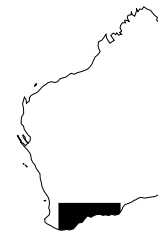


South Coast



Standing on the cliffs of the wild South Coast as the winds come in off the southern ocean and the waves pound below is a truly elemental experience. And on calm days, when the sea is varied shades of aqua and the glorious white sand beaches lie pristine and welcoming it's different again; either way you're about as close to nature as you can get.

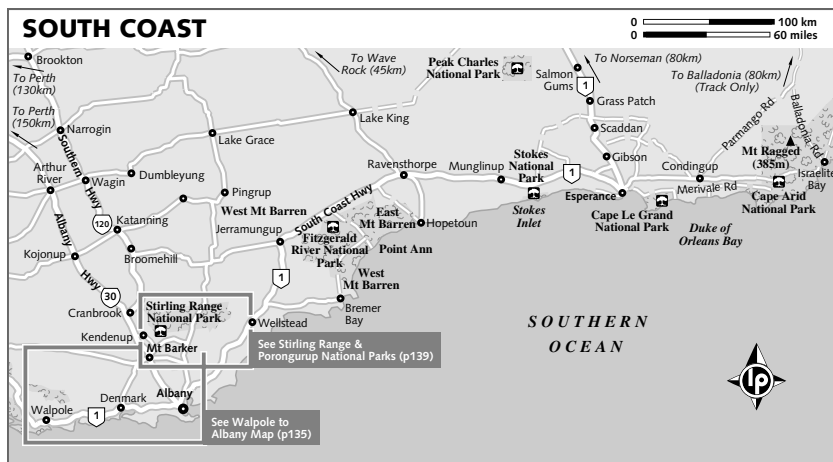
Stunning coastal national parks in the region include Fitzgerald River and Cape Le Grand while, inland, the Porongurups and Stirling Ranges offer great bushwalking and climbing. If you're seeking solitude, even busy holiday periods here in 'The Great Southern' are relaxed; for many it's just that bit too far from Perth, and the region rewards its visitors with time away from the crowds.

Marine visitors come this way, too. The winter months bring migrating whales, some simply passing by while others calve and stay with their babies in the shallows of sheltered bays. And you know you're at the end of the continent when watching seals and sea lions on the off-shore islands of the Recherche Archipelago. When you need a change from the great outdoors, Albany – the earliest European settlement in the state – has a wealth of colonial history, and pretty rural towns like Denmark and quiet coastal Esperance invite you to sit back with a glass of fine local wine and watch the world go by.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Walk among and above the giant tingle trees in Walpole's Valley of the Giants' **Tree Top Walk** (p134)
- Whale-watch between July and October in Albany's **King George Sound** (p143)
- Fish for smaller fry in the region's sheltered bays, like those of quiet **Stokes National Park** (p151)
- Hike among the tall trees and granite outcrops of The Pass and Devil's Slide trails in the **Porongurup National Park** (p138)
- Tread lightly by bush camping at St Mary Inlet, in glorious **Fitzgerald River National Park** (p147)
- Wander through wildflowers along the walking tracks of **Point Ann** (p147) in Fitzgerald River National Park
- Relive the small-town life in some of beloved Australian writer Tim Winton's novels along the coastline of **Albany** (p141)
- Swim, surf and soak in the sun at the squeaky-clean beaches in **Cape Le Grand National Park** (p151)





Getting There & Away

SkyWest Airlines (☎ 1300 660 088; www.skywest.com.au) flies daily from Perth to both Albany and Esperance.

Transwa (☎ 1300 662 205; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) runs bus services between Perth and Denmark (\$57 one way, eight hours), Albany (\$48, six hours) and Esperance (\$72, 10 hours); some services go via Walpole. You can also travel by train to Bunbury, then by coach from Bunbury to Albany.

Transwa also runs a service several times a week between Kalgoorlie-Boulder to Esperance (\$46, five hours).

Goldrush Tours Golden Triangle Tour (☎ 1800 620 441; www.goldrushtours.com.au) offers a hop-on hop-off bus pass (\$475) between Perth, Margaret River and the southwest coast and forests, Albany and Esperance on the south coast, and up to Kalgoorlie.

To make the most of this region, especially its national parks, your own wheels really are the best option.

WALPOLE & NORNALUP

☎ 08 / pop 450 & 50

The peaceful twin inlets of Walpole and Nornalup are close to majestic forests of giant tingle trees, including the famous Tree Top Walk. The heavily forested Walpole-Nornalup National Park, covering 180 sq km around Nornalup Inlet and the town of Walpole, contains beaches, rugged coastline, inlets, the Nuyts Wilderness area and the magnificent Valley of the Giants (when you're under the tall forest

canopy you'll understand the name). The South West Hwy almost meets the coast at the two inlets, then becomes the South Coast Hwy.

The helpful **Walpole visitors centre** (☎ 9840 1111; www.southernforests.com.au; South Coast Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) is in Pioneer Cottage. Contact the **Department of Environment & Conservation** (DEC; ☎ 9840 1027; South Coast Hwy) for national park and bushwalking information.

Sights & Activities

The Tree Top Walk (☎ 9840 8263; adult/child \$6/2.50; ☎ 9am-4.15pm, 8am-5.15pm Christmas school holidays) has become Walpole's main drawcard, and it is not hard to see why. A 600m-long ramp rises from the floor of the valley, allowing visitors access high into the canopy of the giant tingle trees; you really are walking 'through' the tree tops. At its highest point, the ramp is 40m above the ground and the views below and above are simply stunning. It's on a gentle incline so it's easy to walk, and is even accessible by assisted wheelchair.

The ramp is an engineering feat in itself, though vertigo sufferers might have a few problems; it's designed to sway gently in the breeze to mimic life in the tree tops. At ground level, the **Ancient Empire** boardwalk meanders around and through the base of veteran red tingles, some of which are 16m in circumference, including one that soars to 46m.

This is part of the **Valley of the Giants** (Walpole-Nornalup) national park: inland giants are the red, yellow and Rates tingle trees, and closer to the coast is the red flowering gum.

Pleasant, shady paths lead through the forests, which are frequented by bushwalkers.

There are numerous good walking tracks around, including a section of the **Bibbulmun Track**, which passes through Walpole to Coalmine Beach (two hours). There are a number of scenic drives, including the **Knoll Drive**, 3km east of Walpole; the **Valley of the Giants Rd**; and through pastoral country to **Mt Frankland**, 29km north of Walpole. Here you can climb to the summit for panoramic views or walk around the trail at its base. Opposite Knoll Drive, Hilltop Rd leads to a **giant tingle tree**; this road continues to the **Circular Pool** on the Frankland River, a popular canoeing spot.

A trip to Walpole should include the popular **WOW Wilderness Cruise** (☎ 9840 1036; www.wowwilderness.com.au), through the inlets and river systems. This magnificent landscape and its ecology are brought to life with anecdotes about Aboriginal settlement, salmon fishers and shipwrecked pirates. A 2½-hour trip (adult/child \$35/15) leaves daily at 10am.

The Frankland River, lined with karri and tingle trees, is peaceful and great for **canoeing**. Hire canoes from **Nornalup Riverside Chalets** (☎ 9840 1107; South Coast Hwy, Nornalup) for \$20 per hour or \$45/60 per half/full day.

Parrot Jungle Bird & Reptile Park (☎ 9840 8335; Bow Bridge; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm), off the South Coast Hwy at Bow Bridge, is an aviary with a host of native birds, including Major Mitchell and black cockatoos, as well as exotics such as Amazon rainforest macaws. The scaly reptilian residents are handled daily at 2pm.

BONZER BACKROADS – THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

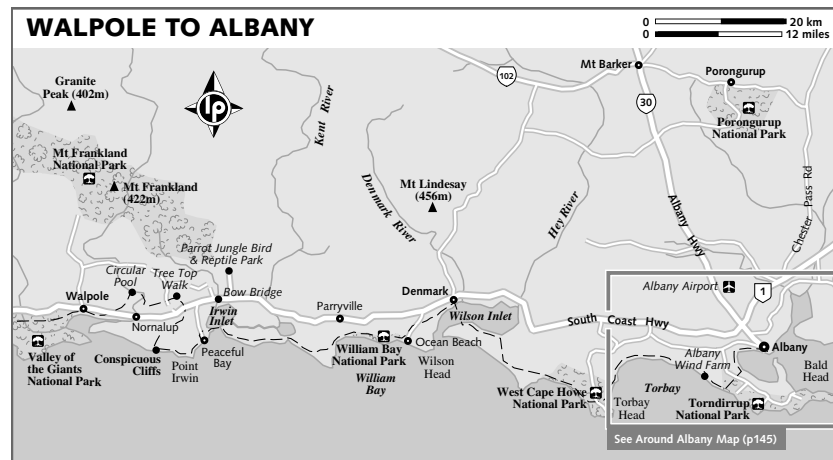
About 13km west of Walpole, at Crystal Springs, is an 8km gravel road to **Mandalay Beach**. Here, the *Mandalay*, a Norwegian barque, was wrecked on the beach in 1911. As the sand gradually erodes with storms, the wreck eerily appears every 10 years or so, in shallow water that is walkable at low tide (check out the photos at Walpole visitors centre). The beach is glorious, often deserted, and accessed by an impressive boardwalk across sand dunes and cliffs; it's now part of D'Entrecasteaux National Park.

Midway between Nornalup and Peaceful Bay, check out **Conspicuous Cliffs**. It's a great spot for **whale-watching** from July to November, with a boardwalk, hilltop lookout and steep-ish 800m walk to the beach.

Sleeping & Eating

For camping sites in Walpole-Nornalup National Park, including bush sites at Crystal Springs and huts at Fernhook Falls or Mt Frankland, use the honesty registration and fee boxes on site. Most accommodation is designed for self-caterers.

Coalmine Beach (☎ 9840 1026; www.coalminebeach.com.au; Knoll Dr, Walpole; unpowered/powerd sites per person from \$13/16, cabins from \$65) You couldn't get a better location than this, under shady trees above the beach. In quiet periods you might be



lucky to hit a free fish night, where the owners cook up the day's catch.

Walpole Lodge (☎ 9840 1244; www.walpolelodge.com.au; cnr Pier St & Park Ave; dm/s/d \$20/35/65; ♿) This popular place is open plan and informal, with great info boards around the walls and casual, cheery owners.

Tingle All Over YHA (☎ 9840 1041; tingleallover2000@yahoo.com.au; Nockolds St; dm/s/d \$22/38/50) Exercise your brain with the giant chess set in the garden at this clean, basic option near the highway.

Rest Point Holiday Village (☎ 9840 1032; www.restpoint.com.au; Rest Point; camp sites \$22, cabins from \$65) On wide lawns with direct waterfrontage, this is a light and bright camping area.

Normalup Riverside Chalets (☎/fax 9840 1107; Riverside Dr, Normalup; chalets \$80-125) Stay a night in sleepy Normalup in these comfortable, colourful self-contained chalets, just a rod's throw from the fish in the Frankland River. One chalet is adapted for disabled access.

Riverside Retreat (☎ 9840 1255; www.riversideretreat.com.au; chalets \$99) Set off the road on the banks of the Frankland River, these quiet, private and well-equipped chalets are great value, with pot-bellied stoves for cosy winter warmth.

In Walpole, stop by for a casual coffee at Top Deck Café, or a filling counter meal at the Walpole Hotel Motel, both on the main road. Better still, head to **Thurlby Herb Farm** (☎ 9840 1249; www.thurlbyherb.com.au; Gardiner Rd), 14km north of town, which serves up delicious light lunches and cakes – accompanied by fresh-picked herbal teas – in a pretty café overlooking the garden. It also distils its own essential oils, and makes herb-based products including soap. The gift shop has an eclectic collection of goodies.

DENMARK

☎ 08 / pop 4000

There are many good reasons why Denmark, 55km west of Albany, attracts folk looking to opt out from city life – gorgeous coastline, rolling hills, magnificent forests and a vibrant artistic community. There are some fine beaches in the area, especially Ocean Beach, a surfer's delight, and, in the 17-sq-km **William Bay National Park**, the sheltered **Greens Pool** and **Elephant Rocks** with a backdrop of coastal dunes, granite boulders and heath land. The area also has some notable wineries, including Howard Park and West Cape Howe Wines.

Denmark was established to supply timber for the goldfields. Known by Noongar people as Koorabup (place of the black swan), there's

evidence of early Aboriginal settlement in the 3000-year-old fish traps found in Wilson Inlet.

Information

Denmark Environment Centre (☎ 9848 1644;

Strickland St) Has an extensive library and bookshop.

Telecentre (☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) Next door to the

visitors centre, this place has internet access.

Visitors centre (☎ 9848 2055; www.denmark.com.au; Strickland St; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Sights & Activities

Surfers and anglers usually waste no time in heading to rugged **Ocean Beach**. If you're keen to try surfing, accredited local instructor Mike Neunuebel gives **surflessons** (☎ 9848 2057) from \$40. For a gentler experience **Denmark Dingy Hire** (☎ 0429 421 786; ☎ Sep-May) can set you up with boats for the river.

Walk the **Mokare Heritage Trail** (3km along the Denmark River) or the **Wilson Inlet Trail** (6km starting at the river mouth). Put everything into perspective at **Mt Shadforth Lookout**, with its coastal view. **Mt Shadforth Rd**, which begins in the centre of town and finishes up on the South Coast Hwy west of town makes a great scenic drive, as does the longer pastoral loop of **Scotsdale Rd**. Potter along these, taking your pick of attractions including alpaca farms, wineries, cheese farms and galleries.

If you need some sweetening, swing by **Bartholomews Meadery** (☎ 9840 9349; South Coast Hwy; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), about 16km west of Denmark. The house mead (honey wine) is internationally award-winning, the honey ice cream is delicious, and the showroom takes a holistic approach to bees and beeswax for health. Check out the lovingly made mud-brick buildings (including the loo).

Tours

Visit West Cape Howe National Park (\$75) or take short local tours (\$25) with **Little River Discovery Tours** (☎ 9848 2604), operated by long-term resident naturalists who also run 4WD day tours to the Valley of the Giants (\$81).

Denmark Bike Adventures (☎ 9848 3300; blue.wren@bigpond.com; per person from \$30) offers drop-off/ride back walking and cycling tours along the coast, wineries and forests; a great way to see the country at your own pace. Alternatively, cruise the islets of Wilson Inlet with **MV Jasmin B** (☎ 9840 8183; jasmine.b@bordermet.com.au); 2½ hour cruises run twice daily on most days.

Festivals & Events

Three times a year (December, January and Easter) Denmark hosts a colourful **market day** on the parkland by the river, with an unusual range of high-quality craft stalls, music and food. An annual **Festival of Voice** (www.dfov.org.au) – performances and workshops – takes place in June.

Sleeping

Riverbend Caravan Park (☎ 9848 1107; rivabend@omninet.net.au; East River Rd; unpowered sites \$14-20, /powered sites \$17-23, cabins from \$80) About 2km from town, on a quiet stretch of river, this lovely shaded site has excellent, well-equipped cabins with private verandas and a veggie garden.

Rivermouth Caravan Park (☎ 9848 1262; Inlet Dr; unpowered/powered \$16/18.50, cabins \$50-70; ♿) Ideally located for nautical pursuits, this park has sites along the Wilson Inlet beside the boat ramp.

Blue Wren Travellers' Rest YHA (☎ 9848 3300; http://bluewren.batcave.net; 17 Price St; dm/tw/d \$19/48/55) Chooks live under this little timber house and the goofy house dog is spoilt by everyone. Great info panels cover the walls, and it's small enough to have a homey feel.

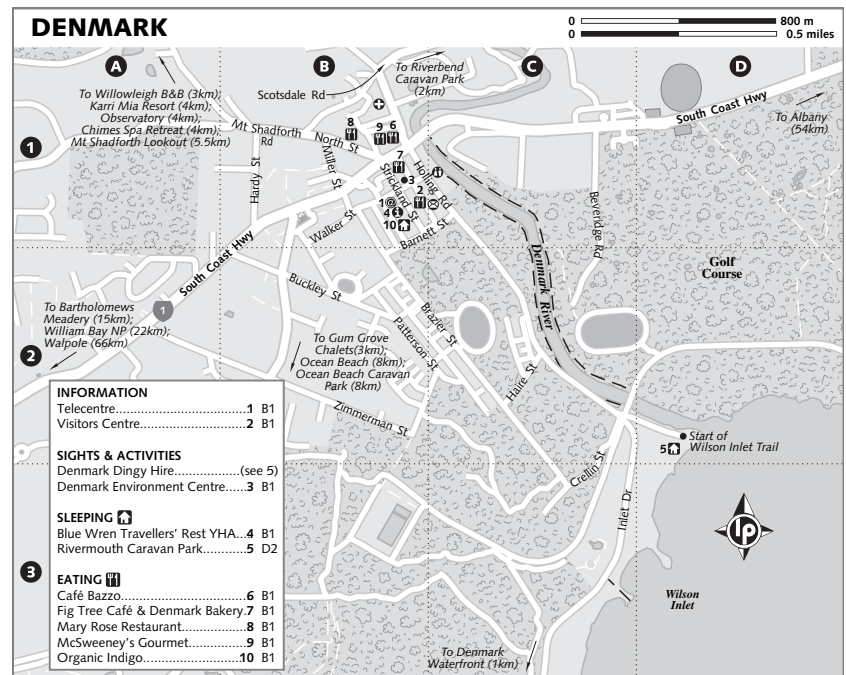
Ocean Beach Caravan Park (☎ 9848 1106; Ocean Beach; unpowered/powered sites \$19/22; cabins \$55-85) Playgrounds and space for the kids are great at this big park, popular with surfers. The cheaper cabins are very basic.

Denmark Waterfront (☎ 9848 1147; www.denmarkwaterfront.com.au; 63 Inlet Dr; lodge \$75, motel \$85-110, cottages from \$130) With great views of the water through the gum trees, there's a range of accommodation here. The four quiet lodge rooms – tucked off the road, with a communal kitchen and great views from the balconies – are good value.

Gum Grove Chalets (☎ 9848 1378; Ocean Beach Rd; chalets from \$80) These self-contained bush chalets, about 3km south of Denmark, are tatty but clean. It's good value for families or groups of friends; most sleep up to six people.

Willowleigh B&B (☎ 9848 1089; kenannm@wn.com.au; Kearsley Rd; r \$100) Enjoy the two acres of gorgeous gardens from your conservatory or veranda at this B&B on the edge of town.

Karri Mia Resort (☎ 9848 2233; www.karrimia.com.au; Mt Shadforth Rd; bungalows from \$180; ♿) With magnificent views, this property boasts tastefully furnished, self-contained bungalows.



If you're a fan of authentic Thai food, don't miss **Maleeya's Thai Café** (☎ 9853 1123; 1376 Porongurup Rd; mains \$20; ☹ Thu-Sun). It's just before Porongurup township on the Mt Barker road.

Stirling Range National Park

This 1156-sq-km national park consists of a single chain of peaks (including Bluff Knoll, at 1073m, which is the highest in the southwest), 10km wide and 65km long. Running most of its length are isolated peaks towering above broad valleys covered in shrubs and heath. The range is widely noted for its spectacular colour changes through blues, reds and purples and was named, in 1835, after Captain James Stirling, first governor of the Swan River Colony.

Due to the altitude and climate there are many localised plants in the Stirlings. It is estimated that there are more than 1500 species of native plants, 60 of which are endemic. The most beautiful are the Darwinias or mountain bells, which occur only above 300m. Ten species have been identified, and only one of them occurs outside the range; one may be seen in season on the Mt Talyuberlup walk.

The Stirlings are renowned for serious **bushwalking**. Keen walkers can choose from a number of high points: **Toolbrunup** (for views and a good climb), **Bluff Knoll** (a well-graded tourist track), and **Mt Hassell** and **Talyuberlup** are popular half-day walks.

Challenging walks cross the eastern sector of the range from **Bluff Knoll to Ellen Peak**, which should take three days, or the shorter traverse from the **Arrows to Ellen Peak** (two days). The latter option is a loop but the former, from Bluff Knoll, will require a car shuttle. *Mountain Walks in the Stirling Range*, by AT Morphet, has detailed mud-maps and track info, and is a must for serious walkers; it's usually available at local roadhouses and visitors centres. Walkers must be suitably experienced and equipped as the range is subject to sudden drops in temperature, driving rain

and sometimes snow; and register in and out of your walk with the rangers.

About 12km north of Bluff Knoll is a surprising anomaly – a replica 16th-century **Dutch windmill** called *The Lily*. The only working windmill in Australia, it operates as a flour mill and was built by an enterprising Dutchman, Pleun Hitzert. Replica Dutch cottages of the same era sit comfortably next to it, making the bush look like something out of a Rembrandt etching. You can stay and eat at **Lily** (☎ 9827 9205; www.thelily.com.au; Chester Pass Rd, Borden; cottage from \$119; ☹ closed Mon), where lunch in the restaurant – the relocated and precisely reconstructed 1924 Gnowangerup railway station – is a delight, and may be your only chance to eat real Dutch apple cake (\$6.50) in rural WA. You can also tour the windmill (adult/child \$5/2).

You can camp in the National Park at **Moin-gup Springs** on Chester Pass Rd, near the Toolbrunup Peak turn-off. Another good option is **Mt Trio Bush Camping & Caravan Park** (☎ 9827 9270; www.mounttrio.com.au; Salt River Rd; unpowered/powerd per person \$10/12), a big block of bush on a farm property close to the walking tracks of the western half of the park. There are decent facilities, including wheelchair access to the showers.

The well-run **Stirling Range Retreat** (☎ 9827 9229; www.stirlingrange.com.au; Chester Pass Rd; camp/caravan sites \$9/22, dm/d \$19/45, cabins \$79-115) is on the park's northern boundary. It has a wide range of accommodation, from a backpackers lodge to self-contained, rammed-earth cabins.

MT BARKER

☎ 08 / pop 1730

You'll pass through the town of Mt Barker – 55km northeast of Denmark, 64km southwest of the Stirling Range and 20km west of the Porongurup Range – on the way to the mountain national parks. The **visitors centre** (☎ 9851 1163; www.mountbarkertourismwa.com.au; 622 Albany Hwy; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) is in the restored train station. There's a

panoramic view of the area from the **Mt Barker Lookout**, 5km south of town.

The town was settled in the 1830s and the convict-built 1868 police station and gaol have been preserved as a **museum** (Albany Hwy; adult/child \$5/free; ☹ 10am-4pm Sat, Sun & school holidays).

All 77 species of banksia have found a home at the **Banksia Farm** (☎ 9851 1770; www.banksiafarm.com.au; Pearce Rd; adult/child \$5.50/2; ☹ 9.30am-4.30pm). You can wander around alone or take a guided 'touch, taste and observe' tour at 10.30am and 2.30pm.

Southwest of Mt Barker, on the Egerton-Warburton estate, is the gorgeous **St Werburgh's Chapel**, built between 1872 and 1873. The wrought-iron chancel screen and altar rail were shaped on the property.

ALBANY

☎ 08 / pop 28,600

Hugging the calm waters of King George Sound, Albany is the oldest European settlement in the state. The commercial centre of the Great Southern region, it was established in 1826, three years before Perth. The area was previously occupied by Aborigines and there is evidence of their presence, especially around Oyster Harbour.

Albany's *raison d'être* is its sheltered harbour, which made it a thriving whaling port. Whales are still a part of the Albany experience, but these days as seen through a camera lens rather than at the business end of a harpoon. Later the city became a coaling station for British ships bound for the east coast; during WWI it was the mustering point for transport ships of the 1st Australian Imperial Force heading for Egypt and the Gallipoli campaign.

The coastline around Albany features some of Australia's most rugged and spectacular scenery. Many pristine beaches mean you don't have to compete for sand space – try (misnamed) Misery Beach, or Ledge Bay and Nanarup Beach. The **Bibbulmun Track** ends (or starts) here, just outside the visitors centre. Walkers' log books are kept in the visitors centre; the exhausted and/or exuberant comments make great reading.

Orientation & Information

The main drag, York St, leads down from Albany Hwy to the harbour foreshore. Middleton Rd, starting from the northern end of York St, is the most direct route to Middleton Beach.

The informative **visitors centre** (☎ 1800 644 088, 9841 1088; www.amazingalbany.com; Proudlove Pde;

☹ 9am-5pm) is in the old train station. For national parks information, visit **DEC** (☎ 9842 4500; 120 Albany Hwy). You can check your email at several places around town.

Sights

Albany has some fine colonial buildings. Take a stroll down **Stirling Tce** – noted for its Victorian shop fronts, the **Old Post Office** and **Courthouse** – and up York Street, where you'll see the lovely **St John's Anglican Church** and the **Town Hall**. A guided walking-tour brochure of colonial buildings is available from the visitors centre.

One of the most impressive buildings was turned into the **Albany Residency Museum** (☎ 9841 4844; www.museum.wa.gov.au; Residency Rd; admission by donation; ☹ 10am-5pm). Built in the 1850s as the home of the resident magistrate, the museum's displays tell seafaring stories, and explain local flora and fauna and Aboriginal artefacts. The 'Sea & Touch' display is a great hands-on experience for children and adults; it focuses on the marine and animal world (think sea urchins, possum fur and bones) and has a fascinating lighthouse optic display. Next to the museum is a full-scale replica of the brig **Amity** (adult/child \$3/1; ☹ 9am-5pm), the ship that carried Albany's founding party from Sydney in 1826.

Opposite the museum, the 1851 **Old Gaol** (☎ 9841 1401; Lower Stirling Tce; adult/child \$4/2.50; ☹ 10am-4.15pm) was constructed as a hiring depot for ticket-of-leave convicts. Most were in private employment by 1855 so it was closed until 1872, when it was extended and reopened as a civil gaol. These days it's a folk museum. Nearby is the 1832 wattle-and-daub **Patrick Taylor Cottage**.

The National Trust-owned **Old Farm at Strawberry Hill** (☎ 9841 3735; 170 Middleton Rd; adult/child \$5/3; ☹ 10am-5pm) is one of the oldest farms in WA, established in 1827 as the town's government farm. The homestead features antiques and artefacts that belonged to the original owner, and lovely gardens and tearooms.

The **Vancouver Arts Centre** (☎ 9841 9260; Vancouver St; admission free; ☹ 10am-4pm), in an 1887 building formerly used as a hospital, is the centre of the area's arts community. It has regular touring exhibitions and cultural events.

On Middleton Rd you can't miss one of Albany's icons, the kitsch **Dog Rock**, which looks like a dog's head (the locals have even painted on a dog collar to reinforce the point).

As Albany was a strategic port, its vulnerability to attack loomed as a potential threat to

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

You'll really do the destinations on the South Coast justice (and yourself a favour) by camping out and getting closer to nature. There's just something about the smell of the morning bush when you wake, with the birdsong so close. No tent or campervan? No worries. Make use of the on-site vans or cabins in many of the (commercial) camp sites.

Our favourite spots in this area are the Porongurups (that morning light is glorious), and the bush camp site at St Mary Inlet, near Point Ann, in Fitzgerald River National Park (there aren't many places where you can walk 10m from your tent and have the real possibility of seeing whales).

Australia's security. The **Princess Royal Fortress** (Mt Adelaide; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 9am-5pm) was built on Mt Adelaide in 1893. The restored buildings, gun emplacements and views make a rewarding visit. Particularly poignant are the photos of the troop transports on their way to Gallipoli.

There are more fine views over the coast and inland from the twin peaks, **Mt Clarence** and **Mt**

Melville, which overlook the town. On top of Mt Clarence is the **Desert Mounted Corps Memorial**, originally erected in Port Said as a memorial to the events of WWI. It was brought here when the Suez crisis in 1956 made colonial reminders less than popular in Egypt. To climb Mt Clarence follow the track accessible from the end of Grey St East; turn left, take the first turn

on the right and follow the path by the water tanks. The walk is tough but the views make it worthwhile; take a picnic and enjoy a well-earned rest at the top. By car, take Apex Dr.

Activities

After whaling ended in 1978, whales slowly began returning to the waters of Albany. They're now here to the extent that it can sometimes be hard *not* to see **southern right** and **humpback whales** near the bays and coves of King George Sound from July to mid-October. **Silver Star Cruises** (☎ 0428 936 711; www.whales.com.au) and **Albany Whale Tours & Sail-A-Way** (☎ 0409 107 180) both run regular whale-watching trips (adult/child around \$55/40) in season.

Other underwater fans enjoy **diving** on the artificial reef created by the scuttling of HMAS *Perth* (visit www.hmasperth.com.au for live webcam images of the wreck) in King George Sound in 2001. Dive with **Albany Dive.com** (☎ 9842 6886; www.albanydive.com; cnr York & Proudlove Sts) or **Southcoast Diving Supplies** (☎ 9841 7176; www.divealbany.com.au; 84b Serpentine Rd). Two-tank dives cost around \$130.

A **scenic path** runs from Middleton Beach to the Pilot Station (from where you can follow Princess Royal Dr back into town). The walk takes about an hour, and is part of a project to link Oyster Harbour, Middleton Bay, Albany and Frenchman Bay by 35km of walking tracks.

Local anglers reckon you can throw a line anywhere in Albany and catch something. **Beach fishing** at Middleton and Emu Beaches is popular. **Spinners Charters** (☎ 9841 7151; www.spinnerscharters.com.au) runs deep-sea fishing trips. **Emu Point Boat Hire** (☎ 9842 9798, 0408 931 544) provides paddle boats, 'surfcats', canoes and motorised dinghies.

Tours

Take a four-hour cruise up the Kalgan River in the glass-bottomed **Kalgan Queen** (☎ 9844 3166; www.albanyaustralia.com) and learn about the history and wildlife of the area. Trips (adult/child \$45/20) leave from Emu Point. For something a little faster, **Albany Down Under** (☎ 9842 2468; www.harleytours.ws; from \$35) offers motorbike tours on a Harley Davidson.

Several local operators run day tours to the Southern Forests and wineries; check with the visitors centre.

Sleeping BUDGET

Albany Backpackers (☎ 9842 5255; www.albanybackpackers.com.au; cnr Stirling Tee & Spencer St; dm/s/d \$23/40/56; ☑) Bright, cheery and with a reputation for partying, this hostel knows how to keep its guests happy with extras like coffee and cake each afternoon, complimentary bike hire and (limited) free internet access.

Albany Bayview YHA (☎ 9842 3388; albanyya@westnet.com.au; 49 Duke St; dm/s/d \$23/40/52; ☑) In a quiet street 400m from the centre, this rambling backpackers has a lazy feel and is less frenzied than the hostel in town.

Discovery Inn (☎ 9842 5535; www.discoveryinn.net.au; 9 Middleton Rd, Middleton Beach; dm/s/d \$25/45/65; ☑) A ceramic bulldog guards the hallway in this great-value 1920s guesthouse close to the beach. With friendly owners, a pretty covered courtyard and great furnishings, you won't get better value than this.

Middleton Beach Holiday Park (☎ 1800 644 674; www.holidayalbany.com.au; Middleton Beach; tent/caravan sites \$25/27, cabins \$99-105, chalets \$150-160; ☑) This beachfront caravan park is sheltered by high sand dunes (a good thing when a gale is raging). Book early – it's popular.

ALBANY

0 500 m
0 0.3 miles

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EATING ☑

DRINKING ☑

TRANSPORT

SOUTH COAST

SOUTH COAST

Emu Beach Holiday Park (Map p145; ☎ 1800 984 411, 9844 1147; www.emubeach.com; Emu Point; tent/caravan sites \$25/30, chalets \$110-140, villas \$140-160) Families love the Emu Beach area and this holiday park, close to the beach, has good facilities, including free barbecues and a kids' playground.

Cruise Inn (☎ 9842 9599; www.cruiseinn.com; 122 Middleton Rd; s/d \$42/52) Lovely bright blues and Indonesian fabrics and furnishings decorate this good value self-catering place.

Norfolk Sands (☎ 9841 3585; www.norfolksands.com.au; 18 Adelaide Cres, Middleton Beach; s/d \$55/80) Just a few minutes' walk from Middleton Beach, this is simple accommodation with a touch of class. The share-facility rooms are tastefully decorated with Asian-style furnishings and breakfast is served at the fantastic Bay Merchants café next door.

MIDRANGE

My Place (☎ 9842 3242; myplace@iinet.net.au; 47-61 Grey St East; r \$85-120) These large self-contained rooms are not the most stylish in the world but they're clean, central and excellent value.

Coraki Holiday Cottages (☎ 9844 7068; www.corakicottages.com.au; Lower King Rd; cottages from \$115) On the edge of Oyster Bay, between the King and Kalgan Rivers, these bright, private cottages with bush surrounds are great value.

TOP END

Esplanade Hotel (☎ 9842 1711; www.albanyesplanade.com.au; cnr Adelaide Cres & Flinders Pde; d \$182-255; 🏠) The *grande dame* of Albany accommodation, while it's not exactly full of character, it's certainly comfortable.

Beach House at Bayside (Map p145; ☎ 9844 8844; www.thebeachhouseatbayside.com.au; Barry Crt; r from \$207) This B&B is midway between Middleton Beach and Emu Point, and offers touches including port and chocs each evening.

Eating & Drinking

Jo Jo's Pizza & Kebab (☎ 9842 6000; 362 Middleton Rd; mains \$5-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This is a great place for late-night souvlaki or falafel, and is still the locals' most popular pizza joint.

Bay Merchants (☎ 9841 7821; 18 Adelaide Cres, Middleton Beach; mains \$10-14, 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Just a sandy-footed stroll from the beach, this café-cum-*providore* makes the best coffee in town and to-die-for gourmet sandwiches.

Dylan's on the Terrace (☎ 9841 8720; 82 Stirling Tce; mains \$12-20; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) With its 1950s ambience and menu of hamburgers,

pancakes and the like, Dylan's is always family friendly.

Squid Shack (☎ 0417 170 857; Emu Beach; fish & chips \$12; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This local institution serves fish straight from the ocean, from what is literally a shack on the beach. Take a bottle of wine and plan a sunset picnic.

Harvest Moon Café (☎ 9841 8833; 86 Stirling Tce; mains \$13; 🍷 lunch) In an informal bookish café setting, you'll find great vegetarian food and fresh juices.

Vancouver 51 (☎ 9841 2475; 65 Vancouver St; lunches \$13; 🍷 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri & Sat) This great little café is perched above the coast, with balcony views and creative fusion food; Szechuan duck and spicy plums, yum. Go for the \$28 two-course dinner if you can.

Nonna's (☎ 9841 4626; 135 Lower York St; lunch special \$15; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Classic Italian food served at reasonable prices and in a cosy setting.

Earl of Spencer Historic Inn (☎ 9841 1322; cnr Earl & Spencer Sts; mains \$20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) On a cold night you can't beat the warming qualities of the Earl's famous pie and pint or hearty lamb shanks. It's popular for a quiet drink or, on the weekends, for live music.

Entertainment

The *Albany Advertiser*, published on Tuesday and Thursday has information on events in and around town. The **Town Hall Theatre** has regular shows.

For the latest snog-and-shoot blockbusters, try **Albany 3 Cinemas** (☎ 9842 2210; 451 Albany Hwy), on the northern edge of town.

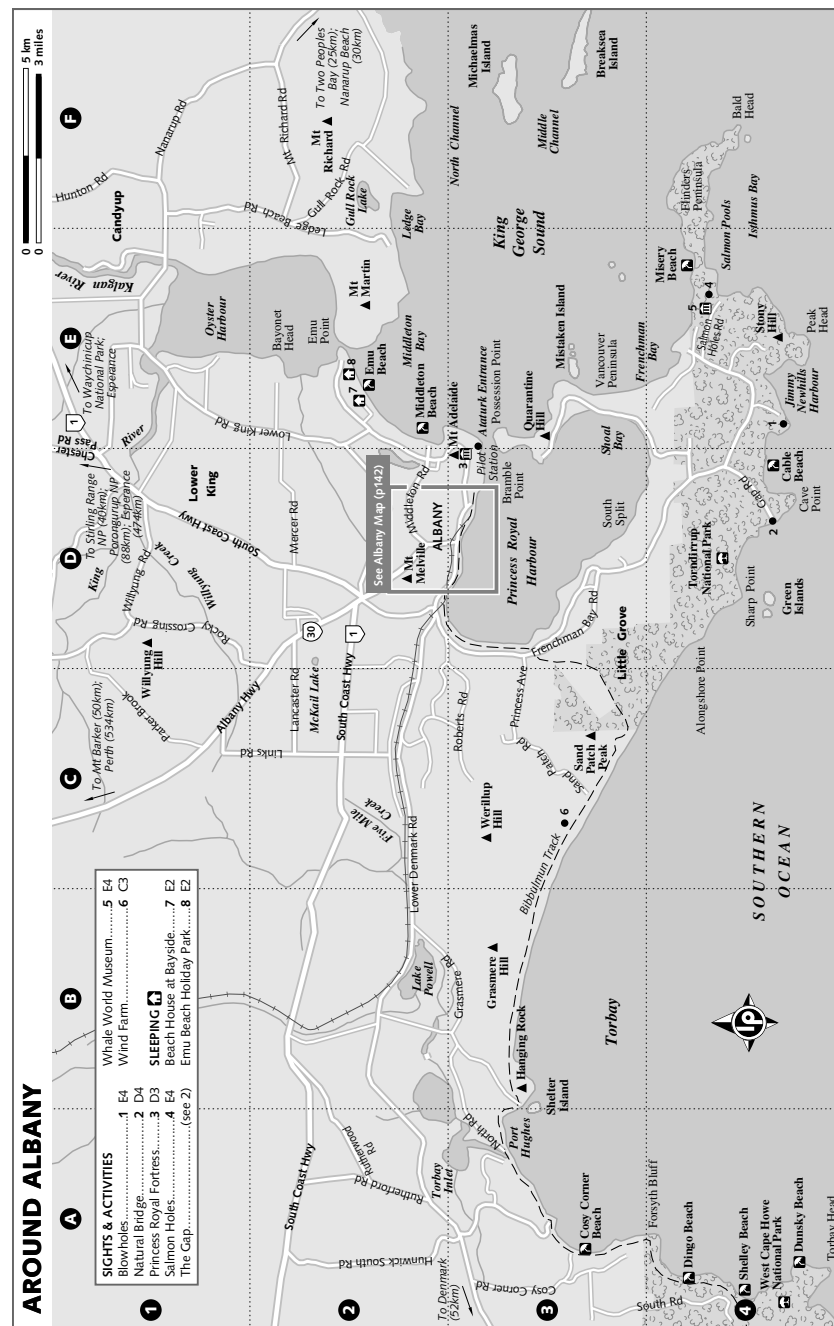
Getting Around

Love's (☎ 9841 1211) runs local bus services (adult/child \$1.90/0.80) around town on weekdays and Saturday morning. The visitors centre has routes and timetables.

You can rent a car locally from **Rainbow Coast Car Rentals** (☎ 9841 7130) and both **Avis** (☎ 9842 2833) and **Budget** (☎ 9841 7799) have agencies out at the airport.

AROUND ALBANY

South of Albany, off Frenchman Bay Rd, is a stunning stretch of coastline that includes The Gap and Natural Bridge, rugged natural rock formations surrounded by pounding seas. Also here are the Blowholes, especially interesting in heavy seas when spray is blown with great force through the surrounding rock; the rock-climbing areas of **Peak Head** and



ALBANY'S WHALING BATTLEGROUNDS

Talk to some Western Australians about their childhood holidays in Albany and, as well as care-free days of fishing and swimming, they're also likely to recall an almighty stench in the air and sharks circling in bloody corners of Frenchman Bay. The local whales – whose blubber created the vile smell while being melted down in pressure cookers, and whose blood spilled into water around the Cheynes Beach Whaling Station – also appear to remember this scene far too well. It took them well over a decade to return in full strength to the waters around Albany after the last whale was hunted on 20 November 1978.

The whaling industry was gruesome in a most public way – whales were hunted, harpooned and dragged back to shore to be cut up and boiled, while their teeth were salvaged to make artistic carvings called scrimshaw – which is perhaps why the environmental movement managed to make its closure one of their earlier successes. It became harder for the industry to make the smell, the blood and the sight of harpooned carcasses being towed into the harbour anything but unattractive. One of Tim Winton's earlier novels (*Shallows*, 1984), set in Albany, where Winton lived for some time as an adolescent, describes how whaling became an emotional battleground for environmentalists and the many local employees of the industry, like the situation in timber towns throughout the Southwest in recent years. This pressure from protesters, as well as dwindling whale numbers and a drop in world whale-oil prices, sounded the death knell for the industry.

But Albany has cleverly managed to turn this now-unacceptable industry into a quaint tourist attraction, with the fascinating Whale World Museum (below), where you can buy scrimshaw carvings and walk on the flensing deck, and maritime festivals, which celebrate its rough-and-ready history on the seas. The whales who play in the surrounding waters are all the happier for it – as are the town's tourism-boosted coffers.

West Cape Howe National Park; steep, rocky coves such as **Jimmy Newhills Harbour** and **Salmon Holes**, popular with surfers but considered quite scary; and **Frenchman Bay** with a fine swimming beach and a shady barbecue area. This is a dangerous coastline so beware of freakish, large waves – many locals and tourists have lost their lives after being swept off the rocks. Detour to Albany's **Wind Farm**, where a walking track winds surreally among the turbines.

Whale World Museum

The interesting and worthwhile **Whale World Museum** (☎ 9844 4021; www.whaleworld.org; Frenchman Bay; adult/child/family \$18/9/45; ☎ 9am-5pm), 21km from Albany, is based in Frenchman's Bay at Cheynes Beach Whaling Station, which ceased operations in November 1978. There's the rusting *Cheyne IV* whale chaser, as well as station equipment (such as whale-oil tanks – a whale weighing 40 tonnes would provide seven tonnes of oil), to inspect outside. The museum screens several 3-D gore-spattered and other films about whaling operations, and displays harpoons, whaleboat models and scrimshaw (etchings on whalebone). There are also free guided tours on the hour, and there's a superb collection of paintings of marine mammals by noted US artist Richard Ellis.

National Parks & Reserves

There are a number of excellent natural areas near Albany. From west to east along the coast you can explore several different habitats and a wide variety of coastal scenery.

West Cape Howe National Park, 30km west of Albany, is a 35-sq-km playground for naturalists, bushwalkers, rock climbers and anglers. Inland, there are areas of coastal heath, lakes, swamp and karri forest. With the exception of the road to Shelley Beach, access is restricted to 4WDs, mostly travelling through sand dunes to explore the wild coast.

Torndirrup National Park includes two popular attractions: the often windswept and elemental **Natural Bridge** and **The Gap**. Nearby the **Blowholes** put on a show when the surf's up, worth the 80-step stairway up and down. Beautiful **Misery Beach** (a contradiction in terms) is often deserted and is an easy drive in/walk down. At **Stony Hill**, a short heritage trail leads around the site of an observatory station from both World Wars. Keen walkers can tackle the hard 10km-return **bushwalk** (more than five hours) over Isthmus Hill to Bald Head, at the eastern edge of the park. The views are spectacular. Whales are frequently seen from the cliffs, and the park's varied vegetation provides habitats for many native animals and reptiles.

Some 20km east of Albany, **Two Peoples Bay** is a 46-sq-km nature reserve with a good swimming beach and scenic coastline. Little of the reserve is easily accessible; it's a significant conservation area, home to two once-thought-to-be-extinct animals: the noisy scrub bird and Australia's rarest marsupial mammal, the pointy-nosed Gilbert's potoroo. Keen naturalists should seek access permits from DEC (☎ 9842 4500) in Albany.

ALBANY TO ESPERANCE

The coast between Albany and Esperance is relatively isolated and unpopulated. It boasts beautiful beaches around Bremer Bay and Hopetoun, and the impressive Fitzgerald River National Park.

From Albany, the South Coast Hwy runs northeast along the coast before turning inland to skirt the Fitzgerald River National Park and finishing in Esperance, 476km later. Along the way, you'll pass through **Jerramungup**, 182km northeast of Albany, and the small town of **Ravensthorpe**, 187km west of Esperance and once the centre of the Phillips River goldfield (later, copper was also mined here). These days the area is dependent on farming, although new nickel mines in the vicinity are expected to have an ongoing economic effect. West of Ravensthorpe is the **WA standard time meridian**, indicated by a boulder with a plaque on it.

Fitzgerald River National Park

This 3300-sq-km park is designated a Unesco 'Biosphere', the intention of which is to discover and demonstrate how people and nature can live together sustainably. It is simply stunning, with a beautiful (and sometimes dangerous) coastline, sand plains, the rugged Barrens mountain range and heath country, and deep river valleys. It's accessible by good 2WD gravel roads, except after heavy rain.

NOISY SCRUB BIRD SOUNDS SUCCESSFUL

This little, near-flightless bird certainly lives up to its name: it has a powerful, ear-piercing call. The noisy scrub bird (*Atrichornis clamosus*) almost joined the thylacine in extinction. It was sighted in jarrah forest at the foot of the Darling Scarp, near Perth, in 1842, and the last recorded specimen was collected near Torbay in 1889. The bird was then thought extinct until rediscovered in 1961 at Two Peoples Bay, east of Albany.

In 1983 several breeding pairs were moved to similar habitats in Mt Manypeaks Nature Reserve (now part of Waychinicup National Park) to regenerate populations where the bird had died out. In 1987 another colony was established at the Walpole-Nornalup National Park. It is believed that there are now well over 100 breeding pairs.

Wildflowers are most abundant in spring, but flowers – especially the hardy proteas – bloom throughout the year. The park is botanically significant, containing about 1700 (20%) of WA's described species, including half the orchid species in WA (more than 80 varieties, 70 of which are endemic). It is the home of the spectacularly showy royal heakea and endemic Quaalup bell. Many **animals** are present, too. There are 19 native mammal species, including honey possums, dibblers (small endangered marsupials) and tamar wallabies; 200 species of birds, including the endangered ground parrot and western bristlebird; 41 reptile and 12 frog species. **Southern right** and **humpback whales** can be seen offshore from July to September.

There is some very good **bushwalking** here. Shorter walks are accessible at **East Mt Barren** (three hours), **West Mt Barren** (two hours) and **Point Ann** (one hour). Spend time at Point Ann if you can; the headland walking track takes you past the ruins of the 1164km-long, **number two rabbit-proof fence** (built between 1904 and 1960), while boardwalks take you out over the gorgeous bay, where whales are often seen, close by the pretty bush camp site at nearby St Mary Inlet.

The wilderness route from **Fitzgerald Beach** to **West Beach** is for serious walkers – there is no trail and no water (plan for water drops on access roads), but camping is permitted. You'll need to register with the ranger on Quiss Rd, **Jerramungup** (☎ 9835 5043); **Murray Rd** (☎ 9837 1022), just north of Bremer Bay; or at **East Mt Barren** (☎ 9838 3060).

Although the park is one of the areas in southern WA least affected by dieback fungus, precautions are in place to ensure it remains so; respect the 'no entry – dieback' signs, and clean your shoes before each walk.

The three main 2WD entry points to the park are from the South Coast Hwy (Quiss

Rd & Pabelup Dr), Hopetoun (Hamersley Dr), and Bremer Bay (along Swamp & Murray Rds). This last is the prettiest route, winding through acres of flowering shrubs. It's also likely to be impassable after rain, so check locally before you set out.

There are 2WD **camp sites** at St Mary Inlet (near Point Ann) and Four Mile Beach, while camping at Hamersley Inlet, Whale Bone Beach, Quoin Head and Fitzgerald Inlet is by 4WD only.

Bremer Bay

☎ 08 / pop 350

This fishing and holiday hamlet, 180km northeast of Albany and 61km from the South Coast Hwy, sits at the western end of the Great Australian Bight. From July to November it can be a good spot to observe **southern right whales**, which enter bays in the area to give birth.

If you're staying overnight **Bremer Bay Beaches Resort & Tourist Park** (☎ 98374290; www.bremerbayaccommodation.com; Wellstead Rd; camp sites/vans/cabins \$25/55/70; ♿) has camping grounds that are green and shady with a well-equipped campers' kitchen, and the cabins – while ordinary – are a good size. It's also the local visitor centre.

A somewhat basic and eccentric place to stay (you may or may not encounter anyone else, including staff), on the outskirts of Fitzgerald River National Park, is the historic 1858 **Quaalup Homestead** (☎ 9837 4124; www.whalesandwildflowers.com.au; Gairdner Rd; camp sites/cabins/cottages \$15/60/110). It's 45km from Bremer Bay, and there's limited power supply.

Hopetoun

☎ 08 / pop 350

There are fine beaches and bays around Hopetoun, the eastern gateway to the Fitzgerald River National Park. It's been booming more from the proximity of a new nickel mine than from tourism, and accommodation can be hard to find. You'll find visitor information brochures in Taste of the Toun Café (Veal St).

To the west of town is the landlocked **Culham Inlet** (great for fishing – especially for black bream) and east of town is the scenic **Southern Ocean East Drive** – in 2006 in the process of being sealed – which features camping beaches at Mason Bay and Starvation Bay. The old railway track between Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun is now a **heritage walking track**.

The world's longest fence – the 1833km-long **number one rabbit-proof fence** – enters the sea in the south at Starvation Bay, east of Hopetoun; it starts at Eighty Mile Beach on the Indian Ocean, north of Port Hedland. The fence was built during the height of the rabbit plague between 1901 and 1907. However, the story goes that the bunnies beat the fence-builders to the west side so it wasn't as effective a barrier as hoped.

You'll find plenty of time for contemplation at the **Hopetoun Motel & Chalet Village** (☎ 9838 3219; cnr Veal & Canning Sts; s/d \$85/95, chalets \$150), a quiet little rammed-earth complex set in bushland. Eat at the Port Hotel or Taste of the Toun. In the old post office, **Deck** (☎ Sep-May) is a welcome addition to the Hopetoun summer scene, making it hard to resist a daily ice cream. Opening hours are erratic in the winter.

ESPERANCE

☎ 08 / pop 13,000

The pretty coastal town of Esperance is the place to be for sun, sea and sand. You'll have to drive to reach some of the picture-perfect beaches, such as Lucky Bay (widely reputed to be the most beautiful beach in Australia) in Cape Le Grand, but town beaches like Twilight and Blue Haven also have squeaky-clean white sand and clear, azure water. No need to fight for solitude here, as Esperance's isolation guarantees it. It is a popular resort due to its even climate, stunning coastal scenery, blue waters, good fishing and dazzling beaches. The seas offshore are studded with the many islands of the Archipelago of the Recherche, home to a variety of wildlife.

History

On the coast 200km south of Norseman, Esperance was named in 1792 when the *Recherche* and *L'Espérance* sailed through the archipelago and into the bay to shelter from a storm. Although the first settlers came in 1863, it was during the gold rush in the 1890s that the town really became established as a port. When the gold fever subsided, Esperance went into a state of suspended animation until after WWII.

In the 1950s it was discovered that adding missing trace elements to the soil around Esperance restored fertility; the town has since rapidly become an agricultural centre.

Information

Computer Alley (☎ 9072 1293; 69c Dempster St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Internet.

Visitors centre (☎ 9071 2330; www.visitesperance.com; Dempster St; ☎ 9am-5pm) In the museum village; can book tours and transport.

Sights & Activities

When you hit Esperance, a must is the 36km **Great Ocean Drive**. It includes spectacular vistas from **Observatory Point** and the lookout on **Wire-**



less Hill; popular swimming spots at **Blue Haven Beach** and **Twilight Cove**; surfing wherever the swell's up along the coast; and the **Pink Lake**, stained by salt-tolerant algae. You'll also pass the **wind farm**. There's a walking track among the turbines that is quite surreal when it's windy; and it often is here, with the farm supplying about 23% of Esperance's electricity.

About 100 small islands are in the **Archipelago of the Recherche**; you'll see many of them from the waterfront. Colonies of seals, penguins and a variety of water birds live on the islands. **Woody Island** (p150) is a wildlife sanctuary, which you can visit on cruises and even stay at.

The **Museum Village** (James St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) consists of various restored heritage buildings, including a gallery, smithy's forge, café and craft shop. Among its local history collection the **Esperance Museum** (Museum Village; adult/child \$4/1; ☎ 1.30-4.30pm) contains a Skylab display – when the USA's Skylab crashed to earth in 1979, it made its fiery re-entry at Balladonia, east of Esperance. The **Cannery Arts Centre** (☎ 9071 3599; Norseman Rd; ☎ 1-4pm)

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has occasional exhibitions, artists' studios and a shop selling creative local artwork.

Kids will enjoy **Telegraph Farm** (☎ 9076 5044; South Coast Hwy; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Tue, Wed & Jun-Aug), 21km west of town. This commercial protea farm has a host of animals, including water buffalo, camels and birds. Also fun for kids is **Ralph Bower Adventureland Park**, near the Taylor St Jetty, where kids can ride about on a miniature train or climb all over the playground. The **Esperance Aquarium** (☎ 9071 7222; 53 The Esplanade; adult/child \$59/7; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Wed May-Sep) has a small marine discovery trail and a touchpool.

Lake Warden wetland's **Kepwari Trail**, off Fisheries Rd, has a boardwalk across the lake, interpretive displays and good bird-watching.

Tours

The tour to Woody Island is highly recommended – you'll likely see seals and sea lions lolling about on rocks, sea eagles hunting prey, Cape Barren geese, common dolphins and a host of other wildlife, including whales in season. **Mackenzie's Island Cruises** (☎ 9071 5757; www.woodyisland.com.au; 71 The Esplanade) has a power catamaran that regularly tours Esperance Bay and Woody Island (adult/child half day \$65/24). Mackenzies also operates a daily ferry to the island from December 26 to January 26, leaving Esperance at 7.30am and returning at noon (adult/child return \$39/16).

Esperance Diving & Fishing (☎ 9071 5111; www.esperancedivingandfishing.com.au; 72 The Esplanade) can take you diving off the wreck of the *Sanko Harvest* (two-tank dive including all gear plus lunch \$195) or charter fishing throughout the Archipelago.

Eco-Discovery Tours (☎ 0407 737 261; www.esperance-tours.com.au) runs 4WD day tours to the coastal national parks of Cape Le Grand and Cape Arid (\$138 per person, minimum four). Its associated company, **Kepa Kurl Eco Cultural Discovery Tours** (☎ 9072 1688; www.kepakurl.com.au; Museum Village), shows the country from an Aboriginal perspective (half/full day \$76/145 per person, minimum two).

Sleeping BUDGET

Woody Island (☎ 9071 5757; www.woodyisland.com.au; tent sites \$12, on-site tents \$25-45, huts \$66-97; ☎ late Sep-end Apr) It's not every day you get to stay in an A-class nature reserve. Choose between leafy camp sites or timber bush cabins; a few have

private decks and their own lighting. Power is mostly solar, and rainwater only supplies the island – both are highly valued.

Esperance Guesthouse (☎ 9071 3396; 23 Daphne St; dm/d \$20/45; ☎) Still popular, this casual, comfortable place supplies homemade bread and brewed coffee (gasp!) for breakfast.

Blue Waters Lodge YHA (☎ 9071 1040; yhaesperance@hotmail.com; 299 Goldfields Rd; dm/s/d \$20/30/50; ☎) On the beachfront about 1.5km from the centre, this is a rambling place with views over the water, a green back yard and wood fires in winter.

Crokers Park Holiday Resort (☎ 9071 5100; www.acclaimparks.com.au; 817 Harbour Rd; powered sites \$22, cabins \$53-72; ☎) Of the several very ordinary camp sites in town, this stands apart for its clean, shady and decent-sized grounds and its pretty pool area. It's worth the five-minute drive from town and the water.

Goldie's Place (☎ 9071 2879; www.goldiesplace.esperance.com; 51 Goldfields Rd; d \$70) A standout in comfort and value, Goldie's is a sizable, spotless and well-equipped two-bedroom unit with cheery young owners living upstairs and their friendly dog living in the garden.

MIDRANGE

Esperance B&B by the Sea (☎ 9071 5640; www.esperancebb.com; Stewart St; s/d \$75/110) The views from the deck overlooking Blue Haven Beach are breathtaking, especially at sunset. This big, new beach house with a private guest wing is just a stroll from the ocean and a five-minute drive from Dempster St.

Old Hospital Motel (☎ 9071 3587; 1a William St; r from \$90) Named after the 1896 old hospital building on site, the pleasant motel-style rooms – coolly tiled – are well equipped; the spacious two-room units upstairs are particularly good value.

Jetty Resort (☎ 9071 3333; www.thejettyresort.com.au; 1 The Esplanade; d \$105-189, ste \$249; ☎) You can't miss this blindingly white balconied building as you drive along the Esplanade. More expensive rooms come with beach views, balconies or spas. There's a pool with a barbecue, comfy seats and a giant chess set in its garden, and a great kids' playground.

TOP END

Island View Esperance (☎ 9072 0044; www.esperanceapartments.com.au; 14-16 The Esplanade; apt \$140-\$270) It's easy-living in these architect-designed and tastefully furnished units, with floor-to-

ceiling windows overlooking the beach across the road. The kitchens have all mod cons, and there's a spacious living area.

Eating & Drinking

Onshore Traders (☎ 9071 2575; 105 Dempster St; mains \$7-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch, closed Sun) A homewares store and *providore*-cum-café in a breezy modern space, this place has lunch specials, salads and Turkish breads, as well as decent coffee.

Taylor Street Tearooms (☎ 9071 4317; Taylor St Jetty; mains \$12-24; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This rather attractive, sprawling café by the jetty serves good, reliable fare; the salt-and-pepper squid is becoming an institution. Locals hang out at the tables on the grass or on the covered terrace, and it's very much a child-friendly zone.

Ocean Blues (☎ 9071 7107; 19 The Esplanade; mains \$20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner, closed Mon) Wander in sandy-footed and order some simple fare (try the classic steak sandwich), or shelter from the sea breeze over an afternoon coffee and cake. Early dinner is served until 8.30pm.

For what's been described as the best coffee in town, look for the **Coffee Cat**, a mobile red-and-black van often parked opposite the Jetty Resort.

Entertainment

The Pier Hotel (☎ 9071 1777; The Esplanade) has a throbbing nightclub on Friday and Saturday; if you're over 25 you might feel out of place. Touring bands play regularly at **Esperance Motor Hotel** (☎ 9071 1555; Andrew St).

Fenwick 3 Cinemas (☎ 9072 1355; 105 Dempster St) shows the latest blockbusters.

Getting Around

There are plenty of taxis (☎ 9071 1782) in Esperance. For car rentals try **Avis** (☎ 9071 3998) or **Budget** (☎ 9071 2775). **Hollywood Car Hire** (☎ 9071 3144) is the local car rental mob.

CAPE LE GRAND & CAPE ARID

There are four national parks in the Esperance region; **DEC** (☎ 9071 3733) in Esperance has information on each.

The closest and most popular is **Cape Le Grand**, which extends 60km east of Esperance and boasts spectacular coastal scenery, beautiful white-sand beaches and excellent walking tracks. There are fine views across the park from **Frenchman Peak**, at the western end of the park, good fishing and swimming at **Lucky Bay** and **Hellfire Bay**, and a sheltered

bush campsite at **Le Grand Beach**. Make the effort to climb Frenchman Peak (a steep 3km return walk, only for the fit) as the views from the top and through the 'eye' (the huge open cave at the top) are superb, especially during the late afternoon. **Rossiter Bay** is where explorers Edward John Eyre and the Aborigine Wylie, during their epic overland crossing in 1841, fortuitously met Captain Rossiter of the French whaler *Mississippi*. The pair spent two weeks resting on this same ship. The roads to all these places are sealed. A 15km one-way **coastal walking track** links Rossiter Bay and Le Grand Beach; you can do shorter stretches between beaches. Be sure to stop on the way to or from the park at the wonderful **Hellfire Gallery**, 20km out of Esperance, for great coffee, cake, artworks and the lavender garden; it's open Thursday to Monday.

Further east, at the start of the Great Australian Bight and on the fringes of the Nullarbor Plain, is **Cape Arid National Park**. If the sand at Cape Le Grand is like sugar, at Cape Arid it's the texture of flour, so smooth that it squeaks when you walk on it. The park is rugged and isolated, with good bushwalking, great beaches and camp sites. Whales (in season), seals and Cape Barren geese are seen regularly here. Most of the park is accessible by 4WD only, although the Poison Creek and Thomas River sites are accessible in normal vehicles. For the hardy, there is a tough walk to the top of Tower Peak, adjacent to Mt Ragged (3km return, three hours) where the world's most primitive species of ant was found thriving in 1930.

Other national parks in the area include pretty **Stokes National Park**, 90km west of Esperance, with an inlet, long beaches and rocky headlands backed by sand dunes, low hills and bush campground. It's popular for fishing and is 2WD accessible. **Peak Charles National Park**, 130km to the north, is a granite wilderness area with no visitor facilities.

The **Orleans Bay Caravan Park** (☎ 9075 0033; orleansbay@bigpond.com; unpaved/power sites \$18/20, cabins \$40, chalets \$70), at Duke of Orleans Bay between Cape Le Grand and Cape Arid National Park, is a shady, child-friendly place to stay, 2kms from stunning Wharton Beach with its surfing, swimming, fishing and 4WD beach tracks.

For those heading east across the Nullarbor, the **Balladonia Track** and **Parmango Rd**, north of Capes Le Grand and Arid, offer alternative routes to the Eyre Hwy (see p166).

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