

NORTH TO THE MURRAY

The magic of the Murray, Australia's largest river, sweeps you away in a tourist heaven of balmy weather, water sports, paddle steamers and, of course, wineries. Australia's most important waterway flows from the mountains of the Great Dividing Range in northeastern Victoria to Encounter Bay in South Australia – more than 2700km. It's also an unusual river: for very long stretches it collects no water from the country it passes through.

Many of the river towns carry evocative reminders of past riverboat days, including historical museums, old buildings and well-preserved paddle steamers. The Murray Valley Hwy links them all, but is separated from the river by flood plains, subsidiary waterways and forests of red gum. However, you can take advantage of the fairly frequent tracks (often marked 'River Access') that lead you to the banks.

Those magnificent red gum forests have made the Murray River famous, and provide plentiful bird and animal life plus leisurely riverbank camping. There's almost always 'twin' towns along here: back in the days before Federation (1901), all major river crossings had customs houses on each bank, from which the two states (Victoria and New South Wales) levied tariffs on goods carried across their borders.

Whichever road you take north from Melbourne, the air grows warmer as the country rolls away. By the time you reach the mighty Murray, you are in endless summer (well, it feels like that...). Travel up through the wide spaces of the Mallee, or up the Hume, Victoria's busiest freeway, past pleasant country towns, wineries, galleries, fine food outlets and adventure sports opportunities. Or there's the Hume's little sister, the Goulburn Hwy, which leads you through Victoria's fruit bowl, the Goulburn Valley, a rich agricultural district. The wineries here include the well-respected Tahbilk and Mitchelton.

WATER WONDERLAND

Have your swimwear and sunscreen ready, your body trimmed and tanned (or not-so-trim and healthily pale), and muster up loads of energy – a plethora of **water sports** is waiting for you. There's **water-skiing**, **wake-boarding**, **kayaking**, **swimming**, or even just floating, regardless of which direction you're headed. And if the rivers and lakes are a bit too *au naturale*, from Wangaratta to Wodonga, Mildura to Nagambie, there are state-of-the-art **aquatic centres** with slides, wave pools, spas and saunas.

Love the water but prefer to stay dry? **Paddle steamers** are steamed-up and ready to burble you along the magic Murray; **canoes** tempt you out onto the Goulburn River; **river launches** transport you to wineries or wetlands; and **houseboats** await for you to stay in, anywhere from Rutherglen to Mildura. Just follow your diving stick and sniff the air – you're headed for water!

TAKE TO THE SKY

You don't need to feel earthbound, water-bound or bound at all. This is fun country, holiday time, sporting heaven – take to the skies and totally embrace your freedom! If you're adventurous, the air currents around

Nagambie, Euroa and Benalla mean stacks more days available for **skydiving** and **hot-air ballooning** (p340). Reliable weather further north encourages small aircraft to offer you seats for scenic **joyflights**. Everywhere you go there'll be a sky-bound experience waiting for you.

If you prefer your feet on the ground, visit the **Lake Boga Flying Boat Museum** (p328).

PIONEER EXPLORATIONS

Amidst all this leisure, it's surprising to find such a treasure-trove of history. Of course, **Echuca** (p329) is renowned for its historic wharf and living-history walk along the Esplanade; but homesteads like **Byramine** (p333) also take you back to the past in a truly emotional way.

Learn about the engineering and personal struggles involved in building the irrigation scheme in **Mildura** (opposite). Fascinating! See the river ports where pioneers built punts and fords, bars and stores to assist the transport of produce throughout the region. Be totally immersed in the past at ancient little towns like **Chiltern** (p335) and **Rushworth** (p338), or recall your youth at the costume museum (if you're over 15!) in **Benalla** (p340). Surely the ultimate relationship with the past can be found at the very many **B&Bs** that offer dream-filled nights

in stunning old banks, grand estates, princely farmhouses and towered homesteads.

WINE, WOMEN & SONG

Well, forget the women and song. This is wine, wine, wine country! Head off on Swan Hill's **Golden Mile Wine Trail** (p328). Check out **Mildura's wineries** (p323), where most of Australia's export wine is produced. Settle in for the long haul at **Rutherglen** (p334), where you can catch a festival or two and roll on from one gourmet experience to the next. On all sides on your way north, vineyards with cellar-door sales and gorgeous, scrumptious food await to distract you from your journey.

MILDURA

pop 30,000

After crossing windswept deserts and pale-golden wheat fields, you reach a thriving regional centre. Mildura (pronounced 'Mild-yoo-ra', meaning 'red soil') is a true oasis: a town ready to take you back to the grand old pastoralist era.

Mildura makes full use of the Murray, one of the state's great water-sports playgrounds, where activities include fishing, swimming, canoeing, water-skiing, houseboat holidays and paddle steamer cruises. The Murray region is also a golfer's paradise, with plenty of excellent riverside courses.

Mildura is an amazing tourist destination for people in search of endless blue skies. Foodies, clubbers, shoppers and lazeabouts delight in the resorts, wineries, markets, boutique or budget shopping, and the fabulous eateries known for their famous chefs. The main road, **Deakin Ave**, is a wide boulevard impressively lined with palms and gum trees, lit-up at night by the neon signs of motels and restaurants. **Langtree Ave**, one block north, is a shopping mall between Eighth and

Ninth Sts. The **Centro Plaza** is an ultramodern, one-stop retail-therapy spot.

The irrigation schemes of northern Victoria support dairy farms, vineyards, market gardens, orchards and citrus groves that provide fresh fruit and supply the thriving dried-fruit industry. The area is also the biggest producer of wine in Australia (most of which is exported). In fact, Mildura is one of the richest agricultural areas in the country. It's easy to forget you're in the midst of Victoria's arid region when you see the lush green golf courses, endless orange groves, orchards and vineyards for which Mildura is renowned.

Sadly, after years of irrigation, soil salinity has become a major problem, one that poses a long-term threat to the economic viability of much of this area.

Mildura owes its existence to the Chaffey brothers and their irrigation systems (see below). The visitors centre has a brochure called *The Chaffey Trail*. Pick up a copy and follow the Chaffey story.

Stops on the Chaffey Trail include the **Old Mildura Homestead** (☎ 5018 8322; Cureton Ave, Old Mildura House Heritage Park; adult/child \$2/free; ☺ 9am-6pm), a cottage that was the first home of William B Chaffey. On the banks of the Murray, it's in a pleasant heritage park which contains a few other historic buildings and has picnic and barbecue facilities.

Nearby is Chaffey's grand homestead, the historic **Rio Vista** (part of the Mildura Arts Centre; see p322). The house has been beautifully preserved; restorers peeled back the walls to the original wallpaper then reproduced it. The interior is set up as a series of historical displays depicting life in the 19th century, with period furnishings, costumes, photos and a collection of letters and memorabilia.

Also emerging from the Chaffey vision were the **Mildura Wharf**, the **weir** and the **lock**.

THE CHAFFEY BROTHERS

Canadian brothers George and William Chaffey were famous 19th-century irrigation engineers who set up an irrigation colony at Mildura.

Their promotional scheme was launched in 1887 and attracted more than 3000 settlers to the area. They cleared scrub, dug irrigation channels and built fences, and two massive pumping-station engines were shipped from England.

The early years of the settlement were tough and full of frustrations. There was an economic collapse in the 1890s, rabbit plagues and droughts, and clearing the mallee scrub was a nightmare. George became disillusioned, and in 1896 returned to North America.

In 1889 William built Rio Vista, a grand riverside homestead, to express his confidence in the new settlement. But his wife, Hattie, died during childbirth before it was finished, and their newborn son died five months later. William later married his deceased wife's niece, also named Hattie, and lived in Mildura until he died in 1926 at the age of 70. Happily, he was there to see the Melbourne–Mildura railway line finally open in 1902, meaning the town's future was assured.



The lock is operated at 11am, 12.30pm, 2pm and 3.30pm daily.

The **Old Psyche Bend Pump Station** (☎ 5024 5637; off Cureton Ave; adult/family \$3/8; 🕒 1-4pm Tue & Thu, 10am-noon Sun) is where Chaffey set up his system to supply irrigation and drainage over 115 years ago. The system is still used, except the pumps are electric now and placed a bit further up the river. You can walk around the old centrifugal pumps and Chaffey's triple-expansion steam-

engine pump. The old pumps run on special occasions; ask at the visitors centre.

Mildura Arts Centre (☎ 5018 8322; www.milduraarts.net.au; 199 Cureton Ave; adult/child \$3/free; 🕒 10am-5pm), at the Rio Vista complex, combines a modern-art gallery and a theatre. The gallery has a large collection which includes *Woman Combing Her Hair at the Bath* by French Impressionist Edgar Degas in the European section. Australian paintings include works by Fred McCubbin

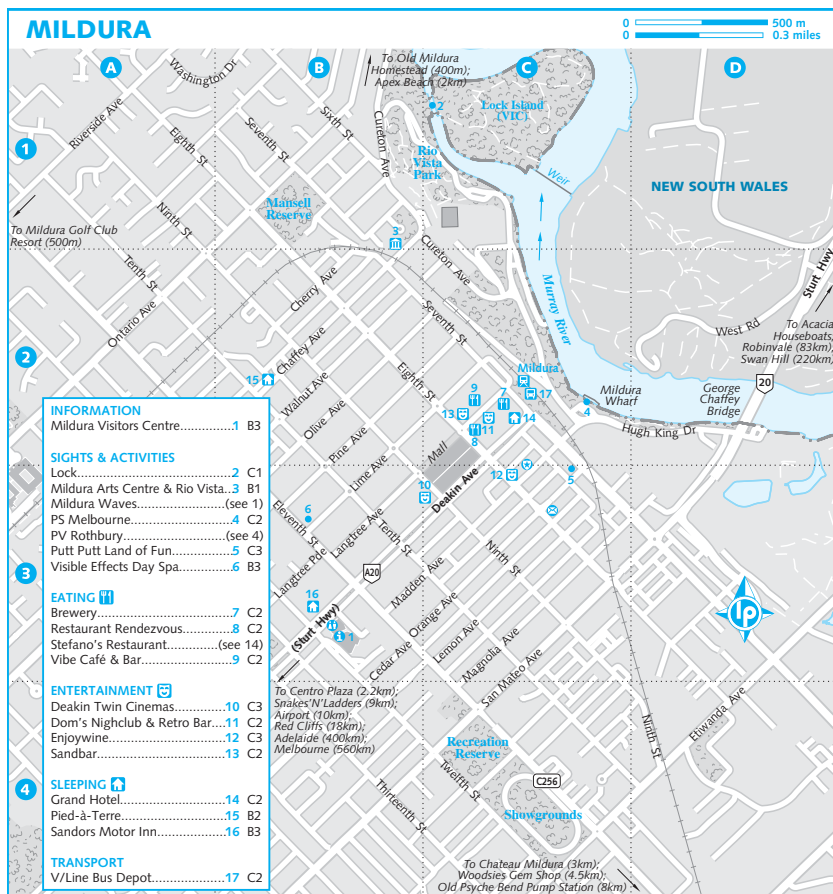


and Arthur Streeton, and there's an interesting Australian sculpture collection too.

Chateau Mildura (☎ 5024 5901; www.chateau mildura.com.au; 191 Belar Ave, Irymple; adult/child \$10/free; 🕒 10am-4pm), established in 1888 and still producing table wines, is a living wine and horticultural museum with wine tasting to help your cultural experience.

Cruises depart from the Mildura Wharf, and most go through a lock: watch the gates open-

ing and the water levels changing. A favourite cruise is on **PS Melbourne** (☎ 5023 2200; Mildura Wharf; 2hr cruise adult/child \$24/8; 🕒 cruises 10.50am & 1.50pm), one of the original paddle steamers, and the only one still driven by steam power. Watch the operator stoke the original boiler with wood. Another popular choice is **PV Rothbury** (☎ 5023 2200; Mildura Wharf; dinner or winery cruise adult/child \$56/26, lunch cruise \$26/10). The fastest of the riverboats, it



offers a dinner or winery cruise on Thursday and a lunch cruise on Tuesday. The winery cruise visits Trentham Estate Winery.

Sunraysia Helicopters (☎ 5023 5255, 0409-555232; www.sunraysiahelicopters.com.au; 20min flight per person \$135) offers a range of stunning scenic flights; see the spectacular red Perry Sandhills, the wayward Kings Billabong and more.

Kayaking is big on the Murray. Take a guided kayak adventure tour with **Mooztongue Eco-Adventures** (☎ 5024 3721, 0427-898 317; mooztongue@bigpond.com; tours from \$25; ☽ sunset Sat & Sun). Ian will tell you about the landscape and bird life as you work those muscles in magnificent, peaceful surroundings.

There's a fun range of outdoor activities available with **Wild Side Outdoors** (☎ 5024 3721; www.wildsideoutdoors.com.au; sunset canoe tours adult/child

\$25/10), which runs a six-hour 4WD tour into the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park (adult/child \$75/35). It also has canoe/kayak/mountain bike hire (\$30/20/20 per hour).

The **Mildura Golf Club** (☎ 5023 1147; www.mildura.golfclub.com.au; Twelfth St; 18 holes \$22, club hire \$16) has a well-maintained course, open to the public, and also offers motel rooms, a pool, barbecue and bistro, all in a beautiful setting. The **Riverside Golf Club** (☎ 5023 1560; www.visitmildura.com.au/golf; Park St, Nichols Pt; 18 holes \$18) is a good course by the river, with a licensed clubhouse.

If your golf swing fails you, try a hot-air balloon trip with **Mildura Ballooning** (☎ 5021 2876; www.mildurabalooning.com.au; 40min from \$255; ☽ dawn daily), weather permitting. The price includes champagne afterwards to celebrate your dream trip. Alternatively, drown your problems at **Mil-**

dura Waves (☎ 5023 3747; www.mildurawaves.com.au; cnr Deakin Ave & 12th St; adult/child from \$5/2.50; ☽ 6am-9pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun), a modern complex with an artificial wave pool among other facilities. If you are swimming in the mighty, muddy Murray, be careful of snags and deep holes, and never jump into water when you can't see what's below the surface. **Apex Beach** is a favourite swimming spot.

Grab a few hours at **Visible Effects Day Spa** (☎ 5022 8000; www.visibleeffects.com.au; 157 Lime Ave; ☽ 9am-5pm Mon, Tue & Fri, to 8pm Wed & Thu, to 1pm Sat). Try the Vitamin A facial (\$55) followed by a hot-stone massage (\$135) in a cocoon of music and aromatherapy.

Other stuff to do includes **tenpin bowling** and **Formula K Go Karts** – both somehow irresistible when you're taking a break. Check with the visitors centre for details, or perhaps head off to **Putt Putt Land of Fun** (☎ 5023 3663; cnr 7th St & Orange Ave; ☽ 10am-7.30pm), which has to be good with a name like that. Other play-places are **Snakes'N'Ladders** (☎ 5025 3575; Seventeenth St, Cabarita; admission \$8; ☽ 9am-4.30pm) – 6 hectares of fun, with a playground, vineyard and museum, and **Woodsies Gem Shop** (☎ 5024 5797; cnr Morpung & Cureton Ave, Nichols Pt; admission free; ☽ 9am-5.30pm), which has a huge garden maze (adult/child \$2/1) covered in pretty vines and flowers, a sparkly Aladdin's Cave and a workshop where gems are cut and polished.

INFORMATION

Mildura visitors centre (☎ 1800 039 043, 5018 8380; www.visitmildura.com.au; cnr Deakin Ave & 12th St; ☽ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) In the Alfred Deakin Centre. There's a free accommodation-booking service, interesting displays, local produce and very helpful staff who book tours and activities.

TOURS

Famous, extraordinary Mungo National Park (in NSW) is within striking distance of Mil-

dura. Several operators run tours out there, concentrating on its culture, 45,000 years of history, and wildlife:

Discover Mildura Tours (☎ 5024 7448; www.discovermildura.com.au; tours adult/child \$89/30) Takes you out to 10am to see the river and the land, and through gourmet food experiences. Add a scenic helicopter flight for an extra \$70.

Harry Nanya Tours (☎ 5027 2076; www.harrynanyatours.com.au; tours adult/child \$130/55) The best-known Mungo tour. Guide Graham Clarke keeps you enchanted with Dream-time stories and his deep knowledge and understanding of the region. In summer, there's a spectacular sunset tour.

Sunraysia Discovery Tours (☎ 5023 5937; www.sunraysia.discoverytours.com.au; all-day tours from adult/child \$95/45) Takes you to Mungo daily (\$105/45), and to pioneer sites or on nature tours twice a week.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival (www.visitmildura.com.au/major-events; r) Magical concerts by the river, in the sandhills, and all around; held in March.

Easter Power Sports (www.milduraevents.com.au) Includes the Mildura 100 Ski Race, drag racing and motocross.

Mildura Country Music Festival (www.milduracountrymusic.com.au) Ten days of free concerts during the September school holidays.

Jazz, Food & Wine Show (www.mrimf.com.au/jazz) Traditional bands, great food, good wine; held in October or November.

Mildura Show (www.mildura.vic.gov.au) One of the largest festivals in rural Victoria; held mid-October.

EATING

Mildura's café and restaurant precinct runs along Langtree Ave and around the block, between the mall and the river. Many local motels have well-respected restaurants; many local vineyards offer picnic and barbecue facilities in beautiful surroundings, with wine-tasting thrown into the mix.

BIG LIZZIE

Red Cliffs, 18km southeast of Mildura, is the final resting place of **Big Lizzie**, a huge steam-engine tractor. Mr Frank Bottrill designed it to cart wool from the outback sheep stations around Broken Hill in central NSW.

Lizzie was built in 1915 in a backyard factory in Richmond, Melbourne, but she wasn't made for city living. She had a travelling speed of 1.6km per hour and a turning circle of 60m. Undaunted, Frank and his family set out; two years later they reached the Murray River but the river was in flood. Lizzie couldn't get across. So she was put to work in the Mallee where she cleared scrub and trees for many years.

Lizzie was saved from rusty oblivion and brought to Red Cliffs in 1971, and now stands proudly in a small park on the Calder Hwy, where a taped commentary tells her story.

TRANSPORT: MILDURA

Distance from Melbourne 570km

Direction Northwest

Travel time Seven hours

Air Regional Express Airlines (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies daily between Melbourne and Mildura, as does Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), with return fares from \$252.

Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs direct overnight buses from Melbourne (return \$70, 9½ hours, nightly Sunday to Friday), and train/bus services with changes at Bendigo or Swan Hill (return \$70, seven to eight hours, several daily). V/Line's Murraylink service connects towns along the Murray River from Mildura: Swan Hill (return \$42, 2¾ hours, four weekly), Yarrawonga (\$54, six hours, four weekly), Wodonga (\$61, seven hours, four weekly).

Car See p336.

Vibe Café & Bar (☎ 5023 1555; 29 Langtree Ave; mains \$12-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) New in town, this place buzzes as it makes its mark on the street.

Brewery (☎ 5022 2988; www.mildurabrewery.com.au; 16 Langtree Ave; snacks \$6-14, meals \$14-28; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This microbrewery is still the 'in' place, set amongst fabulous stainless steel vats, pipes and brewing equipment. Take a tour, have a taste, buy a few ales, kick back, eat and be merry.

Restaurant Rendezvous (☎ 5023 1571; 34 Langtree Ave; mains \$28-33; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) A local favourite with fine dining in a warm, casual atmosphere (alfresco if you'd rather), and many Sunraysia wines from which to choose.

Stefano's Restaurant (☎ 5023 0511; Grand Hotel, 7th St; set menu \$95; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Down in the old cellars of the Grand Hotel is this candle-lit experience: five delightful northern Italian courses using local produce, with extras like mouth-freshening sorbets. Bookings essential.

ENTERTAINMENT

Mildura has a small but lively nightlife scene. All the nightclubs are about two minutes' walk apart, so it's easy to find a change of scene or band.

Sandbar (☎ 5021 2181; www.thesandbar.com.au; nr Langtree Ave & Eighth St; ☎ noon-late Tue-Sun) Hang out in the only licensed beer garden in town. Local, national, original and mainstream bands play on Thursday to Sunday nights.

Dom's Nightclub & Retro Bar (☎ 5021 3822; 28 Langtree Ave; meals \$5-22; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, nightclub till 2am Fri & Sat) Enjoy a luscious snack, then go upstairs (cover \$7) to where the music is mostly dance.

Enjoywine (☎ 5023 7722; www.enjoywine.com.au; 120 Eighth St; ☎ 7am-late Mon-Sat, 7-10.30am Sun) In the lovely old Hotel Mildura you can taste the

local wines until you decide which one to buy for dinner. It could take a while – there are 32 vineyards represented. Tastings are free (or wines per glass cost \$5 to \$7.50).

Deakin Twin Cinemas (☎ 5023 4452; movie hotline 1900 937 179; www.deakininema.com.au; 93 Deakin Ave; tickets \$9; ☎ from 1pm) Shows the latest mainstream films.

SLEEPING

There are nearly 30 camping grounds and caravan parks around Mildura. It really is a holiday destination!

Staying on a houseboat is bliss. Over 20 companies hire houseboats that range from two- to 12-berth and from modest to luxurious. Most have a minimum hire of three days and prices increase dramatically in summer and during school holidays. Contact the visitors centre for details, or try these operators:

Acacia Houseboats (☎ 0428-787 250; www.acaciaboats.com.au; 3 nights from \$580) Has many gorgeous houseboats (including the *Love Boat*) with everything supplied except food and drink.

Willandra Houseboats (☎ 5024 8867; www.willandrahouseboats.com.au; 3 nights from \$660) Has gourmet and golf getaways, or complete packages including airfares.

Sandors Motor Inn (☎ 1800 032 463, 5023 0047; www.sandorsmotorinn.com; 179 Deakin Ave; B&B s/d from \$95/105; ☎) If you're driving into town hot and weary, turn into this attractive motel for a warm welcome, spacious rooms and cooling pool.

Mildura Golf Club Resort (☎ 1300 366 883; www.mildura.golfclub.com.au, Twelfth St; s/d/f from \$80/85/135; ☎) This is the place for golf enthusiasts, or those who enjoy lazing comfortably while others chase little white balls around. The rooms look out over the course, there's a barbecue area, great pools, abundant bird life, and a bar and bistro.

Grand Hotel (☎ 5023 0511; www.milduragrandhotel.com; Seventh St; B&B std/grand/ste \$100/160/230; ☎) The different architectural styles of the Grand reflect Mildura's development. Although it's a gambling venue, there are pleasant rooms upstairs and many suites (like the Grand Suite; \$280) open onto a delightful courtyard garden. There are bars and dining areas to suit every taste, including award-winning Stefano's down in the cellar.

Pied-à-terre (☎ 5022 9883; 97 Chaffey Ave; d \$180, extra adult/child \$30/10) *Pied-à-terre* is French for a home-away-from-home, but we doubt home ever looked this good! Five-bedroom, stylish and luxurious accommodation with all amenities, boat and car parking, barbecue area and holiday vibes. Ask about discounts.

SWAN HILL

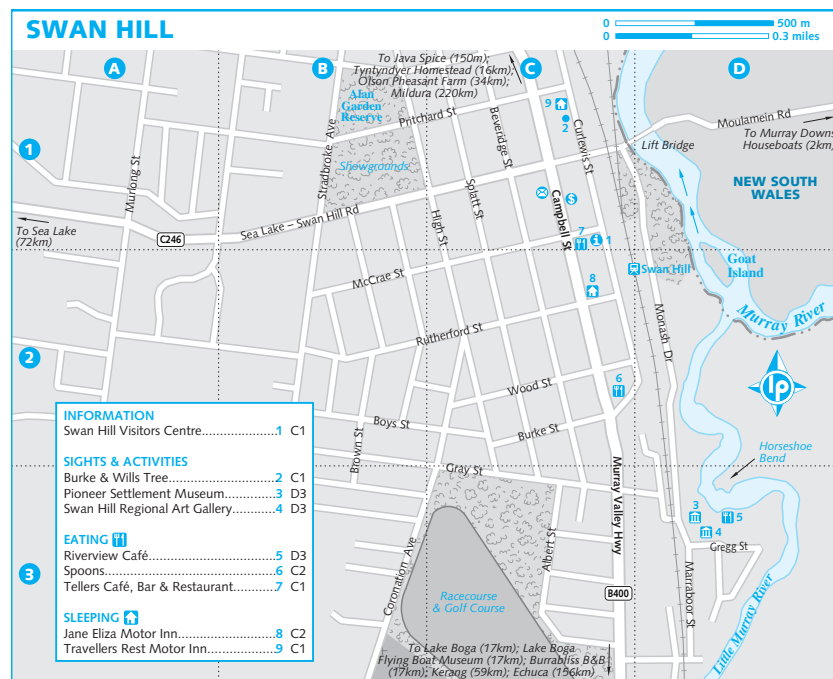
pop 9700

Back in 1836, Major Mitchell, explorer and surveyor, was kept awake all night by swans on the nearby lagoon. So he named the spot Swan Hill. The area was settled by sheep graziers soon after, and the original homesteads of the two major properties in the area, Mur-

ray Downs and Tyntyndyer, are still looking magnificent. Swan Hill is a major regional centre surrounded by fertile irrigated farms that produce grapes and other fruits, yet it maintains the easy pace of a country town.

Swan Hill's major attraction is the **Pioneer Settlement Museum** (☎ 5036 2410; www.pioneersettlement.com.au; Horseshoe Bend; adult/child/family \$22/12/53; ☎ 9.30am-4pm), a re-creation of a riverside port town of the paddle steamer era. The settlement's displays include *PS Gem*, one of Australia's largest riverboats, a great collection of old carriages and buggies, and an old-time photographic parlour. The paddle steamer *PS Pyap* makes short **crises** (adult/child/family \$16/9.50/40.50) along the Murray at 10.30am and 2.30pm. Other attractions include vintage-car and wagon rides. Every night at dusk the 45-minute **sound-and-light show** (adult/child/family \$16/9.50/40.50) entails a dramatic journey through the settlement in an open-air transporter.

Tyntyndyer Homestead (☎ 5030 2754; Murray Valley Hwy, Beverford; adult/child/family \$8/4/20; ☎ tours 10am-4pm Tue & Thu), 16km north of town, has a small museum and many reminders of the hardships of colonial life, such as the wine cellar! Visit at other times by appointment.



THE BURKE & WILLS TREE

This magnificent Moreton Bay fig tree, the largest in the southern hemisphere, was planted in 1860, possibly by Burke himself. It was to commemorate the visit by Burke and Wills as they passed through Swan Hill on their ill-fated journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The planting was held at the home of Dr Gummow, who hosted the explorers and their party. Everyone expected the explorers to see the progress of their tree on their return visit, but they never made it back. The tree is on Curlewis St opposite the bowling green.

The **Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 5036 2430; www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/gallery; Horseshoe Bend; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), opposite the Pioneer Settlement Museum, concentrates on the works of contemporary artists.

The famous Catalina flying boat *A24-30* is on display, outside a secret communications bunker, just 16km away at **Lake Boga Flying Boat Museum** (☎ 5037 2850; www.oldcmp.net/lake_boga.html; Catalina Park; adult/child/family \$6/2.50/12; ☎ 9.30am-4pm). Flying boats were repaired at Lake Boga during WWII.

The **Golden Mile Wine Trail** is a section along the Murray River where major wine companies and boutique wineries offer cellar-door tastings and lunches overlooking the river. It will indeed make you feel golden! Wine festivals are held here every October, including the **Australian Inland Wine Show** (www.inlandwine.com; ☎ 3rd weekend Oct). The region's motto: 'Life is too short to drink bad wine.'

For one fabulous jaunt, get a map and drive out to **Olson Pheasant Farm** (☎ 5030 2648; www.gamebirds.com.au; 2167 Chillingollah Rd; adult/child/family \$7/4/18; ☎ 10am-4pm), where game birds are reared, native birds are on display and peacocks wander around looking gorgeous. Take a picnic or ring ahead if you'd like lunch.

INFORMATION

Swan Hill visitors centre (☎ 1800 625 373, 5032 3033; www.swanhillonline.com; cnr McCrae & Curlewis Sts; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun; ♿) Crammed with helpful maps and brochures. Book tickets for concerts, and find out where to go to taste olives, pistachios, orchard produce and, of course, wines.

EATING

The café scene is on Campbell St where everyone heads on Sunday morning.

Spoons (☎ 5032 2601; 387 Campbell St; meals \$6-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A small, award-winning deli with inside/outside eating areas, and delicious risottos, salads, curries and couscous dishes.

Riverview Café (☎ 5032 1231; Monash Dr; meals \$9-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) Sit at big log tables and watch the mighty Murray zap past. The food is good and the service quick.

Tellers Café, Bar & Restaurant (☎ 5033 1383; 223 Campbell St; mains \$14-28; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Named 'Tellers' because it's inside an old bank, this friendly place uses all-local produce.

Java Spice (☎ 5033 0511; 17 Beveridge St; mains \$19-25; ☎ lunch Thu-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun) New and exciting, set-up as a southeast Asian village and getting an amazing reputation for its cuisine.

SLEEPING

There are no grand hotels or quaint B&Bs right in town, but you'll find plenty of very pleasant places to stay.

Jane Eliza Motor Inn (☎ 5032 4411; jeliza@swanhill.net.au; 263 Campbell St; s/d/f \$86/100/190; ♿ ♿) The lady is getting old, but the position is excellent and the staff friendly.

Travellers Rest Motor Inn (☎ 5032 9644; www.bestwestern.com.au/travellersrest; 110 Curlewis St; s/d/f \$99/109/125) Sits gloriously in the shade of the Burke & Wills Tree, giving you a good feeling, as do the comfortable rooms.

Burrabliss B&B (☎ 5037 2527; www.burrabliss.com.au; 169 Lakeside Dr, Lake Boga; d/ste \$115/150) It's only 10 minutes' drive out to Lake Boga and the luxury of the fabulous B&B. Go with your hosts to see their ultra-fine-wool sheep, bird-watch in the wetlands, or walk by the lake and enjoy the gardens.

Murray Downs Houseboats (☎ 5032 2160, 0428-500 066; www.murrayriver.com.au/houseboats/murraydowns; 8-/12-berth per 3 nights from \$700/1950). This is the perfect way to experience the Murray. High-season

rates are significantly more – don't fret, you can always hire a dinghy (two hours for \$75).

ECHUCA

pop 12,400

Echuca (pronounced 'E-choo-ka', meaning 'the meeting of the waters') is where three great rivers meet – the Goulburn, Campaspe and the Murray. There's history in these waters. Some of Australia's earliest explorers, including Thomas Mitchell, Charles Sturt and Edward Eyre travelled along the Murray. Long before roads and railways crossed the land, the Murray's paddle steamers carried supplies and carted wool to and from remote sheep stations and homesteads, travelling for hundreds of miles along the Murray's winding waterways, and up and down the Murrumbidgee, Goulburn and Darling Rivers.

The town was founded in 1853 by ex-convict Harry Hopwood. He settled on the banks of the Murray, converted some rough sheds into an inn and store, then established punt and ferry crossings over the Murray and Campaspe Rivers. With his transport monopoly and the gold rush in full swing, he profited handsomely! Hopwood built the Bridge Hotel in 1858, and lived his remaining years in Echuca as a wealthy man, watching his town grow into the busiest inland port in Australia.

At the peak of the riverboat era there were more than 100 paddle steamers carting wool, timber and other goods between Echuca and the outback sheep stations. Lined with shops and hotels, the famous red-gum wharf was just over 1km long.

It was too good to last: the Melbourne-Echuca railway line opened in 1864, and within a decade the boom years of the riverboat trade had ended.

These days Echuca has some fascinating tourist attractions plus water-skiing, swimming, paddle steamer cruises and houseboat holidays.

The most wonderful thing about Echuca is its **Historic Port** (cnr Leslie St & Murray Esp; passport adult/child/family \$12/8/35, with paddleboat cruise \$27/13.50/72; ☎ 9am-5pm, tours 11.15am). Attractions are spread along the waterfront, and you buy a passport at the entrance that admits you to the three main sections: Echuca Wharf, the Star Hotel and the Bridge Hotel. Everything is original – you're exploring living history as you walk along the pedestrian-only **Murray Esplanade**. Complimentary

(and very entertaining) **guided tours** with Buster and Rocky the cocky set out from the **gift shop**.

Behind the entrance is **Echuca Wharf**. In the wharf's cargo shed, there's a surprisingly interesting audiovisual presentation and dioramas depicting life on the riverboats. Walk along the various levels of the massive wharf and onto the restored historic **paddle steamers**: PS *Pevensey* (built in 1911) and PS *Adelaide* (1866), which are moored alongside. The wharf was built with three tiers because of the changing river levels. There are gauges marking the highest points.

Back on the Esplanade, stop in at the **Star Hotel** (1867) and escape through the underground tunnel, which helped drinkers avoid the police during the years when the pub was a 'sly grog shop'. Hang about for breakfast or lunch in the café, or come to hear live music on Friday and Saturday nights.

On Hopwood Pl at the far end is the **Bridge Hotel**, where your ticket admits you to a historic upstairs gallery. The pub now operates as a restaurant and bistro.

Sharp's Magic Movie House & Penny Arcade (☎ 5482 2361; www.sharpsmoviehouse.com.au; Murray Esp; adult/child/family \$15/10/45; ☎ 9am-5pm) has authentic and fully restored penny-arcade machines – you're given a fist-full of pennies. Free fudge tasting is another blast from the past. The movie house shows old movies such as Buster Keaton or Laurel & Hardy classics using original equipment. Your ticket is valid all day so you can come and go; nick through the back door to the **Olive Company** (☎ 5482 2361; 622 High St; ☎ 9am-5pm) to see a range of local products.

Other port-area sights include **Red Gum Works** (Murray Esp; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm), a historic sawmill that recreates old timber-milling days. Watch wood-turners and blacksmiths work with traditional equipment, and purchase red-gum products.

A **paddle steamer cruise** (Murray Esp; 45min cruise adult/child/family \$16/7.50/43.50, 1hr cruise \$19.50/8/50) here is almost obligatory. Buy tickets from the port entrance or along the Esplanade, and ask for the brochure on the boats' histories. Check out the timetable for lunch and dinner, twilight and sunset cruises. At least six paddle steamers offer cruises:

PS Adelaide (☎ 5482 4248) The oldest wooden-hulled paddle steamer still operating anywhere in the world.

PS Alexander Arbuthnot (☎ 5482 4248)

PS Canberra (☎ 5482 2711)

PS Emmylou (☎ 5480 2237) Fully restored and driven by an original engine.

TRANSPORT: SWAN HILL

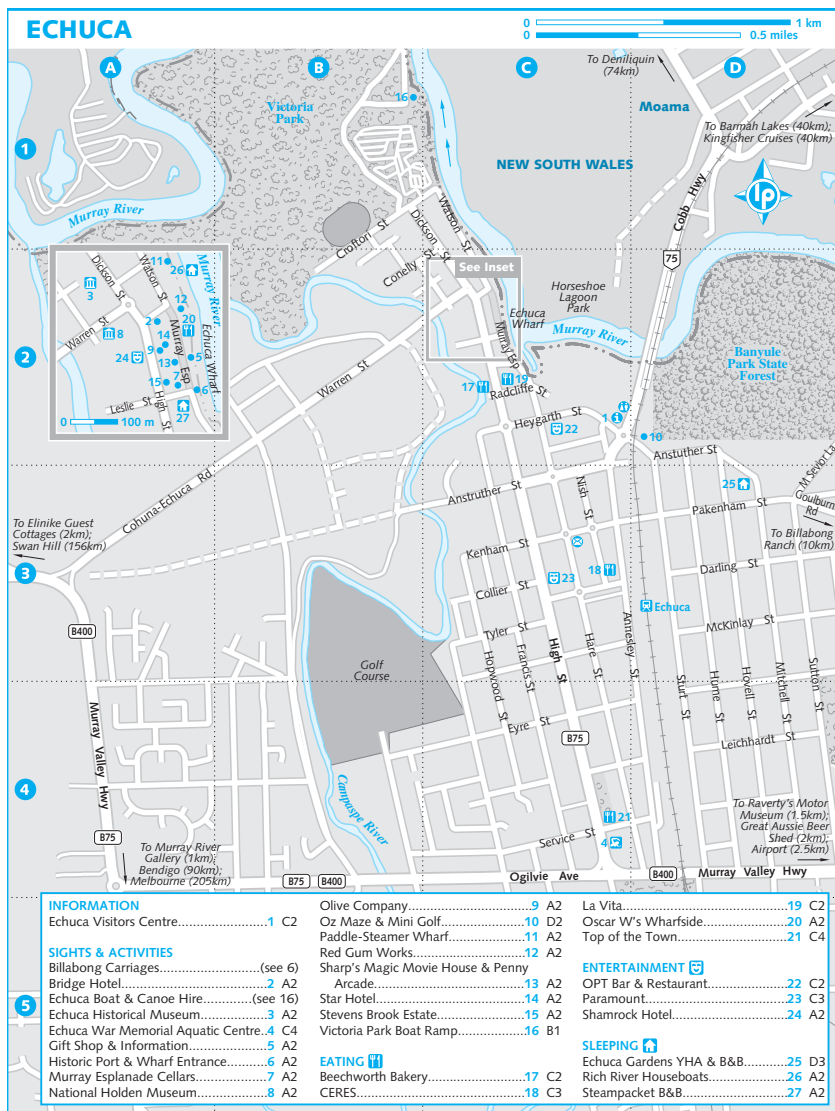
Distance from Melbourne 337km

Direction Northwest

Travel times 3½ hours

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs trains between Melbourne and Swan Hill (return \$57, four hours, three daily), and some train/coach services with a change at Bendigo.

Car See p336.



PS Pevensey (☎ 5482 4248)

PS Pride of the Murray (☎ 5482 5244)

MV Mary Ann (☎ 5480 2200; Murray Esp; 1½hr cruise adult/child \$45/10) is a cruising restaurant. Prices include a two-course meal and entertainment. Call ahead for dining times.

Breeze around the port in style in a horse-drawn coach with **Billabong Carriages** (☎ 5483 5122;

www.justhorses.com.au; adult/child \$6/5; ☎ 10am-2pm). Get your tickets on the coach. Love it? Then take a scenic wine tour (\$65) out to Cape Horn Vineyard for the day.

There are free tastings of local wines at **Murray Esplanade Cellars** (☎ 5482 6058; Old Customs House, Murray Esp; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) and at **Stevens Brook Estate** (☎ 5480 1916; www.stevensbrookwines.com; 620 High St; ☎ 10am-6pm) around the corner.

Echuca Historical Museum (☎ 5480 1325; 1 Dickson St; adult/child \$3.50/1; ☎ 11am-3pm) is in the old police station, classified by the National Trust. It has a collection of local history items, charts and photos from the riverboat era, and early records. **Murray River Gallery** (☎ 5482 3608; 8774 Northern Hwy; entry free; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon), an Aboriginal fine-art gallery, helps you read the message in each piece (art was used for story-telling in the past).

Car buffs should check out the **National Holden Museum** (☎ 5480 2033; www.holdenmuseum.com.au; 7 Warren St; adult/child \$6/3; ☎ 9am-5pm), which has over 40 beautifully restored Holdens and associated memorabilia. Then head off to see **Raverty's Motor Museum** (☎ 5482 2730; 33 Ogilvie Ave; adult/child \$5/1; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), where vehicles date from 1900.

A spot of real culture is at the **Great Aussie Beer Shed** (☎ 5480 6904; www.greataussiebeershed.com.au; 337 Mary Ann Rd; adult/child/family \$9.50/3.50/20; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat & Sun). Expect wall-to-wall beer cans (one dating back to Federation), guided tours and an interesting display of old equipment.

To get out on the Murray, **Echuca Boat & Canoe Hire** (☎ 5480 6208; www.echucaboatcanoehire.com; Victoria Park Boat Ramp) hires out tinnies (\$40/60 per one/two hours), 'barbyboats' (10 people \$100/135), kayaks (\$16/26) and canoes (\$20/30). Multi-day hires also available. Around on the Goulburn River are canoe safaris or canoe hire with **River Country Adventours** (☎ 0428-585 227; www.adventours.com.au; half-/full-/2-day safaris \$55/88/125).

Several operators offer water-skiing trips and classes. Very popular is **Brett Sands Watersports** (☎ 5482 1851; www.brettsands.com; half/full day \$140/220), which will teach you skills behind a boat on skis, wake board, knee board or barefoot.

Magnificent **Barmah Lakes** offers something totally different. Head out to the visitors area where **Kingfisher Cruises** (☎ 5480 1839; www.kingfishercruises.com.au; adult/child/family \$25/18/82; ☎ Sun, Mon, Wed, Thu & Sat) glides you along in a flat-bottom boat through Australia's largest river red-gum forest and Barmah's World Heritage-listed wetlands. Your captain points out bird and mammal species along the way. Ring for departure times and bookings.

For horse riding along rivers or through the bush, contact **Billabong Trail Rides** (☎ 0428-507 828; www.justhorses.com.au; per hr/half-day \$35/80), which also has rides for kids and a pub ride. Go out to the **Billabong Ranch** (☎ 5483 5122; www.justhorses.com.au; 2831 Tehan Rd; adult/child/family \$25/22/75; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) for a fun day. There's minigolf, pedal boats, an animal nursery, tenpin bowling, a playground, a café,

TRANSPORT: ECHUCA

Distance from Melbourne 220km

Direction North

Travel times 2½ hours

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) has direct Melbourne-Echuca train and bus services (return \$40, 3½ hours, seven daily), plus combo train/bus services with changes at Bendigo, Murchison or Shepparton.

Car See p336.

bar and pony rides, amongst other things like off-road buggies (\$30 per 15 minutes).

The **Echuca War Memorial Aquatic Centre** (☎ 5480 2994; cnr High & Service Sts; adult/child/family \$5/3.50/11.50; ☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) is crystal-bright, with heated pool, spa, sauna and gym.

Take to the air with **Aus-Air** (☎ 5480 3100; www.ausair.com; Echuca Airport; flights from \$110), which offers all sorts of fun trips over the rivers. **Air Nostalgia** (☎ 0428-991 309; www.airnostalgia.com.au) flies you to Echuca from Melbourne in a 1940s DC3, takes you for a cruise on an old paddle steamer, then flies you back to Melbourne.

Just to ground you, try to find your way around **Oz Maze & Mini Golf** (☎ 5480 2220; www.ozmaze.com.au; cnr Heygarth & Annesley Sts; maze or golf adult/child/family \$8.50/7.50/30, maze & golf \$15/14/54; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Mon).

INFORMATION

Echuca visitors centre (☎ 1800 804 446, 5480 7555; www.echucamoama.com; 2 Heygarth St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Has an accommodation booking service.

Murray River website (www.murrayriver.com.au) Stacks of useful information.

TOURS

It's holiday time up here, so relax and be looked after.

Echuca Limo Tours (☎ 0418-509 493; www.echucalimo.tours.com.au; tours per person 2½/4hr \$69/99) Visit wineries and enjoy cheese platters or lunch.

Echuca Moama Wine Tours (☎ 5480 1839; www.echuca.moamawinetours.com.au; tours \$75) Winery visits and a cruise along the Murray. Reduced tour prices for children.

Happy Hookers (☎ 0427-466 547; half-day adult/child/family \$95/60/260) Helps you feed the fish.

Murray River Fishing Tours (☎ 0418-576 526; www.geocities.com/fishforcod; half-day adult/child/family \$80/40/240) Takes you out in a shaded boat.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are many events and activities in Echuca. Check the online calendar at www.echucamoama.com/html/whatson.htm.

Club Marine Southern 80 (www.southern80.com.au) The world's largest water-skiing race; held in February.

Riverboats Jazz Food & Wine Festival (www.echucamoama.com/jazz) Music, food and wine by the Murray; held in late February.

Steam, Horse & Vintage Rally (www.echucasteamrally.com.au) On the Queen's Birthday weekend in June; classic and historic vehicles powered by all imaginable methods.

EATING

High and Hare Sts both have a collection of bakeries, cafés, restaurants, pubs and takeaways.

Beechworth Bakery (☎ 5480 1057; 513 High St; meals \$5-12; ☞ breakfast & lunch) An open, cheerful place with delicious sandwiches and home-baked goodies. Find a seat on the deck overlooking the rippling Campaspe River.

La Vita (☎ 5482 6688; 554 High St; mains \$16-38; ☞ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner nightly) A sparkling Italian place with a great atrium and award-winning dishes.

CERES (☎ 5482 5599; Nish St; tapas \$3-10, mains \$27-39; ☞ lunch & dinner) An atmospheric place with an innovative menu, top chef, all-day coffee and tapas and a lounge bar, all in an historic 1881 flour mill.

Oscar W's Wharfside (☎ 5482 5133; 101 Murray Esp; mains \$28-35; ☞ lunch & dinner) Enjoy the only restaurant in the whole world that overlooks the Murray! Maybe not true, but still, the view is magic. The food here is delicious, the prices reasonable and the wine list extensive.

Top of the Town (☎ 5482 4600; cnr High & Service Sts; fish & chips \$11; ☞ 10am-8pm) This claims to be the best fish-and-chip shop in the state. It has a good range including river fish (redfin, yellowbelly), crays and oysters.

ENTERTAINMENT

Shamrock Hotel (☎ 5482 1036; 583 High St; ☞ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10-2am Sat & Sun) There are quite a few good pubs in town. This one has a big welcome, Guinness and live music.

OPT Bar & Restaurant (☎ 5480 0150; 272 Hare St; ☞ bar from 5pm Tue-Sat, nightclub to 4am Fri & Sat) This is the

place to be, with its mezzanine dining and live music on weekends. Downstairs is a dance band, upstairs a DJ.

Paramount (☎ 1900 931 166; 392 High St; adult/child \$13.50/9.50; ☞ from 10.30am) Has daily screenings of mainstream movies and occasional live shows.

SLEEPING

Echuca has accommodation everywhere, from quaint B&Bs to spacious caravan parks, huge brick motels and old lace-trimmed hotels. Alternatively, experience river life on a houseboat – they sleep from four to 12, and are fully equipped with facilities including sundecks and TVs. Rates vary according to season and size of boat; the visitors centre has full details.

Echuca Gardens YHA & B&B (☎ 5480 6522; echucagardens@inet.net.au; 103 Mitchell St; dm/d \$30/70, B&B d 1/2 nights \$130/195) A 145-year-old workers' cottage with tiny bedrooms, smart bathrooms, country kitchen and TV room. The garden has ponds, statues, chooks and fruit trees. There's also an exotic B&B where rooms are works of art and breakfast is served amongst potted plants. Owner Kym can tell you where to go and entertain you with local anecdotes.

Steampacket B&B (☎ 5482 3411; fax 5482 3408; cnr Murray Esplanade & Leslie St; B&B s/d from \$98/135) Right by the old port in a National Trust-classified building, the rooms here have views of the activities on the wharf, taking you right back in time. The lounge room is cosy and breakfast is served on fine china. It's even kid-friendly.

Elinike Guest Cottages (☎ 5480 6311; www.elinike.com.au; 209 Latham Rd; B&B d 1/2 nights \$185/320) Quaint cottages set in rambling gardens on the Murray River, totally private and gorgeous, blending old-world romance with modern conveniences like double spas. The lilac cottage (\$195) has a glass-roofed garden room.

Rich River Houseboats (☎ 1800 032 643; www.richriverhouseboats.com.au; Riverboat Dock; 4 nights from \$660) Right in town, with a range of beautiful boats. Packages include a stay-put deal (sleeping at the dock) for \$200 per couple. Now that's easy, and the views are spectacular!

YARRAWONGA

POP 5700

If you like sunny weather, activities like windsurfing, swimming, power boating and water-skiing, lots of parks and a laid-back, slightly surreal atmosphere, then Yarrowonga is for

you. It has more sunshine hours than almost anywhere else in Australia.

When Elizabeth Hume's husband was killed by bushrangers, she moved here and built **Byramine Homestead** (☎ 5748 4321; Murray Valley Hwy; adult/child/family \$4.50/2.50/14; lunch \$15; ☞ 10am-4pm Sun-Thu) in 1842 – a safe haven which saw her become the first permanent European settler in the area. The homestead is shaped like a fortress and is set in magnificent grounds, just 14km west of town. Enjoy a ploughman's lunch or Devonshire tea under a very grand old tree.

Back in town, the **Clock Museum** (☎ 5744 1249; 21 Lynch St; admission \$4.50; ☞ 10am-4.30pm Sat-Thu) has hundreds of clocks simultaneously ticking and tocking – encouraging or ominous, your life ticking away...

Lake Mulwala, the centre of much activity and entertainment, has great parks along its shores, with picnic and barbecue areas. The lake was formed during the project to harness the waters of the Murray for irrigation. Every few years the lake is drained for weir maintenance purposes – the empty lake is an eerie sight.

Two cruise boats – the **Lady Murray** (☎ 0412-573 460) and the **Paradise Queen** (☎ 0418-508 616) – take you cruising along the lake and the Murray River, pointing out historic spots and bird life. Both have 1½-hour barbecue cruises (\$20) at noon, scenic cruises (\$12) at 2pm, and dinner cruises during summer.

Yarrowonga Outdoors (☎ 5744 3522; www.yarrowongaoutdoors.com.au; 21 Belmore St; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat, open some Sun) hires out kayaks (\$45), wake-board gear (\$50) and bikes (\$20). To really discover the lake and river, take one of their half-day guided kayak tours (\$80). Ask about romantic overnight B&B paddles.

Wander along the foreshore to see where the cruise boats leave. There's a pool and waterslide here to tempt you, and **Ski Rides** (☎ 0419-

211 122; www.skirides.com.au; per 30min \$50) which runs water-skiing lessons and sessions. Other boat-towed thrills include tubing, or hire a canoe (\$40 per half-day) or fishing boat (\$60).

Feeling a bit up in the air? Take a scenic flight with **Jarden Aviation** (☎ 5743 3636, 0409-008 960; www.jardenaviation.com.au; Yarrowonga Airport; flights 15/25min \$45/65) to see vineyards, snowfields and the mighty Murray. Good deals for children travelling with adults.

INFORMATION

Yarrowonga visitors centre (☎ 1800 062 260, 5744 1989; www.yarrowongamulwala.com.au; Irvine Pde; ☞ 9am-5pm) By the lake; you can book accommodation and tours here for no charge.

EATING

There's a fantastic café scene on Belmore St, with lots of outdoor seating from which to enjoy the sunshine and people-watching while modern, fresh food is prepared for you.

Nosh Deli (☎ 5744 1756; 42 Belmore St; meals \$7-12; ☞ breakfast & lunch) Busy, bright and beautiful. Good coffee too.

Four Winds (☎ 5743 3533; cnr Murray Valley Hwy & Woods Rd; mains \$15-20; ☞ dinner Tue-Sun) New in town and all the rave, this Thai restaurant is in an old house next to Pistols Sports Tavern. Essential eating.

Coops Restaurant & Wine Bar (☎ 5743 1922; 137 Belmore St; mains \$15-31; ☞ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sun) Great for dining, quick snacks or just a leisurely drink at the bar. On Wednesday and Thursday there's a \$20 two-course special.

SLEEPING

There are lots of caravan parks, motels and time-share resorts in Yarrowonga.

Terminus Hotel (☎ 5744 3025; fax 5743 2725; 95 Belmore St; s/d from \$50/65) This popular old pub has spacious rooms, a grand balcony and fresh bathrooms, and the lounge area has a TV and kitchen appliances. Downstairs, there's lunch and dinner available in the bistro.

Lakeview Motel (☎ 5744 1555; fax 5743 1327; 1 Hunt St; s/d/f \$85/95/130; ☞ ☞) It looks out onto the lake, has spacious attractive rooms and the rates are very reasonable. Large pool, cable TV. Top spot.

Coghill Cottages (☎ 5744 2271; www.coghill.com.au; 6 Coghill St; d/f \$95/150; ☞ ☞) It's close to the lake and the cottages are smart and modern.

TRANSPORT: YARRAWONGA

Distance from Melbourne 290km

Direction North

Travel times 3¼ hours

Bus/Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) train/coach services run between Melbourne and Yarrowonga (return \$46, four hours, three daily) with a change at Benalla.

Car See p336.

Murray Valley Resort (☎ 5744 1844; www.murrayvalleyresort.com.au; Murray Valley Hwy; s/d from \$120/145; ♿ ♿) The amazing facilities here include a gym, indoor and outdoor pools, tennis courts, billiard tables and spas. The accommodation is modern with soft colours and lots of space.

RUTHERGLEN

pop 2000

A food-and-wine buff's paradise, Rutherglen is at the centre of one of Victoria's major wine-growing districts. As well as being a popular base for touring the wineries, the town has a Main St that is an historic precinct, lined with weathered timber buildings, antique and bric-a-brac shops, tearooms and veranda-fronted pubs.

The **Common School Museum** (☎ 1800 622 871, 02-6033 6300; 57 Main St; admission \$2; ♿ 1-4pm Sun) has an amazing range of weights and measures, local inventions, period pieces and school equipment.

A great way to take a winery tour is with **Rutherglen Stretch Limousine** (☎ 02-6032 7317; www.rutherglenlimousines.com.au). The limo takes up to 11 passengers, picnic hampers can be provided, and half- or full-day tours arranged.

Head out of town to the stunning **All Saints Estate** (☎ 02-6035 2222; www.allsaintswine.com.au; All Saints Rd, Wahgunyah; ♿ 9am-5.30pm). There's an atmospheric cellar-door in a 120-year-old castle, and in the front building Indigo Cheese Co offers tastings of gourmet cheeses and other produce from the region. Between them, **The Terrace** (☎ 02-6033 1922; meals \$28-32; ♿ lunch daily, dinner Sat) serves meals showcasing local produce.

Return to town along Hopetoun Rd and call into the **Wicked Virgin** (☎ 02-6032 7022; www.thewickedvirgin.com; Calico Town, 165 Hopetoun Rd; lunch \$8-15; ♿ 10am-4pm Thu-Mon) to taste their delicious fresh olives and oils and enjoy a light lunch (soups

TRANSPORT: RUTHERGLEN

Distance from Melbourne 290km

Direction Northeast

Travel time Three hours

Bus/Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) has a train/coach service between Melbourne and Rutherglen with a change at Wangaratta (return \$50, four hours, four weekly).

Car See p336.

and platters). It's at Calico Town, a picturesque vineyard producing an exclusive range of wines including an award-winning shiraz.

A few blocks south of Main St is **Scion** (☎ 02-6032 8844; www.scionvineyard.com; 74 Slaughterhouse Rd; ♿ 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), a cellar-door with an art exhibition and a small range of boutique wines.

INFORMATION

Rutherglen visitors centre (☎ 1800 622 871, 02-6033 6300; www.rutherglenc.com.au; 57 Main St; ♿ 9am-5pm) A fun place where you'll get all the info you need.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are special events on almost every weekend here, all featuring a wide range of activities, especially focussed around eating and drinking. For details on the following events see www.rutherglenc.com/events.

Tastes of Rutherglen Two weekends of total indulgence with food-and-wine packages at dozens of vineyards and restaurants; held in March.

Winery Walkabout Weekend Australia's original wine festival – there's music, barrel racing and probably some wine; held in June.

Rutherglen Agriculture & Wine Show Don't miss this late-September show: a cowbell is rung at 7am to signal a mad rush as all wines are \$8.

Tour de Rutherglen A cycling event with a purpose; held in early October.

Winemakers' Legends Weekend The new generation of winemakers mix it with the legends to provide picnics, markets, feasts and wine; held in late October.

EATING

There are cafés all along Main St, and take-away places to fill a picnic hamper.

Rendezvous Courtyard (☎ 02-6032 9114; 68 Main St; mains \$24-27; ♿ dinner) A traditional menu where the décor is pleasantly casual.

Tuileries Restaurant (☎ 02-6032 9033; 13 Drummond St; mains \$25-32; ♿ dinner) Lots of glass around a fountain, and fine dining in an attractive restaurant. On the other side of the fountain, the café has equally exciting lunches (\$10 to \$16) and top-quality breakfasts. Around the vineyard here, luxury B&B units cost from \$175 for two.

House at Mount Prior (☎ 02-6026 5256; www.houseatmountprior.com.au; 1194 Gooramadda Rd; mains \$12-25; ♿ lunch & dinner) On a hill above the Mt Prior winery, this homestead even has a tower. Have drinks at dusk on the veranda then move into the elegant dining room for a delicious three-course set meal (\$55). Stay the night in a stun-

ning room with soaring ceilings from \$110 per double.

SLEEPING

Accommodation here is likely to be tight during major festivals when rates are, of course, higher. They're also seriously higher on weekends and public holidays.

Victoria Hotel (☎ 02-6032 8610; www.victoriahotelrutherglen.com.au; 90 Main St; s \$35 d with/without bathroom \$65/40) This beautiful National Trust–classified place has several little, old rooms. Grab a front room with bathroom and views over Main St, and live like a king. The wide, lace-trimmed balcony is the perfect spot to discuss wine.

Motel Woongarra (☎ 02-6032 9588; www.motelwoongarra.com.au; cnr Main & Drummond Sts; s/d/f \$77/88/104; ♿ ♿) You'll love the special touches, like the carafe of port on your dresser.

Carlyle House (☎ 02-6032 8444; www.carlylehouse.com.au; 147 High St; B&B r/ste from \$155/185) Spread your wings in a garden apartment, or nestle amongst the antiques inside the beautifully restored house. The breakfast is excellent.

THE WAY NORTH UP THROUGH THE MALLEE

Coming from the south where the trees are tall, the Mallee appears as flat horizon and

CHILTERN

Tiny **Chiltern** (population 1100) is one of Victoria's most historic and charming colonial townships. The streetscape is so authentic that the town is often used as a film set for period pieces, including the early Walt Disney classic *Ride a Wild Pony*. Originally called Black Dog Creek, it was established in 1851 and prospered when gold was discovered here in 1859.

Ask Beryl at the **Chiltern visitors centre** (☎ 5726 1611; www.chiltern.com.au; 30 Main St; ♿ 10am-4pm) about bird-watching in the nearby Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, and pick up the *Chiltern Touring Guide*, which walks you around 14 labelled sites (or go to www.albury.net.au/~tim/chwalk.htm). The following **National Trust–classified buildings** (www.natstrust.com.au; adult/child \$2/free) you'll pass on this route are staffed by volunteers who open them most days, but ring and make an appointment to be sure:

Athenaeum Library & Museum (☎ 5726 1467; www.chilternathenaeum.com.au; Conness St), in the former Town Hall (1866), has a collection of memorabilia, art, photos and equipment from the gold-rush days.

Dow's Pharmacy (☎ 5726 1597; Conness St) has lotions and potions from the early days; it's been a chemist since 1859.

Lake View Homestead (☎ 5726 1317; Victoria St) was built in 1870 and overlooks Lake Anderson. It was the home of Henry Handel (Florence Ethel) Richardson, who wrote about life here in the book *Ultima Thule* (1929), the third part of her trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930).

Star/Grapevine Theatre (☎ 5726 1395; cnr Main & Conness Sts), once used for plays and dances, was the centre-piece of Chiltern's social and cultural life. It's now a museum filled with memorabilia. The grapevine in the courtyard is the largest in Australia.

When you've explored the town, check out the surrounding countryside on a friendly horse with **Mt Pilot Trail Rides** (☎ 5726 1655; mtpilotfarm@hotmail.com; Toveys Rd; 1hr rides \$35).

DETOUR: WAHGUNYAH

Just northeast of Rutherglen on the Murray River is the idyllic little township of **Wahgunyah** (population 800). At the height of the riverboat era, Wahgunyah was a thriving port town and trade depot. Now, renowned wineries such as All Saints Estate (above), St Leonards and Pfeiffers surround it – wining and dining here is fantastic.

In town is the fabulous old **Wahgunyah Empire Hotel** (☎ 02-6033 1094; 6 Food Street), where **Fairy's** (mains \$14-23; ♿ lunch & dinner daily) serves traditional fare with fresh veggies. The perfect place to stay is **Riverside Waterfront Motel** (☎ 02-6033 1177; www.riversidemotel.com.au; Cadel Tce; s/d \$85/95; ♿), where sparkling units lead out onto the grassy banks of the Murray. Rates include a light breakfast, plus there's a communal kitchen and barbecue – and a courtesy car!

While you're here, visit the Cofield winery for tastings and a pleasant meal in the **Pickled Sisters Café** (☎ 02-6033 2377; Distillery Rd, Wahgunyah; mains \$19-28; ♿ lunch Wed-Mon year-round, dinner Fri & Sat Dec-Feb).

TRANSPORT: THE WAY NORTH

Distance from Melbourne Ouyen/Mallee Hwy 460km, Shepparton 180km, Wodonga 300km

Direction Northwest, north, northeast

Travel times Six hours, two hours, 3½ hours

Air Regional Express Airlines (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies between Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga (return from \$200, 45 minutes, daily).

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs a coach through the Mallee to Mildura (\$70, 9½ hours, one daily). Trains run between Melbourne and Shepparton, stopping at Seymour (return \$34, 2½ hours, two daily). V/Line train/coach services to Wodonga (return \$39, three hours, daily) follow the Hume Fwy, stopping at Seymour, Euroa, Benalla and Wangaratta. CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) trains have an XPT (express) service to Albury-Wodonga (\$134, 3¼ hours, two daily); reservations required.

Car Heading north through the Mallee is a fast drive on open roads: take the Calder Hwy through Bendigo, or the Western Hwy to Ballarat then the Sunraysia Hwy. The Hume Fwy takes you over the Great Divide to Seymour. Exit the Goulburn Hwy 10km from Seymour for the Goulburn Valley, Shepparton and Echuca, or continue north on the Hume Fwy to Wodonga. The Northern Hwy from Kilmore is a smooth run to Echuca.

endless, undulating, twisted mallee scrub. A mallee is a hardy eucalypt with multiple slender trunks. Its roots are twisted, gnarled, dense chunks of wood, famous for their slow-burning qualities and much sought after by wood-turners. Mallee gums are canny desert survivors – root systems over 1000 years old are not uncommon – and are part of a diverse and rich biosystem with waterbirds, fish in the huge (but unreliable) lakes, kangaroos and other marsupials, emus, and the many edible plants that thrive in this environment.

When the railway line from Melbourne to Mildura was completed in 1902, much of the region was divided into small blocks for farming. The first Europeans had terrible problems trying to clear the land. They used mullensising (crushing the scrub with heavy red-gum rollers pulled by teams of bullocks, then burning and ploughing the land). But after rain, the tough old mallee roots regenerated and flourished. Farmers also had to deal with rabbit and mouse plagues, sand drifts and long droughts. Today the Mallee is a productive sheep-grazing and grain-growing district, with more exotic crops, such as lentils, also appearing.

You know you've reached the northwest when the land extends forever, skies are vast, rivers lazy and the sun is always meltingly hot. It's dry here, although the creeks and lake beds did fill three times in the last 100 years. The attractions (other than huge horizons and friendly little towns) are the semi-arid wilderness areas, such as **Wyperfeld National Park**, **Big Desert Wilderness Park** and **Murray-Sunset National Park**. Collectively these parks cover over 750,000 hectares, and are particularly notable for their abundance of native

plants, spring wild flowers and birds. This is 'Sunset Country', the one genuinely empty part of the state. Nature-lovers might delight in it, but it's frighteningly inaccessible, except to experienced bushmen with wide hats and wider water bottles, in their high-clearance 4WDs.

Hattah-Kulkyne National Park

The vegetation of the beautiful and diverse Hattah-Kulkyne National Park ranges from dry, sandy mallee-scrub country to the fertile riverside areas closer to the Murray, which are lined with red gum, black box, wattle and bottlebrush.

When the area was proposed as a park in 1976, it was the most rabbit-infested part of the state. The rabbits were largely eradicated, but now the 20,000-odd local population of kangaroos are wrecking the fragile environment – they can't be culled because the issue is too politically sensitive.

The **Hattah Lakes** system fills when the Murray floods, which is great for waterbirds. The many hollow trees here are perfect for nesting, and more than 200 species of birds have been recorded. There are many native animals, mostly nocturnal desert types and wetland species, such as the burrowing frog, which digs itself into the ground and waits until there's enough water to start breeding. Reptiles here include the mountain devil, the inspiration for the Aussie saying 'flat out like a lizard drinking' because it draws surface water into its mouth by lying flat on the ground. Over 1000 plant species have been recorded here, 200 of which are listed as rare or endangered.

The main access road is from **Hattah**, 70km south of Mildura on the Calder Hwy. There are two **nature drives**, the Hattah and the Kulkyne, and a network of old camel tracks which are great for **cyding**, although you'll need thorn-proof tubes. Tell the rangers where you're going, and carry plenty of water, a compass and a map.

You can **camp** (unpowered sites \$12) at Lake Hattah and Lake Mournpoul, but there's limited water and the lake water (when there is any) is undrinkable. Camping is also possible anywhere along the Murray River frontage.

INFORMATION

Hattah-Kulkyne National Park visitors centre (☎ 5029 3253; 5km into the park) A cool building with posters, tables and chairs. Ring the ranger to find out if the tracks are passable.

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) For more information.

Murray-Sunset National Park

If you've packed your hat and filled your water bottle you're ready to enjoy the stunning 633,000 hectares of mallee woodland of Murray-Sunset National Park, reaching from the river red gums of Lindsay Island down to Underbool. Don't go exploring in a 2WD; one hour's driving equals one day's walking, and you won't see any water or passing traffic. Move slowly in your 4WD to catch glimpses of rare animals, especially at dusk. The park was established to save unique native fauna, which suffered greatly from the clearing of 65% of the mallee scrub.

The **Pink Lakes**, near Underbool, get their colour from millions of microscopic organisms in the lake, that concentrate an orange pigment in their bodies. From **Linga**, on the Mallee Hwy, there's a signed, unsealed road that was built when salt was harvested from the lakes. Nearby is a basic camping ground, but beyond that you need a 4WD.

If you go for walks along the tracks, leave before dawn and be out of the sun before noon. As the wide sky turns pink at dusk, venture out again to watch the bird life and the magic of the night sky.

You can go fishing and yabbing in the billabongs and creeks around Lindsay Island, and marvel at the snow-white sand dunes. On the western side of the park, the **Shearer's Quarters** (☎ 5028 1218; off Settlement Rd; groups \$55) has hostel-type accommodation. It's pretty basic (hot and cold water and a fridge are supplied) and accessible only by 4WD.

In **Underbool**, the old **Underbool Hotel** (☎ /fax 5094 6262; Cotter St; s/d \$45/83) has basic rooms and serves dinner on Wednesday and Saturday. In **Murrayville** near the South Australian border, the **Mallee Fowl Hotel** (☎ /fax 5095 2120; Mallee Hwy, Murrayville; B&B s/d \$70/83; ☎) has en suite rooms, motel units and a bistro serving lunch and dinner from Monday to Saturday.

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63, Underbool 5094 6267, Werrimull 5028 1218; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) For more information and to let someone know your whereabouts contact the rangers in Underbool on the Mallee Hwy, or north at Werrimull.

THROUGH THE GOULBURN VALLEY

The beautiful Goulburn River, the irrigation source that makes intensive agriculture possible, was once a complex of rivers, creeks and billabongs. It's been tamed by dams, levees and channels, although you can still find pockets of riverine ecology.

The 'Food Bowl of Australia' is an important centre for fruit, dairy, food processing and some of Australia's oldest and best wineries. The waterways – the Goulburn, Broken and Murray Rivers – are the lifeblood of the region and their wetlands are the habitat for diverse wildlife.

To get here, leave the Hume Fwy after Seymour and head north on its little sister road, the Goulburn Valley Hwy.

Nagambie

pop 1400

First stop, Nagambie, is on the shores of pretty **Lake Nagambie**, which was created by the construction of the Goulburn Weir back in 1887. The weir is now popular for water sports such as water-skiing, rowing, canoeing, sailing, fishing and swimming. The **World Masters Rowing** (☎ March) competition is held on the lake; school rowing camps do much splashing around year-round. The town provides a useful base for touring local wineries, wetlands, horse studs and the Strathbogie Ranges.

Two of the best-known wineries in Victoria are just south of town: **Tahbilk Winery** (☎ 5794 2555; www.tahbilk.com.au; off Goulburn Valley Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) and **Mitchelton Wines** (☎ 5794

2710, 5736 2222; www.mitchelton.com.au; Mitchellstown Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm). Visit both these wineries on a cruise with **Goulburn River Cruises** (☎ 5794 2877; rivercruise@bigpond.com; per person \$19; ☎ Sep-May), a delightful way to go. Floodlit evening cruises and meals are available; group cruises can be arranged.

Nagambie is also the place to try **skydiving** (see p340). Afterwards you'll deserve a gourmet dining experience at one of the excellent restaurants around town, and a bed in one of the many accommodation options (contact the visitors centre or visit their website).

INFORMATION

Nagambie visitors centre (☎ 1800 444 647, 5794 2647; www.nagambielake tourism.com.au; 319 High St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Staff are passionate about their lake, their town and their region. Enjoy a coffee at the adjacent café while you consider your next move.

Shepparton

pop 45,000

Where the Goulburn and Broken Rivers meet is Shepparton, the regional centre of the Goulburn Valley. It's a modern town at the junction of the Midland and Goulburn Valley Hwys.

'Shepp' started out in 1850, when McGuire's punt and inn were built beside the Goulburn River. In 1912 irrigation technology came to the Goulburn Valley, leading to a sudden influx of settlers and a steady growth in the local agricultural industries. You'll know you've arrived here when you see the extraordinary

cows alongside the road. So colourful! Perhaps they produce flavoured milk...

Make sure your stay here includes a visit to the **Shepparton Art Gallery** (☎ 5832 9861; www.sheppartonartgallery.com.au; Eastbank Centre, 70 Welsford St; ☎ 10am-4pm). Its permanent collection of Australian art includes *Goulburn River near Shepparton* (1862) by Eugene von Guérard, depicting McGuire's punt crossing the river. A separate gallery houses temporary and touring exhibitions.

Bangerang Cultural Centre (☎ 5831 1020; Parkside Dr; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is always a place to visit. Check out its unique collection of Koorie art and artefacts.

Just south of town beside beautiful and popular **Victoria Park Lake** (Wyndham St) is **Aquamoves** (☎ 5832 9400; www.aquamoves.com.au; Tom Collins Dr; adult/child \$4.50/3; ☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat & Sun), a health and fitness extravaganza with several pools (including a rapid-river simulation pool), a hydrotherapy pool and gym. Take a swim, spa and sauna for \$7.50.

Ardmona KidsTown (☎ 5831 4213; www.kidstown.org.au; Midland Hwy/Mooroopna Causeway; admission gold coin; ☎ dawn-dusk) is for kids under 98 years old, with flying fox, miniature railway, giant playground, barbecues, café and more, just a few minutes east out of Shepparton.

INFORMATION

Shepparton visitors centre (☎ 1800 808 839, 5831 4400; www.greatershepparton.com.au/visitors/vic; Wyndham St; ☎ 9am-5pm) At the southern end of the Victoria Park Lake. Staff provide info and make bookings for you.

GOLD, WITH A DUSTING OF BROWN

Famous old **Rushworth** (population 1000), a spread-out little town that lazes dustily in the sun, was a stopover for travellers between the Beechworth and Bendigo gold diggings, until some local Koories took a couple of travellers to see a local gold deposit. By the 1880s there were more than 50 gold reefs being mined around here.

Rushworth's High St, classified an historic precinct, is divided by a central plantation and a Victorian band rotunda. You hardly need to visit the **Historical Museum** (☎ 58561951; rushworthmuseum@hotmail.com; High St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-noon Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) in the old Mechanics Institute to get a feel for the past.

The surrounding box ironbark country is known as 'golden ironbark', since it provided wealth after the gold ran out. At one stage these forests supported seven sawmills. Ironbark gums are scruffy, but let your eyes adjust to their raggedy-tag limbs and you'll grow to love this harsh bush.

South of Rushworth is **Whroo Historic Reserve** (pronounced 'Roo'), an old gold-mining ghost town with relics aplenty: old mine shafts, cyanide vats (used for separating the gold from quartz), puddling machines, and the Baladava open-cut mine – walk through the tunnel. **Whroo visitors centre** (☎ 5856 1561; wmr46@hotmail.com; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a café and a newly produced DVD and history book for sale; see the area as it was and trace the local history. The town once had over 130 buildings, but the ironbarks have reclaimed much of it. There are walking tracks and signed nature trails twisting through the scrub, and the evocative **cemetery** nearby on Spring Hill. Headstone inscriptions indicate that life was hard for the diggers and their families.

AN EARLY STOP

Kilmore (population 4700) was the first coach stop on the Melbourne-to-Sydney route, reaching its prime during the gold-rush years. Impressive old bluestone and brick buildings from the era include three pubs and the courthouse buildings (1863). The **Old Post Office & Museum** (cnr Powley & Foote Sts) will soon house a café, and the old mill sells antiques and coffee.

There's trash-and-treasure and produce **markets** (☎ 5781 1319; www.mitchellshire.vic.gov.au) around the district on some weekends, and an Agriculture Show in December on East St, complete with showbags.

Whitburgh Cottage (☎ 5782 1118; Piper St; admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Sun) was built in 1857. This simple and solid bluestone cottage, with twin-peaked slate roof, has been preserved as an historic museum.

The friendly **Kilmore visitors centre** (☎ 5781 1319; msls@vicnet.net.au; 12 Sydney St; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in the central library.

Kyabram

pop 5600

Kyabram, from a local Koorie word meaning 'dense forest', is a bustling commercial centre, with modern retail facilities for the surrounding farming communities. **Kyabram Fauna Park** (☎ 5852 2883; Lake Rd; adult/child/family \$14/7/35; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) is respected throughout the region for its devotion to native species. Kangaroos, koalas, Tasmanian devils and dingoes live here in natural habitats. There's a large number of bird species in aviaries and a variety of waterbirds in the wetlands section.

River Country Adventours (☎ 5852 2736; www.adventours.com.au; 57 Lake Rd; half-/full-/2-day safaris \$55/88/125) takes you frolicking on the beautiful Goulburn River. Rent a canoe if you'd rather.

The indigenous peoples of this area called the Murray River *tongala*. Northwest of Kyabram, the town of **Tongala** boasts the **Golden Cow Centre** (☎ 5859 1100; cnr Henderson & Finlay Rds; adult/child/family \$9/5.50/25; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Wed-Fri & Sun-Mon, tours & milking 11am), a working dairy with amazing, interactive displays on the dairy industry (milk a tin cow!) and the best milkshakes in Australia.

UP THE HUME

This used to be a track to Sydney, with bullock wagons piled with wheat waiting for those ahead to make the next river crossing. Even 40 years ago, heading north was a jostle of sedans, caravans and trucks on a narrow, potholed road. If they could see us now! Powering north on a broad band of bitumen, the Hume Fwy runs along the eastern edge of the Goulburn Valley, separating the valley from the foothills of the High Country in Victoria's northeast. **Wangaratta** and **Benalla** are the main centres.

Off the freeway, the minor roads and flat terrain make this the perfect region for leisurely **cycling**. The many country clubs boast

excellent **golf** courses, and race-meetings are held throughout the region.

Seymour to Benalla

Come off the freeway to stroll along the banks of the Goulburn River at Seymour (population 6000), passing the historic New Crossing Bridge, vineyards, majestic old gums and abundant native wildlife. Seymour is known for industry and agriculture. It's also central to many activities. The **Seymour visitors centre** (☎ 5799 0233; Emily St; ☎ 9am-5pm) will set you up with fun activities which won't disappoint – like walking up Mt Disappointment!

Riddy's Trawool Valley Tours (☎ 5792 3641, 0419-168 918; riddys@eck.net.au; 8366 Goulburn Valley Hwy; adult/child \$40/20) offers 4WD scenic tours of Trawool Valley, its waterfalls, reservoir and granite mine.

Seymour Railway Heritage Centre (☎ 5799 0515; www.srhc.org.au; Victoria St; admission \$2; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun) has a fantastic collection of heritage Victoria Railway locomotives and carriages.

The **RAAC Tank Museum** (☎ 5735 7285; www.army tankmuseum.com.au; Hopkins Barracks, Puckapunyal; adult/child/family \$7.50/3/15; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm last weekend of the month) is 18km west of Seymour. It houses vintage armoured vehicles and tanks (including the *Vicker MKII*), antitank weapons and historic army displays. From here you can start the 107km **Military Heritage Trail** along Tourist Drive 65 to Murchison, which takes in points like the Graytown War Camps and the Italian Ossario Memorial.

Back on the freeway heading north, turn into **Plunkett Fowles** (☎ 5796 2150; www.plunkettfowles.com.au; Lambing Gully Rd, Avenel; ☎ 9am-5pm). The wines made here are full and fresh, and from the stunning **café** (lunch \$15-27; ☎ breakfast & lunch) you look across the vineyard to the Strathbogie Ranges. If you sit out in the courtyard you may be serenaded!

A little further north, Upton Rd takes you through beautiful countryside to **Avenel Maze**

MITCHELL, WHERE THE FUN BEGINS

A small shire that includes places like Kilmore, Seymour and Tallarook State Forest, **Mitchell** (www.mitchell.shire.vic.gov.au) is just an hour's easy drive north of Melbourne. You'll find action-packed activities up here, varied and exquisite crafts, superb food and wine, and a countryside that's lush with rivers, plantlife, wildlife and sweeping plains. The special events here are fantastic – everything from Celtic festivals and classic-car days to spring racing carnivals and wine-and-food festivals. Check out the Events Calendar on the shire's website, or contact any regional visitors centre for details.

(☎ 5796 2667; Upton Rd, Avenel; 🕒 10am–5pm Thu–Mon). There are five amazing mazes here; the hedge mazes smell fantastic but you'll be totally bamboozled, so try the rock labyrinth where you can see where you're going. There's also minigolf, a licensed café and barbecue area.

Continue up the freeway to **Euroa** (population 2800; see also [below](#)), a pretty town at the foot of the Strathbogie Ranges. Here you'll find late-Victorian and Edwardian redbrick buildings, the Farmers Arms museum, many parks, and the Seven Creeks which run through town. Euroa's **Miniature Steam Train** (☎ 5759 3000; www.euroaonline.com.au; Turnbull St; rides \$1.50) steams up on the fourth Sunday of the month. On any day, call into **Jumping Jumbuck** (☎ 5795 1181; Old Hume Hwy; mains \$10–14; 🕒 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri–Sun). The quick-service meals and heady coffee will set you happily back onto the freeway and on to Benalla.

Benalla (population 9000) has associations with the Ned Kelly legend: Ned made his first court appearance here in 1869 when, aged

14, he was charged with robbery and assault. In 1877 he was again being escorted to the Benalla court when he escaped and hid in a saddle-and-boot maker's shop on Arundel St. It was here he told police trooper Thomas Lonigan that if ever he shot a man, it would be Lonigan, which he did a year later (see [p342](#)).

Benalla visitors centre (☎ 5762 1749; www.benalla.vic.gov.au; Mair St; 🕒 9am–5pm), by the lake, is in the **Costume & Pioneer Museum** (www.benallamuseum.org; adult/child \$3/2), which has fascinating exhibits and a delightful miniature house. The centre has all the info you'll need to explore the town and its culture, full accommodation listings, and the brochures *A Self-guided Heritage Tour*, *Benalla Lake Walk* and *Benalla Ceramic Mural Guide*.

Across the lake, **Benalla Art Gallery** (☎ 5762 3027; www.benallaartgallery.com; Bridge St; 🕒 10am–5pm) has a collection of Australian art, including paintings from the Heidelberg School, and a café that spreads onto a deck overlooking the lake. Outside is the very moving Weary Dunlop Memorial.

Northeast of Benalla, the **Winton Motor Raceway** (☎ 5766 4235; www.wintonmotorraceway.com.au; Fox St, Winton) is one of Victoria's main motor-racing circuits. Its website also lists local accommodation.

Glenrowan

pop 350

Ned Kelly's legendary bushranging exploits came to their bloody end here in 1880. The story of Ned and his gang has been preserved in Glenrowan, a town of legend and tourist attraction. All the sites are signed – collect a walking map and become immersed in the Glenrowan Affair.

The highlight is the living museum, **Kellyland-Animated Theatre** (☎ 5766 2367; Gladstone St; adult/child/family \$10/14/60; 🕒 9.30am–4.30pm, shows every 30min). Move through different rooms, like the bar of McDonnell's Tavern, while the story acts out around you courtesy of life-like computerised characters (it may be too scary for young children). Original props include a hand gun owned by Ned, Sgt Kennedy's hitching post and a rare copy of the findings of the Royal Commission into the Kelly manhunt. Also ask for the brochure titled *Glenrowan – Ned Kelly's Last Stand*.

Nearby, underneath Kate's Cottage, a **museum** (☎ 5766 2448 www.nedkellyworld.com.au; Gladstone St; adult/child \$2/50c; 🕒 9am–5pm) holds Kelly memorabilia and artefacts gathered from all over the district.

Warby Range State Park

The 400-million-year-old Warby Range extends about 25km north of Glenrowan and probably provided Ned Kelly and his gang with many vantage points. It's a low range of steep, granite slopes, preserved as a state park because of its scenic value (and, probably, because it wasn't farmable). Features include fast-flowing creeks and waterfalls after rain, wildflowers in spring, some great picnic spots and an abundance of bird life.

The views from **Ryan's Lookout** are exceptional. There are good sealed roads (a short trip starts at Ryan's Lookout, goes along Gerrett Rd, links up with Adam's Track and then Thoona Rd), and also good walking tracks, picnic areas and a camp site. Ask for a map and brochure at the Wangaratta visitors centre ([right](#)).

Wangaratta

pop 15,500

Wangaratta (just plain old 'Wang' to the locals) means 'resting place of the cormorants'. The town is at the junction of the Ovens and King Rivers, and the first buildings, in the 1840s, were based around a punt service which operated until 1855. The Wangaratta Woollen Mills (Australian Country Spinners) and Bruck Mills, established after WWII, are both still operating. These days, Wangaratta is an industrial and textile centre. It's also the turn-off point for the Great Alpine Rd, which leads to the northern ski resorts of the Victorian Alps (see [p300](#)).

At the Wangaratta Cemetery, south of town, is the grave of **Dan 'Mad Dog' Morgan**, a notorious bushranger. It contains most of

Morgan's remains – after he was fatally shot at nearby Peechelba Station in April 1865, his head was taken to Melbourne for a study of the criminal mind, and his scrotum was supposedly fashioned into a tobacco pouch.

Head 20km east of Wangaratta to **Eldorado**, which has a signed walk around 31 mining and commercial sites from the 1850s on. The main feature is Cock's Eldorado Dredge. This mining monstrosity has a belt with 110 steel buckets that can dig down to 30m. It dredged for gold and tin in Reedy Creek for 18 years.

INFORMATION

Wangaratta visitors centre (☎ 1800 801 065, 5721 5711; www.visitwangaratta.com.au; 100 Murphy St; 🕒 9am–5pm; 📺) In the old library, with displays, internet access and videos depicting local rail trails, a Ned Kelly debate, and snippets from the annual Wangaratta Jazz Festival. Pick up informative brochures like *Official Visitors Guide* and *Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail* (which starts in Bowser, 8km northeast of Wangaratta), and *Wangaratta Cemetery Self-guided Tour*.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Wangaratta Sports Carnival (☎ 5721 8708) An athletics meeting featuring the Wangaratta Gift foot race; held in late January.

Wangaratta Jazz Festival (www.wangaratta-jazz.org.au) First held in 1990, this is one of Australia's premier music festivals, featuring traditional, modern and contemporary jazz. It's held on the weekend before the Melbourne Cup in November, with hundreds of musicians and acts, and many awards and workshops.

EATING

The café scene is all happening along Murphy St and Reid St, in the centre of town.

Hollywood's (☎ 5721 9877; 87 Murphy St; mains \$23–36; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) This friendly spot spreads itself around the pavement.

Café Martini (☎ 5721 9020; 1 Murphy St; mains \$13–26; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon–Sat, dinner Sun) Choose a table on the veranda and look down on the town.

Vine Hotel (☎ 5721 2605; Detour Rd; mains \$12–24; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed–Sun) Ned Kelly and his gang used to hang out here; these days the food's better! Go underground to the small museum and cellars. The Vine is about 3km north of town, on the road to Eldorado.

SLEEPING

There's all sorts of accommodation here, which you can book online at www.visitwangaratta.com.au.

COME FLY WITH ME

From the coast, head north over the Great Divide to where the weather patterns don't change and calm air-currents enable far more days suitable for skydiving. Euroa and Nagambie are really into this most exhilarating of sports. Don't believe us? Go out to the airfields, lie in the sun, and watch people of all ages and fitness floating down from above.

Go Jump the Parachute School (☎ 1300 302 907; www.skydivingassoc.com.au; Drysdale Rd, Euroa) has 150 hectares of open acres in Euroa and bunk houses where you can stay for free. Start with an introductory scenic flight with a tandem jump (\$345), or take a weekend course (\$516) where you end up freefalling with two instructors and pull your own ripcord.

Skydive Nagambie (☎ 1800 266 500, 5794 2626; www.skydivenagambie.com; 1232 Kettles Rd, Nagambie) offers tandem dives (\$340) or a two-day package with three jumps (\$865).

Benalla, known worldwide for its fabulous thermal activity, is more into gliding. The **Gliding Club of Victoria** (☎ 5762 1058; www.gliding-benalla.org; Samaria Rd Aerodrome; flights from \$175) has a base at Benalla airport. Go softly, quietly, into a timeless space. . .

THE KELLY GANG

Ned Kelly is probably Australia's greatest folk hero. His life and death have been embraced as a part of the national culture – from Sidney Nolan's famous paintings to Peter Carey's Booker Prize-winning novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Ned himself has become a symbol of the Australian rebel character.

Before he became a cult hero, Edward 'Ned' Kelly was labelled a horse thief. Born in 1855, Ned was first arrested when he was 14 and spent the next 10 years in and out of jails. In 1878 a warrant was issued for his arrest for stealing horses, so he and his brother Dan went into hiding. Their mother and two friends were arrested, sentenced and imprisoned for aiding and abetting. The Kelly family had long felt persecuted by the authorities, and the jailing of Mrs Kelly was the last straw.

Ned and Dan were joined in their hide-out in the Wombat Ranges, near Mansfield, by Steve Hart and Joe Byrne. Four policemen – Kennedy, Lonigan, Scanlon and McIntyre – came looking for them, and, in a shoot-out at Stringybark Creek, Ned killed Kennedy, Lonigan and Scanlon. McIntyre escaped to Mansfield and raised the alarm.

The government put up a £500 reward for any of the gang members, dead or alive. In December 1878 the gang held up the National Bank at Euroa, and got away with £2000. Then, in February 1879, they took over the police station at Jerilderie, locked the two policemen in the cells, and robbed the Bank of New South Wales wearing the policemen's uniforms. By this time the reward was £2000 a head.

On 27 June 1880, the gang held 60 people captive in a hotel at Glenrowan. A train-load of police and trackers was sent from Melbourne. Ned's plan to destroy the train was foiled when a schoolteacher warned the police. Surrounded, the gang holed up in the hotel and returned fire for hours, while wearing heavy armour made from ploughshares. Ned was shot in the legs and captured, and Dan Kelly, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart, along with several of their hostages, were killed.

Ned Kelly was brought to Melbourne, tried, then hanged on 11 November 1880. He met his end bravely; his last words are famously quoted as, 'Such is life.'

His death mask, armour and the gallows on which he died are on display in the Old Melbourne Gaol (see p56).

Pinsent Hotel (☎ 5721 2183; 20 Reid St; s/d \$35/60)

The charming old rooms upstairs here are quite swish.

Billabong Motel (☎ 5721 2353; 12 Chisholm St; s/d from \$40/55; 🚰) A homely warren of fresh little rooms, with very old but clean bathrooms.

Hermitage Motor Inn (☎ 5721 7444; www.hermitagemotorinn.com.au; cnr Cusack & Mackay Sts; s/d/f/spa \$98/115/135/140; 🚰 🚿) You'll see the sign to this place as you come into town from the south; it's a great place to stay.

Wodonga

pop 30,000

Wodonga looks out on the lovely **Sumsion Gardens** and a lake formed by Wodonga Creek. It's a commercial centre, also know for its sporting and aquatic facilities and bike trails. The Lincoln Causeway runs from the city centre across Wodonga Creek to the border at the Murray River. The Gateway shopping area, along the Causeway, has art and craft shops

where you can watch timber pieces being carved, or buy fine china, dolls or whatever takes your fancy.

There are signed trails for the many walking and bike trails around Gateway Island, along the Murray River and to the beautiful wetlands of Sumsion Gardens.

The **Army Museum Bandiana** (☎ 6055 2525; www.defence.gov.au/army/awma_mus; Murray Valley Hwy, Bandiana; adult/child/family \$5/2/10; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) displays a variety of war weaponry, items from missions, and documents. The old cars are magnificent. There's Buick and Holden staff cars, Chevrolet and Dodge trucks, carriages, motorbikes.

INFORMATION

Wodonga visitors centre (Gateway visitors centre; ☎ 1300 796 222, 6051 3750; www.destinationalbrywodonga.com.au; Hume Hwy, Gateway Is; 🕒 9am-5pm) Has 24-hour touch-screen information and an accommodation-booking service.

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