

Southwest England



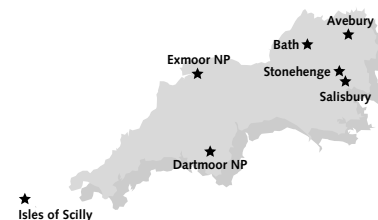
From the broad sandy beaches of Devon and Cornwall and the vibrant cities of Bristol and Bath to the endearingly old-fashioned seaside resorts of Torquay, Lyme Regis and Weymouth, the southwest is one of Britain's richest and most rewarding areas. Few regions in Britain can boast such a fantastically diverse mix of landscapes, communities and characters – this is a patchwork land of rural fields and rugged cliffs, sleepy hamlets and medieval market towns, Roman settlements and picturesque fishing harbours.

First settled by prehistoric people and later inhabited by successive waves of Celtic, Saxon, Roman and Norman invaders, this corner of Britain was once divided into several self-governing kingdoms, and that sense of separateness endures to this day. The differences between the region's five counties – Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall – may not be immediately obvious to the first-time visitor, but spend a little time here and you'll soon realise just how different these next-door neighbours are beneath the surface.

The rural counties of Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset once made up the old kingdom of Wessex, which officially disappeared in the 8th century but was memorably revived in the novels of Thomas Hardy. This is an area best known for its ancient heritage, home to the mysterious stone circles of Avebury and Stonehenge, as well as an astonishing array of barrows, burial mounds and hilltop forts and the cathedral cities of Wells and Salisbury. To the west of Wessex is Devon, famous for its cream teas and coastal scenery, and still one of Britain's favourite home-grown holiday spots. Further west the Celtic stronghold of Cornwall, long a favourite haunt for smugglers, surfers and second-home-owners alike, is enjoying something of a renaissance as a centre

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drinking in the view from the spire of **Salisbury Cathedral** (p286)
- Playing the dandy on the streets of Georgian **Bath** (p256)
- Taking to the trails and tors of **Dartmoor** (p309) and **Exmoor** (p269)
- Exploring the ancient history of **Avebury** (p293) and **Stonehenge** (p289)
- Wandering the clifftops along the **South West Coast Path** (p244)
- Escaping the outside world on the remote **Isles of Scilly** (p337)



■ POPULATION: 2.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 7649 SQ MILES

SOUTHWEST ENGLAND



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Orientation & Information

The Southwest Peninsula stretches west from the flat plains and chalky downs of Wiltshire and Dorset all the way to Land's End, mainland Britain's most westerly point. Rugged coastline surrounds the region on three sides, while a spine of hard granite runs through its centre and the high heaths of Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor.

The various railway lines to the southwest converge on Bristol and Exeter before cutting south towards the coast, skirting the edge of Dartmoor and continuing west all the way to Truro and Penzance. The main road through the region is the M5, which runs into the A30 just west of Exeter and continues on into Cornwall. Another main route is the A303, which cuts across Salisbury Plain past Stonehenge on its way towards Exeter and Plymouth, before joining the A38 into Cornwall.

The **South West Tourist Board** (www.visitsouthwest.com) covers a huge area from Gloucester and Dorset down to the Isles of Scilly. The main website has links to themed sub-sites exploring nature, adventure, family and heritage holidays around the region.

The free monthly listings magazine *twenty4-seven* (www.twenty4-seven.co.uk) covers all the latest bars, gigs and clubs, and is available from tourist offices, bars and restaurants around the region.

Activities

CYCLING

Cycling is a great way to appreciate the region's spectacular scenery, but the hills and coastal roads can be tough going. Several sections of the National Cycle Network (NCN) cross the region, including the **West Country Way** (NCN Rte 3), a 250-mile jaunt from Bristol to Padstow via Glastonbury, Taunton and Barnstaple, and the **Devon Coast to Coast Cycle Route** (NCN Rte 27), which travels for 102 miles between Exmoor and Dartmoor. The 160-mile circular **Wiltshire Cycleway** runs along the county's borders. The best areas for off-road mountain biking are the North Wessex Downs and Exmoor.

Many cycle trails trace the routes of old railway lines, including the 11-mile **Granite Way** between Okehampton and Lydford and the popular Camel Trail (p334) linking Padstow with Wadebridge.

For further information on cycling trails, contact **Sustrans** (☎ 0845 113 00 65; www.sustrans.org.uk) or local tourist offices.

WALKING

At 610 miles the **South West Coast Path** is Britain's longest national walking trail. You can pick it up at many points along the coast for a short (and spectacular) day's stroll, or tackle longer stretches between the main coastal towns. The **South West Coast Path Association** (www.swcp.org.uk) publishes an annual guide.

Dartmoor is another favourite location for walkers, with some of the highest hills and best hiking trails in southern England (see p312). Other popular hiking spots include Exmoor (p271), the Mendips (p264) and the Quantock Hills (p264).

In northeast Wiltshire, the **Ridgeway** national trail starts near Avebury and winds 44 miles through chalk hills to meet the River Thames at Goring. The trail then continues another 41 miles (another three days) through the Chiltern Hills.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Water sports are popular along the south coast, especially around Weymouth (p281) and Poole (p277), where you can try everything from kitesurfing to powerboating. Other outdoor pursuits include horse riding and rock climbing on Exmoor and Dartmoor, windsurfing, kitesurfing and kiteboarding on the region's beaches, and scuba diving around Cornwall's coastline and the Isles of Scilly. The adrenaline-fuelled thrills don't stop there, though – caving, coasteering, mountainboarding, wakesurfing and kitebugging are all popular pastimes in these parts. Check out www.adventuresw.co.uk for info on just about every adventure sport you could think of.

Cornwall is Britain's surfing mecca, with breaks running all the way from Porthleven (near Helston), west around Land's End and along the north coast. Popular spots include Newquay, Perranporth, St Agnes and Bude in Cornwall, and Croyde in north Devon. The latest surf updates can be found online at www.a1surf.com.

Getting Around

It's quite possible to get around the region by bus or train, but as always you'll have much more freedom if you bring your own wheels. Timetables and transport maps for public transport are available from stations and tourist offices, and the handy *Car-Free Days Out* (www.carfreedaysout.com) booklet has public-transport listings.

BUS

The region's bus network is fairly comprehensive, but becomes increasingly patchy the further you move away from the main towns; Dartmoor and west Cornwall are particularly tricky to negotiate. National Express coaches usually provide the quickest routes between cities and larger towns. For regional timetables, call ☎ 01392-328200 in Devon or ☎ 01872-322142 in Cornwall, or contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinesw.com).

The **First group** (☎ 0845 600 1420; www.firstgroup.com) provides the majority of the region's bus services. The First Bus & Rail Card (one/seven days £11/44) allows unlimited travel on First Great Western trains and most First buses in Cornwall and Devon. The pass can be bought from bus drivers and main railway stations. The Firstday Southwest (adult £7) is valid on First buses in Devon and Cornwall, as well as Bristol, Somerset, Gloucestershire and Dorset.

The PlusBus scheme allows you to add on bus travel around many main towns (including Bristol, Exeter, Bath and Plymouth) to your train ticket from around £2 per day – ask at any train station or check out www.plusbus.info.

CAR

All the main car-hire firms (Hertz, Avis, Budget, Europcar) have offices at airports and main-line train stations. Rates in this region are similar to elsewhere in the UK, starting from around £35 per day for a small hatchback (see p970); one-way and short-term rentals often incur a hefty surcharge. The budget operator **easyCar** (www.easycar.com) often offers the most competitive deals and has branches in Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth and Bath.

TRAIN

The main train line to the southwest follows the historic Great Western Railway route to Bristol, from where there are regular links to London Paddington, as well as services north to Scotland via Birmingham. Bristol also has connections to most other towns across the region including Bath, Swindon, Chippenham, Bradford-on-Avon, Weymouth and Southampton. Trains from London Waterloo also travel to Salisbury, Southampton and Weymouth. Beyond Exeter, the main-line travels west via Liskeard, St Austell, Truro and Penzance, with spur lines to Barnstaple, Paignton, Gunnislake, Looe, Falmouth, St Ives and Newquay.

The Freedom of the South West Rover pass allows unlimited train travel west of Salisbury, Bath, Bristol and Weymouth. It's available in two versions, allowing either three days' travel in one week (£70) or eight days' travel in fifteen (£95). For more information contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk) or **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk).

The Devon and Cornwall Rover ticket allows unlimited travel across the rail network throughout Devon and Cornwall. It's available either for three days' travel in one week (£40), or eight days' travel in fifteen (£60).

BRISTOL

☎ 0117 / pop 393,300

For years gritty, grimy old Bristol has been the ugly sister of Britain's cities, outclassed by Bath, outsmarted by London and upstaged by the rejuvenated cities of Newcastle and Manchester to the north. But the fortunes of this old industrial city have changed dramatically in recent years, and the transformation that's taken place over the last decade is pretty astonishing. There's a new sense of swagger and self-belief around Bristol these days; while the once-great trades of shipbuilding, manufacturing and the railways have long since sailed upriver, the city has steadily reclaimed its rightful place as an economic powerhouse, gastronomic centre and a cultural force to be reckoned with. The crumbling docks have been prettified and polished up; the streets are packed with cutting-edge restaurants, designer bars and world-class museums; and the city's music, media and nightlife scenes are all showing the rest of the country how things should be done. It's real, raw and just a little rough around the edges, but if you really want to know exactly where Britain's at right now, then Bristol is hard to beat.

HISTORY

A small Saxon village at the confluence of the Rivers Frome and Avon became the thriving medieval Brigstow (later Bristol) as the city began to develop its trade in cloth and wine with mainland Europe. Over the following centuries Bristol became one of Britain's major transatlantic ports, and grew wealthy on the lucrative trade of cocoa, sugar and tobacco – as well as slaves – from Africa to the New World.



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During the 18th and 19th centuries Bristol became an important hub for shipbuilding, as well as the terminus for the pioneering Great Western Railway line from London to the southwest. Unfortunately, the city became a target for German bombing during WWII; much of the city centre had been levelled by the time peace was declared in 1945. The postwar rush for reconstruction left Bristol with plenty of concrete carbuncles, but over the last decade the city has undergone extensive redevelopment, especially around the dockside.

ORIENTATION

The city centre, north of the river, is easy to get around on foot but very hilly. The central area revolves around the narrow streets by the markets and Corn Exchange and around the newly developed docklands. Park St is lined with trendy shops and cafés, while a strip of Whiteladies Rd is the hub of bar and restaurant life. The genteel suburb of Clifton, with its Georgian terraces and boutique shops, is on the hilltop west of the centre.

As in any big city, it pays to keep your wits about you after dark, especially around the suburb of St Paul's, just northeast of the centre. It's still a run-down area with a heavy drug scene, and is best not visited alone at night.

The main train station is Bristol Temple Meads, a mile southeast of the centre. Some trains use Bristol Parkway, 5 miles to the north. The bus station is on Marlborough St, northeast of the city centre.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Blackwell's/George's (☎ 927 6602; 89 Park St) This vast bookshop sells both secondhand and new titles.
Waterstone's (☎ 925 2274; The Galleries, Broadmead) General bookshop in the Galleries shopping centre.

Emergency

Police (☎ 927 7777; Nelson St)

Internet Access

LAN Rooms (☎ 973 3886; 6 Cotham Hill; per hr £2.50; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

This is Bristol (www.thisisbristol.com) Web edition of the *Bristol Evening Post*.

Venue (www.venue.co.uk) Online version of Bristol's listings guide, with reviews of clubs, bars and restaurants.

Visit Bristol (www.visitbristol.co.uk) Official tourism website with info on events, accommodation, transport and exploring the city.

What's On Bristol (www.whatsonbristol.co.uk) Useful online city guide with comprehensive listings.

Laundry

Alma Laundrette (☎ 973 4121; 78 Alma Rd; ☎ 7am-9pm)

Redland (☎ 970 6537; Chandos Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Medical Services

Bristol Royal Infirmary (☎ 923 0000; 2 Marlborough St)

Money

You'll find all the main banks along Corn St, including Barclays at number 40, Lloyds at number 55, and NatWest at number 32.

Post

Post office (Upper Maudlin St & The Galleries, Broadmead)

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2191; www.visitbristol

.co.uk; The Annexe, Wildscreen Walk, Harbourside;

☎ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm

Sun Nov-Feb) Well stocked with leaflets, transport maps and local info, and books accommodation for £3.

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (☎ 929 4399; 43 Queens Rd)

Traifinders (☎ 929 9000; 48 Corn St; ☎ 9am-6pm)

SIGHTS

@tBristol

Just off the harbourfront on Millennium Sq, **@tBristol** (☎ 0845 345 1235; www.at-bristol.org.uk; Harbourside; combined tickets Explore & Wildwalk adult/child £15/11, Explore & IMAX £14/10.50, Wildwalk & IMAX £13/10, all three £20/15; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) houses three fantastic attractions under one roof.

Explore (adult/child £9/6.50) is Bristol's impressive science museum, with several zones spanning space, technology and the human brain, as well as the Curiosity Zone, where you can walk through a tornado, spin on a human gyroscope and strum the strings of a

virtual harp. It's fun, imaginative and highly interactive, and should keep kids of all ages enthralled for a few hours.

The natural world takes centre stage at **Wildwalk** (adult/child £8/6). Highlights include the steamy Botanical House, which re-creates the rainforest in the heart of Bristol (complete with butterflies and touraco birds) and contains a living replica of a coral reef.

The **IMAX** (adult/child £7/5.50) shows several jaw-dropping 3-D films: subjects range from the moon landings to an African safari, and there's a terrifying sharks documentary that'll put you off taking a bath for a week.

One of Bristol's most famous sons was Cary Grant (aka Archibald Leach), who was born here in 1804; look out for his statue on Millennium Sq.

Museums

The city's municipal **museums** (www.bristol-city.gov.uk/museums) are free, and open 10am to 5pm Saturday to Wednesday unless otherwise stated.

The **City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 922 3571; Queen's Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm daily) is housed in a stunning Edwardian baroque building split into several floors. There's an excellent collection of British and French art on the 1st floor, along with galleries dedicated to ceramics and decorative arts. On the ground floor you'll find the archaeological, geological and natural history wings, as well as the museum's best-known resident, Alfred the Gorilla.

The 18th-century **Georgian House** (☎ 921 1362; 7 Great George St) is an atmospheric illustration of aristocratic life in Bristol during the Georgian era. The six-storeyed house was home to the West India merchant John Pinney, along with his slave Pero (after whom Pero's Bridge across the harbour is named), and is still decorated throughout in period style;

BRISTOL & BRUNEL

The year 2006 saw the 200th anniversary of the birth of one of Bristol's towering figures, the extravagantly named Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-59) – industrial genius, pioneering engineer, and general all-round renaissance man.

The precocious young Isambard was picked out for greatness at an early age. Educated at the Lycée Henri-Quatre in Paris and the University of Caen in Normandy, Brunel was barely 20 years old when he was appointed chief engineer of the pioneering Thames Tunnel between Rotherhithe and Wapping in London, designed by his father Marc. The project was fraught with difficulties; foul-smelling river water and explosive gases were a constant threat, and the tunnel was breached twice by serious floods in 1827 and 1828. Brunel was almost drowned during the second flood while trying to rescue trapped workers; while recovering, he entered a competition to design a bridge over the Avon at Clifton. His first submission was rejected along with all the other entries, but the competition was run again in 1831 and this time Brunel's design was awarded first prize. The foundation stone was laid in June of the same year, but sadly Brunel died before his first major commission was completed.

Thankfully he had plenty of opportunity to bask in the glory of his other achievements. During his 30-year career Brunel was responsible for many of the landmark projects of Victorian engineering, including the construction of the first rail bridge over the River Tamar, the foundation of the Great Western Railway line from London to the southwest, and the design of three of the greatest ships the world has ever seen: the ground-breaking transatlantic vessels *Great Western* and *Great Eastern*, as well as the first iron-hulled, screw-propeller steamship, *Great Britain* (below). He also built more than 1000 miles of railway lines, modernised the docks at Bristol, Plymouth and Cardiff, and designed the first prefabricated field hospital for use during the Crimean War.

Despite surviving on a diet of four hours' sleep and 40 cigars a day, and suffering from numerous bouts of ill health, Brunel's closest shave came when he nearly choked to death having accidentally swallowed a coin while performing a conjuring trick for his children. His eventual end was rather more prosaic; he suffered a stroke in 1859, just before the *Great Eastern* made its first voyage to New York, and died 10 days later at the age of 53.

the huge kitchen (complete with cast-iron roasting spit) and the grand drawing rooms are particularly impressive.

The Elizabethan **Red Lodge** (☎ 921 1360; Park Row) was built in 1590 but was much remodelled in 1730. The highlight is the Elizabethan Oak Room, which still features its original oak panelling, plasterwork ceiling and carved chimneypiece.

In the northern suburb of Henbury lies **Blaise Castle House Museum** (☎ 950 6789; Henbury Rd), a late-18th-century house and social history museum. Displays include vintage toys, costumes and other Victorian ephemera. Across the road is **Blaise Hamlet**, a cluster of picturesque thatched cottages designed for estate servants by John Nash in 1811. Bus 43 (45 minutes, every 15 minutes) passes the castle from Colston Ave; bus 1 (20 minutes, every 10 minutes) from St Augustine's Pde doesn't stop quite as close, but is quicker and more frequent.

The massive avant-garde **Arnolfini Arts Centre** (☎ 929 9191; www.arnolfini.org.uk; 16 Narrow Quay) has

had an impressive face-lift, and remains the top venue in town for dance, photography and art exhibitions.

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum

Brunel's marvellous old train station at Temple Meads houses the **British Empire & Commonwealth Museum** (☎ 925 9480; www.empiremuseum.co.uk; Clock Tower Yard; adult/child £6.95/3.95; ☎ 10am-5pm), which tells the story of 500 years of British exploration, trade and conquest. There's everything here from flickering old films to Inuit whale-bone sunglasses and a Hawaiian feather cape, and it doesn't skimp on confronting the more gruesome facts of Empire – particularly the issues of slavery and indigenous exploitation.

SS Great Britain

In 1843 Brunel designed the **SS Great Britain** (☎ 929 1843; www.ssgreatbritain.org; adult/child £8.95/4.95; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar), the first transatlantic steamship to be driven by a screw propeller. For 43 years the ship served

BRISTOL IN TWO DAYS

Start off with a tour around Bristol's historic dockside, allowing a few hours to explore the cutting-edge **Arnolfini** (opposite) and the attractions at **@tBristol** (above). Grab some food at **Severnshed** (p253) before cruising down the river aboard the **Bristol Ferry Boat** (p255) to the **SS Great Britain** (opposite). Check into the **Brigstock Hotel** (p252), dine out in style at the **Glassboat** (p253) and catch an evening film at the **Watershed** (p254) if there's time.

On day two catch a bus over to Clifton, stopping at the **Georgian House** (above) and the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (above) en route, before taking a wander around Clifton's many shops, boutiques and cafés. Take an afternoon stroll across the marvellous **suspension bridge** (p250) and around **The Downs** (p250) nearby, and finish up with a slap-up supper at **Quartier Vert** (p253) on Whiteladies Rd.

as a luxury ocean-going liner and cargo vessel, but was damaged in 1886 near the Falkland Islands and was later sold off as a coal hulk. The ship was eventually abandoned near Port Stanley; there she remained for several decades, forgotten and rusted, before finally being towed back to Bristol in 1970.

Since then a massive 30-year programme of restoration costing £11.3m has allowed the ship to rediscover her former splendour. Reconstructed rooms include the ship's galley, surgeon's quarters, mess hall, and the Great Engine room, but the highlight is the amazing 'glass sea' on which the ship sits, enclosing an airtight dry dock which preserves the delicate hull. Moored nearby is a replica of John Cabot's ship *Matthew*, which sailed from Bristol to Newfoundland in 1497.

The informative **Maritime Heritage Centre** (☎ 927 9856; Great Western Dockyard, Gas Ferry Rd; admission £6.25; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) houses temporary exhibitions relating to the ship and her illustrious history. The steam-powered **Bristol Harbour Railway** (single/return 60p/£1; ☎ Sat & Sun Mar-Oct) runs along the dockside.

Clifton & the Suspension Bridge

Bristol's most famous (and photographed) landmark is another Brunel masterpiece, the 76m-high **Clifton Suspension Bridge** (www.clifton-suspension-bridge.org.uk), which spans the Avon Gorge from Clifton over to Leigh Woods in northern Somerset. It's a beautiful, graceful sight, and undoubtedly one of Britain's most elegant bridges. Though initial construction work began in 1836, sadly Brunel died before the bridge's completion in 1864. It was mainly designed to carry light horse-drawn traffic and foot passengers, but these days around 12,000 motor vehicles cross it every day – testament to the quality of the bridge's construction and the vision of Brunel's design. It has also become a magnet for stunt artists and suicides; in 1885 Sarah Ann Hedley jumped from the bridge after a lovers' tiff, but her voluminous petticoats parachuted her safely to earth and she lived to be 85.

There's a small **visitor information point** (☎ 9744665; visitinfo@clifton-suspension-bridge.org.uk; ☎ 10-5pm) on the Leigh Woods side; guided tours (£2.50) are available by arrangement.

The grassy parks of **Clifton Down** and **Durdham Down** beside the bridge (often referred to as just The Downs) make a fine spot for a picnic. Nearby, a tatty observatory houses Britain's

only **camera obscura** (☎ 974 1242; admission £1; ☎ from 12.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am Sat & Sun), which offers incredible views of the suspension bridge. Opening hours vary depending on the weather.

Bristol Zoo (☎ 973 8951; www.bristolzoo.org.uk; Clifton; adult/child £10/6; ☎ 9am-5.30pm summer, 9am-5pm winter) is renowned as much for its conservation work as for its exotic residents. Attractions include a group of West African gorillas, underwater walkways for viewing seals and penguins, and a Brazilian rainforest section where you can get up close and personal with agouti, capybara and golden lion tamarins.

See p255 for buses to Clifton and the zoo.

Bristol Cathedral

Originally founded as the church of an Augustinian monastery in 1140, **Bristol Cathedral** (☎ 926 4879; www.bristol-cathedral.co.uk; College Green; ☎ 8am-6pm) has a remarkably fine Norman chapterhouse and gate, while the attractive chapels have eccentric carvings and fine heraldic glass. Although much of the nave and the west towers date from the 19th century, the 14th-century choir has fascinating misericords depicting apes in hell, quarrelling couples and dancing bears. The south transept shelters a rare Saxon carving of the 'Harrowing of Hell', discovered under the chapterhouse floor after a 19th-century fire.

St Mary Redcliffe

Described as 'the fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in England' by Queen Elizabeth I, **St Mary Redcliffe** (☎ 929 1487; www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk; Redcliffe Way; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat summer, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat winter, 8am-7.30pm Sun year-round) boasts a soaring, 89m-high spire, a grand hexagonal porch and a vaulted ceiling decorated with fine gilt bosses. At the entrance to the America Chapel is a whale rib presented to the church by John Cabot as a souvenir of his trip to Newfoundland in 1497.

BRISTOL FOR CHILDREN

There's no shortage of things to keep kids happy in Bristol, with loads of hands-on activities and interesting events. First port of call has to be the brilliant **Bristol Zoo** (above), where there are enough hairy apes and even hairier spiders to keep the young whippersnappers entertained for hours. For more bugs and beasts, head over to Wildwalk at @Bristol (p248), and the interactive exhibits at the Explore science museum. Then you could join a detective trail in search of the missing ship's cat, Sinbad, at the SS

Great Britain (p249), chug along the dockside on the Harbour Railway (opposite), or take a river cruise aboard the Bristol Packet (below). The Bristol Children's Festival kicks off at the beginning of August on The Downs, with four days of puppetry, circus skills, magic and children's theatre, and there are also annual festivals for hot-air balloons and kite-flying (below).

For babysitters try:

Park Lane Nannies (☎ 373 0003; www.parklanenannies.com)

Tinies (☎ 3005630; bristol@tinieschildcare.co.uk)

TOURS

Bristol Highlights Walk (☎ 968 4638; studytours@aol.com; £3.50; ☎ 11am & 2pm Sat Apr-Sep) is a regular tour of the old town, city centre and harbourside, run every Saturday by Bristol's Blue Badge guides; there's no need to book, just turn up outside the tourist office.

Visit Eastside (www.visiteastside.co.uk) offers two free downloadable tours of the multicultural districts of St Paul's and Easton.

City Sightseeing (☎ 926 0767; www.bristolvisitor.co.uk; adult/child £8.50/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Easter-Sep) has a hop-on, hop-off open-top bus visiting all the major attractions. Buses leave St Augustine's Pde hourly (every 30 minutes July to September).

Bristol Packet Boat Trips (☎ 926 8157; www.bristolpacket.co.uk; adult/child £4.25/2.75; ☎ Mar-Oct) offers cruises around the harbour area, as well as weekend day trips to Avon Gorge (adult/child £11.50/8.50, July to October) and Bath (adult/child £20/15, July to September).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bristol has an ever-expanding programme of annual events. Things kick off in April with **bristolive** (www.bristolive.co.uk), a festival for amateur orchestral groups. The **St Paul's Carnival** (☎ 944 4176) is on the first Saturday of July, swiftly followed by the **Bristol Harbour Festival** (☎ 922 3148), the city's biggest waterside event, and the **Ashton Court Festival** (www.ashtoncourtfestival.co.uk), an outdoor extravaganza of bands, theatre and performing arts held on the Ashton Court estate. Ashton Court is also the venue for the **International Balloon Fiesta** (☎ 953 5884; www.bristolifesta.co.uk) in August, and the **International Kite Festival** (☎ 977 2002; www.kite-festival.org) in September. Bristol's biggest film festival is the **Encounters Festival** (☎ 929 9188; www.encounters-festival.org.uk), held at the Watershed every November, and there's a **Christmas market** held on various nights in late November and December.

SLEEPING

Bristol is a bit of a mixed bag when it comes to finding a place to stay. There's a great riverside hostel and a couple of stunning top-end hotels, but most of the city-centre business is hoovered up by the bland chain hotels along the river. Pick up the free *Bristol* guide for accommodation listings and a fold-out map.

Budget

Bristol Backpackers (☎ 925 7900; www.bristolbackpackers.co.uk; 17 St Stephen's St; dm/tw £14/36; ☎ ☑) Plump in the heart of town, this ecofriendly independent hostel is a decent budget option, although the private rooms are cramped and the grungy dorms sometimes get very busy in summer. There's cheap internet access (£2 for three hours) and no curfew, so expect some noise on weekends.

Bristol YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5726; bristol@yha.org.uk; Hayman House, 14 Narrow Quay; dm £20, s incl breakfast £25-35, d incl breakfast £40-45; ☎ ☑) In a wonderful spot beside the river, this smartly converted brick warehouse makes a fantastic base, and offers much better value than many of the city's midrange hotels. The modern dorms and doubles are spread over several floors, and the facilities include internet access and the excellent Grainshed coffee lounge.

Midrange

Downlands House (☎ 962 1639; www.downlandshouse.com; 33 Henleaze Gardens; s £38-52, d £55-75; ☎ ☑ wi-fi) Pleasant, uncomplicated bedrooms are scattered around this 19th-century gabled house, perched on the edge of Durdham Down. Pretty curtains, plush carpets and framed watercolour prints (as well as the odd china figurine) characterise the interior décor, and there's free wi-fi throughout.

Downs Edge (☎ 968 3264; www.downsedge.com; Saville Rd; s £48-57, d £71-78; ☎) This quiet, countrified B&B would be more at home in the Cotswolds than central Bristol. In a fine spot on the edge of the Bristol Downs, overlooking private gardens, the double-gabled house offers a choice of fresh, light-filled rooms filled with antique furniture and frippy furnishings.

Victoria Square Hotel (☎ 973 9058; www.vicsquare.com; Victoria Sq; s £59-89, d £79-99; ☎ ☑) Despite being owned by the Best Western behemoth, this brick-built pile is the pick of the hotels in Clifton village. It's kitted out with more character than you'd normally expect from a chain-run hotel, with large pocket-sprung

beds, pine furniture and lovely views across the wooded square, and all the Clifton night-spots are within easy reach.

Rodney Hotel (☎ 973 5422; rodney@cliftonhotels.com; 4 Rodney Pl; s £64-87, d £79-92; (P)) Shabby chic sums up this venerable hotel, which stands in a glorious terrace of Georgian town houses in the heart of Clifton. A couple of the rooms are really rather grand, with smart furnishings and tasteful pastel fabrics, but most tend towards the scruffy side. The main draw here is the fantastic location, with some of the city's best cafés and brasseries galore right on your doorstep.

Also recommended:

Arches Hotel (☎ 924 7398; www.arches-hotel.com; 132 Cotham Brow; s £28.50-45, d £50.50-58.50; ☒) Great-value eco-conscious guesthouse with huge veggie-only breakfasts.

Clifton Hotel (☎ 973 6882; clifton@cliftonhotels.com; St Paul's Rd; s £64-74, d £79-84; ☒) Decent hotel in the B&B-heavy area around St Paul's Rd, though the rooms are looking tired.

Top End

Berkeley Square Hotel (☎ 925 4000; berkeley@cliftonhotels.com; 15 Berkeley Sq; s £79-129, d £115-139; (P) ☒) Beautifully situated on a leafy Georgian square, this hip hotel brings baroque imagination to a traditional Bristol town house. Puce and purple sofas and gilt mirrors are dotted around the ice-white lobby and downstairs restaurant. While the bedrooms aren't quite as wacky, they're still luxurious and beautifully appointed, with widescreen TVs, fresh fruit and complimentary sherry.

our pick Hotel du Vin (☎ 925 5577; www.hotelduvin.com; Narrow Lewins Mead; d £130-160, ste £185-205; (P) ☒) Manhattan comes to Bristol at the sumptuous Hotel du Vin, housed in six converted warehouses near the city centre. Much of the building's industrial character has been incorporated into the stripped-back rooms: hefty wooden beams and iron pillars sit stylishly alongside the huge futon beds and bespoke furniture. The rooms are named after vintage wines, and all boast plenty of indulgent touches – clawfoot baths, walk-in showers, hi-fis and Egyptian-cotton bathrobes – and if you can afford them, the split-level loft suites are absolutely out of this world.

Brigstow Hotel (☎ 929 1030; www.brigstowhotel.com; Welsh Back; r midweek £149-250, weekend £99-250; ☒) The concrete-and-glass exterior of this riverside hotel has all the appeal of a municipal car park, but don't be put off by appearances – in-

side you'll discover one of Bristol's funkier, freshest places to stay. The plate-glass windows and gleaming wood floors of the lobby set the designer tone, and the same sleek aesthetic is carried into the bedrooms, which boast trendy floating beds, curved wood-panel walls and tiny TVs set into the bathroom tiles.

EATING

Eating out in Bristol is a real highlight – the city is jammed with restaurants ranging from classic British caffs to designer dining emporiums.

Budget

RESTAURANTS

One Stop Thali Café (☎ 942 6687; 12A York Rd; set meal £6.95; ☒ lunch) For an introduction to Bristol's spicier side, look no further than this wonderful little Indian place in the heart of Montpelier. Students and neighbourhood diners cram into the tiny dining room for the hectic street-market vibe and the fantastic-value set menu, which costs just £6.95 for 6 courses.

Obento (☎ 929 7392; 69 Baldwin St; mains £4-9; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The city has a growing number of Asian eateries, but this is one of the newest and most exciting. Yakitori chicken, fresh sushi and hot noodles are served up in the stark minimalist dining room, as well as authentic 'bento' boxes – a Japanese three-course lunch box that's practically a work of art in itself.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Pieinister (☎ 942 9500; 24 Stokes Croft; pies £3; ☒ lunch) The great British pie is alive and well at this yummy little eatery, but there's more on offer than just the traditional steak and kidney. All the pies are handmade on the spot and drowned in lashings of mash, gravy and mushy peas – try the creamy Chicken of Aragon or the award-winning Mr Porky Pie.

York Café (☎ 923 9656; 1 York Pl; breakfast £1-5; ☒ breakfast & lunch) A British greasy spoon from the old school, famous across the city for its huge, heart-stopping all-day fry-up. The tea's served in solid china mugs, the menus are printed on Day-Glo sheets and there's brown sauce and ketchup on every table – what more could you possibly ask for?

Oppo Music Coffee House (☎ 929 1166; 72 Park St; breakfast £1.50-5, lunch £3-6; ☒ breakfast & lunch) This excellent little place turns into Bristol's only haiku-café on Thursday and Friday lunchtimes, but it's popular throughout the week

for rich Lavazza coffee and herbal teas, as well as a lunchtime menu of Thai fishcakes and hefty sandwiches.

Bar Chocolat (☎ 974 7000; 19 The Mall; ☒ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) If there is such a thing as death by chocolate, then this holy temple to the cocoa bean is where you'll find it. There's everything from hot chocolates and chocolate-flavoured coffees to chocolate-chip muffins and chocolate with a Fairtrade conscience – and remember to leave room for some handmade chocolates before you leave.

SELF-CATERING

Papadeli (☎ 973 6569; 84 Alma Rd) A delectable Italian deli stocked with the kind of zesty flavours and sweet treats you'd normally only find in a Tuscan street market. Fresh pasta salads, salami sandwiches and goat's cheese tarts are served in the main café, or you can load up with picnic supplies and Italian cakes at the deli counter.

Chandos Deli (☎ 970 6565; 121 Whiteladies Rd & 6 Princess Victoria St) Gourmet sandwiches, handmade tapas and great takeaway coffee make this a favourite lunch stop for many Bristolians.

St Nicholas Market (Corn St; ☒ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The city's lively street market has a bevy of food stalls selling everything from artisan bread to cheese toasts; the best sarnies come from Royce Rolls, while Gallic crêpes are made in the time-honoured fashion at Crêperie.

Midrange & Top End

Clifton Sausage (☎ 973 11192; 7-9 Portland St; mains £8.50-14; ☒ lunch & dinner) Despite the name, this Clifton classic isn't just about bangers (although there are eight different varieties, from reindeer and cranberry to traditional toad-in-the-hole). In fact, it's one of Bristol's smartest British gastropubs, with a refined ambience and a menu that takes in everything from Cornish fish to fillet steak and apple crumble.

Oh! Calcutta! Indian Kitchen (☎ 924 0458; 216 Cheltenham Rd; mains £8-12; ☒ dinner) The best of the cluster of Indian restaurants strung along Cheltenham Rd. Stone-topped tables and back-lit chrome benches fill the vibrant dining room, and the menu is filled with all the usual Indian standards as well as a range of intriguing blackboard specials.

our pick riverstation (☎ 914 4434; The Grove; mains £14; ☒ lunch & dinner) Housed in a dramatic dockside building with an amazing barrelled roof, this swish restaurant has been a favourite with Bristol's fooderati since its opening nine

years ago, and has recently been refurbished with vibrant colours and an all-new bar. The food's as good as ever; light lunches, coffee and crumbly pastries define the downstairs café, while up on the first floor it's all effortless elegance and European cuisine.

Severnshed (☎ 925 1212; The Grove; mains from £12; ☒ lunch & dinner) Another stunning, sophisticated restaurant along the old quay, inside a renovated goods shed designed by Brunel. It's a stylish mix of designer bar, modern bistro and waterside café, mixing industrial trappings with contemporary chrome and a floating bar; the 977 menu (served before 7pm) features two courses for £9.77.

Glassboat (☎ 929 0704; Welsh Back; lunch mains £7-8, dinner mains £14-21; ☒ closed Sun) This double-decked barge is the city's most romantic place to eat, with a fine wood-panelled interior lit by soft globe lanterns, an extensive menu stuffed with British and French country dishes, and dreamy views across the water.

Quartier Vert (☎ 973 4482; 84 Whiteladies Rd; mains £11.50-18.50; ☒ lunch & dinner) Consistently featuring in all the major food guides for the last 20-odd years, the split-level QV remains a Bristol big-hitter, with a lovely front patio, a fine ground-floor café and a smart European bistro upstairs. A second branch is due to open up by the harbour in late 2006, housing a deli, bakery and the restaurant's much-respected cookery school.

Cafe Maitreya (☎ 951 0100; 89 St Marks Rd; 3 courses £20.95; ☒ dinner Tue-Sat) Voted the UK's top vegetarian restaurant two years running, the Maitreya has firmly established itself as one of the city's most inventive eateries. It's a long way from the world of veggie hotpots and bean casseroles: the seasonal menu is renowned for its culinary creativity and dabbles in everything from red onion *tartelette* to cashew nut roulade.

Mud Dock (☎ 934 9734; 40 The Grove; mains £8-16; ☒ daily) An über-trendy combo of bar, bistro and bike shop, in a brick warehouse by the harbour.

DRINKING

The fortnightly listings magazine *Venue* (www.venue.co.uk; £1.20) contains the latest info on what's hot and what's not in Bristol and Bath. The freebie mag *Folio* is published monthly.

Elbow Room (☎ 930 0242; 64 Park St) Part dimly lit bar, part hustler's pool hall, this is a favourite hang-out for Bristol's style-conscious crowd.

Rack up the balls and knock back the bourbons to a soundtrack of jazz, funk and whatever else is on the playlist. For budding Fast Eddies, there's a pool competition every Monday.

Woods (☎ 925 0890; 1 Park St Ave; 🕒 4pm-2am Sun-Thu, 4pm-4am Fri, 4pm-6am Sat) Run by the same chaps behind the Elbow Room, this high-class drinking hole is split into a main bar, mezzanine and a patio garden dotted with plants and chrome outdoor heaters.

Arc (☎ 922 6546; 27 Broad St; 🕒 noon-2am Tue-Fri, 7pm-2am Sat, 6pm-12.30am Sun) Arguably Bristol's hippest bar, mixing industrial styling and an underground vibe with plenty of hip-hop and electronic beats.

Park (☎ 4.30pm-1am Sun-Wed, 4.30pm-2am Thu, 4.30pm-4am Fri & Sat) This place has got the metropolitan bar aesthetic nailed – stripped wood, banquet seats and moody lighting abound, and designer drinks are mixed behind the wood-panelled bar. Funk and hip-hop on Wednesday and Thursday give way to classic beats on weekends.

MBargo (☎ 925 3256; 38-40 Triangle St West; 🕒 noon-2am) New incarnation of an old bar next door to the Park, with a totally overhauled interior heavy on the marble and leather, a huge cocktail list and a selection of weekend DJs.

Hop Pole (☎ 446327; 7 Albion Bldgs) This old-fashioned boozier in Clifton makes a fine stop for a pint of ale, with a mismatched interior filled with eclectic furniture, a huge ticking clock and a reassuringly local crowd.

Pipe & Slippers (☎ 942 7711; 118 Cheltenham Rd) Bath Ales on tap and a menu of Pieminister pies make this pub a reliable choice for late-night drinking, as well as Sunday lunch.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinemas

Watershed (☎ 927 5100; www.watershed.co.uk; 1 Canon's Rd) The city's leading art-house cinema and digital media centre, specialising in new indie releases and the occasional silver-screen classic.

Nightclubs

The Bristol club scene moves fast, so check the latest listings to see where the big nights are happening.

Timbuk2 (22 Small St; admission £5-10; 🕒 9am-2pm) The city's current club tip is this underground venue crammed into a labyrinth of caverns and arches just off Corn St. The regular breaks, house and drum'n'bass nights usually get the seal of approval.

Native (☎ 930 4217; www.nativebristol.co.uk; 15 Small St; admission £5-8) Jointly run by a trio of Bristol trendsetters, this tiny, 200-cover club is making waves on the Bristol circuit, with drum'n'bass on Tuesday, Latin and soul during the week, and resident DJs on weekends, including Bristol-based names Ben Dubuisson and Boca45.

Thekla (☎ 929 3301; www.thekla.co.uk; The Grove; admission £5-7) Longstanding two-floored club in a converted ship by the harbour, with DJs and dance floor downstairs, and a chill-out zone on the upper level. The house night on Friday and the Espionage night on Saturday are always crammed.

Nocturne (☎ 929 2555; 1 Unity St) A hyper-exclusive members club part owned by Massive Attack, with a decadent designer vibe and notoriously fussy bouncers, so smarten up your act and start queuing early.

Carling Academy (☎ 0870 711 2000; Frogmore St; admission £6-10) Bristol's original superclub can hold a 2000-strong crowd on its biggest nights, but it's practically never that busy. There's indie and R&B during the week and big house nights on weekends.

Theatre

Bristol Old Vic (☎ 987 7877; www.bristol-old-vic.co.uk; King St) The city's oldest theatre stages big touring productions, with occasional forays into comedy and dance.

Tobacco Factory (☎ 902 0344; www.tobaccofactory.com; Raleigh Rd) This small-scale theatre venue stages cutting-edge drama and dance. Catch bus 24 or 25 from Broadmead to the Raleigh Rd stop.

Live Music

Big names tend to play at the Carling Academy (see above), while a host of smaller venues feature emerging acts.

Fleece & Firkin (☎ 945 0996; www.fleecegigs.co.uk; St Thomas St) A small, intimate venue, much favoured by indie artists and breaking names on the local scene.

Colston Hall (☎ 922 3686; www.colstonhall.org; Colston St) The biggest concert hall in Brizzle, hosting everything from big-name comedy to touring bands.

Croft (☎ 987 4144; www.the-croft.com; 117-119 Stokes Croft) Chilled venue with a policy of supporting new names and Bristol-based artists. There's usually no cover charge if you arrive by 10pm Sunday to Thursday.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Bristol International Airport (☎ 0870 121 2747; www.bristolairport.co.uk) is 8 miles southwest of town. Most flights are holiday charters but there are also scheduled flights to European destinations.

Air Southwest (☎ 0870 241 6830; www.airsouthwest.com) Several UK destinations including Newquay, Plymouth and Jersey.

British Airways (☎ 0845 773 3377; www.ba.com) Flies to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Paris.

easy Jet (☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com) Budget flights to UK destinations including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Inverness and Belfast, plus several European cities.

Bus

National Express coaches go to Birmingham (£16.60, two hours, eight daily), London (£16.50, 2½ hours, at least hourly), Cardiff (£6.50, 1¼ hours, two daily) and Exeter (£11.60, two hours, four daily). There's also a direct daily bus to Nottingham (£24.50, 4¾ hours) and Oxford (£13, three hours).

Buses X39 (one hour, several per hour) and 332 (50 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday) run to Bath. Bus 375/376 goes to Wells (one hour) and Glastonbury (1¼ hours) every half-hour during the week and hourly on Sunday. There are buses to most destinations around Somerset and Wiltshire from Bath and Wells.

Train

Bristol is an important rail hub, with regular connections to London (£58, 1¼ hours), Exeter (£17.60, 1¼ hours), Plymouth (£44, 2½ hours) and Penzance (£73, four hours). Virgin Trains travel north to Glasgow (£97, 5¾ hours, five direct daily) via Birmingham (£29.50, 1½ hours, eight direct daily). Most main-line trains arrive at Bristol Temple Meads.

Bath makes an easy day trip (single £5.20, 11 minutes, four per hour).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bristol International Flyer runs buses (single/return £5/7, 30 minutes, half-hourly 5am to 11pm) to the airport from Marlborough St bus station and Temple Meads train station. A taxi to the airport costs around £25.

Bicycle

Hilly as Bristol is, masochists might want to hire bikes at **Blackboy Hill Cycles** (☎ 973 1420; 180 Whiteladies Rd; per day £10; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Boat

The nicest way to commute around the city is with the **Bristol Ferry Boat Co** (☎ 927 3416; www.bristolferryboat.co.uk), which runs two routes: one from the city centre to Temple Meads (one hour, six to 10 daily April to October, weekends only November to March), stopping at Bristol Bridge and Castle Park; and one from the city centre to Hotwells (40 minutes, 12 to 16 daily year-round), stopping at Mardyke and the SS *Great Britain*. A single fare is £1.50, or you can pay £6 for a day's unlimited travel.

Bus

Buses run from Parkway Station to the centre every 15 minutes (30 minutes). Buses 8 and 9 run every 15 minutes to Clifton (10 minutes), Whiteladies Rd and Bristol Zoo from St Augustine's Pde; add another 10 minutes from Temple Meads.

FirstDay tickets (adult/child £4.40/2.70) are valid on all buses for one day in the Greater Bristol area. The FirstFamily ticket (£7) buys one day's travel for two adults and three children, but is only valid after 9am Monday to Friday.

Car & Motorcycle

Bristol's traffic can be a real headache, and the city has a seriously confusing one-way system – you'd be better off avoiding driving altogether or using the **Park & Ride** (☎ 922 2910; return Mon-Fri before 10am £3, after 10am Mon-Fri £2.50, Sat £2; every 10min Mon-Sat), which operates from Portway, Bath Rd and Long Ashton. They're well signed on routes into the city.

WORTH THE TRIP

Tyntesfield (NT; ☎ 01275 461900; Wraxall; adult £9; 🕒 11am-5pm Sat, Sun, Mon & Wed) Formerly the aristocratic home of the Gibbs family, this ornate Victorian pile has recently been acquired by the National Trust (NT). Prickling with spiky turrets and towers, the house was built in grand Gothic Revival style by architect John Norton and is crammed with Victorian decorative arts, a working kitchen garden and a magnificent private chapel. The house is currently undergoing extensive renovation, so it's still a work in progress – call ahead for the latest updates.

BATH

☎ 01225 / pop 90,144

Ask any visitor for their ideal image of an English city, and chances are they'll come up with something pretty close to Bath – an architectural icon, cultural trendsetter and fashionable haunt for the last three centuries. With its grand Georgian terraces, Palladian parades and lofty town houses of honey-coloured stone, it's one of Britain's most attractive cities, and still exudes an air of gentility and chi-chi sophistication – in fact, Bath boasts more listed buildings than almost anywhere else in the country. The whole city has been named a World Heritage Site by Unesco, and it's blessed with a wealth of architectural wonders, including the glorious Royal Crescent and one of the world's finest Roman spas. But it's not without its problems: the hills are knackered, the bars are snooty, the hotels are expensive, and the rush-hour traffic will have you weeping into your steering wheel, but despite all the niggles, it's impossible not to fall in love with this finely-wrought jewel in England's crown.

HISTORY

Prehistoric peoples probably knew about the hot springs, and legend has it that King Bladud, a Trojan refugee and father of King Lear, founded the town some 2800 years ago. He was supposedly cured of leprosy by a bath in the muddy swamps. The Romans established the town of Aquae Sulis in AD 44 and built the extensive baths complex and a temple to the goddess Sulis-Minerva.

Long after the Romans had departed, the Anglo-Saxons arrived and in 944 a monastery was founded on the site of the present abbey. Throughout the Middle Ages, Bath was an ecclesiastical centre and a wool-trading town and it wasn't until the early 18th century that Ralph Allen and Richard 'Beau' Nash made Bath the centre of fashionable society. Allen developed the quarries at Coombe Down, constructed Prior Park (p259) and employed the two John Woods (father and son) to create the glorious buildings you see today.

As the 18th century wore on, Beau Nash lost his influence and sea bathing started to draw visitors away from Bath; by the mid-19th century the city was thoroughly out of fashion. Fortunately, most of Bath's grand architecture has been preserved.

ORIENTATION

Like Rome, Bath is famed for its seven hills, and although the city centre is compact it will test your legs. Most street signs are carved into the golden stone of the buildings.

The train and bus stations are both south of the tourist office at the end of Manvers St. The most obvious landmark is the abbey, across from the Roman Baths and Pump Room.

INFORMATION

Bath Quarterly (www.bathquarterly.com) Guide to sights, accommodation, restaurants and events.

Click (☎ 481008; 13A Manvers St; internet per 20min £1; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Laundrette (4 St Margarets Bldgs; per load £2; ☎ 6am-9pm)

Main post office (☎ 0845 722 3344; 25 New Bond St)

Retailer Internet (☎ 443181; 12 Manvers St; per 20min £1; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun)

Royal United Hospital (☎ 428331; Combe Park)

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2000, call per min 50p; www.visitbath.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

What's On (www.whatsonbath.co.uk) Up-to-date listing of the city's events and nightlife.

SIGHTS Baths

Ever since the Romans arrived in Bath, life in the city has revolved around the three natural springs that bubble up near the abbey. In typically ostentatious style, the Romans constructed a glorious complex of bathhouses above the springs to take advantage of their natural hot water, which emerges from the ground at a constant temperature of 46°C. The buildings were left to decay after the Romans departed and, apart from a few leprosy souls who came looking for a cure in the Middle Ages, it wasn't until the end of the 17th century that Bath's restorative waters again became fashionable.

The site now forms one of the best-preserved ancient Roman spas in the world. The **Roman Baths Museum** (☎ 477785; www.romanbaths.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; adult/child £10/6, incl Museum of Costume £13/7.60; ☎ 9am-6pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-10pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Nov-Feb) gets very, very busy in summer; visit outside July and August if you possibly can. An audio guide (read by bestselling author Bill Bryson) is included in the admission price.

The first sight inside the complex is the **Great Bath**. Head down to water level and along the raised walkway to see the Roman paving

and lead base. A series of excavated passages and chambers beneath street level lead off in several directions and let you inspect the remains of other smaller baths and hypocaust (heating) systems.

The 12th-century **King's Bath** was built around the original sacred spring; 1.5 million litres of hot water still pour into the pool every day. You can see the ruins of the vast 2000-year-old **Temple of Sulis-Minerva** under the Pump Room, and recent excavations of the **East Baths** give an insight into its 4th-century form.

Head outside to Bath St and note the colonnaded arcade, constructed so bathers could walk between the town's three main baths without getting wet. At the end of Bath St stands the **Cross Bath**, where Mary of Modena, wife of James II, erected a cross in gratitude for her pregnancy in 1688. Opposite is the **Hot Bath**, the third bath built over Bath's hot springs. These two historic sites have been restored and, together with the Hetling Pump Room, now form part of the **Thermae Bath Spa** (☎ 331234; www.thermaebathspa.com; Hot Bath St), a steel-and-glass complex that's ruffled many local feathers thanks to its super-modern design. The privately owned enterprise was originally due to open in 2002, but has been beset by countless legal problems and a spiralling construction budget. It finally opened its doors to the general public in late summer of 2006.

Bath Abbey

Edgar, the first king of united England, was crowned in a church in Abbey Courtyard in 973, but the present **Bath Abbey** (☎ 422462; www.bathabbey.org; requested donation £2.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Easter, afternoons only Sun) was built between 1499 and 1616, making it the last great medieval church raised in England. The nave's wonderful fan vaulting was erected in the 19th century.

The most striking feature of the abbey's exterior is the west façade, where angels climb up and down stone ladders, commemorating a dream of the founder, Bishop Oliver King. The abbey boasts the second-largest collection of wall monuments after Westminster Abbey. Among those buried here are Sir Isaac Pitman, who devised the Pitman method of shorthand, and Beau Nash.

On the abbey's southern side, steps lead down to the small **Heritage Vaults Museum** (☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), which explores the abbey's

history and its links with the nearby baths. It also contains fine stone bosses, archaeological artefacts and a weird model of the 10th-century monk Aelfric, dressed in his traditional black Benedictine habit.

Royal Crescent & The Circus

The crowning glory of Georgian Bath is Royal Crescent, a semicircular terrace of majestic houses overlooking the green sweep of Royal Victoria Park. Designed by John Wood the Younger (1728-82) and built between 1767 and 1775, the houses would have originally been rented by the season by wealthy socialites.

For a glimpse into the splendour and razzle-dazzle of Georgian life, head for **Number 1 Royal Crescent** (☎ 428126; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov), which has been restored with painstaking detail. Only materials available during the 18th century were used during its refurbishment, so it's about as authentically Georgian as you can get; sadly, the same can't be said for the endearingly hammy staff dressed in period costume.

A walk along Brock St leads to **The Circus**, a magnificent circle of 30 houses. Plaques on the houses commemorate famous residents such as Thomas Gainsborough, Clive of India and David Livingstone. To the south is the restored 18th-century **Georgian Garden**, where gravel replaces grass to protect women's long dresses from unsightly stains.

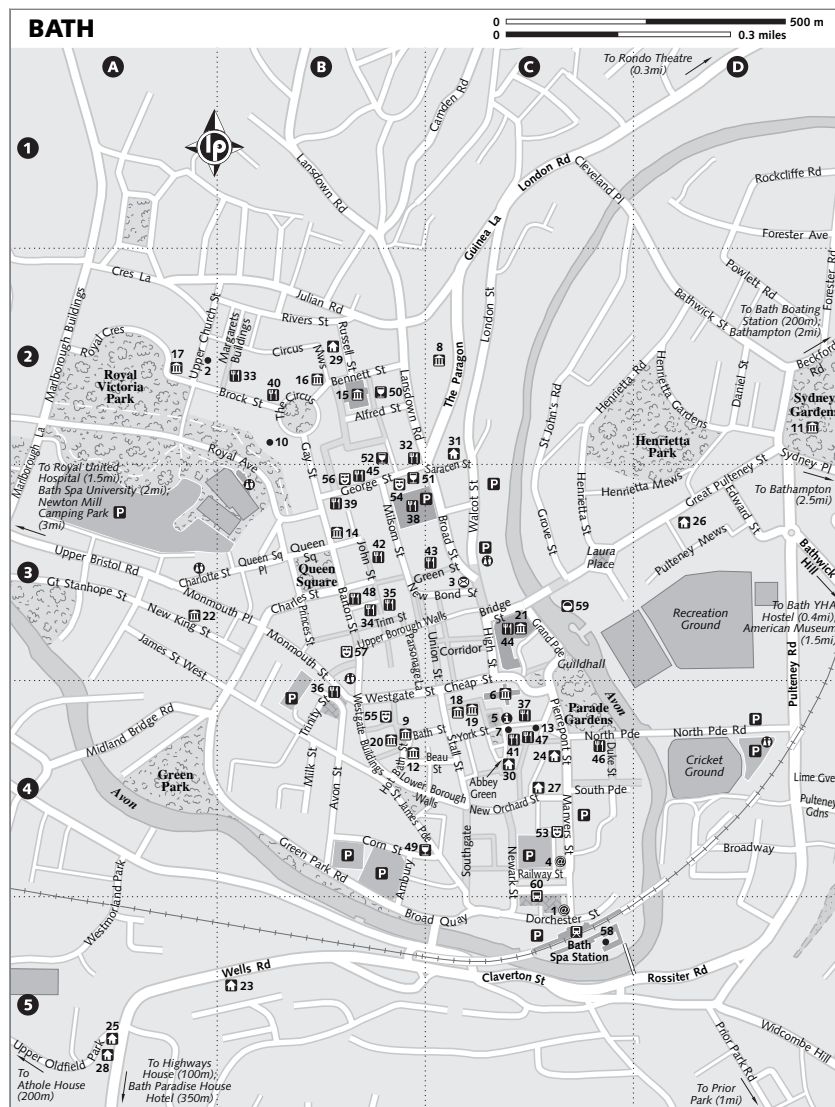
Assembly Rooms & Museum of Costume

Opened in 1771, the city's glorious **Assembly Rooms** (☎ 477785; www.museumofcostume.co.uk; Bennett St; ☎ 11am-6pm Mar-Oct, 11am-5pm Nov-Feb) are where fashionable Bath socialites once gathered to waltz, play cards and listen to the latest chamber music. You can visit the rooms as long as they haven't been reserved for a special function; highlights include the card room, tearoom and ballroom, all lit by their original 18th-century chandeliers.

In the basement is the **Museum of Costume** (adult/child £6.50/4.50, incl Roman Baths Museum £13/7.60), displaying costumes worn from the 16th to late 20th centuries. There's an audio guide to talk you through the fickle vagaries of fashion.

Jane Austen Centre

Bath is perhaps best known as the location for the novels of Jane Austen, who visited the city many times throughout her life, and lived here



from 1801 to 1806 (a plaque marks one of her former houses at 4 Sydney Pl, opposite the Holburne Museum). *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were both largely set in Bath, and the **Jane Austen Centre** (☎ 443000; www.janeausten.co.uk; 40 Gay St; admission £4.45; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun) explores the author's connections with the city. Its displays include period

costume, contemporary prints of Bath and lots of exhibits relating to the author's life.

Other Museums

The fine 18th-century **Holburne Museum** (☎ 466669; Great Pulteney St; admission £5.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) houses the booty of Sir William Holburne, a 19th-century Bath

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resident who brought together an outstanding collection of porcelain, antiques, and paintings by great 18th-century artists such as Gainsborough, Turner and Guardi.

Housed in an 18th-century Gothic chapel, the **Building of Bath Museum** (☎ 333895; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk; The Vineyards; admission £4; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Feb-Nov) details how Bath's Georgian splendour came into being, tracing the city's evolution from a sleepy spa town into one of the centres of Georgian society. There are some intriguing displays on contemporary construction methods, and the museum also explores the way in which social class and interior décor were intimately linked during the Georgian era; heaven forbid you should use a wallpaper that outstripped your station!

In 1781 the astronomer William Herschel discovered Uranus from the garden of his home, which now houses the **William Herschel Museum** (☎ 311342; 19 New King St; admission £3.50; 🕒 1-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Feb-Nov). The house is decorated as it would have been in the 18th century; an astrolabe in the garden marks where Herschel would probably have placed his telescope.

The **Victoria Art Gallery** (☎ 477233; www.victoriagal.org.uk; Pulteney Bridge; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun) houses the city's main art collection, mainly dating from the 15th to 20th centuries. There are some particularly fine canvases by Gainsborough, Turner and Sickert, as well as a wonderful series of Georgian

caricatures from the wicked pens of artists such as James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson.

The **Museum of East Asian Art** (☎ 464640; www.meaa.org.uk; 12 Bennett St; admission £4; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) contains more than 500 jade, bamboo, porcelain and bronze objects from Cambodia, Korea and Thailand, and substantial Chinese and Japanese carvings, ceramics and lacquerware.

The **American Museum** (☎ 460503; www.americanmuseum.org; Claverton Manor; 🕒 noon-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-Oct) houses a collection of stateside artefacts, memorabilia and furniture dating from the 17th century to the Civil War. There are 15 individually decorated rooms scattered around the manor house, including a suitably sparse Shaker Room, and a New Orleans room in the lavish style of a plantation villa. Even the trees and plants in the surrounding grounds have a Yankee provenance. The museum is 2 miles southeast of the city centre; bus 18 and several other buses to the university stop nearby.

Prior Park

The celebrated landscape gardener Capability Brown and the satirical poet Alexander Pope both had a hand in the creation of **Prior Park** (NT; ☎ 833 422; Ralph Allen Dr; admission £4.50; 🕒 11am-5.30pm Wed-Mon Feb-Nov, 11am-dusk Fri-Sun Dec & Jan), an 18th-century ornamental garden dreamt up by the local entrepreneur Ralph Allen. Cascading lakes, a Gothic temple and a famous

Sally Lunn's. There's been a tearoom and bakery on this site since the 18th century; the atmosphere is as frilly and English as ever, but it's the trademark Sally Lunn's bun that's still packing in the crowds.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Café René (☎ 447147; Shires Yard; ☹ breakfast & lunch) This delightful café has an air of Paris' Left Bank thanks to its lovely courtyard terrace and an authentic menu of baguettes, croissants, *croques-monsieurs* (toasted cheese-and-ham sandwiches) and *moules marinières* (mussels cooked in white wine).

Adventure Café (☎ 462038; 5 Princes Bldgs; mains £3-6) Big city style in little city Bath. Huge plate-glass windows, dark wood floors and laid-back tunes conjure a sophisticated metropolitan atmosphere at this trendy café-bar, which is as popular for a lunchtime ciabatta as for a late-night Bud.

Café Retro (☎ 339347; 18 York St; mains £5-11) Retro by name, retro by nature, this popular boho hang-out is the perfect venue for a light lunch or an extended coffee break. If you don't feel like sitting in, grab a sandwich and a takeaway coffee from Retro2Go and head for a picnic in the Parade Gardens nearby.

Boston Tea Party (☎ 313901; 19 Kingsmead Sq; ☹ Mon-Sat) With a lovely outside terrace spilling onto Kingsmead Sq, the Bath outpost of this small southwest franchise is always full to bursting at lunchtime thanks to its prodigious selection of sandwiches, homemade soups and sweet treats.

SELF-CATERING

Self-caterers should head for the covered **Guild-hall Market** (High St), where you'll find crêpes and other takeaway food.

Blackstones (☎ 338803; 10 Queen St; mains £2-7; ☹ Mon-Sat) This fantastic gourmet takeaway is such good value you might never need to pick up a pan again. Delicious dishes such as rich cottage pie, Italian casserole and Chinese noodles are served either in the small café or packed up for the ultimate take-home meal.

Chandos Deli (☎ 314418; George St; ☹ Mon-Sat) Gourmet sarnies, fresh pasta and Italian cakes are the mainstays at this excellent deli, perfect for stocking up on picnic supplies.

Midrange

Bistro Papillon (☎ 310064; 2 Margarets Bldgs; 2-course lunch £8.50, mains £11-15; ☹ Tue-Sat) Ooh la la – a little

piece of *la belle France* comes to Bath at this quintessentially Gallic bistro near Royal Crescent. Rustic Mediterranean dishes are matched by a thoroughly French ambience, complete with checked tablecloths, clattering pans, sun-baked colours and a streetside terrace.

Firehouse Rotisserie (☎ 482070; 2 John St; mains £11-15; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Stateside flavours and a Californian vibe characterise this excellent American restaurant, run by a couple of ex-LA chefs. The menu takes its cue from Mexico and the deep South, with signature dishes including rotisserie chicken, Louisiana catfish and Texan steak, as well as huge brick-fired pizzas.

Demuth's (☎ 446059; 2 North Pde Passage; mains £11.50-12.50; ☹ lunch) This much-admired vegetarian restaurant is renowned for its inventive cooking. The intimate town house dining room is finished with lustrous wood and abstract art, and the mood is buzzy and informal. Cooking courses can be booked at www.vegetariancookeryschool.com.

FishWorks (☎ 448707; 6 Green St; mains from £13; ☹ lunch & dinner) This wonderful place combines a fishmonger, cookery school and seafood restaurant into one piscatorially perfect bundle. Choose your fish from the ice-packed trays downstairs, or select something fresh from the chalkboard menu, and sit back and enjoy the flavours of the sea.

Onefishtwofish (☎ 330236; 10A North Pde; mains £13-18; ☹ dinner Tue-Sun) More top-class seafood is on offer at this new restaurant by the weirs, housed in an extraordinary barrel-vaulted cellar built from rough brick and flagstone tiles. The menu changes according to the daily catch; the Marseillaise bouillabaisse offers a true taste of the Côte d'Azur.

Circus (☎ 318918; 34 Brock St; set menu £19.95; ☹ Tue-Sun) The razor-edge tablecloths and blinding cutlery set the scene at this swish Anglo-French restaurant. It's one of the city's top tables, with a complex menu that mixes Gallic flavours with local produce, and an atmosphere that's starchier than a matron's apron.

Top End

Olive Tree Restaurant (☎ 447928; Russell St; 2-/3-course lunch £14.50/16.50, dinner mains £15-23; ☹ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sun) If you're after a special supper, look no further than the in-house restaurant at the Queensberry Hotel, which boasts a new Michelin-starred chef and a fresh minimalist look. The cooking is straight from the top

drawer and specialises in creative takes on local meat, seafood and game.

Hole in the Wall (☎ 425242; 16 George St; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Back in the '60s, the venerable Hole in the Wall was one of the restaurants that heralded the rebirth of British cuisine, and though it's changed hands many times since then, it's still a beacon for innovative cooking. Fusion flavours and a modern country-tinged interior have given a new lease of life to this old fave.

DRINKING

Common Room (☎ 425550; 2 Saville Row) Next door to an anarchic antiques shop, this tiny little bar is a favourite with Bath's beautiful people. It's got all the designer credentials – exposed brickwork, blonde-wood floors, black-leather sofas – and a more chilled atmosphere than the drinking dens on George St.

Revolution (☎ 336168; George St) Swish and ever-so-slightly snooty Manhattan-style bar, with the standard-issue blend of retro lamps and chrome fixtures, and a selection of cocktails served by the jug.

Sub 13 (☎ 466667; 4 Edgar Bldgs, George St; ☹ closed Sun) This hip new hang-out has established itself as a smooth-operating alternative to Bath's bigger, brasher joints. Iced beers, bespoke cocktails and an intimate vibe are the order of the day.

Porter (☎ 424104; George St) Bath's only veggie pub is a rustic, spit-and-sawdust affair run by the folk behind Moles nightclub. Regular bands play in the downstairs cellar, and it's usually jammed to the rafters on Friday and Saturday night.

Bath Tap (☎ 404344; 19-20 St James Pde; ☹ to 2am Thu-Sat) The classic pub hang-out for Bath's gay community, with a late weekend licence and a fun range of theme nights ranging from drag to cabaret.

ENTERTAINMENT

Venue magazine (www.venue.co.uk; £1.20) has comprehensive listings with details of theatre, music, gigs – the works, basically – for Bristol and Bath. Pick up a copy at any newsagent.

Nightclubs

Moles (☎ 404445; www.moles.co.uk; 14 George St; admission £5-7) The best venue in town continues to go from strength to strength, hosting a regular line-up of cutting-edge new acts and breaking bands, as well as occasional club nights. There's also live music in the cellar bar of Porter across the road.

Babylon (☎ 465002; Kingston Rd; admission £3-5; ☹ Thu-Sat) This is Bath's big night out, at least if you're a student; drum'n'bass, house, funk, breaks and indie all feature on the revolving programme of events, but seasoned clubbers tend to head over to Bristol instead.

Cadillacs (☎ 464241; 90B Walcot St; £4-6) A venerable old club that's been around for donkey's years and is starting to show its age; still, it's worth a look for a late-night drink and the occasional decent night.

Theatre & Cinemas

Theatre Royal (☎ 448844; www.theatreroyal.org.uk; Sawdise) This seriously posh provincial theatre features comedy, drama, opera, ballet and world music in the main auditorium, and more experimental productions at its smaller Ustinov Studio.

Rondo Theatre (☎ 463362; www.rondotheatre.co.uk; St Saviours Rd, Larkhall) This small but adventurous rep theatre mixes professional, amateur and community work in a varied programme of comedy, music, dance and drama.

Little Theatre (☎ 466822; St Michael's Pl) Bath's art-house cinema, screening mostly fringe and foreign-language films.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus National Express coaches run to London (£16.50, 3½ hours, 10 daily) via Heathrow (£16.50, 2¾ hours), and to Bristol (£3.50, 45 minutes, two daily) for buses to the north. Services to most other cities require a change at Bristol or Heathrow.

Buses X39/339 (55 minutes, several per hour) and 332 (50 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday) run to Bristol. Other useful services include buses X4/X5 to Bradford-on-Avon (30 minutes, half-hourly), X71/X72 to Devizes (one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) and 173/773 to Wells (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday).

Map-timetables for individual routes are available from the **bus station office** (☎ 464446; Manvers St; ☹ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Train

There are half-hourly trains to London Paddington (£56, 1½ hours) and Cardiff (£120, 1¼ hours), and several each hour to Bristol (£5.20, 11 minutes), where you can connect with the main-line trains to northern England.

Trains go to Oxford roughly hourly (£17.20, 1½ hours, change at Didcot Parkway); Weymouth (£11.60, 2¼ hours) every two hours via Bradford-on-Avon (£3, 15 minutes) and Dorchester West (£11.30, two hours); and Portsmouth (£24.10, 2½ hours) hourly via Salisbury (£11.20, one hour).

GETTING AROUND Bicycle

Bikes can be hired from **Avon Valley Cycles** (☎ 461880; www.bikeshop.uk.com; Arch 37; half-/full day £10/15; 🚲 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, till 8pm Thu) near the train station. The 13-mile **Bristol and Bath Railway Path** (www.bristolbathrailwaypath.org.uk) runs along the disused track of the old Midland Railway, decommissioned in the late 1960s.

Bus

Bus 18 runs from the bus station, High St and Great Pulteney St up Bathwick Hill past the YHA to the university every 10 minutes. Bus 4 runs every 20 minutes to Bathampton from the same places. A FirstDay Pass for unlimited bus travel in the city costs adult/child £4/2.60.

Car

Bath has a serious traffic problem (especially at rush hour) and an infuriating one-way system. **Park & Ride services** (☎ 464446; return £1.70, 10min to centre, every 10-15min; 🚗 6.15am-7.30pm) operate at Lansdown to the north, Newbridge to the west and Odd Down to the south.

SOMERSET

For a snapshot of the classic English countryside, you can't do much better than Somerset, where life still seems to move at its own decidedly low-key pace. With its hotchpotch landscape of quiet villages, ivy-covered pubs and broad fields, it makes the perfect place for some good old-fashioned rural R&R, and is often much quieter than the better-known holiday regions of Devon and Cornwall further to the west. Highlights include the beautiful cathedral city of Wells, the caves of Wookey Hole and Cheddar Gorge and the excellent walking country around Exmoor National Park.

Orientation & Information

Somerset nestles around the crook in the elbow of the Bristol Channel. The Mendip Hills (the Mendips) follow a line below Bristol, just north

of Wells and Cheddar, while the Quantock Hills (the Quantocks) sit just east of Exmoor. Most places of interest are in northern Somerset. Bath or Wells make good bases to the east, as do Lynton and Lynmouth to the west.

Most towns have tourist offices and there's a central **Somerset Visitor Centre** (☎ 01934-750833; somersetvisitorcentre@somerset.gov.uk; Sedgemoor Services M5 South, Axbridge) for general information. The new website at www.somerset.net is a useful source of online info.

Getting Around

Most buses in Somerset are operated by **First** (☎ 0845 606 4446; www.firstgroup.com), supplemented by a few smaller operators and coach companies. For timetables and general travel information, visit the First website, contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk) or contact **Somerset County Council's transport department** (☎ 0845 345 9155; transport@somerset.gov.uk). Area timetables are available at bus stations and tourist offices.

WELLS

☎ 01749 / pop 10,406

Tiny Wells is England's smallest city, and only qualifies for the title of 'city' thanks to its magnificent medieval cathedral, which sits in the heart of town beside the grand Bishop's Palace – the main seat of ecclesiastical power in this part of Britain since the 12th century, and still the official residence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Medieval buildings and cobbled streets radiate out from the cathedral green to the main marketplace, which has been the bustling heart of Wells for some nine centuries. These days Wells is a quiet provincial city, with some good restaurants and busy shops, and makes a good launch pad for exploring the Mendips and northern Somerset.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 672552; www.wells.gov.uk; Market Pl; 🚗 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) stocks the *Wells City Trail* leaflet (30p) and sells discount tickets to the nearby attractions of Wookey Hole, Cheddar Gorge and Longleat. Wednesday and Saturday are market days.

Wells Laundrette (☎ 01458 830409; 39 St Cuthbert St; 🚗 8am-8pm) is opposite St Cuthbert's Church.

Sights

WELLS CATHEDRAL

The **Cathedral Church of St Andrew** (☎ 674483; www.wellscathedral.org.uk; Chain Gate, Cathedral Green; requested

donation adult/child £5/2; 🚗 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 7am-6pm Oct-Mar) was built in stages between 1180 and 1508. The building's most famous asset is the wonderful **west front**, an immense sculpture gallery decorated with over 300 figures, built in the 13th century and restored to its original splendour in 1986. The façade would once have been painted in vivid colours; apart from the figure of Christ, installed in 1985 in the uppermost niche, all the figures are original.

Inside, the most striking feature is the pair of **scissor arches** separating the nave from the choir, designed to counter the subsidence of the central tower. High up in the north transept is a wonderful **mechanical dock** dating from 1392 – the second-oldest in England after the one in Salisbury Cathedral – which shows the position of the planets and the phases of the moon.

Other highlights are the elegant **lady chapel** (1326) at the eastern end and the seven **effigies** of Anglo-Saxon bishops ringing the choir. The 15th-century **chained library** houses books and manuscripts dating back to 1472. It's only open at certain times during the year or by prior arrangement.

From the north transept follow the worn steps to the glorious **Chapter House** (1306), with its delicate ceiling ribs sprouting like a palm from a central column. Externally, look out for the **Chain Bridge** built from the northern side of the cathedral to Vicars' Close to enable clerics to reach the cathedral without getting their robes wet. The **cloisters** on the southern side surround a pretty courtyard.

Guided tours (🚗 Mon-Sat) of the cathedral are free.

CATHEDRAL CLOSE

Wells Cathedral forms the centrepiece of a cluster of ecclesiastical buildings dating back to the Middle Ages and beyond. Facing the west front are the 15th-century **Old Deanery** and the **Wells Museum** (☎ 673477; 8 Cathedral Green; www.wellsmuseum.org.uk; admission £3; 🚗 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Easter), with exhibits on local life, cathedral architecture and the infamous Witch of Wookey Hole.

Further along on the left, **Vicars' Close** is a stunning cobbled street of 14th-century houses with a chapel at the far end, thought to be the oldest complete medieval street in Europe.

Penniless Porch, a corner gate leading onto Market Sq and built by Bishop Bekynton around 1450, is so-called because beggars asked for alms here.

BISHOP'S PALACE

Beyond the cathedral is the moated 13th-century **Bishop's Palace** (☎ 678691; www.bishopspalacewells.co.uk; adult/child £5/1; 🚗 10.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sun Apr-Oct), purportedly the oldest inhabited building in England. Surrounded by a huge fortified wall, the palace complex contains several fine Italian Gothic state rooms, an imposing Great Hall and beautiful tree-shaded gardens. The natural wells that gave the city its name bubble up in the palace's grounds, feeding the moat and the fountain in the market square. The swans in the moat have been trained to ring a bell outside one of the windows when they want to be fed.

Sleeping

Infield House (☎ 670989; www.infieldhouse.co.uk; 36 Portway; s/d £28/54; 📍 ☒) The best (and cheapest) of several B&Bs scattered along the busy Portway road, offering simple, spacious rooms in a Victorian town house. There are no real surprises, but the buffet breakfast is generous and the town centre is a short walk away.

Beryl (☎ 678738; www.beryl-wells.co.uk; Hawkers Lane; s £60-75, d £75-115; 📍 ☒ 🚗) A mile from the city centre, this stately gabled Victorian mansion on 13 acres of private parkland boasts the kind of luxurious accommodation you'd normally find at double (or triple) the price. The richly furnished rooms have bags of country character, with swags, frills and elegant drapes and a smattering of veneered antiques. The heated outdoor swimming pool is the icing on the cake.

Ancient Gate House Hotel (☎ 672029; www.ancientgatehouse.co.uk; Browne's Gate; s £76, d £91-97.50; 📍 ☒) You can't get much more central than this 15th-century inn, which actually forms part of the Great West Gate of Cathedral Close. The wood beams, wonky walls and slightly musty atmosphere have been faithfully preserved, and there are a couple of rooms with carved wooden four-poster and half-tester beds.

Also recommended:

Old Farmhouse (☎ 675058; www.plus44.com/oldfarmhouse; r from £60; 📍 ☒) Fine 17th-century farmhouse with its own walled garden and comfy if unspectacular rooms.

Swan Hotel (☎ 836300; www.bhere.co.uk; Sadler St; d from £90; 📍 ☒) Elegant 15th-century coaching room with large period-themed rooms.

Eating

Café Romna (☎ 670240; 13 Sadler St; mains £10-15; 🚗 ☒) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A stylish Bangladeshi fusion restaurant, decked out with hot colours,

WORTH THE TRIP

Glencot House (☎ 677160; www.glencothouse.co.uk; Wookey Hole; s/d £74/97, 4-poster-bed rooms £130; (P) (X)) If you're after the ultimate country getaway, look no further than this breathtaking 19th-century manor house, built in opulent Jacobean style and surrounded by 18 acres of private woods and riverside grounds (as well as its own cricket pitch). Walnut panelling, carved ceilings and dazzling chandeliers decorate the public rooms, and there are 13 graceful rooms spread out around the house's meandering corridors, all individually finished with a selection of chaise longue, country prints and antique dressers. Downstairs there's a well-stocked library, a firelit drawing room, and a wood-beamed dining hall that could have fallen straight from the pages of *The Remains of the Day*.

low lighting and black banquettes, and an intriguing menu of unusual dishes such as *zingha bhajee* (Bangladeshi vegetable curry) and *chingri palak* (tiger prawns cooked with garlic and spinach).

Goodfellows (☎ 673866; 5 Sadler St; mains £13-22, set menu £29; (X) lunch & dinner Tues-Sat) This sophisticated restaurant has scooped several awards for its creative blend of Somerset produce and French-inspired cuisine. During the day it's a relaxed café-cum-artisan baker, with designer sandwiches, crumbly pastries and traditional breads, as well as a selection of fresh fish; for something more complex head for the formal dining room, where you'll find classy multi-course menus for lunch and dinner.

Rugantino (☎ 672029; Browne's Gate; 3-course menu £18.90; (X) dinner) Practically every Italian dish you could possibly think of is served up at this rustic restaurant, situated on the ground floor of the Ancient Gate House Hotel. All the pasta and pizza classics are present and correct, as well as more esoteric fare such as bread-crumbed pork and chicken in pancetta.

Getting There & Around

National Express runs direct to London once a day (£18, 4½ hours), although it's usually more convenient to travel to Bristol and catch a local bus.

Bus 173 runs from Bath (one hour 20 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday). Bus 375/376 travels to Wells from Bristol (one hour, hourly) before continuing on to Glastonbury (15 minutes) and Street (25 minutes). Bus 29 travels to Taunton (1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Friday, five or six on weekends) via Glastonbury. Bus 126 runs to Cheddar (25 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday and every two hours on Sunday. There's no train station in Wells.

Bike City (☎ 671711; 31 Broad St; (X) 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) charges £15 per day for bike hire.

AROUND WELLS
Wookey Hole

On the southern edge of the Mendips, the River Axe has carved out a series of deep caverns collectively known as **Wookey Hole** (☎ 01749-672243; www.wookey.co.uk; adult/child £10.90/8.50; (X) 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Mar). The caves are littered with dramatic natural features, including a subterranean lake and some fascinating stalagmites and stalactites (one of which is supposedly the legendary Witch of Wookey Hole, who was turned to stone by a local priest). The deepest subterranean dive ever recorded in Britain was made here in September 2004, when divers reached a depth of more than 149ft. Admission to the caves is by guided tour.

The rest of the complex is taken up by a motley assortment of plastic dinosaurs, mirror mazes and an Edwardian penny arcade, as well as a working paper mill. There are a few prehistoric finds displayed at the onsite museum, but most are on display at the Wells Museum.

Bus 670 runs from Wells (10 minutes, nine daily, four on Sunday).

Cheddar Gorge

☎ 01934

If Wookey Hole is a little too touristy for your tastes, then you'd better be prepared for **Cheddar Caves** (☎ 742343; www.cheddarcaves.co.uk; Explorer Ticket adult/child £11.50/8.50; (X) 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sep-Jun), a spectacular series of limestone caverns that's always jammed throughout the summer. Only a few caves are open to the public; the most impressive are Cox's Cave and Gough's Cave, both decorated by stalactites and stalagmites, and subtly lit to bring out the spectrum of colours in the limestone rock. After the end of the last Ice Age, the caves were inhabited by prehistoric people; a 9000-year-old skeleton (the 'Cheddar Man') was discovered here in 1903, and genetic tests

have revealed that some of his descendants are still living in the surrounding area.

Outside the caves, the 274 steps of **Jacob's Ladder** lead up to an impressive panorama of the surrounding countryside; on a clear day you can see all the way to Glastonbury Tor and Exmoor. A signposted 3-mile-circuit walk follows the cliffs along the most spectacular parts of **Cheddar Gorge**.

The **tourist office** (☎ 744071; cheddar.tic@sedgemoor.gov.uk; (X) 10am-5pm Easter-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Oct, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Easter) is at the southern end of the gorge and has some useful information on local walks and caving trips.

Bus 126 runs to Wells (25 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday and every two hours on Sunday.

GLASTONBURY

☎ 01458 / pop 8429

If you suddenly feel the need to get your third eye cleansed or your chakras realigned, then head for good old Glastonbury, a bohemian haven and centre for New Age culture since the days of the Summer of Love, and still a favourite hang-out for hippies, mystics and counter-cultural types. The main street is thronged with an assortment of crystal-sellers, veggie cafés, mystical bookshops and bong emporiums, but Glastonbury has been a spiritual centre since long before the weekend Buddhists and white witches arrived. It's supposedly the birthplace of Christianity in England, and several of Britain's most important ley lines are said to converge on nearby Glastonbury Tor. Whether you find

spiritual enlightenment or just a solid veggie meal in Glastonbury, one thing's for certain: it's not a bad place to stock up on joss sticks.

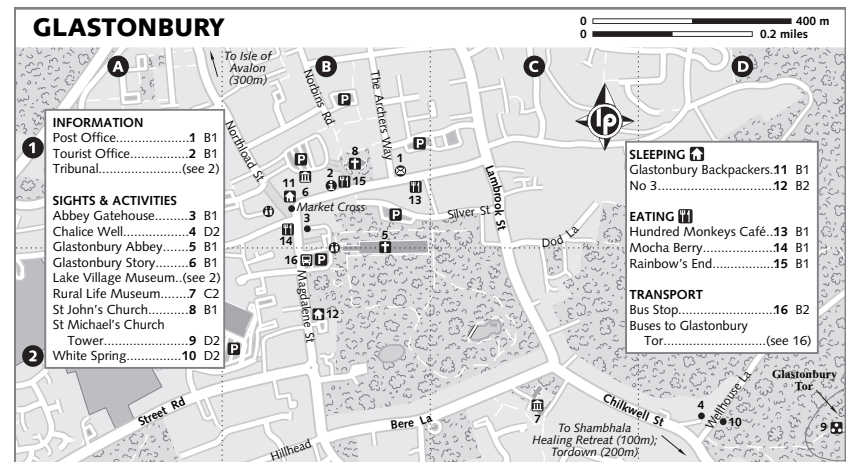
Information

Glastonbury's **tourist office** (☎ 832954; www.glastonburytic.co.uk; The Tribunal, 9 High St; (X) 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) stocks free maps and accommodation lists, and sells leaflets describing local walks and the *Glastonbury Millennium Trail* (60p).

Sights**GLASTONBURY ABBEY**

Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea, great-uncle of Jesus, owned mines in this area and returned here with the Holy Grail after the death of Christ. Joseph supposedly founded England's first church on the site of the ruined **abbey** (☎ 832267; www.glastonburyabbey.com; Magdalene St; admission £4; (X) 9.30am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9.30am-6pm Apr, May & Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mar & Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov, 10am-4.30pm Dec & Jan, 10am-5pm Feb), but the earliest proven Christian connection dates from the 7th century, when King Ine gave a charter to a monastery in Glastonbury. In 1184 the church was destroyed by fire and reconstruction began in the reign of Henry II.

The remaining ruins at Glastonbury mainly date from the church built after the 1184 fire. It's still possible to make out some of the nave walls, the ruins of the St Mary's chapel, and the remains of the crossing arches, which may have been scissor-shaped like those in Wells Cathedral. The site of the supposed tomb of



King Arthur and his wife, Queen Guinevere, is marked in the grass. The grounds also contain a small museum, cider orchard and herb garden, as well as the **Holy Thorn** tree, which supposedly sprung from Joseph's staff and blooms twice a year, at Christmas and Easter.

GLASTONBURY TOR

There are all kinds of myths swirling around the grassy mound of Glastonbury Tor, a 160m-high hill just outside town that commands glorious views over the surrounding countryside. According to some it's the home of a Faery King, while an old Celtic legend identifies it as the stronghold of Gwyn ap Nudd, King of the Underworld; but the most famous legend identifies the tor as the mythic Isle Of Avalon, where King Arthur was taken after being mortally wounded in battle by his nephew Mordred, and where Britain's 'once and future king' sleeps until his country calls again.

Whatever the truth of the legends, the tor has been a site of pilgrimage for many years, and was once topped by the medieval church of St Michael; today only the tower remains. On the way up look out for **Gog and Magog**, two gnarled oak trees believed to be the last remains of an ancient processional avenue.

It takes 45 minutes to walk up and down the tor. Parking is not permitted nearby, so take the Tor Bus (£1) from Dunstan's car park near the abbey. The bus runs to the tor and back every 30 minutes from 10am to 7.30pm April to September, and from 10am to 3.30pm from October to April. It also stops at Chalice Well and the Rural Life Museum.

CHALICE WELL & GARDENS

Shaded by knotted yew trees and surrounded by peaceful paths, the **Chalice Well & Gardens** (☎ 831154; www.chalicewell.org.uk; admission £3; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) has been a site of pilgrimage since the days of the Celts. The iron-red waters from the 800-year-old well are rumoured to have healing properties, good for everything from eczema to smelly feet; some legends also identify the well as the hiding place of the Holy Grail. You can drink the water from a lion's-head spout, or rest your feet in basins surrounded by flowers.

The Chalice Well is also known as the 'Red Spring' or 'Blood Spring'; its sister, **White Spring**, surfaces across Wellhouse Lane. Spigots from both springs empty into the street, where there's often a queue to fill containers.

RURAL LIFE MUSEUM

Somerset's agricultural heritage is explored at the **Rural Life Museum** (☎ 831197; Abbey Farm, Chilkwell St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), which contains a varied collection of artefacts relating to traditional trades such as willow growing, peat-digging, cider-making and cheese-making.

GLASTONBURY STORY

The tale of King Arthur's grave and many other Glastonbury legends is explored at the **Glastonbury Story** (☎ 831666; www.glastonburystory.org.uk; St John's Sq; admission £3; ☎ 11am-5pm late Mar-Oct). It's a little low-budget, but the exhibition is a decent introduction to the various legends that swirl around the town and its famous tor.

LAKE VILLAGE MUSEUM

Upstairs from Glastonbury's tourist office, in the medieval courthouse, the **Lake Village Museum** (EH; The Tribunal, 9 High St; admission £2) displays finds from a prehistoric bog village discovered nearby.

Tours

There are lots of companies offering guided tours of Glastonbury's main sights.

Based at the Gothic Image bookshop on High St, **Mystical Tours of Glastonbury** (☎ 831453; www.gothicimagetours.co.uk; 7 High St; per person £60) offers guided tours to the Weyrill Hill, Gog and Magog and Glastonbury Tor itself, as well as day tours to Stonehenge and Avebury.

Goddess Tours (☎ 275084; kathy.jones@ukonline.co.uk) has guided tours run by the mystical Priestesses of Avalon, who are members of the matriarchal 'Goddess' religious order.

Secret Landscape Tours (☎ 07854-316754; www.secretlandscapestours.com) offers guided trips to sacred sites throughout the southwest, including to Glastonbury Tor and Stonehenge.

Sleeping

If you're a fan of wind chimes, organic brekkies and homemade muesli, Glastonbury's B&Bs won't disappoint.

Glastonbury Backpackers (☎ 833353; www.glastonburybackpackers.com; 4 Market Pl; dm/tw/d £14/35/40; ☎ ☑) Glastonbury's only hostel is a really friendly, welcoming affair, decked out in jazzy colours with some lovely double rooms and small dorms, as well as a TV lounge and kitchen. You can get online and grab a sandwich at the café-bar downstairs.

THE OTHER GLASTONBURY

To many people, the village of Glastonbury is practically synonymous with the **Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts** (www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk), an annual extravaganza of music, street theatre, dance, cabaret, carnival, ecology, spirituality and general all-round weirdness that's been held on and off on Piltown Farm, near Glastonbury, for the last 30 years. The first event was held in 1970, when the young dairy farmer Michael Eavis invited some bands to play on makeshift stages in his field; more than 30 years later, the festival has become the longest-running performing arts festival in the world, attracting some of the world's biggest acts and an annual crowd of more than 120,000 festival-goers. Glastonbury is more a way of life than a music festival, and it's a rite of passage for every self-respecting British teenager; it's also the subject of a new feature-length documentary by film-maker Julian Temple.

Tordown (☎ 832287; www.tordown.com; 5 Ashwell Lane; s £28, d £54-62; ☎ ☑) This red-brick town house is half ecofriendly B&B, half religious retreat. If all you're after is a peaceful sleep and a massive veggie breakfast, then all well and good; for the more enlightened there are courses ranging from cellular healing to 'higher self sessions' and Egyptian ear coning.

Shambhala Healing Retreat (☎ 831797; www.shambhala.co.uk; Coursing Batch, s/d £36/92) Another spiritual sanctuary offering several 'clear energy' rooms furnished in a choice of Tibetan and Egyptian themes, and a meditation tent on the top floor. Reiki massage, DNA activation and colonic hydrotherapy are all on offer; you can even meet your guardian angel.

Number 3 (☎ 832129; www.numberthree.co.uk; 3 Magdalene St; s £75-85, d £100-110; ☎ ☑) This luxurious Georgian-style B&B is the poshest place to stay in Glastonbury, with five classy bedrooms all named after English trees, overlooking a beautiful walled garden filled with silver birch and weeping willow trees.

Eating

Rainbow's End (☎ 833896; 17A High St; mains £4-7; ☎ 10am-4pm) The classic Glastonbury wholefood café, with a down-to-earth dining room plastered with potted plants and wooden tables, and a rotating menu of organic meals including veggie moussaka, sweet potato flan and fiery chilli. Needless to say, the carrot cake is divine.

Hundred Monkeys Café (☎ 833386; 52 High St; mains £4-10; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This smart café is a welcome alternative to Glastonbury's more rustic eateries, with a light dining area filled with leather sofas, pine tables and complimentary newspapers, and a huge blackboard of fresh pastas, salads, baguettes and mains.

Mocha Berry (☎ 832149; 14 Market Pl; mains £5-8; ☎ Sun-Wed) This ever-popular café is the top

spot in Glastonbury for a frothy latte, a fresh milkshake or a stack of breakfast pancakes.

Getting There & Away

There's one early-morning National Express service to Bath (£5.70, 1¼ hours) and on to London (£18, 4¼ hours).

Bus 29 travels to Glastonbury from Taunton (90 minutes, seven daily Monday to Friday, five or six on weekends). Bus 375/376 travels to Wells (30 minutes, half-hourly, hourly on Sunday) and Bristol (1¼ hours), and to Street (15 minutes), Yeovil (30 minutes) and Bridgewater (one hour) in the opposite direction. There is no train station.

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Running along the northwestern coastline of Somerset into Devon, this tiny national park is a hiker's haven and a twitcher's dream come true. With its idyllic landscape of emerald-green meadows, wooded combs and crumbling cliffs, Exmoor is a more pastoral place than its sister national park on the opposite coast, Dartmoor. It's also home to some of Britain's oldest agricultural land; some of its farms date back to the Domesday Book and beyond, and ancient herds of horned sheep, Exmoor ponies and wild red deer roam its fields and bridleways.

Most of the park's main towns are dotted along the coastline, which stretches from the coastal resorts of Lynton and Lynmouth in the far west, along to the pretty harbour of Porlock and the medieval town of Dunster, with its brooding red-brick castle, all the way to the family-fun resort of Minehead in the east. Inland, Exmoor is dotted with small



hamlets and sleepy villages that make ideal getaways from the coastal crowds.

Orientation

The park is only about 21 miles wide from west to east and just 12 miles from north to south. Waymarked paths crisscross the park and a dramatic section of the South West Coast Path runs from Minehead, just outside the park, to Padstow in Cornwall.

Information

There are five **National Park Authority (NPA) visitor centres** (☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, limited hours Nov-Easter):

Blackmoor Gate (☎ 01598-763466;

NPCBlackmoorGate@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)

Combe Martin (☎ 01271-883319;

NPCCombeMartin@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Cross St)

County Gate (☎ 01598-741321;

NPCCountyGate@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; A39

Countisbury)

Dulverton (☎ 01398-323841; NPCDulverton@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; 7-9 Fore St)

Dunster (☎ 01643-821835; NPCDunster@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Dunster Steep)

The **Exmoor NPA Administrative Offices** (☎ 01398-323665; www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Exmoor House, Dulverton) is a good point of contact for general information before you arrive. It also publishes the free *Exmoor Visitor* newspaper, which contains accommodation lists, timetables of organised activities and a handy map.

There are four comprehensive websites covering Exmoor:

Exmoor National Park (www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk) The official NPA site.

Exmoor Tourist Association (www.exmoor.com) Lists details on accommodation and activities.

Visit Exmoor (www.visit-exmoor.info) Excellent information site with advice on activities, events, accommodation and eating out.

What's On Exmoor (www.whatsonexmoor.com) Local listings and information.

Activities

ADVENTURE SPORTS

You can sail, surf and kayak at **Wimbleball Lake Watersports Centre** (☎ 01398-371460), while **Exmoor Adventure** (☎ 01271-830628; www.exmooradventure.co.uk) can arrange rock climbing and abseiling.

CYCLING

The network of bridleways and quiet lanes makes Exmoor great cycling country, but you're not going to get away without tackling a few hills. Popular trails travel through the Brendon Hills, the Crown Estate woodland and along the old Barnstaple railway line. Several sections of the National Cycle Network (NCN) cross the park, including the **West Country Way** (NCN Rte 3) from Bristol to Padstow, and the **Devon Coast to Coast Cycle Route** (NCN Rte 27) between Exmoor and Dartmoor.

MOORLAND SAFARIS

Several companies offer 4WD 'safari' trips across the moor. If you're a nature lover or a

keen photographer, bird-watching and deer-watching safaris can be arranged. Half-day trips start at around £20.

Barle Valley Safaris (☎ 01643-851386; www.exmoor-barlevally-safaris.co.uk; Dulverton & Minehead)

Discovery Safaris (☎ 01643-863080; www.discovery-safaris.com; Porlock)

Exmoor Safari (☎ 01643-831229; www.exmoorsafari.co.uk; Exford)

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

Exmoor is popular riding country. There are lots of stables offering pony and horse treks for around £15 per hour – see the *Exmoor Visitor* for full details.

Brendon Manor Riding Stables (☎ 01598-741246; nr Lynton)

Burrowhayes Farm (☎ 01643-862463; www.burrowhayes.co.uk; Porlock)

Overcott Stables (☎ 01598-753341; www.ouvertcott.co.uk; Lynton)

WALKING

The best-known hiking routes on Exmoor are the **Somerset and North Devon Coast Path** (part of the South West Coast Path) and the Exmoor section of the **Two Moors Way**, which starts in Lynton and travels south to Dartmoor.

Part of the 180-mile **Tarka Trail** (based on the countryside that inspired Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter*) is in the park. Join it in Combe Martin and walk to Lynton/Lynmouth, then inland to Brayford and Barnstaple.

The **Coleridge Way** winds for 36 miles through Exmoor, the Brendon Hills and the Quantocks, taking in Coleridge's home at Nether Stowey and the village of Porlock.

Organised walks run by the NPA are held throughout the year – contact one of the NPA centres, visit www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk, or see the listings in the *Exmoor Visitor* for details. Short walks cost £3, longer walks £5.

Sleeping & Eating

There are YHA hostels in Minehead and Ilfracombe (outside the park), and Lynton and Exford in the park. There are organised camping grounds along the coast and **camping barns** (☎ bookings 01200-420102; per person £6) at Woodadvent Farm near Roadwater and Northcombe, a mile from Dulverton.

There's no shortage of B&Bs and hotels in the park, and plenty of places to eat. If you'd like to hire a cottage, **Exmoor Holiday Group** (www.exmoor-holidays.co.uk) is a good bet.

Getting There & Around

Getting around Exmoor by bus is tricky – there are only a couple of regular routes, and practically none to the west side of the park.

BICYCLE

Several places around the park hire mountain bikes.

Fremington Quay (☎ 01271-372586; www.biketrail.co.uk; Fremington; per day £6.50-24) Delivers bikes to your door.

Tarka Trail (☎ 01271-324202; Train Station, Barnstaple; per day £7-10)

BUS

National Express runs from London to Barnstaple (£27.50, 5½ hours, four daily) and Ilfracombe (£27.50, 6½ hours, two daily), and from Bristol to Barnstaple (£17.80, three hours, one daily).

The *Taunton & West Somerset Public Transport Guide*, free from tourist offices, contains timetables for all the main bus routes.

DULVERTON

☎ 01398

The southern gateway to Exmoor is Dulverton, at the confluence of the region's two main rivers, the Exe and Barle. It's a solid, no-nonsense sort of country town, home to a collection of gun sellers, fishing-tackle stores, clothing boutiques and gift shops, as well as the main **NPA Visitor Centre** (☎ 01398-323841; dulvertovnc@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; 7-9 Fore St; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct).

Walking

There's a stunning 12-mile circular walk along the river from Dulverton to Tarr Steps – an ancient stone clapper bridge haphazardly placed across the River Barle and shaded by gnarled old trees. The bridge was supposedly built by the devil for sunbathing. It's a four- to five-hour trek; you can add another three or four hours by continuing from Tarr Steps up Winsford Hill for distant views over Devon.

Sleeping & Eating

Tarr Farm (☎ 01643-851507; www.tarrfarm.co.uk; s/d £65/130; P ☒) This old Exmoor farm near Tarr Steps, 7 miles from Dulverton, contains several bedrooms finished in a surprisingly contemporary style, all topped off with thoughtful extras such as private fridges and homemade cookies. The excellent restaurant specialises in local flavours – think Exmoor lamb, Devon beef and ham hock with piccalilli.

Town Mills (☎ 323124; www.townmillsdulverton.co.uk; High St; s incl breakfast £32-46, d incl breakfast £54-60; ☒) For something more central, try this old whitewashed millhouse in the middle of Dulverton, with five snug rooms brimming over with flowery furnishings and puffy duvets, as well as the occasional original fireplace. Breakfast in bed comes as standard.

Lewis' Tea Rooms (☎ 323850; 13 High St; ☒ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat) Pastel prints, ticking clocks and pine floors characterise the sunny dining room of this tiny restaurant and tea-room, where you can tuck into a hearty ploughman's lunch, followed by homemade scones for tea and an upmarket country menu by night. Also recommended:

Northcombe Camping Barn (☎ 01200-420102; per person £6) A converted watermill about 1 mile from town.

Springfield Farm (☎ 323722; www.springfieldfarms.co.uk; Ashwick Lane; s £30, d £55-57; ☒ ☒) Traditional Exmoor farmhouse offering basic, good-value rooms.

Getting There & Away

Bus 398 stops at Dulverton six times daily on its way from Minehead (50 minutes) and Dunster (40 minutes) to Tiverton.

LYNTON & LYNMOUTH

☎ 01598

The attractive harbour of Lynmouth is rooted at the base of a steep, tree-lined valley, where the West Lyn River empties into the sea along Exmoor's northern coastline. Like Boscastle, Lynmouth is famous as the location of a devastating flash flood that swept through the village in 1952. Sadly, Lynmouth paid a much heavier price than its Cornish cousin; 34 people lost their lives in the flood, and memory of the disaster remains strong in the village to this day.

These days Lynmouth is a busy tourist harbour town lined with pleasant pubs, souvenir sellers and fudge shops. Up on the rocky cliffs above the harbour is the more genteel Victorian resort of Lynton, which can be reached via an amazing water-operated railway or an arduous climb up the cliff-top path.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0845 660 3232; info@lyntonism.co.uk; Lynton Town Hall, Lee Rd; ☒ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) provides the **Lynton & Lynmouth Scene** (www.lyntonandlynmouthscene.co.uk), which is a free newspaper with accommodation, eating and activities listings.

There's a small **NPA visitor centre** (☎ 752509; The Esplanade; ☒ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-9pm Jul & Aug) near Lynmouth harbour.

Sights

The history of the flood is explored at the **Lyn & Exmoor Museum** (☎ 752317; St Vincent's Cottage, Market St, Lynton; adult/child £1/20p; ☒ 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun), which also houses some interesting archaeological finds and a collection of tools, paintings and period photos.

The **Cliff Railway** (☎ 753486; www.cliffrailwaylynton.co.uk; single/return £1.75/2.75; ☒ 8.45am-7pm Easter-Nov) is an amazing piece of Victorian engineering designed by George Marks, believed to be a pupil of Brunel. Two cars linked by a steel cable descend or ascend the slope according to the amount of water in their tanks. It's been running like clockwork since 1890, and it's still the best way to commute between the two villages. The views aren't bad either.

From the Lynmouth crossroads follow signs 200m to **Glen Lyn Gorge** (☎ 753207; adult/child £4/3; ☒ Easter-Oct), the steepest of the two valleys into Lynmouth. There are several lovely gorge walks and a small **exhibition centre** devoted to hydroelectric power.

Walking

The most popular local walk is to the dramatic **Valley of the Rocks**, a mile west of Lynton. There are also trails to the lighthouse at **Foreland Point** east of Lynmouth, and to **Watersmeet**, 2 miles upriver from Lynmouth, where there's a handily placed National Trust teashop housed in a Victorian fishing lodge. Lynmouth is also the official starting point of the Two Moors Way.

Sleeping

There are plenty of mid-price B&Bs dotted along Lee Rd in Lynton.

Lynton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5942; www.yha.org.uk; Lynbridge; dm £12; ☒ ☒) A decent walkers' lodge in a large Victorian house, about a 500m steep walk uphill from town. The accommodation is a little cramped, but there are three square meals served up daily, and hikers' picnics are available too.

Sea View Villa (☎ 753460; www.seaviewvilla.co.uk; 6 Summer House Path; s £40, d £50-90; ☒) Down by the harbour, this 18th-century Georgian villa is worth splashing out on if you're into some seaside pampering. Indian silk fabrics, shagpile carpets and designer stripes characterise the super-swanky rooms, all finished in coordinated shades of 'champagne', 'ginger' and 'vanilla'.

St Vincent Lodge (☎ 752244; www.st-vincent-hotel.co.uk; Castle Hill; d £65; ☒ ☒) Run by an Anglo-

Belgian couple, this elegant guesthouse once belonged to a comrade of Nelson's, and all the delightful, pared-back rooms are named after battleships from Horatio's fleet. But the real treat is the downstairs restaurant, where Belgian dishes meet Mediterranean spice and Exmoor game.

Victoria Lodge (☎ 753203; www.victorialodge.co.uk; Lee Rd; r £60-90; ☒) This ostentatious gem is the pick of the places along Lee Rd, and boasts a bevy of truly over-the-top bedrooms, all stuffed with heritage fabrics, burnished furniture and poshly pelmeted beds, and each aptly named after a royal princess.

Eating

Eat Moor (☎ 752424; 3 Watersmeet Rd, Lynmouth; mains from £8) This fresh, fiery new restaurant specialises in traditional dishes with a pan-global twist, so it's equally as good for roast local lamb as for Moroccan tagine or authentic Spanish tapas.

Mad Hatters Bistro (☎ 753614; Church Steps, Lynton; mains £12-17; ☒ dinner Mon-Sat) A reliable bistro with a strong focus on local produce, serving mainly modern British and Mediterranean-influenced cuisine in a quirky cellar dining room, just off the main road through Lynton.

Getting There & Away

Bus 39/300 runs from Lynmouth to Minehead (70 minutes) via Porlock (50 minutes) four times daily Monday to Saturday.

The most scenic route to Porlock is the steep, twisting road that hugs the coast all the way from Lynmouth. The stunning scenery is worth the £2 toll, and you get to avoid the notoriously steep descent via Porlock Hill.

PORLOCK & AROUND

☎ 01643

The small village of Porlock is one of the prettiest on the north Exmoor coast, with a huddle of thatched cottages running along its main street to the picturesque breakwater of Porlock Weir, 2 miles to the west. Coleridge's famous poem *Kubla Khan* was written during a brief sojourn in Porlock (helped along by a healthy slug of laudanum and a vicious head cold), and the village is still a popular stop-off for summertime tourists, as well as walkers on the Coleridge Way and the South West Coast Path.

The village of **Selworthy**, 2.5 miles east of Porlock, forms part of the 12,500-acre Holnicote Estate, the largest NT-owned area of land on Exmoor. Though its cob-and-thatch

cottages look ancient, the village was almost entirely rebuilt in the 19th century by the local philanthropist and landowner Thomas Acland.

Porlock's **visitor centre** (☎ 863150; www.porlock.co.uk; West End, High St; ☒ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Mar-Nov; 10.30am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar) is the main point of contact for information on the Coleridge Way.

The tiny **Doverly Manor Museum** (High St; admission free; ☒ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Sat May-Oct) is housed in a pretty, 15th-century building, and exhibits artefacts and interesting photos of the village.

Sleeping & Eating

Rose Bank Guesthouse (☎ 862728; www.rosebankguesthouse.co.uk; High St; s £30, d £50-60; ☒ ☒) This grand half-timbered house stands right in the centre of the village. The plainly furnished rooms are nothing to write home about, but it's good value and in a handy location for the village pubs.

Ship Inn (☎ 862507; www.shipinporlock.co.uk; High St; s/d £30/70; ☒) If history's your thing, then head straight for this 13th-century thatched inn, once a haven for local smugglers and a favoured haunt of Coleridge and his chum Robert Southey. Wicker, pine and cream characterises the 10 plain upstairs rooms, and the higger-mugger bar is an excellent spot for a Devon stew and a pint of local ale.

Porlock Vale House (☎ 862338; www.porlockvale.co.uk; West Porlock; s/d from £70/110; ☒ ☒) This ravishing Edwardian manor house is a real treat, mixing grand period features (oak panelling, log fires, Persian rugs and mounted stags' horns) with a refreshingly unstuffy atmosphere. The rooms are a little flouncy, with flowery pelmeted beds and bedspreads to match, but they're cushy and comfortable nonetheless.

Andrew's on the Weir (☎ 863300; www.andrewsontheweir.co.uk; Porlock Weir; d £100-180; 2-/3-course menu £31.50/38.50; ☒ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Every meal becomes an 'experience' at this outlandishly fine restaurant-with-rooms, hovering beside the lapping waves on Porlock Weir. The cuisine is classic British with a *souçon* of Gallic panache, and the tablecloths are sharp enough to cut your finger on.

Getting There & Away

Bus 39/300 runs from Lynmouth to Porlock (50 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday) and on to Minehead.

DUNSTER

☎ 01643

Dominated by a striking russet-red castle and centred around a cobbled market square, the village of Dunster is an undeniably attractive place and also boasts some unusual architectural features, including a medieval packhorse bridge, a 16th-century stone dovecote and a curious octagonal yarn market. Unfortunately, it's also a favourite on the coach-tour trail, and in high summer the main street is thronged with a constant stream of honking motors and scarlet-faced day-trippers; if you're arriving in July or August, you'll be better off hightailing it straight for the castle, which sits on a hilltop above the village, or just steering clear altogether.

The beautiful **St George's Church** dates mostly from the 15th century and boasts a wonderfully carved fan-vaulted roof screen. Further down the road is the **watermill** (☎ 821759; Mill Lane; admission £2.60; ☎ 11am-4.45pm Jul-Sep, 11am-4.45pm Sat-Thu Apr-Jun, Oct & Nov), a working 18th-century mill that's been turning since the Domesday Book.

The **NPA visitor centre** (☎ 821835; Dunster Steep; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct) is in the main car park.

Dunster Castle

Dunster Castle (NT; ☎ 821314; admission castle £6.80, garden & park only £3.70; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat-Wed Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat-Wed Nov) has served as a fortress for around a thousand years, but the present-day castle bears little resemblance to the original Norman stronghold. The 13th-century gateway is probably the only original part of the castle; the turrets, battlements and towers were all added later during a 19th-century make-over. The castle boasts Tudor furnishings, stunning 17th-century plasterwork and ancestral portraits of the Luttrell family, as well as fine terraced gardens with views across Exmoor and the coastline.

Sleeping & Eating

Yarn Market Hotel (☎ 821425; www.yarnmarkethotel.co.uk; s £40, d £60-80; ☎ ☒) This small hotel overlooks the yarn market, with pleasant, well-proportioned rooms and the usual selection of floral fabrics, identikit furniture and cream-coloured walls.

Spears Cross (☎ 821439; www.spearscross.co.uk; 1 West St; s £42, d £55-65; ☎ ☒) Expect cake and tea on arrival at this peach-coloured cottage near the heart of the village. Several rustic rooms are tucked around the creaky corridors of the 15th-century house, and most boast their

own eccentric features, from wonky ceilings to wood-panelled walls.

Luttrell Arms (☎ 821555; www.luttrellarms.co.uk; d from £100; ☎ ☒) Huge flagstones, heavy arm-chairs and faded tapestries are dotted around the lounge and downstairs bar of this glorious old coaching inn, and a few of the four-poster rooms upstairs would put most royal retreats to shame. If you can, bag the master suite with its rib-vaulted ceiling, sunken fireplace and oak-wood bed.

Cobblestones Café (☎ 821595; lunches £5-10; ☎ ☒ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This dinky little café makes the perfect spot for a light lunch or a sticky teatime cake. Baguettes, pâtés, salads and homemade pies dominate the lunchtime menu, and it's open on Saturday nights for a set three-course supper.

Getting There & Away

Bus 28 runs from Minehead to Taunton via Dunster hourly Monday to Saturday, and nine times on Sunday. Bus 398 travels to Exford (30 minutes, once daily except Sunday) and Dulverton (40 minutes, six daily except Sunday), and to Minehead (50 minutes, six daily except Sunday) in the opposite direction.

DORSET

With everything from full-blown seaside resorts to Iron Age settlements and chocolate-box country hamlets, Dorset is one of the region's most eclectic counties. It's perhaps best known as the home of Thomas Hardy, who immortalised the area in his classic novels of the 19th century. If you're of a literary frame of mind, there are plenty of sites related to the author scattered around the county, especially around his long-standing home in Dorchester. For something more active, head for the popular south-coast towns of Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth, but if it's scenic views you're after, there are glorious stretches of coastline around the Purbeck Peninsula, Lulworth Cove and Lyme Bay.

Orientation & Information

Dorset stretches along the south coast from Lyme Regis on the western (Devon) border, to Christchurch abutting Hampshire on the east. Dorchester, the county town, sits in between and is the most central base for exploring, but Lyme Regis or Weymouth will suit those who prefer the coast.

Dorset has several useful regional websites:

Dorset County Council (www.dorset-cc.gov.uk)

Rural Dorset (www.ruraldorset.com)

West Dorset (www.westdorset.com)

Getting Around

One of the reasons for Dorset's backwater status is that few major transport routes cross it. There are two slow railway lines, running from Bristol and Bath through Dorchester west to Weymouth, and from London and Southampton to Bournemouth and Poole.

The main operator in east and central Dorset is **Wilts & Dorset** (☎ 01202-673555; Poole; www.wdabus.co.uk). For western Dorset and on to Devon and southern Somerset, **First** (☎ 01305-783645; www.firstgroup.com) is the main operator.

Regional timetables are available free from tourist offices or bus stations, or by download from the companies' websites. Otherwise call **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk).

BOURNEMOUTH

☎ 01202 / pop 167,527

Sprawling for 7 miles along the southern Dorset coastline, Bournemouth is one of the largest seaside resorts in Britain, famous for its grand seafront and broad sandy beaches. It's a place with a rather strange split personality; part faded Victorian resort, part corporate anytown and part mass-market tourist holiday park, where wrinkly day-trippers and holidaying coach parties rub shoulders with stag parties, boozed-up clubbers and conference delegates. Still, there are plenty of things to keep you occupied: sunbathing, shopping and water sports by day, and a wealth of bars, clubs and dodgy variety shows to explore by night.

Orientation & Information

Bournemouth straggles all the way along the coast towards Poole to the west and Christchurch to the east. The pier marks the central seafront area, and northeast from there is the town centre and train station.

Bournemouth Library (☎ 454848; 22 The Triangle; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, 9.30am-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-5pm Wed, 10am-4pm Sat) Internet access.

Cyber Place (☎ 290099; 25 St Peter's Rd; internet per hr £2; ☎ ☒ 10am-11pm)

Tourist office (☎ 451700; www.bournemouth.co.uk; Westover Rd; ☎ ☒ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) Beside the Winter Gardens.

Sights & Activities

The first holiday home was established in Bournemouth in 1811 by the local landowner Louis Tregonwell, and during the 19th century the town grew into one of the largest Victorian resorts in Britain. The ornamental **Pleasure Gardens** are the most obvious reminder of the town's genteel golden age, but sadly most of Bournemouth's Victorian architecture has been smothered by a modern mass of retail shops and conference centres.

An ostentatious mix of Italianate villa and Scottish baronial pile, the **Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 451800; www.russell-cotes.bournemouth.gov.uk; Russell-Cotes Rd; admission free; ☎ ☒ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has had a recent £3m overhaul, and is particularly renowned for its galleries of Victorian art and sculpture, as well as a fine Japanese collection gathered by the museum's benefactors, Sir Merton and Lady Russell-Cotes.

Right next to Bournemouth Pier, **Oceanarium** (☎ 311933; www.oceanarium.co.uk; admission £7.50; ☎ ☒ 10am-6pm) re-creates various marine habitats from around the world, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Amazon River and the inky depths of the deep sea.

The tethered hot-air balloon hovering above the city is the **Bournemouth Eye** (☎ 314539; www.bournemouthballoon.com; Lower Gardens; admission £10; ☎ ☒ 7.20am-11pm Apr-Sep). Ascents last about 15 minutes and reach around 500ft, and, unsurprisingly, the views are great.

Construction on Bournemouth's long-awaited **artificial reef** – the only one of its kind in Europe – was due to start in late 2006 and, at the time of writing, was expected to be finished by the summer of 2007.

Dorset Belle Cruises (☎ 558550; www.dorsetbelles.co.uk) operates ferry trips to Swanage, Poole and Brownsea Island from Bournemouth Pier.

Sleeping

Bournemouth is chock-a-block with B&Bs, but none of them are going to win any awards for design or originality.

Bournemouth Backpackers (☎ 299491; www.bournemouthbackpackers.co.uk; 3 Frances Rd; dm £12-15) This small, 20-bed hostel is inside a plain suburban house near the bus and train stations. The dorms are small and basic, with aluminium bunk beds and minimal facilities, but it's cheap and friendly. Reception is only open from 5pm to 6pm weekdays, and closed all weekend, so book ahead.

Tudor Grange (☎ 291472; www.tudorgrangehotel.co.uk; 31 Gervis Rd; s £45-52, d £60-70; (P)) Escape Bournemouth's suburban drudgery at this smart half-timbered house, which stands in private grounds and offers much more character than most of the hotels around town. The oak-panelled, armchair-ridden public rooms set the tone for the rest of the hotel: antiquated, frill-heavy and rather faded, with soft mattresses, battered furniture and ancient television sets.

Balincourt Hotel (☎ 552962; 58 Christchurch Rd; www.balincourt.co.uk; s/d from £45/60; (P) (X)) In a town of decidedly average B&Bs, this is a surprisingly comfortable choice, with rooms ranging from tiny austere singles to spacious superior rooms with small sitting areas, oodles of chintz and the odd cast-iron fireplace.

Langtry Manor (☎ 553887; www.langtrymanor.com; Derby Rd, East Cliff; s/d £70/140; (P) (X)) For more style, seek out this gabled mansion built by Edward VII for his mistress, Lilly Langtry. It's by far the best place to stay in Bournemouth, brimming over with original furniture, patterned carpets, potted plants and Edwardian prints.

Eating

Indian Ocean (☎ 311222; 4 West Cliff Rd; mains £8-11; (X) lunch & dinner) Standard Indian dishes are supplemented by intriguing Korai and Bangladeshi specials at this snazzy Indian place, with a modern, funkily lit interior hidden away behind a rather tacky glass frontage.

Ciao (☎ 555657; 144 Old Christchurch Rd; mains £8-14; (X) lunch & dinner) This small, contemporary café-bar is a great option for pizza, pasta and gourmet panini, with sliding doors opening onto the street and a plain, minimalist theme.

West Beach (☎ 587785; Pier Approach; mains £12-20; (X) daily) Bournemouth's best beachfront location and finest food go hand in hand at this excellent seafood brasserie, with a clean, chic interior and a fantastic alfresco deck.

Basilica (☎ 757722; 73 Seamoor Rd; 3-course menu £14; (X) Mon-Sat) On a sunny summer's day, you could almost convince yourself you were on the Côte d'Azur at this buzzy restaurant a mile from the town centre. Farm-fresh ingredients, crunchy salads and a daily fish board are all laced with a punchy Mediterranean tang.

Getting There & Away

National Express runs from London (£17.60, 2½ hours, hourly), Bristol (£14.60, 3¾ hours, one daily) and Oxford (£17.80, three hours, two daily).

Bus X3 runs half-hourly from Salisbury (1¼ hours) and on to Poole (20 minutes) every hour, while the X34/35 comes from Southampton (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday). There's a multitude of buses between Bournemouth and Poole (15 minutes).

Trains run every half-hour from London Waterloo (£34.50, two hours); half of these continue on to Poole (£2.70, 10 minutes), Dorchester South (£8.30, 45 minutes) and Weymouth (£10.50, one hour).

POOLE

☎ 01202 / pop 144,800

Poole is an altogether more attractive place than its brash, busy sister just along the bay. The town has grown up around its pretty old harbour, which was once busy with fishing boats and trading vessels, and now bustles with designer yachts and cruise boat. The quay area is dotted with restaurants and salty old pubs, and the Sandbanks area has an excellent beach and is a popular centre for water sports.

The **tourist office** (☎ 253253; www.pooletourism.com; Poole Quay; (X) 9.15am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is on the quay.

Sights & Activities

BROWNSEA ISLAND

This small wooded **island** (☎ 707744; www.nation.altrust.org.uk/brownsea; admission £4.40; (X) 10am-6pm mid-Jul-early Sep, 10am-5pm Mar-mid-Jul & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) in Poole Bay is now a nature reserve and wildlife haven run by the National Trust. There are several tranquil walks around the island, which is home to a population of deer, peacocks and rare red squirrels, as well as terns, gulls and wading birds.

Brownsea Island Ferries (☎ 01929-462383; www.brownseaislandferries.com; to Brownsea adult/child £6.50/4.50) goes to Brownsea and also offers cruises to Sandbanks (adult/child £4.50/3.50) and the other bay islands, as well as a daily trip to Wareham (adult/child £8.50/5).

POOLE OLD TOWN & HARBOUR

Poole Old Town has attractive 18th-century buildings, including a wonderful **Customs House** and **Guildhall**. The **Scaplen's Court Museum** (☎ 633558; Old High St) is housed in the town's most complete medieval building, and is open to the public in August, when it hosts displays on domestic life in Poole throughout the ages.

The Waterfront Museum is currently undergoing a major programme of refurbishment, but the **Local History Centre** (☎ 262621; (X) 10am-3pm) next door is still open, with some small displays exploring Poole's history.

WATER SPORTS

There are loads of water-sports operators in the Poole area offering everything from wakeboarding to powerboating. Try **H2O Sports** (☎ 733744; www.h2o-sports.co.uk) or **FC Watersports Academy** (☎ 708283; www.fcwatersports.co.uk) for windsurfing, kayaking and kitesurfing. The wakeboarding specialists are **Poole Wakeboarding** (☎ 07799-878734; www.poolewakeboarding.co.uk).

Shockwave (☎ 558850; www.parkstonebay.com) offers 10-minute speedboat trips around the bay, and you can try powerboating and sailing with **Rockley Watersports** (☎ 0870 777 0541), or jet skiing with **Absolute Aqua** (☎ 666118; www.absoluteaqua.co.uk).

POOLE LIGHTHOUSE

This cutting-edge **arts centre** (☎ 685222; www.lighthousepoole.co.uk; 21 Kingland Rd) hosts a lively events calendar including live music, theatre, film and exhibitions.

Sleeping & Eating

Milsons Hotel (☎ 609000; www.milsonsotel.co.uk; 47 Haven Rd; d £75; (X)) A beautifully appointed semi-boutique hotel decked out in tasteful tones of mauve and cream, and finished with thoughtful extras such as cafeterias and Molton Brown bath products. Breakfast is served in the Loch Fyne restaurant, one of the top places in town for seafood.

Mansion House (☎ 685666; www.themansionhouse.co.uk; Thames St; s £90, d £140-160; (P) (X)) This beautiful brick mansion just off the harbourfront is almost as renowned for its lavish bedrooms as for its glamorous fine-dining restaurant. Indian, Oriental and cottage themes distinguish the upmarket décor, and all the rooms are littered with individual touches (from brass beds to antique suites).

Custom House (☎ 676767; Poole Quay; mains from £12; (X) lunch & dinner) This exciting continental-style brasserie is housed, as its name suggests, in Poole's refurbished customs house. Downstairs there's a funky coffee bar furnished with chrome seats and technicolour walls, which majors in pastries, cakes and quick lunches; upstairs the smart Georgian-style dining room specialises in seafood and steak.

Other options:

Saltings (☎ 707349; saltings_poole@yahoo.co.uk; 5 Salters Way; d from £60; (X) (P)) Unusual marine-themed B&B in a great location just off Poole Quay.

BH13 (☎ 701101; 37 Haven Rd; mains £10-15; (X) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Glossy British-Asian fusion restaurant in Canford Cliffs.

Storm (☎ 674970; 16 High St; mains £13-18; (X) dinner) An excellent seafood restaurant along High St.

Getting There & Around

Countless buses cover the 20-minute trip to Bournemouth. National Express runs hourly to London (£17.60, three hours). Train connections are as for Bournemouth, just 13 minutes closer to London Waterloo (£36.10).

You can hire bikes from **Cycle Paths** (☎ 680123; www.cycle-paths.co.uk; Dolphin Shopping Centre) for around £15 per day.

Sandbanks Ferry (☎ 01929-450203; www.sandbanksferry.co.uk; pedestrian/car 90p/£2.80) crosses to Studland every 20 minutes. This is a short cut from Poole to Swanage, Wareham and the west Dorset coast, but summer queues can be horrendous.

Bus 152 goes from Poole to Sandbanks (15 minutes, hourly).

SOUTHEAST DORSET

Dorset's most beautiful stretch of coastline runs along its southeastern edge, dotted with glittering bays and crumbling cliffs, as well as the romantic ruins of Corfe Castle and the remote Isle of Purbeck (actually a peninsula).

Wareham & Around

☎ 01929 / pop 2568

Saxons established the sturdy settlement of Wareham on the banks of the River Frome in around the 10th century, and the remains of their defensive walls can still be seen encircling the town. St Martin's Church dates from around the same period, and is one of the last remaining Saxon churches in Dorset. The town is also well known for its connections to the enigmatic figure of TE Lawrence, immortalised in David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Purbeck tourist office (☎ 552740; www.purbeck.gov.uk; Holy Trinity Church, South St; (X) 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 1.45-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is opposite the library.

SIGHTS

The bijou **Wareham Museum** (☎ 553448; East St; admission free; (X) 10am-4pm Easter-Oct) has an interesting Lawrence of Arabia collection and

artefacts dating from the town's Iron Age, Roman and Saxon history.

The tiny Saxon **St Martin's Church** dates from about 1020. Inside there's a 12th-century fresco on the northern wall and a marble effigy of Lawrence of Arabia.

The tiny cottage of **Clouds Hill** (NT; ☎ 405616; admission £3.10; ☎ noon-5pm Thu-Sun Apr-Oct) was TE Lawrence's rural retreat, and remains largely unchanged since his death in 1935. There's a small exhibition exploring Lawrence's life and his achievements during WWI; there are also a few relics that hint at his enduring fascination with the art and culture of the Middle East.

Lawrence was stationed at Bovington Camp, now the **Tank Museum** (☎ 405096; www.tankmuseum.org; adult/child £10/7; ☎ 10am-5pm), 6 miles from Wareham. He died at Bovington Military Hospital six days after a motorcycle accident nearby. The museum has a collection of more than 300 armoured vehicles, from the earliest WWI prototypes to remnants from the first Gulf War.

Nearby is **Monkey World** (☎ 462537; www.monkeyworld.co.uk; Longthorns; adult/child £9/6.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug), a sanctuary for rescued chimpanzees, orang-utans, gibbons, marmosets and some ridiculously cute ring-tailed lemurs.

SLEEPING & EATING

Gold Court House (☎ 553320; www.goldcourthouse.co.uk; St John's Hill; s/d £40/60; ☎) Set on a small square, this sweet little 18th-century house jettisons the normal chintzy décor in favour of a refined, pared-back look. There are a couple of rooms tucked in around the house's attic beams, characterised by clean white walls, blonde pine and the odd mahogany dresser.

Old Granary (☎ 552010; The Quay; d £70-95) This village pub-cum-hotel is perched in an idyllic spot beside the riverbanks. The downstairs bar is littered with rustic knick-knacks and mismatched furniture, and the cluttered country theme continues into the upstairs rooms, reached via a little 'Alice door' carved into the wood-panelled walls.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 142, 143 and 144 run between Poole (35 minutes) and Wareham hourly (every two hours on Sunday). Bus 142/143 stops at Wareham hourly on its way from Poole (40 minutes) to Swanage (30 minutes).

Corfe Castle

☎ 01929

The fractured ruins of **Corfe Castle** (NT; ☎ 481294; admission £5; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Mar, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) are perched on a grassy hilltop with commanding views along the southern Dorset coastline. The castle was the ancestral home of Sir John Banke, right-hand man and attorney general to Charles I, and was besieged by Cromwellian forces during the Civil War; following a six-week defence directed by the plucky Lady Banke, the castle was eventually betrayed from within and reduced to rubble by the Roundheads' cannons.

Buses 142/143 run hourly from Poole (50 minutes) through Wareham (15 minutes) to Swanage (20 minutes) via Corfe Castle.

The **Swanage Steam Railway** (☎ 425800; www.swanagesteamrailway.co.uk; adult day rover £8.50) runs between Swanage and Norden and stops at Corfe Castle. Joint tickets to the castle and railway are available, and there are discounts if you arrive by public transport.

Blue Pool

Once a clay pit, the amazing **Blue Pool** (☎ 01929-551408; www.bluepooluk.com; Furzebrook; admission £4.40; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mar-Nov) is renowned for its colour-shifting abilities, which are due to minute particles of clay refracting light through the water. In a matter of seconds the lake can change from deep aquamarine to pale blue to turquoise green. Designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the lakeshore is also home to rare wildlife including green sand lizards and Dartford warblers. The pool is signposted from the A351; bus 142/143 from Wareham (10 minutes) stops nearby.

Lulworth Cove & the Coast

☎ 01929

West of Swanage the Isle of Purbeck gives way to a stunning stretch of coastline, pockmarked by shimmering bays, towering cliffs and tiny beaches. The coast's best-known features are the natural rock arch at **Durdle Door** and the almost perfectly circular bay at **Lulworth Cove**, but the clifftop walks around St Aldhem's Head and the nature reserve at Kimmeridge Bay are also worth exploring.

Built in 1608 as a hunting lodge, **Lulworth Castle** (☎ 400352; www.lulworth.com; East Lulworth; admission £7; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Mar) has endured several centuries of ups and downs – including several extravagant

owners, repeated remodelling and a disastrous fire in 1929 – but it's now been thoroughly refurbished by English Heritage. The castle hosts everything from blues concerts to jousting tournaments during the summer.

The best place to stay is the **Lulworth Beach Hotel** (☎ 400404; www.lulworthbeachhotel.com; Lulworth Cove; d £80-95), a modern, airy place with several uncluttered rooms sprinkled with wicker furniture and colourful prints. The best have French doors leading onto small balconies with views over Lulworth Cove.

Alternatively, try **Cove House** (☎ 400137; West Lulworth; d £75; ☎), a double-gabled Victorian villa with a brace of solid, cosy B&B rooms.

There's also a basic **YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5940; School Lane; dm £11.80; ☎ Mar-Oct) in West Lulworth, and a great clifftop campsite at **Durdle Door Holiday Park** (☎ 400200; durdle.door@lulworth.com; tents £14-18; ☎ Mar-Oct).

DORCHESTER

☎ 01305 / pop 16,171

Thomas Hardy connections abound around Dorchester, which doubles in his novels as the market town of Casterbridge. Hardy was born just outside Dorchester in the village of Higher Bockhampton, and the author lived here for much of his life; its solid red-brick streets, stately Georgian town houses and agricultural heritage seem to have held an enduring fascination for him, and the place certainly seems immediately familiar if you've ever read any of his novels.

Orientation & Information

Most of Dorchester's action takes place along South St, which runs north into pedestrianised Cornhill and then emerges in High St.

The **tourist office** (☎ 267992; dorchester.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Antelope Walk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Nov; 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is brimming over with Hardy information, and sells several town walks and 'location' guides to the main places featured in his novels.

Sights

THOMAS HARDY SITES

Hardy's early career was as an apprentice architect, and he was responsible for the design of **Max Gate** (NT; ☎ 262538; Alington Ave; admission £2.60; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, Wed & Sun Apr-Sep), where he lived from 1885 until his death in 1928. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* were both written here, but it's a little slim on sights. The house is a mile east of Dorchester on the A352.

The small cob-and-thatch **Hardy's Cottage** (NT; ☎ 262366; admission £3; ☎ 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct), where the author was born, is also a bit short on attractions, but it makes an evocative stop for Hardy completists. It's in Higher Bockhampton, 3 miles northeast of Dorchester.

Look out for Hardy's statue at the top of High West St.

OTHER SIGHTS

Dorchester was once a thriving Roman settlement, and excavations have uncovered the foundations of a 1st-century **Roman villa** behind the town hall on Northern Hay. The layout of the house is clearly visible and the remains of the main building, housed within a glass structure, boast remarkable mosaic floors.

The **Dorset County Museum** (☎ 262735; www.dorsetcountymuseum.org; High West St; admission £6; ☎ 10am-5pm Jul-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun) houses archaeological finds from Maiden Castle, canvases by Gainsborough and Alfred Wallis, and stunning fossils from the Jurassic Coast, but the highlight is the museum's extensive Hardy collection – the largest in the world – donated by the author's second wife, Florence. Many of Hardy's manuscripts, diaries and notebooks are on display, and there's a reconstruction of his study at Max Gate.

Rather less educational are the tacky dino-themed displays at the **Dinosaur Museum** (☎ 269880; www.dinosaur-museum.org.uk; Icen Way; adult/child £6.50/4.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm). The **Tutankhamun Exhibition** (☎ 269571; www.tutankhamun-exhibition.co.uk; High West St; adult/child £6.50/4.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) and the **Terracotta Warriors Museum** (☎ 266040; www.terracottawarriors.co.uk; East High St; admission £5; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) are slightly better, with atmospheric reconstructions of the pharaoh's tomb and the X'in warriors. There's also a **Teddy Bear Museum** (☎ 263200; Antelope Walk; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), populated by various historical and famous bears, as well as a rather disturbing family of life-sized teddies.

If you still haven't had your museum fix, head for the **Keep Military Museum** (☎ 264066; www.keepmilitarymuseum.org; Bridport Rd; adult/child £4/3; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Tue-Sat Oct-Mar), which traces the story of the historic Devon and Dorset regiments with plenty of regimental uniforms, vintage muskets and mean-looking cannons.

On the northern side of town is **Poundbury**, a mock-Georgian town dreamt up by Prince Charles as a model housing development for the 21st century.

Sleeping

Casterbridge Hotel (☎ 264043; www.casterbridgehotel.co.uk; 49 High East St; r £45-75) This exquisite guest-house lives up to the town's heritage atmosphere: some rooms are classically countrified, with florid wallpaper, stylish table lamps and feathery duvets, while others are more contemporary. Breakfast is served in a lovely conservatory overlooking the rear garden.

Little Court (☎ 261576; www.littlecourt.net; Charminster; r from £69; ☎) A mile from Dorchester, this Lutyens-style manor house makes for a lavish night's sleep, with huge, luxurious bedrooms equipped with CD players and complementary umbrellas, and a gourmet breakfast made with produce from the hotel's walled garden.

Yalbury Cottage (☎ 262382; www.yalburycottage.com; Lower Bockhampton; s/d £70/100; ☎) Just a short stroll from Hardy's birthplace, this chocolate-box thatched house looks appropriately rustic from the outside, but all of the eight bedrooms are modern, comfortable and current, if a little short on period features.

Also recommended:

Beggars Knap (☎ 268191; beggarsknap@hotmail.co.uk; 2 Weymouth Ave; s £28-35, d £55; ☎) Solid Victorian house with smart rooms, some with private bay windows.

Higher Came Farmhouse (☎ 268908; www.highercame.co.uk; d £58; ☎) Fine farmhouse B&B with snug, homey rooms and a great farm-fresh brekkie.

Eating

Prezzo (☎ 259678; 6 High West St; pizza £7-9; ☎) A typically reliable outpost of this Italian chain, with a baroque interior filled with black-leather sofas and twisted willow, and top-notch pizzas and pastas.

Sienna (☎ 250022; 36 High West St; 2-course set lunch/dinner £13/24; ☎) The stripped-down décor might be austere at this miniature restaurant, but the food is colourful and complex, mixing modern British cooking with Spanish, Italian and southern French flavours. Zesty.

Getting There & Around

There's a daily National Express coach to London (£19.20, four hours).

The hourly bus 31 travels from Dorchester to Weymouth (30 minutes) and to Lyme Regis (one hour 40 minutes). Bus 10 also travels to Weymouth (35 minutes, three per hour). Bus 188 goes to Poole (one hour, three daily Monday to Saturday).

There are two train stations, Dorchester South and Dorchester West, both southwest of the town centre. Trains run at least hourly from Weymouth (£2.90, 11 minutes) to London (£37.80, 2½ hours) via Dorchester South, Bournemouth (£8.30, 45 minutes) and Southampton (£17, 1¼ hours).

Dorchester West has connections with Bath (£11.30, 1¼ hours) and Bristol (£12.40, two hours).

Dorchester Cycles (☎ 268787; 31 Great Western Rd; per day £15) hires bikes.

AROUND DORCHESTER Maiden Castle

The massive earthwork ramparts of Maiden Castle, Europe's largest Iron Age hill fort, stretch for 3 miles and enclose nearly 20 hectares. The site has been inhabited since Neolithic times but the first fort was built here around 800 BC. The Romans captured it in AD 43 and occupied it until the mid-4th century. The sheer size of the walls and ditches is stunning, and there are wonderful views across the countryside.

The castle is located 1.5 miles southwest of Dorchester.

Cerne Abbas & the Cerne Giant

The little village of Cerne Abbas is a typically attractive Dorset hamlet, home to the ruins of an old abbey (adult/child £1/20p) and a pretty 14th-century church. But its most famous resident is the notoriously well-endowed **Cerne Giant**, who stands to attention on a hilltop above the village. Opinions vary regarding the age

ZORBING

If hurtling down a steep incline trapped inside a giant plastic ball sounds like fun rather than borderline insanity, then the zany sport of zorbing could be for you. The zorb itself is a 3.2m inflatable ball with around 1000 internal ties that serve as shock absorbers, with an inner cockpit that can take up to three 'zorbonauts'. Once you're inside and strapped in, the zorb's let loose and you speed down the hill at around 50mph, protected by a cushion of bouncy air. At least, that's the theory.

Zorb South (☎ 01929-426595; www.zorb-south.co.uk), based in Dorchester, is one of the UK's only licensed operators. Prices start at £35 for a single zorb ride.

TOP FIVE ANCIENT SITES

- **Stonehenge** (p289) The world's most famous stone circle; shame no-one's got a clue what it was for.
- **Avebury** (p293) Much bigger, and arguably more impressive than Stonehenge, this huge ring of stones is part of an amazing network of ancient sites.
- **Maiden Castle** (opposite) The biggest Iron Age Fort anywhere in Europe.
- **Glastonbury Tor** (p268) The Isle of Avalon, gateway to the underworld, or a fairy king's palace? Who cares – it's still a breathtaking sight.
- **Old Sarum** (p289) Another stunning Iron Age stronghold on Salisbury Plain.

of the 55m-high giant – some believe him to be a pre-Roman fertility symbol, although no official record exists of the giant until the 17th century – but one thing's for certain: this old man is certainly not shy about showing off his vital assets.

For accommodation try the **New Inn** (☎ 01300-341274; thenewinncerneabbas.co.uk; 14 Long St; d from £55; ☎), a great country coaching inn with simple rustic rooms and an excellent menu of pub grub, and for food head for the thatched **Royal Oak** (☎ 01300-341797; Long St; mains £5-8; ☎) lunch & dinner, an ivy-clad pub renowned for its hearty Dorset dishes and traditional ales.

Dorchester, 8 miles to the south, is reached on bus 216 (20 minutes, four times Monday to Saturday).

WEYMOUTH

☎ 01305 / pop 48,279

Stripey deckchairs, candy-floss stalls, rickety windbreaks and Punch & Judy booths line the beachfront at the well-worn seaside town of Weymouth, once a favoured holiday haunt of the English gentry and now more popular with bawling nippers, family day-trippers and members of the blue-rinse brigade. Depending on your point of view, it's either a glorious example of British kitsch or a soulless summation of everything that's wrong with the domestic seaside experience. Whatever you make of the present-day town, Weymouth looks set for a massive transformation over the next five years, having been chosen as the sailing centre for the 2012 London Olympics.

Orientation & Information

Central Weymouth is strung along the seafront, which stretches west to the old harbour with its cluster of pubs, fishermen's cottages and seafood restaurants.

The **tourist office** (☎ 785747; tic@weymouth.gov.uk; The Esplanade; ☎) 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) sells discounted tickets to many local attractions and can help arrange local accommodation for a fee.

Sights

In the old part of town, Brewer's Quay has a shopping centre and plentiful attractions, including **Timewalk** (☎ 777622; Hope Sq; adult/child £4.50/3.25; ☎) 10am-5.30pm, which explores various key events in Weymouth's history.

Nearby, the **Weymouth Museum** (admission free; ☎) 10am-5pm) uncovers the town's maritime heritage with displays on smuggling, paddle steamers and shipwrecks. The **Tudor House** (☎ 812341; 3 Trinity St; adult/child £2.50/1; ☎) 1-3.45pm Tue-Fri Jun-Sep, 2-4pm 1st Sun of the month Oct-May) is one of the few 17th-century buildings left in Weymouth and is furnished in period style.

Aquatic exhibits are on offer at **Sea Life** (☎ 788255; www.sealife.co.uk; Lodmoor Country Park; adult/child £11.50/8; ☎) 10am-5pm, with seal, otter and penguin enclosures, a shark nursery and a new green turtle sanctuary.

Perched on the end of the promontory, 19th-century **Nothe Fort** (☎ 766465; www.fortressweymouth.co.uk; Barrack Rd; adult/child £5/1; ☎) 10.30am-5.30pm May-Sep, 2.30pm-4.30pm Sun Oct-Apr) is currently undergoing refurbishment, but its collection of weapons and military memorabilia is still on display while the work is being carried out.

Activities

Weymouth has been a popular seaside spot since King George III (the mad one) took an impromptu dip here in 1789. People are still flocking to the seafront some two and a half centuries later, and during the summer holidays the beach is usually packed with nose-to-tail sunbathers. Deckchairs and buckets and spades are available on the seafront; you can also rent pedalos for £5 per hour.

With so many wrecks dotted along the coastline, Weymouth and Portland are popular dive centres; try **Dive Dorset** (☎ 860269; www.divedorset.com; 15 Castletown) on Portland, or the **Old Harbour Dive Centre** (☎ 760888; oldharbourdive@aol.com; 11 Nothe Pde) in Weymouth. Day trips start at around £85 per day including equipment.

Windsurfing is also excellent along the Weymouth coastline; **Second Wind** (☎ 01305 835301; www.second-wind.co.uk; Overcombe Beach) and **Windtek** (☎ 787900; www.windtek.co.uk; 109 Portland Rd) both offer lessons (£90 per day) and hire gear (£15 to £30 per day).

Weymouth & Portland Sailing Academy (☎ 860101; www.wpsna.org.uk; Osprey Quay) runs two-day sailing courses for £155.

Sleeping

Weymouth is practically wall-to-wall B&Bs, but you'll need to discover your inner fondness for net curtains and doily-covered tablecloths. There are plenty of camp sites near Chesil Beach and Weymouth Bay.

Chatsworth (☎ 785012; www.thechatsworth.co.uk; 14 The Esplanade; d £30-100; (P)) Nicely positioned near the Old Harbour, this smart guesthouse offers much more up-to-date accommodation than most of Weymouth's B&Bs. The nicest room has French doors leading to a private balcony overlooking the harbour, and there are a couple more with lovely bay windows; there's also a good in-house brasserie and a pleasant harbourside breakfast terrace.

Seaham (☎ 782010; www.theseaham.co.uk; 3 Waterloo Pl; d £56-60; (X)) The best of the cluster of B&Bs along Victoria Rd, with five well-kept rooms finished in pastel fabrics, prefab furniture and faintly nautical colours. The rooms at the front just about have sea views, but traffic noise on the main seafront road can be a headache.

Eating

Perry's (☎ 785799; 4 Trinity Rd; mains £12-17; (X) lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Right on the quayside, this relaxed bistro specialises in seafood straight off the Weymouth fishing boats – crab soup, lobster bisque and roast sea bass are served up in the light, cheery dining room, dotted with local paintings and dried flowers.

Isobar (☎ 750666; 19 Trinity Rd; mains £12.95-15.50; (X) dinner Tues-Sat) For a quirkier vibe head along the quay to this baroque-styled gastropub, where rough wood floors meet gilt-framed pictures, hot-pink walls and upholstered chairs. There's a great chalkboard menu ranging from Thai fishcakes to whole-tail scampi, and plenty of bottled beers and international wines.

You couldn't come to Weymouth and not try the local staple of fish and chips. The top chippy in town is **King Edward's** (☎ 786924; 100 The Esplanade); for the full seaside experience, chase

down the chips with a classic 99 from **Rossi's** (☎ 785557; 92 The Esplanade), which has been serving up ice creams on the Weymouth seafront since the 1930s.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There's one daily National Express coach to London (£19.20, 4¼ hours).

Bus 10 is the quickest to Dorchester (30 minutes, three per hour). The hourly bus 31 also stops in Dorchester en route to Lyme Regis (two hours) and Axminster, while the X53 travels from Weymouth to Wareham (50 minutes, six daily, four on Sunday) and Bournemouth (two hours), and to Abbotsbury (35 minutes), Lyme Regis (90 minutes) and Exeter (three hours) in the opposite direction. Bus 1 travels regularly over to Portland (30 minutes).

TRAIN

Trains run hourly to London (£63, 2¾ hours) via Dorchester South (£2.90, 11 minutes) and Bournemouth (£10.50, one hour), and every two hours to Dorchester West, Bath (£11.60, two hours) and Bristol (£13, 2¾ hours).

AROUND WEYMOUTH

Portland

☎ 01305

Portland is essentially a craggy island joined to the mainland by the long sweep of Chesil Beach. Portland's unique white limestone has been quarried here for centuries and has found its way into many of the world's finest buildings (including the British Museum, St Paul's Cathedral and the UN Headquarters in New York). The views from the rugged cliffs are breathtaking, especially around the **lighthouse** (☎ 861233; (X) 11am-5pm Apr-Sep) on Portland Bill, where there's also a summer-only **tourist office** (☎ 861233). It costs adult/child £2.50/1.50 to climb the 41m-high tower. Look out for the treacherous stretch of water known as The Race.

Sturdy **Portland Castle** (EH; ☎ 820539; admission £3.50; (X) 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, to 4pm Oct) is one of the finest examples of the defensive castles constructed during Henry VIII's castle-building spree. You can try on period armour and get great views over Portland harbour.

The first curator of the **Portland Museum** (☎ 821 804; 217 Wakeham St; adult/child £2.50/free; (X) 10.30am-5pm Fri-Tue Easter-Oct) was Dr Marie Stopes, who

pioneered the birth-control pill. Housed in two thatched cottages overlooking Church Ope Cove, the museum has some varied displays exploring Portland's history, especially its reputation for smuggling and shipwrecks; there are also some huge fossils and ammonites collected along the Jurassic Coast nearby.

Bus 1 runs to Portland from Weymouth every half-hour.

Chesil Beach

A massive expanse of pebbles stretches along the coast for 10 miles between Portland and Abbotsbury, at times reaching up to 15m high. It's an incredible sight and encloses Fleet Lagoon, a haven for water birds.

The stones vary from pebble size at Abbotsbury in the west to around 15cm in diameter at Portland. Local fishers can supposedly tell their position along the bank by gauging the size of the stones.

Chesil Beach Centre (☎ 01305-760579; Ferrybridge; (X) 11am-6pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4pm Oct-Mar) provides information and organises talks and guided walks.

LYME REGIS

☎ 01297 / pop 4406

Nestled at the edge of the Jurassic Coast, the genteel resort of Lyme Regis is famous for two things: fossils and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Some of the first dinosaur skeletons ever discovered in Britain were found here during the 19th century, and the town has been a magnet for fossil-hunters ever since.

Information

Lyme Regis' **tourist office** (☎ 442138; lyme.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Guildhall Cottage, Church St; (X) 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) arranges regular fossil-hunting expeditions along the Jurassic Coast.

Sights

One of the 19th century's most famous fossil collectors was Mary Anning (1799-1847), who was born in a seafront cottage on a site now occupied by the **Lyme Regis Philpot Museum** (☎ 443 370; www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk; Bridge St; adult/child £2.20/1.60; (X) 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Mary Anning found the first ichthyosaur skeleton near Lyme Regis in 1812, and did much to pioneer the science of modern-day palaeontology.

The **Dinosaurland Fossil Museum** (☎ 443541; www.dinosaurland.co.uk; Coombe St; adult/child £5/4;

(X) 10am-5pm) has lots of excellent fossil displays and sells fossils and ammonites at the museum shop.

The **Cobb**, Lyme's famous 183m-long jetty-cum-breakwater, was constructed in the 13th century to protect the town from sea surges. Though it's been patched up and improved many times over the last 700 years, it still fails to protect the town from occasional flooding; consequently a massive sea protection programme is currently under way along the town's seafront, and you might well find the town beach is closed when you're there.

There's a low-budget **Marine Aquarium** (☎ 443678; admission £2.50; (X) 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, extended hours peak season) near the Cobb.

Sleeping & Eating

Old Lyme Guest House (☎ 442929; www.oldlymequesthouse.co.uk; 29 Coombe St; s £35, d £60-65; (P) (X)) Once home to Lyme's old post office, this stone-fronted house is now an award-winning B&B, with several feminine rooms finished in pale creams and soft hues, topped off by patterned curtains and china trinkets.

Hotel Alexandra (☎ 442010; www.hotelalexandra.co.uk; Pound St; s £60, d £100-140; (P) (X)) Built in 1735 for a dowager countess and run for the last 25 years by a local family, this delightful small hotel feels like a relic from another age. There are 26 quietly classy rooms, 16 of which have views across Lyme Bay.

Fairwater Head Hotel (☎ 678349; Hawkchurch; www.fairwaterheadhotel.co.uk; d £140-190; (P) (X)) A couple of miles north of Lyme Regis in the 'village of roses', this excellent country retreat brings an unmistakably Gallic accent to its rural English setting. The plush en suite bedrooms overlook

WORTH THE TRIP

Abbotsbury Swannery (☎ 871858; New Barn Rd; admission £7.50; (X) 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Oct) Founded by the monks of Abbotsbury's monastery about 600 years ago. Every May the colony of mute swans makes its nests at the swannery, protected by the pebble banks of Chesil Beach; the cygnets usually hatch out in late June. Feathers from the Abbotsbury swans are still used in the helmets of the Gentlemen At Arms, the Queen's official bodyguard, and by calligraphers at the historic insurance broker Lloyd's of London.

private gardens and are divided between the main house and a newer annexe.

Cobb Arms (☎ 443242; Marine Pde; mains £5-10) This salty old harbourfront pub pulls the best pint in Lyme and also serves up plates of battered cod, scampi and chips, and club sandwiches.

Broad St Restaurant (☎ 445792; 57-58 Broad St; lunch £9-13, 3-course dinner £25; ☎ dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) This spanking-new restaurant on the main street has quickly built up a reputation as one of the finest on the south Dorset coast. Blindingly white tablecloths, flagstone floors and sparkling wine glasses set the upmarket mood, and the menu dazzles with its dishes of local Dorset produce and Lyme Bay fish.

Getting There & Away

Bus 31 runs to Dorchester (1¼ hours) and Weymouth (1¼ hours) hourly (every two hours on Sunday). Bus X53 goes west to Exeter (1¼ hours) and east to Weymouth (1½ hours, six daily, four on Sunday).

SHERBORNE

☎ 01935 / pop 9350

All streets in the honey-stoned town of Sherborne lead to its majestic abbey, once the most important church in Wessex; both of Alfred the Great's elder brothers, Ethelred and Ethelbert, are buried beneath the abbey's flagstones. Sherborne was the capital of Wessex until the end of the 11th century, when the bishopric moved to Old Sarum, but continued to be a town of strategic and religious importance throughout the Middle Ages. These days it's a quiet and attractive market town, filled with antique shops, haberdashers and estate agents; reminders of its former status remain in its twin castles, which stand on either side of the silvery sheen of Sherborne Lake.

Sherborne's **tourist office** (☎ 815341; sherborne.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Digby Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) stocks the free *All About Sherborne* leaflet with a map and town trail. **Walking tours** (£3; ☎ 11am Fri May-Sep) depart from the tourist office and last 1½ hours.

Sights

SHERBORNE ABBEY

Established early in the 8th century, the **Abbey Church of St Mary the Virgin** (☎ 812452; suggested donation £2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm late Mar-late Oct, 8.30am-4pm Nov-mid-Mar) became a Benedictine abbey in 998 and functioned as a cathedral until 1075.

The church boasts the oldest fan vaulting in the country, and there are several intriguing tombs – look out for the one belonging to John Digby, Earl of Bristol, flanked by his two wives. Ethelred and Ethelbert are buried in the corner of the abbey. On the edge of the abbey close are the **St Johns' Almshouses** (admission £1.50; ☎ 2-4pm Tue & Thu-Sat May-Sep), constructed in the 15th century.

OLD CASTLE

East of the town centre stand the ruins of the **Old Castle** (EH; ☎ 812730; admission £2.40; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct), originally constructed from 1107 by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, and briefly owned by Sir Walter Raleigh. It became a Royalist stronghold during the Civil War, but Cromwell reduced the 'malicious and mischievous castle' to rubble after a 16-day siege in 1645.

SHERBORNE CASTLE

Sir Walter Raleigh began building **New Castle** (☎ 813182; www.sherbornecastle.com; adult/child house £8/free, gardens only £4/free; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Tue-Thu & weekends Apr-Oct) – really a splendid manor house – in 1594. However, by 1608 he was back in prison, this time at the hands of James I, who eventually sold the castle to John Digby, the Earl of Bristol, in 1617. It's been the Digby family residence ever since, and contains fine collections of art, furniture and porcelain, as well as grounds landscaped by Capability Brown.

SHERBORNE MUSEUM

Sherborne Museum (☎ 812252; www.sherbornemuseum.co.uk; Church Lane; adult/child £1/free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 2.30pm-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct) explores the town's history through costumes, period photos and some fascinating illustrations, as well as a digital version of the 'Sherborne Missal', the most exquisite illuminated manuscript to survive from the Middle Ages. The original is held in the British Library.

Sleeping

Old Vicarage (☎ 251117; www.milborneport.freeserve.co.uk; s £63-84, d £79-112; P ☎) The vicar obviously wasn't short of a few bob when he built this fantastic neo-Tudor mansion on the edge of the village. The gabled, double-chimneyed frontage is impressive enough, but the interior rooms are even smarter, melding country clutter and Victorian bric-a-brac with a vaguely Oriental ambience.

Eastbury Hotel (☎ 813131; www.theeastburyhotel.co.uk; Long St; s/d from £49/90; P ☎) The rooms might be named after flowers at this fine red-brick house, but they're refreshingly light on floral patterns; the atmosphere is closer to a Georgian country residence, with plenty of upholstered armchairs, rich wallpapers and wooden furniture, a conservatory restaurant and a walled garden (complete with croquet lawn).

Also recommended:

Alders (☎ 220666; www.thealdersbb.com; Sandford Orcas; d £48-60; P ☎) Traditional rooms in a modernised stone house 3 miles' drive from Sherborne.

Stoneleigh Barn (☎ 815964; www.stoneleighbarn.com; North Wootton; d £55-80; P ☎) Elegantly converted stone barn with four-poster-bed rooms, 2 miles from town.

Eating

Pear Tree Deli (☎ 812828; Half Moon St; mains £4-8; ☎ lunch) This delectable deli is an ideal place to stock up on a gourmet sandwich or some lunchtime picnic supplies. Homemade pies, soup specials and Greek cheeseburgers are chalked up above the counter, and the shelves are stacked with a mouthwatering array of chutneys, jams, bikkies and cakes.

Half Moon Inn (☎ 812017; Half Moon St; mains £5-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) The town's liveliest pub specialises in hot food platters and local brews, best appreciated on the streetside terrace as the sun sets over the abbey nearby.

Paprika (☎ 816429; Half Moon St; mains £7-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Laminate floors, scarlet-leather chairs and big glass windows characterise the interior of this thoroughly modern Indian place, where the menu also contains a few surprises – try the vegetarian curry with cashew nuts or chicken curry with pineapple and coconut.

Getting There & Away

Bus 57 runs from Yeovil (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday), as does the quicker 58 (15 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday), which sometimes continues to Shaftesbury (1½ hours).

Hourly trains run to Exeter (£13.20, 1¼ hours), London (£35.10, 2½ hours) and Salisbury (£9.20, 45 minutes).

AROUND SHERBORNE Montacute House

This extraordinary Elizabethan **manor house** (NT; ☎ 01935-823289; montacute@nationaltrust.org.uk; admission house £8, garden only £4.50; ☎ house 11am-5pm

Wed-Mon mid-Mar-Oct, garden 11am-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar) was built in the 1590s for Sir Edward Phelips, a Speaker of the House of Commons. The house is particularly renowned for its remarkable plasterwork, fine chimneypieces and magnificent tapestries, but the highlight is the Long Gallery, decorated with Elizabethan-era portraits borrowed from the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Bus 681 from Yeovil (20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday) to South Petherton passes close by.

WILTSHIRE

Three thousand years ago the fields and plains of Wiltshire were home to one of Britain's oldest civilisations, whose legacy remains in the strange stone circles of Stonehenge and Avebury, as well as a number of barrows, processional avenues and burial mounds scattered around the county. Mystery and myth often seem to go hand in hand in this corner of Britain – Wiltshire is also home to a menagerie of chalk figures as well as an ever-changing gallery of crop circles throughout the summer months.

Information

The **Visit Wiltshire** (☎ 0870 240 5599; www.visitwiltshire.co.uk) website is the best source for pre-planning info, and you can pick up the usual range of brochures and leaflets from local tourist offices.

Getting Around

BUS

The bus coverage in Wiltshire still leaves a lot to be desired, especially in the northwest of the county. The two main operators:

First (☎ 0845 606-4446; www.firstgroup.com) Serves the far west of the county.

Wilts & Dorset Buses (☎ 01722 336855; www.wdbus.co.uk) Covers most destinations.

For general bus info contact the **Wiltshire Bus Line** (☎ 0845 709 0899). The Wiltshire Day Rover (adult/child £6.50/4.50) is valid with most operators and can be bought from bus drivers.

TRAIN

Rail lines run from London to Salisbury and beyond to Exeter and Plymouth, branching off north to Bradford-on-Avon, Bath and Bristol,

but most of the smaller towns and villages aren't served by trains.

SALISBURY

☎ 01722 / pop 43,335

Centred on a majestic cathedral topped by a soaring central spire – the tallest in England – the gracious city of Salisbury has been an important provincial city for more than a thousand years. Its streets are dusted with buildings from almost every period in Britain's architectural history – medieval walls, half-timbered Tudor town houses, Georgian mansions and Victorian villas – but Salisbury is a modern, lively place, with plenty of bars, restaurants and terraced cafés, as well as a concentrated cluster of excellent museums.

Orientation

Salisbury's compact town centre revolves around Market Sq, which is dominated by its impressive guildhall. The train station is a 10-minute walk to the west, while the bus station is just 90m north up Endless St.

Information

Library ☎ 324145; Market Pl; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon, 9am–5pm Tue–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat

Post office (nr Castle St & Chipper Lane)

Salisbury Online ☎ 421328; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun

Tourist office ☎ 334956; www.visitsalisburyuk.com;

☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–4.30pm Sun Jun–Sep, 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–4pm Sun May, 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat Oct–Apr

Washing Well Laundrette ☎ 421874; 28 Chipper Lane; ☎ 8am–9pm

Sights

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

Britain is a nation blessed with countless stunning churches, but few can match the grandeur and sheer spectacle of **Salisbury Cathedral** (☎ 555100; www.salisburycathedral.org.uk; requested donation adult/child £4/2; ☎ 7.15am–6.15pm Sep–May, 7.15am–7.15pm Jun–Aug). Built between 1220 and 1258, the cathedral bears all the hallmarks of the early English Gothic style, with an elaborate exterior decorated with pointed arches and flying buttresses, and a sombre, austere interior designed to keep its congregation suitably pious.

Beyond the highly decorative **West Front**, a small passageway leads into the 70m-long nave, lined with handsome pillars of Purbeck stone. Look out for a fascinating old **clock** from 1386

in the north aisle, probably the oldest working clock in the world. At the eastern end of the ambulatory the glorious **Prisoners of Conscience** stained-glass window (1980) hovers above the ornate tomb of Edward Seymour (1539–1621) and Lady Catherine Grey. Other notable tombs include that of William Longespée, son of Henry II and half-brother of King John.

The splendid **spire** was added in the mid-14th century. At 123m it's the highest in Britain, and weighs around 6500 tons; an elaborate system of cross-bracing, scissor arches and supporting buttresses was needed to keep it upright. Look closely and you'll see that the additional weight has buckled the four central piers of the nave. Sir Christopher Wren surveyed the cathedral in 1668 and calculated that the spire was leaning by 75cm; reinforcement on the notoriously 'wonky spire' continues to this day.

There are 1½-hour tower **tours** (adult/child £4/3; ☎ 11.15am & 2.15pm Mar & Oct, 11.15am, 2.15pm & 3.15pm Apr–Sep, plus 5pm Mon–Sat Jun–Aug), which climb up 332 vertigo-inducing steps to the base of the spire, from where there are jaw-dropping views across the city.

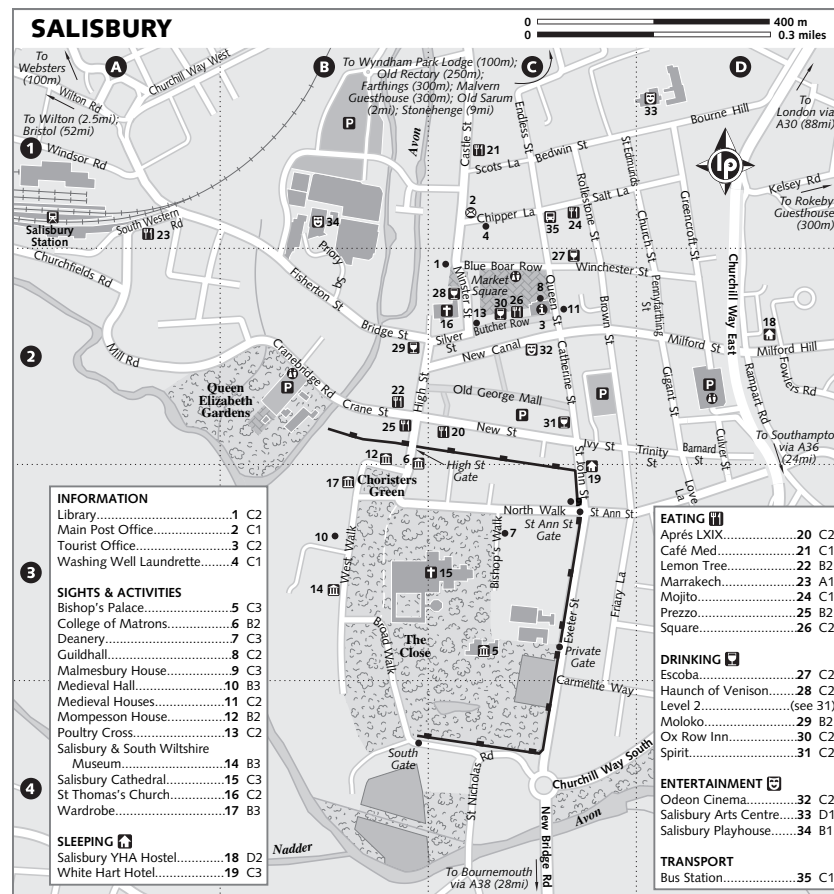
One of the four surviving copies of **Magna Carta** is kept in the cathedral's **Chapter House** (☎ 9.30am–6.45pm Jun–Aug, 9.30am–5.30pm Mar–Jun & Sep–Oct, 10am–4.30pm Nov–Feb).

CATHEDRAL CLOSE

The cathedral is surrounded by one of the country's most beautiful medieval **closets**. Many of the houses date from the same period as the cathedral, although the area was heavily restored during an 18th-century cleanup by James Wyatt. The close is encircled by a sturdy outer wall, constructed in 1333; the stout gates leading into the complex are still locked every night.

The highlight at the **Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum** (☎ 332151; www.salburymuseum.org.uk; 65 The Close; admission £4; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat year-round, plus 2–5pm Sun Jul & Aug) is the interactive Stonehenge gallery, but there are also some interesting artefacts recovered from Old Sarum, and lots of ceramics, historical artefacts and paintings, including a dreamy watercolour of Stonehenge by JMW Turner.

Military buffs will enjoy the **Wardrobe** (☎ 414536; www.thewardrobe.org.uk; 58 The Close; adult/child £2.75/75p; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Feb, Mar & Nov), home to the official museum of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment.



Built in 1701, **Mompesson House** (NT; ☎ 335659; The Close; admission £4.40; ☎ 11am–5pm Sat–Wed Mar–Oct) is a fine Queen Anne house with magnificent plasterwork ceilings, exceptional period furnishings and a wonderful carved staircase. It was used as the location for the 1995 film of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Just inside narrow High St Gate is the **College of Matrons**, founded in 1682 for widows and unmarried daughters of clergymen. South of the cathedral is the **Bishop's Palace**, now the Cathedral School, parts of which date back to 1220.

ST THOMAS'S CHURCH

This elegant church was built for cathedral workmen in 1219 and named after St Thomas

Becket, although it was modified in the 15th century. Its most famous feature is the amazing **doom painting** above the chancel arch, painted in 1475. It depicts Christ on the Day of Judgment, sitting astride a rainbow flanked by visions of heaven and hell.

MARKET SQUARE

Markets were first held here in 1219, and the square still bustles with traders every Tuesday and Saturday. The narrow lanes surrounding the square reveal their medieval specialities (Oatmeal Row, Silver St), but today the action is confined to the square, where you can pick up anything from fresh fish to dodgy digital watches. The 15th-century **Poultry Cross** is the last of four market crosses that once stood here.

Tours

Salisbury City Guides (☎ 320349; www.salisburycityguides.co.uk) leads 1½-hour tours (adult/child £3.50/1.50) from the tourist office at 11am from April to October, Saturday and Sunday only November to March. There are also themed walks at 2.30pm Saturday and an 8pm ghost walk on Friday night from May to September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Salisbury YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6018; salisbury@yha.org.uk; Wilford Hill; dm £17.50; (P) ☒) This great hostel has a wide choice of rooms, ranging from smallish doubles to big, cheap bunk dorms, and a lovely location with private gardens surrounding the listed 19th-century house.

MIDRANGE

Rokeye Guesthouse (☎ 329800; www.rokeyeguesthouse.co.uk; 3 Wain-a-long Rd; s/d from £45/55; (P) ☒) This grand red-brick house is the pick of the mid-range B&Bs in town. It's an elegant Edwardian affair, distinguished by its above-average bedrooms (the best of which have half-tester beds and freestanding enamel baths) and a cute breakfast conservatory, reached by a winding iron staircase.

Wyndham Park Lodge (☎ 416517; www.wyndhamparklodge.co.uk; 51 Wyndham Rd; s £38-42, d £50-55; ☒ (P) ☒ wi-fi) This old-school B&B is a touch more traditional, but still very comfortable. The top rooms are the huge family suite and the stylish garden double with doors onto a private patio; little extras such as complimentary fruit teas and wi-fi are very welcome.

Old Rectory (☎ 502702; www.theoldrectory-bb.co.uk; 75 Belle Vue Rd; d £50-70; (P) ☒) Another old clergyman's residence-turned-B&B, with straightforward rooms decked out in cream and yellow, and a charming walled garden with views to St Edmund's Church. Some of the en suite bathrooms are tiny, though.

Websters (☎ 339779; www.websters-bed-breakfast.com; 11 Hartington Rd; s £40-44, d £50-54; (P) ☒) A choice of checks, stripes or floral wallpapers greets you at this much-recommended B&B. Some of the colour schemes are a little lurid, but treats such as hot chocolate, free broadband and a varied tea tray more than make up for that.

Also recommended:

Farthings (☎ 330749; www.farthingsbandb.co.uk; 9 Swaynes Close; s/d £25/50; (P) ☒) Victorian-era B&B with quilted beds and a pleasant garden; the cheaper rooms share facilities.

Malvern Guesthouse (☎ 327995; www.malvern-guesthouse.com; 31 Hulse Rd; d from £50; (P) ☒) Family-run guesthouse with pretty pastel rooms and homemade marmalade.

TOP END

White Hart Hotel (☎ 327476; St John St; whitehartsalisbury@macdonald-hotels.co.uk; (P)) This big, central hotel is a great option if you're up for some pomp and pampering. The imposing porticoed frontage stands right opposite the cathedral close, and the hotel offers exactly the kind of swish rooms and attentive service you'd expect. The four-poster-bed rooms are worth the premium.

Eating

BUDGET

Square (☎ 331136; Market Sq; mains from £5; ☒ daily) The kind of urban-style café you might not expect to find in provincial Salisbury, with clean lines and cream-and-chocolate tones, and a menu of paninis, pasta bakes and designer breakfasts.

Prezzo (☎ 341333; 52-54 High St; mains £7-9; ☒ lunch & dinner) Housed in a decidedly wonky half-timbered house, this sleek Italian does all the standard pizza, pasta and Italian dishes fantastically well, supplemented by some unusual choices including Sicilian chicken and a delicious red pesto burger.

Lemon Tree (☎ 333471; 92 Crane St; mains £7-12; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Packed with character but short on space, this tiny bistro crams tables into a conservatory dining room. Serves light, modern British food with a quirky twist – try 'tipsy' chicken, or pork pan-fried with apricots.

MIDRANGE

Mojito (☎ 417999; 2-4 Salt Lane; tapas £2-6, mains from £8; ☒ lunch & dinner) Authentic tapas and an unmistakably Spanish atmosphere characterise this sassy restaurant, which has an open-plan kitchen and a couple of dining areas split over twin floors. Our top tip is the fantastic paella, which also comes in a veggie version.

Café Med (☎ 328402; 68 Castle St; mains £9-20; ☒ lunch & dinner) This breezy brasserie brings some Mediterranean vim to Salisbury's streets. The menu offers British classics shot through with sun-kissed flavours – think sirloin steak with grilled vine tomatoes, or roast cod with pancetta.

Marrakech (☎ 411112; 129-133 South Western Rd; ☒ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily) This great little restaurant is the nearest you'll get to North Africa in Wiltshire, serving tangy tagines and bona fide Moroccan couscous in a terracotta-coloured

dining room full of earthenware pots and tiled tables. There's even a small souk where you can buy Moroccan handicrafts.

Après LXIX (☎ 340000; 67-69 New St; mains £10-18; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This achingly trendy bistro feels closer to Soho than Salisbury, with an artfully understated dining room filled with exposed brickwork and designer spotlights, and an imaginative menu with a magpie eye – think good old British produce spiced up with Italian, French and Oriental flavours.

Drinking

Moloko (☎ 507050; 5 Bridge St) This curious bar takes its visual cue from Stalinist Russia – black paint, stark interiors and red stars abound – and you'll need the constitution of a Tartar to stomach the flavoured vodkas.

Escoba (☎ 329608; 5-7 Winchester St) Orange walls, Dalí-esque paintings and a hot and sultry atmosphere make this Spanish-style bar a popular drinking den. Cool Sol beers and jugs of margarita are the tipples of choice, accompanied by plates of fresh tapas.

Spirit (☎ 338387; 46 Catherine St) This hip hang-out is always packed with a young and beautiful crowd on weekends, with banging tunes on the decks and a choice of technicolour cocktails.

Level 2 (☎ 330053; 48 Catherine St) Salisbury's newest club, with guest DJs on Fridays and a 'champagne and house' night on Saturdays.

Salisbury has plenty of decent pubs: try the medieval **Haunch of Venison** (☎ 322024; 1-5 Minster St) for a choice of more than 50 malt whiskies, or the **Ox Row Inn** (☎ 424921; 10-11 Ox Row) for local ales.

Entertainment

Salisbury Arts Centre (☎ 321744; www.salisburyartscentre.co.uk; Bedwin St) Housed in the converted St Edmund's Church, this exciting arts centre has a reputation for staging cutting-edge theatre, dance and live gigs; photography and art exhibitions are often held in the foyer.

The **Salisbury Playhouse** (☎ 320333; www.salisburyplayhouse.com; Malthouse Lane) is the town's big arts venue, and hosts top touring shows, musicals and new plays. The **Odeon Cinema** (☎ 0870 505 0007; New Canal) is quite possibly the only cinema in the world with a medieval foyer.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Three National Express coaches run daily to London via Heathrow (£14, 3½ hours), and

there's a daily coach to Bath (£8.30, 1½ hours) and Bristol (£8.30, two hours).

Salisbury is the main bus hub in Wiltshire. The X4/X5 travels direct to Bath (two hours, hourly, five on Sunday) via Bradford-on-Avon (1½ hours), and there are regular local buses to Lacock, Shaftesbury, Devizes, Avebury and Stonehenge.

TRAIN

Trains run half-hourly from London Waterloo station (£25.20, 1½ hours) and hourly on to Exeter (£22.70, 1¼ hours) and the southwest. Another line runs from Portsmouth (£12.50, 1½ hours, hourly) via Southampton (£7.10, 45 minutes), with connections to Bradford-on-Avon (£8.10, 40 minutes, hourly), Bath (£11.20, one hour, half-hourly) and Bristol (£13.60, 1¼ hours, half-hourly).

AROUND SALISBURY

Old Sarum

The abandoned settlement of **Old Sarum** (☎ 01722-335398; admission £2.50; ☒ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 11am-3pm Nov-Mar) sits on a grassy rise about 2 miles from Salisbury. It began life as a huge hill fort during the Iron Age, and was later occupied by both the Romans and the Saxons. By the mid-11th century, the town had grown into one of the most important in the west of England; William the Conqueror convened one of his earliest councils here, and the first cathedral was built here in 1092, snatching the bishopric from nearby Sherborne Abbey. But Old Sarum was never a comfortable place to live: it was short on water and exposed to the elements, and in 1219 the bishop was given permission to move the cathedral to a new location beside the River Avon, founding the modern-day city of Salisbury. By 1331 the cathedral had been demolished for building material and Old Sarum had been practically abandoned; a scale model in Salisbury Cathedral illustrates how the site once looked.

There are free guided tours at 3pm in July and August, and medieval tournaments, open-air plays and mock battles on selected days.

Buses 3, 5, 6 and 8 all run at least hourly to Old Sarum throughout the week.

STONEHENGE

Arguably one of the world's most important prehistoric sites, and certainly one of Britain's biggest tourist attractions, the ancient

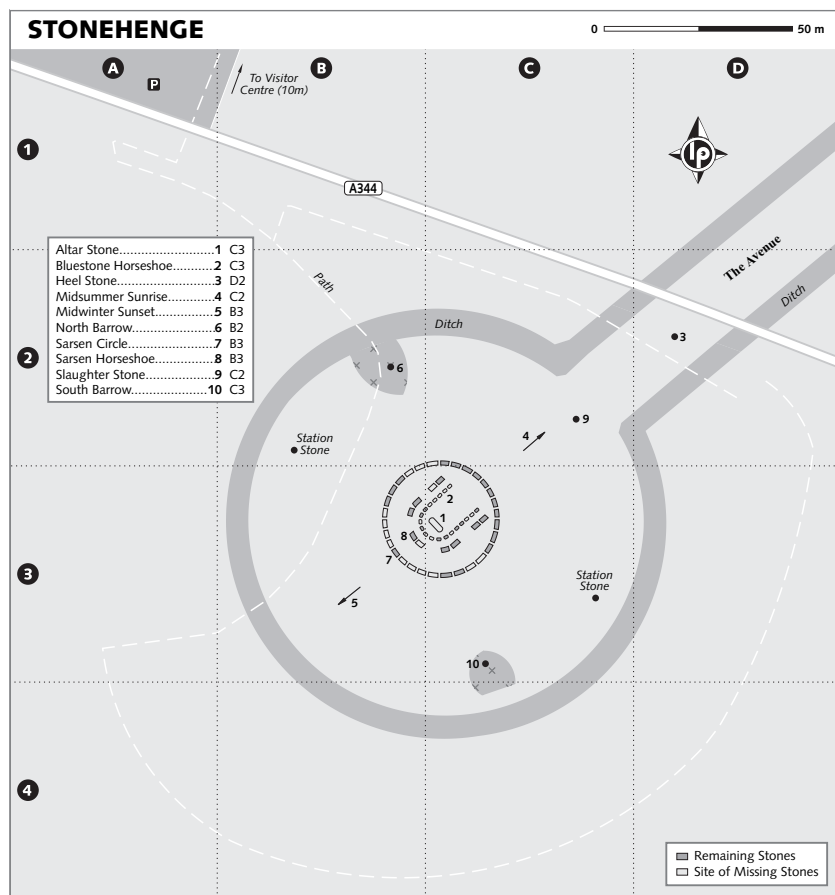
ring of monolithic stones at **Stonehenge** (EH/NT; ☎ 01980-624715; admission £5.90; ☞ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6pm mid-Mar-May & Sep-mid-Oct, 9.30am-4pm mid-Oct-mid-Mar) has been attracting a steady stream of pilgrims, poets and philosophers for the last 5000 years. Despite the constant flow of traffic from the main road beside the monument, and the huge numbers of visitors who traipse around the stones on a daily basis, Stonehenge still manages to be a mystical, ethereal place – a haunting echo from Britain's forgotten past, and a reminder of a lost civilisation that once walked the many ceremonial avenues across Salisbury Plain. Even more intriguingly, it's still one of Britain's great archaeological mysteries: although there are countless theories about what the site was used for, ranging from

a sacrificial centre to a celestial timepiece, in truth no-one really knows what drove prehistoric Britons to expend so much time and effort on its construction.

The Site

Construction at Stonehenge started around 3000 BC, when the outer circular bank and ditch were erected. A thousand years later an inner circle of granite stones, known as bluestones, was added. It's thought these mammoth four-ton blocks were hauled from the Preseli Mountains in south Wales, some 250 miles away.

Around 1500 BC, Stonehenge's main stones were dragged to the site, erected in a circle and topped by massive lintels to make



THE STONEHENGE PROJECT

Despite being one of Britain's most treasured monuments, Stonehenge is far from perfect. Hemmed in by busy roads and wire barricades, jammed with visitors, and underscored by a cacophony of roaring traffic, it's a long way from the haven of peace and spiritual tranquility most visitors expect to find. Thankfully, plans are afoot to reinvent the Stonehenge experience. Over the next decade the main A303 road will be tunnelled underneath the monument and a new visitor centre will be built 2 miles from the site, with regular connecting buses to the stones. Despite the obvious good sense of the plan, progress has been predictably slow; planning applications for the new visitor centre have still not been approved and the rerouting of the road is a long way off. Keep up to speed with developments at www.thestonehengeproject.org.

the trilithons (two vertical stones topped by a horizontal one). The sarsen (sandstone) stones were cut from a hard rock found on the Marlborough Downs 20 miles from the site. It's estimated that dragging one of these 50-ton stones to Stonehenge would require about 600 people.

Around this time, the bluestones were rearranged as an **inner horseshoe** with a central **altar stone**, surrounded by a **second horseshoe** of five trilithons. Three of these are intact; the other two have just a single upright. Then came the **major circle** of 30 massive vertical stones, of which 17 uprights and six lintels remain.

Further out, another circle is delineated by the **58 Aubrey Holes**, named after John Aubrey, who discovered them in the 1600s. Just inside this circle are the **South and North Barrows**, each originally topped by a stone. Like many stone circles in Britain (including Avebury), the inner horseshoes are aligned to coincide with sunrise at the midsummer solstice, which seems to support the theory that the site was some kind of astronomical calendar.

Prehistoric pilgrims would have entered the site via the **Avenue**, whose entrance to the circle is marked by the **Slaughter Stone** and the **Heel Stone**, located slightly further out on one side.

A marked pathway leads around the site, and although you're not permitted to walk into the circle itself, it's still possible to see the stones fairly close up. An audio guide is included in the admission price.

Private tours can be arranged outside normal opening hours by calling ☎ 01722-343834, but you'll need to book well in advance.

Getting There & Away

Bus 3 connects Salisbury bus station with Stonehenge (40 minutes, nine daily, eight on Sunday) via Old Sarum.

Several companies offer organised tours: **City Sightseeing** (☎ 01789-294466; £16 including admission; 3 tours daily Apr-Oct) Two-hour tours from Salisbury train station to Stonehenge via Old Sarum. **Wessex Tourist Guides** (☎ 01980-623463 or ☎ 01980-620596) Specialist local tour guides recommended by English Heritage.

AROUND STONEHENGE

Stonehenge forms part of a complex of ancient monuments. North of Stonehenge and running roughly east-west is the **Cursus**, an elongated embanked oval, and the slightly smaller **Lesser Cursus** nearby. No-one is sure exactly what these sites were used for, but as usual there's no shortage of theories, ranging from ancient sporting arenas to processional avenues for the dead. Other prehistoric sites around Stonehenge include a number of burial mounds, including the **New King Barrows**, and **Vespasian's Camp**, an Iron Age hill fort.

Just north of Amesbury and 1.5 miles east of Stonehenge is **Woodhenge**, a series of concentric rings once marked by wooden posts. Excavations in the 1970s at Woodhenge revealed the skeleton of a child buried near the centre with a cloven skull.

STOURHEAD

Inspired by classical Italy, **Stourhead** (NT; ☎ 01747-841152; Stourton; admission garden or house £6.20, house & garden £10.40; ☞ house 11am-5pm Fri-Tue mid-Mar-Oct, garden 9am-7pm or sunset year-round) is landscape gardening at its finest. The Palladian house has some fine Chippendale furniture and paintings by Claude and Gaspard Poussin, but for most visitors it's the sideshow to the magnificent 18th-century gardens, which spread out across the valley and feature stunning vistas, rare plants, magnificent trees and ornate temples. A lovely 2-mile circuit travels around the lake and to the **Temple of Apollo**. If you're feeling

energetic, from near the **Pantheon**, a 3.5-mile side trip can be made to **King Alfred's Tower** (admission £2.30; ☎ 11.30am-4.30pm mid-Mar–Oct), a 50m-high folly with wonderful views.

Stourhead is off the B3092, 8 miles south of Frome in Somerset.

LONGLEAT

Half ancestral mansion, half safari park, **Longleat** (☎ 01985-844400; www.longleat.co.uk; adult/child house £10/7, grounds £3/2, safari park £10/7, all-inclusive passport £19/15; ☎ house 10am-5.30pm year-round, safari park 10am-4pm Apr–Nov, other attractions 11am-5.30pm Apr–Nov) was the first stately home in England to open its doors to the public in 1946. Twenty years later, it also became Britain's first safari park, and over the last 40 years Capability Brown's landscaped grounds have been transformed into an amazing drive-thru zoo, populated by a menagerie of animals more at home on the African plains than the fields of Wiltshire. These days the zoo is backed up by a throng of tourist attractions, including a narrow-gauge railway, a Dr Who exhibit, a Postman Pat village, a pets' corner and a butterfly garden.

Longleat is about 3 miles from both Frome and Warminster.

MALMESBURY ABBEY

A wonderful blend of ruin and living church, **Malmesbury Abbey** (☎ 01666-826666; donation requested; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov–mid-Mar) began life as a 7th-century monastery, which was later replaced by a Norman church. By the mid-15th century the abbey had been embellished with a spire and twin towers; in 1479 a storm toppled the east tower and spire, destroying the eastern end of the church, and the west tower followed suit in 1662, destroying much of the nave. The present-day church is about a third of its original size. Notable features include the Norman doorway decorated with biblical carvings, the Romanesque **Apostle** carvings and a four-volume, illuminated bible dating from 1407. A window at the western end of the church depicts Elmer the Flying Monk, who in 1010 strapped on wings and jumped from the tower. Although he broke both legs, he survived and became a local hero.

Just below the abbey are the **Abbey House Gardens** (☎ 01666-822212; www.abbeyhousegardens.co.uk; admission £5.50; ☎ 11am-5.30pm mid-Mar–mid-Oct) with a herb garden, river, waterfall and 5 acres of colourful blooms.

Bus 31 runs to Swindon (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), while 92 heads to Chippenham (35 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

LACOCK

☎ 01249

With its geranium-covered cottages, higgledy-piggledy rooftops and idyllic location next to a rushing brook, the medieval village of Lacock seems to have been preserved in aspic since the mid-19th century. The village has been in the hands of the National Trust since 1944, and is almost entirely untouched by modern development – there are no telephone poles or electric streetlights, and it's kept largely free of traffic thanks to the main visitor car park on the outskirts of the village. Unsurprisingly, it's a popular location for costume dramas and feature films – parts of the Harry Potter films, as well as BBC adaptations of *Moll Flanders* and *Pride and Prejudice*, were all filmed here.

Lacock Abbey

Lacock Abbey (NT; ☎ 730227; admission abbey, museum, cloisters & grounds £7.80, abbey, cloisters & grounds only £6.30; ☎ abbey 1-5.30pm Wed–Mon Mar–Oct, gardens 11am-5.30pm Feb–Oct) was founded as an Augustinian nunnery in 1232 by Ela, Countess of Salisbury. After the Dissolution the abbey was sold to Sir William Sharrington in 1539, who converted the nunnery into a home, demolished the church, tacked a tower onto the corner of the abbey and added a brewery. Some of the original 13th-century structure is evident in the cloisters and there are traces of medieval wall paintings. The recently restored botanic garden is also worth a visit.

In the early 19th century, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–77), a prolific inventor, developed the photographic negative while working at the abbey: the **Fox Talbot Museum of Photography** (☎ 730459; admission museum, cloisters & grounds only £4.80; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Mar–Oct, 11am-4pm weekends Nov–Feb) details his ground-breaking work and displays a fine collection of his photographs.

Sleeping & Eating

Our pick Sign of the Angel (☎ 730230; www.lacock.co.uk; 6 Church St; £75, d £105-155; P) This charmingly eccentric country restaurant and hotel makes a memorable place for an overnight stay. Rough wooden benches, rustic beams and old wash-presses are scattered around the twin dining rooms, each of which boasts a crackling log-

fire. Upstairs you'll find rooms crammed with antique beds, burnished chests and low ceilings. The restaurant specialises in traditional, old-fashioned English cooking – our tip is the 'angel plate' of cold meats and bubble and squeak, followed by treacle tart with clotted cream.

King John's Hunting Lodge (☎ 730313; kingjohns@amsolve.com; 21 Church St; s/d £55/95; tearooms ☎ 11am-5.30pm) This tearoom-cum-B&B is a local landmark – it's housed in Lacock's oldest building and run by one of the village's biggest characters, an ex-shepherdess, nurse and celebrity chef. Local specialities such as 'priddy oggies' (a cheese pastry with pork, bacon and Stilton), cheese muffins and homemade elderflower cordial all find their way onto the eclectic menu, and upstairs you'll find snug, old-fashioned rooms crammed with quirky furniture and Tudor touches.

Other options:

Old Rectory (☎ 730335; www.oldrectorylacock.co.uk; s £35-50, d £60-75; P ☎) Elegant Victorian-style rooms in a Grade II-listed house dotted with stained-glass windows and patterned rugs.

George Inn (☎ 730263; 4 West St; mains from £8) A dinky 13th-century pub on the edge of the village, dispensing local ales and pub food.

Getting There & Away

Bus 234 runs hourly from Chippenham (Monday to Saturday, 20 minutes).

AROUND LACOCK Corsham Court

Two miles northwest of Lacock, the Elizabethan mansion of **Corsham Court** (☎ 01249-701610; www.corsham-court.co.uk; admission £6.50; ☎ 2-5.30pm Tue–Thu & weekends Mar–Sep, 2-4.30pm weekends Oct–late Mar) dates from 1582, although the house and grounds were later improved by John Nash and Capability Brown. It's renowned for its superb art collection, featuring works by Reynolds, Cara-

vaggio, Rubens and Van Dyck, and for its formal gardens, containing some stunning ornamental box hedges and a Gothic bathhouse.

AVEBURY

☎ 01672

While the tour buses make a beeline for Stonehenge, prehistoric purists head for the massive ring of stones at Avebury instead. Though it lacks the huge stones and dramatic trilithons of its sister site across the plain, Avebury is a much more rewarding place to visit: it's bigger, older and much quieter than Stonehenge, and judging by its huge scale, it may also have been a more important ceremonial site to its ancient builders.

Orientation & Information

The village itself is entirely encircled by the stones and neatly bisected by two main roads, but it's much easier to take advantage of the National Trust car park on the A4361, just a short walk from the village. The **tourist office** (☎ 539425; all.tic@kennet.gov.uk; Chapel Centre, Green St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue–Sun) is housed in a converted chapel near the centre of the village.

Sights

STONE CIRCLE

With a diameter of about 348m, Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world. It's also one of the oldest, dating from around 2500 to 2200 BC, between the first and second phase of construction at Stonehenge. The site originally consisted of an outer circle of 98 standing stones from 3m to 6m in length, many weighing up to 20 tons, carefully selected for their size and shape. The stones were surrounded by another circle delineated by a 5.5m-high earth bank and a 6m- to 9m-deep ditch. Inside were smaller stone circles to the north (27 stones) and south (29 stones).

WORTH THE TRIP

Woolley Grange (☎ 01225-864705; www.woolleygrangehotel.co.uk; Woolley Green; r £145-335; P ☎) This fabulous country house mixes boutique style with a refreshing family-friendly attitude to create one of the most welcoming hotels in Wiltshire. With its designer bedrooms, laid-back attitude and quietly impressive service, it's a place whose *raison d'être* seems to be keeping everyone in a state of mild euphoria throughout their stay; while the little 'uns are kept lavishly entertained with everything from giant trampolines to PlayStation 2s at the Woolley Bear Den, mum and dad can relax with a truly indulgent range of spa treatments, aromatherapy massages, gourmet meals and champagne cocktails by the heated outdoor pool. Rooms are all individually styled, with a smattering of patchwork quilts, shiny antiques and funky fixtures. Pricey, but worth every penny.

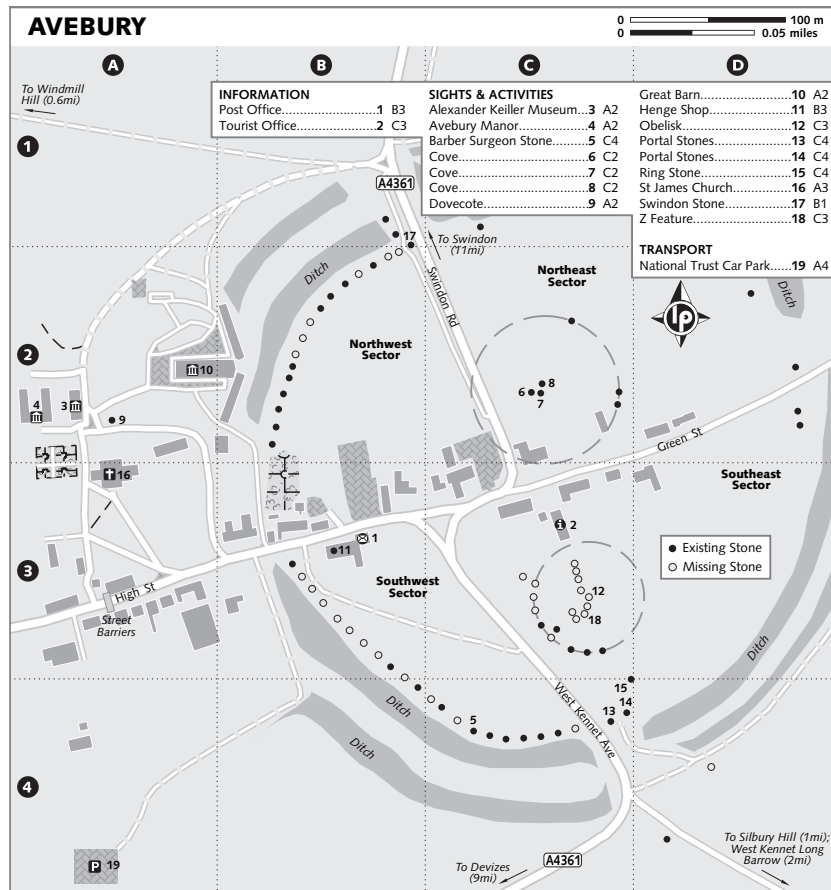
The present-day site represents just a fraction of the circle's original size. Many of the stones were buried, removed or broken up during the Middle Ages, when Britain's pagan past became something of an embarrassment to the medieval Church. In 1934 the wealthy businessman and archaeologist Alexander Keiller supervised the re-erection of the buried stones and planted markers to indicate those that had disappeared; he later bought the site for posterity using funds from his family's marmalade fortune.

Modern roads into Avebury neatly dissect the circle into four sectors. Start at High St, near the Henge Shop, and walk round the circle in an anticlockwise direction. There are 11 standing stones in the southwest sec-

tor, including the **Barber Surgeon Stone**, named after the skeleton of a man found under it. The equipment buried with him suggested he was a medieval travelling barber-surgeon, killed when a stone accidentally fell on him.

The southeast sector starts with the huge **portal stones** marking the entry to the circle from West Kennet Ave. The **southern inner circle** stood in this sector and within this circle was the **Obelisk** and a group of stones known as the **Z Feature**. Just outside this smaller circle, only the base of the **Ring Stone** remains.

The northwest sector has the most complete collection of standing stones, including the massive 65-ton **Swindon Stone**, the first stone encountered and one of the few never to have been toppled.



CROP CIRCLE CENTRAL

Wiltshire is famous across the world for its astonishing crop circles. These strange symmetrical patterns regularly appear in farmers' fields and areas of grassland across the county, and can range from basic circles to mind-boggling complex fractal designs. Some people believe they're caused by extraterrestrial life forms or freak weather patterns, while others are convinced they're simply the work of practical jokers with a penchant for high-school geometry. Check out www.cropcircleconnector.com, which has regular updates on new circles, or www.circlemakers.org, which claims to spill the beans on how the mysterious rings are made.

If you fancy spotting a circle for yourself, the best areas to see them are around the Marlborough Downs and Pewsey Vale; you can usually pick up tips at the **Barge Inn** (☎ 01672-851705) in Honeystreet, 5 miles east of Devizes, where the pool room has been devoted to detailing all the latest finds.

OTHER HISTORIC SITES

Avebury is surrounded by a network of ancient monuments. Lined by 100 pairs of stones, the 1.5-mile **West Kennet Ave** links the Avebury circle with the **Sanctuary**. Post holes indicate that a wooden building surrounded by a stone circle once stood at the Sanctuary, although no-one knows quite what the site was for.

Just to the west, the huge dome of **Silbury Hill** rises abruptly from the surrounding fields. At more than 40m high it's one of the largest artificial hills in Europe, and was constructed in stages from around 2500 BC, but no significant ancient relics have ever been found at the site, and the reason for its construction remains unclear. Due to erosion and the damage caused by earlier excavations, access is now forbidden; you can view it from a car park on the A4.

Across the fields south of Silbury Hill stands **West Kennet Long Barrow**, England's finest burial mound, dating from around 3500 BC. Its entrance is guarded by huge sarsens and its roof is constructed of gigantic overlapping capstones.

Northwest of the Avebury circle you'll find **Windmill Hill**, a Neolithic enclosure or 'camp' dating from about 3700 BC, the earliest site in the area.

The **Ridgeway national trail** starts near Avebury and runs westwards across **Fyfield Down**, where many of the sarsen stones at Avebury (and Stonehenge) were collected.

AVEBURY MANOR

Avebury Manor (NT; ☎ 539250; admission manor £3.80, garden only £2.90; ☎ manor 2-4.40pm Sun-Tue, gardens 11am-5pm Fri-Tue) dates back to the 16th century but was later modified during the Edwardian era. Keiller bought the manor in 1939 and

spent much of his later life here; now owned by the National Trust, the house is still used as a private residence. Entry is by timed ticket.

Housed in the old stables of Avebury Manor, the **Alexander Keiller Museum** (NT; ☎ 539250; admission £4.20; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) explores the archaeological history of the circle and traces the story of the man who dedicated his life to unlocking the secret of the stones.

Getting There & Away

Bus 5 runs to Avebury from Salisbury (1½ hours, four or five Monday to Saturday). Bus 49/X49 serves Swindon (30 minutes) and Devizes (25 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

DEVON

Bordered on either side by spectacular coastline, and blessed with a stunning landscape of wild moorland, craggy hills and rolling rural fields, it's hardly surprising that Devon is still one of the country's top tourist destinations. This historic county caters for practically all tastes, from the classic bucket-and-spade resorts of Torquay and Ilfracombe to the lively cities of Exeter and Plymouth and the open heaths and hiking trails of Dartmoor. If history is your thing, there are numerous country houses, museums and dramatic castles to discover, while the attractive towns of Dartmouth, Brixham and Totnes all offer a refreshingly different face to this sleepily scenic county.

Orientation & Information

Devon is bounded to the east by Somerset and Dorset, the border skirting the southern edge of Exmoor and hitting the coast west of Lyme

Regis. The border with Cornwall follows the River Tamar from its source near the north Devon coast to the estuary at Plymouth. Dartmoor claims much of the inland area between Plymouth and Exeter in the east.

The website **Discover Devon** (www.discoverdevon.com) has plenty of useful information to get you started.

Getting Around

Contact the **Devon County Public Transport Help Line** (☎ 01392-382800; www.devon.gov.uk/devonbus; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) for information and timetables. It also provides the invaluable *Devon Public Transport Map* and the *Discovery Guide to Dartmoor*.

First Western National (☎ 01271-376524; www.firstgroup.com) serves most of north Devon and much of the south and east, including most Dartmoor services.

Stagecoach Devon (☎ 01392-427711; www.stagecoachbus.com) operates mostly local services and buses from Plymouth to Exeter or Totnes. Timetables are available to download from the website. The Day Explorer (adult £5) allows one day's travel on Stagecoach Devon buses, while the Goldrider pass (£18) is valid for a week.

Devon's rail network skirts along the south coast through Exeter and Plymouth to Cornwall. There are picturesque stretches where the line hugs the seashore. Two branch lines run north: the 39-mile Tarka Line from Exeter to Barnstaple, and the 15-mile Tamar Valley Line from Plymouth to Gunnislake. The Devon Day Ranger (£10) allows a day's unlimited travel on Devon trains including Plymouth and the Tamar Valley Line.

EXETER

☎ 01392 / pop 116,393

Though it's often eclipsed by the better-known cities of Bristol and Bath, Exeter is well worth visiting in its own right, with a thriving night-life, a lively cultural scene and a rich history stretching back 2000 years. Founded by Celts and expanded by the Romans, Exeter grew rich as a trading port during the early Middle Ages, and the city's fortunes were demonstrated by the completion of its glorious Gothic cathedral in the early 15th century. Exeter suffered heavily during the Luftwaffe raids of WWII, although the cathedral close survived relatively intact, and still boasts some fine medieval architecture. It might be old, but Exeter's kept young at heart thanks to a large student crowd

and plenty of bars, cafés and clubs, especially around the revitalised dock area.

History

The modern-day city was built on the foundations laid by the Romans, who established Exeter as the administrative capital for the Dumnonii (a Celtic tribe) of Devon and Cornwall around AD 50. The Romans built a fortified wall around the city, which was later improved by Alfred the Great; parts of both the Roman and Saxon walls can still be seen at various points around the modern city. William the Conqueror laid siege to the city in 1067 and took 18 days to break through the walls. He appointed a Norman *seigneur* (feudal lord) to construct a castle, the ruins of which can still be seen in Rougemont and Northernhay Gardens.

Exeter was a major trading port until a weir was built across the river in 1290, halting river traffic. It wasn't until 1563, when the first ship canal in Britain was dug to bypass the weir, that the city began to re-establish itself, especially through the cloth and wool trade.

Orientation

South of the ruined castle, the city centre radiates out from the leafy square around the cathedral; the redeveloped quay is 500m south. There are two main train stations, Central and St David's; most long-distance trains use St David's, a mile northwest of the centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Waterstone's (☎ 218392; 48-49 High St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) Main branch of this large chain bookshop.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 08452 777444; Heavitree Rd; ☎ 24hr)

Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (☎ 411611; Barrack Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

Exeter Library (☎ 384201; Castle St; per hr £3; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5pm Wed, 9.30am-4pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun)

LAUNDRY

Silverspin (12 Blackboy Rd; ☎ 8am-10pm)
Soaps (Isambard Pde; per load £3.50-6; ☎ 8.15am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, 9.15am-5.45pm Sun) Beside St David's train station.

MEDIA

The *List* is a free magazine detailing events, listings and bars and restaurants in the Exeter area.

POST

Main branch (☎ 223344; Bedford Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Quay House Interpretation & Visitor Centre

(☎ 265213; The Quay; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm weekends only Nov-Easter) Offers tourist information and displays on the quay's history.

Tourist office (☎ 265700; tic@exeter.gov.uk; Paris St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Sights

EXETER CATHEDRAL

At the heart of the city is the magnificent **Cathedral Church of St Peter** (☎ 255573; www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk; The Close; suggested donation £3; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-5pm Sat, 8am-7.30pm Sun), which has stood largely unchanged for the last 600 years, despite some WWII bomb damage. Built within a fairly short time span, it's one of the most graceful of England's cathedrals, with celebrated features including the 14th-century stained glass of the East Window, the West Window and the largest section of Gothic rib-vaulting in the world.

The impressive **Great West Front** boasts the largest collection of 14th-century sculpture in England. Inside, the carved **Pulpitum Screen**, completed in 1325, features some marvellous 17th-century ecclesiastical paintings. Behind is the choir, decorated with fine 13th- and 14th-century misericords, including one of an elephant given to King Henry III by Louis IX of France. Nearby, the huge oak canopy over the **Bishop's Throne** was carved in 1312, and the **minstrels' gallery** (1350) is decorated with 12 angels playing musical instruments.

Excellent 45-minute free guided tours run at 11am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday, 11am on Saturday and 4pm on Sunday, April to October. Extra tours are available in summer. It's also worth attending a service: evensong is at 5.30pm Monday to Friday and 3pm on Sunday.

UNDERGROUND PASSAGES

The medieval maintenance passages built to house the lead pipes that once brought fresh water to the city still survive under Exeter's

streets. At the time of research they were closed due to the redevelopment of the Princesshay shopping centre, but are scheduled to reopen sometime in 2007.

ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Exeter's multipurpose **museum** (☎ 665858; Queen St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has a little bit of everything, ranging from Roman-era artefacts dug up around the city to excellent ethnographic displays from across the globe (look out for some spooky African masks and an impressive suit of samurai armour).

Tours

Volunteer Exeter 'Redcoats' provide free guided tours leaving from the Royal Clarence Hotel or Quay House Visitor Centre several times daily. Themes range from the city's Roman architecture to its 'forgotten past'; hardy souls can even brave a ghosts and legends tour. Contact the tourist office on ☎ 265203 or tic@exeter.gov.uk for details.

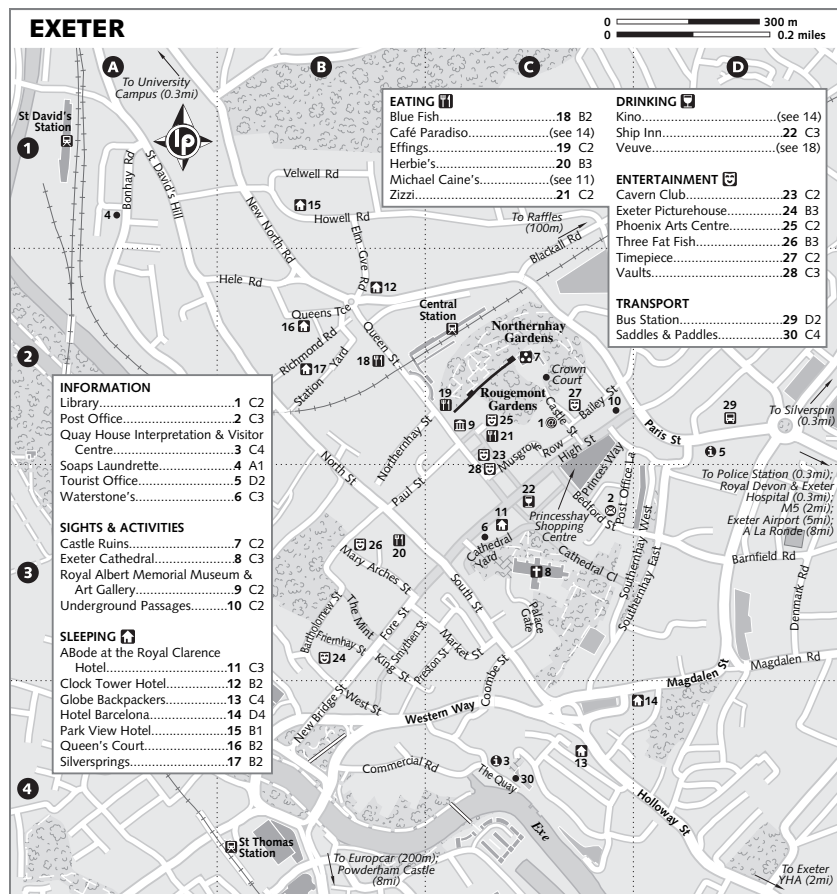
Sleeping BUDGET

Exeter YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5826; exeter@yha.org.uk; 47 Countess Wear Rd; dm £15.50; ☎) Some 2 miles southeast towards Topsham, the city's official hostel is in a spacious 17th-century house overlooking the River Exe. The facilities are good and the dorms are reasonably sized, but the out-of-town location is a drawback. Catch bus K or T from High St, or 57 or 85 from the bus station to School Lane and follow the signs.

Globe Backpackers (☎ 215521; www.exeterbackpackers.co.uk; 71 Holloway St; dm £14, 7th night free, d £35; ☎) This centrally located and slightly chaotic hostel is housed inside a 17th-century grand manor house near the quay. It's spotlessly clean and run by a friendly husband-and-wife team, but there's only one double room, so plan ahead.

MIDRANGE

Raffles (☎ 270200; www.affles-exeter.co.uk; 11 Blackall Rd; s/d from £38/60; ☎ ☒) Victorian fixtures and fittings and an antique-heavy atmosphere make this classically English B&B one of the top B&B options in the city. All the rooms are spacious and pleasantly furnished with framed prints and flowery bedspreads; the best have their own bay windows.



Clock Tower Hotel (☎ 424545; www.cloctowerhotel.co.uk; 16 New North Rd; s £45, d £50-70; (P) (X)) This excellent-value city-style B&B makes a good midrange base, though the rooms are a little on the anonymous side and there are several flights of stairs to negotiate if you're on the upper floors.

Silversprings (☎ 494040; www.silversprings.co.uk; 12 Richmond Rd; s £45, d £70-75, ste £100; (X)) Styling itself as a Georgian town-house hotel, this is really just a plush B&B in disguise. The 10 rooms are comfortable if a little heavy on the floral décor, and all have spacious en suite bathrooms; little touches like fluffy bathrobes and complimentary herbal teas are very welcome. There's also a self-contained cottage suite with its own kitchen and lounge.

Queen's Court (☎ 272709; www.queenscourt-hotel.co.uk; 6-8 Bystock Tce; s £77-87, d £93-103; (X)) This large gabled hotel on a quiet terrace off the main road offers a selection of contemporary-styled bedrooms with large bed-backs, multicoloured furniture, and Roberts radios and power showers in every room.

Also recommended:
Park View Hotel (☎ 271772; www.parkviewhotel.free-serve.co.uk; 8 Howell Rd; s £26-40, d £48-60; (P) (X)) Grade-II listed Georgian house decked out in heritage style.

TOP END

Our pick Hotel Barcelona (☎ 281000; barcelona@alishotels.com; Magdalen St; s £90, d £105-125; (P) (X)) Ever fancied staying inside a movie set? Then the delightfully decadent Barcelona is for you. The

city's former Eye Infirmary has been renovated with enormous imagination and a playful retro aesthetic. You'll find cinematic prints, '60s furniture and reclaimed wheelchairs dotted around the foyer and downstairs lounge, and the bedrooms are kitted out with an eclectic mishmash of gilt mirrors, wonky wardrobes and Cubist bedspreads. It's fresh, funky and great fun – the kind of place that turns an overnight stay into an event in itself.

Abode at the Royal Clarence Hotel (☎ 319955; www.abodehotels.co.uk/exeter; Cathedral Yard; r £125-225) Keen not to be outdone by the Alias crowd, Exeter's oldest hotel has recently reinvented itself as a boutique beauty. The old-fashioned rooms have been transformed into four categories of varying luxury, ranging from 'comfortable' to 'fabulous'; flat-screen TVs, sleek furniture and huge beds are standard throughout, but it's worth splashing out on the lovely cathedral-view rooms if you can.

Eating

Café Paradiso (☎ 281000; Magdalen St; lunch £5-8, dinner mains from £12; (X) lunch & dinner) Sheltered under a soaring canopy, the in-house restaurant at Hotel Barcelona is furnished in typically unusual style, with an all-white interior offset by technicoloured panels and painted bicycles. Café food and gourmet sandwiches are served by day, followed by a sophisticated brasserie menu by night.

Herbies (☎ 258473; 15 North St; mains £5-8; (X) lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) A long-standing favourite with Exeter's veggie crowd, serving up homemade cashew nut loaf, butternut squash risotto and huge curries in a homely, sun-filled dining room.

Zizzi (☎ 274737; 21/22 Gandy St; mains £6-10; (X) lunch & dinner) This excellent Italian-influenced brasserie is fantastic value, serving up huge pizzas and pasta dishes in the swish, high-ceilinged dining room or a suntrap garden terrace.

Blue Fish (☎ 493581; 44 Queen St; mains £12-20; (X) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Look no further for fresh seafood than the Blue Fish, the newly-opened Exeter outpost of an original restaurant in St Ives. Expect the same top-quality fish dishes and a similarly laid-back, quasi-continental atmosphere. For a post-dinner tittle, try the chic Veuve cellar bar downstairs.

Michael Caine's (☎ 310031; www.michaelcaines.com; Cathedral Yard; mains from £18.50-25) Exeter's resident celebrity chef continues to work wonders at his flagship restaurant, recently given a

thorough make-over as part of the refurbishment of the Royal Clarence Hotel. The décor's all gleaming mirrors, crisp tablecloths and smoke-coloured seats, and the cooking is as creative as ever.

Effings (☎ 211888; 74 Queen St; (X) 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, dinner from 7pm Fri & Sat) This new delicatessen is an Aladdin's cave for picnickers, with a mouthwatering selection of Italian meats, local cheeses, freshly-made quiches and sticky tarts; there's also a pleasant café that opens on Friday and Saturday for regionally themed dinners.

Drinking

Ship Inn (☎ 272040; Martin's Lane) Tucked away along a side street off the main cathedral square, this cramped old tavern is said to have been Francis Drake's favourite boozery, and it's still popular with Exeter's ale-drinking crowd.

Kino (Magdalen St; members & guests only after 10pm) This cinematic cellar bar would be more at home on New York's Lower East Side than central Exeter. Expect handmade cocktails, a Chinese-baroque ambience and regular comedy and club nights.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS

Three Fat Fish (☎ 424628; www.threefatfish.co.uk; 1 Mary Arches St) A popular bar and late-night venue, hosting a mix of gigs, comedians, music nights and DJs.

Cavern Club (☎ 495370; www.cavernclub.co.uk; 83-84 Queen St) The top venue for live gigs in Exeter, attracting big-name DJs and breaking acts from the indie and underground scene.

Timepiece (☎ 493096; www.timepienightclub.co.uk; 1t Castle St) Arguably the best club in town, with a revolving programme of urban, garage, drum'n'bass and indie nights.

Exeter's other clubs include the **Vaults** (☎ 203939; 8 Gandy St), a lively basement bar along Gandy St, and a knot of cheesy nightclubs across the river from the quayside.

THEATRES & CINEMAS

Phoenix Arts Centre (☎ 667080; www.exeterphoenix.org.uk; Gandy St) An excellent arts complex hosting dance, theatre, films, DJs and live music. The café-bar's pretty hip, too.

Exeter Picturehouse (☎ 435522; Bartholomew St West) Screens a mix of mainstream and art-house flicks.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Scheduled services connect **Exeter International Airport** (☎ 367433; www.exeter-airport.co.uk) with several UK cities including Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle, as well as the Channel Islands and the Isles of Scilly. There are also regular flights to various European destinations. The budget carrier **Flybe** (www.flybe.com) operates many of the most popular routes.

BUS

The most useful local bus is the X38, which runs to Plymouth (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Sunday). The X9 runs to Bude (three hours, eight daily, two on Sunday) via Okehampton; for most other destinations the train is faster and more reliable.

TRAIN

The fastest trains between London and Exeter St David's use Paddington station and take around 2½ hours (£45.40, hourly). There are also half-hourly connections with Bristol (£17.60, 1¼ hours) and Penzance (£28.40, three hours).

The picturesque Tarka Line between Exeter Central and Barnstaple (£10.80, 1¼ hours, every hour Monday to Saturday, four to six on Sunday) follows the valleys of the Rivers Yeo and Taw and gives good country views.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 5 miles east of the centre, off the A30. Buses 56 and 379 run to the airport from the bus station (20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

BICYCLES & CANOES

Saddles & Paddles (☎ 424241; www.sadpad.com; 4 Kings Wharf, The Quay) on the quayside rents out bikes (adult per day £14) and canoes (single kayaks per hour/day £7/18).

BUS

Exeter is well served by public transport. The one-day Dayrider pass (£4) gives unlimited transport on Stagecoach's Exeter buses. Bus N links St David's and Central train stations and passes near the bus station.

CAR

The tourist office provides a list of car-hire offices; try **Europcar** (☎ 275398; Water Lane).

There are several large city-centre car parks, but if you'd rather not drive into the city, there are Park & Ride schemes from car parks at Sowton (Bus PR4), Matford (Bus PR5), Digby Rd (Bus PR3) and Honiton Rd (PR2). Connecting buses travel to the city centre every 10 minutes.

TAXI

There are taxi ranks outside the train stations. Alternatively, try **A1 Cars** (☎ 218888) or **Capital Taxis** (☎ 433433).

AROUND EXETER Powderham Castle

Powderham (☎ 01626-890243; www.powderham.co.uk; admission £7.95; ☞ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) has been the ancestral home of the Courtenay family for over 600 years. Built in 1391, and extensively modified following damage caused during the Civil War, the castle contains some of the best-preserved Stuart and Regency furniture of any of Britain's stately homes. Guided tours also take in the Great Hall and State Rooms.

Powderham is on the River Exe in Kenton, 8 miles south of Exeter. Bus 85A runs from Exeter (20 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, every 30 minutes Sunday).

À la Ronde

Having returned from their European Grand Tour, sisters Jane and Mary Parminter planned to combine the magnificence of the Church of San Vitale, which they'd visited in Ravenna, Italy, with the homeliness of a country cottage. The result, completed around 1796, is an intriguing 16-sided **house** (NI; ☎ 01395-26514; Summer Lane, Exmouth; admission £5; ☞ 11am-5.30pm Sun-Thu Mar-Oct) with bizarre interior décor that includes a shell-encrusted room, a frieze of feathers, and sand and seaweed collages.

It's 2 miles north of Exmouth on the A376; Stagecoach Devon bus 57 runs close by en route to Exeter (30 minutes, at least every 30 minutes).

SOUTH DEVON COAST Torquay & Paignton

☎ 01803 / pop 110,370

If you thought the British seaside holiday was dead, then think again; it's alive and well along the stretch of coastline between Torquay, Paignton and Brixham collectively known as the English Riviera. Despite the name, this is a long way from St Tropez, but the region does

have its peculiar charms – especially if you've got a soft spot for amusement arcades, deck-chairs and good old-fashioned fish and chips. Queen of the coastline is grand old Torquay, where the Victorian villas and chintzy hotels are stacked up like dominoes above the bay. Just to the west of Torquay is Paignton, the picture of an English seaside resort, complete with a seafront promenade, multicoloured beach-huts and a faded 19th-century pier.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 70 70 010; torbay.tic@torbay.gov.uk; Vaughan Pde; ☞ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4.30pm Sun May-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) sells discounted tickets to local attractions.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Torquay has two famous residents: Agatha Christie, who was born in Torquay in 1890 and lived for many years at the manor house of Greenaway, just outside town; and Basil Fawlty, the deranged Torquay hotelier memorably played by John Cleese in the classic British sitcom *Fawlty Towers*.

Torquay Museum (☎ 293975; 529 Babbacombe Rd; admission £3; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 1.30-5pm Sun Oct-Apr, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.30-4pm Sat May-Sep) has an intriguing selection of Agatha memorabilia, including family photos, first edition novels and a couple of display cases devoted to her famous detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.

Regular boat trips sail along the coastline from Torquay to Dartmouth (£14) and Brixham (£5). Contact **Torbay Belle Cruises** (☎ 528555) or **Western Lady Cruises** (☎ 842424) or just pitch up on the pier.

Torquay is surrounded by pleasant beaches, the best of which is family-friendly **Babbacombe**, about 2 miles north of the centre, which still has a working **funicular** (☎ 328750; ☞ 9.30am-6pm) connecting the beach to the cliff-top.

SLEEPING

You won't have any trouble finding somewhere to sleep in Torquay – the town is practically wall-to-wall B&Bs and hotels, with a concentrated cluster around Avenue Rd and Bridge Rd.

Torquay International Backpackers (☎ 299924; jane@torquaybackpackers.co.uk; 119 Abbey Rd; per person dm/d winter £10/12, summer £12/14) This small hostel is in the middle of a row of Victorian terraced houses, and makes a friendly base in Torquay. The owner, Jane, is full of useful local info and often organises summer barbecues, beach trips and local pub tours.

Norwood Hotel (☎ 294236; www.norwoodhotel.torquay.co.uk; 60 Belgrave Rd; d £44-50; ☞) In the heart of Torquay's B&B ghetto, the Norwood stands head and shoulders above its neighbours. The frill-heavy, Victorian bedrooms might not be to everyone's taste, but they're fantastic value and handily placed for exploring the rest of Torquay.

Everglades Hotel (☎ 295389; www.evergladeshotel.co.uk; 32 St Marychurch Rd; d £54-56; ☞) This is a detached hotel with an elevated sundeck and modern sea-view rooms.

English House (☎ 328760; Teignmouth Rd, Maidencombe; d £70-90) This is a surprisingly stylish B&B-cum-restaurant in the suburb of Maidencombe, with delightful upstairs rooms decorated in warm tones and gingham checks. The breakfast menu includes Luscombe sausages, grapefruit and toasted muffins.

Hillcroft (☎ 297247; www.thehillcroft.co.uk; 9 St Lukes Rd; d £75-130) Not what you'd expect to find in Torquay – a semiboutique hotel kitted out with Indonesian furniture, Balinese furnishings and Tuscan tiling, with individually styled rooms ranging from a four-poster Indian suite to a chic Provençal penthouse.

EATING

Pier Point (☎ 299935; Seafront; mains £5-20; ☞) lunch & dinner) Next to the Princess Theatre, this breezy bistro-bar is the best bet for lunch or a light supper in Torquay, with crispy pizzas, fresh salads and seafood and an extensive selection of wines, cocktails and cold beers.

English House (☎ 328760; Teignmouth Rd, Maidencombe; 2/3 courses £26/30; ☞) dinner) Locally sourced Devonian ingredients underpin the monthly changing menu at this award-winning restaurant, from Brixham mussels and monkfish to slow-roasted Devon lamb and asparagus.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The X80 travels every half-hour from Torquay to Paignton (20 minutes), Totnes (one hour) and Plymouth (two hours 10 minutes). Bus 111 travels to Dartmouth (1¼ hours, hourly, Monday to Saturday) via Totnes.

A branch train line runs from Exeter via Torquay (45 minutes) to Paignton (50 minutes). The **Paignton & Dartmouth Steam Railway** (☎ 555872; www.paignton-steamrailway.co.uk) runs from Paignton on the scenic 7-mile trip to Kingswear on the River Dart, linked by ferry (six minutes) to Dartmouth; a combined ticket costs £9 return per adult. You can add on a river cruise

(£14) or a Round Robin boat trip to Totnes and back to Paignton by bus (£14.50).

Brixham

☎ 01803 / pop 17,460

On the opposite side of the bay from Torquay, the old fishing town of Brixham has built its fortunes on the fruits of the sea, and remains one of the country's busiest harbours. Pastel-shaded fishermen's cottages and old warehouses surround the harbourside and spill over onto the nearby cliffs, but this is far from a neatly packaged tourist resort; Brixham has a rough, gritty charm entirely absent from the other Torbay towns.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0906-680126; brixham.ti@torbay.org.uk; Old Market House, The Quay; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) is right beside the harbour.

Brixham Heritage Museum (☎ 856267; www.brixhamheritage.org.uk; Bolton Cross; admission £1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) has a range of displays exploring the town's history and its connection to the sea, with exhibits on smuggling, the Brixham lifeboat and some unusual items dragged up by local fishing trawlers.

Anchored in the harbour is a replica of the **Golden Hind** (☎ 856223; admission £3; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mar-Sep), Drake's surprisingly small globe-circling ship.

There are plenty of chippies scattered around the quay, but for a real taste of the British seaside you can't beat a pot of prawns or fresh crab from one of the seafood booths on the harbourside; the best is **Browse Seafoods** (☎ 882484), next to the tourist office.

Bus 22 runs along the coast to Kingswear (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday), from where you can catch buses to Torquay or the river ferry over to Dartmouth.

Dartmouth

☎ 01803 / pop 5693

The pretty riverside town of Dartmouth has long been known as the location for Britain's largest naval college, but in recent years it's also established itself as a favourite seaside escape for city types fleeing the rat race. There are some surprisingly chic shops and boutiques dotted around town, not to mention an astonishing concentration of upmarket restaurants – in high summer it's all a bit Knightsbridge by the sea, with posh yachts jostling for space in the small riverside harbour and plenty of impeccably coiffured ladies

doing lunch at one of the town's streetside cafés.

The **tourist office** (☎ 834224; www.discoverdartmouth.com; Mayor's Ave; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Oct) houses the Newcomen Engine, an early (1712) steam engine.

Perched on a promontory at the entrance to the Dart Estuary, **Dartmouth Castle** (EH; ☎ 833588; admission £3.70; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) was constructed to protect the harbour from sea-borne raids in conjunction with its companion castle at Kingswear. There's a ferry along the estuary to the castle, three-quarters of a mile outside the town, from South Embankment every 15 minutes from 10am to 4.45pm (adult one way £1.20).

The **Dartmouth Museum** (☎ 832923; Duke St; admission £1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) displays a jumbled collection of costumes, swords, ships-in-bottles and vintage toys. The museum stands at the end of the **Butterwalk**, a row of super-wonky timber-framed houses that look as though they could collapse at any moment; incredibly, they've somehow managed to remain standing since the late 17th century.

Dartmouth is justifiably proud of its spanking new arts centre, the **Flavel** (☎ 839530; www.theflavel.org.uk), which hosts small-scale theatre and dance, as well as live music and films.

SLEEPING

Hill View House (☎ 839372; www.hillviewdartmouth.co.uk; 76 Victoria Rd; d £56-82; ☎) A short walk uphill from the harbour, this tasteful B&B wears its environmental credentials on its sleeve: eco-friendly toiletries, long-life light bulbs and organic breakfasts are all *de rigueur*, and though some of the rooms are on the small side, you couldn't ask for a friendlier night's sleep.

our pick **Brown's Hotel** (☎ 832572; www.brownsho.teldartmouth.co.uk; 29 Victoria Rd; s £60, d £80-165; ☎) This effortlessly elegant hotel has built up a reputation as one of the top seaside retreats in Devon, and it certainly brings a touch of Chelsea class to Dartmouth's streets. The contemporary rooms are decorated in pale tones of chocolate and cappuccino, offset by the odd zebra print or piece of designer furniture. Downstairs there's a top-notch British restaurant serving Devon lamb and local shellfish, and to top it off you can kick back in the super-sleek bar next door, complete with comfy sofas, board games and an imaginative tapas menu.

Orleans Guest House (☎ 835450; www.orleans-guest-house-dartmouth.co.uk; 24 South Town; d £80-85, ste £150; ☎) Another beautifully designed B&B in a 17th-century Georgian town house, with three rooms finished in varying shades of red, gold or mauve, with Egyptian cotton bedspreads and DVD players in every room.

EATING & DRINKING

Café Alf Resco (☎ 835880; Lower St; mains from £6; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Despite its notoriously erratic opening hours, this wonderful little bistro blends the best elements of a Tuscan trattoria with a Parisian street-side café. Rickety wooden chairs and old street signs are scattered around the front terrace, which makes a great place for a frothy latte or ciabatta sandwich.

RB's Diner (☎ 832882; 33 Lower St; mains £15-18; ☎ dinner) Padded chairs, stripped pine floors and gleaming wineglasses tell you all you need to know about this refined restaurant, where the food is more South Kensington than south Devon – tenderloin of pork, beef fillet and lemon mousse with raspberries are some of the treats in store.

New Angel (☎ 839425; 2 South Embankment; mains £18-23; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, breakfast & lunch Sun) Run by celebrity TV chef John Burton Race, this modern British bistro is the proud owner of a Michelin star, so you'll have to book well ahead for a table; but the top-level cooking is more than worth the effort.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 93 runs to Plymouth (two hours, hourly, four on Sunday) and bus 111 runs to Torquay (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) via Totnes. There are regular ferries across the river from Kingswear (car/pedestrian £3.30/1) every six minutes.

River Link (☎ 834488; www.riverlink.co.uk; return £8.50; ☎ Apr-Oct) operates cruises along the River Dart from Totnes.

For details of the popular Paignton & Dartmouth Steam Railway, see p301.

Totnes

☎ 01803 / pop 8194

The delightful little town of Totnes has been something of a hippy haven since the 1960s, and its artistic connections continue thanks to the nearby Dartington College of Arts, a couple of miles up the road from the town. But the history of Totnes stretches back much further than the summer of love; a well-preserved

Norman keep stands guard on a hilltop above town, and the main street is lined with elegant Tudor and Elizabethan buildings that hint at Totnes' history as a mercantile town. In fact, tiny Totnes has a higher percentage of listed buildings than anywhere in Britain.

The **tourist office** (☎ 863168; www.totnesinforma tion.co.uk; Coronation Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is in the town's old mill.

SIGHTS

Totnes Elizabethan Museum (☎ 863821; 70 Fore St; admission £1.50; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct) is in a house dating from 1575 and still retains many Tudor and Elizabethan features. Its displays explore the history of Totnes, and there's a room dedicated to the mathematician Charles Babbage, father of the modern computer.

The **Devonshire Collection of Period Costume** (☎ 863168; High St; admission £2; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri May-Sep) features annually changing selections from the extensive costume collection, one of the finest in Britain.

Totnes Castle (EH; ☎ 864406; admission £2.40; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) occupies a commanding position on a grassy hilltop above town. Little remains of the original Norman motte-and-bailey fortress, but the outer keep is still standing, and the views of the town and surrounding fields are fantastic.

SLEEPING

Dartington YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5788; dm £12; ☎ mid-Apr-Oct) This small hostel is located inside a 16th-century riverside cottage, complete with original features including a log-burning stove. It's 2 miles northwest of Totnes off the A385; bus X80 stops nearby at Shinners Bridge half a mile away.

Old Forge (☎ 862174; www.oldforgetotnes.com; Seymour Pl; s £46-53, d £60-71; ☎) As its name suggests, this lovely B&B once housed workshops for the nearby castle of Berry Pomeroy, but it's now been converted to provide delightful country rooms equipped with huge, soft beds and plush pillows. There's a peaceful garden beside the breakfast room, and an original lock-up once used to incarcerate local miscreants.

Steam Packet Inn (☎ 863880; www.steampacketinn.co.uk; St Peters Quay; d £79.50; ☎) A historic pub a little way along the river from town, with four pleasant bedrooms equipped with understated furniture, flat-screen TVs and tranquil river views.

EATING

Wills (☎ 0800 056 3006; 3 The Plains; ☹ lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Posh nosh served in a two-floored restaurant at the bottom of Fore St. Illy coffee, sticky tarts and light lunches are served in the downstairs café; upstairs the atmosphere is more refined, with elegant Regency style furniture and food to match.

Willow Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 862605; 87 High St; mains £4-5.50; ☹ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed, Fri & Sat) The hang-out of choice for Totnes' new agers, this rustic wholefood café does a nice line in couscous, quiches, hotpots and homemade cakes during the day, served in a sunny dining room packed with pine tables, potted plants and free newspapers. Dinner's served three nights a week and there's live music at weekends.

Rumours (☎ 864682; 30 Fore St; mains £10.50-14; ☹ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 6-10.30pm Sun) This venerable restaurant is so friendly it's almost like eating out in a friend's front room. Photographs and artwork cover the walls, and the menu's stuffed with everything from pizzas to pan-fried sea trout and Salcombe ice cream.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus X64 runs to Exeter (one hour, six daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and bus X80 goes to Plymouth (1¼ hours, hourly). Bus 200 travels to Paignton (hourly, 30 minutes) and Torquay (50 minutes).

Frequent trains run to Exeter (£7.80, 45 minutes) and Plymouth (£5.70, 30 minutes, hourly). The train station is half a mile from the centre.

A short walk from Totnes main-line train station, steam trains of the private **South Devon Railway** (☎ 0845 345 1420; www.southdevonrailway.org) run to Buckfastleigh (adult return £8.80, four or five daily Easter to October) on the edge of Dartmoor.

There are cruises on the river with frequent departures to Dartmouth from April to October (p303).

PLYMOUTH

☎ 01752 / pop 256,633

Britain is historically a nation of seafarers, and nowhere is this maritime heritage more obvious than at the port of Plymouth, from where the Pilgrim Fathers set sail for the New World and Sir Francis Drake allegedly eyed up the Spanish Armada while indulging in a spot of bowls. The best place to view old Plymouth is the much-restored Barbican area, where

half-timbered houses and Tudor buildings look out across a harbour filled with fishing trawlers and upmarket yachts; sadly the rest of Plymouth was practically levelled by bombing raids during WWII, and was largely rebuilt in functional concrete after the war. But the city's slowly smartening up its act, with a new shopping development in the city centre, a growing selection of bars and restaurants around the Barbican, and the reopening of one of the city's best-loved landmarks, the Tinside Lido, in 2003.

History

The city's position at the mouth of the Plym and Tamar estuaries made it an ideal location for a naval base. During the 15th and 16th centuries, most of the British naval fleet was stationed here; the royal dockyard was established at Devonport beside the River Tamar in 1690 and remains an important naval base.

The globetrotting hero Sir Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth in 1577 aboard the *Golden Hind*. Eleven years later, Drake played a major part in the defeat of the Spanish Armada, chasing the Spanish fleet all the way to Calais and then attacking them with fire ships. Many of the Spanish vessels escaped but were wrecked off the Scottish coast. Total losses: England nil, Spain 51.

Orientation

Plymouth has three main sections. The pedestrianised centre is south of the train station and contains the city's main shopping streets. Further south is the headland Hoe area, packed with guesthouses and B&Bs, and east of the Hoe is the regenerated Barbican area, where you'll find the best places to eat and drink.

Information

Hoegate Laundromat (☎ 223031; 55 Notte St; ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat)

Plymouth Internet Café (☎ 221777; 32 Frankfort Gate; per hr £5; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Police station (Charles Cross; ☹ 24hr)

Tourist office (☎ 306330; www.visitplymouth.co.uk; 3-5 The Barbican; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) Housed inside the Plymouth Mayflower building.

University Bookseller (☎ 660428; 42 Drake Circus; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

West Hoe Laundrette (☎ 667373; 1 Pier St;

☹ 9.15am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Sights & Activities**PLYMOUTH HOE**

Francis Drake supposedly spied the Spanish fleet from this grassy headland overlooking Plymouth Sound; the fabled bowling green on which he finished his game was probably where his statue now stands. Later the Hoe became a favoured holiday spot for the Victorian aristocracy, and the headland is backed by an impressive array of multistoreyed villas and once-grand hotels.

The red-and-white-striped lighthouse of **Smeaton's Tower** (The Hoe; admission £2.25; ☹ 10am-4pm daily Apr-Oct, Tue-Sat Nov-Mar) was built on the Eddystone Rocks in 1759, then rebuilt on the Hoe in 1882 when it was replaced by a larger lighthouse. You can climb the 93 steps for great views and an insight into the history of the Eddystone lighthouses.

Plymouth Dome (☎ 603300; The Hoe; admission £4.75; ☹ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) provides an entertaining romp through Plymouth's history, using models and audiovisual shows to explore subjects including Elizabethan life in Plymouth, the Luftwaffe raids and the construction of the Eddystone lighthouses.

BARBICAN

To get an idea of what old Plymouth was like before the Luftwaffe redesigned it, head for the Barbican, with its many Tudor and Jacobean buildings (now converted into galleries, craft shops and restaurants).

The Pilgrim Fathers' *Mayflower* set sail for America from the Barbican on 16 September 1620. At the **Mayflower Steps** a plaque lists the passengers and marks the point of departure. Another famous voyage was led by Captain James Cook, who set out from the Barbican in 1768 in search of a southern continent.

Plymouth Mayflower (☎ 306330; 3-5 The Barbican; admission £4; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is another hi-tech rundown through Plymouth's nautical heritage, providing the background to the Pilgrim Fathers' trip with plenty of interactive gizmos and multisensory displays.

The **Elizabethan House** (☎ 304774; 32 New St; admission £1.25; ☹ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Nov) is the former residence of an Elizabethan sea captain, housing 16th-century furniture and other period artefacts.

Across the harbour from the Barbican and reached by a footbridge, the **National Marine Aquarium** (☎ 220084; The Barbican; www.national-aquarium.co.uk; admission £8.75; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct,

10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is one of the country's top aquariums. The various tanks re-create marine life in a variety of habitats, including coral seas, an Atlantic reef and the deep ocean.

MERCHANT'S HOUSE

Between the Barbican and the centre is the 17th-century **Merchant's House** (☎ 304774; 33 St Andrews St; admission £1.25; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Fri & 10am-5pm Sat year-round, closed 1-2pm Apr-Oct), a Jacobean building featuring models, pictures, local curiosities (including manacles and truncheons) and replicas of a Victorian school room and apothecary's shop.

CITY MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Near the university is the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 304774; Drake Circus; admission free; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat), hosting collections of local history, porcelain and naval art. The Cottonian Collection includes some significant paintings, prints and etchings by artists including Joshua Reynolds.

BOAT TRIPS

Several boat operators offer cruises from the Barbican to the dockyards and warships (adult return £5), and four-hour cruises up the River Tamar (adult return £7.50) to Calstock. Contact **Plymouth Boat Cruises** (☎ 822797) or **Tamar Cruising** (☎ 822105), both on Phoenix Wharf.

Sleeping

Most of Plymouth's B&Bs are concentrated around the Hoe, especially along Citadel Rd.

Jewell's Hotel (☎ 254760; 220 Citadel Rd; s £25, d £35-55; ☹) This excellent B&B just off the Hoe has a number of tastefully finished rooms spread out over several floors, including some with original Victorian fireplaces and cast-iron beds.

Ashgrove Hotel (☎ 664046; www.ashgrovehotel-plymouth.co.uk; 218 Citadel Rd; s/d £30/40) A simpler option next door to Jewell's, with interior décor that's taken straight from the pages of the British B&B catalogue (think lacy beds, flowery curtains and pine furniture).

Four Seasons Guest House (☎ 223591; www.fourseasonsguesthouse.co.uk; 207 Citadel Rd East; s £30-45, d £45-60; ☹) Slightly further down the hill towards the Barbican, in a small terrace of Victorian houses, this lovely B&B has standard and deluxe rooms all decorated in relaxing shades of mustard and cream, but the highlight is the fantastic breakfast, which includes Scotch pancakes, organic yoghurt and local bacon.

Bowling Green Hotel (☎ 209090; www.bowlinggreenhotel.co.uk; 9-10 Osborne Pl; d from £60; (P) (X)) Ignore the unedifying pebble-dash front – the bedrooms at this five-diamond B&B are some of the nicest in the Hoe, with a welcome absence of floral prints, and views right across Francis' famous bowling green.

Duke of Cornwall Hotel (☎ 275850; www.thedukeofcornwallhotel.com; Millbay Rd; s £94, d £104-160) With one of the most striking edifices in Plymouth, a grand turret-topped pile dotted with balconies and Gothic gables, this is undoubtedly the most luxurious place to stay in town. The rooms are massive, if a touch old-fashioned; if you can afford it the four-poster suite, complete with champagne and complimentary fruit basket, is definitely the one to choose.

Other recommendations:

Berkeleys of St James (☎ 221654; www.onthehoe.co.uk; 4 St James Pl East; s £35, d £50-55; (X)) Reliable B&B distinguished by its organic breakfasts.

Adelphi Hotel (☎ 225520; 59 Citadel Rd; s/d £40/50; (P) (X)) Old sea-captain's residence with a guest lounge and bog-standard B&B rooms.

Eating

Terrace (☎ 603533; Madeira Rd; lunch £3-6; (V) breakfast & lunch) Tucked away beside the Tinside Lido, this bright and breezy café has the best location of any eatery in town, with sweeping views across Plymouth Sound and a selection of sandwiches, coffees and generous jacket potatoes.

Café Incognito (☎ 265999; 92 North Hill; lunch £3-6; (V) 8am-8pm) If you're after a light bite or an

SWIMMING IN STYLE

Downhill from the Hoe is the **Tinside Lido** (☎ 0870 300 0042; (V) noon-6pm during school holidays, 10am-6pm May-Sep), an outdoor saltwater pool built in classic Art Deco style, first opened to the public in 1935. During the Lido's heyday in the '40s and '50s, thousands of Plymouthians flocked to the pool on summer days (backed by the soothing strains of a string orchestra), and during the war it made the perfect place to cool off after cleaning up the rubble from the city's bomb-ravaged streets. On one memorable occasion, some 3000 people took to the water in a very un-British display of high spirits. Sadly, package holidays took their toll on the Lido in the '70s and '80s, and the pool fell into disrepair, finally closing in 1992. It's since been restored to its former glory thanks to a hefty £3.4m investment by the city council and local benefactors, and it's packed throughout summer with school kids and sun-worshippers; sadly, though, there's no sign of the string orchestra returning just yet.

all-day brekkie, head for the sunny Incognito, with a showcase of local art on the walls and all the café classics – baguettes, tortilla wraps and paninis.

Harbour Seafood & Pasta (☎ 260717; 10 Quay Rd; mains £8-16; (V) lunch & dinner) A cosy pasta and fish joint with tables out on the quayside or in the small dining room, serving sumptuous pasta and probably the best seafood in the Barbican.

Cuisine Spontanée (☎ 673757; Century Quay; mains £10-18; (V) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The gastronomic equivalent of a mix-and-match sweetshop – choose your ingredients (meat, fish or veg) and an accompanying sauce (Thai, Chinese, Mexican) and watch the chef put them together at your table.

Tanners Restaurant (☎ 252001; www.tannersrestaurant.com; Finewell St; 2-/3-course dinner £24/30; (V) lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Housed in the city's oldest building, a merchant's mansion built in 1498, Plymouth's most renowned fine-dining restaurant is run by the Tanner brothers, who've made a name for themselves reinventing classic British and French dishes with their own individual twist.

Drinking

Plymouth has a buzzing nightlife, but the main club strip, Union St, has a reputation for trouble at kicking-out time. The area around the Barbican is wall-to-wall pubs and bars.

Bar Rakuda (☎ 221155; 11 Quay Rd; (V) 9am-11pm) One of the best quayside bars, ideal for a morning latté, a lunchtime mocha or a cocktail jing when the sun goes down.

Ship (☎ 667604; Quay Rd) Just along the quay, this historical tavern is another popular boozier in the Barbican, with plenty of real ales and pub grub.

Entertainment

BARS & NIGHTCLUBS

Barbican Jazz Café (☎ 672127; 11 The Parade; admission Fri & Sat £2; (V) noon-2am Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Nightly jazz and guest DJs keep the crowd happy at this barrel-vaulted club beside the quay.

Quay Club (☎ 224144; 11 The Parade; (V) 10am-2pm) Next door to the Jazz Café, this cavernous club is a favourite with Plymouth's night owls, with drum'n'bass on Monday, jazz and soul on Wednesday and chart and cheese on Friday and Saturday.

B-Bar (☎ 242021; Castle St) The in-house café-bar of the Barbican Theatre, B-Bar hosts live music, DJs, cabaret and comedy.

THEATRES & CINEMAS

Theatre Royal (☎ 267222; www.theatreroyal.com; Royal Pde) Plymouth's main theatre puts on large-scale touring productions, while its Drum Theatre stages fringe plays.

Plymouth Pavilions (☎ 229922; www.plymouthpavilions.com; Millbay Rd) Plymouth's main venue for theatre and comedy, hosting everything from the League of Gentlemen to the Flaming Lips.

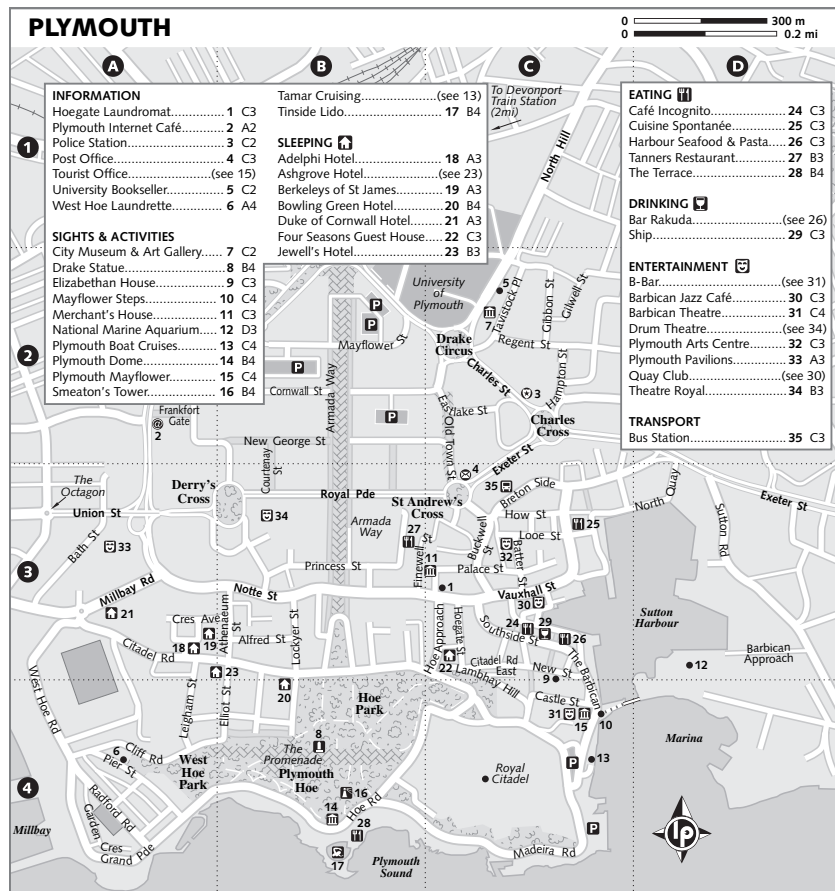
Barbican Theatre (☎ 267131; www.barbicantheatre.co.uk; Castle St) An innovative arts theatre with regular dance and theatre, and photographic exhibitions in the downstairs café.

Plymouth Arts Centre (☎ 206114; www.plymoutharts.org.uk; 38 Looe St) An excellent indie cinema and gallery, with a recently overhauled veggie restaurant and bar.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Bus X38 runs to Exeter (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Sunday); bus 82 runs twice daily at weekends to Plymouth via Moretonhampstead, Postbridge and Princetown on



Dartmoor. Bus X80 runs every half-hour to Torquay (1¼ hours) via Totnes (one hour 10 minutes) from Monday to Saturday, and hourly on Sunday.

National Express runs regular coaches to Birmingham (£41, 5½ hours, four daily), Bristol (£24.50, three hours, four daily), London (£27.50, five to six hours, eight daily) and Penzance (£6.50, 3¼ hours, seven daily).

TRAIN

Services run to London (£63, 3½ hours, half-hourly), Bristol (£44, two hours, two or three per hour), Exeter (£11.60, one hour, two or three per hour) and Penzance (£11.60, two hours, half-hourly).

AROUND PLYMOUTH Buckland Abbey

Originally a Cistercian monastery and 13th-century abbey church, **Buckland Abbey** (NT; ☎ 01822-853607; Yelverton; admission £7; ☞ 10.30am-5.30pm Fri-Wed mid-Mar-Oct, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-mid-Mar) was transformed into a family residence by Sir Richard Grenville and bought in 1581 by his cousin and nautical rival Sir Francis Drake. Exhibitions on its history feature Drake's Drum, said to beat by itself when Britain is in danger of being invaded. There's also a fine Elizabethan garden.

Buckland is 11 miles north of Plymouth. Take buses 83, 84 or 86 (40 minutes, every 30 minutes) to Yelverton, then bus 55 (10 minutes, hourly) to Buckland Abbey.

NORTH DEVON

The north Devon coastline is markedly different to its southern cousin; altogether more rugged and rather less touristy, with some great beaches, pretty seaside towns and excellent surf breaks.

Braunton & Croyde

☎ 01271 / pop 8319

Croyde Bay and the nearby beach at Saunton Sands are Devon's most popular surfing spots, with a clutch of good camp sites, B&Bs and pubs. Check out the Croyde Surf Club website (www.croydesurfclub.com) for webcam shots from all the area's main breaks.

Braunton is the centre for surf shops and board hire. The **tourist office** (☎ 816400; brauntontic@visit.org.uk; Bakehouse Centre; ☞ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) provides information and also houses a small local museum.

Croyde has numerous surf-hire shops, charging around £15 per day for board and wetsuit: try **Le Sport** (☎ 890147; Hobbs Hill; ☞ 9am-9pm Apr-Sep) or **Redwood Surf Hire** (☎ 890999; Down End car park). For lessons, contact **Surfing Croyde Bay** (☎ 891200; www.surfingcroydebay.co.uk) or **Surf South West** (☎ 890400; www.surfsouthwest.com; per half/full day £25/45), both accredited by the British Surfing Association (BSA).

SLEEPING & EATING

Camp sites are plentiful but you should still book ahead.

Bay View Farm (☎ 890501; www.bayviewfarm.co.uk; sites from £15) On the road from Braunton, this is one of the area's best camp sites, with laundry and showers onsite.

Mitchum's Campsites (☎ 890233; www.croydebay.co.uk) There are two locations, one in Croyde village and one by the beach, but they're only open on certain weekends in summer, so phone ahead.

Chapel Farm (☎ 890429; www.chapelfarmcroyde.co.uk; Hobbs Hill; r £44-56; ☎ ☞) A lovely old thatched farmhouse with beamed rooms, rustic furniture and an inglenook fireplace; there's also self-catering in the old smithy behind the house.

Thatch (☎ 890349; www.thethatch.com; 14 Hobbs Hill; d £50-60) Legendary among surfers for its great pub atmosphere and hearty food; the upstairs rooms are fine, but the nightlife can get a little rowdy.

Billy Budd's (☎ 890606; Hobbs Hill; mains £4-10) Another popular surfer's hang-out, serving jacket potatoes, chilli, nachos and huge sandwiches, as well as more substantial main meals and local ales.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 308 runs from Barnstaple (40 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

Ilfracombe

☎ 01271 / pop 12,430

Strung out along a grand seafront promenade backed by a string of Edwardian villas and budget B&Bs, the coastal town of Ilfracombe has been attracting tourists since before Queen Victoria was on the throne, and it's still a favourite destination for holidaying Brits looking for a spot of bracing sea air and summer sunshine. Chic it certainly isn't, but Ilfracombe makes an attractive spot to sample the peculiar charms of the British seaside – candy floss, cloudy days, chip wrappers and all. There are small beaches

along the grassy headland of Hillsborough, but the best sand is 5 miles west at Woolacombe; the little cove of Lee Bay around the headland is also worth seeking out.

The **tourist office** (☎ 863001; www.ilfracombe-tourism.co.uk; The Landmark, The Seafront; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, longer hours in summer) is housed inside the twin-towered Landmark Theatre.

SLEEPING

Ocean Backpackers (☎ 867835; www.oceanbackpackers.co.uk; 29 St James Pl; dm £9-12) A well-run backpacker's in a large house near the seafront, with smallish dorms and a chaotic kitchen; the owners can help organise local activities including surfing, kayaking and even archery.

Norbury House Hotel (☎ 863888; Torrs Park; d £60-78; ☎ ☞) For something altogether more up-to-date, head for this delightful town-house hotel, where contemporary styling (low-level beds, abstract art and bathroom murals) meets the venerable architecture of a former Victorian gentleman's residence.

Beechwood Hotel (☎ 863800; www.beechwoodhotel.co.uk; Torrs Park; d £76-90; ☎ ☞) A handsome detached house with lovely private gardens filled with tall trees and rhododendrons, offering pleasant if slightly spartan rooms, some of which overlook the town and seashore.

Elmfield Hotel (☎ 863377; Torrs Park; www.elmfieldhotellfracombe.co.uk; d from £84; ☎ ☞) The pick of Ilfracombe's hotels is this elegant detached pile, set in an acre of private grounds and decorated in endearingly old-fashioned style with lots of polished wood and well-worn furniture. The indoor heated swimming pool justifies staying here even if the rooms aren't quite to your taste.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 3 and 30 (40 minutes, every half-hour Monday to Friday, hourly Sunday) run to Barnstaple. Bus 300 heads to Lynton (one hour) and Minehead (two hours) three times daily.

Clovelly

☎ 01237 / pop 452

Cliff-top villages don't come more picturesque than Clovelly, which seems to have been stuck in a time warp since the middle of the 19th century. A tangle of cob cottages and slate roofs tumbling down the side of a practically sheer cliff, Clovelly was once one of the busiest fishing harbours on the north Devon coast. The

cobbled main street leads all the way uphill from the quay, and once clattered with the sound of donkeys drawing sledges filled with the daily catch. Charles Kingsley, author of the children's classic *The Water Babies*, spent much of his early life in Clovelly (his father was parish rector from 1830 to 1836), and it's still possible to visit his former house, as well as an old fisherman's cottage and the village's twin chapels.

Entry to the privately owned village is via the **visitor centre** (☎ 431781; admission £4.75), where there's a short film about the history of the village and a tearoom and shops. From Easter to October, Land Rovers regularly ferry visitors up and down the slope for £2 between 10am and 5.45pm.

Bus 319 runs five times daily to Bideford (40 minutes) and Barnstaple (one hour).

Hartland Abbey

This 12th-century **monastery-turned-stately-home** (☎ 01237-441264; www.hartlandabbey.com; admission £7; ☞ 2-5.30pm Wed, Thu & Sun Apr-Oct, plus Tue Jul & Aug) was another post-Dissolution handout, given to the sergeant of Henry VIII's wine cellar in 1539. It boasts some fascinating murals, ancient documents, paintings by English masters, Victorian photos, as well as marvelous gardens.

Hartland Abbey is 15 miles west of Bideford, off the A39 between Hartland and Hartland Quay.

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK

After spending a few days exploring the gentle coastline of south Devon, Dartmoor comes as something of a shock to the senses. The largest stretch of open moorland in the southwest, Dartmoor covers an area of 365 sq miles between Plymouth and Exeter, stretching for around 22 miles between Yelverton in the east and Dunsford in the west. It's a stark, wild and bleakly beautiful place, dotted with granite-topped hills, marshy bogs and patches of purple heather, as well as many weirdly shaped tors – rock pillars sculpted into strange forms by the wind and weather.

Dartmoor is named after the River Dart, which has its source here; the West and East Dart merge at Dartmeet. Most of the park is around 600m high – the highest spot is High Willhays (621m) near Okehampton. About 40% of Dartmoor is common land but 15% (the northwestern section, including High Willhays and Yes Tor) is leased to the Ministry



of Defence (MOD) and is closed for firing practice for part of the year.

Dartmoor encloses some of the wildest, bleakest country in England: suitable terrain for *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (one of Sherlock Holmes' more notorious foes). The landscape and weather can make this an extremely eerie place; try not to think of *An American Werewolf in London* on a dark, foggy night. With its forbidding landscape and scattered prehistoric remains, it's magnificent walking country, but bring a good map: it's easy to get lost, particularly when the mist rolls in.

Orientation

Dartmoor is 6 miles from Exeter and 7 miles from Plymouth. The B3212 cuts right across

the centre of the moor, passing through the tiny villages of Two Bridges, Postbridge and Moretonhampstead. A number of small market towns and villages, including Ashburton, Buckfastleigh, Tavistock and Okehampton, ring the outer edge of the moor. Most of the villages and sights are on the eastern side; the western part is mainly frequented by serious walkers (and MOD artillery).

Information

The **National Park Authority** (NPA; www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk) runs the main High Moorland Visitors Centre in Princetown (p312), as well as smaller visitor centres at **Haytor** (☎ 01364-661520), **Postbridge** (☎ 01822-880272) and **Newbridge** (☎ 01364-631303). The centres

are generally open from 10am to 5pm daily, April to October.

The free *Dartmoor Visitor* newspaper is published annually and is packed with useful info. The centres also stock walking guides, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, and leaflets on hiking, horse riding, cycling and lots of other activities.

The **Dartmoor Tourist Association** (www.discoverdartmoor.co.uk) is another useful information resource.

Don't feed the miniature Dartmoor ponies as this encourages them to move dangerously near to the roads.

Activities

CANOEOING

Canoeing is possible during the winter months on several of Dartmoor's rivers. The British Canoeing Union operates a permit system for the River Dart; visit www.dartaccess.co.uk for further information.

CLIMBING

Popular climbing areas are at Haytor, owned by the NPA, and the Dewerstone near Shaugh Prior, owned by the National Trust. Groups need to book in advance. Ask at a national park visitor centre or tourist office for details.

CYCLING

Cycling is only allowed on public roads, by-ways, public bridlepaths and Forestry Commission roads. There are a couple of marked cycling routes around the moor, including the **Plym Valley Cycle Way** along the disused Great Western Railway between Plymouth and Yelverton, and the **Dartmoor Way**, a 90-mile circular cycling route through Okehampton, Chagford, Buckfastleigh, Princetown and Tavistock.

The best place for bike hire is **Devon Cycle Hire** (☎ 01837-861141; www.devoncyclehire.co.uk; Sourton Down, near Okehampton; bikes per day £12), which is handily situated along the Granite Way. Alternatively try **Okehampton Cycles** (☎ 01837-53248; North Rd, Okehampton).

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

There are lots of places to get in the saddle around Dartmoor. *Dartmoor Visitor* has full details. Prices start at around £18 per hour for half-day rides.

Babeny Farm Riding Stable (☎ 01364-631296; Poundsgate)

Dartmoor Riding Centre (☎ 01364-73266; Cheston)
Shilstone Rocks Riding Centre (☎ 01364-621281; www.dartmoor-riding.com; Widecombe-in-the-Moor)

WALKING

Walking is the main activity on Dartmoor. There are some 730 miles of public footpaths and bridleways to discover, and following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in 2005, much of the rest of the moor is now open to enthusiastic ramblers. Waymarked walking routes include the **Abbot's Way**, an ancient 14-mile route from Buckfast to Princetown, and the **West Devon Way**, a 14-mile hike between Tavistock and Okehampton.

Organised walks exploring the area's wildlife, archaeology and folklore start from various points around the park, guided by volunteer Dartmoor rangers. Contact the **High Moorland Visitors Centre** (☎ 01822-890414) for itineraries. Prices for the walks range from around £4 to £8; bus travellers can join walks free of charge.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping rough on Dartmoor is generally allowed, but it's better for the park if you stick to designated camp sites. Many farms and hostels provide space for campers. There are also several camping barns around the park, including six run by the YHA. Cooking and shower facilities and a wood burner are provided, but only a few barns have bunk beds. For bookings, phone ☎ 01200-420102, or visit www.yha.org.uk.

For a little more comfort, there are excellent YHA hostels at Postbridge (Bellever) and Steps Bridge, as well as Okehampton, Exeter and Dartington. B&Bs and country hotels are dotted around most towns and villages around the moor.

WARNING

Much of the northwest corner of Dartmoor is owned by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and is regularly used for artillery practice. The areas are marked by red-and-white posts and notice boards at the main approaches; red flags (red lights at night) denote live firing is in progress. Firing schedules are available from the **MOD** (☎ 0800 458 4868), the National Park Authority and tourist offices.

DARTMOOR HIKES

The **Templer Way** is an 18-mile hike from Teignmouth to Haytor, following the route originally used to transport Dartmoor granite down to the docks.

The **Two Moors Way** is a longer option, running from Ivybridge, on the southern edge of Dartmoor, 103 miles across Dartmoor and Exmoor to Lynmouth on the north Devon coast.

The **Dartmoor Way** is a 90-mile circular route, stretching from Buckfastleigh in the south, through Moretonhampstead, northwest to Okehampton and south through Lydford to Tavistock. The *Dartmoor Way* pack (£7.95) includes a book and 1:25,000 scale map, and is available from tourist offices and NPA centres. For further information, call ☎ 0870 241 1817 or check www.dartmoorway.org.uk.

The **Tarka Trail** circles north Devon and links with Dartmoor, south of Okehampton; *The Tarka Trail: A Walkers' Guide* can be purchased for £6.45.

It's always wise to carry a map, compass and rain gear since the weather can change very quickly and not all walks are waymarked. OS Explorer Map No 28 (1:50,000; £6.99) is the most comprehensive map, showing the park boundaries and MOD firing-range areas.

The **Dartmoor Tourist Association** (☎ 01822-890567; www.discoverdartmoor.com; High Moor Visitors Centre, Princetown) produces an annual *Dartmoor Guide* with full accommodation listings.

Getting There & Around

The *Discovery Guide to Dartmoor*, available free from most Devon tourist offices and NPA offices, has full details of bus and train services around the park. There are scheduled buses to various points around the park from Totnes, Exeter, Plymouth and Okehampton. The most useful bus is 82, the Transmoor Link, running between Exeter and Plymouth via Moretonhampstead, Warren House Inn, Postbridge, Princetown and Yelverton (three daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

The Dartmoor Sunday Rover ticket (adult £5, June to September) entitles you to unlimited travel on most bus routes, and to train travel on the Tamar Valley Line from Plymouth to Gunnislake. Buy your ticket from bus drivers or at Plymouth train station.

The only main-line train station within easy reach of the park is Okehampton; see p315 for train details.

Princetown

☎ 01822

Perched on a bleak rise of moorland 8 miles east of Tavistock, Princetown is England's highest town, but it's best known as the location of one of Britain's most infamous high-security prisons. The gloomy granite form of **Dartmoor Prison**, built in 1809 to house French and American prisoners of war, looms omi-

nously over the northern edge of town. It's far from the most beautiful spot on Dartmoor, but Princetown's central location makes it a good base for walking.

If you're after an unusual souvenir, the **Dartmoor Prison Museum** (☎ 890305; www.dartmoor-prison.co.uk; admission £2; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat) sells craftwork (mainly benches and garden gnomes) whittled into shape by current prisoners; the museum itself offers an insight into the gaol's early days.

The **High Moorland Visitors Centre** (☎ 890414; hmvc@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk; Old Duchy Hotel; ☎ 10am-5pm) has displays on Dartmoor and an information centre that stocks maps, guides and books. The visitor centre started life as Princetown's main hotel, where Arthur Conan Doyle began his classic Dartmoor tale *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

There's no great reason to stay in Princetown, but there are a couple of pleasant inns serving stout pub grub; try the **Railway Inn** (☎ 890232; Two Bridges Rd) or the **Plume of Feathers** (☎ 890240; The Square), which also has a camping barn and a few unspectacular rooms.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 82 (the Transmoor Link) runs to Princetown from Exeter (one hour, 40 minutes) and Plymouth (50 minutes).

Postbridge

☎ 01822

There's not much to the tiny village of Postbridge apart from a couple of shops, pubs and whitewashed houses. It's best known for its 13th-century **clapper bridge** across the East

Dart, made of large granite slabs supported by stone pillars.

From April to October, there's an **NPA centre** (☎ 880272) in the car park. There's also a post office and shop in the village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Runnage Farm (☎ 880222; www.runnagecampingbarns.com; camping from £5, bunk-beds £6.50-10) This farm has two YHA camping barns, space for camping, and mountain-bike hire. Take the small road off the B3212 towards Moretonhampstead just after Postbridge.

Bellever YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5692; bellever@yha.org.uk; dm £14; ☎ Mar-Oct) Formerly part of a duchy farm, this cosy walker's hostel is located a mile south of Postbridge, with dorm-only rooms and a small restaurant. Bus 98 runs from Tavistock (40 minutes, daily Monday to Saturday) and Princetown (20 minutes).

Two Bridges Hotel (☎ 892309; www.twobridges.co.uk; r£65-90; (P) ☎) A few miles west in the hamlet of Two Bridges, this venerable country hotel offers three categories of accommodation, ranging from standard en suites to premier bedrooms complete with four-poster beds, spa baths and burnished wood furniture. For something extra special, ask for Vivien Leigh's favourite suite.

Warren House Inn (☎ 880208; mains £6-12) Championing itself as Dartmoor's remotest pub, this isolated inn certainly feels a long way from the outside world, surrounded by rolling moorland and warmed by a fire that's allegedly been burning since 1845.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 82 runs through Postbridge between Plymouth (one hour) and Exeter (1½ hours).

Widcombe-in-the-Moor

☎ 01364

One of the prettiest villages on the moor is Widcombe, centred around a charming green shaded by majestic oaks and a 14th-century granite church (known as the Cathedral in the Moor). The village is commemorated in the traditional English folk song 'Widdicombe Fair'; the fair still takes place here on the second Tuesday of September.

There's a visitor information point at Sexton's Cottage, adjacent to the Church House. Built in 1537 as a brew house, the Church House is now the village hall.

SLEEPING & EATING

Cockingford Farm Campsite (☎ 621258; sites £3-8; ☎ mid-Mar-Nov) This camp site is around 1.5 miles south of Widcombe.

Dartmoor Expedition Centre (☎ 621249; www.dartmoorbase.co.uk; bunkhouse £9.50, loft r £11.50) This outdoor activities centre offers bunk beds in a comfortable converted barn, and organises orienteering, canoeing, walking and climbing trips.

Lower Blackaton (☎ 621369; www.lowerblackaton.co.uk; d from £40; (P) ☎) This traditional 17th-century granite longhouse is 3 miles from Widcombe in a commanding position overlooking wild moorland. The five bedrooms have been carefully converted to preserve the house's traditional character, and there's an Aga-equipped kitchen and a well-stocked library.

Higher Venton Farm (☎ 621235; www.ventonfarm.com; tw/d £44/48; ☎) Half a mile from the village centre, this delightful 15th-century thatched farmhouse sits at the centre of 45 acres of working farmland and offers three rustic, oak-beamed bedrooms; as you'd expect, the home-cooked breakfasts are superb.

Old Inn (☎ 621207; mains £5-12) The heart of village life for three centuries and still going strong, this fine old country inn serves hearty meals and great beer.

Rugglesstone Inn (☎ 621327; mains from £5) Just downhill from the village centre, this flower-covered pub has a homely main bar and an outside terrace peacefully placed beside a rushing brook.

WORTH THE TRIP

Holne Chase Hotel (☎ 01364-631471; www.holne-chase.co.uk; Tavistock Rd; d £160-180, ste £200-210; dinner £35; (P) ☎) Hidden away in a beautiful wooded valley above the River Dart, this is arguably the finest of the country house hotels on Dartmoor. Built as a hunting lodge for nearby Buckfast Abbey, the grand gabled house commands sweeping views across private parkland, and is decorated with the style and sophistication you'd expect from a top-notch hotel: antique furniture, opulent fireplaces and effortlessly chic furnishings are dotted throughout the bedrooms and public lounges, and there are several 'stable suites' housed in a cluster of detached cottages beside the main hotel. One to remember.

PREHISTORIC DARTMOOR

The first settlers arrived on Dartmoor somewhere around 12,000 years ago, after the end of the last ice age. The moor looked very different then; it was almost entirely covered by trees, providing a rich source of food, fuel and natural shelter. Evidence of these early settlers is dotted all over Dartmoor; over 1500 cairns and burial chambers have been discovered and the area has more ceremonial rows and stone circles than anywhere else in Britain. The **Grey Wethers** stone circles stand side by side on a stretch of open moor halfway between Chagford and Postbridge, about half a kilometre from another stone circle near **Fernworthy**. **Scorhill** stone circle, near Gidleigh, is sometimes called the Stonehenge of Dartmoor, although only half of the original stones remain. Another intriguing site is at **Merrivale**, on the main road from Princetown to Tavistock, where you'll find several stone rows and standing stones, as well as a small ceremonial circle and the remains of several stone huts. But the most impressive site is the Bronze Age village of **Grimspound**, just off the B3212, where you can still see the remains of the circular stone wall that once surrounded the village, and the ruins of several granite round houses.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 272 stops at Widecombe from Tavistock (one hour 20 minutes, two daily) travelling via Princetown and Two Bridges en route. The afternoon bus continues to Totnes. Bus 274 travels from Okehampton (1¼ hours, three on Sunday) via Moretonhampstead. Several other buses stop at Widecombe on Sunday only as part of the Sunday Rover scheme.

Moretonhampstead

☎ 01647

The small market town of Moretonhampstead stands at an old crossroads where two of the main routes across Dartmoor meet, and makes a handy base for exploring the eastern moor.

SLEEPING & EATING

Steps Bridge YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6048; dm adult £11; ☹ Apr-Sep) A typically efficient chalet-style YHA hostel, about 4.5 miles east of Moretonhampstead along the B3212. Buses 82 and 359 run to Moretonhampstead (15 minutes) and Exeter (40 minutes).

Sparrowhawk Backpackers (☎ 440318; www.sparrowhawkbackpackers.co.uk; 45 Ford St; dm £13, r £30) This welcoming, environmentally friendly backpacker's offers dorm beds in a smartly converted stone stable, solar-heated showers and an excellent veggie kitchen – you can even order your organic veg supplies in advance.

Moorcote Guest House (☎ 440966; www.moorcotehouse.co.uk; s £38, d £48; ☎ ☹) This elegant double-gabled Victorian house is surrounded by grassy gardens, set back slightly from the main road. The rooms are plain and pleasant, though not all have en suite.

White Hart Hotel (☎ 441340; The Square; s £60-70, d £99-120, mains £8-16; ☎ ☹) Owned by local entrepreneur Peter de Savary, who also runs a super-exclusive country house hotel nearby, this old Dartmoor pub has been renovated in a mix of traditional and modern styles – the restaurant and bar have bags of rough-stoned, wood-beamed charm, while the upstairs rooms are thoroughly up-to-date, with flat-screen TVs, big beds and all the mod cons.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 82 runs twice daily in summer from Moretonhampstead to Princetown (40 minutes), Plymouth (1½ hours) and Exeter (one hour). Bus 359 also goes to Exeter (seven daily Monday to Saturday).

Okehampton

☎ 01837 / pop 7029

Just outside the national park on the main A30 road, Okehampton is the largest town within easy reach of Dartmoor and makes an ideal base for exploring the northern part of the moor. The **tourist office** (☎ 53020; okeitic@visit.org.uk; Museum Courtyard, 3 West St; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct) can help with accommodation and walks.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A Norman motte and ruined keep is all that remains of Devon's largest **castle** (EH; ☎ 52844; admission £3; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug); a free audio guide fills in the missing parts.

It's a pleasant three- to four-hour walk along the Tarka Trail from Okehampton to Sticklepath, where the **Finch Foundry** (NT; ☎ 840046; admission £3.70; ☹ 11am-5.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct) has three working water wheels.

SLEEPING

Okehampton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5978; www.okehampton-yha.co.uk; Klondyke Rd; dm £15.50; ☹ Feb-Nov; ☎ ☹) The YHA's flagship Dartmoor hostel stands on the site of the old Okehampton station and doubles as an outdoor activities centre, complete with its own climbing wall and regular organised adventure trips.

Knole Farm (☎ 861241; www.knolefarm-dartmoor-holidays.co.uk; Bridestowe; d £46-50; ☎ ☹) A fine country B&B inside an imposing stone farmhouse 10 miles west of Okehampton, with three floral rooms named after local landmarks and breathtaking views across the moor from the front garden.

Collaven Manor (☎ 861522; www.collavenmanor.co.uk; Sourton; s £61, d £98-120; ☎ ☹) Nine cosy rooms are squeezed in among the roof beams and solid stone walls of this elegant manor house in the hamlet of Sourton, 5 miles west of Okehampton.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lots of local buses run through Okehampton. Bus X9 runs from Exeter (50 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) via Okehampton to Bude. Bus 179 runs two or three times daily to Chagford (30 minutes) and Moretonhampstead (50 minutes). Extra buses run across the moor on summer Sundays.

The steam **Dartmoor Railway** (☎ 55637; www.dartmoorrailway.co.uk) runs between Okehampton and Meldon (£3.50 single, 10 minutes, two on Tuesday, five to seven on weekends April to October), with extra trains to Sampford Courtenay (£3 single) on some Saturdays. Timetables change regularly; phone for details or check the website.

Connecting trains to Okehampton from Exeter run on certain Sundays in summer.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lydford is best known for the 1.5-mile **Lydford Gorge** (NT; ☎ 820320; admission £5; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10.30am-3pm Nov-Mar). An attractive but strenuous riverside walk leads to the 28m-high White Lady waterfall past a series of bubbling whirlpools, including the Devil's Cauldron. Alternatively, you can drive to the car park at the other end of the track, near the waterfall itself.

CORNWALL

The former poet laureate John Betjeman once referred to Cornwall as another country, not just another county, and he was dead right – the ancient land of Kernow has long nurtured a sense of distance from the rest of Britain, with its own customs, traditions and distinctive Celtic culture. Cornwall even boasted its own language – Kernewek, a Celtic tongue related to Breton and Welsh – and although the last native speaker died in 1874, the language is currently undergoing a mini-renaissance, along with many other aspects of traditional Cornish culture. While the traditional industries of fishing, farming and tin-mining have long been in decline, tourism in Cornwall is booming and the county is currently reinventing itself as a haven for culture and the arts, with a clutch of world-class attractions such as the Eden Project and the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth.

Orientation & Information

Cornwall is just over 50 miles wide at its broadest, near the Devon border, and it's only 77 miles from Penzance to Plymouth, just across the Tamar from Cornwall, so you're never far from the coast and the main attractions.

The county is divided into several districts, most of which publish handy brochures with accommodation listings. **Visit Cornwall** (☎ 01872-322900; www.visitcornwall.co.uk), otherwise known as the Cornwall Tourist Board, is the main point of contact, and can provide you with information on subjects ranging from Cornish cuisine to cycling trails and adventure sports.

For the low-down on all the latest events and arts exhibitions, check out the comprehensive listings at www.seencornwall.com.

Getting Around

Most of Cornwall's main bus, train and ferry timetables are collected into one handy brochure (available free from bus stations and tourist offices).

BUS

The main bus operator in Cornwall is **First** (☎ 0845 600 1420; www.firstgroup.com). The FirstDay ticket (£6) offers unlimited travel on its bus networks for 24 hours, it's also available in weekly (£28) and monthly (£80) versions.

CAMPER CAPERS

Want to tour the southwest in style? Then you'll need your own vintage VW campervan, complete with grill, fridge, crockery, cutlery, four bunk beds and the kitchen sink. Contact **O'Connor's Campers** (☎ 01837-659599; www.oconnorscampers.co.uk) in Okehampton or **Kernow Kampers** (☎ 01637-830027; www.kernowcampers.co.uk) near Newquay. Prices start from around £375 per week; surfboards and sunglasses not included.

was completed in 1910, the first new cathedral to be built in England since St Paul's. Today, little evidence remains of Truro's industrial heyday, but the city still makes a good base, with a selection of shops, galleries and restaurants and Cornwall's main museum.

Information

Library (☎ 279205; Union Pl; internet access per hr £3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat)
Post office (High Cross; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
Tourist office (☎ 274555; tic@truro.gov.uk; Boscawen St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat).

Sights

The **Royal Cornwall Museum** (☎ 272205; www.royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk; River St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is the county's oldest museum and has some excellent displays exploring the county's industrial and archaeological past. There are also temporary exhibitions of art, photography and local craft.

Built on the site of a 16th-century parish church in soaring Gothic Revival style, **Truro Cathedral** (☎ 276782; www.trurocathedral.org.uk; High Cross; suggested donation £4) contains an impressive high-vaulted nave, some fine Victorian stained glass and the world-famous Father Willis Organ.

The **Lemon Street Market** (Lemon St) houses craft shops, cafés, delicatessens and an upstairs art gallery. There are several excellent art galleries around town, including the upmarket **Lemon Street Gallery** (☎ 275757; 13 Lemon St; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Guided tours (☎ 271257; blue.badge@kernow.net; adult/child £3/1.50) of the town depart from the tourist office at 11am every Wednesday.

Sleeping

Carlton Hotel (☎ 223938; www.carltonhotel.co.uk; 49 Falmouth Rd; s £40-47.50, d £57.50-65; (P) ☎) This excellent-value B&B just up the main hill from the city centre makes a great base for exploring Truro and further afield, with a range of simply finished rooms inside the gabled town house. Little luxuries include a sauna, Jacuzzi and cycle storage.

Royal Hotel (☎ 270345; www.royalhotelcornwall.co.uk; Lemon St; s £69, d £90-115; (P) ☎) In the heart of the city, the Georgian-fronted Royal Hotel is the top place to stay in town, with 35 bold, bright bedrooms, each with a slightly different character (the best is the loft-style room, number 39). For something even more stylish,

check out the super-sleek 'aparthotels' just behind the main building, which come with dishwashers, galley kitchens and contemporary workspaces.

Alverton Manor (☎ 276633; reception@alvertonmanor.co.uk; Tregolls Rd; s £80, d £95-180; (P) ☎) Just outside the town centre, this grand hotel, housed in a former convent and surrounded by landscaped grounds, makes a luxurious place to stay. There's a selection of country-style rooms, ranging from standard singles to spacious suites – make sure you bag one with a garden view.

Other recommendations:

Fieldings (☎ 262783; www.fieldingsintruro.com; 35 Treyew Rd; s/d £18/32) Pleasant Edwardian house run by a local couple, with great city views.

Townhouse (☎ 277374; www.trurotownhouse.com; 20 Falmouth Rd; s £45, d £65-75; (P) ☎) City-style B&B with pleasant rooms, guest kitchen and a buffet breakfast.

Eating

Xen Noodle Bar (☎ 222998; 47-49 Calenick St; mains £4-8; ☎ lunch & dinner) This reliable noodle bar brings out the best from Chinese standards without overdosing on the MSG.

Saffron (☎ 263771; Quay St; mains £8-15; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) For something more intimate, you can't do better than this tiny backstreet brasserie – local produce and fish dishes always feature heavily on the ever-changing menu.

Mannings Restaurant (☎ 247900; www.trurores.taurants.co.uk; mains £12-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) The restaurant at the Royal Hotel is one of the town's busiest eating places. Cocktails and beers are served in the foyer bar, and the main restaurant menu takes in everything from fresh fish to blackened chicken and Mexican fajitas.

Stingi Lulu's (☎ 262300; River St; mains £14-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) A funky, buzzy restaurant next door to the museum, with eclectic Eastern-themed décor and a menu that ranges through Thai, Japanese and Indonesian flavours.

Drinking

Indaba (☎ 274700; Tabernacle St) If you like plate glass and chrome pipes with your pints, then head for this award-winning industrial-style café just off Lemon Quay.

Kasbah (☎ 272276; 3 Quay St) This vaguely Eastern wine bar is always stuffed to the gunnels with 30-something boozers at the weekend, so it's hardly surprising that it's expanded into the old teashop next door.

MI Bar (☎ 277214; Lemon Quay) This metropolitan-style bar boasts a modern ambience and guest DJs on weekends.

Old Ale House (☎ 271122; Quay St) There are plenty of pubs around town, but this old-fashioned ale den is the best of the bunch – pick your poison from the daily ale blackboard, find a handy nook, and settle in for the night.

Heron (☎ 272773; Malpas; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Sat, 7-10.30pm Sun) Two miles from the city along the river estuary, in the tiny village of Malpas, this creekside pub serves good beer and excellent pub grub.

Entertainment

Hall for Cornwall (☎ 262466; www.hallforcornwall.co.uk; Lemon Quay) The county's main venue for touring theatre and music, housed in Truro's former town hall on Lemon Quay.

Plaza Cinema (☎ 272894; www.wtvcinemas.co.uk; Lemon St) A four-screen cinema showing mainly mainstream releases.

Getting There & Away BUS

There are direct National Express coaches to London Victoria (£35.50, 7½ hours, four daily), and local buses to destinations across the county. Bus 18 (1½ hours, hourly) travels to Penzance via Camborne and Redruth, and bus 14 (1½ hours, hourly) travels to St Ives; lots of services travel to Falmouth and Newquay. Buses leave from the bus station just off Lemon Quay.

TRAIN

Truro is on the main line between London Paddington (£102.50, 4½ to five hours, hourly)

WORTH THE TRIP

At the head of the Fal estuary, 4 miles south of Truro, **Trelissick Garden** (NT; ☎ 01872-862090; Feock; admission £5.50; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Feb-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Dec) is one of Cornwall's most beautiful landscaped gardens, with several tiered terraces covered in magnolias, rhododendrons and hydrangeas. A lovely walk runs all the way from the main garden along the river to the estate's private beach.

The Truronian T16 bus runs from Truro (20 minutes, six daily) from Monday to Saturday.

Two of the smaller companies, **Truronian** (☎ 01872-273453; www.truronian.com) and **Western Greyhound** (☎ 01637-871871; www.westerngreyhound.com), also offer handy Day Rover tickets (£5). Many tourist attractions (including the Eden Project) offer discounts if you arrive by bus. For the latest timetables, call ☎ 01872-322003 or visit www.cornwall.gov.uk/buses.

TRAIN

If you're taking the train, phone **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50) for the latest timetables and fares. The main route from London passes through Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Liskeard, Truro and Camborne en route to Penzance; there are also branch lines to St Ives, Falmouth, Newquay and Looe.

The **Cornish Day Ranger** (£10) ticket allows one day's travel on trains after 9.30am Monday to Friday and all weekend. There are also Branch Rover tickets valid on one of the county's spur lines. The **Cornish Railcard** (£10 per year) entitles you to 33% off most train fares in Cornwall.

TRURO

☎ 01872 / pop 17,431

Cornwall's capital city has been at the centre of the county's fortunes for over eight centuries. Truro grew up around a hilltop castle (no longer standing) built by Richard Lucy, a minister of Henry II's, but it was the town's position at the confluence of the Rivers Allen, Kenwyn and Truro that sealed its fortunes (the town's name is thought to derive from the Cornish word *tri-veru*, meaning three rivers). Throughout the Middle Ages, Truro was one of five Stannary towns in Cornwall, where the county's tin and copper was assayed and stamped. The city's three-spired cathedral

and Penzance (£7.10, 45 minutes, hourly). There's a branch line to Falmouth (£3, 20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

SOUTHEAST CORNWALL

Dotted with picturesque fishing villages and patchwork fields, southeast Cornwall offers a much gentler side to the county than the stark, sea-pounded granite cliffs along the northern coast. Carpeted with wildflowers and crisscrossed by hedgerows, this is still working dairy country, where much of Cornwall's famously rich milk and clotted cream is produced.

Looe

☎ 01503 / pop 5280

The twin villages of East and West Looe stand on opposite sides of a broad river estuary, and there's long been a sense of friendly rivalry between the two communities. In previous centuries Looe was a thriving shipyard and fishing port, but these days tourism has taken over as the town's biggest industry. Victorian bathing machines rolled up to the water's edge off **Banjo Pier** throughout the 19th century, and the small beach in East Looe is still a popular spot for sandcastle-building and sunbathing.

The **tourist office** (☎ 262072; www.southeastcornwall.co.uk; Fore St; ☹ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, noon-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Easter) is in the Guildhall.

The **Monkey Sanctuary** (☎ 262532; www.monkey-sanctuary.org; St Martins; admission £5; ☹ 11am-4.30pm Sun-Thu Easter-Sep), a popular attraction half a mile west of Looe, is home to some unfeasibly cute woolly monkeys and a colony of horseshoe bats.

A mile offshore from Hannafore Point is tiny Looe Island, a 22-acre nature reserve established by sisters Babs and Evelyn Atkins, who jointly bought the island in 1965 and lived and worked there for most of their lives. The island is now administered by the Cornwall Wildlife Trust; occasional boat trips travel there in summer from the quay in East Looe. Ask at the tourist office for details.

SLEEPING

Barclay House (☎ 262929; www.barclayhouse.co.uk; St Martins Rd; d £70-90; ☎ ☹ ☒ ☒) This gorgeous detached Victorian villa in 6 acres of private gardens has the best bedrooms in Looe, decorated in graceful shades of peach, pistachio and

aquamarine, and some of the most glorious river views you could possibly wish for.

Trehaven Manor Hotel (☎ 262028; www.trehavenhotels.co.uk; Station Rd; d £80-110; ☎ ☹ ☒ ☒) A grand 19th-century manor house that's been lovingly converted to provide several delightful rooms, all with their own unique touches – some have rolltop baths and cast-iron bedframes, others have small sitting areas and estuary views.

Other recommendations:

Tresco (☎ 265981; www.trescoloe.co.uk; Dawn Rd; r £64-76; ☎ ☹ ☒ ☒) Plush B&B with balcony bedrooms overlooking Hannafore Point.

Beach House (☎ 262598; www.thebeachhouselooe.com; Hannafore Point; d £80-110; ☎ ☹ ☒ ☒) Stunningly situated, contemporary B&B, with rooms named after Cornish beaches.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains travel the scenic Looe Valley Line from Liskeard (£2.50, 30 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday), on the London–Penzance line.

Bus 80A or 81A (four daily, two on Sunday) and bus 72 (two daily Monday to Saturday) from Polperro both stop at Looe en route to Plymouth. Bus 573 from Looe only stops at Polperro on Sunday.

Polperro

Polperro is another ancient fishing village, a picturesque muddle of narrow lanes and fishing cottages set around a tiny harbour, best approached along the coastal path from Looe or Talland. It's always jammed with day-trippers and coach tours in summer, so arrive in the evening or out of season if possible.

Polperro was once heavily involved in pilchard fishing by day and smuggling by night; the small **Heritage Museum** (☎ 01503-272423; The Warren; admission £1; ☹ 10am-6pm Easter-Oct) features some fascinating smuggling memorabilia and tells some interesting tales.

For buses to Polperro see above.

Fowey

☎ 01726 / pop 2273

Nestled on the steep tree-covered hillside overlooking the River Fowey, opposite the old fishing harbour of Polruan, Fowey (pronounced Foy) is a pretty tangle of pale-shaded houses and snaking lanes. It has a long maritime history, and in the 14th century raids on French and Spanish coastal towns were conducted from here. To defend the town

against Spanish raids, Henry VIII constructed **St Catherine's Castle** (EH; admission free), above Ready-money Beach, south of town. The town later prospered by shipping china clay, quarried at the clay pits around St Austell, but the industrial trade has long disappeared and Fowey has now reinvented itself for summertime tourists and second-home-owners.

The **tourist office** (☎ 833616; www.fowey.co.uk; 5 South St; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) shares a building, phone and opening hours with a literary centre devoted to Fowey's most famous resident, the British thriller-writer Daphne du Maurier (1907–89), who lived most of her life in a house at nearby Polridmouth Cove. Every May Fowey hosts the **Daphne du Maurier Literary Festival** (www.dumaurier.org) in her honour.

Fowey is at the southern end of the Saints' Way, a 26-mile waymarked trail running to Padstow on the northern coast. **Ferries** (car/pedestrian £2.30/90p; ☹ in summer last ferry 8.50pm) cross the river to Bodinnick. The 4-mile Hall Walk leads along the river to Polruan, from where you can catch a return ferry to Fowey.

SLEEPING & EATING

Golant YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5832; golant@yha.org.uk; Penquite House; dm £15.50; ☒) This imposing whitewashed Georgian manor house makes a fantastic base in Fowey, with views across the estuary and helpful staff who can organise walking trips and other local activities.

Globe Posting House Hotel (☎ 833322; www.globepostinghouse.co.uk; 19 Fore St; s £22.50, d £45-55; ☹ ☒) A snug little hotel with a clutch of cosy rooms tucked away along its higgledy-piggledy corridors, all with low ceilings and sturdy walls, and decorated in relaxing shades of white and blue.

Marina Hotel (☎ 833315; www.themarinahotel.co.uk; The Esplanade; d £108-152) A boutique-styled gem slightly out of the town centre, with an elegant staircase leading to a confection of plush, expensive bedrooms. Some are exceedingly poky for the money – hold out for a back room on the upper floors if you can, most of which have private patios and lovely river views.

Old Quay House (☎ 833302; 28 Fore St; www.theoldquayhouse.com; d £160-210; ☹ ☒) This beautifully appointed luxury hotel is right in the heart of Fowey and offers some really lavish rooms, decorated with natural fabrics, rattan chairs and achingly tasteful tones; seven rooms have private balconies above the estuary.

King of Prussia (☎ 627208; www.kingofprussia.co.uk; Town Quay) The king of Fowey's many pubs takes its name from the local 'free trader' John Carter, and makes a lovely spot for a quayside pint or a quick lunchtime sandwich.

Food For Thought (☎ 832221; 4 Town Quay; menu £19.95; ☹ lunch & dinner) There's a touch of the French Riviera to this smart restaurant on the corner of Town Quay, with an excellent fixed-price menu filled with fishy treats, and a pleasant outside terrace shaded by navy-blue awnings.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 25 from St Austell (55 minutes, half-hourly) runs to Fowey via Par, the closest train station.

Lanhydrock House

Set in 900 acres of sweeping grounds above the River Fowey, the 16th-century manor house of **Lanhydrock** (NT; ☎ 01208-73320; house & gardens £9, gardens only £5; ☹ house 11am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Mar-Sep, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct, gardens 10am-6pm year-round) was devastated by fire in 1881, but was later rebuilt in lavish style. The house offers a fascinating insight into 'upstairs-downstairs' life in Victorian England: highlights include the gentlemen's smoking room (complete with old Etonian photos, moose heads and tiger-skin rugs), the children's toy-strewn nursery, and the huge original kitchens. There's also a fabulous carved ceiling in the Long Gallery.

Lanhydrock is 2.5 miles southeast of Bodmin. Bus 554 runs from Bodmin Parkway train station three times daily.

Restormel Castle

The ruined 13th-century castle at **Restormel** (☎ 01208-872687; admission £2.40; ☹ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) has one of the best-preserved circular keeps in the country, affording fine views across the surrounding fields. Edward, the Black Prince, is thought to have stayed there twice during his reign.

Eden Project

The giant biomes of the **Eden Project** (☎ 01726-811911; www.edenproject.com; Bodelva; admission £13.80; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) – the largest greenhouses in the world – have become one of Cornwall's most celebrated landmarks since being raised from the dust of an abandoned china clay pit near St Austell in 2000. Tropical, temperate and desert environments

have been re-created inside the biomes, so a single visit can carry you from the steaming rainforests of South America to the dry deserts of Northern Africa. In summer the biomes become a spectacular backdrop to the **Eden Sessions** (recent artists include José Gonzalez, Goldfrapp and The Magic Numbers) and from November to February Eden transforms itself into a winter wonderland for the **Time of Gifts** festival, complete with a full-size ice-rink.

It's impressive and immensely popular: crowds (and queues) can be large, so avoid peak times if possible, especially during summer. Eden is about 3 miles northeast of St Austell. **Truronian** (☎ 01872-273453) runs shuttle buses from St Austell, Newquay, Helston, Falmouth and Truro; combined bus and admission tickets are available onboard. Alternatively, if you arrive by bike, you'll get £3 off the admission price.

Lost Gardens of Heligan

Before he dreamt up the futuristic phenomenon known as the Eden Project, ex-record producer Tim Smit was best known for re-discovering the **Lost Gardens of Heligan** (☎ 01726-845100; www.heligan.com; Pentewan; admission £7.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb). Heligan was the former home of the Tremayne family, and during the 19th century was renowned as one of Britain's finest landscaped gardens; the gardens fell into disrepair following WWI (when most of its staff were killed), and are only now regaining their former glory thanks to a dedicated team of gardeners and volunteers. Formal terraces, flower gardens, a working kitchen garden and a spectacular jungle walk through the 'Lost Valley' are just some of Heligan's secrets.

The Lost Gardens of Heligan are 1.5 miles from Mevagissey and 7 miles from St Austell. Bus 25 leaves from St Austell station (30 minutes, nine daily), or you can catch bus 526 (six daily, two on Sunday), which travels from Newquay via St Austell station.

Cotehele

Dating from Tudor times, the manor house at **Cotehele** (NT; ☎ 01579-351346; St Dominick; admission £8, garden & mill only £4.80; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Sat-Thu Apr-Oct) served as the family seat of the aristocratic Edgcombe dynasty for 400 years. It's stocked with some of Britain's finest Tudor interiors, best seen in the great hall, and dot-

ted throughout with impressive tapestries and suits of armour. It's also notoriously haunted – several ghostly figures are said to wander through the house, accompanied by music and a peculiar herbal smell.

Outside, the lovely terraced gardens include a Victorian summerhouse and a medieval dove-cote. **Cotehele Quay** is part of the National Maritime Museum and has a small museum with displays on local boat-building and river trade, while the restored **Cotehele Mill** is a 15-minute walk away.

Cotehele is 7 miles southwest of Tavistock on the western bank of the Tamar. Bus 190 travels to Cotehele from Gunnislake station via Callington (40 minutes) four times daily on Sunday.

Roseland Peninsula

South of Truro, this beautiful rural peninsula gets its name not from flowers but from the Cornish word *ros*, meaning promontory. Highlights include the coastal villages of **Portloe**, a wreckers' hang-out on the South West Coast Path, and **Veryan**, awash with daffodils in spring and entered between two thatched roundhouses. Nearby are the beaches of **Carne** and **Pendower**, which join at low tide to form one of the best stretches of sand on Cornwall's south coast.

St Mawes has an unusual clover-leaf **castle** (EH; ☎ 01326-270526; admission £3.60; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10am-4pm

WORTH THE TRIP

Lugger Hotel (☎ 01872-501322; www.luggerhotel.co.uk; Portloe; depending on season r £160-180) Teetering over the harbour's edge in the beautiful old fishing town of Portloe, this supremely indulgent boutique hotel makes the consummate place for a romantic getaway. A range of higgledy-piggledy rooms are dotted around the old smuggler's inn and a couple of adjoining fishermen's cottages, making for some imaginative layouts and a charming mix of rough oak beams, clean, contemporary furnishings and huge, decadent beds. Downstairs the elegant restaurant serves fishy treats straight off the boats, and the panoramic portside terrace makes the ideal place for watching the sun go down. When did the British seaside get this sexy?

Fri-Mon Nov-Mar), designed as the sister fortress to Pendennis Castle across the estuary.

St-Just-in-Roseland boasts one of the most beautiful churchyards in the country, full of flowers and tumbling down to a creek with boats and wading birds.

SOUTHWEST CORNWALL

Cornwall's southwest coastline, dotted with inlets, estuaries and wooded creeks, has long been one of the county's main maritime areas. The deepwater port at Falmouth – the third-largest natural harbour in the world – makes it a busy seafaring town, and the remote area further to the west around the Lizard was once notorious as a haven for smugglers and wreckers. These days, history and natural scenery are the main attractions, with long stretches of protected coastline, fine beaches and some of Cornwall's most impressive subtropical gardens all within easy reach of Falmouth.

Falmouth

☎ 01326 / pop 20,775

The maritime port of Falmouth sits on the county's south coast at the end of the Carrick Roads, a huge river estuary that empties out into the third-deepest natural harbour in the world. Falmouth's fortunes were made during the 18th and 19th centuries, when clippers, trading vessels and mail packets from across the world stopped off to unload their cargoes in the town, and Falmouth remains an important centre for shipbuilding and repairs. These days, however, it's better known for its lively nightlife and the newly-built campus of the CUC (Combined Universities of Cornwall), a few miles up the road in Penryn; salty sea-dogs can still get a taste of the town's nautical heritage at the stunning National Maritime Museum beside the harbour.

The **tourist office** (☎ 312300; falmouthtic@yahoo.co.uk; 28 Killigrew St; ☎ 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, plus 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug) is opposite the bus terminal.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pendennis Castle

Falmouth's deepwater harbour has been a vital strategic asset throughout the town's history, a fact acknowledged by Henry VIII, who constructed Cornwall's largest fortress out on Pendennis Point. **Pendennis Castle** (EH; ☎ 316594; adult £4.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) was designed to defend

the entrance to the Carrick Roads in tandem with its sister fortress at St Mawes, on the opposite side of the estuary, although neither fortress was ever engaged in battle.

The recently refurbished visitor centre includes an education suite and an interactive exhibition, which aims to bring the history of the castle to life using reconstructions, artefacts and a hands-on scale model of the castle.

National Maritime Museum

The **National Maritime Museum** (☎ 313388; www.nmmc.co.uk; Discovery Quay; adult £7.00; ☎ 10am-5pm), housed in an award-winning building by Falmouth Docks, contains vessels and exhibitions exploring Britain's seafaring heritage through the ages. The Flotilla Gallery houses more than 40 boats from the national collection.

Boat Trips

In summer, boat trips set out from the Prince of Wales pier to the Helford River and Frenchman's Creek (£8 return), a 500-year-old smuggler's cottage upriver (£6.50 return), and Truro (£8 return, one hour). The pier is lined with boat companies' booths; try **Enterprise Boats** (☎ 374241) or **Cornish Belle** (☎ 01872-580309).

Passenger ferries cross to St Mawes and Flushing from the pier every hour in summer.

Beaches

The nearest beach to town is busy **Gyllyngvase**, a short walk from the town centre, where you'll find plenty of flat sand and a decent beach café. Further along the headland, **Swanpool** and **Maenporth** are usually quieter.

SLEEPING

Falmouth is crammed with B&Bs and hotels, especially along Melville Rd and Avenue Rd.

Grove Hotel (☎ 319577; www.thegrovehotel.net; Grove Pl; s £30-45, d £60-65; ☎ ☒) This Georgian residence, formerly the home of a 19th-century sea captain, has had a thorough facelift and now offers plain, great-value rooms in a handy location for the centre of Falmouth and the Maritime Museum.

Dolvean Hotel (☎ 313658; www.dolvean.co.uk; 50 Melville Rd; s £40-46, d £76-96; ☎ ☒) If you're looking for clean lines and contemporary style, then you'd be sensible to look elsewhere, but if it's lashings of lace and frilly drapes you're after, then this homely B&B will fit the bill.

St Michael's Hotel (☎ 312707; www.stmichaels-hotel.co.uk; s £49-69, d £69-126, ste £90-145; (P) (X) (A)) A programme of refurbishment has turned this venerable hotel into one of Falmouth's most stylish sleeping spots, with a selection of light, unfussy bedrooms decked out with nautical touches, and a beautiful spa and seafood restaurant.

Greenbank Hotel (☎ 312440; www.greenbank-hotel.com; Harbourside; harbour view d £125-215, nonharbour view d £105-150; (P) (X) (A)) A little way out of town along the harbourfront, the Greenbank is the grand old dame of Falmouth hotels, with a huge old-fashioned coffee lounge with panoramic views, and plenty of comfy, country-style rooms.

Other recommendations:

Chelsea House (☎ 212300; www.chelseahousehotel.com; 2 Elmslie Rd; s £35, d £42-70; (P) (X) (A))

Rosemullion Hotel (☎ 314690; gail@rosemullionhotel.demon.co.uk; Gyllyngvase Hill; d £45-55; (P) (X) (A)) Mock-Tudor hotel split over three floors, uphill from Gyllyngvase Beach.

EATING & DRINKING

Boathouse (☎ 315425; Trevehan Hill; mains £6-10; (X) (lunch & dinner)) This fantastic gastropub is so laid-back it's almost horizontal. It's especially popular with Falmouth's creative crowd, who come for the generous plates of food, cold beer and chilled-out vibe.

Three Mackerel (☎ 311886; Swanpool Beach; mains £11-20; (X) (lunch & dinner)) Perched on the cliff above Swanpool Beach, a mile or so from Falmouth town, this light, bright bistro makes the perfect place to watch the sun go down over a plate of tapas and a cold beer. For something more sophisticated, head inside for imaginative seafood and steaming hot mussels.

Hunky Dory (☎ 212997; 46 Arwenack St; mains £12.25-25; (X) (dinner)) This stylish seafood restaurant at the end of Arwenack St has fast gained a reputation as one of the top tables in town. The décor's clean and minimal, with plain wooden tables, muted lighting and terracotta floors, and the menu's stuffed to the gills with local produce, from pan-fried seabass to baked Newlyn cod.

There are plenty of pubs around town, ranging from **Quayside** (☎ 312113; Arwenack St), with outside seating on the harbour, to the nautically-themed **Chain Locker** (☎ 311685; Quay St).

ENTERTAINMENT

Falmouth Arts Centre (☎ 314566; www.falmoutharts.org; Church St) A good arts venue with programmes of theatre, music and independent cinema.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Falmouth is at the end of the branch train line from Truro (£2.30 single, 20 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday).

Bus 7 runs to Penzance (1¼ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday). Bus 88 offers the most frequent service to Truro (1¼ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday).

The Lizard

☎ 01326

For a glimpse of Cornwall's stormier side, the ink-black cliffs, rugged coves and open heaths of the Lizard Peninsula are hard to beat. This is England's most southerly point, and on a wind-lashed winter's day, it certainly feels a long way from the outside world; in high summer the clifftops burst into life with wildflowers and butterflies, and the remote coves make the perfect place for a spot of secluded swimming. In past centuries the Lizard was at the centre of Cornwall's smuggling industry, and the area is crammed with tales of Cornish 'free-traders' sneaking barrels of liquor and contraband goods under the noses of government Preventive boats. Some smugglers even became local legends – the most notorious was John Carter, the so-called King of Prussia, after whom Prussia Cove near Marazion is named.

For more information visit www.lizard-peninsula.co.uk.

GOONHILLY EARTH STATION

The last thing you'd expect to find in the middle of the Lizard is a radio station, but in fact the vast dishes of the **Goonhilly Earth Station** (☎ 0800 679593; www.goonhilly.bt.com; admission £6.50; (X) 10am-6pm late May-Sep, 10am-5pm Apr-late May & Oct, 11am-4pm Tue-Sat Nov, Dec & mid-Feb-Mar) make

up the largest satellite station on earth. The multimedia visitor centre has lots of interactive exhibits and romps through the last 200 years of telecommunications.

RIVER HELFORD

Across the north of the Lizard flows the **River Helford**, lined with overhanging oaks and hidden inlets: the perfect smugglers' hideaway. **Frenchman's Creek**, the inspiration for Daphne du Maurier's novel of the same name, can be reached on foot from the car park in Helford village.

On the northern bank of the river is **Trebah** (☎ 250448; www.trebahgarden.co.uk; admission Mar-Oct £5.80, Nov-Feb £3; (X) 10.30am-6.30pm, last entry 5pm), touted as Cornwall's 'Garden of Dreams'. First planted in 1840, it's one of Cornwall's finest subtropical gardens, dramatically situated in a steep ravine filled with giant rhododendrons, huge Brazilian rhubarb plants and jungle ferns.

The gardens of **Glendurgan** (☎ 250906; glendurgan@nationaltrust.org.uk; admission £5; (X) 10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat Feb-Oct) were established in the 18th century by the Fox family, who made their fortune importing exotic plants from the New World. There are stunning views of the River Helford, and there's also a 19th-century maze and a secluded beach near Durgan village.

Near Gweek, 6 miles from Helston at the western end of the river, is the **National Seal Sanctuary** (☎ 221361; www.sealsanctuary.co.uk; adult/child £11/8; (X) 10am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Apr), which cares for sick and orphaned seals washed up along the Cornish coastline before returning them to the wild.

LIZARD POINT & AROUND

Three miles west of Helston is **Porthleven**, another quaint fishing port with excellent beaches nearby. **Cadgwith** is the quintessential Cornish fishing village, with thatched, whitewashed cottages and a small harbour. **Lizard Point** is a 3.5-mile walk along the South West Coast Path.

At the peninsula's tip is the **Lizard Lighthouse** (☎ 290065), built in 1751 and now entirely automated. Lizard Point is one of the most treacherous coastal areas in Cornwall; hundreds of ships have foundered on the peninsula's rocky shores and cliffs over the years. Below the lighthouse, a rough track leads down to the disused lifeboat station and a shingle cove. The views from the surround-

ing cliff tops are some of the most dramatic in all of Cornwall.

A mile west is the beautiful National Trust beach of **Kynance Cove**, overlooked by towering cliffs and flower-covered headland. Much of the red-green serpentine rock fashionable during the Victorian era was mined here.

SLEEPING

Lizard YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5780; lizard@yha.org.uk; dm £15.50; (X) Apr-Oct) Few top-end hotels can boast the kind of spectacular sea view enjoyed by this gloriously situated hostel, in a renovated Victorian hotel right below the lighthouse on Lizard Point.

Coverack YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5780; coverack@yha.org.uk; Coverack; dm £15.50; (X) Mar-Oct) Tucked away above the pretty harbour of Coverack, this is another good hostel, with spacious dorms arranged over several floors in an old gentleman's town house.

Housel Bay Hotel (☎ 290417; www.houselbay.com; The Lizard; d £64-136; (P) (X) (A)) By far the most impressive hotel on Lizard Point, this grand gabled manor was constructed by a group of Victorian entrepreneurs to offer its discerning guests the sort of stirring views and luxurious rooms they'd expect from a Cornish country house. A century later it's still a gorgeous place to stay, with plenty of antiques, period rugs and a charming old-world atmosphere.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Lizard's transportation hub is Helston, served by **Truronian** (☎ 01872-273453; www.truronian.co.uk). Bus T1 runs from Truro to Helston (50 minutes, 16 to 20 Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday); for onward connections to the Lizard village, catch bus T34 from the Tesco car park in Helston.

Bus T2 runs from Helston to Goonhilly (20 minutes), Coverack (25 minutes) and St Keverne (40 minutes, 15 daily Monday to Saturday).

A Day Rover ticket valid on all Truronian buses costs £5.

St Michael's Mount

Before the domes of the Eden Project appeared on the scene, Cornwall's best-known landmark was **St Michael's Mount** (NT; ☎ 01736-710507; admission £6; (X) 10.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, last admission 4.45pm, phone ahead at other times), an island abbey connected to the mainland at Marazion by a cobbled causeway, and completely cut off at high tide.

WORTH THE TRIP

Ferryboat Inn (☎ 01326-250625; Helford Passage; mains £5-15) Tucked away along the beautiful Helford Estuary, this riverfront pub is an old favourite with locals and visiting yachties alike. On summer nights the creekside patio is packed with a lively crowd tucking into huge plates of beer-battered fish or triple-decker club sandwiches, and in winter it becomes the quintessential smuggler's pub, perfect for Sunday lunch in front of a roaring log fire.

The first church was believed to have been founded on the island in the 5th century, although most of the present-day abbey derives from a 12th-century chapel constructed by the same Benedictine monks who built Mont St Michel off the Normandy coast in France. The mount became an important place of pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ages, and briefly served as a fortress during the Civil War. Since 1659 the mount has been the home of the St Aubyn family, and has been open to the public since 1954 under the stewardship of the National Trust.

Highlights include the rococo Gothic drawing room, the original armoury and the 14th-century priory church, but the island is perhaps most famous for its subtropical **gardens** (admission £3), teetering dramatically above the sea.

It's possible to walk across the causeway at low tide, or you can catch a ferry at high tide in summer.

Bus 2 passes Marazion as it travels from Penzance to Falmouth.

Penzance

☎ 01736 / pop 21,168

Perched dramatically above the glittering sweep of Mounts Bay, Penzance has been the last stop on the main line from London since the days of the Great Western Railway, and the town still feels one step removed from the rest of the county. With its hotchpotch of winding streets, old shopping arcades and grand seafront promenade, it feels much more authentic than the polished-up, prettified towns of Padstow and St Ives, and makes an excellent base for exploring the rest of west Cornwall and Land's End.

INFORMATION

Library (☎ 363954; internet access per hr £3; Morrab Rd)
Polyclean Laundrette (☎ 364815; 4 East Tce; per load £3.50; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm)
Tourist office (☎ 362207; pztic@penwith.gov.uk; Station Approach; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Next to the bus station.
www.penzance.co.uk Useful local guide to Penzance and the surrounding area.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Penlee House Gallery & Museum (☎ 363625; www.penleehouse.org.uk; Morrab Rd; admission £2, free on Sat; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) displays a fine range of paintings by art-

ists of the Newlyn School (including Stanhope Forbes) and hosts regular exhibitions exploring the history of art in Cornwall.

The **Trinity House National Lighthouse Centre** (☎ 360077; Wharf Rd; admission £3; ☎ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct) relates the history of the lighthouses that have helped keep ships from harm along the treacherous Cornish coastline.

The busy fishing harbour of **Newlyn**, on the western edge of Penzance, was the centre of the Newlyn School of artists in the late 19th century; the cutting-edge **Newlyn Art Gallery** (☎ 363715; www.newlynartgallery.co.uk) is currently undergoing extensive refurbishment and is set to reopen in 2007.

SLEEPING Budget

Penzance has lots of low-price B&Bs, especially along Alexandra Rd and Morrab Rd.

Penzance Backpackers (☎ 363836; www.pzbackpack.com; Alexandra Rd; per person dm/d £13/14; ☎) Penzance's only independent hostel is a cheery, welcoming affair, with a few dorms and private rooms squeezed into a converted town house, and a decent-sized lounge and kitchen.

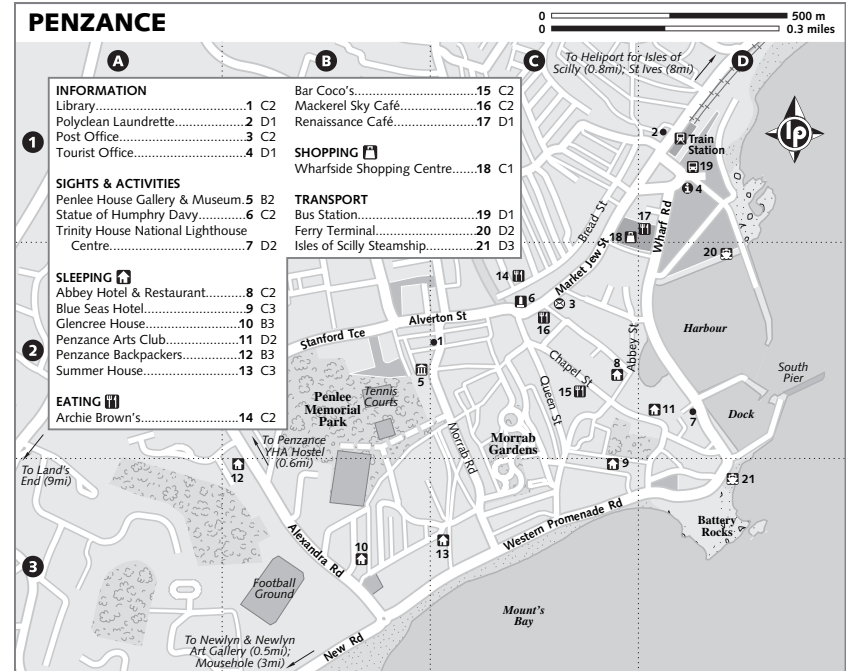
Penzance YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5992; penzance@yha.org.uk; Castle Homeck, Alverton; dm £15.50; ☎) The official YHA hostel in Penzance is housed inside an 18th-century Georgian manor on the outskirts of town, with an onsite café and mostly four- to 10-bed dorms. Buses 5 and 6 run from the bus station to Alverton; it's a 500m walk from the bus stop.

Glencree House (☎ 362026; www.glencreehouse.co.uk; 2 Mennaye Rd; r depending on season £32-50) Fantastic value B&B just a short stroll from the town centre with eight old-fashioned rooms, including a couple with sea views; the huge breakfast includes a choice of smoked but-terfly kippers, croissants and fresh fruit.

Midrange & Top End

Blue Seas Hotel (☎ 364744; www.bluehayeshotel-penzance.co.uk; 13 Regent Tce; s £30-35, d £60-80; ☎) One of several posh B&Bs along Regent's Tce, with plain, pale-toned rooms and a spacious lounge and reading room downstairs. The top-notch breakfast features homemade kedgeree and smoked salmon scrambled eggs.

Penzance Arts Club (☎ 363761; www.penzanceartsclub.co.uk; Chapel St; s £55-70, d £80-100) Penzance's funkiest place to stay is this fabulous cross between an arts club and boutique B&B. The colour-coded rooms are simple, comfortable



and unfussy, but the centre of the action is the downstairs lounge, decked out like a Victorian gentleman's residence, where there are regular gigs, poetry readings, salsa nights and residential arts courses.

Summer House (☎ 363744; www.summerhouse-cornwall.com; Cornwall Tce; s £70, d £75-95; ☎ closed Nov-Mar; ☎) The grand, Grade II-listed Regency house offers a patchwork of rooms decorated in checks, pinstripes and sunny tones, with tons of original features and carefully chosen furniture; downstairs there's a Mediterranean-themed restaurant and a garden perfect for summer barbecues.

our pick **Abbey Hotel** (☎ 366906; www.theabbeyonline.co.uk; Abbey St; r £130-190) The excellent Abbey Hotel is run by the same husband-and-wife team that owns the Abbey Restaurant next door. The sky-blue 17th-century town house has been refurbished with taste, grace and plenty of period furniture – quirky antiques and topsy-turvy layouts are the order of the day.

EATING

Bar Coco's (☎ 350222; 13 Chapel St; tapas £2-6; ☎ closed Sun) The Mediterranean hits Penzance at this

laid-back restaurant and tapas bar, where you can tuck into Provençal fish soup and seared tuna or just sit back with an ice-cold Sol and a bowl of marinated olives.

Archie Brown's (☎ 362828; Bread St; mains £3-6; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This much-loved veggie/vegan café is on the 1st floor above a health-food shop, and serves up hearty portions of old veggie faves including hominy pie, hot chilli and crumbly carrot cake.

Renaissance Café (☎ 366277; 6 Wharfside Shopping Centre; mains £5-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) A continental-style café-bar tucked away in the Wharfside shopping centre, with an excellent menu packed with club sandwiches, burgers and seafood specials, and fine views across Mount's Bay.

Mackerel Sky Café (☎ 366866; 45 New St; mains £7-10; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat) Next door to the upmarket Harris' restaurant, this new café is a cosy spot for a huge open sandwich or a gourmet burger, but also serves up fresh fish dishes and quite possibly the frothiest cappuccinos in Penzance.

Abbey Restaurant (☎ 330680; Abbey St; 2/3 courses £18/23; ☎ lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat Jun-Sep, phone

TOP FIVE GARDENS

- Glendurgan – River Helford (p323)
- Heligan – near Mevagissey (p320)
- Lanhydrock – near Bodmin (p319)
- Trebah – River Helford (p323)
- Trelissick – near Truro (p317)

Check out www.gardensofcornwall.com for further tips.

ahead at other times) One of Cornwall's most acclaimed restaurants, run by the renowned chef Ben Tunncliffe. Upstairs the restaurant serves cutting-edge British cuisine in a contemporary dining room; downstairs the boldly-coloured cellar bar serves all the aperitifs and digestifs you could wish for.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

National Express coaches travel to London (£35.50, nine hours, eight daily) via Exeter (£22, five hours, two daily), sometimes changing at Plymouth (£6.50, 3½ hours, seven daily). For buses to Land's End, see right.

Train

There are regular services to Penzance from London Paddington (£108, six hours, eight daily) via Truro. There are frequent trains from Penzance to St Ives (£4.40, 20 minutes, hourly), with connections at St Erth.

WEST CORNWALL

West Cornwall contains some of the county's wildest scenery, a classic landscape of sea-battered cliffs, churning surf, crumbling mine-workings and wheeling gulls. The West Penwith area was one of the oldest Celtic settlements in Cornwall, and the area is littered with prehistoric sites.

Mousehole

☎ 01736

The compact harbour of Mousehole was once at the heart of Cornwall's thriving pilchard industry, but these days it's best known for its colourful Christmas lights, and as the location for a much-loved local children's story called *The Mousehole Cat*.

The **Old Coastguard** (☎ 731222; www.oldcoastguard.hotel.co.uk; depending on season r £80-160) is a swish,

modernised hotel decorated with a healthy dose of designer flair. Deep sofas, smart pine floors and neutral colours characterise the rooms, half of which are in a detached lodge by the harbour; the sunlit restaurant has beautiful bay views and specialises, as you might expect, in fantastic seafood.

Bus 6 runs the 20-minute journey to Penzance half-hourly.

Minack Theatre

Surely the world's most spectacularly located theatre, the **Minack** (☎ 01736-810181; www.minack.com; tickets from £7.50) is carved into the cliffs overlooking Porthcurno Bay. The **visitor centre** (admission £3; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) recounts the story of Rowena Cade, the indomitable local woman who originally conceived the theatre and oversaw it until her death in 1983. The theatre's 17-week season runs from mid-May to mid-September – though aficionados always bring umbrellas and blankets in case the British weather should take centre stage. The visitor centre is closed when there's a matinée.

The Minack is above the beautiful beach of Porthcurno, 3 miles from Land's End and 9 miles from Penzance. Bus 345 from Penzance to Land's End stops at Porthcurno, Monday to Friday.

Land's End

Last stop on the journey from John o'Groats is Land's End, where the crumbling granite cliffs of west Cornwall tumble into the booming Atlantic surf. It's one of Britain's most dramatic and unforgettable locations, which makes the decision to build the monumentally tacky **Legendary Land's End** (☎ 0870 458 0099; www.landsend-landmark.co.uk; admission £10; ☎ 10am-5pm summer, 10am-3pm winter) theme park all the more inexplicable. Take our advice – skip the ragtag collection of fibreglass models and half-hearted multimedia shows and take an exhilarating clifftop stroll along the headland instead. On a clear day it's possible to see all the way to the Isles of Scilly, 28 miles out to sea.

Land's End is 9 miles from Penzance and 886 miles from John o'Groats. Bus 1 runs around the coast to St Ives (1½ hours) and Penzance (2½ hours, five daily) – for some reason it becomes bus 300 in the opposite direction. The twice-daily bus 345 offers a quicker service straight to Penzance.

St Just-in-Penwith

☎ 01736 / pop 1890

There's not much to see around the grey-granite settlement of St Just, 6 miles north of Land's End, but a century or so ago this was a hub of activity for the local tin- and copper-mining industry. The old **Geevor Tin Mine** (☎ 788662; www.geevor.com; admission £7.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Fri Easter-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) at Pendeen, north of St Just, finally closed in 1990, and now offers tours of the underground shafts every hour in summer, offering an amazing insight into the dark and dangerous conditions in which Cornwall's miners once worked.

St Just is also the site of the **Plen-an-gwary**, an open-air auditorium, which was once used to stage outdoor theatre and Cornish mystery plays.

Land's End YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5906; Letcha Veay; dm £14; ☎ Easter-Oct) is in an isolated spot half a mile south of the village, and makes an ideal spot for keen bird-watchers and walkers on the coast path. It's definitely a no-frills hostel, with smallish dorms and a basic kitchen, but it's ideal if you're after some peace and quiet.

Bus 17 travels from St Ives via Penzance every half-hour Monday to Saturday.

Zennor

☎ 01736 / pop 217

A stunning 6-mile stretch of the South West Coast Path runs from St Ives to the windswept village of Zennor, where DH Lawrence wrote much of *Women in Love*. **St Senara's Church** dates from at least 1150. Look for the carved Mermaid Chair; legend tells of a beautiful, mysterious woman who lured a chorister into the sea at Mermaid's Cove, where you can still hear them singing.

The extraordinary **Wayside Folk Museum** (☎ 796945; admission £3; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Sun-Fri May-Sep, 11am-5pm Sun-Fri Apr & Oct) started out as a private collection of local artefacts gathered together by Colonel 'Freddie' Hirst in the 1930s, and over the last 70 years has grown into the country's most fascinating folk museum. The treasure-trove of exhibits here includes original equipment belonging to local blacksmiths, miners and cobblers, an 18th-century kitchen, two reclaimed water-mills and an extensive photographic archive

WEST CORNWALL



of the local area – it really has to be seen to be believed.

The only place to stay locally is the **Old Chapel Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 798307; dm/d £12/40; (P)), handily placed along the coast path. Inside it's smart, modern and efficient, with dorm rooms and a great-value café downstairs.

DH Lawrence's favourite local while he lived on the Zennor coastline was the **Tinner's Arms** (☎ 792697; lunch from £7-10), a classic Cornish inn with a rambling, atmospheric main bar sheltering under a slate roof. Pub lunches and local ale are served either inside or on the sea-view patio.

From St Ives, catch bus 300 (20 minutes, five daily) or bus 343 (20 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday).

St Ives

☎ 01736 / pop 9870

Tucked into the coastline of a glittering arch-shaped bay, St Ives was once one of the county's busiest pilchard-fishing harbours, but it's better known these days for its long-standing reputation as the centre of the Cornish arts scene. From the old harbour, cobbled alleyways and switchback lanes lead uphill into a jumble of buzzy galleries, cafés and brasseries, catering for the thousands of summertime visitors who arrive every year to sample the artistic atmosphere for themselves. It makes for an intriguing mix, where boutique chic meets the old-fashioned British seaside, and while the high-season traffic can certainly take the shine off things, St Ives is still an essential stop on any Cornish grand tour.

INFORMATION

Library (☎ 795377; 1 Gabriel St; internet access per hr £3)

Post office (☎ 795004; Tregenna Pl; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

stives-cornwall.co.uk Official town website with accommodation and activity guides.

Tourist office (☎ 796297; ivtic@penwith.gov.uk; Street-an-Pol; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Inside the Guildhall.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Tate St Ives

The artwork almost takes second place to the surroundings at the stunning **Tate St Ives** (☎ 796226; www.tate.org.uk/stives; Porthmeor Beach; admission £5.75, joint ticket with Barbara Hepworth Museum £8.75; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), which hovers like a white concrete curl

above Porthmeor Beach. Built in 1993, the gallery contains work by celebrated local artists, including Terry Frost, Patrick Heron and Barbara Hepworth, and hosts regular special exhibitions. On the top floor there's a stylish café-bar with the best sea views in town.

There are plenty more art galleries to discover around town – perhaps the most interesting is the **Sloop Craft Centre**, just off the harbour, where you'll find a treasure-trove of tiny artists' studios selling everything from handmade jewellery to driftwood furniture.

Barbara Hepworth Museum & Sculpture Garden

Barbara Hepworth was one of the leading abstract sculptors of the 20th century, and a key figure in the St Ives art scene, so it seems fitting that her former studio has been transformed into a moving archive and **museum** (☎ 796226; www.tate.org.uk/stives; Barnoon Hill; admission £4.75, joint ticket with Tate St Ives £8.75; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb). The studio itself has remained almost untouched since her death in a fire in 1975, and the adjoining garden contains some of her most famous sculptures. Hepworth's work is scattered throughout St Ives; look for her sculptures outside the Guildhall and inside the 15th-century parish church of St Ia.

St Ives Museum

Housed in a pier-side building variously used as a pilchard-packing factory, laundry, cinema, sailor's mission and copper mine, the **heritage museum** (☎ 796005; admission £1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4pm Sat Mar-Oct) contains local artefacts relating to blacksmithery, fishing and shipwrecks.

Beaches

The largest town beaches are **Porthmeor** and **Porthminster**, but the tiny cove of **Porthgidden** is also popular. Nearby, the pre-14th-century **Chapel of St Nicholas**, patron saint of children and sailors, is the oldest (and smallest) church in St Ives. **Carbis Bay**, to the southeast, is popular with families and sun-seekers.

On the opposite side of the bay from St Ives, the receding tide reveals over 3 miles of golden beach at **Gwithian** and **Godrevy Towns**, both popular spots for kiteboarders and surfers. The lighthouse just offshore at Godrevy was the inspiration for Virginia Woolf's classic stream-of-consciousness novel *To The Lighthouse*.

Several places on Porthmeor Beach and Fore St rent wetsuits and surfboards; try **Windansea** (☎ 794830; 25 Fore St).

Boat Trips

Sea-fishing trips and coastal cruises to the grey-seal colony on Seal Island (£8) are run by the **St Ives Pleasure Boat Association** (☎ 01736-796080, 07712-386162) and several other operators on the harbour.

SLEEPING

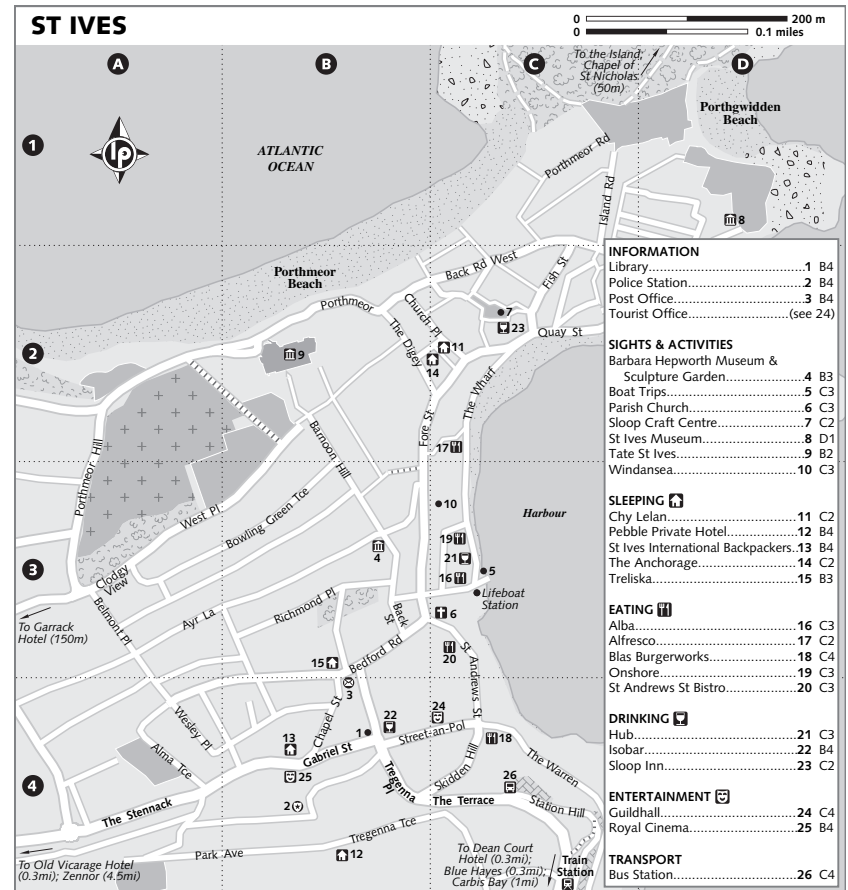
Budget

St Ives International Backpackers (☎ 799444; www.backpackers.co.uk/st-ives; The Stennack; dm depending on season £11-17; ☎) This grungy old hostel, housed in an old chapel school, could do with some

serious spring cleaning, but if you don't mind cramped rooms and the odd spot of peeling paintwork, it makes a good budget base for exploring the town.

Anchorage (☎ 797135; 5 Bunkers Hill; info@theanchoragebandb.co.uk; s £30-35, d £60-70; ☎) This 18th-century cob cottage just off the main street is packed with old-world atmosphere – think oak beams, rough stone walls and a maze of snug, tiny rooms leading off the low-ceilinged corridors.

Chy Lelan (☎ 797560; Bunkers Hill; www.chylelan.co.uk; d £50-60; ☎) Just up the hill from the Anchorage, two old fishermen's cottages now provide simple, plain B&B rooms, with views onto the street or across the town's slate-covered rooftops.



ANCIENT CORNWALL

Like many other areas of Celtic Britain, Cornwall is strewn with reminders of its ancient past. The area between St Just and St Ives is dotted with dolmens, menhirs and mysterious stone circles – if prehistory is your thing, track down **Lanyon Quoit** (a table-shaped dolmen between Madron and Morvah), the **Mén-an-Tol stone** (a ring-shaped stone near Madron), the **Merry Maidens** (Cornwall's most complete stone circle, near Trewoofe) and **Chysauster Iron Age Village** (☎ 07831-757934; adult £2.40; ☎ 10-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct), the most complete prehistoric settlement in Cornwall.

Perhaps the most impressive ancient monument in Cornwall is the **Hurlers**, a series of stone circles near the village of Minions on Bodmin Moor. Legend has it that the stones were once local men who were turned to stone for playing the local game of hurling on the Sabbath. Around 1.5km across the moor is the **Cheesewring**, a 20-foot stack of stones balanced on top of each other. Although it looks like it's manmade, in fact it's an entirely natural formation that's been weathered down by the elements over several million years.

Midrange & Top End

Pebble Private Hotel (☎ 794168; www.pebble-hotel.co.uk; 4 Park Ave; s £30-42, d £60-88; ☒) Located up on the steep hillside above town, this gorgeous and very contemporary B&B comes as a breath of fresh air, with a choice of imaginatively decorated rooms kitted out in technicolour tones, funky patterns and crazy-shaped mirrors.

Treliska (☎ 797678; treliska@connexions.co.uk; 3 Bedford Rd; ☒) Another beautifully finished B&B that's a world away from chintzy curtains and flock wallpaper – here it's all clean lines, chrome bath-taps and elegantly understated pine furniture.

Old Vicarage Hotel (☎ 796124; www.oldvicaragehotel.com; Parc-an-Creet; s/d £51/68; ☒ ☒) A former rectory in lovely landscaped gardens, set back from the tourist-thronged streets of the town centre, and decorated throughout in mock-Victorian style. Most impressive is the mahogany and red velvet lounge-bar, although the bedrooms themselves aren't quite as striking.

Dean Court Hotel (☎ 796023; www.deancourthotel.com; Trelyon Ave; d £80-104; ☒) A short walk uphill from the town centre, this upmarket six-room hotel in a double-fronted Victorian town house commands panoramic views across the bay. All the bedrooms are smartly furnished with fluffy beds and sitting areas, but the sea-view ones are the pick of the bunch.

Blue Hayes (☎ 797129; www.blue-hayes.co.uk; Trelyon Ave; r £140-170; ☒ ☒) There are a couple of seriously grand country hotels around town, but for something less ostentatious try this boutique beauty, where you'll find five luxurious cream-coloured suites (including one with

its own private roof patio) and a balustraded breakfast terrace overlooking the bay.

EATING

St Ives has almost as many restaurants and brasseries as Padstow. Most are dotted along the harbourfront, but the back lanes can turn up some surprising treats too.

Blas Burgerworks (☎ 797272; The Warren; burgers £4-8; ☎ lunch) The humble burger becomes a work of art at this fantastic new diner, where the gourmet creations range from beetburgers in sunflower baps to black-bean burgers livened up with lashings of chilli sauce.

Onshore (☎ 796000; The Wharf; pizzas £7-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Gourmet pizzas cooked to perfection in a wood-fired oven are the mainstay at this lively chrome-and-glass pizzeria, next door to the Hub.

Our pick **St Andrews Street Bistro** (☎ 797074; 16 Andrews St; mains £9-15; ☎ lunch Sun, dinner Wed-Sun) The latest entry on the St Ives eating scene is this eclectic new bistro, serving up British classics fused with North African flavours in a boho dining room filled with Moroccan rugs, murals and *objets d'art*.

Alfresco (☎ 793737; The Wharf; mains £10-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) On a fine summer's day this tiny wharfside bistro is the only place to be, with sliding doors that open onto the harbour and a blackboard menu that takes its cue from the daily catch.

Alba (☎ 797222; Old Lifeboat House; mains £14-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) The award-winning Alba is still one of the top places for seafood on the harbourfront, with a split-level dining room and sumptuous seafood such as pan-fried seabass and fillet of John Dory with spring vegetables.

DRINKING

Hub (☎ 799099; The Wharf; ☎ 10am-late) This harbourfront café-bar opens late into the night, but makes a good spot for morning coffee too, with a trendy chocolate-coloured interior and a fine sea-view aspect.

Isobar (☎ 796042; Tregenna Pl; ☎ to 2am) St Ives's main nightclub boasts a pared-back bar on the ground floor and a hot-and-sweaty club upstairs, with regular funk, house and techno nights, and the odd cheesy disc thrown in for good measure.

Sloop Inn (☎ 796584; The Wharf) A classic old fishermen's boozer, complete with low ceilings, tankards behind the bar and a comprehensive selection of Cornish ales.

ENTERTAINMENT

Royal Cinema (☎ 796843; www.merlincinemas.co.uk; The Stennack) Shows new films and often has cheap matinées.

Guildhall (☎ 796888; 1 Street-An-Pol) Regular programmes of music and theatre, especially during the St Ives September Festival.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express runs coaches to London (£35.50, nine hours, four daily), Plymouth (£6.50, three hours, four daily) and most local towns. Local First buses 16 and 17/17A/17B regularly connect St Ives with Penzance; the circular bus 300 travels to Land's End en route.

St Ives is on a scenic branch train line from St Erth (£2.20, 20 minutes, hourly), on the main London–Penzance line via Truro.

NORTH CORNWALL

The north Cornish coast is where the rolling grey Atlantic smacks hard into the county's granite cliffs, and for many people it's the quintessential Cornish landscape – a wild mix of grassy headlands, craggy bluffs and pounding surf. It's also where you'll find the county's best beaches and biggest waves.

St Agnes & Perranporth

The secluded beaches and reliable swells around the coastal towns of St Agnes and Porthtowan are popular with surfers and holidaymakers alike. The tiny National Trust cove of **Chapel Porth**, tucked away at the bottom of a beautiful river valley, is a particularly fine spot; a dramatic coast path travels along the clifftops to the abandoned mine at **Wheal Coates** and breathtaking views at **Tubby's Head**.

North of St Agnes is the busy beach town of Perranporth, packed to bursting with scarlet-faced holidaymakers in summer and all but deserted in the winter months. The beach at Perranporth (sometimes referred to as **Perran Sands**) is one of the north coast's finest stretches of sand, and is popular with surfers, kiteboarders and swimmers alike, especially during the summer months.

SLEEPING, EATING & DRINKING

Driftwood Spars (☎ 01872-552428; www.driftwoodspars.com; d £82-94; ☒ ☒) A lively beachside pub at Trevaunance Cove near St Agnes, with 15 delightful upstairs rooms, many of which have sea views and attractive nautical touches.

Rose-in-Vale Hotel (☎ 01872-552202; www.rose-in-vale-hotel.co.uk; Mithian; d from £130; ☒ ☒ ☒) A grand country-house hotel set in flower-filled grounds 2 miles from St Agnes, with 18 supremely tasteful rooms and a smart country restaurant.

Blue Bar (☎ 01209-890329; www.blue-bar.co.uk; Porthtowan; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Sun) One of the favourite hangouts for Cornwall's beach crowd, with a bright surf-style interior and a sea-view patio overlooking Porthtowan Beach. Burgers, sandwiches and salads are on the menu, and there's live music and DJs at weekends.

Watering Hole (☎ 01872-572888; Perranporth Beach) One of the liveliest beach bars on the north coast, with outside tables on the sand, regular bands and a buzzy surf-shack vibe.

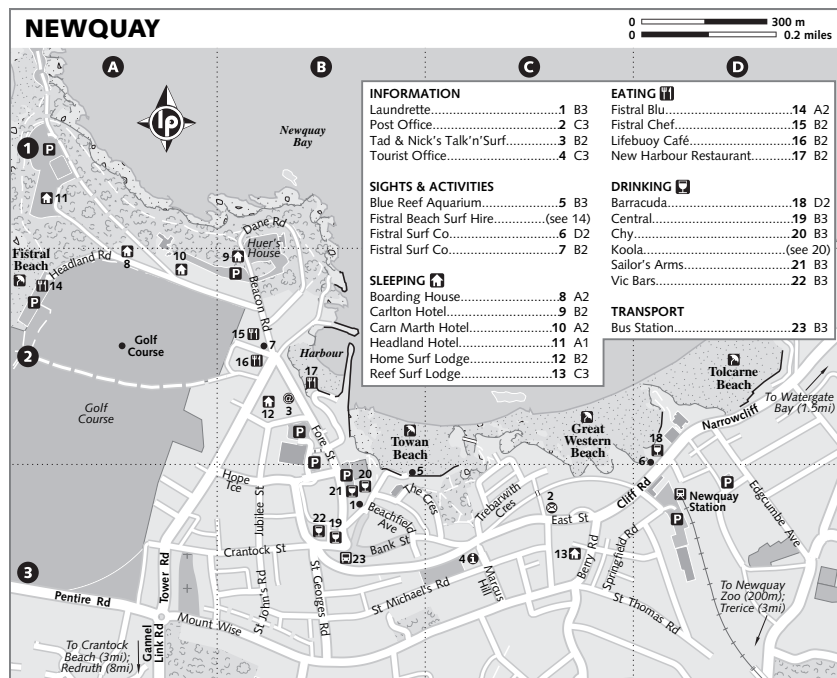
GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 557 travels along the north coast from Newquay to St Ives once in each direction Sunday to Friday, stopping at St Agnes and Perranporth en route. Bus T1 travels from Truro (40 minutes, hourly) to St Agnes, but only a few daily buses travel on to Perranporth (15 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday).

Newquay

☎ 01637 / pop 19,423

If Padstow is Cornwall's Cannes, then Newquay is its Costa del Sol. Perched on the cliffs above a cluster of white-sand beaches, and packed with enough pubs, bars and dodgy clubs to give Ibiza a run for its money, it's become the summer venue of choice for beer boys, beach bums and surf addicts alike, all of whom descend on the town in droves. It's also the unofficial capital of Cornish surfing,



and if you're looking to learn how to brave the waves, this is the place to do it.

INFORMATION

Laundrette (☎ 875901; 1 Beach Pde, Beach Rd)

Tad & Nick's Talk'n'Surf (☎ 874868; 72 Fore St; internet access per hr £3; ☎ 10am-6pm)

Tourist office (☎ 854020; www.newquay.co.uk; Marcus Hill; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Newquay's trump card is its spectacular location near some of the best beaches on the north coast. **Fistral**, west of Towan Head, is England's best-known surfing beach, and the venue for the annual Boardmasters surfing festival. Below town are **Great Western** and **Towan**, and a little further up the coast you'll find Tolcarne, Lusty Glaze and Porth. All the beaches are good for swimming and supervised by lifeguards in summer.

Blue Reef Aquarium (☎ 878134; www.blureefaquarium.co.uk; Towan Promenade; admission £5.95; ☎ 10am-5pm) on Towan Beach has a selection of weird and wonderful underwater characters, in-

cluding jellyfish, sea horses, octopi and rays; several of the tanks have open tops allowing you to touch the fish.

There are lots more beautiful beaches to discover around Newquay. Three miles to the southwest is **Crantock**, sandwiched between the twin headlands of East and West Pentire, and a little further west is family-friendly **Holywell Bay**. Just east of Newquay is **Watergate Bay**, where you'll find a glorious sandy beach and an excellent outdoor activities centre (see opposite). The stately rock towers of **Bedruthan Steps** are a few miles further east towards Padstow.

SLEEPING Budget

There are plenty of surf lodges in Newquay – the best ones have secure board storage and links with local surf schools.

Reef Surf Lodge (☎ 879058; www.reefsurflodge.info; 10-12 Berry Rd; dm £15-29.50; ☎) This place is a quantum leap from your average surf lodge – forget saggy beds and overcrowded dorms, here it's all plasma-screen TVs, cappuccino machines and groovy modern furniture. There's a great onsite bar, and surfing courses

are provided by the in-house Reef Surf School (www.reefsurfschool.com).

Home Surf Lodge (☎ 873387; www.homesurflodge.co.uk; 18 Tower Rd; dm £16-20; ☎) Another popular lodge near the town centre, with basic dorm rooms, free internet access and a pleasant DVD lounge and licensed bar.

Boarding House (☎ 873258; www.theboardinghouse.co.uk; 32 Headland Rd; dm £18-25; ☎) This stylish surf lodge is in a fantastic location near Fistral Beach. Rooms are clean and modern; downstairs there's a lively bar decorated with potted plants and Indonesian furniture, and a fantastic wooden-decked terrace overlooking the golf course and Trevoze Head.

Midrange & Top End

Carlton Hotel (☎ 872658; www.carltonhotelnewquay.co.uk; 6 Dane Rd; d £60-70; ☎) This sumptuous B&B offers nine cream-themed bedrooms, complete with huge, plush beds, country prints and DVD players in every room.

Carnmarth Hotel (☎ 872519; www.carnmarth.com; Headland Rd; d depending on season £65-100) This old package-holiday hotel is in the midst of transforming itself into Newquay's first boutique hotel. The rooms themselves are still on the tired side, although most have decent sea views – at the moment the highlight is the fantastic steel-and-glass bar and panoramic drinks terrace. One to watch.

Headland Hotel (☎ 872211; www.headlandhotel.co.uk; Fistral Beach; d £80-302; ☎) The grand old lady of Newquay hotels is this fabulous red-brick pile perched above Fistral Beach. The impeccable rooms range from budget singles to ornate sea-view suites, and facilities include a brace of swimming pools, tennis courts and a nine-hole golf course.

SURF'S UP

Newquay is literally brimming over with surf schools, offering everything from half-day taster lessons (£25 to £30) to full-blown multiday 'surfaris' (from £130). Reputable operators include the **British Surfing Association** (BSA; ☎ 850737; Fistral Beach), **Tolcarne Beach** (☎ 851487; www.nationalsurfingcentre.com), **Reef Surf School** (☎ 879059; www.reefsurfschool.com; Great Western Beach) and the **Extreme Academy** (☎ 860840; www.extremeacademy.co.uk; Watergate Bay) on Watergate Bay, which also offers lessons in kitebuggying, mountainboarding and waveskiing. If you choose another school, make sure the instructors are certified by the BSA.

Boards (£10/25/45 for one/three/seven days) and wetsuits (£5/12/25 for one/three/seven days) can be hired from **Fistral Surf Co** (☎ 850808; 19 Cliff Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm) or **Fistral Beach Surf Hire** (☎ 850584; Fistral Beach).

And for seasoned surfers looking for a few more thrills and spills, how about a spot of kitesurfing? Contact **Mobius Kite School** (☎ 831383; Cubert; www.mobiusonline.co.uk).

EATING

Lifebuoy Café (☎ 878076; Lower Tower Rd; mains £4.50-12) This reliable old café is an excellent spot for breakfast smoothies and coffee, and baguettes, burgers and fresh salads at lunchtime.

Fistral Chef (☎ 850718; 2 Beacon Rd; breakfasts £2-6, mains £6-10; ☎) breakfast daily, dinner in summer) This popular new café champions its all-day breakfast as the best in town. On summer nights there's also a Thai-themed evening menu, with a BYO wine policy.

Fistral Blu (☎ 879444; Fistral Beach; mains £7-19; ☎) lunch & dinner) This impressive glass-fronted restaurant on Fistral Beach experiments with Thai and Mediterranean flavours, as well as Cornish standards such as fish pie and local scallops. For something more relaxed, you can grab sandwiches and burgers at the informal café downstairs.

New Harbour Restaurant (☎ 874062; South Quay Hill; mains £10-15; ☎) lunch & dinner) In a lovely spot beside the old harbour, this relaxed restaurant is a fine place to escape the crowds along Newquay's main drag. Fish and seafood are the menu's mainstays – think crab claws, homemade fishcakes and skate wing.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Chy (☎ 873415; www.the-chy.co.uk; 12 Beach Rd) This sophisticated café-bar is a world away from most of the dodgy clubs and pubs around Newquay, with plenty of stripped wood, chrome fixtures and plush sofas, not to mention a fantastic panoramic terrace.

Koola (☎ 873415; www.thekoola.com; 12 Beach Rd) Underneath the Chy, the Koola is the venue of choice for connoisseur clubbers, with regular house, Latin, and drum'n'bass nights, and a regular slot for local DJs, Jelly Jazz.

WORTH THE TRIP

Fifteen Cornwall (☎ 01637-861000; www.fifteen-cornwall.com; Watergate Bay; 6-course dinner menu £50; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Fresh from his campaign to change the stomach-churning eating habits of Britain's school kids, everyone's favourite mockney chef Jamie Oliver recently opened the second branch of his Fifteen restaurant in a stunning location on Watergate Bay. Giving underprivileged Cornish youngsters an opportunity to work and train in a professional restaurant environment while turning out top-quality cooking, Fifteen is currently the hottest ticket in the county. If you can bag a table, the beach views, electric atmosphere and contemporary cooking won't disappoint.

Central (☎ 878310; 11 Central Sq) As its name suggests, this popular pre-club pub is right in the heart of town, and the outside patio is always overflowing on warm summer nights.

Other options:

Vic Bars (☎ 872671; King St) Tavernous pub with regular bands on Friday and Saturday night.

Barracuda (☎ 875800; 27-29 Cliff Rd) One of the largest clubs in town, with big-name DJs on weekends.

Sailor's Arms (☎ 872838; Fore St) Pub-club playing cheesy house and chunky choons.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express has direct buses to London (£35.50, seven hours, five daily), Plymouth (£5.70, 1½ hours, four daily) and Penzance (£5, 1¼ hours, two daily).

There are trains every couple of hours between Newquay and Par (£4.80 single, 45 minutes), on the main London–Penzance line.

Trerice

Built in 1751, the charming Elizabethan manor of **Trerice** (NT; ☎ 01637-875404; admission £6; ☺ 11am–5pm Sun–Fri Mar–Oct, gardens from 10.30am) is famous for the elaborate barrel-roofed ceiling of the Great Chamber, but has plenty of other intriguing features, including ornate fireplaces, original plasterwork and a fine collection of period furniture. There's also an amusing lawn-mower museum in the barn, with over 100 grass-cutters going back over a century.

Trerice is 3 miles southeast of Newquay. Bus 526 runs from Newquay to Kestle Mill, about a mile from the manor house.

Padstow

☎ 01841 / pop 3162

Wind the clock back a decade or two and Padstow was just another quiet fishing village along Cornwall's north coast, but over recent years this little harbour has been transformed into the capital of Cornish cuisine. The transformation is almost entirely due to the efforts of one man, celebrity chef Rick Stein, who opened his first seafood restaurant on the harbourside back in the mid-'70s and has since expanded his property portfolio with a second café, a couple of hotels, a seafood school, a delicatessen and even a fish and chip shop. Hardly surprising, then, that the locals often wryly refer to the town as 'Pad-stein' – but despite its chichi provenance, it's still a pretty place to visit, with a cluster of cafés and fishermen's cottages nestled around its old harbour.

The **tourist office** (☎ 533449; www.padstowlive.com; North Quay; ☺ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) charges £3 to book accommodation.

Much favoured by directors of costume dramas, the stately manor house of **Prideaux Place** (☎ 532411; admission £6; ☺ 12.30–4pm Sun–Thu Easter Sun–mid-Apr & mid-May–Oct) above the village was built by the Prideaux–Brune family (who still reside here), purportedly descendants of William the Conqueror.

The disused Padstow to Bodmin railway line now forms the **Camel Trail**, one of Cornwall's most popular cycling tracks. The trail starts in Padstow and runs east through Wadebridge (5.75 miles), Bodmin (11 miles) and beyond. Bikes can be hired from **Padstow Cycle Hire** (☎ 533533; www.padstowcyclehire.com; South Quay; ☺ 9am–5pm) and **Brinham's** (☎ 532594; South Quay; ☺ 9am–5pm) for around £10 to £15 per day.

The **Jubilee Queen** (☎ 521093) offers boat trips (adults £6) around the bay and offshore islands, leaving from the harbourside.

Padstow is surrounded by some excellent beaches, including **Polzeath** and **Treyarnon Bay**.

SLEEPING

Treyarnon Bay YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6076; Tregonnan; dm £15.50; ☎ ☒ ☒) Possibly one of the best-situated hostels in Cornwall, in a fantastic headland position above Treyarnon Bay, 4.5 miles west of Padstow. There's a café, kitchen and barbecue area and the beach is just a stone's throw away. Bus 556 from Padstow stops at nearby Constantine several times daily.

Althea Library (☎ 532717; www.althealibrary.co.uk; 27 High St; d £78–110; ☎ ☒ ☒) One of the nicest B&Bs in central Padstow, with a couple of cosy, tasteful rooms tucked away on the 1st floor of the listed cottage, and a more expensive 'nook suite'. Guests have use of a pretty little A-frame lounge, complete with CD player and board games, and the Aga-cooked breakfasts will keep you going for hours.

Cross House Hotel (☎ 532391; Church St; d £90–125; ☎ ☒ ☒) A short stroll uphill from the harbour brings you to this imposing Georgian town house, with a range of traditionally styled bedrooms decorated with rich bedspreads and heavy curtains – the more expensive even have plasma-screen TVs and the odd piece of antique furniture.

St Ervan Manor (☎ 540255; www.stervanmanor.co.uk; St Ervan; r £140–245; ☎ ☒ ☒) This award-winning B&B is really a country-house hotel in disguise, with five beautifully appointed bedrooms decorated in sumptuous shades and polished furniture, and a truly palatial garden cottage complete with a regal lounge and private patioed garden.

EATING

Rojano's (☎ 532796; 9 Mill Sq; pizzas £4–8, pasta £6–10; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) This bright, buzzy Italian joint turns out excellent pizza and pasta, served either in the snug, sunlit dining room or the tiny front terrace.

Rick Stein's Café (☎ 532700; Middle St; mains £8.50–15; ☺ closed Sun) Head for this relaxed bistro along the backstreet behind the harbour for a straightforward, daily-changing menu of seafood specials and a laid-back continental vibe.

Pescadou (☎ 532359; South Quay; mains £14–18; ☺ lunch & dinner) Mr Stein isn't the only one around town who can turn out top-notch seafood, as this pleasant restaurant next to the Old Custom House pub proves. Our tip? Try the rosemary-roasted turbot.

Seafood Restaurant (☎ 532700; www.rickstein.com; Riverside; mains £17.50–45; ☺ lunch & dinner) The restaurant that started the Stein empire, and still one of the county's most celebrated eateries. As you'd expect, the fish and seafood is of the highest calibre, but you'll need to plan your visit with military precision to bag a table.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 555 goes to Bodmin Parkway (50 minutes, hourly, six on Sunday) via Wadebridge.

Bus 595 travels to Truro (1¼ hours, once or twice daily), while bus 556 serves Newquay (1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday, five Sunday).

Tintagel

☎ 01840 / pop 1822

The spectre of King Arthur looms large over the village of Tintagel and its spectacular clifftop **castle** (EH; ☎ 770328; admission £4.30; ☺ 10am–6pm Apr–Sep, 10am–5pm Oct, 10am–4pm Nov–Mar). Though the present-day ruins mostly date from the 13th century, archaeological digs have revealed the foundations of a much earlier fortress, fuelling speculation that the legendary king may indeed have been born at the castle as local legend claims. Part of the crumbling stronghold stands on a rock tower cut off from the mainland, accessed via a bridge and steep steps, and it's still possible to make out several sturdy walls and much of the castle's interior layout.

The village is awash with touristy shops and tearooms making the most of the King Arthur connection, but there's not much to keep you entertained for long. The **Old Post Office** (NT; ☎ 770024; Fore St; admission £2.60; ☺ 11am–5.30pm Jul & Aug, 11am–5.30pm Sun–Fri Mar–Jul & Sep, 11am–4pm Sun–Fri Oct) is a beautiful example of a traditional Cornish longhouse and mostly dates from the 1500s; it was used as the village's post office during the 19th century.

The **tourist office** (☎ 779084; tintagelvc@btconnect.com; Bossiney Rd; ☺ 10am–5pm Mar–Oct, 10.30am–4pm Nov–Feb) has a few exhibits exploring local history and the Arthur legend.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 594 runs from Truro via Wadebridge (1¼ hours, six daily Monday to Friday); the more

TOP FIVE BEACHES

- For safe swimming: Perran Sands, Perranporth (p331)
- For scenic views: Bedruthan Steps, near Padstow (p332)
- For peaceful strolling: Gwithian and Godrevy Towans, near St Ives (p328)
- For family fun: Holywell Bay, near Newquay (p332)
- For learning to surf: Fistral or Crantock, both near Newquay (p332)

frequent bus 524 runs from Wadebridge only. Both buses go on to Boscastle (10 minutes).

Boscastle

☎ 01840

A few years ago Boscastle was just another pretty village on the north Cornish coast, renowned for its beautiful harbour and picturesque valley setting. But on 16 August 2004 the village hit the headlines thanks to a devastating flash flood, the worst in Britain since the deluge at Lynmouth in 1952. Some 440 million gallons of water tore through the heart of the village in just a few hours, carrying away cars, trees and the Boscastle visitor centre, and causing devastating damage to many of village's oldest buildings. Fifty-eight properties were flooded, over a hundred cars were swept out to sea and most of the village was evacuated by helicopter – but miraculously not a single person lost their lives.

Residents have spent the last few years piecing Boscastle back together, and though many properties have been completely refurbished, rebuilding work is still going on by the harbour. At the time of writing the **visitor centre** (☎ 250010; visitorcentre@boscastle.demon.co.uk; ☎ 10am–5pm Mar–Oct) was housed in a Portakabin opposite the Cobweb Inn, although plans were afoot to move it into a building near the harbour sometime in 2006.

The much-loved **Museum of Witchcraft** (☎ 250111; The Harbour; admission £2.50; ☎ 10.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, 11.30am–6pm Sun) has been thoroughly renovated since the flood, and its eclectic collection of witch-related memorabilia (the world's largest, apparently) is back on display. Artefacts include some spooky wooden poppets (a kind of voodoo doll), lots of witchy implements, and a hideous cast-iron 'witch's bridle' designed to extract confessions from suspected hags.

SLEEPING & EATING

Riverside Hotel (☎ 250216; www.hotelriverside.co.uk; s/d £30/60; ☎) A lovely B&B housed in one of the village's oldest buildings, with pleasant pastel-coloured rooms and a new restaurant serving open sandwiches and cream teas on a delightful riverside terrace.

Old Rectory (☎ 250225; www.stjuliot.com; St Juliot; d from £52; ☎ ☎; ☎ Mar–Nov) Formerly the home of the vicar of St Juliot, this opulent B&B is famous as the house where Thomas Hardy fell in love with his future wife, Emma Lavinia

Gifford (the rector's sister-in-law). Period antiques, Victorian knick-knacks and heavy drapes recreate the Hardy-era atmosphere; bookworms can stroll through the woods to St Juliot Church, which features in the pages of Hardy's novel *A Pair Of Blue Eyes*.

Wellington Hotel (☎ 250202; www.boscastle-welington.com; The Harbour; d £76–140; ☎ ☎) The grand old Welly Hotel, complete with its own crenellated turret, is the poshest place to stay in the village, with 15 old-fashioned country rooms dotted with antique clocks, polished dressers and thick floral carpets. The ground-floor bar is one of the village's main meeting spots and makes a great place for Sunday lunch.

Other recommendations:

Old Coach House (☎ 250398; www.old-coach.co.uk; Tintagel Rd; d £40–48; ☎ ☎) Chintzy rooms inside a 200-year-old coaching house above the village.

Botreux Hotel (☎ 250231; www.boscastlecornwall.co.uk; d £65–100; ☎ ☎) Fine, understated rooms inside an end-of-terrace town house, including one with a regal four-poster bed.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For buses see p335.

Bude

☎ 01288 / pop 9242

The last town of any note on the north Cornish coast, Bude is a busy seaside resort and another popular surfing hang-out, thanks to several great beaches all within easy reach. **Summerleaze** beach is closest to town and a favourite with picnicking families; the surfer's choice is **Crooklets**, just to the north. **Widemouth Bay** and **Sandymouth** are also worth a look, while the cove at **Duckpool** is often quieter than its neighbours.

Bude Visitor Centre (☎ 354240; www.visitbude.info; The Crescent; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, plus 10am–4pm Sun summer) is south of the town centre.

The pick of the B&Bs in Bude is **Camelot Hotel** (☎ 0800 781 2536; www.camelot-hotel.co.uk; Downs View; s/d £49/98; ☎ ☎ ☎), with plenty of plain and comfortable rooms dotted around the rambling house and views across the fairways of the nearby golf course.

The beachside café **Life's a Beach** (☎ 355222; Summerleaze Beach; mains £11–16; ☎ Mon–Sat) transforms from a lunchtime bistro to a snazzy candlelit restaurant by night, specialising in seafood and fantastic fish dishes.

Bus 594 travels from Truro (three hours, four daily Monday to Saturday) via Wadebridge, Boscastle and Tintagel.

Bodmin Moor

Cornwall's 'roof' is a high heath pockmarked with bogs and granite hills, including Rough Tor (pronounced *row-tor*, 400m) and Brown Willy (419m), Cornwall's highest point. It's a desolate place that works on the imagination; the Beast of Bodmin, a large black cat-like creature, has been seen regularly for many years, although no-one's ever managed to snap a decent picture.

Bodmin tourist office (☎ 01208-76616; www.bodminlive.com; Mount Folly; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) can help with information on exploring the moor. The small **Town Museum** (☎ 01208-77067; Mount Folly; admission free; ☎ 10.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat Apr–Sep) is opposite.

The A30 cuts across the centre of the moor from **Launceston**, which has a ruined 11th-century **castle** (EH; ☎ 01566-772365; admission £2; ☎ 10am–6pm Jul–Aug, 10am–5pm Apr–Jun & Sep, 10am–4pm Oct), and an interesting granite **church**.

Jamaica Inn (☎ 01566-86250; www.jamaicainn.co.uk; s £65, d £70–100; ☎ ☎), out on the desolate moor near Bolventor, was made famous by Daphne du Maurier's novel. On a misty winter's night the place still feels hugely atmospheric; the inn also contains a small smuggling museum and a room devoted to du Maurier.

About a mile south is **Dozmary Pool**, said to have been where Arthur's sword, Excalibur, was thrown after his death. It's a 4-mile walk northwest of Jamaica Inn to Brown Willy.

The **Bodmin & Wenford Railway** (☎ 0845 125 9678; www.bodminandwenfordrailway.co.uk; return ticket £7.50) is the last standard-gauge railway in Cornwall plied by steam locomotives. The old-fashioned steam trains are still decked out with their original 1950s livery, and chug from Bodmin Parkway and Bodmin General station to Boscarne Junction, where you can join up with the Camel Trail cycle route (p334). There are two to four return trips daily depending on season.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bodmin has bus connections with St Austell (bus 529, one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday), as well as Bodmin Parkway (bus 555, 15 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), on the London to Penzance train line.

ISLES OF SCILLY

☎ 01720

It's not quite true to say that Land's End is the most westerly point of the British Isles; that claim truly belongs to the tiny Isles of

Scilly, 28 miles southwest of mainland Cornwall. Over 140 islands make up this miniature archipelago, but only five are inhabited: St Mary's is the largest and busiest island, closely followed by Treco, while only a few hardy souls remain on Bryher, St Martin's and St Agnes. Nurtured by the Gulf Stream and blessed with a balmy subtropical climate, the Scillies have long survived on the traditional industries of farming, fishing and flower-growing, but these days tourism is by far the biggest money-spinner. With a laid-back island lifestyle, a strong community spirit and some of the most glorious beaches anywhere in England, it's hardly surprising that many visitors find themselves drawn back to the Scillies year after year. While life moves on at breakneck speed in the outside world, time in the Scillies just seems happy to stand still.

Information

The **Isles of Scilly Tourist Board** (☎ 422536; tic@scilly.gov.uk; Hugh Town, St Mary's; ☎ 8.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, 9am–2pm Sun May–Sep, shorter hours in winter) is on St Mary's.

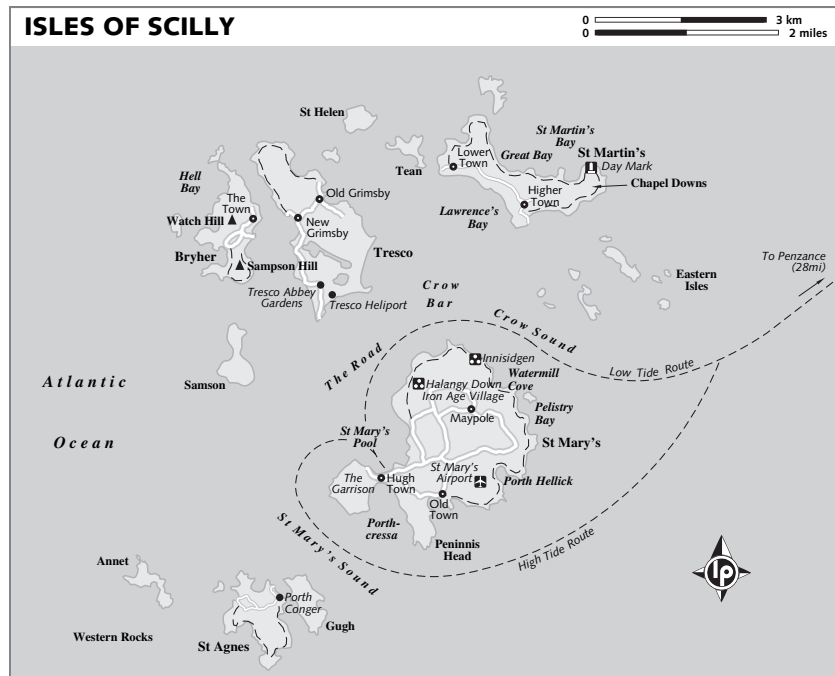
There are several good resources available online, including the locally run website www.scillyonline.co.uk and the tourist information centre's website (www.simplyscilly.co.uk), which has full accommodation listings.

The islands get very busy in summer, and many businesses shut down completely in winter, so make sure you plan ahead accordingly. All the islands, except Treco, have a simple camp site, but many visitors choose to stay in self-catering accommodation – try **Island Properties** (☎ 422082; St Mary's) or **Sibley's Island Homes** (☎ 422431; sibleys@scilly.fsnet.co.uk).

St Mary's

The largest and busiest island in the Scillies is St Mary's, and by local standards it's a bustling metropolis, with most of the islands' big hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and shops, and the vast majority of the summertime visitors. The Scillonian ferry and all flights from the mainland arrive on St Mary's, but the other main islands are easily reached via the inter-island launches that leave from the harbour every morning.

About a mile south of the airport is the main settlement of **Hugh Town**, where you'll find most of the island's hotels and guesthouses, and the **Isles of Scilly Museum** (☎ 422337; Church St; adult/child £2/50p; ☎ 10am–4.30pm in summer, 10am–noon



Mon-Sat in winter, or by arrangement), which has some fantastically atmospheric exhibits, including lots of archive photos of the islands, various artefacts recovered from shipwrecks (including muskets, a cannon and a ship's bell) and a fully rigged pilot gig dating from 1877.

The island even has its own **perfumery** (☎ 423304; Porthloo; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), which sells handmade soaps, potpourri and perfumes flavoured with the scents of Scilly flowers.

A little way south of Hugh Town is **Old Town**, once the island's main harbour but now home to a few small cafés, a village pub and a pleasant beach. Look out for the minuscule Old Town Church, where the services are still conducted by candlelight; the graveyard contains a memorial to Augustus Smith, founder of the Abbey Garden, as well as the grave of former prime minister Harold Wilson.

There are lots of small inlets scattered around the island's coastline, best reached on foot or by bike: Porth Hellick, Watermill Cove and the relatively remote Pelistry Bay are worth seeking out. St Mary's also has some unique ancient sites, notably the Iron Age village at Halangy Down, a mile north of

Hugh Town, and the barrows at Bant's Carn and Innisidgen.

Scilly Walks (☎ 423326; www.scillywalks.co.uk) leads three-hour archaeological and historical tours, costing £5/2.50 per adult/child, as well as visits to other offshore islands. Twitchers should get in touch with **Will Wagstaff** (☎ 422212), who runs regular bird-watching tours.

For diving on St Mary's, contact **Island Sea Safaris** (☎ 422732), which also offers white-knuckle speedboat rides (£18 to £25) around the islands and snorkelling trips to the local seal colonies (£36).

The traditional sport of pilot-gig racing is still popular in the Scillys. These six-oared wooden boats were originally used to race out to rescue foundering ships, but these days gig racing is a highly competitive sport. Races are held most weekends, and every May St Mary's hosts the World Pilot Gig Championships, which attracts teams from as far away as Holland and the USA.

SLEEPING

Campsite (☎ 422670; tedmoulson@aol.com; Tower Cottage, Garrison; tent sites per person £6-8) This popu-

lar, well-run camp site is tucked away in the dunes just behind Middle Town beach. The facilities are a little basic, but still a cut above most other camp sites on the Scillys. There's a laundry and a toilet block equipped with coin-operated showers, kitchen sinks and hot and cold water, and the beach is just steps away.

Evergreen Cottage (☎ 422711; www.evergreencottagetagehouse.co.uk; The Parade; d £58-69) This tiny little whitewashed cob cottage has unsurprisingly mini-sized rooms, but its sturdy walls means it stays cool even in the height of summer.

Wheelhouse (☎ 422719; Porthcressa Beach; d £60-90) This lovely modern B&B has perhaps the best position of any on St Mary's, right above Porthcressa Beach, with a small outside terrace where you can soak up the sunshine while tucking into a hearty home-cooked breakfast.

Crebinick Guest House (☎ 422968; www.crebinick.co.uk; Church St; d £66-80; ☒) Small, sweet rooms in a solid 18th-century terraced house, carefully renovated and efficiently run by its local owners.

Star Castle Hotel (☎ 422317; www.star-castle.co.uk; The Garrison; depending on season r £110-146, ste £166-296; ☒ ☒) This strangely shaped hotel was originally part of a 16th-century fort, which explains its peculiar layout in the form of an eight-pointed star. These days it's a supremely comfortable island hotel, boasting lovely maritime-themed rooms and a brace of restaurants where the seafood is out of this world.

St Mary's Hall Hotel (☎ 422316; www.stmarys-hallhotel.co.uk; r £160-240; ☒) This beautifully renovated mansion was built for the Italian nobleman Leon de Ferrari in 1938, and it's still an upper-class place to stay, with a choice of flowery Count Leon rooms or lavish designer suites, complete with LCD TVs and Chinese rugs.

Tresco

Once owned by Tavistock Abbey, Tresco is the second-largest island, and the second most visited after St Mary's. The main attraction is the **Abbey Garden** (☎ 424105; www.tresco.co.uk/the_abbey_garden; admission £8.50; 🕒 9.30am-4pm), first laid out in 1834 on the site of a 10th-century Benedictine abbey. The terraced gardens feature more than 5000 subtropical plants, including species from Brazil, New Zealand and South Africa, and the intriguing Valhalla

collection, made up of figureheads and nameplates salvaged from the many ships that have foundered off Tresco's shores.

There are only two places to stay on the island, apart from self-catering cottages.

New Inn (☎ 422844; newinn@tresco.co.uk; d depending on season £77-110; mains £5-18; ☒) has been whetting Scillonian whistles for several centuries, and is still the hub of island life. The upstairs rooms are smartly finished with subtle colours and all the mod cons, and a few boast views over the channel to Bryher.

For something altogether more upmarket, the eye-poppingly expensive **Island Hotel** (☎ 422883; islandhotel@tresco.co.uk; r £150-440; ☒ ☒) has bedrooms spread across several wings, with a choice of either private garden patios or glorious sea-view balconies. The décor throughout is elegance personified, ranging from gingham-checked bedrooms to luxurious suites decked out in gold and navy blue.

Bryher & Samson

Home to approximately 70 people, Bryher is the smallest and wildest inhabited island in the Scillys. Much of the landscape is covered by rough bracken and heather, and the coast often takes the full force of the Atlantic weather; Hell Bay in a winter gale is a powerful sight. There are good views over the islands from the top of Watch Hill, and Rushy Bay is one of the finest beaches in the Scillys. From the quay, occasional boats visit local seal and bird colonies and deserted Samson Island, where abandoned settlers' cottages tell a story of hard subsistence living.

The **camp site** (☎ 422886; sites £7.50) is near the quay.

Hell Bay Hotel (☎ 422947; hellbay@aol.com; d £135-420; ☒ ☒) is a beautiful hotel that consists entirely of upmarket, impeccably finished suites, most of which boast sleek, contemporary décor, en suites, sitting rooms and private balconies.

St Martin's

The most northerly of the main islands, St Martin's is renowned for its beautiful beaches. The largest settlement is **Higher Town**, where you'll find a small village shop and **Scilly Diving** (☎ 422848; www.scillydiving.com; Higher Town; dives from £36.50). A short way to the west is **Lower Town**, home to a cluster of tightly huddled cottages and the island's only hotel.

There are several small art galleries scattered across the island, as well as a tiny vineyard and a flower farm.

On the island's southern shore is Lawrence's Bay, which reveals a broad sweep of sandy flats at low tide. Along the northern side is Great Bay, arguably the finest beach in the Scillies; from the western end, you can cross to White Island at low tide. If you walk east along the windswept northern cliffs you'll find the Day Mark, a red-and-white candy-striped landmark that was built back in 1687, and the secluded cove of Perpitch.

The **camp site** (☎ 422888; chris@stmartinscampsite.freeserve.co.uk; Middle Town; tent sites £6-8) is near Lawrence's Bay at the western end of the island.

Polreath (☎ 422046; Higher Town; s £35-50, d £70-100; ☒) is a traditional cottage and one of the few B&Bs on the island. Rooms are snug and cosy, and it's handy for the island bakery and post office.

St Martin's on the Isle (☎ 422090; www.stmartinshotel.co.uk; d £230-550; ☒ ☎) is the only hotel on St Martin's, and arguably one of the best in the Scillies, with landscaped grounds, an indoor swimming pool and a private quay. The 30 bedrooms have a choice of sea or garden views, and there are several upmarket suites with private sitting rooms. The in-house restaurant is renowned throughout the islands.

St Agnes

England's most southerly community somehow transcends even the tranquillity of the other islands in the Isles of Scilly; it's an ideal spot to stroll, unwind and reflect, with lots of cloistered coves, coastal walks and even a scattering of prehistoric sites. Visitors disembark at **Porth Conger**, near the decommissioned **Old Lighthouse**, which is indeed one of the oldest lighthouses in the country. Other points of interest include the tiny **Troy Town Maze**, and the historic inlets of Periglis Cove and St Warna's Cove (dedicated to the patron saint of shipwrecks). At low tide you can cross over to the island of **Gugh**, where you'll find some intriguing Bronze Age remains as well as standing stones.

The **camp site** (☎ 422360; Troy Town Farm; tent sites £5.75-8) is at the southwestern corner of the island.

The little stone-walled **Covean Cottage** (☎ 422620; d £56-68) is the perfect location for getting away from the crowds; it offers four pleasant, good-value rooms and serves excel-

lent cream teas, light meals and sticky treats during the day.

The most southwesterly pub in all of Britain, the **Turk's Head** (☎ 422434; mains £6-10) is a real treat, with fine views, excellent beers, good pub grub and a hearty island atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

There's no transport to or from the islands on a Sunday.

AIR

The **Isles of Scilly Skybus** (☎ 0845 710 5555; www.ios-travel.co.uk) flies between St Mary's and Land's End (£119, 15 minutes) and Newquay (£138, 30 minutes) several times daily year-round. Cheaper saver fares are available for flights leaving Land's End after 2pm, or leaving St Mary's before noon. There's also at least one daily flight to Exeter (£221, 50 minutes) and Bristol (£266, 70 minutes). All prices are return fares.

British International (☎ 01736-363871; www.islesofscillyhelicopter.com) helicopters fly to St Mary's (20 minutes, nine to 11 daily Monday to Friday, 15 to 17 Saturday April to September; seven daily Monday to Friday, 13 Saturday in October; three to four daily Monday to Saturday November to March) and Tresco (20 minutes, four to six daily Monday to Saturday April to October; two daily November to March) from Penzance heliport (parking costs £6 per day). Adult return fares are £142 including taxes and fuel surcharges; a cheap day-return costs £98.

BOAT

The **Scillonian** ferry (☎ 0845 710 5555; www.ios-travel.co.uk) sails between Penzance and St Mary's (£89 return, two hours 40 minutes, daily Monday to Saturday). The crossing can be notoriously rough – landlubbers might be better off taking the chopper.

Getting Around

Regular inter-island launches sail from St Mary's harbour daily in summer to the other main islands. The boats usually leave in the early morning and return in late afternoon, although there are several daily boats over to Tresco. A return trip to most offshore islands costs £6.80, although there are lots of operators and off-island trips available – ask around at the harbour to see what's on offer.

If you're travelling between the islands, make sure you pack your luggage well and label it clearly with your name and the island

you're going to, as the inter-island boat trips can be a little rough and ready. Luggage rarely gets totally lost, but in the busy summer season bags sometimes end up on the wrong island and might not turn up till the next trip.

The airport bus service (single/return £2.50/4.50) departs from the strand in Hugh Town roughly 40 minutes before each flight. A circular bus service runs around St Mary's several times daily in summer (£1 to all destinations).

There's a twice-daily trip around St Mary's on a vintage open-top bus known as the Island Rover (www.islandrover.co.uk, £6), leaving at 10.15am and 1.30pm from the park. Ferry passengers can buy bus tickets on board the boat.

Bikes are available from **Buccaboo Hire** (☎ 422289; Porthcressa, Hugh Town) from around £6 per day.

For taxis, try **Island Taxis** (☎ 422126) or **Scilly Cabs** (☎ 422901).

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