's amazing that what appears to be scrubby bushland to us is actually a bush tucker supermarket. Capes spots some rather innocuous clouds on the horizon and instantly proclaims it's going to rain tomorrow. We think he's eaten too many berries.

When we arrived at Monkey Mia we'd been on the road for a month but had only met a few Aborigines working in tourism. Capes explains to us why it's taken so long for Aborigines to start running their own tour companies: 'Thinking in terms of product doesn't come too easy to our mob – while talking about our culture comes easy', he says. He had strong support from the **Western Australian Indigenous Tour Operators Committee** (WAITOC; www.waitoc.com) through training, networking and mentoring when setting up his business.

Research has shown that 80% of overseas visitors are seeking an Aboriginal cultural experience, but only 20% are getting it. Clearly the industry needs quite a few more 'Capes' to set up shop.

The next morning it's raining, just as Capes predicted. 'Well, what did you expect?', says Capes. 'This is my country!'

km – this is mostly sunburnt country because the river seldom flows above ground west of the Kennedy Range. Verdant Carnarvon is the region's hub, with a rugged coastline stretching north. To the east is the ancient, arid Kennedy Range and massive Mt Augustus.

CARNARVON

📞 08 / pop 6900

At the mouth of the Gascoyne River, fertile Carnarvon, with its fruit and vegetable plantations and thriving fishing industry, makes a good stopover between Denham and Exmouth. This lush centre of the dry Gascoyne has a variety of decent accommodation and well-stocked supermarkets.

Information

There's a post office on Camel Lane and a couple of ATMs on Robinson St.

Visitors centre (📞 9941 1146; www.carnarvon.org.au; Civic Centre, 11 Robinson St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Has lots of information on the town and region,

and can provide walking trail and self-driving maps. It also sells unique local products, such as the tasty dried 'Mango Leather'.

Wise Owl Book Exchange (Babbage Island Rd) Has a good selection of secondhand books.

Sights & Activities

On the outskirts of town, the **OTC Dish** (Mahoney Ave) was established by NASA in 1966 as a tracking station for the Gemini and Apollo space missions, and tracked Halley's Comet in 1986. It was closed in 1987 although there are plans to open it for tours in the future.

Carnarvon's luxuriant plantations provide nearly 70% of the state's tropical fruits and vegetables. While some, such as the banana producers, offer **plantation tours** (see visitors centre for details) you can get a taste of everyone's delicious produce at the **Gascoyne Growers Market** (Gascoyne Civic Centre Carpark; 🕒 8am-noon Sat May-Nov).

You can ride a restored **steam train** (adult/child \$7/5) from the end of the town footbridge to

the **Historic Precinct**, and another along **One Mile Jetty**, where locals fish for mulloway; you can also walk along the jetty (\$4/3).

The multicultural **Carnarvon Pioneer Cemetery** (Crowther St) is worth a wander; it's the final resting place of pioneers from as far away as Afghanistan and China.

Tours

Carnarvon Fishing Charters (☎ 0417 923 723, 0407 995 432; day trips per person \$150) offers fishing trips and whale-watching including bait, ice and fishing gear.

Stockman Safaris (☎ 9941 2421; stockman safaris@wn.com.au; town tours adult/child \$30/17, blowholes, Quobba & salt mine tours \$55/39, Kennedy Range tours \$120/90) runs a variety of tours that take in the town, local and regional sites.

Sleeping

Coral Coast Tourist Park (☎ 9941 1438; coralcoastpk@westnet.com.au; 108 Robinson St; unpowered/powerd sites d \$20/22 ☹ ☹) This pleasant shady park, with well-manicured grounds, has a tropical pool and a new campers kitchen.

our pick **Fish & Whistle** (☎ 9941 1704; 35 Robinson St; dm/s \$22/35; ☹ ☹ ☹) This big, breezy backpackers is a hit with travellers for its enormous communal spaces, excellent kitchen, BBQ area and big verandas, not to mention no bunks and private rooms! To top it off, the friendly owners treat guests like family, help them find seasonal work, drive them to work everyday, and take them fishing on their days off. And there's comfy flashpacker sleeps out back. Little wonder travellers don't want to leave!

Carnarvon Central Apartments (☎ 9941 1317; www.carnarvonholidays.com; 120 Robinson St; 1-2-bedroom apt \$95/115) These modern apartments are spotlessly clean and fully self-contained – ideal for self-caterers.

Gateway Motel (☎ 9941 1532; 309 Robinson St; d \$98) The motel rooms here may be basic but the management is accommodating. Arrive late after a long drive and they just might wrap up some leftovers from the Chinese buffet (\$18) for you!

Eating

There's a supermarket, a couple of takeaways and cafés on Knight Tce.

Old Post Office Cafe (☎ 9941 1800; 10 Robinson St; pizzas \$15-21; ☹ ☹ 5.30pm-10.30pm Tue-Sat) Locals and travellers alike enjoy tucking into the authentic pizzas and delicious pastas on the raised front veranda of this stylish yet casual eatery. And you can't help liking the music, which is easily the hippest in town. Licensed and BYO.

Harbourside Café (☎ 9941 4111; Small Boat Harbour; mains \$15-30; ☹ ☹ 9am-8pm) This place has a recipe that works – the freshest seafood, served in good-sized portions, in imaginative ways, at reasonable prices, on a casual sunny waterfront terrace. How can they go wrong? Local favourites include the Shark Bay prawn omelette (\$16) for brunch; tandoori scallops (\$15); Cajun calamari (\$18), and Moroccan snapper (\$27).

Hacienda Crab Shack (9941 4078; Small Boat Harbour; price varies, by weight; ☹ ☹ 7am-4pm) Come here for fresh sweet steamed crabs and other delicious straight-from-the-sea-food.

Westcoast Fish & Chips (☎ 9941 1879; Carnarvon Blvd Shopping Centre, Robinson St) Get your scrummy seafood takeaway here. While the seafood baskets (\$12) are big, we loved our prawn burgers (\$7).

Getting There & Around

Skywest (☎ 1300 660 088) flies to Perth daily, and has less frequent flights to Denham and Exmouth, with links to Geraldton and Karratha.

Daily **Greyhound** (☎ 13 20 30) buses that go to Perth (\$139, 13 hours) and Broome (\$218, 21 hours), via Port Hedland (\$139, 14 hours), stop at the visitors centre.

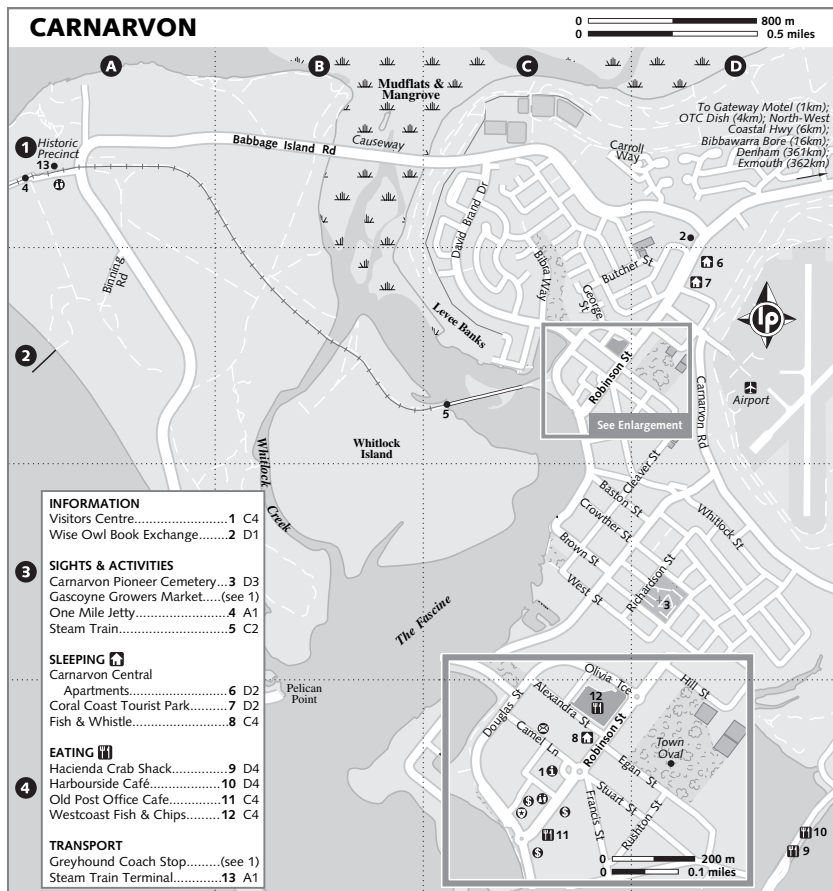
KENNEDY RANGE

This spectacular mountain plateau, just south of the Tropic of Capricorn some 170km east of Carnarvon, runs north from Gascoyne Junction for 195km and in places is 25km wide. A huge mesa pushed up from a seabed millions of years ago; the range has fossilised seashells in its cliffs. The southern and eastern sides of the plateau have eroded to create dramatic 100m-high cliffs and canyons and are covered with red sand dunes and spinifex. The discovery of ancient artefacts here attests to the presence of Balarung and Warriyanga peoples some 20,000 years ago.

An expedition led by Francis Gregory explored the park in 1858, resulting in its naming after the then-governor of WA, and while it was examined for minerals, the mining potential was fortunately deemed to be too low.

Some 295 species of plant have been recorded in the park with 40% of these being annual wildflowers. Cliff-top eyries provide perfect vantage points for the magnificent flora and fauna, such as the wedge-tailed eagle. There are several good walks you can do; pick up the walking trail guide from visitors centres before leaving.

While the eastern escarpment can be reached in a conventional vehicle in good weather, bad weather can quickly close the road to all vehicles; 4WD vehicles are recommended. Neither fuel nor water is available



BONZER BACKROADS – BLOWHOLES AND BEACH SHACKS

About 20km north of Carnarvon along the main highway is the Blowhole Rd turn-off. This sealed road leads 49km to the frenzied **blowholes** and swaths of desolate, windswept coastline. Keep a sharp eye on the ocean: as the sign says, 'king waves kill'. Just 1km further north is secluded **Point Quobba**, where locals have beach shacks and come for the fishing and swimming. You can often spot turtles, whales (in season) and sea eagles. There are rocky camp sites (\$5), but no facilities.

Around 10km further north (mostly unsealed) find **Quobba Station** (☎ 08-9941 2036; www.quobba.com.au; 2-person unpowered/powerd sites \$16/18, fishing shack/chalet d from \$40/80), an oceanfront property with plenty of rustic accommodation and a mini store.

in the park so travel with adequate supplies. Overnight camping is permitted in the main visitor area at the base of the eastern escarpment of the Kennedy Range.

MT AUGUSTUS NATIONAL PARK

Mt Augustus (1106m), or Burringurrah as the local Wadjari people know it, is protected in this national park 476km from Carnarvon. Over twice the size of Uluru (Ayers Rock) and three times as old (the granite underneath the layered rocks is estimated to be 1700 million years old), it's the biggest 'rock' in the world. It looks less dramatic because of its partial vegetation cover.

There are Aboriginal engravings at three main sites: **Ooramboo** has engravings of animal tracks on a rock face; at **Mundee** the engravings

are in a series of overhangs; and **Beedoboondy**, the starting point for a climb to the summit, has engravings of animal tracks and hunters.

From the car park near Beedoboondy, a strenuous excursion to the rock's top can take at least six hours and is 12km return. There is a shorter walk of 6km (2½ hours return) from Ooramboo that also has elevated views.

The best way to get to Mt Augustus is with your own wheels (4WD recommended) from the west coast via Gascoyne Junction, 175km east of Carnarvon. Take plenty of supplies and fuel, although there is a general store and pub at the Junction. There is accommodation at the base of the rock at **Mt Augustus Outback Tourist Resort** (☎ 9943 0527; camp/caravan sites \$18/22, motel d \$80), which has basic facilities and a licensed restaurant.