

Gold Coast



Boasting 35 beaches and 300 sunny days a year, the Gold Coast has cornered the tourist market as the quintessential Aussie lifestyle of sun, surf and fun. With four million visitors flocking here each year the strategy appears to be working. On the surface, the long, virtually unbroken ribbon of beach stretching for 40km from the tip of South Stradbroke Island to the New South Wales border – backed by a shimmering strip of high-rises, theme parks and nonstop recreational action – promises to deliver the goods. But the brash commercialism and relentless pace won't appeal to everyone. The undisputed capital is Surfers Paradise which, depending on your viewpoint, is either the heart of the action or the place you'll most want to avoid. Here the bonanza of eateries, drinking holes and artificial attractions peak. The dizzying fun sucks you into a relentless spin and spits you back out exhausted. For respite, however, you won't need to head far. The hype diminishes drastically outside the epicentre; Broadbeach offering beach-chic without the frenzy, Burleigh Heads delivering seaside charm, and Coolangatta offering the quietest (and cheapest) option.

The beaches, the original drawcard, are spectacular and there's excellent surfing at Currumbin, Burleigh Heads, Kirra and Duranbah. Often overlooked, South Stradbroke Island has some great waves, and a looong stretch of uncrowded beach. Also overlooked is the lush, subtropical rainforested hinterland less than 30km from the beach. The cool mountain landscape has rainforest walks, waterfalls and cosy retreats in Lamington and Springbrook National Parks and the quaint hill-top village of Tamborine Mountain.

GOLD COAST

GOLD COAST

HIGHLIGHTS

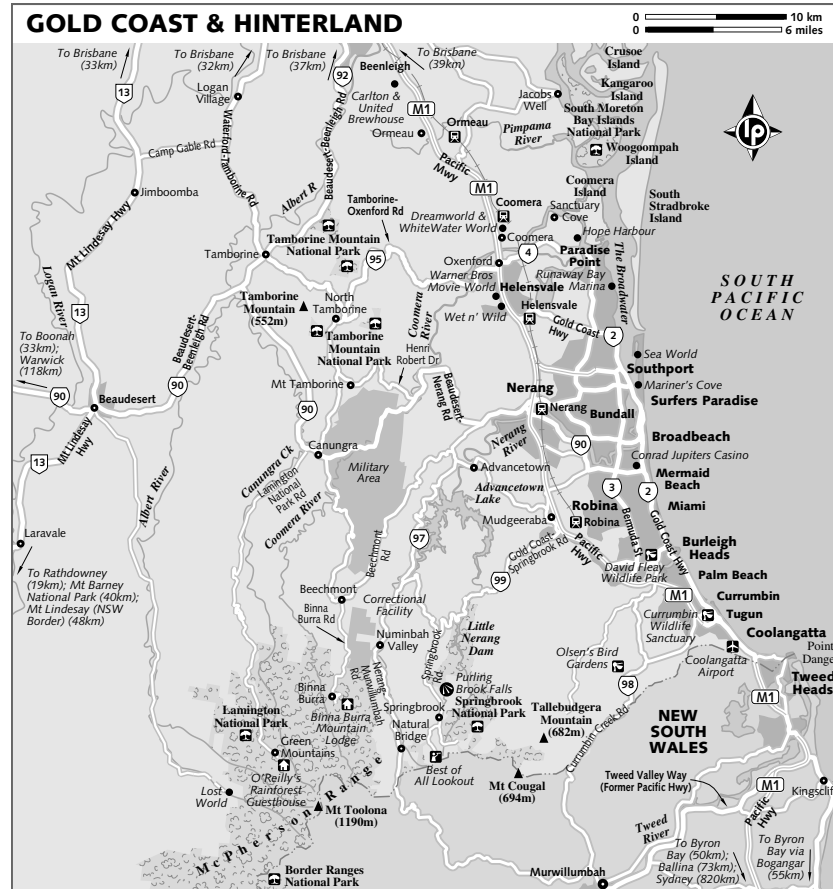
- Overdosing on glitz and good times and partying hard in heady **Surfers Paradise** (p141)
- Surfing the breaks and surfing the menu at **Burleigh Heads'** (p150) great surf beach and swish restaurants
- Bushwalking through deep gorges and towering rainforests in **Springbrook National Park** (p156) and **Lamington National Park** (p158)
- Luxuriating in the opulent **Palazzo Versace** (p141) at Main Beach
- Blissing out with a mind-body-soul makeover in a hinterland **spa retreat** (p156)
- Flying on roller coasters, losing yourself in Hollywood and getting wet and wild at the Gold Coast **theme parks** (p148)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07

■ www.verygc.com

■ www.goldcoastguide.com



Dangers & Annoyances

Car theft is a major problem all the way along the Gold Coast; park in well-lit areas and don't leave valuables in your vehicle.

The Gold Coast turns into party central for thousands of school leavers between mid-November and mid-December during 'schoolies week'. Although it's generally a lot of fun for those celebrating, it can be hell for everyone else.

Getting There & Away

AIR
The Gold Coast international airport at Coolangatta is 25km south of Surfers Paradise. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com) flies from Sydney (\$110, 1½ hours) and

Melbourne (\$165, two hours). **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) and **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com) also fly from Sydney (\$80) and Melbourne (\$140). **Tiger Airways** (☎ 03 9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com) has flights from Melbourne.

BUS

Long-distance buses stop at the bus transit centres in Southport, Surfers Paradise and Coolangatta. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) has frequent services to/from Brisbane (\$20, 1½ hours), Byron Bay (\$30, 2½ hours) and Sydney (\$154, 15 hours). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) serves the same routes and is less expensive. **Kirklands** (☎ 02 6686 5254;

www.kirklands.com.au) travels to Surfers Paradise from Byron Bay (\$28) and Brisbane (\$16), stopping at most Gold Coast towns along the way.

Coachtrans (☎ 3358 9700; www.coachtrans.com.au) operates the Airporter direct services from Brisbane airport (one-way \$39) to anywhere on the Gold Coast and also has services from Brisbane City to Surfers (\$28, 1½ hours) or to the theme parks.

Aerobus (☎ 1300 664 700; www.aerobus.net; one-way tickets \$35) has transfers from Brisbane airport to Gold Coast accommodation.

TRAIN

Citytrain services link Brisbane to Helensvale station (\$8.40, one hour), Nerang (\$9.40, 1¼ hours) and Robina (\$11, 1¼ hours) roughly every half-hour. **Surfside Buslines** (☎ 13 12 30; www.transinfo.qld.gov.au) runs regular shuttles from the train stations down to Surfers (\$3 to \$4) and beyond, and to the theme parks.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Coachtrans (☎ 3358 9700; www.coachtrans.com.au) operates a shuttle between Tweed Heads and Brisbane, with stops along the way, including Dreamworld, Movie World and Wet'n'Wild. **Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle** (☎ 1300 655 655, 5574 5111; www.gcshuttle.com.au; adult/child/family \$18/9/45) meets every flight into Coolangatta Airport and operates door-to-door transfers to most Gold Coast accommodation. It also offers a Freedom Pass, which includes return transfers to your accommodation plus unlimited theme-park transfers and unlimited Surfside Buslines travel from \$58/29/145 per adult/child/family for three days.

BUS

Surfside Buslines (☎ 13 12 30; www.transinfo.qld.gov.au) runs a frequent service up and down the Gold Coast Highway from Tweed Heads, stopping at Dreamworld, Sanctuary Cove and Paradise Point. You can buy individual fares or get an Ezy Pass for three days' unlimited travel (\$26), or a weekly pass (\$45).

TAXI

Ring ☎ 13 10 08 for taxi services on the Gold Coast.

SOUTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

This narrow, 20km-long sand island is a largely undeveloped tranquil contrast to the developed mainland sprawl of the Gold Coast tourist strip. At the northern end, the narrow channel separating it from North Stradbroke Island (p129) is popular for fishing, while at the southern end the tip of the long sandbar known as the Spit is only 200m away. There are two resorts, a camping ground and plenty of bush, sand and sea to satisfy anglers, surfers, bushwalkers and kayakers. Cars aren't permitted on the island so you'll have to walk or cycle to get around.

The **Couran Cove Island Resort** (☎ 1800 268 726, 5509 3000; www.couran.com; d from \$241; ☎ ☎) is an exclusive luxury resort with all guests' rooms perched on the water's edge. There are four restaurants to choose from, a day spa, a private marina and guided nature walks. Rates don't include ferry transfers (adult/child \$47/25 return) from Hope Harbour at the northern end of the Gold Coast. Ferries leave at 10.30am, 2pm, 4pm and 6pm and return at 9am, noon, 3pm, 5pm and 7pm.

For something less extravagant, you can head to the **Couran Point Island Beach Resort** (☎ 5501 3555; www.couranpoint.com.au; d incl breakfast from \$200; ☎), which has colourful and comfortable hotel rooms, and slightly larger units with kitchenettes. All rates include a continental breakfast and use of nonmotorised facilities but do not include ferry transfers (adult/child \$25/20 one way). Day-trippers can access the resort facilities (adult/child/family \$65/30/170, includes barbecue lunch). The ferry leaves Marina Mirage daily at 10am and returns at 4pm.

GOLD COAST BEACHES

SOUTHPORT & MAIN BEACH

☎ 07 / pop 24,100

Sheltered from the ocean by a long sandbar (known as the Spit) and the Broadwater estuary, Southport is a relatively quiet residential enclave 4km north of Surfers Paradise. There's not much to do here and it's a long way from the beach but it can be a good base if you want to escape the nonstop frenzy of Surfers.

SOUTHPORT & MAIN BEACH

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles

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Main Beach, just south of Southport, marks the gateway to the Spit and the high-rise tourist developments. The Spit runs 3km north, dividing the Broadwater from the South Pacific Ocean. The ocean side of the Spit is relatively untouched, backed by a long strip of natural bushland, and has excellent beaches and surf. At the southern end of the Spit is the Sea World theme park, while the upmarket shopping complex of Marina Mirage is near Mariner's Cove and the marina, the departure point for cruises and other water-based activities.

Information

Gold Coast Hospital (☎ 5571 8211; 108 Nerang St, Southport)

Post office (☎ 13 13 18; Shop 301, Australia Fair Shopping Centre, Southport; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 6pm Thu, to 2pm Sat, 10.30am-2pm Sun)

Activities

Mariner's Cove is the place to book all water activities. The easiest way to sift through the plethora of operators is to book at the **Mariner's Cove Tourism Information & Booking Centre** (☎ 5571 1711; Mariner's Cove; ☎ 9am-5pm). Some recommended activities include the following:

SURFING & KAYAKING

Australian Kayaking Adventures (☎ 0412-940 135; www.australiankayakingadventures.com.au; 3hr/half-day tours to South Stradbroke Island \$55/75) Includes breakfast on the beach.

First Wave Surfing (☎ 0412-729 747; www.firstwavesurfing.com.au; Main Beach Pavilion; 2hr lessons \$50) Next to Main Beach Surf Life Saving Club (SLSL). Also rents out boards.

Gold Coast Kayaking (☎ 0419-733 202; 3hr kayak tours adult/family \$45/110) Guided tours including snorkelling and breakfast or afternoon tea.

CRUISING & FISHING

Gone Fishing (☎ 5510 9611; www.gonefishing.net.au; 4/5hr tours \$75/105, full-day tours \$155) Game fishing for all levels.

Mirage Boat Hire (☎ 5591 2553; www.mirageboat-hire.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina) Skipper your own half-cabin cruiser (from \$140 for three hours), speedboat (from \$140 per hour) or barbecue pontoon (half-day \$200).

Paradise Aqua (☎ 5591 8830; Mariner's Cove Marina; 2hr glass-bottomed boat cruises adult/child \$55/35, mud-crab cruises adult/child \$98/68) The three-hour lunch or dinner cruise includes a seafood platter or barbecue meal (adult/child \$105/70).

Tall Ship (☎ 5532 2444; www.tallship.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina; full-day cruises adult/child/senior/family from \$99/59/89/269) Cruises to South Stradbroke Island on yachts dressed up to look like tall ships. Half-day cruises also available. Combine parasailing with a tall ship experience for \$50. Also has whale-watching cruises.

WATER SPORTS

Paradise Jet Boating (☎ 1300 538 2628; Mariner's Cove Marina; 45min rides \$60) Serious speed, spins and beach-blasting on a jet boat reaching 85km/h.

Queensland Scuba Diving Company (☎ 5526 7722; www.queenslandscubadive.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina; dives from \$99)

Seabreeze Sports (☎ 5527 1099; www.seabreeze.sports.com.au; jet-ski & parasailing packages \$90, Broadwater cruise adult/child \$29/15)

Shane's Watersports World (☎ 5591 5225) Jet-ski hire from \$75 per half-hour. Jet-ski, speedboat and parasailing packages from \$97.50.

Surfer's Paradise Divers (☎ 5591 7117; certified/uncertified dives \$77/99) English and Japanese instructors for shipwreck dives and Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) dive courses. Snorkelling from \$66.

WHALE-WATCHING

Available June to November.

Australian Whale Watching (☎ 1300 422 784; www.australianwhalewatching.com.au; 3hr cruises adult/child \$85/50)

Spirit of Gold Coast (☎ 5572 7755; www.goldcoast.whalewatching.com; adult/child \$85/50) Will organise return transfers from Brisbane (per person \$40) and the Gold Coast (per person \$15).

HELICOPTER FLIGHTS

Dreamworld Helicopters (☎ 5529 4744; www.dreamworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Coomera) Head north on the Gold Coast Hwy to the Pacific Hwy, then go north along there to the Coomera exit. Follow the signs for Dreamworld.

Gold Coast Helitours (☎ 5591 8457; www.goldcoasthelitours.com.au; Mariner's Cove Marina) Flights range from five minutes (adult/child \$44/33) up to 30 minutes (\$203/115). The only company to offer tandem skydiving out of a helicopter at 10,000ft.

Sea World Helicopters (☎ 5588 2224; Sea World Dr, Main Beach) Offers five-minute (adult/child \$49/39) to 30-minute (\$249/189) flights.

SKYDIVING

Skydive Queensland (☎ 5528 2777; www.skydiveql.com.au; Mariner's Cove) Offers tandem jumps from 10,000ft (\$280) to 14,000ft (\$325).

Tours

Blue Fire Cruises (☎ 5557 8888; www.bluefirecruises.com.au; Marina Mirage) Offers dinner and cabaret cruises (adult/child from \$75/55), South Stradbroke Island day cruises (from \$75/55) including morning tea, lunch, boom netting and ski boarding, and whale-watching cruises (adult/child \$75/40) from April to November.

Broadwater Canal Cruises (☎ 0410 403 020; adult/child \$32/15) Offers cruises to Tiki Village Wharf in Surfers Paradise. Cruises depart Mariner's Cove at 10.30am, 2pm and 4.30pm and the two-hour tour includes a buffet-style Devonshire tea.

Wyndham Cruises (☎ 5539 9299; www.wyndhamcruises.com.au; adult/child/family \$42/22/106) operates two-hour cruises up to and around the Broadwater with morning or afternoon tea included.

Sleeping

Surfers Paradise YHA at Main Beach (☎ 5571 1776; www.yha.com.au/hostels; 70 Sea World Dr, Main Beach; dm/d & tw \$24/\$66; ☑) In a great position overlooking the marina, here you only have to drop over the balcony to access the plethora of water sports, cruises and tours on offer. Barbecue nights are every Tuesday and Friday, and the hostel is within staggering distance of the Fisherman's Wharf Tavern.

Trekkers (☎ 1800 100 004, 5591 5616; www.trekkersbackpackers.com.au; 22 White St, Southport; dm/d & tw \$26/68; ☑) You could bottle the friendly vibes of this beautiful Queensland and make a mint. Some of the themed doubles have bathrooms and come with TVs, the communal areas are spotless and homy, and the garden is a mini-oasis.

Main Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7722; www.gctp.com.au/main; Main Beach Pde, Main Beach; unpowered/powered sites from \$29/32, cabins \$129-205; ☑) Just across the road from the beach, this caravan park is a favourite with families. It's a tight fit between sites but the facilities are good. Rates are for two people.

Harbour Side Resort (☎ 5591 6666; www.harbour.sideresort.com.au; 132 Marine Pde, Southport; studio \$100, 1-2-bedroom apt \$130/170; ☑) Disregard the overwhelming brick façade and busy road; within this sprawling property you'll find pastel-hued units with oodles of room. The kitchens are well equipped and the complex also has a laundry and tennis courts. In high season there's a minimum five-night stay.

Sheraton Mirage Resort & Spa (☎ 1800 073 535, 5591 1488; www.sheraton.com/goldcoast; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; d from \$275, ste \$500-650; ☑) If you must have direct beach access this is the only

five-star resort on the coast that will do. The rooms are classy and spacious and there's a gym, tennis courts, two restaurants, three bars and a beautiful lagoon-style pool. Spa aficionados will get their fix at the Golden Door Spa & Health Club at Mirage Resort.

our pick Palazzo Versace (☎ 1800 098 000, 5509 8000; www.palazzoversace.com; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; d \$480-585, ste/condos from \$685/1300; ☑) The Palazzo is quite simply pure extravagance, from the sumptuous rooms to the equally indulgent restaurants and bars. Everything from the pool furniture to the buttons on the staff uniforms has Donatella Versace's glamorous mark on it.

Eating

The cheapest place to eat is the food court in the Australia Fair Shopping Centre. Opposite the shopping centre, the newly built Southport Central on Scarborough St has a cluster of cool cafés.

Sunset Bar & Grill (☎ 5528 2622; Marina Mirage, Main Beach; dishes \$5-17; ☑) If your wallet has taken a beating at the exclusive boutiques in the mall, you'll be glad to find this little place right on the water. Steaks, burgers and seafood dishes are all reasonably priced and all sandwiches are only \$5. There's also a small grocery store next door, the only one in the complex.

Peter's Fish Market (☎ 5591 7747; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; meals \$12; ☑) lunch & dinner) A no-nonsense fish market selling fresh and cooked seafood in all shapes and sizes at reasonable prices.

Fisho's (☎ 5571 0566; Mariner's Cove, Main Beach; dishes under \$13; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Attached to the Fisherman's Wharf Tavern (right), Fisho's serves up reliable staples such as burgers, seafood snacks, and fish and chips for \$8.50. It transforms into a partying hot spot with live music on weekends.

Wok Boiz (☎ 5591 6808; Marina Mirage, Main Beach; dishes \$14; ☑) lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) If the towering, tasty bowls of noodles don't lure you to this tiny noodle bar, maybe the fact that Jessica Alba ate here will.

Blue Fire Grill & Bar (☎ 5557 8877; Marina Mirage, Main Beach; mains \$28-42; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Fancy something totally unexpected? Then try the *churrascaria*. This Brazilian method of flame-grilling and serving meats, chicken and fish (carved at your table) is a theatrical and gastronomic treat. Otherwise the Mediterranean menu will be sure to please, as will the stylish décor and water views.

BABY-SITTING BLISS

We know you love the little tackers – bless their cotton socks – but in the event you need an adult-only spell, help is at hand. The **Gold Coast Baby Sitters Service** (☎ 1800 064 192) provides certified babysitters and nannies, who specialise in hotel baby-sitting all along the coast. All have a government-issued suitability certificate and a first-aid certificate. They can sit for between an hour up to overnight, but you'll need to give 24 hours' notice.

Saks (☎ 5591 2755; Marina Mirage, 74 Sea World Dr, Main Beach; mains \$30-50; ☑) lunch & dinner) This smart, salubrious bar and restaurant lures cultured palettes with a brief but sophisticated menu boasting dishes such as chargrilled eye fillet topped with Moreton Bay bugs, scallops and king prawns. Tall glass windows offer uninterrupted views of the marina.

Drinking

Fisherman's Wharf Tavern (☎ 5571 0566; Mariner's Cove, Main Beach) The famous Sunday Sessions at this styled-up tavern kick off at 3pm with live music on the deck overlooking the Broadwater.

Kokonut Willy's (☎ 5528 6442; 360 Marine Pde, Southport) Plastic coconut palms and castaway décor equals cocktail bar (of course!). In the Grand Hotel at the northern end of Southport, this cute bar has views over the water and a decent menu (mains \$17 to \$25). The bar next door has live music most nights.

Getting There & Away

Coaches stop at the Southport Transit Centre on Scarborough St, between North and Railway Sts. Catch local Surfside buses from outside the Australia Fair Shopping Centre on Scarborough St.

SURFERS PARADISE

☎ 07 / pop 18,510

Sprouting out of the commercial heart of the Gold Coast is the signature high-rise settlement of Surfers Paradise. Here the pace is giddy and frenetic, a brash pleasure dome of nightclubs, shopping and relentless

SURFERS PARADISE

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entertainment. Imagine Daytona Beach or Miami shifted down under, and you'll have some idea of what to expect. But with so much bling and glitz in your face, be prepared to part with your cash. About the only time you won't is if one of the famous 'meter maids' - pretty young things in gold-lamé bikinis - feeds your expired parking meter.

If sun-worship is your thing, head to the beach early as the density of towering high-rises shades the sand from midafternoon. Not that it matters; the beach is no longer the main attraction. If you're not here for the nearby theme parks, you're here to party! Surfers is the acknowledged party hub of the Gold Coast, happily catering to all demographics, from 40-somethings getting squiffy on martinis to Gen Ys dropping pills on the dance floor and schoolies cutting loose on the beach. The backpacker places particularly go all out to ensure that the town goes off every night of the week, but after a while the excessive party scene becomes repetitive.

If you're after a relaxing beach holiday, head further south.

Orientation

The main thoroughfare, Cavill Ave, runs down to the seafront, ending in a pedestrian mall. Orchard Ave, one block back from the Esplanade, is the nightclub and bar strip. The Gold Coast Hwy splits either side of Surfers, with Surfers Paradise Blvd taking southbound traffic and Remembrance Dr, which then becomes Ferny Ave, taking northbound traffic.

Although Cavill Mall is the recognized centre of Surfers, new upmarket shopping precinct Circle on Cavill (bounded by Ferny Ave, Cavill Ave and Surfers Paradise Blvd) promotes itself as the 'new heart of Surfers Paradise'.

Japanese visitors will be pleased to find most street signs written in both English and Japanese - a reflection of the strong attraction the Gold Coast has for Japan.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access costs \$3 to \$4 per hour.

café (☎ 5570 6166; RSL Centre, 9 Beach Rd; ☎ 9.30am-11pm)

Email Centre (☎ 5538 7500; Orchard Ave; ☎ 9am-10pm)

Ozki Photos (☎ 5538 4937; 3189 Gold Coast Hwy; ☎ 9am-8pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Paradise Medical Clinic (☎ 5592 3999; Centro Surfers Paradise, Cavill Ave Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

Surfers Paradise Day & Night Medical Centre (☎ 5592 2299; 3221 Surfers Paradise Blvd; ☎ 7am-11pm) Pharmacy attached.

MONEY

American Express (Amex; ☎ 1300 139 060; Pacific Fair Shopping Centre, Hooker Blvd, Broadbeach) Two km south of Surfers.

POST

Post office (☎ 13 13 18; Shop 165, Centro Surfers Paradise, Cavill Ave Mall; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gold Coast Tourism Bureau (☎ 5538 4419; Cavill Ave Mall; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) Information booth; also sells theme-park tickets

Travellers Central (☎ 1800 359 830, 5538 3274; www.stayoz.com.au; Surfers Paradise Transit Centre, cnr Beach & Cambridge Rds; ☎ 9am-7pm) Extremely friendly and helpful information-desk staff can help with accommodation and tours for travellers of all budget ranges.

Sights

Surfers' sights are usually spread across beach towels but for something different visit **Infinity** (☎ 5538 2988; www.infinitygc.com.au; Chevron Renaissance, cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Elkhorn Ave; adult/child/family \$23.90/15.90/67.90; ☎ 10am-10pm). Essentially, it's a walk-through maze cleverly disguised by an elaborate sound and light show. Squeals of wonder and delight from little tackers indicate it's a winner with the kids.

At 230m high, you won't miss the **Q1 building**. Zip up to the **Q1 observation deck** (☎ 5630 4525; Hamilton Ave; adult/child/family \$17.50/10/45; ☎ 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) for a spectacular 360-degree panorama of the Gold Coast and its hinterland. On a clear day you can see north to Brisbane and south to Byron Bay. Wander around the glass-enclosed deck and you'll learn other interesting tidbits, like the Q1 is the world's 20th tallest building, the arc lights illuminating the spine can be seen 200km away, and it takes 43 seconds to reach the observation deck on the 77th floor. There's a café and comfy lounge chairs so there's no need to hurry back to earth.

For a spot of culture, the **Gold Coast Art Gallery** (☎ 5581 6567; www.gcac.com.au; Gold Coast Arts Centre,

COOLANGATTA GOLD

The Gold Coast beaches are the natural habitats of Speedo-clad surf life-savers and bronzed bikini babes. At any time, a stroll along the beach promises a visual flesh-feast but in October the eye-candy barometer zooms into the stratosphere when the superb and superbuff trust their stuff at the famous Coolangatta Gold. It's the Ironman of surf life-saving, one of the most gruelling physical events on the planet, and an incredible eye-candy extravaganza for the rest of us mere mortals.

First run in 1984 to promote a best-forgotten movie of the same name, the race got off to a shaky start before its firm placement on the annual Surf Life Saving Australia racing calendar in 2005. From Surfers Paradise, the 46.6km race involves a gruelling surf-ski paddle to Greenmount, beach runs, an ocean swim, a board paddle and a final 10km beach run back to Surfers. The women's event, raced over a distance of 25.5km, is just as punishing. After a torturous three hours or so, winners of the Coolangatta Gold earn the right to be gods of the sand and legends of the surf.

135 Bundall Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun), about 1.5km inland, displays excellent temporary exhibitions.

Activities

You won't be bored in Surfers. Apart from swimming at the beach it's action all the way.

SURFING & KAYAKING

Behind the seemingly impenetrable wall of high-rises, the beach here has enough swell to give beginners a feel for the craft of surfing. Surf schools charge between \$40 and \$50 for a two-hour lesson.

Brad Holmes Surf Coaching (☎ 5539 4068, 0418-757 539; www.bradholmessurfcoaching.com; 90min lessons \$75) Also caters to disabled surfers.

Cheyne Horan School of Surf (☎ 1800 227 873, 0403-080 484; www.cheynehoran.com.au; 1hr lessons \$45) World Champion surfer Cheyne Horan offers excellent tuition.

Go Ride a Wave (☎ 1800 787 337, 5526 7077; www.gorideawave.com.au; Cavill Ave Mall; surfing/kayaking 2hr lessons from \$55; ☎ 9am-5pm) Also rents out surfboards and kayaks.

Splash Safaris Sea Kayaking (☎ 0407-741 748; www.kayakingaustralia.com.au; tours \$59-75) Kayak tours ranging from introductory courses to five-hour safaris including snorkelling, dolphin-searching, bushwalking and lunch.

AIRBORNE ACTIVITIES

Both **Balloon Down Under** (☎ 5593 8400; www.balloonunder.com.au; 1hr flights adult/child \$295/200) and **Balloon Aloft** (☎ 5578 2244; www.balloonaloft.net; 1hr flights adult/child \$295/200) offer early morning flights over the Gold Coast hinterland; prices include transfers and a hot breakfast after the flight.

See p140 and p153 for skydiving options near Surfers Paradise.

ADRENALINE ACTION

Experience the Broadwater with spins, slides and speed! **Jetboat Extreme** (☎ 5538 8890; www.jetboatextreme.com.au; 1hr rides adult/child \$50/35) propels you across the water in a turbo-charged, twin-jet-powered, custom-built jet boat.

Almost a rite of passage in Surfers is betting your life on the strength of a giant rubber band at **Bungy Australia** (☎ 5570 4833; cnr Cypress & Ferny Aves; jumps from \$99). On the same block (known locally as **Adrenalin Park**) there are new and inventive ways to revisit your breakfast. **Flycoaster** (☎ 5539 0474; www.flycoaster.com; rides \$39) swings you like a pendulum after you've been released from a hoist 34m up. **Sling Shot** (☎ 5570 2700; rides \$30) catapults you into the air at around 160km/h and **Vomatron** (☎ 5570 200; rides \$30) whisks you around in a giant arc at about 120km/h. All are open from 10am to 10pm daily from August to April. From May to July opening hours are 2pm to 10pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 10pm Saturday and Sunday.

WHALE-WATCHING

Between June and November, **Whales in Paradise** (☎ 3880 4455; www.whalesinparadise.com; adult/child \$85/50) leaves central Surfers for 3½ hours of whale-watching action.

HORSE RIDING

Numinbah Valley Adventure Trails (☎ 5533 4137; www.numinbahtrails.com) has three-hour horse-riding treks through beautiful rainforest and river scenery in the Numinbah Valley, 30km south of Nerang (\$70/60 per adult/child).

Gumnuts Horseriding (p158) operates out of Canungra in the Gold Coast hinterland, with courtesy transfers from the coast.

Tours

A kitschy way to explore Surfers is on the **Aqua Duck** (☎ 5538 3825; 7A Orchid Ave; adult/child \$32/26), a semiaquatic bus (or a boat on wheels) that moves effortlessly from the road to the river and back again.

You can also access the Gold Coast hinterland with a number of tour operators from Surfers Paradise. See p155 for more information.

Festivals & Events

Big Day Out (www.bigdayout.com) Huge international music festival in late January.

Quicksilver Pro-Surfing Competition See some of the world's best surfers out on the waves in mid-March.

Surf Life-Saving Championships Also in mid-March, expect to see some stupidly fit people running about wearing very little.

Gold Coast International Marathon Run in July.

IndyCar (www.indy.com.au) For four days in October the streets of Surfers are transformed into a temporary race circuit for the Australian leg of the IndyCar motor racing series. With over 250,000 spectators, Surfers' party scene goes way over the top.

Coolangatta Gold October. See boxed text, opposite.

Schoolies week Month-long party by school-leavers from mid-November to mid-December. Generally involves lots of alcohol and unruly behaviour.

Sleeping

The **Gold Coast Accommodation Service** (☎ 5592 0067; www.goldcoastaccommodationsservice.com; Shop 1, 1 Beach Rd) can arrange and book accommodation.

BUDGET

Surfers has several decent hostels, all of which offer vouchers for the nightclubs in town.

Cheers Backpackers (☎ 1800 639 539, 5531 6539; www.cheersbackpackers.com.au; 8 Pine Ave; dm/d \$24/56; ☎ ☎) Amid the friendly blur of theme nights, karaoke, pool comps, pub crawls, happy hours and barbecues, you'll also find adequate rooms and good facilities. Cheers is undeniably a party hostel, and the fun frequently trickles out to the action of Surfers.

Surf 'n' Sun Backpackers (☎ 1800 678 194, 5592 2363; www.surfnsun-goldcoast.com; 3323 Surfers Paradise Blvd; dm/d \$24/60; ☎ ☎) A very friendly family-run business that rivals Cheers as party central, this hostel is the best option for Surfers' beach

and bars. There's a constant hum of music, a TV in every room, plus surfboards for hire. Gary, the manager, takes care of every detail.

Sleeping Inn Surfers (☎ 1800 817 832, 5592 4455; www.sleepinginn.com.au; 26 Peninsular Dr; dm \$26, d with/without bathroom \$76/66; ☎ ☎) This converted motel has modern facilities and a wide choice of rooms but needs a few more bathrooms. A quieter option is the shared apartments nearby. You can watch movies in the pool or in Priscilla (the orange bus out the back).

Also recommended:
Backpackers in Paradise (☎ 5538 4344; www.backpackersinparadise.com; 40 Peninsular Dr; dm/d \$26/65; ☎ ☎) Aspiring party hostel with basic dorms and en suites.

Surfers Paradise Backpackers Resort (☎ 1800 282 800, 5592 4677; www.surfersparadisbackpackers.com.au; 2837 Gold Coast Hwy, Surfers Paradise; dm/d \$26/68; ☎ ☎) Purpose-built hostel with sauna, tennis court, pool room and bar.

MIDRANGE

Surfers is riddled with self-contained units. In peak season, rates skyrocket and there's usually a two- or three-night minimum stay. High-season rates are quoted.

International Beach Resort (☎ 1800 657 471, 5539 0099; www.internationalresort.com.au; 84 The Esplanade; apt \$120-165; ☎ ☎) A seafront high-rise, this place is just across from the beach, and has good studios and one- and two-bedroom units. The café downstairs is open for breakfast, lunch and cocktails.

Olympus (☎ 5538 7288; www.olympusapartments.com.au; 62 The Esplanade; d \$130-180; ☎ ☎) Just 200m north of Elkhorn Ave and opposite the beach, this high-rise block has well-kept, spacious apartments with one or two bedrooms.

Trickett Gardens Holiday Inn (☎ 5539 0988; www.trickettgardens.com.au; 24-30 Trickett St; d \$140; ☎ ☎) This friendly low-rise block is great for families, with a central location and well-equipped, self-contained units. It's so tranquil it's hard to believe you're close to Surfers' frantic action.

Breakfree Cosmopolitan Resort (☎ 5570 2311; www.breakfree.com.au; cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Beach Rd; r from \$143; ☎ ☎) Set back from the beach a tad but still very central, this complex contains 55 privately owned, self-contained apartments, each uniquely furnished by the owners. There's also a barbecue area, a spa and a sauna. It can be noisy at night.

View Pacific Holiday Apartments (☎ 5570 3788; www.viewpacific.com; 5 View Ave; 1-/2-bedroom apt \$150/155; ☑ ☑) The self-contained units in this wee complex are spacious and offer good value. All contain life's necessities like washers and dryers (but only some have air-con), and balconies get glimpses of the beach between the surrounding buildings.

Surfers International Apartments (☎ 1800 891 299, 5579 1299; www.surfers-international.com.au; 7-9 Trickett St; 1-/2-bedroom apt from \$150/190; ☑) This high-rise, just off the beach, has plush apartments bathed in classy blue hues. Each contains a modern kitchen, sizable bedrooms and full ocean views. The complex comes with a small gym and a poolside barbecue. This is a good option, close to everything.

Also recommended:

Quarterdeck Apartments (☎ 1800 635 235, 5592 2200; www.quarterdeckapartments.com; 3263 Surfers Paradise Blvd; 1-bedroom apt from \$134; ☑ ☑) Comfortable one-bedroom apartments but air-con is extra.

TOP END

Raffles Royale (☎ 5538 0099; www.afflesroyale.com.au; 69 Ferny Ave; r from \$165; ☑) An unobtrusive, low-rise block with bright and cheerful self-contained units.

Chateau Beachside (☎ 5538 1022; www.chateaubeachside.com.au; cnr Elkhorn Ave & The Esplanade; d/studio/1-bedroom apt \$165/180/195; ☑ ☑) Right in the heart of Surfers, this seaside complex has comfortable, spacious units with excellent views.

Courtyard Marriott (☎ 1800 074 317, 5579 3499; www.marriott.com; cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Hanlan St; d/ste from \$165/235; ☑ ☑) Right in the centre of Surfers, this plush top-end hotel is attached to the Centro Shopping Complex and offers all the luxury you would expect in this price range, including sea views, and spa baths in the top-price suites.

Q1 Resort (☎ 1300 792 008, 5630 4500; www.q1.com.au; Hamilton Ave; 1-/2-/3-bedroom apt from \$284/444/654; ☑ ☑) Spend a night in the world's tallest residential tower. This stylish 80-storey resort is a modern mix of metal, glass and fabulous wrap-around views. All units have glass-enclosed balconies. There's a lagoon-style pool, a fitness centre and a day spa.

Marriott Resort (☎ 5592 9800; www.marriott.com.au; 158 Ferny Ave; d/ste from \$315/575; ☑ ☑) Just north of the centre, this resort is ridiculously sumptuous, from the sandstone-floored foyer with punka-style fans to the lagoon-style

pool, complete with artificial white-sand beaches and a waterfall.

Eating

Self-caterers will find supermarkets in **Centro Surfers Paradise** (Cavill Ave Mall), **Chevron Renaissance Shopping Centre** (cnr Elkhorn Ave & Gold Coast Hwy) and **Circle on Cavill** (cnr Cavill & Ferny Ave).

BUDGET

Chapters & Cino's (☎ 5504 7731; Shop 8, Chevron Renaissance, Surfers Paradise Blvd; dishes \$5-10; ☑) 8am-5.30pm) This little bookstore café on the busy boulevard dishes up cappuccinos, cakes and simple fare alongside a smattering of select literary works.

Fishnets Café (☎ 5538 2280; Circle on Cavill, 3/38 Surfers Paradise Blvd; dishes \$7-13; ☑) lunch & dinner) Forget the paper plates and plastic cutlery – the fish and chips, octopus salad, and fresh fish fillets at this outdoor eatery in the heart of the Circle are excellent value.

Surpick! Bumbles Café (☎ 5538 6668; 21 River Dr; dishes \$11-18; ☑) 7am-4pm) One of the few tranquil spots in Surfers, this cute café is located in a quiet nook opposite the Nerang River. The menu isn't extensive and the service a bit slow but the food is well worth the wait. For a light lunch try the roasted vegetables with feta and cashew-nut pesto.

MIDRANGE

Central Lounge Bar & Restaurant (☎ 5592 3228; 27 Orchid Ave; mains lunch \$11-20, dinner \$20-32; ☑) lunch & dinner) Rubbing shoulders with Costa D'oro (opposite), this modern restaurant and lounge bar is a cool place to indulge in a long lunch. Tables and chairs spill into the centre of the mall so passers-by can watch you having a good time. Salads, steaks, and beer-battered fish and chips are on offer. The resident DJ creates a fusion of cool tunes to smooth you into the weekend club scene.

Euro (☎ 5538 1996; Circle on Cavill, Surfers Paradise Blvd; mains \$13-20; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dine alfresco in the heart of the Circle with a prime view of the big screen. The gentle splash of the fountain masks the outer-Circle traffic noise. The Mediterranean salad or steak sandwich is a good choice before a night of clubbing.

Beer Thai Garden (☎ 5538 0110; cnr Chelsea Ave & Gold Coast Hwy; mains \$13-21; ☑) dinner) Reputed to dish up the best Pad Thai on the coast, this lovely restaurant brims with atmosphere. Two glitzy elephants flank the entrance, and soft lighting

makes the most of the outdoor Thai garden bar. Good value and easy on the pocket. It's south down the Gold Coast Hwy.

Chat Room Café & Bar (☎ 5539 0062; Chevron Renaissance, cnr Surfers Paradise Blvd & Elkhorn Ave; mains \$14-23; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Free wireless connection if you order from the menu is a good enough reason to plonk yourself down at this casually funky café. There are no great surprises on the menu but where else can you sip a piña colada while checking emails?

Tandoori Place (☎ 5538 0808; Aegean Resort, Laycock St; mains \$15-20; ☑) lunch & dinner) An Indian restaurant that boasts a swag of awards and is highly recommended by locals has to be a winner. On the extensive menu you'll find seafood, poultry, lamb, beef and hot, hot, hot vindaloo roo. Vegetarians are also spoiled for choice.

Costa D'oro (☎ 5538 5203; 27 Orchid Ave; mains \$17-29; ☑) lunch & dinner) The Italian village setting painted into the backdrop of this popular restaurant goes nicely with the authentic, if not predictable, pasta, pizzas, salads and mains. It's in a good people-watching possie and if you have a late lunch (or early dinner) between 3pm and 7pm you get 40% off your meal.

TOP END

Melbas (☎ 5592 6922; 46 Cavill Ave; mains \$25-38; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Melbas' revolutionary menu dishes up such surprises as vanilla-roasted duck breast with creamy polenta. Steak and fish feature prominently; unfortunately vegetarian options are limited. Upstairs, Melbas Nightclub is a popular drinking hole (see p148).

Grumpy's Wharf (☎ 5531 6177; Tiiki Village, Cavill Ave; mains \$27-38; ☑) dinner) Right on the water, Grumpy's is a secluded and tranquil retreat serving fine seafood with Asian and Mediterranean touches.

Drinking

Basement (☎ 5588 4000; Gold Coast Arts Centre, 135 Bundall Rd) Beneath the Arts Centre (p148), this bar hosts touring performers who excel in jazz, blues and folk. Regular Saturday night sessions specialise in blues, roots and world music courtesy of the resident band.

Minus 5 Ice Lounge (☎ 5527 5571; Circle on Cavill, Cavill Ave; 30min adult/child \$30/15; ☑) 11am-midnight) The coolest bar in town – literally. At minus 5°C, everything in the bar is made of ice,

including the seats, walls, bar and even your glass. You'll need more than one vodka to warm your innards.

My Bar (☎ 5592 1144; 15 Orchid Ave) In the mega-complex housing Shooters, this new bar is a seductive chill zone. Curtained booths, towering candle-holders, softly lit glass-topped tables and House music create a class venue.

Northcliffe SLSC (☎ 5539 8091; Garfield Tee) A little south of Cavill Mall, this surf club sits directly on the beach. It's large and modern with zero intimacy but the expansive ocean views go well with a coldie on a hot day.

Shooters (☎ 5592 1144; 15 Orchid Ave) This Wild West American saloon bar is where *Big Brother* evictees immediately come to drown their sorrows. The décor is spot-on so you know there's got to be a cowboy somewhere among the pool tables, big-screen videos, DJs and live acts.

Entertainment

Orchid Ave is Surfers' main bar and nightclub strip. Cover charges are usually between \$10 and \$20 and Wednesday and Saturday are generally the big party nights.

Take the hassle out of your big night out with **Wicked Club Crawl** (☎ 5580 8422; www.wickedclubcrawl.com.au; tickets \$40). Every Wednesday and Saturday the Wicked team organise a club crawl to five nightclubs (including free entry for the rest of the week), a free drink and pizza at each venue, party games and loads of fun.

Backpackers Big Night Out (www.goldcoastbackpackers.net; tickets \$30) hosts a similar club crawl on Wednesdays and Saturdays, exclusively for backpackers. A party bus picks you up from your hostel and that's when the party begins. Tickets are available only through Gold Coast Association hostels and get you free entry into four nightclubs, a free drink and pizza at each venue, and other goodies.

NIGHTCLUBS

Bedroom (☎ 5592 0088; 26 Orchid Ave) One of the hottest clubs in town brings upmarket funk to the Gold Coast. Softly lit double beds along the walls make this a seriously sexy venue. Throw in high-tech mood lighting, plasma screens in the dance floor, and pumping acoustics and you know you're in for a good time. But before you get too comfy, remember the rules: no smoking, no pillow fights and no jumping on the beds.

Drink (☎ 5570 6155; 4 Orchid Ave) Another hot spot, and the place to satisfy R & B cravings;

you can chill out on the mezzanine level overlooking the dance floor or in one of the VIP booths.

Strike Bowling Bar (☎ 1300 787 453; Circle on Cavill, Cavill Ave) Retro meets the future in this hip bowling bar. Forget daggy – when bowling fuses with disco lighting, pumping music and cool cocktails, the effect is striking.

Melbas (☎ 5538 7411; 46 Cavill Ave) Upstairs from the restaurant, this nightclub is a local haunt and gets packed quickly. Aspiring pole-dancers can gyrate to their heart's content.

MP's (☎ 5526 2337; Forum Arcade, 26 Orchid Ave) This popular gay club has cheap drinks and drag shows on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. On Friday and Saturday it fills with a happy, mixed crowd soaking up a generic nightclub atmosphere.

THEATRE

Gold Coast Arts Centre (☎ 5588 4000; www.gcac.com.au; 135 Bundall Rd) This excellent centre, beside the Nerang River, has two cinemas, a restaurant,

a bar and a 1200-seat theatre, which regularly hosts impressive theatrical productions.

Getting There & Away

The transit centre is on the corner of Beach and Cambridge Rds. All the major bus companies have desks here. For more information on buses and trains, see p137.

Getting Around

Car hire costs around \$30 to \$50 per day. Some of the many operators:

All Age Car Rentals (☎ 5570 1200, 0418 766 880; Transit Centre, cnr Beach & Cambridge Rds)

Avis (☎ 13 63 33; 5539 9388; cnr Ferny & Cypress Aves)

Budget (☎ 1300 362 848, 5538 1344; cnr Ferny & Palm Aves)

Getabout Rentals (☎ 5504 6517; Shop 9, The Mark, Orchid Ave) Also rents scooters and bikes and organises motorcycle tours of the Broadwater area (from \$50 for 30 minutes to \$260 per half-day).

Red Back Rentals (☎ 5592 1655; Transit Centre, cnr Beach & Cambridge Rds)

GOLD COAST THEME PARKS

Test your lung capacity (or better yet, the kids') on the thrilling rides and swirling action at the five American-style theme parks just north of Surfers. Discount tickets are sold in most of the tourist offices on the Gold Coast; the 3 Park Super Pass (adult/child \$177/115) covers entry to Sea World, Movie World and Wet'n'Wild.

Dreamworld (Map p137; ☎ 5588 1111; www.dreamworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Coomera; adult/child \$66/43; ☎ 10am-5pm) Skip breakfast if you plan on tackling the Big 6 Thrill Rides, which include the Claw, a giant pendulum that swings you nine storeys high at 75km/h, and the Giant Drop, a terminal-velocity machine where you free fall from 38 storeys. It's not all rides, though – there's an interactive tiger show and an IMAX theatre. A two-day world pass (adult/child \$102/68) lets you jump between Dreamworld and WhiteWater World as often as you like.

WhiteWaterWorld (Map p137; ☎ 5588 1111; www.whitewaterworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Coomera; adult/child \$43/29; ☎ 10am-5pm) A new addition next door to Dreamworld, this aquatic theme park is the place to take the kids on a hot summer day. There's the Hydrocoaster (a rollercoaster on water), and the Green Room, where you'll spin in a tube through a tunnel then drop 15m down a green water funnel. Get caught in the Rip or splash around in the surging swells in the Cave of Waves.

Sea World (Map p139; ☎ 5588 2222, show times 5588 2205; www.seaworld.com.au; Sea World Dr, Main Beach; adult/child \$66/43; ☎ 10am-5pm) See Australia's only polar bears in this aquatic park, along with dugongs, sharks and performing seals and dolphins. There are dizzying rides, of course, but for a unique hands-on experience book an Animal Adventure with a marine-mammal trainer.

Warner Bros Movie World (Map p137; ☎ 5573 8485; www.movieworld.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child \$66/43; ☎ 10am-5pm) 'Hollywood on the Gold Coast' boasts more movie-themed rides than movie-set action but the kids will love meeting their favourite movie legends and Loony Tunes characters.

Wet'n'Wild (Map p137; ☎ 5573 2255; www.wetnwild.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child \$45/29; ☎ 10am-5pm Feb-Apr & Sep-Dec, to 4pm May-Aug, to 9pm 27 Dec-25 Jan) If the beach is too sedate, this colossal water-sports park offers plenty of creative ways to get wet. You can launch from a 15m-high platform in a tube and blast down a 40m tunnel, or swirl through the Black Hole, or zoom down Mammoth Falls in a big rubber ring. If all that sounds too energetic, catch a movie in a tube at the Dive'n'Movies.

OUTBACK ON THE COAST

You don't need to travel long distances into the dusty heart of Australia to experience the outback. The venue at the **Australian Outback Spectacular** (☎ 133 386; Pacific Hwy, Oxenford; adult/child incl dinner \$95/65; ☎ shows start 6.45pm Tue-Sun) has been built to resemble a traditional outback shearing shed and the backdrops and props (you even get a stockman's hat to wear) reflect the Australian landscape. The Man from Snowy River comes to life when stockmen and -women (in Akubras and Driza-Bones) show off their superb horsemanship, crack bullwhips and muster stampeding cattle. Dinner is typical outback tucker – damper and barbecue steak. It's a 'bonza' night out and you even get to keep the hat!

Red Rocket Rent-A-Car (☎ 1800 673 682, 5538 9074; Centre Arcade, 16 Orchid Ave) Also rents scooters (per day \$30) and bicycles (per day \$12).

Thrifty (☎ 5570 9960; Circle on Cavill; cars per day \$39) Also operates a tour desk.

Mopeds City (☎ 5592 5878; 103 Ferny Ave) hires out brand-new mopeds (per hour/day \$30/70).

BROADBEACH

☎ 07 / pop 3800

Only a few kilometres south of Surfers, bling gives way to upmarket glam. Boutique shops and fashionable cafés line the Broadbeach streets while open stretches of green parkland separate the fine sandy beach from the esplanade. This is where Gold Coast locals wine and dine, and for a taste of the stylish beach-and-sun lifestyle it's exquisite.

Shopaholics will find two of the coast's major shopping centres (Oasis and Pacific Fair) within easy reach of the beach. Broadbeach is also a good alternative to Surfers if you want a peaceful night's sleep.

Sights & Activities

Broadbeach's main claim to fame is the temple to Mammon that is **Conrad Jupiters Casino** (☎ 5592 8100; www.conrad.com.au; Gold Coast Hwy; admission free; ☎ 24hr). Hundreds of thousands of optimistic gamblers filter through the Conrad every year and leave with their pockets slightly lighter and their addiction briefly sated. This was the first legal casino in Queensland, and it

features more than 100 gaming tables, including blackjack, roulette, two-up and craps, and hundreds of bleeping poker machines. Also here is **Jupiters Theatre** (☎ 1800 074 144), with live music and glamorous dinner shows. You have to be over 18 years of age to enter, and the usual dress codes apply – no thongs (flip-flops), vests or ripped clothes. A monorail runs here from the Oasis Shopping Centre.

Sleeping

Hi-Ho Beach Apartments (☎ 5538 2777; www.hiho.beach.com; 2 Queensland Ave; 1-/2-bedroom apt \$130/160; ☎) A great choice, close to the beach and Broadbeach's café scene. Apartments are bright and airy with a favourable northeasterly aspect.

A Montego Mermaid Beach Motel (☎ 5575 1577; www.mermaidbeachmotel.com.au; 2395 Gold Coast Hwy; r from \$135; ☎) This small, personable motel has spotless units that are a mark above the surrounding litter of cheapie options.

Conrad Jupiters (☎ 1800 074 344, 5592 8130; www.conrad.com.au; Gold Coast Hwy; r \$220-1240, penthouse ste \$3100; ☎) If you hit the jackpot at the casino downstairs, splash out on the luxury penthouse suite at this landmark Gold Coast icon. The hotel's facilities include six restaurants, four bars and a professional gym and health centre.

Wave (☎ 5555 9200; www.thewavesresort.com.au; 89-91 Surf Parade; r \$269-750, minimum 3-night stay; ☎) You can't miss this spectacular high-rise with its wave-inspired design towering over Broadbeach's glam central. These luxury apartments make full use of the coast's spectacular views, especially from the sky pool on the 34th floor.

Eating

Broadbeach's culinary scene is a class above Surfers'.

Manolas Brothers Deli (☎ 5538 8223; 19 Albert Ave; dishes \$8-25; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Cosmopolitan delicacies fill every nook and cranny on the ceiling-high shelves in this sumptuous gourmet deli-café. Park yourself at the massively long wooden table to better salivate over the juicy olives, antipasti, imported cheeses and decadent homemade cakes and biscuits. Health freaks will love the salads and juices.

Champagne Brasserie (☎ 5538 3877; 2 Queensland Ave; mains \$20-35; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) This lively, unassuming restaurant could have been

plucked from a French village. Quail, grain-fed beef and barramundi are worked into tantalizing taste sensations but don't forget to leave room for the crêpe suzette.

Koi (☎ 5570 3060; Wave Bldg, cnr Surf Parade & Albert Ave; mains \$24-40; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) For serious people-watching, morning lattes or sunset cocktails, this cruisy café and lounge bar is the happening place. Gourmet pizzas and tapas rub shoulders with an interesting contemporary menu including crocodile tail and kangaroo loin. Live music on Sunday afternoons draw the après-beach crowd.

Moo Moo (☎ 5539 9952; Broadbeach on the Park, 2685 Gold Coast Hwy; mains \$30-60; ☎ lunch & dinner) Vegetarians steer clear, this is a mecca for serious carnivores. Moo Moo's signature dish is a 1kg Wagyu rump steak rubbed with spices, char-grilled until smoky then roasted, and carved at the table. Beef connoisseurs will drool over the Master Kobe rib fillet, a luxury beef produced from a long period of grain feeding of Wagyu beef.

Also recommended:

Three Beans Espresso (☎ 5538 8744; Phoenician Bldg, 90 Surf Pde; dishes \$5-10; ☎ 24hr) Serious coffee!
Sonatas (☎ 5526 9904; cnr Surf Pde & Queensland Ave; mains \$20-35; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Snazzy Mod Oz menu in a sunny, cosmopolitan café

Entertainment

Dracula's Theatre Restaurant (☎ 5575 1000; www.draculas.com.au; 1 Hooker Blvd; dinner & show midweek/weekend \$74/79) For the ghoulishly inclined, this restaurant offers a fang-tastically good time. Be entertained by both the vampirish cabaret act and fetishily dressed wait-staff while sinking your fangs into fiendish-sounding dishes including the restaurant's signature diabolical and delicious Death by Chocolate. What better way to die?

BURLEIGH HEADS & CURRUMBIN

☎ 07 / pop 7610 & 2650

A little further south and the true essence of the Gold Coast – far removed from the frenzied party atmosphere of Surfers – permeates the chilled-out surfer town of Burleigh Heads. With its cheery cafés and beachfront restaurants overlooking a gorgeous stretch of white sand, and its small but beautiful national park on the rocky headland, Burleigh Heads charms everyone.

In the right weather conditions, the headland here produces a spectacular right-hand

point break, famous for its fast, deep barrel rides, but it definitely isn't for beginners. The shore is lined with vicious black rocks and the rip is ferocious.

Currumbin, 6km south of Burleigh Heads, is a sleepy little town, and a great spot for a relaxing family holiday, especially as the kids can swim in the calm waters of Currumbin Creek. Currumbin Alley is known as a good spot for stand-up paddling and for learner-surfers.

Information

QPWS Information Centre (QPWS; ☎ 5535 3032; 1711 Gold Coast Hwy; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon & Wed, 9am-3pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) is at the northern end of Tallebudgera Creek.

Sights

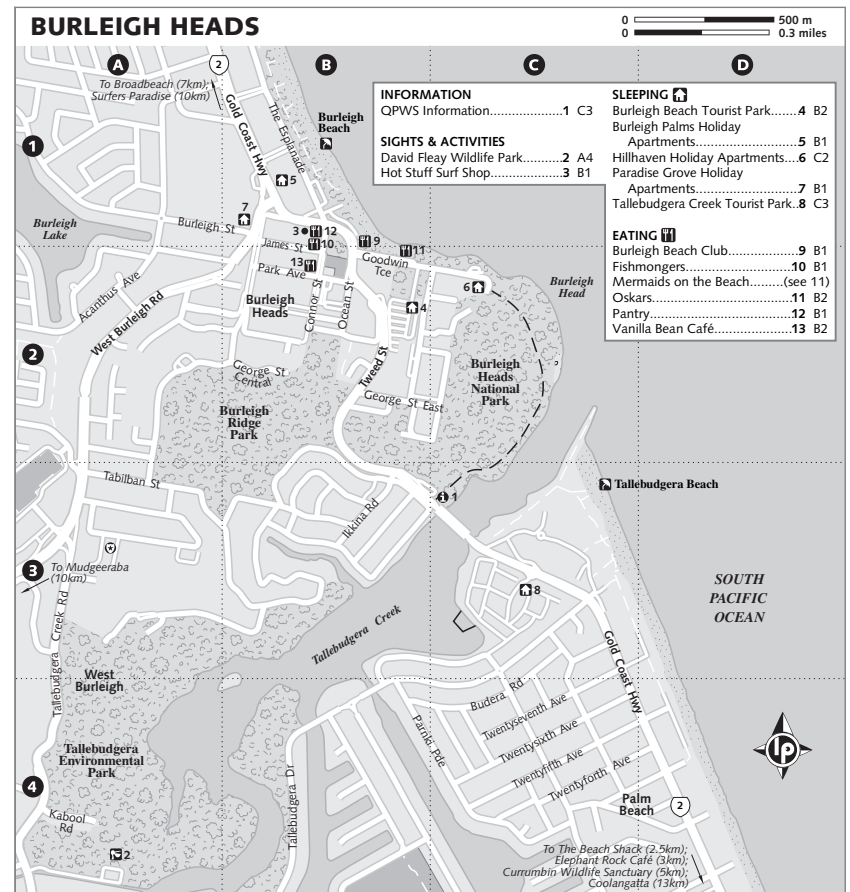
Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary (☎ 5534 1266; www.cws.org.au; Gold Coast Hwy, Currumbin; adult/child \$32/21; ☎ 8am-5pm) showcases Australian native animals in natural bush and rainforest habitats. Tree kangaroos, koalas, emus, wombats and other cute-and-furries are joined daily by flocks of brilliantly coloured rainbow lorikeets, which take great delight in eating out of your hand. There are informative and interactive shows throughout the day (did you know the scrub python can swallow prey four times the size of its head?), and there is also an Aboriginal dance show. One of the best ways to see the sanctuary is on a Wildnight Tour (adult/child \$49/27), when the native nocturnal animals go about their business.

David Fleay Wildlife Park (☎ 5576 2411; West Burleigh Rd; adult/child/senior/family \$15.40/7.20/10.30/39.10; ☎ 9am-5pm) is run with the help of the QPWS. With 4km of walking tracks through mangroves and rainforest and plenty of informative shows throughout the day, it's an excellent opportunity to experience Australian fauna. The platypus was first bred in captivity here and the park still runs a research and breeding programme for rare and endangered species.

Activities

The right-hand point break at Burleigh Heads is the best wave here, but it's usually crowded with pro surfers. There are plenty of other waves to practise on along the beach.

Surfing Services Australia (☎ 5535 5557; www.surfingservices.com.au; adult/child \$30/20) holds surfing lessons at Currumbin Alley every weekend at 8am and 10.30am. Meet on the grass opposite the lifeguard tower.



The **Hot Stuff Surf Shop** (☎ 5535 6899; 1706 Gold Coast Hwy) rents out surfboards for \$20/30 per half-/full day and sells surfwear and surfing accessories.

Sleeping

Burleigh Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7755; www.gctp.com.au/burly; Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; unpowered/powered sites \$24/26, cabins \$115; ☎) This council-run park is snug, but it's in a great spot. Get in quick to bag a shady site. The good news is that you can stumble to the beach, the barbecues are free, and there's a saltwater pool just across the road. Rates are for two people.

Tallebudgera Creek Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7700; www.gctp.com.au/tally; 1544 Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads; unpowered/powered sites \$29/32, cabins \$125-167;

☎) This sprawling park is colossal but it's well laid out with its own road system and sits right on the banks of Tallebudgera Creek. Rates are for two people.

Burleigh Palms Holiday Apartments (☎ 5576 3955; www.burleighpalms.com; 1849 Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads; 1-bedroom apt per night/week from \$120/490, 2-bedroom apt from \$140/600; ☎) Even though they're on the highway, these large and comfortable self-contained units, so close to the beach, are solid value. The owner is a mine of information and is happy to organise tours and recommend places to visit.

our pick Hillhaven Holiday Apartments (☎ 5535 1055; www.hillhaven.com.au; 2 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; d per night \$160, minimum 3-night stay) These opulent apartments perched high on the headland

adjacent to the national park have a grand view of Burleigh Heads. There's no through traffic so it's ultraquiet yet only 150m to the beach and café scene. The friendly owners can arrange baby-sitting, airport transfers and tours.

Paradise Grove Holiday Apartments (☎ 5576 3833; www.paradisegrove.com.au; 7 West Burleigh Rd, Burleigh Heads; 2-bedroom apt per week from \$900; 🏠 🚗) Set on 2.4 hectares of landscaped gardens only 100m from the beach, these apartments are close to everything. There are two pools, a tennis court, and the ground-floor apartments have a private courtyard. Apartments down the back are quieter; be sure to specify if you want air-conditioning. There's a minimum three-night stay (seven nights in peak season).

Eating

Pantry (☎ 5576 2818; 15 Connor St, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$8-16; 🍷 6am-4.30pm) An extensive breakfast menu greets the cappuccino set at this gathering point. For lunch you can tuck into tasty burgers, wraps, melts and salads. Sit alfresco under umbrellas for a spot of people-watching.

Fishmongers (☎ 5535 2927; 9 James St, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$8-17; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This fishmonger/fish-and-chip shop/restaurant is the business. Select your seafood bites from the display and eat them hot down by the beach. Or sit down at a table in the unpretentious restaurant where you can satisfy your heart and hips with the Healthy Heart special – grilled fish, salad and a glass of wine for \$13.90.

Vanilla Bean Café (☎ 5576 4707; 31 Connor St, Burleigh Heads; mains \$9-14; 🍷 6am-4pm) This busy, modern café opposite the Bowls Club dishes up gourmet salads, focaccias, burgers, grills and nachos. Its freshly made cool juices are a great way to start the surf-day.

Beach Shack (☎ 5598 2000; 818 Pacific Pde, Currumbin; mains \$10-21; 🍷 7am-5pm) The bright red lounge makes a statement, as does the seafood in this cheery seaside café. Head upstairs and feed your soul on the sweeping ocean views while munching on sweet crab cakes or spiced calamari with fragrant coconut rice.

Burleigh Beach Club (☎ 5520 2972; cnr Goodwin Tce & Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$10-25; 🍷 breakfast Wed-Sun, lunch & dinner daily) The fantastic ocean views at this club, sitting directly above the beach, are hard to beat. The fare is typical bistro but it's all tasty and the portions are huge.

Elephant Rock Café (☎ 5598 2133; 776 Pacific Pde, Currumbin; mains \$16-30; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A

cool café specializing in Mod Oz and 'gourmet vegetarian' cuisine (gluten sufferers will want to head here), this trendy café morphs from beach-chic by day to ultrachic at night. You can watch the moon rise over the ocean from the top deck or just enjoy the sound of waves lapping the beach.

our pick Mermaids on the Beach (☎ 5520 1177; 31 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; mains \$23-36; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another gem directly on the beach: the beautiful white sands of Burleigh Heads spread out from your feet down to the water's edge. An interesting Mediterranean menu produces dishes such as Moreton Bay bugs with chilli parsley black linguine, anchovy crumbs and rocket pesto. Outside of meal hours this is a snappy beach bar with live music and a theme night every night.

Oskars (☎ 5576 3722; 43 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads; dishes \$25-34; 🍷 lunch & dinner) One of the Gold Coast's finest, this elegant restaurant (right on the beach) constantly lands a coveted place on best-dining lists from all quarters, and for good reason. Against elevated, sweeping views of the coastline you'll dine on a changing selection of seafood; expect something along the lines of Yamba prawn and Moreton Bay bug tempura with mesclun greens and sweet chilli jam.

COOLANGATTA & TWEED HEADS

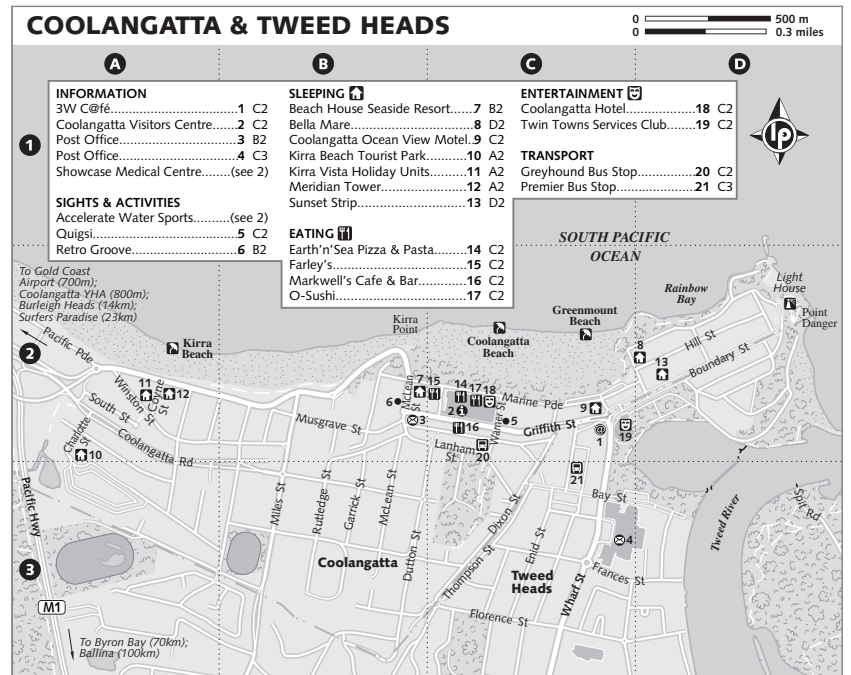
☎ 07 / pop 4870 & 51,790

Coolangatta is a laid-back seaside resort on Queensland's southern border, proud of its good surf beaches and tight community. Despite a few attempts at a makeover, it retains a 1980s summer-holiday feel and this is its greatest charm. If you want to bypass the glam and party scene, catch a few waves and kick back on the beach, you've found the spot. There are good views down the coast from Point Danger, the headland at the end of the state line.

You'll probably miss the concrete plinth marking the state border between the 'twin towns' of Coolangatta and Tweed Heads (in NSW), but it makes no difference as the border is fairly arbitrary anyway. The only time it seems to matter is on New Year's Eve, when daylight savings creates a one-hour time difference and a grand excuse to celebrate and party twice as hard.

Information

3W Café (☎ 5599 4536; Shop 2 Griffith Plaza; internet per 15mins \$2, wi-fi rate per day \$6; 🍷 6.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) Cool café with internet.



Coolangatta visitors centre (☎ 5569 3380; Shop 22, Showcase on the Beach, Griffith St; 🍷 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun)

Post office (☎ 13 13 18) Coolangatta (cnr Griffith St & Marine Pde); Tweed Heads (Tweed Mall)

Showcase Medical Centre (☎ 5536 6771; Shop 41-2, Showcase on the Beach Centre; 🍷 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Activities

The most difficult break here is Point Danger, but Kirra Point often goes off and there are gentler breaks at Greenmount Beach and Rainbow Bay. **Quigsi** (☎ 5599 1731; 87 Griffith St) hires out surfboards (\$30 per day) and bikes (\$30 per day). If your surfboard needs repairing, see **Retro Groove** (☎ 5599 3952; 4/33 McLean St), a cool surf shop which also rents boards for \$30 per day.

Former professional surfer and Australian surfing team coach Dave Davidson of **Gold Coast Surf Coaching** (☎ 0417 191 629) promises to get you up and surfing in your first lesson.

Accelerate Water Sports (☎ 5536 4074; www.acceleratesport.com.au; Shop 7, Showcase on the Beach, Griffith St; 🍷 9am-5.30pm) offers kite-boarding lessons (\$89), wake-boarding and water-skiing

lessons (\$220; minimum three people), and diving courses.

You can get high with **Tandem Skydive** (☎ 5599 1920; Coolangatta Airport), which offers those brave enough tandem jumps from 10,000ft (\$280) to 14,000ft (\$325).

Tours

Catch-A-Crab (☎ 5599 9972; www.catchacrab.com.au; adult/child \$55/\$36) Has great half-day tours along the Terranora Inlet of the Tweed River. The cruise involves mud-crab catching (try to say that in a hurry), fishing, pelican feeding and, if the tides permit, yabbie hunting. Lunch is extra.

Rainforest Cruises (☎ 5536 8800; www.goldcoastcruising.com) Has three cruise options ranging from crab catching to surf 'n' turf lunches on rainforest cruises along the Tweed River. Cruises start from \$32 for two hours.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Coolangatta YHA (☎ 5536 7644; www.coolangattayha.com; 230 Coolangatta Rd, Bilinga; dm \$23-28, s/d \$33/\$4, all incl breakfast; 🏠 🚗) A looong haul from the bustle, this well-equipped YHA is favoured by surf junkies (of all vintages) who overdose on the

excellent breaks across the road. You can also hire boards (\$25 per day) and bikes. Courtesy transfers from Coolangatta are available.

Kirra Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5581 7744; www.gctp.com.au/kirra; Charlotte St, Kirra; unpowered sites \$25-29, powered sites \$27-34, cabins from \$104; ♿) This large park has plenty of trees and a well-stocked open-air camp kitchen. The modern self-contained cabins are good value. There's also a TV room, barbecues and volleyball and basketball courts. Rates are for two people.

Sunset Strip (☎ 5599 5517; www.sunsetstrip.com.au; 199 Boundary St, Coolangatta; s/d/t/q per person \$55/35/35/33, self-contained units from \$285, minimum 3 nights; ♿) There's not much ambience but backpackers will be happy enough with this budget accommodation close to the river and to the beaches. There's a TV lounge and a large, clean kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Coolangatta Ocean View Motel (☎ 5536 8722; oceanviewmotel@bigpond.com; cnr Marine Pde & Clark St, Coolangatta; d \$105; ♿) The facilities are fairly minimal in this small motel but it's all about the location – across the road from Greenmount Beach and close to the Twin Towns Services Club.

Kirra Vista Holiday Units (☎ 5536 7375; www.kirra.vista.com.au; 12-14 Musgrave St, Kirra; d \$125; ♿) These self-contained units are looking a bit worn and tired but the owners are friendly and all rooms have ocean views.

Bella Mare (☎ 5599 2755; www.bellamare.com.au; 5 Hill St, Coolangatta; r from \$140, 2-/3-bedroom villas from \$175/215, minimum 3-night stay; ♿) Adding just a hint of the Mediterranean to Coolangatta, these fancy beachside apartments are set in cool landscaped gardens. All apartments and villas are fully self-contained with private patios or balconies, and it's only 50m to the beach.

Beach House Seaside Resort (☎ 5595 7599; www.classicholidayclub.com.au; 52 Marine Pde, Coolangatta; s/d from \$150/180; ♿) Although it belongs to a holiday club, this apartment complex often has rooms available to nonmembers. The décor is fairly generic, but the units are fully self-contained and sleep up to six people. Also within the complex is a gym, spa and sauna.

Meridian Tower (☎ 5536 9400; www.meridiantower.com.au; 6 Coyne St, Kirra; 1-/2-bedroom apt per week from \$710/1150; ♿) This tall tower block opposite the beautiful Kirra beach has spacious and airy fully self-contained apartments with large north-facing balconies. There's a gym, spa,

sauna and tennis courts. Outside peak season, shorter stays are available.

Eating

O-Sushi (☎ 5563 5455; 66-80 Marine Pde; sushi rolls from \$2.50, mains \$8-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) Boasting Japanese chefs and authentic Japanese cuisine, this perky sushi bar is about as stylish as a sushi bar can get. Try the *kushi-yaki* (traditional Japanese grill). Sit outdoors for beach views.

Markwell's Café & Bar (☎ 5536 4544; 64 Griffith St; mains \$12-30; ☺ breakfast & lunch; ♿) With free wireless internet, this has to be your (all day) breakfast choice. It's licensed, and dishes up salads, sandwiches and a tempting range of seafood such as coconut prawns dipped in beer batter.

Earth'n'Sea Pizza & Pasta (☎ 5536 3477; Marine Pde; mains \$14-27; ☺ lunch & dinner) A hot summer night, a balmy sea breeze, a cold beer and a sizzling pizza – what better way to top off a day at the beach? Voted Best Pizza Restaurant on the Gold Coast, it has 21 gourmet pizzas on offer – you can't go wrong.

Farley's (☎ 5536 7615; Beach House Arcade, Marine Pde; mains \$17-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) From gourmet sandwiches to Mod Oz creations such as Moreton Bay bugs with bok choy and basil pesto, Farley's (opposite the beach) will satisfy your après-surf cravings.

Entertainment

Coolangatta Hotel (☎ 5536 9311; cnr Marine Pde & Warner St) One of the hottest spots on the Gold Coast, the 'Cooly' has legendary Sunday sessions, and the Balcony nightclub attracts some of the biggest acts in the music industry.

Twin Towns Services Club (☎ 5536 1977; Wharf St, Tweed Heads) Has family-oriented shows and regular free movies.

Getting There & Away

The **Greyhound** (☎ 1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) bus stop is in Warner St while **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) coaches stop in Bay St. See p137 for further information.

GOLD COAST HINTERLAND

Inland from the surf, sand and half-naked bods on the Gold Coast beaches, the densely forested and unspoiled mountains of the McPherson Range feel like a million miles

away. The range forms a natural barrier between the eastern coastline and the rolling green hills of the Darling Downs, and is a subtropical paradise of rainforests, waterfalls, panoramic lookouts and amazing wildlife. Closest to the coast, Springbrook is arguably the wettest place in southeast Queensland and the villages that speckle this area are influenced by the cooler air and vast sea of dense forest. Lamington National Park attracts bird-watchers, nature-lovers and serious hikers while Tamborine Mountain lures the craft cottage set. In winter, cosy cabins and fireplaces attract romantic weekenders.

Tours

The only way to access the hinterland without your own wheels is on a tour.

4X4 Hinterland Tours (☎ 1800 604 425, 0429-604 425; www.4x4hinterlandtours.com.au; day tours adult/child \$125/60) Specialises in small-group 4WD ecotours.

Bushwacker Ecotours (☎ 3720 9020; www.bushwacker-ecotours.com.au; day trips adult/child \$115/95) Has an extensive array of ecotours to the hinterland including a two-day tour (adult/child \$239/199) with an overnight jungle camp.

Several big guns operate large coach tours out of Surfers Paradise including **Australian Day Tours** (☎ 1300 363 436; www.daytours.com.au; day tours adult/child \$79/44, 2-day tours \$350/145). Tours travel via Mt Tamborine and Canungra to O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse (p159), where you'll stay if you take the two-day tour.

TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN

A mountaintop rainforest community just 45km inland from the Gold Coast beaches, Tamborine Mountain has cornered the chocolate, fudge and craft cottage industries in a big way. Of the three satellite suburbs (Eagle Heights, North Tamborine and Mt Tamborine), **Gallery Walk** in Eagle Heights is the place to stock up on homemade jams and all things artsy-craftsy but wherever you are on Tamborine Mountain a Devonshire tea is never too far away.

As well as housing a bevy of creative artists and musicians, Tamborine Mountain is home to Queensland's oldest national park. The **Tamborine Mountain National Park** is actually 13 sections of land that stretch across the 8km plateau, offering tumbling cascades and great views of the Gold Coast. Most of the national parks surround North Tamborine and some of

the best spots are **Witches Falls**, **Curtis Falls**, **Cedar Creek Falls** and **Cameron Falls**.

To get to Tamborine Mountain, turn off the Pacific Highway at Oxenford or Nerang. The **visitor information centre** (☎ 5545 3200; Doughty Park; ☺ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) is located in North Tamborine.

Your itinerary should include the **Tamborine Mountain Distillery** (☎ 5545 3452; 87-91 Beacon Rd, North Tamborine; ☺ 10am-3pm Wed-Sat), a boutique distiller manufacturing schnapps, liqueurs and other spirits from organically grown fruits.

There are plenty of cute cottages and snug B&Bs, but romantic weekend hideaways come at a price.

The **Tall Trees Motel** (☎ 5545 1242; www.talltrees.motel.com.au; Eagle Heights Rd, Curtis Falls, North Tamborine; r Mon-Thu \$89, Fri & Sun \$129, Sat \$139; ♿), on the edge of the forest, is definitely good value. The rooms are tidy, and the motel is dressed up in a quaint cottage façade with pretty jasmine bushes framing the veranda.

Another good-value motel in a lovely setting, the **Mt Tamborine Motel** (☎ 5545 0088; www.mttamborinemotel.com.au; 99 Alpine Tce, Mt Tamborine; s/d Sun-Thu \$85/95, Fri & Sat \$150/150; ♿) has comfy rooms with killer views of stunning Guanaba Gorge. All rooms have kitchenettes, and there are laundry facilities and a tennis court on the property.

Maz's on the Mountain (☎ 5545 1766; www.mazsretreat.com; 25 Eagle Heights Rd, North Tamborine; r \$179, cabin \$229 Sun-Thu, 2-night weekend r \$369, cabin \$489) has four musically themed cottages and four romantic B&B suites with dreamy four-poster beds and plush furnishings. Go passion red in the Moulin Rouge room! If you can tear yourself away from the cosy log fire or the comfy seats on the veranda, take a stroll through the garden.

With the only west-facing chalet accommodation, the **Polish Place** (☎ 5545 1603; www.polishplace.com.au; 333 Main Western Rd, Tamborine Mountain; chalets Sun-Thu \$230, Fri-Sun min 2 night stay \$490; ♿) offers spectacular sunset views from its cliff-top perch. The European-style timber chalets are a bit dated but the spa in the lounge is a novel touch. Down a few vodkas before ordering a tongue-twisting dish of Polish tucker at the **café** (mains \$15-35; ☺ lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat), from where you can settle back and admire the sunset.

our pick **Songbirds Rainforest Retreat** (☎ 5545 2563; www.songbirds.com.au; Tamborine Mountain Rd, North

MIND, BODY & SOUL

Tucked into the rolling green hills of the Gold Coast hinterland are three health and spa resorts that promise to cleanse, regenerate and renew your body, mind and spirit. Adopting a holistic approach to wellness, it's not all yoga and meditation; there are challenging hikes, tough fitness schedules and lifestyle workshops on health and nutrition. Each resort has a team of naturopaths, doctors, personal trainers and nutritionists, and offers pampering massages, body treatments, tailored exercise regimes and delicious organic meals. After a week-long detox programme your body will be as pure as a Zen temple.

Golden Door Health Retreat (☎ 1800 816 906, 5540 6100; www.goldendoor.com.au; 400 Ruffles Rd, Willow Vale; 7-day detox from \$2505)

Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat (☎ 1800 219 272, 5589 5000; www.gwinganna.com; 192 Syndicate Rd, Tallebudgera; 7-day detox from \$2790)

Camp Eden Health Resort (☎ 5533 0333; www.campeden.com.au; 1815 Currumbin Creek Rd, Currumbin Valley; 7-day detox from \$2950)

Programs include accommodation and all meals.

Tamborine; villas per night from \$425) has six luxurious Southeast Asian-inspired villas set on 20 hectares of rainforest and tropical gardens. Each villa has a double spa bath with rainforest views, and you can book private massage, meditation or yoga sessions. The open-plan Asian-theme continues in the award-winning restaurant, **Songbirds in the Forest** (mains \$34-55; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat), where rainforest birdsong is the perfect backdrop to a romantic lunch.

Spice of Life (☎ 5545 3553; 28 Main St, North Tamborine; dishes \$5-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) fancies itself as a multicultural café and deli. You'll find Indian curries, Thai salads, quiches and sandwiches as well as healthy smoothies and juices. The outdoor setting is pleasant and the prices better than those you'll find on Gallery Walk.

The cushioned garden of the atmospheric Middle Eastern **Karnak Restaurant** (☎ 5545 4055; www.karnakrestaurant.com; 10 MacDonnell Rd, Eagle Heights; mains \$17-28; ☎ 10am-late) is a cool oasis from the fudge-and-craft set along Gallery Walk. Contemplate the belly-dancer's navel while devouring a Mazza Platter washed down with a thimble of strong Arabic coffee, or just lounge against the comfy tree cushions.

St Bernards Hotel (☎ 5545 1177; 101 Alpine Tce, Mt Tamborine; mains \$16-28; ☎ lunch & dinner), next door to the Mt Tamborine Motel, is a rustic old mountain pub (1911) with lofty ceilings, and is one of the most atmospheric spots in the hinterland. The back deck has commanding views of the gorge, and the nosh is good pub grub.

SPRINGBROOK NATIONAL PARK

An excellent winding drive from the Gold Coast beaches takes you into a *Jurassic Park* ecosystem of lush subtropical rainforests where closed canopies high overhead protect an amazing array of endangered and protected flora and fauna. The 3425-hectare Springbrook National Park consists of three reserves: Springbrook Plateau, Mt Cougal and Natural Bridge.

Like the rest of the McPherson Range, the Springbrook area is a remnant of the huge shield volcano that dominated the region 23 million years ago. From Best of All Lookout (reached via Lyrebird Ridge Rd; see opposite) you can see the once buried volcanic plug, Mt Warning (1156m), in NSW. The southern cliffs of Springbrook and Lamington continue into NSW arcing around in a giant circle, outlining the rim of the ancient volcanic crater.

The park is a mix of subtropical warm and cool temperate rainforests and open eucalypt forest. Hikers will want to make full use of the extensive walking tracks showcasing the weird world of strangler figs, vines, epiphytes, glow-in-the-dark mushrooms and worms, colourful wildlife and spectacular waterfalls and gorges. But be prepared – at 900m the national park can be up to 5°C cooler than the lowlands.

Each section of the park is reached by a long access road, and there are no shortcuts between the sections, so make sure you get on the right road. Coming from Nerang, take Springbrook Rd for the Springbrook section and the Nerang-Murwillumbah Rd for the Natural Bridge section. Take the Currumbin Creek Rd from Currumbin for Mt Cougal.

There's a **ranger's office** (☎ 5533 5147; 87 Carrick Rd; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) at Springbrook where you can pick up a copy of the national park's walking tracks.

Springbrook Plateau

The village of Springbrook is balanced right on the edge of the plateau, with numerous waterfalls tumbling down to the coastal plain below. The 'town' is actually a series of properties stretched along a winding road. Understandably, lookouts are the big attraction here, and there are several places where you can get the giddy thrill of leaning right out over the edge.

At **Gwongorella Picnic Area**, just off Springbrook Rd, the lovely **Purling Brook Falls** drop 109m into the rainforest. There are two easily accessed lookouts with views of the lush canopy and towering falls, and a number of walking trails including a 6km-return walk to Waringa Pool, a beautiful swimming hole. The picnic area has coin-operated barbecues.

The national park **information centre** is at the end of Old School Rd. A little further south **Canyon Lookout** affords jagged views through the valley all the way to the coast. This is also the start of a 4km circuit walk to **Twin Falls** and the 17km **Warrie Circuit**.

At the end of Springbrook Rd, the pleasant **Goomoolahra Picnic Area** has barbecues beside a small creek. A little further on, there's a great lookout point beside the falls with views across the plateau and all the way back to the coast.

True to its name, the **Best of All Lookout** offers spectacular views from the southern edge of the plateau to the flats below. The 350m trail from the car park to the lookout takes you past a clump of mighty Antarctic beech trees. Take time to admire the gnarled and twisted roots of these ancient giants. You'll only find them around here and in northern NSW.

Stargazers will get their fill of blazing night skies throughout the hinterland but for an astronomical close-up head to the **Springbrook Research Observatory** (☎ 5533 5055; www.springbrookobservatory.com; 2337 Springbrook Rd; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ by appointment).

There's only one camping ground at Springbrook, the **Settlement Camp Ground** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Carrick's Rd; campsites per person \$4.50), a rather uninspiring camping ground devoid of trees and showers but it does have toilets and electric barbecues.

Most guesthouses are along or signposted off Springbrook Rd.

Across the road from Canyon Lookout, **Rosellas at Canyon Lookout** (☎ 5533 5120; www.springbrookrosellas.com.au; 8 Canyon Pde; s/d incl breakfast from \$80/95) is a friendly family-run guesthouse. The three en-suite rooms are clean and basic with TVs and bar fridges. There's a lovely **restaurant** (dishes \$10-20; ☎ 9am-4pm Fri & Sun, 9am-late Sat), and a smattering of local crafts for sale (the gumnut and emu-feather beanie will keep your ears warm!)

The stately **Springbrook Mountain Manor** (☎ 5533 5344; www.springbrookmountainmanor.com.au; 2814 Springbrook Rd; s/d incl breakfast from \$155/210) gives you a taste of Tudor-style accommodation. It's set on 10 hectares of landscaped gardens, and you can play golf, croquet and tennis and even try your hand at archery. The rooms are heavy with brocade and period furniture and there's even a bridal suite. The restaurant (open lunch and dinner) offers fine dining with five-star service.

Springbrook Mountain Chalets (☎ 5533 5205; www.smchalets.com.au; 2058 Springbrook Rd; midweek/weekend from \$170/250) has stylish – and private – wooden chalets peppered throughout a thick plot of bush. Cathedral ceilings, large glass doors, spa baths and potbelly stoves add up to an intimate weekend.

Our pick: Mouses House (☎ 5533 5192; www.mouseshouse.com.au; 2807 Springbrook Rd; 2 nights from \$385) are A-frame red-cedar cottages hidden in the magical misty woods. Soft lighting along rainforest boardwalks leads to 11 enchanted chalets, each with a double spa and a wood fire. These ultraprivate fairytale cottages are the ultimate romantic mountain hideaway. Breakfast, lunch and dinner hampers are available on request.

Right by the car park for Purling Brook Falls, **Rainforest Retreat** (☎ 5533 5335; 33 Forestry Rd; dishes \$7-14; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a simple tearoom run by a friendly young couple. The fresh avocado salad is healthy and delicious but you can choose from salads, sandwiches and cakes while being entertained by the king parrots and rosellas in the birdbath. Check out the quality Boulder opals on sale.

Springbrook Homestead (☎ 5533 5200; 2319 Springbrook Rd; mains \$10-29; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Fri) serves ploughman's lunches, soup and damper, and chunky rump pies. You can pick up a walking map here and work out your route over a beer.

Natural Bridge

The Natural Bridge section of the park is just a couple of kilometres west of Springbrook as the crowd flies, but you'll have to drive back up to Numinbah and then down the Murwillumbah road to get here – a trip of about 35km. A steep 1km walking circuit leads to a rock arch spanning a water-formed cave, which is home to a huge colony of glow-worms (well worth seeing!), and a small waterfall tumbling into a swimming hole.

Mt Cougal

The Mt Cougal section is also linked to Springbrook, but to get here, you'll have to go all the way back to the Pacific Hwy and pick up Currumbin Creek Rd at Currumbin. On Currumbin Creek there's a walking trail that passes several cascades and swimming holes, and also a restored sawmill from the wasteful days when the rainforest was felled to make packing cases for bananas!

CANUNGRA

☎ 07 / pop 725

Centrally located between Tamborine Mountain and Lamington National Park (at the junction of the approach roads to Green Mountains and Binna Burra), Canungra is a convenient base from which to explore the hinterland. The town is small but livens up on Sunday mornings when dozens of bikers cruise into town. The **tourist information office** (☎ 5543 5156; cnr Kidston St & Lawson Lane; ☹ 9am-4pm) is in the Canungra Library.

If you're heading up to Green Mountains (right), **O'Reilly's Canungra Valley Vineyards** (☎ 5543 4011; Lamington National Park Rd), owned by the O'Reilly family (of O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse fame), is housed in an old homestead and is open daily for tastings and sales.

Gumnuts Horseriding (☎ 5543 0191; www.gumnutsfarm.com.au; Biddaddaba Creek Rd) operates half-day (adult/child \$65/45) and full-day (adult/child \$110/75) horse rides, which include damper, billy tea (lunch on the full-day ride) and transfers to accommodation throughout the Gold Coast. Night tours include a barbecue and foot-stomping bush dances.

If you've got the gumption, you should definitely take a gander at the hinterland from above. **Paragliding Queensland** (☎ 5543 4000; www.pgqld.com.au) and **SE Queensland Hang Gliding** (☎ 5543 5631; www.hangglidequeensland.com.au; 66 Kidston St) both offer tandem flights for \$220.

Canungra Motel (☎ 5543 5155; www.canungramotel.com; Kidston St; s/d/t \$80/90/100; ♿ ♿), a small brick building in the centre of town, is a good budget motel with friendly owners.

The **Outpost Café** (☎ 5443 5283; 44 Christie St; dishes \$5-14; ☹ 7.30am-4.30pm), opposite the Canungra Motel, is the local hang-out for weekend bikers from Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Brave the studs and leathers for the café's famous homemade chunky steak pie.

The lovely old **Canungra Hotel** (☎ 5543 5233; 18 Kidston St; mains \$10-20; ☹ lunch & dinner) greets you with a long, tiled bar where the cold beer goes down particularly well and the bistro serves mountainous portions of pub grub.

LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK

Australia's largest remnant of subtropical rainforest covers the deep valleys and steep cliffs of the McPherson Range, reaching elevations of 1100m on the Lamington Plateau. The 200-sq-km Lamington National Park is a Unesco World Heritage site and has over 160km of walking trails. Much of the vegetation is subtropical rainforest and there are beautiful gorges, caves, waterfalls and tons of wildlife. Commonly spotted animals include satin and regent bowerbirds and the curious Lamington blue spiny crayfish, and you'll almost certainly see pademelons (a type of small wallaby) on the forest verges in the late afternoon.

The two most popular and accessible sections of the park are **Binna Burra** and **Green Mountains**, both reached via Canungra. Binna Burra can also be reached from Nerang. Both roads twist and snake their way up the mountain, cutting through encroaching forest and open grazing land. It's a spectacular drive, particularly along the Green Mountains Rd, and well worth the effort.

Lamington National Park is a bushwalker's paradise. At Green Mountains, be sure to walk the excellent **tree-top canopy walk** along a series of rope-and-plank suspension bridges 15m above the ground. Serious hikers can tackle the 24km **Border Trail**, which links the two sections of the park. Transport back to base from either of the lodges at each end (or transfer of luggage from one to the other) can be arranged. Walking trail guides are available from the **ranger stations** (Binna Burra ☎ 5533 3584; Binna Burra; ☹ 9am-3.30pm Sat & Sun; Green Mountains ☎ 5544 0634; Green Mountains; ☹ 9-11am & 1-3.30pm Mon-Fri).

Binna Burra Mountain Lodge (☎ 1300 246 622, 5533 3622; www.binnaburrallodge.com.au; Binna Burra Rd,

DETOUR: MT BARNEY NATIONAL PARK

In the rugged dry eucalypt woodlands of the Western Rim, **Mt Barney National Park** is a World Heritage area and one of Queensland's largest areas of pristine wilderness. A very different landscape to the lush Eastern Rim, the park and its seven peaks (the tallest reaching 1359m) attracts serious bushwalkers. Note that some of the tracks are poorly marked and you will need sound navigational skills to hike in this rough terrain.

Yellow Pinch Reserve picnic area is at the base of Mt Barney, Queensland's second-highest mountain. There's a reasonably easy 5km walk from the car park to a swimming hole on Barney Creek. A good base is **Mt Barney Lodge** (☎ 5544 3233; www.mtbarneylodge.com.au; Upper Logan Rd; unpowered sites \$10, cabins with/without bathroom \$110/75, homestead \$180) with its picturesque homestead and self-contained cabins.

Bushwalkers will find a basic **camping ground** (per person \$4.50) in the national park. Purchase permits in advance (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au).

To reach the national park from Tamborine Mountain, drive 20km southwest on the Mt Lindesay Hwy through the small cattle centre of Beaudesert and continue 30km south to Rathdowney. Here you'll find the **Rathdowney Information Centre & Historical Museum** (☎ 5544 1222; Mt Lindesay Hwy; ☹ 9am-2pm Mon-Wed, noon-5pm Thu, 11am-4pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun). Drive about 1km south of Rathdowney and turn right onto the Boonah-Rathdowney Rd. After about 8km Upper Logan Rd veers off to the left and takes you into Mt Barney National Park.

Beechmont; unpowered/powered sites \$24/27, safari tents from \$55, d incl breakfast with/without bathroom \$250/150) is an excellent mountain retreat with rustic log cabins and campsites surrounded by forest. The central **restaurant** (mains \$20-35; ☹ breakfast & dinner Mon-Fri, breakfast, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) has good views over the national park and there's also a small café. While here, try the lodge's **senses trail** for the blind, indulge in the **Rejoice Day Spa**, or learn to abseil. Other activities include guided walks, flying-fox flights and free nightly nature documentaries in the library. Transport to and from Coolangatta airport and Nerang train station can be arranged upon request.

Established in 1926, the famous **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** (☎ 1800 688 722, 5544 0644; www.oreillys.com.au; Lamington National Park Rd; guesthouse s/d from \$155/265, villas 1-2-bedroom from \$310/360) at Green Mountains is still run by the O'Reilly family. A number of luxury villas have recently been built but the original guesthouse (looking dated and faded) still manages to retain its old-world rustic charm – and sensational views. The **Discovery Centre** (☹ 8am-5.30pm) runs daily activities including guided rainforest walks, glow-worm walks, 4WD tours, flying-fox and giant swing rides (all at added cost), and free

nightly nature documentaries. There's a plush **restaurant** (mains \$25-40; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner) or a more affordable café. For cocktails at sunset, the Rainforest Bar opens from 4pm.

There's a national-park camping ground close to O'Reilly's, and bush camping is permitted in several areas within the park, but only a limited number of permits (per person \$4.50) are issued. Camping permits can be obtained by self-registering on site, from the ranger at Green Mountains, or by booking online. During weekends and school holidays all permits must be booked in advance. Note that there is no national park camping available in the Binna Burra section.

All State Scenic Tours (☎ 3003 0700; day trip incl wine tasting \$79) leaves Brisbane Transit Centre at 8.15am for O'Reilly's via Tamborine Mountain and wine tasting at O'Reilly's Canungra Valley Vineyards, and arrives back in Brisbane at 5.30pm. If you use the service to stay overnight at O'Reilly's the cost is \$69 return.

Mountain Coach Company (☎ 5524 4249; return day trip adult/child \$55/27) has a daily service from the Gold Coast to O'Reilly's via Tamborine Mountain (one hour). To overnight at O'Reilly's, the transfer fee is \$40 each way.

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