

Fraser Coast



North of the chic and sassy Sunshine Coast, the sleepy coastal villages and rural inland towns of the Fraser region reflect more of Queensland's easy-going character. Nature buffs and ecotourists will beeline it to the World Heritage-listed mecca of Fraser Island, the world's largest sand island. Four-wheel driving along the east coast's Seventy-Five Mile beach or through the primal inland forests reveals a country sculpted by wind and surf; a mystical land of giant dunes, ancient rainforests, luminous lakes and heathland.

Across the calm waters of the Great Sandy Strait, Hervey Bay is the launch pad to Fraser, and the tourist capital of the region. There's a whiff of burgeoning beach-café culture, but at heart it's a mellow coastal community riding on the back of the annual humpback-whale migrations. From July to October whales stream into the bay to chill out before continuing their trek south to Antarctica, and tourists stream in to watch them play. Further south, tiny Rainbow Beach is a refreshingly unaffected seaside village in a pristine natural setting that is fast gaining popularity as an alternative departure point for Fraser Island. Fishing, swimming, boating and camping are hugely popular along the entire stretch of coastline as the waters are stinger-free all the way to Bundaberg and beyond.

Inland, dry bushland and grazing and agricultural fields surround old-fashioned country towns steeped in history. Bundaberg, the largest city in the region, overlooks a sea of waving sugar cane. A stepping stone to the southern tip of the Great Barrier Reef, Bundaberg is more famously known for its golden rum – a fiery, gut-churning spirit guaranteed to scramble a few brain cells!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cruising up the beach 'highway', camping under stars and exploring rainforest, giant dunes and stunning lakes on **Fraser Island** (opposite), the world's largest sand island
- Watching the humpback whales play in **Hervey Bay** (p219)
- Spotting loggerhead-turtle hatchlings erupt from the sand at **Mon Repos** (p230)
- Soaking up the laid-back beach scene and views of the spectacular coloured sand cliffs at **Rainbow Beach** (p214)
- Drinking liquid-gold sugar cane at the rum distillery in **Bundaberg** (p228) and remaining upright



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07

■ www.seefraserisland.com

■ www.frasercoastholidays.info

FRASER ISLAND

The region's Aborigines call it K'Gari (paradise). Sculpted from wind, sand and surf, the striking blue freshwater lakes, crystal-line creeks, giant dunes and lush rainforests of this gigantic sandbar form an enigmatic island paradise unlike any other in the world. Created over hundreds of thousands of years from sand drifting off the east coast of mainland Australia, Fraser Island is the largest sand island in the world (measuring 120km by 15km) and the only place where rainforest grows on sand.

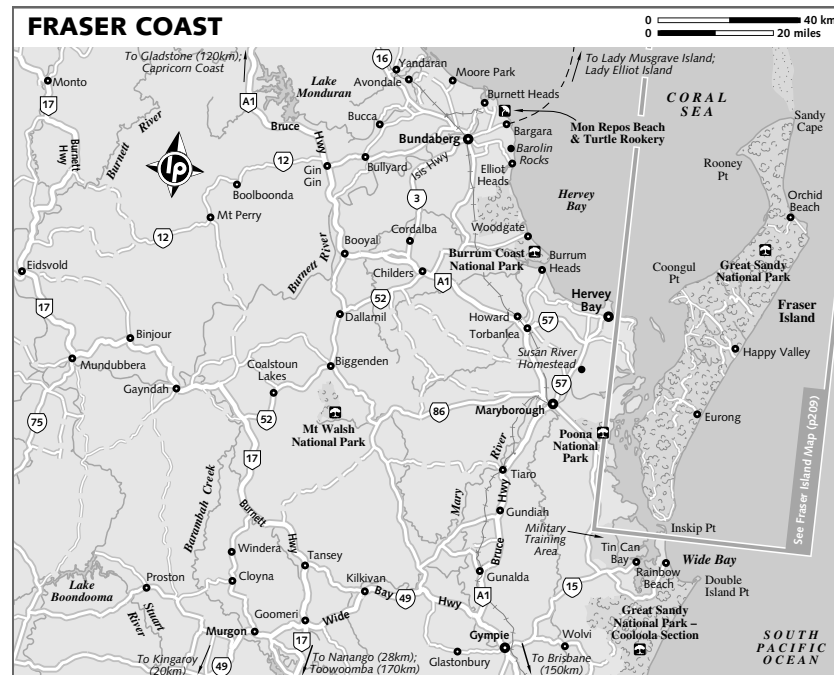
Inland, the vegetation varies from dense tropical rainforest and wild heath to wetlands and wallum scrub, with 'sandblows' (giant dunes over 200m high), mineral streams and freshwater lakes opening onto long sandy beaches fringed with pounding surf. The island is home to a profusion of bird life and wildlife including the purest strain of dingo in Australia, while offshore waters teem with dugong, dolphins, sharks and migrating humpback whales.

This island Utopia, however, is marred by an ever-increasing volume of 4WD traffic tearing down the beach and along sandy inland tracks. With over 350,000 people visiting the island each year, Fraser can sometimes feel like a giant sandpit with its own peak hour and congested beach highway.

History

The Butchulla people lived on K'Gari for over 5000 years until European arrival. In 1836, a group of castaways from the shipwrecked *Stirling Castle* landed on the island. In the group was a Scottish woman, Eliza Fraser, the wife of the captain of the ill-fated ship, who, after her rescue in 1837, returned to London and wrote a harrowing (and unverified) account of her husband's death and her terrifying ordeal with the Aborigines. Although other survivors disputed her story, Eliza made a tidy sum from retelling her tale. As her fame spread, the island became known as Fraser Island.

In 1863, loggers began felling trees including the prized kauri pines, and the satiny (turpentine) valued by shipbuilders.



HOWLING DINGOES

They may look like Fido's long-lost cousins but Fraser's dingoes are wild animals. Fast facts on the canid:

- *Canis lupus dingo* or the 'warragul' is thought to be descended from the Southeast Asian wolf.
- Dingoes were introduced to Australia around three or four thousand years ago.
- Due to the island's isolation, Fraser's dingoes are the most genetically pure strain in Australia.
- The dingo population on Fraser is around 130.
- Dingoes don't bark, but communicate with wolf-like howls.
- These ginger-furred 'wild dogs' weigh around 20kg, live for five to seven years, and climb trees.
- Beware: dingoes can attack! Recorded cases include the disappearance of baby Azaria Chamberlain in 1980, the death of a nine-year-old in 2001, and an attack on a four-year-old in 2006.
- Don't feed, tease or encourage dingoes into campsites – or face a fine of up to \$3000.

Exploitation of the island's natural resources continued when sandmining began in 1950. Fortunately, a shift towards environmental protection brought both industries to an end – sandmining in 1977 and logging in 1991.

Fraser Island joined the World Heritage list in 1992. At present the northern half of the island is protected as the Great Sandy National Park while the rest consists of state forest, crown land and private land.

Information & Orientation

A 4WD is necessary to drive on Fraser Island. General supplies and expensive fuel are available from stores at Cathedral Beach, Eurong, Kingfisher Bay, Happy Valley and Orchid Beach. Most stores stock some camping and fishing gear, and those at Kingfisher Bay, Eurong, Happy Valley and Orchid Beach sell alcohol. There are public telephones at these locations and at most camping grounds.

Treat all tap, lake and stream water before drinking (either by boiling for five to 10 minutes or with water-treatment tablets). There is no pharmacy or resident doctor on the island.

The main ranger station, **Eurong QPWS Information Centre** (☎ 4127 9128; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm Mon, 8am-3.30pm Tue-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) is at Eurong. Others can be found at **Dundubara** (☎ 4127 9138; ☎ hours vary) and **Waddy Point** (☎ 4127 9190; ☎ hours vary).

The **Fraser Island Taxi Service** (☎ 4127 9188) operates all over the island. A one-way fare from Kingfisher Bay to Eurong costs \$70.

The tow-truck service is based at **Eurong** (☎ 4127 9449, 0428-353 164).

PERMITS

You will need permits for vehicles (per month/year \$35.40/177.30) and camping (per person/family \$4.50/18), and these must be purchased before you arrive. Contact **QPWS** (☎ 13 13 04) or purchase the permits online at www.epa.qld.gov.au. Permits aren't required for private camping grounds or resorts. Permit issuing offices:

Bundaberg QPWS Office (☎ 4131 1600; 46 Quay St)

Great Sandy Information Centre (☎ 5449 7792; 240 Moorinidil St, Tewantin; ☎ 7am-4pm) Near Noosa.

Maryborough QPWS (☎ 4121 1800; cnr Alice & Lennox St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

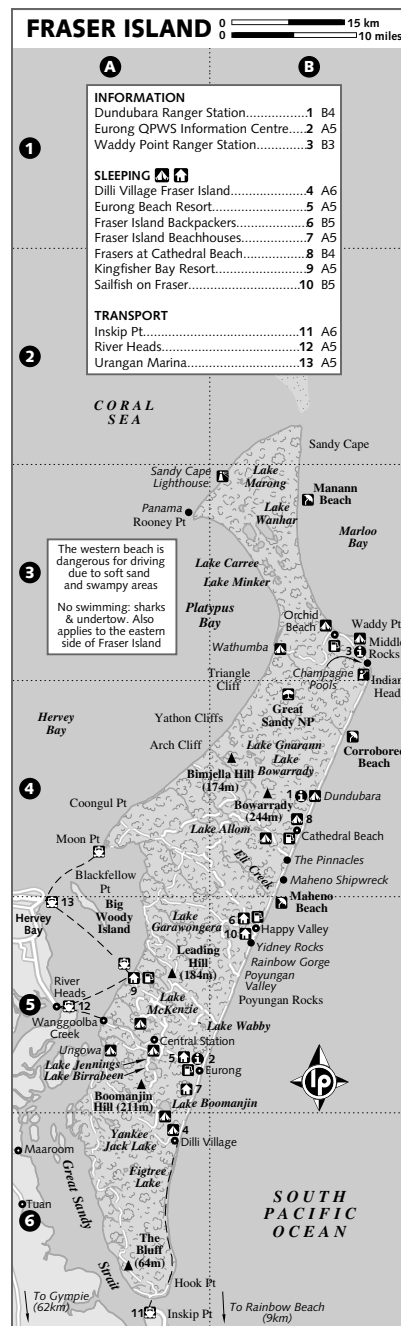
Naturally QLD (☎ 3227 8185; 160 Ann St, Brisbane; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Rainbow Beach QPWS (☎ 5486 3160; Rainbow Beach Rd; ☎ 7am-4pm) Purchase permits from the 24-hour vending machines – credit card only.

River Heads Information kiosk (☎ 4125 8485; ☎ 6.15-11.15am & 2-3.30pm) Ferry departure point at River Heads, south of Hervey Bay.

Sights & Activities

From Fraser's southern tip, use the high-tide access track that cuts inland (avoiding dangerous Hook Point) to reach the main thoroughfare on the eastern beach. The first settlement you reach is **Dilli Village**, the former sandmining centre. Another 9km north is **Eurong**, with a resort, shops and fuel, and the start of the inland track to **Central Station** and **Wangoolba Creek** (for the ferry to River Heads).



Central Station is the starting point for numerous walking trails. From here you can walk or drive to the beautiful **McKenzie, Jennings, Birrabeen** and **Boomanjin** lakes. Like many of Fraser's lakes, these are 'perched' lakes, formed by the accumulation of water over a thin, impermeable layer of decaying leaves and other organic material. Lake McKenzie is spectacular, with its clear blue water ringed with a sugary-white sand beach. It's a great place to swim, as is the similarly beautiful but less crowded Lake Birrabeen. In these open-air beauty spas, you can use the mineral sand to exfoliate your skin and the clear water to soften your hair.

Along the beach about 4km north of Eurong is a signposted walking trail across sandblows to the beautiful **Lake Wabby**. An easier route is from the lookout on the inland track. Lake Wabby is surrounded on three sides by eucalypt forest; the fourth side is a massive sandblow that is encroaching on the lake at a rate of about 3m a year. The lake is deceptively shallow. Don't dive – people have been paralysed by doing so. Turtles and huge catfish can often be seen under the trees in the eastern corner of the lake.

Driving north along the beach you may have to detour inland to avoid Poyungan and Yidney Rocks at high tide to reach **Happy Valley** (with a store and places to stay). About 10km north is **Eli Creek**, a fast-moving, crystal-clear waterway that will carry you effortlessly downstream. About 2km from Eli Creek is the rotting hulk of the **Maheno**, a former passenger liner blown ashore by a cyclone in 1935 while being towed to a Japanese scrap yard.

Roughly 5km north of the *Maheno* are the **Pinnacles** (an eroded section of coloured sand cliffs), and a further 10km is **Dundubara**, with a ranger station and a very good camping ground. Another 20km along the beach is the rock outcrop of **Indian Head**, the best vantage point on the island. Sharks, manta rays, dolphins and whales (during the migration season) can often be seen from the top of the headland.

From Indian Head the trail branches inland passing **Champagne Pools**, the only safe spot on the island for saltwater swimming. The trail leads back to **Waddy Point** and **Orchid Beach**, the last settlement on the island.

Many tracks north of this are closed for environmental protection. The 30km of beach up to the northern tip of **Sandy Cape**,

FRASER ISLAND GREAT WALK

Opened in 2004, the Fraser Island Great Walk is a stunning way to see this enigmatic island in all its diverse colours. The trail undulates through the island's interior for 90km from Dilli Village to Happy Valley. Broken up into sections of six to 16 kilometres, plus some side trails off the main sections, it follows the pathways of Fraser Island's original inhabitants, the Butchulla people, and passes underneath rainforest canopies, through shifting dunes and alongside some of the island's vivid lakes.

From Dilli Village, a 6.3km track cuts inland, affording brilliant views of the island from Wongi Sandblow en route to Lake Boomanjin. Over the next 7.2km leg you begin to leave the dry scribbly-gum woodlands and forests (regenerating from logging and mining) behind as you enter the rainforest to Lake Benaroon.

The third section travels for 7.5km, following the western shore of Lake Benaroon before zig-zagging along Lake Birrabeen's southern shore. The trail continues on an old logging road, dwarfed by towering satinay forests and brush box, to Central Station.

From here you have two options to Lake McKenzie. If you turn west you'll walk via Basin Lake (6.6km), which is a popular haunt for turtles. If you turn east the trail takes a lengthy route through Pile Valley (11.3km).

The fifth section sweeps for 11.9km in a slight arc from Lake McKenzie back towards the island's eastern coast and Lake Wabby. This leg reveals some of the island's most stunning rainforest, as well as the east-coast dunes that buffer Lake Wabby from the coast. The next section to the Valley of the Giants is 16.2km long and passes beneath some of Fraser's oldest and largest trees.

The seventh leg (13.1km) tags along an old tramline to Lake Garawongera, uncovering evidence of the earliest logging camps on the island. Another 6.6km, mostly downhill through open forests and dunes, takes you to the end of the trail at Happy Valley.

The Great Walk trail is mostly stable sand and not particularly difficult, but the island has the potential to throw a few whammies your way. Weather conditions, notably heavy rain, can affect the track, although this can be a blessing as it firms up the patches of soft sand on the trail. Before you go, pick up the *Fraser Island Great Walk* brochure from a QPWS office (or download it from www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/great_walks/fraser_island) and seek updates on the track's conditions.

and its lighthouse, is off limits to hire vehicles. The beach from Sandy Cape to Wathumba is closed to all vehicles, as is the road from Orchid Beach to Platypus Bay.

On the island you can take a scenic flight with **MI Helicopters** (☎ 1800 600 345; www.mihelicopters.com.au; 25min flight \$240), based at Kingfisher Bay Resort (right), or with **Air Fraser** (☎ 1800 600 345; 10min flights from \$70).

Sleeping & Eating

Fraser Island Backpackers (☎ 4127 9144; www.fraserislandco.com.au; Happy Valley; dm \$39-59; mains \$10-20; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner; 🍷 🍷) This wilderness-retreat-turned-backpackers has dorms (sleeping up to seven) in nine timber lodges. The cabins cascade down a gentle slope amid plenty of tropical foliage, and there's a bistro and bar on site.

Eurong Beach Resort (☎ 1800 111 808, 4127 9122; www.fraser-is.com; Eurong; r \$150, 2-bedroom apt \$270, mains \$15-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner; 🍷 🍷) Bright,

cheerful Eurong is the main resort on the east coast and the most accessible for all budgets. At the cheaper end of the market are simple motel rooms and units, while comfortable, fully self-contained apartments are good value for families. On site is a cavernous restaurant, a bar, two pools and tennis courts.

Sailfish on Fraser (☎ 4127 9494; www.sailfishonfraser.com.au; Happy Valley; d/f from \$220/240; 🍷) Any notions of rugged wilderness and roughing it will be forgotten quick smart at this plush, indulgent retreat. These two-bedroom apartments are cavernous and classy, with wall-to-wall glass doors, spas, mod cons, mod furnishings and an alluring pool.

Kingfisher Bay Resort (☎ 1800 072 555, 4120 3333; www.kingfisherbay.com; Kingfisher Bay; d \$285, 2-bedroom villa \$380; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This elegant ecoresort has smart hotel rooms with private balconies, and sophisticated two- and three-bedroom timber villas that are elevated to limit their environmental impact. The villas are utterly

gorgeous and some even have spas on their private decks. There's a three-night minimum stay in high season. The resort has restaurants, bars and shops and operates daily tours of the island (adult/child \$149/89).

Fraser Island Beachhouses (☎ 1800 626 230, 4127 9205; www.fraserislandbeachhouses.com.au; Eurong Second Valley; studio per 2 nights \$360, 1-bedroom house per 2 nights from \$700; 🍷) Another luxury option, this complex contains sunny, self-contained units kitted out with polished wood, cable TVs and ocean views. Rates start with studios and climb to \$900 for two-bedroom beachfront houses.

CAMPING

Supplies on the island are limited and costly. Campers, particularly, should stock up well. Be prepared for mosquitoes and March flies.

Camping permits are required at QPWS camping grounds and any public area (ie along the beach). The most developed **QPWS camping grounds** (per person/family \$4.50/18), with coin-operated hot showers, toilets and barbecues, are at Waddy Point, Dundubara and Central Station. Campers with vehicles can also use the smaller camping grounds with fewer facilities at Lake Boomanjin, Ungowa and Wathumba on the western coast. Walkers' camps (for hikers only) are set away from the main campgrounds along the Fraser Island Great Walk trail (opposite). The trail map lists the campsites and their facilities. Camping is permitted on designated stretches of the eastern beach, but there are no facilities. Fires are prohibited, except in communal fire rings at Waddy Point and Dundubara, and to utilise these you'll need to bring your own firewood in the form of untreated, milled timber. All rates below are for two people.

Dilli Village Fraser Island (☎ 4127 9130; Dilli Village; unpowered sites \$20, bunkrooms \$40, cabins \$60-100) Managed by the University of the Sunshine Coast, Dilli Village offers good sites on a softly sloping camping ground. The facilities are as neat as a pin and the cabins are ageing but accommodating.

Fraser's at Cathedral Beach (☎ 4127 9177; www.fraserislandco.com.au; Cathedral Beach; unpowered/powerd sites \$27/38, cabins with/without bathroom \$140/170) This spacious, privately run park with its abundant, flat, grassy sites is a fave with families. The excellent facilities include large communal barbecue areas and spotless amenities. The quaint, comfortable cabins come with private picnic tables.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Fraser Island (☎ 1800 247 992, 4125 3600; www.airfraserisland.com.au) charges \$70 for a return flight (20 minutes each way) to the island's eastern beach, departing Hervey Bay airport.

BOAT

Several large vehicle ferries connect Fraser Island to the mainland. Most visitors use the two services that leave from River Heads (about 10km south of Hervey Bay) or from Inskip Point near Rainbow Beach.

Fraser Island Barges (☎ 1800 227 437; pedestrian/vehicle & 4 passengers return \$30/150, additional passengers \$10.50) makes the 30-minute crossing from River Heads to Wanggoolba Creek on the western coast of Fraser Island. It departs daily from River Heads at 9am, 10.15am and 3.30pm, and returns from the island at 9.30am, 2.30pm and 4pm. The same company also operates a service from the Urangan Marina in Hervey Bay to Moon Point on Fraser Island, but car-hire companies won't allow you to drive their cars here so it's limited to car owners and hikers. Rates are the same as for the service from River Heads to Wanggoolba Creek.

Kingfisher Vehicular Ferry (☎ 1800 072 555, 4120 3333; vehicle & 4 passengers return \$145, additional passengers \$10) operates two boats. Its vehicle ferry makes the 45-minute crossing from River Heads to Kingfisher Bay daily, departing at 7.15am, 11am and 2.30pm, and returning at 8.30am, 1.30pm and 4pm. The Kingfisher Fast Cat Passenger Ferry (adult/child return \$55/28) makes the 30- to 45-minute crossing between Urangan Marina and Kingfisher Bay at 6.45am, 8.45am, noon, 4pm, 7pm and 10pm daily, returning at 7.40am, 10.30am, 2pm, 5pm, 8pm and 11.30pm daily.

Coming from Rainbow Beach, the operators **Rainbow Venture** (☎ 5486 3227; pedestrian/vehicle return \$10/80) and **Manta Ray** (☎ 5486 8888; vehicle return \$85) both make the 15-minute crossing from Inskip Point to Hook Point on Fraser Island continuously from about 7am to 5.30pm daily.

FRASER COAST

Mixing coast and country, the Fraser Coast runs the gamut from coastal beauty, beachfront national parks and tiny seaside villages

SAND SAFARIS

There's a sci-fi other-worldliness to Fraser Island, as 4WDs and buses with towering wheel bases and chunky tyres pull in to refuel against an idyllic beach backdrop of white sand and waving palm trees. The surfeit of sand and the lack of paved roads mean that only 4WD vehicles can negotiate the island. For most travellers there are three transport options: self-drive tours, organised tours or 4WD hire.

Be aware of your environmental footprint. When choosing, bear in mind that the greater the number of individual vehicles driving on the island, the greater the environmental damage.

Self-Drive Tours

Unbeatable on price, these tours are incredibly popular with backpackers. Nine new friends are assigned to a vehicle, given some 4WD instruction, and head off in a convoy for a three-day, two-night camping safari.

Unfortunately, there have been complaints about costly, dodgy vehicle-damage claims upon return, but booking through a local hostel reduces the risk. Either way, check your vehicle beforehand.

Advantages – it's cheap! You get to choose when and how you see everything and if your group is good, even getting rained on is fun.

Disadvantages – if your group doesn't get along it's a loooong three days. Inexperienced drivers get bogged in sand all the time but this can be part of the fun.

Rates hover around \$140 and exclude food and fuel. Recommended operators:

- **Colonial YHA** (☎ 1800 818 280, 4125 1844; www.cvyha.com) Hervey Bay.
- **Dingo's Backpacker's Resort** (☎ 1800 111 126, 5486 8200; www.dingosatrainbow.com) Rainbow Beach.
- **Fraser Roving** (☎ 1800 989 811, 4125 6386; www.fraserroving.com.au) Hervey Bay.
- **Koala Adventures** (☎ 1800 354 535, 4125 3601; www.koalaadventures.com) Hervey Bay.
- **Next Backpackers** (☎ 4125 6600; www.nextbackpackers.com.au) Hervey Bay.
- **Pippies Beach House** (☎ 1800 425 356, 5486 8503; www.pippiesbeachhouse.com.au) Rainbow Beach.

Organised Tours

Tours leave from Hervey Bay, Rainbow Beach and Noosa and cover the highlights: rainforests, Eli Creek, Lakes McKenzie and Wabby, the coloured Pinnacles and the *Maheno* shipwreck.

to sugar-cane fields, farmlands and old-fashioned country towns. Along this stretch of coastline, mellow Hervey Bay draws the biggest crowds with its easy access to Fraser Island and pumping whale-watching action. Nestled in a picturesque bay south of Hervey Bay, pretty little Rainbow Beach, with its stunning coloured sand cliffs, is even closer to Fraser and has a good surf beach.

Far removed from the cruisy beach scene, Maryborough and Gympie are inland country towns steeped in history and heritage. A little further north, Bundaberg rises out of a sea of sugar-cane fields, fruit orchards and vegetable patches. Seasonal picking and harvesting attract long-staying backpackers, or maybe the pull is Bundaberg's wickedly famous rum!

GYMPIE

☎ 07 / pop 10,933

Gympie's gold once saved Queensland from near-bankruptcy, but that was in the 1860s and not much has happened since. A few period buildings line the main street but most travellers on the Bruce Highway bypass the town centre.

For information on the whole of the Fraser Coast you can stop at one of the three offices of the **Cooloolo Regional Development Bureau** (www.cooloolo.org.au) Matilda (☎ 5483 5554; Matilda Service Centre, Bruce Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm); Lake Alford (☎ 5483 6411; Bruce Hwy, Gympie; ☎ 9am-4.30pm); Gympie (☎ 5483 6656; 107 Mary St; ☎ 8.30am-4pm). They also stock the free *Heritage Walking Tour Map*, which details Gympie's relics of the gold-mining days. If you fancy you've

Advantages – tours can be booked at the last minute; you don't have to cook, drive or plan; and you can jump on at Hervey Bay and return to Rainbow Beach or Noosa, or vice versa. Guides provide informative ecocommentaries.

Disadvantages – during peak season you could share the experience with 40 others.

Among the many operators:

- **Footprints on Fraser** (☎ 1300 765 636; www.footprintsonfraser.com.au; 4-/5-day walk \$1250/1670) Highly recommended guided walking tours of the island's natural wonders.
- **Fraser Experience** (☎ 1800 689 819, 4124 4244; www.fraserexperience.com; 2-day tours \$265) Small groups and more freedom about the itinerary.
- **Fraser Explorer Tours** (☎ 4194 9222; www.fraserexplorertours.com.au; day tours adult/child \$145/85, 2-day tours \$253/170) Overnight at Eurong Beach Resort.
- **Fraser Island Company** (☎ 1800 063 933, 4125 3933; www.fraserislandco.com.au) Offers a range of tour options.
- **Kingfisher Bay Tours** (☎ 1800 072 555, 4120 3333; www.kingfisherbay.com; Fraser Island; day tours adult/child \$155/85, 2-/3-day tours \$265/355) Ranger-guided ecotours. Multiday tours targeted at 18-35-year-olds.

4WD Hire

You can hire a 4WD from Hervey Bay, Rainbow Beach and even on Fraser Island. All companies require a hefty bond, usually in the form of a credit-card imprint, which you *will* lose if you drive in salt water – don't even think about running the waves!

A driving-instruction video will usually be shown, but when planning your trip, reckon on covering 20km an hour on the inland tracks and 50km an hour on the eastern beach. Fraser has had some nasty accidents, often due to speeding.

Advantages – complete freedom to roam the island and escape the crowds.

Disadvantages – you may find you have to tackle beach and track conditions even experienced drivers find challenging.

Rates for multiday rentals start at around \$130 a day and most companies also rent camping gear. See Car & Motorcycle (p225) and Getting There & Around (p216) for rental companies in Hervey Bay and Rainbow Beach. On the island, **Kingfisher Bay 4WD Hire** (☎ 4120 3366) hires out 4WDs from \$250 per day.

got the Midas touch, the Lake Alford branch can fix you up with a gold-fossicking licence (\$5.95 per month), gold-panning equipment (\$4.40 per day) or even a gold detector (\$50 per day).

The **Woodworks Forestry & Timber Museum** (☎ 5483 7691; cnr Fraser Rd & Bruce Hwy; adult/student \$4/2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 1-4pm Sun) on the highway displays memorabilia and equipment from the region's old logging days. The highlight of the museum (and perhaps the lowlight of the industry) is a cross-section of a magnificent kauri pine that lived through the Middle Ages, Columbus' discovery of America and the industrial revolution, only to be felled in the early 20th century.

The **Gympie Gold Mining & Historical Museum** (☎ 5482 3995; 215 Brisbane Rd; adult/child/family

\$8.80/4.40/20; ☎ 9am-4pm), on the southern outskirts of town, has a large collection of mining equipment and functioning steam-driven engines, as well as the more traditional exhibits of a historical museum.

For a scenic tour of the pretty Mary Valley you can chug through the countryside on a restored 1923 steam train, the **Valley Rattler** (☎ 5482 2750; www.thevalleyrattler.com; half-day tours per adult/child \$20/10, day tours \$36/18). The train leaves from the old Gympie train station on Tozer St every Wednesday and Sunday morning at 10am and steams along to the tiny township of Imbil 40km away. The return trip takes 5½ hours, with lunch, caffeine and souvenir stops. On Saturday, **half-day tours** (☎ 9.30am, 11.45am, 1.45pm) only go as far as Amamoor, 20km away. Amamoor is the site of the annual **Muster**, a

country-music hoedown held over six days in late August each year.

If you don't want to camp at the Muster, the **Cooloola Country B&B** (☎ 5482 5018; cooloolacountry@hotmail.com; 69 Duke St; s/d \$95/110) has homey rooms in a classic Queenslander. Otherwise, the **Gympie Muster Inn** (☎ 5482 8666; 21 Wickham St; d \$100; 🚗 🚰) is a large, central motel with business facilities and a restaurant.

Although Gympie's attractions are somewhat lacking, gourmet travellers will salivate over the lovely **Kingston House Restaurant** (☎ 5483 6733; 11 Channon St; mains \$18-29; 🍷; lunch & dinner Wed-Sun). Nestled inside a beautifully renovated, sprawling Queenslander, this restaurant is pure class. The menu features delicious dishes using local produce and has a boutique wine list. Long lunches, tapas nights and a cosy fireplace are worth the trip.

Another novelty in country Gympie is **Emilia's** (☎ 5482 8885; 201 Mary St; mains \$8-20; 🍷; 8am-5pm Mon-Fri), an Italian-run deli and café adorned with heavy brocade, ornate gold-framed mirrors, a tempting range of imported deli items – and excellent espresso.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) has numerous daily services from Brisbane (\$34, 3½ hours), Noosa (\$18, two hours) and Hervey Bay (\$28, 1¼ hours). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) operates the same routes (once daily). Long-distance coaches stop at the bus shelter in Jaycee Way, behind Mary St. **Polley's Coaches** (☎ 5482 9455; Pinewood Ave) has buses to Rainbow Beach (\$15, 1¼ hours), departing from the RSL on Mary St at 1.15pm on weekdays.

Traveltrain (☎ 1300 131 722; www.traveltrain.com.au) operates the *Tilt Train* (adult/child \$39.60/19, 2½ hours, Sunday to Friday) and the *Sunlander* (adult/child \$39.60/19, 3¼ hours, three weekly), which travel from Brisbane to Gympie on their way to Rockhampton and Cairns.

RAINBOW BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 999

Gorgeous Rainbow Beach is a tiny town at the base of the Inskip Peninsula with spectacular multicoloured sand cliffs overlooking its rolling surf and white sandy beach. Still relatively 'undiscovered', the town's friendly locals, relaxed vibe and convenient access to Fraser Island (only 10 minutes by barge; see p211) and the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park has made

this a rising star of Queensland's coastal beauty spots.

Information

QPWS office (☎ 5486 3160; Rainbow Beach Rd;

🕒 7am-4pm) Has walking maps and 24-hour vending machines that issue car and camping permits for Fraser Island (credit cards only).

Rainbow Beach visitors centre (☎ 5486 3227; 8 Rainbow Beach Rd; 🕒 7am-5pm) Privately run, very helpful and can organise tours.

Shell Tourist Centre (☎ 5486 8888; Rainbow Beach Rd; 🕒 8am-5pm) At the Shell service station; tour bookings and permits for Fraser Island.

Sights & Activities

The town is named for the **coloured sand cliffs**, a 2km walk along the beach. The cliffs arc their red-hued way around Wide Bay, offering a sweeping panorama from the lighthouse at Double Island Point to Fraser Island in the north. Beyond Double Island Point is the Cooloola Section of the **Great Sandy National Park** (p200) and with a 4WD it's possible to drive all the way to Noosa.

A 600m track along the cliffs at the southern end of Cooloola Dr leads to the **Carlo Sandblow**, a spectacular 120m-high dune.

Bushwalkers will find tracks throughout the national park (maps from the QPWS office), including the 46.2km Cooloola Wilderness Trail, which starts at Mullens car park (off Rainbow Beach Rd) and ends near Lake Cooloola.

There's a good surf break at Double Island Point, but fishing is the most popular activity here. The vast shoreline provides abundant beach fishing and really serious anglers can access Tin Can Bay (p216) inlet from either the Carlo Point or Bullock Point boat ramps. Both are just north of town.

Horses and beaches are a good combination and for a gallop in the sands **Rainbow Beach Horse Rides** (☎ 0438 710 530; 1hr ride adult/child \$50/40, 1½hr ride \$60/50) has beach-and-bush rides.

Rainbow Paragliding (☎ 5486 3048, 0418-754 157; www.paraglidingrainbow.com; glides \$150) offers tandem glides above the Carlo Sandblow, where the state championships are held every December. If you get hooked you can do a one-day introduction (\$220) or an eight-day full licensed course (\$1400). **Skydive Rainbow Beach** (☎ 0418-218 358; www.skydiverainbowbeach.com; 8000ft/14,000ft dives incl DVD \$305/400) gets your

knees in the breeze and lands on the main beach.

Regular visitors to Rainbow Beach include a pod of dolphins. **Rainbow Beach Dolphin View Sea Kayaking** (☎ 0408-738 192; 4hr tours per person \$65) operates kayaking safaris and rents kayaks (half day \$65) but if you'd rather surf with the dolphins, they also run the Rainbow Beach Surf School (one-hour session \$55). Board hire is \$15 per hour or \$40 per day. **Carlo Canoes** (☎ 5486 3610; per half/full day \$30/45) hires canoes if you want to do your own exploring.

Teeming with gropers, turtles, manta rays and harmless grey-nurse sharks, Wolf Rock, a congregation of four volcanic pinnacles off Double Island Point, is widely regarded as one of Queensland's best scuba-diving sites. The **Wolf Rock Dive Centre** (☎ 5486 8004; www.wolfrockdive.com.au) offers four-day Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) courses (\$595) that include two dives at Wolf Rock.

For a spot of indigenous culture, you can learn to make a didjeridu or a boomerang. **Rainbow Dreaming** (☎ 0428-895 576; 🕒 by appointment) at Pippies Beach House (right) entertains with cultural talks and Dreamtime legends while you spend half a day fashioning a 'didj' (\$100) or boomerang (\$25).

Tours

Surf & Sand Safaris (☎ 5486 3131; www.surfsandsafaris.com.au; adult/child \$80/40) has a combined 4WD and amphibious-vehicle tour through the national park, and along the beach to the coloured sands and lighthouse at Double Island Point.

Dolphin Ferry Cruise (☎ 5486 8085, 0428-838 836; www.dolphinferrycruise.com.au; adult/child \$18/9, 3hr cruise \$35/20; 🕒 7.20am & 9.30am Tue-Sun) runs leisurely houseboat cruises from Carlo Point across the inlet to Tin Can Bay. The highlight of the trip is hand-feeding Mystique, a wild Indo-Pacific Humpback dolphin who makes regular breakfast visits to the Tin Can Bay marina (see boxed text, p216).

Sleeping

The hostels are grouped together along Spectrum St; all of them can arrange adventure activities and tours.

Rainbow Beach Holiday Village (☎ 1300 366 596, 5486 3222; www.beach-village.com; 13 Rainbow Beach Rd; unpowered/powerd sites from \$22/28, cabins from \$90; 🚰 🚰) This excellent park spreads over 5 acres, overlooking the beach and ocean. There's enough foliage for a small jungle, the cabins are fully

self-contained, and it's extremely popular. Rates are for two people.

Pippies Beach House (☎ 1800 425 356, 5486 8503; www.pippiesbeachhouse.com.au; 22 Spectrum St; dm/d \$22/60; 🚰 🚰 🚰) With only seven rooms, this small, superchilled hostel is the place to relax between surfing, diving and bushwalking. Learn to fashion a didjeridu, then play it around the campfire at the free barbecues every Wednesday night. Other bonuses include free breakfasts and water toys, and plenty of space in the garden for tents and vans (\$12 per person).

Dingo's Backpacker's Resort (☎ 1800 111 126, 5486 8222; www.dingosatrainbow.com; 20 Spectrum Ave; dm/d \$22/65; 🚰 🚰 🚰) The bar is as lively as the vivacious English manager in this party hostel. There's live music every Wednesday night, a Balinese-style gazebo for recovery, free tours to Carlo Sandblow, free pancake breakfasts, and cheap meals every night.

Fraser's on Rainbow (☎ 1800 100 170, 5486 8885; www.fraseronrainbow.com; 18 Spectrum St; dm/d from \$22/64; 🚰 🚰) In a nicely converted motel this hostel has clean, roomy dorms and a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere. Locals join guests for a tippie at the sprawling outdoor bar, and you can also buy cheap meals every night.

our pick **Debbie's Place** (☎ 5486 3506; www.rainbowbeachaccommodation.com.au; 30 Kurana St; d/ste from \$69/79; 🚰) Inside this beautiful timber Queenslander, dripping with pot plants, the charming rooms are fully self-contained and have private entrances and verandas. The effervescent Debbie is a mine of information and makes this a cosy home away from home. Laundry facilities are available and there's a barbecue in the tropical gardens.

Rainbow Sands Holiday Units (☎ 5486 3400; 42-46 Rainbow Beach Rd; d \$89, 1-bedroom apt \$100; 🚰 🚰) This low-rise, palm-fronted complex has neat, appealing motel rooms with poolside glass doors and bar fridges, and self-contained units with full laundries for comfortable longer stays. The owners are utterly genuine and helpful.

Rainbow Shores Resort (☎ 5486 3999; www.rainbowshores.com.au; 12 Rainbow Shores Dr; r from \$875 per week, villas & beach houses from \$1075 per week; 🚰 🚰) For luxury in the bush, this is the place. Accommodation options include standard holiday units, funky, individual three-bedroom beach houses and stylish split-level villas. On site is a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, barbecues, a restaurant and plenty of

bush. There's a minimum five-night stay in high season.

Eating

Self-caterers will find a supermarket on Rainbow Beach Rd.

Kombi Kafe (☎ 5486 3733; 48 Rainbow Beach Rd; mains \$6-12.50; ☎ 7am-5pm) Famous for its pancakes and waffles, this small café comes recommended by the locals and dishes up typical Aussie burgers, bacon-and-egg muffins, and yummy cakes.

Archies (☎ 5486 3277; 12 Rainbow Beach Rd; mains \$7-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular café perfectly encapsulates Rainbow's laid-back surfer chic, serving delicious smoothies, veggie burgers, and fish in various guises.

Waterview Bistro (☎ 5486 8344; Cooloola Drive; mains \$23-28; ☎ breakfast Sun, lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Wed-Sun) Sunset drinks are a must at this swish restaurant with sensational views of Fraser Island from its hilltop perch. Interesting seafood dishes include crumbed garfish fillets and Sandy Straits crab linguini, but carnivores and vegetarians alike will find something to complement the view.

Getting There & Around

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) has several daily services from Brisbane (\$52, five hours), Noosa (\$33, 2½ hours) and Hervey Bay (\$28, 1½ hours). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) has less-expensive services. **Polley's Coaches** (☎ 5482 9455) has buses from Gympie (\$15, 1¼ hours).

DETOUR: TIN CAN BAY

Head out of Rainbow Beach along Rainbow Beach Rd, turn north onto Tin Can Bay Rd and after 10km you reach the idyllic and quiet fishing village of Tin Can Bay. Sitting at the southern tip of the Great Sandy Strait, it's the perfect place to escape the beaten track.

Mystique, the resident dolphin, makes regular breakfast visits to the Tin Can Bay marina boat ramp and monitored feeding takes place from 8am to 10am.

On the main road into town, the **Sandcastle Motel** (☎ 5486 4555; Tin Can Bay Rd; d \$75; ☎) has large rooms with small kitchenettes, or you could live it up at **Dolphin Waters** (☎ 5486 2600; www.dolphinwaters.com.au; 40-1 The Esplanade; d per night/week from \$125/700; ☎), which has spotless, self-contained units. Fishing enthusiasts can fish from dawn to dusk and beyond on the fully self-contained houseboats from **Luxury Afloat Houseboats** (☎ 5486 4864; www.luxuryafloat.com.au; Norman Point; per day from \$365, min 3 nights).

The seafood platter at **Codfather Too** (☎ 5486 4400; 1 Oyster Pde; mains \$12-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) has piles of mud crab, Moreton Bay bugs, prawns, calamari, scallops, and fish and chips; the marina restaurant has lovely water views.

Leaving town on Tin Can Bay Rd, turn north towards Maryborough for a pleasant 65km country drive through pine forests and lush greenery.

Most 4WD-hire companies will also arrange permits, barge costs and hire out camping gear. Some recommended companies:

All Trax 4WD Hire (☎ 5486 8767; Karoonda Rd)

Rainbow Beach Adventure Centre 4WD Hire (☎ 5486 3288; www.adventurecentre.com.au; Rainbow Beach Rd; ☎ 7am-5pm)

Safari 4WD (☎ 1800 689 819, 5486 8188; 3 Karoonda Ct)

Cooloola Coast Realty (☎ 5486 3411; Shop 2, 6 Rainbow Beach Rd; per night \$10) rents lock-up garages if you need to leave your own car in town.

MARYBOROUGH

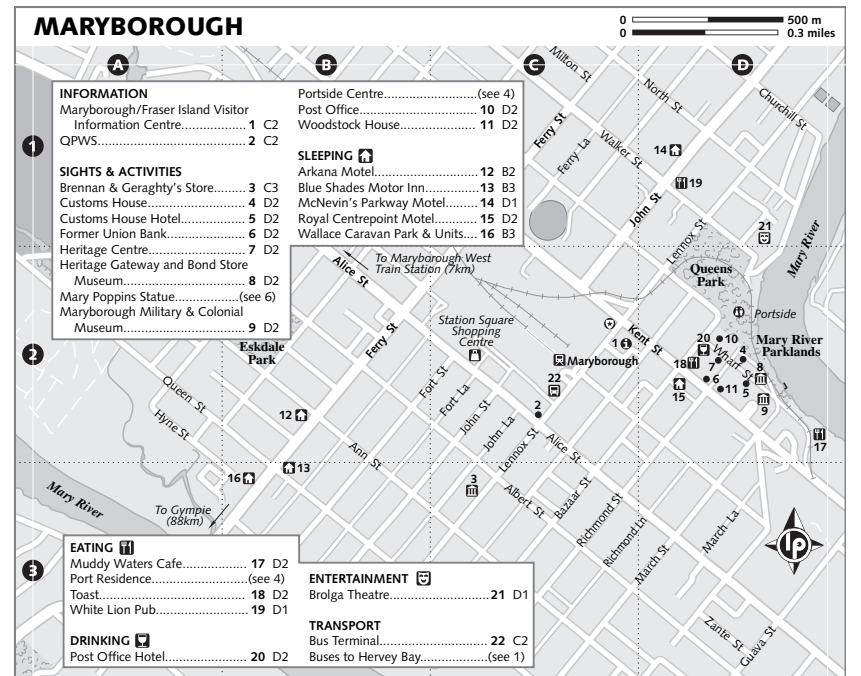
☎ 07 / pop 21,500

Born in 1847, Maryborough is one of Queensland's oldest towns, and its port was the first shaky step ashore for thousands of 19th-century free settlers looking for a better life in the new country. Heritage and history are Maryborough's fortes, the pace of yesteryear reflected in its beautifully restored colonial-era buildings and gracious Queensland homes.

This big old country town is also the birthplace of PL Travers, creator of everyone's favourite umbrella-wielding nanny, Mary Poppins.

Orientation & Information

The **Maryborough/Fraser Island visitors centre** (☎ 1800 214 789, 4190 5742; City Hall, Kent St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) in the 100-year-old City Hall is extremely helpful and has free copies of comprehensive self-guided walking tours.



Kent St is the main strip but you'll find Portside with most of the museums and the Mary River Parklands along Wharf St.

Sights

Portside in the historic port area beside the Mary River has 13 heritage-listed buildings, parklands and museums. Today's tidy colonial-era buildings and landscaped gardens paint a different story from Maryborough's once-thriving port and seedy streets filled with sailors, ruffians, brothels and opium dens. The **Portside Centre** (☎ 4190 5730; cnr Wharf & Richmond Sts; ☎ 10am-4pm), located in the former **Customs House**, has interactive displays on Maryborough's history. Part of the centre but a few doors down, the **Bond Store Museum** also highlights key periods in Maryborough's history. Downstairs is the original packed-earth floor and even some liquor barrels from 1864.

If tracing your genealogical tree is a priority, cross the road to the **Heritage Centre** (☎ 4123 1842; cnr Wharf & Richmond Sts; ☎ 9am-4pm) where you'll find colonial immigration records from ships logs; and if dear old great-great-granddaddy arrived in Australia courtesy of

Her Majesty's prison system, you'll find convict records as well.

Also on Wharf Street, the **Maryborough Military & Colonial Museum** (☎ 4123 5900; 106 Wharf St; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 9am-3pm) has the only surviving three-wheeler Girling car. Originally built in London in 1911, this fully restored model zips along at a blistering 29km/h. The museum also houses a replica Cobb & Co coach and one of the largest military libraries in Australia.

The **Mary River Parklands** on the riverfront have pleasant walkways, picnic areas and a cluster of ships bollards painted to resemble colonial figures. Further down the river is pretty **Queens Park** (also heritage-listed) with a profusion of glorious trees, including a banyan fig that's more than 140 years old. Chug through the park on the **Mary Ann** (☎ 4121 0444; adult/child \$3/2), a life-size replica of Queensland's first steam engine, built in Maryborough in 1873. It operates on the last Sunday of each month and every Thursday. Kiddies will love the **Melsa** (per person \$1) miniature steam engines that chug through the park on the last Sunday of the month.

Lining the streets around Portside are many fine old buildings including Queensland's oldest **post office** (nr Bazaar & Wharf Sts), built in 1866. On Richmond Street is the revival-style **Woodstock House** and the neoclassical **former Union Bank**, birthplace of *Mary Poppins* author PL Travers. The life-size **Mary Poppins statue** on the street depicts the acerbic character Travers created rather than the saccharine-sweet Disney version. Back on Wharf Street is the **Customs House Hotel** (closed for renovations), one of the oldest portside hotels, which once had an opium den and now has a resident ghost!

You'll have to leave Portside to visit the National Trust-classified **Brennan & Geraghty's Store** (☎ 4121 2250; 64 Lennox St; adult/child/family \$5.50/2.50/13.50; ☎ 10am-3pm), which traded for 100 years before closing its doors. The museum is filled with tins, bottles and packets, including early Vegemite jars and curry powder from the 1890s, all crammed onto the ceiling-high shelves. Look for the 1885 tea packet from China, the oldest item in the store.

Activities

On a **Tea with Mary** (☎ 1800 214 789, 4190 5730; per person \$10.50) tour you get more than a morning cuppa. A costumed guide spills the beans on the town's past on a tour of the historic precinct. Admission charges and morning tea are included in the cost.

Otherwise, **Maryborough Riverboat Cruises** (☎ 4123 1523; www.maryboroughrivercruise.com; 1hr tour adult/child \$15/8, 2hr lunch cruise \$30/15; ☎ 10am, noon & 2pm Tue-Sun) provide informed commentaries while you cruise past heritage homes and historic buildings along the Mary River.

On the last weekend of each month you can catch an outdoor flick at **Moonlight Movies** in the Mary River Parklands on Friday night; get spooked on a torch-lit tour of the city's grisly murder sites, opium dens, haunted houses and cemetery with **Ghostly Tours & Tales** (☎ 1800 214 789, 4190 5742; tour incl progressive 3-course dinner \$75) on Saturday night; and top it off with a leisurely morning of food, brass bands, steam-train rides and river cruises the next morning at **Sunday in the Park**.

Sleeping

Wallace Caravan Park & Units (☎ 4121 3970; www.wallacecaravanpark.com.au; 22 Ferry St; unpowered/powerd sites \$17/22, cabins \$35-70; ☎) This pleasant park spreads across a gentle slope underneath a

bevy of towering trees. Modern cabins, self-contained motel units and camp kitchens cater to all tastes. Rates are for two people.

Royal Centrepont Motel (☎ 4121 2241; www.centrepontmotel.com.au; 326 Kent St; s/d \$70/75; ☎) The faded carpets and 1920s-style corridors give this old building in the town centre a Heartbreak Hotel feel. The rooms and the communal kitchenette are spotless and a continental breakfast is included in the tariff.

Arkana Motel (☎ 4121 2261; www.arkanamotel.com.au; 46 Ferry St; s/d \$73/84; ☎) Just out of the town centre this good-value motel has no surprises except for its German restaurant with an all-you-can-eat buffet for \$19.50.

McNevin's Parkway Motel (☎ 1800 072 000, 4122 2888; www.mcnevins.com.au; 188 John St; r/ste from \$99/125; ☎) This well-run complex is popular with business folk but the fresh, light motel rooms are comfortable, regardless of your reason for staying. A step up in style and price are the smart executive suites, which have separate bedrooms and spas.

Blue Shades Motor Inn (☎ 4122 2777; www.blue-shades.com; 35 Ferry St; r/ste from \$86/120; ☎) A close second to the Parkway, this large motel complex has a range of accommodation, from generic and simple motel rooms to family rooms and modern executive rooms. Wireless and dial-up internet is available.

Eating

Toast (☎ 4121 7222; 199 Bazaar St; dishes \$5-7.90; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Sat, 7pm-11pm Fri & Sat) Stainless-steel fittings, polished cement floors and coffee served in paper cups stamp the metro-chic seal on this groovy café. Sushi, gourmet focaccias and yummy sweet treats are on offer but the main attraction is the best coffee you'll find in town.

The Port Residence (☎ 4123 5001; Customs House, Wharf St; mains \$12-25; ☎ lunch Wed-Mon, dinner Fri & Sat) An elegant restaurant and tea room in the old Customs House residence. Light meals and traditional Aussie favourites like scones and tea are served on the shady veranda, which has lovely views over the Mary River Parklands.

Muddy Waters Café (☎ 4121 5011; 71 Wharf St; mains \$15-32; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun, dinner Wed-Sat) The shady riverfront deck and the summery menu at this classy café will keep you happy with tempting seafood dishes such as Heineken-battered barramundi and salt-and-pepper squid.

White Lion Pub (☎ 4121 3374; 37 Walker St; mains \$12-28; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Don't mistake this warm, friendly local for just another generic pub. The cosy restaurant and beer garden has an extensive menu with both steaks and seafood popular with the locals.

Drinking & Entertainment

A few *salutés* and *chin-chins* are in order at the **Post Office Hotel** (☎ 4121 3289; nr Bazaar & Wharf St), a lovely building designed by an Italian architect, Caradini, in 1889. You can also hoe into good pub grub with \$7 roasts.

For a touch of culture, the strikingly contemporary **Brolga Theatre** (☎ 4122 6060; 5 Walker St) hosts musical and theatrical events.

Getting There & Away

Both the **Sunlander** (\$56.10, five hours, three weekly) and the **Tilt Train** (\$55, 3½ hours, Sunday to Friday) connect Brisbane with the Maryborough West station, 7km west of the centre. There's a shuttle bus from the main bus terminal beside the Maryborough train station on Lennox St.

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) have buses to Gympie (\$25, one hour), Bundaberg (\$34, three hours) and Brisbane (\$54, 4½ hours).

Wide Bay Transit (☎ 4121 3719) has hourly services between Maryborough and the Urangan Marina in Hervey Bay (\$7.60, one hour) every weekday, with fewer services on the weekend. Buses depart Maryborough from outside the City Hall in Kent St.

HERVEY BAY

☎ 07 / pop 41,225

Like its English Casanova namesake, Hervey Bay is a seductive charmer that's difficult to resist. A warm subtropical climate, long sandy beaches, calm blue ocean and a relaxed and unpretentious local community lure all sorts – backpackers, families and sea-changing retirees – to its shores. Throw in the chance to see the majestic humpback whales frolicking in the water, and the town's convenient access to the World Heritage-listed Fraser Island, and it's easy to understand how this once-sleepy fishing village seduces without even trying.

Don't bother packing a surfboard though: Fraser Island shelters Hervey Bay from the ocean surf, and the sea here is shallow and

completely flat – perfect for kiddies and postcard summer holiday pics.

Orientation

Hervey Bay covers a string of beachside suburbs – Point Vernon, Pialba, Scarness, Torquay and Urangan – but behind the flawless beachfront and pockets of sedate suburbia, the outskirts of town dissolve into an industrial jungle. Unfortunately, when you enter town on the Maryborough–Hervey Bay Rd, the only way to reach the beach is through this frenzied traffic snarl.

Information

The official tourist office is a fair way from the centre.

Great Adventures (☎ 4125 3601; 408 The Esplanade, Torquay; per hr \$4; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Located at Koala Beach Resort. Offers internet access and is a booking agent for tours and activities.

Hervey Bay Tourism & Development Bureau (☎ 1800 811 728, 4125 9855; www.herveybaytourism.com.au; nr Urraweene & Maryborough Rds; ☎ 9am-5pm) Helpful and professional tourist office on the outskirts of town.

Hervey Bay visitors centre (☎ 1800 649 926, 4124 4050; 401 The Esplanade, Torquay; internet per hr \$4; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) Privately run booking office with internet access.

Post office (☎ 4125 1101; 414 The Esplanade, Torquay) Branches also at Pialba and Urangan.

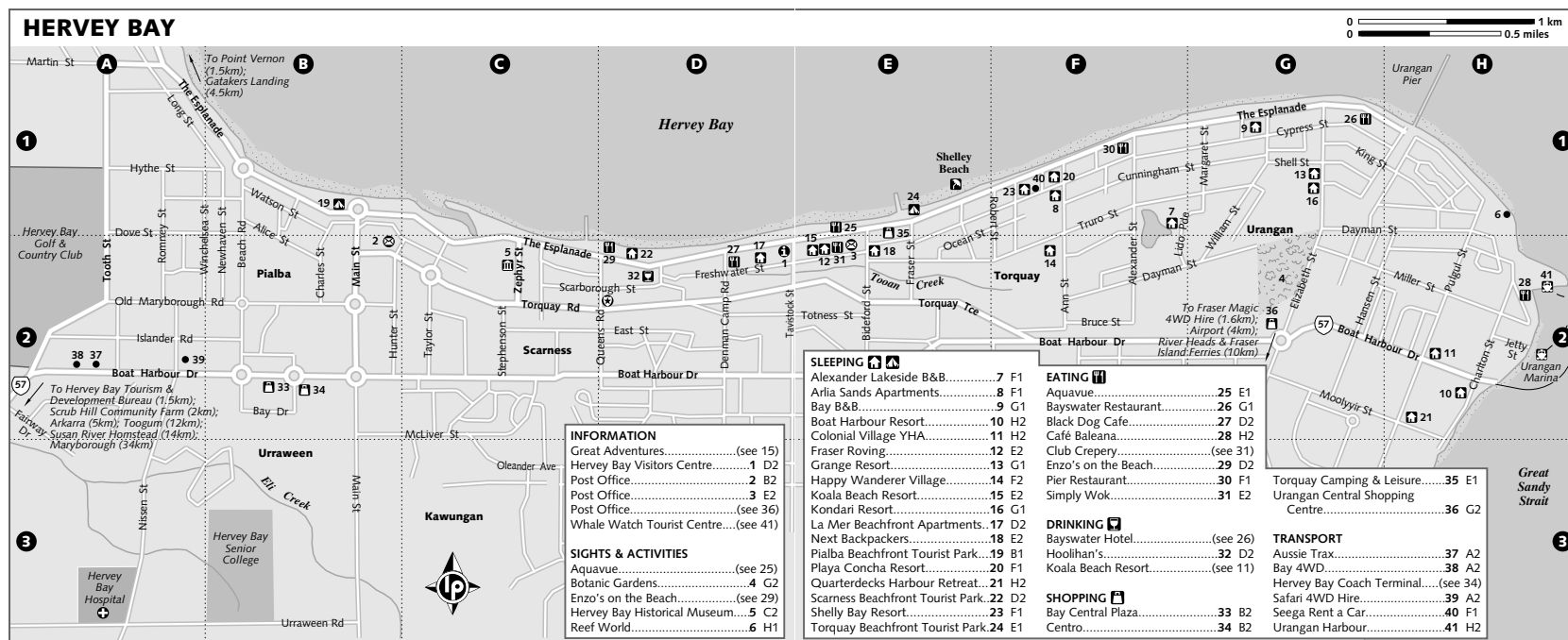
Whale Watch Tourist Centre (☎ 1800 358 595; Urangan Marina, Urangan; ☎ 7am-5pm) At the marina; it's privately run and has good information.

Sights

The beach and related activities are the big lure in Hervey Bay, but there a couple of attractions.

Reef World (☎ 4128 9828; Pulgul St, Urangan; adult/child \$16/8, shark dives \$60; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) is a small aquarium stocked with some of the Great Barrier Reef's most colourful characters, including a giant 18-year-old groper. You can also take a dip with lemon, whaler and other nonpredatory sharks.

Operated by the Korrawinga Aboriginal Community, the **Scrub Hill Community Farm** (☎ 4124 6908; Scrub Hill Rd; tours per adult/child/family \$16.50/5.50/33; ☎ by appointment) is an initiative designed to provide Hervey Bay's indigenous community with training and employment in tourism and related industries. The community produces organic vegetables, tea-tree



oil and excellent artworks, including didjeridus. The guided tours (must be booked) detail how the farm operates, and the slightly more expensive option (adult/child/family \$25/10/55) includes bush tucker and a traditional dancing display.

Hervey Bay's pretty **Botanic Gardens** (Elizabeth St, Urangan; ☎ 6.30am-8.30pm) have a few small lagoons, dense foliage and walking tracks. With over 80 bird species visiting the gardens, it's a pleasant picnic spot. There's also a small but beautiful **orchid house** (admission \$2; ☎ 10am-3.45pm Mon-Fri) and an Aboriginal bush-tucker garden.

For a nature walk with a difference, head 5km north along the Burrum Heads Rd to **Arkarra** (☎ 4128 7300; www.arkarra.com.au; 28 Panorama Dr, Dundowran Beach; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat & Sun). This popular ecotourist Balinese tea garden is set on 30 acres of subtropical rainforest, melaleuca wetlands and lagoons. Taking a walk along the short trails is the best way to absorb the tranquil surrounds and see the wallabies, kangaroos, goannas and more than 170 species of birds on the grounds. Finish off with lunch or afternoon

tea in the authentic thatched-roof Balinese huts overlooking the lagoons.

If it's a rainy day and you're really stuck for something to do, wander down to the **Hervey Bay Historical Museum** (☎ 4128 1064; 13 Zephyr St, Scarness; adult/child \$5/0.50; ☎ 1-5pm Fri-Sun). With more than 3000 items on display, the emphasis is on quantity rather than quality.

Activities WHALE-WATCHING

Hervey Bay is touted as the 'whale-watching capital of the world'. After fleeing the Antarctic winter to mate and calve in the warmer waters off northeastern Australia, the humpback whales cruise into Hervey Bay's sheltered waters for a few days before returning to the deep south. Humpbacks are showy aqua-acrobats; you'll see waving their pectoral fins, tail slapping, breaching or simply 'blowing'. Whales are curious creatures, and many will roll up beside the whale-watching boats with one eye clear of the water, making those on board wonder who's actually watching whom.

Whale-watching tours operate out of Hervey Bay every day (weather permitting) during the annual migrations between late July and early November. Sightings are guaranteed from August to the end of October (you get a free return trip if the whales don't show). Out of season many boats offer dolphin-spotting tours. The boats cruise from Urangan Harbour out to Platypus Bay and then zip around from pod to pod to find the most active whales. Most vessels offer half-day tours for around \$100 for adults and \$60 for children, and most include breakfast or lunch.

Tour bookings can be made through your accommodation or the information centres.

Some recommended operators:

Blue Dolphin Marine Tours (☎ 4124 9600; www.bluedolphintours.com.au; ☎ 7.30am) Maximum 20 passengers on a 10m catamaran.

Descarada (☎ 1800 606 136; www.descarada.com.au; ☎ 8.30am) Maximum of 30 passengers on a 70ft luxury motor yacht.

MV Tasman Venture (☎ 1800 620 322; www.tasmanventure.com.au; ☎ 8.30am & 1.30pm) Maximum of 80 passengers; underwater microphones and viewing windows.

Quick Cat II (☎ 1800 671 977, 4128 9611; www.herveybaywhalewatch.com.au; ☎ 8am & 1pm) With underwater cameras, a maximum of 80 passengers and wheelchair access.

Whalesong (☎ 1800 689 610, 4125 6222; www.whalesong.com.au; ☎ 7.30am & 1pm) Maximum of 70 passengers; caters to travellers with disabilities.

FISHING

The fishing in and around Hervey Bay is excellent, and if you're not one of the fanatics who converge by the trailerload with their own gear and boats, numerous vessels operate fishing safaris. **MV Fighting Whiting** (☎ 4124 6599; adult/child/family \$60/35/160) and **MV Princess II** (☎ 4124 0400; adult/child \$120/85) offer calm-water fishing trips that include lunch. **Lapu Charters** (☎ 4194 2440; www.lapucharters.com.au) can provide tailored fishing or diving expeditions.

CRUISES

On a boat cruise along the Great Sandy Straits with **Blue Horizon Cruises** (☎ 1800 247 992; www.bluehorizoncruises.com.au; 4hr tour adult/child \$80/50; ☎ 10am) you will see shipwrecks, coral reefs and plenty of marine wildlife. The informative guides

give you the run down on the area's ecology and history.

Blackbird Yacht Charters (☎ 0417-339 836; www.blackbirdyachtcharters.com.au; per person 2-/3hr \$60/100, half/full day \$130/230) offers sunset sails through to multiday cruises in the calm, clear waters of the Great Sandy Straits.

Fraser Island Rent-a-Yacht (☎ 1800 672 618; www.rent-a-yacht.com.au; half-/full-day cruise \$130/230) plies the same waters and also rents a range of vessels for self-charter.

WATER SPORTS

Aquavue (☎ 4125 5528; www.aquavue.com.au; The Esplanade, Torquay), a beach shed and café on the foreshore, has the latest water-sports craze to hit the waves: SeaKarts (\$50 per hour) are small sports catamarans reaching speeds of up to 15 knots. You can also zip across to Fraser Island on a jet ski (three-hour guided tour \$150) or play by yourself on a jet ski (\$40/135 per 15 minutes/hour), a kayak (\$20 per hour) or a fishing boat (\$80 for two hours).

Budding kite-surfers can book lessons at **Enzo's on the Beach** (☎ 4124 6375; 351a The Esplanade, Scarness; 2hr lesson \$90), another beachfront café.

There are better diving sites elsewhere on the Queensland coast, but if you want to learn to dive before hitting the reef, **Blue Horizon Cruises** (☎ 1800 247 992; www.bluehorizoncruises.com.au; from \$120) offers introductory dives, PADI certification courses and specialty diver training courses.

SCENIC FLIGHTS

Air Fraser Island (☎ 1800 247 992, 4125 3600) operates whale-watching flights and scenic flights over Fraser Island from \$70. **MI Helicopters** (☎ 1800 600 345) has a range of scenic flights from 10 minutes (\$95) to one hour. Flights of 35 minutes (\$255) and longer take you over Fraser Island.

To really feel like a bird, ditch the metal shell and cruise the skies in a microlite. **Fraser Coast Microlites** (☎ 1300 732 801; flights per 20/30/45/70min \$75/120/175/230) is a novel way to see the Fraser coast.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Hervey Bay Skydivers (☎ 1300 558 616, 4183 0119; www.herveybayskydivers.com.au) offers tandem skydives for \$250 from 10,000ft and \$270 from 14,000ft. Add an extra \$30 for skydives over the beach.

A PULSE OF WHALES

Quick whale facts: three whales form a pod and a dozen form a pulse; calves can drink up to 60 litres of milk a day; and adult humpback whales:

- measure up to 15m in length
- weigh up to 45 tonnes
- eat a tonne of krill each day
- cruise at 7km/h
- reach sexual maturity at six to 10 years of age
- have a gestation period of 12 months

The **Susan River Homestead** (☎ 4121 6846; www.susanriver.com; Hervey Bay-Maryborough Rd), about half-way between Maryborough and Hervey Bay, has popular horse-riding packages (\$165/126 per adult/child), which include accommodation, all meals and use of the on-site swimming pool and tennis courts. Casual two-hour horse rides through bushland cost \$60.

Tours

Fraser Island is the big drawcard here and practically every tour operator, hotel, hostel and information centre can organise your trip. See Sand Safaris (p212) for more information.

You can also fly to Lady Elliot Island with **Lady Elliot Island Resort** (☎ 1800 072 200, 5536 3644; www.ladyelliott.com.au; adult/child \$275/146). The day trip includes at least five hours on the Great Barrier Reef, a glass-bottomed boat or snorkel tour, lunch and use of the resort's facilities. See p248 for information about longer stays on the islands.

Festivals & Events

The **Hervey Bay Whale Festival** (www.herveybaywhalefestival.com.au) is held over a week at the start of August and celebrates the return of the whales. Highlights include a jazz festival, the blessing of the fleet and a street parade.

Sleeping BUDGET

Hervey Bay is inundated with caravan parks and hostels; most of the latter will pick you up from the bus station.

Beachfront Tourist Parks (www.beachfronttouristparks.com.au; unpowered/powered sites \$20/26) are appeal-

ing council-run parks right on the beach at Pialba (☎ 4128 1399), Scarness (☎ 4125 1578) and Torquay (☎ 4128 1274). Rates are for two people.

Colonial Village YHA (☎ 1800 818 280, 4125 1844; www.cvyha.com; 820 Boat Harbour Dr, Urangan; unpowered/powered sites \$18/24; dm/d/cabins from \$20/50/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) This excellent YHA is set on 8 hectares of tranquil bushland, close to the marina and only 50m from the beach. It's a lovely spot, thick with ambience, possums and parrots. Facilities include a spa, tennis and basketball courts, and a funky bar. Breakfast is free and dinners cost \$8 to \$10.

Happy Wanderer Village (☎ 4125 1103; www.happywanderer.com.au; 105 Truro St, Torquay; unpowered/powered sites from \$28/32, cabins/villas from \$62/116; ☎ ☎) The manicured lawns and profuse gum-tree cover at this large park make for great tent sites. The cabins and villas are clean and roomy and the spotless facilities include a spa, free barbecues and a laundry. Rates are for two people. Wheelchair accessible.

Fraser Roving (☎ 1800 989 811, 4125 6386; www.fraserroving.com; 412 The Esplanade, Torquay; dm \$20-25, d with/without bathroom \$60/65; ☎ ☎) With a well-deserved reputation as one of the friendliest hostels in Queensland, this hostel delivers all the backpacker essentials: genuine owners, clean (but spartan) rooms, spotless bathrooms and a party atmosphere. The hostel is a maze of corridors, but you're definitely in the heart of the action. Tuck into the all-you-can-eat Mexican for \$9.90 every night of the week.

Next Backpackers (☎ 4125 6600; www.nextbackpackers.com.au; 10 Bideford St, Torquay; dm \$22-25, d \$65; ☎ ☎) Having won the Best Budget Accommodation Award for the Fraser Coast, you'd expect this modern hostel to be a cut above the usual sus-

pects. With polished wooden floors, ultraclean roomy rooms and a well-equipped stainless-steel kitchen, it certainly is. There's a 'girls only' dorm, a café and a bar open until midnight.

Koala Beach Resort (☎ 4125 3601; www.koalaadventures.com; 410 The Esplanade, Torquay; dm/d \$24/60) This sprawling complex covers almost a hectare of land in Hervey Bay's main hub. Low-level housing clusters around the colonial-style bar, central pool and shady barbecue area. If you want privacy, you can book into one of the motel rooms (\$75), but don't expect a quiet time here – this is party central, and the bar and nightclub goes off every night of the week. Great Adventures (p219) here can book all tours and adventure activities.

MIDRANGE

Playa Concha Resort (☎ 4125 1544; www.playaconcharesort.com; 475 The Esplanade, Torquay; r from \$88; ☎ ☎) This lovely spot across from the beach has clean and airy rooms and masses of trees in the courtyard. It's great value and there's even a Spanish restaurant with a paella and sangria meal deal for \$25. Olé!

Boat Harbour Resort (☎ 4125 5079; www.boatbourresort.net; 651-652 Charlton St, Urangan; r \$110-130; ☎ ☎) Close to the Hervey Bay marina, these timber studios and cabins are set on attractive grounds. The studios have sizable decks out the front and the roomy villas are great for families.

Arlia Sands Apartments (☎ 4125 3778; www.arlia-sands.com.au; 13 Ann St, Torquay; r from \$120; ☎ ☎) This refurbished series of units contains plush furniture, wide-screen TVs and beautiful kitchens. It's off the main drag yet close to the beach and shops and is *très* quiet. There's a minimum three-night stay in high season.

SEXY HUMPBACKS

Males 'strutting their stuff' are nothing new in the animal kingdom: think of a hummingbird's song, a peacock's dance or the local surf club on a Friday night. But unlike land-based animals, giant marine mammals are limited to how (and what) they can strut. In the case of the humpback whale, singing seems to be the best option.

Dr Mike Noad from the University of Queensland, a leading international expert on the humpback, sums up a male whale's song as 'an acoustic version of a peacock's tail. It's complex and very beautiful but meaningless except as a way to show off'. Songs last 10 to 20 minutes and are often repeated continuously for hours on end.

Since only males sing (and only during the breeding migrations), it's a likely bet these bulls are crooning for a mate. After a season of song and sex the male's job is done, leaving the cows responsible for raising their calves.

Not so different from the surf club after all.

Kondari Resort (☎ 4125 4445; www.kondarilake.com.au; 49-63 Elizabeth St, Uranang; r \$120-135; ☼ ☼ ☼) Set on 20 acres beside a lake this sprawling, low-rise resort has two pools, tennis courts, barbecues and a profusion of native bush. All cabins have private verandas and kitchenettes with limited cooking facilities.

Shelly Bay Resort (☎ 4125 4533; www.shellybayresort.com.au; 466 The Esplanade, Torquay; 1-/2-bedroom units \$125/170; ☼ ☼) The bold, cheerful self-contained units at this complex have slightly dated facilities, but the beach is just across the road and all rooms have water views.

Alexander Lakeside B&B (☎ 4128 9448; www.herveybaybedandbreakfast.com; 29 Lido Pde, Uranang; r \$130-160; ☼ ☼) In a quiet street, this warm and friendly B&B offers lakeside indulgence. There's an Asian beach-chic feel, a heated lakeside spa, and all rooms have private bathrooms and TVs. Guests also have access to a kitchen and laundry.

Bay B&B (☎ 4125 6919; www.baybedandbreakfast.com.au; 180 Cypress St, Uranang; s \$75, d \$135-150; ☼ ☼) This cosy and homey B&B is run by a friendly, well-travelled Frenchman. Guest rooms are in a comfy annexe out the back, and breakfast is served on an outdoor patio in a tropical garden surrounded by birds and masses of greenery. Families can take over the separate fully self-contained unit. Dinners available on request.

La Mer Beachfront Apartments (☎ 1800 100 181, 4128 3494; www.lamer.com.au; 396 The Esplanade, Torquay; r per night/week \$180/800; ☼ ☼) Behind the generic façade are fresh and modern luxury apartments with open-plan living areas and spunky new mod cons including full laundries, DVDs, cable TV and even coffee plungers.

TOP END

ourpick The Quarterdecks Harbour Retreat (☎ 4197 0888; www.quarterdecksretreat.com.au; 80 Moolyvir St, Uranang; 1-/2-/3-bedroom villas \$160/210/240; ☼ ☼) These brand-new contemporary villas are fantastic value. Each villa is stylishly furnished with a private courtyard, all the mod cons you could wish for, and little luxuries like fluffy bathrobes. Backing onto a nature reserve, it's quiet apart from the wonderful bird life, and is only 60m from the beach. Pets welcome.

Grange Resort (☎ 4125 2002; www.thegrange-hervey.com.au; cnr Elizabeth & Shell Sts, Uranang; 1-/2-bedroom villas \$195/225; ☼ ☼) Reminiscent of a stylish desert resort with fancy split-level condos and filled with life's little luxuries, this place is

close to the beach and to town. Glossy kitchens and bathrooms, stainless-steel appliances, plump couches, spacious boudoirs and commodious decks are the norm.

Eating

Self-caterers can stock up at the supermarkets inside the Centro, Uranang Central and Bay Central Plaza shopping centres.

Enzo's on the Beach (☎ 4124 6375; 351a The Esplanade, Scarness; mains \$7-15; ☼ 6.30am-5pm; ☼) A shabby-chic outdoor café with a superb beachfront location where you can dine on focaccias, wraps, healthy salads and light meals or just sip a coffee, listen to chill music and wallow in the perfect ocean views. Active sorts can hire kayaks and surf skis or learn kitesurfing.

Aquavue (☎ 4125 5528; www.aquavue.com.au; 415 The Esplanade, Torquay; mains \$8-13; ☼ breakfast & lunch) Another outdoor café on the beachfront offering unbeatable sea views and the usual assortment of sandwiches and light meals. There are plenty of water toys for hire.

Club Crepery (☎ 4194 6488; 417 The Esplanade, Torquay; mains \$10-16; ☼ 9am-9pm) This tiny hole-in-the-wall café has wicked seafood crepes and also sells sushi and cakes.

Café Balaena (☎ 4125 4799; Shop 7, Terminal Bldg, Buccaneer Ave, Uranang; mains \$10-25; ☼ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Mon) This waterfront café provides expensive views, atmosphere with a decidedly laid-back twist and wallet-friendly prices. The menu is hip café fare – mountainous *paninis* and salads – with a good dose of fresh seafood.

Simply Wok (☎ 4125 2077; 417 The Esplanade, Torquay; mains \$14-25; ☼ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Noodles, stir-fries, seafood and curries will satisfy any cravings for Asian cuisine, and there's an all-you-can-eat hot buffet for \$13.90.

Black Dog Café (☎ 4124 3177; 381 The Esplanade, Torquay; mains \$14-33; ☼ lunch & dinner) This funky café oozes groove, starting with the chilled funk on the speakers and ending with the East-meets-West inventions on your fork. Sushi, Japanese soup, fresh burgers, club sambos and seafood salads will tame any black dog.

Pier Restaurant (☎ 4128 9699; 573 The Esplanade, Uranang; mains \$20-40; ☼ dinner Mon-Sat) Although sitting opposite the water, the Pier makes little use of its ocean views but this à la carte restaurant has an interesting seafood menu (mud-crab claws with chilli mango, and oysters with frozen margarita) and is highly recommended by the locals.

Bayswater Restaurant (☎ 4194 7555; 569 The Esplanade, Uranang; mains \$26-39; ☼ lunch & dinner) This stylish contemporary restaurant in Peppers Pier Resort dishes up modern Australian cuisine with European influences. Signature dishes include crispy-skinned salmon and chilli blue-swimmer crab linguini. It's open and airy and the views are sensational.

Drinking & Entertainment

Bayswater Hotel (☎ 4194 7555; 569 The Esplanade, Uranang) Adjacent to the Bayswater Restaurant (above) at Peppers Pier Resort, this breezy bar and bistro is ultracool. Cocktails on the outdoor cane lounges come with the same fantastic ocean views.

Hoolihan's (☎ 4194 0099; 382 The Esplanade, Scarness). Like all good Irish pubs, Hoolihan's is cosy and packed with interesting characters.

Koala Beach Resort (☎ 4125 3601; 410 The Esplanade, Torquay) Backpackers will gravitate to Hervey Bay's party central at Koala's, with loads of drinking and fun every night of the week.

Shopping

Hire or buy camping gear for a trip to Fraser Island at **Torquay Camping & Leisure** (☎ 4125 6511; 424 The Esplanade, Torquay; ☼ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Hervey Bay airport is off Booral Rd, Uranang, on the way to River Heads.

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) has several daily flights to/from Brisbane (\$140, 45 minutes) and a daily flight to/from Sydney (\$186, two hours). **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com) fly daily from Sydney (\$110, two hours).

BOAT

Boats to Fraser Island leave from River Heads, about 10km south of town, and Uranang Marina (see p211). Most tours leave from Uranang Harbour.

BUS

Long-distance buses depart **Hervey Bay Coach Terminal** (☎ 4124 4000; Central Ave, Pialba). **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) have several services to/from Brisbane (\$65, 5½ hours), Maroochydore

(\$46, 3½ hours), Bundaberg (\$18, 1½ hours) and Rockhampton (\$80, six hours).

Suntours (☎ 4125 2221; www.suntours.net.au) has daily services to Brisbane airport (\$55) and the Sunshine Coast airport (\$42).

Wide Bay Transit (☎ 4121 3719) has hourly services from Uranang Marina (stopping along The Esplanade) to Maryborough (\$7.60, one hour) every weekday, with fewer services on weekends.

Trainlink buses connect Maryborough West train station with the Coach Terminal (\$7.50, 45 minutes).

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Bay Bicycle Hire (☎ 0417-644 814; per half-/full day \$15/20) rents bicycles from various outlets along the Esplanade, or can deliver bikes to your door.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Seega Rent a Car (☎ 4125 6008; 463 The Esplanade) has small cars from \$30 to \$40 a day.

Plenty of rental companies makes Hervey Bay the best place to hire a 4WD for Fraser Island:

Air Fraser Island (☎ 1800 247 992, 4125 3600; www.airfraserisland.com.au)

Aussie Trax (☎ 1800 062 275; 56 Boat Harbour Dr, Pialba)

Bay 4WD (☎ 1800 687 178, 4128 2981; www.bay4wd.com.au; 52-54 Boat Harbour Dr, Pialba)

Fraser Magic 4WD Hire (☎ 4125 6612; www.fraser-magic-4wdhire.com.au; Lot 11, Kruger Crt, Uranang)

Hervey Bay Rent A Car (☎ 4194 6626) Also rents out scooters (\$30 per day)

Safari 4WD Hire (☎ 1800 689 819, 4124 4244; www.safari4wdhire.com.au; 102 Boat Harbour Dr, Pialba)

CHILDERS

☎ 07 / pop 1350

Surrounded by lush green fields and rich red soil, Childers is a charming little town, its main street lined with tall, shady trees and lattice-trimmed historical buildings. Backpackers flock here for fruit-picking and farm work, although, sadly, Childers is best remembered for the 15 backpackers who perished in a fire in the Palace Backpackers Hostel in June 2000. There is now a moving memorial, with poignant images of those who perished, at the **Childers Palace Memorial & Art Gallery** (☎ 4126 1994; 72 Churchill St; ☼ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun). You'll also find the visitors centre here.

Childers makes for a pleasant rest stop on a long road trip along the Bruce Highway. The footpath along Churchill Street is decorated with mosaics and sculptures that tell the story of the Isis district. The lovely 100-year-old **Federal Hotel** has batwing doors while a bronze statue of two fighting pig dogs sits outside the **Grand Hotel**.

The **Isis Historical Complex** (Taylor St; adult/child \$2/free; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri) is a mock historical town, with cottages, a general store and a post office. The museum here houses Aboriginal artefacts and photos. It won't take long to explore and there are picnic tables under a glorious jacaranda tree. You'll also find the delightful **Figtree Treasures** out front with a range of interesting antiques.

On the last Sunday in July, Childers' main street is swamped with street performers, musicians, dancers, and food and craft stalls during its annual **Festival of Cultures**, which draws over 50,000 people.

A little out of town, **Sugarbowl Caravan Park** (☎ 4126 1521; 4660 Bruce Hwy; unpowered/power sites \$20/22, cabins \$66; 🚰 🚻) has spectacular views over the surrounding countryside. There's plenty of space and a good scattering of foliage between sites. Backpackers will want to stay here for the views, the facilities and the friendly owners who can help with work placement (by prior arrangement) and transport to the farms. Rates are for two people.

In the centre of town, **Motel Childers** (☎ 4126 1177; 136 Churchill St; s/d \$75/85; 🚰 🚻) has clean, basic rooms with the usual facilities.

For warm, country hospitality the cute cane-cutter cottages at **Mango Hill B&B** (☎ 4126 1311; www.mangohillcottages.com; 8 Mango Hill Dr; s/d/tr \$90/120/140; 🚰 🚻), 4km south of town, are decorated with handmade wooden furniture, country décor and comfy beds that ooze charm and romance. A bottle of preservative-free, organic wine from the on-site boutique winery, **Hill of Promise Estate** (☎ cellar door 10am-4pm, or by appointment), goes well with the picture-pretty views from the cottage veranda.

If you're stopping for lunch, **Kapé Centro** (☎ 4126 1916; 65 Churchill St; mains \$9-15; 🚰 🚻) breakfast & lunch) in the old post office building dishes up light meals, salads and pizzas on the veranda.

A little more upmarket, **Laurel Tree Cottage** (☎ 4126 2911; 89 Churchill St; dishes \$10-20; 🚰 🚻) breakfast & lunch) has an even balance of frills and funk; the interior is very tea shoppe but the

gourmet sandwiches, burgers and breakfasts are definitely from this century. Sip morning lattes or lunchtime vinos on the timber deck outside.

On your way out of town take a detour to **Mammino's** (☎ 4126 2880; 115 Lucketts Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) for a delicious homemade macadamia-nut ice cream. Lucketts Rd is off the Bruce Hwy just south of Childers.

Childers is 50km southwest of Bundaberg. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) both stop at the Shell service station north of town and have daily services to/from Brisbane (\$75, 6½ hours), Hervey Bay (\$18, one hour) and Bundaberg (\$18, 1½ hours).

BURRUM COAST NATIONAL PARK

The attractive Burrum Coast National Park covers two sections of coastline on either side of the little village of **Woodgate**, 37km east of Childers. Woodgate's charming old stilt-houses line the Esplanade, which fronts an incredibly beautiful 16km stretch of white sandy beach. Nothing happens here and it's perfect for family summer holidays. The Woodgate section of the national park begins at the southern end of the Esplanade, and has nice beaches, good fishing and a **camping ground** (per person \$4.50) at Burrum Point, reached by a 4WD-only track. There are more isolated bush-camping areas in the Kinkuna section of the park, a few kilometres north of Woodgate, and you'll need a 4WD to reach them. Book camping permits online at www.epa.qld.gov.au or contact the **park ranger** (☎ 4126 8810).

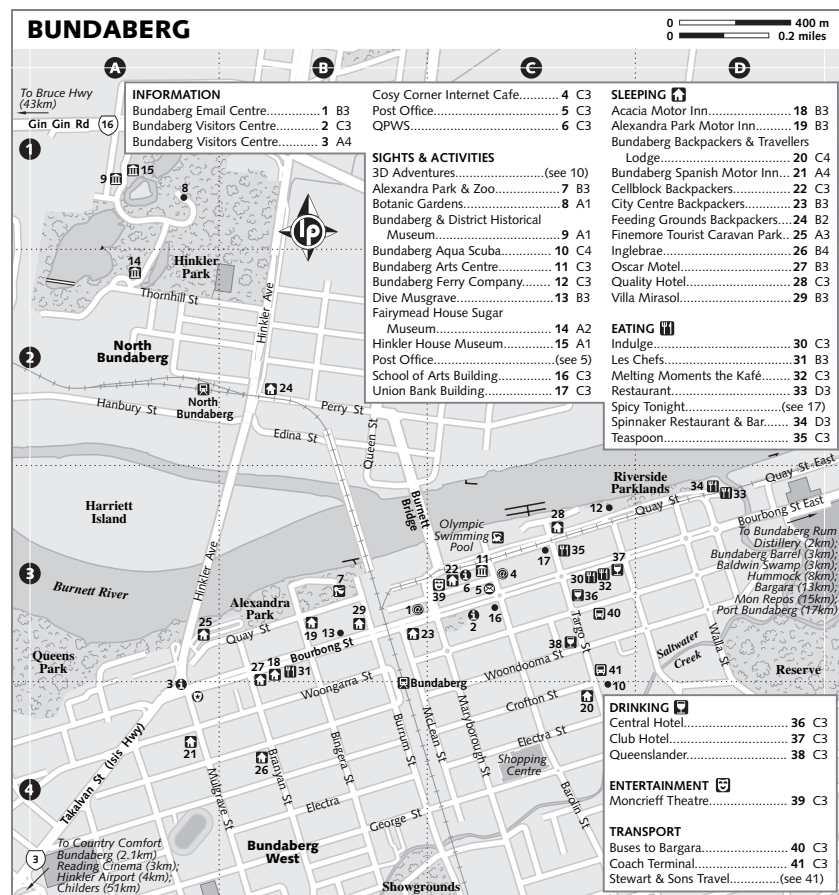
Woodgate Beach Tourist Park (☎ 4126 8802; www.woodgatebeachtouristpark.com; 88 The Esplanade; unpowered/power sites \$20/23, cabins \$79-89, beachfront villas \$130; 🚰 🚻) is a tidy, tranquil park close to the national park and opposite the beach. There's a lovely outdoor café open for breakfast and lunch. Rates are for two people.

The **Woodgate Beach Hotel-Motel** (☎ 4126 8988; 195 The Esplanade; d \$88), at the northern end of the Esplanade, has a block of reasonable motel units just across from the beach, and dishes up decent pub grub.

BUNDEBERG

☎ 07 / pop 46,961

Boasting a sublime climate, coral-fringed beaches and waving fields of sugar cane, 'Bundy' should feature on the Queensland



tourist hit parade. But this old-fashioned country town feels stuck in a centuries-old time warp and nothing much seems to happen here. The pleasant main strip is a wide, palm-lined street, and the surrounding countryside forms a picturesque chequerboard of rich, red volcanic soil, small crops and sugar cane stretching pancake-flat to the coastal beaches 15km away. Born out of these cane fields is the famous Bundaberg Rum, a potent and mind-blowing liquor bizarrely endorsed by a polar bear but as iconically Australian as Tim Tams and Vegemite.

Hordes of backpackers flock to Bundy for fruit-picking and farm work; others quickly pass through on their way to family summer holidays at the nearby seaside villages.

Information

Bundaberg visitors centre (☎ 1300 722 099, 4153 8888; www.bundabergregion.info) 271 Bourbong St (☎ 9am-5pm); 186 Bourbong St (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun)

Bundaberg Email Centre (☎ 4153 5007; 197 Bourbong St; per hr \$4; ☎ 10am-10pm) Internet access.

Cosy Corner Internet Cafe (☎ 4153 5999; Barolin St; per hr \$5; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Internet access.

Post office (☎ 4151 6708; cnr Bourbong & Barolin Sts)

QPWS (☎ 4131 1600; 46 Quay St)

Sights

From the lookout on top of the **hummock** (96m), an extinct volcano and the only hill in this flat landscape, you see Bundaberg's patchwork

fields of sugar cane and small crops spread against an ocean backdrop. During the cane-harvest season from July to November, the horizon blazes with spectacular and incredibly quick-lived and furious cane fires.

Bundaberg's biggest claim to fame is the iconic Bundaberg Rum – you'll see the Bundy Rum polar bear on billboards all over town. Aficionados of the good stuff can see the vats where the sugary gold is made at the **Bundaberg Rum Distillery** (☎ 4131 2999; www.bundabergum.com.au; Avenue St; self-guided tour adult/child \$10/7; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun). Guided tours of the factory and museum (adult/child \$25/12.50) or just of the factory (\$17/10) depart every hour from 10am each day. Tours follow the rum's production from start to finish; each of the 290 vats on site contains 69,000L of maturing rum. If the heady fumes don't get you, the free sample at the end of the wall.

Not quite as famous (probably because it's nonalcoholic) is Bundaberg Ginger Beer. To see how the ginger is mashed, crushed, brewed and fermented, the **Bundaberg Barrel** (☎ 4154 5480; www.bundaberg-brew.com.au; adult/child \$5/3; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) has interactive tours which include a 15-minute holographic movie fronted by a comedic yeast, Doug the fun-gi.

The **Botanic Gardens** (Mt Perry Rd; ☎ 5.30am-6.45pm Sep-Apr, 6am-6.30pm May-Aug), 2km north of the centre, is a green oasis of tropical shrubs, towering trees and flowering gardens surrounding a few small lakes. Bring a picnic lunch! Within the grounds are three museums. The **Hinkler House Museum** (☎ 4152 0222; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 10am-4pm) is set inside the house of Bundaberg's most famous son, the aviator Bert Hinkler, who made the first solo flight between England and Australia in 1928. The house was painstakingly relocated from Southampton in 1983.

The **Bundaberg & District Historical Museum** (☎ 4152 0101; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 10am-4pm) has plenty of colonial-era antiques like quaint 1920s handmade quilts. Look for the wedding albums showcasing every Bundy bride since 1974.

At the southern end of the park, the **Fairmead House Sugar Museum** (☎ 4153 6786; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 10am-4pm), set in an 1890s Queensland house, documents the development of the sugar industry, including some frank displays of the hardships endured by Kanakas (South Sea Islanders) in the cane fields.

The small **Alexandra Park & Zoo** (☎ Quay St; admission free) is tucked into a green corner on the banks of the Burnett River. A handful of animals, including the ubiquitous kangaroo and some vivid and vocal parrots, reside here. It's a pretty spot and the large, grassy park begs for a picnic. There's a 1km boardwalk from here that follows the river to the **Riverside Parklands** – a narrow stretch of greenery with riverside barbecues and picnic tables, and **night markets** on the first Friday of each month between September and April.

Continuing the nature trip, **Baldwin Swamp** (Steindl St), an 87-hectare wetland reserve of lagoons, woodland and open forest 3km from the city centre, is an ecofriendly retreat filled with birds, possums, bandicoots and native trees.

In town, the **Bundaberg Arts Centre** (☎ 4152 3700; www.bundaberg.qld.gov.au/arts; cnr Barolin & Quay Sts; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun) is a small gallery displaying local and travelling exhibitions. Interesting old buildings in the town centre include the ornate **Union Bank building** (Targo St), the **post office** (cnr Bourbong & Barolin Sts) and the **School of Arts Building** (Bourbong St). Pick up a copy of *A Walking Tour of the Bundaberg City Centre* from the visitors centres.

Activities

Bundaberg Ferry Company (☎ 4152 9188; 3 Quay St; 2½hr tours per adult/child/family \$25/13/70; ☎ 9.30am & 1.30pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sun, 1.30pm Sat) operates the *Bundy Belle*, an old-fashioned ferry that chugs at a pleasant pace to the mouth of the Burnett River. The tour includes a commentary and morning or afternoon tea, and the scenery includes mangroves, farmland and even the Bundaberg Rum Distillery.

About 16km east of Bundaberg, the small beach hamlet of **Bargara** (p231) has good diving and snorkelling at Barolin Rocks and in the Woongarra Marine Park. **Bundaberg Aqua Scuba** (☎ 4153 5761; www.aquascuba.com.au; Shop 1, 66 Targo St) and **3D Adventures** (☎ 4152 4064; 66 Targo St) both offer four-day, PADI open-water diving courses for \$219, but this only includes shore dives. Advanced open-water dive courses cost from \$265. **Dive Musgrave** (☎ 4154 3800; www.divemusgrave.com.au; 239 Bourbong St; per person \$678) offers three-day trips for experienced divers to Lady Musgrave and the Bunker group of islands.

Tours

Bundaberg Coach Tours (☎ 1800 815 714, 4153 1037; www.bctours.com.au) offers a variety of charter tours around the state, including a day trip to the Town of 1770 (p249), with sand-boarding and an amphibious-vehicle ride.

You can also fly to Lady Elliot Island with **Lady Elliot Island Resort** (☎ 1800 072 200, 5536 3644; www.ladyelliott.com.au; adult/child \$275/146). The day trip includes at least five hours on the Great Barrier Reef, a glass-bottomed boat or snorkel tour, lunch and use of the resort's facilities. See p248 for information about longer stays on the islands.

Festivals & Events

Bundy Easter Roundup (☎ 4152 9370) Annual country-music talent quest and festival held over Easter.

Bundaberg Regional Show (☎ 4153 5030) Held in late May.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Bundaberg's hostels cater to working backpackers; most hostels arrange harvest work and stays of one week or longer are the norm.

Finmore Tourist Caravan Park (☎ 4151 3663; www.bundaberg.qld.gov.au/tourism; 33 Quay St; unpowered/powered sites from \$16/18, cabins from \$55; ☎ ☎) This small, tidy park sits on an attractive plot on the banks of the Burnett River. Quite a few long-termers pitch their digs here. It's close to the zoo and walking distance to the town centre. Rates are for two people.

Feeding Grounds Backpacker (☎ 4152 3659; www.footprintsadventures.com.au; 4 Hinkler Ave; dm \$23) Sleeping only 18, the smallest hostel in Bundaberg is a friendly, family-run affair in a converted and extended house. The country-style kitchen and lounge, four-bed dorms and two bathrooms make for a very cosy time. The environmentally conscious owner of the hostel runs Footprints Adventures turtle tours (see p230). Combined accommodation and tour packages are available.

Cellblock Backpackers (☎ 1800 837 773; www.cellblock.com.au; cnr Quay & Maryborough Sts; dm per night/week from \$25/145, d \$66; ☎ ☎ ☎) Doing time has never been so good! This arresting hostel in Bundy's heritage-listed former lock-up is a swish resort with plasma-screen TVs, a trendy pool bar and clean, modern facilities. The seven restored jail cells (grab the padded cell!) lack windows (of course) but are great for

couples. The hostel arranges harvest work and the bathrooms are remarkably clean considering most backpackers drag farm soil home from a day in the fields.

City Centre Backpackers (☎ 4151 3501; citycentrebackpackers@hotmail.com; 216 Bourbong St; dm per night/week \$25/135) This hostel in an old country pub (don't expect to find a bar – the hostel is dry) in the centre of town has large rooms with high ceilings and an imposing security grill at the entrance. There's also motel-style accommodation next door. There's no air-conditioning but cool summer breezes blow in through the French doors that open onto the wide upstairs veranda.

Bundaberg Backpackers & Travellers Lodge (☎ 4152 2080; bundybackpackers@iinet.com.au; cnr Targo & Crofton Sts; dm per night/week \$25/150; ☎ ☎) The first place you see when you get off the bus; the friendly and genuine owners of this hostel also run Bus Stop Backpackers (at the bus stop, of course!). The bland brick exterior won't win any awards but the rooms are clean, it's fully air-conditioned and has cable TV.

MIDRANGE

Acacia Motor Inn (☎ 4152 3411; www.acaciatorinn.com.au; 248 Bourbong St; s/d \$80/90; ☎ ☎) There are no surprises in this standard motel, but the rooms are clean and the price is sweet. There's a guest laundry and a barbecue beside the pool.

Bundaberg Spanish Motor Inn (☎ 4152 5444; www.bundabergspanishmotorinn.com; 134 Woongarra St; s/d \$80/90; ☎ ☎) In a quiet side street off the main drag, this Spanish hacienda-style motel is great value. All units are self-contained and all rooms overlook the central pool.

Oscar Motel (☎ 4152 3666; reception@oscardmotel.com.au; 252 Bourbong St; s/d \$83/94; ☎ ☎) The Oscar offers a range of rooms; smaller digs are functional and warm and the larger rooms are huge. There's a guest laundry and a tour desk, and the proud and professional owners keep the whole place spotless.

Alexandra Park Motor Inn (☎ 1800 803 419, 4152 7255; www.alexandra.com.au; 66 Quay St; d \$85-95; ☎ ☎) A gracious timber exterior, complete with sweeping balcony, greets visitors to this quiet motel off the main road into town. The more expensive rooms upstairs are large and contain kitchenettes. The restaurant and bar is open for dinner and serves up New Orleans and hearty Australian cuisine.

our pick **Inglebrae** (☎ 4154 4003; www.inglebrae.com.au; 17 Branyan St; r incl breakfast \$100-130; ☎ ☎) For

old-world English charm in a glorious Queenslander, this delightful B&B is just the ticket. Polished timber and stained glass seep from the entrance into the rooms, which come with high beds and small antiques. Breakfasts are big and hot, and are served on the lovely veranda.

Villa Mirasol (☎ 4154 4311; www.villa.net.au; 225 Bourbong St; s/d/ste \$105/120/175; ♿ ♿) The Mexican theme is evident in this ochre-coloured, centrally located motel. Aztec motifs decorate the rooms and the executive suites come with a spa. Wheelchair accessible.

Quality Hotel (☎ 4155 8777; www.flagchoice.com.au; 7 Quay St; r \$135-150; ♿ ♿) This modern pit stop is popular with conferences and travelling business folk, but the good facilities and décor from the new millennium set it apart from just about every other option in town. The rooms are quite stylish and there's a gym, a sauna, and a licensed restaurant and cocktail bar overlooking the Burnett River.

Also recommended is **Country Comfort Bundaberg** (☎ 4151 2365; www.countrycomforthotels.com; 73 Takalvan St; d \$135; ♿ ♿), a couple of kilometres southwest of town, which has spacious rooms and comfortable beds.

Eating

Melting Moments the Kafé (☎ 4151 0033; 54 Bourbong St; mains \$4-10; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Wraps, salads, homemade biscuits and slices are dished up in pleasant outdoor seating at this main-street café.

Teaspoon (☎ 4154 4456; 10 Targo St; mains \$5-8; ☺ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) This funky little café with

green velvet sofas has the best coffee in town. The cosy vibe is matched with yummy cakes, *paninis* and light meals.

Indulge (☎ 4154 2344; 80 Bourbong St; dishes \$9-16; ☺ breakfast & lunch) With its sophisticated ambience and intoxicating pastries, this narrow café brings a European flavour to country Bundaberg. Fancy brekkies and lunches steer well clear of the sambo and lasagne brigade, and the indulgence is all things sweet, including delicious homemade cakes, slices and muffins.

Spicy Tonight (☎ 4154 3320; 1 Targo St; dishes \$10-19; ☺ dinner) Bundaberg's spicy little secret combines Thai and Indian cuisine with hot curries, vindaloo, tandoori and a host of vegetarian dishes.

Les Chefs (☎ 4153 1770; 238 Bourbong St; mains \$24; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) One for the carnivores, this upmarket, intimate restaurant goes global, treating diners to duck, veal, seafood, chicken and beef dishes à la Nepal, Mexico, France, India and more. It comes highly recommended by locals, so dinner bookings are recommended.

The Restaurant (☎ 4154 4589; cnr Quay & Toonburra St; mains \$25-35; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) Once a rowing shed, this riverside bar and restaurant serves up simple Mod Oz cuisine. The interior can be a bit dim but the outdoor tables on the timber deck make a lovely spot for a quiet drink. Live music plays on weekends.

Spinnaker Restaurant & Bar (☎ 4152 8033; 1A Quay St; dishes \$26-38; ☺ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Bundaberg's classiest restaurant woos diners with a picturesque perch above the Burnett

River where you can nibble on gourmet tapas such as herb-crusted bocconcini, or savour full-flavoured dishes of pasta, seafood and pizza.

Drinking & Entertainment

You won't go thirsty in Bundaberg, but the host of pubs with glorious exteriors around town contain functional public bars and gambling outlets. The locals will probably provide all the animation you need.

Central Hotel (☎ 4151 3159; 18 Targo St) Strut your stuff on the dance floor at Bundy's hottest nightclub. Pretty young things and back-packer crowd in here every weekend.

Club Hotel (☎ 4151 3262; cnr Tantitha & Bourbong Sts) The lounge bar has laid-back lounges and chill-out music; an inner-city vibe in country Bundy.

Queenslander (☎ 4152 4691; 61 Targo St) Live gigs and DJs are a constant at this pub, which rocks on every Friday and Saturday night. When the weather is fine, the gigs move into the tropical beer garden. Only has red wine by the cask (cold!).

Moncrieff Theatre (☎ 4153 1985; 177 Bourbong St) Bundaberg's lovely old cinema has plays, shows and mainstream movies.

Getting There & Around

AIR
Bundaberg's **Hinkler Airport** (Takalvan St) is about 4km southwest of the centre. There are several flights each day between Bundaberg and Brisbane (\$150, one hour) with **Qantaslink** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au).

BUS

The coach terminal is in Targo Street where you'll find **Stewart & Sons Travel** (☎ 4152 9700; 66 Targo St; ☺ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat). Both **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) have daily services connecting Bundaberg with Brisbane (\$81, seven hours), Hervey Bay (\$18, 1½ hours), Rockhampton (\$62, four hours) and Gladstone (\$45, 2½ hours).

Local bus services are handled by **Duffy's Coaches** (☎ 4151 4226). It has numerous services every weekday to Barga (r \$4.40, 35 minutes), leaving from the back of Target on Woongarra St and stopping around town.

TRAIN

Both the *Sunlander* (\$64.90, seven hours, three weekly) and the *Tilt Train* (\$64.90, five hours, Sunday to Friday) travel from Brisbane to Bundaberg on their respective routes to Cairns and Rockhampton.

AROUND BUNDABERG

In many people's eyes, the beach hamlets around Bundaberg are more attractive than the town itself. Some 25km north of the centre is **Moore Park**, with wide, flat beaches. To the south is the very popular **Elliot Heads** with a nice beach, rocky foreshore and good fishing. Locals and visitors also flock to **Mon Repos** to see baby turtles hatching from November to March (see boxed text, opposite).

Bargara

☎ 07 / pop 5525

Some 16km east of Bundaberg lies the cruisy beach village of Bargara, a picturesque little spot with a good surf beach, a lovely esplanade and a few snazzy cafés. Recent years have seen a few high-rises sprout up along the foreshore but the effect is relatively low-key. Families find Bargara attractive for its clean beaches and safe swimming, particularly at the 'basin', a sheltered artificial rock pool.

Bargara Beach Dive (☎ 4159 2663; www.bargaradive.com; Shop 4, 16 See St) hires out equipment and runs PADI open-water dive courses (\$495), as well as local dives (\$130) and snorkelling safaris (four-hour snorkel \$99).

The large sprawling grounds of the **Bargara Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 4159 2228; www.bargarabeach.com.au; Nielson Park, Bargara; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/23, cabins \$70) covers 16 acres, so you're bound to find room to pitch a tent.

Set on five acres of landscaped gardens, **Kelly's Beach Resort** (☎ 1800 246 141; 4154 7200; www.kellysbeachresort.com.au; 6 Trevors Rd, Bargara; cabin weekday/weekend \$99/110; ♿ ♿) has large self-contained condos with private decks. You're surrounded by bird-song and it's just a short walk to Kelly's beach.

Kacy's Restaurant and Bar (☎ 4130 1100; cnr See & Bauer Sts, Bargara; mains \$12-32; ☺ breakfast & dinner daily, lunch Fri-Sun) at the Bargara Beach Hotel is like a fantastic South Pacific oasis. Sip a cocktail on the capacious timber deck while trying to choose between New Orleans gumbo, Thai curry prawns or bugs done any way you please from the huge menu.

MON REPOS' GRAND OLD LADIES OF THE DEEP

Going turtle takes on a whole new meaning at Mon Repos, one of the most important natural turtle rookeries in eastern Australia. At the dead of night on this quiet beach 15km northeast of Bundaberg, female loggerheads lumber laboriously up the sand, scoop a shallow hole with their flippers, lay a hundred or so eggs, then cover them up before returning to the ocean deep. About eight weeks later the hatchlings dig their way to the surface, and under cover of darkness emerge en masse to scurry down to the water as quickly as their little flippers allow. Egg-laying and hatching takes place at night from November to March. The **QPWS visitors centre** (☎ 4159 1652; ☺ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) has information on turtle conservation and organises nightly tours (adult/child \$8.70/4.60) from 7pm during the season. Bookings are mandatory and can be made through the Bundaberg visitors centre (p227) or online at www.bookbundabergregion.com.au. Alternatively, you can take a turtle-watching tour with **Foot Prints Adventures** (☎ 4152 3659; www.footprintsadventures.com.au; adult/child incl transfers \$44/22).

Savour your turtle experience with a few laid-back days at **Turtle Sands Tourist Park** (☎ 4159 2340; www.turtlesands.com.au; Mon Repos; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/22, cabins from \$70; ♿) a pretty caravan park with good facilities, daily parrot feeding, and a superb beachfront location.

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