

KwaZulu-Natal



Rough and ready, smart and sophisticated, rural and rustic, KwaZulu-Natal is as eclectic as its cultures, people and landscapes. It's a region where glassy malls touch shabby suburbs, action-packed adventurers ooze adrenaline, while laid-back beach bods drip with suntan lotion. Mountainous landscapes contrast with flat dry savannas while the towns' downtown streets, teeming with African life, markets and noise, are in stark contrast to the sedate tribal settlements in rural areas. Throw in the wildlife, from the Big Five to rare marine species, the historic intrigue of the old Battlefields, and the sand, sea, surf and sun of the coast's glossy resort towns, and you get a tantalising taste of local heritage and authentic African highlights. Little wonder then that this is on the tourist 'must-do' list.

KwaZulu-Natal has its metropolitan heart in the port of Durban and its nearby historic capital, Pietermaritzburg. The beaches along this coast attract local holiday-makers and visitors wishing to soak up the four 'S's. Head north and you enter Zululand and the Elephant Coast, home to some of Africa's most evocative traditional settlements and cultural sites, where Zulu culture and heritage are proudly displayed. The region also boasts alluring national parks and isolated, wild, coastal reserves. Head northwest of Durban, around the towns of Ladysmith and Dundee, and you enter another realm: the historic heartland where the history of the province was thrashed out on the Battlefields during the Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer Wars. The province's border in the far west, the heritage-listed uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountain range, features awesome peaks, unforgettable vistas and excellent hiking opportunities. KwaZulu-Natal stimulates your senses.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Wildlife-spotting through the Big Five stomping ground of **Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park** (p335) or sitting near a pan at dawn at **Mkhuze Game Reserve** (p345)
- Visiting five distinct ecosystems in one day in the **Greater St Lucia Wetland Park** (p339)
- Hiking the peaks of the Drakensberg's magnificent Amphitheatre in **Royal Natal National Park** (p349)
- Driving through the clouds over the **Sani Pass** (p356) to Lesotho
- Reliving the timeless clashes of the Anglo-Zulu War at **Isandlwana** and **Rorke's Drift** (p370)
- Enjoying the museums and restaurants of the capital, **Durban** (p302)



■ POPULATION: 9.3 MILLION

■ AREA: 92,100 SQ KM

HISTORY

Battled over by Boers, Brits and Zulus, Natal was named by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who sighted the coastline on Christmas Day 1497, and named it for the natal day of Jesus. It took the British Empire more than 300 years to set its sights on the region, proclaiming it a colony in 1843. Briefly linked to the Cape Colony in 1845, Natal again became a separate colony in 1856, when its European population numbered less than 5000.

The introduction of Indian indentured labour in the 1860s – sections of the province still retain a subcontinental feel – and the subsequent development of commercial agriculture (mainly sugar) boosted development, and the colony thrived from 1895, when train lines linked Durban's port (dredged to accommodate big ships) with the booming Witwatersrand.

The recorded history of the province up until the Union of South Africa is full of conflict: the *mfeqane* (the 'forced migration' of South African tribes; the 'crushing' in Zulu) the Boer-Zulu and the Anglo-Zulu Wars, which saw the Zulu kingdom subjugated; and the two wars between the British and the Boers. See p35 for more details about the origin and development of the *mfeqane*.

Just after the 1994 elections, Natal Province was renamed KwaZulu-Natal, in recognition of the fact that the Zulu homeland of KwaZulu comprises a large part of the province. From that time, Ulundi (the former KwaZulu capital), and Pietermaritzburg (the former Natal homeland capital) enjoyed joint status as capital of the KwaZulu-Natal until 2005, when Pietermaritzburg was named the province's official capital.

CLIMATE

The weather (and the water, thanks to the Agulhas current) stays warm year-round along much of the coast, with Durban lapping up a heady 230 sunny days a year. In summer, the heat and humidity, combined with the crowds that flood to the coast to enjoy it, can be exhausting, with temperatures regularly in the mid-thirties (Celsius). Most of the interior enjoys similarly balmy conditions, but sudden and explosive electrical thunderstorms, especially in the

uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountains and northern KwaZulu-Natal, often roll in during the afternoon. Winter even brings a dusting of snow to the higher peaks.

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Wildlife (Map p359; ☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Queen Elizabeth Park, Duncan McKenzie Dr, Pietermaritzburg) is an essential first stop for those planning to spend time in the province's excellent parks and reserves. Accommodation within the parks ranges from humble camp sites to luxurious lodges; the free *Fees & Charges* booklet lists accommodation options and prices, as well as entrance charges, for all KZN Wildlife reserves. Maps to the parks are also available here.

Except where expressly stated, all accommodation must be booked in advance through either the Pietermaritzburg office, or the **KZN Wildlife booking office** (Map pp306-7; ☎ in Durban 031-304 4934, in Pietermaritzburg 033-845 1000; Tourist Junction, 1st fl, cnr 160 Pine St & Soldiers Way, Durban). You can book in person, by phone or via email. Last-minute bookings (ie those within 48 hours) must be made direct with the camp site (and are subject to availability).

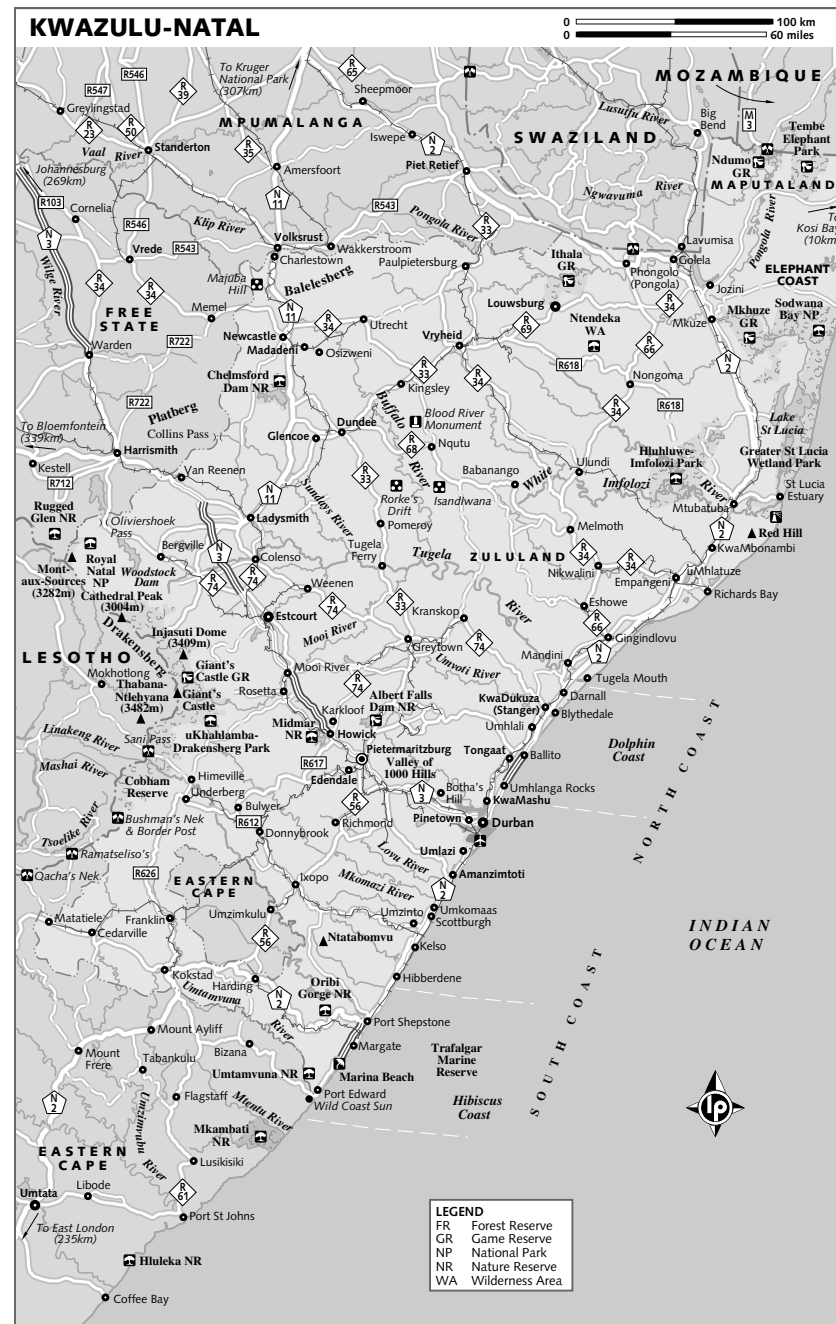
Officially, the gate entry times of all parks are 5am to 7pm (1 October to 31 March: summer) and 6am to 6pm (1 April to 30 September: winter). These tend to change, although not substantially. We have listed the summer hours promoted by the individual parks at the time of research.

While many of the parks are a must-see for animal lovers and outdoorsy types, their camp sites are also excellent for those touring South Africa on a budget.

If you only have time to visit one or two reserves, highlights include the Royal Natal National Park (p349) for uKhahlamba-Drakensberg vistas, Hluhluwe-Imfolozi (p335) for the wildlife, Ithala (p337) and Mkhuzi (p345) for stunning African atmosphere, and Kosi Bay (p344) and the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park (p339) for classic coastal scenery.

LANGUAGE

Eleven official languages are spoken in South Africa, but English, Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans are most widely used in KwaZulu-Natal. Also see p651.



GETTING THERE & AROUND

Durban, with flights, buses and trains to destinations across the country, is KwaZulu-Natal's undisputed transport hub, and at least nationally, the city is well connected. Getting around the province itself, however, is a different story. While long-distance buses run to Port Shepstone, Margate and Kokstad in the south, Richards Bay, Empanjeni and Vryheid in the north and a string of towns including Estcourt, Ladysmith and Newcastle in the west, many of the more remote locations are a headache to get to on public transport. Minibus taxis provide a useful back-up, but distances are large and relying on them as your sole means of getting about will mean many long hours in the back of a cramped van.

If you want to explore the region's true highlights (Drakensberg, the national parks and reserves and the Battlefields), you are better off hiring a car. Durban has a reasonable choice of operators, although they are not as competitive as those in its sister cities. Most roads are good, but a few locations – the Sani Pass (to which you can easily take a tour from Underberg), Tembe Elephant Park and Kosi Bay require a 4WD.

The Baz Bus links most of the province's hostels.

See p318 and Getting There & Away sections in this chapter for more details on transport.

DURBAN

☎ 031 / pop 3.5 million

Durban is like a maturing adolescent: sophisticated, sinful and ever-changing. Stretching along a swathe of butter-yellow sand, South Africa's third-largest city (known as eThekweni in Zulu) has always been known as one of the country's great escapes, offering a lively, if slightly tacky, prepackaged seaside holiday. But this has changed over the past few years. More recently, Durban is frequented as much for its stylish cafés, good shopping and cultural offerings.

The beachfront, with its multikilometre stretch of high-rise hotels and snack bars, remains a city trademark. Traditionally Durban was the silly-season stomping ground of white tourists from Johannesburg (Jo'burg) and Pretoria, who relished the beaches and

central metropolitan hub. Today, however, Durban caters to a more cosmopolitan market of all colours and creed. The city centre, peppered with some grandiose colonial buildings and fascinating Art Deco architecture, throbs to a distinctly African beat. Home to the largest concentration of people of Indian descent in the country, Durban also boasts a distinctive Asian twang, with the marketplaces and streets of the Indian area teeming with the sights, sounds and scents of the subcontinent.

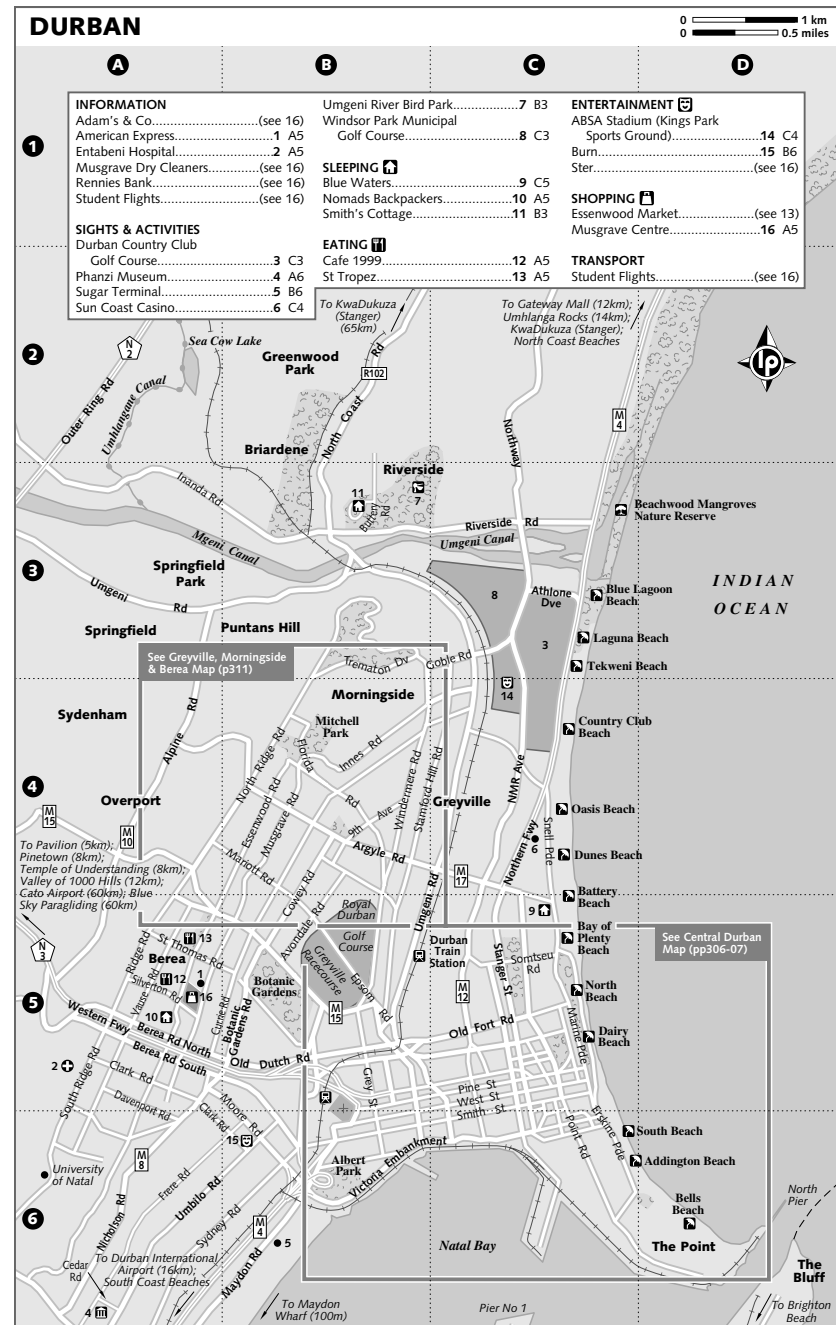
Much of Durban's seafront looks the worse for wear and the centre's streets have lost some shimmer, especially when the sun goes in. Many international offices have relocated to the suburbs and, despite tax incentives introduced in 2004 to encourage investment in central buildings, plus on-going development around the Point, areas of the city are like the visitors at the end of their stay – a little tired.

While the beachfront is still a favourite spot (the popular uShaka Marine World, casino and the Point developments have added some safer beach zones to those that were previously no-go areas), many visitors, wary of the city's increasing reputation for crime, and seeking more than surf, sun, sea and sand, base themselves at the more sedate suburbs such as Greyville, Morningside and Berea. These are chock-a-block with accommodation options, shopping malls, funky bars, stylish eateries and upper-echelon Durbanites. They also feature excellent museums and galleries.

HISTORY

It took some time for Durban to be established. Natal Bay, on which the city is centred, provided refuge for seafarers at least as early as 1685, and it's thought that Vasco da Gama anchored here in 1497. Though the Dutch bought a large area of land around the bay from a local chief in 1690, their ships didn't make it across the sand bar at the entrance to the bay until 1705, by which time the chief had died, and his son refused to acknowledge the deal.

With a good port established at Delagoa Bay (now Maputo in Mozambique), Natal Bay attracted little attention from Europeans until 1824, when Henry Fynn and Francis Farewell set up a base here to trade for ivory with the Zulu. Shaka, a powerful Zulu



chief (see p35), granted land around the bay to the trading company and it was accepted in the name of King George IV.

The settlement was slow to prosper, partly because of the chaos Shaka was causing in the area. By 1835 there was a small town with a mission station, and that year it took the name D'Urban, after the Cape Colony governor.

In 1837 the Voortrekkers crossed the Drakensberg and founded Pietermaritzburg, 80km northwest of Durban. The next year, after Durban was evacuated during a raid by the Zulu, the Boers claimed control. It was reoccupied by a British force later that year, but the Boers stuck by their claim. The British sent troops to Durban to secure the settlement, but were defeated by the Boers at the Battle of Congella in 1842.

The Boers retained control for a month until a British frigate arrived (fetched by teenager Dick King, who rode the 1000km of wild country between Durban and Grahamstown in Eastern Cape in 10 days) and dislodged them. The next year Natal was annexed by the British, and Durban began its growth as an important colonial port city. In 1860 the first indentured Indian labourers arrived to work the cane fields. Despite the unjust system – slave labour by another name – many free Indian settlers arrived in 1893, including Mohandas Gandhi (see the boxed text, p40).

ORIENTATION

Marine Pde, which fronts the beach, is one of Durban's seaside focal points. The parade features several midrange accommodation options, as well as entertainment venues. Formerly derelict, the Point, which runs along the spit south of Marine Pde, is slowly being revived. The area's huge uShaka Marine World theme park has its own patrolled beach; sections of Point Rd and adjoining streets should still be avoided.

West St starts as a mall, but further west it becomes one of central Durban's main streets. The City Hall and the centre of town are about 1km west of the beach, straddling West and Smith Sts.

The Indian area is on the western side of the city centre, around Grey and Victoria Sts. There is a bustle and vibrancy here that's missing from most commercial districts in South Africa.

Near the Indian area, especially around Berea train station, thousands of Zulu have set up camp in an extraordinarily jumbled 'township' right on the city centre's doorstep. Most of these people are near-destitute and live in appalling conditions, so conspicuously wealthy tourists are obvious targets for theft.

Northwest of the city, starting at a ridge and spreading beyond, is the area known as Berea. This incorporates the beginning of the wealthier suburbs (including Greyville, Morningside, Musgrave and the suburb of the same name, Berea), rich with pubs, clubs, eateries and hostels, and the lively Florida and Windermere Rds. Wild elephants roamed the Berea Ridge well into the 1850s; these days, it's the safest place to take a breather from the bustling centre.

The Umgeni River marks the northern boundary of the city, although the suburbs have sprawled over the river all the way up the coast to Umhlanga Rocks, a big resort and retirement town. Inland from Umhlanga Rocks is Phoenix, an Indian residential area named after Gandhi's commune.

On the city's western fringe is Pinetown, a vast collection of dormitory suburbs. A fair proportion of Durban's mainly black population lives in townships surrounding the city. These include Cato Manor, Richmond Farm, KwaMashu, Lindelani, Ntuzuma and the Greater Inanda area.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Adam's & Co (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 8571; 341 West St) Good bookshop with a second outlet at the Musgrave Centre in Berea.

Ike's Books & Collectables (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 9214; 48a Florida Rd, Morningside; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) More like a museum than a bookshop, this antique-filled delight is chock-a-block with 1st editions and is everything an antiquarian bookshop should be.

Steve & Toni's (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-301 2801; 7 Mark Lane; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3.30pm Sat) A labyrinthine bookshop selling second-hand books, and with an exchange service.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 10177)

General emergency (☎ 031-361 0000)

Main police station (Map pp306-7; ☎ 10111; Stanger Rd) North of the city centre.

Police office (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-368 3399; Marine Pde) Near Funworld on the beach.

Internet Access

Most hostels offer Internet access. Charges start at about R40 per hour. Other options: **Internet café** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-305 6998; 1st fl, Workshop, Aliwal St; per hr R25; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) In the city centre.

Internet café (Map p311; ☎ 031-202 7733; Musgrave Centre, Photoworld, Shop 323; per hr R34; ☎ 9am-6pm)

Laundry

McKleens (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 5722; Palmer St; ☎ 8am-5pm)

Musgrave Dry Cleaners & Laundry Services

(Map p303; ☎ 031-201 1936; 2nd fl, Shop 242, Musgrave Centre, Musgrave Rd; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm Sat)

Medical Services

Entabeni Hospital (Map p303; ☎ 031-204 1200, 24hr trauma centre 031-204 1377; 148 South Ridge Rd, Berea) The trauma centre charges R600 per consultation, the balance of which is refunded if the full amount is not utilised.

Travel Doctor (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-360 1122; durban@traveldoctor.co.za; International Convention Centre, 45 Ordnance Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) For travel-related advice.

Money

There are banks with ATMs and change facilities across the city. These include Standard Bank, FNB and Nedbank.

American Express (Central Durban (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-301 5541; 11th fl, Nedbank Bldg, Durban Club Place; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat); Musgrave Centre (Map p303; ☎ 031-202 8733; FNB House, 151 Musgrave Rd, Musgrave) The central Durban branch is accessed from the lane leading from Smith St to the Durban Manor Hotel.

Rennies Bank (Central Durban (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-305 5722; ground fl, 333 Smith St); Musgrave Centre (Map p303; ☎ 031-202 7833; Shop 311, Level 3, Musgrave Centre; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat)

Post

Branch post office (Map pp306-7; Sea View St; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4.40pm Wed, 8am-noon Sat)

Main post office (Map pp306-7; cnr West & Gardiner Sts; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Has a poste restante service.

Tourist Information

You can pick up a free copy of the bi-monthly *What's On in Durban* pamphlet at Tourist Junction. The monthly *Durban for All Seasons* is available from most hotels.

Durban Africa (Tourist Junction (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 4934; www.durbanexperience.co.za; 1st fl, Tourist Junction) Covers Durban; Airport (☎ 031-408 1000; ☎ 7am-9pm) In the arrivals hall; Marine Pde (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 2595; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun) Next to Joe Kool's; uShaka Marine World (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 8099; ☎ 9am-6pm).

KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority Information Office

(Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-366 7516/7; www.zulu.org.za; ground fl, Tourist Junction) Deals with the whole province and offers a smorgasbord of reference and promotional brochures.

Tourist Junction (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 4934; 160 Pine St, cnr Soldiers Way; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) The main tourist information centre is in the old train station (built in 1894).

There are various booking agencies in the Tourist Junction complex:

KZN Wildlife (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 4934; www.kznwildlife.com; 1st fl, Tourist Junction) Here you can reserve accommodation in KZN Wildlife parks and reserves.

South African Parks Reservations (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 4934; www.sanparks.org; 1st fl, Tourist Junction) Takes accommodation bookings for national parks across the country.

Travel Agencies

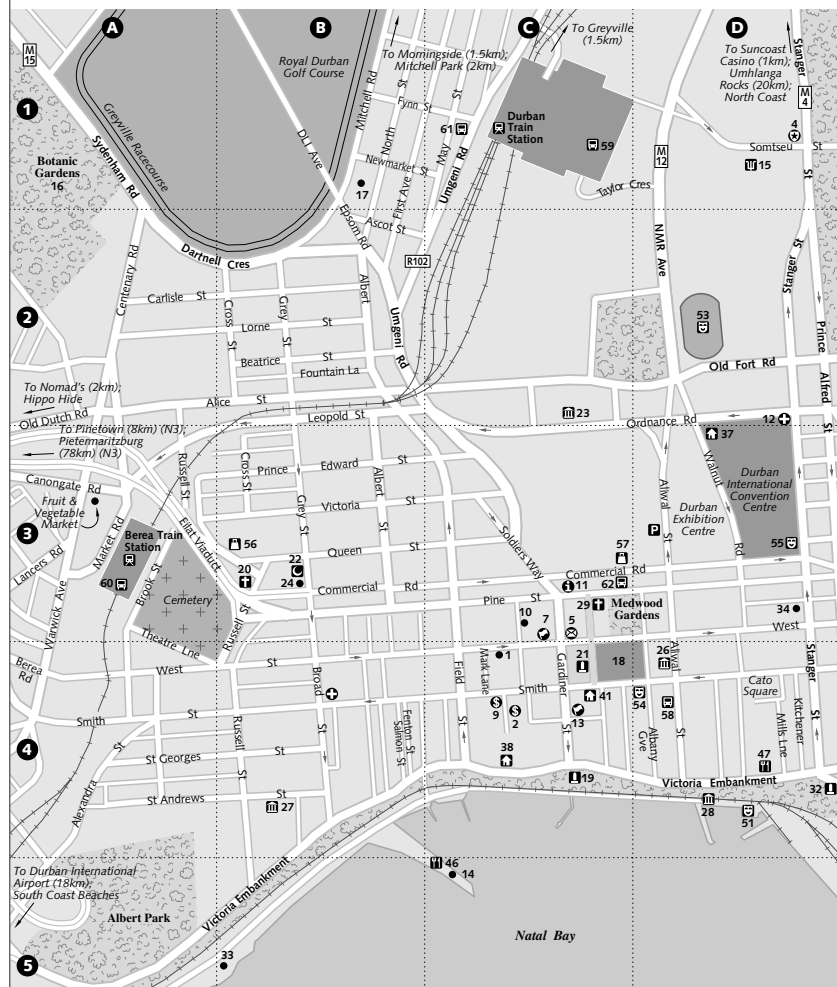
Student Flights (Map p303; ☎ 031-202 5995; www.studentflights.co.za; Shop 324, Musgrave Centre, Musgrave Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Specialises in discounted student and backpacker flights.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

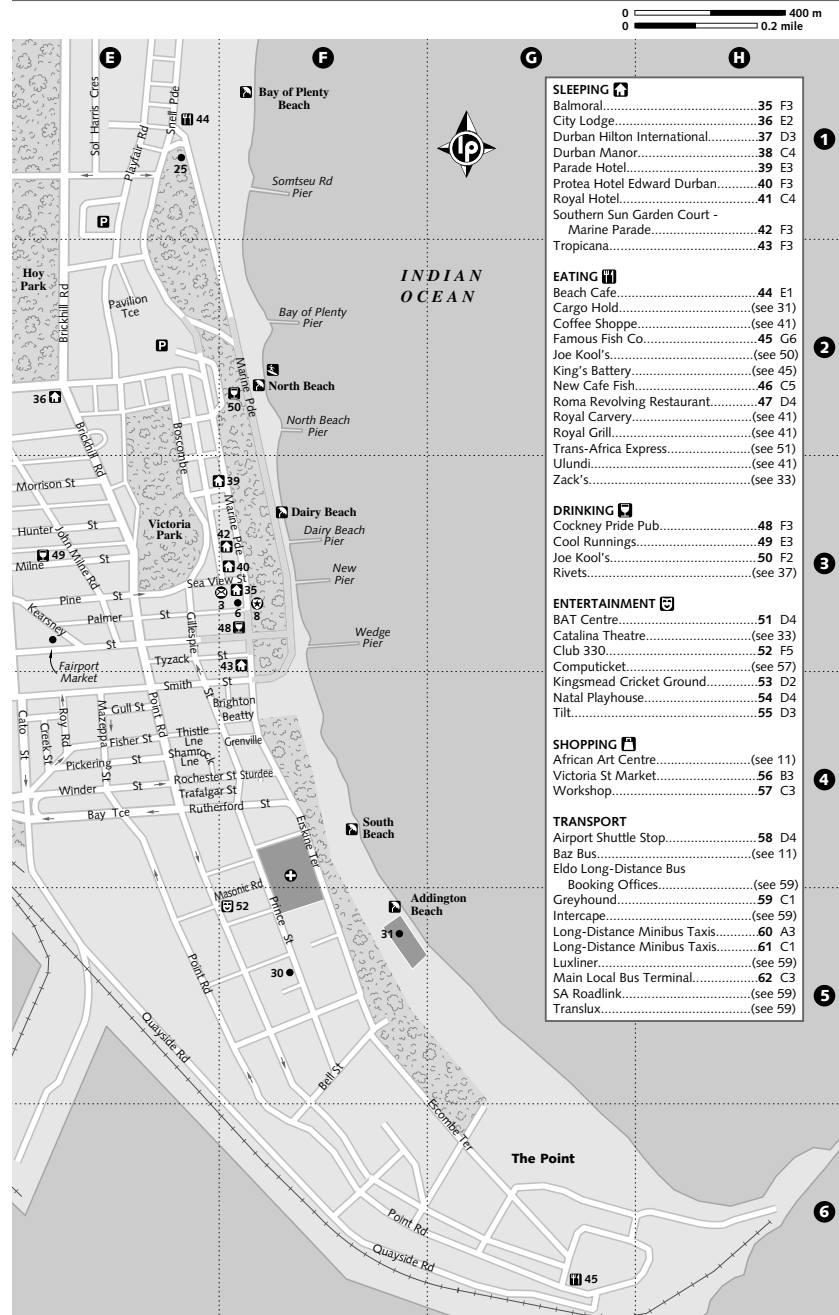
Crime against tourists and locals alike is a stark reality in Durban. Muggings and pick-pockets are a problem around the beach esplanade and some central areas. Particular care should be taken around Point Rd and the area behind the esplanade. Avoid South Beach and areas around the Wheel Shopping Centre. Extra care should also be taken around the train station and the informal settlements nearby.

Many areas including the centre and beachfront are potentially dangerous (especially at night) and central Durban becomes a ghost town as people head to the suburbs for entertainment. Always catch a cab to nightspots (and with a group) if possible.

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KWAZULU-NATAL

KWAZULU-NATAL

If you have a car, make sure you park it in a locked garage after dark. Do not leave valuables exposed on your car seats while driving – ‘smash and grabs’ have been increasing occurrences.

Wherever you are, do not make yourself a target: don't carry or flaunt valuables of any kind and wherever you are, if you are confronted by muggers, never resist and hand over your valuables – immediately.

TOURS

Perhaps the best way to experience Durban is in the company of a professional tour guide. Many hostels arrange backpacker-oriented tours and activities in the Durban area and around KwaZulu-Natal.

Durban Africa (Map pp306-7; ☎ 304 4934; www.durbanexperience.co.za; 1st fl, Tourist Junction) Runs interesting three-hour walking tours of the oriental and historical regions of the city (adult/child R50/25), as well as township tours. It can also provide a list of tour guides.

Sharks Board boat trip (🚣 in Umhlanga Rocks 031-566 0400; Durban Harbour; 2hr trip R150; 🕒 departs 6.30am) A fascinating trip is to accompany Sharks Board personnel in their boat when they tag and release trapped sharks and other fish from the shark nets that protect Durban's beachfront (see p326).

Tekweni Eco-Tours (☎ 031-463 2576; www.tekweni ecotours.co.za) Offers a Durban City Explorer tour to museums, markets and townships.

SIGHTS

Note that a tour may be the best way to see Durban's sights.

Beachfront

You'll either love or hate the Durban beachfront and sandy beaches. If you dip into the city's summer surf and sun, you have a playground of more than 6km of warm-water beaches (protected by the requisite shark nets). The 'Golden Mile' Beaches run from Blue Lagoon (at the mouth of the Umgeni River) to uShaka Marine World on the Point. The 'private' beaches near the casino and uShaka Marine World are accessed through the venues themselves.

But Durban's beachfront ain't for everyone. To some, its smorgasbord of bars and restaurants and hectic holiday atmosphere are garish and tacky. If you do take the plunge, always swim in patrolled areas, which are indicated by flags.

uShaka Marine World (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-368 6675; www.ushakamarineworld.co.za; Addington Beach, the Point; Wet'n'Wild adult/child/senior R60/45/45, Sea World R85/55/75; 🕒 9am-6pm high season, 10am-5pm low season) is a massive new investment in improving the southern beachfront area. Filling a previously run-down 16-hectare site on the Point, the showcase R700-million theme park opened on 30 April 2004. Divided into several areas (Sea World, Wet'n'Wild World and uShaka Beach), the park boasts one of the world's largest aquariums, the biggest collection of sharks in the southern hemisphere, a seal stadium, Africa's largest dolphinarium, marine animals and exhibits, a mock-up 1940s steamer wreck featuring two classy restaurants, a shopping centre, enough freshwater rides to make you seasick, and a beach featuring activities from surfing lessons to kayaking.

The **Promenade** is the pedestrianised tourist superhighway running up the beach from Smith St north of uShaka. On the other side of the road, particularly along Marine Pde, you will find the canyon of high-rise hotels, bars, restaurants and nightclubs typical of seaside cities from Florida to Queensland.

In summer, rickshaws ply their trade along the beachfront, many sporting exotic Zulu regalia. In 1904 there were about 2000 registered rickshaw pullers, and it was an important means of transport. A 15-minute ride costs about R25 (plus R10 for a happy snap).

After uShaka, the beachfront's paying attractions are a bit of a letdown. A few, however, make for a good afternoon out.

The glitzy, nouveau Art Deco of **Sun Coast Casino** (Map p303; ☎ 031-328 3000; www.suncoastcasino.co.za; Snell Pde) is popular among locals and features slot machines, cinemas and some well-attended restaurants. The casino's **Sun Coast Beach** (admission R5; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) is a safe and pleasant spot to lie and bake. It has lawn, deck chairs and brollies.

Mini Town (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 7892; 114 Snell Pde; adult/child R12/6; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm) is a typically tacky model city with replicas of Durban's best-known buildings of the 1970s – best for the mini adults.

Victoria Embankment

Maydon Wharf, which runs along the southwestern side of the harbour and south of Victoria Embankment, contains the **Sugar**

Terminal (Map p303; ☎ 031-365 8153; 51 Maydon Rd; adult/concession R13/6; tours 8.30am, 10am, 11.30am & 2pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am, 10am & 11am Fri), which offers an insight into the former importance of the sugar trade.

A little further north, **Wilson's Wharf** (Map pp306-7; www.wilsonswarf.co.za) is a reasonably hip waterside development, with a clutch of decent eateries (p315), boat-charter outfits (p312), shops and a theatre. Enter by car opposite Fenton St.

Dick King Statue (Map pp306-7; Victoria Embankment), near Gardiner St, commemorates the historic ride of this teenager in 1842 to fetch a British frigate, after the Boers took control of Durban.

The **Port Natal Maritime Museum** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2230; Maritime Dr; adult/child R3/1.50; 🕒 8am-3.45pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3.45pm Sun) is on a service road running parallel to Victoria Embankment. You can explore two former steam tugs and see the huge wicker basket once used for hoisting passengers onto ocean liners.

BAT Centre (Map pp306-7; Maritime Pl) is a colourful bohemian arts centre started in 1995 as a job-creation and training project. It houses upmarket art and craft shops, artists' studios (explore a bit to find them), occasional live music, and a bar-restaurant (Trans-African Express), all cut through with a lively trans-Africa theme. Free activities, such as regular drum circles, are on offer.

The **Vasco da Gama Clock** (Map pp306-7), a florid Victorian monument on the Embankment just east of Stanger St, was presented by the Portuguese government in 1897, the 400th anniversary of Vasco da Gama's sighting of Natal.

Durban's **harbour** is the busiest in Southern Africa (and the ninth busiest in the world). A pleasant place to view the activity is from Wilson's Wharf or the balcony at the BAT centre. At the southern end of the beachfront, the Point is an old area on a spit of land between the harbour and the ocean. From the restaurants at the end of the Point you can watch ships coming through the narrow heads into the harbour. These eateries will be relocated in the future; there are plans to widen the channel mouth by a further 100m in 2007. Point Rd, leading down to the Point, runs through a notoriously dodgy area and is definitely unsafe at night.

City Centre

Dominating the city centre is the opulent 1910 Edwardian neobaroque **City Hall** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2137; Smith St). In front of the hall is Francis Farewell Sq, where Fynn and Farewell made their camp in 1824.

The **Art Gallery** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2264; City Hall; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) houses an outstanding collection of contemporary South African works, especially Zulu arts and crafts – both temporary and rotating exhibitions (look out for the collection of baskets from Hlabisa, finely woven from a variety of grasses and incorporating striking natural colours).

The **Natural Science Museum** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2256; City Hall; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) boasts an impressive display of stuffed birds and insects, plus African animals. Check out the cockroach and dung beetle displays, the reconstructed dodo and the life-sized dinosaur model.

The **municipal library** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2117; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) is also in the City Hall complex.

The **Old Courthouse Museum** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2229; 77 Aliwal St; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) is in the beautiful 1863 courthouse behind the City Hall. It offers a worthwhile insight into the highs and lows of colonial living and houses an interesting sugar-mill exhibit.

The excellent **KwaMuhle Museum** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2237; 130 Ordinance Rd; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) is a must-see for those interested in understanding South Africa. This was formerly Bantu Administration headquarters, where Durban's colonial authorities formulated the structures of urban racial segregation (the 'Durban System'), the blueprints of South Africa's apartheid policy. There are powerful displays on urban Durban as it was, plus another on Cato Manor, Durban's contemporary informal settlement and the site of the new South Africa's ambitious urban-renewal programme.

On the eastern side of the main post office on West St is **Church Sq** (Map pp306-7), with its old vicarage and the 1909 **St Paul's Church**.

The **Old House Museum** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-311 2261; 31 St Andrews St; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) is the restored home of Natal's first prime minister.

Indian Area

The big **Juma Mosque** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-306 0026; cnr Queen & Grey Sts; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11am Sat) is the largest in the southern hemisphere; call ahead for a guided tour. **Madrasa Arcade** is next to the mosque between Grey St and Cathedral Rd near the Catholic Emmanuel Cathedral.

Alayam Hindu Temple (Map pp306-7; Somtseu Rd; 🕒 7am-6pm) is the oldest and biggest in South Africa. It's away from the main Indian area, on Somtseu Rd, which runs between Stanger St and NMR Ave.

See p318 for information on the popular Victoria St Market.

Greyville, Morningside & Berea

The **Campbell Collections** (Map p311; ☎ 031-207 3432; 220 Marriott Rd, cnr Essenwood Rd; admission R15; 🕒 by appointment only) are well worth seeing. Muckleneuk, a superb house designed by Sir Herbert Baker, holds the documents and artefacts collected by Dr Killie Campbell and her father Sir Marshall Campbell (KwaMashu township is named after him), which are extremely important records of early Natal and Zulu culture.

Killie Campbell began collecting works by black artists 60 years before the Durban Gallery did so, and she was the first patron of Barbara Tyrrell. Tyrrell recorded the traditional costumes of the indigenous peoples; her paintings beautifully convey clothing and decoration, and the grace of the people wearing them.

The **Phanzi Museum** (Map p303; ☎ 031-206 1591; 41 Cedar Rd, Glenwood, cnr Frere Rd; admission R30; 🕒 by appointment) houses a private collection of Southern African tribal artefacts, displayed in the basement of a Victorian home. Owner-collector Paul Mikula has amassed outstanding examples of contemporary sculptures, beadwork of KwaZulu-Natal, carved statues, and artefacts from pipes to fertility dolls.

The **Botanic Gardens** (Map p303; ☎ 031-309 1170; Sydenham Rd; admission free; 🕒 7.30am-5.15pm 16 Apr-15 Sep, 7.30am-5.45pm 16 Sep-15 Apr) is a 20-hectare garden with one of the rarest cycads, *Encephalartos woodii*, as well as many species of bromeliad and is a pleasant place to wander. On weekends local bridal parties galore pose with their petals for the photographers. The gardens play host to an annual concert series featuring the KZN Philharmonic

Orchestra and other musicians (adults/children/students R35/free/25).

North & West Durban

Umgeni River Bird Park (Map p303; ☎ 031-579 4600; Riverside Rd; adult/child R20/15; 🕒 9am-5pm) on the Umgeni River makes for a relaxing escape from the throng. You can see many African bird species in lush vegetation and aviaries. Look out for the chicks in the 'baby room'.

Temple of Understanding (☎ 031-403 3328; Bhaktiedanta Sami Rd; 🕒 10am-1pm & 4-8pm), situated 8km west of Durban, is the biggest Hare Krishna temple in the southern hemisphere. This unusual building also houses a vegetarian restaurant. Follow the N3 towards Pietermaritzburg and then branch off to the N2 south. Take the Chatsworth turn-off and turn right towards the centre of Chatsworth.

ACTIVITIES

With a temperate climate and excellent facilities, Durbanites are passionate about their nature, outdoor and adrenaline-inducing activities. Durban offers heaps of fun for outdoor types.

Bird-Watching

Avian EcoTours (☎ 031-262 8984; www.avianeco.co.za; activities from R350) offers birding walks and excursions around Durban and elsewhere. Guide Terry Walls is also passionate about wildlife conservation.

Canoeing

Trips on nearby rivers can be organised through **180° Adventures** (☎ 031-566 4955; www.180.co.za). Keen paddlers can try their luck by fronting up to one of the canoeing clubs at Blue Lagoon Beach on Umgeni River.

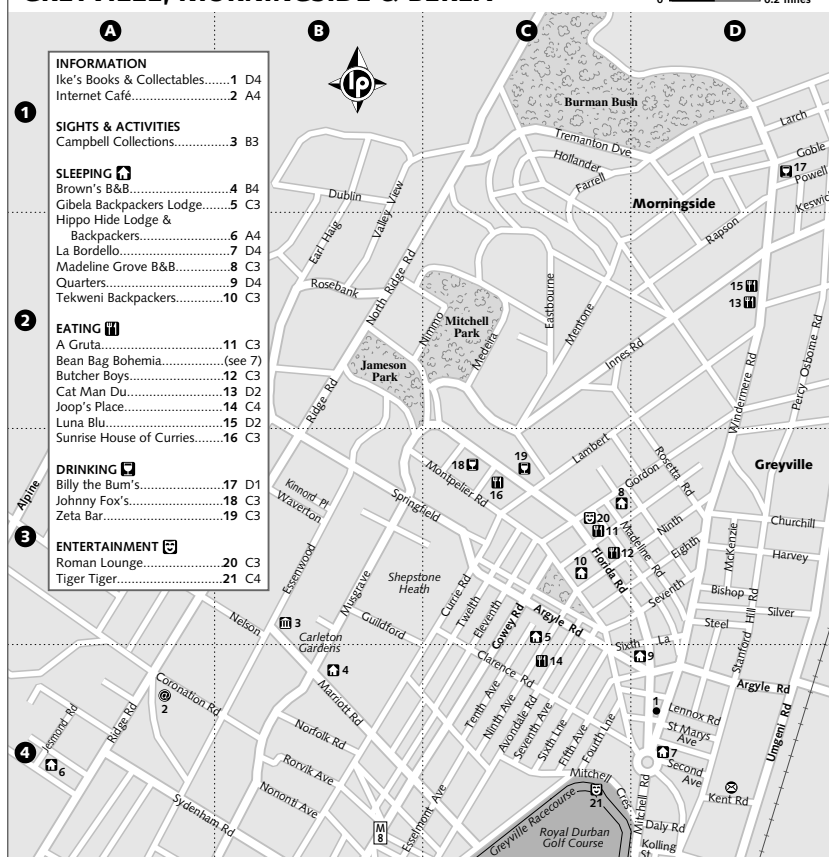
Cycling

Durban Mountain Bike Club (☎ 031-312 9076) runs informal Saturday-afternoon rides. Give it a call and find out where riders meet.

Diving & Fishing

Underwater World (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 5820; www.underwaterworld.co.za; 251 Point Rd) runs open-water courses from R1850 and organises dives to sites around Durban over the weekend (from R140).

GREYVILLE, MORNINGSIDE & BEREA



Dozens of outfits offer sport-fishing charters across Durban. The following include food, drinks and a day's fishing (maximum four to six people) in their prices.

Cool Runnings (Map pp306-7; ☎ 084-701 6912; 49 Milne St; per day from R3000) Kevin from the bar, Cool Runnings, offers a laid-back, distinctly Jamaican-style experience.

Lynski Fishing Charters (☎ 539 3338; www.lynski.com; Durban Harbour; per day 1-6 people from R3800) Ask how the boat got its name.

Golf

Durban has an array of decent golf courses. **Windsor Park Municipal Golf Course** (Map p303; ☎ 031-312 2245; fax 303 2479; NMR Ave; per person from R50; 🕒 visitors welcome 9am-1pm Sat, 8-11am Sun) is one of South Africa's most popular courses.

On another par is the **Durban Country Club** (Map p303; ☎ 031-313 1777; Walter Gilbert Rd; per person from R425), considered by some to be the best golf course in South Africa.

Paragliding & Skydiving

Blue Sky Paragliding (☎ 031-765 1318; www.blusky.co.za) provides tandem flights from R350 and introductory courses from R950. It is at Cato Airport, 60km out of Durban. **Skydive Durban** (☎ 072-214 6040; www.skydivedurban.co.za; tandem jump R1250) offers a seagull's view of Durban.

Surfing, Sailing & Kite-surfing

For surfers, Durban has a multitude of good surfing beaches with any number of breaks

THE KWAZULU-NATAL SURF SCENE *Patrick Moroney & David Malherbe*

Durban and the KwaZulu-Natal coast have a surf culture, quality and history to match anywhere in the world. They are the home of true legends such as Shaun Tomson, Frankie Oberholzer (also known as The Search), Travis Logie, David Weare and Jordy Smith.

Durban itself has a range of quality breaks, given the right swell, all best when the sou'wester blows. South Beach and Addington are normally the best beginner spots, but with the right swell they can throw some gaping barrels. Dairy Pier has the best left-hander of the lot while New Pier, North Beach, Bay of Plenty and Snake Park can be long and hollow, often with great right-handers breaking off the piers. If the town starts getting a little too crowded, then head for the northern town beaches, Battery and Tekweni, which can produce quality waves with fewer people in the water. Joe Kool's (see p317), right on North Beach, is the most popular postsurfing *jol* (party).

The Bluff, just south of Durban, has some good spots, with the infamous Cave Rock being its showpiece. Often compared with Hawaii's Backdoor, the Rock is for experienced surfers only.

The KwaZulu-Natal coast really comes into its own on the north and south coasts, which offer a selection of world-class point breaks and the chance to get away from the city crowds. The coast is best in winter, from April to August, before 10am or 11am, when you're basically guaranteed a northwest land breeze. When solid groundswells roll in from the south, you are assured solid waves. On the north coast the best-known spots are Westbrook (arguably the hollowest wave around), Ballito Bay and Zinkwazi Beach. The south coast offers Greenpoint, Scottburgh, Happy Wanderers, St Michaels and the Spot (all right-handers). Each produces incredibly rideable 1m to 2.5m-plus grinders over rock and sand bottom, with the occasional ride that is a couple of hundred metres. Plenty of barrels are around, but check with locals to be safe. Lucien Beach, near Margate, is the place to check when the northeasterly is blowing. Further south are more right-hand points along the Wild Coast (p282), with plenty of quality waves between.

(see above). **Surf Zone** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-368 5818; Ocean Sports Centre, North Beach; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun) rents out boards (R70/100 per half/full day) and offers lessons (R180 per hour). Upstairs, you'll find the **Time-Warp Surf Museum** (☎ 031-368 5842; admission donation; ☎ 10am-4pm), which is packed with surfie memorabilia.

Durban is an excellent place to learn to sail. **Ocean Sailing Academy** (☎ 031-301 5726; www.oceansailing.co.za) runs the five-day, beginner's ASA 101 course for R2995.

Kite-surfing is available through **Wind-sports** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 4069; www.windsports.co.za; 71 Pine St). A full course (three two-hour lessons, covering everything from safety to surfing) costs R900. Gear hire is available for R300 per day.

White-Water Rafting

The Umkomaas River and mighty Tugela River (uThukela in Zulu, meaning 'the Startling One') are the rafting places in KwaZulu-Natal. The Umkomaas offers some of the best white-water rafting, especially from November to April, when you can rip through Grade II-IV rapids. **180° Adventures** (☎ 031-566 4955; www.180.co.za) organises rafting on both

ivers (from R625 for Tugela and from R350 for Umkomaas). **Umko Rafting** (☎ 083-2700 403; www.umkorrafting.co.za) runs an action-packed four- to five-hour trip plus a more lazy river ride of about 18km with great scenery and a few rapids to keep you alert and busy (R495 and R400 respectively).

Indoor Extreme Activities

The giant Gateway Mall houses some indoor extreme activities including a wave house, the first of its kind in the world, and the highest free-standing indoor climbing rock in the world.

Cruises

The luxury yacht **African Queen** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 032-943 1118; Durban Yacht Harbour; R150; ☎ depart 10am & 1pm) cruises dolphin waters for three hours. Several other boat and charter trips can be arranged from Wilson's Wharf.

FESTIVALS

Kavadi Festival This major Hindu festival is held twice a year (January/February and April/May). It honours the god Muruga, who heals and dispels misfortune and, as a sign of devotion, much self-inflicted pain accompanies the ceremony.

Draupadi Festival An 18-day festival in April/May, in honour of the goddess Draupadi, culminates in fire-walking.

Mariamman For 10 days during July/August the Mariamman, or Porridge Festival, is celebrated.

Diwali The three-day Diwali in December is also known as the Festival of Lights.

Ratha Yatra The colourful, five-day Hare Krishna festival Ratha Yatra, held in December, is also known as the Festival of Chariots.

SLEEPING

Durban Africa's accommodation website www.bookabedahead.co.za allows you to browse and book online. **Durban Africa** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 4934; www.durbanexperience.co.za; 1st fl, Tourist Junction) can also help you out, whatever your budget, but it's best not to front up here on arrival with your luggage as you could become an easy target for theft.

Despite what you think when you see the hotel-lined beachfront promenade, much of Durban's accommodation is also in the western and northwestern suburbs, mainly in the form of upmarket B&Bs and hostels for the budget traveller. Unless you are in Durban for the sun and sand alone, accommodation in the suburbs is better value than the beachfront options. Some hostels will collect you from the airport and many arrange trips to the beach and other places of interest. Many top-end options are in

the suburbs and towards Umhlanga Rocks, with a few in and around the city centre.

Beachfront MIDRANGE

Parade Hotel (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 4565; www.paradehotel.co.za; 191 Marine Pde; s/d incl breakfast R323/435; ☎) The Parade Hotel is a bit old, with a slightly dowdy array of 1970s sales-room furniture and saggy mattresses, but its charming Art Deco dining room resembles a 1950s ballroom. Request a sea-facing room.

Tropicana (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 4222; www.goodersonleisure.com; 85 Marine Pde; s/d R515/780; ☎) The bright and breezy Tropicana is another beachfront tower with an '80s feel, with spacious rooms boasting air-con and TV.

Blue Waters (Map p303; ☎ 031-368 3877; www.bluewatershotel.co.za; 175 Snell Pde; s/d incl breakfast R650/720; ☎) At the northern end of the beachfront away from the madding Promenade crowd, Blue Waters is a classic hotel. The quilted bedheads, velvet chairs and pleasant rooms, all of which are front-facing with balconies, are the type your Auntie Dot would love.

TOP END

Ask about special rates at top-end hotels.

Southern Sun Garden Court – Marine Parade (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 3341; www.southern.sun.com; 167 Marine Pde; s/d incl breakfast R704/850; ☎) One of Southern Sun's four beachfront offerings, this comes from the steel-and-glass school of architecture, with modern-ish décor and uncluttered rooms.

Protea Hotel Edward Durban (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 3681; www.proteahotels.com/edwarddurban; 149 Marine Pde; s/d R792/922; ☎) King of the seafront hotels, this is classic and comfortable, with fresh-polish smells and full-on décor with piped music to match.

Balmoral (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-368 5940; www.raya-hotels.com; 125 Marine Pde; s/d incl breakfast R940/1260; ☎) Making the odd concession to colonial-era splendour, this beachfront place has lashings of understated style and plenty of plush rooms.

Victoria Embankment

Durban Manor (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-366 0700; fax 031-366 0701; 93-96 Victoria Embankment; s/d incl breakfast R385/570; ☎) Housed in the former Durban

Club, one of the city's finest and most opulent colonial-era landmarks, Durban Manor is an impressive jumble of Victorian and Edwardian architectural elements. It has lost some of the Club's former glory (there's no sign of the billiard table) but the large recently renovated rooms ensure a comfortable stay.

City Centre

City Lodge (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 1447; www.citylodge.co.za; cnr Brickhill & Old Fort Rds; s/d R555/690; 📍 📺) This secure place offers motel styling and slick service. It doesn't ooze charm, but it does have everything you would want for the price. Ask about the 'spouse-on-house' special.

Royal Hotel (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-333 6000; www.theroyal.co.za; 267 Smith St; s/d incl breakfast R1620/2160; 📍 📺 📺) Overlooking the City Hall, the Royal is one book you shouldn't judge by its modernish cover. This five-star institution is one of the city's most historical and swankiest offerings and has hosted royalty and Nelson Mandela. There is a special floor assigned to female clients.

Durban Hilton International (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-336 8100; www.hilton.com; 12 Walnut St; r incl breakfast R1805; 📍 📺 📺 📺) Glitzy and chic, this slick, modern behemoth is arguably Durban's most exclusive hotel, with crowds of business travellers and local movers-and-shakers filling the downstairs bar. Some excellent deals take rooms down to R1275.

Greyville, Morningside & Berea

BUDGET

Nomads Backpackers (Map p303; ☎ 031-202 9709; www.durban.co.za/nomads; 70 Essenwood Rd, Berea; dm R60, d with/without bathroom R200/160; 📍 📺 📺) An organised and neat, yet relaxed kind of joint (for those who like relaxing joints), and one that likes to party. If it's too cool in the pool, or the chilled-out crowd at the hostel's 'Bambooza' bar is not your 'thang', then you're a jump away from the cinemas and cappuccino bars of the Musgrave Centre.

Hippo Hide Lodge & Backpackers (Map p311; ☎ 031-207 4366; www.hippohide.co.za; 2 Jesmond Rd, Berea; dm/s/d with shared bathroom R75/120/180; 📍 📺 📺) There's not much room to swing a hippo in this cosy hide, but it pulls in the punters with its friendly, informal style and high standards. It's out on a limb in

terms of location but the staff will help you organise outings. You can always enjoy a wallow in the 'mock rock' pool or kick back in the TV room.

Tekweni Backpackers (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 1433; www.tekwenibackpackers.co.za; 169 Ninth Ave, Morningside; dm with shared bathroom R80, s with shared bathroom R140-160, d with shared bathroom R225-240; 📍 📺) This place looks as hung over as the travellers who stay here. It has a reputation as one of the party hostels, and this is the place for those wanting raucous, gregarious surrounds. Its friendly staff are in the 'nightlife know', and you're just off Florida Rd for social snacks.

Gibela Backpackers Lodge (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 6291; www.gibela.co.za; 119 Ninth Ave, Morningside; dm/s/d with shared bathroom & breakfast R90/175/240; 📍 📺) Housed in a stylish terracotta-coloured 1950s building with a Tuscan feel, this place takes a lot of beating. It has tasteful ethnic décor throughout, shower heads the size of dinner plates, bathroom floors you could eat off, and a friendly, personable feel in a secure location, close to Florida Rd. If you want to know about South Africa, the former tour-guide-now-hostel-owner is your man. Oh, and did we say anything about the delicious breakfasts?

MIDRANGE

Madeline Grove Bed & Breakfast (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 5425; www.madeline.co.za; 116 Madeline Rd, Morningside; s/d incl breakfast R295/450; 📍 📺) This large mansion is configured into various comfortable self-contained apartments both upstairs and down. The separate poolside room is popular among waterbabies. Speaking of which, it's child-friendly.

La Bordello (Map p311; ☎ 031-309 6019; www.beanbagbohemia.co.za; 47/49 Campbell Ave, Morningside; s/d R400/600; 📍 📺) In former times, this boutique hotel was a house of ill-repute. Nowadays it's owned by the Bean Bag Bohemia team, who does good trade with the beautiful people who enjoy its plush Moroccan interiors, aroma oils and breakfast in its small fountain court. It's off Windermere Rd.

Brown's Bed & Breakfast (Map p311; ☎ 031-208 7630; brownb@africa.com; 132 Marriott Rd, Essenwood; s/d R440/660; 📍 📺) The communal living area of this smart establishment is decked out with chic interiors, ornaments and guests to match. These elegant suites are good value.

TOP END

Quarters (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 5246; ceres@threecities.co.za; 101 Florida Rd; s/d R825/1170; 📍 📺) Right in the throbbing heart of Durban's most fashionable eating and drinking quarter, this attractive boutique hotel balances colonial glamour with small-scale home comforts. The cosy rooms have tasteful soft furnishings and balconies, and the restaurant is one of the best in the area.

Umgeni Heights

Smith's Cottage (Map p303; ☎ 031-564 6313; www.smithscottage.8m.com; 5 Mount Argus Rd, Umgeni Heights; dm/d incl breakfast R70/170, self-catering cottage R450; 📍 📺) Travellers frequently praise this comfortable 'home away from home'. Super-helpful owner Pat has it 'down pat', offering accommodation in all shapes and sizes in a friendly, laid-back atmosphere. It's a bit further out, though within chirping distance from the Umgeni River Bird Park, and the hostel's shuttle transport ensures you're not cooped up for long.

EATING

Finding a decent bite to eat in Durban is rarely difficult; the ingredients are fresh and the helpings plentiful, although variety is a little harder to come by. Without doubt, your best bet for a good feed is in the suburbs. Many of the following eateries double as bars once the plates have been cleared.

Beachfront & The Point

While the beachfront is chock-a-block with cheap and cheerful diners, you'll be hard-pressed to find much more than the usual spread of burgers, pizza and candy floss. Several of the beachfront hotels house some passable restaurants. There is a clutch of decent seafood places around the Point (King's Battery), but it's safer to drive there. At the time of research, there was talk of restaurants on the Point being relocated due to the port expansion.

Beach Cafe (Map pp306-7; ☎ 082-762 9223; Bay of Plenty Beach; mains R26-45; 📍 📺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Durbs's hot new beach hang-out. Soak up the sun in a deck chair or sun lounge (R15/25 hire per day), or chill out with a cocktail on the restaurant deck, overlooking the beach and life guards. Seafood BBQs and music on Sundays are planned for the future.

Joe Kool's (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 9697; Lower Marine Pde, North Beach; mains R30-48; 📍 📺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular nightspot's own claim to fame is as 'the world's worst restaurant' – a statement that is not too far from the truth come midnight on a Saturday – but it does serve a great Sunday morning fry-up.

Cargo Hold (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-328 8065; mains R45-190; 📍 📺) lunch & dinner) A seafood encounter of the most novel kind. On the Phantom Ship in uShaka Marina, your dining companions are fish with large teeth – the glass tank forms one of the walls to a shark aquarium. Well-known for casting some high-quality fish dishes with international flavours.

Famous Fish Co (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-368 1060; King's Battery, the Point; mains R75-190; 📍 📺) lunch & dinner; 📺) Something of a Durban institution, with a dreamy sea view (and the cargo ships are so close, they're almost on your plate) this reliable fish restaurant has fed such luminaries as Danny Glover, Jimmy Carter and the Springboks.

Victoria Embankment

The new Wilson's Wharf development on Victoria Embankment has a good choice of seaside eats.

Zack's (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-305 1677; Wilson's Wharf, Victoria Embankment; mains R27-75; 📍 📺) breakfast, lunch & dinner; 📺) Offering café-style dining, this stylish (chain) eatery serves good bistro fare washed down with a blast of fresh sea air.

Trans-Africa Express (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 0804; 1st fl, BAT Centre, Victoria Embankment; mains R28-95; 📍 📺) lunch & dinner) Upstairs at the Bat Centre, with terrace views over the docks, this restaurant serves taste-tempting meals from Madagascar to Morocco. Try the Congo crocodile curry (R95).

New Cafe Fish (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-305 5062; 31 Yacht Mole, Victoria Embankment; mains R45-200; 📍 📺) lunch & dinner) This distinctive green and blue construction was designed to look like an upside-down ship. Its seafood dishes are as appealing as its views of the city and surrounding moored yachts. The best catch is the good-value set menu.

City Centre

Takeaway places around Victoria St Market (p318) have good Indian snacks including

bunny chow (a thick slice of Durban history!), which is a half or quarter loaf of bread hollowed out and filled with beans, traditionally, or curry stew. For daytime munchies and a cheap lunch, follow your nose to near the main post office where there's usually someone with a braai (barbecue) cooking sausages, or try one of the fast food chains at the Workshop (p318).

Roma Revolving Restaurant (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 3337; 32nd fl, John Ross House, Victoria Embankment; mains R50-95; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎ ☎) One of only 37 revolving restaurants worldwide, and one of the few central restaurants surviving in Durban, this reasonably priced Italian eatery offers stunning views over Durban in its own leaning House of John Ross.

The **Royal Hotel** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-333 6000; www.theroyal.co.za; 267 Smith St) has several renowned restaurants (closed Sundays): the **Coffee Shoppe** (mains 28-40) is great for a lunch-eon snack or relaxing cuppa; **Ulundi** (mains R36-60) is the place to sample a Bombay fish curry or a lamb dish; and the **Royal Carvery** (buffet R125) has a buffet for both lunch and dinner.

Greyville, Morningside & Berea

Durban's more affluent suburbs are filled with adventurous and not-so-adventurous eateries. Most whip up the same staple spread of pasta, steak and pizza, usually pepped up with a selection of Indian and African specialities. Prices are generally fair and standards reliable. The adjoining arteries of Florida and Windermere Rds are the best places to start.

St Tropez (Map p303; ☎ 031-201 9175; 199 Essenwood Rd; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Housed in a former power station, this pleasant sidewalk café-cum-bistro gives a pleasant shock – it has good coffee! Great for a Saturday brunch recharge (it's next to the Essenwood market on Berea Park), it has jazz on Sunday afternoons.

Sunrise House of Curries (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 6076; 275 Florida Rd; mains R12-45; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10am-10pm Fri) You don't come here for the vinyl tablecloths, but for the food – this tiny place serves the cheapest and most satisfying *bunny chows*, roti wraps and curries. The chip chows will cure the hottest of hangovers.

Luna Blu (Map p311; ☎ 031-312 4665; 427 Windermere Rd; mains R28-68; ☎ lunch & dinner) Small

restaurant, big aromas. Offering a range of gourmet toppings (Thai chicken, gorgonzola, roast lamb), this is the ideal place to order that special takeaway pizza (free delivery).

Cat Man Du (Map p311; ☎ 031-312 7893; 411 Windermere Rd; mains R30-100; ☎ lunch & dinner) This groovy diner-cum-cocktail bar serves international fusion-style tucker (and Cuban cigars) in barlike surrounds. Carnivores might like the kudu fillet in red wine (R85) and vegos are extremely well catered for.

Bean Bag Bohemia (Map p311; ☎ 031-309 6019; 18 Windermere Rd; mains R31-77; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The food and flavours are as creative as the mosaics, chandeliers and gothic décor of the artistically hip restaurant (upstairs) and downstairs café-bar. Temporary art exhibitions complement the theme. Don't miss the burnt-chocolate ice cream (R20).

A Gruta (Map p311; ☎ 031-312 8675; 200C Florida Rd; mains R43-130; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎ ☎) If you're not heading on to Mozambique (or Portugal for that matter), this is a great place to sample the flavours of Iberia. It fills up at night, making for a nearly authentic Mediterranean-style ambience.

Cafe 1999 (Map p303; ☎ 031-202 3406; Silvervause Centre, Silverton Rd, Berea; mains R45-100; ☎ lunch & dinner) The place to eat for trendy Durbanites. This buzzing restaurant serves creative fusion food which comes in 'bitparts' – 'titbit' and 'bigbit'. Try the crispy roast duck on vanilla-seed risotto (R51/81).

Joop's Place (Map p311; ☎ 031-312 9135; Avonmore Centre, Ninth Ave, Morningside; mains R50-90; ☎ dinner) In a most unlikely location at the back of a shopping centre, Durbanites flock to this unpretentious place for its high-quality steaks. Rare indeed.

Butcher Boys (Map p311; ☎ 031-312 8248; 170 Florida Rd; mains R60-90; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎ ☎) This stylish joint's catchphrase 'Grill by design' refers as much to its clientele as to its menu. The 'steak as you like it' is popular with business people and the 'it' market.

DRINKING

While there are basic drinking and dancing dens along the beachfront (watch what you wander into), the best options are found in the suburbs.

Zeta Bar (Map p311; ☎ 031-312 9436; 258 Florida Rd) Voluptuous red-plush seats and curvy soft lines provide the backdrop for this lounge

lizard's favourite. Sip your cocktail and watch the beautiful people – or just have a cold beer on the terrace.

Billy the Bum's (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 1988; 504 Windermere Rd, Morningside) Attracting a crowd of Durban's upwardly mobile (even the sign above the bar says 'elegantly wasted'), this suburban cocktail bar is reliably raucous.

Cool Runnings (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-368 5604; 49 Milne St) Ten years on (it recently had its anniversary) this (in)famous place is still true to its name – it has a truly Rasta bohemian feel and it stays open until 6am. Come late as it fills up after 11pm and catch a cab – this is *not* an area to walk around.

Joe Kool's (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 9697; Lower Marine Pde, North Beach) The inevitable finish line for any day on the beach, this venerable nightclub cooks up a cocktail of cold beer, big-screen TV, dance music and feisty crowds. Sunday night is party night.

Johnny Fox's (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 5404; 295 Florida Rd) This no-nonsense Irish bar, set in a plush colonial villa, serves up a passable pint of Guinness, a massive TV sports screen and a fair dose of *craic* (good times).

Rivets (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-336 8100; Durban Hilton, 12 Walnut St) As glossy as you'd expect a bar in the guts of the Hilton to be, Rivets boasts Thursday jazz nights, chichi décor, a contingent of the beautiful set and pricey cocktails.

Cockney Pride Pub (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-337 5511; cnr Marine Pde & West St) This little slice of East London features all the authentic features of a true English boozier: pub tucker, caricatures of the regulars on the walls, billows of smoke and stained carpets.

ENTERTAINMENT

Durban is a lively city with a vibrant cultural scene. Many events, from the Natal Sharks games to Shakespeare performances, can be booked through **Computicket** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 083-915 8000; 1st fl, the Workshop, Commercial Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

Cinemas

There are cinemas in all of the major malls: **Imax** (☎ 031-566 4415; Gateway Mall, Umhlanga Ridge) Big-screen action in the Gateway Mall. **Ster** Gateway Mall (☎ 031-566 3222; Gateway Mall, Umhlanga Ridge); Musgrave Centre (Map p303; ☎ 0860-300 222; www.sterkinetor.com; Musgrave Centre, Musgrave Rd)

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Durban is a bit short on gay and lesbian venues. However, new on the scene is **Bent** (www.bent.co.za), which organises monthly parties (not on set nights) at roaming, classy venues in Durban's 'burbs. Parties range from between 200 to 600 patrons – both guys and gals – although they're more popular among the 'wymyn' (their spelling, not ours). International guests are welcome.

Roman Lounge (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 9023; 202 Florida Rd, Morningside) Right in the heart of the bar district, this is a good place to hook up and caters to both men and women.

Live Music

KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra (☎ 031-369 9438; www.kznpo.co.za) The orchestra has an interesting spring concert programme with weekly performances in the City Hall (see p309). It also performs in the Botanic Gardens Music at the Lake concert series.

BAT Centre (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-332 0451; www.batcentre.co.za; 45 Maritime Pl, Victoria Embankment) One of Durban's more interesting haunts, this fun venue features everything from DJs on Friday and Sunday evenings to a regular drum circle. It also plays host to regular performances by some excellent jazz musicians.

Rainbow Restaurant & Jazz Club (☎ 031-702 9161; 23 Stanfield Lane) In Pinetown, 8km west of the centre, this was the first place in Natal to cater to blacks in a so-called 'white area' in the 1980s. With a reputation as the centre of the jazz scene and still the preferred local haunt, it features concerts and headline acts on the first or last Sunday of the month.

Nightclubs

Tilt (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-306 9356; 11 Walnut Rd) This place shares DJs with the Hilton's Rivets bar. Friday is often the big one, with quality music ranging from deep house to chunky bass.

Club 330 (Map pp306-7; www.330.co.za; 330 Point Rd) Clubbing in a point-blank sense. In-your-face full-on rave scene and throb city, depending what level you're on. This is not an area to walk around – taxis are obligatory.

Other recommendations:

Burn (Map p303; ☎ 082-325 9746; 112 Umbilo Rd)

Heavy rock to sizzle on the dance floor.

Tiger Tiger (Map p311; ☎ 031-303 7681; 15 Mitchell Cres, Greyville) A mature, trendy disco scene.

Sport

Soccer and rugby are played in KwaZulu-Natal. Professional teams such as AmaZulu and Manning Rangers play in town, and international teams also visit.

ABSA Stadium (King's Park Sports Ground) (Map pp303; ☎ 031-312 5022; Jackson Dr) With 60,000 seats, King's Park is home to the Natal Sharks (www.sharksrugby.co.za) rugby team.

Sahara Stadium (Kingsmead Cricket Ground; Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-335 4200; 2 Kingsmead Close) Cricket fever is cured here, where the international knockabouts are hosted.

Theatre

Natal Playhouse (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-369 9444; www.playhousecompany.com; Smith St) Opposite the City Hall, Durban's central theatre has dance, drama and music most nights.

Other venues:

Barnyard Theatre (☎ 031-566 3945; www.barnyardtheatre.co.za; Gateway Mall, Umhlanga Ridge)

Catalina Theatre (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-305 6889; Wilson's Wharf, Victoria Embankment)

SHOPPING

Victoria St Market (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-306 4021; Victoria St; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Sat, 6am-4pm Sun) At the western end of Victoria St, this is the hub of the Indian community and offers a typically rip-roaring, subcontinental shopping experience, with more than 160 stalls selling wares from across Asia. It's the main tourist attraction in the area, but watch your wallet. Grey St, between Victoria and West Sts, is the main shopping area. Prices are low and you can bargain. Most Muslim shops close between noon and 2pm on Friday.

Essenwood Market (Map pp303; ☎ 031-306 7744; Berea Park, Essenwood; ☎ 9am-2pm Sat) Sells a good range of handicrafts, homemade wares and clothes.

African Art Centre (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-301 2717; www.afrart.org.za; 160 Pine St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) In the same building as Tourist Junction, this not-for-profit gallery is not a curio shop, but has an excellent selection of work by rural craftspeople and artists.

Car boot & second-hand clothing flea market (Map pp306-7; ☎ 7am-noon Sun) This Sunday market, behind Greyville Racecourse and opposite Standard Bank, is a regular event for some Durbanites who buy and sell the

second-hand items, which are sublime and ridiculous.

Gateway Mall (☎ 031-566 2332; www.gatewayworld.co.za; 1 Palm Blvd, Umhlanga Ridge; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Thu, 9am-9pm Fri & Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) The mother of all shopping malls, it's north of central Durban and popular among locals living in the area.

Musgrave Centre (Map pp303; ☎ 031-201 5129; Musgrave St, Musgrave) is another shopping mall with all the necessities, while **Pavilion** (☎ 031-265 0558; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) is similar to the Musgrave Centre and is on the city's outskirts in Westville, just a quick drive from the centre on the N3 towards Pietermaritzburg.

The city centre's shopping mall, **Workshop** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 9894; 99 Aliwal St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun), is housed in a former train shed.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Durban International Airport (☎ 031-451 6666) is off the N2, 16km south of the city. **Student Flights** (Map pp303; ☎ 031-202 5995; www.studentflights.co.za; Shop 324, Musgrave Centre, Musgrave Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) is a good first stop for flights.

Several airlines link Durban with South Africa's other main centres. Prices quoted (Internet fares) are for the cheapest available one-way fares at the time of research and may cost less than prices quoted by travel agents.

1time (☎ 0861-345 345; www.1time.co.za) A no-frills airline offering some great deals to Jo'burg (R299).

Kulula (☎ 0861-585 852; www.kulula.com) A no-frills competitor to 1time, it links Durban with Jo'burg (R499), Cape Town (R569) and Port Elizabeth (R429).

Nationwide Air (☎ 0861-737 737; www.nationwideair.co.za) Flies at least once daily to Jo'burg (R450), Cape Town (R600) and Port Elizabeth (R429).

South African Airlink (SA Airlink) (☎ 011-978 1111; www.saaairlink.co.za) Flies daily to Port Elizabeth (R421), Bloemfontein (R1490) and Nelspruit (R1930).

South African Airways (SAA) (☎ 031-978 1111; www.flysaa.com) Flies at least once daily to Jo'burg (R763), Port Elizabeth (R888), East London (R888), Cape Town (R968), George (R1500) and Nelspruit (R1420).

Bus

The popular and useful **Baz Bus** (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com; 1st fl, Tourist Junction; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

has an office next to Durban Africa. You can hop-on/off as often as you like along the Baz Bus route for a given price and are picked up and dropped off at selected hostels. The seven-/14-day (R850/1600) passes allow you to travel in any direction and as often as you like within the time period.

Long-distance buses leave from the bus stations near the Durban train station (Map pp306-7). It's safest to enter from NMR Ave, not Umgeni Rd. The following long-distance bus companies have their offices here.

Eldo Coaches (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-307 3363) has three buses daily to Jo'burg (R130 to R170, eight hours).

Greyhound (Map pp306-7; ☎ 083-915 9000; www.greyhound.co.za) has daily buses to Richards Bay (R100, 2½ hours), Jo'burg (R195 to R220, eight hours), Cape Town (R465, 22 to 27 hours), Port Elizabeth (R330, 15 hours) and Port Shepstone (R120, 1¼ hours).

Buses also run daily to Pietermaritzburg (R80 to R100, one hour), Estcourt (R95 to R100, 2½ hours), Ladysmith (R160, four hours) and Newcastle (R170, 5½ hours), as well as to Vryheid (R100 to R200, six hours) and Paulpietersburg (R190, 6½ hours).

Intercape (Map pp306-7; ☎ 0861-287 287; www.intercape.co.za) has several daily buses to Jo'burg (R195 to R220, eight hours), Cape Town (R490, 23 hours), Gaborone (via Jo'burg; R345, 15½ hours) and Maputo (via Jo'burg; R230, 15 hours).

Luxliner (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-305 9090; www.intercity.co.za) operates daily services from Durban to Margate (R85, 2½ hours), Jo'burg International Airport and Park Station (R180 to R190, 8½ hours) and Pretoria (R180 to R190, nine hours).

SA Roadlink (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-307 5424; www.saroadlink.co.za) has double-decker buses to Cape Town (via Bloemfontein; R449, 23 hours), Jo'burg (R195, 6½ hours) and Port Elizabeth (via Mthatha and East London; R299, 15 hours).

Translux (Map pp306-7; ☎ 031-308 8111; www.translux.co.za) runs daily buses to Jo'burg (R200 to R210, eight hours) and Cape Town (R465, 27 hours). City to City buses, operated in partnership with Translux, go to destinations across the country.

You can also book at the Greyhound office for the **Margate Mini Coach** (☎ 039-312

1406), which links Durban and Margate three times a day (R80, 2½ hours).

Car

Hiring a car is pricey in KZN but it's one of the best ways of getting around. Be aware that few car-rental companies cover damage to tyres and undercarriage.

Around-about Cars (☎ 021-422 4022; www.aroundaboutcars.com) This is a Capetown-based agent for National Alamo in Durban. Its rates are more competitive than most and it has options with unlimited mileage and full insurance; but dealing with two organisations can be confusing if there are problems.

Comet Car Rental (☎ 031-903 4994; www.cometcar.co.za) Has some reasonable deals.

Most major car-rental companies also have offices at the airport:

Avis (☎ 031-304 1741, 086-102 111)

Budget (☎ 086-101 6622)

Imperial (☎ 031-337 3731)

Hitching

Although we *don't* recommend it, if you do choose to hitch, and are heading south, hitch from the traffic lights at the Victoria Embankment or catch a cab to the airport and try your luck from the car park's exit access to the south coast.

Minibus Taxi

Some long-distance minibus taxis leave from stops in the streets opposite the Umgeni Rd entrance to the train station (Map pp306-7). Others running mainly to the south coast and the Wild Coast region of Eastern Cape leave from around the Berea train station (Map pp306-7) – minibus taxis to Swaziland leave from the corner of Fynn and May Sts. To Jo'burg it costs R130 and to Swaziland Manzini it about R120. The areas in and around the minibus taxi ranks are unsafe and extreme care should be taken if entering them. Travellers are probably better off paying slightly more and taking the buses.

Train

Durban train station (Map pp306-7; ☎ 0860-008 888) is huge. Use the NMR Ave entrance, 1st level. The local inner-city or suburban trains are not recommended for travellers; even hardy travellers report feeling unsafe.

Long-distance services are another matter – they are efficient and arranged into separate male and female sleeper compartments (double-, four- or six-sleeper). Bookings are highly recommended. Trains include the *Trans Natal*, which leaves Durban daily (except Tuesday and Saturday) for Jo'burg (1st-/2nd-class R250/165, 12½ hours), and the *Trans Oranje*, which makes a weekly run (phone the station for the departure day) to Cape Town (R645/435, 38 hours).

The **Rovos** (www.rovosrail.co.za) is a luxury steam train on which, for a mere R8500 starting price, you can enjoy old-world luxury on a three-day choof from Durban to Pretoria via Swaziland and Kruger National Park.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Some hostels run their own taxi shuttle services for clients at competitive prices. By taxi, the same trip should cost about R150. The **Airport Shuttle Bus** (☎ 031-465 1660) departs the airport regularly for the beach and city centre's major hotels (R30). Buses return to the airport on the hour between 5am to 10pm from the corner of Aliwal and Smith Sts (Map pp306–7).

Bus

The main bus terminal and information centre for inner-city and metropolitan buses is on Commercial Rd across from the Workshop (Map pp306–7).

Durban Transport (☎ 031-309 5942) runs the bus services Mynah and Aqualine. Mynah covers most of the beachfront and central residential areas. Trips cost around R3 and you get a slight discount if you prebuy 10 tickets. Routes are as follows: North Beach, South Beach, Musgrave Rd/Mitchell Park Circle, the Ridge/Vause, Botanic Gardens, Kensington/Mathias Rd. The larger Aqualine buses run through the outer-lying Durban metropolitan area. Timetables are also available from the **Tourist Junction** (Map pp306-7; 160 Pine St, cnr Soldiers Way).

Taxi

A taxi between the beach and Florida Rd, Morningside usually costs about R30. **Mozzie Cabs** (☎ 0860-669 943) runs a reliable 24-hour service.

WEST OF DURBAN

VALLEY OF 1000 HILLS

☎ 031

A very pleasant and hassle-free (if slightly kitsch) getaway from the steamy streets of Durban, the Valley of 1000 Hills runs from the city's western outskirts to Nagle Dam, east of Pietermaritzburg. The area abounds in touristy craft shops and eateries, but the rolling hills, sleepy villages and traditional Zulu communities make for an interesting visit. You can drive on Rte 103, which begins in Hillcrest, off the M13 freeway, or head to Hillcrest from the N3 between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. If you want to see more of the valley, head north from this road, which just skirts the southern edge.

Information

Thousand Hills Tourism (☎ 031-777 1874; www.1000hills.kzn.org.za; Old Main Rd, Botha's Hill; ☎ 7.45am-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun) is strangely situated in the middle of the 1000 Hills trail. It offers the useful *1000 Hills Experience* brochure, listing six routes through the region and stacks of places to stay and eat.

Sights & Activities

Shongweni Resource Reserve (☎ 031-769 1283; fax 769 1175; adult/child R20/10; ☎ 5am-7pm Oct-Mar, 6am-6pm Apr-Sep), about halfway between Durban and Pietermaritzburg off the N3, is Route 5 & 6 of the 1000 Hills experience. Part of a beautiful river valley and grassland area, it has a number of mammals and birds. Canoeing is available (R65/85 half/full day). Accommodation is in **safari tents** (per person R110-160) erected on wooden platforms peeking over the edge of the lake and complete with braai, mosquito net.

Surprisingly, Route 2 of the 1000 Hills experience is one of the region's best-kept secrets. The 600-hectare **Krantzkloof Nature Reserve** (adult/child R10/5; ☎ 6am-6pm year-round) has a variety of stunning gorge, wetland and grassland walks of between one and six hours' duration. There are also picnic sites available. Ask where you can get the best views of the gorge. Maps of self-guided trails are available from the security guard for R5.

PheZulu Safari Park (☎ 031-777 1000; www.phezulusafaripark.co.za; Old Main Rd, Botha's Hill; adult/child R60/30; ☎ shows 10am, 11.30am, 2pm & 3.30pm) is a reptile park, and small and touristy traditional Zulu village, complete with cultural displays.

The **Umgeni Steam Railway** (☎ 031-764 6706; adult/child R70/40) operates out of the old Kloof station (now home of the Stoker's Arms Tavern). The 1000 Hills choo-choo service departs on the first and last Sundays of every month at 8.45am and 12.30pm and huffs and puffs its way through the area for about an hour.

Tekweni Eco-Tours (☎ in Durban 031-463 2576; www.tekweniecotours.co.za) organises tours (R380) to a Zulu village in the region, where you meet traditional healers. For an extra R150 or so, you can stay overnight in a local house.

Sleeping & Eating

Valley Trust (☎ 031-716 6800; www.thevalleytrust.org.za; s/d with shared bathroom R80/160) Home of the Simunye Handicraft Project, which promotes traditional handicrafts to raise funds for local development projects, this place off Old Main Rd in Nyuswa offers cheap, clean beds in basic rooms.

Longacre B&B (☎ 031-777 1335; www.longacre1000hills.co.za; 160 Old Main Rd, Botha's Hill; s/d self-catering R150/300, incl breakfast R200/400; ☎ ☎) The views over the valley from the pool and garden are the most appealing aspects of this pleasantly decked-out B&B. The thatched studio in the front is the pick of the bunch.

Chantecler (☎ 031-765 2613; chantecler@mweb.co.za; 27 Clement Stott Rd, Botha's Hill; s/d incl breakfast R350/600; ☎ ☎) Known for its living birdlife (as opposed to Chaucer's dead rooster), this thatched place oozes high-country class, with pleasant gardens, water features aplenty and old-meets-new styling.

Pot & Kettle (☎ 031-777 1312; 168 Old Main Rd, Botha's Hill; mains R38-68) A casual restaurant with a kitsch gift shop as an entrance, but a delightful outdoor terrace overlooking the valley.

The Chantecler has a restaurant, as does Rob Roy (signposted on the main road), which is great for tea and scones. Several train stations in the area, such as Botha's Hill and Kloof, have been renovated as English-style pubs and tea gardens.

SOUTH COAST

The South Coast is a 160km-long string of seaside resorts and suburbs running from Durban to Port Edward, near the Eastern Cape border. There's a bit of a Ground Hog Day feel about this mass of the shoulder-to-shoulder getaways along the N2 and Rte 102, albeit a pleasant one. The coastal region's sandy beaches are interspersed with some pretty gardens and grassy areas. The region is a surfers' and divers' delight (the latter because of the Aliwal Shoal), and in summer there ain't much room to swing a broly. Inland, the sugar cane, bananas and palms provide a pleasant, lush, green contrast to the beach culture. The stunning Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve, close to Port Shepstone, provides beautiful forest walks, eating and accommodation options.

The South Coast's first official town is Amanzimtoti, a huge resort and residential area about 10km from Durban International Airport. Further south, other major centres are Umkomaas, Scottburgh, Park Rynie and Hibberdene. The area from Hibberdene to Trafalgar is called the Hibiscus Coast. Information is available from **Hibiscus Coast Tourism** (☎ 039-312 2322; www.hibiscuscoast.kzn.org.za; Panorama Pde, Main Beach, Margate; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun). Its useful *Southern Explorer* brochure is a must-have for any visitor.

Port Shepstone is the South Coast's industrial administrative centre, but has some pleasant surrounding areas, while 10km south, frantic Margate is the claustrophobic holiday hub. Port Edward is the last main centre in the region.

AMANZIMTOTI & KINGSBURGH

☎ 031

Called 'Toti' for short, Amanzimtoti (Sweet Waters) is a high-rise jungle of apartment blocks. Warner Beach, at the southern end of Amanzimtoti, is less built-up and more relaxed. From here Amanzimtoti merges into Kingsburgh, which has a number of beaches, to the south. Some might prefer to base themselves here, rather than in 'Durbs'.

The **Amanzimtoti information office** (☎ 031-903 7498; fax 903 7493; 95-97 Beach Rd; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1-4pm Mon-Sat) is not far from the Inyoni Rocks.

PORT SHEPSTONE & AROUND

☎ 039 / pop 29,000

The industrial town of Port Shepstone is of little interest to tourists. However, it does have the **Banana Express** (☎ 039-682 4821), a steam-powered train which, when it's got puff in the holiday season, runs daily (R60; Thursday and Saturday out of season), to Izotsha, the site of a craft school. The train departs at 10am from the station next to the Sharks Den Family Restaurant on the beachfront.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of hotels in Port Shepstone, but two backpackers on the strip of coast north of Port Shepstone are well worth a stopover.

Mantis & Moon Backpacker Lodge (☎ 039-684 6256; travelsa@saol.com; 7/178 Station Rd, Umzumbe; camp sites R50, dm R70, d R180-220; 🍷) 'A' for atmosphere. The new owner has done justice to this jungle oasis with its range of quality accommodation options. Guests can bubble away in the Jacuzzi, wallow in the rock pool or chill under the stars in an open-air bath.

Spot Backpackers (☎ 039-695 1318; spotbackpackers@netactive.co.za; Ambleside Rd, Umtentweni; camp sites R50, dm/d with shared bathroom R70/180) Closer to Port Shepstone, this is spot-on for position, (right on the beach), and is another well-regarded place. Clean, basic and ideal for the four 'S's of sand, sun, sea and surf.

Saffron on 3rd Avenue (☎ 039-695 1295; Third Ave, Umtentweni; 🍷 8.30am-late) Close to Spot Backpackers, this new eatery has funky chairs, lights, décor and marble table tops in a tasteful indoor/outdoor setting. Creative main meals are R34 to R70.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound (☎ 083-915 9000; www.greyhound.co.za) has daily buses between Port Shepstone and Durban (R120, 1¼ hours). If you are staying at one of the backpackers, ask the driver to drop you in Umzumbe or Umtentweni.

ORIBI GORGE NATURE RESERVE

☎ 039

This **nature reserve** (☎ 039-679 1644; www.kzn.wildlife.com; admission R10., camp sites R30, 2-bed huts R108; 🍷 6am-6pm) is inland from Port Shepstone, off the N2. The spectacular gorge, on the Umzimkulwana River, is one of the

highlights of the South Coast with beautiful scenery, animals and birds. The reception office is accessed via the N2.

Oribi Gorge Hotel (☎ 039-687 0253; www.oribigorge.co.za; s/d incl breakfast R430/660; 🍷) is a large pine place (with the foyer incorporating a jacaranda tree). If you can ignore the piped 'Jingle Bell Rock' music in the foyer, for rocks of a more natural variety in the nearby gorge (R10 for the viewpoint), then there's fun to be had.

Wild 5 Extreme Adventures (☎ 082-566 7424) is based at the Oribi Gorge Hotel. It offers a 100m Gorge Swing (read bungee jump) off Lehr's Falls (R300), abseiling (R200) and white-water rafting (R350). It is 11km off the N2 along the Oribi Flats Rd.

MARGATE & AROUND

☎ 039 / pop 34,000

The south coast's tourist mecca is loud and lively, with a string of bars and clubs pumping up the volume, and a knot of hotels putting up the visitors. This claustrophobic concrete jungle's string of chain restaurants and shops ensures that it's not a 'glamour' resort, but it's fun if you're into the bump-and-grind brand of beach life. Nearby Ramsgate is a quieter version of Margate, with a nice little beach.

Ocean Safaris (☎ 082-960 7682; www.oceansafaris.co.za; Shelly Beach; adult/child R200/160) runs whale-watching tours (best between June and November) and the sardine run from the Ski Boat Club on Shelly Beach, north of Margate.

Sleeping & Eating

A decent night's sleep in Margate can come at a premium during the high season.

Wailana Beach Lodge (☎ 039-314 4606; www.wailana.co.za; 436 Ashmead Dr, Ramsgate; s incl breakfast from R430, d incl breakfast per person from R350; 🍷 🍷) This svelte guesthouse, 200m from the sea in nearby Ramsgate, has five 'designer' bedrooms with contemporary, individual styling and private sun decks, leafy gardens and a bar.

Sunlawns Hotel (☎ /fax 039-312 1078; Uplands Rd, Margate; r per person incl breakfast R210; 🍷 🍷) This long-established hotel has delightful old-English charm. There is a 'Ladies Lounge' and pub, as well as a good-sized pool.

Margate Hotel (☎ 039-312 1410; info@margatehotel.co.za; Marine Dr, Margate; s incl breakfast R495, d incl

breakfast per person from R325; 🍷) This place is a little plain, but it is in a top location (if you want to be in the heart of things) on the main drag.

Keg & Galleon (☎ 039-312 2575; Marine Dr, Margate; mains R20-55; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This busy boozier is typical of Margate's eating and drinking options. Icy beer and decent pub grub – especially the pies – draw the tourists, who flock here to be amply fed and watered.

La Capannina (☎ 039-317 1078; Marine Dr, Ramsgate North; mains R45-90; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Locals recommend this authentic Italian restaurant, with all the pasta, seafood and meat favourites that Mama used to make, including lamb shanks with rosemary and red wine.

Getting There & Away

SA Airlink (☎ 031-250 1111; www.saaairlink.co.za) flies daily between Margate and Jo'burg (R1020).

The **Margate Mini Coach** (☎ 031-312 1406; www.margate.co.za/minicoach) links Durban and Margate twice daily (R80 one way, R110 for a same-day return). Book through **Hibiscus Coast Tourism** (☎ 039-312 2322; www.hibiscuscoast.kzn.org.za; Panorama Pde, Main Beach, Margate; 🍷 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun).

Luxliner (☎ 039-317 4628; www.luxliner.co.za) has an office in Hibiscus Coast Tourism, and runs regular buses between Margate and Jo'burg (R250, 10 hours).

PORT EDWARD & AROUND

☎ 039

The little village of Port Edward and its surrounds are as sedate as their pleasant lush environs; they make a pleasant escape from the concrete jungle.

The **tourist office** (☎ 039-311 1211; 🍷 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is in Ilva's Craft Shop, 2.5km north of Port Edward on Rte 61.

Umtamvuna Nature Reserve (☎ 039-311 2383; admission R10; 🍷 6am-6pm) is on a gorge on the Umtamvuna River (which forms part of the border with Eastern Cape). This beautiful dense forest has great nature walks, with wildflowers in spring, plus mammals and many species of birds. To get to the reserve from Port Edward, follow the signs off Rte 61 to Izingolweni and continue for a few kilometres.

The **Umtamvuna Mountain Bike Trail** (☎ 039-311 1130; www.clearwatertrails.co.za; per trail/guided trails

R30/190) operates out of Clearwater Trails Chalets and rents out bikes for use on a network of trails above the gorge.

There are a couple of small restaurants and a supermarket in Port Edward, but it's best to bring some of your own food if you are staying at the hostels.

Sleeping

Clearwater Trails Chalets (☎ 039-311 1130; clearwater@venturenet.co.za; s/d with shared bathroom R135/190) Your own two-in-one 'chalets' and separate (private) doll-house kitchen and bathroom are set in a stunning location above the gorge. From Port Edward, cross Rte 61 and follow signs to Izingolweni Rd and continue 5.5km (past Old Pont Rd and Beaver Creek Coffee Estate). Turn left at the T-Junction and follow the Clearwater Trails sign.

Ku-Boboyi River Lodge Backpackers (☎ 039-319 1371; www.kuboboyi.co.za; Old Main Rd, Leisure Bay; camp sites per person R60, s/d with shared bathroom R170/250, d with private bathroom R350; 🍷 🍷) This hill-top lodge has a chilled African feel with a French twist (the brekky crepes are *delicieux*), plus great inland and sea views. It is 4km north of Port Edward and just off Rte 61. Take the Leisure Bay South turn and follow the signs.

NORTH COAST

The stretch of coast from Umhlanga Rocks north to the Tugela River is a profusion of upmarket timeshare apartments and retirement villages with some pleasant beaches. The section from Zimbali, slightly north of Umhlanga, to the Tugela is known as the Dolphin Coast. The coast gets its name from the bottlenose dolphins that favour the area, attracted by the continental shelf and warm water conditions.

Dolphin Coast Publicity (☎ 032-946 1997; www.dolphincoast.co.za; Ballito Dr; 🍷 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) is near the BP petrol station, just where you leave the N2 to enter Ballito. It books B&Bs and lists other accommodation.

The North Coast is home to a fascinating mix of peoples: descendants of former colonialists, Indians, French Mauritian sugar-cane growers and indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent, plus colourful Zulu cultures.

King Shaka is said to have established a military camp on the coast; Royal handmaidens gathered salt from tidal pools, since immortalised in the name Salt Rock. A memorial to King Shaka can be found at KwaDukuza (Stanger), slightly inland.

Metropolitan buses run between Durban and Umhlanga Rocks, and buses and minibuses taxis also run between Durban and KwaDukuza (Stanger) and other inland towns. The latter can get very crowded, so are possible havens for petty thieves.

UMHLANGA ROCKS

☎ 031

The buckle of Durban's chichi commuter belt, Umhlanga is a cosmopolitan mix of upmarket beach resort, moneyed suburbia and small malls. Umhlanga means 'Place of Reeds' (the 'h' is pronounced something like 'sh').

At the time of research, **Umhlanga Tourism Information Centre** (☎ 031-561 4257; www.umhlanga-rocks.com) was temporarily housed on the 1st floor of the Lighthouse Mall, Chartwell Dr.



Sights & Activities

NATAL SHARKS BOARD

A research institute, the **Natal Sharks Board** (☎ 031-566 0400; www.shark.co.za; 1A Herrwood Dr; audiovisual & dissection adult/child R20/12; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sun) is dedicated to studying sharks, specifically in relation to their danger to humans. With the great white shark – a big shark with a fearsome, but largely undeserved reputation for attacks on humans – frequenting the KwaZulu-Natal coast, this is more than an academic interest. There are audiovisual presentations and shark dissections at 9am and 2pm Tuesday to Thursday. The public can accompany the Sharks Board personnel on their boat trips (see p308).

The Natal Sharks Board is signposted; it is about 2km out of town, up the steep Umhlanga Rocks Dr (the M12 leading to the N3).

UMHLANGA LAGOON NATURE RESERVE

This **nature reserve** (admission free; ☎ 6am-6pm) is on a river mouth just north of town. Despite its small size (26 hectares) there are many bird species. The trails lead through stunning dune forest, across the lagoon and onto the beach.

Sleeping & Eating

Umhlanga is crowded with holiday apartments, most of which are close to the beach. A two-bedroom serviced apartment in low/high season starts at about R400/600 per night (a minimum number of nights often applies); contact **Umhlanga Accommodation** (☎ 031-561 2012; www.umhlangaaccommodation.co.za; Protea Mall, Chartwell Dr; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) for help. There are also plenty of B&Bs around the area. Hotel prices are seasonal and vary enormously; expect a 10% fluctuation either way in low or high season.

There's a huge choice of eating options for breakfasts, lunches and dinners and many pleasant pavement cafés.

Oyster Box (☎ 031-561 2233; www.oysterbox.co.za; 2 Lighthouse Rd; s incl breakfast R530-795, d per person R430-625; ☎ 10am-10pm) In the shadow of Umhlanga's lighthouse, this spot exudes colonial-era grace (is that a straw pith helmet on the doorman's head?), with an old-school atmosphere that offers an antidote to Umhlanga's trademark concrete towers.

Beverley Hills Sun Intercontinental (☎ 031-561 2211; www.southernsun.com; Lighthouse Rd; s & d R2750; ☎ 10am-10pm) They didn't pull out the stops on the exterior, but this top-notch classic is deliciously stylish on the inside. It's the perfect place for a platinum-card splurge.

Ile Maurice (☎ 031-561 7609; 9 McCausland Cres; mains R79-95; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) For a special seaside splurge with a Gallic touch, try this chic eatery; it's much *bon gout*, not to mention having a reputation among Durban's connoisseurs as *la place-to-eat-by-la-mer*.

Sugar Club (☎ 031-561 2211; Lighthouse Rd; mains R90-365; ☎ lunch & dinner) This award-winning eatery is at the Beverley Hills Sun Intercontinental.

Getting There & Away

Metro buses 716 and 706 run between Umhlanga and Durban.

TONGAAT

A big, sedate sugar town with some fine old buildings, Tongaat is on the train line running north from Durban. With a large Indian population, it is home to a handful of temples including the small but fascinating **Shri Jagganath Puri Temple**.

BALLITO TO SHEFFIELD BEACH

☎ 032

Ballito, Shaka's Rock, Salt Rock, Umhlali and Sheffield Beach lack Zulu flavour; they form a continuous, strip of seaside suburbia, luxury guesthouses and multistorey condos, most with pleasant beaches at their doorstep. They are connected by the old coast road, so you don't have to jump back and forth on the N2 to travel between them.

Dolphin Coast Publicity Association (☎ 946 1997; www.thedolphincoast.co.za; cnr Link Rd & Ballito Dr; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) is near the BP petrol station.

Much of the accommodation is in apartments, and in the high season most are let by the week. A good rental agency in Ballito is **Realty 1** (☎ 031-946 2140; www.realty1parsons.co.za; Ballito Business Centre, Ballito Dr).

Secret Spot (☎ 082-495 9811; www.secretspot.co.za; Main Rd, Shaka's Rock; dm R75, d with shared bathroom R180) Carve your way to this surfers' (and landlubbers') paradise, nestled above Shaka's Rock beach and boost yourself with surf lessons. For serious surf rats, there's

a board shaping bay. The quality cabins or dorms are a great place to hang ten. Best to ring for directions. Surfing packages available.

Dolphin Holiday Resort (☎ 031-946 2187; www.dolphinholidayresort.co.za; Dolphin Cres, Ballito; camp sites R300, r R660) This resort has camp sites in lush surrounds and some pleasant cottages. Rates are much cheaper out of season.

KWADUKUZA (STANGER)

☎ 032 / pop 36,700

In July 1825, Shaka established KwaDukuza as his capital and royal residence. It was here that he was killed in 1828 by his half-brothers Mhlangane and Dingaan; Dingaan then took power (see the boxed text, p334). Also known as Stanger, KwaDukuza is a busy, rough-and-ready town with a large Indian population and an African buzz. The town has no accommodation, but it's an important stop for those undertaking a Shaka pilgrimage or interested in Zulu culture.

The **Dukuza Interpretive Centre** (☎ 032-552 7210; 5 King Shaka Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) is worth visiting for limited, but clear, historical and chronological information on Shaka and his kingdom. It also hands out a brochure with other places of (some) interest relating to Shaka and colonialists.

Dukuza Museum (☎ 032-437 5075; King Shaka Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri), opposite the interpretive centre, has related historical exhibits.

Head to Cooper St to visit the **Shaka Memorial Gardens**, where a memorial stone was erected in 1932 over Shaka's burial chamber, originally a grain pit. There is a rock featuring a well-worn groove where it's believed Shaka sharpened his spears. Each year Zulus, donned in their traditional gear, gather in the gardens for Shaka Day (also known as Heritage Day) celebrations (see p332).

Minibus taxis link KwaDukuza with Durban (R25, one hour) and towns along the coast.

BLYTHEDALE

☎ 032

Blythedale is a quiet seaside village with a sandy (shark-net) beach and crashing surf.

Mini Villas (☎ 032-551 1277; www.minivillas.co.za; Umvoti Dr; r R229) is a bit like a series of bowling

green clubs, offering excellent-value self-catering villas with sea views. **La Mouette Caravan Park** (☎ 032-551 2547; www.caravanparks.co.za/lamouette; 1 Umvoti Dr; camp sites R60) is a clean, suburban-style place right on the beach, with braais and tarred roads. Prices skyrocket in summer. There are a few simple eateries in town.

Occasional minibus taxis run between Blythedale and KwaDukuza (R10, 15 minutes), 7km away.

ZULULAND

Evoking images of wild landscapes and tribal rhythms, this beautiful swathe of KwaZulu-Natal offers a different face of South Africa, where fine coastline, mist-clad hills and traditional settlements are in contrast to the ordered suburban developments around Durban. Dominated by the Zulu tribal group, the region offers a fascinating historical and contemporary insight into one of the country's most enigmatic, and best-known, cultures. However, while the name Zulu (which means Heaven) aptly describes the rolling expanses that dominate the landscape here, it doesn't tell the whole story. Intense poverty and all the social problems that come with it are still commonplace, and much of the population struggles in a hand-to-mouth existence. Head off the main roads and this becomes glaringly obvious.

Zululand extends roughly from the mouth of the Tugela River up to St Lucia and inland west of the N2 to Vryheid. The region is most visited for the spectacular Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park and its many traditional Zulu villages. Here, you can learn about Zulu history and the legendary King Shaka (see p334).

TUGELA MOUTH

☎ 032

The sprawl of resort towns on the north coast comes to an end with Blythedale, giving way to a wilder landscape at the mouth of the mighty Tugela River. With one of the most unspoilt sweeps of sand in the region (beware, there are a lot of sharks here – you're advised not to swim), the small town of Tugela Mouth, which sits on the north bank of the Tugela estuary

and on the very boundary of Zululand, is a soporific, undeveloped alternative to the gloss and glitz of the tried-and-tested holiday centres. Fantastic fishing and a remote atmosphere only bolster the appeal.

Emolweni (☎ 032-458 4133; w2wog@lantic.net; s/d R100/200; 📍) is a rustic, no-frills hotchpotch of several self-catering cottages with heaps of bohemian and sand-dune charisma.

You can take the **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) to Eshowe and phone ahead to be collected.

GINGINDLOVU

☎ 035

Crowds and dust are Gingindlovu's trademarks, but there are two fine accommodation options in the area, making it a good pit stop on the route north. The town was once one of King Cetshwayo's strongholds and two battles of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 were fought in the vicinity.

Mine Own Country House (☎ 035-337 1262; fax 337 1025; s/d incl breakfast R500/700), in an opulent villa, is surrounded by sugar plantations and has lashings of colonial-era nostalgia. It's 4km north of Gingindlovu, off Rte 102.

At rustic **Inyezane** (☎ 082-704 4766; inyezane@ethniczulu.com; camp sites R50, dm/d with shared bathroom R80/200), the open-air herbal and (very natural) mud baths need a thorough detox themselves, but hopefully the new owners will revitalise this colourful and alternative experience in the heart of sugar-cane Zululand. Go 1.5km north of Gingindlovu on Rte 66 (to Eshowe), turn left onto a gravel road at the large school building and follow the signs.

MTUNZINI

☎ 035

A little oasis of neatly tended lawns surrounded by the wild, rolling hills of Zululand, Mtunzini screams 'Europe' in the heart of Africa. But there is more to this pretty village than herbaceous borders. Sitting above a lush sweep of rare Raffia palms, and bordering the Umlalazi Nature Reserve, Mtunzini makes an excellent base for exploring this beautiful slice of Zululand.

The town had a colourful beginning. John Dunn, the first European to settle in the area, was granted land by King Cetshwayo.

He became something of a chief himself, took 49 wives and sired 117 children. He held court here under a tree, hence the town's name (*mtunzini* is Zulu for 'a place in the shade'). After the British defeated Cetshwayo and divided the kingdom, Dunn was one of the chiefs granted power.

The town was declared a Conservancy in 1995. Visitors can enjoy its network of nature trails, as well as some antelope and bird species.

Information

ABSA (Hely Hutchinson Rd) Has an ATM.

Fat Cat Coffee Shop (☎ 035-340 2897; 2 Station Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Tourist information is available from the gift shop here.

Sights & Activities

Near the mouth of the Mlalazi River, there is lush tropical forest where you'll find the **Raffia Palm Monument** (admission free; 🕒 24hr). *Raffia Australis* were first planted here in 1916 from seeds sent to the local magistrate by the Director of Prisons in Pretoria. The idea was to use the palms' fibres to make brooms for the prison service, but as the fibres were too short the commercial enterprise soon ended. The palms flourished, however, and by 1942 had been declared a National Monument. The palms are home to the palmnut vulture (*Gypohierax angolensis*), South Africa's rarest breeding bird-of-prey.

The entrance to **Umlalazi Nature Reserve** (☎ 035-340 1836; www.kznwildlife.com; admission R10;



☞ 5am-10pm) is 1.5km east of town, on the coast. It has trails through the dune and forested ecosystems and is great for birders. Visit the Indaba Tree, where John Dunn held his court gatherings, and the remains of John Dunn's Pool, which he built so his wives could swim safely away from hippos and crocs.

Sleeping & Eating

Nature's Way Backpackers (☎ 082-936 2370; nway@zini.co.za; 1 Nature's Way, Mtunzini; dm R70, s/d R80/150) On the edge of coastal reserves, with dune forest, wetlands, lagoons and access to beaches, this place is seriously in tune with nature. The open-air showers, basic tented facilities and chilled bar are all you'll need – the natural surroundings do the rest. Even a zebra has adopted this laid-back place as its home.

Trade Winds Country Inn (☎ 035-340 2533; trade.winds@microweb.co.za; Hely Hutchinson Rd; s/d incl breakfast R305/465) This motel-styled place is a reliable, if slightly carpet-stained and overpriced, option.

Mtunzini Forest Lodge (☎ 035-340 1953; fax 035-340 1955; 4-/5-bed chalets R720/750; 🏠) These attractive and spacious chalets – with pool, a bar and private beach access – are in a densely forested nature reserve by the sea.

Clay Oven (☎ 035-340 1262; 32 Hely Hutchinson Rd; mains R34-45; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This friendly diner whips up excellent pizzas (yes, cooked in the clay oven) and serves them on the breezy wooden terrace or in the refined interior.

You can get a good feed at **Tides Inn restaurant** (mains R30-70; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner), attached to the Trade Winds Country Inn.

UMLHATHUZE (RICHARDS BAY & EMPANGENI)

☎ 035 / pop 115,000

Incorporating the industrial port of Richards Bay and the nearby town of Empangeni, uMhlathuze is a mass of modern suburbia, aluminium smelters and a web of roads linking very little. Bird-watchers may be rewarded by the 350 or so bird species that favour the surrounding lakes, marshes and vegetation, but for most visitors (even those who fly here direct to access northern locations), there are better places to spend your time.

Both Empangeni and Richards Bay have a branch of the **uMhlathuze Tourism Association**

(☎ 035-907 5018; www.tourismassociation.org.za; 5 Mark Strasse St, Richards Bay; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm alternate Sat).

BirdLife South Africa (☎ 035-753 5644; www.birdlife.org.za; Imvubu Log Cabins, cnr Hibberd & Davidson Lane, Meerensee; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-noon Sat & Sun) may be sponsored by a major industrial company, but this excellent organisation offers guides, birding routes and tours for keen birders around KZN. At the traffic lights in front of Meerensee Mall turn right into Kreweking Rd and left at the next stop street (500m).

Empangeni Arts & Crafts Centre (☎ 035-907 5405; cmi@richemp.org.za; Turnbull St; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is worth a browse.

Sleeping

Woodpecker Inn (☎ 035-786 1230; fax 786 1243; Pelican Pde, Richards Bay; s/d R280/340; 🏠 🍴) Offering thatched, lodge-style country comforts in a garden setting, this popular place has a bar and swish rooms with en suite. It's close to the airport.

Harbour Lights (☎ 035-796 6239; www.harbourlights.co.za; per camp site R120, plus per person R5, s/d 190/290) A decent range of affordable accommodation for tight budgets. Formerly a sugar plantation, this resort is off the N3, between Richards Bay and Empangeni.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound buses stop at the Empangeni branch of the uMhlathuze Tourism Association, where you can also get tickets and information; and by McDonald's, next to the Bay Hospital in Richards Bay. Buses run daily to Durban (R100, 2½ hours) and Jo'burg (R220, eight hours). Most of the surrounding towns can be reached from here by minibus taxi.

ESHOWE

☎ 035 / pop 14,700

Situated around a beautiful indigenous forest and surrounded by green rolling hills, Eshowe is in idiosyncratic Zululand. The centre has a rural, rough-and-tumble atmosphere, but the suburbs are leafy and quiet. It is well placed for exploring the wider region and there are many decent attractions and accommodation options on offer.

Eshowe has been home to four Zulu Kings (Shaka, Mpande, Cetshwayo and Di-

nizulu). It was Cetshwayo's stronghold before he moved to Ondini and, like Ondini, it was destroyed during the Anglo-Zulu War. The British occupied the site and built Fort Nongqayi in 1883, establishing Eshowe as the administrative centre of their newly captured territory.

Information

ABSA (Miku Bldg, Osborne Rd) Changes money and has an ATM.

Eshowe Computers (☎ 035-474 5441; Osborne Rd; per hr R40; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-10am Sat) Internet access.

Umlalazi Municipality Publicity & Tourism Office (☎ 035-474 1141; www.umlalazi.org.za; cnr Hutchinson & Osborne Rds; 🕒 7.15am-4pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-3pm Fri) For information on the area.

Sights & Activities

The **Fort Nongqayi Museum Village** (☎ 035-474 1141; zhm@umlalazi.org.za; Nongqayi Rd; adult/child R20/4; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) is based around the three-turreted, mud-and-brick Fort Nongqayi. The entrance fee includes access to the Zululand Historical Museum, with artefacts and Victoriana; the excellent Vukani Zulu Basketry Collection; the Zululand Missionary Museum; and the Museum Crafter's Market, where local crafts are sold.

From the museum you can also walk to **Mpushini Falls** (40 minutes return), but note that bilharzia has been reported here in the past.

When war approached, King Shaka is said to have hidden his wives in the thick swathe of forest that now makes up the 200-hectare **Dlinza Forest Reserve** (☎ 035-474 4029; www.zbr.co.za/boardwalk; admission free; 🕒 6am-6pm Sep-Apr, 8am-5pm May-Aug). There is prolific birdlife – look out for crowned eagles (*Stephanoaetus coronatus*) – as well as some walking trails, some of which are believed to have been made by British soldiers stationed here after the Anglo-Zulu War.

The 100m-long **Dlinza Forest Aerial Boardwalk** (www.zbr.co.za/boardwalk; adult/child R25/5) offers some great views of the canopy and birdlife. This is the start of the Prince Dabulamanzi Trail, a three-day circuit through nature reserves and rivers. **Entumeni Nature Reserve** (☎ 035-474 5084; admission free; 🕒 6am-6pm) is larger than Dlinza, and preserves indigenous mist-belt forest in a sugar-cane

region. It's 16km west of town, off the road to Entumeni and Nkandla.

Sleeping & Eating

Amble Inn (☎ 035-474 1300; ambleinn@corpdiol.co.za; 116 Main St; s/d incl breakfast R225/315) Filling the guts of an old British Army brothel, this place offers slightly shabby but spacious backpacker charm, complete with a giant gargoyles.

George Hotel & Zululand Backpackers (☎ 035-474 4919; www.eshowe.com; 38 Main St; s/d incl breakfast R245/345; 🏠 🍴) March into this attractive, whitewashed building with rooms that ooze colonial-era pretensions. Troops let down their guard on a Friday night for Eshowe's party of the week. The separate backpackers (camp sites R55, dorm/single/double with shared bathroom R75/130/180) in this Zululand institution is hung-over, but the George's microbrewery and 101 activities (also on tap) distract any thoughts of deserting.

Adam's Outpost (☎ 035-474 1787; mains R25-60; 🍴 lunch) Find refuge in the garden café and cosy, corrugated-iron restaurant, complete with real fireplaces and candles. This little gem is the victor in Eshowe's culinary roll call.

Getting There & Away

Minibus taxis leave from the bus and taxi rank (downhill from KFC near the Osborne/Main Sts roundabout – go across the bridge and to the right) to Empangeni, (R30, one hour), Gingindlovu (R7) and Melmoth (R20, 45 minutes), the best place to catch taxis deeper into Zululand.

Washesha Buses (☎ 035-477 4504) runs services in the area, including a scenic but rough run on dirt roads through forest areas to Nkandla (R30, two hours), where you can get a taxi to Melmoth.

NIKWALINI VALLEY

Shaka's kraal (fortified village), KwaBulawayo, once loomed over this beautiful valley but today Nikwalini is regimented with citrus orchards and cane fields rather than Zulu warriors. From Eshowe head north for 6km on Rte 66, and turn right onto Rte 230 (a dirt road that will eventually get you to Rte 34).

Across the road from the KwaBulawayo marker is **Coward's Bush**, now just another

marker, where warriors who returned from battle without their spears, or who had received wounds in the back, were executed.

Further west, a few kilometres before Rte 230 meets Rte 66, the **Mandwe Cross** was erected in the 1930s, against the wishes of the Zulu. There are excellent views from the hill.

Shakaland & Simunye

☎ 035

There are several Zulu-village cultural experiences in this area. Created as a set for the telemovie *Shaka Zulu*, the Protea-managed **Shakaland** (☎ 035-460 0912; www.shakaland.com; Nandi Experience R195; 🕒 display 11am) beats up a touristy, but entertaining, blend of permanent performance and informative authenticity. The Nandi Experience (Nandi was Shaka's mother) is a display of Zulu culture and customs (including lunch); the Zulu dance performance is said to be the best in the country. You can also stay overnight at the four-star **hotel** (s/d with Nandi Experience & full board R1150/980).

Shakaland is at Norman Hurst Farm, Nikwalini, 3km off Rte 66 and 14km north of Eshowe.

Simunye Zulu Lodge (☎ 035-450 3111; s/d with full board R1365/2050) is owned by renowned 'white Zulu' Barry Leitch. The Simunye experience gives you a chance to move with the rhythm of Zulu life. Located between Melmoth and Eshowe, and nestled at the bottom of cliffs on the banks of the Mfuli, Simunye Lodge – cottages, beehive huts or rondavels – is accessed by horse, donkey cart or ox (4WD for the less hardy), as arranged by your hosts. Guests meet local Zulus and learn about their traditional and contemporary culture. This authentic experience doesn't come cheap but you'll be richer for it.

MELMOTH

☎ 035 / pop 3800

Named after the first resident commissioner of Zululand, Melmoth is a small but pretty town dozing in the hills.

Golf View Lodge B&B (☎ 035-450 2476; 33 AF Leitch Dr; s/d incl breakfast R260/520) Behind a lovely

old homestead, these comfortable rooms live up to their tag line: 'Your leisure – our pleasure'.

From here, you can catch minibus taxis to Eshowe (R20, 45 minutes) and Ulundi (R20, 30 minutes).

ULUNDI

☎ 035 / pop 15,200

Once the hub of the powerful Zulu empire and until recently joint capital of KZN (with Pietermaritzburg, which gained pre-eminence), Ulundi has lost much of its heart. Brightly coloured box houses have replaced the traditional huts of old and its small centre (cum-shopping mall) has a temporary feel. It's merely a functional place that sprawls across the surrounding hills. For Zulu fanatics, however, there are still plenty of historic sites to explore in the immediate area.

Information

There are plenty of banks, with ATMs, in town.

Ulundi Tourism (☎ 035-870 0034; Princess Magogo St; 🕒 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-3pm Fri) Has an office in the municipal building.

Zululand Tourism (☎ 035-870 0812; www.zululand.org.za; Princess Magogo St; 🕒 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Also in the municipal building, offers information on the whole of Zululand.

Sights

ONDINI

Established as Cetshwayo's capital in 1873, **Onidini** (High Place; ☎ 035-870 2050; admission R15; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) was razed by British troops after the Battle of Ulundi (July 1879), the final engagement of the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War.

It took the British nearly six months to defeat the Zulu army, but the Battle of Ulundi went the same way as most of the campaign, with 10 to 15 times more Zulus killed than British. Part of the reason for the British victory at Ulundi was the adoption of the Boer laager tactic, with troops forming a hollow square to protect the cavalry, which attacked only after the Zulu army had exhausted itself trying to penetrate the walls.

The royal kraal section of the Ondini site has been rebuilt and you can see where archaeological digs have uncovered the floors

of identifiable buildings. The floors, of mud and cow dung, were preserved by the heat of the fires, which destroyed the huts above. The huge area is enclosed in a defensive perimeter of gnarled branches.

Also at Ondini is the **KwaZulu Cultural-Historical Museum** (included in Ondini admission; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), with good exhibits on Zulu history and culture and an excellent audiovisual show. It also has one of the country's best collections of beadwork on display. An excellent collection of books is for sale.

To get to Ondini, take the 'Cultural Museum' turn-off from the highway just south of Ulundi centre and keep going for about 5km. Minibus taxis occasionally pass Ondini. This road continues on to Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (tarred for 30km).

En route to Ondini, you will also pass the **Ulundi Battlefield** (admission free; 🕒 24hr), where there is a small memorial.

CITY CENTRE

The former **KwaZulu Legislative Assembly** is just north of the train line, and has some unique tapestries charting a course through Zulu history. You can request permission from the guards at the gate to enter; at the time of research, the official guide had left.

Opposite the Legislative Assembly is the site of King Mpande's *iKhanda* (palace), **kwaNodwengu**. Mpande won control from Dingaan after the disaster at Blood River (see p371). He seized power with assistance from the Boers but Zululand declined during his reign. The king's grave is there, but there's little else to see.

AROUND ULUNDI

Emakhosini Ophathe Heritage Park (Valley of the Kings; admission free; 🕒 8am-4pm) is of great significance to the Zulu. The great *makhosi* (chiefs) Nkhosinkulu, Senzangakhona (father of Shaka, Dingaan and Mpande) and Dinizulu are buried here. A monument, the **Spirit of eMakhosni**, sits on a hill (go up Rte 34 for about 3km, beyond the junction with Rte 66 to Ulundi). This comprises a massive bronze Zulu beer pot, surrounded by seven large horns symbolising the seven kings buried in the valley. The park produces an excellent brochure outlining the many historic sites in the park, including graves and battlefields.

ZULU FESTIVALS

Throughout the year there are a few major festivals that celebrate the rich culture of the Zulu people. These peaceful and joyous occasions involve colourful displays of traditional singing and dancing and are not to be missed. See www.kzn.org.za for a sneak preview, and for further details contact Graham Chennells of Zululand Eco-Adventures at the **George Hotel & Zululand Backpackers** (☎ 035-474 4919; www.eshowe.com) in Eshowe.

King Shaka Day Celebration

On the last Saturday in September, thousands of Zulus converge on KwaDukuza (formerly Stanger) for the King Shaka Day Celebration. The annual event, attended by the current Zulu king, pays homage to the Zulu hero.

Reed Dance

Every year thousands of young bare-breasted Zulu 'maidens' gather before their king, honouring the ancient tradition of the Reed Dance. In days long gone, the king would select a new bride from the mass of beautiful young maidens before him. The dance takes place around the second weekend of September before the King Shaka Day Festival at King Nyonkeni's Palace, which lies between Nongoma and Ulundi.

Shembe Festival

During the month of October, more than 30,000 Zulus gather at Judea, 15km east of Eshowe, for the annual Shembe Festival. This eye-opening festival celebrates the Shembe, the Church of the Holy Nazareth Baptists – an unofficial religion that somehow manages to combine Zulu traditions with Christianity. Presiding over the festivities is the church's saviour, Prophet Mbusi Vimbeni Shembe. Throughout the festival the emphasis is on celebration, with much dancing and singing and the blowing of the horns of Jericho.

LEGENDARY KING SHAKA

Despite all that is written about him, King Shaka is an enigmatic and controversial figure. Whether fact or mythology, Shaka is frequently portrayed as either a vicious and bloodthirsty tyrant or a military genius.

Shaka was the illegitimate son of Nandi with whom he was very close. By the 1820s he had created one of the most powerful kingdoms in the subcontinent. Violence was one of his weapons, both against his enemy and his own warriors. (On the death of his mother it is said that he killed many Zulus who he believed weren't grieving enough.)

He is probably best known for his fighting tactics: he devised the ingenious 'bull formation' where groups of warriors – the 'head and chest' – penetrated the enemy front on, while the 'horns' encircled the enemy from behind. He shortened the throwing spear to a short-shafted, close-range stabbing spear and lengthened the shield.

In 1828 Shaka's life came to an unpleasant end – he was murdered by his half-brothers Dingaan and Mhlangane (who was later toppled by Dingaan). Contemporary Zulus are incredibly proud of their Warrior King. Shaka Day is celebrated annually on 24 September at the Shaka Memorial Gardens in KwaDukuza (see p327). Thousands of Zulus wearing traditional dress and carrying shields, spears and dancing sticks descend upon the gardens. The current king and Chief Minister Dr Buthelezi usually lead the celebration.

Opathe Game Reserve (☎ 870 5000; www.kzn.wildlife.com; adult/child R10/5; 🕒 7am–6pm), 10km from Ulundi on Rte 66 towards Melmoth, has a good menagerie of animals, including black and white rhinos.

Sleeping

uMuzi Bushcamp (☎ 035-450 2531; d incl breakfast R395) Inside the Ondini complex is this privately run group of traditional beehive huts. The owners seemed to have capitalised on the location; the price stings for what you get.

Holiday Inn Garden Court (☎ 035-870 1012; fax 035-870 1220; Princess Magogo St; s/d R699/750; 📶) Catering to passing dignitaries and bureaucrats, this offers the predictably safe comforts of a chain hotel. Ask about the weekend specials.

Getting There & Away

The minibus taxi park is opposite the Holiday Inn, with services to destinations including Vryheid (R45, 1½ hours) and Eshowe (R45, 1½ hours).

MGUNGUNDLOVU

This was Dingaan's capital from 1829 to 1838, and it was here that Pieter Retief and the other Voortrekkers were killed by their host in 1838, the event that precipitated the Boer-Zulu War. (There are several variations of the spelling of Mgungundlovu, including Ungungundhlovu.) There's a small **interpretative centre** (admission R15; 🕒 8am–4pm) outlin-

ing the life history of Dingaan, and artefacts (note the sweat scraper used by the British troops) and a monument to the Voortrekkers nearby. In 1990 excavations revealed the site of Dingaan's *indlu* (great hut).

The site is 5km off Rte 34, running between Melmoth and Vryheid. Turn off to the left (west) about 5km northeast of the intersection with Rte 66 to Ulundi.

KWAMBONAMBI

☎ 035

KwaMbonambi (often called Kwambo) is a tiny town off the N2, between Empanjeni and Mtubatuba. Some believe that KwaMbonambi means 'Place of the Gathering of Kings', while others believe it means 'Place of the Blacksmith', as Shaka's spears were made here. Nowadays it's a place where very little happens, although it's close to the wildlife parks.

Cuckoos Nest (☎ 035-580 1001; www.cuck-nest.com; 28 Albizia St; dm/d with shared bathroom R70/170; 📶), especially the tree house (R160), has lost some of its perkiness since the former owners moved on, but it's spacious and friendly and with its lush garden, is a pleasant stopover if stuck.

MTUBATUBA & AROUND

☎ 035

The name Mtubatuba comes from a local chief, Mthubuthubu, meaning 'He who was Pummelled Out', referring to his difficult

birth. After a stroll through the chaotic centre you may feel much the same.

The main reason to visit is that minibus taxis run through here on their way south to Durban (R70, two hours) north to Phongolo (R80 to R100, two hours; via Hluhluwe and Mkuze) and west into Zululand. Coming from those destinations, Mtubatuba is the stop for St Lucia (St Lucia Estuary is 25km east; take Rte 8 by minibus taxi).

On the southern side of Mtubatuba is Riverview, a neat town with a sugar mill. Here, **Wendy's B&B Country Lodge** (☎ 035-550 0407; www.wendybnb.co.za; 3 Riverview Rd, Riverview; r incl breakfast R560; 📶) drips with soft furnishings and old-fashioned homey charm. It provides a warm welcome and an inhouse restaurant and pub.

HLUHLUWE & AROUND

☎ 035 / pop 3200

Hluhluwe village (roughly pronounced shloo-shloo-wee) is northeast of Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park. Here, next to the Engen petrol station on the main road through town, you will find the **Hluhluwe Tourism Association** (☎ 035-562 0353; www.hluhluwe.net; Bush Rd; 🕒 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sun), which has useful advice on accommodation and transport in the area.

You can also indulge in some local retail therapy at **Ilala Weavers** (☎ 035-562 0630; www.ilala.co.za; 🕒 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sat), where there's an excellent selection of Zulu handicrafts and aims to make local women more self-sufficient. Some 2000 Zulus now contribute to the works on offer.

Dumazulu means 'thundering Zulu', although it's the tourists who crash through the 'living museum' of **Dumazulu Cultural Village** (☎ 035-562 2260; www.goodersonleisure.com; admission R95; 🕒 shows 8.15am, 11am & 3.15pm). This popular Zulu cultural experience features spear-throwing, basket-weaving exhibitions and dancing. It's 14km south of Hluhluwe and east of the N2.

Sleeping

Isinkwe Backpackers Lodge (☎ 035-562 2258; www.isinkwe.co.za; camp sites per person R65; dm/d with shared bathroom R85/200, d R280; 📶) This well-managed place, in a sweep of virgin bush 14km south of Hluhluwe, is as close as you can get to a bona fide bush-lodge backpackers. There's a list of activities as tall

WARNING

There is malaria in the low-lying areas of coastal Zululand and parts of the Elephant Coast (especially Mapuland). It also exists in the north of KwaZulu-Natal, especially as you get close to the Mozambique and eastern Swaziland borders. There is the risk of bilharzia in some waterways and dams, especially those below 1200m above sea level. See p647 for more information.

as a giraffe, and you can exchange hippo-adventure stories at the bar-deck by the pool. Ring for directions.

Hluhluwe Hotel (☎ 035-562 0251; www.hluhluwehotel.co.za; 104 Bush Rd; s/d incl breakfast R570/840; 📶) This monolithic, central and sanitised motel-with-a-thatched-roof caters for the mass-tourist market.

Zululand Tree Lodge (☎ 035-562 1020; s/d with full board R2100/2800; 📶) Seven kilometres outside Hluhluwe, and set in the Ubizane reserve amid fever trees, this romantic spot offers dreamy, thatched tree houses, and some self-catering, four-bed safari lodges (R690). Tours are included in the price; it has excellent specials.

HLUHLUWE-IMFOLZOI PARK

☎ 035

Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (☎ 035-550 8476; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R70/35; 🕒 5am–7pm Nov–Feb, 6am–6pm Mar–Oct) is one of South Africa's best-known and most evocative parks. Covering 96,000 hectares, the park is best visited in winter as the animals then range widely without congregating at water sources, although the lush vegetation sometimes makes viewing difficult. However, summer visits can also be very rewarding, especially at Imfolozi where there is more-open savanna country.

The park has lion, elephant, rhino (black and white), leopard, giraffes and wild dogs. The land is quite hilly except on the river flats: the White Imfolozi River flows through Imfolozi, and the Black Imfolozi forms the northern border of the park; the Hluhluwe River bisects Hluhluwe, and the dam on it attracts wildlife.

The **Centenary Centre** (🕒 8am–4pm), a wildlife-holding centre with an attached museum and information centre, is in the

eastern section of Imfolozi. It incorporates rhino enclosures and antelope pens (open 9am to 3pm), and was established to allow visitors to view animals in transit to their new homes.

The wildlife drives here are very popular. **Hilltop Camp** (☎ 035-562 0848) offers morning and night drives, while Mpila Camp does night drives only. The drives are open to resort residents only and cost R150 per person.

Bear in mind that the reserves are in a (low-risk) malarial area and there are lots of mosquitoes – come prepared.

Wilderness Trails

One of Imfolozi's main attractions is its trail system, in a special 24,000-hectare wilderness area (note: these are seasonal). The **Base Trail** (3 nights/4 days, R2700) is, as the name suggests, at a base camp. Trailists carry daypacks on the daily outings.

The **Short Wilderness Trail** (2 nights/3 days, R1500) is at satellite camps with no amenities (bucket shower), yet are fully catered. Similar is the **Extended Wilderness Trail**

(3 nights/4 days, R2250) but guests must carry their gear for 7km into camp. On the **Primitive Trail** (4 nights/5 days, R1800), you carry equipment, help prepare the food (provided) and sleep under the stars. Some consider this trail to be more fun as you get to participate more (for example, hikers must sit up in 1½-hour watches during the night).

Bushveld Trail (2 nights/3 days, R1600) is a softer experience; the base camp has amenities (including fridge) and guests have walks and summer siestas.

Tours

Most of the accommodation options, including hostels, offer day trips to Hluhluwe-Imfolozi. If you've got time, a good option is to hire a car and travel at your own pace through the park.

Tekweni Eco-Tours (☎ in Durban 031-463 2576; www.tekweniecotours.co.za) offers tours from Durban.

Sleeping & Eating

You must book accommodation in advance through **KZN Wildlife** (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com) in Pietermaritzburg or at Durban's **Tourist Junction** (☎ 035-304 4934; 160 Pine St, cnr Soldiers Way; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat). Last-minute bookings – those made 48 hours ahead – should be made direct with the camp site.

Hilltop Camp (☎ 035-562 0848; rest huts/chalets per person R230/466, 2-bed units with full board per person R466) is the signature resort on the Hluhluwe side, with stupendous views, a restaurant and a much-needed bar (it gets very hot here). The drawback is that it's the most popular destination for tour buses and is generally quite busy. If you want peace and quiet, try one of the smaller and more sedate accommodation centres in Imfolozi.

Muntulu Bush Lodge (8-bed bush lodges per person R515) is perched high above the Hluhluwe River; and **Munywaneni Bush Lodge** (8-bed bush lodges per person R468, minimum R3090) is secluded and self-contained. There's also a fully hosted and catered nine-bed lodge at **Mtwazi Lodge** (per person incl wildlife drives & walks price on application).

The main accommodation centre on the Imfolozi side is spectacular **Mpila Camp** (4-bed rest huts per person R213, 2-bed safari camps per person R242) in the centre of the reserve. **Masinda**

(9-bed lodge per person incl wildlife drives & walks R1800), near the Centenary Centre, is fully hosted and catered. There is also accommodation available at **Nselweni Bush Camp** (8-bed bush camps per person R319), **Gqoyeni Bush Camp** (8-bed bush camps per person R515) and **Hlatikulu** (8-bed bush camps per person R515).

Be warned: all accommodation options are billed per person but are subject to a minimum charge. Additionally, if you are self-catering, remember to bring your own food!

Getting There & Away

You can access the park via three gates. The main entrance, Memorial Gate, is about 15km west of the N2, about 50km north of Mtubatuba. The second entrance, the Nyalazi Gate, is accessed by turning left off the N2 onto Rte 618 just after Mtubatuba to Nongoma. The third, Cengeni Gate, on Imfolozi's western side, is accessible by road (tarred for 30km) from Ulundi.

Petrol is available at Mpila Camp in Imfolozi and at Hilltop Camp in Hluhluwe, where you can also get diesel.

PHONGOLO (PONGOLA)

☎ 034

Back on the N2, Phongolo (also known as Pongola) is a small town in a sugar-growing district near the Mpumalanga and Swaziland borders. There's an ATM, and petrol is available 24 hours. There's not a lot here, unless you stop en route to the **Phongolo Reserve** (☎ 034-435 1012; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R18/9/20; ☎ 6am-6pm), a lovely area southeast of Phongolo, backed by the Lebombo Range and encompassing a large lake, on which you can go boating.

KZN Wildlife (☎ 034-033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites per person R45) has (unfenced) camp sites in Phongolo Reserve. Minimum charges apply.

Pongola Country Lodge (☎ 034-413 1352; fax 413 1353; 14 Jan Mielie St; s/d R350/400) Modern, comfortable and central, this is a good bet for an overnight stay in Phongolo.

ITHALA GAME RESERVE

KZN Wildlife's **Ithala Game Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 034-983 2540; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R35/18/30; ☎ 5am-7pm) has all the trappings of a private wildlife reserve but much lower prices. It also doesn't get the crowds that flock into Hluhluwe-Imfolozi, as it's

slightly off the main routes, but is equally as captivating.

Most of the 30,000 hectares are taken up by the steep valleys of six rivers (tributaries of the Phongolo), with some open grassland on the heights, rugged outcrops and bushveld. Some of the world's oldest rock formations are found here, as are Stone Age spear and axe heads.

Animals include black and white rhino, elephant, tsessebes, buffalo and giraffes (the park's emblem as they are believed to be indigenous to Ithala) and rare bird species.

Guided walks (R65 per person) and wildlife and night drives (R86 per person) are available.

Sleeping

There are camp sites available at **Mhlangeni** (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites per person R40), and bush camps at **Thalu** (R275) and **Mbizo** (R275). Minimum charges apply.

Ntshondwe (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; self-catering 2-bed chalets per person R352, 2-bed non-self-catering units per person R319; ☎) This is the main centre, with superb views of the reserve below. Facilities include a restaurant, shop and swimming pool. There's a full-board option for the units, on request (R440).

Getting There & Away

Ithala is reached from Louwsburg, about 55km northeast of Vryheid on Rte 69, and about the same distance southwest of Phongolo via Rtes 66 and 69. Louwsburg is much smaller than many maps indicate.

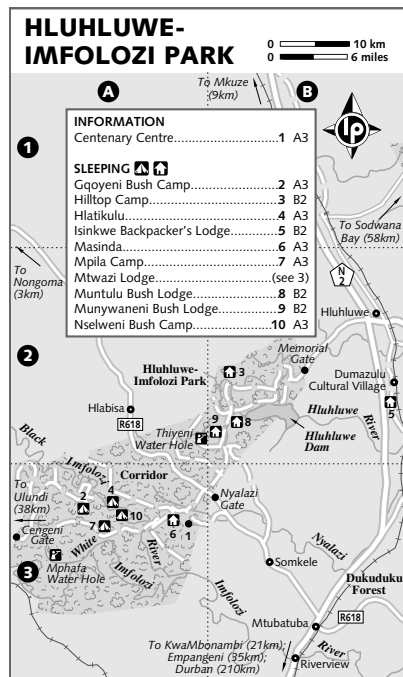
VRYHEID

☎ 034 / pop 63,600

Vryheid (Liberty) is the largest town in northern Zululand. Today it is an agricultural, timber and mining centre but in 1884 it was the capital of the Nieuwe Republiek, which was absorbed into the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (South African Republic) four years later. After the Anglo-Boer War, the area was transferred to Natal. There's still a strong Afrikaner presence here.

The helpful **Vryheid information office** (☎ 034-982 2133; www.vryheid.co.za; cnr Market & High Sts) can provide information on the surrounding area, and on tours of the Battlefields.

The interesting **Nieuwe Republiek Museum** (☎ 034-982 2133; 119 Landdrost St; admission free;



BLURRED BORDERS

Historically and traditionally, the region of Zululand ran from the Tugela River all the way to the Mozambique border, and west as far as Vryheid. The northeastern section of this region was known as Maputaland. Over the years, the increase in tourism has led to an explosion of promotional activity. A more recent branding exercise by tourist authorities has created (or blurred) borders, by renaming the eastern coast the Elephant Coast. References to 'Maputaland' are being phased out, although it still exists on many maps, and in this book.

☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, by appointment Sat & Sun), in the former Parliament building, is devoted to the shortlived Nieuwe Republiek. The **Lucas Meijer Museum** (☎ 034-982 2133; cnr Landdrost & Mark Sts; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, by appointment Sat & Sun) is a small local-history museum in the old Lucas Meijer House (Meijer was the only president of the Nieuwe Republiek).

Sleeping

With the exception of Mountain View, accommodation in Vryheid is generally overpriced for what you get.

Vryheid Lodge (☎ 034-981 5201; fax 034-981 5467; 200 Kerk St; s/d R130/190) Resembling 1950s-style university accommodation, these digs are frugal on every front. They're above a pub; single females may not feel comfortable here.

Mountain View (☎ 034-980 1199; mountainview@vryheid.co.za; 90 Smal St; s/d R250/350; 📍) This is a welcome addition to the town's B&B market. The rooms are as welcoming and generous as the owner, and have a tasteful touch of ethnic design.

Villa Prince Imperial (☎ 034-983 2610; www.princeimperial.com; 136 Bree St; s/d incl breakfast R410/620; 📍 📞 📧) Vryheid's most upmarket home-cum-hotel offers a splash of frontier-town French luxury, if with a touch of stale-smoke syndrome (despite the no-smoking signs).

Getting There & Away

Greyhound (☎ in Durban 031-334 9700; www.greyhound.co.za) runs daily buses between Durban and Vryheid (R190, six hours) and Jo'burg and Vryheid (R200, 6½ hours).

The well-organised minibus taxi park is near the former train station. Vryheid is the centre for minibus taxis in this part of KwaZulu-Natal. Services from Vryheid include Ulundi (R45, 1½ hours), Dundee (R25, 1¼ hours), Phongolo (R45, two hours), Durban (R100, four hours; via Melmoth) and Jo'burg (R100, five hours).

THE ELEPHANT COAST

Up there on the podium with the world's great ecotourist destinations, and not far from the top of the scribbled list marked 'Places I Must See In South Africa', the tourism-authority labelled Elephant Coast (which incorporates the northern region known as Maputaland) is a phenomenal stretch of natural beauty, with a fabulously diverse mix of environments and wildlife. The Elephant Coast is bound in the south by the Umfolozi River just below the St Lucia Estuary, and to the northwest by the Lebombo Mountains. (Note, some tourist literature can be confusing, with both the Elephant Coast and Zululand promotions claiming parks, such as Hluhluwe-Imfolozi, to be their own.)

This large stretch of coastline includes some of the country's true highlights, including the wonderfully diverse and perennially photogenic Greater St Lucia Wetland Park and the coffee table-book vistas of Kosi Bay Nature Reserve. Sparsely populated and uncompromisingly untamed, this region, away from the scattered resort towns, offers a glimpse of the wild heart of Africa. The climate becomes steadily hotter as you go north and, thanks to the warm Indian Ocean, summers are steamy and almost tropical. The humid coastal air causes frequent dense mists on the inland hills, reducing visibility to a few metres. If driving, be careful of pedestrians and animals suddenly appearing around a corner.

There is a good network of minibus taxis and local-bus companies covering this area. The **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) also goes up the coast, on the run between Durban and Jo'burg via Swaziland.

GREATER ST LUCIA WETLAND PARK

☎ 035

The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, a Unesco World Heritage site, stretches for 280 glorious kilometres, from the Mozambique border near Kosi Bay in the north of Maputaland, to Maphelana, at the southern end of Lake St Lucia. With the Indian Ocean on one side, and a series of lakes on the other (including Lake St Lucia), the 328,000-hectare area is made up of a jumbled jigsaw of different reserves (with separate accesses) and protects five distinct ecosystems, offering everything from off-shore reefs and beaches, to lakes, wetlands, woodlands and coastal forests. Loggerhead and leatherback turtles nest along the park's shores. The ocean beaches pull big crowds during the holiday season.

Lake St Lucia itself is Africa's largest estuary. Despite its past healthy water levels, it is currently at its lowest level for 50 years, due to a severe drought. Controversy surrounds a long-term solution to the management of the lake, with both animal and plant species being affected by the changing ecological factors (see the boxed text, p341).

At the time of research, the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park was about to relaunch its ecodestination image. Part of this included granting concessions to 'responsible' ecotour operators as well as renaming the park to better reflect the merging (several years ago) of the jigsaw of reserves and parks down the eastern seaboard.

In any case, your best bet is to spend a night in St Lucia Estuary to visit the KZN Wildlife office for information on parks and reserves and get your head around the activities and destinations on offer.

Remember that unless specified, all KZN Wildlife accommodation must be booked at **KZN Wildlife** (☎ in Pietermaritzburg 033-845 1000, in Durban 031-304 4934) with 48 hours' notice. Within 48 hours, try your luck directly with the lodges and camp sites.

Activities & Tours

Numerous fascinating day and night tours are on offer. Most of the hostels run or can organise tours through tour operators. Tour companies are being granted 'concessions', which identify them as the region's ecoresponsible operators. Many of these

WARNING

Although St Lucia Estuary has itself been declared malaria-free following a hefty spraying program, the area outside the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, especially towards Kosi Bay, is a malarial area and there are lots of mosquitoes. Ticks and leeches can be a problem. Also beware of crocs and hippos: both can be deadly. Be careful at night, as this is when hippos roam. In more remote areas hippos might be encountered on shore during the day – maintain your distance and retreat quietly. Sharks sometimes venture up near the St Lucia Estuary.

have offices based in St Lucia Estuary and are useful first stops for information.

BIRDING

Zululand Birding Route (☎ 033-753 5644)

BOAT TOURS

Advantage Tours (☎ 035-590 1259)

Born Free and Fannas (☎ 035-590 1047)

Santa Lucia (☎ 035-590 1340)

CANOING

Muzi Pan Adventures (☎ 073-161 8189)

St Lucia Kayak Safaris (☎ 035-590 1233)

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Amoray (☎ 083-252 9448)

Coral Divers (☎ 033-345 6531)

Rocktail Bay Lodge (☎ 011 807 1800)

Thonga Beach Lodge (☎ 035-474 1473)

HIKING

Hiking is awesome around the region. The main trails are all in the Eastern Shores (Mfabeni) area and are guided walks. For more information, see p341. There are also day walks, detailed in the scant KZN Wildlife literature at St Lucia Estuary office.

HORSE RIDING

Bhangazi Horse Safaris (☎ 035-550 4898)

Exodus Adventures (☎ 083-349 8575)

TURTLE TOURS

David Ngubane (☎ 072-847 7057) & **Richard Mathenjwa** (☎ 082-968 3766) Both are community guides.

EuroZulu Safaris (☎ 035-590 2173)

Rocktail Bay Lodge (☎ 011 807 1800)
Shaka Barker Tours (☎ 035-590 1162)
Sodwana Bay Lodge (☎ 035-571 0117)
Thonga Beach Lodge (☎ 035-474 1473)

WHALE-WATCHING

Advantage Tours (☎ 035-590 1259)

WILDLIFE DRIVES

Leisure EcoTours (☎ 035-590 4059)
Shaka Barker Tours (☎ 035-590 1162)

St Lucia Estuary

St Lucia Estuary, the park's main resort town and the region's gateway, is a good place in which to get your bearings for the region. In high season, this pleasant village is a hotbed of activity as the population swells from 600 to the thousands. But outside the silly season, you're guaranteed a comfortable bed, a cold beer and a good feed. The main drag, MacKenzie St (a former hippo pathway), is packed with restaurants, lively hostels and bars, but the quieter avenues behind offer a touch more hush and a good selection of midrange B&Bs. Hippos sometimes amble down the town's quieter streets (beware, these are not cute).

INFORMATION

First National Bank (MacKenzie St) Has an ATM.

Internet café (☎ 035-590 1056; 310 MacKenzie St; per hr R30; ☎ 7am-10pm) At BiB's International Backpackers.

KZN Wildlife (☎ 035-590 1340; fax 035-590 1343; Pelican Rd; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm) Offers information on the reserves.

St Lucia Tours & Charters (☎ 035-590 1259; www.advantagetours.co.za; cnr MacKenzie St & Katonkel Rd; ☎ 6.30am-6pm) Offers plenty of information and tour bookings. There is another office on the corner of MacKenzie St and Rte 618.

Standard Bank (MacKenzie St) Has an ATM.

SIGHTS

About 1km north of St Lucia, on the road to Cape Vidal, is the KZN **Crocodile Centre** (☎ 035-590 1386; croc-centre@kznwildlife.com; adult/child R30/25; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun), where a fine array of crocs can be seen in their not-so-natural habitat.

SLEEPING

There is rarely a shortage of places to stay, but it is worth booking ahead during the summer months.

In St Lucia Estuary itself, you can camp at three sites run by **KZN Wildlife** (☎ 033-845 1000, 590 1340; www.kznwildlife.com; Pelican St). The pretty **Sugarloaf** (per person R52) is on the estuary, as are **Eden Park** (per person R65), near the KZN Wildlife office, and **Iphiva** (per person R52), off MacKenzie St.

BiB's International Backpackers (☎ 035-590 1056; www.bibs.co.za; 310 MacKenzie St; camp sites R45, dm/d with shared bathroom R70/150, d R200; ☎ ☎ ☎) Occupying a series of sprawling buildings, the tarnished rooms in this happening place are as tired as its guests after their day of activities. But the atmosphere makes up for it: BiB's offers all the backpacker staples – a busy bar, a huge (serviced) kitchen for cooking, and organised fun.

Hornbill House (☎ 035-590 1071; 43 Hornbill St; s/d incl breakfast R245/390; ☎ ☎) A pleasant place to nest, with homey B&B comforts, plus pool and deck. That is, if you're not flitting about on one of the many ecofriendly trips or activities offered by the knowledgeable owner, also a tour-company operator.

Santa Lucia Guest House (☎ 035-590 1151; www.santalucia.co.za; 30 Pelican St; s/d incl breakfast R290/580; ☎ ☎) This highly acclaimed B&B adds some old-fashioned luxury to the usual standard fare. It's chock-a-block with décor and hotel trimmings and the friendly, hospitable owners ensure a pleasant hippo-free stay.

Hippo Hideaway (☎ 035-590 1025; www.hippohideaway.co.za; 70 MacKenzie St; s/d R500/560; ☎ ☎) The new hippo in the hide, this smart place caters to the better-heeled traveller: the small complex of self-catering apartments is spanking new, sparkling clean, and decked out in the inevitable ethnic (hippo-themed) décor.

EATING

St Pizza (☎ 035-590 1048; MacKenzie St; mains R18-62; ☎ lunch & dinner) Pizza with a South African spin (they'll even put biltong – strips of meat dried and cured in the sun – on top) is on the menu at this down-to-earth place with a buzzy, beer-garden atmosphere.

Quarterdeck (☎ 035-590 1116; MacKenzie St; mains R25-75; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a slightly tacky maritime theme, this lively place serves up mountainous portions and plenty of atmosphere. Steaks and seafood top the billing, but come nightfall, the outside terrace takes on a bustling, bar-style buzz.

POSING PROBLEMS – THE ST LUCIA ESTUARY

Lake St Lucia, Africa's largest estuary, is part of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, which covers 320,000 hectares, features five ecosystems and was declared a World Heritage Site in 1999.

But not all is going swimmingly. The lake – and estuarine system of 35,000 hectares – is the centre of an ecological conundrum. Scientists and others are at loggerheads over the best way of dealing with a complicated combination of drought, a former river diversion and expanded water usage (through population increases, crop irrigation, farm dams and timber plantations), all of which have resulted in a severe drop in the lake's water levels – currently 80cm below mean sea level. This not only has major ecological repercussions, but tourist numbers in the area are said to have decreased due to a resulting decline in fish populations and a ban on beach driving. (That said, the nature of the tourist has changed from fishermen, who have decreased in numbers, to more ecodestination-driven visitors, whose numbers are increasing.)

Part of this complex problem is the Umfolozi River which, diverted from the estuary mouth in 1951 to become a separate entity, is being prevented – with the construction of artificial sand barriers – from breaking into the estuary. The mouth of the Umfolozi is moving north towards the estuary due to erosion and force of currents. (Five other rivers enter the lake, but the Umfolozi River has a runoff that is larger than all these combined.)

The main issue is whether or not the estuary mouth should be opened or remain closed. The pro-closure camp believes that if the river enters the estuary, it may cause the closed estuary mouth to break open. This would result in millions of tonnes of sea water surging into the estuary, as well as massive deposits of salt from the sea and sediment from both the sea and river – causing permanent ecological damage. They believe that the healthy animal life including hippo, crocs, pelicans and waders, thrive on the rich feeding.

The anti-closure camp says that the current dry conditions are a threat to the future of the lake. They are concerned that St Lucia is in danger of turning into a freshwater lake, with freshwater species invading a traditional estuarine area. The lake is a nursery and rich feeding ground for many fish species, prawns and crabs which, unable to spawn at sea, are now facing decline.

The Wetland Authority has sought research funding from the Global Environment Facility, which assists developing countries in finding solutions to environmental problems. It is looking at a holistic approach to water-management issues in the catchment system. A possible suggestion includes restoring a number of surrounding sugar farms to swampland (acting as a sediment filter for water flowing into the lake).

Alfredo's Italian Restaurant (☎ 035-590 1150; MacKenzie St; mains R40-58; ☎ lunch & dinner) Don't let the tartan tablecloths mislead – the pizza, pasta and salads at this smart place bring Little Italy to town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) drops backpackers several times a week. If you're not doing tours out of St Lucia Estuary, the only way of getting around is to have your own wheels.

Eastern Shores (Mfabeni) Reserve

☎ 035

Two kilometres north of St Lucia Estuary, on the eastern side of the lake, is the boom gate for the **Eastern Shores (Mfabeni) Reserve** (☎ 035-590 9002; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R20/15/35; ☎ 5am-7pm), which has the sea

on its eastern flank. This section of the park has an excellent selection of wildlife, and a variety of ecosystems from rocky shore and swamp to open grassland. Fourteen kilometres north of the boom gate are the **Mission Rocks**, where you will find the **ranger station** (☎ 035-590 9002) for the hiking trails. At low tide, the Mission Rocks are covered in rock pools containing a fabulous array of sea life.

HIKING TRAILS

You can drive through the reserve on a day trip, but by far the best way to see this section of the park is to take one of the trails offered by KZN Wildlife.

The **Mziki Trail** (☎ 035-90 9002; per person per night R70) is a guided, three-day trail of about 40km. In fact, the route is made up of three, distinct one-day trails, which span out

from the Mount Tabor Base Camp, where accommodation is in a basic, eight-bed hut. Reservations should be made on the listed phone number and you should check in at the Mission Rocks ranger station between 2pm and 4pm on the first day. You must bring your own food.

The **Emoyeni Trail** (☎ 035-590 9002; per person R55) is a guided, five-day excursion. The trail is 65km long and you stay each of the four nights in a different camp. The trail offers an indepth insight into the ecosystems and history of the area – there used to be a WWII British radar observation post on Mt Tabor. Reservations should be made on the listed phone number and you should check in at the Mission Rocks ranger station before noon on the first day. You must bring your own food, cooking equipment, sleeping bag and tent.

See KZN Wildlife for the latest information on unguided trails.

Cape Vidal

☎ 035

This beautiful **coastal camp** (☎ 033-845 1000, 590 9024; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R20/15/35; ☎ 6am-6pm) takes in the land between the lake and the ocean, north of Cape Vidal itself. Some of the forested sand dunes are 150m high and the beaches are excellent for swimming.

There is KZN Wildlife accommodation at the **Bhangazi Complex** (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites R72, 5-8-bed log cabins per person R222, 8-bed bush lodge R350), near Lake Bhangazi. Minimum charges apply.

From St Lucia Estuary head north, past the Crocodile Centre and through the entrance gates. Cape Vidal is approximately 35km further on.

Fani's Island & False Bay Park

Both Fani's Island and False Bay Park desperately need the rainbird to sing; it hasn't for many years. Due to the drought, there is no water in the lake and the area has been closed for several years. It will reopen as soon as there is sufficient rainfall. Check with KZN Wildlife – there are two excellent camps.

Sodwana Bay

☎ 035

Spectacular Sodwana Bay, a sheltered recess at the very northern tip of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, isn't a whole lot more than sand, sea and silence. And that's its appeal. The spread-out village of Sodwana Bay is also here, but the two nearby parks – Sodwana Bay National Park and Ozabeni – provide most of the highlights.

Isolated and peaceful (outside the holidays, – when 4WDs take to the sands and scuba-diving groups gather), this little slice of paradise offers stunning coastal scenery, guided walking trails and some serious deep-sea game fishing (note: self-guided walks are no longer available due to robberies). It's possibly best known on the tourist trail for its scuba diving and its diversity of underwater seascapes and marine flora and fauna.

Tourist information is best obtained from the KZN Wildlife office at the camp site reception. (This is further on from the first log cabin labelled 'tourist office', which has extremely limited information.)

Sodwana Bay National Park (☎ 035-571 0051; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/15; ☎ 6am-6pm) is on the coast, east of Mkuze. There are some animals, and the dunes, swamps and offshore coral reefs are well worth visiting,

SNORKELLING & DIVING

The coastline near Sodwana Bay, which includes the southernmost coral reefs in Africa, is a diver's paradise. Schools of fish glide through the beautiful coral, turtles swim by, and moray eels peer inquisitively from rock crevices. Predominantly soft coral over hard, the reef has one of the world's highest recorded numbers of tropical-fish species. All of these wonders can be seen using scuba or snorkelling equipment, and excellent visibility and warm winter waters allow for diving year-round.

Popular snorkelling spots are Cape Vidal, Two-Mile Reef off Sodwana Bay, Mabibi and the Kosi Mouth with its famous 'aquarium', so named because of the diversity of fish. Scuba divers should head for Tenedos Shoal, between the Mlalazi River and Port Durnford, and Five-Mile, Seven-Mile and Nine-Mile Reefs. Courses are held at Two-Mile Reef.

but the area can become very congested during holidays. Between November and February there are turtle-viewing tours (R150 per person).

If you opt for accommodation in the park's massive camp-site area (some of the lodges are also here), you pay a one-off charge of R45 at reception; day visitors pay R5.

For a more peaceful look at a similar ecosystem, head south to the adjoining **Ozabeni** (☎ 035-571 0268; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R20/10/15; ☎ 6am-6pm), which runs all the way down to Lake St Lucia. Bird-watchers are in for a treat here, as more than 330 species have been recorded. Visitors are free to walk through the reserve.

Orca Launches (☎ 035-571 5000, 083-6547204; www.orcasafaris.co.za; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) is in the artistic-looking store on the main street of the village and organises a host of activities from snorkelling to turtle tours (activities from R150 per person). Nearby, **Off Road Fun** (☎ 082-785 7704) offers quad-bike tours (R180).

The nearest ATM is in Mbazwana, 14km west.

SLEEPING & EATING

KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Ozabeni camp sites per person R30, Sodwana Bay National Park camp sites/5-bed cabins per person R140/220) Offers camping at Ozabeni, and hundreds of camp sites and cabins at Sodwana Bay National Park. Minimum charges apply.

Coral Divers (☎ 033-345 6531; www.coraldivers.co.za; Sodwana Bay National Park; s/d with shared bathroom from R165/300; ☎ 8) Some readers have reported feeling like a small tadpole in a big pond at this Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) resort (others

feel like sharks). While it's a factory-style operation, it has cabins in a lovely setting, satellite TV, a pool and a bar, plus a shoal of other activities. Standard dive packages with three nights' accommodation and five dives starts at around R1300. For R150, staff will pick you up from Hluhluwe.

Sodwana Bay Lodge (☎ 035-571 0095; www.sodwanadiving.co.za; s/d with half board R738/1210) This slick resort, with neat boardwalks, banana palms and thatched roofs, caters to high-life divers, offering combinations of dive packages (from R1410 per person sharing). It's on the main road through the village.

Mseni Lodge (☎ 035-571 0284; www.mseni.co.za; Sodwana Bay National Park; s/d with half board R905/1190) Nestled in lush dune forest, these luxury cabins are worth diving into your wallet for. The lodge also offers dive courses through **Amoray Diving** (☎ 083-252 9448; www.amoraydiving.com), which cost between R750 and R2,500.

Also recommended for accommodation with diving, tours and other activities: **Da Blu Juice** (☎ 082-924 7757, 082-681 5459; www.dabluejuice.co.za; dm per person R120, cabins from R200) **Natural Moments Bush Lodge & Diving** (☎ 035-571 0167; naturalmoments@planetblue.co.za; bungalows per person from R100)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are two road routes from the N2. The northern route leaves the highway about 8km north of Mkuze and runs up into the Lebombo Mountains to the small town of Jozini. After Jozini it's a dirt road running through flat country. The southern route is sealed the whole way and leaves the N2 north of the turn-off for Hluhluwe village. Both routes converge at the village

MARINE TURTLES

Five species of turtle live off the South African coast but only two actually nest on the coast: the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). The nesting areas of the leatherback extend from the St Lucia mouth north into Mozambique, but the loggerhead only nests in the Maputaland Marine Reserve.

Both species nest at night in summer. The female moves above the high-tide mark, finds a suitable site and lays her eggs. The loggerheads' breeding area is more varied as they clamber over rocks in the intertidal zone; leatherbacks will only nest on sandy beaches.

About 70 days later, the hatchlings scramble out of the nest at night and make a dash for the sea. Only one or two of each thousand hatchlings will survive until maturity. The females return 12 to 15 years later to the very same beach to nest.

of Mbazwana, from where it's about 20km to the park.

Minibus taxis run from the N2 up to Jozini. From there to Sodwana Bay you shouldn't have trouble finding transport (taxis) as it's a fairly densely populated region. There are far fewer taxis on the southern route but there is a fair amount of tourist traffic, so hitching should be fairly easy.

LAKE SIBAYA NATURE RESERVE

Protecting the largest freshwater lake in South Africa, **Lake Sibaya Nature Reserve** (www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R20/10/35; ☎ 6am-6pm) covers between 60 and 70 sq km, depending on the water level. It lies very close to the coast, and between the eastern shore and the sea is a range of sand dunes up to 165m high. There are hippo, some crocs and a large range of birdlife (more than 280 species have been recorded). The lake is popular for fishing; you can hire boats (complete with skipper) for fishing trips.

There is currently no accommodation in the reserve. The main route to the reserve is via the village of Mbazwana, south of the lake, either from Mkuze or from Mhlosinga, off Rte 22.

KOSI BAY NATURE RESERVE

☎ 033

The jewel of the Elephant Coast, **Kosi Bay Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 035-592 0234; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R20/10/15; ☎ 6am-6pm) features a string of four lakes, Nhlange, Mpungwini, Sifungwe and Amanzimnyama, that tip down the hillside into an estuary lined with some of the most beautiful (and quietest) beaches in South Africa. Fig, mangrove and raffia-palm forests provide the greenery, while a coral reef offers excellent snorkelling just offshore.

There are antelope species in the drier country and hippo, Zambezi sharks and some crocs in the lake system. More than 250 bird species have been identified here, including the rare palmnut vulture.

The 44km **Kosi Bay Trail** (4 days per person for group of 10 R350, minimum charge R3500) is a self-catered, guided hike around the Kosi estuarine system, stopping each night in remote camps, which focus on different aspects of the reserve. This trail includes a walk to the estuary at Kosi Mouth.

There are camp sites and basic cabins in the reserve, but very little else. **KwaNgwanase** is the nearest service centre, some 10km west of the reserve, and you will find shops and an ATM here. There are two entrances to the reserve – Kosi Bay Camp (7km north of KwaNgwanase) and Kosi Bay Mouth (19km north of KwaNgwanase). The access roads to both can get very bad, and you may need a 4WD. The Total petrol station, on the main road through KwaNgwanase, is a good place to ask about the state of the roads (ask for Jan, the owner) and the best spot to try and hitch into the reserve with a passing 4WD.

Sleeping & Eating

Most lodge accommodation is dispersed around the region's sandy dunes several kilometres from KwaNgwanase and often away from the water. In many cases 4WDs are needed to negotiate the sandy tracks.

Utshwayelo Campsite (☎ 033-592 9626, 073-134 3318; camp sites per person R60) This quiet, community-run camp site offers camping right by the parks-board office on the Kosi Bay Mouth access road. From here, you can walk to one of the country's best beaches in 20 minutes.

KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites per person R65, 2- & 4-bed cabins per person R236) Offers camping and cabin accommodation on the western shore of Nhlange – minimum charges apply.

I Gwala Gwala Lodge (☎ 084-588 0564; camp sites R50, s/d R150/300) Around 1km from the parks-board office on the Kosi Bay Camp access road, this excellent place offers transfers to all beaches, picks up from Mkuze and organises snorkelling, dolphin swims, boat trips and diving. Accommodation is in basic chalets.

Maputaland (☎ 033-592 0654; maputaland@polka.co.za; Posbus 757, KwaNgwanase; s/d incl breakfast R345/590) These 10 modern chalets in KwaNgwanase have all the mod cons including DSTV, bar and restaurant, plus the 'mother' of mozzie nets hanging from ropes. Great for those who want to base themselves in a creature-free zone, but close enough to explore the reserve with transport.

Getting There & Away

You need your own transport to get to Kosi Bay. Take the Jozini turn-off from the N2

and head towards Tembe Game Reserve. If heading from Sodwana Bay continue north up the major Rte 22. Note, Kosi Bay Mouth and Kosi Bay Camp are two different places in the reserve, each serviced by a different access road north of KwaNgwanase. The first road (7km north) leads to Kosi Bay Camp and the second (19km north) leads to Kosi Bay Mouth. Both may require a 4WD to access.

TEMBE ELEPHANT PARK

☎ 035

Heading back to the N2 from Kosi Bay, South Africa's last free-ranging elephants are protected in the sandveld (dry, sandy belt) forests of **Tembe Elephant Park** (☎ 035-592 0001; www.tembe.co.za; adult/child/vehicle R30/15/35; ☎ 6am-6pm) on the Mozambique border. There are now about 160 elephants in the area, many of them the last remnants of elephant herds from the Maputo Elephant Reserve, saved from Mozambique's civil war. The park boasts the Big Five (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino).

Although this is a KZN Wildlife park, the accommodation is privately run.

Tembe Lodge (☎ 035-592 0545; www.tembe.co.za; r with full board & activities from R1600; ☎) offers accommodation in secluded safari tents built on wooden platforms. In the centre of the camp there is a large dining area, a shaded pool and braai facilities.

There's a sealed road all the way to the park entrance, but only 4WD vehicles are allowed to drive through the park itself.

NDUMO GAME RESERVE

☎ 033

A little further west, the **Ndumo Game Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 035-591 0004; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R35/18/35; ☎ 5am-7pm) is beside the Mozambique border and close to the Swaziland border, about 100km north of Mkuze. On some 10,000 hectares, there are black and white rhino, hippo, crocodiles and antelope species but it is the birdlife on the Phongolo and Usutu Rivers, and their flood plains and pans, which attracts visitors. It is known locally as a 'mini Okavango'.

Wildlife-viewing and bird-watching guided walks (R45) and vehicle tours (R100) are available. This is the southernmost limit of the range of many bird species and the

reserve is a favourite with bird-watchers, with more than 400 species recorded.

Fuel and limited supplies are usually available 2km outside the park gate. Camping and rest huts are offered by **KZN Wildlife Accommodation** (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites per person R55, 2-bed rest huts per person R200) – minimum charges apply.

MKHUZE GAME RESERVE & AROUND

☎ 035

A possible trip highlight is the **Mkhuze Game Reserve** (☎ 031-845 1000, 573 9001; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child/vehicle R35/18/35; ☎ 6am-6pm). Established in 1912, this reserve, covering some 36,000 spectacular hectares, is a well-kept 'secret'. It lacks lions, but just about every other sought-after animal is represented, as well as more than 400 species of birds, including the rare Pel's fishing owl (*Scotopelia peli*).

Better still, the reserve has hides at water holes, which offer some of the best wildlife viewing in the country. Morning is the best time. It's 15km from Mkuze (18km from Bayla if heading north). Wildlife drives (R90) are available.

KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Nhlonhlela bush lodge R199, Mantuma rest huts/2- & 4-bed safari camps & chalets per person R99/244) offers a bush lodge at Nhlonhlela, and a variety of accommodation at Mantuma. Minimum charges apply.

The best route is via the north from Mkuze town (from the south, you turn off the N2 around 35km north of Hluhluwe village but it's on dirt road).

The town of Mkuze is west of the Lebombo Range on the N2. **Ghost Mountain**, south of the town, was an important burial place for the Ndwandwe tribe and has a reputation for eerie occurrences, usually confined to strange lights and noises. Occasionally human bones, which date from a big battle between rival Zulu factions in 1884, are found near Ghost Mountain.

Ghost Mountain Inn (☎ 035-573 1025; www.ghostmountaininn.co.za; s/d incl breakfast R515/930; ☎) is an old-school colonial place with a modern (and luxurious) touch. A massive indoor-outdoor lounge area with an *Out of Africa* feel, blooming gardens, tennis courts and drives to the Mkhuze Game Reserve all add to the appeal.

PHINDA RESOURCE RESERVE

This 17,500-hectare reserve, to the north-west of Lake St Lucia, is an 'ecotourism' showpiece of the Conservation Corporation, a private-reserve chain.

There are seven different habitats in the park, from sand forests and riverine woodland to natural pans and savanna grasslands. This attracts more than 380 species of birds and promotes a diverse range of plant life. Prolific animal life includes the Big Five, and lion and cheetah kills can occasionally be spotted (even leopard are occasionally seen during wildlife drives). In addition to these, there are also accompanied walks, canoeing and river-boat cruises on offer.

But 'ecoluxury' adventures don't come cheap: doubles with full board and activities start at R2605. Bookings can be made through **Conservation Corporation Africa** (☎ 011-809 4300; www.ccafrica.com).

To get there, take the Phinda/Southern Maputland turn-off from the N2 and follow the signs.

UKHAHLAMBA-DRAKENSBERG

The tabletop peaks of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Range, which form the boundary between South Africa and the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, offer some of the country's most awe-inspiring landscapes. They provided the backdrop for the films *Zulu* (1964) and *Yesterday* (2004) and the setting for Alan Paton's novel *Cry The Beloved Country*, and are the inspiration for a million picture postcards.

This vast 243,000-hectare sweep of basal summits and buttresses was formally granted World Heritage status in November 2000, when it was renamed uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park. Today, some of the vistas, particularly the unforgettable curve of the Amphitheatre in the Royal Natal National Park, are so recognisably South African that they have become tourist-brochure clichés. But that doesn't make them any less magnificent. If any landscape lives up to its air-brushed, publicity-shot alter ego, it is the jagged, green sweep of the Drakensberg.

Drakensberg means 'Dragon Mountains'; the Zulu named it Quathlamba, meaning

'Battlement of Spears'. The Zulu word is a more accurate description of the sheer escarpment but the Afrikaans name captures something of the Drakensberg's otherworldly atmosphere. People have lived here for thousands of years – this is evidenced by the many San rock-art sites – yet many of its peaks were first climbed little more than 50 years ago.

The San, already under pressure from the tribes that had moved into the Drakensberg foothills, were finally destroyed with the coming of white settlers. Some moved to Lesotho, where they were absorbed into the Basotho population, but many were killed or simply starved when their hunting grounds were occupied by others. Khoesaaan cattle raids annoyed the white settlers to the extent that the settlers forced several black tribes to relocate into the Drakensberg foothills to act as a buffer between the whites and the Khoesaaan. These early 'Bantu locations' meant there was little development in the area, which later allowed the creation of a chain of parks and reserves.

Be aware that the Drakensbergs are deceptive – it's not easy to 'do' the whole Berg. There is no single road linking all the main areas of interest – you have to enter and exit and re-enter each region from the N3 or Rte 103. You are better off to select one (or only a few) places of interest and enjoy what each area has to offer – from hiking to bird-watching – rather than spend most of your time behind a wheel in search of sites and sights.

Orientation

The uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, which is actually several spectacular parks in and around the Drakensberg Range, is usually divided into three sections, although the distinctions aren't strict. The Northern Berg runs from the Golden Gate Highlands National Park in Free State (see p385) to the Royal Natal National Park. Harrismith and Bergville are sizable towns in this area.

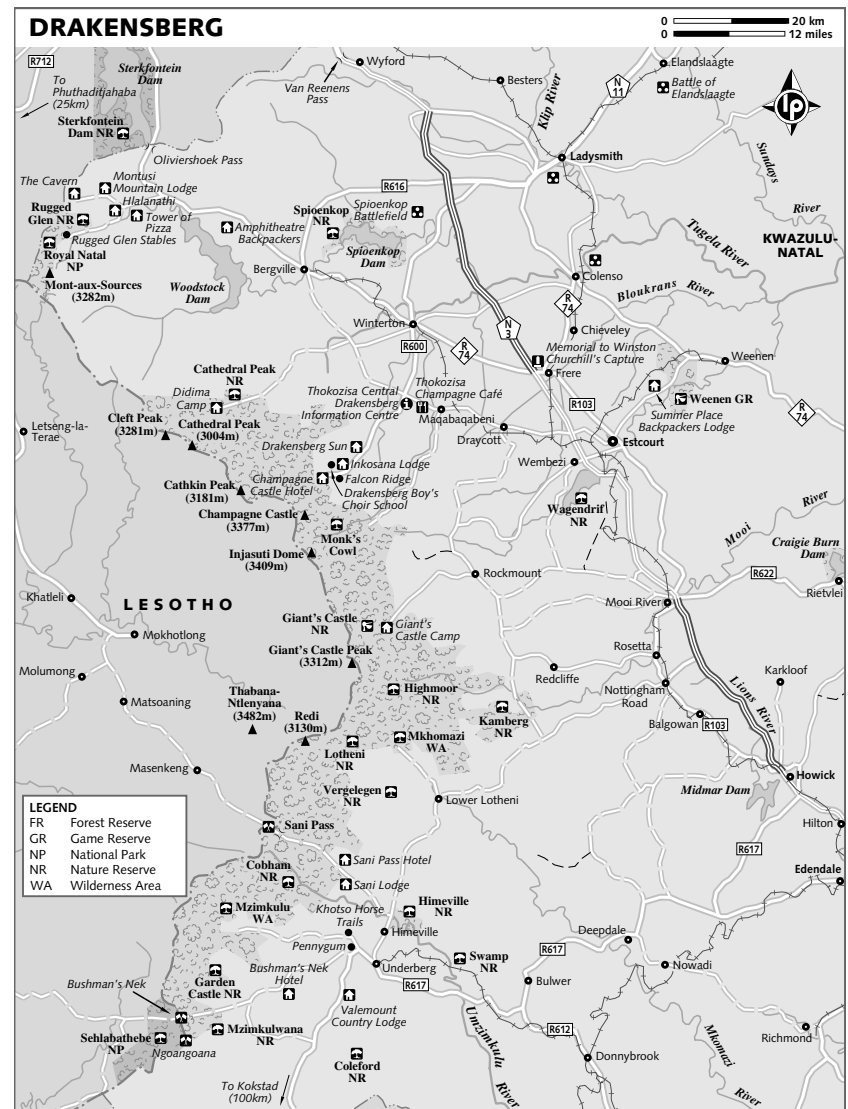
The Central Berg's main feature is Giant's Castle Game Reserve, the largest reserve in the area. North of Giant's Castle is Cathedral Peak and two wilderness areas. Estcourt and Winterton are towns adjacent to the central Drakensberg.

The Southern Berg runs down to the Wild Coast area of Eastern Cape. There's a huge

wilderness area here and the Sani Pass route into southern Lesotho. Pietermaritzburg to the east and Kokstad to the south are the main access points to the southern Drakensberg and in the hills are some pleasant towns, notably Underberg and Himeville.

David Bristow's books *Guide to the Drakensberg* and *Best Walks of the Drakensberg*

are useful references for those planning to explore the region. KZN Wildlife sells six 1:50,000 topographic maps, which detail hiking trails, camp sites etc, for around R40 each. They're available from KZN Wildlife's headquarters in Pietermaritzburg, the various park offices and some shops in the area.



Information

KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com) in Pietermaritzburg can provide information on the various parks and accommodation options. In general, you must book all KZN Wildlife accommodation (except camping) in advance through either the Pietermaritzburg or Durban **KZN Wildlife** (☎ 031-304 4934; www.kznwildlife.com; 1st fl, Tourist Junction) branches. There are also several local information offices:

Central Drakensberg Information Centre

(☎ 036-488 1207; www.cdic.co.za; Thokozisa; ☎ 9am-6pm) Based in the Thokozisa complex, 13km outside Winterton on Rte 600, this private enterprise is extremely helpful.

Okhahlamba Drakensberg Tourism

(☎ 036-448 1557; www.drakensberg.org.za; Tatham Rd, Bergville; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Covers the northern and central Drakensberg.

Southern Drakensberg Escape Tourism Centre

(☎ 033-701 1471; www.drakensberg.org; Clocktower Centre, Old Main Rd, Underberg; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) Covers the southern region from Underberg, Himeville and Sani Pass.

Climate

The frosts come in winter, but the rain falls in summer, and snow has been recorded every month of the year. While the summer weather forecasts, posted in each of the KZN Wildlife park offices, often make bleak reading for those hoping for blue skies and sunshine, you can often bet on clear, dry mornings, with the thunderheads only rolling in during the afternoon. Whenever you visit, always carry wet-weather gear, and be prepared for icy conditions and snowfalls.

Hiking

The uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park has some superb walks and hikes, ranging from gentle day walks to strenuous hikes of two or more days. The trails in the Mkhomazi and Mzimkulu Wilderness Areas, and the Mzimkulwana Nature Reserve, in the southern Drakensberg, offer some of the most remote and rugged hiking in South Africa. For the less experienced there's also the five-day Giant's Cup Trail, running from near Sani Pass Hotel down to Bushman's Nek (p354).

Summer hiking can be made frustrating, and sometimes even dangerous, by flooding rivers; in winter, frosts and snow are the

main hazards. April and May are the best months for hiking.

Make sure you get the relevant maps (see p347) that show trails and have essential information for hikers.

Permits are needed on most of the hikes; get them from KZN Wildlife offices at the various trailheads. Trail accommodation is often in huts (which means you don't need a tent). It's best to book accommodation in advance.

Due to serious incidents involving single hikers KZN Wildlife warns that walkers should *not* go alone (even on day walks) and must sign the register. Guides are available for hire.

Sleeping

The perfect way to see the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park is to stay at one of KZN Wildlife's excellent reserves. The biggest and most popular are Royal Natal and Giant's Castle, but accommodation and camp sites can also be found in other reserves.

Usually more expensive than the parks board's accommodation are the private resorts, which dot the foothills near Royal Natal and Giant's Castle.

Getting There & Around

There is little public transport in the northern and central Drakensberg, although there is a lot of tourist traffic. With so many resorts all needing staff there are some minibus taxis. The main jumping-off points are on or near the N3; for more information, see Estcourt, Mooi River, Winterton and Bergville. The **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) drops off and picks up at a couple of hostels in the area. Through hostels in Durban you can arrange a lift to the hostels near Sani Pass and Himeville.

Sani Pass is the best-known Drakensberg route into Lesotho. There are other passes over the escarpment but most don't connect with anything in Lesotho larger than a walking track (if that).

Many back roads in the Drakensberg area are unsealed and after rain some are impassable – stick to the main routes.

NORTHERN BERG

An ideal stopover on the journey between Durban and Jo'burg, the Northern Berg is crowned with the beautiful Royal Natal

National Park and some wonderfully empty spaces.

Royal Natal National Park

☎ 036

Spanning out from some of the range's loftiest summits, the 8000-hectare **Royal Natal Park** (☎ 036-438 6310; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R25/15; ☎ 5am-7pm) has a presence that far outstrips its relatively meagre size, with many of the surrounding peaks rising as high into the air as the park stretches across. With some of the Drakensberg's most dramatic and accessible scenery, the park is crowned by the sublime Amphitheatre, an 8km wall of cliff and canyon, which is spectacular from below and even more so from up on high. Here the Tugela Falls drop 850m in five stages (the top one often freezes in winter). Looming up behind is Mont-aux-Sources (3282m), so called because the Tugela, Elands and Western Khubedu Rivers rise here; the latter eventually becomes the Senqu (Orange) River and flows all the way to the Atlantic.

Other notable peaks in the area are Devil's Tooth, the Eastern Buttress and the Sentinel. Rugged Glen Nature Reserve adjoins the park on the northeastern side.

The park's **visitors centre** (☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm) is about 1km in from the main gate. There's also a shop selling basic provisions. Fuel is available in the park. Look out for the latest copy of *Royal Natal Walks & Climbs*.

WILDLIFE

With plentiful water, a range of more than 1500m in altitude and distinct areas such as plateaus, cliffs and valleys, it isn't surprising that the park's flora is extremely varied. Broadly speaking, much of the park is covered in grassland, with protea savanna at lower altitudes. This grassland depends on fire for reproduction and to discourage other vegetation. In areas that escape the park's periodic fires, scrub takes over. At lower levels, but confined to valleys, are small yellowwood forests. At higher altitudes grass yields to heath and scrub.

Royal Natal is not as rich in wildlife as Giant's Castle and other sections of the Drakensberg but there is still quite a lot to be seen. Of the six species of antelope, the most common is the mountain reedbuck. Hyraxes are everywhere, as are hares.

Royal Natal also has a large population of baboons, the feeding of which by tourists and visitors has become a growing problem as the baboons hang around camp sites and steal food.

If you have your own tackle, there is also good trout fishing here. Permits are available from the visitors centre.

ROCK ART

There are several San rock-art sites, although Royal Natal's are fewer and not as well preserved as those at Giant's Castle; the latter has many more rock shelters and caves, and has suffered less from vandalism. The notable sites are Sigubudu Shelter, north of the road just past the main gate, and Cannibal Caves, on Surprise Ridge, outside the park's northern boundary.

HIKING TRAILS

Except for the **Amphitheatre-to-Cathedral** (62km, four to five days) and the **Mont-aux-Sources** (20km, 10 hours) hikes, most of the 25-odd walks in Royal Natal are day walks. Only 50 day visitors and 50 overnights are allowed on Mont-aux-Sources each day. The hike to the summit starts from the Mahai camp site and takes you up to Basotho Gate. Note that the Nek is closed

PROTECTING THE SAN PAINTINGS

There are thousands of San paintings in caves and rockscapes around KZN. More are being discovered all the time. Sadly, many of these have already suffered from ignorant visitors: many have been defaced with graffiti, while visitors have even splashed water on some to make the colours appear brighter. Some artwork has been destroyed altogether. Travellers should be aware of taking appropriate measures to ensure the ongoing preservation of these precious cultural treasures.

KZN currently has an agreement with Amafa, the provincial cultural and heritage conservation body, to build preservation practices into its management plans. This includes ensuring that guides accompany visitors to the sites and educating visitors not to touch the sites or do anything to cause harm when a guide is not in attendance.

and it's necessary to walk to the Sentinel car park. Or, you can drive to the Sentinel car park on the road from Phuthaditjhaba in QwaQwa (p386).

If you plan to camp on the mountain, you should book with the **QwaQwa tourist officer** (☎ 058-713 4415). Otherwise there's a basic hut on the escarpment near Tugela Falls. Unlike other KZN Wildlife accommodation, you don't need to book (except for registering before walking here) and there's no fee for the hut, but an overnight hiking permit costs R30.

Guides to see the San paintings can be booked through the visitors centre.

HORSE RIDING

Just outside the park gates, **Rugged Glen Stables** (☎ 036-438 6422) organises a wide range of horse-riding activities, including two-day trails.

CLIMBING

Some of the peaks and faces were first climbed by mountaineers just over 50 years ago, and the park has become a mecca for climbers. You must apply for a permit from the KZN Wildlife office before you attempt a climb; unless you are experienced, it may not be granted. If you plan to venture into Lesotho, take your passport.

SLEEPING & EATING

Thendele (☎ 033-845 1000; chalets per person R320-350) The park's main camp has a variety of accommodation, including some reasonable two-bed chalets – minimum charges apply.

You can also camp at **Mahai** (☎ 033-845 1000, 438 6303; fax 033-438 6231; camp sites per person R60) inside the park, or in the nearby **Rugged Glen Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 438 6303; fax 438 6231; camp sites per person R60).

The following places are all outside the park.

Amphitheatre Backpackers (☎ 036-438 6675; www.amphibackpackers.co.za; camp sites R45; dm/d 75/200) Facing out over the Amphitheatre, this is an in-your-face experience. The key to this recently relocated backpackers are the tours to Lesotho (R265) and activities galore (but there are no locks on the dorm room doors). A rock-climbing wall is being constructed, plus there's a bar where you can restore aching limbs. It's 21km north of Bergville on R74.

Hlalanathi (☎ 036-438 6308; www.hlalanathi.za.net; camp sites per person R50, 2-/4-bed chalets R390/690; 🚽) With a location lifted straight from an African chocolate-box lid, this pretty resort offers camping and excellent accommodation on a finger of land overlooking the Tugela River. Go for a site facing the river and mountains.

Cavern (☎ 036-438 6270; www.cavernberg.co.za; s/d with full board R690/920) North of Royal Natal, this award-winning resort offers family-friendly service in lush forest surrounds. There's even babysitting available.

Montusi Mountain Lodge (☎ 036-438 6243; www.montusi.za.net; s/d with half board R1030/1560; 🚽 🍷) With oodles of bush-lodge exclusivity, this opulent place blends a thatch-and-fireplace homeliness with plenty of five-star comforts, including 4WD trails, trout fishing and some very swish chalets. The turn-off is just after the Tower of Pizza; follow the signs from there.

Tower of Pizza (☎ 036-438 6480; http://towerofpizza.co.za; mains R27-50; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🚽) Yep, there really is a tower, where very good oven-fired pizza is prepared. It also offers comfortable cottages (doubles per person, including breakfast, R370) and Internet access.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The road into Royal Natal runs off Rte 74, about 30km northwest of Bergville and about 5km from Oliviershoek Pass.

Bergville

☎ 036

Small and a little rough around the edges, Bergville is nevertheless a useful stock-up and jumping-off point for the northern Drakensberg.

ABSA (Tatham Rd) Has an ATM.

Okhahlamba Drakensberg Tourism (☎ 036-448 1557; www.drakensberg.org.za; Tatham Rd; 🗓 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

SLEEPING & EATING

Bergville Caravan Park (☎ 036-448 1273; bergcarav@xsinet.co.za; camp sites R60, rondavels R80, caravans R120, 2-bed chalets R280; 🚽) This park is a bit like Bergville itself – pleasant, but a little gritty. But it's a reasonable budget option and has some pleasant spots by the water. It's south of town on Rte 74 – turn off 500m before the Tugela River bridge.

NATURE AREAS

The use of 'Nature Reserve' and 'Game Reserve' is now being phased out in the uKahlamba-Drakensberg region to more accurately reflect its amalgamation as one large protected wilderness area. You will increasingly see signs, maps and texts without these terms.

Drakensberg Inn (☎ 036-448 2946; www.drakensberginn.com; 3 Tatham Rd; s/d incl breakfast R230/420) A terrace restaurant, real fires and a comfortable communal lounge all help to spice up this slightly plain, small town inn.

Sanford Park Resort (☎ 036-448 1001; sanfordparklodge@mweb.co.za; s/d with half board R520/830; 🍷 🚽) Bergville's swankier option, the Sanford offers cosy rooms in thatched rondavels or in a creaking, 150-year-old farmhouse with memorabilia-filled bar. Head a few kilometres out of Bergville, off the road to Ladysmith (Rte 616).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

None of the long-distance bus lines runs very close to Bergville. You'll have to get to Ladysmith and take a minibus taxi from there (R20, 45 minutes). A daily Greyhound bus stops at Estcourt and Ladysmith.

The minibus taxi park is behind the tourist office. Taxis run into the Royal Natal National Park area for about R10 but few run all the way to the park entrance.

CENTRAL BERG

Crowned with some of the Drakensberg's most formidable peaks – Giant's Castle Peak (3312m), the Monk's Cowl (3234m) and Champagne Castle (3377m) are found here – the Central Berg is a big hit with climbers. But with dramatic scenery aplenty, this beautiful region is just as popular with those who prefer to admire their mountains from a safe distance.

Just off Dragon Peaks road are South Africa's singing ambassadors, the **Drakensberg Boys' Choir School** (☎ 036-468 1012; www.dbchoir.co.za). There are public performances at 3.30pm on Wednesday during school term. Seven kms from the Drakensberg Sun turn-off is **Falcon Ridge** (☎ 082-774 6398; adult/child R30/10; 🗓 talks 10.30am), with awesome falcon-, kites- and eagle-flying demonstrations and talks.

Thokozisa (☎ 036-488 1273; thokozisa@futurest.co.za), 13km out of Winterton on Rte 600, is a creative village in every respect, housing the **Central Drakensberg Information Centre** (☎ 036-488 1207; www.cdic.co.za; 🗓 9am-6pm), which has Internet access, a clutch of crafts shops and an excellent restaurant.

Winterton

☎ 036

Quaint and sedate, this peaceful little town is the gateway to the Central Drakensberg and makes a pleasant stopover. **Winterton Museum** (☎ 036-488 1885; Kerk St; admission by donation; 🗓 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) offers an excellent insight into San rock art, Zulu history and the Spioenkop battle (see the boxed text, p366). There are ATMs in the main street.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bridge Lodge (☎ 036-488 1554; thebridge@futurest.co.za; Main Rd; s/d R160/260) Doubling as the town's favoured nightspot (Friday's the big one), this has a pleasant thatched restaurant and dowdy rooms.

Lilac Lodge (☎ 036-488 1025; www.wheretostay.co.za/lilacldge; Springfield Rd; s/d incl breakfast R180/360) Yes, there's a purple house, but this deceptive place is actually a string of cottages and units, set on an expanse of lawn with braais and a trampoline. The impersonal owners are clearly used to groups.

Thokozisa Restaurant (☎ 036-488 1827; mains R36-70; 🍷 lunch & dinner) In the Thokozisa crafts village, this lively little place serves a delicious range of steaks, wraps and salads (including vegetarian options) in courtyard surrounds. Try the Drakensburger (R33).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are minibus taxis to Cathedral Peak (R8, 30 minutes), Bergville (R6, 15 minutes) and Estcourt (R12, 45 minutes).

Cathedral Peak Nature Reserve

☎ 036

In the shadow of the ramparts of Cathedral Peak, **Cathedral Peak Nature Reserve** (☎ 036-488 8000; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R25/13; 🗓 6am-6pm) backs up against a colossal escarpment of peaks between Royal Natal National Park and Giant's Castle, west of Winterton. With the Bell (2930m), the Horns (3005m) and Cleft Peak (3281m) on the horizon, this is a

beautifully photogenic park. Cathedral Peak is a long day's climb (10km, seven hours return) but other than being physically fit, no special ability or equipment is required (ask at the park office for trail details).

The **Didima San Art Centre** (☎ 036-488 1332; adult/child R40/20; ☎ 8am-4pm), 1km into the park, offers an excellent, multimedia insight into San rock art.

The **park office** (☎ 036-488 8000; www.kznwildlife.com), in Didima Camp, sells permits for the scenic drive (4WD only) up Mike's Pass (R15/35 per person/vehicle) and arranges guides.

SLEEPING & EATING

Didima Camp (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites per person R45, chalets per person R330-360; ☎ ☎) One of KZN Wildlife's swankiest offerings, this upmarket, thatched lodge boasts huge views, a restaurant, tennis courts, lashings of elegant style and a range of excellent two- and four-bed self-catering chalets (full-board options are also available on request). Minimum charges apply.

There is also camping available near the main gate.

Monk's Cowl

☎ 036

Monk's Cowl (☎ 036-468 1103; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; ☎ 6am-6pm), another stunning slice of the Drakensberg range, offers superb hiking and rock climbing. Within Monk's Cowl are the two peaks Monk's Cowl and Champagne Castle.

The **park office** (☎ 036-468 1103; camp sites per person R70) is 3km beyond Champagne Castle Hotel, which is at the end of Rte 600 running southwest from Winterton. The office takes bookings for camping and overnight hiking (R30 per person).

SLEEPING & EATING

As well as camping in the reserve, there are some other accommodation options in the area.

Inkosana Lodge (☎ 036-468 1202; www.inkosana.co.za; dm/d with shared bathroom R85/250, thatched rondavels with/without en suite R165/125; ☎) When a sign on a bunk says 'This bed is ready' you know you have one hell-of-an-organised owner. This Drakensberg delight's indigenous garden, rock-pool view and clean rooms make it one of the best backpackers

in KZN. Excellent cuisine (make sure you put your name down) and heaps of activities and walks are on offer. It's on Rte 600, en route to Champagne Castle.

Champagne Castle Hotel (☎ 036-468 1063; www.champagnecastle.co.za; s/d with full board R680/1160; ☎) The ever-reliable, predictably 'nice' Champagne Castle is one of the best-known resorts, conveniently in the mountains at the end of the road to Champagne Castle Peak, off Rte 600. Staff will collect you from Estcourt (R120) and Durban (R400).

Drakensberg Sun (☎ 036-468 1000; www.southern.sun.com; d with half board R1149; ☎) This chain-style place with a ski-resort feel is just before Champagne Castle Hotel en route to Champagne Castle Peak. It sometimes quotes for family rooms, meaning that up to two children can stay in the room for free. Standards are predictably high.

Giant's Castle Game Reserve

☎ 036

Rising up to Injisuthi Dome (3409m), South Africa's highest peak, **Giant's Castle Game Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 353 3718; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R25/13; ☎ 5am-7pm) is one of the Drakensberg's loftiest – even its lowest point sits at 1300m above sea level. It was established in 1904, mainly to protect the eland, and it is a rugged, remote and popular destination, with huge forest reserves to the north and south, and Lesotho's barren plateau over the escarpment to the west.

Limited supplies (including fuel) are available at Giant's Castle Camp (opposite) and there's a kiosk selling provisions.

WILDLIFE

The reserve is mainly grassland, wooded gorges and high basalt cliffs with small forests in the valleys. There's also some protea savanna and, during spring, swathes of wildflowers.

The reserve is home to several species of antelope, with relatively large numbers of elands, mountain reedbucks, grey rheboks and oribis. The rarest antelope is the klipspringer, which is sometimes spotted on the higher slopes. The rarest species is a small, short-tailed rodent called the ice rat, which lives in the boulders near the mountain summits. Altogether there are thought to be about 60 mammal species.

The rare lammergeier, or bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), which is found only in the Drakensberg, nests in the reserve. Reserve staff sometimes give guests bones to put out to encourage the birds to feed here. The **Lammergeier Hide** (☎ 036-353 3718; giants@kznwildlife.com; per person R150, minimum R480; ☎ May-Sep) has been built nearby, and is the best place to see the vultures. The hide is extremely popular so it's necessary to book in advance.

ROCK ART

Giant's Castle Game Reserve is rich in San rock art, with at least 50 sites. It is thought that the last San lived here at the beginning of the 20th century.

You can see the paintings at **Main Cave** (adult/child R25/5; ☎ 9am-4pm), 2km south of Giant's Camp (a 30-minute walk), which must be visited as part of a tour that departs from Giant's Camp every hour, on the hour, during the cave's opening times.

Battle Cave (admission R25) is near Injisuthi and must be visited on a self-guided tour. It's an 8km walk each way; there's a good chance of seeing wildlife en route. The cave's name reflects the paintings here, which record a clash between San groups.

HIKING

Trails begin at Giant's Camp and lead to Meander Hut (5.5km, two hours), on a cliff above the Meander Valley; Giant's Hut (10.5km, four hours), under Giant's Castle itself; and Bannerman's Hut (11km, 4½ hours), close to the escarpment near Bannerman's Pass.

Hikers can stay at mountain huts (R30) for which you'll need sleeping bags and cooking utensils. The fee for the huts is a one-off 'hiking fee'. If you're planning to walk between huts rather than return to Giant's Camp, you have to arrange to collect keys. Unless you've booked the entire hut, you must share it with other hikers.

There are other trails. The booklet *Giant's Castle Day Walks* (R5), available at Giant's Castle Camp, gives details and has a basic map of the trails (distances not stated). Before setting out on a long walk you must fill in the rescue register.

Don't confuse trails around here with the Giant's Cup Trail (p356), further south in the Drakensberg.

SLEEPING

There are several accommodation centres inside the reserve, as well as trail huts and caves for hikers. Note that hikers are not allowed to light fires, so you'll need to bring a stove. There's a small shop at reception with basic supplies only.

Giant's Castle Camp (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; mountain huts per person R30, chalet per person R315-346) The main camp has two-, four- and six-bed chalets and four- and eight-bed mountain huts. Book through KZN Wildlife in Pietermaritzburg or Durban.

Injisuthi Huttet Camp (☎ 033-845 1000, 036-431 7849; camp sites per person R48) This secluded and pleasant spot on the northern side of the reserve has camp sites. It is accessed from Loskop, northwest of Estcourt. Turn south 4km west of Loskop or 6km east of Rte 600; the road is signposted. Minimum charges apply.

There are several places outside the reserve, on and around Rte 600, which runs southwest from Winterton towards Cathkin Peak and Champagne Castle.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The roads from both Mooi River and Estcourt are sealed – do not take the unsealed back roads as they can become impassable and in the past, robberies have been reported.

Inrequent minibus taxis run from Estcourt to villages near the main entrance (KwaDlamini, Mahlutshini and Kwa-Mankonjane), but these are still several kilometres from Giant's Camp.

SOUTHERN BERG

Best accessed from the pleasant towns of Himeville and Underberg, the Southern Berg boasts one of the region's highlights: the journey up to Lesotho over the Sani Pass. It is also renowned as a serious hiking area and as well as some great walks, including the fabulous Giant's Cup Trail, the region also offers a smorgasbord of wilderness areas.

Southern Drakensberg Wilderness Areas

Four reserves, Highmoor, Mkhomazi, Cobham and Garden Castle, all run south from Giant's Castle to beyond Bushman's Nek, to meet Lesotho's Schlabathebe National Park at the top of the escarpment.

The wilderness areas are near the escarpment and to the east are Kamberg, Lotheni, Vergelegen and Mzimkulwana Nature Reserves.

These areas are administered by KZN Wildlife. The costs for overnight-hiking permits is dependent on what you do. You must sign the hiking registers.

COBHAM NATURE RESERVE

The Mzimkulu Wilderness Area and the Mzimkulwana Nature Reserve are in **Cobham Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-702 0831; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; ☹ 6am-6pm). The park office is about 15km from Himeville on the D7; it's a good place to get information on the many hiking trails in the reserve, some with trail huts (R60 per person). Basic camp sites (R40 per person) are available.

GARDEN CASTLE & BUSHMAN'S NEK

The park office of **Garden Castle** (☎ 033-701 1823; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; camp sites per person R40, huts per person R60; ☹ 6am-6pm) is 30km west of Underberg – carry along the road past Khotso Horse Trails (opposite).

This reserve incorporates beautiful **Bushman's Nek Valley**, dominated by the 3051m Rhino Peak. The area has many sandstone buttresses and rock-art sites and a good (long) day walk.

Overnight hikers can use trail huts, camp sites or even caves.

HIGHMOOR NATURE RESERVE

The park office of **Highmoor Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 033-263 7240; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; camp sites per person R40; ☹ 6am-6pm) is off the road from Rosetta to Giant's Castle and Kamberg. Turn off to the south just past the sign to Kamberg, 31km from Rosetta.

Camp sites are available.

KAMBERG NATURE RESERVE

Southeast of Giant's Castle and a little away from the main escarpment area, **Kamberg Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-267 7251; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; 2-bed huts R200; ☹ 6am-6pm) has a number of antelope species and guided rock-art walks.

You can get there from Rosetta, off the N3 south of Mooi River, travelling via either Nottingham Road or Redcliffe.

Other sleeping options in the area include the **Spotted Horse Country Inn** (☎ 033-267 7194;

karene@mjvn.co.za; dm/f with shared bathroom per person R95/150, d R195), 32km west of Rosetta along Rte 103. This is the new foal in the herd. Trot on in for the choice of a thoroughbred 'stable' and 'tack' rooms with 'mare' and 'stallion' bathrooms. Choice feed available for R35. Horse trips are its speciality in case you hadn't realised.

LOTHENI NATURE RESERVE

Lotheni (☎ 033-702 0540; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; ☹ 6am-6pm) has a Settlers' Museum and some very good day walks.

KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; camp sites R50, 3-bed chalets per person R164) offers camp sites and chalets.

The access road runs from Lower Lotheni, about 30km northeast of Himeville or 65km southwest of Nottingham Road (off Mooi River). The roads aren't great and heavy rain can close them. They are, however, some of the most scenic in South Africa, with the Drakensberg as a backdrop and picturesque Zulu villages in the area.

MKHOMAZI WILDERNESS AREA & VERGELEGEN NATURE RESERVE

The **Mkhomazi Wilderness Area** (033-266 6444; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R20/10; ☹ 6am-6pm) is one of the few places where you can hike for days without seeing anyone else. The **Vergelegen Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-702 0712; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child R15/10; ☹ 6am-6pm) has trout fishing. There are no established camp sites in the area, but you can camp on hikes (R30). The turn-off is 44km from Nottingham Road, off the Lower Lotheni to Sani Pass road, at the Mzinga River. From there the area is another 2km.

Underberg

☎ 033 / pop 1500

Clustered in the foothills of the southern Drakensberg, this small farming town fills up in summer, when Durbanites head to the peaks for a breath of the fresh stuff. It has good infrastructure, and is the place to go for money, shopping and to organise activities in the region. The more sedate Himeville, just down the road, is also a pleasant place to stay.

INFORMATION

First National Bank (Old Main Rd) Has an ATM. Close to NUD Entertainment.

NUD Entertainment (☎ 033-701 1317; Old Main Rd; per hr R60; ☹ 10am-6pm) Internet access, next to Spar.

Sani Pass Tours (☎ 033-701 1064; www.sanipasstours.com; Clocktower Centre, Old Main Rd; day tours per person R280; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) Offers day tours up the Sani Pass, as well as packages tailored to more specialist interests. It also takes bookings for the Sani Top Chalet in Lesotho (p565). Several other companies around town also offer similar tours.

Southern Drakensberg Escape Information Office

(☎ 033-701 1471; www.drakensberg.org; Clocktower Centre, Old Main Rd; ☹ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) Publishes the *Sani Saunter* map and booklet (free) listing hotels, hostels, restaurants and tour guides.

WC Books (☎ 033-701 2059; Clocktower Centre, Old Main Rd; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) Sells a wide range of local maps.

ACTIVITIES

Khotso Horse Trails (☎ 033-701 1502; www.khotsohorses.co.za) offers rides and treks in the area. (Owner Steve is described by readers as 'South Africa's Crocodile Dundee'.) It's about 7km northwest of Underberg. Nearby, **Pennygum** (☎ 033-701 1023) rents out rafts for (relatively) gentle, river drifting.

FESTIVALS

The annual Easter weekend features the **Splashy Fen Festival**, a long-running music festival of gentle, alternative styles. It's held 20km from Underberg, on the road to Drakensberg Gardens.

SLEEPING & EATING

Underberg Hotel (☎ 033-701 1412; Old Main Rd; dm/s/d incl breakfast R70/190/320) Old-world-meets-spit-and-sawdust. Underberg's inn has seen better days, but the bar's good for a tippie and the rooms are fine after a nightcap.

Valemount Country Lodge (☎ 033-701 1686; www.valemountafrica.com; s/d incl breakfast R385/680) This cosy, thatched farmhouse B&B oozes graceful charm, with roaring fires in winter and 48 hectares of grounds to explore when things heat up again. It's 8km from Underberg on the Kokstad road.

Lemon Tree Bistro (☎ 033-701 1589; Clocktower Centre, Main Rd; ☹ breakfast & lunch) This friendly place serves up zesty pastas, burgers and pancakes, and it has filter coffee (R7).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sani Pass Carriers (☎ 033-701 1017; spc@y.co.za) runs minibuses to Underberg from Kokstad

(R125, 1½ hours) on Monday and Thursday, and daily except Sunday to Pietermaritzburg (R115, two hours), from where you can catch buses to Durban. You must book these services. Return fares are slightly cheaper than buying two one-way tickets.

There is a new shuttle from Durban to Underberg, and from Underberg to Durban (R200 one-way, three hours) organised by **Gibela Backpackers** (☎ 031-303 6291). The shuttle runs any day on demand (minimum two people), picking you up from central hostels in Berea and the city, and dropping you off at the Underberg Inn, from where you can arrange to be collected by your accommodation.

Minibus taxis run to Himeville (R5, 10 minutes) and Pietermaritzburg (R30, 1½ hours) and you might find one running to the Sani Pass Hotel (p356).

Himeville

☎ 033

A skip and a jump from Underberg, Himeville is a prettier, more-sedate jumping-off point for the southern Drakensberg.

The **Himeville Museum** (☎ 033-702 1184; admission by donation; ☹ 9am-12.30pm) is one of the best rural museums in the country. Housed in the last laager built in South Africa (c 1896), the museum now contains an incredible array of bric-a-brac, from the Union Jack flown at the siege of Ladysmith to a map of El Alamein signed by Montgomery. Mike, the man-at-the-desk is the man-in-the-know.

SLEEPING & EATING

See above for information on a couple of hostels near Himeville, on the road to Sani Pass.

Himeville Arms (☎ 033-702 1305; www.himevillehotel.co.za; Main Rd; dm R95, s R270-290, d R480-520) Quaint Middle England meets modern(ish) Himeville at this homey inn, with cosy bar, comfy rooms and lashings of rustic, village-green atmosphere.

Robin's Nest (☎ 702 1039; 11 Thomas St; s/d incl breakfast R190/380) As English as they come: this is your old-world B&B with oak furniture, florals and stupendous garden views.

Moorcroft Manor (☎ 033-702 1967; info@moorcroft.co.za; s/d incl breakfast R660/1100) Designer Africa hits Himeville. For those who can't afford such luxury, dust the frock off and enjoy a

meal at a starched table setting. On Sunday there's a R75 luncheon. Bookings are obligatory (children under 12 aren't permitted).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

About the only regular transport from Himeville is minibus taxis to Underberg (R5, 10 minutes).

See Sani Pass (below) for details on transport into Lesotho.

The road from Himeville to Nottingham Road is well worth driving. The distance between the two towns is 92km, with 60km on a dirt road that winds through some spectacular country. The section between Himeville and Lower Lotheni is well gravelled, but check on its condition before you leave. The section between Lower Lotheni and the sealed road that runs to Nottingham Road could require 4WD after heavy rain.

Sani Pass

☎ 033

The drive up the Sani Pass is a trip to the roof of South Africa: a spectacular ride around hairpin bends into the clouds to the kingdom of Lesotho. At 2865m, this is the highest pass in the country and the vistas (on a clear day!) are magical, offering stunning views out across the Umkhomazana River to the north and looming cliffs, almost directly above, to the south. There are hikes in almost every direction and inexpensive horse rides are available. Amazingly, this is also the only road link between Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal.

At the top of the pass, just beyond the Lesotho border crossing, is the Sani Top Chalet (p565). Various operators run 4WD trips up to the chalet.

Daily minibus taxis bring people from Mokhotlong (Lesotho; R65 between Mokhotlong and Underberg) to South Africa for shopping; if there's a spare seat going back, this would be the cheapest option, and you would get to a town, not just the isolated lodge at the top of the pass. Ask around in Himeville. You need a passport to cross into Lesotho. The border is open daily from 8am to 4pm on the South African side (until 5pm on the Lesotho side).

SLEEPING

The following places are all at the bottom of the pass.

Sani Lodge (☎ 033-702 0330; www.sani-lodge.co.za; camp sites R45, dm/d with shared bathroom R65/80, 2-bed rondavels R220) Owned by Russell Suchet, the author of *A Backpacker's Guide to Lesotho*, Sani Lodge tops the pops in the local-knowledge stakes, offering a range of fabulous tours and activities and insider tips about the region through its company, Drakensberg Adventures. It's about 10km from Himeville on the Sani Pass road.

Sani Pass Hotel (☎ 033-702 1320; www.sanipasshotel.co.za; r with half board R1100) This tidy, three-star hotel, complete with guards and razor-wire fence, is on the Sani Pass road, 14km from Himeville. Not great reports about the food.

Giant's Cup Trail

If you are planning to stretch your legs anywhere in South Africa, this is the place to do it. Without doubt, the Giant's Cup Trail (68km, five days and five nights), running from Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek, is one of the nation's great walks. Any reasonably fit person can walk it, so it's very popular. Early booking (up to nine months ahead), through **KZN Wildlife** (☎ in Pietermaritzburg 033-845 1000) is advisable. Weather-wise, the usual precautions for the Drakensberg apply – expect severe cold snaps at any time of the year. Fees are based on the composition of the hiking party.

The stages are: day one, 14km; day two, 9km; day three, 12km; day four, 13km; and day five, 12km (note, it's not a circuit walk). Highlights include the **Bathplug Cave** with San rock paintings and the breathtaking mountain scenery on day four. You can make the trail more challenging by doing two days in one, and you can do side trips from the huts if the weather is fine. Maps are sold at Sani Lodge for R45.

Camping is not permitted on this trail, so accommodation is in limited **shared huts** (adult/child per trail R65/50), hence the need to book ahead. No firewood is available so you'll need a stove and fuel. Sani Lodge (above) is almost at the head of the trail; arrange for the lodge to pick you up from Himeville or Underberg.

Bushman's Nek

☎ 033

This is a South Africa–Lesotho border post (no vehicles!). From here there are hiking

trails up into the escarpment, including to Lesotho's Sehlabathebe National Park. You can trot through the border and into Lesotho on horseback (see Khotso Horse Trails, p355).

Accommodation options include the **Bushman's Nek Hotel** (☎ in Pinetown 031-701 9999; r with half board R300), about 2km east of the border post, and the **Silverstreams Caravan Park** (☎ 033-701 1249; www.silverstreams.co.za; camp sites per person R90), which has camp sites right next to the border.

EAST GRIQUALAND

Recently classified as the Southern Drakensbergs, the region of East Griqualand has a fascinating history. The Voortrekkers had been moving into the Griqua territory between the Vaal and Senqu (Orange) Rivers, around Philippolis, since the 1820s. The Griqua chief, Adam Kok III, realising that there would soon be no land left, encouraged his people to sell off their remaining titles and move elsewhere.

In 1861 Kok's entire community of 2000, along with about 20,000 cattle, began its epic, two-year journey over the rugged mountains of Lesotho to Nomansland, a region on the far side of the Drakensberg. When they reached the southern slopes of Mt Currie, they set up camp. Later, in 1869, they moved to the present site of Kokstad. Nomansland was called East Griqualand after it was annexed by the Cape in 1874. Kok died the following year when he was thrown from his cart.

Kokstad & Around

☎ 039 / pop 25,100

Kokstad is named in honour of Adam Kok III. It lies 1280m above sea level in the Umzimhlava River Valley, between Mt Currie and the Ngele Mountains. Today it's a bustling little place with some solid buildings and excellent transport connections.

The Avis office next to the Mount Currie Inn also doubles as a **tourist office** (☎ 039-727 2178; exploreeg@futurenet.co.za; ☎ 8am-4.30pm).

The **East Griqualand Museum** (Main St; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has some interesting information on the history of the Grikwas, as well as the usual small-town relics.

A few kilometres north of Kokstad, off Rte 626 to Franklin, is KZN Wildlife's **Mount**

Currie Nature Reserve (☎ 039-727 3844; www.kzn.wildlife.com; adult/child Mon-Fri R10/5, Sat & Sun R9; ☎ 6am-6pm). There are walking trails, fishing and bird-watching in this 1800-hectare reserve. A memorial marks the site of Adam Kok's first laager. You can camp (R45 per person) or stay in a two-bed hut (R95 per person) – for this, you must book direct.

SLEEPING & EATING

Mount Currie Inn (☎ 039-727 2178; fax 039-727 2196; s/d R440/580) This hotel, on the outskirts of town on the main road leading to the N2, is the best place to stay in Kokstad. The hotch-potch of petrol stations and fast-food joints out the front is deceptive: it's actually a pleasant hotel with a good bar and Cassandra's restaurant (mains R35 to R70).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Shoprite's 'Money Market' kiosk sells tickets for Translux and Cityliner buses, which stop at Wimpy (near Mount Currie Inn), a little way out of town on the Durban–Mthatha road, and run daily to destinations including Durban (R120, four hours), Port Elizabeth (R230, 11 hours), Cape Town (R420, 23 hours) and Jo'burg (R230, nine hours).

The minibus taxi park is on the corner of Groom and Main Sts, and regular taxis or buses go to Pietermaritzburg (R45, 4½ hours) and Durban (R45, 4½ hours).

THE MIDLANDS

The Midlands run northwest from Durban to Estcourt, skirting Zululand to the northeast. This is mainly farming country with little to interest visitors. The main town is Pietermaritzburg – KwaZulu-Natal's joint capital along with Ulundi.

West of Pietermaritzburg is picturesque, hilly country, with horse studs and plenty of European farms. It was originally settled by English farmers.

Today, the region is as highly promoted as the Midlands Meander ('registered trade mark') – a slightly contrived concoction of craft shops, artistic endeavours, tea shops and B&Bs – winding along Rte 103 west of the N3, northwest of Pietermaritzburg. While the meander beyond Pietermaritzburg is a relaxing jaunt, don't amble too

long in lieu of more interesting nature-based locations. The informative *Midlands Meander* brochure is available from tourist offices and contains a detailed colour-coded map of the area.

PIETERMARITZBURG

☎ 033 / pop 457,000

Billed as the heritage city, and KZN's administrative and legislative capital (previously shared with Ulundi), Pietermaritzburg's grand historic buildings hark back to an age of pith helmets and midday martinis. Today, these stand proudly as house museums and refurbished hotels. By day, the city is vibrant: its large Zulu community sets a colourful flavour and the Indian community brings echoes of the subcontinent to its busy streets. A large student population adds to the city's vitality. While the centre is appealingly scruffy, the outer suburbs are leafy and sedate. Unfortunately, Pietermaritzburg suffers from smog, thanks to its location in a 'basin'.

History

After defeating the Zulu at the decisive Battle of Blood River (see p371), the Voortrekkers began to establish their republic of Natal. Pietermaritzburg (usually known as PMB) was named in honour of leader Pieter Mauritz Retief, and was founded in 1838 as the capital (later the 'u' was dropped and, in 1938, it was decreed that Voortrekker leader Gert Maritz be remembered in the title). In 1841 the Boers built their Church of the Vow here to honour the Blood River promise. The British annexed Natal in 1843 but they retained Pietermaritzburg – well positioned and less humid than Durban, and already a neat little town – as the capital.

Orientation

The central grid of Pietermaritzburg contains most places of interest to travellers, including the museums, and is easy to get around on foot. Southeast of the centre is the University of Natal, to the west lie the Botanical Gardens and to the north is a fairly recent development, the Liberty Midlands Mall.

The northeastern end of the city, beyond Retief St, is a largely Indian commercial district. Along with much of the city centre

it shuts down at night and is the most unsafe part of the city centre. North of here is the Indian residential area of Northdale (with suburbs such as Bombay Heights and Mysore Ridge). To the southwest of the city are Pine and West Sts – do not walk around here at night. Further in this direction is Edendale, the black dormitory suburb. To the northwest, beyond Queen Elizabeth Park, is the leafier, more upmarket residential area, including Hilton about 10km further on. If it's rainy (or smoggy) in Pietermaritzburg, then Hilton will probably be in the clouds.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Adams (☎ 033-394 6830; 230 Church St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Has a wide selection of books and maps.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 845 2421, 10111; Loop St)

INTERNET ACCESS

IDS Computers (☎ 342 7135; Victoria Centre, 157 Victoria Rd; per hr R20)

LAUNDRY

Wash Tub (☎ 033-345 7458; Shop 2, Park Lane Centre, cnr Greyling & Commercial Rds; per 5kg R27; ☎ 7am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-4pm Sat, 8am-2pm Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

St Anne's Hospital (☎ 033-897 5000; Loop St)

MONEY

There are several banks across town.

ABSA (cnr Longmarket & Buchanan Sts) Has an ATM and change facilities.

American Express Bureau de Change (Victoria Centre, 157 Victoria Rd)

First National Bank (Church St)

POST

Main post office (Longmarket St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

KZN Wildlife Headquarters (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Queen Elizabeth Park, Duncan McKenzie Dr; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Provides information and accommodation bookings for all KZN Wildlife parks and reserves. To get to the office, head out to Howick Rd (from Commercial Rd) and after some kms you'll come to a roundabout – don't go straight ahead (to Hilton) but take the road

veering to the right. This road has a very small sign directing you to 'QE Park', which is 2km further on. Some minibus taxis running to Hilton pass this roundabout.

Pietermaritzburg Tourism (☎ 033-345 1348; www.pmbtourism.co.za; 117 Commercial Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Has excellent information on the city and surrounds. Ask for a copy of the 'mini-guide', which has a good walking tour of the city.

Sights & Activities

In keeping with Pietermaritzburg's self-styled role as the 'heritage city', one of its finest sights is the **Tatham Art Gallery** (☎ 033-342 1804; fax 394 9831; Commercial Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), which was started in 1903 by Mrs Ada Tatham. Housed in the beautiful Old Supreme Court, it contains a

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SA Roadlink & Translux Buses.....	34 C3

fine collection of French and English 19th- and early-20th-century works. Every 15 minutes, little figurines appear out of the building's treasured ormolu clock to chime the bells. The nearby, colonial-era **City Hall** (cnr Church St & Commercial Rd) is the largest load-bearing red-brick building in the southern hemisphere.

At **Macrorie House Museum** (☎ 033-394 2161; 11 Loop St; adult/child R5/2; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon, 9am-1pm Tue-Fri) you'll find furniture and items of the early British settlers, and plenty of documented ghosts! For trekker relics, head to the **Voortrekker Museum** (☎ 033-394 6834; cnr Longmarket & Boshoff Sts; adult/child/student R3/1.50/1; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat). The Church of the Vow is in the museum grounds. It was built in 1841 to fulfil the Voortrekkers' promise to God at the Battle of Blood River. Afrikaaner icons on display include Retief's prayer book and water bottle, and a replica of a trek wagon. The words of the Vow are in the **Modern Memorial Church**, located next door.

The **Natal Museum** (☎ 033-345 1404; 237 Loop St; adult/child R5/2; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) features a diversity of displays reflecting a diversity of cultures, including settler history, war records and African mammals.

The **Comrades House Museum** (☎ 033-897 8650; Connaught Rd; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Mon-Fri) is packed with memorabilia from the Comrades Marathon (see the boxed text, p313). Connaught Rd is off Durban Rd, an extension of Commercial Rd.

Natal Botanical Gardens (☎ 033-344 3585; 5 Swartskop Rd; adult/child R8/3; ☎ 8am-6pm summer, 8am-5.30pm winter), 2km west of the train station on the continuation of Berg St, has exotic species and a garden of indigenous mist-belt flora.

Back in the centre, there are two **Hindu temples** at the northern end of Longmarket St. The main **mosque** is nearby, on East St. A **statue of Gandhi**, who was famously ejected from a 1st-class carriage at Pietermaritzburg station, also stands defiant opposite the **old colonial buildings** on Church St.

Architect Phillip Dudgeon modelled the **Standard Bank** (Church St Mall) on the Bank of Ireland in Belfast. Rather less highbrow is **Peggy the Pegasus**, which stands 14m tall and qualifies for the spurious accolade of being the largest horse statue in the world. It is

at the entrance to the **Golden Horse Casino** (☎ 033-395 8136; 45 New England Rd).

Tours

Pietermaritzburg Tourism (☎ 033-345 1348; www.pmbtourism.co.za; 117 Commercial Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) organises city walking (R80 per person) and driving (R150 per person) tours.

Festivals & Events

Dusi canoe marathon Held every January (see the boxed text, p313).

Midmar Mile The world's largest swimming event on an inland dam in February.

Fire walking ceremony An annual Hindu event held in April.

Art in the Park May sees South Africa's largest outdoor art-selling exhibition.

Comrades Marathon Held in June; see the boxed text, p313.

Garden & Leisure Show South Africa's 'equivalent' to the Chelsea Flower Show blossoms in October.

Amashosha Cycling Race In November; see the boxed text, p313.

Echo Craft Bazaar At the Tatham Art Gallery during November, with local, emerging crafter's items on sale.

Sleeping BUDGET

Umphiti Backpackers (☎ 033-394 3490; umphiti@mweb.co.za; 317 Bulwer St; dm with shared bathroom R75, d from R170; ☎) The many wagging tails reflect the warm welcome at this friendly, if a little dog-eared, bohemian place. While it won't feature in a detergent advertisement, this Victorian house can be promoted for its helpfulness and its wealth of information and activities.

Prince Alfred Street Backpackers (☎ 033-345 7045; www.chauncey.co.za; 312 Prince Alfred St; s/d R85/170) This bright place, with multicoloured mosquito-net extravaganzas, ethnic adornments and style, takes some beating. It's one of the most stylish renovated 'backpackers' around and handy to the centre. It's gay-friendly, but all are welcome.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

There are many B&Bs in the area; Pietermaritzburg Tourism can help with bookings. You will need to book ahead during major sporting events (see above).

Duvel & Crumpets (☎ 033-394 4133; www.duvelandcrumpets.co.za; 1 Freelands Pl; s/d R200/300; ☎) In

a quiet, leafy location, this place offers a combo of unpretentious, clean rooms and self-catering units (great for a roll in bed with honey). If you prefer, you can lay back by the pool. Breakfast is extra.

Smith Grove (☎ 033-345 3963; www.smithgrove.co.za; 37 Howick Rd; s/d R250/400) This renovated Victorian home offers English-style B&B comforts with decorated, individually styled rooms, each in a different colour.

Torwood Lodge (☎ 033-390 1072; www.torwood.co.za; tw R420; ☎) With a quaint rural setting, lungfuls of fresh air and a landscaped rock pool, this excellent out-of-town option is great for those seeking city days and rustic nights. It's 10km out of town (ring ahead or see the website for directions). Owners are happy to pick you up or lead the way.

Redlands Hotel & Lodge (☎ 033-394 3333; www.guestnet.co.za; cnr Howick Rd & George McFarlane Lane; s R545-770, d R675-880; ☎ ☎) Swish and stately, this elegant place offers contrived but tasteful colonial-style surrounds and personal service. The spacious grounds add to the escape-from-it-all ambience. It's north of the centre off Howick Rd, past the Royal Agricultural Showgrounds.

Imperial Protea Hotel (☎ 033-342 6551; www.proteahotels.com/imperial; 224 Loop St; s/d incl breakfast R825/930; ☎) With more history than most, this was the spot the French Prince Imperial rode out from prior to coming to a sticky end during the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War. A few of the old fixtures and fittings survive and the plush rooms are good value if you catch a special (as low as R500).

Eating & Drinking

Paddy's (☎ 033-345 4835; 22 Timber St; mains R10-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Greasy spon meets Tudor tearoom serving some of the cheapest eats around.

Artist's Palate (☎ 033-342 8327; Commercial Rd; lunch R25-35; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Upstairs at the Tatham Gallery, this arty little café whips up a range of creative and fresh, healthy fare. It's open during gallery hours.

TAPS (☎ 033-342 9658; Chatterton Rd; mains R17.50-35; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) Numerous drinkable draughts, a massive deck and an enormous sports screen are here for those who want a big 'pubby' night out. There's a grill to appease hearty appetites.

Afro Cafe 94 (☎ 033-345 0773; 266 Prince Alfred St; mains R25-80; ☎ lunch & dinner) Less patriotic

carnivores can get their mouths around 'world African cuisine': from Hluhluwe Impala salad to springbok loin and Cuban oxtail. This friendly African eatery is handy to several sleeping options.

Els Amics (☎ 033-345 6524; 380 Longmarket St; mains R40-95; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) The city's fine-dining option is in a cosy Victorian house with a series of rooms and a classy Spanish-influenced menu. Bookings essential.

Butchery (☎ 033-342 5239; www.thebutchery.co.za; 101 Roberts Rd; mains R46-70; ☎ noon-late) There are no prizes for guessing the menu here. Ladies (200g) and gents (300g) steaks of every type, racks of drying biltong, wall-to-wall wine racks and a packed deck of eaters make for a sizzling night out. Vegetarians are also catered for. Bookings essential.

Another recommendation is **Lizard's Rock** (☎ 033-345 7745; Durban Rd; mains R25-50; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) cocktail bar and seafood restaurant southeast of the centre.

Entertainment

Crowded House (☎ 033-345 5977; 99 Commercial Rd; ☎ 8pm-late Tue-Sat) Late-night boozers head here, where 'Pigs Night' means you can stomp down as many drinks as you can stomach in two hours for only R30.

There are several theatres including the **Hexagon** (☎ 033-260 5537; Golf Rd), which is part of Natal University. It's about 3km south of the centre, off Durban Rd. For all other entertainment bookings, call **Computicket** (☎ 083-915 8000).

Getting There & Away

AIR

SAairlink (☎ 033-386 92861), with an office at the airport, flies to Jo'burg daily (R845 high season).

BUS

Most bus companies' head offices are in Berger St, or directly opposite in McDonalds Plaza. **Greyhound/Cityliner** (☎ 083-915 9000; www.greyhound.co.za), **Translux** (☎ 031-308 8111; www.translux.co.za), **SA Roadlink** (☎ 345 6890; www.saroadlink.co.za), **Luxliner** (☎ 011-914 4321; www.luxliner.co.za) and **Intercape** (☎ 0861 287 287; www.intercape.co.za) offer similar prices depending on the level of onboard services. City to City (see Translux) and Cityliner (see Greyhound) have the cheapest no-frills deals. Offices are generally

open 7am or 8am until 11pm. Checkers/Shoprite also sells tickets for some major bus routes. Destinations offered by the listed companies from Pietermaritzburg include Jo'burg (R125 to R200, six to seven hours), Pretoria (R195, seven to eight hours), Cape Town (R400 to R480, 22 hours), Port Elizabeth (R310, 15 hours) and Durban (R50 to R180, 1½ hours).

Cheetah Coaches (☎ 033-342 4444) runs daily between Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Durban International Airport. The fare to Durban is R60.

Sani Pass Carriers (☎ 033-701 1017; spc@y.co.za) runs buses up into the Southern Drakensberg. See p355 for more details.

The **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) travels between Durban and Pietermaritzburg twice a week.

Another option is to arrange 'transfers' through a tour operator to destinations including Estcourt (R100), Ladysmith (R140), Jo'burg (R200), Pretoria (R200) and Durban (R100). Call **African Link Travel** (☎ 033-345 3175) for further information.

CAR

Most of the major car-rental companies have agents here. **Budget** (☎ 033-342 8433; 224 Loop St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) is in the Imperial Protea Hotel.

HITCHING

Lonely Planet does not recommend hitching. However, if you are hitching on the N3, the safest places to get off are Exit 82 (Sanctuary/Armitage Rds) from Durban or Exit 83 (Chatterton Rd) from Jo'burg.

MINIBUS TAXI

Minibus taxis generally congregate in Church St in front of the train station. Destinations from Pietermaritzburg include: Durban (R30, one hour), Estcourt (R40, 1¼ hours), Ladysmith (R55, 2½ hours), Underberg (R40, 2½ hours), Newcastle (R80, 3½ hours) and Jo'burg (R120, eight hours). Other taxis depart from Market Sq (behind Pietermaritzburg Tourism).

TRAIN

Pietermaritzburg is serviced by the *Trans Natal*, which runs daily (except Tuesday and Saturday) to Jo'burg (1st/2nd class R215/145, 10 hours) and Durban (R50/35,

2½ hours); and the *Trans Oranje*, which heads to Cape Town (1st/2nd class R610/415, 36 hours) on Wednesday, returning on a Monday. There is a **train information line** (☎ 0860-008 888).

Getting Around

The main rank for city-area buses is on the road running behind Pietermaritzburg Tourism.

If you're after a taxi, phone **Yellow Cabs** (☎ 033-397 1910).

HOWICK & AROUND

☎ 033

In the town of Howick, about 25km northwest of Pietermaritzburg on the N3, are the popular 95m **Howick Falls**, which you can abseil down – call **Over The Top Adventures** (☎ 082-736 3651; www.overtthetop.co.za). Just before the falls there is the small **Howick Museum** (admission free; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-3.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), an unabashedly parochial celebration of the town.

Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve (☎ 033-330 3931; www.wildlifesociety.org.za/umgeni.htm; 1 Karkloof Rd; adult/child R10/6; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) is nearby, with giraffes, zebras, antelopes and six walking trails. Around 260 bird species have been recorded here.

Midmar Nature Reserve (☎ 033-330 2067; www.kznwildlife.com; admission R15; ☎ 6am-6pm) is 7km from Howick off the Greytown Rd. Although there are some animals in the reserve, it is mainly a recreation area, and has water sports on the dam.

END OF FREEDOM

One of the most significant events in South Africa's apartheid history occurred in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

In August 1962 it was just outside Howick that Nelson Mandela's days of freedom ended and his lengthy incarceration began.

Mandela had been driving to Johannesburg along the Old Howick Rd with Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation, MK) member Cecil Williams, when their car was stopped by police. The place of his arrest on Rte103 is now marked by a memorial, which Mandela unveiled himself in 1996.

ZULU ZEAL

For an affordable cultural experience of a Zulu kind, head to **Ecabazini Zulu Homestead** (☎ 033-342 1928; ecabazini@futurenet.co.za; half board R345, minimum 2 people), a working farm on the shores of the Albert Falls Dam and 22km from Pietermaritzburg. Guests are treated to all aspects of traditional Zulu life: activities include dunging floors, weaving, cooking and dancing. You even visit contemporary Zulu homes on the farm and eat the local chow. Arrival time is 2pm and checkout is 11am the following day.

In Karkloof, 14km north of Howick, **Karkloof Canopy Tours** (☎ 033-330 3415; www.karkloofcanopytour.co.za; groups up to 6 R395; ☎ 8am-3pm) conducts three-hour tours through the canopy of Karkloof forest. Do not attempt this if you have vertigo; book ahead.

Sleeping

Midmar Nature Reserve (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Munro Bay; camp sites R45, chalets R190) You can camp or take a chalet at Munro Bay in the reserve.

Windermere Guest House (☎ 033-330 8284; windermeregh@yebo.co.za; 11 Windermere Pl; s/d incl breakfast R280/500; ☎) One of the best-value places (for its calibre), this Cape Dutch-style home has luxurious old-world rooms with designer-style décor. The enthusiastic, well-travelled owner is keen on the local war history.

MOOI RIVER

☎ 033 / pop 10,000

The early Voortrekkers probably had high hopes for Mooi River, as *mooi* means 'beautiful'. The Zulu were more matter of fact, calling it Mpofana, 'Place of the Eland'. Today, it's a town on the verge of going to seed. The surrounding countryside to the west is, however, horse-stud country on rolling hills dotted with old European trees.

Mooi River is closer to Giant's Castle than Estcourt and, while there are fewer minibus taxis, the town is right on the N3 so hitching to and from Mooi River may be easier. If you do find yourself here, a good sleeping option is **Gleneagles Guest House**

(☎ 033-263 2883; www.gleneagles.co.za; Claughton Tce; s/d incl breakfast R250/500). Just off the Giant's Castle Rd, this restored manor offers spacious 1950s-style floral rooms, plus some fake flowers inside and real ones outside. It's child-friendly.

There are some excellent country guesthouses in the surrounding area – for details, see below.

Greyhound buses running between Durban (R100, two hours) and Jo'burg/Pretoria (R175, eight/nine hours) stop at the Engen petrol station on the Rosetta road near the N3, 1km from the centre.

Minibus taxis aren't frequent and run mainly to nearby villages.

NOTTINGHAM ROAD & AROUND

☎ 033

The quaint little town of Nottingham Road was so-named to honour the Nottinghamshire Regiment of the British Army, which was garrisoned here. After the Cape Wine-lands, this is probably the most gentrified rural area in the country (it falls under the Midlands Meander); there are some excellent guesthouses, and most have extensive gardens.

Stillwaters Guest House (☎ 033-267 7280; stillwaters@futurenet.co.za; s/d R190/380) The owner is as down-to-earth and pleasant as her homely cottage in a delightful cottage-garden setting. There are plans afoot to build a backpackers within the grounds, overlooking a small lake. It's 500m along the Kamberg Rd from Rosetta.

Granny Mouse Country House (☎ 033-234 4071; www.grannymouse.co.za; Old Main Rd; s/d incl breakfast from R395/790) This deceptively named award-winning country house near the village of Balgowan, south of Mooi River, is not one abode, but rather a range of neat, thatched, luxurious cottages, complete with a chapel. It's off Rte 103, a scenic road running parallel to the N3 between Howick and Mooi River. There are also midweek specials on offer.

Hartford House (☎ 033-263 2713; www.hartford.co.za; s incl breakfast R610-1120, d per person R470-1015; ☎ ☎) Worthy of dignitaries, this posh place was the home of a former Natal prime minister. It's now one of the country's top luxury lodges, with prices to show for it – it's South African interior design at its opulent best.

Louis Botha. The elusive keys to the **museum** (admission free) are either with Mrs Louw at the **Battlefields Hotel** (☎ 036-422 2242), at the police station (adjacent to the museum) or with the enthusiastic curator.

Lord Roberts' only son, Freddy, was among those slaughtered here (with about 1100 other British); he is buried in the **Chieveley Military Cemetery**, south of the town.

Zingela Safaris (☎ 036-354 7005; www.zingela-safaris.co.za; full board per person R550), a bush camp in a glorious setting, offers relaxation or loads of activities including abseiling, fishing and river rafting (add another R150 for the activity package). The indoor-outdoor units are tasteful designer numbers of stone and canvas and built to make the most of their natural surrounds. Bookings advised as it's popular with groups. From Colenso take Rte 74 and follow the signs to Weenen from where you will be collected in a high-clearance vehicle.

SPIOENKOP NATURE RESERVE

☎ 036

The 6000-hectare **Spioenkop Nature Reserve** (☎ 036-488 1578; www.kznwildlife.com; admission R15; 🕒 6am-6pm; 🚗) is based on the Spioenkop Dam on the Tugela River. The reserve is handy for most of the area's battlefield sites and not too far from the Drakensberg for day trips into the range. Animals include white

rhino, giraffes, various antelope species and over 270 bird species. There's a swimming pool, horse riding and vulture hide.

iPika (camp sites/bush camp per person R50/146) inside the reserve in a valley, offers camp sites and one four-bed tented bush camp. Book all accommodation directly through the reserve.

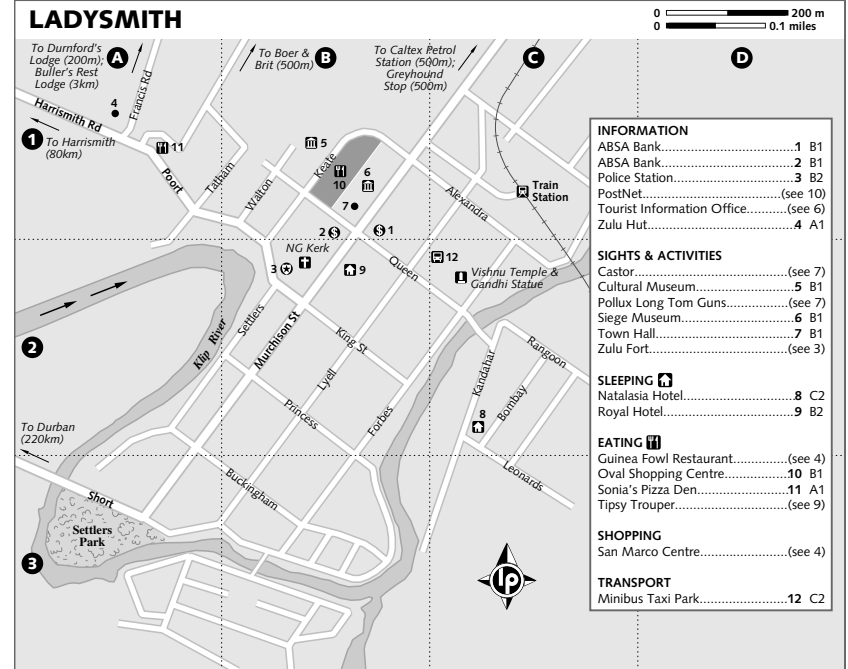
Spion Kop Lodge (☎ 036-488 1404; www.spionkop.co.za; r per person with full board R890, 4-/6-person cottages R890/990) was once the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces. It's well known for the owner, Raymond Heron, a raconteur and battlefield guide. Overlooking the Spioenkop Battlefield, his luxury 'barracks' also has a converted barn dining room, a well-appointed library, and all the trimmings for visiting 'troops'.

The reserve is northeast of Bergville but the entrance is on the eastern side, 13km from Winterton off Rte 600. If you are coming from the south on the N3, take the turn-off to Rte 74 to get to Winterton. You will need a car to get here. If coming by car, the Spioenkop Battlefield is accessed from Rte 616 (not Rte 600; follow the signs).

LADYSMITH

☎ 036

Ladysmith was named after the wife of Cape governor Sir Harry Smith, but it could well have had a much more colourful moniker;



her actual name was Lady Juana Maria de los Dolores de Leon Smith.

The town achieved fame during the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War, when it was besieged by Boer forces for 118 days. Recently, it has made world headlines as the home of the group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Apart from the historical aspect – several buildings were here during the siege – Ladysmith is a nice place to walk around.

Information

ABSA (cnr Queen & Murchison Sts) Has two branches on the same crossroads, one with an ATM.

Police station (☎ 036-638 3309; King St) By the NG Kerk.

Tourist information office (☎ 036-637 2992; www.ladysmith.co.za; Murchison St; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) In the Siege Museum. Ask here about guided tours of the Battlefields.

Zulu Hut (☎ 036-631 4413; San Marco Centre, 3 Francis Rd; per hr R40; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

The excellent **Siege Museum** (☎ 036-637 2231; adult/child R2/1; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat),

next to the town hall in the Market House (built in 1884), was used to store rations during the siege. You can pick up a guide to Ladysmith here.

There's also the small **Cultural Museum** (☎ 036-637 2231; 25 Keate St; adult/child R2/1; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), with some dusty displays including a room dedicated to Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

Outside the **town hall** are two guns, **Castor** and **Pollux**, used by the British in defence of Ladysmith. Nearby is a replica of **Long Tom**, a Boer gun capable of heaving a shell 10km. Long Tom was put out of action by a British raiding party during the siege, but not before it had caused a great deal of damage.

On King St (opposite Settlers Dr) is a wall with loopholes from the original **Zulu Fort**, built as a refuge from Zulu attack. The wall is now part of the police station.

Tours

The only way to do justice to the Battlefields is to hire a guide for the day. Sites can be isolated and signage poor. Highly recommended guides who specialise in the

THE BATTLE OF SPIOENKOP

On 23 January 1900 the British, led by General Buller, made a second attempt to relieve Ladysmith, which had been under siege by the Boers since late October 1899. At Trichardt's Drift, 500 Boers prevented 15,000 of his men from crossing the Tugela River, and Buller decided that he needed to take Spioenkop – the flat-topped hill would make a good gun emplacement from which to clear the annoying Boers from their trenches.

During the night, 1700 British troops climbed the hill and chased off the few Boers guarding it. They dug a trench and waited for morning. Meanwhile the Boer commander, Louis Botha, heard of the raid. He ordered his field guns to be trained onto Spioenkop and positioned some of his men on nearby hills. A further 400 soldiers began to climb Spioenkop as the misty dawn broke.

The British might have beaten off the 400, but the mist finally lifted, and was immediately replaced by a hail of bullets and shells. The British retreated to their trench and, by midafternoon, continuous shellfire caused many to surrender. By now, reinforcements were on hand and the Boers could not overrun the trench. A bloody stalemate was developing.

After sunset, the British evacuated the hill; so did the Boers. Both retreats were accomplished so smoothly that neither side was aware that the other had left. That night Spioenkop was held by the dead.

It was not until the next morning that the Boers again climbed up Spioenkop and found that it was theirs. The Boers had killed or wounded 1340 British – Gandhi's stretcher-bearer unit performed with distinction at this battle. Buller relieved Ladysmith a month later on 28 February.

Anglo-Boer War and are based out of Ladysmith include the following:

Elizabeth Spiret (☎ 036-637 7702, 072-262 9669; lizs@telkomsa.net)

John Snyman (☎ 036-631 0660)

For lists of tour guides specialising in other battles contact **Tourism Dundee** (☎ 034-212 2121; www.tourdundee.co.za; Victoria St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

Sleeping

There are plenty of B&Bs out of town off Short St.

Natalasia Hotel (☎ 036-637 6821; 342 Kandahar Ave; s/d R150/200) A bit on the outer, this place has neat rooms with no trimmings. Feels like the troops might use it for 'day skirmishes'. Single females are not encouraged to stay here.

Boer & Brit (☎ 036-631 2184; fax 036-637 3957; 47-49 Convent Rd; s/d R170/220; 🚗) True to its name, this straightforward pleasant B&B (and its dogs) welcomes all travelling types. It has a little slice of jungle for a garden, a braai area and might let you set up camp if you're trying to save the pennies. It's north of the centre, off Berea Rd.

Durnford's Lodge (☎ 036-637 2828; www.durnfordslodge.co.za; 28 Francis Rd; s/d incl breakfast R260/360; 🚗 🚗) The rooms at this siege-proof place may be cell-like in size, but they're pleasant in nature. Freedom comes in the form of the spacious African-style, indoor-outdoor lounge, garden and pool.

Buller's Rest Lodge (☎ 036-637 6154; www.bullersrestlodge.co.za; 61 Cove Cres; s/d incl breakfast R325/440; 🚗 🚗) You'll want to dig in long-term at this smart thatched abode. There's the snug 'Boer War' pub complete with Battlefields artefacts (if you're lucky, you might make it to Andy's cellar), scrumptious home cooking, and views of the Drakensbergs from the sundeck. It's popular with the local business crowd and fills up on weekdays. Turn right at Francis Rd off Harrismith (Port) Rd and follow the signs.

Royal Hotel (☎ 036-637 2176; royalhotel@intekom.co.za; 140 Murchison St; s/d incl breakfast R335/575; 🚗 🚗) Enjoy these historical digs, which combine predictable old-style grandeur (floral borders) with some 1980s renovations (shag-pile carpet). You can discuss tactics at the hotel's pub before engaging in the tourist onslaught of the surrounding streets.

Eating

There are several eateries in the Oval Shopping Centre behind the Siege Museum.

Sonia's Pizza Den (☎ 036-631 2895; 28 Poort Rd; mains R24-43; 🍷 dinner) The troops would have killed for this authentic Italian grub; this little place has a reputation around town for its delectable pizzas. A couple of times a week Sonia will serve up a three-course set menu.

Tipsy Trouper (☎ 036-637 2176; 140 Murchison St; mains R30-60; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This themed eatery serves English pub grub, including 'battlefield burgers' (R24 to R27) and decent beer; if you drink 32 different brews in 40 days, they'll etch your name on a brass plaque. It's in the Royal Hotel.

Guinea Fowl Restaurant (☎ 036-637 8163; mains R40-70; 🍷 lunch & dinner) One of the more formal restaurants in Ladysmith, this eatery warrants another battlefield analogy: 'you win some you lose some'. The staff are friendly, but travellers report varying standards of steaks and meat dishes.

Getting There & Away BUS

Bus tickets can be purchased from Shoprite/Checkers in the Oval Shopping Centre. Buses depart from the Caltex petrol station on Murchison Rd, and connect Ladysmith with Durban (R160, four hours), Jo'burg (R195, six hours), Pretoria (R195, seven hours) and Cape Town (R390, 19 hours).

MINIBUS TAXI

The main taxi rank is east of the town centre near the corner of Queen and Lyell Sts. Taxis bound for Jo'burg are nearby on Alexandra St. Some destinations are Newcastle (R35, one hour), Durban (R75, 2½ hours) and Jo'burg (R110, five hours).

TRAIN

The *Trans Oranje* (Durban to Cape Town) and the daily *Trans Natal* (Durban to Jo'burg/Pretoria) both stop here, but at inconvenient times. For more details about train schedules see p643.

NEWCASTLE & AROUND

☎ 034

Now twinned with its UK namesake, Newcastle (population 309,000) lacks the big-city feel of its English counterpart. As a coal-

mining and steel-producing centre, however, it does share the same no-nonsense atmosphere.

The **tourist information office** (☎ 034-315 3318; www.tourismnewcastle.co.za; Scott St; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9.30-10.30am Sat) is in the colonial-era town hall.

There's an Anglo-Boer War museum in **Fort Amiel** (☎ 034-328 7621; admission R5; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Thu, 11am-4pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which was established in 1876 when the British anticipated conflict with the Zulu.

The turn-off to **Chelmsford Nature Reserve** (☎ 034-351 1753; www.kznwildlife.com; admission R10; 🍷 6am-7pm) is off the N11 (turn-off 7km to the gate) and 25km south of Newcastle. As well as fishing and spring wildflowers, there's a beautiful wildlife reserve with the highest concentration of the endangered oribi species in South Africa. Accommodation is available.

Sleeping & Eating

KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; camp sites/5-bed chalets per person R55/117) Offers camp sites and chalets with good facilities in the pleasant Chelmsford Nature Reserve.

Cannon Lodge (☎ 034-315 2307; fax 315 2308; 96 Allen St; s/d incl breakfast R260/350) In a red-brick, colonial-style building, this B&B combines clean, motel-style rooms with a vibrant, English-style pub serving lunches and dinners (mains R30 to R68).

Newcastle Inn (☎ 034-312 8151; fax 034-312 4142; cnr Hunter & Victoria Rds; s/d R325/395; 🚗 🚗) Predictable and reliable, this is a decent, business-style offering. You'll need your own transport as it's slightly out of the city centre.

Getting There & Away

Shoprite Hyper and Checkers Hyper in town and at Amajuba Mall (opposite the Newcastle Inn) sell Greyhound tickets. Buses run daily to Jo'burg (R175, five hours) and Durban (R170, 5½ hours) from the Shell petrol station on Allen St.

Car-rental companies with agents in Newcastle include **Imperial** (☎ 034-312 2806), which is based at the Engen petrol station on Murchison St, east of Allen St.

MAJUBA HILL

The first Anglo-Boer War ended abruptly with the British defeat at Majuba Hill, 40km north of Newcastle, in early 1881. The **site**

(adult/vehicle R3.50/10; 🕒 7am-5pm) is off the N11. A rudimentary map is available. The more remote Laing's Nek battlefield is signposted and Schuinshoogte battlefield is also in the vicinity.

Peace negotiations took place at **O'Neill's Cottage** at the foothills near Majuba. The cottage, used as a hospital during the battle, has a photographic display.

UTRECHT

☎ 034 / pop 3500

Utrecht was once the capital of one of the original Voortrekker republics, measuring just 30km by 65km, and then the British headquarters during the Anglo-Zulu War. By 2000, several decades after the closure of the mines in the 1960s and 1970s and the town's subsequent demise, Utrecht was almost a ghost town. To attract tourism to the area, residents came up with the wild idea of rebranding it 'a town within a game park'. Over 3500 hectares of land – including the town – was fenced in so that introduced wildlife could roam freely. While you can be lucky to spot an animal in the street during the day, you can see other interesting monuments and buildings in this compact place.

The **Utrecht Information Bureau** (☎ 034-331 3613; www.utrecht.co.za; 1 Voor St; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is near the town's *lapa* (circular, thatched-roofed building used for cooking and parties) entrance. The **Old Parsonage Museum** (admission R5; Loop St; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) displays local history.

For guaranteed wildlife sightings head to the pretty **Balele Community Game Park** (per pedestrian/car load R11/50; camp sites/4-bed cottages/4-bed rondavels/4-bed safari tents R90/179/221/400) at the far end of town. It's on a dam and boasts a huge range of sleeping options.

Mangosuthu Art & Craft Village & Backpackers (upuba@worldonline.co.za; 1 Voor St; r with shared bathroom R90) has great-value accommodation in rondavels.

DUNDEE

☎ 034 / pop 29,000

Coal mines pepper the surrounds, but Dundee is another planned swathe of middle-class, South African suburbia. There's not much to do, but it's a decent base for exploring the region's history.

Tourism Dundee (☎ 034-212 2121; www.tourdundee.co.za; Victoria St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), by the

gardens in the centre, can put you in touch with Battlefields guides, who charge between R300 and R500 for a one-day tour of sites including Rorke's Drift and Isandlwana.

On the Vryheid road, 1.5km out of town, is the fascinating **Talana Museum** (☎ 034-212 2654; www.talana.co.za; adult/child R15/2; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun). Talana means 'the shelf where precious items are stored', strangely appropriate for this excellent museum and its surrounds, which have memorials, cairns and several historic buildings relating to the 1899 Anglo-Boer Battle of Talana. There are comprehensive displays on the Anglo-Zulu and the Anglo-Boer Wars (including a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi during his stretcher-bearing days), local history, exquisite Zulu beading, and a glassworks and coal-mining display. Curator Pam McFadden is the guru on all things Talana. Allow time to spend here.

East of Dundee, 52km away via Rtes 33 and 66, is the regional centre of Nqutu, an important trading hub for the surrounding Zulu community. A further 30km north of Nqutu, near Nondweni, is the memorial to the Prince Imperial Louis Napoleon, the last of the Bonaparte dynasty, who was killed here on 1 June 1879. Both places are isolated and poorly signposted; it's not recommended to go without a guide.

Sleeping

Royal Country Inn (☎ 034-212 2147; www.royalcountryinn.com; Victoria St; backpackers & d R175, s/d incl breakfast R335/460) With oodles of late-19th-century charm, an English-style pub and courtyard fit for a spot of post-Rorke's Drift R'n'R and cosy rooms named after the battle's Victoria Cross recipients, this is a great little place to stay during a tour of the Battlefields.

Penny Farthing Country House (☎ 034-642 1925; www.pennyf.co.za; s/d with half board R440/1050; ☎) In the midst of a 3000-hectare beef and wild-life farm, this homey Victoriana-filled place offers snug accommodation, big spaces and a sociable atmosphere. It's 30km south of Dundee on Rte 33 towards Greytown and well placed for visits to Rorke's Drift and Isandlwana. The owner, Foy Vermaak, is also a tour guide (R600 for four people with own transport).

Kwa Rie (☎ 034-212 2333; www.caravanparks.co.za; Tandy Rd; camp sites R55, s/d R100/200; ☎) With *Flintstones*-style mock-rock chalets, a lake,

garden and mock-rock pool, this relaxing place is an excellent budget option. It's 1.5km southwest of the centre – head down Victoria St.

Also recommended is **Battlefields Backpackers** (☎ 034-212 4040; battlepackers@telkomsa.net; dm from R80, d R200), which is run by registered Battlefields guide Evan Jones and his wife. This friendly place offers welcoming drinks and Battlefields tours, just to scratch the surface.

Getting There & Away

There is very little transport to Dundee. You can arrange a pick-up with **PMB Heritage Tours** (☎ 034-212 4040), from the Greyhound bus drop-off at Fort Mistake (R80 one-way, 70km), and from the **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) at Winterton (R180, 250km).

ISANDLWANA & RORKE'S DRIFT

☎ 034

If you have seen *Zulu*, the film that made Michael Caine a star, you will have doubtless heard of Rorke's Drift, a victory of the misty-eyed variety, where on 22–23 January 1879, 139 British soldiers successfully defended a small mission station from around 4000 Zulu warriors. A propaganda-minded Queen Victoria lavished 11 Victoria Crosses on the survivors and the battle was assured its dramatic place in British military history.

For the full picture, however, you must travel 15km across the plain to Isandlwana, the precursor of Rorke's Drift, where only hours earlier the Zulus dealt the Empire one of its great Battlefields disasters by annihilating the main body of the British force in devastating style. Tellingly, *Zulu Dawn* (1979), the film made about Isandlwana, never became the cult classic *Zulu* (1964) is now. Victories sell better than defeats.

Ideally, the two battlefields should be visited together. Start at the **Isandlwana Visitors Centre** (☎ 034-271 8165; adult/child R15/5; ☎ 8am-4pm), where there is a small museum. The battlefield itself is extremely evocative. Spread out from the base of Isandlwana hill, white cairns and memorials mark the spot where each British soldier fell – the hillside is peppered with them.

If you have seen *Zulu*, which was filmed in the Drakensberg, the scenery around Rorke's

THE BATTLE OF ISANDLWANA

It hardly bears thinking about. When a soldier from one of the five British armies sent to invade Zululand peered over a ridge on 22 January 1879, he was confronted not with an empty stretch of savanna, but with 25,000 Zulu warriors, crouching in the grass less than 1km away. They had intended to delay their attack until the following day, the day after the full moon, but once discovered moved into battle formation – two enclosing horns on the flanks and the main force in the centre – and fell on the British, catching them off guard and unprepared. By the end of the day, the British column had been annihilated and the Anglo-Zulu War, for the invaders at least, had got off to a very bad start.

Meanwhile, the small British contingent that had remained at Rorke's Drift (where the army had crossed into Zululand) to guard supplies, heard of the disaster and fortified their camp. They were attacked by about 4000 Zulus but the defenders, numbering fewer than 100 fit soldiers, held on through the night until a relief column arrived. Victoria Crosses were lavished on the defenders – 11 in all – and another couple went to the two officers who died defending the Queen's Colours at Fugitive's Drift, about 10km south of Rorke's Drift.

Drift may come as a bit of a disappointment. The landscape is still beautifully rugged, however, and the **Rorke's Drift Orientation Centre** (☎ 034-642 1687; adult/child R15/5; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), on the site of the original mission station, is excellent. The Zulu know this site as Shiyane, their name for the hill at the back of the village. The *Rorke's Drift-Shiyane Self-Guided Trail* brochure (R3) is helpful for understanding the close nature of the fighting in this battle.

Next to the museum, there's the **Evangelical Lutheran Church Art & Craft Centre** (☎ 034-642 1627; admission by donation; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun), one of the few places to offer artistic training to black artists during apartheid. It still has a workshop, although does not always stick to its opening hours.

About 10km from Rorke's Drift is **Fugitive's Drift**. Two British soldiers were killed here while attempting to rescue the Queen's Colours.

Sleeping

Rorke's Drift Lodge (☎ 034-642 1805; www.rorkesdriftlodge.co.za; Rorke's Drift; s/d with half board R285/570; ☎) With wonderful views over the Battlefields, this hospitable place promotes an 'eat well, sleep well' policy. It's 5km up a rough track from the Rorke's Drift Orientation Centre – turn left out of the museum and you will see the sign on the right. Call ahead to check on road conditions and for pick-ups from Ladysmith and Dundee. It organises tours of the battlefields.

Fugitives' Drift Lodge (☎ 034-642 1843; www.fugitives-drift-lodge.com; Fugitives' Drift; s/d with half board

R2880/4360; ☎) Run by Battlefields authority David Rattray (tours R700), this opulent private wildlife reserve is dripping in colonial-style class and military memorabilia. There are rooms in a slightly less glamorous guesthouse (R1550/2200 singles/doubles). Low-season rates are reduced. It is by Fugitives' Drift, about 10km from Rorke's Drift.

Getting There & Away

The battle sites are southeast of Dundee. Isandlwana is about 70km from Dundee, off Rte 66; Rorke's Drift is 42km from Dundee, accessible from Rte 66 or Rte 33 (the Rte 33 turn-off is 13km south of Dundee). The roads to both battlefields can be dusty and rough. A dirt road connects Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift.

BLOOD RIVER MONUMENT

☎ 034

On 16 December 1838 a small force of Voortrekkers avenged the massacre of Piet Retief's diplomatic party by crushing an army of 12,000 Zulu. More than 3000 Zulu died – the river ran red with their blood – while the Voortrekkers sustained barely a few casualties. The battle became a seminal event in Afrikaner history. The victory came to be seen as the fulfilment of God's side of the bargain and seemed to prove that the Boers had a divine mandate to conquer and 'civilise' Southern Africa, and that they were in fact a chosen people.

However, Afrikaner nationalism and the significance attached to Blood River grew

in strength simultaneously and it has been argued (by Leach in *The Afrikaners – Their Last Great Trek* and others) that the importance of Blood River was deliberately heightened and manipulated for political ends. The standard interpretation of the victory meshed with the former apartheid regime's world view: hordes of untrustworthy black savages were beaten by Boers who were on an Old Testament-style mission from God. Afrikaners still visit the site on 16 December, but the former 'Day of the Vow' is now the 'Day of Reconciliation'.

The battle site is marked by a full-scale bronze re-creation of the 64-wagon laager. The cairn of stones was built by the Boers after the battle to mark the centre of their laager. The monument and the nearby **Blood River Museum** (☎ 034-632 1695; adult/child R15/5; 🕒 8am-4.30pm) are 20km southeast of Rte33; the turn-off is 27km from Dundee and 45km from Vryheid.

The **Ncome Museum** (☎ 034-271 8121; admission by donation; 🕒 8am-4.30pm), on the other side of the river, offers the Zulu perspective of events.