

Melbourne & Victoria

Wilsons Promontory & Gippsland (PDF Chapter)

Edition 10th Edition, Nov 2017

Pages 26

Page Range 253–278

Useful Links

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COVERAGE INCLUDES:

- South Gippsland
- Wilsons Promontory National Park
- West Gippsland
- Lakes District
- Lakes Entrance
- East Gippsland & The Wilderness Coast



Wilsons Promontory & Gippsland

Includes ➔

South Gippsland.	256
Wilsons Promontory National Park	258
West Gippsland.	263
Lakes District	265
Lakes Entrance.	268
East Gippsland & The Wilderness Coast.	270

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Koonwarra Store (p257)
- ➔ Nautica (p268)
- ➔ Pier 70 (p267)
- ➔ Lucy's (p277)
- ➔ Wildfish (p263)
- ➔ Tinamba Hotel (p266)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Lighthouse Keepers' Cottages (p261)
- ➔ Wilderness Retreat – Tidal River (p261)
- ➔ Limosa Rise (p262)
- ➔ Adobe Abodes (p276)
- ➔ Tin Chalet (p273)
- ➔ Rodondo (p263)

Why Go?

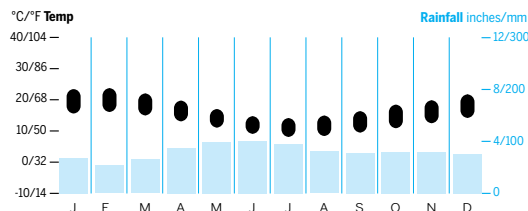
The Great Ocean Road may get the crowds, but Gippsland hides all the secrets. Gippsland is one region where it pays to avoid the cities – the towns along the Princes Hwy are barely worth a traveller's glance. But beyond the highway are some of the state's most absorbing, unspoiled and beautiful wilderness areas and beaches.

Along the coast there's Wilsons Promontory National Park, a fabulous destination for hikers and sightseers alike. This is only the start when it comes to stirring beaches. Epic Ninety Mile Beach yields to Cape Conran Coastal Park and Croajingolong National Park. Put them together and it's one of the wildest, most beautiful coastlines on Earth.

Inland, the Buchan Caves are a must-see attraction, while the national parks at Snowy River and Errinundra are as deeply forested, remote and pristine as any in the country.

When to Go

Point Hicks



Feb–Mar Revel in long days of sunshine without the holiday crowds.

Sep–Nov Spring is the time for wild flowers and wildlife, as well as bushwalking.

Dec–Jan It gets busy, but there's no better time to hit the oceans and lakes than summer!



Gippsland & Wilsons Promontory Highlights

1 Wilsons Promontory (p258) Hiking from Tidal River to Sealers Cove, past remote lighthouses, in this national park.

2 East Gippsland Rail

Trail (p274) Saddling up for Gippsland's longest cycle path.

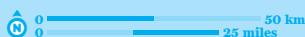
3 Ninety Mile Beach (p266) Camping in the dunes and fishing from the beach at this legendary beach.

4 Snowy River National Park (p271) Hiking deep into the forest or driving remote tracks in this beautiful region.

5 Buchan (p271) Exploring



BASS STRAIT



ancient limestone caves at the foot of the Snowy Mountains.

6 Lakes Entrance (p268)
Taking an afternoon winery cruise then feasting on a seafood dinner.

7 Croajingolong National Park (p277) Finding your quiet corner of the world in this humbling wilderness area.

8 Metung (p267) Cruising the waters of the Lakes

District from this tranquil marina village.

9 Raymond Island (p267)
Looking for koalas in this little-known spot.

SOUTH GIPPSLAND

South Gippsland has plenty of gems along the coast between Melbourne and Wilsons Promontory – Venus Bay, Cape Liptrap Coastal Park and Waratah Bay are all worth exploring. Inland among the farming communities are some great drives through the Strzelecki Ranges and trendy villages such as Koonwarra.

Sights & Activities

Great Southern Rail Trail OUTDOORS
(www.railtrails.org.au) This 74km cycling and walking path follows the old rail line from Leongatha to Port Welshpool, passing through the villages of Koonwarra, Meenyan, Buffalo, Fish Creek, Toora and Welshpool. The trail meanders through farmland with a few gentle hills, trestle bridges and occasional views of the coast and Wilsons Prom.

The first section from Leongatha to Koonwarra is through the rolling open country of the region's dairy farms. The middle section from Koonwarra to Meenyan and on to Foster is the most scenic section of the route, with plenty of bridges, eucalyptus forest and fine views. The final few stages of the trail were completed in late 2016, extending from Foster through to Toora and Welshpool, finishing at Port Welshpool, taking in landscapes of rolling hills, bushland, dairy farms and coastal outlooks.

Tours

Gippsland Food Adventures FOOD & DRINK
([03-5663 2386](tel:03-5663-2386), [0419 153 377](tel:0419-153-377); www.gippsland-foodadventures.com.au; 1720 Buffalo–Waratah Rd, Tarwin Lower; farm tours adult/child \$55/\$35) Set up by a husband-and-wife team, these tours encompass anything from visits to their farm and area winery to coastal walks – with local Gippsland produce always the focus.

Eating

Famous as a dairy-producing region, the South Gippsland district is a good place to sample local produce. Check out the **South-eastern Gippsland Foodmap** (www.southern-gippslandfoodmap.com.au) for ideas of where you can visit cheesemakers, wineries, gastropubs, cafes and provedores.

Prom Country Cheese CHEESE \$
([03-5657 3338](tel:03-5657-3338); www.promcountrycheese.com.au; 275 Andersons Inlet Rd, Moyarra; plates from \$10; ☉10am–5pm Sat & Sun, daily school holidays) Get among Gippsland's rolling green coun-

tryside, famed for its dairy products, and pay a visit to this family-run farm producing award-winning soft cheeses. Grab a tasting plate (\$10) to sample eight of its cheeses, or the ploughman's platter that showcases local produce. Here you can watch the cheesemakers at work, or head out and play with the lambs.

Drinking & Nightlife

Loch Brewery & Distillery

BREWERY, DISTILLERY

([0423 812 172](tel:0423-812-172), [0414 590 474](tel:0414-590-474); www.lochbrewery.com.au; 44 Victoria Road, Loch; half/pint \$6/\$10, gin & tonic \$10; ☉11am–4pm Fri–Sun) A shining example of regional Victoria's rise as a epicurean destination is this brewery and distillery inside an old 19th-century bank. Set up by a husband-and-wife team in 2014, Loch produces traditional UK real cask ales on-site, as well as London dry gins using 12 hand-ground botanicals, and, its primary focus, a single malt whisky – due for release in 2018.

You can grab a pint (or half) of ale poured using a wooden hand pump from the weekly rotating cask, or grab a tasting paddle of three ales for \$10.

Getting There & Away

Car The South Gippsland Hwy (A440) links the region to Melbourne; it takes 2½ hours to drive to Foster (174km) before continuing on to Wilsons Prom. Alternatively if driving from Phillip Island you'll head along the Bass Hwy (B460) through Kilcunda, Wonthaggi and Inverloch before winding your way inland to link up with the South Gippsland Hwy.

Bus The region is well connected by V/Line buses from Melbourne's Southern Cross station, as well as local buses linking the smaller towns.

Inverloch

POP 4960

Calm inlet beaches, surf, and outstanding diving and snorkelling make the coast along the road between Cape Paterson and Inverloch a popular destination. You'll wonder what all of the fuss is about if you pass through in winter, but stay for a few days in summer and you'll come to appreciate Inverloch's charms, not least among which is its unpretentious vibe.

Sleeping

Big 4 Inverloch Holiday Park CABIN \$
([03-5674 1447](tel:03-5674-1447); www.inverlochholidaypark.com.au; 2 Cuttriss St; powered sites from

\$50, 2-bedroom cabins from \$140; 🏠🚐) The reliable Big 4 chain offers spacious powered sites for vans, and a range of multibedroom cabins catering to families and groups. There's a heap of ways to keep busy, including an indoor pool, an adventure playground, tennis, ping pong and basketball.

If you're wanting a more basic setup, head to its **foreshore** (📞 03-5674 1236; www.inverlochforeshorecamping.com.au; cnr Esplanade & Cuttriss St; unpowered sites \$38-65, powered sites \$43-75) camping ground for unpowered sites.

Inverloch Views

RENTAL HOUSE \$\$\$

(📞 0407 100 070; www.inverlochviews.com; 9 Scarborough St; house \$450; 🏠) A sleek, architect-designed house with a resort ambience and handily adjacent to the park, beach and shops. It has four bedrooms (the master room features a spa), so it's well set up for groups, as well as several lounges and a rooftop deck with ocean views. It's Gippsland's only purpose-built wheelchair accessible accommodation, and includes a lift among other features. Two-night minimum stay.



Eating

★ **Tomo's Japanese Inverloch** JAPANESE \$\$\$
(📞 03-5674 3444; www.tomos-japanese.com; 23 A'Beckett St; sushi from \$2.50, mains \$17-36; ☺ noon-2pm & 6-8pm Wed-Sun, daily Dec-Feb) Modern Japanese cuisine prepared to perfection. Start with tender sushi or sashimi, and don't miss the gyoza (dumplings) or tempura tiger prawns. They have Sapporo on tap and a good range of Japanese whiskies. Cash only.

Vela Nine

CAFE \$\$

(📞 03-5674 1188; velanine.com.au; 9 A'Beckett St; mains \$14-19; ☺ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, to 8pm Fri & Sat; 🍷) New owners have transformed this tapas bar into a smart cafe-bar that does excellent coffee, cooked breakfasts, steak sandwiches and homemade pies. On Friday and Saturday nights they do a modern Australian dinner.

Information

Bunurong Environment Centre & Shop (📞 03-5674 3738; www.sgcs.org.au; cnr Esplanade & Ramsey Blvd; ☺ 10am-4pm Fri-Mon, daily in school holidays) An excellent selection of books and an abundance of brochures on environmental and sustainable-living topics – from beachcombing to dinosaur fossils. Also here is the Shell Museum (\$2) with more than 6000 shells.

Inverloch Visitor Centre (📞 1300 762 433; www.visitbasscoast.com; 39 A'Beckett St; ☺ 9am-5pm) Helpful staff, brochures and free

accommodation bookings. There's free wi-fi at the library next door.

Getting There & Away

Car From Melbourne (148km), follow the signs to Phillip Island and Wonthaggi. The route via Leongatha, 27km northeast of Inverloch, is less picturesque but slightly quicker.

Public Transport V/Line (www.vline.com.au) trains depart daily from Melbourne's Flinders St and Southern Cross Stations for Dandenong, connecting with buses to Inverloch (\$19, 3½ hours). A quicker option (2½ hours) is the V/Line coach with a change at gloriously named Koo Wee Rup.

Koonwarra

POP 385

Tucked away in rolling dairy country along the South Gippsland Hwy is this tiny township that's built itself a reputation as something of a niche foodie destination. It has a cooking school, renowned farmers market and produce store, plus wineries nearby. There's plenty of wildlife about in the surrounding bush.



Courses

Milly & Romeo's Artisan Bakery & Cooking School

COOKING

(📞 03-5664 2211; www.millyandromeos.com.au; 1 Koala Dr; adult/child from \$100/50; ☺ 9am-4pm Thu-Sun, longer hrs in summer) Victoria's first organic-certified cooking school offers short courses in making cakes, bread, traditional pastries, French classics and pasta, as well as cooking classes for kids. They also have a bakery selling their baked goods, made using local ingredients.



Sleeping & Eating

The Wine Farm

B&B \$\$\$

(📞 03-5664 3204; www.thewinefarm.com.au; 370 Koonwarra-Inverloch Rd; d \$150; 🍷) Set on a 15-acre family-run boutique winery is this three-bedroom self-contained weatherboard cottage that's excellent value for couples and groups (\$25 per extra person). It's a must for wine-lovers; South African vintner Neil Hawkins impresses with his range of 10 cool-climate varieties. Tastings at the cellar door can be arranged.

★ **Koonwarra Store**

CAFE \$\$

(📞 03-5664 2285; www.koonwarrastore.com.au; 2 Koonwarra-Inverloch Rd; mains \$12-26; ☺ 8.30am-4pm; 🍷) Local produce and wines are on sale in this renovated timber building. It's

also a renowned cafe that serves simple food with flair, priding itself on using organic, low-impact suppliers and products – go the Koonie burger with all-Gippsland ingredients. Soak up the ambience in the wooded interior, or relax at a table in the gardens with local ice cream, regional wines and a cheese paddle.

Getting There & Away

Car By road the town is 32km southwest of Korumburra and 21km northeast of Inverloch.

Bus V/Line runs buses between Melbourne's Southern Cross station and Koonwarra (\$17.20, 2½ hours) three to four times a day.

Fish Creek

POP 791

Travellers in the know have been stopping for a bite to eat at Fish Creek on their way to the coast or the Prom for years. These days it has developed into a little bohemian artists community with craft shops, galleries, studios, bookshops and some great cafes. The Great Southern Rail Trail (p256) passes through too.

Sights

Celia Rosser Gallery

GALLERY

(☎ 03-5683 2628, 0455 777 334; www.celiaross-ergallery.com.au; Promontory Rd; ☀ 10am-4pm Fri-Sun) **FREE** A bright art space featuring the works of renowned botanical artist Celia Rosser who's most famous for her banksia watercolours. The *Banksia rosserae* was named after her; Queen Victoria is the only other woman to have a banksia in her name.

Sleeping & Eating

Fish Creek Hotel

PUB \$

(☎ 03-5683 2404; www.fishcreekhotel.com.au; 1 Old Waratah Rd; mains \$16-30, d with shared/private bathroom \$85/100; ☀ noon-2pm & 6-9pm) The striking art deco Fish Creek Hotel, universally known as the Fishy Pub, is not only an essential stop for a beer or bistro meal, but also serves as a handy base for trips into Wilsons Prom. There's a choice of upstairs comfortable pub rooms (no TV or kettle) with shared bathrooms, and self-contained motel accommodation at the back.

Drinking & Nightlife

Waratah Hills Vineyard

WINERY

(☎ 03-5683 2441; www.waratahhills.com.au; 20 Cottmans Rd; ☀ 11am-4pm Fri-Sun, daily Jan) A five-minute drive out of Fish Creek on the

road to the Prom, this attractive winery offers free tastings at its cellar door in a converted tractor shed. Grab a glass of its award-winning pinot or chardonnay and a cheese plate, and enjoy views of the Hoddle Ranges from its Adirondack chairs.

Getting There & Away

Car Follow the signs off the South Gippsland Hwy at Foster (13km) or Meeniyan (28km). It's 24km (20 minutes) from the Wilsons Promontory entrance gate.

Public Transport There are four direct daily buses from Melbourne's Southern Cross station (\$20.40, 2¾ hours). It's also along the Korumburra-Foster bus line, with at least three departures daily.

WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK

If you like wilderness bushwalking, stunning coastal scenery and secluded white-sand beaches, you'll absolutely love this place. The Prom, as it's affectionately known, is one of the most popular national parks in Australia. Hardly surprising, given its accessibility from Melbourne, its network of more than 80km of walking tracks, its swimming and surf beaches and the abundant wildlife. The southernmost part of mainland Australia, the Prom once formed part of a land bridge that allowed people to walk to Tasmania.

Tidal River, 30km from the park entrance, is the hub, although there's no fuel to be had here. It's home to the Parks Victoria office, a general store, a cafe and accommodation. The wildlife around Tidal River is incredibly tame, but to prevent disease do not feed the animals or birds.

LOCAL MARKETS

Food is an increasingly important part of the traveller experience in Gippsland. It's always worth checking the dates of the farmers and other markets in the small towns across the region.

- ➔ Koonwarra – 1st Sat of the month
- ➔ Korumburra – 2nd Sat of the month
- ➔ Foster – 3rd Sat of the month
- ➔ Mirboo North – last Sat of the month
- ➔ Inverloch – last Sun of the month

Wilsons Promontory National Park



Sights

Norman Beach

BEACH

(Tidal River) The Prom's most popular beach is this beautiful stretch of golden sand, perfect for swimming and surfing, conveniently located at Tidal River campground.

Wilsons Promontory

Lighthouse

LIGHTHOUSE

(Wilsons Promontory National Park) Close to being the southernmost tip of mainland Australia, this 19m granite lighthouse dates back to 1859. It's only accessibly on foot, a six-hour walk (18.3km) from Telegraph Saddle car park, hence most stay overnight at the Lighthouse Keepers' Cottages (p261), or Roaring Meg campsite, 5.2km away.

Wilsons Promontory Marine

National Park

NATIONAL PARK

The offshore version of Wilsons Prom National Park. It's Victoria's largest marine protected area and popular with divers.



Activities

Foster Kayak & Outdoor

OUTDOORS

(☎ 0475 473 211; www.facebook.com/fosterkay-akandoutdoor; 50 Main St, Foster; bike hire half/full day \$35/70) Run by a Kiwi outdoor en-

thusiast, this adventure company hires out bikes for those wanting to tackle the Great Southern Rail Trail (p256) (and surrounding mountain-bike trails). They also offer a range of innovative outdoor activities, where you can do anything from learning to free dive and kayak-fish to handplane bodysurfing.

Prom Country Scenic Flights

SCENIC FLIGHTS

(☎ 0488 555 123; www.promcountryflights.com.au; 3680 Meeniyar Promontory Rd, Yanakie; 45-min flights adult/child under 10yr \$210/100; ☀ 9am-5pm) Head to the skies for spectacular Prom views with these 45-minute flights over the coast, lighthouse and bushland. They're based just past the Yanakie General Store on the road into the park.

Swimming

Swimming is safe at the gorgeous beaches at Norman Bay (Tidal River) and around the headland at Squeaky Beach – the ultrafine quartz sand here really does squeak beneath your feet!



Tours

First Track Adventures

ADVENTURE

(☎ 03-5634 2761; www.firsttrack.com.au; ☀ Dec & Jan) In the summer months this

TOP PROM WALKS

During school holidays and on weekends from Christmas to Easter, a free shuttle bus operates between the Tidal River visitor car park and the Telegraph Saddle car park – a nice way to start the Great Prom Walk. They run every 30 minutes from 8.30am to 5.45pm, with a break for lunch at 1pm. For the overnight walks you'll need to arrange a hiking permit beforehand, as well as payment for campsites and/or other accommodation.

Great Prom Walk The most popular long-distance hike is a moderate 45km circuit across to Sealers Cove from Tidal River, down to Refuge Cove, Waterloo Bay and the lighthouse, returning to Tidal River via Oberon Bay. Allow three days and coordinate your walk with tide times, as creek crossings can be hazardous. It's possible to visit or stay at the lighthouse (p261) by prior arrangement with the parks office.

Sealers Cove Walk The best overnight hike, this two-day walk starts at Telegraph Saddle and heads down Telegraph Track to stay overnight at beautiful Little Waterloo Bay (12km, 4½ hours). The next day, walk on to Sealers Cove via Refuge Cove and return to Telegraph Saddle (24km, 7½ hours).

Lilly Pilly Gully Nature Walk An easy 5km (two-hour) walk through heathland and eucalyptus forests, with lots of wildlife.

Mt Oberon Summit Starting from the Mt Oberon car park, this moderate-to-hard 7km (2½-hour) walk is an ideal introduction to the Prom with panoramic views from the summit. The free Mt Oberon shuttle bus can take you to the Telegraph Saddle car park and back.

Little Oberon Bay An easy-to-moderate 8km (three-hour) walk over sand dunes covered in coastal tea trees with beautiful views over Little Oberon Bay.

Squeaky Beach Nature Walk An easy 5km return stroll through coastal tea trees and banksias to a sensational white-sand beach.

Yarragon-based company organises customised bushwalking, canoeing and abseiling trips to the Prom for individuals and groups. Prices vary according to group size and activity.

Sleeping

Nothing beats a night at the Prom. The main accommodation base is Tidal River, and there are remote bush camp sites in the north and south sections of the park. The helpful visitor centre (p262) at Tidal River books all park accommodation, including permits for camping away from Tidal River.

Otherwise there are B&Bs, hostels and pub accommodation outside the park that can be used for day trips into the park.

There are 11 bush-camping (outstation) areas around the Prom. All are only accessible via overnight hikes, which you'll need to obtain a permit for before setting out. For details of campsites on the southern and northern hikes visit www.parkweb.vic.gov.au. For bookings in towns around the Prom, such as Yanakie, Foster and Fish Creek, try www.promcountry.com.au.

Tidal River


Situated on Norman Bay and a short walk to a stunning beach, Tidal River is incredibly popular. Book accommodation online well in advance through Parks Victoria (p262), especially for weekends and holidays.

Of Tidal River's 484 camp sites, only 20 are powered sites – so you'll need to book well in advance to secure these. For the Christmas school holiday period there's a ballot for sites (apply online by 30 June through Parks Victoria).


There are also wooden huts with bunks and kitchenettes, comfortable self-contained units and spacious safari-style tented camping with en-suite bathrooms.


Lighthouse Keepers' Cottages

COTTAGE \$\$\$


( 13 19 63, 03-5680 9555; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Wilsons Promontory National Park; d cottages \$352-391, 12-bed cottages per person \$127-141) These isolated, heritage-listed 1850s cottages, attached to a working light station on a pimple of land that juts out into the wild ocean, are a real getaway. Relax after the 19km hike (around six hours) from Tidal River and watch ships or whales passing by. The cottages have thick granite walls

and shared facilities, including a fully equipped kitchen.

Park Campsites – Tidal River CAMPGROUND \$
( 03-8427 2122, 13 1963; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park; unpowered/powered sites \$56.10/62.50) Camp sites sprawled across the precinct and along the foreshore within close access to the beach. A maximum of eight campers are allowed at each site. There's access to hot showers, flush toilets, a dish-washing area, rubbish disposal points and gas barbecues. No camp fires permitted.



Park Cabins – Tidal River CABIN \$\$\$
( 13 1963, 03-8427 2122; www.parkstay.vic.gov.au; Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park; 6-bed cabins from \$234.50) These spacious and private self-contained cabins with fully equipped kitchen (but no TV) sleep up to six people. They have large, sliding-glass doors and a deck, and overlook the bush or river.

Wilderness Retreat – Tidal River TENTED CAMP \$\$\$
(www.wildernessretreats.com.au; Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park; d \$318.50, extra person \$26.20) Nestled in bushland at Tidal River, these large safari tents, each have their own deck, bathroom, queen-sized beds, fridge and heating, and there's a communal tent kitchen. Tents sleep up to four people and are pretty cool. It's like being on an African safari with a kookaburra soundtrack.

Park Huts – Tidal River HUT \$\$\$
( 03-8427 2122, 13 1963; www.parkstay.vic.gov.au; Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park; 4-/6 bed huts from \$100.53/153.20) If you're travelling tent-free, these cosy wooden huts are a decent option, with bunks, minibar, kitchenette and cooking utensils, but no bathrooms. Bring your own linen, pillows and towels.

Yanakie & Foster

The tiny settlement of Yanakie offers the closest accommodation – from cabins and camping to luxury cottages – outside the park boundaries. Foster, the nearest main town, has a backpackers and several motels.

Top of the Prom at Promview Farm COTTAGE \$\$
( 03-5687 1232, 0407 804 055; 4295 Meeniyar Promontory Rd, Yanakie; d \$140-155, per extra person \$20; ) Only 200m from the park entrance, this two-bedroom dairy cottage is the closest private accommodation to the Prom. It has a

kitchen, wi-fi, a DVD player and views over the paddocks; BYO linen and towel.

★ Limosa Rise

COTTAGE \$\$\$

(☎ 03-5687 1135; www.limosarise.com.au; 40 Dalgleish Rd, Yanakie; d \$295-400; 🏠 📶) The views are stupendous from these luxury, self-contained cottages near the Prom entrance. The three tastefully appointed cottages (a studio, one bedroom and two bedroom) are fitted with wood-fire heaters, and full-length glass windows to take complete advantage of sweeping views across Corner Inlet, farmland and the Prom's mountains. Two-night minimum.

Black Cockatoo Cottages

COTTAGE \$\$

(☎ 03-5687 1306; www.blackcockatoo.com; 60 Foley Rd, Yanakie; d \$150-250, 6-person houses \$295-450) You can take in glorious views of the national park without leaving your very comfortable bed in these private, stylish, timber cottages. There are three modern cottages painted in a cool 'yellow-tailed black cockatoo' colour scheme, as well as a 1970s-style brown-brick three-bedroom house.



Eating

The **General Store** (☎ 03-5680 8520; Tidal River; mains \$5-24; ☀ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, to 4pm Sun) in Tidal River stocks grocery items (but no alcohol), some camping equipment and a cafe. If you're hiking, or here for a while, it's cheaper to stock up in Foster. There's also a general store in Yanakie which is handy for food supplies, cold beer and Gippsland wines.

❶ Information

Prom Country Visitor Information Centre (cnr McDonald & Main St, Foster; ☀ 9am-5pm) Helpful info for those heading into Wilsons Prom, as well as ideas for the surrounding region.

Tidal River Visitors Centre (☎ 03-5680 9555, 03-8427 2122, 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; ☀ 8.30am-4.30pm, to 4pm in winter) The helpful visitor centre at Tidal River books all park accommodation (including permits for camping away from Tidal River), and offers info for all hiking options in the area.

❶ Getting There & Away

Car Tidal River lies approximately 224km southeast of Melbourne. There is no fuel here; the closest petrol station is at Yanakie.

Public Transport There's no direct public transport between Melbourne and the Prom. The closest towns accessible by V/Line buses

are Fish Creek (\$20.40, 2¾ hours) and Foster (\$23, three hours, four daily) via Dandenong and Koo Wee Rup.

EAST OF THE PROM

Heading eastwards into Gippsland from Wilsons Prom takes you past green dairy farms en route to a string of sleepy coastal hamlets and charming historic towns. Port Albert sees the most tourist traffic with its beach, fresh fish and seafaring atmosphere. Yarram (one hour's drive from Wilsons Prom) is one of Gippsland's most picturesque towns, distinguished by grand colonial-era architecture. There's also some scenic bushland, swimming holes and waterfalls, including Agnes Falls, a 15-minute drive from Toora.

For cyclists the **Great Southern Rail Trail** has recently been extended east of Foster to conclude at Port Welshpool.

Port Albert

POP 247

This little old fishing village, 111km by road northeast of Tidal River, is developing a reputation as a worthwhile stopover for boating, fishing and sampling the local seafood. The town proudly pronounces itself Gippsland's first established port, and the many historic timber buildings in the main street dating from the busy 1850s each bear a brass plaque, detailing their age and previous use.

👁 Sights & Activities

Gippsland Regional Maritime Museum

MUSEUM

(☎ 03-5183 2520; Tarraville Rd; adult/child \$6/1; ☀ 10.30am-4pm daily Sep-May, Sat & Sun Jun-Aug or by appointment) In the old Bank of Victoria (1861) is this interesting museum that will give you an insight into the highlights of Port Albert's maritime history, with stories of shipwrecks, the town's whaling and sealing days, and local Aboriginal legends.

Port Albert Boat Hire

BOATING

(☎ 0447 527 222; Slip Jetty; kayaks per hr \$15, pedal boats per 30min \$25, motor boat per 2/5/8hr \$80/150/200; ☎ call for bookings) Here you can hire boats and canoes from the Slip Jetty for cruising around the sheltered waters of the Nooramunga Marine & Coastal Park. No boat licence required. Fishing rods and equipment are included in boat rental.

Sleeping

There's a caravan park at Seabank, about 6km northwest of Port Albert, and there are a few B&Bs in town.

Rodondo

B&B \$

(☎ 0429 333 303, 03-5183 2688; www.portalbert-accommodation.com.au; 74 Tarraville Rd; r from \$100) The contemporary blends seamlessly with the historic in this renovated 1871 home. The rooms have a homely but luxurious feel, and the friendly hospitality adds to the satisfaction of staying here. There's also a cosy, self-contained cabin in the former wash house.

Port Albert Motel

MOTEL \$

(☎ 03-5183 2435; www.portalbertmotel.com.au; 35-37 Wharf St; s/d \$80/100, extra person \$15; 🏠) The last vestige of the historic Port Albert Hotel, which burnt down in 2013, are these pub rooms, which have since been refurbished into motel-style accommodation. It's well placed for the water and restaurants, and, ironically, next door to the new pub. Rooms are comfortable, spacious and sleep up to four.

Eating

★ Port Albert Wharf

FISH & CHIPS \$

(☎ 03-5183 2002; 40 Wharf St; fish from \$7, minimum chips \$2.70; ☀ 11am-7.30pm Sun-Thu, to 8pm Fri & Sat) If there's one reason to visit Port Albert, it's to drop in for a bit of flake from this renowned fish and chipper on the jetty. Lightly battered, white and tender flesh, perfectly presented and as fresh as you'd expect from a town built on fishing.

★ Wildfish

SEAFOOD \$\$

(☎ 03-5183 2002; www.wildfish.restaurant; 40 Wharf St; mains \$17-32; ☀ noon-2pm Mon, noon-2pm & 6-8pm Thu-Sun) With a sublime harbour-side location and the freshest local seafood, Wildfish is earning a well-deserved reputation for serving good food. By day it does crumbed burgers with slaw and aioli, and chilli and lime calamari; by night the menu turns to thoughtful seafood dishes such as macadamia-crusted duckfish and seafood spaghetti with white-wine butter sauce.

Customs House Inn

PUB FOOD \$\$

(☎ 03-5183 2566; 39 Wharf St; mains \$15; ☀ 10.30am-11pm) With Port Albert's historic pub burning down in 2013, the next door Customs House Inn has stepped up to take over duties as PA's local watering hole. And

a fine job it's doing, with several local beers on tap including its own house-brewed Customs House lager. There's good food, including fish and chips, and roasts.

Getting There & Away

Car Take the South Gippsland Hwy and follow the signs to Port Albert along the Yarram–Port Albert Rd.

Bus The closest public transport from Melbourne is the V-Line bus service to Yarram, located 12km north of Port Albert.

WEST GIPPSLAND

Walhalla

POP 12

Tiny Walhalla lies hidden high in the green hills and forests at the foot of Baw Baw National Park. It's a postcard-pretty collection of sepia-toned period cottages and other timber buildings (some original, but mostly reconstructed). The setting is gorgeous, strung out along a deep, forested valley with Stringers Creek running through the centre of the township.

Gold was discovered here on 26 December 1862, although the first find was not registered until January 1863, which is when the gold rush really began. In its gold-mining heyday, Walhalla's population was 5000, today it's just 12!

Like all great ghost towns, the dead that are buried in the stunningly sited cemetery vastly outnumber the living.

Sights

The historical sights, including museums and a gold mine, are the main attraction in town. There's also a walk to extraordinary

GETTING OFF THE GRID

Despite being one of the first towns in Australia to get electric street lighting, albeit briefly in 1884, Walhalla was also the last mainland town in Australia to be connected to the electricity grid – in 1998! Despite that, there's still no street lighting. Nor is there TV reception, mains water (bring bottled water), mobile coverage or an internet network, so it's just the place for that digital detox. There's also no ATM or petrol either, in case you were wondering.

AUSTRALIAN ALPS WALKING TRACK

One of Australia's best and most challenging walks, the Australian Alps Walking Track begins in Walhalla and ends close to Canberra. This 655km epic traverses the valleys and ridge lines of Victoria's High Country, and en route to Tharwa in the ACT it climbs to the summit of Mt Bogong, Mt Kosciuszko and Bimberi Peak, the highest points in Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT respectively. Making the full trek is a serious undertaking that requires good navigational skills and high levels of fitness and self-sufficiency. If you're planning on making the trek, which takes up to eight weeks to complete, track down a copy of *Australian Alps Walking Track* by John and Monica Chapman.

Walhalla Cemetery (20 minutes return), where the gravestones cling to the steep valley wall. Their inscriptions tell a sombre, yet fascinating, story of the town's history.

Post & Telegraph Office Museum MUSEUM
(☎ 0400 276 004; www.walhallaboard.org.au; Main Rd; gold coin donation; ☀ 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) The last of Walhalla's original, unrenovated buildings is the old post office on the main road. Dating to 1886, it has been preserved as a museum open on weekends; literally nothing seems changed once you walk through its doors.

Walhalla Historical Museum MUSEUM
(☎ 03-5165 6250; www.victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/walhalla-museum#collection-records; 41 Main Rd; gold coin donation; ☀ 10am-4pm) In a restored historic building along the main street, Walhalla Historical Museum displays artefacts from its bygone era, as well as acting as an information centre, souvenir shop and post office.

Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine MINE
(☎ 03-5165 6259; www.walhallaboard.org.au; off Walhalla-Beardmore Rd; adult/child/family \$20/15/50; ☀ tours 1.30pm daily, plus noon & 3pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Relive the mining past with guided tours exploring Cohens Reef, once one of Australia's top reef-gold producers. Almost 14 tonnes of gold came out of this mine.



Activities

Walhalla Goldfields Railway RAIL
(☎ 03-5165 6280; www.walhallarail.com; adult/child/family return \$20/15/50; ☀ from Walhalla station 11am & 1pm, from Thomson Station 11.40am & 1.40pm Wed, Sat, Sun & public holidays) A star attraction is the scenic Walhalla Goldfields Railway, which offers a 20-minute ride between Walhalla and Thomson Stations (on the main road, 3.5km before Walhalla). The train snakes along Stringers Creek Gorge, passing lovely, forested gorge

country and crossing a number of trestle bridges. There are daily departures during school holidays.



Tours

Walhalla Ghost Tours TOURS
(☎ 03-5165 6250; www.walhallaghosttour.info; adult/child/family \$25/20/75; ☀ 7.30pm Sat, 8.30pm during daylight saving) Locals lead rather spooky ghost tours through this real-life ghost town on Saturday nights. Book through the Walhalla Historical Museum.



Sleeping

North Gardens Campground CAMPGROUND \$
(sites free) You can camp for free at North Gardens, with 20 unpowered sites with flush toilets and barbecues (but no showers) at the north end of the village. There's no bookings, so it's first come first served.

Windsor House B&B \$\$
(☎ 03-5165 6237; www.windsorhouse.com.au; off Walhalla Rd; d \$170, ste \$175-215) The five rooms and suites in this beautifully restored two-storey 1878 home are fittingly old fashioned and ghost free. No children under 12.

Walhalla Star Hotel HISTORIC HOTEL \$\$
(☎ 03-5165 6262; www.starhotel.com.au; Main Rd; d incl breakfast \$189-249; ☀ @ @) The rebuilt historic Star offers stylish boutique accommodation with king-sized beds and simple but sophisticated designer decor, making good use of local materials such as corrugated-iron water tanks. Guests can dine at the upmarket house restaurant; others need to reserve in advance.



Eating

Greyhorse Cafe CAFE \$
(☎ 03-5165 6262; Main Rd, Walhalla Star Hotel; dishes from \$5; ☀ 10am-2pm) Attached to the Star Hotel, this cafe serves breakfasts, pies, toasted sandwiches, coffee and cake.

Walhalla General Store & Miner's Cafe

CAFE \$

(☎03-5165 6227; Main Rd; mains \$14; ☀10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) In a replica historical building on the main road, this cafe does burgers, flathead tails, steak sangas, beers and wine, and, most importantly bottled water – handy given there's no drinkable tap water in Walhalla. It's also a general store stocking bread, milk, newspapers etc.

i Information

There's tourist information at the **Walhalla Historical Museum** (p264), and ww.walhalla.org.au is another helpful resource.

i Getting There & Away

Walhalla lies approximately 180km east of Melbourne. There's no public transport. By road, the town can be reached along a lovely, winding forest drive from Moe or Traralgon. If coming down the summit from Mt Baw Baw it's around an hour's drive for the slow, twisting 48km journey.

LAKES DISTRICT

The Gippsland Lakes form the largest inland waterway system in Australia, with the three main interconnecting lakes – Wellington, King and Victoria – stretching from Sale to beyond Lakes Entrance. The lakes are actually saltwater lagoons, separated from the ocean by the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and the narrow coastal strip of sand dunes known as Ninety Mile Beach. Apart from the beach and taking to the water, the highlights here involve hanging out at the pretty seaside communities.

Sale

👁 Sights & Activities

Gippsland Art Gallery

ART GALLERY

(☎03-5142 3500; www.gippslandartgallery.com; 68 Foster St, Civic Centre; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) **FREE** Sale's gallery exhibits works by both local and nationally renowned artists, as well as touring exhibitions. They are preparing to move into a new space in late 2017, which will have more of a focus on landscapes, plus a dedicated gallery showcasing the works of Dutch-born Australian textile artist, Annemieke Mein.

Sale Wetlands Walk

WALKING

The Sale Wetlands Walk (4km, 1½ hours) is a pleasant wander around Lake Guthridge (immediately east of where the Princes Hwy does a dogleg in the centre of Sale) and its adjoining wetlands. It incorporates an Indigenous Art Trail commemorating the importance of the wetlands to the local Kurnai community.

👉 Tours

Port of Sale Heritage Cruises

BOATING

(☎0400 933 112; www.saleheritagecruises.com.au; 1½hr cruises adult/child under 15yr \$20/15; ☀10am & 2pm) Explore Sale's scenic waterways on the *Rubeena*, a 1911 heritage boat that's older than the *Titanic* and the longest continuously running vessel in Australia. Along the way you'll learn about Indigenous and local history, see plenty of birdlife and often koalas. The trip concludes at the historic swing bridge (c 1883), the oldest of its kind in Australia.

🍴 Eating

Criterion Hotel

PUB FOOD \$\$

(☎03-5143 3320; www.crihotel.com.au; 90 Macalister St; mains \$26-33; ☀11am-late) It's pubs like this that make travelling in country Victoria so great. Originally built in 1865, the Criterion was restored in 2013 and is one of Sale's best spots for a meal. Here they keep things local, with dishes such as pale-ale battered Lakes Entrance shark and their signature parma with Maffra cheese and double-smoked Gippsland ham.

It's a good spot for a drink too, including \$2 pots and wine at happy hour on Friday and Saturday (5pm to 6pm). The rooms here are also recommended.

Red Catt

CAFE \$\$

(☎03-5143 1911; 192 Raymond St; breakfast \$12-15, mains \$15-25; ☀8am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 10pm Fri & Sat) Along Sale's main strip is this cafe, often packed with folk who've come for the excellent coffee and mains such as salt-and-Sichuan-pepper squid, Korean fried chicken and pulled-pork tacos. They're open for dinner Fridays and Saturdays, and it's a good spot for a drink too.

i Information

Wellington Visitor Information Centre (☎03-5144 1108; www.tourismwellington.com.au; 8 Foster St; ☀9am-5pm; 📶) A ton of brochures, wi-fi access and a free accommodation-booking

service. From late 2017 they will be relocating to a new address at the Civic Centre, sharing space with the new **Gippsland Art Gallery** (p265) and library.

Maffra

POP 5112

Maffra is a sizeable but relaxed country town with a picturesque main street lined with 19th-century buildings. It's popular with cyclists tackling the Gippsland Plains Rail Trail, which runs 67km from Traralgon to Stratford, as well as foreign backpackers here to work in the region.

It's 20km from Sale and a short drive to Tinamba, where there's a renowned restaurant.



Sleeping

Cambrai Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(☎ 03-5147 1600; www.maffra.net.au/hostel; 117 Johnson St; dm per night/week \$35/175, s/d \$75/80) One of the few true backpackers in Gippsland is this relaxed 'worker's' hostel that attracts primarily international travellers who are here to fruit pick etc. It's in a 120-year-old building that was once a doctor's residence, with a licensed bar, an open fire and a pool table in the cosy lounge, a self-catering kitchen and cheerful, well lived-in rooms.

Its front garden bar is a great place to chill and hosts regular events. The owners can sometimes arrange work in the region, however the business is up for sale as of 2017 – so be sure to call ahead.

Happy Days

INN \$\$

(☎ 0428 451 484, 03-5145 1751; www.happydaysaccommodation.com; 6a Tinamba-Seaton Rd, Tinamba; d \$140; 🍷🍷🍷) A 10-minute drive away from Maffra in Tinamba, Happy Days is on a 5-acre property and is popular with those here for the Tinamba Hotel, or as a stop on the Gippsland Plains Rail Trail. Though its decor is straight out of 1987 – thick carpet, blonde-wood panel walls and a kitschy indoor pool in the foyer – the rooms are comfortable and have lovely views.



Eating

★ Tinamba Hotel

MODERN AUSTRALIAN \$\$

(☎ 03-5145 1484; www.tinambahotel.com.au; 4-6 Tinamba Seaton Rd, Tinamba; 2-/3-course lunch incl drink \$30/39.50, dinner mains \$35-39; ☉ noon-2pm & 6-8pm Wed-Sat, noon-2pm Sun) In

WORTH A TRIP

KROWATHUNKOOLONG KEEPING PLACE

Krowathunkoolong Keeping Place

(☎ 03-5152 1891, 03-5150 0737; www.batalukculturaltrail.com.au; 37-53 Dalmahoy St; adult/child \$3.50/2.50; ☉ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a stirring and insightful Koorie cultural exhibition space that explores Kurnai life from the Dreaming until after European settlement. The exhibition traces the Kurnai clan from their Dreaming ancestors, Borun the pelican and his wife Tuk the musk duck, and covers life at Lake Tyers Mission, east of Lakes Entrance, now a trust privately owned by Aboriginal shareholders. The massacres of the Kurnai from 1839 to 1849 are also detailed.

the small township of Tinamba, 10km west of Maffra, is this classy restaurant that's well known for its delectable menu using local, seasonal produce. Its dining room with piano and Chesterfield couches is in keeping with the lavishly presented cuisine centred around slow-cooked meats, Gippsland steaks and local seafood, accompanied by great local wines.



Getting There & Away

Car Maffra is located 19km north of Sale, with the fastest route being via the Maffra–Sale Rd (C492).

Public Transport There's a V/Line train-bus service from Melbourne (\$28.20, 3½ hours) four times a day.

Ninety Mile Beach

To paraphrase the immortal words of Crocodile Dundee...that's not a beach, *this* is a beach. Isolated Ninety Mile Beach is a narrow strip of sand backed by dunes, featuring lagoons and stretching unbroken for more or less 90 miles (150km) from near McLoughlins Beach to the channel at Lakes Entrance. The area is great for surf fishing, camping and long beach walks, though the crashing surf can be dangerous for swimming, except where patrolled at Seaspray, Woodside Beach and Lakes Entrance.

The main access road to Ninety Mile Beach is the South Gippsland Hwy from Sale or Foster, turning off to Seaspray, Golden Beach and Loch Sport.

Paynesville & Raymond Island

POP 3776

Paynesville is a relaxed little lake town where life is all about the water, fishing and boating; some residents have their luxury boats moored right outside their house on purpose-built canals.

A good reason to detour here is to take the ferry on one of its regular, five-minute hops across to Raymond Island for some **koala spotting**. There's a large colony of koalas here, mostly relocated from Phillip Island in the 1950s.



Activities

Bulls Cruisers

BOATING

(☎ 03-5156 1200; www.bullscruisers.com.au; 54 Slip Rd; boat hire from \$120, cruiser 2-nights from \$910; ☀ 8am-4.30pm) The perfect way to enjoy the lakes is to hire a boat and get out on the water yourself. Grab a fishing boat for the day, or hire a cruiser (equipped with air-con cabins, beds, kitchens and bathrooms, and sleeping from six to 12 people) for a night or two. You don't need a boat licence to operate any of the boats, so you have no excuses.

PS Curlip

CRUISE

(☎ 0433 416 445; www.paddlesteamercurlip.com.au; adult/child/family \$25/15/60; ☀ 10.30am Sat & Sun, longer hours Dec & Jan) Relocated from Marlo is this 19th-century paddle streamer refitted with a 21st-century eco, solar-powered makeover. A not-for-profit community project, it was still being rebuilt as of 2017; keep an eye on the website for updates on its upcoming trips along the Mitchell River and surrounding Ramsar-listed wetlands.



Sleeping

Gippsland

Lakes Escapes

ACCOMMODATION SERVICES \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 0432; www.gippslandlakesescapes.com.au; 87 The Esplanade) Offers a good range of house rentals for both Paynesville and Raymond Island, and also books Point Hicks Lighthouse (p278) further afield.

Mariners Cove

MOTEL \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 7444; www.marinerscoveresort.com; 2-8 Victoria St; s/d from \$125/135, apt \$200-225; ☀ ☎) These bright, sunny waterside motel-style units open directly on to the pictur-

esque canal, and are well located near the Raymond Island ferry.



Eating

★ Pier 70

SEAFOOD \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 1199; www.pier70.com.au; 70 The Esplanade; breakfast \$6-22, mains \$16-38; ☀ 9am-10pm Wed-Mon) With a sublime location right on the marina, this breezy and luxurious cafe has an outdoor deck on which to enjoy a 'breakfast jar', or a Wagyu beef burger with twice-cooked beer-battered chips for lunch. At night it's more fine dining, with fantastic seafood dishes and Gippsland porterhouse steaks.



Getting There & Away

Car Paynesville is 16km south of Bairnsdale along the C604 – watch for signs to the turn-off along the Princes Hwy in the centre of Bairnsdale.

Public Transport V-Line coaches travel twice daily between Bairnsdale and Paynesville (\$6.40, 30 to 45 minutes), connecting with onward, Melbourne-bound trains.

Metung

POP 1222

Curling around Bancroft Bay, little Metung is one of the prettiest towns in the Lakes District. Besotted locals call it the Gippsland Riviera, and with its absolute waterfront location and unhurried village charm, it's hard to argue.

WORTH A TRIP

RAYMOND ISLAND

For one of the best places in Victoria to see koalas, drop down off the Princes Hwy to the relaxed lakeside town of Paynesville. Agreeable in its own right, Paynesville is the departure point for a five-minute ferry crossing to Raymond Island. There's a large colony of koalas here, mostly relocated from Phillip Island in the 1950s. Kangaroos and echidnas are also regularly spotted.

The flat-bottom car-and-passenger ferry operates every 20 minutes from 6.40am to midnight and is free for pedestrians and cyclists. Cars cost \$12 and motorcycles \$5.

Sights & Activities

Riviera Nautic

BOATING

(☎ 03-5156 2243; www.rivieranautic.com.au; 185 Metung Rd; 2½hr tours adult/child/under 6yr \$45/20/free, boat hire per 2hr/day \$85/175, yachts & cruisers for 3 days from \$1065; ☼ tours 2.30pm Tue, Thu, Sat) Getting out on the water is easy in Metung, with Riviera Nautic hiring out boats and yachts for cruising, fishing and sailing on the Gippsland Lakes. There are also sightseeing cruises three times a week, with regular sightings of seals and dolphins. The liveaboard boats and motorised yachts offer a unique form of accommodation, and good value if you have a group. No boat licence required.

Sleeping

McMillans of Metung

RESORT \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 2283; www.mcmillansofmetung.com.au; 155 Metung Rd; cottages/villas from \$110/160; ☼☼☼) This swish lakeside resort has won stacks of tourism awards for its complex of English country-style cottages set in 3 hectares of manicured gardens, as well its modern villas, private marina and spa centre.

Moorings at Metung

APARTMENT \$\$\$

(☎ 03-5156 2750; www.themoorings.com.au; 44 Metung Rd; apt \$160-390; ☼☼) At the end of the road in Metung, and with water views to either Lake King or Bancroft Bay, this contemporary complex has a range of apartments from spacious studios to two-bedroom, split-level town houses. The complex has a tennis court, indoor and outdoor pools, a spa and a marina. Outside peak season it's good value.

Eating

★Nautica

MODERN AUSTRALIAN \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 2345; www.facebook.com/nauticame; 50 Metung Rd; breakfasts from \$10, mains from \$19; ☼ 8am-2pm & 6pm-late Wed-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) A classy affair with smart polished wooden floorboards, open fire and views out to the water, Nautica is one not to miss in Metung. Start the day by treating yourself to a breakfast brioche roll filled with double bacon and Swiss cheese, while for lunch go the panko calamari or oysters. Dinner is anything from slow-cooked lamb shoulder to crispy-skin barramundi.

Its attached fish and chip shop is also worth popping by – enjoy on its patch of grass overlooking the lake.

★Metung Hotel

PUB FOOD \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 2206; www.metunghotel.com.au; 1 Kurnai Ave; mains \$25-40; ☼ kitchen noon-2pm & 6-8pm, pub 11am-late; ☼) You can't beat the location overlooking Metung Wharf, and the big windows and outdoor timber decking make the most of the water views. The bistro serves top-notch pub food with a focus on fresh local seafood. The hotel also has the cheapest rooms in town (\$85).

Bancroft Bites

CAFE \$\$

(☎ 03-5156 2854; www.bancroftbites.com.au; 2/57 Metung Rd; breakfast \$7.50-17.50, mains \$12-26; ☼ 8am-3pm, & dinner in summer) A seriously good cafe with great coffee, Bancroft does build-your-own brekkies and hearty lunches including its popular seafood hotpot with sourdough.

Information

Metung Visitor Centre (☎ 03-5156 2969; www.metungtourism.com.au; 3/50 Metung Rd; ☼ 9am-5pm) Accommodation-booking and boat-hire services. Also has a gift shop with local produce.

Getting There & Away

Metung lies south of the Princes Hwy along the C606; the turn-off is signposted at Swan Reach. The nearest major towns are Bairnsdale (28km) and Lakes Entrance (24km). The nearest inter-city rail services are at Bairnsdale.

Lakes Entrance

POP 4569

With the shallow Cunninghame Arm waterway separating the town from the crashing ocean beaches, Lakes Entrance basks in an undeniably pretty location. In holiday season it's a packed-out tourist town with a graceless strip of motels, caravan parks, minigolf courses and souvenir shops lining The Esplanade. Still, the bobbing fishing boats, fresh seafood, endless beaches and cruises out to Metung and Wyanga Park Winery should win you over.

Sights & Activities

Venture Out

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(☎ 0427 731 441; www.ventureout.com.au; 347 The Esplanade; bike hire per hr/day \$18/50, SUPs & kayaks per 2hr \$25, tours from \$45; ☼ 10am-5pm, or call for bookings) Rents out bicycles, sea kayaks and stand-up paddleboards (SUPs), as well

as running mountain-biking tours on single tracks through the surrounding forest.

Mako Fishing Charters

FISHING

(☎) 0412 699 394, 0421 340 764; www.makofishingcharters.com; 3½hr tours adult/child \$100/80) A father and son team running offshore fishing trips through the Entrance on a 15m boat, where you'll catch snapper, flathead and gummy sharks. Tours run from 3½ hours to all day. Bring your own beer, and you'll need to arrange your own fishing licence.

Sea Safari

CRUISE

(☎) 0458 511 438; www.lakes-explorer.com.au; Post Office Jetty; 1½hr cruises adult/child/family \$15/10/40) ☎ These safaris aboard the *Lakes Explorer* have a focus on research and ecology, identifying and counting seabirds, testing water for salinity levels and learning about marine life.

Tours

Lonsdale Eco Cruises

CRUISE

(☎) 0413 666 638; www.lonsdalecruises.com.au; Cunningham Quay; 3hr cruises adult/child/family \$50/25/120; ☎ 1pm Thu-Tue) ☎ Scenic cruises out to Metung and Lake King on a former Queenscliff-Sorrento passenger ferry, with common dolphin sightings.

Peels Lake Cruises

CRUISE

(☎) 03-5155 1246, 0409 946 292; www.peelscruises.com.au; Post Office Jetty; 4hr Metung lunch cruises adult/child \$55/16, 2½hr cruises adult/child \$45/22.50; ☎ 11am Tue-Sun, 2pm Tue-Thu & Sat) This long-running operator has daily lunch cruises aboard the *Stormbird* to Metung and 2½-hour cruises on the *Thunderbird*.

Sleeping

Eastern Beach Tourist Park

CARAVAN PARK \$

(☎) 03-5155 1581, 1800 761 762; www.easternbeach.com.au; 42 Eastern Beach Rd; unpowered sites \$28-50, powered sites \$35-69, cabins \$118-285; @ ☎ ☎ ☎) Most caravan parks in Lakes pack 'em in, but this one has space, grassy sites and a great location away from the hubbub of town in a bush setting back from Eastern Beach. A walking track takes you into town (30 minutes). New facilities are excellent, including a camp kitchen, barbecues and a kids' playground. Sells beers at reception, too.

Bellevue on the Lakes

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎) 03-5155 3055; www.bellevuelakes.com; 201 The Esplanade; d from \$189, 2-bedroom apt from \$249;

☎ ☎ ☎) Right in the heart of the Esplanade, Bellevue has neatly furnished rooms in earthy tones, most with water views. For extra luxury, go for the spacious spa suites or two-bedroom self-contained apartments.

Goat & Goose

B&B \$\$\$

(☎) 03-5155 3079; www.goatandgoose.com; 27b McCrae St; d from \$120-200) Bass Strait views are maximised at this wonderfully unusual, multistorey, timber pole-framed house, with quaint rooms featuring spas.

Kalimna Woods

COTTAGE \$\$\$

(☎) 03-5155 1957; www.kalimnawoods.com.au; Kalimna Jetty Rd; d \$130-160; ☎ ☎) Retreat 2km from the town centre to Kalimna Woods, set in a large rainforest-and-bush garden, complete with friendly resident possums and birds. These self-contained country-style cottages (some with spas) have wood-burning fireplaces and are spacious, private and cosy.

Eating

★Ferryman's Seafood Cafe

SEAFOOD \$\$\$

(☎) 03-5155 3000; www.ferrymans.com.au; Middle Harbour, The Esplanade; mains lunch \$18-24, dinner \$21-45; ☎ 10am-late) It's hard to beat the ambience of dining on the deck of this floating cafe-restaurant (an old Paynesville to Raymond Island passenger ferry), which will fill you to the gills with fish and seafood dishes. The fisherman's basket for lunch and seafood platter for dinner are popular orders. Downstairs you can buy fresh seafood, including prawns and crayfish.

Sparrows Nest

CAFE \$\$\$

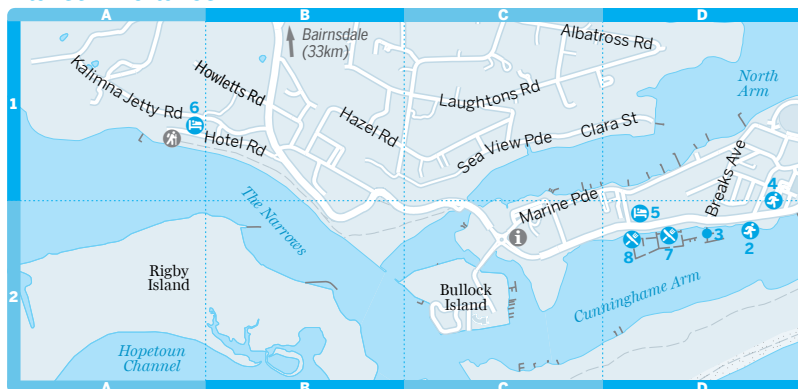
(www.facebook.com/sparrowsnestlakesentrance; 581 The Esplanade; meals \$11-21; ☎ 7.30am-4pm; ☎) Bringing a bit of urban style to Lakes Entrance is this cool spot doing single-origin coffees and house-made crumpets spread with Raymond Island honeycomb-butter speckled with bacon bits for breakfast. Lunches are good too, with the likes of pulled-pork baguettes and craft beer by Sailors Grave Brewing (p274) in Marlo.

Floating Dragon

CHINESE \$\$\$

(☎) 03-5155 1400; www.floatingdragon.com.au; 160 The Esplanade, Western Boat Harbour; mains \$26-39; ☎ 6pm-late) This floating restaurant on the harbour dishes up high-end Cantonese cuisine with soothing views through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Chilli-pepper salt calamari, half-roasted duck and pork belly are favourites.

Lakes Entrance



Miriam's Restaurant

STEAK, SEAFOOD \$\$\$

(☎ 03-5155 3999; www.miriamsrestaurant.com.au; cnr The Esplanade & Bulmer St; mains \$29-59; ☺ noon-late) The upstairs dining room at Miriam's overlooks The Esplanade, and the Gippsland steaks, local seafood dishes and casual cocktail-bar atmosphere are excellent. Try its epic 'Greek fisherman's plate' – 500g of local seafood for \$59. It offers a good choice of local wines and craft beer too.

i Information

Lakes Entrance Visitor Centre (☎ 1800 637 060, 03-5155 1966; www.discovereastgippsland.com.au; cnr Princes Hwy & Marine Pde; ☺ 9am-5pm; ☎) Free accommodation- and tour-booking services. Also check out www.lakesentrance.com.

i Getting There & Away

Lakes Entrance lies 314km from Melbourne along the Princes Hwy.

V/Line (☎ 1800 800 007; www.vline.com.au) runs a train-bus service from Melbourne to Lakes Entrance via Bairnsdale (\$39.80, 4½ hours, three daily).

EAST GIPPSLAND & THE WILDERNESS COAST

Beyond Lakes Entrance stretches a wilderness area of spectacular coastal national parks and old-growth forest. Much of this region has never been cleared for agriculture and it contains some of the most remote and pristine national parks in the state, making logging in these ancient forests a hot issue.

Buchan

POP 385

The sleepy town of Buchan, in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, is famous for the spectacular and intricate limestone cave system at the Buchan Caves Reserve, open to visitors for almost a century. Underground rivers cutting through ancient limestone rock formed the caves and caverns, and they provided shelter for Aboriginal people as far back as 18,000 years ago.

Buchan has huge potential as an outdoor adventure destination, with some 600 caves in the area – however only five remain open to the public. There are also swimming holes, mountain-biking trails, bushwalks and white-water rafting; see www.buchan.vic.au for more info.

👁 Sights

★ Buchan Caves

CAVE

(☎ 131963; www.parks.vic.gov.au; tours adult/child/family \$22/12.90/60.90, 2 caves \$33/19.10/90.90; ☺ tours 10am, 11.15am, 1pm, 2.15pm & 3.30pm, hours vary seasonally) Since it was unveiled to Melburnians as a blockbuster sight in the early 1900s, the Buchan Caves has been dazzling visitors with its fantasy world of glistening calcite formations. Parks Victoria runs guided cave tours daily, alternating between **Royal** and **Fairy Caves**. They're both impressive: Royal has more colour, a higher chamber and dripping candle-like formations; Fairy has more delicate decorations and potential fairy sightings.



Lakes Entrance

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 1 Lonsdale Eco Cruises.....E1
- 2 Mako Fishing Charters.....D2
- 3 Peels Lake Cruises.....D2
- Sea Safari.....(see 3)
- 4 Venture Out.....D2

Sleeping

- 5 Bellevue on the Lakes.....D2
- 6 Kalimna Woods.....A1

Eating

- 7 Ferryman's Seafood Cafe.....D2
- 8 Floating Dragon.....D2
- 9 Miriam's Restaurant.....E1
- 10 Sparrows Nest.....E1

The rangers also offer hard-hat guided tours to the less-developed **Federal Cave** or **Murrindal** Cave during the high season.

The reserve itself is a pretty spot with shaded picnic areas, walking tracks and grazing kangaroos. Invigoration is guaranteed when taking a dip in the icy rock pool.

Sleeping

Buchan Caves Motel

LODGE \$\$

(☎ 03-5155 9419; www.buchanmotel.com.au; 67 Main Rd; d \$130, tr & q \$150) Enjoy views of the bucolic countryside from your balcony at this comfortable hilltop lodge with modern rooms featuring boutique touches. The friendly, young, enthusiastic owners are a wealth of knowledge on the area and have grand plans to capitalise on Buchan's tourism potential.

Buchan Caves Reserve

CAMPGROUND \$\$

(☎ 13 19 63; www.parks.vic.gov.au; unpowered/powered sites from \$46/51, d cabins from \$90, wilderness retreats d \$191; ♿ ♿) You can stay right by the caves at this serene Parks Victoria camping ground edged by state forest. Though its campsites are exorbitantly priced, there are a couple of decent-value cabins, plus safari-style tents providing a 'luxury' wilderness experience, with comfortable queen-sized bed and air-conditioning. In summer there's a freshwater pool.



Drinking & Nightlife

Buchan Caves Hotel

PUB

(☎ 03-5155 9203; www.facebook.com/buchan-caveshotel; 49 Main Rd; ☺ 11am-late) Rising from the ashes, the 125-year-old Buchan pub is

back in business after burning to the ground in 2014. It came about via the world's first crowd-funding campaign to build a pub, with funds raised from around the globe. It reopened its doors in December 2016. Be sure to celebrate its return by stopping in for a chicken parma and a cold frothy.

Getting There & Away

Buchan is an easy drive 56km north of Lakes Entrance. **Dyson's** (☎ 03-5152 1711) runs a bus service on Wednesday and Friday from Bairnsdale to Buchan (\$16, two hours). It meets the train at Bairnsdale. At other times you'll need your own transport.

Snowy River National Park

Northeast of Buchan, this is one of Victoria's most isolated and spectacular national parks, dominated by deep gorges carved through limestone and sandstone by the Snowy River on its route from the Snowy Mountains in NSW to its mouth at Marlo. The entire park is a smorgasbord of unspoiled, superb bush and mountain scenery. It covers more than 950 sq km and includes a huge diversity of vegetation, ranging from alpine woodlands and eucalyptus forests to rainforests.

Walking and **canoeing** are the most popular activities, but you need to be well prepared for both – conditions can be harsh and subject to sudden change.

The classic canoe or raft trip down the Snowy River from McKillops Bridge to a pull-out point near Buchan takes at least

four days and offers superb scenery: rugged gorges, raging rapids, tranquil sections and excellent camping spots on broad sandbars.

The hilly and difficult Silver Mine Walking Track (15km, six hours) also starts at the eastern end of McKillops Bridge.

Tours

Snowy River Expeditions

ADVENTURE

(☎ 03-5155 0220; www.karoondapark.com; Karoonda Park; tours per day \$110-275) Snowy River Expeditions is a well-established company operating out of Karoonda Park, running adventure tours including one-, two- or four-day rafting trips on the Snowy. Half- or full-day abseiling, caving and horse-riding trips are also available. Costs include transport, meals and camping gear.

Sleeping

All of the camp sites in the Snowy River park are free, with six basic but scenic setups around the park. You'll find bush camping at Balley Hooley, McKillops Bridge, Raymond Creek Falls, Waratah Flat, Jackson's Crossing and Hicks camp sites. Hikers are also permitted to pitch a tent, providing you're 30m from a river or creek.

McKillops Bridge

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; camp sites free) The most popular of the free camping grounds in the area is this beautiful spot along the Snowy River. Sites have nonflush toilets and fireplaces. It's a popular launching site for canoeists, and a range of hikes start out from here.

Karoonda Park

FARMSTAY \$

(☎ 03-5155 0220; www.karoondapark.com; 3558 Gelantipy Rd; dm/s/d/tr \$35/50/70/90; ☼@☎☎) Just south of Gelantipy, 40km north of Buchan on the road to Snowy River National Park, is this 1800-acre cattle-and-sheep property with comfortable backpacker and cabin digs. Meals are available with prior notice, and there's a kitchen for self-caterers. They can also arrange activities such as abseiling, horse riding, wild caving and white-water rafting.

To get here by public transport, there's a bus on Wednesday and Friday from Bairnsdale – the driver can drop you off at the farm upon request.

Getting There & Away

The two main access roads to the park are the Buchan-Jindabyne Rd from Buchan, and the Bonang Rd north from Orbost. These roads are joined by McKillops Rd (also known as Deddick Valley Rd), which runs across the northern border of the park. Various minor access roads and scenic routes run into and alongside the park from these three main roads. The 43km Deddick Trail, which runs through the middle of the park, is only suitable for 4WDs.

Dyson's (☎ 03-5155 0356) operates a bus service from Bairnsdale to Gelantipy (via Buchan) on Wednesday and Friday (\$21.80, 2¾ hours), which can drop folks off at **Karoonda Park**.

Errinundra National Park

Errinundra National Park contains Victoria's largest cool-temperate rainforest and is one of east Gippsland's most outstanding natural areas. The gorgeous

SAVING EAST GIPPSLAND'S FORESTS

A former logging town, the tiny township of **Goongerah** on the northwest boundary of Errinundra National Park now serves as a stronghold for environmentalists, conservationists, activists, self-sufficient eco-farmers and people who live off-grid. A number of local conservation groups are based here campaigning to save East Gippsland forests and endangered species such as the potoroo, spot-tailed quoll, greater glider, powerful owl and Orbost spiny crayfish.

The **Goongerah Environment Centre** (GECO; ☎ 0414 199 645, 03-5154 0174; www.geco.org.au; 7203 Bonang Rd) ☼ may be of interest to travellers: every three months they arrange 'citizen science' survey camps where volunteers can assist with the counting of endangered species residing in potential logging areas. Volunteers either camp at the free Goongerah camping ground or stay at the centre itself (vegetarian meals are provided for \$5). Keep an eye on its website for upcoming events.

Environment East Gippsland (☎ 03-5154 0145; www.eastgippsland.net.au; Goongerah) ☼ is another group in Goongerah open to visitors; you can book accommodation at their **Tin Chalet** (p273) eco-cottage which couldn't look more Australian.

EAST GIPPSLAND RAIL TRAIL

The **East Gippsland Rail Trail** (www.eastgippslandrailtrail.com.au) is a 94km walking/cycling path along the former railway line between Bairnsdale and Orbost, passing through Bruthen and Nowa Nowa, and close to a number of other small communities. On a bike the trail can comfortably be done in two days, but allow longer to explore the countryside and perhaps detour on the Gippsland Lakes Discovery Trail to Lakes Entrance.

The East Gippsland Rail Trail passes through undulating farmland, temperate rain-forest, the Colquhoun Forest and some impressive timber bridges. Arty Nowa Nowa is a real biking community, with a mountain bike park and trails leading off the main rail trail. There are plans to extend the trail from Orbost down to Marlo along the Snowy River.

For those without their own bike, **Snowy River Cycling** (p274) offers self-guided tours with a map and bike (\$40), plus luggage transport (\$15); return transport is \$50. They also run guided cycle adventures.

forests surrounding the park are a constant battleground between loggers and environmentalists.


The national park covers an area of 256 sq km and has three granite outcrops that extend into the cloud, resulting in high rainfall, deep, fertile soils and a network of creeks and rivers that flow north, south and east. The park has several climatic zones – some areas of the park are quite dry, while its peaks regularly receive snow. This is a rich habitat for native birds and animals, which include many rare and endangered species such as the potoroo.

Nestled by the edge of the national park is tiny **Goongerah** (population 50), a thriving community for conservationists.

Sights & Activities

You can explore the park with a combination of scenic drives and short- and medium-length walks. **Mt Ellery** has spectacular views; **Errinundra Saddle** has a rainforest boardwalk; and from **Ocean View Lookout** there are stunning views down the Goolgook River as far as the town of Bemm River. The park also has **mountain plum pines**, some of which are more than 400 years old and easily accessible from Goonmirk Rocks Rd.

Sleeping

Tin Chalet COTTAGE \$
(03-5154 0145; Goongerah; houses \$90)  A genuine rustic getaway is this solar-powered, double-storey cottage constructed from corrugated iron. It features a charming interior with wood-fire stove, reclaimed timber and plenty of character. By the river and surrounded by forest, it's set on an organic farm and orchard run by Jill Redwood,

a well-known environmentalist who set up Environment East Gippsland (p272).

Goongerah Camp Site CAMPGROUND \$
(free) The most accessible of the free camping grounds on the park's edges is Goongerah, a 1½ hour's drive north of Orbost. It's within a state forest on the edge of the park, set along the Brodribb River, from which you are able to drink.

Frosty Hollow Camp Site CAMPGROUND \$
(03 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; sites free) This is the only camping area within the national park, with basic sites (nonflush toilets, no fireplaces) along the eastern side. The only way to reach the campsite is along unsealed tracks into the park off the Bonang Rd north of Goongerah.

Getting There & Away

Errinundra National Park lies approximately 490km east of Melbourne. The main access roads to the park are Bonang Rd from Orbost and Errinundra Rd from Club Terrace. Bonang Rd passes along the western side of the park, while Errinundra Rd passes through the centre. Roads within the park are all unsealed, but are 2WD accessible. Road conditions are variable. Expect seasonal closures between June and November, though roads can deteriorate quickly at any time of year after rain and are often closed or impassable after floods (check Parks Victoria in Orbost or Bendoc first). Also watch out for logging trucks when driving.

Orbost

POP 2493

Servicing the surrounding farming and forest areas, Orbost is a relaxed country town that's gaining popularity as the start (or end)

point of the East Gippsland Rail Trail. While few people spend the night here it's a good stopover for a meal (or to check out the microbrewery) for those en route to the mountains or the beach.

Sights & Activities

Snowy River Cycling

CYCLING

(☎ 0428 556 088; www.snowyrivercycling.com.au; 7 Forest Rd; per day \$40) A specialist in Gippsland's rail trails, particularly the **East Gippsland Rail Trail** (p273) that passes through Orbost, this bike operator arranges tours and mountain-bike hire. It shares space with the Sailors Grave brewery.

Eating & Drinking

Morganics

CAFE \$

(☎ 03-5154 2188; 36a Nicholson St; dishes from \$5; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) ☹ A hang-out for Gippsland greenies is this earthy cafe and organic grocer that also hosts live gigs. Good coffee, toasted sandwiches and cheese-and-vegetarian pies.

Sailors Grave Brewing

MICROBREWERY

(☎ 0466 331 936; www.sailorsgravebrewing.com; 7 Forest Rd; ☺ by appointment) Set up in an old butter factory, this microbrewery is notable for its inventive brews – from a Gose produced using local seaweed to a whisky sour Berliner Weisse. Other core beers include IPA and southern right ale. While it plans to open a taproom in the future, for the moment you'll need to call ahead to sample its range.

Information

Orbost Visitor Information Centre (☎ 03-5154 2424; 39 Nicholson St; ☺ 9am-5pm) is in the historic 1872 Slab Hut relocated from Buchan. It has an open fire and books on local history for sale.

Getting There & Away

Car Most travellers fly through as the Princes Hwy passes just south of the town. The Bonang Rd heads north towards the Snowy River and Errinundra National Parks, and Marlo Rd follows the Snowy River south to Marlo and continues along the coast to Cape Conran Coastal Park.

Bicycle Orbost is the start or finishing point of the **East Gippsland Rail Trail** (p273).

Bus There are three buses a day from Bairnsdale (\$19, one hour 40 minutes).

Cape Conran Coastal Park

This blissfully undeveloped part of the coast is one of Gippsland's most beautiful corners, with long stretches of remote white-sand beaches. The 19km coastal route from Marlo to Cape Conran is particularly pretty, bordered by banksia trees, grass plains, sand dunes and the ocean.

Activities

Cape Conran is a fabulous spot for walking. One favourite is the nature trail that meets up with the East Cape Boardwalk, where signage gives you a glimpse into how Indigenous peoples lived in this area. Following an indigenous theme, take the West Cape Rd off Cape Conran Rd to **Salmon Rocks**, where there's an Aboriginal **shell midden** dated at more than 10,000 years old.

For some relaxed swimming, canoeing and fishing, head to the Yerrung River, which shadows the coast east of the cape and can be reached along Yerrung River Rd. There's good surfing at West Cape Beach, extending northwest from the cape and accessible from West Cape Rd. For qualified divers, Marlo-based **Cross Diving Services** (☎ 03-5154 8554, 0407 362 960; www.crossdiving.com.au; 20 Ricardo Dr; ☺ shore dives with/without equipment hire \$80/15, boat dives \$100/150, 4-day open course \$550) offers dives on most weekends.

Sleeping

Parks Victoria has three excellent privately managed accommodation options in Cape Conran Coastal Park – offering camping, cabins and safari-style tented camping, which are all privately managed.

Banksia Bluff Camping Area

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎ 03-5154 8438; www.conran.net.au; Marlo-Conran Rd; unpowered sites \$35.90-39.90) Run by Parks Victoria, this excellent privately managed camping ground is right by the foreshore. Its generous sites are surrounded by banksia woodlands offering shade and privacy. It has flush toilets, cold showers and a few fireplaces, but you'll need to bring drinking water. A ballot is held for using sites over the Christmas period.

Cape Conran Wilderness Retreat

TENTED CAMP \$\$

(☎ 03-5154 8438; www.conran.net.au; d \$191.20) Nestled in the bush by the sand dunes, these stylish safari tents are a great option, offering

all the simplicity of camping, but with comfortable beds and a deck outside your flywire door. Two-night minimum stay on weekends.

Cape Conran

Coastal Park Cabins

CABIN \$\$

(☎03-5154 8438; www.conran.net.au; cabins \$171.70-237.20) These self-contained cabins, which can sleep up to eight people, are surrounded by bush and just 200m from the beach. Built from local timbers, the cabins are like oversized cubby houses, with lofty mezzanines for sleeping.

West Cape Cabins

CABIN \$\$

(☎03-5154 8296; www.westcapecabins.com; 1547 Cape Conran Rd; d \$195-255) Crafted from locally grown or recycled wood, these self-contained cabins a few kilometres from the park are works of art. The timbers are all labelled with their species, and even the queen-sized bed bases are made from tree trunks. The outdoor spa baths add to the joy. The larger cottage sleeps eight. It's a 15-minute walk through coastal bush to an isolated beach.

Getting There & Away

Cape Conran Coastal Park lies south of the Princes Hwy, 405km from Melbourne. The well-signposted turn-off from the highway lies just east of the small settlement of Cabbage Tree. The park is around 15km south of the turn-off along Cabbage Tree-Conran Rd.

Mallacoota

POPULATION 1032

One of Gippsland's, and indeed Victoria's, little gems, Mallacoota is the state's most easterly town, snuggled on the vast Mallacoota Inlet and surrounded by the tumbling hills and beachside dunes of beautiful Croajingolong National Park. Those prepared to come this far are treated to long, empty, ocean-surf beaches, tidal estuaries and swimming, fishing and boating on the inlet.

It's a good place for wildlife too with plentiful kangaroos, as well as koalas and echidnas.

Sights & Activities

The calm estuarine waters of Mallacoota Inlet have more than 300km of shoreline – hiring a boat is the best way to explore, and there are plenty of great walks along the water's edge.

For good surf, head to Bastion Point or Tip Beach. Get in touch with Surf Shack for

board rental and surf classes. There's swimmable surf and some sheltered water at Betka Beach, which is patrolled during Christmas school holidays. There are also good swimming spots along the beaches of the foreshore reserve, at Bastion Point (patrolled by a surf life-saving club) and at Quarry Beach.

Gabo Island

ISLAND

On Gabo Island, 14km offshore from Mallacoota, the windswept 154-hectare **Gabo Island Lightstation Reserve** is home to seabirds and one of the world's largest colonies of little penguins, far outnumbering those on Phillip Island. Whales, dolphins and fur seals are regularly sighted offshore. The island has an operating **lighthouse**, built in 1862 and the tallest in the southern hemisphere – you can stay in the old keepers' cottages (p276) here.

Transport out here however is an issue, with boat access often restricted due to bad weather; Wilderness Coast Ocean Charters (p276) and Gabo Island Escapes (p276) are your best bet.

While there no longer direct flights offered to Gabo Island from Mallacoota, **Merimbula Air Services** (☎02-6495 1074; www.mairserv.com.au) can arrange a drop-off and pickup service, but unless you have a group, it certainly ain't cheap (four seater one-way \$775).

Mallacoota Equipment Hire

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(☎0488 329 611; www.mallacootahire.com.au; Buckland Dr, Mallacoota Foreshore Caravan Park; per hr/day bike hire from \$10/40, kayaks \$15/75; ☎9am-5pm) Hires bikes, kayaks and fishing gear, and has plenty of ideas for trails and itineraries. Can deliver bikes to where you're staying.

Mallacoota Hire Boats

BOATING

(☎0438 447 558; www.mallacootahireboats.com; 10 Buckland Dr, motorboats per 2/8hr \$70/160, kayaks 1/2 people per 2hr \$30/50) Hires out kayaks, motorboats, pedal boats and fishing equipment. No boat licence required; cash only. They're based out of Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park (p276).

Tours

★ Wilderness Coast Ocean Charters

BOATING

(☎0417 398 068, 03-5158 0701) Runs trips to Gabo Island (p275) – \$60, 30 minutes, minimum six people – for a five-hour tour, which can include a tour of the lighthouse

for \$10. They also run occasional trips down the coast to view the seal colony off Wingan Inlet if there's enough demand.

Gabo Island Escapes

BOATING

(☎ 0437 221 694, 03-5158 0605; per person \$100) Runs boat trips to Gabo Island (p275) for around \$100 a head (minimum six people) including lighthouse tours.

Surf Shack

SURFING

(☎ 03-5158 0909; www.surfshack.com.au; 41 Maurice Ave; surf lessons per person \$60, rental per half/full day surfboard \$25/35, SUP \$35/50; ☼ 9am-5pm) Runs surf lessons at nearby Bastion Point or Cape Conran, normally on Tuesday and Thursday (or by appointment); minimum three people. Otherwise they hire out surfboards, SUPs and wetsuits (per half/full day \$15/20).

MV Loch-Ard

CRUISE

(☎ 0438 580 708; www.mallacootacruises.com; Main Wharf, 1 Buckland Dr; adult/child 2hr cruises \$30/15) Runs several inlet cruises, including wildlife spotting and a twilight cruise on the *MV Loch-Ard*, a 1910 heritage passenger boat.



Sleeping

Shady Gully Caravan Park

CARAVAN PARK \$

(☎ 03-5158 0362; www.mallacootacaravanpark.com; 95 Mallacoota-Genoa Rd; unpowered/powered sites from \$23/28, cabins with shared/private bathroom from \$60/80; ☼☼☼☼) Run by friendly management, this bush caravan park is full of kangaroos and birdlife. There's a good variety of campsites and cabins, including uniquely designed cylindrical units made of corrugated iron and kitted out with all the mod cons. I

Mallacoota Foreshore

Holiday Park

CARAVAN PARK \$

(☎ 03-5158 0300; cnr Allan Dr & Maurice Ave; unpowered sites \$16.60-33, powered sites \$23.70-53; ☼) Curling around the waterfront, the grassy sites here morph into one of Victoria's most sociable and scenic caravan parks, with sublime views of the inlet and its resident population of black swans and pelicans. No cabins, but the best of Mallacoota's many parks for campers. Reception is across the road in the same building as the visitor information centre.

★ Adobe Abodes

APARTMENT \$\$

(☎ 0499 777 968; www.adobeabodes.com.au; 17-19 Karbeethong Ave; d \$95-145, extra person \$15) ☼ These unique mud-brick self-contained units in Karbeethong are something spe-

cial. With an emphasis on recycling and eco-friendliness, the flats have solar hot water and guests are encouraged to compost their kitchen scraps. The array of whimsical apartments are comfortable and well equipped, and come with welcome baskets of wine and chocolate, and wonderful views. They promote themselves proudly as a wi-fi free zone.

★ Karbeethong Lodge

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎ 03-5158 0411; www.karbeethonglodge.com.au; 16 Schnapper Point Dr; r incl breakfast \$100-150) It's hard not to be overcome by a sense of serenity as you rest on the broad verandahs of this early 1900s timber guesthouse, which give uninterrupted views over Mallacoota Inlet and the expansive gardens. The large guest lounge and dining room have an open fire and period furnishings, there's a mammoth kitchen and the pastel-toned bedrooms are small but tastefully decorated.

Gabo Island Lighthouse

COTTAGE \$\$

(☎ 03-8427 2123, Parks Victoria 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; up to 8 people \$323.70-359.70) For a truly wild experience head out to stay at this remote lighthouse. Accommodation is available in the historic three-bedroom assistant lighthouse keeper's residence. There's a two-night minimum stay and a ballot for use during the Christmas and Easter holidays; take note there's no refunds if you're unable to reach the island (or get stranded there) during inclement weather.

Mallacoota Wilderness

Houseboats

HOUSEBOAT \$\$\$

(☎ 0409 924 016; www.mallacootawildernesshouseboats.com.au; Karbeethong Jetty; 4 nights midweek from \$800, weekly from \$1250) These six-berth houseboats are not as luxurious as the ones you'll find on the Murray, but they are the perfect way to explore Mallacoota's waterways, and they are economical for a group or family. They're fully self-contained with kitchen, fridge and hot-water showers. There's a \$500 deposit from which fuel costs are deducted upon return. No boat licence required.



Eating & Drinking

Croajingolong Cafe

CAFE \$

(☎ 03-5158 0098; Shop 3, 14 Allan Dr; mains \$10-19; ☼ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) Overlooking the inlet, this cafe has a vintage nautical theme and an outdoor terrace with views over the water; the

GIPPSLAND OFF-ROAD TOURS

Most of the Snowy River and Errinundra National Parks are inaccessible with a 2WD, and sections of Croajingolong are only open to a limited number of walkers. An easier way to see these beautiful wilderness areas is with an organised tour.

An ecotourism award winner, **Gippsland High Country Tours** (☎ 03-5157 5556; www.gippslandhigh-countrytours.com.au) is an East Gippsland-based company running easy, moderate and challenging five- to seven-day hikes in Errinundra, Snowy River and Croajingolong National Parks. The Croajingolong trips include three nights' accommodation in the Point Hicks Lighthouse (p278). There's also a five-day birdwatching tour in Snowy River country.

Snowy River Expeditions (p272) is an established company running adventure tours including rafting trips, abseiling or caving trips.

place to spread out the newspaper over coffee, toasted sandwiches or an all-day breakfast.

★ Lucy's

ASIAN \$\$

(☎ 03-5158 0666; 64 Maurice Ave; mains \$8-28; ☺ 8am-8pm) Lucy's is popular for delicious and great-value homemade rice noodles with chicken, prawn or abalone, as well as dumplings stuffed with ingredients from the garden. It's also good for breakfast.

Mallacoota Hotel

PUB

(☎ 03-5158 0455; www.mallacootahotel.com.au; 51-55 Maurice Ave; ☺ noon-10pm) The local pub is a popular spot for a drink with a cosy indoor bar and a wonderful outdoor beer garden full of palm trees. Its bistro serves hearty meals (mains \$20 to \$40) from its varied menu, with reliable favourites being the chicken parma, Gippsland steak and pale ale fish and chips. Bands play regularly in summer.

There's motel pub accommodation (single/double from \$100/110) here too.

Information

Mallacoota Visitor Centre (☎ 03-5158 0800, 03-5158 0116, 0408 315 615; www.visitmallacoota.com.au; cnr Allan Dr & Maurice Ave; ☺ 9am-5pm; ♿) On the main strip across from the water is this extremely helpful tourist cen-

tre with a ton of info on the area and its walking trails, and a handy booklet on local sights (\$1). Has wi-fi and internet access too.

i Getting There & Away

Mallacoota is 23km southeast of Genoa (on the Princes Hwy), which is 492km from Melbourne. Take the train to Bairnsdale (3¼ hours), then the V/Line bus to Genoa (\$51.80, 3½ hours, one daily). The Mallacoota-Genoa bus meets the V/Line coach on Monday, Thursday and Friday, plus Sunday during school holidays, and runs to Mallacoota (\$3.20, 30 minutes).

Croajingolong National Park

Croajingolong is one of Australia's finest coastal wilderness national parks, recognised by its listing as a World Biosphere Reserve by Unesco (one of 14 in Australia). The park covers 875 sq km, stretching for about 100km from the town of Bemm River to the NSW border. Magnificent, unspoiled beaches, inlets, estuaries and forests make it an ideal park for camping, walking, swimming and surfing. The five inlets, **Sydenham, Tamboon, Mueller, Wingan** and **Mallacoota** (the largest and most accessible), are popular canoeing and fishing spots.

Two sections of the park have been declared wilderness areas (which means no vehicles, access to a limited number of walkers only and permits required): the **Cape Howe Wilderness Area**, between Mallacoota Inlet and the NSW border; and the **Sandpatch Wilderness Area**, between Wingan Inlet and Shipwreck Creek.

👁 Sights & Activities

Point Hicks was the first part of Australia to be spotted by Captain Cook and the *Endeavour* crew in 1770, and was named after Lieutenant Zachary Hicks. There's a lighthouse (p278) here and accommodation in the old cottages (p278). You can still see remains of the *SS Saros*, which ran ashore in 1937, on a short walk from the lighthouse.

Croajingolong is a birdwatcher's paradise, with more than 300 recorded species (including glossy black cockatoos and the rare ground parrot), while the inland waterways are home to myriad waterbirds, such as the delicate azure kingfisher and the magnificent sea eagle. There are also many small mammals here, including possums, bandicoots and gliders, as well as some huge goannas.

Park vegetation ranges from typical coastal landscapes to thick eucalyptus forests, with areas of warm-temperate rainforest. The heathland areas are filled with impressive displays of orchids and wild flowers in the spring.

The **Wilderness Coast Walk** runs for 100km between the eastern shores of Sydenham Inlet and Wonboyn in the Nadgee Nature Reserve, across the border in New South Wales. You can walk shorter sections of the trail; Thurra River is a good starting point, making for an easy-to-medium hike (59km, five days) to Mallacoota.

Point Hicks Lighthouse

LIGHTHOUSE

(☎10am-3pm Mon-Fri 03-5158 4268; www.pointhicks.com.au; Lighthouse Track, Tamboon; adult/child/family \$7/4/20; ☼ tours 1pm, Fri-Sun) Climb to the top of this remote 1890 lighthouse for fantastic views and interesting stories, including one about the ghost of Kristoffer-son, a former lighthouse keeper. Note there's no vehicle access to the lighthouse, so it's a 2.2km walk to get here from the car park.

Sleeping

Mueller Inlet

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎03-5158 4268; www.pointhicks.com.au; unpowered sites from \$25) The calm waters here are fantastic for kayaking and swimming, and the camp sites are only a few metres from the water. It has eight sites, three of them walk-in, but no fireplaces. There's no vegetation to provide privacy, but outside Christmas and Easter holidays it's usually quiet. Bookings are made through Point Hicks Lighthouse (p278).

Thurra River

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎03-5158 4268; www.pointhicks.com.au; unpowered sites from \$25) This is the largest of the park's camping grounds, with 46 well-designed sites stretched along the foreshore from the river towards the lighthouse. Most of the sites are separated by bush, and there are communal fireplaces and pit toilets. Bookings are made through Point Hicks Lighthouse. (p278)

Shipwreck Creek

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; unpowered sites from \$26.50) Only 15km from Malla-coota, this is a beautiful camping ground set in forest above a sandy beach. It's a small area with just five sites, drop toilets and fireplaces (BYO wood) and there are lots of short walks to do here. Bookings through Parks Victoria.

Wingan Inlet

CAMPGROUND \$

(☎13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; unpowered sites from \$25.80) This serene and secluded camping ground has 24 sites among superb sandy beaches and great walks. The Wingan River Walk (5km, 2½ hours return) through rainforest has great waterholes for swimming. Bookings through Parks Victoria (p278).

Point Hicks Lighthouse

COTTAGE \$\$

(☎03-5156 0432; www.pointhicks.com.au; bungalows \$120-150, cottages \$360-550) This remote lighthouse has two comfortable, heritage-listed cottages and one double bungalow, which originally housed the assistant lighthouse keepers. The cottages sleep six people, and have sensational ocean views and wood-burning fireplaces. Bring along your own bedding and towels, or you can hire it for \$15 per person. To get here you'll need to walk 2.2km from the car park.

Getting There & Away

Croajingolong National Park lies 492km east of Melbourne. Unsealed access roads of varying quality lead south off Princes Hwy and into the park from various points between Cann River and the NSW border. Among these are tracks leading to camping grounds at Wingan Inlet, Mueller Inlet, Thurra River and Shipwreck Creek.

Apart from Mallacoota Rd, all of the access roads are unsealed and can be very rough in winter, so check road conditions with Parks Victoria in **Cann River** (☎13 19 63, 03-5158 6351; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Cann River) or **Mallacoota** (☎13 19 63, 03-8427 2123; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Mallacoota) before venturing on, especially during or after rain.

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