

North Coast New South Wales



A beach interrupted by a few rocks is one way to think of the north coast of New South Wales. And indeed that's not far from the truth. One breathtaking vista after another yields scenes of endless sand pounded by ceaseless Pacific breakers. Not a lot of people live up here, so on some days it may feel like the ratio of beach to people is 500m to 1.

Surfing, diving and just plain lounging are major coastal activities. Byron Bay, the one definite stop on every itinerary, combines all three. It also has energetic nightlife, great restaurants, a languid café culture and enough activities to tempt you out of your hammock. And it's not alone. All along the Pacific Hwy are little towns and parks scattered amid the rich deltas of the mighty Clarence, Richmond and Tweed Rivers.

And after your first experience with a nasty delay on the stress-inducing highway, you'll be happy to know that opportunities to get off it abound. Roads head west into the thick subtropical rainforest and towns such as Bellingen nestle in the lush hills and offer temptations that may have you quickly altering your plans.

In the northern part of NSW, the hinterlands are a celebration of alternative lifestyles and lush organic produce. Little villages boast restaurants that are among the best in the country and creative-minded consumers will find much to enjoy while wandering the backroads of this idiosyncratic corner of the state.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Filling your days and nights in exciting **Byron Bay** (p271)
- Enjoying the artful village charms of **Bellingen** (p254)
- Losing yourself on the untrod beaches near **Woolli** (p263)
- Exploring hinterland villages, including **The Channon** (p282)
- Finding treasures in markets like the one at **Nimbin** (p283)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02

■ www.visitnsw.com.au



Getting There & Around

AIR

Airports along the north coast, including Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Ballina and Lismore, are attracting the service of budget carriers in addition to commuter runs to Sydney. Services fluctuate all the time.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) both offer services three to five times daily linking major – and minor – towns along the Pacific Hwy. The real choice between them may come down to which one you have a bus pass with and which has the schedule you want.

Local bus services are sporadic along the coast and are often timed solely for school runs.

ROAD

The Pacific Hwy (Hwy 1) is an adventure in itself. Parts have been greatly improved (eg north of Byron Bay) with eased curves and dual carriageways. But other stretches remain a minefield of narrow curves, stoplights, traffic

(eg Coffs Harbour) and speed cameras. One local politician has called it a 'national shame'. Of course the rotten road conditions give you yet more reasons to stop and enjoy yourself.

TRAIN

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) stopped its essential services to Byron Bay in 2004. Trains to/from Sydney stop far inland at the agricultural town of Casino and you have to transfer to a bus to reach Byron, Lismore et al. To the south, the train still serves Coffs Harbour, Nambucca Heads and Kempsey. Other CountryLink buses offer useful services linking towns, especially in the far north.

MID-NORTH COAST

The best thing about the Pacific Hwy driving north from Port Macquarie is all the chances you have to drive off it. On the ocean, Crescent Head and Southwest Rocks bracket beautiful and often deserted beaches; in the hills, the drive through delightful Bellingen and on to Dorrigo plunges into the heart of waterfall-laced rainforest. North, beachy Coffs Harbour defines 'family-friendly' and there's discoveries to be made, including the natural beauty of Woolli.

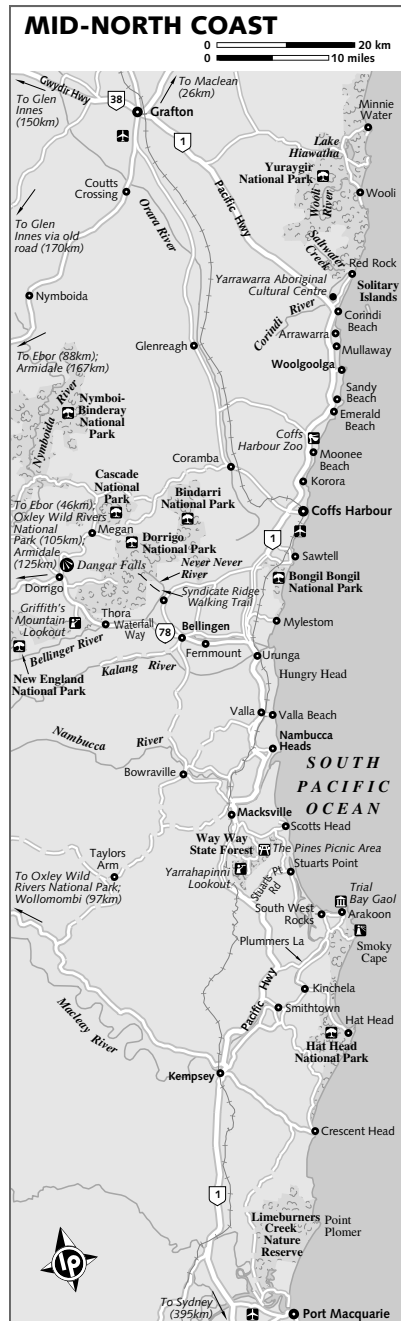
KEMPSEY

☎ 02 / pop 8500

Kempsey is a large agricultural town about 45km north of Port Macquarie serving the farms of the Macleay Valley. The town is the home of the **Akubra hat** (www.akubra.com.au), which screams 'Down under!' from the top of any head sporting one. Although the factory misses tourism opportunities by the busload (it's closed to visitors), you can see the full range at **Barsby's Department Store** (☎ 6562 4870; Main St), an old-fashioned gem in the heart of Kempsey.

The late Slim Dusty, another Oz icon, was born here and he presumably got his inspiration for country-music songs like 'Duncan' from this unassuming town. A long-proposed **Slim Dusty Heritage Centre** (www.slimdustycentre.com.au) remains the attraction with no completion date.

The highly useful regional **visitors centre** (☎ 6563 1555, 1800 642 480; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is at a rest stop on the south side of town. It shares space with a small museum that honours the sacrifice of sheep-shearers, lumber-whackers, cattle-pokers



and all the others who've made Kempsey an agricultural paradise.

Sleeping & Eating

There's a small string of motels just north of the centre. For camping, the best spots are out on the coast.

Moon River (☎ 6562 8077; www.moonriver.com.au; 157 Pacific Hwy; s/d from \$65/75; ♿ ♿; wi-fi) Most appealing of the traveller-friendly motels, Moon River may not be as Andy Williams sang, but it does have 33 comfortable, good-sized rooms and a view of the Macleay River.

our pick Fredo Pies (☎ 6566 8226; 75 Madeay St, Frederickton; pies under \$4; ☎ 7am-7pm) Just 6km north of Kempsey look for the iconic statue of Marilyn Monroe as her skirt blows up in the film *The Seven Year Itch*. It's all tasty inside at this equally iconic pie purveyor, where you can sample from up to 50 pie varieties including the 'Truckie' (steak, bacon, onion and cheese).

Getting There & Around

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) pass through several times a day on their Pacific Hwy runs.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) runs a north coast train service that goes north to Coffs Harbour (\$13, 1½ hours) and south to Sydney (\$59, seven hours).

CRESCENT HEAD

☎ 02 / pop 1200

In surfing circles, this is where the Malibu surfboard gained prominence in Australia during the '60s. Now a third generation continues the surfing legacy this town cherishes. Many come just to watch the longboard riders surf the epic waves of **Little Nobby's Junction** when the swell's up. Crescent Head is a low-key mix of families and surfers. The real attraction here is untrammelled **Killick Beach**, which stretches 14km north.

If you're driving, the direct road to Crescent Head is near the visitors centre in Kempsey. Alternatively, from the north you can take the very scenic Belmore Rd, which leaves the Pacific Hwy at Seven Oaks and follows the sinuous bends of the Belmore River through lush flatlands.

For holiday rentals, try the **Crescent Head Accommodation Bureau** (☎ 6566 0306; www.pointbreakrealty.com.au).

WORTH A TRIP: SLIM DUSTY SPECTACULAR

Even if the heritage centre seems jammed on the spindle, this part of NSW is Slim Dusty country. To visit his childhood home, take the Armidale road west of Kempsey for 55km until 2km before the village of Bellbrook, then turn north on Nulla Creek Rd. When the road turns to gravel, it's another 2.2km to what is now a private home but displays by the road put the place into context. Retrace your drive back to Hickey's Creek and take the partially paved road of that name 26km northeast to the fabled **Pub With No Beer** (☎ 6564 2100; Taylors Arm Rd; ☎ noon-late) in Taylor's Arm. You won't find a dog on the v'randa but inside you'll find a slick operation with its own microbrewery (Murray's) and upscale meals (\$10 to \$25); see p436 for more details on the song that made this place famous. From here it is 25km east to Macksville and the Pacific Hwy. Note that south of Taylors Arm you can get a feel for the land of Dusty's youth in the old gum forests of the Ngambaa Nature Reserve.

Right at the mouth of the river, **Crescent Head Holiday Park** (☎ 6566 0261; Pacific St; camp sites from \$25, cabins from \$80) has 156 sites.

Surfaris (☎ 1800 007 873; www.surfaris.com; per person from \$85; wi-fi) has a surf camp 3km north of Crescent Head. Rates include beds in dorms or space in a single or double tent, meals and surfing lessons on Killick Beach. Transport options include Sydney, Byron Bay and the bus and train stops in Kempsey.

The nine-room, two-storey **Mediterranean Motel** (☎ 6566 0303; www.crescentheadaccommodation.com.au; 35 Pacific St; r 90-145; ♿ ♿) is the pick of the handful of motels. Groups of up to eight may enjoy the 'surf shacks' (self-catering cottages) out the back (\$90 to \$200).

Busways (☎ 1300 555 611; www.busways.com.au) runs two or three times daily Monday to Saturday to/from Kempsey (Belgrave St, \$9, 50 minutes).

HAT HEAD NATIONAL PARK

This remote coastal park of 6500 hectares runs north from near Crescent Head almost to South West Rocks. It protects wetlands and some excellent beaches backed by one of NSW's largest sand dunes. Birds are prolific. Rising up from the generally flat landscape is Hungry Hill, near Hat Head, and sloping Hat Head itself. Walking tracks include a 2½-hour loop from the Cap picnic area.

Surrounded by the national park, the village of **Hat Head** is minute. **Hat Head Holiday Park** (☎ 6567 7501; www.4shoreholidayparks.com.au; camp sites from \$19, cabins from \$70) has 280 tent sites, eight cabins and a beautiful location. You can camp (\$5 per person) in the park at Hungry Head, 5km south of Hat Head. There are pit toilets and no showers, and you'll need to take your own water.

The park is accessible from the hamlet of Kinchela, on the pretty road between Kempsey and South West Rocks.

At the north end of the park, **Smoky Cape Lighthouse** has commanding views out to sea, 9km southeast of South West Rocks. Relive the lives of the lighthouse-keepers by staying in one of two large restored self-catering 1891 cottages (☎ 6566 6301; www.smokycapelighthouse.com; d \$190, cottages from \$230), except you won't be screwing in any lightbulbs. Two large bedrooms are also available for B&B accommodation.

SOUTH WEST ROCKS

☎ 02 / pop 4150

Well off the Pacific Hwy, South West Rocks is a little beach town with just enough to keep you busy relaxing for days. Overlooking Trial Bay to the north, the town has a hook shape which affords views back over the water at sunset. Ignore the fringe of suburban blight and make for the centre.

Just getting to South West Rocks may be more than half the fun. The area west of the Pacific Hwy is a rich river delta lined with dense reeds, appealing old farmhouses and vintage shacks built on stilts. It's a great drive; to fully appreciate it, leave the Pacific Hwy at Seven Oaks and take the sinuous 22km road along the Macleay River, which passes through a few quaint fishing villages.

You may feel like the stranger who's walked into a bar in the old west, but once past the suspicious reception at **Boatman's Cottage** (☎ 6566 7099; cnr Ocean Ave & Livingstone St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm) you'll be rewarded by a fascinating little museum that shows how life on the coast once revolved around boats as opposed to roads. The building, which dates to 1902, has a small display of tourist info.

Sights & Activities

The waters off South West Rocks are great for divers, especially **Fish Rock Cave**, south of Smoky Cape. **South West Rocks Dive Centre** (☎ 6566 6474; www.southwestrocksdive.com.au; 5/98 Gregory St) offers dive lessons and trips.

Imposing and historic, **Trial Bay** occupies the east headland of South West Rocks. The area has a rather dramatic past: Sydney convicts stole a boat, the *Trial*, in 1816 but their bid for freedom ended up literally on the rocks after a storm sank it. Eventually the government decided that a breakwater was needed to protect boats – stolen or otherwise – taking shelter in the now-named Trial Bay. As a result, the **Trial Bay Gaol** (☎ 6566 6168; admission \$5; ☎ 9am-4:30pm) was built to house convicts charged with the breakwater's construction. However, plans fizzled and except for a brief interlude in WWI when it housed Germans, the gaol has been unoccupied for more than 100 years. It's now a museum.

The **Arakoon State Conservation Area** surrounds the gaol and has a popular campground. From South West Rocks it's a pleasant 4km walk to Trial Bay along the beach; look out for the **love shack**, formerly a fisherman's abode, about halfway between South West Rocks and Trial Bay.

Sleeping & Eating

Trial Bay Camping Area (☎ 6566 6168; camp sites per adult/child \$24/9) is beside the gaol and has over 70 sites, some set right on the beach. Amenities include hot showers and coin-powered barbies.

Horseshoe Bay Beach Park (☎ 6566 6370; Livingstone St; camp sites from \$35, cabins from \$80) Superb position right in town and right on the little namesake beach cove. The 70 sites and 13 cabins are often booked out over the summer holidays.

Seabreeze Hotel (☎ 6566 6909; www.seabreezebeachhotel.com.au; Livingstone St; r \$80-120; meals \$8-20; ☎ bistro lunch & dinner; ☎ wi-fi) Tables in the casual Sea Breeze bistro overlook the town's green verge with the ocean beyond. The 28 rooms are motel-style; the better ones have balconies and/or views of the water.

Rock Pool Motor Inn (☎ 1800 180 133; www.rockpoolmotorinn.com.au; 45 McIntyre St; r \$90-200; ☎ wi-fi) This 28-room modern motel is right in the centre and a short walk to the beach and shops. The small pool is kid-friendly; rooms are unadorned but have niceties such as fridges.

Heritage Guest House (☎ 6566 6625; www.heritageguesthouse.com.au; 21-23 Livingstone St; r \$115-170;

☎) Proof that tourism has always been important here, this 1887 building is beautifully renovated but still serves its original purpose. The nine rooms have internet and some on the 2nd floor have ocean views from the veranda.

Seaside Café (☎ 6566 9557; 21-23 Livingstone St; meals \$6-12; ☎ 8am-3pm) The old billiard pavilion at the Heritage guest house is now an upscale café where you can enjoy creative breakfasts and lunches at tables inside and out. In every iteration, the pancakes are excellent.

Getting There & Away

Busways (☎ 1300 555 611; www.busways.com.au) runs two or three times daily Monday to Saturday to/from Kempsey (Belgrave St, \$12, 50 minutes).

NAMBUCCA HEADS

☎ 02 / pop 6200

Nambucca Heads (nam-buk-a) has a workaday centre atop a hill. But get towards the water and you'll be rewarded with wide vistas of the coast. There's a number of nature walks and plenty of beachy walking so you can get fit while you holiday.

The Nambucca Valley (which means 'many bends') was occupied by the Gumbainggir people until European timber-cutters arrived in the 1840s. There are still strong Aboriginal communities in Nambucca Heads and up the valley in Bowraville.

Orientation

The town is just off the Pacific Hwy. Riverside Dr runs alongside the estuary of the Nambucca River, then climbs a steep hill to Bowra St, the main shopping street. A right turn onto Ridge St at the top of the hill leads to the bluffs and the beaches. Wellington Dr follows the river to the V-Wall.

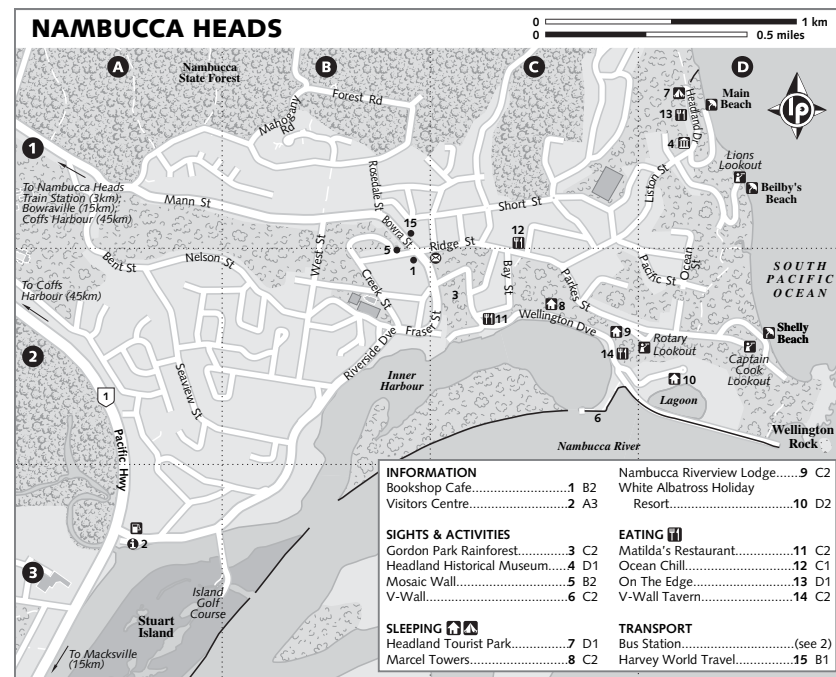
Information

Bookshop Cafe (☎ 6568 5855; cnr Ridge & Bowra Sts; ☎ 8am-5pm; ☎) Used books and internet access.

Visitors centre (☎ 6568 6954; cnr Riverside Dr & Pacific Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) Very helpful; doubles as the main bus terminal. It has a nice spot on the estuary.

Sights & Activities

At the east end of town, 1.2km from the centre on a high bluff, the **Captain Cook Lookout** is the place to ponder the swath of beaches. A road here leads down to **Shelly Beach**, which has



tidepools. Going north, it blends into **Beilby's Beach** and then **Main Beach**, which has lots of parking and surf patrols.

Above Main Beach, the **Headland Historical Museum** (☎ 6568 6380; Liston St; adult/child \$2/50¢; ☎ 2-4pm Wed, Sat & Sun) has local history exhibits, including a collection of over 1000 photos and displays of maritime equipment.

Wellington Dr leads downhill off Bowra St to the waterfront and the V-Wall breakwater with its mostly well-mannered graffiti by locals and travellers. There's a short but interesting boardwalk through the mangroves here. Various nature trails wander the hillside up to the lookouts; scan the many trees for a sighting of a kookaburra. The **Gordon Park Rainforest** at the start of Wellington Dr is a small but dense patch of trees with several twisting paths.

On Bowra St, the **Mosaic Wall** is a riot of polychromatic tiles and broken crockery that has a wealth of hidden detail.

Sleeping

Nambucca Heads has a loyal cadre of sun-seekers and books out in summer.

Headland Tourist Park (☎ 6568 6547; www.headlandtouristpark.com.au; Liston St; camp sites from \$16, cabins from \$60) Just above Main Beach and close to the museum, this nicely landscaped place has 78 sites under swaying palms.

White Albatross Holiday Resort (☎ 6568 6468; www.white-albatross.com.au; Wellington Dr; camp sites from \$28, cabins from \$70) Located near the river mouth with an adjacent lagoon to swim in, this large holiday park surrounds a sheltered lagoon. Beaches and the V-Wall Tavern are all close by.

Nambucca Riverview Lodge (☎ 6568 6386; www.riverviewlodgenambucca.com.au; 4 Wellington Dr; r \$80-145; ☎) Built in 1887, the Riverview has just that from its long veranda out front. This old two-storey wooden charmer has a colourful history the owners will happily share. The eight rooms have fridges; some have stunning views.

Marcel Towers (☎ 6568 7041; www.marceltowers.com.au; 12 Wellington Dr; r \$85-250; wi-fi) Overlooking the estuary, this 1970s apartment complex has 11 large units with multiple bedrooms and full kitchens. The balconies have fine views and a recent redecoration trumps the daggie architecture.

Eating & Drinking

The bracing ocean breezes here put people to bed early; the streets are mostly rolled up by 10pm weeknights.

Bookshop Cafe (☎ 6568 5855; cnr Ridge & Bowra Sts; meals \$6-10; ☎ 8am-5pm; ☎) The porch tables here are *the* place in town for breakfast. The fruit smoothies are excellent.

On The Edge (☎ 6569 4494; 1 Headland Dr; mains \$15-25; ☎ dinner Wed-Sat, brunch Sun) Right by the museum on the head, you can dine on an octagonal terrace to the atmospheric distant roar of the surf. The huge, well-thumbed curry cookbook attests to the popularity of the curry special; other dishes include sprightly seasoned seafood and steaks.

ourpick Matilda's Restaurant (☎ 6568 6024; Wellington Dr; mains \$15-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A whimsical gem down by the water. The playful theme extends from the colourful birds on the walls to the vegemite-and-toast starter. There's numerous daily specials reflecting what's fresh. Seafood dishes are unpretentious but surprising in their rich flavours and presentation. BYO.

Ocean Chill (☎ 6568 8877; 58 Ridge St; mains \$25-30; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) In a simple little house just east of the centre, the Ocean Chill has a short Mod Oz menu dramatically prepared in an open kitchen. Seafood stars although carnivores appreciate the lamb. BYO.

V-Wall Tavern (☎ 6568 6394; 1 Wellington Dr) A big, modern place with classic water views from its long patio on the upper floor. There's pub food and a bistro with more expensive fishy fare. On weeknights the taps stop pouring their mediocre selection of beer as early as 9pm.

Getting There & Around

Harvey World Travel (☎ 6568 6455; 16 Bowra St) handles transport bookings.

Long-distance buses stop at the visitors centre. **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) charges \$58 to either Sydney or Brisbane (both eight to nine hours) on the Pacific Hwy. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) is usually somewhat more.

Busways (☎ 1300 555 611; www.busways.com.au) runs two or three times Monday to Saturday from Nambucca Heads to Bellingen (\$9, one hour) and Coffs Harbour (\$9, 50 minutes) via Urunga.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) has three trains north to Coffs Harbour (\$5, 40 minutes) and beyond, and south to Sydney (\$66, eight hours).

URUNGA

☎ 02 / pop 2750

Urunga is family-friendly, with safe river beaches, good fishing and a perpetual calm, about 20km north of Nambucca Heads. Hungry Head, just south along the coast, is a popular surf spot.

The **Bellingen Shire visitors centre** (☎ 6655 5711; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is on the Pacific Hwy, just before you reach the river, and serves the whole area. It has a model that will help you finally make sense of the region's chaotic topography.

Catch a buzz at the **Honey Place** (☎ 6655 6160; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), or maybe just have a sugar high. Hives hum and you can sample a wide variety of honeys produced by busy bees. The New England Blackbutt is significantly better than the name implies: the fruity bouquet is divine. It's 3km south of town.

Have a total getaway at **Hungry Head Nature Reserve Cabins** (☎ 6655 6208; Hungry Head; cabins from \$75). Set in a dense forest behind the beach, 5km south of town, the 10 cabins here are very basic but have full kitchens and porches ideal for viewing the many marsupials who hop past.

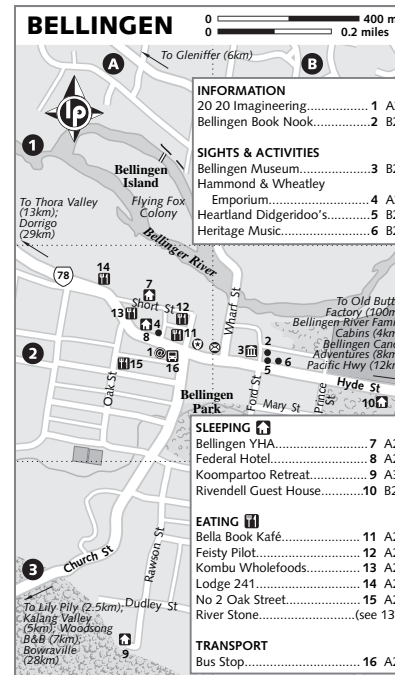
The most prominent building in Urunga, the **Ocean View Hotel** (☎ 6655 6221; 15 Morgo St; s/d from \$40/70; mains \$10-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) dates to 1927 and offers genteel B&B rooms.

BELLINGEN

☎ 02 / pop 2850

Bellingen is a charming hill town that manages to have a lot of interest without selling itself out with some of the tacky tourism vices found in other places along the coast. There's a delightfully laid-back vibe that's spiced with art and alternative lifestyles. Many of the buildings date from the early 1900s and have cast-iron details. Numerous folk musicians live in the region while the bulletin board at the bus stop features fliers for various forms of yoga, guinea-pig breeding, acoustic-guitar lessons and much more.

The lovely 12km drive off the Pacific Hwy is worth the journey alone and the road continues west to the Waterfall Way. The wide Bellingen River valley here was part of the extensive territory of the Gumbainggir people until European timber-cutters arrived in the 1840s. The first settlement here was at Fernmount, about 5km east of Bellingen, but later the administrative centre of the region was moved to Bellingen. River craft were able



to come up here until the 1940s, when dredging was discontinued. Until tourism boomed at Coffs Harbour in the 1960s, Bellingen was the most important town in this area.

Orientation

The main road from the Pacific Hwy to Dorrigo and the Waterfall Way becomes Hyde St in town. Next to the post office, Wharf St leads across the river to North Bellingen and Gleniffer. There isn't a visitors centre, so stop at the regional centre in Urunga (opposite).

Information

The visitor centres in Urunga on the coast and up the mountain in Dorrigo have Bellingen info. See Eating (p256) for the Bella Book Kafé.

20 20 Imagineering (☎ 6655 0006; Elite Espresso Gallery, 62 Hyde St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Full-service internet shop (per hour \$8) adjoining a café.

Bellingen Book Nook (☎ 6655 9372; 25 Hyde St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat market) In a real nook. Lots of books are crammed into this small space. There's always a few itinerant readers lounging around while others gossip.

www.bellingen.com This community website is an excellent resource.

Sights & Activities

To get a feel for the town's past, head to the magnificent **Hammond & Wheatley Emporium** (Hyde St), which looks like a musty old department store until you see the range of stylish goods for sale in the restored 1909-vintage surrounds. There's also an art gallery and a café.

The historic **Old Butter Factory** (☎ 6655 2150; 1 Doepel Lane; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) houses craft shops, a local art gallery, opal dealers and various New Age healers.

Among the dozens of interesting shops, two attest to the importance of music locally: **Heritage Music** (☎ 6655 1611; 23 Hyde St; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) and **Heartland Didgeridoo's** (☎ 6655 9881; www.heartlanddidg.com; 2/25 Hyde St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat). The former is an acoustic mecca selling and servicing guitars. You can take lessons from local luminaries and on occasion, a few drop by to perform. The latter is the real deal, with didj's from across Australia, lessons on offer and more.

Bellingen Museum (☎ 6655 1259; Hyde St; adult/child \$2/free; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue, 10am-noon Wed & Fri) is one of those places run by enthusiastic volunteers who you suspect hang out there even when it's closed. It has a range of booklets on local walks and history.

For a nature fix, from December to March there's a huge colony of flying foxes on **Bellingen Island**. It's an impressive sight when thousands head off at dusk to feed (best seen from the bridge). There's also an interesting walk to **rope swings** into the river, near the YHA hostel.

About 8km east of town in Fernmount, **Bellingen Canoe Adventures** (☎ 6655 9955; www.canoadventures.com.au; 4 Tyson St) rents out canoes (from \$11) and organises ecofriendly river tours (\$45 to \$90). You'll see stars on the full moon tour.

On the third Saturday of the month the community **market** takes to the streets and it is a regional sensation, with over 250 stalls. On the second and fourth Saturday of the month there's an **organic market**. Although mobbed, the markets show Bellingen in full blossom.

Festivals & Events

Stamping Ground (☎ 6655 2472; www.stampingground.com.au) A festival of international dance performances in January.

Bellingen Jazz & Blues Festival (www.bellingenjazzfestival.com.au) Features a strong line-up of jazz names in mid-August.

Global Carnival (www.globalcarnival.com) A multicultural mix of music and performances held annually in early October.

Sleeping

Much of the region's accommodation is in small B&Bs and cottages scattered across the hillsides.

Bellingen YHA (☎ 6655 1116; www.yha.com.au; 2 Short St; dm/d from \$25/64; ☑) Once you enjoy the rainforest views from the broad veranda or listen to the flying foxes from a hammock, it's easy to see why this hostel is always popular. A tranquil, engaging atmosphere pervades this renovated weatherboard house. There's a free shuttle to the bus stop and train station in Urunga. Tent sites are \$15.

Federal Hotel (☎ 6655 1003; 77 Hyde St; dm \$25, r from \$45) The basic but clean rooms have access to a wide 2nd-floor veranda with views of the local action. Tiny TVs are mounted up near the wooden ceilings.

Bellingen River Family Cabins (☎ 6655 0499; www.bellingencabins.com.au; 850 Waterfall Way; cabins from \$100) Two large two-bedroom cabins overlook the wide river valley on this family farm 4km east of Bellingen. The units are nicely equipped with DVDs and other extras. Make friends with Marilyn the pig and Jack the dog.

Rivendell Guest House (☎ 6655 0060; www.rivendellguesthouse.com.au; 12 Hyde St; r \$110-150; ☑) Unlike many, Rivendell is right in town. The three bedrooms have verandas fronting lush gardens surrounding a freshwater pool. Décor is restrained, always a plus with a B&B.

Koompartoo Retreat (☎ 6655 2326; www.koompartoo.com.au; cnr Lawton & Dudley Sts; r from \$145; ☑) Ferns hang over the wide balconies on the four chalets at this tropical retreat close to town. Each is constructed from local hardwoods and blends right into the hillside. Kitchenettes let you show off your romantic prowess at the cooker.

Woodsong B&B (☎ 6655 9687; www.woodsong.com; 720 Kalang Rd; r \$150; ☑) Made from heavy bricks and timber found on the estate, this cottage stays cool in summer and warm in winter – although the wood fire may light your own fires anyway. Lush grounds surround a freshwater pool.

Lily Pily (☎ 6655 0522; www.lilypily.com.au; 54 Sunny Corner Rd; r \$180-220; ☑) Set on a knoll, this

architect-designed modern complex has three bedrooms overlooking the valleys. It's a high end place designed to pamper with champagne on arrival, lavish breakfasts served until noon, luxurious furnishings and more. It's 3km south of the centre.

Eating & Drinking

The creativity of the locals comes through in the many cafés and restaurants.

Kombu Wholefoods (☎ 6655 9299; 105 Hyde St) An organic grocery-cum-community centre that speaks to the local culture by posting its business philosophy outside.

ourpick Feisty Pilot (☎ 6655 0840; 5 Church St; meals \$5-10; ☎ 10am-5pm) A Bellingen classic: enjoy sushi from the café while you browse busking gear or get your face painted. Get your rave wear here and find out when they're on locally.

Bella Book Kafé (☎ 0413 707 775; 7 Church St; meals under \$12; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) Excellent brekkies and fresh juices fuel the tummy while the broad assortment of books and games fuel the mind. Sofas are the place to curl up when the rains fall outside.

Federal Hotel (☎ 6655 1003; 77 Hyde St; meals \$8-15; ☎ 11am-late) Tragically modernized inside, the town's main pub still has wide porches where you can often hear local musicians jamming.

River Stone (☎ 6655 9099; 103 Hyde St; meals \$12-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) The Balinese teak furniture at this stylish open-air café hints at the Asian touches on the ever-changing menu. The corn fritters at breakfast are a treat, the *mezze* plate at lunch sumptuous and the prawn *laksa* for dinner divine.

Lodge 241 (☎ 6655 2470; 117-121 Hyde St; mains \$16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Art adorns the walls and there are valley views outside at this bistro set in an old Masonic lodge. Enjoy organic fare such daily pasta specials at large wooden tables inside and out.

No 2 Oak St (☎ 6655 9000; 2 Oak St; mains \$28; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) The bounty of local produce is celebrated at this celebrated restaurant where host Toni Urquart provides the welcome while Ray Urquart works his kitchen magic. A table on the veranda at this 1910 country house is a magical place for the evening.

Getting There & Away

Busways (☎ 1300 555 611; www.busways.com.au) runs two or three times Monday to Saturday from Nambucca Heads (\$9, 40 minutes) and

Coffs Harbour (\$8, 70 minutes) to Bellingen via Urunga.

Keans (☎ 1800 625 587) has buses west to Dorrigo and Tamworth a pitiful two times a week.

From Bellingen the Waterfall Way climbs steeply 29km to Dorrigo – it's a spectacular drive. From Dorrigo you can continue west to the Armidale–Grafton road. A network of unsealed roads leads south to Bowraville and some tiny mountain settlements.

AROUND BELLINGEN

Explorations of Bellingen's lush surrounding valleys are always rewarded. The most accessible is the tiny hamlet of **Gleniffer**, 6km to the north and clearly signposted from North Bellingen. There's a good swimming hole in the **Never Never River**, behind the small Gleniffer School of Arts at the crossroads. Then you can drive around Loop Rd, which takes you to the foot of the New England Tableland – a great drive that words cannot do justice to.

If you want to sweat, tackle the **Syndicate Ridge Walking Trail**, a strenuous 15km walk from Gleniffer to the Dorrigo Plateau followed by the route of a tramline once used by timber-cutters. There's a very steep 1km climb on the way up. To get to the start of the trail, take the Gleniffer road from Bellingen, turning into Adams Lane soon after crossing the Never Never River. The walking track commences at the first gate.

The **Kalang Valley**, southwest of town, and the **Thora Valley**, about 10km west of town, are also well worth exploring. Feel like you missed the 1960s? They never ended here.

DORRIGO NATIONAL PARK

Layered over sharp peaks and plunging valleys, this is the most accessible of Australia's World Heritage rainforests. The 11,732-hectare park is home to a huge diversity of vegetation owing to its rich soil and subtropical conditions. All those trees mean there's plenty of places for birds to perch and at last count there were over 120 species present.

The **Waterfall Way** climbs the hills between Bellingen and Dorrigo and lives up to its name by passing several plunging streams at the roadside. Near the top, 2km south of Dorrigo, the **Rainforest Centre** (☎ 6657 2309; Dome Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm), at the park entrance, has information about the park's many walks and nature displays. The highlight – literally – is

the short **Skywalk** walkway that arches over the rainforest and provides vistas to the valleys below. You can see right down to the ocean on a fine day. The **Wonga Walk** is a three-hour, 6km-return walk on a sealed track through the heart of the rainforest. It's well worth making the drive down to the **Never Never rest area** in the middle of the national park, from where you can walk to waterfalls or begin longer walks.

DORRIGO

☎ 02 / pop 980

The drowsy streets of this agricultural village atop the plateau are starting to see an upscale outpost or two, attesting to its burgeoning popularity. It's sunny and warm up here in contrast to the often misty forests in the national park below.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 6657 2486; 36 Hickory St; ☎ 10am-4pm), in the middle of what passes for the main drag, is run by volunteers who share a passion for the area. Pick up the useful scenic drives brochure (\$1). The town's main attraction is **Dangar Falls**, which pound down into a swimming hole – think of it as aquatic massage.

The fire's gone out of a proposed **Steam Railway Museum**, but it's well worth visiting the site: there's a long line of steam engines and lots of old railway paraphernalia scattered about.

In town, **Dorrigo Antiques** (☎ 6657 1000; cnr Waterfall Way & Hickory St), gives artistic presentation (and price tags) to the kinds of old items often found in local attics or country museums. **Pinnata Gallery** (☎ 6657 1668; 69a Hickory St; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) has a good line-up of local art.

Sleeping & Eating

Dorrigo Hotel/Motel (☎ 6657 2017; www.hotelmoteldorrigo.com.au; cnr Cudgergy & Hickory Sts; dm \$17, r \$60-85) This classic country pub is a stately example of 1920s architecture. Rooms span the gamut from restored beauties on the veranda to modern motel jobbies out back. Food is equally, shall we say, timeless: try the chicken nuggets lunch plate.

Gracemere Grange (☎ 6657 2630; www.gracemeregrange.com.au; 325 Dome Rd; dm \$30, s/d from \$40/70) The endearing owner serves a yummy breakfast here. Cosy bedrooms upstairs have slanted, attic-style roofs. It's just 1km east of the centre.

(☎ 8am-5pm) Has a complete rundown on accommodation, activities and tours, although it obliterates contact info on brochures with its own.

Sights

Some see the **Big Banana** (☎ 6652 4355; www.bigbanana.com; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) as a national icon with plenty of appeal, others find it ripe for abuse. This long-running roadside attraction has ice-skating (\$12), a snow slope (\$5) and other attractions. It's great for kids and those whose sense of style is not easily bruised.

Strolling through **North Coast Botanic Gardens** (☎ 6648 4188; Hardacre St; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-5pm) you can immerse yourself in the subtropical surrounds. Lush rainforest and numerous endangered species are some of the features, which also include sections devoted to places as faraway and foreign as Africa, China and Queensland. The 6km **Coffs Creek Habitat Walk** passes by, starting opposite the council chambers on Coff St and finishing near the ocean.

Dramatic **Muttonbird Island** was joined to Coffs Harbour by the northern breakwater in 1935. It's occupied by some 12,000 pairs of mutton birds from late August to early April, with cute offspring visible in December and January. The 500m walk to the top rewards with sweeping vistas along the coast. This marks the southern boundary of Solitary Islands Marine Park (p264), a meeting place of tropical waters and southern currents.

Coffs Harbour Regional Museum (☎ 6652 5794; 191a Harbour Dr; adult/child \$3/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) has displays of the region's nautical and fruit heritage in an old weatherboard house.

Legends Surf Museum (☎ 6653 6536; Pacific Hwy; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 9am-4pm) lets you smell the wax. Over 160 boards are on display, including ancient ones from, like, 50 years ago, man. Owner Scott Dillon is as salty as the ocean and has a passel of tales, although as he notes: 'Everyone wants to hear shark stories'. It's 500m west of the Pacific Hwy 7km north of town.

BEACHES

Park Beach, which has a picnic ground and is patrolled at busy times, is a long and lovely stretch of sand. It is backed by dense shrubbery and dunes that conceal the urban blight beyond. **Jetty Beach** is more sheltered. **Diggers Beach**, reached by turning off the highway near the Big Banana, has a nude section. Surfers

enjoy Diggers and **Macauleys Headland** where swells average 1m to 1.5m.

GALLERIES

Coffs Harbour City Gallery (☎ 6648 4861; Rigby House, cnr Coff & Duke Sts; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sat) has exhibits of regional art and travelling shows.

Bunker Cartoon Gallery (☎ 6651 7343; City Hall Dr; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) is a unique institution where humour knows no borders. Rotating selections from the permanent collection of 12,000 cartoons are on display.

Activities

Coffs Harbour is a centre for activities in the region, many involving the ocean. Pick up the useful walking brochure from the visitors centre.

Jetty Dive Centre (☎ 6651 1611; www.jettydive.com.au; 398 Harbour Dr; double dives from \$95) offers great-value PADI certification; the diving and snorkelling is pretty spectacular as you explore the Solitary Islands Marine Park.

Watery fun of all kinds is on offer at **Liquid Assets Adventure Tours** (☎ 6658 0850; www.surfrfting.com; 328 Harbour Dr; half-day surf rafting \$50), which offers surf-kayaking, white-water rafting, kayaking in the marine park, platypus tours and more.

East Coast Surf School (☎ 6651 5515; www.eastcoastsurfschool.com.au; Diggers Beach; lessons from \$55) is particularly female-friendly as it is run by noted East Coast surfer Helene Enevoldson. Fellow boardie **Lee Winkler's Surf School** (☎ 6650 0050; Park Beach; lessons from \$45) also has a good rep.

Valery Horse Trails (☎ 6653 4301; www.valerytrails.com.au; 758 Valery Rd, Valery; 2hr ride \$45) has a stable of 60 horses and plenty of acreage to explore in the hills behind town.

Tours

Mountain Trails (☎ 6658 3333; tours per person from \$65) Award-winning ecofriendly 4WD tours. A reader fave.

Festivals & Events

Gold Cup (☎ 6652 1488) Early August. Coffs' premier horse race.

Coffs Harbour International Buskers' Festival (www.coffsharbourbuskers.com) Late September and not to be missed. Tattooed men balance precariously on a unicycle while juggling bearded ladies.

Coffs Harbour Food & Wine Festival Last weekend in October.

Pittwater to Coffs Yacht Race New Year. Starts in Sydney and finishes here.

Sleeping

Motels cluster in two spots: out on the Pacific Hwy by the visitors centre where they can suck in road-trippers, and down by Park Beach where they can comfort beachgoers.

One of many holiday-apartment agents is **Pacific Property & Management** (☎ 6652 1466; www.coffsholidayrentals.com.au; 101 Park Beach Rd). The range of offerings is numbing. The visitors centre has an accommodation booking service.

BUDGET

If you're visiting during peak times, it's good to note that most hostel prices remain consistent all year, but book ahead.

Park Beach Holiday Park (☎ 6648 4888; Ocean Pde; camp sites from \$24, cabins from \$90; ☎) Massive, with 332 sites and 55 cabins; ideally located at the beach.

Aussitel Backpackers Hostel (☎ 1800 330 335, 6651 1871; www.aussitel.com; 312 Harbour Dr; dm/d \$24/60; ☎) On a bluff across from parkland and near the jetty, this delightful hostel has free canoes you can take out on the river plus diving and other activities.

Coffs Harbour YHA (☎ 6652 6462; www.yha.com.au; 51 Collingwood St; dm/d from \$24/70; ☎) There's 92 beds in spacious dorms and en-suite doubles. It's all very modern and immaculate. Rentals include surf boards and bikes.

Hoey-Moey Backpackers (☎ 6651 7966; Ocean Pde; dm/d \$26/60; ☎; wi-fi) Right on the beach, Hoey Moey shares space with a high-volume pub and drive-through bottle shop. Rooms range from singles to four-bed dorms.

MIDRANGE

There's no real reason to stay out by the Pacific Hwy.

Ocean Parade Motel (☎ 6652 6733; 41 Ocean Pde; s/d from \$65/70; ☎; wi-fi) One of the best choices on the motel strip, the 19 units here are kept immaculate. Rooms are large and include fridges, barbeques and views of the salt-water pool.

Ocean Palms Motel (☎ 6651 5594; www.oceanpalmsmotel.com.au; cnr Park Beach Rd & Ocean Pde; r from \$70; ☎) The mature palms at this mature motel give it a South Seas feel. There's a 12m saltwater pool surrounded by gardens. Rooms are good-sized and you'll stay sweet-smelling thanks to the free laundry.

Bananatown Motel (☎ 6652 4411; cnr Grafton St & Pacific Hwy; r from \$70; ☎) The roadside choice for those just blowing through, the

Bananatown logo of a slacker munching a banana under a palm is hard to resist. Rooms are basic and clean as is the diminutive pool. It's close to the bus stop.

Caribbean Motel (☎ 6652 1500; www.stayincoffs.com.au; 353 High St; r \$75-115; ☎) Close to Coffs Creek and the jetty, this 24-unit motel features a breakfast buffet and tables outside. The best rooms have balconies, views, kitchens and spas.

Bo'suns Inn Motel (☎ 6651 2251; www.motelcoffsharbour.com; 37 Ocean Pde; d from \$90; ☎) The nautical theme here runs from the life-size seaman out the front to the scenes of frigates mounted over the beds. You can almost smell the poop deck. The 12 units are close to Park Beach and have lots of niceties such as microwaves and fridges.

Observatory Holiday Apartments (☎ 6650 0462; www.theobservatory.com.au; 30-36 Camperdown St; apt from \$140; ☎; wi-fi) Some have window spas and all have balconies with ocean views. The one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments in this attractive complex are bright and airy, with chef-friendly kitchens.

TOP END

Novotel Pacific Bay Resort (☎ 6659 7000; www.pacificbayresort.com.au; cnr Pacific Hwy & Bay Dr; r from \$190; ☎; wi-fi) Has all the features of a large resort: tennis courts, a golf course, walking trails, a kids' club, a spa and a fitness centre. The grounds are large and the 180 rooms have balconies, many with kitchens.

Eating

You can eat well down by the jetty. The strip of eateries on Harbour St is a hungry browser's delight.

JETTY

As well as the listings here, you'll find budget Italian, Vietnamese, Indian, and fish and chips. Kitchens start closing around 8.30pm, so come early and make a reservation if you have your heart set on a particular place or a pavement table.

Urban Espresso Lounge (☎ 6651 1989; 384a Harbour Dr; mains \$6-16; ☎) breakfast & lunch) A stylish little java outpost on the strip. Pancakes, fresh fruit and yogurt are some of the breakfast delights. Lunches include a Thai beef and prawn salad and a luscious roast beef sandwich.

Crying Tiger (☎ 6650 0195; 382 Harbour Dr; mains \$8-20; ☎) dinner) Elegant Thai food is served in

this stylish open-air restaurant. There's oodles of tables for slurping your noodles; which is good as the place is very popular.

our pick Caffé Fiasco (☎ 6651 3000; 368 Harbour Dr; mains \$15-30; ☎ brunch Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) It doesn't live up to its name. Really, how about Caffé Wonderful? Classic Italian fare is prepared in an open kitchen surrounded by widely spaced tables that flow from inside to out. The gardens are fields with herbs used in the dishes, which include some excellent local seafood.

MARINA

Second to the Jetty in popularity; there is some excellent seafood here.

Fisherman's Co-op (☎ 6652 2006; cnr Marina Dr & Orlando St; mains \$8-10; ☎ 9am-6pm winter, 9am-8pm summer) Fresh fish right off the boats here includes whiting and chips. Homemade gelato and covered picnic tables complete the joy; there's much here that would make a good picnic at Muttonbird Island.

Tide & Pilot Oyster Bar & Sea Grill (☎ 6651 6888; Marina Dr; café \$6-12, mains restaurant \$20-30; ☎ café breakfast & lunch, restaurant lunch & dinner) Right on the ocean this bifurcated seafood place has casual fare at ground level and exquisite dining on the second level, where tables have views over the jetty. This is the place to bring a date.

Ocean Front Brasserie (☎ 6651 2819; Jordan Esplanade; meals \$6-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Located on a knoll at the south end of the marina, the restaurant of the Coffs Harbour Deep Sea Fishing Club does – surprise! – fish well. But you may not notice as the views are panoramic; in season, watch for whales.

CBD

The downtown area is good for lunch, or for coffee all day, but most places are closed in the evening. The pedestrian area opposite Palm Mall (part of High St Pedestrian Mall) has a few pavement cafés.

Swanky's (☎ 6651 5403; City Sq; meals \$5-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) A vine-covered awning shelters the sturdy wood tables at this popular open-air café. There is a full espresso bar and classic Aussie breakfasts, salads and sandwiches.

Drinking & Entertainment

See Thursday's edition of the *Coffs Harbour Advocate* for listings. Clubs change names with the seasons.

Hoey Moey Pub (☎ 6852 3833; Ocean Pde) In the same complex as Hoey Moey Backpackers, this party pub caters to the demanding backpacker and tradies markets and is your best bet for local acts and Journey cover bands. Karaoke nights are an endurance test.

Pier Hotel (☎ 6652 2110; cnr Hood & High Sts) Renovated into a bland band venue, you can find bad beer in a warren of rooms that draw crowds due to the location. Wait! Do I hear Journey?

Plantation Hotel (☎ 6652 3855; Pacific Hwy) Don't let the neon lights, mirrored walls and colourful wedge seating fool you, the Plantation is still a pub at heart, so beer, live rock and the occasional 'Miss Indy' quest are still mainstays. It's near a few other charmers of this ilk.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Coffs Harbour Airport (CFS) is just south of town. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) has flights to Sydney and Melbourne. **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) flies to Sydney.

BUS

Long-distance and regional buses leave from a shelter adjacent to the visitors centre.

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has several services a day north, including Byron Bay (\$58, four hours) and south to Sydney (\$82, nine hours). **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) offers similar services in both directions.

Busways (☎ 1300 555 611; www.busways.com.au) runs two or three times daily Monday to Saturday to Nambucca Heads (\$9, 70 minutes) and Bellingen (\$8, 70 minutes) via Urunga.

TRAIN

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) has three trains daily all the way north to the nonthriving town of Casino (where the train used to branch off to Byron Bay) and Brisbane (\$59, 5½ hours), and south to Sydney (\$67, nine hours).

Getting Around

Hostel shuttles meet most long-distance buses and trains.

Coffs Bike Hire (☎ 6652 5102; cnr Orlando & Collingwood Sts; per day from \$25; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) rents cruisers, mountain bikes and more.

Major car-rental companies are at the airport.

For a cab, **Coffs District Taxi Network** (☎ 13 10 08, 6658 5922) operates a 24-hour service.

COFFS HARBOUR TO GRAFTON

The Pacific Hwy runs near the coast – but not in sight of it – for 30km north of Coffs. Look for turnoffs to small beaches that are often quite uncrowded. The road then turns inland to Grafton, avoiding Yuraygir National Park and the isolated beach town of Woolli.

Woolgoolga

☎ 02 / pop 3800

With a nice beach in a deep cove, Woolgoolga is a less-developed coastal town 20km north of Coffs that is renowned for its surf and sizeable Sikh community. As you drive by on the highway you will notice the impressive **Guru Nanak Temple**, the *gurdwara* (place of worship). Don't confuse it with the **Raj Mahal**, an Indian-influenced decrepit concrete eyesore with two mangled elephant statues out front.

Even if you're not sticking around, drive straight through town up to the point, you'll get a magnificent view of the Solitary Islands Marine Park and the coast stretching into the mists north and south.

The **Woolgoolga Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 6654 1373; Beach St; camp sites \$24, cabins \$60) is a crowded place right on the beach (which affords great walks to flee the mobs).

On the beachfront, **Bluebottles Brasserie** (☎ 6654 1962; cnr Wharf & Beach Sts; mains \$10-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat) is a bistro with fare that includes the mandatory caesar salad, big sandwiches, seafood specials and pasta. On some summer evenings, there's live jazz.

Red Rock

☎ 02 / pop 290

Red Rock, a site that's sacred to the Gunawarri tribe, is a sleepy village 5km off the highway. It has a beautiful inlet and gorgeous surroundings. Soak up the sun or catch a fish while camping at **Red Rock Caravan Park** (☎ 6649 2730; 1 Lawson St; camp sites from \$13, cabins from \$65).

Yuraygir National Park

Yuraygir (20,000 hectares) protects the longest stretch of undeveloped coast in NSW (60km). It is the southernmost in a chain of coastal national parks and nature reserves

that runs almost all the way north to Ballina. It encompasses forests, heaths, estuaries and wetlands. The beaches are outstanding and there are some bushwalking paths where you can view endangered coastal emus. The park is in three sections, from **Red Rock** to the Woolli River (turn off the highway just north of Red Rock); from the township of **Woolli** to the Sandon River (turn off the highway 12km south of Grafton); and from near **Brooms Head** to **Angourie Point** (accessible from those towns). Together the areas comprise 60km of coast but there is no vehicle access between the sections; on foot you'd have to cross the challenging Woolli and Sandon Rivers.

Walkers can bush-camp and there are basic **camping areas** (per person \$10) at Station Creek in the southern section; at the Boorkoom and Illaroo rest areas in the central section; and on the north bank of the Sandon River, and at Red Cliff at the Brooms Head end of the northern section. These are accessible by car; there are also walk-in camp sites in the northern section: Plumbago Headland, Shelly Head and Shelly Beach. Self-service kiosks collect the park's \$10 day-use fee.

Woolli

☎ 02 / pop 570

The beauty of this little town is that it is surrounded by the Yuraygir National Park on land and the Solitary Islands Marine Park by sea. This means you are encircled by wildlife and crisp waters.

Just getting here is a treat. The 34km drive from the Pacific Hwy passes through a variety of natural terrain in and out of park. Stands sell produce from the many small farms. The beach is backed by dunes and stretches for eight uninhabited kilometres. The town is on a long isthmus, with a river estuary on one side and the ocean on the other. This only adds to its isolated charm.

On the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June, the locals hold their big event, the **Goanna Pulling Championships**. It's not what some might assume, as contestants wrap a leather strap around their head for a good old-fashioned tug-of-war.

Woolli has a couple of small grocers and a café. Apartments can be booked through **Woolli Holiday Accommodation** (☎ 6649 7540). The **Woolli Camping & Caravan Park** (☎ 6649 7671; North St; camp sites from \$20, cabins from \$60) is a quiet, compact option on the river and the centre – such as it

is. The **Solitary Islands Marine Park Resort** (☎ 6649 7519; www.solitaryislandsresort.com.au; camp sites from \$22, cabins from \$70) is another pastoral spot, in this case about 2km north of town.

Solitary Islands Marine Park

This group of five islands is the meeting point of warm tropical currents and cooler southern currents, making for a wonderful combination of corals, reef fish and seaweeds. Dubbed the 'rivers of life', this is the best area in North Coast NSW in which to dive or snorkel (look out for extremely rough conditions). The **park** (☎ 6652 0900) protects some 550 species of fish and 90 species of coral. Check at tourism information centres and dive shops for a handy booklet outlining the many rules and regulations designed to preserve the park. Dive shops in Coffs Harbour (p260) organise tours of the park.

FAR NORTH COAST

This is where the coast heats up in activity, hype and temperature. Byron Bay is the centre of all the attention, with its nightlife, stunning location and beach. But there are places with equal beauty that are much quieter. Lennox Head and its surrounds are much more serene than the tourist Babylon to the north, while Yamba offers a bit of colour on its estuary.

Coupled with the beaches and ideal subtropical climate are rivers rich in appeal. The Clarence River vies to be the most beautiful river in NSW, such is its striking blueness. The Richmond and Tweed Rivers sprawl out into rich deltas and provide wide vistas. Many visitors simply come for the weather: warm winters and long, hot summers.

GRAFTON

☎ 02 / pop 17,500

Grafton is a regional agricultural centre that has prominence due to its location on the Pacific Hwy. In fact it will give you a good taste of the vast NSW hinterlands and may well encourage you to keep right on driving. Still it is pretty enough and in season the streets are awash with the purple flowers of Brazilian jacaranda in late October. For the road weary, there's just enough places to offer a choice.

Don't be fooled by the franchises along the highway, the main part of town is

reached over an imposing 1932 double-decker (road and rail) bridge.

Information

Clarence River visitors centre (☎ 6642 4677; www.clarenceturism.com; cnr Spring & Charles Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm) On the Pacific Hwy south of the town, near the turn-off to the bridge. Tellingly, it shares a parking lot with a McDonald's.

NPWS office (National Parks & Wildlife Service; ☎ 6641 1500; 49 Victoria St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm)

Sights

Victoria St is the focal point of days gone by with the **courthouse** (1862), **Roches Family Hotel** (1870), **Anglican Cathedral** (1884) and the private residence **Istria** (1899) providing glimpses of 19th-century architecture.

Fitzroy St runs parallel to Victoria St. The **Grafton Regional Gallery** (☎ 6642 6996; 158 Fitzroy St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) is in a slightly grand 1880 house and has works by regional artists. It's a well-curated place and there are regular special exhibitions.

Nearby, **Schaeffer House** (1903) is where you'll find the **Clarence River Historical Society** (190 Fitzroy St; adult/child \$3/1; ☎ 1-4pm Tue, Wed, Thu & Sun), with its displays of treasures once littering attics across town.

Festivals & Events

Horse Racing Carnival Every July; this is the richest in country Australia.

Jacaranda Festival In the week joining October and November, Australia's longest-running floral festival sees Grafton come alive in an ocean of mauve.

Sleeping & Eating

Motels line the Pacific Hwy.

Roches Family Hotel (☎ 6644 2866; www.roches.com.au; 85 Victoria St; s/d \$30/40) is a historic old corner pub in the town centre with spruced up rooms. Be sure to get one with doors opening onto the veranda. It's a tidy place with new bathrooms.

Jacaranda Motor Lodge (☎ 6642 2833; www.jacarandamotorlodge.com.au; Pacific Hwy; s/d \$80/90; ☎) One of the nicer highway motel options, the Jacaranda knows its market well: there's stabling for horses and pets are welcome. Some of the 25 modern rooms have large, shady balconies.

Courtyard Cafe (☎ 6642 6644; cnr Prince & Fitzroy Sts; meals \$9-15; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) Make your way past a heritage sandstone building to this local

favourite. The salads and sandwiches are fresh and varied. More ambitious options include grilled local seafood and steaks.

Georgie's Café (☎ 6642 6996; 158 Fitzroy St; mains \$12-20; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) The food here is as artful as the location: the courtyard of the Grafton Regional Gallery. Dishes by day include lovely baked goods, creative salads, thick sandwiches and more. At night it's a serious restaurant with a changing menu depending on what's coming off the local farms.

Getting There & Away

Busways (☎ 1300 555 611; www.busways.com.au) runs to Yamba (\$12, 75 minutes, six times daily) and Maclean (\$10, 45 minutes).

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) stop at the train station on their multiple Pacific Hwy runs.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) stops here on its north coast route. Sydney is served three times daily (\$72, 10 hours).

Near Grafton there are several scenic routes that parallel the Pacific Hwy. Try the north bank of the Clarence route between Grafton and Maclean, which involves a ferry crossing at Lawrence.

CLARENCE RIVER VALLEY

The Clarence River rises in Queensland's McPherson Ranges and runs south through the mountains before thundering down the gorge in the Gibraltar Range west of Grafton.

The Clarence then meanders northeast to the sea at Yamba, giving life to a beautiful and fertile valley along the way.

The delta between Grafton and the coast is a patchwork of farmland in which the now sinuous and spreading Clarence River forms over 100 islands, some very large. If you're driving,

the profusion of small bridges and waterways makes it hard to keep track of whether you're on an island or the mainland.

There are Aboriginal sites throughout the region dating back 4500 years or more. Today it is the start of sugar-cane country and also the beginning of Queensland-style domestic architecture: wooden houses with high-pitched roofs perched on stilts to allow air circulation in the hot summers. The burning of the cane fields (May to December) adds a smoky tang to the air.

Clarence Riverboats (☎ 6647 6232; www.clarenceriverboats.com.au; Brushgrove) has cute houseboats that sleep up to six. Meandering amid the dozens of islands and channels defines relaxation. Rates vary widely but three days and two nights costs from \$600 – a bargain with a group.

For casual explorations, **Seelands Boat Hire** (☎ 6644 9381; Seelands Hall Rd) is on the Clarence River west of Grafton. Rentals include aluminium outboards (per day \$80) and canoes (per day \$60).

MACLEAN

☎ 02 / pop 3300

It's never this warm in Scotland. And here the sugar is still growing while there the sugar is in a deep-fried Mars bar. Tartan-clad Maclean takes its Scottish heritage very seriously, so such comparisons are inevitable. That said, the town is set in charming surrounds with the imposing Clarence River beginning its lazy sprawl over the delta. Prawn fishing is popular.

The amazing **Lower Clarence visitors centre** (☎ 6645 4121; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) is on the southern entry to town in a large building with a riverside café. Internet access is \$3 for 15 minutes. There is a staggering amount of local

WORTH A TRIP: INLAND FROM GRAFTON

The Clarence River is navigable as far upstream as the village of **Copmanhurst**, about 35km northwest of Grafton. Further upstream the Clarence River descends rapidly from the Gibraltar Range through the rugged **Clarence River Gorge**, a popular and challenging site for white-water canoeing.

Private property flanks the gorge. On the south side the land is owned by the Winters family, who allow day visitors and have cabin accommodation at **Winters' Shack** (☎ 6647 2173; s/d \$30/60). Access is via Copmanhurst. It's best to ring first to get permission and to arrange for the gates to be unlocked. On the north side, **Wave Hill Station** (☎ 6647 2145; www.wavehillfarmstay.com.au; camp sites \$25, B&B per person from \$60) has homestead and accommodation plus 4WD or horse-riding trips to the gorge.

can bushwalk and swim. Smack in the middle of the park is the evocatively named **Hell Hole Lagoon**; try not to fall in.

The day-use fee is \$10 per vehicle.

EVANS HEAD

☎ 02 / pop 2614

Evans Head is a low-key little place that eschews charm and instead concentrates on its intense prawn and fishing industry. There are no compelling reasons to visit the town itself, but the 11km road north that joins the Pacific Hwy passes through the unspoiled **Broadwater National Park**.

Extending from north of Evans Head to Broadwater, this small coastal park (3750 hectares) protects an 8km stretch of beach backed by coastal heath. The beach is excellent and you can go kayaking. **Evans River Kayak Adventures** (☎ 6682 6229; www.evansriverkayaks.com) leads a variety of tours (from \$25) through he estuaries.

BALLINA

☎ 02 / pop 18,750

Crossing the Richmond River marks the end of the fishing villages and the beginning of the tourist-driven economy. Ballina is a sign of the times, basing its appeal around family holidays and nature activities. Although it likes to tout itself as a quiet alternative to Byron, Ballina is fast-developing along the riverfront.

The Pacific Hwy approaches from the south and turns into River St, the main drag. A bypass due for completion by 2010 will whack off the Pacific Hwy's clogged route through Ballina to the benefit of the town and drivers.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 6686 3484; www.discoverballina.com; cnr Lasbalsas Plaza & River St; ☎ 9am-5pm) has detailed information on surrounding attractions. Pick up the excellent brochure on local birds.

For internet access, try Ice Creamery Internet Café (see opposite).

Sights

Behind the information centre is the large **Naval & Maritime Museum** (☎ 6681 1002; Regatta Ave; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-4pm). Here you will find the amazing remains of a balsawood raft that drifted across the Pacific from Ecuador as part of the Las Balsas expedition in 1973.

For a good sampling of local history, stroll the length of Norton St, which boasts a number of impressive late 19th-century buildings from Ballina's days as a rich lumber town. For architecture of a different, the

fabled (and faded) **Big Prawn** petrol station is 1km west of town.

White and sandy, like all good beaches, **Shelly Beach** is patrolled. Calm **Shaws Bay Lagoon** is popular with families.

Cruises up the Richmond River are a good way to get away from it all; **Richmond River Cruises** (☎ 6687 5688; Regatta Ave; 2hr trip adult/child \$26/13) has good views from its two-deck boat.

Just north of Ballina, the **Thursday Plantation** (☎ 1800 029 000; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) is an established vendor of products made with tea tree oil. Its roots go back to local markets. It lures visitors with a large sculpture garden.

Activities

Ballina's many waterways are lined with paths, so it's good for biking and walking. **Jack Ransom Cycles** (☎ 6686 3485; Cherry St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), rents bikes from \$20 per day.

Ballina Boat Hire (☎ 6681 6115; cnr Brunswick St & Winton Lane; per half-day \$90) has tinnies for fishing and catamarans for the more adventurous.

Ballina Ocean Tours (☎ 0408 863 999; www.ballinaoceantours.com; tours from \$45) has whale- and dolphin-watching tours, snorkelling and various other exciting aquatic diversions.

Sleeping

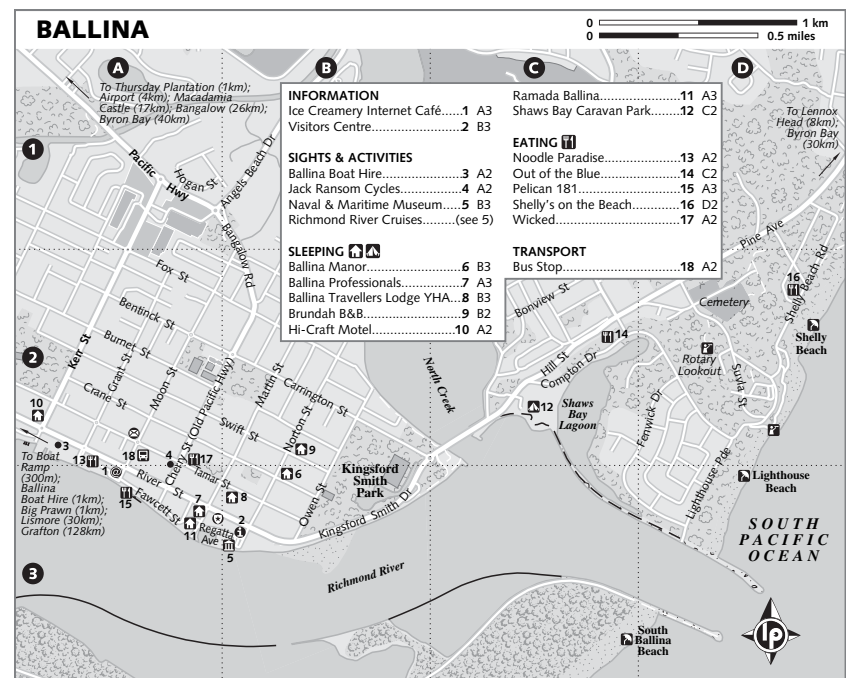
River St and the northern approach from the Pacific Hwy both have many motels to choose from. Among the local holiday-rental agents is **Ballina Professionals** (☎ 6686 3511; www.professionalsballina.com.au; cnr Martin & River Sts).

Shaws Bay Caravan Park (☎ 6681 1413; www.bscp.com.au/shawsbay; 1 Brighton St; camp sites from \$22, cabins from \$54; wi-fi) Right on the lagoon and low-key, it's an easy walk to the centre; there are 123 sites.

Ballina Travellers Lodge YHA (☎ 6686 6737; 36-38 Tamar St; dm/s/d from \$25/65/75; ☎ ☎ ☎) Part hostel, part motel, this quiet one-storey place has modern rooms. Bikes and body boards are available for hire if you want to leave the ink-blot-shaped pool.

Hi-Craft Motel (☎ 6686 8868; hi-craft@bigpond.com; 297 River St; r \$65-135; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) If there's a friendlier motel in town, it's probably been shut by the saccharine police. The welcome here is warm and the 26 rooms in a two-storey block are basic and comfortable.

Ramada Ballina (☎ 1800 826 181; www.ramadaballina.com.au; 2 Martin St; r from \$130; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) Part of a flash new development right on the river, the Ramada has large rooms that come with king-sized beds, work desks, spa tubs and balconies



with great views. One-bedroom apartments are available (and you can buy a time-share in one should you feel light-headed). The swish café is popular with local scenesters.

Brundah B&B (☎ 6686 8166; www.babs.com.au/brundah; 37 Norton St; s/d \$145/190; ☎ ☎) This restored 1908 Federation home is completely surrounded by lovely gardens. The three large bedrooms have access to splendid public spaces and a library.

Ballina Manor (☎ 6681 5888; www.ballinamanor.com.au; 25 Norton St; r \$165-250; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) One of the best places to stay in the region, this boutique hotel began in the 1920s as an Edwardian-style girls' school. The 12 rooms have been beautifully restored and boast many antiques. The small restaurant serves dinner.

Eating & Drinking

Ice Creamery Internet Café (☎ 6686 5783; 178 River St; snacks \$3; ☎ 7am-5pm; ☎) Sip a good banana smoothie or an espresso while you surf the internet (\$1 per 5 minutes).

Noodle Paradise (☎ 6686 6632; 216 River St; mains \$10; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of several cheap and cheerful takeaways on this little strip.

Singapore fried noodles with extra peppers and garlic will have you singing.

Shelly's on the Beach (☎ 6686 9844; Shelly Beach Rd; meals \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) The mist from the surf over the dunes will help perk up your tired cheeks. The fine brekkies and lunchtime sambos will fuel your day.

Pelican 181 (☎ 6686 9181; 12-24 Fawcett St; meals \$6-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A breezy fish-and-chips restaurant and takeaway right on the river. Prawn baguettes are irresistible for many.

Out of the Blue (☎ 6686 6602; 3 Compton Dr; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch Sun, dinner Wed-Sat) The good views of Shaw's Bay complement the huge variety of fresh seafood and daily specials at this popular restaurant. Lots of daily specials.

Wicked (☎ 6686 2564; 37 Cherry St; mains \$24-30; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun) Global tastes flavour the excellent seafood at this chic open-air bistro. Portuguese *piri-piri* prawns, Boston clam chowder, piquant Thai fish cakes and more delight the nightly crowds.

Getting There & Around

If you're driving to Byron Ball, take the coast road through Lennox Head. It's much prettier

than the Pacific Hwy and less traffic-clogged as well.

AIR

Ballina's airport (BNK) is the best way to reach Byron Bay – only 30km to the north. It has car rental desks and plenty of local transport options. Airline service is increasing.

Jetstar (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) Serves Melbourne and Sydney.

Regional Express (☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) Serves Sydney.

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) Serves Melbourne and Sydney.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) stops at the Big Prawn, 1km southwest town. **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) stops at the Tamar St bus stop.

Blanch's Bus Service (☎ 6686 2144; www.blanchs.com.au) operates several daily services from the airport and the Tamar St bus stop to Lennox Head (\$6, 30 minutes), Byron Bay (\$10, 70 minutes) and Mullumbimby (\$10, 85 minutes). **Kirklands Buslines** (☎ 6626 1499; www.kirklands.com.au) offers similar but less frequent service.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) has buses connecting to trains at the Casino train station (70 minutes).

CAR RENTAL

Companies with desks at the airport include:

Avis (☎ 6686 7650; www.avis.com)

Ballina Byron Rental Cars (☎ 6687 4009; www.bbr.com.au)

Budget (☎ 6686 9955; www.budget.com)

Byron Bay Rentacar (☎ 6685 5517)

Hertz (☎ 6686 2143; www.hertz.com)

SHUTTLES

Numerous shuttle companies meet flights and serve Ballina, Byron Bay and other nearby towns. Rates average \$15 to \$20.

Airport Express (☎ 0414 660 031; www.stevestours.com.au)

Byron Easy Bus (☎ 6685 7447; www.byronbayshuttle.com.au)

AROUND BALLINA

Inland from Ballina, the closely settled country of the north coast hinterland begins with winding, hilly roads running past tropical

fruit farms, tiny villages and the occasional towering rainforest tree that has somehow escaped the wholesale clearing of the forest.

Come out of your shell at the **Macadamia Castle** (☎ 6687 8432; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), a classic roadside attraction some 17km north of Ballina. Kids go nuts here.

LENNOX HEAD

☎ 02 / pop 5900

Think of it as Byron Jr. Once sleepy Lennox Head now has the buzz and crowds of its flashier neighbour to the north. A vibrant strip of stylish shops and cafés fronts the long and popular beach. Surfing is part of the local culture and the breaks here have been declared a state surfing reserve, which means planning will include preservation of the local surfing culture, dude. **Seven Mile Beach**, north of Lennox, is a mostly people free.

Lake Ainsworth is a freshwater lake conducive to pleasant swimming and windsurfing. Swimming there can be somewhat beneficial to the skin as the water has a trace of tea-tree oil.

Wind & Water Action Sports (☎ 0419 686 188; www.windwater.net; sailboard or longboard per day \$60) rents boards for surfing or powered by kite or wind. Kitesurfing lessons are \$110 per hour.

Sleeping

The **Professionals** (☎ 6687 7579; www.professionalslennoxhead.com.au; 66 Ballina St) is a good agent for holiday rentals.

Lake Ainsworth Caravan Park (☎ 6687 7249; www.bscp.com.au/lakeains; Pacific Pde; camp sites \$21, cabins \$71) Across from the hostel, this 293-site holiday park is right along the lake and enjoys cool breezes.

Lennox Head Beachouse YHA (☎ 6687 7636; www.yha.com.au; 3 Ross St; dm/d \$26/62; ☑) You'll be in the pink at this rosy-hued 46-bed purpose-built hostel that's only 100m from the beach. You can rent boards, sailboards and bikes or get a massage.

Eating

In The Pink (☎ 6687 5552; 76 Ballina St; cones \$3; ☎ 10am-7pm) Serves homemade ice cream; the dreamy passion fruit may cause you to burst your banana hammock.

Red Rock Cafe (☎ 6687 4744; 3/60 Ballina St; mains \$10-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; wi-fi) A delightful pavement café that gets a loyal following of holidaymakers on their second day. Big break-

kies, scrumptious burgers, salads and more are all made with zesty extra touches.

Lime (☎ 6687 7132; 1/70 Ballina St; meals \$10-20; ☎ 7am-5pm) A classic Mod Oz café with lots of comfy chairs in a stylish open-air setting across from the beach. Breakfast features plenty of egg dishes bearing the name Benedict; lunch features a BLAST – which takes a BLT and adds avocado and Swiss cheese. Yum!

7 Mile Café (☎ 6687 6210; 41 Pacific Pde; mains \$12-24; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Just north of the commercial strip, this simple place offers shady outdoor seating. The menu runs from burgers to pasta to seafood. It's licensed so you can have a snoot while you choose.

Getting There & Away

Blanch's Bus Service (☎ 6686 2144; www.blanchs.com.au) has daily service to Byron Bay and Ballina.

BYRON BAY

☎ 02 / pop 7100

New South Wales doesn't hurt for beaches, in fact go a short distance north and south from Byron Bay and you'll find untrod beaches stretching beyond your vision. Byron's beaches are nice as well, but what makes them special is Byron itself: one of Australia's best beach towns. Low-rise, funky, walkable, relaxed are all good descriptions. It is everything that the overhyped, overdeveloped towns across the border in Queensland are not.

Of course Byron does get crowded, which is in direct conflict with its mellow charms. Jonson St can seize up like the arteries of a pie addict and the bars can get jammed. Developers would cheerfully turn Byron into a Surfers Paradise given the chance. But locals are dedicated to preserving the essential small-town soul even as everyone wants a piece. The left-wing council is constantly under assault from business interests and property prices are sending residents packing.

The thing to remember about Byron is that under all the glitz it is still at heart a small town. The whole place is set up for the several thousand who live there year-round. So if the roads were widened and new shopping centres built, the charm would be gone.

Byron was a quiet, unassuming little village until 1963. That year surfers discovered 'The Pass' and over the following years the town became a cauldron of artistically minded people. Surfers adore the seven different

beachfronts that surround the point, knowing that at least one will always have a break.

Information

In addition to the resources listed here, the website www.byron-bay.com is helpful. The *Pink Guide* is a local publication aimed at gay and lesbian tourists; have a look at its useful website (www.byronbaypinkguide.blogspot.com).

BOOKSHOPS

Byron Book Exchange (☎ 6685 5458; 31A Fletcher St) Lots of used books.

Mary Ryan's (☎ 6685 8183; 21-25 Fletcher St) Good selection, has author signings and a small café.

INTERNET ACCESS

Byron has many internet-access places that cram customers together in tight, sweaty little pods to stare at tiny screens. The Balcony and One One One have wi-fi (see p276).

Global Gossip (☎ 6680 9140; 84 Jonson St; per hr \$8; ☑) Internet access.

LAUNDRY

Coin Laundry (☎ 0427 6685 0427; cnr Jonson & Marvell Sts; load \$9; ☎ 7am-7pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Bay Centre Medical Clinic (☎ 6685 6206; 6 Lawson St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Full-service general surgery.

Byron Bay Hospital (☎ 6685 6200; cnr Wordsworth & Shirley Sts; ☎ 24hr) For medical emergencies.

ChemCoast Pharmacy (☎ 6685 6274; 31 Jonson St; ☎ 8am-8pm)

MONEY

Byron Foreign Exchange (☎ 6685 7787; Central Arcade, 4/47 Byron St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; ☑) Foreign exchange, cash and money transfers, internet access.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Backpackers World (☎ 6685 8858; www.backpackersworld.com.au; Shop 6, 75 Jonson St; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun; ☑) Primarily a travel agent.

Byron Bus & Backpacker Centre (☎ 6685 5517; 84 Jonson St; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) Next to the coach stop; handles bus, train, accommodation and activity bookings. Has left-luggage lockers (\$6).

Byron Environmental Centre (Octagonal hut, Jonson St) The hours are highly sporadic but the passions of these local environmentalists are not.

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- Skylive Byron Bay (9am).....26 F
- Tringalair Airport (9am).....27 E
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- Buddha Gardens.....(see 28)
- Byron Ayurveda.....12 C3
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- Coccon.....15 F3
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- Surfing Byron Bay.....17 F4
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- Yoga & Massage Studio.....19 F2

Visitors centre (☎ 6680 9279; www.visitbyronbay.com; Stationmaster's Cottage, Jonson St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Ground zero for tourist information (and when it's busy this cramped office feels like it).

Sights
CAPE BYRON

Many think the town is the namesake of George Gordon Lord Byron, but they're off by two generations, Captain Cook named this spot for his grandfather while they were sailing past in the 1770s. (Later bureaucrats assumed it was the poet's grandson who'd been honoured and planned out streets with names such as Jonson and Shelley.) Among the spectacular views, you can see dolphins and humpback whales, which pass nearby during their northern (June to July) and southern (September to November) migrations.

You can drive right up to the picturesque 1901 **lighthouse** (☎ 6685 6585; ☎ 8am-sunset), but it'll cost you \$7 to park (there's free parking 300m below). There are good displays and if you like it here, you can stay; see p275 for details. **Tours** (adult/child \$8/6; ☎ 11am, 12.30 & 2pm Tue & Sat) are illuminating. There's a 4km circular walking track round the cape from the **Captain Cook Lookout** on Lighthouse Rd. You've a good chance of seeing wallabies, brush turkeys and feral goats in the final rainforest stretch.

BEACHES

Immediately in front of town, **Main Beach** is as good for people-watching as for swimming. At the western edge of town, perfect **Belongil Beach** avoids many of the crowds and is unofficially clothing optional. At the east end, the **Wreck** is a powerful right-hander surf break.

Clarks Beach, at the eastern end of Main Beach, can have good surf but the best surf is at the next few beaches going east. **The Pass** adjoins Clarks. **Watego's** is a wide crescent of sand with turquoise surf. There's limited parking, so use the 1.1km walk that begins at the **Captain Cook Lookout**. Another 400m brings you to **Little Watego's**, another lovely patch of sand backed by rocks. Go another 300m east and the only option to go further is swimming; you've reached the easternmost point in Australia.

Tallow Beach extends 7km south of Cape Byron. It's quite an amazing stretch of sand, backed by Arakwal National Park, and fronting rugged open ocean. The rocks of Cape Byron are to the north and there are many good walks near the beach parking area (\$2).

This is the place to flee the crowds and its only a short walk or bike ride from the centre.

Past Tallow Beach, there is a rockier stretch around **Broken Head** and the nature reserve, where a succession of small beaches dot the coast before opening onto **Seven Mile Beach**, which goes all the way to Lennox Head.

The suburb of **Suffolk Park** (with more good surf, particularly in winter) starts 5km south of town. **Kings Beach** is a popular gay beach and is just off Seven Mile Beach Rd near the Broken Head Holiday Park.

Activities

Adventure sports abound in Byron Bay and most operators offer a free pick-up service from local accommodation. Surfing and diving are the biggest draws.

COG (☎ 6680 7066; 1-31 Lawson St) rents bikes (\$20 per day), kayaks (half-day \$45), surfboards (\$25 per day) and other active gear.

Once upon a time you wanted to run away and join the circus. You can finally make good on this desire by taking trapeze with **Circus Arts** (☎ 6685 6566; www.circusarts.com.au; 17 Centennial Circuit), about 2km west of town. Type A characters may find the juggling classes useful.

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Healing hippies are just some of the many characters ready to put your mind and body at rest in Byron. Bulletin boards are awash in cards for people with titles like 'Evolutionary Facilitator'.

Ambaji (☎ 6685 6620; www.ambaji.com.au; 6 Marvell St; treatments from \$65; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) Hawaiian massage, aqua balance healing and more.

Buddha Gardens (☎ 6680 7844; www.buddhagar dens.com; Arts Factory Village, 21 Gordon St; treatments from \$80; ☎ 10am-6pm) Balinese-style day spa.

Cocoon (☎ 6685 5711; 6/11 Fletcher St; massage from \$60; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) Offers 'healthful retreats' from family holidays.

Byron Ayurveda Centre (☎ 6632 2244; www.ayurveda house.com.au; Shop 6, Middleton St; treatments from \$45; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) It's exfoliation over enemas at this restful place aimed at the masses.

Yoga and Massage Studio (☎ 0407 807 797; Main Beach; massage from \$40; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Above the surf life-saving, offers massage and yoga lessons and treatments.

DIVING

About 3km offshore, **Julian Rocks** is a meeting point for cold southerly and warm northerly

currents, attracting a profusion of marine species and divers alike. Much of these waters is protected by the Cape Byron Marine Park. PADI open-water certification costs about \$400 locally; snorkelling/dive trips are about \$50/80.

Dive Byron Bay (☎ 1800 243 483, 6685 8333; www.byronbaydivecentre.com.au; 9 Marvell St) Rentals, sales, wide range of trips and lessons.

Sundive (☎ 6685 7755; www.sundive.com.au; 8 Middleton St) A good, full-service choice.

FLYING

Byron Airwaves (☎ 6629 0354; www.byronair.cjb.net) Tandem hang-gliding (\$145) and courses (from \$1500).

Byron Bay Gliding (☎ 6684 7572; www.byronbaygliding.com; Tyagarah Airport) Glider joy flights over the coast and hinterland from \$95 for 20 minutes.

Skydive Byron Bay (☎ 6684 1323; www.skydivebyronbay.com; Tyagarah Airport) Tandem dives (\$214 to 299) are priced depending on altitude and time of freefall (20 to 70 seconds).

KAYAKING

Cape Byron Kayaks (☎ 6680 9555; www.capebyronkayaks.com; tours from \$60) See dolphins and turtles.

SURFING

Most hostels provide free boards to guests, or you can rent equipment. Classes typically start at \$65.

Blackdog Surfing (☎ 6680 9828; www.blackdogsurfing.com; Shop 8, The Plaza, Jonson St) Intimate group lessons and women's courses.

Byron Bay Surf School (☎ 1800 707 274; www.byronbaysurfschool.com; 127 Jonson St; classes from \$60) Most students enjoy the lab work.

Byron Surf Shop (☎ 6685 7536; cnr Lawson & Fletcher Sts) Shop selling gear and renting boards (from \$30) and wetsuits (\$5).

Surfing Byron Bay (☎ 6685 7099; www.gosurfingbyronbay.com; 84 Jonson St) Has courses for kids.

Tours

Numerous operators run tours to Nimbin and other interesting places in the hinterland. See p283 for details. Most tour companies will pick you up from where you're staying.

Mountain Bike Tours (☎ 1800 122 504, 0429-122 504; www.mountainbiketours.com.au; per person from \$100) Environmentally friendly bike tours.

Festivals & Events

East Coast International Blues & Roots Music Festival (☎ 6685 8310; www.bluesfest.com.au) Held over

Easter, this international jam attracts high-calibre international performers and local heavyweights. Book early.

Splendour in the Grass (www.splendourinthegrass.com) Held in late July/early August, this indie music festival includes funk, electronica, folk, rock, hip-hop and a host of other genres. Book early.

Byron Bay Writers Festival (☎ 6685 5115; www.byronbaywritersfestival.com.au) In late July/early August, this gathers together top-shelf writers and literary followers from across Australia.

Taste of Byron (www.atasteofbyron.com) Celebration of regional produce, held in late September.

Sleeping

There's every kind of accommodation you could hope for in and around Byron. Just don't be a bonehead and turn up in January without a reservation or you'll join the hordes of backpackers and jet-set models milling around the visitors centre with hang-dog looks because they thought there would be just one more room.

Motels are clustered in town and south along Bangalow Rd. There are scores of B&Bs and apartments all along Belongil Beach.

The **Accommodation booking office** (☎ 1300 465 669, 6680 8666; www.byronbayaccom.net), run by the visitor centre, is a great service for booking in advance.

Holiday houses during low/peak season cost from \$400/600 per week and go much, much higher. Rental agents:

LJ Hooker (☎ 6685 7300; www.ljhooker.com; 4/31 Lawson St)

Professionals (☎ 6685 6552; www.byronbaypro.com.au; cnr Lawson & Fletcher Sts)

BUDGET

Byron has more than 10 hostels; here is a selection.

Cape Byron YHA (☎ 6685 8788, 1800 652 627; www.yha.com.au; cnr Middleton & Byron Sts; dm/d from \$25/82; ☎ ☎ ☎) This two-storey complex is situated close to the town centre and has its own shops and heated pool. It's a modern and tidy place.

Belongil Beachouse (☎ 6685 7868; www.belongilbeachouse.com; Child St; dm/d from \$28/70, self-contained cottages from \$160; ☎) Across from Belongil Beach in a park-like area, this stylish place has excellent self-contained cabins, spartan studio units and comfortable dorms. Pick of the bunch are the cosy, self-contained doubles.

Arts Factory Lodge (☎ 6685 7709; www.artsfactory.com.au; Skinners Shoot Rd; camp sites from \$15, dm/d from \$30/80; ☎ ☎) A huge pool set in lush tropical

forest is just one of the highlights of this vast complex that includes pubs and a café. Bunk down in a tepee, tent or a dorm. There are free minibuses around town.

our pick Middle Reef Beach House (☎ 6685 5118; www.middlereef.com.au; 13 Marvell St; dm from \$20, s/d \$50-190; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) Great little residential compound close to everything. Rooms are basic but very comfortable; the cheapest share bath-rooms and some have patios. There are shared kitchens and dorm rooms are bunk-free.

Also recommended:

Byron Bay Holiday Village Backpackers (☎ 6685 8888; www.byronbaybackpackers.com.au; 116 Jonson St; dm from \$26; ☎ ☎) Motel-style with a good vibe and lots of freebies.

Clarks Beach Caravan Park (☎ 6685 6496; clarks@bshp.com.au; unpowered sites/cabins from \$25/120) Tightly packed cabins and sites in a bush setting off Lighthouse Rd.

Great Northern (☎ 6685 6454; Jonson St; s/d \$55/65) Basic pub rooms; crash here – with or without a band member from downstairs.

Main Beach Backpackers (☎ 6685 8695; www.mainbeachbackpackers.com; cnr Lawson & Fletcher Sts; dm/d from \$18/50; ☎ ☎ ☎) A good quality 94-bed place near the beach. There's a decent-sized pool.

MIDRANGE

Off-season, midrange places offer deals galore.

Bamboo Cottage (☎ 6685 5509; www.byron-bay.com/bamboocottage; 76 Butler St; r from \$90) Featuring global charm (French and Japanese is spoken), the cottage has three rooms with a the kind of decor you end up with after several trips across Asia. Hammocks are hard to leave should you feel the call of chores in the shared kitchen.

Byron Motor Lodge (☎ 6685 6522; www.byronmotorlodge.com; cnr Lawson & Butler Sts; s/d from \$95/100; ☎ ☎) This low-key low-rise 14-room motel has a central location near everything. The grounds are simple as are the rooms but everything is in perfect shape.

Hibiscus Motel (☎ 6685 6195; www.byronbayresorts.com/hibiscus; 33 Lawson St; r from \$140; ☎ ☎) Excellent location, right in town and right near Main Beach. The seven rooms are right out of the 1960s; they're clean but there's no wry wink at their retro status.

Outrigger Bay Resort (☎ 6685 8646; www.outriggerbay.com; 9 Shirley St; r from \$170; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) This apartment complex has one-, two- and three-bedroom units on a shady site overlooking a pool. The beach is only 50m away. The open kitchens are good for festive food fun.

Bay Beach Motel (☎ 6685 6090; www.baybeachmotel.com.au; 32 Lawson St; r \$170-200; ☎ ☎) A trip to Ikea and you can transform dowdy to chic. This older motel has been given a stylish, clean-lined makeover. The large rooms are comfortable and the beach is right across the street.

BreakFree Eco Beach Resort (☎ 6639 5700; www.breakfree.com.au; 35 Shirley St; ste from \$190; ☎ ☎ ☎) One of many holiday apartment complexes and B&Bs on this stretch of Belongil Beach, this 30-unit resort claims its 'eco' label because of the architecture is designed to blend into the surroundings.

Lighthouse Keeper Cottages (3-day rentals from \$800) Located right at the Byron Bay Lighthouse (p273), these two historic 1901 cottages have been renovated with polished wood floors and lovely furnishings. The views are swell and you have the place to yourself after dusk. Book through the **Professionals** (☎ 6685 6552; www.byronbaypro.com.au).

TOP END

Friday on the Beach (☎ 1300 554 150, 6685 6373; www.fridayonthebeach.com.au; r from \$180; ☎ ☎ ☎; wi-fi) Would you get that same sense of languor if it was called Monday at the Beach? This small, older motel overlooking the grassy verge behind Main Beach has been transformed into a stylish little complex. The 19 rooms are a study in taupe, go for ones with private balconies up front.

Beach Hotel (☎ 6685 6402; www.beachhotel.com.au; cnr Jonson & Bay Sts; r \$240-700; ☎ ☎; wi-fi) Byron's hub, nothing is more central than this beachfront icon. Ground-floor rooms open onto lush gardens and a heated pool; rooms in the upper storeys have ocean views.

Rae's on Watego's (☎ 6685 5366; www.raes.com.au; Marine Pde; d \$400-1150; ☎ ☎ ☎; wi-fi) This dazzlingly white Mediterranean villa was rated by *Condé Nast Traveller* as one of the world's top 25 hotels. Rooms here have an artistic and casual elegance that lets the luxury sneak up on you. The restaurant (p276) is worth the trip alone.

Eating

You can eat well in Byron; there's a huge range of choices and many are excellent.

CAFÉS

Espressohead (☎ 6680 9783; shop 13, 108 Jonson St; snacks \$3; ☎ 8am-5pm) Tucked away behind Woolworths, locals flock to this place for its

excellent coffees. See if you can count the number of dodgy vans for sale on the bulletin board.

Orgasmic (☎ 6680 7778; 11 Bay Lane; mains \$6-9; ☎ 10am-10pm) Plop your bum on a cube cushion at this alley eatery that's one step above a stall. The exciting Middle Eastern food explains the name.

Twisted Sista (☎ 6680 9100; Shop 1, 4 Lawson St; mains \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Bounteous baked goods include huge muffins, cheesy casseroles and overstuffed sandwiches on beautiful bread. Outdoor tables finish the deal.

Fresh (☎ 6685 7810; 7 Jonson St; meals \$7-22; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Top spot for breakfast with excellent pancakes. Mod Oz at night is great at the open-air tables. Always popular, the people-watching is half the appeal.

Bay Leaf Café (☎ 6685 8900; Marvell St; mains \$10-18; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This tiny wedge-shaped bohemian café has a small but excellent menu prepared in a busy open-kitchen. Aioli and other big flavours figure in the daily changing menu of sandwiches, pastas and more.

RESTAURANTS

Vegasm (☎ 6680 7080; 130 Jonson St; mains \$10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Legumes are squirting out all over at this pea-sized vegan eatery. Pizzas with organic crusts are popular as are the lentil pies and salads.

One One One (☎ 6680 7388; 1/111 Jonson St; mains \$10-25; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat; wi-fi) HQ for slow food devotees locally, the ingredients celebrate regional produce. The menu is mostly vegetarian save for some superb spiced prawns and other seafood. Flavours are mostly Med and plates are good for sharing.

Earth 'n' Sea Pizza & Pasta (☎ 6685 6029; 11 Lawson St; mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) The pizza list at this old favourite is long and full of flavour (eg the Capriciosa, a ham, pepperoni, mushroom and anchovies gem). Beers include several excellent microbrews from the Northern Rivers Brewing Co.

Balcony (☎ 6680 9666; cnr Lawson & Jonson Sts; dinner \$18-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; wi-fi) The eponymous architectural feature here wraps around the building and gives you tremendous views of the passing Byron parade and the always clogged traffic circle. The food is Mediterranean fusion, with global influences. The drink list is long.

Orient Express (☎ 6680 8808; 1/2 Fletcher St; mains \$20-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) At first you might think

you're in a stylish Asian decorator's shop but no, you're in one of the best restaurants in Byron. Unlike some places, the Thai-Vietnamese menu here is fairly brief but, you guessed it, full of flavour. Expect to wait.

Olive (☎ 6685 7950; 34 Jonson St; mains \$25-30; ☎ dinner) The long and narrow brick-walled space here is complemented by beige leather seating. The menu features local produce and is heavily accented by Mediterranean flavours. A steak will come with polenta, roasted fish will be covered in capers etc. The dark chocolate mousse always rewards those with fortitude.

Rae's on Watego's (☎ 6685 5366; Marine Pde; mains \$40-45; ☎ lunch & dinner) Exquisite Mod Oz cuisine on a terrace with the sound of surf providing background noise to your witticisms. The menu changes daily but always surprises with its unconventional pairings of ingredients and spices. Book ahead.

QUICK EATS

Krave (3/93 Jonson St; meals from \$7; ☎ 10am-10pm) This sparkly storefront serves a profusion of juices and kebabs right off the grill.

Mongers (☎ 6680 8080; 1 Bay Lane; meals \$9-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Tucked behind the Beach Hotel, the region's best fish and chips issue forth to tables of devotees. It's a narrow, back alley space but the quality is all high street.

Cardamom Pod (Shop 8, Pier Arcade, 7 Lawson St; meals \$10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Tucked off the street, this small vegetarian Indian place is the counterpoint to the donut shop next door.

SELF-CATERING

Blue Olive (☎ 6680 8700; 27 Lawson St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Fine cheeses and deli items; enjoy the beautiful prepared foods at shady pavement tables.

Byron Farmers' Market (☎ 6685 9792; Butler St; ☎ 8-11am Thu) This is an open-air temple to the amazing food produced in the region.

Citrus (☎ 6680 7040; 130 Jonson St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) Small deli with tables inside and out.

Green Garage (☎ 6680 8577; 68 Tennyson St; ☎ 7am-7pm) Like an ongoing farmers market; good prepared foods.

Santos (☎ 6685 7071; 105 Jonson St; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) A locally beloved organic food store.

Entertainment

Byron Bay's nightlife is varied and runs late. Check the gig guide in Thursday's *Byron Shire News* or tune into Bay 99.9 FM.

SLOW BUT GOOD

Victoria Cosford writes the weekly food column for the *Byron Shire Echo*. She's been chronicling the growth of the Slow Food movement in the region (started in Italy, Slow Food puts an emphasis on eating the best local foods from non-industrial suppliers).

What should people seek out to eat in the Byron region? The local growers' markets held regularly, where regional produce is showcased (macadamias, pecans, avocados, coffee, olive oil, blueberries, pineapples – the list goes on).

Why are there so many foodies locally? People have moved up here from places like Melbourne and Sydney bringing with them their expertise, experience and knowledge of food-related issues. There are a lot of very passionate people up here – there are also a lot of people who have money and are retired or semiretired and can indulge the passion.

What does Slow Food mean locally? People think more about the provenance and sustainability of foods – it has heightened people's appreciation of regional foods.

Where should people eat? There's no real getting around the touristy restaurants, but good food can be found – just ask a local where! Which, let's face it, applies to everywhere in the world.

As told to Ryan Ver Berkmoes

CINEMAS

Lounge Cinema (☎ 6685 5833; Gordon St; admission \$10) The cinema at the Arts Factory Lodge (p274) shows second-run and arthouse flicks nightly.

CLUBS

Cheeky Monkeys (☎ 6685 5886; 115 Johnson St; ☎ 7pm-3am) Mayhem is the theme at this full-on boozier. Keep your wits so things won't get out of hand.

Cocomas (☎ 6685 8493; 32 Jonson St; ☎ 9pm-late) This bilingual gay-friendly club thrashes about to indie rock, old school, techno and fusion.

PUBS

Beach Hotel (☎ 6685 6402; cnr Jonson & Bay Sts; ☎ 11am-late) This sprawling beachfront terrace at the hotel of the same name (see p275) draws everyone from model-wannabes to beach bums. There's live music by cover bands many nights.

Balcony (☎ 6680 9666; cnr Lawson & Jonson Sts; ☎ until late) The popular restaurant (see opposite) is also a fine bar. Sit and soak up the view from stools, chairs or sofas while ploughing through the long drinks list.

Great Northern Hotel (☎ 6685 6454; Jonson St) This enormous, boisterous pub has live music and DJs many nights and Coopers ales on tap.

Railway Friendly Bar (☎ 6685 7662; Jonson St; ☎ 11am-late) The railway may have deserted Byron but this bar stays true. It's a vast indoor/outdoor pub with excellent burgers, salads, pasta and more. There's live music many nights and the excellent St Arnou beer on tap.

Shopping

You can while away hours away from the beach in Byron's many shops. Broadly speaking Fletcher St, north of Marvell St, has artsy boutiques; frock shops hover around the Lawson and Fletcher Sts traffic circle; west of here and south on Jonson St you'll find a huge range: everything from lingerie to New Age hokum.

Planet Corroboree (☎ 6680 7884; 1/69 Jonson St) has a huge range of Aboriginal art.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The closest airport is at Ballina (p270) and with its rapidly expanding service it is the best airport for Byron. It also has shuttle services and rental cars for Byron travellers.

Coolangatta airport (see p289) on the Gold Coast has a greater range of services but can involve a traffic-clogged drive. **Airport Express** (☎ 0401-622228) serves the airport from Byron (\$25).

BUS

Long-distance buses for **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) stop on Jonson St. Approximate times and fares for both are as follows: Brisbane (\$40, three hours), Coffs Harbour (\$55, four hours) and Sydney (\$110, 12 to 14 hours). Services operate several times daily. Check the boards at the bus stop for other Queensland options.

Blanch's Bus Service (☎ 6686 2144; www.blanchs.com.au) operates several daily services from

the airport to Lennox Head (\$6, 25 minutes), Ballina (Tamar St stop, \$10, 40 minutes) and Mullumbimby (\$10, 35 minutes). **Kirklands Buses** (☎ 6626 1499; www.kirklands.com.au) offers similar but less frequent service.

TRAIN

People still mourn the loss of the popular CountryLink train service from Sydney. In fact a popular movie released in 2008, *Derailed*, documents this transport travesty. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) has buses connecting to trains at the Casino train station (70 minutes). Get full details from the rather forlorn **train station** (🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri).

Getting Around

Byron Bay Bicycles (☎ 6685 6067; The Plaza, 85 Jonson St) Hires mountain bikes for \$28 per day.

Byron Bay RentaCar (☎ 6685 5517; 84 Jonson St) Rents a wide range of vehicles.

Byron Bay Taxis (☎ 6685 5008) On call 24 hours.

Hertz (☎ 6621 8855; 5 Marvell St) Ask about one-way rentals to Ballina airport.

BANGALOW

☎ 02 / pop 1230

Just a short distance inland from Byron Bay (14km), Bangalow has become a major stop on the foodie circuit. Its sloping main drag (Byron St) is lined with famous and soon-to-be-famous cafés and restaurants. The odd boutique or two gives you something to do between meals.

Riverview Guesthouse (☎ 6687 1317; www.riverviewguesthouse.com.au; 99 Byron St; s/d from \$95/145) is a stately Victorian house filled with Federation-period antiques. You can relive the era while soaking in a claw-foot tub.

About 4km north, **Possum Creek Eco Lodge** (☎ 6687 1188; www.possumcreeklodge.com.au; Cedarvale Rd; bungalows from \$165; 🍷) has views across the lush valleys. The 'eco' in the name is not green-washing – water is recycled, stored from rain and otherwise conserved. Power is partially solar. Two stylish cottages for two and a larger house have broad decks and cooking facilities.

The **farmers market** (Byron St; 🕒 8-11am Sat) is renowned for its selection of local foodstuffs.

The interior at **Utopia** (☎ 6687 2088; 13 Byron St; meals \$12-16; 🍷) breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat; 🍷) is like the foam on a rich latte. The long narrow space is open and airy; piles of stylish magazines provide diversions. The fare is Mod Oz bistro with an em-

phasis on local produce. There is live jazz Saturday afternoons.

Satiati (☎ 6687 1010; 33 Byron St; menu \$55; 🍷) dinner Tue-Sat), on the upper floor of a heritage building, has well-spaced tables sporting white tablecloths. Those out the back look over the valley. Dinner is a five-course meal; diners choose between meat, seafood and veggie and then the fun begins. The same chefs run a literally truncated version downstairs called **Ate** (meals \$9-16; 🍷) breakfast & lunch Tue-Sat) – deli-café combo. Grab a stool up front or a small table in the tiny rear garden. Blackboards specials can include pancakes with rhubarb or fresh pea risotto.

Another place with a split personality is **Urban** (☎ 6687 2000; 37 Byron St; meals \$6-12; 🍷) breakfast & dinner). By day it is an upscale corner café with luscious eggs Benedict and other treats. At night, the incense burns and it becomes **Bang Thai** (mains \$20-32; 🍷) dinner Thu-Sat), an ambitious restaurant with Thai food several cuts above the norm. When's the last time you had spicy prawns wrapped in betel leaves?

Blanch's Bus Service (☎ 6686 2144; www.blanchs.com.au) runs three times weekdays to Byron Bay (\$6, 25 minutes) and Ballina (\$10, 45 minutes).

MULLUMBIMBY

☎ 02 / pop 3050

The hip and happening are spilling over from Byron and this atmospheric former centre of animal husbandry is seeing trendy cafés and bistros appear along with the beautiful people who are drawn to them.

Burringbar St is the main shopping street and runs off Dalley St, which is the main road through town. Byron Bay is 19km southeast. A good adventure is the 20km Coolamon Scenic Drive south to Bangalow. It twists through the rugged hills and offers a surprise vista around every bend.

Sights & Activities

The best thing to do in Mullumbimby is simply walk around. Besides the interesting commercial streets, there is a trail along the Brunswick River in town that passes through tropical forest and is lined with signs relating Aboriginal stories.

The **Brunswick Valley Historical Society Museum** (☎ 6684 1149; cnr Myocum & Stuart Sts; 🕒 11am-3pm Fri & market Sat) has collections of farm implements housed in the old post office.

Art Piece Gallery (☎ 6684 3446; 105 Stuart St; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat) displays art, ceramics and jewellery by many local talented artisans.

Sleeping

Maca's Camping Ground (☎ 6684 5211; Main Arm Rd, Main Arm; camp sites \$15) Camping under a macadamia-nut plantation is what Maca's offers and delivers. This otherwise basic place is 12km north of town.

Mullumbimby Motel (☎ 6684 2387; www.mullumbimbymotel.com.au; 121 Dalley St; r from \$80; 🍷; wi-fi) The 10 rooms in this older one-storey building are lushly shaded by gardens. It's clean as a whistle and bits of colour spiff up the grey décor.

Mooyabil Farm Holidays (☎ 6684 1128; 448 Left Bank Rd; r from \$95; 🍷) Hang with a pony or make friends with a cow at this 100-acre working farm 2km west of town. There are two large two-bedroom units that have access to a 20m-long pool in addition to all the barnyard diversions.

Eating

Santos (☎ 6684 3773; 51-53 Burringbar St; meals \$6; 🕒 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) Withdraw some local organic produce from this grand old bank building that's now a health food market. Deposit yourself on a veranda table for a daily lunch special from the café.

Milk & Honey (☎ 6684 1422; 59A Station St; mains \$14-22; 🍷) dinner Mon-Sat) Chef Chris Pellen is an artisan when it comes to pizza. The wood-fired thin-crust wonders come with a changing line-up of toppings. Lines form early for the tables inside and out. Pasta specials may well tempt you to the fork-side.

Poinciana (☎ 6684 4036; 55 Station St; meals \$6-20; 🍷) breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat; wi-fi) With a patio shaded by ancient poinciana trees, you may just put down roots for a while (even if you don't join the kids in the sandbox). Tables in a little open-sided house are matched by many more outside. Breakfast choices include buckwheat crepes with fresh local fruit. Later in the day there is more savoury fare with Mediterranean touches. At night there's a long list of tapas and wine.

Getting There & Away

Blanch's Bus Service (☎ 6686 2144; www.blanchs.com.au) operates two to six times daily to Byron

Bay (\$6, 30 minutes) and Ballina (\$10, 75 minutes).

BRUNSWICK HEADS

☎ 02 / pop 1900

Fresh oysters and mud crabs call the Brunswick River home, as do retirees and families, who love this place as a quiet getaway with good beaches and great fishing. Go for a quiet swim on the river and then cross the short bridge to the lively ocean beaches.

The **Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 6685 1003; 7 Park St; 🍷) varies, usually 10am-2pm) is a great little resource.

The **Terrace Reserve Caravan Park** (☎ 6685 0071; www.northcoastparks.com.au/terrace; Fingal St; camp sites from \$25, cabins from \$105), right on the Simpson River and right in town, has 182 sites 500m from the beach. The 11 cabins are posh – they even have cable TV.

Much local life centres on the splendid **Hotel Brunswick** (☎ 6685 1236; www.hotelbrunswick.com.au; Mullumbimby St; s/d \$50/80). It has a magnificent beer garden that unfurls beneath flourishing poincianas. On a Sunday, the place jumps. **The Bruns** (mains \$15-25; 🍷) lunch & dinner) serves good burgers, pasta and more; there's live music on weekends.

Chalet Motel (☎ 6685 1257; www.brunswickvalley.com.au/chaletmotel; 68 Tweed St; r \$80-150; 🍷 🍷) is one of a handful of motels in town and like the rest is low-key and centrally located. Many of the 9 rooms have kitchenettes.

The **Dolphin Cafe** (☎ 6685 1355; 8 The Terrace; meals \$8-12; 🍷) breakfast & lunch) is one of several

WORTH A TRIP: WOoyUNG NATURE RESERVE

Exit the newish Pacific Hwy dual carriage-way at the Wooyung turn. Crossing over a cool little old wooden railway bridge, the road passes through untouched coastal NSW countryside. Drive 5km east to where the sealed road turns north up the coast. You're in the **Wooyung Nature Reserve**, a suitably undeveloped place that features a long, dune-backed beach. Pull off most anywhere for beautiful and deserted seashore. After 8km, you come to Pottsville Beach, your cue to head west back to the highway. North along the coast things only get more developed until you reach the sprawl of Tweed Heads.

excellent places that give the town its own little café culture, replete with buzzy soundtrack. It has a deli and good meals such as creative salads and sandwiches.

Easy to miss in a daggie motel, **Fat Belly Cat** (☎ 6685 1100; 26 Tweed St; mains \$6-15; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon) is a much-lauded Greek restaurant that brings feta-cheese-seekers from afar. You can't get food this good in the Old Country.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.com.au) has buses to Byron Bay (\$5, 30 minutes) and Casino (90 minutes) for the train connection.

TWEED HEADS

Tweed Heads is the butt end of the Gold Coast – and that's not a good place to be. The mirrored-glass high-rises have nothing to do with the cool vibe of the beach towns to the south. But the showy lack of taste at the water pales in comparison to the nightmare of strip malls littering the Pacific Hwy.

Tweed Heads represents the beginning of the Gold Coast strip, the 18m monument at **Point Danger** a testament to the ghastly designs that are apparent along this belt. The border between NSW and Queensland can pass by

unnoticed, as there is no river or landmark, but rather an imaginary line and a lot of cars caught in traffic.

Most of the cafés, surfers' bars and motels are just over the border in Coolangatta (Tweed Heads having cornered the market on discount auto-parts stores). See p290 for places to sleep and eat locally.

The **Minjungbal Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (☎ 5524 2109; cnr Kirkwood & Duffy Sts; adult/child \$15/7.50; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is set in a grove of old gum trees on the Tweed River. Displays detail how the Minjungbal people were able to live in harmony with the land.

Tweed Heritage Maritime Museum (☎ 5536 8625; Kennedy Dr; adult/child \$5/1; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 1-4pm Sun) has an array of photos documenting the time when locals fished for fish and not tourists.

FAR NORTH COAST HINTERLAND

It's not all beach. Away from the coast, the lush scenery, organic markets and alternative lifestyles inland complement places such as Byron Bay and make the far north coast region one of Australia's most appealing places – for locals and visitors alike. In fact the post-hippy rural lifestyle out here has become so mainstream that the epicentre of Nimbin is almost a theme park.

Twenty-two million years ago, an eruption of lava from Mt Warning created the northern half of the hinterland, flattening the valley and enclosing it with dramatic mountain ranges. The southern end is a maze of steep hills and beautiful valleys, some still harbouring magnificent stands of rainforest. Other parts of the area have been cleared for cattle grazing as well as macadamia-nut, avocado and coffee plantations. The area's three national parks – Border Ranges, Mt Warning and Nightcap – are all World Heritage rainforest.

LISMORE

☎ 02 / pop 27,400

A great base for visiting the hinterland, or even Byron, Lismore is close to rainforest, beaches and the river, has some interesting cafés and bookstores and has a thriving arts scene. The campus of Southern Cross University gives the town a young vibe.

The excellent **visitors centre** (☎ 6622 0122; Ballina St; internet access per 15min \$2.50; ☎ 9.30am-4pm) has a rainforest display (\$1). Little kids dig the **Heritage Park** playground, next to the centre, with its skate park and **train rides** (\$2; ☎ 10am-2pm Thu, 10am-4pm Sat).

The **Lismore Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 6622 2209; www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/gallery; 131 Molesworth St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) displays the works of many local artists and has an evocative collection of old photos from Nimbin's early hippy days.

The **Koala Care & Research Centre** (☎ 6622 1233; www.friendsofthekoala.org; Rifle Range Rd; admission \$3; ☎ 10am & 2pm Mon-Fri, 10am Sat) is home to recovering koalas and well worth a visit (you can view animals from outside anytime). It is 2km east of the centre. To get a glimpse of a platypus, head up the north end of Kadina St and walk up to **Tucki Tucki Creek**; your best bet to witness these animals in the wild is at dawn or dusk.

More than a half dozen used book stores are within a block of the intersection of Carrington and Magellan Sts. Typical is **Noahs Arc** (☎ 6621 8169; 66 Magellan St), which has a large selection in a heritage building.

Sleeping

With a couple of exceptions. Lismore is not a motel mecca. Most people stay in the hinterland's villages or closer to the coast.

Lismore Palms Caravan Park (☎ 6621 7067; 42 Brunswick St; camp sites from \$16, cabins from \$60; ☎) The best of Lismore's caravan parks, this one is right on the river and has 13 self-contained cabins.

Wilson Motel (☎ 6622 3383; 119 Ballina St; r from \$90; ☎; wi-fi) The pick of the litter, the Wilson is a low-rise place close to the centre with 25 large and comfortable rooms. The décor may leave you cold but the welcome is warm.

Eating & Drinking

Lismore stages its farmers market every Saturday at the Showground, off Nimbin Rd. Several good cafés make it a good place to pause.

Goanna Bakery & Café (☎ 6622 2629; 171 Keen St; mains \$6-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) An amazing and inventive bakery makes stupendous treats. Try the house-roasted coffee and some of the enticing veggie meals at tables inside or out.

Left Bank Café (☎ 6622 2338; 133 Molesworth St; mains \$8-20; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri &

MARKETS

You can get a real insight to the far north coast and hinterland at one of the myriad markets, which bring together hippies, yuppies and just about anyone else you can imagine. The food offerings are exquisite and diverse and you get a chance to experience the region first-hand.

Expect to find oodles of seasonal organic produce along with other foodstuffs such as farm-house cheeses, honey and baked goods. There are often vendors selling crafts and it's common to hear some live folk music, especially at the weekend markets. Hours can be erratic, but you're safest aiming to arrive in the morning.

Weekly Markets

Bangalow Farmer's Market (Byron St; ☎ 8-11am Sat) Organic produce.

Byron Farmers' Market (Butler St; ☎ 8-11am Thu)

Lismore Farmers Market (Lismore Showground; ☎ 8am-noon Sat)

Rainbow Region Organic Markets (Lismore Showground; ☎ 8-11am Tue)

First Weekend of the Month

Brunswick Heads (Memorial Park; ☎ Sat)

Byron Community Market (Butler St; ☎ Sun)

Lismore Car Boot Market (Lismore Shopping Centre; ☎ Sun)

Second Weekend of the Month

Alstonville Market (Apex Pavilion, Alstonville Showground; ☎ Sun)

Channon Craft Market (Coronation Park; ☎ Sun)

Lennox Head Lakeside Market (Lake Ainsworth Foreshore; ☎ Sun)

Third Weekend of the Month

Aquarius Fair Markets (Nimbin Community Centre; ☎ Sun) Produce and art. Live music.

Ballina Markets (Canal Rd; ☎ Sun)

Lismore Car Boot Market (Lismore Shopping Centre; ☎ Sun)

Mullumbimby Museum Market (Stuart St; ☎ Sat)

Uki Buttery Bazaar (Uki Village Buttery; ☎ Sun)

Fourth Weekend of the Month

Bangalow Village Market (Bangalow centre; ☎ Sun)

Evans Head Riverside Market (Recreation Reserve; ☎ Sat)

Fifth Weekend of the Month

Aquarius Fair Markets (Nimbin Community Centre; ☎ Sun) Produce and art. Live music.

Lennox Head Lakeside Market (Lake Ainsworth Showground; ☎ Sun)

Sat; wi-fi) The art gallery's café, the Left Bank manages just a touch of Parisian snobbery. Although the Mod Oz meals will put your nose in the air sniffing for more too.

Mega Pizza (☎ 6622 2900; Wyrallah Rd Shopping Centre; meals \$11-14; ☎ 4.30pm-late) Chef Barry is the hinterland's pizza sorcerer, cooking up pies with a range of unusual flavours including chicken satay and seafood cocktail. Go for crispy and thin. It's all take-away so you'll have to picnic.

Mecca Café (☎ 6621 3901; 80 Magellan St; meals \$8-16; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Wed, 7am-late Thu-Sat) A stodgy old caff has been reborn as a retro-hip scenester playground. Lots of local musicians hang out at the pavement tables sipping the excellent coffee by day and jamming till late weekend nights.

Entertainment

Lismore has a number of typical large pubs that literally burst with liquored up rural folks on weekends.

For a total change of pace, try the vintage **Winsome Hotel** (☎ 6621 2283; 11 Bridge St), which sits proudly across the river from the centre and has regular sessions with DJs and bands. There's some outdoor seating, a small bistro and events that are gay- and lesbian-friendly.

Getting There & Away

Lismore may well have the most helpful transit centre in NSW. It's right on Molesworth St by the gallery.

Kirklands (☎ 6622 1499; www.kirklands.com.au) runs to Byron Bay (\$15, 50 minutes, two to three times daily). **Waller's** (☎ 6687 8550) school buses run to Nimbin (\$10, 70 minutes).

THE CHANNON

The Channon is an intimate village on a detour between Nimbin and Lismore. If you can, time your visit for the second Sunday of each month for a true classic hinterlands craft market. Other times you'll find a café and old pub where you can chill out and find out about the many idiosyncratic B&Bs hidden in the hills.

Eternity Springs B&B (☎ 6688 6385; www.eternitysprings.com; 483 Tuntable Creek Rd; camping per person \$12, s/d from \$50/80) is a true eco-haven. Choose from cosy 'cubbies' with private verandas and shared bathrooms; en-suite doubles filled with art; or the stylish, self-contained, one-bedroom 'Lotus Room'. Eco

features include spring water, solar power, permaculture, flushing compost toilets and organic breakfasts.

Havan's (☎ 6688 6108; www.rainbowregion.com/havan; Lot 1, Lawler Rd; s/d \$75/125) is an ecotourist retreat set in the heart of a rainforest. There are numerous walks near the property, including ones where you can see platypus and other exotic creatures plus treks to waterfalls. The owner offers courses in yoga and painting.

NIGHTCAP NATIONAL PARK

South of Murwillumbah, north of Lismore and bordering Nimbin and The Channon is the Nightcap National Park, encompassing 8080 hectares. It was given World Heritage status in 1989.

The park is home to diverse subtropical rainforests and many species of wildlife, notably the bent-winged bat, the wom poo fruit-dove, the masked owl and the red-legged pademelon (a type of wallaby). With the highest annual rainfall in NSW, the park has spectacular waterfalls, gorgeous green gullies and sheer cliff walls. The exposed rock pinnacles of the **Sphinx** can be seen from Lismore.

You can choose from walks, lookouts and picnic spots to enjoy, and **Mt Nardi** (800m) offers a challenging climb. However, most of the access is on unsealed roads and the park is – rightfully – undeveloped.

WHIAN WHIAN STATE FOREST

Timber is still produced in this **state forest** (☎ 6627 0200), which is unfortunate given the beauty of the area. The forest adjoins the southeast side of Nightcap National Park and is home to the Albert's lyrebird. There are plans to develop camping areas.

The spectacular **Minyon Falls** are found here, plunging over 100m into a rainforest gorge and surrounded by a flora reserve with several walking tracks. Take a dip under the falls for an unforgettable experience.

The **Nightcap Track** (16km long) passes through state forest and Nightcap National Park, and was the original track used by postal workers and others in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. **Rummery Park** is not far off the road down from the falls and has a picnic spot with barbecues and cold showers. **Peate's Mountain Lookout**, just on from Rummery Park, gives you a great panoramic view from

Jerusalem Mountain in the north to Byron Bay in the east.

Mud Manor Forest Retreat (☎ 6688 2205; www.mudmanor.com; Fox Rd, Rosebank; r from \$120; ☎ ☎), southeast of the state forest, is a perfect haven for those who just want to get away from the crowds. The building is built of bricks made on site and the two rooms have large decks. It is roughly equidistant by country road from The Channon and Bangalow (20km).

NIMBIN

☎ 02 / pop 500

A true product of the hippy-era and the legendary 1973 Aquarius Festival, Nimbin works so hard at being alternative it's almost mainstream. But not too mainstream. Bra is still an abbreviation for brass here even if the tattoos are still red around the edges and the didgeridoo players went to the best Sydney prep schools. Characters young and old prowl the streets and there are numerous businesses and community centres that attest to the unique culture found locally.

Nimbin is a study in contrasts. At noon when the hordes of bused-in day-trippers from Byron are prowling the streets in gaggles while being hectored by pot dealers it can all seem literally like a bad trip. (This scene took a hit in 2008 when a huge force of heavily armed state police made mass arrests of pot dealers.)

At other times when the true locals are dominant, you get a sense of the real Nimbin, where anyone searching for a real rainbow might just find it.

Orientation & Information

Nimbin is actually a tiny village, easily walked in a few minutes. Most businesses are on Cullen St – and green alert! – there's lots of parking out the back.

Given that some locals would have a hard time answering the question: 'Which came first, Nimbin or the organic farms?', it shouldn't surprise that there are nearly 100 local farms more than happy to host volunteers willing to yank weeds and perform other chores. The international **Willing Workers on Organic Farms** (www.wwoof.com.au) coordinates many such programs.

The **Nimbin Visitors Centre** (☎ 6689 1388; www.visitlismore.com; 80 Cullen St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) is at the northern end of town and has accommodation options, bus tickets and a wealth

of knowledge. The community website (www.nimbinweb.com.au) is useful. Blow your mind listening to 2NIM 102.3FM.

Sights & Activities

Despite the reticence of many locals to be pinned down on exact opening times, for fear of ruining Nimbin's image, generally everything is open 10am to 6pm.

Nimbin Museum (☎ 6689 1123; 62 Cullen St; admission \$2) is an interpretive and expressionistic museum, far more a work of art than of history. Across the street, the **Hemp Embassy** (☎ 6689 1842; www.hempembassy.net; 51 Cullen St) raises consciousness about marijuana legalisation, as well as providing all the tools and fashion items you'll need to get high (or at least attract more police raids). The embassy leads the **Mardi Grass** festival each May. Smokers are welcome at the tiny **Hemp Bar** next door, which is like Haight-Ashbury in a bottle.

There are even more artists than pot dealers and you can find their work on display at the **Nimbin Artists Gallery** (☎ 6689 1444; 47 Cullen St; ☎ 10am-4pm).

Just 400m down the hill from town and off the Murwillumbah road, the Old Butter Factory is just that. It now incubates a number of little businesses including the **Nimbin Candle Factory** (☎ 6689 1010), which is redolent with wax. Thousands of hand-dipped paraffin candles are on display.

Every third and fifth Sunday, Nimbin has its own **market**, a spectacular affair of produce and art where locals revel in their culture. There's live music.

Sleeping

Rainbow Retreat Backpackers (☎ 6689 1262; www.rainbowretreat.net; 75 Thorburn St; camp sites \$10, dm/d \$20/45) Very basic, but totally in the age-of-Aquarius spirit. Relax, chill out, sleep in a shack or camp out in the gypsy vans. There's a free courtesy bus from Byron Bay.

Nimbin Rox YHA Hostel (☎ 6689 0022; www.nimbinrox.com; 74 Thornburn St; camp sites \$10, dm/d from \$24/60; ☎ ☎) Rox has hammocks, permaculture gardens, craft workshops, live bands, Thai massage, tepees and a heated pool. Check out the website, a trip in itself.

Nimbin Caravan & Tourist Park (☎ 6689 1402; 29 Sibley St; camp sites from \$17; ☎) A simple place with three dozen sites next to the local swimming pool, down Cullen St past the Nimbin Hotel.

WORTH A TRIP: THE RAINFOREST WAY

The **Rainforest Way** (www.rainforestway.com.au) is a touring route that takes in much of the Gondwanan rainforest, the primeval vestiges of the dense forests that covered Australia 50 million years ago when it was part of the supercontinent Gondwana. Today bits of the surviving forest are preserved in a series of Unesco-recognized parks in northern NSW and southern Queensland. These national parks include Nightcap (p282), Mt Warning (below), Border Ranges (p286) and Springbrook (p304).

The driving route has many options; visitor centres have brochures and maps. You can see quite a bit of it by following the portion from Lismore north through Nimbin, Uki and Murwillumbah, then into Queensland, going through Springbrook and rejoining the Pacific Hwy at Nerang.

Nimbin Hotel (☎ 6689 1246; freemasonhotel@bigpond.com; 53 Cullen St; dm \$25) The two- and four-bed rooms in the town's veteran pub are tidy and open onto the classic, shaded veranda.

Eating & Drinking

A number of coffee places tenuously exist along the pavement.

Rainbow Café (☎ 6689 1997; 64A Cullen St; mains \$4-9; ☞ breakfast & lunch) The original Nimbin institution makes delicious cakes, big breakfasts, avocado-laden burgers and vegetarian fare, and has a big, funky backyard.

Aquarius Bakery/Cafe (☎ 6689 1566; 45 Cullen St; meals \$5-8; ☞ 6am-4pm) An excellent mainstream bakery where you can have a tasty sandwich on fresh bread and a delicious coffee out on the patio.

Nimbin Hotel (☎ 6689 1246; Cullen St; meals \$7-15) The classic local boozer. A vast covered porch out back overlooks a verdant valley. Inside, artistic photos of regulars grace the walls and there's actually a slight hint of minimalist style. The fare is typical pub grub; there's live music many Friday nights.

Nimbin Trattoria & Pizzeria (☎ 6689 1427; 70 Cullen St; mains \$8-16, pizzas \$4-23; ☞ dinner daily, lunch Thu-Sun) The sort of top-end place in town is fittingly laid-back. Groovy pizzas vie with salubrious salads for your attention.

Getting There & Around

Several outfits run shuttles and tours for day-trippers from Byron Bay; some include stops in the region at natural wonders such as Minyon Falls (p282). The tours charge \$25 to \$35 depending on the itinerary and time of year, but most offer a lower rate if you just want to get to or from Nimbin.

Operators include:
Happy Coach (☎ 6685 3996; www.happycoach.com.au) Departs daily.

Jim's Alternative Tours (☎ 6685 7720; www.jim.salternativetours.com; per person \$35) Entertaining tours (with free fruit) to Nimbin.

Nimbin Tours & Shuttle Bus (☎ 6680 9189; www.nimbintours.com) Departs Byron at 11am.

Waller's (☎ 6687 8550) For a traditional trip (as it were), Waller's runs school buses run to Lismore (\$10, 70 minutes).

UKI

☎ 02 / pop 220

Uki (*uke-i*) is a cute little village tucked between the surging Tweed River and the dominating peak of Mt Warning. It has a couple of galleries and a used bookshop. The **visitor information centre** (☎ 6679 5399; ☞ 10am-3pm Mon-Sat), run by volunteers, has details of the nearby national parks.

This is a stop on the **Rainforest Way** driving route (see above). Note the **memorial** at the town crossroads. The sheer number of names attests to the profound impact the 20th century's world wars had on small country towns.

The fully accessible **Uki Guesthouse** (☎ 6679 5777; www.ukiguesthouse.com.au; Mitchell St; r from \$70; ♿) is in an old weatherboard house overlooking the crossroads. The **Uki Café** (☎ 6679 5351; 1 Rowlands Creek Rd; mains \$7-12; ☞ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat), serves good food on a sweeping veranda, or by a damp-banishing potbelly stove inside.

MT WARNING NATIONAL PARK

Relatively small in size (2380 hectares), this park is the most dramatic feature of the hinterland, with Mt Warning (1156m) towering over the valley. The peak is the first part of mainland Australia to be touched by sunlight each day. Over 60,000 people a year make the 4.4km, five-hour round-trip trek to the top from Breakfast Creek.

Captain Cook aptly named this mountain in 1770 to warn seafarers of the offshore reefs. The Aboriginal people called it Wollumbin, meaning all of these: 'cloud catcher', 'fighting chief of the mountain' and 'weather maker'.

You can't camp at Mt Warning, but the **Mt Warning Caravan Park & Tourist Retreat** (☎ 6679 5120; Mt Warning Rd; camp sites from \$18, cabins from \$55), on the Mt Warning approach road, is a viable option, with good kitchen facilities and a well-stocked kiosk.

Some 12km west of Uki, **Mount Warning Forest Hideaway** (☎ 6679 7277; www.foresthideaway.com.au; 460 Byrill Creek Rd; r from \$90; ♿) has simple rooms with kitchenettes in a motel-style building. There are miles of hikes nearby.

For a first, second or unofficial honeymoon, **Wollumbin Palms Retreat** (☎ 6679 5063; www.wollumbinpalms.com.au) has three individual lodges, each sleeping two people, scattered across its large rainforest estate on the road to the park. Each is a design wonder, with private spas and large open areas where you can immerse yourself in the sounds of the rainforest.

Waller's (☎ 6687 8550) runs infrequently between Nimbin and Murwillumbah via Dum Dum, the town at the turn-off for Mt Warning. Call for schedules.

MURWILLUMBAH

☎ 02 / pop 7596

Sitting on the banks of the wide Tweed River, Murwillumbah bridges the mist-shrouded hills that include Mt Warning to the west and the broad, green fertile river plain to the east.

It's a scenic spot and well worth the detour off the Pacific Hwy. It is also the gateway to the Border Ranges National Park (p286) and is a key point on the Rainforest Way (opposite) driving tour. The compact centre is good for a stroll and a stop in a café.

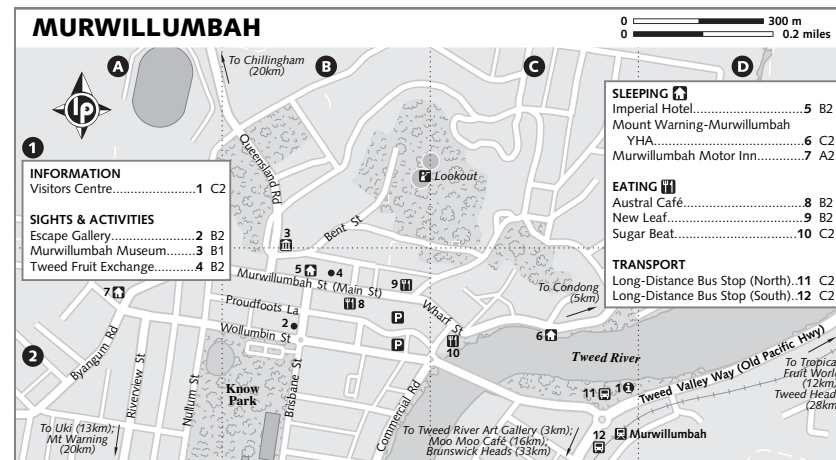
The **visitors centre** (☎ 6672 1340; www.tweedcoolangatta.com.au; cnr Alma St & Tweed Valley Way; ☞ 9am-4.30pm) has national park info and passes, a great rainforest display and a prime position on the Tweed River.

Sights

The exceptional **Tweed River Art Gallery** (☎ 6670 2790; www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery; cnr Mistral Rd & Tweed Valley Way; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) is an architectural delight and home to some of Australia's finest in a variety of media. Temporary exhibits complement the permanent fixtures. Check out the iconic portrait of Jonathan Aatty by Hui Hai Xie. The gallery is 3km south of town.

The large **Escape Gallery** (☎ 6672 2433; 1 Brisbane St; ☞ 10am-4pm) has rotating exhibits by regional artists, an 'escape corner' where weary tourists can chill out and a sweet little café. The **Murwillumbah Museum** (☎ 6672 1865; 2 Queensland Rd; adult/child \$2/1; ☞ 9.30am-4pm Wed & Fri) brings to life the region's long heritage as a sugar producer.

Tropical Fruit World (☎ 6677 7222; www.tropicalfruitworld.com.au; Duranbah Rd; adult/child \$33/16; ☞ 10am-4.30pm) is a fruit-themed family attraction 12km northeast of Murwillumbah, with an admission price that's a bit ripe. For a more affordable experience with local fruit, check out the **Tweed**



Fruit Exchange (☎ 6672 1155; 103 Murwillumbah St), a 68-year-old family business right in town.

Sleeping

Mount Warning-Murwillumbah YHA (☎ 6672 3763; www.yha.com.au; 1 Tumbulgum Rd; dm/d from \$26/56) Bohemian airs perfume this colourful waterfront house with eight-bed dorms. There's free ice cream at night plus canoe and bike hire. Tours to Mt Warning are reason enough to bunk down here.

Imperial Hotel (☎ 6672 2777; 115 Murwillumbah St; s/d with shared bathroom \$35/45, d \$60) These old pub rooms look like they haven't been altered since the opening ceremony – shabby chic without even trying. Still a stay here will you put in the pink, even if it's just the paint outside.

Murwillumbah Motor Inn (☎ 1800 687 224, 1800 023 105; www.murwillumbahmotorinn.com.au; 17 Byangum Rd; s/d \$89/99; 🚰 📶; wi-fi) They're a mite frumpy, but all 31 rooms here have cable TV and basic cooking facilities. There's also a pleasant courtyard out the back.

Eating

Austral Café (☎ 6672 2624; 88 Main St; mains \$6; 🍳 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat; 📶) The motto at this 1950s icon is 'a great place to meet and eat'. It dates from 1919 and offers vintage treats such as cupcakes.

New Leaf (☎ 6672 4073; Shop 10, Murwillumbah Plaza; meals \$5-10; 🕒 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri; 📶) The food here is creative and vegetarian. There are many Middle Eastern dishes such as falafel and hummus. Enjoy inside, out on the courtyard or take away. It now also has an organic grocery.

Sugar Beat (☎ 6672 2330; Shop 2, 6-8 Commercial Rd; mains from \$10; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) Park yourself by the sunny window, settle into a corner of the long bench seating or take in the scene from one of the pavement tables. There's café-style fusion fare and locally famous baked goods.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) have services several times daily on the Sydney to Brisbane route.

Waller's (☎ 6622 6266) has school-day buses to Nimbin (one hour) and Lismore.

BORDER RANGES NATIONAL PARK

The Border Ranges National Park, a World Heritage area of 31,729 hectares, covers the NSW side of the McPherson Range, which runs along the NSW–Queensland border, and some of its outlying spurs. The park's wetter areas protect large tracts of superb rainforest and it has been estimated that a quarter of all bird species in Australia can be found in the park.

The park is made up of three main sections. The eastern section – which includes the escarpments of the massive Mt Warning caldera – is the most easily accessible area. Access it via the Tweed Range Scenic Drive, which begins at Barkers Vale, 40km southwest of Murwillumbah. It's possible to access the smaller central section from Lions Rd, which turns off the Kyogle–Woodenbong road 22km north of Kyogle. The large and rugged western section is almost inaccessible except to well-equipped bushwalkers, but it's possible to get good views of the peaks in the area from the Kyogle–Woodenbong road. The Rainforest Way (p284) skirts the very eastern edge of the park as goes north from Murwillumbah.

To really experience the park, try the rugged **Tweed Range Scenic Drive** – gravel and usable in dry weather – which loops through the park from Lillian Rock (midway between Uki and Kyogle) to Wiangaree (north of Kyogle on the Woodenbong road). The signposting on access roads isn't good (when in doubt take roads signposted to the national park), but it's well worth the effort of finding it. The road is unsuitable for caravans and large vehicles.

The road runs through mountain forest most of the way, with steep hills and breathtaking lookouts over the Tweed Valley to Mt Warning and the coast. The seemingly perilous walk out to the crag called the **Pinnacle** – about half an hour's walk from the road and back – is not for agoraphobics. At **Antarctic Beech** there is, not surprisingly, a forest of Antarctic beeches. Some of these trees are more than 2000 years old. From here, a walking track (about 5km) leads down to **Brindle Creek**, where there is lush rainforest and a picnic area. The road also runs down to Brindle Creek.

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