

Northeast Scotland



The northern and eastern slopes of the Grampian Mountains are draped with a broad, green mantle of fertile lowlands, fringed with forests and hemmed around with long, sandy beaches and rugged, bird-haunted cliffs, bejewelled here and there with picturesque little fishing villages.

Many visitors pass by this corner of the country in their headlong rush to the tourist honeypots of Loch Ness and Skye. But they're missing out on a part of the country that's as beautiful and diverse as the more obvious attractions of the western Highlands and islands.

Within its bounds you will find two of Scotland's four largest cities – Dundee, the city of jute, jam and journalism, the cradle of some of Britain's favourite comic characters, and home to Captain Scott's Antarctic research ship, the *Discovery*; and Aberdeen, the granite city, an economic powerhouse fuelled by the riches of North Sea oil.

Angus, to the north of Dundee, is a region of rich farmland and scenic glens dotted with the mysterious stones left behind by the ancient Picts, while Aberdeen's rural hinterland is home to a thriving indigenous culture, where the old Scottish dialect known as the Doric still survives. Here you'll find the greatest concentration of Scottish Baronial castles anywhere in the country, and lovely little fishing villages such as Pennan and Gardenstown.

In the north is the ancient earldom of Moray, famous for the cathedral town of Elgin, the beaches of Banff and Lossiemouth, and dozens of distilleries that cluster along the banks of the River Spey.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking through the hills around beautiful **Glen Clova** (p243)
- Meditating on the meaning of the mysterious **Pictish stones** (p242) of Angus
- Tucking into the freshest of Scottish seafood at the **Harbour Restaurant** (p259) in Gardenstown
- Exploring the hills, forests, castles and pretty villages of **Royal Deeside** (p254)
- Being initiated into the mysteries of malt whisky on a Speyside **distillery tour** (p263)



■ POPULATION: 780,000

■ AREA: 10,979 SQ KM

Getting Around

The Dundee to Aberdeen route is served by **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) buses. **Stagecoach Strathtay** (www.stagecoachbus.com/strathtay) in Dundee and Angus and **Stagecoach Bluebird** (www.stagecoachbus.com/bluebird) in Aberdeenshire and Moray are the main regional bus operators, with a range of services linking all the main towns and cities. Stagecoach Bluebird offers a Bluebird Explorer ticket (adult/child £13/6.50) that allows unlimited travel on all its services for one day.

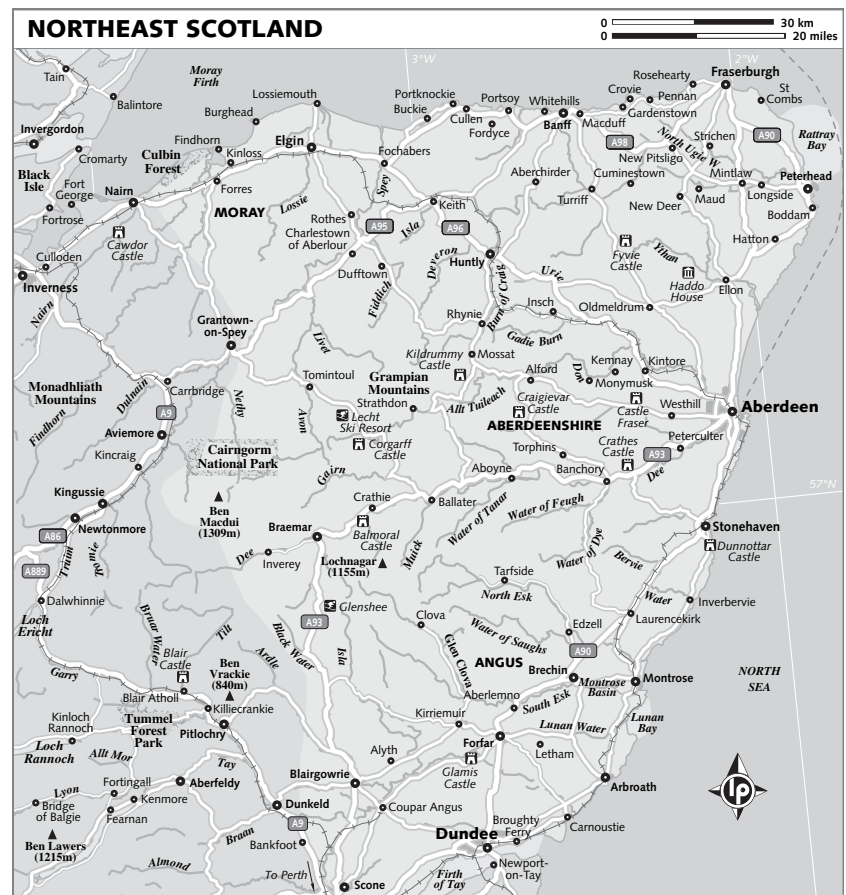
From mid-May to September, the Speyside Stroller (bus 500) runs from Cullen, on the Banffshire coast, to the Cairngorm Mountain Railway via Buckie, Spey Bay, Fochabers,

Elgin, Dufftown, Tomintoul, Granttown-on-Spey and Aviemore (3¾ hours, once daily, Saturday and Sunday only). The Heather Hopper (bus 501) links Ballater to Granttown-on-Spey via Strathdon and Tomintoul (1½ hours, twice daily mid-May to September).

Royal Mail postbuses (☎ 0845 774 0740; www.postbus.royalmail.com) run to remote communities in the Angus Glens and Deeside, charging on average £2 to £5 for single journeys.

The Dundee–Inverness railway line passes through Arbroath, Montrose, Stonehaven, Aberdeen, Huntly and Elgin.

You can pick up a public-transport map and guide from tourist offices and bus stations. For timetable information, call **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233).



DUNDEE & ANGUS

Angus is a region of fertile farmland stretching north from Dundee – Scotland's fourth-largest city – to the Highland border. It's an attractive area of broad straths (valleys) and low, green hills contrasting with the rich, red-brown soil of freshly ploughed fields. Romantic glens finger their way into the foothills of the Grampian Mountains, while the scenic coastline ranges from the red-sandstone cliffs of Arbroath to the long, sandy beaches around Montrose. This was the Pictish heartland of the 7th and 8th centuries, and many interesting Pictish symbol stones (p242) survive here.

Apart from the crowds visiting Discovery Point in newly confident Dundee and the coach parties shuffling through Glamis Castle, Angus is a bit of a tourism backwater and a good place to escape the hordes.

DUNDEE

☎ 01382 / pop 144,000

London's Trafalgar Sq has Nelson on his column, Edinburgh's Princes St has its monument to Sir Walter Scott and Belfast has a statue of Queen Victoria outside City Hall. Dundee's City Sq, on the other hand, is graced – rather endearingly – by the bronze figure of Desperate Dan. Familiar to generations of British school children, Dan is one of the best-loved cartoon characters from the children's comic *The Dandy*, published by Dundee firm DC Thomson since 1937.

Dundee enjoys perhaps the finest location of any Scottish city, spreading along the northern shore of the Firth of Tay, and can boast tourist attractions of national importance in Discovery Point and the Verdant Works museum. Add in the attractive seaside suburb of Broughty Ferry, some lively nightlife and the Dundonians themselves – among the friendliest, most welcoming and most entertaining people you'll meet – and Dundee is definitely worth a stopover.

History

During the 19th century Dundee grew from its trading port origins to become a major player in the shipbuilding, whaling, textile and railway engineering industries. Dundonian firms owned and operated most of the jute mills in India (jute is a natural fibre used in making ropes and sacking), and the city's

textile industry employed as many as 43,000 people – little wonder Dundee earned the nickname 'Juteopolis'.

Dundee is often called the city of the 'Three Js' – jute, jam and journalism. According to legend, it was a Dundee woman Janet Keillor who invented marmalade in the late 18th century; her son founded the city's famous Keillor jam factory. Jute is no longer produced, and when the Keillor factory was taken over in 1988 production was transferred to England. Journalism still thrives, however, led by the family firm of DC Thomson. Best known for children's comics, such as *The Beano*, Thomson is now the city's largest employer.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Dundee was one of the richest cities in the country – there were more millionaires per head of population here than anywhere else in Britain – but the textile and engineering industries declined in the second half of the 20th century, leading to high unemployment and urban decay.

In the 1960s and '70s Dundee's cityscape was scarred by ugly blocks of flats, office buildings and shopping centres linked by unsightly concrete walkways – the view as you approach across the Tay Road Bridge does not look promising – and most visitors passed it by. Since the mid-1990s, however, Dundee has reinvented itself as a tourist destination, and a centre for banking, insurance and new industries, and its waterfront is currently undergoing a major redevelopment. It also has more university students – one in seven of the population – than any other town in Europe, except Heidelberg.

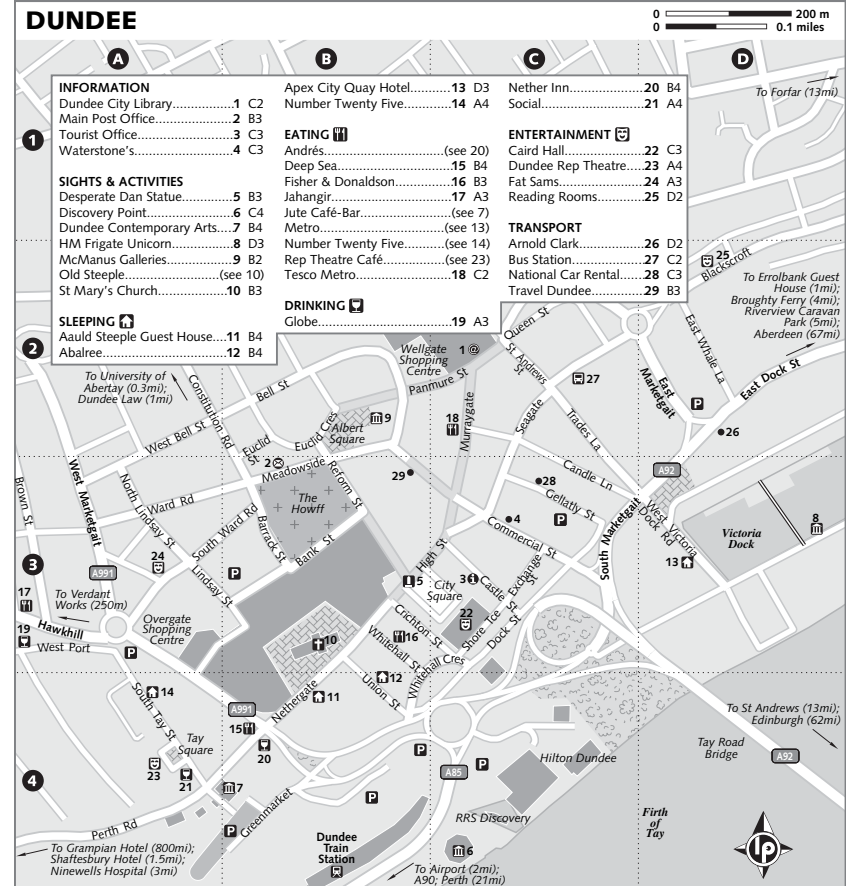
Orientation

The compact city centre is focussed on City Sq, just 400m from the northern end of the Tay Road Bridge. The train station and Discovery Point are 300m south of City Sq; the bus station is 400m to the northeast along Seagate. Immediately north of the city centre is the prominent hill of Dundee Law (174m), and 4 miles to the east is Broughty Ferry, Dundee's seaside resort.

Information

Dundee Central Library (☎ 431500; Wellgate; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 10am–6pm Wed, 9.30am–5pm Sat) Free internet access.

Main post office (☎ 0845 722 3344; 4 Meadowside) A block north of the Overgate Shopping Centre.



Linewells Hospital (☎ 660111; ☎ casualty 24hr)

At Menzieshill, west of the city centre.

Tourist office (☎ 527527; www.angusanddundee.co.uk; 21 Castle St; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun–Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Sat Oct–May)

Waterstone's (☎ 200322; 35 Commercial St; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon, Tue & Thu–Sat, 9.30am–5pm Wed, 11am–5pm Sun) Dundee's biggest bookshop.

Sights

CITY CENTRE

The heart of Dundee is **City Sq**, flanked to the south by the 1930s façade of **Caird Hall**, which was gifted to the city by a textile magnate and is now home to the City Chambers. A more recent addition to the square, unveiled in 2001, is a bronze statue of **Desperate Dan**, the

lantern-jawed hero of the children's comic *The Dandy* (he's clutching a copy in his right hand), which has been published in Dundee since 1937.

Pedestrianised High St leads west into Nethergate, flanked to the north by **St Mary's Church**. Most of the church dates from the 19th century, but the **Old Steeple** was built around 1460.

The focus for the city's emerging Cultural Quarter is **Dundee Contemporary Arts** (☎ 909900; www.dca.org.uk; Nethergate; admission free; ☎ galleries & shop 10.30am–5.30pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10.30am–8.30pm Thu, noon–5.30pm Sun, print studio 11am–9pm Tue–Thu, 11am–6pm Fri & Sat), a centre for modern art, design and cinema. The galleries here exhibit work by contemporary UK and international artists,

and there are printmakers' studios where you can watch artists at work, or even take part in craft demonstrations and workshops. There's also the Jute Café-Bar (see p237).

DISCOVERY POINT

The three masts of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's famous polar expedition vessel the **RRS Discovery** (☎ 201245; www.rrsdiscovery.com; Discovery Quay; adult/child £6.95/4.25; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Nov-Mar) dominate the riverside to the south of the city centre. The ship was built in Dundee in 1900, with a wooden hull at least half a metre thick to survive the pack ice, and sailed for the Antarctic in 1901 where she spent two winters trapped in the ice. From 1931 on she was laid up in London where her condition steadily deteriorated, until she was rescued by the efforts of Peter Scott (son of Robert) and the Maritime Trust, and restored to her 1925 condition. In 1986 she was given a berth in her home port of Dundee, where she became a symbol of the city's regeneration.

Exhibitions and audiovisual displays in the main building provide a fascinating history of both the ship and Antarctic exploration, but *Discovery* herself – afloat in a protected dock – is the star attraction. You can visit the bridge, the galley and the mahogany-panelled officers' wardrobe, and poke your nose into the cabins used by Scott and his crew.

A joint ticket that gives entry to both Discovery Point and the Verdant Works costs £11.25/7 per adult/child.

HM FRIGATE UNICORN

Unlike the polished and much-restored *Discovery*, Dundee's other floating tourist attraction retains the authentic atmosphere of a salty old sailing ship. Built in 1824, the 46-gun **HM Frigate Unicorn** (☎ 200893; Victoria Dock; adult/child £4/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, noon-4pm Wed-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is the oldest British-built ship still afloat – she was mothballed soon after launching and never saw action. By the mid-19th century sailing ships were outclassed by steam and the *Unicorn* served as a gunpowder store, then later as a training vessel. When it was proposed to break up the ship for scrap in the 1960s, a preservation society was formed.

Wandering around the four decks gives you an excellent impression of what it must

have been like for the crew forced to live in such cramped conditions. The *Unicorn* is berthed in Victoria Dock, just northeast of the Tay Road Bridge. The entry price includes a self-guided tour (also available in French and German).

VERDANT WORKS

One of the finest industrial museums in Europe, the **Verdant Works** (☎ 225282; www.verdantworks.com; West Henderson's Wynd; adult/child £6.95/4.25; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun Nov-Mar) explores the history of Dundee's jute industry. Housed in a restored jute mill complete with original machinery still in working condition, the museum's interactive exhibits and computer displays follow the raw material from its origins in India through to the manufacture of a wide range of finished products, from sacking to rope to wagon covers for the pioneers of the American West.

MCMANUS GALLERIES

Housed in a solid Victorian Gothic building designed by Gilbert Scott in 1867, **McManus Galleries** (☎ 432084; www.mcmamus.co.uk; Albert Sq; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun) contains the city's museum and art collection. The exhibits cover the history of the city from the Iron Age to the present day. Although closed for a major redevelopment at time of research, it's expected to be reopened by spring 2008.

DUNDEE LAW

It's worth making the climb up **Dundee Law** (174m) for great views of the city, the two Tay bridges and across to Fife. The **Tay Rail Bridge** – at just over 2 miles long, it was the world's longest when it was built – was completed in 1887 and replaced an earlier bridge whose stumps can be seen alongside. The original bridge collapsed during a storm in 1879, less than two years after it was built, taking a train and 75 lives along with it. The 1.5-mile **Tay Road Bridge** was opened in 1966.

Dundee Law is a short walk northwest of the city centre, along Constitution Rd.

Festivals & Events

If you're around in late June-early July, look out for the **Dundee Blues Bonanza** (www.dundeebluesbonanza.co.uk), a two-day festival of free blues, boogie and roots music.

Sleeping

Most of Dundee's city-centre hotels are business oriented, and offer lower rates on weekends. The main concentrations of B&Bs are along Broughty Ferry and Arbroath Rds east of the city centre, and on Perth Rd to the west. If you don't fancy a night in the city, consider staying at nearby Broughty Ferry (p239).

Accommodation in Dundee is usually booked solid when the Open Golf tournament is staged at Carnoustie or St Andrews (as it will be in 2010) – check www.opengolf.com for future dates and venues.

BUDGET

At the time of research there was no backpacker hostel in Dundee, but there were plans to open one in the near future – check www.hoppers.com or ask at the Edinburgh Backpackers Hostel (p99).

Riverview Caravan Park (☎ 535471; www.riverview.co.uk; Marine Dr, Monifieth; tent or campervan sites £13; ☎ Apr-Oct) The nearest camping ground to Dundee is attractively sited near the beach, 5 miles east of the city centre.

Abalree (☎ 223867; 20 Union St; s/d £20/34) This is a pretty basic B&B – there are no en suites – but the owners are welcoming (don't be put off by the dark entrance) and it couldn't be more central, close to both train and bus stations. This makes it popular, so book ahead.

MIDRANGE

Aauld Steeple Guest House (☎ 200302; www.aauldsteepleguesthouse.co.uk; 94 Nethergate; s/d £25/44) Just as central as Abalree, but a bit more comfortable, the Aauld Steeple has spacious double and family rooms, some with views of St Mary's Church. Suffers a bit from street noise, though.

Errolbank Guest House (☎ 462118; 9 Dalgleish Rd; s/d £32/56; ☎) A mile east of the city centre, just north of the road to Broughty Ferry, Errolbank is a lovely Victorian family home, with small, flowery en-suite rooms set in a quiet street.

Number Twenty Five (☎ 200399; www.g1group.co.uk; 25 South Tay St; r £60) Set in an elegant Georgian town house in the heart of the city's cultural quarter, upstairs from the restaurant of the same name, this place has four luxurious boutique-style bedrooms.

Shaftesbury Hotel (☎ 669216; www.shaftesbury-hotel.co.uk; 1 Hyndford St; s/d £55/69) The family-run, 12-room Shaftesbury is a Victorian mansion built for a jute baron and has many authentic

period features, including a fine marble fireplace in the dining room. It's 1.5 miles west of the city centre, just off Perth Rd.

Grampian Hotel (☎ 667785; www.grampianhotel.com; 295 Perth Rd; s/d from £55/70; ☎) The Grampian is a small and welcoming hotel set in a restored Victorian town house with six spacious bedrooms (all en suite), just five minutes' walk from the West End.

TOP END

Apex City Quay Hotel (☎ 202404; www.apexhotels.co.uk; 1 West Victoria Dock Rd; s/d from £80/90; ☎) Though it looks plain from the outside, the Apex overlooks the city's redeveloping waterfront and sports the sort of stylish, spacious, sofa-equipped rooms that make you want to lounge around all evening munching chocolate in front of the TV. If you can drag yourself away from your room, there are spa treatments, saunas and Japanese hot tubs to enjoy.

Eating

Jute Café-Bar (☎ 909246; Dundee Contemporary Arts, 152 Nethergate; mains lunch £6-9, dinner £9-13; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) The industrial-chic café-bar in the Dundee Contemporary Arts centre serves excellent pasta dishes, panini and salads, as well as more adventurous Mediterranean-Asian fusion cuisine; tables spill out into the sunny courtyard in summer. Early bird menu (5pm to 7pm daily) offers a two-course dinner for £11.

our pick André's (☎ 224455; 134a Nethergate; 2-course lunch £7.50, mains £8-11; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-11pm Tue-Sat, 1-11pm Sun) A quaint little corner that appears to have been fashioned out of someone's attic bedroom, André's nevertheless offers an authentic taste of France with a small, ever-changing menu of French classics ranging from onion soup to *boeuf bourguignon*.

Number Twenty Five (☎ 200399; 25 South Tay St; mains £8-11; ☎ food served noon-10pm) This elegant bar set in a Georgian town house offers a mellow, candle-lit dining room serving good-value bistro cuisine, including courgette and white bean soup, char-grilled lamb and crispy sea bass with wild mushrooms.

Rep Theatercafé (☎ 206699; Tay Sq; mains £6-12; ☎ café 10am-late, restaurant noon-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat) The city's arty types hang out in this Continental-style café-bar and restaurant in the foyer at the Dundee Rep Theatre. Great sandwiches and pizza, as well as tasty steaks, fish cakes and veggie dishes.

our pick Metro (☎ 0845 365 0002; Apex City Quay Hotel, 1 West Victoria Dock Rd; mains £8-14; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-9.30pm) Sleek slate-blue banquettes, white linen napkins, black-clad staff and a view of Victoria Dock lend an air of city sophistication to this stylish hotel brasserie. The bargain lunch menu (two-/three-course for £8/10) includes tempting dishes such as gravadlax with mustard dressing, and crab linguini with sweet peppers and saffron butter.

Jahangir (☎ 202022; 1 Session St; mains £9-14; ☎ 5pm-midnight) The food is good, but it's worth going to this curry house for the décor alone – pure Hollywood Moghul, with a turbaned doorman, an over-the-top tent, and a tinkling fountain inhabited by live goldfish and carp (no, they're not on the menu).

There's an excellent tearoom in the upmarket bakery and patisserie **Fisher & Donaldson** (12 Whitehall St; ☎ 6.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), while Dundee's best fish and chips can be found at **Deep Sea** (81 Nethergate; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat).

Self-caterers can shop at **Tesco Metro** (Murraygate; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Fri, 7am-10pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun).

Drinking

There are many lively pubs, especially in the West End and along West Port. The large, stylish **Nether Inn** (☎ 349970; 134 Nethergate), with its comfy couches, pool table and drinks promos, is popular with students, while **Social** (☎ 202070; 10 South Tay St) is a lively style bar with a separate dining area. The **Globe** (☎ 224712; 53-57 West Port) serves good bar meals from noon to 7.30pm (6pm Sunday) and often has live music or sport on the big-screen TV.

Entertainment

Dundee's nightlife may not be as hot as Glasgow's, but there are lots of places to go – pick up a free what's-on guide from the tourist office, or check out the What's On section of www.dundee.com. Tickets for most events are on sale at the Dundee Contemporary Arts centre.

Caird Hall (☎ 434940; www.cairdhall.co.uk; 6 City Sq; ☎ box office 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat) The Caird Hall hosts regular concerts of classical music, as well as organ recitals, rock bands, dances, fetes and fairs. Check its website for details of coming events.

Dundee Rep Theatre (☎ 223530; www.dundee-rep-theatre.co.uk; Tay Sq; ☎ box office 10am-6pm or start of performance) Dundee's main venue for the performing arts, the Rep is home to Scotland's

only full-time repertory company and to the Scottish Dance Theatre.

Fat Sams (☎ 228181; www.fatsams.co.uk; 31 South Ward Rd; admission £5-13; ☎ 10.30pm-2.30am Tue-Sun) Fat Sams has been around for more than 20 years but is still one of the city's most popular clubs, with regular live gigs, DJs and student nights pulling in a young crowd (including lots of students from St Andrews University).

Reading Rooms (☎ 07905 353301; www.myspace.com/thereadingrooms; 57 Blackscroft; admission £3-8; ☎ 8.30pm or 10.30pm-2.30am Wed-Sat) Dundee's hippest venue is an arty, bohemian hang-out that hosts some of Scotland's best indie club nights. Live gigs have ranged from island singer-songwriter Colin MacIntyre (aka Mull Historical Society) to Glasgow guitar fiends Franz Ferdinand.

Getting There & Away

The Tay Road Bridge linking Dundee and Fife costs 80p per car southbound, but is toll free for northbound traffic.

AIR

Two and a half miles west of the city centre, **Dundee Airport** (☎ 662200; Riverside Dr) has daily scheduled services to London City airport (ScotAirways), Birmingham and Belfast (FlyWhoosh). A taxi to the airport takes five minutes and costs £3.

BUS

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) operates two direct services a day from London to Dundee (£35, 10½ hours).

Scottish Citylink (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) has hourly buses from Dundee to Glasgow (£11, two hours), Perth (£5, 35 minutes), Aberdeen (£1, 1½ hours) and Edinburgh (£11, two hours, change at Perth); book via www.megabus.com for fares as low as £2. Some Aberdeen buses travel via Arbroath, others via Forfar. There are also direct buses to Oban (£20, 3½ hours).

Stagecoach Strathtay operates buses to Perth (one hour, hourly), Blairgowrie (one hour, hourly), Forfar (40 minutes, once or twice an hour), Kirriemuir (one hour, half-hourly), Brechin (1¼ hours, 10 daily, change at Forfar) and Arbroath (one hour, half-hourly).

Stagecoach Fife bus 99 runs to St Andrews (40 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday).

For timetable information, call **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233).

TRAIN

Trains run to Dundee from Edinburgh (£18, 1¼ hours) and Glasgow (£21, 1½ hours) at least once an hour Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday from Edinburgh, and every two hours on Sunday from Glasgow.

Trains from Dundee to Aberdeen (£22, 1¼ hours) travel via Arbroath and Stonehaven. There are around two trains an hour, fewer on Sunday.

Getting Around

The city centre is compact, and is easy to get around on foot. For information on local public transport, call **Travel Dundee** (☎ 201121; www.traveldundee.co.uk; Forum Shopping Centre, 92 Commercial St; ☎ 9.15am-4.55pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3.55pm Sat). City bus fares cost 60p to £1.25 depending on distance; buy your ticket from the driver (exact fare only – no change given).

Phone **Discovery Taxis** (☎ 732111) if you need a taxi. If you'd like to drive yourself, rental companies in Dundee include **Arnold Clark** (☎ 225382; East Dock St) and **National Car Rental** (☎ 224037; 45-53 Gellatly St).

BROUGHTY FERRY

☎ 01382

Dundee's attractive seaside suburb, known locally as 'The Ferry', lies 4 miles east of the city centre. It has a castle, a long, sandy beach, and a number of good places to eat and drink, and is handy for the golf courses at nearby Carnoustie.

Sights

Broughty Castle Museum (☎ 436916; Castle Green; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun, closed Mon Oct-Mar) occupies a 16th-century tower house that looms imposingly over the harbour, guarding the entrance to the Firth of Tay. There's a fascinating exhibit on Dundee's whaling industry, and the chance of spotting seals and dolphins offshore.

Sleeping

Invermark House (☎ 739430; www.invermark.co.uk; 23 Monifieth Rd; s/d £30/45; ☎) Invermark is a grand Victorian villa set in its own grounds, built for a jute baron in the mid-19th century, with five large en-suite bedrooms and an elegant lounge and dining room with a view of the gardens.

Ashley House (☎ 776109; www.ashleyhousebroughty-ferry.co.uk; 15 Monifieth Rd; s/d from £30/50; ☎) This spacious and comfortable guesthouse has long

been one of Broughty Ferry's best, with four cheerfully decorated bedrooms equipped with hotel-grade beds and DVD player; one has a particularly grand bathroom.

Fisherman's Tavern (☎ 775941; www.fishermans-tavern-hotel.co.uk; 10-16 Fort St; s/d £39/64; ☎) A delightful 17th-century terraced cottage just a few paces from the seafront, the Fisherman's was converted to a pub in 1827. It now has 11 stylishly modern rooms, most with en suite, and an atmospheric pub (see below).

Hotel Broughty Ferry (☎ 480027; www.hotelbroughtyferry.com; 16 W Queen St; s/d £68/88; ☎) Doesn't look like much from the outside, but this is the Ferry's swankiest place to stay, with 16 beautifully decorated bedrooms, a sauna and solarium, and a small, heated pool. It's only a five-minute stroll from the waterfront.

Eating & Drinking

Fisherman's Tavern (☎ 775941; 10-16 Fort St; mains £6-9; ☎ food served noon-2.30pm & 5-7.30pm) The Fisherman's – a maze of cosy nooks and open fireplaces in a 17th-century cottage – is a lively little pub where you can wash down fresh local seafood with a choice of Scottish real ales.

Visocchi's (☎ 779297; 40 Gray St; mains £7-10; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue, 9.30am-8pm Wed, Thu & Sun, 9.30am-1pm Fri & Sat) Visocchi's – a 70-year-old institution – is a traditional, family-run Italian café that sells delicious homemade ice cream, good coffee, and a range of burgers, pizzas and pasta dishes.

Ship Inn (☎ 779176; 121 Fisher St; mains £9-14; ☎ food served noon-2pm & 5-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-10.30pm Sat & Sun) On the seafront around the corner from the Fisherman's is the snug, wood-panelled, 19th-century Ship Inn, which serves top-notch dishes ranging from gourmet haddock and chips to venison steaks. It's always busy, so get in early if you want a meal.

Getting There & Away

Buses 7 to 12 run from Dundee High St to Broughty Ferry (20 minutes) several times an hour from Monday to Saturday, and hourly on Sunday.

GLAMIS CASTLE & VILLAGE

Looking every inch the Scottish Baronial castle, with its roofline sprouting a forest of pointed turrets and battlements, **Glamis Castle** (☎ 01307-840393; www.glamis-castle.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/4.30; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Mar–Oct, 11am-5pm Nov

& Dec, closed 22 Dec–mid-Mar) was the legendary setting for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. A royal residence since 1372, it is the family home of the earls of Strathmore and Kinghorne – the Queen Mother (born Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon; 1900–2002) spent her childhood at Glamis (pronounced glams) and Princess Margaret (the Queen's sister; 1930–2002) was born here.

The five-storey, L-shaped castle was given to the Lyon family in 1372, but was significantly altered in the 17th century. Inside, the most impressive room is the drawing room, with its vaulted plasterwork ceiling. There's a display of armour and weaponry in the haunted crypt and frescoes in the chapel (also haunted). Duncan's Hall is where King Duncan was murdered in *Macbeth*. You can also look around the royal apartments, including the Queen Mother's bedroom. The one-hour guided tours depart every 15 minutes (last tour at 4.30pm, or 3.30pm in winter).

The **Angus Folk Museum** (NTS; ☎ 01307-840288; Kirkwynd, Glamis; adult/child £5/4; ☹ 11am–5pm Mon–Sat, 1–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, noon–5pm Sat & Sun only Easter–Jun & Sep), in a row of 18th-century cottages just off the flower-bedecked square in Glamis village, houses a fine collection of domestic and agricultural relics.

Glamis Castle is 12 miles north of Dundee. There are two to four buses a day from Dundee (35 minutes) to Glamis; some continue to Kirriemuir.

ARBROATH

☎ 01241 / pop 22,800

Arbroath is an old-fashioned seaside resort and fishing harbour, home of the famous Arbroath smokie (a form of smoked haddock) – no visit is complete without buying a pair of smokies from one of the many fish shops and eating them with your fingers while sitting beside the harbour. Yum.

The town has a brand-new **visitor centre & tourist office** (☎ 872609; Fishmarket Quay; ☹ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–3pm Sun Jun–Aug, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat Apr, May & Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat Oct–Mar) beside the harbour.

There's internet access at **Coldroom Computers** (☎ 431777; 15 Westport; per 15 min 50p; ☹ 10am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, noon–4pm Sat).

Sights & Activities

The magnificent, red-sandstone ruins of **Arbroath Abbey** (HS; ☎ 878756; Abbey St; adult/child

£4.50/2.25; ☹ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Oct–Mar), founded in 1178 by King William the Lion, dominate the town centre. It is thought that Bernard of Linton, the abbot here in the early 14th century, wrote the famous Declaration of Arbroath in 1320 asserting Scotland's right to independence from England (see the boxed text, p30). You can climb to the top of one of the towers for a grand view over the town.

The **Arbroath Museum** (☎ 875598; Ladyloan; admission free; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat year-round, plus 2–5pm Sun Jul & Aug), housed in the elegant Signal Tower, covers local history, including the textile and fishing industries. The tower was originally used to communicate with the construction team working on the Bell Rock Lighthouse 12 miles offshore, which was built between 1807 and 1811 by the famous engineer Robert Stevenson (grandfather of writer Robert Louis Stevenson).

St Vigeans Museum (HS; ☎ 878756; admission free; ☹ key available 9.30am–6.30pm Apr–Sep, to 4.30pm Mon–Sat Oct–Mar), about a mile north of the town centre, houses a superb collection of Pictish and medieval sculptured stones. It was closed for refurbishment at the time of research, but should re-open in 2009.

If you fancy catching your own fish, the **Marie Dawn** (☎ 873957) and **Girl Katherine II** (☎ 874510) offer three-hour sea-angling trips (usually from 2pm to 5pm) out of Arbroath harbour for £14 per person, including tackle and bait.

The coast northeast of Arbroath consists of dramatic red-sandstone cliffs riven by inlets, caves and natural arches. An excellent **walk** follows a path along the top of the cliffs for 3 miles to the quaint fishing village of **Auchmithie**, which claims to have invented the Arbroath smokie. The humble smokie achieved European Union 'Protected Geographical Indication' status in 2004 – the term 'Arbroath smokie' can be only be used legally to describe haddock smoked in the traditional manner within an 8km radius of Arbroath.

Sleeping & Eating

Old Vicarage (☎ 430475; www.theoldvicaragebandb.co.uk; 2 Seaton Rd; s/d from £35/50; (P)) The three five-star bedrooms in this attractive Victorian villa have a pleasantly old-fashioned atmosphere, and the extensive breakfast menu includes Arbroath smokies. The house is on a quiet street close to the start of the cliff-top walk to Auchmithie.

Harbour Nights Guest House (☎ 434343; www.harbour-nights-scotland.com; 4 The Shore; s/d from £40/50) With a superb location overlooking the harbour, five stylishly decorated bedrooms and a gourmet breakfast menu, Harbour Nights is our favourite place to stay in Arbroath. Rooms 2 and 3, with harbour views, are a bit more expensive (doubles £60 to £65), but well worth asking for when booking.

Smithie's (☎ 873344; 16 Keptie St; mains £3–5; ☹ 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–4pm Sat) Housed in a former butcher's shop, with hand-painted tiles and meat hooks on the ceiling, Smithie's is a great little neighbourhood deli and café serving Fairtrade coffee, pancakes, wraps and freshly made pasta – butternut squash and sage tortellini make a tasty change from macaroni cheese for a vegetarian lunch.

Sugar & Spice Tearoom (☎ 437500; 9–13 High St; mains £5–8; ☹ 10am–4pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun; ♀) With its flounces, frills and black-and-white uniformed waitresses, this chintzy tearoom verges on the twee. However, the place is very child-friendly – there's an indoor play area and a Wendy house out the back – and the tea and scones are sublime. You can even try an Arbroath smokie, grilled with lemon butter.

our pick But'n'Ben Restaurant (☎ 877223; 1 Auchmithie; mains £6–11; ☹ noon–3pm, 4–5.30pm & 7–10pm Mon & Wed–Sat, noon–5.30pm Sun) Above the harbour in Auchmithie, this cosy, tartan-clad cottage restaurant serves the best of local seafood – the Arbroath smokie pancakes are recommended – plus great homemade cakes and desserts.

Gordon's Restaurant (☎ 830364; Main St, Inverkeillor; 3-course lunch £25, 4-course dinner £37; ☹ noon–1.45pm Wed–Sun, 7–9pm Tue–Sun) Six miles north of Arbroath, in the tiny and unpromising-looking village of Inverkeillor, is this hidden gem – an intimate and rustic eatery serving gourmet-quality Scottish cuisine, with three comfortable bedrooms (single/double from £55/80) for those who don't want to drive back to a hotel after dinner.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses from Dundee to Arbroath, but the scenic train journey along the coast (£4, 20 minutes, two per hour) is the better option. Trains continue from Arbroath to Aberdeen (£17, 50 minutes) via Montrose and Stonehaven.

Bus 140 runs from Arbroath to Auchmithie (15 minutes, six daily Monday to Friday, three daily on Saturday and Sunday).

MONTROSE

☎ 01674 / pop 11,800

Despite its seaside setting, broad main street of Victorian buildings and reputation as a golfing resort, Montrose exudes an austere and slightly down-at-heel atmosphere. It sits at the mouth of the River South Esk, where its industrial harbour serves the North Sea oil industry; and is backed by the broad, tidal mud flats of Montrose Basin, a rich feeding ground for thousands of resident and migrant birds.

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre (☎ 676336; Rossie Braes; adult/child £3/2; ☹ 10.30am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10.30am–4pm Nov–Mar) at the southern edge of town has indoor and outdoor hides, and viewing platforms with high-powered binoculars and remote-controlled TV cameras where you can zoom in on the local wildlife. In summer you can see curlews, oystercatchers and eider ducks – and perhaps an otter if you're lucky – and in autumn the basin is invaded by huge flocks of pink-footed and greylag geese. The bird-watching is best from two hours after high tide till two hours before the next high tide – check times at any tourist office.

Prettier than Montrose's town beach, the 2-mile strand of **Lunan Bay** to the south is overlooked by the dramatic ruin of **Red Castle**.

Montrose lies on the Dundee to Aberdeen railway line.

FORFAR

☎ 01307 / pop 13,200

Forfar, the county town of Angus, is the home of Scotland's answer to the Cornish pasty: the famous **Forfar bridle**. A shortcrust pastry turnover filled with cooked minced beef, onion and gravy, it was invented in Forfar in the early 19th century. If you fancy trying one, head for **James McLaren & Son** (☎ 462762; 8 The Cross; ☹ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Wed, Fri & Sat, 8am–1pm Thu), a family bakery bang in the centre of town, which has been selling tasty, home-baked bridies since 1893.

Strathgry Scottish buses from Dundee to Kirriemuir travel via Forfar.

ABERLEMNO

Five miles northeast of Forfar, on the B9134, are the mysterious **Aberlemno stones**, some of Scotland's finest Pictish symbol stones (see boxed text, p242). By the roadside there are three 7th- to 9th-century slabs with various symbols, including the z-rod and double disc,

and in the churchyard at the bottom of the hill there's a magnificent 8th-century stone displaying a Celtic cross, interlace decoration, entwined beasts and, on the reverse, scenes of the Battle of Nechtansmere (where the Picts vanquished the Northumbrians in 685). The stones are covered up from November to March; otherwise there's free access at all times.

KIRRIEMUIR

☎ 01575 / pop 6000

Known as the Wee Red Town because of its close-packed, red-sandstone houses, Kirriemuir is famed as the birthplace of JM Barrie (1860–1937), writer and creator of the much-loved *Peter Pan*. A willowy bronze statue of the 'boy who wouldn't grow up' graces the intersection of Bank and High Sts.

The tourist office is in the Gateway to the Glens Museum (see right).

Sights

JM Barrie's Birthplace (NTS; ☎ 572646; 9 Brechin Rd; adult/child £5/4; ☎ 11am–5pm Mon–Sat, 1–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, noon–5pm Sat–Wed, 1–5pm Sun Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct) is the town's big attraction, a place of pilgrimage for *Peter Pan* fans from all over the world. The

two-storey house where Barrie was born has been furnished in period style, and preserves Barrie's writing desk and the wash house at the back that served as his first 'theatre'. The ticket also gives admission to the **Camera Obscura** (adult/child £3/2 for Camera Obscura only; ☎ 11am–5pm Mon–Sat, 1–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, noon–5pm Sat–Wed Easter–Jun & Sep) on the hill top northeast of the town centre, gifted to the town by Barrie himself.

The old Town House opposite the *Peter Pan* statue dates from 1604 and houses the **Gateway to the Glens Museum** (☎ 575479; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat), a useful introduction to local history, geology and wildlife for those planning to explore the Angus Glens.

For generations of local school kids, the big treat when visiting Kirriemuir was a trip to the **Star Rock Shop** (☎ 572579; 27–29 Roods). Established in 1833, it still specialises in traditional Scottish 'sweets' (candy), ranged in colourful jars along the walls – humbugs, tablet, cola cubes, pear drops, and the original Star Rock, still made to an 1833 recipe.

Sleeping & Eating

Crepto B&B (☎ 572746; david@jessma.wanadoo.co.uk; Kinnordy Pl; r per person £23–26; ☎) You'll get a warm welcome at this modern B&B, tucked away

in a quiet cul-de-sac about 10 minutes' walk from the town centre (head along Glengate and Kinnordy Rd).

Airlie Arms Hotel (☎ 572847; www.airlearms-hotel.co.uk; St Malcolms's Wynd; s/d £40/65; ☎) This attractive old coaching inn, just a few minutes' walk from the tourist office, has luxurious en-suite rooms and a stylish, candle-lit café-bar called the Wynd (mains £6 to £9), open from noon to 3pm Friday to Sunday and 5 pm to 9pm daily.

Visocchi's (☎ 572115; 37 High St; mains £2–4) A proudly old-fashioned family café that serves Costa coffee and great homemade ice cream.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach Strathtay runs bus services from Dundee to Kirriemuir (£5, 1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday) via Glamis (20 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday) and Forfar (25 minutes).

ANGUS GLENS

The northern part of Angus is bounded by the Grampian Mountains, where five scenic glens – Isla, Prosen, Clova, Lethnot and Esk – cut into the hills along the southern edge of the Cairngorms National Park. All have attractive scenery, though each glen has its own distinct personality: Glen Clova and Glensk are the most beautiful, while Glen Lethnot is the least frequented. You can get detailed information on walks in the Angus Glens from the tourist office in Kirriemuir and from the Glen Clova Hotel in Glen Clova.

Glen Isla

At Bridge of Craigisla at the foot of the glen is a spectacular, 24m waterfall called **Reekie Linn**; the name Reekie (Scottish for 'smoky') comes from the billowing spray that rises from the falls.

A 5-mile walk beyond the road end at Auchavan leads into the wild and mountainous upper reaches of the glen, where the **Caenlochan National Nature Reserve** protects rare alpine flora on the high plateau.

A **Royal Mail postbus** (☎ 0845 774 0740) runs from Blairgowrie to Auchavan via Alyth (once daily, except Sunday).

Glen Prosen

Near the foot of Glen Prosen, 6 miles north of Kirriemuir, there's a good forest walk up

to the **Airlie monument** on Tulloch Hill (380m); start from the eastern road, about a mile beyond Dykehead.

From Glenprosen Lodge, at the head of the glen, a 9-mile walk along the **Kilbo Path** leads over a pass between Mayar (928m) and Driesh (947m), and descends to Glendoll Lodge at the head of Glen Clova (allow five hours).

Glen Clova

The longest and loveliest of the Angus Glens stretches north from Kirriemuir for 20 miles, broad and pastoral in its lower reaches but growing narrower and craggier as the steep, heather-clad Highland hills close in around its head.

The minor road beyond the Glen Clova Hotel ends at a Forestry Commission car park (£1.50 per car) with toilets and a picnic area, which is the trailhead for a number of strenuous walks through the hills to the north.

Jock's Road is an ancient footpath that was much used by cattle drovers, soldiers, smugglers and shepherds in the 18th and 19th centuries; 700 Jacobite soldiers passed this way during their retreat in 1746, en route to final defeat at Culloden. From the car park the path strikes west along Glen Doll, then north across a high plateau (900m) before descending steeply into Glen Callater and on to Braemar (15 miles, allow five to seven hours). The route is hard going and should not be attempted in winter; you'll need OS 1:50,000 maps Nos 43 and 44.

An easier, but still strenuous, circular walk starts from the Glen Clova Hotel, making a circuit of the scenic corrie (glacial hollow) that encloses **Loch Brandy** (6 miles, four hours).

Outpick Glen Clova Hotel (☎ 01575-550350; www.clova.com; Glen Clova; s/d £50/80; ☎) is a lovely old drover's inn near the head of the glen and a great place to get away from it all. As well as 10 comfortable, country-style, en-suite rooms (one with a four-poster bed), it has a bunkhouse out the back (£11 per person), a rustic, stone-floored climbers' bar with a roaring log fire, and a bay-windowed **restaurant** (mains £4–10; ☎) noon–8.15pm Sun–Thu, noon–8.45pm Fri & Sat) with views across the glen. The menu includes steak and Guinness pie and lamb casserole with rosemary gravy, and there are separate children's and vegetarian menus.

A **Royal Mail postbus** (☎ 0845 774 0740) to Glen Clova departs from Kirriemuir post office at 8.30am and 3.10pm Monday to Friday,

PICTISH SYMBOL STONES

The mysterious carved stones that dot the landscape of eastern Scotland are the legacy of the warrior tribes who inhabited these lands 2000 years ago. The Romans occupied the southern half of Britain from AD 43 to 410, but the region to the north of the firths of Forth and Clyde – known as Caledonia – was abandoned as being too dangerous, sealed off behind the ramparts of the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall.

Caledonia was the homeland of the Picts, a collection of tribes named by the Romans for their habit of painting or tattooing their bodies. In the 9th century they were culturally absorbed by the Scots, leaving behind only a few archaeological remains, a scattering of Pictish place names beginning with 'Pit', and hundreds of mysterious carved stones decorated with intricate symbols, mainly in northeast Scotland. The capital of the ancient Southern Pictish kingdom is said to have been at Forteviot in Strathearn; and Pictish symbol stones are to be found throughout this area and all the way up the eastern coast of Scotland into Sutherland and Caithness.

It is thought that the stones were set up to record Pictish lineages and alliances, but no-one is sure exactly how the system worked. They are decorated with unusual symbols, including z-rods (lightning bolt?), circles (the sun?), double discs (hand mirror?) and fantastical creatures, as well as figures of warriors on horseback, hunting scenes and (on the later stones) Christian symbols.

Local tourist offices provide a free leaflet titled the *Angus Pictish Trail*, which will guide you to the main Pictish sites in the area. The finest assemblage of stones in their natural outdoor setting is at Aberlemno (p241), and there are excellent indoor collections at St Vigeans Museum (p240) and the Meigle Museum (p231). The Pictavia interpretive centre at Brechin (p245) provides a good introduction to the Picts, and is worth a look before you visit the stones.

The Pictish Trail by Anthony Jackson lists 11 driving tours, while *The Symbol Stones of Scotland* by the same author provides more detail on the history and meaning of the Pictish stones.

8.30am only on Saturday. The morning run goes all the way to Glendoll at the head of the glen (2½ hours), the afternoon one only as far as Glen Clova Hotel (1¼ hours).

Glen Lethnot

This glen is noted for the **Brown & White Caterthuns** – two extraordinary Iron Age hill forts, defended by ramparts and ditches, perched on twin hill-tops at its southern end. A minor road crosses the pass between the two summits, and it's an easy walk to either fort from the parking area in the pass; both are superb viewpoints. If you don't have a car, you can walk there from Brechin (6 miles) or from Edzell (5 miles).

Glenesk

The most easterly of the Angus Glens, Glenesk, runs for 15 miles from Edzell to lovely **Loch Lee**, surrounded by beetling cliffs and waterfalls. Ten miles up the glen from Edzell is **Glenesk Folk Museum** (☎ 01356-648070; The Retreat; adult/child £2/1; ☹ noon-6pm daily Jun–mid-Oct, noon-6pm Sat & Sun only Easter-May), an old shooting lodge that houses a fascinating collection of antiques and artefacts documenting the local culture of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. It also has a tearoom, restaurant and gift shop, and has public internet access.

Five miles further on the public road ends at **Invermark Castle**, an impressive ruined tower guarding the southern approach to the Mounth, a hill track to Deeside.

EDZELL

☎ 01356 / pop 785

The picturesque village of Edzell, with its broad main street and grandiose monumental arch, dates from the early 19th century when Lord Panmure decided that the original medieval village, a mile to the west, spoiled the view from Edzell Castle. The old village was razed and the villagers moved to this pretty, planned settlement.

Lord Panmure's predecessors as owners of **Edzell Castle** (HS; ☎ 648631; adult/child £4/2; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar; 🚫) were the Lindsay earls of Crawford, who built this 16th-century L-plan tower house. Sir David Lindsay, a cultured and well-travelled man, laid out the castle's beautiful **Pleasance** in 1604 as a place of contemplation and learning. Unique in all of Scotland, this Renaissance walled garden is lined with niches for nesting

birds, and sculptured plaques illustrating the cardinal virtues, the arts and the planetary deities.

Two miles north of Edzell, the B966 to Fettercairn crosses the River North Esk at Gannochy Bridge. From the lay-by just over the bridge, a blue-painted wooden door in the stone wall gives access to a delightful footpath that leads along the wooded river gorge for 1.5 miles to a scenic spot known as the **Rock of Solitude**.

Alexandra Lodge (☎ 648266; www.alexandralodge.co.uk; Inveriscandy Rd; s/d £45/70; 📍) is an attractive Edwardian villa with comfortable bedrooms and a lovely wood-panelled lounge, while the **Panmure Arms Hotel** (☎ 648950; www.panmurearmshotel.co.uk; 52 High St; s/d from £50/75, bar meals; 📍) is a pretty, mock-Tudor place serving excellent bar meals (£9 to £10) from noon till 2pm Monday to Friday and noon till 9pm Saturday and Sunday.

Bus 29A or 29C that runs from Brechin to Laurecekirk stops at Edzell (15 minutes, two to four a day Monday to Friday, one on Saturday).

BRECHIN

☎ 01356 / pop 7200

The name of the local football team, Brechin City, proclaims this diminutive town's main claim to fame – as the seat of **Brechin Cathedral** (now demoted to a parish church) it has the right to call itself a city, albeit the smallest one in Scotland. Adjacent to the cathedral is a 32m-high **round tower** built around 1000 as part of a Celtic monastery. It is of a type often seen in Ireland, but one of only three that survive in Scotland. Its elevated doorway, 2m above the ground, has carvings of animals, saints and a crucifix.

Housed nearby in the 18th-century former town hall, court room and prison, **Brechin Museum** (☎ 622687; St Ninian's Sq; admission free; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) records the history of the round tower, cathedral and town.

The town's (OK, city's) picturesque Victorian train station dates from 1897 and is now the terminus of the restored **Caledonian Railway** (☎ 622992; www.caledonianrailway.co.uk; 2 Park Rd), which runs steam trains (adult/child £5/3 return) along a 3.5-mile stretch of track to Bridge of Dun. Trains run on Sunday from late May to mid-September, on Saturday in July and August, and at Easter and Christmas. From Bridge of Dun it's a 15-minute sign-

posted walk to the **House of Dun** (NTS; ☎ 810264; adult/child £8/5; ☹ 11.30am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 12.30-5.30pm Wed-Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct), a beautiful Georgian country house built in 1730.

Adjoining Brechin Castle Centre (a gardening and horse-riding centre on the A90 just west of Brechin) is **Pictavia** (☎ 626241; www.pictavia.org.uk; adult/child £3.25/2.25; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun Easter–mid Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun mid-Oct–Easter), an interpretive centre telling the story of the Picts, and explaining current theories about the mysterious carved symbol stones they left behind. It's worth making a trip here before going to see the Pictish stones at Aberlemno.

Getting There & Away

Scottish Citylink buses between Dundee and Aberdeen stop at Clerk St in Brechin. Stagecoach Strathtay buses depart from South Esk St heading to Forfar (30 minutes, hourly), Aberlemno (15 minutes, six a day) and Edzell.

Bus 24 links Brechin and Stonehaven (55 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

ABERDEENSHIRE & MORAY

Since medieval times Aberdeenshire and its northwestern neighbour Moray have been the richest and most fertile regions of the Highlands. Aberdeenshire is famed for its Aberdeen Angus beef cattle, its many fine castles and the prosperous 'granite city' of Aberdeen. Moray's main attractions are the Speyside whisky distilleries that line the valley of the River Spey and its tributaries.

ABERDEEN

☎ 01224 / pop 197,300

Aberdeen is the powerhouse of the northeast, fuelled by the North Sea petroleum industry. Oil money has made the city as expensive as London and Edinburgh, and there are hotels, restaurants and clubs with prices to match the depth of petroleum industry pockets. Fortunately, most of the cultural attractions, such as the excellent Maritime Museum and the Aberdeen Art Gallery, are free.

Known throughout Scotland as the granite city, much of the town was built using silvery grey granite hewn from the now abandoned

Rubislaw Quarry, at one time the biggest artificial hole in the ground in Europe. On a sunny day the granite lends an attractive glitter to the city, but when low, grey rain clouds scud in off the North Sea it can be hard to tell where the buildings stop and the sky begins.

Royal Deeside is easily accessible to the west, Dunottar Castle to the south, sandy beaches to the north and whisky country to the northwest.

History

Aberdeen was a prosperous trading and fishing port centuries before oil became a valuable commodity. After the townspeople supported Robert the Bruce against the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, the king rewarded the town with land for which he had previously received rent. The rental income was used to establish the Common Good Fund, to be spent on town amenities, a fund that survives to this day: it helped to finance Marischal College, the Central Library, the art gallery and the hospital, and also pays for the colourful floral displays that have won the city numerous awards.

The name Aberdeen is a combination of two Pictish-Gaelic words, *aber* and *devana*, meaning 'the meeting of two waters'. The area was known to the Romans, and was raided by the Vikings when it was already an important port trading in wool, fish, hides and fur. By the 18th century paper- and rope-making, whaling and textile manufacture were the main industries, and in the 19th century it became a major herring-fishing centre.

Since the 1970s Aberdeen has been the main focus of the UK's offshore oil industry, home to oil company offices, engineering yards, a bustling harbour filled with supply ships, and the world's busiest civilian heliport. Unemployment rates, once among the highest in the country, are now among the lowest.

Orientation

Central Aberdeen is built on an east–west ridge to the north of the River Dee. Union St, the main shopping street, runs along the crest of this ridge between Holburn Junction in the west and Castlegate in the east. The bus and train stations are next to each other, between Union St and the river. Aberdeen Beach is 800m east of the city centre. Old Aberdeen is just over a mile to the north of the city centre along King St.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Waterstone's Union Bridge (☎ 592440; 3-7 Union Bridge; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun); Union St (☎ 210161; 269 Union St; ☞ 9am-8pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri & Sat, 10am-5.30pm Sun)

INTERNET ACCESS

Books & Beans (☎ 646438; 22 Belmont St; per 15min £1; ☞ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Fairtrade coffee and second-hand books.

Café LAN (☎ 593054; 11 Market St; per 20min £1; ☞ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-8pm Sun)

Central Library (☎ 652500; Rosemount Viaduct; ☞ 9am-7pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri & Sat) Free internet access in the Media Centre; sessions limited to 30 minutes.

Tourist office (☎ 288828; www.agtb.org; 23 Union St; per 10min 50p; ☞ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (☎ 681818; Foresterhill) About a mile northwest of the western end of Union St.

POST

Main post office (☎ 0845 722 3344; St Nicholas Shopping Centre, Upperkirkgate; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
Union St post office (489 Union St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 288828; www.agtb.org; 23 Union St; ☞ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter)

Sights

ABERDEEN HARBOUR

Aberdeen has a busy, working harbour crowded with survey vessels and supply ships servicing the offshore oil installations, and car ferries bound for Orkney and Shetland. From dawn until about 8am the colourful **fish market** on Albert Basin operates as it has done for centuries.

Overlooking all this nautical bustle is the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 337700; www.aagm.co.uk; Shiprow; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun), centred on a three-storey replica of a North Sea oil production platform, with exhibits explaining all you ever wanted to know about the petroleum industry. Other galleries, some situated in **Provost Ross's House**, the oldest building in the city, cover the shipbuilding, whaling and fishing industries. Sleek and

speedy Aberdeen clippers were a 19th-century shipyard speciality, used by British merchants for the importation of tea, wool and exotic goods (opium, for instance) to Britain, and, on the return journey, the transportation of emigrants to Australia.

UNION ST

Union St is the city's main thoroughfare, lined with solid, Victorian granite buildings. The oldest area is **Castlegate**, at the eastern end, where the castle once stood. When it was captured from the English for Robert the Bruce, the password used by the townspeople was 'Bon Accord', which is now the city's motto.

In the centre of Castle St stands the 17th-century **Mercat Cross**, bearing a sculpted frieze of portraits of Stuart monarchs. The Baronial heap towering over the eastern end of Castle St is the **Salvation Army Citadel**, which was modelled on Balmoral Castle.

On the northern side of Union St, 300m west of Castlegate, is **St Nicholas Church**, the so-called 'Mither Kirk' (Mother Church) of Aberdeen. The granite spire dates from the 19th century, but there has been a church on this site since the 12th century; the early 15th-century **St Mary's Chapel** survives in the eastern part of the church.

Surrounded by concrete and glass office blocks in what was once the worst slum in Aberdeen is **Provost Skene's House** (☎ 641086; Guestrow; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun), a late-medieval, turreted town house occupied in the 17th century by the provost (the Scottish equivalent of a mayor) Sir George Skene. It was also occupied for six weeks by the duke of Cumberland on his way to Culloden in 1746. The tempera-painted ceiling with its religious symbolism, dating from 1622, is unusual for having survived the depredations of the Reformation. It's a period gem featuring earnest-looking angels, soldiers and St Peter with crowing cockerels.

MARISCHAL COLLEGE

Across Broad St from Provost Skene's House is **Marischal College**, founded in 1593 by the 5th Earl Marischal, and merged with King's College (founded 1495) in 1860 to create the modern University of Aberdeen. The huge and impressive façade in Perpendicular Gothic style – unusual in having such elaborate masonry hewn from notoriously hard-to-work granite – dates from 1906 and is the



world's second-largest granite structure (after L'Escorial near Madrid). It now houses the university's science faculty.

Founded in 1786, the **Marischal Museum** (☎ 274301; Marischal College, Broad St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun) houses a fascinating collection of material donated by graduates and friends of the university over the centuries. In one room, the history of northeastern Scotland is depicted through its myths, customs, famous people, architecture and trade. The other gallery gives an anthropological overview of the world, incorporating objects from vastly different cultures, arranged thematically (Polynesian wooden masks alongside gas masks and so on). There are the usual Victorian curios, an Inuit kayak found in the local river estuary in the 18th century and Inuit objects collected by whalers. Go through the arch from Broad St, straight across the quadrangle and up the stairs; the museum is on the 1st floor.

ABERDEEN ART GALLERY

Behind the grand façade of **Aberdeen Art Gallery** (☎ 523700; www.aagm.co.uk; Schoolhill; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun; ☎) is a cool, marble-lined space exhibiting the work of contemporary Scottish and English painters, such as Gwen Hardie, Stephen Conroy, Trevor Sutton and Tim Ollivier. There are also several landscapes by Joan Eardley, who lived in a cottage on the cliffs near Stonehaven in the 1950s and '60s, and painted tempestuous oils of the North Sea and poignant portraits of slum children. Among the Pre-Raphaelite works upstairs, look out for the paintings of Aberdeen artist William Dyce (1806-64), ranging from religious works to rural scenes.

Downstairs is a large, empty, circular, white room, with fish-scaled balustrades evoking the briny origins of Aberdeen's wealth, commemorating the 165 people who lost their lives in the Piper Alpha oil rig disaster in 1988.

ABERDEEN BEACH

Just 800m east of Castlegate is a spectacular 2-mile sweep of clean, golden sand stretching between the mouths of the Rivers Dee and Don. At one time Aberdeen Beach was a good, old-fashioned British seaside resort, but the availability of cheap package holidays has lured Scottish holidaymakers away from its somewhat chilly delights. On a warm

summer's day, though, it's still an excellent beach.

The Esplanade sports several traditional seaside attractions, including **Codona's Amusement Park** (☎ 595910; Beach Blvd; admission free, pay per ride; ☎ 11am-midnight Sat & Sun), complete with stomach-churning waltzers, dodgems, a roller coaster, log flume and haunted house. The adjacent **Sunset Boulevard** (☎ 595910; admission free, pay per game; ☎ 10am-midnight) is the indoor alternative, with tenpin bowling, Dodgems, arcade games and pool tables.

Halfway between the beach and the city centre is **Satrosphere** (☎ 640340; www.satrosphere.net; 179 Constitution St; adult/child £5.75/4.50; ☎ 10am-5pm), a hands-on, interactive science centre.

You can get away from the fun fair atmosphere by walking north towards the more secluded part of the beach. There's a **bird-watching hide** on the south bank of the River Don, between the beach and King St, which leads back south towards Old Aberdeen.

Buses 14 and 15 (eastbound) from Union St go to the beach; or you can walk from Castlegate in 10 minutes.

OLD ABERDEEN

Just over a mile north of the city centre is the district called Old Aberdeen. The name is misleading – although Old Aberdeen is certainly old, the area around Castlegate is older still. This part of the city was originally called Aulton, from the Gaelic for 'village by the pool', and this was anglicised in the 17th century to Old Town.

It was here that Bishop Elphinstone established King's College, Aberdeen's first university, in 1495. The 16th-century **King's College Chapel** (☎ 272137; College Bounds; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is easily recognised by its crown spire; the interior is largely unchanged since it was first built, with impressive stained-glass windows and choir stalls. The nearby **King's College Visitor Centre** (☎ 273702; College Bounds; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) houses a multimedia display on the university's history and a pleasant coffee shop.

The 15th-century **St Machar's Cathedral** (☎ 485988; The Chanony; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar), with its massive twin towers, is a rare example of a fortified cathedral. According to legend, St Machar was ordered to establish a church where the river takes the shape of a bishop's crook, which it does just here. The cathedral

is best known for its impressive heraldic ceiling, dating from 1520, which has 48 shields of kings, nobles, archbishops and bishops. Sunday services are held at 11am and 6pm.

Bus 20 from Littlejohn St (just north of Marischal College) runs to Old Aberdeen every 15 to 20 minutes.

GORDON HIGHLANDERS MUSEUM

The excellent **Gordon Highlanders Museum** (☎ 311200; St Lukes, Viewfield Rd; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 12.30-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Sat Nov, Feb & Mar) records the history of one of the British Army's most famous fighting units, described by Winston Churchill as 'the finest regiment in the world'. Originally raised in the northeast of Scotland by the 4th duke of Gordon in 1794, the regiment was amalgamated with the Seaforth's and Camerons to form the Highlanders regiment in 1994. The museum is about a mile west of the western end of Union St – take bus 14 or 15 from Union St.

Sleeping

There are clusters of B&Bs on Bon Accord St and Springbank Tce (both 400m southwest of the train station), and along Great Western Rd (the A93, a 25-minute walk southwest of the city centre). They're usually more expensive than the Scottish average and, with so many oil industry workers staying the night before flying offshore, single rooms are at a premium. Prices tend to be lower on weekends.

BUDGET

Aberdeen Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1100; 8 Queen's Rd; dm £13-15) This hostel, set in a granite Victorian villa, is a mile west of the train station. Walk west along Union St and take the right fork along Albyn Pl until you reach a roundabout; Queen's Rd continues on the western side of the roundabout.

During the university summer holidays some colleges let rooms to visitors:

Robert Gordon University (☎ 262134; www.scotland2000.com/rgu; Business & Vacation Accommodation Service, Schoolhill, Aberdeen AB10 1FR; 6 people for 2 nights £130; ☎ mid-Jun–mid-Aug) Flats comprise six to eight single rooms with shared bathroom, lounge and kitchen, close to the city centre.

University of Aberdeen (☎ 272664; www.abdn.ac.uk/confevents; Conference Office, King's College, Old Aberdeen AB24 3FX; r per person from £15, s/d £50/75) Basic self-catering flats (available mid-Jun to mid-Aug), or

plush B&B rooms at Kings Hall in the heart of Old Aberdeen (available year-round).

MIDRANGE

Dunrovin Guest House (☎ 586081; www.dunrovinguesthouse.co.uk; 168 Bon Accord St; s/d from £40/60; ☎) Dunrovin is a typical granite Victorian house with eight bedrooms; the upstairs rooms are bright and airy, and the friendly owners will provide a veggie breakfast if you wish.

Butler's Islander Guest House (☎ 212411; www.butlersguesthouse.com; 122 Crown St; s £33-60, d £50-70; ☎) Just across the street from the Royal Crown, Butler's is a cosy place with a big breakfast menu that includes fresh fruit salad, kippers and kedgeree as alternatives to the traditional fry-up.

Our pick **Globe Inn** (☎ 624258; 13-15 North Silver St; s/d £48/53) This popular pub (see p251) has seven appealing and comfortable guest bedrooms upstairs, done out in dark wood with burgundy bedspreads. There's live music in the pub on weekends so it's not a place for early-to-bed types, but the price vs location factor can't be beat. No dining room, so breakfast is continental, served on a tray in your room.

Royal Crown Guest House (☎ 586461; www.royal.crown.co.uk; 111 Crown St; s £35-70, d £60-80; ☎) The Royal Crown has eight small but nicely furnished bedrooms, and has a top location only five minutes' walk from the train station (up a steep flight of stairs).

Brentwood Hotel (☎ 595440; www.brentwood-hotel.co.uk; 101 Crown St; s £41-86, d £62-96; ☎) The friendly and flower-bedecked Brentwood, set in a granite town house, is one of the most attractive hotels in the area, comfortable and conveniently located, but often busy during the week – weekend rates are much cheaper.

Other recommendations:

Adelphi Guest House (☎ 583078; www.adelphiguesthouse.com; 8 Whinhill Rd; s/d from £28/50)

Penny Meadow Private Hotel (☎ 588037; frances@pennymeadow.freereserve.co.uk; 189 Great Western Rd; s/d £45/70; ☎)

Kildonan Guest House (☎ 316115; www.kildonan-guesthouse.com; 410 Great Western Rd; s/d £36/52)

TOP END

Aberdeen Douglas Hotel (☎ 582255; www.aberdeen.douglas.com; 43-45 Market St; s £45-85, d £60-120) You can't miss the grand Victorian façade of this historic landmark, which first opened its doors as a hotel in 1853. Recently renovated, it now

offers classy modern rooms with polished woodwork and crisp white bed linen, and is barely a minute's walk from the train station.

Simpson's Hotel (☎ 327777; www.simpsonshotel.co.uk; 59 Queen's Rd; s £75-160, d £95-180; (P) (♿)) Simpson's, a mile west of Union St, is a stylish boutique hotel decorated with a Mediterranean-Italian theme in shades of sand, terracotta and aqua. It's aimed at both business and private guests, and is totally wheelchair accessible. Cheaper rates on weekends.

our pick City Wharf Apartments (☎ 0845 094 2424; www.citywharfapartments.co.uk; 19-20 Regent Quay; d £120; (♿) (♿)) You can watch the bustle of Aberdeen's commercial harbour as you eat breakfast in one of these luxury serviced apartments, complete with stylish, fully equipped kitchen, champagne-stocked minibar and daily maid service. Available by the night or the week, with discounts for longer stays.

Eating

BUDGET

Beautiful Mountain (☎ 645353; 11-13 Belmont St; mains £3-6; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) This cosy café is squeezed into a couple of tiny rooms (seating upstairs), but serves all-day breakfasts and tasty sandwiches (smoked salmon, Thai chicken, pastrami) on sourdough, bagels, ciabatta and lots of other breads, along with exquisite espresso and consummate cappuccino.

our pick Sand Dollar Café (☎ 572288; 2 Beach Esplanade; mains £4-7; ☎ 9am-5pm) This place is a cut above your usual seaside café – on sunny days you can sit at the wooden tables outside and share a bottle of chilled white wine, and there's a tempting menu that includes pancakes with maple syrup, homemade burgers and chocolate brownie with Orkney ice cream.

Victoria Restaurant (☎ 621381; 140 Union St; mains £4-8; ☎ 9am-5pm Fri-Wed, 9am-6.30pm Thu) The Victoria, above the Jamieson & Carry jewellery shop, is a traditional, posh Scottish tearoom, with delicious fresh soups, salads and sandwiches. Breakfast served till 11.30am.

Carmine's (☎ 624145; 32 Union Tce; 3-course lunch £6, pizza £5-11; ☎ 11.45am-2.30pm & 4.45-6.45pm Mon-Sat) Cosy little Carmine's is famed for good, inexpensive Italian food, including the best pizza in town; the lunch deal is available Monday to Friday only. No licence, so BYOB, and best to book; the place seats only 16 people.

For self-caterers, **Somerfield** (Union St; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-8pm Sun) is a convenient city-centre supermarket near the Music Hall.

MIDRANGE

Ashvale Fish Restaurant (☎ 596581; 42-48 Great Western Rd; takeaways £3-5, sit-in mains £7-10; ☎ 11.45am-11pm; (♿)) The Ashvale, an upmarket fish-and-chip shop, is well known outside the city, having won several awards. The Ashvale Whale – a one-pound cod fillet (£8) in batter – is a speciality; finish it off and you get a second one free (as if you'd want one by then!).

Howie's (☎ 639500; 50 Chapel St; 2-course lunch/dinner £11/18; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm) The Aberdeen branch of the well-known Edinburgh chain of restaurants is a chic bistro dishing up great-value 'modern Scottish' cuisine accompanied by very reasonably priced house wine.

our pick Café 52 (☎ 590094; 52 The Green; mains £13; ☎ noon-9.30pm) This little haven of laid-back industrial chic – a high, narrow space lined with bare stonework, rough plaster and exposed ventilation ducts – serves some of the finest and most inventive cuisine in the northeast, from starters such as refreshing lettuce and sorrel soup or silky carpaccio of tuna with passion fruit, to mains like its signature dish – a Thai seafood stockpot served with rustic chips.

Moonfish Café (☎ 644166; 9 Correction Wynd; mains £11-17; ☎ noon-11pm) A funky little eatery tucked away on a back street, the Moonfish menu combines light snacks based on Spanish tapas and Greek *mezes* (starters) with more filling Mediterranean dinner dishes, such as chicken breast wrapped in Parma ham with garlic and rosemary.

Foyer (☎ 582277; 82a Crown St; mains £12-18; ☎ 11am-10pm) A light, airy space filled with blonde wood and bold colours, Foyer is an art gallery as well as a restaurant and is run by a charity that works against youth homelessness and unemployment. The seasonal menu is full of interesting vegetarian options such as Jerusalem artichoke clafoutis with creamed green peas and leek stew, and salad of char-grilled halloumi cheese with mint, watermelon, red onion and pumpkin seed. A light lunch menu (mains £7 to £9) is available from 11am to 6pm.

Rendezvous@Nargile (☎ 323700; cnr Forest Ave; mains £13-18; ☎ noon-10pm; (♿)) This stylish West End venue specialises in Turkish cuisine, serving tasty spreads of *mezes*, *shakshuka* (a blend of roast peppers, tomatoes, aubergines and chilli), *djadjik* (yoghurt with garlic and cucumber) and *sigara boregi* (cheese pastries), for example – followed by delicious, melt-

in-the-mouth kebabs and marinated meats, and vegetarian dishes such as *mantar guvec* (casserole button mushrooms in creamy sauce with a cheese and couscous crust).

Poldino's (☎ 647777; 7 Little Belmont St; lunch mains £9-19; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10.45pm Mon-Sat) Poldino's is a long-established Aberdeen eatery – an upmarket, Italian family restaurant that never fails to impress with the quality of its food and service.

TOP END

Silver Darling (☎ 576229; Pocra Quay, North Pier; lunch mains £11-13, dinner mains £19-22; ☎ noon-1.45pm Mon-Fri & 7-9.30pm Mon-Sat) The Silver Darling (an old Scottish nickname for herring) is housed in a former Customs office, with picture windows overlooking the sea at the entrance to Aberdeen harbour. Here you can enjoy fresh Scottish seafood prepared by a top French chef while you watch the porpoises playing in the harbour mouth. The lunch menu offers good-value gourmet delights, such as roast monkfish with chickpea and cumin purée; bookings are recommended.

Drinking

Aberdeen is a great city for a pub crawl – it's more a question of knowing when to stop than where to start. There are lots of pre-club bars in and around Belmont St, with more traditional pubs scattered throughout the city centre.

Lemon Tree Café (☎ 621610; 5 West North St; ☎ noon-4pm Thu-Sun; (♿)) The bohemian café-bar at the theatre does excellent coffee, cakes and light meals, and there's live blues on Friday, jazz on Sunday and kids' activities on Saturday.

Globe Inn (☎ 624258; 13-15 North Silver St; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-11pm Mon-Thu, noon-1am Fri & Sat, 12.30pm-midnight Sun) This lovely Edwardian-style pub with wood panelling, marble-topped tables and walls hung with old musical instruments is a great place for a quiet lunchtime or afternoon drink. It serves good coffee as well as real ales and malt whiskies, and has live music in the evenings Friday to Sunday. And probably the poshest pub toilets in the country.

Prince of Wales (☎ 640597; 7 St Nicholas Lane) Tucked down an alley off Union St, Aberdeen's best-known pub boasts the longest bar in the city, and a great range of real ales and good-value pub grub. Quiet in the afternoons, but standing-room only in the evenings.

Cameron's (☎ 644487; 6 Little Belmont St) Known as Ma Cameron's, this is Aberdeen's oldest pub, established in 1789. It has a pleasantly old-fashioned atmosphere, with lots of wood, brick and stone, and a range of excellent real ales and malt whiskies.

Old Blackfriars (☎ 581922; 52 Castlegate) This is one of the most attractive traditional pubs in the city, with a lovely stone and timber interior and a relaxed atmosphere – a great place for an afternoon pint.

Blue Lamp (☎ 647472; 121 Gallowgate) A long-standing feature of the Aberdeen pub scene, the Blue Lamp is a favourite student hang-out – a dark, but not dingy, drinking den with good beer, good *craic* and a jukebox selection that has barely changed since Elvis died. There are regular sessions of live folk and acoustic music.

Entertainment

CINEMAS

Vue Cinema (☎ 08712 240240; 10 Shiprow; adult/child £6.65/4.15) A seven-screen multiplex, conveniently located just off Union St, that shows mainstream, first-run films.

Belmont Cinema (☎ listings 343534, bookings 343536; 49 Belmont St; adult/child £6.40/4) The Belmont is a great little art-house cinema, with a lively programme of cult classics, director's seasons, foreign films and mainstream movies. There's also a Saturday morning kids club, with a children's movie screened at 11.30am.

NIGHTCLUBS

Check out what's happening in the club and live-music scene at local record shops – try **One Up Records** (17 Belmont St).

Kef (☎ 648000; 9 Belmont St; admission free-£5; ☎ 11pm-2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) Decked out with a Moroccan theme – there are booths with lots of rugs and comfy cushions to lie around on – this is Aberdeen's most laid-back club, with DJs playing seven nights a week. The main attractions are Jungle Nation (drum n bass and jungle) and Wax (hip-hop).

The Tunnels (☎ 211121; www.thetunnels.co.uk; Carnegie's Brae; admission £3-10; ☎ from 8pm or 9pm) This cavernous club hosts regular DJ nights, from new music on Tuesday's Club NME to the Dirty Disco indie night most Fridays and Saturdays. It's also a great live music venue, with a packed programme of up-and-coming Scottish bands.

O'Neill's (☎ 621456; 9 Back Wynd; admission £2-4; ☎ to 2am Sun-Thu, 3am Fri & Sat) Upstairs at O'Neill's you're guaranteed a wild night of pounding, hardcore Irish rock, indie and alternative tunes; downstairs is a (slightly) quieter bar packed with rugby types downing large quantities of Murphy's stout.

THEATRE & CONCERTS

His Majesty's (☎ 637788; www.hmtaberdeen.com; Rosemount Viaduct) The main theatre in Aberdeen hosts everything from ballet and opera to pantomimes and musicals.

Aberdeen Arts Centre (☎ 635208; www.aberdeenartscentre.org.uk; King St) The Arts Centre stages regular drama productions in its theatre, and changing exhibitions in its gallery.

Lemon Tree Theatre (☎ 642230; www.lemontree.org; 5 West North St) The Lemon Tree theatre has an interesting programme of dance, music and drama, and often has live rock, jazz and folk bands playing. There are also children's shows, ranging from comedy to drama to puppetry.

You can book tickets for most concerts and other events at the **Box Office** (☎ 641122; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) next to the **Music Hall** (☎ 632080; Union St), the main venue for classical music concerts.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aberdeen Airport (☎ 722331; www.aberdeenairport.com) is at Dyce, 6 miles northwest of the city centre. There are regular flights to numerous Scottish and UK destinations, including Orkney and Shetland, and international flights to the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, France and the Czech Republic.

Bus 27 runs regularly from Union St to the airport (£1.80, 35 minutes). A taxi from the airport to the city centre costs £12.

BOAT

Car ferries from Aberdeen to Orkney and Shetland are run by **Northlink Ferries** (☎ 0845 600 0449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk). For more details, see p405. The ferry terminal is a short walk east of the train and bus stations.

BUS

The **bus station** (Guild St) is next to the train station.

National Express runs direct buses from London (£40, 12 hours) twice daily, one of

them overnight. Scottish Citylink runs direct services to Dundee (£11, two hours), Perth (£16, 2½ hours), Edinburgh (£20, 3¼ hours) and Glasgow (£20, 4¼ hours).

Bus 10 runs hourly to Inverness (£11, 3¼ hours) via Huntly, Keith, Fochabers, Elgin (£10, two hours) and Nairn. Service 201 runs every half-hour (hourly on Sunday) to Crathes Castle gate (45 minutes), continuing once an hour (less frequently on Sunday) to Ballater (1¾ hours) and every two hours to Crathie (for Balmoral Castle) and Braemar (£8, 2¼ hours).

Other local buses serve Stonehaven, Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Banff and Buckie.

TRAIN

There are several trains a day from London's King's Cross to Aberdeen (£112, 7½ hours); most services involve a change of train at Edinburgh.

Other destinations served from Aberdeen by rail include Edinburgh (£36, 2½ hours), Glasgow (£36, 2¾ hours), Dundee (£22, 1¼ hours) and Inverness (£23, 2¼ hours).

Getting Around

BUS

The main city bus operator is **First Aberdeen** (☎ 650065; www.firstaberdeen.com). Local fares cost from 70p to £1.80; pay the driver as you climb onboard the bus. A FirstDay ticket (adult/child £3.50/2.50) allows unlimited travel from the time of purchase until midnight on all First Aberdeen buses. Information, route maps and tickets are available from the **First Travel Centre** (47 Union St; ☎ 8.45am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

The most useful services for visitors are buses 18, 19 and 24 from Union St to Great Western Rd (for B&Bs); bus 27 from the bus station to the Aberdeen Youth Hostel and the airport; and bus 20 from Marischal College to Old Aberdeen.

CAR

For rental cars try **Arnold Clark** (☎ 249159; www.arnoldclarkrental.com; Girdleness Rd) or **1car1 Car Hire** (☎ 594248; www.1car1.com; 16 South College St).

TAXI

The main city-centre taxi ranks are at the train station and on Back Wynd, off Union St. To order a taxi, phone **ComCab** (☎ 353535) or **Rainbow Cabs** (☎ 878787).

AROUND ABERDEEN

Stonehaven

☎ 01569 / pop 9600

Originally a small fishing village, Stonehaven has been the county town of Kincardineshire since 1600 and is now a thriving, family-friendly seaside resort. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 762806; 66 Allardie St; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat Jun & Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr, May & Oct) near Market Sq in the town centre.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

From the lane beside the tourist office, a boardwalk leads south along the shoreline to the picturesque cliff-bound **harbour**, where you'll find a couple of appealing pubs and the town's oldest building, the **Tolbooth**, built about 1600 by the Earl Marischal. It now houses a small **museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon & Thu-Sat, 2-5pm Wed & Sun) and a restaurant.

At the northern end of town is the **Open-Air Swimming Pool** (☎ 762134; adult/child £3.50/2; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 1-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Jun), an Olympic-size (50m), heated, sea-water pool in Art Deco style, dating from 1934. The pool is also open for 'midnight swims' from 10pm to midnight on Wednesday from the end of June to mid-August.

A pleasant, 15-minute walk along the cliff tops south of the harbour leads to the spectacular ruins of **Dunnottar Castle** (☎ 762173; adult/child £5/1; ☎ 9am-6pm daily Jul-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Easter-Jun & Oct, 10.30am-dusk Fri-Mon Nov-Easter), spread out across a grassy promontory rising 50m above the sea. As dramatic a film set as any director could wish for, it provided the backdrop for Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, starring Mel Gibson. The original fortress was built in the 9th century; the keep is the most substantial remnant, but the drawing room (restored in 1926) is more interesting.

The **Lady Gail 2** (☎ 765064; adult/child £10/5) offers boat trips from the harbour to the nearby sea cliffs of Fowlsheugh nature reserve, which from May to July are home to around 160,000 nesting seabirds, including kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and puffins.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The town hosts several special events, including the famous **Fireball Ceremony** (www.stonehavenfireballs.co.uk) at Hogmanay (31 December), when people parade along the High St at midnight swinging blazing fireballs around their heads,

and the three-day **Stonehaven Folk Festival** (www.stonehavenfolkfestival.co.uk) in mid-July.

SLEEPING & EATING

Ourpick 24 Shorehead (☎ 767750; www.twentyfourshorehead.co.uk; 24 Shorehead; s/d £50/60) Location makes all the difference, and the location of this former cooorage offering peaceful B&B accommodation can't be beat – last house at the end of the road, overlooking the harbour, with lovely sea views – using the binoculars provided, you can even spot seals from your bedroom.

Beachgate House (☎ 763155; www.beachgate.co.uk; Beachgate Lane; s/d £55/70; (P)) This luxurious modern bungalow is right on the seafront, just a few paces from the tourist office; two of its five rooms have sea views, as does the lounge/dining room.

Marine Hotel (☎ 762155; 9-10 The Shore; mains £7-12; ☎ food served noon-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm) A recent makeover with bare timber, slate and dove-grey paintwork has given this popular harbour-side pub a boutique look; the old juke box is gone, but there are still half a dozen real ales on tap, and a bar meals menu that includes fresh seafood specials.

Carron Restaurant (☎ 760460; 20 Cameron St; mains £10-16; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-9.30pm Tue-Sun) This beautiful Art Deco restaurant is a remarkable survival from the 1930s, complete with bow-fronted terrace, iron fanlights, Deco mirrors, player piano and original tiled toilets. The French- and Mediterranean-inspired menu makes the most of local produce, matching the elegance of the surroundings.

Tolbooth Restaurant (☎ 762287; Old Pier; mains £15-18; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-11pm Tue-Sun) Set in a 17th-century house overlooking the harbour, this is one of the best seafood restaurants in the region – reservations are recommended. From Tuesday to Saturday you can get a three-course lunch for £15.

You can enjoy excellent coffee and cakes with a view of the harbour at the **Boathouse Café** (☎ 764666; Old Pier; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue & Wed, 9am-10pm Thu-Sat, 10am-6.30pm Sun), while the **Bervie Chipper** (☎ 762658; 12 David St; ☎ noon-9pm) serves the best fish and chips in town – it's a branch of the Inverbervie chip shop that lay claims to inventing the notorious deep-fried Mars Bar (and yes, it's still on the menu!).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Stonehaven is 15 miles south of Aberdeen, and is served by the frequent buses travelling

between Aberdeen (45 minutes, hourly) and Dundee (1½ hours). Trains to Dundee are faster (£11, 55 minutes, hourly) and offer a more scenic journey.

Castle Fraser

The impressive 16th- to 17th-century **Castle Fraser** (NTS; ☎ 01330-833463; adult/child £8/5; 🚗 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Jun, noon-5pm Wed-Sun Sep & Oct) is the ancestral home of the Fraser family. The largely Victorian interior includes the great hall (with a hidden opening where the laird could eavesdrop on his guests), the library, various bedrooms and an ancient kitchen, plus a secret room for storing valuables; Fraser family relics on display include needlework hangings and a 19th-century artificial leg. The 'Woodland Secrets' area in the castle grounds is designed as an adventure playground for kids.

The castle is 16 miles west of Aberdeen and 3 miles south of Kemnay. Buses from Aberdeen to Alford stop at Kemnay.

Haddo House

Designed in Georgian style by William Adam in 1732, **Haddo House** (NTS; ☎ 01651-851440; Tarves; adult/child £8/5; 🚗 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, 11am-5pm Fri-Mon Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct) is best described as a classic English stately home transplanted to Scotland. Home to the Gordon family, it has sumptuous Victorian interiors with wood-panelled walls, Persian rug-scattered floors and a wealth of period antiques. The beautiful grounds and terraced gardens are open all year (9am to dusk).

Haddo is 19 miles north of Aberdeen, near Ellon. Buses run hourly Monday to Saturday from Aberdeen to Tarves/Methlick, stopping at the end of the Haddo House driveway; it's a mile-long walk from bus stop to house.

Fyvie Castle

Though a magnificent example of Scottish Baronial architecture, **Fyvie Castle** (NTS; ☎ 01651-891266; adult/child £8/5; 🚗 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, noon-5pm Sat-Wed Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct) is probably more famous for its ghosts, which include a phantom trumpeter and the mysterious Green Lady. The castle's art collection includes portraits by Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Henry Raeburn.

The castle is 25 miles north of Aberdeen on the A947 towards Turriff. A bus runs hourly every day from Aberdeen to Banff and Elgin via Fyvie village, a mile from the castle.

DEESIDE

The valley of the **River Dee** – often called Royal Deeside because of the royal family's long association with the area – stretches west from Aberdeen to Braemar, closely paralleled by the A93 road. From Deeside north to Strathdon is serious castle country – there are more examples of fanciful Scottish Baronial architecture here than anywhere else in Scotland.

The Dee, world-famous for its **salmon fishing**, has its source in the Cairngorm Mountains west of Braemar, the starting point for long walks into the hills. The **FishDee website** (www.fishdee.co.uk) has all you need to know about fishing on the river.

Crathes Castle

The atmospheric, 16th-century **Crathes Castle** (NTS; ☎ 01330-844525; adult/child £10/7; 🚗 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-3.45pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar; 🏰) is famous for its Jacobean painted ceilings, magnificently carved canopied beds, and the 'Horn of Leys', presented to the Burnett family by Robert the Bruce in the 14th century. The beautiful formal **gardens** include 300-year-old yew hedges and colourful herbaceous borders.

The castle is on the A93, 16 miles west of Aberdeen, on the main Aberdeen to Ballater bus route.

Ballater

☎ 01339 / pop 1450

The attractive little village of Ballater owes its 18th-century origins to the curative waters of nearby Pannanich Springs (now bottled commercially as Deeside Natural Mineral Water) and its prosperity to nearby Balmoral Castle.

The **tourist office** (☎ 755306; Station Sq; 🚗 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-Jun) is in the Old Royal Station. For internet access, go to **Cybernaut** (☎ 755566; 14 Bridge St; per 15min £1.75; 🚗 9am-7pm Mon-Sat & noon-4pm Sun).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

When Queen Victoria travelled to Balmoral she would alight from the royal train at Ballater's **Old Royal Station** (☎ 755306; Station Sq; admission free; 🚗 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-Jun). The station has been beautifully restored, and now houses a museum, a restaurant and the tourist office. (At the time of research the museum was hoping to have a Victorian royal coach on display by summer 2008.) Note the

crests on the shop fronts along the main street proclaiming 'By Royal Appointment' – the village is a major supplier of provisions for Balmoral.

Also on Station Sq is **Dee Valley Confectioners** (☎ 755499; Station Sq; admission free; 🚗 9am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Thu Apr-Oct), where you can drool over the manufacture of traditional Scottish sweets; and **Cabin Fever** (☎ 754004; Station Sq), where you can rent mountain bikes (£15 per day, or £35 for a full-suspension model), or arrange to go pony-trekking, quad-biking, clay-pigeon shooting or canoeing.

As you approach Ballater from the east the hills start to close in, and there are many pleasant **walks** in the surrounding area. The steep woodland walk up **Craigendarroch** (400m) takes just over one hour. **Morven** (871m) is a more serious prospect, taking about six hours, but offers good views from the top; ask at the tourist office for more info.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation here is fairly expensive and budget travellers usually continue to Braemar.

Celical (☎ 755699; celical@euphony.net; 3 Braemar Rd; s/d from £35/46; 📞) Celical is a friendly, family-run B&B in a modern cottage right across the street from Station Sq, within easy walking distance of all attractions.

Ourpick Auld Kirk (☎ 755762; www.theauldkirk.com; Braemar Rd; s/d from £50/70) Here's something a little out of the ordinary – a six-bedroom 'restaurant with rooms' housed in a converted 19th-century church. A recent makeover blends original features with sleek modern décor, and the stylish restaurant (2-/3-course dinner £23/29) serves local lamb, venison and wild rabbit.

Green Inn (☎ 755701; www.green-inn.com; d £60; 📞) A lovely old house dotted with plush armchairs and sofas, this is another 'restaurant with rooms' – three comfortable en-suite bedrooms – with the accent on fine dining; the menu includes French-influenced dishes such as roast quail with crayfish, truffle and wild mushrooms. A 2-/3-course dinner costs £31 to £37 and meals are served from 7pm till 9pm Tuesday to Saturday.

Old Station Café (☎ 755050; Station Sq; mains £7-15; 🚗 10am-5pm daily, 6.30-8.30pm Thu-Sat) The former waiting room at Queen Victoria's train station is now an attractive dining area with black-and-white floor tiles, basketwork chairs, and marble fireplace and table tops. Daily specials

make good use of local produce, from salmon to venison, and good coffee and home-baked goods are available all day.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 201 runs from Aberdeen to Ballater (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) via Crathes Castle, and continues to Braemar (30 minutes).

Balmoral Castle

Eight miles west of Ballater lies **Balmoral Castle** (☎ 01339-742334; www.balmoralcastle.com; adult/child £7/3; 🚗 10am-5pm Apr-Jul, last admission 4pm), the Queen's Highland holiday home, screened from the road by a thick curtain of trees. Built for Queen Victoria in 1855 as a private residence for the royal family, it kicked off the revival of the Scottish Baronial style of architecture that characterises so many of Scotland's 19th-century country houses.

The admission fee includes an interesting and well thought out audio guide, but the tour is very much an outdoor one through garden and grounds; as for the castle itself, only the ballroom, which displays a collection of Landseer paintings and royal silver, is open to the public. Don't expect to see the Queen's private quarters! Dedicated royal-watchers will enjoy themselves; otherwise it's hard to justify braving the crowds and the admission fee just for a lot of photographs of smiling royals, a few pieces of art and some stuffed animals.

The massive, pointy-topped mountain that looms to the south of Balmoral is **Lochnagar** (1155m), immortalised in verse by Lord Byron, who spent his childhood years in Aberdeenshire:

England, thy beauties are tame and domestic

To one who has roamed o'er the mountains afar.

O! for the crags that are wild and majestic:

The steep frowning glories of dark Lochnagar.

Balmoral is beside the A93 at Crathie and can be reached on the Aberdeen to Braemar bus.

Braemar

☎ 01339 / pop 400

Braemar is a pretty little village with a grand location on a broad plain ringed by mountains

where the Dee valley and Glen Clunie meet. In winter this is one of the coldest places in the country – temperatures as low as minus 29°C have been recorded – and during spells of severe cold hungry deer wander the streets looking for a bite to eat. Braemar is an excellent base for hill walking, and there's skiing at nearby Glenshee.

The **tourist office** (☎ 741600; The Mews, Mar Rd; ☞ 9am–6pm Aug, 9am–5pm Jun, Jul, Sep & Oct, 10am–1.30pm & 2–5pm Mon–Sat, 2–5pm Sun Nov–May), opposite the Fife Arms Hotel, has lots of useful info on walks in the area. There's a bank with an ATM in the village centre, a couple of outdoor equipment shops and an **AllDays** (☞ 7.30am–9pm Mon–Sat, 9am–6pm Sun) grocery store.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Braemar Highland Heritage Centre** (☎ 741944; Mar Rd; admission free; ☞ 9am–6.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am–6pm Jun & Sep, 10am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun Mar–May, call for winter hr), beside the tourist office, tells the story of the area with displays and videos.

Just north of the village, turreted **Braemar Castle** dates from 1628 and served as a government garrison after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. It was taken over by the local community in 2007 and was undergoing restoration at the time of research; it should be open to the public in 2008.

An easy walk from Braemar is up **Creag Choinnich** (538m), a hill to the east of the village above the A93. The route is waymarked and takes about 1½ hours. For a longer walk (three hours) and superb views of the Cairngorms, head for the summit of **Morrone** (859m), southwest of Braemar. Ask at the tourist office for details of these and other walks.

You can hire bikes from **Braemar Mountain Sports** (☎ 741242; 5 Invercauld Rd; ☞ 9am–6pm) for £10/15 per half-day/day.

BRAEMAR GATHERING

There are Highland games in many towns and villages throughout the summer, but the best known is the **Braemar Gathering** (☎ 01339-755377; www.braemargathering.org), which takes place on the first Saturday in September. It's a major occasion, organised every year since 1817 by the Braemar Royal Highland Society. Events include highland dancing, pipers, tug-of-war, a hill race up Morrone, tossing the caber, hammer- and stone-throwing and the long jump. International athletes are among those who take part.

These kinds of events took place informally in the Highlands for many centuries as tests of skill and strength, but they were formalised around 1820 as part of the rise of Highland romanticism initiated by Sir Walter Scott and King George IV. Queen Victoria attended the Braemar Gathering in 1848, starting a tradition of royal patronage that continues to this day.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

More than 20,000 people, including the royal family, descend on Braemar on the first Saturday in September for the annual **Braemar Gathering** (☎ 755377; www.braemargathering.org; adult/child £7/2), the most famous Highland games in the country. Bookings for ringside and grandstand seats (£13 to £22) are essential. See the boxed text, below, for more information.

SLEEPING

Ourpick Rucksacks Bunkhouse (☎ 741517; 15 Mar Rd; bothy £7, dm £12, tw £30; Ⓟ) A shiny new extension now houses the comfortable dorms in this appealing cottage bunkhouse, with cheaper beds in an alpine-style bothy (shared sleeping platform for 10 people). Extras including a drying room, laundry and even a sauna (£10 an hour) mean that Rucksacks is understandably popular with walkers and climbers. Nonguests are welcome to use the internet (£2 per hour, 10.30am to 4.30pm), laundry (£4) and even the showers (£2), and the friendly owner is a fount of knowledge about the local area.

Braemar Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1105; 21 Glenshee Rd; dm £13–14; ☞ late Dec–Oct) This hostel is housed in a grand former shooting lodge just south of the village centre on the A93 to Perth; it has a comfy lounge with pool table, and a barbecue in the garden.

Craiglea (☎ 741641; www.craigleabraemar.com; Hillside Dr; s/d from £25/46; Ⓟ) Craiglea is a homely B&B set in a pretty stone-built cottage with three en-suite bedrooms. Vegetarian breakfasts are available and the owners can give advice on local walks.

Clunie Lodge Guesthouse (☎ 741330; www.clunie.lodge.com; Cluniebank Rd; r per person from £25; Ⓟ) A spacious Victorian villa set in beautiful gardens, the Clunie is a great place to relax after a hard day's hiking, with its comfortable resi-

dents lounge, bedrooms with views of the hills and red squirrels scampering through the neighbouring woods. There's a drying room for wet weather gear and secure storage for cycles.

Braemar Lodge Hotel (☎ 741627; www.braemarlodge.co.uk; Glenshee Rd; dm £11, s/d £60/100; Ⓟ) This Victorian shooting lodge on the southern outskirts of the village has bags of character, not least in the wood-panelled Malt Room bar, which is as well stocked with mounted deer heads as it is with single malt whiskies. There's a good restaurant with views of the hills, plus a 12-berth hikers' bunkhouse in the hotel grounds.

Campers will find good facilities at **Invercauld Caravan Club Site** (☎ 741373; tent sites £9–14; ☞ late Dec–Oct), or you can camp wild (no facilities) along the minor road on the east bank of the Clunie Water, 3 miles south of Braemar.

EATING

Hungry Highlander (14 Invercauld Rd; mains £3–7; ☞ noon–8pm Tue, 10am–8pm Wed, Thu & Sun, 10am–10pm Fri & Sat) If you're too late for a sit-down dinner at one of the restaurants, this place serves a range of take-away meals and hot drinks.

Taste (☎ 741425; Airlie House, Mar Rd; mains £9–10; ☞ 10am–5pm Thu–Tue, 6.30–8.30pm Fri & Sat; Ⓟ) Taste is a relaxed little café with armchairs in the window, serving soups, snacks, coffee and cakes during the day, and more substantial fare – beef and Guinness casserole, or vegetable crumble with a cheese and nut topping – in the evenings.

Ourpick Gathering Place Bistro (☎ 741234; 9 Invercauld Rd; mains £15–17; ☞ 12.20–2.30pm Wed–Sat, 6–9pm Tue–Sat) This bright and breezy bistro is an unexpected corner of culinary excellence, with a welcoming dining room and sunny conservatory, tucked below the main road junction at the entrance to the village.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 201 runs from Aberdeen to Braemar (2½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday). The drive from Perth to Braemar is beautiful, but there's no public transport on this route.

Inverey

Five miles west of Braemar is the tiny settlement of Inverey. Numerous mountain walks start from here, including the adventurous walk through the **Lairig Ghru** pass to Aviemore (see the boxed text, p334).

The **Glen Luibeg** circuit (15 miles, six hours) is a good day walk. Start from the woodland car park 250m beyond the **Linn of Dee**, a narrow gorge at the road bridge about 1.5 miles west of Inverey, and follow the footpath and track to Derry Lodge and Glen Luibeg – there are beautiful remnants of the ancient Caledonian pine forest here. Continue westwards on a pleasant path over a pass into Glen Dee, then follow the River Dee back downstream to the linn. Take OS 1:50,000 map sheet No 43.

A good short walk (3 miles, 1½ hours) begins at the **Linn of Quoich** – a waterfall that thunders through a narrow slot in the rocks. Head uphill on a footpath on the east bank of the stream, past the impressive rock scenery of the **Punch Bowl** (a giant pothole), to a modern bridge that spans the narrow gorge and return via an unsurfaced road on the far bank.

The **Inverey Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1126; dm £12.25; ☞ May–Sep) provides basic digs in a cosy little cottage (only 14 beds, so book ahead).

A Royal Mail postbus runs from Braemar to Inverey Youth Hostel (15 minutes), Linn of Dee (20 minutes) and Luibeg (30 minutes), departing from Braemar post office at 1.20pm Monday to Saturday.

STRATHDON

The valley of the River Don, home to many of Aberdeenshire's finest castles, stretches westward from Kintore, 13 miles northwest of Aberdeen, taking in the villages of Kennay, Monymusk, Alford (*ah-ford*) and tiny Strathdon. The A944 parallels the lower valley; west of Alford, the A944, A97 and A939 follow the river's upper reaches.

Bus 220 runs from Aberdeen to Alford (1½ hours, seven a day Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday); the Strathdon A2B bus continues from Alford to Strathdon village (50 minutes, two daily Tuesday and Thursday only) via Kildrummoy.

From May to September the Heather Hopper bus runs twice daily from Ballater to Grantown-on-Spey via Strathdon, Corgarff, the Lecht and Tomintoul.

Alford

☎ 01975 / pop 1925

Alford has a **tourist office** (☎ 562052; Old Station Yard, Main St; ☞ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 12.45–5pm Sun Jun–Aug, 10am–1pm & 2–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–noon & 1.45–5pm Sat, 12.45–5pm Sun Apr, May & Sep), banks with ATMs and a supermarket.

The **Grampian Transport Museum** (☎ 562292; www.gtm.org.uk; adult/child £5.40/2.70; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) houses a fascinating collection of vintage motorbikes, cars, buses and trams, including a Triumph Bonneville in excellent nick, a couple of Model T Fords (including one used by Drambaie), a Ferrari F40 and an Aston Martin V8 Mk II. Unusual exhibits include a 19th-century horse-drawn sleigh from Russia, a 1942 Mack snowplough and the Craigievar Express, a steam-powered tricycle built in 1895 by a local postman.

Next to the museum is the terminus of the narrow-gauge **Alford Valley Steam Railway** (☎ 562811; www.alfordvalleyrailway.org.uk; adult/child £2.50/1; 🕒 trains run daily Jun-Aug, Sat & Sun only Apr, May & Sep), a heritage line that runs from here to Houghton Country Park.

For B&B, you can't do better than **Frog Marsh** (☎ 571355; www.frogmarsh.com; Mossat; d/ste £70/90), a restored and extended cottage 6 miles west of Alford, which has two gorgeous doubles plus a luxury suite in the attic space.

Craigievar Castle

The most spectacular of the Strathdon castles, **Craigievar Castle** (NTS; ☎ 01339-883280; adult/child £10/7; 🕒 noon-5.30pm Jul & Aug, noon-5.30pm Fri-Tue Easter-Jun & Sep), a superb example of the original Scottish Baronial style 9 miles south of Alford, has managed to survive pretty much unchanged since its completion in the 17th century. The lower half is a plain tower house, the upper half sprouts corbelled turrets, cupolas and battlements – an extravagant statement of its builder's wealth and status.

Kildrummy Castle

Nine miles west of Alford lie the extensive remains of the 13th-century **Kildrummy Castle** (HS; ☎ 01975-571331; adult/child £3.50/1.75; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), former seat of the Earl of Mar and once one of Scotland's most impressive fortresses. After the 1715 Jacobite rebellion the earl was exiled to France and his castle fell into ruin.

If you're in the mood for a night of luxury, head for **Kildrummy Castle Hotel** (☎ 01975-571288; www.kildrummycastlehotel.co.uk; s/d £95/165; 📺) just along the road, a splendid Baronial hunting lodge complete with original oak panelling, log fires and four-poster beds.

Corgarff Castle

In the wild upper reaches of Strathdon, near the A939 from Corgarff to Tomintoul, is

the impressive fortress of **Corgarff Castle** (HS; ☎ 01975-651460; adult/child £4.50/2.25; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm daily Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar). The tower house dates from the 16th century, but the star-shaped defensive curtain wall was added in 1748 when the castle was converted to a military barracks in the wake of the Jacobite rebellion.

Jenny's Bothy (☎ 01975-651449; www.jennysbothy.co.uk; dm £9) is a welcoming year-round bunkhouse set in a remote croft; look out for the sign by the main road, then follow the old military road (drivable) for 0.75 miles.

Lecht Ski Resort

At the head of Strathdon the A939 – a magnificent rollercoaster of a road, much loved by motorcyclists – crosses the Lecht pass (637m), where there's a small skiing area with lots of short easy and intermediate runs. **Lecht 2090** (☎ 01975-651440; www.lecht.co.uk) hires out skis, boots and poles for £16 a day; a one-day lift pass is £23. A two-day package, including ski hire, lift pass and instruction, costs £84.

The ski centre opens in summer, too, when you can rent go-karts and quad bikes (£8.75 a session).

NORTHERN ABERDEENSHIRE

North of Aberdeen, the Grampian Mountains fall away to rolling agricultural plains pocked with small, craggy volcanic hills. This fertile lowland corner of northeastern Scotland is known as Buchan, a region of traditional farming culture immortalised by Lewis Grassie Gibbon in his trilogy, *A Scots Quair*, based on the life of a farming community in the 1920s. The old Scots dialect called the Doric lives on in everyday use here – if you think the Glaswegian accent is difficult to understand, just try listening in to a conversation in Peterhead or Fraserburgh.

The Buchan coast alternates between rugged cliffs and long, long stretches of sand, dotted with picturesque little fishing villages such as Pennan, where parts of the film *Local Hero* were shot.

Peterhead

☎ 01779 / pop 17,950

Peterhead's sprawling harbour stands as testimony to a once-great fishing industry. Not much more than a decade ago the high-tech trawlers operating from here were so productive that they supported a Ferrari-driving

fishing community with a large disposable income. Overfishing and EU quotas and restrictions have now led to a point where the entire industry is in danger of disappearing, and the town is turning to tourism and North Sea oil for salvation.

Peterhead Maritime Heritage (☎ 473000; The Lido, South Rd; admission free; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep) documents the town's involvement in the whaling and fishing industries and their replacement by North Sea oil; it overlooks a good sandy beach beside the marina. The central **Arbuthnot Museum** (☎ 477778; St Peter St; admission free; 🕒 11am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat, closes 1pm Wed) has wide-ranging displays on local history and Arctic whaling.

Buses 260 and 263 run from Aberdeen to Peterhead (1¼ hours, every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday and hourly on Sunday).

Fraserburgh

☎ 01346 / pop 12,500

Fraserburgh, affectionately known to locals as the Broch, is Europe's largest shellfish port. Like Peterhead, Fraserburgh's fortune has been founded on the fishing industry and has suffered from its general decline. The harbour is still fairly busy, though, and is an interesting place to wander around; there are good sandy beaches east of the town. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 518315; Saltoun Sq; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct), a supermarket and banks with ATMs.

The excellent **Scottish Lighthouse Museum** (☎ 511022; www.lighthousemuseum.org.uk; Kinnaird Head; adult/child £5/2.20; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 11am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) provides a fascinating insight into the network of lights that have safeguarded the Scottish coast for over 100 years, and the men and women who built and maintained them (plus a sobering fact – that *all* the world's lighthouses are to be decommissioned by 1 January 2080). A guided tour takes you to the top of the old Kinnaird Head lighthouse, built on top of a converted 16th-century castle; the engineering is so precise that the 4.5-ton light assembly can be rotated by pushing with a single finger. The anemometer here measured the strongest wind speed ever recorded in the UK, with a gust of 123 knots (142mph) on 13 February 1989.

Maggie's Hoosie (☎ 514761; 26 Shore St, Inverallochy; admission free; 🕒 2-4.30pm May-Sep), 4 miles east of

Fraserburgh, is a traditional fishwife's cottage with earthen floors and original furnishings, a timeless reminder of a bygone age.

Buses 267 and 268 run hourly to Fraserburgh from Aberdeen (1½ hours) via Ellon.

Pennan

Pennan is a picturesque harbour village tucked beneath red-sandstone cliffs, 12 miles west of Fraserburgh. The whitewashed houses are built gable-end to the sea, and the waves break just a few metres away on the other side of the village's only street. Most of the cottages are now holiday homes – around a quarter of them were damaged when a huge mudslide caused by torrential rain hit the village in 2007.

The village featured in the 1983 film *Local Hero*, and fans of the film still come to make a call from the red telephone box that played a prominent part in the plot. However, the box in the film was just a prop, and it was only later that film buffs and locals successfully campaigned for a real one to be installed!

The interior of the village hotel, the **Pennan Inn**, also appeared in the film, though one of the houses further along the seafront to the east doubled for the exterior of the fictional hotel. The beach scenes were filmed on the other side of the country, at Camasdarach Beach in Arisaig, see p348.

Bus 273 from Fraserburgh to Banff stops at the Pennan road end (25 minutes, two a day, Saturday only), 350m south of (and a steep climb uphill from) the village.

Gardenstown & Crovie

The fishing village of Gardenstown (or Gamrie, pronounced *game-rey*), founded by Alexander Garden in 1720, is built on a series of cramped terraces tumbling down the steep cliffs above the tiny harbour. Drivers should beware of severe gradients and hairpin bends in the village, parts of which can only be reached on foot. Crovie (pronounced *crivvy*), 800m to the east, is even more claustrophobically picturesque.

our pick **Harbour Restaurant** (☎ 01261-851690; 2a Harbour St, Gardenstown; mains £13-16; 🕒 noon-2.30pm Thu-Mon, 6-10pm Wed-Mon) is a hidden gem, a tiny place overlooking Gardenstown harbour serving superbly prepared seafood; if the weather's looking good book early and grab a table on the little outdoor terrace.

Huntly

☎ 01466 / pop 4400

An impressive ruined castle and an attractive main square make this small town worth a stopover between Aberdeen and Elgin. The **tourist office** (☎ 792255; The Square; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct) is on the main square, next to a bank with an ATM.

Castle St (beside the Huntly Hotel) runs north from the town square to an arched gateway and tree-lined avenue that leads to 16th-century **Huntly Castle** (HS; ☎ 793191; adult/child £4.50/2.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar), the former stronghold of the Gordons on the banks of the River Deveron. Over the main door is a superb carving that includes the royal arms and the figures of Christ and St Michael.

Just off the A96 3 miles northwest of Huntly is the **Peregrine Wild Watch Centre** (☎ 760790; Bin Forest; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Aug), a centre where you can observe rare peregrine falcons, both live from a hide and via a remote camera monitoring their nest site.

There are a couple of hotels on the main square and a handful of B&Bs in the surrounding streets; the hospitable **Hillview** (☎ 794870; www.hillviewbb.com; Provost St; r per person £17-23; (P)) and its tasty breakfast pancakes are recommended.

If you want to spoil yourself, continue along the drive beyond the castle to the **Castle Hotel** (☎ 792696; www.castlehotel.uk.com; s/d from £73/103; (P)), a splendid 18th-century mansion set amid acres of parkland. It's comfortably old fashioned, with a grand wooden staircase, convoluted corridors, the odd creaky floorboard and rattling sash window, but must be among the most affordable country house hotels in Scotland.

Bus 10 from Aberdeen (1½ hours, hourly) to Inverness passes through Huntly. There are also regular trains from Aberdeen to Huntly (one hour, every two hours), continuing to Inverness.

MORAY

The old county of Moray (pronounced murray), centred on the county town of Elgin, lies at the heart of an ancient Celtic earldom and is famed for its mild climate and rich farmland – the barley fields of the 19th century once provided the raw material for the Speyside whisky distilleries, one of the region's main attractions for present-day visitors.

Elgin

☎ 01343 / pop 21,000

Elgin's been the provincial capital of Moray for over eight centuries and was an important town in medieval times. Dominated by a hilltop monument to the 5th duke of Gordon, Elgin's main attraction is its impressive ruined cathedral, where the tombs of the duke's ancestors lie.

The **tourist office** (☎ 542666; 17 High St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is a short distance east of the pedestrianised High St. The bus station is a block north of the High St, and the train station is 900m south of the town centre. The **post office** (Batchen St; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat) is just south of High St, and there's internet access at **Moray Business & Computer Centre** (☎ 552000; 20 Commerce St; per 15min £1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat).

SIGHTS

Many people think that the ruins of **Elgin Cathedral** (HS; ☎ 547171; adult/child £4.50/2.25, joint ticket with Spynie Palace £6/3; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar), known as the 'lantern of the north', are the most beautiful and evocative in Scotland. Consecrated in 1224, the cathedral was burned down in 1390 by the infamous Wolf of Badenoch, the illegitimate son of Robert II, following his excommunication by the Bishop of Moray. The octagonal chapter house is the finest in the country.

Palaeontologists and Pict lovers will enjoy **Elgin Museum** (☎ 543675; 1 High St; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat Apr-Oct), where the highlights are its collections of fossil fish and Pictish carved stones.

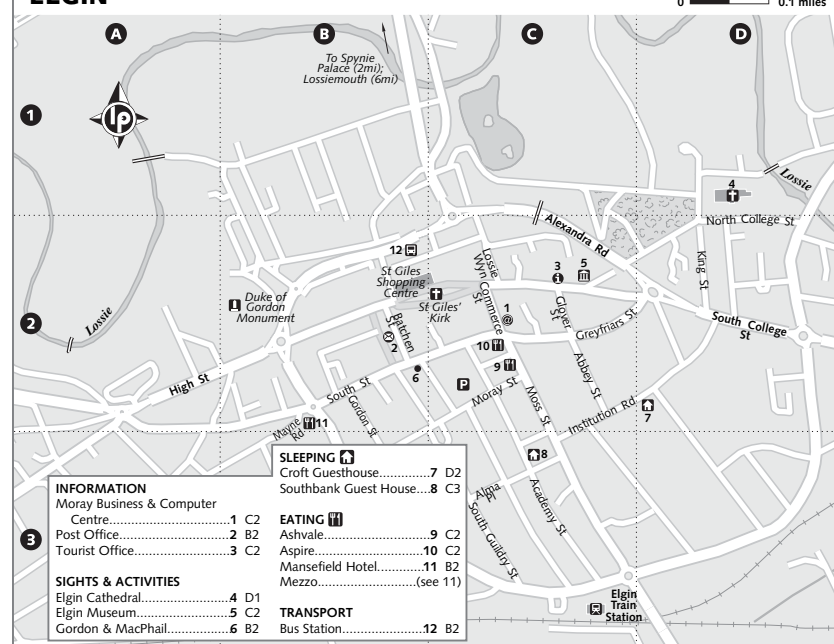
Spynie Palace (HS; ☎ 546358; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), 2 miles north of Elgin, was the residence of the medieval bishops of Moray until 1686. The massive tower house commands lovely views over Spynie Loch.

Not a sight as such, but a sight for sore eyes perhaps, **Gordon & MacPhail** (☎ 545110; www.gordonandmacphail.com; 58-60 South St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is the world's largest specialist malt whisky dealer. Over a century old and offering around 450 different varieties, its Elgin shop is a place of pilgrimage for whisky connoisseurs, as well as housing a mouth-watering delicatessen.

SLEEPING & EATING

Southbank Guest House (☎ 547132; www.southbank-guesthouse.co.uk; 36 Academy St; s/d from £40/50; (P))

ELGIN



The family-run, 12-room Southbank is set in a large Georgian town house in a quiet street south of Elgin's centre, just five minutes' walk from the cathedral and other sights.

Croft Guesthouse (☎ 546004; www.thecroftelgin.co.uk; 10 Institution Rd; s/d £45/68; (P)) The Croft offers a taste of Victorian high society, set in a spacious mansion built for a local lawyer back in 1848. The house is filled with period features – check out the cast-iron and tile fireplaces – and the three large bedrooms are equipped with easy chairs and crisp bed linen.

Mansfield Hotel (☎ 540883; www.themansfield.com; Mayne Rd; s/d £95/125; (P)) Centred on a 19th-century manse (minister's house), but with extensive modern additions, the Mansfield offers elegant accommodation both in sleek, modern rooms aimed at business travellers, and in more traditional rooms with four-poster beds.

Mezzo (☎ 540883; cnr Hay & South Sts; mains £7-12; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-9.30pm Mon-Thu, noon-9.30pm Fri & Sat, 5-9.30pm Sun) This lively bar and restaurant is part of the Mansfield Hotel complex, and serves tasty bistro fare, including pasta, pizza, burgers and various vegetarian dishes.

Aspire (☎ 540932; 9a Moss St; mains £12-19; ☎ 10am-10pm) Housed in a converted church, Aspire (geddit?) is a stylish bar and restaurant that serves everything from morning coffee to candlelit dinners, with a cosmopolitan menu that ranges from steak to seafood to vegetarian.

Ashvale (11 Moss St; ☎ 11.45am-10pm daily) A branch of the famous Aberdeen fish-and-chip shop.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are buses from Elgin to Banff and Macduff (£8, one hour), Dufftown (£4, 30 minutes), Inverness (£8, one hour) and Aberdeen (£10, two hours). Elgin is on the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line.

Lossiemouth

☎ 01343 / pop 9000

Lossie, as it's known locally, is the former port of Elgin, now better known as a seaside resort, yachting harbour and air force base; it's also the birthplace of James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937), who was the UK's first Labour prime minister (served 1923-24 and 1929-31; there's a plaque at 1 Gregory Pl, where he was born).

Lossiemouth's big selling point is the **East Beach**, a beautiful golden-sand beach that stretches for several miles to the southeast of the town, reached via a footbridge over the River Lossie. The old harbour, now a yachting marina, is a pleasant place to stroll.

Good places for coffee and cake or a light lunch include the **Harbour Tearooms** (☎ 814622; 5 Pitgaveny Quay; snacks £1-3; ☎ 9am-5pm), overlooking the marina, and **La Caverna** (☎ 813027; 20 Clifton Rd; mains £9-12; ☎ noon-2pm & 5-9.30pm), a stone-vaulted Italian café and restaurant – the outdoor tables have a view of the beach.

Dufftown

☎ 01340 / pop 1450

Rome may be built on seven hills, but Dufftown's built on seven stills, say the locals. Founded in 1817 by James Duff, 4th earl of Fife, Dufftown is 17 miles south of Elgin and lies at the heart of the Speyside whisky-distilling region.

The **tourist office** (☎ 820501; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Easter-Oct) is in the clock tower in the main square; the adjoining museum contains some interesting local items.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

With seven working distilleries nearby, Dufftown has been dubbed Scotland's malt whisky capital. Ask at the tourist office for a **Malt Whisky Trail** (www.maltwhiskytrail.com) booklet, a self-guided tour around the seven stills plus the Speyside Cooperage.

As well as housing a selection of distillery memorabilia (try saying that after a few drams), the **Whisky Museum** (☎ 821097; 24 Fife St; ☎ 1-4pm Mon-Fri) holds 'nosing and tasting evenings' where you can learn what to look for in a fine single malt (£6 per person; 8.30pm Tuesdays in July and August). You can then test your new-found skills at the nearby **Whisky Shop** (☎ 821097; 1 Fife St), which stocks hundreds of single malts and a huge range of bottled Scottish beers.

At the northern edge of town is the **Glenfiddich Distillery Visitor Centre** (☎ 820373; www.glenfiddich.co.uk; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun Easter-mid-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Oct-Easter), where the guided tour includes a visit to the bottling plant – the only Highland distillery where bottling takes place on the premises. Your free dram is genuinely free, but enthusiasts can opt for the in-depth, 2½-hour Connoisseur's Tour (£20), which includes a

'nosing' of half a dozen whiskies under the supervision of an experienced taster.

The nearby **Speyside Cooperage** (☎ 871108; www.speysidecooperage.co.uk; Craigellachie; adult/child £3.20/1.90; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) turns out around 100,000 oak barrels a year for the maturing of Scottish malt whiskies; the visitor centre allows you to watch skilled coopers and apprentices at work. Across the River Spey from the cooperage lies the **Macallan Distillery** (☎ 872280; www.themacallan.com; Easter Elchies, Craigellachie; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 11am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar), approached through waving fields of Golden Promise barley. The guided tours (£5) last 30 minutes; there's a more detailed two-hour tour for enthusiasts (£15; book in advance).

The **Keith and Dufftown Railway** (☎ 821181; www.keith-dufftown-railway.co.uk; Dufftown Station) is a heritage railway line running for 11 miles from Dufftown to Keith. Trains hauled by 1950s diesel motor units run on Saturdays and Sundays from June to September, plus Fridays in July and August; a return ticket costs £9.50/4.50 for an adult/child. There are also two 1930s 'Brighton Belle' Pullman coaches on display, and a café housed in a 1957 British Rail cafeteria car.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The four-day **Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival** (www.spiritofspeyside.com), held at the end of April/beginning of May, takes in whisky tastings, tours, locally produced food and traditional music, as does the **Autumn Speyside Whisky Festival** (www.spiritofspeyside.com), which takes place at the end of September.

SLEEPING & EATING

Fife Arms Hotel (☎ 820220; www.fifearmsdufftown.co.uk; 2 The Square; s/d £30/50; Ⓟ) This welcoming hotel offers slightly cramped but comfortable accommodation in a modern block around the back; its bar is stocked with a wide range of single malts, and the restaurant (mains £8 to £16) dishes up sizzling steaks, homemade steak pies and locally farmed ostrich steaks.

Davaar B&B (☎ 820464; www.davaardufftown.co.uk; 17 Church St; s/d £35/50) Just along the street opposite the tourist office, Davaar is a sturdy Victorian villa with three smallish but comfily kitted out rooms; the breakfast menu is superb, offering the option of Portsoy kippers instead of the traditional fry-up (which uses eggs from the owners' own chickens).

A Taste of Speyside (☎ 820860; 10 Balvenie St; mains £14-17; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sun) This upmarket

restaurant prepares traditional Scottish dishes using fresh local produce, including a challenging platter of smoked salmon, smoked venison, brandied chicken liver paté, cured herring, a selection of Scottish cheeses and homemade bread (phew!). A two-course lunch costs £12.50.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses link Dufftown to Elgin (50 minutes, hourly), Huntly, Aberdeen and Inverness.

On summer weekends, you can take a train from Aberdeen or Inverness to Keith, and then ride the Keith and Dufftown Railway (see Sights, p262) to Dufftown.

Tomintoul

☎ 01807 / pop 320

This high-altitude (345m) village was built by the Duke of Gordon in 1775 on the old

military road that leads over the Lecht pass from Corgarff, a route now followed by the A939 (usually the first road in Scotland to be blocked by snow when winter closes in). The duke hoped that settling the dispersed population of his estates in a proper village would help to stamp out cattle stealing and illegal distilling.

Tomintoul (pronounced tom-in-towel) is a pretty, stone-built village with a grassy, tree-lined main square, where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 580285; The Square; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, plus 1-5pm Sun Aug); and, next door, the **Tomintoul Museum** (☎ 673701; The Square; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri May & Oct), which has displays on a range of local topics. The surrounding Glenlivet Estate (now the property of the Crown) has lots of walking and cycling trails – the estate's **information centre** (☎ 580283; www.crownestate.co.uk/glenlivet; Main St)

TOP 10 SINGLE MALT WHISKIES – OUR CHOICE

After a great deal of diligent research (and not a few sore heads), Lonely Planet's *Scotland* authors and editors have selected their 10 favourite single malts from across the country (with the proviso that each offers a good distillery tour).

- Bowmore** (Islay) Smoke, peat and salty sea air – a classic Islay malt. One of the few distilleries that still malts its own barley (p291).
- Bruichladdich** (Islay) Peat, peat and more peat – not for the faint-hearted! A visitor-friendly distillery with a quirky, innovative approach (p292).
- Edradour** (Highland) Smooth and sweet, with toffee, vanilla and honey notes. The country's smallest and prettiest distillery (p227).
- Glenfiddich** (Speyside) Fragrant, fruity and interesting, especially the special finishes. Distillery still in family ownership after 120 years (opposite).
- Glenmorangie** (Highland) Fruit, flowers, citrus and honey – a breath of springtime. Distillery has the tallest stills in Scotland (p356).
- Glenturret** (Highland) The backbone of the Famous Grouse blend. Pretty little distillery, with a cute resident cat called Amber (p221).
- Highland Park** (Island) Full and rounded, with heather, honey, malt and peat. Award-winning distillery tour (p409).
- Macallan** (Speyside) The king of Speyside malts, with sherry and bourbon finishes. Distillery set amid waving fields of Golden Promise barley (opposite).
- Old Pulteney** (Highland) Light and sherry scented, with a tang of salt air. The most northerly distillery on the mainland (p361).
- Springbank** (Campbeltown) Complex flavours – sherry, citrus, pear-drops, peat – with a salty tang. Entire production process from malting to bottling takes place on site (p288).

A visit to a whisky distillery should be part of any trip to Scotland – many distilleries around the country open their doors to visitors. For some, showing tourists around has become a slick marketing operation complete with promotional videos, gift shops that rival Harrods in size and glitziness, and an admission charge of around £3 to £5 (in most places this is refundable if you buy something in the shop).

See also How To Be A Malt Whisky Buff, p55.

distributes free maps of the area – and a spur of the **Speyside Way** long-distance footpath (see the boxed text, p59) runs between Tomintoul and Ballindalloch, 15 miles to the north.

Accommodation for walkers includes the **Tomintoul Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1152; Main St; dm £13; ☹ May-Sep), housed in the old village school. The small, family-run **Glenavon Hotel** (☎ 580218; www.glenavon-hotel.co.uk; The Square; r per person £20-28; Ⓟ) is a more comfortable alternative.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 362 and 363 operate an infrequent service from Tomintoul to Dufftown (40 minutes, one or two daily Monday to Saturday) and to Elgin (1¼ hours, one daily Thursday only) respectively. The Speyside Stroller and Heather Hopper bus services (p233) also stop at Tomintoul.

Banff & Macduff

☎ 01261 / combined pop 7750

The handsome Georgian town of Banff and the busy fishing port of Macduff lie on either side of Banff Bay separated only by the mouth of the River Deveron. Banff Links – 800m of clean golden sand stretching to the west – and Macduff's impressive aquarium pull in the holiday crowds.

The **tourist office** (☎ 812419; Collie Lodge, High St; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep) is beside St Mary's car park in Banff.

SIGHTS

Duff House (☎ 818181; adult/child £6/5; ☹ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Mar) is an impressive baroque mansion on the southern edge of Banff (upstream from the bridge, and across from the tourist office). Built between 1735 and 1740 as the seat of the earls of Fife, it was designed by William Adam and bears similarities to that Adam masterpiece, Hopetoun House (p115). Since being gifted to the town in 1906 it has served as a hotel, a hospital and a POW camp, but is now an art gallery. One of Scotland's hidden gems, it houses a superb collection of Scottish and European art, including important works by Raeburn and Gainsborough. Nearby **Banff Museum** (☎ 622906; High St; admission free; ☹ 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep) has award-winning displays on local wildlife, geology and history, and Banff silver.

The centrepiece of **Macduff Marine Aquarium** (☎ 833369; 11 High Shore; adult/child £5.20/2.60; ☹ 10am-5pm) is a 400,000L open-air tank, complete with

kelp-coated reef and wave machine. Marine oddities on view include the brightly coloured cuckoo wrasse, the warty-skinned lumpsucker and the vicious-looking wolf fish.

SLEEPING & EATING

Banff Links Caravan Park (☎ 812228; Banff; tent/campervan from £7/12; ☹ Apr-Oct) This camp site is beside the beach, 800m west of town.

Bryvard Guest House (☎ 818090; www.bryvardguesthouse.co.uk; Seaford St, Banff; s/d £35/60) The Bryvard is an imposing Edwardian town house close to the town centre, with four bedrooms (two with en suite). Go for the 'suite', which has a four-poster bed and a sea view; there's a minimum stay of two nights in high season.

County Hotel (☎ 815353; www.thecountyhotel.com; 32 High St, Banff; s/d £40/75; Ⓟ) The County occupies an elegant Georgian mansion in the town centre, and is owned by a French chef – the hotel's bistro serves light meals (mains £7 to £10), while the restaurant (L'Auberge) offers the finest French cuisine (à la carte mains £22 to £30, three-course dinner £21 to £26).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 305 runs from Banff to Elgin (1½ hours, hourly) and Aberdeen (two hours), while bus 271/272 runs less frequently to Fraserburgh (one hour, once daily Monday to Friday).

Portsoy

☎ 01261 / pop 1730

The pretty fishing village of Portsoy has an atmospheric 17th-century harbour and a maze of narrow streets lined with picturesque cottages. An ornamental stone known as Portsoy marble – actually a beautifully patterned green and pale pink serpentine – was quarried near Portsoy in the 17th and 18th centuries, and was reputedly used in the decoration of some rooms in the Palace of Versailles. The **Portsoy Marble Shop & Pottery** (☎ 842404; Shorehead; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) beside the harbour sells hand-made stoneware and objects made from the local marble.

Each year on the last weekend in June or first weekend in July, Portsoy harbour is home to the **Scottish Traditional Boat Festival** (☎ 842951; www.scottishtraditionalboatfestival.co.uk), a lively gathering of historic wooden sailing boats accompanied by sailing races, live folk music, crafts demonstrations, street theatre and a food festival.

The 12-room **Boyne Hotel** (☎ 842242; www.boynohotel.co.uk; 2 North High St; s/d £35/65) is a cosy and atmospheric place to stay, while the **Shore**

Inn (☎ 842831; Church St) is a characterful real-ale pub overlooking the harbour.

Portsoy is 8 miles west of Banff; the hourly bus between Elgin and Banff stops here.

Fordyce

pop 150

This impossibly picturesque village lies about 3 miles southwest of Portsoy. The main attractions are the 13th-century **St Tarquin's Church**, with its extraordinary canopied Gothic tombs, and the impressive 16th-century tower house of **Fordyce Castle**. The castle isn't open to the public, but its whitewashed west wing provides atmospheric **self-catering accommodation** (☎ 01261-843722; www.fordycecastle.co.uk; per week £395-595, 3 nights in low season £295) for up to four people.

The nearby **Joiner's Workshop & Visitor Centre** (☎ 01771-622906; admission free; ☹ 10am-6pm Thu-Mon) has a collection of woodworking tools and machinery, and stages woodwork demonstrations by a master joiner.

Fochabers & Around

☎ 01343 / pop 1500

Fochabers sits beside the last bridge over the River Spey before it enters the sea. The town has a pleasant square, with a church and clock tower dated 1798, and a handful of interesting antique shops.

West of the bridge over the Spey is **Baxters Highland Village** (☎ 820666; admission free; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Apr-Dec, 10am-4pm Jan-Mar), which charts the history of the Baxter family and their well-known brand of quality Scottish foodstuffs. The brand was founded in 1868 when they opened their first shop in Fochabers. There's a factory tour with cookery demonstrations on weekdays.

Four miles north of Fochabers, at the mouth of the River Spey, is the tiny village of **Spey Bay**, the starting point for the Speyside Way long-distance footpath (see boxed text, p59). It's also home to the **WDCS Wildlife Centre** (☎ 820339; www.wdcs.org; Tugnet Ice House; admission free; ☹ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, to 7pm Jul & Aug) with an interesting display on the Moray Firth dolphins, which can occasionally be seen off the mouth of the river.

Fochabers is on the Aberdeen to Inverness bus route.

Findhorn

☎ 01309 / pop 885

The attractive village of Findhorn lies at the mouth of the River Findhorn, just east of the

Findhorn Bay nature reserve. It's a great place for bird-watching, seal-spotting and coastal walks.

Findhorn Heritage Centre (☎ 630349; admission free; ☹ 2-5pm daily Jun-Aug, 2-5pm Sat & Sun May & Sep), housed in a former salmon-fisher's bothy at the northern end of the village, records the history of the settlement. The beach is just over the dunes north of the heritage centre – at low tide, you can see seals hauled out on the sandbanks off the mouth of the River Findhorn.

Hippies old and new should check out the **Findhorn Foundation** (☎ 690311; www.findhorn.org; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 1-4pm Sat Mar-Nov & 1-4pm Sun May-Sep), an international spiritual community founded in 1962. There's a small permanent population of around 150, but the community receives thousands of visitors each year. With no formal creed, the community is dedicated to cooperation with nature, 'dealing with work, relationships and our environment in new and more fulfilling ways', and fostering 'a deeper sense of the sacred in everyday life'. Projects include eco-friendly houses, a biological sewage-treatment plant and a wind-powered generator. Guided tours (£3) are available at 2pm on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from April to October, and on Sunday as well from May to September.

The **Kimberley Inn** (☎ 690492; mains £6-12; ☹ food served noon-10pm) does good bar meals.

Culbin Forest

On the western side of Findhorn Bay is Culbin Forest, a vast swathe of Scots and Corsican pine that was planted in the 1940s to stabilise the shifting sand dunes that buried the Culbin Estate in the 17th century. The forest is a unique wildlife habitat, supporting plants, birds and animals (such as the pine marten) that are normally found only in ancient natural pine woods, and is crisscrossed by a maze of walking trails.

Forres

The tidy town of Forres, 4 miles south of Findhorn, is famous for **Sueno's Stone**, a remarkable, 6.5m-high Pictish stone. It is the tallest and most elaborately carved Pictish stone in Scotland, dating from the 9th or 10th century, and is thought to depict a battle between the Picts and invading Scots or Vikings. It's protected from the elements by a huge plate-glass box.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'