

Britain

Neophyte visitors to Western Europe's third-most populous nation often arrive expecting warm beer, teetering double-decker buses and red telephone boxes on every street corner. Instead they discover a country that has dramatically moved on from its clichéd stereotypes and is riding a wave of latter-day economic and cultural confidence.

But just because the double-deckers are disappearing and the telephone boxes have taken on a steely grey hue (room-temperature beer can still be found if you head to the right pub), doesn't mean that Britain has abandoned the qualities that still make it great for travellers.

Cosmopolitan London remains one of the most exciting cities in the world, with rising post-industrial challengers like Manchester, Bristol and Glasgow jostling for the mantle of Britain's second-most vibrant metropolis. For nature-huggers, there are plenty of remote areas of jaw-dropping beauty, including the desolate Devon moors, the craggy Scottish Highlands and the pretty, sheep-strewn Cotswolds. And for those who like their history served on a platter with its heart still beating, almost every town in the country has an ancient market square and a clutch of centuries-old pubs and churches that are still in use to this day.

Whether it's history, nature or contemporary culture that attracts you to Britain's shores, it's clear that leaving your preconceptions at the border is a good idea. This diverse yet easily travelled land is ideal for wandering off the beaten path. And if you happen to find a double-decker bus along the way, don't forget to take a photo.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 240,000 sq km (149,000 sq miles)
- **Capital** London
- **Currency** pound sterling (£); A\$1 = £0.40; ¥100 = £0.47; NZ\$1 = £0.33; US\$1 = £0.52; €1 = £0.68
- **Famous for** historic sites, rolling countryside, haggis, tea, football, Shakespeare, royal family
- **Official Languages** English, Gaelic, Welsh
- **Phrases** where's the toilet?; can I have the bill please?; one overseas postcard stamp please
- **Population** 60 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 44; international operator for overseas reverse-charges calls ☎ 155; international access code ☎ 00



HIGHLIGHTS

- Take in some of London's bustling **markets** (p176), saving room for a strolling smorgasbord of great food.
- Stroke your chin with artistic understanding at contemporary galleries, like Newcastle's **Baltic** (p228), Bristol's **Arnolfini** (p204) and London's **Tate Modern** (p163).
- Tramp through the mist and aim for the desolate summit of **Snowdon** (p271), the highest peak in Wales.
- Laugh yourself silly with a gaggle of comedy shows at the gargantuan **Edinburgh Fringe Festival** (p247).
- Duck down the historic back alley 'shuts' of **Shrewsbury** (p213), Britain's greatest Tudor town.

ITINERARIES

Depending on the duration of your stay, consider the following itineraries:

- One week** Travel west from London to Winchester, England's ancient capital, then continue to Salisbury for a saunter around Stonehenge. Head northwest to Bath, a World Heritage city, then drop into Bristol for its contemporary vibe. End your stay in Glastonbury, overlooking the countryside from the hilltop Tor.
- Two weeks** Drive north from London to the dreamy spires of Cambridge, then continue to York, the ancient Viking capital. Next stop is Durham, with its stunning cathedral, followed by miles of gorgeous Northumbrian countryside. Head across the border into Scotland and make for Edinburgh before continuing via the Grampians to Inverness, the gateway to the Highlands.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Although Britain's climate is generally mild and its annual rainfall unspectacular, grey, overcast skies can make for depressing days any time of year. Average July temperatures in London are 22°C (71°F) and the average January temperature is 4°C (39°F). Further north it's cooler. For more information, see Climate Charts (p1100).

July and August are the busiest months for tourism, often leading to headache-inducing crowds at major attractions. Flights and accommodation can be prohibitively expensive during this period. You are just as likely to enjoy fine weather in late spring and early

HOW MUCH?

- Hostel bed** £16
- Restaurant main** £8
- Loaf of bread** £0.65
- Local phone call** £0.20
- Cappuccino** £2

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- 1L petrol** £0.90
- 1L bottled water** £0.50
- Pint of beer** £2.25
- Souvenir T-shirt** £10
- Takeaway fish and chips** £4

autumn, so May to June and September to mid-October are recommended as alternative times to visit.

HISTORY

See individual England (p148), Scotland (p240) and Wales (p266) history sections in this chapter for in-depth information on Britain's colourful past.

PEOPLE

With a population of 60 million, Britain is one of the world's most densely populated nations. Despite this, there are a myriad of distinct regional identities: it's common to travel less than 50 miles and find a completely different accent with its own special vocabulary. Southerners will tell you they don't understand a word uttered by the Geordies, while northerners will happily tease the Welsh over the way they speak. For the most part, this regional rivalry is fairly friendly – although it's wise to avoid calling someone 'English' if they come from Scotland or Wales. Indeed, the independent-minded Scots and Welsh often view themselves as separate races from the English.

RELIGION

In the nation's most recent census, 72% of Brits identified themselves as Christians, with Muslims being the second-biggest group at 3%. The remaining largest faiths were Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Buddhists. Around 16% said they had no religion – a



category that included agnostics, atheists, heathens and those who claimed a spiritual affiliation with the Jedis of *Star Wars* fame.

ARTS

Britain has a colourful and important cultural history that stretches back centuries. While theatre and literature are at the forefront of these historic achievements – there have been few world-renowned British painters or composers – the UK's latter-day popular culture and conceptual art movements resonate throughout the world.

Literature

Travelling in the footsteps of storied English, Scottish or Welsh writers can be the highlight of any trip to Britain. Ambling through the cobbled streets of Canterbury recalls Chaucer's ribald comedy, while strolling in the Scottish glens should easily evoke the spirit of Robbie Burns. Spirits of a different variety should be sampled in the pubs of Wales, some of which inspired the poetry of Dylan Thomas.

For most lit lovers, a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon is a must. Not only is this the historic hometown of Western literature's greatest playwright, it's also the world centre of Shakespeare performance and the home of the renowned Royal Shakespeare Company.

Shakespeare is also a big part of London life, with seasonal performances of the Bard's work at the Globe (p163), an authentic re-creation of an Elizabethan theatre-in-the-round. Look out for the blue plaques (www.blueplaque.com) on buildings throughout the city; along with other prominent British people, they show where legendary authors, including Charles Dickens, Jane Austen and Lewis Carroll, once resided.

Among the most telling of contemporary Scottish novels are the works of Irvine Welsh, whose *Trainspotting* and *The Acid House* explore the underbelly of life north of the border. John King, his English counterpart, chronicles similar dark themes in uncompromising novels such as *Skinheads* and *The Football Factory*. Most contemporary British authors produce far more whimsical fare, with JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series a world-leading publishing phenomena, and the works of Nick Hornby (*High Fidelity* and *A Long Way Down*) and Helen Field-

ing (*Bridget Jones's Diary*) speaking of the humorous side of everyday life.

Cinema & TV

While the BBC is perennially threatened by funding cuts and tabloid suggestions about how it should be run, it remains the world's finest public service broadcaster. While many complain about its bureaucracy, there's no denying its astonishing level of innovation and creativity. In TV comedy alone, its legendary gems have ranged from *Monty Python's Flying Circus* to *The Office*. Travellers should catch a few episodes of *Little Britain*, a rabidly successful BBC comedy populated by entertaining characters from all four corners of the country, including a certain Welsh village and its determinedly solo gay resident.

Britain's home-grown film industry moves through periods of ebb and flow, although most of its worldwide hits – including *Love Actually*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Bend It Like Beckham* – occupy the heart-warming side of film narrative. For a whiff of originality try *Vera Drake*, *Trainspotting*, *Shaun of the Dead* or *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*.

Music

British artists enjoy huge record sales around the world, with entertainment juggernauts like the Rolling Stones, Elton John and Paul McCartney routinely topping lists of highest-grossing concert tours. Back home, the reality is much edgier. Although Coldplay is in danger of becoming ubiquitous, bands like Franz Ferdinand, Kaiser Chiefs and British Sea Power continue to attract the art school crowd, while talented youngsters like Sheffield's Arctic Monkeys can still burst on the scene as if they were born with 50 great songs ready to play. There's also a great depth of classical music performance in Britain, with several cities hosting their own renowned symphony orchestras.

Visual Arts

Britain's contribution to contemporary art has undergone a transformation in recent years, with new galleries and public art creating feverish debate in pubs and tabloid newspapers. While cities like Glasgow, Manchester and London house some of Europe's finest galleries, exciting new developments such as the capital's Tate Modern

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION...

With Hollywood relying on clever set construction to make its movies, filmmakers in Britain can simply step outside. From untouched rolling vistas and dark London streets to castles, cathedrals and villages that have remained unchanged for centuries, the country is a giant outdoor movie set waiting to happen. For visitors, this means the fun of identifying familiar or not-so-familiar backdrops from favourite movies.

Among recent epics, the latest version of *Pride and Prejudice* brought Keira Knightley to the windswept vistas and handsome country houses of Lincolnshire (p220), Derbyshire and the Peak District (p215), while the 2006 movie version of *The Da Vinci Code* scoured the country for historic sites. Among its real-life sets – some of them standing in for other locations named in the book – were Winchester Cathedral (p188), the National Gallery (p159) and the story's climatic Rosslyn Chapel in Edinburgh.

The *Harry Potter* movie series is the most prominent user of British locations. From train stations to suburban streets and even London Zoo, these films stretch across England, with the magical Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry being comprised from interiors and exteriors at Gloucester Cathedral, Wiltshire's Lacock Abbey, Northumberland's Alnwick Castle and Oxford's Christ Church College (p206). The most popular site for visitors, though, is Hogsmead Station. Played in the movie by the charming Goathland Station (p225) on the North York Moors, it has barely changed since opening in 1865.

Not surprisingly, London remains England's movie location capital with hundreds of films shot in and around the city since directors first began yelling 'action' more than a century ago. Celebrated movies shot here include *Elizabeth* (Tower of London), *Notting Hill* (have a guess), *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Staples Market and Borough Market), *The Madness of King George* (St Paul's Cathedral and Royal Naval College, Greenwich) and *Shakespeare in Love* (Marble Hill House and the Thames River near Barnes). Also check out *28 Days Later*: it includes some incredibly eerie scenes of empty London streets.

(p163) and Newcastle's Baltic (p228) have become dramatic and incredibly popular showcases for the most recent artistic movements.

Public art has also taken on a new role, with the *Angel of the North* – a giant metal sculpture known locally as the Gateshead Flasher – becoming a symbol of northern pride, while arguments over what should occupy an empty Trafalgar Square plinth show that artistic debate remains surprisingly strong. Britain's contemporary artists can always make the front pages of the tabloids, with guerrilla artist Banksy regularly stoking the fires of controversy by smuggling his works onto the walls of august galleries or depositing his installations in prominent public places.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

At less than 600 miles from north to south and under 300 miles at its widest point, Britain is roughly the same size as New Zealand or half the size of France. There's a huge array of landscapes, including the

craggy Snowdonia mountains in northwest Wales (p271), the rolling Yorkshire Dales in England (p224) and the barren, windswept islands off western Scotland (p264).

Wildlife

Mostly famous for being run over on roads, hedgehogs are commonly found throughout Britain, including in urban settings where they scavenge for food at night. Another night-time scavenger, although a far rarer sight, is the red fox. While deer occupy large estates, particularly in the north, you are much more likely to see a grey squirrel. This ubiquitous tree-hopper may look cute but it was originally an interloper from North America and has pushed the smaller, indigenous red squirrel closer to extinction.

While it might seem that pigeons dominate the skies, Britain's colourful and varied birdlife includes river-dwelling herons, coastal guillemots and the ever-popular red-breasted robin. In the wilds of Scotland, you may spot a golden eagle, Britain's largest bird of prey.

Environmental Issues

Farming methods adopted after WWII saw the swift demolition of much of Britain's archetypal patchwork landscape, replacing stone walls, ancient wetlands and centuries-old hedgerows with vast, open fields. These hedgerows – knotty shrubs and bushes that sheltered some of Britain's most vulnerable flowers, insects and small mammals – have almost disappeared in some regions, taking their rare flora and fauna with them.

While experiments with alternative energy have seen wind and solar farms emerging across the UK, there remains a not-in-my-backyard rejection from many communities to these developments, leading the government to seriously suggest a new generation of nuclear power plants to meet the nation's future energy requirements.

FOOD & DRINK

The words 'British' and 'cuisine' never used to be uttered in the same sentence without a nervous laugh or gagging reflex. Those days are long gone and there's now a rich variety of well-prepared regional dishes alongside an impressive array of cosmopolitan options, reflecting the nation's burgeoning ethnic diversity.

Staples & Specialities

While the rib-sticking breakfast fry-up has changed little over the years, Britain's other traditional dishes have been reinvented for foodies at some of the nation's finest restaurants. These newly revered dishes – still available in less gourmet fashion at pubs across the land – include fish and chips, bangers and mash, steak and kidney pie, Sunday roast and ploughman's lunch: a salad heavily reliant on pickles, cheese and cold pies rather than fresh vegetables.

Most Brits have also embraced a huge variety of ethnic cuisines, with Chinese and Indian restaurants now more common than traditional English chippies. Indeed, curry from the Indian subcontinent is the most popular food in Britain, with cities like Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester vying to be the nation's curry capital.

Where to Eat & Drink

There's a good variety of eateries in most towns, with vegetarians catered for on many menus. Cities often have vegan and

vegetarian-only restaurants if you prefer not to sit with the meat-eating crowd. While not every pub serves food, most provide inexpensive, filling meals. It's also the perfect opportunity to try some regional beers. If you've been raised on lager, a traditional bitter or ale is a bit of a shock – not as cold or as effervescent. Keep in mind that Scotland has introduced a nonsmoking ban in pubs and restaurants, with England and Wales set to introduce similar bans in 2007.

ENGLAND

When the government's Department for Culture launched a campaign to discover England's enduring icons in 2006, they kicked-off with a top 12 of well-worn classics. Spitfire war planes, the FA Cup and *Alice in Wonderland* made the cut, while chestnuts like Stonehenge and cups of tea rounded out the numbers.

But when organisers opened the list to public nomination, they were overwhelmed with suggestions for icons they hadn't even thought of, creating a collage of self-reflection from the population about what being English really means. Eschewing the obvious, suggestions included gin, Penguin books, the *Teletubbies*, regional accents, John Cleese's silly walk and closed-circuit TV cameras in public places.

With Scotland and Wales gaining more power to run their own affairs in recent years, the 'idea' of England – as opposed to Britain – is clearly back on the agenda. For visitors, the debate indicates the surprising level of diversity that can be expected to experience here. Rolling hills, thatch-roofed cottages and olde-world pubs are a given, but latter-day England is also stuffed with exciting cities like Bristol, Manchester and Newcastle; dripping with excellent beaches from Whitby to Newquay; and coloured by accessible outdoor adventure in regions like Exmoor, the Peak District and the North York Moors.

HISTORY Celts & Romans

Populated by bands of hunter-gatherers for centuries, England was shaken from its stupor around 4000 BC when modern Europeans, wielding new-fangled stone tools,



arrived to case the joint. While some English still claim to be the result of superior, unfettered breeding, the arrival of these interlopers was the beginning of thousands of years of imported genes.

The only evidence today of this obscure period are the impressive stone columns at Stonehenge (p191) and Avebury (p192), along with hundreds of smaller near-forgotten rock circles dotted throughout the country. Historians remain divided over what exactly went on at these sites, although claims that they were early football stadiums have been largely discredited.

The next important gene pool influx came from the Celts of central Europe, whose bronze- and iron-smelting skills launched a mini cultural revolution. London's British Museum (p159), along with many town and city museums across the country, display artefacts from this period, many unearthed by metal detector enthusiasts.

Even more numerous are the excavated discoveries from England's colourful Roman era. In AD 43 the modern storm troopers of the empire arrived on England's shores, overcoming fierce resistance to establish dominion over much of the land for the next 350 years. They were a major civilising influence, creating buildings, fortifications and roads that can still be seen in and around Bath (p199), York (p221), and at Hadrian's Wall (p231), once the northernmost border of the entire empire.

Dark Ages

With its empire crumbling, the Romans abandoned the island around 410, sparking a period of history in the region that is still poorly understood. This is when the idea of England as an entity began to emerge. With tribes carving larger territories and entering uneasy pacts to protect their regions, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes rose to prominence, while Christianity slowly overcame paganism as the religion of choice.

With such a fragile network of power, England was ripe for invasion. By the end of the first millennium both the Danish and Norwegian Vikings occupied large swathes of land across northern and eastern England. York was the capital of the Danish region, and the sights, sounds and smells of the settlement are colourfully evoked today at the city's Jorvik Centre (p221).

By 1016 the Danes had taken tenuous control of the country, but a period of turmoil ensued involving rival claims to the barely unified crown. The chaos continued until the Battle of Hastings in 1066, when the Norman, William the Conqueror, acquired his name by defeating his main rival Harold on the English south coast. The Normans had as much impact on England as the Romans, importing French aristocrats to take charge and building an imposing network of hulking castles and astonishing cathedrals. Many of these architectural landmarks can be visited today, although they're often now romantic ruins. Among the most remarkable intact Norman structures are Windsor Castle (p179), Westminster Abbey (p159) and Durham Cathedral (p227).

Middle Ages

The ensuing centuries saw England racked with intrigue and conspiracy as aristocratic families squared off against each other to influence the succession. Costly battles with France, itself as disunited as England, eventually brought English defeat. But the period's main victor was Parliament, which consolidated its power against the monarchy, sowing the seeds for future strife. By 1485, King Henry VII had been crowned, launching a period of rule that's much in evidence today in the timber-framed Tudor streets and buildings of English towns like Shrewsbury (p213) and Stratford-upon-Avon (p210).

A brewing struggle with the Catholic church came to a head in 1536 during the reign of Henry VIII, when Papal power in England was renounced and the monarch became the head of a new Church of England. Many splendid abbeys and cathedrals were sacked or destroyed, some forever. The ruins of some of these – including Whitby Abbey (p226) and Glastonbury Abbey (p202) – can still be visited. Others were eventually rebuilt, although often altered in the process. The religious strife was not over, however, and the conflict dissolved into a bitter civil war in 1642, with Parliament rising to the full extent of its power, ultimately leading to the execution of Charles I. When the war's instigator, Oliver Cromwell, died in 1658, the monarchy was restored.

Victorian Age

The monarchy and Parliament were never the same again. By the 18th century the new position of prime minister began to assume greater power while the monarchy, soon represented by Queen Victoria, sank into a largely ceremonial role.

By the 19th century England had built a formidable global empire and was using its territories to fuel immense commercial expansion. The country was perfectly positioned to launch the Industrial Revolution, which tied machine innovation to the population explosion. The lasting cultural impact of the Victorian era is still evident throughout the country in the enormous 19th-century, glass-roofed train stations and magnificent public buildings that can be found in cities such as London, Newcastle and Manchester.

New Labour, New Millennium

England's 20th century was a period of war and end-of-empire followed by cultural and economic resurgence. Two world wars brought the nation almost to its knees, although many still recall the 1940 Battle of Britain, when the English resisted a three-month air attack from Germany, as its finest hour. Many former colonies were restored to independence after WWII and the nation's manufacturing industries entered a period of slow, painful decline.

By the 1990s, though, England had bounced back and entered the new millennium with one of the world's strongest economies. Its role on the world stage was exemplified by its relationship with the USA and participation in military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Echoing a history of protest, millions took to the streets of London and other major English cities to protest the nation's involvement. In 2005, terrorist bombs killed dozens on public transit in the capital, a direct reaction to Britain's support for the War on Terror.

With the country's Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair coming towards the end of his final term in office, Britain's political future is entering a period of uncertainty. Dour Gordon Brown is preparing to take over and square-off against a slowly regrouping Conservative Party that is itching to repeat the hold on power it enjoyed under Margaret Thatcher.

PEOPLE

With 49.5 million residents, England dominates the numbers when it comes to Britain's population. But there is great cultural diversity throughout the country's many regions, with most areas retaining a distinct identity, complete with specific accents and vocabulary. Many English towns and cities – particularly London, Birmingham and Manchester – have large and vibrant Asian communities. For an insight into the English psyche, flick through Kate Fox's entertaining *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Social Behaviour*.

LONDON

 020 / pop 7.4 million

Like a mid-sized country on its own, London has enough history, vitality and cultural drive to keep most visitors occupied for weeks. But while first-timers come thinking they'll spend their time snapping photos of red double-decker buses and Trafalgar Square pigeons, they discover the city that accounts for almost a sixth of England's total population has moved on from its clichéd persona.

In recent years this most cosmopolitan of world capitals has led international trends in music, fashion and the arts, riding a wave of 21st-century British confidence that has washed into areas of the city that were formerly dark and depressing. Adding to established tourist-haven neighbourhoods like Westminster, Knightsbridge and the City, reinvented areas of London like Clerkenwell and the South Bank have become visitor-friendly. It's a process that, with the Olympic Games rolling into town in 2012, will continue to alter London's tourist landscape. The downside of this gentrification, of course, is increasing cost: London is now Europe's most expensive city for visitors.

But while popular attractions like the London Eye (p163) and the Tower of London (p162) remain expensive, there are dozens of excellent free or nearly free sights that can help keep travel budgets down. These include the Tate Modern (p163), the National Gallery (p159) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (p161). And just wandering the streets of London (stopping only for a cheap lunch-time sandwich to scoff in a nearby



BRITAIN

CENTRAL LONDON

BRITAIN



BRITAIN

INFORMATION		SLEEPING 		DRINKING 	
Amex (Main Office).....	1 C5	Arran House Hotel.....	(see 40)	Anchor Bankside.....	74 F5
Australian Embassy.....	2 D4	Charlotte Street Hotel.....	36 B3	Bradley's Spanish Bar.....	75 B4
Britain & London Visitor Centre.....	3 B5	City Inn.....	37 C8	Lamb.....	76 D3
Canada House.....	4 A5	Generator.....	38 C2	Lamb & Flag.....	77 C5
easyInternetcafe.....	5 B4	Hazlitt's.....	39 C4	Queen's Larder.....	78 C3
easyInternetcafe.....	6 A4	Hotel Cavendish.....	40 C3	Seven Stars.....	79 D4
easyInternetcafe.....	7 C5	Indian Student YMCA.....	41 B3	Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese.....	80 E4
Irish Embassy.....	8 A7	James & Cartref Houses.....	42 A8		
Japanese Embassy.....	9 A6	Luna & Simone Hotel.....	43 B8		
London Information Centre.....	(see 101)	Oxford St YHA.....	44 B4		
London Visitor Centre.....	10 D6	Piccadilly Backpackers.....	45 B5	ENTERTAINMENT 	
New Zealand High Commission.....	11 C5	Regent Palace Hotel.....	46 B5	12 Bar Club.....	81 C4
Thomas Cook (Main Office).....	12 B5	St Margaret's Hotel.....	47 C3	Amused Moose Soho.....	82 C4
Trafalgar Sq Post Office.....	13 C5	Travelodge.....	48 D4	Bar Rhumba.....	83 B5
University College Hospital.....	14 B3	Victor Hotel.....	49 B8	Borderline.....	84 C4
		Victoria Hostel.....	50 B8	Candy Bar.....	85 B4
		Wigram House.....	51 B7	Comedy Store.....	86 C5
		Windermere Hotel.....	52 A8	Compton's of Soho.....	87 C5
				Cross.....	88 D1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES				Fabric.....	89 F3
Apsley House.....	15 A6	EATING 		Fiction.....	(see 88)
Benjamin Franklin House.....	16 C5	Anchor & Hope.....	53 E6	Ghetto.....	90 C4
British Museum.....	17 C3	Busaba Eathai.....	54 B3	Heaven.....	91 C5
Buckingham Palace.....	18 B7	Café de Hong Kong.....	55 C5	National Film Theatre.....	92 D5
Cabinet War Rooms.....	19 C6	Café in the Crypt.....	56 C5	Old Vic.....	93 E6
Charles Dickens Museum.....	20 D3	Carluccio's Caffè.....	57 B4	Pacha London.....	94 A7
Dr Johnson's House.....	21 E4	Chuen Cheng Ku.....	58 C5	Queen Elizabeth Hall.....	95 D5
Hayward Gallery.....	22 D6	Cinnamon Club.....	59 C7	Ronnie Scott's.....	96 C4
Houses of Parliament.....	23 C7	Ebury Wine Bar.....	60 A8	Royal Festival Hall.....	97 D6
London Canal Museum.....	24 D1	Food for Thought.....	61 C4	Royal National Theatre.....	98 D5
London Eye.....	25 D6	Footstool.....	62 C7	Shakespeare's Globe.....	99 F5
Museum of London.....	26 F4	Hakkasan.....	63 C4	South Bank Centre.....	100 D6
National Gallery.....	27 C5	India Club.....	64 D5	tkts.....	101 C5
National Portrait Gallery.....	28 C5	Ivy.....	65 C4		
Shakespeare's Globe.....	(see 99)	Kazan.....	66 B8	SHOPPING 	
Somerset House.....	29 D5	Masala Zone.....	67 B4	Agent Provocateur.....	102 B4
St Martin-in-the-Fields.....	(see 56)	Nobu.....	68 A6	Muji.....	103 C5
St Paul's Cathedral.....	30 F4	Oxo Tower Restaurant & Brasserie.....	69 E5	Paperchase.....	104 C3
Tate Britain.....	31 C8	Rasa Sumudra.....	70 B4	Top Shop.....	105 B4
Tate Modern.....	32 F5	Rules.....	71 C5		
Theatre Royal Drury Lane.....	33 D4	Satsuma.....	72 B4	TRANSPORT	
Wellington Arch.....	34 A6	World Food Café.....	73 C4	Victoria Coach Station.....	106 A8
Westminster Abbey.....	35 C7				

park) is a free activity that even wealthy visitors will enjoy: Big Ben (p159), Buckingham Palace (p161) and St Paul's Cathedral (p162) really are just around the corner.

HISTORY

While a mud-stained straggle of Celtic communities clung to the banks of the Thames River for centuries, it wasn't until the arrival of the Romans in AD 43 that the modern-day idea of London – or 'Londinium' – began to take shape. Foreshadowing a frequently tumultuous future, the early settlement was burned to the ground in AD 61 by Boudicca, a tribal chief who took grave exception to the occupying forces.

Eventually quelling the unrest, the Romans returned to London to build a key regional capital. By AD 200 the town had 30,000 inhabitants and a 6m-high wall to keep out the

riff-raff. Fragments of this fortification can still be seen, and the names of its four gates are preserved in districts known as Ludgate, Aldgate, Bishopsgate and Newgate.

With their empire crumbling, the Romans gave up on the ungrateful locals in the 5th century, leaving the settlement to several hundred years of less-sophisticated Saxon rule. 'Lundenwic' soon began outstripping other important English towns due to the trading advantage of its giant river. As merchant routes grew like tentacles across Europe, the Thames became a key port for delivering goods inland. Trade fuelled the growth of the city and its population for centuries.

This increased economic, political and symbolic importance made invasions inevitable. The Danish Vikings arrived and smashed the place up in 851, with Saxon

King Alfred taking 25 years to retake and rebuild the city. A period of short-lived Saxon prosperity ensued, but the persistent Vikings finally appointed a Danish king in 1016, naming London their capital. In 1042 the Viking-friendly Saxon, Edward the Confessor, took the throne. He built Westminster Abbey – where British monarchs are still crowned – but died a few years before a turning point in English history.

The power vacuum created by Edward's death led to an international struggle for control over the country. Following a series of skirmishes, the 1066 Battle of Hasting enabled the Norman King William the Conqueror to march into London, build his citadel at the Tower of London (p162) and underline the city's pre-eminent role as capital.

With this foundation, London grew prosperous and increased in global importance throughout the medieval period, surviving devastating challenges like the 1665 Plague and 1666 Great Fire that would have gutted other cities. Instead, London simply shrugged and reinvented itself – many of the city's landmarks were built at this time by visionary architect Christopher Wren. By 1720 London had 750,000 inhabitants and was the centre of a growing world empire. Fuelled by mercantile wealth, the Victorian era was the city's golden age.

In contrast, WWII was London's darkest hour, with the city on the edge of destruction after relentless bombing. Several museums recall this period, still fresh in the memory of many locals. The ugly postwar rebuilding phase of the 1950s gave way to the cultural renaissance of the 1960s when London was the planet's undisputed swinging capital.

A couple of decades in the doldrums ensued, but today's London is both economically and culturally pre-eminent, as hip as it was in the '60s, and almost as rich as it was in the Victorian era, creating a self-confidence that fuelled its selection as 2012 Olympic Games host. But for every period of success, tragedy has never been far away. The day after winning its Olympic bid, four terrorist bombs killed dozens of people on buses and underground trains around the city. While deep anxiety initially gripped many Londoners, most soon returned to their daily routines – a response mirrored throughout the capital's turbulent history.

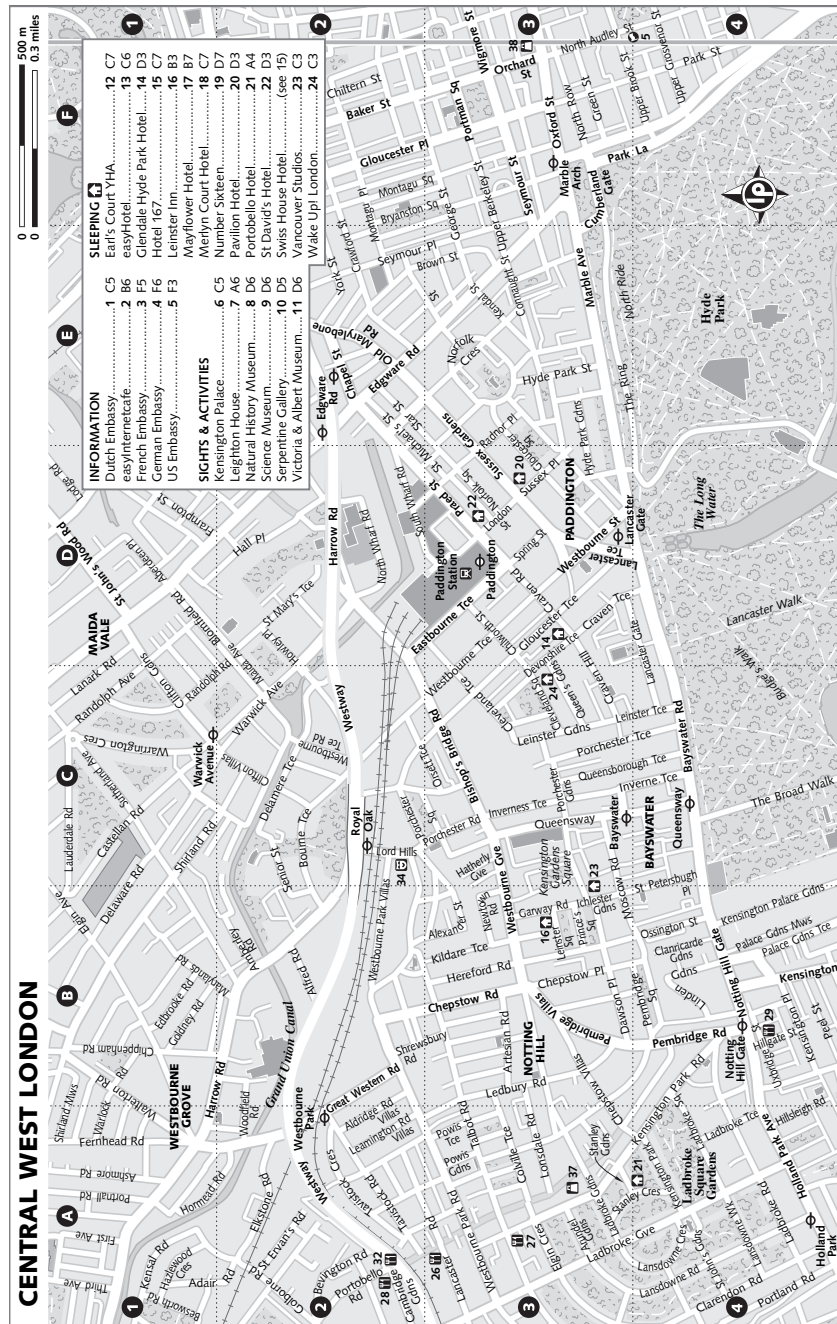
ORIENTATION

The Thames River, London's main geographic feature, divides the city roughly into north and south. Many of London's must-see attractions – including Buckingham Palace (p161), Big Ben (p161) and the Houses of Parliament (p161) – are located surprisingly close to each other, to north of the river in the highly walkable Westminster area.

The easy-to-use London Underground system ('the tube') is the essential method for finding your way to everything else – pick up a colour-coded underground map to navigate your way around the extensive network. Don't worry if you take a wrong turn or head in the wrong direction: getting a little bit lost on the tube is a rite of passage and it is easy to retrace your steps and find your way back to your point of origin. Many of the city's main attractions lie within the loop of the Circle Line (colour-coded yellow).

Among London's other popular districts for visitors, the West End includes major theatres, a small Chinatown, and Covent Garden's markets and buskers. The chichi Kensington and Knightsbridge areas feature pricey boutiques, major national museums and the verdant Hyde Park. The area known as the City is home to St Paul's Cathedral (p162) and a plethora of fantastic old pubs. It is also a short hop from the Tower of London (p162). The South Bank includes gentrified riverside back alleys, in addition to the Globe theatre (p163), London Eye (p163) and the Tate Modern (p163). The East End houses up-and-coming, formerly grungy areas packed with street markets and great ethnic restaurants. Heading east along the river, you will witness the dramatic revival of the Docklands and experience the colourful history of Greenwich. Turning west upriver you'll stumble upon the green havens of Richmond Park, Kew Gardens (p164) and imposing Hampton Court Palace (p165).

Major main-line train stations are dotted throughout the capital at Victoria, Waterloo, Euston, King's Cross, Paddington and Marylebone. The main bus and coach hub is Victoria Station, due south of Buckingham Palace. Pick up a *London A-Z* map book: it's the definitive street guide and comes in a handy pocket-sized version.



INFORMATION

Internet Access

easyInternetcafé (www.easyInternetcafé.com; per 20 min from £1); Kensington (Map pp156-7; 160-166 Kensington High St W8; ☎ 7am-11pm; ☎ High St Kensington); Oxford St (Map pp152-3; 358 Oxford St W1; ☎ 8am-11pm Sun-Wed, 8am-midnight Thu-Sat; ☎ Bond St); Tottenham Court Rd (Map pp152-3; 9-16 Tottenham Court Rd W1; ☎ 8am-midnight Sun-Wed, 8am-2am Thu-Sat; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd); Trafalgar Square (Map pp152-3; 456-459 Strand WC2; ☎ 8am-11pm; ☎ Charing Cross).

Internet Resources

BBC London (www.bbc.co.uk/london) News, transport and entertainment.
Evening Standard (www.thisislondon.co.uk) News and entertainment listings.
London Town (www.londontown.com) Vast tourism resource portal.
Time Out (www.timeout.com/london) Superior listings guide.
Visit London (www.visitlondon.com) Official tourism site.

Media

Evening Standard London's daily newspaper, with Thursday listings magazine. It costs £0.45 and is circulated Monday to Friday.
Metro Free slim commuter paper, circulated Monday to Friday.
Time Out Essential London listings magazine. It costs £2.50 and is published weekly.

Medical Services

Charing Cross Hospital (Map pp152-3; ☎ 8846 1234; Fulham Palace Rd W6; ☎ Hammersmith) Offers 24-hour accident and emergency treatment.
Dental Emergency Care Service (Map p160; ☎ 7188 0511; Guy's Hospital, St Thomas St SE1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri; ☎ London Bridge) Arrive early: walk-in service is always busy.
NHS Direct (☎ 0845 4647; ☎ 24hr) Call for latest roster of 24-hour pharmacies.
University College Hospital (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7387 9300; Grafton Way WC1; ☎ Euston Square) Offers 24-hour accident and emergency treatment.

Money

Amex (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7484 9600; 30-31 Haymarket SW1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Has additional branches across the city.
Thomas Cook (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7853 6400; 30 St James's St SW1; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Wed, 9am-4pm Sat; ☎ Green Park) Has additional branches across the city.

Post

Trafalgar Square Post Office (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0845 722 3344; 24-28 William IV St WC2; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat; ☎ Charing Cross) Busy central post office; hundreds of branches throughout the city.

Tourist Information

Britain & London Visitor Centre (Map pp152-3; www.visitbritain.com; 1 Lower Regent St SW1; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon, 9am-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Massive repository of free London and UK maps and brochures, plus transport and accommodation booking service, Internet computers (per 15 minute £1) and a bureau de change.
London Information Centre (Map pp152-3; 7292 2333; www.londontown.com; 1 Leicester Sq WC2; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☎ Leicester Square) Located in the Leicester Sq ticket booth.
London Visitor Centre (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7620 1550; Arrivals Hall, Waterloo International Terminal SE1; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Late-opening TIC.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

London has considerable antiterrorist measures in place. As a visitor *never* leave your bag unattended – you may trigger a security alert. If you do see an unattended package, don't touch it and inform the authorities. The main annoyance to avoid is pickpockets, whose haunts include bustling areas like Oxford St and Leicester Sq. Women should take particular care alone after dark and should never take minicabs unaccompanied (see p178).

SIGHTS

London is teeming with magnificent buildings, world-leading museums and cutting-edge attractions. This section includes major sights as well as off-the-beaten-path

LONDON IN TWO DAYS

Stroll around the sights of **Westminster** (opposite) before enjoying the artworks of the **National Gallery** (opposite). Walk across to Covent Garden for some shopping in **Neal's Yard** (p175), before taking the tube to Blackfriars. Duck into **Dr Johnson's House** (p162) off Fleet St, grab a beer at the nearby **Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese** (p172), then stroll up to **St Paul's Cathedral** (p162). Walk the **Millennium Bridge** (p163) to the **Tate Modern** (p163).

attractions that are well worth a visit. The listings are grouped by district.

The West End

NATIONAL GALLERY

Occupying a handsome promontory overlooking Trafalgar Square, the **National Gallery** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7747 2885; www.nationalgallery.org.uk; Trafalgar Square WC2; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sun, 10am-9pm Wed; ☎ Charing Cross) is Britain's leading public art space. Seminal paintings from every epoch in art history are here, including works by Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Van Gogh. Arrive early and take your time or target your visit to a particular period.

CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM

London's most celebrated novelist is fondly remembered at the **Charles Dickens Museum** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7405 2127; www.dickensmuseum.com; 48 Doughty St WC1; adult/child £5/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; ☎ Russell Square), which occupies the modest town house residence where he worked on *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. The museum's Aladdin's cave of glass-encased Dickensia includes writing quills and the tiny wooden desk where he penned many of his great works.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

The excellent **National Portrait Gallery** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7306 0055; www.npg.org.uk; 2 St Martin's Pl WC2; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed, Sat & Sun, 10am-9pm Thu & Fri; ☎ Charing Cross) is the place to put faces to the famous and infamous names of Britain's past and present. The ground floor is the most fun, focusing on contemporary figures from popular culture, including Harry Potter actor Daniel Radcliffe – the gallery's youngest non-Royal portrait.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOUSE

The recently opened **Benjamin Franklin House** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7930 6602; www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org; 36 Craven St WC2; adult/child £8/5; ☎ hourly tours 10am-5pm Wed-Sun; ☎ Charing Cross) is tucked in the backstreets of Charing Cross. The Founding Father's only remaining residence in the world, entry into this steep-staired town house is by costumed tour only. You'll learn about Franklin's colourful life in London, including his predilection for standing naked at his window to 'take the air'.

ST MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS

There was a church on this site long before Trafalgar Square arrived out the front. Today's incarnation of **St Martin-in-the-Fields** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7766 1100; www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org; Trafalgar Square WC2; admission free; ☎ 8am-6.30pm; ☎ Charing Cross) was completed in 1726 and is renowned for its neoclassical and baroque flourishes. It's a busy parish church with plenty to attract visitors, including classical music concerts (tickets from £5), brass rubbing (£3 to £15) and an atmospheric crypt café.

SOMERSET HOUSE

The magnificent Georgian courtyard of **Somerset House** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7845 4600; www.somerset-house.org.uk; Strand WC2; admission free; ☎ Temple/Covent Garden) is a lively ice rink in winter and a concert venue in summer. Its visitor-friendly cultural collections include the **Courtauld Gallery** (☎ 7848 2526; adult/child £5/free, free 10am-2pm Mon; ☎ 10am-6pm), famous for its impressionist paintings; the **Gilbert Collection** (☎ 7420 9410; adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm), with its decorative arts exhibitions; and the **Hermitage Rooms** (☎ 7845 4630; adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm), with its treasures from St Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum. Combined entry tickets are available (two collections/three collections £12/8).

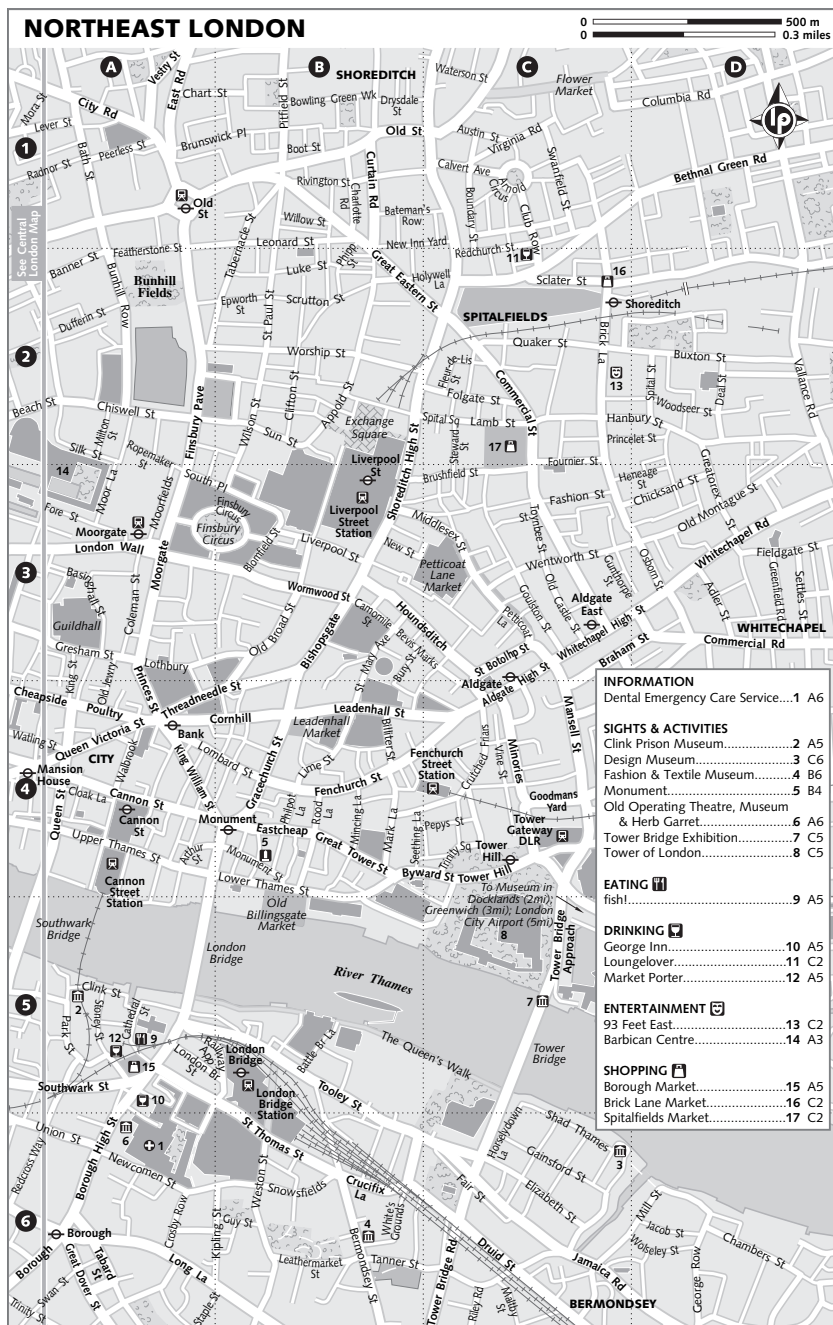
BRITISH MUSEUM

Founded in 1753, the **British Museum** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7323 8299; www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk; Great Russell St WC1; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Sat-Wed, 10am-8.30pm Thu & Fri; ☎ Russell Square/Tottenham Court Rd) houses one of the world's oldest and finest cultural collections. With some seven million items – the result of judicious acquisition and the controversial plundering of the empire – its highlights include rooms stuffed with Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman antiquities. A latter-day wonder, the museum's spectacular **Great Court** is the largest covered public square in Europe.

Westminster, St James's & Pimlico

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

London's leading religious attraction, **Westminster Abbey** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7222 5152; www.westminster-abbey.org; 20 Dean's Yard SW1; adult/child £10/6; ☎ 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 9.30am-8pm Wed, 9.30am-2.45pm Sat, worship only Sun; ☎ Westminster) is where most British monarchs have been crowned since Christmas Day 1066. Once



a monastery, its highlights include cloistered courtyards, the fan-vaulted Henry VII chapel, and a gaggle of monuments to famous statesmen, scientists and poets.

CABINET WAR ROOMS

The evocative **Cabinet War Rooms** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7930 6961; <http://cwr.iwm.org.uk>; Clive Steps, King Charles St SW1; adult/child £11/free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm; ☎ Westminster) are the mothballed underground bunkers where Winston Churchill and his advisors ran Britain's war effort. Check out the tiny bed from where he held morning meetings and the Transatlantic Telephone Room where he called President Roosevelt. The new **Churchill Museum** adjunct delves even deeper into the war leader's life and times.

TATE BRITAIN

Ever in the shadow of its rambunctious sibling, **Tate Britain** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 78878000; www.tate.org; Millbank SW1; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm; ☎ Pimlico) features a world-leading collection of British art from the 16th century to the late 20th century. Keep an eye out for works by Blake, Constable, Hockney, Bacon and Moore. The Turner collection is also particularly comprehensive. There is a **boat service** (p178) to the Tate Modern from here.

APSLEY HOUSE

An 18th-century masterpiece with a multi-columned exterior and gilded, highly ornate interiors, **Apsley House** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7499 5676; 149 Piccadilly W1; adult/child £5.10/2.60; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar; ☎ Hyde Park Corner) is the historic home of the Duke of Wellington – his descendants still live here. Check out the giant dinner services on the ground floor: they show that money was no substitute for taste. An excellent audioguide handset is included.

TOP FIVE LONDON HOUSE MUSEUMS

- Freud Museum (p164)
- Dr Johnson's House (p162)
- Charles Dickens Museum (p159)
- Benjamin Franklin House (p159)
- Leighton House (right)

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Built for the Duke of Buckingham in 1703, **Buckingham Palace** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7766 7300; Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; state rooms adult/child £14/8; ☎ 9.45am-6pm Aug & Sep, changing of the guard 11.30am daily May-Jul, alternate days Aug-Apr; ☎ Green Park) has been the monarch's main London pad since 1837. The gaudily furnished **State Rooms** are open in summer for the hordes of Royal-loving tourists, but it's more fun watching the **changing of the guard** outside.

OTHER SIGHTS

The neatest and most royal of London's royal parks, **St James's Park** (Map pp152-3; The Mall SW1; ☎ 5am-dusk; ☎ St James's Park) is also one of the city's most tranquil picnic spots.

Visit **Wellington Arch** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7230 2726; Hyde Park Corner W1; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar; ☎ Hyde Park Corner), a restored 19th-century archway with an historic exhibition.

More impressive from the outside (especially the soaring, crenulated tower known as Big Ben), tours of the **Houses of Parliament** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7219 3000; www.parliament.uk; Parliament Sq SW1; tour adult/child £7/5; ☎ Jul & Aug; ☎ Westminster) are also available during MPs' summer hols.

Kensington & Knightsbridge VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

The **Victoria & Albert Museum** (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7942 2000; www.vam.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sun, 10am-10pm Wed; ☎ South Kensington) is the world's greatest repository of decorative arts. Spread over nearly 150 galleries, it's bursting with everything from furniture to fashion and ceramics to sculpture. Regular temporary exhibitions – including recent Art Deco shows – are often must-see blockbusters.

LEIGHTON HOUSE

The home of leading Victorian artist Lord Fredric Leighton, the highlight of **Leighton House** (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7602 3316; 12 Holland Park Rd W1; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sun, 10am-10pm Wed; ☎ High St Kensington) is the astonishing ground-floor Arab Hall. An homage to both ancient Islamic motifs and 19th-century English aesthetics, it's covered with swirling marble and peacock blue tiles, while its elaborate domed ceiling is awash with gold leaf. Many of Leighton's canvases line the sunlit studio upstairs.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Fascinating interactive exhibits ensure the **Natural History Museum** (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7942 5000; www.nhm.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5.50pm Sun; ☎ South Kensington) is a favourite for both kids and adults. Highlights include the Darwin Centre, with 22 million plant and animal specimens, and the Kobe earthquake simulator. Miss the towering dinosaur skeletons and the ginormous blue whale at your peril.

SCIENCE MUSEUM

The **Science Museum** (Map pp156-7; ☎ 0870 870 4868; www.sciencemuseum.org.uk; Exhibition Rd SW7; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm; ☎ South Kensington) does a terrific job of bringing to lustrous life a subject that can be impenetrable. Curiously, although it's stuffed with hi-tech simulators and a five-storey IMAX cinema, kids crowd in awe around the low-tech steam engines and Industrial Revolution machinery. Escape the crowds at the museum's lounge-style **Dana Centre**, an adults-only bar and café.

OTHER SIGHTS

Charming **Kensington Palace** (Map pp156-7; ☎ 0870 751 5170; www.hrp.org.uk; Kensington Gardens W8; adult/child £10.80/7.20; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb; ☎ High St Kensington/Notting Hill Gate) is the smaller royal palace that was Princess Diana's last home.

At 145 hectares **Hyde Park** (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7298 2000; ☎ 5am-dusk; ☎ Hyde Park Corner) is a sprawling green space, with its own gallery, lake and Speakers Corner of nut-bar orators.

The City

MUSEUM OF LONDON

The underrated **Museum of London** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 444 2852; www.museumoflondon.org.uk; 150 London Wall EC2; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, noon-5.50pm Sun; ☎ Barbican/St Paul's) is a recommended introduction to the city's rich history, starting with a set of 300,000-year-old flint tools found in Piccadilly. The rest is a fascinating smorgasbord of Romans, royals and rooms re-creating London's historic epochs. Don't miss the dramatic Fire of London simulation and check the museum's lively roster of temporary exhibitions.

DR JOHNSON'S HOUSE

The 18th-century residence of this most famous of Londoners, **Dr Johnson's House** (Map

pp152-3; ☎ 7353 3745; www.drjh.dircon.co.uk; 17 Gough Sq EC4; adult/child £4.50/1.50; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 11am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; ☎ Blackfriars) is hidden along an alleyway off Fleet St. The handsome, creaky-floored property contains the rotund raconteur's drinking chair, where he entertained pals like actor David Garrick and philosopher Edmund Burke, and the top-floor garret is where he researched his monumental *Dictionary of the English Language*.

TOWER OF LONDON

Despite the coach parties and surrounding tower blocks, it is still possible to back into a corner at the **Tower of London** (Map p160; ☎ 0870 756 6060; www.hrp.org.uk; Tower Hill EC3; adult/child £15/9.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun-Mon Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun-Mon Nov-Feb; ☎ Tower Hill) and find uninterrupted views of the crenulated medieval buildings. After the obligatory **Crown Jewels** visit, take some time to explore the walls, dungeons and museum rooms. Reserve ahead well ahead of time (see www.hrp.org.uk) for the 9.30pm **Ceremony of the Keys**, the tower's 700-year-old lock-up routine.

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Christopher Wren's grand masterpiece, the recently renovated **St Paul's Cathedral** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7246 8350; www.stpauls.co.uk; Ludgate Hill EC4; adult/child £9/3.50; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, services only Sun; ☎ St Paul's) is the proud bearer of the capital's largest church dome. Attractions include the golden ceiling mosaics and the **Whispering Gallery** – if you talk close to the wall it carries your words around to the opposite side. VIPs remembered by their tombs and monuments here include Nelson, Joshua Reynolds and Christopher Wren himself.

OTHER SIGHTS

Iconic London landmark **Tower Bridge** (Map p160; ☎ 7403 3761; www.towerbridge.org.uk; Tower Bridge SE1; adult/child £5.50/3; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Oct-Mar; ☎ Tower Hill) houses a small exhibition.

The **Monument** (Map p160; ☎ 7626 2717; Monument St EC3; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm; ☎ Monument) is a 65m (202ft) Doric column designed by Wren to commemorate the Great Fire of 1666. Climb the spiral staircase for some good views.

Along the South Bank

TATE MODERN

The hugely popular **Tate Modern** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7887 8008; www.tate.org.uk; Bankside SE1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Sun-Thu, 10am-11pm Fri & Sat; ☎ Blackfriars) exhibits 20th-century art in an evocative former power station shed. The permanent collection, ranging from Rothko to Lichtenstein, is impressive, while temporary installations in the Turbine Hall and regular special exhibitions draw locals back for more. The **café** on level seven has great views over the Thames, and there's a boat to Tate Britain (p178).

OLD OPERATING THEATRE

Near St Thomas's Hospital, the excellent **Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret** (Map p160; ☎ 7188 2679; www.thegarret.org.uk; 9a St Thomas's St SE1; adult/child £4.75/3.75; ☎ 10.30am-5pm; ☎ London Bridge) contains a herbal workshop where an 18th-century apothecary compounded natural remedies, some of which may even have worked. The main attraction is a later surgical theatre where gruesome procedures were performed – check out the large 'decapitating hook' on display.

SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE

An authentic 1997 rebuild of the original London theatre where many Shakespeare plays were performed, the **Globe** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7902 1500; www.shakespeares-globe.org; 21 New Globe Walk SE1; adult/child £8.50/7; ☎ 10am-5.45pm; ☎ Mansion House/Southwark/London Bridge) has become a pilgrimage destination for fans of the Bard. Within its circular wood-framed walls, outdoor plays are performed 'in the round' from early May to early October (p173). The rest of the year, there are a colourful exhibition and popular theatre tours.

ROUTEMASTERS RULE

Decommissioned after more than 50 years of public service, London's charming red double-decker Routemaster buses have begun a new lease of life travelling on two heritage routes. Bus 9 trundles from the Royal Albert Hall to Aldwych via Piccadilly Circus, while bus 15 runs from Trafalgar Square to Tower Hill via Fleet St. Standard fares apply (see p178) and they run every 15 minutes from 9.30am to 6pm.

CLINK PRISON MUSEUM

The darkened Bankside alleyways are the perfect location for the gruesome **Clink Prison Museum** (Map p160; ☎ 7403 0900; www.clink.co.uk; 1 Clink St SE1; adult/child £5/3.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun; ☎ London Bridge), which illuminates the gory history of a hellish dungeon that occupied this area from the 12th century. With its shadowy, sawdust-floored rooms populated by mannequins sporting the latest line in face sores, torture features heavily, with terrifying 'iron boots' and 'scold's bridles' on prominent display.

DESIGN MUSEUM

The **Design Museum** (Map p160; ☎ 0870 833 9955; www.designmuseum.org; 28 Shad Thames SE1; adult/child £7/free; ☎ 10am-5.45pm; ☎ London Bridge/Tower Hill) celebrates the look of leading contemporary products from shoes to motorway signage to furniture. Not surprisingly, it has an excellent shop of irresistible trinkets, and its chichi restaurant overlooking the Thames is popular with chin-stroking aesthetes and those pretending to be architects.

LONDON EYE

On a clear day, from the **London Eye** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 500 0600; www.londoneye.com; Jubilee Gardens SE1; adult/child £13/6.50; ☎ 10am-9pm Jun-Sep, 10am-8pm Oct-May; ☎ Westminster/Waterloo) you can see for 25 miles in every direction. The 32 glass-enclosed gondolas of the world's largest Ferris wheel take 30 minutes to completely rotate, so passengers (up to 25 in each capsule) really get time to take in the experience. Consider a night 'flight' for more sparkly views. It's a good idea to book tickets in advance via the website – especially in summer, when everyone wants a ride.

OTHER SIGHTS

Walk across the **Millennium Bridge** (Map pp152-3; ☎ St Paul's/Blackfriars), the 'Blade of light' footbridge over the Thames linking the Tate Modern and St Paul's Cathedral.

On the **Golden Jubilee Bridge** (Map pp152-3; ☎ Embankment/Waterloo), two hi-tech, pedestrian walkways straddle the Thames between Embankment tube station and the South Bank.

Kooky British designer Zandra Rhodes' **Fashion & Textile Museum** (Map p160; ☎ 7407 8664; 83 Bermondsey St SE1; adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-4.15pm Tue-Sat, noon-4.15pm Sun; ☎ London Bridge)

showcases fashion from 1950 to the present day.

The justly revered contemporary art space, **Hayward Gallery** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7960 4242; www.hayward.org.uk; Belvedere Rd, South Bank SE1; adult/child £8/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon & Thu-Sun, 10am-8pm Tue-Wed; ☎ Waterloo/Embankment), has been revamped with a swish new foyer and glass pavilion. The main attraction, though, is the wealth of temporary exhibitions that pass through, illuminating blockbuster as well as little-known artists and movements.

North London

FREUD MUSEUM

Celebrating the life and work of the father of psychoanalysis, the **Freud Museum** (☎ 7435 2002; www.freud.org.uk; 20 Marsefield Gardens NW3; adult/child £5/free; ☎ noon-5pm Wed-Sun; ☎ Finchley Rd) occupies the home where Sigmund Freud lived his final years. Combining glimpses into his everyday life with fascinating insights into his theories, the highlight is the ground-floor study – complete with cushion-covered analyst couch – where it's easy to imagine Freud gently questioning his patients. A series of remarkable home movies runs in an upstairs TV room.

LONDON CANAL MUSEUM

The capital's near-forgotten network of waterways is brought to life at the tranquil **London Canal Museum** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7713 0836; www.canalmuseum.org.uk; 12-13 New Wharf Rd N1; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun; ☎ King's Cross), situated alongside a Regent's Canal section jostling with brightly painted narrow boats. Along with the treasure trove of boat ephemera, scale models and a walk-in re-creation of an old barge, there's an exhibition on the 19th-century ice trade, when huge blocks were imported from Norway and transported via canal to London's iceboxes.

South London

GREENWICH

Worthy of its own maritime-themed day trip, Greenwich's highlights start with the **Cutty Sark** (☎ 8858 2698; www.cuttysark.org.uk; King William Walk SE10; adult/child £5/3.70; ☎ 10am-5pm; ☎ DLR Cutty Sark), a lovely old tea-and-wool clipper ship. It's a short walk to the complex of handsome Greenwich palaces that includes the **National Maritime Museum** (☎ 8312 6565; www.nmm.ac.uk; Park Row SE10; admission free;

☎ 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-Jun) and the baroque **Old Royal Naval College** (☎ 8269 4747; www.oldroyalnavalcollege.org; King William Walk SE10; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm). Climb the nearby hill to the **Royal Observatory** (☎ 8312 6565; www.rog.nmm.ac.uk; Greenwich Park SE10; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-Jun). A brass strip in the courtyard here marks the Prime Meridian, dividing the world into eastern and western hemispheres.

ELTHAM PALACE

London's most beautiful Art Deco home, **Eltham Palace** (☎ 8294 2548; www.elthampalace.org.uk; Court Yard SE9; adult/child £7.30/3.70; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Wed Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sun-Wed Nov-Mar), off Court Rd, is worth an afternoon of anyone's time. In the grounds of a 12th-century royal estate – the ruin-strewn gardens remain from centuries past – a large new house was built in the 1930s, reflecting the best of cutting-edge design. Concealed lighting and under-floor heating were the hot mod cons but the curved wooden walls, marble-lined dining room and glass-domed roof remain breathtaking to this day.

MUSEUM IN DOCKLANDS

Housed in a 200-year-old brick warehouse once used to store rum and sugar, the **Museum in Docklands** (☎ 0870 444 3857; www.museum.indocklands.org.uk; West India Quay, Hertsmere Rd E14; adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm; ☎ Canary Wharf) illuminates the intriguing ebb and flow of two millennia of Thames River history. Displays include Roman figurines, along with a striking scale model of the medieval London Bridge. Save time for a scurvy stroll around Sailortown, an evocative walk-through re-creation of the area's 18th-century streets, complete with recorded sounds of drunken sailors and cackling hags.

West of London

KEW GARDENS

The verdant Royal Botanic **Kew Gardens** (☎ 8332 5655; www.rbkgew.org.uk; Richmond TW9; adult/child £10/free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Sep & Oct, 9.30am-3.45pm Nov-Jan, 9.30am-5pm Feb & Mar; ☎ Kew Gardens) covers 120 hectares and grows more species than any other in the world. A haven of tranquillity, the stunning variety of flora and the magnificent conservatories are a respite from the city streets. Following an extensive

10-year renovation, the handsome **Kew Palace** (☎ 0870 751 5179; www.hrp.org.uk; adult/child £5/3.50; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Tue-Sun), which has been home to generations of royals since 1728, reopened in 2006.

HAMPTON COURT PALACE

Britain's grandest Tudor pile, **Hampton Court Palace** (☎ 0870 752 7777; www.hrp.org.uk; East Molesey, Surrey; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ☎ 10.15am-5.15pm Mon, 9.30am-5.15pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-3.45pm Nov-Mar) fuses Henry VIII's splendid Great Hall, Christopher Wren's later King's Apartments and the entertaining Tudor Kitchens, complete with animal carcasses and giant fireplaces. Costumed interpreters roam the grounds on most days, offering colourful insights into everyday life at the palace. Save time to stroll the immaculate gardens, which include the wizeden Great Vine – the oldest vine in the world – and the Privy Garden, recently restored to its early-18th-century glory. Twice-hourly trains arrive at Hampton Court station (change at Surbiton) from London Waterloo (£4.80, 30 minutes), and a boat travels here (p178).

TOURS

London is crisscrossed with great walking tours that scratch below the surface of the city's rich history.

Back Passages of Spitalfields (☎ 7729 4816; www.backpassageswalks.co.uk; adult/child £6/5; ☎ 6.30pm first 2 Sun of every month Apr-Oct) For a less-conventional approach, the tour combines comic street theatre and eye-opening stories on this infamous East End enclave.

London Walks (☎ 7624 3978; www.walks.com; adult/child £6/free) History-huggers will enjoy these strolls, which expertly cover a huge array of subjects, including Haunted London, Hidden Pubs and the Da Vinci Code.

Theatre Royal Drury Lane (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7850 8791; Catherine St; adult/child £10.50/8.50; ☎ 2.15pm & 4.45pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10.15am Sat; ☎ Covent Garden) Theatre lovers can peek behind the curtain on a colourful backstage tour, which brings to life notable characters from London theatrical lore.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

University Boat Race (www.theboatrace.org) Traditional Oxford versus Cambridge row-off in March from Putney to Mortlake along the Thames River.

London Marathon (www.london-marathon.co.uk) Held in April, this is the capital's giant annual jog-a-thon from Greenwich Park to The Mall.

Trooping the Colour (www.royal.gov.uk) The Queen's 'other birthday', celebrated with pomp, pageantry and parades at Horse Guards Pde in mid-June.

Lawn Tennis Championships (www.wimbledon.org) World's leading tennis event, held at Wimbledon from late June.

Pride Parade (www.pridelondon.org) From Oxford St, gays and lesbians paint the town pink in July.

Notting Hill Carnival (www.lnhc.org.uk) Enormous multicultural party and street parade in mid-August.

London Film Festival (www.lff.org.uk; National Film Theatre, South Bank) Showing the best of British and international arthouse films in October.

Lord Mayor's Show (www.lordmayorsshow.org; City of London) Held in November, this is a giant colourful street procession in the City.

New Year's Eve Celebration From 31 December to 1 January, countdown to midnight in Trafalgar Square.

SLEEPING

Staying in London is an expensive business, but there are ways to cut your costs without sleeping on the streets. Hostels increasingly offer private rooms and colleges offer good-value summer accommodation – contact **Venuemasters** (☎ 0114 249 3090; www.venuemasters.com), which represents many of London's universities. It's also worth trying a B&B homestay: check your options with the **London Bed & Breakfast Agency** (☎ 7586 2768; www.londonbnb.com).

In the midrange market, chain hotels like Premier Travel Inn and Holiday Inn Express offer some of London's most reliable and best-value accommodation. Contact London's official **hotel bookings service** (☎ 0845 644 3010; www.visitlondonoffers.com) for up-to-date sleeper bargains throughout the city.

West End

The centre of the action charges a premium for convenience, but it can also be a noisy place to spend the night.

BUDGET

Piccadilly Backpackers (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7434 9009; www.piccadillybackpackers.com; 12 Sherwood St W1; dm/s/tw £12/36/52; ☎; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) This giant, cheap and cheerful spot is as bright as a kindergarten art class. Along with pod-style dorm beds, high-speed Internet (per hour £1) and a travel shop for local and onward vacation planning, there's a rowdy on-site bar. This is a party hostel, so don't expect to get far with your copy of *War and Peace*.

Oxford St YHA (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 770 5894; oxfordst@yha.org.uk; 14 Noel St W1; dm £23.50; ☒ ☑); ☉ Oxford Circus) The most central of London's YHA hostels is basic, clean, welcoming and loud. All the dorms are small – there's a maximum of four beds per room – and there's a TV lounge and large kitchen. It's a great location for nearby pubs, clubs and theatres.

MIDRANGE

Travelodge (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 850 950; www.travelodge.co.uk; 10 Drury Lane WC2; r from £49; ☉ Covent Garden/Holborn) On the northern fringes of Covent Garden, price is the main selling point at this functional chain hotel. The rooms are clean but institutional – perfect if you're planning to be out all day and just need a well-located place to crash.

Regent Palace Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 400 8703; www.regentpalacehotel.co.uk; Glasshouse St W1; s/d/tr from £64/89/99; ☒ ☑); ☉ Piccadilly Circus) Particularly convenient for shops, pubs and restaurants, this central hotel has 888 rooms. Less than half are en suite – the shower complexes on each floor are reminiscent of a hostel – and most have standard facilities and humdrum furnishings. The proximity to major sights is hard to beat, though.

TOP END

Hazlitt's (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7434 1771; www.hazlittshotel.com; 6 Frith St W1; s/d/ste from £175/255/300; ☒ ☑); ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Named after essayist William Hazlitt, there is a strong tradition of famous writers staying at this wonky-walled rustic charmer. Filled with antique furniture, it has all the modern flourishes of a chic boutique property – including triple-glazed windows to keep out the sounds of the passing Soho rabble.

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

A quieter, more residential area than the rabble-raising West End, prices are usually more reasonable here.

BUDGET

Generator (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7388 7666; www.generatorhostels.com; Compton Pl WC1; dm/s/tw from £12.50/35/46; ☒ ☑); ☉ Russell Square) Don't be fooled by the industrial, factory-floor interiors here: this hostel, off 37 Tavistock Pl, is not about work but about serious hedonism. There are nearly 900 beds, an on-site travel agency and an

Internet suite, but it's the late-opening bar that sees the most action. There's no kitchen, so you'll have to have beer for breakfast.

Indian Student YMCA (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7387 0411; www.indianymca.org; 41 Fitzroy Sq W1; dm/s/d £22/35/50; ☒ ☑); ☉ Warren St) For all nationalities and not just students, this good-value YMCA has clean, good-sized rooms, laundry facilities and an excellent gym. Prices include breakfast and a tasty curry dinner, and there are attractive discounts for longer stays.

MIDRANGE

St Margaret's Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7636 4277; www.stmargaretsotel.co.uk; 26 Bedford Pl WC1; s/d from £55/82; ☒ ☑); ☉ Russell Square/Holborn) This smashing family-run town house hotel is among the most homey sleepovers in central London. The rooms are simply furnished but comfortable, and the bathrooms – mostly shared – are spotless. Ask for a back room if you're craving tranquillity and you'll be overlooking a small garden.

Arran House Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7636 2186; www.arranhotel-london.com; 77-79 Gower St WC1; dm/s/d from £18.50/55/72; ☑); ☉ Goodge St) This good-value, hotel has dorm and private accommodation, and is a short walk from the British Museum. The cosy double rooms have Art Deco fireplaces and the rose garden is a pleasant summer bonus. Free wi-fi.

Also recommended:

Hotel Cavendish (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7636 9079; www.hotelcavendish.com; 75 Gower St WC1; s/d/tr £75/90/130; ☒ ☑); ☉ Goodge St) Simple B&B hotel with some heritage flourishes.

TOP END

Charlotte St Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7806 2000; www.firmdale.com; 15-17 Charlotte St W1; s/d/ste from £195/230/340; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☑); ☉ Goodge St) This superior property combines traditional furnishings with contemporary art flourishes but doesn't sacrifice service for looks. Popular with visiting media types, its sumptuous rooms and suites include granite and oak bathrooms with TVs. The chichi bar has a colourful Alexander Hollweg wall mural.

Westminster, Pimlico & Victoria

Not the most attractive part of London, Victoria's budget hotels are better value than those in Earl's Court. Pimlico is more residential but convenient for the Tate Britain area.

BUDGET

Victoria Hostel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7834 3077; www.astorhostels.com; 71 Belgrave Rd SW1; dm £15-18, d & tw £50; ☑); ☉ Pimlico) This warm and welcoming backpacker joint has 200 beds in mostly mid-sized dorms. Facilities include two kitchens and a TV lounge with DVDs. Thursday nights are reserved for group dinners, and rates include continental breakfast. Beware the hostel guitar and take down anyone who looks ready to play it.

Wigram House (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7834 1169; www.wmin.ac.uk/comserv; 84-99 Ashley Gardens SW1; s/tw £35/56; ☉ Victoria) One of seven University of Westminster student residences available from June to September, this six-storey Victorian mansion has basic study rooms (all with sinks), shared bathrooms, large kitchens and laundry facilities. Located in a quiet residential area near St James's Park.

MIDRANGE

Luna & Simone Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7834 5897; www.lunasinonehotel.com; 47-49 Belgrave Rd SW1; s/d/tr from £35/65/90; ☒ ☑); ☉ Victoria) In a street crowded with B&Bs of widely varying quality, this is a shining example of a basic good-value option. The bright, spotless rooms have satellite TV and most are en suite (love those power showers). Wi-fi is available on the ground and 1st floors.

James House & Cartref House (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7730 7338/7730 6176; www.jamesandcartref.co.uk; 108 & 129 Ebury St SW1; s/d/tr from £52/70/95; ☒ ☑); ☉ Victoria) The best in the area for the budget, these two handsome town house B&Bs face each other across the street. Run by a friendly couple with a good knowledge of the area, the rooms (some with shared bathrooms) are clean and bright, and the cooked breakfast is hearty enough to keep you going until the afternoon.

Also recommended:

Victor Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7592 9853; www.victorhotel.co.uk; 51 Belgrave Rd SW1; s/d £50/60; ☉ Victoria) Standard town house B&B (continental breakfast only), with easy access to major attractions.

Windermere Hotel (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7834 5163; www.windermere-hotel.co.uk; 142-144 Warwick Way SW1; s/d from £89/114; ☒ ☑); ☉ Victoria) Elegant 22-room character B&B with free high-speed Internet.

TOP END

City Inn (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7630 1000; www.cityinn.com/london; 30 John Islip St SW1; r from £264; ☐); ☉ Pimlico)

One of the largest hotels built in London for decades when it opened in 2003, the clean, contemporary lines of this top-end sleeper mirror London's recent style renaissance. Flat-screen TVs, DVD players and minimalist furnishings fill the rooms – some of which have floor-to-ceiling windows – and the on-site Millbank Lounge is *the* place to watch the local pseudos unwind.

Kensington & Earl's Court

Close to Hyde Park, major museums and a busy shop-lined High St, Kensington is a good base with a wide range of accommodation options. Adjacent Earl's Court mines the budget end of the spectrum, but the quality here can vary enormously.

BUDGET

Earl's Court YHA (Map pp156-7; ☎ 0870 770 5804; earls court@yha.org.uk; 38 Bolton Gardens SW5; dm £19.50; ☒ ☑); ☉ Earl's Court) Situated in a large, recently refurbished Victorian town house, this immaculate and spacious hostel has mainly four-bed dorms and very helpful staff. There is a well-equipped self-catering kitchen and a large lounge with satellite TV. Bike hire is available (per day £9.50).

easyHotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7216 1717; www.easyhotel.com; 14 Lexham Gardens W8; r from £30; ☒ ☑); ☉ Earl's Court/Gloucester Rd) The first of a planned chain of orange-hued no-frills properties, the rooms here are 'small', 'very small' or 'tiny' and most are windowless. Each has a double bed, aeroplane-style cubicle bathroom and wall-mounted TV (£5 extra). On the plus side, it's clean, well located and, if you book far enough ahead, an exceptional deal.

MIDRANGE

Swiss House Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7373 2769; www.swiss-hh.demon.co.uk; 171 Old Brompton Rd SW5; B&B s/d/tw/tr from £58/95/95/135; ☉ Gloucester Rd) Graceful, relaxed and uncluttered, this family-friendly guesthouse is a breath of fresh air on a street of otherwise dull options. Its large, light-filled rooms have laminated floors and a simple, contemporary décor, and the hosts are happy to point you in the direction of the attractions you want to visit.

Mayflower Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7370 0991; mayflowerhotel.co.uk; 26-28 Trebovir Rd SW5; s/d/tr from £65/85/105; ☑); ☉ Earl's Court) Yet another white-stucco, former town house hotel, the Mayflower distinguishes itself by offering

rooms with a refreshing Indonesian theme, including lovely teak furnishings and colourful fabric flourishes. The bathrooms, with floor-to-ceiling tiles, are equally impressive. There's a juice bar in the lobby, and the continental breakfast includes cheese, waffles and fresh fruit.

Also recommended:

Merlyn Court Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7370 1640; www.merlyncourthotel.com; 2 Barkston Gardens SW5; B&B s/d/tr/q from £38/55/65/70, with shared bathroom from £30/45/60/65; ☒; ☎ Earl's Court) Lovely family-run B&B with rooms for up to four people.

Hotel 167 (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7373 3221; www.hotel167.com; 167 Old Brompton Rd SW5; s/d from £79/99; ☎ Gloucester Rd/South Kensington) Colourful B&B with plenty of quirky character.

TOP END

Number Sixteen (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7589 5232; www.numbersexteenhotel.co.uk; 16 Sumner Pl SW7; s/d from £95/170; ☒ ☑; ☎ South Kensington) This luxury boutique hotel, with tranquil interiors and choice art throughout, is a tasteful respite from the bustling city streets. Each high-ceilinged room has a calming, individually designed colour scheme and some overlook the private gardens at the back. The idyllic conservatory and sumptuous drawing room compete for attention.

Bayswater, Paddington & Notting Hill

This area has a good selection of inexpensive accommodation, with some funky options at the higher price range around Notting Hill.

BUDGET

Wake Up! London (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7262 4471; www.wakeuplondon.co.uk; 1 Queen's Gardens W2; dm/s/d/tw from £11/18/30/35; ☒ ☑; ☎ Paddington) The spartan mid-sized dorms at this colourful Australian-owned hostel are complemented by a plethora of facilities that include laundry facilities, Internet access, a well-stocked kitchen and an on-site travel agency. The subterranean bar specialises in getting you as drunk as possible for the least amount of money.

Leinster Inn (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7229 9641; www.astorhostels.com; 7-12 Leinster Sq W2; dm/s/d from £14/26.50/41; ☒ ☑; ☎ Bayswater) In a large, old house northwest of Bayswater tube station and close to Portobello Rd Market, this friendly, well-established hostel has an Internet café, late-opening bar and regular themed party nights. Prices include continental breakfast.

MIDRANGE

St David's Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7723 3856; www.stdavidshotels.com; 16-20 Norfolk Sq W2; s/d/tr from £35/59/80; ☎ Paddington) A warm welcome makes this 19th-century hotel property one of the best on the block. Rooms have satellite TV and are clean and comfortable, with calming creamy colours and dark wood furniture.

Vancouver Studios (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7243 1270; www.vancouverstudios.co.uk; 30 Prince's Sq W2; s/d/tw £75/99/110; ☒; ☎ Paddington) Don't be fooled by its typical Victorian exterior: Vancouver Studios is a cut above everything else on the street. All rooms have kitchenettes (so you can save a bundle on eating) and the house cat (ambitiously named Panther) will likely follow you to the ivy-covered garden for a chat. Rooms are a kaleidoscope of different styles but all are beautifully maintained and feature large shower rooms.

Also recommended:

Glendale Hyde Park Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7706 4441; www.gphotel.com; 8 Devonshire Tce W2; s/d/tw/tr from £45/55/55/60; ☒ ☑; ☎ Paddington) Comfortable, pastel-coloured guesthouse B&B.

Pavilion Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7262 0905; www.pavilionhoteluk.com; 34-36 Sussex Gardens W2; s £60-85, d/tr £100/120; ☎ Paddington) Funky, trinket-packed art hotel with theme rooms ranging from 'Casablanca Nights' to 'Honky Tonk Afro'.

TOP END

Portobello Hotel (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7727 2777; www.portobello-hotel.co.uk; 22 Stanley Gardens W11; s/d/tw from £135/180/200; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) From the Sex Pistols to Kate Moss, this exclusive Notting Hill sleeper has been a firm favourite of discerning stars for years. Its public spaces are bright and theatrical but the rooms are tastefully decorated with high ceilings, colourful fabrics and unforgettable beds, some of them four-poster. There's a 24-hour bar and restaurant and free Internet access – but if you can afford to stay here, that's probably not an issue.

EATING

It's hard *not* to find somewhere to eat in London. All-you-can-eat pizza bars abound, pubs serve heaping grub by the tonne and street markets dish up home-cooked nosh for the price of a Starbucks latte. But quality varies enormously and it's easy to drop £20 on a meal and walk away feeling dissatisfied. Pick up *Time Out* or visit the restaurant

review website of the **Evening Standard** (www.esrestaurants.co.uk) for news on the latest foodie hotspots. The following reviews are grouped by district and price category.

West End

Soho is one of London's gastronomic centres, with plenty of worthy choices along Old Compton and Dean Sts. Chinatown offers plenty of set-menu bargains here, while a 10-minute stroll to Covent Garden delivers options for trendy vegetarian scoffers.

BUDGET

Café de Hong Kong (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7534 9898; 47-49 Charing Cross Rd WC2; lunch combo £5.80; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☎ Leicester Square) This clamorous Chinese cafeteria is full every lunch time with noisy Asian students comparing mobile-phone images and sipping bubble tea. The fast-food approach delivers great value, though, with dozens of rice or noodle combos for under £6.

Food for Thought (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7836 9072; 31 Neal St WC2; mains £4-8; ☒ 9.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; ☒; ☎ Covent Garden) Crammed among Neal St's trendy boutiques, this tiny vegetarian nook is good value. Its ever-changing menu of hearty dishes includes excellent stir-fries and substantial salads plus the kind of cakes your granny would make, if she was into GM-free cooking.

Also recommended:

Café in the Crypt (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7839 4342; St Martin-in-the-Fields, Duncannon St WC2; mains £4-9; ☒ 8am-8pm Mon-Wed, 8am-10.30pm Thu-Sat, noon-8pm Sun; ☎ Charing Cross) Under the shadowy church arches, this is a great spot for coffee and a cake.

Chuen Cheng Ku (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7437 1398; 17 Wardour St W1; combo lunch £8.80; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☎ Leicester Square) Arrive early at this giant Cantonese restaurant: it's hugely popular.

MIDRANGE

Masala Zone (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7287 9966; 9 Marshall St W1; mains £6-12; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☒; ☎ Oxford Circus) The industrial, canteen-like design, juxtaposed against terracotta walls and Indian artworks, fits perfectly with the modern approach to Indian cuisine here. Dishes range from street hawker snacks to noodle bowls and curries, but there are some good-value combos that allow you to flex your taste buds without exhausting your cash.

World Food Café (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7379 0298; 1st fl, 14 Neal's Yard WC2; mains £6-12; ☒ 11.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat; ☒; ☎ Covent Garden) Accompanied by world music and colourful artwork, this friendly vegetarian eatery overlooking funky Neal's Yard offers wholesome, generously portioned dishes from several regions. There are excellent Mexican and West African meals, along with Thai curries and Turkish meze.

Satsuma (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7437 8338; 56 Wardour St W1; mains £6-12; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Don't be put off by the modern Japanese chain restaurant look of this place; the food includes excellent handmade sushi and more good-value combo options than you can shake a stick at. The fresh tempura plates are recommended, as well as the takeout bento boxes – a perfect picnic lunch.

Also recommended:

India Club (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7836 0650; 2nd fl, Strand Continental Hotel, 143 Strand WC2; set meal £12; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ Temple) The food comes first at this shabby upstairs canteen, specialising in home-style Indian dishes.

Rules (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7836 5314; 35 Maiden Lane WC2; mains £18-26; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☒; ☎ Covent Garden) One of London's oldest restaurants, specialising in gamey British cuisine.

TOP END

Ivy (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7836 4751; 1 West St WC2; mains £12-25; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☎ Leicester Square) Sitting in the heart of London's theatre district, the ritzy Ivy remains a top draw for visiting glitterati, who come to relive their humble backgrounds by scoffing delightfully gourmet versions of traditional British dishes, like kedgeree and shepherd's pie. You'll have to book far in advance here, preferably before your birth.

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

Prices are generally lower in this area, but there are some expensive chichi pockets lurking around many corners.

BUDGET

Carluccio's Caffè (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7636 2228; 8 Market Pl W1; mains £6-12; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☎ Oxford Circus) Among the family-owned Italian restaurants in the backstreets behind Oxford St, this lunch-time shopping pit stop serves satisfying pasta and risotto dishes. The good-value menu includes daily-changing

specials and the hearty desserts are prepared with care. Sit outside in summer to watch the locals rush by.

MIDRANGE

Busaba Eathai (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7299 7900; 22 Store St W1; mains £5-11; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☒; ☎ Goodge St) A happening Thai eatery with the communal bench seating arrangements favoured by many of London's new wave Asian restaurants. But the aesthetics are only part of the equation here. Generous, innovative dishes, like butternut pumpkin curry and prawns pomelo on betel leaves, bring the office workers back for more.

Rasa Samudra (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7637 0222; 5 Charlotte St W1; mains £6-12; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎ Goodge St) Ignore the neon-pink exterior of this lip-smacking South Indian restaurant and head straight for the Kerala fish and shellfish menu. There are plenty of well-priced mains, but if you can stretch to £30, indulge in the Seafood Feast, a banquet of entrées, curries and desserts that covers the kitchen's main highlights, including the excellent crab curry. A Vegetarian Feast is also available.

TOP END

Hakkasan (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7907 1888; 8 Hanway Pl W1; mains £6-35; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) You don't have to spend much to eat here but it helps. The first Chinese restaurant in London to receive a Michelin star, this sleek, sophisticated haunt serves exquisite reinventions of traditional dishes in its haughty dining room. If you would rather soak up the atmosphere without making your credit card sweat, drop by for lunch or just linger at the cocktail bar.

Westminster, Pimlico & Victoria

Not exactly a smorgasbord of great dine-out options – the pubs are a popular alternative here – there are a few midrange restaurants worth pulling up a chair at in this area.

Footstool (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7222 2779; St John's, Smith Sq SW1; mains £8-18; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri; ☎ Westminster) Set in an atmospheric brick-vaulted church crypt, the buffet lunch is deservedly popular and focuses on traditional British and Mediterranean fare. Check out the shady character in the corner – he's probably an MP from the nearby House of Commons. Dinner is also served when there are concerts

in the upstairs church, usually several times per week; call for evening opening hours.

Cinnamon Club (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7222 2555; 30 Great Smith St SW1; mains £11-29; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ St James's Park) Britain's love affair with Indian cuisine is nowhere more apparent than at this sumptuous restaurant, housed in a restored Victorian library. Classic regional dishes receive a pioneering contemporary twist, while a new Indian breakfast menu attracts the adventurous.

Also recommended:

Kazan (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7233 7100; 93 Wilton Rd SW1; mains £8-14; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☎ Victoria) Minimalist Turkish restaurant with authentic cuisine.

Ebury Wine Bar (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7730 5447; 139 Ebury St W1; mains £10-20; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☒; ☎ Victoria) Unpretentious spot serving traditional Brit nosh-like beef and ale sausages.

Kensington, Knightsbridge & Earl's Court

From finger-licking cheap eats to credit card-busting Michelin stars, this area caters well to most budgets.

BUDGET

Troubadour (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7341 6333; 265 Old Brompton Rd SW5; mains £6-13; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎ West Brompton/Earl's Court) This wood-floored bohemian hang-out is exactly what a great café should be: tons of trinkety character, servers who encourage you to linger and a menu focused on comfort food. A great place for breakfast – it serves boiled eggs with soldiers – the menu classics include Cajun chicken and bangers and mash, with an emphasis on organic ingredients.

MIDRANGE

Lundum's (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7373 7774; 117 Old Brompton Rd SW7; mains £4.50-14; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun; ☎ Gloucester Rd/South Kensington) Set in a beautiful Edwardian building with bright and airy interiors, this Danish eatery serves authentic Scandinavian dishes like hearty pork meatballs and succulent grilled salmon. The lunch special – two courses for £13.50 – is a good deal, allowing you to dip into marinated herrings without gagging at the price.

Nobu (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7447 4747; Metropolitan Hotel, 19 Old Park Lane W1; mains £6-28; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎ Hyde Park Corner) Overlooking Hyde Park, this strong contender for London's best Japanese restaurant has a

comfortably minimalist décor, anonymously efficient service, and is out of this world when it comes to exquisitely prepared and presented sushi and sashimi. The bento boxes include a chocolate version.

L'etranger (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7584 1118; 36 Gloucester Rd SW7; mains £15-26; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☎ Gloucester Rd) This elegant contemporary restaurant focuses on French cuisine with an Indo-chinese twist. The service can be a bit snooty but the food is usually worth the hassle: the caramelised black cod is excellent and the wine list has some great tipples from around the world – there's a wine shop next door if you fancy a takeout.

TOP END

Boxwood Café (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7235 1010; Wilton Pl SW1; mains £10-26; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☒; ☎ Hyde Park Corner) The stylish interiors of this Gordon Ramsay restaurant belie a surprisingly comfortable eatery with an excellent menu of contemporary British dishes. The seasonal offerings focus on simple preparations that reveal naturally complex flavours, hence dishes like steamed wild sea bass and fried oysters with fennel and lemon. A nonsnooty way to enjoy a top-class meal in haughty Knightsbridge.

Notting Hill

Increasingly a London food-lovers paradise, Notting Hill combines cheap ethnic takeaways, quirky cafés and some seriously trendy restaurants.

BUDGET

Sausage & Mash Café (Map pp156-7; ☎ 8968 8898; 268 Portobello Rd W10; mains £6-8; ☺ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, 9am-11.30pm Fri & Sat, 9am-10pm Sun; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) Wittily known as the S&M café, this place does an upmarket version of the rib-sticking English favourite. There are 20 sausage varieties to choose from (including vegetarian options), with wild boar and mushroom and tarragon recommended. The excellent puddings include treacle tart and cherry trifle.

Café Grove (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7243 1094; 253a Portobello Rd W11; mains £5-9.50; ☺ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri, 10am-6pm Sun; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) This no-frills neighbourhood eatery has been attracting the locals for decades. They come for all-day breakfasts (the eggs Benedict are worth dropping in for), as well as heaping pasta dishes, large salads and jaw-stretching

sandwiches. There's a large terrace overlooking the nearby market.

MIDRANGE

Geales (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7727 7528; 2 Farmer St W8; mains £10; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) Decked out in maritime blue and white, Geales is as close to the seaside as many Notting Hill locals ever get. A cut above the area's greasy chip shops, its chefs know exactly how to prepare the best seasonal catches. If you must fry fish and chips in London, this is *the* place to do it. Grab one of the tables outside in summer for a bonus tan at no extra cost.

Food at The Muse (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7792 1111; 269 Portobello Rd W11; mains £8-14; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Sun & Mon; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) Part of the Muse Gallery, this sleek, modern restaurant focuses on contemporary European cuisine. Its dishes are eclectic and adventurous, with the hot and sour green mango salad with roast peanuts particularly recommended. Although its stark white interiors make it look a little cold, there's a comfortable, laid-back vibe.

E&O (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7229 5454; 14 Blenheim Cres W11; mains £6-22; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☎ Notting Hill Gate/Ladbroke Grove) Its long name is 'Eastern & Oriental' but the trendy E&O has moved way beyond most fusion restaurants with dishes that defy categorisation. Come for a culinary adventure and you'll find yourself mixing Japanese, Chinese and West Coast-influenced courses. Book ahead: it's always popular.

South Bank & Bankside

Reflecting this area's growing gentrification, there are some good midrange 'gastropubs' and a few swanky new restaurants.

Anchor & Hope (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7928 9898; 36 The Cut SE1; mains £11-16; ☺ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ Southwark/Waterloo) One of London's most-celebrated gastropubs, the mainly British fare includes delicacies like pigeon and pig's heart. It's not all offal, though, with Lancashire hot pot and steak and ale pie catering to more conventional tastes. It also roasts a vegetarian every Sunday – just kidding.

fish! (Map p160; ☎ 7407 3803; Cathedral St SE1; mains £11-17; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☎ London Bridge) Situated in an incongruous glass pavilion overlooking Borough Market, this contemporary brasserie specialises in fresh, sustainably

sourced fish dishes. Among the exquisitely prepared, seasonal offerings, the seared scallops with roast tomatoes is recommended, while a side order of Thai crab cakes is a good idea.

Oxo Tower Restaurant & Brasserie (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7803 3888; 8th fl, Barge House St SE1; mains £11-26; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; 🚶 Blackfriars/Waterloo) For a splurge with a view, it's hard to beat these twin Thameside restaurants located in one of London's leading Art Deco landmarks. The restaurant is on the pricey side, so head to the brasserie: the views are the same and the menu features plenty of tempting French-themed treats.

DRINKING

Booze has flown through London like a second Thames River since the wine-quaffing Romans set up shop here almost 2000 years ago. But while the capital has more old-school pubs than you can shake a yard of ale at, a new breed of lounge-style bars has also slid onto the scene in recent years. The following are some of our favourite London drinking holes.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7353 6170; 145 Fleet St EC4; 🚶 Blackfriars) One of the granddaddies of London pubs, this 17th-century multiroomed maze is stacked over several levels. Head downstairs to find a brick-lined vault fringed with stone arches and dimly lit corners – it's the kind of place villains from Dickens might have come to plan their nefarious shenanigans. There's also a great selection of Samuel Smith ales.

Market Porter (Map p160; ☎ 7407 2495; 9 Stoney St SE1; 🚶 London Bridge) Nestled in the backstreets near Borough Market, the exterior of this real-ale pioneer is decked with flowers in spring and summer. A little less fragrant inside, its hardwood floors and upturned barrel tables are the perfect setting for a pint of Otter Bitter or the splendidly named Slater's Top Totty.

Bradley's Spanish Bar (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7636 0359; 44 Hanway St W1; 🚶 Tottenham Court Rd) Shabby, small and charming, this roguish bohemian haunt can still pack in the alternative types on most nights. Head downstairs for dimly lit alcoves, red velvet seats and a diverse selection of draught European beers or just plug some money into the jukebox. It's stocked with classics by Nirvana, Pearl Jam et al.

Queen's Larder (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7837 5627; 1 Queen Sq WC1; 🚶 Russell Square) Used by Queen Charlotte to store delicacies for George III, this old pub has been whitewashed of much of its colourful history. It's still a tranquil retreat from the London hubbub, though – especially in summer, when you can sit outside in the lovely square.

Lamb & Flag (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7497 9504; 33 Rose St WC2; 🚶 Covent Garden) Tucked in the narrow backstreets of Covent Garden, this old charmer has hardly changed in decades. The wood floors are still painted black, the tables are chipped and wobbly, and the shadowy backroom still contains an open fireplace. For those who like to eat with their beer, it also offers a celebrated gourmet cheese selection.

Anchor Bankside (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7407 1577; 34 Park St SE1; 🚶 London Bridge) With a large patio on the edge of the Thames, this is the perfect spot to watch the pleasure boats slide by. On rainy days the main pub building – a handsome brick and timber construction, garnished with red window frames and bright blue shutters – is a cosy gem, with an array of Shakespearean ephemera indicating the area's link to the Bard.

Loungelover (Map p160; ☎ 7012 1234; 1 Whitby St E1; 🚶 Shoreditch) With its menagerie of interior quirks – think stuffed hippo's heads and Victorian chandeliers – this eccentric drinking hole has been popular with hipsters since it opened. Despite the determinedly wacky aesthetics, it's still cosy and has a kick-ass selection of cocktails. There's also live music on Friday nights.

Seven Stars (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7242 8521; 53-54 Carey St W12; 🚶 Holborn) There's not much elbow room at this eccentric sliver of a pub that combines the history of several centuries with movie-buff wall displays and some serious gastropub dining. Built in the early 1600s, it has a continental ambience, a surprisingly good wine list and a roster of sturdy high-end scotches.

George Inn (Map p160; ☎ 7407 2056; Talbot Yard, 77 Borough High St SE1; 🚶 London Bridge) Dating from 1676, London's last surviving galleried coaching inn, with its low ceilings and dark-panelled rooms, is mentioned in Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. Now owned by the National Trust, it has become something of a history theme pub – which explains the coach parties that roll up in summer.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lamb (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7405 0713; 94 Lamb's Conduit St WC1; 🚶 Russell Square) Residing on the strangely named Lambs Conduit St, this classic old-school boozier is like walking into a Victorian pub museum. A heritage award winner, the Lamb celebrates several bar-room features that were once standard across the land. High-backed banquettes are finished in green leather, small tables are topped with brass rails to keep pints from toppling and the polished, U-shaped counter is topped with dozens of etched glass 'snob screens' located at eye level. These small revolving panels were designed to close so that drinkers could conceal their identity while drinking at the bar. While the screens are rarely used today, the Lamb is a warm and welcoming spot and a good bar to sample distinctive tipples, including the honey-sweet Waggle Dance, the fruity St George's Ale and the surprisingly light Triple A – a good beer for first-time bitter drinkers.

ENTERTAINMENT

By day and night London hosts a lively, vibrant mix of welcome distractions. It's a world leader in live theatre, a catalyst for new music and a hub of great clubs. Following are some of the city's recommended entertainment highlights.

Theatre

While juggernaut musicals that never seem to end and vanity projects starring Hollywood glitterati like Nicole Kidman draw the headlines, London's theatreland is far more diverse than it's often given credit for. A glimpse at the depth of what's on offer in the West End and beyond is available at the **Official London Theatre website** (www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk), which provides comprehensive listings and regular discounts.

There are many hole-in-the-wall businesses advertising cheap tickets but Leicester Sq's **tkts** (Map pp152-3; www.tkts.co.uk; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun; 🚶 Leicester Square) is the only one that's consistently reputable. Arrive in the morning to see what's on offer for the day (booking fee £2.50). If you're in town during the low season – mid-January to mid-March – dozens of theatres take part in **Get Into London Theatre** (☎ 0870 040 0039; www.getintolondontheatre.com), a discount promotion with tickets for top shows running from £15 to £30.

Royal National Theatre (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7452 3000; www.nt-online.org; South Bank SE1; tickets £7-35; 🚶 Waterloo) Running its own discount promotion in summer, with tickets selling for £10 during the annual Traveler promotion, the National is Britain's flagship repertory. Located on the South Bank, this three-stage theatre combines innovative new plays and sparkling revivals of important dramas.

Shakespeare's Globe (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7401 9919; www.shakespeares-globe.org; 21 New Globe Walk SE1; 🕒 May-Oct; 🚶 Mansion House/Southwark/London Bridge) Fans of the bearded Bard will love taking in a performance at the Globe, a near-perfect replica of the building where his plays were staged from 1598 to 1611. This is alfresco theatre-in-the-round, so make sure you bring something warm to wear on cooler evenings. Tours and exhibitions are also offered (p163).

Old Vic (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 060 6628; www.oldvictheatre.com; Waterloo Rd SE1; 🚶 Waterloo) London theatre buffs are enjoying watching the controversial 10-year tenure of Hollywood hot shot Kevin Spacey at this venerable playhouse, which was on its last legs until the late 1990s. Its famous white knight has not been given an easy ride, though: several shows have been panned and its future is far from assured.

Live Music

London's live rock, pop, indie and classical music scenes hit the stage at dozens of venues around the city. Pick up a copy of *Time Out*, which lists hundreds of gigs every week. The following are among the notable venues:

Brixton Academy (☎ 7771 3000; www.brixton-academy.co.uk; 211 Stockwell Rd SW9; 🚶 Brixton) Top venue for hot bands.

Shepherd's Bush Empire (☎ 8534 3300; www.shepherds-bush-empire.co.uk; Shepherds Bush Green W12; 🚶 Shepherd's Bush) Leading larger rock and pop venue.

12 Bar Club (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7916 6989; www.12barclub.com; Denmark St WC2; 🚶 Tottenham Court Rd) Intimate, with an emphasis on singer-songwriters.

Borderline (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7734 5547; www.meanfiddler.com; Orange Yard, Manette St WC2; 🚶 Tottenham Court Rd) Subterranean space with rock edge.

Garage (☎ 8963 0940; www.meanfiddler.com; 20-22 Highbury Corner N5; ☎ Highbury & Islington) Focused on indie acts.

Ronnie Scott's (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7439 0747; www.ronniescotts.co.uk; 47 Frith St W1; ☎ Leicester Square) Old-school jazz favourite.

Barbican Centre (Map p160; ☎ 7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; ☎ Moorgate/Barbican) Home of the London Symphony Orchestra.

South Bank Centre (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 380 0400; www.rfh.org.uk; Belvedere Rd SE1; ☎ Waterloo) Classical venue with Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room stages.

Nightclubs

Not surprisingly, London hosts an astonishing array of clubs, from noisy warehouse-sized dance stadiums to intimate house and hip-hop fests where fans immerse themselves in the latest groove. While 'super-clubs' can charge anywhere up to £20 for entry on Friday and Saturday nights, admission on a wet Monday in January at one of the smaller joints can be free. The following is a tasting menu of what's on offer.

93 Feet East (Map p160; ☎ 7247 3293; 150 Brick Lane E1; admission free-£10; ☎ 5-11pm Mon-Thu, 5pm-1am Fri, noon-1am Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun; ☎ Liverpool St) Hosting Hoxton's finest, this excellent club has three rooms, a swish downstairs bar and an appealing outdoor courtyard for cooling off. Hip-hop, soul and house are the mainstays, but there's an eclectic mix of additional happenings to keep the smart crowd interested.

Bar Rhumba (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7287 2715; 26 Shaftesbury Ave W1; admission free-£12; ☎ 10.30pm-3am Mon & Wed, 8.30pm-3am Tue, Thu & Fri, 9pm-5am Sat, 8pm-1.30am Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) This intimate subterranean club in the heart of Soho has been packing them in for more than 10 years. The crowds come for theme nights like Barrio Latino, focusing on salsa and urban Latin beats, and Sportswear Jam, where Adidas-clad funksters party to house music.

Fabric (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7336 8898; 77a Charterhouse St EC1; admission £12-15; ☎ 9.30pm-5am Fri, 10pm-7am Sat; ☎ Farringdon) This former meat-cellar venue attracts an international crowd to its three packed dance floors, including the kidney-shaking 'Bodysonic' floor. Focuses include electro and house, but Friday night's Fabriclive event is a heart-racing mix of everything from hip-hop to drum n'bass.

Pacha London (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7834 4440; admission £15-20; Terminus Pl SW1; ☎ 10pm-4am Fri,

10pm-6am Sat; ☎ Victoria) Large, loud and mainstream, this ever-popular London nightclub combines wood panelling, upholstered booths and an amazing stained-glass ceiling. The music is pop, soul and house, and there are regular monthly theme nights.

Also recommended:

Cross (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7837 0828; 27-31 King's Cross Goods Yard; admission £12-15; ☎ 10.30pm-5am Fri & Sat, 10.30pm-4am Sun; ☎ King's Cross) House with an Ibiza flavour; located off York Way N1.

Cherry Jam (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7727 9950; 58 Porchester Rd W2; admission £5-8; ☎ 7pm-1.30am Thu-Sat; ☎ Royal Oak) Latin to deep-house, plus live bands and readings.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Soho is the heart of gay London – head for the main strip of Old Compton St where there are plenty of bars and cafés, and pick up free listings like *Boyz* and *QX*. More serious papers and magazines include *Divya* and *Gay Times*. The annual Pride Parade is in July (p165). Recommended popular pubs, bars and clubs:

Candy Bar (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7494 4041; 4 Carlisle St W1; ☎ 5-11.30pm Mon-Thu, 5pm-2am Fri & Sat, 5-11.30pm Sun; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) London's best lesbian bar.

Compton's of Soho (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7479 7961; 51-53 Old Compton St W1; ☎ Leicester Square) Popular cruising bar for the boys.

Fiction (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7749 1199; 27-31 King's Cross Goods Yard; admission £9-15; ☎ 11pm-5am Fri; ☎ King's Cross) Weekly gay night at the Cross nightclub, off York Way N1.

Ghetto (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7287 3726; 5-6 Falconberg Ct W1; admission £2-7; ☎ 10.30pm-3am Mon-Thu, 10.30pm-4am Fri, 10.30pm-5am Sat, 10pm-3am Sun; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Club for fashionable glitterati.

Heaven (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7930 2020; The Arches, Villiers St WC2; admission £1-12; ☎ 10.30pm-3am Mon & Wed, 10.30am-6pm Fri, 10pm-5am Sat; ☎ Charing Cross) Legendary London gay club.

Sport

Football is at the heart of English culture and London has 11 professional teams – more than any other city in the world. While Premiership high-flyers like **Chelsea** (☎ 7915 2951; www.chelseafc.com; Stamford Bridge Stadium, Fulham Rd SW6; admission £38-48; ☎ Fulham Broadway) and **Arsenal** (☎ 7704 4040; www.arsenal.com; Avenell Rd N5; admission £28-50; ☎ Arsenal) attract the lion's share of the crowds, it's easy (and cheaper) to catch a game at one of the smaller London clubs, like **Queen's Park Rangers**

A SPOT OF TEE-HEE

Bored with sleepy old pubs and nightclubs that won't play that obscure Kraftwerk single for you? London's booming comedy-club scene offers an alternative night out where you can rub shoulders with the locals and practise your understanding of the eclectic British sense of humour.

Some shows are staged in purpose-built clubs, while many more take place in spare pub rooms. There's always plenty of beer flowing to keep the audience well lubricated, and there are usually at least three stand-up comics ready to take the stage and launch their candid observations on an unsuspecting world – don't sit too close to the front or you'll be one of the main observations. If you think you're funnier, some venues have open-mic nights where you can tell all your best jokes in a drunken stupor.

Among the best clubs, the **Comedy Store** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 0870 060 2340; www.thecomedystore.co.uk; 1a Oxendon St SW1; admission £13-15; ☎ Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus) is the most established, while **Downstairs at the King's Head** (☎ 8340 1028; www.downstairsatthekingshead; 2 Crouch End Hill N8; admission £4-8; ☎ Finsbury Park), **Amused Moose Soho** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 8341 1341; www.amusedmoose.co.uk; 17 Greek St W1; admission £5-12; ☎ Leicester Square) and **Headliners** (☎ 8566 4067; www.headlinerscomedy.biz; The George IV, 185 Chiswick High Rd W4; admission £10; ☎ Turnham Green) are always good for a few guffaws. For information on upcoming shows, check *Time Out* or visit **Chortle** (www.chortle.co.uk).

(☎ 0870 112 1967; www.qpr.co.uk; Loftus Rd Stadium W12; admission £22-28; ☎ Shepherd's Bush).

Wembley Stadium (☎ 8795 9000; www.wembleystadium.com; Empire Way, Wembley; ☎ Wembley Stadium) This new 80,000-seat, state-of-the-art stadium in northwest London was not finished at the time of research, but will be the country's premier venue for football matches and the host stadium for the 2012 Olympic Games.

Twickenham (☎ 8892 2000; www.rfu.com; Rugby Rd, Twickenham; ☎ Hounslow East then bus 281, or rail Twickenham) The shrine of English rugby union.

Lord's (☎ 7432 1000; www.lords.org; St John's Wood Rd NW8; admission £5-50; ☎ St John's Wood) One of the city's two major cricket venues.

Brit Oval (☎ 7582 7764; www.surreyccricket.com; Kennington Oval SE11; admission £5-50; ☎ Oval) The city's other venerable cricket ground.

All England Lawn Tennis Club (☎ 8944 1066; www.wimbledon.org; Church Rd SW19; admission £15-60; ☎ Southfields) Watch tennis and eat strawberries and cream at Wimbledon's tennis club (see p165).

Walthamstow Stadium (☎ 8531 4255; www.wsgreyhound.co.uk; Chingford Rd E4; admission £1-6; ☎ Walthamstow Central, then bus 97 or 215) You can rub shoulders with the working classes on a cheap and cheerful greyhound racing night out here.

SHOPPING

Manically crowded Oxford St is lined with generic high street chains, but it's far more fun to duck down London's backstreets for

some less mainstream shopping. Among the more enjoyable shopping areas are Covent Garden's Neal's Yard for youthful shoe shops and clothing boutiques; the Charing Cross Rd area between Tottenham Court Rd and Leicester Sq for general and specialist bookshops; King's Rd for designer knick-knacks and home accessories; and Knightsbridge for credit card-breaking top-end designers. While simply wandering around these areas until you find something you like is highly recommended, the following London shops are on the top of our list.

Agent Provocateur (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7439 0229; 6 Broadwick St W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) This playful designer lingerie shop manages to produce an air of tasteful eroticism without the sleaze factor of less classy outfits. Founded by designer Vivienne Westwood's son, it has become a major success with matching outfits across the capital.

Conran Shop (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7589 7401; 81 Fulham Rd N1; ☎ Angel) Before IKEA, there was Britedesign guru Terence Conran. This eminently browsable store – one of a small chain across the capital – has lots of large furnishings that are unlikely to fit in your suitcase, but there are legions of small, must-have vases, clocks and picture frames that are hard to resist.

Harrods (Map pp156-7; ☎ 7730 1234; 87-135 Brompton Rd SW1; ☎ Oxford Circus) London's temple to indulgent shopping, this legendary megalithic department store has acres of designer goods that are outside the budgets of most London visitors. The colourful ground-floor

HOT MARKETS

Brick Lane is still the best place for a morning fried-egg sandwich, sold from a rusting roadside van held together with layers of old cooking fat. But there's much more to London's eclectic street markets than a heart attack waiting to happen. The following are five great market recommendations.

Borough Market (Map p160; 8 Southwark St SE1; ☎ noon-6pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat; 🚶 London Bridge) 'London's Larder', this original 13th-century farmers market is a smorgasbord of quality fresh food and produce. Come here hungry; you'll want to snack on treats like rustic pork pies and succulent chorizo sandwiches. If you get thirsty, grab a beer in the nearby Market Porter pub (p172).

Brick Lane Market (Map p160; Brick Lane E2; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun; 🚶 Aldgate East) This sprawling East End pearl is a real hotchpotch of fake designer T-shirts, cheap razor blades and socks that are as thin as paper. But it's just as much fun to watch as it is to buy: there are still a few old-school market hawkers here and their lively banter is always entertaining. Arrive early to avoid the bottleneck crowds.

Camden Market (Camden High St NW1; ☎ 10am-6pm; 🚶 Camden Town) A cosmopolitan grab bag of several markets lining the High St, this colourful area is great for local arts, trendy crafts and cheap souvenirs. There are some excellent outdoor food stands serving heaping ethnic dishes for just a few quid along with fun vintage clothes stalls under the railway arches.

Portobello Rd Market (Map pp156-7; Portobello Rd W10; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 8am-1pm Thu; 🚶 Notting Hill Gate/Ladbroke Grove) Like a giant open-air bric-a-brac museum, this clutch of markets specialises in browsable used goods, including vintage clothes and funky costume jewellery. Since this is chichi Notting Hill, there are also plenty of tasty takeout treats that are a cut above the burger stands of other markets.

Spitalfields Market (Map p160; Commercial St, E1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & Sun; 🚶 Liverpool St) A favourite among Londoners, there's a youthful, intelligent vibe to this lovely covered Victorian market between Brushfield and Lamb Sts. You'll find cool stuff like funky new fashions and retro furniture alongside jewellery and handmade soaps. The twice-weekly food market (Wednesday and Sunday) is a delightful feast of organic beer, piquant cheeses and chocolate croissants.

food court is worth a stroll – it has lots of cheap Harrods-label teas and biscuits you can buy as souvenirs for your poor friends back home.

Muji (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7379 0820; 135 Long Acre WC2; 🚶 Covent Garden) Homesick language students and budget-conscious young locals flock to this Japanese general store whenever they have a few pennies to spare. Despite the generally low prices, everything – from basic sweatshirts to stainless-steel business-card holders – has a minimalist flair. There are outlets throughout the city.

Paperchase (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7467 6200; 213-215 Tottenham Court Rd W1; 🚶 Goodge St) Those who drool over stationery won't want to miss this three-storey flagship store. It's bristling with clever notepads, quirky journals, slick pens and designer desk storage units.

Selfridges (☎ 7636 7700; 36-38 Great Castle St W1; 🚶 Bond St/Marble Arch) Trendier than its Harrods department-store rival, Selfridges' expansive clothing floors cover a kaleidoscope of designers from Paul Smith to Karen Mil-

len. The annual January sale is an orgy of cut-price designer wear.

Topshop (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7636 7700; 36-38 Great Castle St W1; 🚶 Oxford Circus) This giant flagship store is a bit of a revelation to those who think they know this chain from its high street locations across Britain. Funky designer copies, hipster disposable fashions and low, low prices are the reasons it's always crowded.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

As the country's major transport gateway, much of the information about arriving in London is covered in this chapter's Transport in Britain section (p277).

Air

Along with the region's much larger Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton airports, **London City Airport** (LCY; ☎ 7646 0088; www.londoncityairport.com) services an expanding roster of UK, European and international destinations. Mainly used by business travellers, it's in Docklands, 6 miles east of central London. Its

domestic routes include regular Flybe flights from Edinburgh (from £50, 1¼ hours).

Bus

Most long-distance bus services terminate at **Victoria Coach Station** (Map pp152-3; ☎ 7730 3466; 184 Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; 🚶 Victoria).

The array of National Express buses arriving here includes daily direct services from Oxford (£12, 1¼ hours), Cambridge (£10, two hours), Birmingham (from £1, three hours), Manchester (from £1, four to five hours), Cardiff (from £3, three to four hours) and Glasgow (from £5, eight to nine hours).

Megabus runs direct services to Victoria from Birmingham (from £1, three hours), Cardiff (from £1, three hours), Edinburgh (from £3, eight to nine hours), Liverpool (£3.50, five hours) and Plymouth (from £1, three hours).

Train

High-speed **Eurostar** (☎ 0870 518 6186; www.eurostar.com) trains arrive in London from Paris (from £59, three hours) and Brussels (from £59, 2½ hours) via the Channel Tunnel. There are regular direct services from Lille, Avignon and Disneyland Paris, with additional connections from across Europe. Eurostar services currently arrive at London Waterloo, but will begin arriving at a swanky new St Pancras terminal, due to open in 2007, once a high-speed rail link has been completed across the city. The new line will shave 30 minutes from travel times.

Frequent daily train routes into the city include Oxford to London Paddington (£16.50, one hour), Manchester to London Euston (from £12.50, 2½ hours), Edinburgh to London King's Cross (from £12.50, 4½ to 5½ hours), Newcastle to London King's Cross (from £10, three hours) and Cardiff to London Paddington (from £24, two hours). Megatrain discount services into the city include Salisbury to London Waterloo (from £1, 1½ hours), Portsmouth to London Waterloo (from £1, 1½ hours) and Bath to London Waterloo (from £1, 2½ hours).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airports

HEATHROW

Fifteen miles west of central London, Heathrow is accessible by main-line train, tube and bus. Arriving every 15 minutes be-

tween 5.25am and 11.55pm at London Paddington, the **Heathrow Express** (☎ 0845 600 1515; www.heathrowexpress.co.uk) is the fastest transit option (£14.50, 20 minutes). The Piccadilly Line underground train service also picks up at Heathrow and stops at several central London stations, including Knightsbridge, Hyde Park Corner, Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square (£6.20, one hour). The service runs every few minutes from 5.30am to 11.45pm. Frequent National Express buses from Heathrow arrive at London Victoria through the day (£10, one hour).

GATWICK

Some 30 miles south of London, Gatwick Airport is accessible by main-line train and bus services. Arriving at London Victoria every 15 or 30 minutes between 5.50am and 2.10am, the **Gatwick Express** (☎ 0845 850 1530; www.gatwickexpress.co.uk) is the most efficient option (£14, 30 minutes). Frequent National Express buses from Gatwick arrive at Victoria during the day (£6.60, one to two hours).

STANSTED

About 35 miles northeast of central London, Stansted is London's third-busiest international gateway. It's accessible by main-line train and bus. Arriving at London Liverpool St every 15 to 45 minutes between 6.15am and 1.15am, the **Stansted Express** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.standstedexpress.com) is the fastest route into London (£15, 45 minutes). Frequent direct National Express buses from Stansted arrive at London Victoria throughout the day (£10, 1½ hours).

LONDON CITY

Six miles east of central London, London City Airport is in Docklands. With the demise of its shuttle bus service, the best way to get to central London is via the Docklands Light Railway (DLR). The station is 50m from the airport terminal and services run regularly to Bank (£3, 22 minutes), Canning Town (£3, eight minutes) and Canary Wharf (£3, 14 minutes). You can link with the underground system at any of these stations.

LUTON

About 35 miles north of London, Luton is a growing London airline link for domestic

and international routes. It's accessible by main-line train and bus. Regular direct train services arrive from Luton at London King's Cross throughout the day (£11.20, one hour). Frequent National Express buses from Luton arrive at London Victoria throughout the day (£8, one to 1½ hours). **easyBus** (www.easybus.co.uk) runs a frequent daily minibus service from the airport to London's Regent's Park area (from £2, one to two hours).

Boat

New boat services are popping up all the time around London. If you have a Travelcard (see Bus & Tube, right), you'll get one-third off all fares listed here. The following options are the most useful for visitors.

Tate-to-Tate (☎ 7887 8888; www.tate.org.uk/tate-totate; ☎ 10am-5pm) ferries operate between Bankside pier at Tate Modern and the new Millbank pier at sister museum Tate Britain, stopping en route at the London Eye (one-way/day ticket £4.30/7.30).

City Cruises (☎ 7740 0400; www.citycruises.com) links Greenwich and Westminster (one-way/return £7/9), as well as Tower Pier and the London Eye (one-way/return £6/7). A popular all-day Red Rover pass is available (£9.50), and the company also offers lunch and dinner cruises.

Westminster Passenger Service Association (☎ 7930 2062; www.wpsa.co.uk; ☎ Apr-Oct) operates a regular up-river service from Westminster to Kew Gardens (one-way/return £10.50/16.50, 1½ hours) and Hampton Court (one-way/return £13.50/19.50, two hours).

Car & Motorcycle

We do not advise driving in London: traffic jams are common, parking space is at a premium and there are annoyingly dutiful traffic wardens. If you bring your car into central London from 7am to 6.30pm on a weekday, you'll need to pay a £5 per day **congestion charge** (☎ 0845 900 1234; www.cdondon.com). You know you are entering the chargeable zone when you see a large letter 'C' painted on the road.

Public Transport

For information on London's bus, underground (tube), DLR and main-line train services, contact **Transport for London** (☎ 7222 1234; www.tfl.gov.uk). Its website has a useful journey planner engine.

For the lowest fares on public transport, buy an Oyster prepaid fare card. Purchased at tube stations (£3 returnable deposit), you charge the card with cash, swipe it on buses or at tube/train station barriers and the fare is deducted from your balance. Oyster fares are lower than the regular fares charged to passengers buying single tickets.

BUS & TUBE

London's extensive bus and tube systems generally run from early morning (typically 7am for buses and 5.30am for the tube) until around midnight. The single adult fare on buses is £1.50 (£0.80 to £1 with Oyster). Depending on the length of your trip, single adult fares on the tube cost £3 to £6.20 (£1 to £5.50 with Oyster).

Travelcards allow all-day, unlimited access to bus, tube, DLR and many main-line London train services. The adult one-day Travelcard costs £4.30 to £6.20, depending on the areas you will be travelling in and the time of day you will be travelling. If you use an Oyster card for all-day travel, the card is capped so that you will never pay more than the price of a Travelcard no matter how many trips you take.

When the regular bus and tube services stop for the night, a system of night buses (prefixed with the letter 'N') rolls into action. Trafalgar Square, Tottenham Court Rd and Oxford Circus are its main terminals. They stop by request only, so make sure you have your arm outstretched when the bus turns up. These services run every 10 to 20 minutes and they accept your previous day's Travelcard up until 4.30am.

DLR & TRAIN

The monorail-like, driverless Docklands Light Railway (DLR) runs from Bank and Tower Hill underground stations to Canary Wharf, Stratford, Beckton, Greenwich and Lewisham. Fares operate the same way as on the tube and your Travelcard is valid on the DLR network. Main-line trains are the primary means of transport to much of London's suburbia. Main-line stations interchange with the tube and you can use your Travelcard for any parts of the journey within London.

Taxi

The city's famous black cabs now come in a variety of colours and can be hailed when

their 'for hire' sign is lit. They're not the cheapest way to travel and there are extra charges for more than five passengers. You can tip taxi drivers up to 10% but most people round up to the nearest pound. To book a taxi in advance, call **Dial-a-Cab** (☎ 7253 5000). It runs a 24-hour service.

Minicabs can carry up to four people and tend to be cheaper than black cabs. Be aware that there is a problem with unlicensed minicabs in London. Do not get into a minicab if you are unsure whether it is legitimate. Transport for London estimates that unlicensed minicab drivers commit 10 sexual assaults in the capital every month. Visit its website at www.tfl.gov.uk for a search engine of accredited operators. These operators include **Lady Cabs** (☎ 7272 3300), which employs women drivers and is recommended for women travelling alone, and **Green Tomato Cars** (☎ 8748 8881), which uses energy-efficient vehicles.

AROUND LONDON

When you're tired of London, you're tired of life, opined arch 18th-century Londoner Samuel Johnson. But he wasn't living in an age when a day out on the airless tube system can leave you exhausted and grouchy. Luckily, the capital is surprisingly close to some excellent day-out escapes. Excluding well-known day-trip haunts like Brighton, Oxford and Stonehenge, here are some historic gems closer to home.

Windsor & Eton

☎ 01753 / pop 31,000

One of Britain's largest and most imposing medieval palaces, **Windsor Castle** (☎ 020-7766 7304; adult/child £13.50/7.50; ☎ 9.45am-5.15pm Mar-Oct, 9.45am-4.15pm Nov-Feb) is still in use by the Queen. But that doesn't mean visitors have to content themselves with peering through the gates outside. Instead, you can enter large sections of the complex, now fully restored after the devastating 1992 fire. Highlights include Queen Mary's giant dolls' house, designed by Sir Edward Lutyens, and St George's Chapel, containing the tombs of several monarchs, including Henry VIII (interred with third wife, Jane Seymour). The surrounding Victorian town is also worth checking out, particularly for its traditional tea rooms. Make sure you put the milk in the cup before the tea or they'll know you're a tourist.

A short walk along Thames St and across the river brings you to **Eton College** (☎ 671177; www.etoncollege.com; adult/child £4/3.20; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm mid-Mar-mid-Apr, 2-4.30pm mid-April-Jun, 10.30am-4.30pm Jul-Aug, 2-4.30pm Sep), that famous public school that has educated 18 prime ministers and any number of royals. Several buildings date from when Henry VI founded the school in the mid-15th century. Entry includes a free tour and admission to the **Museum of Eton Life**, which focuses on the world of the public schoolboy past and present.

Direct trains from London Waterloo arrive at Windsor and Eaton Riverside twice hourly (£7, one hour).

Hatfield House

Home to the 7th Marquess of Salisbury, **Hatfield House** (☎ 01707-287010; www.hatfield-house.co.uk; adult/child £8.50/4; ☎ noon-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Sep) is England's most celebrated Jacobean edifice – a graceful stone and red-brick mansion teeming with period tapestries, paintings and furniture. The largest private estate in Hertfordshire, it's surrounded by 800 hectares of tranquil woodland. Its attractions include a national collection of **model soldiers** and dozens of rural trails, and it's a great place to bring a picnic and spend the day.

The entrance to the grounds is just across the street from Hatfield train station. Direct trains arrive from London King's Cross every 15 minutes (£6.80, 20 minutes).

SOUTHEAST ENGLAND

Traditionally a day-trip playground for Londoners looking to escape the capital's overcrowded streets, the southeast offers fascinating historic towns, sweeping green-belt vistas and some of the country's most vibrant seaside resorts – most less than a 60-minute train ride from the city.

With a disproportionately large swathe of the UK population living in one of the five 'Home Counties' here – these are the miserable commuters you'll see silently clutching their daily newspapers on the train ride into London – even the southeast's small towns can feel busy.

This is especially true on summer weekends, when street markets burst into life and high street shopping becomes a clamorous

contact sport. Luckily, respite is never more than a few miles away in the sleepy pub-strewn villages, handsome castle complexes and patchwork rolling hills that colour the region. For visitor information, contact **Tourism South East** (☎ 023-8062 5400; www.visit-southeastengland.com).

CANTERBURY

☎ 01227 / pop 43,552

With its jaw-dropping, multispired cathedral surrounded by cobbled medieval streets, this Unesco World Heritage city has been a popular pilgrimage site for Christians and tourists for centuries. Latter-day visitors – they just about overwhelm the area during summer – come to immerse themselves in religious and secular history, including Thomas Becket's murder and the bawdy works of Geoffrey Chaucer. But this is no mothballed outdoor museum: Canterbury is a surprisingly vibrant centre, and a good base for exploring the region's quaint villages, gentle valleys and colourful coastline.

Orientation & Information

Almost enclosed by a medieval wall and fully surrounded by a modern ring road, the historic centre of Canterbury is compact enough to explore on foot, which is just as well since many of its ancient streets are closed to cars. The bus station is within the old city walls on St George's Lane, but the two train stations – Canterbury East and Canterbury West – are a few minutes' walk from the ancient perimeter.

The **TIC** (☎ 378100; www.canterbury.co.uk; 12-13 Sun St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Dec) is opposite the cathedral. Free Internet access is available at the **library** (☎ 463608; High St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 9.30am-7pm Tue, 8.30am-7pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat).

Sights & Activities

Barely surviving major fires in 1067 and 1174, **Canterbury Cathedral** (☎ 762862; www.canterbury-cathedral.org; adult/child £6/4.50; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2.30pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sun Nov-Mar) embodies Britain's tumultuous and frequently bloody religious history. Following the 1170 martyrdom of Thomas Becket in the northwest transept, the site became Europe's top spot for pilgrims and remains the

spiritual centre of today's Church of England. It's easy to spend a couple of hours marvelling at the Early English architecture here, but it's worth taking a one-hour tour (adult/child £4/2) to hear the stories behind the stonework.

Illuminating the city's earlier history, Canterbury's **Roman Museum** (☎ 785575; Butchery Lane; adult/child £2.90/1.80; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Oct) is located underground at the level of the original settlement. A fascinating mix of excavated artefacts and clever reconstructions – check out the mosaic remains and the smells in the Roman kitchen – visitors are encouraged to handle some of the displays and use their deductive skills as archaeologists.

The gloriously cheesy **Canterbury Tales** (☎ 479227; www.canterburytales.org.uk; St Margaret's St; adult/child £7.25/5.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) is a kid-friendly 3-D evocation of scenes from Geoffrey Chaucer's ribald 17,000-line prose and verse epic. The *Knight's Tale*, *Miller's Tale* and *Wife of Bath's Tale* are among those given the moving puppet treatment, while the final display is a reconstruction of St Thomas Becket's shrine.

Those craving a tranquillity break from the hordes should consider a chauffeured **punt** (☎ 07816-760869; adult/child £7/4; ☎ 10am-dusk Easter-Oct) along the Stour River. Pick up a boat near West Gate Tower and sit back and watch the ancient city slip by. The sleepy trawl lasts around 40 minutes, and highlights include miles of tree-lined river bank and acres of grassy meadows.

Sleeping

Summer is uber-crowded in Canterbury, so booking ahead is essential.

BUDGET

YHA Hostel (☎ 462911; www.yha.org.uk; 54 New Dover Rd; dm £17.50; ☎ ☒ ☒) A splendid Victorian Gothic pile that looks as though it should be haunted, this 69-bed YHA is now open year-round. Located less than a mile from Canterbury East train station, the ambience is at this hostel is typically institutional and the facilities – including a TV lounge, games room, shop and cycle storage – are a couple of notches above basic. The leafy garden is a nice bonus and is used for barbecues in summer.

Kipps Independent Hostel (☎ 786121; www.kipps-hostel.com; 40 Nunnery Fields; dm/s/d £14/19/33; ☎ ☒ ☒) A good-value backpacker joint located a few minutes' walk from the city centre, Kipps combines the warmth of a family-run property with facilities that create a comfortable home-from-home. Internet access (per 30 minutes £1), a games room and a tuck shop are available, and there's a wide array of rooms types – dorms have a maximum of eight beds and camping spots are offered (£6.50 per person).

MIDRANGE

Cathedral Gate Hotel (☎ 464381; www.cathgate.co.uk; 36 Burgate; s £26-60, d £50-90; ☎ ☒) An amazing location, just a hop, skip and jump from the cathedral to this labyrinthine 15th-century property. The rooms offer a grab bag of historic quirks – giant interior beams and wonky floors are common – but all have fairly modern, if slightly worn furnishings. The basic budget rooms on the 3rd floor have shared facilities but are a bargain.

White House (☎ 761836; www.canterburybreaks.co.uk; 6 St Peter's Lane; s/d £50/70; ☎ ☒) Reputedly the retirement home of Queen Victoria's coachman, this lovely Regency-era town house is a five-minute walk from the cathedral. All rooms have mostly modern furnishings surrounded by pastel and flower-patterned décor – not everyone's cup of tea but certainly comfortable. A family-run property, the hosts are warm and welcoming, and they serve a hearty breakfast.

Greyfriars House (☎ 456255; www.greyfriars-house.co.uk; 6 Stour St; s £35-55, d £55-70; ☎ ☒) Once the gatehouse to a Franciscan monastery, this centrally located 12th-century guesthouse backs onto the river, enabling guests to enjoy a tranquil waterfront garden. Rooms are furnished in a modern, floral-patterned style. There's a vegetarian breakfast for noncarnivorous travellers.

Also recommended:

Tudor House (☎ 765650; 6 Best Lane; s £25-35, d £48-55; ☎ ☒)

Acacia Lodge & Tanglewood Cottage (☎ 769955; www.acacialodge.com; 39 London Rd; s £32-48, d £48-60; ☎ ☒)

TOP END

Abode Canterbury (☎ 766266; www.abodehotels.co.uk; High St; s & d from £99; ☎ ☒) The former County Hotel, this handsome timber-framed prop-

erty in the heart of the city was undergoing renovations when we visited and was due to relaunch as a chichi boutique property by the time you read this. If all goes to plan, it will be the city's most sought-after sleeper.

Eating & Drinking

The streets of Canterbury are full of coffee and sandwich shops offering cheap eats, but there's also an array of quality dining options for those with the time and money for something a little fancier. With history on its side, the number of olde-world pubs is satisfyingly large.

Café St Pierre (☎ 456791; 41 St Peter's St; baguettes £3.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5.30pm Sun) This welcoming French eatery – with popular people-watching seating out the back – has fresh-baked pastries, baguettes and quiches. It's perfect for a mid-morning snack or lunch to go as you meander towards the cathedral.

Thomas Becket (☎ 464384; 21 Best Lane; mains £5-9) Probably Canterbury's best traditional bar, this textbook English pub comes complete with a roaring fireplace and a coterie of copper pots. A good spot to hunker in a corner and work your way through the local ales.

Café des Amis du Mexique (☎ 464390; 93-95 St Dunstan's St; mains £7-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) A popular and laid-back Mexican restaurant, this spot serves superior burritos and enchiladas, along with a side dish of tequilas and Latin music. Despite the Southwestern US artwork and blue and white tiles adorning the walls, the menu also includes mashed potatoes.

Goods Shed (☎ 459153; Station Rd; mains £8.50-22; ☎ market 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, restaurant noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sun; ☎ ☒) Adjacent to Canterbury West train station, this converted Victorian warehouse is a must-visit for those craving great food. Sourcing fine seasonal ingredients from its on-site daily farmers market, the restaurant's ever-changing menu has a rustic brasserie approach.

Getting There & Away

Regular direct National Express buses arrive throughout the day from London Victoria (£11.40, two hours) and Dover (£4.30, 40 minutes). The **Stagecoach East Kent** (☎ 0870 243 3711) bus 115 service also arrives hourly (less frequently on Sunday) from Dover (£2.90, 35 minutes). Train services from London Victoria (£18.30, 90 minutes) arrive at either

Canterbury West or Canterbury East stations, while services from London Charing Cross and London Waterloo (£18.30, 90 minutes) arrive only at Canterbury West. Trains from Dover Priory (£5.20, 15 to 30 minutes) arrive at Canterbury East twice an hour.

DOVER

☎ 01305 / pop 34,087

The definition of a 'gateway town', the brightest thing about Dover is its signature white cliffs. The rest – aside from a visit-worthy medieval castle – is a grey, uninspiring, run-down melange of access routes to the ferry port.

Orientation & Information

Ferry departures are from the Eastern Docks, while Dover Priory train station is a short walk west of the city centre, just off Folkestone Rd. The bus station is more central, on Pencester Rd. The city centre TIC (☎ 205108; www.whitedcliffscountry.org.uk; Old Town Gaol, Biggin St; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun) provides accommodation, and ferry and bus booking services.

Sights & Activities

One of England's mightiest medieval fortresses, **Dover Castle** (☎ 211067; adult/child £9.50/4.80; ☎ 10am–6pm Apr–Jul & Sep, 9.30am–6.30pm Aug, 10am–5pm Oct, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri Nov–Jan, 10am–4pm Feb & Mar) occupies a spectacular hilltop promontory dripping with history. There are Roman, Saxon and Norman remains here, but it's the site's more recent past that attracts many visitors. Expanded during WWII, the castle's labyrinth of secret Napoleonic tunnels was used as an Allied command post during the evacuation of Dunkirk. Entry includes a colourful 50-minute underground tour of this fascinating complex.

Make some time to visit the **White Cliffs of Dover** (☎ 202756; Langdon Cliffs, Upper Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mar–Oct, 11am–4pm Nov–Feb) and take a windy stroll along its protected 5-mile stretch of marked coastal trail. The visitor centre introduces some of the flora and fauna to look out for while you're on this gentle hike. The cliff top is a fantastic spot to run towards your partner at full speed, but make sure you don't fall over the edge.

Sleeping

Castle St and Maison Dieu Rd are B&B hotspots but there are plenty of other options throughout the town.

Dover YHA (☎ 0870 770 5798; dover@yha.org.uk; 306 London Rd; dm £17.50; ☎ ☑) This slightly run-down Georgian town house is a 15-minute walk from the bus and train stations. Home to a wide configuration of room sizes, the most popular are its three two-bed dorms. There are no laundry facilities, but cycle storage, a games room and a café serving evening meals are useful extras. Rates include breakfast.

East Lee Guest House (☎ 210176; www.eastlee.co.uk; 108 Maison Dieu Rd; s/d from £35/52; ☎ ☑) This lovely, flower-fronted Victorian heritage house – home of local 19th-century artist William Henry East – offers a warm welcome and a selection of chintz-themed rooms. Vegetarians can enjoy a cooked breakfast but the continental – featuring fresh fruit and cheese – is also recommended (the hosts will pack it up for you if you have to leave in a rush).

Churchill Hotel (☎ 203633; www.bw-churchillhotel.co.uk; Waterfront; s/d £68/90; ☎ ☑) Set in an attractive curve of Regency town houses, some of the Churchill's rooms have great sea views. All rooms are decorated in a comfortable, if uninspired business hotel manner. There's a useful on-site gym for those who want to work up a sweat before their cross-channel ferry trip, and a buffet breakfast is available (£9) in the brasserie.

Eating & Drinking

Dover has never been a culinary hotspot but there are a couple of foodie haunts almost worth missing your ferry for.

Coastguard Pub & Restaurant (☎ 853176; The Bay, St Margaret's Bay; mains £6–18; ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) The closet pub to France in Britain, the Coastguard is a perfect summer spot to quaff a few beers while overlooking the gleaming white cliffs. Among the traditional brews, Dogbolter and Seaside are recommended. The rustic restaurant is also worth a splurge, and is renowned for its hearty seafood dishes and 30-variety cheese menu: good fuel for the 5-mile trek back to the city centre.

Cullin's Yard (☎ 211666; 11 Cambridge Rd; mains £6–20; ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) Popular with the locals, this waterfront bistro specialises in regional seafood but also serves traditional British

dishes, like beef and ale casserole, with a dash of gourmet flair. A lively, friendly place on most days, there's the added bonus of live music on most weekends.

Getting There & Away

For details of ferry services from mainland Europe, see p279.

National Express buses arrive twice hourly from London Victoria (£11.50, three hours) and also several times a day from Canterbury (£4.30, 40 minutes). Regular Stagecoach East Kent buses arrive from Brighton (£5.50, three hours) throughout the day.

Train services arrive several times an hour at Dover Priory station from London Victoria (£22, two hours) and hourly from London Charing Cross (£22, two hours).

HEVER CASTLE

Anne Boleyn's childhood home, the grounds of **Hever Castle** (☎ 01732-865224; www.hever-castle.co.uk; adult/child £9.80/5.30; ☎ ☎ noon–5pm Mar–Oct, noon–3.30pm Nov), near Edenbridge, Kent, have a moat, a 13th-century castle and a 15th-century Tudor manor house. Despite their royal provenance, the castle fell into disrepair during the 18th century only to be rescued by an extensive renovation in the early 1900s, which included 'new' Edwardian interiors. The stunning Italian Garden, complete with sculptures, secret grottoes and a forest of flowers, is at least as attractive as the buildings, while the yew and water mazes ensure families are kept well occupied. There's also a meticulous display of model houses depicting homes from 1086 to 1901.

Hourly trains arrive from London Victoria (£7.70, 50 minutes, change at East Croydon) at Hever station, a 1-mile walk from the castle.

LEEDS CASTLE

One of Britain's most-visited historic attractions, **Leeds Castle** (☎ 01622-765400; www.leeds-castle.com; adult/child £13/9; ☎ ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10am–3.30pm Nov–Mar) does not disappoint. A magnificent and romantically alluring site near Maidstone, Kent situated on two islands surrounded by formidable woodlands, the castle began life as a Norman stronghold before housing six of England's medieval queens. In private ownership until the 1970s, the castle is stuffed with

medieval furnishings, has an aviary of endangered birds and even displays an odd collection of antique dog collars. Save time for the elaborate maze – if you solve it, you're rewarded with panoramic views of the surrounding park.

National Express runs a daily direct bus to the castle from London Victoria (£18 return, 90 minutes). The coach leaves London at 9am and departs from the castle at 3.05pm. The price includes admission.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

☎ 01273 / pop 247,820

While many of England's crumbling seaside resorts are paint-peeled reminders of an era when all Brits used to vacation at local beaches, Brighton – which merged with nearby Hove in 2000 – has successfully moved on from its past of deck chairs and donkey rides. Now one of the country's hippest cities, it has a vibrant cultural scene and a youthful bohemian edge that make up for a seven-mile stretch of beach completely covered with stones. The beach has never been the main attraction, though, and today's visitors are happiest hitting the city's eccentric tangle of quirky backstreets or indulging in the biggest annual arts festival south of Hadrian's Wall.

Orientation & Information

The seafront is a 10-minute downhill stroll from the train station along Queen's Rd and West St. When you arrive at the beach, the near-derelict West Pier is to your right while the bustling Brighton Pier is to your left. Between the piers, a few streets back from the front, you'll find the Lanes and North Laine shopping areas. Hove is west of the city centre.

The TIC (☎ 292590; www.visitbrighton.com; Bartholomew Sq; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) has maps, listings magazines and an accommodation booking service. Between Hove and Brighton, **Internet Junction** (109 Western Rd; per hr £2.50; ☎ ☎ 10am–9pm Mon–Fri, 10am–8pm Sat, 11am–6pm Sun) offers Internet access with 20 computers on two floors.

Sights

Built between 1815 and 1822 for the playboy Prince Regent, the onion-domed **Royal Pavilion** (☎ 290900; www.royalpavilion.org.uk; adult/child £6.10/3.60, guided tours £1.25; ☎ ☎ 9.30am–5.45pm

Apr-Sep, 10am-5.15pm Oct-Mar, tours 11.30am & 2.30pm) is a jaw-dropping fusion of faux Asian interiors and over-the-top period furnishings. Among the gold-slathered surfaces, multichandeliered ceilings and near-obsessive displays of languid decadence, there's a comparatively discreet tearoom and a new permanent exhibition on the palace's turbulent conservation history.

Brighton's original fishing-village heart is now known as **The Lanes**, a narrow, cobblestone web of 17th-century cottages housing a cornucopia of independent shops, restaurants and pubs. Renowned for its one-of-a-kind eateries, it is more gentrified than the adjacent **North Laine** area, which has a funkier, alternative vibe. Along streets of multicoloured shops, this avant-garde area offers used record stores, vegetarian cafés and retro skater fashions to local hipster types.

Formerly named Palace Pier, the landmark **Brighton Pier** (☎ 609361; www.brightonpier.co.uk; admission free; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10am-11pm Fri-Sun) is a suitably brash reminder of England's simple, seaside-loving past. Its white-painted exterior houses noisy arcades, greasy takeout food stands, and – like a fairground on a stick – a clutch of thrill rides and traditional attractions, including a stripy helter-skelter and a cheesy ghost train. The skeletal remains of the nearby **West Pier** shimmer in the haze, but are now just a giant perching post for flocks of visiting starlings.

Festivals

For the final three weeks of every May, **Brighton Festival** (☎ 709709; www.brightonfestival.org) takes over the city with a bewildering cavalcade of more than 700 dance, music, theatre and book events. Highlights of England's largest arts festival include free performances on almost every street corner, and a weird and wacky fringe festival that mirrors the city's colourful eccentricity.

Sleeping

Traditional B&Bs line the streets radiating from Brighton Pier, but there are also some new boutique properties and a good selection of backpacker joints. Book ahead during summer and Brighton Festival season, and be aware that some local hotels have a minimum two-night stay on weekends.

BUDGET

St Christopher's Inn (☎ 020-7407 1856; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 10-12 Grand Junction Rd; dm £10-27; 🍷 📺) A great waterfront location near Brighton Pier for this bustling, party-lovers hostel. Along its brightly painted corridors, the dorms have up to 10 beds and all have en suite facilities. There's no kitchen – free continental breakfast is included – but there are good food and drinks specials at the hopping downstairs bar. Guests with extra money can upgrade to a hotel room on the property's upper floors (singles/doubles from £25).

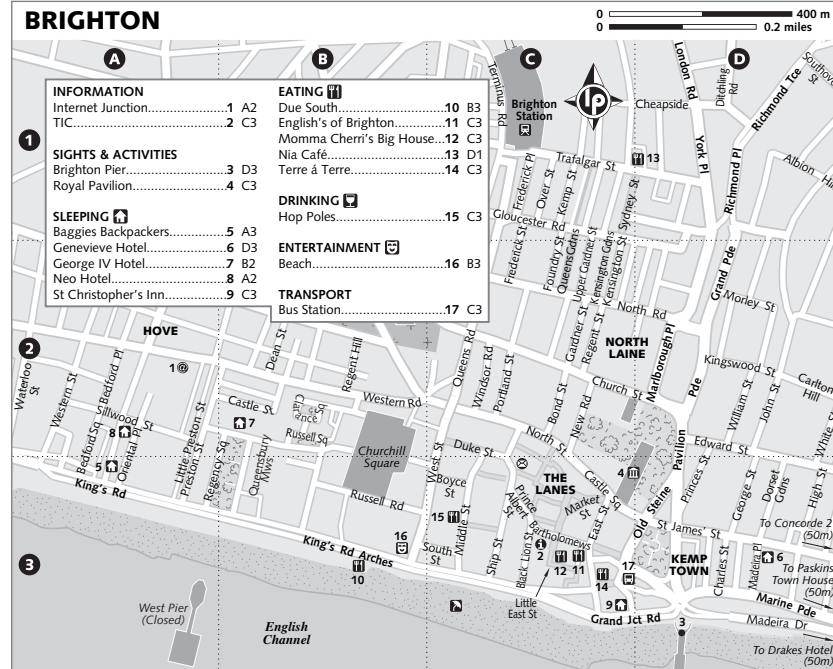
Baggies Backpackers (☎ 733740; 33 Oriental Pl; dm/d £12/30; 🍷 📺) A popular, laid-back budget option with a good vibe, Baggies has a communal feel and is close to the seafront. Attracting long-termers as well as short-stop visitors, most areas are a little worn but everything is clean and functional. Dorms are mostly small but shower rooms are shared, which may be an issue for shy travellers.

MIDRANGE

Paskins Town House (☎ 601203; www.paskins.co.uk; 18-19 Charlotte St; s & d per person from £27.50; 🍷 📺) This excellent 19-room boutique B&B occupies two Victorian town houses and has a commendable eco-friendly stance that includes properly feeding vegetarian guests; the organic traditional or veggie breakfasts (including homemade sausages) are almost worth the price of staying. Its eminently comfortable rooms are designed in Regency, pop culture or Art Deco styles, and some have four-poster beds.

Genevieve Hotel (☎ 681653; www.genevievehotel.co.uk; 18 Madeira Pl; s/d from £40/70; 🍷 📺) This clean, well-maintained heritage establishment with a friendly proprietor has a central location near Brighton Pier. The 13 rooms are fairly sparse – two have four-poster beds – but all include free wi-fi.

George IV Hotel (☎ 321196; www.georgeivhotel.co.uk; 34 Regency Sq; s £40-50, d £60-120; 🍷 📺) This recently refurbished gem combines high ceilings, elegant furnishings and a juke box in reception. The warm welcome includes a slew of borrowable DVDs and board games, and the accommodation highlight is a balcony room with a commanding view of the ghostly West Pier. There's no dining room, but basket breakfasts can be ordered for morning delivery.



Neo Hotel (☎ 711104; www.neohotel.com; 19 Oriental Pl; s/d from £45/85; 🍷 📺) At the forefront of Brighton's new wave of boutique properties, this artsy, sophisticated spot near the West Pier combines modern Asian design flourishes with cosy home comforts. The mostly en suite bathrooms feature chrome and matte black finishes, and the breakfasts here – check out the pancakes – are clearly made with love. Neo Hotel may well represent the future of the venerable British B&B.

TOP END

Drakes Hotel (☎ 696934; www.drakesofbrighton.com; 44 Marine Pde; s/d from £95/125; 🍷 📺) Sumptuous and ultra-fashionable, the 20-room Drakes has justifiably been hailed as one of Britain's top boutique hotels. While the immaculate design aesthetic is easy to achieve with enough money, it's the service element that puts this sleeper in the big league: unlike many snooty UK hotels, it manages to be both top-end and laid-back. The rooms are effortlessly swanky and most have great views over the seafront.

Eating

Unlike most British seaside resorts, Brighton has more to offer than limp fish and chips. The Lanes is a good area for adventurous foodie exploring but there are eye-opening culinary surprises in many other parts of the city, too.

Nia Café (☎ 6711371; 87 Trafalgar St; mains £6-14; 🍷 🕒 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) A smashing lunch spot for those craving more than a vacuum-packed sandwich – sesame chicken fillet is recommended – this funky spot attracts chin-stroking trendies to its school-desk interiors and popular outdoor seating area. It also makes for a good afternoon cappuccino spot but beware of the tempting cake selection.

Momma Cheri's Big House (☎ 325305; 2-3 Little East St; mains £8-11; 🍷 🕒 Lunch & dinner) Recently moved to its second location after a TV-show makeover, Momma's is a riot of colourful interiors and exuberant dishes guaranteed to spice up the coldest seaside day. The Southern-style jerk chicken and jambalaya are great, but for those who haven't eaten in a month, the two-course 'Soul in a Bowl'

dinner is recommended, washed down with an imported US beer.

Terre a Terre (☎ 729051; 71 East St; mains £12-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner only Tue) Brighton has done more than most cities in moving the vegetarian menu away from grungy, stomach-sticking lentil roasts towards fine veggie dining. This handsome, creative restaurant does enough to satisfy the most ardent carnivores with imaginative menu items, like Parmesan dumplings and a great tasting plate of hot and cold tapas.

Due South (☎ 821218; 139 Kings Rd Arches; mains £11-19; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun) Revered by many locals as the city's best restaurant, fine regional ingredients are sourced to create a menu of French and modern British dishes that includes Sussex beef tournedos and fillets of sea bass stuffed with lemon and herbs. The unfettered seafront views are almost as impressive as the food. Reservations are essential.

English's of Brighton (☎ 327980; 29-31 East St; mains £11-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This 150-year-old family-owned seafood restaurant, located in three converted fisherman's cottages, serves unfussy and well-executed dishes – including great oysters – amid an opulent red velvet décor. It's the best place in the Lanes to sample local fish without a coating of deep-fried batter.

Drinking & Entertainment

It would be criminal to come to Brighton and not sample the ever-happening nightlife, which ranges from some of the region's best pubs to a wide array of live music and clubbing options. Pick up the Friday *Argus* newspaper for its listings guide.

Hop Poles (☎ 710444; 13 Middle St) Among the pubs, this place has an artsy, laid-back vibe and attracts the city's chattering smartypants crowd. Its gastropub menu is a plus but there's also a selection of candy behind the bar for those who like to nibble chocolate with their cask ale.

Beach (☎ 722272; 171-181 Kings Rd Arches; admission £3-10) For clubbers, this is welcoming, mainstream – think '70s and house nights – and massively popular: arrive early on weekends because the queues can be enormous.

Concorde 2 (☎ 673311; www.concorde2.co.uk; Madeira Shelter Hall, Maderia Dr; admission £4-14) Live music aficionados should appreciate this club, where Brighton luminaries like Fat Boy Slim

and British Sea Power cut their teeth. It also doubles as a great dance club.

Getting There & Away

Megabus services arrive from London Victoria (from £1, 2½ hours) three times a day, while National Express buses also arrive twice hourly from London Victoria (£10, 2½ hours). The company runs frequent daily airport services from London Heathrow (£20, two hours) and London Gatwick (£6.40, 45 minutes).

Frequent direct train services arrive from London Victoria (£17.30, 1½ hours) and London King's Cross Thameslink (£13.50, 1½ hours) throughout the day. There's also an hourly service from Portsmouth (£13.80, two hours) and a twice-hourly service from Dover (£24.50, 2½ hours).

PORTSMOUTH

☎ 023 / pop 187,056

Like deeply buried pirate treasure, you'll have to dig through several layers to find the real gold in Portsmouth. With streets of uninspiring shops and houses in its city centre, visitors can avoid the unnecessary spade work by heading straight for the historic waterfront. The spiritual home of Britain's Royal Navy, much of the ancient docks here have been polished to a gentrified hue in recent years, but their salty, richly storied past is still much in evidence.

Orientation & Information

Portsmouth's southern Southsea district houses many of the city's best restaurants, pubs and accommodations, but the harbourfront area on the west side – site of the bus station and the end of the train line from London – is its historic heart. Known as The Hard, this cobblestoned patch is the site of Portsmouth's major maritime attractions and its main **TIC** (☎ 9282 6722; www.visitportsmouth.co.uk; The Hard; ☎ 9.30am-5.45pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5.15pm Oct-Mar), which has an accommodation booking service (£2). The **Central Library** (☎ 9281 9311; Guildhall Sq; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun) offers free Internet access.

Sights & Activities

Dripping with seafaring heritage, Portsmouth's **Historic Dockyard** (☎ 9286 1512; www.flagship.org.uk; all-inclusive ticket adult/child £15.50/12.50;

☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is the final resting place for a gaggle of prized vessels. The remains of the **Mary Rose** (adult/child £9.70/8), Henry VIII's favourite warship, provide an object lesson in shipwreck preservation. In contrast, the handsome, fully intact decks of **HMS Victory** (adult/child £9.70/8), Lord Nelson's Battle of Trafalgar flagship, memorialises Britain's greatest naval hero and his famous win against the French. Lacking the historic provenance of the other two vessels, **HMS Warrior** (adult/child £9.70/8), the world's first all-iron battleship, colourfully evokes life on board in the Victorian era.

Taking to the water without getting your feet wet is recommended on a 45-minute **Harbour Tour** (☎ 9283 9766; adult/child £3.50/2) around Portsmouth's leading maritime sights. Aside from the aforementioned old warships, you'll likely glimpse the Royal Navy's latter-day hardware – this is home to Britain's three aircraft carriers and a coterie of steely grey frigates and destroyers. They're enough to shiver anyone's timbers.

Literary history is also part of the picture in Portsmouth, where the off-the-beaten-path **Charles Dickens' Birthplace Museum** (☎ 9282 7261; www.charlesdickensbirthplace.co.uk; 393 Old Commercial Rd; admission £2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) celebrates the surprising fact that Britain's leading 19th-century novelist was born here in 1812. Rooms are decorated with Regency-era furnishings, and displays evoke Dickens' later life with a smattering of his inkwells and snuff boxes. Ghoulish visitors will enjoy seeing the couch where he died in 1870.

Sleeping

Southsea's crumbling Victorian town houses are a hotbed of B&B action, but there are also a couple of good options on the Point (also known as Spice Island) in Old Portsmouth.

Southsea Backpackers Lodge (☎ 9283 2495; www.portsmouthbackpackers.co.uk; 4 Florence Rd, Southsea; dm £13, d £30-34; ☎ ☑) A quiet, cosy atmosphere permeates this large, labyrinthine Victorian house in a residential side street near the seafront. The wooden-bedded dorms are mostly small, and there's coin-operated Internet access (per 30 minutes £1) in the satellite TV-equipped lounge. The garden area is a popular summer barbecue spot.

Sailmaker's Loft (☎ 9282 3045; 5 Bath Sq; s/d £25/55; ☎ ☑) This small, recently renovated B&B is run by a retired merchant seaman

with plenty of salty stories about old Portsmouth. Located on a cobblestone seafront promontory of character taverns and ancient houses, you'll likely awake to the sound of seagulls hovering overhead. Mostly en suite, some of the rooms have great views across the harbour.

Queen's Hotel (☎ 9282 2466; www.bw-queenshotel.co.uk; Clarence Pde, Southsea; s/d from £45/90; ☎ ☎) If Dickens' Miss Havensham was a hotel, this is what she'd look like: a faded former aristocrat that still has more character than anything around her. Behind the Victorian wedding cake architecture, the rooms are comfortable but a bit worn; some face the windswept waterfront. Wi-fi is available.

Eating & Drinking

Sallyport Tea Rooms (☎ 9281 6265; 35 Broad St; mains £2.50-5.50; ☎ 10am-5pm; ☎) This charmingly old-fashioned tea nook is an ideal respite from the rain and wind. Tuck into a large pot of Earl Grey and a tea bun while some gentle jazz tunes drone in the background. It's also a good spot for lunch – the fresh-made sandwiches are a treat – but it can get crowded so consider eating early or late.

Spice Island Inn (☎ 9282 4293; 65 Broad St; mains £6-14; ☎) Occupying a handsome corner plot on this historic waterfront elbow, this large gentrified pub has the best outdoor seating of any in the area. Order some fish and chips and a couple of pints and head to a table overlooking the water. Watch the boats slip by as you fend off the seagulls.

Bistro Montparmasse (☎ 9281 6754; 103 Palmerston Rd, Southsea; 2-/3-course lunch £14.50/17.50, 2-/3-course dinner £22.50/27.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat; ☎) Along a street of generic Indian and Chinese restaurants, this oasis of Mediterranean comfort food is worth a splurge, especially with lovingly created desserts like banana and butterscotch pancakes. The hardwood floors and Tuscan-orange walls are a perfect, chilled-out accompaniment.

Getting There & Away BOAT

Portsmouth services a wide array of passenger routes to and from France, Spain and the Channel Islands. These include an Isle of Wight car ferry provided by **Wightlink** (☎ 0870 582 7744; www.wightlink.co.uk) throughout the day (£15.20 day return, 15 minutes); a service from Bilbao on **P&O Ferries** (☎ 08705

980 333; www.poferies.com) two to three times per week (from £152); and a daily **Brittany Ferries** (☎ 08703 665 333; www.brittany-ferries.co.uk) route from Cherbourg (from £52, three to five hours).

BUS & TRAIN

National Express buses arrive throughout the day from London Victoria (£14, two to three hours) and Heathrow Airport (£14, two to four hours). There are also regular services from Brighton (£3.20, 3½ hours) and Southampton (£3, 50 minutes). Megabus services arrive from London Victoria (from £1, 2½ hours); the discount operator also offers cheap Portsmouth train services under its Megatrain banner from London Waterloo (from £1, 2½ hours). There are regular-priced train services every 10 minutes or so from London Victoria and London Waterloo (from £23, 1½ to 2½ hours). Additional trains also arrive hourly from Brighton (£13.80, 1½ hours).

WINCHESTER

☎ 01962 / pop 107,213

Dripping with ancient attractions, the capital of Saxon England is a history-lovers dream. With a grand cathedral, frisson of Arthurian legend and dozens of centuries-old buildings lining its streets, it's like stepping into a time capsule. Far from being a sleepy museum piece, though, Winchester has a busy city centre, plenty of bustling shops and some smashing old pubs.

Orientation & Information

Winchester's compact centre is easy to explore on foot, but make sure you duck down the backstreets behind the chain stores to find the historic gems. The train station is a 10-minute walk west of the city centre, and the bus station is on Broadway, opposite the **TIC** (☎ 840500; www.visitwinchester.co.uk; Guildhall, Broadway; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), which provides regular guided tours (adult/child £3/free) of the city. **Jamie's Internet Cafe** (☎ 870880; 10 Parchment St; per hr £3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) offers Internet access.

Sights

Glorious **Winchester Cathedral** (☎ 857200; www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk; 1 The Close; suggested donation £4, tours free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-

5.30pm Sun, tours 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) features a magnificent, multicoloured melange of architectural styles and is the final resting place of Jane Austen, whose discreet gravestone resides on the north side of the nave. Duck down to the chilly crypt for the modern Anthony Gormley figure. It stands spookily reflected in several inches of water during the basement's regular floods.

Nearby flint-walled **Great Hall** (☎ 846476; www.hants.gov.uk/discover/places/great-hall.html; Castle Ave; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) is all that remains of a gargantuan 11th-century castle destroyed by Oliver Cromwell in 1651. It now houses the giant, multicoloured **King Arthur's Round Table**, a medieval commemorative artefact created to celebrate the legendary monarch long after his reputed reign.

Step into the past over at the **Hospital of St Cross** (☎ 851375; www.stcrosshospital.co.uk; St Cross Rd; adult/child £2.50/0.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar), Britain's oldest charitable institution. This still-working almshouse is home to 25 elderly gents who reside in a row of picturesque stone cottages. Visitors receive the Wayfarer's Dole – some bread and sherry – and can check out a magnificent Norman church whose walls are more than 1m thick.

Festivals & Events

The outlandish **Winchester Hat Fair** (☎ 849841; www.hatfair.co.uk), held from late June to early July, bills itself as Britain's longest-running festival of street theatre. Combining clowns, comedy, live music and buskers (hence the hat reference in the title), it's the town's annual excuse for putting a smile on its face.

Sleeping

With the recent closure of Winchester's YHA hostel, budget accommodation is hard to come by here. Ask at the TIC for recommendations.

Mrs Blockley's (☎ 852073; roseyblockley@uwclub.net; 54 St Cross Rd; s £30, d £52-60; ☎ ☒) A 10-minute walk from the city centre, this homy but good-quality B&B is a great deal for budget travellers. Its three cosy rooms share a large bathroom, and wi-fi is available. The emphasis is on quiet, since the friendly hosts live on-site.

Bethany House (☎ 862188; www.bethanyhousebandb.co.uk; 114 Christchurch Rd; s/d £45/65; ☎ ☒)

It's well worth the 15-minute walk from the city centre to this large former convent that's been expertly renovated with a rustic chic ambience. The three themed bedrooms – ask for the White Room if you want a tranquillity fix – have modernist en suites and there's ample off-road parking.

Wessex Hotel (☎ 861611; www.wessex-hotel.co.uk; Paternoster Row; s/d from £65/120; ☎ ☒) A bland 1960s exterior contrasts sharply with handsome rooms that look like they've been imported from a country manor. Ask for a cathedral view – the hotel backs onto the ancient site – and you can lay in bed and count the windows when you wake up. It has an unbeatable central location.

Hotel du Vin (☎ 841414; www.hotelduvin.com; Southgate St; d/ste from £125/185) Set in a thoroughly updated 18th-century Georgian town house, Winchester's smartest boutique property has 23 stylish rooms with luxe touches, like monsoon showers and Egyptian linen. There's a lovely walled garden, and a popular on-site bistro serving French and British specialties.

Eating & Drinking

Forté Tea Rooms (☎ 856840; 78 Parchment St; mains £3-7; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) This chatter-filled upstairs nook offers well-priced home-style dishes, a warming atmosphere and a small shelf of well-thumbed travel books. There's a large finger-licking sandwich selection but it's the cakes that draw most visitors – hot fruit scones and a pot of tea never tasted better.

Black Boy (☎ 861754; 1 Wharf Hill; mains from £5; ☎ lunch & dinner) A wood-fired hearth scents the air while a wide selection of regional beers takes care of the palate at this unabashedly traditional hilltop pub. It's hard to beat a pint of Cheriton sipped slowly over a giant weekend newspaper here, but the food – due to a newly installed gourmet chef – is also a big draw.

Wykeham Arms (☎ 853834; 75 Kingsgate St; mains £5-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) Winchester's favourite pub is a charming combination of old-world atmosphere, fine regional ales, well-stocked wine and a diverse, locally sourced menu that's far above the usual pub fare. Check out the beef and bitter sausages. Arrive early if you want an evening table.

Café De Paris (☎ 860006; 5 Jewry St; mains £4-21; ☎ 10-11.30am, noon-2pm & 7-11pm Mon-Sat) An

authentic Parisian ambience permeates this spick and span French brasserie, where the impressive menu of meticulously prepared dishes runs from light baguette lunch sandwiches to serious dinner cuisine, including swordfish, steak and oysters.

Getting There & Away

National Express buses arrive in the city centre several times a day from London Victoria (£12.60, two hours), while Megabus services run from London Victoria to St Catherine's Park & Ride (from £1, 1½ hours) four times daily. The park and ride is a 10-minute local bus ride from the city centre. **Stagecoach Hampshire** (☎ 0845 121 0180) provides additional local bus links from Salisbury, Southampton and Portsmouth. Trains arrive several times daily from London Waterloo (£22, one hour), Southampton (£4.30, 20 minutes) and Portsmouth (£7.90, one hour).

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Closer to the French coast, the Channel Islands – Jersey, Guernsey, Herm, Sark and Alderney – are a strangely exotic hybrid of English and French culture. Though a bit sleepy for visitors under 50, they are characterised by their rugged coastlines, sandy bays and multiflowered vistas: a direct result of the balmy climate enjoyed by the islanders. With their own stamps and currency (which has the same value as sterling but can't be used on the mainland), taxes are low and there's no value-added tax (VAT).

Jersey, the biggest and busiest of the islands, is the best one to visit. Its main attraction is **Jersey Zoo** (☎ 01534-860000; Les Augres Manor, Trinity; adult/child £11.50/7.40; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), which was founded by Gerald Durrell and focuses on rare animal conservation. The **Jersey War Tunnels** (☎ 01534-860808; adult/child £9/5; ☎ 10am-6pm) are also worth a visit. Housed in a German underground hospital, the site colourfully explores the island's past as an occupied region during WWII.

For more information on visiting Jersey, contact **Jersey Tourism** (☎ 01534-500700; www.jersey.com; Liberation Sq, St Helier; ☎ 8.30am-6pm, reduced hr in winter). For information on visiting any of the other islands, contact **Guernsey Tourism** (☎ 01481-723552; www.visitguernsey.com; North Plantation, St Peter Port; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun).

Getting There & Away

There are daily flights to the Channel Islands from several mainland UK airports, including London Gatwick, London Stansted, Birmingham and Manchester. Fares vary considerably but range from £49 to £200, so it pays to shop around. Airlines serving the islands include **British Airways** (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com), **Flybe** (☎ 0870 567 6676; www.flybe.com) and **Aurigny Air Services** (☎ 01481-822886; www.aurigny.com).

Regular high-speed boat services operated by **Condor Ferries** (☎ 0870 243 5140; www.condorferries.co.uk) arrive in Jersey from Poole (£53, 4½ hours) and Weymouth (£47, 3½ hours), with similar rates for routes to Guernsey.

SOUTHWEST ENGLAND

With two of England's best moorland national parks – South Devon's Dartmoor and North Devon's Exmoor – as well as some superbly craggy Cornish coastal walks dripping with sandy bays and the occasional palm tree, the balmy southwest is one of England's most naturally attractive regions. But it's not all about the outdoors here. History fans will find it hard to leave Salisbury, where the past resides on every street corner, and nearby Stonehenge and Avebury recall the mysteries of past civilisations. It's even more difficult to tear yourself away from Bath, England's most handsome Georgian city. But the region's other main towns – Bristol and Exeter – also have their charms and are enlivened by their more youthful, student-driven populations. For information on visiting the region, contact **South West Tourism** (☎ 0870 442 0880; www.visitsouthwest.co.uk).

SALISBURY

☎ 01722 / pop 43,355

While you can't throw a brick in Salisbury without hitting a preserved antique pile, this charming city is far from being a moth-balled historic theme park. Amid its winding thoroughfares and implausibly leaning pubs, the streets are constantly buzzing with rushing locals studiously ignoring their pretty surroundings. Along with its stirring cathedral – its soaring architecture is enough to convert hardened atheists – two of Britain's leading prehistoric sites lie on the city's doorstep.

Orientation & Information

A 10-minute walk from the train station along Fisherton St, Salisbury city centre is easily negotiated on foot and radiates from its busy Market Sq focal point. Behind the square's hulking Guildhall, you'll find a welcoming **TIC** (☎ 334956; www.visitsalisbury.com; Fish Row; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun May-Sep), with a free accommodation booking service. Walk to the square's opposite corner – a circuitous route during the Tuesday and Saturday markets – for free Internet access at the **library** (☎ 324145; Market Pl; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, 9am-7pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm Thu & Sat).

Sights & Activities

Beneath its soaring wedding-cake spire, **Salisbury Cathedral** (☎ 555120; www.salisburycathedral.org.uk; suggested donation adult/child £4/2; ☎ 7.15am-6.15pm) is one of Britain's finest 13th-century Gothic churches. Free tours run throughout the day and illuminate the intricate stonework interior of flying buttresses and arching vaulted ceilings. Restore the crick in your neck in the octagonal chapter house, where one of only four original Magna Carta documents is displayed, before heading into Cathedral Close, an impressive medieval perimeter of small museums and restored period houses.

Find out what happened to the region's first cathedral with a 10-minute bus ride (bus 3, 5, 6, 8 or 9) to **Old Sarum Castle** (☎ 335398; adult/child £2.90/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-6pm Jul-Aug, 11am-3pm Nov-Feb), an Iron Age settlement abandoned due to overcrowding in 1217. Bricks from the church that once stood here were used to build Salisbury's 'new' cathedral, and the area is now a tranquil grassy knoll that's perfect for soft hiking and summer picnicking.

Sleeping

Not short of heritage-hugging B&Bs and character hotels, Salisbury's accommodation options can quickly diminish in summer when the Stonehenge-bound coach parties roll into town. Use the TIC's free booking service for assistance.

Salisbury YHA Hostel (☎ 327572; salisbury@yha.org.uk; Milford Hill; dm £17.50-20.50, s/d with shared bathroom £20.50/40.50; ☎ ☒ ☑) A leafy, winding driveway opens out onto this surprisingly large country house, offering solid institu-

tional YHA facilities and a bonus cooked breakfast. Most dorms are mercifully small and private rooms with shared facilities are also available. It's a five-minute downhill walk into the city centre.

Spire House (☎ 339213; lois.faulkner@talk21.com; 84 Exeter St; d/tw/f £60/80/100; ☎ ☒ ☑) Ask for a front room at this well-restored period B&B and you'll be treated to a view of the cathedral, looking like a pale ghost behind its night-time floodlights. The surfeit of home comforts here includes brass, mostly four-poster beds, sparkling-clean bathrooms and heaping breakfasts, with several vegetarian options available.

Red Lion Hotel (☎ 323334; www.the-redlion.co.uk; Milford St; s/d £97/126; ☎ ☒) Opened in 1220, and reputedly England's oldest purpose-built hotel, the Red Lion is a heritage-lovers dream. Antiques colour the public areas, while discreet mod cons, including newly added en suites, ensure guests don't have to live in the past. If you fancy a pint, look no further than the timber-beamed downstairs bar.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of cafés and sandwich bars in central Salisbury. Head along Fisherton St for a wide selection of dinner options.

Suzette's Pancake Café (☎ 326966; 4 Fish Row; mains £3-4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5.30pm Sun) An ideal cheap-eat spot with a bonus outdoor seating area, the crepe-wrapped light meals have sweet and savoury ingredients, like brie, bacon and bananas – although not necessarily together. The Fair Trade coffee is a nice touch.

Anokaa (☎ 414142; 60 Fisherton St; mains £7-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Anokaa's popular lunch buffet (£7.25) is great value, while its stylish, loungey décor is enough to make you forget all about the flock wallpaper and sitar music ambience of most British Indian eateries. Drop by for dinner and choose from dishes with a contemporary twist, like sea bass and lamb rack.

Haunch of Venison (☎ 411313; 1 Minster St; mains £6-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Combines perhaps the city's best olde-worlde bar – check out the warming hearth, wonky walls and low-ceilinged nooks – with a great upstairs restaurant serving finger-licking gastropub versions of Brit faves. The venison sausages with mash and red onion marmalade is recommended.

TOP FIVE SOUTHERN ENGLAND CHURCHES

- **Winchester Cathedral** (p188)
- **Salisbury Cathedral** (opposite)
- **Bath Abbey** (p199)
- **Exeter Cathedral** (p192)
- **Wells Cathedral** (p202)

Getting There & Away

Three direct National Express buses arrive daily from London Victoria (£14, three to 3½ hours) via Heathrow (£14, two to 2½ hours). One daily service also arrives from Bath (£8.30, 1½ hours) and another from Bristol (£8.30, two hours).

Salisbury train services arrive every 30 minutes from London Waterloo (£24.20, 1½ hours). There's also an hourly service from Portsmouth (£12.50, 1½ hours, hourly) and frequent services throughout the day from Bath (£11.20, one hour) and Exeter (£22.70, two hours).

Getting Around

Local bus services run by **Wilts and Dorset Bus Company** (☎ 336855; www.wdabus.co.uk) are reasonably well organised and link Salisbury with Stonehenge and Avebury. Bikes can be hired from **Hayball Cyclesport** (☎ 411378; 26-30 Winchester St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) for £10 per day.

STONEHENGE

Looking like a ring of giant stone dominoes and cursed by poor site management, **Stonehenge** (☎ 0870 333 1181; www.english-heritage.org.uk/stonehenge; adult/child £5.90/3; ☎ 9.30am-6pm mid-March–May, 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 9.30am-6pm Sep–mid-Oct, 9.30am-4pm mid-Oct–mid-Mar) can be a distinctly underwhelming experience. Most visitors come hoping to feel the site's spooky mysticism or marvel at the unfathomable prehistoric engineering project that brought these huge rocks from a Welsh quarry up to 5000 years ago. The reality is a stubbly field next to a noisy main road housing a roped-off area where the ring – which may be an ancient calendar or place of pagan worship – sits sullen and unloved. Plans to reroute the road and transform the experience for the coachloads of perplexed tourists arriving daily collapse every few years. The best time

to arrive in early morning when the crowds are at their smallest: watching the sun filter between the upright stones can still create a flicker of eeriness, especially if you pan around and count the number of ancient burial mounds dotting the landscape on the otherwise pancake-flat Salisbury Plain.

Wilts and Dorset public buses from Salisbury bus and train stations arrive at Stonehenge every 15 minutes in summer (bus 3, £6.50 return). The company also runs seasonal double-decker guided tours to the site (adult/child £15/8). But the best deal is the one-day Explorer bus pass (£6.50), enabling you to take in the superior Avebury after your Stonehenge disappointment.

AVEBURY

Older and more eerily tranquil than its over-touristed neighbour, Avebury's **stone circle** (☎ 01672-539250; admission free) is one of the largest megalithic monuments in Britain, completely encircling the pretty village of the same name that has resided here for centuries. The 100 stones are smaller than Stonehenge's, but the site is far bigger and visitors can move around it without restriction. The northwest corner has the most complete cluster of standing rocks, including the massive Swindon Stone, one of the few never to have been toppled by Christians during the medieval era. For some useful context, check out the fascinating **Alexander Keiller Museum** (☎ 01672-539250; adult/child £4.20/2.10; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), which carefully explains the history of the stones and the region's mysterious spiritual past. This includes the ancient, pyramid-shaped **Silbury Hill** nearby. The height of Nelson's Column, it's Europe's largest human-made prehistoric construction.

Wilts and Dorset public buses from Salisbury arrive every hour in Avebury (buses 5 and 6, £6.50 return).

EXETER

☎ 01392 / pop 111,078

A half-destroyed red stone church on Catherine St recalls what Exeter looked like before WWII bombing raids decimated much of the historic city centre. A bland postwar rebuilding programme created a grey, New Town look and latter-day visitors have to search a little to uncover the area's charms. A large student population, reinvented Quay

and attractive Cathedral Green are the heart of the city today.

Orientation & Information

St David's train station is a 15-minute walk northwest of the city centre. While Exeter Central station is much closer, most inter-city trains don't stop there. The large Paris St bus and coach station is near the eastern end of the High St, just a few minutes' walk from Cathedral Green, Exeter's historic centre. Follow the signs south of the cathedral for the downhill stroll to the Quay on the River Exe.

The **TIC** (☎ 265700; www.exeter.gov.uk/tourism; Civic Centre, Dix's Field; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct), near the bus and coach station, is the staging point for a wide array of free **walking tours** (☎ 265203), including one covering Exeter's little-known underground catacombs. The **Central Library** (☎ 384201; Castle St; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5pm Wed, 9.30am-4pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun) offers free 30-minute Internet sessions for nonmembers.

Sights & Activities

Nestled on a close of historic houses, **Exeter Cathedral** (☎ 255573; www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk; The Close; suggested donation £3.50; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-5pm Sun) has a grand, statue-covered entrance that historians believe was once painted in vibrant colours. Grab the mobile wheeie-mirror inside and check out the gold bosses that stud the vaulted ceilings, before comparing the tiny chapels that punctuate the interior. Like many English cathedrals, there's plenty of evidence of Victorian renovation but some of the best ancient quirks remain, including carvings of a man standing on his head and an angel playing bagpipes.

The **Quay** area is a highlight of any visit to Exeter. Situated on a curving elbow of the Exe River, this cobbled, quaintly gentrified former port area is crowded with lazy, leisure-minded locals in summer. Its refurbished brick warehouses are home to galleries, cafés and pubs, and on sunny days, everyone can find an outdoor seating spot here.

Those who prefer to be more active should pack a picnic and rent a bike or canoe from the area's **Saddles & Paddles** (☎ 424241; www.sadpad.com; 4 King's Wharf; bikes/canoes per day £13/15; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) before heading downriver to spot herons and kingfishers.

Sleeping

There is a clutch of mid-priced B&Bs on St David's Hill between the train station and city centre. There are several more clustered around the Clock Tower near Exeter Central station.

Exeter YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5826; exeter@yha.org.uk; 47 Countess Wear Rd; dm £15.50; (P) ☎ ☎) This large 17th-century house overlooking the Exe River is 3 miles southeast of the city centre and offers dorm rooms with up to eight beds (most have four), as well as a café, games room and bike-hire service. There's a large lounge-worthy garden. Take bus K or T from the High St or bus 57 or 85 from the bus station, alight at School Lane and follow the signs.

Raffles Hotel (☎ 270200; www.raffles-exeter.co.uk; 11 Blackall Rd; s/d from £38/60; (P)) A superior town house B&B with a good location near the city centre, the Raffles is all about its antiques. Each high-ceilinged room is stuffed with period features, adding a quiet understated elegance that keeps some guests coming back for more. The owners are also committed to serving their guests organic produce and offer a good breakfast option for starving vegetarian travellers.

Clock Tower Hotel (☎ 424545; www.clocktowerhotel.co.uk; 16 New North Rd; s £42, d £58-68; (P)) Among a row of adjoining B&Bs on New North Rd, this clean and comfortable Georgian town house has some titchy single rooms and can be a little noisy when full. But all rooms are newly furnished, and it's just a few minutes' walk from Exeter Central station and the city's main action. In summer guests can sit on the landscaped patio and watch the world go by.

Eating

Exeter has a good selection of cafés to feed its cosmopolitan student population and a couple of worthy top-end establishments for those who want to splurge. The Quay is the hotspot for alfresco summer dining.

Mango's Café Bar (☎ 438538; Cellar 3, King's Wharf, The Quay; mains £4-6; ☎ 10am-6pm, 10am-10pm in summer) A funky yellow cave interior, friendly staff and quality fresh-made dishes make this low-cost eatery feel like an expensive treat. In fact, it couldn't be much cheaper, with hearty wraps and panini sandwiches around the £5 mark. The soups – try the carrot and coriander – will have you licking the plate

for more and there are plenty of options for vegetarians.

Milkmaid Restaurant (☎ 277438; 15 Catherine St; mains £5-8; ☎ breakfast & lunch) An Exeter legend that has reinvented itself several times over the years, the well-located Milkmaid has fancied up its menu with yuppie ingredients like feta and ricotta. But it's the fish and chips and farmhouse grills that its mainly elderly defenders keep coming back for – some of these old women would come here to order their daily Welsh Rarebit even if the place closed down.

Red Square (☎ 411292; Rougemount House, Castle St; mains £9-16; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Causing a bit of a revolution in Exeter's conservative dining scene, this excellent Russian restaurant is well worth a night out. Rather than covering its walls with Soviet kitsch, the staid dining room focuses on delivering ethnic fusion dishes, like stroganoff-style calamari and aubergine caviar.

Getting There & Away

Nine direct National Express buses arrive at Paris St station from London Victoria daily (£21.50, four to five hours). There are five daily direct arrivals from Plymouth (£8.90, one to two hours), four from Bristol (£11.60, two hours) and two from Penzance (£22, 4½ hours). Megabus runs one daily bus from London Victoria (from £1, four hours). Train services from Paddington arrive at St David's station hourly (£26.50, 2½ hours). Services also arrive from Bristol (£17.60, 1½ hours), Salisbury (£22.70, two hours) and Penzance (£21.50, three hours).

PLYMOUTH

☎ 01752 / pop 243,795

Bypassing its ugly post-WWII city centre and heading for the salty, olde-worlde charms of the Hoe and Barbican areas is the best way to experience Plymouth. With a rich maritime history that includes the Pilgrim Fathers and Francis Drake, visitors can spend a couple of days here communing with the spirits of sea dogs past.

Orientation & Information

Plymouth's grey, shop-heavy city centre is south of the train station. Continue south (and uphill) to the headland Hoe for commanding views of Plymouth Sound and most of the city's best accommodation

options. Downhill and to the east of here is the cobbled Barbican area, stuffed with restaurants, attractions and the city's TIC (☎ 304849; www.visitplymouth.co.uk; 3-5 The Barbican; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat). Back in the city centre, **Plymouth Internet Café** (☎ 221777; 32 Frankfort Gate; per hr £4; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) offers adequate but expensive Internet access.

Sights & Activities

The utterly charming tangle of Elizabethan streets that makes up the **Barbican** has undergone a recent renaissance that's added sea-front cafés and galleries to Plymouth's top pubs and restaurants. It's also home to the city's best and newest attractions, including **Plymouth Mayflower** (☎ 306330; 3-5 The Barbican; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar), an entertaining hi-tech exploration of the Pilgrim Fathers' departure for America; the **National Marine Aquarium** (☎ 600301; www.national-aquarium.co.uk; Rope Walk, Cox Side; adult/child £9.50/5.75; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar), an excellent interpretive centre dripping with live exhibits; and the **Plymouth Dry Gin Distillery** (☎ 665292; 60 Southside St; tour £5; ☎ tours 10.30am-4.30pm in summer, call head at other times), a tipple-happy historic production facility where the tours include some warming samples.

Sleeping & Eating

Head to the Hoe – especially Citadel Rd – for a plethora of good-value B&Bs, but make sure you shop around: while rates may be similar, there are wide disparities between the facilities on offer. For dining to suit all budgets, stroll down to the Barbican.

Globe Backpackers Plymouth (☎ 225158; www.backpackers.co.uk/plymouth; 172 Citadel Rd; dm/d £12/30) Grubby and a bit chaotic, Plymouth's only backpacker option could use some competition to keep it on its toes. Located in a crumbling pink-painted town house on the Hoe, facilities include a large lounge and small dorms, as well as a few private double rooms. The staff mean well and the property is close to all the historic action.

Jewell's Hotel (☎ 254760; 220 Citadel Rd; s £25, d £45-60; (P)) Among the dozens of good-value, traditional B&Bs around the Hoe's labyrinthine northern tip, this superb property stands out. Elegant but comfortable rooms include welcoming extras like hairdryers and hot-water bottles and the hosts' pudgy

lapdog offers a friendly personal greeting to anyone arriving at the door.

Platters (☎ 227262; 12 The Barbican; mains £4-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Carved fish leap from the timber beams in this character-packed Barbican favourite. The locally sourced, freshly cooked fish and chips are second-to-none, while more adventurous diners can feast on turbot, red mullet and the small but well-chosen wine list. Watch out for the tempting dessert menu, a largely health-free zone.

Himalayan Spice (☎ 252211; 31 New St; mains £7-11; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) Incongruously located in a 16th-century stone cottage in a Barbican back alley, this excellent Indian and Nepalese restaurant is a local favourite, with plenty of vegetarian options. Try the flour-rolled, deep-fried Himalayan Chicken followed by a jog up the hill to the Hoe to work it off.

Getting There & Away

Seven direct National Express buses arrive from London Victoria daily (£27.50, five to seven hours), while four buses arrive from Bristol (£24.50, three to four hours) and five from Exeter (£8.90, one to two hours). Megabus runs a daily service from London Victoria (from £1, 5½ hours). Hourly train services arrive in the city from London Paddington (3½ hours), while frequent services arrive from Penzance (£11.40, two hours), Exeter (£4.90, one hour) and Bristol (£42.50, 2½ hours).

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK

If existentialism was a landscape, this is what it would look like: bleak, wasted, wild vistas are the norm here, and it's one of the few places in England where you can feel utterly alone, despite wandering pockets of sheep and semiwild Dartmoor ponies. This menacing emptiness was the main reason why Arthur Conan-Doyle set *The Hound of the Baskervilles* here. But there's an undeniably haunting beauty to this south Devon moor that encourages trek-loving visitors to quietly commune with the barren tableland, jutting tors and scrubby gorse as if they're meeting Mother Nature face-to-face.

Orientation

This 368-sq-mile park is a hiker's paradise, but with changeable weather and visibility-

crushing fog it's not a place to stroll unprepared. Thankfully, there are some excellent resources for those planning a visit.

Information

Princetown, the moor's largest village, houses the region's main **High Moorland Visitor Centre** (☎ 01822-890414; Tavistock Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm, 10am-4pm in winter), which can assist with maps, accommodation and activities, like cycling and horse riding.

There are additional, smaller information centres at **Haytor** (☎ 01364-665120; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun only in winter), **Postbridge** (☎ 01822-880272; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun only in winter) and **Newbridge** (☎ 01364-631303; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun only in winter), the last of which is also the arrival point for many summer coach parties. The majority of visitors stick to the eastern side of the park where the main settlements are, while serious hikers prefer to get away from it all on the western edge.

Keep in mind that the **Ministry of Defence** (☎ 0800 458 4858; www.dartmoor-ranges.co.uk) has three well-marked live firing ranges in the park's north section: phone ahead for an update on firing schedules. For further visitor information, contact the **Dartmoor Tourist Association** (☎ 01822-890567; www.discoverdartmoor.com) or **Dartmoor National Park Authority** (☎ 01626-832093; www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk).

Sleeping

B&Bs are plentiful in the larger settlements on the edge of the park (like Buckfastleigh, Okehampton and Tavistock), but Dartmoor is also well served with hostelling and camping options. Most of the area is privately owned, but it's generally acceptable to camp so long as you stick to the area's Backpacking Code: don't camp on moorland enclosed by walls, within sight of roads or houses, or near heavily trafficked areas.

Plume of Feathers (☎ 01822-890240; www.plumeof-feathers-dartmoor.co.uk; Princetown; camp sites from £5, bunkhouse from £6, d from £55; (P)) One of Princetown's best-value accommodation options, this large, friendly stone pub offers 75 camp sites with a shower and toilet block, basic but cheap dorm bunkhouses and comfortable but not luxurious private B&B rooms. It's busy in summer, so call ahead.

Bellever YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5692; bellever@yha.org.uk; Bellever; dm £13.95; (P) ☎) This impos-

ing stone farmhouse hostel in the heart of the park offers basic but tranquil accommodation in its mostly small dorms. It's an outdoor-lovers favourite, with hiking trails, Dartmoor ponies and open moorland just outside the windows. There's a £1 discount for those arriving on foot and by bike or bus – bus 82 from Plymouth to Exeter stops in nearby Postbridge.

Okehampton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5978; okehampton@yha.org.uk; Klondyke Rd, Okehampton; dm £15.50; (P) ☎) On the northern edge of the park, this charming Victorian railway goods shed is an activity-centre hostel combining standard but well-maintained facilities, with programs in archery, pony trekking and gorge scrambling. It's also a good base for hitting the park's many hiking trails.

Lydgate House (☎ 01822-880209; www.lydgatehouse.com; Postbridge; s per person £55, d per person £60-70; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P) ☎) This lovely country house overlooking a river valley in the centre of Dartmoor is highly recommended. Relaxed and adult-oriented, its seven rooms are eminently comfortable and tastefully decorated, while the peaceful terrace is a good spot to view herons and house martins.

Getting There & Around

Transmoor Link bus 82 (three daily Monday to Saturday, five Sunday, weekends only in winter) runs across Dartmoor between Plymouth and Exeter via Postbridge, Princetown and Yelverton. Pick up a copy of the *Discovery Guide to Dartmoor by Bus and Train* from local information centres or contact **Devon Bus** (☎ 01392-382800; www.devon.gov.uk/buses) for information. An alternative to the buses is to hire a bike from Tavistock's **Dartmoor Cycle Hire Centre** (☎ 01822-618178; West Devon Business Park) for £6/12 per half-/full day.

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

North Devon's Exmoor is smaller than Dartmoor, its national park cousin to the south, but it makes up for its lack of size with some uniquely breathtaking scenery. Within its 265 sq miles, it offers lovely beaches, dramatic sea cliffs, tree-lined copses, verdant hidden valleys, and romantically expansive moorland crisscrossed by tumbling streams, horned sheep and England's last herd of wild red deer.

There are a number of particularly attractive villages in the region: Lynton and

Lynmouth are joined by a water-operated railway; pretty Porlock, at the edge of the moor in a beautiful valley, is studded with thatch-roofed cottages; Dunster, dominated by its handsome Victorian-restored castle, is a picturesque survivor from the 13th century; and Selworthy, a National Trust village that's so stuffed with rustic charm that it's often used as an olde-world movie set.

Orientation

Well-marked walking paths crisscross Exmoor. One of the best and easiest sections of the region's Southwest Coast Path runs through the park between Minehead and Padstow. This is also excellent horse-riding country – ask at visitor centres for local stables.

Information

The five visitor information centres include the main facility in **Dulverton** (☎ 01398-323841; Fore St; ☹ year-round), as well as outposts in **Combe Martin** (☎ 01271-883319; 13 Cross St; ☹ Apr-Oct), **County Gate** (☎ 01598-741321; A39 Countisbury; ☹ Apr-Oct), near Lynton, **Dunster** (☎ 01643-821835; Dunster Steep; ☹ Apr-Oct) and **Lynmouth** (☎ 01598-752509; The Esplanade; ☹ Apr-Oct). For visitor information, contact **Greater Exmoor Tourism** (www.visit-exmoor.info) or the **Exmoor National Park Authority** (☎ 01398-323665; www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Sleeping

Greater Exmoor Tourism's online accommodation site **Exmoor Coast & Country** (www.exmoorholidayguide.co.uk) is a good place to start your research. For those on a tight budget, there are comfortable but basic YHA hostels in **Lynton** (☎ 0870 770 5942; lynton@yha.org.uk; dm £11.95; ☹ Apr-Oct; (P) ☒), **Exford** (☎ 0870 770 5828; exford@yha.org.uk; Exe Mead; dm £12.95; (P) ☒) and **Minehead** (☎ 0870 770 5968; minehead@yha.org.uk; Alcombe Combe; dm £11.95; (P) ☒).

Quaint B&Bs and guesthouses are scattered throughout Exmoor. Recommendations include Lynton's charming **Sinai House** (☎ 01598-753227; www.sinaihouse.co.uk; Lynway; s & d per person £27-36; (P) ☒), Porlock's delightfully thatch-roofed **Myrtle Cottage** (☎ 01643-862978; bob.steer@virgin.net; High St; s/d per person £20/30; (P) ☒) and Dunster's classically medieval **Luttrell Arms** (☎ 01643-821555; www.bhere.co.uk; High St; s/d from £65/95; ☒).

Getting There & Around

Planning transport to Exmoor requires a little creativity. Three direct National Express buses arrive daily from London Victoria (£27.50, 5½ hours) in Barnstaple, outside the park's western edge. From here you can take local bus 307 (1¼ hours) to Dulverton, or bus 309 or 310 to Lynton (one hour). Frequent trains arrive in Exeter from London Paddington (from £26.50, two to three hours). From here you can pick up the pretty Tarka Line train service to Barnstaple (£10.80, one hour, 12 daily Monday to Saturday, six daily Sunday). Active travellers can rent mountain bikes at several spots around the park, including Minehead's **Pompy's Cycles** (☎ 01643-704077; www.pompyscycles.co.uk; Mart Rd) for £12.50 per day.

CORNWALL Penzance

☎ 01736 / pop 20,260

Lacking the idyllic quaintness of nearby St Ives, Penzance – the end of the train line from London – is larger and a bit scruffier than its Cornish neighbours. But beyond the derelict reminders of the town's bustling port days, there are several latter-day reasons to drop by, including some smashing old pubs, a sea-bound historic castle and a dramatic coastal cliff hike. The **TIC** (☎ 362207; www.visit-westcornwall.com; Station Approach; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun May-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Oct-Apr) is opposite the train station.

St Michael's Mount (☎ 710507; www.stmichaelsmount.co.uk; Marazion; adult/child £6/3; ☹ 10.30am-5.30pm Sun-Fri Mar-Oct), a dramatic 12th-century castle complex on a lush tree-covered island just off the coast, is well worth a visit. Echoing the palatial Mont St-Michel off Normandy, the Cornish version houses beautiful baronial rooms, a lovely priory church and some verdant subtropical hanging gardens. You can walk across at low tide and there are ferries at high tide in summer.

Walkers should also check out the 17-mile stretch of the **South West Coast National Trail** (☎ 01752-896237; www.southwestcoastpath.com) between Penzance and Land's End. Head west along the windswept cliffs towards the tip of England's crenulated boot for some achingly beautiful bays, a symphony of crashing waves and an accompanying chorus of cawing seabirds. Before you hit the Land's

End crowds, you'll spot the seafront Minnick Theatre, Bishop's Rock lighthouse and the shimmering Isles of Scilly.

Penzance's accommodation includes characterful B&Bs and rooms above old-school pubs. A popular spot is **Penzance YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5992; penzance@yha.org.uk; Castle Homeck, Alverton; dm £15.50; ☒ ☒), 1.5 miles from the train station on the edge of town. This solid Georgian mansion has great views of the coastline. The facilities are predictably institutional, but include a TV lounge, bike storage and a small library. There's also a wooded garden and some spots for camping.

For those with a little more to spend, **Chyan-Mor Hotel** (☎ 363411; www.chyanmor.co.uk; Regent Tce; s £36-43, d £60-93; (P) ☒) is a charming listed town house B&B with 10 elegantly decorated guest rooms, including some with four-poster beds. Most rooms enjoy views across Mount's Bay, while the rear-facing accommodation looks over the peaceful, palm-fringed vista of St Mary's Church. It's a 10-minute walk to the town centre.

Aside from the ubiquitous Cornish pasty shops – don't knock 'em until you've tried 'em – Penzance town centre has some good eating alternatives. Among these, **Yam Parlour** (☎ 366740; 36 Causewayhead; mains £5-8.50; ☹ lunch & dinner, also breakfast Sat) is a vegetarian café where nonveggers are happy to eat. This highly convivial wood-floored nook has a laid-back vibe and a serious commitment to hearty, locally sourced ingredients. The changing menu can range from mushroom ravioli to squash and coconut curry, and there's a money-saving dinnertime bring-your-own-beer option.

A 10-minute walk away, the **Union Hotel** (☎ 362319; www.unionhotel.co.uk; Chapel St; mains £8-16; ☹ lunch & dinner), opposite the architecturally splendid Egyptian House, houses the snug Nelson Bar, which serves some distinctive local brews in an atmospheric sea-dog setting. Great food is also part of the attraction at the hotel's wood-lined Hamilton Restaurant, where locally caught fish is a particular menu highlight. There are also 28 guest rooms (singles/doubles £35/58) here – a fact that Charles Dickens made use of during a brief visit.

Five direct National Express buses arrive in Penzance daily from London Victoria (£35.50, nine hours), while two direct services also arrive from Exeter (£22, 4½ hours),

two from Newquay (£5, 1½ hours) and two from Bristol (£37, 6½ hours). Hourly direct train services arrive from London Paddington (£67, 5½ hours) throughout the day, while there are also frequent direct services from Exeter (£28.40, three hours) and Plymouth (£11.40, two hours).

Land's End ☎ 01736

The jagged sea-battered cliffs that surround it would warn off most visitors but many still manage to get through and dive into **Legendary Land's End** (☎ 0870 458 0099; www.landsend-landmark.co.uk; admission £10; ☹ 10am-3pm, later in summer), a slick, seaside-style complex of campy attractions, pricey fast-food joints and 'Last in Britain' gift shops. Fans of the tacky will enjoy the 'multi-sensory' Last Labyrinth, a 'spooky' light-show menagerie of witches, pirates and monsters. Consider avoiding it entirely and pick your way across the rocks to check out the end of Britain as it crumbles into the sea. On a clear day, you can spot the Isles of Scilly in the distance.

If you're feeling adventurous, continue along the coastal path for about 3 miles to Porthcurno's **Minack Theatre** (☎ 810181; www.minack.com; adult/child £2.50/1; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar). Dramatically carved into a cliff overlooking the bay, this outdoor amphitheatre is open year-round for curious visitors, and stages a varied roster of musicals, Shakespearean classics and popular dramas from May to September (tickets £6 to £7.50). Bus 1 to Penzance stops at Porthcurno and provides a late-night escape after the shows in summer.

Accommodation in the area includes hostels and family-run B&Bs. Among the highlights are **Land's End YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5906; Letcha Vean, St Just-in-Penwith; dm £14; ☹ Apr-Oct, by appointment Nov-Mar), a remote property with small dorms and commanding sea views but no laundry facilities, and **Whitesand's Lodge** (☎ 871776; www.whitesandslodge.co.uk; Sennen; tent sites £6.50, dm £12.50, s/d £22/44; (P) ☒), an uber-relaxing, recently refurbished holiday spot offering tent pitches, dorm accommodation and B&B private rooms. There's a hearty menu in its vegetarian-friendly restaurant, and an array of guest activities are available, including surfing, yoga and horse riding.

St Ives

☎ 01736 / pop 9870

The train from St Erth to St Ives delivers curving sandy bays and paradise-blue waters before drawing towards a higgly-piggly of stone cottages rising invitingly from the sea. Combining steep, rock-hewn streets with a friendly, artist-dominated cultural scene and a surprisingly sophisticated array of restaurants, this may be Cornwall's prettiest village. Ask at the **TIC** (☎ 796297; www.visit-westcornwall.com; Guildhall, Street-an-Pol; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat May-Oct) for gallery and dining guides.

Like a tasty, overstuffed Cornish pasty, the streets of St Ives are full of tiny artist-run galleries, but it's the **Tate St Ives** (☎ 796226; www.tate.org.uk; Porthmeor Beach; adult/child £5.50/free; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) that is the focal point. From its striking beachfront setting, the southwest satellite of the popular London gallery showcases the works of local legends like Barbara Hepworth and John Wells. There's a panoramic top-floor café, and an array of free talks and tours that keep the place livelier than a seagull with a live catch.

For those who'd like to try surfing, consider taking lessons from **Shore Surf** (☎ 755556; www.shoresurf.com; lessons half-/full day £20/35) in nearby Hayle – it operates a free minibus to get you around the area. Popular surfing beaches include **Porthminster** and **Porthmeor**.

Among the area's sleeper options, **St Ives International Backpackers** (☎ 799444; www.backpackers.co.uk/st-ives; The Stennack; dm £11-17; 📺) is a large, 70-bed hostel occupying a former Wesleyan chapel opposite the town cinema. There's nothing holy about its grungy interior, funky coloured walls and basic rooms. A surf-loving party joint in summer, board fans are always welcome – board and wetsuit storage is available.

In contrast, the **Anchorage** (☎ 797135; www.theanchoragebandb.co.uk; 5 Bunkers Hill; per person £30-38; 📺), among the dozens of tiny, period B&Bs tucked in the backstreets behind Wharf Rd, is a real charmer. Its friendly, dedicated owners are continually improving a cosy property that already features dark timber ceilings and sparkling bathrooms. Breakfast includes several vegetarian options.

Not surprisingly, fish is a local dine-out speciality, and a highlight is the **Seafood Café**

(☎ 794004; 45 Fore St; mains £5-15; 🍷 lunch & dinner), a modern, good-value bistro lunch spot near the harbourfront. One of the best places in town to sample locally caught seafood, it becomes a gourmet dinner spot every evening but never loses its low-key, informal approach. Try the sea bream and herb-roasted new potatoes for a taste of local marine life.

If you've had your fill of fish, try **St Andrews Street Bistro** (☎ 797074; 16 St Andrews St; mains £4-14; 🍷 lunch & dinner), a chilled-out, rather eclectic restaurant lined with works by local artists. The artistry carries over to the menu, which brings piquant Moroccan influences to the preparation of locally sourced ingredients. There are always good vegetarian options, too.

Newquay

☎ 01637 / pop 19,570

The UK's surfing capital, noisy Newquay seems like a giant, open-air nightclub in summer when party-loving drinkers throng the streets. If you're just here for the waves, you'll meet plenty of like-minded souls on the 11 sandy stretches around town, especially the ever-popular **Fistral Beach** to the west and the learner-friendly **Watergate Bay** to the east.

The **TIC** (☎ 854020; www.newquay.co.uk; Marcus Hill; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun, reduced hr in winter) is near the bus station and there are surf shops dotted around the town, including the recommended **Offshore Extreme** (☎ 877083; www.offshore-extreme.co.uk; 6 Pentire Ave; per day equipment rental from £6, lessons & equipment rental from £12).

Newquay has many competing surf-happy independent hostels, including the bright and modern town centre **Reef Surf Lodge** (☎ 879058; www.reefsurlodge.info; 10-12 Berry Rd; per person £15-30; 📺). Most of its dorms, each with CD players and TVs, are tiny but the facilities are superior to other local hostels, with a bar, licensed restaurant and regular live music shows. Twin and en suite rooms are available for those who want to upgrade, but watch out for the somewhat annoying muzak playing almost permanently through the corridors.

Other budget recommendations:

Original Backpackers (☎ 874668; www.originalbackpackers.co.uk; 16 Beachfield Ave; dm £8-17) This comfortable 25-year-old backpacker joint, complete with cosy 1970s interiors, overlooks Towan Beach.

Boarding House (☎ 873258; www.theboardinghouse.co.uk; 32 Headland Rd; dm £18-25) Close to Fistral Beach, this superior hostel has a great sundeck and an on-site surfing school.

BATH

☎ 01225 / pop 90,144

Getting lost is the first thing any visitor to Bath, the UK's most handsome city, should do. Its lovely, honey-coloured stone streets and higgly-piggly of teeming back alleys are a stroller's delight and encourage unplanned exploration. But while it's tempting to just keep walking, there are some sights in England's only Unesco World Heritage city that are well worth stopping for.

History

Bath's enduring popularity for visitors is based on a stroke of geological luck. It's the site of the only hot springs in the country, which is why tribal Brits established a settlement here almost 3000 years ago. The restorative waters are also the main reason the Romans arrived in AD 44. Creating the town of Aquae Sulis, an enormous complex of baths and temples dedicated to Sulis-Minerva, they laid the foundations for the modern city. But instead of lounging around in hot baths after the departure of the Romans, the later medieval era was one of monastic devotion with the town becoming a religious centre and the site of an important abbey. The hot springs were rediscovered in the early 18th century when, fed by wool trade wealth, Bath began expanding and attracting the fashionable glitterati for restorative sojourns. The present-day city owes much of its appearance to this golden age.

Orientation & Information

Bath's bus and train stations face each other on the southern edge of town in a bend of the Avon River. The main historic attractions occupy a fan-shaped area north of this point, with the landmark Abbey just five minutes' walk away.

The **TIC** (☎ 09067112000; www.visitbath.co.uk; Abbey Chambers, Abbey Churchyard; per min £0.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-May, 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep) is on the southern side of the Abbey. Internet access is available at **Click** (☎ 481008; 13a Manvers St; per 20 min £1; ☎ 10am-10pm) across from the train station.

Sights & Activities

ROMAN BATHS

The unmissable heart of any visit here, the **Roman Baths** (☎ 477785; www.romanbaths.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; adult £10-11, child £6; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Jan & Feb, 9am-5pm Mar-Jun, 9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep & Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov & Dec) are a tangible link with the UK's ancient past. While you won't want to dive into the steaming, sickly green pools, check out the largely intact Roman engineering on display and you'll get a glimpse of what it was like to be a Roman in Britain. Note the number of coins thrown into some of the pools – it should be enough to make this attraction free. It's always crawling with tourists in summer, so arrive late or early to beat the crowds.

JANE AUSTEN CENTRE

Celebrating the life and times of Bath's most famous resident – she only lived here for five years but keep that to yourself – the bright, **Jane Austen Centre** (☎ 443000; www.janeausten.co.uk; 40 Gay St; adult/child £5.95/2.95; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun) is a must for lit lovers. Visits start with a 15-minute introductory talk, before you're let loose in rooms of artefacts and educational displays. Visit the top-floor teahouse where you can sink your teeth into Mr Darcy (the cake), and enquire about the centre's popular 90-minute walking tours (adult/child £4.50/3.50) at 11am on Saturday and Sunday.

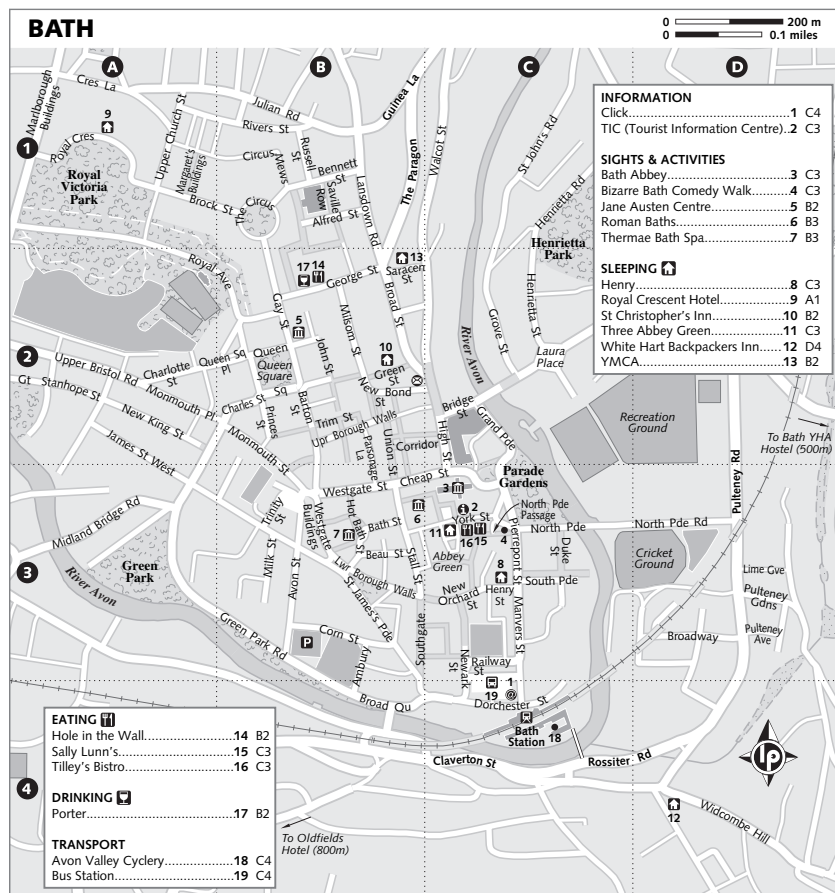
BATH ABBEY

Off Cheap St, do not miss **Bath Abbey's** (☎ 422462; suggested donation £3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-2.30pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-2.30pm Sun Nov-Mar) extraordinary exterior of angels ascending and descending heavenly ladders before you duck inside this lovely medieval edifice. Compact compared to many of England's cathedrals, highlights of the well-scrubbed interior include a spider web-style vaulted ceiling and some impressively intricate stained-glass windows. Head to the onsite **Heritage Vaults** (adult/child £2.50/free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) for an exhibition of the Abbey's centuries-old stone carvings.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Other recommended attractions and activities:

Bizarre Bath Comedy Walk (☎ 335124; www.bizarrebath.co.uk; adult/child £7/5; ☎ 8pm Apr-Sep) Like a



fringe-festival show on legs, this irreverent and highly entertaining 90-minute trowal around the city is great fun. It departs from Huntsman Inn, North Parade Passage.

Thermae Bath Spa (☎ 335678; www.thermaebathspa.com; Hetling Pump Room, Hot Bath St; spa sessions 2hr/4hr/full day £19/29/45) Limping towards completion at the time of research, this giant modern-day reinvention of the Bath bath experience promises a smorgasbord of spa treatments.

Sleeping

Sleepover bargains are hard to find in summertime Bath when the tourists arrive en masse. Book ahead or suffer the consequences.

BUDGET

YMCA (☎ 325900; www.bathymca.co.uk; International House, Broad St Pl; dm £13-15, s £24-28, tw £36-44; P)

(☎ ☎) Bath's largest hostel is bright, cheerful and right in the city centre. The dorms are somewhat institutional, but the compact private rooms are great value. Facilities include laundry facilities and an on-site gym and continental breakfast is thrown in (not literally).

White Hart Backpackers Inn (☎ 313985; www.whitehartbath.co.uk; Widcombe Hill; dm £14, s £25, d £40-60; ☎) Modern furnishings in a recently renovated pub heritage building five minutes' south of the train station, this cosy property combines good-value private rooms with a corridor of mid-sized dorms. Most rooms share bathrooms, and guests can have their free continental breakfast in the pretty pub garden. The downstairs pub has a great at-

mosphere and some super Mediterranean-influenced dishes (mains £9 to £12).

Other recommended budget options:

Bath YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5688; bath@yha.org.uk; Bathwick Hill; dm £12.50; ☎) A 25-minute uphill climb from the city centre brings you to this typical YHA hostel in a rambling Italianate mansion.

St Christopher's Inn (☎ 481444; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 9 Green St; dm £16; ☎) Party-lovers hostel in the heart of the city.

MIDRANGE

Henry (☎ 424052; www.thehenry.com; 6 Henry St; s £35, d £60-65; ☎) Smashing guesthouse with a strong claim to being Bath's best sleep-over deal. The warren of recently renovated rooms – with shared bathrooms – successfully combine period features with IKEA-esque furnishings. Wi-fi is available, and extra beds can be added to some rooms.

Oldfields Hotel (☎ 317984; www.oldfields.co.uk; 102 Wells Rd; s £45-69, d £65-115; P ☎) This elegant hilltop property overlooking Bath's Georgian splendour is surprisingly affordable. The service is excellent, and the rooms combine reproduction antiques and Jacuzzi-style baths. The cooked vegetarian breakfast is a nice touch. It's a 10-minute downhill stroll to the city centre – a bit of a hike on your way back.

Three Abbey Green (☎ 428558; www.threeabbeygreen.com; 3 Abbey Green; d/tw/tr £95/95/125; ☎) A 17th-century town house in a quiet square near the Abbey, this immaculate period property has been recently renovated to a high standard. The wide configuration of rooms tastefully combine new and antique furnishings. There are original hearths in some rooms but also a bright, modern subterranean breakfast room. There's a computer for free Internet access.

TOP END

Royal Crescent Hotel (☎ 823333; www.royalcrescent.co.uk; 16 Royal Cres; d £290-390; P ☎) Bath's signature hotel, the gloriously refined Royal Crescent combines beautiful, antique-lined rooms with an air of nonpompous pampering. The hedonistic on-site spa is popular with chichi guests, while the tranquil gardens are perfect for a spot of afternoon tea.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of eating options lining the main streets of Bath, but it's worth exploring

the back alleys for something unexpected. The TIC has a couple of good dine-out guides.

Sally Lunn's (☎ 461634; 4 North Parade Passage; mains £5-10; ☎) brunch, lunch & dinner) This chatty 17th-century tearoom is a local favourite. Sample the Georgian-era Sally Lunn Bun, a triumph of historic marketing that's actually a giant bread roll with sweet or savoury toppings (the real reason for its popularity). Try not to bang your head as you manoeuvre down the wonky stairs to the little on-site museum of excavated artefacts.

Porter (☎ 424104; 15 George St; mains £3-6; ☎) lunch & dinner) An old-school pub with an unusual twist, Porter's good-value menu is entirely vegetarian, with hearty burgers, crepes and large salads well represented. Students make up much of the clientele, which is attracted by a nightly roster of eclectic live music (cover £3 to £5). Sunday is comedy night, and there are regular beer and wine specials.

Tilley's Bistro (☎ 484200; 3 North Parade Passage; mains £6-17; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎) This centrally located, French-influenced characterful restaurant is a cosy lunch spot and a romantic dinner destination. There's a large selection of small dishes that diners can mix and match, including recommended garlic escargots and Cornish white crab salad. Vegetarians are also well served with a good range of options, including finger-licking wild mushroom pancakes.

Hole in the Wall (☎ 425242; 16 George St; mains £10-18; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎) There's a gastropub feel to this lovely British bistro where seasonal, locally sourced ingredients are de rigueur. Ask for one of the discreet alcove tables and have a couple of tipples from the impressively large wine list before tucking into the recommended pan-fried Gloucester beef.

Getting There & Around

Bath is eminently walkable, but bike rentals are also available from **Avon Valley Cyclery** (☎ 442442; Bath train station; ☎) 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) for £10/15 per half-/full day.

Ten direct National Express buses arrive daily from London Victoria (£16.50, 3½ hours), while one arrives direct from Salisbury (£8.30, 1½ hours) and two from Bristol (£3.50, 50 minutes). There's also a frequent nondirect service from Glastonbury (£6.50, three hours). Direct train services from

London Paddington (from £19, 1½ hours) arrive twice hourly, while hourly direct services arrive from Cardiff (£12.90, one hour). There's also a four-times-an-hour service from Bristol (£5.20, 15 minutes).

WELLS

☎ 01749 / pop 10,406

This Somerset gem is one of England's smallest cities, but it has more medieval charm than settlements many times its size. Named after the springs rising around several of its ancient buildings, its marvellous cathedral alone draws visitors from far and wide. With some great pubs, a bustling street market (on Wednesday and Saturday) and its proximity to popular Glastonbury, it's an ideal base for exploring the region – unless you're travelling by train: Wells has no train station. The **TIC** (☎ 672552; www.wells.gov.uk; Town Hall, Market Pl; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Nov–Mar) offers historic walking tours in summer.

Sights

The jaw-dropping west front of **Wells Cathedral** (☎ 674483; www.wells cathedral.org.uk; suggested donation adult/child £5/2; ☎ 7am–7pm Apr–Sep, 7am–6pm Oct–Mar) would satisfy most visitors, with its vast menagerie of 300 medieval sculptures representing bishops, angels and biblical scenes. But the structure's impressive interior should not be missed. Its highlights include the **scissor arches**, a clever medieval solution to subsidence, a 14th-century **mechanical clock** with jousting knights and an octagonal **chapter house** that's dripping with ecclesiastical atmosphere. Save some time to wander the nearby **Vicar's Close**, a clutch of pretty houses completed in 1363 for the men of the choir. It's reportedly one of the oldest continuously inhabited streets in Europe.

Beyond the cathedral is the **Bishop's Palace** (☎ 678691; adult/child £5/1; ☎ 10.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, noon–6pm Sun Apr–Oct), surrounded by a moat where boiling oil might once have flowed. Highlights include Jacobean staircases, Gothic staircases and a ruined, but imposing, Great Hall. It's worth strolling through the beautiful gardens – avoid the swans that regard it as their territory.

Sleeping & Eating

Bay Tree House (☎ 677933; www.baytree-house.co.uk; 85 Portway; s/d £28/42; P ☎) With no dedicated budget accommodation, one of the city's

best sleepover deals is Bay Tree House, a few minutes' walk from the city centre. The rooms are simply decorated with modern pine furnishings, there's a pretty garden at the back and vegetarian breakfasts are available.

Canon Grange B&B (☎ 671800; www.canongrange.co.uk; Cathedral Green; s & d from £52; ☎) Set in a near-perfect location, this 15th-century, antique-strewn B&B has impeccable views of the cathedral's west front. The best room is the Walnut Suite, with its lavish interior, high ceilings and exposed beams.

Good Earth (☎ 678600; 4 Priory Rd; mains £4-7; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat) Near the bus station, this eatery serves hearty home-made soups, chunky pizza and healthy salads.

Fountain Inn & Boxers Restaurant (☎ 672317; 1 St Thomas St; mains £8-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) A gastropub delight, combining a cosy old-school bar with a restaurant featuring clever reinventions of traditional game and fish ingredients. Curd fans are well looked after, with plates of regional cheese prominent on the menu.

Getting There & Away

Without a train service to call its own, a once-daily direct National Express bus arrives from London Victoria (£18, 3½ hours) at the Princess Rd bus park. You can also use local transport to connect from the far busier National Express stops in Bristol and Bath. From Bristol, take the frequent bus 376 or 377 (one hour), and from Bath take bus 173 or 403 (1¼ hours). There's also the hourly bus 163 service from Glastonbury (15 minutes).

GLASTONBURY

☎ 01458 / pop 8429

Druidic mysticism and straggly-haired young hippies converge like ley lines on this pretty Somerset town that has reinvented itself as a New Age capital. The **TIC** (☎ 832954; www.glastonburytic.co.uk; 9 High St; ☎ 10am–5pm Sun–Thu, 10am–5.30pm Fri & Sat Apr–Sep, 10am–4pm Sun–Thu, 10am–4.30pm Fri & Sat Oct–Mar) is used to fielding rapid-fire questions about recommended veggie restaurants as well as the supposed remains of King Arthur.

There is only one daily direct National Express bus from London Victoria (£18, four hours), so it's best to hook up with the numerous services running to Bristol. Buses

376 and 377 connect Glastonbury with Bristol (hourly, 1½ hours) throughout the day. There is no Glastonbury train station.

Sights & Activities

While the town is reputed (on tenuous evidence) to be the birthplace of English Christianity, its main attraction is the romantically ruined **Glastonbury Abbey** (☎ 832267; www.glastonburyabbey.com; adult/child £4.50/3; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–5pm Oct, 9.30am–4.30pm Nov–Jan, 10am–5pm Feb & Mar), where intricately carved arch and pillar remnants indicate a once-stunning structure. Most visitors spend a couple of minutes reflecting in front of an area fancifully marked in the grass as King Arthur's grave. As with many of Glastonbury's attractions, faith is the key. But even if you don't believe that Glastonbury Tor, a derelict hilltop church tower on the edge of town, is a gateway to the underworld, it's a lovely spot to bring a picnic and spend a few hours enjoying the inquisitive sheep and panoramic views.

Festivals & Events

The town's youthful summer vibe is exemplified by **Glastonbury Festival** (☎ tickets 0870 120 0332; www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk), a long weekend of music, theatre and New Age shenanigans that's one of England's favourite outdoor events. More than 100,000 turn up to writhe around in the fields at Pilton, 8 miles east of Glastonbury. Three-day admission is by advance ticket (£125) and the late-June extravaganza takes place annually – except in 2006, when it took a long-overdue year off.

Sleeping & Eating

Glastonbury Backpackers (☎ 833353; www.glastonburybackpacker.com; 4 Market Pl; dm/d £12/30; ☎) This bright and lively backpackers is perfectly central and has a popular bar with regular live music. Try to snag one of the good-value private rooms or you'll be stuck in a cramped dorm. Book ahead: it's very busy in summer.

AppleTree House (☎ 830803; www.appletreehouse.org.uk; 27 Bere Lane; s/d £30/60; ☎) Experience B&B perfection at AppleTree House, where you can borrow movies for your VCR, relax in the poppy-covered garden or hang out in your calming, pastel-coloured room while contemplating the mysteries of the cosmos.

Café Galatea (☎ 834284; 5a High St; mains £8-10; ☎ lunch Mon, lunch & dinner Wed–Sun; ☎) Recommended for an array of carnivore-pleasing vegetarian meals, along with a menu of Spanish and Italian favourites, this café has an Internet café and a boutique where you can pick up those essential crystals.

BRISTOL

☎ 0117 / pop 420,556

The most exciting city in the southwest, this once-decrepit port town is characterised by a hip cultural scene, trend-setting populace and a wealth of historic and modern attractions. This new Bristol is exemplified by the city's Harbourside: a cool Euro-plaza of street cafés and waterfront restaurants, complete with hi-tech museums and funky galleries. With public artworks, cobbled squares and cleaned-up urban waterways, this regenerated area – reminiscent of central Amsterdam – is contemporary Bristol's latter-day heart.

Orientation & Information

The Harbourside is a 15-minute walk west of Temple Meads train station, in an elbow of the Floating Harbour, a system of locks and docks that snakes through the city and looks like a river. The hilly city centre is a few minutes' north of this area, while further north on Marlborough St is the busy bus and coach station.

Ask at the **TIC** (☎ 0906 711 2191; www.visitbristol.co.uk; Wildscreen Walk, Harbourside; per min £0.50; ☎ 10am–6pm Mar–Oct, 10am–5pm Nov–Feb) for maps, walking trails and an excellent free vegan guide. **Internet Exchange** (☎ 945 9926; 27–29 Baldwin St; per hr £4; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Fri, 11am–7pm Sat, 1–5pm Sun) provides convenient Internet access near the Harbourside.

Sights

@**Bristol** (☎ 0845 345 1235; www.at-bristol.org.uk; Harbourside; combined admission Explore & Wildwalk adult/child £15/11, Explore & IMAX adult/child £14/10.50, Wildwalk & IMAX adult/child £13/10; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sun) is a triumvirate of popular hi-tech attractions that includes **Explore** (adult/child £9/6.50), a kids-of-all-ages hands-on science centre; **IMAX** (adult/child £7/5.50), mostly showing eye-popping documentary flicks, and **Wildwalk** (adult/child £8/6), a fun-but-educational trawl through the natural world, which includes some mesmerising leafcutter ants.

For those with more intellectual pursuits in mind, the **Arnolfini** (☎ 917 2300; www.arnolfini.org.uk; 16 Narrow Quay; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Fri-Wed, 10am-6pm Thu), Bristol's version of London's Tate Modern, is a funky, recently reopened arts centre in an atmospheric dockyard venue. Alongside revolving exhibitions of contemporary art in its high-ceilinged gallery rooms, there's an art-house cinema and a roster of cutting-edge dance performances. Head to the cool ground-floor café-bar to hang out with Bristol's young creative types. It's open until 2am on Friday.

Restored to its former glory for the recent bicentenary of its local designer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel's **SS Great Britain** (☎ 929 1843; www.ssbritain.org; Great Western Dockyard; adult/child £8.95/4.95; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is a must-see feat of Industrial Revolution engineering. Mounted on a shimmering glass 'sea', visitors can clamber up the gangway to compare the luxury of 1st class with the cramped steerage accommodation.

Check out the **British Empire & Commonwealth Museum** (☎ 925 4980; www.empiremuseum.co.uk; Clock Tower Yard, Temple Meads Station; adult/child £6.95/3.95; ☎ 10am-5pm) for its fascinating evocation of British colonialism around the globe.

Brunel's other great local landmark is the **Clifton Suspension Bridge** (☎ 974 4664; Clifton).

Sleeping

Bristol is characterised by conservative, old-fashioned B&Bs and business hotels, but there are a few good sleeper options around the city. Check out the St Paul's Rd area for its plethora of guesthouses.

Bristol Backpackers (☎ 925 7900; www.bristolbackpackers.co.uk; 17 St Stephen's St; dm/tw/tr £14/36/45; ☎) A character-stuffed joint with its own dungeon-style bar, the predominantly mid-sized dorms are cramped but comfortable. There's free wi-fi – plus a few on-site computers for those travelling sans laptop – and the central location is highly desirable.

Bristol YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5726; bristol@yha.org.uk; 14 Narrow Quay; dm/tw £19.95/44; ☎ ☎) An excellent warehouse renovation in the heart of the Harbourside, the rooms here – mostly four-bed, en suite dorms – have been refurbished with new carpets and furnishings. A free cooked breakfast is now included and there's an on-site cosy café that also serves beer.

Arches Hotel (☎ 924 7398; www.arches-hotel.co.uk; 132 Cotham Brow; s/d £35/58; ☎ ☎) Go green at

this friendly, nine-room guesthouse committed to recycling, low-energy lighting and no genetically modified foods. There are several vegan and vegetarian-only breakfast options available: the continental is free, the cooked costs £3 extra.

Washington Hotel (☎ 973 3980; www.cliftonhotels.com; St Paul's Rd; s £30-64, d £50-80; ☎) Among the dozen or so B&Bs occupying faded Georgian town houses on this pretty curve of St Paul's Rd, the Washington is perhaps the best value. Spread over three knocked-together houses, there's a variety of room configurations (the cheapest singles don't have en suites) but all have high ceilings, standard furnishings and welcome packs of fresh fruit.

Also recommended:
Toad Lodge (☎ 924 7080; www.toadlodge.com; 12 Cotham Park; s/d £25/35) It's a 20-minute walk from the city centre to this great-value B&B.

Brigstow Hotel (☎ 929 1030; www.brigstowhotel.com; Welsh Back; r £149-250; ☎ ☎ ☎) Cool waterside location for this stylish designer sleeper.

Eating

There are good cafés and restaurants lining the Harbourside – the alfresco dining areas here are especially popular in summer – but it's also worth strolling uphill via Park Row to Whiteladies St, where you'll find a full menu of worthy alternatives.

St Nicholas Market (922 4017; entrances High St, Corn St & St Nicholas St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) A smashing undercover Victorian market full of gourmet, deli-style takeouts. Make a circuit to check out home-made options, like olive bread, Stilton pasties and Caribbean delicacies, before deciding what you're in the mood for. Then top it off with some vintage clothes shopping.

Mud Dock Café (☎ 934 9734; 40 The Grove; mains £7-18; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Occupying an industrial-chic renovation of an old red-brick harbour building, Mud Dock offers modern Brit cuisine (check out the lamb cutlet topped with chicken and blue-cheese mousse) and a lively, laid-back ambience. The top-floor patio enjoys fab summertime views of the busy waterfront.

Hullaballos (☎ 923 9212; 46 Whiteladies Rd; 2-course lunch £9.75, dinner mains £12-18; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) This chilled-out British brasserie offers excellent service and the kind of perfectly prepared food with gourmet flourishes usually found on more expensive menus.

The lunch soups are superb, while mains like grilled salmon or pork and leek sausages are deservedly popular. Bringing your own beer is encouraged, but there's also a good wine menu.

Also recommended:
Clifton Sausage (☎ 973 1192; 1 Chandos Rd; mains £8.50-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) Eight types of banger are the cornerstone of this gourmet comfort-food classic.
Red Snapper (☎ 973 7999; 7-9 Portland St; mains £11-19.50; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) Fish-lovers paradise with a veritable smorgasbord of options – anyone for gurnard?

Entertainment

As one of Britain's leading contemporary music incubators, Bristol has some great live venues. Pick up a copy of *Venue* (£1.30), the region's glossy weekly listings magazine, to find out what's on.

Fleece (☎ 945 0996; www.fleecegigs.co.uk; 12 St Thomas St; admission from £4) Features local indie faves and quality cover bands that move expertly from Manic Street Preachers to Massive Attack.

Croft (☎ 987 4144; www.the-croft.com; 117-119 Stokes Croft; admission from £3) If you're interested in seeing the next big thing before it hits MTV, head to this venue in the city's funky Stokes Croft area.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Bristol International Airport (BRS; ☎ 0870 121 2747; www.bristolairport.co.uk) is 7 miles southwest of the city. It services an expanding roster of routes from Europe, including Prague, Berlin, Dublin and Amsterdam. Domestic routes include regular easyJet flights from Edinburgh (from £15, 1¼ hours), Glasgow (from £15, 1¼ hours) and Newcastle (from £12, one hour). Regular Air Southwest services arrive from Leeds Bradford (from £19, one hour), Manchester (from £19, one hour) and Norwich (from £19, one hour).

BUS

Eighteen daily direct National Express buses arrive in Bristol from London Victoria (from £7, 1½ hours), as well as three direct services from Cardiff (£6.50, one hour), four from Exeter (£11.60, two hours) and two from Penzance (£37, seven hours). Megabus runs five daily services from London Victoria (from £1, three hours).

TRAIN

Half-hourly trains arrive from London Paddington (from £20, 1½ hours) daily, with frequent services arriving from Bath (£5.20, 15 minutes), Cardiff (£7.80, 45 minutes) and Exeter (from £8, 1½ hours).

Getting Around

The Bristol International Flyer bus is the most cost-effective way to travel from the airport to the city (adult/child £5/4, 30 minutes, half-hourly 5am to 11pm). Visit the excellent **Travel Bristol Info Centre** (www.travelbristol.org; 11 Colston Ave; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) for further information on regional buses, ferries, trains and bike routes.

CENTRAL ENGLAND

The geographic heartland of England is a grab bag of wildly differing scenes that represent Britain in miniature. There are flower-decked villages studded with ancient cottages in the Cotswolds, windswept rocky vistas in the hiking-friendly Peak District, history around every corner in fascinating towns like Stratford-upon-Avon, Oxford and Shrewsbury, and rejuvenated former industrial cities like Birmingham that are as vital as almost any in the country. For information on visiting the region, contact **Heart of England Tourism** (☎ 01905-761100; www.visitheartofengland.com).

OXFORD

☎ 01865 / pop 143,016
A crowded tourist hotspot in summer, Oxford lives up to its advance billing as a colourful, history-flavoured sleeper – especially if you bypass the jostling tour groups and turn up early or late in the season. The celebrated university's ancient buildings dominate the city centre, but it's not quite as pretty as Cambridge, its comparatively quaint rival to the northeast. However, it more than makes up for this by being a far more vibrant, cosmopolitan spot, with a wider array of attractions and activities.

History

Oxford University is the oldest university in Britain, with the first of its 39 colleges built for the country's chin-stroking intellectuals in the early 13th century. Its colourful

history includes a 14th-century riot over the quality of a local innkeeper's wine, which suggests that students have changed little over the centuries, and its plethora of notable graduates includes William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll and, allegedly, Sherlock Holmes. Women were not admitted to Oxford's closeted halls until 1878 and were not allowed to receive degrees until the 1920s. All colleges are now coeducational, except St Hilda's, which accepts only women.

Orientation & Information

Surrounded by rivers on its eastern, southern and western edges, pedestrian-friendly Oxford is best explored on foot or by bike – keep an eye out for zooming cyclists when crossing the streets. The train station is just an easy 10-minute stroll west of the city centre along George St and Hythe Bridge St – you will pass by the bus station on Gloucester Green (there's no green) along the way.

Ever-busy **TIC** (☎ 726871; 15-16 Broad St; www.visitoxford.org; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) is packed with maps and brochures on the region, which is just as well since the harried staff will probably be too busy to talk to you. Pick up an Oxford Visitor Card (£2.50) while you're there for attraction and eat-out discounts across the city. Web access is available at **Mic@s Internet** (☎ 726364; 118 High St; per 30 min £1; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun).

Sights & Activities

OXFORD UNIVERSITY

It is impossible to miss Oxford's crenulated college buildings, some of which are surrounded by fortress-like walls presumably intended to keep out intellectual inferiors. Fool the dons by assuming a foppish haircut, wearing a striped shirt, and clutching some weighty tomes under your arm as you stroll purposely around the town. The following are some of the university's must-see college highlights. Keep in mind that colleges can be closed to visitors on any given day, so call ahead.

The most spectacular of Oxford's colleges, the main entrance to **Christ Church** (☎ 286573; www.visitchristchurch.net; Broadwalk; adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun) is **Tom Tower**, with its postcard-perfect Christopher Wren-designed dome. Save time for

a look at the **Great Hall**, which was copied for the *Harry Potter* movie series, and check out **Christ Church Cathedral**, the smallest in Britain. It has some lovely stained-glass windows.

Arguably Oxford's prettiest college, **Magdalen** (☎ 276000; www.magd.ox.ac.uk; High St; adult/child £3/2; ☎ noon-6pm Jul-Sep, 1-6pm Oct-Jun) combines a collection of stately buildings with a verdant tapestry of landscaped grounds. The architectural highlight is the **cloister**. Surrounding a lovely quadrangle, it features fantastical carvings of hippos, jesters and dancers that are said to have inspired CS Lewis during his time here.

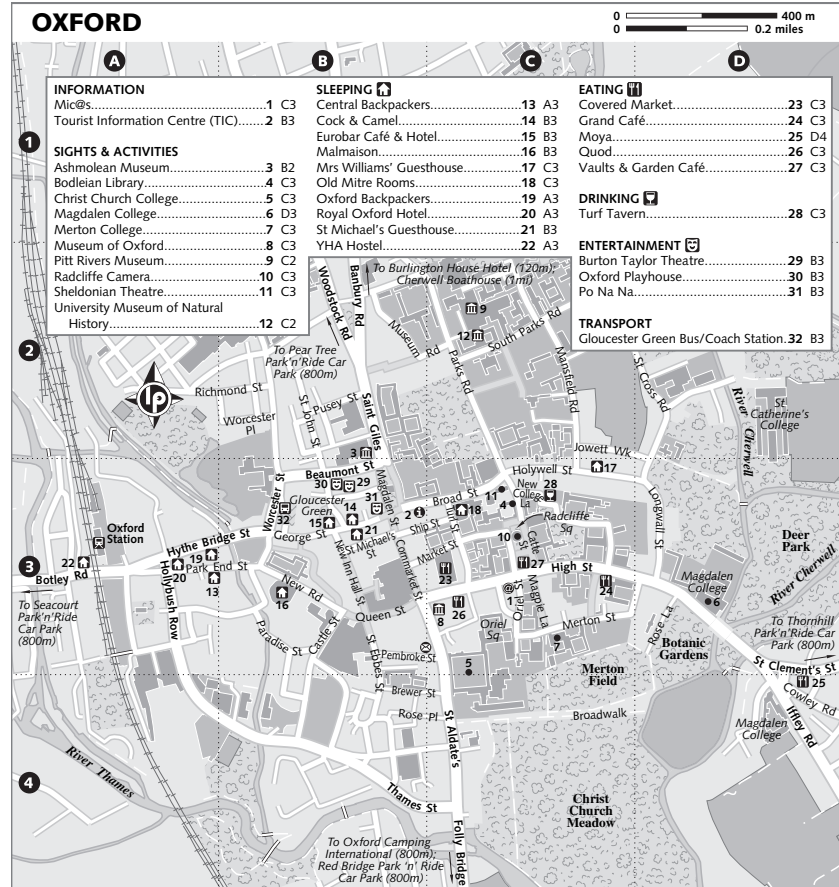
One of Oxford's oldest colleges, the main highlight of **Merton** (☎ 276310; www.merton.ox.ac.uk; Merton St; admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is the 14th-century **Old Library**, the oldest continuously operating college library in the world. Summer tours (£2) of the building are offered from July to September for curious bookworms.

The following Oxford attractions are also well worth a visit: **Bodleian Library** (☎ 277224; www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk; tour £5; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat), one of the world's oldest public libraries (enter on Broad or Cattle Sts); **Radcliffe Camera** (Radcliffe Sq), a circular architectural gem and Oxford landmark (no public access inside); and **Sheldonian Theatre** (☎ 277299; www.sheldon.ox.ac.uk; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat), a magnificent Christopher Wren-designed edifice with a joyously colourful interior (enter on Broad or Cattle Sts).

MUSEUMS

Founded in 1683, Britain's oldest museum is also one of its best. The highlights of the vast **Ashmolean** (☎ 278000; www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk; Beaumont St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) collection include a wealth of Chinese, Egyptian and European artworks and antiquities. There's also a collection of modern British paintings in the Sands Gallery and an ever-changing roster of fascinating temporary exhibitions (also free).

In its magnificent Victorian Gothic home, the **University Museum of Natural History** (☎ 272950; www.oum.ox.ac.uk; Parks Rd; admission free; ☎ noon-5pm) deftly illuminates the natural sciences, with wide-eyed visitors inexorably drawn to the hulking dinosaur skeletons. The adjacent **Pitt Rivers Museum** (☎ 270927; www.prm.ox.ac.uk; admission free; ☎ noon-4.30pm Mon-Sun) is a bewildering menagerie of collected artefacts



ranging from shrunken heads to stuffed animals. It's like a vast fairground sideshow of the wild and wacky. For an introduction to the city's history, the **Museum of Oxford** (☎ 252761; St Aldgate's; adult/child £2/0.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) is well worth a visit. Its evocation of the university's early days – including re-created rooms and college treasures – is illuminating.

PUNTING

Consider hiring a punt at **Cherwell Boathouse** (☎ 515978; Bardwell Rd; per hr £10-12). You can spend a leisurely couple of hours winding along the river honing your pole-wielding skills while drinking in the pretty college buildings. Remember that punting is not

as easy as it looks – make sure you bring a picnic for relief if the going gets too tough.

Tours

The TIC offers an array of good walking tours, including a **City and College Tour** (adult/child £6.50/3), an **Inspector Morse Tour** (adult/child £7/3) and a **Ghost Tour** (adult/child £5/3). A popular night-time option is the **Pub Tour** (£6.50), which winds its merry way, with plenty of quaffing time, through several atmospheric local hostels. Times and frequency for these tours vary through the year, so call ahead. Downloadable MP3 tours from **Tourist Tracks** (www.tourist-tracks.com; £5) are also available for those loners who prefer to amble at their own pace.

Sleeping

Oxford accommodation can be hard to come by in summer, so make sure you book well ahead. Abingdon Rd is a B&B hotspot, but the TIC's *Staying in Oxford* guide (£1) details a wide range of additional options.

BUDGET

Central Backpackers (☎ 242288; www.centralbackpackers.co.uk; 13 Park End St; dm £14-18; ☒ ☑) Oxford's newest hostel has spick-and-span facilities, free wi-fi and a fairly quiet ambience. It also offers free luggage storage, a female-only dorm and a lounge with Sky TV. There are plenty of showers, but if you get up early enough you can snag the only bath for a private soak.

YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5970; oxford@yha.org.uk; 2a Botley Rd; dm £20.95; ☒ ☑) One of England's newest YHA properties, this purpose-built hostel is just behind the train station. Most of its bright, well-maintained rooms have four to six beds, and its range of facilities include bike storage and washing machines. There's no parking (except for disabled travellers), but rates include breakfast.

Other budget recommendations:

Oxford Camping International (☎ 246551; 426 Abingdon Rd; per person £9.25) Large, popular camp site 1.5 miles from town.

Oxford Backpackers (☎ 721761; www.hostels.co.uk; 9a Hythe Bridge St; dm £14-16; ☑) Typically colourful party joint, with its own happening bar.

MIDRANGE

Mrs Williams' Guesthouse (☎ 721880; 14 Holywell St; s/d £35/50; ☐ ☒) Opposite New College in central Oxford, this homy and immaculate property has a panelled dining room and a romantic fireplace to add to its tranquil feel. Book far in advance, as there are only four rooms. The hearty breakfast is excellent.

Eurobar Café & Hotel (☎ 725087; www.eurhotels.co.uk; 48 George St; s/d £35/50; ☐ ☒) Well located with plenty of nearby pubs and restaurants, the comfortable Eurobar Café & Hotel has the look of a continental pub with the rooms of a standard British B&B: most of them are slightly chintzy and not all come with en suites. The bar itself is worth a visit even if you are not staying here: the food is cheap and cheerful, and they have a good selection of real ales.

Royal Oxford Hotel (☎ 248432; www.royaloxfordhotel.co.uk; Park End St; s/d/tr/tw from £75/80/80/90;

☐ ☒) The honey-coloured edifice of the Royal Oxford, opposite the train station, has been refurbished to include some boutique flourishes (the welcome fruit baskets are a nice touch). Its high-ceilinged rooms are decorated in a comfortable, nonfussy style and many of the bathrooms are surprisingly large.

Other midrange recommendations:

St Michael's Guesthouse (☎ 242101; 26 St Michael's St; s/d £40/55; ☒) Amazing backstreet city-centre location for this charming B&B.

Old Mitre Rooms (☎ 279821; mitre@lincoln.ox.ac.uk; 4b Turl St; r from £45; ☒) mid-Mar–mid-Apr & Jun–Sep) College-owned student rooms, mostly singles.

Cock & Camel (☎ 203705; cockandcamel@youngs.co.uk; 24-26 George St; s & d from £75; ☒) Comfortable rooms above a sometimes noisy pub.

TOP END

Malmaison (☎ 268400; www.malmaison-oxford.com; 3 Oxford Castle; r from £110; ☐ ☒) This seriously swanky boutique-chic property is in the former HM Prison Oxford, an austere Victorian edifice on the site of the old Oxford Castle. Not surprisingly, the rooms – many converted from two or three poky cells – are dripping with stylish modern flourishes, including the kind of large-tub, luxury bathrooms that are very difficult to leave. An ideal place to be incarcerated for the night.

Eating & Drinking

There's an array of eateries to suit all budgets in Oxford, so it's not hard to find a place to fill your face. If you run out of ideas, head to the nearest bar for traditional pub grub and a pint of regional ale.

Covered Market (Market St; snacks from £1.50; ☒ 8am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) Not everything is for eating in this large, airy market hall, but it's hard to shake the idea that you're wondering around a gourmet smorgasbord. From samosas to sausages and olives to sticky buns, the quality is a cut above standard market fare. A good spot to bring a newspaper and grab a strong morning coffee.

Turf Tavern (☎ 243235; 4 Bath Pl; mains £4-8; ☒) lunch & dinner) There's excellent pub grub at this recommended 16th-century watering hole that's hidden along a back alley between Holywell St and New College Lane. Welcoming a mix of students, locals and tourists under its low-beamed ceilings,

drinkers spill out into the adjoining courtyards in summer. Allegedly the spot where Bill Clinton 'didn't inhale' cannabis in his student days.

Vaults & Garden Café (☎ 279112; St Mary's Church, Raddiffe Sq; mains £5-8; ☒) 10am–5pm) The handsome city-centre church of St Mary's is home to this chatty, wholesome spot, which specialises in organic and vegetarian dishes – the tasty pancakes and large salads are recommended. In summer pick up a cold organic beer and sit outside in the shadow of Raddcliffe Camera.

Moya (☎ 200111; 97 St Clement's St; mains £5-11; ☒) lunch & dinner) This sleek, contemporary Slovak restaurant serves an array of well-priced, carnivore-friendly dishes, including richly sauced venison medallions and an excellent goulash. There's plenty of menu space for vegetarians, too: check out the goats cheese devil's toast.

Grand Café (☎ 204463; 84 High St; mains £6-14; ☒) 9am–7pm) The grande dame of Oxford coffeehouses, this elegant, multicoloured 1920s room is a little past its prime, but it recalls an age of elegance now almost forgotten. Potted palms abound and the gilded arms protruding from the walls are a little alarming, but the menu of tasty sandwiches, dainty salads and decadent desserts is popular with locals and visitors.

Quod (☎ 202505; 92-94 High St; mains £8-17; ☒) lunch & dinner) This modern European brasserie includes specials like duck confit with celeriac, bacon and prunes and succulent slow-roasted lamb shank. The room, with its exposed brick walls, high ceilings and large windows, is bright and welcoming, and the curved bar is a good spot for an end-of-day cocktail. Large paintings by young British artists line the walls.

Entertainment

Leaflets and posters paper the streets of Oxford announcing all sorts of events at the colleges and around town – you don't have to be a student to partake.

Po Na Na (☎ 249171; 13 Magdalen St) A hip, late-opening bar-cum-nightclub.

Oxford Playhouse (☎ 305305; www.oxfordplayhouse.com; 11-12 Beaumont St) The city's leading theatre, music and dance stage.

Burton Taylor Theatre (☎ 305305; www.burtontaylor.co.uk; Gloucester St) The Playhouse's studio hotspot for offbeat productions.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Oxford is an easy bus hop from London, and there are several companies servicing this route. Direct National Express buses arrive every 20 minutes from London Victoria (£12, 1½ hours), with five additional direct services from Birmingham (£10.20, one to two hours) and one from Bristol (£13, three hours). Megabus services arrive from London Victoria (from £1, 1½ hours) every 15 minutes. **Oxford Tube** (☎ 772250; www.oxfordtube.com) bus services arrive throughout the day from London Victoria (£11, 1½ hours), offering a 24-hour service and discounts for students and young people. **Oxford Express** (☎ 785400; www.oxfordbus.co.uk) operates a similar service with competing times and prices. **Stagecoach Express** (☎ 01234-212852) runs an hourly X5 service from Cambridge (£7, 3½ hours).

TRAIN

Direct trains arrive from London Paddington (from £9.50, 55 minutes) every 30 minutes. Direct trains also arrive twice hourly from Birmingham (from £8, one hour). Nondirect trains arrive regularly from Bath (£10.40, 1½ hours) and Bristol (£13.40, 1¼ hours); both trains change at Didcot Parkway.

Getting Around

Oxford is best explored on foot – almost everything is within easy reach if you hoof it. But this is also a highly bike-friendly town, so consider renting from **Cycloanalysts** (☎ 424444; www.cycloanalysts.com; 150 Cowley Rd; ☒) 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) from £10 per day and pick up a map of bike routes from the TIC.

BLENHIM PALACE

Britain's largest stately pile, still lived in by the latest Duke of Marlborough, **Blenheim Palace** (☎ 0870 060 2080; Woodstock; adult/child £14/8.50; ☒) 10.30am–5.30pm mid-Feb–Oct, 10.30am–5.30pm Wed–Sun Nov–mid-Dec) is arguably the nation's finest baroque masterpiece. Built from the proceeds of a large reward paid to John Churchill by Queen Anne for his role in defeating Louis XIV, the extravagant 18th-century home was the historic birthplace of Winston Churchill in 1874. The detailed **Churchill Exhibition** explores the life of this decorated and still-revered wartime leader. Additional highlights include the aptly named

Long Library, the painted ceilings of the **Great Hall** and the **private apartments** of the sitting duke, accessible via a special 30-minute tour. Save plenty of time for the beautifully landscaped **gardens**. Partly designed by 'Capability' Brown, they include a maze, greenhouse and a picturesque human-made lake. Time your visit correctly and you'll hit the colourful annual **Jousting Tournament** in late April. Bus 20 (£4.20 return, 30 minutes, twice hourly) from Oxford train and bus stations stops in Woodstock village, in the shadow of the palace.

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

☎ 01789 / pop 111,474

Stratford teeters on the edge of theme-park madness in summer, when coachloads of tourists descend on the town to pay camera-wielding, gift shop-hogging homage to England's leading dead playwright. But if you can circumvent the crowds by arriving early or late in the season, it's still possible to celebrate Shakespeare's life and works without jostling for space on every street corner. Whatever you do, remember that the play's the thing and make sure you catch a performance by the resident Royal Shakespeare Company. It will remind you what all the fuss is about, 450 years after the Bard shuffled off this mortal coil.

Orientation & Information

Stratford's compact old centre is easily explored on foot. The train station is a 15-minute walk (or £5 taxi ride) west and the Avon River abuts the town centre's eastern edge. Head south along the river bank to find the main theatres and Holy Trinity Church, Shakespeare's final resting place.

You can book accommodation, buy theatre tickets and exchange currency at the **TIC** (☎ 293127; www.shakespeare-country.co.uk; Bridgefoot; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-Mar, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Apr-Sep). For Internet access, head to **Cyber Junction** (☎ 263400; 28 Greenhill St; per 30 min £3; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Sights & Activities

Much like mothballed artefacts in glass cases, there's an unreal quality to the five timber-framed Shakespeare-related houses on Stratford's mostly modern streets. The most worthy of a visit is **Shakespeare's Birthplace** (Henly St; adult/child £7/2.75), a scrubbed-clean

Tudor building where chatty interpreters explain the history of the house. Reputed to be the spot where the Bard entered the world mewling and puking, the upstairs bedroom has been a pilgrimage site for Shakespeare fans – including Dickens and Thomas Hardy – for centuries. Located a mile from the town centre, **Anne Hathaway's Cottage** (adult/child £5.50/2) is an idyllic thatched-roofed farmhouse where Shakespeare's wife was raised. It's often crowded in summer so take a breather in the cottage garden, which includes sculptures of Shakespearian characters and a Yew maze. All five houses are administered by the **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust** (☎ 204016; www.shakespeare.org.uk), which sells two good-value combined-entry ticket options (three houses adult/child £11/5.50, five houses £14/6.50).

You can see where the Bard is now at the immaculate **Holy Trinity Church** (☎ 266316; www.stratford-upon-avon.org; Old Town; suggested donation £1.50; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Nov-May), accessed via a handsome tree-lined avenue and a tiny doorway through which almost everyone has to stoop. The high altar and stained-glass windows are highlights, but most people come for the grave in the chancel, a discreet stone slab in the floor marked with a blue chord.

The man himself is brought back to life at Stratford's newest attraction. **Shakespeare-ence** (☎ 290111; www.shakespeare-ence.co.uk; Waterside; adult/child £7.25/6.25; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, 11am-5pm Oct-Mar) is a surprisingly entertaining hi-tech extravaganza that uses holograms to stage highlights from nine plays inside a re-creation of a traditional Elizabethan theatre. 'Shakespeare' even makes a messianic appearance himself to explain his philosophies on life.

Check out some real theatre performed by the world-leading **Royal Shakespeare Company** (☎ 0870 609 1110; www.rsc.org.uk; tickets £5-55; ☎ box office 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) where tickets for plays are often available on performance day. The company's Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST) is closed for redevelopment until 2010. Its plays will be temporarily transferred to the new Courtyard Theatre. The company's other theatre, the Swan, will be closed for refurbishment in 2008 and 2009. It will not produce any plays during this period.

Sleeping

Grove Rd and Evesham Pl, between the train station and town centre, is B&B central. Be aware that many places charge per person rather than per room.

YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6052; stratford@yha.org.uk; Hemmingford House, Alveston; dm £19.95; (P) (Q)) Nearly 2 miles from the town centre, this splendid white stucco Georgian mansion contains mostly small dorms and good facilities. The cycle storage and games room are a nice touch, but it's the 1.2 hectares of verdant grounds that stand out. Take bus X18 or 77 to Alveston from Stratford's Bridge St.

Hamlet House (☎ 204386; www.hamlethouse.com; 52 Grove Rd; s/d from £22.50/45; (P) (Q) (R)) All rooms at this exceptionally comfortable B&B are scrupulously clean and some include video libraries alongside their TVs. Breakfast options include a gourmet omelette choice and cooked vegetarian alternative. Broadband access is free – you can borrow the house computer if you don't have a laptop – and guests can freely loan a couple of mountain bikes.

White Swan (☎ 297022; www.thewhiteswanstratford.co.uk; Rother St; s £60-70, d £80-100; (P) (Q) (R)) A characterful pub near the centre of the action, the accommodation combines modern and olde-worlde flourishes, with all rooms en suite. Ask for a heritage room and you'll have wonky ceiling beams, creaky floors and a four-poster bed (some rooms only). The downstairs bar contains a good menu of traditional pub food.

Falcon Hotel (☎ 0870 832 9905; www.legacy-hotels.co.uk; Chapel St; s £54-105, d £80-145; (P)) Like two hotels in one, there are beautifully maintained, wood-beamed rooms with leaded windows here but also some modern chichi suites for those who prefer 21st-century living. Either way, the Falcon is a well-located, larger property sitting atop a warren of atmospheric bars and restaurants.

Also recommended:

Quilts & Croissants (☎ 267629; www.quiltcroissants.co.uk; 33 Evesham Pl; s £18-40, d £36-52; (P) (Q) (R)) Charming, family-run B&B a short walk from the town centre.

Moonraker House (☎ 268774; www.moonrakerhouse.com; 40 Alcester Rd; s £40, d £68-75; (P)) Lovely, indulgently comfortable B&B with friendly owners.

Eating & Drinking

Sheep St is Stratford's restaurant row, but aside from the pie and cake shops there's a paucity of cheap eats in town.

Baguette Barge (☎ 0796 395 6720; Barncroft Gardens, Waterside; sandwiches £2-3; ☎ lunch & dinner) This charming barge moored on the Avon River serves superior good-value takeout sarnies and baguettes. Expect to wait up to 10 minutes for a burger – they're actually cooked from scratch.

Garrick Inn (☎ 292186; 25 High St; mains £4-9; ☎ lunch & dinner) A smashing Tudor pub, complete with low ceilings and leaded windows, the Garrick also has a large and varied menu of hearty pub food, with more than the usual share of vegetarian options. Baked potatoes – with more toppings than you can shake a stick at – are the best deal and will likely fill you up for the day.

Dirty Duck (☎ 297312; Southern Lane; mains £6-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) This great Flowers brewery pub on the banks of the Avon River has an excellent menu of gastropub delights, including slow-cooked Welsh lamb, prime beef and ale pie, and Duchy of Cornwall pork and herb sausages. If you're not hungry, decamp to the patio with a beer and watch the world float by.

Lambs (☎ 292554; 12 Sheep St; mains £11-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) Combining a smart and sassy menu fusing traditional ingredients with new influences with a charming exposed beam interior, Lambs offers mouth-watering reinterpretations of steak, lamb and pasta classics. It is worth dining here for the ambience alone: this 16th-century building is one of Stratford-Upon-Avon's oldest structures.

Also recommended:

Thespians (☎ 267187; 27 Sheep St; mains £6-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Good-value South Indian restaurant with plenty of vegetarian options.

Malbec (☎ 296106; 6 Union St; 2-course lunch £10, 3-course dinner £26; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Low-key modern British brasserie with gourmet flourishes.

Getting There & Away

Four direct National Express buses arrive daily from London Victoria (£15, 2½ to 3½ hours), while two direct buses arrive from Birmingham (£6.50, one hour) and two from Oxford (£8.30, one hour). Every two hours a direct train arrives in Stratford from London Marylebone (from £10.50, 2¼ hours). In addition, the Shakespeare Line is a direct hourly train service from Birmingham Snow Hill to Stratford (£5.40, 50 minutes).

THE COTSWOLDS

A delightful higgledy-piggledy of implausibly pretty villages – think charming stone churches, thatch-roofed homes and hearthlit pubs – set in a postcard-perfect sea of rolling hills studded with dozy sheep, the Cotswolds is classic English countryside. Built on the medieval wool trade, the region is popular with hikers and bikers but also attracts convoys of tour buses in summer.

Orientation & Information

Running north from Bath for around 100 miles, the Cotswolds is easily divided into southern and northern areas, with the northern half attracting most visitors. With its own train station, Moreton-in-Marsh is a good northern access point for visiting the more attractive nearby villages of Chipping Campden and Stow-on-the-Wold. In the south, Cheltenham is a handsome spa town with excellent train and bus access. For more information on planning a visit, contact the **Cotswold Tourist Board** (☎ 01452-426280; www.cotswolds.com, www.the-cotswolds.org).

Getting There & Around

Five nondirect (change at Cirencester) National Express buses arrive daily from London Victoria at Moreton-in-Marsh (£18.60, three to four hours) and Stow-on-the-Wold (£18.60, 3½ to 4½ hours). Eleven direct daily London Victoria bus services also arrive in Cheltenham (from £4, three hours). Direct daily train services arrive every two hours from London Paddington at Moreton-in-Marsh (£23.30, 1½ hours). Regular direct and nondirect trains also arrive at Cheltenham from London Paddington throughout the day (from £19, two to 2½ hours).

Getting around the Cotswolds by public transport isn't easy. If you're trying anything ambitious, contact Traveline. Bike fans can also rent in Chipping Campden from **Cotswold Country Cycles** (☎ 01386-438706; www.cotswoldcountrycycles.com; Longlands Farm Cottage; per day £12). It also offers some popular bike tours of the region (from £195) that include accommodation.

Chipping Campden

☎ 01386 / pop 1943

The breathtaking, historically intact **High St** here is worth a visit alone, with its combination of handsome wool-trade public

buildings and nearby fringe of beautiful thatch-roofed cottages, many with immaculate gardens. Among the highlights are the 17th-century **Market Hall** and the lovely Perpendicular Gothic **St James Church**, possibly the finest church in the Cotswolds. For a town map (£0.20) and more recommendations, visit the **TIC** (☎ 841206; www.visitcippingcampden.com; Old Police Station, High St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar).

There are no hostels here, but the **Eight Bells** (☎ 840371; www.eightbellsinn.co.uk; Church St; s/d from £50/85; ☎) is among the best sleepovers with its modern-decorated pub rooms. The **Kings Arms** (☎ 840256; www.thekingsarmshotel.com; The Square; s/d from £75/85; ☎) is a slightly pricier alternative, with more traditional interiors. Both have good restaurants that are a cut above the usual pub offerings (mains from £8), and they serve great beers like Hook Norton and Tangle Foot.

Stow-on-the-Wold

☎ 01451 / pop 2074

Known colloquially as Stow, this elegant town is dripping with twee teashops and pricey boutique galleries serving the strolling tourists that descend here en masse in summer. The lovely Georgian-era **Square** is worth a visit, complete with its historic **Market Cross**. The nearby 15th-century **St Edward's Church** is notable for the tombstones of wool-trade big-wigs that line its floor. The **TIC** (☎ 831082; www.stowonthewold.net; Hollis House, The Square; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) can assist with further recommendations.

The central **YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6050; stow@yha.org.uk; The Square; dm £15; ☎ ☎ ☎) is popular with families and has top-notch facilities. For those with greater budgets, there's the historic **Stow Lodge Hotel** (☎ 830485; www.stowlodgehotel.co.uk; The Square; s/d from £75/95; ☎ ☎), which has large rooms and its own gardens. Its popular on-site restaurant serves traditional British dishes with a gourmet flourish (three-course dinner £22).

Cheltenham

☎ 01242 / pop 98,875

This large and elegant spa town is the biggest settlement in the southern Cotswolds. It's worth visiting for its central **Promenade**, the only place to be seen in summer, its **Art Gallery & Museum** (popular with Arts and Crafts fans) and its handsome Regency-era

Pittville Pump Room, the heart of the town's spa claim to fame. Horse-racing fans make a beeline here every March, when the **Cheltenham Festival** – England's top steeplechase event – hits town. Contact the **TIC** (☎ 522878; www.visitcheltenham.info; 77 Promenade; ☎ 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Sat) for its free accommodation booking service.

For budget travellers, it will likely recommend the **YMCA** (☎ 524024; www.cheltenhamymca.org; 6 Vittoria Walk; dm/s £16.50/25), with small dorms and single rooms; breakfast is included in the rates. For those with more money, the **Hotel Kandinsky** (☎ 527788; www.aliashotels.com; Bayshill Rd; s/d £75/105) is the coolest sleeper in town, with its eclectic antique and arty interiors.

BIRMINGHAM

☎ 0121 / pop 970,892

Britain's second-largest city, Birmingham has lagged behind post-industrial rivals like Glasgow and Manchester and their successful rebranding as hip urban centres. But while 'Brum' appears on the surface to be just a vast, open-air shopping centre, its increasing cultural vibrancy, space-age new architecture and undoubted cosmopolitan charms make it a city on the rise.

For maps, brochures and a free accommodation booking service, contact the **TIC** (☎ 0870 428 1859; www.beinbirmingham.co.uk; The Rotunda, 150 New St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat). There are free computers with Internet access on every floor of the grubby **Central Library** (☎ 303 4511; Chamberlain Sq; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat).

Sights

For a fascinating glimpse into Birmingham's tenement-housing past, check out the **Back to Backs** (☎ 666 7671; 50-54 Inge St; adult/child £4.50/2.20; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), a preserved courtyard of 19th-century working-class homes illustrating what life was like here from the 1840s to the 1970s.

Take a crash course in the cool new Birmingham, over at **IKON Gallery** (☎ 248 0708; www.ikon-gallery.co.uk; 1 Oozells Sq, Brindleyplace; admission free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun), a nest of rooms with an ever-changing roster of contemporary artworks.

Along with its comprehensive selection of chain stores, Birmingham is a market-lovers mecca, with several overlapping indoor and outdoor **markets** centred around

the Bull Ring area near the cathedral. Visiting magpies will also want to check out the charming **Jewellery Quarter**, with its walkable streets of 100 shiny gem shops.

Sleeping & Eating

Billy's International Backpackers (☎ 07951-745102; 58 Coventry St, Digbeth; dm from £17) Opened in early 2006, this is one of the city's first hostel-style sleepover spots. Located above a pub in the city centre, it has 30 beds and each room has an en suite shower (toilets are shared). Breakfast and a free luggage room are included, and some twin rooms are available.

The midrange chains offer some of the best prices and locations in central Birmingham. They include **Ibis** (☎ 622 6010; www.ibishotel.com; Ladywell Walk; r £49-85; ☎) and **Holiday Inn Express** (☎ 0870 400 9670; www.hiexpress.co.uk; 65 Lionel St; r £49-75; ☎).

Birmingham's eating-out options have vastly improved in recent years with some good restaurants slowly emerging on the local scene. Reflecting its large Asian population, the city's Balti Triangle area is a must-do pilgrimage for curry connoisseurs. Excellent baltis (Pakistani curries made and served in a flat-bottomed pan) are proffered at the laid-back **Royal Al Faisal** (☎ 449 5695; 136 Stoney Lane; buffet £6; ☎ lunch & dinner), the ornate **Punjab Paradise** (☎ 449 4110; 377 Ladypool Rd; mains from £7; ☎ dinner) and the ever-popular **Al Frash** (☎ 753 3120; 186 Ladypool Rd; mains from £7; ☎ dinner).

Getting There & Away

Direct National Express buses arrive twice hourly from London Victoria (from £2, 2½ hours). Five direct services arrive daily from Oxford (from £1, two hours) and eight from Bristol (from £1, two hours). Nine daily direct Megabus services arrive from London Victoria (from £1, three hours). Twice-hourly direct train services arrive at Birmingham New Street from London Euston (from £10, 1½ hours) and Birmingham Snow Hill from London Marylebone (from £10, 2½ hours).

SHREWSBURY & AROUND

☎ 01743 / pop 67,150

With justifiable claim to being England's finest Tudor town (there are more than 50 handsome medieval black-and-white buildings around this curve of the Severn River) Shrewsbury is a history-lovers dream. But the secret to really enjoying the town is to

duck along the ancient passageways (known locally as 'shuts') behind the preserved mansions. Shrewsbury is also a great base for exploring the breathtaking Shropshire countryside. For information on visiting the wider region, contact **Shropshire Tourism** (☎ 462462; www.shropshiretourism.info).

Orientation & Information

Eminently explorable on foot, Shrewsbury's olde-world town centre is a five-minute uphill walk from the bus and train stations. The **TIC** (☎ 281200; www.visitshrewsbury.com; The Square; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar) is in the Music Hall on the ancient market square. It's the starting point for a roster of entertaining historic walks. Free Internet access is available at the **Reference Library** (☎ 255380; 1a Castle St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun).

Sights & Activities

Wandering Shrewsbury's winding medieval streets is the best way to spend an afternoon here. But while marvelling at teetering 15th-century masterpieces like **Ireland's Mansion** and **Abbot's House**, there are some hidden gems that do warrant further exploration. Head down **Grope Lane** – a narrow alleyway that was once sex-trade central – and you will find dozens of markings scored into the wood by craftsmen from centuries past. Drop into the **King's Head** pub to take a look at a recently uncovered medieval wall painting. And stroll around the back of the **Nag's Head** to see the shell of a near-derelict Tudor building.

WORTH A TRIP

A 30-minute bus 96 ride from Shrewsbury brings you to **Ironbridge** (☎ 01952-884391; www.ironbridge.org.uk; single-attraction ticket adult £1.50-9, child £1-6, combined-attraction ticket adult/child £14/9.50; ☎ 10am-5pm), a World Heritage-designated cluster of 10 Industrial Revolution themed museums. Head first to the **TIC** (☎ 01952-884391; www.visitironbridge.co.uk; Tollhouse; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) to plan your visit. It's tricky to make the best of Ironbridge without transport, so arrive on the weekend when a shuttle bus operates between the museums (£0.50 per trip).

Originally founded after the Battle of Hastings and 'modernised' in the 13th and 19th centuries, **Shrewsbury Abbey** (☎ 232723; www.shrewsburyabbey.com; Abbey Foregate; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.45pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3pm Nov-Mar) is a magnificent sandstone edifice. Once the centrepiece of a complex of monastic buildings, it survived the Dissolution by becoming a parish church. It houses Norman-era arches and a technicolour Victorian altar.

Located in one of the town's finest Tudor structures, **Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 361196; Barker St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) exhibits fascinating artefacts from the nearby Roman settlement of Viroconium. Look for temporary exhibitions on Charles Darwin leading up to 2009, when the city celebrates the birth of its famous son.

Sleeping & Eating

Shrewsbury's youth hostel has closed, but there are several pubs offering cheap B&B rates for visitors.

Lion & Pheasant Hotel (☎ 236288; lionandpheasant@aol.com; 49-50 Wyle Cop; s £25-45, d £50-55; ☎) This clean, comfortable and well-maintained 17th-century guesthouse is a warren of 27 mostly en suite rooms in a wide array of sizes. Most are fairly modern but some have character features, like old fireplaces and exposed beams. There's an excellent Sunday roast in the downstairs pub restaurant (£8.50).

Tudor House (☎ 351735; www.tudorhouseshrewsbury.com; 2 Fish St; from s/d £69/79; ☎) A superior 15th-century pub classic with immaculate accommodation, on a quiet cobbled backstreet in the town centre. The rooms have been tastefully modernised with sinks and LCD TVs but have lost none of their Tudor charm. This family-run sleeper spot also cooks up organic cooked breakfasts.

Prince Rupert Hotel (☎ 499955; www.prince-rupert-hotel.co.uk; Butcher Row; s/d £85/105; ☎) Ask for a room in the historic 12th-century Mansion House wing and you can live out all your medieval role-playing fantasies. Many of the hotel's other rooms are markedly more modern, but there's a cosy, maiden aunt feel throughout. With three on-site restaurants – the Royalist is the best – there's no excuse for going hungry. It has a great location right in the heart of town.

Good Life Wholefood Restaurant (☎ 350455; Barracks Passage; mains £2-5; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat) Tucked along a quiet 'shut'

off Wyle Cop, this great-value vegetarian and vegan eatery is well worth a visit. Every meal has a home-cooked feel and there's an ever-changing roster of daily specials. Regulars include hearty quiches – the broccoli and Stilton is recommended – along with curries and large salads.

Three Fishes (☎ 344793; 4 Fish St; mains £5-9; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This affable, multi-beamed Tudor tavern serves quite decent pub grub, but most visitors are here for the ale. Start slowly, and make sure you try the Adnams, White Monk and award-winning Timothy Taylor's Landlord.

Owens Brasserie (☎ 363633; 18 Butcher Row; mains £7-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) This contemporary bistro with a Mediterranean-influenced, locally sourced menu has a good outside seating area. The goat's cheese with walnut crumb, served with piquant cranberries, is a recommended lunch, while finger-licking larger mains include pan-fried Barbary duck. There's an impressive wine selection and regular live music.

Getting There & Away

Two direct National Express buses arrive from London Victoria (£16.50, 4½ hours) daily, while one arrives from Wrexham (£4.50, 1½ hours) and two from Birmingham (£5, 1½ hours). Frequent nondirect train services (change at Crew or Birmingham New Street) arrive from London Euston (from £10, two to three hours) throughout the day. Hourly direct services also arrive from Wrexham (£5, 40 minutes), Swansea (£27.80, three hours) and Cardiff (£27, two hours).

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

Squeezed between the industrial Midlands to the south, Manchester to the west and Sheffield to the east, the 555-sq-mile Peak District is one of England's wildest and windiest outdoor spots. That's not to say it's inhospitable. In fact, the 'peaks' here are often fairly gentle hills, and there are plenty of soft hiking and biking routes for those who prefer not to break a sweat when heading out for the day.

Orientation

The region is divided into the wilder and more dramatic scenery of the Dark Peak area in the north and the gentler, low-lying mead-

ows and dales of the White Peak area in the south. Buxton to the west or Matlock to the east are good bases for exploring the park, or you can stay right in the centre at Bakewell or Castleton. There are also prehistoric sites, limestone caves and the fine stately homes of Chatsworth and Haddon Hall to keep you occupied. From Edale, the Pennine Way starts its 250-mile meander northwards.

Information

There are 10 well-resourced visitor information centres in and around the park, including those at **Bakewell** (☎ 01629-813227; Old Market Hall, Bridge St), **Buxton** (☎ 01298-25106; The Crescent), **Edale** (☎ 01433-670207; Main St) and **Castleton** (☎ 01433-620679; Buxton Rd). For further information, check out the region's official visitor website **Peak District** (www.visitpeakdistrict.com). It has search engines for accommodation and activities.

Sleeping

For those on a tight budget, there are popular YHA hostels in **Castleton** (☎ 0870 770 5758; castleton@yha.org.uk; dm £14; ☎) and **Bakewell** (☎ 0870 770 5682; bakewell@yha.org.uk; Fly Hill; dm £14; ☎), and a recommended but often very busy YHA Activity Centre hostel in **Edale** (☎ 0870 770 5808; edale@yha.org.uk; Rowland Cote, Nether Booth; dm £12.50; ☎), where you can try your hand at caving, kayaking, climbing and abseiling.

B&Bs and pub sleepovers are scattered throughout the Peak District. Recommendations include Edale's charming **Stoncroft Guest House** (☎ 01433-670262; www.stoncroftguesthouse.co.uk; Stoncroft, Grindsbrook; r £64-74; ☎), Buxton's ancient **Old Hall Hotel** (☎ 01298-22841; www.oldhallhotelbuxton.co.uk; The Square; s/d £70/105) and Bakewell's handsome **Rutland Arms Hotel** (☎ 01629-812812; www.bakewell.demon.co.uk; The Square; s/d £65/120; ☎) is reputedly the historic home of the venerable Bakewell pudding (or tart as everyone else calls it).

Getting There & Around

One direct National Express bus arrives in Buxton from London Victoria (£21, five hours) and another from Manchester (£6.20, one hour) daily. One daily direct service also arrives in Bakewell from Derby (£6.50, 50 minutes) and another from Manchester (£7.30, 1¼ hours). Hourly nondirect (change at Stockport) train services arrive in Buxton

from London Euston (from £13.50, three hours). A direct service also arrives every two hours from Sheffield in Edale (£4.25, 33 minutes) and another arrives hourly from Manchester in Buxton (£6.35, one hour).

The local and regional bus system serves the park surprisingly well. Many visitors use the hourly Trent Barton Transpeak service that cuts across the Peak District from Nottingham and Derby to Manchester via Matlock, Bakewell and Buxton. Additional well-used routes include the First South Yorkshire bus 272 Sheffield to Castleton, Bowers bus 58 Macclesfield to Bakewell and Trent Barton bus 199 Manchester Airport to Buxton. Visit the useful online route planner at **Derbyshire County Council** (www.derbyshire.gov.uk/buses) for more information.

EAST ENGLAND

Despite the bustling tourist magnet of Cambridge, few visitors to the UK ever make it to the wilds of Norfolk and Lincolnshire, a clutch of picturesque counties that remain a mystery even to the majority of Brits. This absence of tourists belies a region that is well worth exploring. East England is where you'll find pretty market towns, gently undulating farm-strewn landscapes, swathes of beautifully desolate coastline and gallons of colourful history.

A founding economic powerhouse of the industrial revolution – wool and weaving made Norwich one of England's most prominent cities, and King's Lynn a major port in centuries past – the region's restaurants and accommodation scenes have undergone a quiet revolution in recent years, surprising those who come here to salve their curiosity. For information on visiting the area, including a great selection of cycling route maps, contact the **East of England Tourist Board** (0870 225 4800; www.visiteastofengland.com).

CAMBRIDGE

☎ 01223 / pop 117,717

Hallowed home of one of the world's most prestigious centres of learning, pretty Cambridge is steeped in crenulated history and scholarly ambience. The 31-college university, which dominates the city centre, was founded by a 13th-century splinter group that broke off from Oxford – still known

locally as the 'other place' – to set up their own competing academic bastion. The rivalry has been barely concealed ever since. Yet Cambridge does not rest only on its swotty laurels. It is also a lively city with enough designer boutiques and trendy cafés to keep its compact centre teeming with locals and visitors.

Orientation & Information

Pedestrian-friendly Cambridge is easily explored on foot by even the laziest of walkers. Like Oxford, it's also a great city for cyclists. The main university buildings occupy the city centre in a wide bend of the Cam River. The bus station is also in the city centre on Drummer St, but the train station is a 20-minute walk or £5 taxi ride to the southeast. The most revered colleges and the Backs – a popular stretch of the river and grasslands at the 'back' of these colleges – are west of Sidney St.

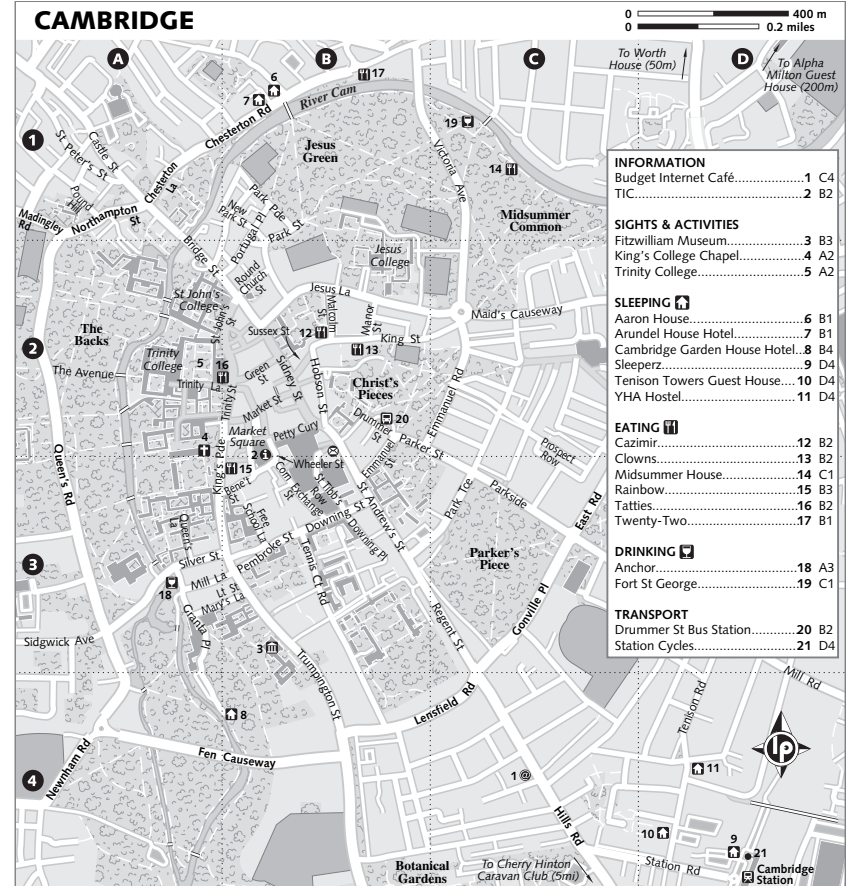
Crowded in summer, the **TIC** (☎ 0871 226 8006; www.visitcambridge.org; The Old Library, Wheeler St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) sells a £2.50 Official Visitor Card that provides small discounts at sights, activities and restaurants. Between the train station and the city centre, **Budget Internet Café** (☎ 464625; 30 Hills Rd; per hr from £0.90; ☎ 9am-11pm) offers the cheapest Internet access in Cambridge.

Sights & Activities

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

There's an uneasy relationship between some of the colleges and the tourists that overrun the city in summer. Visitors are not simply allowed to run free in the halls of academe, and each of the five main colleges – King's, Queen's, Clare, Trinity and St John's – charges entry fees of up to £5. Colleges frequently close to visitors at short notice, so call ahead if you want to follow in the footsteps of VIP alums like Tennyson, Isaac Newton and Prince Charles.

Among the university's unmissable highlights is **King's College Chapel** (☎ 331212; www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel; King's Pde; adult/child £4.50/3; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3.15pm Sat, 1.15-2.15pm Sun term-time, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun outside term-time), a dazzling Tudor testament to Christian devotion that has the power to make the most ardent atheist think twice. If you can un-crick your neck after



staring at the astonishing **fan-vaulted ceiling**, check out the intricately carved **wooden screen** contributed by Henry VIII.

Nearby **Trinity College** (☎ 338400; adult/child £2.20/1.30; ☎ 10am-5pm) is one of the university's grandest and most attractive academic piles. Founded in 1546, it includes the **Great Court**, with acres of manicured lawns, broad pathways and palatial historic buildings. Don't miss the **Wren Library** (☎ 338488; admission free; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Fri year-round, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat term-time). Its collection includes AA Milne's original **Winnie the Pooh**.

Echoing its history as a centre of discovery, many Cambridge colleges have their own museums covering themes such as archaeology, anthropology and polar research.

But the university's leading cultural light is the **Fitzwilliam Museum** (☎ 332900; www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), one of Britain's most important collections of art and antiquities. Founded in 1816, highlights include Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, a kaleidoscope of artworks from Titian, Rembrandt and Monet, and a treasure trove of ceramics, glass and silver ware. Don't miss the breathtaking William Morris edition of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*.

Tours

Time-challenged visitors should consider a TIC-arranged **walking tour** (☎ 457574; adult £7-9, child £4.50; ☎ 10.30am Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 11.30am Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 1.30pm daily year-round). These

'Cambridge 101' strolls include punting and costumed drama options in summer, when you might run into Lord Byron or Elizabeth I. Those who prefer their own company can order a four-pack of downloadable **MP3 tours** (www.tourist-tracks.com; £5) and amble at their own pace.

Festivals & Events

Over four end-of-July days in the fields around Cherry Hinton, the **Cambridge Folk Festival** (☎ 457245; www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk; Cherry Hinton; full festival £86, Fri/Sat/Sun £29/40/4) hosts the best British and overseas folk musicians. It sells out in advance, so book ahead.

Sleeping

Limited by size and overstretched demand in summer, it can be challenging to find a good-value Cambridge sleepover. For peak-season trips, book as far ahead as possible, use the **Visit Cambridge** (www.visitcambridge.org) accommodation search engine or access the **TIC's booking service** (☎ 457581), which charges a £3 fee. Chesterton Rd has plenty of accommodation options.

BUDGET

Cherry Hinton Caravan Club (☎ 244088; caravanclub.co.uk; Lime Kiln Rd, Cherry Hinton; camp site £4-7, per person £3.50-5; ☹ Mar-Jan) This grassy, tree-lined caravan park has plenty of camp sites and includes disabled facilities. It's also just a 10-minute bus ride to the city centre for those who want to camp and commute.

YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5742; cambridge@yha.org.uk; 97 Tenison Rd; dm £17.50; ☹) Fifteen minutes from both the city centre and the train station, this red-brick Victorian town house is a typically institutional YHA effort, with plenty of solid 1970s furniture. Happily, most dorms are small (including 10 two-bed rooms) and bike storage is available.

Other budget recommendations:

Alpha Milton Guest House (☎ 311625; www.alpha-miltonguesthouse.co.uk; 61-63 Milton Rd; s/d from £20/40; ☹) Comfortable, family-run B&B with some en suite rooms.

Tenison Towers Guest House (☎ 363924; www.cambridgecitytenison-towers.com; 148 Tenison Rd; s/d £30/55) Clean, great-value B&B five minutes from the train station.

MIDRANGE

Sleeperz (☎ 304050; www.sleeperz.com; Station Rd; s/tw/d £39/49/59; ☹) A minimalist make-

over turned this old brick granary into a good-value hotel. The chic bathrooms are a plus, and the breakfast of croissants, brie and ham is a refreshing start to the day. A stone's throw from the train station, some rooms have disabled access and there's hardwood floors throughout.

Worth House (☎ 316074; www.worthhouse.co.uk; 152 Chesterton Rd; s £35-45, d £55-60; ☹) This cosy, recently renovated B&B has the kind of attention to detail not normally associated with midrange spots. All rooms have hair-dryers, and each breakfast table has its own toaster so you can scoff as much Marmite toast as you want. The rooms are larger than average, and the property is a 10-minute stroll from the city centre.

Other midrange recommendations:

Aaron House (☎ 314723; 71 Chesterton Rd; s/d from £30/48; ☹) Traditional B&B that's a 15-minute walk from the city centre.

Arundel House Hotel (☎ 367701; www.arundelhouse-hotels.co.uk; 53 Chesterton Rd; s/d from £75/95; ☹) Large, tranquil manor-house property overlooking the Cam.

TOP END

Cambridge Garden House Hotel (☎ 259988; www.moathousehotels.com; Granta Pl, Mill Lane; s £86-179, d £172-214; ☹) This modern hotel in the city centre has rooms overlooking the river and a private garden on the banks, as well as a swimming pool and gym. Attracting business travellers during the week, it has reduced rates on some weekends.

Eating & Drinking

Once the regional capital of twee tearooms, Cambridge now has a cosmopolitan selection of cafés, bars and restaurants to suit most tastes and budgets.

Clowns (☎ 355711; 54 King St; mains £3-6.50; ☹ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat, 8am-11pm Sun) If the creepy Clown-themed décor doesn't scare you off, this cosy café is well worth a look. It can be crowded with students at peak times, but its toasted sandwiches, hearty pasta dishes and hot chocolate make it a comfortable spot to peruse the local papers.

Cazimir (☎ 355156; 13 King St; mains £4-8; ☹ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-7pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun) The antithesis of the Starbucks chain that permeates many streets here, Cazimir is lined with works by local artists and serves a darn good sandwich. The daily soup specials are hearty enough for most travellers.

Rainbow (☎ 321551; 9a Kings Pde; mains £7-9; ☹ 10am-10pm Tue-Sat; ☹) Near the gates of King's College, this inviting subterranean vegetarian bistro fuses influences from around the world to keep its menu enticing, even for those not traditionally interested in a meat-free diet. There are also plenty of vegan options and the service is excellent.

Fort St George (☎ 354327; Midsummer Common; mains £6-12; ☹ lunch & dinner) The city's best pub, this lovely 16th-century spot is ideal for sitting outside in summer watching the world float by. There's a hearty selection of real ales and the menu combines well-prepared pub standards with some veggie-friendly options. If you don't drink too much, you can rent a punt outside.

Twenty-Two (☎ 351880; 22 Chesterton Rd; set menu dinners £25-30; ☹ dinner Tue-Sat) In a quiet neighbourhood near Jesus Green, this tiny town house restaurant is one of the city's best. The seasonal menu of English and French modern classics, often incorporating Asian influences, changes monthly but frequently includes sumptuously prepared partridge, sea bass or spring lamb.

Also recommended:

Tatties (☎ 323399; 11 Sussex St; mains £1-4;

☹ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sun) Local budget legend specialising in baked potatoes and baguettes.

Anchor (☎ 353554; Silver St; mains £5-9; ☹ lunch & dinner) This traditional pub has lovely views over the Cam's willow trees and bobbing punts.

Midsummer House (☎ 369299; Midsummer Common; set menu lunch £30, set menu dinner £50; ☹ lunch Fri & Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) A sophisticated two Michelin-starred dining room serving exquisite French/Mediterranean meals.

Getting There & Away

Fourteen daily direct National Express buses arrive from London Victoria (£10, two hours), while one daily direct service arrives from King's Lynn (£7, two hours). There are two late-night direct services from Norwich (£13.40, two hours) and several nondirect services from the city throughout the day. National Express Airport runs 20 daily services from Stansted Airport (£9.70, 50 minutes) and 29 daily services from Heathrow Airport (£25, two to three hours). **Stagecoach Express** (☎ 01234-212852) runs an hourly X5 service from Oxford (£7, 3½ hours).

Direct trains arrive every 30 minutes from London King's Cross (£17.50, 50

minutes) and London Liverpool St (£17.50, one hour). There are also regular direct services from Norwich (£13.30, one hour), Ely (£4.10, 15 minutes) and King's Lynn (£9.30, 50 minutes).

Getting Around

Cambridge has a good local bus network, with **Stagecoach in Cambridge** (☎ 423578; www.stagecoachbus.com/cambridge) dominating the services. It offers a £2.50 unlimited Dayrider pass on all of its routes. If you're wanting to zip around the city centre or plan to check out the surrounding countryside, hire a bicycle from **Station Cycles** (☎ 307125; www.stationcycles.co.uk; Station Rd; ☹ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Mar-Oct) for £8/16 per day/week.

Ely

☎ 01353 / pop 13,954

Pronounced 'eelee', this pretty Cambridgeshire town was once an inland island surrounded by eel-infested waters. Ely remains at the centre of the Fens (a flat, marshy area that is both desolate and hauntingly attractive) and is notable for its lovely Georgian houses and history-lined winding streets. For information on the town, visit the **TIC** (☎ 662062; www.tourism.eastcambs.gov.uk; 29 St Mary's St; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). Visit the website for comprehensive local accommodation listings.

The town's chief attraction is the imposing **Ely Cathedral** (☎ 667735; www.ely.org.uk/cath.htm; adult/concession £5.20/4.50; ☹ 7am-7pm May-Sep, 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-5pm Sun Oct-Mar), a wonderful example of Norman Romanesque architecture built between 1081 and 1189. Known as the 'Ship of the Fens', its highlights include the lovely **Octagon Tower** and the palatial **Lady Chapel**, which attracts choirs from around the world. Free general tours are offered daily, with additional paid tours of the Octagon and West towers available from March to November (£5 or £3.20 with cathedral admission).

Buses X11 and X12 run half-hourly from Cambridge (£2.50, one hour). There are also regular direct train services from London King's Cross (£20.50, one hour), and frequent direct train services from Cambridge (£4.10, 15 minutes), Norwich (£12.20, 50 minutes) and King's Lynn (£5.60, 30 minutes).

LINCOLNSHIRE Lincoln

☎ 01522 / pop 85,963

Since it's not on the main tourist drag, many visitors bypass this historic city, missing the hilltop 900-year-old **Lincoln Cathedral** (☎ 544544; www.lincolncathedral.com; adult/child £4/1; 🕒 7.15am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.15am-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 7.15am-6pm Mon-Sat, 7.15am-5pm Sun Sep-May) in the process. Its magnificent triptych of towers – including the 81m central tower – dominate the landscape and invite visitors to check out the rewarding building and its surrounding tangle of medieval streets. Nearby **Lincoln Castle** (☎ 511068; adult/child £3.50/2; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun, 4pm closing in winter) is a history-lovers dream where you can learn about the old Roman town, the public executions once staged here and the Magna Carta, a copy of which is on display.

For further local information and accommodation options, visit the **TIC** (☎ 873213; www.visitlincolnshire.com; 9 Castle Hill; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Jul-Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 9.30am-5pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Jun).

National Express runs one daily direct service from London Victoria (£19.60, 4½ hours) and one daily direct service from Birmingham (£13, three hours). Train travellers have to change at Newark North Gate for the hourly rail service from London King's Cross (from £17, two hours).

NORFOLK Norwich

☎ 01603 / pop 174,047

East England's largest city (it was even bigger than London in the Middle Ages), Norwich has undergone a quiet renaissance in recent years, transforming it from a forgotten backwater into a surprisingly vibrant centre that's well worth a visit. Part of its attraction is its young university population, but it also has a Championship soccer team, an international airport and a foundation of attractive historic buildings. For information and accommodation tips, contact the **TIC** (☎ 727927; www.visitnorwich.co.uk; The Forum, Millennium Plain; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar).

Opened in 2001, the horseshoe-shaped **Forum** (☎ 727950; www.theforumnorwich.co.uk; admission free; 🕒 7am-midnight) is a swanky, lottery-funded edifice housing public services as well as **Origins** (☎ 727922; adult/child £5.95/3.95;

🕒 10am-5.15pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.45pm Sun), a multimedia, hands-on introduction to the region that makes the formation of Norfolk seem like an experiment hatched by hi-tech whiz-kids. It's also worth dropping by the University of East Anglia's newly renovated **Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts** (☎ 593199; www.scva.org.uk; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), which displays an excellent collection of contemporary works by the likes of Francis Bacon and Henry Moore.

Norwich International Airport (NWI; ☎ 411923; www.norwichinternational.com) is just a 15-minute drive from the city centre. Flights arrive from Dublin (1½ hours), Manchester (55 minutes), Cardiff (one hour) and Edinburgh (1½ hours). National Express runs five daily direct buses from London Victoria (£14, three hours) and one daily direct service from King's Lynn (£6.80, 1½ hours). There are twice-hourly trains from London Liverpool Street (from £19.50, two hours) and Ely (£12.20, one hour).

King's Lynn

☎ 01553 / pop 40,921

A once-vital English port, King's Lynn is a sleepy Norfolk town clinging to the banks of the Great Ouse River. Still busy on market days (Tuesday, Friday and Saturday), it's worth an afternoon of wandering for those looking for a quiet break. For information and accommodation recommendations, contact the **TIC** (☎ 0870 770 5902; www.west-norfolk.gov.uk; Custom House, Purfleet Quay; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Oct-Mar). There's a small, well-located **YHA Hostel** (☎ 772461; kingslynn@yha.org.uk; College Lane; dm £11.95; 🕒 Apr-Oct) with basic facilities. Hourly direct trains arrive from London King's Cross (£25.50, 1½ hours) and Cambridge (£9.30, 45 minutes).

NORTHEAST ENGLAND

By turns wild, pretty, historic and urban, this corner of England offers excellent walking and hiking country, great expanses of empty beach, two of England's most vibrant cities – historic York and resurgent post-industrial Newcastle – plus a hoard of world-class relics and ruins dating back two turbulent millennia. Highlights include the magnificent York Cathedral, Newcastle's buzzing arts,

entertainment and party scenes, Roman emperor Hadrian's vast wall straddling England's narrow neck, the haunting monastery island of Lindisfarne and countless hiking and cycling options around the area's many national parks, such as the Yorkshire Dales and along the ever-popular, 268-mile Pennine Way. For general information on visiting the region, check **North East England** (www.visitnorthumbria.com) and **Yorkshire Tourist Board's** (www.yorkshirevisitor.com) official website. For art, theatre and heritage information visit www.culturalyorkshire.com.

YORK

☎ 01904 / pop 180,000

A well-preserved time capsule, York has been a settlement of military, political, religious and commercial eminence dating as far back as Roman times right up to the Industrial Revolution. Visitors from York's medieval past would recognise, even today, much of its wonderfully preserved heritage, such as the spectacular Minster and the stout medieval wall girdling the city's ancient alleyways, although they might be surprised at the modern profusion of gift shops and tea rooms, not to mention the sheer mass of sightseeing visitors. Despite this press of people, York wears its popularity well and retains an undiluted appeal. This bustling, tourist-friendly city, easily explored on foot, is one of England's finest urban attractions.

Orientation

Although the city is relatively small, York's streets are a confusing medieval tangle, further confused by the fact that 'gate' means street, and 'bar' means gate. There are five major landmarks: the walkable 2.5 miles of city wall; the Minster at the northern corner; Clifford's Tower, a 13th-century fortification and mound at the southern end; the Ouse River that cuts the city centre in two; and the train station just outside the western corner.

Information

City Screen (☎ 541155; 13-17 Coney St; per 30 min £2; 🕒 10am-5pm)

Post Office (Lendal; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat)

TIC (☎ 621756; www.thisisYork.co.uk/www.visitYork.org; De Grey Rooms, Exhibition Sq; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm

Sun Apr-Oct) The website is useful for accommodation listings and special offers. There's also a small tourist information office at the train station.

What's on York (www.whatsonyork.com) Up-to-date events listings.

Sights

YORK MINSTER

Northern Europe's largest Gothic cathedral, **York Minster** (☎ 557216; Minster Yard; adult/concession £5/4; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-6.30pm Sun) is the city's highlight and a 1000-year-old treasure house of architecture and richly coloured stained glass, especially the giant **Great Eastern Window**, whose 117 detailed panels cost just £58 to create in 1408. Take an audio tour of the **Undercroft** (adult/concession £3/2, combined ticket £7/5) for subterranean Roman, Norman and Viking remains and treasure, and the atmospheric crypt. The view past gargoyles and over the city atop the Minster's 275-step **tower** is spectacular.

JORVIK CENTRE

Offering a time-machine ride through Viking streets, the **Jorvik Centre** (☎ 543402; Coppergate; adult/concession/child £7.20/6.10/5.10; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), York's most popular visitor attraction, is entertainingly cheesy. The animatronic dioramas conjuring the sights, sounds and unfortunate smells of the era are a tad tired by now, although a planned revamp with talking Viking ghosts, a new gallery and a new display of artefacts from the era should have pepped things up by the time you read this.

NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

In a big train shed near the train station, the **National Railway Museum** (☎ 621261; Leeman Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm) is one giant train set offering you the chance to get up close to dozens of steam-age leviathans, including the legendary *Mallard* and *Flying Scotsman*, the liveried splendour of various royal trains and a Japanese bullet train. There are good interactive displays and a fully working locomotive turntable. Even for nontrainspotters it's surprising fun.

YORK CASTLE MUSEUM

The **York Castle Museum** (☎ 687687; Castle Area, Eye of York; adult/child £6.50/4; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) contains a labyrinth of rooms exploring 600 years of British life

from medieval prisons to Victorian parlours. There's a less-than-homely prison cell where you can try the bed of York's most famous prisoner, the notorious high-wyman Dick Turpin.

Tours

The **Association of Voluntary Guides** (☎ 10.15am & 2.15pm Apr-Oct, 6.45pm Jun-Aug) offers free two-hour walking tours, departing across the street from the TIC. There's fierce competition among the city's cut-throat ghost-tour operators, which befits a city reputed to be Europe's most haunted. Among the best is the **Ghost Hunt of York** (☎ 608700; The Shambles; adult/child £4/2.50; ☎ 8pm), a 75-minute tour led by a top-hatted guide offering an entertaining mix of horror and hilarity.

Sleeping

York is always crowded in summer and finding a bed can be trying. Use the TIC's accommodation booking service (£3).

BUDGET

Marmadukes Hostel (☎ 0870 066 0156; www.marmadukeshostels.com; St Peter's Grove; dm £10-18, d from £18; ☎) Easily the best hostel in town, newcomer Marmadukes offers modern surroundings, small dorms (the largest holds 10 beds) and plush doubles with wood floors. There's also a summer garden and a cosy little bar-café in this solid old house, a five-minute walk from the city walls.

York Youth Hotel (☎ 625904; www.yorkyouthhotel.com; 11-13 Bishophill Senior; dm £12-18) Located in a smart Georgian town house, this popular, if basic, hostel offers decent four-, six- and eight-bed dorms, and a comfortable bar serving hearty pub grub.

York International Youth Hostel (☎ 08707706102; york@yha.org.uk; 42 Water End, Clifton; dm £13.50-18.50; ☎) Large and busy, this hostel is reached via a riverside footpath from the city centre. Most rooms have four beds, and there's a good café-bar and private garden. Book in advance to avoid the summer crush.

York Backpackers (☎ 627720; www.yorkbackpackers.co.uk; 88-90 Micklegate; dm £13-14, d £35; ☎) This group-oriented place offers spartan dorm accommodation beneath elaborately corniced ceilings in a splendid 18th-century historic house. The wooden bunks are rickety and there's one huge, sleep-defying 36-bed dorm. On the plus side, it's one of

the city's most sociable hostels thanks to its lively bar and cheap beer.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

A gaggle of B&Bs cluster along Bootham and Grosvenor Tces, parallel to the train line and a quick walk from the city centre.

Marmadukes (☎ 0870 066 0156; www.marmadukesworld.com; St Peter's Grove; d £25-50; ☎) Next door to Marmadukes Hostel and run by the same enthusiastic owners, this new guesthouse offers cut-price boutique chic, with serene, minimalist décor and good-quality fittings. It's terrific value.

Bar Convent (☎ 464902; www.bar-convent.org.uk; 17 Blossom St; s/d with shared bathroom £30/55, d & tw £66; ☎) Inside this 17th-century convent you'll find a serene, welcoming atmosphere and appropriately monastic (but comfortable) accommodation.

Jorvik Hotel (☎ 653511; Marygate; s/d/ste £40/65/70) The central, charmingly old-fashioned Jorvik, a short amble from the city walls, might not win any prizes for its perfectly adequate, if somewhat dated, furnishings but it just might win hearts with its excellent cooked breakfast.

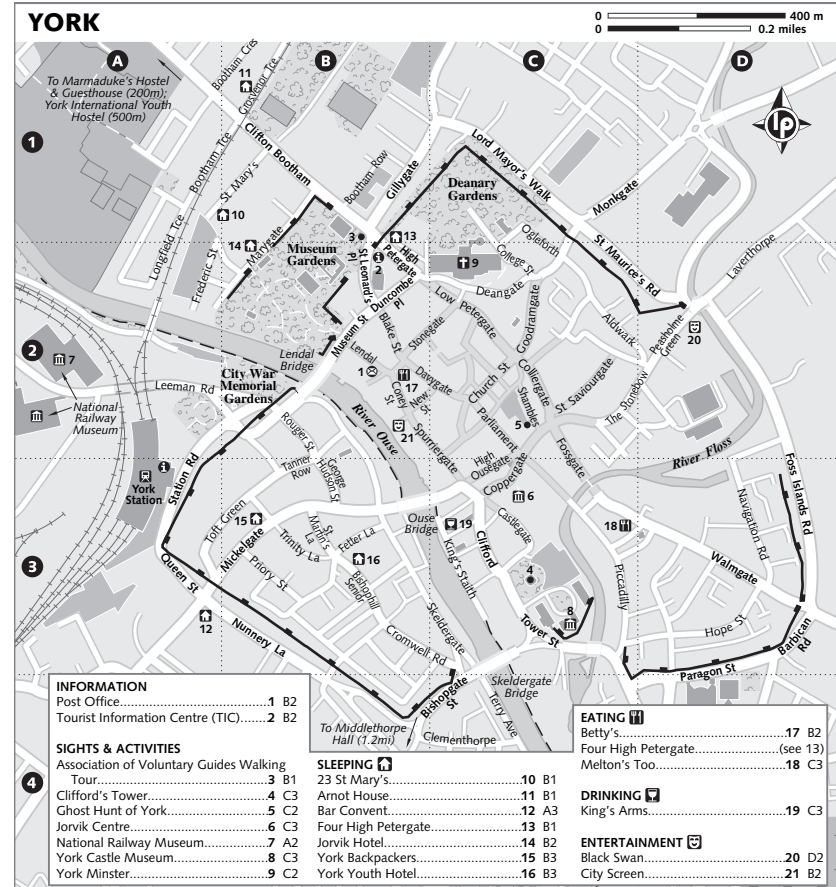
Four High Petergate (☎ 658516; www.fourhighpetergate.co.uk; 4 High Petergate; s/d/tw from £65/90/100) Just inside the city walls, this elegant town house is wonderfully equipped to pamper with solid teak furniture, soft, silky bed linen, goose-down pillows, posh bathrooms and flat-screen TVs, although the standard rooms are on the small side. There's a great bistro downstairs (see opposite).

Also recommended:
23 St Mary's (☎ 622738; www.23stmarys.co.uk; 23 St Mary's, Bootham; s/d £34/60) Award-winning hospitality, good-sized rooms, lots of character and ever-helpful owners.
Arnot House (☎ 641966; www.arnothouseyork.co.uk; 17 Grosvenor Tce; £65-70; ☎) A cosy, quirky B&B with Victorian-era furnishings, five minutes from the city walls.

Eating

Food lovers will be spoilt for choice; York is awash with individual and inexpensive little tearooms serving light lunches and snacks. There's a vast array of restaurants, too.

Betty's (☎ 659142; St Helen's Sq; lunch mains £6-8, cream tea £7; ☎ 9am-9pm) A high-class treat complete with a pianist tickling the ivories, this refined tearoom serves excellent lunches and breakfasts, along with dainty pastries and great cream teas.



Melton's Too (☎ 629222; 25 Walmgate; tapas £3-5, mains £7.50-12; ☎ 10.30am-10pm) Sister restaurant to the foodies' favourite Meltons, this is a slightly more casual, keenly priced place specialising in unpretentiously prepared and presented (and often locally sourced) British fare, such as Yorkshire steak and kidney and Whitby smoked haddock croquettes. Good tapas, too.

Four High Petergate (☎ 658516; www.fourhighpetergate.co.uk; 4 High Petergate; mains £12-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Let's let the dishes speak for themselves: how about caramelised fennel and tomato tart or crisp ham hock and baby pear salad, or maybe scrumpy marinated loin of wild boar with warm aduki bean salad, chorizo and cherry apples?

Drinking & Entertainment

Forget the clubbing scene, York is hardly party central, but the profusion of atmospheric city-centre pubs more than compensates.

Black Swan (☎ 686911; Peasholme Green) A rambling, higgledy-piggledy Tudor boozier that serves great cask ales, and hosts live blues and jazz on Sunday.

King's Arms (☎ 659435; King's Staith) The enduringly popular riverside King's Arms really does come into its own over the summer months.

City Screen (☎ 541144; 13-17 Coney St; admission from £4) A great little independent arthouse cinema that also hosts regular live music and comedy gigs.

Getting There & Away

There are National Express buses arriving throughout the day from London (£22.50, five to seven hours) and four from Edinburgh (£30.50, six to eight hours).

There are numerous daily trains from London's King's Cross (£83.50, two hours) and from Edinburgh (£63.50, 2½ hours).

AROUND YORK

There are stately homes and then there's **Castle Howard** (☎ 01653-648333/444; www.castlehoward.co.uk; adult/concession/child £9.50/8.50/6.50; ☹ 10am-4pm Feb-Oct), a palatial, magnificent 18th-century pile 15 miles northeast of the city. The most popular day out from York, its ostentatious Renaissance exteriors are complemented by sumptuous interiors of priceless art and artefacts. The surrounding landscaped parkland is also impressive, complete with temples, fountains, a grand mausoleum by the architect Hawksmoor, a romantic rose garden and strutting peacocks.

YORKSHIRE DALES & AROUND

Probably the most scenic and certainly the most popular part of the Pennine uplands, the Dales is a region of lush valleys crowned by craggy limestone cliffs. In between there are trickling streams, mossy dry-stone walls, sheep-strewn meadows and unspoilt villages with excellent pubs. Not surprisingly, it can get very crowded in summer, so pick up a good map from the nearest TIC and head off the beaten path. Check out the **Dales Way** (www.thedalessway.co.uk) for some recommended routes.

Orientation & Information

The 700-sq-mile Yorkshire Dales National Park is best explored from Grassington, home of the region's main TIC. For orientation, the Dales can be broken into northern and southern halves. In the north, the main dales run parallel and east to west, and include Wensleydale, Teesdale and Swaledale. In the southern half, the north to south Ribblesdale with its famous viaduct is the route of the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle (LSC) railway. Pretty Wharfedale is parallel to the east.

Getting Around

Unless you're driving, the LSC is the best way to get to those places along its route. Settle, which offers good accommodation

and hiking options, is the best of these. Public transport is patchy across the region. Cycling is a viable alternative. In Skipton, the **Bicycle Shop** (☎ 01756-794386; 3-5 Water St) hires bikes for £9 per half-day.

Good maps on local hiking and biking routes can be obtained through the **National Park Centre** (☎ 01756-752774; Hebdon Rd, Grassington; ☹ 9.30am-5.15pm Apr-Oct), which is open for limited hours seasonally throughout the year.

Grassington

☎ 01756 / pop 1100

Set deep in some delightful rolling country, Grassington is arguably the prettiest Dale village, centred on a cobbled market square ringed with stone cottages. A popular base for hikers, the **Dales Way** footpath passes through the village. There's a clutch of small B&Bs, including the wonderful stone and slate **Ashfield House** (☎ 752584; www.ashfieldhouse.co.uk; Summers Fold; r from £40), but **Kettlewell YHA** (☎ 0870 770 5896; kettlewell@yha.org.uk; dm £10.60), with limited opening hours, is the nearest hostel, 6 miles away in sleepy Kettlewell. Catch the Pride of the Dales bus 74.

Settle

☎ 01729 / pop 3600

This small but perfectly formed town is accessible by rail and makes a good base for exploring the Dales. Hike up to **Castleberg Rock** overhanging the town for breathtaking views or tackle the 5-mile circular route to the gorgeous **Attermire Scar**.

The **TIC** (☎ 825192; Town Hall; ☹ 9.30am-5pm) can help with maps and accommodation. Try the **YHA Stainforth Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6046; stainforth@yha.org.uk; dm £13.95), a Georgian house near rivers and wooded glades (opening times are limited so call ahead), or the **Golden Lion Hotel** (☎ 01524-251240; bookings@goldenlionyorks.net; Duke St; s/d £40/72, with shared bathroom £33/60), with chintzy but comfy rooms and a cosy pub restaurant downstairs.

Skipton

☎ 01756 / 14,300

Skipton is worth a visit for its excellent **castle** (☎ 792442; adult/concession/child £5.40/4.80/2.90; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun), which is one of Britain's best-preserved medieval fortresses. The giant complex was besieged for three years and finally captured during the Civil War. On market days (Monday,

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday) the town comes alive with stalls and shoppers. The **TIC** (☎ 792809; 35 Coach St; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-3.30pm Sun) has comprehensive information on the town and surrounding area. There are B&Bs aplenty on Keighley Rd, and the town is served by frequent trains from Leeds.

Haworth

☎ 01535 / pop 6078

Even without its literary heritage the captivatingly pretty cobbled streets and hillside vistas in Haworth make it well worth a visit. Being the home of the legendary Bronte sisters, it's also a hugely popular literary shrine to Emily, Anne and Charlotte. A summer tourist magnet, the **Bronte Parsonage Museum** (☎ 642323; Church St; adult/concession/child £4.90/3.60/1.60; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-5pm Oct-Mar) offers a fascinating trip back in time for literature buffs. The **TIC** (☎ 642329; www.haworth-village.org.uk; Main St; ☹ 9am-5pm) can help with accommodation, but good bets include the former Victorian stately home **Haworth Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5858; Haworth@yha.org.uk; Longlands Dr, Lees Lane; dm £13.95; ☹ Feb-Oct), which should be your first option. There are frequent buses from Keighley, which has train connections with Leeds.

NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK

Wilder and more dramatic than the Dales but no less beautiful, the brooding North York Moors cover 550 sq miles of wild and wonderful terrain coloured by purple heather (between July and September) dotted with old stone farmhouses and romantic ruins; the perfect setting in which to imagine star-crossed Bronte heroes and heroines in a clinch.

Orientation & Information

The moors run east to west, from the craggy coastline that includes Whitby and Scarborough to the gentle rolling hills and steep cliffs of Hambleton and Cleveland Hills. There are several TICs in the area, but the **Moors Centre** (☎ 01439-772737; Lodge Lane, Danby; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Dec & Mar, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun only Jan-Feb) is the best of them. The official park website, **North York Moors National Park** (www.moors.uk.net), is an excellent resource for planning your exploration of the area.

Activities

A network of trails snakes through the park, making walking the best way to experience the area. The 110-mile **Cleveland Way** from Helmsley to Filey will take you via as many of its hills and coastal vistas as you can handle. The steam trains of the **North Yorkshire Moors Railway** (NYMR; ☎ 01751-473799; 1-day pass adult/concession/child £14/12/7; ☹ Apr-Oct, limited winter services) offer a more sedate way to traverse the region, running the picturesque 18 miles between Pickering and Grosmont – look out for **Gothland Station**, transformed into Hogswhead Station for the *Harry Potter* movies.

Getting Around

The **Moobus** (☎ 01845-597426; www.moors.uk.net; Moorslink) services a network of stops (daily June to September, Sunday April to October) throughout the region.

Helmsley & Around

☎ 01439 / pop 1500

Starting point for the **Cleveland Way**, Helmsley's 13th-century ruined **castle** (☎ 770442; adult/concession/child £4/3/2; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) is the town's top visitor attraction. The locals focus more on the **market place**, where stallholders set up shop every Friday. The nearby town hall houses the **TIC** (☎ 770173; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Fri-Sun Nov-Feb).

Among Britain's most impressive monastic ruins is the 13th-century **Rievaulx Abbey** (☎ 798228; adult/concession/child £4.20/3.20/2.10; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar), about 3 miles west of Helmsley. The abbey's soaring arches and intricate decorative flourishes are a testament to the wealth and power of the monks who once lived here. The fanciful fake 18th-century temples at nearby **Rievaulx Terrace & Temples** (☎ 01969-640382; admission £4; ☹ variable Mar-Nov) offer glorious views overlooking the abbey (although it's a steep, mile-long slog uphill from the abbey).

Helmsley has several atmospheric B&Bs and coaching inns, including historic coaching inn **Feathers** (☎ 770275; feathershotel@aol.com; s/d from £40/70). **Helmsley Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5860; helmsley@yha.org.uk; Carlton Lane; dm £13.95) is a friendly backpacker option, with varying opening hours.

Scarborough & District buses (☎ 01723-507300) runs an hourly service from Scarborough via Pickering (£3.55, 90 minutes) on bus 128.

Pickering

☎ 01751 / pop 6600

An excellent gateway to the moors, this bustling little market town's atmospheric train station, restored to its 1930s glory, is a suitably charming terminus for the steam locomotives of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, the best way to explore the area without a car. The well-preserved ruins of Pickering's Norman **castle** (☎ 474989; adult/concession £3/2.30; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) are also well worth a visit, as are the 15th-century frescoes in the nearby **Church of St Peter and St Paul**. Pickering's helpful **TIC** (☎ 473791; The Ropery; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) can assist with accommodation bookings.

You'll find several B&Bs on Eastgate (the road to Scarborough), including **Eden House** (☎ 472289; www.edenhousebandb.co.uk; s/d £30/56), a pretty little flower-bedecked stone cottage.

Whitby

☎ 01947 / pop 14,100

We challenge you not to fall in love with Whitby, Yorkshire's most rewarding coastal town, the moment you set eyes on it. Dominated by a forbidding cliff-top abbey ruin, threaded with steep, narrow streets winding down to pretty harbour quays stacked high with lobster pots and lined with pubs and excellent seafood restaurants, it's well worth putting on your itinerary.

Whitby has a compelling history, too; the young Captain James Cook was apprenticed

to a Whitby shipowner and HMS *Endeavour* was built here, but much of the town's renown is based on the fictional character of Dracula: for Whitby is where Bram Stoker's creation makes landfall (follow in his great undead footsteps with the TIC's *Dracula Trail* leaflet; £0.60).

The **TIC** (☎ 602674; 🕒 9am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Apr) is across from the train station.

SIGHTS

Burial place of Anglo Saxon saints and kings, venerable **Whitby Abbey** (☎ 603568; adult/concession/child £4/3/2; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), accessible via 199 stone steps and through the graveyard of the church next door, is an evocative wind-whipped spot with a history dating back to AD 657, engagingly explained at the **visitor centre**. Hold onto your hat for a wind-blasted 5.5-mile cliff-top walk south to beautiful **Robin Hood's Bay**.

SLEEPING

The helpful staff at the TIC will book accommodation for free.

Whitby Backpackers (☎ 601794; www.thewhitbybackpackers.co.uk; 28 Hudson St; dm £10-15; 🕒 Mar-Nov) Centrally located in a Victorian house, this is the town's best hostel, combining a friendly atmosphere with good-sized rooms and superior facilities.

Harbour Grange Backpackers Whitby (☎ 600817; backpackers@harbourgrange.co.uk; Spital Bridge; dm from £12; 🕒) Roll out of your bunk and you're

TOP FIVE YORKSHIRE WALKS

The best way to explore this lovely part of the country is to get its measure with your own feet. Most of the following walks can be split into day-long sections. Be sure to take the right gear and sensible precautions, as the weather can close in suddenly. For detailed information on these paths, consult **Outdooryorkshire.com** (www.outdooryorkshire.com) or Lonely Planet's *Walking in Britain*.

- **The Cleveland Way** Along 109 miles of rugged coast and high moorland through the North York Moors National Park (see p225).
- **The Dales Way** Heading into the Lake District from Ilkely to Windermere over some wonderfully remote hills.
- **The Herroit Way** A 52-mile track over the northern Dales of Wensleydale and Swaledale.
- **The Kirklees Way** Easily split into manageable day-trip chunks, this 72-mile path takes in some varied Pennine terrain.
- **The Pennine Way** The 268-mile daddy of them all, creeping up the backbone of England from Derbyshire, through three national parks and into the Scottish Borders.

along in the harbour at this small, basic backpackers. The only small downside is the 11.30pm curfew.

White Horse & Griffin (☎ 604857; www.whitehorseandgriffin.co.uk; 87 Church St; s/d from £35/60) A fantastic mix of olde-worlde charm and modern creature comforts with an excellent and popular restaurant attached. It's the pick of Whitby's accommodation.

Also recommended:

Riviera Hotel (☎ 602533; www.rivierawhitby.com; 4 Crescent Tce; B&B s/d £31/52) Pay a little extra for a grand four-poster or a mesmerising view across the bay.

Langley Hotel (☎ 604250; www.langleyhotel.com; 16 Royal Cres; s/d £35/66) Some chintz horrors, but it's comfortable and offers good value, with panoramic sea views.

EATING

Grapevine Bistro (☎ 820275; 2 Grape Lane; tapas £4-6, mains £7-11; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Creditable tapas by day, with slightly more substantial Mediterranean flavours by night, including a couple of good veggie options.

Magpie Café (☎ 602058; 14 Pier Rd; mains £7-14; 🕒 11.30am-9pm) Join the line snaking outside this crowded Whitby institution for what may be Yorkshire's best seafood. The fish and chips live up to their reputation, but the long selection of finer fare is worth considering. There's a window for takeaway fish and chips if you can't be bothered waiting.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains arrive via Middlesbrough, so you have to change if you're coming from York or Durham. It's a long journey, but worth it for the hypnotic panorama of the Dales scrolling past along the way. Regular buses arrive from York and Scarborough.

DURHAM

☎ 0191 / pop 100,000

Worth a day trip at the least, Durham is a magnificent natural hill fortress defended on three sides by a loop of the Wear River. Crowned by a magnificent castle and Britain's finest Norman cathedral, it's an atmospheric town down to the cobbles of its medieval streets. It's also a lively place packed with busy pubs and bars.

Orientation & Information

The compact town centre is best explored on foot and it's hard to get lost with the cathedral looming above. The train station is

above and northwest of the cathedral, while the bus station is on the western side.

The **TIC** (☎ 384 3720; www.durhamtourism.co.uk; Millennium Pl; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) books accommodation for free. Internet access is available at no cost at **Clayport Library** (☎ 386 4003; Millennium Pl; 🕒 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat), but photo ID is required and there is a 30-minute limit at peak times.

Sights

If you need one good reason to visit the city, that reason is the part church, part fortress of **Durham Cathedral** (☎ 386 4266; Palace Green; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun, 9.30am-8pm mid-Jun-Sep). A magnificent Unesco-listed landmark, its ornate, rib-vaulted architecture was an engineering breakthrough for its time and the soaring structure remains an architectural marvel today. Climb the 66m **tower** (adult/child £3/1.50) for spectacular city views or take an illuminating tour (adult/child £3.50/free); call ahead for times.

The stout **Durham Castle** (☎ 334 3800; Palace Green; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Jul-Sep) nearby, also a World Heritage Site, was completed in 1072 and was the university's first home 800 years later. Don't miss the beautifully preserved Norman chapel.

Sleeping

Accommodation options abound online at www.visitbritain.com, although vacancies are virtually nonexistent during university graduation in late June. During holidays 11 **colleges** (☎ 334 5878; www.dur.ac.uk/conference_tourism; r per person from £20) – including the castle's medieval University College – offer a variety of rooms outside term-time.

There's no youth hostel, so the best budget bet is to stay with the friendly **Mrs Metcalfe** (☎ 384 1020; 12 The Ave; s £22). There are only two cosy rooms, so book ahead.

Court Inn (☎ 384 7350; Court Lane; s/d £50/70) The three spacious rooms above this cosy, central little pub have lots of character and are more like mini-apartments. Well worth considering.

Farnley Tower (☎ 375 0011; www.farnley-tower.co.uk; The Ave; s/d £65/75, s with shared bathroom £55; 🕒) A five-minute walk from town, this former country house (with castle and cathedral views from many rooms) is our pick for atmosphere, pleasant grounds and a great breakfast.

Eating & Drinking

Almshouse (☎ 386 1054; Palace Green; dishes £3-7; ☎ 9am-5pm) Right on Palace Green you'll find good-value, hearty, made-on-the-premises soups, light lunch and café fare here.

Brown Sugar Bistro (☎ 386 5050; 81-83 New Elvet; dishes £4-7; ☎ 7am-11pm) This great little bar, café and bistro is great for filling breakfasts and good *ciabatta* sandwiches.

It may be a student town, but don't expect wild nightlife from Durham. There are plenty of good clubs and bars, though, including the low-key **Shakespeare** (63 Saddler St) and **Varsity** (46 Saddler St), a bright, backpacker-friendly three-level pub offering a good beer selection, cheap bar food and a covered garden.

Getting There & Around

Six National Express buses run from London daily (£27.50, six to eight hours) and three arrive from Edinburgh (£21.50, four to five hours). The Arriva X1 service runs throughout the day to Newcastle, excluding Sunday. On the main London-Edinburgh line, trains arrive from London (£90.40, three hours) and Edinburgh (£44, two hours) throughout the day. Trains also arrive every few minutes from York (£18.90, 45 minutes).

For local bus information, call ☎ 0870 608 2608.

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

☎ 0191 / pop 470,000

Once synonymous with post-industrial decline and decay, these days Newcastle is brimming with confidence and a hedonistic yen to have fun. All of a sudden, it seems, this unflinching friendly city, with its distinctive Geordie accent thicker than molasses, has kick-started a vibrant arts and entertainment scene (although its riotous nightlife is a bit more of an established tradition). Then there's the city's captivating riverside vista, a press of solid 19th-century and futuristic 21st-century architecture, with a mini Sydney Harbour Bridge stuck in the middle of it, all lit at night like a classic 1940s movie.

Orientation & Information

Newcastle's compact city centre is easy to navigate on foot and it has an excellent public transport system, including a metro system circling the centre and connecting the suburbs. The Central train and bus sta-

tion is just south of the city centre. Packed with chain stores, indoor markets and giant £1 shops, it's partly pedestrianised around Grainger St. A surprising number of buildings here are formidable 19th-century classical structures, with almost half-heritage listed. Tourist information is available at the **TIC** (☎ 277 8000; www.visitnewcastle.org.uk; Market St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Sights

Make sure you take a stroll down by the riverside where many of Newcastle's great buildings and structures will jostle for your attention – although those on the south bank technically fall within neighbouring Gateshead).

BALTIC

A contemporary art centre housed in a vast former flourmill, **Baltic** (☎ 478 1810; Gateshead Quay; admission free; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; ☎ Gateshead) is the North's answer to London's Tate Modern. It's reached from the Newcastle side of the river via the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, a bowed pedestrian walkway that opens like an eye for passing ships.

SAGE MUSIC CENTRE

To call the **Sage Music Centre** (☎ 443 4666; www.thesagegateshead.org; Gateshead Quays; ☎ 10am-11.30pm; ☎ Gateshead) a live music venue hardly does justice to this terrific building, designed by celebrated architect Sir Norman Foster, although the splendid concert halls are acoustically excellent. Even if you're not attending a gig or a concert (every genre is represented), it's well worth wandering the vast lobby just for a peep at the building, lingering for a coffee or snack at the excellent café, and listening to the jazz and classical music listening posts.

LIFE SCIENCE CENTRE

It's dedicated to explaining genetics, but if this sounds dull, think again, because **Life** (☎ 243 8210; Times Sq; adult/concession £6.95/5.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun; ☎ Central Station) is a brilliantly realised audiovisual treat with great simulated rides that take you on hair-raising taxi rides through Newcastle and bungee jumping off its bridge (although what that has to do with genetics isn't immediately clear).

ANGEL OF THE NORTH

A short drive from the city south along the A1 (you can't miss it), the most potent symbol of restored Northeast pride is the towering, rusting, forbidding, welcoming, redemptive, apocalyptic **Angel of the North** (☎ 478 4222; A1, Gateshead; admission free) sculpture, with a 54m wingspan and built from 200 tonnes of steel by artist Antony Gormley.

Sleeping

There has long been a dearth of good accommodation, although things are slowly improving.

Newcastle YHA (☎ 0870 770 5972; www.yha.org.uk; 107 Jesmond Rd; dm £12; ☎ Jesmond) A basic but clean YHA property in quiet Jesmond. It fills up quickly, so book ahead.

Albatross Backpackers (☎ 233 1330; www.albatrossnewcastle.com; 51 Grainger St; dm £16.50-19.50, s/d £45/47; ☎; ☎ Central Station) Finally the city centre has some good budget accommodation in this smart new backpackers, with no curfew and 24-hour reception. Light sleepers beware, the chances of sharing with groups of drunken snorers are high.

Premier Lodge (☎ 0870 990 6530; www.premierlodge.com; Quayside; r from £45; ☎ Central Station) This McHotel chain is your best (almost only) midrange bet in the city centre. The rooms are uniformly bland, the clientele are business folk in the week and stag and hen party animals on weekends, but on the plus side, it's smack dab in the middle of the quayside action.

Adelphi Hotel (☎ 281 3109; theadelphihotelnewcastle.co.uk; 63 Fern Ave, Jesmond; s/d £40/60; ☎ Jesmond) This is a cosy B&B, in a leafy Newcastle suburb a short metro ride from the city centre and away from the hubbub.

Eating

New restaurants have sprouted like mushrooms around the city centre in recent years. Grey St and the general Quayside area are good places to follow your nose. Many Newcastle restaurants have early-bird dinner specials.

Blake's Coffee House (☎ 261 5463; 53 Grey St; breakfast £2-4; ☎ 9am-6pm; ☎ Monument) This central, popular, high-ceilinged café is the perfect spot to while away a morning over the papers and gently recover from the night before.

El Torero (☎ 233 1122; The Side, Quayside; mains £4-6; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Central Station) Decent tapas served right in the city centre, perfect for a light lunch or a later beer ballast pit stop.

Paradiso Caffe Bar (☎ 221 1240; 1 Market Lane; mains £5-17; ☎ 11am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-3.30pm Sun; ☎ Monument) An atmospheric location in an old print-works factory and a decent bistro menu make the Paradiso an enduring hit with locals. There's also a great balcony for relaxing alfresco dining.

Drinking & Entertainment

Newcastle may be trying to shed its image as a late-night, open-air vomitorium but, well, it still is if you wander round at throwing out (and up) time. If you like the idea, as so many locals do, of staggering from one packed drinking shed to another to chase the seemingly eternal happy hour, simply head to the Bigg Market and Quayside areas. More discerning revellers will have to look a little harder, but there are some excellent little bars, clubs and pubs if you know where to go. The local listings magazine *The Crack* has the latest clubbing intelligence.

Sage Music Centre (☎ 443 4666; www.thesagegateshead.org; Gateshead Quays; ☎ 10am-11.30pm; ☎ Gateshead) For live music and concerts, do not forget to consult the programme at this excellent centre.

Trent House Soul Bar (☎ 261 2154; 1-2 Leazes Lane; ☎ Haymarket) Easy-going and run by the World Headquarters folk (which explains the fantastic jukebox), this is a great place to kick off the night.

Crown Posada (31 The Side; ☎ Central Station) In the midst of the Quayside throngs, this low-key pub offers relative repose and some decent real ale.

World Headquarters (☎ 261 7007; Curtis Mayfield House, Carloli Sq; ☎ Monument) Fantastic sounds ranging from funk, soul and old-school R&B to rare groove, northern soul and a smattering of house are the auditory treats on offer at Newcastle's coolest nightclub.

Baja Beach Club (☎ 477 6205; Hillgate Quay; ☎ Gateshead) The pumping pop, bikini-clad barmaids, tropical theming and roaring drunken crowd take this place so far over the top (and that's saying something for this town) it's compelling (in a multicausal pile-up kind of way).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Located 20 minutes from the city centre, daily flights to **Newcastle International Airport** (NCL; www.newcastleairport.com) arrive from London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports, as well as Amsterdam and Paris, with other cities served on a less regular basis. Low-cost favourites **Ryanair** (☎ 0870 156 9569; www.ryanair.com) and **easyJet** (☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com) ply their trade here, so check their websites for the latest deals.

BOAT

Regular ferries arrive at Royal Quays from Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands. For more information, see p279.

BUS

National Express coaches arrive from many major UK cities, including London (£25.50, 6½ hours) and Edinburgh (£11, 2½ hours). The excellent-value Explorer Northeast ticket (£6) is valid on most local regional services. Bus 505 arrives from Berwick-upon-Tweed, and bus 685 comes from Hexham and Haltwhistle for Hadrian's Wall.

TRAIN

There are frequent trains from Edinburgh (£39, 1¼ hours), York (£19.50, one hour) and London (£90.40, three hours). Berwick-upon-Tweed and Alnmouth (for Alnwick) are also served.

Getting Around

The city centre is surprisingly easy to navigate on foot, and the excellent metro is quicker and more efficient than many local buses. Unlimited travel for one day costs £3.20.

NORTHUMBERLAND

Relatively unknown to international visitors and for that matter a good number of Brits, Northumberland offers wild, empty spaces, a rugged coastline, acres of empty beaches and some magical little islands. Inland you'll find vast expanses of forested land, much of it a dedicated national park, its horizons dotted with the jagged remains of immense fortifications that speak of centuries of bloody conflict, mostly with the Scots.

The most significant of these ruins is Hadrian's Wall. Brainchild of Roman Emperor Hadrian in AD 122, it stretches from

Newcastle to Bowness-on-Solway near Carlisle and was the northern frontier of the empire for almost 300 years. It was superseded in Norman times by dozens of castles and fortified houses, some of which remain largely intact. You'll stumble upon some of these by hiking in the wild and empty **Cheviot Hills in Northumberland National Park**, but take good care, these are wild regions and the weather can turn nasty. Check **Visit Northumberland** (www.visitnorthumberland.com) for further regional information.

Berwick-Upon-Tweed & Around

☎ 01289 / pop 26,000

A good stopover before heading up to Scotland, Berwick-upon-Tweed sits on the northern tip of England. The historic site of Scottish-English strife for centuries, it's now a peaceful market town set amid some beautiful countryside. Tourist information is available from the **TIC** (☎ 330733; www.berwickonline.org.uk; 106 Marygate; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun), which has a free town guide with accommodation listings.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

While the town is pretty and its intact Elizabethan **wall** offers a scenic walk, the best attractions lie outside.

Dominating the coastal skyline, the stunning **Bamburgh Castle** (☎ 01668-214515; adult/concession/child £6/5/2.50; ☹ 11am-5pm Mar-Oct) was the seat of Northumbria's Angle kings and remains one of the most impressive castles in the British isles. The present 11th-century structure (restored in the 19th century) was a Norman stronghold that survived many sieges, and holds an interesting collection of art and weaponry.

SLEEPING & EATING

Berwick is the main accommodation hub in the area.

Berwick Backpackers (☎ 331481; www.berwickbackpackers.co.uk; 56 Bridge St; dm/d £15/20) Occupying a top location only five minutes from the bus and train stations and close to several good restaurants and pubs, this recently refurbished place is a great budget option.

Old Vicarage Guest House (☎ 306909; www.oldvicarageberwick.co.uk; Church Rd, Tweedmouth; B&B s/d £30/50) Just south of the river, this friendly place offers cosy, if slightly old-fashioned, rooms.

Amaryllys (☎ 331711; 5-7 West St; lunch mains £4-7, dinner mains £10-16) A cosy café and a creditable restaurant offering fresh home-made fare, including some decent veggie options such as wild mushroom risotto.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Berwick is on the main London to Edinburgh train line and several trains arrive daily from each city (from London £109, 3½ hours; from Edinburgh £16, 45 minutes). The main local bus for travellers is bus 501, which runs to/from Alnwick via Bamburgh; call ☎ 0870 608 2608 for information.

Alnwick

☎ 01665 / pop 7700

A good alternative Northumberland base to Berwick is the pretty market town of Alnwick with an endearing, cobbled town centre, a **TIC** (☎ 510665; 2 The Shambles) that's open year-round and a huge medieval **castle** (☎ 510777; adult/child £7.50/free; ☹ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct), which contains a sumptuous interior and a surprisingly good collection of Italian art including Titians and Canalettos. The TIC can help with accommodation in the area and there are several B&Bs along Bondgate without.

Hadrian's Wall

Rome's most ambitious engineering project, the surviving sections of this 73-mile wall, built to repel marauding tribes from Scotland, are mightily impressive to this day. The most spectacular section of this World Heritage Site is between Hexham and Brampton. You can now walk and cycle its length along Hadrian's Wall Path. Local

TICs sell guides with full details and maps of the path.

Chesters Roman Fort (☎ 01434-681379; adult/concession £3.80/2.90; ☹ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar), near Chollerford, is a well-preserved fortification that includes an impressive bathhouse. Its museum displays a fascinating array of Roman sculptures and drawings found in the area.

Housesteads Roman Fort (☎ 01434-344363; adult/concession £3.80/2.90; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar), northeast of Bardon Mill, is the area's most dramatic and popular ruin. The carefully preserved foundations include a famous latrine, which offered ancient users some great views over the Northumbrian countryside.

Roman Army Museum (☎ 01697-747485; adult/concession £3.90/3.50; ☹ from 10am, seasonal closing times Feb-Nov) offers a graphic reconstruction of military life, including a cool virtual reality flight over a reconstructed Hadrian's Wall.

SLEEPING

Corbridge, Hexham, Brampton and Haltwhistle make ideal bases for exploring the wall, and are stuffed with B&Bs and a number of cheap, convenient YHA hostels. The following selection starts in the east.

Greenhead Youth Hostel (☎ 016977-47401; greenhead@yha.org.uk; Greenhead, Brampton; dm £11.95; ☹ Apr-Oct) A charming chapel-conversion beside a babbling brook, with better facilities than most. It's 3 miles west of Haltwhistle station, and is also served by the trusty bus 685 and the White Star bus 185 from Carlisle. Opening hours vary, so call ahead.

Once Brewed Youth Hostel (☎ 08707705980; oncebrewed@yha.org.uk; Military Rd, Bardon Mill; dm £13.95; ☹ daily Feb-Nov, Mon-Sat Feb & Oct, Mon Mar & Nov)

WORTH A DETOUR

While you're near the coast make time for two of Northumberland's islands if you can. The star attraction is the holy island of **Lindisfarne**, a serene, enchanting place with some important religious and historical heritage, including a castle and an ancient **Benedictine Priory** (☎ 01289-389200; adult/concession £3.60/2.70; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Jan, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun only Feb-Mar).

An early site of Christian worship in the British Isles, it was also one of the early victims (AD 793) of the Viking raids. The island is reached by a causeway at low tide (see www.lindisfarne.org.uk for tide times). Although often overrun with tourists in summer, this seat of Anglo-Saxon Christianity rediscovers its tranquillity at most other times.

Also worth a trip are the **Farne Islands**, a seabird sanctuary teeming with puffins, guillemots, razorbills, terns, shags, cormorants and eider ducks, oh, and a large colony of grey seals. For information on a range of excellent tours contact **Billy Shiel's Boat Trips** (☎ 01665-720308).

Modern, equipped, next to a TIC and 3 miles from Housesteads Roman Fort. Northumbria bus 685 (from Hexham or Haltwhistle stations) drops you at Henshaw.

Holmhead Guest House (☎ 016977-47402; www.bandbhadranswall.com; Castle Farm, Hadrian's Wall; s/d £43/66) A picturesque old farmhouse built from stones pillaged from the wall. The rooms are on the small side, but the hosts are experts on local Roman life and can help you plan trips around the area.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Newcastle to Carlisle train line has stations at Hexham, Haydon Bridge, Bardon Mill, Haltwhistle and Brampton, but not all trains stop at all stations. There are hourly buses from Carlisle and Newcastle on bus 685. From June to September the hail-and-ride Hadrian's Wall Bus links Hexham, Haltwhistle and Carlisle with the main sites. Call Hexham TIC (☎ 01434-652220).

NORTHWEST ENGLAND

Popular culture, the arts, music and big nights out on the town are the major attractions in the southern part of this decidedly urban corner of England, a sprawl of conurbations that sprang from the Industrial Revolution running from Merseyside (Liverpool) to the Humber River. The area was, and in many ways still is, the working-class heartland of England. It's a decidedly urban landscape dominated by the bright lights of Liverpool and Manchester, although there are some important exceptions, including historic walled Chester, which makes a good starting point for North Wales and the Lake District, the latter a complete contrast and the most beautiful corner of England.

MANCHESTER

☎ 0161 / pop 390,000

Two historical double acts neatly encapsulate Manchester's modern history, for this is where Mr Rolls met Mr Royce and where Mr Marx worked with Mr Engels on the *Communist Manifesto*. The former duo epitomises Manchester's key role as a centre of innovation and engineering excellence since the early days of the Industrial Revolution, while the latter highlights the labour often harshly exploited to realise its achievements.

Manchester's era as the crucible of industrialisation and political ferment is long behind it, however, and what remains is a lively, modern city with ample public space and art, strikingly juxtaposed modern and Victorian architecture, and a buzzing nightlife, including a vibrant gay scene. Visitors will find plenty to do and see, and can get around easily by foot or public transport.

Orientation & Information

The University of Manchester lies to the south of the city centre (on Oxford St/Rd). To the west of the university is Moss Side, a ghetto still dogged with high unemployment and a thriving drug trade – avoid. Victoria train station caps the city in the north.

The **TIC** (☎ 0871 222 8223; www.visitmanchester.com; Town Hall Extension, Lloyd St, St Peter Sq; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun & bank holidays) also has branches in Terminals 1 and 2 at the airport. Internet access is available at **easyEverything** (☎ 832 9200; St Anne's Sq).

Sights & Activities

Explore the city centre on foot and you'll find some grand Victorian architecture, most notably in Albert Sq, home of the enormous Victorian Gothic Town Hall, designed by Albert Waterhouse (of London's Natural History Museum fame) in 1876.

Further south, the Castlefield district offers a pleasing mosaic of solid old civic structures, warehouses, Roman ruins, serene canalside paths and pubs next to soaring modern skyscrapers, such as the new Hilton tower.

The area also contains the excellent **Museum of Science & Industry** (☎ 832 2244; Liverpool Rd, Castlefield; admission free, exhibitions adult/child £5/3; ☎ 10am-5pm), offering vivid, interactive displays on the city's once proud textile and engineering industries, and featuring some excellent live demonstrations of industrial weaving and working steam engines. If you only visit one museum in Manchester, make it this one.

The **Manchester Art Gallery** (☎ 234 1456; cnr Nicholas & Mosley Sts; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) houses an impressive collection covering everything from early Italian, Dutch and Flemish painters to Gainsborough, Blake, Constable and the Pre-Raphaelites.

Out in Manchester's rapidly regenerating **Quays** area (take the Metrolink to either

Broadway or Harbour City), the excellent and free **Imperial War Museum** (☎ 836 4000; Trafford Wharf Rd, Trafford Park; ☎ 10am-6pm; M Harbour City Metrolink) is a cut above the usual armoury for war anoraks, projecting 20ft-high short films on the walls that explore the impact of war on the lives of everyday people.

Also in the Quays is the architecturally bold **Lowry Complex**, with two theatres and a number of free galleries (one devoted to the complex's namesake LS Lowry, visual chronicler of urban working-class landscapes and their 'matchstick' denizens).

You may begin to understand why fans of the city's most famous football club treat its home as hallowed ground if you head to the **Manchester United Football Museum** (☎ 0870 442 1994; www.manutd.com; Old Trafford stadium; museum only adult/child £5.50/3.75, with tour £7.50/5). The entertaining hour-long tours of changing rooms and sacred turf run every 10 minutes. Call or email ahead, as tour times depend on match days and times. Your only chance of getting a ticket to an actual game is to go to the box office early on match day and wait with thousands for the handful of cancelled tickets to be released.

Sleeping

The TIC can arrange accommodation for a £2.50 booking fee, plus a 10% deposit.

YHA Manchester (☎ 839 9960; manchester@yha.org.uk; dm adult/under 18yr £20.95/15.95) Across the road from the Museum of Science & Industry in the Castlefield area (well signposted), this hostel has over 140 beds and full facilities.

Hatters (☎ 236 9500; www.hattersgroup.com; 50 Newton St; dm £15-17, s/d £30/45; ☎) The best low-priced option is equidistantly located between the train and coach stations in the city centre, and offers 200 beds, cheap high-speed Internet access, no lockout, plus a full restaurant and laundry facilities.

Ox (☎ 839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd; d from £45) Next to the Museum of Science & Industry you'll find reasonably priced rooms upstairs from this pub/restaurant. The rooms nearest the bar can be noisy.

Mitre Hotel (☎ 834 4128; www.mitrehotel.com; Cathedral Gates; s/d/f £52/65/85) The location (beside Manchester Cathedral and Arndale) and the charm (sloping 200-year-old floors and simple, plain but welcoming rooms) make this family-owned place your best midrange bet in town.

Eating

The most distinctive restaurant zones are Chinatown in the city centre and Rusholme in the south, called the Curry Mile for its plethora of Indian restaurants, but cafés and restaurants cover the city centre, as well.

Chinatown is bounded by Charlotte, Portland, Oxford and Mosley Sts, and it has a number of restaurants, mostly, but not exclusively, Chinese.

Basement (☎ 237 1832; 24 Lever St; mains £2-3; ☎ noon-6pm Wed-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) Ludicrously cheap organic and vegan fare, including tasty jacket potatoes and fresh juices, are the reason to come to this excellent community-run, not-for-profit café. That and the free Internet access. Don't forget to tip your volunteer staff.

Café And (☎ 834 1136; 74-76 High St; sandwiches £3) A café, record store and quirky interiors shop in the up-and-coming Northern Quarter, Café And serves fresh, inexpensive wraps and warming soups.

Tampopo (☎ 819 1966; 16 Albert Sq; mains £6.50-9) Near the Town Hall in smart, contemporary surroundings you'll find this excellent Pan-Asian canteen serving affordable noodle, dumpling, yakitori and satay dishes.

Le Mont (☎ 605 8282; Levels 5 & 6, Urbis, City Gardens; 2-course lunch £15, mains £21-26; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) For dinner with a view and few compromises on ingredients, quality (or price). Dishes might include butter-fried skate wings with Morecombe Bay shrimps, or saffron risotto with lobster pieces in a cognac cream sauce.

Drinking

There are several places to drink close to the canal in Castlefield. We recommend:

Dukes 92 (☎ 839 8646; 2 Castle St) High ceilings and outdoor seating for sunny days.

Britons Protection (☎ 236 5895; 50 Great Bridge-water St) A convivial little pub serving a selection of real ales and an extensive range of single malt whisky.

Bar Centro (☎ 835 2863; 72 Tib St) In the ever-cool Northern Quarter, this bar has an alternative vibe and makes a great place to kick off a big night out.

Entertainment

The glory days of acid house, ecstasy-fuelled house and the loose-limbed, guitar-backed Madchester sound may have faded,

but Manchester still parties hard and offers a huge choice to clubbers.

Following are two abiding Manchester stalwarts (by the ephemeral standards of clubland).

Music Box (☎ 236 9971; 65 Oxford St; admission £5-12; ☹ Wed-Sat) An intimate club, leaning towards jagged, hard-edged house.

Sankey's Soap (☎ 661 9085; Jersey St, Ancoats; admission free-£11; ☹ Fri & Sat) Much larger and slightly more mainstream, Sankey's hosts the biggest names from the international clubbing firmament.

Getting There & Away

Manchester International Airport (MAN; 489 3000; www.manchesterairport.co.uk) is 10 miles south of the city centre and has flights to more than 100 destinations, including Amsterdam, Berlin, Dublin, Nice, Paris and Prague. Domestic services with **BMI** (www.bmi.co.uk) include London Heathrow (from £28, 50 minutes), Aberdeen (from £48, one hour) and Inverness (from £60, one hour).

There are many coach links with the rest of the country. National Express operates out of Chorlton St train station in the city centre to almost anywhere you'll want to go, including London's Victoria Station (£21 return, 4½ hours, seven to nine daily) and Edinburgh (£24.50, 6½ hours, about five daily).

Piccadilly is the main station for trains to and from the rest of the country, although Victoria serves Halifax and Bradford. Both train stations are linked by **Metrolink** (☎ 0845 748 4950). There are frequent services to London (£92, 2¾ hours, hourly) and Liverpool (£8.30, 45 minutes to one hour, three hourly).

Getting Around

The free buses 1 and 2 make travelling anywhere in the city centre a breeze. Routes and schedules are available from the TIC. For general inquiries about local transport, including night buses, phone ☎ 228 7811 from 8am to 8pm. A Day Saver ticket (£3) covers travel throughout the Great Manchester area on bus, train and Metrolink. Manchester's Metrolink light-railway (tram) makes frequent connections between Victoria and Piccadilly train stations and G-Mex (for Castlefield). Buy tickets from machines on the platforms.

CHESTER

☎ 01244 / pop 80,000

One of the oldest cities in England, Chester oozes historical appeal and is well worth a day trip. Ringed by the most complete city walls in Britain (much of its 2 miles is the original Roman construction), its streets are lined with ancient timber-framed houses. Make time to stroll the walls and to nose around the unusual two-level shopping streets (known as the Rows, and thought to date back as far as the post-Roman period). Unsurprisingly, Chester attracts hordes of summer visitors, but it's big and bustling enough in its own right to avoid being hollowed out entirely by tourism.

Orientation & Information

Built in a bow formed by the Dee River, the walled city centre is now surrounded by suburbs. The train station is a 15-minute walk from the city centre; go up City Rd, then turn right onto Foregate at the large roundabout.

The **TIC** (☎ 402111; www.chestercc.gov.uk; Town Hall) is just opposite the cathedral, while the **Chester Visitor Centre** (☎ 351609; tis@chestercc.gov.uk; Vicar's Lane) can book your accommodation, and then keep you busy for days with guided walks, brass rubbing, ghost hunting and even a wall patrol with fully clad Roman legionaries.

Sights & Activities

The present **Chester Cathedral** (☎ 324756; admission £2) was originally a Saxon minster, and with its cloisters, showcases the most complete monastic complex in Britain.

The **Dewa Roman Experience** (☎ 343407; Pierpoint Lane; adult/concession/child £3.95/3.50/2.25; ☹ 9am-5pm) is an interactive museum. Its simulated archaeological dig and reconstruction of typical Roman street life is especially great for kids, but, honestly, who doesn't want to try on a set of Roman armour?

Sleeping & Eating

Sleeping options inside the city walls are rare, although numerous good-value B&Bs line Hoole Rd, the road into the city from the M53/M56.

Chester Backpackers (☎ 400185; www.chesterbackpackers.co.uk; 67 Boughton St; dm/s/d £14/20/38; ☹) The only real budget choice in Chester, five minutes from both the train station and the city centre, is small, friendly but rather

cramped (the tiny 18-bed dorm in particular). The en suite singles and doubles are basic but good value.

Recorder House Hotel (☎ 326580; www.recorderhotel.co.uk; 19 City Walls; s/d/tr from £45/70/85) Top spot in town, right on the city walls, this delightful Georgian inn overlooks the Dee River. Some of the homy rooms feature four-poster bedsteads.

Katie's Tea Room (☎ 400322; 38 Watergate St; tea & scones £3, lunches £4-6; ☹ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat) A cosy, stone-walled, wood-beamed little nook ideal for a light refreshment break.

Francs (☎ 317952; 14 Cuppin St; dinner mains £8-10, 3-course lunch £11; ☹ lunch & dinner) Rib of sirloin, mustard roasted and served with a red wine gravy or rustic, hearty 'rillettes de porc' with onion chutney are typical of the honest, flavoursome fare served in this avowedly Francophone little 'coin de France'.

Getting There & Around

Chester has excellent transport connections, especially to and from North Wales.

National Express has numerous connections with Chester, including Birmingham (£10.20, 2½ hours, four daily), and on to London (£21, 5½ hours), Manchester (£6.20, 1¼ hours, three daily), Liverpool (£6.10, one hour, four daily) and Llandudno (£9, 1½ hours, departs once daily at 4.55pm). For many destinations in the south or east, it's necessary to change at Birmingham; for the north, change at Manchester.

For information on local bus services ring **Chester City Transport** (☎ 602666). Local buses leave from Market Sq behind the Town Hall.

Any bus from the train station goes into the city centre. There are numerous trains to Manchester (£10.30, one hour, hourly); Liverpool (£4.30, 40 minutes, half-hourly); Holyhead (£16.40, two hours, approximately hourly), via the North Wales coast, for ferries to Ireland; Shrewsbury (£7.10, one hour, hourly in the morning); and London's Euston station (£56.20, 2½ to three hours, almost hourly, last one at 7.30pm). Phone ☎ 0845 748 4950 for details.

LIVERPOOL

☎ 0151 / pop 510,000

Visually more striking than Manchester, with some fantastic architecture, a grand waterfront facing the broad Mersey estu-

ary, towering cathedrals and a busy nightlife, infectiously friendly Liverpool is on the up. Formerly a down-at-heel city trying to evolve from economic depression following its industrial and maritime decline, Europe's City of Culture for 2008 is busily polishing and patching itself for the occasion. Of all northern England's cities, Liverpool has perhaps the strongest sense of its own identity, one closely tied with the sporting totems of Liverpool and Everton football teams, and, of course, with its most famous sons, the Beatles.

Orientation & Information

Lime St, the main train station, is just to the east of the city centre. The National Express coach station is on the corner of Norton and Islington Sts, slightly northeast of the train station. The bus station is in the city centre on Paradise St. The city is fairly compact, but a steepish hill lies between the Albert Dock and the eastern part of the city centre.

Occupying the same building as the information centre in charge of the 2008 Year of Culture celebrations, the **TIC** (☎ 233 2008; www.visitliverpool.com; The 08 Place Whitechapel; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) also has a branch inside the Maritime Museum (both book accommodation). You can log on at **CafféLatte.net** (☎ 709 9683; 4 South Hunter St; per 30 min £1; ☹ 9am-6pm).

Sights & Activities

A £100 million renovation helped make **Albert Dock** (☎ 708 8854; all museums admission free; ☹ from 10am), deservedly, Liverpool's number one tourist attraction, housing several outstanding museums.

The **Merseyside Maritime Museum** (☎ 4784499; ☹ 10am-5pm) is Liverpool's best museum, with several absorbing exhibition spaces on the city's maritime heritage. Don't miss the ones covering the slave trade and the Atlantic War against the Nazis.

Tate Gallery Liverpool (☎ 702 7400; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun & bank holiday Mon) won't thrill if you've already visited its London counterpart, but it's well represented by a roll call of 20th-century artistic talent all the same.

For many, a visit to Liverpool wouldn't be complete without a Beatles pilgrimage. A sanitised version of the rise of Liverpool's most famous sons it may be, but the **Beatles Story** (☎ 709 1963; Britannia Vaults, Albert Dock; adult/

child £7.95/5.45; ☎ 10am-5.50pm) still pulls in the punters and includes a re-creation of the famous Cavern Club, which also hosts live music. It's also the departure tour for the rather more worthwhile **Magical Mystery Tour** (☎ 709 3285; www.caverncitytours.com; tickets £11.95; ☎ tours from the main TIC/Beatles Story 2.10pm/2.30pm, also 11.40am/noon during summer, weekends & holidays), which takes passengers by a psychedelic bus to the actual Penny Lane and Strawberry Fields (you know, where the banker never wore a mac in the pouring rain).

Liverpool's two cathedrals, looming either side of Hope St, are both well worth visiting. The modern concrete lantern, brightly lit at night, of the **Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King** (☎ 709 9222; Mount Pleasant; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun) contains a wonderfully serene and uplifting space for worship, washed with a celestial blue when the sun lights the stained glass. The massive neo-Gothic **Liverpool Cathedral** (☎ 709 6271; Hope St; ☎ 8am-6pm) is the largest church in England, and offers unrivalled views across the city and estuary from its 100m-high tower (adult/child £4.25/2.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat).

Sleeping

Swanky new boutique independents and international chains just keep coming but, alas, the choices are still pretty limited at the mid and budget ranges. For help with accommodation, ring ☎ 0845 601 1125.

Embassie Hostel (☎ 707 1089; www.embassie.com; 1 Falkner Sq; dm 1st night £13.50, subsequent nights £12.50) Named for its former life as the Venezuelan consulate, this comfortable hostel is a labour of love for its owners, a former backpacker and his father, who provide a comfortable environment, summer barbecues on the patio, and free coffee, tea and toast.

YHA Liverpool International (☎ 0870 770 5924; liverpool@yha.org.uk; 25 Tabley St, Wapping; dm adult/under 18yr £20.95/15.95; ☎) Large, smart, modern and boasting a full complement of facilities including 24-hour Internet access, games room and laundry, this hostel also occupies a handy location right near all the sights, bars and museums in and around Albert Dock.

International Inn (☎ 709 8135; www.international.inn.co.uk; 4 S Hunter St; dm/tw £15/36; ☎) Close to the city centre, off Hardman St, the International is well equipped with a café, kitchen and games room.

Aachen Hotel (☎ 709 3477; www.aachenhotel.co.uk; 89 Mount Pleasant; s/d £42/50, s with shared bathroom £32) The decidedly old-fashioned rooms (and often rather tacky fittings) are more than compensated for by the friendly service and the generous breakfasts. Reasonable value overall.

Feathers Hotel (☎ 709 9655; feathershotel@feathers.co.uk; 117 Mount Pleasant; s/d £47/75) Part of a chain but managing to avoid feeling too much like one, Feathers offers spacious, burgundy-carpeted, beechwood-panelled rooms and a good buffet breakfast.

Eating

Good new places, from inexpensive cafés to fine dining restaurants, are springing up all the time and dining out in Liverpool has never been better. The area around Hope St is really buzzing, as is the up-and-coming Ropewalks/Chinatown district.

Flannagan's Apple (☎ 231 1957; 18 Mathew St; pub meals £5) In the city centre, the famed Flannagan's Apple won't win culinary prizes, but it's cheap and fun.

Everyman Bistro (☎ 708 9545; 5-9 Hope St; mains £6-8; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) With freshly made food, this eatery offers great value with soups and salads starting at £2, a reasonable list of beers and wines and some good veggie options.

Tea Factory (☎ 708 7008; Fleet St; snacks £2.50-4.50, mains £6-11; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat) Iron girders, brick walls and a long, long bar lend this bar-cum-bistro in a former tea factory an air of cool. The international menu is wide and eclectic, including bangers and mash, steak and chips, lamb tagine, pizza and chilli con carne.

Alma De Cuba (☎ 709 7097; St Peter's Church; tapas £2.50-5, mains £11-21; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A wonderfully atmospheric space in a stylishly converted church with a very cool bar and Latin American flavours, such as jalapeno rib-eye steak or calamari with saffron rice and grilled prawns.

60 Hope St (☎ 707 6060; 60 Hope St; 2-course set lunch £14, mains £15-24; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Featuring modern European food, such as confit duck leg with garlic mash, or foie gras ballotine with apple jelly and toasted brioche, 60 Hope St is one of Liverpool's premier restaurants. It offers a fine dining menu as well as good-value bistro lunch deals.

PARTY TIME IN LIVERPOOL

The city has spent the last few years limbering up for two years of cultural events, carnivals, races, celebrations and some good, hard partying. It all starts in 2007, when it will celebrate its 800th birthday (based on exactly what event isn't clear). This is just the preamble, however, to 2008 when Liverpool celebrates its status as European City of Culture, a partly EU-funded year extravaganza of art, dance, performance, music and theatre events, led by former-artistic director Robyn Archer. In 2008 world-renowned conductor Sir Simon Rattle will return to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The start of the 2008 Tall Ships Race will also begin here in 2008. For more details of the events in store and the artistic programme, visit **08 Liverpool** (www.liverpool08.com).

Drinking & Entertainment

The old Beatles stamping ground of Mathew St is still a good place to go for a night out. Slightly southwest of Bold, Seel and Slater Sts you'll stumble on an amazing array of clubs and pubs catering to most punters.

Philharmonic Dining Room (☎ 709 1163; cnr 36 Hope & Hardman Sts) Built in 1900 by the shipwrights who fitted out the ocean-going liner *Lusitania*, the Philharmonic is one of Britain's most extraordinary pubs. The interior is resplendent with etched glass, stained glass, wrought iron, mosaics and ceramic tiling, and wingback armchairs. Even the men's loo is a heritage-listed marble marvel.

Baby Cream (☎ 702 5823; Atlantic Pavillion) Down at Albert Dock the cool-and-it-knows-it Baby Cream is a great style bar despite its rather sniffy airs and graces. You can select your own compilation CD from a menu of tracks to take home.

Heebie Jeebies (☎ 708 7001; 80-82 Seel St; admission £4-7; ☎ Mon-Sat) Depending on the night, you'll find house, techno, '50s rock and roll and funk. Admission is free on Thursday, when you get a bit of everything.

Everyman Theatre (☎ 709 4776; Hope St) One of the best repertory theatres in England, with a proud roll call of past and present talent.

Getting There & Away

Liverpool John Lennon International Airport (LPL; 0870 129 8484; www.liverpooljohnlennonairport.com) is 7 miles southeast of the city centre and operates services to more than 50 destinations. European destinations include Amsterdam, Barcelona, Dublin, Madrid, Nice, Paris and Rome, while domestic routes include Aberdeen and Inverness with Ryanair (both from £12, one hour), Southampton (from £22, 1¼ hours) with Flybe and Belfast with easyJet (from £15, 35 minutes).

There are National Express coach services linking Liverpool to most major towns, including London's Euston station (£22, 5¼ hours, four daily), Manchester (£5.80, 1½ hours, hourly) and Chester (£4.70, 45 minutes, half-hourly).

Direct trains head to London's Euston station (£94.50, three hours, hourly) and Chester (£4.30, 45 minutes, half-hourly).

Getting Around

The 500 bus service runs at least twice an hour (£2.80 one-way) between Liverpool's Lime St station and the airport. After midnight the N86 service links the airport with the main bus station at Queen Sq.

Public transport in the region is coordinated by **Merseytravel** (☎ 236 7676). For day visitors, a Saveaway ticket costs £3.70; it offers all-day off-peak travel on buses, trains and ferries throughout the region.

Liverpool has no less than 18 bus companies operating, and these change every few months. Most services are quite frequent. Check the Queen St Travel Centre in the main TIC for up-to-date information.

The ferry across the Mersey, started 800 years ago by Benedictine monks but made famous by Gerry & the Pacemakers, still offers one of the best views of Liverpool. Boats depart from Pier Head ferry terminal, just north of Albert Dock. Special 50-minute commentary cruises (adult/concession/child £4.95/3.60/2.75) run year-round, departing hourly from 10am to 3pm Monday to Friday and until 6pm Saturday and Sunday. Phone **Mersey Ferries** (☎ 330 1444) for more information.

LAKE DISTRICT

A dramatic landscape of dizzying ridges and huge lakes gouged out by the slow march of Ice Age glaciers, the Lake District is the most

beautiful corner of England. It may not be the wildest place on earth but for bucolic England it's as extreme as it gets. The Lake District is home to both the highest peak (Scafell; 978m) and the wettest inhabited place (Seathwaite; over 3m of rain a year), so take the changeable weather conditions seriously if you venture into the hills.

Even in summer, hikes on the mountains – with their swiftly changing microclimates – have proved fatal to experienced hikers. Before heading out, prepare thoroughly and check the **Weatherline** (☎ 0870 055 0575).

The lakes are easily England's most popular wilderness, attracting 14 million-plus visitors yearly who come for some serious hiking or to potter gently around the tea shops, stone cottages and souvenir shops of the countless pretty Lakeland villages.

The awe-inspiring geography of the place shaped Wordsworth's real and literary persona, and resonates powerfully in his poetry. His houses, Dove Cottage at Grasmere and Rydal Mount, between Ambleside and Grasmere, are literary shrines.

Orientation & Information

The two principal bases for the Lake District are Keswick in the north (particularly for walkers) and Windermere/Bowness in the south. Kendal, Conistone, Ambleside, Grasmere and Cockermouth are less-hectic alternatives. All these towns have hostels, numerous B&Bs and places to eat.

Ullswater, Grasmere, Windermere, Conistone Water and Derwent Water are usually considered the most beautiful lakes, but they also teem with boats. Wastwater, Crummock Water and Buttermere are equally spectacular and less crowded.

The shelves of the local TICs groan with guidebooks and brochures, and both Windermere and Keswick have decent information centres with free accommodation booking services. If you're staying for a few days, buy any one of the dozens of books featuring information on walking, bicycling, travelling with children or driving. Those interested in Wordsworth's life might enjoy reading his sister Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals*.

The numerous walking/climbing shops in the region, particularly in Ambleside and Keswick, are good sources of local information. **George Fisher** (☎ 01768-772178; 2 Borrowdale

Rd, Keswick) is an excellent shop for stocking up on equipment.

There are over 25 YHA hostels in the region, many of which can be linked by foot. The YHA also runs a shuttle-bus between eight of the Lake District hostels during summer. Call ☎ 0870 770 5672 for more information.

Getting There & Away

National Express buses have direct connections from Windermere to Preston (£9.90, two hours, two daily) and Keswick to Birmingham (£31, 3½ hours, two daily).

For all public transport inquiries, contact Traveline. There are several important bus services in the Lake District, including bus 555, which runs about once an hour year-round and links Lancaster with Carlisle, via Kendal, Windermere, Ambleside, Grasmere and Keswick. Bus 599 is an open-top bus that runs during the summer between Windermere and Ambleside, via Grasmere. Bus 505 runs from Ambleside to Conistone via Hawkshead. Ask about Day Ranger (£7.50) and Explorer tickets (four/seven days £17/25), which can offer better value than single tickets.

Windermere is at the end of a spur off the main train line between London's Euston station and Glasgow. Trains arriving include from London (£109, four hours, at least six daily) and Manchester (£13.30, two hours, 15 daily).

Getting Around

Walking or cycling are the best ways to get around, but bear in mind that conditions can be treacherous and the going can be very, very steep. **Country Lanes** (☎ 01539-444544; www.countrylanes.co.uk; train station, Windermere) rents many bike sizes from £15 per day.

Windermere, Bowness & Around

☎ 015394 / pop 8500

Thanks to the railway, the Windermere/Bowness conglomerate is the largest tourist town in the Lake District. The two towns are quite strung out, with lakeside Bowness a 30-minute downhill walk from Windermere. The excellent **TIC** (☎ 46499; Victoria St, Windermere) is conveniently located near the train station at the northern end of town, and also offers Internet access for £3 per 30 minutes.

Offering beds in small rooms and plenty of camaraderie, **Lake District Backpackers Lodge**

(☎ 46374, 44725; High St; dm £12.50) is 200m from the train station. Call ahead for reservations. Popular with families, **Windermere YHA** (☎ 0870 770 6094; High Cross, Bridge Lane, Troutbeck; dm adult/under 18yr £13.95/9.95) commands a scenic spot on Lake Windermere in the Troutbeck Valley. Two miles from the train station, numerous buses run past Troutbeck Bridge, and in summer the hostel sends a minibus to meet trains.

Windermere is dry stone wall-to-wall with B&Bs, which the TIC can book for you. The great-value **Bendan Chase** (☎ 45638; www.placetostaywindermere.co.uk; 1 College Rd; s/d from £25/40; Ⓟ) is close to the train station and offers an excellent cooked breakfast. Almost opposite, **Applegarth Hotel** (☎ 43206; www.lake.sapplegarth.co.uk; College Rd; s/d from £40/80) offers Victorian wood-panelled splendour and comfort. Guests have free use of a nearby country club pool, gym, sauna and gym.

There are plenty of decent cafés and tea-rooms in town, but the steady flow of visitors means the restaurants in both townships don't have to try very hard to win custom, so they don't. The **Bowness Kitchen** (☎ 45529; 4 Grosvenor Tce, Bowness) serves tasty toasted sandwiches for £3, while **Old England** (☎ 42444; Church St; afternoon tea £11) offers a refined riverside spot for afternoon tea. If you have wheels, your best bet for a square meal is to head up into pretty Troutbeck, about 5 miles north of Windermere for excellent food, roaring fires and lip-smackingly good cask ale at the **Queen's Head** (☎ 31274; www.queensheadhotel.com; mains £6-10, 3-course set menu £11).

Grasmere

☎ 015394 / pop 2700

Occupying a graceful spot amid meadows, woods and water, Grasmere is a delight. Unsurprisingly, in summer it's completely overrun. Information can be found at the **TIC** (☎ 35245; Red Bank Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm).

The homes of poet William Wordsworth are the major attractions here. **Dove Cottage & Museum** (☎ 35544; adult/concession/child £6.20/5/3.90; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) is where Wordsworth wrote much of his most important work, including *The Prelude*, his powerful, exultant paean to an awakening mind nurtured by and mirrored in the natural drama of the area. The admission price includes a worthwhile guided tour. Just south of Grasmere, it's accessible by bus 555 or 599 (in summer).

Grasmere Butharlpy How YHA (☎ 0870 770 5836; grasmere@yha.org.uk; Easedale Rd; dm adult/under 18yr £15.50/10.95) is just north of the village. The lovely **How Foot Lodge** (☎ 35366; www.howfoot.co.uk; d from £64) is right next to Dove Cottage, which is on the main A591 Kendal-Keswick Rd, just south of Grasmere village.

Keswick

☎ 017687 / pop 5000

Keswick is an important walking centre, and although the town centre lacks the green charm of Windermere, the lake is beautiful. The **TIC** (☎ 72645), in the middle of the pedestrianised town centre, books accommodation and runs guided tours of the area.

The **Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5894; keswick@yha.org.uk; dm adult/under 18yr £17.50/13.95), a short walk down Station Rd from the TIC, is open most of the year. Station Rd has a number of B&Bs, most charging around £26 per person.

Kendal

☎ 01539 / pop 27,100

On the eastern outskirts of the Lake District National Park, Kendal is a lively town and makes for a good base from which to explore the region. The **TIC** (☎ 725758; Highgate) is in the Town Hall.

Kendal Youth Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5892; kendal@yha.org.uk; 118 Highgate; dm adult/under 18yr £17.50/13.95; ☎ daily mid-Apr–Aug, Tue-Sat Sep-early Apr) is right next door to the Brewery, a wonderful arts complex with a theatre, cinema and bar/bistro.

Kendal is on the branch train line from Windermere to Oxenholme, with connections north to Manchester and south to Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness.

Ambleside

☎ 015394 / 2600

Towards the northern end of Windermere, Ambleside is a good base for both hikers and village ambblers.

Rydal Mount (☎ 33002; adult/student/child £4.50/3.50/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb), where Wordsworth lived for 37 years, still contains many effects from the poet's life.

Right beside the water, the vast **Ambleside YHA** (☎ 32304; www.yha.org.uk; Waterhead; dm/d £20/38) is an excellent flagship hostel, with a few (very popular) doubles, some family rooms and a full range of facilities, including a shuttle bus service to carry you or your rucksack around the area.

At the tip of Windermere, the **Wateredge Inn** (☎ 32332; www.wateredgeinn.co.uk; s/d from £50/70) offers some great accommodation housed in two converted 17th-century fishermen's cottages.

CARLISLE

☎ 01228 / pop 73,000

Most visitors pass quickly through unremarkable Carlisle, a transport hub for five scenic railway journeys (see the boxed text, below) to Northumberland, Dumfries & Galloway, the Borders (the beautiful Scottish border counties) and the Lake District.

The well-stocked **TIC** (☎ 625600; Old Town Hall; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun May-Aug & Easter, shorter hr Mon-Sat & closed Sun rest of year) has information for visiting Hadrian's Wall. A general information office at the train station is open until 7.30pm.

National Express coaches have services to London (£30.50, 6½ hours, two daily), Edinburgh (£15.60, 3¾ hours, three daily), Glasgow (£15.40, two hours, 10 daily) and Manchester (£21.50, three hours, three daily). A Rail Link coach service runs to Galashiels in the Scottish Borders.

You can get almost anywhere easily by rail from Carlisle, most notably London's Euston station (£99, four hours, 15/10 daily in summer/winter).

SCOTLAND

Don't make the mistake of thinking Scotland is just a continuation of England. It's a dramatically different, proudly independent country that's worth making as much time as you possibly can for in your itinerary. Its vast wilderness areas of wild coast, remote islands, high moorland, vast lochs, stone-hewn villages and snow-capped mountains are an obvious draw outshining and outsize anything in England or Wales. The array of terrain makes it an outward-bound and adventure-sport enthusiast's playground, and one that's easily accessible from its cities. The principal cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, are important and thriving centres rich with historical, cultural and social interest.

HISTORY

Scotland's early history is evoked by the ancient standing stones on Lewis (p264), but almost nothing is known about those who lived here around 3000 BC. Roman chroniclers were the first to record the presence of fierce and dogged tribes here who repelled their advance from England after their arrival in 55 BC. After decades of clashes, Emperor Hadrian built his eponymous fortified wall to contain these restive clans.

SCOTLAND: EUROPE'S ADVENTURE SPORT CAPITAL?

Scotland is trying to play down its dowdy tartan-and-shortbread image and recast itself as Europe's thrusting young adrenaline sport destination, a kind of New Zealand of the northern hemisphere. While there may be some stiff competition elsewhere, Scotland offers more than enough outdoor thrills to stake a serious claim to the title.

Bored with merely hiking in all that spectacular scenery? Want to gorge jump, surf, snow hole, mountain bike, sea kayak, dive with basking sharks, ice climb, dog sled, kite surf or white-water raft? It's all on offer somewhere in Scotland. Two important centres for such horseplay and rough housing are Aviemore and Fort William.

At the foot of the Cairngorms, about 25 miles southeast of Inverness, **Aviemore** offers great trekking, biking, white-water rafting and, yes, dog sledding. The adventure centre at **Glennmore Lodge** (☎ 01479-861256; www.glenmorelodge.org.uk) is a good place to start.

Fort William is fast becoming an important centre. It has hosted the Mountain Bike World Cup, the Wilderness Arc adventure race and the annual run, yes run, up Ben Nevis. Nearby Kinlochleven boasts an excellent climbing centre, the **Ice Factor** (☎ 01855-831100; www.icefactor.co.uk), complete with climbing walls and a massive indoor freezer containing 9m of ice wall to get your crampons into. For these and other activities in the area, see **Outdoor Capital of the UK** (www.outdoorcapital.co.uk).

The west coast is another good area for adventure sports, including **Oban**, offering some excellent wreck diving and sea kayaking. Contact the local TIC for further details (see p260). A good general resource may be found at **Adventure in Scotland** (www.visitscotland.com/adventure).

Scandinavian tribes, who dominated northern Europe for much of the first millennium, were the next big threat, causing the Celts from Ireland to arrive and form an alliance with the local Picts. The alliance began a unifying process that evolved into the concept of nationhood. Scone became the first capital, and the Stone of Destiny, now at Edinburgh Castle (p246), was launched into legend as a symbol of Scottish nationhood.

By the start of the next millennium the Normans had conquered England, but all they could do in Scotland was influence affairs. The outlying regions remained a law unto themselves, culminating in the first full-scale invasion from England in 1296. The resulting 1328 Treaty of Northampton recognised Robert the Bruce as king of an independent country.

By the 16th century Scotland was a strongly nationalistic society with its own close links to Europe and a visceral hatred of the English. It boasted universities at St Andrews, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen (there were only two in England at the time), reflecting a rigorous and pioneering intellectual climate. The period's distinctive and imposing architecture can be seen today at palaces at Holyrood (p246) and Stirling (p256).

When the childless Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603, Mary Stuart's son united the

crowns of Scotland and England, becoming James I of England and James VI of Scotland. In 1707, after complex bargaining and a modicum of double-dealing, England's government persuaded the Scottish Parliament to agree to the formal union of the two countries under a single parliament. But after a rebellion was suppressed at the Battle of Culloden (1746), the English set out to destroy the clans, prohibiting Highland dress, weapons and military service. They also cleared entire villages from the land to make way for sheep grazing, forcing thousands of families to abandon their traditional homes – the remains of destroyed houses from this time can still be seen throughout the Highland region.

While its political power had been forcibly removed, Scotland's cultural and intellectual life flourished throughout the 18th century, and Edinburgh in particular became an important centre of Enlightenment thinking. Philosophers Adam Smith and David Hume along with seminal Scottish poet Robert Burns influenced generations of thinkers, and the city became one of Europe's most beautiful examples of the new rational approach to architecture. Much of this heritage is still intact, making modern-day Edinburgh one of the world's most picturesque cities.

THE NORTHWEST'S SCENIC RAILWAYS

Carlisle is the terminus for six famous scenic railways that are well worth riding on just for the sheer pleasure of watching such great scenery roll past. Part of the main rail network, they also connect with some important destinations. Most of the following have Day Ranger tickets that allow unlimited travel. Phone ☎ 08457-484950 for timetable details and information on Day Ranger passes.

- **Cumbrian Coast Line** Hugs the coast in a great arc around to Lancaster, with views over the Irish Sea and back to the Lake District.
- **Glasgow–Carlisle Line** The main route north to Glasgow goes through Lockerbie and takes in some grand scenery.
- **Lake District Line** You think the landscape on the north–south main line is the most beautiful yet and then the line branches west just outside Kendal, taking you towards Windermere (your destination) and things get even better.
- **Leeds–Settle–Carlisle Line (LSC)** One of the great engineering achievements of the Victorian railway age, this famous line cuts southeast across the Yorkshire Dales through beautiful countryside. Several stations make good starting points for walks in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- **Tyne Valley Line** This scenic line follows Hadrian's Wall to and from Newcastle.



The 19th century saw Scotland take a leading role in the Industrial Revolution, with Glasgow becoming an international powerhouse of commerce and the 'second city' in the British Empire after London. While generations of Scots now turned to heavy industry for their employment, Scottish industrialists moved around the world, leaving a lasting legacy as far afield as Canada and Australia.

Scotland escaped much of the devastation that saw English cities reduced to rubble in WWII. A gradual industrial decline followed the war, along with a growing feeling that England was increasingly treating its brother nation as a second-class citizen.

Nationalistic fervour grew in the 1970s, with the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) using its newly won seats in the British Parliament as a soapbox to call for devolution. Separatist demands became louder throughout the 1980s following economic recession and cuts to government services. Following through on its election promise, Britain's new Labour government of 1997 announced a referendum on devolution among the Scots. The result was overwhelmingly in favour.

Representatives to the new Scottish Parliament – which has limited but increasing law-making powers – were elected in 1999. Plans for a new parliament building (p246) were quickly announced. Massively over budget, woefully late and dogged by serious subsequent teething troubles – Scotland's electorate must be praying the story of its parliament building isn't a sign of things to come in the brave new world of devolved government.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

The Scottish landscape is divided into the Southern Uplands, Central Lowlands and the Highlands. The first is characterised by low, heather-covered hills; the second by the coal and oil deposits that fuelled the country's economic growth; and the third by sword-shaped lochs, broad valleys and dramatic mountain peaks. Loch Awe is the longest loch (24 miles), Ben Nevis is the highest peak (1343m) and there are 790 islands around the coast. While Scotland covers only half as much landmass as England (about 491,000 sq miles), almost 80% of

Britain's coastline lies north of the English border.

Wildlife

Scotland is blessed with some amazing wildlife, from red deer, the endangered red squirrel, otters and an array of rare bird life, including ospreys, golden eagles, kites and puffins. There are even reindeer (introduced into the Cairngorms) and the odd fierce (but small and reclusive) wildcat. Not so wild, but hugely endearing, are Scotland's Highland Cattle (imagine a normal cow, but dressed up in a thick rug of ginger shag pile and sporting giant comedy Viking horns).

National Parks & Conservation Areas

Huge areas of Scotland are naturally beautiful and 12.8% of the country is designated as areas of Specific Scientific Interest (SSI). This includes several categories of protected land, including 73 National Nature Reserves, 40 National Scenic Areas and 51 Wetlands Areas of International Importance. There are also two national parks, Cairngorms National Park (p258) and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park. In addition, Scotland houses several Unesco-designated World Heritage Sites, including Edinburgh, New Lanark and Orkney.

Environmental Issues

Despite its outstanding natural beauty, Scotland has historically suffered serious challenges to its natural environment. Native forests and traditional farms were cleared by the English to make way for sheep grazing in the 18th century, and the 1980s witnessed the introduction of giant non-native conifer plantations that destroyed huge areas of delicate ecosystems.

While the long-term effects of these are difficult to calculate, global warming is already taking its toll: Scotland's tentative skiing industry is further under threat due to decreasing snowfalls; the Cairngorm Railway (p258), built to service the slopes despite a huge environmental outcry, may become a white elephant if snowfall levels continue to decrease.

Blessed with endless opportunities to generate power through tidal, hydro and wind power, Scotland offers huge potential to generate renewable energy. While hydroelectric power generation has been well

established here, harnessing tidal power is at the early experimental stages and the increased use of wind power is being held back by controversy over planning, in addition to objections from those who see the wind turbines as an intrusion on the landscape.

PEOPLE

The Scottish regard themselves as a separate race occupying the same island as the English and Welsh. While the English proudly label themselves British, the Scots rarely do and mistakenly calling them English won't make you any friends.

Scotland's strong sense of nationalistic pride is partly based on the many influential and conspicuous achievers in its past, including poet Robert Burns, novelist Sir Walter Scott, and an incredible roster of inventors and innovators.

Scotland's population is five million (25 million around the world claim Scottish lineage), with more than 80% living in towns and cities in the Central Lowlands. Only 9% of Britain's population lives in Scotland.

LANGUAGE

Gaelic is spoken here by 80,000 people, mainly in the Highlands and Islands, while Lallans, or Lowland Scots, is spoken (theoretically at least) in the south. It's not unusual to see bilingual road signs, Gaelic shows on TV and Gaelic words used in English conversation. For example, ceilidh (pronounced kay-lay), which translates as 'visit' but now means an evening of dance and live music, is in wide usage. There's an online Scots dictionary at www.scots-online.org.

EDINBURGH

☎ 0131 / pop 440,000

Scotland's proud and historic capital city is a visual delight. Built on a grand scale around two hills, one topped by its impressive castle, the other, called Arthur's Seat, a big chunk of undeveloped mountain seemingly helicoptered in for effect. Among the large, well-proportioned Georgian buildings and the tangle of arches and walkways you'll find a rich haul of excellent museums, galleries, pubs, and entertainment options to suit every taste and budget. History jumps out at you from every turn and every building seems to have its own ghost story. And with

the UK's most popular and comprehensive summer festival scene, visitors who plan a brief stopover often end up staying longer.

Orientation

Edinburgh's two most distinctive landmarks are Arthur's Seat, the 251m-high rocky peak southeast of the city centre, and the castle, which dominates Princes St Gardens. The Old and New Towns are separated by Princes St Gardens and Waverley train station. Buildings are restricted to the northern side of Princes St, lined with high-street chains. At the eastern end, Calton Hill is crowned by several monuments, including an incomplete war memorial modelled on the Parthenon, and a tower honouring Nelson. The Royal Mile (Lawnmarket, High St and Canongate) is Princes St's parallel equivalent in the Old Town. The bus station is in the New Town, off the northeastern corner of St Andrew Sq, north of Princes St.

Information

EMERGENCY

Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre (☎ 556 9437)

INTERNET ACCESS

connect@edinburgh (☎ 473 3800; 3 Princes St; per 15 min £0.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-Jun) Inside the TIC near Waverley train station.

e-Corner (☎ 558 7858; 54 Blackfriars St; per 30 min £1; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-9pm Sun) Fast Internet access.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Eventful Ed (www.eventful-edinburgh.com) Guide to city festivals.

The List (www.list.co.uk) Local listings magazine's events site.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Chemists and pharmacies operate standard shop hours, with 24-hour opening arranged on a rotating basis. Check information in chemist shop windows when closed.

Minor Injuries Unit (☎ 537 1330; Western General Hospital, Crew Rd South; ☎ 9am-9pm) Walk-in clinic for the slightly afflicted.

Royal Infirmary (☎ 536 1000; 51 Little France Cres, Old Dalkeith Rd; ☎ 24hr) For accident and emergency treatment.

MONEY

Amex (☎ 718 2501; 69 George St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Wed)



POST

Main Post Office (☎ 0845 722 3344; St James Centre, Leith St; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION**Edinburgh & Scotland Information Centre**

(☎ 0845 225 5121; www.edinburgh.org; 3 Princes St; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-Jun) Accommodation reservations, currency exchange and coach booking services. Offers free city guide and pocket map.

Sights**EDINBURGH CASTLE**

Dominating the skyline like a city in the clouds, the hilltop complex of **Edinburgh Castle** (☎ 225 9846; Castle Hill; adult/concession/child £10.30/8.50/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar) should be the first stop for any visitor. Perched on an extinct volcano, it's a hodge-podge of architectural styles, representing centuries of myriad historic uses. The Romanesque 11th-century **St Margaret's Chapel** is Edinburgh's oldest building, the **Scottish Crown Jewels** are among the oldest in Europe and the **Stone of Destiny**, symbol of Scottish nationhood, resides here. It's darker history is recorded in a new permanent **Prisoners of War** exhibition, where disembodied wails permeate the shadows.

REAL MARY KING CLOSE

A formerly plague-ridden nest of hidden streets, homes and shops built over and preserved intact for centuries comes to life at the **Real Mary King Close** (☎ 430160; 2 Warriston's Ct, High St; adult/concession/child £8/6/5; ☎ 10am-9pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) on the Royal Mile. It's a fascinating underground tour through the lives of the ordinary folk who once lived here. It's not officially a ghost tour, but being Edinburgh, they have to get the

supernatural angle in. 'Sightings' have been numerous – especially in one room where visitors from around the world routinely leave gifts for a ghostly child resident. A great crash course in Edinburgh history, but not one for claustrophobics.

PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE

At the foot of the Royal Mile, the **Palace of Holyroodhouse** (☎ 556 5100; Canongate; adult/concession/child £8.80/7.70/4.80; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is a beautiful baroque confection mostly dating from a reconstruction by Charles II in 1671. Best known as the home of Mary Queen of Scots, it's the official Scottish residence of the British royal family – which means it's closed when the Queen turns up. Don't miss the elaborate plaster ceiling and Brussels tapestries in the **State Apartments**. The new Scottish Parliament Building is just opposite.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND

Edinburgh has five impressive national galleries, linked by a free bus. First stop for many is the **National Gallery of Scotland** (☎ 624 6200; The Mound; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed, 10am-7pm Thu), a beautifully housed collection of European blockbusters by the likes of Titian, Rembrandt and Monet.

OTHER SIGHTS

Visit the **Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art** (☎ 624 6200; 75 Belford Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed, 10am-7pm Thu) for its eclectic collection of 20th- and 21st-century works from Picasso and Mondrian to Brit Art favourites, such as Damian Hirst.

At the **Scottish National Portrait Gallery** (☎ 624 6200; 1 Queen St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed, 10am-7pm Thu) portraits of famous royalty, poli-

ticians and celebrities from Mary Queen of Scots to Sean Connery are exhibited.

The **Museum of Scotland** (☎ 247 4422; Chambers St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) offers a thorough telling of Scotland's story from its days as volcanic magma to devolution.

Far from being the gin palace you might expect, the Royal Family's now retired luxury boat, the **Royal Yacht Britannia** (☎ 555 5566; Ocean Terminal, Leith; adult/child £9/5; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-3.30pm Oct-Mar), offers some surprisingly clean, elegant Art Deco lines and some insights into Royal life.

Festivals & Events

Unrivalled anywhere else in the UK, the **Edinburgh International Festival** (☎ 473 2000; www.eif.co.uk) takes over the city in August with three weeks of world-class music, dance, drama and opera.

Sitting alongside the official Edinburgh International Festival is the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe** (☎ 226 0000; www.edfringe.com), a semi-alternative arts festival focusing on theatre, comedy and music.

Just to make sure every bed within a 40-mile radius is taken for the whole of August, there's also the **Edinburgh Film Festival** (☎ 228 4051; edfilmfest.org.uk) and a book festival, plus the magnificent **Edinburgh Military Tattoo** (☎ 0870 555 1188; www.edinburgh-tattoo.co.uk), a stirring celebration of pipe bands and pageantry (no really, it's excellent).

While booking ahead is advised for the International Festival and Military Tattoo, tickets for many Fringe shows can often be purchased on the day.

Sleeping

It's essential to book for festival, New Year and peak summer periods, and it's never too early to do so. The TIC can help with reservations (£3); it also has a good free listings brochure, and plenty of options online at **Edinburgh – Inspiring Capital** (www.edinburgh.org/accommodation). Almost all the hostels have better locations than the B&Bs and guesthouses, which are mostly outside the city centre.

BUDGET

St Christopher's Inn (☎ 226 1446; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 9-13 Market St; dm £13-19; ☎) With two bars and proximity to city-centre nightlife, St Christopher's Inn is the party hostel. There

is swipe-card entry providing additional security, all dorms have en suite bathrooms and a continental breakfast is included. In addition to all of this, there is a good-value restaurant attached. Book online to receive a discount.

Smart City Hostel (☎ 0870 892 3000; www.smartcityhostels.com; 50 Blackfriars St; dm/tw from £16.50/28.50) This huge new hostel was still a building site when we visited but should be worth checking out by the time you read this. The owners promise a high-end, 620-bed hostel. Should be good, they're spending £10m on it. Facilities include women-only dorms, laundry and café. Linen is included in the price.

Brodies Backpackers (☎ 556 6770; www.brodieshostels.co.uk; 12 & 93 High St, Royal Mile; dm £10-19.50, s/d £35/40; ☎) Brodies occupies two sites (93 for the slightly smarter one at number 93, which also has the private rooms). Otherwise the dorms are fine, with superior mattresses and themed rooms that range from *Trainspotting* to traditional tartan, although new carpets in the older block wouldn't hurt.

Edinburgh Backpackers Hostel (☎ 220 1717; www.hoppo.com; 65 Cockburn St; dm £14-20, d/tr/q from £50/64/78) Bright and friendly, close to pubs and nightlife, this hostel is a good bet, with a large TV and pool room, and a few quiet doubles over the road. The shower/bed ratio could be higher.

Also recommended:

High St Hostel (☎ 557 3984; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; 8 Blackfriars St; dm £11-12.50) With luck a major renovation programme will see the old carpets chucked out and the lingering aroma of stale socks banished forever.

Belford Hostel (☎ 225 6209; www.hoppo.com; 6/8 Douglas Gardens; dm incl breakfast £15-17, d/tr/q from £40/58/79; ☎) A church conversion with an excellent bar lounge. Close to two major galleries and a 10-minute walk from the city centre.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Dene Guest House (☎ 556 2700; deneguesthouse@yahoo.com; 7 Eyre Pl; s £30-45, d £50-80) Very quiet and rather grand, this guesthouse is located in a high-ceilinged Georgian town house in New Town, about a mile's walk from the city centre.

Ardenlee Guest House (☎ 556 2838; info@ardenlee.co.uk; 9 Eyre Pl; s £30-59, d £50-90) Ardenlee is a short walk from the city centre in a listed Victorian

THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Even by construction industry standards in which projects routinely run over time, over budget and hit snags, the saga of the **Scottish Parliament Building** (☎ 348 5000; Canongate), built to house Scotland's newly devolved government, was a humdinger. Jaw-droppingly expensive, unforgivably late and at the time of writing still dogged with problems, it's now almost compulsory to attach the adjective 'controversial' whenever describing the bold new Parliament occupying a prime site close to Arthur's Seat. In purely architectural terms though, the building is a marvel and is well worth a visit (when Parliament is not sitting). Architect Enric Miralles' delicate structure, reminiscent of the hulls of slender ships and cleverly nodding to Scottish history in its concrete, stone and wood construction, is utterly unique and a visit won't cost you a penny (unless you're a Scottish tax payer that is). Call for opening hours.

town house. Family-run and informal, breakfast includes vegetarian options.

Ibis Hotel (☎ 240 7000; www.ibishotel.com; 6 Hunter Sq; r £55-77; 🚗) Great value for its location, rooms are clean and well equipped (satellite TV, wi-fi), if a little impersonal. It's always popular, so book well ahead at peak times.

Apex International Hotel (☎ 0845 365 0000; reservations@apexhotels.com; 31-35 Grassmarket; r £120-145; 🚗 🚗 🚗) A cannonball's shot from the castle and close to the lively pubs and restaurants of Grassmarket, the Apex offers plush, modern rooms, with muted décor, wood floors, large beds, and splashes of colour from the throws and cushions. There's also a smart spa, gym and 15m pool.

Lined with solid Georgian town houses, Pilrig St, a 10-minute walk from the city centre, offers about a dozen B&Bs. We recommend:

Balmoral Guest House (☎ 554 1857; www.balmoralguesthouse.co.uk; 32 Pilrig St; s/d from £30/45) Our favourite. Quiet, friendly and homy, with comfortable beds and attractive period décor.

Ayden Guesthouse (☎ 554 2187; www.ayden-edinburgh.com; 70 Pilrig St; s/d from £45/60) Contemporary chic in chocolate and cream tones, with a gourmet breakfast.

Ardmor House (☎ 554 4944; www.ardmorhouse.com; 74 Pilrig St; s/d £45/65) A lovely interior design job, with charming hosts.

Fraoch House (☎ 554 1353; www.fraochhouse.com; 66 Pilrig St; r from £60; 📺) Appealing, with free Internet and wi-fi access and DVD players.

Eating

Offering by far the best selection of dining options in Scotland, Edinburgh has food to satisfy most tastes, although finding real bargain budget food in the city centre isn't easy. The dining scene is quite diffuse and far flung, so there's no one defined foodie area in which to stroll and browse. Many of the city's 700 bars also offer good budget to mid-price meals.

RESTAURANTS

David Bann (☎ 556 5888; 56-58 St Mary's St; mains £8-12; 🍷 11am-midnight Tue-Sun) A mastery of flavour and texture, with Asian, Indian and Middle Eastern influences, together with great service in smart, softly lit surroundings make this vegetarian place one of the best restaurants, meat or no meat, in Edinburgh. Vegan options, too.

Urban Angel (☎ 225 6215; www.urban-angel.co.uk; 121 Hanover St; mains £7-13; 🍷 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) Fresh bistro and café food, often locally sourced, including pastries, light lunches, brunches and more substantial and polished dishes, such as pheasant with Puy lentils, Savoy cabbage and beetroot salsa. Good veggie options, too.

Blue bar café (☎ 221 1222; 10 Cambridge St; mains £11-16; 🍷 noon-3pm & 6-10.30pm Mon-Sat) Continental influences with British favourites, creating a menu that mixes Toulouse cassoulet with sticky toffee pudding, although not on the same plate. It's popular with visitors from the Traverse Theatre downstairs.

Oloroso (☎ 226 7614; 33 Castle St; mains £14-24; 🍷 noon-2.30pm & 6-10.30pm) Accessed via a lift in an anonymous street-level foyer, Oloroso is an Edinburgh foodie favourite, with a smart bar and the best views in town – especially from the terrace. The ever-changing menu features delicately prepared versions of Scottish fare, salmon and game.

CAFÉS

Always Sunday (☎ 622 0667; 170 High St, Royal Mile; mains £4-6; 🍷 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sun) This elegant, modern café is the best on offer along the Royal Mile, serving Fair Trade coffee, wheat-free dishes, good light lunches and plenty of vegetarian options.

Monster Mash (☎ 225 7069; 4 Forrest Rd; mains £5-9; 🍷 8am-10pm) The greasy spoon café re-invented, Monster Mash serves generous portions of Brit comfort food – fried breakfasts, sausage and mash, shepherd's pie, steak pie – fast and without fuss.

SELF-CATERING

Valvona & Crolla (☎ 556 6066; 19 Elm Row, Leith Walk; 🍷 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) The makings of a luxury picnic, including a great array of cheeses, bread and deli goodies, such as Spanish ham and Scottish smoked salmon, await at this atmospheric old providore.

Self-caterers have easy access to a couple of small urban supermarkets, including **Tesco Metro** (94 Nicolson St; 🍷 7am-midnight).

Drinking

The array of pubs and bars is vast, as you might expect from a capital city, tourist hotspot and student town. If you just want to wander, the area around Grassmarket has a few good places in close proximity.

Dragonfly (☎ 228 4543; West Port) A quirky, glam little cocktail bar just far enough off the beaten path to make you feel like you've stumbled on a hidden gem. The bar staff know their cocktails, and the crowd is smart, youngish and friendly.

Dome Bar (☎ 624 8624; 14 George St) Occupying a palatial former bank, the Dome is by far the most magnificent eating and drinking space in town. The food is forgettable, but it's a great place for a drink. The quieter, Art Deco cocktail bar linked to the main bar is great, too. If only the cocktail list were better.

Belushi's (☎ 226 1446; 9-13 Market St; 🍷 noon-1am) Attached to St Christopher's Inn, this place has a ready client base of young party-goers, but the late licence, live music and pumping DJ sets make it worth considering even if you're not sleeping upstairs.

Bow Bar (☎ 226 7667; 80 The West Bow, Victoria St) Small and popular, with a slightly older crowd than other nearby places, you'll find a good real ale and single malt whisky selection at the bar.

Opal Lounge (☎ 226 2275; 51a George St; 🍷 noon-3am) A subterranean-style bar with house beats on the sound system. It's been around a while, but remains as cool as ever, with good wine and cocktail lists. Dress up.

Entertainment

Edinburgh has a frenetic arts and entertainment scene that stretches well beyond the traditional festival period. Pick up fortnightly local magazine the *List* (£2.20) for the latest information on Edinburgh and Glasgow happenings. It usually includes a few coupons with two-for-one offers.

Sandy Bells (☎ 225 2751; 25 Forrest Rd; 🍷 11.30am-1am Mon-Sat, 12.30-11.30pm Sun) This tiny pub is the best spot in the city to experience traditional Scottish music. It has free performances almost nightly and on Sunday afternoons. It fills up quickly on weekends.

Liquid Room (☎ 225 2564; 9c Victoria St; admission £4-8; 🍷 10.30pm-3am Mon-Sat, 11pm-3am Sun) Popular mid-sized club, the subterranean Liquid Room has the best indie night in town on Friday. It's also a good live venue attracting some big rock acts.

Filmhouse (☎ 228 2688; www.filmhousecinema.com; 88 Lothian Rd; admission £5.50) A great independent cinema, Filmhouse's eclectic programme runs the gamut of the classic to the down-

right weird. It's also home to the August Edinburgh International Film Festival.

Getting There & Away

AIR

More than 50 airlines, including BA, KLM, Ryanair, easyJet, Flybe and BMI Baby, operate out of **Edinburgh International Airport** (EDI; ☎ 333 1000; www.edinburghairport.com). The number of connections between Edinburgh and other European cities is increasing all the time, including to Amsterdam, Paris and Madrid, while US flights also arrive from New York. There are many arrivals from the rest of the UK – via such hubs as London, Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Luton and Manchester – and from other Scottish cities, including Aberdeen and Inverness.

BUS

National Express and Scottish Citylink services arrive from a multitude of locations throughout the UK at **St Andrew Square Bus & Coach station** (St Andrew Sq), north of Princes St. Citylink arrives from Aberdeen (£17.20, 3¼ hours, hourly), Glasgow (£4.20, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutes) and Inverness (£16.70, four hours, hourly) among others, while National Express services arrive from destinations, such as London (£31, nine to 12 hours, seven daily), Newcastle (£15.20, three hours, three daily) and York (£30.50, 5½ to nine hours, four daily).

New kid on the block, **Megabus** (☎ 01738-639095; www.megabus.com) runs frequent refurbished double-decker bus services to Edinburgh from three Scottish cities (Glasgow, 1½ hours; Dundee, two hours; Perth, 1½ hours). Fares are as low as £1 (plus £0.50 booking fee).

TRAIN

Up to 20 trains run daily from London's King's Cross station (4½ to 5½ hours) and fares vary considerably (for details, see p281). **ScotRail** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.firstgroup.com/scotrail) runs two northern lines to Edinburgh from Inverness (£34.90, 3½ hours) and Aberdeen (£34.90, 2½ hours), with trains throughout the day. There are trains every 15 minutes from Glasgow (£9.90, 45 minutes).

Getting Around

An Airlink service operated by **Lothian Buses** (www.lothianbuses.co.uk) shuttles between the

airport and the city centre (£3, 30 minutes, every 15 minutes). Local buses for travel around the city are operated by Lothian Buses and **First Edinburgh** (www.firstedinburgh.co.uk). Adult fares start at £1; exact change is required. For full information – including details on the night bus system – pick up a free *Edinburgh Travelmap* from the TIC or call Traveline. For a taxi call **Central Taxis** (☎ 229 2468).

GLASGOW

☎ 0141 / pop 630,000

Not as picturesque as its richer neighbour Edinburgh, the former industrial powerhouse of Glasgow is grittier, edgier and arguably more fun for it. Overflowing with fine museums and galleries, the best nightlife in Scotland and a lively arts scene (kept vibrant and cutting edge by the presence of a good art school), Glasgow also makes a good jumping-off point for the Highlands.

Orientation

The two train stations (Central and Queen St), Buchanan St bus station and the TIC are all within a couple of blocks of George Sq, the city's main public space. Running along a ridge in the northern part of the city, Sauchiehall (sokky-hall) St is a busy pedestrian mall, with high street shops at its eastern end and pubs and restaurants to the west. In front of the Royal Concert Hall, it connects with Buchanan St, a second major pedestrian thoroughfare where shops, restaurants and coffee bars collide. The nearby Merchant City area contains street cafés, swanky restaurants and popular bars.

Information

Amex (☎ 222 1401; 115 Hope St; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Central Post Office (47 St Vincent St; ☎ 8.30am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat) Also has currency exchange.

easyInternet (☎ 222 2364; 57 St Vincent St; per hr £1.40; ☎ 24hr)

Glasgow Museums (www.glasgowmuseums.com) A great guide to city museums.

Glasgow Royal Infirmary (☎ 211 4000; 84-86 Castle St; ☎ 24hr) For accident and emergency treatment.

Glasgow TIC (☎ 204 4400; www.seeglasgow.com; 11 George Sq; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jul & Aug) Also has currency exchange.

Munro (☎ 339 0012; 693 Great Western Rd; ☎ 9am-9pm) Late-opening chemist.

Sights

KELVINGROVE ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

Closed for what feels like forever, **Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 287 2699; Argyle St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun) reopened in 2006. Contained in this Victorian fairy-tale of a stately home is a magpies' nest of oddities – suits of armour, a giraffe, a Spitfire fighter plane hanging from the ceiling. There's also a lot of serious art – Renaissance art from the likes of Botticelli, plenty of impressionists, including Van Gogh, Whistler and Monet, works from local boy Charles Rennie Mackintosh and, in pride of place, Salvador Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross*. If you only visit one museum in Glasgow, make it this one.

GALLERY OF MODERN ART

Glasgow's **Gallery of Modern Art** (☎ 229 1996; Queen St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun) is a most accessible and very popular collection of works housed in a beautiful neoclassical building in the city centre. It's a good introduction to some of Scotland's finest contemporary artists and has some quirky, humorous installations. There is art here for both aesthetes and people who wouldn't normally set foot in a gallery.

ST MUNGO'S MUSEUM OF RELIGIOUS LIFE & ART

At **St Mungo's** (☎ 553 2557; 2 Castle St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun) you'll find a fascinating exploration of major world religions, including medieval and modern stained-glass windows and a magnificent bronze sculpture of Shiva. The **Gallery of Religious Life** illuminates disparate beliefs relating to birth, marriage, death and the afterlife.

GLASGOW NECROPOLIS

Looming on a hill above the nearby cathedral, Glasgow's 'City of the Dead' **Necropolis** (☎ 287 3961; Wishart St; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk) is like no other cemetery in Scotland. Undulating turf and minor headstones on its lower reaches give way to giant Victorian temples built to house some of the city's great and good in the afterlife. A fascinating glimpse into the vanity and wealth of a bygone age, there are also some of the best views of the city from between the crooked tombs at the top.

GLASGOW

INFORMATION

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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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SLEEPING

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21	C2

EATING

22	D3
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24	C1
25	D2
26	E4
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DRINKING

29	D3
30	E3
31	E3
32	E3

ENTERTAINMENT

33	D3
34	F4
35	C2

TRANSPORT

36	D2
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OTHER SIGHTS

Visit **Glasgow Cathedral** (☎ 552 6891; Cathedral Sq; admission free; ☞ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun Oct-Mar), Scotland's most magnificent surviving medieval church.

Mackintosh's greatest architectural achievement is the **Glasgow School of Art** (☎ 353 4526; 167 Renfrew St; adult/child £5/4). Opening hours vary throughout the year, so call ahead.

At the **Burrell Collection** (☎ 287 2550; Pollok Country Park; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sat) you'll find an eclectic treasure trove of artworks, artefacts and ephemera.

The **Glasgow Science Centre** (☎ 420 5000; Pacific Quay; adult/child £6.95/4.95; ☞ 10am-6pm) offers an excellent, hands-on day out with more than 500 exhibits in its Science Mall. Don't miss the 3D Virtual Science Centre.

Sleeping

The arrival of new accommodation is slowly improving the range on offer in Glasgow (admittedly from a pretty low base), but finding a decent B&B in July and August can still be difficult, so book well ahead for the summer peak season. Last-minute deals are also available via the TIC site at **Glasgow: Scotland with Style** (www.seeglasgow.com).

BUDGET

Glasgow Youth Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1119; 7-8 Park Tce; dm £14-16; ☎) A grand hostel. It has acres of wood panelling, with excellent four- and eight-bed dorms, and a good address next to a leafy park.

Euro Hostel (☎ 222 2828; www.euro-hostels.co.uk; 318 Clyde St; dm £14-19, s/d £35/40; ☎) A large, party-friendly mega hostel in a high-rise just around the corner from Central Station. It's clean and recently refurbished, with a women-only floor, a bar, TV room and plenty of other facilities.

Campus Village (☎ 553 4148; www.rescat.strath.ac.uk; Cathedral St; r per person incl breakfast £27-33; ☞ Jun-Sep) This modern student accommodation complex at the University of Strathclyde has clean but basic facilities. Some singles have shared bathrooms, and phone-cards are needed to use in-suite phones.

MIDRANGE

Babbity Bowster (☎ 552 5055; 16-18 Blackfriars St; s/d £40/55) In the heart of the revitalised Merchant City area you'll find a few basic

rooms upstairs from the decent pub/restaurant of the same name. It's a great location for the nearby cafés, restaurants and posh boutiques.

Cathedral House Hotel (☎ 552 3519; www.cathedralhouse.com; 28-32 Cathedral Sq; s £45-53, d £70-85) At the quiet eastern edge of the city centre near the Necropolis, this eight-bedroom hotel is a great little find, with appealingly simple rooms complete with comfy beds and soft linen sheets, and a plush bar.

Also recommended:

Willow Hotel (☎ 332 2323; 228 Renfrew St; s/d £32/50) Past its prime, but clean, tidy and well located.

Victorian House (☎ 332 0129; 212 Renfrew St; B&B s/d £39/60, s with shared bathroom £32) Similar comfort levels to the Old School House, but slightly dated décor.

Old School House (☎ 332 7600; oschool@hotmail.com; 194 Renfrew St; B&B s/d £40/60, s with shared bathroom £32) Good-value accommodation in a heritage-listed Georgian villa with quiet, comfortable rooms and a few contemporary flourishes.

Jurys Glasgow Hotel (☎ 334 8161; www.jurysdoyle.com; Great Western Rd; r £60-140; ☎) Large rooms, wi-fi access, an on-site fitness centre and a central location.

TOP END

Langs Hotel (☎ 333 1500; www.langshotels.co.uk; 2 Port Dundas Pl; r £100-195) A swanky, modern, independent hotel brashly looming over the heart of the city centre. Power showers, Play-Stations, lush bathrooms and satellite TVs are standard features in this stylish boutique hotel, as is an on-site spa.

Eating

Despite the prevalence of greasy fast-food joints on many streets, Glasgow's eating scene has been revitalised in recent years and now includes a growing number of excellent cafés and some of the best restaurants in Scotland.

RESTAURANTS

Wee Curry Shop (☎ 353 0777; 7 Buccleuch St; 2-course lunch £4.75; ☞ noon-2pm Mon-Sat, 5.30-10.30pm Sat) Glasgow often touts itself as Britain's curry capital and with this fabulous little South Indian restaurant who can argue? The two-course £4.75 special is the city's best lunch deal. At night prices jump, but with a BYO beer policy, you'll save anyway. Book ahead, it's not called 'wee' for nothing.

Café Andaluz (☎ 339 1111; 2 Cresswell Lane; tapas £2.75-5; ☞ noon-10.30pm Mon-Thu, noon-11pm Fri & Sat,

6-10.30pm Sun) Once you've fashioned some earplugs from the Manchego cheese to keep out the interminable muzak, you'll be ready to enjoy the hot and cold tapas among ersatz (but impressive all the same) Moorish surroundings.

Mono (☎ 552 9458; 12 King's Ct; mains £2.50-6; ☞) The sign on the beer tap reading 'Fosters is not vegan, sorry' says it all at this endearing, scruffy and inexpensive veggie café, bar, health-food shop and left-field record store. Tofu jerk with basmati rice, hummus, falafel and veggie burgers are some of the options. Skip the Fosters for the excellent Fraoch Heather Ale. Mono is off King's St.

Café Gandolfi (☎ 552 6813; 64 Albion St; mains £6-14; 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-11pm Sun) A Glasgow institution serving fine European brasserie food (made with Scottish produce), good breakfasts, coffee and pastries, and now with a new bar upstairs. Mains might include smoked venison with daupinoise potatoes, or pancakes with Stornoway black pudding and mushrooms. It's popular, so book ahead for dinner.

Le Chardon D'Or (☎ 248 3801; 176 West Regent St; 2-/3-course lunch £15.50/18.50, dinner mains £12-18; ☞ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) The flavoursome old-school French cuisine, such as fried scallops with pancetta lardons or confit of lamb with linguine and thyme jus, make sense when you know that chef Brian Maule (who's name you'll see emblazoned everywhere among the towering lilies, dark brown leather banquettes and crisp white linen) is the former head chef at London's estimable Le Gavroche.

CAFÉS

Willow Tea Rooms (☎ 332 0521; 217 Sauchiehall St; lunches £3-7; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) Designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, this must-see Art Nouveau café is often packed at peak times, so plan to eat early or late to avoid the crowds. The afternoon tea is a local legend. The deluxe room is the place to sit, with its high-backed Mackintosh chairs.

Grassroots Café (☎ 333 0534; 93-97 St Georges Rd; mains £5-12; ☞ 10am-10pm) A laid-back restaurant using mainly organic ingredients on its eclectic vegetarian menu. Homely comfort dishes like veggie bangers and mash are popular, with the daily soup special often worth checking out. Organic beers – including the

delicious Lomond Gold – or filling fruit smoothies are the perfect accompaniments.

Drinking

Glasgow has plenty of street cafés – the piazza around the Gallery of Modern Art is a great spot for sitting outside and watching the world go by – and it's full of great pubs, too. There are dozens of interesting spots just waiting to be discovered.

Fresh (☎ 552 5532; 51-53 Cochrane St; juices & smoothies £2.50; ☞ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) The city centre's only fresh juice bar has the décor of a day spa to complement its wide range of fruity pick-me-ups.

Blackfriars (☎ 552 5924; 36 Bell St; ☞ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 12.30pm-midnight Sun) Glasgow's best traditional pub couldn't be more laid-back, attracting a healthy mix of locals, students and visitors.

Corinthian (☎ 552 1101; 191 Ingram St; ☞ 11am-3am) Even if you don't want a drink, pop in for the amazing, lofty, elaborate Victorian interior of this former bank. It's an incredible statement of the wealth and status Glasgow enjoyed in its heyday as second world city of the British Empire. These days three stylish bars and a nightclub occupy this incredible space.

Bar 10 (☎ 572 1448; 10 Mitchell Lane; ☞ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) The brainchild of Ben Kelly, creator of Manchester's legendary Hacienda Club, this older venue still beats most of Glasgow's would-be trendy drinking holes. Capturing the essence of a busy, metropolitan Euro-bar, there are drinks specials and DJs on most nights.

Entertainment

Glasgow is Scotland's entertainment and nightlife capital, and you can plug in to what's on by picking up the *List* (£2.20) or scanning local newspapers (especially the *Herald* and the *Evening Times*) throughout the week. The monthly *Gig Guide*, available free in many pubs, lists upcoming music concerts. Tickets can be booked via **Ticket Scotland** (☎ 204 5151; www.ticketsscotland.com).

LIVE MUSIC & NIGHTCLUBS

King Tut's Wah Wah Hut (☎ 221 5279; 272a St Vincent St; ☞ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun) A legendary live music spot where the early indie versions of Oasis and Radiohead started out. There's live music nightly.

Barrowlands (☎ 552 4601; www.glasgow-barrowland.com; 244 Gallowgate) Legendary old dance-hall venue where some of the larger visiting bands crack open their guitar cases. Check online and book ahead.

Arches (☎ 565 1000; 253 Argyle St; admission £5-12; ☎ 11pm-3am Wed-Sat) A fantastic, modular club space that can turn from intimate little multivenu to pumping mega club depending on the night and bill. Carl Cox and Laurent Garnier are some of the recent DJs to drop in. There's also live music and an excellent bar and café (11am until late Monday to Saturday) under one of the high brick arches.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Ten miles west of the city, **Glasgow International Airport** (GLA; ☎ 887 1111; www.glasgowairport.com) receives flights from the UK and the rest of the world. Several no-frills airlines, including easyJet, bmiBaby and Ryanair, provide domestic services from London and other cities. For more details, see p277. Don't confuse GIA with Glasgow Prestwick, a much smaller airport, much, much further out.

BUS

All long-distance buses arrive and depart from **Buchanan St bus station** (☎ 333 3708; Killermont St), and there are a number of competing services that keep prices down.

Silver Choice (☎ 01355-230403; www.silverchoice.travel.co.uk) offers the best deal from London (£25, 8½ hours). There are daily departures at 10pm from London Victoria, but book well in advance because it's a popular service.

Seven National Express services arrive daily from London (single £31, 8½ to 10 hours). National Express also runs regular coaches from Birmingham (£42.50, seven to nine hours), Carlisle (£15.60, two hours) and York (£30.50, seven to 10 hours), among others.

Coaches run by **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) arrive in Glasgow from most of Scotland's towns and cities. Services include the popular route from Edinburgh that runs every 20 minutes (£4.20, 1¼ hours). There are also daily arrivals from Aberdeen (£17.20, four hours), Fort William (£14, three hours), Inverness (£16.70, four hours), Oban (£13.10, three hours), Skye (£24.80, 6¼ hours) and Stirling (£4.20, 45 minutes).

Daily refurbished double-decker buses owned by **Megabus** (☎ 01738-639095; www.mega-bus.com) run to Glasgow from three Scottish cities: Dundee (two to three hours), Edinburgh (1½ hours) and Perth (two hours). Fares are as low as £1 (plus £0.50 booking fee) if you order far enough in advance.

TRAIN

As a general rule, Glasgow's Central train station serves southern Scotland, England and Wales, while Queen St train station serves the north and east. Trains arrive throughout the day from London Euston and London King's Cross stations. A much more comfortable ride than a long-haul bus trek, prices can vary considerably (from £25) for the five-hour direct trip.

The West Highland train line north to Oban and Fort William is run by **ScotRail** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.firstgroup.com/scotrail), with direct links from Dundee (£23.10, 1½ hours), Aberdeen (£34.90, 3¼ to four hours) and Inverness (£34.90, 3½ hours). There are numerous trains from Edinburgh (from £9.90, 50 minutes) to Glasgow.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The bus 905 shuttle service travels between Glasgow International Airport and Buchanan St bus station (£3.30) from 6am Monday (from 7am Sunday) to midnight Saturday. It runs every 10 to 15 minutes during the week and every 30 minutes on weekends. A taxi on the same route costs £12 to £17.

BUS

The city is covered by a good bus system, but passengers often need exact change when purchasing tickets. The main operator is **First Glasgow** (☎ 423 6600; www.firstglasgow.com), whose city-centre fares average £0.90. For multiple trips, the company's FirstDay ticket, purchased from the driver, allows unlimited all-day travel after 9.30am for £2.45. There are also several night bus routes, mostly alighting in George Sq.

TRAIN

There's an extensive suburban train network in Glasgow, which connects to the highly efficient **SPT subway** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.spt.co.uk) loop at Buchanan St bus station. Serving 15 stations in the city centre, west and south

of the city, single SPT tickets cost £1. For travel after 9.30am, there's an unlimited-trip Discovery Ticket for £1.90. Alternatively, the Roundabout Glasgow ticket (£4.50) covers travel on all train and subway routes in the city for one day.

SOUTHWEST SCOTLAND

Southwest Scotland offers some fine Scottish scenery – bare hills, moors, woods and a craggy coastline – without the attendant tour buses and crowds you might find in the Highlands. Warmed by Gulf Stream currents, it also enjoys the region's mildest climate (we're speaking relatively here). This was also the home of Robbie Burns, Scotland's national poet.

Ayrshire is immediately southwest of Glasgow, while Dumfries & Galloway covers the southern half of this western elbow. There are many notable historic and prehistoric attractions linked by the Solway Coast Heritage Trail. The Southern Upland Way links the region coast-to-coast. This is also great cycling country. Visit a local TIC for extensive information on these routes.

Isle of Arran

☎ 01770 / pop 4800

The region's best walking country, Arran is often described as 'Scotland in miniature' because of its compact reflection of a variety of scenery. This includes sheep-strewn farmland, rock-sheltered beaches, looming peaks, such as **Goat Fell**, and a coastal road that's perfect for cycling.

The main **TIC** (☎ 303774; www.ayrshire-arran.com; The Pier, Brodick; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-7.30pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) is helpfully stocked with information on how to experience the region, which includes the highly recommended **Brodick Castle** (☎ 302202; adult/child £10/7; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-3.30pm Oct), 2.5 miles north. It's a magnificent 13th-century sandstone pile full of silver, porcelain and hunting trophies of the stuffed-head variety. The landscaped gardens, featuring many exotic plants, are excellent.

Call the TIC for accommodation assistance or head for the **Belvedere Guest House** (☎ 302397; stb@vision-unlimited.co.uk; Alma Rd; s/d £20/40). The nearest **SYHA hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1140; dm £12-14; ☎ Mar-Oct) is 14 miles north in Lochranza.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Conveniently accessible from Glasgow, Brodick is only an hour's ferry ride by **CalMac** (☎ 302166; www.calmac.co.uk) from Ardrossan (passenger/car £5/36.50, four to six daily). Six buses run daily from Brodick to Lochranza (£2, 45 minutes, Monday to Saturday) and there are complete services around the island. Ask for additional transport information at the TIC, or consider renting a bike for your visit from **Mini Golf Cycle Hire** (☎ 07968-024040; Shore Rd).

Stranraer & Cairnryan

☎ 01776 / pop 11,500

These port towns a few miles apart are transport hubs rather than destinations in themselves. The bus and train stations, as well as the TIC and some accommodation options, are huddled around the sea terminals. At less than 2½ hours away, Stranraer offers the shortest link to Northern Ireland.

The **TIC** (☎ 702595; 28 Harbour St) specialises in booking Citylink/National Express journeys, as well as day trips across the Irish Sea. Frequent **Stena Line** (☎ 0870 570 7070; www.stenaline.co.uk) services arrive from Belfast.

For an economical bed for the night, try **Ivy House** (☎ 704176; www.ivyplace.worldonline.co.uk; 3 Ivy Pl; r per person £22).

National Express coach services arrive from London, while **Stagecoach Western** (☎ 704484) runs services from Glasgow (£8.35, three hours, six daily). ScotRail trains arrive from Glasgow throughout the day (£15, 2½ hours).

SOUTHEAST SCOTLAND

The ancient abbeys, lush glens and proud forests of the Scottish Borders have a unique beauty and romance that's often missed by travellers rushing through on their way to Edinburgh. Those who do stop discover the lovely valley of the Tweed River and a host of dramatic ruins, charming stone towns and villages. This is a great region to explore on foot or by bike: check local TICs for maps and options, or head straight for the signposted **Tweed Cycleway** between Biggar and Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Located between England's Cheviot Hills and Scotland's Pentland, Moorfoot and Lammermuir Hills, the Scottish Borders has a good network of local buses. **First** (☎ 01896-752237) runs numerous services from

Galashiels, Melrose and Edinburgh, and it offers a Rover ticket for unlimited travel in the region (£6.45).

Jedburgh & Around

☎ 01835 / pop 4000

The best base for exploring the Scottish Borders, Jedburgh is a bustling wee town that's well worth checking out on foot. Its **TIC** (☎ 863170; Murray's Green; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, variable hr rest of year) has plenty of maps and transport information for exploring the region but your first stop should be **Jedburgh Abbey** (☎ 863925; adult/concession/child £4.50/3.50/2; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sun Oct-Mar). The most complete of the ruined Border abbeys, this 12th-century red sandstone masterpiece was founded by David I as an Augustinian priory.

Local bus services arrive from Melrose (£3, 30 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday). Munro bus services from Edinburgh arrive throughout the day (£5.90, two hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

Melrose & Around

☎ 01896 / pop 1650

Another popular base for exploring the Borders, Melrose is a pretty little village clustered around a perfectly formed market square, with a good selection of cafés and restaurants. Check in with the **TIC** (☎ 0870 608 0404; Abbey St; ☎ 10am-5pm year-round, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Oct) for local B&B options, or head to the **Melrose Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1141; Priorwood; dm from £13; ☎), a quiet, well-maintained place in a rather grand Georgian mansion overlooking the abbey.

The main attraction here is **Melrose Abbey** (☎ 822562; adult/concession/child £3.50/2.50/1.20; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar). Repeatedly attacked by the English in the 14th century, the abbey's highly decorative red sandstone shell is a potent symbol for many Scots. Rebuilt by Robert the Bruce – whose heart is reputedly buried here – this Gothic gem has great views from the top of the tower. Next to the Abbey, **Marmion's** (☎ 822245; Buccleuch St; snacks £3-5, mains £7-13; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) is a good bet, serving coffee, pastries, light lunches and decent restaurant food in the evening. The owners of Marmion's also run the nearby **Fauhope Country House** (☎ 823184;

fauhope@bordernet.co.uk; d £70), a fabulous country home in a great spot near the Tweed River.

Buses arrive in Melrose throughout the day from Jedburgh (£3, 30 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday) and Edinburgh (£5.20, 2¼ hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday).

CENTRAL SCOTLAND

North of the big cities, but before the Highlands start their climb north, this area of gently rolling hills is home to some of Scotland's most important secondary towns, including striking and historic Stirling. On the coast near Dundee, the ancient university town of St Andrews, spiritual home of the game of golf, is well worth the detour.

Stirling

☎ 01786 / pop 45,000

Commanding spectacular views over the surrounding plains and across to snow-capped mountains, Stirling Castle must be one of the two most spectacular Scottish fortifications and it's the main reason for a visit to this lively little university town. The castle has played a huge role in the town's blood-drenched history – key victories over the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge (1297) and the Battle of Bannockburn (1314) both happened in this area.

Head up the steep streets from the train station and you'll find some fascinating old stone buildings, the SYHA hostel and the windswept castle itself. Take a slight detour to the **TIC** (☎ 08707-200620; 41 Dumbarton Rd; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-6.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, variable hr rest of year) for local information.

The thick, grey walls of **Stirling Castle** (☎ 450000; adult/concession/child £8/6/2; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar), perched dramatically on an extinct volcano, contain some excellent sights and experiences, including an absorbing guided tour and a top-rate military museum. The current complex was conceived as a fortress in the 14th century when a succession of Stuart monarchs began their residency.

One of Scotland's best SYHA properties, **Stirling Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1149; St John St; dm £14-15, tw £35; ☎) occupies a large old church building near the castle. Rooms are small and each has en suite facilities. The huge dining room/lounge area is a great hang-out.

Munro Guesthouse (☎ 472695; www.munroguesthouse.com; 14 Princes St; s/d £35/48) is a homy little B&B right in the heart of town. If you're after refreshment, **Peckham's** (☎ 447047; 52 Port St; mains £7-9; ☎ 10am-10pm) is a great delicatessen with an inexpensive bistro and café attached serving good-value wines. You're likely to run into a castle employee who'll regale you with some great insider stories.

Scottish Citylink buses arrive throughout the day from Aberdeen (£14.50, 3½ hours, four daily), Edinburgh (£6.20, one hour, three daily), Glasgow (£4.20, 45 minutes, hourly) and other towns and cities. ScotRail services arrive from Dundee (£13.70, 50 minutes), Edinburgh (£5.90, 50 minutes, twice hourly), Glasgow (£6.10, 40 minutes, every two hours) and other cities throughout the day.

St Andrews

☎ 01334 / pop 14,200

Another university town, St Andrews is better known for its affiliations with the game of golf and is something of a pilgrimage for golfers. Its fascinating history casts a long shadow over its cobbled streets and ancient terrace cottages. Scotland's former ecclesiastical capital, the ruins of a cavernous cathedral and moody, seafront castle lurk on its outskirts. The university, founded in 1410, is the country's oldest. While 6000 students fill St Andrews during term, golfers annually flock here in even bigger numbers for the area's nine courses – especially the legendary Old Course, the sport's spiritual home.

The **TIC** (☎ 472021; www.visit-standrews.co.uk; 70 Market St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, 9.30am-5pm daily Apr-Sep) has a free town guide with a street map.

The turmoil of the Reformation reduced Scotland's largest-ever church, **St Andrews Cathedral** (☎ 472563; The Pends; adult/child ind castle £6/2.70; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar), to rubble in 1559. Half-eaten walls detail its past splendour, while a visitor centre explains its turbulent history. The 12th-century tower offers spectacular views – watch out for seals bobbing offshore. A short, wind-swept walk away is the ruined **St Andrews Castle** (☎ 477196; The Scores; adult/child ind cathedral £4/1.25; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar). Perched on coastal rocks, this is a great spot for storm-watching. In contrast, the **British Golf Museum** (☎ 460046; Bruce Embankment; adult/child

£5/2.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-mid-Oct, 11am-3pm mid-Oct-Easter) offers a lively, light-hearted account of the evolution and history of the game. Those who don't know their mashie niblick from their brassie spoon, however, won't miss much if they skip it.

Golf fans take over the town's accommodation during major tournaments and throughout summer, so make peak bookings well in advance. Five minutes' from the bus station, the only hostel in town, **St Andrews Tourist Hostel** (☎ 479911; www.standrews-hotel.com; St Mary's Pl; dm £12-16; ☎ 7am-11pm), is clean, basic and friendly, with only a few bunks per room. Guesthouses are numerous, with **Brownlees Guest House** (☎ 473868; www.brownlees.co.uk; 7 Murray Pl; r per person £25-32) being a good budget option that serves a rib-sticking breakfast.

There are some good eating options, including the **Eating Place** (☎ 475671; 177-179 South St; mains £4-7; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun), which serves sweet and savoury Scottish pancakes and tapas upstairs. The **Vine Leaf Restaurant** (☎ 477497; 131 South St; 2-course dinner £19.95; ☎ from 7pm Tue-Sat) serves inventive seafood and meat options, such as oh-so-tender eight-hour lamb.

The **Central Bar** (☎ 478296; Market St) is the town's top pub for real ale and quiet chats, while **Ma Bells** (☎ 472611; 40 The Scores) is where students and backpackers spend most of their drinking time.

Leuchars, the nearest train station, is a £10 taxi or £2.10 bus (96 or 99) ride away, with direct links to/from Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Inverness. **Stagecoach Fife** (☎ 01334-474238) runs buses from Edinburgh (£7, two hours, hourly) and Dundee (£3.10, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

EASTERN HIGHLANDS

Like a craggy nose jutting defiantly into the North Sea, the land between Perth and the Firth of Tay in the south and Inverness and Moray Firth in the north offers great expanses of empty beach, craggy cliffs teeming with seabirds, tiny stone fishing villages and the bare shoulders of the Cairngorm Mountains – oh, and two of Scotland's biggest cities, Aberdeen and Dundee.

Orientation & Information

The Grampian Mountains march from Oban in a great arc northeastwards, becoming the

Cairngorm Mountains in the eastern region. The Cairngorms are as dramatic and demanding as any of the Scottish ranges, and the coastline, especially from Stonehaven to Buckie, is exceptional. Aberdeen is the region's biggest city, providing the main ferry port for Shetland. Reflecting the division between the Eastern and Western Highlands, there are few links between Perth and Inverness, the capital of the Highlands.

There are information centres in towns and cities throughout the region and a useful website from the **Highlands of Scotland Tourism Board** (www.visithighlands.com).

Perthshire & Cairngorms

One of the region's most important towns (it's on the main train line from Edinburgh and Inverness), Perth became Scotland's capital in the 12th century. It's now a bustling settlement that celebrates its heritage without resting idly on it.

With its excellent visitor amenities, Aviemore makes a good base for exploring the region and is regarded as the gateway to the Cairngorms. This is where hikers, bikers and climbers congregate to take on the Scottish outdoors and in winter it's the centre of the country's skiing and snowboarding action. While the season traditionally runs from December until April, recent light snowfalls have seen closures as early as February. Check **Ski Scotland** (ski.visitscotland.com) for the latest conditions.

The **Cairngorms National Park** (www.cairngorms.co.uk), Britain's newest, is a wildly beautiful place combining wild mountain tundras, secluded old pinewoods, ancient castles, unique wildlife and lush colours year-round. There are plenty of attractions and activities here, with the **Cairngorm Mountain Railway** (☎ 01479-861261; Cairngorm Ski Area; adult/concession £8.75/7.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm), the UK's highest and longest funicular, a popular, though pricey, trip.

The modern **Aviemore Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1104; 25 Grampian Rd; dm £12-14; 📺) is well equipped with small dorms, and is close to both the local TIC and village centre.

Aberdeen

☎ 01224 / pop 205,000

Founded in part on the demand for oil – whale oil that is – today granite-hewn Aberdeen is again booming from oil, this

time black gold from deep under the North Sea. This busy working town and harbour lacks the historical charms of other Scottish towns of its size, and is really only worth visiting if you're heading on to another part of the nearby coast or some of the remote northern isles. That said, there are a couple of good museums, and a fairly lively nightlife and cultural scene supported by Aberdeen's large university population.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The city is built on a ridge that runs east-west to the north of the Dee River. Union St, the main shopping street, runs along the crest of this ridge. The train and bus stations are next to each other off Guild St, and the **TIC** (☎ 288828; www.aberdeen-grampian.com; 23 Union St; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, variable hr rest/of year) is on the corner of Union St and Shiprow. The Old Town, with its cobbled streets, old university and ecclesiastical buildings, is a mile north of the city centre.

SIGHTS

There's a fascinating modern exploration of the region's long association with the sea at **Aberdeen Maritime Museum** (☎ 337700; Shiprow; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun). There's plenty of hi-tech, touch-screen action, the chance to pilot a mini-sub, a three-storey replica of a North Sea oilrig, and plenty of well-presented information about ships and drilling for oil. Also worth a look is **Aberdeen Art Gallery** (☎ 523700; Schoolhill; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun), the city's third-oldest surviving home, with a surprisingly good collection of 19th-, 20th- and 21st-century art, including work from bad boy double act Gilbert & George.

SLEEPING

The booming oil economy means beds fill up in the week when oilfield workers monopolise much of the city's accommodation. Their presence keeps many hotel prices artificially high, although weekend deals are available almost everywhere. Clusters of B&Bs line Bon Accord St and Springbank Tce (both close to the city centre).

SYHA Aberdeen Youth Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1100; 8 Queen's Rd; dm £13-15; 📺) An imposing granite house a mile west of the train station. It's clean and welcoming but a bit too clinical to be truly cosy.

Dunrovin Guest House (☎ 586081; 186 Bon Accord St; s/d £30/50, with shared bathroom £27/40) This place gets our vote for its hearty Scottish breakfast (with fresh fruit and vegetarian options), for the enthusiastic hosts and for their tongue-in-cheek brochure likening the place to Edgar Allen Poe's *Haunted Palace* ('Everything about it was evil...it reeked of human depravity – but what of its occupants, what of them?'). Book ahead.

Highland Hotel (☎ 583685; www.highlandhotel.net; 91-5 Crown St; r from £70, guesthouse s/d Mon-Thu from £45/58, Fri-Sun £37.50/50) A comfortable hotel with cheerful, if rather neutral, rooms and some cheaper guesthouse accommodation nearby.

EATING & DRINKING

Close to the TIC and just off Union St, the refurbished Belmont St houses some of Aberdeen's best cafés, bars and restaurants.

Prince of Wales (☎ 640597; 7 St Nicholas Lane; mains £5) The best pub for a cheap and cheerful lunch. This institution offers some great Scottish ales to help the chips slip down.

Ashvale Fish Restaurant (☎ 596581; 42-48 Great Western Rd; takeaway £3, mains £6-9; ☎ 11.45am-11pm) Outside the city centre, you'll find this quality, award-winning fish-and-chip joint.

Foyer Restaurant (☎ 582277; 82a Crown St; light dishes £5.50-7, mains £10.50-16; ☎ 10am-11pm Tue-Sat) A glass and beechwood interior with natural light and an inventive, hearty dishes, like mushroom and onion suet pudding or grilled sea bass with fennel sauerkraut, make this the fine-dining pick. It's a laudable not-for-profit community venture, too.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Six miles northeast of the city centre, **Aberdeen Airport** (ABZ; ☎ 0870 040 0006; www.aberdeenairport.com) receives flights from 34 destinations in 21 countries. Ryanair and easyJet offer competitive and highly variable fares from London and other UK cities. There are also regular but expensive **Loganair** (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.loganair.co.uk) flights from Orkney and Shetland.

Boat

The passenger ferry terminal is a short walk east of the train and bus stations. **NorthLink Ferries** (☎ 0845 600 0449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) runs services to Orkney (passenger only

one way from £15.60, car from £61.50, six hours, daily) and Shetland (passenger only one way from £20.40, car from £82.80, 12½ hours, three weekly).

Bus

There are National Express buses from London (£40, two hours, five daily) in addition to which Scottish Citylink runs frequent services from Edinburgh (£17.20, three hours), Glasgow (£17.20, four hours) and other Scottish cities.

Train

Services from London King's Cross (£122.50, 7½ hours) and Scottish destinations, including Dundee (£20.70, one hour) and Inverness (£21.50, 2¼ hours), arrive throughout the day.

GETTING AROUND

From the airport, **First Aberdeen's** (☎ 650065) bus 27 (£1.30, 35 minutes) arrives frequently on Union St. The company runs an extensive service throughout the city and offers an unlimited one-day adult pass for £2.50.

WESTERN HIGHLANDS

If you were to explore just one part of Scotland's vast wilderness, make it this one. Stretching from Rannoch Moor past Fort William on the west coast, this is a majestically wild region of mist-covered glens, ice-cold lochs and towering snow-covered mountains, including Ben Nevis, Britain's highest peak. To the south lies Loch Lomond, the largest lake in Scotland, to the west the rugged Isle of Mull. The 95-mile **West Highland Way** between Fort William and Glasgow is one of Britain's best hiking trails (for moderately accomplished ramblers).

Orientation & Information

Fort William, at the southern end of the Great Glen, is the region's main base for visitors. Oban, on the west coast, is the key ferry port for the Inner Hebrides (Mull, Coll, Tiree, Colonsay, Jura and Islay), and the Outer Hebridean islands of South Uist and Barra.

There's a reasonable scattering of SYHA accommodation and some independent hostels in some locations, including Glencoe, Oban, Tobermory, Crianlarich, Inchree and Corpach. Call in at the Fort William TIC for details.

Fort William

☎ 01397 / pop 9500

Situated on the banks of Loch Linnhe and at the bottom of the great Caledonian Canal, Fort William is no great shakes as a destination itself but is a useful base for exploring the local mountains. There's at least one of everything here that a visitor might need – including hiking shops, cafés, pubs and accommodation. For local information, visit the **TIC** (☎ 703781; Cameron Sq; ☹ 9am–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–6pm Sun) or check **Discover Fort William** (www.discover-fortwilliam.com).

The lively, convivial **Fort William Backpackers** (☎ 700711; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; Alma Rd; dm £12; ☑ ☒) is a short walk from the bus and train stations, and has impressive hillside views. **Bank St Lodge** (☎ 700070; www.accommodation-fortwilliam.com; dm/d/tr/q £13/45/55/65) is a tad sterile but very central.

Scottish Citylink buses travel from Glasgow (£14, three hours, four daily) and Edinburgh (£19.90, 3¼ hours, two daily), both via Glencoe. The spectacular West Highland train line runs three daily trains from Glasgow (£20.30, 3¾ hours).

Some local buses are run by **Rapsons/Highland Country** (☎ 702373; www.rapsons.co.uk), but call ahead for timetables since services are seasonal. **Off-Beat Bikes** (☎ 704008; 117 High St; ☹ 9am–5.30pm) rents bikes from £10 per half-day.

Oban

☎ 01631 / pop 8500

A hub for holiday-makers every summer, Oban is a traditional resort town combining pretty bay-front vistas with a raft of visitor amenities. The bus and train station and ferry terminal are together beside the harbour, and the **TIC** (☎ 563122; Argyll Sq; ☹ Mon–Sat May–Sep) is in a former church nearby.

Oban Backpackers Lodge (☎ 562107; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; Breadalbane St; dm £12–13; ☑ ☒) is less than a mile from the train station and has a welcoming ambience, including a friendly lounge area. The SYHA **Oban Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1144; Corran Esplanade; dm £13–15, s/d £17.50/35; ☒) is a little more institutional, but has great views across the bay and a smart new block of private rooms. There are several B&Bs along Corran Esplanade, but these can fill up quickly in summer. The best spot for food is **Ee-Usk** (☎ 565666; North Pier; mains £10–20; ☹ lunch &

dinner), serving excellent seafood, including delicious smoked haddock chowder (£3.95) and yummy desserts.

There are Scottish Citylink buses from Glasgow (£13.10, three hours, four daily), Fort William (£8.20, 1½ hours, four daily) and other Scottish destinations. There are also three daily trains from Glasgow (£16.80, three hours). **CalMac** (☎ 566688; www.calmac.co.uk) ferries link Oban with the Inner and Outer Hebrides.

Isle of Mull

Scotland's third-largest island abounds with great mountain views and pretty seascapes, drawing thousands of visitors to its charming shores every summer, offering a field day to the especially bloodthirsty strain of Mull midge (thankfully only a pest in summer). While most visitors arrive at the Craignure ferry terminal, many quickly head north to Tobermory, a picture-perfect fishing port that's also the capital, with its quaysides lined with houses in cheerful primary colours and cosy pubs.

There are TICs in both towns, but only **Craignure's** (☎ 01680-812377; ☹ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Thu, 8.30am–5.15pm Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, 10am–5pm Sun) is open year-round. Call ahead for accommodation options.

Don't expect to turn up and easily find a bed in summer, when accommodation is often booked out. Call in advance for the tiny SYHA **Tobermory Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1151; Main St; dm £12.50), which fills up quickly, or **Highland Cottage** (☎ 01688-302030; Breadalbane St), quite simply a cute little cottage B&B in the centre of town.

For a filling pub lunch or weekend evening of live music, **MacGochan's** (☎ 01688-302350; Ledaig, Tobermory; mains £3.50–6) is popular with locals and visitors.

NORTHERN HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS

One of Europe's last great wildernesses, this breathtakingly beautiful swathe of endless moors, glassy lochs and buffeted coastal cliffs is as close to nature as anyone could wish to be. It's also the ancient homeland of Gaelic culture.

It's easy to underestimate the size of the region, so give yourself extra time to explore via air, bus, train or ferry. Public transport outside the main centres can be as rare as a wild haggis sighting and some services are

severely curtailed out of season. Contact the **Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com) for transport and accommodation advice throughout the region, or drop by one of the local TICs that dot the area.

Inverness

☎ 01463 / pop 61,000

The capital of the Highlands, rapidly expanding Inverness is the perfect base for plotting a trip through the region. It's an attractive town straddling the Ness River, although it has few attractions of its own (even the red, baronial-style castle is closed to visitors), but it's just 6 miles from Loch Ness and few visit here without making an excursion to this vast, deep body of water reputed to be the home of the famous monster, Nessie.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The town centre resides on the river's eastern bank, along with the bus and train stations, new Eastgate shopping centre and several hostels.

The **TIC** (☎ 234353; Castle Wynd; ☹ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun) is near the castle and has probably the friendliest tourism bureau staff in Scotland. It can help with information on the entire Highlands region, and offers currency exchange and an Internet access terminal (per 20 minutes £1).

SIGHTS

No visit to Inverness is complete without a trek to **Loch Ness**. While tourists by the coach load roll up here every few minutes in summer, there's no doubt that a half-day excursion is worth the Citylink bus fare (adult £7.30 return). The romantic ruin of **Urquhart Castle** (☎ 01456-450551; adult/concession/child £6/4.50/1.20; ☹ 9.30am–6.30pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 2–4.30pm Sun Oct–Mar) commands a great spot over the loch. Entry includes a movie presentation on the castle history.

Nearly Drumnadrochit earns an often tacky living from the cult of the monster. **Loch Ness 2000** (☎ 01456-450573; adult/concession/child £5.95/4.50/3.50; ☹ 9am–8pm Jul & Aug, 9am–6pm Jun & Sep, 9am–5.30pm Oct, 9.30am–5pm Easter–May, 10am–3pm Nov–Easter) traces the historic hunts for Nessie. A good way to see a bit more of the Loch and surrounding area is aboard the *Loch Ness Express* (see p262).

SLEEPING

Inverness has plenty of budget options and a good range of B&Bs and guesthouses, but the town fills quickly in summer, so book ahead. If you're thinking about staying longer, **Wilderness Cottages** (☎ 01456-486358; www.wildernesscottages.co.uk) is a good website for booking longer stays in some great locations around the Highlands. There are also several midrange and top-end options along the banks of Loch Ness and on Old Edinburgh Rd.

Backpackers Backpackers Hostel (☎ 717663; 4 Culduthel Rd; dm £10–15; ☒) Clean and compact, with great views across the river. The homy feel is enhanced by a wood-burning stove.

Inverness Millburn Youth Hostel (☎ 0970 004 2227; Victoria Dr; dm £11.50–13.50; ☹) A large, modern property that's one of the SYHA's best, although the location set far back from the river on the other side of the town centre is not ideal.

Inverness Tourist Hostel (☎ 241962; 24 Rose St; dm £13–14; ☒) Located right at the bus station, the town's newest backpacker option has a swanky fitted kitchen and black leather couches, and a helpful band of staff.

Eastgate Backpackers Hostel (☎ 718756; www.eastgatehostel.com; 38 Eastgate; dm £10–16) This well-situated, lively hostel offers power showers, metal bunks, and mixed and single-sex dorms.

Bluebell House (☎ 238201; www.bluebell-house.co.uk; 31 Kenneth St; s/d from £30/54) This delightful place, set just back from the northern side of the Ness, has three good-value rooms decorated with care by the charming landlady, who has an eye for interiors and antiques.

King's Highway (☎ 251800; invernesslodge@jdwetherspoon.co.uk; 72-74 Church St; r £44) Modern, uniform and located above the town's Wetherspoon chain pub. At this flat rate year-round, it's very good value, especially the family rooms.

Ivybank Guest House (☎ 232796; ivybank@talk21.com; 28 Old Edinburgh Rd; s; £25–60, d £50–65) A neatly kept stone lodge with a pleasant garden on a quiet road.

Rocpool Reserve (☎ 240089; www.rocpool.com; Culduthel Rd; s/d from £95/130) The finest address in Inverness, this sleek little style hotel aims to pamper and please, with terrific contemporary furnishings, broadband access, plasma TVs, spa-like bathrooms and fluffy gowns. There's a good bar and restaurant (p262).

EATING & DRINKING

Castle Restaurant (☎ 230925; 41-43 Castle St; mains £4-7; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) A backpacker favourite, this cheap and cheery café serves hearing plates of simple comfort food that provide enough fuel for a giant hike around the region. Mountains of chips come accompanied with fried fish or crusty meat pies.

Mustard Seed (☎ 220220; 16 Fraser St, mains £8-15; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-10pm) The queen of Inverness restaurants until Rocpool came along, but still holding its own by focusing on traditional French and Scottish produce prepared with a modern flare, such as seared wild halibut in lobster oil.

Rocpool Reserve (☎ 240089; www.rocpool.com; Culduthel Rd; mains £10-19) Beneath bold swathes of contemporary art, you'll find modern European food (chargrilled lamb with polenta and sea bass ravioli with a seafood carpaccio) and surprisingly reasonable lunch deals. For summer browsing, there's a delightful terrace overlooking the river.

Hootannay Ceilidh CaféBar (☎ 233651; 67 Church St; ☎ noon-midnight) This excellent, sociable and folk music-friendly pub easily wins the prize for best boozier in town. A host of Scottish beer specials are on offer, with the rust-coloured Red Kite from Black Isle Brewery particularly recommended. There's rip-roaring traditional music on the ground floor nightly and a host of rock and comedy events upstairs almost as regularly. Shows are free throughout the week; there's a £2 charge, covering both floors, on Friday and Saturday.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Ten miles east of town, **Inverness Airport** (INV; ☎ 01667-464000) receives flights from Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Orkney and Shetland, among other destinations.

National Express coach services arrive from London (£40, 13 hours, four daily), while Citylink buses travel from Edinburgh (£16.70, four hours, hourly), Fort William (£8.80, two hours, six daily), Glasgow (£15.50, four hours, hourly) and other Scottish destinations.

There are several daily train services from London (£122, eight to 10 hours), including the overnight *Caledonian Sleeper*, along with services from Glasgow (£34.90, 3½ hours) and Edinburgh (£34.90, 3¼ hours). The highly picturesque Kyle of Lochalsh

(£15.90, 2½ hours, two to four daily) line delivers passengers from the bridge across to the Isle of Skye, while the line from Thurso (£14, 3½ hours, two to three daily) connects with the ferry from Orkney.

Highland Country (☎ 710555; www.rapsons.com) operates local buses, with information and advice available at the TIC. A Rover ticket costs £6 for unlimited one-day travel.

Fort Augustus

☎ 01320 / pop 1500

At the far southern end of Loch Ness, halfway between Inverness and Fort William, the pretty village of Fort Augustus is a good place to stop and take it easy. The village marks an important staging post of the Caledonian Canal, an engineering triumph that carves its way through the Highlands from the North Sea to the Atlantic. At Fort Augustus a series of locks raises boats up to the level of the next loch. Potter about, relax and watch the goings on around the lock gates. Its 'high street' is the quayside, and it's lined with good pubs and cafés.

The **TIC** (☎ 366367) can help with finding and booking B&B accommodation in the village, or there's **Stravaigers Lodge** (☎ 366257; Glendoe Rd; dm from £15, tw £30), a new backpackers just near the old Abbey (closed to visitors). Your best bet for food and drink is the **Bothy** (☎ 366736; mains £6-12; ☎ lunch & dinner), serving reasonable pub grub right by the swing bridge over the canal.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Citylink buses connect Fort Augustus with Inverness (£8, 45 minutes, six daily) and Fort William (£8.20, one hour, six daily). Much more fun, but far less frequent, the **Loch Ness Express** (☎ 0800 328 6426; www.lochness.express.com) steams the length of Loch Ness to Fort Augustus (£13, two hours, twice daily May to October, once daily November and December) from Dochgarroch (with a bus transfer into and out of the centre of Inverness), stopping at Urquhart Castle and Foyers along the way.

Orkney Islands

☎ 01856 / pop 19,250

Just 6 miles off the northern coast of Scotland, this magical group of islands is renowned for its dramatic coastal scenery (which ranges from soaring cliffs to white,

sandy beaches), abundant marine bird life and a plethora of mysterious prehistoric finds. If you find yourself in the area around mid-June, do not miss the **St Magnus Arts Festival** (www.stmagnusfestival.com), which is a lively celebration of arts, performance and music.

Sixteen of the 70 Orkney Islands are inhabited, but Kirkwall is the main town and Stromness is the major port. They're both on Mainland, the largest island. Contact Kirkwall's **TIC** (☎ 872856; 6 Broad St; ☎ Mon-Sat Oct-Apr, daily May-Sep) for more information, or check **Visit Orkney** (www.visitorkney.com) for some pretrip resources.

Stenness, a small village that is a short bus ride from Kirkwall or Stromness, is the most accessible spot for exploring prehistoric Orkney. The **Standing Stones of Stenness, Barnhouse Neolithic Village** and **Skara Brae**, a 5000-year-old village uncovered 150 years ago, are all quite close by. Particularly recommended, though, is **Maes Howe** (☎ 761606; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar), a 5000-year-old earth-mound tomb, which is an impressive engineering feat by any standards and a wonderfully atmospheric place.

There's a good selection of low-priced B&Bs in the area – especially on Mainland – and numerous hostels dot the region. In Stromness, **Brown's Hostel** (☎ 850661; 45 Victoria St; dm £11) is popular and close to the ferry, while **Rickla** (☎ 761575; www.rickla.co.uk; Harray; d from £70) offers sumptuous B&B accommodation, with well-equipped rooms overlooking the hills of Hoy and near all the prehistoric monuments.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights run by **Loganair** (☎ 0845 773 3377) arrive daily in Kirkwall from Aberdeen (from £147, one hour), Glasgow (from £184, 1¼ hours) and a number of other Scottish cities. Meanwhile British Airways provides affiliated connections to London, Manchester and throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

Services operated by **NorthLink Ferries** (☎ 0845 600 0449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) run from Aberdeen, Scrabster and the Shetlands, while **John o'Groats Ferries** (☎ 01955-611353; www.jogferry.co.uk) also operates a passenger-only run from the mainland.

Shetland Islands

☎ 01595 / pop 23,000

Sixty miles north of Orkney, the Shetland Islands remained under Norse rule until 1469, when they were given to Scotland as part of a Danish princess's dowry. Even today these remote, windswept, treeless islands are almost as much a part of Scandinavia as Britain. Lerwick, the capital, is less than 230 miles from Bergen in Norway. For some pretrip information, check **Visit Shetland** (www.shetland-tourism.co.uk).

Much bleaker than Orkney, Shetland is famous for its varied bird life, its rugged coastline and 4000-year-old archaeological heritage. It's worth taking a **boat** (☎ 01950-431367) to the astounding and mysterious prehistoric engineering marvel of **Mousa Broch**, an amazingly preserved lookout tower on a tiny island south of Lerwick.

Small ferries connect a handful of the smaller islands. Contact the **TIC** (☎ 693434; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct) for information on B&Bs and camping barns, or you can stay at **Lerwick Youth Hostel** (☎ 692114; King Harald St; dm £11; ☎ mid-Apr-Sep), which has a good café attached.

NorthLink Ferries (☎ 01856-851144; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) runs services from Aberdeen to Lerwick and Kirkwall to Lerwick.

North Coast

The coast from Dounreay to Ullapool is spectacular. Everything you see is on a massive scale: vast emptiness, enormous lochs and snow-capped mountains. Unreliable weather and the limited public transport system are the only drawbacks.

From the tiny town of **Durness**, you can make forays out to the savagely beautiful **Cape Wrath**, play extreme golf (at the most northerly course in mainland Britain) or explore mile after mile of empty beach. The **Durness TIC** (☎ 01971-511259) can help with accommodation and sightseeing.

Getting to Thurso by bus or train is no problem, but from there your troubles start. From June to September **Rapsons/Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01847-893123; www.rapsons.co.uk) runs its Northern Explorer service once daily (except Sunday) from Thurso to Durness (£7.75, 2½ hours). The rest of the year, there are Monday to Saturday services from Thurso to Bettyhill.

West Coast

Ullapool is the jumping-off point for the Isle of Lewis; contact its **TIC** (☎ 01854-612135; 6 Argyle St; ☹ daily Apr-Sep, Mon-Sat Oct, Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) for information. The coastline keeps getting better round to Gairloch, along Loch Maree, and down to the Kyle of Lochalsh and Skye. From there you're back in the land of the tour bus; civilisation (and main roads) can be a shock after all the empty space.

Kyle of Lochalsh ('Kyle') is a small village that overlooks the lovely island of Skye across narrow Loch Alsh. There's a **TIC** (☎ 01599-534276; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct) beside the seafront car park, but the nearest hostels are on Skye. Kyle can be reached by bus and train from Inverness, and also by direct Citylink buses from Glasgow (£22.40, 5½ hours).

Isle of Skye

pop 8850

Skye is a large, rugged island, 50 miles north to south and 25 miles east to west. It's ringed by stunning coastline and dominated by the magnificent Cuillin Hills. The remote west coast is especially beautiful and is teeming with wildlife; seals and otters are frequently sighted. You can contact the **Portree TIC** (☎ 01478-612137; Bayfield Rd) for more information.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are more than a dozen SYHA and independent hostels on the island and numerous B&Bs. The SYHA hostels most relevant to ferry users are at **Uig** (☎ 0870 004 1155; dm £12; ☹ Apr-Sep) for the north and the Outer Hebrides (Western Isles), and **Armadale** (☎ 0870 004 1103; dm £12; ☹ Apr-Sep) for Mallaig.

Skye Backpackers (☎ 01599-534510; www.scotlandstopping-hotels.com; Kyleakin; dm £12-13) The best independent hostel is this welcoming backpackers, a short walk from the Skye Bridge.

Portree House Hotel (☎ 01478-613713; Home Farm Rd; s £24-28, d £50-70) In Portree, this hotel offers a homy kind of comfort.

Bosville Hotel (☎ 01478-612846; www.madeoodhotels.co.uk/bosville; 9-11 Bosville Tce; s/d from £75/90) Also in Portree, the Bosville Hotel offers the plushest lodgings, and a good restaurant and bistro.

Kinloch Lodge (☎ 01471-833214; www.kinloch-lodge.co.uk; mains £6.50-13.50; ☹ lunch) Run by acclaimed food writer Claire Macdonald, this

is the undisputed gourmet destination on the island.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A road bridge connects Skye to the mainland. **CalMac** (☎ 08705-650000; www.calmac.co.uk) operates a ferry service from the mainland between Mallaig and Armadale (passengers/cars £2.60/15.05, 30 minutes, four daily). It's wise to book, especially during the summer.

Outer Hebrides (Western Isles)

The Outer Hebrides are bleak, remote and treeless. The climate is fierce – the islands are completely exposed to the gales sweeping in from the Atlantic, and it rains more than 250 days of the year. Some people find the landscape mournful, but others are captivated by the stark beauty and isolated world of the crofters. Check **Visit Hebrides** (www.visithebrides.co.uk) for resources. Home to Harris Tweed, the windiest place in Britain, and prehistoric standing stones and brochs, there's more to these islands than you might think.

Lewis is reached by ferry from Ullapool, and its largest town, Stornoway, has a **TIC** (☎ 01851-703088; 26 Cromwell St) as well as several banks. On Harris (which can be reached from Uig on Skye), the **TIC** (☎ 01859-502011; Pier Rd) is in Tarbert. North Uist sports a **TIC** (☎ 01876-500321) in Lochmaddy, while South Uist has a **TIC** (☎ 01878-700286) in Barra.

WALES (CYMRU)

You don't have to go far from the urban southeastern corner of Wales to hit its vast rolling hills and mountains and its sparsely populated coastline. For all the charm of its capital city, Cardiff, you'll get the most from a visit by heading into Wales' great outdoors, tramping some of its glorious national-park wildernesses, and exploring remote inland and coastal towns and villages.

It's in these remote spots you'll get a feel for the distinctive Welsh culture and history, as well as its language, one of the oldest in Europe, and one that's tentatively regaining in popularity. Millennia-long literary and musical traditions live on in some villages and towns, many of them represented at the annual Eisteddfod (see p272).

Despite a tumultuous history as the whipping boy of European invaders and English



WHAT TO DO WHERE IN WALES

- Hiking – Wales has many popular walks; the most challenging are in the rocky Snowdonia National Park (around Llanberis and Betws-y-Coed, p271) and the grassy Brecon Beacons National Park (around Brecon). The three official National Trails in Wales are the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, Offa's Dyke Path along the English border and Glyndwr's Way through Mid Wales. See Lonely Planet's *Walking in Britain* for more information.
- Cycling – Much of Wales is excellent for cycling (you'll need to love hills, though). Two of the best-known routes are Lon Las Cymru (the Welsh National Route), which takes in 260 miles from Holyhead to Cardiff, and the 227-mile Lon Geltaidd ('the Celtic Trail') from near Chepstow to Fishguard. Pick up the Wales Tourist Board's free *Cycling Wales* publication from major TICs for an introduction to these and other routes.
- Surfing – The southwest coast of Wales has a number of good surf spots. From east to west, try Porthcawl, Oxwich Bay, Rhossili, Manorbier, Freshwater West and Whitesands. Call the backpackers in Fishguard (p270) to find out which are the best breaks.
- Coasteering – A relatively new adrenaline sport, coasteering is the art of, well, jumping off a cliff into the sea (OK, there's a bit more to it than that, but that's the best bit). It's wet and slightly scary fun. St David's (p270) is the place to go. You can also try sea kayaking there.

monarchs (leaving a rich legacy of stout-walled castles), Wales remains an intensely proud nation, no more so than now. In 1997 its people voted to devolve some power from the British Parliament to Wales' new Assembly, which is helping the region develop its voice as a nation.

After years of environmental degradation from mining and unchecked seaside tourism, Wales is carefully guarding its natural landscape and historical architecture. The best way to appreciate the great Welsh outdoors is by walking, cycling, canal-boating or using Wales' excellent public transport. Outdoors enthusiasts will be blown away by the beauty of Pembrokeshire and Snowdonia, and village ambblers will enjoy Hay-on-Wye, Brecon, St David's, Dolgellau, Llanberis and Betws-y-Coed.

Check information online at [VisitWales](http://VisitWales.com) (www.visitwales.com).

HISTORY

Celtic tribes settled here some time between 10,000 and 5000 BC. In AD 43 the Romans invaded and for the next 400 years kept close control over the Welsh tribes from their garrison towns at Chester and Caerlon, guarding valuable deposits of lead, tin and gold. For the next few hundred years Germanic Anglo-Saxon tribes attacked.

Although thinking of themselves as one people as far back as the Battle of Chester in 616, internal struggles and the strategically

unfortunate law of dividing land among all male heirs created a fractured Wales in the centuries before the arrival of the Normans. Although the 'Marcher Lords' around the Marches ruled heavy-handedly over Wales, they brought relative peace, and a thriving Welsh literature movement was born.

After a short-lived period of independence, the English Edward I ascended to the throne in 1272 with the goal of creating a united Britain. Famed Welsh Prince Llewellyn fought hard, but fell in battle after further internal squabbles.

Soon after King Edward named his eldest son Prince of Wales, a tradition that continues to this day with Prince Charles. You can still visit the castles Edward built in Caernarfon, Conway, Harlech and Beaumaris, most a mile or so from a train station.

Wales unsuccessfully revolted against the English crown, but having no capital city or central university, and being subject to English law, reluctantly accepted its British status.

Industry thrived throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Mining villages emerged with a unique culture of their own, Methodism their new religion, rugby their new sport and male voice choirs their new idea of fun. However, natural resources ran out and the 1960s saw the start of a collapse in the coal and associated steel industry, bringing widespread unemployment and socioeconomic problems from which Wales is just now recovering.

In 1997 the people of Wales voted to be governed by a Welsh Assembly rather than from the House of Commons in London. In a self-confident step towards greater political autonomy, the first Assembly was put in place in May 1999, and it now meets in a fantastic new Assembly building at Cardiff Bay (p268).

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Wales has two major mountain systems: the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons in the south, and the more dramatic mountains of Snowdonia in the northwest. The population is concentrated in the southeast along the coast between Cardiff (the capital) and Swansea and the old mining valleys that run north into the Brecon Beacons. Wales is approximately 170 miles long and 60 miles wide. About 20% of the country is designated as three national parks: Snowdonia, Pembrokeshire and Brecon Beacons.

Wildlife

Keep an eye open for peregrine falcons around Brecon Beacons, and dolphins and seals off the coast of Pembrokeshire.

Environmental Issues

Wales is committed to preserving its natural heritage. The national parks use a 'park and ride' system where drivers can hop on and hop off buses after leaving their cars in car parks. In Snowdonia try the Snowdon Sherpa (p271), or the Puffin Shuttle in Pembrokeshire along the coast path.

PEOPLE

Wales has a population of 2.9 million people, around 5% of the total population of Britain.

LANGUAGE

Welsh is spoken by over 20% of the population, mainly in the north. Recent efforts have been made to reverse its decline. Every Welsh person speaks English, but there's been a national push for Welsh TV and radio programmes and a more aggressive education policy, and most signs are now bilingual.

At first sight, Welsh looks impossibly difficult to get your tongue around. Once you know that 'dd' is pronounced 'th', 'w' can

also be a vowel pronounced 'oo', 'f' is 'v' and 'ff' is 'f', and you have had a native speaker teach you how to pronounce 'll' (roughly 'cl'), you will be able to ask the way to Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch (a village in Anglesey reputed to have Britain's longest place name – no joke) and be understood. Try out the following (pronunciation in brackets) for practice:

- *Bore da* (bora-da) good morning
- *Peint o gwrw* (paint-o-guru) pint of beer
- *Diolch* (diolkh) thank you

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Wales is pretty easily accessible from Chester, Liverpool and Shrewsbury in the north, and from Bristol in the south. Regular ferries depart from Swansea, Fishguard and Holyhead for Cork, Rosslare and Dublin in Ireland.

GETTING AROUND

Wales is committed to creating better public transport, but in the meantime you might have difficulty getting around, especially in the more rural areas. Call the eternally helpful **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.traveline.org.uk), which will give you everything you need to know about buses and trains (except prices).

Travel Passes

Four excellent passes allow free travel in designated regions of Wales and immediately adjacent areas of England, and on all rail routes and nearly all intercity bus routes. Following are the passes, with high-/low-season prices (high season is late May to September and Christmas):

4 in 8 Flexi-pass Eight days' bus travel plus any four days' train travel throughout Wales (£55/45).

8 in 15 Flexi-pass Fifteen days' bus travel plus any eight days' train travel throughout Wales (£92/75).

Freedom of North and Mid Wales 7-day Flexi

Rover Any three days out of seven of bus and train travel in north and Mid Wales (£35/30).

Freedom of South Wales 7-day Flexi-Rover Seven days' bus travel plus any three days' train travel in south Wales (£35/30).

These passes are sold online at **Freedom of Wales Flexipass** (www.walesflexipass.co.uk), over the counter at most train stations and at many TICs.

Bus

Some 70 private bus companies operate in Wales. The biggest intercity operators are Arriva Cymru, First Cymru and Stagecoach. For all public transport information call the UK-wide Traveline.

Train

Wales has some fantastic train lines, both main-line services (☎ 0845 748 4950) and narrow-gauge and steam-train survivors. See the **Great Little Trains of Wales** (www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk) for more information on nine narrow-gauge railways.

Tours

Several backpacker bus companies run three- to seven-day trips throughout Wales:

Bus Wales (☎ 0800 328 0284; www.buswales.com) Leaves from Cardiff, Bath and Bristol, and offers three-day All Wales Tours (£75).

Dragon Tours (☎ 01874-658124; www.dragonbackpackertours.co.uk) Picks up at Cardiff (including hostels and train and bus stations). Trips usually leave Monday and include the six-day All-Wales Circuit (£175), four-day Welsh Highlights (£125) and three-day Weekend Mountain Breaks (£110).

Shaggy Sheep (☎ 07919-244549; www.shaggysheep.com) Leaves from London and offers three-day Merlin Backpacker weekends (£69, plus £39 kitty) and a four-day Dragon All-Wales Tour (£79, plus £59 kitty).

SOUTH WALES

The villages that form a continuous chain along the valleys have their own stark beauty. The traditional market town of **Abergavenny** is worth a stop.

Nestled in a beautiful valley is the breath-taking **Tintern Abbey** (☎ 051-562650; adult/concession £2.50/2; ☎ 9.30am-6pm, shorter hr in winter), Cistercian ruins on a grand scale, and immortalised in poetry by Wordsworth.

WORTH A TRIP

In the early 1970s a group of folk interested in an alternative and above all sustainable way of living set up home in a Welsh quarry. What looked like an eccentric experiment by a bunch of hippies and dreamers then looks like a prescient move today, as oil prices soar and climate change accelerates alarmingly. Still an endearingly idealistic bunch but communicating a serious and practical message, their **Centre for Alternative Technology** (☎ 01654-702400; www.cat.org.uk; adult/concession & child summer £8/4, winter £6/4; ☎ 10am-5.30pm, 10am-4pm in winter) is home to three interactive hectares of experimentation and information about renewable energy and sustainable living. It's an inspiring place and full of ideas that you can apply in your own life. Courses and residential visits are available, as well as countless special events. Great for kids.

The **Big Pit** (☎ 01495-790311; admission free), near Blaenafon, closed as a coal mine in 1980. These days it gives you a chance to experience life underground, and the guided tours conducted by former miners are highly recommended.

CARDIFF (CAERDYDD)

☎ 029 / pop 285,000

Poor Cardiff. There's absolutely nothing wrong with it. It's a handsome town, with a castle, a large park, pleasant riverside walks, a few good museums and galleries, an interesting civic architecture and a reasonably lively cultural scene (helped by the presence of a university). The trouble is that these parts add up to a less than compelling whole and there's little to keep you here for long. Do make time to explore the new Cardiff Bay area if you're in town, though.

Stock up on maps and information at the **TIC** (☎ 2022 7281; www.visitcardiff.info; The Hayes) for all of Wales. Free Internet access is available at **Cardiff Central Library** (☎ 2038 2116; Frederick St).

Sights

The gargoyle-like animals guarding the outer walls give some clue to the lavish Victorian interior at **Cardiff Castle** (☎ 2087 8100; Castle St); it's more Hollywood than medieval. Nearby, the **National Museum & Gallery of Wales** (☎ 2039 7951; Cathays Park; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun & bank holidays) offers a good crash course in Welsh culture and one of the finest collections of impressionist art in Britain.

The port area at **Cardiff Bay**, about 2 miles from the city centre, is well worth making an afternoon for and is also a good place to stop for lunch. Here you'll find the imposing, modern, slate-sided performance and arts space of the **Wales Millennium Centre**, and the glass and wood marvel, with a roof

like an upturned boat, that is the new **Welsh Assembly Building**. You can find out about it at the **Pierhead** (☎ 2089 8477; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun).

Sleeping

The city's beds can fill up when there's a big rugby match in town.

YHA Cardiff (☎ 0870 770 5750; cardiff@yha.org.uk; 2 Wedal Rd; dm £14.90; ☎ bus 28 or 29) Located in a hip student area.

Cardiff Backpacker (☎ 2034 5577; www.cardiffbackpacker.com; 98 Neville St, Riverside; dm from £17.70; ☎ ☎) A lively backpackers, a five- to 10-minute walk from most sights in the city centre.

Riverbank (☎ 2037 8866; www.sleepcheap.co.uk; 53-59 Despenser St, Riverside; s/d £40/50; ☎) This good, central newcomer is an excellent, central budget guesthouse and close to the Millennium Centre.

BigSleepHotel (☎ 2063 6363; www.thebigsleephotel.com; Bute Tce; r from £45; ☎) Top spot in town for value and interior cool, the high-rise big sleep is really great value given the amazingly stylish rooms occupying a former office block.

Cathedral Rd, which runs alongside the Taff River, is lined with B&Bs occupying large, solid houses. The following are recommended:

Church Hotel (☎ 340881; 126 Cathedral Rd; s/d/f from £30/50/60) A homy place run, apparently, by famed Welsh singer Charlotte Church's mum.

Town House (☎ 2023 9399; www.thetownhousecardiff.co.uk; 70 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/62; ☎) A solid old Victorian house, comfortable and quiet.

Eating

Finding good, fresh food that's not out of a fryer or from familiar chain outlets is surprisingly hard in the city centre. Your best bet is to head to Cardiff Bay, which offers lots of options.

Norwegian Church (☎ 2045 4899; mains £3-5; ☎ 10am-6pm) A scenic spot for a snack overlooking the water is at this cosy café inside the pretty, white-weatherboard church close to the Assembly Building.

Bayside Brasserie (☎ 2035 8440; mains £5-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) For a full-blown meal, this brasserie serves good, reasonably priced modern European dishes. The fish, which you select before it's cooked, is particularly tasty.

Getting There & Away

National Express buses travel to/from London (£19, 3¼ hours, seven daily) and Bristol (£6.50, 50 minutes, every half-hour). Trains come from all over the southeast and head west to Swansea and as far as Haverfordwest.

Brecon Beacons National Park

The Brecon Beacons National Park covers 519 sq miles of high bare hills, surrounded on the northern flanks by a number of attractive market towns; Llandovery, Brecon, Crickhowell, Talgarth and Hay-on-Wye make good bases. The railhead is at Abergavenny (with a Norman castle). A 55-mile cycleway/footpath, the Taff Trail, connects Cardiff with Brecon.

The **National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 01874-623366; www.visitbreconbeacons.com), near Libanus, is close to many walking trails. Other information offices are in **Brecon** (☎ 01874-622485) and **Llandovery** (☎ 01550-720693; Kings Rd). All make B&B bookings.

Brecon (Aberhonddu)

☎ 01874 / pop 8000

Brecon is an attractive, historic market town that provides an excellent base for walking in the magnificent surrounding countryside. There's also a **cathedral** dating from the 13th century, a market held on Tuesday and Friday, and a highly acclaimed jazz festival in August.

The **TIC** (☎ 622485; brectic@powys.gov.uk) can help with further information and offers a useful mini-guide to the national park. The **YHA Brecon** (☎ 0870 770 5718; brecon@yha.org.uk; Groesfordd) is popular with trekkers and cyclists. The walker-friendly **Bridge Café** (☎ 622024; www.bridgecafe.co.uk; 7 Bridge St; mains £4-8; r £40-50; ☎ café 11am-6pm Wed-Sat) offers delicious, fresh, creative home-made food and a couple of appealing, comfortable rooms. A shade upmarket is the enchanting and central **B&B Centre Selyf** (☎ 622904; www.centreselyf.co.uk; Lion St; s £48, d £60-72; ☎), which occupies a spacious Georgian town house, with décor that harks back to the 17th century, scrubbed floors and a lovely garden.

Brecon has no train station, but there are regular bus links. **Stagecoach Red & White** (☎ 01685-385539) has regular buses to Swansea and Abergavenny, and to Hereford via Hay-on-Wye.

Hay-on-Wye

☎ 01497 / pop 1600

At the northeastern tip of the Black Mountains is Hay-on-Wye, an eccentric market village that is now known as the world centre for **second-hand books** – there are over 35 shops and more than one million books, everything from first editions costing £1000 to books by the yard (literally).

Contact the **TIC** (☎ 820144; www.haye-on-wye.co.uk; Craft Centre, Oxford Rd; ☞ 11am-1pm & 2-4pm) for information on the excellent restaurants and B&Bs in the area. **Capel-y-Ffin Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5748) is 8 miles south of Hay on the road to Abergavenny. The walk here from Hay follows part of Offa's Dyke and is highly recommended. Get away from it all at the **Barn** (☎ 01873-890477; www.thebarn-wales.co.uk; Pen-y-Maes; s/d £25/50, with shared bathroom £40/45) in a peaceful remote valley 8 miles from Hay.

SOUTHWEST WALES

The coastline northeast of St David's to Cardigan is particularly beautiful and, as it is protected by Pembrokeshire National Park, it remains delightfully unspoilt. The Pembrokeshire Coast Path begins at Amroth, north of Tenby, on the western side of Carmarthen Bay, and continues to St Dogmaels to the west of Cardigan. Tenby is an attractive holiday destination, a little overrun at times.

Carmarthen Bay is more often referred to as Dylan Thomas Country; **Dylan's boat-house** (☎ 01994-427420; adult/concession £3/2; ☞ 10am-5.30pm May-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Nov-Apr) at Laugharne, where he wrote *Under Milk Wood*, is a moving memorial preserved exactly as he left it. Llanstephan has a beautiful Norman castle above sandy beaches. On west-facing beaches, there's good surf.

From Pembrokeshire Dock **Irish Ferries** (☎ 08705-171717) leaves for Rosslare in Ireland; ferries connect with buses from Cardiff and destinations east. **Stena Line** (☎ 08705-707070) has ferries from Fishguard to Rosslare, from where buses and trains connect.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

The national park protects a narrow band of magnificent coastline, broken only by the more dense development around Pembroke and Milford Haven. The only significant inland portion is the mystical Preseli Hills to the southeast of Fishguard. There are National Park Information Centres and TICs

at **Tenby** (☎ 01834-842402), **St David's** (☎ 01437-720392) and **Fishguard** (☎ 01348-873484). The free *Coast to Coast* has detailed local information or check out the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's website at www.pcnpa.org.uk. Apart from hostels, there are loads of B&Bs from around £20. Contact Traveline for bus information.

St David's (Tyddewi)

☎ 01437 / pop 1450

The linchpin for the southwest is beautiful St David's, one of Europe's smallest 'cities', referred to as such because of its cathedral. There's a web of interesting streets and, concealed in the Vale of Roses, beautiful **St David's Cathedral** (☎ 720517; ☞ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, shorter hr in winter) is spectacularly well preserved. Contact the **TIC** (☎ 720392; www.stdavids.co.uk; High St) for more information. **TYF Adventure** (☎ 721611; 1 High St) offers a range of outdoor adrenaline fun including coasteering, sea kayaking, surfing and rock climbing.

There are several handy youth hostels: near **St David's** (☎ 0870 770 6042); at **Trefin** (☎ 0870 770 6074), 11 miles from St David's; and the superb little **Pwll Deri** (☎ 0870 770 6004), on the cliffs 8 miles from Trefin and just over 4.5 miles from Fishguard.

There are regular **Richards Bros** (☎ 01239-613756) buses to/from Fishguard (45 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday). The closest train station is Haverfordwest, from where bus 411 runs hourly into St David's.

Fishguard (Abergwaun)

☎ 01348 / pop 3200

Fishguard is on a beautiful bay, and the old part of town, Lower Fishguard, was the location for the 1971 film version of *Under Milk Wood*, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. The train station and harbour (for ferries to Rosslare) are at Goodwick, a 20-minute walk from the town proper.

There's a **TIC** (☎ 873484; www.fishguardonline.com; ☞ daily summer), but the **Hamilton Guest House & Backpackers Lodge** (☎ 874797; www.fishguard-backpackers.com; 21 Hamilton St; dm/d £12/30) is even more helpful, and has a sauna.

MID WALES

Most visitors to Wales head either for the easily accessible south or the scenically more dramatic north, leaving the quiet valleys of Mid Wales to the Welsh

The 120-mile **Glyndwr's Way** national trail visits sites associated with the Welsh hero between Knighton (on Offa's Dyke Path) and Welshpool via picturesque villages, such as Machynlleth, and stunning natural scenery. Leaflets are available from TICs in the area and are invaluable, as route-finding is difficult in places.

Machynlleth is an attractive market town and a good base for exploring Mid Wales. Check with the **TIC** (☎ 01654-702401; mactic@mail.powys.gov.uk) for local information.

A remarkably pleasant coastal university town, **Aberystwyth** has good transport connections. Contact the **TIC** (☎ 0197-612125; www.aberystwyth-online.co.uk) for B&Bs. **Borth Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5708; yha.org.uk; dm adult/child £11.95/9.95) is 8 miles north of Aberystwyth, near a wide sandy beach.

Running through the Vale of Rheidol to Devil's Bridge are **steam trains**, offering spectacular views of the waterfall.

NORTH WALES

North Wales is dominated by the Snowdonia Mountains, which loom over the beautiful coastline. The Red Rover day ticket (£16.90) covers most of the region. For information call Traveline.

Holyhead (Caergybi)

☎ 01407 / pop 12,500

Holyhead is a grey and daunting ferry port. Both **Irish Ferries** (☎ 08705-171717) and **Stena Line** (☎ 08705-707070) run ferries to Dublin. Stena Line also sails to Dun Laoghaire, just outside Dublin.

The **TIC** (☎ 762622; holyhead@nwtic.com) is in ferry terminal 1. In the nearby township there's a batch of B&Bs that are used to dealing with late ferry arrivals (check ahead with the TIC). Trains come from all over Britain, including London, Chester, Birmingham and Llandudno.

Llandudno

☎ 01492 / pop 22,000

Developed as a Victorian holiday town, Llandudno has retained much of its 19th-century architecture and antiquated atmosphere, and seethes with visitors in summer. There's a wonderful **pier & promenade** and donkeys on the beach.

Llandudno is situated on its very own peninsula nestled between two sweeping

beaches, and dominated by the spectacular limestone headland, the **Great Orme**, with the mountains of Snowdonia providing the backdrop. The Great Orme, with its **tramway** (adult/child £3.95/2.80), superb views and Bronze Age mine, is fascinating.

There are hundreds of guesthouses, but it can be difficult to find somewhere to stay in the peak July/August season. Contact the **TIC** (☎ 876413; www.llandudno-tourism.co.uk; 1/2 Chapel St) for more information.

Conwy

☎ 01492 / pop 3900

Conwy has been revitalised since the through traffic on the busy A55 was consigned to a tunnel, which burrows under the estuary of the Conwy River. It's a picturesque and interesting little town, dominated by superb **Conwy Castle** (☎ 592358; adult/concession £4.50/4; ☞ 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Oct-May), one of the grandest of Edward I's castles and a medieval masterpiece.

The **TIC** (☎ 592248; conwy.tic@virgin.net; Conwy Castle Visitor Centre) is located in the castle. About 3 miles south of Llandudno, Conwy is linked to Llandudno by several buses hourly and a few trains. There are, however, numerous trains from Llandudno to Llandudno Junction, a 15-minute walk from Conwy.

Snowdonia National Park

Although the Snowdonia Mountains are fairly compact, they loom over the coast and offer easily the most spectacular scenery in Wales. The most popular region is in the north around Mt Snowdon, at 1085m the highest peak in Britain south of the Scottish Highlands. Hikers must be prepared to deal with hostile conditions at any time of the year. Check **Mount Snowdon** (www.visitsnowdonia.info) or **Snowdonia National Park** (www.snowdonia-npa.gov.uk) for more information.

There are several National Park Information Centres, including **Betws-y-Coed** (☎ 01690-710426; ticbetws@hotmail.com), **Blaenau Ffestiniog** (☎ 01766-830360) and **Harlech** (☎ 01766-780658). They all have a wealth of information, and all make B&B bookings.

The beautiful, if crowded, hamlet of **Betws-y-Coed** is a lovely base from which to explore Snowdonia. The nearest hostel is **Capel Curig** (☎ 0870 770 5746; capelcurig@yha.org.uk; dm adult/child £16/12.50), 5 miles west.

Bed and breakfasts, and hotels, are plentiful. The intimate **Henllys Guest House** (☎ 01690-710534; www.jhaddy.freereserve.co.uk; Old Church Rd; per person from £15) is housed in a converted Victorian magistrate's court set next to the Conwy River. Another historic building is the homey, welcoming **Royal Oak Hotel** (☎ 01690-710219; www.royaloakhotel.net; r per person £40-60; (P)), a former coaching inn located right in the heart of the village.

Snowdon Sherpa buses run along the major mountain routes within the national park, and have connections to Llandudno from Betws-y-Coed, to Caernarfon from Waunfawr and to Caernarfon/Bangor from Llanberis.

In Llanberis, you can take the **Snowdon Mountain Railway** (☎ 08704580033; www.snowdonrailway.co.uk) for the ride to the top and back (adult/child £21/14). The **TIC** (☎ 01286-870765; www.llanberis.org; 41a High St) is helpful.

The best hostel in the area is the **Pen-y-Pass Youth Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5990; penypass@yha.org.uk; Nantgwynant, Caernarfon; dm adult/child £13.95/9.95), 6 miles up the valley situated in a spectacular site at the start of one of the paths up Snowdon. **Pete's Eats** (☎ 01286-870358; mains £2-5) is a warm café opposite the TIC where hikers swap information over large portions of hearty food, like chip butties, and big mugs of tea. In the evening, climbers hang out in the **Heights** (☎ 01286-871179; www.heightshotel.co.uk; 74 High St; dm/d £14/50, f £60-100; (P)), a hotel/hostel that has a pub and restaurant that will arrange outdoor adventures for guests.

Llangollen

☎ 01978 / pop 2600

Famous for its **International Musical Eisteddfod** (☎ 862001; www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk), Llangollen is just 8 miles from the English border. This six-day music, song and dance festival, held in July, attracts folk groups from around the world.

The town makes an excellent base for outdoor activities, such as walks to ruined **Valle Crucis Abbey** and the Horseshoe Pass, horse-drawn canal-boat trips and canoeing on the Dee River.

The **Llangollen Youth Hostel & Activity Centre** (☎ 0870 770 5932; llangollen@yha.org.uk; Tyndwr Rd; adult/under 18yr £11.95/8.95) is 1.5 miles from the town centre. Contact the **TIC** (☎ 860828) for B&Bs.

BRITAIN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Reflecting the wide array of sleepover options available in Britain, accommodation in this chapter has been listed in budget order, with the lowest-priced first. Budget listings are usually hostels or backpacker joints, midrange options are often B&Bs or small guesthouses and top-end spots are typically swish hotels. Remember that local TICs will find and book accommodation for you ahead of your arrival if you tell them your budget and what you're looking for. This service is sometimes free but usually costs around £3.

Most budget listings in this chapter are under £30 per person, while midrange options are generally under £60. Top-end accommodation ranges upwards of £60. London prices are often higher in these categories. Typically, breakfast is included in midrange and top-end options and may also be included in budget accommodation.

Free camping is rarely possible in Britain, except in remote areas, but there's a surfeit of pay-per-pitch sites across the country. Rates can range from £2 to £15 per night, depending on location and season, and facilities can run from shared cold-water taps to hot showers and laundry facilities. The best-selling and comprehensive *AA Caravan and Camping Britain & Ireland* (£9.99) guide is widely available. Also visit **UK Campsite** (www.ukcampsite.co.uk) for thousands of listings and user-reviews.

The separate Youth Hostel Associations (YHA) for **England & Wales** (☎ 0870 770 8868; www.yha.org.uk) and **Scotland** (☎ 0870 155 3255; www.syha.org.uk) offer dorm bed rates from £9 to £20 per night. Their facilities vary from institutionalised basic to IKEA-chic modern, with some larger hostels now offering private rooms and free breakfasts to compete with independent operators. Prices in this chapter are for adults, but per-night discounts are available to all under 18s (usually about 25%) and Hostelling International (HI) members (usually £1 to £2). Not all hostels are open year-round, so book or call ahead before you arrive.

There's a growing array of independent hostels and backpackers across Britain, varying widely in quality, facilities and

price (typically from £10 to £25). Some are quiet and cosy, while others are for serious party travellers. The online **Independent Hostel Guide** (www.independenthostelguide.co.uk) is a listing resource for tracking down some of these hostels. For Scotland only, check **Scottish Independent Hostels** (www.hostel-scotland.co.uk) for online listings.

Many universities offer student accommodation to visitors during Christmas, Easter and summer holidays. Usually in basic single study rooms, rates typically range from £15 to £35 per person. For information, contact **Venuemasters** (☎ 0114 249 3090; www.venuemasters.com), which represents 100 British universities and offers online bookings.

A British institution and often the best-value accommodation in town, B&Bs and guesthouses can range from £15 per person for a bedroom in a family home to more than £50 for a warm and fuzzy stay in a characterful heritage house. The common link is the heaping cooked breakfast intended to keep you fuelled well into the afternoon. For comprehensive listings, pick up the *AA Bed & Breakfast Guide* (£12.99).

Hotels can run from poky pub rooms (£20 to £50) to a night of luxury in a sleek boutique property (upwards of £75). In between is a growing roster of competitive mid-range chains, including **Ibis** (www.ibishotel.com) and **Premier Travel Inn** (www.premiertourinn.com). Often in convenient city-centre locations, they provide modern, good-value rooms for flat rates (from £40). Note that most B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels charge per room but some charge per person – make sure you know what you're paying before you unpack your bag.

ACTIVITIES

Britain is a great destination for outdoor enthusiasts, from daredevil rock climbers to beach-bum surfer dudes and leisurely day hikers. There are clubs and associations across the land, and useful brochures and maps available from **Visit Britain** (www.visitbritain.com). Its website has some good recommendations and links under its Get Active section.

Cycling

Compact Britain is an excellent destination to explore by bike. Not all cities are cycle-friendly (Oxford, Bristol and Bath

are among the best) but there are plenty of designated routes through some of the nation's best countryside. Popular routes and regions include the Yorkshire Dales Cycleway, Derbyshire's Peak District and the Scottish Borders. The 10,000-mile **National Cycle Network** (☎ 0845 113 0065; www.nationalcyclenetwork.org.uk) crisscrosses Britain with one-day and multi-day rides, and is actively expanding. Contact the network for excellent maps and other cycling resources. The **Cyclists' Touring Club** (☎ 0870 873 0060; www.ctc.org.uk) is the leading national organisation for biking enthusiasts, and they can help out with route information and general inquiries about cycling throughout Britain. Hiring bicycles is easy in the UK, with prices typically ranging from £6 for a half-day to £60 for a week – book ahead for summer rentals.

Hiking

Britain's cornucopia of picturesque terrains makes for great hiking country. Day hikes are a popular and accessible way to escape from the crowded cities, and there are hundreds of longer routes waiting for more adventurous travellers. Popular hiking trails include the 191-mile **Coast to Coast Walk** (www.coast2coast.co.uk) across three northern England national parks, the 100-mile **Cotswold Way** (www.cotswold-way.co.uk) between Bath and Chipping Campden, and the 84-mile **Dales Way** (www.thedalesway.co.uk) through Yorkshire's charming countryside. Other routes crisscross Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks, Pembrokeshire National Park in Wales, and the highlands and islands of Scotland. Many of these are mentioned throughout this chapter.

Ramblers Association (☎ 020-7339 8500; www.ramblers.org.uk) is a voluntary organisation with a wealth of experience on hiking and walking across Britain. It produces dozens of maps, guides and accommodation listings for local and visiting hoofers. For additional information and resources (some for free download), check out **National Trails** (www.nationaltrails.co.uk).

Water Sports

Surrounded by water and dripping with lakes, lochs and canals, Britain offers a brimming bucket full of coastal and inland water-based activities.

The Devon and Cornwall region is England's surfing mecca, with rideable swells at more than 100 closely linked beaches, including Newquay's ever-popular Fistral Beach. Scotland is opening up to its surfing potential, with the north coast proving popular among adventurous board fans. Southwest Wales also has some great waves around Newgale and Whitesands. Equipment hire centres are widespread. The **British Surfing Association** (☎ 0870 011 4240; www.britsurf.org) should be your first stop for information and resources. Windsurfers can also check out Brit-based options via the **Royal Yachting Association** (☎ 0845 345 0400; www.rya.org.uk).

With hundreds of shipwrecks strewn around its coast, diving is also popular. Some of the best wetsuit haunts are along the English south coast, where hapless medieval and WWII vessels jostle for space. The **British Sub-Aqua Club** (☎ 0151 350 6200; www.bsac.com) offers courses and information for dive fans.

BOOKS

For detailed country guides pick up the latest Lonely Planet editions of *Great Britain, England, Scotland and Wales*. Among the legions of travel literature on the British Isles, Bill Bryson's *Notes from a Small Island* is hugely entertaining, while AA Gill's acidic *The Angry Island* is great fun. For an alternative take on the country's kitsch attractions, read *Bollocks to Alton Towers*, a celebration of day trips out to off-beat attractions such as the Cumberland Pencil Museum.

BUSINESS HOURS

Standard office hours are from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Most banks are open 9.30am to 5pm during the week, with larger branches also opening on Saturday morning. Shops open from at least 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday, while opening from 10am to 4pm on Sunday is also increasingly common at larger shops. Many will also stay open late one night per week, usually Thursday or Friday. Some city-centre supermarkets are open 24 hours. Restaurants often open daily for lunch from 11am to 3pm, then reopen for dinner from 6pm to 10pm, but specific hours can vary widely. Traditional pub opening hours are from 11am to 11pm Monday to Saturday and from noon to 10.30pm Sunday, however, a recent relaxing of the

licensing laws means that many – particularly those ones in the cities – will stay open later, especially on weekends.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

British Embassies & Consulates Abroad

For more British embassies, visit the website of the **Foreign & Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk).

Australia (☎ 02-6270 6666; www.britaus.net; Commonwealth Ave, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600)

Canada (☎ 613-237 1530; www.britainincanada.org; 80 Elgin St, Ottawa, ON K1P 5K7)

France (☎ 01 44 51 31 00; www.amb-grande-bretagne.fr; 35 rue du Faubourg St Honoré, 75383 Paris Cedex 08)

Germany (☎ 030-204 570; www.britischesbotschaft.de; Wilhelmstrasse 70, 10117 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 01-205 3700; www.britishembassy.ie; 29 Merrion Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Japan (☎ 03-5211 1100; www.uknow.or.jp; 1 Ichiban-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8381)

Netherlands (☎ 070 427 04 27; www.britain.nl; Lange Voorhout 10, 2514 ED, The Hague)

New Zealand (☎ 04-924 2888; www.britain.org.nz; 44 Hill St, Wellington 1)

USA (☎ 202-588 6500; www.britainusa.com; 3100 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Britain

For more embassies, visit the website of the **Foreign & Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk).

Australia (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7379 4334; www.australia.org.uk; Australia House, Strand, London, WC2B 4LA)

Canada (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7258 6600; Macdonald House, 1 Grosvenor Sq, London, W1K 4AB)

France (Map pp156-7; ☎ 020-7073 1200; www.ambafrance-uk.org; 58 Knightsbridge, London, SW1X 7JT)

Germany (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7824 1300; www.german-embassy.org.uk; 23 Belgrave Sq, London, SW1 8PZ)

Ireland (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7235 2171; 17 Grosvenor Pl, London, SW1X 7HR)

Japan (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7465 6500; www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp; 101-104 Piccadilly, London, W1J 7JT)

Netherlands (Map pp156-7; ☎ 020-7590 3200; www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk; 38 Hyde Park Gate, London, SW7 5DP)

New Zealand (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7930 8422; www.nzembassy.com; 80 Haymarket, London, SW1Y 4TQ)

USA (Map pp152-3; ☎ 020-7499 9000; www.usembassy.org.uk; 24 Grosvenor Sq, London, W1A 1AE)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are countless diverse special events held around Britain throughout the year. Many of them are based on traditional

customs initiated centuries ago. Some of the more prominent festivals and events include:

January

Hogmanay/New Year (www.edinburghshogmanay.org; Princess St, Edinburgh) Huge, raucous party from 31 December to 1 January echoed by smaller versions throughout the UK.

April

Grand National (www.aintree.co.uk) Britain's top annual horse race. Held in Aintree, Liverpool, in early April.

May

FA Cup Final (www.thefa.com) Nail-biting conclusion to England's annual knock-out football club competition at Wembley Stadium in London. Held in mid-May.

June

Glastonbury Festival (www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk) Giant open-air music extravaganza at Somerset in late June.

July

Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod (www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk) In Llangollen, Wales, a 60-year-old celebration of international folk music and dance. Held in early July.

T in the Park (www.tinthepark.com) Scotland's leading open-air music festival, held in Glasgow in mid-July.

Farnborough International Air Show (www.farnborough.com) In Farnborough, Surrey, the world's largest aeroplane display. Held in mid-July.

August

Edinburgh Fringe Festival (www.edfringe.com) Sprawling, three-week comedy and avant-garde performance fest in Edinburgh from early August.

Brecon Jazz Festival (www.breconjazz.co.uk) In mid-August, indoor and outdoor jazz concerts in the Welsh countryside.

Reading Festival (www.readingfestival.com) Popular annual live music (and camping) fest in Reading, Berkshire. Held in late August.

September

Braemar Gathering (www.braemargathering.org) Held in early September, haggis scoffing and caber tossing in the Scottish Highlands of Braemar, Deeside, attended by a kilted Royal Family.

November

Guy Fawkes Night Bonfires and fireworks recalling failed antigovernment plot from the 1600s. Held nationwide on 5 November.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Most major cities have 'out' gay and lesbian scenes – especially London, Brighton, Manchester and Glasgow – but there can still be some mindless intolerance in smaller towns and tabloid newspapers. **Visit Britain** (www.visitbritain.com) has introductory information and an e-newsletter for gay travellers on its website, while the website of the **Gay Britain Network** (www.gaybritain.co.uk) provides links to searchable databases and offers gay-friendly travel information. **Gay Times** (www.gaytimes.co.uk) and **Divya** (www.divyamag.co.uk) provide resources and information in their print and online versions, while the **National Gay & Lesbian Switchboard** (☎ 020-7837 7324; www.lgls.org.uk) offers a 24-hour support service for residents and visitors throughout Britain.

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

Called bank holidays in Britain, these affect most businesses, although larger shops increasingly remain open. The following is a list of the main public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

New Year's Holiday 2 January (Scotland only)

Good Friday March/April, Friday before Easter

Easter Monday March/April (except Scotland)

May Day First Monday in May

Spring Bank Holiday Last Monday in May

Summer Bank Holiday First Monday in August (Scotland only)

Summer Bank Holiday Last Monday in August (England and Wales only)

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

MEDIA

Britain has some of the world's best and worst newspapers. At the top end, it's hard to beat the *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Times* and *Independent*, most of which now come in handy tabloid sizes. At the bottom of the barrel, the *Sun*, *Star* and *Mirror* continue to mine their puerile fascination with sex and celebrities – a recipe that has made the *Sun* Britain's most widely read newspaper. The magazine sector is equally diverse, with classy *GQ* and *Vogue* only dreaming they could reach the massive circulation of *Viz*, Britain's adults-only comic strip.

On TV and radio, the public service British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) continues to provide high-quality news,

entertainment and sports services. Along with the BBC's two free-to-air TV channels, there are three additional free channels available on regular TV sets. A massive expansion in cable and satellite services has also delivered dozens of new channels to viewers who pay for decoders and/or packages.

MONEY

Still refusing to adopt the euro (€) – it's accepted at some major tourist attractions, larger hotels and at increasing numbers of businesses in London and the southeast – Britain's currency remains the pound sterling (£), split among a variety of coins and banknotes each bearing the Queen's image. Scotland and Northern Ireland also issue banknotes, which are legal tender across the UK: if you have trouble using them in England, exchange them at any bank for free.

ATMs

It's not hard to find an ATM – usually called 'cashpoints' – in Britain, where they're often located outside banks, building societies and large supermarkets. They accept a wide variety of cards, including Visa, MasterCard and American Express (Amex). Some cashpoints, particularly those in unusual locations like pubs, charge extra fees for withdrawals.

Credit Cards & Debit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are the most acceptable cards in Britain, with Amex not far behind. Britain recently launched 'Chip & Pin', a debit and credit card payment system that requires a security number to be entered. This system does not apply to traditional cards issued overseas: you will be able to use your card in the usual manner.

Moneychangers

Be careful with bureaux de change: they may advertise good exchange rates but sometimes levy outrageous fees and commissions. Always ask what the 'extras' are before making a transaction. Banks are a safe money-changing option and some larger post offices will also exchange your foreign dosh.

Travellers Cheques

An inconvenient method of payment in Britain – they are rarely accepted at businesses and have to be exchanged for cash

at banks or exchanges – travellers cheques have been largely superseded by credit and debit cards.

POST

Most post offices are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and until noon on Saturday. Within the UK, 1st-class mail is quicker and more expensive (£0.32 per letter) than 2nd-class mail (£0.23). Postcards sent overseas cost £0.44 (Europe) and £0.50 (outside Europe). Stamp-vending machines are located outside some post offices, and larger newsagents and supermarkets sell them in books of four or 10. Single stamps are often available at larger attractions and some TICs.

STUDYING

There are thousands of language schools throughout Britain, not just the ones advertised on the postcards handed out along Oxford St in London. Unfortunately, some of the outfits are scams preying on the impressionable. The **British Council** (www.britishcouncil.org) administers an accreditation scheme for schools and its website provides a good introduction to studying in Britain. **English UK** (www.englishuk.com) offers an even more specific service, and is a one-stop shop for information on classes, visas and regions for study.

TELEPHONE

Call boxes, mostly operated by British Telecom (BT), are a common enough sight on UK streets. Most take coins, credit cards, phonecards or a combination of all three. Coin phones do not give change and they charge a minimum of £0.20. Local calls are charged by time, while national calls are by time and distance: it's cheaper to call before 8am or after 6pm Monday to Friday or any time on weekends. Many hotels charge high fees for in-room phone usage – you may need to sell your body if you want to make an international call.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

For almost any type of emergency, dial ☎ 999. You will be connected to the nearest coastguard, fire service, mountain rescue, ambulance or police via this number.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are ubiquitous in Britain, with text messaging a national pastime. Britain uses the GSM 900/1800 network, covering Europe, Australia and New Zealand. It's not generally compatible with North America. Ask your service provider if you can use your phone in Britain. If mobile access is important to you, consider buying a pay-as-you-go phone here for as little as £50. It has its own number and you buy top-up cards to stay in credit. Mobile phone numbers usually begin with ☎ 07.

Phone Codes

For international direct calls, dial ☎ 00 followed by the country code, area code (drop the first zero if there is one) and local number. Dial ☎ 155 for the international operator. For calls within Britain, dial ☎ 100 for operator assistance and ☎ 118118 for directory enquiries. Useful codes to know include:

- ☎ 0800 – free call
- ☎ 0845 – local rate call
- ☎ 0870 – national rate call
- ☎ 0871 – local rate call
- ☎ 0891 – premium rate call
- ☎ 0906 – premium rate call

TOURIST INFORMATION

The website of **Visit Britain** (www.visitbritain.com) is stuffed with resources and staff are ever-eager to send brochures and information on request. **England** (www.enjoyengland.com), **Scotland** (www.visitscotland.com) and **Wales** (www.visitwales.com) also have dedicated tourism agencies. Most regions and many towns and cities have their own visitor websites – they are listed throughout this chapter. Britain also has a good network of local TICs.

TRAVELLING WITH DISABILITIES

While newer businesses and attractions are user-friendly for disabled people, there are many old buildings in Britain that are not. Wheelchair travellers, in particular, are not well served by traditional pubs and B&Bs. Ibis and Premier Travel Inn hotels provide well-designed disabled rooms, while many banks and ticket offices are fitted with hearing loops. Newer buses have ramps for wheelchair access – one of the reasons for the demise of London's old Routemasters – and train networks usually provide personal

ramps and attendants if you call ahead. Contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457-484950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) for further details. **RADAR** (☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk) publishes an invaluable guide on disabilities holidays in Britain, while **Holiday Care** (☎ 0845 124 9971; www.holidaycare.org.uk) provides lists of accessible accommodation.

VISAS

You don't need a visitor visa if you are a citizen of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa or the USA. Tourists are generally permitted to stay for up to six months, but are prohibited from working. All other nationalities should apply for a visitor visa through their nearest British diplomatic mission. These currently cost around £50. For more information, visit **UK Visas** (www.ukvisas.gov.uk).

Current worldwide security issues mean that immigration officials at all ports of entry are stricter now than ever before. Be prepared to answer questions about your reasons for entering Britain and the date you expect to leave – show your outbound travel ticket if necessary.

WORK

The Working Holidaymaker scheme allows Commonwealth citizens aged 17 to 27 years to live and work here for up to two years, but arrangements must be made in advance via a British embassy overseas. Visiting full-time students from the USA are eligible to apply to work in Britain for up to six months. Contact the **British North America Universities Club** (☎ 020-7251 3472; www.bunac.org.uk) for details. Nationals from most EU countries can live and work freely in Britain, but there may be restrictions on citizens from newer member nations. For more information, visit **Working in the UK** (www.workingintheuk.gov.uk).

TRANSPORT IN BRITAIN

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air
Britain is a hectic airline hub, with London, Manchester and Glasgow in particular receiving frequent flights from around the world. A plethora of regional airports has also sprung up in recent years, servicing busy routes from Europe and beyond.

Consider some of these as alternatives to the main airports; they may be cheaper and more convenient, depending on where you plan to stay in Britain. The following are among the key international airports:

- Birmingham** (BHM; ☎ 0870 733 5511; www.bhx.co.uk)
Bristol (BRS; ☎ 0870 121 2747; www.bristolairport.co.uk)
Cardiff (CWL; ☎ 01446-711111; www.cwlfly.com)
Edinburgh (EDI; ☎ 0870 040 0007; www.edinburghairport.com)
Glasgow (GGW; ☎ 0870 040 0008; www.glasgowairport.com)
Liverpool John Lennon (LPL; ☎ 0870 129 8484; www.liverpooljohnlennonairport.com)
London Gatwick (LGW; ☎ 0870 000 2468; www.gatwickairport.com)
London Heathrow (LHR; ☎ 0870 000 0123; www.heathrowairport.com)
London Luton (LTN; ☎ 01582-405100; www.london-luton.co.uk)
London Stansted (STN; ☎ 0870 000 0303 www.stanstedairport.com)
Newcastle (NCL; ☎ 0870 122 1488; www.newcastleairport.com)
Manchester (MAN; ☎ 0161 489 3000; www.manchesterairport.co.uk)
Southampton (SOU; ☎ 08700 4020 0009; www.southamptonairport.com)

Following are some of the busiest airlines flying to/from Britain, including their UK contact details:

- Aer Lingus** (code EI; ☎ 0845 876 5000; www.flyaerlingus.com)
Air Canada (code AC; ☎ 0871 220 1111; www.aircanada.com)
Air France (code AF; ☎ 0870 142 4343; www.airfrance.com)
American Airlines (code AA; ☎ 0845 778 9789; www.aa.com)
British Airways (code BA; ☎ 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com)
British Midland/BMI (code BD; ☎ 0870 6070 555; www.flybmi.com)
Cathay Pacific (code CX; ☎ 020-8834 8888; www.cathaypacific.com)
easyJet (code EZY; ☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com)
KLM (code KLM; ☎ 0870 507 4074; www.klm.com)
Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 0870 833 7747; www.lufthansa.com)
Qantas (code QF; ☎ 0845 774 7767; www.qantas.com/au)
Ryanair (code FR; ☎ 0871 246 0000; www.ryanair.com)
United (code UA; ☎ 0845 844 4777; www.united.com)
Virgin Atlantic (code VS; ☎ 0870 574 7747; www.virgin-atlantic.com)

Land BUS

Servicing a vast network of long-distance routes, **Eurolines** (☎ 0870 514 3219; www.euro-lines.com; 52 Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria, London) is an umbrella company linking 32 regional bus/coach operators. Popular direct daily services to London Victoria arrive from Amsterdam (from £10, two hours, three daily), Paris (from £15, nine hours, four daily) and Dublin (from £24, 12 hours, two daily), among many others. There are also Euro-lines services to cities outside London. You can book tickets online, through any UK National Express office or at many larger travel agencies.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Visitors can bring cars or motorbikes to Britain from Europe via ferry services or the Channel Tunnel. For specific information on these routes, refer to Sea (opposite) and for tips on driving in Britain, see p280. If hiring, check with the company regarding insurance requirements and drop-off charges for travelling from mainland Europe to Britain.

TRAIN

Regular **Eurostar** (☎ 0870 518 6186; www.eurostar.com) high-speed services arrive from France (£59, three hours) and Belgium (£59, 2½ hours) throughout the day. Currently, these terminate at London Waterloo but this will switch to London St Pancras when a new terminal is opened in 2007. Youth discounts are available to travellers under 26 years.

An alternative to Eurostar is the vehicle train service operated by **Eurotunnel** (☎ 0870 535 3535; www.eurotunnel.com). These carry cars and their passengers through the Channel Tunnel between Folkestone in the UK and Calais in France. Trains depart up to four times an hour in each direction between 6am and 10pm, and hourly from 10pm to 6am. A car plus passengers can cost up to £220 but advertised promotions can bring this down to £39. The journey takes 35 minutes.

Rail/ferry links involve trains at either end and a ferry or high-speed catamaran across the Channel. It's usually cheaper but much slower than travelling by Eurostar. Contact **Rail Europe** (www.railurope.com) for routes, information and prices. Eurail passes are not valid for travel to or around Britain, but Eurostar discounts are offered to Eurail pass holders.

Sea

With a bewildering array of marine services linking Britain and Europe, prices can change rapidly to reflect the intense competition. Shop around for bargains via operators' websites and keep an eye on national newspapers for summer promotions. The shortest crossing from mainland Europe is Calais to Dover on the English south coast. Some key routes and operators are listed following. Contact operators for additional routes and information.

Brittany Ferries (☎ 0870 366 5333; www.brittanyferries.co.uk) From France, operates between Cherbourg and Portsmouth (£29, six to nine hours, daily); from Spain, operates between Santander and Plymouth (from £48, 24 hours, twice weekly).

DFDS Seaways (☎ 0870 252 0524; www.dfds.co.uk) From the Netherlands, operates between Amsterdam and Newcastle (from £110, 15 hours, daily); from Sweden, operates between Gothenburg and Newcastle (from £105, 17 hours, twice weekly).

P & O (☎ 0870 242 4999; www.poferries.com, www.poirishsea.com) From France, operates between Calais and Dover (from £18, 75 minutes, every 45 minutes); from Ireland, operates between Dublin and Liverpool (£99, seven hours, twice daily); from Spain, operates between Bilbao and Portsmouth (from £150, 31 hours, two to three times weekly).

Stena Line (☎ 0870 570 7070; www.stenaline.com) From Ireland, operates between Rosslare and Fishguard, south Wales (from £65, 1½ to three hours, twice daily); from the Netherlands, operates between the Hook of Holland and Harwich (from £59, 3½ hours, three daily).

Superfast Ferries (☎ 0870 234 0870; www.superfast.com) From Belgium, operates between Zeebrugge and Rosyth near Edinburgh (from £99, 17½ hours, daily).

GETTING AROUND

Buses, trains and cheap airlines form a dense transport network across much of Britain, but these services dwindle to almost nothing in remote areas where populations are low. With some creative thinking, visitors can get almost anywhere – especially if they deploy a bike or the odd hiking trail. Hire cars are also an option, but they are rarely cost-effective unless travelling in a group or to areas not well served by other transport methods.

Contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.traveline.org.uk, www.travelinescotland.com; ☎ 8am-8pm) for information on local and regional bus and train options, or visit the website of **Transport Direct** (www.transportdirect.info) for longer journeys – the website has car route maps,

and a useful tool for comparing flight, bus and train options between cities.

Air

No-frills airlines offer some of the best potential bargains for travelling around Britain – especially between London and Scotland – but you'll have to be flexible to get the best deals (flights from £1, excluding taxes and fees) and factor in the cost of travelling to and from airports. There are sometimes extortionate penalties for ticket changes and some airlines now charge for hold luggage.

AIRLINES IN BRITAIN

The following airlines operate domestic flights:

Air Scotland (code GRE; ☎ 0141 222 2363; www.air-scotland.com) Serving Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle.

Air Southwest (code WOW; ☎ 0870 241 8202; www.airsouthwest.com) Serving Bristol, Cardiff, Jersey, Leeds Bradford, London Gatwick, Manchester, Newquay, Norwich and Plymouth.

BA Connect (code TH; ☎ 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com/baconnect) Serving Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, London Gatwick, London Luton, London City, Manchester and Southampton.

BmiBaby (code WW; ☎ 0870 224 0224; www.bmibaby.com) Serving Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London Gatwick, Manchester and Newquay.

easyJet (code EZY; ☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com) Serving Aberdeen, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Liverpool, London Gatwick, London Luton, London Stansted and Newcastle.

Flybe (code BE; ☎ 0871 700 0535; www.flybe.com) Serving Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Jersey, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool John Lennon, London City, London Gatwick, London Luton, Manchester, Newcastle, Newquay, Norwich and Southampton.

Ryanair (code FR; ☎ 0871 246 0000; www.ryanair.com) Serving Aberdeen, Birmingham, Blackpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool John Lennon, London Gatwick, London Luton, London Stansted, Manchester, Newcastle and Newquay.

Scot Airways (code CB; ☎ 0870 606 0707; www.scotairways.com) Serving Dundee, Edinburgh, London City and Southampton.

Bicycle

Compact Britain is a bike-friendly destination, with urban and countryside routes attracting plenty of pedal pushers. Helmets are not compulsory here but they are advisable

since some routes – particularly in cities – can be overly crowded. While the best roads for cycling are country lanes, many urban centres have designated bike paths. Cost-effective bike rentals (from £6 per half-day) are available in larger towns. See Cycling (p273) for further information.

Bus

Buses are the cheapest way to get around in Britain but they can be slow, with some services dawdling interminably before reaching their destination. While local services operate in each region, there's also a network of inter-city buses (usually referred to as coaches) covering longer distances. It's advisable to make coach reservations in advance during July and August, either online, by phone or at larger bus stations.

Britain's dominant coach operator is **National Express** (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com), along with its north-of-the-border subsidiary **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk). **Megabus** (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.megabus.com) is its no-frills rival, with a growing roster of services between major cities. It's worth checking out for a bargain (book early for fares from £1) but keep in mind that National Express frequently offers low 'funfares' to compete on Megabus routes.

Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.traveline.org.uk, www.travelinescotland.com; ☎ 8am-8pm) has a comprehensive online search engine covering bus and coach options throughout Britain.

BUS PASSES

The National Express Brit Xplorer pass comes in Hobo (seven-day), Footloose (14-day) and Rolling Stone (28-day) versions, allowing for unlimited travel across more than 1000 destinations. It is only available to non-Brits but can be purchased in the UK. It also offers an annual NX2 discount card for all under 26s (£10, ID required, 30% discount on regular fares). They have a similar card for over 50s. Scottish Citylink offers three-day, five-day and eight-day passes (£35/59/79) for both locals and visitors.

Car & Motorcycle

Often the quickest, most convenient way to travel around Britain is by motorbike or car – particularly in remote areas and for groups of two or more. Cars are often

inconvenient in city centres where parking can be troublesome and expensive. Petrol is also pricey in Britain, especially compared with North America.

DRIVING LICENCE

Your overseas driving licence is valid in Britain for up to 12 months from your date of entry.

HIRE

Vehicle hire is expensive within Britain and it is often better to make arrangements in your home country for a fly/drive deal. Larger operators charge up to £275 per week for a tiny car but rates will vary considerably based on a number of factors, including the pick-up and drop-off locations, whether or not you are picking up on the weekend and how long you are renting the vehicle for. Ask for any special offers and mention that you are shopping around for the best rate. It is also worth considering smaller independent operators in larger cities, as they're usually more open to negotiation.

Following are the major hire companies:

Avis (☎ 0870 010 0287; www.avis.co.uk)

Budget (☎ 0870 153 9170; www.budget.co.uk)

EasyCar (☎ 0906 333 3333; www.easycar.com)

Europcar (☎ 0845 758 5375; www.europecar.co.uk)

Hertz (☎ 0870 844 8844; www.hertz.co.uk)

Thrifty (☎ 01494-751600; www.thrifty.co.uk)

PURCHASE

For longer treks, it may be more cost-effective to buy an older car or a camper van, especially if you split the cost with fellow travellers. Roadworthy near-wrecks cost anywhere from £500 but for something with seats you should budget for around £1000. Make sure the vehicle comes with a logbook and has passed its Ministry of Transport (MOT) test before you hand over any money. Additional costs before you set out on your road trip will include road tax (up to £105 for six months) and third party insurance (often around £400). Check out what's available in the used market via **Autotrader** (www.autotrader.co.uk) and **Exchange and Mart** (www.exchangeandmart.co.uk) magazines.

ROAD RULES

The *Highway Code*, available in most bookshops, contains everything you need

to know about Britain's road rules. Vehicles drive on the left-hand side; seat belts are compulsory in the front seats (also in the back, where they are fitted); and the speed limit is 30mph around built-up areas, 60mph on single carriageways and 70mph on dual carriageways. Remember to give way to your right at roundabouts. The maximum blood-alcohol level for driving is 35mg (100mL). A yellow line along the edge of the road indicates parking restrictions – look for a sign nearby stating exact limits. Motorcyclists must wear helmets. In England and Wales, brown road signs guide you to attractions and places of interest, while blue signs do the same thing in Scotland.

Train

Travelling by train in Britain is far better than flying if you actually want to see the country you are visiting. Train travel also has the added convenience of dropping you right into the centre of town, rather than making you struggle in from an airport out in the middle of nowhere. But with new trains and faster rail services in recent years (redressing decades of underinvestment) fares can be expensive. There are two ways to circumvent this expense: book your tickets early and be flexible on dates you wish to travel so that you can shop around for the best deal, or consider buying either a discount or unlimited-travel train pass. While the network is extensive, covering all cities and most towns, it can be somewhat difficult to use the train to reach remote areas. For comprehensive fare, route and timetable information, contact the **National Rail Enquiry** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk).

Consider adding almost unlimited one-day regional bus travel at both ends of your train trip by booking a combined bus and train **Plusbus** (www.plusbus.org.uk) ticket. This can be useful for outbound and onward travel to your accommodation.

CLASSES & COSTS

Many but not all trains have two classes: 1st-class tickets are up to 50% more expensive than standard-class tickets and have separate carriages on the trains. There are myriad ticketing options within standard class and the system is needlessly complex on some

routes. Following are some of the options available:

Apex The cheapest option for long-distance outward and return journeys on different days. Must be booked at least 48 hours in advance; availability is limited.

Cheap Day Return For outward and return journeys on the same day (usually limited to travel after 9.30am); often costs little more than a one-way fare and is a great deal for day-trippers.

SuperSaver Return ticket, but with weekday peak time travel, Friday travel and holiday travel not allowed.

Keep in mind that there are dozens of train operators in Britain, many servicing the same routes. Frequent promotions are advertised, especially during low or shoulder seasons, and these can dramatically reduce fares. While the no-frills, low-cost approach has not yet deeply infiltrated the train market, Megabus subsidiary **Megatrain** (☎ 0900 120 0300; www.megatrain.com) recently launched routes between London, Bath, Exeter, Portsmouth and Salisbury. If you book these tickets far enough in advance, fares can be as low as £1.

RESERVATIONS

Reserving your tickets is recommended for travel during summer, in peak times and on popular routes. Advance tickets can be purchased at any train station, or online via **Qjump** (www.qjump.co.uk) or **Trainline** (www.thetrainline.com).

TRAIN PASSES

The Young Persons Railcard (£20), Senior Railcard (£20) and Disabled Persons Railcard (£14) are each valid for up to 12 months and provide a one-third discount on most trips within Britain. Check out the various options at the **Railcard website** (www.railcard.co.uk). Applications can be processed over the counter at the larger stations: you will need to show proof of age or student enrolment to get the Young Persons or Senior Railcards, and proof of entitlement for the Disabled Persons Railcard. Some regions will also offer their own discount train passes, with the southeast's Network Card (£20) being a particularly popular choice.

The most convenient, cost-effective option for extensive train travel is the **BritRail** (www.britrail.com) pass. You must buy them in your home country via the **BritRail** or **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com) websites or from larger travel agents. With a validated pass,

you do not need to pick up tickets: just step on the train and show your pass to the attendant. You might consider paying that little bit extra for a 1st-class pass, especially if you plan on travelling during the crowded summer season. Winter discounts are offered on some BritRail passes.

Pass options include the popular BritRail Consecutive Pass (unlimited four- to 31-

day travel for US\$218 to US\$702) and the BritRail Flexipass (four-, eight- or 15-day travel over a two-month period for US\$275 to US\$604). England-only and Scotland-only versions of these passes are cheaper. There are also popular nonconsecutive London passes (US\$70 to US\$176). Remember that Eurail passes are not valid in Britain.