

REGIONAL VICTORIA



AROUND MELBOURNE

Melbourne sits at the northern end of Port Phillip Bay, which, at nearly 2000 sq km, is a vast (and relatively shallow) body of water. The bay's heads – the famous Rip – are just 3.5km apart, making Port Phillip Bay almost an inland sea. With more than 3.2 million people living around its shoreline it's the country's most densely populated area. Port Phillip Bay and her little sister Westernport Bay (to the east), their peninsulas and islands, and the mountains and valleys of the hinterlands are all rich with natural beauty and opportunities for activities and adventures, and culinary and cultural pursuits. Indeed, within an hour or two of Melbourne you can experience mountains, rivers, beaches, bush and wildlife, and lovely little historic towns that you'll never want to leave. While there are many superb national parks, countless wineries and brilliant restaurants that are all accessible as day trips, there are also some great B&Bs and guesthouses where you can unpack a toothbrush and fresh set of smalls for the morning.

Walkers and cyclists can explore the many trails that criss-cross the region's national parks, from the cool mountain air and birdsongs of the Dandenongs and Yarra Valley to the briny sea winds of Point Nepean National Park. Gourmands and wine buffs can overindulge at the outstanding restaurants and wineries in the Yarra Valley and the Bellarine and Mornington Peninsulas. Surfers can zip up their steamers, strap on their leg ropes and ride some of the best waves in Australia at Phillip Island, the ocean breaks between Flinders and Portsea, and Point Lonsdale to Barwon Heads.

Best of all, Melbourne, one of the world's largest cities in area and within the top 90 most-populated cities, sits amid a region of sparsely peopled, broad open spaces and native bushland that team with local flora and fauna. The Melbourne environs are ideal for short-stay escapes as well as longer sojourns. Don't come to Australia's greatest city without getting out of it for a while.

NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE

The area around Melbourne offers excellent opportunities to commune with nature and see Australian wildlife. Some of the easily accessible national parks include **Dandenong Ranges National Park** (p211), with fantastic day walks among the towering mountain ash trees and bellbird songs; the **Mornington Peninsula National Park** (p209) that covers swathes of coastal dunes between Point Nepean and Cape Schanck; pretty **Kinglake National Park** (p214) on the Great Dividing Range; **Yarra Ranges National Park** (p215), home to Mt Donna Buang; and **Cape Woolamai State Faunal Reserve**, where you'll find a good **surf beach** (p201) on Phillip Island.

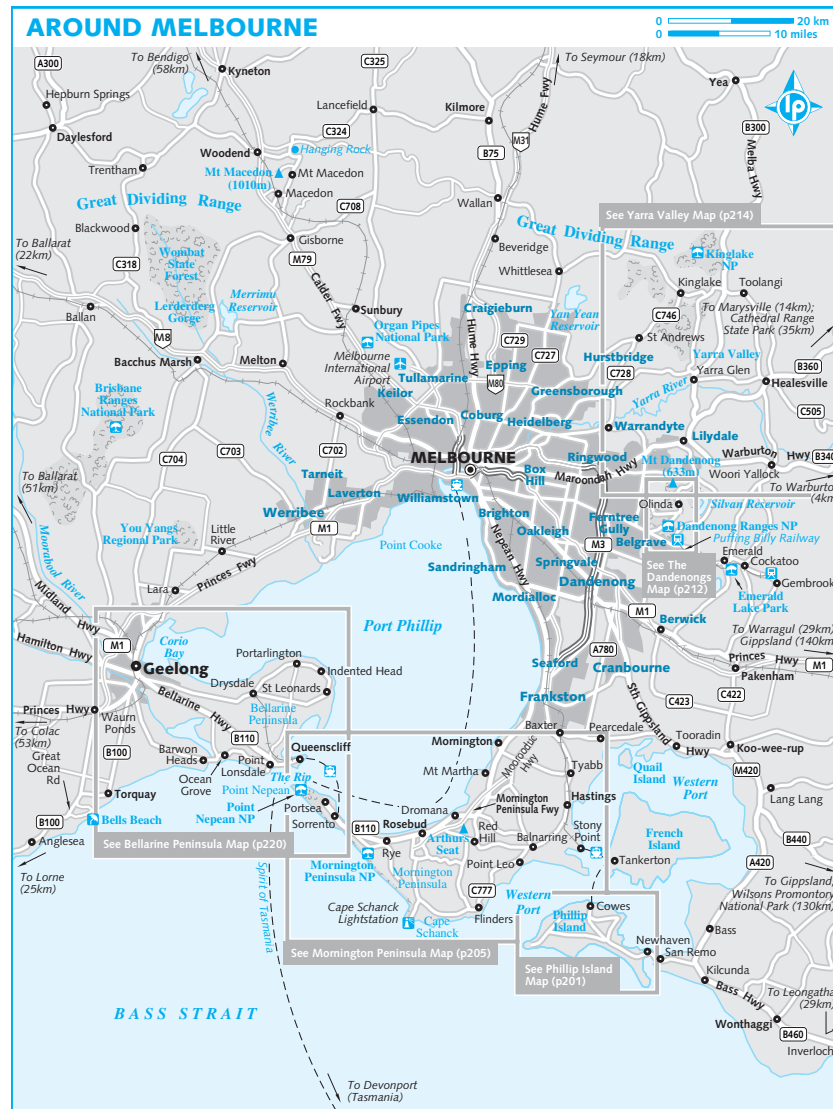
Wildlife-spotters should head to Phillip Island for the **Penguin Parade** (p200) and the **Phillip Island Wildlife Park** (p202), or go to **Healesville Sanctuary** (p213) to cluck over the koalas and hand-feed kangaroos. There's also an interesting wildlife reserve at the **Briars** (p206) on the Mornington Peninsula. Those that want to get up close and personal can try swimming with dolphins off **Sorrento** (p207) and **Queenscliff** (p220).

QUAFF!

Victoria is endowed with some of the best wine-growing regions in Australia (nay, the world!). While northern and central Victoria are famous for fat shiraz and cabernet sauvignon tend to produce cool-climate drops like chardonnay, pinot gris and pinot noir. The **Mornington Peninsula** (p204), **Yarra Valley** (p213), the **Geelong** (p216) region and **Bellarine Peninsula** (p220) are peppered with vineyards – mostly small boutique operations. Most have cellar-door tastings and many have fine restaurants. **Phillip Island** (p203) also has a couple of great wineries. Some wineries charge between \$2 and \$5 for tastings, although this is redeemable against the purchase price of a bottle. Tourist offices issue wine-touring guides with maps and stacks of information, including how to get to more off-the-beaten-track wineries. See the Lush & the Liquid Lunch boxed text (p207) for our recommendations.

JUST FOR KIDS

The kids are in the car dripping ice cream on the upholstery, and Dad looks over his shoulder and says, 'Whatcha wanna do?' The region



around Melbourne has some great things for kids. Go to Phillip Island and watch the **Penguin Parade** (p200), do a tour of the **Grand Prix Circuit** (p200) and go to **Amaze'n Things** (p201).

In the Dandenongs, ride on **Puffing Billy** (p211), check out the **Emerald Lake Model Railway** (p211) and **SkyHigh Mount Dandenong** (p213) for amazing views over Melbourne.

At Mornington you can hire a boat at **Schnapper Point Boat Hire** (p204) and catch a fish. Enjoy

amazing views from the summit at **Arthurs Seat** (p206) and lose the kids at the **Enchanted Maze Garden** (p206). Put your togs on and take the kids for a swim at the delightful bay beaches at **Portsea** (p208) on your way out to see the fascinating old battlements at **Point Nepean** (p209). Take a tour of **Cape Schanck Lightstation** (p210) and walk down the boardwalks for outstanding views.

In the Yarra Valley visit **Healesville Sanctuary** (p213) and tickle a koala, or ride your bikes

along the [Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail](#) (p214). Summer or winter, [Mt Donna Buang](#) (p215) is a hit with the kids, especially if the tobogganing is happening.

Check out [Geelong](#) (p216), with stacks of kiddie stuff to do along delightful Eastern Beach, and the [Ford Discovery Centre](#) (p218). At Queenscliff, ride the restored steam locomotive on the [Bellarine Peninsula Railway](#) (p220) and the [Queenscliff–Sorrento Ferry](#) (p222). Watch for dolphins that sometimes swim alongside.

PHILLIP ISLAND & THE PENGUIN PARADE

pop 7500

Phillip Island – about 100 sq km – sits at the entrance to Western Port Bay, 140km south-east of Melbourne, connected to the mainland by a bridge across the Narrows from San Remo to Newhaven. The island is home to the world-famous Penguin Parade, Victoria's biggest tourist attraction, as well as the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix – rather a schizoid visitor demographic. The permanent islander population is largely made up of sheep and cattle farmers (and sheep and cattle), surfers, hippies, retirees and a few retailers flogging penguin souvenirs and petrol-head paraphernalia.

The summer population swells to 40,000 as holiday-makers book out every bed and caravan park on the island. Excellent surf beaches bring day-tripping boardriders from Melbourne to ride the swells of the southern oceanside beaches, while kids loll about in the calmer shallows of the north-side beaches. With some terrific accommodation options and a vibrant café and restaurant scene, Phillip Island has plenty to keep you busy for a few days.

The Boonerwring people were the traditional inhabitants of the island, though what they'd have made of coach loads of Penguin Parade tourists and biker gangs making their way over the San Remo bridge is anyone's guess.

The island's main town is Cowes, on the north coast. On the east coast is Rhyll, with the island's main boat ramp.

Phillip Island Nature Park PENGUIN PARADE

The [Penguin Parade](#) (☎ 5951 2800; www.penguins.org.au; Summerland Beach; adult/child/family \$20/10/50; ☎ 10am–nightfall) attracts more than 500,000 visitors a

year. The 'fairy penguins' have been recently rebadged as 'little penguins' – a more accurate translation of the scientific name *Eudyptula minor*. Concrete amphitheatres hold up to 3800 people who coo over the ridiculously cute penguins that emerge from the sea after sunset and waddle resolutely up to their beach nests. The visitors centre has a gift shop and café (try the penguin burger!).

KOALA CONSERVATION CENTRE

From the boardwalks at the [Koala Conservation Centre](#) (☎ 5952 1307; www.phillipislandguide.com/koala; Phillip Island Rd; admission adult/child/family \$10/5/25; ☎ 10am–5pm) you can watch koalas chewing on tasty eucalyptus leaves (or more probably dozing – they sleep about 20 hours a day!).

CHURCHILL ISLAND

[Churchill Island](#) (☎ 5956 7214; off Phillip Island Rd; adult/child/family \$10/5/25; ☎ 10am–4.30pm), connected by a bridge near Newhaven, is a working farm where Victoria's first crops were planted. There's a historic homestead and gardens here, and pleasant walking tracks looping round the island.

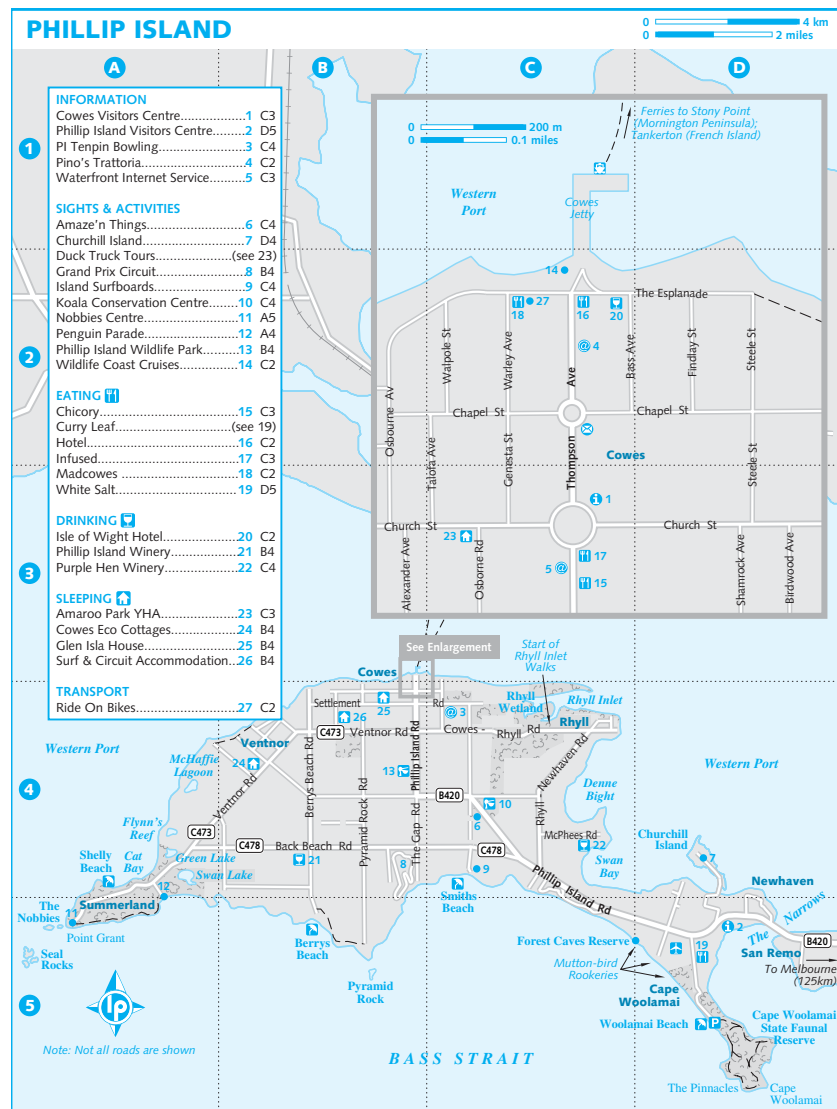
SEAL ROCKS & THE NOBBIES

The [Nobbies](#) are a couple of large craggy offshore rocks at the island's southwestern tip. Beyond them are [Seal Rocks](#), inhabited by Australia's largest fur-seal colony. The [Nobbies Centre](#) (☎ 5951 2816; www.penguins.org.au/nobbies/index.asp; Ventnor Rd; admission free, tours adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 10am–8pm Dec–Feb, to 5pm Mar–May, to 4pm Jun–Aug, to 6pm Sep–Nov) offers great views over the Nobbies and the 6000 Australian fur seals that sun themselves there. You can view the seals from boardwalk binoculars or use the centre's underwater cameras.

Grand Prix Circuit

The [Grand Prix Circuit](#) (☎ 5952 2710; www.phillipislandcircuit.com.au; Back Beach Rd; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri) hosted its first grand prix in 1928. It was overhauled to stage the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix in 1989. The [visitors centre](#) (☎ 5952 9400; ☎ 9am–5pm) runs one-hour [walking tours](#) (adult/child/family \$18/9/42) of the track, and you can have your photo taken on the winner's podium.

The [History of Motor Sport Museum](#) (adult/child/family \$14/7/30) is here too, where you can strap yourself into a V8 Supercar for three [Hot Laps](#) (1/2/3 people \$199/299/349) of the track.



Surf Beaches

Some of the island's south-side ocean surf beaches, including [Woolamai](#), have rips and currents, and are only suitable for experienced surfers. Beginners and families can go to [Smiths Beach](#), which is often teeming with surf-school groups. Both beaches are patrolled in summer. Around the Nobbies, [Cat Bay](#) and [Flynn's Reef](#) will often work when the wind

is blowing onshore at the Woolamai and Smiths areas.

[Island Surfboards](#) (☎ 5952 3443; www.islandsurfboards.com.au; 65 Smiths Beach & 147 Thompson Ave, Cowes; lessons \$50) gives surfing lessons and hires gear.

Amaze'n Things

The kids will bug you to take them to [Amaze'n Things](#) (☎ 5952 2283; www.amazenthings.com.au; 1805

TRANSPORT: PHILLIP ISLAND

Distance from Melbourne Cowes 143km

Direction Southeast

Travel time 1½ hours

Bicycle Hire bicycles from Ride On Bikes (☎ 5952 2533; www.rideonbikes.com.au; 2-17 The Esplanade, Cowes; half-/full-day \$25/35).

Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) buses (\$10, ¾ hours, one daily) depart Melbourne's Southern Cross station at 3.50pm Monday to Friday.

Car From Melbourne take the Monash Fwy (M1); take the Phillip Island exit onto South Gippsland Hwy (M420) near Cranbourne.

Ferry Inter Island Ferries (☎ 9585 5730; www.interislandferries.com.au; return adult/child/bike \$20/10/8; 🚗 every 8.30am-5pm daily, plus 7pm Friday) run between Stony Point and Cowes via French Island.

Taxi Cowes/San Remo Taxis (☎ 5952 2200).

Phillip Island Rd; adult/child/family from \$13/10/44; 🕒 9am-6.30pm). There's a maze (naturally), 'maxi golf' course and a building full of 'illusions' rooms where water flows uphill and people fly, disappear and get decapitated.

Birds & Wildlife

Phillip Island Wildlife Park (☎ 5952 2038; Phillip Island Rd; adult/child/family \$15/8/40; 🕒 10am-5pm), about 2km south of Cowes, has over 100 Australian native wildlife species. Kids love handfeeding the wallabies and kangaroos.

Mutton birds (shearwaters) nest in the Woolamai dunes. They're here from late September to April before returning to Japan and Alaska. There are **pelicans** (that are fed at Newhaven at 11.30am daily), and **swans** and **ibises** at **Rhyll Inlet**. **Rhyll Wetland** has a boardwalk and lookout.

INFORMATION

Phillip Island visitors centres (☎ 1300 366 422, 5956 7447; www.phillipisland.net.au; Phillip Island Rd, Newhaven & cnr Thompson & Church Sts, Cowes; 🕒 9am-5pm) Both centres sell the Three Parks Pass (adult/child/family \$34/17/85) which covers admission to the Penguin Parade, Koala Conservation Centre and Churchill Island.

PI Tenpin Bowling (☎ 5952 3977; 91 Settlement Rd, Cowes; 🕒 noon-late Mon-Fri, 10am-late Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Internet access \$8 per hour.

Pino's Trattoria (☎ 5852 2808; Thompson St, Cowes; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Free wi-fi for customers.

Waterfront Internet Service (☎ 5952 3312; Shop 1/30 Thompson Ave, Cowes; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Internet access \$8 per hour.

TOURS

Duck Truck Tours (☎ 5952 2548; www.yha.com.au; 97 Church St; tours from \$70) Based at Amaroo Park YHA (opposite).

Go West (☎ 1300 736 551; www.gowest.com.au; 1-day tour \$99) Does a one-day tour from Melbourne that includes lunch and iPod commentary in several languages.

Wildlife Coast Cruises (☎ 5952 3501; www.bayconnections.com.au; Rotunda Bldg, Cowes Jetty; tours \$22-181; 🕒 Nov-May) Runs a cruise around Phillip Island and Seal Rocks, and trips to French Island.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Pyramid Rock Festival (www.thepyramidrockfestival.com; New Year) This huge event coincides with New Year's festivities and features some of the best Aussie bands.

Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix (http://bikes.grandprix.com.au; Oct) The island's biggest event – three days of bike action in October.

V8 Supercars (www.v8supercar.com.au) Racing throughout the year. Contact the Grand Prix Circuit (p200) for more information.

EATING

Infused (☎ 5952 2655; 115 Thompson Ave, Cowes; mains \$22-32; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Infused's groovy mix of timber, stone and lime-green décor makes a relaxed place to enjoy a stunningly presented lunch or dinner, or a late-night cocktail. It's at once a café, restaurant and bar, and the eclectic menu moves from entrée portions of sashimi through to rib-eye steak and salmon croquettes.

Chicory (☎ 5952 2665; 115 Thompson Ave, Cowes; mains \$25-35; 🕒 lunch & dinner) One of the few fine-dining places on the island, Chicory serves contemporary dishes like New Zealand trevalla (blue eye) soured in a passionfruit and peppercorn glaze. There's a select wine list and less expensive lunchtime fare, but dinner is what people talk about.

White Salt (☎ 5956 6336; 7 Vista Pl, Woolamai; meals from \$10; 🕒 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) White Salt serves gourmet fish and chips – selected fish fillets and hand-cut chips, tempura prawns and marinated BBQ octopus salad with corn, pesto and lemon. The bench seats out front are usually packed, but you can make off for the beach with a parcel under your arm.

Hotel (☎ 5952 2060; 11-13 The Esplanade, Cowes; mains \$14-26; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Formerly the Hotel Phillip Island, this corner pub has had a snazzy makeover and features a lovely light-filled main dining room that looks out over the pier. The straightforward pub-grub menu is tricked up with kangaroo kebabs and Moroccan chickpea curry. The nightclub upstairs is lively and popular on weekends.

Curry Leaf (☎ 5956 6772; 9 Vista Pl, Woolamai; mains \$12-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This cheery Indian restaurant and takeaway is popular for its piquant meat, seafood and vegetarian curries and aromatic biryani dishes.

Madcowes (☎ 5952 2560; 17 The Esplanade, Cowes; mains \$6-15; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) A stylish, breezy café-foodstore cooking big, hearty breakfasts and quality lunches. Try the ricotta hotcakes with caramelised banana, yoghurt and maple syrup. At lunch wash down a roast beef and brie sandwich with some Victorian wine – all by the glass.

DRINKING

Isle of Wight Hotel (☎ 5952 2301; The Esplanade, Cowes; mains \$16-24; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This Cowes icon is a classic rambling pub and a great place for a beer or simple pub meal. The hotel has planning approval for a huge redevelopment that will replace the existing building with a five-star hotel and convention centre. Drink a toast to the old girl before they 'doze her'!

Phillip Island Winery (☎ 5956 8465; www.phillipislandwines.com.au; Berrys Beach Rd; platters \$14-17; 🕒 11am-5pm Apr-Oct) Here you can sample excellent wines made by renowned Diamond Valley wine-makers and share platters of cheese, terrine, smoked salmon, trout fillets and pâté.

Purple Hen Winery (☎ 5956 9244; www.purplehenwines.com.au; 96 McPhees Rd, Rhyll; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Try the signature pinot at the cellar door of this pretty winery off the main tourist route, with views over Westernport Bay. It's a light, pale red with almost a rosé-style palate – not too overcooked like many Australian pinots.

SLEEPING

During big motor-racing events, Christmas, Easter and school holidays, rates are sky-high and you'll need to book your bed way in advance. There's a dozen caravan parks, mostly around Cowes – pick up a *Caravan Parks on Phillip Island* flyer from the visitors centres.

Glen Isla House (☎ 5952 1882; www.glenisla.com; 230 Church St, Cowes; d \$265-395; 🚗 🚗) This brilliant boutique hotel is probably the best address on the island. Ensnconced in a renovated 1870 homestead and outbuildings, Glen Isla is all about understated old-world luxury and all rooms have private access, huge plasma TVs, bathrooms, refrigerators and complimentary wi-fi. Children under 12 are not welcome.

Cowes Eco Cottages (☎ 5952 6466; www.cowesecocottages.com.au; cnr Justice & Ventnor Rds, Ventnor; d \$175-250) These comfortable, roomy cottages are set on 2½ acres of rural land near Cowes. There are two two-bedroom cottages that sleep four, and one one-bedroom cottage with a spa-bathroom. They're purpose-built with kitchens and comfortable lounges with TV/DVD.

Amaroo Park YHA (☎ 5952 2548; www.yha.com.au; 97 Church St, Cowes; unpowered sites \$30, dm/s/d/f from \$30/60/90/145; 🚗 🚗) In a shady bush setting, the Amaroo Park YHA has a range of well-maintained accommodation options, a communal kitchen and BBQ areas, bar, lounge and TV room. It also organises surfing lessons and tours through Duck Truck Tours (opposite).

Surf & Circuit Accommodation (☎ 5952 1300; www.surfandcircuit.com; 113 Justice Rd, Cowes; r \$220-315; 🚗) This is ideal for families or groups. Eight large, comfortable units accommodate up to six and ten people, and have kitchens and lounges with plasma TVs and patios, and some have spas. Tariffs are levied on a per-unit basis regardless of the number of occupants – terrific value. Outside there are barbecue areas, a tennis court and a playground.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Holiday-makers from Melbourne have been visiting the Mornington Peninsula since the 1870s, when paddle-steamers ran down to Portsea. Thirty years ago the Mornington Peninsula was a rural region of cattle farming and fruit orchards without a grape in sight. Today, the farmers are gone and their lands have been subdivided for low-density suburban-style housing and vineyards that now number nearly 100. The peninsula still retains lovely stands of native bushland, rugged ocean beaches and national parks, and you can enjoy wine tastings, pick your own fruit in orchards and berry farms, bushwalk and swim, or surf some of Victoria's best breaks.

The calm 'front beaches' are on the Port Phillip side. The rugged ocean 'back beaches' face Bass Strait, and there are stunning walks along this coastal strip, part of Mornington Peninsula National Park.

Foodies love the peninsula, where a winery lunch is a definite highlight. Several property agents manage private holiday rentals, including **Sandy Ridge Retreat** (☎ 5988 6641; www.srr.com.au).

MORNINGTON

pop 21,000

Originally part of the lands of the Booner-wurung people, pretty Mornington began life as a European township in 1854. The town thrived and by 1890 there were steamers and a daily train service from Melbourne (now sadly defunct). Many of Mornington's original buildings survive, and historic Schnapper Point Pier and the colourful Mills Beach bathing boxes make it a nice place to visit. Melbourne's relentless suburban sprawl has all but engulfed the little town, stopping (for now) just 10km away in Frankston.

There are several grand old buildings around Main St, including the 1892 **Grand Hotel**. The **Old Court House** on the corner of Main St and the Esplanade was built in 1860, and the **Police Lock-Up** behind it was built in 1862. On the adjacent corner is the 1863 **Old Post Office Museum** (☎ 5976 3203; cnr Main St & The Esplanade; 🕒 1.30pm-4.30 Sun & public holidays). On the other corner of this intersection is a **monument** to the 15 members of Mornington's football team who lost their lives in 1892 when their boat, *Process*, sank returning from a game against Mordialloc.

For views over the harbour, take a walk along the 1850s **pier** and around the Schnapper Point foreshore past the **Matthew Flinders monument** that commemorates his 1802 landing. **Mothers Beach** is the main swimming beach, while at **Fossil Beach** limestone was mined in the 1860s and there are remains of a lime-burning kiln. Fossils found here date back 25 million years! You can hire a boat with **Schnapper Point Boat Hire** (☎ 5975 5479; www.fishingmornington.com; Boatshed 7, Scout Beach).

The first three Sundays of each month the **Mornington Railway** (☎ 1300 767 274; www.morningtonrailway.org.au; Mornington train station; return adult/child/family \$12/6/34) runs steam locomotives between Mornington and Moorooduc.

Information

IT-Tech (☎ 5977 1116; 12 Mornington Village Shopping Centre) Internet access \$8 per hour.

Mornington Library (☎ 5950 1820; Vancouver St; 🕒 9am-2pm Mon & Sat, to 8pm Tue & Thu, to 6pm Wed & Fri) Free internet access.

Mornington visitors centre (☎ 5975 1644; www.visit morningtonpeninsula.org; 320 Main St; 🕒 9am-5pm) Has useful regional information and a Mornington walking-tour map.

Eating

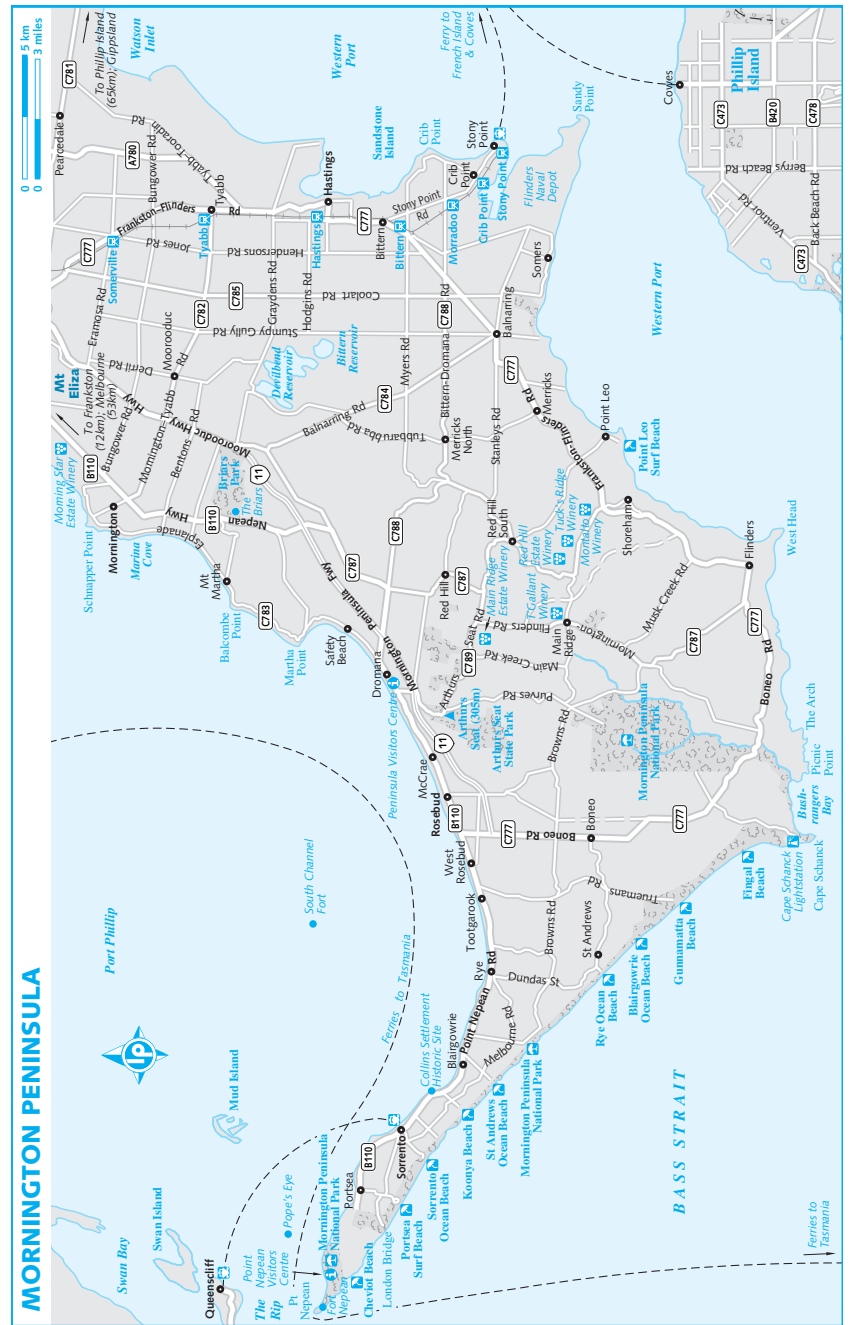
Kazu (☎ 5976 1323; 37d Main St; mains \$15-22; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) Tucked away behind some other shops, little Kazu is the real deal in Japanese cuisine. Wonderfully light tempura and lovely teriyaki dishes, but we balked at the eel...

Afghan Marco Polo (☎ 5975 5154; 9-11 Main St; mains \$17-21; 🕒 dinner) Marco Polo is an atmospheric place with Persian rugs and brass hookahs, and serves traditional Afghan cuisine. Kebabs, kormas, *boranis* – a Central Asian mash up!

Brass Razu (☎ 5975 0108; 13 Main St; tapas \$7-16; 🕒 noon-late Tue-Sun) This convivial bar serves drinks and tapas to trendy Morningtonians until the wee hours.

Sleeping

Morning Star Estate (☎ 9788 6611; www.morningstarestate.com.au; 1 Sunnyside Rd, Mt Eliza; d \$150-300; 🏠 🚗 🐾 📺) Morning Star is a huge 1867 Victorian mansion on 38 acres that operates as winery, restaurant and boutique hotel. Once owned by the Catholic Church, it was a home for delinquent boys. The many outbuildings, rose gardens and sweeping bay vistas make it a lovely place to wander around.



MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Royal Hotel (☎ 5975 9115; www.theroyal.com.au; 770 Esplanade; d \$90-145; ♿) The Royal is classified by the National Trust. It's fully renovated, offering authentic old-world accommodation in a range of rooms. Some have en suites and open onto brilliant sea-view balconies.

Apsley Cottage (☎ 9787 3166; www.apsleycottage.com; 19 King Georges Ave; d from \$150) Decorated in period style, this two-bedroom 1910 self-contained cottage has open fireplaces and a large garden. The larder comes provisioned with breakfast goodies.

MORNINGTON TO BLAIRGOWRIE

The Esplanade leaves Mornington and heads south, skirting the rocky Port Phillip Bay foreshore past the affluent seaside neighbourhood of **Mt Martha**. The Nepean Hwy takes a less scenic inland route and again becomes the Mornington Peninsula Freeway. The **Briars** (☎ 5974 3686; 450 Nepean Hwy, Mt Martha; adult/child \$5/4; ♿ 10am-4pm) is the 1840 homestead of one of the peninsula's first pastoral runs. Sitting on 96 hectares, it includes original farm buildings, parklands and a wildlife reserve. There are bird hides, koalas, echidnas and kangaroos. The homestead houses the Dame Mabel Brookes collection of Napoleon relics, which includes locks of the emperor's hair and his death mask. Her great-grandfather owned the lands on the island of St Helena where Napoleon was exiled by the British for the final six years of his life.

At Safety Beach the Esplanade becomes Marine Dr and goes *under* the entry to a huge new marina-residential **Martha Cove** (www.marthacove.com.au). The **Mornington Peninsula visitors centre** (☎ 1800 804 009, 5987 3078; www.visitmorningtonpeninsula.org; Nepean Hwy, Dromana; ♿ 9am-5pm) is a few kilometres further on.

From **Dromana** take the steep hair-pin Arthurs Seat Rd inland up to the lookout at **Arthurs Seat** (called Wonga by Boonerwrung people), which, at 314m, is the highest point on the Port Phillip Bay coast. Forlorn chairs of a chairlift – closed after a series of accidents – hang idly from their cable. There are coin-operated binoculars and the superbly located **Arthurs Hotel** (☎ 5981 4444; Arthurs Seat; mains \$16-28; ♿ breakfast, lunch & dinner). From here you can see Mt Macedon and the You Yangs on a clear day. Nearby is the **Enchanted Maze Garden** (☎ 5981 8449; www.enchantedmaze.com.au; 55 Purves Rd, Arthurs Seat; adult/child/family \$15/9/45; ♿ 10am-6pm), a fan-

tastic hedge maze and ornamental garden that makes the kids squeal with delight.

Back at Dromana there's a relic of the 1960s when there were more than 330 drive-in cinemas across Australia. The National Trust-listed **Dromana Drive-In** (☎ 5987 2492; www.drivein.net.au; 113 Nepean Hwy; adult/child/family \$14/7/40) is one of just a handful that remain. The eateries along this stretch of Point Nepean Rd towards Sorrento are all fairly generic, but exceptions include **Fed-Up Fish Café** (☎ 5986 4716; 1571 Point Nepean Rd, Rosebud; mains \$15-28; ♿ lunch Fri-Sun, dinner daily) and **Bamboo** (☎ 5989 7700; 2257 Nepean Hwy, Rye; mains \$19-31; ♿ breakfast, lunch & dinner).

Peninsula Hot Springs (☎ 5950 8777; www.peninsulahotsprings.com; Springs La, Rye; adult/child Tue-Thu \$24/15, Fri-Mon \$30/20) is a large, luxurious complex that utilises hot, mineral-rich waters pumped from deep underground. There's a huge menu of spa, private bathing and massage treatments available.

At **Blairgowrie**, further down the road, **Bayplay Lodge** (☎ 5988 0188; www.bayplay.com.au; 46 Canterbury Jetty Rd, Blairgowrie; dm/d/f \$35/75/95; ♿ ♿ ♿) is one of only two backpacker-style accommodation options on the peninsula (the other being Sorrento Backpackers Hostel YHA; p208), with communal lounge and kitchen areas, and a pool. Bayplay is a diving and sea-kayaking operator with headquarters in Portsea.

SORRENTO

pop 1500

Seaside Sorrento was the site of Victoria's first official European settlement. It was established by an expedition of convicts, marines, civil officers and free settlers that arrived from England in 1803. It was from the Sorrento penal settlement that William Buckley escaped (see p208). Sorrento is hugely popular in summer for its historic buildings and pleasant beaches. During low tide, the **rock pool** at the back beach is a safe spot for swimming.

Sorrento has the biggest range of accommodation, cafés and restaurants on the peninsula. Dolphin swims and cruises are incredibly popular, and a trip to Queenscliff on the ferry is a fun outing. The small **Sorrento visitors centre** (☎ 5984 5678; 2 St Aubins Way) is on the main drag.

There are some grand **19th-century buildings** built from locally quarried limestone around town, including the **Sorrento Hotel** (1871), **Conti-**

LUSH & THE LIQUID LUNCH

Victoria has more than 500 wineries, many of them a day trip from Melbourne. The state's southern region is particularly suited to producing cold-climate chardonnay and pinot varieties. Cellar doors aren't the bargains they once were, but boutique wineries often sell exclusively to restaurant sommeliers, so cellar-door sales can turn up some excellent, interesting and unusual wines, even if they're not bargains.

Many wineries have superb restaurants, and there are few experiences as pleasurable as a long lunch with great wine, bucolic surrounds and panoramic vistas (ease up if you're seeing double). Look out for *The Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide*, and James Halliday's *Wine Companion*, published each year.

Here are some of our favourite wineries around Melbourne (this list could've been *much* longer). Opening hours vary so call ahead:

TarraWarra Estate (☎ 5957 3510; www.tarrowarra.com.au; 311 Healesville-Yarra Glen Rd, Yarra Glen) Convivial bistro and art gallery come together in a striking building (see also p214).

Coldstream Hills (☎ 5964 9410; www.coldstreamhills.com.au; 31 Maddens Lane, Coldstream) The chardonnay, pinot noir and merlot are the star picks here.

Rochford (☎ 5962 2119; www.rochfordwines.com; cnr Maroondah Hwy & Hill Rd, Coldstream) Reason enough alone to head into the Yarra Valley.

Yering Station (☎ 9730 0100; www.yering.com; 38 Melba Hwy, Yering) A modern complex with a fine restaurant, gourmet provedore and bar, it's home to the heady shiraz-viognier blend. The Yarra Valley Farmers' Market is held here on the third Sunday of every month.

Pettavel Winery (☎ 5266 1120; www.pettavel.com; 65 Pettavel Rd, Waurn Ponds) The Geelong region's premier winery, with a fabulous restaurant.

Kilgour Estate (☎ 5251 2223; www.kilgourestate.com.au; 85 McAdams Lane, Bellarine) Outstanding Port Phillip Bay views and a restaurant that features famous Portarlington mussels. Known for its oaked chardonnay.

Montalto (☎ 5989 8412; www.montalto.com.au; 33 Shoreham Rd, Red Hill South) One of the Mornington Peninsula's best winery restaurants. Montalto pinot noir and chardonnay are terrific (see also p211).

T'Gallant (☎ 5989 6565; www.tgallant.com.au; 1385 Mornington-Flinders Rd, Main Ridge) Pioneered luscious pinot gris in Australia and produces the country's best. There's fine dining at La Baracca Trattoria.

Red Hill Estate (☎ 5931 0177; www.redhillestate.com.au; 53 Red Hill Rd, Red Hill South) Max's Restaurant at Red Hill Estate is one of the best restaurants on the Mornington Peninsula, while the winery's signature pinot is outstanding (see also p211).

Morning Star Estate (☎ 9788 6611; www.morningstarestate.com.au; 1 Sunnyside Rd, Mt Eliza) Best known for its chardonnay, pinot noir and merlot cabernet wines, this is a delightful place for a long lunch (see also p204).

mental Hotel (1875) and **Koonya** (1878). Interestingly, there was once a steam tram service (built in 1876) that ran until 1921 from Sorrento pier to the back beach.

There are plenty of **swimming** and **walking** opportunities along Sorrento's wide, sandy beaches and bluffs. At low tide, the **rock pool** at the back beach is a safe spot for adults and children to swim and **snorkel**. The 10-minute climb up to **Coppins Lookout** is worthwhile.

Apart from four **graves** that are believed to hold the remains of 30 original settlers, there's little evidence of Sorrento's original abandoned settlement. The **Collins Settlement Historic Site** (Leggett Way), midway between Sorrento and Blairgowrie, marks the settlement site at Sullivan Bay, and a display centre tells its story.

Several operators offer sightseeing and dolphin-swimming cruises that depart from Sorrento Pier, including the following:

Moonraker Charters (☎ 5984 4211; www.moonrakercharters.com.au; adult/child sightseeing \$44/33, dolphin swimming \$90/88)

Polperro Dolphin Swims (☎ 5988 8437; www.polperro.com.au; adult/child observers \$50/30, all swimmers \$110)

Eating

Acquolina Ristorante (☎ 5984 0811; 26 Ocean Beach Rd; mains \$20-30; ♿ lunch Sun, dinner Thu-Mon, closed Jun-Sep) Acquolina upped the ante when it opened in Sorrento with its authentic northern Italian fare. This is hearty simple food – handmade

BUCKLEY'S CHANCE

In October 1803 William Buckley (1780–1856), a strapping 6ft 7in bricklayer, was transported to Victoria's first settlement (now Sorrento) as a convict for receiving stolen goods.

Buckley and three others escaped in December, though one was shot dead during the escape. The remaining three set off around the bay, thinking they were heading to Sydney, but two turned back and died from lack of food and water.

Buckley wandered for weeks, surviving on shellfish and berries. He was on his last legs when two Wathaurong women found him, and Buckley spent the next 32 years living with the nomadic clan on the Bellarine Peninsula, learning their customs and language.

In 1835 Buckley surrendered to a party from a survey ship. He was almost unable to speak English, and the startled white settlers dubbed him the 'Wild White Man.' Buckley was subsequently pardoned, and acted as an interpreter and mediator between white settlers and the Wathaurong people. John Morgan's 1852 book *The Life & Adventures of William Buckley* provides an insight into Aboriginal life before white settlement.

The Australian colloquialism 'Buckley's chance' (or 'You've got Buckley's' – meaning a very slim or no chance) is said to be based on William Buckley's story, but there's dispute about this. Some claim the expression gained currency later in the late 1800s and derived from the name of the Melbourne department store Buckley's & Nunn ('You've got two chances – Buckley's and none'). 'Buckley's chance' first appeared in print in the *Bulletin* magazine in 1898, but the etymology of the phrase remains a mystery... and we've got Buckley's chance of ever knowing the truth.

pasta dishes matched with imported Italian wines. The owners winter in Italy.

Baths (☎ 5984 1500; 3278 Point Nepean Rd; mains \$17-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Formerly the sea baths, this place does excellent breakfast cook-ups served on its fantastic waterfront decking. Lunch and dinner get more sophisticated.

Continental Cafe (☎ 5984 2201; 1 Ocean Beach Rd; mains \$17-26; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Continental Hotel does gourmet fish and chips and stylish Mod Oz grub. Eat outside at weathered picnic tables overlooking the bay or in the funky and cosy café. Tuesday is pizza-and-pasta night, and Thursday is 300g steak night – both \$15 flat rate.

Stringer's (☎ 5984 2010; 2 Ocean Beach Rd; light meals \$4-8; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Stringer's is a Sorrento institution, with house-made meals and Mornington wines for sale in the attached grocery shop.

Sleeping

Carmel of Sorrento (☎ 5984 3512; www.carmelofsorrento.com.au; 142 Ocean Beach Rd; s \$160, d \$185-210, self-contained units from \$220; ☺) This lovely old limestone house in central Sorrento has been tastefully restored in period style. There are four Edwardian-style B&B guestrooms with bathrooms and two self-contained units.

Oceanic Whitehall Guesthouse (☎ 5984 4166; www.oceanicgroup.com.au; 231 Ocean Beach Rd; r \$125-220, apt \$170-220; ☺) The timber veranda of this limestone, two-storey guesthouse near the back beach has lovely views. The simple rooms have shared bathrooms but better ones have en suites.

Hotel Sorrento (☎ 5984 2206; www.hotelsorrento.com.au; 5-15 Hotham Rd; motel r \$195-280, apt \$220-320; ☺) The legendary Hotel Sorrento trades on its famous name and has a swag of accommodation. 'Sorrento on the Park' offers standard and overpriced motel rooms, but the lovely 'On the Hill' double and family apartments have airy living spaces, spacious bathrooms and private balconies.

Sorrento Backpackers Hostel YHA (☎ 5984 4323; www.yha.com.au; 3 Miranda St; dm/d \$35/90; ☺) This purpose-built hostel maintains high standards and the staff can organise horse riding, snorkelling and diving trips. To get here, take bus 788 to stop 18.

PORTSEA

pop 650

Portsea is where many of Melbourne's wealthiest families have built seaside mansions. Head to the **back beach** to see **London Bridge**, an impressive natural rock formation, and hang-gliders launching off the cliff face. This ocean beach has wild, dangerous surf – swim between the flags. The **front beaches** offer more sheltered swimming spots.

Bayplay (☎ 5988 0188; www.bayplay.com.au; 3755 Point Nepean Rd; ☺ 8.30am-5.30pm) offers aquatic activities (diving, snorkelling, swimming with dolphins, sea kayaking and surfing) and land pursuits like horse riding. Accommodation is available at Bayplay Lodge in Blairgowrie (p206).

Dive Victoria (☎ 5984 3155; www.divevictoria.com.au; 3752 Point Nepean Rd; snorkelling with gear \$65, 1/2 dives without gear \$50/100) runs diving and snorkelling trips and hires out equipment.

HAROLD HOLT

On a hot day in December 1967, Harold Holt (1908–67) disappeared in wild surf off Cheviot Beach, aged 59, while serving as Australia's prime minister. Despite a three-week air and land search – the biggest in Australia's history – his body was never recovered. This, and the fact that it was the height of the Cold War, led to a raft of conspiracy theories.

It was suggested that the CIA had Holt murdered because he wanted to withdraw Australian troops from Vietnam. It was also alleged that the Rockefeller family/Mobil Oil company/CIA had him bumped off because, with the covert activities of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) at Lucas Heights in Sydney, Australia was secretly emerging as a major nuclear energy supplier. Some said that Holt suicided because he was depressed and there was a leadership challenge emerging within the Liberal Party. The most colourful theory was that Holt was a Chinese spy, and that he climbed aboard a Chinese submarine waiting off Cheviot Beach and died in the mid-1980s after living out his days with a lover in France.

The lack of a body meant that an inquest was never held, but in 1985 the Victorian Coroner's Act was amended so that 'suspected deaths' had to be investigated. The inevitable 2005 coroner's inquest found he died by accidental drowning. But we reckon he was taken by a UFO...

The iconic, faux-Tudor **Portsea Hotel** (☎ 5984 2213; www.portseahotel.com.au; 3746 Point Nepean Rd; s \$65-250, d \$110-250, mains \$17-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is most of what there is to Portsea township. The Mod Oz menu in the restaurant is very good, and clean rooms provide comfortable accommodation.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA NATIONAL PARK

The peninsula's tip is marked by the stunning **Point Nepean** section of the **Mornington Peninsula National Park** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Point Nepean Rd, Portsea; ☺ 9am-5pm, to dusk Jan), originally a quarantine station and army base and off-limits to the public. **Quarantine** is a legendary surf break at the Rip, and is still only accessible by boat.

Point Nepean

Point Nepean visitors centre (☎ 5984 4276; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Point Nepean; pedestrian or bicycle admission adult/child/family \$7/4/20, incl return transport \$16/10/42, bike hire per 3hr \$17; ☺ 9am-6pm Jan, to 5pm Feb-Apr & Oct-Dec, 10am-5pm May-Sep) has stacks of information. You can walk or cycle to the point (12km return), or take the Point Explorer, a hop-on, hop-off bus service. There are **walking trails** throughout the park.

Observatory Point is a sheltered picnic spot with wheelchair access from Gunners car park – en route, take a look at the **graves** of Victoria's first settlers and shipwreck victims.

Cheviot Beach is where prime minister Harold Holt drowned in 1967 (see boxed text, above). On the end of the point is **Fort Nepean**, which played an important role in Australian defence from the 1880s to 1945. On the parade

ground are two historic **gun barrels** that fired the first Allied shots in WWI and WWII.

This is also home to the annual **Point Nepean Music Festival** (☎ 1300 788 161; www.pointnepeanmusic.com; 2-day ticket adult/child \$195/20) held over the Easter weekend.

Ocean Beaches

The southwestern coastline of the peninsula faces Bass Strait. Along here are the beautiful and rugged beaches of **Portsea, Sorrento, Blairgowrie, Rye, St Andrews, Gunnamatta** and **Cape Schanck**. This is spectacular coastal scenery, most familiar to the birdlife, surfers and fisherfolk who all have their secret spots. There are also lovely tidal rock pools where kids like to poke at sea anemones and crab holes. Swimming and surfing is dangerous at these beaches: the undertow and rips can be severe, and drownings continue to occur. Swim only between the flags at Gunnamatta and Portsea during summer.

Parks Victoria staff collect a \$4.30 car park fee along this stretch during summer, but the one ticket allows you to come and go and enter any of the beach car parks. One exception is postcard-perfect **Koonya Beach** at the end of Hughes Rd, where there's no fee. Here there are march flies as big as budgerigars – lather up with repellent!

Occasionally these ocean beaches are used by **surf schools** (but mostly they operate at Point Leo in Westernport Bay). If you want to learn to surf contact **East Coast Surf School** (☎ 0417-526465; www.eastcoastsurfschool.net.au) or **Mornington Peninsula Surf School** (☎ 0417-338079; www.greenroomsurf.com.au).

You can ride along wild Gunnamatta beach with **Gunnamatta Trail Rides** (☎ 5988 6755; www.gunnamatta.com.au; cnr Trueman's & Sandy Rds, Rye; 1/2-hour rides \$39/77).

TRANSPORT: MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Distance from Melbourne Mornington 65km, Flinders 109km, Sorrento 112km

Direction Southeast

Travel time Mornington one hour, Flinders 1½ hours, Sorrento two hours

Bus From Frankston train station (on Melbourne's suburban network), Portsea Passenger Service (☎ 5986 5666; www.grenda.com.au) bus 788 runs to Portsea (\$5, 1½ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday) via Mornington, Dromana and Sorrento.

Peninsula Bus Lines (☎ 9786 7088; www.grenda.com.au) buses 782 and 783 run from Frankston train station to Flinders (\$5.50, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Friday, two-hourly Saturday and Sunday) via Hastings.

Car Moorooduc Hwy and Point Nepean Rd both siphon into the Mornington Peninsula Fwy, the main peninsula access. Alternately, exit the freeway at Mornington and take the coast road around Port Phillip Bay. Access to the back beaches between Rye and Flinders is via a tangle of roads best approached with a map.

Ferry Inter Island Ferries (☎ 9585 5730; www.interislandferries.com.au; return adult/child/bike \$20/10/8; ☎ every 30min 8.30am–5pm daily, plus 7pm Friday) runs between Stony Point and Cowes via French Island.

Queenscliff–Sorrento Car & Passenger Ferries (☎ 5258 3244; www.searoad.com.au; one-way foot passenger adult/child \$9/7, 2 adults & car standard/peak \$58/64; ☎ hourly) runs between Sorrento and Queenscliff.

Cape Schanck

Built in 1859, **Cape Schanck Lightstation** (☎ 5988 6184, 0500-527 891; museum only adult/child/family \$10/8/30, museum & lighthouse \$14/11/38, parking \$4; ☎ 10.30am–4pm) is an operational lighthouse, with a kiosk, museum and visitors centre. You can stay at **Cape Schanck B&B** (☎ 5988 6184; www.austpacinns.com.au; d \$165) in the limestone Keeper's Cottage.

From the lightstation, descend the steps of the **boardwalk** that lead to the craggy cape for outstanding views. Longer **walks** include tracks to **Bushrangers Bay**, which can be approached from Cape Schanck or the Bushrangers Bay car park on Boneo Rd – about 40 minutes each way. Wild **Fingal Beach** is a one-hour return walk, 2km north of the cape.

FLINDERS

pop 750

Where development has irreparably changed many small coastal communities, little Flinders, where the thrashing ocean beaches give way to Westernport Bay, has been largely spared. It's a delightful little town, originally known as Black Head, and is home to a busy fishing fleet. Surfers have been coming to Flinders for decades, drawn by oceanside breaks like Gunnery, Big Left and Cyril's, and golfers know the clifftop Flinders course as the most scenic and wind-blown in Victoria. Hang-gliders launch off the oceanside cliffs.

European settlement started here around 1850, and Chinese prospectors on their way to the Western District goldfields landed at Flinders to avoid the £10 immigration tax that Melbourne and Geelong ports exacted. The Navy still maintains the West Head Gunnery Range and lets a few big'uns off into Bass Strait now and then – BOOM!

Flinders Bakehouse Café (☎ 5989 0091; 60 Cook St; mains \$6–18; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed) This is the original home of Flinders Bread (now owned by a conglomerate and made in Dandenong!), but the folks who operate this licensed bakery-café-food store still bake great bread in a wood oven, and serve up pasta, pies and fresh sandwiches.

Flinders Hotel (☎ 5989 0201; www.flindershotel.com.au; cnr Cook & Wood Sts; d \$110–130; mains \$17–28; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) The historic Flinders Hotel has been a beacon on this sleepy street corner longer than anyone can remember. Out back is a modern accommodation wing with recently refurbished en suite units that are comfortable with tasteful décor. The real joy is in the award-winning pub dining room where pub grub goes gastronomic – nothing too fussy, just staple dishes done really well.

Flinders Caravan Park (☎ 5989 0458; www.flinderscaravanpark.com.au; 1-7 The Avenue; powered sites \$40, d cabins \$95–135) Just a short walk to the bay beach, this is a shady park with good amenities. Ask proprietor Judy about midweek discounts and deals for longer stays.

Papillon B&B (☎ 5989 1071; www.papillonbb.com.au; 21 King St; d \$150–180; ☎) This purpose-built mud-brick place has two self-contained units in a delightful 1-acre garden. The units are large and comfortable, and 'homely' in their decorative style.

RED HILL

pop 480

Red Hill is the centre of the Mornington Peninsula's viticulture and wine-making industries, and is famed for its pinot noir. It's a lovely region of trees and tumbling hills. Online, check out the Mornington Peninsula Vignerons website: www.mpva.com.au.

The popular **Red Hill Market** (www.craftmarkets.com.au/redhill.asp; ☎ 8am–1pm) is held the first Saturday of each month.

Among the stand-out wineries here are **Montalto** (☎ 5989 8412; www.montalto.com.au; 33 Shoreham Rd; ☎ 11am–5pm) and **Tuck's Ridge** (☎ 5989 8660; www.tucksridge.com.au; 37 Shoreham Rd; ☎ 11am–5pm), both of which produce top-shelf wines and have excellent restaurants.

The **Red Hill Brewery** (☎ 5989 2959; www.redhillbrewery.com.au; 88 Shoreham Rd; ☎ 11am–5pm Thu–Sun), one of the state's best microbreweries, is a great spot for a German/Belgian-inspired lunch.

La Pétanque (☎ 5931 0155; 1208 Mornington–Flinders Rd; set menu \$65; ☎ lunch Wed–Sun, dinner Fri–Sat) and **Max's Restaurant** (☎ 5989 2204; 53 Shoreham Rd; set menu from \$70; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) are two of the best restaurants in the region. If all this booziness is too much, pick your own strawberries at **Sunny Ridge Strawberry Farm** (☎ 5989 4500; www.sunnyridge.com.au; cnr Shands & Mornington–Flinders Rds; ☎ 9am–5pm).

THE DANDENONGS

The verdant Dandenong Ranges, just 35km from Melbourne, make a lovely day trip. You can see the ranges from Melbourne on a clear day. Hardly the Himalayas, **Mt Dandenong** (633m) is the tallest peak, but the hills do occasionally get a winter sprinkling of snow. The area was intensively logged and most of the majestic mountain ash had been cleared by the end of the 19th century. European settlers planted deciduous oaks, elms and poplars, and now the landscape is a patchwork of exotic and native flora with a lush understorey of tree ferns.

The consumption of tea and scones with lashings of jam and cream is *de rigueur* in the hills, or you can stop for lunch in lovely towns like **Olinda**, **Sassafras** and **Emerald**.

Perennially popular **Puffing Billy** (☎ 9754 6800; www.puffingbilly.com.au; Old Monbulk Rd, Belgrave; Belgrave–Gembrook return adult/child/family \$49/25/99) is a restored steam train that toots its way through the Dandenongs' picturesque hills. Kids dangle their feet out the windows and passengers pick flakes of coal dust out of their hair when they alight. There are six departures on holidays, three or four on other days, so you can hop-on/hop-off and enjoy a picnic or walk. Puffing Billy train station is a short walk from Belgrave train station on Melbourne's suburban network.

Emerald Lake Park (☎ 1300 131 683; www.emeraldlakepark.com.au; Emerald Lake Rd, Emerald; admission free, full-day parking \$6) has picnic areas, a waterslide and swimming pool, paddle boats and **Emerald Lake Model Railway** (☎ 5968 3455; adult/child/family \$5.50/3.50/14.50; ☎ 11am–4pm Tue–Sun). It's the largest HO scale model (1:87) railway in the southern hemisphere, with over 2km of tracks, miniature hills, tunnels, towns and little people.

Dandenong Ranges National Park (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) is made up of the four largest areas of remaining forest in the Dandenongs. The **Ferntree Gully Area** has several short walks, including the popular **1000 Steps Track** up to One Tree Hill picnic ground (two hours return), part of the **Kokoda Memorial Track**, which commemorates Australian WWII servicemen who served in New Guinea.

William Ricketts Sanctuary (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Mt Dandenong; adult/child/family \$7/3/17; ☎ 10am–4.30pm) features Ricketts'

TRANSPORT: THE DANDENONGS

Distance from Melbourne Upper Ferntree Gully 37km, Olinda 45km, Belgrave 42km

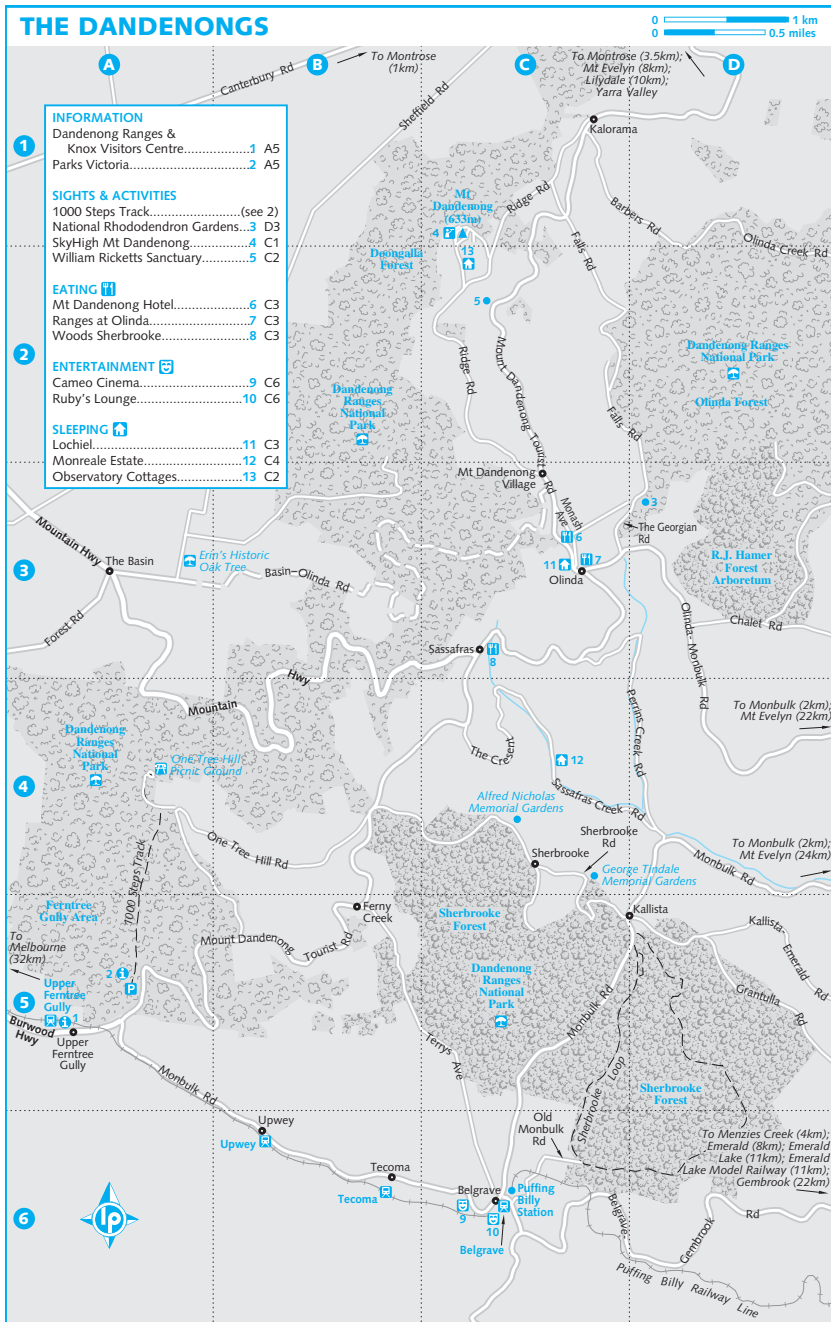
Direction East

Travel time Upper Ferntree Gully 45 minutes, Olinda one hour, Belgrave one hour

Bus Companies operating services within the Dandenong Ranges include Martyrs (☎ 5966 2035; www.martyrs.com.au) and US Bus Lines (☎ 9752 1444; www.usbus.com.au).

Car The Dandenong Ranges are easily accessed from Melbourne via the Burwood Hwy B26 or down the South Eastern Fwy M1 and exiting at Ferntree Gully Rd B22.

Train Melbourne's Metlink (☎ 13 16 38; www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au) suburban trains run to Belgrave train station.



sculptures of Aboriginal people, inspired by years spent living among them. We find his renderings, however well intentioned, rather twee, paternalistic and unsettling – Aborigines as angelic bush fairies rather than real people. The sanctuary is set in damp fern gardens with trickling waterfalls.

Giant eucalypts tower over shady lawns and brilliant flowerbeds at the **National Rhododendron Gardens** (☎ 9751 1980; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Georgian Rd, Olinda; adult/child/family \$8.50/3/19.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) that feature over 15,000 rhododendrons and 12,000 azaleas.

It's worth driving up to **SkyHigh Mt Dandenong** (☎ 9751 0443; www.skyhighmtdandenong.com.au; Observatory Rd, Mt Dandenong; vehicle entry \$4; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-10.30pm Fri-Sun) for amazing views over Melbourne from the highest point in the Dandenongs. There's a café-restaurant, garden and picnic areas, and a maze (adult/child/family \$6/4/16) here too.

INFORMATION

Dandenong Ranges & Knox visitors centre (☎ 9758 7522; www.dandenongrangelstourism.com.au; 1211 Burwood Hwy, Upper Ferntree Gully; ☎ 9am-5pm) Outside the Upper Ferntree Gully train station.

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground, Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

EATING & ENTERTAINMENT

Ranges at Olinda (☎ 9751 2133; 5 Olinda-Monbulk Rd, Olinda; lunch \$12-20, dinner \$22-29; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) This stylish place features Mod Oz food. Breakfasts (available until noon) are hearty and excellent. Pasta and risotto dishes, and pita wraps filled with tandoori chicken or Mexican beef, are among the lunchtime offerings. You can eat alfresco on the deck overlooking the nursery.

Mt Dandenong Hotel (☎ 9751 1202; 1451 Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Olinda; mains \$18-26; ☎ lunch & dinner) Award-winning chef Jake Ward dishes up great gourmet pub food in a relaxed and convivial setting. There's live music on weekends, trivia on Thursday and a \$12 'Parma Night' on Wednesday.

Woods Sherbrooke (☎ 9755 2131; 21 Sherbrooke Rd, Sherbrooke; mains \$18-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Thu-Sat) Hidden in the hills, this is another great café by day, serious mod-Asian restaurant by night. You can dine outdoors in a pleasant garden.

Ruby's Lounge (☎ 9754 7445; www.rubyslounge.com.au; 1648 Burwood Hwy, Belgrave; ☎ Tue-Sun) Head to Ruby's for a night out in the Dandenongs. Ruby's is a café-restaurant by day, and at night it morphs into a funky 330-capacity music venue with live gigs Thursday to Sunday.

Cameo Cinema (☎ 9754 7844; www.cameocinemas.com.au; 1628 Burwood Hwy, Belgrave; tickets adult/child \$15/11) The Cameo is a beautifully restored cinema that has kept its old-fashioned grace. See art-house, new-release and golden oldie flicks on one of its six screens. It also screens films outdoors in its garden.

SLEEPING

Observatory Cottages (☎ 9751 2436; www.observatorycottages.com.au; 10 Observatory Rd, Mt Dandenong; r \$220-300; ☎ ☎) Near the peak of Mt Dandenong, these sumptuous cottages are beautifully decorated in heritage style and furnished with antiques. The grounds are lovely, with formal hedges and flowers.

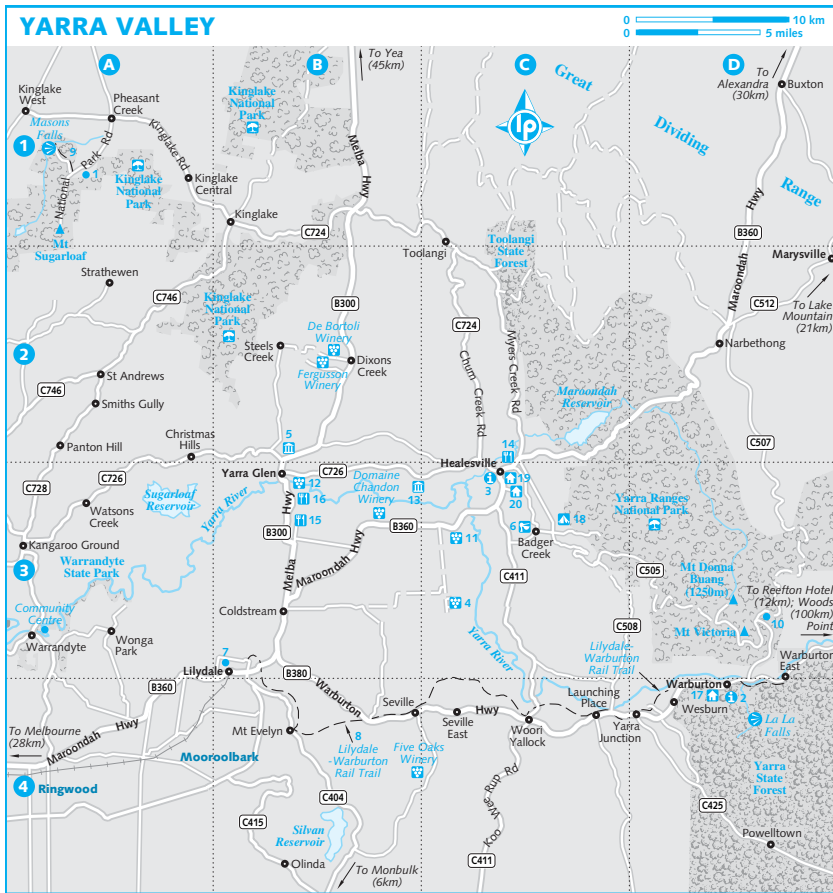
Monreale Estate (☎ 9755 1773; www.monreale-estate.com.au; 81 The Crescent, Sassafras; cottages \$200-380; ☎ ☎) This beautifully restored 1920s country house has four luxurious cottages in its grounds. The fireside spa is an inspired innovation.

Lochiel (☎ 9751 2300; www.lochielaccommodation.com; 1590 Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Olinda, d \$250-350; ☎ ☎) Nothing quaint or old-world about this place – modern design and décor with every luxury taken care of. Choose one of the three-level cottages or stay in the superb Lochiel house: open fires, timber floors, modern kitchens, tree-top decks, huge plasma TVs and spas, all in a rainforest setting.

YARRA VALLEY

An hour from Melbourne, the Yarra Valley is brimming with boutique vineyards. Ballooning is popular here, and there are cycling and walking trails. While the Yarra Valley is a popular day trip from Melbourne, the region boasts some fantastic B&Bs and cottages, and there's more to do than you can manage in a day. **Healesville** is the ever-popular wildlife sanctuary, and is a good base for exploring the Lower Yarra Valley region. **Warburton** is the centre of the Upper Yarra Valley.

One of Australia's best places to see native fauna is **Healesville Sanctuary** (☎ 5957 2800; www.zoo.org.au; Badger Creek Rd, Healesville; adult/child/family \$23/11.50/52.50; ☎ 9am-5pm), a wildlife park that's a huge hit with international visitors who come



to see kangaroos, dingoes, lyrebirds, Tasmanian devils, bats, koalas, eagles, snakes and lizards. The Platypus House displays these shy underwater creatures that you'll never see in the wild, and the exciting Birds of Prey presentation (noon and 2pm daily) features huge wedge-tailed eagles and owls soaring through the air.

The superb **TarraWarra Museum of Art** (☎ 5957 3100; www.twma.com.au; 311 Healesville-Yarra Glen Rd, Healesville; admission \$5; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a permanent collection of modern Australian art dating from the 1950s. Contemporary exhibitions change regularly.

Just north of Yarra Glen is **Gulf Station** (☎ 9730 1286; www.gulfstation.com.au; 1029 Melba Hwy; adult/child \$10/free; 🕒 10am-4pm Wed-Sun), a National Trust-classified farm dating back to the 1850s, with

an old slab-timber farmhouse, barns, stables and a slaughterhouse.

Kinglake National Park (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) is the largest national park near Melbourne, a huge eucalypt forest on the slopes of the Great Dividing Range. In the centre of the park is **Kinglake**, a small township with a pub and a few shops (but no lake!). **Toolangi**, 18km east, was the home of CJ Dennis, who wrote the *Sentimental Bloke*. Near the **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5786 5351; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; National Park Rd, Pheasant Creek; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, later Dec-Feb) office is the popular **Masons Falls Track**, an easy 15-minute walk to a waterfall.

Following a 1901 railway line, the 38km **Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail** (☎ 1300 368 333; www.railtrails.org.au) is a lovely cycling trail. The whole route takes about three hours one way, but it's

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relatively flat and can be done in sections. The trail starts about 1km from the Lilydale train station. You can hire bikes next door from **Lilydale Cycles** (☎ 9735 5077; 6-8 William St E).

Towering above Warburton is the ruggedly beautiful **Yarra Ranges National Park** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au). **Mt Donna Buang** (1250m) is the highlight of the park, snow-topped in winter. Toboggans can be rented at the toboggan run. Before the summit, the **Rainforest Gallery** (☎ 5966 5996; admission free; Acheron Way), also known as the Mt Donna Buang Skywalk, is a fantastic tree-top walk along a 40m observation platform through the rainforest canopy. Check at visitors centres for brochures on other walks in the region's national and state parks, including **Warrandyte State Park**.

Ballooning over the Yarra Valley is a peaceful way to view the hills and vineyards. Flights with the following operators average about \$290 (some offer cheaper midweek rates):

Balloon Sunrise (☎ 1800 992 105; www.hotairballooning.com.au)

Global Ballooning (☎ 9428 5703; www.globalballooning.com.au)

Go Wild Ballooning (☎ 9739 0772; www.gowildballooning.com.au)

INFORMATION

Warburton Water Wheel visitors centre (☎ 5966 9600; www.yarrawalleytourism.asn.au; 3400 Warburton Hwy,

Warburton; 🕒 11am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Information on the Upper Yarra Valley.

Yarra Valley visitors centres (☎ 5962 2600; www.yarrawalleytourism.asn.au; Harker St, Healesville; 🕒 9am to 5pm) The main info centre for the Lower Yarra Valley.

Yarra Valley Wine (www.yarrawalleywine.com) The latest on the local wine scene.

TOURS

Adventure Canoeing (☎ 9844 3323; www.adventurecanoeing.com.au; self-guided tour 2hr/full-day per person \$45/60, guided tour \$120) Hires out canoes and runs Yarra River tours around Warrandyte State Park.

Eco Adventure Tours (☎ 5962 5115; www.ecoadventuretours.com.au) Offers nocturnal wildlife-spotting walks in the Healesville and Marysville area.

Yarra Valley Winery Tours (☎ 5962 3870; www.yarrawalleywinerytours.com.au; tours from \$85)

EATING & SLEEPING

Bodhi Tree Café (☎ 5962 4407; 317 Maroondah Hwy, Healesville; mains \$9-16; 🕒 dinner Wed-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) Friendly eco vibes and chillin' karma flow from the earth-conscious hippies milling about the salvaged-wood furniture and pot-belly stove here. There are vego options aplenty, a kiddie-friendly menu, shifting art exhibitions and mellow live music on Friday and Saturday.

Yarra Valley Dairy (☎ 9739 0023; www.yvd.com.au; McMeikans Rd, Yering; mains/degustation platters from \$18/20; 🕒 lunch) These renowned cheesemakers sell cheese, produce and wine from their picturesque farm gate. Eat cheese platters in the dairy's refurbished milking shed, while feasting on the valley views.

Reefton Hotel (☎ 5966 8555; 1600 Woods Point Rd, McMahons Creek; meals \$7-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A bona fide slice of colonial Australiana, the Reefton is authentic. Eat your fish and chips or burger out back near the kiln or in the fancier restaurant. The beautiful winding drive to get out here is popular with motorcyclists who discuss conrods on the veranda. Follow Warburton's Main Rd east.

Badger Creek Holiday Park (☎ 5962 4328; www.badgercreekholidays.com.au; 419 Don Rd, Badger Creek; powered sites \$35, d cabins \$80-160; 🚰 🚿 🏠) This riverside park has an adventure playground, games rooms, camp kitchen, pool and tennis courts. The many accommodation options include a house that sleeps 10.

TRANSPORT: YARRA VALLEY

Distance from Melbourne Healesville 65km, Warburton 113km

Direction Northeast

Travel time Healesville one hour, Warburton 1½ hours

Bus McKenzie's Bus Lines (☎ 5962 5088; www.mckenzie.com.au) runs from Lilydale train station to Healesville (\$2.70, 1½ hours) and Yarra Glen (\$2.70, 30 minutes) at least hourly from 6am to 9pm.

Martyrs (☎ 5966 2035; www.martyrs.com.au) buses run from Lilydale train station to Yarra Junction (\$2.70, 35 minutes) and Warburton (\$2.70, 50 minutes) at least hourly between 6am and 9pm.

Car Maroondah Hwy (B360) runs east from Melbourne to Lilydale, continuing northeast through Coldstream and Healesville. The Warburton Hwy (B380) runs east from Lilydale to Warburton. The Melba Hwy (B300) branches off the Maroondah Hwy at Coldstream running north to Yarra Glen and Kinglake.

Train Melbourne's Metlink (☎ 13 16 38; www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au) suburban trains run to Lilydale train station.

Healesville Hotel (☎ 5962 4002; www.healesvillehotel.com.au; 256 Maroondah Hwy, Healesville; d Sun–Thu \$100, Fri \$130, Sat incl dinner \$315) An iconic Healesville landmark, this restored 1910 hotel offers classic upstairs pub rooms with TV and shared bathrooms. The Saturday night accommodation-and-dinner package books out months in advance. Downstairs there's a café (mains \$8 to \$16) and a formal dining room (mains \$29 to \$39) that's one of the area's culinary showstoppers.

Tuck Inn (☎ 5962 3600; www.tuckinn.com.au; 2 Church St, Healesville; d incl breakfast \$145–175) This former Masonic Lodge has been refitted in contemporary style – a beautiful and stylish guesthouse with friendly hosts. Five immaculate en suite rooms – three queen and two king – have plush mattresses with quality linen and luxury woollen quilts.

Alpine Retreat Hotel (☎ 5966 2411; www.alpineretreat.com.au; 12 Main St, Warburton; budget s/d from \$60/85, standard s/d/f \$105/145/165) The sprawling, 33-room, faux-Tudor Alpine Retreat has budget, upmarket and family rooms with and without en suites, views, TVs and ghosts in the cupboards. There's good eating here (mains \$16 to \$30, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner) in wonderful Art Deco surrounds.

GEELONG

pop 161,000

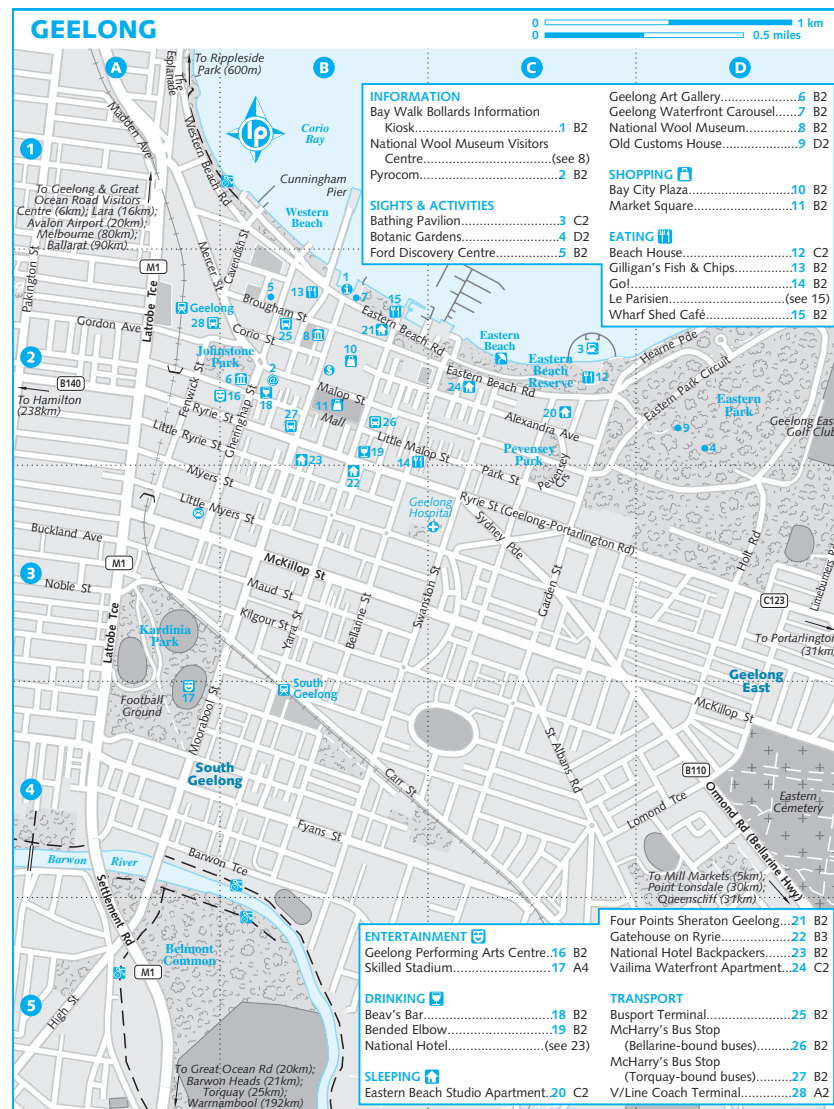
Geelong has long been regarded as Melbourne's ugly little sister. Melburnians tend to laugh derisively when you mention the place, but ask them when they last visited and it'll be years ago. Perhaps because of this, people from Geelong are fiercely parochial – their Geelong Cats football team won the 2007 AFL Grand Final (after a 44-year drought), and the city,

home to the Ford Motor Company, has long been a lynchpin of Victorian manufacturing.

The Wathaurong people – the original inhabitants of Geelong – called the area Jillong. Today's Geelong has had a stunning waterfront makeover, replete with beaches, restaurants and bars, on the shores of **Corio Bay**. Add to that the thriving student scene and a recent population boom, and you'll find an edgy and bohemian enclave at Geelong's heart. The city continues to suffer a weird, architectural identity crisis, with superb historic buildings and even Bauhaus-style industrial buildings sitting next to tragic '70s-era prefab-slab shopping malls. But those historic buildings are superb indeed, and there are many likeable aspects to this town. Most people blow through Geelong along the Princess Hwy, past railyards, factories and fast-food chains, and from there it does look unremarkable. But get off the highway and into Geelong's historic heart and brilliant waterfront and be prepared for a surprise!

Wander Geelong's glittering, revamped **waterfront**, where you can swim, picnic at a foreshore reserve or just gaze at yachts bobbing on Corio Bay. Walking trails extend from **Rippleside Park** (Bell Pde) – which has a playground, rock pool, jetty, BBQs and picnic tables – right up the hill to Limeburners Point.

Pick up a *Bay-Walk Bollards* brochure from the information kiosk at **Cunningham Pier** so you can more formally acquaint yourself with Jan Mitchell's 104 famous **painted bollards** that give the waterfront its unique character. For a different perspective on town, cruise the bay with **Freedom Bay Cruises** (☎ 0418-522 328; cruises adult/child \$12/6) or spend five minutes aloft on a 'fun fly' with **Geelong Helicopters** (☎ 0422-515 151; www



.geelonghelicopters.com.au; flights adult/child \$45/35). Both operate on-demand from the waterfront.

Those with kids can ride the ornate hand-carved **Geelong Waterfront Carousel** (☎ 5224 1547; adult/child \$3.50/3; ☎ 10.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 8pm Sat, to 6pm Sun), a refurbished 1898 steam-driven carousel built in New York.

At **Eastern Beach**, stop for a splash about at the Art Deco **bathing pavilion**, opposite the promenade.

The 1851 **Botanic Gardens** (in Eastern Park) are a peaceful place for a stroll or picnic. **Old Customs House**, also in Eastern Park, is Victoria's oldest timber building, built in Sydney in 1838 and transported here in sections. **Eastern Park** surrounds the gardens and is Geelong's largest foreshore reserve, with many trees planted as early as 1859.

Geelong Art Gallery (☎ 5229 3645; www.geelonggallery.org.au; Little Malop St; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri,

TRANSPORT: GEELONG

Distance from Melbourne 74km

Direction South

Travel time One hour

Air For Jetstar (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) services to/from Avalon Airport, see p344.

Bus Avalon Airport Shuttle (☎ 5278 8788; www.avalonairportshuttle.com.au) meets all flights at Avalon Airport and goes to Geelong (\$18, 35 minutes) and along the Great Ocean Road to Lorne (\$70, 1¼ hours).

Gull Airport Service (☎ 5222 4966; www.gull.com.au; 45 McKillop St) has 14 services a day between Geelong and Melbourne Airport (\$25, 1¼ hours).

McHarry's Buses (☎ 5223 2111; www.mcharrys.com.au) runs frequent buses to Torquay and the Bellarine Peninsula.

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) buses run from Geelong to Apollo Bay (\$13, 2½ hours, two to four daily) via Torquay (\$2.50, 30 minutes) and Lorne (\$8.50, 1½ hours). On Monday, Wednesday and Friday a bus continues to Port Campbell (\$13, four hours) and Warrnambool (\$19.40, 5¼ hours). V/Line also runs to Ballarat (\$7.50, 1½ hours, three or four daily).

Car Princes Hwy (M1) is the main entry and exit point. For Geelong's waterfront, take Bell Pde and follow the Esplanade along the bay.

Taxi Geelong Radio Cabs (☎ 1800 636 088, 13 10 08).

Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs from Geelong train station (☎ 5226 6525; Gordon Ave) to Melbourne's Southern Cross station (\$9, one hour, frequently). Trains also continue to Warrnambool (\$18, 2½ hours, three daily).

1-5pm Sat & Sun) houses over 4000 works in one of the city's most impressive buildings. The Australian collection is strong and includes Frederick McCubbin's 1890 *A Bush Burial*, the gallery's most celebrated painting.

The **National Wool Museum** (☎ 5227 0701; www.nwm.vic.gov.au; 26 Moorabool St; adult/child/family \$7.50/4/20; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), in a lovely 1872 blue-stone building, showcases the history, politics and heritage of wool growing. There's a sock-making machine and a massive 1910 Axminster carpet loom that still works.

The **Ford Discovery Centre** (☎ 5227 8700; www.forddiscovery.com.au; cnr Gheringhap & Brougham Sts; adult/child/family \$7/3/18; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) takes a then-and-now look at Ford (still Geelong's biggest employer). See the 'Cars of the Future' display and the Bathurst-winning Falcons, as well as heritage exhibits. You can buy combined Wool Museum/Ford Discovery Centre tickets for \$11.50/5.50/30 per adult/child/family.

INFORMATION

Geelong & Great Ocean Road visitors centre (☎ 5275 5797; www.greatoceanroad.org; Stead Park, Princes Hwy, Corio; ☎ 9am-5pm) A huge and well-resourced tourist

office by the highway in Geelong, 72km from Melbourne, sharing a prominent roadside spot with McDonalds and KFC.

National Wool Museum visitors centre (☎ 5222 2900; www.nwm.vic.gov.au; 26 Moorabool St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm)

Pyrocom (☎ 5229 0288; 28 Malop St; ☎ 10.30am-10pm Mon-Sat) Internet access \$4 per hour.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Skandia Geelong Week (☎ 5229 1418; www.geelongweek.com.au; 22-27 Jan) Held on the Eastern Beach foreshore, Skandia is Australia's largest keel-boat regatta and is a sister event to Skandia Cowes Week in the UK. Around 400 yachts compete, and there's a heap of entertainment.

SHOPPING

The **Little Malop St** precinct has the boutique speciality shops and designer clothing, or try the following big-scale shopping extravaganzas:

Bay City Plaza (☎ 5224 2384; http://westfield.com/geelong; Malop St)

Market Square (☎ 5221 2411; www.marketsquaregeelong.com.au; cnr Malop & Moorabool Sts)

Mill Markets (☎ 5248 2390; http://themillmarkets.com.au; 114 Bellarine Hwy, Newcomb; ☎ 10am-6pm) For collectibles and curios.

EATING

Gilligan's Fish & Chips (☎ 5222 3200; 100 Western Beach Rd; mains \$10-17; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sun) Gilligan's has been frying chips and flippin' flake for eons. It's a colourful, licensed place with jaunty sea creatures painted on the walls and a slightly deranged shark out front.

Go! (☎ 5229 4752; 37 Bellarine St; mains from \$8; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Mon-Fri) Go! is a fun café that serves great food in a riot of colour and amusement, though you may need an interpreter to make sense of the humorous menu.

Wharf Shed Café (☎ 5221 6645; 15 Eastern Beach Rd; pizzas \$13-17, mains \$12-22; ☎ lunch Mon-Sun, breakfast Sat & Sun) Below Le Parisien, this spacious waterfront café serves good Mod Oz meals like chicken souvlaki, gourmet pizzas, beef burgers and filo parcels. But really, it's all about the view. Sit outside and they'll hold onto your credit card lest you do a runner!

Le Parisien (☎ 5229 3110; 15 Eastern Beach Rd; mains \$30-45; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Thu-Mon) You can feast on classic French cuisine à l'*Australienne* (try the kangaroo fillet with bush-tomato chutney) right on the water. All the favourites on the meat-heavy menu are done extremely well.

Beach House (☎ 5221 8322; Eastern Beach Reserve; mains \$28-35; ☎ dinner Wed-Sat) In a town blessed with fantastic waterfront restaurants, this might be the best. The modern international menu includes a seafood paella, eye fillet and chargrilled pork over braised cabbage. A sure bet for starters is the pan-seared Lakes Entrance scallops. The café downstairs is more casual.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Bended Elbow (☎ 5229 4477; www.thebendedelbow.com.au; 69 Yarra St; meals \$8-24) This Brit boozier with English brews on tap has live bands Friday and Sunday nights and snug booths where you can curl up with a jar or two. Upstairs, Level 1 is a club space that plays dance pop.

National Hotel (☎ 5229 1211; www.nationalhotel.com.au; 191 Moorabool St) Live bands play regularly at Geelong's rockingest pub, which has a young clientele and upstairs backpacker accommodation (see right). Feast on the cheap, generous wok-tossed noodles and Asian soups at the Noodle Bar (mains \$8 to \$11; lunch Tuesday to Friday, dinner Tuesday to Sunday).

Beav's Bar (☎ 5222 3366; www.beavsbar.com.au; 77 Little Malop St; ☎ 4pm-late Wed-Sat) Chilled out with lounge chairs, soft lighting and eclectic décor. On Tuesday nights the space hosts screenings

for the Red Rum Film Society (http://redrumfilmsociety.googlepages.com).

Geelong Performing Arts Centre (GPAC; ☎ 5225 1200; www.gpac.org.au; 50 Little Malop St) Geelong's major arts venue has two theatres – an 800-seater and a 300-seater. Local amateur productions are performed here, as well as touring professional dance, musicals and theatre shows.

Skilled Stadium (☎ 5225 2300; Kardinia Park; Moorabool St; tickets through www.ticketmaster.com.au from \$23.90) This is the home of the mighty Cats, and on weekends in winter you can join the one-eyed crowd to watch Gary Ablett Jnr (son of God), Jimmy Bartel (2007 Brownlow Medal winner) and Lingie 'run around the park'. Cricket is played here over summer.

SLEEPING

Gatehouse on Ryrie (☎ 0417-545 196; www.bol.com.au/gatehouse/g.html; 83 Yarra St; s \$80, d incl breakfast \$95-120; ☎) This central guesthouse (built in 1897) has good-value rooms with double-glazed windows that are warm in winter and quiet year-round. There's a communal kitchen and lounge area.

Eastern Beach Studio Apartment (☎ 0431-301 642; kaninaglen@dodo.com.au; 2 Pevensey St; d from \$140) In a great location above the bathing pavilion, this modern, compact, two-bedroom apartment can sleep four.

Vailima Waterfront Apartment (☎ 5229 8818; www.vailima.com.au; 26 Eastern Beach Rd; d from \$250; ☎) The apartment in this 1908 Edwardian home is tastefully decorated with modern kitchen and laundry, large lounge and brilliant Corio Bay views from the sun deck.

National Hotel Backpackers (☎ 5229 1211; www.nationalhotel.com.au; 191 Moorabool St; dm \$22) 'The Nash' (see also left) is a friendly place and Geelong's only backpacker accommodation. The dorms are old, tired and squishy, but there are free lockers, tea and coffee, and linen is supplied. Downstairs there's one of Geelong's favourite watering holes, with live bands and DJs to keep you going all night – a mixed blessing.

Four Points Sheraton Geelong (☎ 5223 1377; www.fourpoints.com/geelong; 10-14 Eastern Beach Rd; r from \$200; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Four Points is the top digs in town. It's a true international hotel in a great waterfront location with everything that opens and shuts, and efficient uniformed staff to attend to your every whim (almost). The beach-facing balcony rooms come at a premium, but rooms without views are often available as packages.

BELLARINE PENINSULA

The Bellarine Peninsula forms the northwestern side of the entrance to Port Phillip Bay. The bay itself is huge but the heads between Point Nepean on the Mornington Peninsula and the Bellarine's Point Lonsdale are just 3.5km apart. Bellarine beach communities are affluent areas, and the region has surf beaches, mellow seaside towns, cafés and restaurants, making it a nice region to explore. The peninsula also has accessible diving and snorkelling sites.

Accommodation prices soar from Christmas to the end of January, when even some caravan parks have minimum-stay requirements. Many places also charge more at weekends, even in the depths of winter.

QUEENSCLIFF

pop 3900

Historic Queenscliff is a lovely spot, popular with day-tripping and overnighting Melburnians who come for fine food and wine, boutique and antique shopping and leisurely walks along the splendid beach. The views across the Port Phillip Heads and Bass Strait are glorious.

Queenscliff was established for the pilots who to this day steer all ships through the treacherous Port Phillip Heads. Known as 'the Rip', this is one of the most dangerous seaways in the world. In the 1850s Queenscliff was a favoured settlement for diggers who'd struck it rich on the goldfields, and wealthy Melburnians and the Western District's squatocracy flocked to the town. Extravagant hotels

and guesthouses built then are operational today, giving Queenscliff a historic charm and grandness.

Impressive historic buildings line Gellibrand St. Check out the old **Ozone Hotel** (being refurbished as apartments), **Lathamstowe** (44 Gellibrand St), **Queenscliff Hotel** (16 Gellibrand St), and a row of old **pilots' cottages** (66 & 68 Gellibrand St) dating back to 1853. The main drag, Hesse St, runs parallel to Gellibrand St. King St takes you to Point Lonsdale, and the ferry terminal is on Larkin Pde.

The visitors centre (see Information) runs the 45-minute guided **Queenscliff Heritage Walk** (\$12 incl afternoon tea) at 2pm each Saturday or by appointment.

Fort Queenscliff (☎ 5258 1488; cnr Gellibrand & King Sts; adult/child/family \$10/5/20; 🗺️ tours 1pm & 3pm Sat & Sun) was built in 1882 to protect Melbourne from a feared Russian invasion, although some of the buildings within the grounds date from the 1860s. The 30-minute guided tours take in the military museum, magazine, cells and Black Lighthouse.

The **Bellarine Peninsula Railway** (☎ 5258 2069; www.bpr.org.au; Queenscliff train station; return adult/child/family \$18/10/48; 🗺️ trips 11.15am & 2.30pm Sun year-round, Tue & Thu school holidays, daily late Dec-early Jan, Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun mid-late Jan) is run by a group of cheerful volunteer steam-train trags, and has some beautiful steam-hauled trains that ply the 1¼-hour return journey to Drysdale.

Popular with cyclists, joggers and walkers, the adjacent **Bellarine Rail Trail** runs 34km between the Geelong Showgrounds and Queenscliff.

Queenscliff Maritime Museum (☎ 5258 3440; 1 Weeroona Pde; adult/child \$6/3; 🗺️ 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 1.30-4.30pm Sat & Sun) is home of the last lifeboat to serve the Rip, and out back there's a quaint boat shed lined with paintings. They also run 30-minute tours of the working Point Lonsdale Lighthouse.

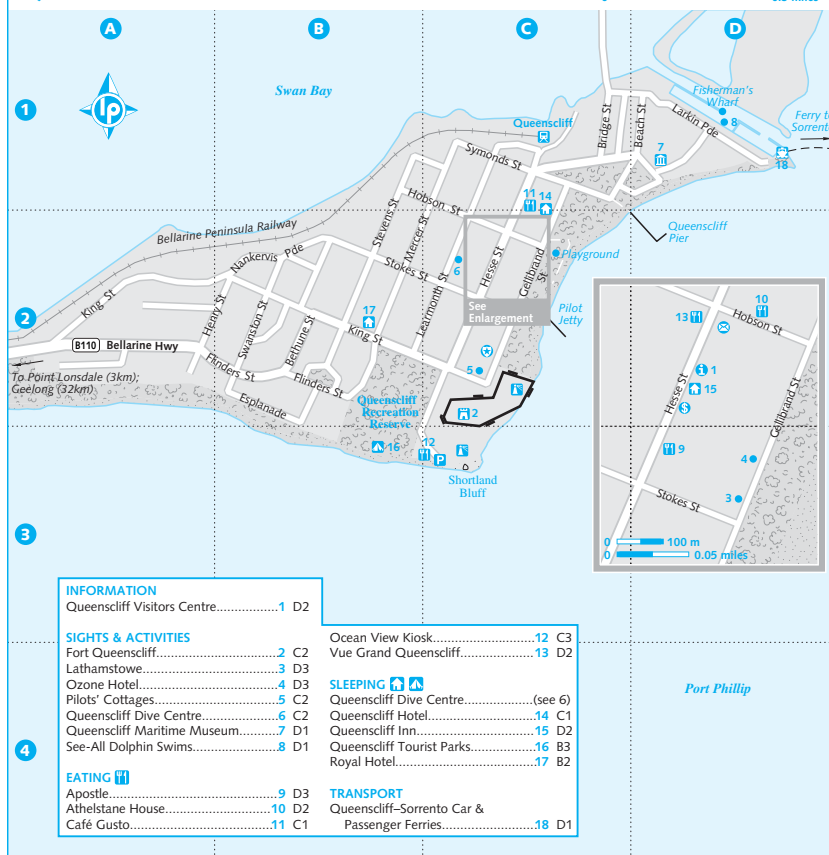
Sea-All Dolphin Swims (☎ 5258 3889; www.dolphin-swims.com.au; Larkin Pde; sightseeing adult/child \$60/50, 4hr swim \$115/100; 🗺️ 8am & 1pm Sep-May) offers sightseeing tours and swims with seals and dolphins in Port Phillip Bay.

Queenscliff Dive Centre (☎ 5258 1188; www.divequeenscliff.com.au; 37 Learmonth St; per dive with/without gear \$110/55) can get you out exploring the wrecks of the area.

Information

Queenscliff visitors centre (☎ 5258 4843; www.queenscliff.vic.gov.au; 55 Hesse St; 🗺️ 9am-5pm; 📶) Internet access \$6 per hour (also available next door at the library).

QUEENSCLIFF



Festivals & Events

Queenscliff Music Festival (☎ 5258 4816; www.qmf.net.au; last weekend Nov) Features Australian musos with a folksy, bluesy bent.

Blues Train (www.thebluestrain.com.au) Get your foot tapping with irregular train trips that feature rootsy music and meals; check the website for dates and artists.

Eating

Ocean View Kiosk (☎ 5258 4488; 140 Hesse St; lunch \$6-10; 🗺️ breakfast & lunch Thu-Mon, daily Jan) Vicki and Ben run this takeaway kiosk serving up whopping burgers, tasty falafels, good coffee and shakes overlooking the beach. This is the best takeaway eatery in Queenscliff and the locals know it!

Athelstane House (☎ 5258 1024; www.athelstane.com.au; 4 Hobson St; lunch \$12-25, dinner \$29-39; 🗺️ lunch &

dinner) OK, you'll have to rob the Queenscliff ferryman to pay for it, but the food and wine at multi-award-winning Athelstane are simply outstanding. Feast on a ploughman's lunch in the all-day café or take your cheesecake to the courtyard or deck. At dinner it gets serious with a menu of superb Mod Oz mains, like the oven-roasted barramundi fillet. Stylish accommodation is also available.

Café Gusto (☎ 5258 3604; 25 Hesse St; breakfast \$7-12, lunch \$14-16; 🗺️ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) Another favourite Queenscliff eatery, great for breakfast with a spacious garden out the back. Even basics like sausages become gourmet snags in sourdough with onion and homemade tomato relish. On summer Saturday nights Gusto runs film screenings in its courtyard.

Vue Grand Queenscliff (☎ 5258 1544; 46 Hesse St; café mains \$17-28, restaurant mains \$32-39; 🗺️ breakfast, lunch



TRANSPORT: BELLARINE PENINSULA

Distance from Melbourne Queenscliff 105km

Direction South

Travel time Queenscliff 1½ hours

Bus McHarry's Buslines (☎ 5223 2111; www.mcharrys.com.au) connects Geelong with most peninsula towns. A two-hour adult ticket costs \$3.50, taking you to Barwon Heads (30 minutes), Ocean Grove (45 minutes), Portarlington (45 minutes), Queenscliff (one hour) and Point Lonsdale (55 minutes). Full-day adult ticket \$6.50.

Car From Melbourne the Bellarine Peninsula is easily accessible via the Princess Fwy (M1) to Geelong. From there follow the signs to the Bellarine Hwy (route 91).

Ferry Queenscliff-Sorrento Car & Passenger Ferries (☎ 5258 3244; www.searoad.com.au; one-way foot passenger adult/child \$9/7, 2 adults & car standard/peak \$58/64; 🕒 7am-6pm) runs between Queenscliff and Sorrento.

& dinner) This historic hotel offers sophisticated dining in the Grand Dining Room with its elaborate chandeliers and menu of dory fillets and other seafood dishes. More casual dining can be had at the hotel's Café Lure.

Apostle (☎ 5258 3097; 79 Hesse St; mains \$20-32; 🕒 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sun) Ensnared in a lofty former church (1888) with exquisite stained-glass windows, Apostle is the newbie on a restaurant scene already brim with big-hitters. And it more than makes the grade – evening mains include kaffir lime and chilli marinated prawns on coconut rice.

Sleeping

Queenscliff Inn (☎ 5258 4600; www.queenscliffinn.com.au; 59 Hesse St; inn without bathroom incl breakfast d/f \$120/188, hostel dm/s/d/f \$30/80/110/120; 🕒 📺) This Edwardian inn is a cross between a hostel and hotel, with a choice of period-style rooms and four-bed dorms, and a beautiful common area.

Queenscliff Dive Centre (☎ 5258 1188; www.dive.queenscliff.com.au; 37 Learmonth St; dm/d \$33/95; 🕒) This diving operator has recently opened up some excellent hostel-style accommodation at their Learmonth St headquarters. The terrific shared kitchen and lounge facilities are bright and airy in a central atrium. There's a pool to share with aqualunged diving students.

Queenscliff Tourist Parks (☎ 5258 1765; www.queenscliffcliffouristparks.com.au; 134 Hesse St; unpowered sites/cabins \$33/120) This simple, council-run camping ground on Queenscliff's recreation reserve is the closest camping ground to town and right on the beach. Shady sites are scarce.

Royal Hotel (☎ 5258 1669; www.queenscliff.com.au; 34 King St; d from \$95) At the time of writing, the Royal was in the throes of renovations. This remarkable old building (1853) has an amaz-

ing cellar and turret, both of which you can access. The large rooms are nicely refurbished, and some open onto sea-view balconies. The friendly pub downstairs serves good food.

Queenscliff Hotel (☎ 5258 1066; www.queenscliffhotel.com.au; 16 Gellibrand St; d from \$215; 🕒 📺) Classified by the National Trust, this is a superb, authentically old-world luxury hotel – small Victorian-style rooms with no telephones or TVs, and bathrooms are shared. You can relax in the comfortable guest lounges or dine at the wonderful restaurant and bar.

POINT LONSDALE

pop 2500

Point Lonsdale, 5km southwest of Queenscliff, is a laid-back community with a few cafés and an operational 1902 **lighthouse**. From the foreshore car park you can walk to the **Rip View lookout** to watch ships entering the Rip, to **Point Lonsdale Pier** and to the lighthouse. There's good **surf** off the rocky beach below the car park.

Below the lighthouse is **Buckley's Cave**, where William Buckley lived with Aborigines for 32 years after he escaped from the Sorrento convict settlement (see p208).

Kelp (☎ 5258 4797; 67 Point Lonsdale Rd; mains \$18-29; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a funky, modern café-restaurant. The locals come for all-day breakfasts, lunchtime pita-bread wraps, and Asian and Middle Eastern-inspired evening meals.

Grow Naturally (☎ 5258 2508; 59 Point Lonsdale Rd; mains \$10-15; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) is the new kid on the block – a gourmet café that turns out fine fare for mums with bubs and salty surfers.

Point Lonsdale Guest House (☎ 5258 1142; www.pointlonsdaleguesthouse.com.au; 31 Point Lonsdale Rd; r \$90-220; 🕒) has a range of rooms in the former Terminus House (1884), from basic motel rooms to

lavish B&B affairs. Lighthouse views come at a premium. There's a communal kitchen, tennis court, games room and BBQ facilities.

Check with the Queenscliff visitors centre (p220) for holiday-house rentals for groups.

OCEAN GROVE

pop 11,300

Ocean Grove, 3km northeast of Barwon Heads and 12km west of Queenscliff, is the big smoke of the Bellarine Peninsula, where folks come for their supermarket and department-store shopping. There are some good **surfing** breaks around here, and some good **scuba diving** and **snorkelling** spots beyond the rocky ledges of the bluff.

Groovy **7th Wave** (☎ 5255 1521; 64b The Terrace; mains \$18-33; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) is one of a clutch of cafés along the Terrace that caters to casual café diners by day and scrubbed-up dinner guests by night. The Bellarine Seafood Sizzle, a sample plate of the day's seafood catch, is the house special.

Ti-Tree Village (☎ 5255 4433; www.ti-treevillage.com.au; 34Orton St; cottages \$160-230; 🕒) is like a glamorous retirement home, with cosy, self-contained garden and spa cottages. The playground and communal barbecue areas make it a popular spot with families grilling their day's catch. There's a weekend two-night minimum stay.

Terrace Lofts (☎ 5255 4167; www.terracelofts.com.au; 92 The Terrace; d from \$175; 🕒 📺) is a terrific spot: four luxurious, self-contained, split-level apartments where the bedrooms overlook cosy, open-plan living areas from huge mezzanines. A short walk to the beach and town, these apartments have wood combustion fires, TVs with DVD and relaxed, modern décor.

BARWON HEADS

pop 3000

At the mouth of the broad **Barwon River**, Barwon Heads is a haven of sheltered beaches, tidal river flats and chilled-out holiday-makers. Feisty **Thirteenth Beach**, 2km west, is beacon for surfers. Just 3km west of Ocean Grove, Barwon Heads was made famous as the setting for *Seachange* – a popular TV series – and a decade on still trades on the kudus.

There are short walks around the headland and the **Bluff** with panoramic sea vistas, and there are **scuba-diving** spots under the rocky ledges below.

Follow the signs 2km from the town centre to **Jirrahlinga Koala & Wildlife Sanctuary** (☎ 5254 2484; www.jirrahlinga.com.au; Taits Rd; adult/child \$14/8), an

animal park with pelicans, koalas and a few other Australian natives.

Eating

Barwon Orange (☎ 5254 1090; 60 Hitchcock Ave; mains \$18-20; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Big Bertha – the orange wood-fired oven that cooks up Barwon Orange's crazily topped pizzas – helps the mood along. Innovative menus and quality food earn this café-restaurant a high distinction; breakfast is served until a civilised 3pm.

Starfish Bakery (☎ 5254 2772; 78 Hitchcock St; meals \$5-9; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) This relaxed, colourful bakery-café has views from its windows. Come here for strong coffee, fresh sourdough bread, chunky muffins and toasties, or grab a sandwich. Breakfasts here are fantastic.

At the Heads (☎ 5254 1277; Jetty Rd; meals \$17-32; 🕒 lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sat & Sun) Built on stilts over the mouth of the river, this light, airy café-restaurant has huge breakfasts, Italian fare and the most amazing views. Its bustling family ambience makes it a fun daytime locale. After dark try the seafood bouillabaisse.

Barwon Heads Hotel (☎ 5254 2201; 1 Bridge Rd; mains \$18-24; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Serving slap-up counter meals from its massive bistro, this is where to come for serious drinking and a few bets on the greyhounds. Accommodation is available, but it's noisy on the weekends.

Sleeping

Barwon Heads Caravan Park (☎ 5254 1115; www.barwoncoast.com.au; Ewing Blyth Dr; unpowered/powered sites \$36/45, d/f cabins \$123/190, f beach house \$235) Right on the Barwon River, this park has tea-tree-shaded sites, tennis courts and playgrounds.

Seahaven Village (☎ 5254 1066; www.seahavenvillage.com.au; 3 Geelong Rd; d \$170-270; 🕒) Seahaven, opposite Village Park, is a cluster of self-contained studios and cottages with electric blankets, open fires, full kitchens and entertainment systems.

Moonah Beach House (☎ 5254 3145; www.moonahbeachhouse.com.au; 9 Reid St; d from \$250) This lovely place, two blocks behind the main drag (Hitchcock Ave), is a fully equipped three-bedroom house that can sleep eight. Tariffs vary depending on the time and length of stay and the numbers of stayers.

A lot of private holiday accommodation is managed by agents, including the following: **Barwon Grove Holiday Rentals** (☎ 5254 3263; www.bgholidayrentals.com.au)

Beds By the Beach (☎ 5254 2419; www.bedsbythebeach.com.au)

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