

Darling Downs



West of the Great Dividing Range stretch the rolling plains and rural townships of the Darling Downs, one of Australia's most fertile pastoral and agricultural landscapes. Perched high on the range, Toowoomba, the region's capital and one of Queensland's oldest cities, is a large and charming country town with wide tree-lined streets, stately homes and magnificent gardens.

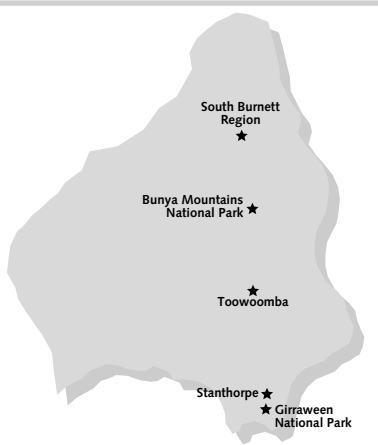
In the Granite Belt of the Southern Downs, vineyards and orchards thrive in the cold, crisp air. This is the heart of Queensland's wine country and the lush countryside is dotted with apple, pear, plum and peach trees, cosy cottages and boutique wineries. Further south, on the NSW border, balancing boulders and spring wildflowers attract bushwalkers to the dramatic Girraween and Sundown National Parks.

Heading west towards the flat grassy plains and big-sky country of Miles and Roma, sheep and cotton predominate in a land that becomes increasingly more arid and less populated. This is the gateway to Queensland's unique outback.

Closer to the coast and northwest of Brisbane, the picturesque South Burnett region is a rolling countryside of deep-red soil, green crops and grazing cattle. Here, on a spur of the Great Dividing Range, is the spectacular Bunya Mountains National Park, a brooding high-altitude rainforest with towering Bunya pines and ancient grasstrees.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sampling the fruit of the vine or one of the many vineyard festivals at the Granite Belt wineries around **Stanthorpe** (p170)
- Hiking through the ancient high-altitude rainforests of the **Bunya Mountains National Park** (p177)
- Driving through the tiny townships and rolling countryside of the **South Burnett region** (p177)
- Bushwalking followed by a picnic among the rugged granite boulders of **Girraween National Park** (p173)
- Finding flower power at the springtime Carnival of Flowers in **Toowoomba** (opposite)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07 ■ www.tourism.southburnett.com.au ■ www.qldsoutherndowns.org.au

Dangers & Annoyances

The roads through the Downs may seem peaceful and uncrowded, but remember that you're sharing the highway with two of Australia's most lethal inhabitants – the road train and the kangaroo. Avoid driving at night, especially on dusk.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) flies from Brisbane to Roma.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) has two major bus services that pass through the Darling Downs. The Brisbane–Longreach service runs along the Warrego Hwy via Toowoomba (\$26, two hours), Dalby (\$42, 3½ hours), Miles (\$62, five hours) and Roma (\$77, seven hours), while its inland Brisbane–Adelaide and Brisbane–Melbourne services pass through Warwick (\$53, four hours) and Stanthorpe (\$54, 3½ hours) or Goondiwindi (\$75, five hours), depending on the route.

Greyhound also has buses between Toowoomba and Rockhampton (\$96, 10 hours), and the Gold Coast (\$52, three hours) via Brisbane. See p166 for more details of Greyhound services.

Crisps' Coaches (☎ 3236 5266; www.crisps.com.au) is the biggest local operator, with services from Brisbane to Warwick, Toowoomba, Goondiwindi, Stanthorpe and south to Tenterfield in New South Wales (NSW).

Brisbane Bus Lines (☎ 3355 3633; www.brisbanebuslines.com.au) has daily services from Brisbane into the South Burnett region.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The major route through the Darling Downs is the Warrego Hwy, which runs west from Ipswich to Charleville. There's also the Cunningham Hwy, which runs southwest from Ipswich to Warwick and Goondiwindi.

The two main north–south routes in the Downs are the Leichhardt Hwy, which runs north from Goondiwindi to Rockhampton via Miles; and the Carnarvon Hwy, which runs north from Mungindi on the NSW border to Roma. The Burnett Hwy runs inland between Brisbane and Rockhampton, passing through the South Burnett region.

The most scenic drives in this region pass through the Great Dividing Range, particularly around Stanthorpe and the Bunya Mountains. West of the mountains most of the highways are pretty dull.

TRAIN

The air-conditioned *Westlander* runs from Brisbane to Charleville on Tuesday and Thursday, returning on Wednesday and Friday, stopping in Toowoomba (four hours) and Roma (11 hours). The 777km journey from Brisbane to Charleville takes about 16 hours.

TOOWOOMBA

☎ 07 / pop 114,479

Perched on the edge of the Great Dividing Range, 700m above sea level, Toowoomba is a gracious rural city with a rich pastoral heritage. The air is distinctly crisper on the range, and in spring the town's numerous gardens blaze with colour. Not only is the 'Garden City' Queensland's largest inland city, it is also the birthplace of that archetypal Aussie cake, the lamington.

Orientation & Information

Downtown Toowoomba centres around Ruthven St (part of the north–south New England Hwy) and Margaret St. The east–west Warrego Hwy (James St) crosses Ruthven St 1km south of Margaret St.

Coffee On Line (☎ 4613 0627; 12 Russell St; per hr \$6; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–8pm Sat, 10am–3pm Sun) Lots of terminals and fast connection.

Main post office (66 Annand St) One block east of Ruthven St.

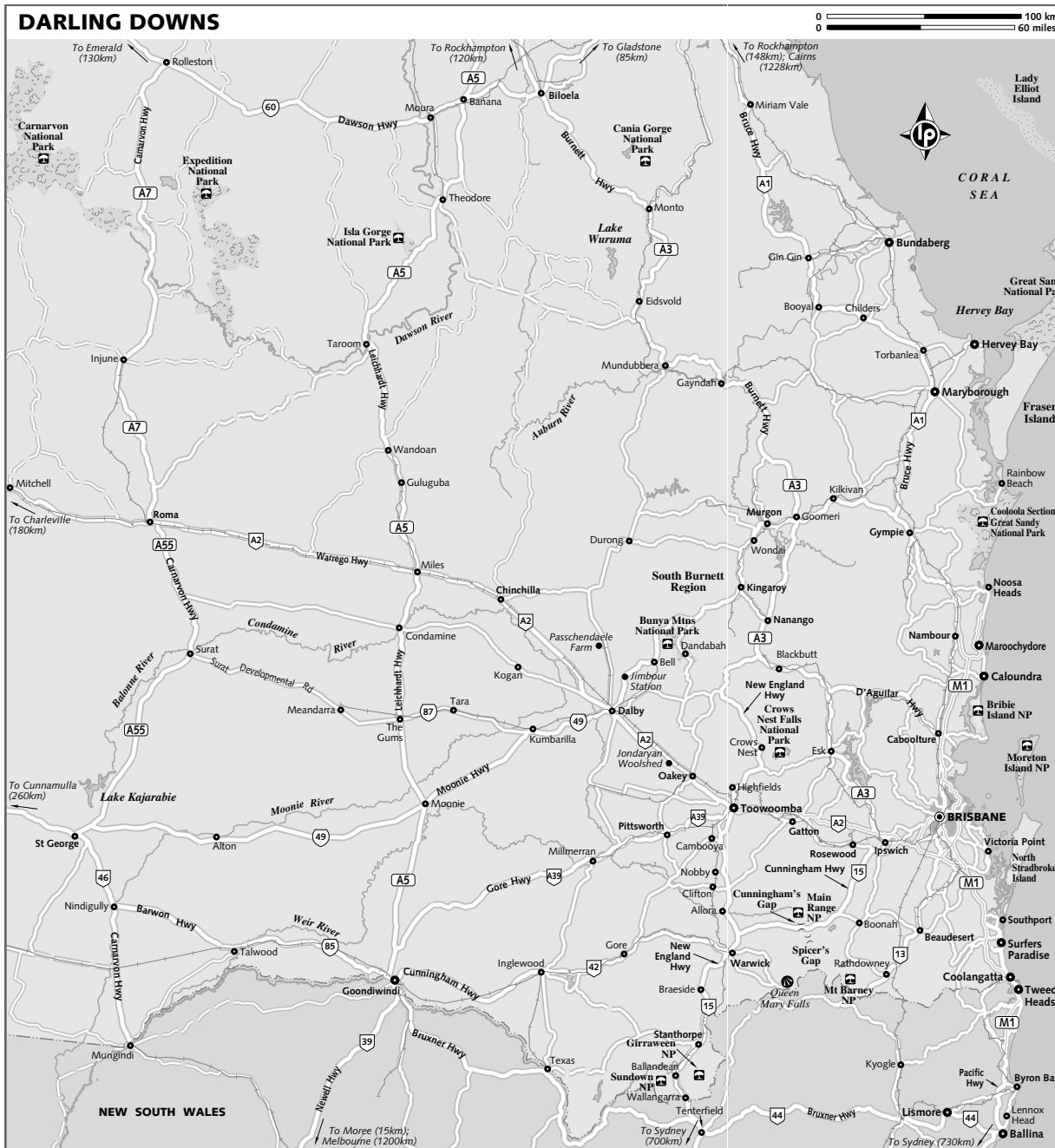
Police (☎ 4631 6333; Neil St)

QPWS office (☎ 4699 4334; 158 Hume St; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri)

Toowoomba visitors centre (☎ 4639 3797; www.toowoomba.qld.gov.au; 86 James St; ☎ 9am–5pm) Located southeast of the centre, at the junction with Kitchener St. Very helpful.

Sights & Activities

Toowoomba's fabulous public parks and gardens (over 240) have rightly earned it the moniker 'the Garden City'. The **Ju Raku En Japanese Garden** (☎ 4631 2627; West St; ☎ 7am–dusk) is a tranquil and beautiful spot several kilometres south of the centre at the University of Southern Queensland. Designed by a Japanese



professor in Kyoto, the 5 hectares garden has 3km of walking tracks around a lake, waterfalls and streams. The 'solitary mind garden' will induce zen-like states, and early morning visitors will find rolled-up daily newspapers on the benches.

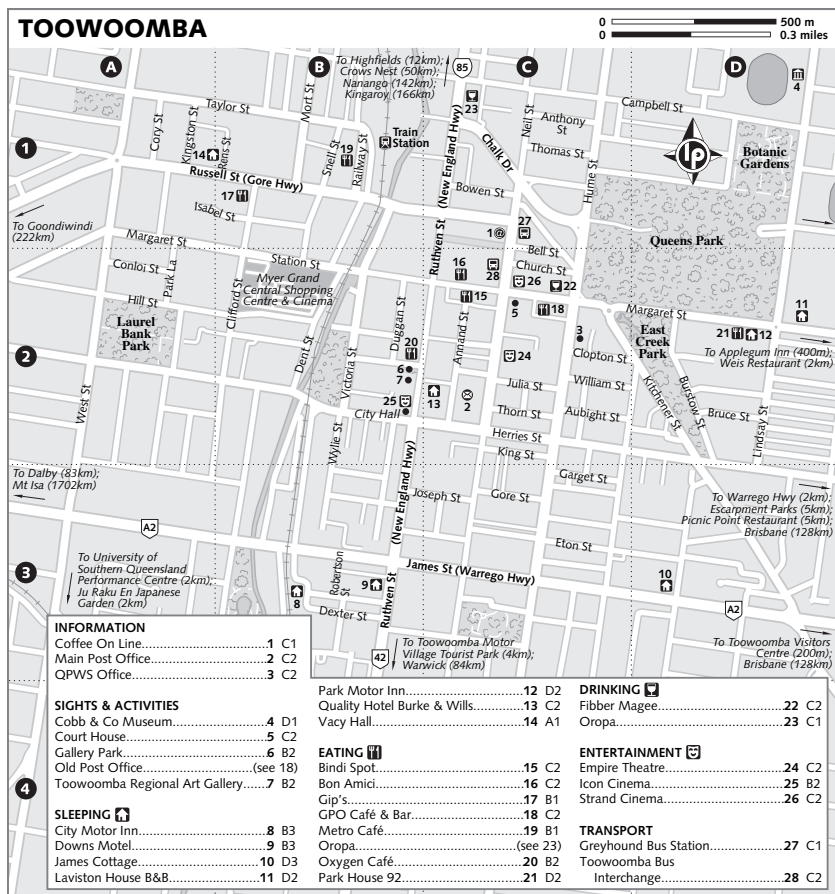
The pretty **botanic gardens** (cnr Lindsay & Campbell Sts) occupy the northeast corner of Queens Park. In autumn, the changing leaves blaze with colour. Test your senses at the **Laurel Bank Park** (cnr Herries & West Sts), which has a scented garden for the visually impaired.

Toowoomba's other great parks are the **Escarpment Parks** strung along the eastern edge of the plateau. The seven separate bushland areas – Jubilee, Redwood, Picnic Point, Table Top, McKnight, Duggan and Glen Lomond – offer great views and a variety of walking trails. **Picnic Point**, on the eastern outskirts of town, is the most accessible and has outstanding views over the Lockyer Valley. There's a restaurant and a café here and ample picnic grounds. All Escarpment Parks have walking trails; collect a free map at the visitors centre.

Immediately north of Queens Park, the **Cobb & Co Museum** (☎ 4639 1971; 27 Lindsay St; adult/child \$9/5; ☹ 10am-4pm) has some evocative displays of life in the horse-drawn age when coaches carried mail and passengers across the outback. The museum also has a very interesting megafauna display of giant marsupials dating from the Pleistocene epoch (10,000 to 1.8 million years ago) whose fossilized bones were preserved in the rich black soil of the Darling Downs. You can see Tasmanian devils munching on *Diprotodon*, a giant wombat the size of a rhino (and the largest marsupial ever discovered).

The small **Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 4688 6652; 31 Ruthven St; admission free; ☹ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) houses the Lionel Lindsay Art Collection of paintings, fine art and drawings; the Bolton Library Collection of rare books, maps and manuscripts; and hosts touring exhibitions. Beside the gallery, **Gallery Park** has interesting sculptures created by Aboriginal art trainees depicting the 'sacred journey home', the story of creation and life eternal.

A walk through Toowoomba's city precinct with its stately late-19th-century sandstone buildings (including the **old post office** and **courthouse**) is a pleasant way to while away an hour or so. The visitors centre publishes a superb series of *A Walk Through History* brochures. The ghoulishly



inclined might also want to pick up a copy of *Tombstone Trails*, a self-guided tour through Toowoomba's cemetery and the gravesites of its early pioneers.

Festivals & Events

Toowoomba's **Carnival of Flowers** (www.carnivalofflowers.com.au) is a colourful celebration of spring held during the last week in September. It includes floral displays, a grand parade, exhibition gardens and a food and wine festival.

More than 30,000 people gather each Easter for the **Australian Gospel Music Festival** (www.agmf.com.au), which runs the gamut from country to heavy metal. In early September, the **Ag Show** is a three-day agricultural and horticultural festival.

Sleeping BUDGET

Toowoomba Motor Village Tourist Park (☎ 4635 8186; www.toowoombamotorvillage.com.au; 821 Ruthven St; powered sites \$22, cabins & units \$45-85) This excellent modern park is a bit out of town, but is very well equipped and has terrific views.

Downs Motel (☎ 4639 3811; www.downsmotel.com.au; 669 Ruthven St; s/d \$65/75; ☎) On busy Ruthven St and close to the CBD, this budget motel has clean, comfortable and surprisingly quiet rooms. A good-value option.

City Motor Inn (☎ 4616 8400; www.citymotorinn.com.au; 195a West St; s/d \$74/84; ☎) Another good budget option close to town. You can choose between studio rooms and larger kitchenette

units. Breakfast is included when you stay in a studio.

Park Motor Inn (☎ 4632 1011; www.parktoowoomba.com.au; 88 Margaret St; s/d \$88/98; ☎) A more up-market option opposite Queens Park. These motel rooms have all the usual features and the bathrooms have full-length mirrors. It's close to a couple of popular cafés.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

our pick Vacy Hall (☎ 4639 2055; www.vacyhall.com.au; 135 Russell St; d \$98-205) Just uphill from the town centre, this magnificent 1880s mansion offers 12 heritage-style rooms with loads of romantic old-world charm. A wide veranda wraps around the house, all rooms have private bathrooms and some even have their own fireplaces.

James Cottage (☎ 4637 8377; www.jamescottage.com; 128 James St; s/d \$95/135) This elegant B&B in an early 20th-century Queenslander features 11ft pressed-metal ceilings and a wonderful leadlight door. The two guest bedrooms have individual en suites, there's an open fireplace and it's only a short walk into town.

Quality Hotel Burke & Wills (☎ 4632 2433; www.qhbw.com.au; 554 Ruthven St; d \$99-220; ☎) Situated in the centre of town, this is a six-storey hotel with 90 modern rooms ranging from corporate rooms to luxury spa suites. The hotel has two bars, two restaurants, 24-hour reception and gaming facilities.

Applegum Inn (☎ 4632 2088; www.bestwestern.com.au/applegum; 41 Margaret St; d \$109; ☎) In a quiet location opposite the historic Toowoomba Grammar School on the eastern outskirts of town, this is a good choice for both tourists and business travellers. It also has a licensed restaurant.

Laviston House B&B (☎ 4632 4053; www.babs.com.au/laviston; 67 Margaret St; d \$175-185; ☎) This elegant home close to Queens Park is set in a beautiful garden. The decor is country-cottage charm, the walls decorated with delicate watercolours by the talented artist-host. Choose the garden suite for maximum privacy and an indulgent double spa.

Eating BUDGET

Bon Amici (☎ 4632 4533; 191 Margaret St; light meals \$5-10; ☎ 8am-late) For a stiff drink or a good coffee (with delectable cakes) settle down at this red-walled, cruisy café. There's often live

music or poetry in the evenings and jazz every Sunday between 3pm and 6pm.

Oxygen Café (☎ 4613 1131; cnr Ruthven & Little St; mains \$8-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) This modern, breezy café will appeal to health-conscious sorts looking for organic, gluten-free, lactose-free, GMO-free, diabetic and vegetarian fare. Order a bucket of organic fair-trade coffee to go with your free-range chicken burger.

Park House 92 (☎ 4638 2211; 92 Margaret St; mains \$9-18; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This chic cottage café has a lovely wide veranda for sunny breakfasts and light lunches. As well as the usual assortment of wraps and gourmet sandwiches you can dine on fajitas, Thai fish cakes and other cosmopolitan fare. Romantics can order a picnic hamper (\$35) to enjoy in Queens Park across the road.

Metro Café (☎ 4632 0090; 15 Railway St; mains \$10-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Opposite the train station, this slick café is Toowoomba's answer to the inner-city latte scene. Trendy types order Persian feta salad and gourmet focaccias.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Bindi Spot (☎ 4638 0044; 164 Margaret St; mains \$15-22; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun) A colourful and exotic splash of India in country Australia, this joint has smiling staff and hot curries. For an exotic take on the Aussie wrap try a lunch-time naan-bread wrap.

GPO Café & Bar (☎ 4659 9240; 1/140 Margaret St; mains \$16-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Slick and modern with a stainless-steel bar and an airy dining room, GPO's surroundings reflect the kind of food served: big on flavour and very inner city with slick combinations such as duck, wild fig, pancetta, pistachio, cherry bocconcini and herb salad. Grab a coffee in the morning or a brew come dark.

Gip's (☎ 4638 3588; 120 Russell St; mains \$20-35; ☎ lunch daily, breakfast Sun-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Another top-end choice is this sophisticated restaurant housed in the billiard room of beautiful old Clifford House, which was owned by a mayor of Toowoomba in the late 19th century (the restaurant is named after his Jack Russell dog!). The menu includes such treats as pasta with Moreton Bay bugs and asparagus.

Picnic Point Restaurant (☎ 4631 5101; 104 Tourist Rd; mains \$28-33; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) With top-notch cuisine and outstanding views, this smart place by the Picnic Point lookout is a popular venue for big Toowoomba weddings. Carnivores are well-catered for but be sure

to sample the assorted flavours on the oyster menu (champagne sabayon, or tequila and kaffir lime granita).

our pick Weis Restaurant (☎ 4632 7666; 2 Margaret St; buffet lunch/dinner per person \$42/55; 🍷 lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sun) Famous for its lavish smorgasbord where tables groan under the weight of huge seafood platters, hot roasts, fresh salads and gooey desserts, this is the place to splurge. It's hugely popular and bookings are highly recommended.

Drinking

Oropa (Spotted Cow; ☎ 4632 4393; cnr Ruthven & Campbell Sts) A European beer café is a rarity in regional Queensland and to see the locals exchanging XXXX Gold for a Leffe Blond is a rare experience not to be missed. Soak up your favourite brew with a 1kg pot of mussels (no knives or forks allowed).

Fibber Magee (☎ 4639 2702; 153 Margaret St) If you fancy a beer without the noise, this agreeable, Irish-themed pub is popular and central, and there's a garden out the back.

Entertainment

The stylishly restored heritage-listed **Empire Theatre** (☎ 4698 9900; 56 Neil St) has regular concerts and cabarets, while Golden Age movie-buffs will get their fix at Ric's Flicks at the **Icon Cinema** (☎ 4639 1239; cnr Ruthven & Herries St; 🎟 7pm first Fri & Sat of the month). Ric's Flicks has a minimum \$30 three-screening fee with a complimentary guest pass.

The **Strand Cinema** (☎ 4639 3861; cnr Margaret & Neil Sts) and **Grand Central** (☎ 4638 0879; Myer Centre) screen predictable mainstream movies.

From theatre to opera, there's generally a colourful programme of events running at the **University of Southern Queensland Performance Centre** (☎ 4631 1111; West St), be it student artists or high-profile national performers.

Getting There & Away

Toowoomba is 126km west of Brisbane on the Warrego Hwy.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au; 28-30 Neil St) has numerous daily services from Toowoomba to Brisbane (\$26, two hours) including Brisbane airport (\$36). It also has regular services west along the Warrego Hwy to Dalby (1½ hours), Chinchilla (2½ hours), Roma (3½ hours) and Charleville (11

hours). **Toowoomba Transit Coaches** (☎ 4699 4700; www.ttcoaches.com.au; Neil St) has several daily services to Brisbane for \$23.

Greyhound also acts as the agent for several other local companies. **Crisps' Coaches** (☎ 3236 5266; www.crisps.com.au) runs to Warwick twice daily (\$24, 1½ hours, no services on Saturday), with connections on to Stanthorpe, Tenterfield, Goondiwindi and Moree. **Kynoch Coaches** (☎ 4639 1639; www.kynoch.com.au) runs to St George (\$65, five hours, daily except Tuesday and Saturday), Cunnamulla (\$95, nine hours, Sunday, Wednesday and Friday) and Lightning Ridge (\$95, 8½ hours, Monday and Thursday).

TRAIN

You can get here on the *Westlander*, which runs between Brisbane and Charleville twice a week. The seat-only fare from Brisbane to Toowoomba is \$30.80. The attractive old train station is northeast of the town centre, just off Russell St, and has a **ticket office** (☎ 4631 3381; 🕒 9am-3.45pm Mon-Fri).

Getting Around

Sunbus services depart from the Toowoomba bus interchange on Neil St. There's an information booth in the terminal where you can find out which bus will take you where.

AROUND TOOWOOMBA

Crows Nest

North of Toowoomba the New England Hwy travels the ridges of the Great Dividing Range, passing through a series of small villages on the road to Crows Nest. One of these villages, **Highfields** (12km from Toowoomba), is little more than a satellite cluster of houses and a small shopping centre but it's worth stopping at the charming **Chocolate Cottage and Café** (☎ 4630 8729; 10475 New England Hwy; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Wed-Mon) for a light lunch, wicked handmade chocolates and great views over the escarpment.

Another 38km north, the pretty little township of **Crows Nest** hosts the World Worm Races every October. The **Crows Nest Falls National Park** is far more impressive, with a gushing waterfall in an area of eucalypt forest punctuated by craggy granite outcrops. The park is about 6km east of town and there's a **rangers station** (☎ 4698 1296; 🕒 3.30-4pm Mon-Fri) at the park entrance. For accommodation there's the **Crows Nest Caravan Park** (☎ 4698 1269;

DAD & DAVE DETOUR

Take a drive on the 'rural side' – head south from Toowoomba on the New England Hwy and turn right at the Cambooya turnoff. **Cambooya** is real grain and crop country, with giant silos and acres and acres of the Darling Downs' most productive farming land. Keep driving south towards **Nobby**, a teeny town and home of the 100-year-old **Rudd's Pub**. This was the local drinking hole of author Steele Rudd (aka Arthur Hoey Davis, 1868–1935). His books, particularly *On Our Selection* and the 'Dad and Dave' stories are humorous accounts based on his own experiences of life on a plot of land 'selected' in the late 1800s. Continue south towards **Clifton** and its graceful old train station, which you may recognise from Australian films such as the *Thorn Birds*. From Clifton turn east back onto the highway then south to Warwick and the Granite Belt wine district.

www.crowsnestcaravanpark.com.au; New England Hwy; campsites \$18) and **Crows Nest Motel** (☎ 4698 1399; www.crowsnestmotel.com.au; New England Hwy; s/d \$86/90).

Beyond Crow's Nest the road continues north, entering the region of South Burnett (see p177 for details).

Jondaryan Woolshed Complex

Built in 1859, the huge **Jondaryan Woolshed Complex** (☎ 4692 2229; www.jondaryanwoolshed.com; Evanslea Rd; adult/child self-guided \$9/5, guided \$13/8; 🕒 10am-4pm, tours 10.30am & 1pm Sat, Sun & school holidays) is 45km northwest of Toowoomba on the Warrego Hwy.

The woolshed played a pivotal role in the history of the Australian Labor Party as it was here in 1890 that the first of the legendary shearers' strikes began. Today the woolshed is the centrepiece of a large tourist complex with an interesting collection of rustic old buildings, antique farm and industrial machinery (including a mighty, steam-driven 'roadburner', which applied the first tarmac to many of Australia's roads) and weekend blacksmithing and shearing demonstrations.

There are several rustic accommodation choices, all organised through the Woolshed reception. The **shearers quarters** (adult/child \$13/6.50, linen extra) are basic rooms around an open-sided communal cooking and dining shelter with sawdust-covered floors. They score top marks for atmosphere, and there are a few comforts such as hot showers and toilets. There's also a self-contained **cabin** (\$75) with a kitchenette and en suite or you can **camp** (up to 4 people \$10) or stay in a **safari tent** (\$34). You need to bring your own swag or bedroll if you camp.

Jondaryan hosts a number of annual events, including a nine-day **Australian Heritage Festival** in late August and early September, a **New Year's Eve bush-dance**, an

Australia Day celebration, a **Working Draught Horse Expo** in June and a **Big Sunday** country brunch every third Sunday of the month.

DALBY

☎ 07 / pop 9778

Strategically situated at the junction of three highways, Dalby is an agricultural town at the heart of Queensland's grain- and cotton-growing region. A modern steel-and-glass shopping centre dominates the otherwise pleasant and relaxed rural-vibe on the main street but it's the huge Supastock Feeds factory that sets the character for the town.

The **tourist office** (☎ 4662 1066; cnr Drayton & Condamine Sts; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, to 11am Sun) is located at Thomas Jack Park.

Dalby is a stopover rather than a destination but if you want to while away a couple of hours pay a visit to the **Pioneer Park Museum** (☎ 4662 4760; 17 Black St; adult/child \$5/1; 🕒 8am-5pm), signposted off the Warrego Hwy west of the centre. Most of the displays are located inside a collection of old buildings dating from the 1900s. There's a surprisingly enormous collection of fossils from around the globe and a 28-inch kangaroo tibia from the days when megafauna roamed the Downs.

To mingle with the sheep cockies, slap on an Akubra and slip on down to the **Dalby Saleyards** (☎ 4662 2125; Yumborra Rd) for the lamb and sheep sales every Monday morning. If you're here on a Wednesday morning make sure to wear a cow cocky's hat (more a 10-gallon affair) for the cattle and pig sales.

It's not often you'll find a monument to a caterpillar but you will in this town. The **Cactoblastis Cairn**, beside the creek in Marble St, pays homage to an Argentine caterpillar that saved the Downs from a prickly-pear infestation in the 1920s.

CROSSING THE GREAT DIVIDE

Southwest of Ipswich, the Cunningham Hwy to Warwick crosses the Great Dividing Range at Cunningham's Gap, passing through the 1100m-high mountains of **Main Range National Park**. This rugged park is the western part of the Scenic Rim and covers 184 sq km of dense rainforest. There are numerous walking trails through the three sections of the park – Cunningham's Gap, Spicer's Gap and Queen Mary Falls – and you can camp at Spicer's Gap (per person \$4.50). The **ranger's station** (☎ 4666 1133) is west of Cunningham's Gap. Close to the NSW border and 43km southeast of Warwick, the pretty **Queen Mary Falls** plunge 40m down a sheer rock face. You can't camp here but the privately run **Queen Mary Falls Caravan Park** (☎ 4664 7151; Spring Creek Rd, Killarney; unpowered/power sites \$18/20) is just across the road from the park. A rough, unsealed road continues north to Boonah, through the southern reaches of the Main Range National Park.

About 27km from Dalby is grand **Jimbour Station** (☎ 4663 6221; www.jimbour.com; Jimbour Station Rd; adult/child \$5.50/3; ☎ 10am–4.30pm), a superb reminder of the early pastoral industry of the Darling Downs. The station once covered 300,000 acres; now it's a working property of 11,500 acres. The homestead, built in 1875 in a classic French sandstone design, is a private residence but you can stroll through the expansive grounds, which feature a mix of formal rose gardens, tropical plants, citrus orchards and colourful flower beds that bloom all year. The **café** (mains \$12–17; ☎ 10am–4.30pm) with its lovely views across the black-soil plains is a great spot for lunch. Be sure to sample the range of red and white wines made on the station.

Dalby Tourist Park (☎ 4662 4793; 32 Myall St; powered/unpowered sites \$16/22, cabins from \$69; ♿) has plenty of shady sites on the banks of the Myall Creek and it's only a short walk to town.

A good-value motel is the **Motel Myall** (☎ 4662 3399; www.motelmyall.com.au; cnr Warrego Hwy & Myall St; s/d \$79/89; ♿), a friendly place with stock-standard rooms, but it's quiet and within walking distance of the pub and the RSL.

Opposite the Thomas Jack Park the **Dalby Homestead Motel** (☎ 4662 5722; www.dalbyhomesteadmotel.com.au; 27–29 Drayton St; s/d \$115/125; ♿; wi-fi) is a cut above the usual bland country motel options. The rooms have wooden furnishings and free wireless internet access.

If you're after a takeaway to eat in your room, order Singapore noodles or Pad Thai from **Lucky Noodle** (☎ 4662 6118; 126b Cunningham St; mains \$8.50–13; ☎ lunch & dinner).

A good venue for families and groups is the **Phoenix Bistro** (☎ 4662 2122; 1 Cunningham St; mains \$20–30; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Mon–Sat) in the Russell Tavern. The menu is big on steaks

and seafood, and the bistro has a bizarre but rather nice starlit ceiling.

The tables and chairs spill out of the **Sportsman's Bar & Bistro** (☎ 4662 2980; 38 Cunningham St; mains \$21–29; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon–Sat, breakfast Sun) to take over the entire corner at the Oasis Hotel. You can line your stomach with the usual steak, chicken and pasta dishes then sidle next door to the Mirage nightclub and catch a live band every Friday and Saturday night.

WARWICK

☎ 07 / pop 12,562

Roses and rodeos are an odd combination but Warwick is equally proud of its famous rodeo (dating back to 1850) and its magnificent rose gardens. The 'Rose and Rodeo City' is an attractive country town on the Condamine River with a few gracious sandstone buildings and friendly 'g'days' as you stroll along the main street. Travellers from southern states will find this a likely overnight stopover on their way to coastal Queensland.

Information

The **Warwick visitors centre** (☎ 4661 3122; 49 Albion St; ☎ 8.30am–5pm) has plenty of material on the neighbouring Southern Downs towns, and also has a heritage-trail map of Warwick's historic buildings. Also useful is the *Cultural Heritage & Historic Building Trail* brochure, with scenic drives around Warwick and Stanthorpe.

Sights & Activities

Well worth a visit is **Pringle Cottage Museum** (☎ 4661 2028; 81 Dragon St; adult/child \$6/2; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–4pm Wed–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun), a cottage dating from 1870 stuffed with a collection of old telephones, costumes, photos and assorted historical contraptions.

Warwick Art Gallery (☎ 4661 0434; 49 Albion St; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun), next to the information centre, has a very small collection of works. The **Australian Rodeo Heritage Centre** (☎ 4661 8183; 4 Alice St; adult/concession \$10/7.50; ☎ 10am–3pm Mon–Sat) has photographs and trophies from Australian professional rodeo champions. Unless there's a live demonstration in the arena out the back, or you're a die-hard rodeo fan, you won't last eight seconds.

The **Glengallan Homestead & Heritage Centre** (☎ 4667 3866; New England Hwy; ☎ 10am–4pm Sat & Sun), 15km from Warwick, is a ruined sandstone homestead currently undergoing innovative restoration.

Be sure to wander around town to see Warwick's lovely sandstone buildings including the **Abbey of the Roses** on Lock St (see below).

Equestrians and motor-sports and 4WD enthusiasts will have more to do. Unlikely as it seems, Warwick has hosted two world Polocross championships, and horse-power events are held every weekend at Morgan Park. Warwick also holds state and national events in dragway and raceway for hard-core petrolheads while 4WD treks include the exciting 14 Crossings (as the name suggests it involves 14 river crossings). The information centre has a fact sheet detailing the 4WD routes. Check on weather conditions before tackling the trails, especially those involving river crossings.

Festivals & Events

Warwick's major annual event is the **Warwick Rodeo**, held on the last weekend in October. Rock-hounds can get their rocks off (or swapped) at the **Easter Rock Swap**, the country's biggest swap-meet for collectors of precious and semiprecious stones. Closet tree-huggers will get a kick out of the quirky **Jumpers and Jazz in July** (www.jumpersandjazz.com) when the trees on Warwick's main street are knitted up in cosy jumpers, and the town comes alive with free jazz in the parks, streets and selected venues.

Sleeping

Jackie Howe Motel (☎ 4661 2111; www.jackiehowemotel.com.au; cnr Palmerin & Victoria Sts; s/d \$69/79; ♿) This budget motel is a family-run business fairly close to the centre, but quiet nonetheless. It has some wheelchair-friendly units.

our pick **Abbey of the Roses** (☎ 4661 9777; www.abbeyoftheroses.com; cnr Locke & Dragon Sts; d \$90–149)

This gothic sandstone building, once a convent and boarding school, is a stylish B&B and is National Trust-listed. The rooms are period furnished and you can wander through the cloisters and lovely rose gardens. It's the perfect location for a murder-mystery weekend.

Coachman's Inn (☎ 4660 2100; www.coachmans.com.au; 91 Wood St; d \$105–145; ♿) is the best motel in town, with stylish rooms, modern furnishings and spas in the suites. There's also a good restaurant, Rupert's Bar & Grill (see below).

Eating

Brysons Place (☎ 4661 4308; 90 Palmerin St; mains \$5–15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon–Sat) An interesting fusion of city chic meets country grandma, you can sip a latte at the sleek stainless-steel counter on the front deck or browse through the boutique soaps and dainty glass figurines in the arty-crafty florist shop at the back. The menu offers sandwiches, open grills and homemade muffins and cakes.

Bramble Patch Café (☎ 4661 9022; 8 Albion St; dishes \$9–15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A friendly café housed in a curious, dome-topped building serving good gourmet sandwiches and wraps for under \$14 as well as a range of delicious preserves from its farm, Bramble Patch Berry Gardens, near Stanthorpe. Great coffee.

Wen's in Warwick (☎ 4667 1122; 127 Palmerin St; mains \$10–14; ☎ lunch Tue–Fri, dinner Tue–Sun) Thai restaurants in country towns can be a dodgy affair but this unpretentious little place on the main street is highly recommended by the locals.

Rupert's Bar & Grill (☎ 4660 2199; 91 Wood St; mains \$21–38; ☎ dinner Tue–Sat) The only place to dine in style; fire up with a cocktail while you salivate over the carnivores' menu, which features such meaty delights as Wagyu rump steak and flame-grilled kangaroo fillet. There's live music on Saturday nights.

Getting There & Away

The **Warwick Transit Centre** (☎ 4661 8333; 78 Grafton St) is near the Albion St corner. Warwick lies on the daily **Crisps' Coaches** (☎ 3236 5266; www.crisps.com.au) run from Brisbane. Fares from Warwick are \$44 to Brisbane (2¼ hours), \$21 to Stanthorpe (45 minutes) and \$45 to Goondiwindi (2½ hours). There are also buses to Toowoomba (\$24, 1½ hours). **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) stops here on the inland Brisbane–Melbourne run (\$53 from Brisbane, four hours).

STANTHORPE & BALLANDEAN

☎ 07 / pop 4,400

Queensland's coolest town (literally), at an altitude of 915m, is one of its least-known tourist hotspots. With a distinct four-season climate, Stanthorpe is a popular winter retreat where normally sweltering Queenslanders can cosy in front of a fire or warm up with a fine red wine from one of the more than 50 boutique wineries in the region. In 1860 an Italian priest planted the first grapevine in the Granite Belt but it wasn't until the influx of Italian immigrants in the 1940s (bringing with them a lifetime of viticultural nous) that the wine industry truly began. Today Stanthorpe and the tiny village of Ballandean, less than 20km south of town, boast a flourishing 'wine tourism' industry – a term describing small, boutique wineries that offer cellar door sales, and often onsite dining and vineyard performances and events, and boutique accommodation.

But it's not all wine and song: the Granite Belt's changing seasons also make it a prime fruit growing area and there's plenty of

fruit-picking available for backpackers who don't mind chilly mornings.

Information & Orientation

Maryland St is the main thoroughfare in town. Most of the wineries are located south of Stanthorpe around Ballandean. You can get a winery-trail map from the **Stanthorpe visitors centre** (☎ 4681 2057; Leslie Pde; ☹ 9am-5pm) just south of the creek, or get wine-savvy and plan your own trail with a visit to www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au.

Ready Workforce (☎ 4681 6200; www.readyworkforce.com.au; cnr Railway & Rogers Sts; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) A helpful service that can help with all job placements including work on orchards and vineyards.

Stanthorpe Internet Café (☎ 4681 0724; 20 Maryland St; per hr \$5) Fast internet access right above Cosmo café.

Sights & Activities

Wine-tasting is a must-do in Queensland's premier wine region, as is a drive through the spectacular Granite Belt landscape. If you plan on swilling one too many, opt for a tour (opposite).

The **Queensland College of Wine Tourism** (☎ 4685 5050; cnr New England Hwy & Caves Rd; ☹ 10am-3pm) is the first facility in Australia to offer educational courses covering all aspects of wine tourism from winemaking to guest hospitality in the food and boutique accommodation fields. You can see student winemakers at work and there's a chic **café** (mains \$12-23; ☹ 11am-2pm Wed-Mon) where you can sample their culinary delights.

If organic wines take your fancy, visit **Wild Soul** (☎ 4683 4201; www.wildsoul.netfirms.com; 149 Horans Gorge Rd, Glen Aplin; ☹ 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, or just drop in), the only organic winery in the Granite Belt. As the red-dressed lady on the label hints at, the winery only produces dry reds.

For an alternative wine experience see the boxed text on p173.

For nonalcoholic pursuits, the **Stanthorpe Heritage Museum** (☎ 4681 1711; 12 High St; adult/child \$5/2.50; ☹ 10am-4pm Wed-Fri, 1-4pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), on the northern outskirts of town, gives a comprehensive insight into Stanthorpe's tin-mining and grazing past. Well-preserved old buildings from the 1800s include a slab-timber jail, a shepherd's hut and a school house. Be sure to check out the shed made entirely from kerosene tins and the 1940s handmade tractor that still works.

The **Granite Belt Maze** (☎ 4683 2181; 365 Old Warwick Rd; adult/child \$14/9; ☹ 9.30am-4.30pm Fri-Mon), 8.5km north of town, is as kitschy as a hedged maze can be but the kids will love it.

The **Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 4681 1874; Lock St; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun), northwest of the post office, has a small collection of works by local artists.

While you're in town, take a stroll through the parkland around Quart Pot Creek, near the visitors centre. The park is full of cool-climate trees and in autumn the leaves are ablaze with colour.

Tours

Several companies run day tours of the wineries out of Stanthorpe (\$65 to \$75) and Brisbane (\$130):

Filippo's Tours (☎ 4683 3130; www.filippotours.com.au) Also has overnight packages (per person \$250)

Granite Belt Winery Tours (☎ 0428 2871; www.granitebeltwinerytours.com.au) Personalised tours from Brisbane or Stanthorpe.

Granite Highlands Maxi Tours (☎ 4681 3969; www.maxitours.com.au) Offers a range of options including overnight packages (per person \$260)

Festivals & Events

The main event in the Granite Belt spans an entire season. Winter (June to August) is the **Brass Monkey Season**, with a parade of music events and food fiestas in town and at various wineries.

The **Apple & Grape Festival** (www.appleandgrape.org) is a three-day harvest festival held every second year in March where you can celebrate the 37,000 tonnes of apples produced here each year. The next scheduled event is for 2010.

Many of the wineries hold regular performances and events; check with the visitors centre for details. One of the largest wineries, **Ballandean Estate Wines** (☎ 4684 1226; www.ballandeanestate.com; Sundown Rd, Ballandean) hosts **Picilla in the Vineyard** (March), **Opera in the Vineyard** (May) and **Jazz in the Vineyard** (October), all with copious amounts of food and wine.

The **Sicilian Vintage Lunch** held in February at **Golden Grove Estate** (☎ 4684 1291; www.goldengroove.com.au; Sundown Rd, Ballandean) celebrates the start of the vintage Italian-style with grape stomping, Italian music and a three-course Sicilian lunch.

Sleeping

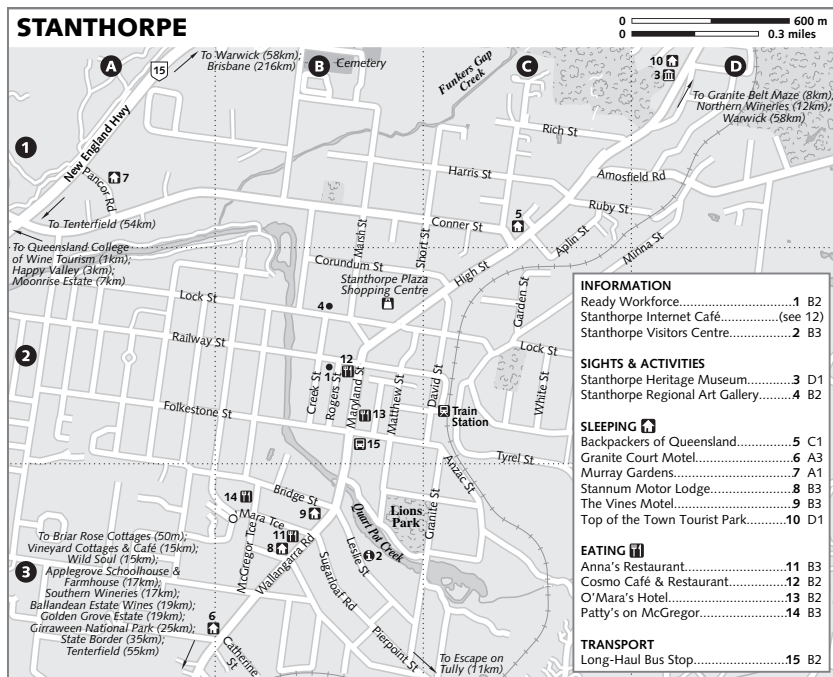
Top of the Town Tourist Park (☎ 4681 4888; 10 High St; www.toptown.com.au; powered sites \$22, dm per week \$110, cabins from \$95; ♿) On the northern outskirts, this caravan park has had a recent upgrade but still happily caters to seasonal workers, who camp or stay in the bunkhouse.

Backpackers of Queensland (☎ 0429 810 998; www.backpackersofqueensland.com.au; 80 High St; dm per week \$160) This purpose-built hostel has a cluster of clean, en suited stone-and-wood cottages sleeping up to six people. All rooms have a TV and there's plenty of space. The hostel arranges work on local farms and transport to/from work is included in the weekly fare.

Murray Gardens (☎ 4681 4121; www.murraygardens.com.au; 10 Pancor Rd; s/d \$65/80; cottages \$120-160; ♿) A good-value option set on 20 acres of natural bushland on the outskirts of town. You can choose between a motel room or a fully self-contained cottage with a fireplace or gas heating. Except for the bird life, it's very quiet.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Ourpick Briar Rose Cottages (☎ 4683 6334; www.briarrosecottages.com.au; 66 Wallangarra Rd; d \$85 Sun-Fri, \$110 Sat) These cute cottages are small in size but big on romance. Both the two-bedroom front cottage and the one-bedroom back



cottage have log fires, feather doonas and stacks of charm.

Applegrove Schoolhouse & Farmhouse (☎ 4684 1319; applegrove@optusnet.com.au; 139 Booth Lane, Ballandean; schoolhouse midweek/weekend \$100/120, farmhouse midweek/weekend \$200/220) School was never this good! Get up to mischief in this historic old schoolhouse set on 38 acres of land. You can relax on the squatter's chairs on the veranda but you won't need to use the outback dunny. The farmhouse close by has three large bedrooms and is ideal for a group of friends.

Moonrise Estate (☎ 4683 6203; www.moonriseestate.com.au; 47 Clarke Lane; d \$165-180 Fri-Sun) If you want to stay at a vineyard, this charming place is a great option, tucked into a private wing of the homestead. There are seriously lovely views of the grapes, kangaroos roaming the 12 acre property, and oodles of Shiraz to enjoy. Homestead dinners are available by arrangement.

Vineyard Cottages & Café (☎ 4684 1270; www.vineyardcottages.com.au; New England Hwy; 2-person cottages midweek/weekend from \$155/215, 4-person cottages from \$265/325) This interesting place on the northern outskirts of Ballandean has seven comfortable, attractive, heritage-style brick cottages with spas and private verandas overlooking several acres of English-style gardens. There is also an excellent restaurant (open for dinner Friday and Saturday) in a converted wooden church that has a fine reputation for its fresh, seasonal menu.

Happy Valley (☎ 4681 3250; www.happyvalleyretreat.com; Glenlyon Dr; d midweek/weekend \$150/200) An impressive resort 4km west of Stanthorpe (sign-posted off the Texas road), this fine complex offers modern homestead units or more secluded timber cabins, all with their own bathrooms and wood fires. It stands on a bush property studded with granite outcrops, and has a tennis court, a restaurant and daily winery tours.

Escape on Tully (☎ 4683 7075; www.escapeontully.com; 934 Mt Tully Rd; per night 1 couple \$180, 2 couples \$280) This stylish self-contained cottage set on 43 acres has two queen-sized bedrooms with en suites and makes a great weekend retreat for a couple or a group of friends. It's 12km out of town but when you get here you can soak in the claw-foot bathtub on the deck.

There are also a few motels in town to choose from, including the following: **Granite Court Motel** (☎ 4681 1811; 34 Wallangarra Rd; s/d \$64/72; 🚰) This good-value budget option has spacious rooms and is close to town.

Stannum Motor Lodge (☎ 4681 2000; www.stannumlodge.com.au; 12 Wallangarra Rd; r \$100 Sun-Fri, \$110 Sat; 🚰 🚰) Next door to Stanthorpe's popular Anna's Restaurant, this motel is also a good option.

Vines Motel (☎ 4681 3844; www.thevinesmotel.com.au; 2 Wallangarra Rd; d \$119, cottage \$145-175; 🚰) A four-star choice next to a lovely park.

Eating

Barrel Room Café (☎ 4684 1226; Ballandean Estate Wines, Sundown Rd, Ballandean; mains \$8-15; 🍷 9am-5pm) The menu is limited to burgers and pasta but the 130-year-old floor-to-ceiling wooden barrel lids lining the walls in this rustic café create the perfect atmosphere for an antipasto platter (\$30) and a bottle (or two) of the winery's excellent vino.

Cosmo Café & Restaurant (☎ 4681 3131; 18 Maryland St; mains \$8-18; 🍷 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) If you aren't snuggled up in a cosy cottage, cruise down here for breakfast before hitting the wine trail. Order a latte and contemplate the brass monkey on the street corner who seems to have lost his balls.

O'Mara's Hotel (☎ 4681 1044; 45 Maryland St; dishes \$12-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This friendly little pub has an open fire, good pub nosh, and a wooden pig dog chained to the floor near the public-bar door.

Anna's Restaurant (☎ 4681 1265; cnr Wallangarra Rd & O'Mara Tce; mains \$18-29; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) A family-run, Italian BYO restaurant set in a cosy Queenslander, Anna's is famous locally for its weekend buffets, where you can gorge yourself on antipasto platters, hearty pasta and a vast array of veal, poultry and seafood dishes. Midweek, the fireplace and candle-lit tables make for more intimate dining.

our pick **Patty's on McGregor** (☎ 4681 3463; 2 McGregor Tce; mains \$20-29; 🍷 lunch Wed-Fri, dinner Wed-Sun) You can travel the globe without leaving country Stanthorpe. Every Wednesday to Friday is World Food Night at Patty's, the cuisine and decor reflecting a different theme each month. Expect belly dancers with your falafels, Romeos with your lasagne. Theme nights have a set menu (\$35).

Getting There & Around

Greyhound Australia (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Crisps Coaches** (☎ 3236 5266; www.crisps.com.au) stop at the Shell garage on the corner of Folkestone and Maryland Sts. There are buses to Warwick (45 mins), Toowoomba (2½ hours), Brisbane (3½ hours) and Tenterfield

STRANGE BIRD ALTERNATIVE WINE TRAIL

A strange bird sings a different song, and if you're looking for something beyond Chardonnay and Shiraz, this is the bird for you. A Strange Bird wine is made from alternative wine grape varieties – think Tempranillo, Barbera, Nebbiolo, Viognier and a dozen other unpronounceable names. These are Italian, French, Spanish, German and Argentine grapes grown in the Granite Belt; the Australian climate and intense sun producing a denser, heavier (but no less tantalizing) version of their native counterparts.

On a wine-sipping tour of the 20 or so wineries in the area offering Strange Bird wines you might learn how to pronounce Gewürztraminer, pick up a Silvaner for your next cheese platter, or burst into a quirky tune or two.

To follow the Strange Bird trail pick up a map and brochure from the visitors centre or download a copy from www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au

in NSW (1½ hours), where you can pick up the Kirklands bus to Byron Bay. Brisbane to Stanthorpe costs \$54 (3½ hours).

GIRRAWEE NATIONAL PARK

Wonderful Girraween National Park adjoins Bald Rock National Park over the border in NSW and features the same towering granite boulders surrounded by pristine forests. Wildlife is everywhere and there are 17km of walking trails to take you to the top of some of the surreal granite outcrops. The shortest trail is a 3km walk and scramble up the 1080m Pyramids, while the granddaddy of Girraween walks is the 10.4km trek to the top of Mt Norman (1267m).

There are two good camping grounds in the park, which teem with wildlife and offer facilities such as drinking water, barbecues and hot showers. Access is via a paved road from Ballandean, 17km south of Stanthorpe on the New England Hwy.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 4684 5157; 🍷 noon-2pm) has information on the park and walking tracks. Camping permits can be obtained at the self-registration stands in the park. Although winter nights here can be cold, it's hot work climbing the boulders, so take plenty of water when you hike.

If you aren't up for camping, there are several good places to stay on the access road from Ballandean.

Wisteria Cottage (☎ 4684 5121; www.wisteriacottage.com.au; Pyramids Rd; cottages per adult/child \$75/35 incl breakfast) has three beautiful wooden chalet-style cottages in a large paddock with grazing cattle. The cabins have wide verandas, cosy fireplaces and sleep up to six people. There's also a fine chocolate shop, **Heavenly Chocolate** (🍷 10am-4pm Fri-Mon) with a decadent

range of handmade and imported Belgian chocolates to satisfy any chocoholic; and imported hot chocolate for those cold winter mornings.

Girraween Country Inn (☎ 4683 7109; www.girraweencountryinn.com.au; Eukey Rd; d incl breakfast from \$110) is a two-storey, chalet-style guesthouse set on 40 acres of bushland on the northern edge of the park. It oozes old-world charm with a warm and welcoming restaurant downstairs, and eight guestrooms upstairs. To get here, turn off the New England Hwy at Ballandean and follow Eukey Rd for 9km.

our pick **Girraween Environmental Lodge** (☎ 4684 5138; www.girraweenlodge.com.au; Pyramids Rd, Ballandean; cabin \$190) is an ecofriendly bushland retreat set on 400 acres adjacent to the national park. The self-contained timber cabins are ultra-comfy and have wood heaters and private decks with barbecues. After a hard day's walk you can relax under the stars in the outdoor spa and plunge pool. There's no restaurant at the lodge but you can buy a range of gourmet frozen meals, barbecue packs and breakfast baskets.

SUNDOWN NATIONAL PARK

On the Queensland-NSW border, about 80km southwest of Stanthorpe, Sundown National Park is dominated by the steep, spectacular gorges of the Severn River. There are several ruined mines in the park, but the rugged wilderness and plentiful wildlife are the main attractions. At the southern end of the park, the Broadwater camping ground can be reached in a conventional vehicle along a 4km gravel road. Burrows camping area is 34km west of Ballandean and is only accessible by 4WD vehicles. Camping permits can be obtained

online (www.epa.qld.gov.au) or at the self-registration stands onsite.

GOONDIWINDI

☎ 07 / pop 5629

The boots and cowboy hats say it all: you're now in cotton-picking, grain-growing and grazing country. West of Warwick, on the NSW border, 'Gundy' is something of a one-horse town, the horse in question being the famous Gunsynd.

Information

Goondiwindi visitors centre (☎ 4671 2653; 4 McLean St; internet per hr \$4.40; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Sights

The 'Goondiwindi Grey' is a legend in this town, a racehorse that loved to win (see boxed text, opposite). There's a **memorial statue** of Gunsynd in MacIntyre St, beside the bridge across the MacIntyre River. You'll find memorabilia, trophies and photos of the star in the **Gunsynd Museum** in the information centre. There's also a Gunsynd memorial lounge in the **Victoria Hotel** (cnr Marshall & Herbert Sts), a beautiful old country pub with broad verandas and an eccentric tower (with an unsightly beer logo on top!).

The **Customs House Museum** (☎ 4671 3041; 1 MacIntyre St; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Mon), with its gorgeous flower-filled garden, has a collection put together by the local historical society. There is also a couple of other interesting historical buildings in town including the century-old **Martha's Cottage** on Bowen St.

The **Natural Heritage Water Park**, 2km out of town on Kildonan Rd, is a 210-hectare recreational park with a purpose-built lake for water-skiing, boating, canoeing and swimming. It's a popular spot for picnics and barbecues, as are the **Botanic Gardens & Western Woodlands** (St George Rd; ☎ 7am-9.30pm), 3km from town.

Sleeping

Backpackers here for the cotton-picking season will find good cheap digs at the **Queensland Hotel** (☎ 4671 2011; s/d \$30/50) and **Royal Hotel** (☎ 4671 1877; s/d \$54/65) in the main street, and the **Railway Hotel** (☎ 4671 1577; s/d \$55/65) on Herbert St.

The **Goondiwindi Tourist Park** (☎ 4671 2566; www.goondiwinditouristpark.com.au; 20 Hungerford St; unpowered/power sites \$17/23, cabins \$59-89; 🚰) is a spacious caravan park with incredibly clean

facilities and a shady camping ground by the billabong. On Sunday morning everyone gets out of bed for a huge pancake brekkie. Prices are for two people.

Goondiwindi Motel (☎ 4671 1544; www.goondiwindimotel.com.au; Old Cunningham Hwy; s/d from \$75/84; 🚰 🚰), at the back of town along the old highway, is a quiet place with decent rooms and also has a restaurant, **Tracks** (mains \$25-30; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat), highly recommended by the locals.

In the heart of town the **Country Comfort Motel** (☎ 4671 1855; 110 Marshall St; s/d \$87/92; 🚰 🚰) has stock-standard rooms but an above-average restaurant, the **Town House** (mains \$20-30).

Eating & Drinking

Tucked into an alley off the main street, **Three Wishes Café** (☎ 4671 3191; 99 Marshall St; mains \$4-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) sells gifts and homewares along with risotto and smoked-salmon frittata.

A trip to Gundy isn't complete without a drink at the iconic **Victoria Hotel** (☎ 4671 1007; cnr Marshall & Herbert Sts; mains \$12-22). The Vic has undergone substantial renovations, carefully preserving the glorious country charm of its former heyday. You can get a hearty cattleman's steak and decent pub grub. Rooms (single/double \$30/50) should be available by mid-2008.

Getting There & Away

Goondiwindi is 200km west of Warwick. Another 200km west of Goondiwindi, the tiny cotton-growing town of St George lies at the junction of the Carnarvon, Moonie and Balonne Hwys. **Greyhound** (☎ 1300 473 946) buses from Brisbane (\$75, five hours) stop at Goondiwindi at the BP Bridge Garage, 1km east of town on the Cunningham Hwy. **Crisp's Coaches** (☎ 3236 5266) also operates a daily bus service from Warwick (\$45, 2½ hours).

MILES

☎ 07 / pop 1164

Hitting kangaroos on the road is highly likely when driving out west, especially at night. And that's about the only good reason to spend a night in Miles. Lying on the intersection of the Warrego and Leichhardt Hwys, Miles was originally founded in 1844 as Dogwood Crossing by the eccentric Prussian explorer Ludwig Leichardt on his 31st birthday. Disappointingly, the town was

renamed for a local politician, rather than because it was miles from anywhere.

However, if you happen to be passing through, make sure to spend a couple of hours at the **Miles Historical Village** (☎ 4627 1492; Morella St; adult/child/family \$10/4/20; ☎ 8am-5pm), an incredibly well-presented streetscape of historic buildings including a bootmaker, saddlery, general store and bank. The set-up is so authentic you expect to see a horse and carriage tied to the post-and-rail fence. The main building houses a collection of all sorts of bits and pieces, from rocks and gems to tie stretchers and silk-screen printers. There's also a visitors centre here.

On the main road is **Dogwood Crossing@Miles** (☎ 4627 2455; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), a \$1.6-million community project that combines visual arts, social history and literature into a museum, gallery, library and multimedia resource centre. It's a very slick venture but the exhibits are rather disappointing. There's also internet access (per hour \$4) and an information centre.

Miles outback Motel (☎ 4627 2100; www.milesoutbackmotel.com.au; 11 Murilla St; s/d \$85/95; 🚰) welcomes you with a cheery 'G'day mate' inscribed above the reception office and colourful outback murals painted on the front of the building.

For a totally bizarre sleeping option, drive 20km north of town to **Possum Park** (☎ 4627 1651; Leichardt Hwy; unpowered/power sites \$9/22, cabin \$75), where you can sleep in a refurbished underground bunker that used to house thousands of tonnes of bombs and munitions during WWII. The windowless cabins can get a bit stuffy and the décor could do with a revamp but they're clean and comfy and set on 700 acres of bushland so there's plenty of walking

to be done here. It's a long way from town so remember to bring your own food. There's a good bush kitchen for campers and you can also sleep in a restored train carriage. The park is not open for casual sightseeing.

The Leichardt Hwy runs north from Miles all the way to Rockhampton.

ROMA

☎ 07 / pop 5983

Way out west on the Warrego Hwy, Roma is a small rural town in big-sky sheep and cattle country. Not exactly a hub of activity, it is still the capital of the Western Downs, and rules over a landscape that has changed little from the days of the early pioneers and cattle drovers. If you want a taste of the 'west', look no further.

It's a sure bet you'll be driving a car, not driving cattle (duffed or otherwise – see boxed text, p176), along one of the two highways (the Warrego and the Carnarvon) that lead into town.

Information

The **visitors centre** (☎ 4622 9221; Warrego Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) is located in the Big Rig complex.

Sights & Activities

There's not much to see or do around Roma but since you're here you may as well pay a visit to the **Big Rig** (☎ 4622 4355; www.thebigrig.com.au; Warrego Hwy; adult/child \$10/7, combined entry & night show \$15.50/10.50; ☎ 9am-5pm, night show 7pm). This tourist complex, set on an old oil derrick, tells you everything you ever wanted to know about the history of oil and gas since the 1900s. Apart from its farming industry, the Roma district has enough oil to support

THE GOONDIWINDI GREY

Gunsynd (1967–83), the legendary star of the turf, was an equine athlete as famous for his horsey showmanship as for his incredible courage and will to win. Like all good underdogs, he was bought for a mere \$1300 by four bush owners. Gunsynd (named for his syndicate of Goondiwindi owners) took to racing with a passion, winning race after race, his charismatic personality also winning the hearts of the public. A true star of the track, Gunsynd would refuse to walk into the ring until the applause from race-goers reached the appropriate crescendo. But he always gave his all (no matter how heavy the handicap), responding to the roar from the crowd as he raced home to yet another victory. In keeping with his celebrity status, at his farewell at Randwick he walked onto the track, turned and seemed to bow to the crowd in a final salute. During his career, out of 54 starts Gunsynd won 29 races, ran seven second and eight third places. A record, 'The Goondiwindi Grey', even made the hit parade. This incredibly popular athlete is the only animal to make the Queensland Icon List.

a small refinery and was the site of Australia's first natural gas strike. Every night the Big Rig holds a pyrotechnic sound and light show. Although the visitors centre is housed in the same complex, if the desk is unmanned don't expect any helpful tourist advice from the Big Rig desk.

If you still have time to spare, wander across the road to historic **Lenroy Slab Hut** (Riggers Rd), opposite the Big Rig. It's hard to imagine a family of 12 once lived in this small timber hut, built in 1893. At the end of Edwardes St (off McDowall St) you'll find an enormous **bottle tree**, transplanted here in 1927; with a girth of 8.9m it's too big to hug.

Twice a week you can watch the farmers (and animals) in action at Australia's largest cattle-selling centre, the **Roma Bungil Saleyards** (☎ 4622 1201; 🕒 from 9am Tue, from 8am Thu) where up to 12,000 head of cattle can be sold in one morning.

Country towns usually have a pub on every corner and Roma is no different. The **Empire Hotel** (☎ 4622 2212; cnr McDowall & Quintin Sts) is a stately old building with big wide verandas dating to 1877. You won't find a counter meal here but pull up a stool, grab a beer and rub shoulders with the locals. Be sure to comment on the likely bull you spotted at the saleyards that morning.

The handful of sights are easily seen on your own but if you prefer a guided trip **Bottle Tree Bush Tours** (☎ 4622 1525) runs a 2½-hour free town tour which leaves from the Big Rig at 2pm on Monday, and Wednesday through to Saturday.

Roma's major festival is **Easter in the Country**, which includes a rodeo, horse races, parades, bush dances and reels of country music.

Sleeping & Eating

Roma Big Rig Van Park (☎ 4622 2538; 4 McDowall St; unpowered/power sites \$20/26, cabins \$60-90) is a quiet park facing the river just down the road from the Big Rig. Prices are for two people.

Auburn B&B (☎ 4622 2295; 146a Northern Rd; s/d \$85/110) When there are drab motels on every corner, this relaxed guesthouse opposite the Bassett Park race course makes a fine change. The hearty home cooking is an added plus; book ahead if you plan to eat in.

Overlander Homestead Motel (☎ 4622 3555; www.overlandermotel.com.au; Warrego Hwy; d \$125) This colonial-style motel on the eastern outskirts of town is easily the best in town, and has an

CAPTAIN STARLIGHT

Roma is the old stomping ground of the notorious Captain Starlight, cattle-duffer Harry Redford, who in 1870 stole 1000 head of cattle from a nearby station and drove them down to Adelaide. It was an audacious plan, to move a large herd of cattle through largely unexplored territory and, despite Redford's dubious motives, his cattle-thieving exploits pioneered the lower Cooper Creek and opened a new stock route along the Strzelecki Creek. Unfortunately, a distinctive white stud bull in the herd gave the game away and Redford was arrested and sent back to Roma for trial. Despite the evidence, the jury's sympathies lay with the cattle-duffer and he was not convicted.

above-average licensed **restaurant** (mains \$20-30; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat).

Bakearoma (☎ 4622 4395; 63 McDowall St; snacks from \$4; 🕒 from 7am) This popular bakery and café is good for a breakfast of coffee and pastries.

Bogarts Coffee Shop (☎ 4622 5666; 37 Hawthorne St; mains \$6-13; 🕒 9.30am-9pm Wed-Sat, to 5pm Sun-Tue) Tucked away at the back of Cinema Roma, this is an oasis for the caffeine addicted. There are pizzas, salads, focaccias, gourmet sandwiches and decadently delicious apple pie. Movie meal-deals are good value – movie tickets, two mains, two glasses of wine and coffee for \$50 per couple.

Irish McGanns Restaurant (☎ 4622 1330; McDowall St; mains \$16-30; 🕒 lunch & dinner) in the Queens Arms Hotel is an Irish-themed pub serving generous plates of Celtic chicken, Gaelic steak and other hearty Irish fare. The décor and ambience are a welcome change from the usual outback style.

Getting There & Away

Roma is 350km west of Toowoomba on the Warrego Hwy. If you're travelling to Carnarvon Gorge National Park, head 90km north towards the park's southern access town of Injune. See p259 for more details.

Qantas has flights between Roma and Brisbane (\$260). **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) has daily buses to Roma from Brisbane (\$77, seven hours). Buses stop at **Kookas Travel** (☎ 4622 1333; Bowen St).

The **Westlander** train passes through twice weekly on its way travelling from

Brisbane to Charleville. From Roma to Brisbane is 11 hours (economy seat/sleeper \$72.60/130.90).

AROUND ROMA

Mitchell lies on the western edge of the Darling Downs and marks the gateway to Queensland's outback. It's another one-horse town on the Maranoa River, 88km west of Roma on the Warrego Hwy. Mitchell's claim to fame is its hot artesian springs and Australia's largest open-air spa complex, the **Great Artesian Spa Complex** (☎ 4623 1073; 2 Cambridge St; 🕒 8am-7pm). There's a small **tourist information office** in the complex.

Mitchell is the southern access point for the Mt Moffat Section of the Carnarvon National Park (p258), 200km to the north.

Another 90km further west you reach the junction of the Warrego and Landsborough Hwys. From here, you can continue west to Charleville (90km) or take the Landsborough Hwy northwest to Augathella (90km).

SOUTH BURNETT REGION

The South Burnett region is a colourful patchwork of deep-red soil, cereal crops, vineyards and open woodland. Eucalyptus trees and grazing cattle bake under the summer sun but after the rains the rolling hills turn lush and green and the countryside is as pretty as the proverbial picture. A meandering drive through the country on Hwy 17 (the 600km inland route from Ipswich to Rockhampton) is the best way to appreciate the area's charming character, passing through a succession of small country towns, sampling locally grown produce, wines and olives, and stopping to hike in the spectacular national parks of the Bunya Mountains and Cania Gorge.

BUNYA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

The Bunya Mountains form a dramatic spur of the Great Dividing Range, rising abruptly to 1100m above the flat lowland plains. A winding road twists through the dense (often misty) rainforests and towering bunya and hoop pines to offer spectacular vistas of the surrounding fields and cleared farming land. The Bunya Mountains National Park is Queensland's second-oldest national park

(formed in 1908) and protects the world's largest remaining bunya-pine rainforest.

The bunya pine is an ancient, statuesque tree with a curious dome-shaped crown and every few years it produces a crop of edible nuts. Beware of falling bunya nuts during January to April; the nuts are as big as a pineapple and weigh up to 11kg. These 'botanical bombs' hit the ground so hard they bury themselves in the ground. Before European settlers started logging these forests in the 1860s, Aboriginal tribes used to gather for feasts and ceremonies whenever the bunya nuts were ripe.

The vegetation of the Bunya Mountains is a mosaic of rainforest, heath, eucalypt forest, low vine scrub and grassy plains (known as 'balds'). Ancient grass trees grow on the slopes of Mt Kiangarow, some of them 5m tall and hundreds of years old. Wildlife in the 11,700 hectare park includes red-necked wallabies, crimson rosellas, king parrots and currawongs, and over 30 rare and threatened species including the rare Bard frog.

An extensive network of walking trails zig-zags through the park, from the 500m Bunya Bunya track (where you can hug a huge bunya pine) to the 10km trail to the Big Falls Lookout. The park is an extremely popular weekend destination, only 56km southwest of Kingaroy and 55km northeast of Dalby.

Pick up a map of the walks from the **ranger's station** (☎ 4668 3127; Bunya Ave) in **Dandabah** near the southern entrance to the park. You can usually catch a ranger between 2pm and 4pm. There are several places to camp (per person \$4.50) including the lovely green site adjacent to the ranger's station. The Burton Wells site and the small and cosy Westcott site are for tent campers only. Camping permits can be obtained online at www.epa.qld.gov.au.

Also at Dandabah is the **Bunya Mountains Getaway Accommodation and General Store** (☎ 4668 3131; 🕒 9am-5pm), where you can book accommodation in a range of chalets (prices start at \$135/night). Opposite the ranger's station, the **Bunya Mountains Accommodation Centre** (☎ 4668 3126; www.bunyamountains.com; Bunya Ave) lets out private holiday homes for a minimum two night stay. The estate has 80 homes to choose from but, surprisingly, there aren't many trees in the grounds.

To fully appreciate the rainforest, stay in one of the two rustic cabins at **Munro's Camp Cabins** (☎ 4668 3150; just off Bunya Ave; d cabins \$50, each additional person \$7). The décor is so dated it's

almost retro, but the wood stove, deck (where king parrots come to feed) and privacy can't be matched. You'll find genuine hospitality here, and walking trails start from your door. Enjoy the hot bath as there's no shower.

Closer to Dandabah, **Rice's Log Cabins** (☎ 4668 3133; www.riceslogcabins.com.au; Bunya Mountains Rd; d cabins \$85) has five cosy, self-contained log cabins with fireplaces on two acres of beautiful landscaped gardens. There's a small and intimate restaurant here, Puzzles, which is only open on Saturday nights and offers a set three-course dinner.

There are great views along with clean amenities, ultrahot showers and masses of trees at the peaceful **Bushland Park** (☎ 4663 4717, 0407-113 514; Soldiers Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$11/16.50, cabins from \$55) camping ground, which is 10km south of Dandabah on the road to Dalby. Rates are for two people.

The deck of the **Cider Gum Café and Restaurant** (☎ 4668 3131; mains \$15-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Sat-Wed, breakfast Sat & Sun) in Dandabah overlooks the rainforest and is a good spot to sample the local bunya-nut scone or a menu of modern Australian cuisine infused with native bush flavours.

Also with a focus on Australian bush ingredients, the peaceful **Bunya Forest Gallery & Tearoom** (☎ 4668 3020; 14 Bunya Ave; mains \$6-12; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a rainforest outlook and serves up delicious treats straight from the oven.

KINGARROY

☎ 07 / pop 7620

Kingaroy, at the junction of the Bunya Mountains and D'Aguiar Hwys, is the prosperous little capital of the South Burnett region and the centre of Australia's most important peanut-growing area. In fact, peanuts dominate almost every facet of life in Kingaroy.

Other than peanuts (and the fact that Queensland's notorious former premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen came from here), Kingaroy's main point of interest is its promising wine industry. South Burnett was the first official wine region in Queensland but was quickly overshadowed by the Granite Belt.

Kingaroy is also the northern access point for the Bunya Mountains National Park.

The very helpful **visitors centre** (☎ 4162 6272; 128 Haly St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is just north of the centre, opposite the white peanut silos. Connected to the centre is the

Kingaroy Heritage Museum (☎ 4162 6275; admission free), devoted to the early days of the peanut industry. Take a look at the first mechanical peanut-puller. Also in the complex is the **Kingaroy Shire Art Gallery**. The 1938 building is a fine example of Art Deco – step outside to view the facade and check out the three-layered stepping in the wall columns.

Away from the city lights, a 45km drive south of Kingaroy, you can check the astral night sky at the **Maidenwell Astronomical Observatory** (☎ 4164 6194; www.sbstars.com; Maidenwell; adult/child \$11/5.50; ☎ nightly by appointment).

If you want to relive the days of mangled grammar and the gerrymander, tours of **Bethany** (☎ 4162 7046; 218 Petersen Dr; admission \$10), the home of the Bjelke-Petersen family, are held every Wednesday and Saturday at 2pm. Try the famous pumpkin scones. If you can't get enough of the Flo-and-Joh show, you can stay in an attractive self-contained cottage on the property. The small **Bethany Cottages** (☎ 4162 7046; www.bethany.net.au; 218 Peterson Dr; d midweek/weekend \$120/130 incl breakfast; ☎) are on top of a hill and have spectacular views from the veranda.

Some of the more notable wineries in the region are **Barambah Ridge** (☎ 4168 4766; 79 Goschnicks Rd, Redgate via Murgon; ☎ 10am-5pm) and **Clovely Estate** (☎ 3216 1088; Steinhards Rd, Moffatdale via Murgon; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Sun). Closer to Kingaroy, **Crane Winery** (☎ 4162 7647; Haydens Rd, Booie via Kingaroy; ☎ 10am-4pm), 10km northeast of town, opened the first cellar door in the South Burnett region. The cellar door is a cute little blue cottage, once the kitchen of an old Queenslander homestead. The 'liquid gold' Frontignac (a late-harvest muscat) goes well with a cheese platter and views of the Booie Range.

About 60km from Kingaroy, **Passchendaele** (☎ 4164 8147; www.pfarm.com.au; d \$140 or \$225 pp incl all meals & activities) is a farmstay that gets excellent reports from travellers who have enjoyed the insight into life on a Darling Downs property. It's not just about milking cows and collecting eggs – guests can take part in seasonal mustering, fencing, whipcracking, fishing, 4WD driving and camp-oven cooking.

The neat **Kingaroy Holiday Park** (☎ 4162 1808; www.kingaroycaravanpark.com.au; 48 Walter Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/25), 1.5km out of the town centre just off the Brisbane-Nanango Hwy, has a nice grassy area and lots of shady spots to set up camp. Rates are for two people.

In town, the **Ascot Lodge Motor Inn** (☎ 4162 8333; www.ascotlodgemotorinn.com; 69-71 Kingaroy St; s/d \$95/105; ☎) is a decent motel with a friendly host.

For a more eccentric stay, **Captains Paddock** (☎ 4162 4534; www.captainspaddock.com.au; 18 Millers Rd; d midweek/weekend \$100/130, incl breakfast) is a secluded, architecturally designed cottage nestled in the Captains Paddock Vineyard, 7km from Kingaroy. Quirky fantasy sculptures decorate the place, including the whimsical dragon-fireplace in the cellar-door **café** (mains \$15; ☎ 10am-5pm). The vineyard dogs, Merlot and Zell, are doggie stars of *Wine Dogs*, a photographic book about dogs living on wineries; they'll be happy to paw-sign a copy of the book.

Kingaroy's restaurants are generally on the dull side. It's worth the 6.5km drive out of town to the **Bell Tower Restaurant** (☎ 4162 7000; Haydens Rd; mains \$16-30; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri & Sat) at Booie Range Distillers. The menu runs the gamut from seafood and steaks to tapas, and the views from its hilltop perch are magnificent.

You can't leave Kingaroy without sampling its famous nuts. The **Peanut Van** (☎ 4162 8400; 77 Kingaroy St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) has 23 different flavours including hickory-smoke, curry, salt-and-vinegar, toffee-coated Vienna peanuts and bags of good old salt roast in a shell.

Brisbane Bus Lines (☎ 3355 0034; www.brisbanebuslines.com) operates services daily (except Saturdays) from Brisbane to Kingaroy (\$34.50, 3¼ hours) and on to Murgon (\$40, four hours).

KILKIVAN

☎ 07 / pop 339

Kilkivan is a quaint country town at the northeastern entrance to the South Burnett, lying on the Bicentennial National Trail, which follows old coach and stock routes from Cooktown (in Queensland's far north) to Victoria. The original township, slightly east of Kilkivan, was the site of Queensland's first gold discovery in 1852.

For more information visit the **Kilkivan Historical Museum & Visitor Information Centre**

(☎ 5484 1612; 12 Bligh St; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, noon-3pm Sat).

The town hosts the famous **Kilkivan Great Horse Ride** (www.kilkivangreathorseride.info; per person \$10, full weekend adult/child \$30/10 incl ride, camping & concert) every year, attracting riders from around the state. The Grand Parade is a spectacular sight as thousands of horse-riders ride down the town's wide main street. The ride, held in April, criss-crosses the pretty range country and is a full weekend of rousing bush fun with boxing troupes, market stalls and a campfire concert.

If you don't want to camp, **The Left Bank B&B** (☎ 5484 1016; www.theleftbank.com.au; 10 Bligh St; from \$145) is an extremely cute cottage and **café** (☎ 10am-4pm) housed in a former bank.

Kilkivan is 90km northeast of Kingaroy and only 53km southwest of Gympie.

CANIA GORGE NATIONAL PARK

About 300km north of Kingaroy, the small Cania Gorge National Park preserves a range of habitats from dry eucalyptus forest and rugged sandstone escarpments to deep gullies filled with mosses and ferns. The scenery is spectacular, wildlife is plentiful and there are numerous walking trails to impressive rock formations.

You can't camp at the park itself, but **Cania Gorge Caravan & Tourist Park** (☎ 07-4167 8188; www.cania gorge.com.au; Phil Marshall Dr; unpowered/powerd sites \$26/29, bunkhouses \$60-75, cabins \$70-100; ☎) is about 7km beyond the picnic area in the national park. It's well equipped, with a shop and a campers' kitchen, and has boat and kayak hire.

If you don't want to camp, the nearest town is **Monto**, 26km southeast, near the junction of the Burnett River and Three Moon Creek. The **Colonial Motor Inn & Restaurant** (☎ 4166 1377; 6 Thomson St; s/d motel units \$55/65) is a pleasant place fronted by a 100-year-old timber building. There's an atmospheric, colonial-style restaurant (open for dinner Monday to Saturday) here.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'