

Southern Highlands & Islands



From the rasping spout of a minke whale as it breaks the surface of the sea off the coast of Islay, to the mysterious 'krek-krek-krek' of a corncrake hiding amid the long summer grass of Coll, the coast and islands of southwest Scotland are filled with unusual wildlife experiences. Here you can spot otters tumbling in the kelp along a deserted shore, watch sea eagles snatch fish from a lonely loch, and thrill to the sight of dolphins riding the bow wave of your boat.

The region covered in this chapter corresponds with the old county of Argyll, whose name comes from the Gaelic *earra-ghaidheal* – the seaboard of the Gael. Though measuring only 155 miles north to south, Argyll's convoluted coastline is a staggering 2300 miles in length. This is a corner of Scotland where sea travel is as important as road and rail – a network of ferry crossings allows you to island-hop your way from the Firth of Clyde to Oban and beyond, via the whisky distilleries of Islay, the wild mountains of Jura and the scenic delights of little Colonsay.

Oban itself is the gateway to the isles – from the peaceful backwaters of Kerrera and Lismore to the dramatic coastal scenery of Mull and the wild, windswept beaches of Coll and Tiree. The waters around these islands are rich in marine wildlife, and offer some of the best whale-watching opportunities in Europe.

The region is rich in prehistoric sites and is home to important religious and political centres of the past, including Dunadd, the ancient crowning place of Scottish kings; Finlaggan, the lake-island headquarters of the medieval Lords of the Isles; and the sacred island of Iona, where St Columba based his mission to spread Christianity throughout Scotland.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Staring in wonder at the magnificent marble-clad halls of **Mount Stuart** (p283)
- Walking barefoot across the strand from Colonsay to **Oronsay** (p296) to visit the medieval priory
- Riding a high-speed motorboat through the surging white water of the **Gulf of Corryvreckan** (boxed text, p294)
- Sitting by a log fire in the **Port Charlotte Hotel** (p292), sampling some of Islay's finest single malt whiskies
- Whale watching in the waters off the west coast of **Mull** (boxed text, p305)



■ POPULATION: 91,300

■ AREA: 227,420 SQ KM

LOCH LOMOND & AROUND

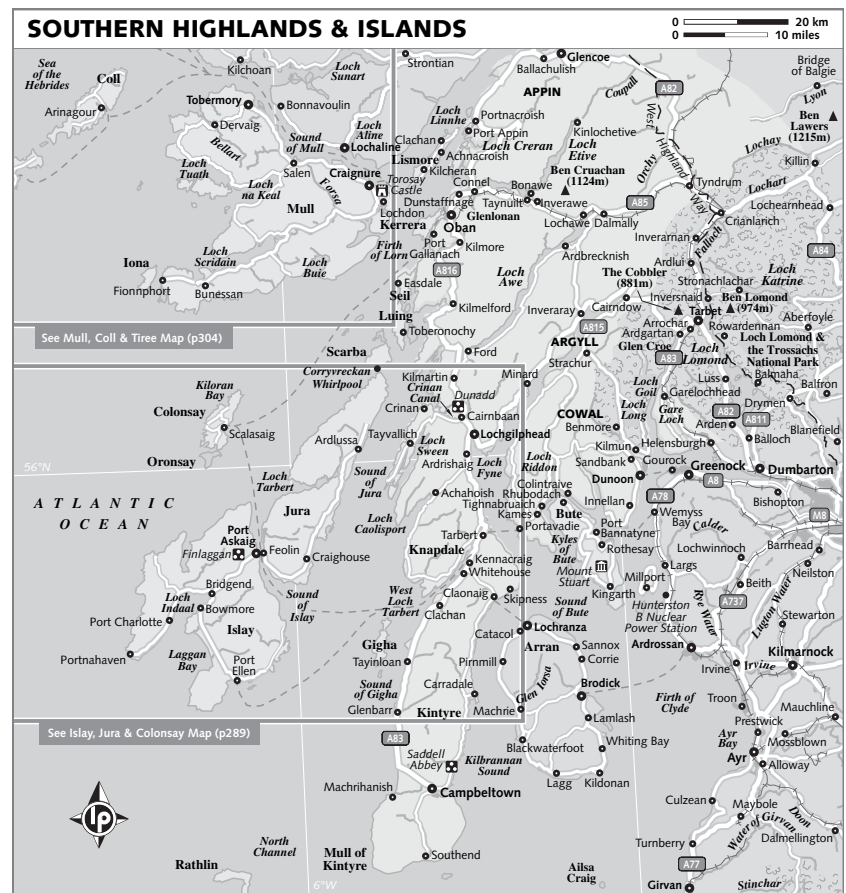
The 'bonnie banks' and 'bonnie braes' of Loch Lomond have long been Glasgow's rural retreat – a scenic region of hills, lochs and healthy fresh air within easy reach of Scotland's largest city. Since the 1930s Glaswegians have made a regular weekend exodus to the hills, by car, by bike and on foot, and today the loch's popularity shows no sign of decreasing (Loch Lomond is within an hour's drive of 70% of Scotland's population).

The region's importance was recognised when it became the heart of **Loch Lomond &**

the Trossachs National Park (☎ 01389-722600; www.lochlomond-trossachs.org) – Scotland's first national park, created in 2002.

LOCH LOMOND

Loch Lomond is the largest lake in mainland Britain and, after Loch Ness, perhaps the most famous of Scotland's lochs. Its proximity to Glasgow (20 miles away) means that the tourist honeypots of Balloch, Loch Lomond Shores and Luss get pretty crowded in summer. The main tourist focus is on the loch's western shore, along the A82, and at the southern end, around Balloch, which can occasionally be a nightmare of jet skis and motorboats. The eastern shore, which is followed by the West Highland Way long-distance footpath, is a little quieter.



GAELIC & NORSE PLACE NAMES

Throughout the Highlands and islands of Scotland the indigenous Gaelic language has left a rich legacy of place names. They're often intermixed with Old Norse names left behind by the Viking invaders who occupied the western and northern islands between the 8th and 13th centuries. The spelling is now anglicised but the meaning is still clear once you know what to look for. Here are a few of the more common Gaelic and Norse names and their meanings.

Gaelic Place Names

- ach, auch** – from *achadh* (field)
ard – from *ard* or *aird* (height, hill)
avon – from *abhainn* (river or stream)
bal – from *baile* (village or homestead)
ban – from *ban* (white, fair)
beg – from *beag* (small)
ben – from *beinn* (mountain)
buie – from *buidhe* (yellow)
dal – from *dail* (field or dale)
dow, dhu – from *dubh* (black)
drum – from *druim* (ridge or back)
dun – from *dun* or *duin* (fort or castle)
glen – from *gleann* (narrow valley)
gorm – from *gorm* (blue)
gower, gour – from *gabhar* (goat), eg Ardgour (height of the goats)
inch, insh – from *inis* (island, water-meadow or resting place for cattle)
inver – from *inbhir* (river mouth or meeting of two rivers)
kil – from *cille* (church), as in Kilmartin (Church of St Martin)
kin, ken – from *ceann* (head), eg Kinlochleven (head of Loch Leven)
kyle, kyles – from *caol* or *caolas* (narrow sea channel)
more, vore – from *mor* or *mhòr* (big), eg Ardmòr (big height), Skerryvore (big reef)
strath – from *srath* (broad valley)
tarbert, tarbet – from *tairbeart* (portage), meaning a narrow neck of land between two bodies of water, across which a boat can be dragged
tay, ty – from *tigh* (house), eg Tyndrum (house on the ridge)
tober – from *tobar* (well), eg Tobermory (Mary's well)

Norse Place Names

- a, ay, ey** – from *ey* (island)
bister, buster, bster – from *bolstaor* (dwelling place, homestead)
geo – from *gja* (chasm)
holm – from *holmr* (small island)
kirk – from *kirkja* (church)
pol, poll, bol – from *bol* (farm)
quoy – from *kvi* (sheep fold, cattle enclosure)
sker, skier, skerry – from *sker* (rocky reef)
ster, sett – from *setr* (house)
vig, vaig, wick – from *vik* (bay, creek)
voe, way – from *vagr* (bay, creek)

Loch Lomond straddles the Highland border and its character changes as you move north. The southern part is broad and island-studded and fringed by woods and Lowland meadows. However, north of Luss the loch

narrows, occupying a deep trench gouged out by glaciers during the Ice Age, with 900m mountains crowding in on either side.

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Orientation

Loch Lomond is 22 miles long and varies in width from 1 to 5 miles. The A82 along the western shore is the main road north from Glasgow to Fort William. The minor road along the eastern shore, reached from Balloch via Drymen, ends at Rowardennan; hikers can continue along this shore on the West Highland Way.

Information

Balloch tourist office (☎ 0870 720 0607; Balloch Rd; ☞ 9.30am–6pm Jun–Aug, 10am–6pm Apr & Sep)
Balmaha National Park Centre (☎ 01389-722100; Balmaha; ☞ 10am–5pm Easter–Oct)
National Park Gateway Centre (☎ 0845 345 4978; www.lochlomondshores.com; Loch Lomond Shores, Balloch; ☞ 9.30am–6.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am–6pm Jun & Sep, 10am–6pm Apr & May, 10am–5pm Nov–Mar)
Tarbet tourist office (☎ 0870 720 0623; ☞ 10am–6pm Jul & Aug, 10am–5pm Easter–Jun, Sep & Oct) At the junction of the A82 and the A83.

Activities**WALKING**

The big walk around here is the **West Highland Way** (p280), which runs along the eastern shore of the loch. There are shorter lochside walks at Firkin Point on the western shore and at several other places around the loch. You can get further information on local walks from the national park information centres at Loch Lomond Shores and Balmaha.

Rowardennan is the starting point for an ascent of **Ben Lomond** (974m), a popular and relatively easy five- to six-hour round trip. The route starts at the car park just past the Rowardennan Hotel.

BOAT TRIPS

The main centre for boat trips is Balloch, where **Sweeney's Cruises** (☎ 01389-752376; www.sweeneyscruises.com; Balloch Rd) offers a range of trips including a one-hour cruise to Inchmurrin and back (adult/child £6.50/4, departs hourly), and a two-hour cruise (£12/6, departs 1pm and 3pm) around the islands. The quay is directly opposite Balloch train station, beside the tourist office. Sweeney's also runs hourly cruises from the Maid of the Loch jetty at Loch Lomond Shores.

Cruise Loch Lomond (☎ 01301-702356) is based in Tarbet and offers trips to Inversnaid and

Rob Roy MacGregor's cave. You can also be dropped off at Rowardennan and picked up at Inversnaid after a 9-mile hike along the West Highland Way.

The mail boat, run by **Balmaha Boatyard** (☎ 01360-870214; The Boatyard, Balmaha), cruises from Balmaha to the loch's four inhabited islands, departing at 11.30am and returning at 2pm with a one-hour stop on Inchmurrin (adult/child £8/4). Trips depart daily in July and August, and Monday, Thursday and Saturday in May, June and September.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The mostly traffic-free **Clyde and Loch Lomond Cycle Way** links Glasgow to Balloch (20 miles), where it links with the **West Loch Lomond Cycle Path**, which continues along the loch shore to Tarbet (10 miles).

You can rent **rowing boats** at Balmaha Boatyard (above) for £10/30 per hour/day, or £20/50 for a boat with outboard motor. **Lomond Adventure** (☎ 01360-870218), also in Balmaha, rents out per half-/full day Canadian canoes (£20/25), **kayaks** (£15/20) and **sailing dinghies** (£45 a day).

At Loch Lomond Shores (below) you can hire canoes (£10/15 per half-/full hour) and bicycles (£7/10/15 per two hours/four hours/full day), take a **guided canoe trip** on the loch or go **pony trekking** (£1 a ride).

Western Shore

The town of **Balloch**, which straddles the River Leven where it flows from the southern end of Loch Lomond, is the loch's main population centre and transport hub. A Victorian resort once thronged by day-trippers transferring between the train station and the steamer quay, it is now a 'gateway centre' for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

Loch Lomond Shores (☎ 01389-722406; www.lochlomondshores.com), a major tourism development a half-mile north of Balloch, sports a national park information centre plus various visitor attractions, outdoor activities and boat trips. It's home to the **Loch Lomond Aquarium** (☎ 01389-721500; adult/child £8.95/6.50; ☞ 10am–6pm), which has displays on the wildlife of Loch Lomond, an otter enclosure (housing short-clawed Asian otters, not Scottish ones), and a host of sea-life exhibits ranging from sharks to stingrays to seahorses.

In keeping with the times, the heart of the development is a large shopping mall.

The vintage paddle steamer **Maid of the Loch** (☎ 01389-711865; admission free; ☞ 11am-4pm May-Oct), built in 1953, is moored here while awaiting full restoration – you can nip aboard for a look around.

Unless it's raining, give Loch Lomond Shores a miss and head for the little picture-postcard village of **Luss**. Stroll among the pretty cottages with roses around their doors (the cottages were built by the local laird in the 19th century for the workers on his estate), then pop into the **Glan Colquhoun Visitor Centre** (☎ 01436-671469; adult/child £1/free; ☞ 10.30am-6pm Easter-Oct) for some background history before enjoying a cuppa at the Coach House Coffee Shop.

SLEEPING & EATING

Loch Lomond Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1136; Arden; dm £15-16; ☞ Mar-Oct) Forget about roughing it, this is one of the most impressive hostels in the country – an imposing 19th-century country house set in beautiful grounds overlooking the loch. It's 2 miles north of Balloch and very popular, so book in advance in summer. And yes, it *is* haunted.

Ardlui Hotel (☎ 01301-704243; www.ardlui.co.uk; Ardlui; s/d £55/90; ☐) If the Drover's Inn (below) is a little rough for your bedtime tastes, nip down the road to the plush Ardlui Hotel, a comfy country house hotel with a great loch-side location and a view of Ben Lomond from the breakfast room.

Coach House Coffee Shop (☎ 01436-860341; Luss; mains £4-11; ☞ 10am-5pm) With its chunky pine furniture and deep, deep sofa in front of a rustic fireplace, the Coach House is one of the cosiest places to eat on Loch Lomond. The menu includes coffee and tea, home-baked cakes, scones and ciabattas, and more-substantial offerings such as haggis.

our pick **Drover's Inn** (☎ 01301-704234; www.droversinn.co.uk; Inverarnan; bar meals £6-9; ☞ food served 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun; ☐) This is one howff (drinking den) you shouldn't miss – a low-ceilinged place with smoke-blackened stone, bare wooden floors spotted with candle wax, barmen in kilts and walls festooned with moth-eaten stag's heads and stuffed birds; there's even a stuffed bear, and the dessicated husk of a basking shark. The bar serves hearty hill-walking fuel such as steak and Guinness pie with mustard mash, and hosts live folk music on Friday and Saturday nights. We recommend this inn more as a place to eat and drink than to stay – accommodation

(single/double from £35/68) varies from eccentric, old-fashioned and rather run-down rooms in the old building (including a ghost in room 6), to more comfortable rooms (with en-suite bathrooms) in the modern annexe across the road (ask to see your room before taking it, though).

Eastern Shore

The road along the loch's eastern shore passes through the attractive village of **Balmaha**, where you can hire boats or take a cruise on the mail boat (see p277). There are several picnic areas along the lochside; the most attractive is at **Millarochy Bay** (1.5 miles north of Balmaha), which has a nice gravel beach and superb views across the loch to the Luss hills.

The road ends at **Rowardennan**, but the West Highland Way continues north along the shore of the loch. It's 7 miles to Inversnaid, which can be reached by road from the Trossachs (p199), and 15 miles to Inverarnan on the main A82 road at the northern end of the loch.

SLEEPING & EATING

Cashel Campsite (☎ 01360-870234; Rowardennan; backpackers per person £5, tent sites per 2 people incl car £14-15; ☞ Apr-Oct) This is the most attractive camping ground in the area and is 3 miles north of Balmaha, by the loch.

Rowardennan Youth Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1148; Rowardennan; dm £13-14; ☞ Mar-Oct) Housed in an attractive Victorian lodge, this hostel has a superb setting right on the loch shore, beside the West Highland Way.

Oak Tree Inn (☎ 01360-870357; www.oak-tree-inn.co.uk; Balmaha; bunkroom per person £25, s/d £50/70; ☐ ☞) An attractive traditional inn built in slate and timber, the child-friendly Oak Tree offers luxurious guest bedrooms for pampered hikers, and two four-bed bunkrooms for hardier souls. The rustic restaurant dishes up hearty meals (£7 to £15; noon to 9pm) such as sausage and mash, haggis, and vegetable lasagne, and cooks up an excellent bowl of *Cullen skink*.

Passfoot Cottage (☎ 01360-870324; www.passfoot.com; Balmaha; r per person from £28; ☞ Apr-Sep) Passfoot is a pretty little whitewashed cottage decked out with colourful flower baskets, with a lovely location overlooking Balmaha Bay. The bright bedrooms have a homely feel, and there's a large lounge with a wood-burning stove and loch view.

Rowardennan Hotel (☎ 01360-870273; www.rowardennanhotel.com; Rowardennan; bar meals £7-17; ☞ food served 11am-9pm; ☐) Originally an 18th-century drovers' inn, the Rowardennan has two big bars (often crowded with rain-sodden hikers) and a beer garden (often crowded with midgets). Rooms are available (£47.50), but we can't really recommend it as a place to stay – overpriced and a bit run down – but it's the only place to eat and drink beyond Balmaha.

Getting There & Away

First Glasgow buses 204 and 215 run from Argyle St in central Glasgow to Balloch and Loch Lomond Shores (1½ hours, at least two per hour).

Scottish Citylink coaches from Glasgow to Oban and Fort William stop at Luss (£6, 55 minutes, six daily), Tarbet (£7, 65 minutes) and Ardlui (£10, 1¼ hours).

There are frequent trains from Glasgow to Balloch (£4, 45 minutes, two per hour) and a less-frequent service on the West Highland line from Glasgow to Arrochar & Tarbet (one station, halfway between the two villages) and Ardlui (£12, 1½ hours, three or four daily), continuing to Oban and Fort William.

Getting Around

BUS

McColl's Coaches' (☎ 01389-754321) bus 309 runs from Balloch to Balmaha (25 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday). An SPT Daytripper ticket (www.spt.co.uk/tickets) gives a family group unlimited travel for a day on most bus and train services in the Glasgow, Loch Lomond and Helensburgh area. Buy the ticket (£8.50 for one adult and one or two children, £15 for two adults and up to four children) from any train station or main Glasgow bus station.

FERRY

There are several passenger ferries on Loch Lomond, with fares ranging from £1 to £5 per person, and around £1 for a bicycle. These are mostly small motorboats that operate on demand, rather than to a set timetable – telephone, or call at the establishment listed for more information.

Ardlui to Ardluish (☎ 01307-704243; Ardlui Hotel)

From 9am to 8pm on demand.

Balmaha to Inchcailloch (☎ 01360-870214; Balmaha Boatyard, Balmaha) From 9am to 8pm on demand.

Inverbeg to Rowardennan (☎ 01360-870273; Rowardennan Hotel) Three daily Easter to September.

Inveruglas to Inversnaid (☎ 01877-386223; Inversnaid Hotel) On demand.

Tarbet to Invernaid (☎ 01301-702356; Cruise Loch Lomond, Tarbet) Once daily, May to September.

HELENSBURGH

☎ 01436 / pop 16,500

With the coming of the railway in the mid-19th century, Helensburgh – named in the 18th century after the wife of Sir James Colquhoun of Luss – became a popular seaside retreat for wealthy Glaswegian families. Their spacious Victorian villas now populate the neat grid of streets that covers the hillside above the Firth of Clyde, but none can compare with the splendour of **Hill House** (☎ 673900; Upper Colquhoun St; adult/child £8/5; ☞ 1.30-5.30pm Apr-Oct). Built in 1902 for the Glasgow publisher Walter Blackie, it is perhaps architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh's finest creation – its timeless elegance feels as chic today as it no doubt did when the Blackies moved in a century ago.

Helensburgh has a ferry connection with Gourock (p148) via Kilcreggan, and a frequent train service to Glasgow (£4.60, 50 minutes, two per hour).

ARROCHAR

☎ 01301 / pop 850

The village of Arrochar has a wonderful location, looking across the head of Loch Long to the jagged peaks of the **Cobbler** (881m). The mountain takes its name from the shape of its north peak (the one on the right), which looks like a cobbler hunched over his bench. The village has several hotels and shops, and a bank and a post office.

If you want to climb the Cobbler, start from the roadside car park at Succoth near the head of Loch Long. A steep uphill hike through the woods is followed by an easier section as you head into the valley below the triple peaks. Then it's steeply uphill again to the saddle between the north and central peaks. The central peak (to the left/south) is the highest point, but it's awkward to get to – scramble through the hole and along the ledge to reach the airy summit. The north peak (to the right/north) is an easy walk. Allow five to six hours for the 5-mile return trip.

There's good camping at **Ardgartan Caravan & Campsite** (☎ 702293; Ardgartan; tent sites per person £4-7; ☞ Apr-Oct) at the foot of Glen Croe.

WEST HIGHLAND WAY

This classic hike – the country's most popular long-distance path – stretches for 95 miles through some of Scotland's most spectacular scenery, from Milngavie (pronounced mull-guy), on the northwestern fringes of Glasgow, to Fort William.

The route begins in the Lowlands but the greater part of the trail is among the mountains, lochs and fast-flowing rivers of the western Highlands. After following the eastern shore of Loch Lomond and passing Crianlarich and Tyndrum, the route crosses the vast wilderness of Rannoch Moor and reaches Fort William via Glen Nevis, in the shadow of Britain's highest peak, Ben Nevis.

The path is easy to follow, making use of old drovers' roads (along which Highland cattle were once driven to Lowland markets), an old military road (built by troops to help subdue the Highlands in the 18th century) and disused railway lines.

Best done from south to north, the walk takes about six or seven days (the fastest time, set during the West Highland Way Race in 2006, is 15 hours 45 minutes!). Many people round it off with an ascent of Ben Nevis (p345). You need to be properly equipped with good boots, waterproofs, maps, a compass, and food and drink for the northern part of the walk. Midge repellent is also essential.

The West Highland Way Official Guide by Bob Aitken and Roger Smith is the most comprehensive guidebook. The Harveys map *West Highland Way* shows the entire route in a single map sheet.

Accommodation shouldn't be too difficult to find, though between Bridge of Orchy and Kinlochleven it's limited. At peak times (May, July and August), book accommodation in advance. There are some youth hostels and bunkhouses on or near the path, and it's possible to camp in some parts. A list of accommodation is available for free from tourist offices.

For more information check out the website www.west-highland-way.co.uk.

The black-and-white, 19th-century **Village Inn** (☎ 702279; Arrochar; mains £8-16; ☺ food served noon-5pm & 6-9pm) is a lovely spot for lunch, or just a pint of real ale – the beer garden has a great view of the Cobbler. There are 14 ensuite bedrooms (per person £35 to £50); the ones at the top end of the price range have four-poster beds and a view over the loch.

Scottish Citylink buses from Glasgow to Inveraray and Campbeltown call at Arrochar and Ardgartan (£7, 1¼ hours, three daily). See p279 for trains to Arrochar & Tarbet station.

SOUTH ARGYLL

COWAL

The remote Cowal peninsula is cut off from the rest of the country by the lengthy fjords of Loch Long and Loch Fyne – it's an area more accessible by boat than by car. It's comprised of rugged hills and narrow lochs, with only a few small villages; the scenery around Loch Riddon is particularly enchanting. The only town on the mainland is the old-fashioned holiday resort of Dunoon.

From Arrochar, the A83 to Inveraray loops around the head of Loch Long and climbs up Glen Croe. The pass at the head of the glen

is called the **Rest and be Thankful** – when the original military road through the glen was repaired in the 18th century, a stone was erected at the top inscribed 'Rest, and be thankful. This road was made, in 1748, by the 24th Regt...Repaired by the 93rd Regt. 1786'. A copy of the stone can be seen at the far end of the parking area at the top of the pass.

There's a Forest Enterprise **visitors centre** (☎ 702432; Ardgartan; admission free; ☺ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) at the foot of the glen, with information on various walks in the Cowal peninsula.

As you descend Glen Kinglas on the far side of the Rest and be Thankful, the A815 forks to the left just before Cairndow; this is the main overland route into Cowal. From Glasgow, the most direct route is by ferry from Gourock to Dunoon (see p148 for details).

Dunoon & Around

☎ 01369

Like Rothesay on the Isle of Bute, Dunoon (population 9100) is a Victorian seaside resort that owes its existence to the steamers that once carried thousands of Glaswegians on pleasure trips 'doon the watter' (down the water) in the 19th and 20th centuries. As with Rothesay, Dunoon's fortunes declined in recent decades when cheap foreign holidays

stole its market – however, while the Bute resort appears to be recovering, Dunoon is still a bit down in the dumps.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0629; 7 Alexandra Pde; ☺ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is on the waterfront 100m north of the pier; there's internet access for £1 per 12 minutes.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The town's main attraction is still, as it was in the 1950s, strolling along the **promenade**, licking an ice-cream cone and watching the yachts at play in the Firth of Clyde. On a small hill above the seafront is a statue of **Highland Mary** (1763-86), one of the great loves of Robert Burns' life. She was born near Dunoon, but died tragically young; her statue gazes longingly across the firth to Burns' home territory in Ayrshire.

The **Benmore Botanic Garden** (☎ 706261; Benmore; adult/child £3.50/1; ☺ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Mar & Oct), 7 miles north of Dunoon, was originally planted in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It contains the country's finest collection of flowering trees and shrubs, including Bhutanese and Chilean rainforest specimens, and is entered along a spectacular avenue of giant Californian redwoods planted in 1863. The café here (which stays open all year) is a nice place for lunch or a coffee.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Dunoon hosts the annual **Cowal Highland Gathering** (www.cowalgathering.com) in mid-August; the spectacular finale traditionally features 3000 bagpipers playing en masse.

Cowalfest (www.cowalfest.org) is a 10-day arts and walking festival that takes in art exhibitions, film screenings, guided walks and bicycle rides throughout the Cowal peninsula.

SLEEPING & EATING

Dhailing Lodge (☎ 701253; www.dhailinglodge.com; 155 Alexandra Pde; s/d £37/70; ☑ ☐ ☒ ☓) You can experience some of Dunoon's former elegance at this large Victorian villa overlooking the bay about 0.75 miles north of the CalMac ferry pier. The owners are the essence of Scottish hospitality, and can provide excellent evening meals (£21.50 for five courses) if you wish.

Black of Dunoon (☎ 702311; 113 George St) The local bakery, halfway along the main street, is famous for its traditional, all-butter Scottish shortbread.

Chatters (☎ 706402; 58 John St; mains £8-16; ☺ noon-3pm & 6-10pm Wed-Sat) Chatters is a pretty little cottage restaurant serving traditional Scottish dishes, and is famous for its tempting desserts. The two-course lunch (£11) is excellent value.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Dunoon is served by two competing ferry services from Gourock (p148) – the CalMac ferry is better if you are travelling on foot and want to arrive in the town centre.

Tighnabruaich

☎ 01700 / pop 200

Sleepy little Tighnabruaich (pronounced tinna-broo-ach), a colony of seaside villas built by wealthy Glasgow families at the turn of the 20th century, is one of the most attractive villages on the Firth of Clyde. It was once a regular stop for Clyde steamers, and the old wooden pier is still occasionally visited by the paddle steamer *Waverley* (see boxed text Getting Around on the Clyde, p125).

The link with the sea continues in the **Tighnabruaich Sailing School** (☎ 811717; www.tssargyll.co.uk; Carry Farm; ☺ May-Sep), 2 miles south of Tighnabruaich. A five-day dinghy-sailing course costs £205, excluding accommodation.

The village is home to **An Lochan** (☎ 811239; www.anlochan-argyll.co.uk; Tighnabruaich; 2-course lunch £14, 3-course dinner £48; ☐), a luxurious boutique hotel (rooms £120 to £190) that's comfortable, but in our opinion, a tad over-priced. The food is exquisite, and uses fresh, locally sourced produce – from nettle and dandelion risotto to seared scallops with a smear of smoky, caramelised shallot purée – but portions are very small.

If all you want to do is fill up with good, hearty homemade grub, go for the mussels and chips at the **Burnside Bistro** (☎ 811739; mains £5-13; ☺ 9am-9pm) in the village centre, or a bar meal at the **Kames Hotel** (☎ 811489; mains £7-12; ☺ food served noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm), a mile to the south.

ISLE OF BUTE

☎ 01700 / pop 7350

The island of Bute lies pinched between the thumb and forefinger of the Cowal peninsula, separated from the mainland by a narrow, scenic strait known as the Kyles of Bute. The Highland Boundary Fault cuts through the middle of the island so that, geologically speaking, the northern half is in the Highlands and

the southern half in the central Lowlands – a metal arch on Rothesay's Esplanade marks the fault line.

The **Isle of Bute Discovery Centre** (☎ 505156; www.visitbute.com; Esplanade, Rothesay; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 10am–5pm daily Apr–Jun & Sep, 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun Oct–Mar) in Rothesay's restored Winter Garden provides tourist information, and has internet access for £1 per 12 minutes.

The five-day **Isle of Bute Jazz Festival** (www.butejazz.com) is held over the first weekend of May, and in late July there's the **Butelive** (www.butelive.co.uk) music and arts festival.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

In the southern part of the island you'll find the 12th-century ruin of **St Blane's Chapel**, with a 10th-century tombstone in the graveyard, and a sandy beach at **Kilchattan Bay**.

There are more good beaches on the west coast. **Scalpsie Bay** is a 400m walk across a field from the parking area, and has a fantastic outlook to the peaks of Arran. You can often spot seals basking at low tide off Ardschalpsie Point, to the west.

Ettrick Bay is bigger, easier to reach, and has a tearoom (not the most attractive building on the island), but is not as pretty as Scalpsie.

There are lots of easy walks on Bute, including the **West Island Way**, a waymarked 30-mile walking route from Kilchattan Bay to Port Bannatyne; map and details are available from the Isle of Bute Discovery Centre.

Cycling on Bute is excellent – the roads are well surfaced and fairly quiet. You can hire a bike from the **Bike Shed** (☎ 07718 023571; 23–25 East Princes St, Rothesay) for £10/15 per half-/full day.

Kingarth Trekking Centre (☎ 831673; Kilchattan Bay) offers paddock rides for kids (£5; minimum age eight years), riding lessons (£20 per hour), and pony treks (£35 for two hours).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CalMac ferries travel between Wemyss Bay (p148) and Rothesay (passenger/car £3.80/15.25, 35 minutes, hourly). Another CalMac ferry crosses the short stretch of water between Rhubodach in the north of the island and Colintrave (passenger/car £1.20/7.65, five minutes, every 15 to 20 minutes) in Cowal.

West Coast Motors buses run four or five times a week from Rothesay to Tighnabruaich and Dunoon via the ferry at Colintrave. On Monday and Thursday a bus goes from Rothesay to Portavadie (via the Rhubodach–Colintrave ferry), where there's a ferry to Tarbert in Kintyre (passenger/car £3.20/14.65, 25 minutes, hourly).

Rothesay

From the mid-19th century until the 1960s, Rothesay – once dubbed the Margate of the Clyde – was one of the most popular holiday resorts in Scotland. Its Esplanade was bustling with day-trippers disembarking from the numerous steamers crowded round the pier, and its hotels were filled with elderly holiday-makers and convalescents taking advantage of the town's famously mild climate.

The fashion for foreign holidays that took off in the 1970s saw Rothesay's fortunes decline, and by the late 1990s it had become dilapidated and despondent. But in the last few years a nostalgia-fuelled resurgence of interest in Rothesay's holiday heyday has seen many of its Victorian buildings restored, the ferry terminal rebuilt, and a new feeling of optimism in the air.

SIGHTS

Just two blocks inland from the pier are the splendid ruins of 13th-century **Rothesay Castle** (☎ 502691; King St; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Sat–Wed Oct–Mar), with seagulls

and jackdaws nesting in the walls. Once a favourite residence of the Stuart kings, it is unique in Scotland in having a circular plan, with four massive round towers. The landscaped moat, with its manicured turf, flower gardens and lazily cruising ducks, makes a picturesque setting.

There aren't too many places where a public toilet would count as a tourist attraction, but Rothesay pier's **Victorian toilets** (adult/child 10p/free), dating from 1899, are a monument to lavatorial luxury, a disinfectant-scented temple of green marble, glistening white enamel, glass-sided cisterns and gleaming copper pipes. The attendant will escort ladies into the hallowed confines of the gents for a look around if those facilities are unoccupied.

The most interesting displays in **Bute Museum** (☎ 503157; 7 Stuart St; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 10.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 2.30–4.30pm Sun Apr–Sep, 2.30–4.30pm Tue–Sat Oct–Mar) are those recounting the history of the famous Clyde steamers. Other galleries cover natural history, archaeology and geology; the prize exhibit is a stunning jet necklace found in a Bronze Age burial on the island.

Gardeners will enjoy the beautifully restored **Victorian Fernery** (☎ 504555; Ascog; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 10am–5pm Wed–Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct) at Ascog Hall, on the southern edge of town.

SLEEPING

Ascog Farm (☎ 503372; Ascog; r per person £20; (P)) All four rooms at this peaceful farmhouse B&B have been laid out in accordance with the rules of feng shui. It's 3 miles from Rothesay, heading south on the A844 coastal road.

Glendale Guest House (☎ 502329; www.glendale-guest-house.com; 20 Battery Pl; s/d/f from £35/60/90; (P)) Look out for the ornate, flower-bedecked façade on this beautiful Victorian villa, complete with pinnacled turret – all those windows mean superb sea views from the front-facing bedrooms, the elegant, 1st-floor lounge, and the breakfast room, where you'll find homemade smoked haddock fishcakes on the menu as well as the traditional fry-up.

Moorings (☎ 502277; www.themoorings-bute.co.uk; 7 Mountstuart Rd; s/d £35/50; (P)) Another delightful Victorian lodge with good sea views, the family-friendly Moorings has an outdoor play area for kids and a high chair in the breakfast room. Vegetarian breakfasts not a problem.

Boat House (☎ 502696; www.theboathouse-bute.co.uk; 15 Battery Pl; s/d from £45/60; (S)) The Boat House brings a touch of class to Rothesay's guest-

house scene, with quality fabrics and furnishings and an eye for design that feels a little like a boutique hotel without the expensive price tag. Other features include sea views, a central location, and a ground-floor room kitted out for wheelchair users.

EATING

Musicker (☎ 502287; 11 High St; mains £3–4; ☎ 9am–5pm) This cool little café, tricked out in pale minty green, serves the best coffee on the island, alongside a range of sandwiches with imaginative fillings – haggis and cranberry, anyone? It also sells music CDs (folk, world and country) and sports an old-fashioned jukebox.

Waterfront Bistro (☎ 505166; 16 East Princes St; mains £7–13; ☎ noon–3pm Sat & Sun, 5.30–9pm Thu–Mon) Cheerful and informal, the wood-panelled Waterfront has a bistro menu that ranges from haddock and chips to red Thai chicken curry to grilled langoustines with garlic butter; bottled real ale from the Arran complements the wine list. (Credit cards are not accepted.)

Pier at Craigmore (☎ 502867; Mount Stuart Rd; mains lunch £5–8, dinner £11–21; ☎ 10.30am–4.30pm daily, 6.30–9.30pm Fri & Sat) Housed in the former waiting room at a Victorian pier on the eastern edge of town, the Craigmore is a neat little bistro with fantastic views. The lunch menu offers sandwiches, salads, homemade burgers and quiche, while dinner is more sophisticated with seafood, steak and lamb.

Around Rothesay

MOUNT STUART

The Stuart earls of Bute are direct descendants of Robert the Bruce and have lived on the island for 700 years. When a large part of the family seat was destroyed by fire in 1877, the third marquess of Bute, John Patrick Crichton-Stuart (1847–1900) – one of the greatest architecture patrons of his day, and the builder of Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch in Wales – commissioned Sir Robert Rowand Anderson to create a new one. The result – **Mount Stuart** (☎ 503877; www.mountstuart.com; adult/child £7.50/3.50; ☎ 11am–5pm Sun–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat Easter & May–Sep) – became the finest neo-Gothic palace in Scotland, and the first to have electric lighting, central heating and a heated swimming pool.

The heart of the house is the stunning **Marble Hall**, a three-storey extravaganza of Italian marble that soars 25m to a dark-blue vault spangled with constellations of golden

THE MAIDS OF BUTE

One of the best walks on Bute is from the ferry pier at Rhubodach to the northern tip of the island (1.5 miles), where you can watch yachts negotiate the rocky narrows at the Burnt Islands. Just around the point are the Maids of Bute, two rocks painted to look like old women. The story goes that the distinctively shaped (but then unpainted) rocks were first noticed by the skipper of a pleasure steamer in the early 20th century, who always pointed them out to the passengers on his boat. Frustrated that the tourists could never see the resemblance, he sent a deckhand ashore with a couple of tins of paint to give them some clothes and recognisable faces. No one is quite sure who now maintains the maids, but every time the paint begins to peel, it's not long before a fresh coat brightens them up.

stars. Twelve stained-glass windows represent the seasons and the signs of the zodiac, with crystal stars casting rainbow-hued highlights across the marble when the sun is shining.

The design and decoration reflect the third marquess' fascination with astrology, mythology and religion, a theme carried over into the grand **Marble Staircase** beyond (where wall panels depict the six days of the Creation), and the lavishly decorated **Horoscope Bedroom**. Here the central ceiling panel records the positions of the stars and planets at the time of the marquess' birth on 12 September 1847.

Yet another highlight is the **Marble Chapel**, built entirely out of dazzling white Carrara marble. It has a dome lit to spectacular effect by a ring of ruby-red stained-glass windows – at noon on midsummer's day a shaft of blood-red sunlight shines directly onto the altar. It was here that Stella McCartney – daughter of ex-Beatle Sir Paul, and friend of the present marquess, former racing driver Johnny Dumfries – was married in 2003.

Mount Stuart is 5 miles south of Rothesay. Bus 90 runs from the bus stop outside the ferry terminal at Rothesay to Mount Stuart (15 minutes, 10 per day May to September). You can buy a special **Mount Stuart Day Trip** ticket (adult/child £18.50/9.25) that covers return train, ferry and bus travel from Glasgow (or any train station in Strathclyde region) to Mount Stuart, as well as admission. Ask at the Glasgow tourist office or any train station.

INVERARAY

☎ 01499 / pop 700

You can spot Inveraray long before you get here – its neat, whitewashed buildings stand out from a distance on the shores of Loch Fyne. It's a planned town, built by the duke of Argyll in Georgian style when he revamped his nearby castle in the 18th century. The **tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; Front St; ☎ 9am–6pm Jul & Aug, 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am–3pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar) is on the seafront, and has internet access for £1 per 12 minutes.

Sights

Inveraray Castle (☎ 302203; adult/child £6.30/4.10; ☎ 10am–5.45pm Mon–Sat, 1–5.45pm Sun Apr–Oct) has been the seat of the dukes of Argyll – chiefs of Clan Campbell – since the 15th century. The 18th-century building, with its fairytale turrets and fake battlements, houses an im-

pressive armoury hall, its walls patterned with a collection of more than 1000 pole arms, dirks, muskets and Lochaber axes. The castle is 500m north of town, entered from the A819 Dalmally road.

Inveraray Jail (☎ 302381; Church Sq; adult/child £6.50/3.50; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Apr–Oct, 10am–5pm Nov–Mar), in the centre of town, is an award-winning, interactive tourist attraction. You can sit in on a trial, try out a cell, and discover the harsh torture meted out to unfortunate prisoners. The attention to detail – including a life-sized model of an inmate squatting on a 19th-century toilet – more than makes up for the sometimes tedious commentary.

The ship *Arctic Penguin*, a three-masted schooner built in 1911 and one of the world's last surviving iron sailing ships, is permanently moored in Inveraray harbour and houses the **Inveraray Maritime Museum** (☎ 302213; The Pier; adult/child £3.80/2.20; ☎ 10am–6pm Apr–Sep, 10am–5pm Oct–Mar). It has interesting photos and models of the old Clyde steamers and a display about Para Handy (see the boxed text *Essential Scottish Reads*, p44). Kids will love exploring below the decks – there's a special play area in the bowels of the ship.

Sleeping & Eating

Inveraray Youth Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1125; Dalmally Rd; dm £13; ☎ Apr–Oct) To get to this hostel, housed in a comfortable, modern bungalow, go through the arched entrance on the seafront – it's set back on the left of the road about 100m further on.

our pick **George Hotel** (☎ 302111; www.thegeorgehotel.co.uk; Main St East; s/d from £35/70; ☎ P) The George Hotel boasts a magnificent choice of opulent rooms, complete with four-poster beds, period furniture, Victorian roll-top baths and private Jacuzzis (these superior rooms cost £120 to £140 a double). The cosy wood-panelled bar, with its rough stone walls, flagstone floor and peat fires, is a delightful place for a bar meal (mains £6 to £8). Food is served from noon till 9pm daily.

Claonairigh House (☎ 302160; www.claonairighhouse.co.uk; Bridge of Douglas; s/d from £40/90; ☎ P) This grand 18th-century house, built for the duke of Argyll in 1745, is set in 3 hectares of grounds on the bank of a river (salmon-fishing available). There are three homely en-suite rooms, one with a four-poster bed, and a resident menagerie of dogs, ducks, chickens and goats. It's 4 miles south of town on the A83.

Loch Fyne Oyster Bar (☎ 600236; Clachan, Cairndow; mains £10–18; ☎ 9am–9pm) Six miles northeast of Inveraray in Cairndow, this rustic-themed restaurant serves excellent seafood, though the service can be a bit hit-and-miss. It's housed in a converted byre, and the menu includes locally farmed oysters, mussels and salmon. The neighbouring shop sells packaged seafood to take away.

Getting There & Away

Scottish Citylink buses run from Glasgow to Inveraray (£9, 1½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). Three of these buses continue to Lochgilphead and Campbeltown (£10, 2½ hours); the others continue to Oban (£8, 1¼ hours).

CRINAN CANAL

☎ 01546

Completed in 1801, the picturesque Crinan Canal runs for 9 miles from Ardrishaig to Crinan allowing seagoing vessels – mostly yachts, these days – to take a short cut from the Firth of Clyde and Loch Fyne to the west coast of Scotland, avoiding the long and sometimes dangerous passage around the Mull of Kintyre. You can easily walk or cycle the full length of the canal towpath in an afternoon.

Gemini Cruises (☎ 07776 082256, 07736 520099; www.gemini-crinan.co.uk), based at Crinan Harbour a half-mile west of the Crinan Hotel, runs two-hour boat trips (adult/child £20/15) to the spectacular Gulf of Corryvreckan (see boxed text *The Scottish Maelstrom*, p294). It will also ferry groups across to the northern end of Jura (£50 for up to 12 passengers and bicycles, 30 minutes) by prior arrangement.

The canal basin at Crinan is the focus for the annual **Crinan Classic Boat Festival** (www.isleofjura.com/crinandclassic), held over the last weekend in July, when traditional wooden yachts, motor boats and dinghies gather for a few days of racing, drinking and music.

The plush **Cairnbaan Hotel** (☎ 603668; www.cairnbaan.com; Cairnbaan; s/d £80/132, mains £9–16; ☎ P), halfway along the canal, serves good food – including seafood pie topped with chive mash, and Thai-spiced butternut squash risotto – in a comfortable conservatory. The accommodation is a bit overpriced though.

The even more luxurious, and even more overpriced **Crinan Hotel** (☎ 830261; www.crinanhotel.com; Crinan; s/d from £135/235; ☎ P), overlooking Loch Crinan at the northwestern end of the

canal, has one of Scotland's top seafood restaurants. Better to eat in the hotel's **Crinan Bar** (mains £10–18; ☎ food served noon–2.30pm & 6–8.30pm), though – it's better value for money.

The **coffee shop** (☎ 10am–5.30pm) on the western side of the canal basin at Crinan has great home-baked cakes and scones.

KILMARTIN GLEN

☎ 01546

In the 6th century Irish settlers arrived in this part of Argyll and founded the kingdom of Dalriada, which eventually united with the Picts in 843 to create the first Scottish kingdom. Their capital was the hill fort of Dunadd, on the plain to the south of Kilmartin Glen.

This magical glen is the focus of one of the biggest concentrations of prehistoric sites in Scotland. Burial cairns, standing stones, stone circles, hill forts and cup-and-ring-marked rocks litter the countryside – within a 6-mile radius of Kilmartin village there are 25 sites with standing stones and over 100 rock carvings.

There's a shop and post office in Kilmartin village.

Sights

Your first stop should be **Kilmartin House Museum** (☎ 510278; www.kilmartin.org; adult/child £4.60/1.70; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Mar–Oct), in Kilmartin village, a fascinating interpretive centre that provides a context for the ancient monuments you can go on to explore, alongside displays of artefacts recovered from various sites. The project was partly funded by midgets – the curator exposed himself in Temple Wood on a warm summer's evening and was sponsored per midget bite!

The oldest monuments at Kilmartin date from 5000 years ago and comprise a linear cemetery of **burial cairns** that runs south from Kilmartin village for 1.5 miles. There are also ritual monuments (two stone circles) at **Temple Wood**, three-quarters of a mile southwest of Kilmartin. The museum bookshop sells maps and guides.

Kilmartin Churchyard contains some 10th-century Celtic crosses and lots of medieval grave slabs with carved effigies of knights. Some researchers have surmised that these were the tombs of Knights Templar who fled persecution in France in the 14th century.

The hill fort of **Dunadd**, 3.5 miles south of Kilmartin village, was the seat of power

of the first kings of Dalriada, and may have been where the Stone of Destiny (p81) was originally located. The faint rock carvings of a wild boar and two footprints with an ogham inscription may have been used in some kind of inauguration ceremony. The prominent little hill rises straight out of the boggy plain of the Moine Mhor Nature Reserve. A slippery path leads to the summit where you can gaze out on much the same view that the kings of Dalriada enjoyed 1300 years ago.

At **Kilmichael Glassary** (a mile east of Dunadd) and **Achnabreck** (half a mile south) there are rock faces carved with elaborate designs – like ripples from a pebble dropped into a pond – known to archaeologists as cup-and-ring marks. Archaeologists have speculated that the marks may have had religious significance, or served as a record of land ownership or boundaries, but their meaning and purpose remains a mystery.

Sleeping & Eating

Burdale B&B (☎ 510235; bbdalekilmartin@aol.com; s/d from £30/54; (P)) Set in a lovely Victorian manse (minister's house), this homely and hospitable B&B is just a short walk north from the Kilmartin House Museum.

Kilmartin Hotel (☎ 510250; www.kilmartin-hotel.com; s/d £40/65; (P)) Though the rooms are a bit on the small side, this attractively old-fashioned hotel is full of atmosphere and has a restaurant, and a real-ale bar where you can enjoy live folk music at weekends.

our pick **Glebe Cairn Café** (☎ 510278; mains £5-7; ☎ 10am-5pm, lunch noon-3pm, dinner 7-9pm Thu-Sat in summer) The café in the Kilmartin House Museum has a lovely conservatory with a view across fields to a prehistoric cairn. Daily specials include homemade soup and dishes such as smoked haddock pancakes, and red pepper and spring onion hummus with oatcakes, while the drinks menu ranges from espresso to elderflower wine by way of Fraoch heather-scented ale.

Getting There & Away

Bus 423 between Oban and Ardrishaig (four daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday) stops at Kilmartin (£4, one hour).

You can walk or cycle along the Crinan Canal from Ardrishaig, then turn north at Bellanoch on the minor B8025 road to reach Kilmartin (12 miles one way).

KINTYRE

The Kintyre peninsula – 40 miles long and 8 miles wide – is almost an island, with only a narrow isthmus at Tarbert connecting it to the wooded hills of Knapdale. During the Norse occupation of the Western Isles, the Scottish king decreed that the Vikings could claim as their own any island they could circumnavigate in a longship. So in 1098 the viking Magnus Barefoot stood at the helm while his men dragged their boat across this neck of land, thus validating his claim to Kintyre.

Tarbert

☎ 01880 / pop 1500

The attractive fishing village and yachting centre of Tarbert is the gateway to Kintyre, and well worth a stopover for lunch or dinner. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 820429; Harbour St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct), a Co-op supermarket and two banks with ATMs near the head of the harbour.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The picturesque harbour is overlooked by the crumbling, ivy-covered ruins of **Tarbert Castle**, built by Robert the Bruce in the 14th century. You can hike up to it via a signposted footpath beside the **Loch Fyne Gallery** (Harbour St; ☎ 10am-5pm daily), which showcases the work of local artists.

Tarbert is the starting point for the 103-mile **Kintyre Way** (www.kintyreway.com), a walking route that runs the length of the peninsula to Southend at the southern tip. The first section, from Tarbert to Skipness (9 miles), makes a pleasant day-hike, climbing through forestry plantations to a high moorland plateau where you can soak up superb views to the Isle of Arran.

Highland Horse Riding (☎ 820333; www.highlandhorseriding.com; An Tairbeart; ☎ Apr-Oct), on the western edge of the village, offers sightseeing and wildlife-spotting pony treks into the hills of Knapdale.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Tarbert is a lively little place, and never more so than during the annual **Scottish Series Yacht Race** (www.dyde.org), held over five days around the last weekend in May, when the harbour is crammed with hundreds of visiting yachts. The **Tarbert Seafood Festival** (www.seafood-festival.co.uk) is held on the first weekend in July, and the **Tarbert Music Festival** (www.aug74.dsl.pipex.com) is on the third weekend in September.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are plenty of B&Bs and hotels, but be sure to book ahead during festivals and major events. Contact the tourist office for details about more local accommodation options.

Springside B&B (☎ 820413; www.scotland-info.co.uk/springside; Pier Rd; per person £25-28; (P)) You can sit out the front of this attractive fisherman's cottage, which overlooks the entrance to the harbour, and watch the yachts and fishing boats come and go. There are four comfy rooms, three with en suite, and the house is just five minutes' walk from the village centre in one direction, and a short stroll from the Portavadie ferry in the other.

our pick **Corner House Bistro** (☎ 820263; Harbour St; mains £12-26; ☎ 6-10pm) It's worth making the trip to Tarbert just to eat at this relaxed and romantic restaurant, with its log fires, candlelight and award-winning French chef who knows exactly what to do with top-quality local seafood. The entrance is on the side street around the corner from the Corner House pub – look for the green awning.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Tarbert is served by five Scottish Citylink coaches a day between Campbeltown and Glasgow (Glasgow to Tarbert £13, 3¼ hours; Tarbert to Campbeltown £6, 1¼ hours).

CalMac operates a car ferry from Tarbert to Portavadie on the Cowal peninsula (passenger/car £3.20/15, 25 minutes, hourly).

Ferries to the islands of Islay (p290) and Colonsay (p296) depart from Kennacraig ferry terminal on West Loch Tarbert, 5 miles southwest of Tarbert.

Skipness

☎ 01880 / pop 100

The tiny village of Skipness is on the east coast of Kintyre, about 13 miles south of Tarbert, in a pleasant and quiet setting with great views of Arran. There's a post office and general store in the village.

Beyond the village rise the substantial remains of 13th-century **Skipness Castle** (☎ 24hr), a former possession of the Lords of the Isles. It's a striking building, composed of dark-green local stone trimmed with contrasting red-brown sandstone from Arran. The tower house was added in the 16th century and was occupied until the 19th. From the top you can see the roofless, 13th-century **St Brendan's**

Chapel down by the shore; the kirkyard contains some excellent carved grave slabs.

Skipness Seafood Cabin (☎ 760207; sandwiches £2, mains £5-8; ☎ 11am-6pm Sun-Fri late May-Sep), in the grounds of nearby Skipness House, serves tea, coffee and home baking, as well as local fish and shellfish dishes. In fine weather you can eat at outdoor picnic tables with grand views of Arran.

Local bus 448 runs between Tarbert and Skipness (35 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday).

At Claonaig, 2 miles southwest of Skipness, there's a daily car ferry to Lochranza on the Isle of Arran (passenger/car £4.65/21, 30 minutes, seven to nine daily).

Isle of Gigha

☎ 01583 / pop 120

Gigha (pronounced *ghee-a*) is a low-lying island, 6 miles long by about a mile wide, that's famous for its sandy beaches and mild climate – subtropical plants thrive in the island's **Achamore Gardens** (☎ 505254; Achamore House; admission free, donation requested; ☎ 9am-dusk). Locally made Gigha cheese is sold in many parts of Argyll – there are several varieties produced on the island, including pasteurised goat's-milk cheese and oak-smoked cheddar.

The island's limited accommodation includes **Post Office House** (☎ 505251; www.gighastores.co.uk; r per person £22-25; (P)), a Victorian house at the top of the hill above the ferry slip (it houses the island post office and shop as well as being a B&B), and the **Gigha Hotel** (☎ 505254; www.gigha.org.uk; r per person £35-48), 100m south of the post office, which serves up bar meals (£6 to £8), or if you're feeling peckish, four-course dinners (£30). You can also eat at the **Boat House Café Bar** (☎ 505123; mains £7-13; ☎ 11am-4pm & 6-11pm) near the ferry slip.

There's a range of self-catering cottages available as well (see www.gigha.org.uk for details). Camping is allowed on a grassy area beside the Boat House near the ferry slip – there's no charge but space is limited, so call the Gigha Hotel in advance to check availability, and book in at the hotel when you arrive.

CalMac runs a ferry from Tayinloan in Kintyre to Gigha (passenger/car £5.60/21 return, 20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) – only return fares are available. A bicycle costs an extra £2.20.

You can rent bikes from Post Office House or Gigha Hotel for £10 per day.

Mid-Kintyre

At Glenbarr, 6 miles south of Tayinloan, is **Glenbarr Abbey Visitor Centre** (☎ 01583-421247; adult/child £3/2; ☞ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon Easter-Oct), a centre for the Clan Macalister. This 18th-century house has a large collection of clothes, thimbles and china, and a pair of gloves worn by Mary, Queen of Scots. Angus Macalister, the laird of Glenbarr, will himself take you on an entertaining guided tour.

On the east coast of Kintyre is the pretty village of **Carradale**, with its mile-long sweep of golden beach on Carradale Bay. The **Network Heritage Centre** (☎ 01586-431296; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun Easter-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct) is housed in the old school house, and has fishing, farming and forestry displays.

There are several interesting ruins in the area, including a vitrified Iron Age fort on the eastern point of Carradale Bay, and the 12th-century **Saddell Abbey** (5 miles south), founded by Somerled, Lord of the Isles.

Campbeltown

☎ 01586 / pop 6000

Campbeltown, with its ranks of gloomy grey council houses, feels a bit like an Ayrshire mining town that's been placed incongruously on the shores of a beautiful Argyllshire harbour. It was once a thriving fishing port and whisky-making centre, but industrial decline and the closure of the former air force base at nearby Machrihanish saw Campbeltown's fortunes decline.

The town feels a very long way from anywhere else, a feeling intensified by the continuing failure to re-open the ferry link from Campbeltown to Ballycastle in Northern Ireland (every year the message from the government is, 'something will be done *next year*'). But renewal is in the air – the spruced-up seafront, with its flower beds, smart Victorian buildings and restored Art Deco cinema, lends the town a distinctly optimistic air.

The **tourist office** (☎ 552056; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) is beside the harbour. There are plenty of shops and banks in the nearby town centre.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There were once no fewer than 32 distilleries in the Campbeltown area, but most closed down in the 1920s. Today, **Springbank Distillery** (☎ 552085; tours £3; ☞ by arrangement 2pm Mon-Fri) is one of only three that now operate in town.

It is also one of the very few distilleries in Scotland that distils, matures and bottles all its whisky on the one site.

One of the most unusual sights in Argyll is in a cave on the southern side of the island of **Davaar**, at the mouth of Campbeltown Loch. On the wall of the cave is an eerie painting of the Crucifixion by local artist Archibald MacKinnon, dating from 1887. You can walk to the island at low tide across a shingle bar called the Dhorlinn (allow at least 1½ hours for the round trip), but make sure you're not caught by a rising tide – check tide times with the tourist office before you set off.

Mull of Kintyre Seatoours (☎ 0870 720 0609; www.mull-of-kintyre.co.uk) operates two-hour high-speed boat trips (adult/child from £25/15) out of Campbeltown harbour to look for wildlife – seals, porpoises, minke whales, golden eagles and peregrine falcons – in the turbulent tidal waters beneath the spectacular sea cliffs of the Mull of Kintyre.

The **Mull of Kintyre Music Festival** (☎ 551053; www.mokfest.com), held in Campbeltown in late August, is a popular event featuring traditional Scottish and Irish music.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink buses run from Campbeltown to Glasgow (£16, 4½ hours, three daily) via Tarbert, Inveraray, Arrochar and Loch Lomond. They also run to Oban (£17, four to five hours, three daily), changing buses at Inveraray.

British Airways/Loganair operates two flights daily, Monday to Friday, from Glasgow to Campbeltown (£50, 35 minutes).

Mull of Kintyre

A narrow winding road, about 18 miles long, leads south from Campbeltown to the Mull of Kintyre, passing some good sandy beaches near Southend. The name of this remote headland was immortalised in Paul McCartney's famous song – the former Beatle owns a farmhouse in the area. A lighthouse marks the spot closest to Northern Ireland, whose coastline, only 12 miles away, is visible across the North Channel.

ISLE OF ISLAY

☎ 01496 / pop 3400

The most southerly island of the Inner Hebrides, Islay (pronounced *isle-a*) is best known for its single malt whiskies, which have a dis-

tinctive smoky flavour. There are eight working distilleries, all of which welcome visitors and offer guided tours.

Islay's whisky industry contributes approximately £100 million a year to the government in excise duty and value-added tax (VAT); that's about £30,000 for every man, woman and child on the island. Little wonder that the islanders complain about the lack of government investment in the area.

With a list of over 250 recorded bird species, Islay also attracts bird-watchers. It's an important wintering ground for thousands of white-fronted and barnacle geese. As well as the whisky and wildfowl, there are miles of sandy beaches, pleasant walking, and good food and drink.

ORIENTATION

There are two ferry terminals on the island, both served by ferries from Kennacraig in West Loch Tarbert – Port Askaig on the east coast and Port Ellen in the south. Islay airport lies midway between Port Ellen and Bowmore.

There's a camp site and bunkhouse at Kintira, near Port Ellen, and a camp site and youth

hostel in Port Charlotte. If you want to camp elsewhere, ask permission first. Camping is prohibited on the Ardtalla and Dunlossit estates on the eastern side of Islay.

INFORMATION

Celtic House (☎ 810304; The Square, Bowmore) Books about Islay, Jura and whisky.

Islay Service Point (☎ 810332; Jamieson St, Bowmore; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Free internet access.

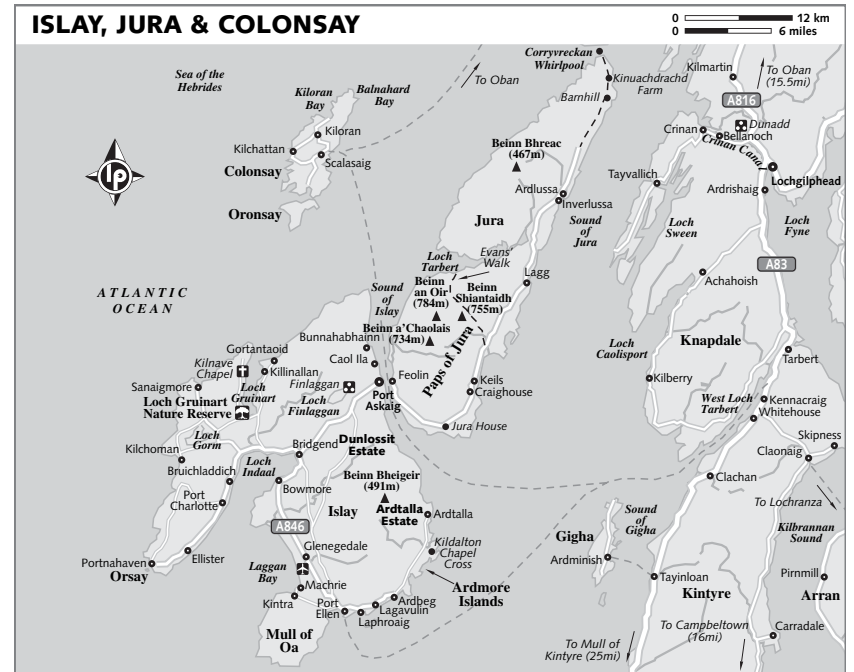
Islay tourist office (☎ 0870 720 0617; The Square, Bowmore; ☞ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Apr-Jun, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep & Oct)

MacTaggart Community CyberCafé (☎ 302693; 30 Mansfield Pl, Port Ellen; per 30min £1; ☞ noon-7pm) Internet access.

MacTaggart Leisure Centre (☎ 810767; School St, Bowmore; ☞ noon-9pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) Coin-operated laundrette (wash £3.75, dry £1.75).

TOURS

Islay Birding (☎ 850010; www.islaybirding.co.uk) Provides full-day bird-watching tours (adult/child £40/20) of the island, and will pick you up from your accommodation.



There are also two-hour dawn and dusk tours (£25 per person). Also offers bushcraft courses (£60 for a day) teaching outdoor survival skills.

Islay Marine Charters (☎ 850436) Based at Port Askaig, offering wildlife cruises through the Sound of Islay (adult/child £16/9) to Ardmore Island to see seals and seabirds, and to Loch Tarbert on Jura (£26/15) where you can spot red deer, wild goats, seals and possibly otters.

Islay Sea Safaris (☎ 07768 450000; www.islaysea.safari.co.uk) Can arrange customised tours (£25 per person per hour) by sea from Port Ellen to visit some or all of Islay and Jura's distilleries in a single day, as well as bird-watching trips, coastal exploration, and trips to Jura's remote west coast and the Corryvreckan whirlpool.

Islay Stalking (☎ 850120; www.thegearach.co.uk) Here's your chance to stalk deer and other wildlife in the company of a gamekeeper, and shoot them not with a gun but with a camera. Morning and evening photographic tours are £20/10 per adult/child.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Feis Ile (Islay Festival; www.islayfestival.org) Held at the end of May, this is a week-long celebration of traditional Scottish music and takes in the Islay Whisky Festival. Events include *ceilidhs* (informal entertainment and dance), pipe-band performances, distillery tours, barbecues and whisky tastings.

Islay Jazz Festival (☎ 810262; www.islayjazzfestival.co.uk) This annual three-day festival takes place over the second weekend in September. It sees a varied line-up of international talent playing at various venues across the island.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

British Airways flies from Glasgow to Islay two or three times daily on weekdays and once on Saturday and Sunday (£90 one way, 45 minutes).

CalMac (☎ 302209) runs ferries from Kennacraig in West Loch Tarbert to Port Ellen (passenger/car £8.30/59, 2¼ hours, one to three daily) and Port Askaig (same fare, two hours, one to three daily). On Wednesday only in summer the ferry continues from Port Askaig to Colonsay (£4.40/23, 1¼ hours) and on to Oban (£12/57, 4¾ hours).

GETTING AROUND

A bus service links Ardbeg, Port Ellen, Bowmore, Port Charlotte, Portnahaven and Port Askaig (limited service on Sunday). Pick up a copy of the timetable from the tourist office.

Taxis are available in Bowmore (☎ 810449) and Port Ellen (☎ 302155). Car hire is available from **D & N MacKenzie** (☎ 302300).

You can hire bikes in Bowmore and Port Charlotte.

Port Ellen & Around

Port Ellen is the main point of entry for Islay. It has a **Co-op Food minimarket** (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-7.30pm Sun), a pub and a bank (closed most afternoons and all day Wednesday); there's an ATM in the Spar shop around the corner from the bank. While there's nothing to see in the town itself, the coast stretching northeast from Port Ellen is one of the loveliest parts of the island.

There are three **whisky distilleries** in close succession: **Laphroaig** (☎ 302418; ☎ visitor centre 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, tours 10.15am & 2.15pm by appointment); **Lagavulin** (☎ 302400; ☎ tours 9.30am, 11.15am & 2.30pm Mon-Fri); and **Ardbeg** (☎ 302244; ☎ visitor centre 10am-5pm daily Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, tours 10.30am, 11.30am, 2.30pm & 3.30pm Jun-Aug, 10.30am & 2.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May). All guided tours are £3.

A pleasant bike ride leads past the distilleries to the atmospheric, age-haunted **Kildalton Chapel**, 8 miles northeast of Port Ellen. In the kirkyard is the exceptional late-8th-century **Kildalton Cross**, the only remaining Celtic high cross in Scotland (most surviving high crosses are in Ireland). There are carvings of biblical scenes on one side and animals on the other. There are also several extraordinary grave slabs around the chapel, some carved with swords and Celtic interlace patterns.

The kelp-fringed *skerries* (small rocky islands or reefs) of the **Ardmore Islands**, off the southeastern corner of Islay near Kildalton, are a wildlife haven and home to the second-largest colony of common seals in Europe. For details of wildlife cruises see the Tours section (p289).

SLEEPING & EATING

Ourpick Kintra Farm (☎ 302051; www.kintrafarm.co.uk; Kintra; tent sites £3, per person £3, r per person £28-35; ☎ Apr-Sep) At the southern end of Laggan Bay, 3.5 miles northwest of Port Ellen, Kintra offers three bedrooms in a homely farmhouse B&B, and a basic but beautiful camping ground on buttercup-sprinkled turf amid the dunes with a sunset view across the beach.

Oystercatcher B&B (☎ 300409; 63 Frederick Cres, Port Ellen; r per person £25-30) If you like your breakfasts fishy, then this welcoming waterfront house is the place for you – there's smoked haddock, smoked salmon and kippers on the menu, as

well as the usual stuff. Bedrooms are small but comfortable and nicely decorated.

Glenmachrie Country Guest House (☎ 305260; www.glenmachrie.com; per person from £60; ☎) This delightful farmhouse B&B is 4 miles north of Port Ellen, set in a large landscaped garden where the kids can play safely. Dinner is a superb four-course affair using fresh local produce (veggie dishes available) with sunset views from the dining room. (Note that credit cards are not accepted – it's cash or cheque only.)

Ourpick Old Kiln Café (☎ 302244; Ardbeg; mains £3-9; ☎ 10am-4pm daily Jun-Aug, 10am-3pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun, lunch served from noon) Housed in the former malting kiln at Ardbeg Distillery, this well-run café serves hearty homemade soups such as sweet potato and chilli, tasty light meals (try a panini sandwich with haggis and apple chutney, or a platter of smoked Islay beef, venison and pastrami), and a range of home-baked desserts including traditional *clootie dumpling* (a rich steamed pudding filled with currants and raisins) with ice cream.

Bowmore

The attractive Georgian village of Bowmore was built in 1768 to replace the village of Kilarrow, which just had to go – it was spoiling the view from the laird's house. Its centrepiece is the distinctive **Round Church** at the top of Main St, built in circular form to ensure that the devil had no corners to hide in.

Bowmore is in the centre of the island, 10 miles from both Port Askaig and Port Ellen, and is the island's main town. It has a **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0617; The Square), two banks with ATMs, and a **Co-op supermarket** (Main St; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-7pm Sun).

Bowmore Distillery (☎ 810671; School St; adult/child £2/1; ☎ visitor centre 9am-5pm daily Jul-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Jun, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat Oct-Easter, tours 10am, 11am, 2pm & 3pm) is the only distillery on the island that still malts its own barley. The tour, which begins with an overblown 10-minute marketing video, is redeemed by a look at (and taste of) the germinating grain laid out in golden billows on the floor of the malting shed.

If the weather's bad, there's always the **MacTaggart Leisure Centre** (☎ 810767; School St; pool adult/child £2.70/1.70; ☎ pool 12.30-5pm Tue, 2-6pm Wed, 3.30-9pm Thu, 1-2pm & 3-4pm Fri, 2.30-3.30pm Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun), with a 25m pool (heated using the waste energy from the distillery!), sauna and fitness centre.

Islay House Square, a collection of craft shops and studios 3 miles northeast of Bowmore at Bridgend, is home to **Islay Ales** (☎ 810014; www.islayales.com; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus noon-4pm Sun Jun-Aug), a microbrewery that produces a range of real ales, all bottled by hand. After a tour of the premises, you can taste the ales for free, and buy a bottle or two to drink outdoors or back home (the brewery doesn't have a bar licence) – our favourite is Angus Og, a refreshing, summery pale ale.

You can hire **bikes** at the post office, near the church at the top of Main St, for £10 per day.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lambeth House (☎ 810597; lambethguesthouse@tiscali.co.uk; Jamieson St; r per person £35-50) The Lambeth is a simple, good-value guesthouse with four bedrooms, and is a short stroll from the harbour. It also offers a two-course evening meal for £10.

Lochside Hotel (☎ 810244; www.lochsidehotel.co.uk; 19 Shore St; r per person from £45; ☎) The ten en-suite bedrooms at the Lochside are kitted out with chunky pine furniture, including one room adapted for wheelchair users. The conservatory dining room provides sweeping views over Loch Indaal, plus the bar boasts a range of 250 single malts.

Harbour Inn (☎ 810330; www.harbour-inn.com; The Square; s/d from £75/110) The plush seven-room Harbour Inn, smartly decorated with a nautical theme, is the poshest place in town. The restaurant (mains £16 to £24) has harbour views and serves fresh local oysters, lobster and scallops, Islay lamb and Jura venison. Food is served from noon to 2pm and 6pm to 9pm.

Cottage Restaurant (☎ 810422; 45 Main St; mains £4-7; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) This old-fashioned, tartan-clad tearoom does a line in healthy home-cooked food, as well as some traditional artery-clogging café favourites such as sausage and chips.

Port Charlotte

Eleven miles from Bowmore, on the opposite shore of Loch Indaal, is the attractive village of Port Charlotte. It has a **general store** (☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-1.30pm Sun) and post office, and you can hire **bikes** from the house opposite the Port Charlotte Hotel.

Islay's long history is lovingly recorded in the **Museum of Islay Life** (☎ 850358; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter), housed in the former Free

Church. Prize exhibits include an illicit still, 19th-century crofters' furniture, and a set of leather boots once worn by the horse that pulled the lawnmower at Islay House (so it wouldn't leave hoof-prints on the lawn!). There are also touch-screen computers displaying archive photos of Islay in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The **Islay Natural History Visitor Centre** (☎ 850288; adult/child £3/1.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct), next to the youth hostel, has displays explaining the island's natural history, with advice on where to see wildlife, and lots of interesting hands-on exhibits for kids.

The **Bruichladdich Distillery** (☎ 850190; www.bruichladdich.com; tours £4; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4pm Sat, tours 10.30am, 11.30am & 2.30pm), at the northern edge of the village, re-opened in 2001 with all its original Victorian equipment restored to working condition. Independently owned and independently minded, Bruichladdich (pronounced brook-lah-day) produces an intriguing range of distinctive, very peaty whiskies. It also runs a whisky 'academy', a five-day course during which you learn to malt, mash, brew, distil, cask and bottle your own whisky (£795 per person, including food and accommodation for four nights).

SLEEPING & EATING

Port Mor Campsite (☎ 850441; tent sites per person £5) The sports field to the south of the village doubles as a camp site – there are toilets, showers, laundry and a children's play area in the main building.

Islay Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1128; dm £13; 🕒 Apr-Oct) This modern and comfortable hostel is housed in a former distillery building with views over the loch.

Debbie's Minimarket (☎ 850319; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) The village shop and post office at Bruichladdich doubles as a deli that stocks good wine and posh picnic grub, and also serves the best coffee on Islay – sit at one of the outdoor tables and enjoy an espresso with a sea view.

Croft Kitchen (☎ 850230; mains lunch £3-7, dinner £11-14; 🕒 snacks 10am-5pm, lunch noon-3pm, dinner 5.30-7.30pm) This laid-back little bistro serves as a café during the day and transforms into a restaurant serving quality meals in the evening.

Port Charlotte Hotel (☎ 850360; www.portcharlottehotel.co.uk; bar meals £7-10, restaurant mains £15-22; 🕒 restaurant 6.30-9pm, bar meals noon-2pm & 5-8pm; 📍) This lovely old Victorian hotel has a stylish, candle-

lit restaurant serving local seafood (seared scallops with braised leeks and truffle cream sauce), Islay beef, venison and duck. The bar is well stocked with Islay malts and real ales, and has a nook at the back with a view over the loch towards the Paps of Jura. Rooms are available (single/double £75/120).

Portnahaven

Six miles southwest of Port Charlotte the road ends at **Portnahaven**, another pretty village that was purpose-built as a fishing harbour in the 19th century. A mile north of the village is the pretty little shell-sand beach of **Currie Sands**, with a lovely view of Orsay island.

The next inlet to the north of the beach is occupied by the world's first commercially viable, wave-powered electricity generating station, built on cliffs that are open to the Atlantic swell. The 500kW plant – known as the **Limpet** (land-installed, marine-powered energy transformer) – provides enough electricity to power 200 island homes.

Loch Gruinart & Around

Seven miles north of Port Charlotte is **Loch Gruinart Nature Reserve**, where you can hear corncrakes in summer and see huge flocks of migrating ducks, geese and waders in spring and autumn; there's a hide with wheelchair access. The nearby **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Information Centre** (☎ 850505; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) offers two- to three-hour guided walks around the reserve (£2 per person, 10am Thursday and 6pm Tuesday in August).

Three miles north of the reserve, at **Kilnave Chapel**, is a Celtic stone cross made from an improbably thin slab; though less elaborate than the cross at Kildalton, it is more delicate. The beach at **Killinallan**, northeast of the reserve, is one of Islay's best. You can walk for miles along the raised beaches on the coast to its north.

Kilchoman Distillery (☎ 850011; www.kilchomandistillery.com; Rockfield Farm, Kilchoman; tours £3.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, plus 10am-5.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr & Oct-Dec, tours at 11am & 3pm), 5 miles southwest of Loch Gruinart, is Islay's newest, going into production in 2005. The distillery grows its own barley on Islay, and the visitor centre explores the history of farmhouse distilling on the island. But it'll be at least 2010 before we get to taste the fruits of its labours...

our pick Visitor Centre Café (main £5-9; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Mar-Oct, plus Sat Apr-Sep, plus Sun Jul & Aug) at Kilchoman Distillery rustles up an excellent lunch – crusty brown rolls filled with hot-smoked salmon and dill mayo, plus a bowl of rich, smoky *Cullen skink* on the side.

Finlaggan

Lush meadows swathed in buttercups and daisies slope down to reed-fringed Loch Finlaggan, the medieval capital of the Lords of the Isles (see the boxed text, p29). This bucolic setting, 3 miles southwest of Port Askaig, was once the most important settlement in the Hebrides, the central seat of power of the Lords of the Isles from the 12th to the 16th centuries. From the little island at the northern end of the loch the descendants of Somerled administered their island territories and entertained visiting chieftains in their great hall. Little remains now except the tumbled ruins of houses and a chapel, but the setting is beautiful and the history fascinating. A wooden walkway leads over the reeds and water lilies to the island, where information boards describe the remains.

Finlaggan Visitor Centre (☎ 810629; admission free; 🕒 1-4.30pm May-Sep, 1-4.30pm Tue, Thu & Sun Apr, 1-4pm Tue & Thu Oct), in a nearby cottage, explains the site's history and archaeology. The island itself is open at all times.

Buses from Port Askaig stop at the road-end, from where it's a 15-minute walk to the loch.

Port Askaig & Around

Port Askaig is little more than a hotel, a shop (with ATM), a petrol pump and a ferry pier, set in a picturesque nook halfway along the Sound of Islay, the strait that separates the islands of Islay and Jura.

There are two distilleries within easy reach: **Caol Ila Distillery** (☎ 840207; 🕒 tours by appointment Mon-Fri), pronounced cull ee-la, a mile to the north, and **Bunnahabhain Distillery** (☎ 840646; www.bunnahabhain.com; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Mar-Oct, by appointment Nov-Feb), pronounced boo-na-haven, 3 miles north of Port Askaig. Both enjoy a wonderful location with great views across to Jura.

The rooms at the **Port Askaig Hotel** (☎ 840245; www.portaskaig.co.uk; s/d £39/90; 📍), beside the ferry pier, seem pleasantly stuck in the 1970s, but the staff are warm and friendly, the breakfast is good and there's a great view of the Paps of Jura from the residents lounge. The beer

garden is a popular spot to sit and watch the comings and goings at the quay.

ISLE OF JURA

☎ 01496 / pop 180

Jura lies off the coast of Argyll, long, dark and low like a vast Viking longship, its billowing sail the distinctive triple peaks of the Paps of Jura. A magnificently wild and lonely island, it's the perfect place to get away from it all – as George Orwell did in 1948. Orwell wrote his masterpiece *1984* while living at the remote farmhouse of Barnhill in the north of the island, describing it in a letter as 'a very un-get-at-able place'.

Jura takes its name from the Old Norse *dýr-a* (deer island) – an apt appellation, as the island supports a population of around 6000 red deer. The deer outnumber their human cohabitants by about 35 to one. Most of the island is occupied by deer-stalking estates, and access to the hills may be restricted during the stalking season (July to February); the Jura Hotel can provide details of areas to be avoided.

The community-run **Jura Service Point** (☎ 820161; Craighouse; 🕒 10am-1pm Mon-Fri), 400m north of the Jura Hotel, provides tourist information and free internet access. **Jura Stores** (☎ 820231; Craighouse; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Sat) is the island's only shop. There's no bank or ATM, but you can get cashback on a debit card at the Jura Hotel.

Sights & Activities

Apart from the superb wilderness walking and wildlife-watching, there's not a whole lot to do on the island apart from visit the **Isle of Jura Distillery** (☎ 820240; admission free; 🕒 by appointment) or wander around the beautiful walled gardens of **Jura House** (adult/child £2.50/free; 🕒 9am-5pm year-round) at the southern end of the island. There's a lovely walk from the gardens down to a tiny white-sand beach where, if you're lucky, you might spot an otter, and in summer a **tea tent** (🕒 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sun Jun-Aug) sells hot drinks, home baking, crafts and plants.

There's also the **Feolin Study Centre** (www.theisleofjura.co.uk; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm), just south of the ferry slip at Feolin, which has a small exhibition on Jura's history and provides information on all aspects of the island's history, culture and wildlife.

There are also regular **ceilidhs** (evenings of traditional Scottish entertainment including

THE SCOTTISH MAELSTROM

It may look innocuous on the map, but the Gulf of Corryvreckan – the 1km-wide channel between the northern end of Jura and the island of Scarba – is home to one of the three most notorious tidal whirlpools in the world (the others are the Maelstrom in Norway's Lofoten Islands, and the Old Sow in Canada's New Brunswick).

The tide doesn't just rise and fall twice a day, it flows – dragged around the earth by the gravitational attraction of the moon. On the west coast of Scotland, the rising tide – known as the flood tide – flows northwards. As the flood moves up the Sound of Jura, to the east of the island, it is forced into a narrowing bottleneck jammed with islands and builds up to a greater height than the open sea to the west of Jura. As a result, millions of gallons of sea water pour westwards through the Gulf of Corryvreckan at speeds of up to 8 knots – an average sailing yacht is going fast at 6 knots.

The Corryvreckan whirlpool forms where this mass of moving water hits an underwater pinnacle, which rises from the 200m-deep sea bed to within just 28m of the surface, and swirls over and around it. The turbulent waters create a magnificent spectacle, with white-capped breakers, standing waves, bulging boils and overfalls, and countless miniature maelstroms whirling around the main vortex.

Corryvreckan is at its most violent when a flooding spring tide, flowing west through the gulf, meets a westerly gale blowing in from the Atlantic. In these conditions, standing waves up to 5m high can form and dangerously rough seas extend more than 3 miles west of Corryvreckan, a phenomenon known as the Great Race.

You can see the whirlpool by making the long hike to the northern end of Jura (check tide times at Jura Hotel, and see Walking, below, for walk details), or by taking a boat trip from Islay (see Tours, p289), Easdale (p302) or Crinan (p285).

music, song and dance) held throughout the year where visitors are made very welcome; check the notice board outside Jura Stores for announcements.

WALKING

There are few proper footpaths on Jura, and any off-the-beaten-path exploration will involve rough going through giant bracken, knee-deep bogs and thigh-high tussocks. The only real trail is **Evans' Walk**, a stalkers' path that leads for 6 miles from the main road through a pass in the hills to a hunting lodge above the remote sandy beach at Glenbatrick Bay. The path leaves the road 4 miles north of Craighouse (just under a mile north of the bridge over the Corran River). The first 0.75 mile is hard going along an interwoven braid of faint, squelchy trails through lumpy bog; aim at or just left of the cairn on the near horizon. The path firms up and is easier to follow after you cross a stream. On the descent on the far side of the pass look out for wild orchids and sundew, and keep an eye out for adders basking in the sun. Allow six hours for the 12-mile round trip.

Another good walk is to a viewpoint for the **Corryvreckan whirlpool** (see boxed text, above),

the great tidal race between the northern end of Jura and the island of Scarba. From the northern end of the public road at Lealt you hike along a 4WD track past Barnhill to Kinuachdrachd Farm (6 miles). About 30m before the farm buildings a footpath forks left (there's an inconspicuous wooden signpost low down) and climbs up the hill-side before traversing rough and boggy ground to a point 50m above the northern tip of the island. A rocky slab makes a natural grandstand for viewing the turbulent waters of the Gulf of Corryvreckan; if you have timed it right (check tide times at the Jura Hotel), you will see the whirlpool as a writhing mass of white water diagonally to your left and over by the Scarba shore. Allow five to six hours for the round trip (16 miles) from the road end.

Climbing the **Paps of Jura** is a truly tough hill walk over ankle-breaking scree that requires good fitness and navigational skills (you'll need eight hours for the 11 long, hard and weary miles). A good place to start is by the bridge over the Corran River, 3 miles north of Craighouse. The first peak you reach is Beinn a' Chaolais (734m), the second is Beinn an Oir (784m) and the third is Beinn Shiantaidh (755m). Most people also climb Corra

Bheinn (569m), before joining Evans' Walk to return to the road. If you succeed in bagging all four, you can reflect on the fact that the record for the annual Paps of Jura fell race is just three hours!

There are easier **short walks** (one or two hours) east along the coast from Jura House, and north along a 4WD track from Feolin. *Jura – A Guide for Walkers* by Gordon Wright (£2) is available from the tourist office in Bowmore, Islay.

Sleeping & Eating

Places to stay on the island are very limited, so book ahead – don't rely on just turning up and hoping to find a bed. Most of Jura's accommodation is in self-catering cottages that are let by the week (see www.juradevelop ment.co.uk).

You can camp for free in the field below the Jura Hotel (ask at the bar first, and pop a donation in the bottle); there are toilets and hot showers (£1 coin needed) in the block behind the hotel.

Kinuachdrachd Farm (☎ 07899 912116; joanmiked@ hotmail.com; dm £7, d £35) There is a basic bunkhouse and more luxurious farmhouse B&B accommodation at this remote farm in the far north of the island. You can hike or bike here, or arrange for the owner to come and pick you up from the end of the public road at Lealt.

Jura Hotel (☎ 820243; www.jurahotel.co.uk; Craighouse; s/d from £47/82; ☎) The 18-room Jura is the most comfortable place to stay on the island; ask for a room at the front with a view of the bay. The hotel also serves decent bar meals (£6 to £10) and the bar itself is a very sociable place to spend the evening. Food is served from noon to 2pm and 6.30pm to 9pm.

Getting There & Away

A car ferry operated by **ASP Seascot** (☎ 840681) shuttles between Port Askaig on Islay and Feolin on Jura (passenger return £2.50, bicycle free, car and driver return £14, five minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday). There is no direct car-ferry connection to the mainland.

Gemini Cruises (☎ 01546-830238; www.gemini-crinan .co.uk; Kilmahumaig, Crinan) operates a water-taxi service on demand and will take passengers from Crinan on the mainland to the north end of Jura (£50 one way for up to 12 passengers).

From Easter to September, **Lorn Ferry Service** (☎ 01951-200320; www.colonsay.org.uk/4jayne.html) runs a pedestrian- and bicycle-only ferry from Loch Tarbert on Jura to Colonsay (£15, two hours, one daily Tuesday and Friday). Prior booking is essential. (At the time of research this service was suspended, but may start up again.)

Getting Around

Alex Dunnachie (☎ 820314) runs a minibus service between Feolin and Craighouse, timed to coincide with ferry arrivals and departures at Feolin. One or two of the runs continue north as far as Inverlussa.

Mike Richardson (☎ 07899 912116) operates a Landrover taxi service from the road end at Lealt to Kinuachdrachd Farm for those wanting to shorten the hike to the Corryvreckan whirlpool (minimum £20 for two people, plus £5 a head).

You can hire bikes from **Jura Bike Hire** (☎ 07092 180747) at Bramble Cottage in Keils, a mile northeast of Craighouse.

ISLE OF COLONSAY

☎ 01951 / pop 100

Legend has it that when St Columba set out from Ireland in 563, his first landfall was Colonsay. But on climbing a hill he found he could still see the distant coast of his homeland, and pushed on further north to found his monastery in Iona, leaving behind only his name (Colonsay means 'Columba's Isle').

Colonsay is a connoisseur's island, a little jewel box of varied delights, none exceptional but each exquisite – an ancient priory, a woodland garden, a golden beach – set amid a Highland landscape in miniature: rugged, rocky hills, cliffs and sandy strands, machair and birch woods, even a trout loch. Here, hill walkers bag 'McPhies' – defined as 'eminences in excess of 300ft' (90m) – instead of Munros (see boxed text, p62). There are 22 in all; the super-competitive will bag them all in one day.

Orientation & Information

The ferry pier is at **Scalasaig**, the main village, where you'll find a **general store** (☎) 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9am-1pm Tue & Sat), post office, public telephone and free internet access at the **Service Point** (☎ 200263; ☎) 9.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri). There's no tourist office and no bank or ATM on the island. General information is

available at the CalMac waiting room beside the ferry pier, and at www.colonsay.org.uk.

The tiny **Colonsay Bookshop** (☎ 200232; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 12.30-5pm Wed) at Kilchattan, on the west side of the island, has an excellent range of books on the Hebridean history and culture.

Sights & Activities

If the tides are right, don't miss the chance to walk across the half-mile of cockleshell-strewn sand that links Colonsay to the smaller island of Oronsay. Here you can explore the 14th-century ruins of **Oronsay Priory**, one of the best-preserved medieval priories in Scotland. There are two beautiful late-15th-century stone crosses in the kirkyard, but the highlight is the collection of superb 15th- and 16th-century carved grave slabs in the Prior's House; look for the ugly little devil trapped beneath the sword-tip of the knight on the right-hand side of the two horizontal slabs. The island is accessible on foot for about 1½ hours either side of low water, and it's a 45-minute walk from the road-end on Colonsay to the priory. There are tide tables posted at the ferry terminal in Scalasaig.

The **Woodland Garden** (☎ 200211; Kiloran; admission free; ☎ garden dawn-dusk, café 9am-5pm Wed & Fri Easter-Sep) at Colonsay House, 1.5 miles north of Scalasaig, is tucked in an unexpected fold of the landscape and is famous for its outstanding collection of hybrid rhododendrons and unusual trees. The formal walled garden around the mansion has a terrace café.

There are good sandy beaches at several points around the coast but **Kiloran Bay** in the northwest, a scimitar-shaped strand of dark golden sand, is outstanding. If there are too many people here for you, walk the 3 miles north to beautiful **Balnahard Bay**, accessible only on foot or by boat.

Back at Scalasaig, the **Colonsay Brewery** (☎ 200190; www.colonsaybrewery.co.uk; ☎ shop 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Wed, 4-7pm Fri & Sun, 10am-1pm Sat) offers you the chance to have a look at how it produces its hand-crafted ales – the Colonsay IPA is a grand pint.

Kevin & Christa Byrne (☎ 200320; byrne@colonsay.org.uk) offer guided tours on foot (£20 per hour per tour for up to eight people) or by minibus (£25 per hour per tour), and boat trips for fishing (£15 per person), seal- and bird-watching (£25 per person) or whale-spotting (£30 per person).

Sleeping & Eating

Short-stay accommodation on Colonsay is limited and should be booked before coming to the island. Wild camping is allowed, as long as you abide by the provisions of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (p57). See www.colonsay.org.uk for self-catering accommodation options.

Keepers Backpackers Lodge (☎ 200312; Kiloran; dm £12-14, tw £32) Set in a former gamekeeper's house near Colonsay House, this lodge is about 30 minutes' walk from the ferry terminal (you can arrange to be picked up at the pier). Advance bookings are essential. You can hire bikes here for £5 per day.

our pick **The Colonsay** (☎ 200316; www.thecolonsay.com; Scalasaig; s/d from £60/110; ☎ P) Completely refurbished in 2007, this wonderfully laid-back hotel is set in an atmospheric old inn dating from 1750, a short walk uphill from the ferry pier. The bar is a convivial melting pot of locals, guests, hikers, cyclists and visiting yachties, and the stylish restaurant (mains £9 to £18) offers down-to-earth cooking using local produce as much as possible, from Colonsay oysters and lobsters to herbs and salad leaves from Colonsay House gardens. Food is served from noon to 2pm and 6pm to 9pm.

Island Lodges (☎ 200320; byrne@colonsay.org.uk; Scalasaig; chalets 2-night stay £150-195) These comfortable and modern self-catering holiday chalets, sleeping from two to five people, are just 10 minutes' walk from the ferry pier at Scalasaig. You can check last-minute availability at www.colonsay.org.uk.

Pantry (☎ 200325; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 2.30-8pm Sun Apr-Sep) This tearoom, close to the ferry pier, serves up light meals, snacks and ice creams. It also opens from October to March on the days that the ferry calls.

Getting There & Around

From April to October CalMac operates a car ferry from Oban to Colonsay (passenger/car £12/57, 2¼ hours, one daily except Saturday); from November to March the ferry runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only.

From April to October, on Wednesday only, the ferry from Kennacraig on the Kintyre peninsula to Islay's Port Askaig continues to Colonsay. A day trip from Kennacraig or Port Askaig to Colonsay allows you six hours on the island; a day return fare from Port Askaig to Colonsay is £7.55/40 per passenger/car.

From Easter to September, **Lorn Ferry Service** (☎ 01951-200320; www.colonsay.org.uk/4jayne.html) runs a pedestrian- and bicycle-only ferry from Colonsay to Loch Tarbert on Jura, Port Askaig on Islay and Uisken on Mull (all routes £15). Prior booking is essential. (At the time of research this service was suspended, but may start up again.)

A 90-minute **bus tour** (☎ 200320) of the island costs £7.50, available Monday and Friday, departing at 10.30am from the ferry pier. Booking is essential.

From January 2008 **Highland Airways** (www.highlandairways.co.uk) will operate flights twice daily, three days a week, from Connel Airfield (near Oban) to the islands of Colonsay, Coll and Tiree. The return fare to any of the islands will be around £65.

OBAN & MULL

OBAN

☎ 01631 / pop 8120

Oban is a peaceful waterfront town on a delightful bay, with sweeping views to Kerrera and Mull. OK, that first bit about peaceful is true only in winter; in summer the town centre is a heaving mass of humanity, its streets jammed with traffic and crowded with holidaymakers, day-trippers and travellers headed for the islands. But the setting is still lovely.

There's not a huge amount to see in the town itself, but it's an appealingly busy place with some excellent restaurants and lively pubs, and it's the main gateway to the islands of Mull, Iona, Colonsay, Barra, Coll and Tiree.

Orientation

The bus, train and ferry terminals are all grouped conveniently together next to the harbour on the southern edge of the bay. The tourist office is one block east of the train station, and George St, the main drag, runs north along the promenade to North Pier. From the pier, Corran Esplanade runs round the northern edge of the bay to the youth hostel.

Information

Esplanade post office (☎ 562340; Corran Esplanade)

Fancy That (☎ 562996; 112 George St; per hr £3; ☎ 10am-5pm) Internet access.

Lorn & Islands District General Hospital (☎ 567500; Glengallan Rd) Southern end of town.

Main post office (☎ 510450; Lochside St; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Inside Tesco supermarket.

Police station (☎ 510500; Albany St)

Tourist office (☎ 563122; www.oban.org.uk; Argyll Sq; ☎ 9am-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) Internet access is also available for £1 per 12 minutes.

Waterstone's (☎ 571455; 12 George St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Wed, 11am-5pm Sun) Bookshop.

Sights

Crowning the hill above the town centre is the Victorian folly known as **McCraig's Tower** (admission free; ☎ 24hr). Its construction was commissioned in 1890 by local worthy John Stuart McCraig, an art critic, philosophical essayist and banker, with the philanthropic intention of providing work for unemployed stonemasons. To reach it on foot, make the steep climb up Jacob's Ladder (a flight of stairs) from Argyle St and then follow the signs. The views over the bay are worth the effort. **Pulpit Hill**, to the south of the bay, is another excellent viewpoint; the footpath starts to the right of Maridon House B&B on Dunuaran Rd.

Oban Distillery (☎ 572004; Stafford St; guided tour £5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, plus noon-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Dec & Feb-Easter, closed Jan) has been producing Oban single malt whisky since 1794. There are guided tours available (last tour begins one hour before closing time), but even without a tour, it's still worth a look at the small exhibition in the foyer.

Military buffs should visit the **Little War & Peace Museum** (☎ 570007; www.obanmuseum.org.uk; Corran Esplanade; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm daily Mar & Apr), which chronicles Oban's role in WWII as a base for Catalina seaplanes and as a marshalling area for Atlantic convoys.

The **Oban Rare Breeds Farm Park** (☎ 770608; www.obanrarebreeds.com; New Barran Farm, Glencruitten; adult/child £6/4; ☎ 10am-6pm late-Mar-Oct) is a favourite with children, who get to meet all kinds of animals at close quarters, including rabbits, goats, cows, deer and even llamas. The farm maintains rare breeds of domesticated animals, including Tamworth pigs, Shetland and Soay sheep and longhorn cattle; it is 2 miles east of the town centre.

A pleasant 1-mile north along the coast road beyond Corran Esplanade leads to **Dunolzie Castle**, built by the MacDougalls of Lorn in the 13th century and unsuccessfully besieged

for a year during the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. It's always open but very much a ruin. You can continue along this road to the beach at **Ganavan Sands**, 2.5 miles from Oban.

Activities

A tourist-office leaflet lists local **bike rides**, which include a 7-mile Gallanach circular

tour, a 16-mile route to the Isle of Seil and routes to Connel, Glenlonan and Kilmore. You can hire mountain bikes from **Evo Bikes** (☎ 566996; 29 Lochside St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), opposite Tesco supermarket, for £15 per day.

Based at North Pier, **sea-kayaking** coach **Rowland Woolven** (☎ 710417; www.rwoolven.co.uk) offers instruction for beginners and guided

tours (£100 for a full day) for more experienced paddlers in the waters around Oban.

If you fancy exploring the underwater world, **Puffin Adventures** (☎ 566088; www.puffin.org.uk; Port Gallanach) offers a 1½-hour Try-a-Dive package (£58) for complete beginners.

Various operators offer **boat trips** to spot seals and other marine wildlife, departing from the North Pier slipway (adult/child £7/5); ask for details at the tourist office.

Tours

From April to October, **Bowman's Tours** (☎ 563221; www.bowmantours.co.uk; Railway Pier & Queens Park) offers a Three Isles day trip from Oban that visits Mull, Iona and Staffa (adult/child £44/22, 10 hours, daily); the crossing to Staffa is weather dependent. A shorter day trip visits Mull and Iona only (£32/16, eight hours, daily).

Bowman's also runs a **wildlife tour** (adult/child £44/22) departing from Oban at 10am Sunday to Friday from early May to late July. The trip takes in a ferry crossing to Craignure on Mull, travel by coach to Fionnphort, and a cruise around Staffa and the Treshnish Isles, plus two hours ashore on Lunga to visit a puffin colony, returning to Oban at 8pm.

Festivals & Events

Argyllshire Gathering (☎ 562671; www.obangames.com; adult/child £8/4) Held over two days in late August, this is one of the most important events on the Scottish Highland games calendar and includes a prestigious pipe-band competition. The main games are held at Mossfield Park on the eastern edge of town.

West Highland Yachting Week (☎ 563309; www.whyw.co.uk) At the end of July/beginning of August, Oban becomes the focus of one of Scotland's biggest yachting events. Hundreds of yachts cram into the harbour and the town's bars are jammed with thirsty sailors.

Sleeping

Despite having lots of B&B accommodation, Oban's beds can still fill up quickly in July and August so try to book ahead. If you can't find a bed in Oban, consider staying at Connel, 4 miles to the north.

BUDGET

Oban Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 562425; www.obancaravanpark.com; Gallanachmore Farm; tent site £11.50; 🕒 Apr-Oct) This camping ground has a superb location overlooking the Sound of Kerrera, 2.5 miles south of Oban. The quoted rate includes

up to two people and a car; extra people are £2 each. A one-person tent with no car is £5.

Jeremy Inglis Hostel (☎ 565065; jeremyinglis@mctavishs.freereserve.co.uk; 21 Airds Cres; dm £9.5-10.50, tw £18) This bargain place is more of a basic B&B than a hostel – most 'dorms' have only two or three beds, and are decorated with books, flowers and cuddly toys. The kitchen is a little cramped, but the owner is friendly and knowledgeable (and makes delicious homemade jam). The price includes a continental breakfast.

Oban Backpackers Lodge (☎ 562107; www.obanbackpackers.com; Breadalbane St; dm £12.50-13.50; 📺) This is a friendly place with a good vibe and an attractive communal area with lots of sofas and armchairs. From the train station, walk 800m north along George St, past the cinema, and veer right into Breadalbane St.

Oban Youth Hostel & Lodge (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1144; Corran Esplanade; dm £13-15, r per person £15-17; 📺) Oban's SYHA hostel is set in a grand Victorian villa on the Esplanade, 0.75 miles north of the train station. The metal bunks are a bit creaky, but there are good showers and the lounge has great views across Oban Bay. The neighbouring lodge has four-bedded rooms with en-suite bathrooms.

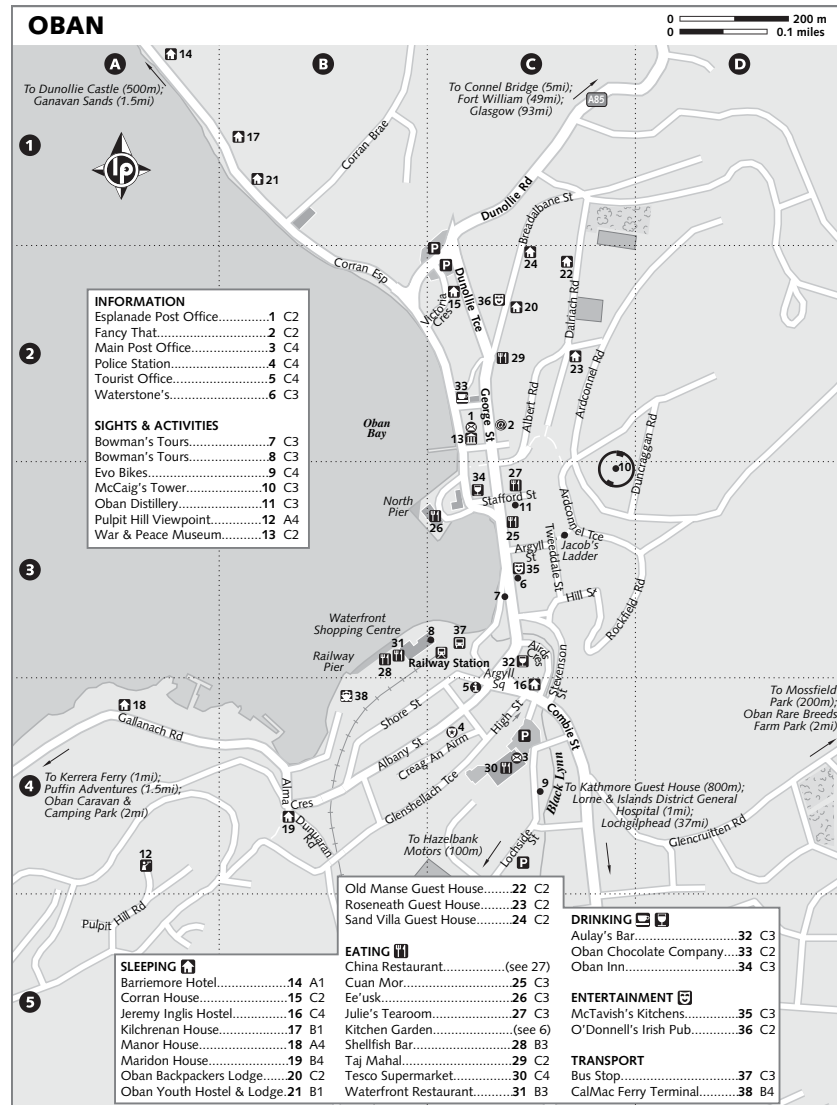
Corran House (☎ 566040; www.corranhouse.co.uk; 1 Victoria Cres; dm £15, s/d from £25/40; 📺 📺 📺) The family-friendly Corran House has a nice waterfront location and offers big comfy beds in four- and six-bed dorms, as well as twin and double rooms. Facilities include a kitchen, a laundry and bike hire.

MIDRANGE

Maridon House (☎ 562670; maridonse@aol.com; Dunuaran Rd; s/d £30/54) The bright blue, flower-bedded Maridon House has eight rooms (all with private bathroom), and is only a few minutes' walk from the ferry terminal. The owners are very helpful and will provide a vegetarian breakfast if you ask.

Kilchrenan House (☎ 562663; www.kilchrenanhouse.co.uk; Corran Esplanade; r per person £32-45; 📺) You'll get a warm welcome at the Kilchrenan, an elegant Victorian villa built for a textile magnate in 1883. Most of the rooms have views across Oban Bay, but Nos 5 and 9 are the best – No 5 has a huge freestanding bath tub, perfect for soaking weary bones.

Barriemore Hotel (☎ 566356; www.barriemore-hotel.co.uk; Corran Esplanade; s/d from £55/80; 📺) The Barriemore enjoys a grand location, overlooking



the entrance to Oban Bay. There are 13 spacious rooms – ask for one with a sea view – a guest lounge with magazines and newspapers, and plump Loch Fyne kippers on the breakfast menu.

Old Manse Guest House (☎ 564886; www.obanquesthouse.co.uk; Dalriach Rd; s/d from £61/72; (P) (♿)) Set on a hillside above the town, the Old Manse commands great views over to Kerrera and Mull. The sunny, brightly decorated bedrooms have some nice touches (a couple of wine glasses and a corkscrew), and kids are made welcome.

Other recommendations:

Sand Villa Guest House (☎ 562803; www.holidayoban.co.uk; Breadalbane St; r per person £25-30)

Roseneath Guest House (☎ 562929; www.roseneathoban.com; Dalriach Rd; s/d from £35/54; (P))

Kathmore Guest House (☎ 562104; www.kathmore.co.uk; Soroba Rd; s £35-60, d £50-70; (P))

TOP END

Manor House (☎ 562087; www.manorhouseoban.com; Gallanach Rd; s/d from £80/145; (P)) Built in 1780 for the duke of Argyll as part of his Oban estates, the Manor House is now one of Oban's finest hotels. It has small but elegant rooms in Georgian style, a posh bar frequented by local and visiting yachties, and a fine restaurant serving Scottish and French cuisine. Children under 12 are not welcome.

Eating

There's no shortage of places to eat in Oban. Most are strung out along the bay between the train station and North Pier, and along George St.

BUDGET

our pick Shellfish Bar (Railway Pier; sandwiches £3; ☎ 9am-6pm) If you want to savour superb Scottish seafood without the expense of an upmarket restaurant, head for Oban's famous seafood stall – it's the green shack on the quayside. Here you can buy fresh and cooked seafood to take away – prawn sandwiches, dressed crab, and fresh oysters for only 55p each.

Julie's Tearooms (☎ 565952; 37 Stafford St; mains £3-7; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) Nip into Julie's neat little café for homemade soup with crusty bread, tea and a scone, or some delicious Luca's ice cream.

our pick Kitchen Garden (☎ 566332; 14 George St; mains £3-7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5pm Sun, 6-9pm Thu-Sat) This deli is packed with delicious

picnic food, and also has a great little café on a mezzanine floor above the shop – good coffee, scones and cakes, and homemade soups and sandwiches.

For takeaway food, try the **Taj Mahal** (☎ 566400; 146 George St; mains £5-9; ☎ noon-2pm & 5pm-midnight) for Indian food, or **China Restaurant** (☎ 563575; 39 Stafford St; mains £7-10; ☎ noon-2pm & 5-10.30pm) for Chinese.

Self-caterers and campers can stock up at **Tesco** (Lochside St; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun).

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Cuan Mor (☎ 565078; 60 George St; mains £8-12; ☎ food served noon-4pm & 6-10pm) This always-busy bar and bistro sports a no-nonsense menu of old favourites – from haddock and chips to sausage and mash with onion gravy – spiced with a few more sophisticated dishes such as scallops with black pudding and raisin vinaigrette.

our pick Waterfront Restaurant (☎ 563110; Waterfront Centre, Railway Pier; mains £8-19; ☎ noon-2.15pm & 5.30-9.30pm) Housed in a converted seamen's mission, the Waterfront's stylish, unfussy décor – dusky pink and carmine with pine tables and local art on the walls – does little to distract from the superb seafood freshly landed at the quay just a few metres away. The menu ranges from crispy-battered haddock and chips to pan-fried scallops with garlic butter and crab spring rolls. There's an early evening menu (5.30pm to 6.45pm) offering a choice of half-a-dozen main courses at £8 to £10, or soup followed by fish and chips for £9.75.

Ee'usk (☎ 565666; North Pier; mains £12-20; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-10pm) Bright and modern Ee'usk (it's how you pronounce *iasg*, the Gaelic word for fish) occupies Oban's prime location on the North Pier, where floor-to-ceiling windows allow diners on two levels to enjoy views over the harbour to Kerrera and Mull, all the while sampling a seafood menu ranging from fragrant Thai fish cakes to langoustines with chilli and ginger. A little overpriced, perhaps, but both food and location are first class.

Drinking

Oban Chocolate Company (☎ 566099; 34 Corran Esplanade; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, plus 12.30-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Feb, Mar & Oct-Dec, closed Jan) This shop specialising in hand-crafted chocolates also has a café serving excellent coffee and hot chocolate, with big leather sofas in a window with a view of the bay.

Oban Inn (☎ 562484; Stafford St) The lively Oban Inn, overlooking the harbour by North Pier, is the best pub in town. It's a traditional bar with wood panelling, brass rails and stained glass, and has real ales, a wide range of single malt whiskies and good bar food (£7) – the *moules frites* (mussels and chips) are a local favourite. Food is served from noon to 8.30pm.

Aulay's Bar (☎ 562596; 8 Airds Gres) An authentic Scottish pub, Aulay's is cosy and low-ceilinged, its walls covered with old photographs of Oban ferries and other ships. It pulls in a mixed crowd of locals and visitors with its warm atmosphere and wide range of malt whiskies.

Entertainment

McTavish's Kitchens (☎ 563064; George St; adult/child show only £4.50/2, show if dining £2.50/1; ☎ show 8pm May-Sep) The nightly 'Scottish show' here caters to the kilts-and-tartan tourist market, with Scottish country dancing, live bands, piping, fiddle music and Gaelic songs.

O'Donnells Irish Pub (☎ 564849; Breadalbane St; ☎ 2pm-1am Sun-Thu, 2pm-2am Fri & Sat) This Irish bar, opposite Oban Backpackers, has live entertainment – usually Celtic music – most nights.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

CalMac (☎ 566688; www.calmac.co.uk) ferries link Oban with the islands of Kerrera, Mull, Coll, Tiree, Lismore, Colonsay, Barra and Lochboisdale. See relevant island entries for details of ferry services. Information and reservations for all CalMac ferry services are available at Oban's ferry terminal. Ferries to the Isle of Kerrera depart from a separate jetty, about 2 miles southwest of Oban town centre.

BUS

Scottish Citylink buses run to Oban from Glasgow (£15, three hours, four daily) via Inveraray; from Fort William (£10, 1½ hours, four daily), with connections to Inverness; and from Perth (£11, three hours, twice daily Friday to Monday) via Tyndrum and Killin.

West Coast Motors (☎ 0870 850 6687) bus 423 runs from Oban to Lochgilphead (£4.50, 1¾ hours, four daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday) via Kilmartin.

The **West Highland Flyer** (☎ 07780 724248) is a minibus service that links Oban with Fort William (£8, 1¼ hours) and Mallaig (£16, 2½

hours, one daily Monday to Saturday), where you can connect with the Skye Flyer (p381); it operates from April to late October. Bicycles can be carried for an extra £2.

TRAIN

Oban is at the end of a scenic route that branches off the West Highland line at Crianlarich. There are up to three trains daily from Glasgow to Oban (£18, three hours).

The train's not much use for travelling north from Oban; to reach Fort William requires a detour via Crianlarich (3¾ hours). Take the bus instead.

Getting Around BUS

The main bus stop is outside the train station. West Coast Motors bus 417 runs from here to Ganavan Sands via Oban Youth Hostel (five minutes, two per hour Monday to Saturday). Bus 431 connects the train station with the Kerrera ferry and Oban Caravan & Camping Park (15 minutes, two or three daily Monday to Saturday from late May to September).

CAR

Hazelbank Motors (☎ 566476; www.obancarhire.co.uk; Lynn Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) rents small cars from £40/225 per day/week including VAT, insurance and CDW (collision damage waiver).

TAXI

There's a taxi rank outside the train station. Otherwise, call **Oban Taxis** (☎ 564666) or **Kennedy's Taxis** (☎ 564172).

AROUND OBAN Isle of Kerrera

☎ 01631 / pop 40

Some of the best **walking** in the area is on Kerrera, which faces Oban across the bay. There's a 6-mile circuit of the island (allow three hours), which follows tracks or paths (use Ordnance Survey map 49) and offers the chance to spot wildlife such as Soay sheep, wild goats, otters, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, seals and porpoises. At **Lower Gylen**, at the southern end of the island, there's a ruined castle.

Kerrera Bunkhouse & Tea Garden (☎ 570223; www.kerrerbunkhouse.com; Lower Gylen; dm £14) is a charming seven-bed bothy (hut) in a converted 18th-century stable near Gylen Castle, a 2-mile

walk south from the ferry (keep left at the fork just past the telephone box). Booking ahead is recommended. You can get snacks and light meals at the nearby Tea Garden, which is open from 10.30am to 4.30pm Wednesday to Sunday, Easter to September.

There's a daily passenger ferry (☎ 563665) to Kerrera from Gallanach, about 2 miles southwest of Oban town centre, along Gallanach Rd (adult/child return £4/2, bicycle 50p, 10 minutes). From Easter to October it runs half-hourly from 10.30am to 12.30pm and 2pm to 6pm daily, plus 8.45am Monday to Saturday. From November to Easter there are five or six crossings a day.

Isle of Seil

☎ 01852 / pop 500

The small island of Seil, 10 miles southwest of Oban, is best known for its connection to the mainland – the so-called **Bridge over the Atlantic**, designed by Thomas Telford and opened in 1793. The graceful bridge has a single stone arch and spans the narrowest part of the tidal Clachan Sound.

On the west coast of the island is the pretty conservation village of **Ellanbeich**, with its whitewashed cottages. It was built to house workers at the local slate quarries, but the industry collapsed in 1881 when the sea broke into the main quarry pit – the flooded pit can still be seen. The **Scottish Slate Islands Heritage Trust** (☎ 300449; Ellanbeich; adult/child £1.50/25p; ☎ 10.30am–5pm Apr–Jun & Sep, 10.30am–6pm Jul & Aug) displays fascinating old photographs illustrating life in the village in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Coach tours flock to the **Highland Arts Studio** (☎ 300273; Easdale; ☎ 9am–9pm Apr–Sep, 10am–6pm Oct–Mar), a crafts and gift shop and a shrine to the eccentric output of the late 'poet, artist and composer' C John Taylor. Please, try to keep a straight face.

Just offshore from Ellanbeich is the small island of Easdale, which has more old slate-workers' cottages and the interesting **Easdale Island Folk Museum** (☎ 300370; adult/child £2.25/50p; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm Apr–Oct). The museum has displays about the slate industry and life on the islands in the 18th and 19th centuries. Climb to the top of the island (a 38m peak!) for a great view of the surrounding area.

Sea.fari Adventures (☎ 300003; www.seafari.co.uk; Easdale Harbour) runs a series of exciting boat trips in high-speed RIBs (rigid inflatable boats) to

the Corryvreckan whirlpool (adult/child from £30/22.50; see boxed text, p294) and the remote Garvellach Islands (£38/27.50); there's also a three-hour whale-watching trip (£39/29).

Anyone who fancies their hand at ducks and drakes should try to attend the **World Stone-Skimming Championships** (www.stoneskimming.com), held each year in Easdale on the last Sunday in September.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

West Coast Motors (☎ 0870 850 6687) bus 418 runs four times a day, except Sunday, from Oban to Ellanbeich and on to North Cuan for the ferry to Luining.

Argyll & Bute Council (☎ 01631-562125) operates the daily passenger-only ferry service from Ellanbeich to Easdale island (£1.50 return, bicycles free, five minutes, every 30 minutes).

Isle of Luining

☎ 01852 / pop 180

Luining (pronounced ling), about 6 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, is separated from the southern end of Seil by the narrow Cuan Sound. There are two attractive villages – **Cullipool** at the northern end and **Toberonochy** in the east – but Luining's main pleasures are scenic.

The **slate quarries** of Cullipool were abandoned in 1965. About 1.5 miles out to sea you can see the remains of the extensively quarried slate island of **Belnahua** – workers used to live on this remote and desolate rock. You can get a closer look on a boat trip from Easdale (see Sea.fari Adventures, left).

There are two Iron Age forts, the better being **Dun Leccamore**, about a mile north of Toberonochy. In Toberonochy itself are the ruins of the late medieval **Kilchatton Church** and a graveyard with unusual slate gravestones.

You can visit both villages, the fort, the ruined chapel and the scenic west coast on a pleasant 8-mile circular walk.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

A small **car ferry** (☎ 01631-562125) runs from Cuan (on Seil) to Luining (passenger/car £1.50/6 return, bicycles free, five minutes, every 30 minutes).

There's a Monday to Saturday **postbus** (☎ 314243) service from the ferry to Cullipool and Toberonochy.

Sunnybrae Caravan Park (☎ 314274), just 50m from the ferry slip, rents bikes for £10/15 per half-/full day.

ISLE OF MULL

pop 2600

From the rugged ridges of Ben More and the black basalt crags of Burg to the blinding white sand, rose-pink granite and emerald waters that fringe the Ross, Mull can lay claim to some of the finest and most varied scenery in the Inner Hebrides. Add in two impressive castles, a narrow-gauge railway, the sacred island of Iona and easy access from Oban and you can see why it's sometimes impossible to find a spare bed on the island.

Despite the number of visitors who flock to the island, it seems to be large enough to absorb them all; many stick to the well-worn routes from Craignure to Iona or Tobermory, returning to Oban in the evening. Besides, there are plenty of hidden corners where you can get away from the crowds.

The waters to the west of Mull provide some of the best whale-spotting opportunities in Scotland, with several operators offering whale-watching cruises (see the boxed texts p305 and p311).

ORIENTATION

About two-thirds of Mull's population lives in and around Tobermory, the island's capital, in the north. Craignure, at the southeastern corner, has the main ferry terminal and is where most people arrive. Fionnphort is at the far western end of the long Ross of Mull peninsula, and is where the ferry to Iona departs.

INFORMATION

Clydesdale Bank (☎ 0345-826818; Main St, Tobermory; ☎ 9.15am–4.45pm Mon–Fri) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Craignure tourist office (☎ 01680-812377;

Craignure; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–5pm Sun)

Dunaros Hospital (☎ 01680-300392; Salen) Has a minor injuries unit; the nearest casualty department is in Oban.

Post office (☎ 01688-302058; Main St, Tobermory; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2–5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am–1pm Wed & Sat)

Tobermory tourist office (☎ 01688-302182; The Pier, Tobermory; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat & 10am–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am–5pm Mon–Sat & 11am–5pm Sun May & Jun, shorter hrs rest of year)

TOURS

See Bowman's Tours, p299, for details of day trips from Oban to Mull, Staffa and Iona by ferry and bus.

Gordon Grant Marine (☎ 01681-700388; www.staffatours.com) Runs boat trips from Fionnphort to Staffa (adult/child £20/10, 2½ hours, daily April to October), and to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles (£40/20, five hours, Sunday to Friday May to July).

Mull Magic (☎ 01688-301245; www.mullmagic.com) Offers guided walking tours in the Mull countryside (£32.50 per person), as well as customised tours and four-day walking holidays.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Mishnish Music Festival (☎ 01688-302383; www.mishnish.co.uk/musicfestival.htm) Held in the last week-end of April, this festival involves three days of foot-stomping traditional Scottish and Irish folk music at Tobermory's favourite pub.

Mendelssohn on Mull (☎ 01688-301108; www.mullfest.org.uk) A week-long festival of classical music in early July.

Mull Highland Games (☎ 01688-302001; www.mishnish.co.uk/mhg.htm) Third Thursday in July.

Mull & Iona Food Festival (www.wildisles.co.uk/food) Five days of food and drink tastings, chef demonstrations, farm tours, produce markets, restaurant visits and a host of other events. Early September.

Tour of Mull Rally (☎ 01254-826564; www.2300club.org) Part of the Scottish Rally Championship; around 150 cars are involved and public roads are closed for parts of the weekend in early October.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are frequent **CalMac** (☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk) ferries from Oban to Craignure (passenger/car £4.15/37, 40 minutes, every two hours). There's another car-ferry link between Fishnish, on the east coast of Mull, and Lochaline (£2.55/11.15, 15 minutes, at least hourly).

A third CalMac car ferry links Tobermory to Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan peninsula (£3.95/21, 35 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday); from June to August there are also five sailings on Sunday.

GETTING AROUND

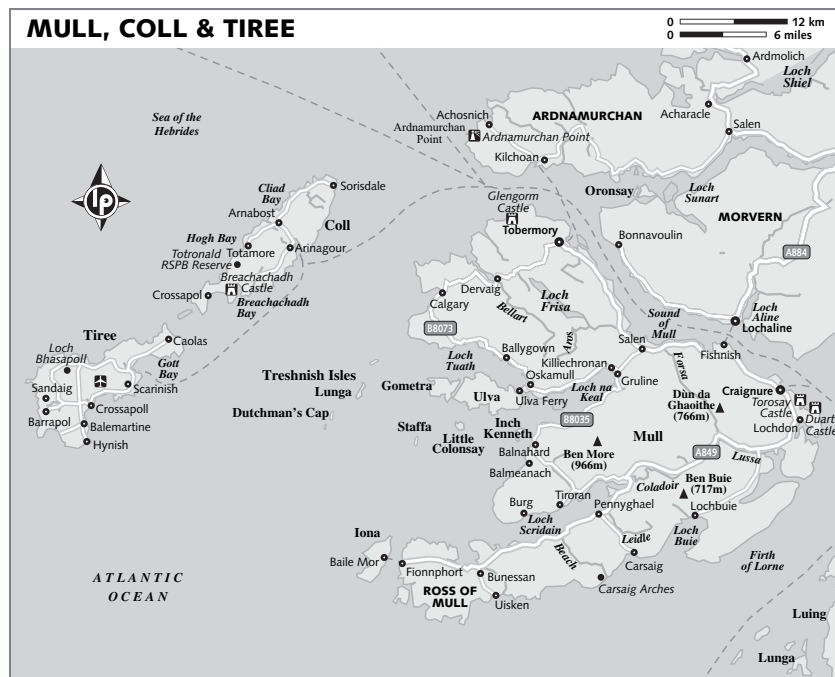
Bicycle

You can hire bikes for about £10 to £15 a day from the following places.

Blazing Saddles (☎ 01681-700235; Seaview B&B, Fionnphort)

Brown's Hardware Shop (☎ 01688-302020; Main St, Tobermory)

On Yer Bike (☎ 01680-300501; Craignure) Has an outlet in the craft shop near the ferry terminal in Craignure.



Bus

Public transport on Mull is fairly limited. **Bowman's Tours** (☎ 01680-812313; www.bowmans.tours.co.uk) is the main operator, connecting the ferry ports and the island's main villages. The routes useful for visitors are bus 495 from Craignure to Tobermory (£7 return, one hour, six daily Monday to Friday, four or five Saturday and Sunday) and bus 496 from Craignure to Fionnphort (£11 return, 1¼ hours, three or four daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday).

On weekdays **RN Carmichael** (☎ 01688-302220) buses go from Tobermory to Dervaig (five daily) and Calgary (four daily); there are only two buses on Saturday and none on Sunday.

Car

Almost all of Mull's road network consists of single-track roads. There are petrol stations at Craignure, Fionnphort, Salen and Tobermory.

Mull Taxi (☎ 07760 426351; www.mulltaxi.co.uk) is based in Tobermory, and has a vehicle that is wheelchair accessible.

Craignure & Around

☎ 01680

There's not much to see at Craignure other than the ferry terminal and the hotel, so turn left, walk 200m and hop onto the **Mull Railway** (☎ 812494; Old Pier Station; adult/child return £4.50/3; ☹ Apr-Oct), a miniature steam train that will take you 1.5 miles south to Torosay Castle.

Torosay Castle & Gardens (☎ 812421; www.torosay.com; adult/child £5.50/3; ☹ house 10.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, gardens 9am-sunset year-round) is a rambling Victorian mansion in the Scottish Baronial style, stuffed with antique furniture, family portraits and hunting trophies. 'Take your time but not our spoons' advises the sign, and you're left to wander at will.

Two miles beyond Torosay is **Duart Castle** (☎ 812309; www.duartcastle.com; adult/child £5/2.50; ☹ 10.30am-5.30pm daily May-mid-Oct, 11am-4pm Sun-Thu Apr), a formidable fortress dominating the Sound of Mull. The seat of the Clan Maclean, this is one of the oldest inhabited castles in Scotland – the central keep was built in 1360. It was bought and restored in 1911 by war hero Sir Fitzroy Maclean and has damp dungeons, vast halls and bathrooms equipped with

WATCHING WILDLIFE ON MULL

Mull's varied landscapes and habitats, from high mountains and wild moorland to wave-lashed sea cliffs, sandy beaches and seaweed-fringed skerries, offer the chance to spot some of Scotland's rarest and most dramatic wildlife, including eagles, otters, dolphins and whales.

Mull Wildlife Expeditions (☎ 01688-500121; www.torobuan.com; Ulva Ferry) Offers full-day Land Rover tours of the island with the chance of spotting red deer, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, white-tailed sea eagles, hen harriers, otters, and perhaps dolphins and porpoises. The cost (adult/child £36/33) includes pick-up from your accommodation or from any of the ferry terminals, a picnic lunch and use of binoculars. The timing of this tour makes it possible as a day trip from Oban, with pick-up and drop-off at the Craignure ferry.

Sea Life Surveys (☎ 01688-302916; www.sealifesurveys.com) Runs whale-watching trips from Tobermory harbour to the waters north and west of Mull. An all-day whale watch (£70 per person, daily April to October) gives up to eight hours at sea (not recommended for kids under 14), and has a 95% success rate for sightings. The four-hour family whale-watch is geared more towards children and costs £40/35 per adult/child. The booking office is next to MacGochan's pub, in the big car park at the southern end of the waterfront (from summer 2008 it will be in the new harbour offices beside the pub).

Turus Mara (☎ 0800 085 8786; www.turusmara.com) Runs boat trips from Ulva Ferry in central Mull to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles (adult/child £43/23, 6½ hours, daily April to October), with an hour ashore on Staffa and two hours on Lunga, where you can see seals, puffins, kittiwakes, razorbills and many other species of seabird.

ancient fittings. A bus runs from Craignure to the castle at 10.45am and 12.50pm.

SLEEPING

To camp within walking distance of the ferry, turn left and walk south for five minutes to **Shieling Holidays** (☎ 812496; www.shielingholidays.co.uk; tent & 2 people £13, with car £15, dm £11; ☹ late-Mar-Oct), a well-equipped camping ground with great views. Most of the permanent accommodation, including the hostel dorms and toilet block (dribbly showers), consists of 'cottage tents' made from heavy-duty tarpaulin, which gives the place a bit of a PVC-fetish feel.

Recommended B&Bs within 10 minutes' walk of the ferry include **Pennygate Lodge** (☎ 812333; info@pennygatelodge.co.uk; s/d from £31/56; ☐), next to the Shieling Holidays entrance, and **Dee-Emm B&B** (☎ 812440; www.dee-emm.co.uk; s/d from £50/50; ☐), a half-mile south of Craignure on the road towards Fionnphort.

Tobermory

☎ 01688 / pop 750

Tobermory, the island's main town, is a picturesque little fishing port and yachting centre with brightly painted houses arranged around a sheltered harbour, with a grid-patterned 'upper town'. As the setting for the children's TV programme *Balamory*, the town swarms in summer with toddlers towing parents

around looking for their favourite TV characters (frazzled parents can get a *Balamory* booklet from the tourist offices in Oban and Tobermory).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Places to go on a rainy day include **Mull Museum** (☎ 302603; Main St; adult/child £1/20p; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Easter-Oct), which records the history of the island. There are also interesting exhibits on crofting, and on the 'Tobermory galleon', a ship from the Spanish Armada that sank in Tobermory Bay in 1588 and has been the object of treasure seekers ever since.

There's also **An Tobar Arts Centre** (☎ 302211; Argyll Tce; admission free; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr), an art gallery and exhibition space, and the **Tobermory Distillery** (☎ 302645; guided tour £2.50; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct), which offers guided tours. This tiny distillery, established in 1798, produces two award-winning malt whiskies – Tobermory 10-year-old and Ledaig 10-year-old.

The Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust's **Marine Discovery Centre** (☎ 302620; www.whaledolphin.turst.co.uk; 28 Main St; admission free; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) has displays, videos and interactive exhibits on whale and dolphin biology and ecology, and is a great place for kids to learn about sea mammals. It also provides information

about volunteering and reporting sightings of whales and dolphins.

Sea Life Surveys (☎ 01688-302916; www.sealife-surveys.com) runs whale-watching boat trips out of Tobermory harbour; for more information see the boxed text, p305.

You can hire mountain bikes from **Archibald Brown** (☎ 302020; 21 Main St) for £10/15 per five/24 hours.

SLEEPING

Tobermory has dozens of B&Bs, but the place can still be booked solid in July and August, especially at weekends.

Tobermory Campsite (☎ 302624; www.tobermory-campsite.co.uk; Newdale, Dervaig Rd; tent sites per adult/child £5/2; ☽ Mar-Oct; Ⓜ) The nearest place to camp is this quiet, family-friendly camping ground a mile west of town on the road to Dervaig.

Tobermory Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1151; Main St; dm £14.50; ☽ Mar-Oct) This hostel has a great location, set in a Victorian house right on the waterfront. Bookings are recommended.

2 Victoria St (☎ 302263; 2 Victoria St; s/d £22/34) Set in an 18th-century stone house in the upper town, this is a traditional, old-school B&B with simple, homely bedrooms (with shared bathroom) and a very friendly and hospitable landlady.

Baliscate Guest House (☎ 302048; www.baliscate.co.uk; Salen Rd; r per person £25; Ⓟ) A handsome 18th-century house set in beautiful gardens, Baliscate has three large en-suite bedrooms, a breakfast conservatory and a comfortable lounge with library. The house is a mile south of the village centre, off the main road towards Craignure.

Ptarmigan (☎ 302863; www.bed-&-breakfast-tobermory.co.uk; The Fairways; s/d from £85/95; ☽ Mar-Nov; Ⓟ) Here's a first – a B&B with a heated, indoor 10m swimming pool! Ptarmigan is a large modern house built by the former owners of the Western Isles Hotel, and offers luxury B&B in a beautiful setting with superb views over Tobermory Bay – ask for the upper turret bedroom, with its own balcony.

our pick **Highland Cottage Hotel** (☎ 302030; www.highlandcottage.co.uk; Breadalbane St; d £140-175; ☽ mid-Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) Antique furniture, four-poster beds, embroidered bedspreads and fresh flowers and candlelight lend this small hotel (only six rooms) an appealingly old-fashioned cottage atmosphere, but with all mod cons including cable TV, full-size baths and room service. There's also an excellent fine-dining restaurant.

EATING & DRINKING

Fish & Chip Van (mains £4-5; ☽ 12.30-9pm Mon-Sat Apr-Dec) If it's just takeaway you're after, you can tuck into some of Tobermory's best gourmet fish and chips down on the waterfront. Where else will you find a chip van selling freshly cooked prawns and scallops?

MacGochan's (☎ 302350; Ledaig; mains £7-15; ☽ food served noon-10pm) A lively pub beside the car park at the southern end of the waterfront, MacGochan's does good bar meals, and often has outdoor barbecues on summer evenings; there's a more formal restaurant upstairs, and live music in the bar at weekends.

our pick **Café Fish** (☎ 301253; The Pier; mains £8-18; ☽ 11am-3pm & 6-9pm) Seafood doesn't come much fresher than the stuff served at this warm and welcoming little restaurant overlooking Tobermory harbour – as their motto says, 'the only thing frozen here is the fisherman!' Langoustines and squat lobsters go straight from boat to kitchen to join rich shellfish bisque, fat scallops, seafood pie and catch of the day on the daily-changing menu, alongside freshly baked bread, homemade desserts and a range of Scottish cheeses.

Mishnish Hotel (☎ 302009; Main St; mains £9-15; ☽ food served noon-2pm & 6-9pm) You can't miss the bright yellow façade of this hotel. It's a favourite hang-out for visiting yachties and a good place for a bar meal, or dinner at the more formal restaurant upstairs. The wood-paneled and flag-draped 'Mish' is a fine traditional pub where you can listen to live folk music, toast your toes by the open fire, burrow into a booth with a book, or challenge the locals to a game of pool.

Anchorage (☎ 302313; 28 Main St; mains £14-18; ☽ 10am-4pm & 6-9pm) This nautical bistro decked out in smart navy blue and white, with bare stone walls and rope-wound pillars, is run by a French chef who turns out adventurous dishes based on local shellfish, beef and venison.

Tobermory Chocolate Factory (☎ 302526; Main St; ☽ café 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 10.30am-3pm Sun, shop 9am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun) This tempting little shop not only sells exquisite handmade chocolates, but also has a café that serves excellent espresso, cappuccino and hot chocolate.

Campers can stock up on provisions at the **Co-op supermarket** (Main St; ☽ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-7pm Sun), and the **Island Bakery** (☎ 302223; Main St; ☽ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), which sells delicious, locally baked wholegrain bread, cakes, biscuits and pastries, as well as having a great deli counter.

ENTERTAINMENT

Mull Theatre (☎ 302673; www.mulltheatre.com; Royal Bldgs, Main St) is one of Scotland's best-known touring companies, putting on shows all over Scotland. Its long-time home in Dervaig, the Little Theatre, has closed and performances are now staged in various village halls on Mull; check the website or visit the Tobermory box office for programme details of the latest shows.

North Mull

☎ 01688

The road from Tobermory west to Calgary cuts inland, leaving most of the north coast of Mull wild and inaccessible. Just outside Tobermory a long, single-track road leads north for 4 miles to majestic **Glengorm Castle** (☎ 302321; Glengorm; admission free; ☽ 10am-5pm daily Easter-mid-Oct) with views across the sea to

Ardnamurchan, Rum and the Outer Hebrides. The castle houses an art gallery and pottery featuring the work of local artists, a farm shop selling local produce, and an excellent coffee shop serving meals (from noon to 4.30pm) made with fresh local ingredients.

The **Old Byre Heritage Centre** (☎ 400229; Dervaig; adult/child £4/2; ☽ 10.30am-6.30pm Wed-Sun Easter-Oct; Ⓜ) brings Mull's heritage and natural history to life through a series of tableaux and half-hour film shows; prize for most bizarre exhibit goes to the 40cm-long model of a midge. The centre's tearoom serves good, inexpensive snacks, including homemade soup and cloutie dumpling, and there's a kids outdoor play area.

Mull's best (and busiest) silver-sand beach, flanked by cliffs and with views out to Coll and Tiree, is at **Calgary**, about 12 miles west of Tobermory. And yes – this is the place from

WALKING ON MULL

More information on the following walks can be obtained from the tourist offices in Oban, Craignure and Tobermory.

Ben More

The highest peak on the island, Ben More (966m) offers spectacular views of the surrounding islands when the weather is clear. A trail leads up the mountain from Loch na Keal, by the bridge on the B8035 over the Abhainn na h-Uamha (the river 8 miles southwest of Salen, Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:50,000 map sheet 49, grid reference 507368). Return the same way or continue down the narrow ridge to the eastern top, A'Chioch, then descend to the road via Gleann na Beinn Fhada. The glen can be rather wet and there's not much of a path. The round trip is 6.5 miles; allow five to six hours.

Carsaig Arches

One of the most adventurous walks on Mull is along the coast west of Carsaig Bay to the Carsaig Arches at Malcolm's Point. There's a good path below the cliffs most of the way from Carsaig, but it becomes a bit rough and exposed near the arches – the route climbs and then traverses a very steep slope above a vertical drop into the sea (not for the unfit or faint-hearted). You'll see spectacular rock formations on the way, culminating in the arches themselves. One, nicknamed the 'keyhole', is a freestanding rock stack; the other, the 'tunnel', is a huge natural arch. The western entrance is hung with curtains of columnar basalt – an impressive place. The round trip is 8 miles – allow three to four hours' walking time from Carsaig plus at least an hour at the arches.

Burg

At the tip of the remote Ardmeanach peninsula there is a remarkable 50-million-year-old fossil tree preserved in the basalt lava flows of the cliffs. A 4WD track leads from the car park at Tiroran to a house at Burg; the last 2.5 miles to the tree is on a very rough coastal path. About 500m before the tree, a metal ladder allows you to climb down to the foreshore, which is only accessible at low tide – check tide times at Tobermory tourist office before setting off. Allow six to seven hours for the strenuous 14-mile round trip.

which the more famous Calgary in Alberta, Canada, takes its name.

SLEEPING & EATING

Calgary Hotel (☎ 400256; www.calgary.co.uk; Calgary; r per person from £48; (P)) The Calgary provides delightfully rustic accommodation a few minutes' walk from the sandy beach at Calgary Bay. There are also two lovely self-catering loft apartments available for £440 per week (sleeping two to four people). There's also a tearoom and restaurant where you can tuck into a two- or three-course dinner (£20/25).

Bellachroy Hotel & Pub (☎ 400314; www.bellachroyhotel.co.uk; Dervaig; s/d from £60/80; (P)) The six-room Bellachroy is an atmospheric 17th-century droving inn; the bar, known as the Bear Pit, is a focus for local social life and serves good-value bar meals (£6 to £9) from noon to 2.30pm and 5.30pm to 9pm.

You can camp for free at the southern end of the beach at Calgary Bay – keep to the area south of the stream. There are no facilities other than the public toilets across the road; water comes from the stream.

Central Mull

☎ 01680

The central part of the island, between the Craignure–Fionnphort road and the narrow isthmus between Salen and Gruline, contains the island's highest peak, Ben More (966m) and some of its wildest scenery (see the boxed text, p307).

The narrow B8035 road along the southern shore of Loch na Keal squeezes past some impressive cliffs before cutting south towards Loch Scridain. About a mile along the shore from Balmeanach, where the road climbs away from the coast, is **Mackinnon's Cave**, a deep and spooky fissure in the basalt cliffs that was once used as a refuge by Celtic monks; a big, flat rock inside, known as Fingal's Table, may have been their altar.

Balmeanach Park Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 300342; tent, car & 2 people £11; (S) Mar-Oct) is a peaceful camping ground 10 minutes' walk from the Fishnish–Lochaline ferry, on the main road between Craignure and Tobermory.

There's a very basic **camping ground** (tent/campervan sites £4/5) at Killiechranan, half a mile north of Gruline (toilets and water are a five-minute walk away), and plenty of wild camping on the south shore of Loch na Keal below Ben More.

South Mull

☎ 01681

The road from Craignure to Fionnphort climbs through some wild and desolate scenery before reaching the southwestern part of the island, which consists of a long peninsula called the **Ross of Mull**. The Ross has a spectacular south coast lined with black basalt cliffs that give way further west to white-sand beaches and pink granite crags. The cliffs are highest at Malcolm's Point, near the superb **Carsaig Arches** (see the boxed text, p307).

The little village of **Bunessan** has a hotel, tearoom, pub and some shops, and is home to the **Ross of Mull Historical Centre** (☎ 700659; admission £1; (S) 10am–4.30pm Mon–Fri Apr–Oct), a Portakabin that houses displays on local history, geology, archaeology, genealogy and wildlife.

A minor road leads south from here to the beautiful white-sand bay of **Uisken**, with views of the Paps of Jura. You can camp beside the beach here (£1 a head, ask permission at Uisken Croft), but there are no facilities.

At the western end of the Ross, 38 miles from Craignure, is **Fionnphort** (pronounced *finn-a-fort*) and the ferry to **Iona**. The coast here is a beautiful blend of pink granite rocks, white sandy beaches and vivid turquoise sea. The **Columba Centre** (☎ 700660; admission free; (S) 10am–5.30pm Apr–Oct) has displays about the life of St Columba, the Celts and the history of Iona.

SLEEPING & EATING

Fidden Farm (☎ 700427; tent sites per adult/child £4/2; (S) Apr–Sep) There's a basic but beautifully situated camping ground here, with a view over pink granite reefs to the Iona and Erraid; it's 1.25 miles south of Fionnphort (continue on the road past the Columba Centre).

Ourpick Seaview (☎ 700235; www.iona-bed-breakfast-mull.com; Fionnphort; s/d from £35/56; (P)) Barely a minute's walk from the Iona ferry, the five-bedroom Seaview has a breakfast conservatory with grand views across to Iona. The owner – a semiretired fisherman – is happy to take guests for a trip along the coast in his lobster boat.

Staffa House (☎ 700677; www.staffahouse.co.uk; Fionnphort; s/d from £35/60; (P)) Several readers have recommended this family B&B for its charm and hospitality. The house is packed with antiques and period features, and like the Seaview offers breakfast in a conservatory with a view of Iona.

Pennyghael Hotel (☎ 704288; www.pennyghaelhotel.com; Pennyghael; s/d from £65/100; (P)) This delightful, six-room country hotel is set in a 17th-century farmhouse near the head of Loch Scridain, about halfway between Craignure and Fionnphort, and has great views across the loch. Evening meals (four-course dinner £28) are available from 7pm to 9pm.

ISLE OF IONA

☎ 01681 / pop 130

There are few more uplifting sights on Scotland's west coast than the view of Iona from Mull on a sunny day – an emerald island set in a sparkling turquoise sea. From the moment you step off the ferry you begin to appreciate the hushed, spiritual atmosphere that pervades this sacred island. Not surprisingly, the island attracts a lot of day-trippers, so if you want to experience the island's peace and quiet then the solution is to spend a night here. Once the crowds have gone for the day, you can wander in peace around the ancient graveyard where the early kings of Scotland are buried, attend an evening service at the abbey, or walk to the top of the hill and gaze south towards Ireland, as St Columba must have done so many centuries ago.

There's a tiny post office on the right as you head uphill from the ferry, and a **Spar** ((S) 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun) grocery store a little further along on the left. Turn left on leaving the ferry to find **Finlay Ross Ltd** ((S) 10am–5.15pm Mon–Sat, 11am–5pm Sun), which sells gifts, books and maps, rents out bikes, and provides a laundry service. There are several art and craft shops on the island too.

History

St Columba sailed from Ireland and landed on Iona in 563 before setting out to spread Christianity throughout Scotland. He established a monastery on the island and it was here that the *Book of Kells* – the prize attraction of Dublin's Trinity College – is believed to have been transcribed. It was taken to Kells in Ireland when Viking raids drove the monks from Iona.

The monks returned and the monastery prospered until its destruction during the Reformation. The ruins were given to the Church of Scotland in 1899, and by 1910 a group of enthusiasts called the **Iona Community** (www.iona.org.uk) had reconstructed the abbey. It's still

a flourishing spiritual community that holds regular courses and retreats.

Sights & Activities

Head uphill from the ferry pier and turn right through the grounds of a ruined 13th-century **nunnery** with fine cloistered gardens, and exit at the far end. Across the road is the **Iona Heritage Centre** (☎ 700576; adult/child £1.90/free; (S) 10.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat Apr–Oct), which covers the history of Iona, crofting and lighthouses; the centre's coffee shop serves delicious home baking.

Turn right here and continue along the road to **Reilig Oran**, an ancient cemetery that holds the graves of 48 of Scotland's early kings, including Macbeth, and a tiny Romanesque chapel. Beyond rises the spiritual heart of the island – **Iona Abbey** (HS; ☎ 700512; adult/child £4.50/2.25; (S) 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Oct–Mar; (S)). The spectacular nave, dominated by Romanesque and early Gothic vaults and columns, contains the elaborate, white marble tombs of the 8th duke of Argyll and his wife. A door on the left leads to the beautiful Gothic cloister, where medieval grave slabs sit alongside modern religious sculptures. A replica of the intricately carved **St John's Cross** stands just outside the abbey – the massive 8th-century original is in the **Infirmary Museum** (around the far side of the abbey) along with many other fine examples of early Christian and medieval carved stones.

Back at the ferry slip, **Alternative Boat Hire** (☎ 700537; www.boattripsiona.com) offers cruises in a traditional wooden sailing boat to see, well, whatever you like – go fishing, bird-watching, picnicking, or just drift along admiring the scenery. Three-hour trips cost £15/7 per adult/child.

The **MV Volante** (☎ 700362; www.volanteiona.com) provides four-hour sea-angling trips (£30 per person including tackle and bait), as well as 1½-hour round-the-island wildlife cruises (adult/child £14/8) and 3½-hour whale-watching trips (£30 per person).

The **MV Iolaire** (☎ 700358) runs three-hour boat trips to Staffa (£20/10), departing Iona pier at 9.45am and 1.45pm, and from Fionnphort at 10am and 2pm.

Sleeping & Eating

Ourpick Iona Hostel (☎ 700781; www.ionahostel.co.uk; Lagandorain; dm £17.50; (S) check-in 4–7pm) This hostel is set in an attractive, modern timber building on a working croft, with stunning views out to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles. Rooms are

clean and functional, and the well-equipped lounge/kitchen area has an open fire. It's at the northern end of the island – to get here, continue along the road past the abbey for 1.5 miles (a 20- to 30- minute walk).

Iona Cottage (☎ 700579; Baile Mor; r per person £25) This pretty little whitewashed cottage sits directly in front of the ferry landing, with a neat garden looking across to the Ross of Mull.

Shore Cottage (☎ 700744; www.shorecottage.co.uk; Baile Mor; s/d from £37/56) This attractive modern house is just a few minutes' walk south from the ferry. There are three bedrooms (all with en suite), and breakfast is served in a sunroom with great views across the sea to Mull.

our pick **Argyll Hotel** (☎ 700334; www.argyllhoteliona.co.uk; Baile Mor; s/d from £69/98; ☹ Feb-Nov) The terrace of cottages above the ferry slip houses this cute little hotel – it has 16 snug rooms (a sea view costs rather more – £130/150 for a single/double) and a country house restaurant with wooden fireplace and antique tables and chairs. The kitchen is supplied by a huge organic garden around the back, and the menu (mains £9 to £15) includes 'real beans on toast' (blackeye, lima and haricot beans in tomato and rosemary sauce on home-baked whole-meal toast). Food is served from 12.30pm to 2pm and 7pm to 8.30pm.

Getting There & Away

The passenger ferry from Fionnphort to Iona (£3.85 return, five minutes, hourly) runs daily. There are also various day trips available from Oban (see Tours, p299) to Iona.

ISLE OF ULVA

☎ 01688 / pop 16

Ulva, a privately owned island on the west coast of Mull, has good walking and off-road biking, a 9th-century Viking fort, and an old chapel with a graveyard. A short walk north of the ferry landing is **Sheila's Cottage Heritage Centre** (☎ 500241; admission incl with ferry ticket; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct, plus 9am-5pm Sun Jun-Aug), a reconstruction of a traditional thatched crofter's cottage with displays about the history of the island.

At the **Boathouse tearoom** (mains £5-15), beside the ferry landing, you can savour locally harvested oysters washed down with Guinness. An interpretative centre upstairs has information on walks and natural history.

The two-minute ferry crossing (adult/child/bicycle £5/2/50p return) runs on demand during the heritage centre's opening hours.

ISLE OF STAFFA

Felix Mendelssohn, who visited the uninhabited island of Staffa in 1829, was inspired to compose his *Hebrides Overture* after hearing waves echoing in the impressive and cathedral-like **Fingal's Cave**. The cave walls and surrounding cliffs are composed of vertical, hexagonal basalt columns that look like pillars (Staffa is Norse for 'Pillar Island'). You can land on the island and walk into the cave via a causeway. Nearby **Boat Cave** can be seen from the causeway, but you can't reach it on foot. Staffa also has a sizable puffin colony, north of the landing place.

Northwest of Staffa lies a chain of uninhabited islands called the **Treshnish Isles**. The two main islands are the curiously shaped **Dutchman's Cap** and **Lunga**. You can land on Lunga, walk to the top of the hill, and visit the shag, puffin and guillemot colonies on the west coast at **Harp Rock**.

Unless you have your own boat, the only way to reach Staffa is on an organised boat trip – see the Tours section, p299, and the boxed text, p305, for details.

ISLE OF COLL

☎ 01879 / pop 100

Rugged and low lying, Coll is Tiree's less fertile and less populous neighbour. The northern part of the island is a mix of bare rock, bog and lochans (small lochs) – the south is swathed in golden shell-sand beaches and machair dunes up to 30m high.

Arinagour, a half-mile from the ferry pier, is the only village, and is home to the **Island Stores** (☹ 10am-5.30pm Mon & Fri, 10am-1pm Tue & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Wed, 9.30am-5pm Sat) grocery shop, a post office (with ATM), some craft shops and a petrol pump. For more information see www.visitcoll.co.uk.

Sights & Activities

The island's main attraction is the peace and quiet – empty beaches, bird-haunted coastlines, and long walks along the shore. The biggest and most beautiful sandy beaches are at **Crossapol** in the south, and **Hogh Bay** and **Ciad** on the west coast.

In summer, you may be lucky enough to hear the 'krek-krek-krek' of the corncrake at the **RSPB Nature Reserve** at Totronald in the southwest of the island; there's a free **information centre** (☎ 230301; ☹ at all times). From Totronald a sandy 4WD track runs north

past the dunes backing Hogh Bay to the road at Totamore, allowing walkers and cyclists to make a circuit back to Arinagour rather than returning the way they came.

There are two ruined castles about 6 miles southwest of Arinagour, both known as **Breathachadh Castle**, built by the Macleans in medieval times.

Sleeping & Eating

Garden House Camping & Caravan Site (☎ 230374; Uig; tent site £2-3 plus per person £2; ☹ May-Sep) A basic camping ground with toilets and cold water only, 4.5 miles southwest of Arinagour. Dogs are not allowed.

Coll Hotel (☎ 230334; www.collhotel.com; Arinagour; r per person £35-50; ☹) The island's only hotel is an atmospheric old place. It has quirkily shaped rooms with white-painted, wood-panelled walls, many of which have lovely views over the manicured hotel gardens and the harbour. The hotel also has a really good restaurant (mains £8 to £16) that serves dishes ranging from crab sandwiches to venison casserole. Food is served from noon to 2pm and 6pm to 9pm.

our pick **Island Café** (☎ 230262; Arinagour; mains £5-7; ☹ 11am-5pm Mon, 11am-7.30pm Fri & Sat, 11am-4pm Sun, plus 11am-5pm Tue & Wed Jul & Aug) This cheerful little café serves hearty, homemade meals such as sausage and mash with onion gravy, haddock and chips, and vegetarian cottage pie, accompanied by organic beer, wine and cider.

Most accommodation on Coll is self-catering, but a few places offer B&B, including **Taigh-na-Mara** (☎ 230354; www.taighnamara.info; r per person £25-30) in Arinagour. You can camp

for free on the hill above the Coll Hotel (no facilities); ask at the hotel first.

Getting There & Around

A CalMac car ferry runs from Oban to Coll (passenger/car £13/77, 2¾ hours, one daily) and continues to Tiree (one hour); the fare between Coll and Tiree is £3.40/21. On Thursdays only, you can take a ferry from Coll and Tiree to Barra in the Outer Hebrides (£10.30/46, four hours).

See the Colonsay's Getting There & Around section (p296) for details of flights to Coll.

Mountain bikes can be hired from the post office in Arinagour for £10 per day.

ISLE OF TIREE

☎ 01879 / pop 765

Low-lying Tiree (pronounced *tye-ree*; from the Gaelic *tìrìodh*, meaning 'land of corn') is a fertile sward of lush, green machair liberally sprinkled with yellow buttercups, much of it so flat that, from a distance, the houses seem to rise out of the sea. It's one of the sunniest places in Scotland, but also one of the windiest – cyclists soon find that although it's flat, heading west usually feels like going uphill. One major benefit – the constant breeze keeps away the midges.

The surf-lashed coastline is scalloped with broad, sweeping beaches of white sand, hugely popular with windsurfers and kite-surfers. Most visitors, however, come for the bird-watching, beachcombing and lonely coastal walks.

Orientation & Information

The ferry arrives at **Gott Bay**, on the eastern side of the island. The airport is right in the centre.

THAR SHE BLOWS!

The North Atlantic Drift – a swirling tendril of the Gulf Stream – carries warm water into the cold, nutrient-rich seas off the Scottish coast, resulting in huge blooms of plankton. Small fish feed on the plankton, and bigger fish feed on the smaller fish. And this huge seafood smorgasbord attracts large numbers of marine mammals, from harbour porpoises and dolphins to minke whales and even – though sightings are rare – humpback and sperm whales.

In contrast to Iceland and Norway, Scotland has cashed in on the abundance of minke whales off its coast by embracing whale watching rather than whaling. There are now dozens of operators around the coast offering whale-watching boat trips lasting from a couple of hours to all day; some have whale-sighting success rates of 95%.

While seals, porpoises and dolphins can be seen year-round, minke whales are migratory. The best time to see them is from June to August, with August being the peak month for sightings. The website of the **Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust** (www.whaledolphintrust.co.uk) has lots of information on the species you are likely to see, and how to identify them.

A booklet titled *Is It a Whale?* is available from tourist offices and bookshops, and provides tips on identifying the various species of marine mammal that you're likely to see.

There's a bank (without ATM), post office and **Co-op supermarket** (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) in Scarinish, the main village, a half-mile south of the ferry pier.

Tourist information and internet access are available at the **Rural Centre** (☎ 220677; Crossapol; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), and An Iodhlann (see opposite), but there is no accommodation book-

ing service. For more information see www.isleoftiree.com.

Sights

In the 19th century Tiree had a population of 4500, but poverty and overcrowding – plus food shortages following the potato famine of 1846 – led the landowner, the duke of Ar-

gyll, to introduce a policy of assisted emigration. Between 1841 and 1881 more than 3600 people left the island, many of them emigrating to Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

An Iodhlann (☎ 220793; www.aniodhlann.org.uk; Scarinish; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Jul-Sep, 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Jun; ☎) is a historical and genealogical library and archive, where many of the estimated 38,000 descendants of Tiree emigrants come to trace their ancestry. The centre stages a **summer exhibition** (adult/child £3/free; ☎ 2-5pm Jul-Sep) on island life and history.

At **Sandaig**, in the far west of the island, is the **Island Life Museum** (admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep), a row of quaint thatched cottages each restored as a 19th-century crofter's home.

The picturesque harbour and hamlet of **Hynish**, near the southern tip of the island, was built in the 19th century to house workers and supplies for the construction of the Skerryvore Lighthouse, which stands 10 miles offshore. **Skerryvore Lighthouse Museum** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) occupies the signal tower above the harbour, which was once used to communicate by semaphore with the light-house site.

For the best view on the island, walk up nearby **Ben Hynish** (141m), which is capped by a conspicuous radar station known locally as the Golf Ball.

Activities

Reliable wind and big waves have made Tiree one of Scotland's top windsurfing venues – the annual **Tiree Wave Classic** (www.tireewaveclassic.com) competition is held here in October.

Wild Diamond Watersports (☎ 220399; www.surf.schoolscotland.co.uk), based at Loch Bhasapoll in the northwest of the island, runs courses in surfing, windsurfing, kitesurfing and kayaking, and rents out equipment. A day's equipment hire costs from £20, and a beginners course (five hours over two days) costs £60 including gear.

You can also try **sand-yachting** (☎ 220317; per hr £15) on Gott Bay beach at low tide.

Sleeping & Eating

Balinoe Croft Campsite (☎ 220399; Balinoe; tent sites per person £6) A sheltered site in the southwest of the island, near Balemartine, with great views of Mull.

Millhouse Hostel (☎ 220435; www.tireemillhouse.co.uk; Coraigmore; dm £13, tw £31) Housed in a con-

verted barn next to an old water mill, this small but comfortable hostel is 5 miles west from the ferry pier.

Ceabhar (☎ 220684; www.ceabhar.com; Sandaig; r per person from £30; ☎) This snug little cottage B&B has a fantastic location at the western end of the island, looking out over the Atlantic towards the sunset. The owners are outdoor enthusiasts and can advise on kitesurfing, powerkiting and scuba diving. There's also a restaurant (mains £7 to £12) in a sunny conservatory with sea views, open 5pm to 9pm daily, and 12.30pm to 2pm Sunday).

Kirkapol (☎ 220729; www.kirkapoltiree.co.uk; Gott Bay; s/d £32/60; ☎) Set in a converted 19th-century church overlooking the island's biggest beach, the Kirkapol has six homely rooms and a big lounge with a leather-studded sofa. It's 2 miles north of the ferry terminal.

our pick Scarinish Hotel (☎ 220308; www.tiree.scarinishhotel.com; Scarinish; s/d from £40/70; ☎) There's hospitality on tap at the Scarinish, with enthusiastic owners who go out of their way to make you feel welcome. The recently redecorated rooms are crisp and clean, and the restaurant (mains £8 to £18) and traditional lean-to bar have a cosy atmosphere. Meals are served from noon to 2pm and 6pm to 9pm.

Getting There & Around

British Airways/Loganair flies from Glasgow to **Tiree airport** (☎ 220309) once daily (£80, 50 minutes) from Monday to Saturday. See also Colonsay's Getting There & Around section (p296) for additional flights to Tiree.

Ferry connections and fares are the same as for Coll (see Getting There & Around, p311).

You can rent bicycles from Millhouse Hostel and from **McLennan Motors** (☎ 220555; Scarinish); the latter will also rent you a car. For a taxi, call **John Kennedy** (☎ 220419).

NORTH ARGYLL

LOCH AWE

Loch Awe is one of Scotland's most beautiful lochs, with rolling forested hills around its southern end and spectacular mountains in the north. It lies between Oban and Inveraray and is the longest loch in Scotland – about 24 miles long – but is less than a mile wide for most of its length. See www.loch-awe.com for more information.

WHALE-WATCHING WISDOM: RUSSEL LEAPER

Russel Leaper works for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), conducting scientific research to try and help reduce threats to whales around the world. He lives in Banavie, near Fort William.

How does Scotland's west coast compare in the league of world whale-watching spots?

Rather like the weather, whale watching in Scotland is less predictable than elsewhere. There is a good chance of seeing minke whales and harbour porpoise. Bottlenose and common dolphins are also seen regularly, and there is a small chance of seeing several other species of whales and dolphin. Basking sharks are also often seen on whale-watching trips. The whale-watching season tends to run from April to September because of the weather [they're easier to spot in calm conditions] but the whales may be around longer than this.

What was your most memorable whale sighting in Scottish waters?

In 20 years of studying whales around the world, it's Scotland that has given me some of my most memorable encounters. On a small sailing boat on a glassy calm day in the Sound of Arisaig, myself and a group of children watched for nearly an hour as a minke whale played with the boat like a dolphin. The huge body with a small, curious eye, would pass back and forth underneath us before surfacing to breathe out with a rasping blow that smelt of rotten vegetables. A special experience shared with my own children, but also with two girls from Belarus. Visiting Scotland for a month to escape a home still suffering from the effects of Chernobyl, they had never seen the sea before, let alone made eye contact with a whale.

Are whale and dolphin numbers in Scottish waters rising, falling, staying the same?

We only have rather approximate estimates of numbers for a few species and almost no information on trends. The numbers of animals close to the coast varies from year to year but we don't really know how this relates to overall numbers. Unfortunately, Norway still kills several hundred minke whales a year from the same population that is watched around Scotland.

Does the whale-watching industry in Scotland have any negative impact on cetacean populations?

There's certainly a risk that whale watching can disturb whales but we don't have any evidence that this is a problem on the west coast of Scotland. The quantity of boat traffic, including whale watching, is much lower than many other areas.

How can visitors ensure that their whale-watching activity has minimal impact?

Scottish Natural Heritage has developed the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code (www.marinecode.org). These are simple, common-sense measures to minimise disturbance. Feedback from customers is probably the most effective way of ensuring that operators stick to the code. You can contribute to minimising impact by knowing the code and telling the boat operator if they are not respecting it.

Are there any organisations that people can get involved with on a voluntary basis?

IFAW is one of a number of groups campaigning on behalf of whales and dolphins at an international level. Locally, the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust based in Tobermory (see p305) runs programmes with volunteers and also collates sightings.

At its northern end, the loch widens out and there are several islands you can visit: **Inishail** has a ruined church and **Froach Eilean** has a broken-down castle. You can hire boats from **Loch Awe Boats** (☎ 01866-833256; The Boat House, Ardbrecknish); a rowing boat costs £5/30 per hour/day, a motor boat £10/40. Ardbrecknish is on the south shore of the loch, 8 miles southwest of Dalmally.

Also at the northern end of Loch Awe are the scenic ruins of **Kilchurn Castle** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Sep), built in 1440, which enjoys one of Scotland's finest settings; you can climb to the top of the four-story castle tower. It's a half-mile walk from the A85 road, just east of the bridge over the River Orchy.

At its northern end, Loch Awe escapes to the sea through the narrow **Pass of Brander**, where Robert the Bruce defeated the MacDougalls in battle in 1309. In the pass, by the A85, you can visit **Cruachan power station** (☎ 01866-822618; www.visitcruachan.co.uk; Lochawe; adult/child £5/2; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Easter-Nov, tours every 30 min). Electric buses take you more than half a mile inside Ben Cruachan, allowing you to see the pump-storage hydroelectric scheme in action.

Getting There & Away

Scottish Citylink buses from Glasgow to Oban go via Dalmally, Lochawe village and Cruachan power station. Trains from Glasgow to Oban stop at Dalmally and Lochawe village. See p301 for details.

LOCH ETIVE

Hemmed in by dramatic mountain scenery, Loch Etive stretches for 17 miles from Connel to Kinlochetive (accessible by road from Glencoe).

Connel

☎ 01631 / pop 500

At Connel Bridge, 5 miles north of Oban, Loch Etive is joined to the sea by a narrow channel partly blocked by an underwater rock ledge. When the tide flows in and out – as it does twice a day – millions of tons of water pour through this bottleneck, creating spectacular white-water rapids known as the **Falls of Lora**. You can park near the north end of the bridge and walk back into the middle to have a look.

Dunstaffnage Castle (☎ 562465; Dunstaffnage; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar), 2 miles west of Connel, looks like a schoolkid's drawing of what a castle

should look like – square and massive, with towers at the corners, and perched on top of a rocky outcrop. It was built around 1260 and was captured by Robert the Bruce during the Wars of Independence in 1309. The haunted ruins of the nearby 13th-century **chapel** contain lots of Campbell tombs decorated with skull and crossbone carvings.

Buses between Oban and Fort William or Glasgow, and trains between Oban and Glasgow, all stop in Connel. See p301 for details.

Taynuilt

☎ 01866 / pop 700

One of the region's most unusual historical sights is **Bonawe Iron Furnace** (☎ 822432; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), near Taynuilt. Dating from 1753, it was built by an iron-smelting company from the English Lake District because of the abundance of birchwood in the area. The wood was made into charcoal, which was needed for smelting the iron – to produce Bonawe's annual output of 700 tons of pig iron took 10,000 acres of woodland. A fascinating self-guided tour leads you around the various parts of the site.

From the jetty opposite the entrance to Bonawe, **Loch Etive Cruises** (☎ 822430) runs boat trips to the head of Loch Etive and back between one and three times daily (except Saturday) from April to October. There are two-hour cruises (adult/child £10/8, depart 10am and noon) and three-hour cruises (£15/12, departs 2pm). You may spot eagles, otters, seals and deer, and at the head of the loch you can see the famous Etive slabs – dotted with rock climbers in dry weather.

Aficionados of smoked salmon should pay a visit to **Inverawe Smokehouse & Fishery** (☎ 822274; www.smokedsalmon.co.uk; Inverawe; admission free; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mar-Oct), 2 miles east of Taynuilt, where local salmon (and trout, herring and venison) is smoked over split oak logs. There's also an angling school and trout fishery where you can learn to fly-fish, and a tearoom where you can sample the smokery's mouthwatering produce.

Taynuilt is 6 miles east of Connel. Scottish Citylink buses and trains to and from Oban stop here. See p301 for details.

APPIN & AROUND

☎ 01631

The Appin region, once ruled over by the Stewarts of Appin from their stronghold at Castle

Stalker, stretches north from the rocky shores of Loch Creran to the hills of Glencoe.

The **Scottish Sea Life Sanctuary** (☎ 720386; www.sealsanctuary.co.uk; Barcaldine; adult/child £9.50/7.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct), 8 miles north of Oban on the shores of Loch Creran, provides a haven for orphaned seal pups. As well as the seal pools there are tanks with herring, rays and flatfish, touch pools for children, an otter sanctuary and displays on Scotland's marine environment.

Glen Creran, at the head of Loch Creran, is a scenic glen with several good walks. North of Loch Creran, at Portnacroish, there's a wonderful view of **Castle Stalker** perched on a tiny offshore island – Monty Python buffs will recognise it as the castle that appears in the final scenes of the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. **Port Appin**, a couple of miles off the main road, is a pleasant spot with a passenger ferry to the island of Lismore.

The delightfully quaint **Pierhouse Hotel** (☎ 730302; www.pierhousehotel.co.uk; Port Appin; s £70-85, d £90-135; ☎) sits on the waterfront above the ferry pier for Lismore. The restaurant enjoys a view across the water to Lismore, and specialises in local seafood and game. Meals (mains £15 to £23) are served from noon to 2pm and 6.30pm to 9pm.

You can hire bikes from **Port Appin Bike** (☎ 730391) at the entrance to the village for £7/10 per half-/full day.

Scottish Citylink buses between Oban and Fort William stop at the Sea Life Sanctuary and Appin village. See p301 for details.

LISMORE

☎ 01631 / pop 170

The first thing you notice about the island of Lismore is how green it is (the Gaelic name Lios Mor means 'Great Garden') – all lush grassland sprinkled with wildflowers, with grey blades of limestone breaking through the soil. And that's the secret – limestone is rare in the Highlands, but it weathers to a very fertile soil.

Lismore is long and narrow – 10 miles long and just over a mile wide – with a road run-

ning almost its full length. **Clachan**, a scattering of houses midway between Achnacroish and Point, is the nearest the island has to a village. **Lismore Stores** (☎ 760272; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-1pm Wed & Sat), between Achnacroish and Clachan, is a grocery store and post office, and has internet access.

St Moluag's Centre (Ionad Naomh Moluag; ☎ 760300; www.celm.org.uk; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 11am-5pm) houses a fascinating exhibition on Lismore's history and culture; alongside stands a reconstruction of a crofter's cottage. The **Lismore Café** (mains £3-5; ☎ 10am-5pm daily, plus 7-10.30pm Fri only Apr-Oct) here has an outdoor deck with a stunning view of the mainland mountains. The centre is in the middle of the island – if you're walking, you can take a short cut by starting along the coastal path north of the pier at Achnacroish (2 miles by road, just over 1 mile by the path).

The romantic ruins of 13th-century **Castle Coffin** have a lovely setting on the west coast, a mile from Clachan (follow the waymarked path). **Tirefour Broch**, a defensive tower with double walls reaching 4m in height, is directly opposite on the east coast.

There is very little short-stay accommodation on Lismore. However, there are several self-catering options advertised on www.isleoflismore.com.

Getting There & Around

A CalMac car ferry runs from Oban to Achnacroish, with two to five sailings Monday to Saturday (passenger/car £2.90/£25, 50 minutes).

Argyll & Bute Council (☎ 01546-604695) operates the passenger-only ferry from Port Appin to Point (£1.22, 10 minutes, hourly). Bicycles are carried for free.

A Royal Mail postbus runs the length of the island daily Monday to Saturday, and there's a **taxi service** (☎ 760220).

Lismore Bike Hire (☎ 760213) will deliver your bike to the ferry slip; rental costs £6/10 per half-/full day.

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