

## GOLDFIELDS & GRAMPIANS

Gold, gold, gold. Over a third of the world's gold has come out of Victoria. So how come all the locals aren't rich? Share a little of the rewards by heading to one of the state's most interesting areas, the goldfields region. Gold fever informed the area's history, and everywhere you go are reminders of the rich heritage of the gold rush days: grand, classic Victorian buildings; boulevards wide enough to turn a bullock team in; imposing banks with bushranger-proof vaults and fortified yards alongside for the wagons; old mining sites; fascinating museums and cemeteries. Fabulous attractions are linked to the era. Sovereign Hill, in Ballarat, is one of Australia's most popular tourist spots; Bendigo has the famous Chinese dragons, Old Loong and Sun Loong; Castlemaine is surrounded by charming, historic hamlets. Up around Moliagul it's called the 'Golden Triangle' because so many nuggets were found, big ones too, including the Welcome Stranger, the largest alluvial nugget ever found in the world.

Daylesford and Hepburn Springs, in the scenic central highlands, are famous for their mineral spas. Along with the healing waters are masseurs and naturopaths, gardens and craft shops, restored guesthouses and cottages, and great eateries.

This blend of quaint townships and grand regional centres sprawls across dramatically contrasting landscapes, from pretty countryside and green forests to red earth and granite country. The Grampians, an adventurer's paradise, stand majestically over the idyllic Wartook Valley and cute, touristy Dunkeld. Further north amidst the expanses of wheat and sheep properties are the wide open spaces of the Little Desert.

Go exploring, go bike touring, horse riding, prospecting. Bush-walkers will find trails everywhere and never too far from a musty old pub, rose garden café, olive farm or winery. Whatever you want is what you'll find.

### PROSPECTING

The old diggers dug up most of the gold, but even today significant nuggets are unearthed. This adds a whole new dimension to walking in the bush! First check out all the major gold-rush centres – there's a well-signposted Goldfields Tourist Route; get a route map from any visitors centre. Join other prospectors on the alluvial goldfields of [Maryborough](#) (p266). Buy a gold-panning kit at [Castlemaine](#) visitors centre and go splash around at nearby [Forest Creek Historic Gold Diggings](#) (p258). Carmen's Tunnel, out of [Maldon](#) (p265), never produced much gold, so that may be a good place to start. Or get some help, on a tour with one of the adventure companies that guarantees you will find gold. If all else fails, try to pick up a little gold dust at [Sovereign Hill](#) (opposite) in [Ballarat](#) and experience the Eureka spirit of the times when the miners struggled against injustice. Then see goldmining 500m underground at Central Deborah Goldmine in [Bendigo](#) (p255).

### LUXURIATING

This area is rich in produce and services to keep your senses glowing with gratitude. [Daylesford](#) and [Hepburn Springs](#) (p259) have been famous for their spa baths and body treat-

ments since the 1800s, when wealthy city slickers came up from Melbourne to relax. Nowadays there are also olive farms, wineries, trout farms, lavender farms, produce stores with bottles of healthy goodies, and chocolate outlets where you can watch the production of the little nuggets. Then, when you've been totally massaged and eaten sufficient lavender ice cream, take a stroll through one of the magnificent botanic gardens, like Baron Ferdinand von Mueller's work of art in [Kyneton](#) (p262), or the very old Botanic Gardens (p264) in [Castlemaine](#), which has National Trust-registered trees.

### ADVENTURE SPORTS

The [Grampians](#) are renowned for spectacular scenery and kilometres of walks throughout, but the rock climbing and abseiling in the area are thrilling. You'll find adventure companies (p266) ready to give you a wild and wonderful time. While you're enjoying the great outdoors, head north to the [Little Desert National Park](#) (p271) for a totally grounding holiday. Then hop on a horse for a ride through bush and desert, along creeks and past lagoons at any horse riding centre from [Wartook Valley](#) (p271) to [Daylesford](#) and up to [Bendigo](#).

## GENEALOGY

Many aspects of Australia's history are brought alive in the region's historic towns, museums and sites, but the goldfields provide another rich resource for anyone tracing a family history. Each weekend, there's an exodus of people from Melbourne to the area's cemeteries (p264) and associated historic societies. The Goldfields Historical Chinese Cemetery in **Bendigo** is a moving place to visit, even if you're not looking for ancestors. The Pennyweight Children's Cemetery in **Castlemaine** will leave a memory of the sad and impossibly difficult years the pioneers struggled through. The mausoleum at **Maryborough** gives further insights into the past, as do the gravestones in the cemetery at **Maldon**, where ghosts still linger.

## BALLARAT

pop 78,300

The area around here was known to the local Koories as 'Ballaarat', meaning 'resting place'. When gold was discovered in August 1851, thousands of diggers flooded in, forming a shanty town of tents and huts. Ballarat's alluvial goldfields were the tip of the golden iceberg, and when deep shaft mines were sunk they struck incredibly rich quartz reefs. About 28 percent of Victoria's gold came from Ballarat.

The original town of canvas and bark was replaced with a wealth of gracious Victorian-era buildings. The main drag, impressive **Sturt St**, had to be three chains wide (60m) to allow for the turning circle of bullock wagons. **Lydiard St** is a historic precinct with some of the finest examples of Victorian architecture, reminding us of how prosperous the town was, and

still is. The **Camp St** arts precinct buzzes with student activity and includes a public open space for the performing arts. The jewel in this historic and architecturally intriguing precinct is **Ballarat Fine Art Gallery** (☎ 5320 5858; www.balgal.com; 40 Lydiard St Nth; adult/child \$5/free; ☎ 9am-5pm) which houses a wonderful collection of early colonial paintings, works from noted Australian artists (including Tom Roberts, Sir Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale and Fred Williams) and contemporary works. A section is devoted to the Lindsay family who lived in nearby Creswick.

Allow at least half a day to visit **Sovereign Hill** (☎ 5331 1944; www.sovereignhill.com.au; Magpie St; adult/child/family \$35/16/90; ☎ 10am-5pm), a fascinating re-creation of an 1860s gold-mining township. The site was mined in the gold-rush era and much of the equipment is original, as is the mine shaft. There are above-ground and underground diggings. You can pan for gold in the stream – maybe you'll find a speck or two – and watch an hourly gold pour. The main street is a living history museum with people performing their chores dressed in costumes of the time. Several places offer food, from pies at the Hope Bakery to a three-course lunch at the United States Hotel. Sovereign Hill opens again at night for the impressive sound-and-light show **Blood on the Southern Cross** (☎ 5333 5777; ticket combined with Sovereign Hill admission adult/child/family \$74/36/196; ☎ summer 9.15 & 10.30pm, winter 6.45 & 8pm), a simulation of the Eureka Stockade battle. Bookings are essential (and check the show times).

Your ticket also gets you into the nearby **Gold Museum** (☎ 5331 1944; Magpie St; adult/child \$9/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.20pm) which sits on a mullock heap from an old mine. There's imaginative displays and samples from all the old mining

## TRANSPORT: BALLARAT

**Distance from Melbourne** 116km

**Direction** Northwest

**Travel time** 1½ hours

**Bus** Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) has Adelaide-to-Melbourne buses that stop at Ballarat (departs Adelaide 8pm; adult/child \$72/51, 8½ hours) if you ask the driver. Airport Shuttlebus (☎ 5333 4181; www.airportshuttlebus.com.au) goes direct from Melbourne Airport to Ballarat train station (return \$45, 1½ hours, seven times daily).

**Car** Ballarat is a smooth drive up the Western Hwy from Melbourne.

**Train** V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs between Melbourne (Southern Cross station) and Ballarat (return \$20, 1½ hours, 21 daily).