ROUGH GUIDES

THE ROUGH GUIDE to Scotland

EXPERT ADVICE • FULL COVERAGE • EASY TO USE

INSIDE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION What to see, what not to miss, itineraries and more – everything you need to get started

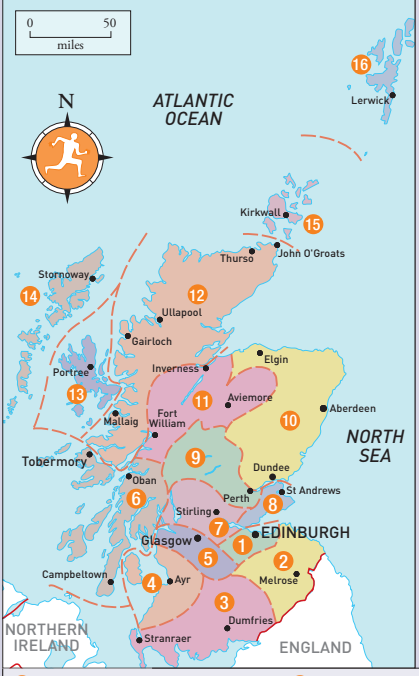
BASICS Pre-departure tips and practical information

THE GUIDE Comprehensive, in-depth guide to Scotland, with area highlights and full-colour maps throughout

CONTEXTS History and recommended books, plus a useful language section

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide with the ★ symbol

Scotland chapters



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

Scotland

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OPPOSITE OLD MAN OF STORR, TROTTERNISH PENINSULA **PREVIOUS PAGE** THE RIVERSIDE MUSEUM, GLASGOW

Introduction to Scotland

As befits a nation that produces infinite variations on tartan and whisky, simple definitions don't really suit Scotland. Clichéd images of the place abound – postcards of wee Highland terriers, tartan tins of shortbread, diamond-patterned golf jerseys – and they drive many Scots apoplectic. Yet Scotland has a habit of delivering on its classic images. In some parts ruined castles really do perch on almost every hilltop. In summer the glens really do turn purple with heather and if you end up in a village on gala day, the chances are a formation of bagpipers will come marching down the street.

The complexity of Scotland can be hard to unravel: somewhere deep in its genes a generous dose of romantic **Celtic** hedonism blends (somehow) with stern **Calvinist** prudence. It's a country where the losers of battles (and football games) are more romanticized than the winners. There's little more splendid here than the scenery, yet half the time it's hidden under a pall of drizzle. The country's major contribution to medieval warfare was the chaotic charge of the half-naked Highlander, yet in modern times it has given the world steam power, the television and penicillin. Chefs throughout Europe rhapsodize over Scottish langoustine and Aberdeen Angus steaks, while back at home there is still a solid market for deep-fried pizza.

Naturally, the tourist industry tends to play up the heritage, but beyond the nostalgia lies a modern, dynamic nation. **Oil** and **nanotechnology** now matter more to the Scottish economy than fishing or Harris tweed. Edinburgh still has its medieval Royal Mile, but just as many folk are drawn by its **nightclubs** and modern restaurants, while out in the Hebrides, the locals are more likely to be building websites than shearing sheep. Even the Highland huntin' shootin' fishin' set are outnumbered these days by **mountain bikers** and wide-eyed whale-watchers. **Outdoor music festivals** draw thousands of revellers, but the folk band rocking the ceilidh tent with accordions and an electric fiddle are usually just as popular as the pop stars on the main stage.

Stuck in the far northwest corner of Europe, Scotland is remote, but it's not isolated. The inspiring emptiness of the wild northwest coast lies barely three hours from

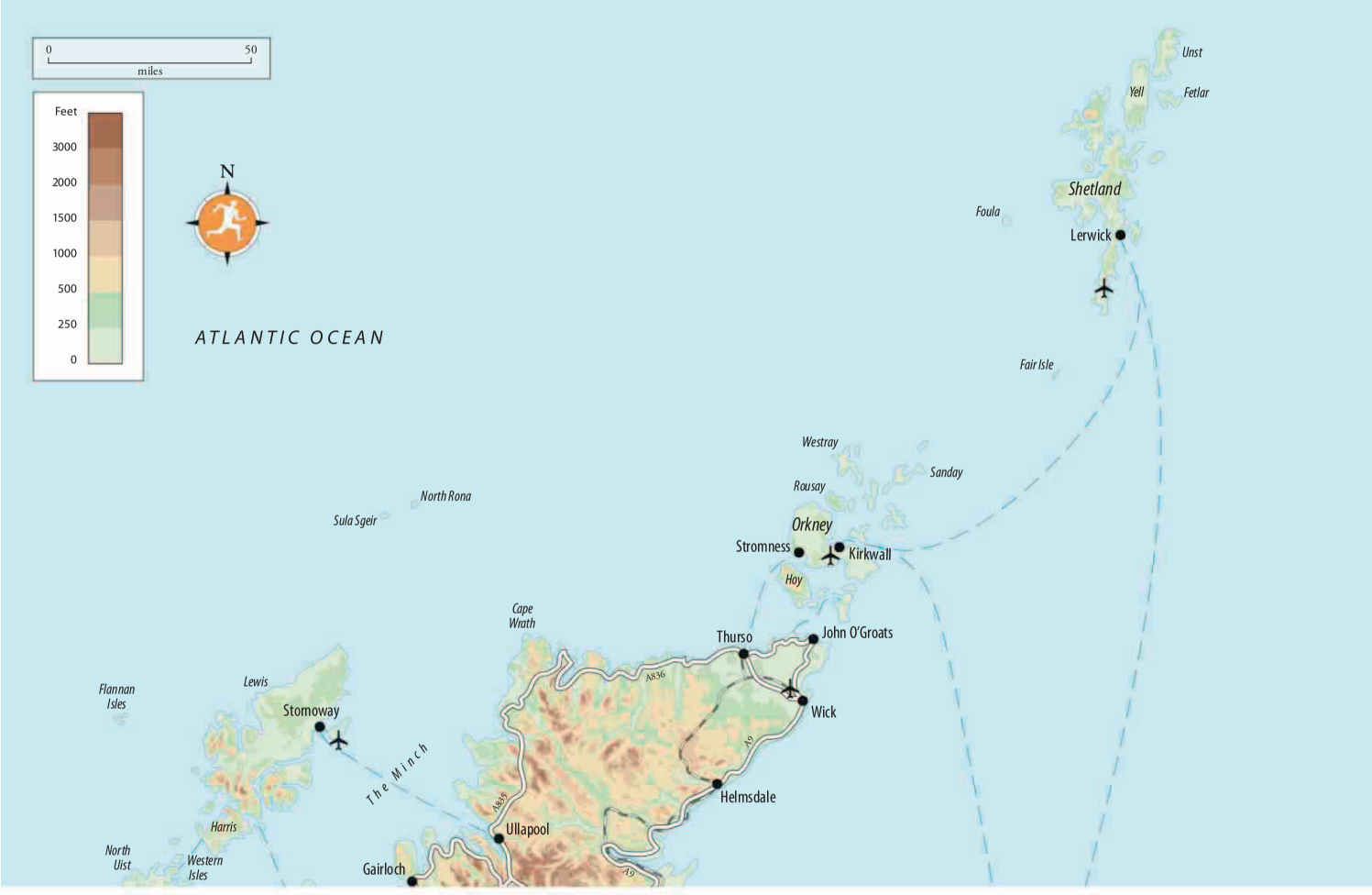
ABOVE GLEN COE **RIGHT** T IN THE PARK (P.289)

Edinburgh and Glasgow, two of Britain's most vibrant urban centres. Ancient ties to Ireland, Scandinavia, France and the Netherlands mean that – compared with the English at least – Scots are generally enthusiastic about the **European Union**, which has poured money into infrastructure and cultural projects, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. By contrast, Scotland's relationship with the "auld enemy", England, remains as problematic as ever. The **Scottish Parliament** in Edinburgh has helped to focus Scottish minds on Scottish affairs and, by the time you read this, Scotland may even be a separate nation if nationalists win an **independence referendum** on 18 September, 2014. Even if that doesn't happen, Scots are likely to continue to view matters south of the border with a mixture of exaggerated disdain and well-hidden envy. Open hostility is rare, but ask for a "full English breakfast" and you'll quickly be put right.

Where to go

Even if you're planning a short visit, it's perfectly possible to combine a stay in either Edinburgh or Glasgow with a brief foray into the Highlands. With more time, a greater variety of **landscapes** in Scotland are available, but there's no escaping the fact that travel in the more remote regions of Scotland takes time even with your own transport, and – in the case of the islands – money. If you plan to spend most of your time in the countryside, concentrate on just one or two areas for a more rewarding visit.

The initial focus for many visitors to Scotland is the capital, **Edinburgh**, a dramatically handsome and engaging city famous for its castle and historic Old Town. Come in August and you'll find the city transformed by the Edinburgh Festival, the largest arts festival in the world. An hour's travel to the west, the country's biggest city, **Glasgow**, is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Kirkwall
Hoy
Cape Wrath
Thurso
John O'Groats
A836
Wick
A9
Helmsdale
Flannan Isles
Lewis
Stornoway
The Minch
A835
Ullapool
Harris
North Uist
Western Isles
Gairloch
A9

Benbecula
South Uist
Barra
Skye
Rùm
Coll
Tiree
Mull
Colonsay
Jura
Islay
Bute
Arran
Portree
Kyle of Lochalsh
Mallaig
Fort William
Oban
Campbeltown
Ballycastle
Larne
Belfast
Stranraer
Ayr
Crianlarich
Callander
Stirling
Glasgow
Dumfries
Kirkcudbright
Carlisle
Manchester
Inverness
Moray Firth
Elgin
Fraserburgh
Aberlour
Grantown-on-Spey
Aviemore
GREAT GLEN
Loch Ness
THE
Braemar
Aberdeen
Montrose
Pitlochry
Dundee
Perth
St Andrews
Loch Lomond
Firth of Forth
EDINBURGH
Galashiels
Hawick
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Newcastle upon Tyne
York
Amsterdam
NORTHERN IRELAND
ENGLAND
NORTH SEA
A832
A835
A96
A98
A90
A99
A86
A82
A87
A830
A9
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A92
A85
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A1
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FACT FILE

• Scotland contains over 31,460 **lochs**, and of its 790 **islands**, 130 are inhabited. The highest point is the summit of Ben Nevis (4406ft), while the bottom of Loch Morar is 1017 feet below sea level.

• Scotland itself has a **population** of 5.3 million (1.2 percent of whom, roughly 60,000 people, speak **Gaelic**). However, nearly 28 million **Americans** define themselves as having Scottish ancestry too, including both Presidents Bush. Other famous names with Scots blood include Theodore Roosevelt, Jack Daniels, John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe and Jim Morrison.

• Between 2009 and 2010, four groups of **beavers** were released in Knapdale Forest, Argyll. If some environmentalists have their way, **lynx**, **wolves** and even **bears** will be reintroduced into Scotland too. The argument goes that they can help control deer numbers, and so protect woodland. Unsurprisingly, sheep farmers aren't quite so keen.

• Never mind Nessie, **midges** are the real monsters of the Highlands. These tiny summer blood-suckers bite hardest from mid-May to August in calm cloudy conditions, especially at dawn and dusk. There's even a Midge Forecast (Ⓦ midgeforecast.co.uk).

quite different in character. Once a sprawling industrial metropolis, it now has a lively social and cultural life to match its impressive architectural heritage. Other urban centres are inevitably overshadowed by the big two, although the transformation from industrial grey to cultural colour is injecting life into **Dundee**, while there's a defiant separateness to **Aberdeen**, with its silvery granite architecture and port. Other centres serve more as transport or service hubs to the emptier landscapes beyond, though some contain compelling attractions such as the wonderful castle in **Stirling** or the Burns' monuments in **Ayr**.

You don't have to travel far north of the Glasgow–Edinburgh axis to find the first hints of **Highland** landscape, a divide marked by the Highland Boundary Fault, which cuts across central Scotland. The lochs, hills and wooded glens of the **Trossachs** and **Loch Lomond** are the most easily reached and correspondingly busier. Further north, **Perthshire** and the Grampian hills of **Angus** and **Deeside** show the Scottish countryside at its richest, with colourful woodlands and long glens rising up to distinctive mountain peaks. South of Inverness the **Cairngorm** massif hints at the raw wilderness Scotland still provides, which is at its most spectacular in the north and western Highlands. To get to the far north you'll have to cross the **Great Glen**, an ancient geological fissure which cuts right across the country from Ben Nevis to **Loch Ness**, a moody stretch of water rather choked with tourists hoping for a glimpse of its monster. Arguably, Scotland's most memorable scenery is to be found on the jagged west coast, stretching from **Argyll** all the way north to **Wester Ross** and the hills of Assynt.

Not all of central and northern Scotland is rugged Highlands, however. The east coast in particular mixes fertile farmland with pretty stone-built fishing villages and golf courses – none more famous than that at the university town of **St Andrews**, the spiritual home of the game. Elsewhere, the whisky trail of **Speyside** and the castles and Pictish stones of the **northeast** provide themes for exploration, while in the southern part of the country, the rolling hills and ruined abbeys of the **Borders** offer a refreshingly untouristy vision of rural Scotland.

FROM TOP DEER, WESTER ROSS (P.452); SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, EDINBURGH (P.80)

NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND
SCOTTISH
NATIONAL
GALLERY
Masterpieces
MOUNT STUART
THE BUTE COLLECTION
Free Admission

The splendour of the Highlands would be bare without the **islands** off the west and north coasts. Assorted in size, flavour and accessibility, the long chain of rocky Hebrides which necklace Scotland's Atlantic shoreline includes **Mull** and its nearby pilgrimage centre of **Iona**; **Islay** and **Jura**, famous for their wildlife and whisky; **Skye**, the most visited of the Hebrides, where the snow-tipped peaks of the Cuillin rise above deep sea lochs; and the **Western Isles**, an elongated archipelago that is the country's last bastion of Gaelic language and culture. Off the north coast, **Orkney** and **Shetland**, both with a rich Norse heritage, differ both from each other and quite distinctly from mainland Scotland in dialect and culture – far-flung islands buffeted by wind and sea that offer some of the country's wildest scenery, finest birdwatching and best archeological sites.

When to go

The **summer** months – June, July and August – are high season, with local school holidays making July and early August the busiest period. While the weather is

MUNRO-BAGGING

As the Inuit have hundreds of words for snow, so a **hill** is rarely just a hill in Scotland. Depending on where you are, what it's shaped like and how high it is, a hill might be a ben, a mount, a law, a pen, a brae or even a pap (and that's without talking about the Gaelic *beinn*, *cnoc*, *creag*, *meall*, *sgurr* or *stob*). Even more confusing are "**Munros**". These are the Scottish hills over 3000ft high, defined by a list first drawn up by one Sir Hugh Munro in 1891. You "bag" a Munro by walking to the top of it, and once you've bagged all **284** you can call yourself a Munroist and let your chiropodist retire in peace. Actually, Munro-bagging at heart is less about conquering than appreciating the great Scottish outdoors. And if you do meet Sir Hugh's challenge, you can then start on the "Corbetts" (hills between 2500–2999ft) and "Donalds" (hills above 2000ft).

Author Picks

Scotland has its poster places: Edinburgh's Royal Mile or Eilean Donan castle for example. But the cherished memories of a country are usually more personal discoveries. Here are those of Rough Guides' authors as they travelled down every lane and supped in every pub in the cause of researching this guide.

Mill on the Clyde Glasgow's prosperity wasn't just built on iron and ships. In the late eighteenth century, the Utopian mill village of New Lanark (see p.219) inspired the Cooperative movement and introduced adult education.

Seafood sensation Look for the wooden shack in Crail harbour (see p.310), select your lobster (caught that day), and have it cooked to order. Seafood doesn't get fresher than this.

Subculture Release your inner bohemian in the caverns beneath Edinburgh's South Bridge, rediscovered after two hundred lost years and turned into entertainments venue *The Caves* (p.98).

Skye crafts The mountains are marvellous, but Skye also appeals for its modern art and crafts scenes; pick up a booklet of galleries in Portree tourist office (p.492) or visit Ⓦ art-skye.co.uk.

Autumn blaze Catch Dawyck's Botanic Garden (p.130) in all its shimmering, spectral glory and inhale the scent of summer's retreat. All set against a stunning hillside backdrop beside a rushing burn.

Stonehaven This coastal town (p.373), best known for its annual folk festival, is also near Scotland's finest medieval ruin, Dunnottar Castle.

Beaver Trial Beavers are back in Scotland after a four-hundred-year absence and the Beaver Trial at Knapdale (see p.259) is a rare opportunity to seek out these hard-working creatures in the wild – the 60ft-long dam is a feat of engineering.

Flying visit The trip in an eight-seater plane to North Ronaldsay, Orkney (p.552), is worth it to see seaweed-eating sheep, even without a night at the eco-friendly bird observatory.

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.

FROM TOP DUNNOTTAR CASTLE (P.374); LOBSTER CREELS, CRAIL (P.310); NEW LIGHTHOUSE, NORTH RONALDSAY (P.552)

THE WEATHER

"There's no such thing as bad weather, only inadequate clothing", the poet laureate Ted Hughes is alleged to have said when asked why he liked holidaying on Scotland's west coast. For those who don't share Hughes' attitude, the **weather** is probably the single biggest factor to put you off visiting Scotland. It's not that it's always bad, it's just that it is **unpredictable**: you could just as easily enjoy a week of fabulous sunshine in early April while the rest of the UK was sodden as suffer a week of low-lying fog and drizzle in high summer.

No surprise then that six of the ten wettest counties in the UK are here. The reason is location: almost every **low pressure system** that barrels east out of the North Atlantic passes over Scotland, often forced north by the Azores' high pressure system. The good news is that such systems tend to blow over rapidly. Out in the islands, they say you can get all four seasons in a day. And even if the weather's not necessarily good, it's generally interesting – often exhilarating or dramatic, and certainly photogenic. And when the **sun** finally comes out all is forgiven. A week spent in thick mist is transformed when the clouds lift to reveal a majestic mountain range or a group of islands far offshore.

unpredictable, days are generally warm and, most importantly, long, with daylight lingering until 9pm or till after 10pm further north. **August** in Edinburgh is Festival time, which dominates everything in the city and means accommodation is hard to come by. Elsewhere, events such as Highland Games, folk festivals or sporting events – most of which take place in the summer months – can tie up accommodation, though normally only in a fairly concentrated local area. If you're out and about in the countryside throughout the summer, you won't be able to avoid the clouds of small biting **midges**, which can be a real annoyance on still days, particularly around dusk.

May and **September** throw up weather every bit as good as, if not better than, the months of high summer. You're less likely to encounter crowds or struggle to find somewhere to stay, and the mild temperatures combined with the changing colours of nature mean both are great for outdoor activities, particularly hiking. The caveat is that September is prime **stalking season** for deer, which can affect access to some parts of the Highlands for hiking, fishing or riding a mountain bike.

The **spring** and **autumn** months of April and October bracket the season for many parts of rural Scotland. A large number of attractions, tourist offices and guesthouses often open for business on the Easter weekend and shut up shop after the school half-term in mid-October. If places do stay open through the winter, it's normally with reduced opening hours; this is the best time to pick up deals at hotels and guesthouses. Note too that in more remote spots public transport will often operate on a reduced winter timetable.

Winter days, from November to March, occasionally crisp and bright, are often cold, gloomy and all too short, although Hogmanay and New Year has traditionally been a time to visit Scotland for partying and warm hospitality – something which improves as the weather worsens. While even tourist hotspots such as Edinburgh are notably quieter during winter, a fall of snow in the Highlands will prompt plenty of activity around the ski resorts.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND MONTHLY RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
EDINBURGH												
Max/min (°C)	7/1	8/1	10/2	12/4	15/6	17/9	19/11	19/11	17/9	13/6	10/3	7/1
Max/min (°F)	44/34	46/34	50/36	53/39	59/43	63/48	66/52	66/52	63/48	55/43	50/37	45/34
Rainfall (mm)	47	39	39	38	49	45	69	73	57	56	58	56
FORT WILLIAM												
Max/min (°C)	5/-1	5/-1	8/1	10/3	14/7	17/10	18/11	18/11	15/8	11/5	8/2	6/1
Max/min (°F)	41/30	41/30	46/34	50/37	57/45	63/50	64/52	64/52	59/46	52/41	46/36	52/34
Rainfall (mm)	200	132	152	111	103	124	137	150	199	215	220	238
LERWICK												
Max/min (°C)	6/2	6/2	6/2	8/4	10/5	12/8	14/10	14/10	13/9	10/6	8/4	6/2
Max/min (°F)	43/35	43/35	43/35	46/38	51/42	54/46	58/40	58/50	55/48	51/43	46/39	43/35
Rainfall (mm)	127	93	93	72	64	64	67	78	113	119	140	147
TIREE												
Max/min (°C)	8/3	8/3	9/4	10/5	13/7	15/10	16/11	16/11	15/10	13/8	10/6	8/4
Max/min (°F)	46/38	46/38	48/39	51/41	55/45	59/49	61/52	61/52	59/49	55/46	49/43	46/39
Rainfall (mm)	120	71	77	60	56	66	79	83	123	125	123	123
WICK												
Max/min (°C)	6/1	6/1	8/2	9/3	11/5	14/8	16/10	16/10	14/8	12/6	8/3	7/2
Max/min (°F)	43/34	43/34	46/36	49/38	53/42	57/46	60/50	60/50	57/46	53/43	46/38	44/35
Rainfall (mm)	81	58	55	45	47	49	61	74	68	73	90	81

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things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Scotland has to offer on a short trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows, in no particular order, is a selective taste of the country's highlights: compelling sights, vibrant festivals and some of the most spectacular scenic wonders in Europe. All highlights have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.

1 EDINBURGH SKYLINE
Page 79
From Calton Hill, the old town appears as an unforgettable vista of tightly packed tenements and spires that rise to the immense castle.

2 HOGMANAY
Page 38
New Year celebrations, with whisky, dancing and fireworks staving off the midwinter chill.

3 ROSSLYN CHAPEL
Page 108
This richly decorated cathedral-like masterpiece is a testament to the skills of its medieval sculptors.

4 LOCH NESS
Page 407
Take the old road around the east shores to escape the caravanning crowds, and find red squirrels and pretty pubs like the *Dores Inn*.

5 WHISKY
Page 35
Single malts have never been more varied or so innovative and you'll find hundreds of varieties in Scotland's pubs. Good luck.

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6 RHINNS OF GALLOWAY
Page 153
Famous for its balmy gulf-stream-fed micro-climate, the southwest is a sanctuary for exotic plants, with six botanic gardens to discover.

7 CALEDONIAN FOREST
Page 425
Among the gnarled survivors of the great ancient forests you'll find one of Scotland's largest populations of the elusive red squirrel.

8 AILSA CRAIG
Page 168
Conspicuous, muffin-shaped hump just off the Ayrshire coast that's home to one of the world's largest colonies of gannets.

9 ISLAY
Page 265
Endless pretty villages and bays, wonderfully varied wildlife, and no fewer than eight whisky distilleries.

10 EIGG
Page 497
Perfect example of a tiny Hebridean island with a golden beach to lie on, a hill to climb and stunning views across to Rùm.

11 KNOYDART PENINSULA
Page 446
No matter whether you arrive by boat or on foot, the sense of dropping off the radar is the same in one of Britain's last wilderness regions.

12 BIKING AT GLENTRESS
Page 131
7stanes has seven forest centres with adrenaline-pumping downhill biking for all levels.

13 SKYE CUILLIN
Page 489
The most spectacular mountain range on the west coast: superb to see, breathtaking (literally) to climb.

14 THE CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS
Page 425
Natural splendour and terrific outdoor activities abound here.

15 STAFFA AND THE TRESHNISH ISLES
Page 244
View the basalt columns of Fingal's Cave from the sea, then picnic beside the puffins on the Isle of Lunga.

16 SOUTH HARRIS BEACHES
Page 513
Take your pick of deserted golden beaches in South Harris, or further south in the Uists.

17 GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART
Page 191
The finest example of the unique style of Glasgow architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

18 WEST HIGHLAND WAY
Page 293
Ninety-six miles, five days, one utterly spectacular walk from Glasgow to Fort William.

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19 TOBERMORY
Page 240
The main town on the beautiful island of Mull, and Scotland's most picturesque fishing port.

20 JARLSHOF, SHETLAND
Page 566
An exceptional archeological site taking in Bronze Age, Iron Age, Pictish, Viking and medieval remains.

21 WHALE-WATCHING, MULL
Page 241
Close encounters with a very different type of Highland wildlife.

22 AUGUST FESTIVALS IN EDINBURGH
Page 101
Actors, comedians, artists, writers and celebs converge en masse for the world's biggest arts gathering.

23 IONA
Page 246
The home of Celtic Christian spirituality, an island of pilgrimage today as in antiquity.

24 KINLOCH CASTLE, RÙM
Page 497
Its rooms are not just the epitome of Edwardian decadence, they're also quite frankly bonkers, and all the better for it.

25 CRAIL
Page 310
Fife's picture-perfect harbour town, home to small fishing vessels, caught-that-morning seafood and easel-toting artists.

26 STIRLING CASTLE
Page 280
The grandest castle in Scotland, with a commanding outlook over the Highlands and Lowlands.

27 GLEN COE
Page 404
Scotland's most spectacular glen puts Munro summits, glacial valleys and cool waterfalls within day-trip distance of Fort William.

28 CALLANISH, LEWIS
Page 510
Prehistoric standing stones that occupy a serene setting in the Western Isles.

29 BURRELL COLLECTION, GLASGOW
Page 201
An unconventional but impressive museum at the heart of Glasgow's cultural renaissance.

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Itineraries

The following itineraries plot routes through Scotland in all its variety, from the royal castles of Edinburgh to the blackhouses of the Western Isles, the putting greens of St Andrews and the Cuillin mountains' jagged ridges. Whether you're after a whistle-stop week, a fortnight of utter escapism or you're looking for an excuse to discover some of the finest tastes in Scotland, they will point the way.

A SCOTLAND PRIMER

A week is barely sufficient to do Edinburgh justice, let alone a diverse nation, yet this tour offers tasters of contemporary culture, heritage, Highland scenery and even island life.

❶ **Edinburgh** The capital deserves two days of any visit. Must-sees include the cobbled streets and castle of the Old Town, the view from Calton Hill, and perhaps the Museum of Scotland, or a pub like *Bow Bar* if it rains. **See p.52**

❷ **Fife** So close to Edinburgh, so different in atmosphere, Fife has some highlights of Scottish culture: lovely Culross village; a novice-friendly putting green at St Andrews; and fresh lobster for lunch in Crail. **See p.302**

❸ **Stirling and the Trossachs** One of Scotland's most iconic castles is reason enough to visit Stirling. It's also the gateway for walks and bike rides in the Trossachs, a sort of Highlands-lite, and beyond them, the much-mythologized Loch Lomond. **See p.276**

❹ **Gigha** Sub-tropical gardens, golden beaches and life in the slow lane – Gigha is the perfect island introduction to the Hebrides. **See p.262**

❺ **Glasgow** We bookend the route with the great rival to Edinburgh. Vibrant, modern Glasgow is all about the arts – don't miss the Glasgow School of Art– and nightlife that is glam and gritty by turns. **See p.178**

A TASTE OF SCOTLAND

A whistle-stop tour around the regional culinary highlights of Scotland – you'll have no trouble finding porridge, broth, Cullen skink and haggis, neeps and tatties wherever you go.

❶ **Edinburgh** With both Michelin-starred restaurants and fine old drinking holes, foodies have never had it so good here. Highlights include *Wedgwood* and *The Kitchin*. **See p.92**

❷ **Abroath** "A world-class delicacy" said chef and writer Rick Stein of the humble haddock after it has been smoke-cured here, and who are we to argue? Head to the harbour and take your pick from the family-run smokehouses. **See p.351**

❸ **Speyside** Welcome to the heartland of whisky country, nutured by pure cold water and a gentle climate. Of the fifty distilleries in the area, eight are on an official Malt Whisky Trail, from famous names like Glenfiddich and Glenlivet to wee distilleries like Strathisla. **See p.431**

❹ **Skye for foodies** Small gourmet restaurants like *Three Chimmneys* and *Glenview* are reason enough to visit Skye. Expect innovative menus of super-fresh produce that need not be as expensive as you'd expect. **See p.491 & p.494**

❺ **Islay** Peat and smoke define Islay single malts, heavy pungent whiskies compared to the

ABOVE CULROSS PALACE

lighter honeys and vanilla in Speyside. Laphroaig, Lagavulin and Bowmore are the big hitters, and all eight offer tours. **See p.267**

❻ **Loch Fyne** Fine dining without the fuss in the most famous seafood restaurant in Scotland, the *Loch Fyne Oyster Bar and Restaurant*. Expect local oysters, langoustine, scallops and superb fish. **See p.227**

TWO WEEKS ON THE ISLANDS

While Orkney and Shetland deserve a dedicated trip, the west coast islands seem tailor-made to explore by ferry. Who needs Greece?

❶ **Mull** Embark from one of the Highlands' loveliest fishing ports, Tobermory, for one of its best wildlife adventures – whale-watching – and visit nearby Iona, its atmosphere steeped in thousands of years as a pilgrimage destination. **See p.238**

❷ **Barra** A pip-squeak among the Western Isles where clear bays, white beaches, impressive mountains and a sense of dropping off the radar deliver a concentrated dose of Hebridean magic. **See p.522**

❸ **The Uists** Trout-fishing doesn't get much more fun than in the half-drowned lochs of North Uist. **See p.515**

❹ **Lewis and Harris** The conjoined twins of the Hebrides deserve several days of a trip. Visit for astonishing beaches like Luskentyre, mysterious standing stones at Callanish and to journey back a century in the restored village of Garenin. **See p.505 & p.512**

❺ **Skye** Skip back to Skye to tackle the Cuillin ridge, the must-do mountain route of any trail-junkie, or discover Loch Coruisk by boat, then settle into some of the islands' best hotels. **See p.484**

❻ **The Small Isles** So, what do you feel like doing today: sampling genuine island life on Eigg; discovering a barmy baronial manor on Rum; or spotting birdlife on strolls around tiny Muck? From Mallaig they're all just across the water. **See p.496**

LOCH SCAVAIG

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Getting there

The quickest, easiest and cheapest way to get to Scotland is by plane. Scotland has three main international airports: Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Glasgow handles most long-haul flights, though all three have a reasonable spread of European connections, as does Glasgow Prestwick Airport, a hub for the budget airline Ryanair.

With most airlines nowadays, how much you pay depends on how far in advance you book and how much **demand** there is during that period – generally speaking, the earlier you book, the cheaper the prices. That said, it's worth looking out for sales, which often start 10–12 weeks before the departure date.

If you're coming from elsewhere in Britain, from Ireland or even northwest Europe, you can reach Scotland easily enough by **train**, **bus** or **ferry** – it probably won't work out cheaper or faster than flying, but it's undoubtedly better for the environment.

From England and Wales

If you're heading out to the Highlands and Islands, **flying** is the quickest way to travel. Airfares are most competitive on popular routes such as London or Birmingham to Edinburgh and Glasgow, which can cost as little as £50 return (journey time around 1hr). Once you add on the cost of transport to the airport and flying with **luggage** (many budget airlines charge for all but the smallest cabin bags), the savings compared with doing the same journey overland are often minimal.

Flying with airlines such as British Airways (Ⓦba.com), Ryanair (Ⓦryanair.com) and easyJet (Ⓦeasyjet.com) may be quick, but coach and train fares can be pretty competitive. If you book far enough in advance, return **train** fares to Glasgow can cost as little as £50 from Manchester (3hr 30min) or £70 from London (4hr 45min). A more flexible or last-minute fare will cost two or three times the amount. Another option is the overnight **Caledonian Sleeper** run by ScotRail (Ⓦscotrail.co.uk) from London Euston (daily except Sat; journey time to Glasgow around 8hr); again, if you book in advance, single overnight fares cost around £25, though most return fares are more like £100. The **coach** takes much longer than the train (around 9hr one-way), but costs less, with a London or Birmingham to Glasgow return starting for as little as £20.

From Ireland

Travel from Ireland is quickest by plane, with **airfares** from either Belfast or Dublin to Glasgow from as little as €45 return; try Aer Lingus (Ⓦaerlingus.com) and Ryanair (Ⓦryanair.com), both based in Ireland. There are also good **ferry** links with Northern Ireland and the combined coach and ferry fares are very competitive: Belfast to Glasgow (via Cairnryan) is just £56 return (6hr one-way). P&O Ferries runs several sea crossings daily from Larne to Cairnryan (1hr) and Troon (2hr 15min) and Stena Line operates several services daily from Belfast to Stranraer (2hr 10min; single passenger without car £28).

From mainland Europe

Ferries run by DFDS Seaways go overnight from IJmuiden, near Amsterdam, to Newcastle (daily; 16–17hr), less than an hour's drive south of the Scottish border. High-season return fares start at around €500, for a passenger with a car and an overnight berth. The very useful Direct Ferries website (Ⓦdirectferries.co.uk) gives you the latest information on crossings and allows you to compare all the options. A much quicker (and usually cheaper) alternative is to fly with one of Europe's big budget carriers, such as easyJet (Ⓦeasyjet.com), Ryanair (Ⓦryanair.com), Norwegian (Ⓦnorwegian.com) or Jet2 (Ⓦjet2.com).

From the US and Canada

If you fly nonstop to Scotland from **North America**, you'll arrive in either Glasgow or Edinburgh. The majority of cheap fares, however, route through Amsterdam, London, Manchester, Dublin or Paris. To reach any other Scottish airport, you'll definitely need to go via London, Glasgow or Edinburgh.

Figure on six to seven hours flight time nonstop from the **east coast** of the USA to Glasgow, or seven hours to London plus an extra hour and a quarter from London to Glasgow or Edinburgh (not including stopover time). Add three or four hours more for travel from the **west coast**.

United (Ⓦunited.com) flies direct from Newark Liberty International Airport in New York to Glasgow, with return fares (including taxes) from around $850. Air Canada (Ⓦaircanada.com) has direct flights to Edinburgh from Toronto; return fares for nonstop flights (including taxes) cost around $1000.

From Australia and New Zealand

Flight time from **Australia** and **New Zealand** to Scotland is at least 22 hours. There are a wide variety of routes, with those touching down in Southeast Asia the quickest and cheapest on average. To reach Scotland, you usually have to change planes either in **London** – the most popular choice – or in another European gateway such as Paris or Amsterdam. Given the length of the journey involved, you might be better off including a night's stopover in your itinerary.

The cheapest scheduled flights to London are usually to be found on one of the Asian airlines, such as Malaysia Airlines (Ⓦ malaysiaairlines.com) or Thai Airways (thaiair.com). Average **return fares** (including taxes) from eastern Australian cities to London are Aus$1500–2000 in low season, and Aus$2000–2500 in high season. Fares from Perth or Darwin cost around Aus$200 less. Return fares from Auckland to London range between NZ$2000 and NZ$3000 depending on the season, route and carrier.

From South Africa

There are **no direct flights** from South Africa to Scotland, so you must change planes en route. The quickest and cheapest route to take is via **London**, with flight time around eleven hours, usually overnight. **Return fares** from Cape Town to London are around ZAR10,000; try British Airways (Ⓦ ba.com), South African Airways (Ⓦ flysaa.com) or Virgin Atlantic (Ⓦ virgin-atlantic.com). You'll save money if you buy the next leg of your journey to Scotland separately, through one of the budget airlines.

TRAVEL AGENTS AND OPERATORS

ebookers Ⓦ ebookers.com, Ⓣ 02033 203320. Low fares on an extensive selection of scheduled flights and package deals.

North South Travel Ⓦ northsouthtravel.co.uk, Ⓣ 01245 608291. Friendly, competitive travel agency, offering discounted fares worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

STA Travel Ⓦ statravel.com, Ⓣ 03333 210099. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail passes, and more. Good discounts for students and under-26s.

Trailfinders Ⓦ trailfinders.com, Ⓣ 020 7368 1200. One of the best-informed and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

Travel CUTS Ⓦ travelcuts.com, Ⓣ 18006 672887. Canadian youth and student travel firm.

USIT Ⓦ usit.ie, Ⓣ 016 021906. Ireland's main student and youth travel specialists.

TRAIN AND COACH INFORMATION

East Coast Ⓦ eastcoast.co.uk Ⓣ 08457 225333. Trains to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness.

Man in Seat 61 Ⓦ seat61.com. The best train information website on the internet.

National Express Ⓦ nationalexpress.com Ⓣ 08717 818178. Coaches to Scotland.

National Rail Ⓦ nationalrail.co.uk Ⓣ 08457 484950. Information and fares for all train services and companies.

ScotRail Ⓦ scotrail.co.uk. Caledonian Sleeper train to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness and Fort William.

Traveline Scotland Ⓦ travelinescotland.com. Excellent Scotland-wide journey planner, connected to the latest bus and train timetables.

Virgin Ⓦ virgintrains.co.uk. Trains to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

FERRY COMPANIES

DFDS Seaways Ⓦ dfdsseaways.com. Ferries from Europe.

P&O Ferries Ⓦ poferries.com. Ferries from Ireland.

Stena Line Ⓦ stenaline.co.uk. Ferries from Ireland.

Getting around

The majority of Scots live in the central belt, with Glasgow in the west and Edinburgh in the east. Public transport in this region is efficient and most places are easily accessible by train and bus. Further south and north it can be a different story: off the main routes, public transport services are few and far between, particularly in more remote parts of the Highlands and Islands. With careful planning, however, practically everywhere is accessible, and the scenery is usually adequate compensation for a long journey.

By train

Scotland has a modest **rail network**, at its densest in the central belt, skeletal in the Highlands, and nonexistent in the Islands. ScotRail (Ⓦ scotrail.co.uk) runs the majority of train services, reaching all the major towns – sometimes on lines rated among the great scenic routes of the world.

You can buy train **tickets** at most stations, but if the ticket office is closed, or the automatic machine isn't working, you may buy your ticket on board from the inspector using cash or a credit card. Those eligible for a **national rail pass** (£30) can obtain discounted tickets, with up to a third off most fares. These include the **16–25 Railcard**, for full-time

MINIBUS TOURS

Minibus tours that operate out of Edinburgh (and Glasgow) and head off into the Highlands are popular with backpackers who want a quick taste of Scotland. Aimed at the youth market, they adopt an upbeat and irreverent approach to sightseeing, as well as offering a good opportunity to get to know fellow travellers.

The current leading operator, **Haggis** (T 01315 579393, W haggisadventures.com), has bright yellow minibuses setting off daily on whistle-stop tours lasting between one and ten days, in the company of a live-wire guide. A three-day trip from Edinburgh to Skye via Loch Ness costs £119 (food and accommodation not included).

Several other companies offer similar packages, including **Macbackpackers** (T 01315 589900, W macbackpackers.com), which runs tours linking up their own hostels round the country. The popular **Rabbie's** tours (T 01312 263133, W rabbies.com) don't aim quite so squarely at the backpacker market and have a mellower outlook.

students and those aged between 16 and 25, and the **Senior Railcard** for people over 60. Alternatively, a **Family & Friends Railcard** entitles up to four adults and up to four children to a reduction.

In addition, ScotRail offers several regional passes. The most flexible is the **Freedom of Scotland Travelpass**, which gives unlimited train travel within Scotland. It's also valid on all CalMac ferries and on various buses in the remoter regions. The pass costs £134 for four days' travel in an eight-day period, or £179.70 for eight days' travel in a fifteen-day period. The **Highland Rover** allows unlimited train travel within the Highlands; it costs £81.50 for four out of eight consecutive days. Lastly, there's a **Central Scotland Rover**, which gives unlimited train travel on lines between Glasgow and Edinburgh; it costs £36.30 for three out of seven consecutive days.

BritRail passes (W britrail.com) are only available to visitors not resident in the UK and must be purchased before you leave your home country. The pass is available in a wide variety of types; for example the Adult pass allows unlimited train travel for eight days and costs €249. If you've been resident in a European country other than the UK for at least six months, an **InterRail** pass, allowing unlimited train travel within Britain, might be worth it if Scotland is part of a longer European trip. For more details, visit W interrail.eu. Note that **Eurail** passes are not valid in the UK.

On most ScotRail routes **bicycles** are carried free, but since there are only between two and six bike spaces available, it's a good idea to reserve ahead, and this is a requirement on longer journeys.

By coach and bus

All of Scotland's major towns and cities are served by a few long-distance bus services, known across Britain as **coaches**. Scotland's main long-distance operator is **Scottish Citylink** (T 08712 663333, W citylink.co.uk). On the whole, coaches are cheaper than trains and, as a result, are very popular, so for longer journeys it's advisable to book ahead.

There are various **discounts** on offer for those with children, those under 26 or over 60, and full-time students (contact Scottish Citylink for more details), and you can also buy an **Explorer Pass**, which gives unlimited travel throughout Scotland; the £93 pass gives you eight days' travel over a sixteen-day period. Overseas passport holders can buy a **Brit Xplorer pass** (in 7-, 14- or 28-day versions) in the UK, from National Express (W nationalexpress.com), or at major ports and airports; the seven-day pass costs £79, though you'd have to do a lot of bus travelling to make it worthwhile.

Local bus services are run by a bewildering array of companies, many of which change routes and timetables frequently. Local tourist offices can provide free timetables or you can contact **Traveline Scotland** (T 0871 200 2233, W travelinescotland.com), which provides a reliable service both online and by phone. There is also a free app available for download.

Some remote parts of Scotland are only served by **postbuses**, vehicles carrying mail and a handful of fare-paying passengers. They set off early in the morning, usually around 8am and, though sociable, can be excruciatingly slow. You can view routes and timetables on the **Royal Mail website** (T 08457 740740, W royalmail.com/postbus).

By car

In order to **drive** in Scotland you need a current full driving licence. If you're bringing your own vehicle into the country you should also carry your vehicle

registration, insurance and ownership documents at all times.

In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, you **drive on the left**. Speed limits are 20–40mph in built-up areas, 70mph on motorways and dual carriageways (freeways) and 60mph on most other roads. As a rule, assume that in any area with street lighting the limit is 30mph.

In the Highlands and Islands, there are still plenty of **single-track roads** with passing places; in addition to allowing oncoming traffic to pass at these points, you should also let cars behind you overtake. These roads can be frustrating but take care and stay alert for vehicles coming in the opposite direction, which may have been hidden by bends or dips in the road. In remoter regions, the roads are dotted with sheep, which are entirely oblivious to cars, so slow down and edge your way past; should you kill or injure one, it is your duty to inform the local farmer.

The AA (T 08008 87766, W theaa.com), RAC (T 08448 913111, W rac.co.uk) and Green Flag (T 08452 462766, W greenflag.com) all operate 24-hour **emergency breakdown** services. You may be entitled to free assistance through a reciprocal arrangement with a motoring organization in your home country. If not, you can make use of these emergency services by joining at the roadside, but you will incur a hefty surcharge. In remote areas, you may have a long wait for assistance.

Car rental

Car rental in Scotland is expensive. Most firms charge £25–50 per day, or around £130–200 a week. The major chains are confined mostly to the big cities, so it may be cheaper to use small **local agencies** – we've highlighted some in the Guide. The best deals are usually found in advance, through sites such as Auto Europe (W auto-europe.co.uk). With all rentals it's worth checking the terms and conditions carefully; some rentals only allow you to drive a limited number of miles before paying extra.

Remember, too that **fuel** in Scotland is expensive – petrol (gasoline) and diesel cost well over £1.35 per litre. **Automatics** are rare at the lower end of the price scale – if you want one, you should book well ahead. **Camper vans** are another option; rates start at around £400 a week in the high season, but you'll save on accommodation – visit W walkhighlands.co.uk to view a range of options. Few companies will rent to drivers with less than one year's experience and most will only rent to people over 21 or 25 and under 70 or 75 years of age.

By ferry

Scotland has more than sixty inhabited islands, and nearly fifty of them have scheduled **ferry** links. Most ferries carry cars and vans, and the vast majority can – and should – be booked as far in advance as possible.

CalMac has a virtual monopoly on services on the River Clyde and to the Hebrides, sailing to 22 islands and 4 peninsulas. They aren't quick – no catamarans or fast ferries – or cheap, but they do have two types of reduced-fare pass. If you're taking more than one ferry, ask for one of the discounted **Island Hopscotch** tickets (there are more than 20 different variations to choose between). If you're going to be taking a lot of ferries, you might be better off with an **Island Rover**, which entitles you to eight or fifteen consecutive days' unlimited ferry travel. It does not, however, guarantee you a place on any ferry, so you still need to book ahead. Prices for the eight-day/fifteen-day pass are around £57/£82 per passenger and around £270/£400 per car.

Car ferries to **Orkney and Shetland** are run by NorthLink Ferries. Pentland Ferries also run a car ferry to Orkney, and John O'Groats Ferries run a summer-only passenger service to Orkney. The various Orkney islands are linked to each other by Orkney Ferries; Shetland's inter-island ferries are mostly council-run so the local tourist board (W shetland.gov.uk) is your best bet for information. There are also numerous **small operators** round the Scottish coast that run fast RIB taxi services, day-excursion trips, and even the odd scheduled service; their contact details are given in the relevant chapters of this guide.

FERRY COMPANIES

CalMac T 08000 665000, W calmac.co.uk
John O'Groats Ferries T 01955 611353, W jogferry.co.uk
NorthLink Ferries T 08456 000449, W northlinkferries.co.uk
Orkney Ferries T 01856 872044, W orkneyferries.co.uk
Pentland Ferries T 01856 831226, W pentlandferries.co.uk

By plane

Apart from the three major **airports** of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, Scotland has numerous minor airports around the Scottish Highlands and Islands, some of which are little more than gravel airstrips. Airfares fluctuate enormously depending on demand – if you book early enough you can fly from Glasgow to Islay for £45 one-way, but leave it to the last minute and it could cost you more than

twice that. Most flights within Scotland are operated by **flybe** (Ⓦflybe.com), or its franchise partner **Loganair** (Ⓦloganair.co.uk). For inter-island flights in Shetland, you need to book through **Directflight** (Ⓣ01595 840246; Ⓦdirectflight.co.uk). Competition emerges from time to time, with **Eastern Airways** (Ⓦeasternairways.com) currently offering flights from Aberdeen to Stornoway and Wick.

Accommodation

In common with the rest of Britain, Scotland is expensive, but in terms of accommodation, budget travellers are relatively well catered for, with numerous hostels, campsites and bunkhouses. Those with money to spend will relish the more expensive country-house hotels. In the middle ground, however, the standard of many B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels can be disappointing. Welcoming, comfortable, well-run places do, of course, exist in all parts of the country – and you'll find the best ones listed in this Guide.

Star ratings

VisitScotland, the country's tourist board, operates a system for grading accommodation, which is updated annually. However, not every establishment participates, and you shouldn't assume that a particular B&B is no good simply because it's not on VisitScotland's lists. The tourist board uses star awards, from one to five, which are supposed to reflect the quality of welcome, service and hospitality – though it's pretty clear that places without en-suite toilets, a TV in every room, matching fabrics or packets of shortbread on the sideboard are likely to be marked down.

Booking accommodation

If you decide not to book online, most **tourist offices** will help you find accommodation and **book a room** directly, for which they normally charge a flat fee of £4. If you take advantage of this service, it's worth being clear as to what kind of place you'd prefer, as the tourist office quite often selects something quite randomly across the whole range of their membership. Bear in mind, too, that outside the main towns and cities many places are only open for the **tourist season** (Easter to Oct): you'll always find somewhere to stay outside this period, but the choice may be limited.

ACCOMMODATION PRICES

Throughout the Guide, accommodation **prices** are quoted according to the least expensive **double room** in high season. Individual prices for **dorm beds** and (if available) double or twin rooms are given for hostels. For campsites the figure given is for a **pitch** including a vehicle and two people, or else per person.

Hotels

Hotels come in all shapes and sizes. At the **upper end** of the market, they can be huge country houses and converted castles offering a very exclusive and opulent experience. Most will have a licensed bar and offer both breakfast and dinner, and often lunch as well. In the cities the increasing prevalence of modern **budget hotels** run by national (and international) chains may not win any prizes for aesthetics or variety, but they are competitively priced and for the most part meet criteria for clean, smart, serviceable accommodation.

Guesthouses and B&Bs

Guesthouses and B&Bs offer the widest and most diverse range of accommodation. VisitScotland uses the term "**guesthouse**" for a commercial venture that has four or more rooms, at least some of which are en suite, reserving "**B&B**" for a predominantly private family home that has only a few rooms to let. In reality, however, most places offer en-suite facilities, and the different names often reflect the pretensions of the owners and the cost of the rooms more than differences in service: in general, guesthouses cost more than B&Bs.

Similarly priced are **inns** (in other words, pubs), or their modern equivalent, "restaurants with rooms". These will often have only a handful of rooms, but their emphasis on creating an all-round convivial atmosphere as well as serving top-quality food often makes them worth seeking out.

A surprising number of guesthouses and B&Bs still have decor that consists of heavy chintz and floral designs, but a good location, and the chance to get an insight into the local way of life, can be some compensation. Many B&Bs, even the pricier ones, have only a few rooms, so **advance booking** is recommended, especially in the Islands.

Hostels

There's an ever-increasing number of **hostels** in Scotland to cater for travellers – youthful or otherwise – who are unable or unwilling to pay the rates charged by hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs. Most hostels are clean and comfortable, sometimes offering **doubles** and even **singles** as well as **dormitory accommodation**. Others concentrate more on keeping the price as low as possible, simply providing a roof over your head and a few basic facilities. Whatever type of hostel you stay in, expect to pay £10–22 per night.

The **Scottish Youth Hostels Association** (Ⓦ syha.org.uk), referred to throughout the Guide as "SYHA hostels", run the longest-established hostels in the Highlands and Islands. While these places sometimes occupy handsome buildings, many retain an institutionalized air. Bunk-bed accommodation in single-sex dormitories, lights out before midnight and no smoking/no alcohol policies are the norm outside the big cities. Breakfast is not normally included in the price, though most hostels have self-catering facilities.

If you're not a **member** of one of the hostelling organizations affiliated to **Hostelling International** (HI), you can pay your £10 joining fee at most hostels. **Advance booking** is recommended, and essential at Easter, Christmas and from May to August. You can book online, in person or by phone.

There are also loads of **independent hostels** (sometimes known as "bunkhouses") across Scotland. These are usually laidback places with no membership, fewer rules, mixed dorms and no curfew. You can find most of them in the annually updated *Independent Hostel Guide* (Ⓦ independenthostelguide.co.uk). Many of them are also affiliated to Scottish Independent Hostels (Ⓦ hostelscotland.co.uk), which has a programme of inspection and lists members in the *SIH Hostel Guide*, available free online.

Camping

There are hundreds of **caravan and camping parks** around Scotland, most of which are open from April to October. The majority of sites charge about £10–15 for two people with a car to pitch a tent, and are usually well equipped, with shops, a restaurant, a bar and, occasionally, sports facilities. Most of these, however, are aimed principally at **caravans**, trailers and motorhomes, and generally don't offer the tranquil atmosphere and independence that those travelling with just a tent are seeking.

That said, peaceful and **informal sites** do exist, and are described throughout this guide, though they are few and far between. Many **hostels** allow camping, and farmers will usually let folk camp on their land for free or for a nominal sum. In this guide, we've listed **the price for a pitch** (ie one tent for two people, plus a car) wherever possible. Where campsites charge per person, we've listed prices in that format instead.

Scotland's relaxed land access laws allow **wild camping** in open country. The basic rule is "leave no trace", but for a guide to good practice, visit Ⓦ outdooraccess-scotland.com.

The great majority of **caravans** are permanently moored nose to tail in the vicinity of some of Scotland's finest scenery; others are positioned singly in back gardens or amidst farmland. Some can be booked for self-catering, and with prices starting at around £100 a week, this can work out as one of the cheapest options if you're travelling with kids.

If you're planning to do a lot of camping at official camping and caravanning sites, it might be worthwhile joining the **Camping and Caravanning Club** (Ⓦ campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk). Membership costs £51 (£41 if paying by direct debit) and entitles you to pay only a per-person fee, not a pitch fee, at CCC sites. Those coming from abroad can get the same benefits by buying an international camping carnet, available from home motoring organizations or a CCC equivalent.

Self-catering accommodation

A huge proportion of visitors to Scotland opt for **self-catering** accommodation, booking a cottage or apartment for a week and often saving themselves a considerable amount of money by doing so. In most cases, the minimum rental period is one week, and therefore this isn't a valid option if you're aiming to tour round the country. The least you can expect to pay in the high season is around £250 per week for a place sleeping four, but something special, or somewhere in a popular tourist area, might cost £500 or more. Such is the

5 CAMPSITES NOT TO MISS

Comrie Croft Near Crieff. See p.328.
Red Squirrel Glen Coe. See p.406.
Ardnamurchan Campsite Ormsaigbeg. See p.442.
Long beach Knoydart. See p.447.
Camusdarach Campsite Camusdarach. See p.444.

number and variety of self-catering places on offer that we've mentioned very few in the Guide. A good source of information is **VisitScotland**'s self-catering website (W visitscotland.com/accommodation/self-catering), updated frequently and listing more than 2700 properties. Alternatively, you could try one of the websites listed below.

HOLIDAY RENTAL AGENCIES

Cottages and Castles W cottages-and-castles.co.uk T 01738 451610. A range of self-catering properties, mostly in mainland Scotland.

Cottages4you W cottages4you.co.uk T 08452 680760. Hundreds of reasonably priced properties all over Scotland.

Ecosse Unique W uniquescotland.com W 01835 822277. Carefully selected cottages across mainland Scotland, plus a few in the Hebrides and Orkney.

Landmark Trust W landmarktrust.org.uk T 01628 825925. A very select number of historical properties, often in prime locations.

LHH W lhhscotland.com, T 01381 610496. Attractive homes across Scotland, including mansions, castles and villas.

Mackay's Agency W mackays-self-catering.co.uk T 01315 501180. A whole range of properties in every corner of mainland Scotland (plus Skye and Orkney), from chalets and town apartments to remote stone-built cottages.

National Trust for Scotland W nts.org.uk T 01312 439331. The NTS lets around forty of its converted historic cottages and houses.

Scottish Country Cottages W scottish-country-cottages.co.uk T 08452 680801. Superior cottages with lots of character, scattered across the Scottish mainland plus some of the Inner Hebrides.

Campus accommodation

A different and generally cheaper self-catering option, especially if you're staying a week or more in one of the cities, is **campus accommodation**. The universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde, Edinburgh, Stirling, St Andrews and Dundee all open their halls of residence to short-term visitors during the summer break, and some also offer rooms during the Easter and Christmas holidays. Accommodation varies from tiny single rooms in long, lonely corridors to relatively comfortable places in small, shared apartments. Prices start at around £20 per night for a single room, not always including breakfast. All the useful university details are given in the Guide.

Food and drink

While Scotland isn't exactly known for its culinary heritage, the country's eating habits are changing, and from the cities to some of the furthest islands, you can often eat extremely well, with a strong emphasis on fresh, local and organic produce.

Scottish **fish and shellfish** is the envy of Europe, with a vast array of different types of fish, prawns, lobsters, mussels, oysters, crabs and scallops found around the extensive coastline. The prevalence of fish-farming, now a significant industry in the Highlands and Islands, means that the once-treasured salmon is widespread and relatively inexpensive now. Both salmon and trout, another commonly farmed fish, are frequently served cold with bread and butter.

Scottish-reared **beef** is often delicious, especially the Aberdeen Angus breed, though Highland cattle are also rated for their depth of flavour. **Venison**, the meat of the red deer, also features large – low in cholesterol and very tasty, it's served roasted or in casseroles, and is often cooked with juniper and red wine. Other forms of **game** include grouse, which when cooked properly is strong, dark and succulent; pheasant, a lighter meat; and the less commonly served, but still tasty, pigeon and rabbit.

In rural Scotland, attitudes towards **vegetarianism** are still some way behind the big cities, but almost all pubs and restaurants will have at least one vegetarian option on their menus. Veggies – and vegans for that matter – will find plenty of great food on offer in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Breakfast

In most hotels and B&Bs you'll be offered a **Scottish breakfast**, similar to its English counterpart of sausage, bacon and egg, but typically with the addition of black pudding (blood sausage) and potato scones. Porridge is another likely option, as is fish in the form of kippers, smoked haddock or even kedgeree. Scotland's staple drink, like England's, is **tea**, drunk strong and with milk, though **coffee** is just as readily available everywhere. However, while smart coffee shops are now a familiar feature in the cities, execrable versions of espresso and cappuccino, as well as instant coffee, are still all too familiar.

Lunches and snacks

The most common lunchtime fare in Scotland remains the **sandwich**. A bowl or cup of hearty **soup** is a typical accompaniment, particularly in winter. A **pub lunch** is often an attractive alternative. Bar menus generally have standard filling but unambitious options including soup, sandwiches, scampi and chips, or steak pie and chips, with vegetarians suffering from a paucity of choice. That said, some bar food is freshly prepared and

CLASSIC DISHES

Arbroath smokies Powerful smoked haddock (see p.351).
Cullen skink Rich soup made from smoked haddock, potatoes and cream (p.385).
Haggis Flavoursome sausage meat (spiced liver, offal, oatmeal and onion) cooked inside a bag made from a sheep's stomach. Tasty and satisfying, particularly when eaten with its traditional accompaniments, "bashed neeps" (mashed turnips) and "chappit tatties" (mashed potatoes).
Porridge A breakfast staple, this is properly made with oatmeal and water, and cooked with a pinch of salt. Some prefer to add milk and honey, fruit or sugar to sweeten.
Scots broth Hearty soup made with stock (usually mutton), vegetables and barley.

filling, equalling the à la carte dishes served in adjacent hotel restaurants. Pubs or hotel bars are among the cheapest options when it comes to eating out – in the smallest villages, these might be your only option.

Restaurants are often, though not always, open at lunchtimes. When they tend to be less busy and generally offer a shorter menu compared with their evening service, and this can make for a more pleasant and less expensive experience. For morning or afternoon snacks, as well as light lunches, **tearooms** are a common feature; you will often find decent home baking on offer.

As for **fast food**, chip shops, or **chippies**, abound, the best often found in coastal towns within sight of the fishing boats. Deep-fried battered fish is the standard choice – when served with chips it's known as a "fish supper", even if eaten at lunchtime – though everything from hamburgers to haggis suppers is normally on offer, all deep-fried, of course. Scotland is even credited with inventing the **deep-fried Mars bar**, the definitive badge of a nation with the worst heart disease statistics in Western Europe. For alternative fast food, major towns feature all the usual pizza, burger and baked potato outlets, as well as Chinese, Mexican and Indian takeaways.

Evening meals

There's no doubt that, as with the rest of the UK, eating out in Scotland is **expensive**; our restaurant listings include a mix of high-quality and budget establishments. Wine in restaurants is marked up strongly, so you'll often pay £15 for a bottle selling for £5 in the shops; house wines generally start around the £10 mark.

If you're travelling in remoter parts of Scotland, or staying at a B&B or guesthouse in the countryside, ask advice about nearby options for your **evening meal**. Many B&Bs and guesthouses will cook you dinner, but you must book ahead and indicate any dietary requirements.

As for **restaurants**, standards vary enormously, but independent restaurants using good-quality local produce are now found all over Scotland. Less predictable are hotel restaurants, many of which also serve non-residents. Some can be very ordinary despite the highfalutin descriptions on the à la carte menu. You could easily end up paying £30–40 a head for a meal with wine.

In central Scotland, particularly in Edinburgh and Glasgow, you'll find a range of **international cuisines** including Japanese, Thai, Caribbean and Turkish, as well as the more common Indian, Chinese and Italian establishments. Glasgow is one of Britain's curry capitals, while Edinburgh's restaurant scene is consistently lively, its seafood and vegetarian restaurants a particular strength.

Among traditional **desserts**, "clootie dumpling" is a sweet, stodgy fruit pudding bound in a cloth and cooked for hours, while Cranachan, made with toasted oatmeal steeped in whisky and folded into whipped cream flavoured with fresh raspberries, or the similar Atholl Brose, are considered more refined.

Food shopping

Most Scots get their supplies from supermarkets, but you're increasingly likely to come across good delis, farm shops and specialist **food shops**. Many stock local produce alongside imported delicacies, as well as organic fruit and veg, specialist drinks such as locally brewed beer, freshly baked bread, and

MEAL TIMES

In many parts of Scotland outside the cities, inflexible **meal times** mean that you'll have to keep an eye on your watch if you don't want to miss out on eating. B&Bs and hotels frequently serve breakfast only until 9am, lunch is usually over by 2pm, and, despite the long summer evenings, pub and hotel kitchens often stop serving dinner as early as 8pm.

MAKING MALT WHISKY

Malt whisky is made by soaking barley in **steeps** (water cisterns) for two or three days until it swells, after which it is left to germinate for around seven days, during which the starch in the barley seed is converted into soluble sugars – this process is known as **malting**. The malted barley or "green malt" is then dried in a **kiln** over a furnace, which can be oil-fired, peat-fired or, more often than not, a combination of the two.

Only a few distilleries still do their own malting and kilning in the traditional pagoda-style kilns; the rest simply have their malted barley delivered from an industrial maltings. The first process in most distilleries is therefore **milling**, which grinds the malted barley into "grist". Next comes the **mashing**, during which the grist is infused in hot water in mashtuns, producing a sugary concoction called "wort". After cooling, the wort passes into the washbacks, traditionally made of wood, where it is fermented with yeast for two to three days. During **fermentation**, the sugar is converted into alcohol, producing a brown foaming liquid known as "wash".

Distillation now takes place, not once but twice: the wash is steam-heated, and the vapours siphoned off and condensed as a spirit. This is the point at which the whisky is poured into oak casks – usually ones which have already been used to store bourbon or sherry – and left to age for a minimum of three years.

The average **maturation** period for a single malt whisky, however, is ten years; and the longer it matures, the more expensive it is, because two percent evaporates each year. Unlike wine, as soon as the whisky is bottled, maturation ceases.

sandwiches and other snacks to takeaway. Look out too for **farmers' markets** (Ⓜ scottishfarmersmarkets.co.uk), which generally take place on Saturday and Sunday mornings; local farmers and small producers, from pig farmers to cheese-makers and small smokeries, set up stalls to sell their specialist lines.

Scotland is notorious for its sweet tooth, and **cakes and puddings** are taken very seriously. Bakers with extensive displays of iced buns, cakes and cream-filled pastries are a typical feature of any Scottish high street, while home-made shortbread, scones or tablet (a hard, crystalline form of fudge) are considered great treats. In the summer, Scottish berries, in particular raspberries and strawberries, are particularly tasty.

You'll also find a number of specialist cheese shops, while many restaurants serve only **Scottish cheeses** after dinner. Look out for Isle of Mull, a tangy farmhouse cheddar; Dunsyre Blue, a Scottish Dolcelatte; or farmhouse Dunlop, the local version of cheddar.

Drinking

As in the rest of Britain, Scottish **pubs**, which originated as travellers' hostelries and coaching inns, are the main social focal points of any community. Pubs in Scotland vary hugely, from old-fashioned inns with open fires and a convivial atmosphere, to raucous theme pubs with loud music and satellite TV. Out in the islands, pubs are few and far between, with most drinking taking place in the local hotel bar. In Edinburgh and Glasgow you'll find traditional pubs supplemented by upbeat, trendy café-bars.

Pub **opening hours** are generally 11am to 11pm, but in the cities and towns, or anywhere where there is demand, places stay open much later. Whatever time the pub closes, "last orders" will be called by the bar staff about fifteen minutes before closing time to allow a bit of "drinking-up time". In general, you have to be 16 to enter a pub unaccompanied, though some places are relaxed about people bringing children in, or have special family rooms and beer gardens where the kids can run free. The legal drinking age is 18. As with the rest of the UK, **smoking** is not allowed in any pubs, bars or restaurants.

Whisky

Whisky – *uisge beatha*, or the "water of life" in Gaelic – has been produced in Scotland since the fifteenth century, but only really took off in popularity after the 1780 tax on claret made wine too expensive for most people. The taxman soon caught up with whisky, however, and drove the stills underground. Today, many distilleries operate on the site of simple cottages that once distilled the stuff illegally.

Despite the dominance of the blended whiskies such as Johnnie Walker, Bell's, Teacher's and The Famous Grouse, **single malt whisky** is infinitely superior and, as a result, a great deal more expensive. Single malts vary in character

enormously depending on the amount of peat used for drying the barley, the water used for mashing and the type of oak cask used in the maturing process. Malt whisky is best drunk with a splash of water to release its distinctive flavours.

Beer

Traditional Scottish beer is a thick, dark ale known as **heavy**, served at room temperature in pints or half-pints, with a full head. Quite different in taste from English "bitter", heavy is a more robust, sweeter beer with less of an edge. All of the big-name breweries – McEwan's, Tennent's, Bellhaven and Caledonian – produce a reasonable selection of heavies. However, if you really want to discover Scottish beer, look out for the products of small **local breweries** such as Cairngorm, the Black Isle, Arran, Fyne Ales, Isle of Skye, Orkney or Valhalla. Look out, too, for Froach, available mostly in bottles, a very refreshing, lighter-coloured ale made from heather according to an ancient recipe.

Water and soft drinks

Scotland produces a prodigious amount of **mineral water**, much of which is exported – tap water is chill, clean and perfectly palatable in most parts of the country, including the areas of the Highlands and Islands where it's tinged the colour of weak tea by peat in the ground. Locally produced **Irn-Bru**, a fizzy orange, sickly sweet concoction, has been known to outsell Coke and Pepsi in Scotland.

The media

Many Scots see the UK's "national media" as London-based and London-biased, and prefer to listen to Scottish radio programmes, read Scottish newspapers, and – albeit to a much lesser extent – watch Scottish TV. Local papers are also avidly consumed, with the weekly papers in places like Orkney and Shetland read by virtually the entire adult population.

The press

The Scottish press centres on two serious **dailies** – *The Scotsman*, now published in tabloid format and based in Edinburgh, and *The Herald*, a broadsheet published in Glasgow. Both offer good coverage of the current issues affecting Scotland, along with British and foreign news, sport, arts and lifestyle pages. Scotland's biggest-selling dailies are the downmarket *Daily Record*, a tabloid from the same stable as the *Daily Mirror*, and the local edition of *The Sun*. Most of the main UK newspapers do produce specific Scottish editions, although the "quality" press, ranging between the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* and the left-of-centre *Guardian*, are justifiably seen in Scotland as being London papers.

The provincial daily press in Scotland is more widely read than its English counterpart, with the two biggest-selling **regional titles** being Aberdeen's famously parochial *Press and Journal*, read in the northeast, Orkney and Shetland, and the right-wing *Dundee Courier*, mostly sold in Perth, Angus, Tayside and Fife. The weekly *Oban Times* gives an insight into life in the Highlands and Islands, but is staid compared with the radical, campaigning weekly *West Highland Free Press*, printed on Skye; both carry articles in Gaelic as well as English. Further north, the lively *Shetland Times* and sedate *Orcadian* are essential weekly reads.

Many national **Sunday newspapers** have a Scottish edition, although Scotland has its own offerings – *Scotland on Sunday*, from the *Scotsman* stable, and the *Sunday Herald*, complementing its eponymous daily. Far more fun and widely read is the anachronistic *Sunday Post*, published by Dundee's D.C. Thomson publishing group. It's a wholesome paper, uniquely Scottish, and has changed little since the 1950s, since which time its two long-running cartoon strips, *Oor Wullie* and *The Broons*, have acquired cult status.

Scottish **monthlies** include the glossy *Scottish Field*, a parochial version of England's *Tatler*, covering countryside interests along with local travel and fashion, and the widely read *Scots Magazine*, an old-fashioned middle-of-the-road publication which promotes family values and lots of good fresh air.

TV and radio

In Scotland there are five main (sometimes called "terrestrial") **TV channels**: state-owned BBC1 and BBC2, and three commercial channels: ITV1, Channel 4 and Channel 5. **BBC Scotland** produces news programmes and a regular crop of local-interest lifestyle, current affairs, drama and comedy shows which slot into the schedules of both BBC channels. The vast majority of homes receive dozens of additional TV channels and radio stations through digital services like Freeview and Sky.

The **BBC radio** network broadcasts six main FM stations in Scotland, five of which are national stations originating largely from London: Radio 1 (youth-focused, playing pop and dance music),

Radio 2 (mainstream pop, rock and light music), Radio 3 (classical music), Radio 4 (current affairs, arts and drama) and Radio 5 Live (sports, news and live discussions and phone-ins). Only the award-winning BBC Radio Scotland offers a Scottish perspective on news, politics, arts, music, travel and sport, as well as providing a Gaelic network in the Highlands with local programmes in Shetland, Orkney and the Borders. Note that in large areas of the Highlands and Islands, some or all of these stations are impossible to receive.

A web of local **commercial radio** stations helps to fill in the gaps, mostly mixing rock and pop music with news bulletins, but a few tiny community-based stations such as Lochbroom FM in Ullapool – a place famed for its daily midge count – transmit documentaries and discussions on local issues. The most populated areas of Scotland also receive UK-wide commercial stations such as Classic FM, Virgin Radio and TalkSport. With a DAB **digital radio**, you can get all the main stations crackle-free, along with special interest and smaller-scale stations.

Events and spectator sports

Scotland offers a huge range of cultural and heritage-themed events as well as a packed sporting calendar. Many tourists will home straight in on the Highland Games and other tartan-draped theatricals, but there's more to Scotland than this: numerous regional celebrations perpetuate ancient customs, and the Edinburgh Festival is an arts celebration unrivalled in size and variety in the world. A few of the smaller, more obscure events (particularly those with a pagan bent), do not always welcome the casual visitor. The tourist board publishes a weighty list of all Scottish events on its website (Ⓦ visitscotland.com).

Events calendar

DEC–JAN

Dec 31 and Jan 1 Hogmanay and Ne'er Day. Traditionally more important to the Scots than Christmas, the occasion is known for the custom of "first-footing" (see box, p.38). More popular these days are huge and highly organized street parties, most notably in Edinburgh (Ⓦ edinburghshogmanay.org), but also in Aberdeen, Glasgow and other centres.

Jan 1 Stonehaven fireball ceremony. Locals swing fireballs on long sticks to welcome New Year and ward off evil spirits. Also Kirkwall Boys' and Men's Ba' Games, Orkney: mass, drunken football game through the streets of the town, with the castle and the harbour the respective goals. As a grand finale the players jump into the harbour.

Jan 11 Burning of the Clavie, Burghead, Moray Ⓦ **hogmanay.net/events/burghhead.** A burning tar barrel is carried through the town and then rolled down Doorie Hill. Charred fragments of the Clavie offer protection against the evil eye.

BURNS NIGHT

To celebrate the birthday of the country's best-known poet, Rabbie Burns (1759–1796), Scots all over the world gather together for a **Burns Supper** on January 25. Strictly speaking, a piper should greet the guests until everyone is seated ready to hear the first bit of Burns' s poetry, *The Selkirk Grace*:

Some hae meat and canna eat,
and some wad eat that want it,
but we hae meat and we can eat,
and sae the Lord be thankit.

At this point the star attraction of the evening, the **haggis**, is piped in on a silver platter, after which someone reads out Burns's *Ode to a Haggis*, beginning with the immortal line, "*Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face/Great chieftain o' the pudding-race!*". During the **recitation**, the reader raises a knife ("*His knife see Rustic-labour dight*"), pierces the haggis, allowing the tasty gore to spill out ("*trenching its gushing entrails*"), and then toasts the haggis with the final line ("*Gie her a Haggis!*"). After everyone has tucked into their **haggis**, **tatties and neeps**, someone gives a paean to the life of Burns along with more of his poetry. A male guest then has to give a speech in which women are praised (often ironically) through selective quotations from Burns, ending in a Toast to the Lassies. This is followed by a (usually scathing) reply from one of the Lassies, again through judicious use of Burns's quotes. Finally, there's a stirring rendition of Burns's poem, *Auld Lang Syne*, to the familiar tune.

Mid- to late Jan Celtic Connections, Glasgow Ⓦ **celticconnections.com.** A major celebration of Celtic and folk music held in venues across the city.

Last Tues in Jan Up-Helly-Aa, Lerwick, Shetland Ⓦ **visitshetland.com.** Norse fire festival culminating in the burning of a specially built Viking longship. Visitors will need an invite from one of the locals, or you can buy a ticket for the Town Hall celebrations.

Jan 25 Burns Night. Scots worldwide get stuck into haggis, whisky and vowel-grinding poetry to commemorate Scotland's greatest poet, Robert Burns (see boxes, p.37 & p.165).

FEB–MARCH

Feb Scottish Curling Championship Ⓦ **royalcaledoniancurlingclub.org.** Held in a different (indoor) venue each year.

Feb–March Six Nations Rugby tournament. Tournament between Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, France and Italy (Ⓦ rbs6nations.com). Scotland's home games are played at Murrayfield stadium in Edinburgh.

March 1 Whuppity Scourie, Lanark. Local children race round the church beating each other with home-made paper weapons in a representation (it's thought) of the chasing away of winter or the warding off of evil spirits.

APRIL–MAY

April Scottish Grand National, Ayr Ⓦ **ayr-racecourse.co.uk.** Not quite as testing as the English equivalent steeplechase, but an important event in the Scottish racing calendar. Also **Rugby Sevens** (seven-a-side tournaments; Ⓦ melrose7s.com) in the Borders and the entertaining and inclusive **Edinburgh Science Festival** Ⓦ sciencefestival.co.uk.

April 6 Tartan Day. Over-hyped celebration of ancestry by North Americans of Scottish descent on the anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320. Ignored by most Scots in Scotland, other than journalists.

Early May Spirit of Speyside Scotch Whisky Festival (Ⓦ **spiritofspeyside.com**). Four-day binge with pipe bands, gigs and dancing as well as distillery crawls. **Shetland Folk Festival** (Ⓦ shetlandfolkfestival.com). One of the liveliest and most entertaining of Scotland's round of folk festivals.

May Scottish FA Cup Final. Scotland's premier football event, played in Glasgow.

Late May Atholl Highlanders Parade at Blair Castle, Perthshire Ⓦ **blair-castle.co.uk.** The annual parade and inspection of Britain's last private army by their colonel-in-chief, the Duke of Atholl, on the eve of their Highland Games. Also **Burns an' a' That** (Ⓦ burnsfestival.com), a modern celebration of poet Robert Burns, including gigs by contemporary pop acts.

JUNE–JULY

June–Aug Riding of the Marches in border towns such as Hawick, Selkirk, Jedburgh, Langholm and Lauder. The Ridings originated to check the boundaries of common land owned by the town and also to commemorate warfare between the Scots and the English.

June Beginning of the Highland Games season across the Highlands, northeast and Argyll. Also, the **St Magnus Festival**, Orkney, is a classical and folk music, drama, dance and literature festival celebrating the islands (Ⓦ stmagnusfestival.com). The **Edinburgh International Film Festival** (Ⓦ edfilmfest.org.uk) runs from mid-June for 10 days.

Late June Royal Highland Agricultural Show, at Ingliston near Edinburgh Ⓦ **royalhighlandshow.org.** Old wooden boats and fishing craft gather for the **Traditional Boat Festival** at Portsoy on the Moray Firth coast (Ⓦ stbfportsoy.com). **Glasgow Jazz Festival** (Ⓦ jazzfest.co.uk).

Early July T in the Park Ⓦ **tinthepark.com.** Scotland's biggest outdoor music event, held at Balado near Kinross, with a star-studded line-up of contemporary bands.

July Scottish Open Golf Championship. Held each year at Loch Lomond golf course, just before the **British Open** tournament, which is played in Scotland at least every alternate year.

Late July The Wickerman Festival Festival of alternative music held near Kirkcudbright (Ⓦ thewickermanfestival.co.uk).

AUG–SEPT

Aug Edinburgh Festival Ⓦ **edinburghfestivals.com.** One of the world's great arts jamborees (see p.101). **The Edinburgh Military Tattoo** (Ⓦ edinburgh-tattoo.co.uk) features floodlit massed pipe bands and drums on the castle esplanade. There's also the **World Pipe Band Championship** at Glasgow (Ⓦ seeglasgow.com/piping), and plenty more Highland Games.

Early Sept Shinty's Camanachd Cup Final Ⓦ **shinty.com.** The climax of the season for Scotland's own stick-and-ball game, normally

HOGMANAY

When hardline Scottish Protestant clerics in the sixteenth century abolished Christmas for being a Catholic mass, the Scots, not wanting to miss out on a mid-winter knees-up, instead put their energy into greeting the New Year, or **Hogmanay**. Houses were cleaned from top to bottom, debts were paid and quarrels made up, and, after the bells of midnight were rung, great store was laid by welcoming good luck into your house. This still takes the form of the tradition of "**first-footing**" – visiting your neighbours and bearing gifts. The ideal first-foot is a tall dark-haired male carrying a bottle of whisky; women or redheads, on the other hand, bring bad luck – though, to be honest, no one carrying a bottle of whisky tends to be turned away these days, whatever the colour of their hair. All this neighbourly greeting means a fair bit of partying, and no one is expected to go to work the next day, or, indeed, the day after that. Even today, January 1 is a public holiday in the rest of the UK, but only in Scotland does the holiday extend to the next day too.

held in one of the main Highland towns. Also various food festivals and events under the banner of **Scottish Food and Drink Fortnight** (Ⓦ scottishfoodanddrinkfortnight.co.uk).

Late Sept Doors Open Day Ⓦ **doorsopendays.org.uk.** The one weekend a year when many public and private buildings are open to the public; actual dates vary. Also Dufftown's **Autumn Speyside Whisky Festival** (Ⓦ spiritofspeyside.com), and **the Scottish Book Town Festival** in Wigtown (Ⓦ wigtown-booktown.co.uk).

OCT–NOV

Oct Tiree Wave Classic Ⓦ **tireewaveclassic.com.** Annual event attracting windsurfers from around the world to the breezy Hebridean island.

Mid-Oct The National Mod Ⓦ **www.the-mod.co.uk.** Held over nine days at a different venue each year, the Mod is a competitive festival and features all aspects of Gaelic performing arts.

Nov 30 St Andrew's Day. Celebrating Scotland's patron saint. The town of St Andrews hosts a week of events leading up to it (Ⓦ standrewsweek.co.uk).

Highland Games

Despite their name, **Highland Games** are held all over Scotland between May and mid-September, varying in size and in the range of events they offer. The Games probably originated in the fourteenth century as a means of recruiting the best fighting men for the clan chiefs, and were popularized by **Queen Victoria** to encourage the traditional dress, music, games and dance of the Highlands; indeed, various royals still attend the Games at Braemar.

Apart from **Braemar**, the most famous games take place at **Oban** and **Cowal**, but the smaller events are often more fun – like a sort of Highland version of a school sports day. There's money to be won, too, so the Games are usually pretty competitive. The most distinctive events are known as the "heavies" – tossing the caber (pronounced "kabber"), putting the stone, and tossing the weight over the bar – all of which require prodigious strength and skill, and the wearing of a kilt. Tossing the caber is the most spectacular, when the athlete must lift an entire tree trunk up, cupping it in his hands, before running with it and attempting to heave it end over end. Just as important as the sporting events are the **piping** competitions – for individuals and bands – and **dancing** competitions, where you'll see girls as young as 3 tripping the quick, intricate steps of dances such as the Highland Fling.

Football

Football (soccer) is far and away Scotland's most popular spectator sport. The national team (accompanied by its distinctive and vocal supporters, known as the "Tartan Army") is a source of pride and frustation for Scots everywhere. Once a regular at World Cups where they were involved in some memorable matches against the likes of Holland and Brazil, Scotland have failed to qualify for an international tournament since 1998.

The national domestic league established in 1874 is one of the oldest in the world, but today most of the teams that play in it are little known beyond the boundaries of Scotland. The exceptions are the two massive Glasgow teams that have long dominated the Scottish scene, **Rangers** and **Celtic** (see box, p.201) – known collectively as the "Old Firm". The sectarian, and occasionally violent, rivalry between these two is one of the least attractive aspects of Scottish life, and until the end of the 2011–2012 season when financial problems led to Rangers being demoted to Division Three, their stranglehold over the **Scottish Premier League** (now rebranded as the Scottish Premiership; Ⓦ scotprem.com), made the championship fairly predictable.

As in England, foreign players have flooded the top league, to the extent that **home-grown players** can be in the minority in the main teams. However, talented local players still have a stage on which to perform, and the new blend of continental sophistication mixed with Scottish passion and ruggedness makes for a distinctive spectacle.

The **season** begins in early August and ends in mid-May, with matches on Saturday afternoons at 3pm, and also often on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings. Standard tickets cost around £25 for big games and can be purchased from club websites. For a quick overview see Ⓦ scotprem.com, which features details of every Scottish club, with news and match report archives.

Rugby

Although **rugby** has always lived under the shadow of football in Scotland, it ranks as one of the country's major sports. Weekends when the national team is playing a home international at Murrayfield stadium in Edinburgh are colourful occasions, with kilted masses filling the capital's pubs and lining the streets leading to the ground. Internationals take place in the spring, when Scotland takes on the other "home nations", along with France and Italy, in the annual **Six Nations** tournament (see opposite), although there are always fixtures in the autumn against international touring teams such as New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Tickets for big

games are hard to come by; contact the **Scottish Rugby Union** (T 01313 465000, W sru.org.uk).

The area where the **domestic rugby** tradition runs deepest is in the Borders, where towns such as Hawick, Kelso and Galashiels can be gripped by the fortunes of their local team on a Saturday afternoon. The Borders are also the home of **seven-a-side rugby**, an abridged version of the game that was invented in Melrose in the 1890s and is now played around the world, most notably at the glamorous annual event in Hong Kong. The **Melrose Sevens** is still the biggest tournament of the year in Scotland (see p.122), although you'll find events at one or other of the Border towns through the spring, most going on right through an afternoon and invoking a festival atmosphere in the large crowd.

Shinty

Played throughout Scotland but with particular strongholds in the West Highlands and Strathspey, the game of **shinty** (the Gaelic *sinteag* means "leap") arrived from Ireland around 1500 years ago. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was played on an informal basis and teams from neighbouring villages had to come to an agreement about rules before matches could begin. However, in 1893, the **Camanachd Association** – the Gaelic word for shinty is *camanachd* – was set up to formalize the rules, and the first Camanachd Cup Final was held in Inverness in 1896. Today, shinty is still fairly close to its Gaelic roots, like the Irish game of hurling, with each team having twelve players including a goalkeeper and each goal counting for a point. The game, which bears similarities to an undisciplined version of hockey, isn't for the faint-hearted; it's played at a furious pace, with sticks – called camans or cammocks – flying alarmingly in all directions. Support is enthusiastic and vocal, and if you're in the Highlands during the season, which runs from March to October, it's well worth trying to catch a match: check with tourist offices or the local paper, or go to W shinty.com.

Curling

The one winter sport which enjoys a strong Scottish identity is **curling** (W royalcaledoniancurlingclub.org), occasionally still played on a frozen outdoor rink, or "pond", though most commonly these days seen at indoor ice rinks. The game, which involves gently sliding smooth-bottomed 18kg discs of granite called "stones" across the ice towards a target circle, is said to have been invented in Scotland, although its earliest representation is in a sixteenth-century Flemish painting. Played by two teams of four, it's a highly tactical and skilful sport, enlivened by team members using brushes to sweep the ice furiously in front of a moving stone to help it travel further and straighter. If you're interested in seeing curling being played, go along to the ice rink in places such as Perth, Pitlochry or Inverness on a winter evening.

Outdoor activities

Scotland boasts a landscape that, weather conditions apart, is extremely attractive for outdoor pursuits at all levels of fitness and ambition, and legislation enacted by the Scottish Parliament has ensured a right of access to hills, mountains, lochs and rivers. Within striking distance of its cities are two national parks, remote wilderness areas and vast stretches of glens and moorland, while sea-kayakers, sailors and surfers can enjoy excellent conditions along the rugged but beautiful coastline.

Walking and climbing

The whole of Scotland offers superb opportunities for **walking**, with some of the finest areas in the ownership of bodies such as the National Trust for Scotland and the John Muir Trust (W jmt.org); both permit year-round access. Bear in mind, though, that restrictions may be in place during lambing and deerstalking seasons. See W outdooraccess-scotland.com for information about **hiking safely** during the stalking season. In addition, the green signposts of the Scottish Rights of Way Society point to established paths and routes all over the country.

There are several **long-distance footpaths**, such as the well-known West Highland Way (see box, p.293), which take between three and seven days to walk, though you can, of course, just do a section of them. Paths are generally well signposted and well supported, with a range of services from bunkhouses to baggage-carrying services.

Numerous short walks (from accessible towns and villages) and several major walks are touched on in this Guide. However, you should only use our notes as general outlines, and always in conjunction with a good map. Where possible, we have given details of the best maps to use – in most cases one of the excellent and reliable **Ordnance Survey** (OS) series (see p.47), usually available from

MIDGES AND TICKS

Despite being only just over a millimetre long, and enjoying a life span on the wing of just a few weeks, the **midge** (genus: *culicoides*) – a tiny biting fly prevalent in the Highlands (mainly the west coast) and Islands – is considered to be second only to the weather as the major deterrent to tourism in Scotland. There are more than thirty varieties of midge, though only half of these bite humans. Ninety percent of all midge bites are down to the female *Culicoides impunctatus* or **Highland midge** (the male does not bite), which has two sets of jaws sporting twenty teeth each; she needs a good meal of blood in order to produce eggs.

These persistent creatures can be a nuisance, but some people also have a violent allergic reaction to midge bites. The easiest way to avoid midges is to visit in the winter, since they only appear between April and October. Midges also favour still, damp, overcast or shady conditions and are at their meanest around sunrise and sunset, when clouds of them can descend on an otherwise idyllic spot. Direct sunlight, heavy rain, noise and smoke discourage them to some degree, though wind is the most effective means of dispersing them. If they appear, cover up exposed skin and get your hands on some kind of repellent. recommendations include Autan, Eureka!, Jungle Formula (widely available from pharmacists) and the herbal remedy citronella. An alternative to repellents for protecting your face, especially if you're walking or camping, is a **midge net**, which is a little like a beekeeper's hat; though they appear ridiculous at first, you're unlikely to care as long as they work. The latest deployment in the battle against the midge is a gas-powered machine called a "midge magnet" which sucks up the wee beasties and is supposed to be able to clear up to an acre; each unit costs £520 and upwards, but there's been a healthy take-up by pubs with beer gardens and by campsite owners.

If you're walking through long grass or bracken, there's a possibility that you may receive attention from **ticks**, tiny parasites no bigger than a pin head, which bury themselves into your skin. Removing ticks by dabbing them with alcohol, butter or oil is now discouraged; the medically favoured way of extracting them is to pull them out carefully with small tweezers. There is a very slight risk of catching some nasty diseases, such as encephalitis, from ticks. If flu-like symptoms persist after a tick bite, you should see a doctor immediately.

local tourist offices, which, along with outdoor shops, can also supply other local maps, safety advice and guidebooks/leaflets.

For relatively gentle walking in the company of knowledgeable locals, look out for guided walks offered by rangers at many National Trust for Scotland, Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage sites. These often focus on local **wildlife**, and the best can lead to some special sightings, such as a badger's sett or a golden eagle's eyrie.

WALKING INFORMATION

outdooraccess-scotland.com All you need to know about the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, plus daily information for hill walkers about deerstalking activities (July–Oct).

walking.visitscotland.com Official site from VisitScotland, with good lists of operators, information on long-distance footpaths, and details of deerstalking restrictions and contact phone numbers.

wildlife.visitscotland.com Highlights the fauna and flora you may spot on a walk.

WALKING CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Mountain Bothies Association mountainbothies.org.uk. Charity dedicated to maintaining huts and shelters in the Scottish Highlands.

Mountaineering Council of Scotland mountaineering-scotland.org.uk. The representative body for all mountain activities, with detailed information on access and conservation issues.

Ramblers Association Scotland ramblers.org.uk/scotland. Campaigning organization with network of local groups, and news on events and issues.

Scottish Mountaineering Club smc.org.uk. The largest mountaineering club in the country. A well-respected organization which publishes a popular series of mountain guidebooks.

WALKING TOUR OPERATORS

Adventure Scotland 01479 811411, adventure-scotland.com. Highly experienced operator providing a wide range of courses and one-day adventures, from telemark skiing to climbing, kayaking and biking.

C-N-Do Scotland 01786 445703, cndoscotland.com. Prides itself on offering the "best walking holidays in Scotland". Munro-bagging for novices and experts with qualified leaders.

G2 Outdoor 01479 811008, g2outdoor.co.uk. Personable, highly qualified adventure specialists offering gorge scrambling, hillwalking, rock climbing, canoeing and telemark skiing in the Cairngorms.

Glenmore Lodge 01479 861256, glenmorelodge.org.uk. Based within the Cairngorm National Park, and internationally recognized as a leader in outdoor skills and leadership training.

Hebridean Pursuits T 01631 720002, W **hebrideanpursuits.com.** Offers hillwalking and rock climbing in the Hebrides and West Highlands, as well as surf-kayaking and sailing trips.

Nae Limits T 08450 178177, W **naelimits.co.uk.** This excellent Perthshire-based operator offers everything from wet 'n' wild rafting to bug canyoning and cliff jumping.

North-West Frontiers T 01997 421474, W **nwfrontiers.com.** Based in Ullapool, offering guided mountain trips with small groups in the northwest Highlands, Hebrides and even the Shetland Islands.

Rua Reidh Lighthouse Holidays T 01445 771263, W **ruareidh.co.uk.** From its spectacular northwest location, this company offers guided walks highlighting wildlife, rock-climbing courses and week-long treks into the Torridon hills.

Vertical Descents T 01855 821593, W **verticaldescents.com.** Ideally located for the Glencoe and Fort William area, activities and courses include canyoning, "funyakking" (a type of rafting) and climbing.

Walkabout Scotland T 08456 861344 W **walkaboutscotland.com.** A great way to get a taste of hiking in Scotland, from exploring Ben Lomond to the Isle of Arran. Guided day and weekend walking trips from Edinburgh with all transport included.

Wilderness Scotland T 01479 420020, W **wildernessscotland.com.** Guided, self-guided and customized adventure holidays, and trips that focus on exploring the remote and unspoiled parts of Scotland by foot, bike, sea-kayak, yacht and even on skis.

Winter sports

Skiing and **snowboarding** take place at five different locations in Scotland – Glen Coe, the Nevis Range beside Fort William, Glen Shee, the Lecht and the Cairngorms near Aviemore. The resorts can go for months on end through the winter with insufficient snow, then see the approach roads suddenly made impassable by a glut of the stuff. When the conditions are good, Scotland's **ski resorts** have piste and off-piste areas that will challenge even the most accomplished alpine or cross-country skier.

Expect to pay up to £35 for a standard day-pass at one of the resorts, or around £110 for a four-day pass; rental of skis or snowboard comes in at around £30 per day, with reductions for multi-day rentals. At weekends, in good weather with decent snow, expect the slopes to be packed with trippers from the central belt, although midweek usually sees queues dissolving. For a comprehensive rundown of all the resorts, including ticket prices and conditions, visit W ski.visitscotland.com.

Cross-country skiing (along with the related telemark or Nordic skiing) is becoming increasingly popular in the hills around Braemar near Glenshee and the Cairngorms. The best way to get started or to find out about good routes is to contact an outdoor pursuits company that offers telemark or Nordic rental and instruction; in the Aviemore area try Adventure Scotland or G2 Outdoor (see p.425). Also check out the Huntly Nordic and Outdoor Centre in Huntly, Aberdeenshire (T 01466 794428, W nordicski.co.uk/hnoc). For equipment hire, sales or advice for Nordic and ski mountaineering equipment, contact Mountain Spirit (T 01479 811788, W mountainspirit.co.uk) located at the southern entrance to Aviemore village.

Pony trekking and horse-riding

There are approximately sixty pony trekking or riding centres across the country, most approved by either the Trekking and Riding Society of Scotland (TRSS; W ridinginscotland.com) or the British Horse Society (BHS; W bhs.org.uk). As a rule, any centre will offer the option of **pony trekking**, **hacking** and **trail riding**. In addition, a network of special horse-and-rider B&Bs means you can ride independently on your own horse. The **Buccleuch Country Ride**, a three to four day, 57-mile-long route using private tracks, open country and quiet bridleways was the first route of its kind to be opened in Scotland. For more information about this, and the B&B network for riders, contact the Scottish Borders Tourist Board, or visit W buccleuch.com.

Cycling and mountain biking

Cycle touring is a great way to see some of the remoter parts of Scotland and navigate city streets (especially in Edinburgh). You'll find cycle shops in towns but few dedicated cycle lanes. In the countryside it can be tricky finding spare parts unless you are near one of Scotland's purpose-built mountain-bike trail centres.

Scotland is now regarded as one of the world's top destinations for **off-road mountain biking**. The Forestry Commission has established more than 1150 miles of excellent off-road routes. These are detailed in numerous "Cycling in the Forest" leaflets, available from the Commission's Forest Enterprise offices (see opposite). Alternatively, get hold of the *Scottish Mountain Biking Guide* from tourist information centres. Some of the tougher routes are best attempted on full suspension mountain bikes although the easier (blue/green) trails can be ridden on a standard mountain or road bike. Pocket Mountains also publish a series of compact cycling guides to the country (W pocketmountains.com).

For up-to-date information on long-distance routes, including **The Great Glen Cycle Way**, along with a list of publications detailing specific routes, contact the cyclists campaigning group Sustrans (W sustrans.co.uk), as well as the other organizations listed here (see opposite).

STAYING SAFE IN THE HILLS

Due to rapid weather changes, the **mountains** are potentially extremely **dangerous** and should be treated with respect. Every year, in every season, climbers and walkers lose their lives in the Scottish hills.

- Wear sturdy, ankle-supporting **footwear** and wear or carry with you warm, brightly coloured and **waterproof** layered clothing, even for what appears to be an easy expedition in apparently settled weather.
- Always carry adequate **maps**, a **compass** (which you should know how to use), food, water and a whistle. If it's sunny, make sure you use **sun protection**.
- Check the **weather forecast** before you go. If the weather looks as if it's closing in, get down from the mountain fast.
- Always **leave word** with someone of your route and what time you expect to return, and remember to contact the person again to let them know that you are back.
- In an emergency, call **mountain rescue** on T 999.

Another option is to shell out on a cycling holiday package. Britain's biggest cycling organization, the **Cycle Touring Club**, or CTC (W ctc.org.uk), provides lists of tour operators and rental outlets in Scotland, and supplies members with touring and technical advice, as well as insurance. Visit Scotland's "Cycling in Scotland" brochure is worth getting hold of, with practical advice and suggestions for itineraries around the country. The tourist board's "Cyclists Welcome" scheme gives guesthouses and B&Bs around the country a chance to advertise that they're cyclist-friendly, and able to provide an overnight laundry service, a late meal or a packed lunch.

Transporting your bike **by train** is a good way of getting to the interesting parts of Scotland without a lot of hard pedalling. Bikes are allowed free on mainline East Coast and ScotRail trains, but you need to book the space as far in advance as possible. Bus and coach companies, including National Express and Scottish Citylink, rarely accept cycles unless they are dismantled and boxed. You'll find **bike rental** facilities in large towns and tourist centres; expect to pay around £20 per day, or more for top-notch mountain bikes. Most outlets also give good discounts for multi-day rents.

CYCLING INFORMATION

Cycle Scotland T 01315 565560, W cyclescotland.co.uk. Fully organized cycle tours at all levels, with accommodation ranging from campsites to country-house hotels, and a good range of bikes available for rent, from tandems to children's bikes.

Cyclists' Touring Club T 01483 238337, W ctc.org.uk. Britain's largest cycling organization, and a good source of general advice; their handbook has lists of cyclist-friendly B&Bs and cafés in Scotland. Annual membership £41.

Forestry Commission T 08453 673787, W forestry.gov.uk/mtbscotland. The best source of information on Scotland's extensive network of forest trails – ideal for mountain biking at all levels of ability.

Full On Adventure T 01479 420123, W fullonadventure.co.uk. Among its many offerings, provides fully guided mountain-bike tours of Highland trails.

Highland Wildcat Trails W highlandwildcat.com. Scotland's most northerly dedicated mountain-bike centre, complete with one of the country's longest downhill tracks.

Nevis Range W ridefortwilliam.co.uk. For information on all the trails around Fort William, including the home of Scotland's World Cup downhill and cross-country tracks at Nevis Range.

North Sea Cycle Route W www.northsea-cycle.com. Signposted 3725-mile (6000-km) route round seven countries fringing the North Sea, including 772 miles (1242km) in Scotland along the east coast, and in Orkney and Shetland.

Spokes T 01313 132114, W spokes.org.uk. Active Edinburgh cycle campaign group with plenty of good links, and news on events and cycle-friendly developments.

WolfTrax Mountain Bike Centre T 01528 544786, W www.forestry.gov.uk/wolftrax. This Central Highland bike centre near Newtonmore has almost 22 miles of routes for every standard of rider.

Air sports

Scotland has its fair share of fine sunny days, when it's hard to beat scanning majestic mountain peaks, lochs and endless forests from the air. Whether you're a willing novice or an expert **paraglider** or **skydiver**, there are centres just outside Glasgow, Edinburgh and Perth that will cater to your needs. There are also opportunities to try ballooning and gliding.

AIR SPORTS INFORMATION

British Gliding Association T 01162 892956, W gliding.co.uk. Governing body for gliding enthusiasts and schools across the UK with information on where to find clubs in Scotland.

Cloudbusters T 07899 878509, W cloudbusters.co.uk. Highly reputable paragliding school that runs taster and fully accredited paragliding courses in the Lanarkshire hills outside Glasgow every weekend. Full day's training £130.

Flying Fever T 01770 303899, W flyingfever.net. Based on the stunning Isle of Arran, forty miles southwest of Glasgow. From March to October, fully accredited paragliding courses and tandem flights cost £140.

Skydive St Andrews T 01592 882400, W skydivestandrews.co.uk. Year-round, highly professional, fully accredited parachute school that offers tandem, solo "static" line and "accelerated free-fall courses" over the Fife countryside. Tandem jump £265.

Skydive Strathallan T 07774 686161, W skydivestrathallan.co.uk. Located just outside Auchterarder, this non-commercial school operates year-round. Tandem jump £280.

Golf

There are more than four hundred golf courses in Scotland, where the game is less elitist and more accessible than anywhere else in the world. **Golf** in its present form took shape in the fifteenth century on the dunes of Scotland's east coast, and today you'll find some of the oldest courses in the world on these coastal sites, known as "links". It's often possible to turn up and play, though it's sensible to phone ahead; booking is essential for the championship courses.

Public courses are owned by the local council, while **private courses** belong to a club. You can play on both – occasionally the private courses require that you are a **member** of another club, however, and the odd one asks for introductions from a member, but these rules are often waived for overseas visitors and all you need to do is pay a one-off fee. The cost of a round will set you back around £15 on a small nine-hole course, and more than £50 on many good-quality eighteen-hole courses.

St Andrews is the top destination for golfers: it's the home of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, the body that regulates the rules of the game. Go to W scotlands-golf-courses.com for contacts, score-cards and maps of signature holes for most of the main courses. If you're coming to Scotland primarily to play golf, it's worth shelling out for one of the various multi-course passes or packages available, which gives you access to a number of courses in any one region. There's more information at W scottishgolf.com and W visitscotland.com/golf.

Fishing

Scotland's serrated **coastline** – with the deep sea lochs of the west, the firths of the east and the myriad offshore islands – ranks among the cleanest coasts in Europe. Combine this with an abundance of salmon, sea trout, brown trout and pike, acres of open space and easy access, and you have a wonderful location for game-, coarse- or sea-fishing.

No licence is needed to fish in Scotland, although nearly all land is privately owned and its fishing therefore controlled by a landlord/lady or his/her agent. Permission, however, is usually easy to obtain: permits can be bought at local tackle shops, rural post offices or through fishing clubs in the area – if in doubt, ask at the nearest tourist office. Salmon and sea trout have strict **seasons**, which usually stretch from late August to late February. Individual tourist offices will know the precise dates, or see Visit Scotland's excellent "Fish Scotland" brochure (W fishpal.com/VisitScotland). For more information and contacts see W fishscotland.co.uk.

Watersports

Opportunities for **sailing** around Scotland are outstanding. However, even in summer the full force of the North Atlantic can be felt, and changeable conditions combined with tricky tides and rocky shores demand good sailing and navigational skills. Yacht charters are available from various ports, either bareboat or in yachts run by a skipper and crew; contact Sail Scotland (W sailscotland.co.uk) or the Association of Scottish Yacht Charterers (W asyc.co.uk). An alternative way to enjoy Scotland under sail is to spend a week at a sailing school. Many schools, as well as small boat rental operations dotted along the coast, will rent sailing dinghies by the hour or day, as well as **windsurfing boards**.

Scotland's top spots for windsurfing and **kitesurfing** are Troon on the Ayrshire coast, St Andrews and Tiree. The latter is renowned for its beaches and waves and has an excellent surf, windsurfing and kitesurfing school, Wild Diamond Watersports (W surfschoolscotland.co.uk).

In recent years **sea-kayaking** has witnessed an explosion in popularity, with a host of operators offering sea-kayaking lessons and expeditions across the country. Canoe Scotland (W canoescotland.org) offers useful advice, while Glenmore Lodge (W glenmorelodge.org.uk), Uist Outdoor Centre (W seakayak-outerhebrides.co.uk) and Skyak Adventures (W skyakadventures.com) are highly reputable for training and tours.

Surfing

In addition to sea-kayaking, Scotland is fast gaining a reputation as a **surfing** destination. However, the northern coastline lies on the same latitude as Alaska and Iceland, so the water temperature is very low: even in midsummer it rarely exceeds 15°C, and in winter can drop to as low as 7°C. The one vital

accessory, therefore, is a good **wet suit** (ideally a 5/3mm steamer), wet-suit boots and, outside summer, gloves and a hood, too.

Many of the best surf spots are surrounded by stunning scenery, and you'd be unlucky to share the waves with other surfers. However, this isolation – combined with the cold water and big, powerful waves – means that many of the best locations can only be enjoyed by experienced surfers. If you're a beginner, consider a **lesson** with a qualified coach such as Craig "Suds" Sutherland at Wild Diamond Watersports in Tiree (T 07793 063849, W surfschoolscotland.co.uk).

Surf shops rent or sell equipment and provide good information about local breaks and events on the surfing scene. Two further sources of information are *Surfing Britain and Ireland* by Nelson/Taylor (Footprint; £14.99), which details breaks around Scotland, and the Surfing Great Britain website (W surfinggb.com).

SURF SHOPS AND SCHOOLS

Coast to Coast Surf School 13 High St, Dunbar T 07971 990361, W c2cadventure.com. Year-round surfing lessons and surf safaris across Scotland.

Boardwise 14 Lady Lawson St, Edinburgh T 01312 295887. Surf gear, clothes and short-term rental (board and wet suit £20/day).

Clan Surf 45 Hyndland St, Partick, Glasgow T 01413 396523, W clanskates.co.uk. Combined surf, skate and snowboard shop. Lessons also available.

Granite Reef 45 The Green, Aberdeen T 01224 252752, W granitereef.co.uk. Sales, hire and boards available to try before you buy. Boards available to rent and try before you buy.

Tempest Surf Riverside Road, Thurso T 01847 892500. At the harbourside, you'll find lessons, a shop and a café that may tempt you to remain snug indoors.

Wild Diamond Watersports Isle of Tiree, T 07793 063849, W surfschoolscotland.co.uk. Professional instruction and hire for surfing, windsurfing, kitesurfing and kayaking.

Travel essentials

Costs

Scotland is a relatively **expensive** place to visit, with travel, food and accommodation costs higher than the EU average. The minimum expenditure for a couple travelling on public transport, self-catering and camping, is in the region of £30 each a day, rising to around £50 per person a day if you're staying at hostels and eating the odd meal out. Staying at budget B&Bs, eating at unpretentious restaurants and visiting the odd tourist attraction, means spending at least £75 each per day. If you're renting a car, staying in comfortable B&Bs or hotels and eating well, you should reckon on at least £100 a day per person.

Crime and personal safety

For the most part the Scottish **police** are approachable and helpful to visitors. If you're lost in a major town, asking a police officer is generally the quickest way to get help. As with any country, Scotland's major towns and cities have their danger spots, but these tend to be inner-city housing estates where no tourist has any reason to roam. The chief urban risk is **pickpocketing**, so carry only as much money as you need, and keep all bags and pockets fastened. Out in the Highlands and Islands, crime levels are very low. Should you have anything stolen or be involved in some incident that requires reporting, contact the local police station (dial T 101 from any location); T 999 (or T 112) should only be used in emergencies – in other words if someone is in immediate danger or a crime is taking place.

Discounts

Most attractions in Scotland offer **concessions** for senior citizens, the unemployed, full-time students and children under 16, with under-5s being admitted free almost everywhere – proof of eligibility will be required in most cases. Family tickets are often available for those travelling with kids.

Once obtained, **youth/student ID cards** soon pay for themselves in savings. Full-time students are eligible for the International Student Identity Card or **ISIC** (W isiccard.com), which costs around £12 and entitles the bearer to special air, rail and bus fares, and discounts at museums, theatres and other attractions. If you're not a student, but you're 25 or younger, you can get an International Youth Travel Card or **IYTC**, which costs the same as the ISIC and carries the same benefits.

Electricity

The current in Scotland is the **EU standard** of approximately 230v AC. All sockets are designed for British three-pin plugs, which are totally different from the rest of the EU. Adapters are widely available at airports and electronics stores.

Emergencies

For **police**, **fire** and **ambulance** services phone T 999.

Entry requirements

Citizens of all European countries – except Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and all the former Soviet republics (other than the Baltic states) – can enter Britain with just a **passport**, for up to three months (and indefinitely if you're from the EU). Americans, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders can stay for up to six months, providing they have a return ticket and adequate funds to cover their stay. Citizens of most other countries require a **visa**, obtainable from the British consulate or mission office in the country of application.

Note that visa regulations are subject to frequent changes, so it's always wise to contact the nearest British embassy or high commission before you travel. If you visit ⓦukvisas.gov.uk, you can download the full range of **application forms** and information leaflets and find out the contact details of your nearest embassy or consulate. In addition, an independent charity, the Immigration Advisory Service or IAS (ⓦiasuk.org), offers free and confidential advice to anyone applying for entry clearance into the UK.

If you want to **extend your visa**, you should contact the UK Border Agency (ⓦukba.homeoffice.gov.uk), before the expiry date given in your passport.

Gay and lesbian travellers

Both Glasgow and Edinburgh have reasonably prominent **gay and lesbian** communities, with a well-established network of bars, cafés, nightclubs, support groups and events. In **Edinburgh**, the area around Broughton Street is the heart of the city's "pink triangle", while in **Glasgow** the scene is mostly found in the Merchant City area; our entertainment listings for both cities include a number of gay bars and clubs. Elsewhere in Scotland, there are one or two gay bars in both Aberdeen and Dundee, and support and advice groups dotted around the country. Details for these, and many other aspects of the gay scene in Scotland, can be found in the monthly *Scotsgay* newspaper, versions of which can be downloaded for free online (ⓦscotsgay.co.uk).

Health

Pharmacists (known as chemists in Scotland) can dispense only a limited range of drugs without a doctor's prescription. Most pharmacies are open standard shop hours, though there are also late-night branches in large cities and at 24-hour supermarkets.

If your condition is serious enough, you can turn up at the Accident and Emergency (A&E) department of local **hospitals** for complaints that require immediate attention. Obviously, if it's an absolute emergency, ring for an ambulance (ⓣ999). These services are free to all. You can also get free medical advice from NHS Direct, the health service's 24-hour helpline (ⓣ111, ⓦnhsdirect.nhs.uk).

Insurance

Even though EU health-care privileges apply in the UK, it's a good idea to take out **travel insurance** before travelling to cover against theft, loss and illness or injury. For non-EU citizens, it's worth checking whether you are already covered before you buy a new policy. If you need to take out insurance, you might want to consider the travel insurance deal we offer (see box, below).

Internet

Internet cafés are still found in the big cities and towns, but **wi-fi** is now the best way to get online, with free networks available at most B&Bs and hostels, even in the Highlands and Islands. If you don't have your own smartphone, laptop or tablet, the tourist office should be able to help – sometimes they will have an access point – and public libraries often provide cheap or free access.

ROUGH GUIDES TRAVEL INSURANCE

Rough Guides has teamed up with **WorldNomads.com** to offer great travel insurance deals. Policies are available to residents of over 150 countries, with cover for a wide range of adventure sports, 24hr emergency assistance, high levels of medical and evacuation cover, and a stream of travel safety information. **Roughguides.com** users can take advantage of their policies online 24/7, from anywhere in the world – even if you're already travelling. And since plans often change when you're on the road, you can extend your policy and even claim online. Roughguides.com users who buy travel insurance with WorldNomads.com can also leave a positive footprint and donate to a community development project. For more information, go to ⓦroughguides.com/travel-insurance/.

HISTORIC SCOTLAND AND NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND

Many of Scotland's most treasured sights – from castles and country houses to islands, gardens and tracts of protected landscape – come under the control of the privately run **National Trust for Scotland** (Ⓦ nts.org.uk) or the state-run **Historic Scotland** (Ⓦ historic-scotland.gov.uk); we've quoted "**NTS**" or "**HS**" respectively for each site reviewed in this guide. Both organizations charge an admission fee for most places, and these can be quite high, especially for the more grandiose NTS estates.

If you think you'll be visiting more than half a dozen NTS properties, or more than a dozen HS ones, it's worth taking **annual membership**, which costs around £48 (HS) or £50 (NTS), and allows free admission to their properties. In addition, both the NTS and HS offer short-term passes: the NTS has the **Discovery Ticket**, which costs between £25 for an adult ticket lasting three days to £70 for a family ticket lasting fourteen days; and HS's **Explorer Pass**, ranging from £29 for three days (out of five) to £76 for seven days (out of fourteen) for a family.

Laundry

Coin-operated **laundries** are still found in a few Scottish cities and towns, but are becoming less and less common. A wash followed by a spin or tumble dry costs about £3.50; a "service wash" (having your laundry done for you in a few hours) costs about £2 extra. In the more remote regions of Scotland, you'll have to rely on hostel and campsite laundry facilities.

Mail

A stamp for a **first-class letter** to anywhere in the British Isles currently costs 60p and should arrive the next day; second-class letters cost 50p, taking three days. Note that there are now size restrictions: letters over 240 x 165 x 5mm are designated as "Large letters" and are correspondingly more expensive to send. Prices to Europe and the rest of the world vary depending on the size of the item and how quickly you would like it delivered. To get an idea of how much you'll need to spend, check the Royal Mail website (Ⓦ royalmail.com/price-finder).

Note, that in many parts of the Highlands and Islands there will only be one or two mail collections each day, often at lunchtime or even earlier. **Stamps** can be bought at post office counters or from newsagents, supermarkets and local shops, although they usually only sell books of four or ten stamps.

For general postal enquiries phone ⓣ 0845 774 0740 (Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat 8am–1pm), or visit the website Ⓦ royalmail.com. Most **post offices** are open Monday to Friday 9am–5.30pm and Saturday 9am–12.30pm. In small communities you'll find post office counters operating out of a shop, shed or even a private house and these will often keep extremely **restricted hours**.

Maps

The most comprehensive maps of Scotland are produced by the **Ordnance Survey** or OS (Ⓦ ordnancesurvey.co.uk), renowned for their accuracy and clarity. Scotland is covered by 85 maps in the 1:50,000 (pink) **Landranger** series which shows enough detail to be useful for most walkers and cyclists. There's more detail still in the full-colour 1:25,000 (orange) **Explorer** series, which covers Scotland in around 170 maps. The full Ordnance Survey range is only available at a few big-city stores or online, although in any walking district of Scotland you'll find the relevant maps in local shops or tourist offices. If you're planning a walk of more than a couple of hours in duration, or intend to walk in the Scottish hills at all, it is strongly recommended that you carry the relevant OS map and familiarize yourself with how to navigate using it.

Virtually every service station in Scotland stocks at least one large-format **road atlas**, covering all of Britain at around three miles to one inch, and generally including larger-scale plans of major towns. For getting between major towns and cities a sat nav or GPS-enabled smartphone is hard to beat, but you'll have less luck in rural areas, where landmarks and even entire roads can be positioned incorrectly, leading to long and sometimes expensive detours.

Money

The basic unit of **currency** in the UK is the pound sterling (£), divided into 100 pence (p). Coins come in denominations of 1p, 2p, 5p, 10p, 20p, 50p, £1 and £2. Bank of England £5, £10, £20 and £50 banknotes are legal tender in Scotland; in addition the **Bank of Scotland** (HBOS), the **Royal Bank of Scotland** (RBS)

and the **Clydesdale Bank** issue their own banknotes in all the same denominations, plus a £100 note. All Scottish notes are legal tender throughout the UK, no matter what shopkeepers south of the border might say. In general, few people use £50 or £100 notes, and shopkeepers are likely to treat them with suspicion; fear of forgeries is widespread. At the time of going to press, £1 was worth around $1.50, €1.20, Can$1.60, Aus$1.70 and NZ$1.90. For the most up-to-date exchange rates, check the useful website Ⓦxe.com.

Credit/debit cards are by far the most convenient way to carry your money, and most hotels, shops and restaurants in Scotland accept the major brand cards. In every sizeable town in Scotland, and in some surprisingly small places too, you'll find a branch of at least one of the big Scottish high-street **banks**, usually with an **ATM** attached. However, on some islands, and in remoter parts, you may find there is only a **mobile bank** that runs to a timetable (usually available from the local post office). General **banking hours** are Monday to Friday from 9 or 9.30am to 4 or 5pm, though some branches are open until slightly later on Thursdays. Post offices charge **no commission**, have longer opening hours, and are therefore often a good place to change money and cheques. Lost or stolen credit/debit cards should be reported to the police and the following numbers: MasterCard Ⓣ0800 964 767; Visa Ⓣ0800 891 725.

Opening hours and public holidays

Traditional **shop hours** in Scotland are Monday to Saturday 9am to 5.30 or 6pm. In the bigger towns and cities, many places now stay open on Sundays and late at night on Thursdays or Fridays. Large supermarkets typically stay open till 8pm or 10pm and a few manage 24-hour opening (excluding Sunday). However, there are also plenty of towns and villages where you'll find precious little open on a Sunday, with many small towns also retaining an "**early closing day**" – often Wednesday – when shops close at 1pm. In the Highlands and Islands you'll find precious few attractions open outside the tourist season (Easter to Oct), though ruins, parks and gardens are normally accessible year-round. Note that last entry can be an hour (or more) before the published closing time.

Phones

Public **payphones** are still occasionally found in the Highlands and Islands, though with the ubiquity of mobile phones, they're seldom used.

If you're taking your **mobile phone/cellphone** with you to Scotland, check with your service provider whether your phone will work abroad and what the call charges will be. The cost of calls within the EU has decreased significantly within recent years, but calls to destinations further afield are still unregulated and can be prohibitively expensive. Unless you have a tri-band phone, it's unlikely that a mobile bought for use in the **US** will work outside the States and vice versa. Mobiles in **Australia** and **New Zealand** generally use the same system as the UK so should work fine. All the main UK networks cover the Highlands and Islands, though you'll still find many places in among the hills or out on the islands where there's no signal at all. If you're in a rural area and having trouble with **reception**, simply ask a local where the strongest signals are found nearby.

Beware of premium-rate numbers, which are common for pre-recorded information services – and usually have the prefix Ⓣ09.

Time

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) – equivalent to Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) – is used from the end of October to the end of March; for the rest of the year the country switches to **British Summer Time** (BST), one hour ahead of GMT.

Tipping

There are no fixed rules for **tipping**. If you think you've received good service, particularly in restaurants or cafés, you may want to leave a tip of ten

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Official **bank holidays** in Scotland operate on: January 1 and 2; Good Friday; the first and last Monday in May; the last Monday in August; St Andrew's Day (Nov 30), Christmas Day (Dec 25); and Boxing Day (Dec 26). In addition, all Scottish towns have one-day holidays in spring, summer and autumn – dates vary from place to place but normally fall on a Monday. While many local shops and businesses close on these days, few tourist-related businesses observe the holidays, particularly in the summer months.

PHONING HOME

To Australia 0061 + area code without the zero + number
To Ireland 00353 + area code without the zero + number
To New Zealand 0064 + area code without the zero + number
To South Africa 0027 + area code without the zero + number
To US and Canada 001 + area code + number

percent of the total bill (unless service has already been included). It's not normal, however, to leave tips in pubs, although bar staff are sometimes offered drinks, which they may accept in the form of money. The only other occasions when you'll be expected to tip are in hairdressers, taxis and smart hotels, where porters, bellboys and table waiters rely on being tipped to bump up their often dismal wages.

Tourist information

The official tourist board is known as **VisitScotland** (visitscotland.com) and they run **tourist offices** (often called Visitor Information Centres, or even "VICs") in virtually every Scottish town. Opening hours are often fiendishly complex and often change at short notice.

As well as being stacked full of souvenirs and other gifts, most TICs have a decent selection of leaflets, displays, maps and books relating to the local area. The staff are usually helpful and will do their best to help with enquiries about accommodation, local transport, attractions and restaurants, although it's worth being aware that they're sometimes reluctant to divulge information about local attractions or accommodation options that are not paid-up members of the Tourist Board, and a number of perfectly decent guesthouses and the like choose not to pay the fees.

Travellers with disabilities

Scottish attitudes towards travellers with **disabilities** still lag behind advances towards independence made in North America and Australia. Access to many public buildings has improved, with legislation ensuring that all new buildings have appropriate facilities. Some hotels and a handful of B&Bs have one or two adapted rooms, usually on the ground floor and with step-free showers, grab rails and wider doorways. It's worth keeping in mind, however, that installing ramps, lifts, wide doorways and disabled toilets is impossible in many of Scotland's older and historic buildings.

Most **trains** in Scotland have wheelchair lifts and assistance is, in theory, available at all manned stations – for more, go to scotrail.co.uk and click on "Facilities". Wheelchair-users and blind or partially sighted people are automatically given thirty to forty percent reductions on train fares, and people with other disabilities are eligible for the **Disabled Persons Railcard** (£20/year; disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk), which gives a third off most tickets. There are no bus discounts for disabled tourists. **Car rental** firm Avis will fit their cars with Lynx Hand Controls for free as long as you give them a few days' notice.

For more information and advice contact the disability charity Capability Scotland (0131 313 5510 capability-scotland.org.uk).

Working in Scotland

All Swiss nationals and EEA citizens can work in Scotland without a permit, though Bulgarian, Croatian and Romanian nationals may need to apply for permission. Other nationals need a **work permit** in order to work legally in the UK, with eligibility worked out on a points-based system. There are exceptions to the above rules, and these are constantly changing, so for the latest regulations visit ukvisas.gov.

Edinburgh and the Lothians

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75 The New Town
80 The Water of Leith
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87 Getting around
88 Information
88 Tours
88 Accommodation
91 Eating
96 Drinking
97 Nightlife and entertainment
100 Shopping
101 The Edinburgh Festival
103 Edinburgh's other festivals and events
104 Directory
104 East Lothian
107 Midlothian
109 West Lothian

EDINBURGH CASTLE AND CITY SKYLINE

1

Edinburgh and the Lothians

Venerable, dramatic Edinburgh, the showcase capital of Scotland, is a historic, cosmopolitan and cultured city. The setting is wonderfully striking: perched on a series of extinct volcanoes and rocky crags which rise from the generally flat landscape of the Lothians, with the sheltered shoreline of the Firth of Forth to the north. "My own Romantic town", Sir Walter Scott called it, although it was another native author, Robert Louis Stevenson, who perhaps best captured the feel of his "precipitous city", declaring that "No situation could be more commanding for the head of a kingdom; none better chosen for noble prospects."

The centre has two distinct parts: the unrelentingly medieval **Old Town**, with its tortuous alleys and tightly packed closes, and the dignified, eighteenth-century Grecian-style **New Town**. Dividing the two are **Princes Street Gardens**, which runs roughly east–west under the shadow of **Edinburgh Castle**.

Set on the hill that rolls down from the fairy-tale Castle to the royal **Palace of Holyroodhouse**, the Old Town preserves all the key landmarks from its role as a historic capital, augmented by the dramatic and unusual new **Scottish Parliament building**, opposite the palace. A few hundred yards away, a tantalizing glimpse of the wild beauty of Scotland's scenery can be had in **Holyrood Park**, an extensive area of open countryside dominated by **Arthur's Seat**, the largest and most impressive of the city's volcanoes.

Among Edinburgh's many museums, the exciting **National Museum of Scotland** houses ten thousand of Scotland's most precious artefacts, while the **National Gallery of Scotland** and its offshoot, the **Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art**, have two of Britain's finest collections of paintings.

In August, around a million visitors flock to the city for the **Edinburgh Festival**, in fact a series of separate festivals that make up the largest arts extravaganza in the world. On a less elevated theme, the city's distinctive pubs, allied to its brewing and distilling traditions, make it a great **drinking** city. Its four **universities**, plus several colleges, mean that there is a youthful presence for most of the year. Beyond the city centre, the most lively area is **Leith**, the city's medieval port, now a culinary hotspot with a series of great bars and upmarket seafood restaurants.

The wider rural hinterland of Edinburgh, known as the **Lothians**, mixes rolling countryside and attractive country towns with some impressive historic ruins. In East Lothian, blustery clifftop paths lead to the romantic battlements of **Tantallon Castle**, while nearby North Berwick, home of the **Scottish Seabird Centre**, looks out to the gannet-covered Bass Rock. The most famous sight in Midlothian is the mysterious fifteenth-century **Rosslyn Chapel**, while West Lothian boasts the towering, roofless **Linlithgow Palace**, thirty minutes from Edinburgh by train. To the northwest of the

The Stone of Destiny p.63
John Knox p.68
The World's End Burgh p.69
Edinburgh's controversial Parliament p.71
Greyfriars Bobby p.73
The National Galleries' collection p.77
Water of Leith walkway p.80
Robert Louis Stevenson p.86
Top 5 budget accommodation options p.89
Top 5 must-try restaurants p.91
Top 5 beer gardens p.96
Hogmanay p.98
The Fringe p.102
Legends of Rosslyn Chapel p.108

THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

Highlights

❶ **The Old Town** The evocative heart of the historic city, with its tenements, closes, courtyards, ghosts and catacombs cheek-by-jowl with many of Scotland's most important buildings. **See p.58**

❷ **Edinburgh Castle** Perched on an imposing volcanic crag, the Castle dominates Scotland's capital, its ancient battlements protecting the Crown Jewels. **See p.58**

❸ **Scottish Parliament** Enric Miralles' quirky yet thrilling design is a dramatic modern presence in Holyrood's historic royal precinct. **See p.71**

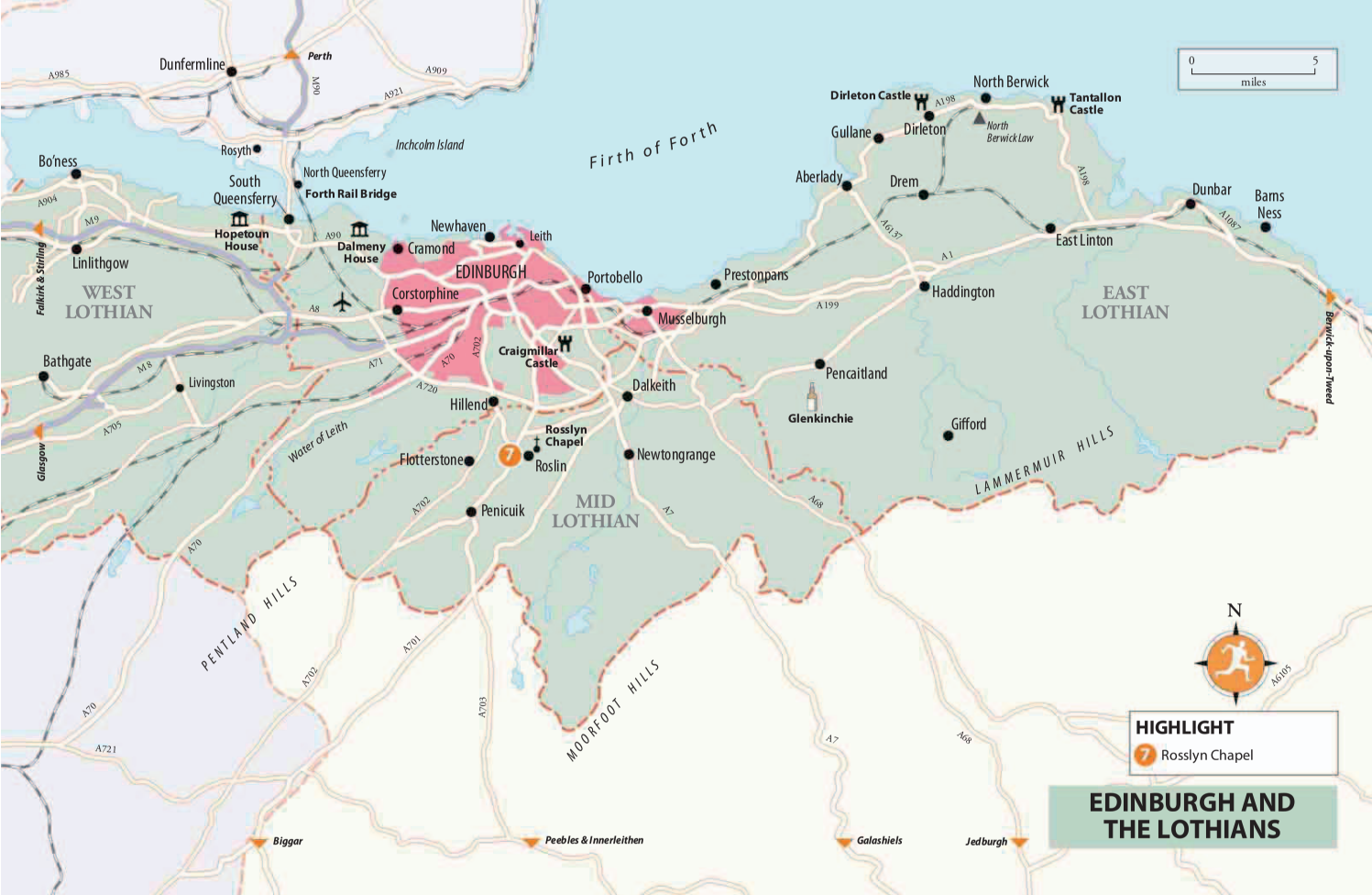
❹ **Holyrood Park** Wild moors, rocky crags and an 800ft-high peak (Arthur's Seat), all slap in the middle of the city. **See p.72**

❺ **Café Royal Circle Bar** In a city filled with fine drinking spots, there are few finer pubs in which to sample a pint of local 80-shilling beer; order six oysters (once the city's staple food) to complete the experience. **See p.96**

❻ **The Edinburgh Festival** The world's biggest arts festival transforms the city every August: bewildering, inspiring, exhausting and endlessly entertaining. **See p.101**

❼ **Rosslyn Chapel** This impeccably preserved, cathedral-like Gothic masterwork boasts some of the finest examples of medieval stone craft in the world. **See p.108**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAPS ON P.54 & P.60-61


0
5
miles
Dunfermline
Perth
A985
M90
A909
A921
Rosyth
Inchcolm Island
Firth of Forth
Bo'ness
South Queensferry
North Queensferry
Forth Rail Bridge
A904
M9
Hopetoun House
A90
Dalmeny House
Cramond
Newhaven
Leith
Linlithgow
EDINBURGH
Portobello
Prestonpans
Falkirk & Stirling
WEST LOTHIAN
Corstorphine
A8
Musselburgh
A199
Haddington
EAST LOTHIAN
Craigmillar Castle
A702
A70
A71
M8
Bathgate
Livingston
A720
Dalkeith
Pencaitland
Hillend
Glenkinchie
Gifford
Glasgow
A705
Water of Leith
Rosslyn Chapel
Roslin
Flotterstone
Newtongrange
LAMMERMUIR HILLS
A68
Penicuik
MID LOTHIAN
A7
PENTLAND HILLS
A701
A703
MOORFOOT HILLS
A721
Biggar
Peebles & Innerleithen
Galashiels
Jedburgh
Dirleton Castle
A198
North Berwick
Tantallon Castle
Gullane
Dirleton
North Berwick Law
Aberlady
Drem
A1087
Dunbar
Barns Ness
A6137
A1
East Linton
Berwick-upon-Tweed
N
A6105
HIGHLIGHT
7 Rosslyn Chapel
EDINBURGH AND THE LOTHIANS

city, the dramatic steel geometry of the Forth Rail Bridge is best seen by walking across the parallel road bridge, starting at **South Queensferry**.

Brief history

It was during the **Dark Ages** that the name Edinburgh – at least in its early forms of Dunedin or Din Eidyn ("fort of Eidyn") – first appeared. The strategic fort atop the Castle Rock volcano served as Scotland's **southernmost border post** until 1018, when King Malcolm I established the River Tweed as the permanent frontier. In the reign of Malcolm Canmore in the late eleventh century the Castle became one of the main seats of the court, and the town, which was given privileged status as a **royal burgh**, began to grow.

Scotland's new capital

Robert the Bruce granted Edinburgh a **new charter** in 1329, giving it jurisdiction over the nearby port of Leith, and during the following century the prosperity brought by foreign trade enabled the newly fortified city to establish itself as the permanent **capital of Scotland**.

Under King James IV, the city enjoyed a short but brilliant **Renaissance era**, which saw not only the construction of a new palace alongside Holyrood Abbey, but also the granting of a **royal charter** to the College of Surgeons, the earliest in the city's long line of academic and professional bodies.

Turbulent Age of Reformation

Edinburgh's Renaissance period came to an abrupt end in 1513 with the calamitous defeat by the English at the **Battle of Flodden**, which led to several decades of political instability. In the 1540s King Henry VIII's attempt to force a royal union with Scotland led to the sack of Edinburgh, prompting the Scots to turn to France: French troops arrived to defend the city, while the young queen Mary was dispatched to Paris as the promised bride of the Dauphin, later (briefly) François II of France. While the French occupiers succeeded in removing the English threat, they themselves antagonized the locals, who had become increasingly sympathetic to the ideals of the **Reformation**. When the radical preacher **John Knox** (see box p.68) returned from exile in 1555, he quickly won over the city to his Calvinist message.

James VI's rule saw the foundation of the University of Edinburgh in 1582, but following the **Union of the Crowns** in 1603 the city was totally upstaged by London. In 1633 Charles I visited Edinburgh for his coronation, but soon afterwards precipitated a crisis by introducing episcopacy to the Church of Scotland, in the process making Edinburgh a bishopric for the first time. Fifty years of religious turmoil followed, culminating in the triumph of **Presbyterianism**.

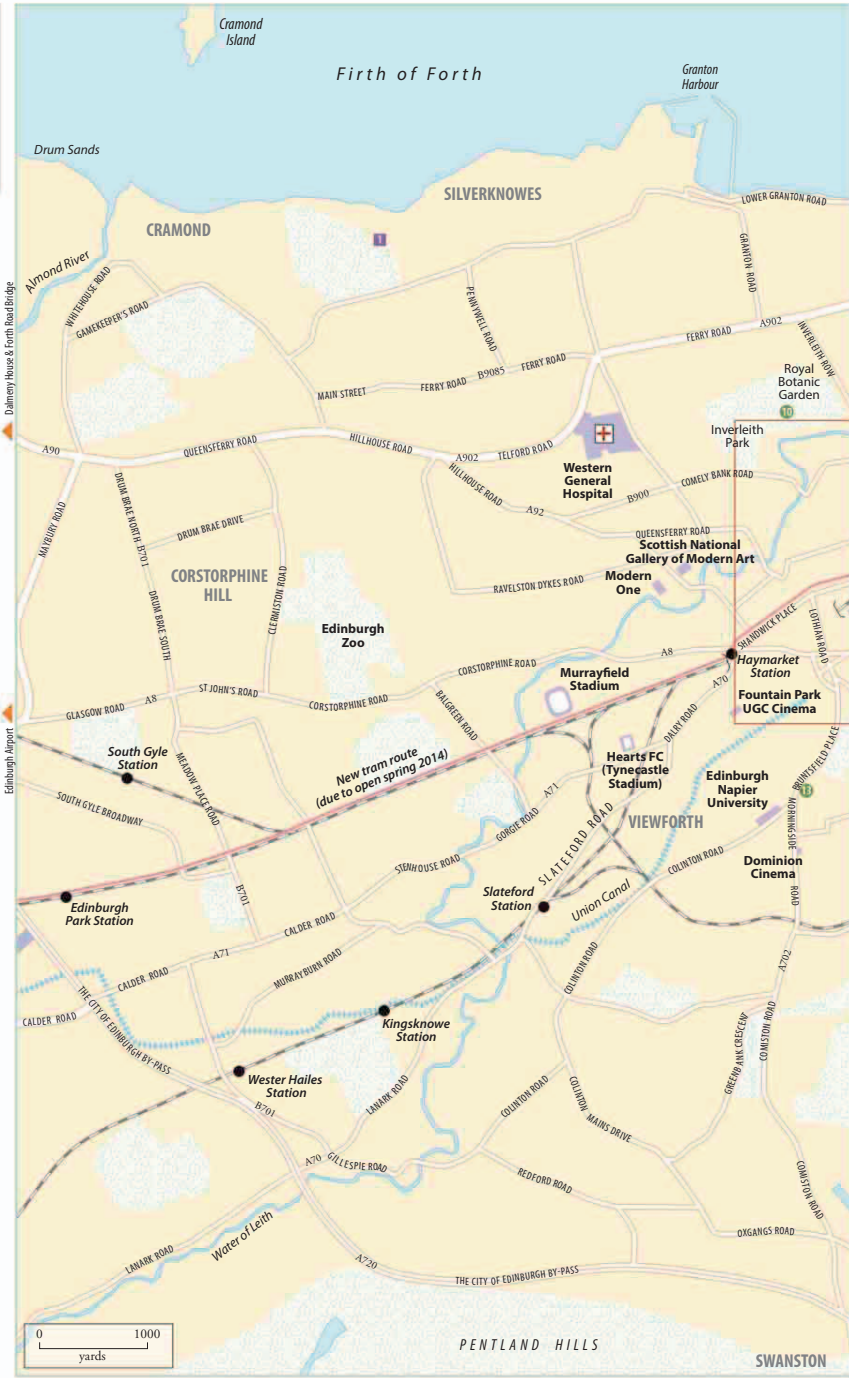
Acts of Union

The **Union of the Parliaments** of 1707 dealt a further blow to Edinburgh's political prestige, though by guaranteeing the preservation of the Church of Scotland and the legal and educational systems the acts ensured that the city was never relegated to a purely provincial role. Indeed, the second half of the eighteenth century saw Edinburgh achieve the height of its intellectual influence, led by natives such as David Hume and Adam Smith. Around the same time, the city began to expand beyond its medieval boundaries, laying out the **New Town**, a masterpiece of the Neoclassical style.

Victorian Edinburgh

Industrialization affected Edinburgh less than any other major city in the nation, and it never lost its white-collar character. Through the Victorian era Edinburgh cemented its role as a conservative bastion of the establishment, controlling Scotland's legal, ecclesiastical and education systems. Indeed, the city underwent an

1


Cramond Island
Firth of Forth
Granton Harbour
Drum Sands
SILVERKNOWES
CRAMOND
LOWER GRANTON ROAD
GRANTON ROAD
Almond River
WHITEHOUSE ROAD
GAMEKEEPER'S ROAD
PENNYWELL ROAD
FERRY ROAD
A902
INVERLEITH ROW
Dalmeny House & Forth Road Bridge
MAIN STREET
FERRY ROAD
B9085
FERRY ROAD
Royal Botanic Garden
A90
QUEENSFERRY ROAD
HILLHOUSE ROAD
A902
TELFORD ROAD
Inverleith Park
Western General Hospital
HILLHOUSE ROAD
COMELY BANK ROAD
B900
A92
QUEENSFERRY ROAD
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
MARBURY ROAD
DRUM BRAE NORTH B701
DRUM BRAE DRIVE
CORSTORPHINE HILL
CLERMISTON ROAD
RAVELSTON DYKES ROAD
Modern One
DRUM BRAE SOUTH
Edinburgh Zoo
SHANDWICK PLACE
LOTHIAN ROAD
A8
Haymarket Station
CORSTORPHINE ROAD
Murrayfield Stadium
A70
Fountain Park UGC Cinema
GLASGOW ROAD
A8
ST JOHN'S ROAD
CORSTORPHINE ROAD
BALGREEN ROAD
DALRY ROAD
Edinburgh Airport
South Gyle Station
MEADOW PLACE ROAD
New tram route (due to open spring 2014)
Hearts FC (Tynecastle Stadium)
Edinburgh Napier University
BRUNTSFIELD PLACE
SOUTH GYLE BROADWAY
A71
GORGIE ROAD
SLATEFORD ROAD
VIEWFORTH
MORNINGSIDE ROAD
STENHOUSE ROAD
COLINTON ROAD
Dominion Cinema
Edinburgh Park Station
B701
Slateford Station
Union Canal
CALDER ROAD
A71
CALDER ROAD
MURRAYBURN ROAD
COLINTON ROAD
A702
CALDER ROAD
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH BY-PASS
Kingsknowe Station
OREHEAD CRESCENT
COMISTON ROAD
Wester Hailes Station
B701
LANARK ROAD
COLINTON ROAD
COLINTON MAINS DRIVE
A70
GILLESPIE ROAD
REDFORD ROAD
COMISTON ROAD
OXGANGS ROAD
LANARK ROAD
Water of Leith
A720
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH BY-PASS
0
1000
yards
PENTLAND HILLS
SWANSTON

EDINBURGH
ACCOMMODATION
Argyle Backpackers 4
Drummohr Caravan and Camping Park 2
Edinburgh Caravan Club Site 1
University of Edinburgh, Pollock Halls of Residence 3
CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS
Chop Chop 4
Fishers 5
The Gateway Restaurant/ Terrace Café 10
Falko Konditorei 13
Hanedan 12
The Kitchin 3
Loch Fyne Restaurant 1
Mimi's Bakehouse 9
Porto & Fi 2
Restaurant Martin Wishart 8
The Shore 6
Sweet Melinda's 11
The Water of Leith Café Bistro 7
PUBS
Kings Wark 2
The Roseleaf 1
Sheep Heid Inn 3
Leith Harbour
Firth of Forth
N
Royal Yacht Britannia
Ocean Terminal Shopping Centre
NEWHAVEN
LEITH
Leith Links
Water of Leith
Hibernian FC (Easter Road)
NEW TOWN
OLD TOWN
Waverley Station
Edinburgh Castle
Abbey & Palace of Holyroodhouse
Holyrood Park
Dunsapie Loch
Arthur's Seat
PORTOBELLO
JOPPA
Brunstane Station
The Meadows
SEE "EDINBURGH CITY CENTRE" MAP FOR DETAILS
Commonwealth Pool
Duddingston Loch
MARCHMONT
GRANGE
MAYFIELD
Craigmillar Castle
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh
Hermitage of Braid
Royal Observatory
BRAID HILLS
Newcraighall Station
Musselburgh & Fisherrow
East Lothian
Biggar & Hillend
A901
LINDSAY ROAD
CRAIGHALL ROAD
COMMERCIAL STREET
FERRY ROAD
SALAMANDER STREET
A199
SEAFIELD ROAD
BONNINGTON ROAD
BROUGHTON ROAD
LEITH WALK
EASTER ROAD
LOCHEND ROAD
RESTALRIG ROAD
SLEIGH DRIVE
CRAIGENTINNY AVENUE
BELLEVUE
ELM ROW
A900
B901
QUEEN STREET
REGENT ROAD
LONDON ROAD
A1
PORTOBELLO ROAD
A1140
PORTOBELLO HIGH STREET
PRINCES STREET
COWGATE
CLERK STREET
QUEEN'S DRIVE
A7
WILLOWBRAE ROAD
DUDDINGSTON ROAD
DUDDINGSTON PARK
DUDDINGSTON ROAD WEST
MILTON ROAD
MILTON LINK
A6106
DUDDINGSTON PARK SOUTH
MELVILLE DRIVE
MARCHMONT ROAD
GRANGE ROAD
A701
MINTO STREET
DALKEITH ROAD
PEFFERMILL ROAD
A6095
NIDDRIE MAINS ROAD
NEWCRAIGHALL ROAD
CRAIGMILLAR PARK
CRAIGMILLAR CASTLE ROAD
OLD DALKEITH ROAD
GILMERTON ROAD
LIBERTON ROAD
THE WISP
MILLERHILL ROAD
A7
A6106
A772
NEWTON CHURCH ROAD
GILMERTON ROAD
FERNIEHILL DRIVE
HOBKIRK WALL ROAD
CAPTAIN'S ROAD
FROGSTON ROAD WEST
B701
FROGSTON ROAD EAST
BURDIEHOUSE ROAD
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH BY-PASS
A720

enormous **urban expansion** in the course of the nineteenth century, annexing, among many other small burghs, the large port of Leith.

The twentieth century and beyond

In 1947 Edinburgh was chosen to host the great **International Festival** which served as a symbol of the new peaceful European order; despite some hiccups, it has flourished ever since, in the process helping to make tourism a mainstay of the local economy. During the 1980s Glasgow, previously the poor relation but always a tenacious rival, began to challenge the city's status as a cultural centre, and it took the re-establishment of a devolved Scottish **Parliament** in 1999 for Edinburgh to reassert its status in a meaningful way. With debates, decisions and demonstrations about crucial aspects of the government of Scotland taking place in Edinburgh, there was a marked upturn in the perceived importance of the city, augmented by notable achievements in scientific research and the arts. The city's financial sector burgeoned, with the Royal Bank of Scotland becoming the second-largest banking group in the UK in the early years of the new century. Its near collapse, however, and subsequent bail-out by the government during the 2008 economic crisis dented not just the city's self-confidence, but also the arguments made by **nationalist politicians** that Scotland has the stability and economic prowess to prosper as an independent country.

The Old Town

The **OLD TOWN**, although only about a mile long and 400yd wide, represented the total extent of the twin burghs of Edinburgh and Canongate for the first 650 years of their existence, and its general appearance and character remain indubitably medieval. Containing the majority of the city's most famous tourist sights, it makes by far the best starting point for your explorations.

In addition to the obvious goals of the **Castle** and the **Palace of Holyroodhouse** at either end of the famous **Royal Mile**, you'll find scores of historic buildings along the length of the street. Inevitably, much of the Old Town is sacrificed to hard-sell tourism, and can be uncomfortably crowded throughout the summer, especially during the Festival. Yet the area remains at the heart of Edinburgh, with important daily business being conducted in the law courts, city chambers and, of course, the new **Scottish Parliament**, which is housed in a radical and controversial collection of buildings at the foot of the Royal Mile. It's well worth extending your explorations to the area immediately to the south of the Royal Mile, and in particular to the engaging **National Museum of Scotland**.

The Old Town is compact enough to allow a brief glance at the highlights in the course of a single day, but a thorough visit requires several days. No matter how pressed you are, make sure that you spare time for the wonderfully varied scenery and breathtaking vantage points of **Holyrood Park**, an extensive tract of open countryside on the eastern edge of the Old Town that includes Arthur's Seat, the peak of which rises so distinctively in the midst of the city.

The Castle

Castlehill • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–6pm; Oct–March 9.30am–5pm (last entry 1hr before closing) • £16; guided tours (every 15min–1hr; 30min) free; audio tours £3 if bought as part of the entrance fee (pick up near Portcullis Gate); HS • ⓣ 0131 225 9846, ⓦ edinburghcastle.gov.uk

The history of Edinburgh, and indeed of Scotland, is tightly wrapped up with its **Castle**, which dominates the city from a lofty seat atop an extinct volcanic rock. It requires no great imaginative feat to comprehend the strategic importance that underpinned the Castle's, and hence Edinburgh's, pre-eminence in Scotland. From Princes Street, the north side rears high above an almost sheer rock face; the southern side is equally

formidable and the western, where the rock rises in terraces, only marginally less so. Would-be attackers, like modern tourists, were forced to approach the Castle from the narrow ridge to the east on which the Royal Mile runs down to Holyrood.

The disparate styles of the fortifications reflect the change in its role from defensive citadel to national monument, and today, as well as attracting more paying visitors than anywhere else in the country, the Castle is still a **military barracks** and home to Scotland's **Crown Jewels**.

Brief history

Although Castlehill has been a defensive settlement since the Bronze Age, the oldest surviving part of the Castle complex is from the twelfth century. Nothing remains from its period as a seat of the Scottish court in the reign of Malcolm Canmore, having been lost to (and subsequently recaptured from) the English on several occasions. The return of King David II from captivity introduced a modicum of political stability and thereafter it gradually developed into Scotland's premier castle, with the dual function of fortress and royal palace. It last saw action in 1745, when Bonnie Prince Charlie's forces, fresh from their victory at Prestonpans, made a half-hearted attempt to storm it. Subsequent advances in weapon technology diminished the Castle's importance, but under the influence of the Romantic movement it came to be seen as a great national monument.

The Esplanade

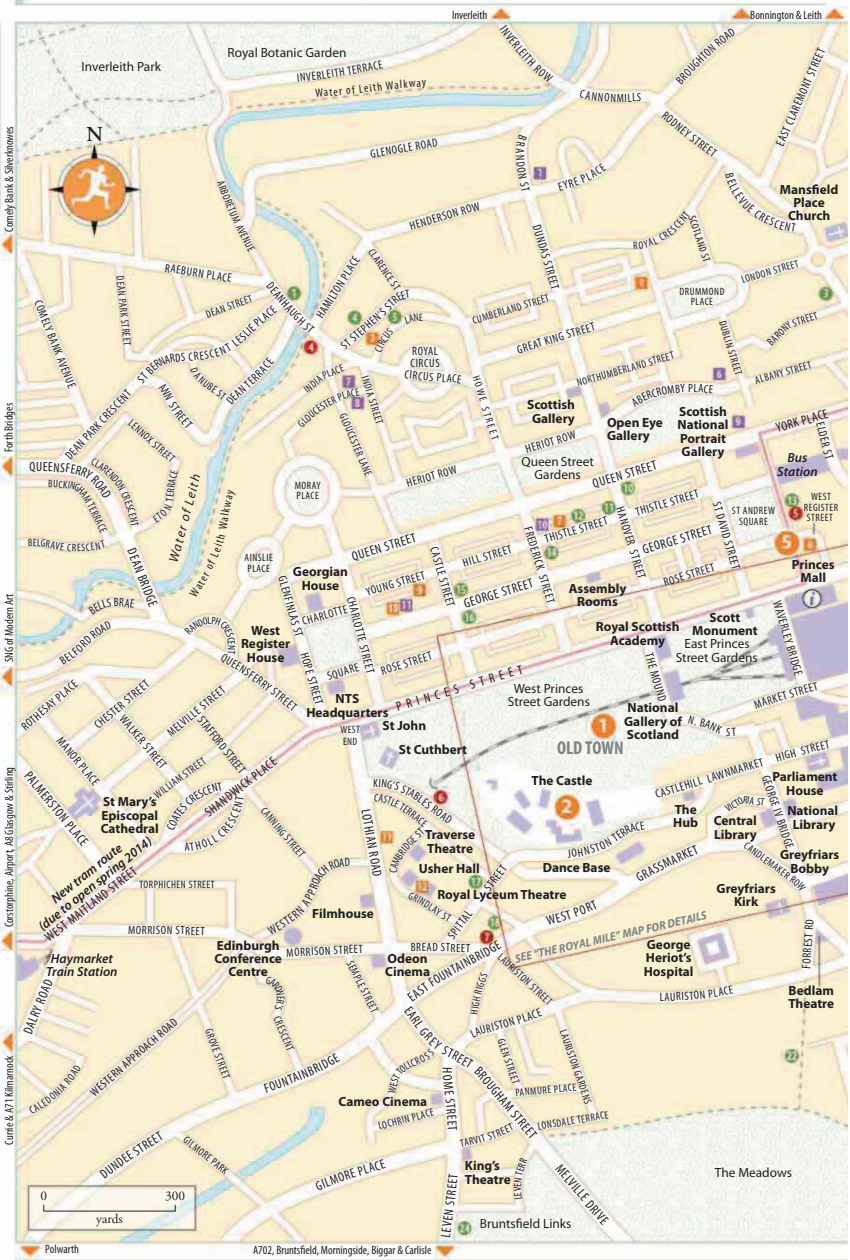
Castlehill, top end of the Royal Mile • Free

The Castle is entered via the **Esplanade**, a parade ground laid out in the eighteenth century and enclosed a hundred years later by ornamental walls. For most of the year it acts as a coach park, though in the summer months huge grandstands are erected for the Edinburgh Military Tattoo (see p.103), which takes place every night during August, coinciding with the Edinburgh Festival. A shameless and spectacular pageant of swinging kilts and massed pipe bands, the tattoo makes full use of its dramatic setting.

Various memorials are dotted around the Esplanade, including an equestrian **statue of Field Marshal Earl Haig**, the controversial Edinburgh-born commander of the British forces in World War I, and the pretty Art Nouveau **Witches' Fountain** commemorating the three hundred or more women burnt at this spot on charges of sorcery, the last of whom died in 1722. Rising up to one side of the Esplanade are the higgledy-piggledy pink-and-white turrets and high gables of **Ramsay Gardens**, surely some of the most picturesque city-centre apartment buildings in the world. Most date from the 1890s and are the vision of Patrick Geddes, a pioneer of the modern town-planning movement.

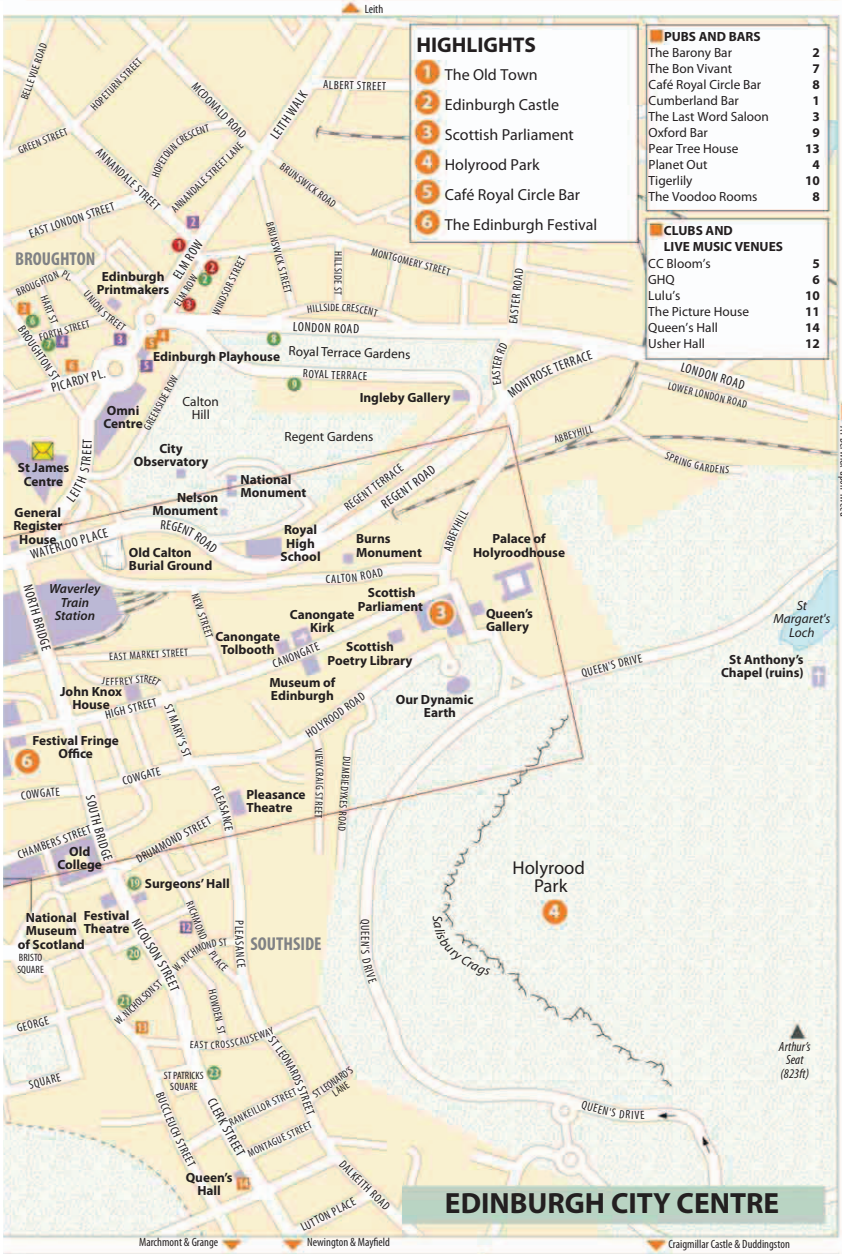
The lower defences

Edinburgh Castle has a single entrance, a 10ft-wide opening in the **gatehouse**, one of many Romantic-style additions made in the 1880s. Rearing up behind is the most distinctive and impressive feature of the Castle's silhouette, the sixteenth-century **Half Moon Battery**, which marks the outer limit of the actual defences. Once through the gatehouse, you'll find the main ticket office on your right, with an information centre alongside. Continue uphill along Lower Ward, showing your ticket at the **Portcullis Gate**, a handsome Renaissance gateway of the same period as the battery above, marred by the addition of a nineteenth-century upper storey equipped with anachronistic arrow slits. Beyond this the wide main path is known as Middle Ward, with the six-gun **Argyle Battery** to the right. Further west on **Mill's Mount Battery**, a well-known Edinburgh ritual takes place – the daily firing of the **one o'clock gun**. Originally designed for the benefit of ships in the Firth of Forth, these days it's an enjoyable ceremony for visitors to watch and a useful time signal for city-centre office workers. There's an interesting little exhibition about the history of the firing of the gun in a room immediately below Mill's Mount Battery.



CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS

21212	9	Dusit	12	L'Escargot Bleu	3	The Stockbridge Restaurant	5
The Apartment Bistro	24	Eteaket	14	Mosque Kitchen	20, 21	Timberyard	18
Artisan Roast	6	Forth Floor Harvey Nichols	13	Peter's Yard (Southside)	22	Urban Angel (Forth St)	7
Castle Terrace	17	The Gardener's Cottage	8	Peter's Yard (Stockbridge)	1	Urban Angel (Hanover St)	10
Centotre	15	Henderson's	11	Purslane	4	Valvona & Crolla	2
Chaophraya	16	Kalpna	23	Spoon Café Bistro	19		



ACCOMMODATION

7 Gloucester Place	8	Holiday Inn Express – Edinburgh City Centre	3
Ardenlee Guest House	1	Nira Caledonia	7
Blue Rainbow Apartments – Royal Garden	9	Regent House	4
Edinburgh Central SYHA	2	Rick's	10
Gerald's Place	6	Ten Hill Place	12
The Glasshouse	5	Tigerlily	11

SHOPS

Edinburgh Books	7	Stockbridge Market	4
Edinburgh Farmers' Market	6	Valvona & Crolla	2
Harvey Nichols	5	Vinyl Villains	3
McNaughtan's Bookshop	1		

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National War Museum of Scotland

Entry included in Castle entry fee

Located in the old hospital buildings, down a ramp between the café-restaurant immediately behind the one o'clock gun and the Governor's House, the **National War Museum of Scotland** covers the last four hundred years of Scottish military history. Scots have been fighting for much longer than that, of course, but the slant of the museum is very definitely towards the soldiers who fought for the Union, rather than against it (or against themselves). While the various rooms are packed with uniforms, medals, paintings of heroic actions and plenty of interesting memorabilia, the museum manages to convey a reflective, human tone. Just as delicate is the job of showing no favouritism to any of the Scottish regiments, each of which has strong traditions more forcefully paraded in the various regimental museums found in regions of Scotland – the Royal Scots and the Scots Dragoon Guards, for instance, both have displays in other parts of Edinburgh Castle.

St Margaret's Chapel

Near the highest point of the citadel is tiny **St Margaret's Chapel**, the oldest surviving building in the Castle, and probably in Edinburgh. Although once believed to have been built by the saint herself, and mooted as the site of her death in 1093, its architectural style suggests that it actually dates from about thirty years later.

Mons Meg

The battlements in front of the chapel offer the best of all the Castle's panoramic views. Here you'll see the famous fifteenth-century siege gun, **Mons Meg**, which could fire a 500lb stone nearly two miles. It last saw active service in the 1540s, and was thereafter used occasionally as a ceremonial saluting gun before being moved to the Tower of London in 1754. Such was Meg's emblematic value that Sir Walter Scott persuaded George IV to return it for his 1822 state visit to Scotland.

Continuing eastwards, you skirt the top of the Forewall and Half Moon Batteries, passing the 110ft-high **Castle Well** en route to Crown Square.

Crown Square

Crown Square, the historic heart of the Castle, is the most important and secure section of the entire complex. The square's eastern side is occupied by the **Palace**, a surprisingly unassuming edifice begun in the 1430s which owes its Renaissance appearance to King James IV – though it was remodelled for Mary, Queen of Scots and her consort Henry, Lord Darnley, whose entwined initials (MAH), together with the date 1566, can be seen above one of the doorways. This gives access to a few historic rooms, the most interesting of which is the tiny panelled bedchamber at the extreme southeastern corner, where Mary gave birth to James VI.

A section of the Palace houses a detailed audiovisual presentation on the nation's **Crown Jewels**, properly known as the **Honours of Scotland** and one of the most potent images of Scotland's nationhood; the originals are housed in the Crown Room at the very end of the display. James V's jewel-encrusted **crown** incorporates the gold circlet worn by Robert the Bruce and is topped by an enamelled orb and cross. The glass case containing the Honours has recently been rearranged to create space for the incongruously plain **Stone of Destiny** (see box, opposite).

On the south side of Crown Square is James IV's hammer-beam-ceilinged **Great Hall**, used for meetings of the Scottish Parliament until 1639, while opposite this on the north side is the serene Hall of Honour housing the **Scottish National War Memorial**, created in 1927 by the architect Sir Robert Lorimer and 200 Scottish artists and craftsmen.

THE STONE OF DESTINY

Legend has it that the **Stone of Destiny** (also called the Stone of Scone) was "Jacob's Pillow", on which he dreamed of the ladder of angels from earth to heaven. Its real history is obscure, but it is known to have been moved from Ireland to Dunadd by missionaries, and thence to Dunstaffnage, from where Kenneth MacAlpine, king of the Dalriada Scots, brought it to the abbey at Scone, near Perth, in 838. There it remained for almost five hundred years, used as a **coronation throne** on which all kings of Scotland were crowned.

In 1296 Edward I stole what he believed to be the Stone and installed it at **Westminster Abbey**, where, apart from a brief interlude in 1950 when it was removed by Scottish nationalists and hidden in Arbroath for several months, it remained for seven hundred years. All this changed in December 1996 when, after a ceremony-laden journey from London, the Stone returned to Scotland, in one of the doomed attempts by the Conservative government to convince the Scottish people that the Union was a good thing. Much to the annoyance of the people of Perth and the curators of Scone Palace (see p.324), and the general indifference of the people of Scotland, the Stone was placed in **Edinburgh Castle**.

However, speculation surrounds the **authenticity** of the Stone, for the original is said to have been intricately carved, while the one seen today is a plain block of sandstone. Many believe that the canny monks at Scone palmed this off onto the English king (some say that it's nothing more sacred than the cover for a medieval septic tank), and that the real Stone of Destiny lies hidden in an underground chamber, its whereabouts a mystery to all but the chosen few.

The rest of the complex

From Crown Square, you can descend to the **Vaults**, a series of cavernous chambers erected by James IV to provide a level surface for the buildings above. They were later used as a prison for captured foreign nationals, who bequeathed a rich legacy of graffiti. Directly opposite the entrance to the Vaults is the **Military Prison**, built in 1842, when the design and function of jails was a major topic of public debate. The cells, designed for solitary confinement, are less forbidding than might be expected.

The Royal Mile

The **Royal Mile**, the main thoroughfare linking the Castle to Holyrood Palace, was described by Daniel Defoe in 1724, as "the largest, longest and finest street for buildings and number of inhabitants, not in Britain only, but in the world". It is divided into four separate streets (**Castlehill**, **Lawnmarket**, **High Street** and **Canongate**, west to east respectively) – from which, branching out in a herringbone pattern, are a series of tightly packed **closes** and steep **lanes** entered via archways known as "pends". Hosting an architectural feast of styles from lofty rubblestone tenements and merchant houses to grand post-sixteenth-century sandstone structures built on medieval foundations – often resulting in hidden subterranean vaults and closes – The Royal Mile caters well to the hoards of tourists that gravitate towards it.

Scotch Whisky Experience

354 Castlehill • Daily: June–Aug 10am–5.30pm; Sept–May 10am–5pm • £12.75 • 0131 220 0441, scotchwhiskyexperience.co.uk

The **Scotch Whisky Experience** mimics the kind of tours offered at distilleries in the Highlands, and while it can't match the authenticity of the real thing, the centre does offer a thorough introduction to the "water of life" (*uisge beatha* in Gaelic), with tours featuring an entertaining tutorial on the specialized art of whisky "nosing", a gimmicky ride in a moving "barrel" car, a peek at the world's largest whisky collection and a tasting. On the ground floor, a well-stocked shop gives an idea of the sheer range and diversity of the drink, while downstairs there's a pleasant whisky bar and restaurant, *Amber* (see p.91).

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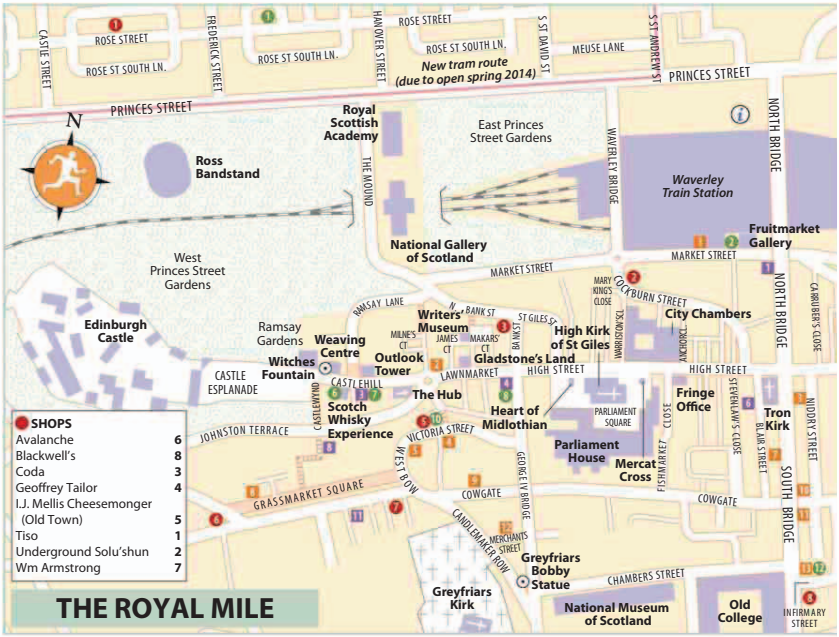


Camera Obscura and World of Illusions

549 Castlehill • Daily: April–June, Sept & Oct 9.30am–7pm; July & Aug 9.30am–9pm; Nov–March 10am–6pm• £11.95 • T 0131 226 3709, W camera-obscura.co.uk

Edinburgh's **Camera Obscura** has been a tourist attraction since 1853. Housed in the domed black-and-white turret on the roof, the "camera" consists of a small, darkened room with a white wooden table onto which a periscope reflects live images of prominent buildings and folk walking on the streets below. Today, the camera is somewhat overshadowed by "**World of Illusions**", a labyrinth of family-friendly exhibits of visual trickery – many of them playfully interactive – in the floors below.

The Hub

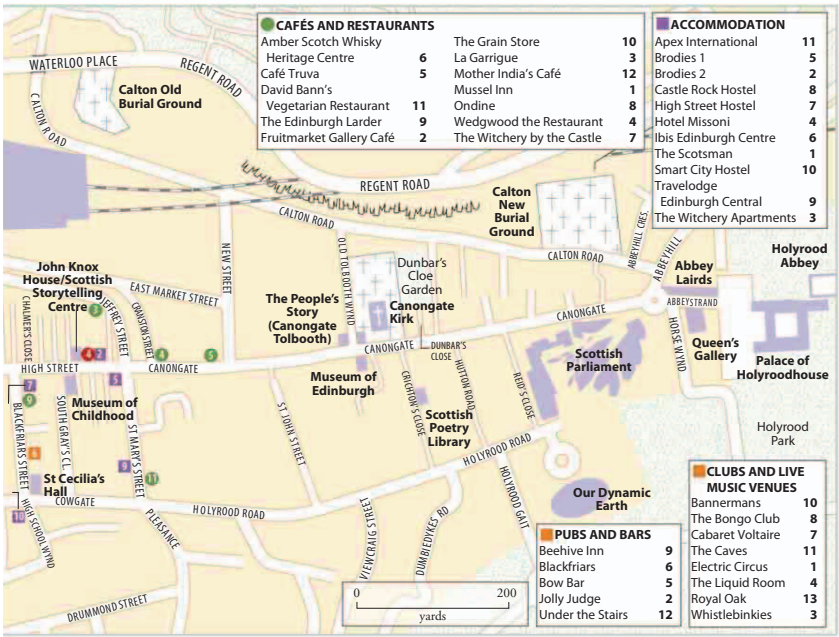
348 Castlehill • Daily 10am–6pm • T 0131 473 2000, W thehub-edinburgh.com

The imposing black church at the foot of Castlehill is **The Hub**, also known as "Edinburgh's Festival Centre". It's open year round, providing performance, rehearsal and exhibition space, a ticket centre and a café. The building itself was constructed in 1845 to designs by James Gillespie Graham and Augustus Pugin, one of the architects of the Houses of Parliament in London – a connection obvious from the superb neo-Gothic detailing and the sheer presence of the building, whose spire is the highest in Edinburgh.

Gladstone's Land

477B Lawnmarket • Daily: April–June, Sept & Oct 10am–5pm; July & Aug 10am–6.30pm • £6.50; NTS • T 0844 493 2120, W nts.org.uk

Doing its best to maintain its dignity among a sea of cheap tartan gifts and discounted woolly jumpers, **Gladstone's Land** is the Royal Mile's best surviving example of a typical seventeenth-century tenement. The tall, narrow building would have been home to various families living in cramped conditions: the well-to-do Gledstanes, who built it in 1620, are thought to have occupied the third floor. The National Trust for Scotland has carefully restored the rooms, filling them with period furnishings and fittings. The arcaded and wooden-fronted ground floor is home to a reconstructed cloth shop; pass



through this and you encounter a warren of tight little staircases, tiny rooms, creaking floorboards and peek-hole windows. The finest room, on the first floor immediately above the arcade, has a marvellous painted ceiling and some fine old dark furniture.

Writers' Museum

Lady Stairs Close, Lawnmarket • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, also Sun noon–5pm in Aug • Free • T 0131 529 4901, W edinburghmuseums.org.uk

Look out for the arched entranceway to Lady Stair's Close on the north side of the road, one of a number of attractive courtyards just off the Royal Mile. Within the seventeenth-century Lady Stair's House is the **Writers' Museum**, dedicated to Scotland's three greatest literary lions: Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson and Robert Burns. The house itself holds as much interest as the slightly lacklustre collection of portraits, manuscripts and knick-knacks that make up the museum, its tight, winding stairs and poky, wood-panelled rooms offering a flavour of the medieval Old Town.

The Heart of Midlothian

Parliament Square, High St

The pattern set in the cobblestones near the main entrance to St Giles is known as the **Heart of Midlothian**, a nickname for the Edinburgh Tolbooth, which stood on this spot and was regarded as the heart of the city. The prison attached to the Tolbooth was immortalized in Sir Walter Scott's novel *Heart of Midlothian*, and you may still see locals spitting on the cobblestone heart, a continuation of the tradition of spitting on the door of the prison to ward off the evil contained therein.

High Kirk of St Giles

High St • May–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; Oct–April Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm • Free • T 0131 225 9442, W stgilescathedral.org.uk

The **High Kirk of St Giles** is the original parish church of medieval Edinburgh, from where John Knox (see box, p.68) launched and directed the Scottish Reformation.

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St Giles is often referred to as a cathedral, although it has only been the seat of a bishop on two brief and unhappy occasions in the seventeenth century. According to one of the city's best-known legends, the attempt in 1637 to introduce the English Prayer Book, and thus episcopal government, so incensed a humble stallholder named Jenny Geddes that she hurled her stool at the preacher, prompting the rest of the congregation to chase the offending clergy out of the building. A tablet in the north aisle marks the spot from where she let rip.

The spire and interior

The resplendent **crown spire** of the kirk is formed from eight flying buttresses and dates back to 1485, while **inside**, the four massive piers supporting the tower were part of a Norman church built here around 1120. In the nineteenth century, St Giles was adorned with a whole series of funerary monuments on the model of London's Westminster Abbey; around the same time it acquired several attractive Pre-Raphaelite stained-glass windows designed by Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris. A more recent addition was the great **west window**, whose dedication to Rabbie Burns in 1985 caused enormous controversy – as a hardened drinker and womanizer, the national bard was far from being an upholder of accepted Presbyterian values. Look out, too, for an elegant bronze relief of Robert Louis Stevenson on the south side of the church.

Thistle Chapel

At the southeastern corner of St Giles, the **Thistle Chapel** was built by Sir Robert Lorimer in 1911 as the private chapel of the sixteen knights of the Most Noble Order of the Thistle, the highest chivalric order in Scotland. Based on St George's Chapel in Windsor, it's an exquisite piece of craftsmanship, with an elaborate ribbed vault, huge drooping bosses and extravagantly ornate stalls showing off Lorimer's bold Arts and Crafts styling.

Mary King's Close

2 Warriston's Close, High St • April–Oct daily 10am–9pm; Nov–March Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–5pm, Fri & Sat 10am–9pm • Tours (every 20min; 1hr) £12.95 • T 0845 070 6244, W realmarykingsclose.com

When work on the Royal Exchange, known as the City Chambers, began in 1753, the existing tenements on the steeply sloping site were only partially demolished to make way for the new building being constructed on top of them. The process left large sections of the houses, together with the old closes that ran alongside them, intact but entirely enclosed within the basement and cellars of the City Chambers. You can visit this rather spooky subterranean "lost city" on **tours** led by costumed actors, who take you round the cold stone shells of the houses where various scenes from the Close's history have been recreated. As you'd expect, blood, plague, pestilence and ghostly apparitions are to the fore, though there is an acknowledgement of the more prosaic side of medieval life in the archeological evidence of an urban cow byre. The tour ends with a stroll up the remarkably well-preserved **Mary King's Close** itself.

Museum of Childhood

42 High St • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm • Free • T 0131 529 4142 W edinburghmuseums.org.uk

Harking back to simpler times, this museum hosts a joyful collection of toys, clothes, dolls and bikes that kids used to cherish before the advent of plastic. Over the five small exhibition spaces there's a surprisingly large amount to see here, including a beautiful model railway scene and some fancy old Victorian dollhouses.

The Scottish Storytelling Centre and John Knox House

43–45 High St • Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, also Sun noon–6pm in July & Aug • John Knox House £5; Storytelling Centre free • T 0131 556 9579, W scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk

There are two distinct parts to the **Scottish Storytelling Centre**. One half is a stylish

FROM TOP ARTHUR'S SEAT (P.72); THE GRASSMARKET (P.72) >

Pizzeria
Pasta
Caffè
MADE IN
Italy
Coca-Cola

1

JOHN KNOX

Protestant reformer **John Knox** has been credited with, or blamed for, the distinctive national characteristic of rather gloomy reserve that emerged from the Calvinist Reformation and which has cast its shadow right up to the present. Little is known about Knox's early years: he was born between 1505 and 1514 in East Lothian, and trained for the priesthood at St Andrews University. Ordained in 1540, Knox then served as a private tutor, in league with Scotland's first significant Protestant leader, **George Wishart**. After Wishart was burnt at the stake for heresy in 1546, Knox became involved with the group who had carried out the revenge murder of the Scottish primate, Cardinal David Beaton, subsequently taking over his castle in St Andrews. The following year this was captured by the French, and Knox was carted off to work as a galley slave.

He was freed in 1548, as a result of the intervention of the English, who invited him to play an evangelizing role in the spread of their own Reformation. Following successful ministries in Berwick-upon-Tweed and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Knox turned down the bishopric of Rochester, less from an intrinsic opposition to episcopacy than from a wish to avoid becoming embroiled in the turmoil he guessed would ensue if the Catholic Mary Tudor acceded to the English throne. When this duly happened in 1553, Knox fled to the Continent, ending up as minister to the English-speaking community in Geneva, which was then in the grip of the theocratic government of the Frenchman **Jean Calvin**.

In exile, Knox was preoccupied with the influence wielded by political rulers, believing that the future of the **Reformation** in Europe was at risk because of the opposition of a few powerful sovereigns. This prompted him to write his infamous treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, a specific attack on the three Catholic women then ruling Scotland, England and France, which has made his name synonymous with misogyny ever since.

When Knox was allowed to return to Scotland in 1555, he took over as spiritual leader of the Reformation, becoming minister of St Giles in Edinburgh, where he gained a reputation as a charismatic preacher. The establishment of Protestantism as the official religion of Scotland in 1560 was dependent on the forging of an alliance with **Elizabeth I**, which Knox himself rigorously championed: the swift deployment of English troops against the French garrison in Edinburgh dealt a fatal blow to Franco–Spanish hopes of re-establishing Catholicism in both Scotland and England. Although the return of **Mary, Queen of Scots** the following year placed a Catholic monarch on the Scottish throne, Knox was reputedly always able to retain the upper hand in his famous disputes with her.

Before his death in 1572, Knox began mapping out the organization of the **Scots Kirk**, sweeping away all vestiges of episcopal control and giving lay people a role of unprecedented importance. He also proposed a nationwide education system, to be compulsory for the very young and free for the poor, though lack of funds meant this could not be implemented in full. His final legacy was the posthumously published *History of the Reformation of Religion in the Realm of Scotland*, a justification of his life's work.

For all his considerable influence, Knox was not responsible for many of the features that have created the popular image of **Scottish Presbyterianism** – and of Knox himself – as austere and joyless. A man of refined cultural tastes, he did not encourage the iconoclasm that destroyed so many of Scotland's churches and works of art: indeed, much of this was carried out by English hands. Nor did he promote unbending Sabbatarianism, an obsessive work ethic, or even the inflexible view of the doctrine of predestination favoured by his far more fanatical successors. Ironically, though, by fostering an irrevocable rift in the "Auld Alliance" with France, he did more than anyone else to ensure that Scotland's future was to be linked with that of England.

contemporary development containing an excellent café, the Netherbow Theatre and an airy **Storytelling Court** with a small permanent exhibition about Scottish stories from ancient folk tales to *Harry Potter*. By contrast, **John Knox House** next door – but part of the same complex – is a fifteenth-century stone-and-timber building which, with its distinctive external staircase, overhanging upper storeys and busy pantile roof, is a classic example of the Royal Mile in its medieval heyday. Inside, the house is all low doorways, uneven floors and ornate wooden panelling; it

contains a series of displays about Knox (see box, opposite), the minister who led the Reformation in Scotland and established Calvinist Presbyterianism as the dominant religious force in the country. Regular performances and events, often aimed at a younger audience, take place in the centre, particularly during the Festival. To get to the lovely, quiet **garden** behind the centre, head down Trunk's Close, a few doors uphill from John Knox House.

The People's Story Museum

Canongate Tolbooth, 163 Canongate • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, also Sun noon–5pm in Aug • Free • 0131 529 4057, edinburghmuseums.org.uk

Dominated by a turreted steeple and an odd external box clock, the late sixteenth-century **Canongate Tolbooth** has served both as the headquarters of the burgh administration and as a prison. It now houses **The People's Story**, which contains a series of display cases, dense information boards and rather old-fashioned tableaux dedicated to the everyday life and work of Edinburgh's population down the centuries. This isn't one of Edinburgh's essential museums, but it does have a down-to-earth reality often missing from places dedicated to high culture or famous historical characters.

Museum of Edinburgh

142–146 Canongate • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, also Sun noon–5pm in Aug • Free • 0131 529 4143, edinburghmuseums.org.uk

The **Museum of Edinburgh** houses the city's principal collection devoted to local history, though the museum is as interesting for the labyrinthine network of wood-panelled rooms within as for its rather quirky array of artefacts. These do, however, include a number of items of real historical significance, in particular the **National Convention**, the petition for religious freedom drawn up on a deerskin parchment in 1638, and the original plans for the layout of the New Town drawn by James Craig (see p.75), chosen by the city council after a competition in 1767.

Scottish Poetry Library

5 Crighton's Close, Canongate • Tues, Wed & Fri 10am–5pm, Thurs 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–4pm • Free • 0131 557 2876, spl.org.uk

A small island of modern architectural eloquence amid a cacophony of large-scale developments, the **Scottish Poetry Library**'s attractive design harmoniously combines brick, oak, glass, Caithness stone and blue ceramic tiles while incorporating a section of an old city wall. Inside you'll encounter Scotland's most comprehensive collection of native poetry, and visitors are free to read the books, periodicals and leaflets found on the shelves, or listen to recordings of poetry in the nation's three tongues, Lowland Scots, Scots Gaelic and English.

Holyrood

At the foot of Canongate lies **Holyrood**, for centuries known as Edinburgh's royal quarter, with its ruined thirteenth-century **abbey** and the **Palace of Holyroodhouse**, the Queen's official Edinburgh residence. In recent years, however, the area has been transformed by the addition of Enric Miralles' dazzling but highly controversial new **Scottish Parliament**, which was deliberately landscaped to mimic the cliffs and ridges of

THE WORLD'S END BURGH

Canongate, the final leg of the Royal Mile, was for over seven hundred years a burgh in its own right that was entered through the now demolished gatehouse known as **Netherbow Port**. Some of the town's poorer residents couldn't afford the toll to pass through and spent their whole lives in Edinburgh – inspiration for the name of the *World's End* pub found by the Port site. Look for the brass plates sunk into the road outside the pub that mark the outline of the old gatehouse.

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Edinburgh's most dramatic natural feature, the nearby **Holyrood Park**, and its slumbering peak, Arthur's Seat.

The Palace of Holyroodhouse

Canongate • Daily: April–Oct 9.30am–6pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4.30pm; last admission 1hr before closing (note that the palace is closed to visitors when the Queen is in residence; check the website for advance notice) • £11; entry includes an audio tour • T 0131 556 5100, W royalcollection.org.uk

In its present form, the **Palace of Holyroodhouse** is largely a seventeenth-century creation, planned for Charles II. However, the tower house of the old palace (the sole survivor of a fire during Oliver Cromwell's occupation) built for James V in 1532 was skilfully incorporated to form the northwestern block of today's building, with a virtual mirror image of it erected as a counterbalance at the other end.

Tours of the palace move through a series of royal **reception rooms** featuring some outstanding encrusted plasterwork, each more impressive than the last – an idea Charles II had picked up from his cousin Louis XIV's Versailles – while on the northern side of the internal quadrangle, the **Great Gallery** extends almost the full length of the palace and is dominated by portraits of 96 Scottish kings, painted by Jacob de Wet in 1684 to illustrate the lineage of Stewart royalty. The result is unintentionally hilarious, as it is clear that the artist's imagination was taxed to bursting point by the need to paint so many different facial types without having an inkling as to what the subjects actually looked like.

As you move into the oldest part of the palace, known as **James V's tower**, the formal, ceremonial tone gives way to dark medieval history, with a tight spiral staircase leading to the chambers used by **Mary**, **Queen of Scots**. These contain various relics, including jewellery, associated with the queen, though the most compelling viewing is a tiny supper room, from where in 1566 Mary's Italian secretary, **David Rizzio**, was dragged by conspirators, who included her jealous husband, Lord Darnley, to the outer chamber and stabbed 56 times; a brass plaque on the wall points out what are rather optimistically identified as the bloodstains on the wooden floor.

Holyrood Abbey

Free as part of palace tour

Standing beside the palace are the evocative ruins of **Holyrood Abbey**, some of which date back to the thirteenth century. Various invading armies paid little respect to the building over the years, and although it was patched up for Charles I's coronation in 1633 it was gutted in 1688 by an anti-Catholic mob. The roof finally tumbled down in 1768, but the melancholy scene has inspired artists down the years, among them Felix Mendelssohn, who in 1829 wrote: "Everything is in ruins and mouldering … I believe I have found the beginning of my Scottish Symphony there today." Adjacent to the abbey are the formal palace gardens, open to visitors during the summer months and offering some pleasant strolls.

The Queen's Gallery

Canongate • Daily: April–Oct 9.30am–6pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4.30pm, last admission 1hr before closing • £6.25 or £15.50 for joint entry with Holyroodhouse • T 0207 766 7324, W royalcollection.org.uk

Essentially an adjunct to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the **Queen's Gallery** is located in the shell of a former church directly between the palace and the Parliament. With just two principal viewing rooms, it's a compact space, but has an appealing contemporary style which manages to remain sympathetic to the older elements of the building. It's used to display changing exhibitions from the **Royal Collection**, a vast array of art treasures held by the Queen on behalf of the British nation. Because the pieces are otherwise exhibited only during the limited openings of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, the exhibitions here tend to draw quite a lot of interest. Recent

EDINBURGH'S CONTROVERSIAL PARLIAMENT

Made up of various linked elements rather than one single building, the unique design of the new **Scottish Parliament** complex was the vision of Catalan architect **Enric Miralles**, whose death in 2000, halfway through the building process, caused more than a few ripples of uncertainty as to whether the famously whimsical designer had in fact set down his final draft. Initial estimates for the cost of the building were tentatively put at £40 million; by the time the Queen cut the ribbon in October 2004, the final bill was over £400 million. A major public inquiry into the overspend blamed costing failures early in the project and criticized the spendthrift attitude of politicians and civil servants alike, yet the building is still an impressive – if imperfect – testament to the ambition of Miralles. While locals still mutter over the cost and the oddness of the design, the building has won over the majority of the general architectural community, scooping numerous prizes including, in 2005, the most prestigious in Britain, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) **Stirling Prize**. Among the most memorable features of the building are the fanciful motifs and odd architectural signatures running through the design, including the anvil-shaped panels which clad the exterior and the extraordinary windows of the offices shaped like the profile of a mountain or a section of the Forth Rail Bridge.

The stark concrete of the building's interior may not be to all tastes, but while some parts of the design are undoubtedly experimental and over-elaborate, there are moments where grace and boldness convene, exemplified by the **Garden Lobby**: an airy, bright meeting place in the heart of the campus with a fascinating roof of glass panels forming the shape of an upturned boat.

displays have included a fascinating collection of anatomical investigative drawings by Leonardo da Vinci from 1510 when he carried out a series of human autopsies.

The Scottish Parliament

Horse Wynd • Tues–Thurs 9am–6.30pm, Fri, Sat & Mon 10am–5pm • Free guided tours (1hr); booking is recommended (access is limited to lobby and debating chamber if unguided) • T 0131 348 5200, W scottish.parliament.uk

For all its grandeur, Holyrood Palace is in danger of being upstaged by the striking buildings that make up the new **Scottish Parliament**. The most controversial public building to be erected in Scotland since World War II, it houses the country's directly elected assembly, which was reintroduced into the British political scene in 1999 – Scotland's parliament was abolished in 1707, when it joined the English assembly at Westminster as part of the Union of the two nations.

There's free access into the building's **entrance lobby**, where you'll find a small exhibition providing some historical, political and architectural background. If Parliament is in session, it's normally possible to watch proceedings in the **debating chamber** from the public gallery, though you have to get a pass from the front desk in the lobby. To see the rest of the interior properly you'll need to join one of the regular **guided tours**, highly recommended to better appreciate the quality, detailed features and unique vision of the building's design. Special tours dedicated to the architecture of the building and its collection of contemporary Scottish art also take place, but much less frequently – check the website for details.

Our Dynamic Earth

112 Holyrood Rd • March–June, Sept & Oct daily 10am–5.30pm; July & Aug daily 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb Wed–Sun 10am–5.30pm; last entry 1hr 30min before closing • £11.50 • T 0131 550 7800, W dynamicearth.co.uk

Beneath a pincushion of white metal struts that make it look like a miniature version of London's Millennium Dome, **Our Dynamic Earth** is a hi-tech attraction based on the wonders of the natural world and aimed at families with kids between 5 and 15. Although James Hutton, the Edinburgh-born "Father of Geology", lived nearby in the eighteenth century, there are few specific links to Edinburgh or Scotland. Galleries cover the formation of the earth and continents with crashing sound effects and a

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shaking floor, while the calmer grandeur of glaciers and oceans are explored through magnificent large-screen landscape footage; further on, the polar regions – complete with a real iceberg – and tropical jungles are imaginatively recreated, with interactive computer screens and special effects at every turn. The tour is rounded off with a "smellivized" 4D cinema experience complete with moving furniture, a chilly blast of snow and a whiff of rhino poo.

Holyrood Park

Accessed from the foot of the Royal Mile • Always open • Coming by bus, take the #35 in the direction of the Old Town from Waverley Bridge

A natural wilderness in the very heart of the modern city, **Holyrood Park** is one of Edinburgh's greatest assets. Packed into an area no more than five miles in diameter is an amazing variety of landscapes – hills, crags, moorland, marshes, glens, lochs and fields – representing something of a microcosm of Scotland's scenery. While old photographs of the park show crops growing and sheep grazing, it's now used mostly by walkers, joggers, cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts. A single tarred road, **Queen's Drive**, loops through the park, enabling many of its features to be seen by car, although you need to get out and stroll around to appreciate it fully.

Salisbury Crags

The amber hue of the setting sun's reflection on **Salisbury Crags**' sheer cliff face makes an enticing backdrop to an evening stroll. An easy hour-long circular route begins across the road from Holyroodhouse; the path nicknamed the "Radical Road" winds southwards around the foot of the crags for a little under a mile before you have the opportunity to hike north through the glen separating the Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat and back to your starting point.

Arthur's Seat

The usual starting point for the ascent of **Arthur's Seat**, which at 823ft above sea level towers over Edinburgh's numerous high points, is Dunsapie Loch, reached by following the tarred Queen's Drive in a clockwise direction from the palace gates (30–40min walk). Part of a volcano which last saw action 350 million years ago, its connections to the legendary king are fairly sketchy: the name is likely to be a corruption of the Gaelic *Ard-na-said*, or "height of arrows". From Dunsapie Loch it's a twenty-minute climb up grassy slopes to the rocky summit. On a clear day, the views might just stretch to the English border and the Atlantic Ocean; more realistically, the landmarks that dominate are Fife, a few Highland peaks and, of course, Edinburgh laid out on all sides.

The Grassmarket

Just south of the Castle

Used as the city's cattle market from 1477 to 1911, the **Grassmarket** is an open, partly cobbled area, which despite being girdled by tall tenements offers an unexpected view north up to the precipitous walls of the castle. Come springtime, it's often sunny enough for cafés to put tables and chairs along the pavement; however, such Continental aspirations are a bit of a diversion as the Grassmarket is best remembered as the location of Edinburgh's public gallows – the spot is marked by a tiny garden. The notorious serial killers William Burke and William Hare had their lair in a now-vanished close just off the western end of the Grassmarket, and for a long time before its relatively recent gentrification there was a seamy edge to the place, with brothels, drinking dens and shelters for down-and-outs.

The Grassmarket's two-sided character is still on view, with stag and hen parties carousing between the area's pubs of an eveaning, while by day you can admire the architectural quirks and a series of interesting shops, in particular the string of offbeat,

independent boutiques on curving **Victoria Street**, an unusual two-tier thoroughfare, with arcaded shops below and a pedestrian terrace above.

The Bridges

Leading eastwards from the Grassmarket is the **Cowgate**, one of Edinburgh's oldest surviving streets. It was also once one of the city's most prestigious addresses, but the construction of the great **viaducts** of George IV Bridge and South Bridge entombed it below street level, condemning it to decay and neglect and leading the nineteenth-century writer, Alexander Smith, to declare: "the condition of the inhabitants is as little known to respectable Edinburgh as are the habits of moles, earthworms, and the mining population." Various nightclubs and Festival venues have established themselves here – on Friday and Saturday nights the street heaves with revellers – but it remains a slightly insalubrious spot.

High above the crestfallen Cowgate, both bridges give the curious impression that you're on ground level thanks to the terraced buildings that rise up in line with the elevated streets. The lowermost **South Bridge**, leading off from halfway down the High Street, is unpleasantly congested with buses and garishly untempered retailers, although it does provide a decent selection of cheap café-restaurants.

By contrast, **George IV bridge** to the west – built in the 1830s – is a sight to behold. Its many grand Neoclassical buildings rise up from the Cowgate below to reach street level and many tourists cross it without realizing they are on a bridge at all.

At the southern end of the bridge, tourists invariably crowd around the tiny bronze statue of a Skye Terrier called Greyfriars Bobby (see box below), while across the road, Chambers Street links the southernmost ends of the two bridges where you'll find the unmissable National Museum of Scotland (see p.74).

Greyfriars Kirk

1 Greyfriars • April–Oct Mon–Fri 10.30am–4.30pm, Sat 11am–2pm • Free • 0131 225 1900, greyfriarskirk.com

Greyfriars Kirk was built in 1620 on land that had belonged to a Franciscan convent, though little of the original late Gothic-style building remains. A fire in the mid-nineteenth century led to significant rebuilding and the installation of the first **organ** in a Presbyterian church in Scotland; today's magnificent instrument, by Peter Collins, arrived in 1990.

Outside, the kirkyard has a fine collection of seventeenth-century gravestones and mausoleums including the grave mourned over by the world-famous canine, Greyfriars Bobby. Visited regularly by ghost tours (see p.88) the kirkyard was known for **grave-robbing** as freshly interred bodies were exhumed and sold to the nearby medical school (a crime taken to a higher level by the notorious Burke and Hare, who bypassed the graveyards by simply murdering the victims they'd then sell on for dissection).

GREYFRIARS BOBBY

The small statue of **Greyfriars Bobby** at the junction of George IV Bridge and Candlemaker Row must rank as one of Edinburgh's more mawkish tourist attractions. Bobby was a **Skye terrier** acquired as a working dog by a police constable named John Gray. When Gray died in 1858, Bobby was found a few days later sitting on his grave, a vigil he maintained until his death fourteen years later. In the process, he became an Edinburgh celebrity, fed and cared for by locals who gave him a special collar to prevent him being impounded as a stray. The statue was modelled from life and erected soon after his death. Bobby's legendary dedication easily lent itself to children's books and was eventually picked up by Disney, whose 1960 feature film hammed up the story and ensured that streams of tourists have paid their respects ever since.

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More significantly, the kirkyard was the setting, in 1638, for the signing of the **National Covenant**, a dramatic act of defiance by the Presbyterian Scots against the attempts of Charles I to impose an episcopal form of worship on the country. In an undemocratic age, thousands of townsfolk as well as important nobles signed the original at Greyfriars; copies were then made and sent around the country with some three hundred thousand names being added.

National Museum of Scotland

Chambers St • Daily 10am–5pm • Free • Guided tours at 11am, 1 & 3pm (1hr; free) • T 0300 123 6789, W nms.ac.uk

The **National Museum of Scotland** is essentially two distinct museums, internally connected to each other: the unorthodox **modern sandstone building** on the corner of George IV Bridge houses collections of Scottish heritage, while the much older **Venetian-style palace** offers a more global perspective. Inside, the wealth of exhibits is enough to occupy days of your time but as entry is free you'll be able to dip in and out at leisure or during rain showers. Parents will also find the place a useful sanctuary since there are numerous child-friendly rooms, interactive exhibits and cafés.

The old building

Modelled on the former Crystal Palace in London, and with a spectacular cast-iron interior, the old building packs in a bedazzling array of artefacts, covering natural history, world culture, geology and technology. The exhibits are housed over three levels surrounding the **Grand Gallery**, a huge central atrium whose beautiful limestone floor turns out to be teaming with fossils, predominantly ammonites. One stand-out exhibit, by the main concourse, is the gruesome **Millennium Clock Tower**, a jumble of cogs, chains and wheels modelled in the form of a Gothic cathedral, with gargoyles and sinister-looking figurines representing characters from twentieth-century politics.

The **Natural World gallery** is particularly fine, too, inhabiting all tiers of the museum's eastern end with numerous recreated animals hanging top to bottom from the rafters and a fearsome T-rex skeleton at the entrance.

The new building

Given its confusing and unconventional layout you might want to pick up a free map before tackling the new building's **Scottish galleries**, which detail the history of Scotland from its geological formation through to the present day. In between, there's a wealth of remarkably well-preserved medieval exhibits – religious, regal and day-to-day objects – on display in the **Kingdom of the Scots**, including the exquisitely idiosyncratic **Lewis chessmen**. Moving forward in time, **Scotland Transformed** offers an insight into the Union of Crowns and the crushed Jacobite rebellion, leading up the Industrial Revolution – evoked by an unmissable life-size working model of a steam-driven Newcomen Atmospheric Engine. Designed in 1712, it foreshadows Scotland's role as covered in the next section, **Industry and Empire**, where you can see a full-size steam locomotive, the *Ellesmere*, highlighting the fact that in the nineteenth century Scotland was building more railway engines than anywhere else in the world.

Surgeons' Hall Museum

Nicolson St, between nos. 14 & 16 • April–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 10am–4pm • £5 • T 0131 527 1649, W www.museum.rcsed.ac.uk

Surgeons' Hall, the former headquarters of the Royal College of Surgeons, is a handsome iconic temple with a stately columned facade, built by William Playfair (1789–1857), one of Edinburgh's greatest architects. Housed round the back is one of Edinburgh's most unusual and morbidly compelling museums. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Edinburgh was a leading centre of medical and anatomical

research, nurturing world-famous pioneers such as James Young Simpson, founder of anaesthesia, and Joseph Lister, the father of modern surgery. The **history of surgery** takes up one part of the museum, with intriguing exhibits ranging from early surgical tools to a pocketbook covered with the leathered skin of serial killer William Burke (see p.72). Another room has an array of gruesome instruments illustrating the history of dentistry, while the third and most remarkable part of the museum, the elegant **Playfair Hall**, contains an array of specimens and jars from the college's anatomical and pathological collections dating back to the eighteenth century.

The New Town

The **NEW TOWN**, itself well over two hundred years old, stands in total contrast to the Old Town: the layout is symmetrical, the streets are broad and straight, and most of the buildings are Neoclassical. Originally intended to be residential, the entire area, right down to the names of its streets, is something of a celebration of the Union, which was then generally regarded as a proud development in Scotland's history. Today, the New Town's main streets form the bustling hub of the city's commercial, retail and business life, dominated by shops, banks and offices.

In many ways, the layout of the greater New Town is its own most remarkable sight, an extraordinary grouping of squares, circuses, terraces, crescents and parks with a few set pieces such as **Register House**, the north frontage of **Charlotte Square** and the assemblage of curiosities on and around **Calton Hill**. However, it also contains assorted Victorian additions, notably the **Scott Monument** on Princes Street, the **Royal Botanic Garden** on its northern fringe, as well as two of the city's most important public collections – the **National Gallery of Scotland** and, further afield, the **Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art**.

Brief history

The existence of the New Town is chiefly due to the vision of **George Drummond**, who made schemes for the expansion of the city soon after becoming Lord Provost in 1725. Work began on the draining of the Nor' Loch below the Castle in 1759, a task that was to last some sixty years. The North Bridge, linking the Old Town with the main road leading to the port of Leith, was built between 1763 and 1772 and, in 1766, following a public competition, a plan for the New Town by 22-year-old architect **James Craig** was chosen. Its gridiron pattern was perfectly matched to the site: central **George Street**, flanked by showpiece squares, was laid out along the main ridge, with parallel **Princes Street** and **Queen Street** on either side below, and two smaller streets, Thistle Street and Rose Street, in between the three major thoroughfares providing coach houses, artisans' dwellings and shops. Princes and Queen streets were built up on one side only, so as not to block the spectacular views of the Old Town and Fife respectively. Architects were accordingly afforded a wonderful opportunity to play with vistas and spatial relationships, particularly well exploited by Robert Adam, who contributed extensively to the later phases of the work. The First New Town, as the area covered by Craig's plan came to be known, received a whole series of extensions in the early decades of the nineteenth century, all carefully in harmony with the Neoclassical idiom.

Princes Street

Although only allocated a subsidiary role in the original plan of the New Town, **Princes Street** had developed into Edinburgh's principal thoroughfare by the middle of the nineteenth century, a role it has retained ever since. Its unobstructed **views** across to the Castle and the Old Town are undeniably magnificent. Indeed, without the views, Princes Street would lose much of its appeal; its northern side, dominated by large outlets of the familiar national chains, is almost always crowded with shoppers, and few

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of the original eighteenth-century buildings remain. Across the road, the southern side looks down onto the basin of Princes Street Gardens which is bisected midway by a direct route into the heart of the Old Town known as the **Mound**, formed in the 1780s by dumping piles of earth and other waste brought from the New Town's building plots.

General Register House

2 Princes St • Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm • £10 for a full or part-day's access to the records • T 0131 535 1314, W nas.gov.uk

General Register House, designed in 1774 by Robert Adam, is the most distinguished building on Princes Street. Today it's home to the **ScotlandsPeople Centre**, a dedicated family history unit which acts as a single point of access for those researching genealogical records. Visitors can pore over a mixed archive of records ranging from national censuses, criminal records and, stretching back to 1553, old parish registers of births, marriages and deaths. A large database complements the physical records and there are a number of computers for public use if you don't have your own. Part of the appeal of embarking on some research is the opportunity to spend time in the elegant interior, centred on a glorious rotunda, lavishly decorated with plasterwork and antique-style medallions.

Princes Street Gardens

Dawn to dusk • Free

It's hard to imagine that the **gardens** which flank nearly the entire length of Princes Street were once the stagnant, foul-smelling Nor' Loch into which the effluent of the Old Town flowed for centuries. The railway has since replaced the water and today a sunken cutting carries the main lines out of Waverley Station to the west and north. The gardens, split into east and west sections, were originally the private domain of Princes Street residents and their well-placed acquaintances, only becoming a public park in 1876. These days, the swathes of green lawn, colourful flower beds and mature trees are a green lung for the city centre: on sunny days local office workers appear in their droves at lunchtime, while in the run-up to Christmas the gardens' eastern section is home to a German Market, a towering ferris wheel and a number of other appealingly lit rides. The larger and more verdant western section has a floral clock and the Ross Bandstand, a popular Festival venue.

Scott Monument

East Princes Street Gardens • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–7pm, Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9am–4pm, Sun 10am–6pm • £4 • T 0131 529 4068

Facing the Victorian shopping emporium Jenners, and set within East Princes Street Gardens, the 200ft-high **Scott Monument** was erected in memory of prolific author and patriot Sir Walter Scott within a few years of his death. The largest monument in the world to a man of letters, the architecture is closely modelled on Scott's beloved Melrose Abbey (see p.122), and the rich sculptural decoration shows sixteen Scottish writers and sixty-four characters from Scott's famous *Waverley* novels. On the central plinth at the base of the monument is a **statue** of Scott with his deerhound Maida, carved from a thirty-ton block of Carrara marble.

Inside, a tightly winding spiral staircase climbs 287 steps to a narrow platform near the top: from here, you can enjoy some inspiring – if vertiginous – vistas of the city below and hills and firths beyond.

National Gallery of Scotland

The Mound, Princes St • Daily 10am–5pm (until 6pm in Aug & until 7pm Thurs year round) • Free; entrance charge for some temporary exhibitions • T 0131 624 6200, W nationalgalleries.org

Built as a "temple to the fine arts" in 1850, the **National Gallery of Scotland** houses Scotland's premier collection of pre-twentieth-century **European art** in the larger of two grand Neoclassical buildings found at the foot of the Mound (the other building houses the **Royal Scottish Academy**, which mostly holds temporary exhibitions).

THE NATIONAL GALLERIES' COLLECTION

The **National Gallery of Scotland** is just one part of the national art collection housed around Edinburgh. Other works of the **National Galleries' collection** are on display at the **Scottish National Portrait Gallery** (see p.78) and the **Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art** (see p.80), housed in two neighbouring buildings, Modern One and Modern Two. A **free bus service** connects the National Gallery of Scotland with Modern One and Two (outbound: daily 11am–4pm, every hour on the hour except 1pm; return: 11.30am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm, 3.30pm & 5pm).

Though by no means as vast as national collections found elsewhere in Europe, it does include a clutch of exquisite Old Masters and some superb Impressionist works. Benefiting greatly from being a manageable size, its series of elegant octagonal rooms are enlivened by imaginative displays and a pleasantly unrushed atmosphere.

On the ground floor the rooms have been restored to their 1850s appearance with pictures hung closely together on claret-coloured walls, often on two levels, and intermingled with sculptures and objets d'art to produce a deliberately cluttered effect. As a result some lesser works, which would otherwise languish in the vaults, are on display, a good 15ft up. The **layout** is broadly chronological, starting in the upper rooms above the gallery's entrance on the Mound and continuing clockwise around the ground floor.

Early works

Among the Gallery's most valuable treasures are **Hugo van der Goes**' *Trinity Panels*, on a long-term loan from the Queen. Painted in the mid-fifteenth century, they were commissioned by Provost Edward Bonkil for the Holy Trinity Collegiate Church, which was later demolished to make way for Edinburgh's Waverley Station. Bonkil can be seen amid the company of organ-playing angels in the finest and best preserved of the four panels, while on the reverse sides are portraits of James III, his son (the future James IV) and Queen Margaret of Denmark. The panels are turned by the gallery every half-hour.

European highlights

Poussin's *Seven Sacraments* are proudly displayed in their own room, the floor and central octagonal bench of which repeat some of the works' motifs. The series marks the first attempt to portray scenes from the life of Jesus realistically, rather than through images dictated by artistic conventions. **Rubens**' *The Feast of Herod*, recently enlivened by meticulous restoration, is an archetypal example of his sumptuously grand manner, its gory subject matter overshadowed by the gaudy depiction of the delights of the table. Among the canvases by **Rembrandt** are a poignant *Self-Portrait Aged 51* and the ripely suggestive *Woman in Bed*, which is thought to represent the biblical figure of Sarah on her wedding night, waiting for her husband Tobias to put the devil to flight. *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* is the largest and probably the earliest of the thirty or so surviving paintings by **Vermeer**.

Scottish and English works

On the face of it, the gallery's Scottish collection, ambitiously covering the entire gamut from seventeenth-century portraiture to the Arts and Crafts movement, is a bit of an anticlimax. There are, however, a few significant works displayed within a broad European context. Both **Gavin Hamilton**'s *Achilles Mourning the Death of Patroclus*, painted in Rome, and Arts and Crafts painter **Robert Burns**'s *Diana and her Nymphs* are finer examples of arresting Scottish art.

One of the most popular portraits in the gallery is the immediately recognizable painting of a lesser-known pastor, *Reverend Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch*, by Henry Raeburn.

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George Street

Running parallel to Princes Street, **George Street** was designed to be the centrepiece of the First New Town, joining two grand squares (St Andrew Square and Charlotte Square). These days, the street is rapidly changing its role from a thoroughfare of august financial institutions to a highbrow version of Princes Street, where the big deals are done in designer-label shops.

St Andrew Square

Lying at the eastern end of George Street is the smartly landscaped **St Andrew Square**, whose centre is marked by the **Melville Monument**, a towering column topped by a statue of Lord Melville, Pitt the Younger's Navy Treasurer. Around the edge of the square you'll find Edinburgh's bus station, the city's swankiest shopping arcade, Multrees Walk, and a handsome eighteenth-century town mansion, designed by Sir William Chambers. Still the ceremonial headquarters of the Royal Bank of Scotland, the palatial mid-nineteenth-century banking hall is a symbol of the success of the New Town.

Charlotte Square

At the western end of George Street is **Charlotte Square**, designed by Robert Adam in 1791, a year before his death. For the most part, his plans were faithfully implemented, an exception being the domed and porticoed church of St George, simplified on grounds of expense. Generally regarded as the epitome of the New Town's elegant simplicity, the square was once the most exclusive residential address in Edinburgh, and though much of it is now occupied by offices, the imperious dignity of the architecture is still clear to see. Indeed, the north side, the finest of Adam's designs, is once again the city's premier address, with the official residence of the First Minister of the Scottish Government at no. 6 (Bute House), the Edinburgh equivalent of 10 Downing Street. In August each year the gardens in the centre of the square are colonized by the temporary tents of the Edinburgh Book Festival (see p.103).

Georgian House

7 Charlotte Square • Daily: March 11am–4pm; April–June, Sept & Oct 10am–5pm; July & Aug 10am–6pm; Nov 11am–3pm; • £6.50; NTS • 0844 493 2118, nts.org.uk

Restored by the National Trust for Scotland, the interior of this residential townhouse provides a revealing sense of well-to-do New Town living in the early nineteenth century. Though a little stuffy and lifeless, the rooms are impressively decked out in period **furniture** – look for the working barrel organ which plays a selection of Scottish airs – and hung with fine **paintings**, including portraits by Ramsay and Raeburn, seventeenth-century Dutch cabinet pictures and the beautiful *Marriage of the Virgin* by El Greco's teacher, the Italian miniaturist Giulio Clovio. In the basement you can see the original wine cellar, lined with roughly made bins, and a **kitchen** complete with an open fire for roasting and a separate oven for baking; video reconstructions of life below and above stairs are shown in a nearby room.

Queen Street

Queen Street, the last of the three main streets of the New Town's first phase, is bordered to the north by private gardens, and commands sweeping views across to Fife. The best preserved of the area's three main streets, it's occupied mostly by offices and has few individual attractions, with the exception of the **Scottish National Portrait Gallery** at its eastern end, just to the north of St Andrew Square.

Scottish National Portrait Gallery

1 Queen St • Daily 10am–5pm (until 6pm in Aug, and until 7pm Thurs year round) • Free • 0131 624 6200, nationalgalleries.org

Housed in a fantastic Gothic Revivalist palace in red sandstone, the **Scottish**

National Portrait Gallery makes an extravagant contrast to the New Town's prevailing Neoclassicism. The exterior of the building is encrusted with statues of national heroes, a theme reiterated in the stunning two-storey entrance hall by William Hole's tapestry-like **frieze** and **mural**, carefully restored in the building's recent revamp.

The gallery's **collection** extends to over thirty thousand images with seventeen exhibition spaces exploring the differing characteristics of Scotland as a nation and a people. Inevitably oil paintings of the likes of Mary, Queen of Scots and Robert Burns form the backbone of the collection but there's a lot to be said for the contemporary portraits that often show a country in cultural flux. Recent temporary exhibitions have included Italian immigrant Valentina Bonizzi's "Migration Stories", a photographic study raising questions of citizenship and belonging, while "Hot Scots" featured a roll call of Scottish celebrity portraits, with subjects ranging from Armando Iannucci to Sean Connery – ironically, a longstanding expat.

Calton Hill

Edinburgh's enduring tag as the "Athens of the North" is nowhere better earned than on **Calton Hill**, the volcanic crag which rises up above the eastern end of Princes Street. Numerous architects homed in on it as a showcase for their most ambitious and grandiose buildings and monuments, the presence of which emphasizes Calton's aloof air and sense of detachment. It's also one of the best viewpoints from which to appreciate the city as a whole, with its tightly knitted suburbs, landmark Old and New Town buildings and the sea beyond.

Calton Gaol

Waterloo Place • No public access

Many visitors arriving into Waverley Station at Calton Hill's southern drop imagine the picturesque castellated building hard up against rock to be Edinburgh Castle itself. In fact, it's the only surviving part of the **Calton Gaol**, once Edinburgh's main prison where former serial killer William Burke spent his final hours before being executed on Lawnmarket. Most of the prison was demolished in the 1930s to make way for the looming Art Deco St Andrew's House, which is today occupied by civil servants.

Old Calton Burial Ground

Waterloo Place • Open 24hr • Free

On Calton hill's southern slopes, tucked behind a line of high, dark, forbidding walls, the picturesque assembly of mausoleums and gravestones of **Old Calton Burial Ground**, some at a jaunty angle and others weathered with age, make for an absorbing wander. Notable among the monuments are the cylindrical memorial by Robert Adam to the philosopher David Hume, one of Edinburgh's greatest sons, and a piercing obelisk commemorating various political martyrs.

Nelson Monument

Calton Hill • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–7pm, Sun noon–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 10am–3pm • £4

Robert Louis Stevenson reckoned that Calton Hill was the best place to view Edinburgh, "since you can see the Castle, which you lose from the Castle, and Arthur's Seat, which you cannot see from Arthur's Seat". Though the panoramas from ground level are spectacular enough, those from the top of the **Nelson Monument**, perched near the summit of Calton Hill, are even better. Each day at 1pm a white ball drops down a mast at the top of the monument; this, together with the one o'clock gun fired from the Castle battlements (see p.59), once provided a daily check for the mariners of Leith, who needed accurate chronometers to ensure reliable navigation at sea.

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National Monument

Summit of Calton Hill

The **National Monument** is often referred to as "Edinburgh's Disgrace", yet many locals admire this unfinished and somewhat ungainly attempt to replicate the Parthenon atop Calton Hill. Begun as a memorial to the dead of the Napoleonic Wars, the project's shortage of funds led architect William Playfair to ensure that even with just twelve of the massive columns completed, the folly would still serve as a striking landmark.

City Observatory

Summit of Calton Hill

Designed by William Playfair in 1818, the **City Observatory** is the largest of the buildings at the summit of Calton Hill. Because of pollution and the advent of street lighting, which impaired views of the stars, the observatory proper had to be relocated to Blackford Hill before the end of the nineteenth century, but the equipment here continues to be used by students. At the corner of the curtain walls is the castellated Observatory House, one of the few surviving buildings by James Craig, designer of the New Town.

The Water of Leith

Slicing a diagonal cleft from the Pentland hills southwest of town, the **Water of Leith** twists and churns, carrying its peaty, golden-brown burden towards The Shore, Leith's (and now Edinburgh's) attractive old harbour. En route, although comfortably bypassing the city's Old Town, the river trundles by old villages that once depended on its power to drive mills. Nature abounds: swans and mallards are commonly sighted under the canopy, while otters, mink and kingfishers make sporadic appearances. Art enthusiasts should keep their eyes peeled for the six life-size Antony Gormley cast-iron **statues** collecting river debris along the way – look down from the bridge at Stockbridge for one of them. The satellite attractions of the **Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art** near Dean Village and the **Royal Botanic Gardens** beside Stockbridge make a good draw from the river's edge. Downstream, the river's final twist opens wide as the boats and gourmet restaurants of Leith's harbour come into view. **The Shore** possesses two of Edinburgh's five Michelin-starred establishments while the wealth of quaint trad-pubs, cafés and floating restaurants on offer make this the ideal finishing point for a **walk** along the river.

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

75 Belford Rd • Daily 10am–5pm (until 6pm in Aug) • Free; entrance charge for some temporary exhibitions • T 0131 624 6200, W nationalgalleries.org • A free bus service connects the National Gallery of Scotland with the Modern One and Two galleries (outbound: daily 11am–4pm, every hour on the hour except 1pm; return: 11.30am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm, 3.30pm & 5pm)

Set in spacious parkland at the far northwestern fringe of the New Town, just west of quaint, riverside Dean Village, **The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art** was the first collection in Britain devoted solely to post nineteenth-century painting and sculpture.

WATER OF LEITH WALKWAY

The Water of Leith flows in a northeasterly direction from the Pentland Hills to The Shore in Leith, over a distance of 24 miles. Following the final twelve miles of the river's course is the **Water of Leith Walkway**, making for a lovely riverside walk – a popular seven-mile stretch is from Colinton Village in the southwest (bus #10 from Princes St) to The Shore. For more information or to download a map, see W www.waterofleith.org.uk.

The Gallery is housed in two impressive Neoclassical buildings recently renamed **Modern One** and **Modern Two**, while its grounds serve as a **sculpture park**, featuring works by Richard Long, Henry Moore, Rachel Whiteread and, most strikingly, Charles Jencks, whose prize-winning *Landform*, a swirling mix of ponds and grassy mounds, dominates the area in front of Modern One.

The art collection here has a strong Scottish contingent with a particularly fine body of works from the early twentieth-century **Colourists** – a term attributed to the Scots-born painters of the era who spent enough time in France to soak up some post-Impressionist ideas and blend them with Scottish painting traditions. Fluid paint handling and vivid colours characterize the works you're likely to encounter from the leading figures of the movement, such as Samuel Peploe, John Duncan Fergusson and Leslie Hunter. The collection's **international works** from the same period feature crowd-pleasing names like Matisse and Picasso while Hockney, Warhol and Freud form the backbone of a solid postwar catalogue.

More recently the gallery has picked up a considerable collection of **contemporary** material from living British exponents of modern art such as Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and David Hockney.

Modern One

The more cutting-edge of the two sister galleries, **Modern One** draws on the Gallery's enviable collection to bolster the themes of the temporary exhibits on show. The recent "Death to Death and Other Small Tales" exhibition was no exception: Picasso's *Nu Assis* ("seated nude") was one of a number pulled from the vaults to shore up this carnal compilation that toyed with ideas of necrosis, eroticism and afterlife.

The building is divided into twenty-two exhibition spaces spread over two floors, with a good mix of audiovisual and sculpture art complementing the main exhibition, while on the ground floor there's a café with sun terrace and a well-stocked book and gift shop.

Modern Two

Just across Belford Road from Modern One, **Modern Two**, originally an orphanage, has been dramatically refurbished specifically to make room for the work of Edinburgh-born sculptor **Sir Eduardo Paolozzi**, described by some as the father of Pop Art. The collection, partly a gift from the artist himself, who died in 2005, includes some three thousand sculptures, two thousand prints and drawings and three thousand books.

There's an awesome introduction to Paolozzi's work in the form of the huge *Vulcan*, a half-man, half-machine which squeezes into the Great Hall immediately opposite the main entrance – view it both from ground level and the head-height balcony to appreciate the sheer scale of the piece. No less indicative of Paolozzi's dynamic creative talents are the rooms to the right of the main entrance, where his London studio has been expertly re-created, right down to the clutter of half-finished casts, toys and empty pots of glue. Elsewhere in the gallery, a selection of his sculptures and drawings are exhibited in a more traditional manner. The rooms upstairs are normally given over to special and touring exhibitions, which usually carry an entrance charge.

Dean Village

From Princes St, take bus #19, #37 or #113 and alight before Dean bridge; Dean Village is a 10min walk down Miller Row, the lane immediately before the bridge

Less than half a mile from Princes Street's west end is the old milling community of **Dean Village**, one of central Edinburgh's most picturesque yet unexpected corners, its atmosphere of decay arrested by the conversion of numerous granaries and tall mill buildings into designer flats. Nestling close to the river, with steep banks rising up on both sides, the Victorian community has a self-contained air, its surviving features

1

including a school, clock tower and communal drying green. High above Dean Village, **Dean Bridge**, a bravura feat of 1830s engineering by Thomas Telford, carries the main road over 100ft above the river.

Stockbridge

Bus #24, #29 or #42 from Princes St

Between the New Town and the Botanic Gardens, the busy suburb of **Stockbridge** grew up around the Water of Leith ford (and its seventeenth-century bridge) over which cattle were driven to market in Edinburgh. The hamlet was essentially gobbled up in the expansion of the New Town, but a few charming buildings and an independent character prevail in the district today. The area is a popular quarter for young professionals who can't afford the property prices in the New Town proper, and as a result there's a good crop of bars, boutiques and places to eat along both Raeburn Place, the main road, and St Stephen's Street, long one of Edinburgh's more offbeat side streets.

Stockbridge Market

Kerr St • June–Sept Sun 10am–5pm & Thurs noon–7.30pm; Oct–May Sun 10am–5pm only • ⓣ 0131 5515633, ⓦ stockbridgemarket.com

New on the scene, trendy **Stockbridge Market** offers a vast array of artisan produce to gobble on the hoof or take away. It's a compact affair, sited under a grove of leaning sorbus trees by the banks of the Water of Leith, where the tightly packed stallholders supply an exciting array of native and global items. The chocolatier's crackling gramophone sets the tone, and tremendous coffee is served out the back of a VW Camper – if you'd like a cake to go with it, don't miss the German *konditorei* stall selling exquisite pastries and gateaux.

The Royal Botanic Garden

Arboretum Place • Daily: March–Sept 10am–6pm; Feb & Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Jan 10am–4pm (note that glasshouses close 30min before garden) • Garden free ; glasshouses £4.50; guided tours £5 (tours last 1hr and leave from the John Hope Gateway at 11am and 2pm April–Oct) • ⓣ 0131 248 2909, ⓦ rbge.org.uk • Take bus #23, #27 or #28 from The Mound

Just beyond the northern boundaries of the New Town is the seventy-acre site of the **Royal Botanic Garden**. Filled with mature trees and a huge variety of native and exotic plants and flowers, the "Botanics" (as they're commonly called) are most popular simply as a place to stroll and lounge around on the grass. The main entrance is the West Gate on Arboretum Place, through the contemporary, eco-designed John Hope Gateway, where you'll find interpretation areas, information, exhibitions, a shop and restaurant. Towards the eastern side of the gardens, a series of ten **glasshouses**, including a soaring 1850s **Palm House**, shows off a steamy array of palms, ferns, orchids, cycads and aquatic plants, including some huge circular water lilies. Elsewhere, different themes are highlighted: the large Chinese-style garden, for example, has a bubbling waterfall and the world's biggest collection of Asian wild plants outside China, while in the northwest corner there's a Scottish native woodland which very effectively evokes the wild unkemptness of parts of the Scottish Highlands and west coast. **Art** is also a strong theme within the Botanics, with a gallery showing changing contemporary exhibitions in the attractive eighteenth-century **Inverleith House** at the centre of the gardens. Scattered all around are a number of outdoor sculptures, including a giant pine cone by landscape artist Andy Goldsworthy and the striking stainless-steel east gate, designed in the form of stylized rhododendrons. Parts of the garden are also notable for their great vistas: the lawns near Inverleith House offer one of the city's best views of the Castle and Old Town's steeples and monuments.

Leith

Bus #16 or #22 eastbound from Princes St

Although **LEITH** is generally known as the port of Edinburgh, it developed independently of the city up the hill, its history bound up in the hard graft of fishing, shipbuilding and trade. The presence of sailors, merchants and continental traders also gave the place a cosmopolitan – if slightly rough – edge, which is still obvious today. While specific attractions are few, Leith is an intriguing place to explore, worth visiting not just for the contrasts to central Edinburgh, but also for its nautical air and the excellent eating and drinking scene, which majors on seafood but includes haute cuisine and well-worn, friendly pubs.

Leith's initial revival from down-and-out port to des-res waterfront began in the 1980s around the area known as The Shore, the old harbour at the mouth of the Water of Leith. Until recently, the massive dock areas beyond were being transformed at a rate of knots, with landmark developments including a vast building housing civil servants from the Scottish Executive, and Ocean Terminal, a shopping and entertainment complex, beside which the former royal yacht **Britannia** has settled into her retirement.

The Shore

The best way to absorb Leith's history and seafaring connections is to take a stroll along **The Shore**, a tenement-lined road running alongside the Water of Leith. Until the mid-nineteenth century this was a bustling and cosmopolitan **harbour**, visited by ships from all over the world, but as vessels became increasingly large, they moored up at custom-built docks built beyond the original quays; these days, only a handful of boats are permanently moored here. Instead, the focus is on the numerous **pubs and restaurants** that line the street, many of which spill tables and chairs out onto the cobbled pavement on sunny days. And the dining here is good; within a few hundred yards of each other Leith has two Michelin-starred restaurants in *The Kitchin* (see p.95) and *Martin Wishart* (see p.95). The historic buildings along this stretch include the imposing Neoclassical **Custom House**, still used as offices by the harbour authority (and not open to the public); the round **signal tower** above *Fishers* restaurant (see p.95), which was originally constructed as a windmill; and the turrets and towers of the **Sailors' Home**, built in Scots Baronial style in the 1880s as a dosshouse for seafarers.

Royal Yacht Britannia

Ocean Terminal • Daily: April–June & Oct 10am–4pm; July–Sept 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March 10am–3.30pm • £12 • 0131 555 5566, royalyachtbritannia.co.uk • Bus #11, #22 or #34 from Princes St; oherwise jump on one of the tour buses that leave from Waverley Bridge

A little to the west of The Shore, moored alongside **Ocean Terminal**, a huge shopping and entertainment centre designed by Terence Conran, is one of the world's most famous ships, the **Royal Yacht Britannia**. Launched in 1953 at John Brown's shipyard on Clydeside, *Britannia* was used by the royal family for 44 years for state visits, diplomatic functions and royal holidays. Leith acquired the vessel following decommission in 1997, against the wishes of many of the royal family, who felt that scuttling would have been a more dignified end. Alongside *Britannia*, the sleek former royal sailing yacht, *Bloodhound*, is also on view (Sept–June).

Visits to *Britannia* begin in the **visitor centre**, on the second floor of Ocean Terminal, where royal holiday snaps and video clips of the ship's most famous moments, which included the 1983 evacuation of Aden and the British handover of Hong Kong in 1997, are shown. An audio handset is then handed out and you're allowed to roam around the yacht: the **bridge**, the **engine room**, the **officers' mess** and a large part of the **state apartments**, including the cabins used by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. The ship has been kept largely as it was when in service, with a well-preserved 1950s

dowdiness which the audio-guide loyally attributes to the Queen's good taste and astute frugality in the lean postwar years. Certainly, the atmosphere is a far cry from the opulent splendour which many expect.

The guide's commentary also reveals quirkier aspects of *Britannia*'s history: a full Marine Band was always part of the three-hundred-strong crew; hand signals were used by the sailors to communicate orders as shouting was forbidden; and a special solid mahogany rail was built onto the royal bridge to allow the Queen to stand on deck as the ship came into port, without fear of a gust of wind lifting the royal skirt.

Greater Edinburgh

There's a great deal to be discovered in **Greater Edinburgh**, beyond the compact city centre. The attractive coastal suburbs of **Crammond**, **Newhaven** and **Portobello** are all popular at weekends when the sun shines. The pick of the historical destinations include the imposing fifteenth-century **Craigmillar Castle** on the south side of the city and the sleepy medieval village of **Duddingston**, with its ancient pub, on the far side of Arthur's Seat. On the opposite side of town is **Edinburgh Zoo**, one of the city's best-loved attractions and home to the country's only pandas.

Newhaven

2 miles north of the centre of town • Bus #11 or #16 eastbound from Princes St

The old village (now suburb) of **Newhaven** was established by James IV at the start of the sixteenth century as an alternative shipbuilding centre to Leith: his massive warship, the *Great Michael*, capable of carrying 120 gunners, three hundred mariners and a thousand troops, and said to have used up all the trees in Fife, was built here. Newhaven has also been a ferry station and an important fishing centre, landing some six million oysters a year at the height of its success in the 1860s. Today, the chief pleasure is a stroll around the stone **harbour**, which still has a pleasantly salty feel, with a handful of boats tied up alongside or resting gently on the tidal mud. While you're here, you could also take an hour-long RIB **boat trip** (April–Oct; £22; ⓣ0131 331 4857, ⓦseafari.co.uk) on the Firth of Forth out to Inchcolm Island (see p.111), where you can expect to see puffins and seals.

Portobello

3 miles east of the centre of town • Bus #15 or #26 eastbound from Princes St

Among Edinburgh's least expected assets is its **beach**, a mile-long stretch of golden sand, most of which falls within **Portobello**, the suburb to the east of Arthur's Seat. Seeing a bit of a resurgence following the removal of some down-at-heel amusement arcades, it retains a certain faded charm from its heyday thanks to some attractive Victorian buildings and its delightful promenade. On hot summer weekends the beach can be a mass of swimmers, sunbathers, surfers and pleasure boats, while the rest of the year it makes for a pleasant stroll in between café stops.

Edinburgh Zoo

134 Corstorphine Rd, 3 miles west of the centre of town • Daily: April–Sept 9am–6pm; March & Oct 9am–5pm; Nov–Feb 9am–4.30pm • £16/person; family tickets £49.50 • ⓣ0131 334 9171, ⓦedinburghzoo.org.uk • Bus #12, #26 or #31 westbound from Princes St

Set on an eighty-acre site on the slopes of Corstorphine Hill, **Edinburgh Zoo** has transformed itself in recent years into a modern and highly successful conservation and recreation park – one of the city's most popular attractions. Appealingly set in the midst of a botanic garden, the new enclosures offer plenty of opportunities for

up-close animal encounters, and the heralded arrival of two **giant pandas** in 2012 has bolstered the zoo's already impressive collection. Other highlights include the 2.15pm **Penguin Parade**, the **Budongo Trail** – a huge modern chimpanzee enclosure with intimate viewing positions – and the walk-through **primate enclosure** where you might come face to face with a curious Saki monkey. Given the zoo's steep incline you may want to hop on the regular free Hilltop Safari bus to the top of the hill and work your way back down.

Duddingston

2.5 miles southeast of the centre of town • Bus #42 south from Waverley Bridge

The beautiful conservation village of **Duddingston**, at the opposite end of Arthur's Seat from the centre, is attractively set on the shores of **Duddingston Loch** – best known as the setting for Henry Raeburn's *Reverend Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch*, on show at the National Gallery (see p.77). Most visitors come here for a stiff drink at the *Sheep Heid Inn* (see p.97) after a hike over Arthur's Seat.

Cramond

5 miles northwest of the centre of town • Bus #41 westbound from central Princes St • For tide times, either check the notice board on shore or look for tide times for Leith on the BBC weather website

The enduring image of **Cramond** – a picturesque village by the Firth of Forth – is of step-gabled whitewashed houses rising uphill from the waterfront, though it also has the foundations of a Roman fort, as well as a tower house, church, inn and mansion, all from the seventeenth century. The best reason to come here is to enjoy a stroll around and a bit of fresh air. The **walk** along the wide promenade that follows the shoreline offers great views of the Forth; or head out across the causeway to the uninhabited bird sanctuary of **Cramond Island** – though be aware that the causeway disappears as high tide approaches and can leave you stranded if you get your timings wrong. Aim to get to and from the island in the two hours either side of low tide. Inland of Cramond, there's another pleasant walk along a tree-lined path leading upstream along the River Almond, past former mills and their adjoining cottages towards the sixteenth-century Old Cramond Bridge. These walks should take around an hour each.

Craigmillar Castle

Craigmillar Castle Rd, 5 miles southeast of the centre • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct daily 9.30am–4.30am; Nov–March Sat–Weds 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • Take bus #8, #33 or #49 from North Bridge to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, from where the castle is a 10min walk along a signposted footpath

Situated amid a small tranche of green belt, **Craigmillar Castle** offers an atmospheric, untrammelled contrast to packed Edinburgh Castle in the city centre. Before Queen Victoria set her heart on Balmoral, Craigmillar was considered her royal castle north of the border – which is hard to imagine now, given its proximity to the ugly council housing scheme of Craigmillar, one of Edinburgh's most deprived districts. That said, the immediate setting feels very rural and Craigmillar Castle enjoys splendid views back to Arthur's Seat and Edinburgh Castle. The oldest part of the complex is the L-shaped **tower house**, which dates back to the early 1400s – this remains substantially intact, and the **great hall**, with its resplendent late-Gothic chimneypiece, is in good enough shape to be rented out for functions. The tower house was surrounded in the 1500s by a quadrangular wall with cylindrical corner towers and was used on occasion by Mary, Queen of Scots. It was abandoned to its picturesque decay in the mid-eighteenth century, and today the peaceful ruins and their adjoining grassy lawns make a great place to explore – and kids, in particular, love having run of their very own castle.

1 The Pentland Hills

For Hillend, 6 miles south of the centre, take bus #4 or #15 westbound from Princes St; to get to Swanston, 5 miles south of the centre, take bus #16 westbound from Princes St or #27 southbound from The Mound to Oxgangs Rd, from where you can walk along Swanston Rd

The **Pentland Hills**, a chain some eighteen miles long and five wide, dominate most views south of Edinburgh and offer walkers and mountain bikers a thrilling taste of wild Scottish countryside just beyond the suburbs.

The simplest way to get a taste of the scenery of the Pentlands is to set off from the car park by the ski centre at **Hillend**, at the northeast end of the range; take the path up the right-hand side of the dry ski slopes, turning left shortly after crossing a stile to reach a prominent point with outstanding views over Edinburgh and Fife. If you're feeling energetic, go higher up where the vistas get even better. An alternative entry point to the Pentland Hills is **Swanston**, a short distance northwest of Hillend. It's an unspoiled, highly exclusive hamlet of whitewashed thatched-roof dwellings separated from the rest of the city by almost a mile of farmland; **Robert Louis Stevenson** (see box, below) spent his boyhood summers in Swanston Cottage, the largest of the houses, immortalizing it in the novel *St Ives*.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Though **Robert Louis Stevenson** (1850–1894) is sometimes dismissed for his straight-up writing style, he was one of the best-loved writers of his generation, and one whose novels, short stories, travelogues and essays remain enormously popular over a century after his death.

Born in Edinburgh into a distinguished family of lighthouse engineers, Stevenson was a sickly child, with a solitary childhood dominated by his governess, Alison "Cummie" Cunningham, who regaled him with tales drawn from Calvinist folklore. Sent to the university to study engineering, Stevenson rebelled against his upbringing by spending much of his time in the low-life howffs and brothels of the city. He later switched his studies to law, and although called to the bar in 1875, by then he had decided to channel his energies into literature: while still a student, he had already made his mark as an **essayist**, and eventually had more than a hundred essays published, ranging from light-hearted whimsy to trenchant political analysis.

Stevenson's other early successes included the **travelogue** *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*, kaleidoscopic jottings based on his journeys in France, where he went to escape Scotland's weather, which was damaging his health. It was there that he met Fanny Osbourne, an American ten years his senior, who was estranged from her husband and had two children in tow. His voyage to join her in San Francisco formed the basis for his most important factual work, *The Amateur Emigrant*, a vivid first-hand account of the great nineteenth-century European migration to the United States. Having married the now-divorced Fanny, Stevenson began an elusive search for an agreeable climate that led to Switzerland, the French Riviera and the Scottish Highlands.

He belatedly turned to the novel, achieving immediate acclaim in 1881 for **Treasure Island**, a moralistic adventure yarn that began as an entertainment for his stepson and future collaborator, Lloyd Osbourne. In 1886 his most famous short story, **Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde** (despite its nominal London setting) offered a vivid evocation of Edinburgh's Old Town: an allegory of its dual personality of prosperity and squalor, and an analysis of its Calvinistic preoccupations with guilt and damnation. The same year saw the publication of the historical romance **Kidnapped**, an adventure novel which exemplified Stevenson's view that literature should seek above all to entertain.

In 1887 Stevenson left Britain for good, travelling first to the United States where he began one of his most ambitious novels, *The Master of Ballantrae*. A year later, he set sail for the South Seas, and eventually settled in **Samoa**; his last works include a number of stories with a local setting, such as the grimly realistic *The Ebb Tide* and *The Beach of Falesà*. However, Scotland continued to be his main inspiration: he wrote *Catriona* as a sequel to *Kidnapped*, and was at work on two more novels with Scottish settings, *St Ives* and *Weir of Hermiston*, a dark story of father and son confrontation, at the time of his sudden death from a brain haemorrhage in 1894. He was buried on the top of Mount Vaea overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

EDINBURGH

BY PLANE

Edinburgh International Airport Edinburgh's airport (T0844 481 8989, W edinburghairport.com) is at Turnhouse, 6 miles west of the city centre, just off the A8.

Getting to/from the city centre Airlink #100 shuttle buses connect the airport with Waverley Rail Station in the centre of town (30min; £3.50; T0131 554 4494, W flybybus.com), with services every 10–15min between 4am and midnight, then every 30min through the night. Meanwhile, plans to reintroduce a tram service are nearing completion, which will link the airport to the city centre; for more info see W edinburghtrams.com. Otherwise, a metered taxi will charge around £18–22 to go between the airport and the town centre, while fixed-price taxis (£19.40 to the city centre) are offered by Onward Travel (T0131 272 8222, W onwardtravel.com) – you can pre-book larger vehicles if required.

BY TRAIN

Conveniently situated at the eastern end of Princes St, right in the heart of the city, Waverley Station (T0845 748 4950, W nationalrail.co.uk) is the arrival point for all mainline trains. There's a second mainline train stop, Haymarket Station, just under 2 miles west on the lines from Waverley to Glasgow, Fife and the Highlands, although this is only really of use if you're staying nearby.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 2hr 20min); Birmingham (hourly; 5hr); Dunbar (8 daily; 30min); Dundee (hourly; 1hr 45min); Falkirk (every 15min; 25min); Fort William (3 daily, change at Glasgow; 4hr 55min); Glasgow (every 15–30min; 50min); Inverness (6 daily direct; 3hr 50min); London (hourly; 4hr 30min); Manchester (3 daily; 4hr); Newcastle upon Tyne (hourly; 1hr 30min); North Berwick (hourly; 30min); Oban (2–3 daily, change at Glasgow; 4hr 10min); Perth (6 daily; 1hr 15min); Stirling (every 30min; 45min); York (hourly; 2hr 30min).

BY BUS

The bus and coach terminal for intercity services is located on the east side of St Andrew Square, a 2min walk from Waverley Station.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 3hr 50min); Birmingham (2–3 daily; 6hr 50min); Dundee (hourly; 1hr 45min–2hr); Glasgow (every 15min; 1hr 10min); Inverness (hourly; 3hr 30min–4hr 30min); London (10 daily; 7hr 50min); Newcastle upon Tyne (5 daily; 2hr 45min); Perth (hourly; 1hr 20min).

GETTING AROUND

Although Edinburgh occupies a large area relative to its population – fewer than half a million people – most places worth visiting lie within the compact city centre, which is easily explored **on foot**. The reintroduction of **trams** by 2014 looks set to redefine Edinburgh's travel map, but for the meantime it's most useful to note that most public transport services terminate on or pass through or near **Princes St**, the city's main thoroughfare, which divides the Old Town from the New Town, with the main **bus station** located just north of here on St Andrew Square.

BY BUS

Lothian Buses The city is generally well served by buses; the white and maroon ones operated by Lothian Buses (ticket offices at Waverley Bridge, 7 Shandwick Place or 27 Hanover St; 9am–6pm; T0131 555 6363, W lothianbuses.com) provide the most frequent and comprehensive coverage of the city. Note that all buses referred to in the text are run by Lothian unless otherwise stated. Usefully, every bus stop displays diagrams indicating which services pass by and the routes they take. A good investment, especially if you're staying away from the centre or want to explore the suburbs, is the £17 "Ridacard" bus pass allowing a week's unlimited travel on Lothian services; Lothian also offer a day ticket allowing unlimited travel for £3.50 or you can pay £1.50 for a single journey. These can be bought as you board the bus but you will need exact change.

First Edinburgh The predominantly white, single-decker buses of First Edinburgh (T0871 200 2233 W firstgroup.com) run services on a number of the main routes through town, but are better for outlying towns and villages. They have their own system of tickets and day tickets, similar in structure to Lothian Buses. Most services depart from or near the main bus station at St. Andrew Square.

Art Gallery Bus A free service (see p.77) connects the National Gallery of Scotland with the Modern One and Two galleries.

BY TAXI

Edinburgh is well-endowed with taxi ranks, and you can also hail black cabs on the street. Costs are reasonable – from the city centre to Leith, for example, costs around £7. All taxis are metered and the price structure is set by the council. Companies include Computer Cabs (T0131 272 8000, W comcab-edinburgh.co.uk), Central Taxis (T0131 229 2468, W taxis-edinburgh.co.uk) and City Cabs (T0131 228 1211, W citycabs.co.uk).

BY CAR

Edinburgh is a relatively uncongested city (except during the August festivals) with just a few traffic jam hot

spots. Parking is very expensive and controlled areas stretch far out into the suburbs. Most on-street parking regulations don't apply on Sundays or after 6.30pm Mon–Sat and after 5.30pm Mon–Fri a little further out from the centre.

Car rental There are a few car rental desks in Waverley train station which arrange for customers to be shuttled to collect cars from nearby depots. Also in the centre of town try Hertz at 10 Picardy Place (T 0843 309 3026) or Avis, 24 East London St (T 0844 544 6059). In addition, all the main rental companies have desks at the airport.

BY BIKE

Although hilly, Edinburgh is a reasonably bike-friendly city, with several cycle paths, particularly in the university areas south of the centre. The local cycling action group, Spokes (W spokes.org.uk), publishes an excellent map of the city with recommended cycle routes; pick up a copy at the tourist office.

Bike rental Available from Biketrax, 11–13 Lochrin Place, Tolcross (£17/day then £13 for additional days; T 0131 228 6633, W biketrax.co.uk) and Edinburgh Cycle Hire, 29 Blackfriars St (from £15/day; T 0131 556 5560, W cyclescotland.co.uk).

INFORMATION

Main tourist office Princes Mall, 3 Princes St, near the northern entrance to the train station (June Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–6pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–7pm, Sun 10am–7pm; Sept–May Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; T 0845 225 5121, W edinburgh.org). Although inevitably hectic at the height of the season, it's reasonably efficient, with scores of free leaflets and a bank of computers available for free if you want to search for travel-related information or £1 for 20min of general surfing.

Airport tourist office In the main concourse, directly opposite Gate 5 (daily: April–Oct 6.30am–10.30pm; Nov–March 7am–9pm). A much smaller affair than its town centre counterpart.

TOURS

BUS TOURS

Open-top, hop-on, hop-off bus tours are big business in Edinburgh. All cost the same (currently £13/person) and depart from Waverley Bridge; see W edinburghtour.com for more info. Recommended companies include MacTours, which uses a fleet of vintage buses and a live guide, and Majestic Tour, ideal for seeing the harder-to-reach sites like the Royal Yacht Britannia (see p.83) and The Royal Botanic Garden (see p.82).

WALKING TOURS

Several companies offer walking tours, many of which depart from the central section of the Royal Mile near the High Kirk of St Giles, or further uphill on the High Street's Merkat Cross. Advance booking is recommended during peak season. The following companies are worth singling out.

Auld Reekie Tours T 0131 557 4700, W auldreekietours.com. Departs from The Tron Kirk, 122 High St daily at noon, 2pm, 3pm (Sat only), 4pm, 6pm, 8pm & 10pm (£9–12). With a friendly mixture of ghost stories, town history and other jovial banter, the tours focus on Edinburgh's narrow closes and vaults, one of which contains a torture exhibition.

Mercat Tours T 0131 225 5445, W mercattours.com. Offers a wide range of history and ghost tours from Mercat Cross, High St (£11–14); some depart late in the evening and include a candlelit poke around the underground vaults of Blair St.

Edinburgh Literary Pub Tour T 0800 169 7410 W edinburghliterarypubtour.co.uk. Mixing a pub-crawl with extracts from local authors acted out along the way, this tour is a fun way to explore Edinburgh's fine drinking establishments. While being introduced to the scenes, characters and words of the major figures of Scottish literature, including Burns, Scott and MacDiarmid, you'll have the opportunity to nip in for a swift ale at each stop. Tours depart from outside the *Beehive Inn*, Grassmarket (see p.96) at 7.30pm (Jan–March Fri & Sun; April & Oct Thurs–Sun; May–Sept daily; Nov & Dec Fri; £14; online discounts available).

ACCOMMODATION

As befits its status as a busy tourist city and important commercial centre, Edinburgh has a greater choice of **accommodation** than anywhere in Britain outside London. Hotels, hostels and rental apartments are essentially the only options you'll find right in the heart of the city, but within relatively easy reach of the centre the choice of guesthouses, B&Bs, campus accommodation and even **campsites** broadens considerably.

ESSENTIALS

Rates Room rates are significantly higher in Edinburgh than elsewhere in Scotland, with double rooms starting at around £80 a night. Budget hotel chains offer the best value if you want basic accommodation right in the centre, while £120–150 will get you something more stylish. Self-catering apartments – of which there are many in Edinburgh – are often the most economical option, especially if you're travelling in a group.

Reservations It's worth making advance reservations at

any time of year, and is strongly recommended for stays during the Festival and around Hogmanay, when places can get booked out months in advance. Note that VisitScotland (T0845 859 1006, Wvisitscotland.com) operates a booking centre for accommodation in Edinburgh (and the rest of Scotland).

Access Bear in mind that many of the guesthouses and small hotels are located in Georgian and Victorian townhouses, over three or more floors, and usually have no lift, so are not ideal for those with restricted mobility.

OLD TOWN

Accommodation in the old town offers a well-balanced mix to cater for all budgets although in recent years the number of five-star hotels being built has rapidly increased. There's a choice of backpacking hostels tucked in among the gloomier alleys, while mid-range accommodation – mostly branded hotel chains and self-catering apartments – tend to sit just off the main drag.

HOTELS

★ **Apex International** 31–35 Grassmarket T0131 300 3456, Wapexhotels.co.uk; map pp.64–65. This ex-university building turned 175-bed business-oriented hotel has comfortable rooms, some with unencumbered views to the Castle and balconies that peer down onto the happening Grassmarket below. Up top there's a double rosette rooftop restaurant with a dramatic skyline view – especially impressive after dark – while downstairs you'll find a small pool and gym. £140

★ **Hotel Missoni** 1 George IV Bridge T0131 220 6666, Whotelmissoni.com; map pp.64–65. Quite what this funky, sexy new tie-up between the Italian fashion house and Rezidor Hotels is doing in the heart of prim Edinburgh is unclear, but the zigzag fabrics, wacky lighting and mosaic-like tiling are enticing, if a little headache-inducing. £310

Ibis Edinburgh Centre 6 Hunter Square T0131 240 7000, Waccorhotels.com; map pp.64–65. Probably the best-located chain hotel cheapie in the Old Town, within sight of the Royal Mile; rooms are modern and inexpensive, but there are few facilities other than a rather plain bar. There's a daily charge of £10 for internet here, but the café on the corner provides it free to customers. £93

The Scotsman 20 North Bridge T0131 556 5565, Wthescotsmanhotel.co.uk; map pp.64–65. The plush but unstuffy new occupant of the grand old offices of the *Scotsman* newspaper is one of Edinburgh's headline hotels. It's five-star stuff, with modern gadgets and fittings, but the marble staircase and walnut-panelled lobby have been retained, and you can even sleep in the editor's old office. £315

Ten Hill Place 10 Hill Place T0131 662 2080, Wtenhillplace.com; map pp.60–61. A contemporary hotel linked to the historic Royal College of Surgeons, with 78 sleek and smartly styled bedrooms, all run according to an environmentally conscious policy. Not part of a chain, but efficiently operated. £145

Travelodge Edinburgh Central 33 St Mary's St T0871 984 6137, Wtravelodge.co.uk; map pp.64–65. There's more than a hint of concrete brutalism in the look of this chain hotel, but it's well priced and centrally located, 100yd from the Royal Mile near some excellent restaurants. At weekends it tends to fill up with stag and hen parties but the rooms are quiet enough if a little grungy. £83

GUESTHOUSES

★ **The Witchery Apartments** Castlehill, Royal Mile T0131 225 5613, Wthewitchery.com; map pp.64–65. Seven riotously indulgent suites grouped around the famously spooky restaurant just downhill from the Castle; expect antique furniture, big leather armchairs, tapestry-draped beds, oak panelling and huge roll-top baths, as well as ultra-modern sound systems and complimentary bottles of champagne. Top of the range, unique and memorable . £325

HOSTELS

Argyle Backpackers 14 Argyle Place, Marchmont T0131 667 9991, Wargyle-backpackers.com; map pp.56–57. A quiet, less intense version of the typical backpackers' hostel, pleasantly located in three adjoining townhouses near the Meadows in studenty Marchmont, just south of the Old Town. The small dorms have single beds, and there are a dozen or so twin rooms, as well as a pleasant communal conservatory and garden at the back. Twins £56; dorms £18

Brodies 93 High St T0131 556 2223, Wbrodieshostels.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Extending over two buildings – the other being across the road at no. 12 – *Brodies* offers a few clean but poorly sound-proofed double rooms, some fairly straightforward dorms sleeping up to a dozen, and limited communal areas. Doubles £65; dorms £13

★ **Castle Rock Hostel** 15 Johnston Terrace T0131 225 9666, Wcastlerockedinburgh.com; map pp.64–65. Tucked below the Castle ramparts, with two hundred or so beds arranged in large, bright dorms, as well as triple and quad rooms and some doubles. The communal areas

TOP 5 BUDGET ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Castle Rock Hostel See p.89
Gerald's Place See p.90
High Street Hostel See p.90
Ibis Edinburgh Centre See p.89
Rick's See p.90

include a games room with pool and table tennis and a sunny patio. Doubles £50; dorms £15

High Street Hostel 8 Blackfriars St 0131 557 3984, highstreethostel.com; map pp.64–65. Lively and popular hostel in an attractive sixteenth-century building just off the Royal Mile with dorms of up to eighteen beds and twin rooms. The communal facilities include a kitchen, a quiet room and a party dining lounge. Twins £68; dorms £20

Smart City Hostel 50 Blackfriars St 0131 516 8074, smartcityhostels.com; map pp.64–65. An upmarket hostel just off the Royal Mile, with 622 beds in twin rooms or dorms. Women-only rooms are available. A reasonable café serves good-value food and breakfasts, and there is a late-night bar for residents. Twins £59; dorms £18

APARTMENTS AND CAMPUS ACCOMMODATION

★ **The Edinburgh Apartment** 0800 840 3070 the-edinburgh-apartment.com. With a good choice of accommodation to suit all budgets and party sizes, this independent agency has plenty of comfortable apartments in the vicinity of the Royal Mile and around town, some with free parking and internet. A one-bed apartment for two to four people is around £115

Greyfriars Apartments 07794 875 890, greyfriars-apartments.com. Among the best value in town, the four moderately spacious apartments offered by Greyfriars are stylishly presented and superbly located; all are just off the Royal Mile. You'll need to book early, especially if you're planning a weekend trip. A one-bed apartment for two people is around £125

★ **University of Edinburgh, Pollock Halls of Residence** 18 Holyrood Park Rd, Newington 0131 651 2007, edinburghfirst.com; map pp.56–57. Unquestionably the best setting of any of the city's university accommodation, right beside Holyrood Park, just southeast of the Old Town. It provides single rooms, doubles and self-catering flats, mostly available Easter & June to mid-Sept, though some rooms are available year-round. Singles £40; doubles £98.50; flats £425/week

NEW TOWN

Most of the New Town's accommodation is made up of converted townhouses rather than purpose-built hotels and consequently there are more independent guesthouses and boutique hotels. The dominant Georgian architecture means elegant large rooms, high ceilings and loftier prices but there are a few exceptions to be found.

HOTELS

★ **The Glasshouse** 2 Greenside Place, Broughton 0131 525 8200, theglasshousehotel.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Incorporating the castellated facade of the former Lady Glenorchy's Church, this ultra-hip hotel has 65 chichi rooms with push-button curtains and sliding doors opening onto a huge, lush roof garden scattered with Philippe Starck furniture. Perfect if you're in town for a weekend of flash indulgence. £172

Holiday Inn Express – Edinburgh City Centre Picardy Place 0131 558 2300, hieedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. It's by a busy roundabout but otherwise a good location in an elegant old Georgian tenement near the top of Broughton St with 161 rooms featuring neat but predictable chain-hotel decor and facilities. Breakfast included. £135

Regent House 3 Forth St, Broughton 0131 556 1616, regenthousehotel.co.uk; map pp.60–61. A small hotel over four floors that makes up for its lack of glamour with a great location, right in the heart of Broughton on a quiet side street. Some rooms are big enough to accommodate three to five people. £140

GUESTHOUSES

7 Gloucester Place 7 Gloucester Place 0131 225 2974, stayinginscotland.com; map pp.60–61. Elegant, well-cared-for B&B, with three bedrooms on the upper floor of a Georgian terrace house. The best of the double rooms has graceful garden views and a classic 1930s bathroom. £120

Ardenlee Guest House 9 Eyre Place 0131 556 2838, ardenleeguesthouse.com; map pp.60–61. Welcoming non-smoking guesthouse at the foot of the New Town, with original Victorian features and nine reasonably spacious rooms, seven of which are en suite and some suitable for families. A two-bed Georgian apartment (£120) is also available, close by at 3 Eyre Place. £150

★ **Gerald's Place** 21b Abercromby Place 0131 558 7017, geraldsplace.com; map pp.60–61. A homely taste of New Town life at an upmarket but wonderfully hospitable and comfy basement B&B. The rustic decor is tasteful, with some fine artwork and old books to catch your eye, while the breakfasts are generous, with many home-made components. £119

Nira Caledonia 6 Gloucester Place 0131 225 2720, niracaledonia.com; map pp.60–61. Elegant and comfortable townhouse hotel located on a typical New Town terrace. Decor is modern, opulent and striking, though it can feel a little overwhelming. £245

Rick's 55a Frederick St 0131 622 7800, ricksedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Ten much-sought-after rooms at the back of the popular New Town bar and restaurant. Beautifully styled with beds fitted with walnut headboards and plush fabrics, plus DVD player, they look out onto a cobbled lane behind. £115

★ **Tigerlily** 125 George St 0131 225 5005, tigerlilyedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. A glitzy boutique hotel, bar and restaurant that epitomizes the new "gorgeous" George St. A classic Georgian townhouse

transformed into a flamboyant design extravaganza; indulgent pink or black bedroom suites are kitted out with hi-tech gadgets and decadent fabrics. £145

APARTMENTS

Blue Rainbow Apartments – Royal Garden York Buildings, Queen St 0845 045 2222, bluerainbowapartments.com; map pp.60–61. Superbly equipped, comfortable modern one- and two-bedroom serviced apartments very centrally located opposite the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Studio apartments for two from £110

HOSTEL

Edinburgh Central SYHA 9 Haddington Place 0131 524 2090, edinburghcentral.org; map pp.60–61. In a handy location at the top of Leith Walk, this five-star hostel has single, double and eight-bed rooms with en-suite facilities. There is a reasonably priced bistro in addition to self-catering kitchen facilities. Twins and family rooms are available as well as the usual dorm beds. Twins £80; family rooms £115; dorms £26.50

CAMPING

There are only a couple of established campsites within half an hour's travel of central Edinburgh.

Drummohr Caravan and Camping Park Levenhall, Musselburgh, on the B1348 0131 665 6867, drummohr.org; bus #15, #26, #30 or #44; map pp.56–57. A large, pleasant site on the eastern edge of Musselburgh, a coastal satellite town to the east of Edinburgh, with excellent transport connections to the city centre. As well as the usual pitches, there are a few bothys (basic wooden huts that sleep four) and the more luxurious static homes. Huts £65; static homes £675/week; camping £25/pitch

Edinburgh Caravan Club Site 35 Marine Drive, Silverknowes, 5 miles northwest of the centre 0131 312 6874, caravanclub.co.uk; map pp.56–57. Caravan-dominated site in a pleasant location close to the shoreline, though there's little else here. £9.20/pitch

EATING

The last decade has seen a marked upsurge in style, sophistication and good taste in Edinburgh's restaurants and cafés. **Café culture** has hit the centre of the city, with tables spilling onto the pavements in the summer, and this has been matched by the rise of a clutch of original, upmarket and stylish **restaurants**, many identifying their cuisine as modern Scottish and championing top-quality local meat, game and fish. With five establishments holding **Michelin stars**, Edinburgh can justifiably claim second place behind London in the UK's fine-dining pecking order. As well as the wide choice offered in the Old Town and New Town, there are some great **neighbourhood** restaurants and cafés outside the centre – for example, in and around **Stockbridge**, on the northern fringe of the New Town; the student area encompassing **Southside**, south of the old town; and particularly in the **Shore of Leith**, the city's most inviting gastro hub. Just west of the Old Town, in the area around **Lothian Road**, you'll also find a good choice of economical pre-theatre menus.

THE OLD TOWN

There's a wide choice of restaurants and diners to suit all budgets and it doesn't take too much investigative work to track down places of character tucked away down the lanes and closes of the Old Town. In summer, this is the busiest part of town, so it's advisable to book a table for an evening meal.

CAFÉS

Café Truva 251 Canongate 0131 556 9524; map pp.64–65. If you like good, strong coffee and sticky pastries then this Turkish café is an ideal stop on the Mile especially on a nice day; its arcaded frontage allows for tables outside. Mediocre meals are offered so best stick with the coffee (£2.20 a cup). Daily 8.30am–7pm.

The Edinburgh Larder 15 Blackfriars St 0131 556 6922, edinburghlarder.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Just yards off the Royal Mile, but acting like a neighbourhood café-cum-bistro, this place makes an ideal stop for cream teas (just £5) or pre-theatre mains (£9). The food dares to depart from the norm, and almost all ingredients are sourced from smaller producers around Edinburgh. Feb–July & Sept–Nov Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat & Sun 9am–5pm; Aug daily 7am–10pm; Dec & Jan daily 8am–4pm.

★ **Fruitmarket Gallery Café** 45 Market St 0131 226 1843; map pp.64–65. This attractive café feels like an extension of the gallery space, its airy, reflective ambience enhanced by the wall of glass onto the street. A coffee and a cake here shouldn't go much over £5–6 whereas for a light lunch, £4.25 is enough for the soup of the day. Mon–Sat 11am–5.30pm, Sun noon–4.30pm.

RESTAURANTS

Amber Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre, 354 Castlehill 0131 477 8477, amber-restaurant.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Contemporary-styled restaurant offering the

TOP 5 MUST-TRY RESTAURANTS

Chaophraya See p.93
David Bann's See p.92
The Gardener's Cottage See p.93
The Kitchin See p.95
Wedgwood See p.92

chance to explore the nation's cuisine with £1.75 Scottish tapas and a "whisky sommelier" on hand to suggest accompanying drams for each. More substantial mains range from the old Scots comfort food, stovies, at £9, up to beef sirloin with whisky sauce at £19.50. Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–7.30pm, Fri & Sat 10am–9pm.

★ **David Bann's Vegetarian Restaurant** 56–58 St Mary's St 0131 556 5888, davidbann.com; map pp.64–65 Thoroughly modern vegetarian restaurant offering a wide choice of beautifully crafted, unconventional dishes such as their pulse-packed chilli pancakes with chocolate sauce – a savoury dish! – or the ever popular chickpea koftas with home-made curd cheese, both £12. Mon–Thurs noon–9.45pm, Fri noon–10.15pm, Sat 11am–10.15pm, Sun 11am–9.45pm.

The Grain Store 30 Victoria St 0131 225 7635, grainstore-restaurant.co.uk; map pp.64–65. This unpretentious restaurant is a relaxing haven amid the bustle of the Old Town, combining top-quality modern Scottish and French cuisines. Lunches offer value with two courses for £12.50 while the evening's £15 artichoke ravioli and truffles veggie option is by far the cheapest on the à la carte. Daily noon–2pm & 6–10pm.

La Garrigue 31 Jeffrey St 0131 557 3032, lagarrigue.co.uk; map pp.64–65. A place of genuine charm and quality, with a menu and wine list dedicated to the produce and traditions of the Languedoc region of France. The care and honesty of the cooking shine through in dishes such as the cassoulet or duck breast with stewed peppers. The two-course lunch (£12.50) and dinner (£25) menus offer consistent quality and value for money. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm.

Mother India's Cafe 3–5 Infirmary St 0131 524 9801, motherindiascafeedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.64–65. This buzzy, Glasgow-based operation has a refreshing approach to Indian food, serving freshly prepared tapas-style dishes for £3–6 that allow you to eat well but also lightly, with fish dishes in particular standing out. The setting is atmospheric, with old photos on even older stone walls. Mon–Thurs noon–2pm & 5–10.30pm, Fri & Sat noon–11pm, Sun noon–10pm.

★ **Ondine** 2 George IV Bridge 0131 226 1888, ondinerestaurant.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Tucked in beside (but a separate venture from) the *Hotel Missoni*, this dedicated seafood restaurant from Edinburgh chef Roy Brett, once Rick Stein's main chef in Padstow, turns out some sublime dishes using native shellfish and fish from sustainable sources. Two-course lunch and pre-theatre menus cost £18. Mon–Sat noon–3pm & 5.30–10pm.

★ **Spoon Café Bistro** 6a Nicholson St 0131 557 4567, spoonedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. A homely, first-floor room with quirky, retro fittings serving reliably rustic two- and three-course menus with punchy flavours from £12. They also make the best soup in town, served with a hunk of bread for £4.50. Under a different name, this was the café where J.K. Rowling first penned *Harry Potter*. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm, Sun noon–5pm.

★ **Wedgwood the Restaurant** 267 Canongate 0131 558 8737, wedgwoodtherestaurant.co.uk; map pp.64–65. This small but reputable fine-dining restaurant with in-house forager creatively plates all the best of Scotland's land, rivers and seas. There's so much choice on the à la carte that they offer "deciding time" – canapés and champagne – while you peruse the menu. The mains here begin at £15 while the £12 lunch deal is a true bargain, all with seasonal freshness guaranteed. Mon–Sat noon–3pm & 6–10pm, Sun 12.30–3pm & 6–10pm.

The Witchery by the Castle 352 Castlehill 0131 225 5613, thewitchery.com; map pp.64–65. An upmarket restaurant that only Edinburgh could create, set in magnificently over-the-top medieval surroundings full of Gothic panelling, tapestries and heavy stonework, all a mere broomstick-hop from the Castle. The rich fish and game dishes are pricey, but you can steal a sense of it all with a lunch or pre- or post-theatre set menu for under £16. Daily noon–4pm & 5.30–11.30pm.

NEW TOWN AND THE WEST END

For the flashier end of the restaurant scene, the New Town and its western fringe, known as the West End, are the happening parts of town. Many nationwide chains have restaurants on and around Princes and George streets, but it's worth exploring a little further afield to areas such as Broughton Street to find more authentic, home-grown places.

CAFÉS

★ **Artisan Roast** 57 Broughton St 07526 236 615, artisanroast.co.uk; map pp.60–61. If you're into the black stuff, this is the must-visit coffee shop in Edinburgh. A narrow, grungy shop lined with hessian, they roast on site, make coffee with skill and care, and delight in taking pops at mainstream coffee culture. Perch on a stool in the main shop or shuffle through to cushioned benches in "The Mooch". Mon–Fri 8am–10pm, Sat 10am–10pm, Sun 10am–8pm.

Eteaket 41a Frederick St 0131 226 2982, eteaket.co.uk; map pp.60–61. The best of the tea boutiques in the city centre, with a restrained but contemporary decor scheme and tables outside. There's an extensive menu of good-quality loose-leaf teas (mostly £2.60 a cup) and some decent nibbles alongside including the essential tea loaf for £2.75. You'll be given an egg timer to advise the optimum time to remove your strainer. Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 11am–6pm.

★ **Valvona & Crolla** 19 Elm Row, Leith Walk 0131 556 6066, valvonacrolla.com; map pp.60–61. The café at the back of what is arguably Britain's finest Italian

deli serves authentic Italian pizzas for around £10 as well as delicious pastries, breakfasts and expensive à la carte meals. The best advert for the café is the walk through the shop – which has food stacked from floor to ceiling, with display cabinets full of sublime olives, meats and cheeses. Mon–Thurs 8.30am–5.30pm, Fri & Sat 8am–6pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm.

RESTAURANTS

21212 3 Royal Terrace, Calton Hill 0845 222 1212, 21212restaurant.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Perhaps Edinburgh's most technically adventurous restaurant, *21212* picked up its first Michelin star within ten months of opening and has no intention of giving it up. Choose from two starters, one soup, two mains, one cheeseboard and two desserts – and soon you realize where the name comes from. Five courses start at £54, or you can opt for a two-course lunch for just £20 midweek and feast on crab followed by trout. Tues–Sat noon–1.45pm & 7–9.30pm.

Centotre 103 George St 0131 225 1550, centotre.com; map pp.60–61. Slick but welcoming bar, café and restaurant in an ornate former bank, offering unfussy, top-quality Italian food, from fresh pastries and coffee to interesting pizzas at a pricey £12 – all accompanied by a seriously impressive drinks list. Arrive before 7pm to benefit from the £16 three-course menu. Mon–Sat 7.30am–midnight, Sun 10am–10pm.

★ **Chaophraya** 33 Castle St 0131 226 7614, chaophraya.co.uk; map pp.60–61. This Thai restaurant is housed in Edinburgh's most glamorous, upmarket dining space with a rooftop location that gives it the best views in town. If you're lucky you'll get to sit in the "Glassbox" looking north, south and west to Fife, the Castle, and Corstorphine, as well as up to the sky. The menu is stunning too, and pretty reasonably priced considering the location; if you go veggie, there's a set meal for just £25. Otherwise try the super-hot jungle fish curry for £15 or pass on the food altogether a have a drink on the convivial roof terrace. Mon–Sat 11am–10.30pm, Sun noon–10pm.

Dusit 49a Thistle St 0131 220 6846, dusit.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Pairing bold Thai flavours with expensive British delicacies like asparagus might be a grave error of judgement but the overriding genius of this place is its adventurous spirit; the use of whisky as spice in their grilled pork tapas is inspired. More conventional Thai dishes are also available, all harmoniously spiced. Mains hover around £9. Mon–Sat noon–3pm & 6–11pm, Sun noon–11pm.

Forth Floor Harvey Nichols 30–34 St Andrew Square 0131 524 8350, harveynichols.com; map pp.60–61. While the rooftop views don't quite match those of its rival, *Chaophraya* (see above), there's a confidence to *Harvey Nicks*' approach which makes it a real contender among the city's Scottish fine-dining options. Choices might include roast John Dory with poached oyster at £23, or the £17 herb-crusted lamb. The brasserie, with its simpler risottos and grills, is less pricey but a little less memorable. Mon noon–3pm, Tues–Fri noon–3pm & 6–10pm, Sat & Sun noon–3.30pm & 6–10pm.

★ **The Gardener's Cottage** 1 Royal Terrace Gardens, London Rd 0131 558 1221, thegardenerscottage.co; map pp.60–61. In an achingly beautiful little cottage, uniquely sited in a woodland setting, it's incredible to think you're steps away from the city's beating heart. Dining is intimate, in two small rooms with communal long tables, while the open kitchen is stamp-sized. There's no choice, just six breathtaking courses of Scottish design for a bargain £30, featuring seasonal ingredients. Vegetarians are catered for if advised on booking. Thurs–Mon noon–2.30pm & 5–10pm.

★ **Henderson's** 94 Hanover St 0131 225 2605, hendersonsofedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Over the past fifty years Henderson's has evolved from a veggie canteen into a gourmet institution and arts centre. At street level there's a deli and bakery while the canteen below still bashes out a superb feast of salads and hot comfort food where you can fill up for around £8–10. In the evening, things get more intimate as restaurant menus take over and solo musicians play inoffensively in a corner. Mon–Wed & Sun noon–8.30pm, Thurs–Sat noon–9.30pm.

L'Escargot Bleu 56 Broughton St 0131 557 1600, lescargotbleu.co.uk; map pp.60–61. A nice step on from the rustic, no-frills French bistro that's still in evidence across Edinburgh. Here classic French country cooking is brought to bear on a range of locally sourced produce, from rare-breed pigs to Trossachs pike. Even the liquor for conventional dishes like coq au vin is sourced locally making it coq à la bière. Two-course pre-theatre or lunch menus cost £13. Mon–Thurs noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10pm, Fri & Sat noon–3pm & 5.30–10.30pm.

Mussel Inn 61–65 Rose St 0131 225 5979 mussel-inn.com; map pp.64–65. After feasting on a kilo of mussels and a basket of chips for under £16 you'll realize why there's a demand to get in here. Their close ties to west-coast shellfish farmers help ensure that the journey from sea to plate is short and swift. Check the website for special deals. Mon–Thurs noon–3pm & 5.30–10pm, Fri & Sat noon–10pm, Sun 12.30–10pm.

Urban Angel 1 Forth St 0131 5566323; 121 Hanover St 0131 225 6215; map pp.60–61; urban-angel.co.uk. With two contemporary New Town branches you're never far from the best eggs benedict in town. Served as part of their all-day brunch menu you can also choose from a variety of "little plate" options like artichoke bruschetta or polenta bites from £4–£5 to temper your appetite while more substantial meals arrive in the evening. Forth St Mon–Sat 9am–9pm, Sun 9am–5pm; Hanover St Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

1

STOCKBRIDGE AND AROUND

On the northern fringe of the New Town, Stockbridge is home to many of the city's young professionals and consequently has more than its fair share of fine cafés and restaurants.

CAFÉS

The Gateway Restaurant/Terrace Café Royal Botanic Garden, Arboretum Place T0131 552 2674; map pp.56–57. At the West Gate of the Botanics, the new John Hope Gateway Centre has tables and a terrace overlooking the gardens on its upper floor, serving cream tea for £6 as well as full breakfasts and lunches. A few hundred yards beyond, the busy *Terrace Café* serves coffees, snacks and less formal lunches, with lots of outdoor tables and kid-friendly options. Daily: March–Sept 10am–6pm; Feb & Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Jan 10am–4pm.

★ **Peter's Yard** 3 Deanhaugh St T0131 332 2901, W petersyard.com; map pp.60–61. Another side to the Continental baking scene, this time a Swedish sourdough outfit with the bread ovens on view and baskets of delicious, crusty loaves out front. They also sell delicate cardamom pastries to go with their satisfyingly nutty coffees for around £5, while most popular around mealtimes is the vibrant sourdough pizza at £10. Mon–Fri 8am–9pm, Sat & Sun 9am–9pm.

RESTAURANTS

Purslane 33a St Stephen St T0131 226 3500, W purslanerestaurant.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Edinburgh's smallest restaurant punches well above its weight when it comes to dishing out high-end nosh – *Purslane*'s offerings are intricate and beautiful to look at, fresh and fragrant to consume. Elements of classic French and Basque cooking are evident on the menu, like the piperade with fennel, but it gets a modern delivery. Three courses for under £26 is not bad value. Tues–Sun noon–2pm & 6.30–11.30pm.

★ **The Stockbridge Restaurant** 54 St Stephen St T0131 226 6766, W thestockbridgerestaurant.co.uk; map pp.60–61. It's hard to believe swanky St Stephen's St used to be one of Edinburgh's worst slums. This basement restaurant sums up how far things have come with its fine linen, silverware and fancy platters, while the blackened stone walls and candlelit hearth give it a slightly bohemian atmosphere. Save for one veggie option, it's meat, game and fish all the way but the quality is exceptional and affordable; set menus begin at £20. Tues–Sat 7–9.30pm, Sun 7–9pm.

LOTHIAN ROAD & TOLCROSS

While Lothian Road, running between Princes St and Tolcross just west of the Old Town, has a shabbier side, particularly around its various late-night bars and clubs, this is Edinburgh's theatre district, with a decent selection of sophisticated, lively places to eat and drink, and good value pre- and post-theatre deals.

Castle Terrace 33–35 Castle Terrace T0131 229 1222, W castleterracerestaurant.com; map pp.60–61. With its first Michelin star recently bagged, this sister restaurant to the highly successful *The Kitchin*, brings high-level French cooking to bear on excellent Scottish produce. Chef-patron Dominic Jack's philosophy is "nature to plate" but clearly there's some magic in between. If your budget will stretch, head straight for the £65 or £75 tasting menus, otherwise try the three-course lunch at £26.50. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6.30–10pm.

★ **Timberyard** 10 Cambridge St T0131 221 1222, W timberyard.co; map pp.60–61. This swanky yet somehow rustic old workshop makes for a genial atmosphere with its shared, candlelit benches indoors and sunny courtyard garden. The food focuses on high-quality Scottish produce, some of it sourced from the nearby farmers' market. Pre-theatre lunch menus are £14 while à la carte mains start at £11.50. Tues–Sat noon–1.30pm & 5.30–9.30pm; bar stays open until 1am.

SOUTHSIDE

As the student quarter of the city, the Southside boasts plenty of good-value eating, but it's also an area where more progressive and interesting restaurants can establish themselves on the fringe of the more expensive city centre.

CAFÉS

Falko Konditorei 185 Bruntsfield Place T0131 656 0763, W falko.co.uk; map pp.56–57. German master-baker Falko Burkert has brought a new level of continental sophistication to Edinburgh's café scene with his superb *plunderstück*– German version of a Danish pastry – and chewy mini-brioche, both £1.70. Wed–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 8.30am–6pm, Sun 9.30am–6pm.

★ **Peter's Yard** 27 Simpson Loan, Southside T0131 228 5876, W petersyard.com map pp.60–61. Southside branch of the popular independent café-bakery, specializing in Scandinavian cakes and sourdough breads all baked to perfection in house. Mon–Fri 7.30am–7pm, Sat & Sun 9am–7pm.

RESTAURANTS

The Apartment Bistro 7–13 Barclay Place, Bruntsfield T0131 228 6456, W apartmentrestaurant.com; map pp.60–61. The hippest place for miles when it opened in 1999, a recent makeover under the same ownership has seen it revitalized as a sultry, Parisian-style brasserie with hearty cooking, good wines and plenty of stylish sophistication. From lunch to pre-theatre you'll be paying about £10 for two courses, but double that after 7pm. Daily noon–10pm.

Hanedan 41 West Preston St T0131 667 4242, W hanedan.co.uk; map pp.56–57. Not the roomiest of

restaurants but that's partly down to the unrelenting popularity of this authentic Turkish gem. Sample your way through the traditional mixed meze starter at £6.75 featuring roast aubergine, meatballs and spinach in strained yoghurt. Onto the mains where you'll find charcoal grilled meats from £9.50 upwards or veggie moussaka for £9. Tues–Sun noon–3pm & 5.30–10.30pm.

★ **Kalpna** 2–3 St Patrick's Square, Newington ⓣ 0131 667 9890, ⓦ kalpnarestaurant.com; map pp.60–61. Outstanding vegetarian family restaurant serving authentic Gujarati dishes at a distinctly unhurried pace. Three *thaalis* (from £13.50 to £17) including a vegan option, stand alongside the main menu for those keen to sample a range of dishes, while the lunch set menu is an "all you can eat" for £8. Mon–Sat noon–2pm & 5.30–10.30pm.

Mosque Kitchen Edinburgh Central Mosque, 50 Potterrow (entrance on West Nicholson St) ⓣ 0131 667 4035; 31 Nicholson Square ⓣ 0131 667 4035; map pp.60–61; ⓦ mosquekitchen.com. Out of the many "curry in a hurry" establishments that are cropping up around the Nicholson St area, this is a true veteran. Tagged onto the mosque, this very basic canteen has for years been dishing out fragrant rice and curry (around £5) to be eaten outside under a large awning. Now they also have new roofed premises in Nicholson Square. Both branches daily 11.30am–11pm; closed Fri 12.50–1.50pm for prayer.

Sweet Melinda's 11 Roseneath St, Marchmont ⓣ 0131 229 7953, ⓦ sweetmelindas.co.uk; map pp.56–57. A pleasant seafood restaurant in a timber-panelled room with a friendly neighbourhood feel. It's worth shelling out for dishes such as mackerel served with Thai herbs for £17.50, or exquisitely fried squid starter for £6.50. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6–10pm.

LEITH AND THE SHORE

The area around the cobbled Shore of Leith, along the edge of the Water of Leith just as it reaches the sea, is the best-known dining quarter in Edinburgh, and lives up to its billing with good-quality, laidback seafood bistros and a concentration of Michelin stars.

CAFÉS

★ **Mimi's Bakehouse** 63 Shore ⓣ 0131 555 5908, ⓦ mimisbakehouse.com; map pp.56–57. This family-run, vintage-styled tea and cake shop became an instant hit on opening in 2010. Its lovingly crafted cupcakes, tray bakes and scones make for an appetizingly colourful display on the shop's counter. The light lunches on offer are a treat too but best of all is the tiered afternoon tea platter for £14.50. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 9am–6pm.

The Water of Leith Café Bistro 52 Coburg St ⓣ 0131 555 2613, ⓦ thewaterofleithcafebistro.co.uk; map pp.56–57. It's a wee bit out on its own, but this welcoming, family-friendly spot is right beside the Water of Leith walkway. The French chef has plenty of restaurant experience, evident in the quality of the food from fishcakes to quiches. At weekends you can partake in their excellent three-course menu, a snip at just £13.50. Tues–Sun 10am–5.30pm.

RESTAURANTS

Chop Chop 76 Commercial Quay ⓣ 0131 553 1818, ⓦ chop-chop.co.uk; map pp.56–57. Specializes in food from and around the northeastern Chinese province of Jilin. Its dumplings – at around £4.50 – are a particular draw while hungrier customers opt for the unlimited banquet at £19.50. Success on one of Gordon Ramsay's TV shows has seen it blossom and it's now regarded as one of Edinburgh's finest Chinese restaurants. Mon–Thurs 6–10pm, Fri 6–10.30pm, Sat noon–2pm & 5–10.30pm, Sun 12.30–2.30pm & 5–10pm.

Fishers 1 Shore ⓣ 0131 554 5666, ⓦ fishersbistros.co.uk; map pp.56–57. One of the first wave of seafood bistros to put Leith's dining scene on the map. The menu here has an appealing range of expensive and fancy fish (upwards of £15), but there are also impressive bar-style snacks such as fishcakes and chowder, and cheaper weekday set menus from £13. Daily noon–1am.

★ **The Kitchin** 78 Commercial Quay ⓣ 0131 555 1755, ⓦ thekitchin.com; map pp.56–57. Opened in 2006 by young Scottish chef Tom Kitchin and the winner – less than six months later – of a Michelin star, this upwardly mobile operation puts itself at the more relaxed end of the fine-dining bracket and offers some tantalizing dishes including razor clams with chorizo (an £18.50 starter) or John Dory with shellfish ravioli (£33.50). More affordable are the set lunches at £26.50 for three courses. Daily 12.15–2.30pm & 6.30–10pm (Fri & Sat until 10.30pm).

Restaurant Martin Wishart 52 Shore ⓣ 0131 553 3557, ⓦ restaurantmartin-wishart.co.uk; map pp.56–57. The eponymous chef is one of the leading lights of the Scottish culinary scene, and was the first Michelin-star holder in Edinburgh. Though relatively modest in size, and demure, this place wows the gourmets with highly accomplished and exquisitely presented dishes featuring Scottish-sourced fish and meat. A two-course lunch (Tues–Fri) is £28.50 while a six-course evening tasting menu costs £75. Tues–Fri noon–2pm & 7–10pm, Sat noon–1.30pm & 7–10pm, Sun 7–10pm.

The Shore 3–4 Shore ⓣ 0131 553 5080, ⓦ fishersbistros.co.uk; map pp.56–57. Part of the Fisher group next door, this is a well-lived-in bar-restaurant with huge mirrors, wood panelling and aproned waiters who serve up good sea and land food from £13.50. Live jazz, folk and hubbub float through from the adjoining bar where you'll find a wide selection of snacks on offer including calamari and deep-fried haggis balls at £3 each. Daily noon–1am.

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GREATER EDINBURGH

Loch Fyne Restaurant 25 Pier Place, Newhaven Harbour T0131 559 3900, W lochfyne.com; map pp.56–57. A fantastic location by Newhaven's fish market and harbour for this chain with strong connections to Scotland's west coast. Best for simple oysters (£2 each) and fish with a glass of wine. Fish mains average around £13. Mon–Thurs 11.30am–10pm, Fri 11.30am–10.30pm, Sat 10am–11pm, Sun 10am–10pm.

Porto & Fi 47 Main St, Newhaven T0131 551 1900, W portofi.com; map pp.56–57. A bright daytime/early-evening café not far from Newhaven's old stone harbour, with tempting cakes alongside serious daily specials including stews and fish pie from an accomplished kitchen. Mains range from £10 to £13. Mon–Sat 8am–8pm, Sun 10am–6pm.

DRINKING

Many of Edinburgh's **pubs**, especially in the Old Town, have histories that stretch back centuries, while others, particularly in the New Town, are unaltered Victorian or Edwardian period pieces. Add a plentiful supply of trendy, modern **bars**, and there's enough to cater for all tastes. The standard licensing hours are 11am–11pm (noon–11pm on Sun), but many places stay open later and, during the Festival especially, you won't have a problem finding a bar open till at least 1am. Edinburgh has a long history of beer-making, though only one working brewery remains in the city itself, the small **Caledonian Brewery** in the western reaches of town. Owned by multinational Scottish & Newcastle, it still uses old techniques and equipment to produce some of the best specialist beers in Britain, including its popular Deuchar's IPA. If you fancy a pub-crawl, a fun way to explore Edinburgh's pubs is to take a **Literary Pub Tour** (see p.88).

THE ROYAL MILE AND AROUND

Beehive Inn 18–20 Grassmarket T0131 225 7171; map pp.64–65. One of the few family-friendly pubs in the centre with an even scarcer beer garden out back. Inside it's a beautiful early-Victorian building with high-backed red leather seating and corniced ceilings in each of its three rooms. Out front is the regular starting point for the Literary Pub Tour. Mon–Sat 9am–1am, Sun 12.30pm–1am.

★ **Blackfriars** 57 Blackfriars St T0131 558 8684, W blackfriarsedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Kitted out with old school desks and chairs, this is a friendly, independent bar without the swank or swagger of nearby boozers. You can sip on a wide selection of wheat beers and wines by the bottle (from £15) or glass. If you get hungry, try their charming sister restaurant next door, with mains from £14. Tues–Thurs 4pm–midnight, Fri & Sat noon–1am, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

Bow Bar 80 West Bow T0131 226 7667; map pp.64–65. Wonderful old wood-panelled bar and one of the nicest, most convivial drinking spots in the city centre, although it can get uncomfortably busy at weekends. Choose from among nearly 150 whiskies or a changing selection of first-rate Scottish and English cask beers. Mon–Sat noon–midnight, Sun noon–11pm.

Jolly Judge 7 James Court T0131 225 2669; map pp.64–65. Atmospheric, low-ceilinged bar in a close just down from the Castle which features in the Literary Pub Crawl. Cosy in winter and pleasant outside in summer. Mon–Sat noon–midnight, Sun noon–11pm.

Under the Stairs 3a Merchant St T0131 466 8550; map pp.64–65. Comfy, shabby-chic bar with great cocktails, popular with the pre-clubbing crowd. Food served late, with sharing plates available up until midnight starting at £2.50 for chilli-fried broad beans up to the £15 cheese board. Mon–Sat noon–1am, Sun noon–midnight.

NEW TOWN AND WEST END

The Barony Bar 81–85 Broughton St T0131 558 2874; map pp.60–61. A fine old-fashioned bar which manages to be big and lively without being spoilt. Chainification has blunted a bit of its appeal, but there's still real ale and a blazing fire. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am.

The Bon Vivant 55 Thistle St T0131 225 6055; map pp.60–61. Classy city-centre bar, with an excellent wine list and good choice of champagne by the glass, as well as interesting food available in tapas-sized portions. Daily noon–1am.

★ **Café Royal Circle Bar** 17 West Register St T0131 556 1884, W caferoyaledinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Worth a visit just for its Victorian decor, notably the huge elliptical island bar and tiled portraits of renowned inventors. The menu is appropriately swanky too, with a wide choice of champagnes and oysters (£10 for six) while real ale fans will not be disappointed by the native selection. Mon–Wed 11am–11pm, Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30–11pm.

★ **Cumberland Bar** 1–3 Cumberland St T0131 558 3134; map pp.60–61. This lovely old pub is just far

TOP 5 BEER GARDENS

Beehive Inn See p.96
Cumberland Bar See p.96
Pear Tree House See p.97
Sheep Heid Inn See p.97
Timberyard see p.94

enough off the beaten track to remain off the radar to the weekend's pub-crawling masses. Its other great assets are its willow-shaded beer garden and fantastic assortment of cask ales. Mon–Fri 11am–1am, Fri & Sat 10am–1pm.

Oxford Bar 8 Young St 0131 539 7119; map pp.60–61. This is an unpretentious, unspoilt, no-nonsense city bar – which is why local crime writer Ian Rankin and his Inspector Rebus like it so much. Fans duly make the pilgrimage, but fortunately not all the regulars have been scared off. Mon–Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30–11pm.

Tigerlily 125 George St 0131 225 5005; map pp.60–61. The daddy of all George Street's decadent destination bars, where the locals come to see and be seen. Can be tons of fun – but only if you're wearing the right clothes. Daily 8am–1am.

The Voodoo Rooms 19a West Register St 0131 225 5005, thevoodoorooms.com; map pp.60–61. Glamorous gilt and plush booths attract a dressed-up crowd, especially at the weekend. Frequent live music, performance and club nights, including Edinburgh's legendary Vegas! Mon–Thurs 4pm–1am, Fri–Sun noon–1am.

GAY BAR

Planet Out 6 Baxter's Place, New Town 0131 556 5551; map pp.60–61. Loud and outrageous bar beside the Playhouse Theatre, with DJs at weekends and regular drinks promotions making it a popular meeting point. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am.

OUTSIDE THE CITY CENTRE

Kings Wark 36 Shore, Leith 0131 554 9260; map pp.56–57. Real ale in a restored fifteenth-century pub with attached restaurant right in the heart of Leith's old port. Its picturesque interior of stone walls and corniced ceilings give an ambience that's little changed since the days of the old sea dogs telling tales at the bar. Mon–Thurs noon–11pm, Fri & Sat noon–midnight, Sun 11am–11pm.

★ **The Last Word Saloon** 44 St Stephen St, Stockbridge 0131 225 9009, lastwordsaloon.com; map pp.60–61. A shadowy, candlelit bar with open fires and table service where an abundance of unconventional home-made cocktails form the backbone of the drinks menu. Try the liver-splitting "Mum's the Word" shake for £6.50, combining gin, absinthe and chartreuse – a spice and herb distillation made by French monks. Daily 4pm–1am.

★ **Pear Tree House** 36 West Nicolson St, Southside 0131 667 7533, pear-tree-house.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Fine bar in an eighteenth-century house with two beautiful old pear trees trained on its west wall. Its greatest asset, however, is its large courtyard – one of central Edinburgh's very few beer gardens. In summer there are live bands and barbecues outside, weather permitting. Mon–Thurs 11am–11.45pm, Fri & Sat 11am–12.45am, Sun 12.30–11.45pm.

The Roseleaf 23–24 Sandport Place, Leith 0131 476 5268; map pp.56–57. Chintzy-cool local that's a little off the beaten track but worth the trip for the pot-tails alone – funky cocktails served in vintage teapots at £5–7. Daily 10am–1am.

★ **Sheep Heid Inn** 43 The Causeway, Duddingston 0131 661 7974, thesheepheidedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.56–57. Laying claim to be the city's oldest licensed premise and one-time rural watering hole to Bonnie Prince Charlie, this pub retains many of its historical charms including an antique skittle alley (rentable for £20) through the back. In winter there are open fires and comfy chairs while in summer, punters gravitate to the courtyard garden. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30–11pm.

NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT

Inevitably, Edinburgh's **nightlife** is at its best during the Festival (see p.101), which can make the other 48 weeks of the year seem like an anticlimax. However, while it lacks Glasgow's clout, Edinburgh's **club scene** can be enormously enjoyable, with a mix of mainstream discos offering pop and dance music and left-field clubs with a dressed-down vibe and a wide range of themed nights, usually rotating on a monthly or fortnightly basis. Most of the city centre clubs stay open till around 3am. Meanwhile, you can normally hear **live jazz**, **folk** and **rock** every evening in one or other of the city's pubs. For the really big rock events, ad hoc places – such as the Castle Esplanade or Murrayfield Stadium – are pressed into service. Other forms of entertainment are well represented, too: the city has permanent venues large enough to host touring **orchestras** and **ballet** companies, while elsewhere you can uncover a lively **comedy** club and a couple of excellent art-house **cinemas**.

LISTINGS INFO

The best way to find out about clubs, music, cinema and anything else that's going on is to pick up a copy of *The List* (list.co.uk), a fortnightly magazine covering both Edinburgh and Glasgow. Alternatively, get hold of *The Skinny* (theskinny.co.uk), a free culture magazine with frequent arts, music and events listings found in trendy bars and cafés around town. Information on nightclubs can also be found on posters and the flyers distributed to most of the pre-club bars around town.

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HOGMANAY

Hogmanay's meaning is, put simply, the last day of the year, but in reality it's all about celebrating the beginning of a new one. The best way to do so is to join one of the street parties that are held in the middle of towns and cities, often centred around a prominent clock face which rings out "the bells" at midnight. These days, the largest New Year's Eve street party in Europe takes place in Edinburgh, with around eighty thousand people enjoying the culmination of a week-long series of events. On the night itself, stages are set up in different parts of the city centre, with big-name rock groups and local ceilidh bands playing to the increasingly inebriated masses. The high point of the evening is, of course, midnight, when hundreds of tons of fireworks are let off into the night sky above the Castle, and revellers begin to chorus "**Auld Lang Syne**", an old Scottish tune with lyrics by Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet. For information about celebrations in Edinburgh, and how to get hold of **tickets** for the street party, visit the Fringe Office at 180 High St (T 0844 573 8455; box office opens Dec 3) or go to W edinburghshogmanay.org.

CLUBS

The Bongo Club 66 Cowgate, Old Town T 0131 558 8844, W thebongoclub.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Legendary Edinburgh club and arts venue; its line-up is eclectic but always worth checking out. Look out for the monthly dub and reggae Messenger Sound System. Daily 11pm–3am.

Cabaret Voltaire 36 Blair St, Old Town T 0131 247 4704, W thecabaretvoltaire.com; map pp.64–65. Atmospheric nightclub in the Old Town's subterranean vaults, playing host to some of the city's best and cheapest (entry £4–7) underground electronic music as well as live rock bands. Club nights Tues–Sat 11pm–3am.

★ **The Caves** 8–12 Niddry St, Old Town T 0131 557 8989, W thecavesedinburgh.com; map pp.64–65. Housed in a labyrinth of arches rediscovered after a hundred years, this bohemian multi-functional venue has the city's most staggeringly atmospheric setting. As well as live music and club nights it's also used for private functions and weddings. Consequently there's little consistency as to when public nights are on, so keep an eye on their website. Club nights 10pm–3am.

Electric Circus 36–39 Market St, Old Town T 0131 226 4224, W theelectriccircus.biz; map pp.64–65. Offers a host of private karaoke rooms (£4–5/person), and puts on burlesque and live music with an indie slant. Clubs here, like "Magic Nostalgic" and "Beep Beep, Yeah!" tend to follow an unashamedly retro vibe. Tues–Thurs & Sun 7pm–1am, Fri & Sat 7pm–3am.

Lulu's 125b George St, New Town T 0131 225 5005, W luluedinburgh.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Sultry subterranean nightspot beneath restaurant *Tigerlily*. A place to see and be seen, with its fair share of Travolta-wannabes striding to the sound-responsive disco light floor. Mon–Thurs & Sun 10pm–3am, Fri & Sat 9pm–3am.

GAY CLUBS

Edinburgh has a dynamic gay culture, for years centred round the top of Leith Walk and Broughton Street, where the first gay and lesbian centre appeared in the 1970s. Since the early 1990s, more and more gay enterprises, especially cafés and nightclubs, have moved into this area, now dubbed the "Pink Triangle".

CC Bloom's 23–24 Greenside Place, New Town T 0131 556 9331; map pp.60–61. Edinburgh's most enduring gay club, with a big dancefloor, stonking rhythms, a young, friendly crowd and free entry all night. Daily 11pm–3am.

GHQ 4 Picardy Place, New Town T 0131 550 1780; map pp.60–61. Stylish bar and club catering to a dressed-up crowd. Highlights on the nightly club menu include Sunday's pop, cheese and chart mash-up, "Ice Cream Sundae", and the electro-chart student night on Tues. Tues–Sun 10.30pm–3am.

LIVE MUSIC VENUES

Bannermans 212 Cowgate, Old Town T 0131 556 3254, W bannermanslive.co.uk; map pp.64–65. A subterranean labyrinth of caves and musky warrens located at the base of South Bridge; the most atmospheric joint in town in which to discover local indie bands hoping for a big break. Daily noon–1am.

The Liquid Room 9c Victoria St, Old Town T 0131 225 2564, W liquidroom.com; map pp.64–65. Open every evening, this small venue is frequented by local acts and touring indie bands as well as a variety of alternating club nights geared towards student patronage. Club nights most Wed, Fri & Sat 10.30pm–3am.

The Picture House 31 Lothian Rd T 0131 221 2280, W edinburgh-picturehouse.co.uk; map pp.60–61. A 1500-capacity city-centre venue that still manages to feel intimate. The reasonably eclectic gig list includes local bands, breakthrough chart-toppers and the occasional tribute band. Box office Mon–Sat noon–4pm.

Queen's Hall 85–89 Clerk St, Southside T 0131 668 2019, W thequeenshall.net; map pp.60–61. Converted Georgian church which now operates as a

concert hall; it's used principally by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Scottish Ensemble, but is also much favoured by jazz, blues and folk groups. Box office Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm.

Royal Oak 1 Infirmary St, Old Town T0131 557 2976, Wroyal-oak-folk.com; map pp.64–65. Traditional Scottish pub hosting daily informal folk sessions performed by locals. On Sundays there's the "Wee Folk Club" (£5 entry) where they bring in soloists or groups from around the country and beyond. Mon–Sat 11.30am–2am, Sun 3pm–2am.

Usher Hall Lothian Rd T0131 228 1155, Wusherhall.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Now reopened after a major refurbishment and strikingly contemporary extension, Edinburgh's main civic concert hall frequently features choral and symphony concerts, as well as legends of country, jazz, world and pop. The upper-circle seats are cheapest and have the best acoustics. Box office Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm.

Whistlebinkies 4–6 South Bridge, Old Town T0131 557 5114 Wwhistlebinkies.com; map pp.64–65. One of the most reliable places to find live music every night of the week and often afternoons too. On the whole it's local indie bands or rock and pop covers, though there are some folk evenings as well. Daily 11.30am–3am.

THEATRE AND DANCE

Assembly Rooms 54 George St, New Town T0131 220 4348, Wassemblyroomsedinburgh.co.uk. This complex of small and large halls is used all year, but really comes into its own during the Fringe, featuring large-scale drama productions and mainstream comedy.

Edinburgh Playhouse 18–22 Greenside Place T0131 524 3333, Wedinburgh-playhouse.co.uk. The largest theatre in Britain with a capacity of over three thousand. Opened in the 1920s as a cinema, it's now used largely for extended runs of popular musicals and occasional music concerts.

Festival Theatre 13–29 Nicolson St, Southside T0131 529 6000, Wedtheatres.com/festival. The largest stage in Britain, principally used for Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet's appearances in the capital, but also for everything from the children's show *Singing Kettle* to Susan Boyle.

King's Theatre 2 Leven St, Tolcross T0131 529 6000, Wedtheatres.com/kings. Majoring in pantomime, touring West End plays and the occasional major drama or opera performance, this stately Edwardian civic theatre, with its bold Neoclassical frontage, is a masterpiece of its era. The interior is surprisingly luxurious, with its marble staircases, carved mahogany doors and a sumptuously regal auditorium.

Royal Lyceum Theatre 30 Grindlay St, Lothian Rd T0131 248 4848, Wlyceum.org.uk. A fine, moderately compact, Victorian civic theatre with its stage overlooked by three curved tiers orbiting the ornate ceiling's glittering chandelier. The leading venue for mainstream drama, this is a producing theatre and commissions around seven plays annually as well as hosting travelling productions.

Traverse Theatre 10 Cambridge St, Lothian Rd T0131 228 1404, Wtraverse.co.uk. One of Britain's premier venues for new plays and avant-garde drama from around the world, going from strength to strength in its custom-built home beside the Usher Hall. Also has a lively and popular bar.

COMEDY

The Stand Comedy Club 5 York Place, New Town T0131 558 7272, Wthestand.co.uk. The city's undisputed top comedy spot, with different acts on every night and some of the UK's top comics headlining at the weekends. Be sure to arrive early to secure a good table for the evening. Entry ranges from £2 to £15 at weekends.

CINEMAS

Cameo 38 Home St, Tollcross T0871 902 5723, Wpicturehouses.co.uk. A treasure of an art-house cinema with a cosy wee bar – opened by Sean Connery – attached; screens more challenging mainstream releases and cult late-nighters in its traditional and intimate auditoriums. Tarantino's been here and thinks it's great.

Dominion 18 Newbattle Terrace, Morningside T0131 447 4771, Wdominioncinemas.net. Housed in a rare late Art Deco structure with four theatres of wildly varying sizes, the Dominion is still family-owned, and battling on with its screenings of popular new releases. A reminder of how cinemas were before multiplexes.

Filmhouse 88 Lothian Rd T0131 228 2688, Wfilmhousecinema.com. Three screens showing an eclectic programme of independent, art-house and classic films. The box office doubles as a DVD shop with an excellent range of arty titles while through the back the café-bar is a hangout for the city's film buffs and serves healthy, light meals for around £6.

Odeon 118 Lothian Rd T0870 224 4007, Wodeon.co.uk. This central four-screen cinema shows the latest releases but otherwise struggles to keep up with the times. It sells the same awful food as the multiplexes but with fewer films on offer.

Vue Omni Centre, Greenside Place, New Town T0871 224 0240, Wmyvue.com. The most central of the big multiscreen venues, this shining new cinema shows all the latest mainstream releases including the 3D ones. On Sundays at 10.30am they do a "Kids am" showing for just £1.75, usually featuring a *Toy Story*-type animation.

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SHOPPING

Despite the relentless advance of the big chains, it's still possible to track down some appealing and unusual shops in central Edinburgh. **Princes Street**, one of Britain's most famous shopping streets, is all but dominated by standard chain outlets. More upmarket shops and boutiques are to be found on and around parallel **George Street**, including an upscale shopping area on the east side of St Andrew Square. There's nothing compelling about central Edinburgh's two big shopping malls, **Princes Mall** and the **St James Centre**, which are dominated by the big names. For more original outlets, head for **Cockburn Street**, south of Waverley Station, a hub for trendy clothes and record shops, while on **Victoria Street** and in and around the **Grassmarket** you'll find an eclectic range of antiques, crafts, food and bookshops. Along and around the **Royal Mile**, meanwhile, several distinctly offbeat places sit among the tacky souvenir sellers.

BOOKS

Blackwell's 53–62 South Bridge, Southside T 0131 622 8222, W blackwell.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Sited near the university, this rambling, multi-floored bookseller has a strong – although far from exclusive – focus on academic tomes. You'll also find many volumes and travel guides relating to Scotland. Mon & Wed–Fri 9am–8pm, Tues 9.30am–8pm, Sat 9am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm.

ANTIQUARIAN AND SECONDHAND

Edinburgh Books 147 West Port, Old Town T 0131 229 4431, W edinburghbooks.net; map pp.60–61. Edinburgh's largest secondhand bookseller is a quirky place: overlooked by a bust of a water buffalo, patrons shuffle through the narrow corridors of teetering bookcases unnervingly stuffed to the ceiling. Just when you think you've seen it all you find a further warren of rooms downstairs in the basement. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm.

McNaughtan's Bookshop 3a–4a Haddington Place, Leith Walk T 0131 556 5897, W mcnaughtansbookshop.com; map pp.60–61. Probably Edinburgh's oldest purveyor of antiquarian literature, this shop aims for quality over quantity, consequently feeling more spacious than its counterparts. Housed in a beautiful old basement, there's also a contemporary art exhibition space. Mon–Sat 11am–5pm.

CLOTHES

In the town centre, Princes Street, particularly its east end and the two nearby malls – St James Centre and Princes Mall – are where you'll find the biggest names in clothing retail. For more exclusive retailers and expensive designer labels aim for George Street and Multrees Walk next to the bus station.

SECONDHAND

Wm Armstrong 83 Grassmarket, Old Town T 0131 220 5557 ; map pp.64–65. A real treasure trove of vintage and retro fashion, this small chain is like a museum; stuffed to the gunnels with items encompassing everything from prewar civvies to the static-inducing nylon-ware of the 1970s. Mon–Thurs 10am–5.30pm, Fri & Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm.

TARTAN

Geoffrey Tailor 57–59 High St, Old Town T 0131 557 0256, W geoffreykilts.co.uk; map pp.64–65. One of the largest and most respected retailers on the Royal Mile – as well as traditional tartan they sell a line of "twenty-first-century kilts" in materials including leather, plain tweed and camouflage pattern. Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

FOOD SHOPS AND MARKETS

Edinburgh has plenty of good delis and specialist food retailers, particularly down Broughton Street or through the main parts of Stockbridge or Bruntsfield, where you're most likely to find small artisan shops, good delis and traditional butchers and fishmongers. The climate here doesn't cultivate a strong outdoor market culture but in recent years there's been a re-emergence of farmers' markets as an antidote to supermarket dominance that's sweeping the country.

Edinburgh Farmers' Market Castle Terrace, Lothian Rd W edinburghfarmersmarket.com; map pp.60–61. Run by the council, the majority of this market's stallholders must be primary producers, selling what they grow. The rigidity of this policy may have somewhat stifled its success as there's an oversupply of vacuum-packed meat and fish; however, you'll always find some interesting cottage-industry produce here. Sat 9am–2pm.

Harvey Nichols St Andrew Square, New Town T 0131 524 8322 W harveynichols.com; map pp.60–61. Harvey Nichols' top-floor food hall is at the cutting edge of foodie fads with its mind-numbing array of ingredients you never thought you needed, but do now, like oak-smoked water. There are also plenty of conventional deli delights such as white truffle oil at £10 and home-brand biscuits from £5. Mon–Wed 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–8pm, Fri & Sat 10am–7pm, Sun 11am–6pm.

I.J. Mellis Cheesemonger 30a Victoria St, Old Town T 0131 226 6215 W mellischeese.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Founded in 1993, Mellis' Old Town shop is charmingly kitted out in a Victorian style and well stocked with expertly conditioned farmhouse and artisan cheeses from Britain, Ireland and, to a lesser extent, the Continent. The Mellis brand is expanding fast and there are shops cropping up in affluent high streets Scotland-wide. Mon–Fri 9am–6.30pm, Sat 9am–6pm, Sun noon–5pm.

Valvona & Crolla 19 Elm Row, Leith Walk 0131 556 6066, valvonacrolla.co.uk; map pp.60–61. Open the door to this most venerated of Edinburgh's delis and you're instantly welcomed by a glorious odour reminiscent of Italian markets. Indeed it is from the markets of Milan that much of the fine produce here directly originates. Mon–Thurs 8.30am–6pm, Fri & Sat 8am–6pm, Sun 10.30am–4pm.

Stockbridge Market Kerr St, Stockbridge stockbridgemarket.com; map pp.60–61. The capital's favourite foodie market has a Continental buzz and a wealth of delicious produce to eat on site or take away. Dine out on paella or Thai noodles, or wash a German pastry down with a coffee served out of the back of a VW camper. June–Sept & Dec Sun 10am–5pm & Thurs noon–7.30pm; rest of year Sun 10am–5pm.

MUSIC

Avalanche 5 Grassmarket, Old Town 0131 659 7708, avalancherecords.co.uk; map pp.64–65. A small but time-honoured chain with a strong focus on indie music; particularly good for championing unsigned Scottish acts. Also serves coffee. Mon–Sat 11am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm.

Coda 12 Bank St, Old Town 0131 622 7246, codamusic.co.uk; map pp.64–65. Just steps from the touristic Royal Mile it's unsurprising to find a record shop with a focus on Scottish music, but Coda's range goes far deeper than the whiny "Bagpipes Plays the Beatles" records that you might find in tacky gift shops nearby. The passion in Coda's collection is for contemporary folk and roots music. Daily 9.30am–5.30pm.

Underground Solu'shun 9 Cockburn St, Old Town 0131 226 2242, undergroundsolushn.com; map pp.64–65. The only surviving dance and electronic music specialist in town, selling records mostly in vinyl format and DJ-oriented hardware. There's a lot of house and techno here but they also dabble in disco, funk and soul. Mon–Wed & Fri & Sat 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–7pm, Sun noon–6pm.

Vinyl Villains 5 Elm Row, Leith Walk 0131 558 1170, vinylvillainsrecords.co.uk; map pp.60–61. An ancient but struggling Edinburgh institution selling some new but mostly secondhand records as well as T-shirts and collectable music-related ephemera. The racks are mostly filled with Sixties and Seventies rock LPs and singles but no genre or era is excluded entirely. Mon–Sat 10.30am–6pm, Sun noon–4pm.

OUTDOOR GEAR

There's a concentration of useful stores specializing in outdoor gear on Rose St in the New Town and round the corner on Frederick St.

Tiso 123–125 Rose St 0131 225 9486, tiso.com; map pp.64–65. A department store for the outdoors; spread over four floors, with maps, knowledgeable staff and all you could need in Scotland's vast wilderness. Mon, Tues, Fri & Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Wed 10am–5.30pm, Thurs 9.30am–7.30pm, Sun 11am–5pm.

THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

The **Edinburgh Festival** is actually an umbrella term encompassing several different festivals taking place at around the same time in the city. The principal events are the **Edinburgh International Festival** and the much larger **Edinburgh Festival Fringe**, but there are also **Book, Jazz and Blues** and **Art** festivals, among others, as well as the **Military Tattoo** on the Castle Esplanade.

PROGRAMMES, LISTINGS AND INFORMATION

As well as the official Edinburgh Festivals website (edinburghfestivals.co.uk), each festival produces its own programme well in advance. During August, various publications give information about what's on and what's good – best of these is *The Scotsman* newspaper's daily supplement, but also worthwhile are *The Guide*, published daily by the Fringe Office; weekly *The List*; and *Fest*, best of the freebie newspapers available around town.

THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

The original Edinburgh Festival, sometimes called the "Official Festival", was conceived in 1947 as a celebration of pan-European culture in the postwar era. Initially dominated by opera, other elements such as top-grade theatre, ballet, dance and classical music were gradually introduced, and it's still very much a highbrow event, its high production values and serious approach offering an antidote to the Fringe's slapdash vigour.

International Festival Box Office The Hub, Castlehill, Old Town 0131 473 2000, eif.co.uk. This is the year-round headquarters and box office for the Edinburgh International Festival which generally runs from the second week of August to the beginning of September, culminating in a ticketed Fireworks Concert based in Princes Street Gardens but visible from all over the city. Performances take place at the city's larger venues such as the Usher Hall and the Festival Theatre and, while ticket prices can run to over £60, it is possible to see even the big productions for as little as £12 if you're prepared to sit at the back.

The Fireworks Concert Princes Street Gardens 0131 473 2000, eif.co.uk. Tickets for the Fireworks Concert (£12.50 standing, £27.50 seated) sell out well in advance; however, a few extra tickets are released for sale at 10am at the Hub, Castlehill, on the day before the show. The concert begins on the last day of the festival at 9pm.

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THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is easily the world's largest arts gathering, and dealing with the logistics of it all can be bewildering. We set out the basics below, but as dates, venues and acts change from one year to the next, be prepared for the unexpected. The Fringe starts and finishes before the International Festival, kicking off in early August and ending on the last weekend of the month.

BOOKING TICKETS FOR THE FRINGE

Festival Fringe Office 180 High St, Old Town 0131 226 0000, edfringe.com. The full Fringe programme is usually available in June from the Festival Fringe Office. Online and telephone bookings for shows can be made immediately after its release, while during the Festival, tickets are sold at the Fringe Office, as well as online or at venues. Ticket prices for most Fringe shows start at £5, and average from £8 to £12 at the main venues, with the best-known acts going for even more; there are often cheap deals on the opening weekend. Performances are staged around the clock, with most scheduled to run for an hour. A downloadable app is available from the edfringe website where you can find shows and book tickets, including those from the Half Price Hut (see below). During the Festival daily 10am–9pm.

Half Price Hut Mound Precinct, beside the National Gallery of Scotland. This is the place to head for bargains, where Fringe shows that are struggling to woo audiences cut their prices in two. There's a downloadable app available from iTunes linked from the edfringe.com website. During the Festival daily 10am–9pm.

FRINGE VENUES

While the Fringe is famous for its tiny and unexpected auditoriums, most of the venue spaces across the city are colonized by the four dominant Fringe companies – Assembly, Pleasance, Gilded Balloon and Underbelly. If you're new to the Fringe, these are all safe bets for decent shows and a bit of star-spotting.

The Assembly Rooms 54 George St, New Town 0131 220 4348, assemblyroomsedinburgh.com. Provides a slick, grand and newly renovated setting for top-of-the-range drama and big-name music and comedy acts. Crowds spill out of here onto the temporarily pedestrianized George St where there are makeshift beer gardens.

Gilded Balloon Teviot Row House, Bristo Square, Southside 0131 622 6555, gildedballoon.co.uk. Basing its operations in a Fringe hot spot housed in a beautiful Victorian building designed to look like a sixteenth-century palace, this is the most elegant of the main Old Town venues.

Pleasance Courtyard 60 The Pleasance, Old Town 0131 556 6550, pleasance.co.uk. The atmosphere in the courtyard surrounded by the sixteen auditoriums here has a slightly raucous feel thanks to its busy courtyard bars and kids' zone. Indoors you'll find offbeat comedy mixing with whimsical appearances by panellists on Radio 4 game shows.

Pleasance Dome Potterrow, Bristo Square, Southside 0131 556 6550, pleasance.co.uk Located in one of Edinburgh University's student unions, there are four small auditoriums here all accessed from the sky-lit dome room.

THE FRINGE

Following decades of war, economic turmoil and racial intolerance, a few wise civic leaders were offered an opportunity to create a festival that would celebrate diversity and "provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit". When a handful of theatre companies turned up uninvited to the International Festival's 1947 inauguration, the seeds of the Fringe festival were unintentionally sown. In the following years more and more performers began showing up, culminating in the formation of the **Festival Fringe Society** in 1958. A charitable union, it provided unbiased assistance to artists and companies who wished to perform in Edinburgh during August. Today it still provides the same service, but on a much grander scale. Even standing alone, the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe** is now easily the world's largest arts gathering. Each year sees over thirty thousand performances from some seven hundred companies, with more than twelve thousand participants from all over the world. There's something in the region of 1500 shows every day, round the clock, in two hundred venues around the city. While the headlining names at the International Festival reinforce the Festival's cultural credibility, it is the dynamism, spontaneity and sheer exuberance of the Fringe that dominate Edinburgh every August, giving the city its unique atmosphere. These days, the most prominent and ubiquitous aspect of the Fringe is **comedy**, having overtaken theatre as the largest genre in 2008. As well as sell-out audiences and quotable reviews, most of the comedy acts are chasing the **Foster's Edinburgh Comedy Award**, given to the outstanding stand-up or comedy cabaret. At the same time, the Fringe's **theatre** programme shows no signs of dying out, with hundreds of brand-new works airing alongside offbeat classics and familiar Shakespearean tragedies. The venues are often as imaginative as the shows themselves – play-parks, restaurants and even parked cars have all been used to stage plays. The Fringe also offers fine musicals, dance, children's shows, exhibitions, lectures and music.

The Udderbelly Bristo Square, Southside T 0844 545 8252, W underbelly.co.uk. Underbelly's giant, inflatable upside-down cow – the Udderbelly – is a makeshift performance space that is one of the Fringe's most unusual and eye-catching venues. The company provides further shows down in their oppressive Cowgate building.

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

Edinburgh International Book Festival Ticket office at Charlotte Square, New Town T 0845 373 5888, W edbookfest.co.uk. The world's largest celebration of the written word is held in a tented village in Charlotte Square during the last two weeks of Aug. It offers talks, readings and signings by a star-studded line-up of visiting authors, as well as panel discussions and workshops. Well-known Scottish authors such as Ian Rankin and Alexander McCall-Smith are good for an appearance most years, while visitors from further afield have included Doris Lessing, Louis de Bernières, Vikram Seth, Joyce Carol Oates and Salman Rushdie. In addition, there's a dedicated programme of children's activities, debates, writing workshops and book-related events, an on-site café and, of course, a bookshop. Tickets (generally £10–15) often sell out quickly, particularly for the big-name events.

EDINBURGH JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

The Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival Ticket office at The Hub, 348 Castlehill, Old Town T 0131 473 2000, W edinburghjazzfestival.com. The Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival runs immediately prior to the Fringe in the first week in Aug, easing the city into the festival spirit with a full programme of gigs in many different locations. Scotland's own varied and vibrant jazz scene is always fully represented, and atmospheric late-night clubs complement major concerts given by international stars. Past visitors have included B.B. King, Bill Wyman, Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck, Van Morrison, Carol Kidd, and The Blues Band. Highlights include the nightly Jam Sessions and a colourful New Orleans-style Mardi Gras and street parade. Tickets range in price from £5 for small pub gigs to £20 for a seat in a big venue.

EDINBURGH ART FESTIVAL

Edinburgh Art Festival W edinburghartfestival.com; W nationalgalleries.org/tickets. A relative newcomer on the scene, August's Edinburgh Art Festival has quickly established itself as an important addition to the festivals portfolio. This is due, in large part, to the ambition and diversity of its programme, which has included high-profile exhibitions by internationally renowned contemporary artists such as Tracey Emin, Douglas Gordon and Ron Mueck as well as retrospectives of work by pioneering twentieth-century artists including sculptor Eva Hesse, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, pop artists Gilbert and George and elder statesmen of Scottish painting Alan Davie and John Bellany. Virtually every art gallery in the city participates in the festival, from small private concerns to blockbuster shows at the National Galleries of Scotland's five venues. Most exhibitions are free, though entry to the National Galleries' exhibitions costs £7–10.

THE MILITARY TATTOO

The Military Tattoo Tattoo Office 32 Market St, Old Town T 0131 225 1188, W edintattoo.co.uk. Staged in the spectacular stadium of the Edinburgh Castle Esplanade, the Military Tattoo is an unashamed display of pomp and military pride. The programme of choreographed drills, massed pipe bands, historical tableaux, energetic battle re-enactments, national dancing and pyrotechnics has been a feature of the Festival for over half a century, its emotional climax provided by a lone piper on the Castle battlements. Followed by a quick fireworks display, it's a successful formula barely tampered with over the years. Tickets (£24–58 depending on seat location, plus a £5 booking fee if bought online) need to be booked well in advance, and it's advisable to take a cushion and rainwear.

EDINBURGH'S OTHER FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Science Festival April T 0131 558 7666, W sciencefestival.co.uk. Incorporates hands-on children's events as well as numerous lectures on a vast array of subjects.

Beltane Night of April 30 W beltane.org. An ancient Celtic fire festival, held on Calton Hill, celebrating the arrival of spring. Has a New-Age feel to it, with lots of painted flesh, beating drums and huge bonfires. Tickets cost £6.

Children's Festival Mid-May T 0131 225 8050, W imaginate.org.uk. Readings, magicians, specialist children's drama and puppetry.

International Film Festival Second half of June W edfilmfest.org.uk. With a programme crammed with premieres, film shorts and retrospectives, this is the perfect Hollywood antidote. That said, you still see the occasional film star getting the red carpet treatment outside the festival's main hub at The Filmhouse on Lothian Rd.

Christmas Dec W edinburghschristmas.com. Draws together various seasonal events, most prominently the installation of a huge ferris wheel beside the Scott Monument and an outdoor skating rink nearby.

Edinburgh's Hogmanay The Festival Fringe Office 180 High St T 0844 573 8455 W edinburghshogmanay.org. One of the world's largest New Year street parties, involving torchlight processions, folk and rock concerts and fireworks galore (see box, p.98). Box office opens Dec 3.

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DIRECTORY

Banks and exchange All the major UK banks have branches in central Edinburgh, with ATMs and currency exchange; the main concentrations are in the area between Hanover St and St Andrew Square in the east end of the central New Town. Post offices will exchange currency and there are also currency exchange outlets in Waverley Station. To change money after hours, try one of the upmarket hotels – but expect a hefty commission charge.

Hospitals and clinics The Hospital Royal Infirmary, Little France (T 0131 536 1000) has a 24hr casualty department, and the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, 9 Sciennes Rd, Marchmont (T 0131 536 0000) has a casualty department for children. Western General, Crewe Rd North (T 0131 537 1330) provides a minor injuries clinic 8am–9pm. NHS24 (T 0845 424 2424, W nhs24.com) offers 24hr health advice and clinical assessment over the phone or online.

Internet access Available at various places, including New Wings, 71 Nicholson St, Southside (Mon–Fri 9am–11pm, Sat & Sun 10am–11pm; T 0131 668 4777) and Coffee Home Internet, 28 Crighton Place, about halfway down Leith Walk (Mon–Fri 10am–9pm, Sat 10am–8pm, Sun noon–8pm; T 0131 477 8336); the latter offers 1hr free internet with a drinks purchase.

Left luggage Counter by platform 2 at Waverley Station from £8 per item per day (daily 7am–11pm; T 0131 558 3829).

Police Lothian and Borders Police have stations at 2 Gayfield Square (T 0131 556 9270) and 188 High St (T 0131 226 6966).

Post office 8–10 St James Centre (Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm; T 0845 722 3344).

East Lothian

East Lothian consists of the coastal strip and hinterland immediately east of Edinburgh, bounded by the Firth of Forth to the north and the Lammermuir Hills to the south. All of it is within easy day-trip range from the capital, though there are places you can stay overnight if you're keen to explore it properly. Often mocked as the "home counties" of Edinburgh, there's no denying its well-ordered feel, with prosperous farms and large estate houses dominating the scenery.

The most immediately attractive part of the area is the coastline, extending from the town of Musselburgh, all but joined onto Edinburgh, round to the harbour town of **Dunbar**, birthplace of the famous naturalist John Muir. There's something for most tastes here, including wide sandy beaches, the enjoyable Seabird Centre at **North Berwick** and the nearby castles of **Dirleton** and **Tantallon,** the latter set in a vertiginous clifftop location. Inland, at the foot of the Lammermuirs, is the county town of **Haddington**, a pleasant enough place, though the attraction nearby of **Glenkinchie,** Edinburgh's "local" whisky distillery by Pentcaitland, is likely to be a stronger draw.

North Berwick and around

NORTH BERWICK, twenty-five miles east of Edinburgh, has a great deal of charm and a somewhat faded, old-fashioned air, its guesthouses and hotels extending along the shore in all their Victorian and Edwardian sobriety. The town's small harbour is set on a headland which cleaves two crescents of sand, providing the town with an attractive coastal setting, though it is the two nearby volcanic heaps, the offshore **Bass Rock** and 613ft-high **North Berwick Law**, which are the town's defining physical features.

Scottish Seabird Centre

Harbour Lodge, 7 Beach Rd • Feb, March, Sept & Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5.30pm; April–Aug daily 10am–6pm; Nov–Jan Mon–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm • £8.95 • T 01620 890202, W seabird.org • Boat trips April–Oct daily (times vary; prices range from £16 to £110 depending on itinerary)

Housed in an attractively designed new building by the harbour, the **Scottish Seabird Centre** offers access to the gannets and puffins that thrive on the rocky outcrops in the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND (P.76); EDINBURGH FRINGE FESTIVAL (P.102); THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT (P.71); CAFÉ ROYAL CIRCLE BAR (P.96) >

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sea before North Berwick. There are live links from the centre to cameras mounted on the islands which show close-up pictures of the birds in their nesting grounds. At the risk of getting wet (and cold) you can hop aboard one of the thrilling speedboat rides to the islands – weather permitting. Trips range from a one-hour jaunt around a couple of islands, to a five-and-a-half-hour trip with time on the Bass Rock itself. Contact the Seabird Centre to find out what boat tours are available on any given day.

Dirleton Castle

2.5 miles west of North Berwick, signposted off the A198 • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March daily 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • Reached in 15min from North Berwick on the Edinburgh bus (First Bus #124; every 30min)

The genteel hamlet of Dirleton huddles around the romantic thirteenth-century ruins of **Dirleton Castle,** which saw action in the Wars of Scottish Independence. It was later rendered militarily defunct after a besiegement by Oliver Cromwell's army to flush out bandits. Today it's an attractive relic, largely intact, with restored Victorian gardens making for a popular wedding venue.

Tantallon Castle

3 miles east of North Berwick on the A198 • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.70; HS • From North Berwick take the Dunbar bus (Eves Coaches #120; Mon–Sat 6 daily, 2 on Sun; 6min), or you can walk there from town along the cliffs in around an hour

The melodramatic ruins of **Tantallon Castle** stand on the precipitous cliffs facing the Bass Rock. With a sheer drop down to the sea on three sides and a sequence of moats and ditches on the fourth, the desolate invincibility of this fourteenth-century stronghold is daunting, especially when the wind howls over the remaining battlements and the surf crashes on the rocks far below.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — NORTH BERWICK AND AROUND

By train North Berwick is served by an hourly train from Edinburgh Waverley (33min). From the station it's a 10min walk east to the town centre.

By bus First Group #124, #X24 and #X25 from Edinburgh's bus station (every 30min; 1hr35min) run along the coast and stop on High St, North Berwick.

By car From Edinburgh take the A1 (London Rd) and turn onto the A198 at Tranent. From here, it's a further 13 miles to North Berwick.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Glebe House B&B Law Rd, North Berwick ☎01620 892 608, ⓦglebehouse-nb.co.uk. A grand eighteenth-century manse in secluded grounds 100yd inland but still overlooking the sea. With decor befitting of its period, the rooms are spacious yet homely and at breakfast you can opt for a Scottish fry-up – although there are healthier choices too. **£110**

★ **Osteria** 71 High St, North Berwick ☎01620 890 589, ⓦosteria-no1.co.uk Run by a highly successful father and daughter team, this is one of the country's top Italian restaurants. Their intelligent use of herbs adds a subtle Mediterranean fragrance to the dishes. Prices hover around £8 for *primi* courses while meaty *secondi piatti* rise steeply from £15. Booking recommended. Mon 6–10pm, Tues–Sat 12.30–2pm & 6–10pm.

Dunbar

Thirty miles east of the capital lies the coastal town of **DUNBAR**, with its delightfully intricate double harbour set beside the shattered remains of a once-mighty castle. Its local industry is fishing but the more affluent residents are commuters who take advantage of the town's station on the main London to Edinburgh train line. Dunbar's recently spruced-up High Street is graced by several grand old stone buildings, one of which is the birthplace of nineteenth-century explorer and naturalist, **John Muir**, whose name is also given to the attractive **country park** neighbouring the town. You can get to the park on an easy three-mile walk west of the harbour, along a rugged stretch of coast to the sands of Belhaven Bay.

John Muir Birthplace

126 High St • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; Nov–March same hours but closed Mon & Tues • Free • ☎ 01368 865 899, ⓦ jmbt.org.uk

More famous abroad than in his native Scotland, John Muir (1838–1914) was a tireless campaigner for the protection of the natural world and played an integral role in the creation of the United States' national parks system. The **John Muir Birthplace** was born out of demand from the many Americans visiting Dunbar in the hope of learning more about Muir's early life and childhood inspirations. The three-storey whitewashed tenement describes itself as an interpretative centre rather than a museum, and while it engagingly tells the story of Muir's passage from childhood to pioneer, there are few historical artefacts on show.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUNBAR

By train Dunbar is served by trains from Edinburgh Waverley (every 30min; 20min). From the station it's a 5min walk north to the high street.

By bus Four buses (#6, #X6, #X6 & #253) depart from Edinburgh's bus station (every 30min) to Dunbar High St; the quickest is the #253 (1hr).

By car From Edinburgh take the A1 (London Rd) and turn onto the A199 3 miles after East Linton, after which Dunbar is a 5min drive.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Creel Restaurant 25 Lamer St, near the old harbour ☎ 01368 863 279, ⓦ creelrestaurant.co.uk. Run by a former chef to Rick Stein, this restaurant knows a thing or two about fish. Serves well-judged meals celebrating regional produce, including fish (battered using the local Belhaven brew) and chips plus dessert for £14.50. Wed–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6.30–9pm, Sun noon–2.30pm.

The Retreat B&B Retreat Crescent ☎ 07572 873 661, ⓦ the-retreat-dunbar.co.uk. Just outside the centre, this seductive nineteenth-century building is the ideal base, especially for families, with its generously proportioned rooms that sleep up to four. It can be a bit tricky to find, so the owners are happy to collect guests from the station. Family room £120; doubles £75

Haddington and around

Sitting on the banks of the River Tyne with the hulking mass of **St Mary's Church**, Scotland's largest parish church, rising tall near its centre, this is one of Scotland's most respectable county towns. Other than a stroll along the riverbank or through the seventeenth-century medicinal gardens of **St Mary's Pleasance** on Sidegate, there's not much to detain you in the town unless you arrive on the last Saturday of the month for the newly revived **farmers' market**.

Just four miles south of town, the pretty hamlet of **Gifford**, with its eighteenth-century estate cottages flanked by a trim whitewashed church and a couple of good pubs, makes for a good last stop before the godforsaken wilderness of the Lammermuir Hills.

Glenkinchie Distillery

7 miles southwest of Haddington on the A6093 • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm; Nov–Easter Mon–Sat 10am–3pm, Sun noon–3pm; last tour 1hr before closing • £7 • Coming by car, turn south at Pencaitland onto Lempockwells Rd and follow the signs for 2 miles

The **Glenkinchie Distillery** is the closest place to Edinburgh where malt whisky is made. Here, of course, they emphasize the qualities that set Glenkinchie, a lighter, drier malt, apart from the peaty, smoky whiskies of the north and west. On display is a pleasant little exhibition featuring some quaint distilling relics, which enhance the factory tour experience almost as much as the free dram at the end.

Midlothian

Immediately south of Edinburgh lies the old county of **Midlothian**, once called Edinburghshire. It's one of the hilliest parts of the Central Lowlands, with the Pentland

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chain running down its western side and the Moorfoots defining its boundary with the Borders to the south. Though predominantly rural, it contains a belt of former mining communities that are struggling to come to terms with the recent decline of the industry. Such charms as it has are mostly low-key, with the exception of the riotously ornate chapel at **Roslin**. An otherwise nondescript place, the village has two unusual claims to fame: it was near here, at the Roslin Institute, that the **world's first cloned sheep**, Dolly, was created in 1997; and it's home to the mysterious, richly decorated late Gothic **Rosslyn Chapel**.

Rosslyn Chapel

Chapel Loan, Roslin, 7 miles south of Edinburgh just off the A701 • April–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm, Sun noon–4.45pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm, Sun noon–4.45pm • £9 • T 0131 440 2159, W rosslynchapel.org.uk • Bus #15 (every 30min; 40min) westbound from Princes St in Edinburgh

Revered for its sublime **stone carvings** – some of the finest in the world – and subject of intrigue and mystery with its alleged crusader connections, Rosslyn is more cathedral-like than chapel in its dimensions. It was intended to be a huge collegiate church dedicated to St Matthew, but construction halted soon after the founder's death in 1484, and the vestry built onto the facade nearly four hundred years later is the sole subsequent addition. After a long period of neglect, a massive fifteen-year restoration project has just been completed.

Rosslyn's **exterior** bristles with pinnacles, gargoyles, flying buttresses and canopies, while **inside** the stonework is, if anything, even more intricate. The **foliage carving** is particularly outstanding, with botanically accurate depictions of over a dozen different leaves and plants. Among them are cacti and Indian corn, compounding the legend that the founder's grandfather, the daring sea adventurer Prince Henry of Orkney, did indeed set foot in the New World a century before Columbus. The rich and subtle **figurative sculptures** have given Rosslyn the nickname of "a Bible in stone", though they're more allegorical than literal, with portrayals of the Dance of Death, the Seven Acts of Mercy and the Seven Deadly Sins.

LEGENDS OF ROSSLYN CHAPEL

Rosslyn Chapel is famous for its exquisite carvings – but almost as compelling are the fascinating **legends** associated with this mysterious building, and the many secrets said to lurk within the cracks and crannies of its skilfully engraved stone.

The greatest and most original carving to grace Rosslyn Chapel is the extraordinary knotted **Apprentice Pillar** at the southeastern corner of the Lady Chapel. According to local legend, the pillar was carved by an apprentice during the absence of the master mason, who **killed** him in a fit of jealousy on seeing the finished work. A tiny head of a man with a slashed forehead, set at the apex of the ceiling at the far northwestern corner of the building, is popularly supposed to represent the apprentice, his murderer the corresponding head at the opposite side.

The imagery of carvings such as the floriated **cross and five-pointed star**, together with the history of the family, the St Clairs of Rosslyn, which owns the chapel, leave little doubt about its links to the **Knights Templar** and **Freemasonry**. Two members of the St Clair family, for example, were allegedly grand masters of the Prieuré de Sion, the shadowy order linked to the Templars, while the Masonic connection was said to have saved the chapel from the armies of Oliver Cromwell, himself a Freemason, which destroyed the surrounding area but spared Rosslyn.

More intriguing still are claims that, because of such connections, Rosslyn Chapel has been the repository for items such as the lost Scrolls of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, the true Stone of Scone and, most famously, the **Holy Grail**.

The chapel is regularly drawn into conspiracy theories on these themes, most famously in recent years through Dan Brown's bestseller **The Da Vinci Code**; the chapel's appearance in the film of the same name precipitated a huge surge in visitor numbers, detracting a little from the mysterious air of the place.

West Lothian

To many, **West Lothian** is a poor relative to the rich, rolling farmland of East and Midlothian, with a landscape dominated by motorways, industrial estates and giant hillocks of ochre-coloured mine waste called "bings". However, in the ruined royal palace at **Linlithgow**, the area boasts one of Scotland's more magnificent ruins. Not too far away, the village of **South Queensferry** lies under the considerable shadow of the Forth rail and road bridges, though it's an interesting enough place in its own right, with a historic high street and the notable stately homes **Dalmeny** and **Hopetoun** nearby. It's also the starting point for boat trips out to **Inchcolm Island**, home to a beautifully preserved medieval abbey.

Linlithgow

Roughly equidistant between Falkirk and the outskirts of Edinburgh, the ancient burgh of **Linlithgow** has largely kept its medieval layout. Sadly, development since the 1960s has stripped it of some fine buildings, in particular close to the **Town Hall** and **Cross** (the former marketplace) on the long High Street – the town does, however, preserve some notable gems, including its ruined palace and an ancient church.

Linlithgow Palace

Kirkgate • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • T 01506 842 896, W historic-scotland.gov.uk

Linlithgow Palace, hidden from the main road, is a splendid fifteenth-century ruin romantically set on the edge of Linlithgow Loch and associated with some of Scotland's best-known historical figures, including **Mary, Queen of Scots**, who was born here on December 8, 1542 and became queen six days later. A royal manor house is believed to have existed on this site since the time of David I, though James I began construction of the present palace, a process that continued through two centuries and the reign of no fewer than eight monarchs. From the top of the northwest tower, Queen Margaret looked out in vain for the return of James IV from the field of Flodden in 1513 – indeed, the views from her bower, six giddy storeys up from the ground, are exceptional. The ornate octagonal **fountain** in the inner courtyard, with its wonderfully intricate figures and medallion heads, flowed with wine for the wedding of James V and Mary of Guise.

This is a great place to take children: the elegant, bare rooms echo with footsteps and there's a labyrinthine network of spiral staircases and endless nooks and crannies. The galleried **Great Hall** is magnificent, as is the adjoining kitchen, which has a truly cavernous fireplace.

St Michael's Church

Kirkgate • Mon–Sat: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • Free • T 01506 842188, W stmichaelsparish.org.uk

St Michael's Church, adjacent to Linlithgow Palace, is one of Scotland's largest pre-Reformation churches, consecrated in the thirteenth century. The present building was completed two hundred years later, with the exception of the hugely incongruous aluminium spire, tacked on in 1964. Inside, it's a soaring Gothic masterwork with a layout typical of the time; huge stone arches and pillars combine to divide the outer aisles from the nave, above which the impressive vaulted ceiling draws the eye forward to the chancel.

Linlithgow Canal Centre

Manse Rd Basin, 100yd southwest of Linlithgow's train station • Boat trips (from £4) run between 2.30pm and 4pm on weekends Easter–Sept, daily July & Aug; self-drive boat hire from £60 • T 01506 671215, W lucs.org.uk

The **Linlithgow Canal Centre** sits on the banks of the tranquil **Union Canal**, the 31-mile-long waterway that runs from Tolcross, near the heart of Edinburgh,

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through Linlithgow and west to Falkirk, where it meets the Forth & Clyde Canal linking the capital with Glasgow; the two canals are connected by the Falkirk Wheel (see p.288). The Canal Centre runs a couple of regular **narrow-boat trips** through town or east towards the Avon Aqueduct – Scotland's largest – as well as the occasional foray onto the Forth & Clyde via the Falkirk Wheel. Along the way, the guide will tell of the near two-hundred-year history of the canals and serve tea and biscuits too.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — LINLITHGOW

By train Linlithgow is on the main train routes from Edinburgh to both Glasgow Queen St (4 trains hourly) and Stirling (2 trains hourly); the journey from Edinburgh takes 20min and the train station lies at the southern end of town.

By car 19 miles west of Edinburgh, Linlithgow is just off the M9 road to Stirling.

EATING

Livingston's Restaurant 52 High St, a minute's walk northwest of the station ⓣ01506 846 565, ⓦlivingstons-restaurant.co.uk. Part housed in the original stable building for Linlithgow Palace, this award-winning family business is split over three stylish rooms, two of which look onto a pleasant enclosed garden. The cuisine is heavily French-influenced but there are flashes of inspired originality. Two-course lunch and dinner menus for £17 and £35 respectively. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

South Queensferry

Eight miles northwest of Edinburgh city centre, the small town of **South Queensferry** (also known as Queensferry) is best known today for its location at the southern end of the two mighty **Forth bridges** (see p.315). Named after the saintly wife of King Malcolm Canmore, Margaret, who would often use the ferry here to travel between the royal palaces in Dunfermline and Edinburgh, it's an attractive settlement tightly packed with old buildings, most of which date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Only one row of houses separates the cobbled High Street from the water; through the gaps there's a great perspective of the two Forth bridges, an old stone harbour and a curved, pebbly beach, the scene each New Year's Day of the teeth-chattering "Loony Dook", when a gaggle of hungover locals charge into the sea for the quickest of dips.

Queensferry Museum

53 High St • Mon & Thurs–Sat 10am–1pm & 2.15–5pm, Sun noon–5pm • Free • ⓣ0131 331 5545

The tiny **Queensferry Museum** contains photos and relics of the town's history showing its importance as a ferry port. The most interesting item on show is the **Burry Man costume**, part of a unique Queensferry tradition designed to ward off evil spirits. Still worn around town on the first Friday of August every year, the Burry man suits are cotton with over ten thousand sticky "burrs" – burdock seed cases – attached from head to toe. You'll also find details on the building of the two bridges.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SOUTH QUEENSFERRY

By train From Edinburgh Waverley take the train to Dalmeny (every 30min; 20min). From there it's a mile to town: head west on Station Rd then turn right on The Loan.

By bus Regular buses (3 hourly) connect Edinburgh's bus station with Hopetoun Rd at the heart of South Queensferry within 40min.

By car South Queensferry is signposted off the M90 motorway on the south end of the Forth Rd Bridge.

EATING AND DRINKING

The Boathouse 19b High St ⓣ0131 331 5429, ⓦtheboathouse-sq.co.uk. With incredible Rail Bridge views it's little wonder this seafood restaurant – with tagged-on bistro and cocktail bar – is so popular. The dishes are pretty simple; just two or three luxurious ingredients delicately forming a jus, oil or sauce to complement the catch of the day. Two-course lunches are a little steep at £16. Daily 10am–11.30pm.

Dalmeny House

Dalmeny Estate, 3 miles east of South Queensferry • June & July Mon–Wed & Sun guided tours at 2.15pm & 3.30pm • £8.50 • T 0131 331 1888, W dalmeny.co.uk • Arriving on foot from South Queensferry, follow the High St eastwards for 1.5 miles until you reach the estate entrance; by car follow signposts from the A90 near South Queensferry

Set on a two-thousand-acre estate, **Dalmeney House** may not be the prettiest you'll encounter in Scotland, but the quality of the items on show within make it a fascinating place to visit. As well as some of the finest baroque and Neoclassical **furniture** produced for Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI in the hundred years before the French Revolution, there's also a valuable selection of memorabilia relating to Napoleon Bonaparte. The **art** collection is surprisingly strong too, with a very rare set of **tapestries** made from cartoons by Goya, and portraits by Raeburn, Reynolds, Gainsborough and Lawrence.

Hopetoun House

3 miles west of South Queensferry • Easter–Sept daily 10.30am–5pm • House and grounds £9.20, grounds only £4.25 • Free tour daily at 2pm • T 0131 331 2451, W hopetounhouse.com • Arriving from South Queenferry on foot, follow the coastline westwards for 3 miles; by car take the M90 turn-off onto the A904, from where it's signposted

Sitting in its own extensive estate on the south shore of the Forth, **Hopetoun House** is one of the most impressive stately homes in Scotland. The original house was built at the turn of the eighteenth century for the first earl of Hopetoun by Sir William Bruce, the architect of Edinburgh's Holyroodhouse. A couple of decades later, William Adam carried out an enormous extension, engulfing the structure with a curvaceous main facade and two projecting wings – superb examples of Roman Baroque pomp and swagger. Hopetoun's **architecture** is undoubtedly its most compelling feature, but the **furnishings** aren't completely overwhelmed, with some impressive seventeenth-century tapestries, Meissen porcelain and portraits by Gainsborough, Ramsay and Raeburn. The house's **grounds** include a regal driveway and some lovely walks along woodland trails and the banks of the Forth.

Inchcolm Island

From South Queensferry's Hawes Pier, just west of the rail bridge, a couple of ferry services head out to **Inchcolm Island**, located about five miles northeast of South Queensferry near the Fife shore. The island is home to the best-preserved medieval **abbey** in Scotland, founded in 1235 after King Alexander I was storm-bound on the island and took refuge in a hermit's cell. Although the structure as a whole is half-ruined today, the tower, octagonal chapterhouse and echoing cloisters are intact and well worth exploring. The hour and a half you're given ashore by the boat timetables also allows time for a picnic on the abbey's lawns or the chance to explore Inchcolm's old military fortifications and extensive bird-nesting grounds.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — INCHCOLM ISLAND

BY BOAT

From South Queensferry There are regular crossings from Hawes Pier between April and Oct on the *Maid of the Forth* (times vary, more regular in high season; £17.50; 45min each way; T 0131 331 4857, W maidoftheforth.co.uk).

From Edinburgh From Waverley Bridge, *Forth Belle* makes two to five sailings each day between Easter and Oct (£20 including bus from Edinburgh, landing fee on the island £5.50 extra; 45min each way; T 0870 118 1866, W forthtours.com).

The Borders

116 Eyemouth and around
119 The Tweed valley
132 Yarrow Water valley
133 Jedburgh
135 Hawick and around

FIDDLE PLAYER AT A BORDERS FESTIVAL

The Borders

2

Sandwiched between the Cheviot Hills on the English border and the Pentland, Moorfoot and Lammermuir hills south of Edinburgh, the Borders is a region made up of the old shire counties of Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles. Travelling from the bleak moorland of neighbouring Northumberland, you'll be struck by the green lushness of Tweeddale, whose river is the pivotal feature of the region's geography. Yet the Borders also incorporate some of the barren stretches of the Southern Uplands, with their bare, rounded peaks and weather-beaten heathery hills.

Tweeddale is the Borders at its best, with the finest section between **Melrose** and **Peebles**, where you'll find a string of attractions, from the eccentricities of Sir Walter Scott's mansion at **Abbotsford** to the intriguing Jacobite past of **Traquair House**, plus a clutch of ruined abbeys. The valley widens to the east to form the **Merse** basin, an area of rich arable land that features a series of grand stately homes, principally **Floors Castle**, **Manderston**, **Paxton** and **Mellerstain House**, all featuring the Neoclassical work of the Adam family.

To the west, the Borders have a wilder aspect, where a series of four narrow valleys lead up to the border with Dumfriesshire. North of the Tweed, the bleak **Lammermuir Hills** form the southern edge of Lothian and are a favourite haunt of Edinburgh-based ramblers, while further east in **Berwickshire**, especially around **St Abb's Head**, the coastline becomes more rugged, its dramatic cliffs and rocky outcrops harbouring a series of desolate ruined castles.

Brief history

The Borders' most famous sights are its **ruined abbeys**, founded under King David I (1124–53), whose policy of encouraging the monastic orders had little to do with spirituality. The monks of Kelso, Melrose, Jedburgh and Dryburgh were the frontiersmen of David's kingdom, helping advance his authority in areas of doubtful allegiance. This period of relative stability was interrupted in 1296 by the Wars of Independence with England.

From the first half of the sixteenth century until the Act of Union, the Borders again experienced turbulent times, bloodily fought over by the English and the Scots, and plagued by endless clan warfare and Reivers' raids (see p.123). Consequently, the countryside is strewn with ruined castles and keeps, while each major town celebrates its agitated past in the **Common Ridings**, when locals – especially the "callants" (young men) – dressed in period costume ride out to check the burgh boundaries. It's a boisterous, macho business, performed with pride and matched only by the local love of **rugby union**, which reaches a crescendo with the **Melrose Sevens** tournament in April.

Rugby Sevens p.116
Eyemouth's fish festivals p.118
Kelso festivals and events p.121
The Border Reivers p.123
The heart of Robert the Bruce p.124
Walking in the Eildon Hills p.126
Sir Walter Scott p.127
Walks around Peebles p.129
Mountain biking in Glentress Forest and Innerleithen p.131
Jedburgh festivals p.134

MELROSE ABBEY

Highlights

❶ **St Abb's Head** Easily accessible, spectacular coastal scenery with sea stacks, sheer cliffs and nesting seabirds galore, all found at the point where Scotland collided with its southern neighbour over four hundred million years ago. **See p.116**

❷ **Melrose Abbey** The vast Border abbey with the best-preserved sculptural detail set within the most charming of the Border towns. Look out for the burial plot for Robert The Bruce's heart. **See p.122**

❸ **Walking and cycling around Peebles** The banks of the Tweed are at their most scenic around Peebles, and you can cycle or walk to medieval Neidpath Castle or the lovely Kailzie Gardens. **See p.129**

❹ **Dawyck Botanic Garden** Take an exotic hike around the world's finest arboretum, with seventeenth-century origins and links to the great, global plant-hunting expeditions. **See p.130**

❺ **Traquair House** A romantic, castellated former hunting lodge dating back to the eleventh century. There also a chance to sample the dark and spicy Jacobite ale made here at the in-house brewery. **See p.130**

❻ **Biking at Glentress and Innerleithen** Eight adrenalin-pumping downhill trails through thick forest, this is the Mecca for exhilarating off-road biking, with runs to suit all levels. **See p.131**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.117

By bus and train The only train line in the Borders runs along the east coast between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed without stopping in the Borders, and travelling around by bus can take some planning. However, there is a good network of bus routes linking the key towns and smaller villages – pick up timetables from the local tourist offices.

Tourist information Ⓦ scot-borders.co.uk. For a bus network map see Ⓦ firstgroup.com.

Eyemouth and around

The history of **EYEMOUTH**, the only settlement of any size on the Borders' coastline, is forever tied up with the sea. Its long, slender harbour remains very much the focus of activity, its waters packed with deep-sea and inshore fleets and its quay strewn with tatters of old net, discarded fish and fish crates.

Eyemouth Maritime Centre

Harbour Rd • April–Nov daily:10am–5pm • £3.95 • Ⓣ 0845 859 1006, Ⓦ worldofboats.org/emc

Housed in a unique waterside structure designed to look like an eighteenth-century frigate, the **Eyemouth Maritime Centre** displays an outstanding array of old sailing craft and cannons as well as putting on nautical exhibitions. It's currently showing smuggling related scenes including a smugglers' cave and landing beach mock-ups complete with duty-free wares.

Eyemouth Museum

Auld Kirk, Manse Rd • Easter–Oct Tues–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun noon–4pm • £3.50 Ⓣ 01890 751701, Ⓦ eyemouthmuseum.org

Documenting the life and times of this small fishing community, the **Eyemouth Museum** focuses in particular on the 1881 disaster when a freak storm took the lives of 189 men, including 129 from Eyemouth, a tragedy of extraordinary proportions for a place of this size. A 15ft tapestry commemorating the event hangs in the museum along with old social and industrial memorabilia relating to farming and fishing. The museum doubles as a **tourist information centre**.

St Abb's Head

4 miles northwest of Eyemouth; from just outside the village of St Abbs, take the only single track north and continue to the end of the road • Reserve always open • Parking £2; NTS

Perhaps not suited for those without a head for heights, **St Abb's Head** rises 300ft out of the sea, its sheer cliffs providing a nesting place for great numbers of kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and other sea birds. Either side of the small valley you'll see different coloured rock marking a geological divide: grey sedimentary to the west and red volcanic to the east distinctly separate the two. From the car park, an easily followed, mile-long walking trail ends at the Stevensons' lighthouse, but you only

RUGBY SEVENS

With a surprisingly long lineage, **seven-a-side rugby** was initially conceived by a pair of Melrose butchers in 1883 as a fundraiser for their local club and quickly became a regional obsession. Nowadays, all the main Borders towns (and a few beyond) take on a kind of carnival atmosphere as they take turns to host one of ten all-day **tournaments** between April and May, with twelve teams competing for the Kings of the Sevens crown. See Ⓦ kingsofthesevens.net.

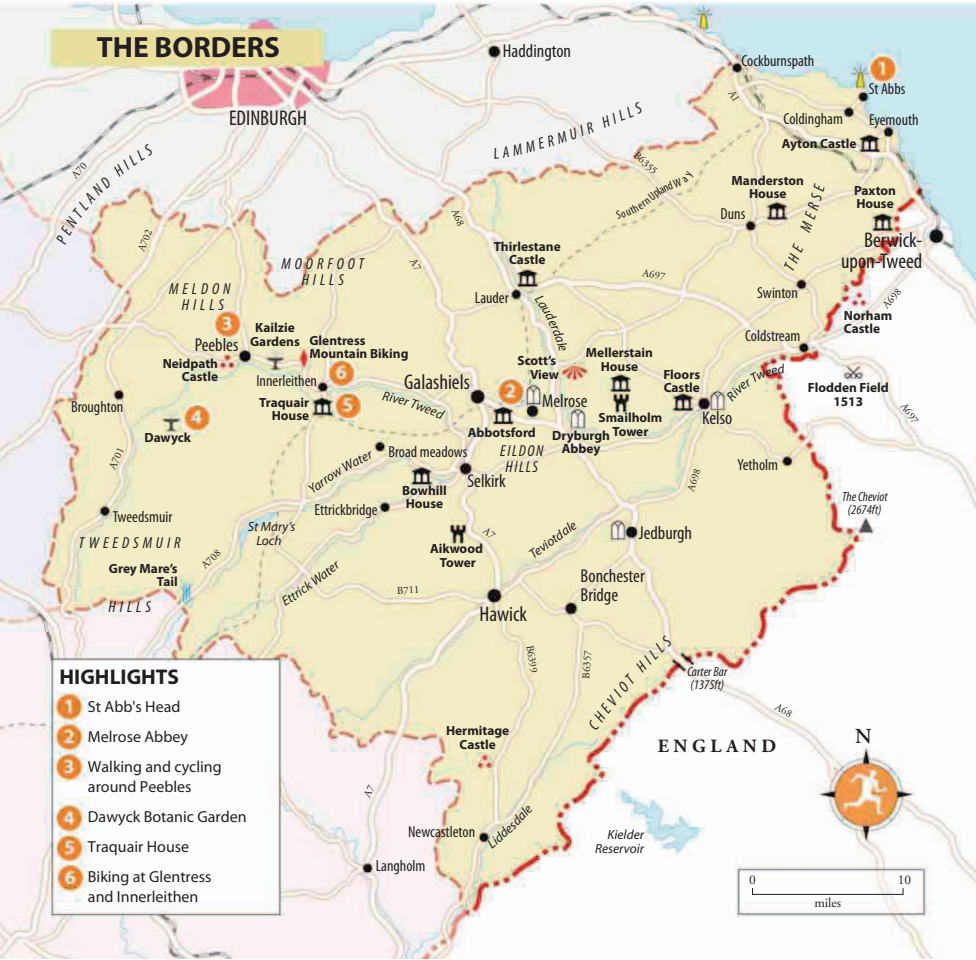
need to take it for half a mile before being rewarded with a spectacular view of the Berwickshire coast.

Paxton House

10 miles south of Eyemouth; 5 miles west of Berwick-upon-Tweed on the B6461 • **House** Mid-March to Oct daily 11am–5pm (tours 11am, 11.45am, 12.30pm, 1.15pm, 2pm & 3.30pm) • £7.60 • **Gardens and grounds** Daily 10am–sunset • £4 • T 01289 386291, W paxtonhouse.co.uk • #32 bus (Mon–Sat 4 daily) from Berwick-upon-Tweed

Overlooking the River Tweed, **Paxton House** is a perfectly proportioned Palladian mansion built in 1758 for Patrick Home of Billie. It was a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to woo his Prussian lover, Sophie de Brandt, lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth Christine, wife of Frederick the Great. Forced to return home on the murder of his mother – apparently, the butler did it – he built Paxton for his intended bride, but, sadly, they were never to meet again.

The interior features a stunning collection of Chippendale furniture, commissioned by the cousin to whom Patrick sold the house on the death of Sophie. The other highlight is the **Picture Gallery**, completed in the 1810s, with its rich Neoclassical



EYEMOUTH'S FISH FESTIVALS

Eyemouth boasts two annual fishy events: the weekend **Seafood Festival** on the second weekend in June, that has cooking demonstrations, sea shanties and storytelling, that has and the week-long **Herring Queen Festival** (Ⓦ eyemouthherringqueen.org.uk) in July, with a week of family frolics loosely based around the novelty crowning of a local lass.

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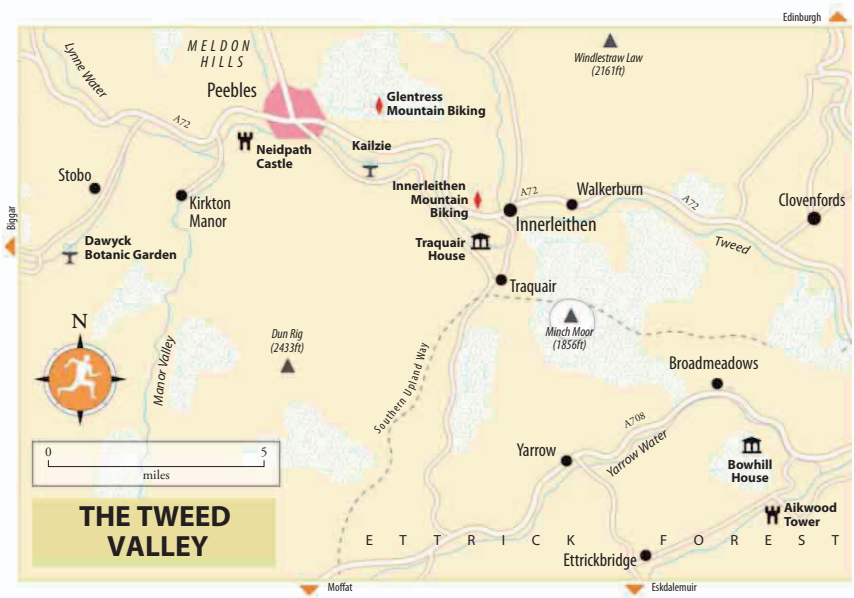
plasterwork and changing display of works from the National Gallery of Scotland. The **grounds**, laid out by an assistant of Capability Brown, include gentle footpaths, a croquet lawn, an army-built adventure playground, a tearoom, Highland cattle, Shetland ponies, a Victorian boathouse housing a salmon-netting museum and a hide, from where you can spy on red squirrels and woodpeckers.

Manderston House

1 mile east of Duns, signposted off the A6105 • **House** Mid-May to Sept Thurs & Sun 1.30–5pm • £9 • **Gardens** Thurs & Sun 11.30am–dusk • £5 Ⓣ 01361 882636, Ⓦ manderston.co.uk • Bus #60 from Galashiels, Melrose, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Tweedmouth (10 daily; Mon–Fri)

Manderston House encapsulates high-class living in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Between 1871 and 1905, the Miller family spent most of their herring and hemp fortune on turning their Georgian home into a prestigious country house. It's certainly a staggering sight, from the intricate plasterwork ceilings to the inlaid marble floor in the hall and the extravagant silver staircase. The whole is sumptuously furnished with trappings worthy of a man who had just married into the aristocracy: James Miller married Eveline Curzon, the daughter of Lord Scarsdale, in 1893. Manderston is currently the home of Lord and Lady Palmer, of Huntley & Palmers biscuits fame – hence the Biscuit Tin Museum in the house. The extensive **gardens** are noted for their courtyard stables (where you can have tea and scones for £3), cloistered marble dairy, mock tower house, rhododendrons and azaleas.



ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses to Eyemouth stop in Albert St, one block south of the main shopping thoroughfare.

Destinations Berwick-upon-Tweed (hourly; 20min); Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 7 buses, Sun 3 buses; 2hr); St Abbs (hourly; 15min).

EYEMOUTH AND AROUND

INFORMATION

Tourist office The tourist information centre is in Eyemouth Museum, Auld Kirk, Manse Rd (Easter–Oct Tues–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun noon–4pm; ☎01890 751701).

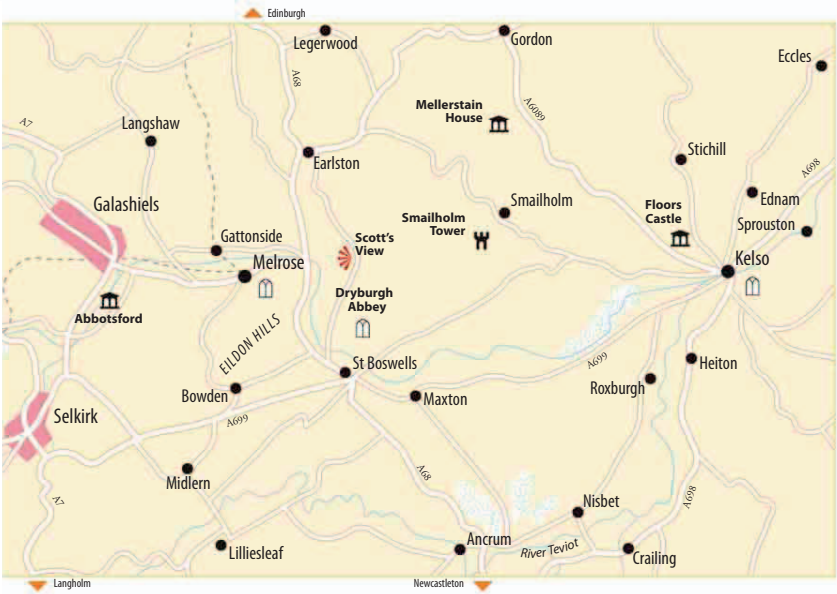
ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **Giacopazzi's** 18 Harbour Rd ☎01890 750317, 🌐giacopazzis.co.uk. There's no mistaking from the man-sized ice-cream models outside this shop that Giacopazzi's are tremendously proud of their gelatos. Made daily, the ice cream is, for many, a reason alone to come to Eyemouth they do a good fish tea too here, for £10 (or £5.90 takeaway). Sun–Thurs 9am–8pm, Fri–Sat 9am–9pm.

Redhall Cottage A1107, 1 mile south of Eyemouth ☎01890 781488, 🌐redhallcottage.com. An attractive, solitary terrace of four farm-workers' cottages, converted into a guesthouse and restaurant with snug bar. The rooms are all en suite with a good breakfast selection each morning; while restaurant meals are the most refined in this neck of the woods. Mains range from a £9 vegetarian risotto to £15 for lamb shank with mash and real gravy. Food served Mon–Thurs 10am–11pm, Fri–Sat 10am–1am, Sun 11.30am–11pm. **£80**

The Tweed valley

Rising in the hills far to the west, the **River Tweed** snakes its way across the Borders until it reaches the North Sea at Berwick-upon-Tweed, most of its final stretch forming the boundary between Scotland and England. This is the area known as the **Merse** (from the Old English for marsh), a flat landscape of rich farmland and wooded riverbanks where the occasional military ruin serves as a reminder of more violent days. The **Border abbeys** – perhaps the best reason for visiting the region – also lie in ruins, not because of the Reformation, but because they were burnt to the ground by the English, for whom the lower Tweed was the obvious point at which to cross the border into Scotland.



The lower Tweed has just one town of note, **Kelso**, a busy agricultural centre, with a couple of stately homes close by and a ruined abbey, the latter easily upstaged by those at **Melrose** and **Dryburgh**, further upstream. Melrose makes a great base for exploring the middle reaches of the Tweed valley. The rich, forested scenery inspired Sir Walter Scott, whose own purpose-built creation, **Abbotsford**, stands a few miles outside Melrose. Perhaps fortunately, Scott died before the textile boom turned his beloved **Selkirk** and **Galashiels** into mill towns. The Tweed is at its most beguiling in the stretch between Melrose and the pleasant country town of **Peebles**, when it winds through the hills past numerous stately homes, most notably **Traquair House**. Public transport is no problem, with frequent buses travelling along the valley. Just west of Peebles, the Tweed curves south towards Tweedsmuir, from where it's just a few miles further to Moffat in Dumfries and Galloway.

Kelso and around

Sir Walter Scott (see p.127) once referred to **KELSO** as the "the most beautiful, if not the most romantic village in Scotland." While its aesthetic powers may have diminished somewhat since Scott's days, this place retains a somewhat jaded charm thanks to its historical buildings and its position at the confluence of the Tweed and Teviot. Today's Kelso grew up in the shadow of its now-ruined Benedictine abbey, which had brought prosperity to the town until the Reformation. The town is now centred on **The Square**, an unusually large cobbled expanse a short distance from the abbey and presided over by the elegant honey-hued **Town Hall**. To one side stands the imposing *Cross Keys Hotel*, with its distinctive rooftop balustrade, and a supporting chorus of three-storey eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pastel buildings on every side. Leaving The Square along Roxburgh Street, take the alley down to the **Cobby Riverside Walk**, where a brief stroll leads to Floors Castle (see below).

Kelso Abbey

Bridge St • Daily dawn–dusk • Free; HS

Once the richest and most powerful abbey in the Borders, **Kelso Abbey** was savaged by the English three times in the sixteenth century: the last (and by far the worst) assault was part of the "Rough Wooing" (see p.583). Such was the extent of the devastation – further compounded by the Reformation – that less survives of Kelso than any of the other Border abbeys. Nevertheless, at first sight it looks pretty impressive, with the heavy Norman west end of the abbey church almost entirely intact. Beyond, little remains, though it is possible to make out the two transepts and towers that gave the abbey the shape of a double cross, unique in Scotland.

Floors Castle

1 mile northwest of Kelso; from the square, follow Roxburgh St to the entrance gate on the outskirts of town, or walk from town centre along Cobby Riverside Walk • Easter & May–Sept daily 10.30am–5pm, Oct daily 10.30–3.30pm • £8.50; garden and grounds only £4 • 01573 223333, www.floorscastle.com

From Kelso's handsome bridge over the Tweed, you can easily make out the pepper-pot turrets and castellations of **Floors Castle**, the country's largest inhabited building. Designed by William Adam in the 1720s for the first Duke of Roxburghe, the interior still demonstrates his uncluttered style, despite some Victorian modifications, while the superb views from the windows give the place an airy feel. Floors remains the home of the Duke of Roxburghe – his imperious features can be seen in a variety of portraits and photos around the house – so you get to see only ten rooms and the basement. In 1903, the eighth duke married Mary Goelet, the wealthiest heiress in America at the time, and the **paintings**, by Matisse, Augustus John and Odilon Redon, as well as the Brussels and Gobelin **tapestries** she carried off from her family home, are now the castle's highlights. There's an above-average **café** and you can wander down to the Tweed and see the holly tree that marks the spot where James II was killed by an

exploding cannon during the siege of Roxburgh Castle. His son, also James, was crowned James III at the age of 9 at Kelso Abbey.

Mellerstain House

6 miles northwest of Kelso signposted off the A608 • May–Sept Fri–Mon 12.30–5pm (gardens open 11.30am) • £8.50; gardens only £5 • 01573 410225, mellerstain.com

Mellerstain House represents the very finest of the Adam family's work: William designed the wings in 1725, and his son Robert the main mansion house fifty years later. Inside, it has an elegant, domestic air, lacking in pomposity. Robert Adam's love of columns, delicate roundels and friezes culminates in a stunning sequence of plaster-moulded, pastel-shaded ceilings, which still preserve the original colours; the **library** is the architectural highlight, with four unusual long panels in plaster relief of classical scenes relegating the books to second place. Perhaps the most intriguing Adam creation is the bathroom in the basement, the only one known to have been designed by him. Notable among the paintings are works by Constable, Gainsborough, Ramsay and Veronese. The house remains the home of the Earl of Haddington, descendant of the Baillie family who acquired the estate in 1642. After the tour you can wander the formal Edwardian gardens, which slope down to the lake, or venture further afield to the Fairy Glen. There's also a children's play area and an excellent tearoom.

Smailholm Tower

Sandyknowe Farm; signposted from Smailholm village and 7 miles west of Kelso • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS

Perched alone on a remote rocky outcrop, craggy and evocative **Smailholm Tower** inspired Walter Scott, and conjures up the era of Reivers' raids and border skirmishes. The fifteenth-century tower was designed to withstand sudden attack: the rough rubble walls are 6ft thick and both the entrance – once guarded by a heavy door plus an iron yett (gate) – and the windows are disproportionately small. Inside, make your way up to the roof, where two narrow **wall-walks**, jammed against the barrel-vaulted roof and the crow-stepped gables, provide panoramic views. On the north side the watchman's seat has also survived, stuck against the chimney-stack for warmth and with a recess for a lantern.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus The bus station is on Roxburgh St, a brief walk from The Square.

Destinations Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily, 5 on Sun; 50min); Galashiels (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily, 5 on Sun; 50min); Hawick (Mon–Sat 9 daily; 1hr); Jedburgh (Mon–Sat 9 daily; 30min) Melrose (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily; 5 on Sun; 30min).

KELSO AND AROUND

KELSO FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Held between Duns and Kelso over three days from the end of May, the **Jim Clark Rally** (jimclarkrally.com) is mainland Britain's only on-road rally, and the five races are a major event on the sporting calendar; the best position from which to watch is nearer to Duns at the Langton splash, where the cars soak spectators by belting through a large puddle.

In Springwood Park during one weekend in mid-June, the **Border Union Dog Show** (buas.org/dogs) is a canine festival and Crufts qualifier, takes place. Over a hundred horse riders in period regalia canter cross-country from Kelso to Yetholm and back for the **Civic Week Sat** (kelso.bordernet.co.uk/civic-week), a Borders tradition in mid-July. Prior to the ride there are week-long festivities including a Ceilidh, fireworks and a torch-lit procession. Early September sees the **St James' Fair** (kelsocommunityevents.co.uk) in The Square. With roots going back a millennium, this event is effectively now a family-orientated weekend of entertainment, funfairs and stalls plus a degree of pomp and ceremony culminating in the novelty coronation of a local child. During October to May at Golf Course Road just north of town, the **Kelso Races** (kelso-races.co.uk; £10 entry) feature a small-jump horse-racing circuit with race meets mostly at weekends.

INFORMATION

Tourist office In a room on the town hall's ground floor in The Square (Easter–June & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; July & Aug daily: 10am–5pm; ⓣ01573 228055).

ACCOMMODATION

Duncan House Chalkheugh Terrace ⓣ01573 225682, ⓦduncanhouse.co.uk. Ideally sited, overlooking the Tweed and beyond to Floors Castle, this guesthouse is tastefully presented with period furnishings to match its roomy Georgian dimensions. Ornate open fires, a black lab and a friendly host make for a homely stay. £65

★ **The Old Priory** Woodmarket ⓣ01573 223030, ⓦtheoldpriorykelso.com. Just off The Square, this is a beautifully furnished Georgian townhouse, full of lived-in character, and has a lush garden out back. There are two double rooms, the best of which overlooks the garden, as well as a two-room connected family suite. £80

EATING AND DRINKING

★ **Cobbles Inn** Bowmont St ⓣ01573 223548, ⓦthecobbleskelso.co.uk. This place has a formidable reputation locally, not just for real ales (supplied by the proprietor's own brewery, Tempest) but for its top-notch gastro-cuisine. Leaning towards red meat and game the menu reflects the regional country produce, with dishes like lamb confit or barley-stuffed partridge both part of the daytime set menu; two courses £21. Mon–Thurs 11.30am–11pm, Fri–Sat 11am–late, Sun noon–10pm.

Pharlanne 13 Bridge St ⓣ01573 229745, ⓦpharlanne.co.uk. This well stocked, upmarket deli doubles as a café-bistro serving inexpensive, light lunches including soup and home-made bread as well as cheese, charcuterie and pâté plates with chutney and bread. Expect to fill up for around £7–£8. Mon–Sat 11.30am–4pm.

SHOPPING

Kelso Pottery The Knowes; across the graveyard from Kelso Abbey to the east ⓣ01573 224027. Run by Ian and Elizabeth Hird, this uses differing colours of local clay to make a variety of objects, including "Time Tablets", using patterns from other countries, all wrapped in dried local vegetation and fired in their large outdoor pit kiln. Tues–Sat 10am–1pm & 2–5pm.

Melrose and around

Tucked in between the Tweed and the gorse-backed Eildon Hills, minuscule **MELROSE** is one of the most appealing towns in the Borders. Centred on its busy little market square, its narrow streets are trimmed by a harmonious ensemble of styles, from pretty little cottages and tweedy shops to high-standing Georgian and Victorian facades. Its chief draw is its ruined **abbey**, by far the finest of the Border abbeys, but it's also perfectly positioned for exploring the Tweed valley. Most of the year it's a sleepy little place, but as the birthplace in 1883 of the **Rugby Sevens** (seven-a-side games), it swarms during Sevens Week (second week in April), during the **Borders Book Festival** in June, and again in early September when it hosts the **Melrose Music Festival**, a popular weekend of traditional music attracting folkies from afar.

Melrose Abbey

Abbey St • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS

The pink- and red-tinted stone ruins of **Melrose Abbey** soar above their riverside surroundings. Founded in 1136 by King David I, Melrose was the first Cistercian settlement in Scotland and grew rich selling wool and hides to Flanders, but its prosperity was fragile: the English repeatedly razed Melrose, most viciously under Richard II in 1385 and the Earl of Hertford in 1545. Most of the present remains date from the intervening period, when extensive rebuilding abandoned the original Cistercian austerity for an elaborate, Gothic style inspired by the abbeys of northern England.

The site is dominated by the **Abbey Church**, which has lost its west front, and whose nave is reduced to the elegant window arches and chapels of the south aisle. Amazingly, the stone **pulpitum** (screen), separating the choir monks from their lay

THE BORDER REIVERS

From the thirteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, the wild, inhospitable border country stretching from the Solway Firth in the west to the Tweed valley in the east, well away from the power bases of both the Scottish and English monarchs, was overrun by outlaws known as the **Border Reivers**, *reive* being a Scots word for plunder. As George MacDonald Fraser put it in his book *The Steel Bonnets*, "The great border tribes of both Scotland and England feuded continuously among themselves. Robbery and blackmail were everyday professions; raiding, arson, kidnapping, murder and extortion were an accepted part of the social system. "This, then, was no cross-border dispute, but an open struggle for power among Borders folk. Those who "shook loose the Border" included people from all walks of life – agricultural labourers, gentleman farmers, smallholders, even peers of the realm – for whom theft, raiding, tracking and ambush became second nature.

The source of this behaviour was the destruction and devastation wrought upon the region by virtually continual warfare between England and Scotland, and the "slash and burn" policy of the era. With many residents no longer able to find sustenance from the land, crime became the only way to survive. Cattle-rustling, blackmail and kidnapping led to an anarchical mindset, where feuding families would habitually wreak havoc and devastation on each other.

The legacy of the Border Reivers can still be seen today in the region's fortified farms and churches; in the **Common Riding** traditions of many border towns; in the great family names such as Armstrong, Graham, Kerr and Nixon, which once filled the hearts of Borderers with dread; and in the language – the words "blackmail" (first used to describe the protection money paid by farmers to the local clan chiefs) and "bereaved" (originally referred to being robbed) have their roots in the mayhem of this period.

brothers, is preserved. Beyond, the **presbytery** has its magnificent perpendicular window, lierne vaulting and ceiling bosses intact, with the most intricate of curly kale carving on the supporting columns while in the **south transept**, another fine fifteenth-century window sprouts yet more delicate, foliate tracery. This kind of finely carved detail is repeated everywhere you look. Outside, the exterior sculpture is even more impressive: crouching figures holding scrolls bearing inscriptions such as "He suffered because he willed it". Elsewhere, look for the numerous mischievous **gargoyles**, from peculiar crouching beasts to the pig playing the bagpipes on the roof on the south side of the nave.

Commendator's House

The paltry ruins of Melrose's abbey continue across Cloisters Road where they edge on to the **Commendator's House** (same hours as the abbey), a lovely red-sandstone building converted into a private house in 1590 by the abbey's last commendator, and now housing a modest collection of ecclesiastical bric-a-brac. Beyond the house is the mill-lade, where water used to flow in order to power the abbey's mills; it was also diverted to flush the monks' latrines.

Priorwood Garden

Abbey St • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; Nov & Dec Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; Jan–Easter Mon–Sat noon–4pm • £6.50 joint ticket with Harmony Garden; NTS

As well as the kempt flower and herb borders, **Priorwood Garden** features a heritage apple orchard, beautifully set within the garden's walled confines with Melrose Abbey standing tall beyond. Unique for its focus on growing flowers for drying, the shop here sells some of the produce that you'll see in the drying area en route to the garden.

Harmony Garden

St Mary's Rd • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1pm–5pm • £6 joint ticket with Priorwood Garden; NTS

More of a pleasant picnic spot than an exotic botanical experience, **Harmony Garden** is as memorable for its setting as for its plants. Its roomy croquet lawn lies before the

THE HEART OF ROBERT THE BRUCE

Legend has it that the heart of **Robert I** is buried here (his body having been buried at Dunfermline Abbey), and in 1997, when a heart cask was publicly exhumed, this theory received an unexpected boost. However, the burial location was not in accordance with Bruce's own wishes. In 1329, the dying king told his friend, Sir James Douglas, to carry his heart on a Crusade to the Holy Land in fulfilment of an old vow: "Seeing therefore, that my body cannot go to achieve what my heart desires, I will send my heart instead of my body, to accomplish my vow." Douglas tried his best, but was killed fighting the Moors in Spain – and Bruce's heart ended up in Melrose. A new commemorative stone marks its current resting place in the chapterhouse, north of the sacristy.

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garden's Georgian villa while the borders and vegetable plots form a seductive foreground to the abbey and Eildon Hills, which rise beyond the garden walls.

Dryburgh Abbey

Dryburgh village; 6 miles southeast of Melrose, off the B6356 • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £5; HS

Hidden away in a U-bend in the Tweed, the remains of **Dryburgh Abbey** occupy an idyllic position against a hilly backdrop, with ancient cedars, redwoods, beech and lime trees and wide lawns flattering the pinkish-red hues of the stonework. The Premonstratensians, or White Canons, founded the abbey in the twelfth century, but they were never as successful – or apparently as devout – as their Cistercian neighbours in Melrose. Their chronicles detail interminable disputes about land and money: one story relates how a fourteenth-century canon called Marcus flattened the abbot with his fist.

The romantic setting is second to none, but the ruins of the **Abbey Church** are much less substantial than, say, at Melrose or Jedburgh. Virtually nothing survives of the nave, but the transepts have fared better, their chapels now serving as private burial grounds for, among others, **Sir Walter Scott** and Field Marshal Haig.

Scott's View

Drivers and cyclists should approach the abbey via the much-visited **Scott's View**, to the north on the B6356, overlooking the Tweed valley, where the writer and his friends often picnicked and where Scott's horse stopped out of habit during the writer's own funeral procession. The scene inspired J.M.W. Turner's *Melrose* (1831), now on display in the National Gallery of Scotland (see p.76).

Abbotsford

B6360, 2 miles west of Melrose • Daily: April–Sept 10am–5pm, Oct–March 10am–4pm • £8.75 • T 01896 752043, W scottsabbotsford.co.uk

A stately home designed to satisfy the romantic inclinations of Sir Walter Scott, **Abbotsford** was home to the writer from 1812 until his death twenty years later. Built on the site of a farmhouse Scott bought and subsequently demolished, Abbotsford (as Scott chose to call it) took twelve years to evolve, with the fanciful turrets and castellations of the Scots Baronial exterior incorporating copies of medieval originals: the entrance porch imitates that of Linlithgow Palace and the screen wall in the garden echoes Melrose Abbey's cloister. Scott was proud of his *folie de grandeur*, writing to a friend, "It is a kind of conundrum castle to be sure [which] pleases a fantastic person in style and manner." That said, it was undoubtedly one of the chief causes of Scott's subsequent bankruptcy.

Despite all the exterior pomp, the interior is surprisingly small and poky, with just six rooms open for viewing on the upper floor. Visitors start in the wood-panelled **study**, with its small writing desk made of salvage from the Spanish Armada at which

WALKING IN THE EILDON HILLS

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 338

From the centre of Melrose, it's a vigorous three-mile walk to the top of the **Eildon Hills**, whose triple volcanic peaks are the Central Borders' most distinctive landmark. The tourist office sells a leaflet detailing the hike, which begins about 90yd south of, and up the hill from, the Market Square, along the B6359 to Lilliesleaf.

The hills have been associated with all sorts of legends, beginning with tales of their creation by the wizard-cum-alchemist Michael Scott (1175–1230) who, in the words of Sir Walter Scott, "cleft the Eildon Hills in three". It was here that the mystic **Thomas the Rhymer** received the gift of prophecy from the Faerie Queen, and Arthur and his knights are reckoned to lie asleep deep within the hills, victims of a powerful spell. The ancient Celts, who revered the number three, also considered the site a holy place and maintained their settlements on the slopes long after the Romans' departure.

Melrose is also the starting point for the popular **St Cuthbert's Way**, a sixty-mile walk which finishes at Lindisfarne (Holy Island) on the Northumbrian coast. The tourist office can give details of the walk, though the trail is well marked by yellow arrows from the abbey up over the Eildons to the pretty village of **Bowden**, where you can make a detour to see a twelfth-century kirk, half a mile down the hill from the square, and browse secondhand books and get a fine home-made tea at *The Old School*.

Scott churned out the Waverley novels at a furious rate. The heavy wood-panelled **library** contains Scott's collection of more than nine thousand rare books and an extraordinary assortment of memorabilia, the centrepiece of which is Napoleon's pen case and blotting book. Also here are Rob Roy's purse and *skene dhu* (knife), a lock of Nelson's hair – and of Bonnie Prince Charlie's – plus the latter's *quaich* (drinking cup), Flora Macdonald's pocketbook, the inlaid pearl crucifix that accompanied Mary, Queen of Scots, to the scaffold and even a piece of oatcake found in the pocket of a dead Highlander at Culloden. You can also see Henry Raeburn's famous portrait of Scott in the **drawing room**, and all sorts of weapons – notably Rob Roy's sword, dagger and gun – in the **armoury**. In the barbaric-looking **entrance hall**, hung with elk and wild cattle skulls, and spoils gathered from the battlefield of Waterloo by Scott himself, is a model of the skull of Robert the Bruce and some of Scott's dandyish clothes.

Thirlestane Castle

B6362, Lauder • Easter, May, June & Sept Wed, Thurs & Sun 10am–3.30pm; July & Aug daily except Fri & Sat; guided tours until 2.30pm • £10; grounds only £3 • T 01578 722430, W thirlestanecastle.co.uk • Take the signposted footpath from the main square in Lauder

Located ten miles north of Melrose is **Thirlestane Castle**, an imposing Scots Baronial pile with reddish turrets and castellated towers. Begun by John Maitland in the late sixteenth century, when he became Lord Chancellor of Scotland, and still owned by the family, the castle's somewhat undistinguished interior is redeemed by the extravagant plasterwork of the Restoration ceilings and a wealth of domestic detail from the Victorian period, including a wonderland of children's toys. There's also an adventure playground for those with children, and a woodland walk.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By bus Buses to Melrose stop in Buccleuch St, a few paces from the abbey ruins and the tourist office opposite.

Destinations Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mon–Sat 8 daily, 6 on Sun; 50min; 1hr 10min); Duns (Mon–Sat 8 daily, 6 on Sun; 50min); Edinburgh (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun hourly; 2hr 20min); Galashiels (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun hourly; 20min); Kelso (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily, 5 on Sun); Jedburgh (school days only, 1 daily; 40min); Peebles (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun hourly; 1hr 10min); Selkirk (Mon–Sat hourly, 3 on Sun; 20min).

Tourist office A good source of walking maps is found at the tourist office at Abbey House, Abbey St, opposite the entrance to the Abbey (April–June & Sept–Oct, daily: 10am–4pm; July & Aug, daily: 10am–5pm; ☎01896 822283).

ACCOMMODATION

Braidwood Buccleuch St ☎01896 822488, ⓦbraidwoodmelrose.co.uk. A comfortable, early Victorian cottage guesthouse ideally sited between the town centre and its abbey. Cheaper rooms have private facilities in the hall or £5 extra gets you an en-suite upgrade. £60

Dunfermline House 3 Buccleuch St ☎01896 822411, ⓦdunfermlinehouse.co.uk. Solid townhouse B&B with en-suite rooms that look on to the garden or across to the abbey. The decor here might be a bit 1980s in style but everything's clean and in good order. £60

Gibson Caravan Park Gibson Park; 300yd west of the tourist office ☎01896 822969, ⓦcaravanclub.co.uk. This lovely, central little campsite opposite the rugby ground caters mostly to caravans although tents are welcome too. It's open all year. £23

★ **Old Bank House** 27 Buccleuch St ☎01896 823712, ⓦoldbankhousemelrose.co.uk. Tastefully furnished Victorian B&B with charming hosts and three pristinely maintained and comfy en-suite rooms. The fine Scottish or vegetarian cooked breakfasts are served on Spode crockery in the old bank manager's office. £65

2

SIR WALTER SCOTT

CHILDHOOD

Walter Scott (1771–1832) was born to a solidly bourgeois family in Edinburgh. Crippled by polio, he was sent by his parents to recuperate at his grandfather's farm in Smailholm, where the boy's imagination was fired by his relatives' tales of derring-do, the violent history of the Borders retold amid the rugged landscape that he spent long summer days exploring.

POETRY

Throughout the 1790s he transcribed hundreds of old Border ballads, publishing a three-volume collection entitled *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* in 1802. An instant success, *Minstrelsy* was followed by Scott's own *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a narrative poem whose strong story and rose-tinted regionalism proved very popular.

More **poetry** was to come, most successfully *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), not to mention an eighteen-volume edition of the works of John Dryden and nineteen volumes of Jonathan Swift. However, despite having two paid jobs, one as **Sheriff-Depute** of Selkirkshire, the other as clerk to the Court of Session in Edinburgh, his finances remained shaky.

NOVELS

From 1813, Scott was writing to pay the bills and poured out a veritable flood of **historical novels** using his extensive knowledge of Scottish history and folklore. He produced his best work within the space of ten years: *Waverley* (1814), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of Midlothian* (both 1818), as well as two notable novels set in England, *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Kenilworth* (1821). In 1824 he returned to Scottish tales with *Redgauntlet*, the last of his quality work. As Scott's financial problems increased, the quality of his writing deteriorated, and the effort broke his health. His last years were plagued by illness, and in 1832 he died at Abbotsford and was buried at Dryburgh Abbey (see p.124).

SCOTT'S INSPIRATION

Although Scott's interests were diverse, his historical novels focused mostly on the Jacobites, whose loyalty to the Stewarts had riven Scotland since the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. That the nation was prepared to be entertained by such tales was essentially a matter of timing: by the 1760s it was clear that the Jacobite cause was lost for good and Scotland, emerging from its isolated medievalism, had been firmly welded into the United Kingdom. Thus its turbulent history and independent spirit was safely in the past, and ripe for romancing – as shown by the arrival of King George IV in Edinburgh during 1822 decked out in Highland dress. Yet for Sir Walter the romance was tinged with a genuine sense of loss. Loyal to the Hanoverians, he still grieved for Bonnie Prince Charlie; he welcomed a commercial Scotland but lamented the passing of feudal ties, and so his heroes are transitional, fighting men of action superseded by bourgeois figures searching for a clear identity.

Townhouse Market Square 01896 822645, thetownhousemelrose.co.uk. This small hotel has eleven individually stylish en-suite rooms including a family room, all with contemporary furnishings. Avoid the street-facing suites to ensure a peaceful night's sleep. £128

EATING AND DRINKING

RESTAURANTS

Hoebridge Inn Hoebridge Rd East, Gattonside; 500yd past Melrose Abbey and across the old suspension bridge 01896 823082, thehoebridgeinn.com. Once a bobbin mill, this restaurant retains a timeless charm thanks to its deep rubble walls and simple furnishings. Its menu offers a good choice of predominantly Scots and French cuisine with a house special of slow roasted rabbit for £16.50 while light lunches start at £5 for soup and bread. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6–9pm, Sun 12.30–2.30pm; closed Tues & Wed eve late Oct–March.

Marmion's Brasserie Buccleuch St 01896 822245, marmionsbrasserie.co.uk. While this popular all-day bistro might have overdone it a bit with pine cladding, it still manages to conjure up a peppy atmosphere of an evening. The menu offers plenty of choice; dependable meat dishes as well as a surprisingly wide and adventurous selection of vegetarian mains like the salad with wild mushroom wontons for £11.25. Mon–Sat 9am–9pm.

CAFÉS

Abbey Coffee Shop 6 Buccleuch St 01896 822165 Untouched by the growth of swanky café culture in Scotland, this time capsule of a place with its pine ceilings, quirky chandeliers and even quirkier rag dolls is stubbornly charming. With its exceptional location, outside tables and a cheap £7 all-day breakfast, business is, unsurprisingly, booming. Mon–Sat 9am–4.30pm, Sun10am–4.30pm.

★ **Abbey Fine Wines & The Cellar Coffee Shop** Abbey St 01896 823224, abbeyfinewines.co.uk. This long-established wine merchant now also turns its hand to coffee and cakes at its good little café through the back of their generously stocked wine shop. Light lunches are also served here from £6.50 for quiche or, if you can't resist, sample wine bottles are always open and go nicely with their £8.75 cheese and quince platter. Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm; shop closes 5.30pm.

PUBS

Ship Inn East Port; at the top of the square 01896 822190. The liveliest pub in town, especially on Saturday afternoons when the Melrose rugby team have played at home. While it could certainly do with some redecoration, its saving grace is the beer garden out back. Mon–Wed 11am–11pm, Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am, Sun noon–11pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

The Wynd 7 The Wynd, Buccleuch St 01896 820028, sites.google.com/site/thewyndtheatre. Melrose's very own pint-sized theatre, tucked away down an alleyway, north off the main square, shows films and puts on classic, jazz and folk concerts as well as live drama. Box office Tues & Thurs 11am–1pm.

SHOPPING

The Whole Lot High St; next to the petrol station 01896 823039, thewholelot.co.uk. Worth seeking out for its sizeable array of Scottish furniture, clothes and bric-a-brac, this superb antique shop claims to be the largest in the Borders. It's certainly big enough to enjoy a browse without feeling your every move is being watched. Mon–Sat 9.30–5pm; April–Dec: Sun 11am–4pm.

Galashiels

In a tour of the region, it's hard to avoid going through "Gala", as **GALASHIELS** is known locally, a hard-working textile town four miles west of Melrose whose grey-green workers' terraces spread along the valley of the Gala Water near its junction with the Tweed. The main street runs parallel with the river, its eastern end cheered by a melodramatic equestrian statue of a Border Reiver above the town's war memorial. The long-demolished New Gala House, a mansion that stood at the top of the town, was taken over during World War II by Edinburgh girls' school, **St Trinnean's**; the artist Ronald Searle met two of the pupils in 1941, inspiration for the unruly schoolgirls in his St Trinian's novels.

ARRIVAL, DEPARTURE AND INFORMATION GALASHIELS

By bus The region's principal bus station is situated close to (and north of the river from) the town centre, just off the A7. Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 4 hourly, 2 on Sun; 2hr); Peebles (Mon–Sat 2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 40min); Hawick

(Mon–Sat 2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 35min); Jedburgh (Mon–Fri 1 daily; 50min); Kelso (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily, 5 on Sun; 55min); Langholm (Mon–Sat 2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 1hr 15min); Melrose (Mon–Sat 2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 20min); Selkirk (Mon–Sat 2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 15min).

Tourist information There's no tourist office in town, but there are plenty of leaflets at the library (Lawyers Brae, south of the river; Mon, Wed & Fri 9.30am–5pm, Tues and Thurs 9.30am–7pm, Saturday 9am–12.30pm).

Peebles and around

Fast, wide, tree-lined and fringed with grassy banks, the Tweed looks at its best at **PEEBLES**, a handsome royal burgh that sits on the north bank, 22 miles due south of the capital. The town has a genteel, relaxed air, its wide, handsome High Street bordered by houses in a medley of architectural styles, mostly dating from Victorian times. A steady stream of day-trippers from the capital, as well as the large population of commuter locals at its make this an affluent place; consequently there are plenty of enticing shops, restaurants and tearooms.

Nearby, hills, drove roads and a disused railway line make this a perfect starting point for easy-going treks into the lush green landscape. Upstream from Peebles the Tweed gradually narrows as the hills tighten up on either side and settlements become small and sparse. Lush fields and deciduous trees thrive in the valley floor while the surrounding high peaks offer a foreboding blanket of heather interrupted frequently by over-regular spruce plantations.

Old Parish Church

High St • Daily 10am–4pm • Free

The soaring crown spire of the **Old Parish Church** rises up at the western end of the High Street and, inside, the church has some unusual features such as the elegant oak, bronze and engraved-glass entrance screen and 22 modern oil paintings illustrating the Scriptures. Suspended from the ceiling are tattered Napoleonic flags, emblems of 1816, the year the Peebleshire Militia disbanded.

Tweeddale Museum and Gallery

Chambers Institute, High St • Mon–Fri 10.30am–12.30pm & 1–4pm, Sat 9.30am–12.30pm • Free

Housed in the Chambers Institute, presented to the town by local worthy William Chambers in 1859, the **Tweeddale Museum and Gallery** is dedicated to the enlightenment of his neighbours. The benefactor stuffed the place with casts of the world's most famous sculptures and, although most were lost long ago, today's "Secret Room", once the Museum Room, contains two handsome friezes: one a copy of the Elgin Marbles taken from the Parthenon; the other of the Triumph of Alexander, originally cast in 1812 to honour Napoleon.

WALKS AROUND PEEBLES

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 337 and 338

A series of footpaths snake through the rough-edged burns, bare peaks and deep woods hills of the surrounding Peebles. The five-mile **Sware Trail** is one of the easiest and most scenic, weaving west along the north bank of the river and looping back to the south. On the way, it passes **Neidpath Castle,** a gaunt medieval tower house perched high above the river on a rocky bluff. The walk also goes by the splendid skew rail bridge, part of the Glasgow line, which was finished in 1850 and closed in 1969. Other, longer footpaths follow the old drove roads, like the thirteen-mile haul to **St Mary's Loch** or the fourteen-mile route to Selkirk via Traquair House (see p.130). For either of these, you'll need an Ordnance Survey map, a compass and proper hiking gear while for a more gentle stroll there's a three-mile amble downstream on the Tweed's southern banks which takes you to the privately owned **Kailzie Gardens.**

Dawyck Botanic Garden

Stobo, 8 miles southwest of Peebles on the B712 • Daily: Feb & Nov 10am–4pm; March & Oct 10am–5pm; April–Sept 10am–6pm • £5.50 • T 01721 760254, W rbge.org.uk

An outstation of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, the masterpiece of seventeenth-century horticultural passion and creativity that is **Dawyck Botanic Garden** ranks among the world's finest arboreta. Hosting species from climatically similar corners of the globe, the 62-acre garden was the culmination of early plant-hunting expeditions, particularly those by David Douglas (of Douglas fir fame). One of the best times to visit is in spring, when, as you enter the garden through the ultra-modern visitor centre, you're welcomed by the feast that is the Azalea Walk in full bloom. Over the brow of the hill, 300-year-old redwoods tower over a gushing burn that feeds the roots of gigantic gunnera plants. In autumn, sorbis and acers mount a flaring foliage of reds, oranges and yellows.

Kailzie Gardens

3 miles east of Peebles on the B7062 • Daily: April–Oct 11am–5.30pm; Nov–March dawn–dusk • T 01721 720007, W kailziegardens.com • £4

Kailzie Gardens encompasses fifteen acres of pleasant, partly formal gardens including a burnside walk, a fishable pond, a delightful walled garden (not open winter), and a pleasant wood-panelled tearoom. In the dedicated viewing hut, you can watch live CCTV pictures of the ospreys that have been successfully introduced into the nearby forest.

Robert Smail's & Sons Printing Works

High St, Innerleithen, 7 miles east of Peebles on the A72 • Easter–Oct Thurs–Sat & Mon noon–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; Nov–Dec Mon, Thurs & Fri 10am–4pm & Sat 9am–3pm.; tours last 1hr • £6.50; NTS

Little changed since its establishment in 1866, **Robert Smail's Printing Works** is now a living, working museum, offering an enjoyable insight into the world of Victorian printing. Originally powered by watermill, the great machines' huge belts and flywheels are electrically powered now, about the only concession to progress here. Tours also take in the case room upstairs where you get the chance to set and print your own block. Most fascinating of all, however, is the archive of every single job the Smails printed for nearly a hundred years as well as wage books, ledgers and other ephemera.

Traquair House

7 miles southeast of Peebles on the B7062 • Daily: Easter–Sept 11am–5pm; Oct 11am–4pm; Nov Sat & Sun 11am–3pm • £8; grounds only £4 • T 01896 830323, W traquair.co.uk

Peeping out from the trees just south of Innerleithen, **Traquair House** is the oldest continuously inhabited house in Scotland, with the present line of owners – the Maxwell Stuarts – having lived here since 1491. The first laird of Traquair inherited an elementary fortified tower, which his powerful descendants gradually converted into a mansion that was visited, it is said, by 27 monarchs, including Mary, Queen of Scots.

Traquair's main appeal is in its ancient shape and structure. The whitewashed facade is strikingly handsome, with narrow windows and trim turrets surrounding the tiniest of front doors. Inside, you can see the original vaulted cellars, where locals once hid their cattle from raiders, and the twisting main staircase as well as the earlier medieval version, later a secret escape route for persecuted Catholics until the Emancipation Act freed things up in 1829. Of the furniture and fittings, it's not any particular piece that impresses, but rather the accumulation of family possessions and revealing letters that give a real insight into the Maxwell Stuarts' revolving-door fortunes and eccentricities. In the **museum room** is a wealth of treasures, including a rosary and crucifix owned by Mary, Queen of Scots and the cloak worn by the earl of Nithsdale during his dramatic escape from the Tower of London, where he was under sentence of death for his part in the Jacobite Rising of 1715. The earl was saved by his wife who got his jailers drunk and smuggled him out disguised as a maid in spite of his red beard.

It's worth sparing time for the surrounding **gardens**, where you'll find a **hedge maze**,

several craft workshops and the **Traquair House Brewery** dating back to 1566, which was revived in 1965 and claims to be the only British brewery that still ferments totally in oak. You can learn about the brewery and taste the ales in the Brewery Shop.

There's also an attractive café serving above-average snacks in an estate cottage on the redundant avenue, which leads to the locked **Bear Gates**; Bonnie Prince Charlie departed the house through the gates, and the then-owner promised to keep them locked till a Stuart should ascend the throne.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By bus The bus terminal is next to the main car park just north of the eastern end of the main shopping street.

Destinations Edinburgh (2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 1hr); Galashiels (2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 40min); Melrose (2 hourly, 1 on Sun; 1hr).

PEEBLES AND AROUND

Tourist office A well-stocked tourist office is in the High St (Nov–March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4pm; April–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm; T 01721 723159), with 24hr virtual tourist information available by way of a touch screen tablet stuck onto the shop window.

ACCOMMODATION

Green Tree Hotel 41 Eastgate T 01721 720582, W greentreehotel.com. A good economical option in the heart of town, between the bus station and the High St, with a choice of singles, doubles and family rooms. All are perfectly comfortable with simple decor and come with en suite and breakfast included. £75

Kingsmuir House Springhill Rd T 01721 724413 W kingsmuirhouse.co.uk. Dating from the 1850s, this generously proportioned villa offers two exemplary guest rooms with well coordinated decor and traditional furnishings; just 2min from the main drag and overlooking Victoria Park across the Tweed from the centre. £120

Traquair 7 miles east of Peebles, on the B7062 T 01896 830323, W traquair.co.uk. Most visitors come here as a day-trip from Peebles, but if you're really taken by the place, you can stay in one of its three double guest rooms, exquisitely decked out with antiques and four-posters, on a bed-and-breakfast basis. £180

CAMPING

Glentress Forest Lodges The Peel Gateway, entrance to Glentress, 2 miles east of Peebles on the A72. T 01721 721007, W glentressforestlodges.co.uk. Like sections of upturned boat hulls, these simple but attractive wooden huts are arranged in clusters, somehow resembling a prehistoric settlement. The accommodation is basic; some benches to sit/sleep on, a door and a window but there's also a communal kitchen and a generous firewood supply. Sleeps five at a push. £48

Rosetta Holiday Park Rosetta Rd T 01721 720770, W www.rosettaholidaypark.com. The only campsite in Peebles not next to a main road, it's peacefully set on the northwest edge of town, surrounded by mature woods, with hike-able drove roads up the Meldon Hills starting almost from the site entrance. There's a bar that serves food in the evenings and for kids, a TV/poolroom as well as a walled playground. April–Oct. £16/pitch

MOUNTAIN BIKING IN GLENTRESS FOREST AND INNERLEITHEN

Glentress Forest, two miles east of Peebles on the A72, has some of the best opportunities for mountain biking in Scotland. Not only are there five superb, carefully crafted, purpose-built trails, colour-coded for difficulty, there's a fantastic bike centre at the entrance to the forest called the **Peel Gateway**. This is a great place for mountain bikers, with changing rooms and showers, a café and a shop filled with spares as well as bike hire from Alpine Bikes. You can choose from a whole range of excellent mountain bikes for all ages and there are occasional training weekends when you can improve your technique. If you fancy staying several days it's worth checking out the timber wigwams (see above) near the entrance. There are more trails just a few miles southeast of Glentress near **Innerleithen**, geared towards more advanced riders, with bike rental available in Innerleithen. Glentress and Innerleithen are collectively one of seven forest biking centres in southern Scotland, known collectively as the **7stanes** (W 7stanesmountainbiking.com).

BIKE RENTAL

Bike hire is pricey hereabouts, ranging from £50 to £70 per day although child bikes are just £15.

Alpine Bikes High St, Innerleithen (in a disused church) T 01896 830880, W alpinebikes.com. Mon–Fri 9.30am–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–6pm.

Alpine Bikes The Peel Gateway, entrance to Glentress, 2 miles east of Peebles on the A72 T 01721 724522, W alpinebikes.com. Daily 9.30am–6pm.

EATING AND DRINKING

★ **Bridge Inn** Port Brae, next to the bridge just off High St ⓣ01721 720589. With its attractive mock-Tudor, dormer frontage, this traditional pub cuts a fine figure in the Peebles skyline. Inside, its classic decor and cosy seating arrangements complement the wide range of real ales and whiskies on offer while out back there's a sunny terrace looking on to the river. Sun–Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am.

Coltman's Deli & Kitchen 71–73 High St ⓣ01721 720405, ⓦcoltmans.co.uk. Passing through the narrow alley next to their immaculate deli you'll find yourself at *Coltman's*, Peebles' most sophisticated dining experience. While most of the ingredients are seasonal and sourced locally, the cuisine thinks globally with an imagination and originality. Fish enthusiasts might try the sea trout with samphire and tomato butter sauce then move on to the vanilla and rhubarb cheesecake; all part of the three course, £26 set menu. Mon–Wed 10am–5pm, Thurs–Sat 10am–10pm, Sun 10am–4pm.

The Courthouse High St ⓣ01721 723537. Moderately swanky bistro with a cocktail bar and child-friendly enclosed beer garden, overlooked by a drinking/dining terrace. The menu here is vast: there's an abundance of sharing platters like Melanzane parmigiana or haggis balls for £5, while for a main dish, try one of the traditional Persian charcoal-grilled meats from £16.50 or play it safe with a £9 pizza. Bar: Sun–Thurs 10am–midnight, Fri & Sat 10am–1am; food served Mon noon–3pm, Wed & Thurs noon–3pm & 5–9pm, Fri & Sat noon–9:30pm, Sun noon–9pm.

Osso 43 Eastgate, ⓣ01721 724477, ⓦossorestaurant.com. Contemporary restaurant, just east of the Eastgate theatre, that does fancy lunches like their truffled scotch egg for £6.50, and moves on to comfort food in the evening. The mains range from the £11 sausage and mash to the £18 lobster or you can snack on tapas for around £4 each. Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Tues–Sat 6–9pm.

The Sunflower 4 Bridgegate ⓣ01721 722420, ⓦwww.thesunflower.net. This adventurous little back restaurant just off Northgate provides an intimate setting for its rustic yet modern cuisine. Their smoked haddock tartlet (£9.50) is clever enough not to overpower its asparagus companion, while veggies can rejoice in the nut-rich roast with cumin potatoes whose price jumps from £9.50 to £11 in the evening. Mon–Sat noon–3pm & 6–9pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Eastgate Theatre and Arts Centre Eastgate. ⓣ01721 725777, ⓦeastgatearts.com. This former church east of High St has been converted into a modern arts space with an eclectic programme of world, folk and light orchestra music as well as theatre, dance and cinema performances. Art exhibitions are, naturally, here too, sited beside the in-house café. Box office: Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

Yarrow Water valley

Cutting through the valley southeast of Peebles is the **Yarrow Water valley**, with a river system that, along with the Ettrick Water, fed the once prosperous mills of Selkirk. Upstream it leads to some of the Borders' finest hiking spots. The A708 leads you to Broadmeadows SYHA **hostel** (see opposite) near Yarrowford which serves as a convenient base and starting point for some good hill walks. From here, you can reach the hilltop cairns of **The Three Brethren** (1530ft), whose summit offers excellent views over this remote corner of the Borders. You can also link up with stretches of the Southern Upland Way by heading east down through Yair Forest, or by following an old drove road west to the Cheese Well at Minchmoor and ending up at Traquair House near Innerleithen (see p.130).

St Mary's Loch and Loch of the Lowes

Sixteen miles west of Selkirk on the A708 lies the Yarrow's source, a pair of icy lakes: **St Mary's Loch**, and its diminutive neighbour, **Loch of the Lowes**, separated by a slender isthmus – home to the Tibbie Shiels Inn - and magnificently set beneath the surrounding hills. This spot was popular with the nineteenth-century Scottish literati, especially Walter Scott and James Hogg, the "Shepherd Poet of Ettrick", who eulogized "the bosom of the lonely Lowes".

For a short and enjoyable walk, follow a section of the Southern Upland Way from the inn along the east side of St Mary's Loch into **Bowerhope Forest**. Alternatively, there's the Southern Upland Way, which heads across the moors north to Traquair

House and south to the valley of the **Ettrick Water**, both strenuous hikes that require an Ordnance Survey map, a compass and proper clothing.

Grey Mare's Tail Waterfall

If you're continuing west along the A708 into Dumfries and Galloway, don't miss the 200ft **Grey Mare's Tail Waterfall** (NTS), four miles southwest of Loch of the Lowes, which tumbles down a rocky crevasse as you descend into Dumfriesshire. The base of the falls is approached by a precipitous footpath along the left side of the stream, a ten-minute clamber each way from the road.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — YARROW WATER

Broadmeadows SYHA Broadmeadows, 4 miles west of Selkirk on the A708 ⓣ01750 76372, ⓦsyha.org.uk. The SYHA's first hostel, opened in 1931, is a charming, traditional one-and-a-half storey cottage with a very limited season. Remember to bring all your supplies here as there's no shop; just excellent hiking right from the doorstep. Mid-June to mid-Aug. £14

Tibbie Shiels Inn Saint Mary's Loch, 17 miles west of Selkirk ⓣ01750 42231, ⓦtibbieshiels.com. Providing basic rooms, predictable bar meals (fish and chips for £11) and a riverside campsite (with tepee) it is its dramatic location and proximity to the Southern Upland Way (see p.138) that keeps this place going. Food served noon–3pm & 6–9pm. Doubles: £90; camping £10/pitch

Jedburgh

Just ten miles north of the English border, **JEDBURGH** nestles in the lush valley of Jed Water near its confluence with the Teviot out on the edge of the wild Cheviot Hills. During the interminable wars between England and Scotland, Jedburgh was the quintessential frontier town, a heavily garrisoned royal burgh incorporating a mighty castle and abbey. Though the castle was destroyed by the Scots in 1409 to keep it out of the hands of the English, its memory has been kept alive by stories. In 1285, for example, King Alexander III was celebrating his wedding feast in the great hall when a ghostly apparition predicted his untimely death and a bloody civil war; sure enough, he died in a hunting accident shortly afterwards and chaos ensued. Today, Jedburgh is the first place of any size that you come to on the A68 if crossing over Carter Bar from England, and as such gets quite a bit of passing tourist trade. The ruined **abbey** is the main event, though a stroll round the old town centre is a pleasant way to while away an hour or so.

Jedburgh Abbey

Abbey Bridge End • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March daily 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS

Despite its ruinous state, **Jedburgh Abbey** still dominates the town, particularly when approached from the south. Founded in the twelfth century as an Augustinian priory by King David I, it's the best preserved of all the Border abbeys, its vast church towering over a sloping site right in the centre of town, beside Jed Water. The abbey was burnt and badly damaged on a number of occasions, but by far the worst destruction was inflicted by the English in the 1540s. By this time, the contemplative way of life had already fallen prey to corruption and only a few canons remained living in the ruins of the abbey, until it was finally closed in 1560. The abbey church remained the parish kirk for another three centuries and as a result has survived particularly intact.

All that remains of the conventual buildings where the canons lived are the foundations and basic ground plan, but then Jedburgh's chief glory is really its **Abbey Church**, which remains splendidly preserved. As you enter via the west door, the three-storey nave's perfectly proportioned parade of columns and arches lies before you, a fine example of the transition from Romanesque to Gothic design,

with pointed window arches surmounted by the round-headed arches of the triforium, which, in turn, support the lancet windows of the clerestory. Be sure you climb up the narrow staircase in the west front to the balcony overlooking the nave, where you can contemplate how the place must have looked all decked out for the marriage of Alexander III to Yolande de Dreux in 1285.

Jedburgh Castle Jail

2

Castlegate; a 5min walk signposted from the main square • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun 1–4pm • Free

An impressive castellated nineteenth-century pile, **Jedburgh Castle Jail**, as its name suggests, was built on the site of the old royal castle. As well as detailed information about Jedburgh's history, there's a fascinating insight into conditions in jail, deportations, crime and punishment. The cells themselves are, for the period, remarkably comfortable, reflecting the influence of reformer John Howard.

Mary Queen of Scots House

Queen St • March–Nov Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun 11am–4pm • Free • ☎ 01835 863331

Despite the name, it's unlikely that Mary actually stayed in the sixteenth-century house known as **Mary Queen of Scots House**, though she did visit the town in 1566 for the Assizes. The attempt to unravel her complex life is cursory, the redeeming features being a copy of her death mask and one of the few surviving portraits of the Earl of Bothwell, her third husband.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — JEDBURGH

By bus Buses pick up and drop off by the car park on Canongate near the town centre. Services are provided by First Bus and Munro's of Jedburgh, 🌐 munrosofjedburgh.co.uk.

Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 7 daily, 5 on Sat, 4 on Sun; 1hr 50min); Galashiels (Mon–Sat hourly, 6 on Sun; 45min); Hawick (Mon–Sat 10–11 daily; 25min); Kelso (Mon–Sat 10–11 daily; 25min); Melrose (Mon–Sat hourly, 6 on Sun; 30min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office On Murray's Green across the road from the Abbey (April–Oct daily, 9am–6pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; ☎ 01835 863170, 🌐 jedburgh.org.uk) and stocks the Jedburgh Town Trail leaflet.

ACCOMMODATION

Jedwater Caravan Park 4 miles south of Jedburgh, signposted off the A68. ☎ 01835 840219. The cheaper and more secluded choice of two campsites nearby, with a pleasant riverside setting. It's a family-orientated site, sizeable enough to have a shop, an exciting play park and a few cute farm animals. March–Oct. £22/pitch

Meadhon House 48 Castlegate ☎ 01835 862504, 🌐 meadhon.co.uk. Pronounced "mawn", this is the finest of several B&Bs among Castlegate's pleasant and antique row of houses, with tasteful en-suite rooms. £60

Willow Court The Friars; from Market Place follow Exchange St and take the first right into Friarsgate. ☎ 01835 863702, 🌐 willowcourtjedburgh.co.uk. This five-star rated B&B, a 2min walk from the centre, has three frill-packed en suites offering the highest level of comfort in Jedburgh. £80

JEDBURGH FESTIVALS

Jedburgh is at its busiest during the town's two main festivals. The **Common Riding**, or Callants' Festival, takes place from late June to early July, when the young people of the town – especially the lads – mount up and ride out to check the burgh boundaries, a reminder of more troubled days when Jedburgh was subject to English raids. In similar spirit, early February sees the day-long **Jedburgh Hand Ba'** game, an all-male affair between the "uppies" (those born above Market Place) and the "doonies" (those born below). The aim of the game is to get a hay-stuffed leather ball – originally representing the head of an Englishman – from one end of town to the other.

EATING AND DRINKING

Border Meringues Unit 1, Old Station Yard, Edinburgh Rd; 0.5 mile north off the Abbey opposite the Shell garage. ☎01835 863383. An unlikely setting for a café /cake shop in an anonymous industrial estate building on the outskirts of town, but locals go out of their way for this place. There are all manner of cakes and tray bakes here, with prices starting at £1.50. Mon–Sat 10.30am–4.30pm.

Clock Tower Bistro Abbey Place ☎01835 869788, 🌐clocktowerbistro.co.uk. This conjures up vibrant, challenging dishes like the venison wellington at £15. The menus – particularly the vegetarian options – show refreshing attention to creativity, and a wide choice to suit all budgets; light-bite lunches from £4.25. Restaurant: Tues–Sat 10am–4pm & 6–9pm. Bar: Thurs 6–11pm, Fri 6pm–1am, Sat noon–1am, Sun noon–11pm.

Hawick and around

Despite being a busy, working mill town, **HAWICK** (pronounced "hoyk") has a surprising number of visitors, the majority of whom come in search of bargains from its woollen knitwear factory outlets. Its textiles industry has been the mainstay of the economy for the last few hundred years, but the town's true heyday came with the advent of steam power which saw a rapid expansion from the town's fifty or so watermills and the formation of knitwear brands like Pringle, Lyle & Scott and Peter Scott. Much of the Victorian architecture here reflects the prosperity of this period, particularly the Scots Baronial town hall halfway down the high street. The town's pre-industrial fortunes were not so; good, though one exception is a skirmish in 1514 when the local Hawick callants (boys) defeated a small English force and captured their banner, an event immortalized by the statue at the end of the high street.

Hermitage Castle

16 miles south of Hawick, signposted off the B6399 • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £4.50; HS

Bleak and forbidding, **Hermitage Castle** is bedevilled by all sorts of horrifying legends: one owner, William Douglas, starved his prisoners to death, while Lord de Soulis, another occupant, engaged the help of demons to fortify the castle in defiance of the king, Robert the Bruce, who had him boiled to death. From the outside, the castle remains an imposing structure, its heavy walls topped by stepped gables and a tidy corbelled parapet. However, the apparent homogeneity is deceptive: certain features were invented during a Victorian restoration, a confusing supplement to the ad hoc alterations that had already transformed the fourteenth-century original. The ruinous interior is a bit of a letdown, but look out for the tight Gothic doorways and gruesome dungeon.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

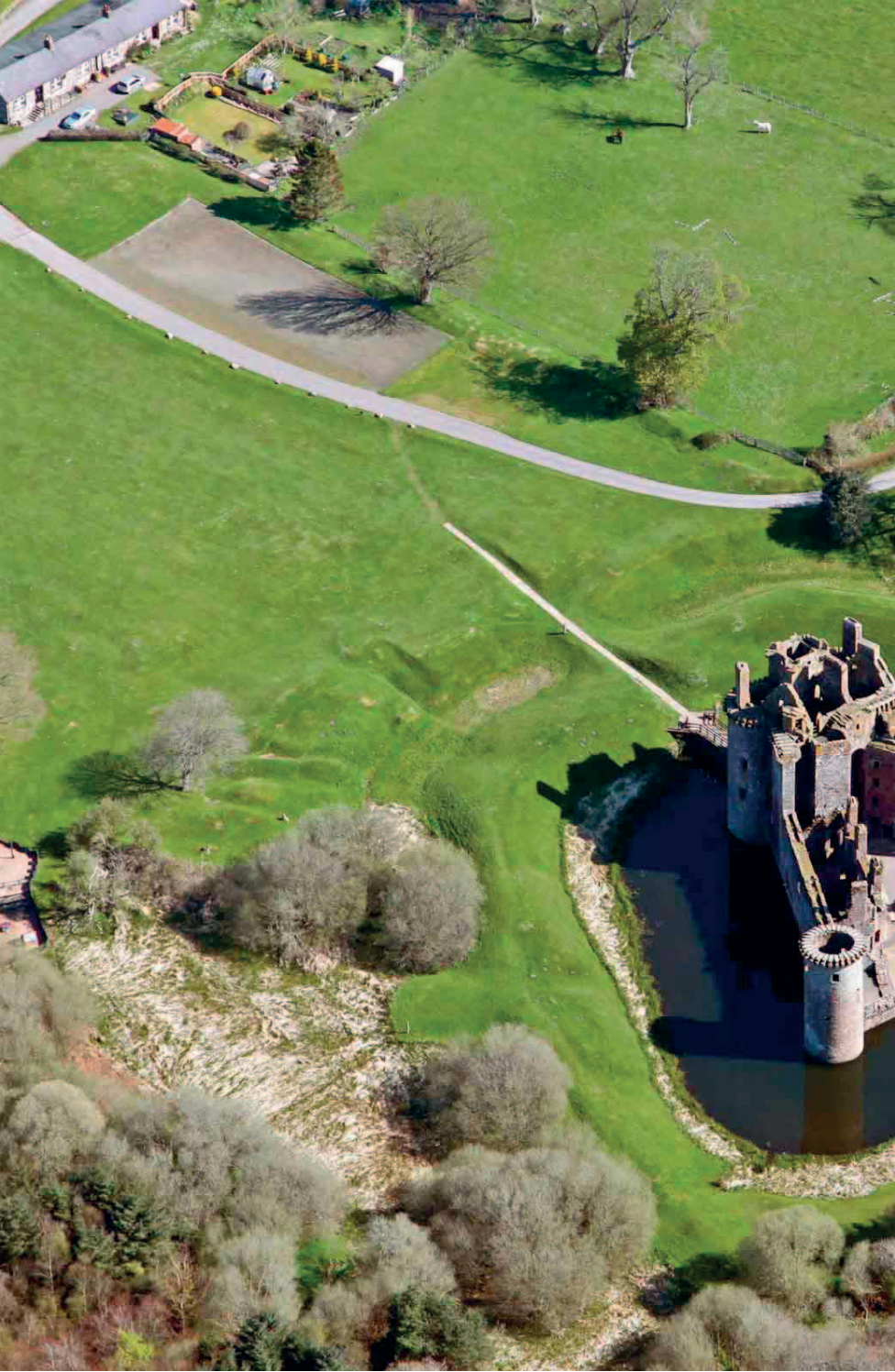
By bus The main bus stand is just north of the centre in Mart St.

Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Sat half-hourly, Sun hourly; 2hr 5min); Galashiels (Mon–Sat half-hourly, Sun hourly; 40min); Jedburgh (Mon–Sat hourly; 25min); Kelso (Mon–Sat hourly; 1hr); Langholm (Mon–Sat hourly, 4 on Sun; 40min); Selkirk (Mon–Sat half-hourly, Sun hourly; 20min).

Tourist office The tourist office is in Tower Mill, a converted water mill housing a cinema and a good café-bar at the southern end of High St (Mon & Wed 10am–5.30pm, Tues & Thurs 10am–6.15pm, Fri & Sat 10am–7.15pm, Sun noon–3.30pm; ☎01450 373993).

EATING

Turnbull's The Horse Monument, 4 Oliver Place. ☎01450 372020, 🌐turnbullshop.com. A family business since 1855, this characterful deli/café is an essential stop if you're in Hawick. As well as serving light lunches (from around £3.50) and the town's best coffee, beautifully packaged, old-fashioned products are on sale such as the shop's own blended whisky and peppermint sweets known as Hawick Balls. Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm.



Dumfries and Galloway

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CAERLAVEROCK CASTLE

Dumfries and Galloway

Scotland's southwest corner, now known as Dumfries and Galloway, is a region set apart, with few people bothering to exit the main Carlisle–Glasgow motorway that runs through the county. Yet the area has stately homes, deserted hills and ruined abbeys to compete with the best of the Borders. It also has something the Borders don't have, and that's the Solway coast, a long, indented coastline of sheltered sandy coves that's been dubbed the "Scottish Riviera" – an exaggeration perhaps, but it's certainly Scotland's warmest, southernmost stretch of coastline.

3

Dumfries is the region's main settlement, a run-down town that's only a must for those on the trail of **Robert Burns**, who spent the last part of his life here. More compelling is the nearby coast, overlooking the Solway Firth, the shallow estuary wedged between Scotland and England, famed for its wildlife and for the nearby red-sandstone ruins of **Caerlaverock Castle** and **Sweetheart Abbey**. Edged by tidal marsh and mudbank, much of the Solway shoreline is flat and eerily remote, but there are also some fine rocky bays sheltering beneath wooded hills, most notably along the **Colvend coast**. Further along the coast is **Kirkcudbright**, once a bustling port thronged with sailing ships, later an artists' retreat and now a tranquil, well-preserved little eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century town. Like Kirkcudbright, **Threave Garden** and **Threave Castle**, just outside Castle Douglas, are popular with – but not crowded by – tourists.

Contrasting with the essentially gentle landscape of the Solway coast is the brooding presence of the **Galloway Hills** to the north, their beautiful moors, mountains, lakes and rivers centred on the 235 square miles of the **Galloway Forest Park**, a hillwalking and mountain-biking paradise that deserves to be better known than it is. As you countinue west into what used to be Wigtownshire, the landscape becomes flatter and more relentlessly agricultural. The main points of interest here are the attractive seaport of **Portpatrick** on the hammer-headed Rhinns of Galloway and the **Mull of Galloway**, Scotland's southernmost point and a nesting site for thousands of seabirds.

The combination of rolling landscape and quiet back roads makes the region good for **cyclists**: five of the **7stanes** (Ⓦ7stanes.gov.uk) purpose-built mountain-bike routes are in the forested hills of Dumfries and Galloway. This is also rewarding **walking** country, featuring the **Southern Upland Way** (Ⓦsouthernuplandway.com), a 212-mile coast-to-coast hike from Portpatrick in the west to Cockburnspath in the east.

Brief history

The region has a fascinatingly diverse heritage. Originally inhabited by southern Picts, it has at various times been overrun by Romans, Anglo-Saxons from Northumberland and Celts from Ireland: the name Galloway means the "land of the stranger Gaels". It was an unruly land, where independent chieftains maintained close contacts with the Vikings rather than the Scots, right up until medieval times. Gradually, this autonomy was whittled away, and the area was swallowed up by the Scottish Crown, though

Gretna Green marriages p.141
Kirkcudbright's festivals p.149
Hiking, biking and star-gazing: Galloway Forest Park p.152
Watersports in Galloway Forest Park p.153
Walks around Portpatrick p.155

KIRKCUDBRIGHT

Highlights

❶ **Caerlaverock Castle** One of Scotland's most photogenic moated castles, beside a superb site for waterfowl and waders. **See p.144**

❷ **Kirkcudbright** One-time artists' colony, and the best-looking town in the "Scottish Riviera". **See p.147**

❸ **Threave Garden and Threave Castle** The perfect day-trip from Castle Douglas: azaleas and rhododendrons to die for and a medieval castle on an island. **See p.149 & p.150**

❹ **Galloway Forest Park** Go mountain biking along remote forest tracks, or hiking on the Southern Upland Way. **See p.150**

❺ **Logan Botanic Garden** Scotland's most exotic garden, where tree ferns, palms and eucalyptus flourish in the southwest's balmy climate. **See p.154**

❻ **Mull of Galloway** Picture-postcard headland, with a Stevenson lighthouse, cliffs full of seabirds and views across the Irish Sea. **See p.155**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.140

Arran
Pladda
Firth Of Clyde
Ayr
Cumnock
Kilmarnock
Leadhills
Wanlockhead
Grey Mare's Tail
0
10
miles
Sanquhar
B797
Moffat
Eskdalemuir
N
Ailsa Craig
Dalmellington
NITHSDALE
A76
Drumlanrig Castle
ESKDALE
B709
A7
Girvan
A713
Carsphairn
Penpont
Thornhill
A74(M)
ANNANDALE
A701
Southern Upland Way
Moniaive
FOREST OF AE
Langholm
A7
Belfast & Larne
Carsenie (2670ft)
Merrick (2746ft)
GLENKENS
A702
Dalry
Glenkiln Reservoir
B7068
Lockerbie
A709
GALLOWAY FOREST PARK
New Galloway
A712
Dumfries
Glentrool
Clatteringshaws Loch
A714
A75
B725
Ecclefechan
B6357
Gretna Green
Corsewall Point
Cairnryan
Parton
Loch Ken
A713
Sweetheart Abbey
Ruthwell
Annan
Newton Stewart
Caimsmore of Fleet (2330ft)
Castle Douglas
New Abbey
Caerlaverock Castle
Castle Kennedy Gardens
Kirroughtree
Threave Castle
Dalbeattie
Criffell (1864ft)
ENGLAND
Carlisle
Stranraer
Dunskey Gardens
A75
Gatehouse of Fleet
Threave Garden
A711
Kippford
Sandyhills
Solway Firth
The Rhinns of Galloway
Glenluce
Wigtown
Rockcliffe
Southerness
Portpatrick
Kirkcudbright
Dundrennan Abbey
A747
A746
A596
Wigtown Bay
Logan Botanic Garden
Port William
Luce Bay
The Machars
Whithorn
Port Logan
Drummore
Isle of Whithorn
Scares
CUMBRIA
Workington
Mull of Galloway
HIGHLIGHTS
1 Caerlaverock Castle
2 Kirkcudbright
3 Threave Garden and Threave Castle
4 Galloway Forest Park
5 Logan Botanic Garden
6 Mull of Galloway
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

GRETNA GREEN MARRIAGES

Up until 1754 English couples could buy a quick and secret wedding at London's Fleet Prison, bribing imprisoned clerics with small amounts of money. The **Hardwicke Marriage Act** brought an end to this seedy wheeze, enforcing the requirement of a licence and a church ceremony. However, in Scotland, a marriage declaration made before two witnesses remained legal. The consequences of this difference in the law verged on farce: hundreds of runaway couples dashed north to Scotland, their weddings witnessed by just about anyone who came to hand – ferrymen, farmers, tollgate keepers and even self-styled "priests" who set up their own "marriage houses".

Gretna Green, due to its position beside the border on the main turnpike road to Edinburgh, became the most popular destination for the fugitives. In their rush, many people tied the knot at the first place to hand after dismounting from the stagecoach, which happened to be a **blacksmith's shop** situated at the crossroads, though the better-off maintained class distinctions, heading for the staging post at Gretna Hall. The association with blacksmiths was strengthened by one of the first "priests", the redoubtable Joseph Paisley, a 25-stone Goliath who – in business from 1754 to 1812 – gave a certain style to the ceremony by straightening a horseshoe, a show of strength rather than a symbolic act. His melodramatic feat led to stories of Gretna Green weddings being performed over the blacksmith's **anvil**, and later "priests" were more than happy to act out the rumour. Gretna Green boomed until the marriage laws were further amended in 1856, but some businesses continued right up to 1940, when marriage by declaration was made illegal.

The only marriages that take place in Gretna Green nowadays, however, are for couples taken in by the "romance" of the name – more than 4000 annually – and English couples under 18, who want to get married without the permission of their parents (Ⓦ gretnaweddings.com).

Galloway continued to be a fiercely independent region, typified by local hero Robert the Bruce. Later, it became a stronghold of the Covenanters, and suffered terribly during the "Killing Times" following the Restoration, when the government forces came to impose Episcopalianism. From around the seventeenth century, the ports of the Solway coast prospered with the expansion of local shipping routes over to Ireland. The region subsequently experienced economic decline as trade routes changed, turning busy ports into sleepy backwaters.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

By train Three train lines run through Dumfries and Galloway. One tracks the A74 motorway between Carlisle and Glasgow, while another heads up Nithsdale via Dumfries and a third stretches from Glasgow to Stranraer in the far southwest.

By ferry Two companies provide services between Northern Ireland and Cairnryan, 6 miles north of Stranraer with 4–8 daily bus connections from Cairnryan to Stranraer and Ayr: StenaLine serves Belfast (5–6 crossings daily; 2hr 15min; Ⓣ 08447 707070, Ⓦ stenaline.co.uk) and P&O Ferries has services to Larne (5–7 crossings; 2hr; Ⓣ 08716 642020, Ⓦ poferries.com).

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

By bus The main bus company for the region is Stagecoach West (Ⓣ 01292 613502, Ⓦ stagecoachbus.com) servicing all the main towns and villages but of little use for the Galloway Forest Park.

Tourist information Ⓦ visitdumfriesandgalloway.co.uk. A good resource for in-depth information and ideas, particularly for families and walking enthusiasts.

Dumfries

Situated on the wide banks of the River Nith, a short distance inland from the Solway Firth, **DUMFRIES** is by far the largest town in southwest Scotland, with a population of more than thirty thousand. Long known as the "Queen of the South" (as is its football club), it flourished as a medieval seaport and trading centre, its success attracting the

attention of many English armies. Despite this, it went on to prosper with its light industries and port supplying the agricultural hinterland. The town planners of the 1960s badly damaged its appearance, but many of the warm red-sandstone buildings that distinguish Dumfries from other places in the southwest survive. The town is second only to Ayr for its associations with **Robbie Burns** (see p.165), who spent the last five years of his life here employed as an exciseman. Consequently a number of sights in Dumfries pay homage to the great poet including his home, his statue, Burns House, his pub, the Globe Inn and his final resting place in a mausoleum beside St Michael's Church.

Globe Inn

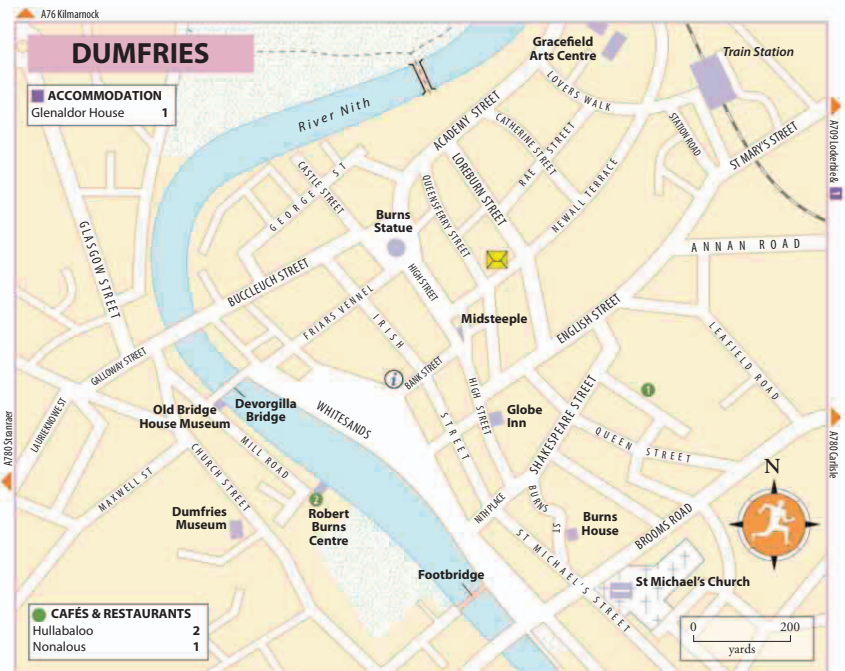
56 High St • Mon–Wed 10am–11pm, Thurs–Sat 10am–midnight, Sun noon–midnight • Free • T 01387 252335, W globeinndumfries.co.uk

If you're on Burns's trail, make sure you duck down the alleyway to the seventeenth-century **Globe Inn**, just past the ornate red and gold Victorian fountain. Burns had a fling with Annie Park, a barmaid in this pub, and the resultant child was taken into the Burns household by his long-suffering wife, Jean Armour. Beyond the main bar you can enter the beautifully panelled snug and sit in the very chair used by the poet – although if you do, by tradition you'll be expected to recite a Burns poem or else buy everyone in the bar a drink.

Burns House

Burns St • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; Oct–March Tues–Sat 10am–1pm & 2–5pm • Free • T 01387 255297

In the simple sandstone building now known as **Burns House**, Robert Burns died of rheumatic heart disease in 1796 aged 37, a few days before the birth of his last son, Maxwell. He lived here for his last three years, though his wife, Jean Armour, stayed



on until her own death, some 38 years later. Inside, there's a collection of Burns memorabilia – manuscripts, letters, his copper kettle, nutmeg grater and the like – while one of the bedroom windows bears his signature, scratched with his diamond ring.

St Michael's Church

As a member of the Dumfries Volunteers, Burns was given a military funeral, before being buried nearby in a simple grave by **St Michael's Church**, a large red-sandstone churchon St Michael's Street, built in 1745. In 1815 his body was dug up and moved across the graveyard to a purpose-built **mausoleum**, a bright white Neoclassical eyesore that houses a statue of him being accosted by the poetic Muse. The graveyard features several tombstones of the poet's friends, a number of them inscribed with wonderfully verbose epitaphs.

Robert Burns Centre

Mill Rd • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; Oct–March Tues–Sat 10am–1pm & 2–5pm; films Tues–Sat • £2 • T 01387 264808, W rbcft.co.uk

In a converted watermill on the western banks of the Nith, the **Robert Burns Centre**, or RBC, has a straightforward exhibition on the poet's years in Dumfries although the most interesting item on display here is the scale model of the town from the 1790s. There's a good audiovisual presentation on Burns in the small cinema which also shows predominantly art-house films in the evenings.

Dumfries Museum

The Observatory, Rotchell Rd • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; Oct–March Tues–Sat 10am–1pm & 2–5pm; camera obscura open weather permitting • Free; camera obscura £2.60 • T 01387 253374, W dumfriesmuseum.com

On the hill west of the Nith stands the **Dumfries Museum**, from which there are great views over the town. The museum is housed partly in an eighteenth-century windmill, which was converted into the town's observatory in the 1830s and features the world's oldest working **camera obscura** on its top floor, well worth a visit on a clear day when the views are projected inside to maximum effect. On the floors below the focus is on local history and prehistory with a good collection of tools and weaponry from the region's earliest peoples as well as some impressive carved masonry from the era of the first Christians.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUMFRIES

By train Dumfries train station is a 5min walk east of the town centre.

Destinations Carlisle (Mon–Sat every 1–2hr, 5 on Sun; 40min); Glasgow Central (Mon–Sat every 1–2hr, 2 on Sun; 1hr 45min); Sanquhar (Mon–Sat every 1–2hr, 2 on Sun; 25min).

By bus Most buses stop off at Whitesands beside the River Nith.

Destinations Kirkcudbright (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun every 2hr; 1hr 40min); New Abbey (Mon–Sat hourly, 6 on Sun; 15min); Stranraer (Mon–Sat every 2hr, 2 on Sun; 2hr 15min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office 64 Whitesands (April–June & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 11am–3pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Sun 11am–4pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat 9.30am–4pm; T 01387 253862).

ACCOMMODATION

Glenaldor House 5 Victoria Terrace T 01387 264248, W glenaldorhouse.co.uk. A light and bright Victorian house near the station with four comfortably spacious en-suite bedrooms. Wake up to a full Scottish breakfast, made with local produce; there's also a wide choice from pastries to porridge. **£62**

EATING

Hullabaloo Robert Burns Centre, Mill Rd ☎01387 259679, ⓦhullabaloorestaurant.co.uk. A casual restaurant on the top floor of a restored old watermill that also houses the Burns Centre and art cinema. The menu, particularly in the evening, is creative with a wide fusion of styles such as crab with watermelon, mint, lemon and basil for £6.50 and a big meaty tapas selection plate for £18.50. Mon–Sat noon–3pm, Tues–Sat 6pm–9pm; Easter–Sept Sun noon–3pm.

★ **Nona Lous** Brooke St ☎01387 249996, ⓦtheoldschooldumfries.com. Located in a converted primary school among arts and beauty-related businesses, this thoroughly contemporary tearoom bakes attractive cakes (around £2 a slice), including a colourful seven-layer rainbow cake. Old crockery and knitted tea and cup cosies give the place a personal touch. Light breakfasts and lunches too. Mon–Wed & Fri 10am–5pm, Thurs 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–4pm.

Around Dumfries

3

Southeast of Dumfries, the medieval ruins of **Caerlaverock Castle** are simply magnificent, as is the adjacent nature reserve and the early Christian cross at nearby **Ruthwell**. On the west bank of the Nith estuary, the star attraction is **Sweetheart Abbey**, the best preserved of the trio of Cistercian abbeys in Dumfries and Galloway.

Caerlaverock Castle

8 miles southeast of Dumfries along the B725 • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • ☎01387 770244 • D6A bus from Great King St in Dumfries (7 buses Mon–Sat, 2 on Sun; 22min)

Caerlaverock Castle is a picture-perfect ruined, moated Scottish castle, built in the late thirteenth century of the rich local red sandstone and preserving a mighty double-towered gatehouse. During the siege of 1300 by Edward I, a contemporary bard commented: "In shape it was like a shield, for it had but three sides round it, with a tower at each corner." Caerlaverock sustained further damage in 1312, this time from the Scots, and again in 1356–57 from the English, forcing numerous rebuilding programmes. The most surprising addition lies inside, where you're confronted by the ornate Renaissance facade of the **Nithsdale Lodging**, erected in the 1630s by the first earl of Nithsdale. Just six years later the earl and his garrison were forced to surrender after a thirteen-week siege and bombardment by the Covenanters, who proceeded to wreck the place. It was never inhabited again.

Caerlaverock Castle makes a good family day out, with a siege-engine playground, a tearoom and an exhibition and video on the siege of 1300, where kids can create their own heraldry. Waymarked walks in the neighbouring **Caerlaverock Wetland Centre** – an area of salt marsh and mud flats abutting the Solway Firth – include one leading to the earthworks of the castle that preceded Caerlaverock; en route, look out for the rare natterjack toad.

Ruthwell Church

7 miles east of Caerlaverock

The modest country church at **RUTHWELL** houses the remarkable 18ft **Ruthwell Cross**, an extraordinary early Christian monument from the early or mid-eighth century when Galloway was ruled by the Northumbrians. The cross was considered idolatrous during the Reformation, smashed and buried, and only finally reassembled in the nineteenth century. The decoration reveals a strikingly sophisticated style and iconography, probably derived from the eastern Mediterranean. The main inscriptions are in Latin, but running round the edge is a poem written in the Northumbrian dialect in runic figures. However, it's the biblical carvings on the main face that really catch the eye – notably Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Jesus.

Sweetheart Abbey

Main St, New Abbey • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Wed, Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • T 01387 850397 • Buses from Dumfries every 2hr Mon–Sat, 3 on Sun; 15min

Sweetheart Abbey takes its unusual name from its founder, Devorgilla de Balliol, Lady of Galloway, who carried the embalmed heart of her husband, John Balliol (after whom Balliol College, Oxford, is named) around with her for the remaining 22 years of her life – she is buried, with the casket, in the presbytery. The last of the Cistercian abbeys to be founded in Scotland, in 1273, Sweetheart is dominated by the red sandstone abbey church, intact minus its roof. Standing in the grassy nave, flanked by giant compound piers supporting early Gothic arches, and above them a triforium, it's easy to imagine what the completed church must have looked like. The central square tower is a massive, brutal structure, but the elaborate tracery in some of the windows and flamboyant corbelling below the central tower clearly mark a change from the austere simplicity of earlier Cistercian foundations.

ACCOMMODATION

Caerlaverock Wetland Centre Eastpark Farm 8 miles southeast of Dumfries along the B725, signposted just east of Caerlaverock Castle T 01387 770200, W wwt.org.uk/visit/caerlaverock. This farmhouse, run by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and with its own attached observation tower, is in the heart of a remote, nature-rich wetland. There are five bedrooms – some en suite – and a shared lounge, kitchen and laundry room. £60

★ **Marthrown of Mabie** Mabie Forest T 01387 247900, W marthrownofmabie.com. Deep in the heart of the forest this remote encampment offers tipis and yurts (each sleeping four), a bunkhouse and, most magical of all, a pair of beautifully thatched, replica Iron Age roundhouses with a central log fire for cooking and warmth. There's a wood-fired hot tub and sauna as well as meals provided at the bunkhouse. Also in the forest are superb purpose-built mountain-biking trails run by the 7stanes (see W 7stanesmountainbiking.com). Roundhouse £17.50/person; tipis £70; yurts £150; bunkhouse £19.50/person

AROUND DUMFRIES

EATING

Abbey Cottage 26 Main St, New Abbey T 01387 850377, W abbeycottagetearoom.com. Enjoying an unrivalled view over Sweetheart Abbey, this tearoom is renowned for its coffee, teas and home-made cakes. The meals are excellent too, exemplified by the formidable ploughman's lunch at £7.65. April–Oct 10am–5pm, Nov, Dec, Feb & March Wed–Sun 11am–4pm.

Nithsdale

North of Dumfries, the A76 and the railway line to Kilmarnock travel the length of **Nithsdale**, whose gentle slopes and old forests hide one major attraction: the many-turreted seventeenth-century mansion of **Drumlanrig Castle** near **Thornhill**, just one of three substantial country seats owned by the duke of Buccleuch. At the opposite end of the class system were the miners who worked the lead mines in the neighbouring Lowther Hills, to the east, now commemorated in the intriguing **Museum of Lead Mining** in Wanlockhead.

Wanlockhead

From the Nith Valley 24 miles north of Dumfries, it's six miles northeast up the striking Mennock Pass to **WANLOCKHEAD**, a remote and windswept spot in the **Lowther Hills**. Sitting at 1500ft, Wanlockhead is the highest village in Scotland.

Museum of Lead Mining

Toll Brae, Wanlockhead • Daily: April–Sept 11am–4.30pm • £7.75 • T 01659 74387, W leadminingmuseum.co.uk

A visit to the **Museum of Lead Mining** starts with a brief foray into the main exhibition where the miner's lives and working conditions are described with the aid of a few

mannequin-enhanced historic scenes. From there you don a hard hat and go on a guided tour of the underground **Lochnell Mine**, resurfacing for a tour of a **miner's cottage** from the 1740s and then one from a hundred years or so later. Also well worth a look is the remarkable eighteenth-century **Miners' Library**; whose 3000-plus volumes were purchased from the voluntary subscriptions of its members. At the end of the visit you can try your hand at gold panning – a sure-fire hit if you have children in tow.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — **WANLOCKHEAD**

By car 30 miles north of Dumfries, off the A76.
By bus Buses run from Sanquhar (5 daily: Mon–Sat; 15min), which is well served by buses from Dumfries.

Drumlanrig Castle

Thornhill, 18 miles north of Dumfries signposted from the A76 • **House** Mid-March to Aug daily 11am–5pm; guided tours only • £10 • **Country park and gardens only** Mid-March–Sept daily 10am–5pm • £6 • ☎ 01848 331555, ⓦ www.drumlanrig.com • Bus stop 1.5 miles' walk; services from Dumfries (every 1 to 2 hrs; 45min) and from Ayr (Mon–Sat 5 buses, Sun 2 buses; 1hr 20min)

3

Drumlanrig Castle is not a true castle but the grandiose stately home of the supremely wealthy Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry. Approached by an impressive driveway that sweeps along an avenue of lime trees, the seventeenth-century sandstone "Pink Palace" bristles with cupolas, turrets and towers. The highlights of the richly furnished interior are the **paintings** by the great masters, most notably Rembrandt, van Dyck, Holbein and Gainsborough.

Drumlanrig offers a host of other attractions, including formal **gardens** and a forested **country park**. Before you go for a stroll round the gardens, pick up the tree trail leaflet, which points out significant trees, such as the red oak planted by Neil Armstrong; seek out the Victorian **Heather Hut**. The old stableyard beside the castle contains a visitor centre, a few shops, the inevitable tearoom and a useful **bike rental** outlet (hire: £7 for 1 hour), as the park is crisscrossed by footpaths and cycle routes. A **cycle museum** boasts a replica of the first-ever pedal bike, invented in 1839 by local boy Kirkpatrick MacMillan.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — **NITHSDALE**

Thornhill Inn 104 Drumlanrig St, Thornhill ☎ 01848 330326, ⓦ thornhillinn.co.uk. One of the more comfortable places to stay locally, with all rooms en suite and with wi-fi. A delightful bar area has a log fire and a restaurant serving traditional roasts and fried fish from £13. The cheaper bar menu features the likes of home-made vegetable fajita for £9.90. Food served daily 5–9pm, lunch by arrangement only. **£80**

The Colvend coast

The **Colvend coast**, twenty miles or so southwest of Dumfries, is probably one of the finest stretches of coastline along the so-called "Scottish Riviera". The best approach is via the A710, which heads south through New Abbey, before cutting across a handsome landscape of rolling farmland to the aptly named **Sandyhills.** A scenic five-mile coastal path runs from there past the cliffs of Castlehill Point and through the pleasant estuary villages of **Rockcliffe** and **Kippford**.

Sandyhills

Little more than a scattering of houses dotted around a wide, sandy bay, **SANDYHILLS**, 18 miles southwest of Dumfries, looks across the tidal mud flats of the Solway Firth to the Lake District beyond. There are some dramatic coves a short walk west of the bay, while inland the hills undulate gently with farmland interspersed with clutches of forest and small lochs.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **SANDYHILLS**

By bus There are buses from Dumfries (6 daily, Mon–Sat, 4 on Sun; 55min) and Rockcliffe (5 daily, Mon–Sat, 4 on Sun; 10min).

ACCOMMODATION

Craigbittern Main Rd (☎01387 780247, ⓦcraigbitterncottage.co.uk A nicely decorated traditional stone self-catering cottage available for rent by the week, sleeping six in two bedrooms and a living room; set back from the road and looking out to the Solway Firth. £450/week

Rockcliffe and around

A village on the Urr estuary twenty miles southwest of Dumfries, **ROCKCLIFFE** peacefully shelters between wooded hills and its beautiful rocky, sand and shell bay. For vehicles, Rockcliffe is a dead end, but it's the start of a pleasant half-hour walk along the Jubilee Path to neighbouring **KIPPFORD**, a tiny, lively yachting centre strung out along the east bank of the estuary. En route, the path passes the Celtic hillfort of the **Mote of Mark**, a useful craggy viewpoint. At low tide you can walk over the Rough Firth causeway from the shore below across the mud flats to **Rough Island**, a humpy bird sanctuary owned by the National Trust for Scotland – it's out of bounds in May and June when terns and oystercatchers are nesting.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **ROCKCLIFFE AND AROUND**

By bus Buses stop at the road's end next to the bay and serve Dumfries (Mon–Sat, 3 daily, 4 on Sun; 1hr 5min) and Kippford (Mon–Sat, 5 daily, 4 on Sun; 10min).

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Roughfirth House** Roughfirth, Kippford ☎01556 620330, ⓦkippford.com. Halfway between Kippford and Rockcliffe accessed by a private cul-de-sac from Kippford, this B&B has an en-suite double and a two-bedroomed family suite with sun lounge overlooking the waterfront. Doubles £90; family suites £130

EATING AND DRINKING

Barons Craig Hotel 250yd north of the shore, Rockcliffe ☎01556 630225, ⓦbaronscraighotel.co.uk. A short walk uphill from the shorefront, this beautiful old hotel's restaurant has superb coastal views and its well-balanced and reasonably priced menu might include fish and chips for £10.50 and pork with fennel and leek compote as part of the two-course evening menu at £19. Worth coming here just for a drink on the terrace. Noon–2pm, 7–8.30pm.

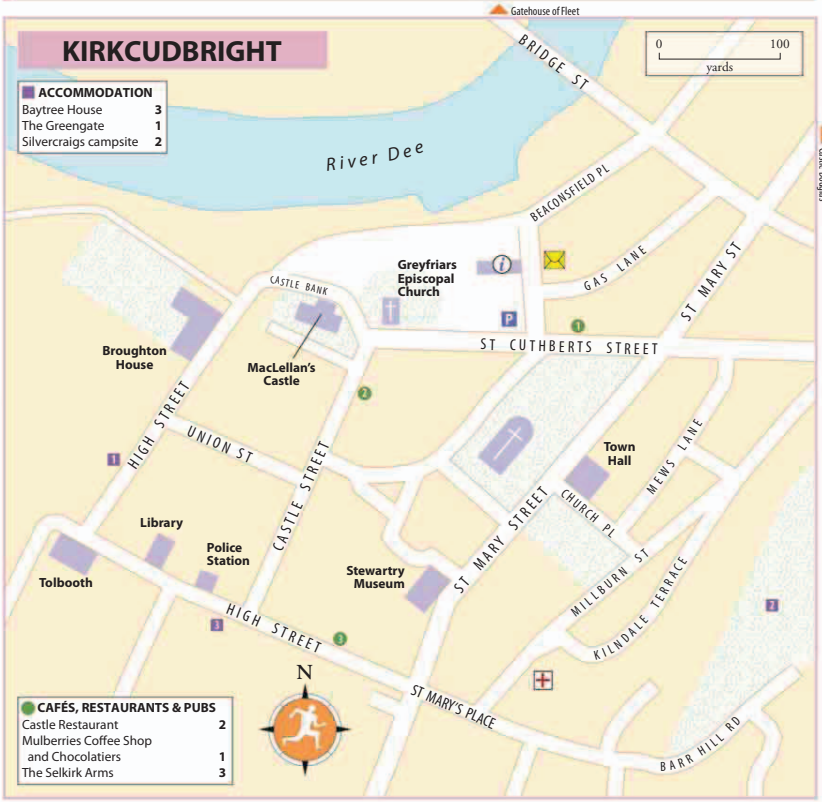
Kirkcudbright and around

KIRKCUDBRIGHT – pronounced "kir-coo-bree" – hugging the muddy banks of the River Dee ten miles southwest of Castle Douglas, is the only major town along the Solway coast to have retained a working harbour. In addition, it has a ruined castle and the most attractive of town centres, a charming medley of simple two-storey cottages with medieval pends, Georgian villas and Victorian townhouses, all built in a mixture of sandstone, granite and brick, and attractively painted. Not surprisingly, Kirkcudbright became something of a magnet for Scottish artists from the late nineteenth century onwards.

MacLellan's Castle

Castle St • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm, Oct–March Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • ☎01557 331856

The most striking sight in Kirkcudbright is **MacLellan's Castle**, a pink-flecked sixteenth-century tower house that sits at one end of the High Street, by the



harbourside. Part fortified keep and part spacious mansion, the castle was built in the 1570s for the Provost of Kirkcudbright, Sir Thomas MacLellan of Bombie, when a degree of law and order permitted the aristocracy to relax its defensive preoccupations and satisfy its desire for comfort. As a consequence, chimneys replaced battlements and windows begin at the ground floor. Nevertheless, the walls remain impressively thick and there are a handful of wide-mouthed gun loops. The interior is well preserved, from the kitchen and vaulted storerooms in the basement, to the warren of well-appointed domestic apartments above. MacLellan's son, Robert, amassed so many debts that on his death in 1639, the house had to be sold off, and from then on it was more or less abandoned.

Broughton House

12 High St • April–Oct noon–5pm; also Feb & March garden only Mon–Fri 11am–4pm • £6.50; NTS • 01557 330437

Near the castle, on the L-shaped High Street, is **Broughton House**, a smart Georgian townhouse set back from, and elevated above, the surrounding terraces. This is the former home of the artist **Edward Hornel** (1863–1933), an important member of the late nineteenth-century Scottish art scene, who spent his childhood a few doors down the street, and returned in 1900 to establish an artists' colony in Kirkcudbright with some of the "Glasgow Boys" (see p.196). Hornel bought Broughton House in 1901 and added a studio and a glass-roofed, mahogany-panelled gallery at the back of the house. The gallery, now filled with the mannered and rather formulaic paintings of girls

KIRKCUDBRIGHT'S FESTIVALS

Kirkcudbright was the location of much of the cult 1970s film, *The Wicker Man*, and is the nearest town for **The Wickerman Festival** (Ⓦ thewickermanfestival.co.uk), southwest Scotland's biggest music festival, on the third weekend in July, during which a giant Wicker Man is torched. The town also has a much smaller **jazz festival** (Ⓦ kirkcudbrightjazzfestival.co.uk) in mid-June, with a strong emphasis on Dixieland as well as a host of **summer festivities** (Ⓦ kirkcudbright.co.uk) in the middle of August including a military tattoo and fireworks display.

at play that he churned out in the latter part of his career, also features a scaled-down plaster cast of some of the Elgin Marbles. A trip to Japan in 1893 imbued Hornel with a life-long affection for the country, and his surprisingly large, densely packed, wonderful jewel-box **gardens** have a strong Japanese influence.

Stewartry Museum

6 St Mary St • May, June & Sept Mon–Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; Oct Mon–Sat 11am–4pm, Sun 2–5pm; Nov–April Mon–Sat 11am–4pm • Free • ☎ 01557 331643

Don't miss the small **Stewartry Museum**. It's an extraordinary collection: cabinets crammed with anything from glass bottles, weaving equipment, pipes, pictures and postcards to stuffed birds, pickled fish and the tricorn hats once worn by town officials. There are also examples of book jackets designed by Jessie M.King and E.A. Taylor.

Dundrennan Abbey

Dundrennan • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • ☎ 01557 500262 • Bus #505 connects Dundrennan with Kirkcudbright (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 10min)

Some six miles southeast of Kirkcudbright, the grey stone ruins of **Dundrennan Abbey** stand at the edge of the village of the same name. Founded in 1142, Dundrennan was the mother house of the local Cistercian abbeys of Sweetheart and Glenluce, and was clearly the grandest of the lot, even though it's now reduced to just its transepts. The chief treasures of the abbey are the chapterhouse's finely carved cusped portal, and the medieval effigy of a tonsured abbot in the northwest corner of the nave; he was murdered – hence the faded dagger in his chest – and the figure being trampled at his feet is thought to be his assassin, in the process of being disembowelled.

Threave Garden

2 miles southwest of Castle Douglas • April–Oct daily 10am–5pm, Nov–Dec & Feb–March Fri–Sun, 10am–5pm; Threave House can be visited on a guided tour April–Oct Wed–Fri & Sun 10am–5pm • NTS; £7; house and garden £12 • ☎ 01556 502575

Threave Garden, the premier horticultural sight in Dumfries and Galloway, is a pleasant mile or so's walk or cycle south of Castle Douglas, along the shores of Loch Carlingwark. The garden features a magnificent spread of flowers and woodland across sixty acres, subdivided into more than a dozen areas, from the old-fashioned herbaceous borders of the Walled Garden to the brilliant banks of rhododendrons in the Woodland Garden and the ranks of primula, astilbe and gentian in the Peat Garden. In springtime, thousands of visitors turn up for the flowering of more than two hundred types of daffodil.

Threave is also home to the School of Practical Gardening, whose postgraduate students occupy one floor of **Threave House**, a hulking Scots Baronial mansion built by the Gordon family in 1872, and now restored to its 1938 condition.

Threave Castle

2 miles west of Castle Douglas, off the A75 • April–Sept daily 9.30am–4.30pm, Oct 9.30am–3.30pm • £4.50; HS • 07711 223101

A visit to **Threave Castle** begins with a ten-minute walk from the car park to the River Dee, where you ring a brass bell for the boat to take you over to the flat and grassy island on which the stern-looking castle stands.

Built in around 1370 for one of the Black Douglases, Archibald the Grim, first Lord of Galloway and third Earl of Douglas, the fortress was among the first of its kind, a sturdy, rectangular structure completed shortly after the War of Independence. The rickety curtain wall to the south and east is all that remains of the **artillery fortifications**, hurriedly constructed in the 1450s by the ninth earl in a desperate – and unsuccessful – attempt to defend the castle against James II's new-fangled cannon. The castle was partially dismantled in the 1640s, but enough remains of the interior to make out its general plan.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses to Kirkcudbright stop by the harbour car park. Destinations Dumfries (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun every 2hr; 1hr 40min); Gatehouse of Fleet (Mon–Sat hourly, 5 on Sun; 10min).

KIRKCUDBRIGHT AND AROUND

INFORMATION

Tourist office Harbour Square (Feb–March & Nov Mon–Sat 11am–4pm, April–June & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm Sun 11am–3pm, July & Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm Sun 10am–5pm; 01557 330494, kirkcudbright.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

Baytree House 110 High St 01557 330824, baytreekirkcudbright.co.uk. An old-fashioned Georgian B&B with four spacious rooms and a drawing room for use by guests. There's also a self-catering garden studio for two with its own conservatory and garden (minimum stay usually three days). Doubles £78; apartment £92

★ **The Greengate** 46 High St 01557 331895, thegreengate.co.uk. Once the home of the illustrator Jessie M. King, this attractive, creaky old B&B offers more privacy than your average guesthouse. There's only one double room for rent, with its own lounge and reception room with log fire and antique furniture. You can also visit the artist owners' studio or take a stroll round the garden. £80

Silvercraigs Caravan and Camping Site Silvercraigs Rd 07824 528482. Centrally located overlooking town, a small, no-frills campsite run by the council. It mostly caters to caravans and motorhomes but it's possible to pitch a tent here too. The facilities on offer include electric connection, a playground and self-service laundry. Easter–Oct. £12/pitch; £18/caravan

EATING AND DRINKING

Castle Restaurant 5 Castle St 01557 330569, thecastlerestaurant.net. An intimate contribution to Kirkcudbright's small fine dining scene, offering Scots-French cuisine in tasteful surroundings overlooking the castle. Offering three courses for £20, the menu might include smoked duck two ways, pairing breast meat with smoked apple duck pâté and honey. Mon–Sat 6–9pm.

Mulberries Coffee Shop and Chocolatiers 11 St Cuthbert St 01557 330961. The town's finest coffee, cakes and chocolates are served in this cosy little café near the harbour car park. The cream tea for £5 offers excellent quality and value for money and coffee comes with free refills. Mon–Wed & Fri–Sat 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–7pm, Sun 11am–6pm.

Selkirk Arms 125 High St 01557 330402, selkirkarmshotel.co.uk. One of the town's more economical dining options; its wide-ranging menu includes soup and soda bread for £4 and wholetail scampi for £11. Daily noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

Galloway Forest Park and around

The strange thing about Galloway is that while the area around the coast is all rolling farmland, stately homes, sandy coves and estuarine mud flats, you only have to head north ten or twenty miles and you're transported to the entirely different landscape of the

OPPOSITE MULL OF GALLOWAY LIGHTHOUSE (P.155)>

Galloway Hills, an environment of glassy lochs, wooded hills and bare, rounded peaks. Much of this landscape is now incorporated into the **Galloway Forest Park**, Britain's largest forest park, which stretches all the way from the southern part of Ayrshire right down to Gatehouse of Fleet, laid out on land owned by the Forestry Commission. Few people live here, but the park is a major draw for hikers and mountain bikers. Accommodation is sparse in the park itself: use **Newton Stewart**, to the southwest, as a base.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus No buses run along the park's only road (the Queen's Way/A712), so if you don't have transport you either need to approach the park from New Galloway to the east or Newton Stewart to the southwest.

Destinations From New Galloway: Castle Douglas (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 30min); Dumfries (Mon–Sat 2 daily; 1hr). From Newton Stewart: Dumfries (Mon–Sat every 1–2 hours, 2 on Sun; 1hr 30min), Stranraer (Mon–Sat hourly, 4 on Sun; 45min); Wigtown (Mon–Sat hourly, 6 on Sun; 15min).

GALLOWAY FOREST PARK AND AROUND

INFORMATION

3

Tourist office Dashwood Square, Newton Stewart (April–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–4pm, Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 11am–3pm; T 01671 402431, W newtonstewart.org).

Galloway Forest Park Office 26 Main St, St John's Town of Dalry (Mon–Thurs 8am–5pm, Fri 8am–4.30pm; T 01671 402420, W www.forestry.gov.uk/gallowayforestpark).

Visitor centres By Clatteringshaws Loch, at Glentrool and at Kirroughtree (times vary but are generally March–June & Sept–Oct Thurs–Sun 10.30am–4.30pm, July–Aug 10.30am–5.30pm). Each has a tearoom, several waymarked walks and lots of information on activities and events.

ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND DRINKING

Wild camping is permitted within the Galloway Forest Park but otherwise most accommodation options are limited to in and around Newton Stewart and New Galloway on the park's western and eastern fringes.

Creebridge House Hotel Creebridge, Newton Stewart T 01671 402121, W creebridge.co.uk. The town's most luxurious hotel is this eighteenth-century former hunting lodge, with extensive grounds. It's also a welcoming spot for a pint of local real ale; the chef's signature dish is the bitter-sweet barbary duck breast with cranberry jus for

HIKING, BIKING AND STAR-GAZING: GALLOWAY FOREST PARK

Both Glentrool and Kirroughtree have mountain-bike trails, which form part of southern Scotland's outstanding mountain-biking facilities, known as the **7stanes** (W 7stanes.co.uk). Of the two, **Kirroughtree**, three miles east of Newton Stewart, is by far the most varied and fun, with lots of exciting single-track trails for all abilities and good bike-rental facilities.

Hikers are better off heading for **Glentrool**, at the western edge of the park, about ten miles north of Newton Stewart, where a narrow lane twists the five miles over to **Loch Trool**. On the north side of the loch the **Bruce Stone**, near the lovely Buchan Waterfall, marks the spot where Robert the Bruce ambushed an English force in 1307 after routing the main body of the army at Solway Moss. From here, you can follow the Gariland Burn to Loch Neldricken and Loch Enoch, with their silver granite sands, and then on to the Devil's Bowling Green, strewn with hundreds of erratic boulders left by the retreating glaciers. Alternatively, you can head for the Range of the Awful Hand, whose five peaks include the **Merrick** (2746ft), the highest hill in southern Scotland.

The only surfaced road to cross the park is the desolate twenty-mile stretch of the A712 between Newton Stewart and New Galloway, known as the **Queen's Way**. About seven miles east of Newton Stewart, at the **Grey Mare's Tail Bridge**, there are various forest trails, all delving into the pine forests beside the road, crossing gorges, waterfalls and burns. There's also a **Wild Goat Park** and, a mile or so further up the road, a **Red Deer Range**. A few more miles on, you'll come to **Clatteringshaws Loch**, a reservoir surrounded by pine forest, and connected with the Southern Upland Way on its north side. Heading southeast from Clatteringshaws is the **Raiders Road**, a ten-mile-long toll road that shadows the River Dee, with some great waterfalls and pools for swimming in.

The park has been formally designated a "dark sky park", with designated spots for astronomy (see W www.forestry.gov.uk/darkskygalloway).

WATERSPORTS IN GALLOWAY FOREST PARK

Loch Ken on the eastern edge of the Galloway Forest Park is a hub for water activities. **Loch Ken Water Ski and Wakeboard School** (Loch Ken Marina, Parton ⓣ01644 470333, ⓦskilochken.co.uk) on the eastern side of the loch, halfway down, can give an hour's ski tuition for £90 or a shot on a towed banana boat for £8. For other watersports head for the **Galloway Activity Centre** (Loch Ken, on the A713 ⓣ01644 420626, ⓦlochken.co.uk) where you can paddle a kayak for £16.50 an hour or have half a day's windsurfing for £36.

£16. Food served noon–2pm & 6–9pm. £116

Galloway Activity Centre Loch Ken, on the A713, near New Galloway ⓣ01644 420626, ⓦlochken.co.uk. As well as hosting a wide variety of land- and water-based activities, this company also offers a range of accommodation including a private loch-side cabin with heating and electricity or a Mongolian yurt with a blazing central wood stove. The café caters for non-residents also and sells cakes, tray bakes and a choice of soup with toastie for just £3.50; guests can also eat here in the evenings by arrangement. Food served April–May & Sept–Oct Sat–Sun 9am–5pm, June–Aug daily 9am–5pm Cabin for two £35; yurt for six £81

Newton Stewart Youth Hostel Millcroft Rd, Newton Stewart ⓣ01671 402211, ⓦsyha.org.uk. In a former primary school on the north end of town, this is well placed to reach the Kirroughtree mountain-bike trail (see opposite). The facilities include self-service laundry, kitchen and a locked bike shed. March–Sept. Dorms £15

3

Wigtown

Seven miles south of Newton Stewart, **WIGTOWN** is tiny yet was once the county town of Wigtownshire. Despite its modest size, it has a remarkable main square, a vast, triangular-shaped affair, its layout unchanged since medieval times. Over the last decade or so Wigtown has reinvented itself as "Scotland's National Book Town", with more than a dozen **bookshops** occupying some of the houses lining the square, and more elsewhere; the town hosts an autumn book festival (ⓦwigtownbookfestival.com).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — WIGTOWN

By bus Buses stop on the main square and services run to Newton Stewart (Mon–Sat hourly, 6 on Sun; 15min) and Stranraer (Mon–Sat 2 daily; 1hr 30min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Hillcrest House Maidland Place ⓣ01988 402018, ⓦhillcrest-wigtown.co.uk. This extended stone Victorian villa on the south side of town provides plenty of space. Champions of slow food, the owners turn out a substantial three-course menu (£21) each night that might include roast venison or a caramelized onion and cheese tart. Food served at 7pm. Doubles £70; family room £96

The Rhinns of Galloway

The hilly, hammer-shaped peninsula at the westernmost point of the Solway coast, known as the **Rhinns of Galloway**, encompasses two contrasting towns: the old seafaring port of **Portpatrick**. and the grimy port of **Stranraer**, which is struggling with the loss of its regular ferry services to Northern Ireland (these now depart from Cairnryan seven miles north). At either end of the peninsula are two lighthouses: one stands above Corsewall Point, and now houses a luxury hotel, the other stands on the **Mull of Galloway**, a windswept headland at the southwest tip of Scotland, which is home to a vast array of nesting seabirds. The Gulf Stream dominates the climate here and subtropical plants grow in abundance throughout the area's gardens, linked by the signposted official garden route (ⓦscotlandsgarderoute.co.uk). Each has its own personality, with colourful seasonal displays, palms trees and often coastal views. If you only have time to visit two, aim for Castle Kennedy Gardens and Logan.

Castle Kennedy Gardens

Castle Kennedy, 3 miles east of Stranraer April–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Feb, March & Oct Sat–Sun 10am–5pm • £5 • T 01776 702024, W castlekennedygardens.co.uk

The approach to **Castle Kennedy Gardens** passes along a tree-lined avenue that frames the ruined medieval fortress of Castle Kennedy beyond, and then across a palm-fringed canal. The castle forms the centrepiece of the gardens, on a hill squeezed between two lochs, though its ruins can no longer be visited. The 75-acre landscaped gardens stretch west as far as nearby Lochinch Castle, seat of the earl of Stair (and also inaccessible), via a giant lily pond and a stupendous avenue of monkey puzzle trees.

Portpatrick

Situated roughly halfway along the west shore of the Rhinns, **PORTPATRICK** has an attractive pastel-painted seafront wrapped around a small rocky bay, sheltered by cliffs. Until the mid-nineteenth century Portpatrick was a thriving seaport, serving as a major embarkation point for Ireland, with coal, cotton and British troops heading in one direction, Ulster cattle and linen in the other. Nowadays, minus its railway, it's a quiet, comely resort enjoyed for its rugged scenery, sea-angling and gentle hikes.

Dunskey Gardens

On the B738 just north of Portpatrick • April–Oct 10am–5pm, late Feb Sat–Sun 10am–4pm • £5 • T 01776 810211, W dunskey.com

Encircled by forest just over a mile north of Portpatrick, **Dunskey Gardens** has a restored Victorian glasshouse, walled garden, maze and tearoom, making for a rewarding excursion. Nectarines and passion fruit thrive in the glasshouses while beyond the main garden and with beautiful loch views there is a woodland walk that's carpeted in snowdrops at the end of winter.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PORTPATRICK

By bus Buses leave from South Crescent next to the sandy bay for Ayr (8 daily, 4 on Sun; 1hr 30min) and Stranraer (hourly; 25min).

ACCOMMODATION

Castle Bay Holiday Park 0.5 miles south of Portpatrick T 01776 810462, W castlebayholidaypark.co.uk. Near the cliff's edge next to Dunskey Castle a short walk south of town, with two-bedroom static homes available to rent by the week. The caravans are reasonably well equipped and there's a little play park in the grounds. Caravans £350/week

Knockinaam Lodge on the coast 2 miles southeast of town T 01776 810471, W knockinaamlodge.com. An exclusive little country-house hotel with a high-quality restaurant, hidden away in its own private cove. The accommodation is suitably luxurious, characterful and tasteful, as befits the hefty price tag. £340

★ **Rickwood House Hotel** Heugh Rd T 01776 810270, W portpatrick.me.uk. Set back from the harbour, with contemporarily furnished en-suite rooms overlooking the sea. The conservatory has a selection of books, and there's a small library of DVDs to watch in your room. £70

EATING AND DRINKING

Campbell's Restaurant 1 South Crescent T 01776 810314, W campbellsrestaurant.co.uk. Expect some superb seafood dishes in this charming, modern restaurant; the £5 crab sandwich makes a satisfying but inexpensive lunch, while the mixed shellfish grill at £28 would satisfy any gourmand. Tues–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm.

★ **The Crown** 9 North Crescent T 01776 810261, W crownportpatrick.com. Right on the seafront, this cosy inn is a good bet for fresh seafood, hand-pulled ales and live music in front of an open fire. Highlight of the menu is the seafood pancake gratin for £13. Food served daily noon–9.15pm.

Logan Botanic Garden

Logan • Feb Sun only 10am–4pm; mid-March to Oct daily 10am–5pm • £5.50 • T 01776 860231, W rbge.org.uk • Bus #407 from Stranraer stops at Port Logan (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 30min), then a 2-mile walk north

An outpost of Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden, **Logan Botanic Garden** sits two miles

WALKS AROUND PORTPATRICK

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 309

For a spectacular one-mile circular stroll from Portpatrick along the sea cliffs to the shattered ruins of **Dunskey Castle**, follow the coastline south from the harbour until you reach the steps leading up to the cliffs. The route up to the castle, a sixteenth-century L-shaped tower house, is quite vertiginous in places but the way back via the disused railway is less hair-raising.

An easy four-mile circular walk takes you north from Main Street to **Dunskey Gardens**. From there head southwest following the stream down Dunskey Glen to the coast to link up with the **Southern Upland Way**, which takes you back to the quayside.

north of Port Logan, a marvellously exotic place where the mild air brought by the Gulf Stream supports an eye-opening abundance of tree ferns and palm trees. Check out the primeval giant Brazilian rhubarb in the Gunnera Bog, take a wander in the woods to the south, and head for the enormous walled gardens, where you'll find a water garden, a peat garden (the first ever), and a massive 20ft-high beech hedge.

Mull of Galloway

Right at the southern tip of the Rhinns peninsula, the isolated **Mull of Galloway** is well worth the ride and really feels like the end of the road. From this precipitous headland on a clear day you can see the Isle of Man and the coasts of Ireland and England. The southernmost point in Scotland, it's a favourite nesting spot for guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, shag, fulmar and even a few puffin; skeins of gannets fish here, too, from their gannetry on the Scares, clearly visible to the east. The headland is also an RSPB reserve – good for linnets and twite – with a **visitor centre** in a building near the **lighthouse.**

Mull of Galloway Lighthouse

Mull of Galloway • Easter–June & Sept–Oct Sat–Sun 10am–4pm; July & Aug Sat–Mon 10am–4pm • £2.50 • 01776 840554, mull-of-galloway.co.uk

Sited 325ft above sea level at the southern end of the Rhinns peninsula, the **Mull of Galloway Lighthouse**, built by Robert Stevenson, was manned from 1830 until as recently as 1988. Today there's a small museum with old photos and running videos but it's the heady view from the top that impresses the most.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — MULL OF GALLOWAY

By bus The nearest bus stop is 4 miles north at Drummore, with services to Port Logan (Mon–Sat 5 daily; 10min) and Stranraer (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 40min).

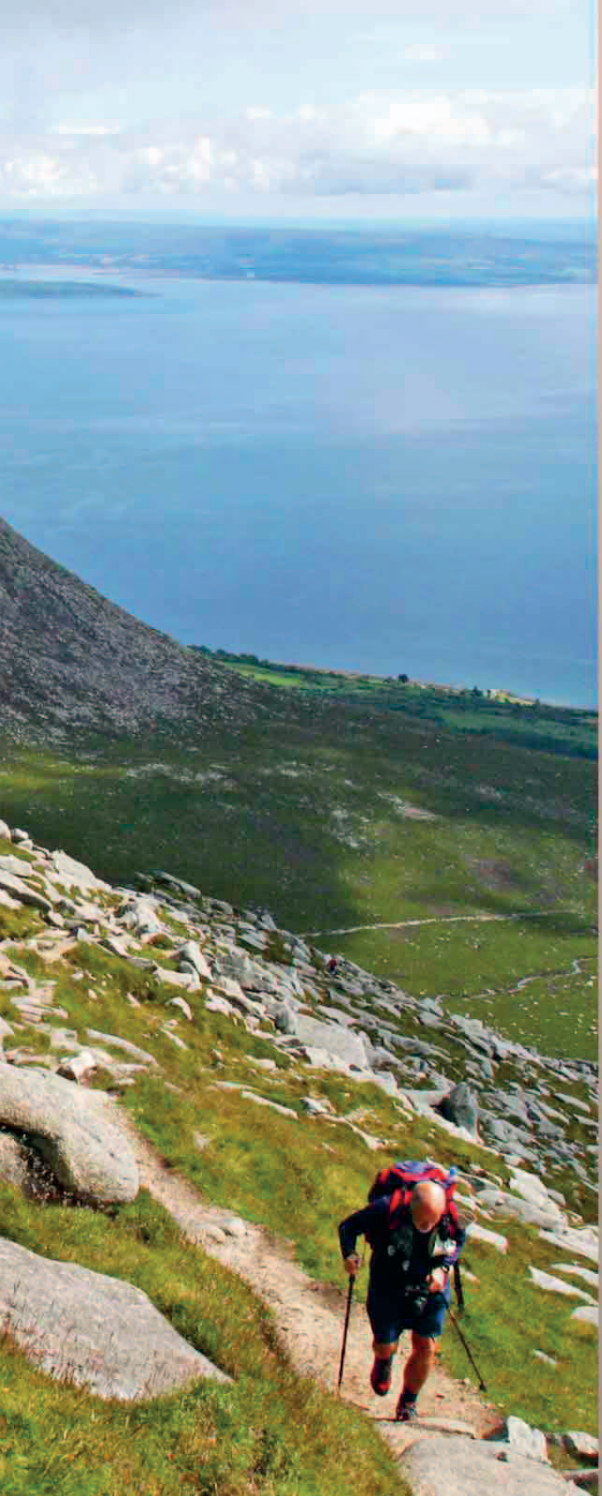
RSPB Visitor Centre Next to the lighthouse. (April to mid-Oct daily 10am–4pm; 01988 402130, rspb.org.uk). Provides a wealth of material about local bird, plant and marine life, and has live images of bird colonies nesting on the cliffs.

EATING

Gallie Craig Just south of the lighthouse 01776 840558, galliecraig.co.uk. Perched on the cliff edge, roofed with turf and with a panoramic glass wall and terrace looking out to the sea, Scotland's most southerly building provides armchair birdwatching while you enjoy some tea, home-baking or reasonably priced hot food (soup and crusty bread for £3.50). Nov, Feb & March Sat–Wed 11am–4pm, April–Oct daily 10am–5.30pm.

Ayrshire and Arran

158 Ayr and around
171 Isle of Arran



HIKER ON GOAT FELL, ARRAN

Ayrshire and Arran

The rolling hills and rich soil of Ayrshire make for prime farming country, etched with a patchwork of lush fields and hedgerows. The region's real draw, however, is its coastline, thanks to its wide, flat, sandy beaches, while its endless, fantastic golfing possibilities (which include several championship links courses), attract golfers from all over the world. The county town is Ayr, which draws a healthy number of visitors thanks to its associations with Robert Burns, who was born in nearby Alloway.

Fifty miles from top to bottom, the largely unblemished **South Ayrshire coastline**, between Ayr and Stranraer, offers several appealing possibilities: notably **Culzean Castle**, Robert Adam's cliffside Neoclassical mansion, and **Ailsa Craig**, the giant muffin-shaped island in the Firth of Clyde, which is home to the world's second-largest gannetry. Back onshore, the little visited but wonderful medieval ruins of **Crossraguel Abbey** are well worth stopping off for, while also inland, **Dumfries House** is one of the finest eighteenth-century stately homes in Britain.

The disparate **North Ayrshire coastline**, whose towns once benefited from the industrialization of Glasgow, offers fewer incentives to visit. That said, **Irvine**, home to the terrific Scottish Maritime Museum, and **Largs**, the area's most agreeable seaside resort, from where you can catch a ferry across to **Great Cumbrae**, both merit a portion of your time.

Without doubt the most alluring destination in Ayrshire is the **Isle of Arran**, its jagged outline visible across the Firth of Clyde from the entire length of the Ayrshire coast. Often described as "Scotland in miniature", the beautiful, barren north of the island is a great place to get a quick taste of the Highlands.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND

BY PLANE

Ayrshire is home to the misleadingly named Glasgow Prestwick Airport (see p.162), which is actually five miles north of Ayr.

BY TRAIN

Both Prestwick and Ayr are served by frequent trains from Glasgow Central, while this line also continues down the coast to Stranraer. Largs is also served by trains from Glasgow.

BY FERRY TO LARNE

P&O 0871 664 2121, poferries.com. Fast ferries to Larne in Ireland (2 daily; 2hr 15min) depart from Troon, ten miles north of Ayr.

BY FERRY TO ARRAN

CalMac 0800 066 5000, calmac.co.uk. Ferries to Brodick, on Arran (5–6 daily; 55min) depart from Ardrossan, twenty-three miles north of Ayr.

Ayr and around

With a population of around fifty thousand, **AYR** is by far the largest town on the Firth of Clyde coast. It was an important seaport and trading centre for many centuries, rivalling Glasgow in size and significance right up until the late seventeenth century. In recognition, Cromwell made it a centre for his administration and built an enormous

Horse racing in Ayr p.163
On the Burns trail p.164
Robert Burns p.165
Golf in Ayr p.167
Largs Viking Festival p.169
Arran golf pass p.173
Goat Fell p.174

CULZEAN CASTLE

Highlights

❶ **Alloway** The village where poet Robert Burns was born, and the best of many Burns pilgrimage spots in the region. **See p.164**

❷ **Dumfries House** An eighteenth-century architectural masterpiece, designed by the Adam brothers and decked out by Thomas Chippendale. **See p.166**

❸ **Culzean Castle** Stately home with a fabulous cliff-edge setting, surrounded by acres of gardens and woods reaching down to the shore. **See p.167**

❹ **Ailsa Craig** Watch baby gannets learn the art of flying and diving for fish. **See p.168**

❺ **Goat Fell, Arran** Spectacular views over north Arran's craggy mountain range and the Firth of Clyde. **See p.174**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.160

fortress here, long since destroyed. With the relative decline of its seaborne trade, Ayr reinvented itself in the nineteenth century as an administrative centre and a popular resort for middle-class Victorians. While there are few real sights in town to detain you, its prestigious **racecourse** pulls in huge crowds, there's superb **golf** all around, and the local tourist industry continues to do steady business out of the fact that Rabbie Burns was born in the neighbouring village of **Alloway** (see p.164).

Auld Brig

One of the oldest stone bridges in Scotland, Ayr's cobbled, four-arched **Auld Brig** was built during the reign of James IV (1488–1513), having replaced an earlier, thirteenth-century wooden one. Thankfully, it survived the threat of demolition in the early twentieth century, thanks largely to Burns's poem *The Brigs of Ayr*.

Auld Kirk

Blackfriar's Walk • Feb–June & Sept–Nov Tues 1–2pm; July & Aug Sat 10.30am–12.30pm • Free • 01292 262938, auldkirk.org

A short stroll upstream from the Auld Bridge stands the town's much-restored **Auld Kirk**, which Burns attended as a young boy. At the lych gate, look out for the coffin-shaped mortsafe (heavy grating) on the walls; placed over newly dug graves, these mortsafes were an early nineteenth-century security system, meant to deter bodysnatchers at a time when bodies were swiftly bought up by medical schools, with no questions asked.

Wallace Tower

The most conspicuous landmark in the centre of Ayr is the rather ugly, castellated **Wallace Tower**, erected in 1828 at the southern end of the High Street. It stands on what is thought to have been the site of Edward I's barracks, which were set alight by William Wallace in 1297.

Citadel

All you can see of Cromwell's zigzag **Citadel**, built to the west of the town centre in the 1650s, is a small section of the old walls – the area was built over, for the most part, in Victorian times, but is still known locally as "the Fort". The best-preserved section of the fortifications lies on South Harbour Street, though the one surviving corbelled corner turret is, in fact, a Victorian addition known as **Miller's Folly** after its eccentric former owner.

St John's Tower

Another survivor from the distant past is **St John's Tower**, near Bruce Crescent, which stands on its own in a well-kept walled garden at the heart of the old citadel, and is all that remains of the medieval church where the Scottish parliament met after the Battle of Bannockburn in 1315 to decide the royal succession. Although a spiral staircase links the five floors (vault, three rooms and bell chamber), it's currently not possible to access the interior.

Wellington Square

To the south of the citadel are the wide, gridiron streets of Ayr's main Georgian and Regency residential development. **Wellington Square**, whose first occupants were "Gentlemen of Rich Fortune and Retired Army Officers", is the area's showpiece, its trim gardens and terraces overlooked by the **County Buildings**, a vast, imposing Palladian pile from 1820.

Esplanade

The opening of the Glasgow-to-Ayr train line in 1840 brought the first major influx of holiday-makers to the town, but today – unless the weather's fantastic – only a few hardy types take a stroll along Ayr's bleak, long **Esplanade** and beach, which look out

to the Isle of Arran. The one building of note is the distinctive whitewashed **Ayr Pavilion**, built in 1911, with its four tall corner towers; it's known locally as "the Piv"and now houses the suitably tacky Pirate Pete's entertainment centre. You're far better off directing the kids to the superb adventure playground next door.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

BY PLANE

Glasgow Prestwick Airport Prestwick ⓣ0871 223 0700, ⓦglasgowprestwick.com. Glasgow Prestwick Airport sits five miles north of Ayr. It has its own train station (alight at Prestwick Airport not Prestwick Town station), with trains to Glasgow (Mon–Sat every 20min, Sun every 30min; 50min) and Ayr (every 20min; 10min). There's also an express bus (#X77) to Glasgow's Buchanan Street station (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun hourly; 50min).

BY TRAIN

Ayr train station is ten minutes' walk southeast of the town centre on Station Road.

Destinations Girvan (Mon–Sat 12 daily, 2 on Sun; 30min); Glasgow Central (every 30min; 50min); Irvine (every

HORSE RACING IN AYR

Horse racing in Ayr dates back to the seventeenth century, though Ayr's present **racecourse** (W ayr-racecourse.co.uk) staged its first race in 1907. Today it ranks as Scotland's premier course, staging both flat and national hunt (jump) races, including Scotland's two most prestigious outings; the **Scottish Grand National** in April and the **Gold Cup** in September.

30min; 20min); Prestwick Airport (every 30min; 10min); Stranraer (Mon–Sat 6 daily, 2 on Sun; 1hr 20min).

BY BUS

The bus station is smack bang in the centre of town at the corner of Sandgate and Fullarton Street.

Destinations Ardrossan (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun every 2hr; 55min); Culzean Castle (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun every 2hr; 30min); Girvan, for Ailsa Craig (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun hourly; 1hr); Glasgow (hourly; 55min); Irvine (every 30min; 35min); Largs (Mon–Sat every 30min, 5 on Sun; 1hr 20min); Stranraer (Mon–Sat 7 daily, 4 on Sun; 2hr); Wemyss Bay (Mon–Sat every 30min, 4 on Sun; 1hr 45min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office 22 Sandgate (Easter–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; Oct–Easter closed Sun; T 01292 290300, W ayrshire-arran.com). Packed with local and regional info, the tourist office can also help with accommodation, which is a particularly useful service during big race meetings.

ACCOMMODATION

Ayr has a reasonable choice of accommodation, with **guesthouses** dominating; the cheapest of these are generally clustered in the streets between the town centre and the Esplanade, with the smarter places to be found in the leafy streets to the south of the town centre. There are no hostels in town, though there are a couple of **campsites** in the vicinity.

The Crescent 26 Bellevue Crescent T 01292 287329, W 26crescent.co.uk. Spacious and cosy Victorian house with five distinctively furnished rooms (one a four-poster suite), though Laura Ashley-style wallpaper, curtains and the like dominate. A cracking breakfast is served in the elegant dining room. £77

Eglinton Guest House 23 Eglinton Terrace T 01292 264623, W eglintonguesthouse.com. Charmingly old-fashioned B&B in a peaceful but still very central location, offering a variety of rooms spread over three floors, a couple of which are with shared shower facilities. The single and family rooms are particularly good value. £50

Heads of Ayr Caravan Park Dunure Rd T 01292 442269, W headsofayr-caravanpark.co.uk. Three miles south of town along the coastal A719, beside the popular Heads of Ayr Farm Park, this caravan site also has pitches for tents. March–Oct. £22.50/pitch

Savoy Park Hotel 16 Racecourse Rd T 01292 266112, W savoypark.com. A splendid red sandstone Scots Baronial building which, though a little lacking in atmosphere, does possess extremely well-appointed rooms. The public rooms are suitably grand, too, and there's a lovely garden complete with gazebo and swings. £65

EATING AND DRINKING

The steady flow of golfers and racegoers to Ayr are well catered for thanks to a clutch of fine **restaurants**, alongside several cheery town-centre **cafés**. With a couple of exceptions, Ayr's drinking dens are your fairly typical town centre establishments, while any late night entertainment is relatively tame.

CAFÉS

Pandora 32 New Bridge St T 01292 289919. Stylish, dark wood-panelled coffee house offering great caffeine fixes alongside light snacks like bagels, toasted baguettes and omelettes. For a wee treat, get stuck into the afternoon tea, consisting of sandwiches, scones and traybakes (£7.25). Mon–Sat 7.30am–6pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

Renaldo's 98 Sandgate T 01292 265956. Cheery *Renaldo's* is renowned for its authentic Italian ice cream (£1.35 a tub), all of which is made on the premises, with flavours ranging from the sublime (pistachio, strawberries and cream) to the ridiculous (Irn-Bruw). Daily 9am–9pm.

RESTAURANTS

Beresford Grill and Wine Bar 22 Beresford Terrace T 01292 280820, W theberesfordayr.com. Ayr's most accomplished restaurant combines great food with fine wine and art (there's an on-site gallery and artwork adorning the walls). The food manifests a strong French and Mediterranean slant, such as *chevre* cheese and green

ON THE BURNS TRAIL

As well as the numerous attractions associated with Robert Burns in **Alloway**, two more places that resonate with Burns fans can be found not too far from Ayr; 6 miles northeast of Ayr is **The Bachelors' Club** (Easter–Sept Fri–Tues 1–5pm; £3.50; NTS), a wee thatched house in the tiny village of Tarbolton. It was here in the upstairs room that the 20-year-old Burns attended dancing classes, set up a debating society and became a Freemason. In Kirkoswald, 14 miles southwest of Ayr, is **Souter Johnnie's Cottage** (Easter–Sept Mon, Tues, Fri–Sun 11.30am–5pm; £3.50; NTS), once the home of John Davidson, Burns's boon companion and the original inspiration for Souter (cobbler) Johnnie in *Tam o' Shanter*. The restored alehouse here has life-size stone figures of Johnnie, Tam himself and other Burnsian characters, all of whom are buried in the nearby graveyard.

olive risotto with Troon langoustine tails, and slow-cooked confit of duck (£14.95). If you're feeling particularly decadent, try one of the house cocktails. Daily 9am–midnight.

Cecchini's 72 Fort St ⓣ01292 263607, ⓦcecchinisayr.co.uk. A cut above your average pizza and pasta joint, cool *Cecchini's* has an enticing range of mains, such as borlotti casserole (£8.95), and spezzatino (Scotch beef cooked with red wine and tomatoes), as well as any number of terrific value daily deals. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm, Sun 10am–9pm.

Stage Door 12 Carrick St ⓣ01292 280444, ⓦstagedoorcafe.co.uk. Given that it shares the same space as the theatre box office, this is a surprisingly classy restaurant, with very favourably priced dishes like honey glazed Ayrshire bacon steak, and monkfish tail with Cajun spices (£9.95) to tempt you in. The two-course express lunch menu costs £10.95. Daily 10am–11pm.

Tudor Kitchen & Grill 8 Beresford Terrace ⓣ01292 261404, ⓦtudorkitchenandgrill.com. Traditional Scottish food dominates in this understatedly appealing restaurant, like haggis, neeps and tatties in a whisky and chive sauce, and pan-seared fillet of pork with Stornoway black pudding mash (£10.95). There's also breakfast (9–11.30am) and the £7.95 two-course early-evening deal from 4–5.30pm is a steal. Mon–Sat 9am–10pm, Sun 10am–9pm.

PUBS

Tam o' Shanter 230 High St ⓣ01292 611684. So named after the eponymous Burns character, this cosy, thatched inn receives a steady flow of locals throughout the day, here for a bit of banter while supping on a pint of the local real ale. Daily 11am–midnight.

West Kirk 58a Sandgate ⓣ01292 880416. For a quiet pint of real ale, head to this music-free Wetherspoon church-to-pub conversion, with wooden balconies held up by pistachio-coloured fluted pillars. Daily 8am–midnight.

Alloway

ALLOWAY, formerly a small village but now on the southern outskirts of Ayr, is the birthplace of Robert Burns (1759–1796), Scotland's national poet. Today it is totally dominated by all things Burnsiana, all of which is gathered under the umbrella of the **Robert Burns Birthplace Museum**. Note that the entrance fee applies only to the museum and cottage; the other sights are free to visit and have no set opening times.

Burns Museum

Murdoch's Lone • Daily: April–Sept 10am–5.30pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm • £8 (including entrance to cottage); NTS • ⓣ0844 493 2601, ⓦburnsmuseum.org.uk

The centrepiece of the Birthplace Museum is the **museum** itself, a voluminous and illuminating exhibition that should satisfy even the most ardent Burns fan. While the focus is, inevitably, on his extraordinary literary accomplishments – look out for four skilfully carved wooden friezes depicting the key scenes in *Tam o' Shanter* – the beautifully presented glass cabinets are stuffed with memorabilia pertaining to other aspects of his life, such as the pistol he used as an exciseman, and the apron he wore at Masonic meetings in Dumfries. In addition, you can view his parlour chair and desk, the wedding ring belonging to his wife, Jean Armour, and dozens of books and letters dedicated to friends and family.

Burns Monument and Brig o' Doon

Heading through the carefully manicured garden behind the museum, you can't miss the **Burns Monument**, a striking, slightly ludicrous Neoclassical rotunda, topped by a scalloped cornice and a miniature copper-gilt baldachin. Despite currently being enveloped in scaffolding pending renovation, you can climb to the top for views over to the **Brig o' Doon**, the picturesque thirteenth-century hump-backed bridge over which Tam is forced to flee for his life. In the nearby **Statue House**, admire some eighteenth-century stone statues of Tam, Soutar and Nanse, which are, in fact, portraits of Burns's friends.

Alloway Kirk

Across the road from the museum is the plain, roofless ruin of the sixteenth-century **Alloway Kirk**, setting for much of *Tam o' Shanter*; Tam, having got drunk in Ayr, passes

ROBERT BURNS

The first of seven children, **Robert Burns**, the national poet of Scotland, was born in Alloway on January 25, 1759. His father, William, was a tenant farmer at Mount Oliphant, near Alloway, moving to Lochlie Farm, Tarbolton, eleven years later. A series of bad harvests and the demands of the landlord's estate manager bankrupted the family, and William died almost penniless in 1784. These events had a profound effect on Robert, leaving him with an antipathy towards political authority and a hatred of the land-owning classes.

With the death of his father, Robert became head of the family and they moved again, this time to a farm at Mossgiel, near Mauchline. Burns had already begun writing **poetry** and **prose** at Lochlie, recording incidental thoughts in his *First Commonplace Book*, but it was here at Mossgiel that he began to write in earnest, and his first volume, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, was published in Kilmarnock in 1786. The book proved immensely popular, celebrated by ordinary Scots and Edinburgh literati alike, with the satirical trilogy *Holy Willie's Prayer*, *The Holy Fair* and *Address to the Devil* attracting particular attention. The object of Burns's poetic scorn was the kirk, whose ministers had obliged him to appear in church to be publicly condemned for **fornication** – a commonplace punishment in those days.

Burns spent the winter of 1786–87 in the capital, lionized by the literary establishment. Despite his success, however, he felt trapped, unable to make enough money from writing to leave **farming**. He was also in a political snare, fraternizing with the elite, but with radical views and pseudo-Jacobite nationalist sympathies that constantly landed him in trouble. His frequent recourse was to play the part of the unlettered ploughman-poet, the noble savage who might be excused his impetuous outbursts and hectic womanizing.

He had, however, made useful contacts in **Edinburgh** and as a consequence was recruited to collect, write and rearrange two volumes of songs set to traditional Scottish tunes. These volumes, James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* and George Thomson's *Select Scottish Airs*, contain the bulk of his **songwriting**, and it's on them that Burns's international reputation rests, with works like *Auld Lang Syne*, *Scots, Wha Hae*, *Coming Through the Rye* and *Green Grow the Rushes, O*. At this time, too, though **poetry** now took second place, he produced two excellent poems: *Tam o' Shanter* and a republican tract, *A Man's a Man for a' That*.

Burns often boasted of his sexual conquests, and he fathered several illegitimate children, but in 1788, he eventually married **Jean Armour**, a stonemason's daughter from Mauchline, with whom he already had two children, and moved to Ellisland Farm, near Dumfries. The following year he was appointed excise officer and could at last leave farming, moving to Dumfries in 1791. Burns's years of comfort were short-lived, however. His years of labour on the farm, allied to a rheumatic fever, damaged his heart, and he died in Dumfries on July 21, 1796, aged 37.

Burns's work, inspired by a **romantic nationalism** and tinged with a wry wit, has made him a potent symbol of "Scottishness". Ignoring the anglophile preferences of the Edinburgh elite, he wrote in Scots vernacular about the country he loved: an exuberant celebration that filled a need in a nation culturally colonized by England. Today, Burns Clubs all over the world mark every anniversary of the poet's birthday with the **Burns Supper**, complete with Scottish totems – haggis, piper and whisky bottle – and a ritual recital of Burns's *Ode to a Haggis*.

"by Alloway's auld haunted kirk" and stumbles across a riotous witches' dance. All that remains inside are a pair of iron mortsafes. The Kirk is also where Robert's father, William, and his sister, Isabella Burns Begg, are buried. His father's grave is prominently located at the entrance to the church; the mournful epitaph on the back of the headstone was penned by Burns.

Burns Cottage

Greenfield Avenue • Daily: April–Sept 10am–5.30pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm • £8 (including entrance to Burns Museum); NTS • T 0844 493 2601, W burnsmuseum.org.uk

Standing opposite the village post office is the **Burns Cottage**, birthplace of the poet and his home for the first seven years of his life. Built by his father, William, the low, whitewashed, thatched cottage was where animals and people lived under the same roof, with a separate section for grain storage – something that was quite modern in its day. Much altered over the years, there's not an awful lot to see inside, but you can nevertheless gain an impression of what the place must have been like when Burns, the first of seven children, was born in the box-bed in the only room in the house.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **ALLOWAY**

By bus From Ayr bus station, bus #58 drops off in the centre of the village. Alternatively bus #361 (hourly) departs from Carrick Street in Ayr and drops off at Burns Cottage.

4

Dumfries House

Outside Cumnock, 14 miles east of Ayr off the A70 • March–Oct daily 11am–4pm; Nov–Feb Sat & Sun 11am–4pm ; pre-booked guided tours only • £8.50 • T 01290 425959, W dumfries-house.org.uk • From Glasgow take bus #X77 or X76 from Buchanan Street bus station; from Ayr bus #46

A handsome Palladian villa, **Dumfries House** was commissioned by the fifth earl of Dumfries, a widower who wanted to remarry and ensure that he had an heir for the family estate. The house, the major early commission for the Adam brothers, was conceived as a honey trap to lure a potential wife, and, judging by the portrait of the ageing, gouty earl in the Pink Drawing Room, he needed all the help he could get. Such was the earl's urgency the house was built and decked out relatively swiftly – between 1756 and 1760 – meaning its Rococo decorative scheme is in perfect harmony with the graceful sandstone exterior. Chief amongst the treasures is a huge collection of **Chippendale furniture**, some ordered direct from Thomas himself, and some created from his "Director" (book of designs) and augmented by local craftsmen with Scottish saltires. Throughout the house, the family symbols of the wyvern (small dragon) and the thistle recur in inventive and playful touches, and exotic Oriental motifs crop up in the fanciful Adam plasterwork ceilings, tapestry fire screens and gilded pier glasses.

The earl secured a wife but died without producing an heir; the family subsequently turned their attention to creating **Mount Stuart** (see p.230), leaving Dumfries House to be looked after by a series of housekeepers. The recent story of the house is as remarkable as its past: the building and its contents were all up for sale in 2007, and some of the furniture had begun its journey south to Christie's when Prince Charles and a hastily assembled trust intervened to make a heritage "save".

Crossraguel Abbey

A77, 2 miles south of Maybole • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £4.50; HS • T 01655 883113

Two miles south of Maybole, right by the A77, lie the substantial remains of **Crossraguel Abbey**, a lovely antidote to the hordes that pile into Culzean. A Cluniac monastery – one of only two in Scotland – it was founded in 1250, though most of what you see here dates from the late fourteenth century following extensive damage during the wars with England.

At the heart of the complex is the **abbey church**, which has ornate carvings over the piscina and sedilia, though it's not as impressive as the fifteenth-century **sacristy**, which has kept its vaulted ceiling and its decorative capitals, corbels and bosses, embellished with squirrels, lions, a triple-faced head and a green man. Next door, off the cloisters, is the similarly intact, though less decorative, **chapterhouse**. The **tower house**, tacked onto the eastern end of the complex, was built in the early sixteenth century as luxury accommodation for William Kennedy, the last abbot to reside here, between 1520 and 1547; in keeping with the abbot's high status in the outside world, it clearly illustrates the corruption of the monastic ideal that spurred the Reformation. On the opposite side of the abbey, the **gatehouse** is equally grand, and has been restored so that you can climb right up to the cap house and walk out onto the battlements.

Visible in one corner of the complex is a beehive-shaped **dovecote**, complete with well-preserved nesting boxes. This was a crucial part of the abbey's economy, as the monks not only ate the doves but also relied on them for eggs.

Culzean Castle

A719, 4km west of Maybole • **Castle** Easter–Oct daily 10.30am–5pm • £15; NTS • **Country park** Daily 9.30am–dusk • £10 T 0844 493 2149, W culzeanexperience.org • From Ayr take bus #60

Sitting on the edge of a sheer cliff, looking out over the Firth of Clyde to Arran, **Culzean Castle** couldn't have a more impressive situation. Given its strategic position, it's hardly surprising that the Kennedy family maintained a castle at Culzean (pronounced "cullane") from the twelfth century onwards. The current castle is actually a grand, late eighteenth-century stately home, designed by the Scottish Neoclassical architect **Robert Adam** for the tenth earl of Cassillis (pronounced "cassles"), as the Kennedys had by then become.

At the **visitor centre**, in the modernized Home Farm buildings, you can watch an audiovisual show on the house, and pick up free maps that help you to get your bearings. From here, it's a few minutes' walk through Adam's mock-ruined arch to the **castle** itself, which overlooks the pristine lawn and herbaceous borders of the Fountain Court on one side, with the high sea cliffs on the other. Begun in 1777, Culzean's exterior preserves a medieval aspect, with its arrow slits and battlements; the interior, however, exemplifies the delicate, harmonious Neoclassical designs that Adam loved – look out for the dolphins and swans (emblems of the Kennedy family) and the rams' heads (Adam's own favourite motif). The most brilliantly conceived work by Adam is the **Oval Staircase**, where tiers of classical columns lead up to a huge glazed cupola allowing light to stream down. After admiring the portrait of Napoleon by Lefèvre, you pass through to the impressive circular **Saloon**, whose symmetrical flourishes deliberately contrast with the natural land and seascapes on view through the windows.

It's worth leaving enough time for an exploration of the 500-acre **country park**, the highlights of which are the walled garden, with its stone and glass orangery, stone grotto and fruit houses, and the Swan Pond, abundant with waterfowl.

GOLF IN AYR

Few parts of Scotland can boast as many world class **golf courses** as this stretch of the Ayrshire coast, with two in particular – **Royal Troon** (W royaltroon.co.uk), ten miles north of Ayr, and **Turnberry** (W turnberry.co.uk), sixteen miles south of Ayr – ranking among the world's most prestigious. Both courses are on the British Open roster, with Troon scheduled to stage the event in 2016. A round at either of these will cost you a small fortune (about £150), but there are plenty more affordable places to play throughout the region.

Ailsa Craig

As you travel along the South Ayrshire coast, the giant muffin-shaped island of **Ailsa Craig** is an intriguing presence on the horizon, stranded as it is in the middle of the Firth of Clyde. The island's name means "Fairy Rock" in Gaelic, though it was a less than enchanting place for the persecuted Catholics who escaped here during the Reformation. The island's granite has long been used for making what many consider to be the finest curling stones – a company in nearby Mauchline still has exclusive rights and sporadically collects a few boulders. In the late nineteenth century, 29 people lived on the island, either working in the quarry or at the Stevenson lighthouse.

With its volcanic, columnar cliffs and 1114ft summit, Ailsa Craig is now a **bird sanctuary** that's home to some 40,000 gannets, plus thousands of other seabirds. Trips to the island depart from **Girvan**, twenty-one miles south of Ayr. The best time to make the trip is at the end of May and in June when the fledglings are trying to fly. It takes about an hour to reach the island, after which you get enough time to walk up to the summit of the rock and watch the birds, weather permitting.

TOURS **AILSA CRAIG**

Boat tours Several companies in Girvan offer cruises round the island, but only Mark McCrindle is licensed to land (T 01465 713219, W ailsacraig.org.uk). The exact timings and prices depend on the length of trip, tides and weather, but generally speaking, these take place between April and September with either one or two trips each day (£20/3hr). Booking ahead is essential.

4

Irvine

IRVINE, twelve miles north of Ayr, was once the principal port for trade between Glasgow and Ireland, and later for coal from Kilmarnock. Those halcyon days are long gone, and the town, sadly, has little now to commend it. That said, it does possess one of the region's finest museums, and for that reason alone, it is worth a visit.

Scottish Maritime Museum

6 Gottries Road • March–Dec daily 10am–5pm • £7 • T 01294 278283, W scottishmaritimemuseum.org

Irvine's one major draw is the **Scottish Maritime Museum**, which is spread across several locations down at the town's carefully restored old harbour. The main exhibition is held inside the **Linthouse Engine Shop**, a magnificent late nineteenth-century hangar-like building held up with massive iron girders, moved here brick by brick from Govan in 1990. As well as superbly documenting the many marvellous feats of engineering, courtesy of engines and turbines galore, it's the superb array of vessels that really catches the eye, such as the **SS Rifle**, the earliest surviving example of a pre-fabricated screw steamer, and an ingeniously crafted paracuted airborne lifeboat, designed to be dropped close to airmen forced to ditch at sea. Inevitably though, some vessels recall tales of disaster, such as the **RNLI TGB**, which capsized in 1969 whilst attempting a rescue at Longhope in the Orkneys, leading to the loss of all eight crew members. More mysterious is the story of Kenneth Kerr and his 13ft glass-fibre dinghy, **Bass Conqueror**. In October 1980, while on his second attempt to row across the Atlantic in the smallest ever boat, Kerr ran into difficulties somewhere off the Irish coast and all radio contact was lost. The dinghy was found near Stavanger several months later, but Kerr was never found.

Three times a day there are free guided tours of the nearby **Shipyard Worker's Tenement Flat**, which has been restored to something like its appearance in 1910, when a family of six to eight would have occupied its two rooms and scullery. Moored at the **pontoons** on Harbour Street is an assortment of craft, which you can board, including a tug, a trawler, a "puffer" boat, a yacht driven by a wind turbine, and the **SY Carola**, the oldest seagoing steam yacht in the country.

Largs and around

Nineteen miles north of Irvine, tucked in between the hills and the sea, **LARGS** remains the most traditional of Ayrshire's family resorts, its guesthouses and B&Bs spreading out behind an elongated seaside promenade. Despite the obvious tack along parts of the seafront, the town does have a couple of worthwhile sites, and is also where ferries depart for the short hop across the water to Great Cumbrae.

Skelmorlie Aisle

Manse Court • June–Aug Mon–Sat 2–5pm; keys available from the museum next door • Free • T 01475 687081

Largs' one real gem is **Skelmorlie Aisle**, a slice of the Renaissance hidden away beside the old graveyard off Main Street – to get there, enter the yard opposite WHSmith. Once the north transept of a larger church (long since gone), and now standing alone in the graveyard, the aisle was converted in 1636 into a **mausoleum** by Sir Robert Montgomerie, a local bigwig, in memory of his wife who died in a horse riding accident. Carved by Scottish masons following Italian patterns, the tomb is decorated with Montgomerie's coat of arms as well as symbols of mortality such as the skull, winged hourglass and inverted torch. Up above, the intricate paintwork of the barrel-vaulted ceiling includes the signs of the zodiac, biblical figures and texts.

Vikingar!

Greenock Road • Feb & Nov Sat & Sun 11.30am–2.30pm; March daily 11.30am–1.30pm; April–June daily 10.30am–2.30pm; July & Aug daily 10.30am–3.30pm; Sept & Oct daily 10.30am–2.30pm • £4.50 • T 01475 689777, W kaleisure.com

Largs' chief historical claim to fame is the **Battle of Largs**, which took place in 1263. The battle was forced on King Haakon's Vikings when their longships were blown ashore by a gale. The invaders were attacked by the Scots and, although both sides claimed victory, the Norwegians retreated north and abandoned their territorial claims to the Hebrides three years later. The battle provides a historical link for **Vikingar!**, five minutes' walk north of the pier, a light-hearted Viking-themed museum housed in a purpose-built leisure complex that also includes a swimming pool and theatre.

Kelburn Castle and Country Centre

Fairlie, 2 miles south of Largs • Easter–Oct daily 10am–6pm; castle tours July & Aug daily 2pm • £8.50; castle tours £2 • T 01475 568685, W kelburnestate.com

The Battle of Largs is commemorated by the distinctive **Pencil Monument** in Fairlie, a modern obelisk a mile south of town, close to the marina, and opposite the **Kelburn Castle and Country Centre**, seat of the earls of Glasgow (aka the Boyle family) since the twelfth century. The castle itself is no great shakes inside and can only be seen by guided tour. Much more enticing are the **grounds**, which feature a steep gorge and waterfall, 1000-year-old yew trees, an Adam monument and some lovely gardens. There's also plenty for kids to do, including an adventure course (with high-wire), a secret forest playground, pets' corner and pony riding.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — LARGS AND AROUND

By train The train station is on Main Street, from where it's a 5min walk to the pier and seafront.
Destinations Glasgow Central (hourly; 1hr).
By bus The bus station is on Main Street, next door to the train station.
Destinations Ayr (Mon–Sat every 30min, 4 on Sun; 1hr 30min); Glasgow (every 20–30min; 1hr 30min).

LARGS VIKING FESTIVAL

Largs' hugely entertaining, week-long **Viking Festival** (W largsvikingfestival.com) is held at the end of August/beginning of September, with music, dance and fireworks. The highlights are the burning of the Viking Longship and a re-enactment of the famous skirmish.

INFORMATION

Tourist office There's no official tourist office, but the volunteer-run Largs and Millport Information Bureau next to the train station entrance can provide information and assistance (April–Sept daily 10am–4pm; T01475 676182, W largsinformation.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

Biscayne House 110 Irvine Road T01475 672851, E info@biscayneguesthouse.co.uk. Located at the top of the hill entering Largs on the Ayr road, this well-positioned hostel-cum-guesthouse offers six rooms with sea views, as well as self-catering accommodation. £56

Old Rectory 2 Aubery Crescent T01475 674405, W oldrectorylargs.co.uk. Formerly the home of the ministers of the neighbouring Episcopal Church, this accomplished seafront guesthouse has just three rooms (two double and a twin), all of which are exquisitely furnished with period pieces and have excellent views over to Cumbrae and Arran. £65

South Whittlieburn Farm Brisbane Glen Road T01475 675881, E largsbandb@southwhittlieburnfarm.freeserve.co.uk. Situated on a working sheep farm in a peaceful glen about three miles northeast of town, this is a great option if you're up for a genuine rural retreat; although primarily a (small) caravan and camping site, they also do excellent B&B in the farmhouse. £14/pitch; doubles £62

EATING AND DRINKING

Nardini's 2 Greenock Road T01475 675000, W nardinis.co.uk. Locally renowned Italian restaurant and ice-cream parlour housed in a wonderful L-shaped Art Deco building on the Promenade, just north of the pier. The freshly caught fish and home-made pasta is terrific, though the Tea Time Special (fish and chips, ice cream and a pot of tea) for £7.95 is a real steal. Daily noon–11pm; ice-cream parlour 9am–10pm.

Teacups 68 Gallowgate Street T01475 676178. Treat yourself to some scrummy calorific fare (home-made scones served with jam and cream, cupcakes and muffins) at this self-styled "shabby-chic" tearoom, with its green and white checked tablecloths, floral bunting and mismatched vintage teacups. A cream tea costs £7. Daily 9.30am–5.30pm.

Great Cumbrae

Immediately offshore from Largs lies **Great Cumbrae**, a plump, hilly and wonderfully peaceful little island roughly four miles long and half as wide. The most popular activity here is **cycling**: a circuit of the island taking no more than two hours even at a very leisurely pace, while there are a couple of good red sandstone beaches on the west coast overlooking Bute. The only settlement of any size is **Millport**, which curves around a lovely wide bay on the south coast, overlooking the privately owned neighbouring island of Wee Cumbrae. The seafront is one long parade of Victorian seaside villas and terraces, interrupted only by **The Garrison**, a distinctive old barracks building with castellated gables.

Cathedral of Argyll & the Isles

College Street • Mon–Sat 11am–4pm; concerts July–Sept Sun 3pm • Free

Hidden from view in the woods above the town is the Episcopal **Cathedral of Argyll & the Isles**, completed in 1851 to a design by William Butterfield, one of the leading High Victorian Gothic architects. It's pretty modest by Butterfield standards, with only the polychromatic tiling in the chancel giving any hint of his usual exuberance. However, it does have the distinction of being Britain's smallest cathedral, with seating for just a hundred worshippers.

Robertson Museum & Aquarium

Near Millport • July–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm, Sat 10am–4pm; Oct–June Mon–Fri 9am–12.15pm & 2–4.15pm • £2 • T01475 530581

Just out of Millport, to the east, overlooking the Hunterston nuclear power station and iron-ore terminal back on the mainland, is the island's University Marine Biological Station. Its west wing contains the **Robertson Museum & Aquarium**, so named after the esteemed nineteenth-century naturalist, David Robertson, and a laudably ecological exhibition on the local marine environment, a mock-up of the

Ark (Millport's original marine station), and an old-fashioned aquarium displaying giant whelks, starfish, dogfish, conger eels and cod.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — GREAT CUMBRAE

By ferry The CalMac ferry from Largs is very frequent (every 15min in summer; £4.75 return/person, £19.65/car), and takes just ten minutes to reach the island's northeast tip, with a connecting bus to Millport.

Bike rental If you're short of time, or just don't fancy walking the island, grab a bike from Bremner's, 17 Cardiff St (T 01475 530309; £4.20 for 2 hrs).

ACTIVITIES

National Centre Cumbrae Near the ferry terminal on the northeast of the island T 01475 530757, W nationalcentrecumbrae.org.uk. Scotland's premier watersports centre offers courses in just about every conceivable waterbound activity, including sea-kayaking, windsurfing, powerboating and dinghy sailing; most of these activities cost around £45 for the day.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

College of the Holy Spirit College St T 01475 530353, W cumbraeguesthouse.co.uk. If you fancy stopping over, make a beeline for the delightfully tranquil Anglican retreat house adjacent to the cathedral, which has a mix of twins, double and family rooms, some en suite. The library and common rooms are available to guests too. £80

Ritz Café 26 Stuart St T 01475 530459. If you don't fancy fish and chips, head to the fabulous *Ritz Café*, which has been in business since 1906, doling out home-made ice cream, marshmallow ices, toasties and Millport Rock, amongst other goodies. Daily noon–11pm.

4

Isle of Arran

Shaped like a kidney bean and occupying centre stage in the Firth of Clyde, **Arran** is the most southerly (and therefore the most accessible) of all the Scottish islands. The Highland–Lowland dividing line passes right through its centre – hence the cliché about it being like "Scotland in miniature" – leaving the northern half sparsely populated, mountainous and bleak, while the lush southern half enjoys a much milder climate. The population of around five thousand – many of whom are incomers – tends to stick to the southeastern quarter of the island, leaving the west and the north relatively undisturbed.

There are two big crowd-pullers on Arran: **geology** and **golf**. The former has fascinated rock-obsessed students since Sir James Hutton came here in the late eighteenth century to confirm his theories of uniformitarianism. A hundred years later, Sir Archibald Geikie's investigations were a landmark in the study of Arran's geology, and the island remains a popular destination for university and school field trips. As for golf, Arran boasts seven courses, including three of the eighteen-hole variety at Brodick, Lamlash and Whiting Bay, and a unique twelve-hole course at Shiskine, near Blackwaterfoot.

Although **tourism** is now by far its most important industry, Arran, at twenty miles in length, is large enough to have a life of its own. While the island's post-1745 history, including the Clearances (set in motion by the local lairds, the Hamiltons), is as depressing as elsewhere in the Highlands, in recent years Arran's population has actually increased, in contrast with more remote islands.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF ARRAN

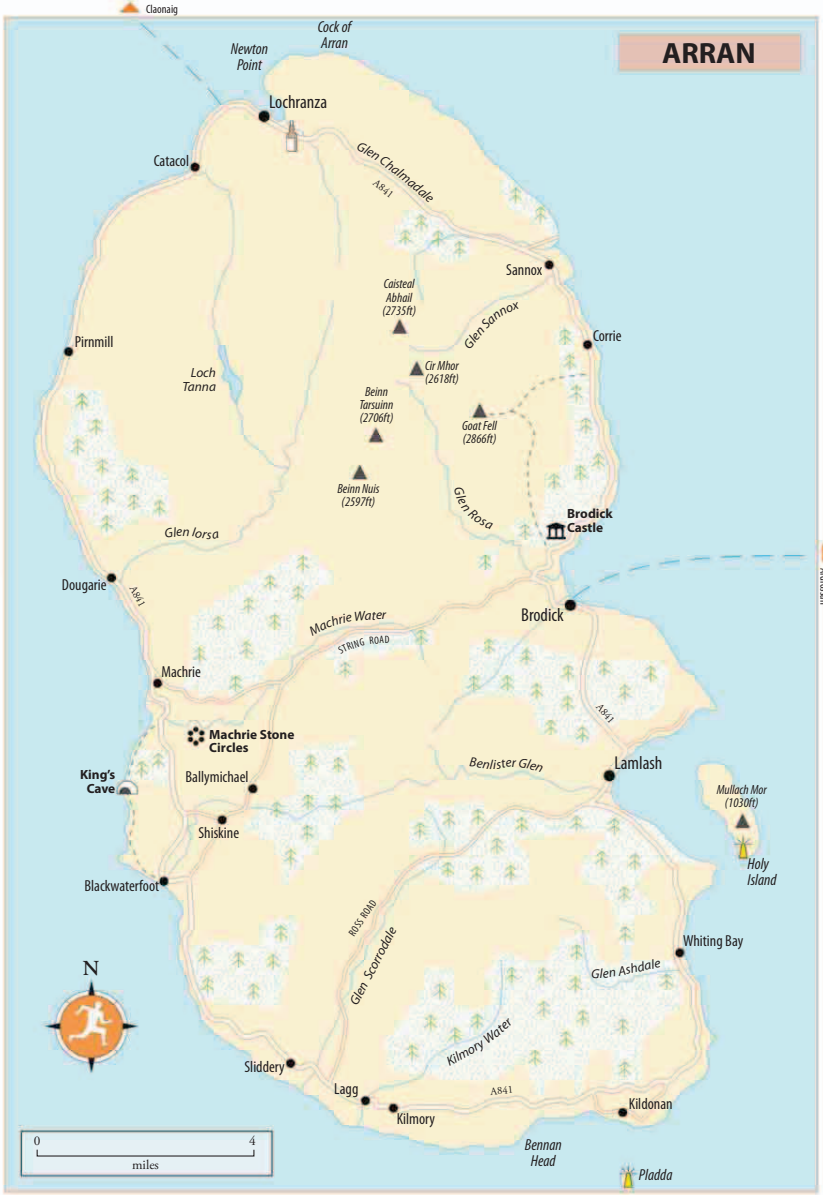
By ferry CalMac (W calmac.co.uk) operate two year-round ferry services: one from Ardrossan in Ayrshire to Brodick (April–Oct 4–6 daily; 55min), and a smaller ferry from Claonaig on the Kintyre peninsula to Lochranza in the north (April–Oct 8–9 daily; 30min).

GETTING AROUND

By bus Transport on Arran itself is pretty good: daily buses circle the island (Brodick tourist office has timetables) while the Arran Day Rider (£5.40) allows you to hop on and off as you please. Buses also link in with the two ferry services.

Brodick

The resort of **BRODICK** (from the Norse *breidr vik*, "broad bay") is a place of only moderate charm, but it does have a grand setting in a wide, sandy bay set against a backdrop of granite mountains. Its development as a tourist resort was held back for a long time by its elitist owners, the dukes of Hamilton, though nowadays, as the island's capital and main communication hub, Brodick is by far the busiest town on Arran.



ARRAN GOLF PASS

The **Arran Golf Pass** (Ⓦ golfonarran.com) currently costs £99, which is remarkable value given that it entitles you to a round on each of the island's seven courses; three 18-hole and three 9-hole courses, as well as the superb 12-hole course at Shiskine. You can buy the pass online or at any of the seven clubs.

The town's shops and guesthouses are spread out along the south side of the bay, along with the tourist office and the CalMac pier. Its tourist sights, meanwhile, are clustered on the west and north side of the bay, a couple of miles from the ferry terminal.

Arran Heritage Museum

Rosaburn • April–Oct daily 10.30am–4.30pm • £3 • Ⓣ 01770 302636, Ⓦ arranmuseum.co.uk

Up along the road to the castle, the intermittently interesting **Arran Heritage Museum** is housed in a whitewashed eighteenth-century crofter's farm, and contains an old smiddy and a twee Victorian cottage with box-bed and range. In the old stables, the main exhibition considers the island's intriguing geological and archeological heritage – the most notable exhibit is an incredibly well-preserved early Bronze Age cist grave, complete with intact food vessel – while another section recalls the island's prominent wartime role, as testified by the dozen or so air crashes here during the course of World War II.

Brodick Castle

Two and a half miles north of town, just off the A841 • **Castle** Daily April–Sept 11am–4pm • £12; NTS • **Gardens** Daily 9.30am–dusk • £6.50; Ⓣ 0844 493 2152

Former seat of the duke of Hamilton, **Brodick Castle** is set on a steep bank on the north side of Brodick Bay. The bulk of the castle was built in the nineteenth century, giving it a domestic rather than a military look, and the interior is decidedly dour in tone, though there are a few gems to look out for. Don't miss the portrait of the eleventh duke's faithful piper, who injured his throat on a grouse bone, was warned never to pipe again, but did so and died. There are also a handful of sketches by **Gainsborough** in the boudoir. Probably the most atmospheric room is the copper-filled Victorian kitchen, which conjures up a vision of the sweated and sweating labour required to feed the folk upstairs.

Much more attractive are the walled **gardens** and extensive grounds, a treasury of exotic plants, trees and rhododendrons, which command a superb view across the bay. There's an adventure playground for kids, but the whole area is a natural playground, with waterfalls, a giant pitcher plant that swallows thousands of midges daily, and a maze of paths. Buried in the grounds is a bizarre Bavarian-style **summerhouse** lined entirely with pine cones, one of three built by the eleventh duke to make his wife, Princess Marie of Baden, feel at home.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — BRODICK

By bus The main bus station is by the ferry terminal.

Destinations Blackwaterfoot (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily, 4 on Sun; 30min); Kildonan (4–6 daily; 40min); Lamlash (Mon–Sat hourly, 4 on Sun; 10–15min); Lochranza (3–5 daily; 45min); Whiting Bay (Mon–Sat hourly, 4 on Sun; 25min).

Tourist office By the CalMac pier (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, also June–Sept Sun 10am–5pm; Ⓣ 01770 303776, Ⓦ visitarran.net).

ACCCOMMODATION

Dunvegan Guest House Shore Road Ⓣ 01770 302811, Ⓦ dunveganhouse.co.uk. Within striking distance of the ferry terminal, this prominently positioned sandstone guesthouse has a selection of bright, modern and comfortable rooms, most with direct sea views. £80

★ **Glen Rosa** Ⓣ 01770 302380, Ⓦ arrancamping.co.uk.

GOAT FELL

Arran's most accessible peak is also the island's highest, **Goat Fell** (2866ft) – take your pick from the Gaelic, *goath*, meaning "windy", or the Norse, *geit-fjall*, "goat mountain" – which can be ascended in around four hours from Brodick or around five hours from Corrie, though it's a strenuous hike whichever way you do it; the latter route is, though, tougher.

Two miles from town off the B880 to Blackwaterfoot, this very basic, almost wild, campsite (no showers and cold water only) enjoys a wonderful setting beside a burn, with superb views across the glen. Campfires are allowed too. There's no reception; the owner will pitch up at some point and collect your money. £4/person

★ **Glenartney Guest House** Mayish Road 01770 302220, glenartney-arran.co.uk. Tucked away just uphill from the post office, this is the pick of the town's guesthouses, with a dozen or so immaculately presented, albeit not overly spacious, rooms. Two homely lounges and an evening bar enhance the Glenartney's charms, while you can expect a spectacular breakfast to see you on your way. £80

EATING AND DRINKING

Brodick Bar and Brasserie Alma Road 01770 302169, brodickbar.co.uk. There's decent fare on offer at this big, family-orientated restaurant opposite the post office. Chalked up on a huge board, the diverse menu features lots of meaty treats (pan-fried calves liver with Arran mustard, honey-glazed belly of pork), while the home-made thin-crust pizzas are worth a punt. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10pm.

Creelers Home Farm 01770 302810, creelers.co.uk. Located along the road towards the castle, *Creelers* is the island's standout restaurant; fillet of halibut with chive mash and squat lobster (£16.95) is typical of the dinner menu, while the cheaper lunch menu features the likes of salt and pepper fried squid with chips (£7.95). You can bring your own bottle too (£3 corkage). Easter–Oct Tues–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm.

Lamlash and around

With its distinctive Edwardian architecture and mild climate, **LAMLASH**, four miles south of Brodick, epitomizes the sedate charm of southeast Arran. Lamlash Bay has, in its time, sheltered King Haakon's fleet, in 1263, and, more recently, served as a naval base during both world wars.

Holy Island

The Holy Island boat runs May–Sept daily and more or less hourly, though it's subject to cancellations in windy weather • £11 return • 01770 600998, holyisland.org

The best reason for coming to Lamlash is to visit the slug-shaped hump of **Holy Island**, where a group of **Tibetan Buddhists** have established a retreat. Providing you don't dawdle, it's possible to scramble up to the top of Mullach Mór (1030ft), the island's highest point, and still catch the last boat back. En route, you might well bump into the island's most numerous residents: feral goats, Eriskay ponies, Soay sheep and rabbits.

ACCOMMODATION

Glenisle Hotel On the main road, right in the centre of the village 01770 600559, glenislehotel.com. High-end, and by no means cheap, option, with thirteen gorgeous rooms, each of which has been painted and furnished in colours that reflect those of the island itself. Only the superior rooms have a sea view. £120

Lilybank Just along from the Glenisle 01770 600230, lilybank-arran.co.uk. This sunny B&B is a typically welcoming island guesthouse, offering six floral, pastel-coloured rooms, four of which overlook the bay. £70

EATING AND DRINKING

Drift Inn 01770 600608. Despite its undistinguished exterior, the food at this seafront pub – including smoked haddock scotch egg (£9.95) – and its convivial beer garden, make the *Drift Inn* a fun place to hang out, plus there's live music at weekends. Daily noon–midnight.

Lochranza

The ruined castle that occupies the mud flats of the surrounding bay and the brooding north-facing slopes of the mountains that frame it make for one of the most spectacular ensembles on the island, yet **LOCHRANZA**, despite being the only place of any size in this sparsely populated area, attracts far fewer visitors than Arran's southern resorts.

Lochranza distillery

South end of the village • March–Oct daily 10am–6pm, first tour 10.15am, then every 90mins • £6 • T 01770 830264, W arranwhisky.com

Lochranza's main tourist attraction now is the island's modern **distillery**, distinguished by its pagoda-style roofs at the south end of the village. Established as recently as 1995 – the first on the island since 1837 – the distillery produces the relatively little-known, fourteen-year old single Arran malt. The tour itself is an entertaining and slick affair, beginning with an audiovisual presentation in a mock-up crofter's cottage, before you are led through the distillery along with thoroughgoing explanations of the various processes. It concludes, naturally, with a dram.

ACCOMMODATION — LOCHRANZA

Apple Lodge 500m from the distillery on the main through road T 01770 830229, W applelodgearran.co.uk. The old village manse accommodates several beautifully conceived rooms decked out with colourful embroidery and paintings, and an abundance of antique furnishings; one contains a superb four-poster bed. £80

Lochranza Camping By the golf course T 01770 830273, W arran-campsite.com. Relaxed and scenically placed campsite where red deer come to graze in the early evening. There are also a couple of cool two-man pods. Reception is basically the golf clubhouse (a hut). March–Oct. £16/pitch; pods £60

SYHA hostel Not far from the castle, en route to the ferry terminal T 01770 830631, W syha.org.uk. Friendly and well-equipped SYHA hostel with views over the bay. Breakfast £4.50, packed lunch £5.50. Mid-Feb to Oct. Dorms £17; doubles £38

EATING AND DRINKING

Sandwich Station T 07810 796248. If you're just passing through, or need a packed lunch, pop into this super little sandwich bar and deli opposite the CalMac slipway; hot breakfast rolls, grilled panini and home-made soup are sample offerings. April–Oct Mon 5.30–10pm, Tues–Sun 9am–5pm; Nov–March Tues–Fri 9am–2pm.

Stags Pavilion T 01770 830600, W stagspavilion.com. Accomplished restaurant located in an attractive pavilion at the entrance to the campsite, with yummy Italian dishes like *pollo cacciatore* (hunter's chicken in a tomato, mushroom and olive sauce). It's not licensed but you can bring your own bottle. Reservations advised. Mon 5.30–10pm, Tues–Sun 10am–4pm & 5.30–10pm.

Bridge

Glasgow and the Clyde

183 George Square and around
186 The Merchant City
187 The East End
190 Glasgow Cathedral and around
191 Sauchiehall Street and around
194 The West End
198 Clydeside
199 The Southside
203 Arrival and departure
204 Getting around
205 Accommodation
207 Eating
211 Drinking
213 Nightlife
214 Entertainment
215 Shopping
216 Directory
216 The Clyde
218 The Clyde Valley

CLYDE AUDITORIUM

5

Glasgow and the Clyde

Rejuvenated, upbeat Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, changed irrevocably in 1990 when it energetically embraced its status as European City of Culture. Set on the banks of the mighty River Clyde, this former industrial giant can seem less than enticing as you approach, and many of its outer suburbs remain seriously deprived. However, after a little time exploring visitors will find a city that is, in its own idiosyncratic way, a cultured and dynamic place well worth getting to know.

GLASGOW has much to offer, including some of the most imaginative museums and galleries in Britain – among them the showcase **Burrell Collection** and popular **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum** – nearly all of which are free. Glasgow's **architecture** is some of the most striking in the UK, from the restored eighteenth-century warehouses of the **Merchant City** to the hulking Victorian prosperity of **George Square**. Most distinctive of all is the work of local luminary Charles Rennie Mackintosh, whose elegantly streamlined Art Nouveau designs appear all over the city, reaching their apotheosis in the stunning **Glasgow School of Art**. Development of the old shipyards of the Clyde, notably in the space-age shapes of the new **Glasgow Science Centre**, hint at yet another string to the city's bow: combining design with innovation. The metropolis also boasts thriving live-music venues, distinctive places to eat and drink, busy theatres, concert halls and an opera house. Above all, the feature that best defines the individualism and peculiar attraction of the city is its **people**, whether rough-edged comedians on the football terraces or style-obsessed youth hitting the designer bars.

Despite all the upbeat hype, Glasgow's gentrification has passed by deprived inner-city areas such as the **East End**, home of the **Barras market** and some staunchly change-resistant pubs. Indeed, even in the more fashionable quarters of Glasgow, there's a gritty edge that's never far away, reinforcing a peculiar mix of grime and glitz that the city seems to have patented.

Glasgow is the obvious base from which to explore the **Clyde Valley and coast**, made easily accessible by a reliable train service. Chief among the draws is the remarkable eighteenth-century **New Lanark** mills and workers' village, a World Heritage Site, while other day-trips might take you to Charles Rennie Mackintosh's **Hill House** in Helensburgh or on a boat heading "doon the watter" towards the scenic Argyll **sea lochs**, past the old shipbuilding centres on the Clyde estuary.

Brief history

Glasgow's earliest history, like so much else in this surprisingly romantic city, is obscured in a swirl of myth. The city's name is said to derive from the Celtic *Glas-cu*, which loosely translates as "the dear, green place" – a tag that the tourist board is keen

Charles Rennie Mackintosh p.192
The Glasgow Boys and the Colourists p.196
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Top five boutique hotels p.206
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GLASGOW CATHEDRAL

Highlights

❶ **Necropolis** Elegantly crumbling graveyard on a city centre hill behind the ancient cathedral, with great views. **See p.190**

❷ **Glasgow School of Art** Take a student-led tour of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's architectural masterpiece. **See p.191**

❸ **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum** Splendid civic collection of art and artefacts in a Gothic red-sandstone palace in the city's lively West End. **See p.194**

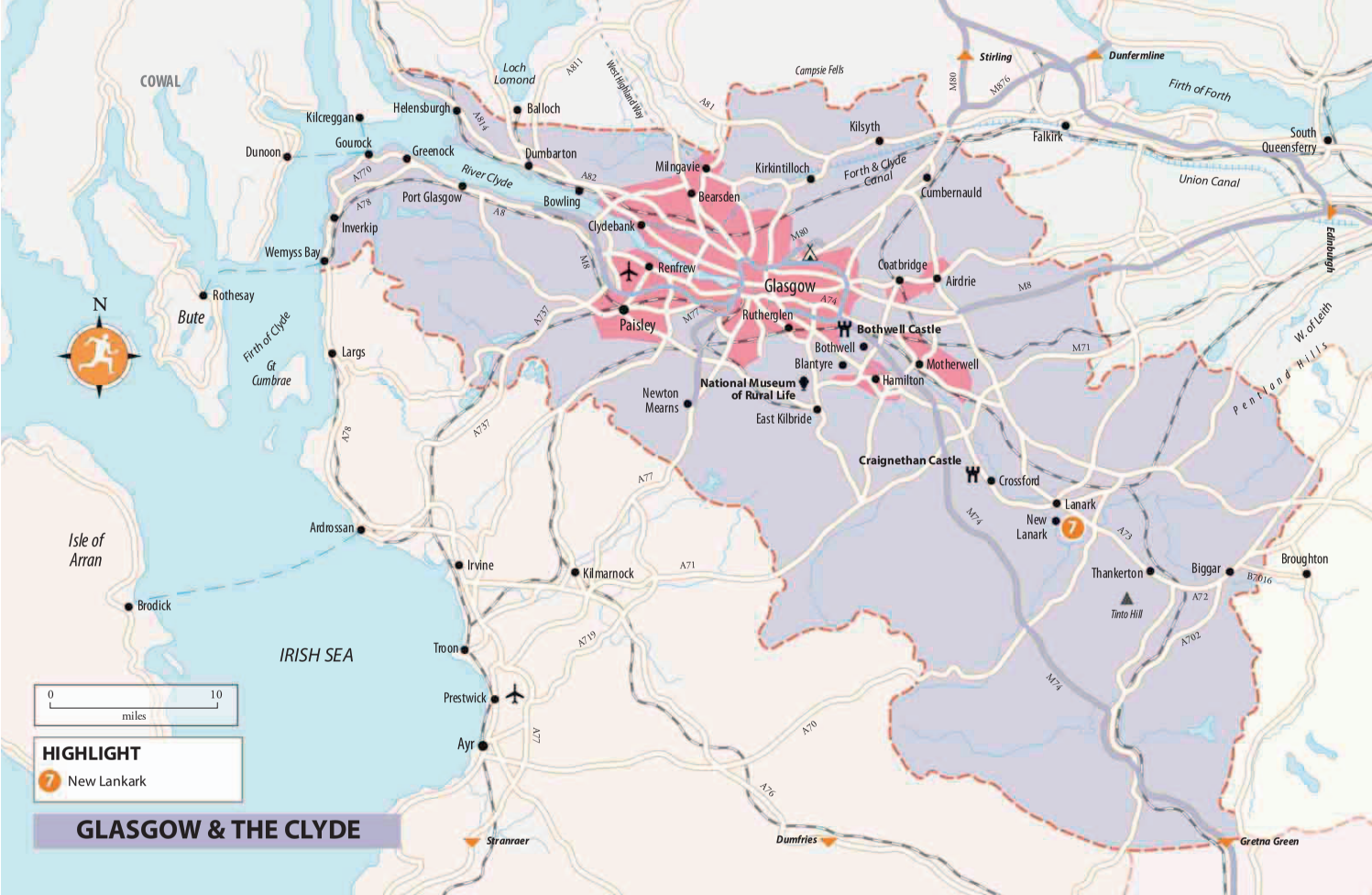
❹ **Clydeside** The river that made Glasgow: walk or cycle along it, take a boat on it, cross a bridge over it, or get a view of it from the new Riverside Museum. **See p.198**

❺ **Burrell Collection** An inspired and eclectic art collection displayed in a harmonious purpose-built museum in Pollok Park. **See p.201**

❻ **"Glesga" nightlife** Sample the glamour and the grit with cocktails at the *Rogano* followed by a pint of heavy at the *Horseshoe Bar*. **See p.208 & p.212**

❼ **New Lanark** A fascinating eighteenth-century planned mill village set in a dramatic gorge. **See p.219**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.180, P.182, PP.184–185 & PP.188–189


COWAL
Loch Lomond
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West Highland Way
A81
Campsie Fells
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Stirling
Dunfermline
Firth of Forth
Kilcreggan
Helensburgh
A814
Balloch
Kilsyth
Falkirk
South Queensferry
Dunoon
Gourock
A770
Greenock
River Clyde
Dumbarton
A82
Milngavie
Kirkintilloch
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Coatbridge
Airdrie
Glasgow
A74
Rothesay
Bute
Paisley
A737
M77
Rutherglen
Bothwell Castle
M8
W. of Leith
Firth of Clyde
Gt Cumbrae
Largs
Bothwell
Blantyre
Motherwell
M71
Pentland Hills
National Museum of Rural Life
Hamilton
Newton Mearns
East Kilbride
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Craignethan Castle
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A73
Isle of Arran
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Irvine
Kilmarnock
A71
Thankerton
Biggar
B7016
Broughton
Brodick
A72
Tinto Hill
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IRISH SEA
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GLASGOW & THE CLYDE

to exploit as an antidote to the sooty images of popular imagination. It is generally agreed that the first settlers arrived in the sixth century to join Christian missionary **Kentigern** – later to become St Mungo – in his newly founded monastery on the banks of the tiny Molendinar Burn.

The growth of the city

William the Lionheart gave the town an official charter in 1175, after which it continued to grow in importance, peaking in the mid-fifteenth century when the **university** – the second in Scotland after St Andrews – was founded on Kentigern's site. This led to the establishment of an archbishopric, and city status, in 1492, and, due to its situation on a large, navigable river, Glasgow soon expanded into a major industrial **port**.

The first cargo of tobacco from Virginia offloaded in Glasgow in 1674, and the 1707 Act of Union between Scotland and England – despite demonstrations against it in Glasgow – led to a boom in trade with the colonies until American independence. Following the **Industrial Revolution** and James Watt's innovations in steam power, coal from the abundant seams of Lanarkshire fuelled the ironworks all around the Clyde, which were worked by the cheap hands of the Highlanders and, later, those fleeing the Irish potato famine of the 1840s.

Victorian Glasgow

The **Victorian age** transformed Glasgow beyond recognition. The population mushroomed from 77,000 in 1801 to nearly 800,000 at the end of the century, and new tenement blocks swept into the suburbs in an attempt to cope with the choking influxes of people. Two vast and stately **International Exhibitions** were held in 1888 and 1901 to showcase the city and its industries to the outside world, necessitating the construction of huge civic monoliths such as the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and the Council Chambers in George Square. At this time Glasgow revelled in the title of the "Second City of the Empire", an unexpected epithet for a place that rarely acknowledges second place in anything.

The shipbuilding era

By the turn of the twentieth century, Glasgow's industries had been honed into one massive **shipbuilding** culture. Everything from tugboats to transatlantic liners was fashioned out of sheet metal in the yards that straddled the Clyde from Gourock to Rutherglen.

In the harsh economic climate of the 1930s, however, unemployment spiralled, and Glasgow could do little to counter its popular image as a city dominated by inebriate violence and (having absorbed vast numbers of Irish emigrants) sectarian tensions. The **Gorbals** area in particular became notorious as one of the worst slums in Europe.

Renaissance

Shipbuilding, and many associated industries, died away almost completely in the 1960s and 1970s, leaving the city depressed, jobless and directionless. Then, in the 1980s, the self-promotion began, starting with the upbeat "Glasgow's Miles Better" campaign in 1983, and snowballing towards the 1988 Garden Festival and the year-long party as European City of Culture in 1990.

Glasgow then beat off competition from Edinburgh and Liverpool to become UK City of Architecture and Design in 1999, and in 2007 won the right to host the **Commonwealth Games** of 2014. These various titles have helped to reinforce the impression that Glasgow, despite its many problems, has successfully broken the industrial shackles of the past and evolved into a city of stature and confidence.

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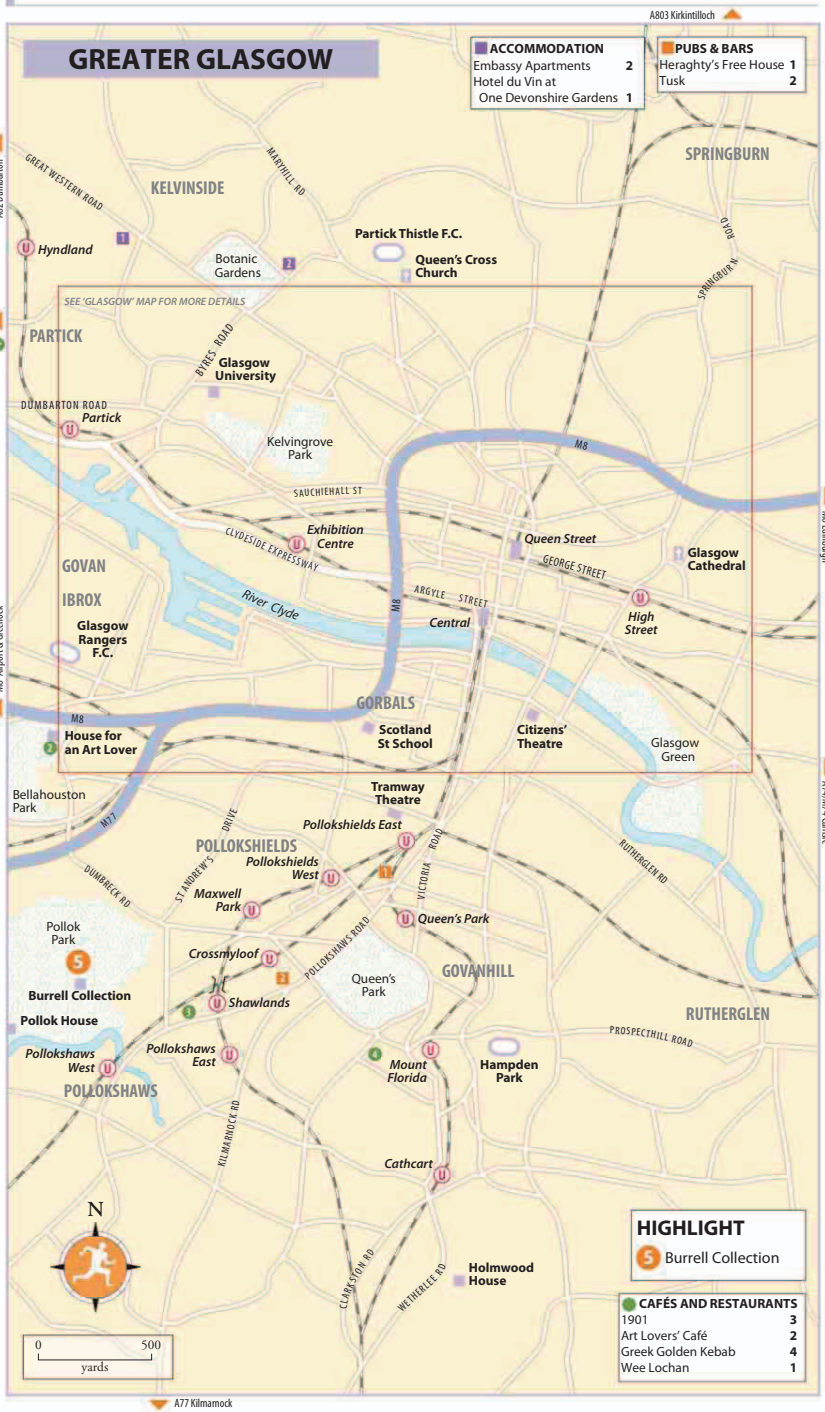

GREATER GLASGOW
A803 Kirkintilloch
ACCOMMODATION
Embassy Apartments 2
Hotel du Vin at One Devonshire Gardens 1
PUBS & BARS
Heraghty's Free House 1
Tusk 2
A82 Dumbarton
GREAT WESTERN ROAD
KELVINSIDE
MARYHILL RD
SPRINGBURN
Hyndland
Botanic Gardens
Partick Thistle F.C.
Queen's Cross Church
SEE 'GLASGOW' MAP FOR MORE DETAILS
PARTICK
BYRES ROAD
Glasgow University
DUMBARTON ROAD
Partick
Kelvingrove Park
M8
SAUCHIEHALL ST
Exhibition Centre
CLYDESIDE EXPRESSWAY
Queen Street
GEORGE STREET
Glasgow Cathedral
GOVAN
IBROX
River Clyde
ARGYLE STREET
Central
High Street
Glasgow Rangers F.C.
M8 Airport & Greenock
M8 Edinburgh
GORBALS
M8
House for an Art Lover
Scotland St School
Citizens' Theatre
Glasgow Green
Bellahouston Park
Tramway Theatre
M77
DRIVE
Pollokshields East
POLLOKSHIELDS
Pollokshields West
ST ANDREW'S
VICTORIA ROAD
RUTHERGLEN RD
DUMBRECK RD
Maxwell Park
Queen's Park
Pollok Park
Crossmyloof
POLLOKSHAWS ROAD
GOVANHILL
Queen's Park
Burrell Collection
Shawlands
Pollok House
RUTHERGLEN
PROSPECTHILL ROAD
Pollokshaws West
Pollokshaws East
Mount Florida
Hampden Park
POLLOKSHAWS
KILMARNOCK RD
Cathcart
N
CLARKSTON RD
WETHERLEE RD
Holmwood House
A74/M74 Carlisle
HIGHLIGHT
5 Burrell Collection
CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS
1901 3
Art Lovers' Café 2
Greek Golden Kebab 4
Wee Lochan 1
0 500
yards
A77 Kilmamock

George Square and around

The imposing architecture of **George Square** reflects the confidence of Glasgow's Victorian age. The wide-open plaza almost has a continental airiness about it, although there isn't much subtlety about the 80ft column rising up at its centre, which is topped by a statue of Sir Walter Scott. Haphazardly dotted around the great writer's plinth are a number of dignified statues of assorted luminaries, ranging from Queen Victoria to Scots heroes such as James Watt and Rabbie Burns.

City Chambers

George Square • Guided tours Mon–Fri 10.30am & 2.30pm • Free • T 0141 287 4018 • Buchanan Street underground

The florid splendour of the **City Chambers**, opened by Queen Victoria in 1888, occupies the entire eastern end of George Square. Built from wealth gained by colonial trade and heavy industry, it epitomizes the aspirations and optimism of late Victorian city elders. Its intricately detailed facade includes high-minded **friezes** typical of the era: the four nations which then comprised the United Kingdom at the feet of the throned queen, the British colonies and allegorical figures representing Religion, Virtue and Knowledge. Head inside and wander around the ground floor, where you'll see domed mosaic ceilings and two mighty Italian marble stairwells, but to get any further you'll need to join one of the **guided tours** of the labyrinthine interior.

The Gallery of Modern Art

Royal Exchange Square • Mon–Wed & Sat 10am–5pm, Thurs 10am–8pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • T 0141 287 3050, W glasgowlife.org.uk • Buchanan Street underground

Queen Street leads south from George Square to **Royal Exchange Square**, where the focal point is the graceful mansion built in 1775 for tobacco lord William Cunninghame. This was the most ostentatious of the Glasgow merchants' homes and, having served as the city's Royal Exchange and central library, now houses the **Gallery of Modern Art**. Surrounded by controversy from the day it opened in 1996, GOMA has not lived up to the potential of the marvellous building and location, though as it's free it does merit a quick visit. The mirrored reception area leads you straight into the spacious ground-floor gallery, a striking room with rows of Corinthian pillars and huge windows. It's principally used for temporary exhibitions of conceptual art. Down in the basement there's a library and an unenticing café, while the smaller galleries on the two upper floors are either linked together for larger exhibitions or used to show smaller themed shows.

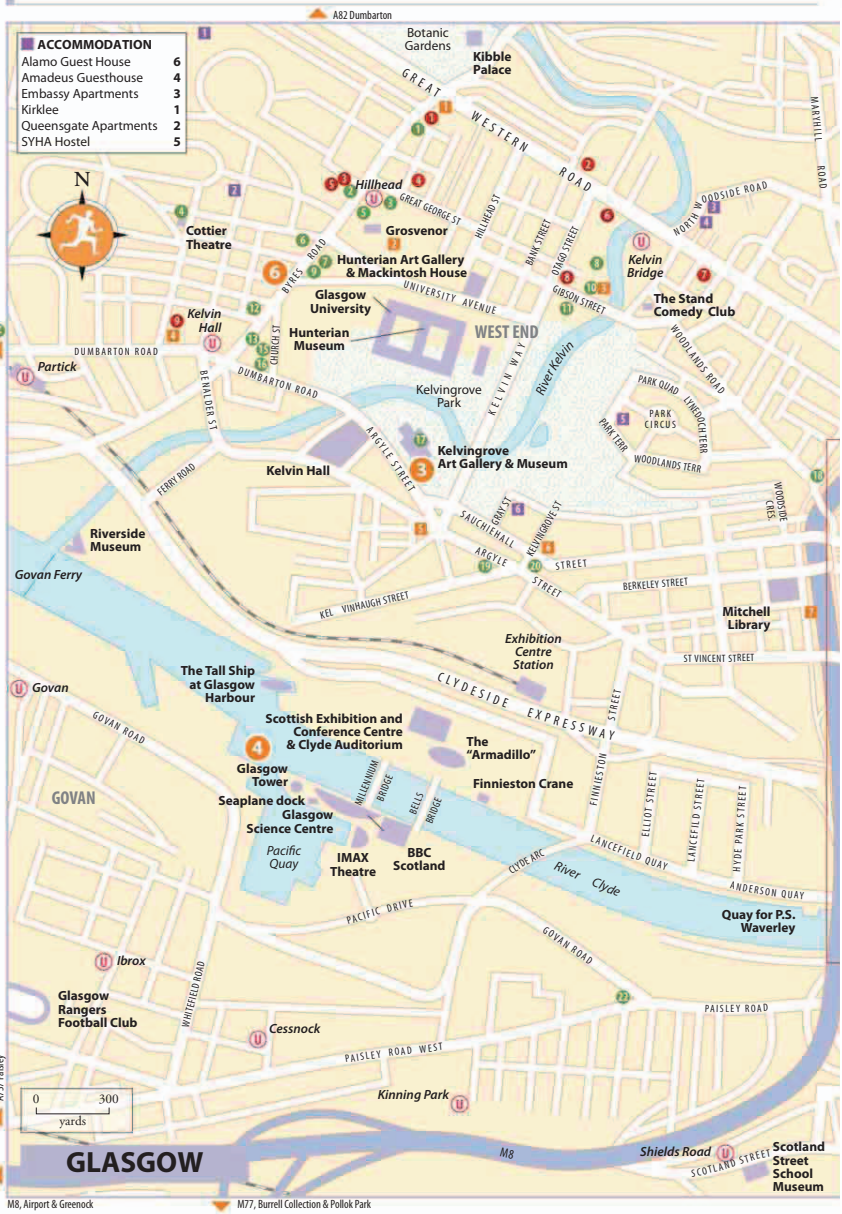
Royal Concert Hall

2 Sauchiehall St • See website for programme and prices • T 0141 353 8000, W glasgowconcerthalls.com • Buchanan Street underground

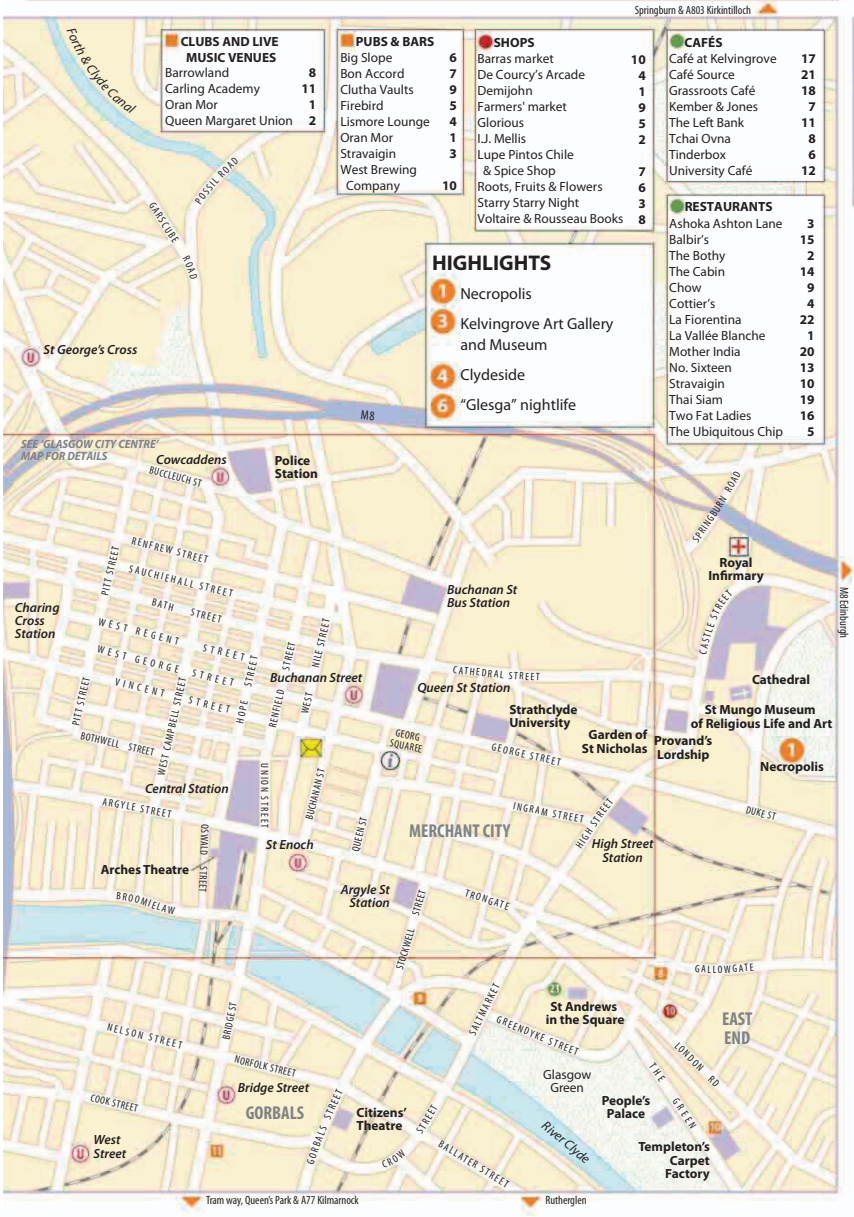
The anonymous £30-million **Royal Concert Hall** has only three huge flagpoles protruding to proclaim that this is, in fact, a building of note. The showpiece hall does, however, have an excellent auditorium that plays host to world-class musical events. Standing outside the concert hall is a statue of **Donald Dewar**, Scotland's First Minister until his untimely death in 2000.

Along Buchanan Street

Buchanan Street runs north–south one block west of George Square, defining Glasgow's main shopping district. At the southern end of the street is the **Princes Square** shopping centre, hollowed out of the innards of a soft sandstone building.



The interior, all recherché Art Deco and ornate ironwork, has lots of pricey fashionable shops, set to a soothing background of classical music. Glaswegians' voracious appetite for shopping is fed further at the northern end of Buchanan Street, just beyond the underground station, in the **Buchanan Galleries** shopping centre, a bewilderingly vast shopping mall of some 600,000 square feet stuffed with most of the predictable chain stores.



CLUBS AND LIVE MUSIC VENUES

Barrowland	8
Carling Academy	11
Oran Mor	1
Queen Margaret Union	2

PUBS & BARS

Big Slope	6
Bon Accord	7
Clutha Vaults	9
Firebird	5
Lismore Lounge	4
Oran Mor	1
Stravaigin	3
West Brewing Company	10

SHOPS

Barras market	10
De Courcy's Arcade	4
Demijohn	1
Farmers' market	9
Glorious	5
I.J. Mellis	2
Lupe Pintos Chile & Spice Shop	7
Roots, Fruits & Flowers	6
Starry Starry Night	3
Voltaire & Rousseau Books	8

CAFÉS

Café at Kelvingrove	17
Café Source	21
Grassroots Café	18
Kember & Jones	7
The Left Bank	11
Tchai Ovna	8
Tinderbox	6
University Café	12

RESTAURANTS

Ashoka Ashton Lane	3
Balbir's	15
The Bothy	2
The Cabin	14
Chow	9
Cottier's	4
La Fiorentina	22
La Vallée Blanche	1
Mother India	20
No. Sixteen	13
Stravaigin	10
Thai Siam	19
Two Fat Ladies	16
The Ubiquitous Chip	5

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Necropolis
3. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
4. Clydeside
6. "Glesga" nightlife

The Lighthouse

11 Mitchell Lane • Mon & Wed–Sat 10.30am–5pm, Tues 11am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm • Free • T 0141 276 5360, W thelighthouse.co.uk • St Enoch underground

At 11 Mitchell Lane, an otherwise nondescript alleyway between Buchanan Street and Union Street, is **The Lighthouse**, a spectacularly converted Charles Rennie Mackintosh building which has found new life as Scotland's **Centre for Architecture, Design and the**

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City. The 1895 building was Mackintosh's first public commission, and housed the offices of the *Glasgow Herald* newspaper; despite glass and sandstone additions, it retains many original features, including the distinctive tower from which the building takes its name.

Alongside temporary exhibitions on design and architecture there's a shop featuring some attractive contemporary design and the stylish **Mackintosh Interpretation Centre**, a great place to learn more about the man and his work. It features plans, models, photographs, original objects, and computer and video displays that explore many of Mackintosh's unique buildings and interiors. A viewing platform and the Lighthouse Tower itself give fantastic views out over the city skyline to a number of his important buildings, including the School of Art and Scotland Street School.

The Merchant City

The grid of streets that lie immediately east of the City Chambers is known as the **Merchant City**, an area of eighteenth-century warehouses and homes once bustling with cotton, tobacco and sugar traders, which in the last two decades has been sandblasted and swabbed clean with greater enthusiasm and municipal money than any other part of Glasgow in an attempt to bring residents back into the city centre. The expected flood of yuppies was more like a trickle, but the expensive designer shops, stylish bars and bijou cafés are still in evidence, giving the area a pervasive air of sophistication and chic.

Trades Hall

Glassford St • Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; tour Tues 10.30am • Free • T 0141 552 2418, W tradeshallglasgow.co.uk • St Enoch underground

At the junction of Ingram and John streets is the delicate white spire of **Hutcheson Hall**, an early nineteenth-century building designed by Scottish architect David Hamilton, while a little way down Glassford Street, the Robert Adam-designed **Trades Hall** is easily distinguished by its neat green copper dome. Purpose-built in 1794, it still functions as the headquarters of the Glasgow trade guilds. These include corporations of Bakers, Hammermen, Gardeners and Weavers, among others, although today they have limited connections to their respective trades and act as charitably minded associations. The former civic pride and status of the guilds is still evident, however, from the rich assortment of carvings and stained-glass windows, with a lively pictorial representation of the different trades in the silk frieze around the walls of the first-floor grand hall. Visitors are free to look around the building, and access is only restricted if there is a function taking place.

Trongate 103

Trongate 103 • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm; open Thurs till 9pm Feb–Dec • Free • W trongate103.com

Behind a sleek glass frontage among otherwise nondescript and downmarket shops on Trongate you'll find **Trongate 103**, a sparkling new arts centre that incorporates a number of organizations, including the Glasgow Print Studio, Street Level Photoworks and Transmission Gallery. The six-storey converted building is used to show printmaking, contemporary photography, video work and ceramics in airy light-filled spaces.

Sharmanka Kinetic Gallery

Trongate 103 • Wed, Fri & Sat 3pm, Thurs & Sun 3pm & 7pm • 45min (3pm)/70min (7pm) show £5/8 • T 0141 552 7080, W sharmanka.com • St Enoch underground

Trongate 103 is home to Glasgow's most unusual attraction. Founded by Russian émigrés Eduard Bersudsky and Tatyana Jakovskaya, the **Sharmanka Kinetic Gallery** is like a mad inventor's magical workshop, with dozens of allegorical contraptions made from old wheels, levers, lights, carved wooden figures and scrap metal that spark into

life during performances. A unique art form, Sharmanka (Russian for barrel organ or hurdy-gurdy) is at once hypnotic, playful and deeply poignant, with its mechanical sculptures, or "kinemats" imprisoned in their relentless routine, while choreographed lighting draws you from one part of the show to the next and rather sinister fairground-style music plays in the background.

The East End

East of Glasgow Cross, down Gallowgate beyond the train lines, lies the **East End**, the district that perhaps most closely corresponds to the old perception of Glasgow. Hemmed in by Glasgow Green to the south and the old university to the west, this densely packed industrial area essentially created the city's wealth. The Depression caused the closure of many factories, leaving communities stranded in an industrial wasteland. Today, isolated pubs, tatty shops and cafés sit amid this dereliction, in sharp contrast to the gloss of the Merchant City only a few blocks to the west. You're definitely off the tourist trail, but unless you're here after dark it's not as threatening as it may feel, and there's no doubt that the area offers a rich flavour of working-class Glasgow.

Three hundred yards from Glasgow Cross down either London Road or Gallowgate is **the Barras**, Glasgow's largest and most popular weekend market (see p.215). By way of contrast, the East End now features some shiny new attractions too: an arena and the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, built in preparation for Glasgow's hosting of the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Glasgow Green

Between London Road and the River Clyde are the wide and tree-lined spaces of **Glasgow Green**. Reputedly the oldest public park in Britain, the Green has been common land since at least 1480, when it was first mentioned in records. Glaswegians hold it very dear, considering it to be an immortal link between themselves and their ancestors, for whom a stroll on the Green was a favourite Sunday afternoon jaunt. Various memorials are dotted around the lawns: an Adams triumphant arch rescued from the demolished Assembly Rooms on Ingram Street, with panels featuring The Three Graces and Apollo with his lyre; the 146ft-high **Nelson Monument**; the ornate terracotta **Doulton Fountain**, rising like a wedding cake to a pinnacle where Queen Victoria oversees her Empire; and the stern monument extolling the evils of drink and the glory of God that was erected by the nineteenth-century **Temperance movement** – now a meeting place for local drunks.

Opposite Templeton's Carpet Factory you can still see lines of **Victorian washing poles**, recalling the days when the Green was very much a public space in daily use.

Templeton's Carpet Factory

On the northeast side of the Green, just beyond the People's Palace, at 62 Templeton Street, it's worth taking a look at the extraordinary **Templeton's Carpet Factory**, a massive brick and moulded terracotta edifice of turrets, arched windows, mosaic-style patterns and castellated grandeur designed in the style of the Doge's Palace in Venice and built in 1892. It has been converted into apartments, but also houses the West Brewing Company's excellent *bier halle* and microbrewery (see p.212).

The People's Palace

Glasgow Green • Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • T 0141 276 0788, W glasgowlife.org.uk uk • St Enoch underground

The People's Palace houses a wonderfully haphazard evocation of the city's history. This squat, red-sandstone Victorian building, with a vast semicircular glasshouse tacked on

the back, was purpose-built as a museum back in 1898 – almost a century before the rest of the country caught on to the fashion for social history collections. Many of the displays are designed to instil a warm glow in the memories of locals: the museum is refreshingly unpretentious and Glaswegian families almost always outnumber visitors.

You'll find displays of everything from a wartime Anderson shelter to Billy Connolly's big banana boots. An entertaining sound-and-light show reconstructs a "single-end" or

one-roomed house, a typical setting for the daily life of hundreds of thousands of Glasgow people through the years. Various themes with a particular resonance in Glasgow are explored, including alcohol, and some guidance to understanding "the Patter" – Glaswegians' idiosyncratic version of the Queen's English. The glasshouse at the back of the palace contains the **Winter Gardens**, which has a café, water garden, and assorted tropical plants and shrubs.

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Glasgow Cathedral and around

Castle St • April–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Sun 1–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4pm, Sun 1–4pm • Free • 0141 552 8198, glasgowcathedral.org.uk • Buchanan Street underground

Built in 1136, destroyed in 1192 and rebuilt soon after, stumpy-spired **Glasgow Cathedral** was not completed until the late fifteenth century, with the final reconstruction of the chapterhouse and the aisle designed by Robert Blacader, the city's first archbishop. Thanks to the intervention of the city guilds, it is the only Scottish mainland cathedral to have escaped the hands of religious reformers in the sixteenth century. The cathedral is dedicated to the city's patron saint and reputed founder, St Mungo.

Because of the sloping ground on which it is built, at its east end the cathedral is effectively on two levels, the crypt being part of the lower church. Either side of the nave, the narrow **aisles** are illuminated by vivid stained-glass windows, most of which date from the last century. Threadbare Union flags and military pennants hang listlessly beneath them, serving as a reminder that the cathedral is very much a part of the Unionist Protestant tradition. Beyond the nave, the **choir** is hidden from view by the curtained stone pulpit, making the interior feel a great deal smaller than might be expected from the outside. In the choir's northeastern corner, a small door leads into the gloomy **sacristy**, in which Glasgow University was founded over five hundred years ago. Wooden boards mounted on the walls detail the alternating Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy of the cathedral, testimony to the turbulence and fluctuations of the Church in Scotland.

Two sets of steps from the nave lead down into the **lower church**, where you'll see the dark and musty **chapel** surrounding the tomb of St Mungo. The saint's relics were removed in the late Middle Ages, although the tomb still forms the centrepiece. The chapel itself is one of the most glorious examples of medieval architecture in Scotland, best seen in the delicate fan vaulting rising up from the thicket of cool stone columns.

The Necropolis

Rising up behind the cathedral, the atmospheric **Necropolis** is a grassy mound covered in a fantastic assortment of crumbling and tumbling gravestones, ornate urns, gloomy catacombs and Neoclassical temples. Inspired by the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, developer John Strong created a garden of death in 1833, and it quickly became a fitting spot for the great and the good of wealthy nineteenth-century Glasgow to indulge their vanity. Various paths lead through the rows of eroding, neglected graves, and from the summit, next to the column topped with an indignant John Knox, there are superb **views**.

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art

Cathedral Square • Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • Buchanan Street underground

The **St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art**, housed in a rather bland late twentieth-century pastiche of a Scots medieval townhouse, focuses on objects, beliefs and art from Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. In addition to the main exhibition there is a small collection of photographs, papers and archive material looking at religion in Glasgow, the zealotry of the nineteenth-century Temperance movement and Christian missionaries (local boy David Livingstone in particular). Outside is Britain's only permanent "dry stone" Zen Buddhist garden.

Provand's Lordship

Cathedral Square • Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • Buchanan Street underground

The oldest house in the city, the **Provand's Lordship** dates from 1471 and has been used as an ecclesiastical residence and an inn, among other things. Inside, the re-creations of

life in the fifteenth century aren't particularly arresting unless you've an interest in period furniture. As a reminder of the manse's earthier history, the upper floor contains pictures of assorted low-life characters such as the notorious drunkards and prostitutes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Glasgow.

Behind the Provand's Lordship lies the small **Garden of St Nicholas**, a herb garden contrasting medieval and Renaissance aesthetics and approaches to medicine.

Sauchiehall Street and around

Glasgow's most famous street, **Sauchiehall Street**, runs in a straight line west from the northern end of Buchanan Street, past some unexciting shopping malls to a few of the city's most interesting sights, including Mackintosh's reconstructed **Willow Tea Rooms** and perhaps his masterpiece, the **Glasgow School of Art**, where you can take student-led tours. The touching **Tenement House**, nearby, is well worth a visit.

Willow Tea Rooms

217 Sauchiehall St • Mon–Sat 9am–5pm Sun 11am–5pm • Free • 0141 332 0521, willowtearooms.co.uk • Cowcaddens underground

Charles Rennie Mackintosh fans should head for the **Willow Tea Rooms** (p.207), not all that easy to spot at first, above Henderson the Jeweller at 217 Sauchiehall Street. Impressive if lacking in atmosphere, this is a faithful reconstruction (opened in 1980 after more than 50 years of closure) on the site of the 1904 original, which was created for Kate Cranston, one of Rennie Mackintosh's few contemporary supporters in the city. Tea is still served here; ask for a table in the Salon de Lux, where everything, from the fixtures and fittings right down to the teaspoons and menu cards, was designed by Mackintosh. Taking inspiration from the word *Sauchiehall*, which means "avenue of willow", he chose the willow leaf as a theme to unify the whole structure, from the tables to the mirrors and the ironwork. The motif is most apparent in the stylized linear panels of the bow window, which continues into the intimate dining room as if to surround the sitter, like a willow grove, and is echoed in the high-backed silver and purple chairs. These elongated forms were used to enhance the small space and demonstrate Mackintosh's superb ability to fuse function with decoration.

Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA)

350 Sauchiehall St • Free • 0141 352 4900, cca-glasgow.com • Cowcaddens underground

It's usually worth wandering into the **CCA** at number 350, where eclectic exhibitions of international and home-grown conceptual art, combined with a stunning atrium bar and café, consistently make this one of the city's trendier cultural hotspots.

The Glasgow School of Art

167 Renfrew St • Guided tours April–Sept daily on the hour 10am–4pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 11am, 2pm & 3pm; booking advised • £9.75 • 0141 353 4526, www.gsa.ac.uk • Cowcaddens underground

Rising above Sauchiehall Street to the north is one of the city centre's steepest hills, with Dalhousie and Scott streets veering up to Renfrew Street, where you'll find Charles Rennie Mackintosh's **Glasgow School of Art** at number 167 – one of the most prestigious art schools in the UK. Widely considered to be the pinnacle of Mackintosh's work, the school is a characteristically angular building of warm sandstone that, due to financial constraints, had to be constructed in two stretches (1897–99 and 1907–09). There's a clear change in the architect's style from the mock-Baronial east wing to the softer lines of the western half.

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The only way to see the School of Art is to take one of the student-led **guided tours**, or visit during the degree show in June. All over the school, from the roof to the stairwells, Mackintosh's unique touches recur – Japanese lantern shapes, images of seeds and roses, and stylized Celtic illuminations. Even before entering the building up the gently curving stairway, you cannot fail to be struck by the soaring height of the north-facing **windows**, which light the art studios and were designed, characteristically, to combine aesthetics with practicality.

In the side entrance hall, the school shop sells tour tickets and a good selection of Mackintosh books, posters and cards. Hanging in the hall stairwell is the artist's highly personal wrought-iron version of the legend of St Mungo represented on the city's coat of arms. Above this, the **Gallery**, the largest space in the school, is a classic example of the architect's use of contrasts, with light flooding in from a skylight, yet dark beams

CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH

The work of the architect **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** (1868–1928) has come to be synonymous with the image of Glasgow. Historians may disagree over whether his work was a forerunner of the modernist movement or merely the sunset of Victorianism, but he undoubtedly created buildings of great beauty, idiosyncratically fusing Scots Baronial with Gothic, Art Nouveau and modern design. Though the bulk of his work was conceived at the turn of the twentieth century, since the 1970s Mackintosh's ideas have become particularly fashionable, giving rise to a certain amount of ersatz "**Mockintosh**" in his home city, with his distinctive lettering and design features used time and again by shops, pubs and businesses. Fortunately, there are also plenty of examples of the genuine article, making the city something of a pilgrimage centre for art and design students from all over the world.

Mackintosh's big break came in 1896, when he won the competition to design a new home for the **Glasgow School of Art** (see p.191). This is his most famous work, but a number of smaller buildings created during his tenure with the architects Honeyman and Keppie, which began in 1889, document the development of his style. One of his earliest commissions was for a new building to house the *Glasgow Herald* on Mitchell Lane, off Argyle Street. A massive tower rises up from the corner, giving the building its popular name of **The Lighthouse**; it now houses the Mackintosh Interpretation Centre (see p.185).

In the 1890s Glasgow went wild for tearooms, where the middle classes could play billiards and chess, read in the library or merely chat. The imposing Miss Cranston, who dominated the Glasgow teashop scene, commissioned Mackintosh to plan the interiors for her growing business. Over the next twenty years he designed articles from teaspoons to furniture and, finally, as in the case of the **Willow Tea Rooms** (see p.191), the structure itself.

The spectre of limited budgets was to haunt Mackintosh throughout his career, and he never had the chance to design and construct with complete freedom. However, these constraints didn't manage to dull his creativity, as demonstrated by the **Scotland Street School** of 1904, just south of the river (see p.200). It is his most symmetrical work, with a whimsical nod to history in the Scots Baronial conical tower roofs and sandstone building material. Mackintosh's forceful personality and originality did not endear him to construction workers: he would frequently change his mind or add details at the last minute, often overstretching a budget. This lost him the support of local builders and architects and prompted him to move to Suffolk in 1914 to escape the "philistines" of Glasgow and to re-evaluate his achievements. Indeed, the building that arguably displays Mackintosh at his most flamboyant was one he never saw built, the **House for an Art Lover** (see p.200), constructed in Bellahouston Park in 1996, 95 years after the plans were submitted to a German architectural competition.

THE MACKINTOSH TRAIL TICKET

This one-day pass (£16), including entry to twelve principal Mackintosh buildings as well as unlimited underground and bus travel, is available from the tourist office, the attractions on the trail, and the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society (T 0141 946 6600, W crmsociety.com), which is based in the Mackintosh-designed Queens Cross Church in the northwest of the city at 870 Garscube Rd.

lowering the perceived space to create a degree of intimacy. Forbidding wrought-iron work gives the sense of a Highland castle, while half-hidden alcoves with unexpected windows look out over the city. Below this is the school's most spectacular room, the glorious two-storey **Library**. Designed to give the sense of a clearing in a forest, sombre oak panelling is set against angular lights, hanging in seemingly random clusters. The dark bookcases sit precisely in their fitted alcoves, and the most unusual piece of furniture is the central periodical desk, whose oval central strut displays perfect and quite beautiful symmetry.

The **Furniture Gallery**, reached at the end of your tour, shelters an Aladdin's cave of designs – numerous tall-backed chairs, a semicircular settle designed for the Willow Tea Rooms, domino tables and a chest of drawers with highlighted silver panels.

The Tenement House

145 Buccleuch St • March–Oct daily 1–5pm • £6.50; NTS • 0844 493 2197 • Cowcaddens underground

Just a few hundred yards northwest of the School of Art – on the other side of a sheer hill – is the **Tenement House**. Glasgow's tenements were originally conceived as a convenient way to house the influx of workers to the city in the late 1800s, though it didn't take long for the wealthy middle classes to realize their potential. Rising three to five storeys, they have two or three apartments per floor; important rooms are picked out with bay windows, middle storeys are emphasized by architraves or decorated panels below sill or above lintel, and street junctions are given importance by swelling bay windows, turrets and domes.

This is a typical tenement block still lived in on most floors, except for the ground and first floors, where you can see the respectable if cramped home of **Agnes Toward**, who moved here with her mother in 1911, changing nothing and throwing very little out until she was hospitalized in 1965. On the ground floor, the National Trust for Scotland has constructed a fascinating display on the development of the humble tenement block as the bedrock of urban Scottish housing, with a poignant display of relics – ration books, letters, bills, holiday snaps and so forth – from Miss Toward's life.

Upstairs, you have to ring the doorbell to enter the flat, which gives every impression of still being inhabited, with a cluttered hearth and range, kitchen utensils, recess beds, framed religious tracts and sewing machine all untouched. The only major change since Miss Toward left has been the reinstallation of the flickering **gas lamps** she would have used in the early days. Tenement flats were home for the vast majority of Glaswegians for much of the twentieth century, and as such developed a culture and vocabulary all of their own: the "hurley", for example, was the bed on castors which was kept below the box bed in an alcove off the kitchen.

National Piping Centre

30–34 McPhater St • Museum: May–Sept Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat 9am–1pm, also Sun 10am–4pm May–Sept • £4.50 • thepipingcentre.co.uk • Cowcaddens underground

Behind the hulking Royal Scottish Academy for Music and Drama, a short way east of the Tenement House, the **National Piping Centre** prides itself on being an international centre for the promotion of the bagpipe. Equipped with rehearsal rooms, performance halls, conference centre, accommodation (see p.206), museum and a café, it is a meeting place for fans and performers from all over the world. For the casual visitor, the single-room **museum** is of most interest, with a collection of instruments and related artefacts from the fourteenth century to the present day. Headsets provide a taped commentary with musical examples at relevant stages and the museum shop contains a stack of related material.

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The West End

The urbane **West End** seems a world away from Glasgow's industrial image and the hustle and bustle of the city centre. In the 1800s the city's wealthy merchants established huge estates away from the soot and grime of city life, and in 1870 the ancient university was moved from its cramped home near the cathedral to a spacious new site overlooking the River Kelvin. Elegant housing swiftly followed, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was built to house the 1888 International Exhibition, and, in 1896, the Glasgow District Subway – today's underground – started its circuitous shuffle from here to the city centre.

The hub of life in this part of Glasgow is **Byres Road**, running between Great Western Road and Dumbarton Road past Hillhead underground station. Shops, restaurants, cafés, some enticing pubs and hordes of roving young people, including thousands of students, give the area a sense of style and vitality. Glowing red-sandstone tenements and graceful terraces provide a suitably stylish backdrop to this cosmopolitan district.

The main sights straddle the banks of the cleaned-up River Kelvin, which meanders through the gracious acres of the **Botanic Gardens** and the slopes, trees and statues of **Kelvingrove Park**. Overlooked by the Gothic towers and turrets of **Glasgow University**, Kelvingrove Park is home to the pride of Glasgow's civic collection of art and artefacts, **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**, off Argyle Street. Note that the much-loved Transport Museum has closed, and its collection has been moved to the new Riverside Museum (see p.198).

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

Argyle St • Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • 0141 276 9599, glasgowlife.org.uk • Kelvin Hall underground

Founded on donations from the city's Victorian industrialists and opened at an international fair held in 1901, the huge, red sandstone fantasy castle of **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum** is a brash statement of Glasgow's nineteenth-century self-confidence. Intricate and ambitious both in its riotous outside detailing and within, where a superb galleried main hall running the length of the building gives way to attractive upper balconies and small, interlinked display galleries, Kelvingrove (as it's popularly known) offers an impressive and inviting setting for the engaging display of art and artefacts within. There are recitals on a giant ornate organ daily at 1pm, and an excellent **café** (see p.208).

The displays are organized under two principal headings: **Life**, in the western half of the building, encompassing archeology, local history and stuffed animals, and **Expression**, in the eastern half, which houses much of the superb art collection. The wide and sometimes bizarre range of the exhibits, from a World War II Spitfire suspended from the roof of the West Court to suits of armour, ancient Egyptian relics and priceless paintings by Rembrandt, Burne Jones, Whistler and Raeburn, has led to accusations that the museum is somewhat ill-defined. Countering this is the argument that this is a rich and deliberately varied civic collection, gathered from legacies, astute purchases and serendipitous good fortune, which principally aims to educate, enlighten and entertain the people of Glasgow.

The artworks

Most visitors will be drawn to the **paintings** at Kelvingrove, the most famous of which is Salvador Dali's radically foreshortened *St John of the Cross*, located on the West Balcony. The focus of huge controversy when it was purchased by the city in 1952 for what was regarded as the vast sum of £8200, it has become an icon of the collection and essential viewing on any visit here. Other favourites include Rembrandt's calm *A Man in Armour*, Van Gogh's portrait of Glasgow art dealer Alexander Reid, Whistler's

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THE GLASGOW BOYS AND THE COLOURISTS

In the 1870s a group of Glasgow-based painters formed a loose association that was to imbue Scottish art with a contemporary European flavour far ahead of the rest of Britain. Dominated by five men – Guthrie, Lavery, Henry, Hornel and Crawhall – **The Glasgow Boys** came from very different backgrounds, but all violently rejected the eighteenth-century sentimental renditions of Scottish history peopled by "poor but happy" families. They began to experiment with colour, liberally splashing paint across the canvas. The content and concerns of the paintings, often showing peasant life and work, were as offensive to the art establishment as their style.

Sir James Guthrie, taking inspiration from the *plein-air* painting of the Impressionists, spent his summers in the countryside. Typical of his finest work during the 1880s, *A Highland Funeral* (in the Kelvingrove collection, see p.194) was hugely influential for the rest of the group, who found inspiration in its restrained emotional content, colour and unaffected realism. It persuaded **Sir John Lavery**, then studying in France, to return to Glasgow. Lavery was eventually to become an internationally popular society portraitist, his subtle use of paint revealing his debt to Whistler, but his earlier work, depicting the middle class at play, is filled with fresh colour and figures in motion.

Rather than a realistic aesthetic, an interest in colour and decoration united the work of friends **George Henry** and **E.A. Hornel**. The predominance of colour, pattern and design in Henry's *Galloway Landscape*, for example, is remarkable, while their joint work *The Druids*, in thickly applied impasto, is full of Celtic symbolism; both are part of the Kelvingrove collection. In 1893 the two artists set off for Japan, funded by Alexander Reid and later William Burrell, where their vibrant tone and texture took Scottish painting to the forefront of European trends.

Newcastle-born **Joseph Crawhall** was a reserved and quiet individual who combined superb draughtsmanship and simplicity of line with a photographic memory to create watercolours of an outstanding naturalism and freshness.

THE SCOTTISH COLOURISTS

The Glasgow Boys school had reached its height by 1900 and did not outlast World War I, but they inspired the next generation of Edinburgh painters, who became known as the "**Colourists**". Samuel John Peploe, John Duncan Fergusson, George Leslie Hunter and Francis Cadell shared an understanding that the manipulation of colour was the heart and soul of a good painting. All took inspiration from the avant-garde of late nineteenth-century Paris as well as the landscapes of southern France. **J.D. Fergusson**, in particular, immersed himself in the progressive Parisian scene, rubbing shoulders with writers and artists including Picasso. The influence of **post-Impressionists** such as Matisse and Cézanne is obvious in the work of all four, with their seascapes, society portraits and still lifes bursting with fluidity, unconventionality and, above all, manipulation of colour and shape.

muted study of Thomas Carlyle, Titian's *Adulteress brought before Christ* and some notable paintings by Pissarro, Monet and Renoir.

You can also acquaint yourself with significant **Scottish art** including works by the Glasgow Boys and the Scottish Colourists (see box, above), as well as more contemporary work such as Joan Eardley's gritty *Two Children* and Stephen Conroy's arresting *Self Portrait*. There's a special section of paintings, furniture and murals devoted to Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the "**Glasgow Style**" that he and his contemporaries inspired. Various busts and pieces of **sculpture** are sprinkled around the galleries, most of them classical in form, while Sophie Cave's 95 hanging face masks fill the East Court with all sorts of facial expressions and emotions.

Glasgow University

University Avenue • University Visitor Centre & Shop: Oct–May Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, June–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 11am–3pm; guided tours from the Visitor Centre April– Sept Wed–Sat 11am, bookings advised • £10 • 0141 330 5511, gla.ac.uk • Kelvin Hall /Hillhead underground

Dominating the West End skyline, the gloomy turreted tower of **Glasgow University**, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the mid-nineteenth century, overlooks the

glades edging the River Kelvin. Access to the main buildings and museums is from University Avenue, running east from Byres Road. In the dark neo-Gothic pile under the tower you'll find the **University Visitor Centre & Shop** which, as well as giving information for potential students, has a small café, and distributes leaflets about the various university buildings and the statues around the campus; from April to September **guided tours** of the campus are run from here.

Hunterian Museum

University Avenue • Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm • Free • Kelvin Hall /Hillhead underground

Beside Glasgow University's Visitor Centre is the **Hunterian Museum**, Scotland's oldest public museum, dating back to 1807. The collection was donated to the university by ex-student William Hunter, a pathologist and anatomist whose eclectic tastes form the basis of a diverting zoological and archeological jaunt. Exhibits include Scotland's only dinosaur, Lord Kelvin's scientific instruments, some gruesome medical specimens and a vast numismatic collection (coins, in other words).

The Hunterian Art Gallery

University Ave • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm • Free • ⓣ 0141 330 5431, ⓦ www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk • Kelvin Hall / Hillhead underground

Opposite the university, across University Avenue, is Hunter's more frequently visited bequest, the **Hunterian Art Gallery**, best known for its wonderful works by **James Abbott McNeill Whistler**: only Washington DC has a larger collection. Whistler's portraits of women give his subjects a resolute strength in addition to their occasionally winsome qualities: look out especially for the trio of full-length portraits, *Harmony of Flesh Colour*; *Black, Pink and Gold: The Tulip* and *Red and Black: The Fan*, as well as his dreamy night-time visions of the Thames.

The gallery's other major collection is of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottish art, including the quasi-Impressionist Scottish landscapes of **William McTaggart**, a forerunner of the Glasgow Boys movement, itself represented here by Guthrie and Hornel. Taking the aims of this group one step further were the **Scottish Colourists**; the monumental dancing figures of J.D. Fergusson's *Les Eus* preside over a small collection of work by this group, including Peploe, Hunter and Cadell, who left a vibrant legacy of thickly textured, colourful landscapes and portraits. A small selection of **French Impressionism** includes works by Boudin and Pissarro, with Corot's soothing *Distant View of Corbeil* being a highlight from the Barbizon school.

Mackintosh House

Hillhead St • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm • Free • ⓣ 0141 330 5431, ⓦ www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk

A side gallery off the Hunterian leads to the **Mackintosh House**, a re-creation of the interior of the now-demolished Glasgow home of Margaret MacDonald and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. An introductory display contains photographs of the original house sliding irrevocably into terminal decay, and from there you are led into an exquisitely cool interior that contains more than sixty pieces of Mackintosh furniture on three floors. In addition, a permanent Mackintosh exhibition gallery shows a selection of his two-dimensional work, from watercolours to architectural drawings.

The Botanic Gardens

730 Great Western Rd • Botanic Gardens: daily 7am–dusk; Kibble Palace: 10am–4.45pm/4.15pm in winter • Free • ⓣ 0141 276 1614 • Hillhead underground

At the top end of Byres Road, where it meets the Great Western Road, is Glasgow's exotic and lush **Botanic Gardens**. The best-known glasshouse here, the hulking, domed

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Kibble Palace, was built in 1863 for wealthy landowner John Kibble's estate on the shores of Loch Long, where it stood for ten years before he decided to transport it into Glasgow, drawing it up the Clyde on a vast raft pulled by a steamer. For over two decades it was used not as a greenhouse but as a Victorian pleasure palace, before the gardens' owners put a stop to the drunken revels that wreaked havoc with the lawns and plant beds. Today the palace is more sedate, housing lush ferns, exotic blooms and swaying palms from around the world. Nearby, the **Main Range Glasshouse** is home to lurid flowers and plants luxuriating in the humidity, including stunning orchids, cacti, ferns and tropical fruit. Between the two in the old curator's house is a small **visitor centre** with art exhibitions and computer games aimed at younger visitors.

In addition to the area around the main glasshouses, there are some beautifully remote paths in the gardens that weave along the closely wooded banks of the deep-set River Kelvin, linking up with the walkway that runs alongside the river all the way down to Dumbarton Road, near its confluence with the Clyde.

Clydeside

"The **Clyde** made Glasgow and Glasgow made the Clyde" runs an old saw, full of sentimentality for the days when the river was the world's premier shipbuilding centre, and when its industry lent an innovation and confidence which made Glasgow the second city of the British Empire. Despite the hardships that heavy industry brought, every Glaswegian would follow the progress of the skeleton ships under construction in the riverside yards, cheering them on their way down the Clyde as they were launched. The last of the great liners to be built on **Clydeside** was the *QE2* in 1967, yet such events are hard to visualize today, with the banks of the river all but devoid of any industry: shipbuilding is now restricted to a couple of barely viable yards, as derelict warehouses, crumbling docks and overgrown wastelands crowd the river's flanks.

Glasgow is often accused of failing to capitalize on its river, and it's only in the last few years, with a flurry of construction, that it's once again becoming a focus of attention. Striking constructions such as the titanium-clad "**Armadillo**" concert hall, the creatively lit **Clyde Arc** (known as "the squinty bridge"), the curvaceous **Glasgow Science Centre** and the box-like new home of **BBC Scotland** have become icons of the city's forward-thinking image, though its shipbuilding heritage is not forgotten, with attractions such as the **Tall Ship at Glasgow Harbour** striving to recreate the river's heyday and the **Finnieston Crane**, retained as an icon of shipbuilding days. The culmination of this activity is the new **Riverside Museum**.

The Riverside Museum

100 Pointhouse Place • Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • T 0141 287 2720, W glasgowlife.org.uk • Partick underground

Just west of the Science Centre, on the other side of the river, the magnificent new **Riverside Museum** – Scotland's Museum of Transport and Travel – houses artefacts from Glasgow's old transport museum, and a lot more besides. The wave-like

THE WAVERLEY

One of Glasgow's best-loved treasures is the **Waverley**, the last seagoing paddle steamer in the world, which spends the summer cruising to various ports on the Firth of Clyde and the Ayrshire coast from its base at the Glasgow Science Centre (see opposite). Built on Clydeside as recently as 1947, she's an elegant vessel to look at, not least when she's thrashing away at full steam with the hills of Argyll or Arran in the background. The booking office (T 0845 130 4647, W waverleyexcursions.co.uk) has information on sailing times and her itinerary.

titanium-clad building by Zaha Hadid is an attraction in its own right, its cathedral-like interior home to a huge, dramatically displayed collection of trains, boats, trams, bikes and cars, and the intricate models on which full-scale ships were based. Interactive exhibits provide engaging background on the city's social fabric, with walk-through streets incorporating real interiors from Glasgow shops and cafés. The museum also provides a dock for an attraction known as **The Tall Ship at Glasgow Harbour**, formed of the square-rigger *Glenlee*, a 245ft-long, three-masted barque launched on the river in 1896 and now one of only five large sailing vessels built on Clydeside that are still afloat.

The Glasgow Science Centre

50 Pacific Quay • Daily 10am–6pm • £9.95 • ⓣ 0141 420 5000, ⓦ www.gsc.org.uk • Govan underground

On the south bank of the river, linked to the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre by a pedestrian bridge, are the three space-age, titanium-clad constructions which make up the **Glasgow Science Centre**. In the dock behind the Science Centre is the base for Scotland's only regular passenger **seaplane** service (see p.204).

Science Mall

Of the Glasgow Science Centre's three buildings, the largest is the curvaceous, wedge-shaped **Science Mall**. Behind the vast glass wall that faces the river are four floors of interactive exhibits ranging from lift-your-own-weight pulleys to high-tech thermograms. Described as "hands-on info-tainment for the genome generation", it's like all your most enjoyable school science experiments packed into one building, with in-house boffins demonstrating chemical reactions, and pensioners and toddlers alike captivated by cockroach colonies and jigsaw puzzles of human organs. The centre covers almost every aspect of science, from simple optical illusions to cutting-edge computer technology, including a section on moral and environmental issues. It's lots of good fun, although weekends and school holidays are busy and noisy. Within the mall, an impressive planetarium and 3D virtual science theatre put on regular shows throughout the day. Alongside the Science Mall is the bubble-like **IMAX theatre** (see p.215).

Glasgow Tower

Also on the site of the Glasgow Science Centre is the 417ft-high **Glasgow Tower**, the tallest freestanding structure in Scotland, built with an aerofoil-like construction to allow it to rotate to face into the prevailing wind. Glass lifts ascend to the viewing cabin at the top, offering terrific panoramic views of central Glasgow.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **CLYDESIDE**

On foot The easiest way to reach the cluster of Clydeside attractions is to walk the mile or so west along the riverside footpath from the city centre.

By underground Head to Partick for the Riverside Museum, Govan for the Science Centre.

By train Jump on a train from Glasgow Central low-level station to the Exhibition Centre station and use the footbridge to cross the river to the Science Centre on the south bank.

By bus Clydeside is served by Arriva buses #23 or #24 from Renfield Street.

The Southside

The section of Glasgow south of the Clyde is generally described as the **Southside**, though within this area there are a number of districts with recognizable names, including the notoriously deprived **Gorbals** and **Govan**, which are sprinkled with new developments but still obviously derelict and tatty in many parts. There's little reason to venture here unless you're making your way to the **Science Centre** (see above), the famously innovative **Citizens' Theatre** (see p.214) or one of the revived architectural

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gems of Charles Rennie Mackintosh – the **Scotland Street School** and the **House for an Art Lover**.

As you move further south, inner-city decay fades into altogether gentler and more salubrious suburbs, including **Queen's Park**, home to Scotland's national football stadium, **Hampden Park**; Pollokshaws and the rural landscape of **Pollok Park**, which contains two of Glasgow's major museums, the **Burrell Collection** and **Pollok House**; and Cathcart, location of Alexander "Greek" Thomson's **Holmwood House**.

Scotland Street School Museum

225 Scotland St, opposite Shields Road underground station • Tues–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • T 0141 287 0500, W glasgowlife.org.uk • Shields Road underground

The **Scotland Street School Museum** is another of the city's Charles Rennie Mackintosh treasures. Mackintosh's distinctively designed school opened in 1906, and since its closure in 1979 has been entertainingly refurbished to house a fascinating collection of memorabilia related to classroom life. There are reconstructed classrooms from the Victorian and Edwardian eras, World War II and the 1960s, as well as changing rooms, a primitive domestic science room and re-creations of the school matron's sanatorium and a janitor's lair. If you visit on a weekday during termtime, you may stumble on a period lesson, local schoolkids struggling with their ink blotters, gas masks and archly unsympathetic teachers, the faint smell of antiseptic conjuring up memories of scuffed knees and playground tantrums.

House for an Art Lover

10 Bellahouston Park • Call for opening hours as the building may be closed to the public due to functions; café 10am–5pm • £4.50 • T 0141 353 4770, W houseforanartlover.co.uk• Dumbreck station

Tucked just inside Bellahouston Park is Charles Rennie Mackintosh's **House for an Art Lover**. Designed in 1901 for a German competition, it was not until 1996, after years of detailed research, that the building was actually constructed and opened as a centre for Glasgow School of Art postgraduate students, with a limited number of rooms open to the public.

It's all quintessential Mackintosh, the exquisitely stylish and original nature of the design making it hard to imagine it suffering the wear and tear of day-to-day life. On the upper floor, you can watch a video giving a detailed account of the building's history, then pass into the delicate **Oval Room**, intended for women to retire to after dinner. From here, a small corridor leads into the main **hallway**, where massive windows cast a cool light upon an area designed for large parties. In direct contrast, the dazzling white **Music Room** has bow windows opening out to a large balcony, though the garden view is marred by an artificial ski slope. The **Dining Room** is decorated with darkened stained wood and enhanced by some beautiful gesso tiles.

On the ground floor, the **café** (see p.211) is particularly popular with locals on Sunday mornings; there's an attractive menu, and it's open every day (even if the rest of the house is closed to the public) and sometimes also in the evenings.

Hampden Park

Mount Florida • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm • £6 • T 0141 616 6139, W scottishfootballmuseum.org.uk • Trains from Central station to Mount Florida

Just east of leafy Queen's Park, the floodlights and giant stands of Scotland's national football stadium, **Hampden Park**, loom over the surrounding suburban tenements and terraces. Home of Queen's Park Football Club, the fact that it's the venue for Scotland's international fixtures and major cup finals makes it a place of pilgrimage for the country's football fans. Regular **guided tours** offer the chance to see the changing

FOOTBALL IN GLASGOW

Football is one of Glasgow's great passions – and one of its great blights. While the city can claim to be one of Europe's premier footballing centres, it's known above all for one of the most bitter rivalries in any sport, that between **Celtic** and **Rangers**. Two of the largest clubs in Britain, with weekly crowds regularly topping 60,000, the Old Firm, as they're collectively known, have dominated Scottish football for a century, lavishing vast sums of money on foreign talent in an often frantic effort both to outdo each other and to keep up with the top English and European teams.

The roots of Celtic, who play at **Celtic Park** in the eastern district of Parkhead, lie in the city's immigrant Irish and Catholic population, while Rangers, based at **Ibrox Park** in Govan on the Southside, have traditionally drawn support from local Protestants. As a result, sporting rivalries have been enmeshed in a sectarian divide that many argue would not have remained so long, nor so deep, had it been divorced from the footballing scene. While large-scale violence on the terraces and streets has not been seen for some time – thanks in large measure to canny policing – Old Firm matches often seethe with bitter passions, and sectarian-related assaults do still occur in parts of the city.

However, there is a less intense side to the game in Glasgow. The city's smaller clubs actively distance themselves from the Old Firm and plod along in the lower reaches of the Scottish league. **Queen's Park**, residents of Hampden, **St Mirren**, the Paisley team, and the much-maligned **Partick Thistle**, who play at Firhill Stadium in the West End, offer the best chances of experiencing the more down-to-earth side of Glaswegian football.

THE TEAMS

Celtic Celtic Park, Parkhead (T 0141 551 8653, W celticfc.co.uk).
Rangers Ibrox Park, Govan (T 0870 600 1993, W rangers.co.uk).
Queen's Park Hampden (T 0141 632 1275, W queensparkfc.co.uk).
St Mirren Paisley (T 0141 840 4100, W stmirrenfc.co.uk).
Partick Thistle Firhill Stadium (T 0141 579 1971, W ptfc.co.uk).

rooms, warm-up areas and inside the stadium itself, complete with anecdotes of players past and the story of the ground. Also here is the engaging **Scottish Football Museum**, which has extensive collections of memorabilia, video clips and displays covering almost every aspect of the game.

The Burrell Collection

Pollok Park, 6 miles southwest of the city centre • Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–5pm, Fri & Sun 11am–5pm • Free • From the centre take a train to Pollokshaws West station (not to be confused with Pollokshields West), or bus #45, #47, #48 or #57 to Pollokshaws Road; a taxi costs roughly £10; a free minibus (every 30min 10am–4.30pm) runs from the park gates

The outstanding **Burrell Collection** comprises the lifetime collection of shipping magnate Sir William Burrell (1861–1958) and, for some, is the principal reason for visiting Glasgow. Unlike many other art collectors, Sir William's only real criterion for buying a piece was whether he liked it or not, enabling him to buy many "unfashionable" works, which cost comparatively little but subsequently proved their worth. He wanted to leave his 9000-piece collection of art, sculpture and antiquities for public display, but stipulated in 1944 that they should be housed "in a rural setting far removed from the atmospheric pollution of urban conurbations, not less than sixteen miles from the Royal Exchange".

For decades, these conditions proved too difficult to meet, with few open spaces available and a pall of industrial smoke ruling out any city site. However, by the late 1960s, after the nationwide Clean Air Act had reduced pollution, and vast **Pollok Park** had been donated to the city, plans began for a new, purpose-built gallery, which finally opened in 1983. Today the simplicity and clean lines of the Burrell building are its greatest assets, with large picture windows giving sweeping views over woodland and

serving as a tranquil backdrop to the objects inside. The major part of the collection, including the sculpture and antiques, are arranged in a fairly fluid style on the **ground floor**, while a **mezzanine** above displays most of the paintings.

The courtyard

On entering the building, head past the information desk and shop to an airy covered **courtyard** where the most striking piece, by virtue of sheer size, is the **Warwick Vase**, a huge bowl containing fragments of a second-century AD vase from Emperor Hadrian's villa in Tivoli. Next to it is a series of sinewy and naturalistic bronze casts of **Rodin sculptures**, among them *The Age of Bronze*, *A Call to Arms* and the famous *Thinker*. On three sides of the courtyard, a trio of dark and sombre panelled rooms have been re-erected in faithful detail from the Burrells' Hutton Castle home, their heavy tapestries, antique furniture and fireplaces displaying the same eclectic taste as the rest of the museum.

The ground floor

From the courtyard, go through the massive sandstone portal and door from Hornby Castle, incorporated into the building, to the start of the **Ancient Civilizations** collection – a catch-all title for Greek, Roman and earlier artefacts – which includes an exquisite mosaic Roman cockerel from the first century BC and a 4000-year-old Mesopotamian lion's head. The bulk of it is Egyptian, however, with rows of inscrutable gods and kings.

Nearby, also illuminated by enormous windows, the **Oriental Art** collection forms nearly a quarter of the whole display, ranging from Neolithic jades through bronze vessels and Tang funerary horses to cloisonné. One of the earliest pieces, from around the second century BC, is a loveable earthenware watchdog from the Han Dynasty, but most dominant is the serene fifteenth-century *Lohan* (disciple of Buddha), who sits cross-legged and contemplative against the background of a glass wall and the trees of Pollok Park.

Burrell considered his **Medieval and Post-Medieval European Art**, which encompasses silverware, glass, textiles and sculpture, to be the most valuable part of his collection. Ranged across a maze of small galleries, the most impressive sections are the sympathetically lit stained glass and the numerous tapestries, including the riotous fifteenth-century *Peasants Hunting Rabbits with Ferrets*. Among these are a selection from Burrell's vast fine art collection, the highlight of which is one of Rembrandt's evocative early self-portraits.

The mezzanine

Upstairs, the cramped and comparatively gloomy **mezzanine** is probably the least satisfactory section of the gallery, and not the best setting for its sparkling array of paintings. The range of works on show does change, but it can make incongruous leaps from a small gathering of fifteenth-century religious works to Géricault's darkly dynamic *Prancing Grey Horse* and Degas's thoughtful and perceptive *Portrait of Edmond Duranty*. Manet, Cézanne and Boudin are also represented.

Pollok House

2060 Pollokshaws Rd • Daily 10am–5pm • April–Oct £6.50, Nov–March free; café and gardens free year-round; NTS • Can be accessed by train to Pollokshaws West station (not to be confused with Pollokshields West) or buses #45, #47, #48 or #57 to Pollokshaws Road

Lovely eighteenth-century **Pollok House** was the manor of the Pollok Park estate and once home of the Maxwell family, local lords and owners of most of southern Glasgow until well into the last century. Designed by **William Adam** in the mid-1700s, the house is typical of its age: graciously light and sturdily built, it looks out onto the pristine raked and parterre gardens, whose stylized daintiness contrasts with the heavy Spanish

paintings inside, among them two El Greco portraits and works by Murillo and Goya.

The house recently came under the management of the National Trust for Scotland – a happy reunion, as it was in the upstairs smoking room in 1931 that the then-owner, Sir John Stirling Maxwell, held the first meetings with the Eighth Duke of Atholl and Lord Colquhoun of Luss that led to the formation of the NTS. The Trust has made a deliberate effort to return the house to the layout and style it enjoyed when the Stirling Maxwells were living here in the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, the **paintings** range from Spanish masterpieces in the morning room and some splendid Dutch hunting scenes in the dining room to Sir John's own worthy but noticeably amateur efforts, which line the upstairs corridors.

Generally, the rooms have the flavour of a well-to-do but unstuffy country house, with the odd piece of attractive furniture and some pleasant rooms, but little that can be described as outstanding. The servants' quarters downstairs, however, do capture the imagination – the virtually untouched labyrinth of tiled Victorian parlours and corridors includes a good **tearoom** in the old kitchen. Free tours of the house are available from the front desk, or you can wander around at your own pace.

Holmwood House

61–63 Netherlee Road • April–Oct Mon & Thurs–Sun noon–5pm • £6.50; NTS

Four miles south of the city centre in the suburb of Cathcart, **Holmwood House**, the finest domestic design by rediscovered Glasgow architect Alexander "Greek" Thomson, has recently been restored and opened to the public. A commission by James Couper, co-owner of a paper mill on the nearby River Carth, the house shows off Thomson's bold classical concepts, with exterior pillars on two levels and a raised main door, as well as his detailed and highly imaginative interiors.

One room upstairs is given over to a series of displays about Thomson and the history of the house. Also on the upper floor is the **drawing room** – look for the white marble fireplace and the night-time star decorations on the ceiling, which contrast with a black marble fireplace and sunburst decorations in the **parlour** immediately underneath on the downstairs level, which also features a delightful round bay window. Across the corridor, the **dining room** has a frieze of scenes from the *Iliad*, along with a skylight at the back of the room designed to allow the Greek gods to peer down on the feasts being consumed inside. One unusual feature not designed by Thomson is the small hatch cut in the interconnecting door between the dining room and the butler's pantry; the house was last occupied by a sisterhood of nuns, who used the dining room as a chapel and created the small hatch for use as a confessional.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — GLASGOW

BY PLANE

Glasgow International Airport Abbotsinch, eight miles southwest of the city (T 0844 481 5555 or T 0141 887 1111, W glasgowairport.com). Not to be confused with Glasgow Prestwick Airport, which is 45 minutes away from the city by train (see p.162).

Shuttle bus The 24hr Glasgow Shuttle bus (20min; £7) runs to the central Buchanan Street bus station every ten minutes during the day.

Taxis Airport taxis charge around £20 to the city centre.

Car rental Car rental at the airport includes Budget (T 0844 544 4606) and Hertz (T 0870 850 2677).

VisitScotland Glasgow International Airport (daily 7.30am–5pm; Oct–April Mon–Sat same hours, Sun 8am–5pm; T 0141 848 4440, W visitscotland.com). There's an airport branch of VisitScotland in the international arrivals hall.

Destinations Barra (2 daily; 1hr 10min); Belfast (Mon–Fri 7 daily; Sat & Sun 3 daily; 45min); Benbecula (Mon–Sat 2 daily; 1 on Sun; 1hr); Campbeltown (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 40min); Dublin (3 daily; 1hr); Islay (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat; 45min); Kirkwall (1 daily; 2hr); London City (Mon–Fri 4 daily, 1 on Sun; 1hr 30min); London Gatwick (Mon–Fri 11 daily, Sat & Sun 4 daily; 1hr 30min); London Heathrow (Mon–Fri 18 daily, Sat & Sun 10 daily; 1hr 30min); London Luton (Mon–Fri 5 daily, 3 on Sat, 4 on Sun; 1hr 15min); London Stansted (Mon–Fri 5 daily, 3 on Sat, 4 on Sun; 1hr 30min); Shetland (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 1hr 30min); Stornoway (Mon–Fri 4 daily, Sat & Sun 2 daily; 1hr 10min); Tiree (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 50min).

Seaplane In the dock behind the Science Centre is the base for Scotland's only regular passenger seaplane service (T 01436 675030, W lochlomondseaplanes.com), which plies routes to places such as Loch Lomond and Oban.

BY TRAIN

Central Station Nearly all trains from England come into Central station, which sits over Argyle Street, one of the city's main shopping thoroughfares. Bus #398 from the front entrance on Gordon Street shuttles every ten minutes to Queen Street station.

Destinations Ardrossan for Arran ferry (every 30min; 50min); Ayr (every 30min; 50min); Birmingham (9 daily; 4hr); Blantyre (every 30min; 20min); Carlisle (hourly; 1hr 10min); East Kilbride (every 30min; 30min); Gourock (every 30min; 45min); Greenock (every 30min; 40min); Lanark (every 30min; 50min); Largs (hourly; 1hr); London Euston (hourly; 4hr 30min); Paisley (every 10min; 10min); Queens Park (every 15min; 6min); Stranraer (4 direct daily; 2hr 30min); Wemyss Bay (hourly; 50min).

Queen Street station Corner of George Square. Terminus for trains serving Edinburgh and the north. The walk between Glasgow Central and Queen Street takes less than ten minutes.

Rail bookings and enquiries You can save money by booking longer train journeys in advance from the Trainline (W thetrainline.com) or National Rail (T 0845 748 4950, W nationalrail.co.uk).

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 2hr 30min); Aviemore (3 daily; 2hr 40min); Balloch (every 30min; 45min); Dumbarton (every 20min; 35min); Dundee (hourly; 1hr 20min); Edinburgh (every 15min; 50min); Fort William (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 1–2 on Sun; 3hr 40min); Helensburgh (every 30min; 45min); Inverness (3 direct daily; 3hr 25min); Mallaig via Fort William (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 1–2 on Sun; 5hr 15min); Milngavie (every 30min; 25min); Oban (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 1–3 on Sun; 3hr); Perth (hourly; 1hr); Stirling (every 20min; 25–40min).

BY BUS

Buchanan Street Station Near George Square, Buchanan Street Station is the arrival point for regional and intercity coaches.

Citylink coaches Connects major Scottish cities including Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Oban, Portree, Dundee and Perth (T 0871 266 3333, W citylink.co.uk).

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 2hr 40min); Campbeltown (3 daily; 4–5hr); Dundee (twice hourly; 1hr 50min); Edinburgh (every 15min; 1hr 10min); Fort William (4 daily; 3hr); Glen Coe (4 daily; 2hr 30min); Inverness (1 direct daily; 3hr 20min); Kyle of Lochalsh (3 daily; 5–6hr); Loch Lomond (hourly; 45min); London (5 daily; 8–9hr); Oban (3 daily; 2hr 50min); Perth (hourly; 1hr–1hr 35min); Portree (3 daily; 6–7hr); Stirling (hourly; 45min).

GETTING AROUND

Walking is the best way of exploring any one part of the city. However, as the main sights are scattered – the West End, for example, is a good thirty-minute walk from the centre – you'll probably need to use the comprehensive public transport system, which includes an **underground network**. If you're travelling beyond the city centre or the West End, or to the main sights on the Southside, you may need to use the bus and train networks; you can pick up timetables at the **Travel Centre** on St Enoch's Square .

TRANSPORT INFORMATION

Travel Centre St Enoch underground station (Mon–Sat 8.30am–5.30pm). To get detailed information on local public transport head for the neo-Gothic hut of the Travel Centre, located a couple of hundred yards southwest of the tourist office above St Enoch underground station. There are smaller Travel Centres at Buchanan Street bus station and Hillhead underground station.

Traveline For information on all transport within the city and further afield, call the fairly efficient national Traveline (T 0871 200 2233, W travelinescotland.com).

PASSES

Various public transport passes are available if you plan to do lots of travelling on one day or are in the city for more than a few days. Both of the main bus companies offer tickets for all-day travel on their buses, which are cheaper after 9.30am on weekdays; you can buy these at one of the one thousand PayPoint outlets in the Greater Glasgow area.

Roundabout Glasgow For train and underground travel the Roundabout Glasgow ticket gives unlimited travel for a day (Mon–Fri after 9am, all day Sat & Sun; £6.30).

Zonecards The simplest of a complicated system of Zonecards, covering train, underground, buses and ferries, costs around £18 and gives travel for a week in central Glasgow, including to Partick in the west and the Burrell Collection in the south.

BY UNDERGROUND

The best way to get between the city centre and the West End is to use the underground (Mon–Sat 6.30am–11pm, Sun 10am–6.30pm), whose stations are marked with a large orange U. Affectionately known as the "Clockwork Orange" (there's only one, circular route and the trains are a garish bright orange), the service is extremely easy to use. There's a flat fare of £1.40, or you can buy a day ticket for £2.60.

Stations The main stations are Buchanan Street, near George Square and connected to Queen Street train station by a moving walkway, and St Enoch, at the junction of

Buchanan Street pedestrian precinct and Argyle Street. Hillhead station is bang in the heart of the West End, near the university.

BY TRAIN

Surburban trains The suburban train network is swift and convenient. Suburbs south of the Clyde are connected to Central station, either at the mainline station or the subterranean low-level station, while trains from Queen Street (which also has mainline and low-level stations) head into the northeast suburbs.

Cross-city lines There are two grim but functional cross-city lines: the one running through Central station connects to southeastern districts as far out as Lanark, while the Queen Street line links to the East End and points east. Trains on both lines go through Partick station, near the West End, which is also an underground stop; beyond Partick, the trains are an excellent way to link to points west and northwest of Glasgow, including Milngavie (for the start of the West Highland Way), Dumbarton and Helensburgh.

BY BUS

Buchanan Street bus station Glasgow's main bus terminus (6am–11pm; T0141 332 6811), north of Sauchiehall Street and opposite the Royal Concert Hall. As well as intercity buses, this is where local city services depart from.

First Glasgow Serves Glasgow, Edinburgh, central Scotland, the Borders and Aberdeen (T0141 423 6600, W firstgroup.com).

BY TAXI

You can hail a black taxi from anywhere in the city centre, day or night. There are also taxi ranks at Central and Queen Street train stations and Buchanan Street bus station. Fares are very reasonable; from the city centre to the West End costs £6–7, or the three-mile journey from Central station to Pollok Park and the Burrell Collection costs around £10.

Taxis Glasgow Taxi Ltd (T0141 429 7070, W glasgowtaxis.co.uk), Hampden Cabs (T0141 332 5050, W hampdencabs.co.uk), West End Radio Cars (T0141 954 2000, W westendradiocars.co.uk).

BY CAR

The M8 motorway runs right through the heart of Glasgow, making the centre very accessible by car; once you're there, however, the grid of one-way streets and pedestrian precincts can be frustrating to navigate. You'll find plenty of parking meters and there are many car parks dotted around the city centre.

Car rental Arnold Clark, multiple branches (T0844 815 2129); Avis, 70 Lancefield St (T0844 544 6064); Budget, West St Trading Estate (T0844 544 4606). Car rental at the airport is listed under "Arrival and Departure".

BY FERRY

Govan Ferry The Govan ferry (T01475 721281) runs between the pontoon at Water Row and the Kelvin Harbour landing stage linking the Riverside Museum with Govan.

INFORMATION

City tourist office 11 George Square (April & May Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–6pm; June & Sept Mon–Sat 10am–7pm, Sun 10am–6pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–8pm, Sun 10am–6pm; Sept–March Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; T0141 204 4400, W seeglasgow.com.

Gay and lesbian information Strathclyde Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (T0141 847 0447).

TOURS AND ACTIVITIES

City Sightseeing City Sightseeing (April–Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm; £11; T0141 204 0444, W citysightseeingglasgow.co.uk) run tours of Glasgow's sights by open-top bus, which leave every half-hour from George Square on a continuous circuit of all the major attractions in the city centre and West End, allowing you to get on and off as you please. Tickets are valid for two days.

The Waverly Tour Glasgow and the Clyde on the *Waverly* (T0845 130 4647, W waverleyexcursions.co.uk), the world's last seagoing passenger-carrying paddle steamer.

Golf The city operates several inexpensive municipal courses. One of the best maintained and longest is Littlehill, at Auchinairn Road (T0141 276 0704).

ACCOMMODATION

There's a good range of accommodation in Glasgow, from a large, well-run **youth hostel** through to some highly fashionable (and not over-priced) **designer hotels** in the centre. The majority of the best guesthouses and B&Bs can be found in the **West End**. Given that many hotels are business-oriented, you can often negotiate good deals at weekends.

CITY CENTRE

HOTELS AND GUESTHOUSES

Adelaide's 209 Bath St T0141 248 4970, W adelaides.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Eight simple, functional rooms (some good for families) in a beautifully restored church building, run by pleasant staff as part of a broad-thinking, approachable Baptist church community. £69

Arthouse Glasgow 129 Bath St T0141 221 6789,

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TOP FIVE BOUTIQUE HOTELS

Arthouse Glasgow See p.206
Blythswood Square See p.206
CitizenM See p.206
Hotel du Vin at One Devonshire Gardens See p.206
Mark's Hotel See p.206

W www.thearthouseglasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Part of a mini-chain, with sixty stylish rooms right in the heart of the city. Room categories range from "Comfortable" to "Fabulous", and there's a 24hr bar serving food. £75

Babbity Bowster 16–18 Blackfriars St, off High St T 0141 552 5055, W www.babbitybowster.com; map pp.188–189. Best known as a pub (see p.211), *Babbity Bowster* also features six plain but serviceable rooms that provide visitors with a great Merchant City location. The rate doesn't include breakfast. £60

Blythswood Square 11 Blythswood Square T 0141 248 5888, W townhousecompany.com; map pp.188–189. A swish but respectful conversion of the landmark Georgian Royal Scottish Automobile Club, on one of the city's loveliest squares. Also features a luxury spa. £120

★ **The Brunswick** 106 Brunswick St T 0141 552 0001, W brunswickhotel.co.uk; map pp.188–189. A small, independent designer hotel in the heart of the Merchant City; fashionable but good value with minimalist furniture, and a smart bar and restaurant. Ask for a room on one of the higher levels to avoid traffic noise. £65

citizenM 60 Renfrew St T 0141 404 9485, W citizenm.com; map pp.188–189. Fresh and funky, this new modern European chain offers a luxury experience that won't break the bank, with free wi-fi, a canteen-style restaurant and a bar on site. Check in via computer then head to your room to enjoy the mood lighting, hip decor and rain shower. £64

Malmaison 278 West George St T 0141 572 1000, W malmaison.com; map pp.188–189. Glasgow's version of this sleek, chic hotel group: the austere Grecian-temple frontage masks a superbly comfortable designer hotel. £89

Mark's Hotel 110 Bath St T 0141 353 0800, W markshotels.com; map pp.188–189. Angular, glass-fronted central hotel with rooftop views from the upper floors and 103 smartly appointed rooms. Double, triple and family rooms all available at a year-round flat rate. £64

Pipers' Tryst 30–34 McPhater St T 0141 353 0220, W thepipingcentre.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Eight soundproofed (fortunately), hotel-grade rooms attached to the bagpiping centre; the room decor is cheery tartan and there's a café on the ground floor (Mon–Sat) that serves breakfasts and evening meals. £80

HOSTEL

Euro Hostel 318 Clyde St. T 0141 222 2828, W euro-hostels.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Glasgow isn't short of hostel bed space thanks to the seven-storey *Euro Hostel* smack in the centre of the city. Its 360 beds are all bunks but they're in en-suite rooms sleeping two, four, six or more – some of which have great views. The hostel can feel a bit impersonal due to the size. Dorms £10

SELF-CATERING

University of Strathclyde T 0141 553 4148, W rescat.strath.ac.uk. Various sites, most of which are around the cathedral. B&B in single rooms is also available near the main campus on Cathedral St. June to early Sept. Single £27.60, double £52.20, four-person flats £70

University of Glasgow T 0141 330 4116, W cvso.co.uk. Low-priced self-catering rooms and flats, which are mostly in the West End. June to early Sept. Single £20 double from £40

THE WEST END

HOTELS AND GUESTHOUSES

★ **Alamo Guest House** 46 Gray St T 0141 339 2395, W alamoguesthouse.com; map pp.184–185. Good-value, family-run boarding house next to Kelvingrove Park, with fabulous views of the museum. Small but comfortable rooms, including two singles. £70

Amadeus Guesthouse 441 North Woodside Rd T 0141 339 8257, W amadeusguesthouse.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Stylish en-suite rooms in a welcoming Victorian townhouse. It's handily located near Great Western Road but on a surprisingly quiet street, opposite the deep green gully of the River Kelvin. £48

Hotel du Vin at One Devonshire Gardens 1 Devonshire Gardens, Great Western Rd T 0141 339 2001, W hotelduvin.com; map p.182. Glasgow's most exclusive and exquisite small hotel, set in a handsome row of converted townhouses a 10min walk up the Great Western Road from the Botanic Gardens. £120

Kirklee 11 Kensington Gate T 0141 334 5555, W kirkleehotel.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Quirky and highly patterned West End B&B in a red-brick Edwardian townhouse, with antique furniture and walls crammed with paintings and etchings. £80

HOSTEL

★ **SYHA Hostel** 7–8 Park Terrace T 0870 004 1119, W syha.org.uk; map pp.184–185. The popular and

TOP FIVE BUDGET STAYS

Alamo Guest House See p.206
Amadeus Guesthouse See p.206
Babbity Bowster See p.206
Adelaide's See p.206
SYHA Hostel See p.206

well-equipped *SYHA Hostel* is located in a wonderful townhouse in one of the West End's grandest terraces. All the dorms are en suite, and there's a large apartment with park views for families. It's a ten-minute walk south of Kelvinbridge underground station and bus #44 from the city centre leaves you with a short stroll west up Woodlands Road. Dorms £15; doubles £44

SELF-CATERING

Embassy Apartments 8 Kelvin Drive T 0141 946 6698, W glasgowhotelsandapartments.co.uk; map p.182 & pp.184–185. Useful one- to six-person self-catering apartments and rooms in locations near Byres Road and at Kelvinbridge. Available to rent on a nightly basis. £70

★ **Queensgate Apartments** T 0141 339 1615, W queensgateapartments.com; map pp.184–185. Two attractive and cosy flats in traditional West End tenement buildings. One sleeps four in two bedrooms and has a gleaming wood-panelled hall and a lovely patio garden; the other sleeps two and also has a patio garden. Four-person apartment £690/week, two-person apartment £490/week

EATING

Glasgow's restaurant scene is a dynamic one, helped by the culinary skills of the long-established **Italian** community and later waves of **Indian** and **Chinese** immigrants. In recent times there's been a move towards taking advantage of great **Scottish produce** – game, fresh fish and soft fruits. Many menus now contain a seasonal and modern Scottish component, offering a new take on the country's culinary traditions. Glasgow is rated as one of the UK's top cities for **vegetarians** and **vegans**: try *Mono* (see p.208), *The 13th Note Café* (see p.207) or the café at the CCA (see p.211), which serves vegan haggis fritters. If you're travelling on a budget, note that many restaurants have excellent **set lunch**, pre-theatre or early dining deals.

CITY CENTRE AND THE MERCHANT CITY

CAFÉS

★ **Café Gandolfi and Bar Gandolfi** 64 Albion St T 0141 552 6813, W cafegandolfi.com; map pp.188–189. *Gandolfi* was one of the first to test the waters in the revived Merchant City in the 1980s and today it's a landmark. Designed with distinctive wooden furniture from the Tim Stead workshop, *Gandolfi* serves up coffee and snacks, plus Scottish staples (including great black pudding), soups, salads, fish dishes and Continental cuisine, with mains around £12–18. The bar upstairs is more contemporary in feel but the food's equally good. Daily 9am–11.30pm.

Café Source 1 St Andrew's Square T 0141 548 6020, W cafesource.co.uk; map pp.184–185. In the basement of St Andrew's, an eighteenth-century church that is now a folk music and Scottish dance centre, this café serves up inexpensive Scottish favourites featuring local produce. Also hosts frequent live jam sessions and a monthly jazz supper club. Daily 10am–11pm.

Tinderbox Merchant City 14 Ingram St T 0141 552 6907; map pp.188–189. Following on after the success of its West End outlet (see pp.184-185), this branch features the same cutting-edge design and strong espresso coffees, as well as good fresh sarnies and cakes. Mon–Sat 7.15am–10pm, Sun 8am–10pm.

★ **Trans-Europe Café** 25 Parnie St T 0141 552 7999, W transeuropecafe.co.uk; map pp.188–189. A fun and somewhat studenty railway-style diner that takes culinary inspiration from various European capitals, and dishes up excellent soup and gourmet sandwiches; handy for a visit to Trongate 103 (see p.186). On weekend evenings they serve bistro mains like venison stew (£10.95). Mon–Wed & Sun 10am–5pm, Thurs– Sat 10am–10pm.

Tron Theatre Chisholm St, off Trongate T 0141 552 8587, W tron.co.uk; map pp.188–189. A rather arty hangout (see p.186), particularly with writers and theatrical types, who adore both the contemporary street-side café-bar and the Victorian pub dining room further inside. Mains start at £7. Mon 10am–6pm, Tues–Sat 10am–late, Sun noon–6pm.

Where the Monkey Sleeps 182 West Regent St T 0141 226 3406, W monkeysleeps.com; map pp.188–189. Owned by graduates of the nearby Glasgow School of Art who acquired their barista skills between classes, this hip home-grown café features freshly prepared sandwiches and salads, and the espressos are superb. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm.

Willow Tea Rooms 217 Sauchiehall St T 0141 332 0521, W willowtearooms.co.uk; map pp.188–189. A semi-authentic bit of architectural heritage on the Charles Rennie Mackintosh trail, the first-floor dining room here offers tea with scones and midday meals. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm.

RESTAURANTS

The 13th Note Café 50–60 King St T 0141 553 1638, W 13thnote.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Vegetarian and vegan food with Greek and other Mediterranean influences in one of Glasgow's hipper restaurants and experimental indie music haunts on arty King St. All mains are under a tenner. Daily noon–midnight.

Brian Maule at Le Chardon d'Or 176 West Regent St T 0141 248 3801, W brianmaule.com; map pp.188–189. Owner-chef Maule, who worked with the Roux brothers at *Le Gavroche* restaurant in London, turns out fancy but unpretentious French-influenced food along the lines of grilled sea bass with fennel and broad beans in a

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TOP FIVE BUDGET EATS

Dakhin See p.208
Ichiban Japanese Noodle Café See p.208
Tchai Ovna See p.210
Trans-Europe Café See p.207
University Café See p.210

Pernod cream. Mains from £23. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm, Sat noon–10pm.

Café Antipasti 305 Sauchiehall St T0141 332 9002, W antipasti.co.uk; map pp.188–189. A busy and bright Italian bistro with a handsome wood interior, serving tasty and well-priced pastas and salads; the two-course pre-theatre menu is just £9.95. Mon–Fri noon–10pm, Sat & Sun 10am–10.30pm.

Café Cossachok 10 King St, or access it via Trongate 103 (see p.186) T0141 553 0733, W cossachok.com; map pp.188–189. Hearty Slavic-style dishes such as blintzes and stroganoff (from £8.95) accompanied by Russian musicians on occasion and plenty of chilled vodka. Hung with shawls and quirky artworks. Tues–Sat 11am–late, Sun 5pm–late.

City Merchant 97 Candleriggs T0141 553 1577, W www.citymerchant.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Popular brasserie that blazed the Merchant City trail, which plenty of others have followed. Offers plenty of fresh Scottish produce, from Ayrshire lamb to the house speciality: fillet steak with haggis mousse (£24). Mon–Sat noon–10.30pm, Sun 4.30–9.30pm.

★ **Dakhin** 89 Candleriggs T0141 553 2585, W dakhin.com; map pp.188–189. Owned by the same people as *The Dhabba* (see below), this first-floor restaurant specializes in South Indian cuisine. Be sure and try a rice dosa (from £13). Mon–Fri noon–2pm & 5–11pm, Sat & Sun 1–11pm.

The Dhabba 44 Candleriggs T0141 553 1249, W thedhabba.com; map pp.188–189. This is not your typical Glasgow curry house. Prices are higher and portions are smaller, but the menu has some truly interesting options and uses fresh ingredients that place it steps above most others. The tandoor dishes are cooked with North Indian spices in a clay oven (around £18). Mon–Fri noon–2pm, 5–11pm, Sat & Sun 1–11pm.

Dragon-i 311–313 Hope St T0141 332 7728, W dragon-i.co.uk; map pp.188–189. The dishes at this stylish, modern restaurant across from the Theatre Royal offer an intriguing mix of Chinese and Far East influences; there's a good pre-theatre menu (3 courses for £16.95). Mon–Fri noon–2pm & 5pm–midnight, Sat 5pm–midnight, Sun 5–11pm.

★ **Gamba** 225a West George St T0141 572 0899, W gamba.co.uk; map pp.188–189. This modern basement restaurant offers one of the best meals in Glasgow. Continental contemporary sophistication prevails, with dishes such as mussel and oyster stew or grilled halibut with scallop cream (£20–25). If you love fish, come here. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5–10pm, Sun 5–9pm.

Ichiban Japanese Noodle Café 50 Queen St T0141 204 4200, W ichiban.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Offers Japanese-style informal and cheap eating, with long benches and tables shared by diners. Bowls (or plates) of noodles are specialities here and service is efficient. Mon–Thurs 12–10pm, Fri & Sat 12–11pm, Sun 1–10pm.

Mono 12 King's Court T0141 553 2400, W monocafebar.com; map pp.188–189. This place combines a fully vegan restaurant, Fairtrade food shop, bar and indie CD shop. Mains such as Malaysian *nasi goreing* and porcini risotto costs around £8. There's lots of space, plus organic beer and wine. Noon–9pm.

Mussel Inn 157 Hope St T0141 572 1405, W mussel-inn.com; map pp.188–189. Like the Edinburgh flagship, this branch concentrates on simply prepared pots of fresh mussels (from £7), grilled scallops (from £7.80) and other delights from the sea, in relaxed, buzzy environs. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 5–10pm, Sat noon–10pm, Sun 12.30–10pm.

Rogano 11 Exchange Place T0141 248 4055, W rogano.co.uk; map pp.188–189. An Art Deco fish restaurant and Glasgow institution since 1935, decked out in the style of the Queen Mary ocean liner. Mains cost around £25; *Café Rogano*, in the basement, is cheaper. Or just have some oysters at the bar. Daily noon–10.30pm.

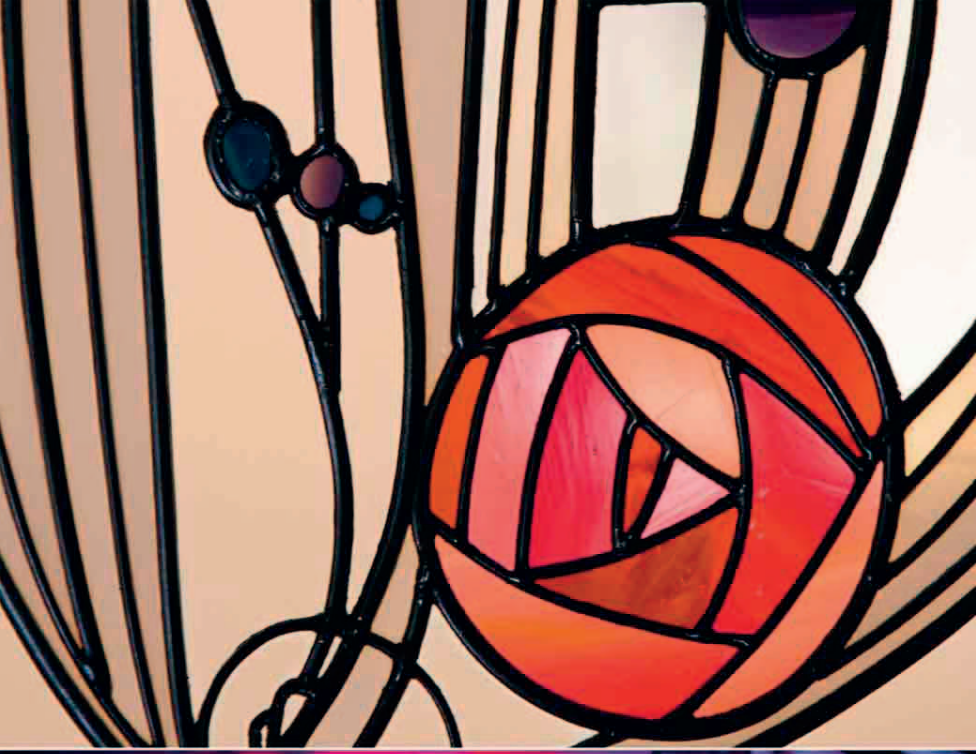
Sarti 133 Wellington St, 121 Bath St & 42 Renfield St T0141 204 0440, W sarti.co.uk; map pp.188–189. The Sarti brothers' flagship Italian café and restaurant: authentic and popular with pizzas and *primi* piatti for around £10. The slightly more formal dining space is accessed from the Bath St entrance. Mon–Thurs 8am–10pm, Fri & Sat 8am–10.30pm, Sun noon–10pm.

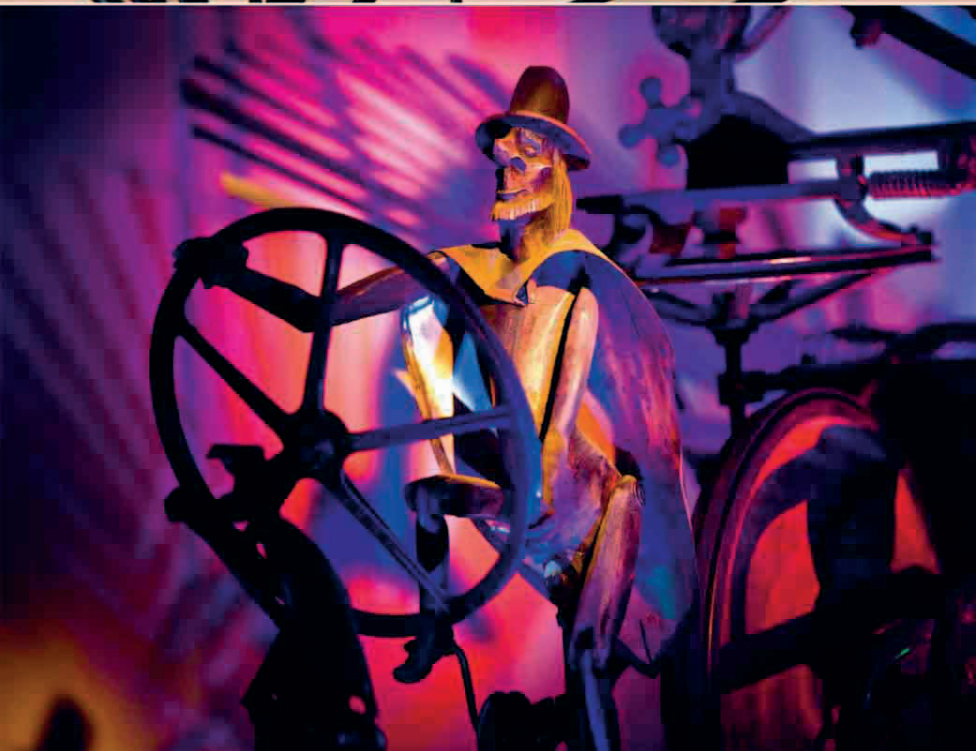
Wee Curry Shop 7 Buccleuch St T0141 353 0777, W weecurryshopglasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Tiny but welcoming place near the Glasgow Film Theatre and Sauchiehall St shops (there's also a branch in the West End on Ashton Lane), serving home-made bargain meals to compete with the best in town. The haggis pakora is £5.30 and butter chicken costs £10.60. BYOB. Mon–Thurs noon–2.30pm & 5–10.30pm, Fri & Sat noon–11pm, Sun 1–10.30pm.

THE WEST END

CAFÉS

Café at Kelvingrove Kelvingrove Museum T0141 353 8040, W glasgowlife.org.uk; map pp.184–185. An elegant modern space within Glasgow's Victorian palazzo; the café has long windows looking out onto verdant Kelvingrove Park. Serves breakfast, light lunches such as Cullen skink (£4.95), more substantial pasta dishes, and quality fish and chips (£8.75). Afternoon tea includes hot





salmon sandwiches, scones and clotted cream (2–4pm; £8.95). Organic baby food is on offer too. Mon–Thurs & Sat 10am–4pm, Fri & Sun 11am–4pm.

Grassroots Café 93 St George's Rd 0141 333 0534; map pp.184–185. This vegetarian outlet (just across the M8 motorway from the city centre) has the best reputation for meat-free food in Glasgow, fresh, creative cooking and a relaxed atmosphere. Mon–Wed 8am–6pm, Thurs & Fri 8am–7pm, Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 11am–5pm.

★ **Kember & Jones** 134 Byres Rd 0141 337 3851, kemberandjones.co.uk; map pp.184–185. This stylish café and deli has become a popular spot in the competitive Byres Road market, serving freshly made salads, sandwiches, and irresistible cakes and pastries. Mon–Fri 8am–1pm, Sat 9am–1pm, Sun 9am–6pm.

The Left Bank 33–35 Gibson St 0141 339 5969, theleftbank.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Part bar and part bistro, this relatively new addition to the Hillhead neighbourhood adjacent to the university dishes up wholesome, rustic food in a chic modern setting; try the Lebanese breakfast (£6.25). Mon–Fri 9am–midnight, Sat & Sun 10am–midnight.

Tchai Ovna 42 Otago Lane 0141 357 4524, tchaiovna.com; map pp.184–185. A low-key and inexpensive bohemian hangout that overlooks the Kelvin River, serving savoury vegetarian options (try the red dahl curry at £5.90), cakes, snacks and a selection of teas from around the world. Mon–Sun 11am–11pm.

Tinderbox 189 Byres Rd 0141 339 3108; pp.184–185. A modern espresso café-bar offering an array of lattes, cappuccinos and the like. One of the trendiest offerings in this style-conscious city. Mon–Sat 7.15am–11pm, Sun 7.45–11pm.

★ **University Café** 87 Byres Rd 0141 339 5217; pp.184–185. This institution dates from the 1910s and has been adored by at least three generations of students and West End residents, with its formica tables in snug booths, glass counters and original architectural features. The favourites here are fish'n'chips or mince'n'tatties rounded off with an ice-cream cone – you won't spend more than a tenner per head. Mon–Thurs 9am–10pm, Fri–Sat 9am–10.30pm, Sun 10am–10pm.

RESTAURANTS

Ashoka Ashton Lane 19 Ashton Lane 0141 337 1115, ashokarestaurants.com; map pp.184–185. Lively and moderately priced curry house which has franchises across the west of Scotland; all offer consistent quality. Other *Ashoka* restaurants are at 1284 Argyle St (0141 339 3371), and on the Southside at 268 Clarkston Rd (0141 637 0711). Mon–Thurs noon–midnight, Fri & Sat noon–1am, Sun 5pm–midnight.

Balbir's 7 Church St 0141 339 7711; map pp.184–185. Owner Balbir Singh Sumal is one of the city's long-standing curry kings, and this modern restaurant with plenty of space reflects his wholesome approach to affordable Indian cuisine. Mon–Thurs & Sun 5–10.30pm, Fri & Sat 5–11pm.

The Bothy 11 Ruthven Lane 0141 334 4040, bothyglasgow.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Set in a lovely 1870s stone mansion, cosy inside and with bench seating in the yard outside. The food is traditional and reasonably priced – for example there's pan-fried chicken stuffed with Stornaway black pudding for £12.95. Daily noon–11pm.

The Cabin 996 Dumbarton Rd 0141 569 1036, cabinglasgow.com; map pp.184–185. Offers three courses of chic Scottish food (£30) with a hint of Irish influence, in a cosy, rather old-fashioned restaurant, and is also known for the live entertainment sing-alongs on a Saturday. Good for parties of four or more, and you'll need to book in advance. Tues–Sun noon–11pm.

Chow 98 Byres Rd 0141 334 9818, chowrestaurant.co.uk; map pp.184–185. This bijou diner with extra seating upstairs offers excellent-value meals – hot tossed shredded chicken, for example – in a sleek, modern setting. Mains from £9. Mon–Thurs noon–2pm & 5–11.30pm, Fri & Sat noon–2pm & 5pm–midnight, Sun 4.30–11.30pm.

Cottier's 93–95 Hyndland St 0141 357 5825, cottiers.com; map pp.184–185. Serving Scottish cuisine (matched with hand-crafted ales), this place has a welcoming West End vibe and is located on the top floor of a church annexe adjacent to Cottier's Theatre. Mains like slow roast Perthshire lamb shoulder are around £14. Mon–Thurs & Sun 5–9.45pm, Fri & Sat 5–6.45pm.

La Vallée Blanche 360 Byres Rd 0141 334 3333, lavalleeblanche.com; map pp.184–185. The elegant wooden-panelled upstairs dining room is a snug winter or wet-weather retreat, serving French classics with a nod towards Alpine cuisine and Scottish ingredients (mains £14.95–22.95). Tues–Fri noon–2.15pm & 5.30–10pm, Sat & Sun noon–3.30pm & 5.30–10pm.

Mother India 28 Westminster Terrace, off Sauchiehall St 0141 221 1663, motherindia.co.uk; map pp.184–185. One of the best Indian restaurants in Glasgow, offering home cooking with some original specials as well as the old favourites at affordable prices. Surroundings are elegant but laidback. Mon–Thurs 5.30–10.30pm, Fri & Sat noon–11pm, Sun noon–10pm.

No. Sixteen 16 Byres Rd 0141 339 2544, number16.co.uk; map pp.184–185. A local favourite, with daily menus of Scottish produce, from pan-fried fillet of sea bream (£15.95) to pork belly with Stornoway black pudding croquette (£15.50). Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10pm, Sun 1–3pm & 5.30–9pm.

★ **Stravaigin** 28–30 Gibson St 0141 334 2665, stravaigin.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Scottish meat and fish are given an international makeover using a host of unexpected ingredients, offering unusual combinations such

TOP FIVE INDIAN RESTAURANTS

Ashoka see p.210
Balbir's see p.210
The Dhabba see p.208
Mother India see p.210
Wee Curry Shop see p.208

as Thai-spiced Aberdeen Angus beef carpaccio, or ham and pistachio terrine. Look out for the occasional "wild food" nights too. There's exceptional-value food in the street-level bar-café, and adventurous fine dining in the pricier basement restaurant. Mains from £9.95. Tues–Sun 11am–10.30pm.

Thai Siam 1191 Argyle St ⓣ0141 229 1191, ⓦthaisiamglasgow.com; map pp.184–185. A friendly neighbourhood ambience with excellent Thai-born chefs. Main courses such as satay start at £10.90; the decor and menu are fairly traditional but it's a reliable spot. Mon noon–2.30pm & 5pm–midnight, Sun 5pm–midnight.

Two Fat Ladies 88 Dumbarton Rd ⓣ0141 339 1944, ⓦtwofatladiesrestaurant.com; map pp.184–185. A long-time West End favourite for well-cooked fish and shellfish dishes (£14–20), with an intimate 25-seat dining room. A second outlet trades at 118a Blythswood St (ⓣ0141 847 0088) in the city centre, as well as at the traditional *Buttery*, 625–654 Argyle St (ⓣ0141 221 8188). Daily noon–3pm & 5.30–10.30pm.

★ **The Ubiquitous Chip** 12 Ashton Lane ⓣ0141 334 5007, ⓦubiquitouschip.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Opened in 1971, the *Chip* led the way in headlining high-end modern Scottish cuisine. Some say it's living on its reputation, but it's still up there; come for organic salmon with lime and vanilla mash or wood pigeon in a wild mushroom sauce. Two-course menu with appetizer £35, three courses with appetizer £40; the brasserie upstairs has mains from £10. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm, 5.30–11pm, Sun 12.30–3pm & 6.30–11pm.

★ **Wee Lochan** 340 Crow Rd ⓣ0141 338 6606, ⓦan-lochan.com; map p.182. If you want the best in fresh, unadulterated west-coast Scottish fish (mains such as medallions of monkfish and tiger prawns cost around £20), there's no better place in Glasgow, although it is off the beaten track, in the Jordanhill district. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 11am–9pm.

THE SOUTHSIDE

CAFÉS

1901 1534 Pollokshaws Rd ⓣ0141 632 0161; map p.182. This French-influenced bistro pub near Pollok Country Park is a lesser-known gem serving hearty and moderately priced Mediterranean food and burgers for around £8.50. Open for lunch and dinner. Mon–Thurs 11.30am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11.30am–midnight, Sun 12.30–11pm.

RESTAURANTS

Art Lovers' Café House for an Art Lover (see p.200), Bellahouston Park ⓣ0141 353 4779, ⓦwww.houseforanartlover.co.uk; map p.182. The dining room in this showcase house looks onto a charming garden and offers sublime lunches, from meat and fish mains (around £10) to light meals such as sweet chilli king prawn wrap (£7.25); there's a Little Art Lovers' menu for kids. Daily 10am–5pm.

Greek Golden Kebab 34 Sinclair Drive, near the south corner of Queens Park ⓣ0141 649 7581, ⓦgreekgoldenkebab.com; map p.182. The longest-running Greek restaurant in Glasgow probably hasn't changed its rustic and affordable cooking in forty years: the kebabs are mostly under £9. Worth seeking out. Thurs–Sun 5pm–1am.

La Fiorentina 2 Paisley Rd West ⓣ0141 420 1585, ⓦla-fiorentina.com; map pp.184–185. A critics' favourite that also tops popular surveys, this Tuscan-oriented restaurant has become an institution. The two-course weekend meal deal is just £13.50 and it's not far from the Glasgow Science Centre in Govan. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10.30pm, Sun 2–8.30pm.

DRINKING

Many drinking dens in Glasgow's city centre, the adjoining Merchant City and buzzy West End are places to experience real local bonhomie. The city's mythical tough-guy image was once linked to its **pubs**, mistakenly believed by a few to be no-go areas for visitors. Today, however, the city is much changed, and windowless, nicotine-stained working-men's taverns are much harder to find than airy modern **bars** (except in neighbourhoods that you're unlikely to visit). If you tire of trendy bars, set out for the slightly edgier district near the Clyde and Glasgow Green, where the local spit-and-sawdust establishments offer a welcome change. A **pub crawl** through either the West End or city centre is easily done on foot; decent pubs are more widely scattered across the Southside, but you'll still find a handful of pleasant spots, ranging from stylish hangouts to historic locals.

CITY CENTRE AND THE MERCHANT CITY

The Arches 253 Argyle St ⓣ0141 565 1035, ⓦthearches.co.uk; map pp.188–189. This basement bar is in a centre for contemporary drama (see p.214) under the railway lines leaving Central station. Offers decent pub grub and an arty clientele. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

★ **Babbity Bowster** 16–18 Blackfriars St, off High St ⓣ0141 552 5055, ⓦwww.babbitybowster.com; map pp.188–189. Lively place with a kitsch-free Scottish feel that features spontaneous folk sessions at weekends. Has good beer and wine, tasty food and outdoor seating.

5

Mon–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

Bar 10 10 Mitchell St T0141 572 1448; map pp.188–189. Across from The Lighthouse, and considered the granddaddy of Glasgow style-bars. Still popular and suitably chic. Mon–Sat 10am–midnight, Sun noon–midnight.

Clutha Vaults 167 Stockwell St T0141 552 7520; map This iconic live music venue was the scene of a tragic helicopter accident in 2013, but the owner has plans to rebuild and reopen. Noon–midnight.

Corinthian 191 Ingram St; map pp.188–189. A remarkable renovation of a florid early Victorian Italianate bank, with three distinct bars and a restaurant: dress smartly if you're arriving in a large pub-crawling group. Daily 11am until late.

Horseshoe Bar 17 Drury St T0141 248 6368, W horseshoebar.co.uk; map pp.188–189. An original "Gin Palace" with the longest continuous bar in the UK, this is among Glasgow's busiest drinking holes; there's karaoke (if you dare) upstairs. A must for pub aficionados. Mon–Sat 10.30am–midnight, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

Nice'n'Sleazy 421 Sauchiehall St T0141 333 0900, W nicensleazy.com; pp.188–189. Better known for its indie rock performance space, the ground-floor bar has the feel of New York's hip East Village, with the best jukebox in the city. Mon–Sat noon–3am, Sun 1pm–3am.

Pot Still 154 Hope St T0141 333 0980, W thepotstill.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Whisky galore! At least five hundred different single malts are found in this traditional pub, which offers a decent real ale selection as well. Daily 11am–midnight.

Scotia Bar 112 Stockwell St, W scotiabar.net; map pp.188–189. Billy Connolly began his career here, telling jokes between singing folk songs; today it's a place for semi-pro live blues, folk and skiffle sessions. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30–midnight.

West Brewing Company Templeton's Carpet Factory, Glasgow Green T0141 550 0135, W westbeer.com templeton; map pp.184–185. Near the People's Palace museum, this place is fashioned after Bavarian beer halls and brews its own excellent Munich-style lager, free of additives and preservatives. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight.

GAY BARS

Delmonica's 68 Virginia St T0141 552 4803, W delmonicas.co.uk; map pp.188–189. One of Glasgow's liveliest and largest gay bars, in a popular area with a mixed, hedonistic crowd, and nightly entertainment and events. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30–11pm.

Merchant Pride 20 Candleriggs T0141 564 1285; map pp.188–189. Formerly the *Candle Bar*: relaxed and unpretentious, if a little dated, with DJs, karaoke and quiz nights. Daily 11am–11pm.

Underground 6a John St T0141 553 2456, W underground-glasgow.com; map pp.188–189. This bar is geared more towards the art of conversation than dance, although the jukebox (free) is tops; welcomes men and women. Daily noon–midnight.

THE WEST END

Big Slope 36a Kelvingrove St T0141 333 0869; map pp.184–185. Near Kelvingrove Park and nearby guesthouses, this is a hip bar where Alpine hunting lodge meets Manhattan's Lower East Side. Noon–midnight.

Bon Accord 153 North St W bonaccordweb.co.uk; map pp.184–185. This pub began the real-ale revival in Glasgow, and often hosts UK beer festivals. It's located at the eastern edge of the West End, adjacent to the M8. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

Firebird 1321 Argyle St St T0141 334 0594, W firebirdglasgow.com; map pp.184–185. Airy modern drinking spot near the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, with a wood-stoked pizza oven producing some tasty snacks, plus DJs to keep the pre-clubbing crowd entertained. It's also a nice daytime haunt, with free wi-fi. Mon–Thurs noon–midnight, Fri Sat noon–1am, Sun noon–midnight.

Lismore Lounge 206 Dumbarton Rd T0141 576 0103; map pp.184–185. Decorated with specially commissioned stained-glass panels depicting the Highland Clearances, this bar is a meeting point for the local Gaels, who come here to chat, relax and listen to impromptu music sessions. Daily11am–midnight.

Oran Mor Byres Rd, at Great Western Rd T0141 357 6200, W www.oran-mor.co.uk; map pp.184–185. Arguably the most impressive addition in many years to the Glasgow nightlife scene, with a big bar, club venue and performance space auditorium (plus two different dining rooms), all within the tastefully – and expensively – restored Kelvinside parish church. Mon–Sat 9am–3am, Sun 12.30pm–3am.

Stravaigin 28–30 Gibson St T0141 334 2665, W stravaigin.com; map pp.184–185. Above the expensive restaurant of the same name (see p.210) is this lively and amiable local pub, with an extensive wine selection and excellent food. Tues–Sun 11am–10.30pm.

THE SOUTHSIDE

Heraghty's Free House 708 Pollokshaws Rd T0141 423 0380; map p.182. Authentic Irish pub that prides itself on pouring the perfect pint of Guinness. Still living down its history of not having a women's loo: one's been installed for several years now. Daily 11am–11pm.

Tusk 18 Moss Side Rd T0141 649 9199; map p.182. Operated by the same company behind the *Corinthian* (see above), *Tusk* is almost as flamboyant, with a giant golden Buddha as the focal point. It also serves decent Asian food. Mon–Thurs & Sun 5pm–midnight, Fri & Sat 5pm–3am.

NIGHTLIFE

Glasgow has a thriving **contemporary music** community and hot new bands emerge practically every year. The liveliest area for nightlife remains the **West End**, with students mixing with locals around Byres Road, as well as in the nearby Woodlands and Kelvingrove districts. There is a clutch of venues city-wide, from the famous Barrowland ballroom to King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, where you've got a good chance of catching a live act. Additionally, the city's **clubbing** scene is rated among the best in the UK, attracting top DJs from around the world and also breeding a good deal of local talent. Establishments are pretty mixed and an **underground scene** thrives, while some mega-clubs in this designer-label-conscious city insist on **dress codes**. Opening hours hover between 11pm to 3am, though some stay open until 5am. **Cover charges** are variable: expect to pay around £5 during the week and up to £25 at the weekend. Drinks are usually about thirty percent more expensive than in the pubs.

INFORMATION AND TICKETS

The List Ⓦlist.co.uk. For detailed listings on what's on, check out the comprehensive fortnightly magazine *The List* (£2.50), which also covers Edinburgh, or check out Ⓦtheskinny.co.uk.

Tickets Scotland 239 Argyle St, under Central station's platforms Ⓣ0141 204 5151, Ⓦtickets-scotland.com. Sells tickets for theatre productions and big concerts. Mon–Wed, Fri & Sat 9am–6pm, Thurs 9am–7pm, Sun noon–5pm.

CLUBS

The Arches 30 Midland St, off Jamaica St Ⓣ0870/240 7528, Ⓦthearches.co.uk. In converted arches under Central station, the renowned club portion of this arts venue offers house and techno music. Daily 10pm–3am.

Buff Club 142 Bath Lane Ⓣ0141 248 1777, Ⓦthebuffclub.com; map pp.188–189. The playlist of vintage disco, funk and northern soul here draws an eclectic crowd of clubbers. Daily 11pm–3am.

The Garage 490 Sauchiehall St Ⓣ0141 332 1120, Ⓦgarageglasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Medium-sized, indie-oriented student club that also hosts gigs across the rock'n'roll spectrum. Daily 11pm–3am.

Glasgow School of Art 167 Renfrew St Ⓣ0141 332 0691, Ⓦheartschool.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Blissfully unadorned space for hipsters, with music that includes some of the best hip-hop in town. See website for events.

O2 ABC 300 Sauchiehall St Ⓣ0141 553 1638, Ⓦo2abcglasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Also a live music venue, *ABC* has become one of the hippest and hottest clubs in the city centre with a focus on indie, classic soul and even punk. See website for events.

Oran Mor Byres Rd, at Great Western Rd Ⓣ0141 357 6200, Ⓦoran-mor.co.uk; map pp.184–185. This converted church offers the West End's classiest and most enjoyable clubbing experience, as well as a great bar. Thurs–Sat 11pm–3am.

Polo Lounge 84 Wilson St, off Glassford St Ⓣ0141 553 1221, Ⓣpologlasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Original Victorian decor – marble tiles and open fires – and a gentleman's club atmosphere upstairs, with a dark, pounding nightclub underneath that attracts a gay and gay-friendly crowd. See website for events.

Sub Club 22 Jamaica St Ⓣ0141 248 4600, Ⓦsubclub.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Near-legendary venue and base for the noteworthy Optimo club night as well as Saturday night's Subculture, this is the home for house and techno lovers in the west of Scotland. Tues–Sun 11pm–3am.

The Tunnel 84 Mitchell St Ⓣ0141 204 1000, Ⓦunnelglasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Contemporary and progressive house music club with arty decor (dig the gents' cascading waterfall walls) and fairly strict dress codes. Daily 11pm–3am.

LIVE MUSIC VENUES

O2 ABC 300–330 Sauchiehall St Ⓣ0141 332 2232, Ⓦo2glasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Opened in 2005 and more proof that Glasgow's a gig-hungry town, this medium-sized hall offers an intimate setting in which to see bands.

Barrowland 244 Gallowgate Ⓣ0141 552 4601, Ⓦglasgow-barrowland.com; map pp.184–185. Legendary East End ballroom that hosts some of the sweatiest and best gigs you may ever encounter. With room for a couple of thousand, it mostly books bands securely on the rise, but still hosts some big-time acts who return to it as their favourite venue in Scotland.

Carling Academy 121 Eglington St Ⓣ0141 418 3000, Ⓦglasgow-academy.co.uk; map pp.184–185. With capacity for 2500, this is the city's principal mid-sized venue.

The Garage 490 Sauchiehall St Ⓣ0141 332 1120, Ⓦgarageglasgow.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Nightclub which converts into a medium-sized venue for bands that are just about to make it big.

King Tut's Wah Wah Hut 272a St Vincent St Ⓣ0141 221 5279, Ⓦkingtuts.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Famous as the place where Oasis were discovered, and still with one of the city's best live music programmes. Also has a good bar with an excellent jukebox.

Nice'n'Sleazy 421 Sauchiehall St Ⓣ0141 333 0900, Ⓦnicensleazy.com; map pp.188–189. Alternative and indie-oriented acts play most nights in the performance space below this city-centre bar; don't be put off by the name – this is a great small venue.

Queen Margaret Union 22 University Gardens T0141 339 9784, Wqmu.org.uk; map pp.184–185. Hosts indie and dance-oriented acts, plus the Revolution club night on a Tuesday.

ENTERTAINMENT

On the **performing arts** scene, Glasgow is no slouch: it's home to Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. All told, the city's cultural programme offers a range of **music**, from contemporary to heavyweight classical, plus **dance**, **theatre** (both mainstream and experimental performance art), as well as **cinema**. Most of the larger theatres, cinema multiplexes and concert halls are in the city centre; the West End is home to one or two venues while the Southside has the Citizens, a much-loved theatre noted for cutting-edge drama.

THEATRES AND COMEDY VENUES

Arches Theatre 253 Argyle St T0141 565 1000, Wthearches.co.uk. Home to its own avant-garde theatre company, reviving old classics and introducing new talent in this hip subterranean venue.

Citizens' Theatre 119 Gorbals St T0141 429 0022, Wcitz.co.uk. The "Citz" has evolved from its 1960s working-class roots into one of the most respected and innovative contemporary theatres in Britain. Offers three stages, concession rates for students and free preview nights.

Cottier Theatre 93–95 Hyndland St T0141 357 3868, Wthecottier.com. This performance space in the old Dowanhill church hosts touring shows, dance performances and gigs. An adjoining bar with beer garden is a favourite on warm summer evenings.

King's Theatre 297 Bath St T0844 871 7648, Wambassadortickets.com, Wkings-glasgow.co.uk. This theatre has gorgeous interiors within an imposing red-sandstone Victorian building; the programme is good quality, if safely mainstream.

Ramshorn Theatre 98 Ingram St T0141 552 3489, Wstrath.ac.uk. Another church conversion, this Merchant City venue features student and other productions at bargain prices.

The Stand 333 Woodlands Rd T0870 600 6055, Wthestand.co.uk. Sister to the first-rate comedy club in Edinburgh, booking local, national and international acts.

Theatre Royal 282 Hope St T0844 871 7648, Wambassadortickets.com. This late nineteenth-century playhouse was revived in the mid-1970s as the opulent home of Scottish Opera. It also plays regular host to visiting theatre groups, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, as well as orchestras.

Tramway 25 Albert Drive, off Pollokshaws Rd T0845 330 3501, Wtramway.org. Based in a converted tram terminus, whose lofty proportions qualified it as the only suitable UK venue for Peter Brook's famous production of the *Mahabharata* in 1998.

Tron Theatre 63 Trongate T0141 552 4267, Wtron.co.uk. Varied repertoire of some mainstream, as well as more challenging, productions from leading local companies, such as Glasgow's Vanishing Point. Also has folk music performances in the theatre bar.

CONCERT HALLS

City Halls Candleriggs T0141 353 8000, Wglasgowconcerthalls.com. Completely renovated Victorian halls and old fruit market, this Merchant City performance space is home to the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and hosts many of the annual Celtic Connections concerts.

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall 2 Sauchiehall St T0141 353 8000, Wglasgowconcerthalls.com. One of Glasgow's less memorable modern buildings, though with great acoustics, this is the venue for big-name touring orchestras and the home of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Also features major rock and r'n'b stars.

Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre & Clyde Auditorium Finnieston Quay T0870 040 4000, Wsecc.co.uk. The SECC is a gigantic aeroplane hangar-like space with dreadful acoustics that, unfortunately, is the only indoor venue in Scotland for world-touring megastars from Bob Dylan to McFly. The adjacent Clyde Auditorium – better known as the Armadillo – is smaller but more melodic.

St Andrews in the Square 1 St Andrew's Square T0141 559 5902, W standrewsinthesquare.com. Hidden away in the East End, this is a magnificent temple-like Georgian church, topped with a slender tower. It is now the Centre for Traditional Scottish Music, Song and Dance: check the website for event details.

CINEMAS

Cineworld 7 Renfrew St T0871 200 2000. A gigantic multistorey cinema with first-run Hollywood mainstream movies, plus a few art and independent films as well.

Glasgow Film Theatre 12 Rose St T0141 332 6353, Wgft.org.uk. Dedicated art, independent and repertory cinema house in an Art Deco building; it's also home to the Glasgow Film Festival in February. The in-house *Café Cosmo* is an excellent place for pre-show drinks.

Grosvenor 24 Ashton Lane ⓣ0845 166 6002, ⓦsocialanimal.co.uk. Renovated two-screen neighbourhood film house with a bar and sofas you can reserve for screenings of mostly mainstream films.

IMAX Theatre Glasgow Science Centre, 50 Pacific Quay ⓣ0141 420 5000, ⓦglasgowsciencecentre.org. Shows 3D and super-screen documentaries and features.

SHOPPING

Glasgow's **shopping** is amongst the best in the UK, after London. While the city's gritty industrial reputation doesn't appear to fit with its status as an oasis of retail therapy, Glaswegians have long enjoyed dressing up to go out. The main area for spending in the city centre is formed by the Z-shaped and mostly pedestrianized route of **Argyle**, **Buchanan** and **Sauchiehall streets**. Along the way you'll find **Princes Square**, the city's poshest mall (see p.183), plus major department stores and branches of high-end chains. **The Buchanan Galleries**, a bland complex built around John Lewis, features some high-fashion budget stores; more interesting is the Parisian-style Victorian **Argyle Arcade**, specializing in antique and contemporary jewellery. Otherwise, make for the **Merchant City** or the **West End**, which have more individual offerings – the latter features quirky vintage and one-off fashion boutiques and is the only district in the city with antiquarian **bookshops**.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Glasgow School of Art 167 Renfrew St ⓣ0141 332 0691, ⓦgsa.ac.uk; map pp.188–189. A showcase for the work of forty designers, with jewellery and homeware created by young graduates and established GSA talent. The shop also commissions the art school's students, staff and graduates to create new products inspired by Mackintosh's work. Daily 10am–5pm.

The Lighthouse 11 Mitchell Lane ⓣ0141 276 5360, ⓦthelighthouse.co.uk; map pp.188–189. Well stocked with tasteful gifts and original design items, from furniture to lighting and accessories. Mon & Wed–Sat 10.30am–5pm, Tues 11am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm.

BOOKS

Oxfam Bookshop 5 Royal Exchange Square ⓣ0141 248 9176; map pp.188–189. A small secondhand bookshop in the centre of town, with well-stocked fiction, crime, history, cookery and Scottish sections. Daily 10am–5pm.

Voltaire & Rousseau Books 18 Otago Lane ⓣ0141 611 8764, ⓦvoltaire-rousseau.co.uk; map pp.184–185. An atmospheric and overflowing secondhand bookshop that's been around for over forty years: you'll find some rare titles on the shelves. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm.

FASHION

Fashionistas with money to burn should head for the chichi and pricey Italian Centre in the Merchant City for some imported glamour, where you'll find lots of designer names under one (Neo-Classical) roof. By far the best option for more affordable and stylish gear is the West End, specifically Byres Road and the cluster of vintage stores on Ruthven Lane.

VINTAGE

De Courcy's Arcade 5 Cresswell Lane ⓣ0141 334 8211; map p.184–185. Features an appealing collection of cute boutiques and vintage stores, as well as a retro teashop serving tea and cupcakes. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon 5pm.

Glorious 41 Ruthven Lane ⓣ0141 357 5662; map p.184–185. Sells good-quality secondhand women's clothes arrayed by colour, with plenty of decent high-street brands. Mon–Fri 11am–5pm, Sat 10.30am–5.30pm, Sun 1–5pm.

Starry Starry Night 19 Dowanside Lane, near Byres Rd ⓣ0141 337 1837; map p.184–185. Stocks vintage clothes, including some antique pieces such as top hats, and also incorporates Bethsy Gray's handmade silver jewellery store. Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 11am–5pm.

FOOD SHOPS

Demijohn 382 Byres Rd ⓣ0141 337 3600. ⓦdemijohn.co.uk; map p.184–185. A quirky foodie attraction: it's lined with demijohns of olive oil, vinegar, whisky and wine. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 11.30am–5pm.

I.J. Mellis 492 Great Western Rd; map p.184–185. A wonderful, old-fashioned cheesemonger specializing in farmhouse cheeses from the British Isles, though they also stock a selection of the best from the Continent. Mon–Fri 9.30am–7pm, Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 10pm–5pm.

Lupe Pintos Chile & Spice Shop 313 Great Western Rd ⓣ0131 228 6241,ⓦlupepintos.com; map p.184–185. Those looking for Mexican, American and Asian treats shouldn't miss this crazily colourful store. Mon–Wed 10am–6pm, Thurs & Fri 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 12.30pm–5.30pm.

Roots, Fruits & Flowers 451–457 Great Western Road ⓦrootsfruitsandflowers.com; map p.184–185. Piled high with organic fruit and veg; they also specialize in products for vegans, vegetarians and coliacs. Mon–Sat 7.30am–7pm, Sun 9am–7.30pm.

MARKETS

Barras market 244 Gallowgate ⓦglasgow-barrowland.com; map p.184–185. Red iron gates announce the official entrance, but boundaries are breached as the stalls – selling household goods, bric-a-brac, secondhand clothes and records (none of it of particularly high quality) – spill out into the surrounding cobbled streets. The fast-talking traders,

lively atmosphere and entertaining vignettes of Glasgow life make it an offbeat diversion from shopping-mall banality. Sat & Sun 10am–5pm.

Farmers' market Mansfield Park, just off Dumbarton Road; map p.184–185. The countryside comes to Glasgow, with forty vendors selling fine Scottish produce and tempting snacks. Second & fourth Sat 10am–2pm.

MUSIC

Monorail Inside Mono café bar (see p.208), Kings Court, 10 King St ⓣ0141 552 9458; map p.188–189. An indie record store with a big range of contemporary CDs, eclectic vinyl, secondhand stock and re-issues. In the café itself you can enjoy vegan food, and craft and organic beers. Mon–Sat 11am–7pm, Sun noon–7pm.

TARTAN

James Pringle Weavers of Inverness 130 Buchanan St ⓣ0141 221 3434; map p.188–189. If you feel the need for tweed – and tartan – this is where to come. Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 11am–5pm.

DIRECTORY

Hospital There is a 24hr A&E at the Royal Infirmary, 84 Castle St near Glasgow Cathedral (ⓣ0141 211 5608).

Internet You'll find terminals at *Sip'n'Surf*, 521 Great Western Rd (ⓣ0141 339 4449).

Left luggage Buchanan St bus station has left luggage facilities, and there are lockers at Central and Queen St train stations.

Police Strathclyde Police HQ, 173 Pitt St (ⓣ0141 532 2000). For emergencies, dial ⓣ999.

Post office General information (ⓣ0845 722 3344). Main office at 47 St Vincent St (Mon–Fri 8.30am–5.45pm, Sat 9am–5.30pm); city centre branch at 87–91 Bothwell St (Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm).

The Clyde

The **RIVER CLYDE** is the dominant physical feature of Glasgow and its environs, an area that comprises the largest urban concentration in Scotland, with almost two million people living in a hinterland of satellite towns. West of the city, regular trains and the M8 motorway dip down from the southern bank of the Clyde to **Paisley**, where the distinctive cloth pattern gained its name, before heading back up to the edge of the river again as it broadens into the **Firth of Clyde**. Here you have **Wemyss Bay** jumping, off point for the lochs and hills of Argyll, and Helensburgh, birthplace of architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the site of one of his greatest buildings, the **Hill House**.

As you head southeast out of Glasgow, the industrial landscape of the **Clyde Valley** eventually gives way to far more attractive scenery of gorges and towering castles, and is also home to a couple of interesting museums. Here eighteenth-century philanthropists built their model workers' community around the mills of **New Lanark**, and the spectacular Falls of Clyde, a mile upstream.

Paisley

Founded in the twelfth century as a monastic settlement around an abbey, **PAISLEY** expanded rapidly after the eighteenth century as a linen-manufacturing town, specializing in the production of highly fashionable imitation Kashmiri shawls. The town quickly eclipsed other British centres producing the cloth, eventually lending its name to the swirling pine-cone design.

Paisley Abbey

Abbey Close • Mon–Sat 10am–3.30pm • Free

South of Paisley train station, the **abbey** was built on the site of the town's original settlement and was massively overhauled in the Victorian age. Inside the squat grey building, the elongated choir is illuminated by jewel-coloured stained glass from a variety of ages and styles. The oldest monument is the tenth-century Celtic cross of St Barochan.

Paisley Museum and Art Gallery

High Street • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm • Free

Paisley's bland pedestrianized **High Street** leads westwards from the town hall to the **Paisley Museum and Art Gallery**. Inside, it's a reasonably attractive civic building with a decent café, but the main reason for coming here is to see the **Shawl Gallery**, which traces the familiar pine-cone (or teardrop) pattern from its simple beginnings to elaborate later incarnations. The **Upper Gallery** houses a small art collection including works by Glasgow Boys Hornel, Guthrie and Lavery (see p.196), as well as paintings by local artist and playwright John Byrne.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — PAISLEY

By train Regular trains from Glasgow Central run to Paisley's Gilmour Street station in the centre of town, and they're a faster, more convenient option than buses.

By bus #9 (First), #36, #38 and #39 (all Arriva) leave from Glasgow city centre. Buses leave Paisley's Gilmour Street forecourt every ten to fifteen minutes for Glasgow International Airport, two miles north of the town.

Tourist information 9a Gilmour St (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; ⓣ0141 889 0711).

Greenock and around

Newark Castle: Castle Road • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £4.50; HS

GREENOCK, west of Glasgow, was the site of the first dock on the Clyde, founded in 1711, and the community has grown on the back of shipping ever since. To get there, you'll pass through **Port Glasgow**, a small fishing village until 1688, when the burghers of Glasgow bought it and developed it as their main harbour.

Look out for sturdy fifteenth-century **Newark Castle** right on the banks of the river; the other main attraction is the **McLean Museum and Art Gallery**. The Neoclassical **Custom House** on the dockside is Greenock's finest building, splendidly located looking out over the river. From the dock in front, tens of thousands of nineteenth-century emigrants departed for the New World.

McLean Museum and Art Gallery

Union Street • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • Free

A hundred yards from well-proportioned **George Square**, close to Greenock West station, the **McLean Museum and Art Gallery** contains pictures and contemporary records of the life and achievements of Greenock-born James Watt, a prominent eighteenth-century industrialist and pioneer of steam power, as well as featuring exhibits on the shipbuilding industry and other local trades. The small **art gallery** on the ground floor contains work by Glasgow Boys Hornel and Guthrie plus Colourists Fergusson, Cadell and Peploe.

ARRIVAL AND TOURS — GREENOCK AND AROUND

By train Hourly trains run from Glasgow Central to Greenock Central (30min).

By bus Served by hourly Citylink buses from Glasgow's Buchanan Street station.

Boat tours Clyde Marine Cruises (ⓣ01475 721281, wclyde-marine.co.uk) operates from Victoria Harbour, a few minutes from Central Station; it runs a ferry link and cruise to Loch Long and Loch Goil (May–Sept Mon–Fri 10.30am & 12.45pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat same hours).

GOUROCK

By ferry CalMac (ⓣ0800 066 5000, ⓦcalmac.co.uk) and the more frequent Western Ferries (ⓣ01369 704452, ⓦwww.western-ferries.co.uk) ply the twenty-minute route across the Firth of Clyde from Gourock (two miles west of Grennock) to Dunoon on the Cowal peninsula (£4.20), while a passenger-only ferry runs year-round to Kilcreggan on the north bank of the Clyde (Mon–Sat 13 daily, also 5 on Sun in summer; £2.50 single; ⓦspt.co.uk ferry).

Wemyss Bay

There's not much south of Gourock until you reach **Wemyss Bay**, the terminus of the southern branch of the train line from Port Glasgow. The most memorable part of the

journey is arriving at Wemyss Bay station, an impressive wrought-iron and glass palace that serves as a reminder of the great glory days when thousands of Glaswegians would alight for their steamer trip "doon the watter". It's now the departure point for the CalMac **ferry** over to Rothesay, capital of the Isle of Bute (see p.228).

Hill House

Upper Colquhoun Street, Helensburgh, 20 miles northwest of Glasgow • April–Oct daily 1.30–5.30pm • £10; NTS

In 1902, Charles Rennie Mackintosh was commissioned by the Glaswegian publisher Walter Blackie to design the **Hill House** in Helensburgh. Without doubt the best surviving example of Mackintosh's domestic architecture, the house is stamped with his very personal, elegant interpretation of Art Nouveau – right down to the light fittings and fire irons. Various upstairs rooms are given over to interpretative displays on the architect's use of light, colour, form and texture, while changing exhibitions on contemporary domestic design from around Britain are a testament to Mackintosh's ongoing influence and inspiration. After exploring the house, head for the **tearoom** in the kitchen quarters, or wander round the beautifully laid-out **gardens**.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **HILL HOUSE**

By train Hill House is a good twenty-minute walk up Sinclair Street from Helensburgh Central train station, or just five minutes from Helensburgh Upper train station (where trains to and from Oban and Fort William stop).

The Clyde Valley

The journey southeast of Glasgow into Lanarkshire, while mostly following the course of the **CLYDE VALLEY** upstream, is dominated by endless suburbs, industrial parks and wide strips of concrete highway. The principal road here is the M74, though you'll have to get off the motorway to find the main points of interest. Less than ten miles from central Glasgow, **Bothwell Castle** lies about a mile northeast of the **Blantyre** mill-workers' tenement in which the explorer David Livingstone was born. Five miles west of Blantyre, on the outskirts of the new town of East Kilbride, the **National Museum of Scottish Country Life** offers an in-depth look at the history of agriculture in Scotland.

From here, the Clyde winds through lush market gardens and orchards before passing beneath the sturdy little town of Lanark, the best base from which to explore the valley; **New Lanark**, on the riverbank, is a remarkable eighteenth-century planned village.

David Livingstone Centre

165 Station Road • April–Dec Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 12.30–5pm • £6.50; NTS • First Bus's bus #267 from Glasgow (Buchanan St) to Hamilton runs via Blantyre, and there are frequent trains from Glasgow Central's lower level

Blantyre, now a colourless suburb of Hamilton, was a remote hamlet based around a mill on the banks of the Clyde when explorer and missionary David Livingstone was born there in 1813. A tenement block set in a quiet country park near the river houses the **David Livingstone Centre**. One room shows the claustrophobic conditions under which he was brought up and the others feature exhibitions on the missionary movement.

Bothwell Castle

A mile or so north of Blantyr • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Wed & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • First Bus #255 from Glasgow (Buchanan St) will drop you off on the Bothwell Rd near the entrance; by car, approach from the B7071 Bothwell–Uddingston road.

Bothwell Castle is one of Scotland's most dramatic citadels, its great red sandstone bulk looming high above a loop in the river. The oldest section is the solid donjon

built by the Moray family in the late thirteenth century to protect themselves against the English king, Edward I, during the Scottish Wars of Independence; Edward only succeeded in capturing it after ordering the construction of a massive siege engine.

National Museum of Rural Life

East Kilbride, 7 miles southeast of Glasgow • Daily 10am–5pm • £6.50; NTS • Bus #31 from Glasgow's St Enoch Centre to East Kilbride takes you past the museum (Stewartfield Way); you can also get a train from Glasgow Central, and then take a taxi for the final 3 miles

On the edge of **EAST KILBRIDE** new town, five miles west of Blantyre and seven miles southeast of Glasgow centre, the **National Museum of Rural Life** is an unexpected union of historic farm and modern museum. A tractor and trailer shuttle visitors the half-mile from the museum up to the eighteenth-century **farmhouse**, which is furnished as it would have been in the 1950s.

New Lanark

1 mile below Lanark town on Braxfield Road

Although **NEW LANARK** is served by an hourly bus from Lanark train station, it's well worth the steep downhill walk to get there. The first sight of the village, hidden away down in the gorge, is unforgettable: large broken curving walls of honeyed warehouses and tenements, built in Palladian style, are lined up along the turbulent river's edge.

The community was founded by David Dale and Richard Arkwright in 1785 to harness the power of the Clyde waterfalls in their **cotton-spinning industry**, but it was Dale's son-in-law, Robert Owen, who revolutionized the social side of the experiment in 1798, creating a "village of unity". Believing the welfare of the workers to be crucial to industrial success, Owen built adult educational facilities, the world's first day nursery and playground, and schools in which dancing and music were obligatory and there was no punishment or reward.

Beyond the visitor centre, a riverside path leads you the mile or so to the **Falls of the Clyde**, where the river plunges 90ft in three tumultuous stages.

The village

New Lanark • April–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–March 11am–5pm • Passport ticket £8.50

While you're free to wander around the village, which is still partially residential, to get into any of the **exhibitions** you need to buy a passport ticket. The Neoclassical building that now houses the visitor reception was opened by Owen in 1816 under the utopian title of **The Institute for the Formation of Character**. These days, it contains the **New Millennium Experience**, a slightly tired "immersive" ride which whisks visitors on a chairlift through a social history of the village. Other parts of New Lanark village prove fascinating: you can visit the **School**, wander through the 1820s shop, find out how the workers lived in the **New Buildings**, then poke around the domestic kitchen, study and living areas of **Robert Owen's House**.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — NEW LANARK

By train You can catch a train from Glasgow Central to Lanark (every 30min; 50min); from there either walk (it's 1.5 miles away) or take a local bus or taxi from the station.

Tourist office In the Horsemarket,100 yards west of the station (May–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct–April Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; ☎01555 661661).

ACCOMMODATION

New Lanark Mill Wee Row, Rosedale Street ☎01555 667200, ⓦnewlanarkhotel.co.uk. A four-star hotel converted from an eighteenth-century mill building, with good views and lots of character; the Mill restaurant serves decent food, and there's a swimming pool and sauna. **£99**

SYHA hostel Wee Row, Rosedale St ☎0870 004 1143, ⓦsyha.org.uk. A very appealing hostel in the heart of the New Lanark complex, with two-, four- and five-bed rooms in a restored mill-workers' tenement row. April–Oct. Dorms **£14**; doubles **£65**

Argyll and Bute

226 Cowal
228 Isle of Bute
230 Inveraray
232 Oban and around
238 Isle of Mull and around
251 Isle of Coll
251 Isle of Tiree
253 Isle of Colonsay and around
254 Mid-Argyll
259 Kintyre
265 Isle of Islay
272 Isle of Jura

IONA

Argyll and Bute

6

Cut off for centuries from the rest of Scotland by the mountains and sea lochs that characterize the region, Argyll remains remote, its scatter of offshore islands forming part of the Inner Hebridean archipelago (the remaining Hebrides are dealt with in Chapters 13 & 14). Geographically as well as culturally, this is a transitional area between Highland and Lowland, boasting a rich variety of scenery, from lush, subtropical gardens warmed by the Gulf Stream to flat and treeless islands on the edge of the Atlantic; it's these islands that are the real magnet here, with their magnificent wildlife, endless walking possibilities and some of the world's finest whiskies. It's in the folds and twists of the countryside, the interplay of land and water and the views out to the islands that the strengths and beauties of mainland Argyll lie, though there is also one area of man-made sights you shouldn't miss, which is the cluster of Celtic and prehistoric relies in mid-Argyll near Kilmartin.

Much of mainland Argyll is comprised of remote peninsulas separated by a series of long sea lochs. The first peninsula you come to from Glasgow is **Cowal**, cut off from the rest of Argyll by a set of mountains including the Arrochar Alps. Nestling in one of Cowal's sea lochs is the **Isle of Bute**, whose capital, Rothesay, is probably the most appealing of the old Clyde steamer resorts. **Kintyre**, the long finger of land that stretches south towards Ireland, is less visually dramatic than Cowal, though it does provide a stepping stone for several Hebridean islands, as well as Arran (see p.171). North of here, **Inveraray**, picturesquely set upon the shores of Loch Fyne, has a superb jail museum to detain you, while further north still, **Oban** is comfortably the largest town in Argyll, as well as its chief ferry port.

Of the islands covered in this chapter, mountainous **Mull** is the most visited, though it is large enough to absorb the crowds, many of whom are only passing through en route to the tiny isle of **Iona**, a centre of Christian culture since the sixth century, or to visit **Tobermory**, the island's impossibly picturesque port (aka "Balamory"). **Islay**, best known for its distinctive malt whiskies, is fairly quiet even in the height of summer, as is neighbouring **Jura**, which offers excellent walking opportunities. And, for those seeking further solitude, there's the island of **Colonsay**, with its beautiful golden sands, and the windswept islands of **Tiree** and **Coll**, which also have great beaches and enjoy more sunny days than anywhere else in Scotland.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND ARGYLL AND BUTE

By train The one main train line in the region runs from Glasgow up to Oban, though it takes in very few places covered in this chapter.

By bus Buses serve most major mainland settlements, with fairly regular services on weekdays, though usually a much reduced service at weekends. There's a good service from Glasgow down to Campbeltown via Arrochar, Inverary and Tarbert. Most of the islands have at least a handful of daily buses too.

By car If you're planning to take a car across to one of the

Loch Fyne Oyster Bar and Shop p.227
Wildlife-watching trips from Tobermory p.241
St Columba and Iona p.250
The Scottish Beaver Trial p.259
Islay Whisky distilleries p.267
George Orwell on Jura p.273

WHISKY BARRELS, ISLAY

Highlights

❶ **Loch Fyne Oyster Bar, Cairndow** Dine in or take away at Scotland's finest smokehouse and seafood outlet. **See p.227**

❷ **Mount Stuart, Bute** Explore this architecturally overblown mansion set in magnificent grounds. **See p.230**

❸ **Tobermory, Mull** Archetypal picturesque fishing village, with colourful houses arranged around a sheltered harbour. **See p.240**

❹ **Boat trip to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles** Take the boat to see the "basalt cathedral" of Fingal's Cave, and then picnic amidst the puffins on Lunga. **See p.244**

❺ **Golden beaches** Kiloran Bay on Colonsay is one of the most perfect sandy beaches in Argyll, but there are plenty more on Islay, Coll and Tiree. **See p.253**

❻ **Isle of Gigha** The perfect island escape: sandy beaches, friendly folk and the azaleas of Achamore Gardens – you can even stay at the laird's house. **See p.262**

❼ **Whisky distilleries, Islay** With eight beautifully sited distilleries to choose from, Islay is the ultimate whisky lover's destination. **See p.267**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.224

ARGYLL & BUTE
N
Castlebay
Lochboisdale
Mallaig
Eig
Muck
Point of Ardnamurchan
Cairns of Coll
Coll
Sorisdale
Ben Hogh (339ft)
Arinagour
Acha
Tiree
Scarinish
Sandaig
Crossapol
Hynish
Treshnish Isles
Staffa
Ulva
Iona
Dubh Artach
Colonsay
Kiloran
Scalasaig
Tobermory
Calgary
Dervaig
Salen
Lochaline
Fishnish
Craignure
Ben More (3169ft)
Mull
Loch Scridain
Pennyghael
Fionnphort
Bunessan
Kerrera
Oban
Firth of Lorn
Seil
Easdale
Luing
Garvellachs
Scarba
Gulf of Corryvreckan
Barnhill
Craignish Point
Kilmartin
Ford
Ardfern
Arduaine
Craobh Haven
Cullipool
Kilmelford
Toberonochy
Dalavich
Inveraray
Cairndow
Ardkinglas Woodland Garden and House
Auchindrain
Strachur
Lochgoilhead
Ardgartan
Arrochar
Tarbet
Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park
Ben Vorlich (3088ft)
The Cobbler (2891ft)
Rest-and-be-Thankful
Kilchrenan
Kilchurn Castle
Loch Awe
Dalmally
Ben Cruachan (3693ft)
Taynuilt
Bonawe
Connel
Loch Etive
Tyndrum
Crianlarich
Port Appin
Castle Stalker
Appin
Lismore
Achnacroish
Loch Creran
Benderloch
Loch Linnhe
Ballachulish
Glen Coe
Fort William
Kilchoan
Ardnamurchan
Morvern
Moidart
Inverliever Forest
Argyll Forest Park
Carrick Castle
Loch Goil
Castle Lachlan
A82
A85
A816
A819
A849
A848
A884
A861
A830
A828
B840
A83

HIGHLIGHTS
1 Loch Fyne Oyster Bar, Cairndow
2 Mount Stuart, Bute
3 Tobermory, Mull
4 Boat trip to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles
5 Golden beaches
6 Isle of Gigha
7 Whisky distilleries, Islay
0
10
miles
NORTHERN IRELAND
Oronsay
Jura
Sound of Jura
Crinan
Crinan Canal
Cairnbaan
Lochgilphead
COWAL
Loch Eck
Ardentinny
Loch Lomond
Tayvallich
Sween
Castle Sween
Loch Fyne
Otter Ferry
Clachan of Glendaruel
Benmore Botanic Garden
Loch Long
Helensburgh
Balloch
Kilmun
Kilcreggan
Gourock
Dunoon
Colintraive
Glasgow
Lagg
Loch Caolis Port
Kilmory
Skervuile
Tighnabruaich
Kames
Portavadie
KNAPDALE
Tarbert
Wemyss Bay
Loch Gruinart
Loch Finlaggan
Port Askaig
Feolin Ferry
Craighouse
Kilberry
Rothesay
Mount Stuart
Great Cumbrae
Bute
Kyles of Bute
Largs
Kilchoman
Buichladdich
Bridgend
Bowmore
Port Charlotte
Islay
Portnahaven
Port Ellen
West Loch Tarbert
Kennacraig
Claonaig
Skipness
Clachan
Gigha
Ardminish
Tayinloan
Lochranza
Goat Fell (2866ft)
Corrie
Ardrossan
Kilbrannan Sound
Arran
Muasdale
Carradale
KINTYRE
Brodick
Lamlash
Holy Island
Troon
Bellochantuy
Saddell
Blackwaterfoot
Whiting Bay
Machrihanish
Campbeltown
Kildonan
Ayr
Rathlin
Mull of Kintyre
Southend
Sanda
Bushmills
Ballycastle
Belfast & Larne
Firth of Clyde

islands, it's essential that you book both your outward and return journeys as early as possible, as the ferries get booked up early, especially in summer.

By ferry CalMac (T 0800 066 5000, W calmac.co.uk) operates a comprehensive timetable of ferries between the islands, though this is reduced during the winter months; information on individual ferry crossings is given in the relevant town accounts.

Cowal

6

The claw-shaped **COWAL** peninsula, formed by Loch Fyne and Loch Long, has been a popular destination since the nineteenth century when rapid steamer connections brought hordes of Glaswegian holiday-makers to its shores. It's still quickest to reach Cowal by ferry across the Clyde – by car, it's a long, though exhilarating, drive through some rich Highland scenery in order to reach the same spot.

Beyond the old-fashioned coastal towns such as **Dunoon**, the largest settlement in the area, the Cowal landscape is extremely rich and varied, ranging from the Munros of the north to the gentle, low-lying coastline of the southwest. One way to explore it is to follow the 47-mile **Cowal Way**, a waymarked long-distance footpath between Portvadie and Ardgartan. The western edge of Cowal is marked by the long, narrow Loch Fyne, famous for both its kippers (smoked herrings) and oysters.

Arrochar and around

Approaching by road from Glasgow, the entry point to Cowal is **ARROCHAR**, at the head of Loch Long. The village itself is ordinary enough, but the area has the peninsula's most grandiose scenery, including the ambitiously named **Arrochar Alps**, whose peaks offer some of the best climbing in Argyll: Ben Ime (3318ft) is the tallest range, while Ben Arthur or **"The Cobbler"** (2891ft), named after the anvil-like rock formation at its summit, is the most distinctive. If you head west from Arrochar to Inveraray or the rest of Cowal, you can climb **Glen Croe**, a strategic hill pass whose saddle is called – for obvious reasons – **Rest-and-be-Thankful**.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Arrochar and Tarbet train station is a mile or so east of town, just off the A83 to Tarbet.

Destinations Glasgow (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily, Sun 3 daily; 1hr 15min).

ARROCHAR AND AROUND

By bus Buses stop just on the A814 near Church Road.

Destinations Glasgow (6 daily; 1hr 10min); Inveraray (6 daily; 35min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Ben Bheula Succoth T 01301 702184, W benbheula.co.uk. Set back from the head of the loch, in nearby Succoth, this clean, three-bedroom B&B is run by a very friendly couple. £55

Fascadail Church Road, Arrochar T 01301 702344, W fascadail.com. A Victorian guesthouse set within its own grounds in the quieter southern part of the village, with five colourfully furnished and superbly equipped rooms. Enjoy breakfast in the dining room with glorious views across the garden. £75

Village Inn Arrochar T 01301 702279. If you need a bite to eat, head for the *Village Inn*, a short walk south of the Fascadail, which has tables outside overlooking the loch as well as a cosy real-ale bar. Daily 10am–midnight.

Ardkinglas Woodland Garden and House

Just off the A83, behind the village of Cairndow • **Garden** Daily dawn–dusk • £4.50 • **House** April–Oct, visits by guided tour only, every Fri 2pm • £7 • T 01499 600261, W ardkinglas.com

The wonderful **Ardkinglas Woodland Garden** contains exotic rhododendrons, azaleas, hydrangeas and a superb collection of conifers, including five so-called Champion Trees – those deemed to be the tallest or broadest examples of their kind within Britain; indeed, the garden is home to what is still the tallest tree in the British Isles, a Grand Fir introduced by David Douglas in 1830 and now standing at a mighty 210ft. Look

LOCH FYNE OYSTER BAR AND SHOP

Loch Fyne Oyster Bar and Shop On the A83, 2 miles north of Cairndow and 8 miles east of Inveraray ⓣ01499 600236, ⓦloch-fyne.com. On the shores of Loch Fyne is the famous *Loch Fyne Oyster Bar*, which spawned the Loch Fyne chain of restaurants. The food is utterly delicious and beautifully thought out, from the chilled crab gazpacho and salmon ceviche (£9.50), to grilled halibut (£21) and hand-dived Islay scallops (£16.50). The restaurant itself oozes class, though it's anything but stuffy, and there's also a superb marble-topped oyster bar where you can tuck into prawns, clams, cockles and heaps of other tasty wet stuff. The gorgeous on-site shop/deli is a great place to assemble a gourmet picnic. Reservations advised. Daily 9am–10pm.

out, too, for the magnificent Silver Fir (159ft), typically found in Central Europe. You can pick up a *Woodland Garden Map* at the entrance to guide you around.

In the southern part of the gardens stands **Ardkinglas House**, a particularly handsome Scottish Baronial mansion, built in 1907 by Robert Lorimer for the Noble family.

Dunoon

The principal entry point into Cowal by sea is **DUNOON**. In the nineteenth century it grew from a village to a major Clyde seaside resort and favourite holiday spot for Glaswegians, but nowadays there's really little to tempt you to stay, particularly with attractive countryside beckoning just beyond. That said, it's worth visiting on the last weekend in August, when the famous **Cowal Highland Gathering** (ⓦcowalgathering.com) takes place here. The largest event of its kind in the world, it culminates in the awesome spectacle of the massed pipes and drums of more than 150 bands marching through the streets.

Castle House Museum

Castle Gardens • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10.30am–4.30pm, Sun 2–4.30pm • £2 • ⓣ01369 701422, ⓦcastlehousemuseum.org.uk.

The centre of town is dominated by a grassy lump of rock known as **Castle Hill**, where you'll find the **Castle House Museum**. There's some good hands-on nature stuff for kids and an excellent section on the Clyde steamers, as well as more about "Highland Mary", betrothed to Robbie Burns (despite the fact that he already had a pregnant wife), who died of typhus before the pair could see through their plan to elope to the West Indies.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUNOON

By ferry There are two 20min ferry crossings across the Clyde from Gourock to Dunoon. The shorter, more frequent service is on Western Ferries (ⓣ01369 704452, ⓦwestern-ferries.co.uk) to Hunter's Quay, a mile north of the town centre. CalMac's boats (ⓣ0800 066 5000, ⓦcalmac.co.uk), though, arrive at the main pier, and have better transport connections if you're on foot.

Destinations Gourock–Dunoon (hourly; 20min); McInroy's Point–Hunter's Quay (every 30min; 20min).

By bus Buses stop on Alexandra Parade, not far from the main pier.

Destinations Colintraive (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 1hr); Inveraray (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 1hr 10min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office On Alexandra Parade, a 5min walk from the CalMac terminal (Easter–Oct daily 9am–5pm; Nov–Easter Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; ⓣ01369 703785, ⓦvisitcowal.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Abbot's Brae West Bay ⓣ01369 705021, ⓦabbotsbrae.co.uk. The welcoming *Abbot's Brae* is a beautiful family-run Victorian villa set in woods above West Bay with lovely views over the Clyde. One interesting feature of the eight spacious rooms is the photographs depicting the local history. £75

Chatters 58 John St ⓣ01369 706402, ⓦchattersdunoon.co.uk. Despite its unappealing location next to *Morrisons*, this is Dunoon's one real restaurant of merit, offering especially delicious meat dishes like pan-fried wood pigeon on cous cous (£9) and roast saddle of lamb (£19.50). Tues noon–3pm, Wed–Sat noon–3pm & 6–11pm.

Benmore Botanic Garden

A815, six miles north of Dunoon • Daily: March & Oct 10am–5pm; April–Sept 10am–6pm • £5.50 • T 01369 706261, W rbge.org.uk

Serenely pitched amidst lush mountain scenery at the foot of Loch Eck, **Benmore Botanic Garden** is an offshoot of Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden. It's a beautifully laid-out garden occupying 120 acres of lush hillside, the mild, moist climate allowing a vast range of unusual plants to grow here, with different sections devoted to rainforest species native to places as exotic as China, Chile and Bhutan. The garden boasts 300 species of rhododendron and a memorably striking avenue of great redwoods, planted in 1863 and now over 150ft high. You can also wander through a Victorian **fernery**, as impressive for its architectural features – notably a fine vaulted entrance, grotto and pool – as for the plants housed within. And look out, too, for "Puck's Hut", designed by the prolific Scottish architect Sir Robert Lorimer, in honour of Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour, who did much to raise awareness of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Clad in various timbers and tiled with red cedar, it originally stood in Puck's Glen in the Eachaig Valley, hence the name.

Isle of Bute

The island of **BUTE** is in many ways simply an extension of the Cowal peninsula, from which it is separated by the narrow Kyles of Bute. Thanks to its mild climate and its ferry link with Wemyss Bay, Bute has been a popular holiday and convalescence spot for Clydesiders for over a century. In its heyday in the 1880s, thirty steamers a day would call in at the island's capital, **Rothesay**, which easily eclipses Dunoon as the most attractive seaside resort on the Clyde thanks to some splendid Victorian architecture, decent accommodation and eating options, and the chance to visit **Mount Stuart**, one of Scotland's most singular aristocratic piles.

Bute's inhabitants live around the two wide bays on the island's east coast, which resembles one long seaside promenade. To escape the crowds head for the sparsely populated west coast, which, in any case, has the sandiest beaches. The best of these, six miles south of Rothesay, are **Kilchattan Bay**, which has a lovely arc of sand overlooked by a row of grand Victorian houses and, further up the west coast, **Ettrick Bay**.

Bute stages a couple of terrific annual events, namely its own **Highland Games** on the third weekend of August, and the **Bute Jazz Festival** over the May Bank Holiday, usually featuring renowned international artists.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF BUTE

By ferry Two CalMac ferry services operate from the mainland to Bute; the main crossing is from Wemyss Bay to Rothesay, and the other is the very short crossing at the northern tip of the island, from Colintraive, in Cowal to Rhubodach.

Destinations Colintraive–Rhubodach (frequently; 5min); Wemyss Bay–Rothesay (every 45min; 30min).

Rothesay

Bute's only town, **ROTHESAY** is a handsome Victorian resort, set in a wide, sweeping bay, backed by green hills, with a classic palm-tree promenade and 1920s pagoda-style pavilion originally built to house the Winter Gardens. Many of the buildings could use a lick of paint or two, but despite this, the town retains a certain well-worn charm.

Pavilion toilets

The Pier • Daily: Easter–Sept 8am–7.45pm; Oct–Easter 9am–4.45pm • 20p

Rothesay's **Victorian toilets**, built in 1899 by Twyfords, are a feast of marble, ceramics and brass so ornate that they're now one of the town's most celebrated sights. The Victorians didn't make provision for ladies' conveniences, so the women's half is a

modern add-on, but if the coast is clear the attendant (attired in a neat burgundy waistcoat) will allow ladies a tour of the gents; it's clad in colourfully painted ceramic tiles and mosaics, and stars an impressive central stand with six urinals – never has the call of nature seemed so attractive.

Rothesay Castle

Castle Hill St • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March Mon–Wed, Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • T 01700 502691

Rothesay boasts the militarily useless, but architecturally impressive, moated ruins of **Rothesay Castle**, hidden amid the town's backstreets. Built around the twelfth century, it was twice captured by the Norwegians, firstly in 1230, then in 1263; such vulnerability was the reasoning behind the unusual, almost circular, curtain wall, with its four big drum towers, only one of which remains fully intact. Look upwards inside the tower and you'll see a superbly preserved dovecot (with nesting boxes), which was a seventeenth-century addition. The wall was actually heightened in the early sixteenth century – the line is clearly identifiable in the stonework; the earlier, lower half comprises light ashlar, the upper half is darker and of rougher hew.

Ascog Hall Gardens

Ascog • Easter–Oct Wed–Sun 10am–5pm • £4 • T 01700 504555

A mile or so east of Rothesay along the coastal road is the **Ascog Hall Gardens**, which is chiefly notable for its highly unusual **Victorian fernery**, a beautiful, dank place, sunk into the ground, and featuring ferns from all over the world. This one fairly recently replaced the original fernery dating from around 1870, its red, weathered sandstone walls, shade and humidity ideal conditions for cultivating these plants. The gardens themselves are likeably dishevelled, and feature species from Europe, Asia and Oceania; the best time to visit is spring when azaleas, tulips and blue poppies are in full bloom.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ROTHESAY

By ferry The CalMac terminal is smack bang in the middle of the Esplanade.

Destinations Wemyss Bay (every 45min; 30min).

By bus The main point for bus departures and arrivals is Guildford Square, opposite the ferry terminal.

Destinations Kilchattan Bay (Mon–Sat hourly, 3 on Sun; 30min); Mount Stuart (Mon–Sat hourly; 15min); Rhubodach (Mon–Fri 2–3 daily; 20min).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office Inside the Winter Gardens on Victoria Street (daily 9.30am–5pm; T 01700 502151, W visitbute.com). Also located here is the "Discovery Centre", which has some well-presented displays on the life and times of Bute.

Bike hire The Bike Shed, 23–25 East Princes St (Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm; T 01700 505515, W thebikeshed.org.uk) has great-value bike hire (£10/day) and also does repairs and servicing.

ACCOMMODATION

Boat House 15 Battery Place T 01700 502696, W theboathouse-bute.co.uk. Chic and utterly contemporary B&B with ten sparkling rooms offering all the modern conveniences you could wish for, including iPod docks. The lounge area is equally inviting, with a DVD player and stereo for guests' use. **£80**

Bute Backpackers 36 Argyle St T 01700 501876. Conveniently located five minutes' walk along the seafront towards Port Bannatyne, the island's sole hostel offers reasonably furnished three- to six-bed rooms. Breakfast is not included but there's a large kitchen for general use. Dorms **£20**

Cannon House Battery Place T 01700 502819, W cannonhousehotel.co.uk. A really elegant Georgian building close to the pier, with an ever-so-slightly old-fashioned atmosphere and seven extremely comfortable (if slightly too floral) rooms, though not all possess sea views. **£70**

EATING AND DRINKING

No.29 29 Gallowgate T 01700 500685, W 29bute.com. Seared loin of tuna with tomato compote, samphire grass and citrus foam (£17.95) gives you some idea of what to expect from Rothesay's most refined restaurant, complete with a smart, all-grey interior and impeccably mannered staff. Mon–Sat 6–10pm, Sun 1–10pm.

Musicker 11 High St 01700 502287. Funky café-cum-music retailer just across from the castle, with delicious coffee, decent snacks and even better music, courtesy of the rather ace jukebox and occasional live performances. Friday jam sessions at 3pm. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

Squat Lobster The Harbour 07748 552761. Housed in a mid-nineteenth-century hut that used to be a refuge for horse cabbies, this super chippie next to the putting green doles out freshly caught fish of the day as well as mussels, whelks, langoustines, and the eponymous squat lobster, served with garlic butter (£5.95). Daily noon–8pm.

6 Mount Stuart

Mount Stuart, 4 miles south of Rothesay • **House** April–Oct, phone for times • £11 • **Grounds** Daily 10am–6pm • £6.50 • 01700 503877, mountstuart.com

Bute's most compelling sight is **Mount Stuart**, a huge, fantasy Gothic mansion set amid acres of lush woodland gardens overlooking the Firth of Clyde, and ancestral home of the seventh marquess of Bute, also known as Johnny Bute (or, in his Formula One racing days, as Johnny Dumfries). The building was created by the marvellously eccentric third marquess and architect Robert Rowand Anderson after a fire in 1877 destroyed the family seat. With little regard for expense, the marquess shipped in tons of Italian marble, built a railway line to transport it down the coast and employed craftsmen who had worked with William Burges on the marquess's other medieval concoction, Cardiff Castle.

The *pièce de resistance* is the columned **Marble Hall**, its vaulted ceiling and stained-glass windows decorated with the signs of the zodiac, reflecting the marquess's taste for mysticism. He was equally fond of animal and plant imagery; hence you'll find birds feeding on berries in the dining-room frieze and monkeys reading (and tearing up) books and scrolls in the library. Look out also for the unusual heraldic ceiling in the drawing room. After all the heavy furnishings, seek aesthetic relief in the vast **Marble Chapel**, built entirely out of dazzling white Carrara marble, with a magnificent Cosmati floor pattern. Upstairs, along with three impressive bathrooms, check out the **Horoscope Room**, where you can see a fine astrological ceiling and adjacent observatory/conservatory.

There are a number of fine **walks** to be had within the vast grounds, ranging from a 45-minute stroll down through the woods to the seashore, to a more vigorous, two-hour walk taking in the **Wee Garden** and **Calvary Pond** (the latter located at the head of a small burn).

EATING — MOUNT STUART

Mount Stuart restaurant Second floor of visitor centre, Mount Stuart 01700 505276, mountstuart.com. Mount Stuart's on-site restaurant is certainly worth making a trek to even if you're not visiting the estate. The majority of ingredients are sourced from the estate's Kitchen Garden, resulting in scrumptious dishes like seared west coast scallops with salad leaves in a chilli and coriander dressing (£9.95). Daily: May–Aug 10am–6pm; Sept & Oct 11am–4pm.

Inveraray

The traditional county town of Argyll, and a classic example of an eighteenth-century planned town, **INVERARAY** was built in the 1770s by the Duke of Argyll in order to distance his newly rebuilt castle from the hoi polloi in the town, and to establish a commercial and legal centre for the region. Inveraray has changed very little since and remains an absolute set piece of Scottish Georgian architecture, with a truly memorable setting, the brilliant white arches of Front Street reflected in the still waters of Loch Fyne.

Despite its picture-book location, there's not much more to Inveraray than its distinctive **Main Street** (perpendicular to Front Street), flanked by whitewashed terraces, which are characterized by black window casements. At the top of the street, the road divides to

circumnavigate the town's Neoclassical **church**: originally the southern half served the Gaelic-speaking community, while the northern half served those who spoke English.

Inveraray Jail

Church Square • Daily: April–Oct 9.30am–6pm; Nov–March 10am–5pm • £8.95 • ☎01499 302381, ⓦinverarayjail.co.uk

Inverary's most enjoyable attraction is **Inveraray Jail**, comprising an attractive Georgian courthouse and two grim prison blocks that, in their day, were the principal ones in Argyll. The prison blocks ceased to function in 1889, though the courthouse continued in one form or another until 1954. The jail is now a thoroughly enjoyable museum, which graphically recounts prison conditions from medieval times to the twentieth century.

Following a trawl through some of the region's most notorious crimes, you get to listen to a **re-enactment** of a trial of the period, staged in the original semicircular courthouse of some 170 years ago. More fascinating, though, are the prisons themselves; built in 1820, the Old Prison housed all convicts – men, women, children, the insane – until 1849 when the New Prison was built, whose twelve cells held male prisoners only. In the courtyard stands the minute "**Airing Yards**", two caged cells where the prisoners got to exercise for an hour a day, though they were forbidden to talk to each other.

Inveraray Castle

A 10min walk north of Main Street • April–Oct daily 10am–5.45pm • £10 • ☎01499 302203, ⓦinveraray-castle.com

Inveraray Castle remains the family home of the Duke of Argyll, the present (thirteenth) incumbent being Duke Torquhil Ian Campbell. Built in 1745, it was given a touch of the Loire in the nineteenth century with the addition of dormer windows and conical corner spires. In truth, the interior is fairly dull, save for a pair of Beauvais tapestries in the Drawing Room, and the armoury hall, whose displays of weaponry – supplied to the Campbells by the British government to put down the Jacobites – rise through several storeys. Otherwise, look out for the small exhibition on Rob Roy, complete with his belt, sporran and dirk handle. The castle's more recent claim to fame is that it was chosen as the location for the shooting of an episode of Downton Abbey.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — INVERARAY

By bus Buses stop on Front Street, opposite the tourist office. Destinations Dalmally (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 2 on Sun; 25min); Dunoon (3 daily; 1hr 10min); Glasgow (4–6 daily; 2hr); Lochgilphead (2–3 daily; 40min); Oban (Mon–Sat 3 daily, Sun 2 daily; 1hr 5min); Tarbert (2–3 daily; 1hr 30min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Front Street (daily: March & Nov 10am–4pm; April, May, Sept & Oct 10am–5pm; June–Aug daily 9am–5.30pm; ☎01499 302063).

ACCOMMODATION

Loch Fyne Hotel Shore Road ☎01499 302980, ⓦcrerarhotels.com. Refined spa hotel out on the road to Lochgilphead offering the full complement of spa facilities (pool, hot tub, steam room and jacuzzi), in addition to a supremely comfortable range of rooms, many with a tartan theme. £110

★ **Newton Hall** Shore Road ☎01499 302484, ⓦnewtonhallguesthouse.co.uk. This former church now accommodates an outstanding ensemble of seven rooms, each one named after an Argyll island. Each has been conceived in a completely different style, though they're all possessed of strikingly bold colours and cool, modern furnishings; a couple of rooms have even retained Gothic-style church windows, through which there are splendid views across the Loch. Particularly welcoming to families. £90

SYHA hostel ☎0870 004 1125, ⓦsyha.org.uk. Small, low-key hostel in a low, wood and stone chalet-type building a short walk up the A819 to Oban (just beyond the petrol station). Twin and quad rooms, all with shared shower facilities, as well as a lounge and kitchen for communal use. Breakfast £3.75. Easter to Oct. Dorms £18.50

EATING AND DRINKING

Brambles Main St West, ☎01499 302252. Fabulous bistro/bakery that's invariably packed to the gunnels with punters here to natter over a cup of freshly roasted coffee and home-made cake. Daily 8.30am–6pm.

George Hotel Main St East, ☎01499 302111. The rambling, and very convivial, restaurant/bar of the *George* feels like a proper pub with its flagstone flooring, log fires, and dimly lit nooks and crannies in which to linger over a pint. Offers decent food too; haggis, neeps and tatties (£7.95), and steak pie with mash and buttered carrots (£9) are typical of the menu. Daily 11am–11pm.

Oban and around

The solidly Victorian resort of **OBAN** enjoys a superb setting – the island of Kerrera to the southwest providing its bay with a natural shelter – distinguished by a bizarre granite amphitheatre, dramatically lit at night, on the hilltop above the town. Despite a population of just 8000, it's by far the largest port in northwest Scotland, the second-largest town in Argyll and the main departure point for ferries to the Hebrides. Although Oban is not blessed with a particularly stunning array of sights, there's more than enough to keep you entertained for a day or so, and it's one of the best places in Scotland to eat fresh seafood.

McCaig's Tower

Apart from the setting and views, the only truly remarkable sight in Oban is the town's landmark, **McCaig's Tower**, a stiff ten-minute climb from the quayside. Built in imitation of Rome's Colosseum, it was the brainchild of a local businessman a century ago, who had the twin aims of alleviating off-season unemployment among the local stonemasons and creating a museum, art gallery and chapel. Originally, the plan was to add a 95ft central tower, but work never progressed further than the exterior granite walls before McCaig died. In his will, McCaig gave instructions for the lancet windows to be filled with bronze statues of the family, though no such work was ever undertaken. Instead, the folly has been turned into a sort of walled garden, which is a popular rendezvous for Oban's youth after dark, but for the rest of the time simply provides a wonderful seaward panorama, particularly at sunset.

Oban Distillery

Stafford Sreet • Jan, Feb & Dec Mon–Fri 12.30–4pm; March & Nov Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; April Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm; May, June & Oct daily 9.30am–5pm; July–Sept Mon–Fri 9.30am–7.30pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–5pm • £7.50 • ☎01631 572004, ⓦ discoveringdistilleries.com

Oban Distillery is one of Scotland's oldest, founded in 1794 by the Stevenson brothers, and today it produces in excess of a million bottles a year of its lightly peaty malt, which is acknowledged to be a touch easier on the palette than many other whiskies produced hereabouts. The excellent forty-five-minute-long guided tours take in the Mash House, with four massive Scandinavian larch washbacks, and the Still House, with its beautifully proportioned copper stills. The tours ends, as is the custom, with a generous dram.

War and Peace Exhibition

Corran Esplanade • May–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 10am–4pm; March, April & Nov daily 10am–4pm • Free • ☎01631 570007, ⓦ obanmuseum.org.uk

Housed in the old *Oban Times* building beside the Art Deco *Regent Hotel* on the Esplanade, the charming **War and Peace Exhibition** is stuffed full of local (and not so local) memorabilia – bizarrely, even a chunk of the Berlin Wall has ended up here. Overall though, the emphasis is on the wartime role of the area around Oban, when it operated as a flying-boat base, mustering point for Atlantic convoys, and as a training

centre for the D-Day landings. Also on display are bits of cargo (including a ladder) washed ashore from the Dutch cargo steamer, the *Breda*, which was attacked in nearby Ardmucknish Bay in 1940. It's now a popular site for wreck diving.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND

By plane Six miles north of town, tiny Oban Airport in North Connel (T 0845 805 7465, W hebrideanair.co.uk) has flights to Coll, Tiree, Islay and Colonsay; the nearest train station to the airport is Connel Ferry, or take bus #405 from Oban to Barcaldine.

Destinations Coll (Mon & Wed 2–3 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily;

30min); Colonsay (Tues & Thurs 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 30min); Islay (Tues & Thurs 2 daily; 40min); Tiree (Mon & Wed 2 daily; 1hr).

By train The train station is on Railway Pier.

Destinations Glasgow, Queen St (3 daily; 3hr 10min).

By bus On Station Road, adjacent to the train station.

Destinations Appin (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 30min); Connel (Mon–Sat hourly; 10–15min); Fort William (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 1hr 30min); Glasgow (4 daily; 3hr); Inveraray (4 daily; 1hr 10min); Kilmartin (Mon–Fri 4 daily, Sat 2 daily; 1hr 15min).

By ferry The CalMac terminal (T 01631 566688, W calmac.co.uk) is on Railway Pier, close to both the train and bus stations.

Destinations Achnacroish, Lismore (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily, 2 on Sun; 50min); Coll (daily except Wed & Fri; 2hr 40min); Colonsay (daily except Tues & Sat; 2hr 15min); Craignure, Mull (daily every 2hr; 45min); Lochboisdale (3–5 weekly; 5hr 20min–7hr); Tiree (1 daily; 3hr 40min).

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GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

By car Arriving in Oban by car can be a bit of a nightmare in the summer, when traffic chokes the main drag. If you're heading straight for the ferry, make sure you leave an extra hour to allow for sitting in the tailbacks.

Tourist office 3 North Pier (April–June, Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–7pm, Sun 10am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–3pm; T 01631 563122, W oban.org.uk).

ACTIVITIES AND TOURS

Bike rental Bike Fix, George Street (Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–4pm; T 01631 566033, W obanbikehire.co.uk), rents bikes (£20/day) and also does repairs and servicing.

Diving If you fancy something a little more vigorous, head to the Puffin Dive Centre, based a mile south of Oban at Port Gallanach (T 01631 566088, W puffin.org.uk), where you can take the plunge with a fully qualified instructor (£5/90min).

Wildlife-watching tours The best of the wildlife-watching companies hereabouts is Coastal Connection, based on Oban Pier (T 01631 565833, W coastal-connection.co.uk), who offer 2–5hr long trips (£30–40) spotting bird-and-sealife.

ACCOMMODATION

Oban is positively heaving with **hotels** and **B&Bs**, most of them reasonably priced and many within easy walking distance of the quayside. Unlikely as it is, if you're struggling to find a place, note that there are stacks more guesthouses in Connel, five miles north. The town is flush with **hostels** too, and there's a decent campsite in the vicinity.

Dungallan House Hotel Gallanach Road T 01631 563799, W dungallanhotel-oban.co.uk. Tucked away to the south of town, this solid Victorian villa offers a dozen classy, but expensive, rooms set in its own woodland grounds, with great views across the Sound of Kerrera. No under-12s. March–Oct. £145

Hawthornbank Guest House Dalriach Road T 01631 562041, W smoothound.co.uk/hotels/hawthorn. Decent, traditional guesthouse in the lower backstreets of Oban, just across the road from the leisure centre. The rooms, one of which has a four-poster bed, are immaculately kept. March–Oct. £65

Jeremy Inglis 21 Airds Crescent T 01631 565065. A somewhat eccentrically run hostel near the train station, with a maze of shared, double and family rooms (no bunks throughout), plus kitchen facilities. It's the cheapest bed in town, with breakfast included. Doubles £42; dorms £17

Kilchrenan House Corran Esplanade T 01631 562663, W kilchrenanhouse.co.uk. A bright and hospitable home located near the cathedral, with ten rooms, most of which have antique furnishings to go alongside the tremendous sea views. £70

Oban Backpackers Breadalbane St T 01631 562107, W obanbackpackers.com. Large, friendly and colourful hostel with a range of differently sized dorms (the largest has twelve beds) as well as doubles, both here and in two buildings nearby. The big, open lounge-dining area has mismatched sofas, a pool table and a real fire. Breakfast included. Doubles £50; dorms £17

★ **The Old Manse Guest House** Dalraich Road T 01631 564886, W obanguesthouse.co.uk. There are few more welcoming places in town than this spotlessly clean Victorian villa whose rooms have unobstructed sea views. There are thoughtful touches all round, including CD players, complimentary sherry, and a great selection of toiletries. The breakfast is top-notch too. £84

SYHA hostel Corran Esplanade T 01631 562025, W syha.org.uk. Occupying a super seafront position in a converted Victorian house, this hostel might be a bit too clinical for some, but the two- to-six-bed en-suite rooms are kept to a very high standard. The only downside is that it's a fair trek with a backpack from the ferry terminal. Breakfast £4.50. Doubles £46; dorms £19.75

CAMPSITE

Oban Caravan & Camping Park Gallanach Rd T 01631 562425, W obancaravanpark.com. Two miles southwest of Oban up a pretty glen, this is a huge, well-equipped site with

lots of camping space and great views across to Kerrera, with a good chance of a breeze to blow the midges away. Facilities include a self-catering kitchen, TV/games lounge, BBQs and on-site shop. April to mid-Oct. **£15**/pitch

EATING

Oban now rates as one of the finest places in Scotland to eat **fresh seafood**, with more than half a dozen highly commendable seafood **restaurants** to choose from. Moreover, if you're on the go, or just need a quick bite whilst waiting for the ferry, you'll find a cluster of excellent seafood **stalls** down by the harbour.

TAKEAWAYS

★ **Oban Fish and Chips** 116 George St ☎01631 567000. A cut above your average chippie (and the best one in Oban), with some surprisingly sophisticated food like Oban Bay chowder, and spicy crab and avocado salad (£8.80) to go alongside the stock fish and chips; good ice cream too, and there's seating available. Daily 11.30am–10.30pm.

Original Green Shack Railway Pier (no phone). Long-standing and hugely popular seafood shack that also goes by the name of John Ogden's, serving langoustine sandwiches, scallops in hot garlic butter (£6.95), mussels in white wine (£3.95), oysters, prawns, cockles and much, much more. Wooden benches available for seating. Mon–Fri & Sun 10am–6pm, Sat 10am–8pm.

CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS

★ **Coast** 104 George St ☎01631 569900, ⓦcoastoban.com. A slick place with a metropolitan atmosphere, serving acclaimed and original fish dishes like seared scallops with ham-hock potato croquettes and pea puree (£17.50). As you'd expect from one of the town's classiest outfits, the atmosphere and service is first-rate. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10pm, Sun 5.30–10pm.

Ee-usk North Pier ☎01631 565666, ⓦeeusk.com. Salmon mousse, sea bass with creamed leeks and savoury mash, and glistening seafood platters (£19.95 for two) are typical offerings in this lively waterfront restaurant that makes the most of the uninterrupted harbour views. Daily noon–3pm & 5.45–10pm.

Fishouse Restaurant 1 Railway Pier ☎01631 563110, ⓦwaterfrontoban.co.uk. Despite the unprepossessing exterior, this is a great place with an open kitchen rustling up impressive dishes primarily using scallops (Isle of Mull scallop salad), langoustine (crispy tails) and the best of the daily catch, such as lobster ravioli (£13.99). Mon–Fri & Sun noon–2.15pm & 5.30am–10pm, Sat–noon 10pm.

Julie's Coffee House 33 Stafford St ☎01631 565952. The pick of the many cafés hereabouts, this is a warm, friendly local with super home-baked treats and tasty coffee. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, also Mon in July & Aug.

Kitchen Garden 14 George St ☎01631 566332, ⓦkitchengardenoban.co.uk. Impressive, central deli with a licensed café up on the mezzanine offering breakfast rolls, filled toasted croissants, and sweet and savoury scones, among other delicious things. Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–4.30pm.

Isle of Kerrera

One of the best places to escape from the crowds in Oban is the low-lying island of **KERRERA**, which shelters Oban Bay from the worst of the westerly winds. Measuring just five miles by two, the island is easily explored on foot. The island's most prominent landmark is the **Hutcheson's Monument**, commemorating David Hutcheson, one of the Victorian founders of what is now Caledonian MacBrayne. The most appealing vistas, however, are from Kerrera's highest point, **Càrn Breugach** (620ft), over to Mull, the Slate Islands, Lismore, Jura and beyond.

The ferry lands roughly halfway down the east coast, at the north end of **Horseshoe Bay**, where King Alexander II died in 1249. If the weather's good and you feel like lazing by the sea, head for the island's finest sandy beach, **Slatrach Bay**, on the west coast, one mile northwest of the ferry jetty. Otherwise, there's a very rewarding trail down to the clifftop ruin of **Gylen Castle** and back to the ferry via the Drove Road.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF KERRERA

By ferry The passenger and bicycle ferry crosses regularly (summer 8am & 8.40am, then every 30min until 7pm; winter every 1–2hr; ☎01631 563665; £5 return) through the day from the mainland two miles down the Gallanach road from Oban. In summer, bus #431 from Oban train station connects with the ferry once a day.

Destinations Gallanach (every 30min; 10min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Kerrera Bunkhouse Lower Gylen ☎01631 566637, ⓦkerrerabunkhouse.co.uk. Located in a lovely spot a 45min walk from the ferry, this converted eighteenth-century stable building, with seven rooms, also has a byre living space for hire by the evening. They also rent a room in the farmhouse for B&B. Bed per person £15

Kerrera Teagarden Lower Gylen, next to the bunkhouse. Given that Kerrera has no shop, you may well find yourself at this delightful café where you can eat home-made veggie snacks, cakes and coffee. Easter–Sept daily 10am–4.30pm.

6

Appin

Seventeen miles north of Oban is **Appin**, best known as the setting for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, a fictionalized account of the "Appin Murder" of 1752, when Colin Campbell was shot in the back, allegedly by one of the disenfranchised Stewart clan. The name Appin derives from the Gaelic *abthaine*, meaning "lands belonging to the abbey", in this case the one on the island of Lismore, which is linked to the peninsula by passenger ferry from **Port Appin**.

Port Appin

A pretty little fishing village at the peninsula's westernmost tip, **PORT APPIN** overlooks a host of tiny little islands dotted around Loch Linnhe, with Lismore and the mountains of Morvern and Mull in the background. Without doubt, it is one of Argyll's most picturesque spots.

Castle Stalker

A828, near Port Appin • Visits by tour only, mid-July to early Sept • £10 • ☎01631 740315 or ☎01631 730354, ⓦcastlestalker.com

Framed magnificently as you wind along the single-track road to Port Appin is one of Argyll's most romantic ruined castles, the much-photographed sixteenth-century ruins of **Castle Stalker**. The castle, which is privately owned, can only be visited on a pre-booked tour, which are limited to five weeks of the year (roughly between mid-July and early September). Otherwise, there is a footpath from the *Stalker View* café that winds down to a point some 200m from the castle, affording some cracking photo opportunities.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PORT APPIN

By ferry Ferries to Lismore depart from a small jetty at the southernmost point of the village, by the Pierhouse Hotel.

Destinations Lismore (hourly; 5min).

ACTIVITIES

Bike rental Bike rental is available from Port Appin Bikes (☎01631 730391; £10/day) – useful if popping across to Lismore (bicycles travel for free on this ferry).

Watersports For outdoor pursuits, head for the Linnhe Marine Water Sports Centre (May–Sept; ☎07721 503981) in Lettershuna (just north of Castle Stalker), which rents out boats of all shapes and sizes, offers sailing and windsurfing lessons, plus waterskiing, clay-pigeon shooting and even pony trekking.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Castle Stalker View Overlooking Castle Stalker ☎01631 730444. In a tiptop position overlooking Castle Stalker, this large, light-filled café makes for a super little pit stop, serving up fluffy jacket spuds with unusual fillings like crayfish tails or haggis (£7.95), and a mouthwatering selection of baked goodies. Daily: March–Oct 9.30am–5pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm.

Pierhouse Hotel Just a few paces from the jetty ☎01631 730302, ⓦpierhousehotel.co.uk. Ideally situated, the whitewashed Pierhouse has twelve sumptuously furnished rooms decorated in cool beige and mocha tones, most with unrivalled loch views – it's pricey, mind you. The hotel's sparkling seafood restaurant is highly rated in these parts too. £130

Isle of Lismore

Lying in the middle of Loch Linnhe, to the north of Oban, and barely rising above a hillock, the narrow island of **LISMORE** (around ten miles long and a mile wide) offers

wonderful gentle walking and cycling opportunities, with unrivalled views – in fine weather – across to the mountains of Morvern, Lochaber and Mull. Legend has it that saints Columba and Moluag both fancied the skinny island as a **missionary base**, but as they raced towards it Moluag cut off his finger and threw it ashore ahead of Columba, claiming the land for himself. Of Moluag's sixth-century foundation nothing remains, but from 1236 until 1507 the island served as the seat of the **bishop of Argyll**. Lismore is one of the most fertile of the Inner Hebrides – its name derives from the Gaelic *lios mór*, meaning "great garden" – and before the Clearances (see p.589) it supported nearly 1400 inhabitants; the population today is around 200, many of them over 60.

The ferry from Oban lands at **ACHNACROISH**, roughly halfway along the eastern coastline.

Ionad Naomh Moluag

500m west of Achnacroish • Daily: March to mid-April & Oct noon–3pm; mid-April to Sept 11am–4pm • £3.50 • ☎ 01631 760030

To get to grips with the history of the island and its Gaelic culture, follow the signs to the Heritage Centre, **Ionad Naomh Moluag**, a turf-roofed, timber-clad building with a permanent exhibition on Lismore, a reference library, a gift shop and a café with an outdoor terrace. Your ticket also covers entry to the nearby restored nineteenth-century cottar's (landless tenant's) cottage, **Tigh Iseabal Dhaibh**, with its traditionally built stone walls, birch roof timbers and thatched roof.

Cathedral of Moluag and around

In **CLACHAN**, two and a half miles north of Achnacroish, you'll find the diminutive, whitewashed fourteenth-century **Cathedral of St Moluag**, whose choir was reduced in height and converted into the parish church in 1749. Due east of the church – head north up the road and take the turning signposted on the right – the circular **Tirefour Broch**, over two thousand years old, occupies a commanding position and has walls almost 10ft thick in places.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF LISMORE

By ferry Two ferries serve Lismore: a small CalMac car ferry from Oban to Achnacroish (Mon–Sat 4 daily, 2 on Sun; 50min), and a shorter passenger- and bicycle-only crossing from Port Appin to Point, the island's north point (hourly; 5min).

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

Bike rental Bike rental is available from Lismore Bike Hire (☎ 01631 760213), who will deliver to the ferry upon request.

Website In the absence of a tourist office, the website, ⓦ isleoflismore.com, has some useful information.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Old Schoolhouse ☎ 01631 760262. Accommodation on the island is extremely limited, but this budget B&B with three rooms, all sharing bathroom facilities, is perfectly acceptable. They also serve evening meals for a very reasonable £10/person. **£60**

Loch Awe

Legend has it that **Loch Awe**, twenty miles east of Oban, was created by a witch and inhabited by a monster even more gruesome than the one at Loch Ness. At more than 25 miles in length, Loch Awe is actually the longest stretch of fresh water in the country, but most travellers only encounter the loch's north end as they speed along its shores by car or train on the way to or from Oban.

Kilchurn Castle

Several tiny islands on the loch sport picturesque ruins, including the fifteenth-century ruins of **Kilchurn Castle**, strategically situated on a rocky spit (once an island) at the

head of the loch; to visit the castle, you can approach by foot from the A85 to the east. The castle is essentially a shell, but its watery setting and imposing outlines make it well worth a detour.

Cruachan Power Station

A85, 19 miles east of Oban • Easter–Oct: daily 9.30am–4.45pm; Nov–March: Mon–Fri 10am–3.45pm • Tours £6.50 • 01866 822618, visitcruachan.co.uk

The main attraction on the shores of Loch Awe is none too picturesque. **Cruachan Power Station** is actually constructed inside mighty Ben Cruachan (3693ft), which looms over the head of Loch Awe; it was built in 1965 as part of the hydroelectric network that generates around ten percent of Scotland's electricity. Thirty-minute guided tours set off every half-hour from the **visitor centre** by the loch, taking you to a viewing platform above the generating room deep inside the "hollow mountain", a 91m-long cavern big enough to contain the Tower of London. The whole experience of visiting an industrial complex hidden within a mountain is very James Bond, and it certainly pulls in the tour coaches. Even if you don't partake in a tour, the visitor centre offers some thoroughgoing and interesting explanations of the workings of the power station and renewable energy projects, while the adjoining café has marvellous loch views.

Isle of Mull and around

The second largest of the Inner Hebrides, **MULL** is by far the most accessible: just forty minutes from Oban by ferry. As so often, first impressions largely depend on the weather – it is the wettest of the Hebrides (and that's saying something) – for without the sun the large tracts of moorland, particularly around the island's highest peak, Ben More (3169ft), can appear bleak and unwelcoming. There are, however, areas of more gentle pastoral scenery around **Dervaig** in the north, and the indented west coast varies from the sandy beaches around **Calgary** to the cliffs of Loch na Keal. The most common mistake is to try and "do" the island in a day or two: flogging up the main road to the picturesque capital of **Tobermory**, then covering the fifty-odd miles between there and Fionnphort, in order to visit **Iona**. Mull is a place that will grow on you only if you have the time and patience to explore.

Historically, crofting, whisky distilling and fishing supported the islanders (*Muileachs*), but the population – which peaked at 10,000 – decreased dramatically in the late nineteenth century due to the Clearances and the 1846 potato famine. On Mull, it is a trend that has been reversed, mostly owing to the large influx of settlers from elsewhere in the country, which has brought the current population up to more than 2500. One of the main reasons for this resurgence is, of course, tourism – more than half a million visitors come here each year. As good a reason as any to visit Mull, and one of the main reasons why many do so, is to view the abundant **wildlife**, with whale-watching the highlight for most visitors, though there's fantastic birdlife here too.

Mull also makes particular efforts to draw visitors to **special events** through the year: these annual events include the Mendelssohn on Mull Festival in July, which commemorates the composer's visit here in 1829, the Mull Highland Games, also in July, and a rally car event around the island's winding roads in October.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF MULL AND AROUND

By ferry Craignure is the main ferry terminal, with a frequent daily car ferry link to Oban, though booking ahead on this route is strongly advised. A smaller and less expensive car ferry crosses daily from Lochaline on the Morvern peninsula (see p.440) to Fishnish, six miles northwest of Craignure. Another even smaller car ferry connects Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan peninsula (see p.441) with Tobermory, the island's capital.

GETTING AROUND

By bus/car Public transport on Mull is not too bad on the main A849, with a steady stream of buses plying the route between Craignure and Tobermory, but there's more or less no service along the west coast. If driving, note that the roads are still predominantly single-track, with passing places, which can slow journeys down considerably.

Craignure and around

CRAIGNURE is little more than a scattering of cottages, though there is a small shop, a bar, some toilets and a CalMac ticket and **tourist office** situated opposite the pier. However, there is plenty of accommodation here, as well as a few places to eat and drink, so it is a useful place to base yourself if you have a car.

Duart Castle

A848, three miles south of Craignure • May to mid-Oct daily 10.30am–5.30pm • £5.75 • 01680 812309, duartcastle.com

Perched on a rocky promontory sticking out into the Sound of Mull, and buffeted by winds and weather, **Duart Castle** makes for a striking landmark viewed from the Oban–Craignure ferry. Duart was headquarters of the once-powerful MacLean clan from the thirteenth century, but was burnt down by the Campbells and confiscated after the 1745 rebellion. In 1911, the 26th clan chief, Fitzroy MacLean – not to be confused with the Scottish writer of the same name – managed to buy it back and restore it, and he remained here until his death, in 1936, at the ripe old age of 101 – look out for the wonderful black-and-white photos of MacLean on his 100th birthday, still looking remarkably fit even then. The top-floor room showcases some superb exhibits, particularly items belonging to Fitzroy from his time serving in the 13th Light Dragoons and 13th Hussars, while you can also learn about the world

scout movement; in 1959, Charles MacLean (the 27th clan chief) became Chief Scout, a role he performed with some distinction until 1971. From the exhibition room, climb up to the ramparts for superlative views of the island and beyond; on a clear day, you can just make out the summit of Ben Nevis. After your visit, head to the castle's pretty, barn-like tearoom, where there's an impressive array of home-made cakes on offer.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By ferry The ferry terminal dominates the centre of the village, with the CalMac office located directly opposite, in the same building as the tourist office.

Destinations Oban (daily every 2hr; 45min).

By bus Buses pick up and drop off by the main road by the ferry terminal.

Destinations Fionnphort (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 1 on Sun; 1hr 10min); Fishnish (1–4 daily; 10min); Salen (4–6 daily; 20min); Tobermory (4–6 daily; 45min).

Tourist office Opposite the ferry terminal in shared premises with CalMac (April–June, Sept & Oct 9am–5pm; July & Aug 9am–7pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–noon & 2–5pm; T 01680 812377).

CRAIGNURE AND AROUND

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Craignure Inn 400m up the road towards Fionnphort T 01680 812305, W craignure-inn.co.uk. A two-minute stroll from town, this eighteenth-century whitewashed inn, frequented by locals and tourists alike, is a snug little place to hole up in. Quiz nights and live music are regular weekly fixtures. Daily 11.30am–11pm.

Isle of Mull Hotel Half a mile from the ferry terminal along the road to Tobermory T 01680 812544, W crerarhotels.co.uk. The hotel exterior is somewhat unprepossessing, but its super waterfront setting, accomplished rooms and friendly staff more than compensate. £95

Old Mill Cottage Lochdon T 01680 812442, W oldmillmull.com. A sensitively converted mill three miles south on the A849, accommodating three pretty rooms with thick-set wood furnishings and cool little touches like roll-top baths; they also provide attractive self-catering accommodation in the old smiddy. £75

★ **Shieling Holidays** Half a mile from the ferry terminal on the road to Fionnphort T 01680 812496, W shielingholidays.co.uk. Set above a shingle beach, this tidy campsite also offers cool accommodation in the form of "shielings" (large, sometimes furnished, hard-top tents – think downmarket glamping), sleeping between two and six people. Some are en suite and some self-catering. There are boats, canoes and bikes for rent too. April–Oct. £16.50/pitch; shielings £32

Tobermory

Mull's chief town, **TOBERMORY,** at the northern tip of the island, is easily the most attractive fishing port on the west coast of Scotland, its clusters of brightly coloured houses and boats sheltering in a bay backed by a steep bluff. Founded in 1788 by the British Society for Encouraging Fisheries, it never really took off as a fishing port and only survived due to the steady influx of crofters evicted from other parts of the island during the Clearances. It is now the most important, and by far the most vibrant, settlement on Mull, and if you've got young kids, you'll instantly recognize it as the place where *Balamory* was filmed.

The harbour – known as **Main Street** – is one long parade of multicoloured hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and shops, and you could happily spend an hour or so meandering around. The rest of the upper town, laid out on a classic grid-plan, merits a stroll too, if only for the great views over the bay.

Mull Museum

Main Street • Easter to mid-Oct Mon–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat 10am–1pm • Free • T 01688 301100

A good wet-weather retreat is the **Mull Museum**, essentially a tiny room packed with fascinating local information and artefacts. Among these are a handful of objects salvaged from the *San Juan de Sicilia*, a ship from the Spanish Armada which sank in 1588 and now lies at the bottom of Tobermory harbour; even today, it remains subject to repeated salvage attempts by locals still, somewhat optimistically, seeking

gold. During World War II, Tobermory was an important naval base, in particular as a centre for the training of Escort vessels, whose job it was to protect convoy ships from being attacked by U-boats. Leading the training was one Vice Admiral Gilbert Stephenson, whose prolific and strict regime (he trained up over nine hundred ships in just four years) earned him the moniker, "The Terror of Tobermory". Such was the Admiral's notoriety that he even had a beer named after him.

Tobermory Distillery

Ledaig car park • Easter–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; tours hourly 11am–4pm • £6 • T 01688 302645, W tobermorymalt.com

Founded in 1798, the minuscule **Tobermory Distillery** has had a chequered history, closing down three times since then, though today it's back in business and thriving thanks to its signature 15-year old Tobermory and 10-year old Ledaig malts. Although its tour is rather drab compared to most distilleries, you do get to see the four magnificent copper stills, as well as try a dram or two at the end.

Glengorm Castle

Five miles northwest of Tobermory • Easter to mid-Oct daily 10am–5pm • £6 • T 01688 302932, W glengormcastle.co.uk

Lying along a dead-end single-track road, **Glengorm Castle** is a Scots Baronial pile overlooking the sea. Here too is an attractively converted steading, housing a delightful café, well-stocked farm shop, craft shop and art gallery. You can walk around their attractive walled garden or make for the longer forest, archeological and coastal trails; they also offer free guided walks, though you need to book in advance. There's luxury accommodation available here too (see p.242).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — TOBERMORY

By ferry The CalMac terminal is at the far end of Main Street, in the northernmost part of the bay.

Destinations Kilchoan (May–Aug daily; Sept–April Mon–Sat every 90min; 35min);

By bus The bus station is in the town's main Ledaig car park, by the distillery.

Destinations Calgary (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 45min); Craignure (4–6 daily; 45min); Dervaig (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 25min); Fishnish (2–4 daily; 40min).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office The Pier, in the same building as the CalMac ticket office at the far end of Main Street. (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm). It's not manned, but there's plenty of literature to take away and the CalMac staff can help with any queries.

Tourist information Privately run Explore Mull, located in a cabin in the Ledaig car park (April–Oct daily 9am–7pm; T 01688 302875, W exploremull.co.uk) has more information than the tourist office, and they also arrange accommodation and wildlife tours.

Bike rental For bike rental, head to Archibald Brown, the endearingly old-fashioned ironmongers at 21 Main Street (Mon–Sat 8.30am–5pm; T 01688 302020, W brownstobermory.co.uk), which charges £15/day.

WILDLIFE-WATCHING TRIPS FROM TOBERMORY

Although boat trips leave from several different places around Mull, Tobermory is as good a place as any from which to begin a tour. Prices with most companies range from around £10 for a half-hour seal cruise to £80 for a full day whale-watching. Easily the best of these is **Sea Life Surveys** situated in the main car park (Easter–Oct; T 01688 302916, W sealifesurveys.com). Linked to the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, they focus on seeking out the whales (minke and even killer whales are the most common), porpoises, dolphins and basking sharks that spend time in the waters around the Hebrides; their seven-hour whale-watching trips are not recommended for under-14s, though their two-hour Ecocruz (adult £30, child £20) is much more family oriented. Rather more sedate are the six-hour wildlife cruises with **Hebridean Adventure**, based in Ulva House (April–Sept; T 01688 302044, W hebrideanadventure.co.uk; £60), who also do a dinner cruise.

ACCOMMODATION

Glengorm Castle Five miles northwest of Tobermory 01688 302321, glengormcastle.co.uk. Fairy-tale, rambling Baronial mansion in a superb, secluded setting, with incredible coastal views, lovely gardens and local walks. Guests get use of the castle's wood-panelled library and lounge, the five large bedrooms are full of splendid features and there are self-catering cottages available too. £130

★ **Highland Cottage** Breadalbane St 01688 302030, highlandcottage.co.uk. Super-luxurious B&B run by a very welcoming couple in a quiet street high above the harbour; the six stunningly furnished rooms, each one named after an Argyll island, are fashioned with home comforts firmly in mind. £150

★ **Strongarbh House** Upper Tobermory 01688 302319, strongarbh.com. Erstwhile bank, doctors surgery and officers mess, but now a fantastic and engagingly run B&B with four rooms that brilliantly combine elements of Victorian and modern; each room has an iPad for starters. There's also a library with books, newspapers and games, while complimentary tea and coffee is served between 4pm and 6pm every day for guests. Not cheap but worth every penny. Mid-March to mid-Oct. £130

SYHA hostel Main Street 0870 004 1151, syha.org.uk. Small, friendly and superbly located on the harbour front, with two- to- six-bed rooms, plus shared shower facilities, kitchen, TV lounge and laundry facilities. Breakfast costs £3.75. Mid-March to mid-Oct. Doubles £45; dorms £18

Tobermory Hotel 53 Main St 01688 302091, thetobermoryhotel.com. Smallish, fairly smart hotel converted from fishermens' cottages, hence the maze-like warren of variously sized rooms, some with coved ceilings, others with window seats, though all are extremely cosy. April–Oct. £98

Western Isles Hotel Above the harbour 01688 302012, westernisleshotel.com. The decor – moth-eaten stag heads and floral drapes – isn't for everyone, but the *Western Isles* continues to undergo gradual renovation. The setting above town is impressive, and the hotel has a glamorous pedigree as a location for the Powell and Pressburger classic *I Know Where I'm Going*. £95

CAMPSITE

Newdale Camping One and a half miles uphill from Tobermory on the B8073 to Dervaig 01688 302624, tobermory-campsite.co.uk; Small, spruce and cheap campsite serenely situated in woodland. Limited facilities include a sink and a couple of showers. April–Oct. £14/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

TAKEAWAY

Fisherman's Pier Fish & Chip Van Fisherman's Pier 01688 301109. The friendly proprietors of this venerable takeaway van serve up all the traditional fish suppers, though most venture here for their scrumptious scallops and chips (£8.50). Mon–Sat 12.30–9pm; July & Aug also Sun.

CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS

An Tobar Argyll Terrace 01688 302211, antobar.co.uk. Housed in a converted Victorian schoolhouse at the top of Back Brae, this small but attractive café doubles up as the town's principal arts centre, with a strong and imaginative programme of visual art and live music. Café Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

Café Fish The Pier 01688 301253, thecafefish.com. Stylish restaurant above the tourist office, sporting an all-glass frontage with superb harbour views. Fresh from their own boat, the day's catch is prominently displayed in a large glass cabinet, which could mean anything from linguine vongole with surf clams (£16) to halibut with roasted red pepper and chorizo. Easter–Oct daily 11.30am–10pm.

★ **Highland Cottage** Breadalbane St 01688 302030, highlandcottage.co.uk. If you're going to treat yourself, then look no further than this sublime guesthouse restaurant, which offers an evening four-course menu for £39, and which – once you've had a glass of fizz and some canapés – could feature anything from diver scallops with cauliflower tempura and spring-onion mash, to leek, blue cheese and walnut strudel. Reservations only, hence there are no defined opening hours.

Island Diner 53 Main St 01688 302091, thetobermoryhotel.com. Highly creditable restaurant in the *Tobermory Hotel*, which conjures up tempting seasonal dishes like gin-cured Isle of Ghiga halibut and salmon. Committed whisky fanatics, meanwhile, might care to try the honey and malt whisky *panna cotta*. Tues–Sun 6–10pm.

PUBS

MacGochan's Ledaig car park 01688 302350. Heaving, hugely popular harbourside pub just a few paces from the distillery, with a terrific beer garden (albeit one facing a car park), well-frequented restaurant-bar and occasional live music to liven things up further. Daily 11am–1am.

Mishnish Main Street 01688 302009. Inside the hotel of the same name (it's the garishly yellow building), this has been the town's most popular local watering hole for many years, with a couple of superb snugs rammed with maritime and musical paraphernalia, and regular evenings of live music. Daily 11am–1am.

Dervaig

The gently undulating countryside west of Tobermory, beyond the freshwater Mishnish lochs, provides some of the most beguiling scenery on the island. Added to this, the road out west, the B8073, is exceptionally dramatic. The only village of any size on this side of the island is **DERVAIG**, which nestles beside narrow Loch Chumhainn, just eight miles southwest of Tobermory, distinguished by its unusual pencil-shaped church spire and single street of dinky whitewashed cottages and old corrugated-iron shacks. Dervaig has a shop, a bookshop/café and a wide choice of places to stay.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — DERVAIG

Am Birlinn Penmore ☎01688 400619, ⓦambirlinn.com. The cross-country road from Dervaig takes you through Penmore where you'll find this striking wood-and glass-clad building serving up steaks and seafood of the highest order: slow roasted lamb shank with apricots and tomatoes in a chardonnay and herb sauce (£16.95) is one of the restaurant's typically flamboyant dishes. April–Oct Wed–Sun noon–2.30pm & 5–11pm.

The Bellachroy ☎01688 400314, ⓦthebellachroy.co.uk. Rugged early seventeenth-century inn with an attractive whitewashed interior serving good seafood (mussels and *frites* for £11.50) and local real ales. Daily 8.30am–11pm.

Bunkhouse Dervaig village hall ☎01688 400491 or ☎07919 870664, ⓦmull-hostel-dervaig.co.uk. Somewhat peculiarly located inside the village hall, though certainly none the worse for it, this clean and welcoming bunkhouse offers two bunkrooms, one sleeping six, the other four, each of which has its own wet room. Bedding is provided. There's also a self-catering kitchen, sitting room and washing machine. Breakfast not included. Dorms £15

Druimnacroish Hotel Two miles out on the Salen road ☎01688 400274, ⓦdruimnacroish.co.uk. A lovely country house pleasantly secreted away, with six, amply sized but very reasonably priced rooms. Breakfast is taken in the conservatory overlooking the gardens. Easter–Oct. £64

Calgary

Some five miles beyond Dervaig is **CALGARY**, once a thriving crofting community, now a quiet glen which opens out onto Mull's finest sandy bay, backed by low-lying dunes and machair, with wonderful views over to Coll and Tiree. Aside from the beach, there's a super little **sculpture trail** that begins at the *Calgary Farmhouse* and winds gently down through the woodland to the beach. It encompasses some twenty cleverly constructed pieces of artwork hewn from various materials; bronze, copper, steel, willow and so on – a little map (£1) outlining the trail is available from the farmhouse. For the record, the city of Calgary in Canada does indeed take its name from this little village, though it was not so named by Mull emigrants, but instead by one Colonel McLeod of the North West Mounted Police, who once holidayed here.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — CALGARY

Calgary Farmhouse Back up the road from the beach ☎01688 400256, ⓦcalgary.co.uk. This delightful farmhouse provides glamorous self-catering accommodation in studio lofts sleeping between two and four people. The daytime café and art gallery are both worth venturing to. Café: daily 7.30am–5pm. Three-day minimum stay £450

Camping Down by the beach itself, there's a spectacular and very popular spot for camping rough; the only facilities are the basic public toilets.

Isle of Ulva

ULVA's population peaked in the nineteenth century at a staggering 850, sustained by the huge quantities of kelp that were exported for glass and soap production. That was before the market for kelp collapsed and the 1846 potato famine hit, after which the remaining population was brutally evicted. Nowadays around fifteen people live here, and the island is littered with ruined crofts. It's great walking country, however, with several clearly marked paths crisscrossing the native woodland and the rocky heather moorland interior – and you're almost guaranteed to spot some of the abundant wildlife.

Heritage Centre and Sheila's Cottage

You can learn more about the history of the island from the exhibition inside the **Heritage Centre** (just up from the pier on Ulva) and, nearby, the newly restored thatched smiddy housing **Sheila's Cottage**, which has been restored to the period when islander Sheila MacFadyen lived there in the first half of the last century. Originally a milk maid, Sheila later made her living by gathering and selling winkles to locals and visitors to the island.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — ISLE OF ULVA

By bus/ferry To get to Ulva, which lies just a hundred yards or so off the west coast of Mull, follow the signs for "Ulva Ferry" west from Salen or south from Calgary – if you've no transport, a postbus can get you there, but you'll have to make your own way back. From Ulva Ferry, a small bicycle/passenger-only ferry (£6 return) is available on demand (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; June–Aug also Sun; at other times by arrangement on ☎ 01688 500226).

Website 🌐 isleofulva.com. Very useful website detailing all you need to know about visiting the island.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Boathouse Near the ferry slip on the Ulva side ☎ 01688 500241, 🌐 theboathouseulva.co.uk. Cheery tearoom serving a mouthwatering selection of seafood tempters like mackerel pâté (£7.50), potted crab (£9.50) and Ulva oysters, alongside cakes and coffee. Easter–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; June–Aug also Sun.

Camping There's no accommodation here, but with permission from the present owners of the café, you might be able to camp rough overnight for free.

Isle of Staffa and around

Five miles southwest of Ulva, **STAFFA** is one of the most romantic and dramatic of Scotland's many uninhabited islands. On its south side, the perpendicular rock face features an imposing series of black basalt columns, known as the Colonnade, which have been cut by the sea into cathedral-esque caverns – most notably **Fingal's Cave**. The Vikings knew about the island – the name derives from their word for "Island of Pillars" – but it wasn't until 1772 that it was "discovered" by the world. Turner painted it, Wordsworth explored it, but Mendelssohn's *Die Fingalshöhle* (the lovely "*Hebrides Overture*"), inspired by the sounds of the sea-wracked caves he heard on a visit here in 1829, did most to popularize the place – after which Queen Victoria gave her blessing, too. The polygonal basalt organ-pipes were created some sixty million years ago when a huge mass of molten basalt burst forth onto land and, as it cooled, solidified into hexagonal crystals. The same phenomenon produced the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland and Celtic folk tales often link the two with rival giants Fionn mac Cumhail (Irish) and Fingal (Scottish) throwing rocks at each other across the Irish Sea.

Treshnish Isles

Northwest of Staffa lie the **Treshnish Isles**, an archipelago of uninhabited volcanic islets, none more than a mile or two across. The most distinctive is **Bac Mór**, shaped like a Puritan's hat and popularly dubbed the Dutchman's Cap. **Lunga**, the largest island, is a summer nesting-place for hundreds of seabirds, in particular guillemots, razorbills and puffins, as well as a breeding ground for seals. The two most northerly islands, **Cairn na Burgh More** and **Cairn na Burgh Beg**, have remains of ruined castles, the first of which served as a lookout post for the Lords of the Isles and was last garrisoned in the Civil War; Cairn na Burgh Beg hasn't been occupied since the 1715 Jacobite uprising.

TOURS — ISLE OF STAFFA AND AROUND

Boat tours From April to October several operators offer boat trips to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles. Long-established Turus Mara, based in Penmore (☎ 01688 400242, 🌐 turusmara.com), sets out from Ulva Ferry and is a classy outfit, charging around £50 for a five-hour round trip, as does Gordon Grant Marine (☎ 01681 700338, 🌐 staffatours.com), who depart from Fionnphort. If you just want to go to Staffa, try Iolaire (☎ 01681 700358, 🌐 staffatrips.co.uk), who charge around £30 for passage from Fionnphort.

Ben More and around

From the southern shores of Loch na Keal, which almost splits Mull in two, rise the terraced slopes of **Ben More** (3169ft) – literally "big mountain" – a mighty extinct volcano, and the only Munro in the Hebrides outside of Skye. It's most easily climbed from Dhiseig, halfway along the loch's southern shores, though an alternative route is to climb up to the col between Beinn Fhada and A'Chioch, and approach via the mountain's eastern ridge. Further west along the shore the road carves through spectacular overhanging cliffs before heading south past the Gribun rocks, which face the tiny island of **Inch Kenneth**, where Unity Mitford lived until her death in 1948. There are great views out to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles as the road leaves the coast behind, climbing over the pass to Loch Scridain, where it eventually joins the equally dramatic Glen More road (A849) from Craignure.

If you're properly equipped for walking, you can also explore the **Ardmeanach peninsula**, to the west of the road. The area, which features a large sea cave and a fossilized tree, is NTS-owned and there is a car park just before *Tiroran House.*

The Ross of Mull

Stretching for twenty miles west as far as Iona is Mull's rocky southernmost peninsula, the **Ross of Mull**, which, like much of Scotland, appears blissfully tranquil in good weather, and desolate and bleak in bad climes. Most visitors simply drive through the Ross en route to Iona, but if you have the time it's definitely worth considering exploring, or even staying, in this little-visited part of Mull.

Lochbuie

The most scenic spots on the Ross are hidden away on the south coast, starting with **LOCHBUIE**, which lies on a fertile plain beside the sea. The bay here is rugged and wide, and overlooked by the handsome peak of Ben Buie (2352ft), to the northwest. Hidden behind a patch of Scots pine are the ivy-strewn ruins of **Moy Castle**, an old MacLean stronghold; in the fields to the north is one of the few **stone circles** in the west of Scotland, dating from the second century BC. A popular and fairly easy walk is the five-mile hike west from Lochbuie along the coastal path to Carsaig.

Carsaig

A rickety single-track road heads south four miles from Lochbuie to **CARSAIG**, which enjoys an idyllic setting, looking south out to Colonsay, Islay and Jura. Most folk come here either to walk east to Lochbuie, or west under the cliffs, to the **Nuns' Cave**, (where nuns from Iona are alleged to have hidden during the Reformation), and then, after four miles or so, at Malcolm's Point, to the spectacular **Carsaig Arches**, which were formed by eroded sea caves and are linked to basalt cliffs.

Bunessan

Ardalanish Weavers • Daily 10am–5pm • Free • 01681 700265, ardalanishfarm.com.

From Carsaig, the main road continues for another twelve miles to **BUNESSAN**, the largest village on the peninsula, roughly two-thirds of the way along the Ross. Just beyond the Argyll Arms Hotel, drop in at Ardalanish Weavers, where beautiful durable organic tweed is produced on Victorian looms originally from Torosay Castle. The tweed is snapped up by high-end high-street stores, and is used for the elegant couture collection displayed in the small shop; you can also buy smaller items such as scarves and balls of wool. A couple of miles out of Bunessan is the wide expanse of **Ardalanish Bay**.

Fionnphort and around

The road along the Ross of Mull ends at **FIONNPHORT**, from where ferries ply the short route across to Iona; there's also some handy accommodation here and a

superb restaurant. Around a mile and a half south of Fionnphort are the golden sands of **Fidden beach**, which looks out to the **Isle of Erraid**, where Robert Louis Stevenson is believed to have written *Kidnapped* while staying in one of the island's cottages; *Kidnapped*'s hero, David Balfour, is shipwrecked on the Torran Rocks, out to sea to the south of Erraid, beyond which lies the remarkable, stripy **Dubh Artach Lighthouse** (meaning "black stony ground" in Gaelic), built by Stevenson's father in 1867. In the book, Balfour spends a miserable time convinced that he's stranded on Erraid, which can, in fact, be reached across the sands on its eastern side at low tide.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE ROSS OF MULL

By ferry The CalMac passenger ferry from Fionnphort to Iona is very frequent (see p.250).

ACOMMODATION AND EATING

UISKEN

Camping Uisken beach, two miles south of Bunessan, is a wonderful spot for wild camping, but ask permission first at *Uisken Croft* (☎01681 700307), just up the hill.

FIONNPHORT

Fidden Farm Campsite Knockvologan Road, Fidden ☎01681 700427. This simple, getting away from it all campsite has a wonderful location, with direct access to Fidden beach. There's a Portakabin with toilets and showers, and best of all, campfires are allowed. Easter–Oct. £12

★ **Ninth Wave** Bruach Mhor ☎01681 700757, ⓦninthwaverestaurant.co.uk. For something a little special, head to this posh restaurant – in a renovated 200-year-old bothy – secreted away in wonderful rural isolation about a mile north of the village (it's well signposted). The owner catches and then serves up crab, lobster and other fishy treats, while the veg is supplied from their own kitchen garden, resulting in fantastic dishes like pan-seared fillet of Mull Highland beef with baby beetroot and horseradish mousse. A three-course meal costs £42. Reservations required. Tues–Sun 7–11pm.

Seaview ☎01681 700235, ⓦiona-bed-breakfast-mull.com. About 200m up from the ferry terminal, on the main road, this conscientiously run sandstone Victorian villa has five somewhat boxy, but pretty and well-equipped, rooms adorned with splashes of artwork. They've also got bikes for rent. March to mid-Nov. £80

Staffa House ☎01681 700677, ⓦstaffahouse.co.uk. Handsome whitewashed building some 100m back along the road from *Seaview*, with four light and immaculately presented rooms, and a lovely glass conservatory for breakfast. March–Oct. £70

Isle of Iona

Less than a mile off the southwest tip of Mull, **IONA** – just three miles long and not much more than a mile wide – has been a place of pilgrimage for several centuries, and a place of Christian worship for more than 1400 years. For it was to this flat Hebridean island that St Columba fled from Ireland in 563 and established a monastery which was responsible for the conversion of more or less all of pagan Scotland as well as much of northern England. This history and the island's splendid isolation have lent it a peculiar religiosity; in the much-quoted words of Dr Johnson, who visited in 1773, "That man is little to be envied … whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona."

Few of Iona's many day visitors get further than Baile Mór, the island's village, and the abbey, but it's perfectly possible to walk to the stunning sandy beaches and turquoise seas at the **north end** of the island, or up to the highest point, **Dún I**, a mere 328ft above sea level but with views on a clear day to Skye, Tiree and Jura. Alternatively, it takes about half an hour to walk over to the **machair**, or common grazing land, on the west side of Iona, which lies adjacent to the evocatively named Bay at the Back of the Ocean, a crescent of pebble and shell-strewn sand with a spouting cave to the south. Those with more time (2–3hr) might hike over to the **south** of the island, where Port a'Churaich ("Bay of the Coracle", also known as St Columba's Bay), the saint's traditional landing place on Iona, is filled with smooth round rocks and multicoloured pebbles and stones.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP TOBERMORY (P.240); BEACH, WEST COAST OF COLL (P.251); PUFFINS (P.244) >

Baile Mór

The passenger ferry from Fionnphort drops you off at **BAILE MÓR** (literally "Large Village"), which is in fact little more than a single terrace of cottages facing the sea. You will, though, find most things of a practical nature located here, including the island's main hotel, restaurant and a well-stocked shop.

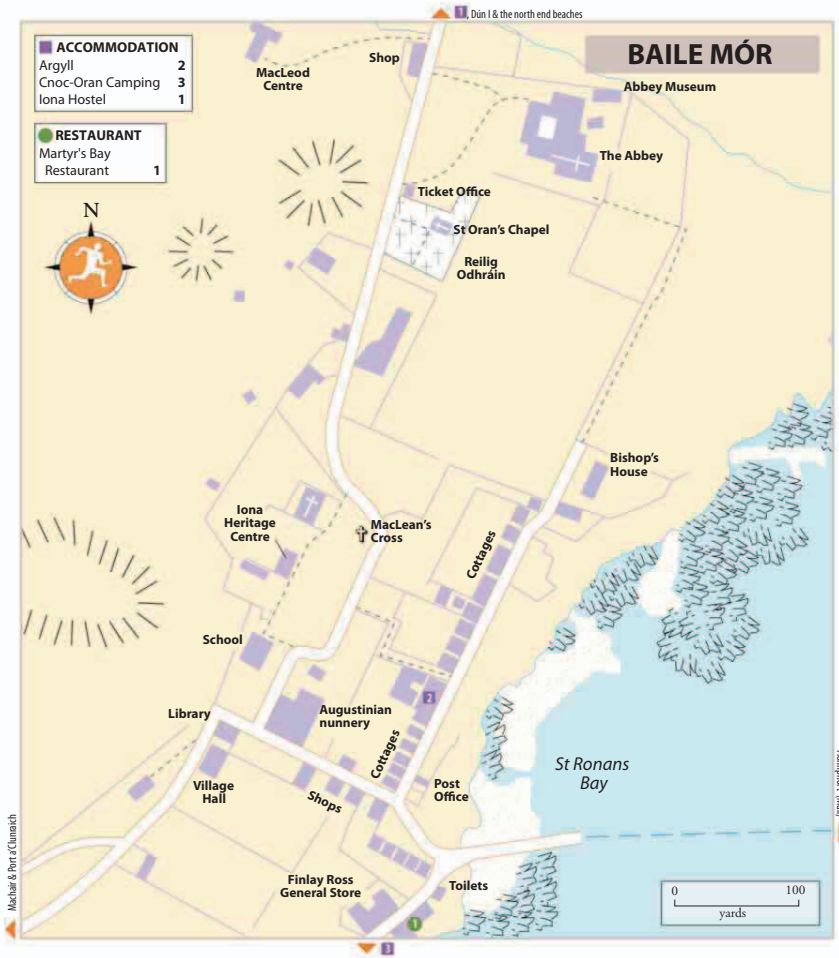
Augustinian nunnery

A short walk up from the jetty lie the extensive pink-granite ruins of the **Augustinian nunnery**, disused since the Reformation. A beautifully maintained garden now occupies the cloisters, and if nothing else the complex gives you an idea of the state of the present-day abbey before it was restored.

Iona Heritage Centre

North of the Augustinian nunnery • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10.30am–4.15pm • £3

In the island's former manse is the **Iona Heritage Centre**, with displays on the social history of the island over the last 200 years, including the Clearances, which nearly



halved the island's population of 500 in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the more intriguing exhibits is part of the stern belonging to the *Guy Mannering*, a sailing packet on the New York to Liverpool route which *sank in machair* in 1865 – indeed, it was just one of twenty or so vessels believed to have been lost in waters hereabouts around that time. At a bend in the road, just south of the manse, stands the slender, fifteenth-century **MacLean's Cross**, a fine, late medieval example of the distinctive, flowing, three-leaved foliage of the Iona school.

St Oran's Chapel

Iona's oldest building, the plain-looking eleventh-century **St Oran's Chapel**, lies south of the abbey, on the right. Legend has it that the original chapel could only be completed through human sacrifice. Oran apparently volunteered to be buried alive, and was found to have survived the ordeal when the grave was opened a few days later. Declaring that he had seen hell and it wasn't all bad, he was promptly reinterred for blasphemy.

Reilig Odhrain

Oran's Chapel stands at the centre of Iona's sacred burial ground, **Reilig Odhráin** (Oran's Cemetery), which is said to contain the graves of sixty kings of Norway, Ireland, France and Scotland, including Duncan and Macbeth. The best of the early Christian gravestones and medieval effigies that once lay in the Reilig Odhráin have been removed to the Abbey Museum, behind the abbey, and to various other locations within the complex.

Street of the Dead

Approaching the abbey from the ticket office, you cross an exposed section of the evocative medieval **Street of the Dead**, whose giant pink-granite cobbles once stretched from the abbey, past St Oran's Chapel, to the village. Beside the road stands the most impressive of Iona's Celtic high crosses, the eighth-century **St Martin's Cross**, smothered with figural scenes – the Virgin and Child at the centre, Daniel in the lion's den, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and David with musicians in the shaft below. The reverse side features Pictish serpent-and-boss decoration. Standing directly in front of the abbey are the base of **St Matthew's Cross** (the rest of which is in the Abbey Museum) and, to the left, a concrete cast of the eighth-century **St John's Cross**, decorated with serpent-and-boss and Celtic spiral ornamental panels. Before you enter the abbey, take a look inside **St Columba's Shrine**, a small steep-roofed chamber to the left of the main entrance. Columba is believed to have been buried either here or under the rocky mound to the west of the abbey, known as Tórr an Aba.

Iona Abbey

A 5min walk up the road from the Heritage Centre • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm; there are free daily guided tours of the abbey (the times are posted up at the ticket office) • £7.10; HS • 01681 700512

Although no buildings remain from Columba's time, the present **Iona Abbey** dates from the arrival of the Benedictines in around 1200, though it was extensively rebuilt in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and restored virtually wholesale last century.

The **Abbey** itself has been simply and sensitively restored to incorporate the original elements. You can spot many of the medieval capitals in the south aisle of the choir and in the south transept, where the white marble effigies of the eighth Duke of Argyll and his wife, Ina, lie in a side chapel – an incongruous piece of Victorian pomp in an otherwise modest and tranquil place. The finest pre-Reformation effigy is that of John MacKinnon, the last abbot of Iona, who died around 1500, and now lies on the south side of the choir steps. For reasons of

ST COLUMBA AND IONA

Legend has it that **St Columba** (Colum Cille), born in Donegal some time around 521, was a direct descendant of the semi-legendary Irish king, Niall of the Nine Hostages. A scholar and soldier priest, who founded numerous monasteries in Ireland, he is thought to have become involved in a bloody dispute with the king when he refused to hand over a copy of *St Jerome's Psalter,* copied illegally from the original owned by St Finian of Moville. This, in turn, provoked the Battle of Cúl Drebene (Cooldrumman) – also known as the **Battle of the Book** – at which Columba's forces won, though with the loss of over 3000 lives.

The story goes that, repenting this bloodshed, Columba went into exile with twelve other monks, eventually settling on **Iona** in 563, allegedly because it was the first island he encountered from which he couldn't see his homeland. The bottom line, however, is that we know very little about Columba, though he undoubtedly became something of a cult figure after his death in 597. He was posthumously credited with miraculous feats such as defeating the Loch Ness monster – it only had to hear his voice and it recoiled in terror – and casting out snakes (and, some say, frogs) from the island. He is also famously alleged to have banned women and cows from Iona, exiling them to **Eilean nam Ban** (Woman's Island), just north of Fionnphort, for, as he believed, "Where there is a cow there is a woman, and where there is a woman there is mischief".

sanitation, the **cloisters** were placed, contrary to the norm, on the north side of the church (where running water was available); entirely reconstructed in the late 1950s, they now shelter lots of medieval grave slabs.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

ISLE OF IONA

By ferry The CalMac passenger ferry from Fionnphort is very frequent (£4.95 return, bicycles free), and takes just 10min.

Destinations Fionnphort (daily, every 30min in summer; less frequent in winter; 5min).

GETTING AROUND

By taxi Believe it or not, there is a taxi on the island (☎07810 325990).

Bike rental Visitors are not allowed to bring cars onto the island, but bikes can be rented from the Finlay Ross general store, just up from the jetty (£8/day) and the *Seaview* guesthouse in Fionnphort.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Website ⓦisle-of-iona.com. There's no tourist office on Iona, but there is a useful information board just up from the jetty.

Boat tours Mark Jardine's Alternative Boat Hire (☎01681 700537, ⓦboattripsiona.com), based on Iona, takes the lovely wooden gaff-rigged sailing boat *Birthe Marie* on short trips to some of the less-visited spots around the Sound of Iona and Erraid (Easter–Oct; 3hr trip £25, bookings advised). There are also whale-watching and wildlife outings with Volante (£40 for 3.5hr; ☎01681 700362, ⓦvolanteiona.com).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Argyll ☎01681 700334, ⓦargyllhoteliona.co.uk. Inviting, stone-built hotel in the village's terrace of cottages overlooking the Sound of Iona, with sixteen sweet, though somewhat boxy, rooms spread throughout a maze of corridors. It is way overpriced, but it can afford to be. Feb–Nov. **£140**

Cnoc-Oran Camping ☎01681 700112, ⓦionacampsite.co.uk. Turn left at the jetty and it's a twenty-minute walk to this super little campsite, which has a couple of showers and toilets, firepits and BBQs. You can also rent tents and sleeping bags. **£6.50**/person

Iona Hostel Lagandorain; follow the road past the abbey for half a mile ☎01681 700781, ⓦionahostel.co.uk. Terrific hostel located to the north of the island, with impeccable green credentials; rooms with bunks sleep two to six people, and there's a main living space filled with lovely wooden furniture and a wood-burning stove that has views out to the Treshnish Isles. Dorms **£19.50**

Martyr's Bay Restaurant ☎01681 700382. A self-service canteen by day, a fully-fledged restaurant come evening; either way, the tourist hordes invariably pack this place out for steaks and seafood. Lunch meals like haddock and chips (£9.95) and baked potato with haggis are worth a punt too. Daily 11am–11pm.

Isle of Coll

Roughly thirteen miles long and three miles wide, the fish-shaped rocky island of **COLL**, with a population of around a hundred, lies less than seven miles off the coast of Mull. For the most part, this remote island is low lying, treeless and exceptionally windy, with white sandy beaches and the highest sunshine records in Scotland. The majority of visitors to Coll (and Tiree) stay for a week in self-catering accommodation, though there are hotels and B&Bs on the islands, which should be booked in advance – as should the ferries.

Arinagour

The ferry docks at Coll's only real village, **ARINAGOUR,** whose whitewashed cottages line the western shore of Loch Eatharna, a popular safe anchorage for boats. Half the island's population lives in the village, and it's here you'll find the island's hotel and pub, post office, churches and a couple of shops. The island's petrol pump is also in Arinagour, and is run on a volunteer basis – effectively it's open when the ferry arrives.

The Breachacha castles

On the southwest coast there are two edifices, both confusingly known as **Breachacha Castle**, and both built by the MacLeans. The older, at the head of Loch Breachacha, is a fifteenth-century tower house with an additional curtain wall, now used by Project Trust overseas aid volunteers as a training centre. The less attractive "new castle", to the northwest, is made up of a central block built around 1750 and two side pavilions added a century later, now converted into holiday cottages. It was here that Dr Johnson and Boswell stayed in 1773 after a storm forced them to take refuge en route to Mull. Much of the surrounding area is now owned by the RSPB, in the hope of protecting the island's corncrakes.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF COLL

By ferry Throughout the summer, the CalMac ferry from Oban calls daily at Coll (2hr 40min) and Tiree (3hr 40min).

Destinations Barra (Thurs 1 daily; 4hr); Oban (daily except Wed & Fri; 2hr 40min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Coll Hotel Arinagour ☎01879 230334, ⓦcollhotel.com. Small, family-run hotel providing decent accommodation in six rooms, four of which overlook the bay. The hotel also offers bike hire, and can do pick-ups/drop-offs to/from the ferry. Wild camping is also possible on the hill behind the hotel, but you should contact the hotel first; it's free though a donation is appreciated. £100

Garden House Down a track on the left before the turn-off for the castle ☎01879 230374. There's very basic camping at this working farm in the shelter of what was formerly a walled garden, with showers, toilets and a camper's room. April–Oct. £14/pitch

Island Café ☎01879 230262, ⓦfirstportofcoll.com. In the old harbour stores overlooking the bay, offering hot meals all day, though Sundays are most popular when they rustle up a superb two-course late lunch, comprising a roast and a dessert (until 6pm; £12.50); reservations are advised for this. Daily 11am–7.30pm.

Tigh-na-Mara Arinagour Bay ☎01879 230354, ⓦtighnamara.info. The "House by the Sea" is a modern guesthouse near the pier, with a selection of shared bathroom and en-suite rooms, the latter being around £10 more expensive. Such is its location that there's a good chance you'll see some great wildlife while eating your breakfast. £70

Isle of Tiree

TIREE, as its Gaelic name *tir-iodh* (land of corn) suggests, was once known as the breadbasket of the Inner Hebrides, thanks to its acres of rich machair. Nowadays crofting and tourism are the main sources of income for the resident population of around 750. One of the most distinctive features of Tiree is its architecture, in

particular the large numbers of "pudding" or "spotty" houses, where only the mortar is painted white. In addition, there are numerous "white houses" (*tigh geal*) and traditional "blackhouses" (*tigh dubh*). With no shortage of wind, Tiree's sandy beaches attract large numbers of windsurfers for the Tiree Wave Classic (Ⓦ tireewaveclassic.com) every October.

An Turas

6

The ferry calls at Gott Bay Pier, now best known for **An Turas** (The Journey), Tiree's award-winning "shelter", a structure that consists of two parallel white walls connected via a black felt section to a glass box which punctures a stone dyke and frames a sea view.

Scarinish

An Iodhlann • July & Aug Mon–Fri 11am–5pm; Sept–June Mon, Wed & Thurs 9am–1pm, Tues & Fri 10.30am–3.30pm • £3 • Ⓣ 01879 220793, Ⓦ aniodhlann.org.uk

Just up the road from the pier is the village of **SCARINISH**, home to a post office, some public toilets, a supermarket, the butcher's and the bank, with a petrol pump back at the pier. Also in Scarinish you'll find **An Iodhlann** – "haystack" in Gaelic – the island's two-roomed archive, which puts on exhibitions in the summer.

Hynish

Museum Lower Square • Easter to mid-Oct daily 9am–5pm • £3 • Ⓣ 01879 220726

The island's most intriguing sights lie in the bulging western half of the island, where Tiree's two landmark hills rise up. Below the higher of the two is **HYNISH** whose **harbour** was designed by Alan Stevenson in the 1830s to transport building materials for the magnificent 140ft-tall **Skerryvore Lighthouse**, which lies on a sea-swept reef some twelve miles southwest of Tiree. Up on the hill behind the harbour, beside the row of lighthouse keepers' houses, stands a stumpy granite signal tower, whose signals used to be the only contact the lighthouse keepers had with civilization. The tower now houses a **museum** telling the history of the herculean effort required to erect the lighthouse; weather permitting, you can see the lighthouse from the tower's viewing platform.

Ceann a'Mhara

A mile or so across the golden sands of Balephuil Bay is the spectacular headland of **Ceann a'Mhara** (pronounced "kenavara"), home to thousands of sea birds, including fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills, shags and cormorants, with gannets and terns feeding offshore.

Taigh Iain Mhoir

Sandaig • June–Sept Mon–Fri 2–4pm • Free

In the scattered west coast settlement of **SANDAIG**, to the north of Ceann a'Mhara, three thatched white houses in a row have been turned into the **Taigh Iain Mhoir**, which gives an insight into how the majority of islanders lived in the nineteenth century, thanks to a collection of old photographs and other memorabilia.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF TIREE

By plane Tiree Airport (Ⓣ 01879 220456, Ⓦ hial.co.uk) is around three miles west of Scarinish, with flights to and from Glasgow (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 45min). You should arrange for your hosts to collect you, most of whom will.

By ferry Throughout the summer, the CalMac ferry from Oban calls daily at Coll (2hr 40min) and Tiree (3hr 40min). On Thursdays – though the day may change – the ferry continues to Barra in the Western Isles, and calls in at Tiree on the way back, making a day-trip from Oban possible; a minibus tour of the island is thrown in as part of the package.

Destinations Castlebay, Barra (Thurs 1 daily; 2hr 45min); Oban (1 daily; 3hr 40min).

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

By minibus Tiree has a Ring'n'Ride minibus service (Mon–Sat 7am–6pm, Tues 7am–10pm; ☎01879 220419) that will take you anywhere on the island, though you should book in advance.

Bike/car rental Based at Scarinish Pier, MacLennan Motors (☎01879 220555, 🌐maclennanmotors.com) offers both car (£45/day) and bike (£10/day) rental. They can also drop cars at the airport.

Tourist information For a map of the island and the daily papers, you need to go to the supermarket at Crossapol. The website, 🌐isleoftiree.com, is also a useful resource.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Balinoe Camping Balinoe ☎01879 220399, 🌐wilddiamond.co.uk. Located in the southwest of the island, six miles from Scarinish, the island's only formal campsite is operated by Wild Diamond Watersports, and is well-equipped with showers, toilets, a self-catering kitchen and washing/drying facilities. £24/pitch

Elephant's End Kirkapol ☎01879 220694. Homely, wonderfully named restaurant serving local goodies such as crab, lobster and langoustine, alongside lamb and beef from the island. Mon–Sat 10am–4pm & 7–11pm, Sun 12.30–2.30pm.

Millhouse Hostel Near Loch Bhasapol, in the northwest of the island ☎01879 220435, 🌐tireemillhouse.co.uk. This superbly converted early twentieth-century barn now accommodates a colourful hostel, with two dorms each sleeping six, and a couple of doubles. The excellent open-plan kitchen/lounge opens up onto a patio where you can kick back with a beer and watch the sunset. Doubles £40; dorms £17

Scarinish Hotel Scarinish ☎01879 220308, 🌐tireescarinishhotel.com. Super location overlooking the old harbour offering six pristine rooms (a couple with shared bathroom facilities), furnished in solid, if not spectacular, fashion. The Upper Deck lounge is a lovely spot to while away an hour or so watching the comings and goings around the harbour. £80

Isle of Colonsay and around

Isolated between Mull and Islay, **COLONSAY** – measuring just eight miles by three – is nothing like as bleak and windswept as Coll or Tiree. Its craggy, heather-backed hills even support the occasional patch of woodland, plus a bewildering array of plant and birdlife, including wild goats and rabbits, and a very fine quasi-tropical garden. The current population of around a hundred is down from a pre-Clearance peak of nearly a thousand. With only one hotel and infrequent ferry links with the mainland, there's no fear of mass tourism taking over any time soon.

The ferry terminal is at **SCALASAIG**, on the east coast, where there's a post office/shop, a petrol pump, a brewery, a café and the island's hotel.

Colonsay House

Two miles north of Scalasaig • Gardens: April–Sept Wed & Fri noon–5pm; the house itself is closed to the public • £3 • ☎01951 200316, 🌐colonsayestate.co.uk

Colonsay House was built in 1722 by Malcolm MacNeil, but in 1904 the island and house were bought by Lord Strathcona, who made his fortune building the Canadian Pacific Railway (and whose descendants still own the island). He was also responsible for the house's romantically dilapidated woodland **gardens**, home to one of the finest rhododendron collections anywhere in Scotland. The gardens also shelter the strange eighth-century **Riasg Buidhe Cross**, which is decorated with an unusually lifelike mug shot (possibly of a monk) – ask for directions from the tearoom.

The beaches

To the north of Colonsay House is the island's finest sandy beach, the breathtaking **Kiloran Bay**, where the breakers roll in from the Atlantic. There's another unspoilt sandy beach backed by dunes at Balnahard, two miles northeast along a rough track; en route, you might spot wild goats, choughs and even a golden eagle.

Isle of Oronsay

Whilst on Colonsay, it's worth taking a day out to visit the **ORONSAY**, half a mile to the south, with its ruined Augustinian priory. The two islands are separated by "The Strand", a stretch of tidal mud flats, which act as a causeway for two hours either side of low tide (check locally for timings); you can drive over to the island at low tide, though most people park their cars and walk across. Legends (and etymology) link saints Columba and Oran with Colonsay and Oronsay, although the ruins only date back to the fourteenth century. You can, nevertheless, still make out the original church and tiny cloisters, abandoned since the Reformation and now roofless. The highlight, though, is the **Oronsay Cross**, a superb example of late medieval artistry from Iona which, along with thirty or so beautifully carved grave slabs, can be found in the restored side chapel. It takes about an hour to walk from the tip of Colonsay across The Strand to the priory (Wellington boots are a good idea).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF COLONSAY AND AROUND

By plane Hebridean Air (☎01631 524568, ⓦhebrideanair.co.uk) operates scheduled flights to and from Oban (Tues & Thurs 2 daily; Sat & Sun during school termtime 1 daily; 25min), as well as Islay (Tues & Thurs 1 daily; 20min).

By ferry CalMac ferries run from Oban and once a week from Kennacraig via Islay, when a day-trip is possible, giving you around six hours on the island. Ferries also make the trip from Port Askaig on Islay.

Destinations Kennacraig (Wed 1 daily; 3hr 40min); Oban (daily except Tues & Sat; 2hr 15min); Port Askaig (Wed 1 daily; 1hr 10min).

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

By minibus There's no public transport, but a minibus meets the Wednesday ferry and takes folk on a tour of the island.

Bike rental Archie McConnel (☎01951 200355) rents bikes.

Website There is no tourist office, but the website, ⓦcolonsay.org.uk, is a useful resource.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

There are a couple of modern **B&Bs** to choose from, though most visitors rent **self-catering accommodation**, the majority of which is run by the estate. Note that self-catering cottages tend to be booked from Friday to Friday, because of the ferries. **Wild camping** is, of course, an option.

Backpacker's Lodge Overlooking Loch Fada about two miles from the ferry terminal ☎01951 200312, ⓦcolonsayestate.co.uk. The Colonsay Estate's very comfortable hostel consists of the house itself (a former gamekeepers lodge), with lounge and real fire, and a bothy with three cabins, each sleeping two people and with a shower block outside. There's a well-equipped dining bothy too. Dorms £20; cabin £15

The Colonsay Scalasaig ☎01951 200316, ⓦthecolonsay.com. A cosy eighteenth-century inn at heart, and a short stroll from the pier, the island's only hotel has transformed itself into a really stylish, comfortable place to stay; it also has a good restaurant, serves very decent bar snacks and acts as the island's social centre. Daily noon–2.30pm & Sun 6–10pm. £100

The Pantry Above the pier in Scalasaig ☎01951 200325. Offers both light refreshments (tea, coffee and cake) alongside substantial and scrumptious home-cooking (smoked haddock scramble with chips costs £9.75); Wednesday evening is a designated seafood night, but in any case, you must phone ahead for evening meals on any night after 8pm. Mon–Sat 9am–8pm, Sun 3–8pm.

Mid-Argyll

MID-ARGYLL loosely describes the central wedge of land south of Oban and north of Kintyre. The highlights of this gently undulating scenery lie along the sharply indented and remote western coastline. Closest to Oban are the melancholy former slate mining settlements of Seil, Easdale and Luing, known collectively as the **Slate Islands**. Further south, the rich Bronze Age and Neolithic remains in the **Kilmartin Glen** comprise one of the most important prehistoric sites in Scotland. Separating Kilmartin Glen from

the **Knapdale** peninsula is the **Crinan Canal**, a short cut for boats disinclined to round the Mull of Kintyre, which ends in the pint-sized, picturesque port of **Crinan**.

The Slate Islands

Eight miles south of Oban, a road heads off the A816 west to the minuscule **SLATE ISLANDS**, which at their peak in the mid-nineteenth century quarried over nine million slates annually. Today the old slate villages are sparsely populated, and an inevitable air of melancholy hangs over them, but their dramatic setting amid crashing waves makes for a rewarding day-trip.

Isle of Seil

The most northerly of the Slate Islands is **Seil**, a lush island separated from the mainland only by the thinnest of sea channels, which is spanned by the elegant humpback **Clachan Bridge**, built in 1793 and popularly known as the "Bridge over the Atlantic".

The main village on Seil is **ELLENABEICH**, its neat white terraces of workers' cottages crouching below black cliffs on the westernmost tip of the island. This was once the tiny island of Eilean a'Beithich (hence Ellenabeich) separated from the mainland by a slim sea channel until the intensive slate quarrying succeeded in silting it up. Confusingly, the village is often referred to by the same name as the nearby island of Easdale, since they formed an interdependent community based exclusively around the slate industry.

Slate Islands Heritage Centre

Ellenabeich • April–Oct daily 10.30am–1pm & 2–5pm • Free • Ⓦ slateislands.org.uk

The **Slate Islands Heritage Centre**, in one of the village's little white cottages, documents the lives and times of island folk in the form of old photographs and artefacts, though mostly the emphasis is inevitably on the local quarry workings, including a model of the slate quarry as it would have been in its heyday. Moreover, and in common with many of Argyll's heritage centres, there's a dedicated geneaological department here.

GETTING AROUND AND TOURS — ISLE OF SEIL

By ferry The Cuan Ferry runs from Seil to Luing (every 30min; 5min).

Boat tours High-adrenaline boat trips are offered by Sea.fari (Ⓣ01852 300003, Ⓦ seafari.co.uk), who are based at the Ellenabeich jetty; the boats are rigid inflatables (RIBs) and travel at some speed round the offshore islands and through the Corryvrechan Whirlpool (see p.272).

EATING AND DRINKING

Oyster Brewery Ellenabeich Ⓣ01852 300121, Ⓦ seilislandpub.co.uk. For home-made pasties, seafood and real ale, pop inside the snug wood-panelled bar of the *Oyster*, on the way to the ferry. Daily 11am–11pm.

Isle of Easdale

Easdale (Ⓦ easdale.org) remains an island, though the few hundred yards that separate it from Ellenabeich have to be dredged to keep the channel open. Up until the eve of a great storm in 1881, Easdale supported an incredible 452 inhabitants, despite being less than a mile across at any one point. That night, waves engulfed the island and flooded the quarries and the island never really recovered.

With lots of wonderfully flat stones freely available, Easdale makes the perfect venue for the annual **World Stone Skimming Championships** (Ⓦ stoneskimming.com), held on the last Sunday of September.

Easdale Folk Museum

Near the main square, Easdale • Daily: April–June, Sept & Oct 11am–4.30pm; July & Aug 11am–5pm • £2.50 • Ⓦ easdalemuseum.org

Many of the village's old workers' cottages now serve as holiday homes, and one is

home to the interesting **Easdale Folk Museum**, near the main square, which has surprisingly expansive collections covering, not just the local slate industry, but the island's social and military associations. It also sells a useful historical map of the island and you can buy some interesting slate souvenirs in the shop.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF EASDALE

By ferry The ferry from Ellenabeich to the Isle of Easdale runs more or less on demand (press the buttons in the ferry shed or phone 01852 300559).

EATING AND DRINKING

Puffer Bar 200 metres from the Folk Museum 01852 300022, pufferbar.com. Should you wish to hang about, then you could do worse than visit the terrific *Puffer* restaurant and bar; the former serves the best of the day's fresh catch, while the latter is a convivial spot for a drink. Mon–Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30–11pm.

Arduaine Garden

A816, 10 miles north Kilmartin • Daily 9.30am–dusk • £6; NTS • 0844 493 2216

A great spot at which to stop and have a picnic on the A816 from Oban to Lochgilphead is **Arduaine Garden**, overlooking Asknish Bay and the islands of Shuna, Luing, Scarba and Jura. The gardens, whose original foundations were laid in 1898, are stupendous, particularly in May and June, and have the feel of an intimate private garden, with immaculately mown lawns, lily-strewn ponds, mature woods and spectacular rhododendrons and azaleas. You can follow several pathways through the gardens, one of which is the woodland walk, which leads down to the lakeshore, where there's a good chance of spotting otters, sea eagles and hen harriers.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — ARDUAINE GARDEN

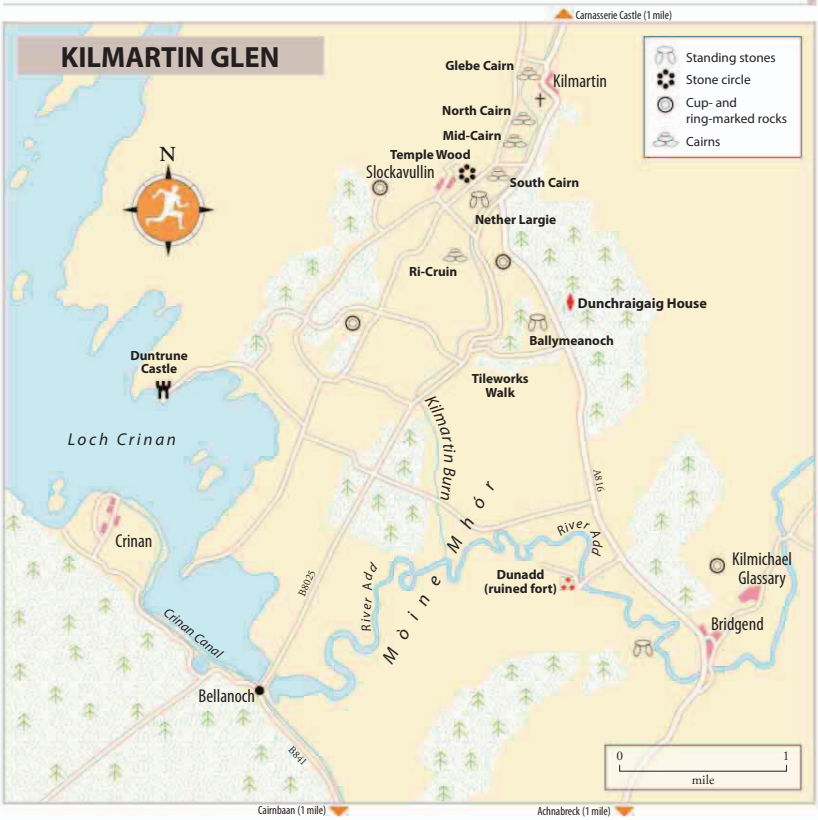
★ **Loch Melfort Hotel** Adjacent to Arduaine Garden 01852 200233, lochmelfort.co.uk. This fine, privately-run country house hotel overlooking Asknish Bay offers a selection of beautifully appointed rooms, each with its own private patio or balcony; best of all, though, are the views, which are unquestionably some of the finest in Scotland. The hotel's sparky *Chartroom Bistro* offers similarly outstanding views, and the food isn't half bad either; their west coast langoustines and mussels (£11.99) rate highly in these parts, though there's plenty more on the menu, including home-made burgers and a choice of scrummy pizzas. Daily 11am–10pm. **£160**

Kilmartin Glen and around

The chief sight on the road from Oban to Lochgilphead is **KILMARTIN GLEN**, the most important prehistoric site on the Scottish mainland. The most remarkable relic is the **linear cemetery**, where several cairns are aligned for more than two miles to the south of the village of Kilmartin. These are thought to represent the successive burials of a ruling family or chieftains, but nobody can be sure. The best view of the cemetery's configuration is from the Bronze Age **Mid-Cairn**, but the Neolithic **South Cairn**, dating from around 3000 BC, is by far the oldest and the most impressive, with its large chambered tomb roofed by giant slabs.

Close to the South Cairn, the two **Temple Wood stone circles** appear to have been the architectural focus of burials in the area from Neolithic times to the Bronze Age. Visible to the south are the impressively cup-marked **Nether Largie standing stones** (no public access), the largest of which looms over 10ft high.

Cup- and ring-marked rocks are a recurrent feature of prehistoric sites in Kilmartin Glen and elsewhere in Argyll. There are many theories as to their origin: some see them as Pictish symbols, others as primitive solar calendars. The most extensive markings in the entire country are at **Achnabreck**, off the A816 towards Lochgilphead.



Kilmartin House Museum

Kilmartin village • Daily: March–Oct 10am–5.30pm; Nov to Christmas 11am–4pm • £5 • T 01546 510278, W kilmartin.org

Situated on high ground to the north of the Kilmartin cairns is the tiny village of **KILMARTIN**, an unremarkable place but home to the superb **Kilmartin House Museum**, housed in the old manse adjacent to the village church. Not only can you learn about the various theories concerning prehistoric crannogs, henges and cairns, but you can practise polishing an axe, examine different types of wood, and listen to a variety of weird and wonderful sounds (check out the Gaelic bird imitations). One of the most remarkable exhibits is a large carved stone head, found in a garden in Port Appin just a few years ago, which is thought to be around 2000 years old. It's worth noting that the museum staff offer superb two-hour guided walks (free) of the cairns, usually on Wednesdays and Saturdays, though it's best to check in advance.

Kilmartin church

Kilmartin church shelters several richly sculpted graves and crosses, while a separate enclosure in the graveyard houses a large collection of medieval grave slabs of the Malcolms of Poltalloch. These are believed to have been crafted by a group of sculptors working around Loch Awe in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Carnasserie Castle

Kilmartin's own castle is ruined beyond recognition; head instead for the much less ruined **Carnasserie Castle**, on a high ridge a mile up the road towards Oban. Built in

the 1560s, the castle is a good example of the transition between fully fortified castles and later mansion houses, and has several original finely carved stone fireplaces and doorways, as well as numerous gun-loops and shot holes.

Mòine Mhór

To the south of Kilmartin, beyond the linear cemetery, lies the raised peat bog of **Mòine Mhór** (Great Moss), now a nature reserve and home to remarkable plant, insect and birdlife. To get a close look at the sphagnum moss and wetlands, head for the Tileworks Walk, just off the A816, which includes a short boardwalk over the bog.

Dunadd

Mòine Mhór is best known as home to the Iron Age fort of **Dunadd**, one of Scotland's most important Celtic sites, occupying a distinctive 176ft-high rocky knoll once surrounded by the sea but currently stranded beside the winding River Add. It was here that Fergus, the first king of Dalriada – which embraced much of what is now Argyll – established his royal seat, having arrived from Ireland in around 500 AD. Its strategic position, the craggy defences and the view from the top are all impressive, but it's the **stone carvings** (albeit now fibreglass copies) between the twin summits which make Dunadd so remarkable: several lines of inscription in Ogham (an ancient alphabet of Irish origin), the faint outline of a boar, a hollowed-out footprint and a small basin. The boar and the inscriptions are probably **Pictish**, since the fort was clearly occupied long before Fergus got there, but the footprint and basin have been interpreted as being part of the royal coronation rituals of the kings of Dalriada. It is thought that the Stone of Destiny was used at Dunadd before being moved to Scone Palace (see box, p.324).

Knapdale and around

Forested **Knapdale** – from the Gaelic *cnap* (hill) and *dall* (field) – forms a buffer zone between the Kintyre peninsula and the rest of Argyll, bounded to the north by the Crinan Canal and to the south by West Loch Tarbert, and consisting of three progressively fatter fingers of land, separated by Loch Sween and Loch Caolisport. Knapdale is a little-visited area, which is surprising, as the ancient wooded landscape is among some of the most beautiful, and unique, in the country. Not only that, but there is some spectacular wildlife to observe here as well, not least thanks to the recent re-introduction of beavers to the area (see box, opposite).

Crinan Canal and around

The nine-mile-long **Crinan Canal** opened in 1801, linking Loch Fyne, at Ardrishaig south of Lochgilphead, with the Sound of Jura, thus cutting out the long and treacherous journey around the Mull of Kintyre. John Rennie's original design, although an impressive engineering feat, had numerous faults, and by 1816 Thomas Telford was called in to take charge of the renovations. The canal runs parallel to the sea for quite some way before cutting across the bottom of Mòine Mhór and hitting a flight of locks either side of **CAIRNBAAN** (there are fifteen in total). The walk along the towpath is utterly delightful (both picturesque and not too strenuous), though you could, of course, cycle too.

Crinan

The most relaxing place from which to view the canal in action is **CRINAN**, the pretty little fishing port at the canal's western end. Crinan's tiny harbour is, for the moment at least, still home to a small fishing fleet; a quick burst up through Crinan Wood to the hill above the village will give you a bird's-eye view of the sea-lock and its setting.

ACCOMMODATION

CAIRNBAAN

Cairnbaan Hotel By lock number five on the canal T01546 603668, W cairnbaan.com. Eighteenth-century coaching inn built at the same time as the canal, which it overlooks, accommodating twelve very accomplished and well-designed rooms. Charmingly staffed too and there is a good restaurant/bar). £85

CRINAN CANAL AND AROUND

CRINAN

Crinan Hotel T01546 830261, W crinanhotel.com. Occupying an enviable position overlooking the harbour, this long-standing family-run hotel has twenty artistically decorated rooms (indeed the hotel has its own gallery), many with a private balcony from which to take in the loch views. They do, though, come at a price. £180

EATING AND DRINKING

CAIRNBAAN

Cairnbaan Hotel By lock number five on the canal T01546 603668, W cairnbaan.com. This hotel's lively restaurant-cum-bar makes for a useful pit stop, and with lots of passing trade from the canal, it does well, too. Although local seafood is the main staple, there's much more besides, such as tempura of haggis and a wickedly tasty Argyll game pie (£14). Daily 11am–10pm.

CRINAN

Coffee Shop By the lockside T01546 830261. If you only fancy a quick refresher, head down to the cheery lock-side café for a home-made sausage roll, or a mug of tea with an enormous scone, jam and butter (£3.85). Easter–Oct daily 10am–5pm.

Seafood Bar Crinan Hotel T01546 830261. Reward yourself after the long canal-side walk with some steamed mussels or an Arbroath smokie (£13) washed down with a pint, at the same time as enjoying one of the most beautiful views in Scotland – especially at sunset, when the myriad islets and the distinctive Paps of Jura are reflected in the waters of the loch. Easter–Oct daily noon–12.30pm & 6–8.30pm.

Kintyre

But for the mile-long isthmus between West Loch Tarbert and the much smaller East Loch Tarbert, the little-visited, sparsely populated peninsula of **KINTYRE** – from the Gaelic *ceann tire*, "land's end" – would be an island. Indeed, in the eleventh century, when the Scottish king, Malcolm Canmore, allowed Magnus Barefoot, King of Norway, to lay claim to any island he could circumnavigate by boat, Magnus dragged his boat across the Tarbert isthmus and added the peninsula to his Hebridean kingdom. Despite its relative proximity to Scotland's Central Belt, Kintyre remains quiet and unfashionable; its main towns of **Tarbert** and **Campbeltown** have few obvious attractions, but that's part of their appeal.

THE SCOTTISH BEAVER TRIAL

In 2009, a colony of beavers from Norway were reintroduced to Knapdale Forest as part of a five-year project by the **Scottish Beaver Trial** (W scottishbeavertrial.org.uk). The first beavers to be released into the wilds of Scotland for over four hundred years, their reintroduction met with a rather mixed reaction, though their effect on the environment (and to a lesser degree the local economy) has been, and continues to be, closely monitored by an independent project team.

From the interpretation centre at **Barnluasgan** (four miles west of Cairnbaan), it's a twenty-minute walk to Dubh Loch, where most of the beaver activity takes place. Here, there's a viewing platform and another rough path that cuts through to Loch Coille Bharr, the two lochs separated by an 18m-long dam that took the beavers around four to five months to build – a quite remarkable feat of engineering. Either side of these two lochs, you'll also see their lodges, large and impressive tangles of severed branches, wood and mud. The best time to see these fascinating creatures is either at dawn or dusk, and though sightings are by no means guaranteed, there is a strong possibility that you will witness some beaver activity. Take along some binoculars, midge repellent and refreshments (you could be waiting a while), and don't bring dogs. You can follow the trail yourself or, alternatively, join one of the **free guided tours** that take place on Tuesday and Saturday evenings between June and September.

Kintyre's bleak but often beautiful **west coast** ranks among the most exposed stretches of coastline in Argyll. Atlantic breakers pound the rocky shoreline, while the persistent westerly wind forces the trees against the hillside. However, when the weather's fine and the wind not too fierce, there are numerous deserted sandy beaches to enjoy, with great views over to Gigha, Islay, Jura and even Ireland. By way of contrast, the **east coast** of Kintyre is gentler than the west, sheltered from the Atlantic winds and in parts strikingly beautiful, with stunning views across to Arran.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KINTYRE

By plane Campbeltown has an airport, with flights to and from Glasgow, which is only 40 miles away by air, compared to over 120 miles by road.

By bus There are regular daily buses from Glasgow to Campbeltown, via Tarbert and the west coast. Note that the bus service from Campbeltown only reaches as far as the fishing village of Carradale, some thirteen miles up the coast.

By ferry Kintyre is well served with ferries: the main port is at Kennacraig, five miles south of Tarbert on the west coast, with ferries serving Port Askaig and Port Ellen on Islay. There are also ferries from Tarbert to Portavadie on the Cowal peninsula, from Claonaig to Lochranza on Arran, and a summer-only one from Campbeltown to Ardrossan.

Tarbert

A distinctive rocket-like church steeple heralds the fishing port of **TARBERT** (in Gaelic *An Tairbeart*, meaning "isthmus"), sheltering an attractive little bay backed by rugged hills. Tarbert's **herring industry** was mentioned in the Annals of Ulster as far back as 836 AD, though right now the local fishing industry is down to its lowest level ever. Ironically, it was local Tarbert fishermen, who, in the 1830s, pioneered the method of herring fishing known as trawling, seining or ring-netting, which eventually wiped out the Loch Fyne herring stocks.

Tourism is now an increasingly important source of income, and though there's nothing really of substance to see in Tarbert itself, it's a good hub, with excellent transport links, a decent stock of accommodation, and some even better seafood restaurants. Moreover, it stages two prestigious annual events; the Scottish Series yacht races in late May, and the Tarbert Seafood Festival in early July when traditional boats also hit town. Tarbert is also the starting point of the **Kintyre Way**, an 89-mile walk that zigzags its way down the peninsula to Southend.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — TARBERT

By bus Buses stop in the centre of town on Campbeltown Road and Barmore Road.

Destinations Campbeltown (5 daily; 1hr 15min); Claonaig (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 30min); Glasgow (5 daily; 3hr 15min); Kennacraig (3–6 daily; 15min); Kilberry (2 daily on schooldays; 40min); Skipness (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 35min); Tayinloan (3–6 daily; 30min).

By ferry The ferry terminal is on Pier Road, a 10min walk along Harbour Street.

Destinations Portavadie (hourly; 25min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Harbour Street (April–June, Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–5pm; ☎01880 820429, ⓦkintyreway.com).

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Knap Guest House** Campbeltown Road ☎01880 820015, ⓦknapguesthouse.co.uk. Handsome Victorian townhouse with four pristine rooms leading off a beautifully appointed lounge; each room manifests a curious mixture of traditional Scottish and Asian furnishings, which somehow works. A little tricky to find as there's no sign, it's next to the Woods Financial Services shop. **£70**

Struan House Harbour Street ☎01880 820190, ⓦstruan.biz. Built in 1846 as a small hotel, this is now a charming six-roomed guesthouse with bespoke furnishings, grand wooden bedsteads, and some sweet little touches like bedside lamps, books and wall-mounted artwork. **£75**

EATING AND DRINKING

Ca'Dora Harbour Street ☎01880 820258. The pick of several cafés ranged along the seafront which, despite looking rather dull from the outside, pulls in the punters for its pizza and pasta, though it's renowned, above all, for its ice cream. Daily 10am–7pm.

Scott's Harbour Street ☎01880 820190, ⓦstruan.biz. Classy, contemporary bistro inside Struan House with just half a dozen tables. The food is fabulous, notably the seafood dishes like crab and chilli bruschetta, and scallops and chorizo with linguine (£11.95). Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

★ **Starfish** Castle Street ☎01880 820733, ⓦstarfishtarbert.com. Sparkling, informally run seafood restaurant where scallops are king, literally. A plate of these will set you back £17, as will the Starfish stew, comprising mussels, queen scallops and the catch of the day. Complete your meal with the crumble of the day. Mon–Thurs & Sun 6–10pm, Fri & Sat noon–2pm & Sun 6–10pm.

Carradale and around

Network Carradale Heritage Centre Located on the road into town • April–Sept daily except Thurs 10am–5pm; Oct–March daily except Wed & Thurs 11am–4pm • Free • ☎01583 431296

The village of **CARRADALE** itself is rather drab, but the tiny, very pretty harbour with its small fishing fleet, and the wide, sandy beach to the south, make up for it. On the road into town, there's the small, but informative **Network Carradale Heritage Centre**, with exhibits pertaining to the local fishing and farming industries. It also has a wide selection of bikes to rent (£14/5hr, £20/day), and there's good home baking to be had in the tearoom.

The B842 ends fourteen miles north of Carradale at **CLAONAIG**, little more than a slipway for the small summer car ferry to Arran.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By ferry The ferry terminal is at Claonaig, fourteen miles north of Carradale.

CARRADALE AND AROUND

Destinations Claonaig–Lochranza, Arran (8–9 daily; 30min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Ashbank Hotel Centre of village, by shops ☎01583 431650, ⓦashbankhotel.com. A dinky little place in the heart of the village, run by two very welcoming sisters. It's nothing flashy, but the five en-suite rooms are homely enough and the Egyptian cotton bedding is something to savour. £75

Carradale Bay Caravan Park Outside Carradale village ☎01583 431665, ⓦcarradalebay.com. The nearest campsite to town is the superbly equipped and well sheltered Carradale Bay Caravan Park, right by, and with great access to, the sandy beach. Although it's predominantly a caravan site, there is a separate area to pitch tents. Easter–Oct. £21/pitch

Dunvalanree Port Righ Bay ☎01583 431226, ⓦdunvalanree.com. Imposing house overlooking the sheltered little bay of Port Righ, towards Carradale Point; the five rooms are of the highest order, with beautiful, bespoke beds, though for those on a tighter budget, there are a couple of budget rooms available. Dinner costs just £20 extra, which is great value. £80

★ **The Green Room** Above Carradale harbour ☎07972 683984, ⓦgreenroomteas.co.uk. Utterly delightful tearoom perched high above the harbour and with glorious views across Kilbrannan Sound to Arran. Apart from the main café area (serving sausage rolls, rock cake, flapjacks and the like), there's a glass conservatory overlooking the croquet lawn (which you are free to play) and, better still, a lounge-cum-observatory with a swallow-cam and binoculars for wildlife-spotting. 10am–4pm; closed Wed.

Skipness

Heading north of the Claonaig ferry terminal, a dead-end road winds its way along the shore a few miles further north to the tiny village of **SKIPNESS**, where the considerable ruins of the enormous thirteenth-century **Skipness Castle** and a chapel look out across the Kilbrannan Sound to Arran. There are also several gentle **walks** laid out in the nearby mixed woodland, up the glen. The main reason people make the effort to visit Skipness, however, is the wonderful *Skipness Seafood Cabin*.

ARRIVAL AND EATING — SKIPNESS

By bus Buses run between Skipness and Kennacraig via the ferry terminal at Claonaig (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 20min).

Skipness Seafood Cabin Below the castle ☎01880 760207. Little more than a hut just below the castle, the Cabin has been doling out fresh local seafood for years: hot smoked salmon or crab rolls (£4), fresh oysters, queenies (queen scallops), langoustine, mussels and home-baked cakes are just some of the treats. There are wooden tables and bench seating from which to admire the splendid views across to Arran. Whit Sunday to Sept 11am–7pm; closed Sat.

Isle of Gigha

Just six miles by one mile, **GIGHA** – pronounced "Geeya", with a hard "g" – is a low-lying, fertile island, with a population of around 150, just three miles off the west coast of Kintyre. The island's Ayrshire cattle produce over a quarter of a million gallons of milk a year to produce the island's distinctive (occasionally fruit-shaped) cheese. Like many of the smaller Hebrides, Gigha was bought and sold numerous times after its original lairds, the MacNeils, sold up, and was finally bought by the islanders themselves in 2002.

The real draw of Gigha, apart from the peace and quiet, are the white sandy beaches – including one at Ardminish, the island's only village – that dot the coastline. The ferry from Tayinloan deposits you at **ARDMINISH**, where you'll find the post office and shop, and the all-denomination island church, which has some interesting stained-glass windows. Although most visitors come to Gigha for the day, it's a great place to stay.

Achamore Gardens

A mile and a half south of Ardminish • Daily 9am–dusk • £4

The main attraction on Gigha is the **Achamore Gardens**. Established by the first postwar owner, Sir James Horlick of hot-drink fame, its spectacularly colourful displays of azaleas are best seen in early summer. Elsewhere, the rhododendrons merit seeking out, as does the walled garden, with its hugely diverse collection of plants, a bamboo maze, and a superb panorama across the island's west coast and beyond to Islay and Jura. Achamore House itself is now home to an American who runs a flower-essence business, it's also possible to stay here.

To the southwest of the gardens, the ruins of the thirteenth-century **St Catan's Chapel** are floored with weathered medieval gravestones; the ogham stone nearby is the only one of its kind in the west of Scotland.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — ISLE OF GIGHA

By ferry CalMac ferries depart more or less hourly from Tayinloan, 23 miles south of Tarbert, for the 20min crossing to Ardminish.

Website There's no tourist office here, but this website is a useful resource: 🌐gigha.org.uk.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Achamore House Achamore Gardens ☎01583 505400, 🌐achamorehouse.com. If you want to stay in the style of a laird, book into one of the grand rooms at the beautiful house in the midst of Achamore Gardens; bay windows, antique wardrobes and chests are standard features, though some rooms do have shared bathroom facilities. £90

The Boathouse By the pier ☎01583 505123, 🌐boathousegigha.co.uk. The place to go for delicious food, good company, and occasionally live music and quiz nights too. April–Oct daily 11.30am–10pm.

Boathouse Camping On the grass adjacent to *The Boathouse* ☎01583 505123, 🌐boathousegigha.co.uk. This designated camping area has fantastic beach views. Facilities are limited to showers (£1) and toilets, though they sell some basic foodstuffs too. There are only twenty pitches, so booking ahead is advisable. £9/pitch

Gigha Hotel ☎01583 505254, 🌐gigha.org.uk. Just 200m from the ferry terminal, this is the social centre of the island and a very welcoming place to stay. The rooms are inviting and spotlessly clean without being particularly spectacular. £80

Machrihanish and around

The only major development along the entire west coast of Gigha is **MACHRIHANISH**, at the southern end of Machrihanish Bay, the longest continuous stretch of sand in Argyll. There are two approaches to the **beach**: from Machrihanish itself, or from Westport, at the north end of the bay, where the A83 swings east towards Campbeltown; either way, the sea here is too dangerous for swimming. Machrihanish itself was once a thriving salt-producing and coal-mining centre – you can still see the miners' cottages at neighbouring Drumlemble – but now survives solely on tourism.

Machrihanish Golf Club

Between the beach and Campbeltown Airport • April–Oct £65; Nov–March £30 • T 01586 810213, W www.macgolf.com

Dominating the village of Machrihanish, and the main draw in these parts, is the exposed 18-hole championship course of the **Machrihanish Golf Club**, between the beach and Campbeltown Airport on the nearby flat and fertile swath of land known as the Laggan. One of Scotland's finest links courses (established in 1876), it plays out on a quite spectacular landscape, and is particularly notable for its first hole, which cuts across the Atlantic in dramatic fashion.

Machrihanish Dunes Golf Club

East of Campbeltown Airport • April–Oct £70; Nov–March £30 • T 01586 810000, W machrihanishdunes.com

Established as recently as 2009, the sister course of Machrihanish golf course, the 18-hole **Machrihanish Dunes**, on the other side of the airport, is perhaps even more impressive. The course layout, including the tee and green positions, is dictated solely by the lay of the land.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — MACHRIHANISH AND AROUND

Machrihanish Holiday Park Machrihanish Village T 01586 810366, W campkintyre.co.uk. Superbly located next to the fairways and with direct sea views, this large, fully equipped, family-run campsite has a terrific mix of caravan and tent space, as well as heated wooden wigwams and fully fitted bell tents (sleeping two people). March–Oct. £14/pitch; wigwams £32.50; bell tents £50

Old Clubhouse Pub Machrihanish Village T 01586 810000. Overlooking the first tee, the erstwhile clubhouse is now a very agreeable village pub, frequented by golfers and locals alike, which means it's not nearly as pretentious as it might be. Good bar food and decent ales. Daily 11am–11pm.

The Putechan Bellochantuy T 01586 421323, W theputechan.co.uk. Located in a roadside hamlet some nine miles from Campbeltown on the A83, this former hunting lodge is now a tip-top restaurant with a cool interior of charcoal-grey painted walls and carpets, and gorgeous, bespoke wooden tables. The food is similarly impressive, from the likes of smoked haddock mornay, to monkfish wrapped in parma ham (£17.95). You're best off making a reservation, and when you do, request a window table as the sea views are fantastic. Daily noon–10pm.

Campbeltown

CAMPBELTOWN's best feature is its setting, in a deep bay sheltered by Davaar Island and the surrounding hills. With a population of around 5000, it's Kintyre's largest town, and its shops are by far the best place to stock up on supplies. Originally known as Kinlochkilkerran (*Ceann Loch Cill Chiaran*), the town was renamed in the seventeenth century by the Earl of Argyll – a Campbell – when it became one of the main points for immigration from the Lowlands. As is evident from the architecture, Campbeltown's heyday was the Victorian era, when shipbuilding was going strong, coal was shipped by canal from Drumlemble, the fishing fleet was vast and Campbeltown Loch was said to be made of whisky. Nineteenth-century visitors to Campbeltown frequently found the place engulfed in a thick fog of pungent peat smoke from the town's 34 **whisky distilleries**. Today, only three distilleries are left to maintain this regional subgroup of single-malt whiskies.

If you're here on the third weekend of August, be prepared for the **Mull of Kintyre Music & Arts Festival** (W mokfest.com), which pulls in some big-name rock bands, plus some good traditional Irish and Scottish ones.

Springbank distillery

55 Longrow • Mon–Sat 10am & 2pm • £6.50; sign-up at Cadenhead's whisky shop at 30–32 Union Street • T 01586 551710, W springbankwhisky.com

If you're interested in whisky, pop into **Cadenhead's** whisky shop on Bolgam St, which runs parallel with Longrow, where you can sign up for a guided tour of the nearby **Springbank distillery**, a deeply traditional, family-owned business (founded in 1828) that does absolutely everything from malting to bottling, on its own premises, and produces three different single malts.

6

Burnet Building

St John Street • Mon–Fri 9am–5pm • Free

Built as the town library in 1897, the **Burnett Building** is crowned by a distinctive lantern and decorated with four relief panels depicting the town's main industries at the time. The building harbours a very old-fashioned one-room local museum, and also includes the **Linda McCartney Memorial Garden**, which you should approach from Shore Street. Here, you'll find a slightly ludicrous bronze statue of Linda holding a lamb, a piece commissioned by Paul McCartney, who spent many happy times with Linda and the kids on the farm he owns near Campbeltown.

Campbeltown Heritage Centre

Lorne Street • April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–5pm • £2 • T 07733 485387, W campbeltownheritagecentre.co.uk

The former Lorne Street Church, with its stripy bell-cote and pinnacles, has been cleverly converted into the intermittently interesting **Campbeltown Heritage Centre**. Due prominence is given to the town's once glittering industrial heritage, in particular the local fishing and whisky industries; going hand in hand with local malt production was a significant coopering industry, and at one stage there were more than sixty coopers in Campbeltown. By far the most prominent exhibit here, however, and occupying the spot where the main altar once stood, is a beautiful wooden skiff called "Yerda", dating from 1906. Look out, too, for the model of the Victorian harbour front with the light railway running along Hall Street.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CAMPBELTOWN

By plane Campbeltown Airport (T 01586 553797, W hial.co.uk) lies three miles west, towards Machrihanish.
Destinations Glasgow (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 40min).

By bus The town's main bus terminal is in front of the swimming pool on the Esplanade.
Destinations Carradale (Mon–Fri 5 daily, 4 on Sat; 45min); Glasgow (5 daily; 4hr 15min); Machrihanish (Mon–Sat 9 daily; 20min); Southend (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 25min); Tarbert (5 daily; 1hr 10min).

By ferry The ferry terminal is on the south side of the harbour, from where it's a five-minute walk into the centre.
Destinations Ardrossan (Fri & Sun 1 daily; 2hr 40min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Old Quay (April–June & Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–4pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 11am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; T 01586 552056).

ACCOMMODATION

Ardshiel Hotel Kilkerran Road T 01586 552133, W ardshiel.co.uk. A former whisky distiller's Victorian mansion situated on a lovely leafy square just a block or so back from the harbour front. The rooms are functional more than anything else, but adequately comfortable and they are reasonably priced. More impressive is the hotel's glamorous, grown-up whisky bar, stocking in excess of 500 malts. £70

Campbeltown Backpackers Big Kiln T 01586 551188, W campbeltownbackpackers.co.uk. Occupying the old school house in the courtyard across from the heritage centre, this new, community-trust-run bunkhouse has sixteen firm, pine beds in two dormitories, a self-catering kitchen and small lounge. There's no reception as such, so if there's no one there, pop into the heritage centre; if that's closed just call the number on the door. Dorms £18

Oatfield House Three miles down the B842 T 01586 551551, W oatfield.org. A beautifully renovated whitewashed laird's house set in its own grounds on the road to Southend, retaining three rooms of some character

and distinction. Guests are also free to avail themselves of the panelled dining room and parlour. **£80**

Royal Hotel Main Street ⓣ0800 151 3701, ⓦmachrihanishdunes.com. New, high-end hotel that sits well with the recent redevelopment of the harbour-front area, and injects a big dollop of colour into this otherwise dull street. The supremely comfortable rooms are mostly furnished in bold tartan colour schemes, with deep armchairs, big beds with thick duvets and fluffy pillows, and a host of other neat touches. **£130**

EATING AND DRINKING

Black Sheep Pub Main Street ⓣ0800 151 3701. The *Royal Hotel*'s pub is by far the most enjoyable watering hole in town, with seating arranged around a shiny, semi-circular bar, in addition to some outdoor tables overlooking the harbour. The eponymous Black Sheep cask ale trumps all other ales here. Daily noon–1am.

Café Bluebell 6 Hall Street ⓣ01586 552800. Simple-looking but warm and welcoming café near the tourist office offering a terrific selection of light snacks (soups, sandwiches, sausage rolls), as well as a gut-busting all day breakfast (£7.50). Tues–Sat 9am–4.30pm, Sun 11am–4pm.

Southend and around

The bulbous, hilly end of Kintyre, south of Campbeltown, features some of the peninsula's most spectacular scenery, interspersed with large swathes of Lowland-style farmland. **SOUTHEND** itself, a bleak, blustery spot, comes as something of a disappointment, though it does have a golden sandy beach. Below the cliffs to the west of the beach, a ruined thirteenth-century chapel marks the alleged arrival point of St Columba prior to his trip to Iona, and on a rocky knoll nearby a pair of footprints carved into the rock are known as **Columba's footprints**, though only one is actually of ancient origin. Southend also marks the end (or start) of the 89-mile long Kintyre Way.

Sanda Island

A couple of miles out to sea from Southend lies **Sanda Island**, which contains the remains of an ancient Celtic chapel, two crosses, a holy well, an unusual lighthouse comprised of three sandstone towers and lots of seabirds, including Manx shearwaters, storm petrels and puffins.

Mull of Kintyre

Most people venture south of Campbeltown to make a pilgrimage to the **Mull of Kintyre**, made famous by the mawkish number-one hit by sometime local resident Paul McCartney, with the help of the Campbeltown Pipe Band. It's also infamous as the site of the RAF's worst peacetime accident when, on June 2, 1994, a Chinook helicopter on its way from Belfast to Inverness crashed, killing all 29 on board. A small memorial can be found on the hillside, not far from the **Gap** (1150ft) – after which no vehicles are allowed. The Mull is the nearest Britain gets to Ireland, just twelve miles away, and the Irish coastline appears remarkably close on fine days. There's nothing specifically to see, but the trek down to the lighthouse, itself 300ft above the ocean waves, is challengingly tortuous.

Isle of Islay

The fertile, largely treeless island of **ISLAY** (pronounced "eye-la") is famous for one thing – single-malt **whisky**. The smoky, peaty, pungent quality of Islay whisky is unique, recognizable even to the untutored palate, and all eight of the island's distilleries will happily take visitors on a guided tour, ending with the customary complimentary tipple. Yet, despite the fame of its whiskies, Islay still remains relatively undiscovered, especially when compared with Arran, Mull or Skye. Part of the reason may be the expense of the two-hour ferry journey from Kennacraig on Kintyre. If you do make the effort, however, you'll be rewarded with a genuinely friendly welcome from islanders proud of their history, landscape and Gaelic culture.

In medieval times, Islay was the political centre of the Hebrides, with **Finlaggan**, near Port Askaig, the seat of the MacDonalds, Lords of the Isles. The picturesque, whitewashed villages you see on Islay today, however, date from the planned settlements founded by the Campbells in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Apart from whisky and solitude, the other great draw is the **birdlife** – there's a real possibility of spotting a golden eagle, or the rare crow-like chough, and no chance of missing the white-fronted and barnacle geese that winter here in their thousands.

In late May, the **Feis Ile**, or Islay Festival of Malt and Music (Ⓦfeisile.org), takes place, with whisky tasting, piping recitals, folk dancing and other events celebrating the island's Gaelic roots.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ISLE OF ISLAY

By plane Islay's airport (Ⓣ01496 302361, Ⓦhial.co.uk) is five miles north of Port Ellen on the A846.

Destinations Colonsay (Tues & Thurs 1 daily; 20min); Glasgow (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 40min); Oban (Tues & Thurs 2 daily; 35min).

By ferry CalMac ferries from Kennacraig on Kintyre connect with both Port Ellen and Port Askaig. There's also a ferry that makes the short trip across to Jura (see p.273).

GETTING AROUND

By bus The island's main bus route links Port Askaig with Bridgend, from where buses continue down to Port Ellen, via Bowmore, and Portnahaven, via Port Charlotte.

Car rental If you're thinking of bringing your own vehicle, it's worth considering car rental on the island itself and saving on ferry fares – Islay Car Hire (T 01496 810544, W islaycarhire.co.uk) will deliver to both ferry terminals.

Port Ellen and around

Laid out as a planned village in 1821 by Walter Frederick Campbell, and named after his wife, **PORT ELLEN** is the chief port on Islay, with the island's largest fishing fleet, and main CalMac ferry terminal. The neat, whitewashed terraces that overlook the town's

ISLAY WHISKY DISTILLERIES

It goes without saying that Islay's **whisky distilleries** are now a major tourist attraction. Nowadays, every distillery offers guided tours, which usually last an hour and traditionally end with a generous dram, and occasionally a free glass. Most also offer more comprehensive tours with more tastings, and some even do warehouse tours. Phone ahead to make sure there's a tour running, as times do change frequently.

Ardbeg Port Ellen T 01496 302244, W ardbeg.com. Ardbeg is traditionally considered the saltiest, peatiest malt on Islay (and that's saying something). Bought by Glenmorangie in 1997, the distillery has been thoroughly overhauled and restored, yet it still has bags of character inside. Its café, the *Old Kiln* is excellent; tours £5. Guided tours 10.30am, noon & 3.30pm; Old Kiln Café June–Aug daily 10am–5pm; Sept–May Mon–Fri 10am–4.30pm.

Bowmore School Street T 01496 810671, W bowmore.com. Bowmore is the most touristy of the Islay distilleries – too much so for some. However, it is by far the most central (with unrivalled disabled access), and also one of the few still doing its own malting and kilning; tours £6. Guided tours Easter–June Mon–Sat 10 & 11am, 2 & 3pm; July–Sept Mon–Sat 10 & 11am, 2 & 3pm, Sun 1 & 2pm; Oct–Easter Mon–Fri 10.30am & 3pm, Sat 10am.

Bruichladdich Bruichladdich T 01496 850190, W bruichladdich.com. In the centre of the village of the same name, this independent distillery was rescued in 2001 by a group of whisky fanatics, but was bought out by the French drinks giants, Remy-Cointreau, in 2012; tours £5. Guided tours Easter–Oct Mon–Fri 10.30, 11.30am & 1, 2, 3 & 4pm, Sat 10.30am & 1 & 2pm, Sun 1 & 2pm; Nov–Easter Mon–Fri 11.30am & 2.30pm, Sat 11.30am.

Bunnahabhain Four miles north of Port Askaig T 01496 840646, W bunnahabhain.com. A visit to Bunnahabhain (pronounced "Bunna-have-in") is really only for whisky obsessives. The road from Port Askaig is windy, the whisky the least characteristically Islay and the distillery itself only in production for a few months each year; tours £6. Guided tours April–Oct Mon–Fri 10.30am, 1.30 & 3.30pm; Nov–March by appointment.

Caol Ila Port Askaig T 01496 302760, W discovering-distilleries.com. Caol Ila (pronounced "Cull-eela"), just north of Port Askaig, is a modern distillery, the majority of whose lightly peaty malt goes into blended whiskies; tours £6. Guided tours April–Aug daily 9.30 & 11.30am, 12.30, 2.30 & 3.30pm; Sept & Oct same times, closed Sun; Nov–March 10.30am & 1.30pm

Kilchoman Rockside Farm, Bruichladdich T 01496 850011, W kilchomandistillery.com. Established in 2005 as the first new distillery on Islay for over a century, Kilchoman is a very welcoming, tiny, farm-based enterprise that grows its own barley, as well as distilling, maturing and bottling its whisky on site; tours £4.50. The café serves good coffee, plus home-made soup and baked items. Guided tours April–Oct Mon–Sat 11am & 3pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 11am & 3pm. Café Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

Lagavulin Port Ellen T 01496 302749, W discovering-distilleries.com. Lagavulin probably is the classic, all-round Islay malt, with lots of smoke and peat. The distillery enjoys a fabulous setting and is extremely busy all year round; tours £6. Guided tours May–Sept Mon–Fri 9.30 & 11.30am, 12.30, 2.30, 3.30, 4.30 & 5.30pm, Sat & Sun 9.30 & 11.30am, 12.30, 2.30 & 3.30pm; Oct–April daily 9.30 & 11.30am, 12.30, 2.30 & 3.30pm.

Laphroaig Port Ellen T 01496 302418, W laphroaig.com. Another classic smoky, peaty Islay malt, and another great setting. One bonus at Laphroaig is that you get to see the malting, and see and smell the peat kilns; tours £5. Guided tours March–Oct Mon–Fri 10 & 11.30am, 2 & 3.30pm; Nov–Feb 11.30am & 2pm.

bay of golden sand are strikingly pretty, but the view is dominated by the village's modern maltings, whose powerful odours waft across the town.

The distilleries

As you head east out of Port Ellen, a dead-end road passes three **distilleries** in as many miles. First up is **Laphroaig**, which, as every bottle tells you, is Gaelic for "the beautiful hollow by the bay", and, true enough, the whitewashed distillery is indeed in a gorgeous setting by the sea. Laphroaig also has the stamp of approval from Prince Charles, who famously paid a flying visit to the island in 1994, crashing an airplane of the Queen's Flight in the process.

A mile down the road lies **Lagavulin** distillery, beyond which stands **Dunyvaig Castle**, a romantic ruin on a promontory looking out to the tiny isle of Texa. Another mile further on, **Ardbeg** distillery sports the traditional pagoda-style kiln roofs – in common with all Islay's distilleries, the above three offer guided tours (see box, p.267).

Kildaton Chapel

Two miles down the track from Ardbeg and you eventually come to the simple thirteenth-century **Kildalton Chapel**, which has a wonderful eighth-century Celtic ringed cross made from the local "bluestone". The quality of the scenes matches any to be found on the crosses carved by the monks in Iona: the Virgin and Child are on the east face, with Cain murdering Abel to the left, David fighting the lion on the top, and Abraham sacrificing Isaac on the right; on the west side amidst the serpent-and–boss work are four elephant-like beasts.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By ferry The ferry terminal is a two-minute walk from the village's main through roads.
Destinations Kennacraig (3–4 daily; 2hr 20min).
By bus Buses pick up and drop off on Charlotte Street in the centre of the village.
Destinations Bowmore (Mon–Sat 10 daily, 4 on Sun; 20–30min).

PORT ELLEN AND AROUND

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Caladh Sona 53 Frederick Crescent ☎01496 302694, ✉hamish.scott@lineone.net. Simple, unassuming detached house in the heart of the village with three en-suite ground-floor rooms (all twins) at a very reasonable price. £72

Islay Hotel 18 Charlotte Street ☎01496 300109, 🌐islayhotel.com. One of the finest hotels on the island, rebuilt from scratch a few years ago, hence the thoroughly modern, sharp-looking rooms, and superbly equipped and very large bathrooms (some with whirlpool bathtub). The *Islay* is also Port Ellen's social hub, with a fine restaurant and a buzzy, more informal whisky bar. The former rustles up sublime dishes like pan-fried turbot with herbed mash and hollandaise sauce (£20), while at the latter you can grab a steak sandwich (£9.50) washed down with a micro-brewed beer. Restaurant: daily noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm; Bar: daily 11am–11pm. £120

★ **Kintra Farm campsite** Three miles northwest of Port Ellen ☎01496 302051, 🌐kintrafarm.co.uk. Enjoying a stunning situation at the southern tip of sandy Laggan Bay among the grassy dunes, this is not far off wild camping at its best. Facilities are basic, but there are showers and running water as well as laundry facilities. April–Sept. £14/ pitch

Bowmore

On the north side of the monotonous peat bog of Duich Moss, and the south shore of the tidal Loch Indaal, lies **BOWMORE**, Islay's administrative capital, with a population of around 800. It's a striking place, laid out in 1768 on a grid plan rather like Inveraray, with the whitewashed terraces of Main Street climbing up the hill in a straight line from the loch to the town's crowning landmark, the **Round Church**, whose central tower looks uncannily like a lighthouse. Built in the round, so that the devil would have no corners in which to hide, it has a plain, wood-panelled interior, with a lovely tiered balcony and a big central mushroom pillar.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses stop on the main square, which, strangely enough, is called The Square.

Destinations Port Askaig (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily, 4 on Sun; 25min); Port Charlotte (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily, 3 on Sun; 25min); Port Ellen (Mon–Sat 10 daily, 4 on Sun; 20–30min); Portnahaven (Mon–Sat 6 daily, 3 on Sun; 50min).

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

Bike rental Bike rental is available from the post office at the top of Main Street (Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–12.30pm; £10/day; ☎ 01496 850232).

Tourist office The Square, Main Street (April–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Sun noon–3pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 10am–3pm; ☎ 01496 810254). The staff here can help you find accommodation anywhere on the island and also on Jura.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **Bowmore House** Shore Street ☎ 01496 810324, 🌐 thebowmorehouse.co.uk. Run by an amiable couple, this grand-looking house, positioned on the main road entering the village, accommodates five fabulous rooms exquisitely furnished in different styles, but all with plush carpets and plump beds, as well as sparkling bathrooms replete with luxury toiletries. There's a complimentary laundry service too. **£130**

Lambeth Guesthouse Jamieson Street ☎ 01496 810597, ✉ lambethguesthouse@tiscali.co.uk. Just off Main Street, this is a jovially run guesthouse with six, modestly sized but impeccably prepared en-suite rooms. A little tricky to find as there's no sign, but it's next to the tiny filling station, the door being around to the side. **£94**

Harbour Inn The Square ☎ 01496 810330, 🌐 harbour-inn.com. Smartly appointed and fairly expensive maritime-themed restaurant serving sumptuous plates of food like halibut, salmon and cod poached in a fish bouillon with saffron potatoes (£21.50). Alternatively, you can warm yourself by a peat fire in the adjoining pub, where they also do lunchtime bar snacks. Daily noon–2pm & 6–10pm.

Loch Gruinart

Aoradh visitor centre Seven miles north of Bridgend on the B8017 • Daily 10am–5pm • Free • ☎ 01496 850505, 🌐 rspb.org.uk/lochgruinart

Between mid-September and the third week of April, it's impossible to miss the island's staggeringly large wintering population of **Greenland barnacle** and **Greater White-fronted geese**. You can see the geese just about anywhere on the island – there are an estimated 15,000 white-fronted and 40,000 barnacles here (and rising) – though they are usually at their most concentrated in the fields between Bridgend and Ballygrant. In the evening, they tend to congregate in the tidal mud flats and fields around **Loch Gruinart**. The nearby farm of Aoradh (pronounced "oorig") is run by the RSPB, and contains a **visitor centre**, with an observation point that has telescopes and a CCTV link with the mud flats; there's also a hide across the road looking north over the salt flats at the head of the loch, though you're more likely to see ducks than geese.

Kilchoman

Without doubt the best sandy beaches on Islay are to be found on the isolated northwest coast near the village of **KILCHOMAN**, in particular, the lovely golden beach of **Machir Bay**, which is backed by great white-sand dunes. The sea here has dangerous undercurrents, however, and is not safe to swim in (the same goes for the much smaller Saligo Bay, to the north), but the beaches are still lovely to walk across.

Port Charlotte

Founded in 1828 by Walter Frederick Campbell, and named after his mother, **PORT CHARLOTTE** was originally set up to provide housing facilities for the workers of the former Lochindaal distillery, which eventually closed in 1929. It's generally agreed to be Islay's prettiest village, its immaculate whitewashed cottages clustered round a sandy cove overlooking Loch Indaal.

Museum of Islay Life

Daal Terrace • April–Sept Mon–Fri 10.30am–4.30pm • £3 • 01496 850358, islaymuseum.org

On the northern fringe of the village, in a whitewashed former chapel, the imaginative **Museum of Islay Life** is crammed to bursting with local memorabilia. As well as tantalizing snippets about eighteenth-century illegal whisky distillers, there are some terrific photos and a good library of books about the island. Best of all, though, are the displays on the *SS Tuscania* and *HMS Otranto*, both of which were sunk in the waters hereabouts during World War I. Among the exhibits is the bell from the *Tuscania* and the notebook belonging to Sergeant Malcolm McNeill, in which he records the names and conditions of those who perished, including one, he writes rather grimly, "whose body is so much decayed that it is crumbling to pieces".

Islay Natural History Trust Visitor Centre

Main Street • May–Sept Mon–Fri 10am–4pm • £3 • 01496 850288, islaynaturalhistory.org

The **Islay Natural History Trust Visitor Centre**, housed in the former distillery warehouse, is well worth a visit for anyone interested in the island's fauna and flora. As well as an extensive library to browse, there's lots of hands-on stuff for kids: microscopes, a touch table full of natural goodies, a sea-water aquarium, a bug world and owl pellets to examine. Tickets are valid for a week, allowing you to go back and identify things you've seen on your travels. They also organize weekly nature rambles in July and August (£2.50), which could be anything from rock-pooling to beachcombing.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PORT CHARLOTTE

By bus Buses stop just outside the *Port Charlotte Hotel*.

Destinations Bowmore (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily, 3 on Sun; 25min)

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Croft Kitchen Opposite the museum 01496 850230. Somewhere between a café and a restaurant, this sparsely furnished place nevertheless knocks up some decent food, as well as tea, coffee and cakes. March–Oct 11am–9pm; closed Wed.

Port Charlotte Hotel In the heart of the village overlooking the beach 01496 850360, portcharlottehotel.co.uk. Smart, though terrifically expensive, accommodation right in the heart of the village overlooking the beach. A handful of the ten rooms have retained their original exposed stone walls, but they're all thoughtfully designed and decorated in bold but beautiful colours. The hotel restaurant is a cut above anything else in Port Charlotte, though it's much more fun to tuck into one of their seafood lunches out on the grassy terrace; try some of the cracked Islay crab claws (£14.95). Live music usually takes place on Wednesday and Sunday evenings in the bar. Daily noon–2pm & 6–11pm. £190

Port Mòr Campsite Just outside the village out on the road to Portnahave 01496 850441, islandofislay.co.uk. A community-run campsite with glorious sea views and tip-top facilities: modern shower block, games room, laundry, café and a brilliant playpark for the kids. £16/pitch

SYHA hostel Next door to the Natural History Trust Visitor Centre 0870 004 1128, syha.org.uk. Islay's only hostel is housed in an old bonded warehouse by the sea. It possesses a handy mix of doubles and triples all the way up to six-bed dorms, and all with shared bathroom facilities; there's also a large kitchen and common room open to all. Breakfast £3.75. Mid-March to mid-Oct. Doubles £42; dorms £17

Portnahaven and Port Wemyss

The main coastal road on Islay culminates seven miles south of Port Charlotte at **PORTNAHAVEN**, a fishing and crofting community since the early nineteenth century. The familiar whitewashed cottages wrap themselves prettily around the steep banks of a deep bay where seals bask on the rocks in considerable numbers; in the distance, you can see Portnahaven's twin settlement, **PORT WEMYSS**, a mile south. The communities share a little whitewashed church, located above the bay in Portnahaven, with separate doors for each village.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PORTNAHAVEN AND PORT WEMYSS

By bus Buses make their way into the centre of both villages, dropping off first at Portnahaven.

Destinations Bowmore (Mon–Sat 6 daily, 3 on Sun; 50min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Burnside B&B Shore Street, Port Wemyss ☎01496 860296, ⓦburnsidelodge.co.uk. Located just off the coastal path, this sweet little place offers three rooms (one en suite) of modest proportions, but they're absolutely up to the mark. The friendly owner here also rustles up delectable home-baked goodies, in particular cupcakes and muffins; you can enjoy these, with a mug of tea, in the cosy residents lounge or outside on one of the barrel seats looking across to Rhinns Point, below which seals bask on the shore. Food served April–Sept Fri–Mon 10.30am–4.30pm. £90

Loch Finlaggan

Information centre Northeast of the loch • Easter & Oct Tues, Thurs & Sun 2–4pm; May–Sept 2.30–5pm; closed Sat • £2

Just beyond Ballygrant, on the road to Port Askaig, a narrow road leads off north to **Loch Finlaggan**, site of a number of **prehistoric crannogs** (artificial islands) and, for four hundred years from the twelfth century, headquarters of the Lords of the Isles, semi-autonomous rulers of the Hebrides and Kintyre. The site is evocative enough, but there are, in truth, very few remains beyond the foundations. Remarkably, the palace that stood here appears to have been unfortified, a testament perhaps to the prosperity and stability of the islands in those days.

To the northeast of the loch, the **information centre** exhibits a number of finds uncovered on the site, notably the head of the commemorative medieval cross. From the centre, a path heads down to the site itself, which is dotted with interpretive panels. Duckboards allow you to walk out across the reed beds of the loch and explore the main crannog, **Eilean Mor**, where several carved gravestones are displayed under cover in the chapel, all of which seem to support the theory that the Lords of the Isles buried their wives and children there, while having themselves interred on Iona. Further out into the loch is another smaller crannog, **Eilean na Comhairle**, originally connected to Eilean Mor by a causeway, where the Lords of the Isles are thought to have held meetings of the Council of the Isles.

Port Askaig

Islay's other ferry connection with the mainland, and its sole link with Colonsay and Jura, is from **PORT ASKAIG**, a scattering of buildings which tumbles down a little cove by the narrowest section of the Sound of Islay or Caol Ila. There's next to nothing here, save for a hotel, shop and post office.

ARRIVAL AND TOURS — PORT ASKAIG

By ferry To all intents and purposes, Port Askaig is the second of the island's main ferry terminals.

Destinations Colonsay (Wed 1 daily; 1hr 10min); Feolin ferry to Jura (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun 7 daily; 5min); Kennacraig (3–4 daily; 2hr 5min).

By bus Buses depart from a spot just up from the ferry terminal.

Destinations Bowmore (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily, 4 on Sun; 25min).

Boat tours For high-adrenaline boat trips, contact Islay Sea Safari (☎01496 40510, ⓦislayseasafari.co.uk), which is based in Port Askaig and is best known for whizzing round the distilleries in a rigid inflatable.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **Kilmeny Farmhouse** Ballygrant ☎01496 840668, ⓦkilmeny.co.uk. Three miles south of Port Askaig, this whitewashed farmhouse is a place that richly deserves all the superlatives it regularly receives. Antique furnishings, locally made fabrics and slipper baths feature in some or all of the four colour-coordinated rooms. You can expect to be well pampered for the duration of your stay, and the gourmet breakfast is a real treat, comprising, among other things, fresh fruit salad, poached plums, and smoked salmon and scrambled eggs. March–Nov. £125

Port Askaig Hotel Opposite the ferry terminal ☎01496 840245, ⓦportaskaig.co.uk. Brilliantly convenient for the

ferry and with wonderful views over to the Paps of Jura, though there's no doubt that this warm and welcoming hotel could do with a lick of paint here and there. Both the restaurant and bar are busy, convivial places any night of the week, popular with local fishermen and tourists alike. The restaurant serves a quality menu of seafood, while the snug, low-ceilinged *Port Bar* (allegedly dating back to the sixteenth century) is about as relaxing a place as you could wish for. Restaurant: daily noon–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm; Bar: daily 11am–11pm. **£125**

6

Isle of Jura

Twenty-eight miles long and eight miles wide, the long whale-shaped island of **JURA** is one of the wildest and most mountainous of the Inner Hebrides, its entire west coast uninhabited and inaccessible except to the dedicated walker. The distinctive **Paps of Jura**, so called because of their smooth breast-like shape, seem to dominate every view off the west coast of Argyll, their glacial rounded tops covered in a light dusting of quartzite scree. The island's name is commonly thought to derive from the Norse *dyr-oe* (deer island) and, appropriately enough, the current deer population of 6000 outnumbers the 180 humans 33 to 1; other wildlife to look out for include mountain hares and eagles. With just one road, which sticks to the more sheltered eastern coast of the island, and only one hotel, a couple of B&Bs and some self-catering cottages, Jura is an ideal place to go for peace and quiet and some great walking.

Jura House

Five miles south of the ferry terminal • Daily 9am–5pm; tea tent June–Aug Mon–Fri • £2.50

Five miles south of the ferry terminal are the lovely wooded grounds of **Jura House**, originally built by the Campbells in the early nineteenth century. Pick up a booklet about the house at the entrance to the grounds and follow the path that takes you down to the sandy shore, a perfect picnic spot in fine weather. Closer to the house itself, there's an idyllic **walled garden**, divided in two by a natural rushing burn that tumbles down in steps. The garden specializes in antipodean plants, which flourish in the frost-free climate; in season, you can buy some of the garden's organic produce or take tea in the **tea tent**.

Craighouse

Anything that happens on Jura happens in the island's only real village, **CRAIGHOUSE**, eight miles up the road from Feolin Ferry. The village enjoys a sheltered setting, overlooking Knapdale on the mainland – so sheltered, in fact, that there are even a few palm trees thriving on the seafront. There's a shop/post office, the island hotel and a tearoom, plus the tiny **Isle of Jura distillery**, which is very welcoming to visitors and offers free guided tours.

Jura distillery

Opposite the Jura Hotel • Guided tours Mon–Fri 11am & 2pm • Free • T 01496 820601, W jurawhisky.com

Established in 1810 by the Campbells, the **Isle of Jura distillery** has endured a somewhat chequered history. It went out of business in the early 1900s, before reopening in 1963 on the premises of the then derelict distillery. It now produces five distinctive single malts, with two notable success stories, the ten-year-old "Origin", and the sixteen-year-old "Diurachs" – you'll get to sample one or both of these on one of the free guided tours.

Corryvreckan Whirlpool

Between the islands of Scarba and Jura is the raging **Corryvreckan Whirlpool** (W whirlpool-scotland.co.uk), one of the world's most spectacular whirlpools, thought to be caused by a rocky pinnacle some 100ft below the sea. Exactly how the whirlpool

GEORGE ORWELL ON JURA

In April 1946, Eric Blair (better known by his pen name of **George Orwell**), intending to give himself "six months' quiet" in which to complete his latest novel, moved to a remote farmhouse called **Barnhill**, at the northern end of Jura, which he had visited for the first time the previous year. He appears to have relished the challenge of a spartan existence here with his adopted 3-year-old son Richard, and later his sister Avril; fishing almost every night, shooting rabbits, laying lobster pots and even attempting a little farming. The book Orwell was writing, under the working title *The Last Man in Europe*, was to become *1984* (the title was arrived at by simply reversing the last two digits of the year in which it was finished – 1948). During his time on Jura, however, Orwell was suffering badly from tuberculosis, and eventually he was forced to return to London, where he died in January 1950.

Barnhill, 23 miles north of Craighouse, is as remote today as it was in Orwell's day. The road deteriorates rapidly beyond Lealt, where vehicles must be left, leaving pilgrims a four-mile walk to the house itself. Alternatively, the Richardsons of Kinauachdrachd (T 07899 912116) can organize a taxi and guided walk, and also run a bunkhouse. Orwell wrote most of the book in the bedroom (top left window as you look at the house); the place is now a self-catering cottage (T 01786 850274). If you're keen on making the journey out to Barnhill, you might as well combine it with a trip to the nearby **Corryvreckan Whirlpool**, which lies between Jura and Scarba, to the north. Orwell nearly drowned in the whirlpool during a fishing trip in August 1947, along with his three companions (including Richard): the outboard motor was washed away, and they had to row to a nearby island and wait for several hours before being rescued by a passing fisherman.

appears depends on the tide and wind, but there's a potential tidal flow of over eight knots, which, when accompanied by gale force winds, can create standing waves up to 15ft high. Inevitably there are numerous legends about the place – known as *coire bhreacain* (speckled cauldron) in Gaelic – concerning *Cailleach* (Hag), the Celtic storm goddess. From the land, the best place from which to view it is Carraig Mhor on the northern tip of Jura.

ARRIVAL AND TOURS — ISLE OF JURA

By ferry The Feolin ferry from Port Askaig will not run if there's a strong northerly or southerly wind, so bring your toothbrush if you're coming for a day-trip. Very occasionally the Jura minibus (T 01496 820314) meets the car ferry from Port Askaig – phone ahead to check times.

Destinations Port Askaig (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun 7 daily; 5min).

By passenger ferry Between April and September, there's also a passenger ferry service (T 07768 450000, W jurapassengerferry.com) from Tayvallich, on the Argyll mainland, to Craighouse.

CORRYVRECKAN WHIRLPOOL

Boat tours If you're interested in taking a boat trip to Scarba, Corryvreckan or the nearby Garvellach islands, contact Sea.fari (T 01852 300003, W seafari.co.uk), based at Easdale; or Craignish Cruises (T 07747 023038, W craignishcruises.co.uk), in Ardfern.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Antlers 100m north of the distillery T 01496 820123. Unlicensed bistro restaurant that serves up burgers, sandwiches and salads for lunch, and beautifully presented Jura lamb (£14.95), pork and salmon in the evening. Tues–Sun noon–2.30pm & 7–10pm.

Jura Hotel Craighouse T 01496 820243, W jurahotel.co.uk. The island's one and only hotel is not much to look at from the outside, but it's warm and friendly within, and centre of the island's social scene. The hotel does the usual bar meals, and has a shower block and laundry facilities round the back for those who wish to camp in the hotel gardens, which is free (showers £1). Bar: daily 11am–11pm. £95

Sealladh na Mara Four miles north of Craighouse T 01496 820349, W isleofjura.net. A modern crofthouse with just two rooms, both of which have stunning views; guests are also free to avail themselves of the adjoining lounge/dining room. £76

Stirling, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

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WOODLANDS IN THE TROSSACHS

Stirling, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

The central lowlands of Scotland were, for several centuries, the most strategically important area in the country. In 1250, a map of Britain was compiled by a monk of St Albans, which depicted Scotland as two separate land masses connected only by the thin band of Stirling Bridge; although this was a figurative interpretation, it is true that Stirling was once the only gateway from the fertile central belt to the rugged, mountainous north. For long periods of Scotland's history kings, queens, nobles, clan chiefs and soldiers wrestled for control of the area, and it's no surprise that today the landscape is littered with remnants of the past – well-preserved medieval towns and castles, royal residences and battle sites.

Lying at the heart of Scotland, **Stirling** and its fine **castle**, from where you can see both snowcapped Highland peaks and Edinburgh, are unmissable for anyone wanting to grasp the complexities of Scottish history. The castle esplanade commands an impressive view of the surrounding area, including the rocket-like **National Wallace Monument**, a Victorian homage to a local hero.

To the south of the city, on the road to Edinburgh, lies **Falkirk**, its industrial heritage now enlivened by the intriguing Falkirk Wheel; to the east, the gentle Ochil Hills run towards Fife. The highlight of the string of towns at the foot of the Ochils is handsome **Dollar**, from where a path leads up the steep glen to dramatically perched Castle Campbell. The flat plain extending west, the **Carse of Stirling**, has the little-visited **Campsie Fells** on its southern edge and the fabled mountains, glens, lochs and forests of the **Trossachs**, stretching west from **Callander** to Loch Lomond, to the north. Here you'll find abundant opportunities for hiking and mountain biking, as well as sublime mountain scenery.

On the western side of the region, **Loch Lomond** is the largest – and most romanticized – stretch of fresh water in Scotland. At the heart of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, the peerless scenery of the loch and its famously "bonnie banks" can be tainted by the sheer numbers of tourists and day-trippers who stream towards it in summer. It can get similarly clogged in parts of the neighbouring Trossachs, although there's much to appreciate once you break away from the main routes. The area is particularly good for **outdoor activities**: it's traversed by the **Glasgow–Loch Lomond–Killin cycleway**; well-managed forest tracks are ideal for mountain biking; the hills of the Trossachs provide great walking country; and the **West Highland Way**, Scotland's premier long-distance footpath, winds along the length of Loch Lomond up to Fort William in the Highlands.

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

While Stirling, Falkirk and Perth are well served by trains from all over Scotland, the rest of the region is only accessible on sporadic local bus services so you may find it easier to have your own transport. Many people opt to explore the Trossachs by mountain bike. For a bus network map see firstgroup.com.

Tourist information See visitstirling.org.

The Antonine Wall p.289
The West Highland Way p.293
Hiking and biking in the Trossachs p.296
Rob Roy p.297

FALKIRK WHEEL

Highlights

❶ **Stirling Castle** Impregnable, impressive and resonant with history. If you see only one castle in Scotland, make it this one. **See p.280**

❷ **Falkirk Wheel** The most remarkable piece of modern engineering in Britain, this fascinating contraption lifts boats 100ft between two canals. **See p.288**

❸ **Loch Lomond** Putter out on a mail boat to one of the wooded islands at the heart of Scotland's first national park. **See p.290**

❹ **The Trossachs** Pocket Highlands with shining lochs, wooded glens and noble peaks. Great for hiking and mountain biking. **See p.295**

❺ **The Lake of Menteith** One of the loveliest stretches of water in the country, with fishing, swimming and boat trips to an island with a ruined abbey. **See p.296**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.278

Stirling

Straddling the River Forth a few miles upstream from the estuary at Kincardine, **STIRLING** appears at first glance like a smaller version of Edinburgh. With its crag-top castle, steep, cobbled streets and mixed community of locals, students and tourists, it's an appealing place, though it lacks the cosmopolitan edge of its near neighbours Edinburgh and Glasgow.

STIRLING, LOCH LOMOND & THE TROSSACHS

Stirling was the scene of some of the most significant developments in the evolution of the Scottish nation. It was here in 1297 that the Scots, under William Wallace, defeated the English at the **Battle of Stirling Bridge**, only to fight – and win again – under Robert the Bruce just a couple of miles away at the **Battle of Bannockburn** in 1314. Stirling enjoyed its golden age in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, most notably when its castle was the favoured residence of the Stuart monarchy and the setting for the coronation in 1543 of the young Mary, future Queen of Scots.

Today the city is best known for its **castle** and the lofty **National Wallace Monument**, a mammoth Victorian monolith high on Abbey Craig to the northeast.

Stirling Castle

Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–6pm, Oct–March 9.30am–5pm • £14, includes entry to Argyll's Lodging (see p.282); audio-guide £3; car park £4 • ☎ 01786 450000, ⓦ www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk

Stirling Castle presented would-be invaders with a formidable challenge. Its impregnability is most daunting when you approach the town from the west, from where the sheer 250ft drop down the side of the crag is most obvious. The rock was first fortified during the Iron Age, though what you see now dates largely from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On many levels, the main buildings are interspersed with delightful gardens and patches of lawn, while endless battlements, cannon ports, hidden staircases and other nooks and crannies make it thoroughly explorable and inspiring.

For the chance to see the castle at night, look out for special **events** such as the Hogmanay (new year) party and concerts in the atmospheric Great Hall by luminaries such as the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

The Great Hall

In the central part of the castle, the **Outer Close** is the first of two main courtyard areas. Looming over it is the magnificently restored **Great Hall**, dating from 1501–03 and used as a barracks by the British army until 1964. The building stands out across Stirling for its controversially bright, creamy yellow cladding, added in the 1990s after the discovery during renovations of a stretch of the original sixteenth-century limewash behind a bricked-up doorway. Inside, the hall has been restored to its original state as the finest medieval secular building in Scotland, complete with five gaping fireplaces and an impressive hammer-beam ceiling of rough-hewn wood created from 35 oak trees.

The Palace

The exterior of the **Palace**, the largest building in the castle, dates from 1540–42 and is richly decorated with grotesque carved figures and Renaissance sculpture, including, in the left-hand corner, the glaring bearded figure of James V in the dress of a commoner. Inside in the royal apartments are the **Stirling Heads**, 56 elegantly carved oak medallions that once comprised the ceiling of the Presence Chamber, where visitors were presented to royalty. Now costumed actors play the role of various nobles, while specially commissioned tapestries and furniture have returned the rooms to something like their appearance in the mid-sixteenth century.

Chapel Royal and the King's Old Building

On one side of the Inner Close, the steeply sloping upper courtyard of the castle, is the **Chapel Royal**, built in 1594 by James VI for the baptism of his son. Alongside, the **King's Old Building**, at the highest point in the castle, houses the museum of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders regiment, with its collection of well-polished silver and memorabilia.

Douglas Gardens

Go through a narrow passageway between the King's Old Building and the Chapel Royal to get to the **Douglas Gardens**, reputedly the place where the eighth earl of Douglas, suspected of treachery, was thrown to his death by James II in 1452. It's a lovely, quiet corner of the castle, with mature trees and battlements over which there are splendid views of the Highlands, as well as a bird's-eye view down to the **King's Knot**, a series of grassed octagonal mounds which in the seventeenth century were planted with box trees and ornamental hedges.

The Old Town

Stirling evolved from its castle, gradually spreading south and east onto the low-lying flood plain. At the centre of the original **Old Town**, Broad Street was the main thoroughfare, with St John Street running more or less parallel, and St Mary's Wynd forming part of the original route to Stirling Bridge below. Because Stirling is a compact town, sightseeing in the Old Town is best done on foot.

Town Walls

The old centre of Stirling is fortified behind the massive, whinstone boulders of the **town walls**, built in the mid-sixteenth century and intended to ward off the advances of Henry VIII, who had set his sights on the young Mary, Queen of Scots as a wife for his son, Edward. The walls now constitute some of the best-preserved town defences in Scotland, and can be traced by following the path known as **Back Walk**. This walkway was built in the eighteenth century and in the upper reaches leads right under the

castle, taut along the edge of the crag. It's a great way to take in the castle's setting, and gives panoramic views of the countryside.

Argyll's Lodging

At the top of Castle Wynd • Guided tour only; book on T 01786 450000 • Entry included with ticket to Stirling Castle; HS

Argyll's Lodging is a romantic Renaissance townhouse built by Sir William Alexander of Menstrie in the seventeenth century. Once the home of Alexander, the first earl of Stirling, it was later used as a military hospital and youth hostel. The oldest part of the building, with its low ceilings and tiny windows, is the Great Kitchen, whose enormous fireplace comes complete with a special recess for salt, while the Drawing Room, hung with lavishly decorated purple tapestries, contains the ninth earl's imposing chair of state.

Mar's Wark and Church of the Holy Rude

Church of the Holy Rude Easter–Sept daily 11am–4pm

Down Castle Wynd and at the top of Broad Street, a richly decorated facade is about all that survives of **Mar's Wark**, a would-be palace that the first earl of Mar, regent of Scotland and hereditary Keeper of Stirling Castle, started in 1570. His dream house was never to be realized, however, for he died two years later and what had been built was left to ruin, its degeneration speeded up by extensive damage during the 1745 Jacobite rebellion.

Behind here is the **Church of the Holy Rude**, the oldest parts of which, including the impressive oak hammer-beam ceiling, date from the early fifteenth century.

John Cowane's Hospital

49 St John St • May–Oct 10am–4.30pm, Nov–April Tues–Sun 10.30am–5pm • Free • W cowanes.org.uk

Near the Church of the Holy Rude and on the edge of the crag, the rugged, whitewashed **John Cowane's Hospital** was built in 1649 as an almshouse for, at its founder John Cowane's request, "decayed [unsuccessful] members of the Guild of Merchants". Above the entrance, Cowane, a wealthy merchant himself, is commemorated in a painted statue that, it is said, comes alive at Hogmanay. The almshouse now houses a little **café**, and visitors can have a wander round the hall.

Old Town Jail

St John St • End May to Oct daily 10am–5pm • £6.50 • W oldtownjail.com

A sweeping driveway leads from St John Street and up to the impressive **Old Town Jail**, built by Victorian prison reformers as an alternative to the depravity of the medieval Tolbooth. Subsequently used as a military jail, it was rescued from dereliction in 1994, with part of the building turned into offices and a substantial section used to create an entertaining visitor attraction. Telling the history of the building and prisons in general, tours are taken by actors, who enthusiastically change costumes and character a number of times; among the features of the jail they'll introduce you to is a working example of the dreaded crank, a lever that prisoners had to turn 14,400 times a day. Take the glass lift up to the prison roof to admire spectacular views across Stirling and the Forth Valley.

Opposite and just uphill from the entrance to the Old Town Jail on St John Street, look out for the **Boys' Club**, a 1929 conversion of the town's old butter market, with its encouraging little mottoes engraved above the door such as "Keep smiling" and "Quarrelling is taboo".

Tolbooth

Jail Wynd • Daily from 9am • See website for admission charges • T 01786 274000, W tolbooth.stirling.gov.uk

The town's original medieval prison is the **Tolbooth**, now an innovative music and arts centre. Originally built in 1705, the striking modern redevelopment received an architectural award as the UK's best public building. During the renovations a secret staircase was discovered, as was a complete skeleton, thought to have been that of the last man publicly hanged in Stirling. Inside there's access to a top-floor viewing

platform looking out over the Old Town rooftops and a box office where you can find out about the centre's programme (see p.285).

Mercat Cross and Darnley's House

On Broad Street, the town's former marketplace, the various historical buildings and monuments include the stone **Mercat Cross** (the unicorn on top is known, inexplicably, as "the puggy") and **Darnley's House**, where Mary, Queen of Scots' husband is believed to have lodged while she lorded it up in the castle; it now houses a reasonable coffee shop (see p.284).

The Lower Town and around

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the threat of attack on Stirling decreased, the centre of commercial life crept down towards the River Forth, with the modern town growing on the edge of the plain over which the castle stands guard. By the time the two main streets of the Old Town merge into King Street, austere Victorian facades block the sun from the cobbled road. The fifteenth-century **Old Bridge** over the Forth lies to the north on the edge of the town centre. Although once the most important river crossing in Scotland it now stands virtually forgotten, an incidental reminder of Stirling's former importance.

Smith Art Gallery and Museum

Dumbarton Rd • Tues–Sat 10.30am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm • Free • 01786 471917, smithartgalleryandmuseum.co.uk

The **Smith Art Gallery and Museum** sits near the edge of town near the King's Knot. Founded in 1874 with a legacy from local painter and collector Thomas Stuart Smith, it houses The Stirling Story, a reasonably entertaining whirl through the history of the town, that balances the stories of kings and queens with more social and domestic history. Among the exhibits is the world's oldest known football, made out of a pig's bladder; found in the rafters of the Queen's Chamber in the castle, it is thought to date from the 1540s. The small art gallery includes changing displays of mostly local arts and crafts, contemporary art and photography, and there's a pleasant café.

The National Wallace Monument

1.5 miles north of the Old Town • Daily: April–June & Sept–Oct 10am–5pm • July & Aug 10am–6pm • Nov–March 10.30am–4pm • £8.50 • nationalwallacemonument.com • Various local buses including First's #63

A mile and a half north of the Old Town, the prominent **National Wallace Monument** is a freestanding, five-storey tower built in the 1860s as a tribute to Sir William Wallace, the freedom fighter who led Scottish resistance to Edward I, the "Hammer of the Scots", in the late thirteenth century. The crag on which the monument is set was the scene of Wallace's greatest victory, when he sent his troops charging down the hillside onto the plain to defeat the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297. An audio-tour handset (free) leads you round inside the tower, where you can find Wallace's long steel sword and the Hall of (Scottish) Heroes, a row of stern white marble busts featuring John Knox and Adam Smith. If you can manage the climb – up 246 spiral steps – to the top of the 220ft tower, you'll be rewarded with superb views across to Fife and Ben Lomond.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — STIRLING

By train The train station is near the centre of town on Station Rd, a 2min walk from the bus station.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 2hr 5min); Dundee (hourly; 55min); Edinburgh (every 30min; 1hr); Falkirk (every 30min; 30min); Glasgow Queen Street (every 20min; 25–40min); Inverness (3–5 daily; 2hr 55min); Perth (hourly; 30min).

By bus The bus station is on Goosecroft Rd.

Destinations Aberfoyle (4 daily; 45min); Callander (1–2 hourly; 45min); Dollar (every 2hr; 35min); Doune (1–2 hourly; 25min); Dunblane (hourly; 20min); Dundee (hourly; 1hr 30min); Edinburgh (hourly; 1hr); Falkirk (hourly; 30min); Glasgow (hourly; 50min); Inverness (every 2hr; 3hr 20min); Perth (hourly; 40min); St Andrews (every 2hr; 1hr 55min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office The main tourist office is a 10min walk away from the city centre (41 Dumbarton Rd; daily 10am–5pm; T01786 475019, W visitstirling.org). As well as the usual range of books, maps and leaflets it offers an accommodation booking service (£4) and internet access.

ACCOMMODATION

It's worth booking accommodation as far in advance as possible, especially from May to October. Stirling has reasonable options in most accommodation categories and is understandably popular both as a lower-key alternative to Glasgow or Edinburgh, and as a base for exploring central Scotland.

7

HOTELS, B&BS AND HOSTELS

Adamo 78 Upper Craigs T01786 430890, W adamohotels.com. Stirling's attempt at a boutique hotel, in a sturdy stone mansion close to the city centre. Lots of purple and black contemporary styling, mod cons in the rooms and an all-day menu in the restaurant. There's a sister hotel in central Bridge of Allan in a similarly handsome building. £110

Castlecroft Ballengeich Rd T01786 474933, W castlecroft-uk.com. Modern guesthouse with six en-suite rooms on the site of the King's Stables just beneath the castle rock, with terrific views north and west, and a very friendly welcome. £60

No. 10 10 Gladstone Place T01786 472681, W cameron-10.co.uk. Modernized Victorian home with neat, uncluttered decor providing friendly and pleasant B&B accommodation. It's close to the city centre, but on a quiet and elegant King's Park street. £60

The Portcullis Castle Wynd T01786 472290, W theportcullishotel.com. Traditional hotel with four en-suite rooms in an imposing building built in 1787 with a dramatic Old Town location adjacent to the castle. Old-fashioned bar, open log fire and beer garden. £75

Stirling Highland Hotel Spittal St T01786 272727, W pumahotels.co.uk/hotels/stirling-highland-hotel. Upmarket if rather pretentiously genteel hotel in a handsome Victorian Gothic building that once housed Stirling High School and still maintains an observatory on the top floor. It is just 500yd from the castle and features comfortable rooms and good leisure facilities. £95

★ **SYHA hostel** St John St T01786 473442, W syha.org.uk. Situated at the top of the town, (a strenuous trek with a backpack), in a converted church with an impressive 1824 Palladian facade. Dorms are small and all have showers and toilets en suite, and facilities include a games room and internet access. £19.50

Willy Wallace Independent Hostel 77 Murray Place T01786 446773, W willywallacehostel.com. Located 100yd from the station in a Victorian building on a busy street, this is the liveliest (and noisiest) budget option in town, with a big common room, five dorms, a family room and a couple of double and twin rooms. £33

SELF-CATERING

Stirling University T01786 467141, W www.holidays.stir.ac.uk. Campus accommodation in halls of residence and self-catering flats a couple of miles north of the town centre. The campus is served by regular buses from Murray Place in the town centre. June to early Sept. En-suite single £33

CAMPING

Witches Craig Caravan & Camping Park Blairlogie T01786 474947, W witchescraig.co.uk. A very attractive sylvan spot tucked under the Ochil Hills, 3 miles east off the A91 road to St Andrews. Take #62 bus from Stirling. April–Oct. £19.50/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

Stirling doesn't have a huge number of eating places, but there are decent options in the scenic old part of town.

Darnley Coffee House Bow St (the continuation of Broad St) T01786 474468. A bit old-fashioned but with plenty of Old Town atmosphere and serving reasonably priced lunches, teas and home-made cakes in an impressive barrel-vaulted interior. Snacks from round £5. 11am–4pm.

Greengrocer Down the Pend 81 Port St T01786 479159. A handy coffee or lunch stop, this lively deli/café tucked down a pend (passageway) in the centre of town serves delicious home-made soups for around £5, plus hearty sandwiches, scones and cakes. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 11am–3.30pm.

Hermann's Mar Place House, 58 Broad St ☎01786 450632, ⓦhermanns-restaurant.co.uk. The classiest option in Stirling, *Hermann's* is set in the historic Mar Place House towards the top of the Old Town with views of the Church of the Holy Rude. It operates brasserie-style at lunchtime and offers upmarket Austrian-Scottish dining such as *jäger schnitzel* (veal) or Scottish lamb with cheese potatoes in the evening (mains from £16). Noon–2.30pm & 6–11pm.

Mamma Mia 52 Spittal St ☎01786 446124, ⓦmammamiastirling.co.uk. Set in an old-town mansion, this is an irrepressibly friendly and boisterous southern Italian restaurant, run by some boys from Bari. They specialize in seafood dishes such as *spaghetti alla pescatora* (£17.55) as well as Italian standards. Mon & Tues 5–11pm, Wed–Sat noon–3pm & 5–11pm, Sun noon–9pm.

Mediterranéa 4 Viewfield Place ☎01786 478534, ⓦmediterraneearestaurant.com. Spanish tapas (from £3.75) and moderately priced pan-Mediterranean dishes (such as Greek souvlaki for £12.95) in an upbeat atmosphere. 5.30–10pm.

Unicorn Café Stirling Castle ☎01786 450000, ⓦwww.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/home/visit/facilities/cafe. The castle's efficiently run café is a better-than-average spot for a simple soup (£4.75) and sandwich or coffee and cake. The rooftop terrace enjoys sweeping views. April–Sept 9.30am–6pm, Oct–March 9.30am–5pm.

NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT

The nightlife scene in Stirling is nothing to write home about, with the cluster of mainstream bars and pubs changing hands frequently. The best choice on a summer evening is the beer garden at the *Portcullis Hotel*. There's a mainstream Vue cinema behind the train station.

MacRobert Arts Centre On the university campus at Bridge of Allan ☎01786 466666, ⓦmacrobert.org. Shows mainstream and art-house films, and hosts theatre, music and dance events. The campus itself is regularly voted the most beautiful in Scotland.

★ **Tolbooth** Jail Wynd ☎01786 274000, ⓦstirling.gov.uk/tolbooth. By far the best option for a night out, the Tolbooth has a glamorous high-ceilinged bar (open only when there's an event on) and a folk-orientated live music programme. Look out for their boisterous ceilidhs in July and August. Open daily.

Around Stirling

Just on the outskirts of town is **Bannockburn**, one of the country's most significant battlefields, while the satellite town of **Bridge of Allan** offers more sedate attractions. North and west of Stirling are the historic draws of the cathedral at **Dunblane**, the imposing castle at **Doune** and the attractive settlements of the **Carse of Stirling**, while, on either side of the Forth, the county of **Clackmannanshire** at the foot of the **Ochil Hills**. A highlight of the semi-industrial hinterland to the east and south of the city is the massive **Falkirk Wheel**, a spectacular feat of modern engineering. Rugged ruined castles are the draw at both **Dollar** and **Loch Leven**.

Bannockburn

A872, 2 miles south of Stirling city centre • ☎0844 493 2139 • #24, #52 or #57 bus from Stirling bus station or Murray Place

A couple of miles south of Stirling, all but surrounded by drab suburban housing, the **Bannockburn Heritage Centre** commemorates the most famous battle in Scottish history, when King Robert the Bruce won his mighty victory over the English at the **Battle of Bannockburn** on June 24, 1314. It was this battle, the climax of the Wars of Independence, which united the Scots under Bruce and led to independence from England, sealed by the Declaration of Arbroath (1320) and the Treaty of Northampton (1328). At the time of writing the visitor centre was closed for a major restoration to coincide with the seven-hundredth anniversary of the battle in 2014.

Dunblane

Small, attractive **DUNBLANE** has been an important ecclesiastical centre since the seventh century, when the Celts founded the church of St Blane here. The cathedral, praised in the highest terms by John Ruskin, stands serenely amid a clutch of old buildings.

Dunblane Cathedral

April–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm, Sun 2pm–5pm • Oct–March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4pm, Sun 2–4pm • Free; HS

Dunblane Cathedral dates mainly from the thirteenth century, and restoration work carried out a century ago returned it to its Gothic splendour. Inside, note the delicate blue-purple stained glass, and the exquisitely carved pews, screen and choir stalls, all crafted in the early twentieth century. Memorials include a tenth-century Celtic cross-slab standing stone and a modern, four-sided standing stone commemorating the tragic shooting in 1996 of sixteen Dunblane schoolchildren and their teacher.

Dunblane Museum

The Cross • May to early Oct Mon–Sat 10.30am–4.30pm • Free

The seventeenth-century Dean's contains houses the small **Dunblane Museum**, which has exhibits on local history, memorabilia from the battle of Sherrifmuir, medieval coins and suchlike. There's also a display on Dunblane's favourite son, Andy Murray, who triumphantly won the men's singles at Wimbledon in 2013: you can see a signed tennis racquet, plus his Olympic cap and jacket (he won gold and silver in London in 2012).

Leighton Library

61 High St • April–Sept Mon–Tues & Thurs–Fri 11am–2pm • Donation requested • T 01786 822296, W leightonlibrary.co.uk

The **Leighton Library**, established in 1684, is the oldest private lending library in Scotland and houses 4500 books in ninety languages, printed between 1500 and 1840. Visitors can browse through some of the country's rarest books, including a first edition of Sir Walter Scott's *Lady of the Lake*.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUNBLANE

By train Frequent trains connect Stirling with Dunblane (every 20min; 13min).

By bus Occasional buses (#47 and #C48 from Stirling bus station) make the journey 5 miles north of Stirling to Dunblane.

ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND DRINKING

Chimes House B&B Cathedral Square T 01786 822481, W bedandbreakfast-scotland.co.uk. A friendly, old-fashioned B&B which overlooks the cathedral in Cathedral Square and offers pleasant en-suite doubles as well as a good Scottish breakfast. £50

Tappit Hen Kirk St T 01786 825226, W thetappithen-dunblane.co.uk. This trad flower-bedecked pub right by the cathedral is a good place for a pint of real ale, and hosts regular folk music nights as well as a May ale festival. Sun–Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri–Sat 11am–1am.

Doune Castle

3 miles west of Dunblane • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm • Nov–March Mon–Wed & Sat–Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS

DOUNE, eight miles northwest of Stirling and three miles due west of Dunblane, is a sleepy village surrounding a fourteenth-century **castle**, a marvellous semi-ruin standing on a small hill in a bend of the River Teith. Today the most prominent features of the castle are its mighty 95ft-high gatehouse, with its spacious vaulted rooms, and the kitchens, complete with medieval rubbish chute. Built by Robert, Duke of Albany, the castle ended up in the hands of the second earl of Moray, James Stewart – son of James V and half-brother of Mary, Queen of Scots – who was murdered in 1592 and immortalized in the ballad *The Bonnie Earl of Moray*; it was also used as a prison by Bonnie Prince Charlie's army after the battle of Falkirk. The building's greatest claim to fame today, however, is as the setting for the 1970s movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. With legions of Python fans arriving here on pilgrimage, Historic Scotland sells a selection of film souvenirs including bottles of the local Holy Grail Ale.

Deanston Distillery and village

A84, just south of Doune • Daily 10am–5pm • Tours £8–40 • 01786 843010, deanstonmalt.com

In the eighteenth century **Deanston** was a cotton mill staffed by Gaelic-speaking victims of the Clearances, and featured the biggest water wheel in Europe. Following the decline of the British cotton industry the mill finally closed in 1965, but swiftly reopened as a **distillery**; the first single malt was created 1982. True to its water-powered origins, Deanston is self-sufficient in hydroelectricity and even supplies a surplus to the national grid. The distillery is notable for its gleaming brass stills as well as for its non-peaty whisky, with notes of vanilla and honey. Barrels are stored in the vast 1825 weaving shed, and the old mill clock still keeps time.

Tours range from the straightforward but highly informative Deanston Tour where you imbibe one dram, to an extended Heritage Tour and a tutored tasting with the distillery manager (book in advance). Take a walk up the road from the distillery to see the attractive purpose-built **mill village**.

ACCOMMODATION — DOUNE

Glenardoch House Castle Rd 01786 841489, glenardochhouse.com. Close to the castle, accommodation is available at this excellent eighteenth-century country-house B&B, which has two comfortable en-suite rooms and a beautiful riverside garden. May–Sept £75

SHOPPING

Scottish Antique & Arts Centre 1 mile west on the A84 01786 841203, scottish-antiques.com. Just outside the village of Doune, the "antiques village", as it's known locally is a vast covered market selling high-quality memorabilia and furniture, notably some stunning Arts and Crafts pieces. There's a reasonable on-site café. 10am–5pm

The Carse of Stirling

West of Stirling, the wide flood plain of the Forth River is known as the Carse of Forth or **Carse of Stirling**. This is fertile farmland bounded on the south by the Gargunnock and Fintry hills, which gradually blend into the **Campsie Fells**. **Kippen**, a scenic village with strong Rob Roy associations, has a couple of good eating options. To the north, the Trossachs inevitably draw many visitors.

Flanders Moss nature reserve

Turn north off the A811 on the B822 towards Callander, and follow the signs

You can find out about the rich ecology and history of the carse's reclaimed marshland at the **Flanders Moss** nature reserve. You walk through the bog on raised boardwalks, spotting dragonflies, damselflies, pond-skaters and green tiger beetles amongst the sphaghnum moss and heather.

Drymen

At the western end of the Campsie Fells, all roads, including the West Highland Way (see box, p.293), meet at the small village of **DRYMEN**, an ancient ecclesiastical centre and stopover point for Highland drovers, which sits peacefully in the hills overlooking the winding Endrick Water as it nears Loch Lomond.

Glengoyne Distillery

Dumgoyne • Tours on the hour daily: March–Nov 10am–4pm • Dec–Feb 11am–3pm • From £7.50 • 01360 550254, glengoyne.com

South of Drymen and not far from Killearn, picturesque **Glengoyne Distillery** features a pagoda roof and whitewashed buildings. Tours range from explorations of the building to classes on matching whisky with chocolate, to a high-powered masterclass.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CARSE OF STIRLING

By bus The hourly bus #12 from Stirling to Balfron goes through Gargunnock and Kippen.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

KIPPEN

Cross Keys 01786 870293, kippencrosskeys.com. This venerable village inn, licensed since 1703, serves above-standard pub grub – try the venison and beetroot casserole (£14) – and features three stylishly renovated rooms. Food served Mon–Fri noon–3pm & 5–9pm, Sat noon–9pm, Sun noon–8pm. £70

Woodhouse Just off the roundabout outside Kippen on the A811 01786 870156, thewoodhousekippen.com. Buzzy, bright and irresistible self-styled diner with a wood-fired stove and an attached farm shop. Excellent soups, sandwiches, specials and baking (from £5) are all home-made, mostly with local ingredients. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm.

GARGUNNOCK

Gargunnock House Gargunnock 01628 825925, landmarktrust.org.uk. If you're in a group, consider a stay at this wonderful country house operated by the Landmark Trust. Behind the Georgian facade are elements of the original sixteenth-century tower house. The historic interiors are plush and beautifully preserved. Sleeps sixteen. Four nights from £787

DRYMEN

Clachan Inn Drymen Square 01360 660824, clachaninndrymen.co.uk. Dating back to 1734, the inn is an atmospheric spot for a pint and offers a range of great simple pub grub such as scampi and burgers (from £6.50). Mon–Sat 11am–11pm, Sun 12.30pm–10.30pm; food served all day.

The Pottery 9–11 Main St, 01360 660458, thedrymenpottery.co.uk. Features a lively upstairs pub (with pool table) serving plain but tasty fish and chips, burgers and pizzas (from £5.95) and a downstairs coffee shop with a nice timbered roof and a pretty garden, serving delicious locally baked cakes. Mon–Sat 9.30am–10pm, Sun 10am–9pm.

Winnock Hotel The Square 01360 660245, winnockhotel.com. In the village square, this flower-bedecked eighteenth-century coaching inn has fairly comfortable en-suite rooms. Look out for the ceilidh nights. £69.50

The Falkirk Wheel

Lime Rd, Tamfourhill • Visitor centre daily 10am–5.30pm • Boat tours daily: April–Oct every 30min 10am–4.30pm; Nov–March hourly 10am–3pm • £8.95 • thefalkirkwheel.co.uk • Bus #3 from Falkirk town centre or walk along the Union Canal from Falkirk High train station

The icon of an ambitious project to link Falkirk's two long-neglected canals is the remarkable **Falkirk Wheel**, opened in 2002 two miles west of Falkirk town centre. Looking more like a giant metal claw than a wheel, it was designed to solve the problem of the 115ft gap between the Union and Forth and Clyde canals. Back in the 1930s, before the canals went to rack and ruin, barges had to spend a day passing though eleven locks. To solve the problem, engineers designed the giant lift, which scoops a boat in one claw and an equal weight of water in the other. The simple process of rotating the perfectly weighted claws and depositing the boat in the other canal is said to use only the same energy that it takes to boil eight kettles.

Boat tours take you from the visitor centre, where there's a decent **café**, on a one-hour journey from the lower basin into the wheel, along the Union Canal for a short distance, then back down to the basin again via the wheel. The boat trip isn't essential if you just want to see the wheel in action, which can be done by **walking** around the basin and adjoining towpaths.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — FALKIRK WHEEL

By train Regular trains run from Edinburgh to Stirling via Falkirk Grahamston Station, while Falkirk High Station, which is further from the centre, is a stop on the Edinburgh–Glasgow line.

Destinations Edinburgh (every 15–30min; 30min); Glasgow Queen Street (every 15–30min; 25min); Stirling (every 30min; 15min).

By bus Falkirk's centrally located bus station is at Callendar Riggs. First Bus #3 Red Line runs to Falkirk Wheel from the bus and coach stations (every 15min).

Dollar

Nestling in a fold of the Ochils on the northern bank of the small River Devon, where mountain waters rush off the hills, affluent **DOLLAR** is known for its Academy, founded

THE ANTONINE WALL

Rough Castle, signposted off the B816 just west of Falkirk, is one of the forts set up at two-mile intervals to defend the entire length of the Roman **Antonine Wall**. The most northerly frontier of the Roman Empire, the wall was built in 142 AD, of turf rather than stone, and stretched for 37 miles right across the country from the Forth to the Clyde. Assailed by skirmishing Picts and the grim Scottish weather, it didn't take long for the Romans to abandon the wall and retreat to Hadrian's Wall, just south of Scotland's present border with England. The signposted site lies along the potholed back road, and though little more than a large grassy mound interpreted by a couple of information boards, the remains at Rough Castle are the best-preserved part of the wall, which has UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

in 1820 with a substantial bequest from local lad John MacNabb; its pupils and staff account for around a third of the town's population. The walk from town up the glen to moody Castle Campbell makes for a dramatic approach.

Castle Campbell

Castle Rd • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm • Nov–March Mon–Wed, Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • 01259 742408

Above Dollar, the steep ravine of **Dollar Glen** is commanded by **Castle Campbell**, formerly, and unofficially, known as Castle Gloom – a fine and evocative tag but, prosaically, a derivation of "Gloume", an old Gaelic name. A one-and-a-half-mile-long road leads up from Dollar's main street, but becomes very narrow and steep and stops short of the castle, with only limited parking at the top. A series of marked **walks** leads up the glen, taking in mossy crags, rushing streams and, if you strike out on the three-hour hike to the top of Dollar Hill, great views.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — DOLLAR

By bus The Stagecoach bus service #23 between Stirling and St Andrews travels along the A91 through the Hillfoot villages to Dollar.

Maps A map shows the walks on a board on the way up to the castle, though it's advisable to buy the relevant OS map (Explorer 366) if you're setting off for the longer hike.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Café des Fleurs 44 Bridge St 01259 743699. Stylish little café/tearoom featuring impressive home baking: you might encounter a lemon drizzle cake, strawberry and white chocolate scones or mini red velvet sponges. Daily 9am–5pm.

Kennels Cottage Dollarbeg 01259 742186, guesthousescotland.co.uk. A great B&B located in an attractive whitewashed former gamekeeper's cottage at Dollarbeg, just south of Dollar. Their own chickens provide the breakfast eggs. £80

Kinross

Although by no means a large place, **KINROSS**, ten miles east of Dollar, has been transformed in the last couple of decades by the construction of the nearby M90 Edinburgh–Perth motorway. Not far from here is Balado Farm, location of the annual **T in the Park** (tinthepark.com), one of the largest outdoor weekend music events in Britain.

Loch Leven

Without doubt the most attractive part of Kinross is by the shores of trout-filled **Loch Leven**, signposted from the main street. The whole loch is a National Nature Reserve; it's a good place to see visiting geese. There's a reasonable **café** by the ferry ticket office.

Loch Leven Castle

Loch Leven • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm • Oct 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50 including ferry trip; HS • 07778 040483

From the shore a small ferry chugs over to an island on which stands the ruined

fourteenth-century **Loch Leven Castle**, where Robert the Bruce established his exchequer and where Mary, Queen of Scots was imprisoned for eleven months in 1567–68. This isn't the only island fortress Mary spent time in; it's easy to imagine the isolation of the tragic queen, who is believed to have miscarried twins while here. She managed to charm the 18-year-old brother of the castle's owner, Sir William Douglas, into helping her escape: he stole the castle keys, secured a boat in which to row ashore, locked the castle gates behind them and threw the keys into the loch – from where they were retrieved three centuries later.

The classically proportioned pile you'll see on the boat trip is late seventeenth-century **Kinross House**, built and owned by the architect of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. Now in private hands, its gardens are undergoing restoration, and may open to the public in future.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **KINROSS**

By bus Bus #23 connects Kinross and Stirling (6 daily; 55min).

Loch Lomond

www.lochlomond-trossachs.org

The largest stretch of fresh water in Britain (23 miles long and up to five miles wide), **Loch Lomond** is the epitome of Scottish scenic splendour, thanks in large part to the ballad that fondly recalls its "bonnie, bonnie banks". The song was said to have been written by a Jacobite prisoner captured by the English, who, sure of his fate, wrote that his spirit would return to Scotland on the low road much faster than his living compatriots on the high road.

The **Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park** covers over seven hundred square miles of scenic territory from the shores of Loch Long in Cowal to Loch Earn and Loch Tay, on the southwest fringes of Perthshire. The centrepiece is undoubtedly Loch Lomond, and the most popular gateway is **Balloch**, the town at the loch's southern tip; with Glasgow city centre just nineteen miles away, both Balloch and the southwest side of the loch around **Luss** are often packed with day-trippers and tour coaches. Many of these continue up the western side of the loch, though the fast A82 road isn't ideal for tourists who wish to enjoy a leisurely drive.

Very different in tone, the verdant eastern side of the loch, abutting the Trossachs, operates at a different pace, with wooden ferryboats puttering out to a scattering of tree-covered islands off the village of **Balmaha**. If you're looking for a relatively easy climb with an impressive view over Loch Lomond, start at Balmaha for the ascent of **Conic Hill** (1175ft), a two- to three-hour walk through forest and open hillside. Much of the eastern shore can only be reached by boat or on foot, although the West Highland Way long-distance footpath (see box, p.293) and the distinctive peak of **Ben Lomond** ensure that even these parts are well traversed.

Balloch

The main settlement by Loch Lomond is **BALLOCH**, at the southwestern corner of the loch, where the water channels into the River Leven for its short journey south to the sea in the Firth of Clyde. Balloch has few redeeming features and is little more than a suburb of the factory town of Alexandria, but you might want to arrange a loch trip from here, or shop at the Loch Lomond stores complex. Across the river in the extensive mature grounds of **Balloch Castle Country Park**, there are shoreside and sylvan walks.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — BALLOCH

By train Balloch has a direct train connection with Glasgow Queen Street (every 30min; 50min).

By bus Regular buses connect Balloch with Balmaha (every 2hr; 25min) and Luss (hourly; 15min).

Tourist office The Old Station Building contains a tourist office (☎01389 753533; daily: June–Aug 9.30am–6pm; Sept–May 10am–5pm).

ACTIVITIES

Can You Experience ☎01389 602576, ⓦcanyouexperience.com. Based right beside Drumkinnon Tower, Can You Experience rents out canoes, bikes and even pedalos. They also organize "aquasphering" in summer, allowing kids to literally walk on water, in large plastic balls.

Sweeney's Cruises ☎01389 752376, ⓦwww.sweeneyscruises.com. In the centre of town near the bridge, Sweeney's Cruises make loch trips, including a 2hr sailing to Luss.

ACCOMMODATION

Cameron House Loch Lomond, Alexandria ☎0871 222 4681, ⓦdevere-hotels.co.uk. The exclusive DeVere *Cameron House* resort just north of Balloch, has its own spa and championship golf course as well as the area's best restaurant, an offshoot of Edinburgh's *Martin Wishart*. **£180**

Dumbain Farm Balloch ☎01389 752263, ⓦdumbainfarm.co.uk. Rambling whitewashed farm with bright and elegant rooms which have TVs and tea- and coffee-making facilities. Trad Scottish breakfast, cooked on an Aga, with home-made jams and baking. **£70**

SHOPPING

Lomond Shores Ben Lomond Way, Balloch ☎01389 751031, ⓦlochlomondshores.com. A "retail crescent" of shops including branches of Edinburgh's venerable department store, Jenners, and of the city's best deli, Valvona & Crolla. The centre can be accessed from town on a miniature train, or by the lakeside path.

The eastern shore

The tranquil **eastern shore** is far better for walking and appreciating the loch's natural beauty than the overcrowded western side. It's the access point for climbing **Ben Lomond** and visiting **Inchcailloch** island, and where the minor road peters out at **Rowardennan** you can continue on foot to the village of **Inversnaid**.

Balmaha

The tiny lochside settlement of **BALMAHA** stands on the Highland Boundary Fault: if you stand on the viewpoint above the pier, you can see the fault line clearly marked by the series of woody islands that form giant stepping stones across the loch. Many of the loch's 37 **islands** are privately owned, and, rather quaintly, an old wooden mail boat still delivers post to four of them. Balmaha gets very busy in summer, not least with day-trippers on the West Highland Way.

Inchcailloch

Boat rental MacFarlane & Son • From £10/hr or £40/day, ferry service £5 return • ☎01360 870214, ⓦbalmahaboatyard.co.uk

Owned by Scottish Natural Heritage, **Inchcailloch** is the closest island to Balmaha. A signposted two-mile nature trail leads around the island, which was extensively planted with oaks to provide bark for the local tanning industry. Along the way you'll encounter the ruins of a fourteenth-century nunnery and associated burial ground, and there's a picnic and camping site at Port Bawn on the southwestern side of the island, near a sandy beach. Until the mid-seventeenth century parishioners on the far (western) shore of Loch Lomond used to row across to Inchcailloch for Sunday services at the church linked to the nunnery. It's possible to row here yourself using a boat rented from MacFarlane & Son, or use their on-demand ferry service.

Rowardennan

Public transport ends at Balmaha, but another seven miles north through the woods brings you to the end of the road at **ROWARDENNAN**, a scattered settlement below Ben Lomond.

THE WEST HIGHLAND WAY

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 392, 384, 377, 364, 385, 342, 347 and 348

Opened in 1980, the spectacular **West Highland Way** was Scotland's first long-distance footpath, stretching some 95 miles from Milngavie (pronounced "mill-guy"), six miles north of central Glasgow, to Fort William, where it reaches the foot of Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain. Today, it is by far the most popular such footpath in Scotland, and while for many the range of scenery, relative ease of walking and nearby facilities make it a classic route, others find it a little too busy in high season, particularly in comparison with the isolation of many other parts of the Highlands.

THE ROUTE

The Way follows a combination of ancient **drove roads**, along which Highlanders herded their cattle and sheep to market in the Lowlands, military roads, built by troops to control the Jacobite insurgency in the eighteenth century, old coaching roads and disused railway lines. In addition to the stunning scenery, which is increasingly dramatic as the path heads north, walkers may see some of Scotland's rarer **wildlife**, including red deer, feral goats and, soaring over the highest peaks, golden eagles.

Running through theLowlands north of Glasgow, the route runs along the eastern shores of Loch Lomond, over the Highland Boundary Fault Line, then round Crianlarich, crossing open heather moorland across the **Rannoch Moor** wilderness area. It passes close to **Glen Coe** (see p.404) before reaching **Fort William** (see p.396). Apart from a stretch between Loch Lomond and Bridge of Orchy, when the path is within earshot of the main road, this is wild, remote country: north of Rowardennan on Loch Lomond, the landscape is increasingly exposed, and you should be well prepared for changeable weather.

TACKLING THE ROUTE

Though this is emphatically not the most strenuous of Britain's long-distance walks – it passes between lofty mountain peaks, rather than over them – a moderate degree of fitness is required as there are some steep ascents. If you're looking for an added challenge, you could work a climb of Ben Lomond or Ben Nevis into your schedule. You might choose to walk individual sections of the Way (the eight-mile climb from Glen Coe up the Devil's Staircase is particularly spectacular), but to tackle the whole thing you need to set aside at least seven days; avoid a Saturday start from Milngavie and you'll be less likely to be walking with hordes of people, and there'll be less pressure on accommodation. Most walkers tackle the route from south to north, and manage between ten and fourteen miles a day, staying at hotels, B&Bs and bunkhouses en route. Camping is permitted at recognized sites.

INFORMATION

The West Highland Way Official Guide (£16.99). Includes a foldout map as well as descriptions of the route, with detailed cultural, historical, archeological and wildlife information.

Official website west-highland-way.co.uk. Further details about the Way, including a comprehensive accommodation list. The site also has links to tour companies and transport providers, who can take your luggage from one stopping point to the next.

Ben Lomond

Ben Lomond (3192ft) is the most southerly of the "Munros" (see p.10) and one of the most popular mountains in Scotland, its commanding position above Loch Lomond affording amazing views of both the Highlands and Lowlands. The well-signposted route to the summit and back from Rowardennan takes five to six hours.

Inversnaid

Only walkers can continue north up the lochside from Rowardennan, where the only other settlement is seven miles north at **INVERSNAID**, made famous by a poem of the same name by Gerard Manley Hopkins about a frothing waterfall nearby ("This darksome burn, horseback brown/His rollrock highroad roaring down").

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By car/bus The dead-end B837 from Drymen (see p.287) will take you halfway up the east bank to Rowardennan, as far as you can get by car or bus (#309 from Balloch and Drymen runs to Balmaha every 2hr), while the West Highland Way sticks close to the shores for the entire length of the loch.

Ferry to Rowardennan Passenger ferries (Easter–Sept 2 daily; ☎01301 702356, ⓦcruiselochlomond.co.uk) cross from Tarbert, on the west shore.

Ferry to Inversnaid It's also possible to get to or from Inversnaid by ferry (£4 one-way/£5 return), which crosses from Inveruglas, directly opposite on the western shore. You'll have to phone the *Inversnaid Hotel* (01887 386223) to make arrangements.

THE EASTERN SHORE

INFORMATION AND TOURS

National Park Centre Balmaha; daily: April–Sept 9.30am–4pm. Beside the large car park and offering information about local forest walks and occasional wildlife workshops.

Boat tours It's possible to join the mail-boat cruise, which is run by MacFarlane & Son, from the jetty at Balmaha. The timetable allows a one-hour stop on Inchmurrin Island, which has just ten permanent residents; it has the ruins of a monastery and castle, and food is served in the bar of the *Inchmurrin Hotel* (May–Oct Mon, Thurs & Sat 11.30am returns 2pm; July & Aug daily 11.30am returns 2pm; Oct–April Mon & Thurs 10.50am returns noon; £9; ☎01360 870214, ⓦbalmahaboatyard.co.uk).

7

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

BALMAHA

Balmaha B&B and Bunkhouse Balmaha House ☎01360 870218, ⓦbalmahahouse.co.uk. Welcoming West Highland Way accommodation located on the loch shore. The bunkhouse is brand new. £70; bunkhouse bed £15

Oak Tree Inn Balmaha ☎01360 870357, ⓦoak-tree-inn.co.uk. This well-run inn is set back from the boatyard, and offers en-suite doubles and bunk-bed quads. There's also a convivial pub, where food is served all day. £85

Passfoot Cottage B&B Balmaha ☎01360 870324, ⓦwww.passfoot.com. This friendly and appealing little option is housed in a whitewashed toll cottage, enjoying an idyllic location and lochside garden. Great for walks along the shore. £75

ROWARDENNAN

Cashel Rowardennan, 2 miles north of Balmaha ☎01360 870234. A lovely, secluded Forestry Commission campsite on the loch shore with a decent loo block. Campers can launch craft from here onto the loch, and Ben Lomond is just 4 miles away. Closed Nov–March. £16.10/pitch

Clansman Bar Rowardennan Hotel ☎01360 870273, ⓦrowardennanhotel.co.uk. Nightlife in the area centres on this hotel's bar, which features open fires, a beer garden and weekend live music. Closed weekdays out of season.

Rowardennan Lodge Youth Hostel Rowardennan ☎01360 870259, ⓦsyha.org.uk. A wonderfully situated SYHA hostel in a classic turreted Scots Baronial lodge with lawns running down to the shore. March–Oct. £16.10

The western shore

Despite the roar of traffic hurtling along the upgraded A82, the **west shore** of Loch Lomond is an undeniably beautiful stretch of water. Ten miles north of attractive **Luss** is the small settlement of **TARBET**, where the West Highland **train** reaches the shoreline. North of Tarbet, the A82 turns back into the narrow, winding road of old, making for slower but much more interesting driving. There's one more **train station** on Loch Lomond at Ardlui, at the mountain-framed head of the loch, but most travellers continue a couple of miles further north to **INVERARNAN**, where you'll find the *Drovers Inn,* arguably the most idiosyncratic **hotel** in Scotland.

Luss

LUSS is the prettiest village in the region, with its prim, identical sandstone and slate cottages garlanded in rambling roses, and its narrow sand and pebble strand. However, its charms are no secret and its streets and beach can become crowded in summer. If you want to escape the hordes, pop into the parish **church**, a haven of peace and has some fine Victorian stained-glass windows and a lovely ceiling made from Scots pine rafters.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

THE WESTERN SHORE

By bus Buses run from Tarbet to Loch Lomond's western shore (hourly; 10min).

INFORMATION AND TOURS

LUSS

Tourist information Pick up local information at the Luss Visitor Centre (T 01436 860229).

TARBERT

Tourist office Tarbet has a small tourist office (April–Oct daily; T 01301 702260).

Boat tours At the pier over the road from the prominent *Tarbet Hotel* you can hop on an hour-long loch cruise run by Cruise Loch Lomond (T 01301 702356, W cruiselochlomond.co.uk). The same operator also offers trips to Inversnaid and Rowardennan on the eastern side.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

LUSS

Coach House Loch Lomond Trading Company Limited T 01436 860341. A spruce and lively little tearoom serving a range of teas, cakes, ciabattas, Orkney ice cream and its own take on haggis. 10am–5pm.

Lodge on Loch Lomond T 01436 860201, W loch-lomond.co.uk. This modern lodge, just north of town, has a string of rooms with balconies and views over the loch, and serves decent meals in its restaurant, *Colquhoun's*. Food served Mon–Sat noon–5pm & 6–9.45pm, Sun 12.30–3.30pm & 6–9.45pm. £179

INVERARNAN

Drovers Inn By Ardlui, North Loch Lomond T 01301 704234, W thedroversinn.co.uk. The bar features a roaring fire, barmen dressed in kilts, weary hillwalkers sipping pints, and bearded musicians banging out folk songs. Down the creaking corridors, past moth-eaten stuffed animals, are a number of resolutely old-fashioned rooms. £65

Crianlarich and Tyndrum

CRIANLARICH, some eight miles north of the head of Loch Lomond, is an important staging post on various transport routes, including the West Highland Railway which divides here, one branch heading due west towards Oban, the other continuing north over Rannoch Moor to Fort William. The West Highland Way long-distance footpath (see box, p.293) passes by. Otherwise, there's little reason to stop here, unless you're keen on tackling some of the steep-sided hills that rise up from the glen.

Five miles further north from here on the A82/A85, the village of **TYNDRUM** owes its existence to a minor (and very short-lived) nineteenth-century gold rush, but today supports little more than a busy service station and several characterless hotels.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CRIANLARICH AND TYNDRUM

By train Crianlarich is well served by regular trains.

Destinations Fort William (3–4 daily Mon–Sat, 1–3 on Sun; 1hr 50min); Glasgow Queen Street (6–8 daily Mon–Sat, 1–3 on Sun; 1hr 50min); Oban (3–4 daily Mon–Sat, 1–3 on Sun; 1hr 15min).

By car At Tyndrum the road divides, with the A85 heading west to Oban, and the A82 heading for Fort William via Glen Coe.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

By The Way Hostel and Campsite Lower Station Rd T 01838 400333, W tyndrumbytheway.com. Right beside Tyndrum Lower railway station is a good campsite and small purpose-built bunkhouse; the cute wooden "hobbit houses" in the grounds sleep four and are self-catering. Camping £8/person; hostel £16/person; hobbit house £40

Real Food Café Tyndrum T 01838 400 235, W therealfoodcafe.com. For a refreshingly different roadside dining experience, it's well worth trying the airy café on the main road serving fresh, fast food that's locally sourced and cooked to order. Mon–Thurs & Sun 9am–10pm, Fri 11am–10pm, Sat 7.30am–9pm.

The Trossachs

Often described as the Highlands in miniature, the **Trossachs** area boasts a magnificent diversity of scenery, with distinctive peaks, silvery lochs and mysterious, forest-covered slopes. Strictly speaking, the name "Trossachs", normally translated as either "bristly country" or "crossing place", originally referred only to the wooded glen between **Loch Katrine** and Loch Achray, but today it is usually taken as being the

whole area from **Callander** right up to the eastern banks of Loch Lomond, with which it has been grouped as one of Scotland's national parks.

The Trossachs' high tourist profile was largely attributable in the early days to Sir Walter Scott, whose novels *Lady of the Lake* and *Rob Roy* were set in and around the area. According to one contemporaneous account, after Scott's *Lady of the Lake* was published in 1810, the number of carriages passing Loch Katrine rose from fifty the previous year to 270. Since then, neither the popularity nor beauty of the region has waned, and in high season it can be jam-packed. Autumn is a better time to come, when the hills are blanketed in rich, rusty colours and the crowds are thinner. In terms of where to stay, **Aberfoyle** has a rather dowdy air while **Callander** feels somewhat overrun, and you're often better off seeking out one of the guesthouses or B&Bs tucked away in secluded corners of the region.

GETTING AROUND

BY BUS

First Group 01324 602200, firstgroup.com. Operates between Callander and Stirling; reduced service at weekends.

BY BIKE

Mounter Bikes Handily located in the centre of Callander, offering rental, sales, repairs and accessories (01877 331052, mounterbikes.co.uk).

Wheels Cycling Centre next to Trossachs Tryst (see p.299), 1.5 miles southwest of Callander (01877 331100, scottish-cycling.com). The best rental place in the area.

Aberfoyle and around

Each summer the sleepy little town of **ABERFOYLE**, twenty miles west of Stirling, dusts itself down for its annual influx of tourists. Though of little appeal itself, Aberfoyle has an ideal position in the heart of the Trossachs, with **Loch Ard Forest** and **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park** stretching across to Ben Lomond and Loch Lomond to the west, Loch Katrine and Ben Venue to the northwest, and Ben Ledi to the northeast. Don't come here for lively nightlife or entertainment, but for a good, healthy blast of the outdoors.

Lake of Menteith

About 4 miles east of Aberfoyle towards Doune • To rent fishing gear contact the Lake of Menteith Fisheries (01877 385664, April–Oct)

The **Lake of Menteith** is a superb fly-fishing centre and Scotland's only lake (as opposed to loch), so named due to a historic mix-up with the word *laigh*, Scots for "low-lying ground", which applied to the whole area. There are also some secluded spots along the shore for picnics and swims.

HIKING AND BIKING IN THE TROSSACHS

The Trossachs are ideal for exploring on **foot** or on a **mountain bike**. This is partly because the terrain is slightly more benign than the Highlands proper, but much is due to the excellent management of the **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park**, a huge chunk of the national park that lies between Loch Lomond and Loch Lubnaig. The main visitor centre for the area, David Marshall Lodge (see opposite), is just outside Aberfoyle, and is well worth a visit.

For **hillwalkers,** as far as height goes the prize peak is Ben Lomond (3192ft), best accessed from Rowardennan (see p.292). Other highlights include Ben Venue (2370ft) and Ben A'an (1520ft) on the shores of Loch Katrine, as well as Ben Ledi (2857ft), just northwest of Callander, which all offer relatively straightforward but very rewarding climbs and, on clear days, stunning views.

Walkers can also choose from any number of waymarked routes through the forests and along lochsides; pick up a map of these at the visitor centre. **Bikers** are served by a network of forest paths and one of the more impressive stretches of the National Cycle Network cutting through the region from Loch Lomond to Killin.

ROB ROY

A member of the outlawed Macgregor clan, **Rob Roy** was born in 1671 in Glengyle, just north of Loch Katrine, and lived for some time as a respectable cattle farmer and trader, supported by the powerful duke of Montrose. In 1712, Rob Roy absconded with £1000, some of it belonging to the duke. He took to the hills to live as a brigand, his feud with Montrose escalating after the duke repossessed Rob Roy's land and drove his wife from their house. He was present at the Battle of Sheriffmuir during the Jacobite uprising of 1715, ostensibly supporting the Jacobites but probably as an opportunist: the chaos would have made cattle-raiding easier. Eventually captured and sentenced to transportation, Rob Roy was pardoned and returned to **Balquhidder** (see p.299), where he remained until his death in 1734. His status as a local hero in the mould of Robin Hood should be tempered with the fact that he was without doubt a bandit and blackmailer. His life has been much romanticized, from Sir Walter Scott's 1818 novel **Rob Roy** to the 1995 film starring Liam Neeson, although the tale does serve well to dramatize the clash between the doomed clan culture of the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and the organized feudal culture of lowland Scots, which effectively ended with the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden in 1746. His **grave** in Balquhidder, a simple affair behind the ruined church, is mercifully free of the tartan trappings that plague parts of the Trossachs, predictably dubbed "Rob Roy Country" by the tourist board.

Island of Inchmahome

Lake of Menteith • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–4.30pm, Oct 9.30am–3.30pm • £5.50 including ferry; HS

From the northern shore of the lake, you can take a little ferry out to the **Island of Inchmahome** to explore the ruined Augustinian abbey. Founded in 1238, **Inchmahome Priory** is the most beautiful island monastery in Scotland, its remains rising tall and graceful above the trees. The masons employed to build the priory are thought to be those who built Dunblane Cathedral (see p.286); certainly the western entrance there resembles that at Inchmahome. The nave of the church is roofless, but in the choir are preserved the graves of important families from the surrounding area. Most touching is a late thirteenth-century double effigy depicting Walter, the first Stewart earl of Menteith, and his countess, Mary, who, feet resting on lion-like animals, turn towards each other and embrace.

Five-year-old Mary, Queen of Scots was hidden at Inchmahome in 1547 before being taken to France, and there's a formal garden in the west of the island, known as Queen Mary's Bower, where she played, according to legend. Visible on a nearby but inaccessible islet is the ruined castle of **Inchtalla**, the home of the earls of Menteith in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Queen Elizabeth Forest Park

David Marshall Lodge visitor centre daily: March–June, Sept & Oct 10am–5pm; July & Aug 10am–6pm; Nov & Dec 10am–4pm; Jan Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; Feb Thurs–Sun 10am–4pm • Car park £3 • ⓣ 01877 382258

North of Aberfoyle, the A821 road to Loch Katrine winds its way into the **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park**, snaking up **Duke's Pass** (so called because it once belonged to the duke of Montrose). You can walk or drive the short distance from Aberfoyle to the park's excellent **visitor centre** at David Marshall Lodge, where you can pick up maps of the walks and cycle routes in the forest, get background information on the area's flora and fauna or settle into the **café** with its splendid views out over the tree tops.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

ABERFOYLE

By bus Regular buses from Stirling pull into the car park on Aberfoyle's Main St.

Destinations Callander (late June to mid-Oct 4 Thurs–Tues; 25min); Port of Menteith (late June to mid-Oct 4 Thurs–Tues; 10min).

Tourist office The tourist office (April–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–March Sat & Sun only; ⓣ 08707 200604) has full details of local accommodation, sights and outdoor activities.

ABERFOYLE AND AROUND

LAKE OF MENTEITH

By bus Take First Edinburgh bus #11 from Stirling to the Lake of Menteith.

ACCOMMODATION

ABERFOYLE

Creag-Ard House Loch Ard ☎01877 382297, 🌐creag-ard.co.uk. Accommodation options in Aberfoyle itself aren't all that inspiring. Head a mile west out of the town to this beautifully sited B&B, which serves excellent breakfasts in a Victorian house overlooking Loch Ard. Easter–Oct. £70

Trossachs Holiday Park ☎01877 382614, 🌐trossachsholidays.co.uk. March–Oct. This excellent family-run 40-acre holiday park is fringed by oak and bluebell woods. Bikes available for rent. £17/pitch

LAKE OF MENTEITH

Lake of Menteith Hotel Port of Menteith ☎01877 385258, 🌐www.lake-hotel.com. A beautiful place to stay, with an idyllic waterfront setting next to Port of Menteith's Victorian Gothic parish church, and also has a classy restaurant. £120

Loch Katrine

Heading down the northern side of the Duke's Pass you come first to **Loch Achray**, tucked under Ben A'an. Look out across the loch for the small **Callander Kirk** in a lovely setting alone on a promontory. At the head of the loch a road follows the short distance through to the southern end of **Loch Katrine** at the foot of Ben Venue (2370ft).

Cruises on Loch Katrine

April–Oct daily • £13 return • ☎01877 376315, 🌐www.lochkatrine.co.uk

The elegant Victorian passenger **steamer**, the SS *Sir Walter Scott*, has been plying the waters of Loch Katrine since 1900, chugging up to the wild country of Glengyle. It makes various cruises each day, but only the first (departing at 10.30am) stops off at Stronachlachar most days, though on Wednesdays and weekends there's a second trip to Stronachlachar departing at 2.30pm; the shorter hour-long cruises don't make any stops (£12). A popular combination is to **rent a bike** from the Katrinewheelz hut by the pier (☎01877 376366, 🌐katrinewheelz.co.uk; £28/day), take the steamer up to Stronachlachar, then cycle back by way of the road around the north side of the loch.

Brig o'Turk and Loch Venachar

From Loch Katrine the A821 heads due east past the tiny village of **Brig o'Turk**, where there are a couple of excellent eating options. From here, carry on along the shores of **Loch Venachar**, where *Venacher Lochside* houses an attractive café and a fishing centre offering boat rental and fly-fishing tuition.

EATING AND DRINKING — BRIG O'TURK

Brig o'Turk Tea-Room Glen Finglas Rd ☎01877 376283, 🌐brigoturktearoom.co.uk. This cosy, wooden-clad little place is a good place to refresh after a walk or cycle. Good coffee and excellent home-made cakes dished up on retro crockery. Also serves appealing dinner options: try beef stew with dumplings (£9.50). Easter–Sept 10am–9pm.

★ **Byre Inn** Brig O'Turk ☎01877 376292, 🌐byreinn.co.uk. A tiny country pub and classy restaurant offering mains such as fillet of cod for £10.95 and set in an old stone barn with wooden pews; it's the starting point for waymarked walks to lochs Achray, Drunkie and Venachar. Noon–late; food served noon–3pm & 6–9pm.

Callander and around

CALLANDER, on the eastern edge of the Trossachs, sits on the banks of the River Teith at the southern end of the **Pass of Leny**, one of the key routes into the Highlands. Significantly larger than Aberfoyle, it suffers in high season for being right on the main tourist trail from Stirling through to the west Highlands. Callander first came to fame during the "Scottish Enlightenment" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the glowing reports of the Trossachs given by Sir Walter Scott and William Wordsworth. Development was given a further boost when Queen Victoria chose to visit, and then by the arrival of the train line – long since closed – in the 1860s.

Tourists have arrived in throngs ever since, as the plethora of restaurants, tearooms, gift shops and shops selling woollens and crafts testifies.

Callander to Strathyre Cycleway

North of Callander, you can walk or ride the scenic six-mile Callander to Strathyre (Route 7) Cycleway, which forms part of the network of cycleways between the Highlands and Glasgow. The route is based on the old Caledonian train line to Oban, which closed in 1965, and runs along the western side of Loch Lubnaig.

ARRIVAL, INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES — CALLANDER AND AROUND

By bus Callander has bus connections with Loch Katrine (late June to mid-Oct 4 daily Thurs–Tues; 55min).

Tourist office In a converted church at Ancaster Square (T 08707 200628; March–Oct daily).

Bike rental There's bike rental at Mounter Bikes (T 01877 331052, W callandercyclehire.co.uk) on Ancaster Square.

ACCOMMODATION

Arden House Bracklinn Rd T 01877 330235, W ardenhouse.org.uk. A grand Victorian guesthouse in its own gardens with good views and woodland walks from the back door. Closed Nov–March. **£85**

Callander Meadows 24 Main St T 01877 330181, W callandermeadows.co.uk. Centrally located rooms in an attractive townhouse with three comfortable en-suite rooms and a decent restaurant. Full board available. **£75**

Roman Camp Country House Hotel Main St T 01877 330003, W romancamphotel.co.uk. The town's most upmarket option is this romantic, turreted seventeenth-century hunting lodge situated in riverside gardens. **£155**

Trossachs Tryst Invertrossachs Rd T 01877 331200, W scottish-hostel.com. A friendly, well-equipped and comfortable 32-bed hostel and activity centre with self-catering dorms and family rooms. It's located a mile southwest of town, down a turn-off from the A81 to Port of Monteith. Bike rental available. Dorms **£20**; doubles **£50**

EATING AND DRINKING

Lade Inn Kilmahog, 1 mile west of Callander T 01877 330152, W theladeinn.com. Pub food such as beer-battered chicken goujons (£10.25) can be had at this convivial inn where the owners are keen on real ales; an on-site shop sells bottled beers. Mon–Thurs noon–11pm, Fri & Sat noon–1am, Sun 12.30pm–10.30pm; food served Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 5.30pm–9pm, Sat noon–9pm, Sun 12.30–8pm.

★ **Mhor Fish** 75–77 Main St T 01877 330213, W mhor.net. One of a new breed of fish and chip shops; it has a sustainable fish policy, daily specials and everything from snacks to bistro-style seafood dishes – and you can get fish suppers, burgers, pies and haggis to take away for around £12. Daily 10am–10pm.

Balquhidder

Beyond the northern end of Loch Lubnaig is tiny **BALQUHIDDER**, famed as the site of the **grave of Rob Roy** (see p.297), which is in the small yard behind the ruined church. His grave is marked by a rough stone carved with a sword, cross and a man with a dog.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — BALQUHIDDER

MHOR 84 Balquhidder Lochearnhead T 01877 384622, W mhor.net/mhor-84. This is a seven-room motel (with one family room and two dog-friendly ones). Their super-cool restaurant serves excellent seafood dishes (five-course dinner £55, two-course lunch £24). Noon–11pm. **£80**

★ **Monachyle Mhor** Loch Voil T 01877 384622. Drive 6 miles beyond the village to this hotel/restaurant, in an eighteenth-century farmhouse. It features chic rooms and a terrific restaurant (open to non-residents, but book ahead; set dinner £47). They specialize in locally sourced food, much of it from the family's farm and bakery, and there are views over Loch Voil. Food served noon–1.45pm & 7–9pm. **£195**

Fife

304 St Andrews

309 The East Neuk

314 Central Fife

315 Western Fife

CULROSS PALACE

Fife

Barely fifty miles at its widest point, the ancient Kingdom of Fife, designated as such by the Picts in the fourth century, is a small area but one which has a definite identity. It is inextricably linked with the waters that surround it on three sides – the Tay to the north, the Forth to the south, and the cold North Sea to the east. One of its most striking aspects is how it changes in character within a few miles, with a marked difference between the rural north and the semi-industrial south. Tourism and agriculture are the economic mainstays of the northeast corner of Fife, where the landscape varies from gentle hills in the rural hinterland to windswept cliffs, rocky bays and sandy beaches. Fishing still has a role, but ultimately it is to St Andrews, Scotland's oldest university town and the home of the world-famous Royal and Ancient Golf Club, that most visitors are drawn. Development here has been cautious, and both the town itself and the surrounding area retain an appealing and old-fashioned feel. South of St Andrews, the tiny stone harbours of the fishing villages of the East Neuk are a deeply appealing extension to any visit to this part of Fife.

Inland from St Andrews, the central Fife settlements of **Glenrothes**, an unremarkable post-war new town, and **Cupar**, a more interesting market town, are overshadowed by the absorbing village of **Falkland** with its impressive ruined palace. In the **south**, the closure of the coal mines over the last thirty years has left local communities floundering to regain a foothold, and the squeeze on the fishing industry may well lead to further decline. In the meantime, a number of the villages have capitalized on their appeal and welcomed tourism in a way that has enhanced rather than degraded their natural assets. The perfectly preserved town of **Culross** is the most notable of these; once a lively port that enjoyed a thriving trade with Holland, the Dutch influence is obvious here in its striking crow-step gabled houses that line the cobbled lanes.

Otherwise, southern Fife is dominated by the town of **Dunfermline**, a former capital of Scotland, and industrial **Kirkcaldy**, with the Forth rail and road bridges the most memorable sights of this stretch of coastline.

GETTING AROUND FIFE

By train The train line follows the coast as far north as Kirkcaldy where you can change for East Neuk bus connections. It then cuts inland towards Dundee, stopping en route at Cupar and Leuchars (from where buses run to St Andrews).

By car The main road into the region is the M90, which links the Forth Road Bridge northwest of Edinburgh with Perth. From just north of the bridge, you can join the 85-mile semi-circular Coastal Tourist Route (signposted) taking in many of the highlights from the Forth to the Tay estuaries.

By bus The main bus operator in Fife is Stagecoach (stagecoachbus.com), with a fleet servicing St Andrews, East Neuk and the rest of the coast as well as the interior, with train connections at Kirkcaldy and Leuchars.

Golf in St Andrews p.305
The vision of St Rule p.307
The Fife coastal Path p.310

HIMALAYAS PUTTING GREEN, ST ANDREWS

Highlights

❶ **Himalayas putting green, St Andrews** The world's finest putting course right beside the world's finest golf course; a snip at £2 a round. **See p.308**

❷ **The East Neuk** After a bracing walk along the Fife Coastal Path, try freshly cooked crab or lobster from the wooden shack at Crail's historic stone harbour or dine in style at one of the excellent seafood restaurants in the nearby fishing towns. **See p.309**

❸ **Falkland Palace** Beautifully placed in a well-preserved village beneath the Lomond Hills, the former hunting retreat of the Stuart kings is an atmospheric semi-ruin in gracious gardens. **See p.314**

❹ **Forth Rail Bridge** One of the great engineering wonders of the Victorian age, a huge cantilever structure spanning the Firth of Forth, floodlit to stunning effect at night. **See p.315**

❺ **Culross** Scotland's best-preserved historic village, all pantile roofs and cobbled wynds, with its own palace and ruined medieval abbey. **See p.316**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.304

St Andrews

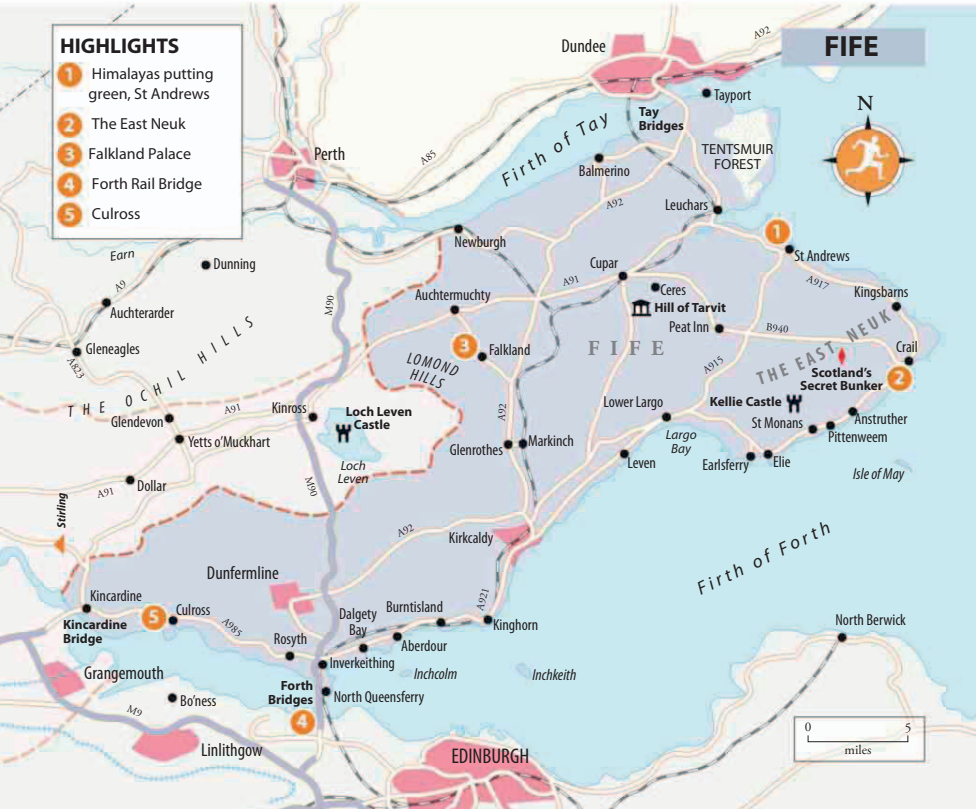
Confident, poised and well groomed, if a little snooty, **ST ANDREWS** is Scotland's oldest **university town** and a pilgrimage centre for **golfers** from the world over, situated on a wide bay on the northeastern coast of Fife. Of all Scotland's universities, St Andrews is the one most often compared to Oxford or Cambridge, both for the dominance of gown over town and for the intimate, collegiate feel of the place. The university attracts a significant proportion of English students including, famously, Prince William, who spent four years studying here. There's an open, airy feel here encouraged by the long stretches of sand on either side of town and the acreage of golf links all around.

St Andrews is compact and easy to walk around. With its medieval layout intact, its three main streets, almost entirely consisting of listed buildings, run west to east past several of the original fifteenth-century university campuses towards the heavily ruined Gothic **cathedral**. There's little left of the town's **castle**, which sits on the promontory a little further north.

St Andrews Cathedral

North St • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm; grounds year-round 9am–5.30pm • £4.50, joint ticket with castle £7.20; grounds free; HS

The ruin of the once-great **St Andrews Cathedral** gives only an idea of the importance of what was once the largest cathedral in Scotland. Though founded in 1160, it was



GOLF IN ST ANDREWS

St Andrews **Royal and Ancient Golf Club** (or "R&A") is the international governing body for golf, and dates back to a meeting of 22 of the local gentry in 1754, who founded the Society of St Andrews Golfers, being "admirers of the ancient and healthful exercise of golf". The game itself has been played here since the fifteenth century. Those early days – highlighted in the British Golf Museum (see p.307) – were instrumental in establishing Scotland as the home of golf, for the rules were distinguished from those of the French game by the fact that participants had to manoeuvre the ball into a hole, rather than hit an above-ground target. It was not without its opponents, however – particularly James II who, in 1457, banned his subjects from playing since it was distracting them from archery practice.

The approach to St Andrews from the west runs adjacent to the famous **Old Course**, one of seven courses in the immediate vicinity of the town. The R&A's strictly private **clubhouse**, a stolid, square building dating from 1854, is at the eastern end of the Old Course overlooking both the eighteenth green and the long strand of the West Sands. The British Open Championship was first held here in 1873, having been inaugurated in 1860 at Prestwick in Ayrshire, and since then it has been held at St Andrews regularly, pulling in enormous crowds. Guided walks of the Old Course are available (see p.308), though any golf aficionado will savour a stroll around the immediate environs of the golf courses, where there are numerous golf shops, including a couple selling and repairing old-fashioned hickory-shafted clubs.

not finished and consecrated until 1318, in the presence of Robert the Bruce. On June 5, 1559, the Reformation took its toll, and supporters of John Knox, fresh from a rousing meeting, plundered the cathedral and left it to ruin. Stone was still being taken from the building for various local projects as late as the 1820s.

The cathedral site, above the harbour where the land drops to the sea, can be a blustery place, with the wind whistling through the great east window and down the stretch of turf that was once the central aisle. In front of the window a slab is all that remains of the high altar, where the relics of St Andrew were once enshrined. From the top of the **St Rule's Tower** (a climb of 150-odd steps), built as part of an abbey in 1130, there's a good view of the town and surroundings, and of the remains of the monastic buildings that made up the priory. Around the entire complex is a sturdy wall dating from the sixteenth century, over half a mile long and with three gateways.

Southwest of the cathedral enclosure lies **The Pends**, a huge fourteenth-century vaulted gatehouse that marked the main entrance to the priory, and from where the road leads down to the harbour

St Andrews Castle

The Scores April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50, joint ticket with cathedral £7.20; HS

With a drop to the sea on two sides and a moat on the inland side, **St Andrews Castle**, founded around 1200, was built as part of the palace of the bishops and archbishops of St Andrews. By consequence it was the scene of some fairly grim incidents at the time of the Reformation. There's not a great deal left, since the castle fell into ruin in the seventeenth century – most of what can be seen dates from a century earlier, apart from the fourteenth-century Fore Tower.

St Andrews Preservation Trust Museum and Garden

12 North St • June–Sept daily 2–5pm; Oct–May 2–5pm, only when exhibitions are on • Free • ☎ 01334 477629, ⓦ standrewspreservationtrust.co.uk

A compact museum housed in a picturesque sixteenth-century cottage with a low wooden door and rubble stone facade, the **St Andrews Preservation Trust Museum**

ST ANDREWS
0 200 yards
ACCOMMODATION
Aslar House 2
Craigtoun Meadows Holiday Park 6
Old Fishergate House 3
St Andrews Country Cabins 1
St Andrews Tourist Hostel 5
West Park House 4
CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS
Balgove Steak Barn 2
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The Seafood Restaurant 1
Tailend Fish Bar 3
PUBS & BARS
Criterion 2
Ma Bells 1
The Rule 3
N
NORTH SEA
West Sands
St Andrews Links Trust clubhouse
Himalayas Putting Course
Ladies Putting Club clubhouse
Swilken Burn
The New Course
The Old Course
Royal & Ancient Golf Club
British Golf Museum
St Andrews Aquarium
Castle
New Picture House
St Salvator's College
Bus Station
Holy Trinity
Spokes
Cathedral
St Rule's Tower
Preservation Trust Museum
Queen Mary's House
St Mary's College
Byre Theatre
St Leonard's School
West Port
Harbour
Long Pier
East Sands
WEST SANDS ROAD
BRUCE EMBANKMENT
GARMOND CLARK'S WYND
OLD STATION ROAD
GIBSON PLACE
THE LINKS
GUARDBRIDGE ROAD
WINDMILL ROAD
GOLF PLACE
PILMOUR TERRACE
THE SCORES
MURRAY PLACE
MURRAY PARK
Butts Wynd
EAST SCORES
NORTH STREET
CASTLE STREET
GREGORY PLACE
ABBOTSFORD CRESCENT
HOWARD PLACE
HOPE STREET
CITY ROAD
STATION ROAD
GREYFRIARS GARDENS
ST MARY'S PLACE
MARKET STREET
BELL'S SHEET
CHURCH ST
SOUTH STREET
ABBEY STREET
QUEEN'S GARDENS
Ladebraes Lane
PENDS ROAD
SHORE HEAD
DOUBLEDYKES ROAD
KENNEDY GARDENS
WARDLAW GDNS
ARGYLE STREET
B939
BRIDGE ST
Ladebraes Walk
1, 2 The Balgove Course, Leuchars & Dundee
5 (6 miles)
6
The Castle Course & Crail

was originally home to four fishermen's families. Today you'll encounter inside a mock-up vintage grocers, a chemist and a gratifyingly generous array of antiquarian bric-a-brac.

St Andrews University

Ⓦ www.st-andrews.ac.uk

Scattered around the town centre, **St Andrews University** is the oldest in Scotland. Founded in 1410 by Bishop Henry Wardlaw, the original building was on the site of the Old University Library and by the end of the Middle Ages three colleges had been built: St Salvator's (1450), **St Leonard's** (1512) on Pends Road and **St Mary's** (1538) on South Street. At the time of the Reformation, St Mary's became a seminary of Protestant theology, and today it houses the university's Faculty of Divinity.

British Golf Museum

Bruce Embankment • April–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10am–4pm • £6.50 Ⓣ 01334 460046, Ⓦ britishgolfmuseum.co.uk

A collection of national importance, the **British Golf Museum** has pictures of golfing greats from Tom Morris to Tiger Woods, along with clubs, trophies and a variety of paraphernalia from the seventeenth century onwards. It's predominantly an attraction for golfing obsessives, but the museum is designed to be family friendly. You can try your hand with an old ball and putt on the museum's indoor green or get togged up in traditional golfing attire.

East and West Sands

St Andrews has two great beaches: the vast expanse of **West Sands**, just north of town, and the more compact **East Sands**, beside the harbour. The West Sands are best known from the opening sequences of the Oscar-winning film *Chariots of Fire* and while they're still used by budding athletes, less energetic activities include sandcastle competitions, breathtaking dips in the North Sea, and birdwatching at the lonely north end. The blustery winds that are the scourge of golfers and walkers alike do at least make the beach a great place to fly a kite.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ST ANDREWS

By train The nearest train station is at Leuchars on the Edinburgh–Dundee line, 5 miles northwest across the River Eden, from where regular buses make the 15min trip into town. When you buy your rail ticket to Leuchars, ask for a St Andrews rail-bus ticket that includes the bus fare.

Destinations Aberdeen (1–2 hourly; 1hr 30min); Dundee (1–2 hourly; 15min); Edinburgh (1–2 hourly; 1hr).

By bus The bus station is on City Rd at the west end of Market St.

Destinations Anstruther (2 hourly; 20–25min); Dundee (1–2 hourly; 35min); Edinburgh (1–2 hourly; 1hr 30min); Leuchars (1–2 hourly; 10min)

THE VISION OF ST RULE

According to legend, St Andrews was founded, pretty much by accident, in the fourth century. **St Rule** – or Regulus – a custodian of the bones of St Andrew in Patras in southwestern Greece, had a vision in which an angel ordered him to carry five of the saint's bones to the western edge of the world, where he was to build a city in his honour. The conscientious courier set off, but was shipwrecked on the rocks close to the present harbour. Struggling ashore with his precious burden, he built a shrine to the saint on what subsequently became the site of the **cathedral**; St Andrew became Scotland's patron saint and the town its ecclesiastical capital.

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

Bike rental Spokes, (37 South St; Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm; T 01334 477835, W spokescycles.net) offers bike rental for £15 a day including locks and helmets.

Tourist office The good-sized tourist office is at 70 Market St (April–June & Sept–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10am–4pm closed Sun; July–Aug Mon–Sat 9.15am–6pm, Sun 10am–5pm; T 01382 472021, W visitstandrews.com); internet access (£1/20min).

TOURS AND ACTIVITIES

TOURS

Bus tour. An open-topped hop-on/hop-off bus tour takes a one-hour spin around the main sights starting at Church St a few paces from the tourist office (July & Aug daily 11.10am–4.10pm; hourly; £8).

Golf tours For a bracing introduction to the importance of golf to the town, the St Andrews Links Trust runs 50min guided walking tours of the Old Course before handing out a complementary novelty scorecard. Starts from outside the golf shop at the eighteenth hole of the Old Course, north of town (July & Aug Tues–Sun 11am & 2pm; £3; T 01334 466666, W standrews.org.uk).

GOLF

You can play any of the town's courses, all of which are administered by the St Andrews Links Trust. With the exception of the Balgove Course, all of the town's courses can be booked through T 01334 466666, or W standrews.org.uk. All courses are on the north side of St Andrews; follow the brown 'Golf' signposts off the A91.

Balgove Course The only nine-hole course in St Andrews is designed for families and beginners and unlike the others, you can just turn up and play. Green fees £8–15. Open all year.

Castle Course Built in 2008, the newest addition to the St Andrews Links has already gained a positive following in part thanks to its clifftop position and views to the town. However, putting here can be a bit frustrating as the greens are not as flat as you might expect for a modern course and even experienced golfers can be heard cursing the design. Green fees £60–120. Open all year.

Ladies Putting Club Nicknamed The Himalayas, and open to the public without booking, this putting course offers arguably the best golfing experience in St Andrews. Even if you can't tell a birdie from a bogey, it's a fantastically lumpy eighteen-holer in an ideal setting right next to the Old Course and the sea. You can have all the thrill of sinking a six-footer in golf's most famous location for a bargain price. Green fees £2. Daily March–Oct, 10am–5pm.

New Course Designed in 1895, this has some pretty bumpy putting greens and the fairways have hard ground and plenty of ball-swallowing bunkers to test any well-seasoned pro. Green fees £35–70. Open all year.

Old Course The oldest course in the world offers the amateur the chance to pit their game against the generations of golfing legends that have birdied and bogeyed their way round the eighteen windswept greens. Its popularity is unrelenting; to play here you must have a handicap certificate (24 for men/36 for women) and enter a ballot at least two days in advance. Green fees £75–155. Open all year.

ACCOMMODATION

There's no shortage of accommodation both in town and around, although average **prices** in all categories vie with Edinburgh's as the highest in Scotland. **Upmarket hotels** are thick on the ground, notably around the golf courses. There are plenty of **guesthouses**, though rooms often get booked up in the summer, when you should definitely book in advance.

B&BS AND HOSTELS

Aslar House 120 North St T 01334 473460, W aslar.com. A smart, contemporary B&B in a three-storey townhouse with an unusual round tower at the back. All rooms are admirably equipped with fridges and hospitality trays; breakfast is perhaps the finest in town. £96

★ **Old Fishergate House** 35 North Castle St T 01334 470874, W oldfishergatehouse.co.uk. Entered via a quaint cobbled pavement, this seventeenth-century townhouse is one of the more personal places to stay in town, with its books, pictures and antique furniture including an old piano. The en-suite rooms have wi-fi and TV. The obvious choice for traditionalists. £100

St Andrews Country Cabins Cuplahills Farm, 7 miles northwest of St Andrews, off the A914 T 01334 870225, W standrewscountrycabins.co.uk. A surprisingly luxurious option for families and groups, these superb ecolodges sleep six in three contemporary bedrooms. There's a kitchen and lounge as well as an exterior deck and site playground. Minimum stay three nights. £130/night

St Andrews Tourist Hostel Inchape House, St Mary's Place T 01334 479911, W hostelworld.com. Handily placed backpacker hostel in a converted townhouse right above *The Grill House* restaurant, with plenty of dorm beds, but no doubles. The cheapest option in town, but not the quietest. Dorms £12

8

West Park House 5 St Mary's Place ☎07429 500130, 🌐westparkstandrews.co.uk. One of the cheapest options in town, this small guesthouse maintains a pretty high standard of rooms; very comfortable and all with en suite and wi-fi. Although there's no breakfast offered, you'll find a hospitality tray in the room to keep you going until the nearby cafés open. **£70**

CAMPING

Craigtoun Meadows Holiday Park ☎01334 475959, 🌐craigtounmeadows.co.uk. Reasonably convenient for the centre of town, this site is well run and has a surprisingly good range of facilities particularly for children. Camping **£18**/pitch; static caravan hire (April–Oct) **£500**/week

EATING

St Andrews has no shortage of restaurants and cafés. Most are found on Market St, South St and the interlinking closes between the two.

★ **Balgove Steak Barn** 1 mile northwest of St Andrews on the A91 ☎01334 898145, 🌐balgove.com. Sited in an open barn, mostly enclosed by stacked potato boxes and climbing plants, this ingenious fair-weather restaurant does a roaring trade thanks to its unorthodox set-up and gourmet comfort food. Beefburgers and mushroom burgers (both £8) are grilled before your eyes on the huge cast-iron barbecue. Wash them down with local draught ales before visiting their fantastic sister farm shop/deli next door. May–Sept Thurs–Sun noon–8pm.

The Doll's House 3 Church Square ☎01334 477422, 🌐dollshouse-restaurant.co.uk. Stylish modern dishes based around Scottish meat and fish, with a continental feel to the outdoor tables. Particularly inventive are platters like saithe (pollock) with pickled vegetables and beetroot essence, although there are more pedestrian options including Thai curried mussels and mushroom stroganoff. Arrive before 7pm and it's two courses for £12. Daily noon–3pm & 5–10.30pm.

The Peat Inn 6 miles southwest of St Andrews, on the junction of the B940 and B941 ☎01334 840206, 🌐thepeatinn.co.uk. With a reputation as one of Scotland's gourmet hot spots for the past thirty years, *The Peat Inn* offers fine dining featuring top local produce in an intimate dining room. Menus range from a three-course set lunch (£16) to a six-course tasting menu (£55) with all dishes immaculately presented, particularly the graceful oyster *panna cotta*. Tues–Sat 12.30–1.30pm & 7–9pm.

★ **The Seafood Restaurant** The Scores ☎01334 479475, 🌐theseafoodrestaurant.com. This restaurant has an eye-popping location in a custom-built glass building on the beach. Set menus range from £15 to £22 for lunch and dinner respectively with creative seafood dishes non-exclusively dominating proceedings: try the super savoury tapenade crusted turbot with bacon and artichokes or the gnocchi with girolles and ceps. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm.

Tailend Fish Bar 130 Market St ☎01334 474070. A terrific and popular restaurant/takeaway dishing up fresh fish sourced from nearby Arbroath. Treat yourself to the famous – and now EU protected – Arbroath Smokie (£7 takeaway or £10.50 eat in), a pungent haddock smoked in the traditional way, over hardwood chips. Daily noon–10.30pm.

DRINKING

★ **The Criterion** 99 South St ☎01334 474543. One of the town's more charming pubs; it's a sensitively preserved Victorian relic – well illuminated by its lofty windows – with good beers and whiskies and a vibrant atmosphere, particularly on live music nights. South-facing in aspect, the pavement tables are a particular draw on sunny afternoons and, for the peckish, they sell "Cri" pies throughout the day for £7. Sun–Wed 9am–midnight; Thurs–Sat 9am–1pm.

Ma Bells 40 The Scores ☎01334 473622. In the basement of the *St Andrews Golf Hotel*, this lively bar was Prince William's choice drinking hole during his student days and still attracts more than its fair share of rugger shirts. With cocktail pitchers for around £8, midweek drinks promotions and djs, a young, student crowd is guaranteed. Tues–Sat 11am–1pm; Sun 12.30pm–midnight; Mon 11am–midnight.

The Rule 116 South St ☎01334 473 473, 🌐the-rule.co.uk. A large, modern pub-diner with cheap grub (cooked breakfast is just £4) and a strong focus on noisy big screen sports screenings. The one redeeming feature here is the generous sun trapping beer garden to the rear – a rarity in St Andrews. Mon–Wed 9am–midnight; Thurs–Sat 9am–1am; Sun 9am–11pm. Food served 9am–9pm.

The East Neuk

Extending south of St Andrews as far as Largo Bay, the **East Neuk** (*neuk* is Scots for "corner") is famous for its series of quaint fishing villages. Old cottages and merchants'

THE FIFE COASTAL PATH

Taking in the East Neuk villages, The **Fife Coastal Path** (fifecoastalpath.co.uk) follows the shoreline for 117 miles between the Forth and Tay bridges, with useful bus services covering some sections. To sample Fife's remoter seafront try the five-mile tranche between Crail and Kingsbarns rounding the headland of Fife Ness. Buses between St Andrews and Crail stop at Kingsbarns from where the path is well signposted. Another interesting section is from St Andrews south to Boarhills, just past the town's golf courses. It's an easy three-mile stretch passing by rocky bays where you'll see the Rock and Spindle, a twisting volcanic sea stack by the water's edge.

houses huddle round stone-built harbours in groupings that are fallen upon with joy by artists and photographers. Their Flemish-influenced crow-stepped gables and red pantiled roofs indicate a history of strong trading links with the Low Countries. Inland, gently rolling hills provide some of the best farmland in Scotland, with quiet country lanes more redolent of parts of southern England than north of the border although, not surprisingly, the area is dotted with windy **golf courses**.

Well patronized by holiday-makers and weekenders from the central belt, the East Neuk is particularly known for its arts and crafts and good food; the **restaurants** are well known for serving fresh seafood, often complemented by produce from the fertile Fife farmland.

Crail

CRAIL is the archetypally photogenic East Neuk fishing village, its maze of rough cobbled streets leading steeply down to a tiny stone-built harbour surrounded by piles of lobster creels, with fishermen's cottages tucked into every nook and cranny in the cliff. Beyond the harbour is a sand beach, and above are perched the grander merchants' houses, as well as the twelfth-century church, where John Knox (see p.68) once delivered a damning sermon rallying against the local fishermen for working on Sundays.

The village still has a working harbour, and if the boats have been out you can often buy fresh lobster and crab cooked to order from a small wooden shack right on the harbour edge.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — CRAIL

By bus Stopping on the High St, bus #95 runs hourly to St Andrews (25min) and Leven (for bus connection to Edinburgh; 1hr).

Tourist office The tourist office doubles with the Crail Museum and Heritage Centre (62 Marketgate; June–Sept Mon–Sat 11am–4pm, Sun 1–4pm; 01333 450869, wcrailmuseum.org.uk) as a free village museum with displays on the village's close ties to the sea, farming and golf, as well as the local contribution to war efforts.

ACCOMMODATION

The Hazelton 29 Marketgate North 01333 450250, thehazelton.co.uk. A pleasant and reasonably priced B&B peacefully located just off the High St. Rooms are well proportioned with high ceilings, en-suite shower rooms and a hospitality tray that includes home-made shortbread. £75

The Sauchope Links Park Balcomie Rd, on Crail's eastern fringe 01333 450460, largoleisure.co.uk. A very pleasant campsite on the coast with caravans, lodges and more basic micro-lodges for rent as well as the usual pitches. There's a grocery shop on site and recreation facilities include a heated pool (open June–Sept) and a games room. Pitches £21; micro-lodges £42

EATING AND DRINKING

With a notable lack of places to sit down and eat, particularly in comparison with what's on offer elsewhere in the East Neuk, the village's businesses cater mostly for day-trippers. It's still possible to enjoy a good cooked lunch, usually involving seafood, but in the evening you'll be restricted to bar meals at one of the hotels.

Crail Harbour Gallery and Tearoom Shoregate ☎01333 451896, 🌐crailharbourgallery.co.uk. Discreet café/gallery tucked into a cottage on the way down to the harbour, with low timbers, rough stone flooring and a terrace overlooking the Isle of May. Predominantly serving fresh coffee, cakes and toasted paninis, plus a few cooked meals including dressed crab for £12. Jan–Oct daily 10.30am–5pm.

★**The Lobster Store** 34 Shoregate ☎01333 450476. The little wooden shack down at the harbour cooks the freshest takeaway lobster and crab you're ever likely to find. Take your pick from the condemned crustaceans scuttling around the tank next to the shack (£10 a whole lobster or £6 a crab). Tues–Sun noon–4pm.

SHOPPING

Crail Pottery 75 Nethergate ☎01333 451212, 🌐crailpottery.com. An unmissable stop for its wide range of stoneware, terracotta pots and painted earthenware, hand thrown on the wheel in the workshop. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm.

Anstruther and around

The largest of the East Neuk fishing harbours, **ANSTRUTHER** retains an attractively old-fashioned air and no shortage of character in its houses and narrow streets. Life here mostly centres on or around its part cobbled promenade, which separates the fish and chip shops, cafés and ice creameries of the cheerful Shore Street from the old harbour where small pleasure yachts vie for limited mooring space.

8

Scottish Fisheries Museum

East Shore, harbour • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 11am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun noon–4.30pm • £7 • ☎01333 310628, 🌐scotfishmuseum.org

Set in an atmospheric complex of sixteenth- to nineteenth-century buildings with timber ceilings and wooden floors, the wonderfully unpretentious **Scottish Fisheries Museum** chronicles the history of the Scottish fishing and whaling industries with ingenious displays, including a whole series of exquisite model ships, built on site by a resident model-maker.

Isle of May

Boat trips Anstruther Harbour ☎07957 585200, isleofmayferry.com • April–Sept Mon–Sat one trip daily at varying times according to the tides; journey takes 50min each way and 2hr 30min spent on island • £24

Located on the rugged **Isle of May**, several miles offshore from Anstruther, is a lighthouse erected in 1816 by Robert Louis Stevenson's grandfather, as well as the remains of Scotland's first lighthouse, built in 1636, which burnt coals as a beacon. The island is now a nature reserve and bird sanctuary. Between April and July the dramatic sea cliffs are covered with breeding kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots and shags, while inland there are thousands of puffins and eider ducks. Boat-trippers should bring warm waterproof clothing and a picnic.

Scotland's Secret Bunker

4 miles inland from Anstruther on the B940 signposted from the St Andrews road (B9131) • Mid-March–Oct daily 10am–5pm • £10 • ☎01333 310301, 🌐www.secretbunker.co.uk

Scotland's Secret Bunker is as idiosyncratic a tourist attraction as you are likely to find. Long a top-secret part of the military establishment, the bunker was opened to the public in 1994 following its decommissioning at the end of the Cold War. Above ground is an innocent-looking farmhouse, although the various pieces of military hardware parked outside and the rows of barbed wire fencing hint that something more sinister is afoot. From the farmhouse, you walk down a long ramp to the bunker, which comprises a vast subterranean complex of operations rooms 100ft below ground and encased in 15ft of reinforced concrete. In the event of a nuclear war this was to have become Scotland's new administrative centre, with room for

three hundred people; it has not been spruced up for tourists, and remains uncompromisingly spartan, with various rooms showing dormitories, radio rooms and James Bond-like control centres.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By bus Buses stop at the harbour and serve Edinburgh (1–2 hourly; 2hr 15min) and St Andrews (hourly; 25min).

ANSTRUTHER AND AROUND

Tourist office East Shore, harbour (April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm; ☎01333 311073).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Anstruther Fish Bar and Restaurant 42–44 Shore St ☎01333 310518, 🌐anstrutherfishbar.co.uk. There's nowhere in Fife better to tuck into a haddock and chips (£5.90 takeaway/£8.25 eat-in) than Anstruther. The reputation of this restaurant has for years been far-reaching thanks to a close relationship between the shop and the quayside fish sellers. Daily 11.30am–10pm.

The Waterfront 20 Shore St ☎01333 312200, 🌐anstruther-waterfront.co.uk. Overlooking the harbour, this restaurant with rooms (ten in total) offers modern and spacious en-suite comfort with a cooked breakfast included. Sadly, the rooms don't come with a view, but they're all the more peaceful. The restaurant spills out onto the pavement on balmier days and serves all meals from breakfast to dinner, with cream teas in between. From the wide seafood menu, go for the fish pie at £12. Food served daily 8am–10pm. **£90**

DRINKING

★ **The Dreel Tavern** 16 High St ☎01333 310727. Away from the harbour, this characterful 16th-century drinking establishment is a favourite among locals, old and young and gets pretty lively in the small hours. There's a nice beer garden overlooking the burn to the rear or if the weather's unaccommodating you can always just keep warm with a drink by the open fire. Daily 11am–midnight.

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Pittenweem and around

Despite its steady tourist influx, the pretty East Neuk village of **PITTENWEEM** thrives, as it always has done, on fishing, thanks to its deep harbour and busy fish market. With its sandy bay west of the port and fishermen's cottages lining the seafront and up into the high street, the village has become something of an artists' colony. An arts festival takes place every year in early August (🌐pittenweemartsfestival.co.uk) with dozens of locals turning their houses into temporary galleries for the week.

Kellie Castle

3 miles north of Pittenweem on the B9171 • April–May & Sept–Oct Sat–Wed 12.30–5pm; June–Aug daily 12.30–5pm • £8.50 • Grounds year-round daily 9.30am–6pm (or dusk) • £10; NTS • ☎01333 720271

Kellie Castle has an unusual but harmonious mix of twin sixteenth-century towers linked by a seventeenth-century building. Abandoned in the early nineteenth century, it was rediscovered in 1878 by Professor James Lorimer, a distinguished political philosopher, who took on the castle as an "improving tenant". The wonderful, under-manicured **gardens**, where space is broken up by arches, alcoves and paths that weave between profuse herbaceous borders, were designed by the professor's son Robert, aged just 16.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses stop at Viewforth Place (on the main road through town) for Edinburgh (1–2 hourly; 2hr 5min) and St Andrews (2 hourly; 25–30min).

PITTENWEEM AND AROUND

ACCOMMODATION

Albert Cottage 15 Viewforth Place ☎01333 313973, 🌐albertcottagefife.co.uk. Offering the best value for money in town, this welcoming B&B on the main thoroughfare has clean, colourful rooms with a hospitality tray and wi-fi. Guests can also make use of the sitting room and the pleasant rear garden. **£70**

Elie

Gathered round a curve of golden-brown sand twelve miles south of St Andrews, **ELIE** is a popular escape for middle-class Edinburgh families who come for the bracing air and golf courses. This was once a popular bathing spot; east of Elie bay stands a tower built as a summerhouse for Lady Janet Anstruther in the late eighteenth century, with a changing room to allow her to bathe in a pool in the rocks below.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ELIE

By bus Buses stop on the High St for Edinburgh (1–2 hourly; 1hr 55min) and St Andrews (2 hourly; 35–40min).

ACTIVITIES

Elie Watersports Elie Harbour. T01333 330962, W eliewatersports.com. Elie's sheltered bay is understandably popular for watersports and this is the place to come if you fancy a spin on a windsurfer (£20 per hour), canoe (£14), sailing boat (£25) or even a fun pedal boat (£10 per half hour). June–Aug 10am–6pm.

EATING AND DRINKING

Ship Inn The Toft, by the harbour T01333 330246, W www.ship-elie.com. The essential (and child-friendly) pub stop in Elie, the *Ship* has low timber ceilings and real fires, while the beer garden to the rear offers sweeping views over the golden sandy bay near the harbour. The bar meals offered here are fresh and tasty if a little unambitious; haddock in home-made beer batter and chips for £11, always goes down well. Mon–Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri–Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30pm–midnight. Food Served: Mon–Thurs noon–2.30pm, 6–9pm; Fri & Sat noon–2.30pm, 6–9.30pm; Sun 12.30–3pm, 6–9pm.

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Central Fife

With its undulating landscape of fertile arable land, **central Fife** has markedly fewer settlements than its coastline and consequently sees less of the region's tourism. Notable exceptions to this are **Hill of Tarvitt**, one of the country's finest Edwardian mansion houses, and **Falkland Palace**, a medieval gem in the heart of Scotland's first conservation village. **Falkland** sits at the foot of the twin peaked, heather-swathed **Lomond Hills** that provide a grandstand view of the region from its easily walked ridge between West Lomond (1696ft) and East Lomond (1378ft).

Falkland

On the eastern margins of the Lomond Hills regional park, ten miles north of Kirkcaldy, the conspicuously handsome small town of **FALKLAND** is a popular day-tripping destination thanks to its grand, medieval palace and narrow streets lined with well-preserved historic buildings.

Falkland Palace

East Port • March–Oct Mon–Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm • £12; NTS • T01337 857397

A hunting retreat to the Stewart kings for two hundred years, the construction of **Falkland Palace** began at the behest of James IV in 1500, and was completed and embellished by James V. Charles II stayed here in 1650 when he was in Scotland for his coronation, but after the Jacobite rising of 1715 and temporary occupation by Rob Roy the palace was abandoned, remaining so until the late nineteenth century when the keepership was acquired by the third marquess of Bute. He completely restored the palace, and today it is a stunning example of early Renaissance architecture, complete with corbelled parapet, mullioned windows, round towers and massive walls. Inside there's a stately drawing room, a Chapel Royal (still used for Mass) and a Tapestry Gallery, swathed with seventeenth-century Flemish hangings. Outside, the **gardens** have well-stocked herbaceous borders lining a

pristine lawn. Look out for the high walls of the oldest real (or royal) tennis court in Britain – built in 1539 for James V and still in use.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — FALKLAND

By bus Buses stop on New Rd, a few paces east of the palace. **Destinations** Glenrothes (Mon–Sat 2 hourly, 7 on Sun; 20min); Perth (Mon–Sat hourly, 2 on Sun; 55min); St Andrews (Mon–Sat hourly, 5 on Sun; 1hr 30min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Covenanter Hotel The Square ⓣ01337 857163, ⓦcovenanterfalkland.co.uk. This traditional inn at the heart of the village has a cosy pub and a good-value restaurant serving unpretentious food from its all-day menu. The evening à la carte options might include herb roasted chicken with mash and mushroom sauce for £8.75. If you're staying over, you'll find that the hotel rooms here offer superb value, with their wide en-suite rooms, big comfy beds and a full Scottish breakfast included. Food served 11am–late. **£70**

Hill of Tarvit

Just off the A916, 2 miles south of the A91 at Cupar • Daily: house April–Oct, Thurs–Mon 1–5pm; gardens all year 9.30am–6pm or dusk; Scotstarvit Tower keys available from the house April–Oct • £10; NTS • ⓣ01337 840319

Remodelled in 1906 by Sir Robert Lorimer from a late seventeenth-century building, **Hill of Tarvit** offers a rare insight into the lives of the wealthy from the turn of the twentieth century, with its central heating, telephones, plumbing and lighting – all state of the art at the time. This Edwardian mansion – formerly the home of the geographer and cartographer Sir John Scott – also contains an impressive collection of eighteenth-century Chippendale and French furniture, Dutch paintings, Chinese porcelain and a restored Edwardian laundry.

Three-quarters of a mile west of the present house and also on the estate, you can visit the five-storey, late sixteenth-century **Scotstarvit Tower**, a fine example of a Scots tower house.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — HILL OF TARVIT

By bus Buses stop at the Cupar entrance (A916) and serve Glenrothes (Mon–Sat hourly, 5 on Sun; 1hr) and St Andrews (Mon–Sat hourly, 5 on Sun; 1hr).

Western Fife

Fife's **south coast** curves sharply north at the mouth of the Firth of Forth, exposing the towns and villages to an icy east wind that somewhat undermines the sunshine image of the beaches. The highlight of the coast is one of the largest man-made structures in Scotland, the impressive **Forth Rail Bridge**, which joins Fife at **North Queensferry**.

East from here you'll find a straggle of Fife fishing communities such as **Aberdour** and **Kinghorn** which have depended on the sea for centuries, and now make popular, although not especially attractive, holiday spots as well as being part of Edinburgh's commuter belt.

To the west of the bridge, the shorefront, blighted by industry and docklands, has one great surprise in the time-capsule village of **Culross**, with links from the sixth century to the dawn of the industrial revolution.

Inland, just north from the bridge, lies **Dunfermline**, Scotland's capital until the Union of the Crowns in 1603. This "auld, grey toun" is built on a hill, dominated by its abbey and ruined palace at the top.

The Forth Bridges

The cantilevered **Forth Rail Bridge**, built from 1883 to 1890 by Sir John Fowler and Benjamin Baker, ranks among the supreme achievements of Victorian engineering. Some fifty thousand tons of steel were used in the construction of a design that

manages to express grace as well as might. Just upriver, the **Forth Road Bridge** is a suspension bridge that strikingly complements the older structure. Erected between 1958 and 1964, it finally killed off a 900-year-old ferry, and now attracts a heavy volume of traffic. For the best **view** of the rail bridge, make use of the pedestrian and cycle lane on the east side of the road bridge. For more on the bridge, head to the museum in South Queensferry (see p.110).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **THE FORTH BRIDGES**

By train: Trains from Edinburgh cross the rail bridge stopping a short walk from the bridge at North Queensferry: (every 10min; 20min).

By car The A90 crosses the road bridges 10 miles west of Edinburgh. Exit the dual carriageway at North Queensferry.

Culross

CULROSS (pronounced "Coorus"), is the best-preserved seventeenth-century village in Scotland, thanks in large part to the work of the National Trust for Scotland, which has been renovating its palace and whitewashed, pantiled buildings since 1932. All cobbled streets and squat cottages with crow-stepped gables, as well as crooked passageways with names such as "Wee Causeway" and "Stinking Wynd", the royal burgh was first developed in the fifth century with the arrival of St Serf on the northern side of the Forth at Cuileann Ros. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Culross was at the centre of the coal-mining industry and operated the world's first below-sea extractions while bailing out the water using a horse-driven Egyptian wheel system. The village's time-warp character brings in plentiful visitors, but its popularity by no means detracts from its charms.

Culross Palace

West Green • June–Aug daily noon–5pm; Sept Thurs–Mon noon–5pm; Oct Fri–Mon noon–4pm • £10; NTS • 01383 880359

The most impressive building in the village, the ochre-coloured **Culross Palace** was built by wealthy coal merchant George Bruce in the late sixteenth century. It is not a true palace at all, but a grand and impressive house with lots of small rooms and connecting passageways. Inside, you follow the fixed route, taking in wonderful painted ceilings, pine panelling, antique furniture and curios, while outside, dormer windows and crow-stepped gables dominate the walled court in which the house stands. The garden is planted with grasses, herbs and vegetables of the period (some on sale), carefully grown from seed, while Dumpy hens roam free.

Culross Abbey

Kirk St, beyond Back Causeway, which is signposted from the main road • Always open • Free • 01383 880231

Founded by Cistercian monks on land given to the Church in 1217 by the earl of Fife, the nave of the original building of **Culross Abbey** is a ruin – a lawn studded with great stumps of columns. The choir of the abbey became the **parish church** in 1633; inside, wooden panels detail the donations given by eighteenth-century worthies to the parish poor, and a tenth-century Celtic cross in the north transept is a reminder of the abbey's origins. Many of the stones in the **graveyard** are eighteenth century, with symbols depicting the occupation of the person who is buried; the gravestone of a gardener has a crossed spade and rake as well as an hourglass with the sand run out.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **CULROSS**

By bus Buses stop outside the palace for Stirling (Mon–Sat hourly; 50min) and Dunfermline (1–2 hourly; 30min).

ACCOMMODATION

★ **St Mungo's Cottage** Low Causeway 01383 882102, martinpjackson@hotmail.com. The only accommodation option within striking distance of Culross, this picturesque part-medieval B&B on the main road 5min walk east of town offers just two traditionally decorated rooms (both en suite), the larger of which caters for families for an additional £20 per head. £70

Dunfermline

The former de facto capital of Scotland and royal seat of power established by Malcolm III in the mid-eleventh century, **DUNFERMLINE** made the significant contribution to medieval Scots politics until it was abandoned by James VI after the 1603 Union of the Crowns. Today the town's charm has been considerably eroded by twentieth-century development and few visitors venture further than the outstanding ruined abbey and its small old town.

Dunfermline Abbey and Palace

Monastery St, 10min walk west of Dunfermline train station • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March Sun–Wed & Sat 9.30am–4.30pm • £3.70; HS • 01383 724586, dunfermlineabbey.co.uk.

Dunfermline abbey is a monolithic demonstration of stone workmanship from the middle ages, its oldest part attributable to Queen Margaret, who began building a Benedictine priory in 1072 (still visible beneath the nave of the present church). Her son, **David I**, raised the priory to the rank of abbey in the following century. In 1303, during the first of the **Wars of Independence**, most of the monastic buildings were destroyed by the English king Edward I's troops, who occupied the palace and had the church roof stripped of lead to provide ammunition for his army's catapults. **Robert the Bruce** helped rebuild the abbey and when he died of leprosy was buried here minus his heart, which was sent, unsuccessfully, on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land only to be buried at Melrose Abbey (see p.122). Inside, the stained glass is impressive, and the thick columns are artfully carved with chevrons, spirals and arrowheads.

The guesthouse of Queen Margaret's Benedictine monastery, south of the abbey, became the **palace** in the sixteenth century under James VI, who gave both it and the abbey to his consort, Queen Anne of Denmark. Charles I, the last monarch to be born in Scotland, entered the world here in 1600. Today, all that is left of the palace is a long sandstone facade, especially impressive when silhouetted against the evening sky.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUNFERMLINE

By train Trains stop at Dunfermline's train station, halfway down the long hill of St Margaret's Drive, southeast of the centre, with services to Edinburgh (every 30min; 30min).

By bus The bus station is on Queen Anne St, a block north of High St.

Destinations Culross (1–2 hourly; 30min); Edinburgh (2 hourly; 1hr).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Offering an accommodation booking service, the tourist office is at 1 High St (Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, April–Sept Sun 11am–4pm. 01383 720999, visitdunfermline.com).

EATING AND DRINKING

★ **Reubens** 10–12 New Row 01383 739071. One of the more progressive establishments in town, Reubens is variously a delicatessen focusing on local suppliers, a licensed café, a restaurant, wine store and a brewer of its own blonde beers; £14 will get you a varied sharing platter (for two) from the deli or go for the hot stovies at £6, good as a winter warmer. Mon–Thurs 8.30am–8pm; Fri & Sat 8.30am–8pm; Sun 11.30am–6pm.

Perthshire

320 Perth and around

326 Strathearn

329 Strath Tay and around

333 Highland Perthshire

LOCH TUMMEL

9

Perthshire

Genteel, attractive Perthshire is, in many ways, the epitome of well-groomed rural Scotland. An area of gentle glens, mature woodland, rushing rivers and peaceful lochs, it's the long-established domain of Scotland's well-to-do country set. First settled over eight thousand years ago, it was ruled by the Romans and then the Picts before Celtic missionaries established themselves here, enjoying the amenable climate, fertile soil, and ideal location for defence and trade.

Occupying a strategic position at the mouth of the River Tay, the ancient town of **Perth** has as much claim as Stirling to be the gateway to the Highlands. Salmon, wool and, by the nineteenth century, whisky – Bell's, Dewar's and the Famous Grouse brands all hail from this area – were all exported from here. At nearby **Scone**, Kenneth MacAlpine established the capital of the kingdom of the Scots and the Picts in 846. When this settlement was washed away by floods in 1210, William the Lion founded Perth as a royal burgh and it stood as Scotland's capital until the mid-fifteenth century.

Rural Perthshire is dominated by the gathering mountains of the Highlands, topography that tolerates little development. There's plenty of good agricultural land, however, and the area is dotted with neat, confident towns and villages like **Crieff**, at the heart of the rolling Strathearn Valley, **Dunkeld**, with its independent cafés and craft shops, and lovely ruined cathedral, and **Aberfeldy**, set deep amid farmland east of Loch Tay. Among the wealth of historical sites in Perthshire are splendid Baronial **Blair Castle,** north of Pitlochry, and the impressive Italianate gardens at **Drummond Castle** near Crieff.

North and west of Perth, **Highland Perthshire** begins to weave its charms: mighty woodlands blend with glassy waterways, most notably the River Tay, overlooked by **Ben Lawers**, the area's tallest peak. Further north, the countryside becomes more sparsely populated and ever more spectacular, and there is some wonderful walking country around **Pitlochry**, **Blair Atholl** and the wild expanses of **Rannoch Moor** to the west.

GETTING AROUND PERTHSHIRE

By train The Perth to Inverness train line hugs the A9 road. There are also train services connecting Perth with Dundee and, in the south, Stirling.

By bus Direct, long-distance buses link Perthshire with Dundee, Inverness and Aberdeen. Local buses – albeit often infrequent – connect towns like Perth with more remote areas.

By car Perthshire's most useful road is the A9, which cuts a line north from Perth to Inverness, passing Dunkeld and Pitlochry.

Perth and around

Surrounded by fertile agricultural land and beautiful scenery, the bustling market town of **PERTH** was Scotland's capital for several centuries. It has a long history of **livestock trading**, a tradition continued throughout the year, with regular Aberdeen Angus shows and sales from June to September, while its position at the heart of one of Scotland's richest food-production areas encouraged a regular **farmers' market** (see p.326).

Out and about in Perthshire p.323
Gleneagles p.327
Walks around Pitlochry p.334
Rannoch Moor p.337

BLAIR CASTLE

Highlights

❶ **The Fergusson Gallery** A touch of Antibes in Perthshire: this Perth gallery celebrates the vibrant work of J.D. Fergusson and his dancer wife Margaret Morris. **See p.323**

❷ **Folk music** Join in a session at the bar of the *Taybank Hotel* in the dignified town of Dunkeld. **See p.330**

❸ **Blair Castle** Observe the grand life of the Highland nobility, along with extensive parkland and the country's only private army. **See p.335**

❹ **Schiehallion** Scale Perthshire's "fairy mountain" for the views over lochs, hills, glens and moors. **See p.336**

❺ **Rannoch Moor** One of the most inaccessible places in Scotland, where hikers can discover a true sense of remote emptiness. **See p.337**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.322

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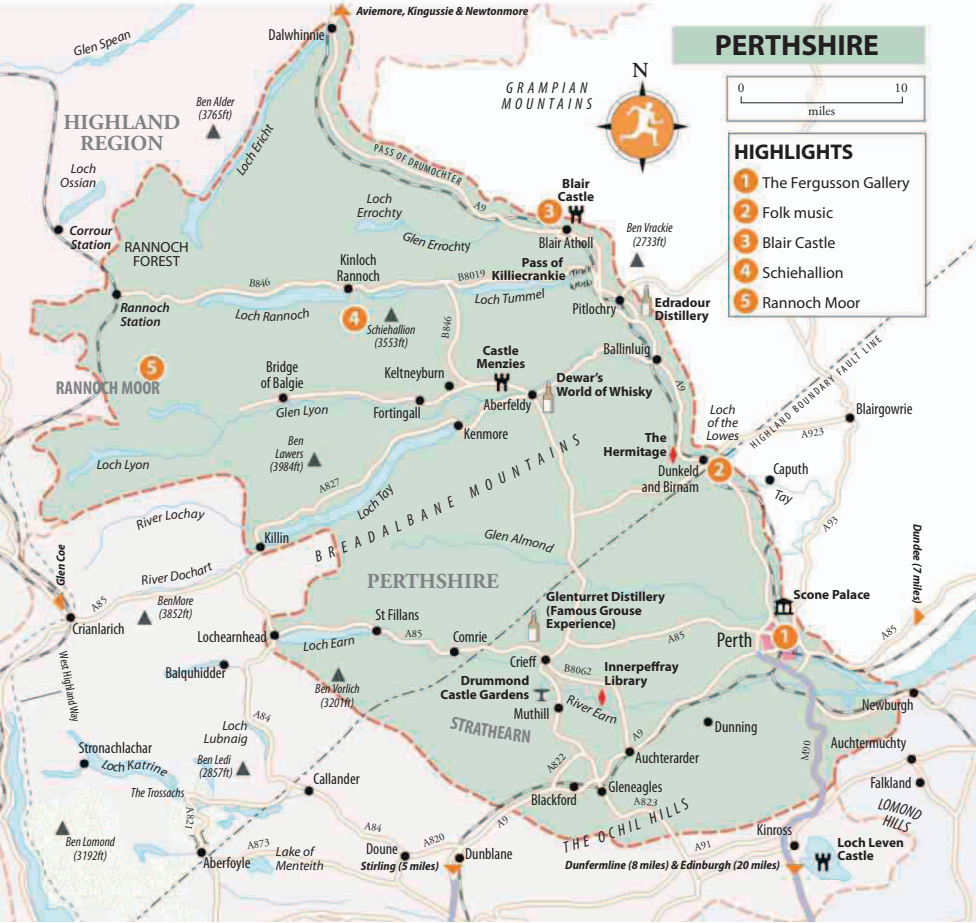
Perth's compact **centre** occupies a small patch on the west bank of the River Tay, flanked by two large areas of green parkland, known as the North and South Inch. The city's main shopping areas are **High Street** and **South Street**, as well as St John's shopping centre on King Edward Street. Opposite the entrance to the centre is the imposing **City Hall**, used by Scotland's politicians for party conferences. Perth is at its most attractive along **Tay Street**, with a succession of increasingly grand buildings along one side and the attractively landscaped riverside embankment on the other.

Brief history

During the reign of James I, Parliament met in Perth on several occasions, but its glory was short-lived: the king was murdered in the town's Dominican priory in 1437 by Sir Robert Graham, who was captured in the Highlands and tortured to death in Stirling. In May 1559, during the Reformation, John Knox preached a rousing sermon in St John's Kirk, which led to the destruction (by those Knox later condemned as "the rascal multitude") of the town's four monasteries – an event that quickened the pace of reform in Scotland. Despite decline in the seventeenth century, the community expanded in the eighteenth century and has prospered ever since; today the whisky and insurance trades employ significant numbers.



OUT AND ABOUT IN PERTHSHIRE

To many, Perthshire means a celebration of the great outdoors, with **activities** from gentle strolls through ancient oak forests to white-knuckle rides down frothing waterfalls. The variety of landscapes and their relative accessibility from the central belt has led to a significant number of operators being based in the area.

Nae Limits Ballinluig, near Pitlochry T 01796 482600, W naelimits.co.uk. For canyoning, whitewater rafting, cliff-jumping and "sphere-ing ", which involves tumbling down a hillside inside a giant plastic ball, be sure to get in touch with these adrenaline junkies.

Splash Aberfeldy T 01887 829706, W rafting.co.uk. Offers rafting sessions on larger craft through the best rapids on the Tay at Grandtully. Also runs accredited rafting courses and can arrange other activities like paintballing and quad biking.

National Kayak School Oban T 01631 565310, W nationalkayakschool.com. Specializes in sea-kayaking trips around Oban (on the west coast of Scotland), but also offers one- and half-day white-water kayaking trips around Aberfeldy and Pitlochry.

Highland Safaris Dull, near Aberfeldy T 01887 820071, W highlandsafaris.net. A good bet if you'd like an introduction to wild Scotland, in which you're taken by four-wheel-drive vehicle to search for golden eagle eyries, stags and pine martens.

St John's Kirk

31 St John Street • May–Sep daily 10am–4pm; Sunday service begins at 9.30am • Free

Solid and attractive **St John's Kirk**, surrounded by cobbled lanes and cafés, was founded by David I in 1126. The present building dates from the fifteenth century and was restored from 1923–28 to house a war memorial chapel designed by Robert Lorimer. Perth was once known as "St John's Town", and the local football team takes the name **St Johnstone** rather than that of Perth.

The Fergusson Gallery

Marshall Place • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; also Sun 1–4.30pm May–Aug • Free • T 01738 783425, W pkc.gov.uk

On the corner of Tay Street and Marshall Place, the **Fergusson Gallery** is the town's one essential place to visit, located in a striking round Victorian sandstone water tower. The gallery is home to an extensive collection of work by J.D. Fergusson, the foremost artist of the Scottish Colourist movement (see p.196). Born in Leith, he lived and worked for long periods in France, where he was greatly influenced by Impressionist and post-Impressionist artists. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Fergusson developed a more radical technique to paint some dramatic nudes such as the Matisse-inspired *At My Studio Window*, which mixes elements of an illuminated Celtic manuscript with his confident understanding of the female form. Look out, too, for *Eastre: Hymn to the Sun*, an exotic and radiant brass head inspired by his dancer wife and collaborator Margaret Morris.

Museum and Art Gallery

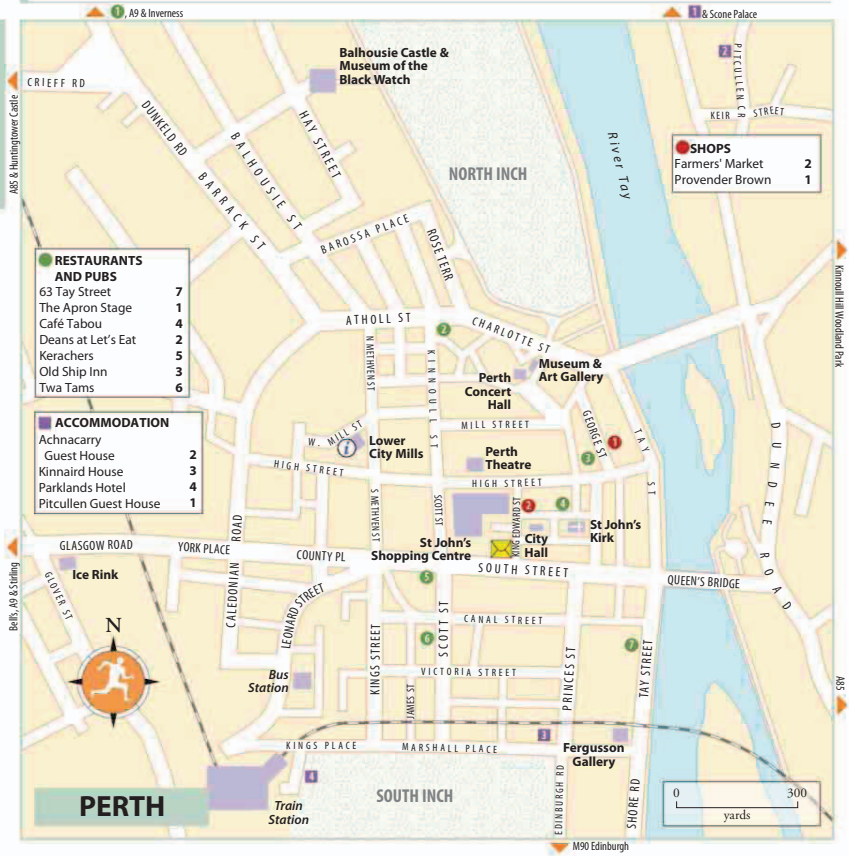
78 George St • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; also Sun 1–4.30pm May–Aug • Free • W pkc.gov.uk

Housed in one of Perth's grandest buildings, the **Museum and Art Gallery** has exhibits on local history, art, natural history, archeology and whisky, and gives a good overview of local life through the centuries. Among the exhibits is a fibreglass replica of Britain's heaviest-ever rod-caught salmon. Fished out of the River Tay in 1922, the 29-kilo beast was given to Perth Royal Infirmary, where staff and patients promptly ate it.

Museum of the Black Watch

Hay Street • Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm • Free • W theblackwatch.co.uk

North of the town centre, just off Hay Street and adjacent to the North Inch, fifteenth-century Balhousie Castle is home to the headquarters of the Black Watch regiment and



the **Museum of the Black Watch**. The Black Watch – whose name refers to the dark colour of their tartan – was the local regiment until it was merged with other Scottish infantry battalions in 2006. The museum chronicles its history, dating back to 1740, through a good display of paintings, uniforms, documents, weapons and photographs.

Scone Palace

A couple of miles north of Perth on the A93 • Daily April–Oct 9.30am–5.30pm (last admission 5pm); grounds only on Fridays Jan–March 10am–4pm • Palace and grounds £10; grounds £6 • W scone-palace.co.uk • Take the #58 bus from Perth bus station, or bus #3 from South St

Almost as well known as Perth itself is **Scone** (pronounced "skoon"), one-time home of the Stone of Destiny and the first capital of a united Scotland. **Scone Palace**, just a couple of miles north of Perth on the A93, exudes graceful Scottish country living and there are some pleasant walks in the grounds that surround it. Owned and occupied by the Earl and Countess of Mansfield, whose family has held it for almost four centuries, the two-storey building on the eastern side of the Tay is more a home than a monument: the rooms, although full of antiques and lavish furnishings, feel lived-in and used.

Scone was once the capital of Pictavia, and it was here that Kenneth MacAlpine, first king of a united Scotland, brought the famous Coronation **Stone of Destiny**, or Stone of Scone, which is now to be found in Edinburgh Castle (see p.63). A replica of the (surprisingly small) stone can be found on Moot Hill, immediately opposite the palace.

Moot Hill, as its name suggests, was the place where Scottish earls came to swear loyalty to their king and discuss the affairs of state in an early form of national parliament. In a symbolic gesture, oak trees from the estate were used in the construction of Scotland's parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh.

Inside the palace, the library houses one of the foremost collections of porcelain in the world, with items by Meissen, Sèvres, Chelsea, Derby and Worcester.

Huntingtower Castle

Three miles northwest of Perth on the A85 • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct daily 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Wed, Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • historic-scotland.gov.uk • Catch bus #13 from South Street to Perth Mart

Nothing like as grand as Scone Palace, but intriguing for its historical connections, is **Huntingtower Castle**. Two three-storey towers formed the original fifteenth- and sixteenth-century tower house, linked in the seventeenth century by a range to provide more room. Formerly known as Ruthven Castle, it was here that the Raid of Ruthven took place in 1582, when the 16-year-old James VI, at the request of William, fourth Earl of Ruthven, came to the castle only to be held captive by a group of conspirators demanding the dismissal of favoured royal advisers. The plot failed, and the young James was released ten months later. Today the castle's chief attractions are its splendid sixteenth-century painted ceilings in the east tower's main hall.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Perth connects with the main train lines north from Edinburgh and Glasgow; trains pull in at the station west of the centre, where Kings Place runs into Leonard Street.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 1hr 30min–1hr 50min); Blair Atholl (3–8 daily; 40min); Dundee (hourly; 25min); Dunkeld (5–8 daily; 20min); Edinburgh (every 1–2hr; 1hr 20min); Glasgow Queen St (at least hourly; 1hr); Inverness (7–11 daily; 2hr); Pitlochry (7–11 daily; 30min); Stirling (roughly hourly; 30min).

By bus Perth is well connected by bus; the main bus station is just north of the railway station on the opposite side of Leonard Street.

Destinations Aberfeldy (hourly; 1hr 25min); Crieff (hourly; 40min); Dundee (every 30min; 1hr 10min); Dunkeld (hourly; 30min); Edinburgh (hourly; 1hr 40min); Glasgow (hourly; 1hr 35min); Gleneagles (hourly; 25min); Inverness (every 2hr; 2hr 45min); Pitlochry (every 2hr; 45min); Stirling (hourly; 50min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office West Mill Street (April–Jul & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm, Sun 10am–4.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm; 01738 450600, perthshire.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

Achnacarry Guest House 3 Pitcullen Crescent 01738 621421, achnacarry.co.uk. Victorian B&B a 15min walk from the main drag, on the eastern side of the Tay. Family rooms make it a good option for those travelling with kids. Doubles £60; family rooms £75

Kinnaird House 5 Marshall Place 01738 628021, kinnaird-guesthouse.co.uk. Smartly furnished B&B in a Georgian terrace house overlooking South Inch Park, within easy reach of the centre. There's also a cosy living room to relax in. £70

Parklands Hotel 2 St Leonards Bank 01738 622451, theparklandshotel.com. Of the numerous central hotels in Perth aim for this award-winning place close to the train station, which has a touch of contemporary styling with flatscreen TVs and wi-fi in all rooms. It also has a good restaurant and bistro. £119

Pitcullen Guest House 17 Pitcullen Crescent 01738 626506, pitcullen.co.uk. Swish, well-run B&B offering neatly styled en-suite rooms. Little extras like blackout blinds and in-room fridges make it a cut above others in the same price range. £70

EATING AND DRINKING

RESTAURANTS

63 Tay Street 63 Tay St 01738 441451, 63taystreet.com. At the top end of Perth's dining scene is this restaurant, serving classy and modern Scottish food, like Scrabster cod with red wine. The five-course dinner costs £37. Lunch: Thurs–Sat noon–2pm; pre-theatre menu: Tues–Fri 5.45pm–6.30pm; dinner: 6.30pm–9pm.

The Apron Stage 5 King St, Stanley 01738 828888. A homely, fun option just north of town in the village of Stanley, with bistro dishes rustled up in a tiny kitchen; the

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breast of guinea fowl costs £16.25. Make sure that you book in advance. Thurs–Sat only 6.30–9.30pm.

Café Tabou 4 St John's Place 01738 446698. For moderately priced food try this cafe, with its menu of French classics – the fish of the day is £11.90 – and pleasant street-side seating. Mon 10am–3pm, Tues–Thurs 10am–9.30pm, Fri & Sat 10am–9pm, Sun noon–3pm.

Deans at Let's Eat 77–79 Kinnoull St 01738 643377, www.letseatperth.co.uk. Serves innovative dishes like slow-cooked pork trotters with cider and cream (for £17.95), in a relaxed space, with a focus on Scottish ingredients. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6.30pm–9.30pm.

Kerachers 168 South St 01738 449777, www.kerachers-restaurant.co.uk. Although it's best known for its elegant fish dishes, Kerachers also does good veggie mains, including a mixed mushroom risotto (£16.90). Wed–Sat 6pm–late.

PUBS

Old Ship Inn Near the High St on Skinnergate 01738 624929. The long-established *Old Ship Inn* serves real ale (pints from £2.70) and basic pub grub. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30pm–11pm.

Twa Tams 79 Scott Street 01738 580948. Has a good beer garden as well as regular live music, and also serves a range of cheap meals (two mains for £9.99 Mon–Thurs & Sun). Thurs–Sat 11pm–midnight, Mon–Wed & Sun 11am–11.15pm.

SHOPPING

Farmers' Market King Edward Street www.perthfarmersmarket.co.uk. This market takes place on the first Saturday of every month, with around 40 stalls selling local produce from home-baked cakes to freshly butchered venison. First Saturday of the month 9am–2pm.

Provender Brown 23 George St www.provenderbrown.co.uk. Perth's best deli, where you can buy everything from Isle of Mull cheeses to Scottish craft beers (from £2.45 a bottle). Mon–Wed & Sat 9am–5pm, Thurs & Fri until 5.30pm.

Strathearn

STRATHEARN – the valley of the River Earn – stretches west of Perth for some forty miles to **Loch Earn**, a popular watersports spot located just to the north of the Trossachs. The Roman general Agricola was here around two thousand years ago, trying to establish a foothold in the Highlands; later the area was frequented by Bonnie Prince Charlie and Rob Roy, both bound up in the north–south struggle between Highlands and Lowlands. Today the main settlement in the valley is the well-heeled town of **Crieff**, which, despite its prosperous air, has some hints of the wilder Highland countryside close by, notably around the popular **Glenturret Distillery**.

Blackford

The village of **BLACKFORD**, just west of Gleneagles, is famous for its high-quality spring water. This, coupled with an abundance of locally produced barley, made Blackford the perfect place to brew beer, and in 1488 James IV demanded that ale made from the village's water be served at his coronation. These days the water is bottled and sold under the Highland Spring brand around the UK.

St Serf's

Dunning • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March access by arrangement • Free • 01764 684497

In the quiet village of Dunning, five miles east of Auchterarder on the B8062, is **St Serf's**, a rugged church with a Norman tower and arch, which houses the magnificent **Dupplin Cross**, reckoned to be the finest surviving carved Pictish stone. Dating from the early ninth century, it was made in honour of Constantine, the first king of the Picts, who also reigned over the Scots of Dalriada (Argyll). The combination of Pictish and Christian imagery – intricately carved Celtic-knot patterns, depictions of animals and warriors – illustrates the developing relationship between king and the Church.

GLENEAGLES

Gleneagles Hotel T 0800 389 3737, restaurant T 0800 389 3737, W gleneagles.com. Just west of Auchterarder, at the southern edge of Strathearn, lies Gleneagles, which is famously home to three championship golf courses. Wrapped by more than 800 acres of countryside, the resort has welcomed leaders and celebrities from every corner of the globe. If staying the night is beyond your means, consider eating at the main restaurant, the refreshingly unstuffy *Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles* (£95 for three courses), which has two Michelin stars and is perhaps the finest restaurant in all of Scotland, with dynamic dishes like roast fillet of brill with seaweed butter. Mon–Sat 6.30pm–10pm. £335

Crieff and around

At the heart of Strathearn sits the old spa town of **CRIEFF**, in a lovely position on a south-facing slope of the Grampian foothills. Cattle drovers used to come to a market, or "tryst", here in the eighteenth century, but Crieff really came into its own with the arrival of the railway in 1856. Shortly after that, Morrison's Academy, a local private school, took in its first pupils, and in 1868 the grand *Crieff Hydro*, then known as the *Strathearn Hydropathic*, opened its doors to Victorian visitors seeking water-therapy cures. These days, Crieff values its respectability and has an array of fine Edwardian and Victorian houses, with a busy little centre that retains something of the atmosphere of the former spa town.

Famous Grouse Experience

At the Glenturret Distillery, a mile north of Crieff • Daily: March–Oct 9am–6pm (last tour 4.30pm); Nov–Feb 10am–5pm (last tour 3.30pm) • £9.95 • W www.thefamousgrouse.com • Catch any bus going to Crieff, Comrie or St Fillans and ask the driver to drop you at the bottom of the Glenturret Distillery road, from where it's a 5min walk

From Crieff, it's a short drive or a twenty-minute walk north to the **Famous Grouse Experience**, located at the venerable **Glenturret Distillery** just off the A85 to Comrie. Glenturret is Scotland's **oldest distillery**, established in 1775, and still one of the more attractive, with whitewashed buildings and pagoda roofs situated beside a gurgling stream. In recent years it has become the home of the Famous Grouse blend. While the corporate edge may be hard to avoid, and the coach park is often full, this is one distillery that makes a decent effort to be family-friendly and to avoid much of the romanticized pomposity which comes with other parts of the malt whisky trail.

Innerpeffray Library

Four miles southeast of Crieff on the B8062 road to Auchterarder • March–Oct Wed–Sat 10am–12.45pm & 2–4.45pm, Sun 2–4pm; Nov–Feb phone for appointment • £5 • T 01764 652819, W innerpeffraylibrary.co.uk

Little known but well worth a visit is the delightfully hidden **Innerpeffray Library**, situated in an attractive eighteenth-century building right by the River Earn. Beside an old stone chapel and schoolhouse, this serene and studious public library, founded in 1680, is the oldest in Scotland. It's a must for bibliophiles, its shelves containing some four thousand cloth and leather-bound books, mainly on theological and classical subjects, which visitors are allowed to browse.

Drummond Castle Gardens

Near Muthill, two miles south of Crieff on the A822 • May–Oct daily 1–6pm (last admission 5pm) • £5 • W drummondcastlegardens.co.uk • Take bus #47 or #18 from Crieff towards Muthill, then walk a mile and a half up the castle drive

Of all the attractions around Crieff, most impressive are the magnificent **Drummond Castle Gardens**. The approach, up a splendid avenue of beech trees, is pretty enough, but by crossing the courtyard of the castle to the grand terrace you can view the garden in all its symmetrical glory. It was begun as early as 1630 (the date of the tall central sundial), though the design of the French/Italianate parterre is Victorian: it depicts a St Andrew's cross and incorporates other images associated with the Drummonds, including two

crowns and the wavy motif found on the family crest. Italian marble statues punctuate the long lines of the cross, and the overall effect is of exceptional harmony and grace.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

CRIEFF AND AROUND

By bus Buses for Stirling (7 daily; 55min) arrive and depart from the High Street, near the junction with Hill Street.

INFORMATION

Tourist office In the town hall on High Street (April–June Mon–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; July–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; Sept–March Mon–Sat 10.30am–3.30/4pm; ☎01764 652578).

Visitor centre At the bottom of the hill, on Muthill Road (daily 10am–4.30pm). Incorporates a garden centre, an exhibition about cattle drovers and the Caithness Glass visitor centre and factory, which you can tour for free.

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Barley Bree** 6 Willoughby Street, Muthill ☎01764 681451, 🌐barleybree.com. The obvious choice if you decide to stay in Muthill, a handsome eighteenth-century village with an ancient church. The rooms are chic and bright, and the French/Scottish cooking has a well-deserved reputation for quality. **£110**

Comrie Croft 4 miles west of Crieff, just off the A85 ☎01764 670140, 🌐comriecroft.com. Largish bunkhouse/activity centre set on a farm halfway between Crieff and Comrie, with its own private fishing loch, mountain-bike rental and a network of paths and walks; you can also camp here, either in your own tent or a Nordic kâta. Dorms **£18**; doubles **£44**; camping **£7**/person

Crieff Hydro North of the centre near Crieff Golf Course ☎01764 655555, 🌐crieffhydro.com. The imposing *Crieff Hydro* is still the grandest place in town, despite the institutional atmosphere. It has splendid leisure facilities including a pool and stables. **£175**

Galvelmore House 5 Galvelmore Street ☎01764 655721, 🌐galvelmore.co.uk. A friendly B&B close to the main drag, with a lovely oak-panelled lounge that has a selection of board games. There's also a pretty two-bedroom self-catering apartment. **£68**

★ **Knock Castle** Drummond Terrace ☎01764 650088, 🌐knockcastle.com. Built for a shipping tycoon in 1885, this grand home is now a luxurious retreat with an indulgent spa and a restaurant that has panoramic views over the Perthshire countryside. The snug ground-floor bar is also open to non-residents. **£120**

EATING AND DRINKING

Delivino 6 King Street ☎01764 655665, 🌐delivino.net. Just downhill from the tourist office, this is a swish Italian café serving antipasti, tapas, good pizzas (£6–8), coffee and cakes. It also has a small but selective wine list. Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun noon–4pm.

Lounge 1–3 West High Street ☎01764 654407, 🌐loungeincrieff.co.uk. Cosy daytime hangout that mixes tearoom with tapas bar. Serves good breakfasts, like smoked salmon and cream cheese croissants (£5.50), plus soups and burgers. Daily 11am–9.30pm.

Yann's at Glenearn Glenearn House, Perth Road ☎01764 650111, 🌐yannsatglenearnhouse.com. The best bet locally for fine food, with French Alpine dishes (mains £13–15) from Yann's home province served in a bistro-style setting. There are attractive rooms here too. Wed–Fri 6pm–9pm, Sat & Sun noon–2pm & 6.30–9pm.

SHOPPING

Harrison's Fine Wines 1A Galvelmore Street ☎01764 655016. The physical face of 🌐winestore.co.uk, this shop stocks everything from Veuve Cliquot to vegan-friendly reds. There's also a sister shop in nearby Comrie. Mon–Sat 10am–8pm.

Strathearn Gallery 32 West High Street ☎01764 656100. This small commercial gallery on the corner of Galvelmore Street regularly hosts exhibitions that include ceramics, jewellery and landscape paintings. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm.

Loch Earn

At the western edge of Strathearn lies **Loch Earn**, a gently lapping Highland loch dramatically edged by rippling mountains. The A85 runs north along the loch shore from the village of **St Fillans**, at the eastern tip, to a slightly larger settlement, **Lochearnhead**, at the western end of the loch, where it meets the A84 linking the Trossachs to Crianlarich (see p.295). The wide tranquil expanse of Loch Earn is popular for **watersports**, particularly engine-based pursuits like waterskiing, powerboating and jet skiing.

ACTIVITIES

Lochearnhead Watersports Crieff Road 07834 4467059, lochearnhead-watersports-centre.com. Offers waterskiing, wakeboarding and the like, as well as a basic licensed café with picture windows looking out to the loch. Kayaking costs £20/hr.

LOCH EARN

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Four Seasons Hotel St Fillans, at the eastern end of the loch 01764 685333, thefourseasonshotel.co.uk. A superb waterside location makes this hotel the area's best place to stay, and there are also half a dozen chalets (sleeping two) tucked behind the main building. The on-site bistro is a good spot for food, with two-course lunches only costing £11.99. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm. Chalets £108; doubles £122

Lochearnhead Hotel Lochside, Lochearnhead 01567 830229, lochearnhead-hotel.com. Cheerful hotel set back from the A85, with ten fresh-feeling en-suite bedrooms, some of which have views over the loch. There's also a bar selling evening meals. Daily 6–8pm. £80

Lochearn House Near the post office in Lochearnhead 01567 830380, lochearnhouse.co.uk. The three double rooms at this small B&B are good value, and are well taken care of by a friendly, retired couple. £64

Strath Tay and around

Heading due north from Perth, both the railway and main A9 trunk road carry much of the traffic heading into the Highlands, often speeding straight through some of Perthshire's most attractive countryside in its eagerness to get to the bleaker country to the north. Perthshire has been dubbed "**Big Tree Country**" by the tourist board in recognition of some magnificent woodland in the area, including a number of individual trees that rank among Europe's oldest and tallest specimens.

Many of these trees are found around the valley of the River Tay, which flows east towards the sea from attractive Loch Tay and is known as **STRATH TAY**. The loch is set among the high Breadalbane Mountains which include the striking peak of **Ben Lawers**, Perthshire's highest, and the hills that enclose the long, enchanting **Glen Lyon**. Studded around Loch Tay are the remains of crannogs – ancient dwellings built on man-made islands. Not far downriver is the prosperous small town of **Aberfeldy**; from here the Tay drifts southeast between the unspoilt twin villages of **Dunkeld** and Birnam before meandering its way past Perth.

Dunkeld

DUNKELD, twelve miles north of Perth on the A9, was proclaimed Scotland's ecclesiastical capital by Kenneth MacAlpine in 850. Its position at the southern boundary of the Grampian Mountains made it a favoured meeting place for Highland and Lowland cultures, and the town is one of the area's most pleasant communities, with handsome whitewashed houses, appealing arts and crafts shops and a charming cathedral. Dunkeld sits just across the River Tay from its sister village, Birnam (see p.330).

Dunkeld Cathedral

Cathedral St • Daily: April–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–6.30pm, Sun 2–4pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4pm, Sun 2–4pm • Free • dunkeldcathedral.org.uk

Dunkeld's partly ruined **cathedral** is on the northern side of town, in an idyllic setting amid lawns and trees on the east bank of the Tay. Construction began in the early twelfth century and continued throughout the next two hundred years, but the building was more or less ruined at the time of the Reformation. The present structure consists of the fourteenth-century choir and the fifteenth-century nave; the choir, restored in 1600 (and several times since), now serves as the parish church, while the nave remains roofless apart from the clock tower. Inside, look out

for the effigy of the **Wolf of Badenoch**, Robert II's son, who was born in 1343. The Wolf acquired his name and notoriety when, after being excommunicated for leaving his wife, he took his revenge by burning the towns of Forres and Elgin, and sacking the latter's cathedral.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUNKELD

By train The nearest train station is in nearby Birnam.
By bus Buses travelling to and from Perth stop opposite the *Royal Dunkeld Hotel* on Atholl St, Dunkeld.

Destinations Inverness (5 daily; 2hr 30min); Perth (every 30min; 40min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office The Visit Scotland information centre is on The Cross, in the middle of Dunkeld (April–June & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun 11am–4pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Sun 10.30am–5pm; Nov–March Fri–Sun 11am–4pm; T 01350 727688).

ACCOMMODATION

Hilton Dunkeld House Blairgowrie Rd T 01350 727771, W hilton.co.uk/dunkeld. Pricey and a little corporate, but undeniably luxurious, this vast country-estate house on the banks of the Tay has a spa, swimming pool and excellent facilities for outdoor pursuits. £169

The Pend 5 Brae Street T 01350 727586, W thepend.com. An elegantly furnished B&B just off the main street in Dunkeld, with three large rooms that share a couple of bathrooms. Dinner is also available for residents. £76

Wester Caputh Independent Hostel Manse Road, Caputh T 01738 710449, W westercaputh.co.uk. Four miles downstream along the Tay from Dunkeld this hostel offers small dorm rooms and there's also a self-catering house for rent. The convenient location and relaxing, welcoming atmosphere make this a great base. Dorms £18

EATING AND DRINKING

The Scottish Deli 1 Atholl Street T 01350 728028, W scottish-deli.com. Fill up on gourmet delights at this well-stocked deli, which also has its own wine room. There's also a counter selling eat-in salads for £4.50. Mon–Fri 9.30am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–5.30pm, Sun 10.30am–4.30pm.

★ **The Taybank** Tay Terrace T 01350 727340, W thetaybank.co.uk. A raggedy beacon for music fans, who come for the regular live sessions in the convivial bar. Fancy joining in? Wednesday night is open mic night. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight, Sun noon–11pm.

Birnam

Dunkeld is linked to its sister community, **BIRNAM**, by Thomas Telford's seven-arched bridge of 1809. This little village has a place in history thanks to Shakespeare, for it was on Dunsinane Hill, to the southeast of the village, that Macbeth declared: "I will not be afraid of death and bane/Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane". The **Birnam Oak**, a gnarly old character propped up by crutches, which can be seen on the waymarked riverside walk, is inevitably claimed to be a survivor of the infamous mobile forest.

Birnam Institute

Station Rd • Daily 10am–4.30pm • £3 • W birnaminstitute.com

Just like Shakespeare, children's author Beatrix Potter drew inspiration from the Birnam area, recalling her childhood holidays here when penning the Peter Rabbit stories. A Potter-themed exhibition and garden can be found in the impressive barrel-fronted **Birnam Institute**, a lively theatre, arts and community centre.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BIRNAM

By train The Dunkeld and Birnam train station is just south of the A9 in Birnam.

Destinations Inverness (8 daily; 1hr 50min); (Perth (10 daily; 20min).

By bus Direct services to Inverness leave from opposite the *Birnam Hotel* on Perth Rd.

Destinations Inverness (5 daily; 2hr 30min); Perth (every 30min; 40min).

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Merryburn Hotel** Station Road ⓣ 01350 727216, ⓦ merryburn.co.uk. An old ironmonger's shop converted into a small and inviting hotel, just across from the Birnam Institute. Many of the building's original Victorian features are still intact. £80

Aberfeldy and around

From Dunkeld the A9 runs north alongside the Tay for eight miles to Ballinluig, a tiny village marking the turn-off along the A827 to **ABERFELDY**, a prosperous settlement of large stone houses that acts as a service centre for the wider Loch Tay area. Aberfeldy sits at the point where the Urlar Burn – lined by the silver birch trees celebrated by Robert Burns in his poem *The Birks of Aberfeldy* – flows into the River Tay.

Wade's Bridge

In Aberfeldy the Tay is spanned by the humpbacked, four-arch **Wade's Bridge**, built by General Wade in 1733 during his efforts to control the unrest in the Highlands, and one of the general's more impressive pieces of work. Overlooking the bridge from the south end is the **Black Watch Monument**, depicting a pensive, kilted soldier; it was erected in 1887 to commemorate the first muster of the Highland regiment gathered as a peacekeeping force by Wade in 1740.

Dewar's World of Whisky

Half a mile east of Aberfeldy, just off the A827 • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–4pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10am–4pm • £7; Cask Tasting Tour £18; Connoisseur Tour £25 • ⓦ dewarswow.com

The main set-piece attraction in Aberfeldy is **Dewar's World of Whisky**, at the Aberfeldy Distillery, which puts on an impressive show of describing the process of making whisky. A **Cask Tasting Tour** and **Connoisseur Tour** are available for real aficionados, giving a more in-depth look around the distillery and a chance to taste (or "nose") the whisky at different stages in its life.

Castle Menzies

One mile west of Aberfeldy, across Wade's bridge • Easter to late Oct Mon–Sat 10.30am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm • £6 • ⓦ castlemenzies.co.uk

One mile west of Aberfeldy, **Castle Menzies** is an imposing, Z-shaped, sixteenth-century tower house, which until the middle of the last century was the chief seat of the Clan Menzies (pronouced "Ming-iss"). With the demise of the line, the castle was taken over by the Menzies Clan Society, which since 1971 has been involved in the process of restoring it. Much of the interior is on view, and most of it is refreshingly free of fixtures and fittings, displaying an austerity that is much more true to medieval life than many grander castles elsewhere in the country.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — ABERFELDY

By bus Buses stop on Chapel Street in Aberfeldy, near the junction with Dunkeld Street (the A827), with regular services to Perth (up to 12 daily; 1hr 25min).

Tourist information The Square in the town centre (April–June, Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Wed 10am–4pm; ⓣ 01887 820276). Good for advice on local accommodation and details of nearby walking trails.

ACTIVITIES

Highland Safaris Two miles west of Castle Menzies, off the B846 ⓣ 01887 820071, ⓦ highlandsafaris.net. Near the hamlet with the unfortunate name of Dull (twinned with Boring, Oregon, USA), this adventure

outlet arranges Land Rover trips into the heather-clad hills nearby in search of eagles, red deer and grouse. At the lodge you can try your hand at gold and mineral panning (£5).

Bike rental If you want to rent a bike (£20/day), head to Dunolly Adventure Outdoors (T01887 820298 W dunollyadventures.co.uk), close to the River Tay on Taybridge Drive.

ACCOMMODATION

Coshieville House Five and a half miles west of Aberfeldy along the B846 T01887 830319, W aberfeldybandb.com. In peaceful surroundings, this 300-year-old inn provides modern accommodation with nice touches like fresh flowers brightening up the communal areas. £40

Balnearn Guest House Crieff Road T01887 820431 W balnearnhouse.co.uk. Stylish and unpretentious rooms close to the middle of town, with the added bonus of a drying room for your outdoor gear. £65

The Bunkhouse Glassie Farm, three miles from Aberfeldy along the winding track that starts near the footbridge T01887 820265, W thebunkhouse.co.uk. The closest bunkhouse to Aberfeldy has small rooms that share simple showers, plus two self-catering kitchens and a communal area with magnificent views over the town. Popular with groups. Dorms £17

EATING AND DRINKING

Ailean Chraggan Across Wade's Bridge in Weem W aileanchraggan.co.uk. The long, regularly updated lunch and dinner menu at this hotel-restaurant includes plenty of fishy mains (£11–16). Daily noon–2pm & 5.30pm–8/9pm.

★ **The Watermill** Mill Street W aberfeldywatermill.com. Aberfeldy isn't short on cafés, but the best bet for a good cup of coffee, a bowl of lunchtime soup (£4.20) or afternoon tea, is this relaxed, superbly restored early nineteenth-century mill, with a pretty riverside garden. There's also an inspiring bookshop. Daily 10/11am–5.30pm.

Loch Tay and around

Aberfeldy grew up around a crossing point on the River Tay, which leaves it six miles adrift of **Loch Tay**, a fourteen-mile-long stretch of fresh water connecting the western and eastern Highlands. Rising steeply above the loch's northern edge is Ben Lawers, the tenth-highest peak in Scotland, whose mineral-rich slopes support plant life more commonly seen in the Alps or Arctic.

Glen Lyon

North of Loch Tay, the mountains tumble down into **Glen Lyon** – at 34 miles long, the longest enclosed glen in Scotland – where, legend has it, the Celtic warrior Fingal built twelve castles. The narrow single-track road through the glen starts at **Keltneyburn**, near Kenmore, at the northern end of the loch, although a road does struggle over the hills to **Bridge of Balgie**, halfway down the glen. Either way, it's a long, winding journey.

Fortingall

A few miles on from Keltneyburn, the village of **FORTINGALL** is little more than a handful of pretty thatched cottages, though locals make much of their 5000-year-old yew tree – believed (by them at least) to be the oldest living thing in Europe. The venerable tree can be found in the churchyard, with a timeline nearby listing some of the events the yew has lived through. One of these, bizarrely, is the birth of Pontius Pilate, reputedly the son of a Roman officer stationed near Fortingall.

Ben Lawers

Dominating the northern side of Loch Tay is moody **Ben Lawers** (3984ft), Perthshire's highest mountain; from the top there are incredible views towards both the Atlantic and the North Sea. The ascent – which shouldn't be tackled unless you're properly equipped for Scottish hillwalking – takes around three hours from the NTS car park, which you can reach by following a winding, hilly road off the A827.

Killin

The mountains **of Breadalbane** (pronounced "bred–albin", from the Gaelic "braghaid Albin" meaning "high country of Scotland") loom over the southern end of Loch Tay. Glens Lochay and Dochart curve north and south respectively from the small town of **Killin**, right in the centre of which the River Dochart comes rushing down over the frothy **Falls of Dochart** before disgorging into Loch Tay. A short distance west of Killin the A827 meets the A85, linking the Trossachs with Crianlarich (see p.295), an important waypoint on the roads to Oban, Fort William and the west coast.

There's little to do in Killin itself, but it makes a convenient base for some of the area's best walks.

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES — KILLIN

Tourist information Located on the ground floor of the old watermill by the falls (Daily: April–Oct 10am–4pm).

Killin Outdoor Centre and Mountain Shop Main Street ☎01567 820652, ⓦkillinoutdoor.co.uk. If you're interested in outdoor activities, make for the helpful and enthusiastic Killin Outdoor Centre and Mountain Shop, which rents out mountain bikes, canoes and tents. Daily 8.45am–5.45pm.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Falls of Dochart Inn Gray Street ☎01567 820270, ⓦfalls-of-dochart-inn.co.uk. Killin's best place to grab a bite to eat is this attractive, stone-walled pub, right above the famous rapids; the varied menu includes braised lemon sole for £13.95. Daily noon–11pm.

The Old Smiddy Main Street ☎01567 820619, ⓦtheoldsmiddykillin.co.uk. Offers three neat B&B rooms near the centre of the town, two of which have views of the river. The bistro-style café downstairs is a popular spot for cakes (£2.95) and ice creams. **£56**

Highland Perthshire

North of the Tay Valley, **Highland Perthshire** doesn't discard its lush richness immediately, but there are clear indications of the more rugged, barren influences of the Highlands proper here. The principal settlements of **Pitlochry** and **Blair Atholl**, both just off the A9, are separated by the narrow gorge of Killiecrankie. Though there are reasons to stop in both places, inevitably the greater rewards are to be found further from the main drag, most notably in the winding westward road along the shores of **Loch Tummel** and **Loch Rannoch** past the distinctive peak of **Schiehallion**, which eventually leads to the remote wilderness of **Rannoch Moor**.

Pitlochry

PITLOCHRY is undoubtedly a useful place to find somewhere to stay or eat en route to or from the Highlands. However, there's little charm to be found on its main street, with its crawling traffic and endless shops selling cut-price woollens and knobbly walking sticks to tourists, who use the town as a starting point for scenic hikes (see p.334). Far more appealing is the area south of the river, which is home to a renowned theatre and a serene botanical garden.

Edradour Distillery

Two and a half miles east of Pitlochry • March & April Mon–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun noon–4pm; May–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm; Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 10am–4pm • £7.50 • ⓦ www.edradour.com

The **Edradour Distillery** – Scotland's smallest – has an idyllic position – tucked into the hills a couple of miles east of Pitlochry on the A924. Although the tour of the distillery itself isn't out of the ordinary, the lack of industralization and the fact that the whole traditional process is done on site give Edradour more personality than many of its rivals.

9

Explorers: the Scottish Plant Hunters' Garden

Across the river from the town centre, near the theatre • April–Oct daily 10am–5pm (last entry 4.15pm) • £4, tours £1 extra • explorersgarden.com

If you want to escape the bustle of Pitlochry's main drag, it's worth having a wander around **Explorers: the Scottish Plant Hunters' Garden**, a garden and forest area that pays tribute to Scottish botanists and collectors who roamed the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in search of new plant species. An open-air amphitheatre in the grounds is sometimes used for outdoor performances.

Pitlochry Power Station and Dam

A short stroll upstream to the west of the theatre is the **Pitlochry Power Station and Dam**, a massive concrete wall that harnesses the water of artificial Loch Faskally, just north of the town, for hydroelectric power. Near the base of the dam there's a small observation cabin where you can take a peek at the underwater workings of Pitlochry's **salmon ladder**, a staircase of murky glass boxes through which you might see some nonplussed fish making their way upstream past the dam. An electronic counter shows how many of them have successfully completed the climb.

With parking available at the theatre, nearby, the dam makes a good starting point for a complete loop of the loch (around nine miles to the Pass of Killiecrankie and back).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PITLOCHRY

By train Pitlochry is on the main train line to Inverness. The station is on Station Rd, just south of the centre. Destinations: Inverness (every 1–2hrs; 1hr 35min); Perth (every 1–2 hrs; 30min).

By bus Buses from Perth stop near the train station. Destinations Inverness (7 daily; 2hr 10min); Perth (every 1–2hrs; 40min).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office 22 Atholl Rd (March Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm, Sun 11am–3pm; April–June Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30am, Sun 10am–4pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–6.30pm, Sun 9.30am–5.30pm; Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm, Sun 10am–4pm; Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm; ☎ 01796 472215). Can sell you a guide to walks in the surrounding area (£1) and also offers an accommodation booking service.

Bike rental For bike rental (£24/day), advice on local cycling routes, as well as general outdoor gear, try Escape Route, 3 Atholl Rd (☎ 01796 473859, escape-route.biz). Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–5pm; closed Wed in Nov.

WALKS AROUND PITLOCHRY

BEN VRACKIE

Pitlochry is surrounded by good walking country. The biggest lure has to be **Ben Vrackie** (2733ft; Ordnance Survey Explorer map 386), which provides a stunning backdrop for the town, and deserves better than a straight up-and-down walk. However, the climb should only be attempted in settled weather conditions and if you're properly prepared.

The direct route up the hill follows the course of the Moulin burn past the inn of the same name. Alternatively, a longer but much more rewarding circular route heads northwest out of Pitlochry, along the edge of Loch Faskally, then up the River Garry to go through the **Pass of Killiecrankie**. This is looked after by the NTS, which has a visitor centre (see p.405) providing background on the famous battle here. From the NTS centre follow the route past Old Faskally to meet the main track at Loch a'Choire. Alternatively, you can turn back here and loop around Loch Faskally instead.

BLACK SPOUT

A lovely short hill walk from the south end of Pitlochry follows a path through oak forests along the banks of the **Black Spout** burn; when you emerge from the woods it's just a few hundred yards further uphill to the lovely Edradour Distillery (see p.333).

ACCOMMODATION

Craigatin House and Courtyard 165 Atholl Road ☎01796 472478, ⓦcraigatinhouse.co.uk. On the northern section of the main road through town, this is an attractive, contemporary B&B with large beds, soothing decor and a pretty garden. £87

Fonab Castle Hotel Foss Rd, south of the river ☎01796 470140, ⓦfonabcastlehotel.com. Once the headquarters of a power company, this turreted, waterside landmark has now been transformed into a luxury hotel with a spa and panoramic fine-dining restaurant. The interiors, with sparkly Swarovski wall coverings, may be a little bling for some tastes. £170

Moulin Hotel 11 Kirkmichael Road, Moulin, on the outskirts of Pitlochry ☎01796 472196, ⓦmoulinhotel.co.uk. Pleasant old travellers' inn with a great bar and restaurant (see below) and its own brewery offering free guided tours (Thurs–Mon noon–3pm). £77

Pitlochry Backpackers Hotel 134 Atholl Rd ☎01796 470044, ⓦpitlochrybackpackershotel.com. Right in the centre of town, this hostel is based in a former hotel, and offers dorms, twin and double rooms, and a communal lounge. Dorms £18; doubles £52

EATING AND DRINKING

Moulin Inn 11 Kirkmichael Road, Moulin, on the outskirts of Pitlochry ☎01796 472196, ⓦmoulininn.co.uk. Joined to the hotel of the same name, this restaurant serves Scottish meals such as deep-fried haggis (£6.95) in a cosy, country pub setting at the foot of Ben Vrackie. Food served noon–9.30pm.

Strathgarry Hotel 113 Atholl Rd ☎01796 472469, ⓦstrathgarryhotel.co.uk. You'll find a range of moderately priced bistro food at this hotel on Pitlochry's main drag; expect to pay £5.95 for a bowl of soup and a sandwich. Daily 10am–10pm.

Scottish Deli 96 Atholl Road ☎01796 473322, ⓦscottish-deli.com. Busy deli with a few seats along one wall, where you can tuck into freshly made rolls, baguettes and ciabattas, with plenty of different fillings to choose from (from £3.25). Mon–Sat 8am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Pitlochry Festival Theatre Port na Craig, on the south side of the river ☎01796 484626, ⓦpitlochry.org.uk. On the southern edge of Pitlochry, just across the river, lies Scotland's renowned "Theatre in the Hills". A variety of productions – mostly mainstream theatre from the resident repertoire company, along with regular music events – are staged in the summer season and on ad hoc dates the rest of the year. Box office: May–Oct 9am–8pm, Nov–April 9am–5pm.

Blair Atholl

Three miles north of Killiecrankie, the village of **BLAIR ATHOLL** makes for a much quieter and more idiosyncratic stop than Pitlochry. Extravagant Blair Castle makes the place understandably popular with day-trippers, but if you decide to stick around there are plenty of walks and bike rides to enjoy in the surrounding countryside.

Blair Castle

Just off the B8079, midway between the train station and the bridge over the River Tilt • April–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm (last admission 4.30pm); Nov–March occasional weekends only (see website for details) • Castle and grounds £9.80; grounds £5.40 • ⓦblair-castle.co.uk

Seat of the Atholl dukedom, whitewashed, turreted **Blair Castle**, surrounded by parkland and dating from 1269, presents an impressive sight as you approach up the drive. You might even spot a piper, one of the Atholl Highlanders, playing in front of the castle; this select group was retained by the duke as his private army – a unique privilege afforded to him by Queen Victoria, who stayed here in 1844.

Thirty or so rooms display a selection of paintings, antique furniture and plasterwork that is sumptuous in the extreme. Highlights are the soaring **entrance hall**, with every spare inch of wood panelling covered in weapons of some description, and the vast **ballroom**, with its timber roof, antlers and mixture of portraits.

Blair Atholl Watermill

Ford Road • April–Oct daily 9.30am–5pm; milling takes place Wed–Fri • Free • ⓦblairathollwatermill.co.uk

Close to the River Tilt is Blair Atholl's **Watermill**, which dates back to 1613. During the summertime you can wander around and witness the mill in action. Better still

is a trip to the pleasant timber-beamed tearoom (see below), where you can enjoy home-baked scones and light lunches (many items are made with the mill's own flour).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES — BLAIR ATHOLL

Atholl Estates Information Centre Close to the bridge over the River Tilt, a 5min walk east of the train station (April–Oct daily 9am–4.45pm; athollestatesrangerservice.co.uk). Modern ranger station, where you can get details of the extensive network of local walks and bike rides, as well as information on surrounding flora and fauna.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Atholl Arms Hotel On the main road, near the train station 01796 481205, athollarms.co.uk. Grand but reasonably priced, and the best place in town for a drink or a bar meal. A tasty ham and haddie (smoked haddock and bacon with cheese sauce) costs £10.15. Bar: Mon–Thurs & Sun noon–10.45pm, Fri & Sat noon–11.30pm; food served daily noon–9.30pm. **£82**

★ **Blair Atholl Watermill** Ford Rd 01796 481321, blairathollwatermill.co.uk. Blair Atholl's top spot for tea, tray bakes, toasties (from £4.65) and bagels (from £5.25). in a charming (and still functioning) old watermill. April–Oct: daily 9.30am–5pm.

Blair Castle Caravan Park Within the grounds of Blair Castle 01796 481263, blaircastlecaravanpark.co.uk. Busy but attractive campsite with laundry facilities, a games room and a shop selling the estate's own sausages. Two-person tent **£18**

Loch Tummel

West of Pitlochry, the B8019/B846 makes a memorably scenic, if tortuous, traverse of the shores of **Loch Tummel** and then Loch Rannoch. These two lochs and their adjoining rivers were much changed by the massive hydroelectric schemes built in the 1940s and 1950s, yet this is still a spectacular stretch of countryside and one that deserves leisurely exploration. **Queen's View** at the eastern end of Loch Tummel is an obvious vantage point, looking down the loch to the misty peak of **Schiehallion**; the name comes from the Gaelic meaning "Fairy Mountain".

Schiehallion

Rising cone-like to a peak of 3553ft, **Schiehallion** is popular, fairly easy and inspiring mountain to climb (3–4hr), with views on a good day to the massed ranks of Highland peaks. The path starts up at Braes of Foss, just off the B846 that links Aberfeldy with Kinloch Rannoch. You'll get a good view of the mountain from the cosy *Loch Tummel Inn* (see below), about halfway along Loch Tummel.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — LOCH TUMMEL

Loch Tummel Inn About halfway along Loch Tummel, on the B8019 01882 634272, lochtummelinn.co.uk. Beautiful stone-built inn serving real ale and rich meals like pan-fried red-deer venison (£15.95). The picnic benches out the front have magnificent views over the loch and Schiehallion. Bar: Tues–Sat 12.30–midnight, Sun noon–midnight; food served Tues–Sat 12.30–2.30pm & 5.30–8.30pm, Sun 12.15–8pm. **£80**

Loch Rannoch and around

Beyond Loch Tummel, marking the eastern end of **Loch Rannoch**, the small community of **Kinloch Rannoch** doesn't see a lot of passing trade – fishermen and hillwalkers are the most common visitors. Otherwise, the only real destination here is Rannoch Station, a lonely outpost on the Glasgow–Fort William West Highland train line, sixteen miles further on: the road goes no further. Here you can contemplate the bleakness of **Rannoch Moor**, a wide expanse of bog, heather and wind-blown pine tree that stretches right across to the imposing entrance of Glen Coe (see p.404).

RANNOCH MOOR

Rannoch Moor occupies roughly 150 square miles of uninhabited and uninhabitable peat bogs, lochs, heather hillocks, strewn lumps of granite and gnarled Caledonian pines, all of it over one thousand feet above sea level. Perhaps the most striking thing about the moor is its inaccessibility: one road, between Crianlarich and Glen Coe, skirts its western side, while another struggles west from Pitlochry to reach its eastern edge at Rannoch Station. The only regular form of transport here is the **West Highland Railway**, which stops at **Rannoch** and, a little to the north, Corrour station, which has no road access at all. **Corrour** stole an unlikely scene in the film *Trainspotting* when the four central characters headed here for a taste of the great outdoors; a wooden SYHA hostel is located a mile away on the shores of **Loch Ossian** and is only accessible on foot, making the area a great place for hikers seeking somewhere genuinely off the beaten track. From Rannoch Station, beside which is the isolated *Moor of Rannoch* Hotel, it's possible to catch the train to Corrour and walk the nine miles back; it's a longer slog west to the eastern end of Glen Coe, the dramatic peaks of which poke up above the moor's western horizon. Determined hillwalkers will find a clutch of Munros around Corrour, including remote Ben Alder (3765ft), high above the forbidding shores of Loch Ericht.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train The West Highland Railway stops at Rannoch and, a little to the north, Corrour station, which has no road access at all.

Destinations (from Rannoch station) Corrour (3–4 daily; 12min); Fort William (3–4 daily; 1hr); Glasgow Queen St (3–4 daily; 2hr 50min); London Euston (sleeper service Mon–Fri & Sun daily; 11hr–12hr 40min).

LOCH RANNOCH AND AROUND

By bus A local bus service (Broons Bus #85) from Kinloch Rannoch provides connections with Rannoch railway station, sixteen miles to the west.

Destinations Rannoch station (up to 4 daily; 40min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

LOCH RANNOCH

Macdonald Loch Rannoch Half a mile west of Kinloch Rannoch along B846 ⓣ 08448 799059, ⓦ macdonaldhotels.co.uk. This large and rather plain hotel has a redeeming loch-side location. Guests have access to a leisure complex with an indoor pool and gym. £63

RANNOCH MOOR

Moor of Rannoch Hotel Rannoch Station ⓣ 01882 633238, ⓦ moorofrannoch.co.uk. If it's isolation you want, this is the place to stay; there's no internet access, radio or TV. The five comfy en-suite rooms look out over the boggy moorland. £104

LOCH OSSIAN

Loch Ossian Youth Hostel A one-mile walk northeast from Corrour's train station, on the shores of Loch Ossian ⓣ 01397 732207, ⓦ syha.org.uk. Only accessible on foot, this is an excellent option for hikers seeking somewhere genuinely off the beaten track. There's a self-catering kitchen for making basic meals, but no fridge. Dorms £19

Northeast Scotland

344 Dundee

351 The Angus coast

354 Strathmore and the Angus glens

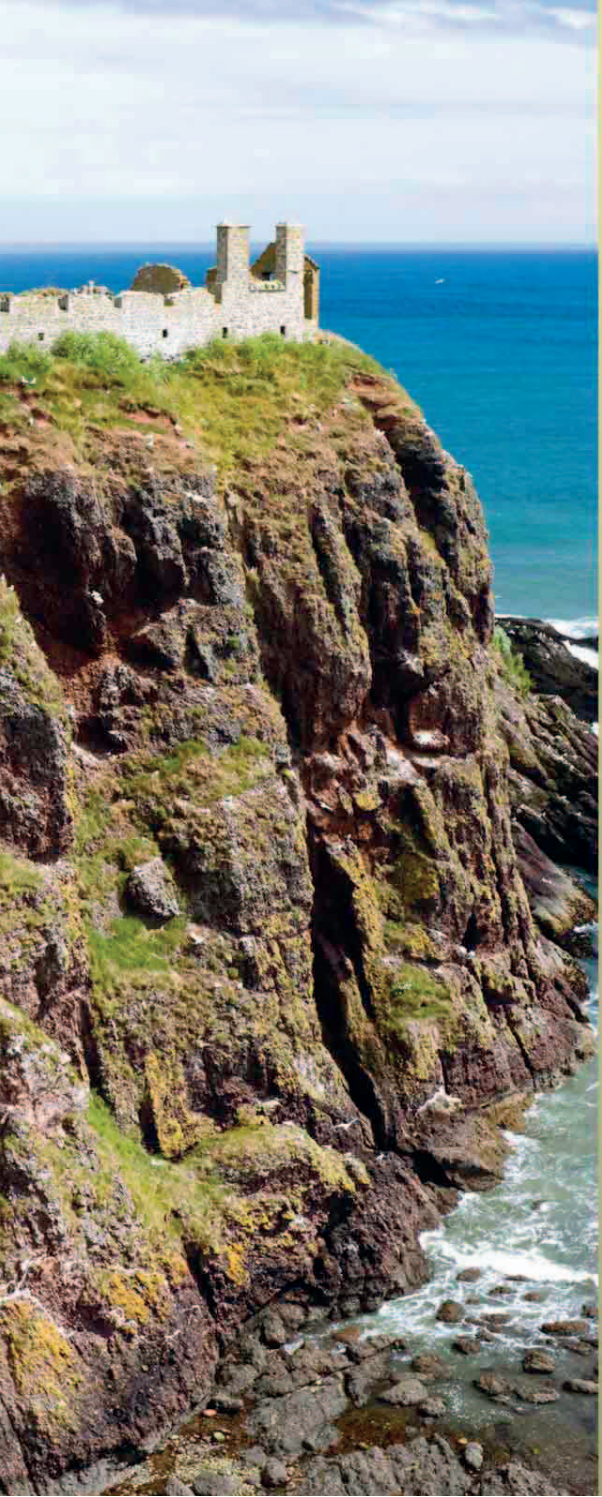
363 Aberdeen

373 Stonehaven and around

376 Deeside

380 The Don valley

382 The northeast coast



DUNNOTTAR CASTLE

Northeast Scotland

10

A large triangle of land thrusting into the North Sea, northeast Scotland comprises the area east of a line drawn roughly from Perth north to the fringe of the Moray Firth at Forres. The region takes in the county of Angus and the city of Dundee to the south and, beyond the Grampian Mountains, the counties of Aberdeenshire and Moray, and the city of Aberdeen. Geographically diverse, the south of the region is comprised predominantly of undulating farmland. However, as you travel further north this gives way to wooded glens, mountains and increasingly rugged terrain, fringed by a dramatic coastline of high cliffs and long sandy beaches.

The long-depressed city of **Dundee** is valiantly trying to shed its post-industrial image with a reinvigorated cultural scene and an impressive waterfront development based around **Discovery**, the ship of Captain Scott ("of the Antarctic"). A little way up the Angus coast are the historically important towns of **Arbroath** and **Montrose,** which are linked by an especially inviting stretch of coastline, with scarlet cliffs and sweeping bays. Further south towards Dundee, these are replaced by gentler dunes and long sandy beaches, while inland the long fingers of the **Angus glens** – heather-covered hills tumbling down to rushing rivers – are overlooked by the southern peaks of the Grampian Mountains. **Glen Clova** is one of the most popular, along with **Glen Shee**, which attracts large numbers of people to its ski slopes. Handsome if uneventful market towns such as **Brechin**, **Kirriemuir** and **Blairgowrie** are good bases for visiting the area, and extravagant **Glamis Castle** is well worth a visit.

The northeast was the southern kingdom of the **Picts**, reminders of whom are scattered throughout the region in the form of beautifully carved stones found in fields, churchyards and museums, such as the one at **Meigle**. Remote, self-contained and cut off from the centres of major power in the south, the area never grew particularly prosperous, and a handful of feuding and intermarrying families grew to wield a disproportionate influence, building many of the region's **castles** and religious buildings, and developing and planning its towns.

Aberdeenshire and **Moray** cover a large chunk of the northeast, some 3500 square miles, much of it open and varied country dotted with historic and archeological sights, from eerie prehistoric rings of standing stones to quiet kirkyards and a rash of dramatic castles. Geographically, the counties break down into two distinct areas: the **hinterland**, once barren and now a patchwork of fertile farms, rising towards high mountains, sparkling rivers and gentle valleys; and the **coast**, a classic stretch of rocky cliffs, remote fishing villages and long, sandy beaches.

Many of the most appealing settlements in these counties are along the coast, but while the fishing industry is but a fondly held memory in many parts, a number of the northeast's ports were transformed by the discovery of **oil** in the North Sea in the 1960s – particularly **Aberdeen**, Scotland's third largest city. It's the region's obvious focal point, with intriguing architecture, attractive museums and a lively social scene. A sophisticated but expensive place to be, it continues to ride a diminishing wave of oil-based prosperity. The city's transport connections make it an undeniably handy base; there's an international **airport**, and **trains** connect the city centre with Inverness and major points further south.

Walks from Glen Doll p.360
Skiing in Glen Shee p.362
Deeside and Donside Highland Games p.379

FISHMONGER, ARBROATH

Highlights

❶ **McManus Art Galleries and Museum** Dundee's most impressive Victorian building is the place to come for ceramics, fine art and contemporary photography. **See p.346**

❷ **Arbroath smokies** A true Scottish delicacy: succulent haddock best eaten when it's still warm from the oak smoker. **See p.351**

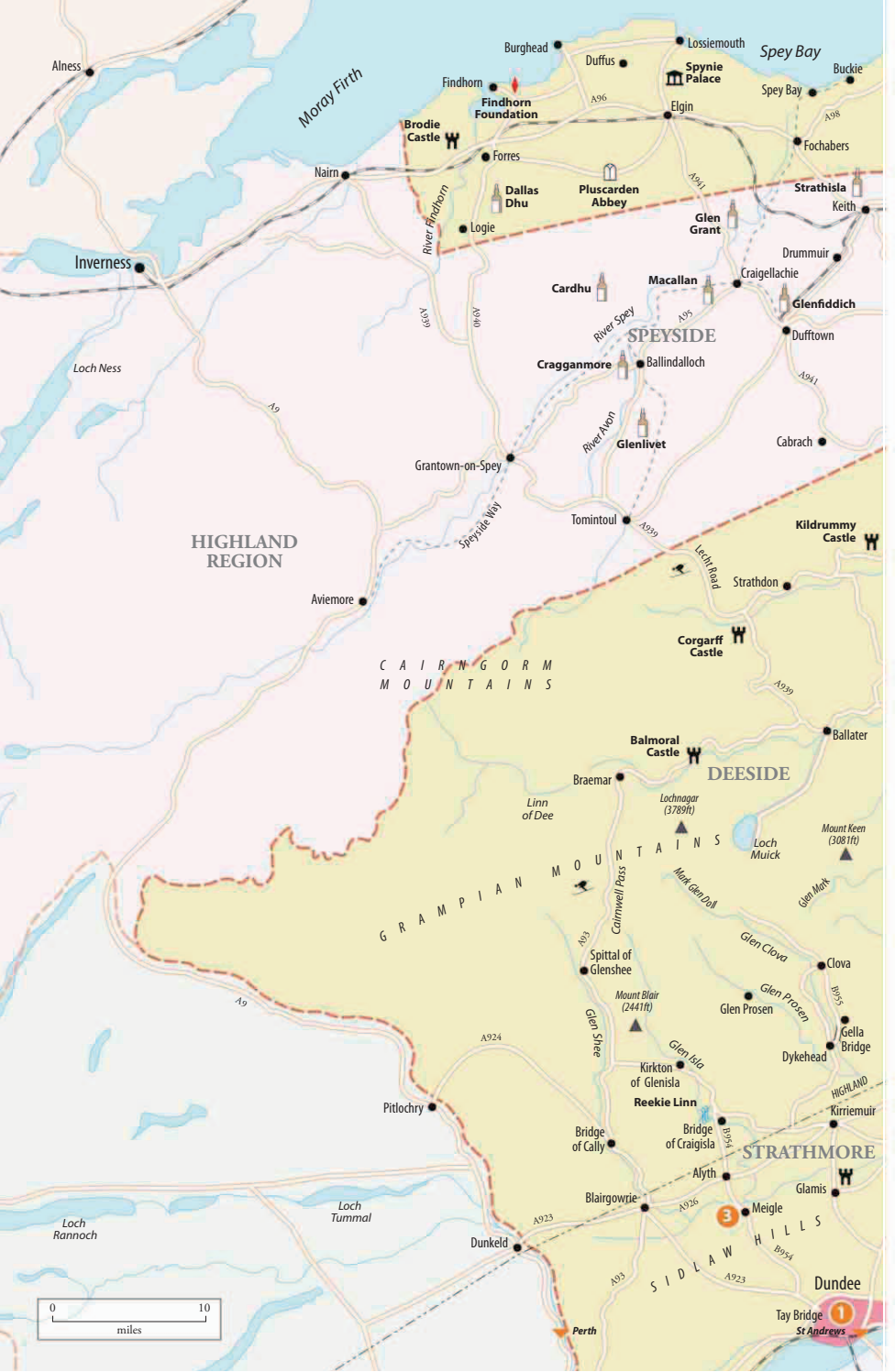
❸ **Pictish stones** Fascinating carved relics of a lost culture, standing alone in fields or protected from the elements in museums such as at Meigle. **See p.361**

❹ **Dunnottar Castle** Scotland's moodiest clifftop ruin, with centuries of bloody tales to tell and views across the swirling North Sea. **See p.374**

❺ **Museum of Scottish Lighthouses** Learn about light, lenses and legends at one of the best small museums in the country. **See p.383**

❻ **Pennan and Gardenstown** Tiny one-street fishing villages on the Aberdeenshire coast: there's no room for any more between the cliff and the sea. **See p.383 & p.384**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.342


Alness
Moray Firth
Burghead
Duffus
Lossiemouth
Spey Bay
Buckie
Spynie Palace
Findhorn
Findhorn Foundation
A96
Elgin
Spey Bay
A98
Brodie Castle
Forres
Fochabers
Nairn
Dallas Dhu
Pluscarden Abbey
A941
Strathisla
Keith
River Findhorn
Logie
Glen Grant
Drummuir
Inverness
Cardhu
Macallan
Craigellachie
Glenfiddich
A939
A940
River Spey
A95
SPEYSIDE
Dufftown
Loch Ness
Cragganmore
Ballindalloch
A941
A9
River Avon
Glenlivet
Cabrach
Grantown-on-Spey
Speyside Way
Tomintoul
A939
Kildrummy Castle
HIGHLAND REGION
Leith Road
Strathdon
Aviemore
Corgarff Castle
CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS
A939
Balmoral Castle
Ballater
DEESIDE
Braemar
Linn of Dee
Lochnagar (3789ft)
Mount Keen (3081ft)
Loch Muick
GRAMPIAN MOUNTAINS
Cairnwell Pass
Mark Glen Doll
Glen Mark
A93
Glen Clova
Spittal of Glenshee
Clova
Mount Blair (2441ft)
Glen Prosen
B955
Glen Prosen
Glen Shee
Gella Bridge
A9
A924
Glen Isla
Dykehead
Kirkton of Glenisla
HIGHLAND
Reekie Linn
Kirriemuir
Pitlochry
Bridge of Cally
Bridge of Craigisla
B954
STRATHMORE
Alyth
Glamis
Loch Tummal
Blairgowrie
A926
Meigle
3
Loch Rannoch
A923
SIDLAW HILLS
B954
Dunkeld
A93
A923
Dundee
Tay Bridge
1
St Andrews
Perth
0
10
miles

HIGHLIGHTS

1. McManus Art Galleries and Museum
2. Arbroath smokies
3. Pictish stones
4. Dunnottar Castle
5. Museum of Scottish Lighthouses
6. Pennan and Gardenstown

NORTHEAST SCOTLAND

From Aberdeen, it's a short hop west to **Deeside**, a fertile yet ruggedly attractive area made famous by the Royal Family, who have favoured the estate at **Balmoral** as a summer holiday retreat ever since Queen Victoria fell in love with it back in the 1840s. Close by, the trim villages of **Ballater** and **Braemar** act as a gateway to the spectacular mountain scenery of the **Cairngorms National Park**. To the north lies the meandering **Don Valley**, a quiet area notable for **castles** such as Kildrummy and Corgarff, both of which are appealingly remote. Further north still, the dramatic **coastline** is punctuated by picturesque fishing villages, and there are a handful of engaging sights including **Duff House**, an outpost of the National Galleries of Scotland, and the New Age community at **Findhorn**.

GETTING AROUND NORTHEAST SCOTLAND

By train Trains from Edinburgh and Glasgow connect with Dundee, Aberdeen and other coastal towns, while an inland line from Aberdeen heads northwest to Elgin and on to Inverness.

By bus The region has a reasonably comprehensive scheduled bus service; only in the most remote and mountainous parts does public transport disappear altogether.

By car Northeast Scotland is well served by an extensive road network, with fast links between Dundee and Aberdeen, while the area north and west of Aberdeen is also dissected by a series of efficient routes.

Dundee

At first sight, **DUNDEE** can seem a grim place. In the nineteenth century it was Britain's main processor of jute, the world's most important vegetable fibre after cotton, which earned the city the tag "Juteopolis". The decline of manufacturing wasn't kind to Dundee, and the city's population of 145,000 are still living with its effects. But regeneration is today's big buzzword, with some commentators drawing comparisons with Glasgow's reinvention as a city of culture in the 1980s and 1990s. Less apparent is the city's international reputation as a centre of biotechnology, computer game technology and cancer research.

Brief history

Even prior to its Victorian heyday, Dundee was a town of considerable importance. It was here in 1309 that **Robert the Bruce** was proclaimed the lawful King of Scots, and during the Reformation it earned itself a reputation for tolerance, sheltering leading figures such as **George Wishart** and **John Knox**. During the Civil War, the town was destroyed by the Royalists and Cromwell's army. Later, prior to the Battle of Killiecrankie, it was razed to the ground once more by Jacobite **Viscount Dundee**, known in song and folklore as "Bonnie Dundee", who had been granted the place for his services to the Crown by James II.

Dundee picked itself up in the 1800s, its train and harbour links making it a major centre for shipbuilding, whaling and the manufacture of **jute**. This, along with jam and journalism – the three Js which famously defined the city – has all but disappeared, with only local publishing giant D.C. Thomson, publisher of the timelessly popular *Beano* and *Dandy*, as well as a spread of other comics and newspapers, still playing a meaningful role in the city. Look out for the statues of Dundee heroes **Desperate Dan** and **Minnie the Minx**, both from the old *Dandy* comic, given pride of place at the junction of Reform Street and City Square.

The Tay bridges

The best approach to Dundee is across the modern mile-and-a-half-long **Tay Road Bridge** from Fife. Running parallel a mile upstream is the **Tay Rail Bridge**, opened in 1887 to replace the spindly structure which collapsed in a storm in December 1879 only eighteen months after it was built, killing the crew and 75 passengers on a train

DUNDEE
ACCOMMODATION
Aberlaw Guest House 6
Andersons Guest House 8
Apex City Quay Hotel 10
Cullaig 1
Dundee Backpackers Hostel 3
Dundee Student Villages 7
Duntrune House 2
Errolbank 4
Fisherman's Tavern 5
Premier Inn Dundee Centre 11
Queen's Hotel 9
CLUBS AND LIVE MUSIC
Fat Sam's 2
The Reading Rooms 1
PUBS AND BAR
Fisherman's Tavern 10
Ship Inn 2
The Social 9
Trades House Bar 7
CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS
Agacan 8
The Blue Marlin 3
Bon Appetit 5
The Burgh Coffeehouse 1
The Glass Pavilion 4
Metro Brasserie 11
The Playwright 6
SHOPS
Clementine 1
Robertson's Deli 2
Victoria Dock
Unicorn
Arnold Clark
City Quay Shopping Centre
EAST DOCK STREET
PEEP-O DAY LANE
BLACKSCROFT
FOUNDRY LANE
PRINCES STREET
VICTORIA ST
KING STREET
NELSON ST
VICTORIA ROAD
HILLTOWN
Wellgate Shopping Centre
QUEEN'S ST
CONGATE
ALLAN STREET
Seagate Bus Station
SEAGATE
TRADES LANE
WEST VICTORIA DOCK RD
SOUTH VICTORIA DOCK RD
MARKET GAIT
St Paul's Episcopal Cathedral
DOCK ST
DOCK PLACE
NORTHERN BOULEVARD
SOUTHERN BOULEVARD
Tay Road Bridge (Toll)
MORAYGATE
PANMURE ST
SQUARE
COMMERCIAL
CASTLE ST
McManus Art Galleries & Museum
Dundee Travel Shop
ALBERT
REFORM STREET
HIGH STREET
CITY SQUARE
Caird Hall
DUDHOPE STREET
BELL STREET
Howff Burial Ground
Overgate Shopping Centre
UNION ST
CONSTITUTION ROAD
BARRACK ST
NORTH MARKETGAIT
WARD ROAD
St Mary's Church
DISCOVERY QUAY
RRS Discovery
Discovery Point
Train Station
WEST BELL STREET
SOUTH WARD ROAD
NORTH LINDSAY STREET
OVERGATE LANE
EAST MARKETGAIT
WEST MARKETGAIT
BROWN STREET
DOUGLAS STREET
Hertz
DCA
SOUTH TAY ST
Dundee Science Centre
GREENMARKET
Dundee Repertory Theatre
NETHERGATE
RIVERSIDE DRIVE
MILN STREET
SESSION STREET
GUTHRIE STREET
HAWKHILL
Verdant Works
Avertical World Climbing Centre
WEST PORT
PARK PLACE
SMALLS WYND
University of Dundee
HAWK HILL
N
0
200
yards
Football Stadiums
Dundee Law
M'Ilk Observatory
Ninewells Hospital & Balgay Hill
& Airport
& Invergowrie
Tay Rail Bridge, Spokes Bike Hire
Leuchars
& Broughty Ferry

passing over the bridge at the time. While the Tay bridges aren't nearly as spectacular as the bridges over the Forth near Edinburgh, they do offer a magnificent panorama of the city on the northern bank of the firth.

St Paul's Episcopal Cathedral

High Street, close to the junction with Commercial Street • Tues–Sat 11am–3pm; call if you'd like to visit at other times • Free • T 01382 224486

10

Midway between the Wellgate and Overgate shopping centres is the mottled spire of **St Paul's Episcopal Cathedral**, a rather gaudy Gothic Revival structure designed by George Gilbert Scott, notable for its vivid if sentimental stained glass and floridly gilded high altar. Immediately in front of the cathedral is a statue to one of the city's heroes, **Admiral Duncan of Camperdown**, who defeated a Dutch fleet not far offshore from Dundee during the Napoleonic Wars.

McManus Art Galleries and Museum

Albert Square • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 12.30–4.30pm; last entry 15min before closing • Free • W www.mcmanus.co.uk

The **McManus Art Galleries and Museum**, Dundee's most impressive Victorian structure, is located in Albert Square in the heart of the city. Recently reopened after a major restoration, this is an unmissable stop for art lovers. The **ground-floor rooms** explore the nature of museums, the surrounding natural landscape and the making of modern Dundee, while upstairs there's the splendid **Victoria gallery**, its curved red walls hung with an impressive collection of works by masters including Rossetti and Henry Raeburn. The rest of this floor is equally engrossing: Dundee and the World shows an eclectic ethnographic collection; the **20th Century Gallery** showcases work by the Scottish Colourists and others; the **Long Gallery** is lined with historic and modern ceramics; while **Here and Now** displays fine art acquisitions, including contemporary photography. The museum's bright and attractive **café** is also a good pit stop, especially on a sunny day when you can sit on the stone terrace outside.

Verdant Works

West Henderson's Wynd, Blackness • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 11am–6pm; Nov–March Wed–Sat 10.30am–4.30pm, Sun 11am–4.30pm • £8.50; joint ticket with Discovery Point £15 • W www.rrsdiscovery.com

An award-winning museum, **Verdant Works** tells the story of jute, from its harvesting in India to its arrival in Dundee on clipper ships. The museum, set in an old jute mill, makes a lively attempt to re-create the turn-of-the-century factory floor, the highlight being the chance to watch jute being processed on fully operational quarter-size machines originally used for training workers.

DCA

152 Nethergate • Daily: complex 10am–midnight; galleries 11am–6pm, until 8pm Thurs • Free • T 01382 909900, W dca.org.uk

Principal among the city's many arts venues is the hip and exciting **DCA**, or Dundee Contemporary Arts, a stunning five-floor complex that incorporates galleries, a print studio, a classy design shop and an airy café-bar. It's worth visiting for the stimulating temporary and touring exhibitions of contemporary art, as well as an eclectic programme of art-house films and cult classics (see p.350).

Discovery Point

Discovery Quay • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 11am–6pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm (last entry one hour before closing) • £8.50; joint ticket with Verdant Works £15 • W www.rrsdiscovery.com

Just south of the city centre, in the waterfront area, which is currently undergoing a

one-billion-pound transformation, domed **Discovery Point** is an impressive development centring on the Royal Research Ship *Discovery*. Something of an icon for Dundee's renaissance, *Discovery* is a three-mast steam-assisted vessel built in Dundee in 1901 to take Captain Robert Falcon Scott on his polar expeditions. A combination of brute strength and elegance, she has been beautifully restored, with polished wood panels and brass trimmings giving scant indication of the privations suffered by the crew. In the Antarctic, temperatures on board would plummet to -28°C and turns at having a bath came round every 47 days. Before you step aboard there are a series of interactive displays about the construction of the ship and Scott's journeys, including the chill-inducing "Polarama" about life in Antarctica.

Unicorn

Victoria Dock • April–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–March Wed–Fri noon–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm • £5.25 • Ⓦ frigateunicorn.org

An endearingly simple wooden frigate built in 1824, **Unicorn** is the oldest British warship still afloat and was in active service up until 1968. Although the interior is sparse, the cannons, the splendid figureheads and the wonderful model of the ship in its fully rigged glory (the real thing would have featured over 23 miles of rope) are fascinating. The ship is moored across from *Discovery* on the other side of the road bridge near the multimillion pound redevelopment of Victoria Dock (a footpath connects the two ships).

Dundee Law

It's a 30min walk to the foot of the Law from the city centre; or you can take bus #22 from Commercial Street

A mile or so north of town, **Dundee Law** is the plug of an extinct volcano and, at 571ft, the city's highest point. Once the site of a seventh-century defensive hill fort, it's now an impressive lookout, with great views across the whole city and the Tay. The climb to the top is steep and often windy.

Mills Observatory

Balgay Hill, two miles west of the centre • April–Sept Tues–Fri 11am–5pm, Sat & Sun 12.30–4pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 4pm–10pm, Sat & Sun 12.30–4pm; planetarium show Oct–March every other Fri, plus one Wed/month in summer (see website for details) • Free; planetarium £1 • Ⓣ 01382 435967 • Buses #17 and #26 from Nethergate stop on Ancrum Road, on the edge of Lochee Park

Balgay Hill, Dundee's smaller volcanic outcrop, sits a mile to the west of Dundee Law and is skirted by wooded **Lochee Park**. On its summit sits the **Mills Observatory**, Britain's only full-time public observatory with a resident astronomer. The best time to visit is after dark on winter nights; in summer there's little to be seen through the telescope, but well-explained, quirky exhibits and displays chart the history of space exploration and astronomy, and on sunny days you can play at being a human sundial and take in the fantastic views over the city through little telescopes. From October to March the **planetarium** runs a fortnightly show, while the observatory also has special opening times to coincide with eclipses and other astronomical events.

Broughty Ferry and around

Ⓦ cometobroughty.co.uk • Connected to the city by a 20min bus ride; use National Express bus #5 or #17, or Stagecoach Strathtay's #73 and #73a services; all leave from either High Street or Seagate in the town centre

Four miles east of Dundee's city centre lies the seaside settlement of **BROUGHTY FERRY,** now engulfed by the city as a reluctant suburb. The ferry referred to in the name was a railway ferry, which transported carriages travelling between Edinburgh and Aberdeen, it was inevitably closed following the building of the first ill-fated Tay Rail Bridge. Comprising an eclectic mix of big villas built by jute barons up on the hillside and small fishermen's cottages along the shoreline, "The Ferry", as it's known, has

experienced a recent resurgence in popularity. It's now a pleasant and relaxing spot with some good restaurants and pubs, and both the beach and the castle's "green" (or grounds), are popular run-around spots for kids.

Broughty Castle and Museum

Castle Approach • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 12.30–4pm; Oct–March Tues–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 12.30–4pm • Free

The striking **Broughty Castle and Museum**, right by the seashore, is worth a look, if only to admire its location at the mouth of the River Tay. Built in 1496 to protect the estuary, its four floors now house local history and military exhibits and cover the story of Broughty Ferry from 400 million years ago to its development as a fishing village.

Claypotts Castle

Just off the A92 at Claypotts Junction • Limited opening hours – for details call 01786 431324 • Free

Just north of Broughty Ferry, at the junction of the A92 and B978, the chunky bricks of **Claypotts Castle** constitute one of Scotland's most complete Z-shaped tower houses. Built between 1569 and 1588, its two round towers have stepped projections to support extra rooms, a sixteenth-century architectural practice that makes Claypotts look like it's about to topple over. Note that you may only view the castle from outside.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

DUNDEE

BY PLANE

Dundee's airport (01382 662200, hial.co.uk) is 2 miles west of the city centre. There are no buses into the centre so expect to fork out around £6 for a taxi.

Destinations London City (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat, 1 on Sun; 1hr 25min).

BY TRAIN

Trains arrive and depart from the station on Riverside Drive, about 300yd south of the city centre, near the river.

Destinations Aberdeen (every 30min; 1hr 15min); Arbroath (every 30min; 20min); Edinburgh (every 30min; 1hr 30min); Glasgow (hourly; 1hr 30min); Montrose (1–2 hourly; 30min).

BY BUS

Long-distance buses operated by Stagecoach Strathtay (01382 313700) arrive at the Seagate bus station, a couple of hundred yards east of the centre. For timetables and information contact Traveline Scotland (08712 002233; travelinescotland.com).

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 2hr 20min); Arbroath (every 30min; 30–50min); Blairgowrie (1–2 hourly; 50min–1hr); Forfar (every 30min; 30min); Glamis (2–5 daily; 35min); Kirriemuir (hourly; 55min); Meigle (hourly; 40min); Montrose (hourly; 1hr).

BY CAR

Car rental Arnold Clark, East Dock St (01382 599340, arnoldclark.com); Enterprise, 131 Seagate (01382 205040, enterprise.co.uk); Hertz 18 West Marketgait (01382 223711, hertz.co.uk).

GETTING AROUND

BY BUS

Local buses leave from the High Street or from nearby Union Street.

Dundee Travel Shop 92 Commercial St 01382 340006, nxbus.co.uk/sdundee. Sells Daysaver tickets, which provide unlimited bus travel for a day (£3.40), and hands out information on local bus routes.

BY TAXI

Taxis are a reliable option for trips in and around the centre; there are taxi ranks on Nethergate. Otherwise, try Dundee Private Hire (01382 203020).

BY BIKE

Bike hire Spokes, at 272 Perth Road (01382 666644) is the most central option for cycle hire, with bikes for £15/day.

Cycle routes/walking trails At the tourist office (see below) you can get route maps for Maritime and Heritage Walking Trails (1–2hr duration; free), which depart from the DCA. There's also a map of a citywide cycle route.

INFORMATION

Tourist office Discovery Point, in the building beside the RSS *Discovery* ship (Mon–Sat 11am–4/5pm, Sun 11am–4/5pm; 01382 527527, angusanddundee.co.uk). The tourist office is conveniently located just across from the train station. Staff here can help you book accommodation across Scotland.

Website You'll find information about the city's upcoming exhibitions, shows and events online at www.dundee.com.

ACTIVITIES

Avertical World 7 Blinshall Street 01382 201901, www.averticalworld.co.uk. Roped climbing and bouldering in an old church west of the centre. Mon–Fri noon–10pm, Sat & Sun 10am–7pm (until 5pm Sat & Sun June–Aug).

Football The city has two leading football clubs, Dundee (01382 889966, dundeefc.co.uk) and Dundee United (01382 833166, dundeeunitedfc.co.uk), whose stadiums face each other across Tannadice St in the north of the city.

Monifeith Golf Club 8 Princes Street, Monifieth 01382 532678 Offers two challenging 18-hole courses east of Broughty Ferry.

ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS

Apex City Quay Hotel West Victoria Dock Road 01382 202404, apexhotels.co.uk. Large, sleek and modern hotel that stands out among the new developments of the dockland area, incorporating a spa, swimming pool and restaurant. £85

Premier Inn Dundee Centre Riverside Drive 08715 278320, premierinn.com. Bland hotel that's part of a nationwide chain, but there's no denying it's well positioned beside Discovery Point and the train station. £76

Queen's Hotel 160 Nethergate 01382 322515, queenshotel-dundee.com. Grand old hotel with some fine period touches, which is now part of the Best Western group. The rooms are comfortable enough and the location is handy for the city sights and Cultural Quarter. £75

GUESTHOUSES AND B&BS

Aberlaw Guest House 230 Broughty Ferry Road 01382 456929, aberlaw.co.uk. Well-run guesthouse 1.5 miles from the city centre, with spotlessly clean rooms (including a large family room), and a welcoming owner who knows the local area inside out. £68

Andersons Guest House 285 Perth Rd 01382 668585, andersonsdundee.co.uk. Comfortable sandstone guesthouse a 15min walk west of the train station, and handy for routes north and south of Dundee. £70

Cullaig Rosemount Terrace, Upper Constitution St 01382 322154, cullaig.co.uk. Victorian six-bedroom terraced guesthouse on the lower slopes of Dundee Law and within walking distance from town. Child-friendly. £50

Duntrune House Duntrune 01382 350239, duntrunehouse.co.uk. Three spacious rooms in one wing of a grand but welcoming country house, built in 1826 and standing in lovely mature gardens five miles northeast of Dundee. £80

Errolbank 9 Dalgleish Rd 01382 462118, errolbank-guesthouse.com. Friendly Victorian villa with clean bright rooms and good views of the Tay. Hearty Scottish breakfast included. £69

Fisherman's Tavern 10–16 Fort St, Broughty Ferry 01382 775941, fishermanstavern.co.uk. Neat contemporary rooms – mostly en suite, and one with facilities for disabled guests – above a cosy, popular traditional pub with a roaring fire and good real ales. £74

HOSTEL AND CAMPUS ACCOMMODATION

Dundee Backpackers Hostel 57 High St 01382 224646, www.hoppo.com. Dundee's only backpackers' hostel, with dorms and private rooms in a warren-like former merchant's house constructed in 1560. Dorms £17; doubles/twins £45

Dundee Student Villages Seabraes, just west of the city centre 01382 573111, Scotland2000.com/seabraes. En-suite single or double rooms, or exclusive use of self-catered flats sleeping up to eight people (from £216 for 3 nights); bland but cheap. July & Aug only. £42

EATING AND DRINKING

The **west end** of Dundee, around the main university campus and Perth Road, is the best area for eating and drinking; the **city centre** has a few good pubs and one or two decent restaurants tucked away near the **Repertory Theatre**. **Broughty Ferry** is a pleasant alternative, with a good selection of pubs and restaurants that get particularly busy on summer evenings.

CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS

Agacan 113 Perth Rd 01382 644227. Tiny, moderately priced Turkish restaurant with an unmistakeable colourful exterior, and rough-hewn walls inside; they serve up decent kebabs (lamb doner £11) and stuffed pittas, and also do takeaways. Tues–Thurs 5–9pm, Fri & Sat 5.30–9.30pm.

The Blue Marlin Camperdown Street, City Quay 01382 534001, www.thebluemarlin.co.uk. As the name suggests, this is a dedicated seafood restaurant serving lunches and dinners with tempting dishes like grilled west coast king scallops (£24.50). Mon–Sat noon–2pm & 5–9/9.30pm.

Bon Appetit 22–26 Exchange St 01382 809000, bonappetit-dundee.com. Probably the most reliable (if not necessarily glamorous) spot for well-sourced, confidently cooked food in the city. Offers friendly service and authentic, good-value French cuisine (the two-course set menu is £17.45). Mon–Thurs noon–2pm & 5–9.30pm, Fri & Sat noon–2pm & 5–10.30pm.

The Burgh Coffeehouse 70 Commercial Street T01382 450333. Relaxed city centre café where leather-bound books and old maps line the walls. Good spot to sip a latte (£2.40) and make use of the free wi-fi. Mon–Sat 8am–8pm, Sun 10am–8pm.

The Glass Pavilion The Esplanade, Broughty Ferry T01382 732738, W theglasspavilion.co.uk. Dramatic, glass-fronted former bathing shelter with 1930s Art Deco styling, serving delicious home baking, healthy light meals and a sumptuous traditional high tea (4–6/7pm; £12.95). Daily 9am–10pm.

Metro Brasserie At the Apex City Quay Hotel, West Victoria Dock Road T 01382 202404, W apexhotels.co.uk. A style-led, but still pleasant, restaurant space, on the ground floor of the dockland's sleekest hotel, serving imaginative Scottish cuisine like Ayrshire pork with an apple purée and black pudding (£16.50). Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm.

The Playwright 11 South Tay Street T01382 223113, W theplaywright.co.uk. Swanky, well-staffed restaurant right by the Repertory Theatre, serving indulgent à la carte dishes (think guinea fowl with truffle cream; £22.95) and cheaper pre-theatre and lunch menus. Mon–Sat noon–roughly midnight, last food orders at 9.30pm.

PUBS

Fisherman's Tavern 10–16 Fort St, Broughty Ferry. Just off the shore in a busy traditional cottage, this pub serves a variety of real ales. There's a small garden for when the sun is shining. Daily 11am–midnight/1am.

Ship Inn 121 Fisher St, Broughty Ferry T01382 779176, W theshipinn-broughtyferry.co.uk. A narrow pub with a warm atmosphere and nautical feel, right on the waterfront with good views over the Tay. Does good seafood dishes (crab salad £9.25) and a fine selection of beers. Mon–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30–midnight.

Trades House Bar 40 Nethergate. A converted bank fronted with stained-glass windows, which provides a friendly atmosphere for boozing in the heart of the city. Also does pub meals for around £7.50. Daily 10/11am–midnight.

BAR

The Social 10 South Tay Street W socialdundee.co.uk. Good pre-club hangout, often packed with students, where you can get a Smirnoff and Coke for £3 (or £1.50 if you download the bar's app). Regular open mic nights. Daily 11am–midnight.

NIGHTLIFE

Fat Sam's 31 South Ward Road W fatsams.co.uk. Student favourite with cheap drinks (often just £1 for a beer) and nights dedicated to house, urban and chart music. Wed–Sat 10.30pm–2.30am.

The Reading Rooms 57 Blackscroft W readingroomsdundee.com. From rock 'n' roll and disco to soul, blues and punk, you'll find it all here. The schedule (available online) is mostly taken up by DJs and club nights, but live guitar bands play here too. Thurs–Sat 10.30pm–2.30/3.30am.

ENTERTAINMENT

CONCERT HALL

Caird Hall City Square T01382 434940, W www.cairdhall.co.uk. The city's best venue for classical music, including visits by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and other bigwigs, is Caird Hall, whose bulky frontage dominates City Square. See website for show times.

THEATRE

Dundee Repertory Theatre Tay Square T01382 223530, W www.dundeereptheatre.co.uk. This prodigious venue sits right at the heart of the Cultural Quarter, north of Nethergate. It's an excellent place for indigenously produced contemporary theatre and the home of the only permanent repertory company in Scotland. Box office Mon–Sat 10am–7.30/8pm.

CINEMAS

DCA 152 Nethergate T01382 909900, W dca.org.uk. DCA has two comfy auditoriums showing an appealing range of foreign and art-house movies alongside some of the more highbrow Hollywood releases. Daily 10am–midnight.

Cineworld Camperdown Leisure Park T08712 002000. Nine-screen cinema a fair way out of the centre, which shows mostly blockbuster movies. Take bus #4 from Commercial Street to get here. Call for show times.

SHOPPING

Clementine 103 Gray Street, Broughty Ferry. Popular old-fashioned greengrocer with food for busy modern people, such as "soup bags" (£3) that come with all the ingredients needed to make a vegetable soup. Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm.

Robertson's Deli Brook St, Broughty Ferry. A good place to stock up on food, with an impressive selection of meats and huge steak pies for just £2.95. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm.

DIRECTORY

Internet At the Central Library.
Library The Central Library, third floor of the Wellgate Shopping Centre (Mon–Fri 9/10am–6pm, Sat 9.30am–5pm).
Medical facilities Ninewells Hospital (☎01382 660111) is in the west of the city and has an Accident and Emergency department; Dundee Dental Hospital (☎01382 425791); *Boots* pharmacy, 49–53 High St (Mon–Sat 8.30am–6pm, Thurs 8.30am–7.30pm, Sun 10.30am–5pm; ☎01382 221756).
Police Scotland's Tayside division is based at West Bell St (☎01382 223200 or ☎101).
Post office 4 Meadowside (Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–12.30pm).

The Angus coast

The predominantly agricultural county of **ANGUS**, east of the A9 and north of the Firth of Tay, holds some of the northeast's greatest scenery and is relatively free of tourists. The coast from **Montrose** to **Arbroath** is especially inviting, with scarlet cliffs and sweeping bays, then, further south towards Dundee, gentler dunes and long sandy beaches.

GETTING AROUND — THE ANGUS COAST

By car Two roads link Dundee to Aberdeen and the northeast coast of Scotland. By far the more pleasant option is the slightly longer A92 coast road, which joins the inland A90 at Stonehaven, just south of Aberdeen.
By bus Intercity buses from Dundee to Aberdeen tend to use the A90, passing Forfar on the way.
By train The coast-hugging train line running north from Dundee is one of the most picturesque in Scotland, passing attractive beaches and impressive cliffs, and stopping in the old seaports of Arbroath and Montrose.

Arbroath and around

Since it was settled in the twelfth century, local fishermen have been landing their catches at **ARBROATH**, situated on the Angus coast where it starts to curve in from the North Sea towards the Firth of Tay, about fifteen miles northeast of Dundee. The name of the town stems from Aber Brothock, the burn which runs into the sea here, and although it has a great location, with long sandy beaches and stunning sandstone cliffs on either side of town, as well as an attractive old working harbour, Arbroath – like Dundee – has suffered from short-sighted development.

The town's most famous product is the **Arbroath smokie** – line-caught haddock, smoke-cured over smouldering oak chips, and still made here in a number of family-run smokehouses tucked in around the harbour.

Signal House Museum

Ladyloan, just west of the dock • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm • Free

Down by the harbour, the elegant Regency **Signal House Museum** still stands sentinel, as it has since 1813 when it was built as the shore station for the Bell Rock lighthouse, improbably erected on a reef eleven miles offshore by Robert Stevenson. The interior is now given over to some excellent local history displays: a schoolroom, fisherman's cottage and lighthouse kitchen have all been carefully re-created.

Arbroath Abbey

Abbey Street, half a mile north of the dock • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50 • ☎01241 878756, ⓦ www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

By the late eighteenth century, chiefly due to its harbour, Arbroath had become a trading and manufacturing centre, famed for boot-making and sail-making (the *Cutty Sark*'s sails were made here). The town's real glory days, however, came much earlier in the thirteenth century with the completion in 1233 of **Arbroath Abbey**, whose rose-pink sandstone ruins, described by Dr Johnson as "fragments of magnificence", stand on Abbey Street.

However, there's enough left to get a good idea of how vast the place must have been: the semicircular **west doorway** is more or less intact, complete with medieval mouldings, and the **south transept** has a beautiful round window, once lit with a beacon to guide ships. In the early 1950s, the **Stone of Destiny** had a brief sojourn here when it was stolen from London by a group of Scottish nationalists and appeared, wrapped in a Scottish flag, at the High Altar. It was duly returned to Westminster Abbey, where it stayed until its relatively recent move to Edinburgh Castle (see p.63).

Brief history

Founded in 1178 but not granted abbey status until 1285, Arbroath Abbey was the scene of one of the most significant events in Scotland's history when, on April 6, 1320, a group of Scottish barons drew up the **Declaration of Arbroath**, asking the pope to reverse his excommunication of Robert the Bruce and recognize him as king of a Scottish nation independent from England. The wonderfully resonant language of the document still makes for stirring reading: "For so long as one hundred of us remain alive, we will never in any degree be subject to the dominion of the English, since it is not for glory, riches or honour that we do fight, but for freedom alone, which no honest man loses but with his life." It was duly dispatched to Pope John XXII in Avignon, who in 1324 agreed to Robert's claim.

The abbey was dissolved during the Reformation, and until the nineteenth century, when the first steps were taken to protect the abbey, it was little more than a source of red sandstone for local houses.

St Vigeans

Although now little more than a northwestern dormitory of Arbroath, the pristine and peaceful hamlet of **ST VIGEANS** is a fine example of a Pictish site colonized by Christians: the church is set defiantly on a pre-Christian mound at the centre of the village. Many **Pictish stones** and fragments, dating back to 842 AD, are housed in the wonderful little museum, including the Drosten Stone, presumed to be a memorial. One side depicts a hunt, laced with an abundance of Pictish symbolism, while the other side bears a cross.

Auchmithie

Four miles north of Arbroath by road or coastal footpath, the clifftop village of **AUCHMITHIE** is the true home of the Arbroath smokie. However, the village didn't have a proper harbour until the nineteenth century – local fishermen, apparently, were carried to their boats by their wives to avoid getting wet feet – so Arbroath became the more important port and laid claim to the delicacy.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Trains arrive at the station on Keptie Street, less than 10min walk from the seafront.

Destinations Aberdeen (every 30min; 1hr); Dundee (every 30min; 20min); Montrose (roughly every 30min; 15min).

By bus The bus station is on Catherine Street, close to the railway station and within easy walking distance of the tourist information office.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 1hr 45min); Dundee (hourly; 30min); Forfar (hourly; 45min); Montrose (every 30min; 25min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Fishmarket Quay, in the revamped harbour area (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun noon–4pm; Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sun noon–4pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat 11am–4pm; ☎01241 872609). Look out for the free Arbroath Path Network leaflet, which has a useful map showing coastal walking routes in the area.

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Brucefield B&B** Cliffburn Road ☎01241 875393, ⓦbrucefieldbandb.com. Rooms at this renovated 1920s manor house are as good as those in the region's best hotels, with high-end bathrooms and plush beds.

Downstairs there's a sitting room with a free minibar, and outside there are seats overlooking a croquet lawn. **£100**

The Old Vicarage 2 Seaton Road ⓣ01241 430475, ⓦtheoldvicaragebandb.co.uk. Simple and friendly, *The Old Vicarage* has an impressive breakfast table that includes hot Arbroath smokies, a freshly baked loaf of bread and home-made preserves. **£80**

EATING AND DRINKING

But'n'Ben In Auchmithie, four miles east of Arbroath ⓣ01241 877223. One of the best restaurants along this stretch of coast, specializing in delicious, moderately priced seafood. The flavoursome platter of local smoked fish and shellfish costs £19.95.

M&M Spink 10 Marketgate ⓣ01241 875287 This tiny whitewashed shop is one of the most approachable and atmospheric places to try the famous Arbroath smokie (£8/kilo); chef and cookery writer Rick Stein described the fish here, still warm from the smoke, as "a world-class delicacy". Mon–Sat 8am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

The Old Brewhouse 1 High Street, by the harbour wall ⓣ01241 879945. A convivial and moderately priced restaurant-cum-pub, where you can sit down and tuck into Arbroath smokies smothered in melted butter and lemon (£10.25). Daily noon–9pm.

Montrose and around

MONTROSE, a seaport and market town since the thirteenth century, can sometimes smell a little rich, mostly because of its position on the edge of a virtually landlocked two-mile-square lagoon of mud known as the Basin. But with the wind in the right direction, the ancient Royal Burgh of Montrose is a great town to visit, with a pleasant old centre and an interesting museum. The Basin too is of interest: flooded and emptied twice daily by the tides, it's a nature reserve for the host of geese, swans and wading birds who frequent the ooze.

If you have time to spare, be sure to check out the town's fabulous golden **seashore**. The beach road, Marine Avenue, across from the town museum, heads down through sand dunes and golf links to car parks fringing the fine, wide beach, which is overlooked by a slender white lighthouse.

Montrose Museum and Art Gallery

Panmure Place, on the western side of Mid Links Park • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm • Free • ⓦwww.angus.gov.uk

Two blocks behind the soaring kirk steeple at the lower end of High Street, the **Montrose Museum and Art Gallery** is one of Scotland's oldest museums, dating from 1842. In the local history section, look out for the mechanical paper sculpture of the town, with a green train running along the top and yachts sailing by. Outside the museum entrance stands a winsome study of a boy by local sculptor William Lamb.

William Lamb Memorial Studio

Market Street • July to mid-Sept Tues–Sun 2–5pm; at other times ask at the museum • Free

Scottish sculptor William Lamb (1893–1951) was a superbly talented but largely unheralded artist. His career is all the more impressive because he taught himself to sculpt with his left hand, having suffered a war wound in his right. Much of his work can be seen in the moving **William Lamb Memorial Studio,** including bronze heads of the Queen, Princess Margaret and the Queen Mother. There's another Lamb sculpture, *Whisper*, outside the library on the High Street.

Montrose Basin Wildlife Centre

Around a mile west of Montrose on the A92 • March–Oct daily 10.30am–5pm; Nov–Feb Fri–Sun 10.30am–4pm • £4 • ⓦmontrosebasin.org.uk

On the south side of the Basin, a mile or so out of Montrose along the A92, the **Montrose Basin Wildlife Centre** has binoculars, high-powered telescopes and remote-control video cameras available for visitors who want to catch a glimpse of wading birds. Family-friendly guided walks also depart from the wildlife centre (see the website for a schedule).

The House of Dun

Four miles west of Montrose off the A935 • Late March–June & Sept–Oct Wed–Sun noon–5pm; July & Aug daily 11am–5pm; last admission 45min before closing • £10; NTS • Accessible on the hourly Montrose–Brechin bus service (#30); ask the driver to let you off outside

Across the Basin, four miles west of Montrose, is the Palladian **House of Dun**. Built in 1730 for David Erskine, Laird of Dun, to designs by William Adam, the house was opened to the public in 1989 after extensive restoration, and is crammed full of period furniture and objets d'art. Inside, the ornate relief plasterwork is the most impressive feature, extravagantly emblazoned with Jacobite symbolism. The buildings in the courtyard – a hen house, gamekeeper's workshop and potting shed – have all been renovated, and include a tearoom and a craft shop.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train The town's train station is by the Basin's edge, a block back from the High Street on Western Road.

Destinations Aberdeen (1–2 per hour; 45min); Arbroath (every 30min; 15min); Dundee (every 30min; 30min); Stonehaven (1–2 per hour; 25min).

MONTROSE AND AROUND

By bus Most buses stop on the High Street, close to *Lloyds Pharmacy*, or at the railway station.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 1hr 20min); Brechin (for the House of Dun; hourly; 20min); Dundee (every 30min; 25min); Stonehaven (every 30min; 50min).

ACCOMMODATION

36 The Mall The Mall, in the north of town ☎01674 673464 ⓦ36themall.co.uk. Attractive B&B accommodation with en-suite facilities in every room. The breakfast menu includes fish smoked in nearby Arbroath. **£80**

The Haven 8 Lower Hall Street ☎01674 677741 ⓦthehaven-montrose.co.uk. Near the centre and with welcoming, helpful owners, the gay-friendly *Haven* offers good-value singles and doubles in a clean, three-storey house, and is particularly popular with cyclists. **£60**

EATING AND DRINKING

Roos Leap 2 Trail Drive, by the golf club ☎01674 672157, ⓦroosleap.com. The liveliest (though hardly cosiest) place in Montrose is this sports bar and restaurant offering burgers, steaks and sandwiches from £6.75. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 5–9.30pm, Sat & Sun noon–9.30pm.

Strathmore and the Angus glens

Immediately north of Dundee, the low-lying Sidlaw Hills divide the city from the rich agricultural region of **STRATHMORE**, whose string of tidy market towns lies on a fertile strip along the southernmost edge of the heather-covered lower slopes of the Grampian Mountains. These towns act as gateways to the tranquil **ANGUS GLENS**, offering some of the most rugged and majestic landscapes in northeast Scotland. **Glen Clova** in particular is well and truly on the tourist circuit, with the rolling hills and dales attracting hikers, birdwatchers and botanists in the summer, grouse shooters and deer-hunters in autumn, and winter skiers who pray for a bountiful snowfall.

GETTING AROUND

STRATHMORE AND THE ANGUS GLENS

By car The most useful road through the glens is the A93, which cuts through Glen Shee, linking Blairgowrie to Braemar on Deeside (see p.379). It's pretty dramatic stuff, threading its way over Britain's highest main road, the Cairnwell Pass (2199ft). Public transport in the region is extremely limited.

Brechin

Eight miles west of Montrose, **BRECHIN** is an attractive town whose red-sandstone buildings give it a warm, welcoming feel. The chief attraction is the old **cathedral**, a building that's emboldened some (including the local football team) to proudly describe Brechin – in line with the historic definition – as a fully fledged city.

The Cathedral

On Bishop's Close, off the High Street • Daily 9am–5pm • Free

There's been a religious building of sorts here since the arrival of evangelizing Irish missionaries in 900 AD, and the red-sandstone structure of the **cathedral** has become something of a hotchpotch of architectural styles. What you see today dates chiefly from an extensive rebuilding in 1900, with the oldest surviving part of the cathedral being the 106ft-high round tower, one of only two in Scotland. The cathedral's doorway, built 6ft above the ground for protection against Viking raids, has some notable carvings, while inside you can see various Pictish stones, illuminated by the jewel-coloured stained-glass windows.

Pictavia

Haughmuir, a mile west of Brechin • April–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; Nov–March Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm • £3.25 • pictavia.org.uk

A mile from Brechin town centre along the Forfar road in the expansive grounds of Brechin Castle (not generally open to the public) is **Pictavia**, a custom-built tourist attraction with the grandly titled Brechin Castle Centre (a garden centre) as its hub. Based on the history and heritage of the Picts, it has interactive exhibits that will appeal to younger visitors, but is a lacking a little in substance. This is also where you'll find Brechin's **tourist office** (see below).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BRECHIN

By bus Brechin is easy to get to and from; bus #30 runs at least once per hour to Montrose, nine miles to the east.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist office At Pictavia (April–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; Nov–March Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; 01356 623050).

Caledonian Railway tours 01356 622992, caledonianrailway.com. Trains operate every weekend from June to August, travelling along four miles of track from Brechin to the Bridge of Dun (£6 return). Diesel trains run on Saturdays, steam trains run on Sundays.

ACCOMMODATION

Gramarcy House 6 Airlie Street 01356 622240. Bright, spacious and tastefully furnished rooms in a house set back from the main road. There's also a self-catering kitchen area and a sunny breakfast room with bay windows. Agnes, the owner, is friendly and helpful. £80

Edzell and around

Travelling around Angus, you can hardly fail to notice the difference between organic settlements and planned towns that were built by landowners who forcibly rehoused local people in order to keep them under control, especially after the Jacobite uprisings. One of the better examples of the latter, **EDZELL**, five miles north of Brechin on the B966, was cleared and rebuilt with Victorian rectitude a mile to the west of its original site in the 1840s. Through the Dalhousie Arch at the entrance to the village the long, wide and ruler-straight main street is lined with prim nineteenth-century buildings, which now do a roaring trade as genteel teashops and antiques emporia.

The original village (identifiable from the cemetery and surrounding grassy mounds) lay immediately to the west of the wonderfully explorable red-sandstone ruins of **Edzell Castle**, itself a mile west of the planned village.

Edzell Castle

A mile west of Edzell • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £5.50; HS

The main part of **Edzell Castle** is a good example of a comfortable tower house, where luxurious living rather than defence became a priority. However it's the **pleasance garden** overlooked by the castle tower that makes a visit essential, especially in late

spring and early to mid-summer. The garden was built by Sir David Lindsay in 1604, at the height of the optimistic Renaissance, and its refinement and extravagance are evident. The walls contain sculpted images of erudition: the Planetary Deities on the east side, the Liberal Arts on the south and, under floods of lobelia, the Cardinal Virtues on the west wall. In the centre of the garden, low-cut box hedges spell out the family mottoes and enclose voluminous beds of roses.

10

The Caterthuns

Four miles southwest of Edzell, lying either side of the lane to Bridgend which can be reached either by carrying on along the road past the castle or by taking the narrow road at the southern end of Edzell village, are the **Caterthuns**, twin Iron Age hill forts that were probably occupied at different times. The surviving ramparts on the White Caterthun (978ft) – easily reached from the small car park below – are the most impressive, and this is thought to be the later fort, occupied by the Picts in the first few centuries AD.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — EDZELL AND AROUND

By bus Edzell is five miles north of Brechin on the B966, and linked to it by buses #21, #29 and #30.

ACCOMMODATION

Alexandra Lodge Inveriscandye Road 01356 648266, alexandralodge.co.uk. Just a short walk east of the High Street, this is a friendly B&B located in a little Edwardian lodge built in 1907. April–Oct. £75

Panmure Arms 52 High Street C 01356 648950, panmurearmshotel.co.uk. The best of Edzell's hotels, offering sizeable, well-decorated rooms and fairly predictable bar meals. You'll find it close to the mini roundabout at the north end of the High Street. £95

Glen Esk

Just north of Edzell, a fifteen-mile road climbs alongside the River North Esk to form **Glen Esk**, the most easterly of the Angus glen, which, like the others, is sparsely populated. Further up the glen there are some excellent **hiking** routes including one to Queen Victoria's Well in Glen Mark and another up Mount Keen, Scotland's most easterly Munro.

Glenesk Retreat and Folk Museum

Tarfside, 10 miles northwest of Edzell • Easter to Nov Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm • Free • 01356 648070, glenesk.dreamhosters.com

Ten miles along Glen Esk, the excellent **Glenesk Retreat and Folk Museum** brings together records, costumes, photographs, maps and tools from the Angus glens, depicting the often harsh way of life for their inhabitants. Housed adjacent to a former shooting lodge known as The Retreat, it's run independently and enthusiastically by the local community. The museum's main attraction is its collection of agricultural tools, some of which date from the eighteenth century.

INFORMATION AND ACCOMMODATION — GLEN ESK

Hiking routes For information on hiking routes around Glen Esk visit visitcairngorms.com.

Glenesk Caravan Park Burn Estate 01356 648565, gleneskcaravanpark.co.uk. One and a half miles north of the village, you can camp at this small, child-friendly site. April–Oct; reception daily 9–11am & 4–6pm. £12/pitch

Forfar and around

Around fifteen miles north of Dundee on the A90 lies **FORFAR**, Angus's county town and the ancient capital of the Picts. The town's wide High Street is framed by some

FROM TOP UPPER DEESIDE (P.376); PICTISH STONES, ST VIGEANS MUSEUM (P.352) >

impressive Victorian architecture and small old-fashioned shops. If you stop here it's worth popping into the quaint bakeries that proudly stock the famous **Forfar bridie,** a semicircular folded pastry-case of mince, onion and seasonings.

Just west of town, a series of glacial lochs peters out at **Forfar Loch**, now surrounded by a pleasant country park with a visitor centre and three-mile nature trail. Further west still is **Glamis Castle** (see below), whose ostentatious interiors, carefully sculpted gardens and château-like turrets make it one of Scotland's most fantastical fortresses.

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Meffan Institute Museum and Art Gallery

20 West High St • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm • Free • www.angus.gov.uk

Midway along Forfar's High Street, the **Meffan Institute Museum and Art Gallery** exhibits Neolithic, Pictish and Celtic remains and a thoroughly enjoyable collection of re-created historical street scenes; the most disturbing examines the town's seventeenth-century passion for witch-hunting, with a taped re-creation of locals baying for blood.

Restenneth Priory and around

Two miles east of Forfar, signposted off the B9113 • Free

A short drive from Forfar in the middle of farmland are the remains of **Restenneth Priory**, approached along a side road off the B9113 (go beyond the Angus Archives to reach the car park). King Nechtan of the Picts was thought to have established a place of worship here in the eighth century, although the oldest parts of the present structure are from an Augustinian priory erected on the spot around 1100.

A little way south of this, off the B9128, a cairn in the village of **Dunnichen** commemorates a battle at nearby Nechtansmere in 685 in which the Picts unexpectedly defeated a Northumbrian army, thus preventing the Angles from extending their kingdom northwards.

EATING AND DRINKING — FORFAR AND AROUND

Tiffins 12 West High Street 01307 461152. The carpet's seen better days and the wallpaper's old-fashioned, but the friendly staff make this tearoom a pleasant spot for a vanilla slice and a cuppa (£2.60). They also do good sandwiches. Daily 9.30am–4.30pm.

Goodfellow & Steven 35 Castle Street 01307 460030. If you want to try the local speciality, Forfar bridie, call in at this bakery near the town's municipal building. A steak-filled bridie costs £1.55. Daily 8am–5pm.

The Vine and Monkey 37–43 West High Street 01307 461116. Fun watering hole on Forfar's main street that hosts live music sessions on Sundays that are occasionally backed up by a quiz (entry £1), and also serves pub food. Daily 11am–midnight/1am.

Glamis Castle

Dundee Road, about six miles west of Forfar • March–Oct daily 10am–6pm; last tour 4.30pm • £10.75 • glamis-castle.co.uk • Take Stagecoach bus #20C from West High Street in Forfar or Commercial Street in Dundee

Pink-sandstone **Glamis Castle**, located a mile north of the picturesque village of **GLAMIS** (pronounced "glahms") is a wondrously over-the-top, L-shaped five-storey pile set in an extensive landscaped park. It's also one of Scotland's most famous castles: Shakespeare chose it as a central location in *Macbeth*, and its **royal connections** (as the childhood home of the late Queen Mother and birthplace of the late Princess Margaret) make it one of the essential stops on every coach tour of Scotland.

As you approach the castle down the long main drive, a riot of turrets, towers and conical roofs appears fantastically at the end of the sweeping avenue of trees, framed by the Grampian Mountains. Obligatory guided tours (50min) take in the fifteenth-century **crypt**, where the 12ft-thick walls enclose a haunted "lost" room, reputed to have been sealed with the red-bearded lord of Glamis and Crawford inside, after he dared to play cards with the Devil one Sabbath. Artist Jacob de Wet was commissioned to produce the frescoes in the family **chapel**, completed in 1688, and his depictions of Christ wearing a hat and St Peter in a pair of glasses have raised eyebrows ever since.

Duncan's Hall, a fifteenth-century guardroom, is the traditional – but inaccurate – setting for Duncan's murder by Macbeth (it actually took place near Elgin).

Brief history

The bulk of the current castle dates from the fifteenth century, although many of the later additions give it its startling Disneyesque appearance. Glamis began life as a comparatively humble **hunting lodge**, used in the eleventh century by the kings of Scotland. In 1372 King Robert II gave the property to his son-in-law, Sir John Lyon, who built the core of the present building. His descendants, the earls of Kinghorne and Strathmore, have lived here ever since.

Kirriemuir and around

The sandstone town of **KIRRIEMUIR**, known locally as Kirrie, is set on a hill six miles northwest of Forfar on the cusp of glens Clova and Prosen. Despite the influx of hunters up for the "season", it's still a pretty special place, a haphazard confection of narrow closes, twisting wynds and steep braes. The main cluster of streets have all the appeal of an old film set, with their old-fashioned bars, tiled butcher's shop, tartan outlets and haberdasheries, but somehow manage to avoid being contrived and quaint.

Barrie's birthplace

9 Brechin Rd • Mid-March–June Sat–Wed noon–5pm; July–Aug daily 11am–5pm; Sept–Oct Sat–Wed noon–5pm • £6.50; NTS

Kirrie was the birthplace of **J.M. Barrie** (born 1860). A local handloom-weaver's son, Barrie first came to notice with his series of novels about "Thrums" – a village based on his home town – and in particular *A Window in Thrums* and his third novel, *The Little Minister*. The story of Peter Pan, the little boy who never grew up, was penned by Barrie in 1904 – some say as a response to a strange upbringing dominated by the memory of his older brother, who died as a child. **Barrie's birthplace**, a plain little whitewashed cottage, has a series of small rooms decorated as they would have been during Barrie's childhood, as well as displays about his life and works.

Camera obscura

In the old cricket pavilion above town, just off West Hill Road • Mid-March to June Sat noon–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; July–Sept Mon–Sat noon–5pm, Sun 1–5pm • £3.50; NTS

One of the few **camera obscuras** still functioning in Scotland, this unexpected treasure was donated to the town in 1930 by J.M. Barrie, and offers splendid views of Strathmore and the glens. On a clear day it's possible to see as far as Ben Ledi, almost 60 miles to the west.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KIRRIEMUIR AND AROUND

By bus The hourly #20 bus runs from Kirriemuir's High Street to Forfar and Dundee.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Muirhouses Farm North of town on the way to Cortachy ☎01575 573128, ⓦmuirhousesfarm.co.uk. Offering a proper taste of the countryside hereabouts, this is a working cattle farm with bright, plain rooms, which are looked after by friendly owner Susan. Breakfast includes fresh meat from the local butcher. Offers discounts for longer stays. **£75**

Thrums Hotel Bank Street ☎01575 572758, ⓦthrumshotel.co.uk. Good central option for lunches and evening meals; the menu includes a succulent slow-roasted lamb shank (£8.50). There are also nine en-suite rooms available. Food daily noon–2pm & 5–8pm. **£80**

SHOPPING

Star Rock Shop 27–29 The Roods ☎01575 572579. Pretty, old-style shop specializing in Scottish confectionary, which first opened in 1833. This is a nice place to try the hard, sweet and milky Scottish candy known as tablet (£2/bag). Tues–Sat 9/10am–5pm.

WALKS FROM GLEN DOLL

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 388 & 387

These **walks** are some of the main routes across the Grampians from the Angus glens to Deeside, many of which follow well-established old drovers' roads. All three either fringe or cross the royal estate of Balmoral, and Prince Charles's favourite mountain – **Lochnagar** – can be seen from all angles. The walks all begin from the car park at the end of the tarred road where Glen Clova meets Glen Doll; all routes should always be approached with care, and you should follow the usual safety precautions.

CAPEL MOUNTH TO BALLATER (15 MILES; 7HR)

Initially, the path zigzags its way up fierce slopes before levelling out to a moorland plateau, leading to the eastern end of Loch Muick. It then follows the River Muick to Ballater.

CAPEL MOUNTH ROUND-TRIP (15 MILES; 8HR)

Follows the above route to Loch Muick, doubling back along the loch's southern shore. The dramatic Streak of Lightning path that follows Corrie Chash leads to a ruined stables below Sandy Hillock; the descent passes the waterfall by the bridge at Bachnagairn, where a gentle burn-side track leads back to Glen Doll car park.

JOCK'S ROAD TO BRAEMAR (14 MILES; 7HR)

A signposted path leads below Cairn Lunkhard and along a wide ridge towards the summit of Crow Craigies (3018ft). From here, the path bumps down to Loch Callater then follows the Callater Burn, eventually hitting the A93 two miles short of Braemar.

Glen Clova and around

With its stunning cliffs, heather slopes and valley meadows, **Glen Clova** – which in the north becomes **Glen Doll** – is one of the loveliest of the Angus glens. Although it can get unpleasantly congested in peak season, the area is still remote enough to enable you to leave the crowds with little effort. Wildlife is abundant, with deer on the mountains, wild hares, and even grouse and the occasional buzzard. The meadow flowers on the valley floor and arctic plants (including great splashes of white and purple saxifrage) on the rocks make it a botanist's paradise.

Clova

The B955 from Dykehead and Kirriemuir divides at the Gella Bridge over the swift-coursing River South Esk. Around six miles north of Gella, the two branches of the road join up once more at the hamlet of **CLOVA**, home to little more than the hearty *Glen Clova Hotel* (see below). An excellent, if fairly strenuous, four-hour walk from behind the old school at the back of the hotel leads up into the mountains and around the lip of **Loch Brandy**.

North from Clova village, the road turns into a rabbit-infested lane coursing along the riverside for four miles to a car park, which makes a useful starting point for numerous superb **walks**. There are no other facilities beyond the village.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — **GLEN CLOVA AND AROUND**

Glen Clova Hotel In Clova, 15 miles north of Kirriemuir, along the B955 ⓣ01575 550350, ⓦclova.com Inviting country hotel, which also has its own bunkhouse and a private fishing loch. The restaurant serves up traditional Scottish food, such as venison casserole and haggis. Mon–Thurs & Sun noon–7.45pm, Fri & Sat noon–8.45pm. Dorms £17; doubles £90

Glen Prosen

Five miles north of Kirriemuir, the low-key hamlet of **Dykehead** marks the point where **Glen Prosen** and Glen Clova divide. A mile or so up Glen Prosen, you'll find the house

where Captain Scott and fellow explorer Doctor Wilson planned their ill-fated trip to Antarctica in 1910–11, with a roadside **stone cairn** commemorating the expedition.

From here on, Glen Prosen remains essentially a quiet wooded backwater, with all the wild and rugged splendour of the other glens but without the crowds. To explore the area thoroughly you need to go on foot, but a good road circuit can be made by crossing the river at the tiny village of **Glenprosen** and returning to Kirriemuir along the western side of the glen via Pearsie. Alternatively, the reasonably easy four-mile **Minister's Path** links Prosen with Clova; it is clearly marked and leaves from near the church in the village.

Meigle Museum

Dundee Rd, Meigle • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £4.50; HS • Hourly bus #57 from Dundee to Perth passes through Meigle

Fifteen miles north of Dundee on the B954 lies the tiny settlement of **Meigle**, home to Scotland's most important collection of early Christian and Pictish **inscribed stones**. Housed in a modest former schoolhouse, the **Meigle Museum** displays some thirty pieces dating from the seventh to the tenth centuries, all found in and around the nearby churchyard. The majority are either gravestones that would have lain flat, or cross slabs inscribed with the sign of the cross, which were usually standing. Most impressive is the 7ft-tall great cross slab, said to be the gravestone of Guinevere, wife of King Arthur. The exact purpose of the stones and their enigmatic symbols is obscure, as is the reason why so many of them were found at Meigle. The most likely theory suggests that Meigle was once an important ecclesiastical centre that attracted secular burials of prominent Picts.

Glen Isla and around

Three and a half miles north of Meigle is **Alyth**, near which, legend has it, Guinevere was held captive by Mordred. It's a sleepy village at the south end of **Glen Isla**, which runs parallel to Glen Shee, and is linked to it by the A926. If you decide to stay in the area, your best options for accommodation are in and around **Kirkton of Glenisla,** a small hamlet ten miles north of Alyth.

Reekie Linn

Close to the Bridge of Craigisla, which is a ten-minute drive north of Alyth along the B954, the River Isla narrows and then plunges some 60ft into a deep gorge to produce the classically pretty waterfall of **Reekie Linn**, or "smoking fall", so called because of the water mist produced when the fall hits a ledge and bounces a further 20ft into a deep pool known as the Black Dub. There's a car park beside the bridge, and the waterfall is a short walk away along the river's edge.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — GLEN ISLA AND AROUND

By bus Transport connections into the glen are limited. Alyth is on the main bus routes linking Blairgowrie with Dundee.

ACTIVITIES

Glenmarkie Horse Riding and Trekking Centre Around three miles northeast of Kirkton of Glenisla ☎01575 582293, ⓦglenmarkie.co.uk. Beyond *West Freuchies* (see below), a long and bumpy road leads to this remote activity centre, where you can take horse-riding lessons (£26/hr) in a spectacularly rural landscape.

ACCOMMODATION

Glenisla Hotel In Kirkton of Glenisla, ten miles north of Alyth ☎01575 582223, ⓦglenisla-hotel.com. Cosy hotel, which doubles as a good place for classy home-made bar food and convivial drinking. **£77.50**

West Freuchies Just outside Kirkton of Glenisla ☎01575 582716, ⓦglenisla-westfreuchies.co.uk. A comfortable B&B whose first-floor rooms have views over the hills. There's also self-catering accommodation nearby in a converted mill. Approaching from Alyth, a right-hand turn leads northeast to the B&B (signposted before you reach Kirkton of Glenisla). **£70**

SKIING IN GLEN SHEE

For information on skiing in Glen Shee contact **Ski Glenshee** (T013397 41320, W ski-glenshee.co.uk), which also offers ski rental and lessons, as does **the Gulabin Lodge Outdoor Centre** (see below), at the Spittal of Glenshee. For the latest snow and weather conditions, phone Ski Glenshee or check out the **Ski Scotland website** (W ski.visitscotland.com).

10

Glen Shee and around

The upper reaches of **Glen Shee**, the most dramatic and best known of the Angus glens, are dominated by its **ski fields**, ranged over four mountains above the Cairnwell mountain pass. The resorts here may not amount to much more than gentle training slopes in comparison with those of the Alps or North America, but they all make for a fun day out for everyone from beginners to experienced skiers. During the season (Dec–March), ski lifts and tows give access to gentle beginners' slopes, while experienced skiers can try the more intimidating Tiger run. In summer it's all a bit sad, although there are some excellent hiking and mountain-biking routes. Active types tend to overnight in Spittal of Glenshee, or twenty miles further south along the A93 in Blairgowrie (see p.362), a small town at the southern end of the glen.

Spittal of Glenshee

The small settlement of **SPITTAL OF GLENSHEE** (the name derives from the same root as "hospital", indicating a refuge), though ideally situated for skiing, has little else to commend it other than the busy *Gulabin Lodge Outdoor Centre*. From Spittal the road climbs another five miles or so to the ski centre at the crest of the Cairnwell Pass.

ACCOMMODATION AND ACTIVITIES — SPITTAL OF GLENSHEE

Dalmunzie Castle Spittal of Glenshee; the entrance is just south of Gulabin Lodge Outdoor Centre, across the bridge T01250 885224, W dalmunzie.com. A lovely Highland retreat in a magnificent turreted mansion, with first-class dining and over sixty malt whiskies to enjoy by the fireside. £135

Gulabin Lodge Outdoor Centre Spittal of Glenshee, just off the A93 15 miles south of Braemar T01250 885255, W gulabinoutdoors.co.uk. Snow sports are the big draw here in winter, of course, but staff here can also arrange summer activities like archery and rock climbing. Pre-booking advised. There is also clean, basic accommodation in a nineteenth-century manse, with singles, doubles and family rooms all available. £50

Blairgowrie

Travelling to Glen Shee from the south you'll pass through the well-heeled little town of **BLAIRGOWRIE**, set among raspberry fields on the glen's southernmost tip, and a good place to pick up information and plan your activities. Strictly two communities – Blairgowrie and **Rattray**, set on either side of the River Ericht – the town's modest claim to fame is that St Ninian once camped at Wellmeadow, a pleasant grassy triangle in the town centre.

Cateran Trail

The **Cateran Trail** is an ambitious, long-distance footpath that starts in Blairgowrie then heads off on a long loop into the glens to the north following some of the drove roads used by caterans, or cattle thieves. It's a four- to five-day tramp, though of course it's possible to walk shorter sections of the way (see the website W caterantrail.org for more information).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BLAIRGOWRIE

By bus Blairgowrie is well linked by hourly bus #57 to both Perth and Dundee.

INFORMATION

Tourist office 26 Wellmeadow (April–June & Sept–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; July–Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10.30am–3.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; ⓣ01250 872960, ⓦperthshire.co.uk). Blairgowrie's friendly tourist office can help with booking accommodation.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Bridge of Cally Hotel Six miles north of town on the A93 ⓣ01250 886231, ⓦbridgeofcallyhotel.com. A welcoming roadside pub serving simple grub throughout the day (steak and kidney pie £10.50), plus real ale by an open fire. Daily 10am–8.45pm.

Cargills By the river on Lower Mill Street ⓣ01250 876735, ⓦcargillsbistro.com Popular bistro serving inexpensive formal meals as well as civilized coffee and cakes. The menu includes good vegetarian options such as mushroom risotto (£11.90). Daily 10.30am–9pm.

Heathpark House Coupar Angus Road ⓣ01250 870700, ⓦheathparkhouse.com. Good, spacious en-suite rooms at a Victorian house south of the town centre with two acres of gardens. No children under the age of 16. £80

SHOPPING

Blairgowrie Farm Shop 14–16 Reform Street ⓣ01250 876528, ⓦblairgowriefarmshop.co.uk. Jams, vegetables, organic breads and frozen meats are all for sale at this well-stocked deli and farm shop. Mon–Sat 8.30am–5.30pm.

Aberdeen

The third-largest city in Scotland, **ABERDEEN**, commonly known as the "Granite City", lies 120 miles northeast of Edinburgh on the banks of the rivers Dee and Don, smack in the middle of the northeast coast. While some extol the many tones and colours of Aberdeen's **granite** buildings, others see only uniform grey, and find the city grim and cold: it lies on a latitude north of Moscow.

Since the 1970s, **oil** has made Aberdeen a hugely wealthy and self-confident place. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, it can seem a soulless city and sometimes it seems to exist only as a departure point for the transient population of some ten to fifteen thousand who live on the 130 oil platforms out at sea. That said, Aberdeen's **architecture** is undeniably striking – a granite cityscape created in the nineteenth century by three fine architects: Archibald Simpson and John Smith in the early years of the century and, later, A. Marshall Mackenzie. Classical inspiration and Gothic Revival styles predominate, giving grace to a material once thought of as only good enough for tombs and paving stones. In addition, the urban **parks** are some of the most beautiful in Britain.

Getting your bearings is easy enough, as Aberdeen divides neatly into five main areas. The **city centre**, roughly bounded by Broad Street, Union Street, Schoolhill and Union Terrace, features the opulent Marischal College, the colonnaded Art Gallery with its fine collection, the burgeoning nightlife of Belmont Street, and homes that pre-date Aberdeen's nineteenth-century town planning and have been preserved as museums. Union Street leads west to the twin diversions of gentrified shopping and raucous nightlife that defines the **West End**. To the south, the **harbour** still heaves with boats serving the fishing and oil industries, while north of the centre lies attractive **Old Aberdeen**, a village neighbourhood presided over by King's College and St Machar's Cathedral and influenced by the large student population. The long sandy **beach** marks Aberdeen's eastern border, just a mile or so from the heart of the city.

Brief history

In the twelfth century, Alexander I noted "Aberdon" as one of his principal towns, and by the thirteenth century it had become a centre for **trade** and fishing, a jumble of

ABERDEEN

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- Babylon 5
- The Blue Lamp 1
- Lemon Tree 2
- Snafu 3
- The Tunnels 4

SHOPS
- Books and Beans 3
- La Gourmandise 4
- The Old Aberdeen Bookshop 2
- Tiso 1

0 200 yards

N

Beach & Gineworld
Footdee & 14
Aberdeen Exhibition & Conference Centre
Aberdeen Arts Centre, 2, 7, & 8
Railroad & Airport
Dutthie Park & Winter Gardens
11 & 14
12 & 13
St Andrews Episcopal Cathedral
Peacock Visual Arts
Mercat Cross
Marischal College
The Tolbooth Museum
KING ST
BROAD STREET
Provost Skene's House
NETHERKIRKGATE
First Travel Centre
Maritime Museum & Provost Ross's House
St Nicholas Kirk
WYND
CORNER
BACK WYND
LITTLE BELMONT STREET
THE GREEN
Academy Shopping Centre
BELMONT ST
Aberdeen Art Gallery
SCHOOL HILL
Triple Kirks
Belmont Picture House
DENBURN ROAD
Union Terrace Gdns.
UNION TERRACE
His Majesty's Theatre
Library
ROSEMOUNT VIADUCT
GOLDEN SQUARE
Music Hall
UNION STREET
St Mary's Catholic Cathedral
SUMMER STREET
HUNTLY
CHAPEL STREET
ROSE STREET
SKENE STREET
THISTLE STREET
WEST END
ALFORD LANE
HOLBURN STREET
JUSTICE MILL LANE
HARDGATE
BON ACCORD TERRACE
BON ACCORD SQUARE
LANGSTANE PLACE
BON ACCORD CRESCENT
SPRINGBANK TERRACE
BON ACCORD STREET
DEE STREET
DEE PLACE
CROWN STREET
SPRINGBANK STREET
MARYWELL STREET
COLLEGE STREET
BRIDGE STREET
GUILD STREET
Bus Station
Train Station
MARKET STREET
PALMERSTON ROAD
ALBERT QUAY
Fish Market
COMMERCIAL QUAY
NORTH ESPLANADE WEST
Ferry Terminal
Harbour
JAMESONS QUAY
BLAIKIES QUAY
REGENT QUAY
TRINITY QUAY
SHIPROW
MARISCHAL STREET
VIRGINIA STREET
GUILDHALL

timber and wattle houses perched on three small hills, with the castle to the east and St Nicholas Kirk outside the gates to the west.

It was here that **Robert the Bruce** sought refuge during the Scottish Wars of Independence, leading to the garrison of the castle by Edward I and Balliol's supporters. In a night-time raid in 1306, the townspeople attacked the garrison and killed them all, an event commemorated by the city's motto "Bon Accord", the watchword for the night. The victory was not to last, however, and in 1337 Edward III stormed the city, forcing its rebuilding on a grander scale. A century later Bishop Elphinstone founded the Catholic university in the area north of town known today as **Old Aberdeen**, while the rest of the city developed as a mercantile centre and important port.

Industrial and economic expansion led to the Aberdeen New Streets Act in 1800, setting off a hectic half-century of development that almost led to financial disaster. Luckily, the city was rescued by a boom in trade: in the **shipyards** the construction of Aberdeen clippers revolutionized sea transport, giving Britain supremacy in the China tea trade, and in 1882 a group of local businessmen acquired a **steam** tugboat for trawl fishing. Sail gave way to steam, and fisher families flooded in.

By the mid-twentieth century, Aberdeen's traditional industries were in decline, but the discovery of **oil** in the North Sea transformed the place from a depressed port into a boom town. This oil-borne prosperity may have served to mask the thinness of the region's other wealth creators, but it has nonetheless allowed Aberdeen to hold its own as a cultural and academic centre, and as a focus of the northeast's identity.

Union Street

The centre of Aberdeen is dominated by mile-long **Union Street** – still the grandest and most ambitious single thoroughfare in Scotland. The challenge for the early nineteenth-century city planners who conceived the street was the building of the ambitious **Union Street bridge**, spanning two hills and the Denburn gorge. The first attempt, a triple-span design by Glasgow architect David Hamilton, bankrupted the city and collapsed during construction. The famous civil engineer Thomas Telford then proposed the single-arch structure that became an engineering wonder of its age. Since completion in 1805 the bridge has been widened twice, the second time, in 1963, adding a row of shops to the southern side that obscures the dramatic impact of the structure.

Castlegate

Peacock Visual Arts: 21 Castle St • Tues–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm • Free • Ⓦ www.peacockvisualarts.co.uk

Any exploration of the **city centre** should begin at the open, cobbled **Castlegate**, where Aberdeen's long-gone castle once stood. At its centre is the late seventeenth-century **Mercat Cross**, carved with a unique gallery of Stewart sovereigns alongside some fierce gargoyles. Castlegate was once the focus of city life but nowadays seems rather lifeless unless you dart along the easily missed lane to **Peacock Visual Arts,** a hub for the northeast's contemporary art scene, which also hosts live music events.

The Tolbooth Museum

Castle Street • July–Sept Tues–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 12.30–3.30pm • Free • Ⓣ 01224 621167

As Union Street begins you have to crane your neck to see the towering, turreted spire of the **Town House**, though the steely grey nineteenth-century exterior is in fact a facade behind which lurks the early seventeenth-century **Tolbooth**, one of the city's oldest buildings. A jail for centuries, The Tolbooth now houses **The Tolbooth Museum** of crime and imprisonment.

St Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral

King St • May to mid-Sept Tues–Fri 11am–4pm, Sat 10.30am–1pm, Sun for worship • Free

The sandstone **St Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral**, where Samuel Seabury, America's first bishop, was ordained in 1784, offers welcome relief from the uniform granite of central Aberdeen. Inside, spartan whiteness is broken by florid gold ceiling bosses representing the (then) 48 states of the USA and 48 local families who remained loyal to the Episcopal Church during the eighteenth-century Penal Laws.

Provost Skene's House

45 Guestrow • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • Free

Tucked away between Broad Street and Flourmill Lane, **Provost Skene's House** is Aberdeen's oldest-surviving private house, dating from 1545. The house is now a museum, with a costume gallery, archeological exhibits, period rooms and a café-bar. Don't miss the Painted Gallery, where a cycle of beautiful religious tempera paintings from the mid-seventeenth century shows scenes from the life of Christ.

Marischal College

On Broad Street stands Aberdeen's most imposing edifice, and the world's second-largest granite building after the Escorial in Madrid – exuberant **Marischal College**, whose tall, steel-grey pinnacled neo-Gothic facade is in absolute contrast to the hideously utilitarian concrete office blocks opposite. This spectacular building, with all its soaring, surging lines, has been painted and sketched more than any other in Aberdeen, though it's not to everyone's taste – it was once described by a minor art historian as "a wedding cake covered in indigestible grey icing". The college was founded in 1593 by the fourth Earl Marischal, and coexisted as a separate Protestant university from Catholic King's, just up the road, for over two centuries. It was long Aberdeen's boast to have as many universities as the whole of England, and it wasn't until 1860 that the two were united as the University of Aberdeen. In 1893, the central tower was more than doubled in height by A. Marshall Mackenzie and the profusion of spirelets added, though the facade, which fronts an earlier quadrangle designed by Archibald Simpson in 1837–41, was not completed until 1906.

St Nicholas Kirk

Just north of Union Street • May–Sept Mon–Fri noon–4pm; Oct–April contact church office • Free • 01224 643494, www.kirk-of-st-nicholas.org.uk

Between Upperkirkgate and Union Street stands **St Nicholas Kirk**. It's actually two churches in one, with a solid, central bell tower, from where the 48-bell carillon, the largest in Britain, regularly chimes. There's been a church here since 1157 or thereabouts, but as the largest kirk in Scotland it was severely damaged during the Reformation and divided into the West and the East Church, separated today by the transepts and crossing; only the north transept, known as Collinson's aisle, survives from the twelfth century. The Renaissance-style **West Church**, formerly the nave of St Nicholas, was designed in the mid-eighteenth century by James Gibbs, architect of St Martin in the Fields in London. The **East Church** was rebuilt over the groin-vaulted crypt of the restored fifteenth-century St Mary's Chapel (entered from Correction Wynd), which in the 1600s was a place to imprison witches: you can still see the iron rings to which they were chained.

Aberdeen Art Gallery and around

Schoolhill • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm • Free • aagm.co.uk

The first-rate **Aberdeen Art Gallery** was purpose-built in 1884 to a Neoclassical design

by Scottish architect Alexander Marshall Mackenzie. You enter via the airy **Centre Court**, dominated by Barbara Hepworth's central fountain and thick pillars running down from the upper balcony, each hewn from a different local marble. The walls highlight the policy of acquiring contemporary art, with British work to the fore. The **Side Court** contains *Jungled*, a garish, erotic spin on stained-glass windows by Gilbert and George, and works gifted by the Saatchi collection. The **Memorial Court**, a calming, white-walled circular room under a skylit dome, serves as the city's principal war memorial. It also houses the Lord Provost's book of condolence for the 167 people who died in the 1988 Piper Alpha oil rig disaster. The **upstairs** rooms house the main body of the gallery's painting collection.

Belmont and Little Belmont streets

Opposite the gallery is Aberdeen's answer to a Bohemian quarter: cobbled Belmont and Little Belmont streets feature a number of the city's more interesting bars, shops and restaurants, and farmers' markets take place on the last Saturday of each month (9am–5pm).

Union Terrace Gardens and around

West of Belmont Street and Denburn Road, the sunken **Union Terrace Gardens** are a welcome relief from the hubbub of Union Street. From here there are views across to the three domes of the Central Library, St Mark's Church and His Majesty's Theatre, traditionally referred to as "Education, Salvation and Damnation". Outside the theatre itself stands a hulking statue of William "Braveheart" Wallace, erected in 1888. The crumbling red-brick spire at the other end of the viaduct tops **Triple Kirks.** Built in 1843 and one of Archibald Simpson's most famous creations, it was Scotland's only example of a single building hosting three churches for three denominations.

The West End

The **West End**, the area around the westernmost part of Union Street, begins more or less at the great granite columns of the city's **Music Hall**. A block north is **Golden Square** – a misnomer as the trim houses, pubs and restaurants surrounding the statue of the Duke of Gordon are uniformly grey. The city has invested much in gentrifying the area north of Union Street, resulting in neat cobbles, old-fashioned lamps, a growing restaurant scene and a string of somewhat stuffy designer boutiques around Thistle Street.

Bon Accord Square

To the south of Union Street, wedged between Bon Accord Street and Bon Accord Terrace, **Bon Accord Square** is a typical, charming Aberdeen square. A grassy centre surrounds a huge solid block of granite commemorating **Archibald Simpson**, architect of much of nineteenth-century Aberdeen.

The harbour

Aberdeen's **harbour**, at the mouth of the River Dee, is one of the busiest ports in the country. From the eastern end of Union Street, cobbled Shiprow winds downhill, passing the Maritime Museum on the right-hand side. The cobbles stop on **Market Street**, which runs the length of the harbour with its brightly painted oil-supply vessels, sleek cruise ships and peeling fishing boats.

The Maritime Museum and Provost Ross's House

Shiprow • Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–3pm • Free • aagm.co.uk

On Shiprow, peering towards the harbour through a striking glass facade, is the **Maritime Museum**, which combines a modern, airy museum with the aged labyrinthine

corridors of **Provost Ross's House**. The museum is a thoroughly engrossing, imaginative tribute to Aberdeen's maritime traditions. Just inside the front entrance you'll see a blackboard updated every day with the price of a barrel of crude oil. Suspended above the foyer and visible from five different levels is a spectacular 27ft-high model of an oil rig, which, along with terrific views over the bustling harbour, serves as a constant reminder that Aberdeen's maritime links remain very much alive. The older industries of herring fishing, whaling, shipbuilding and lighthouse keeping also have their place, with well-designed displays and audiovisual presentations, many drawing heavily on personal reminiscences. Passages lead into Provost Ross's House, where intricate ship's models and a variety of nautical paintings and drawings are on display.

Footdee

An easy walk or bus #15 from Union Street (near St Nicholas Kirk)

At the north end of Market Street, Trinity Quay runs past industrial yards and down York Street towards **Footdee**, or Fittie, a quaint nineteenth-century fishermen's village of higgledy-piggledy cottages backing onto the sea. Their windows and doors face inwards for protection from storms but also, so they say, to stop the devil sneaking in the back door. Here, in a great setting beside the lighthouse at the channel into the harbour, is *Silver Darling* (see p.372), one of the northeast's finest seafood restaurants.

Duthie Park

Polmuir Road • Daily 8am–one hour before dusk; Winter Gardens daily: April 9.30am–5.30pm; May–Aug 9.30am–7.30pm; Sept–Oct 9.30am–5.30pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4.30pm • Free • A 20min walk or 10min bus ride from the centre (#17 or #18 from Union Street

From Market Street it's a short hop to **Duthie Park**, on the banks of the Dee at the end of Polmuir Road. The rose garden here, known as Rose Mountain due to its profusion of blooms, can be stunning in summer, but the real treat is the **Winter Gardens**, a steamy paradise of enormous cacti and exotic plants. By the obelisk, a parterre garden has been installed and outdoor concerts are occasionally held at the restored vintage bandstand. From the northwestern corner of Duthie Park a great cycle and walkway, the **Old Deeside Railway Line**, heads west out of the city past numerous long-gone train stations.

Old Aberdeen

A 10min ride north of the city centre on bus #20 from Littlejohn Street

North of the modern centre and an independent burgh until 1891, tranquil **Old Aberdeen** has maintained a village-like identity. Dominated by King's College and St Machar's Cathedral, its medieval cobbled streets, wynds and little lanes are beautifully preserved.

King's College Chapel

King's Campus, University of Aberdeen • Mon–Fri 9.30am–3.30pm • Free

The southern half of cobbled High Street is overlooked by **King's College Chapel**, the first and finest of the city's college buildings, completed in 1495 with a chunky Renaissance spire. Named in honour of James IV, the chapel's west door is flanked by his coat of arms and that of his queen. It stands on the quadrangle, whose gracious buildings retain a medieval plan but were built much later; those immediately north were designed by Alexander Marshall Mackenzie early in the last century, with the exception of Cromwell Tower at the northeast corner, completed in 1658. The highlights of the interior, which, unusually, has no central aisle, are the ribbed arched wooden ceiling, and the rare and beautiful examples of medieval Scottish woodcarving in the screen and the stalls. The remains of Bishop Elphinstone's tomb and the carved pulpit from nearby St Machar's are also here.

St Machar's Cathedral

The Chanonry • Daily: April–Oct 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March 10am–4pm • Free • ⓣ 01224 485988

From King's College, High Street leads a short way north to **St Machar's Cathedral** on the leafy Chanonry, overlooking Seaton Park and the River Don. The site was reputedly founded in 580 AD by Machar, a follower of Columba, when he was sent by the latter to find a grassy platform near the sea, overlooking a river shaped like the crook on a bishop's crozier. This setting fitted the bill perfectly, and the cathedral, a huge fifteenth-century fortified building, became one of the city's first great granite edifices. Inside, the stained-glass windows are a dazzling blaze of colour, and the heraldic oak ceiling above the nave dates from 1520 and shows nearly fifty different coats of arms from Europe's royal houses and Scotland's bishops and nobles.

Seaton Park

A wander through Seaton Park, immediately to the north of St Machar's Cathedral, brings you to the thirteenth-century **Brig o'Balgownie**, which gracefully spans the River Don nearly a mile north of the cathedral. The bridge is best visited at sunset; Byron, who spent much of his childhood in Aberdeen, remembered it as a favourite place.

The beach

To reach the beach, hop aboard bus #15 from Union Street; to reach the golf links take buses #9 and #13

Aberdeen can surely claim to have the best sandy **beach** of all Britain's large cities. Less than a mile east of Union Street is a great two-mile sweep of clean sand, broken by groynes and lined all along with an esplanade. Further north, most of the beach's hinterland is devoted to golf links.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ABERDEEN

BY PLANE

Aberdeen Airport (ⓦ aberdeenairport.com, ⓣ 08444 816666), seven miles northwest of town, is served by flights from more than fifty UK and European destinations. First Aberdeen bus #27 (£2.50 single; ⓣ 01224 650000) and Stagecoach Bluebird bus #727 (£2.70 single; ⓣ 01224 597590) run to the city centre from the airport; a taxi costs around £20.

Destinations Belfast (1 daily, 1hr 10min); Birmingham (Mon–Fri 3 daily, Sat & Sun 1–2 daily; 1hr 30min); Bristol (Mon–Fri & Sun 1–2 daily; 1hr 25min); East Midlands (Mon–Fri 2–3 daily; 1hr 25min); Kirkwall, Orkney (Mon–Fri 3 daily, Sat 2 daily; 50min); London Gatwick (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat ; 1hr 40min); London Heathrow (Mon–Sat up to 12 daily; 1hr 30min); London Luton (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 1hr 25min); Manchester (Mon–Fri up to 8 daily, Sat 2 daily; 1hr 20min); Newcastle (Mon–Fri up to 6 daily, Sun 1 daily; 55min); Norwich (Mon–Fri 5 daily, Sat–Sun 1–2 daily); Stornoway (Mon–Fri 1 daily, 55min); Wick (Mon–Fri 2–3 daily; 35min).

BY TRAIN

The main train station is on Guild Street, in the centre of the city. There are lockers here for left luggage, which cost £2–4 for 24hrs.

Destinations Arbroath (every 30min; 1hr); Dundee (every 30min; 1hr 15min); Edinburgh (roughly hourly; 2hr 25min); Elgin (up to 11 daily; 1hr 30min); Forres (up to 11 daily; 1hr 45min); Glasgow (hourly; 2hr 35min); Inverness (up to 11 daily; 2hr 20min); Inverurie (roughly hourly; 25min); London (3 daily, 1 nightly sleeper service; 7hr, sleeper service 10hr); Montrose (every 30min; 40min); Nairn (up to 11 daily; 1hr 50min); Stonehaven (every 30min; 15min).

BY BUS

The bus terminal is right beside the train station. For information on local and intercity bus times, call Traveline Scotland on ⓣ 08712 002233 or visit ⓦ travelinescotland.com.

Destinations Ballater (hourly; 1hr 45min); Banchory (1–3 hourly; 55min); Banff (every 30min; 1hr 55min); Braemar (roughly every 2hr; 2hr 5min); Crathie, for Balmoral (roughly every 2 hours; 1hr 55min); Cullen (hourly; 2hr 30min); Dundee (hourly; 2hr 20min); Elgin (hourly; 2hr 25min); Forres (hourly; 2hr 55min); Fraserburgh (hourly; 1hr 30min); Inverurie (up to 5 per hour; 50min–1hr 20min); Macduff (hourly; 1hr 50min); Peterhead (every 30min; 1hr 15min); Stonehaven (every 15–30min; 35min).

BY CAR

Driving into Aberdeen is easy enough, but as many spaces are designated for local permit-holders it can be tricky (and expensive) to find somewhere central to park.

Car rental Arnold Clark, Girdleness Rd (ⓣ 01224 238520 ⓦ arnoldclark.com); Budget, Wellheads Drive

(T01224 771777; W budget.co.uk); Europcar, 16 Broomhill Rd (T08713 841092 W europcar.co.uk); Hertz, at the airport (T08433 093001 W hertz.com).

BY FERRY

Aberdeen has ferry links to Lerwick in Shetland and Kirkwall in Orkney, with frequent NorthLink services (T08456 000449, W northlinkferries.co.uk) departing from Jamieson's Quay in the harbour.

Destinations Kirkwall, Orkney (Thurs, Sat & Sun, plus Tues in summer; 6hr); Lerwick, Shetland (daily; 10–12hr overnight).

GETTING AROUND

Aberdeen's centre is best explored **on foot**, but you might also need to use **buses** – most of which pass along Union Street – to reach some sights. Useful routes from the centre include the #15 bus to the beach esplanade, and the #20 bus to Old Aberdeen.

BY BUS

Most of Aberdeen's buses are operated by First. You can buy an all-day ticket covering city routes aboard any First bus for £4.70 (£4.10 after 9.30am on weekdays), and you can get a weekly pass for £18. If you plan to use the buses a lot, you can buy a First TravelCard (in £10 or £20 denominations) from the depot at 395 King St, or the travel centre at 47 Union St, which also hands out transport maps; each time you travel the fare is deducted from the card. Late-night services on Friday and Saturday – the last leaving at around 3.15am – cost a flat £3, and head to seven separate destinations on the city's outskirts.

BY TAXI

Taxis operate from ranks throughout the city centre, all of which attract long queues after the pubs and clubs empty at the weekend. If you don't manage to hail one, call Rainbow Taxis (T01224 878787) or ComCab Aberdeen (T01224 353535).

INFORMATION

Tourist office 23 Union Street, near the junction with Broad Street (July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 10am–4pm; Sept–June Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm; T01224 269180, W aberdeen-grampian.com). The staff here can book accommodation for you (£4 booking fee, plus 10 percent of the accommodation cost) and internet access is also available (£1/20min). The tourist office can also provide you with excellent leaflets detailing themed heritage trails around the city, each with a different focus, from maritime history and sculpture to the city's use of granite.

Listings magazine/website Keep your eyes peeled for the free "What's On" programme published by Aberdeen Performing Arts, which lists upcoming events, art exhibitions and theatre productions. For details of local gigs, try W aberdeen-music.com.

ACTIVITIES

Football The local football team, Aberdeen, struggles to live to up its golden era of the 1980s when then-manager Alex Ferguson brought home league titles and European trophies. Home fixtures take place at Pittodrie Stadium (T08719 831903, W www.afc.co.uk), between King St and the beach.

Golf There are good options for golfing around Aberdeen; the municipal Kings Links (T01224 641577, W kings-links.com) has a driving range and an artificial putting area near the beach.

ACCOMMODATION

The emphasis on business trade means **weekday rates** can be considerably more expensive than weekends (the prices quoted here). Even in **low season** the whole city is frequently booked up, so it pays to arrange accommodation a week or more ahead of your arrival.

HOTELS

Aberdeen City Centre Hotel 9 Belmont St T01224 658406, W aberdeencitycentrehotel.co.uk. A smart little place tucked away on pedestrianized Belmont Street; the rooms feature spa baths. There are bargain weekend rates and they also have apartments to rent. £65

Carmelite Stirling St T01224 589101, W carmelitehotels.com. Handily located near the Union Square mall, fusing tradition and modern style in a revamped 1820s hotel. The kitchen serves up a surprisingly modestly priced taste of Scotland (see opposite). £69

Ferryhill House 169 Bon Accord St T01224 590867, W ferryhillhousehotel.co.uk. This mansion is set in its own grounds within walking distance of Union Street. Offers good-value lunches and a great Malt Room for guests to sample real ales and whisky by a roaring fire. £55

Hilton Garden Inn 31 St Andrew St T01224 451444, W hiltongardeninn3.hilton.com. Beyond this central building's glass and stone façade are comfy but brashly designed rooms, with deep-red carpets and splashes of

gold and black. The hotel also has a small gym and a business centre. £69

Malmaison 49–53 Queens Rd T08446 930649, W malmaison.com. Part of the stylish Malmaison chain, with striking contemporary decor and all the latest in hi-tech features, plus a day-spa and a brasserie decorated with Scottish art. £99

Marcliffe at Pitfodels North Deeside Rd, Pitfodels T01224 861000, W marcliffe.com. Four miles west of the city centre, this forty-two-room hotel in its own grounds is by far the most luxurious and tasteful option in the Aberdeen area. There's a spa, and a fine restaurant with suitably special dishes. £160

GUESTHOUSES AND B&BS

Allan Guest House 56 Polmuir Rd T01224 584484, W theallan.co.uk. Traditional-style guesthouse not far from Duthie Park and just five minutes from the city centre on bus #17. Free wi-fi, DVD library and good breakfasts. £70

Butler's Guest House 122 Crown St T01224 212411, W butlersguesthouse.com. Central but dated rooms that attract a mix of business travellers and holiday-makers. A cold breakfast is included in the rate, but the cooked option costs £5.50 extra. £58

Dutch Mill 7 Queen's Rd T01224 322555, W dutchmill.co.uk. Has a range of cosy, business-like rooms a mile west of the city centre. They're all above a bar and restaurant that serves the usual pub staples, from prawn cocktails to gammon steaks. £65

Globe Inn 13–15 North Silver St T01224 624258, W the-globe-inn.co.uk. Easy-going city-centre inn with seven en-suite rooms above a bar that hosts live jazz and blues on Friday & Saturday. The rate includes a continental breakfast. £74.99

Roselea House 12 Springbank Terrace T01224 583060, W www.roseleahouse.co.uk. Welcoming guesthouse near the bus station with accommodation suitable for people with restricted mobility. £65

HOSTEL AND CAMPUS ACCOMMODATION

Aberdeen Youth Hostel 8 Queen's Rd T01224 646988, W syha.org.uk. Hostel in a grand stone mansion a mile from the train station, with dorms and private rooms. To get there take bus #11 or #17 from Union St. Dorms £21.50; singles £34

Crombie Johnston Halls College Bounds, Old Aberdeen T01224 273444, W abdn.ac.uk/summer_accommodation. These private rooms in the city's best student halls are also in one of the most interesting parts of town. Rooms are available from early July to Sept, though there's also some year-round accommodation. Singles £35; twins £55

EATING AND DRINKING

CAFÉS

Books and Beans 22 Belmont St T01224 646438. As the name suggests, secondhand books go hand in hand here with decent lattes (£2.49), fresh soups and sandwiches. Mon–Sat 7.45am–4.30pm, Sun 9.45am–4pm.

The Breadmaker 50–52 Rosemount Viaduct T01224 641520, W thebreadmaker.org.uk. Enjoy a coffee (£1.60) and fresh baking in this friendly place that gives people with learning difficulties training and meaningful employment. Mon–Sat 8.30am–5pm.

★ **Musa** 33 Exchange St T01224 571771, W musaaberdeen.com. A good-value art café based in an old church and banana warehouse. The terrific daytime vibe continues into the evening with live music and locally sourced mains (from £12.90) made using ingredients sourced from small Scottish suppliers. Mon 8–11.45pm, Tues–Sat noon–11.30pm.

Rocksalt & Snails 40 St Swithin St T01224 200012. Like its sister restaurant in Ballater (see p.378), this branch of *Rocksalt* does a decent job of healthy snacks and paninis (£4.95 with salad and crisps). Mon–Fri 8am–5pm, Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm.

Sand Dollar Café 2 Esplanade T01224 572288. The cheery interior, decorated with seashells and model lighthouses, makes this the most attractive of the cafés along the beach esplanade. The blackboard lists mains like pea and asparagus ravioli in garlic oil (£8.95). Mon–Wed 7.30am–8pm, Thurs–Sun 7.30am–9pm.

RESTAURANTS

Blue Moon 11 Holburn St T01224 589977, W bluemoon-aberdeen.com. Still the pick of Aberdeen's Indian restaurants, with sleek surroundings and dozens of inventive, moderately priced dishes, such as spiced halibut cooked with white radishes. Mon–Thurs noon–2pm & 5pm–1am, Fri–Sun noon–1am.

Café 52 52 The Green T01224 590094, W cafe52.net. Cosy, bohemian hangout by day that turns into a hip restaurant by night, with Cullen skink (£4), game and vegetarian meals among the tasty, reasonably priced options. Mon–Sat noon–midnight, Sun noon–6pm.

Carmelite Stirling St T01224 589101, W carmelitehotels.com. Moody black interior design and tasty Scottish-influenced cuisine served with simplicity. The long brunch menu includes "Eggs Carmelite" – two poached eggs with bacon, a toasted muffin and hollandaise sauce (£7). Daily 7am–10pm.

★ **Fusion** 10 North Silver St T01224 652959, W www.fusionbarbistro.com. Designed as more of an evening hangout, *Fusion* is actually best visited at lunchtime, when the tapas-style "grazing menu" lets you

tuck into small but flavour-packed portions of tempura monkfish cheeks (£6.95) and tom yum soup (£5.50). Tues–Sat noon–1am.

Howies 50 Chapel St 01224 639500, howies.uk.com. Aberdeen outpost of an Edinburgh institution, serving modern Scottish cooking from West Coast mussels (£7.65) to an ale and root-vegetable pie (£8.45). Set meals and house wine are well-priced. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm.

Ninety-Nine Bar & Kitchen 1 Back Wynd 01224 631640, facebook.com/99aberdeen. Lounge-like bar-restaurant where, instead of the usual pub food, punters can order US-style burgers and £7.50 chilli-cheese dogs. Also does great cocktails. Daily 11am/noon–midnight/1am.

Poldino's 7 Little Belmont St 01224 647777, poldinos.co.uk. An Aberdonian Italian institution, combining fine flavours and quality with convivial dining. The supreme of chicken in a mushroom and red wine sauce costs £14.80. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10.15pm.

Silver Darling Pocra Quay, North Pier 01224 576229, thesilverdarling.co.uk. Attractively located at the harbour in Footdee, this pricey French place specializes in fresh seafood – a dozen rock oysters will cost you £24. Mon–Fri noon–1.45pm & 6.30–9.30pm, Sat 6.30–9.30pm.

PUBS AND BARS

Brewdog Aberdeen 17 Gallowgate 01224 581459. Hipster-friendly bar that sets itself apart from the crowd, with exposed brickwork, dangly lightbulbs and a cracking selection of Scottish ales (most bottles £4.50). Mon–Thurs noon–midnight, Fri–Sat noon–1am, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

The Grill 213 Union St. One of the city's older pubs, with a distinctive old-world charm. Sells real ales on tap, dozens of malts (£2.50 and upwards) and hot stovies. Daily 10am–midnight/1am.

The Illicit Still Netherkirkgate, Broad Street 01224 623123. Follow the stairs down past sneering gargoyles to this subterranean bar with cowhide-covered seats and intimate little booths, where diners tuck into sharing platters (£11.95). Daily 11am–late.

Prince of Wales 7 St Nicholas Lane. Opened in 1850, the quintessential Aberdeen pub has a 20ft-long bar and a flagstone floor. With fine pub grub, renowned real ales and a Sunday evening folk session, it's little wonder that it's often crowded. Mon–Thurs 10am–midnight, Fri & Sat 10am–1am, Sun 11am–12am.

St Machar Bar 97 High St, Old Aberdeen. The medieval quarter's only pub, a poky, old-fashioned bar attracting an intriguing mix of King's College students and workers. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm, Sun 12.30pm–6pm.

Slains Castle 14–18 Belmont Street 01224 631877, eerie-pubs.co.uk. An old church is the perfect setting for this Gothy theme bar, whose cocktail list includes potions named after the seven deadly sins (£4.25). Live bands every Friday. Mon–Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–1am, Sun noon–midnight.

NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT

You can buy tickets for most events at Aberdeen's theatres and concert halls from the **box office** beside the Music Hall on Union Street (Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm; 01224 641122).

CLUB

Babylon 9 Alford Place 01224 595001. Popular with an older crowd, *Babylon* bills itself as one of Aberdeen's coolest and hippest nightspots. The Gothic-styled interior here reverberates to the beat of the latest dance tunes. Fri & Sat 11pm–3am.

LIVE MUSIC VENUES

The Blue Lamp 121 Gallowgate 01224 619769. A spacious bar featuring live jazz, usually at weekends, and a Monday folk session; there's also a much smaller snug for relative peace and quiet. Most acts start at 8pm.

Lemon Tree 5 West North St 01224 641122, boxofficeaberdeen.com. The fulcrum of the city's arts scene, with live music, club nights and comedy.

Snafu 1 Union St 01224 596111, clubsnafu.com. Aberdeen's best indie club, which also strays happily into harder rock and electro. During the week there are more diverse events, from stand-up comedy to magic shows. Mon 11pm–2am, Tues 7.30pm–11pm, Wed & Thurs 11pm–2am, Fri & Sat 11pm–3am, Sun 11pm–2am.

The Tunnels Carnegies Brae 01224 619930, thetunnels.co.uk. One of the city's most popular live music venues, established within old tunnels under Union St. Live bands play a different musical genre every evening including reggae, hip-hop, ska and Northern Soul. See website for show times.

CONCERT HALLS

Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre Off Ellon Rd at Bridge of Don 01224 824824, aecc.co.uk. Huge hall hosting the biggest touring rock and pop acts.

Cowdray Hall Schoolhill 01224 523700, aagm.co.uk. Classical music venue at the Aberdeen Art Gallery, often with visiting orchestras playing; occasionally it hosts free lunchtime concerts.

Music Hall Union St 01224 632080 or 641122, www.musichallaberdeen.com. Big-name comedy and music acts. You can buy tickets for most events at Aberdeen's theatres and concert halls from the box office next door.

THEATRES

Aberdeen Arts Centre 33 King St ⓣ01224 635208, ⓦaberdeenartscentre.org.uk. Hosts a variety of theatrical productions, lectures and exhibitions.

His Majesty's Theatre Rosemount Viaduct ⓣ01224 641122, ⓦboxofficeaberdeen.com. The city's main theatre resides in a beautiful Edwardian building, and its extensive programme ranges from highbrow drama and opera to pantomime.

CINEMAS

Belmont Picture House 9 Belmont St ⓣ08719 025721, ⓦpicturehouses.co.uk. Art-house cinema showing the more cerebral new releases alongside classic, cult and foreign-language films. There's a comfortable café-bar inside and some good places nearby for a bite before or after.

Cineworld Queen's Links Leisure Park, Links Rd ⓣ08712 002000. Huge multiplex cinema close to the beachfront that shows all the mainstream releases.

SHOPPING

BOOKSHOPS

Books and Beans 22 Belmont St ⓣ01224 646438, ⓦbooksandbeans.co.uk. This popular café (see p.371) has shelves packed with paperbacks, quiet spaces for reading, plus a few computers connected to the internet.

The Old Aberdeen Bookshop 140 Spital ⓣ01224 658 355, ⓦoldaberdeenbookshop.com. The city's best bet for secondhand and antiquarian books. Mon–Fri 11.15am–5.15pm, Sat 11.30am–5pm.

DELI

La Gourmandise 63 Thistle St ⓣ01224 625974, ⓦlagourmandise.co.uk. Well-run French patisserie shop that stocks gorgeous croissants, macaroons, tartlets and iced cakes, as well as freshly baked baguettes. Mon–Fri 7.30am– 6pm, Sat 9am–5pm.

OUTDOOR SUPPLIES

Tiso 1 John Street ⓣ01224 646872, ⓦtiso.com. Well-stocked outdoor shop with separate sections for footwear, watersports, mountain sports and camping. Mon, Tues, Fri & Sat 9am–6pm, Wed 10am–6pm, Thurs 9am–7.30pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

DIRECTORY

Internet The Central Library offers free wi-fi and use of its computer terminals. You can also access the net at the tourist office (see p.370) or *Books and Beans* (see above) for £1/20min, which also has printers available (10p/sheet).

Library Central Library, Rosemount Viaduct (Mon & Wed 9am–8pm, Tues & Thurs–Sat 9am–5pm; ⓣ01224 652500).

Medical facilities The Royal Infirmary, on Foresterhill, northeast of the town centre, has a 24hr casualty department (ⓣ01224 681818). *Boots* pharmacy is in The Bon Accord Centre on George St (Mon–Wed, Fri & Sat 8.30am–6pm, Thurs 8.30am–8pm, Sun 10am–5.30pm; ⓣ01224 626080).

Police The main police station is on Queen St (ⓣ08456 005700), including the lost property office.

Post office The central office is upstairs in the St Nicholas Centre, between Union St and Upperkirkgate (Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm), with other branches at 371 George St (Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–12.30pm) and 489 Union St (hours same as George St).

Stonehaven and around

A pretty, pebble-dashed harbour town linked to Aberdeen by the A90, **STONEHAVEN** is a popular summer getaway. Its location along the sheltered Kincardine coastline certainly adds to the appeal, as does the respected **Stonehaven Folk Festival,** which takes place annually in early July.

The town itself is split into two parts, the picturesque working harbour area being most likely to detain you. The old High Street, lined with some fine townhouses and civic buildings, connects the harbour and its surrounding **old town** with the late eighteenth-century planned centre on the other side of the River Carron. On New Year's Eve, High Street is the location for the ancient ceremony of **Fireballs**, when locals parade its length swinging metal cages full of burning debris around their heads to ward off evil spirits for the coming year. The **new town** focuses on the market square, overlooked by the dusky-pink granite market hall with its impressive steeple.

Another reason to base yourself in Stonehaven is **Dunnottar Castle**, a stunningly moody ruin perched on jagged cliffs two miles south. The area south and west of this is known as the **Mearns**, an agricultural district of scattered population and gathering

hills famous for its links to Scots author Lewis Grassic Gibbon. Unfortunately, public transport into the Mearns is virtually non-existent.

Tolbooth

Old Quay, down by the harbour • April–Sept Mon & Wed–Sun 1.30–4.30pm • Free

On one side of the harbour, Stonehaven's oldest building, the **Tolbooth**, built as a storehouse during the construction of Dunnottar Castle (see below), is now a museum of local history and fishing. Above it, rather fittingly, there's a top-notch seafood restaurant as well (see p.376).

Dunnottar Castle

Two miles south of Stonehaven along the coast • April–Oct daily 9am–6pm (last entry 5.30pm); Nov to March daily 10am–sunset • £6 • www.dunnottarcastle.co.uk

Two miles south of Stonehaven (the tourist office hands out free walking guides for the scenic amble there), **Dunnottar Castle** is one of Scotland's finest ruined castles. This huge ninth-century fortress is set on a three-sided sheer cliff jutting into the sea – a setting striking enough to be chosen as the backdrop for Zeffirelli's film version of *Hamlet*. Once the principal fortress of the northeast, the ruins are worth a good root around, and there are many dramatic views out to the crashing sea.

Brief history

Siege and bloodstained drama splatter the castle's past: in 1297 the whole English Plantagenet garrison was burnt alive here by **William Wallace**, while one of the more gruesome tales from the castle's history tells of the imprisonment and torture of 122 men and 45 women Covenanters in 1685 – an event, as it says on the Covenanters' Stone in the churchyard, "whose dark shadow is for evermore flung athwart the Castled Rock".

Arbuthnott

Some five miles inland is the straggling village of **ARBUTHNOTT**, the home of prolific local author **Lewis Grassic Gibbon** (1901–1935), whose romanticized realism perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the agricultural Mearns area. *Sunset Song*, his most famous work, is an essential read for those travelling in this area. He is buried (under his real name of James Leslie Mitchell) in the corner of the little village graveyard, overlooking the forested banks of the Bervie Water off the main road.

Grassic Gibbon Centre

Half a mile northwest of the church, along the B967 • March–Oct daily 10am–4.30pm • £3

The community-run **Grassic Gibbon Centre** and café (on the B967, which runs through the village), is a great introduction to the fascinating and self-assured author who died so young. In the small exhibition beyond the café you'll find some of his personal effects housed in glass cabinets, plus snippets of information on local history.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — STONEHAVEN AND AROUND

By train Rail services from points north and south pull in at Stonehaven station, just off Arduthie Road.

Destinations Aberdeen (every 30min; 25min); Montrose (every 30min; 20min).

By bus Buses from Aberdeen and Montrose stop at the southern end of Barclay Street in Stonehaven, near the junction with Cameron Street.

Destinations Aberdeen (several hourly; 35–50min); Montrose (every 30min; 40min).

RIGHT GARDENSTOWN (P.384) >

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist office 66 Allardice St, the main street past the square (late March to June & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; July–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 1–5.30pm; ☎01569 762806).

Boat trips From March to October, you can take a private boat trip from Stonehaven's harbour to Dunnottar Castle (45min return; from £75). A much cheaper option is to join one of the weekend tours (March–Aug Sat & Sun 12.30pm & 2.30pm; £18/person), which take in the castle, a local seal colony (best from March–May) and the RSPB reserve at Fowlsheugh. To book, contact Ruari at Castle Charter (☎07411 010559, ⓦcastlecharter.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

Arduthie House Ann Street, close to the junction with Margaret Street ☎01569 762381, ⓦwww.arduthieguesthouse.com. Attractive, arty B&B that has a small, free to visit gallery on its ground floor showing sculptures and landscape paintings. **£70**

Marine Hotel 9–10 Shorehead ☎01569 762155, ⓦmarinehotelstonehaven.co.uk. Smart en-suite rooms equipped with coffee machines and flatscreen TVs, right by the harbour. The bar has a decent selection of Belgian beers and whisky, including single malts from the local area. **£110**

EATING AND DRINKING

Carron Restaurant 20 Cameron St ☎01569 760460, ⓦcarron-restaurant.co.uk. The bright, Art Deco surroundings of this restaurant help to complement classic, well-made dishes like beef bourguignon and grilled sea trout (both £13.95). Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6–9.30pm.

Maggie Mays 25 Market Square ☎01569 760333, ⓦmaggiemaysstonehaven.co.uk. Cosy corner café that does a mean hot chocolate topped with Maltesers, marshmallows and whipped cream for £2.95. For lunch there are burgers, soups and paninis. Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm, Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun 10am–4pm.

Tolbooth Restaurant Above the Tolbooth museum by the harbour ☎01569 762287, ⓦtolbooth-restaurant.co.uk. Moderately expensive but beautifully sited restaurant, serving fresh Scottish seafood such as hand-dived west coast scallops with pea purée (£23.95). May–Sept Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6pm–9.30pm, Sun noon–3pm & 6–9pm; Oct–Feb closed Sun.

DUNOTTAR CASTLE

Creel Inn Catterline, four miles south of Dunnottar Castle ☎01569 750254, ⓦthecreelinn.co.uk. In Catterline, a clifftop hamlet typical of those along this stretch of coast, *The Creel Inn* serves moderately priced seafood and game. At lunchtime a two-course meal will set you back £14.95. Wed–Fri noon–2pm & 6–9.30pm, Sat noon–2pm & 5–9.30pm, Sun noon–8.30pm.

Deeside

More commonly known as **ROYAL DEESIDE**, the land stretching west from Aberdeen along the River Dee revels in its connections with the royal family, who have regularly holidayed here, at **Balmoral**, since Queen Victoria bought the estate. Eighty thousand Scots turned out to welcome her on her first visit in 1848. Victoria adored the place and the woods were said to remind Prince Albert of Thuringia, his homeland.

Deeside is undoubtedly handsome in a fierce, craggy, Scottish way, and the royal presence has helped keep a lid on any unattractive mass development. The villages strung along the A93, the main route through the area, are well-heeled and have something of an old-fashioned air. Facilities for visitors hereabouts are first class, with a number of bunkhouses and hostels, some decent hotels, and plenty of castles and grounds to snoop around. It's also an excellent area for **outdoor activities**, with hiking routes into both the Grampian and Cairngorm mountains, alongside good mountain biking, horseriding and skiing.

GETTING AROUND

By bus Stagecoach Bluebird buses #201, #202 and #203 from Aberdeen regularly chug along the A93, serving most of the towns on the way to Braemar. Bus #201 runs to Crathes (45min), Banchory (50min), Ballater (1hr 45min), and Braemar (2hr 10min), while #202 and #203 stop at Lumphanan and Banchory respectively.

Drum Castle

Near Drumoak, ten miles west of Aberbeen off the A93 • April–June & Sept Mon & Thurs–Sun 11am–4pm; July & Aug daily 11am–4pm; Garden of Historic Roses April–Oct daily 11am–4.15pm • £6, grounds only £2; NTS

Ten miles west of Aberdeen, **Drum Castle** stands in a clearing in the ancient woods of Drum, made up of the splendid pines and oaks that covered this whole area before the shipbuilding industry precipitated mass forest clearance. The castle itself combines a 1619 Jacobean mansion with Victorian extensions and the original, huge thirteenth-century keep, which has been restored and reopened. Given by Robert the Bruce to his armour-bearer, William de Irvine, in 1323 for services rendered at Bannockburn, the castle remained in Irvine hands for 24 generations until the NTS took over in 1976. The main part of the house is Victorian in character, with grand, antique-filled rooms and lots of family portraits. The finest room is the **library**, within the ancient tower; you'll get an even better sense of the medieval atmosphere of the place by climbing up to the upper levels of the tower, where the battlements offer views out over the forest.

Crathes Castle and around

Crathes, just east of Banchory • Jan–March Sat & Sun 10.30am–3.45pm; April–Oct daily 10.30am–4.45pm; Nov–Dec Sat & Sun 10.30am–3.45pm; last admission 45min before closing • £12, including access to the gardens; NTS

Four miles west of Drum Castle and around two miles east of Banchory, **Crathes Castle** is a splendid sixteenth-century granite tower house adorned with flourishes such as overhanging turrets, gargoyles and conical roofs. Its thick walls, narrow windows and tiny rooms loaded with heavy old furniture make Crathes rather claustrophobic, but it is still worth visiting for some wonderful painted ceilings; the earliest dates from 1602.

INFORMATION — CRATHES CASTLE AND AROUND

Tourist office The nearest tourist office is within the museum in nearby Banchory, a small town that acts essentially as a gateway into rural Deeside (April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; also Sun 1–5pm July & Aug; ⓣ 01330 822000) Staff can provide information on walking and fishing in the area.

ACCOMMODATION

Tourists looking for somewhere after a day at **Crathes Castle** are understandably tempted to push on into the attractive Deeside countryside, which has a wide choice of accommodation. But there are a couple of reliably good places to stay in and around **Banchory**, a small but fast-growing town just two miles to the west.

Raemoir House Two and a half miles north of Banchory ⓣ 01330 824884, ⓦ raemoir.com. Glamorous country-house hotel set in spacious parkland, complete with a decadent drawing room. The best rooms have four-poster beds. £180

Tor-Na-Coille Hotel Inchmarlo Road, Banchory ⓣ 01330 822242, ⓦ tornacoille.com. Once a retreat for Charlie Chaplin and his family, *Tor-Na-Coille* has a scenic location on the town's southern edge. Some of the smart rooms overlook Banchory Golf Club's rolling fairways. £125

EATING AND DRINKING

The Milton Near the entrance to Crathes Castle ⓣ 01330 844566, ⓦ miltonbrasserie.com. Smart restaurant just across from Crathes Castle, serving moderately priced à la carte meals such as a red pepper and star anise risotto (£12). Mon & Tues noon–3pm, Wed & Thurs noon–3pm & 6–9pm, Fri & Sat noon–3pm & 6–9.30pm, Sun noon–5pm.

Ballater

The neat and ordered town of **BALLATER** is attractively hemmed in by the River Dee and fir-covered mountains. The town was dragged from obscurity in the nineteenth century when it was discovered that waters from the local Pannanich Wells might be useful in curing scrofula. Deeside water is now back in fashion, though these days it's bottled and sold far and wide as a natural mineral water.

It was in Ballater that Queen Victoria first arrived in Deeside by train from Aberdeen back in 1848; she wouldn't allow a station to be built any closer to Balmoral, eight miles further west. Although the line has long been closed, the town's rather self-important royalism is much in evidence at the restored **train station** in the centre. The local shops that supply Balmoral with groceries and household basics also flaunt their connections, with oversized "By Appointment" crests.

If you prefer to discover the fresh air and natural beauty that Victoria came to love so much, you'll find Ballater an excellent base for local **walks and outdoor activities**. There are numerous hikes from Loch Muik (pronounced "mick"), nine miles southwest of town, including the Capel Mounth drovers' route over the mountains to Glen Doll (see p.360), and a well-worn but strenuous all-day trek up and around Lochnagar (3789ft), the mountain much painted and written about by the current Prince of Wales.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BALLATER

By bus Buses from Banchory and Braemar stop at the northern end of Golf Road, near the A93.

Destinations Aboyne (hourly; 20min); Banchory (hourly; 40min); Braemar (9 daily; 35min).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office In the renovated former train station on Station Square (daily: July–Aug 10am–6pm; Sept–June 10am–5pm; ⓣ01339 755306).

Bike rental Good-quality bikes, including mountain bikes and tandems, can be rented from Cycle Highlands (ⓣ01339 755864, ⓦwww.cyclehighlands.com) from £18/day at 13–15 Victoria Road.

ACCOMMODATION

Auld Kirk ⓣ01339 755762, ⓦtheauldkirk.co.uk. As the name suggests, this pleasingly unorthodox B&B is based in a renovated church. All of the rooms are upstairs, leaving the ground floor free for a licensed lounge area. £120

Ballater Caravan Park South of Anderson Road, close to the River Dee ⓣ01339 755727. Large campsite down by the water that mostly attracts touring caravans – tents are welcome too, though, and there are laundry and shower facilities. Easter to Oct only. £13.50/pitch

Deeside Hotel Just west of the centre at 45 Braemar Road ⓣ01339 755420, ⓦdeesidehotel.co.uk. Welcoming nineteenth-century house with relatively expensive doubles and twins, all of which are en suite. The bar downstairs is stacked full of whisky and bottled ales, and there's also a restaurant in the large conservatory out the back. £110

Habitat @ Ballater Bridge Square ⓣ01339 753752, ⓦhabitat-at-ballater.com. Excellent and well-equipped hostel tucked away off the main road. Choose between a bunk bed with its own locker, or one of the private rooms. Dorms £20; doubles £50

EATING AND DRINKING

Barrel Lounge 6 Church Square ⓣ01339 755488, ⓦcrannach.com If you fancy a wee dram with the locals, pop into this pub on the main green. There's an open fire and the TV's usually on in the corner. Mon–Wed & Sun 11am–midnight, Thurs–Sat 11am–1am.

Crannach Bakery A couple of miles east of Ballater at Cambus O'May ⓣ01339 755126, ⓦcrannach.com. A cultured spot offering good coffees, snacks and light meals, as well as superb cakes (around £1.50) and bread from its in-house organic bakery.

Rocksalt and Snails 2 Bridge Street. The pick of Ballater's cafés, selling cupcakes, sharing platters and light bites, including veggie options like goat's cheese in a sweet chilli sauce (£6.50 with bread). Mon–Wed & Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs–Sat 10am–10pm.

Balmoral Castle and around

Eight miles west of Ballater, off the A93 • April–July daily 10am–5pm • £10; audio tour included in admission price (additional £5 deposit required per handset); Land Rover safari £60/person for 3hr (minimum two people) • ⓣ01339 742534, ⓦbalmoralcastle.com

Originally a sixteenth-century tower house built for the powerful Gordon family, **Balmoral Castle** has been a royal residence since 1852, when it was converted to the Scottish Baronial mansion that stands today. The royal family traditionally spend their summer holidays here each August, but despite its fame it can be something of

a disappointment even for a dedicated royalist. For the three months when the doors are nudged open, the general riffraff are permitted to view only the ballroom, an exhibition room and the grounds. With so little of the castle on view, it's worth making the most of the grounds and larger estate by following some of the country walks, heading off on a Land Rover safari or allowing the free audio tour to guide you around.

Opposite the castle's gates on the main road, the otherwise dull granite church of **Crathie**, built in 1895 with the proceeds of a bazaar held at Balmoral, is the royals' local church.

INFORMATION **BALMORAL CASTLE AND AROUND**

Tourist office In the car park by the church on the main road (April–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 10am–noon; ⓣ 01339 742414)

Braemar and around

West of Balmoral, the road rises to 1100ft above sea level in the upper part of Deeside at the village of **BRAEMAR**, situated where three passes meet and overlooked by an unremarkable **castle**. It's an invigorating, outdoor kind of place, well patronized by committed hikers, but probably best known for its Highland Games, the annual **Braemar Gathering** (see box below), on the first Saturday of September.

Linn of Dee

A pleasant diversion from Braemar is to head six miles west to the end of the road and the **Linn of Dee**, where the river plummets savagely through a narrow rock gorge. From here there are countless walks into the surrounding countryside or up into the heart of the Cairngorms (see p.425), including the awesome Lairig Ghru pass which cuts all the way through to Strathspey.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **BRAEMAR AND AROUND**

By bus Buses to and from Ballater (9 daily; 35min) stop on Auchendryne Square, while long-distance coaches drop package tourists in the car park opposite the *Fife Arms Hotel*.

DEESIDE AND DONSIDE HIGHLAND GAMES

Royal Deeside is the home of the modern **Highland Games**, which claims descent from gatherings organized by eleventh-century Scottish king Malcolm Canmore to help him recruit the strongest and fittest clansmen for his army. The most famous of the local games is undoubtedly the **Braemar Gathering**, held on the first Saturday in September, which can see crowds of 15,000. Since Queen Victoria's day, successive generations of royals have attended the event, which has become something of an overcrowded, overblown affair. You're not guaranteed to get in if you just turn up; the website (ⓦ braemargathering.org) has details of how to book tickets in advance.

Vying for celebrity status in recent years has been the **Lonach Gathering** in nearby Strathdon on Donside, held the weekend before Braemar, where local laird Billy Connolly dispenses drams of whisky to marching village men and has been known to invite some Hollywood chums along – Steve Martin has appeared dressed in kilt and jacket, while Robin Williams has competed in the punishing hill race.

For a true flavour of the spirit of Highland gatherings, however, try to get to one of the events that take place in other local towns and villages at weekends throughout **July** and **August**, where locals outnumber tourists and the competitions are guaranteed to be hard-fought and entertaining. Local tourist offices and the tourist board website (ⓦ aberdeen-grampian.com) should be able to tell you what's happening where.

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office In The Mews, in the middle of the village on Mar Road (daily: April–June & Sept–Oct 9.30am–5pm; July & Aug 9.30am–6pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4.30pm; T 01339 741600).

Outdoor activities Advice on outdoor activities, as well as ski, mountain-bike and climbing equipment rental, is available from Braemar Mountain Sports (daily 9am–6pm; W braemarmountainsports.com).

ACCOMMODATION

Clunie Lodge Guest House Clunie Bank Road T 01339 741330, W clunielodge.com. Just south of the tourist office, close to the middle of the village, is this six-room B&B with lovely views up Clunie Glen. £70

Invercauld Caravan Club Park Half a mile south of the village off Glenshee Road T 01339 741373. Year-round caravan site which also has thirty camping pitches. Can get busy in the summer, so book ahead. £21.40/pitch

Rucksacks Tucked behind The Mews T 01339 741517. Cheery, easy-going bunkhouse that's well equipped for walkers and backpackers – stay in one of the twin rooms, or crash out in the shared alpine-style hut. Dorms £10; twins £32

SYHA Braemar Corrie Feragie, 21 Glenshee Road T 01339 741659, W syha.org.uk. SYHA hostel in a former shooting lodge with bike storage facilities and a big communal kitchen. It's also just a short stroll from the centre. £18

EATING AND DRINKING

Taste Airlie House, beside the Mar Road roundabout T 01339 741425, W taste-braemar.co.uk. Reliably good coffee shop and moderately priced contemporary restaurant doing home-made, gluten-free soups (served with local bread) for £3.60. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm.

The Gathering Place Invercauld Rd, by Braemar Mountain Sports T 01339 741234, W the-gathering-place.co.uk. Bistro in the heart of the village selling mouthwatering, though pricey, Scottish-based cuisine, including a game pie made with ale and red wine (£16.95). Tues–Sat 6–8.30pm.

The Don valley

The quiet countryside around the **DON VALLEY**, once renowned for its illegal whisky distilleries and smugglers, lies at the heart of Aberdeenshire's prosperous agricultural region. From Aberdeen, the River Don winds northwest through **Inverurie**, where it takes a sharp turn west to **Alford**, then continues past ruined castles through the **Upper Don valley** and the heather moorlands of the eastern Highlands. This remote and under-visited area is positively littered with ruined castles, Pictish sites, stones and hill forts.

GETTING AROUND THE DON VALLEY

By car Although public transport connects Aberdeen with Inverurie and Alford, getting any further than this without a car is all but impossible.

Alford and around

ALFORD (pronounced "aa-ford"), 25 miles west of Aberdeen, only exists at all because it was chosen, in 1859, as the terminus for the Great North Scotland Railway. A fairly grey little town now firmly within the Aberdeen commuter belt, it's still well worth making the trip here for the **Grampian Transport Museum**.

Grampian Transport Museum

Main Street • April–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct daily 10am–4pm • £9.50 • W gtm.org.uk

The **Grampian Transport Museum** is home to a diverse display of transport through the ages, from old tramcars and pushbikes to modern, eco-friendly cars. Notable exhibits include the Craigevar Express, a strange, three-wheeled steam-driven vehicle developed by the local postman for his rounds, and that famous monument to British eccentricity and ingenuity, the Sinclair C5 motorized tricycle.

Alford Valley Railway

Just north of Main Street, or a short walk east of the Grampian Transport Museum • April– June & Sept Sat & Sun 12.30pm–4pm; July & Aug daily 12.30pm–4pm • Return trip £4 • T 07879 293934, W alfordvalleyrailway.org.uk

A couple of minutes' walk from the Grampian Transport Museum is the terminus for the **Alford Valley Railway**, a narrow-gauge train that runs for about a mile from Alford Station through wooded vales to the wide open space of **Murray Park**. The return journey takes an hour.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — **ALFORD AND AROUND**

By bus Stagecoach Bluebird buses #218 and #220 link Aberdeen with Alford (1hr 10min).

Tourist office The Grampian Transport Museum is home to the helpful tourist office (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 12.45–5pm; T 01975 562650).

Craigievar Castle

Six miles south of Alford • Castle: April–June & Sept Fri–Tues 11am–4.45pm; July–Aug daily 11am–4.45pm; grounds: daily 11am–5.30pm • £12; car parking £1; NTS • T 08444 932174

Six miles south of Alford on the A980, **Craigievar Castle** is a fantastic pink confection of turrets, gables, balustrades and cupolas bubbling over from its top three storeys. It was built in 1626 by a Baltic trader known as Willy the Merchant, who evidently allowed his whimsy to run riot here.

The Upper Don valley

Travelling west from Alford, settlements become noticeably more scattered and remote as the countryside takes on a more open, familiarly Highland appearance. The **Lecht Road**, crossing the area of bleak but wonderfully empty high country to the remote mountain village of Tomintoul (see p.432), passes the Lecht ski centre (see p.433) at 2090ft above sea level, but is frequently impassable in winter due to snow.

Kildrummy Castle

Kildrummy, west of Alford off the A97 • Castle: April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; gardens April–Oct daily noon–5pm • Castle £4.50; gardens £4.50 ; HS

Ten miles from Alford stand the impressive ruins of the thirteenth-century **Kildrummy Castle**, where Robert the Bruce sent his wife and children during the Wars of Independence. The castle blacksmith, bribed with as much gold as he could carry, set fire to the place and it fell into English hands. Bruce's immediate family survived, but his brother was executed and the entire garrison hanged, drawn and quartered. Meanwhile, the duplicitous blacksmith was rewarded for his help by having molten gold poured down his throat. The sixth earl of Mar used the castle as the headquarters of the ill-fated Jacobite risings in 1715, but after that Kildrummy became redundant and it fell into disrepair. Beside the ruins, the separate **Kildrummy Castle Gardens** are quite a draw, boasting everything from swathes of azaleas in spring to Himalayan poppies in summer.

Lost Gallery

Four miles north of Strathdon • Wed–Mon 11am–5pm • Free • W lostgallery.co.uk

Ten miles west of Kildrummy Castle, the A944 sweeps round into the parish of **Strathdon**, little more than a few buildings scattered along the roadside.

Four miles north of here, up a rough track leading into Glen Nochty, lies the unexpected **Lost Gallery**, which shows work by some of Scotland's leading modern artists in a wonderfully remote and tranquil setting.

Corgarff Castle

Corgarff, ten miles southwest of Strathdon • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS

In Corgarff, just off the A939, lies **Corgarff Castle**, an austere tower house with an

unusual star-shaped curtain wall and an eventful history. Built in 1537, it was turned into a barracks by the Hanoverian government in 1748, in the aftermath of Culloden, in order to track down local Jacobite rebels; a century later, English redcoats were stationed here with the unpopular task of trying to control whisky smuggling. Today the place has been restored to resemble its days as a barracks, with stark rooms and rows of hard, uncomfortable beds – authentic touches which also extend to graffiti on the walls and peat smoke permeating the building from a fire on the upper floor.

ACCOMMODATION — **CORGARFF CASTLE**

Allargue Arms Hotel Half a mile north of the castle 01975 651410, allarguearmshotel.co.uk. The nearest accommodation option to Corgarff Castle, offering simple B&B and good-value bar meals that include a half-pound steak burger. This old wayside inn overlooks the castle and is a cosy base for skiing, fishing or hiking trips. Daily noon–3pm & 7–9pm. £60

The northeast coast

The **NORTHEAST COAST** of Scotland from Aberdeen to Inverness has a rugged, sometimes bleak fringe with pleasant if undramatic farmland rolling inland. Still, if the weather is good, it's well worth spending a couple of days meandering through the various little fishing villages and along the miles of deserted, unspoilt beaches. The largest coastal towns are **Peterhead** and **Fraserburgh**, both dominated by sizeable fishing fleets; while neither has much to make a long stay worthwhile, the latter's Museum of Scottish Lighthouses is one of the most attractive small museums in Scotland. More appealing to most visitors are the quieter spots along the Moray coast, including the charming villages of **Pennan**, **Gardenstown**, **Portsoy** and **Cullen**.

GETTING AROUND — **THE COAST**

By train Trains are a faster but less frequent option than taking the bus, running every 1–2hrs from Aberdeen to Elgin (1hr 30min), Forres (1hr 45min) and Nairn (2hr).

By bus The main towns and villages along this stretch of coast are well served by buses. There are hourly services from Aberdeen running to Elgin (2hr 30min), Forres (2hr 50min) and Nairn (3hr 15min).

Forvie National Nature Reserve

Three miles north of Newburgh • Visitor centre April–Sept daily 9am–5pm; call for winter hours • Free • 01358 751330

Fifteen miles north of Aberdeen, a turning (signposted to Collieston) leads off the main A90 coast road to **Forvie National Nature Reserve**. This area incorporates the Sands of Forvie, one of Britain's largest and least disturbed dune systems, which is home to Britain's largest colony of breeding eider duck. There's a small but informative **visitor centre**, from which a network of trails winds along the coast and through the dunes, with one leading to the site of a fifteenth-century village buried by the shifting sands.

Cruden Bay

Superb sandy beaches can be found eight miles north of Forvie at **Cruden Bay**, from where a pleasant fifteen-minute walk leads to the huge pink-granite ruin of **Slains Castle**. The ruin itself is not especially interesting – it was over-modernized in the nineteenth century – though its stark clifftop beauty is striking and it claims notoriety as the place that inspired Bram Stoker to write *Dracula*. The best approach is to pull into the Meikle Partans car park on the A975 north of the village and follow the obvious path until you begin to see the ruins.

Bullers of Buchan

Reached by driving one and half miles north from Cruden Bay along the A975, or walking three precarious miles north from Slains Castle along the cliffs, the **Bullers of Buchan** is a splendid 245ft-deep sea chasm, where the ocean gushes in through a natural archway eroded by the sea. This is some of the finest cliff scenery in the country and attracts a huge number of (smelly) nesting seabirds.

Fraserburgh

Just west of a swooping, sandy bay, **FRASERBURGH** is a large and fairly severe-looking place, edged by warehouse-like superstores and farmland. The intriguing **Museum of Scottish Lighthouses** makes a short visit worthwhile, and you'll find good, seafront hotel rooms nearby in the sleepy fishing village of **St Combs**.

Museum of Scottish Lighthouses

Stevenson Road • May–Sept Mon & Wed–Sun 10am–5pm, Tues noon–5pm; Oct–April Wed–Sun 11am–4pm • £6 • Ⓦ lighthousemuseum.org.uk

At the northern tip of the town, an eighteenth-century lighthouse protrudes from the top of sixteenth-century **Fraserburgh Castle**. The lighthouse was one of the first to be built in Scotland and is now part of the excellent **Museum of Scottish Lighthouses**, where you can see a collection of huge lenses and prisms gathered from decommissioned lighthouses, and a display on various members of the famous "Lighthouse" Stevenson family. The highlight of the museum is the tour of Kinnaird Head lighthouse itself, preserved as it was when the last keeper left in 1991, with its century-old equipment still in perfect working order.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — FRASERBURGH

By bus There are frequent buses from Aberdeen to Fraserburgh (every 30min; 1hr 30min).

Destinations Aberdeen (every 30min; 1hr 30min); Banff (3 daily; 1hr); Macduff (3 daily; 55min).

Tourist office 3 Saltoun Square (April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; ⓣ 01346 518315; Ⓦ visitfraserburgh.com).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Tufted Duck Hotel Corsekelly Pl, St Combs ⓣ 01346 582481, Ⓦ tufteduckhotel.co.uk. Large, family-owned hotel in the village of St Combs, a 10min drive southeast of Fraserburgh. The building is an ugly duckling, but the rooms – many of which have unobstructed sea views – are comfortable and quiet. The restaurant serves a mix of Scottish and Far Eastern flavours, with mains from £11.50. Daily noon–2pm & 5–9pm. **£105**

Fraserburgh to Gardenstown

The coast road between **Fraserburgh** and **Gardenstown**, fifteen miles to the west, is particularly attractive: inland there are villages with pretty churches and cottages, while countless paths lead off it to ruined castles, clifftop walks and lonely beaches.

Pennan

PENNAN is a tiny fishing hamlet that lies just off the B9031 down a steep and hazardous hill. Consisting of little more than a single row of whitewashed stone cottages tucked between a cliff and the sea, the village leapt into the limelight when the British movie *Local Hero* was filmed here in 1982; you can stay at one of the identifiable landmarks from the film, the *Pennan Inn* (see p.384).

Crovie

Locals in the tiny but appealing village of **CROVIE** (pronounced "crivie"), on the other side of Troup Head from Pennan, frequently have their doorsteps washed by the sea.

The Head itself supports over 1500 gannet nests. Wedged in against the steep cliffs, Crovie is so narrow that its residents have to park their cars at one end of the village and continue to their houses on foot.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING **CROVIE**

Pennan Inn By the waterfront 01346 561201, thepennaninn.co.uk. Crovie's most recognizable landmark, the *Pennan Inn* has three en-suite rooms. You can also grab a drink or something to eat in the bar (Thai curry £9.95). Daily noon–2pm & 5–11pm. **£80**

Gardenstown

GARDENSTOWN, a short way west of Crovie, is one of the more attractive villages along this stretch of coast, with stone cottages huddled around a wave-gnawed bay. It's considerably larger than Crovie, and supports a small gallery and teashop down by the harbour.

Macduff

Heading west along the B9031 from Pennan brings you, after ten miles, to **MACDUFF**, a famous spa town during the nineteenth century that now has a thriving and pleasant harbour. Macduff and its neighbour Banff are separated by little more than the beautiful seven-arch bridge over the River Deveron.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **MACDUFF**

By bus Buses from towns and villages along the northeast coast stop on Union Road or Shore Street, both near the harbour.

Destinations Banff (at least hourly; 5min); Cullen via Portsoy (hourly; 40min); Fraserburgh (1–2 daily; 55min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Knowes Hotel 43 Market Street 01261 832152, knoweshotel.co.uk. A small hotel on the hill above Macduff, with plain rooms and great views over both towns. There's a popular bar-restaurant on the ground floor offering reasonably priced bar food, served with mash or chips, plus a view of the coastline. The scampi (£10.50) is locally sourced. Daily: noon–2pm & 5–8pm. **£75**

Banff and around

Roughly the same size as its neighbour, Macduff, **BANFF** has a mix of characterful old buildings and boarded-up shops, which give little clue to the extravagance of **Duff House**, the town's main attraction. The seasonal visitor information centre here can provide information on what to do in Banff, Macduff and the surrounding coastal villages.

Duff House

Half a mile south of Banff's High Street • April–Oct daily 11am–5pm; Nov–March Thurs–Sun 11am–4pm • £7.10; HS • duffhouse.org.uk

Built to a design by William Adam in 1730, this elegant four-floor Georgian Baroque house was originally intended for one of the northeast's richest men, William Braco, who became earl of Fife in 1759. It was clearly built to impress, and could have been even more splendid had Adam been allowed to build curving colonnades either side; Braco's refusal to pay for carved Corinthian columns to be shipped in from Queensferry caused such bitter arguments that the laird never came to live here, and even shut his coach curtains whenever he passed by. Since then the house has been used variously as a hotel, family home and sanatorium. Today, it's home to a tearoom and a gallery, with an impressive collection of fine art provided by the National Galleries of Scotland.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **BANFF**

By bus Local buses arrive and depart from High Street, or Low Street, which runs parallel.

Destinations Macduff (at least hourly; 5min); Cullen via Portsoy (hourly; 35min); Fraserburgh (1–2 daily; 1hr).

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist office Collie Lodge in the town centre, close to where Carmelite St, Low St and Strait Path meet (April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; ⓣ01261 812419).

Boat trips From the harbour, Puffin Cruises (ⓣ01261 832425, ⓦpuffincruises.com) offers wildlife-spotting and sightseeing trips along the coast. A three-hour birdwatching trip to the large colony of gannets at Troup Head costs £25.

ACCOMMODATION

Banff Links Caravan Park One and a half miles west of Banff ⓣ01261 812228, ⓦbanfflinkscaravanpark.co.uk. Well-equipped campsite close to the beach, halfway between Banff and Whitehills. Has an on-site shop and laundry facilities. April–Oct. £12/pitch

Seafield Arms 5 Chapel Street, Whitehills ⓣ01261 861209, ⓦseafieldarms.co.uk. This 200-year-old inn, three miles west of Banff in the friendly village of Whitehills, has surprisingly twenty-first-century rooms, with Sky TV, wi-fi and gleaming bathrooms. The restaurant downstairs (see below) serves excellent shellfish. £60

Trinity Manse Guest House 21 Castle Street, Banff ⓣ01261 812244, ⓦwww.trinitymanseguesthouse.co.uk. Clean and welcoming guesthouse with friendly owners and good value, up-to-date rooms, including one suitable for families. The location in the centre of town is handy too. £60

EATING AND DRINKING

County Hotel 32 High Street, Banff ⓣ01261 815353, ⓦthecountyhotel.com. The French bistro in the grand *County Hotel* does high-end but moderately priced food, with pasta dishes for £8.95. Daily noon–2.30pm & 5.30–8pm.

Seafield Arms 5 Chapel Street, Whitehills ⓣ01261 861209, ⓦseafieldarms.co.uk. High-quality pub food is served in the bar, where photos of old fishing boats adorn the walls, and the popular restaurant that adjoins it. The menu includes plenty of local shellfish, like langoustines with chilli and coriander butter (£12.95). Mon–Thurs 11am–2pm & 5–11.30pm, Fri & Sat 11am–12.30pm, Sun 12.30pm–11pm.

Cullen and around

Twelve miles west of Banff is **CULLEN**. Strikingly situated beneath a superb series of arched viaducts, which were built because the earl and countess of Seafield refused to allow the railway to pass through the grounds of Cullen House, the town is made up of two sections: **Seatown**, by the harbour, and the **new town** on the hillside. There's a lovely stretch of sheltered sand by Seatown, where the colourful houses – confusingly numbered according to the order in which they were built – huddle end-on to the sea. The town is perhaps best known as the home of **Cullen skink** – a thick soup made from milk (or cream), potato and smoked haddock.

Six miles east of Cullen is the quiet village of **PORTSOY**, renowned for its green marble (once shipped to Versailles), and its annual traditional boat festival in early July.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CULLEN

By bus Hourly bus #35A connects Cullen with Aberdeen (2hr 35min), arriving and departing from The Square.

INFORMATION

Tourist office You can pick up leaflets about local walks at the town's independent tourist office on the main square of the new town (generally June–Aug daily 11am–5pm; ⓣ01542 841863) but as it's run by volunteers the opening hours can be sporadic.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Cullen Harbour Hostel Port Long Road ⓣ01542 841997, ⓦcullenharbourholidays.com. Cheap hostel beds are available under exposed wooden rafters in this pretty stone building by the harbour. There's a piano, a well-stocked bookcase and a sociable kitchen. Dorms £16

Trace's Café 22 Seafield Street ⓣ07546 300156. Gingham tablecloths and window drapes make this small café a cosy place to try Cullen skink, the local delicacy. A pot of soup to take away is £3.50. Mon–Thurs 9am–6pm, Fri–Sun 9am–8pm.

Buckie and Spey Bay

West of Cullen, the scruffy fishing town of **BUCKIE** marks one end of the **Speyside Way** long-distance footpath (see p.430). This follows the coast west for five miles to windy **Spey Bay**, at the mouth of the river of the same name, which can also be reached by a small coastal road from Buckie. It's a remote spot bounded by sea, river and sky. It is sometimes possible to see dolphins feeding if you wander along the long pebbly spit by the mouth of the Spey; this is also a good spot to see otters and birds, including ospreys.

Scottish Dolphin Centre

Spey Bay, seven miles west of Buckie • April–Oct daily 10.30am–5pm • Free • www.wdcs.org/wildlifecentre

This small wildlife centre's main mission is researching the Moray Firth dolphin population (see p.419). The centre, run by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, houses an exhibition and a café; alongside, the **Tugnet ice house**, a partially subterranean, thick-walled house with a turf roof used by fishermen in the days before electric refrigeration to store their ice and catches, makes for an atmospheric auditorium in which films of the underwater world are shown.

ACCOMMODATION **BUCKIE AND SPEY BAY**

Rosemount B&B 63 East Church Street 01542 833434, rosemountbb.co.uk. Large B&B in a Victorian townhouse, with a cosy TV room to relax in. Rooms at the front of the house have views across the firth. £66

Elgin

The lively market town of **ELGIN**, a fifteen-mile drive from Buckie, grew up around the River Lossie in the thirteenth century. The centre has mostly kept its medieval street plan, and while the busy main street is choked with chain stores, it does open out onto an old cobbled marketplace with a tangle of wynds and pends on either side.

Elgin Cathedral

King St • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March Mon–Wed, Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; joint ticket with Spynie Palace (see p.388) £7.20; HS

On King Street, a few blocks from the tourist office and clearly signposted, is the lovely ruin of **Elgin Cathedral**. Once considered Scotland's most beautiful cathedral, rivalling St Andrews in importance, it's little more than a shell today, though it does retain its original facade. Founded in 1224, the three-towered building was extensively rebuilt after a fire in 1270, and stood as the region's highest religious house until 1390 when the inimical Wolf of Badenoch (illegitimate son of Robert II) burned the place down, along with the rest of the town, in retaliation for having been excommunicated by the bishop of Moray when he left his wife. The cathedral suffered further during the post-Reformation period, when all its valuables were stripped and the building was reduced to a common quarry for the locals. Unusual features include the Pictish cross slab in the middle of the ruins and the cracked gravestones with their memento mori of skulls and crossbones.

Elgin Museum

High Street • April–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 11am–4pm; Nov–March open on request or if staff are in the building • Free • 01343 543675, elginmuseum.org.uk

At the very top of High Street is one of Britain's oldest museums, the **Elgin Museum**, which has been housed here since 1843. Following a major refurbishment, it has plenty of modern touches, with displays on local history and some weird anthropological artefacts including a shrunken head from Ecuador. In addition, you can see an excellent collection of fossils, some well-explained Pictish relics and a display on the important Birnie hoard of silver Roman dinarii from 197 AD found nearby.

Glen Moray

Bruceland Rd • Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, also Sat 10am–4.30pm May–Sept • £4 • www.glenmoray.com

Elgin is on the edge of whisky country, and while the attractive local distillery, **Glen Moray** isn't part of the official Malt Whisky Trail (see p.431), tours are still available – the distinctive thing here is that your guide is quite likely to be the stillman, mashman or one of the other workers from the distillery floor.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train The train station, served by the Aberdeen–Inverness line, is slightly detached from the city centre on the south side of town.

Destinations Aberdeen (5–11 daily; 1hr 30min); Forres (5–13 daily; 15min); Inverness (5–13 daily; 50min); Nairn (5–13 daily; 25min).

By bus The bus station is on Alexandra Road, right in the town centre.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 2hr 20min); Burghead (hourly; 30min); Duffus (hourly; 15min); Forres (every 30min; 25min); Inverurie (hourly; 1hr 40min); Lossiemouth (every 30min; 20min); Nairn (every 30min; 45min).

INFORMATION

Tourist information The information point at Elgin Library, Cooper Park, provides information on local attractions and accommodation options (Mon–Fri 10am–8pm, Sat 10am–4pm; 01343 562608).

ACCOMMODATION

Moraydale Guest House 276 High Street 01343 546381, moraydaleguesthouse.com. Grand Victorian B&B with off-road parking and seven top-class rooms, some of which are on the ground floor. There's a sunny conservatory to eat your breakfast in. £70

Old Church of Urquhart Meft Road, Urquhart 01343 843063, oldchurch.eu. Five miles east of town, the *Old Church of Urquhart* is one of the area's most appealing places to stay: an unusual and comfortable B&B in an imaginatively converted church. There's also a self-catering apartment available. £74

EATING AND DRINKING

Lido 29 South St 01343 556464. Neatly styled French restaurant near the High Street, with mid-priced mains (the beef bourguignon is £11.95). There's also a good range of appetizers, including grilled asparagus with hollandaise sauce (£4.45).

Scribbles 154 High St 01343 542835, facebook.com/scribbles.elgin. Get past the scruffy facade and try-hard interior design and you'll find very good fruit smoothies (£3.05), plus reasonable coffees, main meals and pizzas (£7.50). Good for families with kids (crayons provided). Mon–Sat 9am–10pm, Sun noon–10pm.

SHOPPING

Gordon & MacPhail 58 South St 01343 545110, www.gordonandmacphail.com. You can pick up some great picnic foods at this old-fashioned Aladdin's cave of delicacies; they claim to have the largest selection of whiskies in the world. Mon–Sat 8.30am–5pm.

Pluscarden Abbey

Six miles southwest of Elgin • Daily 4.30am–8.30pm • Free • www.pluscardenabbey.org

Set in an attractive, verdant valley seven miles southwest of Elgin, **Pluscarden Abbey**, looms impressively large in a peaceful clearing off an unmarked road. One of only two abbeys in Scotland with a permanent community of monks, it was founded in 1230 for a French order and, in 1390, became another of the properties burnt by the Wolf of Badenoch (see p.330); recovering from this, it became a priory of the Benedictine Abbey of Dunfermline in 1454 and continued as such until monastic life was suppressed in Scotland in 1560. The abbey's revival began in 1897 when the Catholic antiquarian, John, third Marquess of Bute, started to repair the building. In 1948 his son donated it to a small group of Benedictine monks from Gloucester who established the present community. It is possible to **stay** here on retreat for a few days; see the website for details.

Lossiemouth

Five miles north of Elgin across the flat land of the Laich of Moray, Elgin's nearest seaside town, **LOSSIEMOUTH** (generally known as Lossie), is a cheery golf-oriented seaside town blessed with lovely sandy beaches; the glorious duney spit of the East Beach is reached over a footbridge across the River Lossie from the town park. The town's only blight is the frequent sky-tearing noise of military aircraft from the nearby RAF base.

10

Spynie Palace

Four miles south of Lossiemouth off the A941 • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; joint ticket with Elgin Cathedral £7.20; HS

Lossiemouth's development as a port came when the nearby waterways of **SPYNIE**, three miles inland, silted up and became useless to the traders of Elgin. Little remains of the settlement except hulking **Spynie Palace**, home of the bishops of Moray from 1107 until 1686. The enormous rectangular David's Tower – visible for miles around – offers stunning views from the top over the Moray Firth and the Spynie Canal.

Burghead

Nine miles northwest of Elgin • Burghead Visitor Centre: April–Sept daily noon–4pm • Entry by donation • Served by hourly bus #32 from Elgin

Another of this coastline's tightly packed, stone-built fishing villages, windswept **BURGHEAD** was once the site of an important Iron Age fort and the ancient Pictish capital of Moray. Between 1805–09 a fishing village was built on the promontory where the ancient fort had sat, in the course of which some unique Pictish stone carvings known as the **Burghead Bulls** were discovered. One is on display in the **Burghead Visitor Centre,** built into the round white lookout tower at the tip of the promontory; others can be seen in the Elgin Museum, the National Museum in Edinburgh and the British Museum in London. The tower offers great views of the Moray Firth, while inside are displays about Pictish times and the dramatic annual fire ceremony known as the **Burning of the Clavie**, one of only a few that still take place in Scotland. A burning tar barrel is carried around the town on January 11 to mark the old calendar's new year, before being rolled into the sea, sparks and embers flying.

Findhorn and around

Nine miles southwest of Burghead, on the other side of the bay • Heritage Centre: May & Sept Sat & Sun 2–5pm; June–Aug daily 2–5pm • Free

A wide sweep of sandy beach stretches five miles around Burghead Bay to **FINDHORN**, a tidy village with some neat fishermen's cottages, a delightful harbour dotted with moored yachts, a small **Heritage Centre** in the village's former salmon-net sheds and grass-roofed ice house, and a couple of good pubs. Like Lossiemouth, however, it's hard to escape the military presence in the area, with **RAF Kinloss**, one of the UK's most important front-line airfields, right on its doorstep. Findhorn is best known, however, for the controversial **Findhorn Foundation**, based beside the town's caravan park.

The Findhorn Foundation

Less than a mile south of Findhorn village • Visitors are free to explore, but it's worth trying to take a more informed look by means of a guided tour: April, Oct & Nov Mon, Wed & Fri 2pm; from May–Sept there are additional tours at 2pm on Sat & Sun; you can also guide yourself via a booklet (£5) from the shop or visitor centre • Free, guided tour £5

In 1962, with little money and no employment, Eileen and Peter Caddy, their three children and friend Dorothy Maclean, settled on a caravan site at Findhorn. Dorothy believed that she had a special relationship with what she called the "devas … the archetypal formative forces of light or energy that underlie all forms in nature – plants, trees, rivers", and from the uncompromising sandy soil they built a remarkable garden filled with plants and vegetables, far larger than had ever been seen in the area.

A few of those who came to see the phenomenon stayed to help out and tune into the spiritual aspect of daily life at the nascent community. With its emphasis on inner discovery and development, but unattached to any particular doctrine or creed, the **Findhorn Foundation** has today blossomed into a permanent community of a few hundred people, with a well-developed series of courses and retreats on subjects ranging from astroshamanic healing to organic gardening, drawing another eight thousand or so visitors each year. The original caravan still stands, surrounded by a whole host of newer timber buildings and eco-homes employing solar power and earth roofs.

The foundation is not without controversy: a community leader once declared that "behind the benign and apparently religious front lies a hard core of New Agers experimenting with hallucinatory techniques marketed as spirituality." Findhorn is also accused of being overly well-heeled, a glance into the shop or a tally of the smart cars parked outside the well-appointed eco-houses does give some substance to such a view. However, the community continues to prosper and it is well known around the world. The reputation of the place is such that it attracts visitors both sympathetic and sceptical – and both find something to feed their preconceptions.

Moray Art Centre

The Park, within the Findhorn Foundation • Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–4pm • Free • T 01309 692426, W morayartcentre.org

Don't miss the **Moray Art Centre**, on the edge of the Findhorn Foundation but not officially a part of it. The centre is located in a terracotta-hued eco-friendly building; it hosts eclectic and imaginative temporary exhibitions and regular (often free) art classes.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By bus The foundation is located on the B9011 about five miles northeast of Forres and served by Stagecoach bus #31 (every 1–2 hrs; 15min). The service connects Forres High Street with Findhorn and Elgin.

THE FINDHORN FOUNDATION

Visitor centre The foundation's visitor centre (Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, also open Sat & Sun 1–4pm from May–Sept; T 01309 690311, W findhorn.org) .

ACCOMMODATION

The **visitor centre** near the foundation's main entrance (see above) can provide you with information on staying within the community, either as part of an introductory "**Experience Week**" (cost based on your income), or simply overnighting. There are a number of **eco-houses** within the area around the Moray Art Centre offering good-value B&B accommodation.

Findhorn Bay Holiday Park At the entrance to the foundation T 01309 690203, W findhornbayholidaypark.com. Despite enormous growth, the Foundation is still situated on the same land as this caravan and camping park, which has pitches (April–Oct only), stationary caravans (Dec–Oct) and unusual eco-chalets (year-round). £16/pitch; caravan £388/week; chalet £729/week

Sunflower 404 The Field of Dreams T 01309 692080, W sunflower-findhorn.co.uk. Right in the heart of the community, *Sunflower* is an attractive wooden house with two twin rooms and a single. They serve a good organic breakfast. Single £40; twins £65.

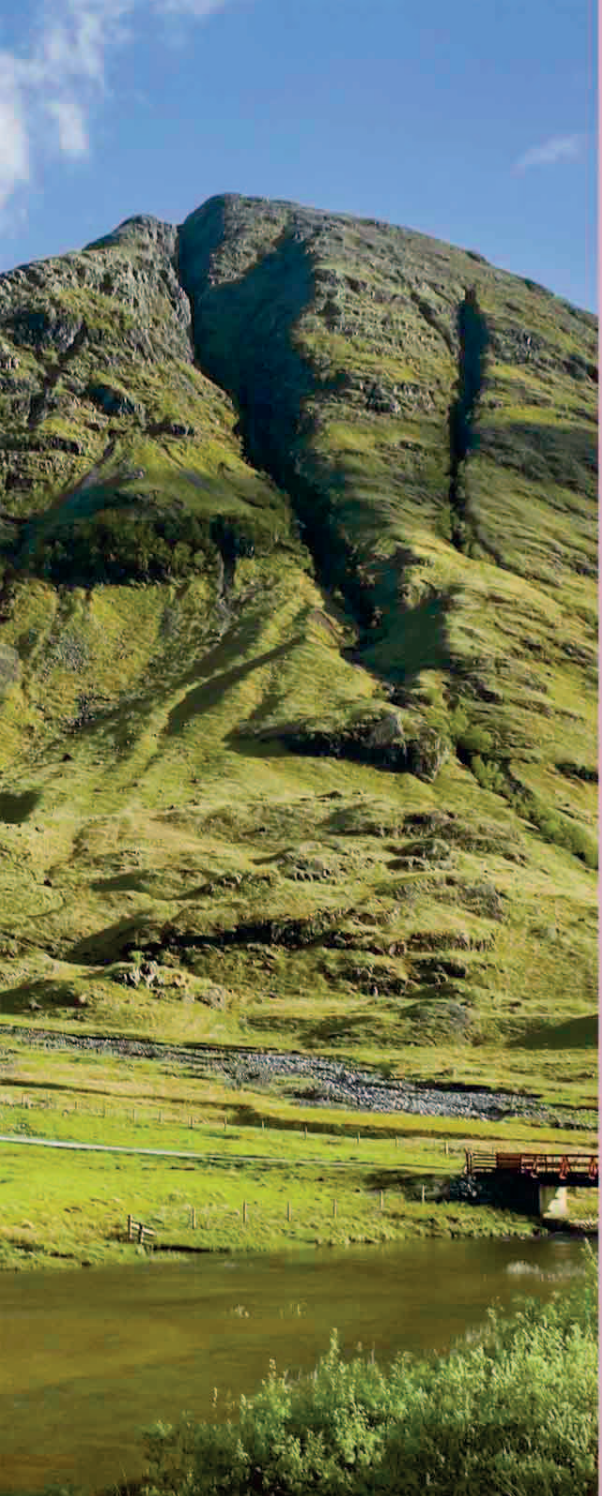
EATING AND DRINKING

Bakehouse 91–92 Findhorn Rd T 01309 691826, W bakehousecafe.co.uk. In Findhorn village, this moderately priced café sells food freshly prepared on site, from organic local cheeses to divine chocolate brownies (£2). There are picnic benches for alfresco dining. Daily 10am–4pm, with extended hours in summer.

★ **Blue Angel** At the entrance to the Universal Hall T 01309 690110, W phoenixshop.co.uk. Be sure to stop off at the community's excellent café, which serves healthy soups, herbal teas (£1.50) and irresistible organic cakes produced by the community's bakery. Daily 10am–5pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Universal Hall Arts Centre A short walk north of the visitor centre T 01309 691170, W findhorn.org. Connected to the *Blue Angel* café is the Universal Hall Arts Centre, an occasional venue for stand-up comedy, drama, and good touring folk and jazz bands. Most events begin at 7.30/8pm (see website for show times).



The Great Glen and River Spey

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401 Around Fort William
404 Glen Coe and around
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429 Speyside

GLEN COE

The Great Glen and River Spey

The Great Glen, a major geological fault line cutting diagonally across the Highlands from Fort William to Inverness, is the defining geographic feature of the north of Scotland. A huge rift valley was formed when the northwestern and southeastern sides of the fault slid in opposite directions for more than sixty miles, while the present landscape was shaped by glaciers that only retreated around 8000 BC. The glen is impressive more for its sheer scale than its beauty, but the imposing barrier of loch and mountain means that no one can travel into the northern Highlands without passing through it. With the two major service centres of the Highlands at either end, it makes an obvious and rewarding route between the west and east coasts.

Of the Great Glen's four elongated lochs, the most famous is **Loch Ness**, home to the mythical monster; lochs **Oich**, **Lochy** and **Linnhe** (the last of these a sea loch) are less renowned, though no less attractive; all four are linked by the **Caledonian Canal**. The southwestern end of the Great Glen is dominated by the town of **Fort William**, the self-proclaimed "Outdoor Capital of the UK". Situated at the heart of the Lochaber area, it is a utilitarian base, with plenty of places to stay and excellent access to a host of adventure sports. While the town itself is charmless, the surrounding countryside is a magnificent blend of rugged mountain terrain and tranquil sea loch. Dominating the scene to the south is **Ben Nevis**, Britain's highest peak, best approached from scenic Glen Nevis. The most famous glen of all, **Glen Coe**, lies on the main A82 road half-an-hour's drive south of Fort William, the two separated by the coastal inlet of **Loch Leven**. Nowadays the whole area is unashamedly given over to tourism, with Fort William swamped by bus tours throughout the summer, but take a short drive from town and solitude is easy to find.

At the northeastern end of the Great Glen is the capital of the Highlands, **Inverness**, a sprawling city that hugs the northern end of the River Ness, close to the Beauly Firth; it's most often used as a springboard to more remote areas further north. Inevitably, most transport links to the northern Highlands, including Ullapool, Thurso and the Orkney and Shetland islands, pass through Inverness.

Rising high in the heather-clad hills above remote Loch Laggan, forty miles due south of Inverness, the River spey, Scotland's second longest river, drains northeast towards the Moray Firth through one of the Highlands' most spellbinding valleys. Famous for its ancient forests, salmon fishing and ospreys, the area around the upper section of the river known as **Strathspey** is just as spectacular as the Great Glen to the west. Strathspey is dominated by the **Cairngorms** , Britain's most extensive mountain massif, unique in supporting subarctic tundra on its high plateau.

A string of villages along the river provide useful bases for setting out into the wilder country, principal among them **Aviemore**, a rather ugly straggle of housing and hotel

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Cairngorms National Park p.425
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Touring malt whisky country p.431

BOTTLE-NOSED DOLPHINS, THE MORAY FIRTH

Highlights

❶ **Glen Coe** Spectacular, moody, poignant and full of history – a glorious spot for hiking or simply absorbing the atmosphere. **See p.404**

❷ **Cruise Loch Ness** Chances of seeing the famous monster Nessie aren't high, but the on-board sonar images are intriguing and the scenery's fine. **See p.408 & p.416**

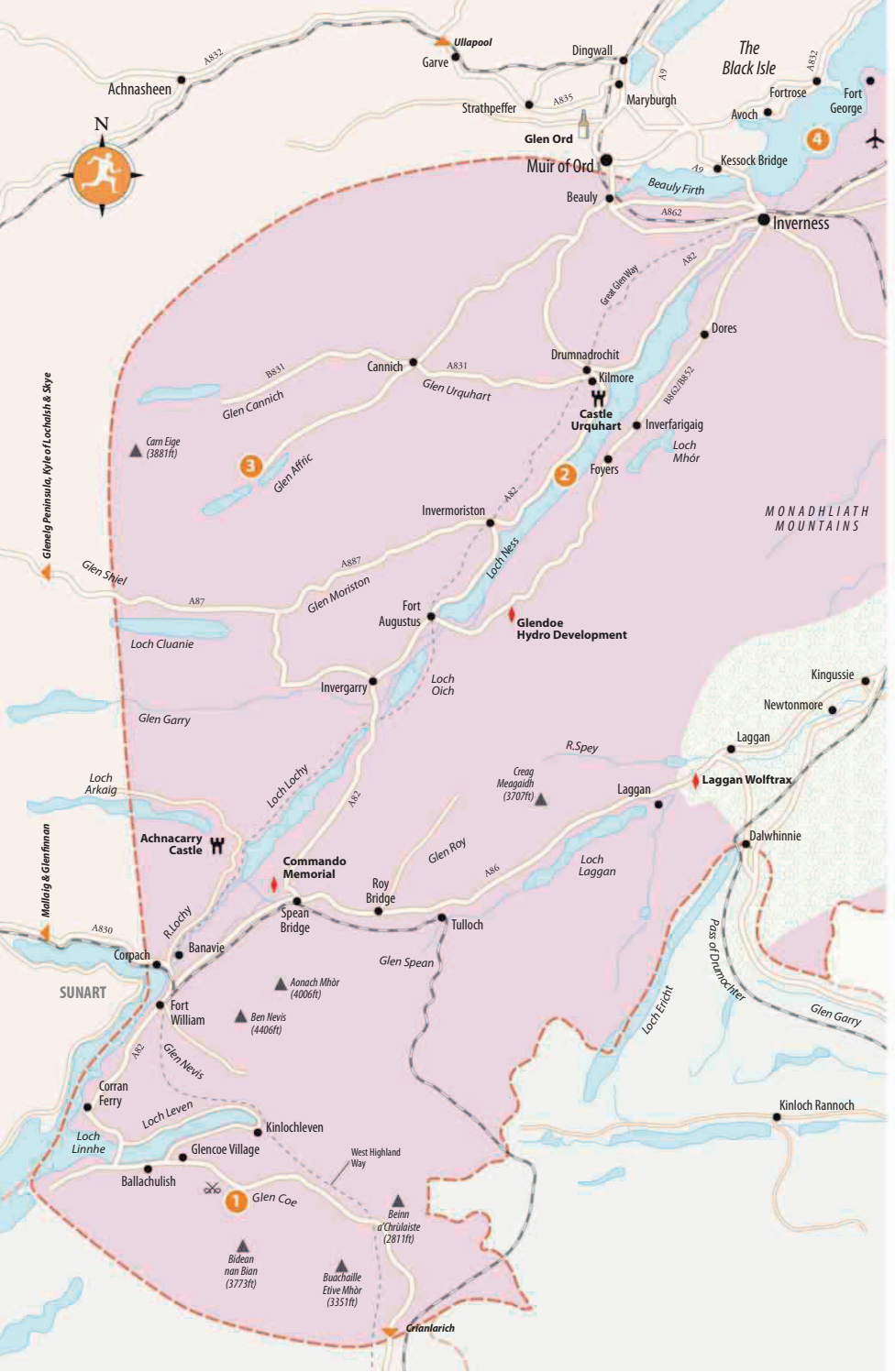
❸ **Glen Affric** Some of Scotland's best-hidden scenery, with ancient Caledonian forests and gushing rivers. **See p.412**

❹ **Dolphins of the Moray Firth** Europe's most northerly school of bottle-nosed dolphins can be seen from the shore or on a boat trip. **See p.419**

❺ **The Cairngorms** Scotland's grandest mountain massif, located within Britain's largest national park, where rare plants, wild animals, inspiring vistas and challenging outdoor activities abound. **See p.425**

❻ **Whisky nosing** Take a tutored "nosing" (tasting) on the very premises where the stuff is made and matured. **See p.431**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.394


N
Achnasheen
A832
Ullapool
Garve
Dingwall
A9
The Black Isle
A832
Fortrose
Fort George
Avoch
Strathpeffer
A835
Maryburgh
Glen Ord
Muir of Ord
A9
Kessock Bridge
Beauly
Beauly Firth
A862
Inverness
A82
Great Glen Way
Dores
Drumnadrochit
Cannich
B831
A831
Glen Cannich
Glen Urquhart
Kilmore
Castle Urquhart
B862/B852
Inverfarigaig
Loch Mhór
Carn Eige (3881ft)
Glen Affric
Foyers
Invermoriston
A82
MONADHLIATH MOUNTAINS
Glenelg Peninsula, Kyle of Lochalsh & Skye
Glen Shiel
A887
Glen Moriston
Loch Ness
A87
Fort Augustus
Glendoe Hydro Development
Loch Cluanie
Invergarry
Loch Oich
Kingussie
Newtonmore
Glen Garry
Laggan
R.Spey
Loch Arkaig
Loch Lochy
A82
Creag Meagaidh (3707ft)
Laggan
Laggan Wolftrax
Dalwhinnie
Achnacarry Castle
Commando Memorial
Glen Roy
A86
Loch Laggan
Mallaig & Glenfinnan
Roy Bridge
Spean Bridge
Tulloch
A830
R.Lochy
Corpach
Banavie
Glen Spean
Pass of Drumochter
Loch Ericht
Glen Garry
SUNART
Aonach Mhòr (4006ft)
Fort William
Ben Nevis (4406ft)
A82
Glen Nevis
Corran Ferry
Loch Leven
Kinloch Rannoch
Loch Linnhe
Kinlochleven
Glencoe Village
West Highland Way
Ballachulish
Glen Coe
Beinn a'Chrùlaiste (2811ft)
Bidean nan Bian (3773ft)
Buachaille Etive Mhòr (3351ft)
Crianlarich

0
10
miles
Buckie
Fochabers
Speyside Way
Nairn
Forres
Strathisla
Glen Grant
Keith
Glendronach Distillery
A96
Cawdor
Cawdor Castle
A939
B9006
Culloden
Cardhu
Macallan
Craigellachie
6
Glenfiddich
Huntly
Dufftown
Aberlour
SPEYSIDE
R.Findhorn
Ballindalloch
A941
River Spey
A95
Grantown-on-Spey
Glenlivet
Carbrach
Rhynie
Carrbridge
Nethy Bridge
A939
Lumsden
Boat of Garten
Loch Garten
Tomintoul
Kildrummy Castle
Kildrummy
A9
Lecht Ski Area
Strathdon
Aviemore
Inverdruie
Loch Morlich
STRATHSPEY
Cock Bridge
River Don
Craigievar Castle
Corgarff Castle
A9
Kincraig
Cairn Gorm (4084ft)
Feshiebridge
Loch Insh
CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS
5
Ben Macdui (4294ft)
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK
River Dee
Aboyne
Crathie
Ballater
Glen Tanar
Braemar
Balmoral Castle
Inverey
Lochnagar (3789ft)
Mount Keen (3080ft)
GRAMPIAN MOUNTAINS
Glen Esk
Glen Clova
Clova
Blair Castle
Spittal of Glenshee
Glen Shee
Glen Prosen
A9
Blair Atholl
Killecrankie
Kirkton of Glenisla
HIGHLIGHTS
1 Glen Coe
2 Cruise Loch Ness
3 Glen Affric
4 Dolphins of the Moray Firth
5 The Cairngorms
6 Whisky nosing
THE GREAT GLEN AND RIVER SPEY

BLOODY TALES BEYOND THE BEAUTY

Although best known for its windswept slopes and glassy lochs, the Great Glen has a turbulent and bloody **history**. Founded in 1655 and named in honour of William III, the town of Fort William was successfully held by government troops during both of the Jacobite risings. The country to the southwest, meanwhile, is inextricably associated with Bonnie Prince Charlie's flight after **Culloden** (see p.418). **Glen Coe** is another historic site with a violent past, renowned as much for the infamous massacre of 1692 as for its magnificent scenery.

developments which nevertheless has a lively, youthful feel to it. A little way north, **Grantown-on-Spey** is more attractive, with solid Victorian mansions but much less vitality, while smaller settlements such as **Boat of Garten** are quieter.

Downriver, Strathspey gives way to the area known as **Speyside**, famous as the heart of Scotland's malt whisky industry. In addition to the Malt Whisky Trail that leads round a number of well-known distilleries in the vicinity of places such as **Dufftown**, the lesser-known **Speyside Way**, another of Scotland's long-distance footpaths, offers the chance to enjoy the scenery of the region, as well as its whiskies, on foot.

GETTING AROUND THE GREAT GLEN AND RIVER SPEY

By bus The Great Glen is reasonably well served by buses, with several daily services between Inverness and Fort William. There are also frequent buses connecting Inverness with Aviemore and Grantown-on-Spey. Further north in malt whisky country, services are extremely limited.

By car The main A82 road runs the length of the Great Glen, although relatively high traffic levels mean that it's not a fast or particularly easy route to drive. The A9 and A95 allow for quick hops between towns on the western side of the Cairngorms, but elsewhere within the national park roads are necessarily narrower (and slower).

By boat The traditional and most rewarding way to travel through the Great Glen is by boat: a flotilla of kayaks, small yachts and pleasure vessels take advantage of the Caledonian Canal and its old wooden locks during the summer.

By bike Well-marked routes make it possible to cycle all the way from Fort William to Inverness. Mountain bikers especially are drawn to the Cairngorms, where there are excellent trails for beginners and experts.

On foot The 79-mile Great Glen Way links Fort William with Inverness, and takes five to six days to walk in full (see box opposite).

Fort William

With its stunning position on Loch Linnhe, tucked in below the snow-streaked bulk of Ben Nevis, **FORT WILLIAM** (known by the many walkers and climbers that come here as "Fort Bill") should be a gem. Sadly, the same lack of taste that nearly saw the town renamed "Abernevis" in the 1950s is evident in the ribbon bungalow development and ill-advised dual carriageway – complete with grubby pedestrian underpass – which have wrecked the waterfront. The main street and the little squares off it are more appealing, though occupied by some decidedly tacky tourist gift shops Other than its excellent **museum**, the town is short on must-sees, but it's undeniably a convenient base for **outdoor activities** – most notably walking. Several cruises leave from the town pier every day, offering the chance to spot the marine life of Loch Linnhe, which includes seals and seabirds. Shops rent out kayaks and mountain bikes for independent exploration of the surrounding area, and local guides run mountaineering courses (in summer and winter) on the slopes of nearby Munros.

West Highland Museum

Cameron Square, just off the High Street • March, Nov & Dec Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • Free • T 01397 702169, W westhighlandmuseum.org.uk

Collections at the splendid and idiosyncratic **West Highland Museum** cover virtually every aspect of Highland life and the presentation is traditional, but very well done,

making a refreshing change from the state-of-the-art heritage centres popping up across Scotland. There's a secret portrait of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the long Spanish rifle used in the famous Appin Murder, and even a 550kg slab of aluminium, the stuff that's processed into silver foil just five miles north of town (you'll see the huge pipes running down the mountainside).

The Jacobite Steam Train

At the train station on Station Square • Mid-May to Oct Mon–Fri; mid-June to mid-Sept daily; departs Fort William 10.20am, return from Mallaig at 2.10pm; additional afternoon service (June–Aug only) departs Fort William 2.30pm, with return at 6.40pm • Return £33 (£56 for first class) • T 08448 504685, W westcoastrailways.co.uk.

Excursions from Fort William include the 84-mile return trip to Mallaig (see p.445) on the **West Highland Railway Line** aboard the **Jacobite Steam Train**. Heading along the shore of Loch Eil to the west coast via historic Glenfinnan (see p.443), the train passes through some of the region's most spectacular scenery, though these days it's as popular for its role in the *Harry Potter* films. The locomotives used are black and barrel-shaped machines from the 1920s and 1930s tugging younger British Rail carriages from the 1960s, which afford good views of the scenery outside.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION FORT WILLIAM

By train Just across the A82 dual carriageway from the north end of the High Street you'll find Fort William's train station (one of the stops on the scenic West Highland Railway from Glasgow).

Destinations Crianlarich (Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 3 daily; 1hr 50min); Glasgow Queen Street (Mon–Sat 3 daily, Sun 2 daily; 3hr 50min); London (1 nightly; 12hr); Mallaig (Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 3 daily; 1hr 20min).

By bus Intercity coaches from Glasgow and Inverness stop outside the train station on MacFarlane Way.

Destinations Drumnadrochit (9 daily; 1hr 25min); Edinburgh (1 daily; 4hr); Fort Augustus (9 daily; 50min); Glasgow (8 daily; 3hr); Inverness (9 Mon–Sat, 6 Sun; 2hr); Mallaig (Mon–Fri 3 daily; 1hr 20min); Oban (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 1hr 30min); Portree, Skye (4 daily; 3hr).

Tourist office 15 High St (April–May Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; June Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 9.30am–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 9am–6pm; Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm; T 01397 701801, W visithighlands.com). Busy and very helpful tourist office, which stocks an excellent selection of maps and guide books on exploring the Great Glen. Upstairs you can surf the net (£1/20min).

THE GREAT GLEN WAY AND CYCLE PATH

Ordnance Survey Landranger maps 26, 34 and 41.

The enormous cleft of the Great Glen is the most obvious – and by far the flattest – way of traversing northern Scotland from coast to coast. Stretching 79 miles, the **Great Glen Way** long-distance footpath is a relatively undemanding five-to-six-day hike that uses a combination of canal towpath and forest- and hill-tracks between Fort William and Inverness. Accommodation is readily available all the way along the route in campsites, hostels, bunkhouses and B&Bs, though in high season you should book ahead, and if you know you're going to arrive late somewhere it's worth checking that you can still get a meal either where you're staying or somewhere nearby. There are various **guidebooks** that describe the route, including *The Great Glen Way*, published by Rucksack Readers (£10.99). For the best selection of guides, plus the relevant Ordnance Survey Landranger maps (£6.99 each) head to the tourist office in Fort William. Note, however, that forestry work can see the route diverted at short notice, so it's wise to check the official website (W greatglenway.com) before setting off.

Cyclists with mountain bikes or hybrids can also use the Great Glen Way, which offers a tranquil alternative to the hazardous A82 (currently the only option for those with road bikes). The route is well signposted and can be pedalled in one long day or two easier days, though of course you can tackle shorter sections. Bikes can be rented at Fort William, Banavie, Drumnadrochit and Inverness.

Whether you're cycling or walking, the suggested **direction** for following the route is from west to east, to take advantage of the prevailing southwesterly wind.

TOURS AND ACTIVITIES

BOAT TOURS

Crannog Cruises Town Pier, Fort William T01397 703786, W crannog.net/cruises. Runs ninety-minute cruises (£12.50) from the town pier down Loch Linnhe, where you'll have the chance to spot porpoises and grey seals. Daily trips April–Sept 10am, noon, 2pm & 4pm, evening cruises July & Aug Tues, Thurs & Sun 7.30pm.

Seaventures 3 Kincardine Place, Fort William T01397 701687, W seaventuresscotland.co.uk. Seaventures offers exhilarating fast boat trips, plus three-and-a-half-hour wildlife cruises to nearby islands (June–Aug Mon, Wed & Fri; £30). Departures from the town pier.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Alpine Bikes 117 High St T01397 704008, Nevis Range T01397 705825, W alpinebikes.com. High-spec mountain bikes are available for rent at Alpine Bikes (from £15/day). Staff here know the best routes and can also issue free maps. There's a second branch at the Nevis Range gondola base station (see p.402) – a location that boasts forest rides and a world-championship standard downhill track. April–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–5.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm.

MOUNTAINEERING

Snowgoose Mountain Centre Station Road, Corpach ☎01397 772467, 🌐highland-mountain-guides.co.uk. Set beside *Smiddy Bunkhouse* and *Blacksmith's Hostel*, this activity centre offers instruction, rental and residential courses for activities such as mountaineering, ice climbing and dinghy sailing.

West Coast Mountain Guides ☎ 01397 719120 🌐westcoast-mountainguides.co.uk. Long-established group of experienced guides who run climbing and mountaineering courses throughout the year. A two-day introduction to winter mountaineering costs £120 per person. Trips to Skye (and even the Swiss Alps) can also be arranged.

KAYAKING

Rockhopper Unit 17, Annat Industrial Estate, Corpach ☎07739 837344, 🌐rockhopperscotland.co.uk. Get in touch with Rockhopper for sea-kayak coaching, including half-day excursions (£40) and two-day camping trips with meals provided (£195/person).

ACCOMMODATION

The town itself isn't the most exciting place to base yourself, but Fort William's plentiful accommodation ranges from large luxury hotels to budget hostels and bunkhouses. Numerous **B&Bs** are also scattered across town, many of them in the suburb of Corpach on the other side of Loch Linnhe, three miles along the Mallaig road (served by regular buses), where you'll also find a couple of good **hostels**.

HOTELS AND B&BS

Crolinnhe Grange Rd ☎01397 703795, 🌐crolinnhe.co.uk. Beautifully appointed guesthouse overlooking Loch Linnhe, with elegant French furniture in the rooms and attractive landscaped gardens outside. Easter–Oct. **£120**

Distillery House North Rd ☎01397 700103, 🌐stayinfortwilliam.co.uk. Very comfortable upper-range guesthouse a 10min walk north of the town centre near the Glen Nevis turn-off, with singles, doubles and more expensive "superior" rooms with king-sized beds. **£99.50**

The Grange Grange Rd ☎01397 705516, 🌐grangefortwilliam.com. Top-grade accommodation in a striking old stone house, with log fires, views towards Loch Linnhe and luxurious en-suite doubles. Does vegetarian breakfasts on request. April–Oct. **£116**

Inverlochy Castle Torlundy, 3 miles north of the town centre on the A82 ☎01397 702177, 🌐inverlochycastlehotel.co.uk. Built on the site of a thirteenth-century fortress, this is one of Scotland's grandest and most luxurious country-house hotels with fantastic accommodation and Michelin-star food. **£440**

★ **Lime Tree** Achintore Rd ☎01397 701806, 🌐limetreefortwilliam.co.uk. A stylish and relaxing option in an old manse, with a great modern restaurant and an excellent gallery; they've also got the practicalities covered with a drying room, map room and bike storage. **£110**

Nevis Bank Inn Belford Rd ☎ 01397 705721, 🌐nevisbankinn.co.uk. The small, functional hotel rooms here are a little on the plain side but they're comfortable and quiet, and the attached restaurant is a convenient place to grab some pasta or a steak. **£144**

St Andrews Guest House Fassifern Rd ☎01397 703038, 🌐standrewsguesthouse.co.uk. Comfortable and very reasonable B&B in a converted granite choir school five minutes' walk uphill from the High Street, featuring various inscriptions and stained-glass windows. **£60**

HOSTELS AND CAMPSITES

Bank Street Lodge Bank St ☎01397 700070, 🌐bankstreetlodge.co.uk. A bright, clean 43-bed hostel, handy for transport options and the town centre. Choose between dorm accommodation and a good range of en-suite rooms. Dorms **£17**; doubles **£55**; singles **£25**

Calluna Heathercroft, Connochie Rd ☎01397 700451, 🌐fortwilliamholiday.co.uk. Well-run self-catering and hostel accommodation a 10min walk from the centre of town, configured for individual, family and group stays. Also has on-site laundry facilities and a bouldering wall. The owners can also organize mountaineering trips. Dorms **£16**

Farr Cottage Lodge 3.5 miles from Fort William in Corpach, on the main A830 ☎01397 772315, 🌐farrcottage.co.uk. Well-equipped, lively place with a range of dorms and double/twin rooms. Offers a multitude of outdoor activities including canyoning and sea-fishing. Dorms **£15**; doubles **£34**

Great Glen Yurts 3 miles northeast of Fort William off A82 (signposted from Torlundy) 🌐greatglenyurts.com. Rotund and spacious, these luxury yurts occupy a magnificently peaceful setting with views of Ben Nevis. There's an open-sided kitchen for sociable evening meals. April–Oct. **£90**

Smiddy Bunkhouse and Blacksmith's Hostel Snowgoose Mountain Centre, Station Rd, Corpach ☎01397 772467, 🌐highland-mountain-guides.co.uk. Alpine hostel and bunkhouse on the site of an old blacksmith's workshop. It's four miles from Ben Nevis at the southwestern end of the Caledonian Canal. Dorms **£16**

THE WEST HIGHLAND WAY

OS Explorer maps 342, 347, 348, 364, 377, 384, 385 & 392

Opened in 1980, the spectacular **West Highland Way** was Scotland's first long-distance footpath, stretching some 96 miles from Milngavie (pronounced "mill-guy"), six miles north of central Glasgow, to Fort William, where it reaches the foot of Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain. Today, it is by far the most popular such footpath in Scotland, and while for many the range of scenery, relative ease of walking and nearby facilities make it a classic route, others find it a little too busy in high season, particularly in comparison with the isolation of many other parts of the Highlands.

THE ROUTE

The route follows a combination of ancient **drove roads**, along which Highlanders herded their cattle and sheep to market in the Lowlands, military roads, built by troops to control the Jacobite insurgency in the eighteenth century, old coaching roads and disused railway lines. In addition to the stunning scenery, which is increasingly dramatic as the path heads north, walkers may see some of Scotland's rarer **wildlife**, including red deer, feral goats and, soaring over the highest peaks, golden eagles.

Passing through the Lowlands north of Glasgow, the route runs along the eastern shores of Loch Lomond, over the Highland Boundary Fault Line, then round Crianlarich, crossing open heather moorland across the **Rannoch Moor** wilderness area. It then passes close to **Glen Coe** (see p.404) before reaching **Fort William** (see p.396). Apart from a stretch between Loch Lomond and Bridge of Orchy, when the path is within earshot of the main road, this is wild, remote country: north of Rowardennan on Loch Lomond, the landscape is increasingly exposed, and you should be well prepared for changeable weather.

TACKLING THE ROUTE

Though this is emphatically not the most strenuous of Britain's long-distance walks – it passes between lofty mountain peaks, rather than over them – a moderate degree of **fitness** is required as there are some steep ascents. If you're looking for an added challenge, you could work a climb of **Ben Lomond** or **Ben Nevis** into your schedule. You might choose to walk individual sections of the Way (the eight-mile climb from Glen Coe up the Devil's Staircase is particularly spectacular), but to tackle the whole thing you need to set aside at least **seven days**; avoid a Saturday start from Milngavie and you're less likely to be walking with hordes of people, and there'll be less pressure on accommodation. Most walkers tackle the route from south to north, and manage between ten and fourteen miles a day, staying at hotels, B&Bs and bunkhouses en route. **Camping** is permitted at recognized sites.

INFORMATION

Website Ⓦ west-highland-way.co.uk. The route's official website includes further details about the Way and a comprehensive accommodation list. The site also has links to tour companies and transport providers, who can take your luggage from one stopping point to the next.

The West Highland Way Official Guide Includes a foldout map as well as descriptions of the route, with detailed cultural, historical, archeological and wildlife information (priced £16.99).

EATING AND DRINKING

CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS

Café 115 115 High St Ⓣ 01397 702500. A decent, cheap and central place to stop for coffee and a snack – a toasted bagel with cheddar and red onion will cost you £3.95. Mon–Sat 10am–4pm.

Crannog at the Waterfront Town Pier Ⓣ 01397 705589, Ⓦ crannog.net. Red-roofed restaurant with loch-side views and fresh seafood, including steamed clams and mussels with tomato and chilli (£17.50), plus a reasonable wine list. Located at the pier just off the bypass on entering Fort William. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm.

Lime Tree Restaurant The Old Manse, Achintore Road Ⓣ 01397 701806, Ⓦ limetreefortwilliam.co.uk. Serves an excellent selection of contemporary Scottish food. The three-course meal (£29.95) includes a roast rack of lamb wrapped in a rosemary crust. Daily 6–9pm.

PUB

Grog and Gruel 66 High St Ⓣ 01397 705078. Loud and friendly, the downstairs alehouse at *Grog and Gruel* is a

good bet for Scottish beer. The upstairs restaurant is more relaxed, doing mostly Mexican mains, including a spicy "inferno burger" for £10.95. **Mon–Wed & Sun noon–midnight, Thurs–Sat noon–1am.**

Around Fort William

Any disappointment you harbour about the dispiriting flavour of Fort William town should be offset by the wealth of scenery and activities in its immediate vicinity. Most obvious – on a clear day, at least – is **Ben Nevis** (see box, below), the most popular, though hardly the most rewarding, of Scotland's high peaks. The path up leaves from beautiful **Glen Nevis**, also a starting point for some other excellent walks of various lengths and elevations. The mountain abutting Ben Nevis is **Aonach Mhòr,** home of Scotland's most modern ski resort and an internationally renowned honeypot for downhill mountain-bike enthusiasts. Some of the best views of these peaks can be had from **Corpach**, a small village opposite Fort William that marks the start of the **Caledonian Canal** (see p.415).

The main road travelling up the Great Glen from Fort William towards Inverness is the A82, ten miles along which is the small settlement of **Spean Bridge**, a good waypoint for getting to various remote and attractive walking areas with several backpacker hostels – notably glens **Spean** and **Roy** – found along the A86 trunk road, which links across the central highlands to the A9 and the Speyside region.

Glen Nevis

A ten-minute drive south of Fort William, **GLEN NEVIS** is indisputably among the Highlands' most impressive glens: a classic U-shaped glacial valley hemmed in by steep bracken-covered slopes and swathes of blue-grey scree. With the forbidding mass of Ben Nevis rising steeply to the north, it's not surprising that the valley has served as a location in the films *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart*. Apart from its natural beauty, Glen Nevis is also the starting point for the ascent of **Ben Nevis** (see box, below).

A great **low-level walk** (six miles return) runs from the end of the road at the top of Glen Nevis. The good but very rocky path leads through a dramatic gorge with impressive falls and rapids, then opens out into a secret hanging valley, carpeted with wild flowers, with a high waterfall at the far end. If you're really energetic (and properly equipped) you can walk the full twelve miles on over **Rannoch Moor** to **Corrour Station** (see p.337), where you can pick up one of four daily trains to take you back to Fort William (50min).

ASCENT OF BEN NEVIS

Harvey's Ben Nevis Superwalker map, available from Fort William's tourist office and most local bookshops and outdoor stores.

Of all the walks in and around Glen Nevis, the **ascent of Ben Nevis** (4406ft), Britain's highest summit, inevitably attracts the most attention. In high summer the trail is teeming with hikers – around 100,000 summit each year. However, this doesn't mean that the mountain should be treated casually. It can snow at the summit any day of the year and people die on the slopes, so make sure that you take the necessary precautions; in winter, of course, the mountain should be left to the experts. The most obvious **route**, a Victorian pony-path up the whaleback south side of the mountain, built to service the observatory that once stood on the top, starts from the helpful Glen Nevis Visitor Centre (see p.405) which also sells mountain equipment and last-minute supplies, a mile and a half southeast of Fort William along the Glen Nevis road. Return via the main route or, if the weather is settled and you're confident enough, make a side trip from the wide saddle into the **Allt a'Mhuilinn glen** for spectacular views of the great cliffs on Ben Nevis's north face. Allow a full day (8hr) for the climb and check the weather forecast before setting out (Ⓜ bennevisweather.co.uk is useful).

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — GLEN NEVIS

By bus Bus #42 runs from the High Street in Fort William, past the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre, campsite and SYHA hostel to the Lower Falls car park (3 daily; 25min) almost five miles up the Glen Nevis road.

Tourist office A mile and a half southeast of Fort William along the Glen Nevis road; take bus #42 from Fort William (daily 8.30am–6pm; ☎01397 705922). Staff here can give good advice on climbing the mountain. It's also worth asking for a copy of the useful leaflet *Ben Nevis: safety information for walking the mountain track*.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Achintee Farm Guest House Glen Nevis ☎01397 702240, ⓦachinteefarm.com. Friendly B&B with adjoining hostel and a self-catering cottage, right by the *Ben Nevis Inn* at the start of the Ben Nevis footpath. Also has drying rooms and wi-fi. Dorms £17; doubles £45

★ **Ben Nevis Inn** Achintee, Glen Nevis ☎01397 701227, ⓦben-nevis-inn.co.uk. A basic and cosy bunkhouse (booking advised) in the basement of a lively 250-year-old pub, 50yd east of *Achintee Farm Guest House*. The pub has a terrific atmosphere and the menu – with a chunky lamb and veg casserole for £9.85 – is especially tempting after a day on the mountain. Daily noon–11pm. Dorms £15.50

Café Beag 2.5 miles southeast of Fort William along the Glen Nevis road, before the Glen Nevis SYHA hostel. Close to the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre, this attractive wood-panelled café sells homely soups (£3.50) and big cooked breakfasts (£6). Mon–Thurs 8am–6pm, Fri–Sun 8am–8pm.

Glen Nevis Caravan and Camping Park Glen Nevis, 2 miles southeast of Fort William along the Glen Nevis road ☎01397 702191, ⓦglen-nevis.co.uk. Offers a range of lodges and rentable caravans as well as camping pitches. Facilities include hot showers, a shop and restaurant, and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms. £11/pitch

Glen Nevis SYHA hostel Glen Nevis, 2.5 miles along the Glen Nevis road from Fort William, opposite the start of the path to the summit ☎01397 702336, ⓦsyha.org.uk. Though far from town, this friendly hostel is an excellent base for walkers. It gets very busy in summer, so book ahead. Dorms £22; doubles £50

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The Nevis Range

The gondola station is at Nevis Range, Torlundy, just east of Fort William • Daily: Easter to June, Sept–Oct 10am–5pm; July & Aug 9.30am–6pm; early Nov & late Dec to Easter 9am–sunset • £11.50 • Bus #41 runs from Fort William's bus station four times a day (Mon–Sat; 2 daily on Sun)

Situated seven miles northeast of Fort William by the A82, on the slopes of **Aonach Mhòr**, one of the high mountains abutting Ben Nevis, the **Nevis Range** is Scotland's highest ski area. The one-and-a-half-mile **gondola** trip (15min) to get here, rising 2000ft, gives an easy approach to some high-level walking as well as spectacular views from the terrace of the self-service restaurant at the top station. There's also a **Discovery Centre** here, providing insights into the mountain's geology and wildlife. The **base station** area also has a café and there's a high-wire adventure course and nature trail nearby.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — THE NEVIS RANGE

Tourist information In the Mountain Discovery Centre, located at the top gondola station (June–Aug 9.30am–6pm; Sept & Oct 10am–sunset; ☎01397 705825, ⓦnevis-range.co.uk).

By bus Bus #42 runs year-round from Fort William to the gondola's base station (3 daily; 20min).

DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKING ON THE NEVIS RANGE

From the top of the Nevis Range gondola station, you can experience a white-knuckle ride down Britain's only World Cup standard **downhill mountain-bike course**, a hair-raising 3km route that's not for the faint-hearted. There are also over 25 miles of waymarked off-road bike routes, known as the Witch's Trails, on the mountainside and in the Leanachan Forest, ranging from gentle paths to cross-country scrambles. At the entrance to the lower gondola station, **Alpine Bikes** (May–Oct daily: 9am–5pm; ☎01397 705825, ⓦalpinebikes.com) rents general mountain bikes (from £15) as well as full-suspension ones for the downhill course. The **Nevis Bike School** (☎01397 705825, ⓦbike.nevisrange.co.uk) runs two-and-a-half-hour training courses for £33 per person (minimum three people). Depending on the trail you choose, you may also need to buy a **gondola pass** (£11.50).

Neptune's Staircase

In the suburb of **Banavie**, three miles north of the centre of Fort William along the A830 to Mallaig, the Caledonian Canal (see p.415) climbs 64ft in less than half a mile via a punishing but picturesque series of eight locks known as **Neptune's Staircase**. There are stunning views from here of Ben Nevis and its neighbours, and it's a popular point from which to walk or cycle along the canal towpath.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — NEPTUNE'S STAIRCASE

By bus Stagecoach bus #45A (every 15–30min; 10min) runs from Middle Street in Fort William to Banavie.

By bike You can rent a bike (£15/day) at *Farr Cottage Lodge* in nearby Corpach; from there it's a short ride northeast along the canal towpath to Neptune's Staircase.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Chase the Wild Goose Hostel Locheil Crescent, Banavie ☎01397 772531, ⓦgreat-glen-hostel.com. A small, comfortable hostel close to Neptune's Staircase and also handy for the Great Glen Way. Has a barbecue area for use in summer. Dorms £17

The Eagle Inn Laggan Locks, at the northern end of Loch Lochy ☎07789 858567. If you do choose to cycle along the Caledonian Canal, look out for this unusual pub, where mains like peat-smoked salmon (£17.80) and real ale are offered aboard a wonderful 1920s Dutch barge. Easter to Oct Mon & Thurs–Sun noon–11pm.

Moorings Hotel Beside the Staircase in Banavie ☎01397 772797, ⓦmoorings-fortwilliam.co.uk. This mid-sized hotel near the canal serves curries and other pub staples in its bar, as well as classier Scottish dinners (£30 for three courses) in the main restaurant. Bar: daily noon–9.30pm; restaurant: daily 7–9.30pm. £123

Spean Bridge and around

Ten miles northeast of Fort William, the village of **SPEAN BRIDGE** marks the junction of the A82 with the A86 from Dalwhinnie and Kingussie (see p.428). If you're here, it's well worth heading a mile out of the village on the A82 towards Inverness to the **Commando Memorial**, a bronze statue depicting a group of soldiers, which commemorates the men who trained in the area during World War II. The statue looks out on an awesome sweep of moor and mountain that takes in the wider Lochaber area and the Ben Nevis massif.

Glen Roy

Three miles east of Spean Bridge, a minor road turns north off the A86 and up **Glen Roy**. Drive a couple of miles along the glen and you'll see the so-called "parallel roads": not roads at all, but ancient beaches at various levels along the valley sides, which mark the shorelines of a loch confined here by a glacial dam in the last Ice Age.

Tulloch and around

East of Roy Bridge along the A86, just before **Tulloch**, the train line and the main road part company. From Tulloch's small railway station, accessible only by a single-track road and served by Caledonian sleeper services from London, trains swing south to pass Loch Treig and cross Rannoch Moor (see p.337).

Beyond the turn-off at the Tulloch station, the A86 runs alongside the artificial **Loch Laggan** with the picturesque Ardverikie Castle on its southern shore and the attractive walking area of Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve to the north.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SPEAN BRIDGE AND AROUND

By bus Buses bound for Spean Bridge depart from Fort William's bus station a couple of times per hour, taking 15–30min to arrive in the centre of the village.

ACCOMMODATION

Àite Cruinnichidh 3.5 miles west of Tulloch railway station, just south of A86 ☎ 01397 712315, 🌐 highland-hostel.co.uk. A comfortable wood-lined bunkhouse in a beautiful setting, with good facilities including family rooms and a sauna, as well as local advice for walkers and cyclists. Dorms £16.50

Station Lodge At Tulloch Station ☎ 01397 732333, 🌐 stationlodge.co.uk The station building at Tulloch is now a friendly and well-equipped hostel that can provide breakfasts and dinners with advance notice. Dorms £17

EATING AND DRINKING

Old Pines Hotel and Restaurant A few hundred yards northwest of the Commando Memorial, on the B8004 to Gairlochy ☎ 01397 712324, 🌐 oldpines.co.uk. At this welcoming hotel and restaurant, diners are treated to locally sourced game and shellfish (the seared scallop starter is £8.50) as well as home baking, pasta and ice cream. Mon & Sun 6.30–9pm, Tues–Sat noon–3pm & 6.30–9pm.

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Glen Coe and around

Breathtakingly beautiful **GLEN COE** (literally "Valley of Weeping"), sixteen miles south of Fort William on the A82, is a spectacular mountain valley between velvety-green conical peaks, their tops often wreathed in cloud, and their flanks streaked by cascades of rock and scree.

Arriving from the south across the desolate reaches of Rannoch Moor, you're likely to find the start of the glen – with **Buachaille Etive Mhòr** to the south and **Beinn a'Chrùlaiste** to the north – little short of forbidding. By the time you've reached the heart of the glen, with the huge rock buttresses known as the **Three Sisters** on one side and the Anoach Eagach ridge on the other combining to close up the sky, you'll almost certainly want to stop. Added to the compelling emotional mix is the story of the notorious **massacre of Glen Coe** in 1692, nadir of the long-standing enmity between the clans MacDonald and Campbell.

Beyond the small village of **GLENCOE** at the western end of the glen, the glen itself (a property of the NTS since the 1930s) is virtually uninhabited, and provides outstanding climbing and walking. From **Loch Leven** the main road goes west and over the bridge at Ballachulish en route to Fort William, while at the eastern end of the loch is the slowly reviving settlement of **Kinlochleven**, site of the world's largest indoor ice-climbing centre and a waypoint on the West Highland Way long-distance footpath (see box, p.400).

Brief history

In 1692 Glen Coe was the site of a notorious massacre, in which the MacDonalds were victims of an abiding government desire to suppress the clans. Fed up with what they regarded as unacceptable lawlessness, and a groundswell of Jacobitism and Catholicism, the government offered a general pardon to all those who signed an oath of allegiance to William III by January 1, 1692. When clan chief **Alastair MacDonald** missed the deadline, a plot was hatched to make an example of "that damnable sept", and **Campbell of Glenlyon** was ordered to billet his soldiers in the homes of the MacDonalds, who for ten days entertained them with traditional Highland hospitality. In the early morning of February 13, the soldiers turned on their hosts, slaying around forty people and causing more than three hundred to flee in a blizzard.

Glencoe Mountain Resort

Half a mile south of the A82 at the foot of the mountain • Jan–Oct Mon–Thurs & Sun 9am–8.30pm, Fri & Sat 9am–10.30pm; Nov & Dec daily 9am–4.30pm • ☎ 01855 851226, 🌐 glencoemountain.co.uk • Chairlift £10; full day's ski/snowboard rental £25

From the **Glencoe Mountain Resort** a chairlift climbs 2400ft to Meall a Bhuiridh, giving spectacular views over Rannoch Moor and to Ben Nevis. At the base station, there's a simple but pleasant café. Skiing, snowboarding and mountain biking sessions can all be arranged at this spectacularly located resort too.

WALKS AROUND GLEN COE

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 384

Flanked by sheer-sided Munros, **Glen Coe** offers some of the Highlands' most challenging **hiking** routes, with long steep ascents over rough trails and notoriously unpredictable weather conditions that claim lives every year. The walks outlined below number among the glen's less ambitious routes, but still require a map. It's essential that you take the proper precautions, and stick to the paths, both for your own safety and the sake of the landscape, which has become badly eroded in places. For a broader selection of walks, get hold of the Ordnance Survey *Pathfinder Guide: Fort William and Glen Coe Walks*.

DEVIL'S STAIRCASE

A good introduction to the splendours of Glen Coe is the half-day hike over the **Devil's Staircase**, which follows part of the old military road that once ran between Fort William and Stirling. The trail, part of the West Highland Way (see p.400), starts at the village of **Kinlochleven** and is marked by thistle signs, which lead uphill to the 1804ft pass and down the other side into Glen Coe.

ALLT COIRE GABHAIL

Set right in the heart of the glen, the half-day **Allt Coire Gabhail** hike starts at the car park opposite the distinctive Three Sisters massif on the main A82. This explores the so-called "Lost Valley" where the Clan MacDonald fled and hid their cattle when attacked. Once in the valley, there are superb views of the upper slopes of Bidean nan Bian, Gearr Aonach and Beinn Fhada, which improve as you continue on to its head, another twenty- to thirty-minute walk.

BUACHAILLE ETIVE BEAG

Undoubtedly one of the finest walks in the Glen Coe area that doesn't entail the ascent of a Munro is the **Buachaille Etive Beag** circuit, which follows the textbook glacial valleys of Lairig Eilde and Lairig Gartain, ascending 1968ft in only nine miles of rough trail. Park near the waterfall at **The Study** – the gorge part of the A82 through Glen Coe – and walk up the road until you see a sign pointing south to "Loch Etiveside".

Glencoe Village and around

Tucked between steep mountains, Loch Leven and the grassy banks of the River Coe, **Glencoe Village** is an attractive place to spend a couple of days. There's a good choice of accommodation in the area, and if you fancy a break from walking, the village museum and nearby visitor centre make for pleasant distractions.

Glencoe Folk Museum

Main Street • Easter–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm (last admission 4pm) • glencoemuseum.com • £3

If you have an hour to spare in Glencoe Village, it's worth paying a visit to the delightful heather-roofed **Glencoe Folk Museum**. Various games and activities for kids can be enjoyed within this cosy 1720 croft where items include a chair that reputedly once belonged to Bonnie Prince Charlie.

NTS visitor centre

A mile east of Glencoe Village on the A82 • Feb–Easter Thurs–Sun 10am–4pm; Easter–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Nov–Jan Thurs–Sun 10am–4pm; Guided walks Easter & June–Sept (book ahead) • glencoe-nts.org.uk • £5.50; guided walks from £5; NTS

The attractive **NTS visitor centre** sits in woodland a mile south of Glencoe Village. It has a good exhibition, with film, giving a balanced account of the massacre, plus information about the area's natural history and conservation issues, and some entertaining material on rock- and hill-climbing through the years. There's also a cabin area providing information on the local weather and wildlife, and you may be able to join a ranger-led **guided walk** of the surrounding area.

ARRIVAL AND ACTIVITIES — GLEN COE AND AROUND

By bus To get to the Glen Coe visitor centre or chairlift station from Fort William's bus station, hop on one of the Glasgow-bound Scottish Citylink coaches (up to 8 daily; 30–45min). Bus #44 from Fort William also stops at least 10 times a day (3 on Sun) at Glencoe village en route to Kinlochleven.

ACCOMMODATION

Glencoe Independent Hostel North of the river, halfway between Glencoe Village and the Clachaig Inn ☎01855 811906, ⓦglencoehostel.co.uk. Cheap independent hostel in rustic whitewashed buildings, offering free wi-fi, hot showers and a laundry service. Dorms £17

Red Squirrel 150m south of the turn-off to Glencoe Independent Hostel ☎01855 811256, ⓦredsquirrelcampsite.co.uk. Sylvan year-round campsite, just south of the SYHA hostel on the road to *Clachaig Inn*. Campfires and pets permitted. £19/pitch

Scorry Breac A short walk from the centre of Glencoe Village, on the north side of the river ☎01855 811354, ⓦscorrybreac.co.uk. Secluded and friendly, *Scorry Breac* has five affordable en-suite rooms, the best of which have views over the mountains. £60

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EATING AND DRINKING

★ **Clachaig Inn** Two and a half miles south of Glencoe Village on the minor road off the A82 ☎01855 811252, ⓦclachaig.com. The liveliest, best-known hotel in the area is a great place to reward your exertions with cask-conditioned ales and heaped platefuls of food (such as venison casserole, £10.95); it's an easy stroll away from the campsite and hostel also listed here. Mon–Thurs & Sun 8am–11pm, Fri 8am–midnight, Sat 8am–11.30pm.

Kinlochleven

At the easternmost end of Loch Leven, the settlement of **KINLOCHLEVEN** is, thanks to its location on the West Highland Way, steadily reviving its fortunes. For many years it was a tourism backwater best known as the site of a huge, unsightly aluminium smelter built in 1904. The tale of the area's industrial past is told in **The Aluminium Story** (same hours as tourist information centre; free), a small series of displays in the same corrugated metal building as the post office and tourist information centre (see below). As well as being close to Glen Coe, Kinlochleven stands at the foot of the Mamore hills, popular with Munro-baggers; Fort William is a day's walk away.

The Ice Factor

Leven Rd • Mon, Wed & Fri–Sun 9am–7pm, Tues & Thurs 9am–10pm • 2.5hr ice-climbing course £48 • ☎01855 831100, ⓦice-factor.co.uk

Kinlochleven's disused aluminium smelter is now the home of an innovative indoor mountaineering centre called **The Ice Factor**. The facility includes the world's largest artificial ice-climbing wall (13.5m) as well as a range of more traditional climbing walls, plus equipment rental, a steam room and sauna. There's a bar upstairs and food is available too.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — KINLOCHLEVEN

By bus The hourly #44 bus from Fort William runs to the centre of Kinlochleven (50min), passing Glencoe en route. Destinations Glencoe (hourly; 15min); Fort William (hourly; 50min).

Tourist information In the Aluminium Story building on Linnhe Road, in the centre of the village (Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–5.30pm, Wed & Sat 9am–1pm; ☎01855 831021). Staff at the combined post office, museum and information point can give tips on local attractions. Look out for the useful leaflet, published by Kinlochleven Community Trust, which details local walking routes.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Blackwater Hostel Beside the river on Lab Rd ☎01855 831253, ⓦblackwaterhostel.co.uk. A decidedly upmarket hostel, with en-suite dorms and Hobbit-sized two-bed "microlodges" available for rent. You can also camp here. Dorms £16.50; microlodge £35; camping £7/person

Edencoille Guest House Garbhein Road ☎01855 831358, ⓦkinlochlevenbedandbreakfast.co.uk. There's fine hospitality at this Edwardian-built house where, with notice, they can organize packed lunches, evening meals and guided walking trips. £72

Lochleven Seafood Café A few miles west of Kinlochleven on the B836 (north side of the loch) ☎01855 821048, ⓦlochlevenseafoodcafe.co.uk. The best place to eat near Kinlochleven, this is a relaxed restaurant with an attractive outdoor terrace. Specializes in local shellfish such as whole brown crab cooked in seawater (£12.75). Daily noon–3pm & 6–9pm.

MacDonald Hotel Fort William Road ☎01855 831539, ⓦmacdonaldhotel.co.uk. This central hotel has ten reasonable en-suite bedrooms, but is best visited for its Bothy Bar, where you can join fellow walkers for fish and chips (£8.90) and other pub meals. Bar: Mon–Wed 12.30–11.30pm, Thurs–Sat 12.30pm–12.30am, Sun 12.30–11.15pm. £84

Loch Ness and around

Twenty-three miles long, unfathomably deep, cold and often moody, **LOCH NESS** is bound by rugged heather-clad mountains rising steeply from a wooded shoreline, with attractive glens opening up on either side. Its fame, however, is based overwhelmingly on its legendary inhabitant, Nessie, the "Loch Ness monster" (see box below), who encourages a steady flow of hopeful visitors to the settlements dotted along the loch, in particular **Drumnadrochit**. Nearby, the impressive ruins of **Castle Urquhart** – a favourite monster-spotting location – perch atop a rock on the loch side and attract a deluge of bus parties during the summer. Almost as busy in high season is the village of **Fort Augustus**, at the more scenic southwest tip of Loch Ness, where you can watch queues of boats tackling one of the Caledonian Canal's longest flight of locks. You'll need your own **car** to complete the whole loop around the loch, a journey that includes an impressive stretch between Fort Augustus and the high, hidden Loch Mhòr, overlooked by the imposing Monadhliath range to the south.

Away from the loch-side, and seeing a fraction of Loch Ness's visitor numbers, the remote glens of **Urquhart** and **Affric** make an appealing contrast, with Affric in

NESSIE

The world-famous **Loch Ness monster**, affectionately known as **Nessie** (and by serious aficionados as *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*), has been a local celebrity for some time. The first mention of a mystery creature crops up in St Adamnan's seventh-century biography of **St Columba**, who allegedly calmed an aquatic animal that had attacked one of his monks. Present-day interest, however, is probably greater outside Scotland than within the country, and dates from the building of the road along the loch's western shore in the early 1930s. In 1934 the *Daily Mail* published London surgeon **R.K. Wilson**'s sensational photograph of the head and neck of the monster peering up out of the loch, and the hype has hardly diminished since. Recent encounters range from glimpses of ripples by anglers to the famous occasion in 1961 when thirty hotel guests saw a pair of humps break the water's surface and cruise for about half a mile before submerging.

Photographic evidence is showcased in two separate exhibitions located at **Drumnadrochit**, but the most impressive of these exhibits – including the renowned black-and-white movie footage of Nessie's humps moving across the water, and Wilson's original head-and-shoulders shot – have now been exposed as **fakes**. Indeed, in few other places on earth has watching a rather lifeless and often grey expanse of water seemed so compelling, or have floating logs, otters and boat wakes been photographed so often and with such excitement.

Yet while even high-tech sonar surveys carried out over the past two decades have failed to come up with conclusive evidence, it's hard to dismiss Nessie as pure myth. After all, no one yet knows where the unknown layers of silt and mud at the bottom of the loch begin and end: best estimates say the loch is over **750ft deep**, deeper than much of the North Sea, while others point to the possibilities of underwater caves and undiscovered channels connected to the sea. What scientists have found in the cold, murky depths, including pure white eels and rare arctic char, offers fertile grounds for speculation, with different theories declaring Nessie to be a remnant from the dinosaur age, a giant newt or a huge visiting Baltic sturgeon.

particular boasting narrow, winding roads, gushing streams and hillsides dotted with ancient Caledonian pine forests. The busiest of these glens to the north is the often bleak high country of Glen Moriston, a little to the southeast of Glen Affric, through which the main road between Inverness and Skye passes.

GETTING AROUND

By bus Using the A82, buses can travel the entire length of Loch Ness, from Inverness to Fort Augustus. On the eastern side of the loch, however, regular bus services are limited to the stretch between Inverness and Foyers.

By car Although most visitors drive along the tree-lined A82 road, which runs along the western shore of Loch Ness, the sinuous, single-track B862/B852 (originally a military road built to link Fort Augustus and Fort George) that skirts the eastern shore is quieter and affords far more spectacular views.

Fort Augustus

FORT AUGUSTUS, a tiny, busy village at the scenic southwestern tip of Loch Ness, was named after George II's son, the chubby lad who later became the "Butcher" duke of Cumberland of Culloden fame; it was built as a barracks after the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. Today, it's dominated by comings and goings along the **Caledonian Canal**, which leaves Loch Ness here, and by its large former **Benedictine abbey**, a campus of grey Victorian buildings founded on the site of the original fort in 1876. Until relatively recently this was home to a small but active community of monks, but it has now been converted into luxury flats. There are some good cycling routes locally, notably along the Great Glen cycle route.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Frequent buses ply the A82, linking Fort Augustus with Inverness and Drumnadrochit to the north, and Fort William, 30 miles south.

Destinations Drumnadrochit (up to 10 daily; 35min); Inverness (up to 9 daily; 1hr); Fort William (up to 9 daily; 1hr).

INFORMATION

Tourist office The Car Park, north of the canal (April & May Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; June Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–4pm; Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm; Nov–March daily 10am–3pm; ☎01320 366779). Fort Augustus's very helpful tourist office hands out useful free walking leaflets and stocks maps of the Great Glen Way (see box, p.397).

Caledonian Canal Visitor Centre Ardchattan House, Canalside, by the locks (Easter–Oct daily 10am–1.30pm & 2–5.30pm; ☎01320 366493). Houses a small exhibition showing why, when and how the Caledonian Canal was built. Black and white pictures reveal how the canal looked in the nineteenth century, but aside from these (and a dusty old telescope) there's little in the way of proper exhibits.

TOURS AND ACTIVITIES

Boat tours From its berth by the Clansman Centre, near the swing bridge, Cruise Loch Ness sails five miles up Loch Ness (daily; 1hr; £13; ☎01320 366277, 🌐cruiselochness.com), using sonar technology to provide passengers with impressive live 3D imagery of the deep where underwater cave systems, salmon, cannibalistic trout (and, some would speculate, Nessie) are to be found.

Fishing The tourist office can advise you on how to obtain permits to fish the loch or nearby river.

ACCOMMODATION

Corrie Liath Market Hill, half a mile south of the centre along A82 ☎01320 366409, 🌐corrieliath.co.uk. Small, thoughtfully managed B&B whose comfortable rooms have books and DVDs for guests to enjoy. The garden has a BBQ hut for use in the summertime. £65

Cumberlands Campsite Glendoe Road, by Stravaigers Lodge ☎01320 366257, 🌐cumberlands-campsite.com. Spacious campsite with good facilities, a five-minute walk from the loch and a short stroll from the shops and pubs of Fort Augustus. £16/pitch

Lovat Arms Hotel On the A82 in the centre of Fort Augustus ☎01456 490000, 🌐thelovat.com. Expensive

hotel refurbished along eco-friendly principles and built on the site of the 1718 Kilwhimen Barracks. The hotel's restaurant and brasserie serve inventive (and costly) dishes with a local focus. £121

Morag's Lodge Bunoich Brae, on the Loch Ness side of town 01320 366289, www.moragslodge.com. The atmosphere at this well-equipped hostel – with 4- and 6-bed dorms – livens up with the daily arrival of backpackers' minibus tours. Dorms £21; doubles £50

Stravaigers Lodge Glendoe Road, a short walk south of the centre 01320 366257, highlandbunkhouse.co.uk. Basic hostel with a mix of twin rooms and cheaper bunk rooms, split between two separate buildings, each with its own kitchen. Dorms £18; twins £46

EATING AND DRINKING

The Lock Inn Canalside, opposite the Caledonian Canal Visitor Centre 01320 366302. With attractive wood-panelled interiors and a wider selection of pub meals (such as chicken curry, £11.95), *The Lock* is a slightly better choice than its neighbour, *The Bothy*. Daily 11am–11pm.

The Scots Kitchen Opposite the tourist office. One of the few cheap spots for a coffee in Fort Augustus. Also sells moderately priced breakfasts, lunches and dinners (June–Oct only), including vegetarian haggis (£9.25). Daily 8am–8pm.

11

The east side of Loch Ness

The tranquil and scenic **east side** of Loch Ness is skirted by General Wade's old military highway, now the B862/B852. From Fort Augustus, the narrow single-track road swings up, away from the loch-side through the near-deserted **Stratherrick** valley, which is dotted with tiny lochans. To the east of Fort Augustus you'll pass the massive earth workings of the Glendoe Hydro Development. From here, the road drops down to rejoin the shores of Loch Ness at **FOYERS**, where there are numerous marked forest trails and an impressive waterfall.

Past **Inverfarigaig** – where a road up a beautiful, steep-sided river valley leads east over to Loch Mhor – is the sleepy village of **DORES**, nestled at the northeastern end of Loch Ness, where the whitewashed *Dores Inn* provides a pleasant pit stop.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE EAST SIDE OF LOCH NESS

By bus Local buses run up and down the east side of the loch, shuttling visitors from Inverness south to Foyers (Mon–Fri up to 5 daily; 2 on Sat; 45min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

DORES

Dores Inn Eleven miles north of Foyers in the village of Dores 01463 751203. Only nine miles southwest of Inverness, this old loch-side pub is popular with Invernessians, who trickle out here on summer evenings for a stroll along the grey pebble beach and some monster-spotting. The barley paella with seafood, garlic and paprika costs £11.95. Mon–Thurs 10am–11pm, Fri & Sat 10am–midnight, Sun 10am–10pm.

FOYERS

Foyers House In Upper Foyers, up the track next to Waterfall Café 01456 486405, foyershouse-lochness.com. Out of the way, adults-only B&B with fabulous views of the loch from its terrace. Has a self-catering kitchen and dining room. £50

Waterfall Café In Upper Foyers village, opposite the footpath to the waterfall 01456 486233. Previously known as the *Red Squirrel Café*, this friendly teashop still runs a live web-cam of red squirrels nesting across the road – and does delicious tray bakes (£1.50) to boot. April–Oct Mon–Thurs 9am–5pm, Fri & Sat 9am–8pm, Sun 10am–3pm; Nov–March Fri & Sat 9.30am–7pm, Sun 10am–2pm.

Drumnadrochit and around

Situated above a verdant, sheltered bay of Loch Ness fifteen miles southwest of Inverness, **DRUMNADROCHIT** is the southern gateway to remote Glen Affric and the epicentre of Nessie-hype, complete with a rash of tacky souvenir shops and two rival monster exhibitions whose head-to-head scramble for punters occasionally erupts into acrimonious exchanges, detailed with relish by the local press.

Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition

On the main A82 • Daily: Easter–June & Sept–Oct 9.30am–5pm; July & Aug 9.30am–6pm; Nov–Easter 10am–3.30pm • T 01456 450573 W lochness.com • £6.95

Of the two major monster hubs in Drumnadrochit (the other being the Nessieland Monster Centre), the **Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition** is the better bet, offering an in-depth rundown of eyewitness accounts and information on various Nessie research projects. It does a good job, mixing "evidence" of the monster's existence with frank appraisals of pictures and sightings that turned out to be hoaxes.

Nessieland Monster Centre and around

Just west of the Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition on the A831 • Sept–June 9am–5pm; July & Aug 9am–9pm • T 01456 450342 W nessieland.co.uk • £6

Aimed mainly at families, the **Nessieland Monster Centre** has an exhibition on monster sightings, a plastic model of Nessie for kids to clamber on, plus its own adventure playground. The wood-panelled and heavily tartanized interior of the adjacent *Loch Ness Lodge Hotel* is said to harbour a resident ghost.

Castle Urquhart

Beside Loch Ness, two miles southeast of Drumnadrochit and just off the A82 • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–6pm; Oct 9.30am–5pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £7.90; HS

The thirteenth-century ruined loch-side **Castle Urquhart,** a couple of miles east of Drumnadrochit, was built as a strategic base to guard the Great Glen. The castle was taken by Edward I of England and later held by Robert the Bruce against Edward III, only to be blown up in 1692 to prevent it from falling to the Jacobites. Today it's one of Scotland's classic picture-postcard ruins, particularly splendid at night when it's floodlit and the crowds have gone. In the small visitor centre, a short film highlights the turbulent history of the castle.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Drumnadrochit is served by frequent buses from Inverness, Fort William and Fort Augustus. Buses arrive and depart from near the post office, on the A82.

DRUMNADROCHIT AND AROUND

Destinations Fort Augustus (up to 10 daily; 35min); Fort William (up to 9 daily; 1hr 30min); Inverness (at least hourly; 30min).

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist information In the middle of the main car park in the village (April & May Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm; June Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–6pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–4pm; Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm; Nov–March Tues–Sat 9.30am–3.30pm; T 01456 459086).

Boat tours The sonar-equipped Nessie Hunter (T 01456 450395, W loch-ness-cruises.com) runs hourly trips on the loch from 9am to 6pm, from Easter to October. The hour-long cruise costs £15 and can be booked at the Nessieland Monster Centre.

ACCOMMODATION

Benleva Kilmore Rd, Kilmore T 01456 450080, W benleva.co.uk. Small, basic hotel in Kilmore, a 15min walk from the monster centres of Drumnadrochit. The six en-suite rooms have tartan bedspreads and free wi-fi. **£70**

Borlum Farm A mile southeast of central Drumnadrochit, off the A82 T 01456 450220, W borlum.com. Attractive campsite overlooking the village, with space for caravans and tents. The site is part of a popular riding school offering lessons, rides and treks (from £15/hr). **£12**/pitch

Glenkirk B&B 300m west of Nessieland Monster Centre along the A831 T 01456 450802, W lochnessbandb.com. Bright, friendly B&B in a former church located just a few minutes' walk from the centre, with simple yet smartly decorated bedrooms. **£80**

Loch Ness Backpackers Lodge Coiltie Farmhouse, Lewiston; follow the signs to the left when coming from Drumnadrochit T 01456 450807, W lochness-backpackers.com. For a cheap bed for the night, head for this immaculate and friendly hostel, which has dorms, private rooms and good facilities including a bar and two lounges. Dorms **£18**; doubles **£52**

EATING AND DRINKING

Benleva Kilmore Rd, Kilmore ☎01456 450080. One of many hotels doing bar food, *Benleva* sets itself apart by using local beer in some of its dishes, including the steak and ale pie with chips and seasonal veg (£10.50). Mon–Thurs noon–midnight, Fri noon–1am, Sat noon–11.45pm, Sun noon–11pm.

Fiddlers' Just south of the village green on the A82 ☎01456 450678, ⓦfiddledrum.co.uk. Busy, friendly bar with plenty of outside seating and, it's claimed, more than five hundred single malt whiskies. The mostly meaty menu has a couple of veggie options too, including a falafel and spinach burger (£7.95). Daily 12.30–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm.

Glen Café On the village green, just off the A82 ☎01456 450282. This inexpensive café does reasonable lunches and snacks. A baked potato stuffed with chilli con carne costs £5.50. Mon–Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 10am–6.30pm.

Glen Affric

Due west of Drumnadrochit lies a vast area of high peaks, remote glens and few roads. The reason most folk head this way is to explore the picturesque native forests and grand mountains of **Glen Affric**, heaven for walkers, climbers and mountain bikers. Munro-baggers (see p.10) are normally much in evidence, and it is possible to tramp 25 miles all the way through Glen Affric to Shiel Bridge, on the west coast near Kyle of Lochalsh.

11

Cannich and Loch Affric

The main approach to Glen Affric is through the small settlement of **CANNICH**, thirteen miles west of Drumnadrochit on the A831. Cannich is a quiet and uninspiring village, but it has an excellent campsite where mountain bikes can be rented. From the car park at the head of the single-track road along the glen, ten miles southwest of Cannich, there's a selection of **walks**: the trip around **Loch Affric** will take you a good five hours but allows you to appreciate the glen and its wildlife.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — GLEN AFFRIC

By bus Ross's Minibuses (☎01463 761250, ⓦross-minibuses.co.uk) runs scheduled services to the car park at Glen Affric (July–Sept, it's vehicles will also carry bikes if given advance notice) from Cannich (4 on Mon, Wed & Fri; 30min); Drumnadrochit (3 on Mon, Wed & Fri; 1hr 35min) and Iuvemess (2 on Mon, Wed & Fri; 2hr 10min)

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist information Notice boards are dotted around the glen; the Forestry Commission website (ⓦwww.forestry.gov.uk/glenaffric) includes an interactive map showing where they're located.

Volunteering For details of volunteer work in Glen Affric helping with restoration of the woodland, get in touch with Trees for Life (ⓦtreesforlife.org.uk).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Bog Cotton Café At Cannich Camping & Caravan Park. The best option for food in Cannich, this welcoming chalet-like café has large windows overlooking the campsite. Planning a hike? You can buy takeaway sandwiches here for £3 too. Daily 9am–5pm.

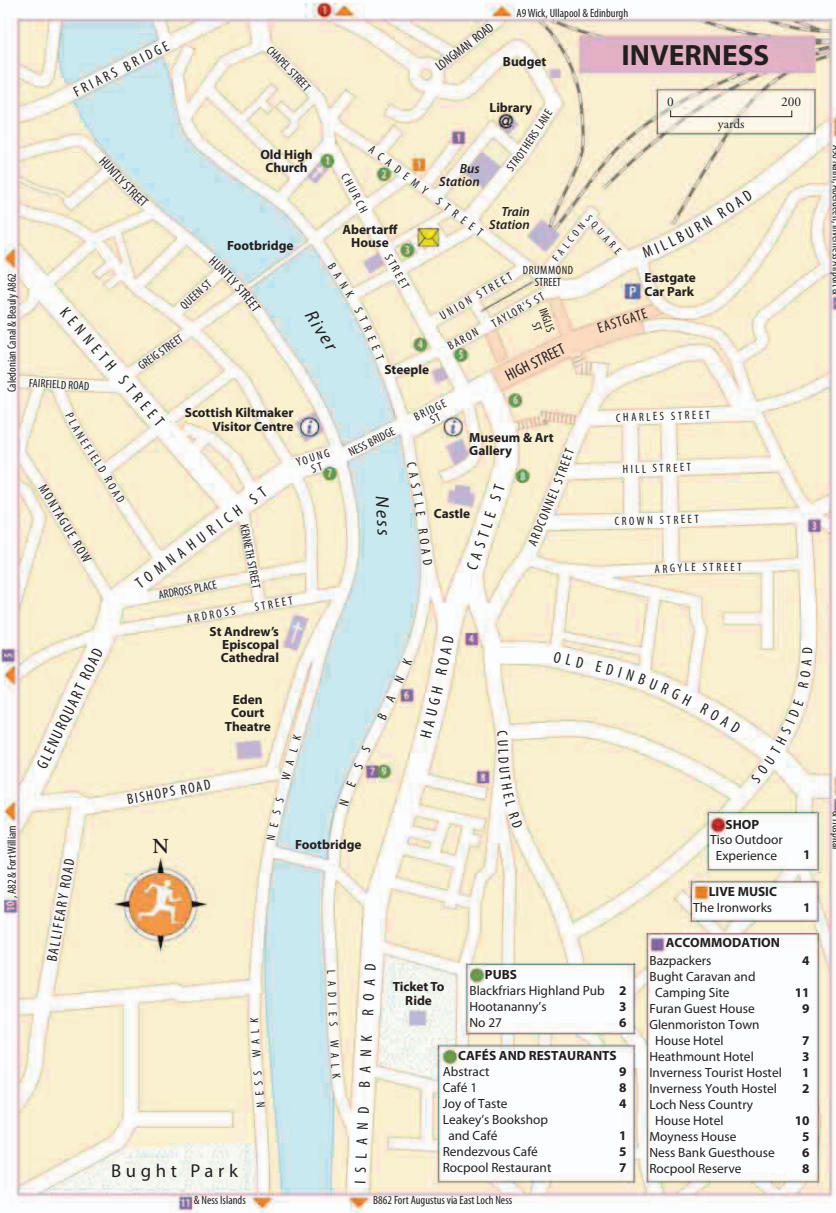
Cannich Camping & Caravan Park In the centre of Cannich ☎01456 415364, ⓦhighlandcamping.co.uk. Mountain bikes can be rented (£17/day) at this pretty, well-shaded campsite, which has good facilities, including wi-fi and a TV room. £7/person

Glen Affric Youth Hostel Allt Beithe, 20 miles southwest of Cannich ☎08452 937373, ⓦsyha.org.uk. Utterly remote, this SYHA hostel near the head of Glen Affric makes a convenient if rudimentary stopover on the 25-mile hike through Glen Affric to Shiel Bridge. A wind turbine and solar panels provide the hostel with electricity, but note that you'll need to bring all your own food. Dorms £22; twins £47

Inverness

Straddling a nexus of major road and rail routes, **INVERNESS** is the busy hub of the Highlands, and an inevitable port of call if you're exploring the region by public transport. Over a hundred miles from any other major settlement yet with a

population rapidly approaching 100,000, Inverness is the only city in the Highlands. Crowned by a pink crenellated **castle** and lavishly decorated with flowers, the city centre still has some hints of its medieval street layout, though unsightly concrete blocks do an efficient job of masking it. Within walking distance of the centre are peaceful spots along by the Ness, leafy parks and friendly B&Bs located in prosperous-looking stone houses.



Brief history

The sheltered harbour and proximity to the open sea made Inverness an important entrepôt and shipbuilding centre during medieval times. **David I**, who first imposed a feudal system on Scotland, erected a castle on the banks of the Ness to oversee maritime trade in the early twelfth century, promoting it to royal burgh status soon after. Bolstered by receipts from the lucrative export of leather, salmon and timber, the town grew to become the kingdom's most prosperous northern outpost, and an obvious target for the marauding Highlanders who plagued this remote border area. A second wave of growth occurred during the eighteenth century as the Highland cattle trade flourished. The arrival of the **Caledonian Canal** and **rail links** with the east and south brought further prosperity, heralding a tourist boom that reached a fashionable zenith in the Victorian era, fostered by the royal family's enthusiasm for all things Scottish.

11 Inverness Castle

Looming above the city and dominating the horizon is **Inverness Castle**, a predominantly nineteenth-century red-sandstone building perched above the river. The original castle formed the core of the ancient town, which had rapidly developed as a port trading with Europe after its conversion to Christianity by St Columba in the sixth century. Robert the Bruce wrested the castle back from the English during the Wars of Independence, destroying much of the structure in the process, and while held by the Jacobites in both the 1715 and the 1745 rebellions, it was blown up by them to prevent it falling into government hands. Today's edifice houses the **Sheriff Court** and is not open to the general public. However, there are good views down the River Ness and various plaques and statues in the grounds, including a small plinth marking the start of the 73-mile Great Glen Way.

Inverness Museum and Art Gallery

Castle Wynd • April–Oct Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Nov–March Thurs–Sat 10am–5pm • Free • Ⓦ inverness.highland.museum

Below the castle, the revamped **Inverness Museum and Art Gallery** on Castle Wynd offers an insight into the social history of the Highlands, with treasures from the times of the Picts and Vikings, taxidermy exhibits such as "Felicity" the puma, caught in Cannich in 1980, and interactive features including an introduction to the Gaelic language. It also has impressive temporary art exhibitions.

Old High Church

Church Street, next to Leakey's bookshop • Grounds open to public; church open for Sun services 11.15am • Free

The **Old High Church**, founded in 1171 and rebuilt on several occasions since, stands just back from the east bank of the river on Church Street, hemmed in by a walled graveyard. Those Jacobites who survived the massacre of Culloden were brought here and incarcerated prior to their execution in the cemetery. If you look carefully you may see the bullet holes left on gravestones by the firing squads.

Scottish Kiltmaker Visitor Centre

In the Highland House of Fraser shop, on the river's west bank at 4–9 Huntly Street • Daily 9am–10pm, , kilt-making demonstrations daily 9am–5pm • Ⓦ highlandhouseoffraser.com • Visitor Centre £2.50

Entered through the factory shop, the **Scottish Kiltmaker Visitor Centre** is an imaginative small attraction, complete with the outfits worn by actors for the *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* films, which sets out everything you ever wanted to know about tartan. There's an interesting seven-minute film shown on the hour, and on

weekdays you can watch various tartan products being made in the workshop. The finished products are, of course, on sale in the showroom downstairs, along with all manner of Highland knitwear, woven woollies and Harris tweed.

Ness Islands

From **St Andrews Episcopal Cathedral**, on the west bank of the river, you can wander a mile or so upriver to the peaceful **Ness Islands**, an attractive, informal public park reached and linked by footbridges. Laid out with mature trees and shrubs, the islands are the favourite haunt of local anglers.

Caledonian Canal

Half a mile upstream from the Ness Islands park, the River Ness runs close to the **Caledonian Canal**, which was designed by Thomas Telford in the early nineteenth century as a link between the east and west coasts, joining lochs Ness, Oich, Lochy and Linnhe. Today its main use is recreational, and there are cruises through part of it to Loch Ness (see p.407), while the towpath provides relaxing walks with good views.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By plane Inverness airport (T 01667 464000) is at Dalcross, seven miles east of the city; from here, bus #11 (every 30min, 6am–11pm, 25min; £3.75; W www.stagecoachbus.com) goes into town, while a taxi (try Tartan Taxis on T 01463 222777) costs around £14.

Destinations Belfast (6 weekly; 1hr 5min); Birmingham (Mon–Fri & Sun 1 daily; 1hr 30min); Bristol (1–2 daily; 1hr 5min); Kirkwall (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 45min); London Gatwick (4–5 daily; 1hr 50min); Luton (1 daily; 1hr 20min); Manchester (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 1hr 30min); Stornoway (Mon–Fri 3–4 daily, Sat, & Sun 1 daily; 40min).

By train The train station is on Station Square, just off Academy Street, to the northeast of the centre.

Destinations Aberdeen (Mon–Sat 11 daily; 5 on Sun; 2hr 15min); Aviemore (Mon–Sat 11 daily, 7 on Sun; 40min); Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 8 daily, 5 on Sun; 3hr 30min); Glasgow (Queen Street; 3–4 daily; 3hr 20min); Kyle of Lochalsh (Mon–Sat 4 daily, 2 on Sun; 2hr 30min); London (King's Cross; 2 daily Mon–Fri & Sun, 1 on Sat; 8hr–12hr 45min); Thurso (Mon–Sat 2 daily, 1 on Sun; 3hr 45min); Wick (Mon–Sat 4 daily, 1 on Sun; 4hr 20min).

By bus The main bus hub is just north of the train station, close to the public library. Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 3hr 50min); Aviemore (every 1/2hr; 45min); Drumnadrochit (1–2/hr; 30min); Fort Augustus (up to 9 daily; 1hr); Fort William (up to 9 daily; 2hr); Glasgow (5 daily; 3hr 25min–4hr); Kyle of Lochalsh (3 daily; 2hr); Nairn (up to 3/hr; 45min); Perth (7 daily; 2hr 50min); Portree (3 daily; 3hr 15min); Thurso (Mon–Sat 5 daily, 3 on Sun; 3hr); Ullapool (2–4 daily; 1hr 25min).

GETTING AROUND

Car rental Budget, Railway Terrace, behind the train station (T 01463 713333).

Bike rental Ticket to Ride at The Pavilion, Bellfield Park (daily 9am–6pm; T 01463 419160, W tickettoridehighlands.co.uk) rents out decent hybrid bikes for £20/day.

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office The tourist office is in an unsightly 1960s block on Castle Wynd, just 5min walk from the train station (April & May Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; June Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 9.30am–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6.30pm, Sun 9.30am–6pm; Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm). It stocks a wide range of literature, including free maps of the city and its environs, and the staff can book local accommodation for a £4 fee. There's also a CalMac ferry booking office in the building (W calmac.co.uk).

Left luggage Train station lockers cost £3–5 for 24hr, depending on size (Mon–Sat 6.40am–7.50pm, Sun 10.40am–6.20pm); the left-luggage room in the bus station costs £4/item/day (Mon–Sat 8.30am–5.30pm, Sun 9am–5.30pm).

Outdoor equipment Tiso Outdoor Experience at 2 Henderson Rd, on the Longman Estate (Mon, Tues, Fri & Sat 9am–6pm, Wed 9.30am–6pm, Thurs 9am–7pm, Sun 10am–5pm; T 01463 729171, W tiso.com) has a large range of outdoor gear to hire or buy. There's also an indoor climbing wall and a path for testing walking boots before you buy.

TOURS

Inverness is the departure point for a range of **day-tours** and **cruises** to nearby attractions, including Loch Ness, Skye, Orkney and the Moray Firth, where there's a chance to spot dolphins (see p.419). Inverness is also one of the few places where transport connections allow you to embark on a major **grand tour** of the Highlands.

THE HIGHLANDS AND SKYE

For exploring the northwest, ScotRail (T 08457 550033, W scotrail.co.uk) sells a Highland Rover pass (£81.50), offering four days of unlimited travel over eight consecutive days, with many train, ferry and coach routes included.

LOCH NESS

Loch Ness cruises typically incorporate a visit to a monster exhibition at Drumnadrochit and Urquhart Castle. Jacobite Cruises (T 01463 233999, W jacobite.co.uk) runs a 3.5hr coach trip (£30) to Loch Ness, including a 30min cruise and admission to the Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition (see p.411).

ORKNEY

From June to August, John O'Groats Ferries (T 01955 611353, W www.jogferry.co.uk) runs day-trips to Orkney (£68), including visits to Kirkwall, Scapa Flow and the Ring of Brodgar. Departures leave daily from Inverness at 7.30am.

ACCOMMODATION

11

HOTELS

Glenmoriston Town House Hotel 20 Ness Bank T 01463 223777, W www.glenmoristontownhouse.com. A smart contemporary hotel by the riverside just a few minutes' walk from the town centre, with muted decor and a good dining experience on offer at *Abstract* (see opposite). £130

Heathmount Hotel Kingsmill Road T 01463 235877, W heathmounthotel.com. Reasonably central boutique hotel with blingy but comfortable rooms, some of which have four-poster beds, which all come with Sky TV and an iPod dock. £95

Loch Ness Country House Hotel Off the A82 Fort William Rd T 01463 230512, W lochnesscountryhousehotel.co.uk. Luxurious country-house hotel, three miles southwest of central Inverness. Offers modern Scottish food, fine wines and more than two hundred malts, as well as very comfortable and spacious rooms. £169

★ **Rocpool Reserve** Culduthel Road T 01463 240089, W rocpool.com. Only a 10min walk south of the castle, this acclaimed hotel and restaurant has tastefully decorated rooms (think white cotton bedsheets and subtle splashes of colour), plus a swanky, French-inspired restaurant. £210

B&BS

Furan Guest House 100 Old Edinburgh Rd T 01463 712094, W furan.co.uk. Good-value B&B a mile south of the centre, run by former hoteliers. Has a good choice of spotlessly clean rooms and a friendly resident cat. Book direct for the best rates. £75

Moyness House 6 Bruce Gardens T 01463 233836, W moyness.co.uk. Warm, welcoming, upmarket B&B on the west side of Inverness, with original Victorian features (it was built in 1880) and a nice walled garden. £78

Ness Bank Guesthouse 7 Ness Bank T 01463 232939, W nessbankguesthouse.co.uk. Five comfortable if slightly dated) rooms in a lovely Grade II listed Victorian house on the river; the in-room information packs have handy tips on the local area. £76

HOSTELS

Bazpackers 4 Culduthel Road T 01463 717663, W bazpackershostel.co.uk. The most cosy and relaxed of the city's hostels, with more than thirty beds, including three doubles and two twins; some dorms are mixed. Good location, great views and a garden, which is used for barbecues. Dorms £17; twins/doubles £40

Inverness Tourist Hostel 24 Rose St T 01463 241962, W invernesshostel.com. Cheap, conveniently located hostel near the bus station, with cheery, helpful staff. The downside is that the dorms are a little musty, and there's a slightly institutional feel to the place. Dorms £10

Inverness Youth Hostel Victoria Drive, off Millburn Road, about three-quarters of a mile east of the centre T 01463 231771, W syha.org.uk. Big SYHA hostel with large kitchens and communal areas, plus six-bed family rooms and cheap singles in addition to the usual dorms. However, it's quite far from the centre, and the building is devoid of character. Dorms £20; singles £22; twins £46; family room £138

CAMPSITE

Bught Caravan and Camping Site Bught Park, a mile south of the centre T 01463 236920, W invernesscaravanpark.com. Inverness's main campsite on the west bank of the river near the sports centre. Has good facilities, but it can get very crowded at the height of the season. Easter to Sept. £8/person

EATING AND DRINKING

CAFÉS

★ **Leakey's Bookshop and Café** Church St T 01463 239947. Prise yourself away from the old books and maps at Scotland's largest secondhand/used bookshop to enjoy a

cup of tea or a warming bowl of soup (£3.30) at the upstairs café. Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm.

Rendezvous Café 14a Church St ☎01463 718444. Good frothy lattes (£2.40) are served inside and out at this café, which is one of the more relaxed places for coffee and a snack in the city centre. Mon–Sat 8am–5pm, Sun 9am–4pm.

RESTAURANTS

Abstract 20 Ness Bank ☎01463 223777, ⓦabstractrestaurant.com. This award-winning French restaurant within the *Glenmoriston Town House Hotel* (see opposite) stylishly serves unexpected combinations of flavours – like liquorice with coriander and pistachio; mains start at £16.50. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

Café 1 75 Castle St ☎01463 226200, ⓦcafe1.net. You'll find contemporary Scottish cooking – like grilled chicken with rocket, pineapple and balsamic vinegar – in a bistro-style setting here. The restaurant's beef, lamb and pork is reared on a croft 8 miles north of Inverness. At £12.50 for two courses, the "early bird" menu (Mon–Fri noon–6.45pm & Sat noon–2.30pm) is good value. Mon–Fri noon–9.30pm, Sat noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm.

Joy of Taste 25 Church St ☎01463 241459, ⓦthejoyoftaste.co.uk. Sparkly green cloths cover *Joy of Taste's* tables, which are worked by a team of volunteers, each of whom has a stake in the restaurant's success. The lunch menu, with pork sausages and mash for £5.95, represents superb value. Refreshingly different. Daily noon–3pm & 5pm–late.

Rocpool Restaurant 1 Ness Walk ☎01463 717274. Another of the city's excellent, smart-ish dining options, with a contemporary setting, attentive staff and deliciously rich food. The escalope of calves liver with roasted purple figs is £19.95. Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5.45pm–10pm.

PUBS

Blackfriars Highland Pub 93–95 Academy St. Popular pub where you can enjoy folk music most Friday and Saturday nights, plus a selection of real ale, cheap steak and gravy pies (£2.25), and bigger pub meals. Mon–Thurs 11am–midnight, Fri 11am–1am, Sat 11am–12.30am & Sun 12.30pm–11pm; food served daily 11am–9pm.

Hootananny's 67 Church St ☎01463 233651. Lively watering hole with homely food (including a butternut squash and chickpea casserole served with cheese scones). On Saturday afternoons there are ceilidhs from 2.30–4.30pm. Mon–Thurs noon–1am, Fri & Sat noon–3am, Sun 6.30pm–midnight.

No 27 27 Castle St. Skinny bar/restaurant with a wide range of beers (there's a new guest ale every Sunday) and salmon fishcakes for £8.50. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 12.30pm–11pm.

NIGHTLIFE

LIVE MUSIC

The Ironworks 122b Academy Street ⓦironworksvenue.com. Large live venue with space for a thousand music fans. The place to come for touring bands, stand-up comedy and the occasional club night. See website for events and respective opening times.

DIRECTORY

Hospital The Raigmore Hospital (☎01463 704000) is at Old Perth Road on the southeastern outskirts of town, close to the A9.

Internet Inverness Library (Mon & Tues 9am–6.30pm, Wed 10am–6.30pm, Thurs 9am–8pm, Fri 9am–6.30pm, Sat 9am–5pm), near the bus station, offers free internet access (ID required).

Laundry New City Laundrette, 17 Young St ☎01463 242507.

Post office 14–16 Queensgate (Mon & Wed–Sat 9am–5.30pm, Tues 9.30am–5.30pm).

Around Inverness

A string of worthwhile sights punctuates the approach to Inverness along the main route from Aberdeen. The low-key resort of **Nairn**, with its long white-sand beaches and championship golf course, stands within striking distance of several monuments, including whimsical **Cawdor Castle**, best known for its role in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and **Fort George**, one of several impressive Hanoverian bastions erected in the wake of the Jacobite rebellion. The infamous battle and ensuing massacre that ended Bonnie Prince Charlie's uprising took place on the outskirts of Inverness at **Culloden**, where a visitor centre and memorial stones beside a heather-clad moor recall the gruesome events of 1746.

Northeast of Inverness is the **Moray Firth**, one of the UK's best locations for spotting dolphins (see box, p.419). Closer to the city, where this inlet merges with the River Ness, is the start of the Beauly Firth, a sheltered sea loch bounded by the Black Isle in the north and the wooded hills of the Aird to the south.

GETTING AROUND

By bus The region's main towns are well served by public transport, but to access Cawdor Castle and Fort George outside of the peak summer season (when special tourist routes are briefly opened) you will first need to travel to Nairn and then transfer to a taxi or the local Dial-a-Bus service (T 01667 456066).

AROUND INVERNESS

By car The overloaded A96 links Inverness with Nairn, 16 miles northeast, with quieter minor roads leading off it to Fort George, Cawdor Castle and Culloden. Heading northwest from Inverness, most traffic uses Kessock Bridge (the A9) to cross the Moray Firth; the A862, which skirts the shoreline and the mud flats, offers a slower, more scenic alternative.

Culloden

Six miles east of Inverness off B9006 • Visitor centre daily: April, May, Sept & Oct 9am–5.30pm; June–Aug 9am–6pm; Nov, Dec, Feb & March 10am–4pm • £10.50; entrance includes an audio-guide of the site; NTS • W nts.org.uk/culloden

The windswept moorland of **CULLODEN** witnessed the last-ever battle on British soil when, on April 16, 1746, the Jacobite cause was finally subdued – a turning point in the history of the Scottish nation. Today, this historic site attracts more than 200,000 visitors annually. Your first stop should be the superb **visitor centre**, which hosts costumed actors and state-of-the-art audiovisual and interactive technology, all employed to tell the tragedy of Culloden through the words, songs and poetic verse of locals and soldiers who experienced it. The pièce de résistance is the powerful "battle immersion theatre" where visitors are surrounded by lifelike cinematography and the sounds of the raging, bloody fight.

Every April, on the Saturday closest to the date of the battle, there's a small commemorative service at Culloden. The visitor centre has a reference library and will check for you if you think you have an ancestor who died here.

Brief history

The second Jacobite rebellion had begun on August 19, 1745, with the raising of the Stuarts' standard at **Glenfinnan** on the west coast (see p.443). Shortly after, Edinburgh fell into Jacobite hands, and Bonnie Prince Charlie began his march on London. The ruling Hanoverians had appointed the ambitious young Duke of Cumberland to command their forces, which included troops from the Lowlands and Highlands. The duke's pursuit, together with bad weather and lack of funds, eventually forced the Jacobite forces – mostly comprised of Highlanders – to retreat north. They ended up at **Culloden**, where, ill fed and exhausted after a pointless night march, they were hopelessly outnumbered by the government forces. The open, flat ground of Culloden Moor was totally unsuitable for the Highlanders' style of courageous but undisciplined fighting, which needed steep hills and lots of cover to provide the element of surprise, and they were routed.

The end of the clan system

After the battle, in which 1500 Highlanders were slaughtered (many of them as they lay wounded on the battlefield), **Bonnie Prince Charlie** fled west to the hills and islands, where loyal Highlanders sheltered and protected him. He eventually escaped to France, leaving his supporters to their fate – and, in effect, ushering in the end of the **clan system**. The clans were disarmed, the wearing of tartan and playing of bagpipes forbidden, and the chiefs became landlords greedy for higher and higher rents. The battle also unleashed an orgy of violent reprisals on Scotland, as unruly government troops raped and pillaged their way across the region; within a century, the Highland way of life had changed out of all recognition.

The battlefield

Flags mark out the positions of the two armies while simple headstones mark the **clan graves**. The **Field of the English**, for many years unmarked, is a mass grave for the fifty or so government soldiers who died (though as this government force also included Scottish infantry regiments, the term "English" is a misnomer).

THE DOLPHINS OF THE MORAY FIRTH

The **Moray Firth**, a great wedge-shaped bay forming the eastern coastline of the Highlands, is one of only three areas of UK waters that support a resident population of **dolphins**. Around 200 of these beautiful, intelligent marine mammals live in the estuary, the most northerly breeding ground in Europe for this particular species – the bottle-nosed dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) – and you stand a good chance of spotting a few, either from the shore or a boat.

One of the best places in Scotland, if not in Europe, to look for them is **Chanonry Point**, on the Black Isle – a spit of sand protruding into a narrow, deep channel, where converging currents bring fish close to the surface, and thus the dolphins close to shore; a rising tide is the most likely time to see them.

Several companies run dolphin-spotting **boat trips** around the Moray Firth. However, researchers claim that the increased traffic is causing the dolphins unnecessary stress, particularly during the all-important breeding period when passing vessels are thought to force calves underwater for uncomfortably long periods. So if you decide to go on a cruise to see the dolphins, which also sometimes provides the chance of spotting minke whales, porpoises, seals and otters, make sure that the operator is a member of the Dolphin Space Programme's accreditation scheme (Ⓦ dolphinspace.org).

BOAT TOURS

Trips with these accredited operators, most of which operate between April and October, are especially popular in July and August, so be sure to book them well in advance. To get from Inverness to Avoch (20min) or Cromarty (50min) with public transport, take Stagecoach bus #26 from the bus station (at least hourly); note that not all services run as far as Cromarty, so check before boarding.

Phoenix Boat Trips Inverness Marina ⓣ 07703 168097, Ⓦ inverness-dolphin-trips.co.uk. Runs one-hour trips (£16) from Inverness Marina at 10.30am, noon, 1.30pm and 3pm. When demand warrants it, they also run a two-and-a-half-hour cruise to Fort George (see p.420) and Chanonry Point (£25).

Dolphin Trips Avoch On the northern side of the firth in Avoch ⓣ 01381 622383, Ⓦ dolphintripsavoch.co.uk. Hourly sailings from Avoch's harbour, at the eastern end of the village, with trips lasting one hour (£14).

Ecoventures Victoria Place, Cromarty ⓣ 01381 600323, Ⓦ ecoventures.co.uk. Based on the Black Isle, on the northern side of the firth, Ecoventures runs two-hour wildlife cruises (£25) with the chance to spot dolphins, harbour porpoises and grey seals.

Half a mile east of the battlefield, just beyond the crossroads on the main road, is the **Cumberland Stone**, thought for many years to have been the point from where the duke watched the battle. It is more likely, however, that he was much further forward and simply used the stone for shelter. Elsewhere, the restored **Leanach cottage** marks the spot where thirty injured Jacobites were burnt alive.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CULLODEN

By bus Hourly Stagecoach buses run from Falcon Square near Inverness train station to the visitor centre (35min).

Cawdor Castle

Fourteen miles northeast of Inverness off the A96 • May–Oct daily 10am–5pm • £9.75; £5.50 for gardens & nature trails only • ⓣ 01667 404401, Ⓦ www.cawdorcastle.com

The pretty village of **CAWDOR**, eight miles east of Culloden, is the site of **Cawdor Castle**, a setting intimately linked to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: the fulfilment of the witches' prediction that Macbeth was to become thane of Cawdor sets off his tragic desire to be king. Though visitors arrive here in their droves each summer because of the site's literary associations, the castle, which dates from the early fourteenth century, could not possibly have witnessed the grisly historical events on which the Bard's drama was based. However, the immaculately restored monument – a fairy-tale affair of towers, turrets, hidden passageways, dungeons, gargoyles and crenellations whimsically shooting off from the original keep – is still well worth a visit.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **CAWDOR CASTLE**

By bus/train/taxi There is no longer a bus service from Inverness to the castle. To reach it, take a train or one of the frequent buses from Inverness to Nairn (several per hour; 40min), where you can pick up a taxi for the final six miles (around £14). Book ahead with Taxi 24/7 Nairn (☎01667 459595) and a driver will meet you at the bus station. A cheaper but less reliable option is Nairn's Dial-a-Bus service (☎01667 456066), which must be booked by 6pm the day before you wish to travel.

Fort George

Thirteen miles northeast of Inverness, near Ardersier • Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £8.90; HS • ☎01667 460 232

Eight miles of undulating coastal farmland separate Cawdor Castle from **Fort George**, an old Hanoverian bastion with walls a mile long, considered by military architectural historians to be one of the finest fortifications in Europe. Crowning a sandy spit that juts into the middle of the Moray Firth, it was built between 1747 and 1769 as a base for George II's army, in case the Highlanders should attempt to rekindle the Jacobite flame. By the time of its completion, however, the uprising had been firmly quashed and the fort has been used ever since as barracks; note the armed sentries at the main entrance and the periodic crack of live gunfire from the nearby firing ranges.

Walking on the northern, grass-covered casemates, which look out into the estuary, you may be lucky enough to see a school of bottle-nosed **dolphins** (see box p.419) swimming in with the tide. This is also a good spot for birdwatching: a colony of kittiwakes occupies the fort's slate rooftops.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE **FORT GEORGE**

By bus There aren't any direct bus services from Inverness or Nairn to Fort George. As with Cawdor Castle (see p.419), the best bet is to take a bus or train from Inverness to Nairn, where you can pick up a taxi or local Dial-a-Bus service for the final stretch.

Nairn

One of the driest and sunniest places in the whole of Scotland, **NAIRN**, sixteen miles east of Inverness, began its days as a peaceful community of fishermen and farmers. The former spoke Gaelic, the latter English, allowing James VI to boast that a town in his kingdom was so large that people at one end of the main street could not understand those at the other end. Nairn became popular in Victorian times, when the train line offered a convenient link to its revitalizing sea air and mild climate, and today the 11,000-strong population still relies on tourism, with all the ingredients for a traditional seaside holiday – sandy beach, ice-cream shops and fish-and-chip stalls. The town has two championship golf courses, and Thomas Telford's **harbour** is filled with leisure craft rather than fishing boats.

Nairn Museum

Viewfield House, King Street • May–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–4.30pm, Sat 10am–1pm (last admission 30min before closing) • £3 • ☎01667 456791, ⓦ nairnmuseum.co.uk

The **Nairn Museum** provides a general insight into the history and prehistory of the area; the **Fishertown Room** illustrates the parsimonious and puritanical life of the fishing families, while the weapon-filled **Military Room** includes information on the battles of Culloden and Auldearn.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND **NAIRN**

By train Nairn's railway station is just south of the centre, where Chattan Drive meets Cawdor Street.

Destinations Aberdeen (every 1–2hr; 2hr); Elgin (every 1–2hr; 25min); Forres (every 1–2hr; 10min); Inverness (every 1–2hr; 20min).

By bus Buses arrive and depart from a car park on King Street, just south of the police station.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 3hr 15min); Elgin (every

30min; 45min); Forres (every 30min; 25min); Inverness (up to 3/hr; 45min).

Bike rental Bikes are available from Bike and Buggy at 6a Falconers Lane (Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat 9.30am–4pm; T 01667 455416, W bikeandbuggy.co.uk) for £15/day.

INFORMATION

Tourist information There's a tourist information point within the Nairn Community & Arts Centre on King Street (Mon–Thurs 8.30am–10pm, Fri 8.30am–late, Sat 8.30am–5pm, Sun 9am–1pm & 5–9pm; T 01667 453476, W nairncommunitycentre.co.uk). Their handy "Welcome to Nairn" map is worth picking up.

ACCOMMODATION

Boath House In the village of Auldearn, two miles east of Nairn T 01667 454896, W boath-house.com. The most luxurious place to stay in the area, this is a fine Georgian country house set in magnificent gardens, with its own Michelin-starred restaurant. **£265**

Cawdor House 7 Cawdor Street T 01667 455855, W cawdorhousenairn.co.uk. A bright and attractive B&B, conveniently located between the train station and the main shopping street. Good choice of breakfasts, with vegetarians well catered for. **£82**

EATING AND DRINKING

Boath House At *Boath House* T 01667 454896. Mouthwatering, pricey, Michelin-starred cooking that draws upon organic produce and regional dairy, fish and meat suppliers. For an affordable taste of such luxury, book a lunchtime table (three courses for £30). Note that there is only one sitting for dinner. Daily: 12.30pm–1.15pm & 7.30pm.

The Classroom 1 Cawdor St T 01667 455999. Nairn's most popular bar/restaurant, serving tasty light bites, lunches and dinners. Try the house salad with sun-blushed tomatoes and chargrilled chicken (£7.50). Mon–Sat 10am–late, Sun 11am–late.

Strathspey

The richly forested area around the River Spey's upper reaches – **STRATHSPEY** – is a magnet for outdoors enthusiasts. Of Strathspey's scattered settlements, **Aviemore** absorbs the largest number of visitors, particularly in midwinter when it metamorphoses into the UK's busiest ski resort. The village struggles to reflect the charm of its surrounding area, but it's a good first stop for information, to sort out somewhere to stay or to find out about nearby outdoor activities, which are likely to seem very enticing after a glimpse of the soaring Cairngorms mountain range or the Glenmore Forest Park, a protected area that's home to one of Scotland's last remaining tracts of ancient Caledonian pinewood.

For summer visitors who'd rather avoid Aviemore, the planned Georgian town of **Grantown-on-Spey** makes a good alternative base. Further upriver, the sedate villages of **Newtonmore** and **Kingussie** are older-established holiday centres, more popular with anglers and grouse hunters than canoeists and climbers. The whole area boasts a wide choice of good-quality accommodation, particularly in the budget market, with various easy-going hostels run by and for outdoor enthusiasts.

Aviemore and around

The once-sleepy village of **AVIEMORE** was first developed as a ski and tourism resort in the mid-1960s and, over the years, fell victim to profiteering developers with scant regard for the needs of the local community. Despite recent attempts to turn things around, it remains a soulless hotchpotch of retail outlets, café-bars and characterless housing developments. That said, Aviemore is undeniably well equipped with services and facilities and is the most convenient base for the Cairngorms.

In summer, the main activities around Aviemore are **walking** (see p.424) and **watersports**, and there are great opportunities for pony trekking and fly-fishing (for the latter, the Aviemore tourist office provides a brochure outlining which permits you'll need).

For both the adventurous and novice cyclist, the entire region is great for mountain biking; the **Rothiemurchus Estate** has several excellent (and non-technical) way-marked trails running through its extensive lands. Sailing, windsurfing and canoeing are also popular, with a specialist centre at **Loch Insh** providing lessons and loaning out equipment.

Wintertime sees the tourist focus switch away from the lochs and rivers and up towards the surrounding slopes, home to a well-established **ski resort** and the country's only **dogsled centre**.

Strathspey Steam Railway

Aviemore Station, Dalfaber Road • July & Aug three times daily; less regular service at other times • £13 return • T 01479 810725, W strathspeyrailway.co.uk

The main attractions of Aviemore are its outdoor pursuits, though train enthusiasts are also drawn to the restored **Strathspey Steam Railway**, which chugs the short distance between Aviemore and Broomhill, just beyond Boat of Garten village. The return journey takes an hour and a half, with glimpses of the Cairngorm Mountains visible through the trees.

Cairngorm Sleddog Adventure Centre

Moormore Cottage, three miles east of Aviemore on the Rothiemurchus Estate • Sledding Oct–April, by appointment • Museum £8; 30min sled experience £60/person; 3hr sleddog safaris £175/person • T 07767 270526, W sled-dogs.co.uk

Between Loch Morlich and Inverdruie lies the **Cairngorm Sleddog Adventure Centre**, the UK's only sleddog centre. On a pre-booked tour of the centre's museum you can meet the centre's dogs and learn more about the history of sledding. More exhilarating are the centre's thirty-minute trips through the forest on a wheeled or ski-based sled, pulled by around ten dogs.

Cairngorm Ski Area

Nine miles southeast of Aviemore • Ski season Dec–April, but varies depending on snowfall • T 01479 861319, W cairngormmountain.org • Buses from Aviemore wind past Inverdruie, stopping at the Coire Cas car park, near the funicular railway's base station

By Continental European and North American standards it's all on a tiny scale, but occasionally snow and sun coincide at the **Cairngorm Ski Area** to offer beginner and expert alike a great day on the pistes. High above Loch Morlich in Glenmore Forest Park, the ski area is well served by public transport. From the car park at Coire Cas (2150ft), the year-round **funicular railway** is the principal means of getting to the top of the ski slopes.

Base station

Accessed via the Coire Cas car park • Ranger office daily: April–Oct 8.30am–5pm; Nov–March 8.30am–4.30pm • Free

At the Cairngorm Ski Area base station there's a **ranger office** where you can find out about various trails, check the latest weather report and – on fine days between May and October – join guided walks. The "Guided Walk @ The Top" (£15.95; allow two and a half hours) involves riding the funicular part way up the mountain, joining a guided walk to the summit, and then taking the funicular back down to the base station. Guided mountain-bike descents of the mountain can also be arranged (from £22.50).

Cairn Gorm Mountain Railway

Leaves from the base station • Daily: May–Oct 10.20am–4.30pm, Nov–April 9am–4.30pm; last train up 4pm; every 20min • £10.30

The Cairngorm Ski Area base station is the departure point for the **Cairn Gorm Mountain Railway**, a two-car funicular system that runs to the top of the ski area. A highly controversial £15 million scheme that was bitterly opposed by conservationists, the railway whisks skiers in winter, and tourists throughout the year, along a mile and a half of track to the top station at an altitude of 3600ft, not far from the summit of Cairn Gorm mountain (4085ft). The top station incorporates an exhibition/

WALKS AROUND AVIEMORE

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 402 & 403

Walking of all grades is a highlight of the Aviemore area, though you should heed the usual safety guidelines (see p.43). These are particularly important if you want to venture into the subarctic climatic zone of the **Cairngorms**. However, as well as the high mountain trails, there are some lovely and well-signposted low-level walks in the area.

LOCH AN EILEAN

It takes an hour or so to complete the gentle circular walk around pretty Loch an Eilean (with its ruined castle) in the **Rothiemurchus Estate**, beginning at the end of the back road that turns east off the B970 a mile south of Inverdruie. The helpful estate visitor centres at the loch-side and by the roadside at Inverdruie provide more information on other woodland trails.

RYVOAN PASS

Another good, shortish (half-day) walk leads along a well-surfaced forestry track from *Glenmore Lodge* (see opposite) up towards the **Ryvoan Pass**, taking in An Lochan Uaine, known as the "Green Loch" and living up to its name, with amazing colours that range from turquoise to slate grey depending on the weather.

MEALL A' BHUACHALLIE

The **Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre** (daily 9am–5pm; T 01479 861220, W www.forestry.gov.uk) by the roadside at the turn-off to *Glenmore Lodge* is the starting point for the three-hour return climb of Meall a' Bhuachallie (2654ft), which offers excellent views and is usually accessible year-round. The centre has information on other trails in this section of the forest too.

interpretation area and a café/restaurant from which spectacular views can be had on clear days. Note, there is no access beyond the confines of the top station and its open-air viewing terrace, so unless you're embarking on a winter skiing trip or a guided walk, you'll have to trudge up from the car park at the bottom.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Aviemore's train station is on Grampian Road, just south of the tourist office.

Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 12 daily, Sun 6 daily; 3hr); Glasgow (11 daily, Sun 6 daily; 2hr 50min); Inverness (Mon–Sat 11 daily, Sun 7 daily; 40min).

AVIEMORE AND AROUND

By bus Buses depart from outside the train station.

Destinations Cairngorm ski area (hourly; 30min); Edinburgh (6 daily; 3–4hr); Glasgow (5 daily; 2hr 40min–3hr 20min); Grantown-on-Spey (Mon–Sat 1–2/hr, Sun 4 daily; 30min); Inverness (at least 11 daily; 45min).

GETTING AROUND

By bus The most useful local bus route is the #31, which runs hourly from Aviemore to the Cairn Gorm Mountain Railway (see p.422) via Rothiemurchus and Loch Morlich. The #34 service is also handy, running regularly (roughly hourly) to Grantown via Boat of Garten.

INFORMATION

Tourist office 7 The Parade, Grampian Rd (April & May Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; June Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 9.30am–5pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–6.30pm, Sun 9.30am–6pm; Sept–March 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; T 01479 810930). Offers an accommodation booking service and reams of leaflets on local attractions.

ACTIVITES

FISHING

Rothiemurchus Estate Inverdruie T 01479 810703, W rothiemurchus.com. Has a stocked rainbow trout-fishing loch, where success is virtually guaranteed. A one-hour lesson followed by an hour's fishing costs £45. July–Aug 9.30am–9pm, Sept–June 9.30am–5.30pm.

HORSE RIDING

Alvie Stables Five miles south of Aviemore, near Kincraig T 07831 495397, W alvie-estate.co.uk. Family-friendly riding centre set in superb countryside a short drive from Aviemore, offering 30min lessons and longer guided rides (£25/hr).

OUTDOOR TRAINING

National Outdoor Training Centre Glenmore Lodge, 8 miles east of Aviemore ☎01479 861256, ⓦglenmorelodge.org.uk. For a crash course in surviving Scottish winters, you could do worse than try a week at the National Outdoor Training Centre, at the east end of Loch Morlich. This superbly equipped and organized centre (complete with cosy après-ski bar) offers winter and summer courses in hillwalking, mountaineering, alpine ski-mountaineering, avalanche awareness and much more.

SKIING

G2 Outdoor Plot 10, Dalfaber Industrial Estate, Aviemore ☎01479 811008, ⓦg2outdoor.co.uk. The experts at G2 Outdoor will provide one-to-one tuition in the art of telemarking (£12/2hr) and back-country skiing. In summer, they also run kayaking and canyoning trips.

Mountain Spirit 98 Grampian Rd ☎01479 811788, ⓦmountainspirit.co.uk. If you want to buy or rent equipment, from ski boots and poles to mountaineering gear, pay a visit to this friendly and well-stocked shop in the centre of Aviemore. Daily 9am–5.30pm.

The Ski School In the Day Lodge, near the funicular railway's base station in the Cairngorm Ski Area ☎08455 191191, ⓦtheskischool.co.uk. A good bet for ski/board rental and lessons, not least because of its proximity to the funicular, which whizzes skiers up to the slopes. Courses run mid-Dec to early April.

WATERSPORTS

Loch Insh Watersports Centre Six miles up-valley near Kincraig ☎01540 651272, ⓦlochinsh.com. Offers sailing, windsurfing and canoeing trips and rents mountain bikes (£19/day), as well as boats for fishing. To save visitors travelling back and forth from Aviemore, the centre also offers accommodation.

ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS AND B&BS

★ **Corrour House Hotel** Inverdruie, 2 miles southeast of Aviemore ☎01479 810220, ⓦcorrourhousehotel.co.uk. A secluded small hotel, surrounded by countryside, with a nice, classy vibe. Good choice if you want to avoid staying in the centre of town. £96

Glenmore Lodge 8 miles east of Aviemore ☎01479 861256, ⓦglenmorelodge.org.uk. Specialist outdoor pursuits centre with excellent accommodation in en-suite twin rooms and self-catered lodges – guests can make use of the superb facilities, which include a pool, weights room, sauna and indoor climbing wall. Twins £74

Ravenscraig Guest House 141 Grampian Rd ☎01479 810278, ⓦaviemoreonline.com. This welcoming, family-friendly B&B has a handy central location. Single, double and family rooms available, plus a wide choice of breakfast options, including sausages bought from a local butcher. £80

HOSTELS AND BUNKHOUSES

Aviemore Bunkhouse Dalfaber Rd, next to the Old Bridge Inn ☎01479 811181, ⓦaviemore-bunkhouse.com. A large modern place beside a cosy pub and walking distance from the station, with 6- and 8-bed dorms, plus private rooms. Dorms £19; doubles £50

Aviemore SYHA 25 Grampian Rd ☎01479 810345, ⓦsyha.org.uk. Aviemore's large SYHA hostel, with its own bike store and drying room, has rather plain rooms but is within easy walking distance of the town centre. Dorms £17; singles £25; twins £45

Cairngorm Lodge Six and a half miles east of Aviemore, by Loch Morlich ☎01479 861238, ⓦsyha.org.uk. A SYHA hostel towards the Cairngorms at Loch Morlich, located in an old shooting lodge. Feb–Oct, plus weekends in Jan. Dorms £17; twins £45

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

The **Cairngorms National Park** (ⓦcairngorms.co.uk) covers almost 1750 square miles and incorporates the Cairngorms massif, the largest mountainscape in the UK and the only sizeable plateau in the country over 2500ft. It's the biggest national park in Britain, and while Aviemore and the surrounding area are regarded as the main point of entry, particularly for those planning outdoor activities, it's also possible to access the park from Perthshire as well as Deeside and Donside in **Aberdeenshire**. Crossing the range is a significant challenge: by road the only connection is the A939 from Tomintoul to Cock Bridge, frequently impassable in winter due to snow, while on foot the only way to avoid the high peaks is to follow the old cattle drovers' route called the **Lairig Ghru**, a very long day's walk between Inverdruie at the edge of Rothiemurchus and the Linn of Dee, near Inverey.

The name Cairngorm comes from the Gaelic An Carm Gorm, meaning "the blue hill" after the blueish-tinged stones found in the area. The park is home to a quarter of Scotland's native woodland and a quarter of the UK's threatened wildlife species; the tracts of ancient Caledonian forest at Rothiemurchus (see p.424) are even home to red squirrels.

CAMPING

Rothiemurchus Caravan Park Two miles southeast of Aviemore in Coylumbridge 01479 812800, rothiemurchus.net. Relaxed site for tents and caravans, nestled among tall pine trees at Coylumbridge, on the way to Loch Morlich. £10/person

EATING AND DRINKING

★ **Mountain Café** 111 Grampian Road 01479 812473. Above the Cairngorm Mountain Sports shop in the centre of town, Kiwi-run *Mountain Café* is reasonably priced, serving an all-day menu of wholesome snacks (scones cost £1.60) and freshly prepared meals. Specializes in wheat- and gluten-free food. Fri–Sun & Mon 8.30am–5.30pm, Tues–Thurs 8.30am–5pm.

Old Bridge Inn Dalfaber Rd, next to Aviemore Bunkhouse 01479 811137. Fire-warmed pub that hosts regular live music sessions and serves up decent dinners; the menu includes a whole grilled sea bream with new potatoes and dressed leaves for £16. Mon–Thurs & Sun noon–midnight, Fri & Sat noon–1am.

Super Panther Bar & Kitchen 12–13 Aviemore Centre, Grampian Road 01479 811670. Unexpectedly cool bar that wouldn't look out of place in Camden or Brooklyn, selling waffles, pancakes and smoothies (£3.50) as well as burgers (£10 with chips and a drink) and cocktails (£6.50). Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–9.30pm, Fri & Sat 10am–1am.

Carrbridge

Worth considering as an alternative to Aviemore – particularly as a skiing base – **CARRBRIDGE** is a pleasant, quiet village about seven miles to the north. Look out for the spindly Bridge of Carr at the northern end of the village, built in 1717 and still making a graceful stone arch over the River Dulnain.

Landmark Forest Adventure Park

Just off the B9153 at the southern end of the village • Daily: April to mid-July 10am–5/6pm; mid-July to Aug 10am–7pm; Sept–March 10am–5pm • £11.55 • 08007 313446 landmarkpark.co.uk

The main attraction in Carrbridge is the **Landmark Forest Adventure Park**, which offers families a host of excellent outdoor and indoor activities including forest walks, nature trails, water fun rides and a vertiginous wooden tower with 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CARRBRIDGE

By train The train station is around half a mile west of the village centre, served by trains from Aviemore and Inverness. Destinations Aviemore (5–6 daily; 10min); Inverness (4–5 daily; 30min).

By bus Frequent buses (every 1–2hr; 15min) connect Aviemore with the car park that lies 200m south of the river on the B9153.

ACCOMMODATION

MellonPatch Station Road, roughly halfway between the train station and the Bridge of Carr 01479 841592, mellonpatch.com. Rambling house with good, large rooms and friendly owners. The rates, including a full Scottish breakfast, are low for this area. £60

Boat of Garten

Seven miles northeast of Aviemore, close to the River Spey, is the attractive village of **BOAT OF GARTEN**, which has a number of good accommodation options. A short drive or pleasant walk away on the other side of the river is the northeastern shore of **Loch Garten**, famous as the nesting site of the osprey, one of Britain's rarest birds.

Abernethy Forest RSPB Reserve

Two and a half miles east of Boat of Garten, on the northeastern edge of Loch Garten • Reserve open year-round; visitor centre daily: April–Aug 10am–6pm; 3hr guided walks late May to early Aug Wed 9.30am • £4; guided walks £5 • 01479 831476, rspb.org.uk •

The **Abernethy Forest RSPB Reserve** on the shore of **Loch Garten**, a short drive from the attractive village of Boat of Garten and seven miles northeast of Aviemore, is famous as

the nesting site of one of Britain's rarest birds. A little over fifty years ago, the **osprey**, known in North America as the fish hawk, had completely disappeared from the British Isles. Then, in 1954, a single pair of these exquisite white-and-brown raptors mysteriously reappeared and built a nest in a tree half a mile or so from the loch. One year's eggs fell victim to thieves, and thereafter the area became the centre of an effective high-security operation. There are now believed to be up to 300 pairs nesting across the UK.

The best time to visit is between April and August, when the ospreys return from West Africa and the RSPB opens an **observation centre**, complete with powerful telescopes and CCTV monitoring of the nest.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — BOAT OF GARTEN

By train Strathspey Steam Railway trains (July & Aug daily, less frequent at other times) stop at the attractive old station in the centre of Boat of Garten.

Destinations Aviemore (3 daily; 15min); Broomhill (3 daily; 25min).

By bus Buses from Aviemore run hourly to Boat of Garten, stopping outside the post office on Deshar Rd.

By car The visitor centre is about two and a half miles east of Boat of Garten: from the village, cross the Spey then take the Grantown road, and the reserve is signposted to the right.

Bike rental You can rent two-wheeled transport from Cairngorm Bike and Hire near the station (Daily July & Aug 9.30am–5.30pm; limited hours at other times; T 01479 831745, W cairngormbikeandhike.co.uk) for £16/day.

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ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Anderson's Deshar Road, 300m west of the train station T 01479 831466, W andersonsrestaurant.co.uk. Attractive place for lunch or dinner, serving creative dishes based on local ingredients, like their Highland lamb, rosemary and root vegetable hotpot (£14.95). Daily: noon–1.45pm & 6–9.30pm.

Boat Hotel Just across from the railway station in Boat of Garten T 01479 831258, W boathotel.co.uk. The most elegant place to stay in the village, with fresh, airy bedrooms. The hotel also has a bistro serving its own interpretations of Scottish favourites – from Cullen skink to chicken tikka masala. £110

Fraoch Lodge 15 Deshar Rd T 01479 831331, W scotmountainholidays.com. Excellent hostel providing high-quality home-cooked meals along with good facilities such as a purpose-built drying room. Enthusiastically run by experienced mountaineers, who also offer guided walking holidays. Minimum stay of two nights when booking in advance; please note that prices quoted here are per night, based on a two-night stay. Singles £21; twins £42

Old Ferryman's House Just east of the village, across the Spey T 01479 831370. A wonderfully simple, and homely B&B, with an old-school approach: no TVs, lots of books and delicious evening meals and breakfasts. £70

Grantown-on-Spey

Around fifteen miles northeast of Aviemore, the pretty town of **GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY** makes a good alternative base for exploring the Strathspey area. Local life is concentrated around the central square, with its attractive Georgian architecture, but there are plenty of opportunities for hiking and biking in the immediate area.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY

By bus Buses from Aviemore and Inverness stop on Grantown-on-Spey's High Street.

Destinations Aviemore (roughly hourly; 35min); Inverness (at least 2 per day Mon–Sat; 1hr 10min).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office 54 High Street (April–June, Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm; July & Aug Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–4pm; T 01479 872242, W grantownonspey.com.) Grantown's seasonal tourist office has leaflets on local attractions, as well as maps of the area.

Bike rental You'll find good bikes and decent coffee at BaseCamp Bikes (Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–5pm; T 01479 870050, W basecampmtb.com; £25/day), next door to the Co-op convenience store on the town's main square.

ACCOMMODATION

Garth Hotel Castle Road, at the north end of the town square 01479 872 836, www.garthhotel.com. If you're after some reasonably swish accommodation head for the large seventeenth-century *Garth Hotel*, where the restaurant serves respectable, traditional meat-based dinners. £95

Dunallan House Woodside Avenue 01479 872140, dunallan.com. Large house with big double rooms – all en suite or with private facilities – and comfy, welcoming lounges to relax in. The room on the top floor, with a freestanding bathtub across the landing, is the pick of the bunch. £86

Lazy Duck Hostel A mile or two south of town, Nethy Bridge 01479 821642, lazyduck.co.uk. Tiny, eight-bed hostel with its own sauna. Makes a peaceful and comfortable retreat, with woodland camping (May–Oct) and great moorland walking on its doorstep. Dorms £15; £15/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

Craig Bar Woodside Avenue 01479 872669. Snug pub full of military aviation memorabilia, from pictures of fighter planes to dangling model aircraft. Warm yourself by the fire with a pint of real ale while you choose some food. The choice is made easy; the jovial landlord only sells pies (£7.50). Mon–Fri 5pm–midnight, Sat & Sun 11am–midnight.

Revack Highland Estate Two miles south of town on the B970 01479 872234. At this café-cum-gift-shop on the 350-acre Revack estate you can watch red squirrels at play as you tuck into a fresh herring salad with mustard and dill (£7.95). Daily 10am–5pm.

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Kingussie

Twelve miles southwest of Aviemore at the head of the Strathspey Valley, **KINGUSSIE** (pronounced "king-yoos-ee") is a pleasant village best known for the free-to-access ruins of **Ruthven Barracks**, which stand east across the river on a hillock. The best-preserved garrison built to pacify the Highlands after the 1715 rebellion, it makes for great exploring by day and is impressively floodlit at night.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KINGUSSIE

By train Kingussie's train station is on Station Road, just south of the A86.

Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 7 daily, Sun 5 daily; 2hr 40min); Glasgow (Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 2 daily; 2hr 30min); Inverness (Mon–Sat 12 daily, Sun 7 daily; 55min); Newtonmore (Mon–Sat 5 daily, Sun 3 daily; 5min).

By bus Buses arrive and depart from near the Duke of Gordon Hotel, on the High Street.

Destinations Edinburgh (5 daily; 3hr 30min); Inverness (Mon–Sat 8 daily, Sun 5 daily; 1hr); Newtonmore (roughly hourly; 5min).

ACCOMMODATION

★ **The Cross** North of the centre off Ardbroilach Road 01540 661166, thecross.co.uk. One of the most appealing places to stay in the whole of Speyside, this relaxed but stylish restaurant (see below) with rooms is located in a converted tweed mill on the River Gynack. £120

The Laird's Bothy 68 High Street 01540 661334, thetipsylaird.co.uk. For a cheap, comfortable bed try this hostel on the High Street. It's attached to the *Tipsy Laird* pub, which hosts occasional jam sessions and karaoke nights. Dorms £17

EATING AND DRINKING

The Cross North of the centre off Ardbroilach Road 01540 661166, thecross.co.uk. The most ambitious (and costly) restaurant in the area, where a three-course meal carefully crafted from fresh Scottish ingredients like Shetland lobster and Perthshire lamb costs £50. Daily 7–8.30pm.

The Potting Shed 84 High Street. Cute little tearoom with teacups hanging in the window. Good spot for a drink, but your main objective should be devouring one of the tasty, wheat-free cakes with fruity fillings (£4.50). Thurs–Mon 9.30am–5pm.

Newtonmore

Kingussie's closest neighbour, **NEWTONMORE**, is also its biggest rival. The two villages, separated by a couple of miles of farmland, both have long-established shinty teams that battle for dominance in the game – a fierce indigenous sport

from which ice hockey and golf evolved. Newtonmore itself is notable for its top-notch **folk museum**, and there are plenty of mountain-biking routes in the forests to the south.

Highland Folk Museum

Kingussie Road • Daily: April–Aug 10.30am–5.30pm; Sept & Oct 11am–4.30pm • Free; donation requested • highlandfolk.com

Newtonmore's chief attraction is the excellent **Highland Folk Museum**. The outdoor site is a living history museum, with reconstructions of a working croft, a water-powered sawmill and a church where recitals on traditional Highland instruments are given.

Laggan Wolftrax

Eight miles southwest of Newtonmore on the A86, just beyond the junction with the A889 from Dalwhinnie • Free; car parking £3/day • 01463 791575, www.forestry.gov.uk

Laggan Wolftrax is a superb, free facility with more than twenty miles of marked mountain-biking trails to suit all abilities. The three-mile-long green route is the best place for those starting out, but expert riders might prefer the gruelling black route, which traverses a steep and rocky staircase made up of uneven slabs.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — NEWTONMORE

By train The train station is south of the centre on Station Road.

Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Sat 3 daily, Sun 2 daily; 2hr 30min); Glasgow (Mon–Sat 2 daily, Sun 1 daily; 2hr 20min); Inverness (Mon–Sat 5 daily, Sun 3 daily; 55min); Kingussie (Mon–Sat 5 daily, Sun 3 daily; 5min).

By bus Buses for Edinburgh and Inverness arrive and depart from Main Street.

Destinations Edinburgh (Mon–Fri 5 daily; 3hr 25min); Inverness (Mon–Sat 8 daily, Sun 5 daily; 1hr 10min); Kingussie (roughly hourly; 5min).

INFORMATION

Tourist information For tourist information, including maps of walking trails that pass local waterfalls and forests, try the volunteer-run Wildcat Centre on Main Street (June–Aug Mon & Thurs 9.30am–12.30pm, Tues & Sat 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5pm; Sept–May Mon, Thurs & Sat 9.30am–12.30pm; 01540 673131).

ACCOMMODATION

Coig Na Shee Laggan Road, a 10-minute walk west of Main Street 01540 670109, coignashee.co.uk. A soothingly decorated B&B in an old Edwardian hunting lodge. Bright rooms with free wi-fi and good en-suite facilities. £75

The Pottery Bunkhouse Eight miles south of Newtonmore at Laggan Bridge 01528 544231, potterybunkhouse.co.uk. The most convenient accommodation for Laggan Wolftrax, with an excellent coffee shop, good-value rooms and even an outdoor hot tub (extra charge). Dorms £12 (bedding £4 extra)

Speyside

Strictly speaking, the term **SPEYSIDE** refers to the entire region surrounding the River Spey, but to most people the name is synonymous with the "**whisky triangle**", stretching from just north of Craigellachie, down towards Tomintoul in the south and east to Huntly. Indeed, there are more whisky distilleries and famous brands concentrated in this small area than in any other part of the country.

At the centre of Speyside is the quiet market town of **Dufftown**, full of solid, stone-built workers' houses and dotted with no fewer than nine whisky distilleries. It's one of the best bases for a tour of whisky country, whether you're on the official Malt Whisky Trail or more independent explorations. Fewer visitors take the chance to discover the more remote glens, such as Glenlivet, which push higher up towards the Cairngorm massif, nestled into which is Britain's highest village, **Tomintoul**, situated on the edge of both whisky country and a large expanse of wild uplands. Though not

THE SPEYSIDE WAY

The **Speyside Way** (Ⓦ speysideway.org), with its beguiling blend of mountain, river, wildlife and whisky, is fast establishing itself as an appealing and less taxing alternative to the popular West Highland and Southern Upland long-distance footpaths. Starting at **Buckie** on the Moray Firth coast (see p.386), it follows the fast-flowing River Spey from its mouth at Spey Bay south to **Aviemore**, with branches linking it to **Dufftown**, Scotland's malt whisky capital, and **Tomintoul** on the remote edge of the Cairngorm mountains. Some 65 miles long without taking on the branch routes, the whole thing is a five- to seven-day expedition, but its proximity to main roads and small villages means that it is excellent for shorter walks or even cycling trips, especially in the heart of **distillery** country between Craigellachie and Glenlivet; the Glenfiddich, Glenlivet, Macallan and Cardhu distilleries, as well as the Speyside Cooperage, lie directly on or a short distance off the route.

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surrounded by distilleries, the market town of **Huntly** has an impressive ruined castle and serves as a useful point of entry if you're coming into the region from the Aberdeenshire side.

GETTING AROUND SPEYSIDE

By train The only mainline railway stops in the area are at Keith, twelve miles northeast of Dufftown, and Huntly.

By bus Transport connections are poor through the area, with irregular buses connecting the main villages.

Dufftown

The cheery community of **DUFFTOWN**, founded in 1817 by James Duff, fourth Earl of Fife, proudly proclaims itself "Malt Whisky Capital of the World" for the reason that it produces more of the stuff than any other town in Britain. A more telling statistic, perhaps, is that as a result Dufftown also reportedly raises more capital for the exchequer per head of population than anywhere else in the country. There are seven active distilleries around Dufftown, as well as a cooperage, and an extended stroll around the outskirts of the town gives a good idea of the density of whisky distilling going on, with glimpses of giant warehouses and whiffs of fermenting barley or peat smoke lingering on the breeze. On the edge of town along the A941 is the town's largest working distillery, **Glenfiddich** (see box opposite),

There isn't a great deal to do in the town itself, but it's a useful starting point for orienting yourself towards the whisky trail. Dufftown's four main streets converge on its main square, scene of a lively annual party at Hogmanay when free drams are handed out to revellers.

Whisky Museum

24 Fife St • Daily 10am–4/5pm • Free

The small, volunteer-run **Whisky Museum** has a slightly disorganized collection of illicit distilling equipment, most of which has been donated by local distilleries. There are also plenty of old books and photographs to help to give visitors a flavour for the industry's humble beginnings.

Keith & Dufftown Railway

Station Road • April–Sept Sat & Sun 3 trips daily; June–Aug also Fri • £10 return • Ⓣ 01340 821181, Ⓦ keith-dufftown-railway.co.uk for journey times

Restored by enthusiasts, the old Dufftown train station is now the departure point for the **Keith & Dufftown Railway**, which uses various restored diesel locomotives to chug forty minutes through whisky country to Keith, home of the Strathisla distillery (see box opposite).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses arrive and depart from the road outside the railway station.

DUFFTOWN

Destinations Aberlour (Mon–Sat hourly; 10–15min); Elgin (Mon–Sat hourly; 50min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Inside the handsome clock tower at the centre of the square (☎01340 820501) . The small tourist office can offer advice on which distilleries to visit. April–June & Sept Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; July & Aug 10am–5pm.

ACCOMMODATION

Loch Park Adventure Centre Three miles northeast of Dufftown on the Drummuir Castle Estate ☎01542 810334, ⓦlochpark.co.uk. It's possible to camp, rent kayaks (£12) and fish (£18) at this outdoor centre, which has self-catering bunkhouse accommodation. Unfortunately there's no public transport this far, and groups are given priority – so call ahead. Dorms £15; £12/pitch

Morven On the main square ☎01340 820507, ⓦmorvendufftown.co.uk. Simple, inexpensive B&B that's conveniently located near the tourist office and the

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TOURING MALT WHISKY COUNTRY

Speyside is the heart of Scotland's **whisky** industry, and the presence of more than fifty distilleries is testimony to a unique combination of clear, clean water, benign climate and gentle upland terrain. Yet for all the advertising-influenced visions of timeless traditions, whisky is a multimillion-pound business dominated by huge corporations, and to many working distilleries visitors are an afterthought, if not a downright nuisance. That said, plenty are located in attractive historic buildings that now go to some lengths to provide an engaging experience for visitors. Mostly this involves a tour around the essential stages in the whisky-making process, though a number of distilleries now offer pricier connoisseur tours with a tutored tasting (or **nosing**, as it's properly called) and in-depth studies of the distiller's art. Some tours have restrictions on children.

There are eight distilleries on the official **Malt Whisky Trail** (ⓦmaltwhiskytrail.com), a clearly signposted seventy-mile meander around the region. These are Benromach, Cardhu, Dallas Dhu Historic Distillery, Glenfiddich, Glen Grant, Glenlivet, Glen Moray and Strathisla. Unless you're seriously interested in whisky, it's best to just pick out a couple that appeal. All offer a guided tour. You could cycle or walk parts of the route, using the Speyside Way (see box opposite). The following is a list of selected highlights from the area (not all are on the official trail):

Glen Grant Rothes. Makes a well-known, floral whisky aggressively marketed to the younger customer. The highlight here is the attractive Victorian gardens, a mix of well-tended lawns and mixed, mature trees that include a tumbling waterfall and a hidden whisky safe; tours £3.50 including voucher. Mid-Jan to mid-Dec Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm;

Glendronach 8 miles northeast of Huntly. Off the official trail, this isolated distillery makes much of the fact that, uniquely, its stills are heated in the traditional method by coal fires; tours £5. May–Sept daily 10am–4.30pm; Oct–April Mon–Fri 10am–4.30pm.

Glenfiddich On the A941 just north of Dufftown. The biggest and slickest of all the Speyside distilleries, despite the fact that it's still owned by the same Grant family who founded it in 1887. It's a light, sweet whisky packaged in triangular bottles – unusually, the bottling is still done on the premises and is part of the tours (offered in various languages); tours free. Daily 9.30am–4.30pm.

Glenlivet On the B9008 to Tomintoul. A famous name in a lonely hillside setting. This was the first licensed distillery in the Highlands, following the 1823 act that aimed to reduce illicit distilling and smuggling. The Glenlivet 12-year-old malt is a floral, fragrant, medium-bodied whisky; tours free. April–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm.

Macallan Near Craigellachie. Small tours, and a classy whisky aged in sherry casks to give it a rich colour and flavour; tours £10. April–Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.30pm; Sept & Oct Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 11am–3pm.

Strathisla Keith. A small, old-fashioned distillery claiming to be Scotland's oldest (1786); it's certainly one of the most attractive, with the River Isla rushing by. Inside there's an old-fashioned mashtun and brass-bound spirit safes. You can arrive here on one of the restored trains of the Keith & Dufftown Railway; tours £6. April–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm.

Speyside Cooperage Craigellachie. This cooperage – which produces and repairs the casks used in whisky-making – is the only stop on the official trail that isn't a distillery, and offers fascinating glimpses of a highly skilled and vital part of the industry; tours £3.50. Mon–Fri 9.30am–4pm.

Whisky Museum in the middle of town. The owners offer a small reduction for longer stays. £50

Tannochbrae Guest House 22 Fife St 01340 820541, tannochbrae.co.uk. Pleasant and enthusiastically run former provost's house near the main square, with six comfortable en-suite rooms, a lovely restaurant and a well-stocked whisky bar. £73

EATING AND DRINKING

Taste of Speyside Just off The Square at 10 Balverie St 01340 820860. You can sample a range of quality Scottish food at the town's most popular restaurant, where mains include a vegetable crumble made with tomato and basil sauce. You'll pay around £20 for two courses. Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

Dufftown Glassworks 16 Conval Street 01340 821534, dufftownglassworks.com. This combined café and gallery is a smart place to sit with a latte or Americano and plan your trip around whisky country. The rocky road slices (£1.80) are scrumptious. Daily 10.30am–5pm.

SHOPPING

The Whisky Shop 1 Fife Street 01340 821 097, whiskyshopdufftown.co.uk. This mind-bogglingly well-stocked shop has over six hundred malts and umpteen beers, produced not just on Speyside but all over Scotland. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm & Sun 10am–5pm.

Tomintoul

Deep into the foothills of the Cairngorms, **TOMINTOUL** (pronounced "*tom*-in-towel") is, at 1150ft, the highest village in the Scottish Highlands, and the northern gateway to the **Lecht Ski Area** (see opposite). Its long, thin layout is reminiscent of a Wild West frontier town; Queen Victoria wrote that it was "the most tumble-down, poor looking place I ever saw". A spur of the Speyside Way connects Ballindalloch through Glenlivet to Tomintoul, and there are plenty of other terrific walking opportunities in the area, as well as some great routes for mountain biking.

Glenlivet Crown Estate

If you've come this far it's worth exploring the Glenlivet Crown Estate, an extensive tract of carefully managed land abutting Tomintoul; information and useful maps about its wildlife (including reindeer) and the numerous paths and bike trails are available from the tourist office or the estate **ranger's office** at the southern end of the long main street.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — TOMINTOUL

By car The only reliable way to reach Tomintoul is by car; from Grantown-on-Spey the A939 snakes east, passing Tomintoul on the way to Ballater.

INFORMATION

Tourist office On the central square, the helpful tourist office (April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; 01309 696261) also acts as the local museum, with mock-ups of an old farm kitchen and a smithie.

Estate ranger's office At the southern end of Main Street (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; 01479 870070, glenlivetestate.co.uk). The place to come for information on local walks and events.

ACCOMMODATION

The Bunkhouse Near the tourist office on the central square 01807 590752 or 07711 466340. Long, white hut with clean and cheap (if cramped) bunk rooms that shared a small kitchen. If no one is around, call for the access code. Dorms £17

Camping at Glenlivet It is possible to camp beside the Glenlivet Estate ranger's office for free, though there are no facilities here whatsoever. Free

Glenavon 01807 580218, glenavon-hotel.co.uk. The most convivial of the hotels gathered around the main square, with en-suite rooms above a bar that screens football matches and does cheap lunchtime meals (2 for £10). £70

Lecht Ski Area

Seven miles southeast of Tomintoul along the A939 • Open year-round • Full-day pass £28; ski rental costs £20/day from the ski school at the base station • For information on skiing and road conditions, call the base station on ☎ 01975 651440, or check ⓦ lecht.co.uk or ⓦ ski.visitscotland.com

The **Lecht** is the most remote of Scotland's ski areas, but it works hard to make itself appealing with a range of winter and summer activities. While its runs include some gentle beginners' slopes there's little really challenging for experienced skiers other than a **Snowboard Fun Park**, with specially built jumps and ramps. Snow-making equipment helps extend the snow season beyond January and February, while downhill bike tracks open in the summer (there's no bike hire on site, though).

Huntly

The ancient burgh of **HUNTLY**, ten miles east of Dufftown, has one of the smallest and prettiest, albeit rather skeletal, castles in the area. The town also makes a good base for salmon fishing on the Deveron River, which flows right past the castle, and it is just on the fringe of whisky country, with the isolated **Glendronach Distillery** (see box, p.431) the nearest to town.

Huntly Castle

Half a mile north of town near the river • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–Nov Mon–Wed, Sat & Sun 9.30am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS

Huntly Castle, power centre of the Gordon family, sits in a peaceful clearing on the banks of the Deveron River, a ten-minute walk from the town centre down Castle Street. Built over a period of five centuries, it became the headquarters of the Counter-Reformation in Scotland in 1562. During the Civil War the earl of Huntly, who had supported Charles I, was shot against his castle's walls, after which the place was left to fall into ruin.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — HUNTLY

By train Huntly is on the main train route from Aberdeen to Inverness. The station is on the east side of town, across the River Bogie.

Destinations Aberdeen (up to 11 daily; 55min); Elgin (up to 11 daily; 35min); Inverness (up to 11 daily; 1hr 25min).

By bus Buses arrive and depart from Gordon Street in the town centre.

Destinations Aberdeen (hourly; 1hr 20min); Elgin (hourly; 1hr); Inverness (hourly; 2hr 30min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office 9a, The Square (April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, July to mid-Aug also Sun 10am–4pm; ☎ 01466 792255). The friendly tourist office is in the middle of town, on the main square, and can provide information on the best places to go fishing.

ACCOMMODATION

Castle Hotel Marquis Drive ☎ 01466 792696, ⓦ castlehotel.uk.com. The former home of the duke of Gordon is now a classy hotel that stands at the end of a long driveway behind the castle ruins. The best rooms here have four-poster beds and fireplaces, and the on-site restaurant serves indulgent mains like baked guinea fowl for around £17. **£135**

Coynachie Guesthouse About 5 miles south of Huntly in Gartly ☎ 01466 720383, ⓦ coynachieguesthouse.com. Handsome, family-run B&B in the countryside south of Huntly, with three good-sized bedrooms and a cosy breakfast room. **£84**

The north and northwest Highlands

440 Morvern to Knoydart: the Rough Bounds

447 Kyle of Lochalsh and around

452 Wester Ross

461 Assynt

465 The far northwest coast

466 The north coast

472 The Black Isle and around

474 The Dornoch Firth and around

478 North to Wick

THE WEST HIGHLAND RAILWAY

The north and northwest Highlands

Come to the north and northwest Highlands, the area beyond the Great Glen, to sample the soul of the Highlands. This is a region of spectacular scenery: a combination of bare mountains, remote glens, dark lochs and tumbling rivers surrounded on three sides by a magnificent coastline. Although the inspiring landscape, along with its tranquility and space, are the main attractions, so too is the sense of remoteness, even today. The vast peat bogs in the north are among the most extensive and unspoilt wilderness areas in Europe and some of the west coast crofting villages can still be reached only by boat.

Different weather conditions and cultural histories give each of the three coastlines a distinct character. For many visitors, the Highlands' **west coast** is the reason to visit Scotland. The Vikings, who ruled the region in the ninth century, called it the "South Land", from which the modern district of Sutherland takes its name. After Culloden, the Clearances emptied most of the inland glens of the far north, and left the population clinging to the coastline, which is the main draw here. Cut by fjord-like **sea lochs**, it is scalloped by white-sand **beaches** or **waterfalls** in high, shattered cliffs, with **mountains** sweeping up from the shoreline. Weather fronts roll over rapidly but when the sun shines, the sparkle of the sea, the rich colours in the clear light and the clarity of the views to the Hebrides are pure magic. With exhilarating scenery everywhere you look, this is superb touring country. It also provides some of the best **cycling**, **walking** and **sea-kayaking** in Britain, superlative trout and salmon **fishing**, and wildlife by the ton. In fact the only issues are the west coast's predictably unpredictable **weather**, and the **midges** that drive even the locals to distraction from June to August.

The most visited part of the west coast is the stretch between Kyle of Lochalsh and Ullapool. This is **Wester Ross**, with quintessentially west-coast scenes of beautiful coast set against some of Scotland's most impressive mountains and Skye and the Western Isles on the horizon. The obvious highlights are the mountainscape of **Torridon**, **Gairloch**'s sandy beaches, the botanic gardens at **Inverewe**, and **Ullapool** itself, a bustling fishing town and launch pad for the Outer Hebrides. However, press on north or south and you get a truer sense of the isolation that makes this coast so special. Traversed by few roads, the remote northwest is wild and bleak. Villages in the southwest tend to be more sheltered, but they are separated by some of the most extensive wilderness areas in Britain – lonely peninsulas like **Ardnamurchan**, **Glenelg** or **Knoydart**, a magical peninsula with no road access and the remotest pub in mainland Britain.

The other coasts receive fewer visitors and of the two the **north coast** is more popular. Stretching from **Cape Wrath** at the very northwest tip of the mainland to **John O'Groats**, it is even more rugged than the west, its sheer cliffs and white-sand bays bearing the brunt of frequently fierce Atlantic storms. The only town here is **Thurso**, jumping-off point for the main ferry service to Orkney.

All of this makes the fertile **east coast** of the Highlands such a surprise. Stretching north from Inverness to the old herring port of **Wick**, it is a place of rolling moors, green

The West Highland Railway p.444
Walking into Knoydart p.446
Hiking in Glen Shiel p.449
Walks around Torridon p.453
Ceilidhs p.461
The Flow Country p.469

SANDWOOD BAY

Highlights

❶ **The West Highland Railway** Like Harry Potter and chums, ride the rails of Britain's most scenic train journey from Glasgow to Mallaig via Fort William for scenery that's more magical by the mile. **See p.444**

❷ **Knoydart** It can only be reached by boat or a two-day hike, but thrilling remoteness is not the only reason to visit Britain's last wilderness – there's also its most isolated pub, the *Old Forge*. **See p.446**

❸ **Wester Ross** Arguably Scotland's finest scenery: a heady mix of high mountains, sea lochs, sweeping bays, scattered islands and idyllic Applecross. **See p.452**

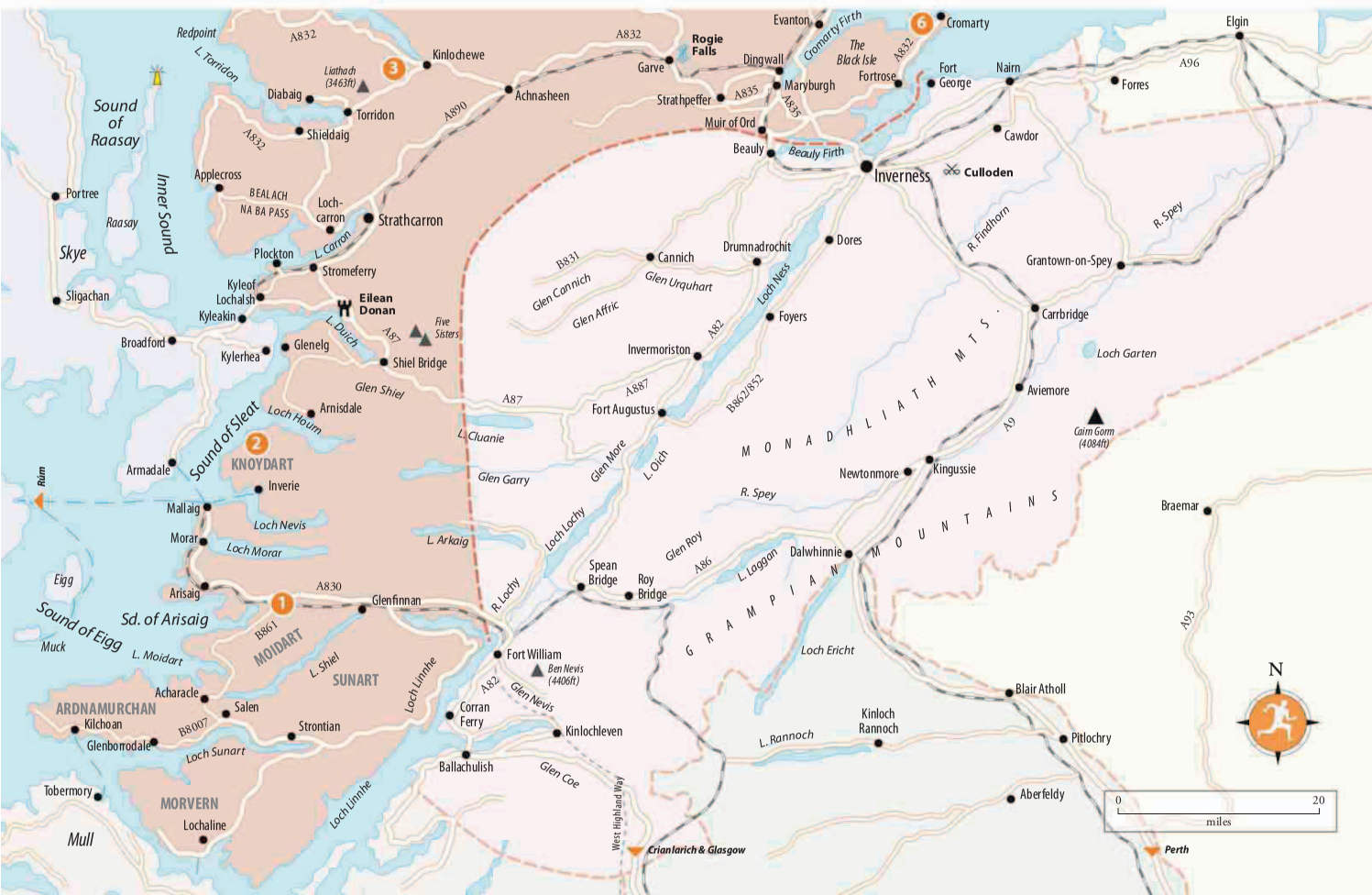
❹ **Suilven** Never mind the nine-hour climb to the summit, the fantastical sugarloaf outline of this iconic mountain is reason enough to travel to Assynt. **See p.463**

❺ **Sandwood Bay** It's a two-hour walk – or the start of a two-day hike around Cape Wrath – to this glorious beach at the tip of Britain. Watch out for mermaids. **See p.466**

❻ **Cromarty** A lovely mix-and-match of handsome Georgian townhouses and cute cottages all packaged up in a friendly small town on the coast. **See p.473**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.438

THE NORTH & NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS
HIGHLIGHTS
1 The West Highland Railway
2 Knoydart
3 Wester Ross
4 Suilven
5 Sandwood Bay
6 Cromarty
Hoy
Pentland Firth
Stroma
Dunnet Head
Duncansby Head
John O'Groats
Dunnet Bay
Scrabster
Thurso
Dounreay
Melvich
Strathy Pt.
A836
A956
Halkirk
Sinclair's Bay
Ness Head
Wick
Grey Cairns of Camster
Loch of Yarrows
Hill o' Many Stanes
Lybster
Dunbeath
Badbea
Helmsdale
Kildonan
Kinbrace
A897
Morven (2316ft)
Forsinard
FLOW COUNTRY
Strath Naver
BORGIE FOREST
Bettyhill
Kyle of Tongue
Tongue
Ben Loyal (2509ft)
Syre
Ben Hope (3040ft)
Altnaharra
Loch Naver
A838
Loch Eriboll
Durness
Smoo Cave
Kyle of Durness
Cape Wrath
Sandwood Bay
Sandwood Loch
Keodale
Sheigra
Kinlochbervie
Loch Laxford
Tarbet
Handa Island
Laxford Bridge
Scourie
A894
Foinaven (2980ft)
Eddrachillis Bay
Kylestrome
Kylesku
Eas-Coul-Aulin Falls
Drumbeg
Pt of Stoer
Achmelvich
B869
Lochinver
Loch Assynt
Inchnadamph
Canisp (2779ft)
A837
Ben More Assynt (3273ft)
Loch Shin
Altandhu
Suilven (2398ft)
Summer Isles
Achiltibuie
COIGACH
Stornoway
NORTH MINCH
Lewis
Lairg
Fall of Shin
Rogart
Brora
Dunrobin Castle
Golspie
L. Fleet
Carbisdale Castle
Bonar Bridge
A9
Dornoch
Dornoch Firth
Tarbat Ness
Portmahomack
Tain
Alness
Nigg
Moray Firth
Croick
Ardgay
Corrieshalloch Gorge
Braemore
Ullapool
A835
Loch Broom
Little Loch Broom
Gruinard Bay
Gruinard Island
Scoraig
Rua Reidh
Cove
Loch Ewe
Inverewe
Poolewe
Gairloch
Badachro
Loch Maree
Ben Wyvis (3432ft)


Redpoint
A832
L. Torridon
Liathach (3463ft)
3
Kinlochewe
A832
Garve
Rogie Falls
Dingwall
Evanton
Cromarty Firth
6
Cromarty
Elgin
The Black Isle
A832
Fortrose
Fort George
Nairn
A96
Forres
Sound of Raasay
Diabaig
Torridon
A890
Achnasheen
Strathpeffer
A835
Maryburgh
A835
Muir of Ord
Beauly
Beauly Firth
Cawdor
Inverness
Culloden
A832
Shieldaig
Applecross
Inner Sound
BEALACH NA BA PASS
Loch-carron
Strathcarron
Portree
Raasay
Skye
Plockton
L. Carron
Stromeferry
Kyleof Lochalsh
Sligachan
Kyleakin
Eilean Donan
L. Duich
A87
Five Sisters
Broadford
Glenelg
Kylerhea
Shiel Bridge
Glen Shiel
Arnisdale
Loch Hourn
Sound of Sleat
2
KNOYDART
Armadale
Rum
Inverie
Mallaig
Loch Nevis
Morar
Loch Morar
L. Arkaig
Eigg
Arisaig
A830
1
Glenfinnan
Sound of Eigg
Sd. of Arisaig
Muck
B8861
MOIDART
L. Moidart
L. Shiel
SUNART
Loch Linnhe
Acharacle
Salen
ARDNAMURCHAN
Kilchoan
B8007
Strontian
Glenborrodale
Loch Sunart
Tobermory
MORVERN
Lochaline
Mull
Loch Linnhe
Fort William
Ben Nevis (4406ft)
A82
Glen Nevis
Corran Ferry
Kinlochleven
Ballachulish
Glen Coe
West Highland Way
Crianlarich & Glasgow
R. Lochy
Spean Bridge
Roy Bridge
A86
Glen Roy
L. Laggan
Dalwhinnie
G R A M P I A N M O U N T A I N S
Loch Ericht
Blair Atholl
Kinloch Rannoch
L. Rannoch
Pitlochry
Aberfeldy
Perth
Braemar
A93
Drumnadrochit
Dores
Cannich
B831
Glen Cannich
Glen Affric
Glen Urquhart
Loch Ness
Foyers
Invermoriston
A82
Fort Augustus
A887
B862/852
Glen More
L. Ochy
L. Cluanie
A87
Loch Garten
Carrbridge
Grantown-on-Spey
R. Findhorn
R. Spey
M O N A D H L I A T H M T S .
Aviemore
A9
Caim Gorm (4084ft)
Newtonmore
Kingussie
R. Spey
Glen Garry
N
0
20
miles

fields and woodlands which run down to the sandy beaches of the **Black Isle** and **Cromarty** and **Dornoch firths**. If the west coast is about raw nature, the east is one of human history: **Golspie**'s Sutherland Monument and castle, **Dornoch**'s fourteenth-century sandstone cathedral, relics of the **Picts** and several sites linked to the **Clearances**.

Morvern to Knoydart: the Rough Bounds

Its Gaelic name *Garbh-chiochan* translates as the "**Rough Bounds**", implying a region geographically and spiritually apart, and the southwest corner of the Highlands is indeed remote and sparsely populated. From the empty district of **Morvern** to the isolated **Knoydart** peninsula are lonely mountains and moors, a rocky, indented coast studded by white beaches and wonderful views to Mull, Skye and other islands. It's scenery that begs you to spend time exploring on foot.

Morvern

Bounded on three sides by sea lochs and in the north by desolate Glen Tarbet, the mountainous **Morvern peninsula** lies at the southwest corner of the Rough Bounds. Many inhabitants of St Kilda were settled here when the island was abandoned (see p.511) and the landscape can seem bleak until the coast reveals views to Mull.

12

Lochaline

Most visitors only travel through the Morvern peninsula to get to **LOCHALINE** (pronounced "loch-*aa*lin") on the **Sound of Mull**, little more than a scattering of houses around a small pier built as a work-for-food scheme during famine in 1846. From here, a small ferry chugs to **Fishnish** – the shortest crossing to Mull from the mainland and cheaper than the Oban–Craignure crossing with a car.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — MORVERN

By bus Shiel Buses (☎01967 431272, ⓦshielbuses.co.uk) runs a single service between Morvern and Fort William on Tues, Thurs and Fri, plus a Sat service from mid-June to early Sept. By request, the bus goes as far as the road end at Drimnin (3h 10min), at the northwest corner of Morvern, for ferries to Tobermory.

By ferry To save the long journey around Loch Eil into the peninsula, a ferry nips across to Ardgour from Corran Ferry, 9 miles south of Fort William, every 20–30min (Mon–Sat 6.30am–9.20pm, Sun 8.30am–9.20pm; 10min). In addition, two services link the peninsula to Mull: a car ferry from Lochaline to Fishnish (Mon–Sat 6.30am–9.20pm, Sun 8.30am–9.20pm; 15min) and a passenger-only charter service from Drimnin to Tobermory, run by Ardnamurchan Charters (☎01972 500208, ⓦwest-scotland-marine.com).

ACTIVITIES

Lochaline Dive Centre Lochaline ☎01967/421627, ⓦlochalinedivecentre.co.uk. Based in the village centre, this outfit specializes in underwater archeology on local wrecks, and provides drift, shallow, scenic and shore dives. Also offers air filling and cylinder hire.

EATING

★ **Whitehouse Restaurant** Lochaline ☎01967 421777, ⓦthewhitehouserestaurant.co.uk. Arguably the best reason to visit Morvern, this is one of the Highlands' finest restaurants. Simple style belies outstanding modern European cooking that showcases local meat and seafood like fresh mussels and crab. Booking recommended. Easter–Oct Tues–Sat noon–9pm.

The Ardnamurchan peninsula

The **Ardnamurchan peninsula** is the most westerly point on the British mainland. Once ruled by Norse invaders, the peninsula lost most inhabitants during the Clearances and

only a handful of crofting settlements cling to the coastline, making this is one of the west coast's backwaters. Yet with its empty beaches and sea vistas, Ardnamurchan is an inspiring place.

A single-track road threads down its length, a superb route with a real sense of transition from ancient mossy oak forest to salt-sprayed moorland as you approach the sea. It's not fast, but this is slow travel at its best, with a huge variety of wildlife and scenery to make **walking** a pleasure; pick up a locally produced guide from tourist offices and most shops.

Strontian and Salen

Actually part of the near-roadless regions of **Sunart** and **Ardgour**, **STRONTIAN** serves as a gateway base for the peninsula. The village's moment of fame came in 1722, when local lead mines yielded the first-ever traces of **strontium**, which was named after the village.

The hamlet of **SALEN**, spread around another sheltered notch on the loch's shore, marks the turn-off for Ardnamurchan Point: from here it's 25 miles of scenic driving beside Loch Sunart – slow, and all the better for it. A turf-roofed Garbh Eilean **hide** (free access) five miles west of Strontian is an opportunity to peer for seals, sea birds and the occasional eagle.

Nàdurra

Glenborrodale • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 11.30am–5pm; Nov, Feb & March Tues–Fri 10am–4pm, Sun noon–3.30pm • £4.50 • ☎ 01972 500209, ⓦ nadurracentre.co.uk

Nàdurra, a small, child-friendly natural history centre just west of **Glenborrodale** (5 miles down the road from Salen), introduces the flora, fauna and geology of Ardnamurchan. Named after the Gaelic word for "nature", the centre is in a timber "Living Building" designed to allow in wildlife – pine martins nest within the walls, long-eared bats occasionally hang from the rafters and a glass wall descends into a wildlife pond. Otherwise there are the usual wildlife displays and a film, plus cameras trained on whatever's most interesting – the pine martins, perhaps, or a heronry opposite.

Kilchoan and Ardnamurchan Lighthouse

KILCHOAN is Ardnamurchan's main village – a modest crofting settlement which straggles along the Sound of Mull. From here, the road continues to **Ardnamurchan Point**, the most westerly point in mainland Britain, marked by a 118ft-high **lighthouse**. The lighthouse buildings house a small café and an **exhibition** on local history, while tours go up the tower to see the lighting mechanism (exhibition April–Oct daily 10am–5pm; £3; tour April–Oct daily 11am–4pm; £6; ☎ 01972 510210, ⓦ ardnamurchanlighthouse.com).

Sanna Bay

Explore the area around Kilchoan to find myriad coves, beaches and headlands. The finest beach is **Sanna Bay**, about three miles north of the lighthouse, a white strand with unforgettable views of the Small Isle. Incidentally, the road there crosses the crater of what was the largest volcano in prehistoric Britain, still visible on a map in the northwest peninsula.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE ARDNAMURCHAN PENINSULA

By bus A single service (Mon–Sat; ☎ 01967 431272) that begins at Fort William (currently 1.25pm) goes via Corren Ferry to reach Strontian (1hr) before continuing to Kilchoan (3hr).

By ferry A CalMac (ⓦ calmac.co.uk) car ferry operates between Tobemory (Mull) and Kilchoan (Mon–Sat 7 daily, plus Sun May–Aug 5 daily; 35min).

By car The single-track road from Salen to Ardnamurchan Point is 25 miles long; allow about 1hr 30min in each direction.

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Strontian tourist office On the village green (Easter–Oct daily 10am–5pm; ☎01967 402382).

Kilchoan tourist office In the community centre (Mon–Sat: Easter–Oct 9am–5pm; Nov–March 10am–4pm; ☎01972 510711, ⓦardnamurchan.com).

Ardnamurchan Charters ☎01972/500208, ⓦwest-scotland-marine.com. Based in Laga, near Lochaline, but operates boat trips out of Kilchoan to observe wildlife, including dolphins, seals, basking sharks, whales and possibly sea eagles.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

STRONTIAN

Ariundle Centre ☎01967 402279, ⓦariundlecentre.co.uk. Part of a pleasant craft centre and café serving cheap fresh lunches and dinner such as tagines and burgers – a godsend for walkers and cyclists – this modern bunkhouse has dorms, family rooms and twins, all en suite. It's set among woods a mile from the centre – turn right across Strontian bridge. Food served noon–8pm. Dorms £18

SALEN

Salen Hotel ☎01967 431661, ⓦsalenhotel.co.uk. Less a small hotel than a restaurant with three smart rooms above – tastefully furnished where modern flair meets antiques – and simpler comfy rooms in a chalet. The restaurant offers a Scottish gastro-pub menu: pâtés of smoked mackerel, whisky and tomatoes, local venison or steak-and-ale pies for around £12–15. Daily 11.30am–2pm & 6–9pm. £60

GLENBORRODALE

Nàdurra ☎01972 500209. The simple café of the natural history centre rustles up home-made soups and sandwiches and has a blackboard menu of dishes such as casseroles and goulash for under a tenner. April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 11.30am–5pm; Nov, Feb & March Tues–Fri 10am–4pm, Sun noon–3.30pm.

KILCHOAN

★ **Ardnamurchan Campsite** Ormsaigbeg ☎01972 5110766, ⓦardnamurchanstudycentre.co.uk. Views to inspire poetry plus campfires on the beach of a laudably back-to-basics campsite behind the loch – pure magic at sunset and usually spared summer midges by a breeze. Find it past the Ferry Stores. Closed Oct–Easter. £7.50/person

Acharacle and Glenuig

At the eastern end of Ardnamurchan, just north of Salen where the A861 heads north towards the district of Moidart, the main settlement is **ACHARACLE**, a nondescript crofting village set back from **Loch Shiel**. The reason to swing through is **Castle Tioram** (pronounced "cheerum"), one of Scotland's most atmospheric monuments. Perched on a promontory above **Loch Moidart** and accessed via a sandy causeway (its Gaelic name means "dry land"), the thirteenth-century fortress was the seat of the MacDonalds of Clanranald until it was destroyed by their chief in 1715 to prevent it falling into Hanoverian hands. There's no entry into the castle, but for a slice of picture-postcard romantic Scotland, it's hard to beat. It's located a mile north of Acharacle via a side road off the A861.

Keep going north on the A861 and you'll roll through woods to arrive at **GLENUIG**, gathered on a picturesque inlet on the Sound of Arisaig. Barely a hamlet, it makes a fine base for walking, sea-kayaking (see below) – or partying, when the community centre hosts gigs every fortnight (listings on ⓦglenuig.com).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ACHARACLE AND GLENUIG

By bus Buses go from Fort William (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily) to Acharacle (1hr 30min) and Glenulig (1hr 10min).

By boat Loch Shiel Cruises runs trips to Acharacle from Glenfinnan at the head of Loch Shiel (Easter to mid-Oct Wed only; £17 single, £26 return; ☎01687 470322, ⓦhighlandcruises.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND ACTIVITIES

Glenuig Inn Glenuig ☎01687 470219, ⓦglenuig.com. A refurbished inn that ticks all boxes: an excellent hostel with single beds, not bunks; modest motel-style rooms in an annexe; and local beers plus well-priced bar-food – posh kebabs, wraps, home-made burgers, all around £12. A sea-kayak guide, the owner runs half- and full-day trips in the Sound of Arisaig from £50. Daily noon–9pm. Dorms £25; doubles £100

The Road to the Isles

The "**Road to the Isles**" from Fort William to Mallaig, followed by the West Highland Railway and the winding A830, traverses the mountains and glens of the Rough Bounds before breaking out near **Arisaig** onto a spectacular coast of sheltered inlets, white beaches and wonderful views to the islands of Rùm, Eigg, Muck and Skye. This is a country commonly associated with **Bonnie Prince Charlie**, whose adventures of 1745–46 began on this stretch of coast with his gathering of the clans at **Glenfinnan** and ended here too when he embarked near Arisdale and fled into French exile.

Glenfinnan

GLENFINNAN may be spectacularly sited at the head of Loch Shiel, yet it's Scottish history that draws most visitors, since it was here that Bonnie Prince Charlie raised his standard and rallied forces before the ill-fated march on London (see p.418). The spot where the Young Pretender raised his battle standard on August 19, 1745 is marked by a **column** crowned with a Highland clansman in full battle dress, erected as a tribute by Alexander Macdonald of Glenaladale in 1815. It's a beautiful, brooding spot at the head of the loch that's best appreciated from a viewpoint behind a **visitor centre** (daily April, May, June, Sept & Oct 10am–5pm; July & Aug 9.30am–5.30pm; £3; NTS; ☎0844 493 2221, ⓦnts.org.uk), which gives an account of the '45 uprising through to the rout at Culloden (see p.418).

Glenfinnan Station Museum

Station Cottage • Daily April to mid-Oct 9am–5pm • 75p • ☎01397 722295, ⓦglenfinnanstationmuseum.co.uk

The town's second claim to fame is for one of the most spectacular parts of the **West Highland Railway** line (see p.444), which chuffs over the 21-arched Loch nan Uamh **viaduct** built in 1901. You might recognize it from *Harry Potter* films, in which it is crossed by the *Hogwart's Express* – Loch Shiel itself serves as the "Dark Lake" seen from the ramparts of Hogwart's.

Head to the **Glenfinnan Station Museum** in the village centre to learn more about the history of this section of the railway in a modest museum in the old booking office – no surprise that the gift shop is stuffed with Harry Potter merchandise. Enthusiastic rail buffs can stay the night or dine here (see below).

ARRIVAL, GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION — GLENFINNAN

By train A direct service links Fort William to Glenfinnan (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily; 35min)

By boat Loch Shiel Cruises (☎01687 470322, ⓦhighlandcruises.co.uk) run several trips to view the superb scenery between Easter and Sept. Cruises embark from a jetty near *Glenfinnan House Hotel*, signposted off the main road half a mile from the monument.

Tourist information ⓦroad-to-the-isles.org.uk.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Prince's House Glenfinnan ☎01397 722246, ⓦglenfinnan.co.uk. This former seventeeth-century coaching inn offers comfy rooms – the best at the front nod to Highlands tradition. The fine restaurant offers a seasonal, fresh menu or there's gastro-pub grub in the bar; expect West Coast scallops, lamb and venison. Mains average £12–16. Closed Jan–Feb. Food served Easter–Sept daily 11am–3pm & 6–10pm. **£120**

Sleeping Car Glenfinnan station ☎01397 722295, ⓦglenfinnanstationmuseum.co.uk. A 1958 camping coach is now a mini-hostel with three twin compartments (bunk beds), a family compartment for four, plus a kitchen, lounge and bathroom – a memorable if slightly cramped place to stay. The adjacent *Dining Car* is open for light lunches from April to Sept (daily 10am–5pm; phone ahead for evening meals). Dorms **£14**; doubles **£28**

Arisaig to Morar

Though short, this is a superb coast – all white sands, turquoise seas and rocky islets draped with orange seaweed. Better still, thanks to a bypass road to Mallaig, the spectacular coast road (signposted "Alternative Coastal Route") is fairly quiet – touring heaven.

THE WEST HIGHLAND RAILWAY

A fixture in lists of the world's most scenic train journeys, the brilliantly engineered **West Highland Railway** runs from Glasgow to Mallaig via Fort William. The line is in two sections: the southern part travels from **Glasgow** Queen Street station, up the banks of Loch Lomond to **Crianlarich**, then around Beinn Odhar on a horseshoe of viaducts to cross **Rannoch Moor**, where the track had to be laid on a mattress of tree roots, brushwood and thousands of tons of earth and ashes. You're out in the wilds here, the line long having diverged from the road. The route then swings into Glen Roy, passing through the **Monessie Gorge** to enter **Fort William**.

Leg two, from Fort William to Mallaig, is even more spectacular. Shortly after leaving Fort William the railway crosses the Caledonian Canal beside Neptune's Staircase at **Benavie**, before travelling along Locheil and crossing the 21-arch viaduct at **Glenfinnan**, where passengers get to live out *Harry Potter* fantasies. Then it's on to the coast, with views of the Small Isles and Skye before journey's end at **Mallaig**. Between May and October, this leg of the route is also served by the **Jacobite Steam Train** (Ⓦ steamtrain.info).

First stop is **ARISAIG**, an appealingly drowsy place scattered around a sandy bay. The only specific attraction in the village is the **Land, Sea and Islands Visitor Centre** (Easter to mid-Oct Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 2–5pm; donations; ⓣ01687 450771, Ⓦarisaigcentre.co.uk), a volunteer-run community project with displays on crofting life, local characters and the area's role as a base for Special Operations during World War II. There's also a small research library of wildlife and walks – gen up before walking to a seal colony at nearby **Rhumach**, reached via a single-track lane heading west out of Arisaig.

Stretching for eight miles or so north of Arisaig is a string of stunning white-sand, azure-water **beaches**: summer holiday favourites backed by flowery machair and with views out to Eigg and Rùm. Pretty **Traigh** beach is your spot to collect cowrie shells, but larger and more celebrated is **Camusdarach Beach** a mile or so north, where the beach scenes of *Local Hero* and *Highlander* were shot. If it's busy, you could make for one of the two intimate beaches lie over the headlands on either side.

Morar village, which bookends this route, is dowdy stuff after such a glorious coast. It that lies a short way west of **Loch Morar**, rumoured to be the home of a monster called Morag, a lesser-known rival to Nessie.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Direct services (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily, Sun 1–2 daily) run from Fort William to Arisaig (1hr 5min) and Morar (1hr 15min).

ARISAIG TO MORAR

By boat Arisaig Marine (ⓣ01687 450224, Ⓦarisaig.co.uk) sails from Arisaig marina to the Small Isles (see p.496) at 11am daily, from late April to late Sept.

ACTIVITIES

Arisaig Sea Kayak Centre ⓣ07858/214985, Ⓦarisaigseakayakcentre.co.uk. Based at the *Arisaig Hotel*, this operator offers trips several times a week in season for all levels (day-trips £70 or private guiding £250 for two people). You can also rent craft here (from £25/day) – a superb way to experience this coastline.

West Coast Cycles ⓣ07769/901823, Ⓦwestcoastcyclehire.co.uk. Rents mountain bikes by the day (£20) or up to a week. Collection of bikes from *Arisaig Hotel*.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Arisaig Hotel Arisaig ⓣ01687 450210, Ⓦarisaighotel.co.uk. Enthusiastic new management since 2013 has pepped up this tired hotel. It now prepares a solid pub menu at good prices plus Highland real ales on draught. A revamp of accommodation (Easter–Oct) is promised. Daily 12.30–2.30pm & 6–9pm.

★ **Camusdarach Campsite** Camusdarach ⓣ01687 450221, Ⓦcamusdarachcampsiteandbeach.co.uk. By far the loveliest campsite in the area, its neat fields a pleasing balance of eco-emptiness and facilities, all spread behind sands so white they've featured in films. A campsite café is promised from 2014. Closed mid-Oct to mid-March. £12/pitch

Cnoc-na-Faire Back of Keppoch, 1 mile north of Arisaig ☎01687 450249, 🌐cnoc-na-faire.co.uk. Highlands meets Art Deco in a hotel with smart modern-country rooms of tartan fabrics, stainless steel and blond wood. It also prepares breakfasts, light lunches and dinners, all of fine Scottish cuisine: expect venison and sloe gin jus, seafood pastas or fresh fish priced around £14–18. Daily 8.30–9.30am, 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–10pm. **£110**

Old Library Lodge and Restaurant Arisaig ☎01687 450651, 🌐oldlibrary.co.uk. The best rooms overlook the bay; those in a garden annexe are modest motel numbers with mod cons like flatscreen TVs and wi-fi. The dining room offers Scottish dishes: Cullen skink or delicious crab sandwiches for lunch (around £8), venison pie or sea bass for dinner (average £13). Feb–March Tues–Sat noon–2.30pm (except early season) & 6–9.30pm. **£96**

Mallaig

The fate of **MALLAIG**, 47 miles west of Fort William, is to be seen as somewhere to go through to. Before the railway arrived in 1901 it consisted of a few cottages, and now rather than as the main embarkation point for ferries to Skye, the Small Isles and Knoydart, in season it's full of visitors. Mallaig is nothing if not well-placed for day-trips and even if not especially pretty it is a solid wee town, given a workaday honesty by its local **fishing** industry – it once had one of Europe's busiest herring ports and the harbour remains the source of the village's wealth.

Mallaig Heritage Centre

Beside the train station • April, May & Oct Mon–Fri 11am–4pm, Sat noon–4pm; June–Sept Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat & Sun noon–4pm • £2 • ☎01687 462085, 🌐mallaigheritage.org.uk

Apart from the hubbub of the harbour, the only sight is **Mallaig Heritage Centre** – nothing to quicken the pulse but worth a browse for displays on the area's past and information about lifeboats, fishing and the highland galleys that once plied the waters of the Inner Hebrides and are direct descendants of Viking longships.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — MALLAIG

BY TRAIN

A direct service arrives from Fort William (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily, Sun 4 daily; 1hr 25min) and Glasgow (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 5hr 15min), via Glenfinnan and Arisaig.

BY BUS

There are regular buses from Fort William to Mallaig via Glenfinnan and Arisaig (Mon–Fri 3 daily, Sat 1 daily; 1hr 20min).

BY FERRY

The CalMac ticket office (☎01687 462403, 🌐calmac.co.uk) is just west of the harbour.

To/from Skye Regular services shuttle between Mallaig and Armadale (Mon–Sat 8 daily; also mid-May to mid-Sept Sun 6 daily; 30min). Reservations are recommended in peak season.

To/from the Small Isles There are services between Mallaig and Eigg (Mon, Thurs, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 1hr 15min); Rùm (Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 1hr 20min); Muck (Tues, Thurs, Fri, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 2hr 5min); and Canna (Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun; 1 daily; 2hr 30min).

To/from Knoydart Bruce Watt Cruises (☎01687 462320, 🌐knoydart-ferry.co.uk) sails from Mallaig to Inverie every morning and afternoon (mid-May to mid-Sept Mon–Fri; mid-Sept to mid-May Mon, Wed & Fri; 45min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Beside the harbour (Easter–Oct daily 8am–8pm, Nov–Easter 9am–4pm; ☎01687 462883, ✉mallaigvisitorcentre@btconnect.com).

ACCOMMODATION

Mallaig Backpackers' Lodge Main St ☎01687 462764, 🌐mallaigbackpackers.co.uk. There are two mixed dorms, a small kitchen and a lounge in this relaxed, independent modern hostel. "Reception" is in the *Tea Garden* restaurant opposite the harbour. Closed Jan to late Feb. Dorms **£17**

Seaview Main St ☎01687 462059, 🌐seaviewguesthousemallaig.com. Snug dimensions and surprisingly smart decor – tasteful shades of taupe and grey with a leaning towards modest boutique – set the tone in this central B&B, which has harbour views from the front. Note that only one room is en suite. March–Oct. **£65**

West Highland Hotel ☎01687 462210, 🌐westhighlandhotel.co.uk. Uphill from the harbour, this traditional pile is slowly being upgraded since 2008. Rooms

don't live up to the promise of the public areas but are spacious, the best with bespoke furnishings and kingsize beds. "Deluxe" ones provide sea or harbour views. March to mid-Oct. **£110**

EATING AND DRINKING

Cornerstone Main St ⓣ 01687 462306. A simple first-floor restaurant that's the locals' choice for classic seafood – expect a daily soup and a blackboard menu of fresh fish, simply but excellently prepared and fairly priced at around £12–16. March to mid-Oct daily noon–2.30pm & 5–9.30pm.

Island View ⓣ 01687 462210, ⓦ westhighlandhotel.co.uk. In the *West Highland Hotel*, this is Mallaig's fine-dining address, with modern Scottish cooking: fish and seafood feature plus well-aged steaks priced around £15 a main. Start (or end) with one of over a hundred whiskies in the bar. March to mid-Oct daily 6.30–9pm.

Tea Garden Main St ⓣ 01687 462764. As central as it gets, with a terrace to watch the world pass by and a relaxed dining room with a traditional bistro menu of Cullen skink, pints of prawns or home-made scones for under £10. Mid-March to mid-Nov daily 9am–9pm.

The Knoydart peninsula

For many, the **Knoydart peninsula** is mainland Britain's most captivating wilderness area. The fact that it is inaccessible by car is part of the allure – to reach the heart of the peninsula, you either catch a **boat** from Mallaig or **hike** across rugged moorland, sleeping in stone bothies (marked on OS maps). The scenery is superb, flanked by **Loch Nevis** ("Loch of Heaven") and the fjord-like **Loch Hourn** ("Loch of Hell") and three Munros sweeping straight up from the sea. Unsurprisingly, the peninsula has long attracted walkers. But with increasingly comfortable accommodation, it is also gaining a cachet among holiday-makers in search of escapism: a place to slow down for a few days' self-imposed exile from modernity.

Brief history

At the end of the eighteenth century, around a thousand people eked out a living from this inhospitable terrain through crofting and fishing. **Evictions** in 1853 began a dramatic decrease in the population, which continued to dwindle through the twentieth century as a succession of landowners ran the estate as a hunting and shooting playground, prompting a famous land raid in 1948 by a group of crofters known as the "**Seven Men of Knoydart**", who claimed ownership of portions of the estate. Although their bid failed, their cause was invoked when the crofters of Knoydart finally achieved a **community buy-out** in 1998. An offer to provide the money by theatre impresario Cameron Mackintosh was rejected because locals were wary of giving up control.

Inverie

Most of the peninsula's hundred or so occupants live near the hamlet of **INVERIE.** Spread along Loch Nevis, it has a pint-sized post office and shop (with internet access), a ranger post with tips on local walks and wildlife, and mainland Britain's most remote pub, the *Old Forge*. You're here for scenery, for walks and for the thrill of dropping off

WALKING INTO KNOYDART

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 398 & 413

There are two main **hiking routes** into Knoydart. The trailhead for the first is **Kinloch Hourn** at the far-east end of Loch Hourn (turn south off the A87 six miles west of Invergarry). From Kinloch Hourn, a well-marked path winds around the coast to Barisdale, where there's a year-round bothy and wild camp (bothy £3, campsite £1; ⓦ barisdale.com) before continuing ten miles to Inverie; expect 18–20 hours' walk in total. The second path into Knoydart starts from the west end of **Loch Arkaig**, approaching the peninsula via Glen Dessary. Hardened walkers reckon on knocking off the 18-mile journey in one long summer's day. The rest of us should set aside two. Either way, take wet-weather gear, a good map, plenty of food, warm clothes and a good sleeping bag, and leave your name and expected time of arrival with someone when you set off.

the radar – unless, that is, your visit coincides with that of seven hundred revellers for the Knoydart Festival (Ⓦknoydartfestival.co.uk) every other April.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By boat Bruce Watt Cruises (Ⓣ01687 462320, Ⓦknoydart-ferry.co.uk) sails from Mallaig to Inverie every morning and afternoon (mid-May to mid-Sept Mon–Fri; mid-Sept to mid-May Mon, Wed & Fri; 45min). A ferry from Arnisdale, Glenelg peninsula, across Loch Hourn to Barisdale (and Kinlochhourn) in northern Knoydart was suspended at the time of writing; for updates call Ⓣ01599 522247 or visit Ⓦarnisdaleferry.com.

On foot It's a two-day hike into Knoydart; our box (see opposite) gives details.

THE KNOYDART PENINSULA

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist information A ranger post (Ⓣ01687 462242) beside the *Old Forge* has information on the Knoydart Foundation, and on local walks and wildlife.

Knoydart Pony Trekking Inverie Ⓣ01687/462830, Ⓦknoydartponytrekking.co.uk. Based at stables near the *Knoydart Foundation Bunkhouse*, this operator provides beginners' treks plus overnight rides with a wild camp for more experienced riders.

Mountain biking Two mountain-bike trails – a 1.5-mile red-grade route and 500yd blue-grade – loop around Inverie. You'll need to bring a bike, however, unless you're staying at *Knoydart Lodge*, which rents bikes to guests.

ACCOMMODATION

Most beds are in Inverie. You can **wild camp** (albeit with a compost toilet and water supply) on "long beach", east of Inverie centre, for a £4 donation to the Knoydart Foundation – pay the ranger or leave it in an honesty box at the campsite. Showers (£4) are available in the Old Forge pub.

HOTELS AND B&BS

★ **Doune Stone Lodges** Ⓣ01687 462667, Ⓦdoune-knoydart.co.uk. No roads, no stress – this may be the ultimate Scottish getaway, with en-suite doubles in restored pine-clad crofts behind a bay. As well as isolation and views, its lovely owners provide superb cooking. Minimum three nights. Full board. Closed Oct–Easter. £156

The Gathering Inverie Ⓣ01687 460051, Ⓦthegatheringknoydart.co.uk. Relaxed sophistication in a modern B&B just west of the wharf that feels like self-contained accommodation (the owner lives opposite). Superb views and sensational breakfasts. Also rents mountain bikes to guests. £99

Knoydart Lodge Inverie Ⓣ01687 460129, Ⓦknoydartlodge.co.uk. Near the beach and beside the community allotment, this airy wooden house provides a warm welcome and modest luxury in en-suite rooms with the full complement of mod cons and a shared veranda. £94

HOSTELS

Knoydart Foundation Bunkhouse Inverie Ⓣ01687 462163, Ⓦknoydart-foundation.com. The community hostel is in an old farm west of the pier, near the beach. Dorms are large, facilities include a kitchen and laundry, and there's internet access in a lofty lounge with a woodburner. Rather dated but perfectly comfy. Dorms £17

Torrie Shieling Inverie Ⓣ01687 462669, Ⓔtorriecottage@gmail.com. Fine self-catering facilities, comfortable four-bunk rooms and open fires in a living room in an independent hostel east and above the village. Close to hillside trails, but less handy for the pub – the owner collects arrivals off the ferry. Dorms £25

EATING AND DRINKING

Knoydart Pottery & Tearoom Inverie Ⓣ01687 460191. A lovely spot to lose a few hours (or a long wet day): choose from sofas or a long communal table with the best loch view in Knoydart. Breakfasts plus home-made soups and gluten-free home baking for around £5–8. Easter–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 11am–3pm.

★ **The Old Forge** Inverie Ⓣ01687 462267. Though far more modern than you'd expect, this remains one of Scotland's finer pubs, fuelled by a convivial atmosphere and sense of remoteness. Generous bar meals feature local seafood – specials are around £16, fish and chips £11 – and terrific loch views. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–midnight, Fri–Sat 11am–1am; food served noon–3pm & 6.30–9.30pm.

Kyle of Lochalsh and around

Once the main gateway to Skye, **Kyle of Lochalsh** has been left as a mere terminus for the train route from Inverness since the construction of the Skye Bridge in 1995. Of

more interest is nearby **Eilean Donan Castle** on the shores of **Loch Duich**. Both are fixtures on the tourist trail, which makes the remote **Glenelg** peninsula to the south side of Loch Duich all the more inspiring. A few miles north of Kyle of Lochalsh, the village of **Plockton** is a lovely spot, with a superb setting on **Loch Carron**, a long inlet which acts as a dividing line between Kyle of Lochalsh and the splendours of Wester Ross to the north.

Kyle of Lochalsh

Moribund since the opening of the Skye Bridge, **KYLE OF LOCHALSH** is not particularly attractive and traffic has little reason to stop, especially since Skye or Plockton nearby offer more appealing accommodation. A great café aside, the only reason to pause is the *Atlantis*, the UK's only semi-submersible **glass-bottomed boat** (T 01471 822716 or 0800 980 4846, W seaprobeatlantis.com).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KYLE OF LOCHALSH

By train It's a glorious journey from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh (Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 2 daily; 2hr 30min); trains stop at Plockton (15min from Kyle) en route.

By bus Reservations are recommended for all services (T 0870 550 5050, W citylink.co.uk). Buses stop on the waterfront at the old slipway.

Destinations Fort William via Invergarry (3 daily; 1hr 50min); Glasgow (3 daily; 5hr); Inverness via Invermoriston (3 daily; 2hr 10min); Kyleakin, Skye (every 45min; 10min).

EATING

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Buth Bheay By the old ferry wharf. A takeaway shack where fish and seafood from the owner's boat goes into big sandwiches and salad boxes – a bargain at £2–3. Also prepares Cullen skink, and home baking. Mid-Feb to Christmas Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 11am–3pm.

Loch Duich

Skirted on its northern shore by the A87, **Loch Duich** features prominently on the tourist trail: coach tours from all over Europe thunder down from **SHIEL BRIDGE** en route to Skye and one of Scotland's most iconic castles, Eilean Donan. Not that it's just the happy hordes who visit: at the end of the loch is Glen Shiel, flanked by the **Five Sisters of Kintail** – a classic tough trek that ticks off three Munros (see box opposite).

Eilean Donan Castle

Beside A87 near the village of Dornie • Feb–Christmas daily 10am–6pm • £6.50 • T 01599 555202, W eileandonancastle.com

After Edinburgh's fortress, **Eilean Donan Castle** has to be the most photographed monument in Scotland. Located on the A87 guarding the confluence of lochs Alsh, Long and Duich, its tower rises on an islet, joined to the shore by a stone bridge and set against a backdrop of mountains. Small wonder it has featured in *Highlander* and the James Bond adventure *The World is Not Enough*. The castle was established in 1230 by Alexander II to protect the area from the Vikings but was destroyed during the Jacobite uprising of 1719. It was rebuilt between 1912 and 1932 by a British army officer, John Macrae-Gilstrap, because of the Macrae clan's ancestral links to the area. So, its three floors, including the banqueting hall, the bedrooms and the troops' quarters, are recreations rather than originals. The Jacobite and clan relics also on display are all original.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — LOCH DUICH

Grants at Craigellachie Ratagan, 2 miles south of Shiel Bridge T 01599 511331, W housebytheloch.co.uk. You'll find B&B charm and hotel quality in the three modern en suites plus a suite with kitchenette. The owner's intimate restaurant serves first-class modern Scottish dishes like pot-roast pheasant with wild boar, leek and taragon stuffing (mains average £16). Reservations essential. Easter–Oct Tues–Sat from 7pm. **£115**

HIKING IN GLEN SHIEL

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 414

The mountains of **Glen Shiel**, rising dramatically from sea level to over 3000ft in less than a couple of miles, offer some of the best hiking routes in Scotland. Taking in a bumper crop of Munros, the classic **Five Sisters traverse** is claimed by some walkers to be the best day-walk in Scotland. Allow ten hours to complete the whole 19km route, which starts at a lay-by off the A87 in Glen Shiel. The distinctive chain of mountains across the glen from the Five Sisters is the **Kintail Ridge**, with breathtaking views south across Knoydart and the islands of the west.

Don't underestimate either of these two routes: walkers come unstuck here every year, so only attempt them if you're confident in your walking experience, and have a map and a compass.

Kintail Lodge Hotel Shiel Bridge ☎01599 511275, ⓦkintaillodgehotel.co.uk. A Victorian pile on the loch's east shore with twelve hotel rooms plus dorm-style hostel accommodation in the well-named *Wee Bunkhouse* plus simple twins and singles in the *Trekkers' Lodge*. Its *Kintail Bar* serves good pub-grub such as steak-and-ale pies or fish and chips (£10). Hotel doubles £130; lodge twins £30; dorms £15

Ratagan SYHA Ratagan, 2 miles south of Shiel Bridge ☎01599 511243, ⓦsyha.org.uk. Superbly sited on the loch, with views across to the Five Sisters. Traditional in public areas but dorms are more IKEA-esque. It also runs guided walks and beginners' sea-kayaking sessions. March–Oct. Dorms £17, doubles £44.20

Shielbridge Caravan Park & Campsite Shiel Bridge ☎01599 511221, ⓦshielbridgecaravanpark.co.uk. A minor legend among hikers thanks to its superb location at the west end of Glen Shiel beneath the Five Sisters. Find it off the A87 behind the garage. Mid-March to Oct. £6/person

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The Glenelg peninsula

In contrast to Loch Duich, the **Glenelg peninsula** is one of the region's more remote areas. Even though summer traffic trickles through for the Kylerhea ferry to Skye, this little-known crofting area remains a quiet backwater jutting into the Sound of Sleat – one benefit of being on a road to nowhere. Indeed, the peninsula has probably changed little since Gavin Maxwell wrote about it in his otter novel *Ring of Bright Water* and he disguised its pristine coast by calling it "Camusfearnà". The landward approach is equally impressive on a road that switchbacks over the Mam Ratagan Pass (1115ft) with a spectacular view over the **Five Sisters** massif. The main village, **GLENELG**, is an appealingly soporific spot – a row of whitewashed houses, surrounded by trees, that shows little indication of its time as a strategic centre in the 1700s, when a large barracks kept clans in check. The ruins of Bernera Barracks are on the left as you drive to the ferry.

Glenelg Brochs

Nearly two miles south of Glenelg, a left turn up Glen Beag leads to the **Glenelg Brochs**, one of the best-preserved Iron Age monuments in Scotland. Its spectacular circular towers – Dun Telve and Dun Troddan – stand in a sheltered valley and are thought to have been erected around two thousand years ago to protect surrounding settlements from raiders.

Arnisdale

A lonely back road beyond Glenelg village snakes southeast through a scattering of old crofting hamlets, timber forests and views that grow more spectacular at each bend. Eventually you drop down to the shore of Loch Hourn at **ARNISDALE**, actually two hamlets in the bosom of the mountains: **Camusbane**, a traditional crofting settlement ranged behind a pebble beach; and **Corran**, a mile further, a minuscule whitewashed fishing hamlet huddled around a river mouth. Display boards in the latter's **Ceilidh House and Heritage Centre** (always open; free) relate local history, including that of

Mansion House (between the hamlets), which was built by Valentine Fleming, father of James Bond author Ian. Other than that, there's no reason to come except to see the most jaw-dropping sea loch in Scotland. Keep it quiet.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE GLENELG PENINSULA

GLENELG

By bus The post bus and Skyeways bus service (both Mon–Fri 1 daily; 50min) operate from Kyle of Lochalsh via Shiel Bridge.

By ferry The six-car Glenelg–Kylerhea ferry (daily: Easter–Oct 9am–6pm; June–Aug 10am–7pm; ☎01599 522313, ⓦskyeferry.co.uk) shuttles to and from Skye every 15min, taking 5min.

ARNISDALE

By bus In a word, tricky. The MacRae Kintail community bus from Kyle of Lochalsh goes to Arnisdale on request via Shiel Bridge, *Ratagan Youth Hostel* and Glenelg (1 daily Mon–Fri). Booking required on ☎01599 511384.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **The Glenelg Inn** Glenelg ☎01599 522273, ⓦglenelg-inn.com. Snug, eclectic, with a fire in the grate and the occasional fisherman at the bar, this is all you could want of a Highland pub, with a spectacular loch-side setting to boot. Luxurious rooms and a top-notch gastro-pub menu that showcases local seafood from that fisherman – fish, crab cakes, mussels (mains average £14) – confirm that this is a class act. Feb–Nov Mon–Thurs 11.30am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11.30am–midnight; food served noon–2.30pm & 6–9.30pm. **£120**

Plockton

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With its picture-postcard cottages curved behind a tiny harbour and views across Loch Carron to the mountains, **PLOCKTON** is one of the most picturesque settlements of the west coast. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Am Ploc, as the settlement was then known, was just another crofting hamlet. Then a local laird transformed it with a prosperous fishery, funding a planned village that was renamed "Plocktown". It's packed in high season with tourists, yachties – a popular regatta fills the bay over a fortnight from late July – and second-home owners, and the brilliance of the light has made it something of an artists' hangout. It may look familiar to first-time visitors – its flower and palm-filled seafront featured in cult horror film *The Wickerman* and BBC's *Hamish Macbeth* series.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — PLOCKTON

By train Trains from Inverness (2hr 15min) to Kyle of Lochalsh (13min) stop in Plockton (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily, Sun 1–2 daily).

Information ⓦplockton.com

ACTIVITIES

Calum's Seal Trips ☎01599/544306 or 07761/263828, ⓦcalums-sealtrips.com. This outfit promises "better views than the QE2" aboard its pretty, traditional cruiser. Perhaps true if you like seals (1hr; £10 or free if no seals) or dolphins (2hr; £16) on an evening sail.

Plockton Boat Hire 33 Harbour St ☎01599 544306 or 07584 044241, ⓦplocktonboathire.co.uk. Rents rowing boats and canoes as well as offering dinghy sailing tasters and two-day courses provided by an accredited RYA instructor.

ACCOMMODATION

An Caladh 25 Harbour St ☎01599 544356, ⓦplockton.uk.com. Anna MacAulay's whitewashed fisherman's cottage is one of the best of Plockton's many B&Bs, boasting a central location, sea views from front rooms and mod cons like wi-fi – though not all are en suites. **£65**

Duncraig Castle Turn-off midway between Duirnish and Plockton ☎01599 544295, ⓦduncraigcastle.com. On the opposite side of the bay from Plockton village, this Scots Baronial pile reopened in spring 2014 after top-to-bottom renovation to restore its former Victorian grandeur. It now has grand rooms, shabby-chic decor, chandeliers, roll-top baths and stone floors, befitting of its romantic location opposite Plockton. April–Sept. **£149**

Plockton Hotel 41 Harbour St ☎01599 544274, ⓦplocktonhotel.co.uk. This friendly, small hotel provides cosy, contemporary-cottage decor in rooms, of which the best come with a view at the front. A four-room annexe on the harbour appeals for its shared kitchen as much as its cheaper rates that still include breakfast. Closed first fortnight in Jan. Annexe **£80**; doubles **£130**

Station Bunkhouse Opposite train station 01599 544235, mickcoe@btinternet.com. A pleasant wee bunkhouse bang opposite the railway station, with rather cramped six-bed dorms and better four-bed dorms popular with families, all below a pleasant open-plan kitchen and living area. Check-in is at the same owner's *Nessun Dorma* B&B next door. Dorms £14

EATING AND DRINKING

Plockton Inn Innes St 01599 544222. The locals' choice offers excellent lunches like watercress and sweet-potato soup or smoked trout pâté, then a fine evening menu of fresh seafood, often from the inn's own smokery. Good vegetarian options too, and music on Tues and Thurs evenings. Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–11.30pm; food served noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm.

Plockton Shores 30 Harbour St 01599 544263. Metropolitan-styled café-restaurant that starts the day as a relaxed coffee and lunch stop, then shifts up a gear for modern Scottish, European-flavoured dishes like monkfish in a light Talisker whisky-and-fennel sauce. Tues–Sun 9.30am–9pm (closed Sun eve Nov–Easter).

Loch Carron

North of Plockton are the twin sea lochs of **Loch Kishorn**, so deep it was once used as an oil-rig construction site, and **Loch Carron**, which cuts far inland to **STRATHCARRON**, a useful rail link between Kyle of Lochalsh and Torridon but little else. If you're arriving from the south by car, however, you pass **Attadale Gardens** (April to mid-Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm; £6; 01520 722603, attadalegardens.com), made up of twenty artistically landscaped acres ranked among Scotland's finest gardens by horticultural aficionados.

Lochcarron

With supermarkets, cafés, a bank and fuel, **LOCHARRON** represents a major hub hereabouts. While it's of more use than interest, two craft sights warrant a pause. A mile north of town on the main road, the **Lochcarron Old Smiddy Heritage Centre** (Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm), a nineteenth-century smithy and forge, is open erratically in season but has become a focus for local **crafts collectives**, with two halls selling weaving and quilting, pottery, painting and woodwork. More celebrated are the tartans of **Lochcarron Weavers** (01520 722212, lochcarronweavers.co.uk). You can see weaving demonstrations (and buy fabrics and clothing) in its workshop a mile south of Lochcarron towards Strome Castle.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — LOCH CARRON

By rail Strathcarron is on the Kyle–Inverness line (Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 2 daily): trains run from/to Inverness (1h 45m) and Kyle (40min).

By bus Timetables are co-ordinated so that buses meet train arrivals at Strathcarron. Services run to Lochcarron from Shieldaig (Mon–Fri 1 daily; 1hr) and Torridon (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 1hr)

Tourist information Due to move on our last visit, the information point should be in the crafts collective at the Old Smiddy by 2014 (Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **Kishorn Seafood Bar** Kishorn, 6 miles north of Lochcarron 01520 733240. A bright, informal café named in the top-ten British seafood restaurants by one national newspaper for local and fresh seafood. Come for sharing platters (£25 for two), Skye mussels or just garlic scallops and a croissant (£8). March–June & Oct–Nov Mon–Thurs, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm, Fri 10am–9pm; July–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–9pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

Old Manse Church St, Lochcarron 01520 722208, theoldmanselochcarron.com. Floral fabrics, pine furniture and wrought-iron beds – country style rules in the five spacious rooms of the Old Manse, on the road to Strome Castle. Perhaps its real appeal is the location before the loch – £10 extra buys you a room with a view. £60

Rockvilla Hotel Main St, Lochcarron 01520 722379, therockvilla.com. Refurbished in 2013 to offer smart (if slightly bland) small-hotel decor, this is far better than the tired pebble-dashed exterior suggests – spotless, comfortable en-suites, posh toiletries plus mod cons like flatscreen TVs, iPod docks and wi-fi. It also has a licensed restaurant. Easter–Sept. £79

Wester Ross

Wester Ross, the western seaboard of the old county of Ross-shire, is where the west coast ups the ante. Here, all the classic elements of Scotland's **coastal scenery** – craggy mountains, sandy beaches, whitewashed crofting cottages and shimmering island views – come together. Settlements such as **Applecross** and the peninsulas north and south of **Gairloch** maintain a simplicity and sense of isolation outside of peak season. There is some tough but wonderful **hiking** in the mountains around **Torridon** and **Coigach**, while **boat trips** and the prolific sealife and birdlife draw nature-lovers. The hub of life is **Ullapool**, a proper wee fishing town and ferry port whose modest size ranks as a metropolis in these parts.

The Applecross peninsula

The **Applecross peninsula** sounds bucolic; the English-sounding name is a corruption of the Gaelic *Apor Crosan*, meaning "estuary". Yet the approach from the south – up a glacial U-shaped valley and over the **Bealach na Bà** ("Pass of the Cattle") at 2054ft – is one of the classic drives and cycle pistes of the Highlands. A former drovers' road provides the greatest road ascent in the UK, with a 1:5 gradient and switchbacks worthy of the Alps. Views across the Minch to Raasay and Skye more than compensate – assuming the weather plays ball. The other way in from the north is a beautiful coast road that meanders from Shieldaig on Loch Torridon, past scattered crofting villages and with gorgeous seascapes.

Applecross

The sheltered, fertile coast around **APPLECROSS** village, where the Irish missionary monk Maelrubha founded a monastery in 673 AD, is a surprise after experiencing the wilds that surround it. Though popular in peak season, it feels exhilaratingly remote, with little to do but potter along lanes, paddle a kayak or build sandcastles on the beach. A small **Heritage Centre** (April–Oct Mon–Sat noon–4pm; Ⓦapplecrossheritage.org.uk) near the site of St Maelrubha's monastery, and beside Clachan church, showcases local history and several **waymarked trails** along the shore are great for walking off lunch.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — APPLECROSS

By bus The Dial-A-Bus (Ⓣ01520 722205) between Strathcarron and Achnasheen calls at Applecross.

Tourist information There's an info point maintained by the campsite opposite the fuel pumps in the centre of the village (Easter–Oct; opening times erratic). Village websites are Ⓦapplecross.info and Ⓦapplecross.uk.com.

ACTIVITIES

Applecross Mountain & Sea Ⓣ01520/744394, Ⓦapplecross.uk.com. Located by the fuel pumps, this company organizes mountain walking and climbing adventures, plus sea-kayaking, from half-day tasters to overnight wild camp trips.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Applecross Campsite East of the centre Ⓣ01520 744268, Ⓦapplecross.uk.com/campsite. A popular, well-run two-field site above the village – the furthest field is the quietest. It also provides basic camping cabins that sleep four, has a buzzy bar and rustles up breakfasts and a menu of stone-baked pizzas and bistro stables like venison casserole or home-made fishcakes in the *Flower Tunnel* café (mains £8–12). Site closed Nov–Feb. Food served May to mid-Sept daily 9am–9pm. Camping £9/person; cabins £48

Applecross Inn On the waterfront Ⓣ01520 744262, Ⓦapplecross.uk.com. The heart of the community provides pretty, cottagey en suites in the eaves, all with sea views. In the lively bar downstairs are Highland ales and freshly prepared classic pastas and pies plus Applecross Bay prawns and crab (mains around £10–14). Reservations recommended in season. Daily noon–11pm; food served noon–9pm. £120

The Potting Shed Signed from back of the bay

WALKS AROUND TORRIDON

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 433

The Torridon area offers a wealth of fantastic **walks**. If you're relatively inexperienced but want to do the magnificent ridge walk along the **Liathach** (pronounced "lee-ach") massif, or the strenuous traverse of **Beinn Eighe** (pronounced "ben ay"), you can join a National Trust Ranger Service guided hike (July & Aug weekdays via Torridon Countryside Centre; ☎01445 791221).

For those confident to go it alone, one of many possible routes takes you behind Liathach and down the pass, **Coire Dubh**, to the main road in Glen Torridon. This covers thirteen miles and takes in superb landscapes: weather permitting, you can make the rewarding diversion up to the **Coire Mhic Fhearchair**, widely regarded as the most spectacular corrie in Scotland. Allow the whole day.

Even in rough weather, the seven-mile hike up the coast from **Lower Diabaig**, ten miles northwest of Torridon village, to **Redpoint** is a rewarding one, and on a clear day the views across to Raasay and Applecross are wonderful. For any of these walks, ensure you are properly equipped with waterproofs, warm clothing, provisions and a map.

☎01520 744440. Head here to enjoy delicious food in the laidback atmosphere of a walled Victorian garden. It's fairly inexpensive as a daytime café, but pricier in the evening, when dishes like chicken-and-thyme casserole, local lobster and local crab in a herb pancake cost around £8–16. March–Oct daily 11am–8.30pm.

Loch Torridon

Loch Torridon marks the northern boundary of the Applecross peninsula and a transition into some awe-inspiring scenery. From the water rise the mountains of **Liathach** and **Beinn Eighe**, shapely hulks of reddish 750-million-year-old Torridonian sandstone tipped with white quartzite. Around fifteen thousand acres of the massif are under the protection of the National Trust for Scotland, which makes this superb walking country, with a trio of Munros to bag.

Shieldaig

Smuggled off the main road on the shore of Loch Torridon, pretty **SHIELDAIG** ("herring bay") is a gentle spot – until the Shieldaig Fete livens things up with some wacky boat races over the first weekend in August. A track winding north up the peninsula from the village makes for an enjoyable stroll. Otherwise, simply enjoy the view to **Shieldaig Island**, managed by the National Trust.

Torridon

TORRIDON village, at the east end of the loch, marks where the road heads inland through spectacular Glen Torridon to Kinlochewe (see p.454). The village itself – thirty or so houses and a shop – straggles along the loch beneath the mountains, making it a fine launch pad for hikes (see box above). A **Countryside Centre** (Easter–Sept Sun–Fri 10am–5pm; £3.50 donation requested; ☎0844 493 2229, ⓦnts.org.uk/Property/Torridon) at the turning into the village provides advice on mountain walks plus information on geology, flora and fauna.

ARRIVAL, DEPARTURE AND ACTIVITIES — LOCH TORRIDON

By bus The Dial-A-Bus (☎01520 722205) between Strathcarron and Achnasheen calls at Shieldaig and Torridon (Mon–Sat 1 daily).

Torridon Activities 1 mile south of turn-off into village ☎01445 791242, ⓦthetorridon.com. An operator based at the *Torridon* hotel (see below) provides the full range of local fun: guided walks, gorge scrambling and climbing, plus kayaking and even clay-pigeon shooting.

Torridon Sea Tours Shieldaig ☎01520/755353, ⓦtorridonseatours.com. Luxury boat tours reveal the superb scenery and wildlife in the area: half-day loch trips, full-day journeys to Isle of Rona or Skye, plus a sunset trip with wine and nibbles.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

SHIELDAIG

Camping area A designated campsite with no facilities but superb views of the loch is above the waterfront near the primary school at the village's north end.

★ **Tigh-an-Eilean** 01520 755251, tighaneilean.co.uk. Faultless service and utter relaxation in a lovely small hotel on the waterfront with classy country accommodation plus a sensational restaurant (reservation essential); expect the likes of west coast sea bream with a Provençal tomato confit on innovative daily menus (£45 for three courses). The attached *Shieldag Bar* and *Coastal Kitchen* rustles up top-notch bistro dishes like seafood stews and posh pizzas (£8–12). Bar Feb–New Year daily 11am–11pm; food served March–Oct daily 6–9pm. £150

TORRIDON

Camping area A wild camp is located beside the turning into the village beside the SYHA hostel. Dishwashing and a shower is in an adjacent public toilet. Beware the midges in summer, though.

Torridon 1 mile south of turn-off into village 01445 791242, thetorridon.com. This Victorian hunting lodge is one of the west coast's grandest stays. Sympathetically styled where Boutique meets Baronial in public areas and Master rooms; Classics are more up to date. A fine dining restaurant (£55 for three courses) is splendidly elegant for daily menus of seasonal modern European cuisine, and the whisky bar with 350-plus malts is a delight. £230

Torridon Inn 1 mile south of turn-off into village 01445 791242, thetorridon.com. Adjacent to and run by the *Torridon* hotel, this is more cyclist- and walker-friendly, with neat, plain en suites. Its moderately priced bar-bistro serves regional ales and good gastro-pub cooking – salmon, fish and chips or steak-and-ale pie (around £10–12). Jan–March & Dec Thurs–Sun 8am–11pm; food served 8–10am & noon–9pm; April–Nov daily, same hours. £104

SYHA Torridon Start of village, 100m from turn-off 01445 791284, syha.org.uk. Though the Seventies-vintage municipal building is no looker, this hostel is spacious and a popular choice with hikers and bikers thanks to a location beneath the peaks. Provides the usual laundry and drying room, plus very cheap meals daily. Closed three weeks in Jan. Dorms £18; doubles £46

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Loch Maree

About eight miles north of Loch Torridon, **Loch Maree**, dotted with Caledonian-pine-covered islands, is one of the area's scenic highlights, best viewed from the A832 road that drops down to its southeastern tip through Glen Docherty. At the southeastern end of the loch, the A896 from Torridon meets the A832 from Achnasheen at small **KINLOCHEWE**, a good base if you're heading into the hills.

Beinn Eighe Nature Reserve

The A832 skirts the southern shore of Loch Maree, passing the **Beinn Eighe Nature Reserve**, Britain's oldest wildlife sanctuary, set up in 1951. Parts of the reserve are forested with Caledonian pinewood, which once covered the whole country, and it is home to pine martens, wildcats, buzzards and golden eagles. A mile north of Kinlochewe, the **Beinn Eighe Visitor Centre** (Easter & May–Oct daily 10am–5pm; 01445 760254, nnr-scotland.org.uk/beinn-eighe) on the A832, informs visitors about the rare species and offers several "talking trails" for children. Two **walks** start from the Coille na Glas-Leitir car park a mile north of the visitor centre: a mile-long trail into ancient pine woodland and a 3.5-mile track into the mountains.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — LOCH MAREE

Kinlochewe Hotel A832 01445 760253, kinlochewehotel.co.uk. A traditional hotel with a warm welcome and decent line in regional beers and daily good-value soups and casseroles. Rooms are modest but comfy enough, though en suites cost another £20. An annexe holds a very basic twelve-bed bunkhouse, with triple-deck bunks in one room. Doubles £75; Dorms £15.50

Whistle Stop Café Torrisdale Rd 01445 760423. The old village hall is always a good stop before or after the hills. There are hearty breakfasts and a modern European bistro menu that swings from sandwiches and wraps to salads of scallops and bacon (£6–14). Easter–Oct Mon–Thurs 9am–7pm, Fri & Sat 9am–9pm; Nov–Easter same hours but closed Mon.

FROM TOP EILEAN DONAN CASTLE (P.448); STAC POLLAIDH (P.462) >

Gairloch and around

Cheerful and unpretentious, **GAIRLOCH** thrives as a low-key holiday resort, with several sandy beaches for the bucket and spade brigade, some good coastal walks within easy reach and an abundance of wildlife cruise operators that pray for passing minke whales. The township is divided into distinct areas spread along Loch Gairloch: to the south, in **Flowerdale Bay**, is Charlestown with the harbour; west, at the turn-off to Melvaig, **Achtercairn** is the centre of Gairloch; and along the north side of the bay is the crofting area of **Strath**. Near the *Old Inn* in Charlestown, the **Sòlas Gallery** (Easter–Oct daily 9am–5pm; ⓣ01445 712626, ⓦsolasgallery.co.uk) is worth a stop for its ceramics and watercolours inspired by the Highlands landscapes. While you're there you might want to take the 1.5-mile walk (round trip) that tracks the Flowerdale river through a woodland glen to a waterfall.

Gairloch Heritage Museum

By the turn-off from the A832 into Achtercairn • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • £4 • ⓣ01445 712287, ⓦgairlochheritagemuseum.org

The **Gairloch Heritage Museum** houses eclectic displays of traditional Highland life, from a mock-up crofthouse to an early knitting machine, plus a small gallery of folk art. Probably the most interesting section is the archive made by elderly locals – an array of photographs, maps, genealogies and taped recollections, albeit mostly in Gaelic.

Big Sand and Melvaig

The area's real attraction is its **coastline**. There's a **beach** just north of the harbour in Charlestown, a crescent of pure sand, as well as a more impressive stretch a few miles around the north side of the bay at **Big Sand** – it's cleaner, quieter and a mite more pebbly. The B8021 terminates at the crofting hamlet of **Melvaig** – a pint and meal await you in the eccentric *Melvaig Inn*.

Rubha Reidh and around

From Melvaig, a rough track heads three miles to **Rubha Reidh** (pronounced "roo-a-ray"), with its operational lighthouse and vast seascapes to the Outer Hebrides. Around the headland lies beautiful **Camas Mor** beach, from where a marked footpath tracks inland (southeast) beneath a sheer scarp slope, past a string of lochans and ruined crofts to **MIDTOWN** on the east side of the peninsula, four miles north of Poolewe on the B8057. Allow half a day, though be aware that few buses travel back from Poolewe (currently Mon, Wed & Sat; 7.45pm; check times on ⓣ01445 712255).

Badachro and Redpoint

On the south side of Loch Gairloch, a single-track lane (built with the Destitution Funds raised during the nineteenth-century potato famine) winds past wooded coves and inlets along the loch to **BADACHRO**, a secluded former fishing village with a wonderful pub.

Beyond Badachro, the road winds five miles further to **REDPOINT**, with its beautiful beaches of peach-coloured sand on either side of the headland and great views to Raasay, Skye and the Western Isles. It also marks the trailhead for the wonderful coast walk to Lower Diabaig (see p.453). Even if you don't fancy a full-blown hike, follow the path a mile or so to find an exquisite **beach** on the south side of the headland.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — GAIRLOCH AND AROUND

By bus Public transport is minimal and requires careful planning. Bus stops for all services are at the *Old Inn*, Charlestown, as well Achtercairn and Strath.

Destinations Inverness (Mon–Sat 1 daily; also ScotBus June–Sept Mon–Sat 1 daily; 2hr 45min); Ullapool (Mon, Wed, Thurs & Sat 1 daily; 1hr 10min); Poolewe (Mon, Wed & Sat 1 daily; 15min).

Tourist information In community centre Gale Centre in Achtercairn (Mon–Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 11am–3pm; ⓣ01397 874543, ⓦgaleactionforum.co.uk).

ACTIVITIES

BOAT TRIPS

Gairloch prides itself on wildlife cruises from its harbour. Orcas and minke whales migrate past from late spring to late summer; porpoise, dolphins and seals are common year-round. All operators are located on the harbour at Charlestown.

Gairloch Marine Life Centre & Cruises Charlestown T01445 712636, W porpoise-gairloch.co.uk. Up to three trips (Easter–Oct; £20) a day run by the largest operator, which deploys a mini-sub for underwater pictures and a hydrophone to pick up audio. Its visitor centre (Easter–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–3pm, Sat & Sun 11am–3pm) has displays of local sea life.

Hebridean Whale Cruises Charlestown T01445 712458, W hebridean-whale-cruises.co.uk. As well as in-shore cruises, the longest established operator runs trips (Easter–Oct; call for winter cruises; from £45) in a high-speed RIB that allows it to reach further off-shore into the North Minch out to the Shiant Isles off Lewis.

PONY TREKKING

Gairloch Trekking Centre 1 Flowerdale Mains, Charlestown T01445 712652, W gairlochtrekkingcentre.co.uk. Lead-rein rides for young or inexperienced riders, plus longer hacks through pretty Highland scenery, between March and Oct.

ACCOMMODATION

GAIRLOCH

Kerrysdale House Charlestown T01445 712292, W kerrysdalehouse.co.uk. Marie Macrae's atmospheric and tastefully furnished B&B is set back from the road in its own gardens before the turn-off to Badachro. One room in particular quickens the pulse with cool contemporary decor. Most are relaxed and homely. £72

Old Inn Charlestown T01445 712006 W theoldinn.net. Country character abounds in the rooms of this former coaching inn set off the main road beside the Flowerdale river. Expect pretty patchwork-style quilts or tartan headboards in cosy en-suite rooms, along with hotel-standard facilities like wi-fi and tea and coffee facilities. £104

BIG SAND

Gairloch Carn Dearg SYHA T01445 712219, W syha.org.uk. This former hunting lodge is spectacularly sited above the foreshore, with vast views to Skye from its lounge. It's also one of the oldest hotels in the network and rather shows its age. Closed Oct–March. Dorms £18; doubles £40

Sands Caravan and Camping T01445 712152, W sandscaravanandcamping.co.uk. The best of the area's campsites, with pitches behind the dunes for sea views. Also rents "wigwams" – actually Scandi-style cabins for up to five with a barbecue and fire pit. Offers laundry facilities, plus kayak and bike rental. Closed Nov to late March. £14.50/pitch; wigwams for two £32

RUBHA REIDH

Rua Reidh Lighthouse T01445 771263, W stayatalighthouse.co.uk. Epic seascapes to the Hebrides in the only lighthouse hostel on Britain's west coast, recently redecorated and with private bathrooms throughout – check website for possibility of a dorm from spring 2014 and to confirm winter openings (undecided on our last visit). Breakfasts, packed lunches and dinner available at bargain prices. £40

EATING AND DRINKING

GAIRLOCH

Mountain Coffee Company Achtercairn T01445 712316. Here's an unusual find for a small Highlands town – a relaxed café with a global backpacker vibe. Coffees, home baking and bagels with fresh fillings, plus a good bookshop on site. Easter–Nov daily 9am–5pm, Dec–Easter Mon–Sat 10am–3pm.

Old Inn Charlestown T01445 712006. Flagstone floors and stone walls provide character in a sympathetically modernized coaching inn. Posh-pub specials such as pheasant in pastry, pork roasts and venison steaks, plus beers from the on-site microbrewery, provide the sustenance. Mains average £13. Daily 11am–11pm; food served noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm.

MELVAIG

Melvaig Inn T01445 771212. Beyond the pebbledash this is more quirky youth club than Highlands pub – the owner's past was with Seventies and Eighties rock bands. In the restaurant, spectacular sea views, local seafood and venison casseroles (£13) are specialities. Feb–Oct Tues–Sun noon–11pm, Nov–Dec Sat & Sun same hours; food served noon–3pm & 6–8pm.

BADACHRO

★ **Badachro Inn** T01445 771212. Settle onto the terrace with a plate of pork belly or creel-caught langoustine (£10–13) and this pub by the old harbour is as fine a place as you'll find for a sunny afternoon. Inside are real ales, excellent malts and a fire for chill evenings. April–Oct daily noon–midnight, Sun noon–11pm; Nov–March Wed–Sun same hours; food served weekdays noon–3pm & 6–9pm, Sat & Sun noon–3pm.

Poolewe

It's a short hop over the headland from Gairloch to the village of **POOLEWE** at the sheltered southern end of Loch Ewe. During World War II, the Arctic convoy embarked from here and the deep-water loch remains one of only three berths for nuclear submarines. One of the area's best **walks** begins nearby, signposted from the layby viewpoint on the A832, a mile south. It takes a couple of hours to follow the easy trail across open moorland to the shores of **Loch Maree** (see p.454), then the car park at Slattadale, seven miles southeast of Gairloch. Double-check timetables (☎01445 712255) but you should be able to continue along the loch shore to catch the Wester bus from Inverness back to Poolewe from the *Loch Maree Hotel* at 7pm (Tues, Thurs & Fri only).

Inverewe Gardens

Half a mile north of Poolewe on A832 • Daily April, May & Sept 9.30am–5pm; June–Aug 9.30am–6pm; Oct 10am–4pm; Nov–March 10am–3pm • £10 • ☎0844 493 2225, 🌐nts.org.uk

Most visitors arrive in Poolewe for **Inverewe Gardens**, an oasis of foliage and riotously colourful compared to the wild coast. The gardens were the brainchild of **Osgood MacKenzie** who collected plants from all over the world for his walled garden, which still forms the nucleus of the complex. Protected from Loch Ewe's salt breezes by Scots pine, rowan, oak, beech and birch trees, the fragile plants flourished on rich soil brought as ballast on Irish ships and by the time MacKenzie died in 1922, his garden sprawled over the peninsula, surrounded by a hundred acres of woodland. Today a network of paths and walkways wander through more than a dozen gardens featuring exotic plant collections from as far afield as Chile, China, Tasmania and the Himalayas.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — POOLEWE

By bus There's a daily bus to Poolewe from Gairloch (15min), currently at 7.45am.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Bridge Cottage Café and Gallery Main road ☎01445 781335. Delicious home baking and freshly prepared snacks like scrambled eggs and smoked salmon (£7) and soups (£3–4) have earned this welcoming café a superb local reputation. The gallery part upstairs displays art and crafts. Easter–Oct daily 10.30am–4.30pm.

Inverewe Gardens Camping & Carvanning Main road ☎01445 781249. As trim a site as usual from a member of the Camping & Caravanning Club and largely occupied by motorhomes. Facilities are well maintained and a few pitches in a shady corner allow campers to wake up to loch views. Closed Nov–Easter. £16.75/pitch

★ **Pool House Hotel** Main road ☎01445 781272, 🌐poolhousehotel.co.uk. Once the residence of Inverewe Gardens' Osgood MacKenzie, the Harrison family home remains one of the Highlands' most romantic small hotels – think rich fabrics, family antiques and art, loch views and a serene sense of calm. Don't be surprised if you struggle to leave the lounge. Closed Nov–Easter. £160

Poolewe to Ullapool

At **LAIDE**, ten miles north of Poolewe, the road skirts the shores of **Gruinard Bay**. It's a great drive, offering fabulous views and, at the inner end of the bay, some excellent sandy beaches before you swing east, tracking high above Little **Loch Broom**, with gorgeous views to mountains opposite – **Badrallach**, seven miles from a left-turn at the head of the loch, is a magical spot to drop off the radar.

Inland, the route joins the A835 at **Braemore Junction**, above the head of Loch Broom. Easily accessible from a lay-by on the A835, the spectacular 160ftm **Falls of Measach** plunge through the mile-long **Corrieshalloch Gorge**, which was formed by glacial meltwaters. A Victorian suspension bridge spans the chasm for a view of the falls and gorge, whose 197ft vertical sides are draped in wych elm, goat willow and bird cherry.

ACCOMMODATION — **POOLEWE TO ULLAPOOL**

Badrallach Croft 9, Badrallach 01854 633281, badrallach.com. Views, space and pure escapism literally at the end of the road. Alongside the campsite are beds in a superb bothy, a 1960s caravan, B&B in an Airstream caravan and a sweet two-bedroom cottage (week minimum). With fishing rod and kayak hire, too, this deserves a few days. £13/pitch; bothy £6; caravan £45

Ullapool

ULLAPOOL, the northwest's principal town, was founded by the British Fisheries Society at the height of the herring boom in 1788. Spread across a sheltered arm of land in Loch Broom, the grid-plan town remains an important fishing centre, which gives it a salty authenticity despite the hundreds of visitors who pass through in high season, bound north or to catch the **ferry** to Stornoway on Lewis (see p.505). And even when holiday-makers throng its streets, Ullapool remains an appealing place – a good base for exploring the northwest Highlands with all the cultural life of the only town worth the name in the region.

Ullapool Museum

7–8 West Argyle St • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; by prior arrangement in winter • £3 • 01854 612987, ullapoolmuseum.co.uk

The only conventional attraction in town, the **Ullapool Museum**, in the old parish church, uses photographs, audiovisual and touch-screen displays to provide an insight into crofting, fishing, local religion and emigration. During the Clearances, Ullapool was one of the ports through which evicted crofters left to start new lives abroad – the musem also has some genealogy resources.

Isle Martin

Isle Martin Trust, 26 Argyle St 01854 612937, islemartin.co.uk • Ferries May–Sept, dependant on weather (£6; contact Ullapool tourist office for times)

Three miles from Ullapool in Loch Broom, **Isle Martin** was inhabited on and off for a few thousand years – they say it was named after a follower of St Colomba, who may be under a fifth-century gravestone in the old graveyard – until the last crofting families called it a day in 1949. Gifted to the RSPB in 1999, the four-hundred-acre island is a romantic spot to be a temporary castaway, with beaches, walks and views to the cliffs of Beinn Mhor Coigach and the Summer Isles. Accommodation overnight is available in two bothies (£35).

Summer Isles

During summer, the *Summer Queen* steamer (May–early Sept Mon–Sat; from £20; 01854 612472, summerqueen.co.uk) and the *Centaur* (Easter–Sept depending on weather; £28; 01854 633708, sea-scape.co.uk), a fast speedboat, run wildlife cruises and trips to the **Summer Isles**, twelve miles west of Ullapool, to view sea-bird colonies, grey seals, dolphins, porpoises and the occasional whale. Whether slow and stately or fast and full-on inside caves, it's a superb trip in good weather.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — **ULLAPOOL**

By bus Buses stop at the pier, near the ferry dock.

Destinations Durness (May–Sept Mon–Sat 1 daily, plus Sun 1 daily in July & Aug; 3hr); Inverness (Mon–Sat 3 daily, Sun 1 daily; 1hr 30min).

By ferry CalMac (01854 612358, calmac.co.uk) sails to Stornaway, Lewis (Mon–Sat 2 daily, Sun 1 daily; 2hr 45min); an extra sailing runs on Sun during summer school holidays.

INFORMATION

Tourist office Argyle St (Easter–May & Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–3pm; June–Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 9.30am–4.30pm; 01854 612486, ullapool.co.uk). This well-run tourist office also offers an accommodation booking service.

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ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS, GUESTHOUSES AND B&BS

★ **The Ceilidh Place** West Argyle St 01854 612103, theceilidhplace.com. Antique beds or old books on vintage cabinets add character to the rooms of this lovely small hotel. Some are pepped up with stylish wallpaper, otherwise modern-rustic rules. The cheapest rooms share bathrooms. Also manages a small two-room bunkhouse (£20) directly opposite. £90

Point Cottage West Shore St 01854 612494, ullapoolbedandbreakfast.co.uk. A seafront former fisherman's cottage with loch views from its two pretty front rooms, finished, like the rear double, in soft natural shades and subtle tartans for a homely atmosphere. £75

★ **Tanglewood House** 1 mile south off A835 01854 612059, tanglewoodhouse.co.uk. Charm and character in an extraordinary house built by a sailor that's full of art and antiques. Superb rooms are individually furnished, the best with a terrace to enjoy the position above Loch Broom – worth its extra £14. Factor in a beach beneath for a dip and this is a truly memorable stay. Closed Easter, Christmas and New Year £96

West House West Argyle St 01854 613126, westhousebandb.co.uk. A former manse, with all the handsome proportions that suggests, plus charming owners who spoil you with fresh bread and cakes. Relaxing modern rooms and a pre-stocked fridge in each room means a continental breakfast at your leisure. All in all a bargain. £60

HOSTEL AND CAMPSITE

Broomfield Holiday Park West Shore St 01854 612020, broomfieldhp.com. Hurrah: a campsite in the centre of town with great loch views and space galore at the tip of Ullapool, plus good facilities and all close to the pub. Closed Oct–Easter. £14/pitch (or £16 with a car)

SYHA Hostel Shore St 01854 612254, syha.org.uk. Busy hostel bang on the seafront, where prints and murals of seaside scenes help add a cheerful holiday atmosphere. There are dorms of various sizes, doubles, twins, two lounges, internet access and laundry plus lots of good information about local walks. Closed Nov–March. Dorms £18; doubles £44

CEILIDHS

The **ceilidh** is essentially an informal, homespun kind of entertainment, the word being Gaelic for a "visit". In remote Highland communities, talents and resources were pooled, people gathering to play music, sing, recite poems and dance. The dances themselves are thought to be ancient in origin; the Romans wrote that the Caledonians danced with abandon round swords stuck in the ground, a practice echoed in today's traditional sword dance, where the weapons are crossed on the floor and a dancer skips over them. Like much of clan culture, the traditions died or were forced underground after the defeat of the Highlanders at **Culloden** and the passing of the 1747 Act of Proscription, which forbade the wearing of the plaid and other expressions of Highland identity. Ceilidhs were enthusiastically revived in the reign of tartan-fetishist **Queen Victoria,** and in the twentieth century became the preserve of the village hall and hotel ballroom. More recently, though, the ceilidh has thrown off its dated associations, with places such as *The Ceilidh Place* in Ullapool and the *Taybank Hotel* in Dunkeld (see p.330) restoring some of its spontaneous, infectious fun to a night of Scottish music and dancing.

EATING AND DRINKING

For a waterfront picnic, pick up fine regional nosh at the West Coast Delicatessen, 5 Argyle St.

The Arch Inn West Shore St ☎01854 612454. Ullapool's liveliest pub divides between a popular bar and informal restaurant with Scottish-French cooking: starters like pan-fried scallops with curry oil or Cullen skink, then home-made fishcakes or duck confit alongside the usual fish and chips. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30–11pm; food served noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

The Ceilidh Place West Argyle St ☎01854 612103. Though locals warn that quality can be erratic, this hall-like venue remains one of the best in town. After breakfasts, it shifts into a bistro menu – home-made burgers, salads, schnitzels, plus daily specials like risotto and fish casseroles – and its bar hosts live music. Daily 9am–10pm.

Deli-ca-sea West Shore St (opposite ferry terminal) ☎01854 612141. Come here for the best takeaway fish and chips to eat by the harbour; all fish is prepared to order and sourced that morning direct from local boats. Mon–Thurs & Sun noon–9pm, Fri & Sat noon–10pm.

Ferry Boat Inn Shore St ☎01854 612366. The interior is nothing special – all of the character of the eighteenth-century pub has been replaced bland by, modern café furnishings – but the *FBI* remains a choice spot to swig a pint of ale at the lochside (midges permitting) and watch the boats. Daily 11am–11pm.

Tea Store Argyle St ☎01854 612995. Fabulous fry-up breakfasts with black pudding and haggis, home-baked cakes and scones, soups and baked potatoes and a refreshing cuppa at prices around £5 – small wonder this unpretentious wee café is popular with locals. Mon–Sat 8am–5pm, Sun 9am–4pm.

ENTERTAINMENT AND FESTIVALS

The liveliest pub around, the *Arch Inn* (see above) hosts live bands, and live Scottish **folk music** is a feature at *The Ceilidh Place* (see above). The town's musical highlight, however, is the excellent **Loopallu rock festival** (🌐loopallu.co.uk), which takes place on the third weekend in Sept; past acts have included Franz Ferdinand, Echo and the Bunnymen, Mumford and Sons, and Paolo Nutini. On a different track, the **Ullapool Book Festival** (🌐ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk) is the Highlands' answer to Hay-on-Wye.

Assynt

If the landscape before Ullapool was impressive, the **Assynt** region just north has an epic, almost cinematic quality. Marking the transition from Wester Ross into Sutherland, this region is one of the least populated areas in Europe and its landscape consists not of mountain ranges but extraordinary peaks which rise individually from the moorland. See a mountain like **Suilven** and you understand why the name is said to derive from "A-ssynt", meaning seen from afar, or "ass" – Old Norse for rocky. Certainly, Assynt boasts some of the world's oldest rock formations, and roadside signs highlight the region's geological importance as the **Northwest Highlands Geopark** (🌐northwest-highlands-geopark.org.uk).

Coigach

Coigach is the peninsula immediately north of Loch Broom, accessible via a road off the A835. It's a beautiful drive, squeezing between the northern shore of Loch Lurgainn and mountains like mammoths, including **Cul Beag** (2523ft), craggy **Stac Pollaidh** (2012ft) and the awesome bulk of **Ben More Coigach** (2439ft), southeast, which presides over the area. There's some spectacular coastal scenery too. It's a place to unwind, with gorgeous views of the Summer Isles scattered offshore and signposted trails along coastal moors and mountains. If the steep Ben More Coigach–Sgurr an Fhidhleir horseshoe (7 miles; 7hr) seems too tough, the Culnacraig circuit (5 miles; 2hr) between Achduart and Culnacraig also offers great views. Coigach's main settlement is **ACHILTIBUIE**, a crofting village spread above beaches and rocks. Sunsets here can be astonishing.

Tanera Mor

A mile offshore, **Tanera Mor** is the largest island of the **Summer Isles**. It briefly hit the headlines in May 2013 when its family custodians put it up for sale – a snip at £2.5 million. Presumably the new owner will continue to allow **boat** trips (Easter–Oct Mon–Sat; 2hr 15min; £25; T01854 622200 or T07927 920592, W summerisles-seatours.co.uk) round the isles to put ashore on Tanera Mor for an hour, allowing visitors to potter up to the post office to buy "Summer Isles" stamps or have a cuppa in a small café by the pier.

Achiltibuie Artists' Gallery

Coigach Community Hall, Achiltibuie • Easter–Oct daily 10am–5pm • T01854 622409, W facebook.com/scotlandgallery

Whether working in jewellery, pottery, painting, prints, textiles or knits, a love of nature inspires the work of the local artists who display and sell work at the community-run **Achiltibuie Artists' Gallery**. These are individual pieces, so don't expect any bargains, but quality is excellent.

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ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

COIGACH

By bus The Scotbus service from Ullapool (Mon–Fri 2–3 daily, Sat 1 daily; 1hr 10min) doubles as the school bus, so services are scheduled around the start and end of the school day.

Tourist information Useful websites include W coigach.com, or W summer-isles.com for Tanera Mor.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Achininver SYHA Achininver, 2 miles south of Achiltibuie T01854 622482, W syha.org.uk. Twenty-bed hostel with dorms and twin rooms which retains all the stone walls, wood panelling and rustic character of the original croft. It makes a fine base for mountain hikes – Ben Mor Coigach ridge rises directly behind. Closed Sept–April. Dorms £17; twins £75

Am Fuaran Althandhu T01854 622339. A lovely wee pub whatever the exterior suggests, as cosy as a cabin inside and with a fine (if pricey) menu – steak-and-ale pies, chickpea tagine, scallops in ginger and lemon butter. Most mains are around £15–18. Daily noon–11pm; food served 12.30–2.30pm & 6–8pm.

★ **Port A Bhaigh Campsite** Althandhu T01854 622339, W portabhaigh.co.uk. Spread behind the beach, with mesmerizing sea views and sunsets and excellent facilities that include a laundry, this is as fine a campsite as you'll find in the Highlands. Midges can be horrendous but the *Am Fuaran* bar is literally over the road. £9/pitch

Summer Isles Bar Achiltibuie T01854 622449, W summerisleshotel.co.uk. This former crofters' pub is run by the *Summer Isles Hotel* and food is correspondingly high-end – sourdough baguettes for around £10 and seafood sharing platters – to go with regional beer and the occasional music. Easter–Oct noon–11pm, Nov–Easter eve only (times vary).

Summer Isles Hotel Achiltibuie T01854 622282, W summerisleshotel.co.uk. A stylish hideaway with a superb setting, fresh modern-country decor and lovely simple rooms, most in adjoining annexes. Its restaurant (£58 menu; reservation essential) is no longer Michelin-starred but seasonal modern British menus still dazzle with plates such as scallops or langoustine. Easter–Oct daily 6–9pm. £155

Lochinver and around

It's hard to think of a more beautiful route than the single-track road that wriggles north from Coigach towards Inverkirkaig. Unremittingly spectacular, the journey is the Highlands

in miniature, threading through stunted beech woods, heaving valleys, open moorland and bare rock, past the startling shapes of Cul Beag (2523ft), Cul Mor (2785ft) and the distinctive sugar-loaf **Suilven** (2398ft) until it slaloms along the sea shore to Inverkirkaig, the start of two fantastic walks (see below). **LOCHINVER**, another two miles north, marks the return to civilization. One of the busier fishing harbours in Scotland, the small town (oversized village, really) has a pleasingly down-to-earth atmosphere. Factor in good accommodation and a growing reputation for food, and it makes a natural base for the area.

Inverkirkaig Falls and Suilven

A car park in Inverkirkaig, two miles south of Lochinver, marks the start of a **walk** upriver to **Falls of Kirkaig**, itself the start of a long but gentle walk to the base of **Suilven** – its huge sandstone dome is as much of a landmark today as it was for Viking sailors. Serious hikers use the path as an approach to scale the peak (10–12hr), but you can also follow it for an easy five-mile, three-hour (return) ramble, taking in a waterfall and a secluded loch.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By bus Lochinver may be large by local standards, but connections are not great.

Destinations Inverness (May–Sept Mon–Sat 1 daily, plus Sun 1 daily in July & Aug; 3hr 10min); Ullapool (Mon–Sat 2 daily school termtime only;1hr).

Tourist information The Assynt Visitor Centre in central Lochinver (Easter to mid-June & Sept–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; mid-June to Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 11am–3pm; ☎01571 844194, ⓘlochinver.org.uk) has displays on geology, wildlife and history and is stuffed with local tourist information, including a booklet of *Walks around Assynt* (£2).

LOCHINVER AND AROUND

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Some of the local accommodation is in a conjoined village, **Baddidarrach**, on the north side of the loch; from Lochinver, cross the bridge and turn left.

★ **The Albannach** Baddidarrach ☎01571 844407, ⓦthealbannach.co.uk. Lesley Crosfield and Colin Craig's Victorian house provides a stay of exquisite taste and astonishing views of Suilven. Individually decorated rooms vary from romantic to hip, with great bathrooms. The couple also possess Britain's most northerly Michelin star: six-course set menus (dinner included for residents; £65 for non-residents) of modern European food created from local and home-grown ingredients are brilliant without ever showing off. No children under 12. Food served from 6pm: mid-March to Oct & Dec Tues–Sun; Nov Thurs–Sun. **£295**

Inver Lodge Signed off Main St, Lochinver ☎01571 844496, ⓦinverlodge.com. Refurbishment of a hillside hotel has created a five-star stay, featuring relaxed contemporary decor with a nod to Highlands country style, and loch views. The latter are at their best from the restaurant, an outpost of *Chez Roux*, with fresh seafood plus rich French country dishes like confit pork belly; menus start at £43. April–Oct daily 6–10pm. **£215**

★ **Lochinver Larder, Main Street, near bridge** ☎01571 844356. Sensational home-made pies, including exotics like wild boar, port and prune have made it famous, but this fine bistro prepares other food too: seafood linguine or home-made fishcakes (£13) or langoustine in lime, ginger and chilli butter (£19). Superb takeaways too: those pies, focaccia and baked potatoes. Daily: Easter–Oct 10am–8pm; Nov–Easter 11am–3pm. Closed first fortnight in Jan.

Lochinver Mission Lochinver harbour ☎01571 844324, ⓦlochinvermission.org.uk. New in 2011, the former seamen's mission by the harbour is now a community-run bunkhouse. It has three modern dorms – spotless if a bit bare and tight for space in the six-bed – plus a good kitchen and laundry facilities. The price includes breakfast in the café beneath. Dorms **£18**

Veyatie Baddidarrach ☎01571 844424, ⓦveyatie-scotland.co.uk. Gorgeous views across the loch and a warm welcome in a B&B of immaculate rooms with excellent new showers. Patterned bedspreads and local pottery soften modern furnishings and hotel-quality extras with homely charm. Two nights minimum April–Sept is no great hardship. **£86**

North of Lochinver

There are two routes **north** from Lochinver: the fast A837 along the shore of Loch Assynt to join the A894, or the scenic B869 coast road. Hugging the indented shoreline, the latter offers coastal views, superb **beaches** and high cliff walks. The first village worth a detour is

ACHMELVICH, three miles northwest of Lochinver, where a tiny bay cradles a white-sand beach lapped by azure water. It's popular (relatively speaking), but there are equally seductive beaches up the coast, including a tiny, hidden cove, **Port Alltan na Bradhan**, a mile north, plus a beautiful strand at **CLACHTOLL** a couple of miles beyond.

Point of Stoer

A side road that branches north off the B869 between **STOER** and **CLASHNESSIE** ends abruptly by a lighthouse at **Raffin**. The reason to come is a two-mile stroll along a boggy track to reach the **Old Man of Stoer**, a 197ft rock stack just off the headland's tip, surrounded by sheer cliffs and occasionally scaled by climbers. It's worth a circuit around the south side of the headland to return with a vast view of the mountains of Assynt.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — NORTH OF LOCHINVER

Achmelvich Beach SYHA Achmelvich 01571 844480, syha.org.uk. Although the open-plan lounge-kitchen of this 27-bed hostel in a former school and cottage struggles when full, most people are outside anyway – just 100m away are the white sands of the beach. Dorms and private twins are available. Closed mid-Sept to Easter, as well as weekdays Sept & Easter. Dorms £18; twins £42

Clachtoll Beach Campsite Clachtoll 01571 855377, clachtollbeachcampsite.co.uk. Less is often more in campsites – less concrete, more nature – and this simple, neat site at the heart of the crofting village is all about its location right behind one of the most appealing stretches of powder white sand on the west coast. Closed Oct–Easter. £14/pitch

Split Rock Croft 145 Clachtoll 01571 855215, splitrockcroftbb.co.uk. B&B on a new-build working croft that's as welcoming as its young owners. Has spacious, quietly luxurious en suites – the Skye Room has sea views, the suite-style Garden Terrace has a kitchenette. Breakfasts are all home-grown. £80

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Kylesku and around

Until a road bridge swept over the mouth of lochs Glencoul and Glendhu, **KYLESKU**, 33 miles north of Ullapool, was the embarkation point for a ferry that was the only link to north Scotland. Off the main road since the bridge's construction in 1984, it's now a beautiful, soporific spot, where interlocking slopes plunge into the deep waters. Marking a last hurrah before the Assynt's sharp sandstone gives way to rounded quartzite, Kylesku is popular with walkers due to its proximity to **Quinag** (2651ft), less a single Munro than several peaks reached by a **ridge walk**. The easiest ascent is from a car park on the A894 a few miles south of Kylesku. Also in the area is Britain's highest waterfall, **Eas a Chùal Aluinn** (650ft), at the head of Loch Glencoul. It's five miles return east of a car park two miles south of Kylesku or a full day on a track around the north side of both lochs. Alternatively, boat tours run from the wharf.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KYLESKU AND AROUND

By bus D&E Coaches' (01463 222444) summer-only service from Inverness to Durness via Ullapool and Lochinver stops at Kylesku. It can carry bikes with reservation.

Destinations Inverness (late May to Sept 1 daily Mon–Sat, plus Sun 1 daily in July & Aug; 4hr); Lochinver (same times; 30min).

ACTIVITIES

Boat trips Alongside boat trips to Eas a Chùal Aluinn aboard the Rachael Clare (Easter–Sept 2–3 daily; round trip 1.5hr; £25; 01971 502239 or 07921 149086, rachaelclare.com), the operator also runs a number of specials afloat, including wildlife safaris, geography tours with a geologist and evening mackerel fishing.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **Kylesku Hotel** Kylesku 01971 502231, kyleskuhotel.co.uk. Refurbishment over 2012–13 has created a small hotel of crisp, modern style – soft natural tones, tweed headboards – beside the loch. It provides by far the best food in the area, all sourced locally. Expect the likes of turbot with vermouth and chive sauce (£14), well-hung steak and home-made fish pie. Closed early Nov to Feb. £92.50

The far northwest coast

The Sutherland coast north of Kylesku is a trip too far for some. Others find that the **far northwest coast** captures the stark, elemental beauty of the Highlands like nowhere else. Here, as the geology shifts into ice-scoured pinkish quartzite barely covered by a thin skin of moorland, peaks become more widely spaced and settlements smaller and fewer, linked by twisting roads and shoreside footpaths. Up here, life feels exhilaratingly on the edge of civilization. The flip side is that accommodation and food is spare, particularly out of season.

Scourie and around

Ten miles north of Kylesku, **SCOURIE** lies among a landscape marbled with lochs and lochans. This is prime Scottish **fly-fishing** territory – permits (£5–10) are available from the Fishing Tackle Shop in the garage. There's also some terrific **walking** hereabouts up mountains like Ben Stack (2359ft) – locals yarn that its pyramidal peak inspired a visiting Hollywood executive to create the logo for Paramount Pictures – and a beautiful beach makes it a small-fry family resort.

Handa Island

Owned by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (Ⓦ swt.org.uk) • No charge to visit, but donations encouraged • Ferries operate April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–2pm, every 20–30min (£12.50)

Reason enough to come through Scourie is **Handa Island**, the huge chunk of red Torridon sandstone just offshore. Carpeted with machair and purple heather, the island is maintained as a **wildlife reserve** by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and supports one of the largest seabird colonies in northwest Europe – razorbills and Britain's largest breeding colony of guillemots on ragged sandstone cliffs during summer, and puffins in clifftop burrows from late May to mid-July. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Handa supported a community of crofters who survived on fish, potatoes and sea birds and devised their own government system, with a "queen" (Handa's oldest widow) and male "parliament" who met each morning. Uprooted by potato famine in 1847, most villagers emigrated to Cape Breton, Canada.

Ferries shuttle regularly in summer from **Tarbet**, six miles north of Scourie. Allow three hours at least to follow a **footpath** around the island – an easy and enjoyable walk taking in Great Stack, a 361ft rock pillar on the north shore, and fine views across the Minch.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SCOURIE

By bus Scourie is on the summer-only bike-carrying Inverness–Durness service of D&E Coaches (☎01463 222444) via Ullapool and Lochinver. The Durness–Lairg service of Durness Bus links to Durness.

Destinations Durness (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 1hr); Inverness (late May to Sept Mon–Sat 1 daily, plus Sun 1 daily in July & Aug; 4hr 10min); Lochinver (same times; 50min) Ullapool (same times; 1hr 10min)

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Scourie Caravan and Camping Park Scourie ☎01971 502060. Spread behind the beach, this well-maintained site provides sea views to go with its flat pitches and tidy amenities block. An on-site café-bar (daily May–Sept 8am–10pm), rustles up food and drinks and has a lounge area in case of bad weather. Closed mid-Oct to March. £15/pitch

Scourie Hotel Scourie ☎01971 502396, Ⓦ scourie-hotel.co.uk. A traditional coaching inn whose fishing obsession only adds character. There are plaster trout in trophies on the walls, squishy sofas, creaky floorboards and comfortable en-suite rooms that make a virtue of simplicity; room 18 is the pick. Closed early Oct to March. £90

★ **Shorehouse** Tarbert wharf ☎01971 502251. With its views of pristine shore, this feels like the restaurant at the end of the world. Simple decor matches excellent, unfussy seafood: home-made soups and sandwiches, plus mains of fresh salmon, hot mackerel and seafood platters, around £13. Mon–Sat noon–7pm, until 8pm July & Aug.

Kinlochbervie

North of Scourie, the road sweeps through the Highlands at its starkest – rocks piled on rocks, bog and water, and a bare, stony coastline that looks increasingly inhospitable. The largest settlement here, reached on a side road, is **KINLOCHBERVIE**, an important fishing port serviced by trucks from all over Europe. Otherwise it's a scruffy, utilitarian place, usually visited only as a launch pad for Sandwood Bay.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KINLOCHBERVIE

By bus Kinlochbervie is on the summer-only Inverness–Durness service of D&E Coaches (☎01463 222444) via Ullapool and Lochinver.

Destinations Scourie (late May–Sept 1 daily Mon–Sat, plus Sun 1 daily in July & Aug; 40min); Ullapool (same times; 3hr).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Old School Restaurant and Rooms Inshegra, 1 mile before Kinlochbervie on B801 ☎01971 521383, ⓦoldschoolklb.co.uk. By far the most comfortable accommodation option in the area, with a handful of rather smart rooms, including a cute separate en-suite single. Guests are treated to good-value evening meals of home cooking: expect haddock chowder then braised lamb shank, venison casserole or veggie lasagne (£12–16). Closed early Sept to April. **£60**

Sandwood Bay

A single-track road continues northwest of Kinlochbervie through **OLDSHOREMORE**, an isolated crofters' village above a stunning white-sand beach (a magic spot to wild camp), then on to **BLAIRMORE**, start of the four-mile walk to **Sandwood Bay**. The shell-white **beach** beyond the peat moors is one of the most beautiful in Scotland, flanked by rolling dunes and lashed by gales for much of the year. Vikings beached their longships here over a millennium ago – the name is a corruption of "sand" and "vatn", meaning sand and water. A later bearded mariner who perished on this dangerous coast (undercurrents are too treacherous for swimming) is said to haunt the beach – two crofters in the early 1940s said he tramped across the sand in a buttoned tunic and bellowed at them that the beach was his – and Britain's most recent sighting of a mermaid was recorded here in 1900; apparently she had red hair, green-blue eyes and a 7ft yellow body. Good luck with them both if you decide to wild camp here.

It's possible to trek overland from Sandwood Bay north to Cape Wrath, the northwestern tip of mainland Britain, a full day's walk away. If you're planning to meet the Cape Wrath minibus to Durness contact them first since it won't run if the weather turns bad.

The north coast

A stream of sponsored walkers, cyclists and tour groups makes it to **John O'Groats**, yet few visitors travel the length of the wild **north coast**. Those who do rarely return disappointed. Scotland's rugged northern shore is backed by superb mountains in the west and by lochs and open rolling grasslands in the east. Between them is mile upon mile of crumbling cliffs, sheer rocky headlands and perfect white beaches that are nearly always deserted except for intrepid surfers who come for the best waves in Scotland. Visit in January and there's a chance you might witness the Northern Lights, too.

Only a small place, **Durness** is a good jumping-off point for **Cape Wrath**, the windswept promontory at Scotland's tip which has retained an end-of-the-world mystique lost long ago by John O'Groats. Continue east, **Tongue** and you'll reach enjoys an attractive setting and a Munro to climb nearby, which while **Thurso**, the largest town on the north coast, is acclaimed by surfers. For everyone else it's a gateway to seabird colonies around **Dunnet Head** and **Duncansby Head**.

Durness and around

Scattered over sheltered sandy coves and grassy clifftops, **DURNESS** is the most northwesterly village on the British mainland, straddling the point where the road swings from peat bogs to the fertile limestone machair of the north coast. The village sits above Sango Sands bay, whose fine beach has made it a modest resort. Beatle **John Lennon** came here as a teenager on family holidays to stay with his Auntie Lizzie (Elizabeth Parkes) – his memories later went into the song "In My Life" and he revisited in 1969 with Yoko. Parkes is buried in the graveyard at Balnakiel.

Smoo Cave

A mile east of the village is **Smoo Cave**, a gaping hole in a limestone cliff created by the sea and a small burn. Tucked at the end of a narrow sea cove, the main chamber is accessible via steps from the car park. The much-hyped rock formations are less memorable than a short trip by rubber dinghy (run on demand May–Sept; £3; ☎01971 511704) into two further caverns, not least after heavy rain causes a waterfall through the middle.

Balnakiel

The white sands of **Balnakiel Bay** are stunning in any weather, but especially spectacular when sunny days turn the sea a brilliant turquoise. A path winds north through the dunes behind to reach **Faraid Head** – fine views east to the mouth of Loch Eriboll and west to Cape Wrath make this circuit (3–4hr) the best in the area.

Cape Wrath

The headland takes its name not from stormy seas but the Norse word *hvarf* ("turning place"), a throwback to the days when Viking warships passed en route to raid the Scottish coast. Yet **Cape Wrath** still exudes a powerful sense of nature in the raw. The British mainland's most northwesterly point – and one of only two capes in the country – is tipped by a Stevenson lighthouse and stands above **Clo Mor cliffs**, the highest sea cliffs in Britain and a prime breeding site for sea birds. On a good day you'll gaze out to Orkney and the Outer Hebrides.

The surprise is that Cape Wrath is so easily reached on a day-trip from Durness. The journey begins two miles southwest at **Keoldale**. A foot-passenger **ferry** crosses the Kyle of Durness estuary to link with a **minibus** for the fourteen-mile run to Cape Wrath and the *Ozone* café at the lighthouse (open daily year-round). With two to three days to spare, you could catch the ferry then walk a circuit to Sandwood Bay, catching a bus back to Durness from Kinlochbervie. There's a basic free bothy at Kearvaig. Note that the Ministry of Defence maintains Garvie Island (An Garbh-eilean) as an air bombing range and so occasionally closes the road to Cape Wrath. Indeed, at the time of research it hoped to buy up the peninsula.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND

By bus Public transport is sparse; the key service is the D&E Coaches (May–Sept Mon–Sat 1 daily; also Sun 1 daily in July & Aug). It goes from Inverness (5hr 15min) via Ullapool (3hr 40min), Lochinver (2hr) and Scourie (1hr 10min) and has a cycle carrier.

DURNESS AND AROUND

CAPE WRATH

By ferry and minibus The foot-passenger ferry from Keoldale runs from April to Sept (in theory daily at 11am, plus June–Aug 9.30am; ☎01971 511246, 07719 678729); call to confirm tides and Ministry of Defence schedule. It drops you on the opposite bank of the kyle to connect with a minibus to Cape Wrath (£10 return; ☎07742 670196).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office Just east of the centre of Durness (April–May & Oct daily 10am–4.30pm; June–Aug daily 9.30am–5pm; Nov–March currently Tues & Thurs 10am–12.30pm; ☎01972 511368, ⓦdurness.org). This helpful tourist office can provide information about walks and cycle tracks, including guided ranger walks.

Information on Cape Wrath is at capewrath.org.uk.

Bike rental Bike rental is available from community operator Bike Hub on the car park in the centre of Durness (£12/day); contacts and opening times posted on door.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

DURNESS

Lazy Crofter Bunkhouse 01971 511202, durnesshostel.com. Run year-round by *Mackay's* next door, this is the finest bunkhouse on the north coast, far more appealing than the SYHA hostel by Smoo Cave. Has a snug cabin atmosphere and gets extra marks for individual reading lights in compact twins and two dorms. Nice terrace too, if the weather and midges allow. Dorms £17

★ **Mackay's** 01971 511202, visitmackays.com. Handmade and vintage furniture, luxury linen, natural colours and genuine hospitality make this one of the best stays on the north coast. It also manages weekly self-catering options: from a sweet cabin to Croft 103's eco-chic. Food at their on-site restaurant is excellent, if you can get a table, with continental flavours added to local seafood, lamb and beef (booking essential; mains £11–16). March/April & Oct daily 6–10pm; May–Sept noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm. £125.

Sango Sands Oasis 01971 511726, sangosands.com. This flat, spacious site spreads over cliffs above the turquoise waters of its namesake and beside the pub that manages it. Campers get premier pitches, so wake to a vast seascape. Free out of season, though cold-water showers only. Closed Nov–March. £13.50/pitch

BALNAKIEL

Cocoa Mountain Balnakiel Craft Village 01971 511233. A rich bitter-sweet hot chocolate topped off by white chocolate is the speciality in the bright modern café of this chocolatier, which sells snacks (£5–7) plus its chocolates and truffles. A treat after time in the wilds. March–Oct daily 9am–6pm.

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Tongue to Thurso

Vast and empty, there's drama in the landscape between Tongue and Thurso. It's a bleak moorland intercut with sandy sea lochs and with few inhabitants: tiny **Tongue** is pleasant enough, as is **Bettyhill**, further east. But the real reason to venture this far is the landscape: a dead-end **coast road** west of Tongue; **Ben Hope** (3040ft), the most northerly Munro; and the blanket bog of the **Flow Country** inland.

Tongue and around

Having taken a slow circuitous route around Loch Eriboll and east over the moors of A'Mhoine, you roll finally into the pretty crofting township of **TONGUE**. Dominated from a hillside spur by the ruins of **Castle Varrich** (Caisteal Bharraich), a medieval stronghold of the Mackays (three-mile return walk), the village is strewn above the east shore of the **Kyle of Tongue**, which you can cross either via a causeway or by a longer and more scenic single-track road around its southern side. When the tide recedes, this shallow estuary becomes a mass of golden sand flats, superb on sunny days, with the sharp profiles of **Ben Hope** (3040ft) and **Ben Loyal** (2509ft) looming like twin sentinels to the south, and the Rabbit Islands a short way out to sea. A dead-end road offers views of the islands, plus superb seascapes and scenery as it threads through Talmine towards a beach at **Strathan**; take the left turn to Melness before Tongue causeway.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — TONGUE AND AROUND

Ben Loyal Tongue 01847 611216. Seafood fresh off the owner's boat is served in a relaxed pub along with favourites such as steak pie or home-made burgers. With decent prices (£8–14 main) and live music most Saturdays, this is the choice of many locals. Daily 11.30am–3pm & 5–11.30pm; food served noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm.

Cloisters Talmine 01847 601286, cloistertal.demon.co.uk. *Cloisters* provides a relaxing stay in homely rooms – think wicker furniture and peach and cream colours – plus beautiful views towards the Orkney Islands outside. Breakfast (and dinner at weekends) is in the owners' converted church alongside. £65.

The Craggan Talmine 01847 601278. Ignore the tired pebbledash exterior – this pub has proper restaurant cooking; fresh mackerel with mustard mash, lemon and samphire are typical of mains created from fresh ingredients (average £17–18). Lunches such as ciabatta sandwiches are simpler and half the price. Daily 11.30am–3pm & 6–11pm; food served noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

Tongue Hotel 01847 611206, tonguehotel.co.uk. This nineteen-bedroom small hotel marries relaxed modern taste with the architectural heritage of a former ducal hunting lodge.

There are antiques in the best rooms, even the odd marble washstand, and spacious proportions throughout. £110

Tongue SYHA 01847 611789, syha.org.uk. Another Victorian pile of the Duke of Sutherland, this large well-equipped hostel has spacious dorms and family rooms, plus great mountain views from its position beside the causeway, on the Kyle's east shore. Closed Oct to early April. Dorms £18; twins £45

Bettyhill and around

Twelve miles east of Tongue, **BETTYHILL** is a major crofting village, set among rocky green hills. In Gaelic it was known as *Am Blàran Odhar* ("Little Dun-coloured Field"). The origins of the English name are unknown but it was definitely not named after Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland, who presided over the Strathnaver Clearances (whose sorry tale is told in the town museum). The village is also surrounded on either side by beautiful beaches: **Farr beach**, a splendid crescent of white sand, is behind the museum, while the unbroken arc of **Torrisdale bay** sweeps west of the town beyond the Naver river. Both receive good surf. For more cerebral stuff, the 24-mile **Strathnaver Trail** runs south along the B873 to Altnaharra, past historical sites from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age periods, not to mention the remains of crofting villages cleared in the early 1800s. Pick up guide leaflets (£2) from the museum.

Strathnaver Museum

In the old Farr church, east of the main village • April–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • £2 • 01971 521418, strathnavermuseum.org.uk

The volunteer-run **Strathnaver Museum** houses the usual exhibits of ethnological and archeological interest – crofting items including a bizarre fishing buoy made from a dogskin, Pictish stones and a 3800-year-old early Bronze Age beaker – and also narrates the Sutherland Clearances through a short film. It's most famous item is free to view – the **Farr stone**, a ninth-century engraved Pictish gravestone, is in the west end of the graveyard.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — BETTYHILL AND AROUND

Bettyhill Hotel Main road 01641 521202, bettyhill-hotel.com On our last visit, the *Bettyhill Hotel* was in the process of being renovated; standard rooms were expected to go for £90, budget ones for £70.

Café at Bettyhill Beside Strathnaver Museum, east of the main village 01641 521244. One of the only options in Bettyhill, this small, simple café is all about home cooking, whether daily specials like fisherman's pie (£8) or filled baked potatoes or cakes. It serves fish and chips year-round at weekends (Fri & Sat 5–7pm). April–Oct daily 10.30am–4.30pm.

Thurso

THURSO feels like a metropolis after the wild west. In reality it's a modest administrative service centre, most of whose visitors only pause before catching the ferry to Orkney from

THE FLOW COUNTRY

A detour inland on the A897 east of Bettyhill towards Helmsdale heads south into the **Flow Country**. The name (pronounced to rhyme with "now") derives from *flói*, an Old Norse word meaning "marshy ground" and this 1544-mile squared expanse of "blanket bog" – the largest in the world, says UNESCO, which has it filed under "possible" on its World Heritage status – is both a valuable carbon sink and a home to a wide variety of birdlife. The RSPB's **Forsinard Flows Visitor Centre** (Easter–Oct daily 9am–5pm; free; 01641 571225, rspb.org.uk reserves) at the train station in **FORSINARD**, is the gateway to the so-called Forsinard Flows. Pick up a leaflet then follow the mile-long **Dubh Lochan Trail** over flagstones to learn about its blanket bog being restored from forestry use. En route, you get to see bog asphodel, bogbean, and insect-trapping sundew and butterwort; you've also got a good chance of spotting greenshanks, golden plovers and hen harriers. The visitor centre runs twice-weekly **guided walks** through the area (May–July, currently Mon & Tues 2–5pm; 3hr walk; £5) to explain the wonders of peat; wellies or walking boots are recommended.

its port, **Scrabster**. Yet it makes a good base for the area and is legendary among British **surfers**, drawn to a wave which barrels off a reef just east of the harbour. One of the most powerful waves in Europe, "Thurso East" is not a break for beginners.

The town's name derives from the Norse word *Thorsa*, literally "River of the God Thor", and in Viking times this was a major gateway to the mainland. Later, ships set sail for the Baltic and Scandinavian ports loaded with meal, beef, hides and fish. Much of the town, however, dates from the 1790s, when Sir John Sinclair built a large new extension to the old fishing port. Consequently, Thurso's grid-plan streets have some rather handsome Victorian architecture in local, greyish sandstone. There's little sign of those older roots except **Old St Peter's Church** up the High Street, a substantial ruin with origins in the thirteenth century.

Caithness Horizons

High St • April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 11am–4pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 10am–6pm• Free • T 01847 896508, W caithnesshorizons.co.uk

Caithness Horizons, a local museum in a revamped Victorian town hall, is more modern than any other museum on the coast, using interactive technology as well as old photos to explore local geology, history, farming and fishing. Treasures include a Bronze Age beaker and a Viking brooch. The centre also hosts temporary art exhibitions in a gallery and has a café.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THURSO

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By train Trains to Thurso leave from Inverness and go up the east coast via Lairg. The following services are all Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 1 daily.

Destinations Inverness (4hr); Lairg (2hr 10min); Wick (30min).

By bus Buses depart from the train station, Olrig St and Sir George's St.

Destinations Inverness (4–5 daily; 3hr 30min); John O' Groats (Mon–Fri 6–10 daily, Sat 5 daily; 1hr); Wick (Mon–Fri 8 daily, Sat 4 daily; 35min).

By ferry NorthLink ferries (W northlinkferries.co.uk) operate ferries to Stromness, Orkney (4–6 daily; 90min), from Scrabster, a mile west of town, linked by buses from the train station.

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office Located in the foyer of the Caithness Horizons, on the High St (April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 11am–4pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; T 01847 896508).

Tempest Surf Riverside Rd, by Thurso harbour T 01847 892500. Offers equipment hire, including boards (£20/day), wetsuits (£20/day) and boots and gloves (£5/day).

ACCOMMODATION

Forss House Hotel 3 miles west of Thurso on A836 T 01847 861201, W forsshousehotel.co.uk. Built in 1810 as a hunting lodge, this thirteen-bedroom hotel offers an upmarket stay, with a choice of traditional accommodation in the main house or more modern rooms in annexes. The Forss river, which wends through the grounds, offers fine salmon fishing – the hotel can provide a gillie. £130

The Marine 38 Shore St T 01847 890676, W themarinethurso.co.uk. Opened in 2013, the newest B&B in town has modern furnishings and tweed headboards for a relaxed, modern style. More appealing than the rooms is the small conservatory off the breakfast room with superb sea views – surfers take note. £90

Murray House 1 Campbell St T 01847 895759, W murrayhousebb.com. Central, comfortable and friendly, this B&B is a proper home from home, with five cottagey rooms of floral wallpaper and warm saffron and cream colours, all en suite. Mod cons include flatscreen TVs and wi-fi. Off-street parking available for residents. £70

Sandra's 24–26 Princes St T 01847 894575, W sandras-backpackers.co.uk. The only hostel in town is a clean and well-run 26-bed place that's managed by the owners of the popular chippy downstairs. Refurbished in 2013, its small but neat rooms are all en suite. Free internet access and discount bike rental. Dorms £16; doubles £38

Thurso Bay Camping & Caravan Park Scrabster Terrace T 01847 892244, W thursobaycamping.co.uk. Large, trim site a 5min walk west from the town centre. As well as views to Dunnet Head and Orkney, it has an on-site café with free wi-fi and a laundry. Closed Oct–March. £15.50/pitch

EATING

★ **Captain's Galley** Harbour, Scrabster ☎01847 894999. Fish fresh off the boat is the speciality – unfussy dishes like roast hake with borlotti broth and mussels – on three-course menus (£49) that win awards for sustainability as much as flavour. Also offers takeaway fish and chips of whatever's freshest (Tues–Sat 12.30–6.30pm). Reservations essential. Easter–Oct Tues–Sat 6–10pm; Nov–Easter Thurs–Sat 6–10pm.

Le Bistro 2 Traill St ☎01847 893737. An ever-popular option in Thurso even though it can feel cramped at peak times. The reason is reliable bistro dishes with a Scottish twist such as chicken stuffed with local haggis or Orkney herring. Mains £12–16. June–Aug Tues–Sat 10am–9pm; Sept–May Tues–Wed 10am–3pm, Thurs–Sat 10am–9pm.

Tempest Surf Café Riverside Rd ☎01847 892500. Home baking, toasties and home-made burgers (£5–8) served in a harbourside café with a laidback surf-shack vibe: think surfboards and surf posters and driftwood art on the walls. Daily 10am–5pm.

Dunnet and around

Despite the publicity given to John O'Groats, the most northerly point of mainland Britain is actually **Dunnet Head** four miles north of the unremarkable village of **DUNNET**. It's a far more evocative spot too, covered in heather and bog and plummeting in red cliffs at the headland, marked by a Stevenson lighthouse, and with the whole north coast spread out before you from Cape Wrath to Duncansby Head on a clear day.

Dunnet Bay

Just south of Dunnet lies **Dunnet Bay**, a vast, golden beach backed by huge dunes. Surfers come for a smattering of reef breaks plus a beach break that offers shelter for beginners depending on whereabouts on the bay you tuck in. At the northeast end of the bay, the **Seadrift Visitor and Ranger Centre** (April–Sept Tues, Thurs, Fri & Sun 2–5pm; free; ☎01847 821531) holds an exhibition about the fauna of the northwest coast and the ecology of its sand dunes. It also stocks information leaflets on local history and nature walks.

Mary-Ann's Cottage

South end of Dunnet • June–Sept Tues–Sun 2–4.30pm • £3 • ☎01847 851765

Signposted off the through road in Dunnet, **Mary-Ann's Cottage** is a farming croft vacated in 1990 by the then 93-year-old Mary-Ann Calder. Her grandfather built the cottage and today it is maintained as she left it, full of mementoes of the three generations who lived and worked there over 150 years. With its antique rocking chair before a blackened hearth, still with its old metal teapot, and family photos, it's a very intimate portrait of a recent past that already feels distant.

Castle of Mey

5 miles east of Dunnet • May–July & mid-Aug to Sept daily 10.20am–4pm • £10.50, gardens only £6 • ☎01847 851473, castleofmey.org.uk

The village of Mey whizzes past in just a few houses – yet it was here that the late Queen Mother had her Scottish home. The original **Castle of Mey** was a sixteenth-century Z-plan affair, owned by the earls of Caithness until 1889, and bought in a state of disrepair in 1952, the year the Queen Mother's husband, George VI, died. She spent her summer holidays here each August, which may help explain why it's a modest wee place, unstuffy inside despite the facade that bristles with turrets. The walls are hung with works by local amateur artists and watercolours by Prince Charles (who still visits in late July, when it's closed for two weeks) and personal mementoes of the Queen Mum remain on show – guides are more than happy to explain their significance. The **gardens** outside are a lovely spot for an amble on a sunny day, not least for their views across the **Pentland Firth**.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DUNNET AND AROUND

By bus Bus #80 between Thurso (stops at train station and Olrig St) and John O' Groats passes through Dunnet and Mey (Mon–Fri 8 daily, Sat 5 daily).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Castle Arms Hotel Mey 01847 851244, castlearmshotel.co.uk. A simple but comfortable stay almost opposite the castle entrance; all rooms are en suite, family-size suites are good value. The restaurant prepares good pub-grub such as local steak and fish and chips (£9) plus daily specials. Daily noon–2pm & 6–9pm. £90

Dunnet Bay Carvan Club Dunnet Bay 01847 721319, caravanclub.co.uk. On the plus side are the position behind the dunes – a surfer's paradise when waves are firing – and immaculate facilities. The bad news is it's geared to motorhomes and is expensive due to a surcharge for non-Caravan Club members. Closed Oct to late March. £27/pitch

John O'Groats and around

Don't expect a magical meeting of land and water at **JOHN O'GROATS** – this is an uninspiring tourist trap. While the views to Orkney are fine, the village is effectively a car park ringed by pebbledashed souvenir shops. Who knows what Jan de Groot, the Dutchman who operated a ferry to Orkney from 1496, would think. Come to tick a box or embark on a wildlife cruise, but that's all.

Duncansby Head

Far more appealing than John O'Groats, **Duncansby Head**, a couple of miles east, has the lonely lighthouse and spectacular cliffs everyone wants from a mainland tip. What it lacks is commercialism. The birdlife here is prolific and south of the headland lie spectacular 200ft-high cliffs, cut by sheer-sided clefts known locally as *geos*, as well as several impressive sea stacks.

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ARRIVAL AND TOURS

By bus Thanks to its fame, John O' Groats has regular bus services from Thurso (Mon–Fri 6–10 daily, Sat 5 daily; 1hr) and Wick (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat 5 daily; 50min).

By ferry The John O'Groats passenger ferry (01955 611353, jogferry.co.uk) sails to Burwick, Orkney (May–Sept 2–3 daily; 40min). It also offers afternoon cruises around the seabird colonies and stacks of Duncansby Head or the seal colonies of Stroma (mid-June to Aug daily 2.30pm; 1hr 30min; £17).

JOHN O'GROATS AND AROUND

INFORMATION

Tourist office Beside the main car park (March–Oct daily 9am–5pm; 01847 89237, visitjohnogroats.com).

The Black Isle and around

The **east coast** of the Highlands is nowhere near as spectacular as the west, and feels more lowland than highland. Heading north from Inverness, you're soon into the **Black Isle** – not an island at all, but a peninsula whose rolling hills, prosperous farms and deciduous woodland make it more reminiscent of Dorset or Sussex than the Highlands. It probably gained its name because of its mild climate: there's rarely frost, which leaves the fields "black" all winter. Another explanation is that the name derives from the Gaelic word for black, *dubh* – a possible corruption of St Duthus (see p.476).

The Black Isle is littered with **prehistoric sites**, but the main incentive to detour east off the A9 is **Cromarty**, a picturesque fishermen's town that is arguably the highlight of the entire Highlands' east coast. If you're heading this way with your own transport, a string of villages along the south coast are worth a stop en route for a modest cultural fix, while **Chanonry Point** is among the best **dolphin-spotting** sites in Europe. In a lay-by just across the Kessock Bridge from Inverness, the small **Dolphin and Seal Centre** (June–Sept daily 9.30am–12.30pm & 1–4.30pm; free; 01343 820339, wdcs.org) provides the chance to observe (and listen to) the creatures.

Fortrose and Rosemarkie

FORTROSE, ten miles northeast of Inverness, is a quietly elegant village dominated by the beautiful ruins of a once huge early thirteenth-century **cathedral** (daily 9.30am–5.30pm; free) founded by King David I. It languishes on a pretty green bordered by red-sandstone and colourwashed houses. **ROSEMARKIE**, a mile on, is equally appealing, with its neat high street of stone houses.

Groam House Museum

High St, Rosemarkie • March–Oct Mon–Fri 11am–4.30pm, Sat 2–4.30pm; Nov–early Dec Sat 2–4pm • Free • 01381 620961, groamhouse.org.uk

Located at the lower end of Rosemarkie's high street, **Groam House Museum** displays fifteen intricately carved **Pictish standing stones** (among them the famous Rosemarkie Cross Slab) dating from as early as the eighth century. It also screens a video that highlights other sites in a region that was a stronghold of Pictish culture – a primer to tempt any history buff into a visit to Portmahomack (p.476).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — FORTROSE AND ROSEMARKIE

By bus Stagecoach buses #23 and #26 from Inverness to Cromarty stop at both villages (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun 4 daily; 30–35min).

Cromarty

An appealing jumble of handsome Georgian townhouses and pretty workers' cottages knitted together by a cat's-cradle of lanes, **CROMARTY**, the Black Isle's main settlement, is simply a joy to wander. An ancient ferry crossing on the pilgrimage trail to Tain, it became a prominent port in 1772, fuelling a period of prosperity that gave Cromarty some of the Highlands' finest Georgian houses. The railways poached that trade in the nineteenth century – a branch line to the town was begun but never completed – but the flip side of stagnation is preservation. Out of town, there's a fine four-mile circular coastal **walk**: leave town to the east on Miller Road and turn right when the lane becomes "The Causeway". For a simpler shoreline walk, turn left here, following the path to the water.

Cromarty Courthouse

Church St • April–Sept Sun–Thurs noon–4pm • £2 • 01381 600418, cromarty-courthouse.org.uk

The streets are gorgeous, but to help bring Cromarty's past alive try this child-friendly **museum** in the old **Courthouse**, which tells the history of the courthouse and town using audiovisuals and "talking" mannequins in period costume. You are also issued with an audio handset and a map for an excellent **walking tour** around the town.

Hugh Miller's birthplace

Church St • Late March to Sept daily noon–5pm; Oct Tues, Thurs & Fri noon–5pm • £6.50; NTS • 01381 600245, hughmiller.org

Cromarty's most celebrated son is **Hugh Miller**, a nineteenth-century stonemason turned author, journalist, geologist, folklorist and Free Church campaigner. His thatched cottage **birthplace** has been restored to give an idea of what Cromarty must have been like in his day, with decor that swings between cosy rustic and rather formal Victoriana, and displays that highlight his efforts as a social reformer. Friendly staff and a pretty garden add to the appeal.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — CROMARTY

By bus Stagecoach buses #23 and #26 run from Inverness main bus station (Mon–Sat every 30min, Sun 5 daily; 1hr).

By ferry Scotland's smallest ferry, the two-car service between Nigg and Cromarty (late July to Sept daily 8am–6.15pm, until 7.15pm July & Aug; £2.50; 01381 610269 or 07879 401659, cromarty-ferry.co.uk) sails from the jetty near the lighthouse.

ACTIVITIES

EcoVentures Off Bank Street, opposite Sutor Creek 01381 600323, ecoventures.co.uk. Sails from the harbour in a powerful RIB out through the Sutor stacks to the Moray Firth to see the resident bottlenose dolphins and other wildlife up to three times daily (2hr; £25).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Royal Hotel Marine Terrace 01381 600217, royalcromartyhotel.co.uk. On the seafront just behind the harbour, this traditional inn provides fairly bland but perfectly acceptable rooms which overlook the Firth. Superiors provide the most character through a mix and match of antique furnishings and more modern decor. **£110**

★ **Sutor Creek** 21 Bank St 01381 600855, sutorcreek.co.uk. A lovely café-restaurant full of laidback seaside charm. It focuses on local and seasonal food, whether light lunches (£6–10) or excellent dinners like Shetland scallops with black pudding. The same ethos carries into posh pizzas, best washed down with Black Isle Brewery beers. A gem. May–Aug daily 11am–9pm; Sept–April Wed–Sun 11am–9pm.

Sydney House High St 01381 600451, sydneyhouse.co.uk. Antique wood or iron beds and pretty dressing tables are typical of the furnishings picked up over the years by the owners to lend character to the three en suites in their smart redbrick house just off High St. The best rooms look out over the rear gardens. **£70**

Strathpeffer

Visitors first came to this leafy Victorian spa town to take the waters. In the 1970s and 1980s they arrived with coach tours to wallow in its faded glamour. Now **STRATHPEFFER** is restyling itself again as a place for activities in the surrounding hills, with a focus – ironically – on "wellbeing" that sees it return to its origins as a renowned European **health resort**. All manner of guests disembarked from the Strathpeffer Spa Express train: George Bernard Shaw, Emmeline Pankhurst (who caused a scandal with a lecture on women's rights) and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt on honeymoon.

Renovation has transformed the town's Victorian grand hall into an arts centre and upgraded the adjacent **Upper Pump Room** (April–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 2–5pm; donation), where displays narrate the spa's history.

For all the appeal of the village's faded grandeur, it's the hills that will make you stay. Within striking distance is **Ben Wyvis**, an approachable Munro usually scaled without complication from **GARBAT**, six miles west of Strathpeffer, in five hours. Another excellent hike in the area is up Cnoc Mor hill, where the Iron Age hillfort of **Knock Farril** affords superb panoramic views to the Cromarty Firth and surrounding mountains.

ARRIVAL AND ACTIVITIES — STRATHPEFFER

By bus Stagecoach bus #27 from Inverness drops passengers in the town square (Mon–Sat 12 daily, Sun 5 daily; 50min).

Bike rental The excellent Square Wheels (01997 421000, squarewheels.biz; closed Mon) on the main square rents out bikes and offers good advice on local trails.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Craigvar The Square 01997 421622, craigvar.com. Good breakfasts set you up for a day in the hills and a relaxing atmosphere to settle into afterwards. As central as it gets, this B&B provides modern decor that refers to the early Victorian house (love the roll-top baths) yet includes flatscreen TVs and wi-fi throughout. **£90**

Red Poppy Main St 01997 423332. By spring 2014, this casual, modern place should have shifted from the exhibition hall to new premises opposite the Pump Room. The bistro menu – Cullen skink, pastas, burgers and beef stroganoff priced around £6–12 – is expected to remain the same. Tues–Sat 11am–8.30pm, Sun noon–3.30pm.

The Dornoch Firth and around

For centuries, visitors on the pilgrim trail to the **Fearn peninsula** came from the south by ferry from Cromarty. Nowadays the area north of **Dornoch Firth** is linked by the A9,

O'NEILL

skirting past the quiet town of **Tain**, best known as the home of Glenmorangie whisky, and the neat town of **Dornoch** itself, an unexpected pleasure known for its cathedral and golf courses.

Tain

There's a sense of having arrived somewhere as you swing through the handsome buildings of central **TAIN**. Reputedly Scotland's oldest Royal Burgh, it was the birthplace of **St Duthus**, an eleventh-century missionary. Many a Middle Ages pilgrim came to venerate his miracle-working relics, enshrined first in a sanctuary then in fourteenth-century **St Duthus Collegiate Church**. James IV visited annually, usually fresh from the arms of his mistress, Janet Kennedy, whom he had installed in nearby Moray.

Tain Through Time

Tower St • April–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, June–Aug also Sat–Sun 10am–5pm • £3.50 • T 01862 894089, W tainmuseum.org.uk

Installed in three buildings of St Duthus church and graveyard, the town museum, **Tain Through Time**, is a good place to gen up on the Fearn peninsula's Pictish past and Tain's pilgrimage history, the latter taking in King James's guilty conscience. There's also a dressing-up box to entertain the kids. The ticket price includes an audio **walking tour** of the town; set aside twenty minutes. The same ticket gets you into a neighbouring **museum** that has a dry display of Tain silver, alongside clan memorabilia.

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Glenmorangie distillery

Beside the A9, 1.5 miles northwest of central Tain • Tours Mon–Fri 10.30am–3.30pm, Sat 10.30am–2.30pm, Sun 12.30–2.30pm; shop Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, June–Aug also Sat 10am–4pm & Sun noon–4pm • £5 (book ahead) • T 01862 892477, W glenmorangie.com

Whatever the history, Tain's most popular attraction is the **Glenmorangie whisky distillery**. Tours of the distillery and warehouses explain the alchemic process that ferments mashed malt, distills the liquid in Scotland's tallest stills then matures it in oak casks to create a delicate, vanillay malt. There's a dram or two to finish, naturally.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — TAIN

By train Tain is on the Inverness–Thurso North Highlands line (4 daily; Inverness, 1hr 10min; Thurso 2hr 30min).

By bus Stagecoach east coast buses from Inverness to Thurso (#X99) stop in Tain (Mon–Fri every 30min–1hr, Sun hourly; Inverness 40min–1hr 10min; Thurso 2hr 10min).

ACCOMMODATION

Golf View House 13 Knockbreck Rd T 01862 892856, W golf-view.co.uk. Just south of the centre, this former manse offers a lovely B&B stay in its five rooms. Decor is relaxed contemporary Scottish with a touch of romance and en-suite bathrooms are excellent. Factor in fine views to the Dornoch Firth and full Scottish breakfasts. **£80**

Portmahomack and around

The fishing village of **PORTMAHOMACK**, strung out around a curving sandy beach, is a surprise after the rolling fields of the **Fearnpeninsula** east of Tain. Though empty nowadays, this was a heartland of eighth-century Picts before Viking raids became too much.

Tarbat Discovery Centre

Tarbatness Rd • April Mon–Sat 2–5pm; May Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; June–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 2–5pm; Oct daily 2–5pm • £3.50 • T 01862 871351, W tarbat-discovery.co.uk

Archeological digs in the church at the edge of the village have unearthed sculpted artefacts, including some fine gravestones decorated with Celtic animals or mythical beasts, all well presented in the church as the **Tarbat Discovery Centre**. It marks the first stop on a trail of other Pictish sites south on the peninsula – pick up the Highlands Pictish Trail leaflet to locate other impressive Pictish standing stones, including those at **Hilton** and **Shandwick**.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses from Tain, Lamington St, go east to Portmahomack (Mon–Fri 7 daily; 20min), and to Shandwick, Hill and Fearn (Mon–Fri 7 daily, Sat 6 daily).

PORTMAHOMACK AND AROUND

ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND SHOPPING

Anta Fearn (signposted) ☎01862 832477, ⓦanta.co.uk. While you're in the area, pay a visit to Fearn village for the workshop outlet of Anta, manufacturer of contemporary fine tweeds and tartans plus pottery and homeware; entertain the kids on a rainy day with painting mugs. Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

Oystercatcher Main St, Portmahomack ☎01862 871560, ⓦthe-oystercatcher.co.uk. This pretty place in a harbourside cottage prepares bistro lunches, then dinner menus specializing in seafood, including a cheeky house Bloody Mary – crab with spiced tomato frappé with a zing of vodka; two courses £29. Bed and outstanding breakfast is available in three pretty en suites above. Reservations recommended. Thurs–Sun 12.15–2.45pm, Wed–Sat 6.30–11pm. £108

Lairg and around

North of Bonar Bridge, the A836 parallels the River Shin to **LAIRG**, scattered at the eastern end of **Loch Shin**. It's predominantly a transport hub, with little of interest unless your visit coincides with the annual lamb sale in mid-August, one of the largest one-day markets in Europe.

Falls of Shin

4 miles south of Lairg • Daily mid-May to Oct 9am–5pm; Nov to mid-May 10am–4pm • Free • ☎01549 402231, ⓦfallsofshin.co.uk •

The reason to come this way is the **Falls of Shin** in Achany Glen, four miles south of Lairg. This is one of the best places in Scotland to see **salmon** leap on their upstream migration between March and November; the 12ft cascade is on the cusp of the maximum leap for a fish and most tumble back into the river. A platform provides a front-row view of the action, which peaks from late July to September.

Dornoch

DORNOCH, a genteel villagey town eight miles north of Tain, lies on a headland overlooking the **Dornoch Firth**. Blessed with good looks and a sunny climate (by Scottish standards) and surrounded by sand dunes, it has morphed into a modest upmarket resort: all antiques shops and fine accommodation in the historic sandstone centre, a championship **golf course** plus miles of sandy beaches just outside. So it was a crowning achievement when, in 2002, Dornoch hosted Scotland's most rock'n'roll wedding of recent times – Madonna married Guy Ritchie at nearby **Skibo Castle** and had her son baptized in Dornoch Cathedral.

Dornoch Cathedral

Castle St • Visitor times mid-May to mid-Sept Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; services Sun 11am • ☎01862 810296

Dating from the twelfth century, Dornoch became a royal burgh in 1628. Pride of place among its oldest buildings grouped around the square is the **cathedral** founded in 1224 and built of local sandstone. The original was horribly damaged by marauding Mackays in 1570, and much of what you see today was restored by the Countess of Sutherland in 1835, though the worst of her Victorian excesses were removed in the twentieth century, when the interior stonework was returned to its original state. The stained-glass windows in the north wall were later additions. The counterpart to the cathedral is the fortified sixteenth-century **Bishop's Palace** opposite, now refurbished as a hotel (see p.478).

Historylinks

The Meadows • 10am–4pm: April, May & Oct Mon–Fri; June–Sept daily; Nov–March Wed & Thurs • £2.50 • ☎01862 811275, ⓦhistorylinks.org.uk

A block behind the Bishop's Palace on the high street, **Historylinks** is a small museum which tells the story of Dornoch, from local saints and the last witch burning in

Scotland, which occurred here in 1727, to golfers and Madonna herself, with the usual exhibits, plus three films.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — DORNOCH

By bus Stagecoach's Inverness–Thurso service (via Helmsdale) stops at Dornoch: Inverness (Mon–Sat 6 daily, Sun 4 daily; 1hr 10min); Thurso (Mon–Sat 5 daily, Sun 4 daily; 1hr 45min)

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office In the courthouse building next to the *Castle Hotel* (Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, plus Sat June–Aug and Sun July & Aug, same hours; ⓣ01862 810594).

Royal Dornoch Golf Club Golf Rd ⓣ01862 810219, ⓦroyaldornoch.com. Opened four hundred years ago, this golf club maintains a par 70 Championship links course (£110) rated among the world's best by many golf media, and the easier par 71 Struie course (£40). Booking is essential to play. Note that it has a dress code of no T-shirts (except polo shirts).

ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND DRINKING

★ **2 Quail** Castle St ⓣ01862 811811 ⓦ2quail.com. What it lacks in size this three-room B&B makes up in traditional country character and charm. Decor is beautiful, featuring tartan fabrics and paint-shades of mossy green and soft mustard, old pine furnishings and oil paintings by local artists. The owner is a chef so breakfasts are excellent. £100

Dornoch Castle Hotel Castle St ⓣ01862 810216, ⓦdornochcastlehotel.com. For a splurge, choose the fabulous historic Deluxe rooms in the turreted tower of the Bishop's Palace. Elsewhere this smart hotel is more modern – spacious Superiors with pillow chocolates and whisky miniatures or comfy but bland Garden rooms that overlook the rear garden. £136

Luigi's Castle St ⓣ01862 810893. A metropolitan-styled bistro with modern European dishes like bream with lemon risotto – but the stress on fresh seasonal produce means you may also find mussels in a red Thai broth or crab fishcakes. Mains £10–18. Easter–June, Sept & Oct lunch daily (11am–2pm) & dinner (6.45–9pm) Wed–Sun; July & Aug lunch and dinner daily; rest of year lunch daily, dinner Sat & Sun.

Trevose Main square ⓣ01862 810269. With the central location of the *Dornoch Castle Hotel* beside the cathedral for a fraction of the price, this detached B&B and swathed in roses is all warm golds and creams in its two rooms, decorated with country style. Closed Oct–April. £60

North to Wick

North of Dornoch, the A9 hugs the coast for most of the sixty miles to **Wick**, the principal settlement in the far north of the mainland. The most telling landmark in the stretch is the **Sutherland Monument** near Golspie, erected to the first duke of Sutherland, the landowner who oversaw the eviction of thousands of tenants during the Clearances. That bitter memory haunts the small towns and villages of this stretch, including **Brora**, **Dunbeath**, **Lybster** and pretty **Helmsdale**. Nonetheless, many of these settlements went on to flourish through a thriving fishing trade, none more so than Wick, once the busiest herring port in Europe.

Golspie and around

Ten miles north of Dornoch the A9 rolls through the red sandstone town of **GOLSPIE**. It's a pleasantly bustling if fairly forgettable place, and for most visitors serves only as a gateway to good mountain-bike trails or the grandest castle of this coastline.

Highland Wildcat Trails

ⓦhighlandwildcat.com

One of the best reasons to stop is the **Highland Wildcat Trails** within the hills west of Golspie. Named the best **mountain-bike** rides in the UK by one magazine in 2008, the black-, red- and blue-graded trails include a huge descent from the summit of Ben Bhraggie to sea level. All trails are accessed from the end of Fountain Road.

Dunrobin Castle

A9, 1 mile north of Golspie • April, May, Sept & early Oct Mon–Sat 10.30am–4.30pm, Sun noon–4.30pm; June–Aug daily 10.30am–5.30pm • £10 • ☎ 01408 633177, 🌐 dunrobincastle.co.uk

Mountain biking aside, the reason to stop in Golspie is to tour the largest house in the Highlands, **Dunrobin Castle**, north of the centre. Modelled on a Loire château by Sir Charles Barry, the architect behind London's Houses of Parliament, it is the seat of the Sutherland family, once Europe's biggest landowners with a staggering 1.3 million acres. They were also the driving force behind the Clearances here – it's worth remembering that such extravagance was paid for by evicting thousands of crofters.

Only a tenth of the 189 furnished rooms are visited on tours of the **interior**, which is as opulent as you'd expect and full of fine furniture, paintings (including works by Landseer, Allan Ramsay and Sir Joshua Reynolds), tapestries and *objets d'art*. Alongside, providing a venue of falconry displays (11.30am & 2pm), the attractive **gardens** are pleasant to wander en route to Dunrobin's **museum**, which is housed in the former summerhouse and the repository of the Sutherlands' hunting trophies – heads and horns on the walls plus displays of everything from elephants' toes to rhinos' tails – and ethnographic holiday souvenirs from Africa.

The last extravagance is that the castle has its own **train** station (summer only) on the Inverness–Wick line; this is no surprise, considering the duke built the railway.

The Sutherland Monument

Approaching Golspie, you can't miss the **monument** to the first duke of Sutherland on the summit of **Beinn a'Bhragaidh** (Ben Bhraggie). A 30ft-high statue on a 79ft column, it bears an inscription which recalls its creation in 1834 by "a mourning and grateful tenantry [to] a judicious, kind and liberal landlord", and quietly overlooks the fact that the duke forcibly evicted fifteen thousand crofters from his million-acre estate.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — GOLSPIE AND AROUND

By bus Stagecoach's Inverness–Thurso service stops at Golspie.

Destinations Inverness (Mon–Sat 6 daily, Sun 4 daily; 1hr 15min); Thurso (Mon–Sat 5 daily, Sun 4 daily; 1hr 40min).

By train Dunrobin Castle is a summer stop on the Inverness–Thurso line (April–Oct Mon–Sat 3 daily; 2hr 10min from Inverness, 1hr 35min from Thurso).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Coffee Bothy Fountain Rd ☎ 01408 633022. A cabin-style café popular with bikers and walkers. Fill up on all-day breakfasts, fresh soups and baked potatoes before (£5–8), and with home baking afterwards. Feb–Dec Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm.

Granite Villa Fountain Rd ☎ 01408 633146, 🌐 granitevilla.co.uk. A floral overload brings country charm and keeps to the period style of this late Victorian house. Accommodation is spacious and comfortable in all en suites; the twin is more restrained in decor. £80

Sleeperjazz Rogart, 8 miles west of Golspie ☎ 01408 641343, 🌐 sleeperzzz.com. Sleep in the quirkiest accommodation for miles around: a first-class railway carriage parked in a siding beside the Inverness–Thurso line; a 1930s' showman's caravan; or a Bedford bus. Closed Oct–Feb. £16/person

Helmsdale

HELMSDALE is one of the largest villages between Golspie and Wick. It's certainly the most picturesque: a tight little grid of streets set above a river-mouth harbour. Romantic novelist Barbara Cartland was a frequent visitor and must have looked as exotic as a flamingo in its grey stone streets. For all its charm, it's a newcomer, founded in the nineteenth century to house the evicted inhabitants of Strath Kildonan, which lies behind it, and which subsequently flourished as a herring port.

Timespan Heritage Centre

Dunrobin St • March–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm; Nov–Feb Tues 2–4pm, Sat–Sun 11am–4pm • £4 • ☎ 01431 821327, ⓦ timespan.org.uk

Good looks and sleepy ambience aside, the appeal of Helmsdale is the **Timespan Heritage Centre** beside the river. An ambitious venture for a place this size, the modern museum tells the story of Viking raids, crofting in recreated houses, the Kildonan Gold Rush, Clearances and fishing through high-tech displays, including Wii-based games to navigate animations of local yarns, and audio tours. It also has an art gallery.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — HELMSDALE

By train On the Inverness–Thurso line (Mon–Sat 3 daily, Sun 2 daily; 2hr 20min from Inverness, 1hr 15min from Thurso).
Tourist information Strath Ullie Crafts on the harbour doubles as a source of tourist information (Mon–Sat 10am–5.30pm; ☎ 01431 821402). Otherwise, visit ⓦ helmsdale.org.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

On our last visit the once-excellent *Bridge Hotel* was awaiting sale. Hopefully, a new owner will restore its restaurants and accommodation.

Helmsdale Hostel Stafford St ☎ 08701 553255, ⓦ helmsdalehostel.co.uk. Snug from panelled walls and wood floors as much as a woodburner in the lounge, this is a friendly wee hostel with room for fourteen guests in two dorms or two rooms, most with single beds. Closed Oct–Easter. Dorms £17; twins £45.

La Mirage Dunrobin St ☎ 01431 821615. Not quite "The North's Premier Restaurant" as it claims, but possibly the most bizarre due to the decor of a former proprietor who styled herself after Barbara Cartland. The menu, although dated, is solid: fish or scampi and chips, gammon steaks, even chicken Kiev (average £9). Daily 11am–9pm.

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Lybster and around

Another neat planned village, **LYBSTER** (pronounced "libe-ster") was established at the height of the nineteenth-century herring boom. Two hundred boats once worked out of its picturesque small harbour, a story told in the **Water Lines** heritage centre here (May–Sept daily 11am–5pm; £2.50 donation requested).

Grey Cairns Of Camster

7 miles north of Lybster on a side road (to Roster)

Prehistoric sites litter the coast north to Wick – evidence of a past as fertile farmland before it was smothered by a blanket of peat bog in the Bronze Age. The most impressive are the **Grey Cairns of Camster**: surrounded by moorland, these two enormous reconstructed burial chambers were originally built five thousand years ago with corbelled dry-stone roofs in their hidden chambers.

Whaligoe staircase

On the A99, at the north end of Ulbster

Go ten miles north of Lybster to the north end of the village of **Ulbster**, then turn towards the sea opposite a sign to "Cairn o'Get" to find the little-known **Whaligoe staircase**. Its 365 uneven steps lead steeply down from beside a car park to a natural harbour surrounded by high cliffs. It's an atmospheric spot that feels far more remote than the road suggests, all wheeling sea birds and empty sea. Just be glad you don't have to haul baskets full of herring back up as the village's fisherwomen once did.

Wick

Since it was founded by Vikings as *Vik* (meaning "bay"), **WICK** has lived by the sea. It's actually two towns: Wick proper and, south across the river, **Pultneytown**, created by the British Fisheries Society in 1806 to encourage evicted crofters to take up fishing. By

the mid-nineteenth century, Wick was the busiest herring port in Europe, with a fleet of more than 1100 boats, exporting tons of fish to Russia, Scandinavia and the West Indian slave plantations. Robert Louis Stevenson described it as "the meanest of man's towns, situated on the baldest of God's bays". The demise of its fishing trade has left Wick down at heel, reduced to a mere transport hub. Yet the huge harbour in Pultneytown and a walk around the surrounding area – scruffy rows of fishermen's cottages, derelict net-mending sheds and stores – gives an insight into the scale of the former fishing trade.

Wick Heritage Centre

Bank Row, Pultneytown • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, last entry 3.45pm • £4 • ☎ 01955 605393, ⓦ wickheritage.org

The volunteer-maintained **Wick Heritage Centre** is the best place to evoke the heyday of the fishing boom. Larger than it looks, it contains a fascinating array of artefacts from the old days, including fully rigged boats, boat models and reconstructed period rooms, plus a superb archive of photographs captured by three generations of a local family between 1863 and 1975.

Old Pulteney Distillery

Huddart St • Mon–Fri 10am–4pm, May–Sept Sat 10am–4pm; tours at 11am & 2pm or by arrangement (from £6) • ☎ 01955 602371, ⓦ oldpulteney.com

Until city fathers declared Wick dry in the 1920s, fishermen consumed three hundred gallons of whisky a day. The last distillery in town – and most northerly in Scotland – distils more refined malts nowadays; most are light or medium-bodied, with a hint of sea salt. Much is made of maritime character on tours which end, needless to say, with a dram or full tastings.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — WICK

The **train station** and **bus stops** are immediately south and west of the central bridge.

By plane Wick Airport (☎ 01955 602215, ⓦ wickairport.com), just north of town, has flights to and from Edinburgh (Mon, Wed–Fri & Sun 1 daily; 1hr) and Aberdeen (Mon–Fri 3 daily; 35min) with Flybe and Eastern Airways respectively.

By train Trains from Inverness (Mon–Sat 4 daily, 2 on Sun; 4hr 15min) make a long but scenic journey via Lairg, Helmsdale then the Flow Country inland.

By bus Local buses run to John O'Groats then Thurso; long-distance routes to and from Inverness involve a co-ordinated change at Durneath.

Destinations John O' Groats (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat 4 daily; 30–35min); Inverness (Mon–Sat 4 daily, Sun 3 daily; 3hr); Thurso (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat 4 daily; 30–35min).

ACTIVITIES

Caithness Sea Coast ☎ 01955 609200, ☎ caithness-seacoast.co.uk. Harbour tours (30min; £10) plus longer tours to spot wildlife and admire the high cliffs south (from £17) in a fast RIB. The operator also runs longer trips to Lybster (3hr; £45), including one-way trips in either direction (£28). All April–Oct.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

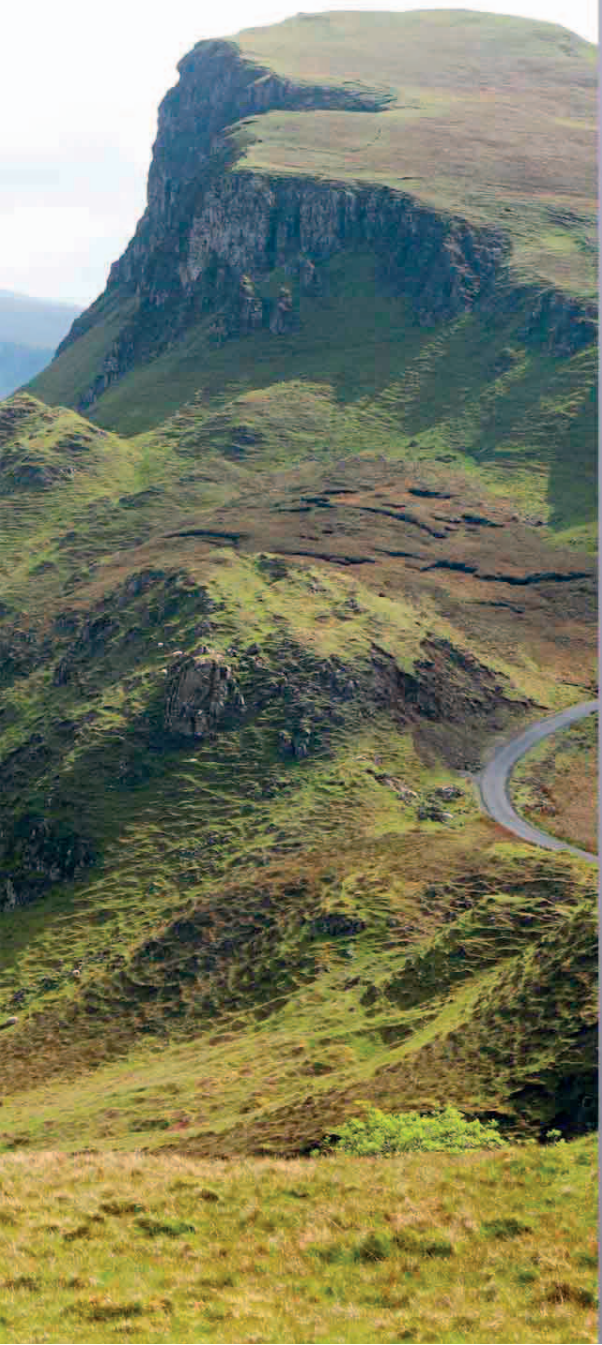
The Clachan 13 Randolph Place ☎ 01955 605384, ⓦ theclachan.co.uk. A four-star B&B on the main road south of Wick, a 5min walk from the centre. So, easy to find and easy to enjoy, in spotless modern rooms in a private section of the house, all simply but tastefully furnished by an owner who goes the extra mile to help. **£80**

Mackays River St ☎ 01955 602323, ⓦ mackayshotel.co.uk. On-going renovation has introduced fresh contemporary cool – oversized headboards, streamlined oak furnishings and iPod docks. First-floor rooms are brightest. Its *No.1 Bistro* serves the likes of lemon-and-garlic roast chicken with Moroccan spices plus fish and chips (mains average £14). 10.30am–9pm. **£107**

Skye and the Small Isles

484 Skye

496 The Small Isles



TROTTERNISH VIEWED FROM THE QUIRAING

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Skye and the Small Isles

For many visitors the Isle of Skye (An t-Eilean Sgiathanach) is the Highlands in miniature. With its shapely summits and shifting seascapes, its superb hiking routes, wildlife and crofting villages, it crams much of the region's appeal into one manageable island. It even has classic Highlands weather. According to one theory, Skye is named after the Old Norse for "cloud" (*skuy*), earning itself the Gaelic moniker *Eilean a' Cheò* (Island of Mist). Despite unpredictable weather, tourism has been an important part of the economy since the railway reached Kyle of Lochalsh in 1897. The Edwardian bourgeoisie swarmed to its mountains, whose beauty had been proclaimed by the Victorians ever since Sir Walter Scott visited in 1814, arguably the most successful tourism PR campaign in Scottish history. People still come in droves, yet Skye is deceptively large. You'll get the most out of it – and escape the worst crowds – if you explore the remoter parts of the island.

The Clearances saw an estimated thirty thousand indigenous *Sgiathanachs* (pronounced "ski-anaks") emigrate in the mid-nineteenth century; today, the population is just over nine thousand. Tourism is now by far the island's biggest earner and has attracted hundreds of incomers from the rest of Britain over the last couple of decades, including an increasing quota of artists. Nevertheless, Skye remains the most important centre for **Gaelic culture** and language outside the Western Isles. Over a third of the population is fluent in Gaelic, the Gaelic college on Sleat is the most important in Scotland, and the Free Church maintains a strong presence.

In contrast to the crowds on Skye, the so-called **Small Isles** – the improbably named Rùm, Eigg, Muck and Canna – receive only to the south a trickle of visitors. Each with a population of fewer than a hundred and with its own identity, they are easily accessible by ferry from Mallaig and Arisaig, though limited accommodation means that an overnight visit requires planning.

Skye

Skye ranks among Scotland's most visited destinations, with all the summer coach tours that suggests. Yet the island also has twenty Munros to bag and year-round hikers and climbers pay homage to the **Cuillin** ridge, whose peaks dominate the island; you'll need experience and determination to explore them. For years, the hiking-and-heather side of Skye was all you could get. So, the most interesting development is that a new generation of islanders has introduced a vibrant arts and crafts scene and updated the food and accommodation. Nowadays, Skye holds its own against anywhere in Scotland. In fact, so sophisticated is some of the relaxation on offer that the island is no longer the preserve of hikers and coach tours. The former congregate around Cuillin or the impressive rock formations of the **Trotternish** peninsula, the latter **Dunvegan** and its castle or **Portree**, the island's capital, with its modest charm and amenities. And if the summer crush really gets too much there's always the **Isle of Raasay** off the east coast to escape to.

WATERFALL, TROTTERNISH

Highlights

❶ **Skye Cuillin** Countless lochans, eleven Munros, one challenging 12km ridge trail. But these mountains are almost as impressive seen on the road to Glenbrittle as on the trail. **See p.489**

❷ **Loch Coruisk** Few sights in Scotland prepare you for the drama of this glacial loch in the Cuillin – the boat ride there from Elgol just adds to the fun. **See p.489**

❸ **Trotternish** Take a walk into the bizarre, Tolkeiesque landscapes of the Quiraing or say hello to the Old Man – this peninsula has some of Skye's most distinctive scenery. **See p.493**

❹ **Food on Skye** Whether in a flagship restaurant like *Three Chimneys* (p.491), the lovely *Glenview* (p.494) or just an arty wee café such as the *Red Roof Gallery*, you'll eat well on Skye. **See p.491**

❺ **Kinloch Castle, Isle of Rùm** Visit this frankly bonkers Edwardian pile to discover the decadence of the contemporary landed gentry. **See p.497**

❻ **Isle of Eigg** Sample off-grid island living in the most vibrant of the Small Isles, with sandy beaches, an easy climb and peace everywhere. **See p.497**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.486

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ARRIVAL, DEPARTURE AND INFORMATION

SKYE

By car The Skye Bridge sweeps across from Kyle of Lochalsh. If driving, don't under-estimate the size of Skye. Fuel is available 24hr at Broadford, plus at Portree, Armadale, Dunvegan and Uig.

By ferry From Mallaig, Caledonian MacBrayne (0800 0665000, calmac.co.uk) operates regular car ferries across to Armadale on the Sleat peninsula (Mon–Sat 8 daily, Sun 4–6 daily; 30min). In addition, a tiny community-run car ferry (01599 522313, skyeferry.co.uk) hops across to Kylerhea from Glenelg, south of Kyle of Lochalsh (Easter to mid-Oct daily 10am–6pm every 15min; 5min).

By train and ferry or bus Mallaig (departure point for ferries to Skye – see above) is served by direct trains from Fort William (4–5 daily; 1hr 20min) and Glasgow Queen St (Mon–Sat 3 daily, Sun 1 daily; 5hr 10min). There are also trains from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily, Sun 1–2 daily; 2hr 30min) where you can catch a bus over the Skye Bridge to Kyleakin (every 45min; 10min) and up to Portree (1 daily; 1hr 10min).

Moving on to the Western Isles It's 57 miles from Armadale and 49 miles from Kyleakin to Uig, from where ferries leave for Tarbert on Harris and Lochmaddy on North Uist.

Tourist information skye.co.uk.

The Sleat peninsula

Thanks to the CalMac ferry from Mallaig to **ARMADALE**, many people's introduction to Skye is the **Sleat** (pronounced "Slate") **peninsula** at the southern tip of the island. The irony is that it's unlike almost anywhere else hereabouts – an uncharacteristically fertile area branded "The Garden of Skye".

Clan Donald Skye

On A851 • Late March to Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm, gardens year-round same hours or till dusk • £7.50 • 01471 844305, clandonald.com

Branded as **Clan Donald Skye** on account of its former inhabitants, **Arnadale Castle**, a mile north of the ferry terminal, is the shell of the neo-Gothic seat of the MacDonald clan – the laird moved into the gardeners' cottage when the kelp fertilizer market collapsed in the 1920s. Intended as an account of the clan, its modern **Museum of the Isles** is actually more interesting for its perspectives on Highland history, with sections on the Jacobite period and its aftermath, featuring Bonnie Prince Charlie keepsakes such as his shoe buckles worn in battle at Culloden and a couple of cannonballs fired at the castle by *HMS Dartmouth*, sent by William III. Just as appealing is the castle's forty-acre wooded **garden**.

Isleornsay

Having retired as Skye's main fishing port, **ISLEORNSAY** (Eilean Iarmain), six miles north of Armadale, is just a pretty secluded village with idyllic views across the bay to seaweed-encrusted rocks and the tidal **Isle of Ornsay**, and behind it all a panorama of peaks on the mainland.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE SLEAT PENINSULA

By ferry Reservations are recommended in peak season (0800 0665000, calmac.co.uk) for the Mallaig–Armadale crossing (Mon–Sat 8 daily, Sun 4–6 daily; 30min).

By bus All bus services from/to Armadale are via Broadford.

Destinations Broadford (Mon–Fri 5 daily, Sat 2 daily; 30min); Portree (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 1hr 20min); Sligachan (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 1hr).

ACTIVITIES

Bike rental You can rent bikes from Armadale Bikes (01471 844241 or 07919 278871, armadalebikes.co.uk), in Ardvasar, half a mile south of the ferry terminal, or bikes can be collected from the ferry terminal with notice.

Sea.fari 01471 833316, seafari.co.uk. Wildlife and scenery trips in a high-speed RIB from Armadale to spot dolphins and minke whales in summer.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Ardvasar Hotel Ardvasar, half a mile south of Armadale 01471 844223, ardvasarhotel.com. This pretty little inn has benefited from refurbishment over 2010–12 to create comfortable, contemporary accommodation as well as a smart restaurant specializing in local seafood – lobster, scallops and crab, plus Speyside beef for around £13. £130

★ **Eilean Iarmain** Isleornsay 01471 833332, eileaniarmain.com. This small hotel is a charmer, romantically furnished in cosy country style: antiques, pretty fabrics, awesome views and not a TV in sight. The restaurant serves fine dining menus such as venison with garlic and white truffle mash, or there's informal eating in the bar (mains average £13). Daily noon–2.30pm & 6–9pm. £170

Flora MacDonald Hostel Kilmore, 4 miles north of Armadale 01471 844272, skye-hostel.co.uk. Turn opposite Kilmore church to find the community-run hostel. Decor is of the granny's armchair variety – character or

dated depending on your view. Bunks are in mixed dorms or a family/group lodge. Dorms £16; twins £42

Rubha Phoil Entry at ferry terminal, Armadale 01471 844700, skye-permaculture.org.uk. Just ten pitches plus two cute cabins in a 16-acre woodland campsite affiliated to an organic nursery. Alongside green credentials, you get eggs from free-range hens (with honesty box), yoga classes, communal campfires and, for early birds, astounding sunrises. Camping £7.50/person; cabins (for two) £30

Kyleakin

The **Skye Bridge** that rendered the ferry crossing redundant has been a mixed blessing for the old port of **KYLEAKIN** (pronounced "ka*la*kin", with the stress on the second syllable). On the one hand it's now bypassed and on the other, that leaves its neat centre that bit quieter, even in high season. Bizarrely, it's also evolved into a backpackers' hangout.

The bridge has been less kind to **Eilean Bàn**, an island from which the bridge leapfrogs to cross Loch Alsh. From 1968 to 1969, its lighthouse keeper's cottage was briefly the home of Gavin Maxwell, author of *Ring of Bright Water* and *Tarka the Otter*. The island now serves as a nature reserve and can be visited on tours booked through the Bright Water Visitor Centre (see below) in Kyleakin.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — KYLEAKIN

By bus There are buses from and to Kyle of Lochlash (Mon–Sat hourly; 10min) and Portree via Broadford (1 daily; 55min).

Tourist information Available in the Bright Water Visitor Centre, The Pier (Easter–Sept, generally 10am–4pm but phone for times; 01599 530040, eileanban.org).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Saucy Mary's Kyleakin 01599 534845, saucymarys.com. The largest hostel in the village has loch views and is popular with backpackers for its location above the pub – quieter accommodation for families is in an annexe, and the same owners also manage a B&B next door. Dorms £18.50; doubles, £49

Broadford

Skye's second-largest village, **BROADFORD** (An t-Àth Leathann), strung out along the main road, has a traffic problem and a charm bypass. That said, Broadford is handy for its full quota of facilities – not least a large supermarket and 24-hour fuel – and has one of the island's few wet-weather retreats. The **Skye Serpentarium** (Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; July & Aug daily; £4.50; 01471 8222209 skyeserpentarium.org.uk), just off the main road, has around fifty reptiles on display, all abandoned or rescued, ranging from tiny tree frogs to large iguanas. There's usually a snake to handle too – handy if you have children to entertain when the heavens open.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BROADFORD

By bus Broadford is served by local buses from and to Kyle of Lochlash (Mon–Sat hourly; 25min), Kyleakin (Mon–Fri 1 daily, Sat 2 daily; 15min) and Portree (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily; 40min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Berabhaigh 3 Limepark 01471 822372, isleofskye.net/berabhaigh. This relaxed B&B behind the Serpentarium, run by a hugely hospitable couple, represents great value for money considering the spotlessly clean en-suite rooms, both with loch views. March–Oct. £76

Broadford Hotel Torrin Rd 01471 822372, broadfordhotel.co.uk. A rather smart four-star hotel with tweedy carpets, russet- and chocolate-toned fabrics and neat extras like iPod docks in the rooms. Its *Spinnaker* restaurant serves mains like sea trout on baby leeks (£13), while the bar offers pub food under £10 and Skye Brewery beers. Daily noon–3pm & 5.30–9.30pm. £130

Tigh an Dochais 13 Harrapool, Broadford 01471 820022, skyebedbreakfast.co.uk. Jaw-dropping views down Broadford Bay through walls of glass are the draw at this striking B&B, although streamlined contemporary style and a calm, grown-up vibe are just as good reasons to check in. March–Nov. £90

The Cuillin and Red Hills

They have razor-edge ridges, the slopes plummet in to scree fields and the lonely lochs are imbued with an almost tangible magic. Small wonder that for many people, the spectacular **Cuillin** range are the sole reason to visit Skye. When – if – the cloud disperses, these spectacular peaks dominate the island. There are three **approaches**: from the south, by foot or by boat from Elgol; from *Sligachan Hotel* to the north; or from Glen Brittle to the west of the mountains. Glen Sligachan is one of the most popular routes as it divides the granite of the round-topped **Red Hills** (sometimes referred to as the Red Cuillin) to the east from the Cuillin themselves – sometimes known as the **Black Cuillin** on account of the colour of their coarse-grained jagged gabbro. With twenty Munros between them, these are mountains to take seriously. There are around five fatalities a year here and many routes are for experienced climbers only. If you're unsure, hire a guide.

Elgol, Loch Coruisk and Glen Sligachan

The road to **ELGOL** (Ealaghol) at the tip of the Strathaird peninsula is one of the most impressive on Skye, swooping into the heart of the Red Hills to culminate in beautiful views to the Small Isles above Elgol pier.

The chief reason for visiting Elgol is to take a boat, whether for a wildlife cruise or a trip across Loch Scavaig to visit **Loch Coruisk**. This isolated, glacial loch lies beneath the highest peaks of the Cuillin and is a superb trip; about an hour by boat then up to a half-day ashore. **Walkers** use the boat simply to begin hikes in the Red Hills or over the pass into **Glen Sligachan**. Alternatively, you can walk round the coast to the bay of **Camasunary**, over two miles to the east – a difficult walk that involves a tricky river crossing and negotiating "The Bad Step", an overhanging rock with a 9m drop to the sea – and head north to Glen Sligachan. Conversely, a time-honoured approach into Glen Sligachan is from the north via the *Sligachan Hotel* (see below), a popular hikers' base.

Glen Brittle

Yet another route into the peaks is from **Glen Brittle** on the west side. The valley edges the most spectacular peaks of the **Cuillin**, a semicircle of mountains which ring Loch Coruisk, before it runs to a beach at Loch Brittle. One of the easiest walks is a five-mile round-trip (3hr) from Glenbrittle campsite (see below) up **Coire Làgan** to a lochan squeezed among stern rock faces. An equally good reason to come are the **Fairy Pools**, one of Britain's most celebrated wild swimming destinations. The scenery is superb as the river tumbles beneath peaks – the downside is water temperature of 8–10°C at best. The pools are signposted from Glumagan Na Sithichean car park, five miles from the Glen Brittle turn.

ARRIVAL AND TOURS — THE CUILLIN AND RED HILLS

By bus Elgol is accessed most easily from Broadford (Mon–Fri 5 daily, Sat 2 daily; 30min). Sligachan is a stop on the Portree–Broadford route (Mon–Sat 6–7 daily; Broadford 35min, Portree 20min).

Boat trips From Easter to Oct, two operators offer superb trips from Elgol to Loch Coruisk, taking 1hr each way, with up to half a day ashore: the *Bella Jane* (daily; £14 single, £24 return; ☎ 0800 731 3089, 🌐 bellajane.co.uk), and the *Misty Isle* (Mon–Sat; £12.50 single, £20 return; ☎ 01471 866288, 🌐 mistyisleboattrips.co.uk). The owner of Bella Jane also runs wildlife-watching and walking trips to the Small Isles in a fast RIB as Aquaxplore (Easter–Oct daily; from £16).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **Coruisk House** Elgol ☎ 01471 866330, 🌐 coruiskhouse.com. A taste of Skye on unfussy super-fresh menus – squat lobster in hazelnut butter, a famous fish pie, Soay lamb or rich Mull beef stews – with two courses from £20. Above are two beautiful cottage rooms of understated luxury: expect dinner, a relaxing night and an awesome breakfast. Perfect. Reservation essential. Daily 7–10pm. **£100**

Glenbrittle Campsite End of road, Glenbrittle ☎ 01478 640404. With sea views and the beach in front, and mountains behind, this spacious, natural site is the best of both worlds. The bad news is midges-thousands

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of them, though they vanish with a breeze. April–Nov. £7/person

Glenbrittle SYHA Glenbrittle 01478 640278, syha.org.uk. Refurbishment in 2013 has reduced the bed quota, opened up the lounge arrangement, modernized facilities and sensitively updated the mountain chalet vibe; its old wood panelling and new leather sofas now combine into a sort of rugged Scandi chic. Offers frozen prepared meals. April–Nov. Dorms £17; doubles £45

Sligachan Bunkhouse On A87 01478 650458, sligachanselfcatering.co.uk. There are peaks just beyond the back door from this modern, clean, no-frills bunkhouse adjacent to the *Sligachan Hotel*. Within are large dorm rooms with some of the largest bunks you'll see plus a laundry, a spacious kitchen and a small lounge with a fireplace. Dorms £16

Sligachan Hotel and Campsite On A87 01478 650204, sligachan.co.uk. This long-standing launchpad for hikers is almost embraced beneath Cuillin's peaks. Alongside dated but comfy enough en-suite rooms, it maintains the barn-like *Seamas Bar* which serves breakfasts plus dishes like venison and chestnut stew or haggis, neeps and tatties (£8–12). A campsite is over the road (no telephone) – the midges in summer are as famous as the view. Hotel March–Oct; campsite open year-round. £130; camping £6/person

Dunvegan

DUNVEGAN (Dùn Bheagain) is something of a letdown after the route there, skirting the bony sea cliffs and stacks of the west coast. Yet it has one of Skye's most famous traditional sights, plus two of the island's more interesting peninsulas, Duirinish and Waternish, in its backyard.

Dunvegan Castle

Easter to mid-Oct daily 10am–5pm • £9.50, or £6 for gardens only • 01470 521206, dunvegancastle.com

At the far end of the village, **Dunvegan Castle** sprawls over a rocky outcrop, sandwiched between the sea and several acres of attractive **gardens**. It's been the seat of the Clan MacLeod since the thirteenth century, but the present facade is a product of Victorian romanticism. Some older architecture remains inside, where you get the usual furniture and oil paintings alongside some more noteworthy items. The most intriguing is the scrappy remnants of the **Fairy Flag**, carried back to Skye, they say, by the Gaelic boatmen of King Harald Hardrada after the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. MacLeod tradition states the flag was the gift of a fairy to protect the clan – as late as World War II, MacLeod pilots carried pictures of it for luck.

Claigan Coral beaches

Keep it quiet but these **beaches** in Claigan, three miles north of Dunvegan, might be as good a reason to visit as the castle. The strands are not coral but calcified maerl (seaweed) and tiny sea shells, but on a sunny day, their white sand and aqua water could almost be the Caribbean. Almost.

ARRIVAL AND ACTIVITIES DUNVEGAN

By bus Dunvegan is served by buses that loop around northern Skye from Portree (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat 3 daily; 45min); about half of them stop at the castle.

Boat trips Seal-watching trips (mid-April to Sept 10am–5pm; £6) in a rowing boat embark from a quay beneath the Dunvegan Castle's garden.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Jann's Cakes Dunvegan This tiny place on the high street is a Skye legend for its cakes and home-made chocolates, and also prepares fresh sandwiches and soups. Not cheap – £5 a slice of cake or £6 for scallop chowder – but quality is high. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm.

Kinloch Campsite Loch Dunvegan 01470 521531, kinloch-campsite.co.uk. Spreads across the head of Loch Dunvegan just as its name (literally "loch head") suggests, although motorhomes and caravans claim the prime waterfront – campers pitch at the sides and on a low hill. April–Oct. £7/person

The Old School Dunvegan 01470 521421. Offers upmarket cooking such as venison haunch with whisky and honey sauce or hake with langoustine bisque (average £17). Raw stone walls add character to a lofty and rather smart dining room. April–Oct daily 6–10pm; Nov–March Sat–Sun same hours.

Roskhill House Ose, 3 miles south of Dunvegan

01470 521317, roskhillhouse.co.uk. Stone walls, crafts and home-made cake bring charm to this old crofthouse, whose modern oak furnishings and bed throws over crisp white linen lend understated style to your stay. Great breakfasts too. £78

The Duirinish peninsula

Much of the **Duirinish peninsula** west of Dunvegan is inaccessible to all except walkers prepared to scale or skirt the area's twin flat-topped basalt peaks: Healabhal Bheag (1600ft) and Healabhal Mhor (1538ft). The mountains are better known as **MacLeod's Tables** – the story goes that the MacLeod chief held a royal feast on the lower of the two for James V.

With dead ends on all roads, the peninsula traditionally received few visitors to its broad, green vales and scattered crofting settlements. Then came the *Three Chimneys* (see below), a gourmet restaurant that has made **Colbost** village something of a pilgrimage for foodies. All but ignored next door is the **Colbost Folk Museum** (Easter–Oct daily 10am–6pm; £1.50; 01470 521 296, glendale-skye.org.uk), a restored blackhouse which replicates a typical croft dwelling of the nineteenth century; a peat fire is often lit.

ARRIVALAND DEPARTURE — THE DUIRINISH PENINSULA

By bus Buses go to Colbost and Glendale from Portree via Dunvegan (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 1hr 15min to Colbost).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Carter's Rest 8/9 Upper Milovaig, 4 miles west of Colbost 01470 511272, cartersrestskye.co.uk. Little touches like a digital radio impress almost as much as furnishings like the wooden sleigh bed in this luxury four-star B&B with astonishing coast views. It prepares evening meals for guests in shoulder months. £85

★ **Red Roof Gallery** Holmisdale, 3 miles west of Colbost 01470 511766. This award-winning little café owned by an artist-musician couple has a loyal fan base for its superb lunches (average £5–8) of local cheese or seafood platters with home-made breads, plus home-baking with great coffee. Sun–Fri 11am–5pm.

★ **Three Chimneys** Colbost 01470 511258, threechimneys.co.uk. A gourmet restaurant at the vanguard of Skye's foodie revolution which has been ranked among the world's best dining experiences. "Seven Courses of Skye" menus (£90) offer exquisite seafood plus unfussy mains like blackface lamb with rosemary maize. Shorter, cheaper menus also available. Reservations essential. Mid–March to Oct Mon–Sat 12.15pm–1.45pm & 6–9pm; also open for Sun lunch in high season. £295

Waternish

Waternish is a backwater by Skye's standards. A little-visited peninsula north of Dunvegan, it is largely empty except for the village of **STEIN** (pronounced "Steen") on the west coast and even this is little more than a row of whitewashed cottages, built in 1787 by the British Fisheries Society. The place never really took off and was more or less abandoned within two generations. Today it's a little livelier, thanks to its lovely restaurant and pub – there are few nicer places on Skye for a pint on a sunny summer evening.

Trumpan Church

At the end of the road that continues north from Stein is the medieval shell of **Trumpan Church**. Its beautiful location belies one of the bloodiest episodes in Skye's history. In a revenge attack in 1578, the MacDonalds of Uist set fire to the church while numerous MacLeods were attending a service within. Everyone perished except one young girl, who squeezed through a window and raised the alarm. The MacLeods rallied and slaughtered the MacDonalds, then threw their bodies into a nearby dyke. In the graveyard is the **Trial Stone** – in the fourteenth century, accused criminals were blindfolded and if they could fit their fingers in its hole they were deemed innocent. Otherwise, ouch.

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ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — WATERNISH

★ **Loch Bay Seafood Restaurant** Stein ☎01470 592235. Tiny, romantic, fabulous, with super-fresh seafood in a dining room full of art. Blackboard menus list the day's catch alongside regulars like peat-smoked salmon or oysters; mains are around £18. Reservations highly recommended. Easter to mid-Oct Tues, Fri & Sat 7–10pm, Wed & Thurs noon–3pm & 7–10pm.

★ **Stein Inn** Stein ☎01470 592362, ⓦsteininn.co.uk. A sixteenth-century waterfront inn that's as traditional as you'd hope: local ales, 125 malts and home-made dishes like pork stroganoff (average £12). Above are five cheerful en-suite rooms; simple, clean and you wake to sea views. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm/midnight, Fri & Sat 11am–midnight/1am; food served Easter–Oct noon–4pm & 6–9pm; Oct–Easter 12–2.30pm & 5.30–8pm. **£74**

Portree

PORTREE is the only town on Skye, with a population of around 2500. It's also one of the most attractive ports in northwest Scotland, its deep, cliff-edged harbour filled with fishing boats and circled by multicoloured houses. Originally known as *Kiltaraglen*, it takes its current name – some say – from *Port Rìgh* (Port of the King), after the state visit James V made in 1540 to assert his authority over the chieftains of Skye.

The focus of activity for many visitors is the **harbour**, which has an attractive wharf that dates from the early nineteenth century and a fishing fleet that still lands a modest catch. Looming behind is **The Lump**, a steep and stumpy peninsula on which public hangings once attracted crowds of up to five thousand. The tidy town centre spreads around **Somerled Square**, built in the late eighteenth century as the island's administrative and commercial centre. A shame that it now serves as Portree's bus station and car park.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PORTREE

By bus Portree is the hub of all transport on the island and has mainland connections from Glasgow with CityLink.

Destinations Broadford via Sligachan (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 50min); Dunvegan (Mon–Sat 3–5 daily; 45min); Glasgow (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 6hr 15min); Glenbrittle (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 50min); Trotternish circuit via Old Man of Storr, Staffin and Uig (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 2hr total circuit).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office Just off Bridge St (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, plus Sun 10am–4pm April–Oct; ☎01478 612992). The best tourist office on the island can book accommodation and has internet terminals.

Bike rental Island Cycles, accessed off The Green or above the long-stay car park (Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, call other months; ☎01478 613121).

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Ben Tianavaig** 5 Bosville Terrace ☎01478 612152, ⓦben-tianavaig.co.uk. The best B&B in the centre, with a warm welcome from your hosts and cottagey en-suites that are modern and bright, with art on the walls and unrestricted harbour views for an extra £10. Good breakfasts whatever the tariff. Reservations recommended. **£70**

★ **The Spoons** 75 Aird Bernisdale, near Skeabost Bridge, 6 miles north of Portree ☎01478 532217, ⓦthespoonskye.com. This epitomizes the new breed of stylish B&B; chalky grey walls, crisp linen and wool throws, an eclectic mix of antique and modern furnishings, plus outstanding breakfasts. A very grown-up, relaxing stay. **£140**

Torvaig Campsite 2 miles north of Portree on A855 ☎01478 611849, ⓦportreecampsite.co.uk. Views of mountains and flat pitches appeal at this family-run site on the road to Staffin. Alongside the usual amenities and electricity hook-ups, handy extras include a laundry with tumble-driers and wi-fi. Easter–Oct. **£7**/person

★ **Viewfield House** Signposted off A87 ☎01478 612217, ⓦviewfieldhouse.com. The last word in Scots Baronial style is this pile on the southern edge of town. It's almost eccentric in its Victorian grandeur, all fabulous floral wallpaper, hunting trophies, stuffed polecats and antiques. Rooms are individually furnished; some tranquil, some gloriously over the top. Great fun. Closed mid-Oct to Easter. **£116**

EATING AND DRINKING

Café Arriba Quay Brae ☎01478 611830. This local institution packs in the punters. They come for a gossip over the best coffee in town or tea served in large china pots as much as the globe-trotting café menu of home-made soups, wraps, pastas or posh lamb kebabs for around £8. Easter–Oct daily 7am–6pm.

Harbour View 7 Bosville Terrace ☎01478 612069. As cosy as the fisherman's front room it once was, Portree's most romantic restaurant prepares the likes of seared hake on puy lentils (£17) or Loch Eihort *moules marinières* on a seafood menu. Tues–Sun: March, April, Nov & Dec 5.30–10pm; May–Oct noon–2.30pm & 5.30–10pm.

Isles Inn Somerled Square ☎01478 612129. With its log fire and flagstone floors, this is the most appealing of Portree's pubs; it also has the occasional ceilidh band. Alongside Skye ales, it has a no-nonsense menu of fish and chips, venison burgers or local Haggis, neeps and tatties (£7–12). Mon–Thurs 11am/noon–midnight, Fri & Sat till 1am, Sun till 11pm.

Trotternish

Protruding twenty miles north of Portree, the **Trotternish peninsula** has some of the island's most bizarre scenery, particularly on the east coast, where volcanic basalt has pressed down on softer sandstone and limestone, causing massive landslides. These, in turn, have created sheer cliffs, peppered with outcrops of hard, wizened basalt – pinnacles and pillars that are at their most eccentric in the **Quiraing**, above **Staffin Bay**, a long arc of beach just north of Staffin village.

Old Man of Storr

6 miles north of Portree along the A855

The most celebrated column of rock on Skye, the **Old Man of Storr** is all that is left after one massive landslip. Huge blocks of stone still occasionally break off the cliff of the Storr (2358ft) above. A half-hour trek from a car park ascends to the pillar but don't expect to have it to yourself – this is one of the island's signature sights.

Quiraing

Just past Staffin Bay a single-track road cuts east across the peninsula into the **Quiraing**, a spectacular area of rock pinnacles, sheer cliffs and strange rock formations produced by rock slips. There are two **car parks**: from the first, beside a cemetery, it's a steep half-hour climb to the rocks; from the second, on the saddle, it's a longer but more gentle traverse. Once you're among the rocks, you can make out "The Prison" to your right, and the 131ft "Needle", to your left. "The Table", a sunken platform where locals used to play shinty, lies a further fifteen-minute scramble up the rocks.

Skye Museum of Island Life

Main road, 2 miles west of Duntulm • Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm • £2.50 • ☎01470 552206, ⓦ skyemuseum.co.uk

It's a short trip from Duntulm to the best of the island's folk museums. Run by locals, the museum – an impressive pair of thatched blackhouses furnished with home furnishing and farming tools – provides an insight into a way of life commonplace only a century ago. Behind the museum are the graves of **Flora MacDonald**, heroine during Bonnie Prince Charlie's flight, and her husband. Such was her fame the original mausoleum fell victim to souvenir hunters and had to be replaced. The Celtic cross headstone is inscribed with a tribute by Dr Johnson, who visited her in 1773: "Her name will be mentioned in history, if courage and fidelity be virtues mentioned with honour."

Uig

Skye's chief ferry port for the Western Isles is **UIG** (Uige; pronounced "oo-ig"), which curves its way round a dramatic, horseshoe bay. Most folk are just passing through, but if you've time to kill, take the lovely, gentle **walk** up Glen Uig, better known as the **Faerie Glen**, a Hobbity landscape of miniature hills at the east end of the bay.

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ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — TROTTERNISH

By ferry CalMac (0800 066 5000, calmac.co.uk) sails between Uig and Tarbert on the Isle of Harris (1–2 daily; 1hr 40min).

By bus The North End Circular bus (service #57A and #57C) loops around the peninsula from Portree via Old Man of Storr, Staffin and Uig (Mon–Sat 6 daily; 2hr total circuit).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

QUIRAING AND AROUND

Dun Flodigarry Hostel 01470 552212, hostelflodigarry.co.uk. What were the servants' quarters for a grand country hotel is now a spacious if fairly dated independent hostel on the loch; rooms and dorms could do with an update. You can also camp on the lawn and use facilities. Camping £9/pitch; dorms £17; twins £45

Ellishadder Art Café Culnacnoc, 3 miles south of Staffin 01470 562734. Superb light lunches of savoury tarts like courgette, fennel and goats cheese plus exquisite cakes for afternoon nibbles in a gallery café that sells the owners' beautiful hand-weavings and paintings. Feb, March, Nov & Dec Fri & Sat 10.30am–5.30pm; Easter–Oct daily same hours.

★ **Glenview Hotel** Culnacnoc, 3 miles south of Staffin 01470 562248, glenviewskye.co.uk. Quirky vintage-style accommodation – all Bakelite radios, naïve paintings and painted floorboards – and sensational cooking in a restaurant with rooms. Short menus (two courses £30) created from super-fresh produce might include nettle and parsley soup with scallops, sole with local mussel sauce or venison in a red wine and tarragon sauce. March–Nov Tues–Sat 7–10pm. £110

UIG

The Sheiling & Ella's Cafe 01470 542797. Within a former crofters' warehouse behind Uig garage, *Ella* serves home-made toasted focaccia, smoked salmon and crowdie pâté and delicious baking (£5–8). It doubles as a local crafts outlet to feel like a village hall on fête day. Easter–Oct Mon 2–5pm, Tues–Sat 9am–5pm; Nov–Easter Tues–Sat 10am–4pm.

Uig SYHA 01470 542746, syha.co.uk. Great views over the bay from the south side of the village and lovely staff, but a 20min walk from the centre and the simple if spacious dorms are rather tired. Bear in mind too that, like all SYHA hostels, it's locked between 10.30am and 5pm. April–Sept. Dorms £17; twins £44.20

Woodbine House 01470 542243, skyeactivities.co.uk. The pick of Uig's accommodation, this B&B is in a tasteful house on the Duntulm road. Front rooms benefit from sea views, and all are en suite. The owners (hugely helpful) also rent mountain bikes. Two nights minimum June–Aug. March–Oct. £68

Isle of Raasay

The fourteen-mile-long island of **Raasay** (Ratharsair) sees few visitors. Yet in many ways it's the ultimate Skye escape, with plenty of walks – intimate strolls to hidden corners rather than the wide spaces of Skye – and that thrill of being cast away on a small island. For much of its history, Raasay was the property of a branch of the Jacobite MacLeods of Lewis. When the clan was forced to sell up in 1843, the Clearances started in earnest. In 1921 seven ex-servicemen and their families from the isle of **Rona** were imprisoned after they squatted in crofts on Raasay. The public outcry led to both islands being bought by the government – they remain in state hands. Raasay's population now stands at around two hundred. The ferry docks in Churchton Bay, near **INVERARISH**, the island's tiny village set within thick woods on the southwest coast.

Dun Caan

Most people come to walk into the interior – a rugged and rocky terrain of sandstone in the south and gneiss in the north. The obvious destination is the flat-top volcanic plug of **Dun Caan** (443m) where Boswell "danced a Highland dance" when he visited with Dr Johnson in 1773. The five-mile trail to the top is easy to follow; it's a splendid trek along the burn through forest behind Inverarish.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — ISLE OF RAASAY

By ferry The CalMac ferry (Mon–Sat 8–10 daily, Sun 2 daily; 25min; 0800 0665000, calmac.co.uk) to Raasay departs from Sconser, 3 miles east of *Sligachan Hotel* (see p.490).

Tourist information raasay.com.

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ACCOMMODATION

Raasay House 01478 660300, raasay-house.co.uk. The MacLeods' rebuilt manor serves as an outdoor centre. Accommodation ranges from B&B in simple modern bunkrooms to large Deluxe rooms with balconies and views to the Cuillins, via hotel-style four-stars that overlook the garden. It also has camping. Among activities on offer (Easter–Oct, weather-dependant other months) are guided walks and canyoning, coasteering, kayaking and sailing. Camping £6/person; dorms £25; doubles £125

Raasay SYHA 01478 660240, syha.org.uk. A two-mile track from the wharf cuts up behind the village to Raasay's hostel, small and simple throughout – just one loo and one shower – but with beautiful views to the Skye Cuillins and well placed to explore the island. A superb getaway. Late May–Aug. Dorms £17.50; doubles £39

The Small Isles

Seen from southern Skye or the west coast of the Highlands, the **Small Isles** – **Rùm**, **Eigg**, **Muck** and tiny **Canna** – lie scattered in a silver-grey sea like a siren call to adventure. After centuries of being passed between owners, most islands have stabilized into tight-knit communities of crofters. While Muck is still privately owned, Eigg was bought out by its islanders in 1997, ending more than 150 years of property speculation, while other islands have been bequeathed to national agencies: Rùm, by far the largest and most-visited of the group, passed to the Nature Conservancy Council (now Scottish Natural Heritage) in 1957; and Canna has been in the hands of the National Trust for Scotland since 1981.

Many people come on a day-trip from Mallaig, yet the Small Isles deserve longer. They are an opportunity to experience some off-grid island life while walking, birdwatching or simply admiring seascapes. Accommodation requires **forward planning** and public transport on the islands is non-existent. But regular ferries mean you're not as cut off as the atmosphere suggests. Better still, services link all islands for a happy week of island-hopping.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE SMALL ISLES

By ferry CalMac (01687 462403, calmac.co.uk) sails from Mallaig (late March to mid-Oct daily, otherwise Mon–Sat), although doesn't sail to all islands each day. Long day-trips are possible on Sat. Sheerwater (01687 450224, arisaig.co.uk) sails daily from Arisaig (see p.444) to Eigg plus Rùm or Muck from late April to late Sept. The ride doubles as a wildlife cruise, so while enjoyable is more expensive than travelling with CalMac. Be aware that boats are frequently cancelled by bad weather, so check forecasts.

Rùm

After almost a century as the "Forbidden Isle" – the exclusive sporting estate of self-made Lancastrian industrialists the Bulloughs – **Rùm** has opened up. Indeed, since it passed to Scottish Natural Heritage in 1957, visitors are positively encouraged. Many come to hike the eight-mile **Rum Cuillin Ridge Walk**, tracking a crown of peaks that are modest by Skye's standards – the summit of Askival is only 812m – but every bit as impressive in looks. And in recent years, crofting land has been released as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) tries to encourage a community. Most of the island's forty inhabitants live around **KINLOCH** on the east coast, and many are employed by SNH, which runs the island as a National Nature Reserve. Of its wildlife, the island is most famous for its **Manx Shearwaters**, which nest in burrows of high peaks. You can learn more about the flora and fauna in an unmanned **visitor centre** halfway between the wharf and castle.

The best beach is **KILMORY** in the north of the island, a flattish walk on tracks through Kinloch then Kilmory glens (10 miles, 5hr return from Kinloch). Bear in mind that Rùm is the wettest of the Small Isles, and is infamous for **midges** (see p.41) – come prepared.

Kinloch Castle

Kinloch • March–Oct guided tours coincide with the ferry • £9 • ☎ 01687 462037

Rùm's chief attraction is **Kinloch Castle**, a squat, red sandstone edifice. Built at huge expense in 1900, its interior is a perfectly preserved example of Edwardian decadence. It's also appealingly bonkers. From the galleried hall, with its tiger rugs, stags' heads and giant Japanese incense burners, to the Soho snooker table in the Billiard Room, the interior is packed with technical gizmos accumulated by Sir George Bullough (1870–1939), the spendthrift son of self-made millionaire, Sir John Bullough, who bought the island as a sporting estate in 1888.

Bullough Mausoleum

When the island's head count peaked at 450 in 1791, the hamlet of **HARRIS** on the southwest coast, a three-hour walk from Kinloch, housed a crofting community. All that remains are ruined blackhouses, which makes the Neoclassical **Bullough Mausoleum** all the more extraordinary. It was built by Sir George for his father and is actually the second family mausoleum here: the first was lined with Italian marble, but dynamited after a friend remarked that it looked like a public lavatory.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — RÙM

By ferry The longest day-trip possibilities from Mallaig are on Sat (11hr). Note that overnight visitors cannot bring dogs, but day-trippers can. Summer timetables are: Arisaig–Rùm (Tues, Thurs & Sat 1 daily; 2hr 30min); Canna–Rùm (Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat 1 daily; 55min); Eigg–Rùm (Mon & Sat 1 daily; 1–3hr 30min); Mallaig–Rùm (Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 1hr 20min–2hr 30min); Muck–Rùm (Sat 1 daily; 1hr 10min).

Tourist information isleofrum.com.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Wild camping is permitted and there are two simple **bothies** (three nights maximum) in Dibidil, on the southeast coast, and Guirdil, on the northwest coast. You'll find a shop/post office/off-licence in **Kinloch**, beside the community hall, which serves teas and snacks (April–Sept Mon–Sat noon–4pm).

Ivy Cottage Kinloch ✉ fliss@isleofrum.com, ☎ 01687 462744. Delivers loch views from two pleasant en-suite rooms and the conservatory where you breakfast, plus a relaxed atmosphere in this, the first B&B on Rùm, in a modern house on the loch in front of the castle. Its young owners prepare dinners for guests and non-residents on request. £90

Kinloch Campsite ☎ 01687 460328. A community-run campsite with an appealing location spread along the shore on the south side of Kinloch bay. Also on site are four tiny, insulated camping cabins with four beds each. Camping £5/person, cabins for two £20

Kinloch Castle Hostel ☎ 01687 462037. This hostel was in transition on our last visit; dormitories have moved to timber-clad Portakabins on the lawn before a new bunkhouse is built by the campsite (by around 2015). It currently has four-bed rooms (one bunk, two singles) plus a shared kitchen and lounge. April–Oct. Dorms £18.50

Eigg

Eigg – which measures just five miles by three – does little to conceal its volcanic origins. It is made of a basalt plateau and a great stump of pitchstone lava, known as An Sgurr, rises in the south. Active geology aside, Eigg is by far the most vibrant of the Small Isles, with a strong sense of community among the hundred residents. This was given an enormous boost in 1997 when they (alongside the Scottish Wildlife Trust) pulled off the first buy-out of a Highlands estate, thereby ending Eigg's unhappy history of private ownership, most recently by Keith Schellenberg, an Olympic bob-sleigher and motor magnate. The anniversary is celebrated with an all-night ceilidh on the weekend nearest June 12.

Galmisdale

Ferries arrive into **Galmisdale Bay**, in the southeast corner of the island. If time is limited, you could head up through woods for superb sea views, or track the shore

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south to see crofting ruins before the Sgurr cliffs – the remains of Upper and Lower Grulin settlements. If the tide is low you can scramble along the shore into Cathedral Cave or Massacre Cave (**Uamh Fhraing**), where all but one of Eigg's 396 inhabitants died in 1577, suffocated by the MacLeod's of Skye who lit a fire in the mouth. Bring a torch and prepare to feel spooked.

An Sgurr

The largest piece of pitchstone in the UK, **An Sgurr** (393m) is the obvious destination for a hike. Actually, the route up is not as daunting as the cliffs suggest; the path is signposted left from the main road, crossing boggy moor to approach the summit from the north via a saddle (3–4hr return). The rewards are wonderful views to Muck and Rùm.

Cleadale

For an easy stroll, strike out to **CLEADALE**, the main crofting settlement in north Rùm. It's spectacularly sited beneath the island's basalt ridge, **Ben Bhuidhe**, and above a beach known as Camas Sgiotaig, or the **Singing Sands**, because the quartz grains squeak underfoot.

ARRIVAL, GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION — EIGG

By ferry Summer timetables are: Canna–Eigg (Mon & Sat 1 daily; 2hr 10min); Mallaig–Eigg (Mon, Tues Eigg–Mallaig only 1 daily, Thurs, Sat 1 daily; 1hr 15min); Muck–Eigg (Thurs 1 daily; 35min); Rùm–Eigg (Mon & Sat 1 daily; 1hr–3hr 30min).
By minibus or bike A minibus is scheduled around ferries (☎01687 482494; £2), or Charlie's taxi can be booked in advance (☎01687 482494). Bike rental is available from Eigg Adventures (late April–Sept; ☎01687 315012, ✉eiggadventures.co.uk), based near the harbour.
Tourist information 🌐isleofeigg.org.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

There's an excellent **wild camp** on north Galmisdale Bay. A craft and produce **market** in the community hall uphill from Galmisdale (June–Aug Mon noon–4pm) is a great spot to pick up lunch.

An Laimhrig Harbour. Island ingredients go into home-made soups, quiche, pizza, lamb or venison burgers, plus blackboard specials such as fishcakes – all for under a tenner. Mon 10am–1pm, Wed & Fri 10am–10pm, Sat 1–10pm, winter open around ferry schedules.

Glebe Barn Galmisdale ☎01687 482417. Eigg's hostel on the hill above the harbour has a rather stylish, spacious lounge with awesome coast views and pleasant wee dorm rooms. Better still is the self-contained cottagey Tigh Ard Beag annexe – a superb stay for up to five people. April–Oct. Dorms £17; twins £40, annexe for two £52

Kildonan House Galmisdale Bay ☎01687 482446, 🌐kildonanhouseeigg.co.uk. A traditional stay in an eighteenth-century farmhouse on the north side of Galmisdale Bay. Marie offers three pleasingly simple pine-panelled rooms, one with an en-suite shower, all with sea views and dinners included. £120

★ **Lageorna** Cleadale ☎01687 460081, 🌐lageorna.com. Beautiful, modern rooms full of contemporary crafts – think rustic wood beds and knitted throws – and astonishing views, plus a lovely vintage cottage that sleeps four. The owner also prepares good-value dishes such as salmon on a bed of spicy puy lentils; reservations recommended. Easter–Sept Mon–Wed & Fri noon–4pm, dinner by arrangement, other months by arrangement. Doubles £140; cottage £500

Sue Holland's Croft Cleadale ☎01687 482480, 🌐eiggorganics.co.uk. On an organic croft, this is the only designated campsite and it's a belter, with views and sunsets to inspire poetry. The old cowshed is now a basic bothy for up to four or for considerably more comfort choose a yurt. Camping £5/person; bothy and yurt £40

Muck

Barely two miles long, tiny **Muck** is the smallest and most southerly of the Small Isles. Low-lying and almost treeless, it is extremely fertile, so has more in common with Coll and Tiree than its neighbours. Its name derives from *muc*, the Gaelic for "pig" (or possibly *muc mara*, "sea pig" or porpoise, which are plentiful) and has long caused embarrassment to lairds – they preferred to call it the "Isle of Monk" because it briefly belonged to the medieval church.

PORT MÓR is the hub of all activity, where visitors arrive and the thirty or so residents live – a tenth of the 320 of the early 1800s. A mile-long road connects Port Mór with the island's main farm, **Gallanach**, which overlooks rocky skerries on the north side. The nicest sandy **beach** is Camas na Cairidh, to the east of Gallanach. For a stiffer challenge, **Beinn Airein** (2hr return), in the southwest corner of the island, is worth climbing, despite being only 450ft above sea level, for a 360-degree panorama of surrounding islands from its summit.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — MUCK

By ferry Summer timetables are: Canna–Muck (Sat 1 daily; 1hr 35min); Eigg–Muck (Tues, Thurs & Sat 1 daily; 35min); Mallaig–Muck (Tues & Thurs–Sun 1 daily; 1hr 40min–4hr 20min); Rùm–Muck (Sat 1 daily; 2hr 45min).

Tourist information The Craft Shop (see below) doubles as an information point. See also Ⓦ isleofmuck.com, a useful website.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

The Craft Shop Port Mór ⓣ 01687 462990. The only shop on the island prepares daily soups and sandwiches made from fresh home-baked bread, plus afternoon teas and dinners of tasty Scottish home cooking prepared on request. April–May & Sept hours vary; June–Aug daily 11am–4pm.

Gallanach Lodge Gallanach Bay ⓣ 01687 462365, Ⓔ lodge@isleofmuck.com. A purpose-built luxury lodge opened in 2013 that takes full advantage of a superb position above the beach to provide fantastic views to Rùm. The style is island boutique – rustic, handmade beds in rooms with hotel-style mod cons. Full board only. £170

Isle of Muck Bunkhouse Port Mór ⓣ 01687 462042. Just six beds in three rooms and not a bunk in sight in the island's simple wee bothy, sited near the port. Life revolves around the Raeburn stove in the living room and the kitchen. Hardly luxurious but full of character. Dorms £12

Wild camping To wild camp on the island, check in at the Craft Shop to find out about any areas currently off limits.

Canna

Measuring a mere five miles by one, **Canna** is managed as a **bird sanctuary** by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). There are no roads, just open moorland stretched over a basalt ridge, and few people now that the population has dwindled to eight. While Canna doesn't receive many visitors by ferry, plenty come by yacht for the best harbour in the Small Isles, a sheltered bay off Canna's main hamlet, **A'Chill**. Notwithstanding walks (see below), you come to Canna for birdlife; this has been a sanctuary since 1938 and 157 species have been recorded, including golden and white-tailed eagles, and Manx shearwaters, razorbills and puffins on cliffs at the western end.

Although less obviously scenic than other Small Isles, the flat(ish) terrain makes for enjoyable **walks**. You can circuit the entire island on a long day (10hr; 12 miles), or from the dock it's about a mile across a grassy plateau to the cliffs on the north shore and Compass Hill, named because its high iron content distorts compasses. A mile west is Carn a' Ghaill, Canna's summit at a heady 688ft.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — CANNA

By ferry Summer timetables are: Eigg–Canna (Mon & Sat; 1 daily; 2hr 10min); Mallaig–Canna (Mon, Wed & Fri–Sun 1 daily; 2hr 30min–3hr 50min); Muck–Canna (Sat 1 daily; 1hr 35min); Rùm–Canna (Mon, Wed & Fri–Sun 1 daily; 55min).

Tourist information Ⓦ thesleofcanna.com

ACCOMMODATION

Tighard ⓣ 01687 462474, Ⓦ tighard.co.uk. Sanday room is the pick – spacious, traditional and with sweeping sea views – in the only B&B on Canna. It's other two smaller and simpler twins also enjoy sea views. Also offers packed lunch and dinner with notice. £90

Wild camping With permission from the NTS, you may wild camp on Canna, though bring supplies.

The Western Isles

505 Lewis (Leodhas)

512 Harris (Na Hearadh)

515 North Uist (Uibhist a Tuath)

518 Benbecula (Beinn na Faoghla)

520 South Uist (Uibhist a Deas)

521 Eriskay (Eiriosgaigh)

522 Barra (Barraigh)

GARENIN (GEARRANNAN)

The Western Isles

Beyond Skye, across the unpredictable waters of the Minch, lie the wild and windy Outer Hebrides, officially known as the Western Isles. A 130-mile-long archipelago stretching from Lewis and Harris in the north to the Uists and Barra in the south, the islands appear as an unbroken chain when viewed from across the Minch, hence their nickname, the Long Isle. In reality there are more than two hundred islands, although only a handful are inhabited, with the total population around 28,000. This is truly a land on the edge, where the turbulent seas of the Atlantic smash up against a geologically complex terrain whose coastline is interrupted by a thousand sheltered bays and sweeping sandy beaches. The islands' interiors are equally dramatic, veering between flat, boggy, treeless peat moor and bare mountaintops soaring high above a host of tiny lakes, or lochans.

The major difference between the Western Isles and much of the Hebrides is that the islands' fragile economy is still mainly concentrated around crofting, fishing and weaving, and the percentage of incomers is low. In fact, the Outer Hebrides remain the heartland of **Gaelic** culture, with the language spoken by the majority of islanders. Its survival is partly thanks to the efforts of the Western Islands Council, the Scottish parliament and the influence of the Church in the region: the Free Church and its various offshoots in Lewis, Harris and North Uist, and the Catholic Church in South Uist and Barra.

Lewis and Harris form two parts of the same island. The interior of the northernmost, **Lewis**, is mostly peat moor, a barren and marshy tract that gives way to the bare peaks of **North Harris**. Across a narrow isthmus lies **South Harris**, with wide beaches of golden sand trimming the Atlantic in full view of the rough boulder-strewn mountains to the east. Across the Sound of Harris, to the south, a string of tiny, flatter isles linked by causeways – **North Uist**, **Benbecula**, **South Uist** – offer breezy beaches, whose fine sands front a narrow band of boggy farmland, which, in turn, is bordered by a lower range of hills to the east. Finally, tiny **Barra** contains all the above landscapes in one small Hebridean package.

In contrast to their wonderful surroundings, villages in the Western Isles are seldom picturesque in themselves, and are usually made up of scattered, relatively modern crofthouses dotted about the elementary road system. And **Stornoway**, the only real town in the Outer Hebrides, rarely impresses.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE THE WESTERN ISLES

By plane There are scheduled flights from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness and Aberdeen to Stornoway on Lewis, and to Barra and Benbecula. Be warned: weather conditions are notoriously changeable, making flights prone to delay and even cancellation.

By ferry CalMac car ferries run daily from Ullapool to Stornoway; from Uig, on Skye, to Tarbert and Lochmaddy; and from Oban to South Uist and Barra, via Coll and Tiree (Thurs only). Timetables quoted in the text are summer frequencies – check calmac.co.uk for the latest, and always book ahead.

Gaelic in the Western Isles p.505
St Kilda (Hiort) p.511
Harris Tweed p.513
SS Politician p.521

LUSKENTYRE BAY

Highlights

❶ **Garenin (Gearrannan), Lewis** An abandoned crofting village whose thatched blackhouses have been beautifully restored: some are now self-catering cottages, one is a café, and a couple have been left as they were when they were last inhabited. **See p.510**

❷ **Callanish (Calanais) standing stones, Lewis** Scotland's finest standing stones have a serene lochside setting on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis. **See p.510**

❸ **Beaches** The western seaboard of the Outer Hebrides, particularly on South Harris and the Uists, is strewn with stunning, deserted golden-sand beaches backed by flower-strewn machair. **See p.513**

❹ **Rodel (Roghadal) Church, Harris** Rodel's pre-Reformation St Clement's Church, at the southernmost tip of Harris, boasts the most ornate sculptural decoration in the Outer Hebrides. **See p.514**

❺ **Barra (Barraigh)** Barra is a great introduction to the Western Isles: a Hebridean island in miniature, with golden sands, crystal-clear rocky bays and mountains of Lewissian gneiss. **See p.522**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.504

THE WESTERN ISLES
0
25
miles
HIGHLIGHTS
1 Garenin (Gearrannan), Lewis
2 Callanish (Calanais) standing stones, Lewis
3 Beaches
4 Rodel (Roghadal) Church, Harris
5 Barra (Barraigh)
N
Sula Sgeir
Butt of Lewis
Port of Ness
A857
Barvas
Flannan Isles
Garenin
A858
Carloway
Bernera
Callanish Standing Stones
Arid Uig
Stornoway
A866
A858
A859
L e w i s
A859
Scarp
An Cliseam (2619ft)
Ullapool
Tarbert
Taransay
Shiant Isles
The Minch
H a r r i s
Scalpay
A859
Leverburgh
Rodel (Roghadal) Church, Harris
WESTERN ISLES
Berneray
North Uist
A867
Lochmaddy
Monach Islands
Benbecula
The Little Minch
Uig
Neist Point
Portree
Raasay
Skye
A865
South Uist
Beinn Mhor (2034ft)
A87
Broadford
Lochboisdale
Eriskay
Canna
Armadale
Barra
Castlebay
Hyskeir
SMALL ISLES
Rùm
Mallaig
Vatersay
Sandray
Pabbay
Eigg
Arisaig
Muck
Mingulay
Barra Head
Tiree
Oban

GAELIC IN THE WESTERN ISLES

All Ordnance Survey maps and many **road signs** are exclusively in **Gaelic**, a difficult language to the English-speaker's eye, with complex pronunciation (see p.597), though the English names sometimes provide a rough pronunciation guide. If you're driving, it's a good idea to pick up a bilingual Western Isles **map**, available at most tourist offices. We've put the English equivalent first in the text, with the Gaelic in parentheses.

GETTING AROUND

By car and by ferry A series of causeways makes it possible to drive from one end of the Western Isles to the other with just two interruptions – the ferry from Harris to Berneray, and from Eriskay to Barra. If you're going to take the ferry, it's advisable to book in advance.

By bus The islands have a decent bus service, though there are no buses on Sundays.

By bike The wind makes cycling something of a challenge – head south to north to catch the prevailing wind.

Lewis (Leodhas)

Shaped rather like the top of an ice-cream cone, **Lewis** is the largest and most populous of the Western Isles. Nearly half of the island's inhabitants live in the crofting and fishing villages strung out along the northwest coast, between **Callanish** (Calanais) and **Port of Ness** (Port Nis), in one of the country's most densely populated rural areas. On this coast you'll also find the best-preserved **prehistoric remains** – Dun Carloway (Dùn Charlabhaigh) and the Callanish standing stones. The landscape is mostly peat bog – hence the island's Gaelic name, from *leogach* (marshy) – but the shoreline is more dramatic, especially around the Butt of Lewis, the island's northernmost tip. The rest of the island's population live in **Stornoway**, on the east coast, the only real town in the Western Isles. To the south, where Lewis is physically joined with Harris, the land rises to over 1800ft, providing an exhilarating backdrop for the excellent beaches that pepper the isolated western coastline around **Uig**.

Stornoway (Steòrnabhagh)

In these parts, **STORNOWAY** is a buzzing metropolis, with all the trappings of a large town. It's a centre for employment, a social hub for the island and home to the Western Isles Council or **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**, set up in 1974, which has done so much to promote Gaelic language and culture. Aesthetics are not the town's strong point, and the urban pleasures on offer are limited, but in July Stornoway hosts the **Hebridean Celtic Festival** (Ⓦ hebceltfest.com), a Celtic music festival. The main arena is in Lews Castle grounds, and the festival club is in An Lanntair, but events are held right across Lewis and Harris.

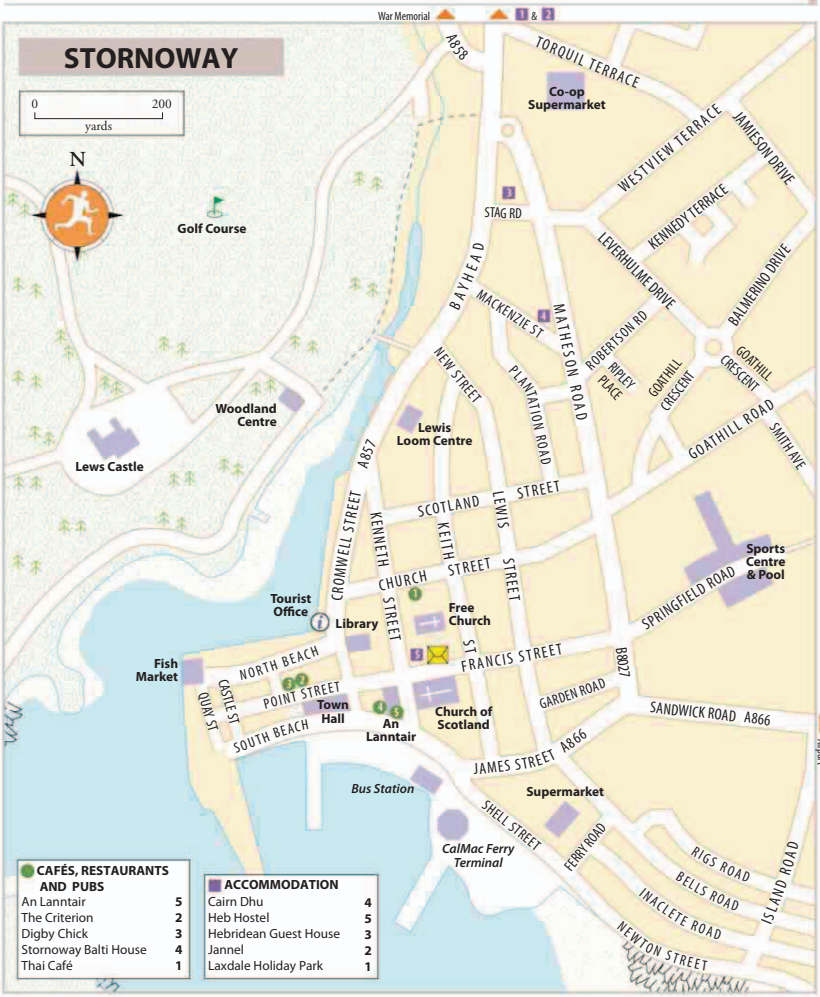
For centuries, life in Stornoway focused on its **harbour**, now a shadow of its former commercial self – the nicest section is Cromwell Street Quay, where the remaining fishing fleet ties up for the night. Stornoway's commercial centre, to the east, is little more than a string of unprepossessing shops and bars. The one exception is the old **Town Hall** on South Beach, a splendid Scots Baronial building from 1905, its rooftop peppered with conical towers, above which a central clock tower rises. One block east along South Beach, and looking rather like a modern church, you'll find **An Lanntair** – Gaelic for "lantern" – Stornoway's modern cultural centre (see below).

Lews Castle

Across the bay from the town centre • Castle interior closed until 2015 • Grounds open 24hr; Woodland Centre Mon–Sat 9am–5pm • Free • Ⓣ 01851 706916, Ⓦ stornowaytrust.org.uk

The castellated pomposity that is **Lews Castle** was built by Sir James Matheson in 1863

after resettling the crofters who used to live here. As the former laird's pad, it is seen as a symbol of oppression. However, the building – closed for over 25 years – is having a £14 million makeover to transform it into a state-of-the-art bilingual museum, due to open in 2015. This will be the new **Museum nan Eilean**, telling the story of the islands' geology, its Gaelic culture, the struggles of the nineteenth century and the Leverhulme era – the museum is even hoping to get six Lewis Chessmen on long-term loan from the British Museum. For the moment, however, Lews Castle's chief attraction is its mature wooded **grounds**, a unique sight on the Western Isles, for which Matheson imported thousands of tons of soil. Hidden among the trees is the **Woodland Centre**, which has a straightforward exhibition on the history of the castle and the island, and a decent café serving soup, salads and cakes.



ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — STORNOWAY

By plane Stornoway airport (T 01851 707400, W hial.co.uk) is 4 miles east of the town centre: the hourly bus takes 15min (Mon–Sat only), or it's a £5 taxi ride into town.

By ferry Ferries between Stornoway and Ullapool (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily, Sun 1 daily; 2hr 45min; T 01851 702361) run from the octagonal CalMac ferry terminal on South Beach, near the bus station.

By bus The bus station (T 01851 704327) is on South Beach in the town centre.

Destinations Arnol (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily; 35min); Barvas (Mon–Sat 6–9 daily; 25min); Callanish (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 40min); Carloway (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily; 45min); Garenin (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily; 1hr); Leverburgh (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily; 2hr); Port of Ness (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily; 1hr); Shawbost (Mon–Sat 6–9 daily; 45min); Tarbert (Mon–Sat 5 daily; 1hr); Uig (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 1hr–1hr 30min).

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

By car Car rental is available from Mackinnon Self-Drive, 18 Inaclete Rd (T 01851 702984, W mackinnonselfdrive.co.uk) from around £25/day – they're based in Stornoway but will deliver locally for free.

By bike Alex Dan's Cycle Centre, 67 Kenneth St (T 01851 704025, W stornowaycyclehire.co.uk; closed Sun) offers bike rental from £20/day to £60/week; panniers and car racks are also available.

Tourist office 26 Cromwell St (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; ☎01851 703088, ⓦvisithebrides.com).

ACCOMMODATION

Cairn Dhu 18a Matheson Rd ☎01851 701611, ⓦlewisapartments.co.uk. Superbly equipped contemporary apartment, with leather upholstery, a modern kitchen and free wi-fi, in a Victorian villa on the town's nicest leafy street. £140

Heb Hostel 25 Kenneth St ☎01851 709889, ⓦhebhostel.co.uk. A clean, centrally located terrace house in salmon pink, converted into a simple hostel, with free wi-fi, laundry and kitchen facilities and run by a friendly resident warden. £16/person

Hebridean Guest House 61 Bayhead St ☎01851 702268, ⓦhebrideanguesthouse.co.uk. Whitewashed property containing a whole range of en-suite rooms with attractive wood furnishings. Also has an annexe with a couple of self-catering apartments. Free wi-fi available. £90

Jannel 5 Stewart Drive ☎0800 634 3270, ⓦjannel-stornoway.co.uk. A short walk from the town centre, this B&B is run by a delightful landlady, and offers five spacious, immaculate rooms, with free wi-fi. £75

Laxdale Holiday Park Laxdale Lane ☎01851 703234, ⓦlaxdaleholidaypark.com. The well-equipped campsite has caravans, a self-catering bungalow and a purpose-built bunkhouse, as well as a sheltered spot for tents. It lies a mile or so along the road to Barvas. Bunkhouse £16/person; camping £24/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS

★**An Lanntair** Kenneth St ☎01851 703307, ⓦlanntair.com. Stylish café-restaurant in the An Lanntair arts centre which does decent sandwiches and lighter dishes during the day, as well as more imaginative stuff, like black-pudding-stuffed chicken wrapped in bacon, in the evening (mains £8–18). Free wi-fi. Mon–Sat 10am–noon, 12.30–2.30pm & 5.30–8.30pm.

Digby Chick 5 Bank St ☎01851 700026, ⓦdigbychick.co.uk. Smart, modern, buzzy little bistro with a real emphasis on using local produce, such as the famous Stornoway black pudding. Sandwiches available at lunchtime, or two courses for around £13; three-course dinners are under £30. Mon–Sat noon–2pm & 5.30–9pm.

Stornoway Balti House 24 South Beach ☎01851 706116. Family-run restaurant that's been in Stornoway for over 25 years. The curries are the real thing and the service is great, but the real boon is that it's open on Sundays. Daily noon–2pm & 5–11pm.

Thai Café 27 Church St ☎01851 307181, ⓦthai-cafe-stornoway.co.uk. Despite the name, this is actually a restaurant, serving authentic Thai food (mains around £8). No licence so bring your own bottle (50p corkage). Mon–Sat noon–2.30pm & 5–11pm.

PUBS

The Criterion 32 Point St ☎01851 701990. A tiny, authentic no-frills Stornoway pub, where they have regular informal (music) sessions – if nothing's going down, try nearby MacNeill's. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–1am.

The road to Ness (Nis)

Northwest of Stornoway, the A857 crosses the vast, barren **peat bog** of the Lewis interior, an empty, undulating wilderness riddled with stretchmarks formed by peat cuttings and pockmarked with freshwater lochans. The whole area was once covered by forests, but these disappeared long ago, leaving a deposit of peat six feet thick, and still being formed in certain places. For the people of Lewis the peat serves as a valuable energy resource; its pungent smoke is one of the most characteristic smells of the Western Isles.

Twelve miles across the peat bog the road approaches the west coast of Lewis and divides, heading southwest towards Callanish (see p.510), or northeast through **BARVAS** (Barabhas), and a string of bleak and fervently Presbyterian crofting and weaving villages. These scattered settlements have none of the photogenic qualities of Skye's whitewashed villages: the churches are plain and unadorned; the crofters' houses relatively modern and smothered in grey pebbledash rendering or harling; the stone cottages and enclosures of their forebears often lie half-abandoned in the front garden; and a rusting assortment of discarded cars and vans store peat bags and the like.

Ness (Nis)

Eventually, you reach the densely populated settlements that make up the parish of **NESS** (Nis), at the northern tip of Lewis. Ness has the highest percentage of Gaelic-speakers in the country (75 percent), but the locals are best known for their annual culling of young gannets on **Sula Sgeir**, a tiny island forty miles north. The road terminates at **PORT OF NESS** (Port Nis), with its tiny harbour and lovely golden beach.

Shortly before you reach Port of Ness, a minor road heads northwest to the hamlet of **EUROPIE** (Eoropaidh) – pronounced "Yor-erpee". By the road junction that leads to the Butt of Lewis stands the simple stone structure of **St Moluag's Church** (Teampull Mholuaidh), amid the runrig fields, now acting as sheep runs. Thought to date from the twelfth century, when the islands were still under Norse rule, but restored in 1912, the church features a strange south chapel with only a squint window connecting it to the nave.

From Europie, a narrow road twists to the bleak and blustery northern tip of the island, **Rubha Robhanais** – well known to devotees of the BBC shipping forecast as the **Butt of Lewis** – where a lighthouse sticks up above a series of sheer cliffs and stacks, and is alive with kittiwakes, fulmars and cormorants, with skuas and gannets feeding offshore; it's a great place for marine mammal-spotting.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — NESS

By bus There's a regular bus service between Stornoway and Port of Ness (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily; 1hr).

ACCOMMODATION

Galson Farm South Galson (Gabhsann Bho) ☎01851 850492, ⓦgalsonfarm.co.uk. An attractive converted eighteenth-century farmhouse, which offers generous portions of Aga-cooked dinner, bed and breakfast, and runs a six-bunk bunkhouse close by. Bunkhouse £17/person; doubles £86

Loch Beag 19 Fivepenny (Coig Peighinnean) ☎01851 810405, ⓦlochbeag.co.uk. A typically dour-looking B&B on the final stretch of road to Butt of Lewis, with a much more cheerful interior run by a very friendly local Gaelic-speaking couple. £60

EATING AND DRINKING

Café Sonas Port of Ness ☎01851 810222. Simple comfort food for the most part, but with a few local specialities thrown in – local fish pie, crab salad and Barra scampi (all under £7). Great views over the bay. Mon noon–5pm, Tues–Sat 10am–8pm.

Cross Inn Cross (Cros) ☎01851 810152. Pubs are few and far between in these parts so the *Cross Inn* is a real find, and has a peat fire to warm yourself by. Mon 5–11pm, Tues & Wed noon–2.30pm & 5–11pm, Thurs & Fri noon–2.30pm & 5pm–1am, Sat 11.30–1am, Sun 12.30–2.30pm & 6–11pm.

Westside (An Toabh Siar)

Heading southwest from the crossroads near Barvas (Barabhas) brings you to the **Westside.** The main road lies a mile or so inland from the coast, but several villages meander down towards the sea. At **Arnol** and **Garenin** (Gearrannan) there are beautifully preserved blackhouses to explore, and at **Callanish** (Calanais), the islands' justifiably popular standing stones.

Arnol Blackhouse

42 Arnol • Mon–Sat: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £4.50; HS • ☎01851 710395, ⓦhistoric-scotland.gov.uk

In Arnol, the remains of numerous **blackhouses** lie abandoned by the roadside, with one carefully preserved to show exactly how a true blackhouse, or *taigh-dubh*, would have been. The interior is dimly lit and heated by a small peat fire in the central hearth of bare earth. Smoke drifts up through the thatch, helping to kill any creepy-crawlies, keep out the midges and turn the heathery sods and oat-straw thatch into next year's fertilizer. The animals would have slept in the byre, separated only by a low partition, while potatoes and grain were stored in the adjacent barn.

Garenin (Gearrannan)

5a Garenin • May–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm • £2.50 • 01851 643416, gearrannan.com

A mile-long road leads north off the A858 to the beautifully remote coastal settlement of **GARENIN** (Gearrannan). Here, in contrast to Arnol, a whole cluster of nine thatched crofters' houses – the last of which was abandoned in 1974 – have been restored and put to a variety of uses. As an ensemble, they give a great impression of what a **Baile Tughaidh**, or blackhouse village, must have been like. The first house is occupied by the ticket office and café. The second house has been restored to its condition at the time of abandonment, so there's electric light, but no running water, lino flooring, but a peat fire and box beds – and a weaving machine in the byre. The third house has interpretive panels and a touch-screen computer telling the history of the village and the folk who lived there. Several others have been converted into **self-catering** accommodation.

Dun Carloway (Dùn Charlabhaigh)

Signposted off the A858 • Open 24hr • 01851 710395, historic-scotland.gov.uk

Just beyond Carloway village, **Dun Carloway** (Dùn Charlabhaigh) perches on top of a conspicuous rocky outcrop overlooking the sea. One of Scotland's best preserved **brochs**, or fortified towers, its dry-stone circular walls reach a height of more than 30ft on one side. The broch consists of two concentric walls, the inner one perpendicular, the outer one slanting inwards, the two originally fastened together by roughly hewn flagstones, which also served as lookout galleries reached via a narrow stairwell. The only entrance to the roofless inner yard is through a low doorway set beside a crude and cramped guard cell. As at Callanish, there have been all sorts of theories about the purpose of the brochs, which date from between 100 BC and 100 AD; the most likely explanation is that they were built to provide protection from Roman slave-traders.

Callanish (Calanais) standing stones

Stones Open 24hr • Free • **Callanish Visitor Centre** April, May, Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; June–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–8pm; Oct–March Tues–Sat 10am–4pm • £2.50 • 01851 621422, callanishvisitorcentre.co.uk

Overlooking the sheltered, islet-studded waters of Loch Ròg, are the islands' most dramatic prehistoric ruins, the **Callanish standing stones**. These monoliths – nearly fifty slabs of gnarled and finely grained gneiss up to 15ft high – were transported here between 3000 and 1500 BC, but their exact function remains a mystery. No one knows why the ground plan resembles a colossal Celtic cross, why there's a central burial chamber or why many of the stones are aligned with the positions of the sun and the stars. Whatever the reason, there's certainly no denying the powerful primeval presence, not to mention sheer beauty, of the stones.

A blackhouse adjacent to the main stone circle serves as a tearoom offering limited snacks. On the other side of the stones is the **Callanish Visitor Centre**, which has a slightly longer (though no more imaginative) menu as well as a small museum on the site, but with so much information on the panels beside the stones there's little reason to visit it. If you want to commune with standing stones in solitude, head for the smaller circles in more natural surroundings a mile or two southeast of Callanish, around Garynahine (Gearraidh na h-Aibhne).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — WESTSIDE

By bus There are regular buses between Stornoway and Callanish (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 40min); Carloway (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily; 45min); Garenin (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily; 1hr); and Great Bernera (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 1hr).

ACCOMMODATION

Eilean Fraoich campsite Shawbost (Siabost) 01851 710504, eileanfraoich.co.uk. Located behind the old village church, the campsite is a pristine, flat, grassy field in complete contrast with the surrounding undulating landscape. Kitchen and laundry facilities available. Closed Nov–March. £10/pitch

Leumadair 7a Callanish (Calanais) 01851 612706, leumadair.co.uk. A purpose-built modern guesthouse owned by a very friendly Lewis couple, who have a pet hawk. Free wi-fi is available and dinner can be provided on request. £80

Uig (Uuige)

It's a long drive along the B8011 to the remote parish of **UIG**, which suffered badly from the Clearances. The landscape here is hillier and more dramatic than elsewhere, a combination of myriad islets, wild cliff scenery and patches of pristine golden sand.

Timsgarry (Timsgearraidh)

The main road takes you through the narrow canyon of Glen Valtos (Glèann Bhaltois) to **TIMSGARRY** (Timsgearraidh), overlooking **Uig Sands** (Tràigh Uuige), the largest and most prized of all Lewis's golden strands, where the sea goes out for miles at low tide; the best access point is from the cemetery car park in Ardroil (Eadar Dha Fhadhail), a couple of miles south of Timsgarry.

Uig Museum

Uig Community Centre • Mon–Fri noon–5pm • £1 • 01851 672456

A giant wooden statue of one of the **Lewis Chessmen**, which were found in a local sandbank in 1831, heralds the **Uig Museum** in Timsgarry. Inside, you can see some replicas of the beautifully expressive twelfth-century Viking chesspieces, carved from walrus ivory and whale teeth. As well as putting on some excellent temporary exhibitions, the museum has bygone bits and bobs from old blackhouses; there's also a **tearoom** in the adjacent nursery during the holidays.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — UIG

By bus There are regular buses between Stornoway and Uig (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 1hr–1hr 30min).

ACCOMMODATION

Ardroil campsite Ardroil (Eadar Dha Fhadhail) 01851 672248. The location, by one of the most remote and incredible sandy beaches in the Western Isles, is unbeatable, but be warned, there's only a toilet block and a cold-water tap. For (very slightly) more facilities, head for nearby Kneep (Cnìp). £6/person

Auberge Carnish 5 Carnish (Carnais) 01851 672459, aubergecarnish.co.uk. A new-build clapboard guesthouse on the far side of the stunning Uig Sands. The rooms are spacious and tastefully furnished and the

ST KILDA (HIORT)

Britain's westernmost island chain is the **St Kilda** (kilda.org.uk) archipelago, forty miles from North Uist. Dominated by Britain's highest cliffs and sea stacks, Hirta, the main island, was occupied until 1930 when the last 36 Gaelic-speaking inhabitants were evacuated at their own request. The island was then bought by the Marquess of Bute, to protect the island's millions of nesting seabirds. In 1957, having agreed to allow the army to build a missile-tracking radar station here linked to South Uist, the marquess bequeathed the island to the NTS. St Kilda is one of only two dozen **UNESCO World Heritage Sites** with a dual status reflecting its natural and cultural significance. Despite its inaccessibility, several thousand visitors make it out here each year; if you get to land, you can see the museum, send a postcard and enjoy a drink at the army's pub, the *Puff Inn*. Between mid-May and mid-August, the NTS organizes volunteer **work parties**, which either restore and maintain the old buildings or take part in archeological digs – for more information, contact the NTS (0844 493 2100, nts.org.uk). For the armchair traveller, the best general book on St Kilda is Tom Steel's *The Life and Death of St Kilda*, or else there's the classic 1937 film *The Edge of the World* by Michael Powell (which was actually shot on Foula in Shetland). Several companies offer **boat day-trips** for around £200/person: Sea Trek (01851 672469, seatrek.co.uk) leave from Miavaig (Miabhig) in Uig; Kilda Cruises (01859 502060, kildacruises.co.uk), from West Tarbert on Harris. The sea journey (8hr return) is not for the faint-hearted and there's no guarantee that you'll be able to land.

restaurant's food – like the owners – is Franco-Hebridean. Mid-March to mid-Nov daily 6.30–8.30pm. £120

Baile na Cille Timsgarry (Timsgearraidh) 01851 672242, bailenacille.co.uk. A chaotic kind of place, run by an eccentric couple who are very welcoming to families and dogs and dish up wonderful set-menu dinners for £30 a head. Free wi-fi. Closed mid-Sept to mid-April. £110

Kneep campsite Kneep (Cnip) 01851 672265. Informal camping beside the wonderful sandy beach of Reef Beach (Tràigh na Beirghe). It's run by the local community and the only facilities are a small unisex toilet block with coin-operated showers. Closed mid-Sept to mid-April. £6/person

Suainaval 3 Crowlista (Cradhlastadh) 01851 672386, suainaval.com. The best B&B in the whole area, run by a truly welcoming couple; rooms have pine floors and furnishings and fabulous views over the golden sands of Uig. £75

14

Harris (Na Hearadh)

Harris (from the old Norse for "high land"), is much hillier, more dramatic and more immediately appealing than Lewis, its boulder-strewn slopes descending to aquamarine bays of dazzling white sand. Lewis and Harris are, in fact, one island, the "division" embedded in a historical split in the MacLeod clan, lost in the mists of time. For the record, the dividing line comprises Loch Reasort in the west, Loch Seaforth (Loch Shìphoirt) in the east, and the six miles in between. Harris itself is clearly divided by a minuscule isthmus into the wild, inhospitable mountains of **North Harris** and the gentler landscape and sandy shores of **South Harris**.

Tarbert (An Tairbeart)

Sheltered in a green valley on the narrow isthmus, **TARBERT** is the largest place on Harris and a wonderful place to arrive by boat. The port's mountainous backdrop is impressive, and the town is attractively laid out on steep terraces sloping up from the dock.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — TARBERT

By ferry There are CalMac car ferries to and from Uig on Skye (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 1hr 45min).

By bus Tarbert is served by regular buses from and to Stornoway, as well as a few other places.

Destinations Hushinish (schooldays Mon–Fri 2–3 daily; school holidays Tues & Fri 3 daily; 45min); Leverburgh (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily; 45min–1hr); Leverburgh via the Bays (Mon–Sat 2–4 daily; 1hr); Rhenigdale (by request 01463 731280; Mon–Sat 2 daily; 30min); Scalpay (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 20min); Stornoway (Mon–Sat 5 daily; 1hr).

Tourist office Harris's tourist office is close to the ferry terminal (April–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; open to greet the evening ferry; 01859 502011).

ACCOMMODATION

Coel na Mara 7 Direcleit 01859 502464, coelnamara.com. With your own transport, this secluded B&B, across the bay from Tarbert, is a good choice. Nicely furnished throughout, with great views over East Loch Tarbert. The smallest and cheapest room doesn't have en-suite facilities. £90

Harris Hotel Scott Rd 01859 502154, harrishotel.com. Just a 5min walk from the harbour, this is Tarbert's longest-established and largest hotel. It's been refurbished fairly recently so it's a solid choice, with 23 en-suite rooms, some with sea views, and all with free wi-fi – also serves food, even on a Sunday. £100

No.5 Hostel 5 Drinishader (Drinisiadar) 01851 511255, number5.biz. A converted cottage, 3 miles south of Tarbert, offering bed linen and laundry service along with canoes, kayaks and cycles for hire. Beds are in dorms, plus one twin. Closed Nov–Feb. £20/person

EATING AND DRINKING

First Fruits Pier Road Cottage 01859 502439. Very pleasant tearoom behind the tourist office, housed in an old stone-built cottage and serving real coffee, home-made cakes, toasties and so forth. April & May Mon, Wed & Fri 10.30am–4pm, Thurs & Sat 10.30am–3pm; June–Sept Mon–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat 10am–3pm.

Isle of Harris Inn Scott Rd 01859 502566. A lively pub, next door to the *Harris Hotel*, offers very good fish and chips (under £10) and the occasional seafood special. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; food served noon–9.30pm.

HARRIS TWEED

Far from being a picturesque cottage industry, **Harris Tweed** production is vital to the local economy, with a well-organized and unionized workforce. Traditionally, the tweed was made by women to provide clothing for their families, using a 2500-year-old process. Each woman plucked the wool by hand, washed and scoured it, dyeing it with lichen, heather flowers or ragwort, carding (smoothing and straightening the wool, adding butter to grease it), spinning and weaving. Finally the cloth was dipped in urine and "waulked" by a group of women, who beat the cloth on a table to soften it while singing Gaelic waulking songs. Harris Tweed was originally made all over the islands, and was known simply as *clò mór* (big cloth).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Catherine Murray, **Countess of Dunmore**, who owned a large part of Harris, started to sell surplus cloth to her aristocratic friends and helped kick-start the modern industry, which still serves as a vital source of employment, though demand (and therefore employment levels) can fluctuate wildly as fashions change. To earn the official **Harris Tweed Authority (HTA)** trademark of the Orb and Maltese Cross – Lady Dunmore's coat of arms – the fabric has to be hand-woven on the Outer Hebrides from pure new Scottish wool, while the manufacturing process must take place in the local mills – currently in Carloway and Shawbost, in Lewis – where the wool is dyed, carded and spun.

North Harris (Ceann a Tuath na Hearadh)

If you're coming from Stornoway on the A859, mountainous **North Harris** is a spectacular introduction to Harris, its bulging, pyramidal mountains of gneiss looming over the dramatic, fjord-like **Loch Seaforth** (Loch Shìphoirt). From **ARDVOURLIE** (Aird a' Mhulaidh), you weave your way over a boulder-strewn saddle between mighty **Sgaoth Aird** (1829ft) and An Cliseam or the **Clisham** (2619ft), the highest peak in the Western Isles. This bitter terrain, littered with debris left behind by retreating glaciers, offers but the barest of vegetation, with an occasional cluster of crofters' houses sitting in the shadow of a host of pointed peaks, anywhere between 1000ft and 2500ft high.

ACCOMMODATION **NORTH HARRIS**

Rhenigidale (Reinigeadal) SYHA Hostel 4 miles off the A859 @gatliff.org.uk. Simple hostel in an isolated coastal community – there's a (request-only) bus connection, or else it's a magnificent six-mile (3hr) hike over the rocky landscape from Tarbert: ask at the tourist office for directions. No advance booking and no phone. £12/person

South Harris (Ceann a Deas na Hearadh)

The mountains of **South Harris** are less dramatic than in the north, but the scenery is equally breathtaking. There's a choice of routes from Tarbert to the ferry port of **Leverburgh**, which connects with North Uist: the east coast, known as **The Bays** (Na Baigh), is rugged and seemingly inhospitable, while the **west coast** boasts some of the finest stretches of golden sand in the Western Isles, buffeted by the Atlantic winds. Surprisingly, most people live along the harsh eastern coastline rather than the more fertile west side. But not by choice – they were evicted from their original crofts to make way for sheep-grazing.

The west coast

The main road from Tarbert into South Harris snakes its way west for ten miles across the boulder-strewn interior to reach the most stunning **beach**, the vast golden strand of **Luskentyre Bay** (Tràigh Losgaintir), first of a chain of sweeping sands, backed by rich **machair**, that stretches for nine miles. In good weather, the scenery is particularly impressive, with foaming breakers rolling along the golden sands set against the rounded peaks of the mountains to the north and the islet-studded turquoise sea to the west. A short distance out to sea is the island of **Taransay** (Tarasaigh), which once held a population of nearly a hundred, but was abandoned as recently as 1974. Beyond lies

Scarista (Sgarasta), where one of the first of the Hebridean Clearances took place in 1828, when thirty families were evicted and their homes burnt.

Seallam!

Northton (Taobh Tuath) • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • £2.50 • 01859 520258, seallam.com

There's loads of information on local history, geology, flora and fauna at **Seallam!**, a purpose-built heritage centre close to the village of **Northton** (Taobh Tuath), overlooked by the round-topped hill of Chaipabhal at the westernmost tip of South Harris. As well as detailing the area's history of emigration, it's a useful centre for ancestor-hunters, and there's a good section on St Kilda (see p.511).

Leverburgh (An t-Ob)

The west coast road trims the island's south shore, eventually reaching the sprawling settlement of **LEVERBURGH** (An t-Ob). Named after Lord Leverhulme, who planned to turn the place into the largest fishing port on the west coast of Scotland in the 1920s, it's the terminal for the CalMac **car ferry** service to Berneray and the Uists across the skerry-strewn Sound of Harris.

Rodel (Roghadal)

A mile or so from Renish Point (Rubha Reanais), the southern tip of Harris, is the old port of **RODEL** (Roghadal), where a smattering of ancient stone houses lies among the hillocks, and the venerable *Rodel Hotel* sits by the old harbour, where the ferry from Skye used to arrive.

St Clement's Church (Tur Chliamainn)

For opening times phone ahead • 01851 710395, historic-scotland.gov.uk

On top of one of Rodel's grassy humps, with sheep grazing in the graveyard, is **St Clement's Church** (Tur Chliamainn), burial place of the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan in Skye. Dating from the 1520s – in other words pre-Reformation, hence the big castellated tower (which you can climb) – the church was restored in 1873 by the Countess of Dunmore. The bare interior is distinguished by its wall tombs, notably that of the founder, Alasdair Crotach, whose heavily weathered effigy lies beneath an intriguing backdrop and canopy of sculpted reliefs depicting vernacular and religious scenes – elemental representations of, among others, a stag hunt, the Holy Trinity, St Michael and the devil, and an angel weighing the souls of the dead. Look out, too, for the *sheila-na-gig* halfway up the south side of the church tower; unusually, she has a brother displaying his genitalia, below a carving of St Clement on the west face.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — SOUTH HARRIS

By ferry There's a daily ferry to and from Berneray, North Uist (3–4 daily; 1hr).

By bus There's a regular bus connection along the west coast between Leverburgh and Tarbert (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily; 45min–1hr), and a less frequent one via the Bays on the east coast (Mon–Sat 2–4 daily; 1hr).

Tourist information On the north side of the bay is the An Clachan co-op store which houses a small information office (Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; 01859 520370).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

THE BAYS

★ **Lickisto Blackhouse Camping** Lickisto (Liceasto) 01851 530485, freewebs.com/vanvon. There's fresh bread and eggs available, a peat fire to warm you in the kitchen blackhouse and toilets in the byres. Yurts available. Closed Nov–Feb. Yurts £70; camping £24/pitch

★ **Old School House** Finsbay (Fionnsbhagh) 01859 530420, theoldschoolhousefinsbay.com. A very friendly couple run this nicely converted Victorian former village schoolhouse, which comes with free wi-fi, good home cooking and huge portions for dinner (£20–30) and breakfast. £70

THE WEST COAST

Beul-na-Mara Seilebost 01859 550205, beulnamara.co.uk. This is a perfectly decent B&B run

by a local couple, but what makes it particularly special is the stunning location, overlooking the golden sands of Luskentyre Bay (Tràigh Losgaintir). £90

★ **Pairc an t-Srath** Borve (Na Buirgh) ☎01859 550386, ⓦpaircant-srath.co.uk. A working crofthouse, with beautiful Harris Tweed furnishings – there's a superb view from the dining room and the food is both filling and beautifully prepared (three-course dinners for £35 a head). £100

Temple Café Northton (Taobh Tuath) ☎01859 550205, ⓦbeulnamara.co.uk. Great little "Hobbit House" café in the former MacGillivray Centre – expect butternut squash soup, roast peppers and veggie burgers (all under £10) and great views over the machair. April–Sept Wed–Sun 10.30am–5.30pm (also some eves until 9pm); Oct–March same hours, Sat & Sun only.

LEVERBURGH

★ **Am Bothan** Ferry Rd ☎01859 520251, ⓦambothan.com. Quirky, bright-red timber-clad bunkhouse that makes for a pretty luxurious, very welcoming hostel close to the ferry. Lovely big kitchen/living room, plus laundry and drying facilities too. £20/person

The Anchorage Ferry Terminal ☎01859 520225. For local venison and beef burgers, langoustines, black pudding with poached egg on muffins (£10–15), head for this lively bar-restaurant by the ferry slipway – great views and occasional live music. Mon–Sat noon–11pm; food served noon–9pm.

Carminish House 1a Strond ☎01859 520400, ⓦcarminish.com. Modern double-glazed guesthouse with light, airy rooms, free wi-fi and some fabulous views over the Sound from the residents' lounge, which has an open fire. £80

North Uist (Uibhist a Tuath)

Compared to the mountainous scenery of Harris, **North Uist** – seventeen miles by thirteen – is much flatter and for some comes as something of an anti-climax. Over half the surface area is covered by water, creating a distinctive peaty-brown lochan-studded "drowned landscape". Most visitors come here for the trout and salmon fishing and the deerstalking, both of which (along with poaching) are critical to the island's economy. Others come for the prehistoric sites, the birds, or the sheer peace of this windy isle and the solitude of North Uist's vast sandy beaches, which extend – almost without interruption – along the north and west coast.

Lochmaddy (Loch nam Madadh) and around

Despite being situated on the east coast, some distance away from any beach, the ferry port of **LOCHMADDY** – "Loch of the Dogs" – makes a good base for exploring the island. Occupying a narrow, bumpy promontory, overlooked by the brooding mountains of North Lee (Lì a Tuath) and South Lee (Lì a Deas) to the southeast, it's difficult to believe that this sleepy settlement was a large herring port as far back as the seventeenth century. While there's not much to see in Lochmaddy itself, there are several prehistoric sites in the surrounding area.

Taigh Chearsabhagh

Mon–Sat 10am–5pm • £3 • ☎01876 603970, ⓦtaigh-chearsabhagh.org

The only thing to keep you in Lochmaddy is **Taigh Chearsabhagh**, a converted eighteenth-century merchant's house that's now home to a community arts centre housing a café, post office, shop and museum, which puts on some seriously innovative exhibitions. Taigh Chearsabhagh was one of the prime movers behind the commissioning of a series of seven sculptures dotted about the Uists – ask for directions to the ones in and around Lochmaddy. The most interesting is the **Both nam Faileas** (Hut of the Shadow), 1km north of Lochmaddy. The hut is an ingenious dry-stone, turf-roofed camera obscura built by sculptor Chris Drury that projects the nearby land, sea and skyscape onto its back wall – take time to allow your eyes to adjust to the light.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — LOCHMADDY AND AROUND

By ferry There's a daily ferry from and to Uig, Skye (1–2 daily; 1hr 40min).

Leverburgh (Harris)
St Kilda
Ullg (Skye)
Tiree
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miles
N
Berneray
Griminish Point
Vallay
A865
Sollas
Tigharry
Bayhead
North Uist
Lochmaddy
Balranald RSPB Reserve
Clachan na Luib
A867
Barpa Langais
Monach Islands
Baleshare
Carinish
Eabhal (1138ft)
Grimsay
Balivanich
Gramsdale
Benbecula
Liniclate
The Little Minch
Dunvegan Head
Neist Point
Skye
Ruevaal
Howmore
Loch Druidibeg
Thacla (1988ft)
A865
Beinn Mhor (2034ft)
Kildonan Museum
Milton
South Uist
Daliburgh
Lochboisdale
B888
Sound of Barra
Eriskay
Eoligarry
Barra
Sheabhal (1260ft)
Northbay
Castlebay
Vatersay
Mingulay
Barra Head
THE UISTS, BENBECULA & BARRA

By bus A regular bus service runs down the backbone of the Uists to Lochboisdale and Eriskay.
Destinations Balivanich (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily; 30–45min); Balranald (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 50min); Eriskay (Mon–Sat 3 daily; 2hr 20min); Lochboisdale (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily; 1hr 30min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Lochmaddy's tourist office (April to mid-Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; open to greet the evening ferry; ☎01876 500321), is a short walk from the quayside and can point you in the direction of local Neolithic sights.

ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND ACTIVITIES

Tigh Dearg Lochmaddy ☎01876 500700, 🌐tighdearghotel.co.uk. The stylish modernity of this cherry-red, purpose-built hotel is unique on the Uists; guests get free use of the hotel's gym, sauna, steam room and wi-fi. The hotel also serves delicious, quite elaborate food in the bar and restaurant (mains £10–15); reservations are essential. Daily 6.30–8.30pm. £90
Uist Outdoor Centre Cearn Dusgaidh ☎01876 500480, 🌐uistoutdoorcentre.co.uk. Outdoor centre with hostel accommodation and activities ranging from sea-kayaking to rock climbing for residents and non-residents alike. Closed mid-Dec to Feb. £10/person

Berneray (Bhearnaraigh)

Berneray is a low-lying island immediately to the north of North Uist, connected via a causeway that starts some eight miles north of Lochmaddy. Two miles by three, with a population of around 140, the island has a superb three-mile-long sandy **beach** on the west and north coast, backed by rabbit-free dunes and machair.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — BERNERAY

By ferry The ferry from Leverburgh on Harris arrives at the very southern tip of Berneray (3–4 daily; 1hr).
By bus There's a decent bus connection with Lochmaddy (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily; 20min).
Tourist information The community website 🌐isleofberneray.com is a useful source of information.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Berneray SYHA Hostel Port Ludaig 🌐gatliff.org.uk. The island has a wonderful Gatliff Trust hostel, which occupies a pair of thatched blackhouses in a lovely spot by a beach, beyond the main village. £12/person
Burnside Croft Borve (Borgh) ☎01876 540235. Follow in Prince Charles's footsteps and stay (and help out) at "Splash" MacKillop's B&B, overlooking the machair and dunes, and enjoy "storytelling evenings"; bike rental also available. £70
The Lobster Pot Borve (Borgh) ☎01876 540288. A tearoom (and shop) on the main road, near the ferry terminal, serving toasties and soup and simple summer evening meals (all under £10). Mon–Sat 9am–8.30pm; closes 5.30pm in winter.

Balranald

Seven miles northwest of Clachan is the **Balranald RSPB Reserve**, best known for its **corncrakes**, once common throughout Britain but now among the country's rarest birds. They're good at hiding, so you're unlikely to see one; however, the males' loud "craking" can be heard from May to July throughout the Uists and Barra: one or two usually make a loud noise right outside the RSPB **visitor centre**, from which you can pick up a leaflet outlining a two-hour **walk** along the headland, marked by posts. A wonderful carpet of flowers covers the machair in summer, and there are usually corn buntings and arctic terns inland, and gannets, Manx shearwaters and skuas out to sea. On a clear day you can see the unmistakeable shape of St Kilda (see p.511).

ACCOMMODATION — BALRANALD

Balranald Hebridean Holidays Hougharry (Hogha Gearraidh) ☎01876 510304, 🌐balranaldhebridean holidays.com. Lovely campsite by the RSPB reserve, surrounded by fields of wild flowers and close to a sandy beach – as well as the usual facilities, there's free wi-fi. Closed Oct–Feb. £20/pitch

Wheelhouse Airigh Mhic Ruairidh, Griminish (Griminis) 07952 163080, hebrides-holidays.co.uk. Eco-yurts and huts, powered with solar power and candlelight, on a spot looking across the tidal flats to Vallay. Two nights' minimum (and bring your own bedding) or stay in the hostel hut or camp. Bike hire and activities from peat cutting to seashore foraging also on offer. Closed Nov–March. Huts for two £50; hostel £16/person

Clachan (Clachan na Luib) and around

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At **CLACHAN** (Clachan na Luib), by the crossroads with the A867 from Lochmaddy, there's a post office and general store. Offshore, to the southwest, lie two flat, tidal, dune and machair islands, the larger of which is **Baleshare** (Baile Sear), with its fantastic three-mile-long beach, connected by causeway to North Uist.

ACCOMMODATION — CLACHAN AND AROUND

★ **Bagh Alluin** 21 Baleshare (Baile Sear) 01876 580370, jacvolbeda.co.uk. A secluded, beautifully designed modern B&B with fantastic views over the island run by a Dutch artist, who is a genuinely warm and friendly host. £85

Langass Lodge Loch Eport 01876 580285, langasslodge.co.uk. From the A867, a side road leads off to this venerable hotel, which has a stylish modern extension, and a restaurant and bar that serves excellent local seafood (£30 for two courses); reservations advised. Daily 6–8.30pm. £110

Moorcroft Holidays 17 Carinish (Cairinis) 01876 580305, moorcroftholidays.com. An exposed, but flat and very well equipped campsite, with sea views; the bunkhouse has just six beds, lovely wooden floors and furnishings, and a modern kitchen. Closed Nov–March. Bunkhouse £18/person; camping £13/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

Claddach Kirkibost Centre Claddach Kirkibost (Cladach Chireboist) 01876 580390. Community-centre café in a conservatory with sea views, which uses local produce to make soups, sandwiches and simple dishes, even the occasional curry or Tex-Mex dish (£6–7). Mon–Sat 11am–4pm; closed Sat in winter.

Westford Inn Claddach Kirkibost (Cladach Chireboist) 01876 580653, j7mis.co.uk/westfordinn. North Uist's only pub is housed in the eighteenth-century factor's house. There's a wood-panelled bar plus several smaller rooms with real fires in bad weather, Skye ales on tap and pub food until 9pm. May–Sept daily noon–11pm.

Benbecula (Beinn na Faoghla)

Blink and you could miss the pancake-flat island of **Benbecula** (put the stress on the second syllable), sandwiched between Protestant North Uist and Catholic South Uist. Scarred from the postwar presence of the Royal Artillery who once made up half the local population, the only reason to come to **BALIVANICH** (Baile a Mhanaich), Benbecula's grim, grey capital, is if you're flying into or out of **Benbecula airport**, need an ATM, the laundry (behind the bank) or a supermarket.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BENBECULA

By plane Benbecula airport (hial.oc.uk) is just a 10–15min walk north of Balivanich. There's a small café inside the airport building.

By bus Buses en route to and from South or North Uist stop outside the post office.

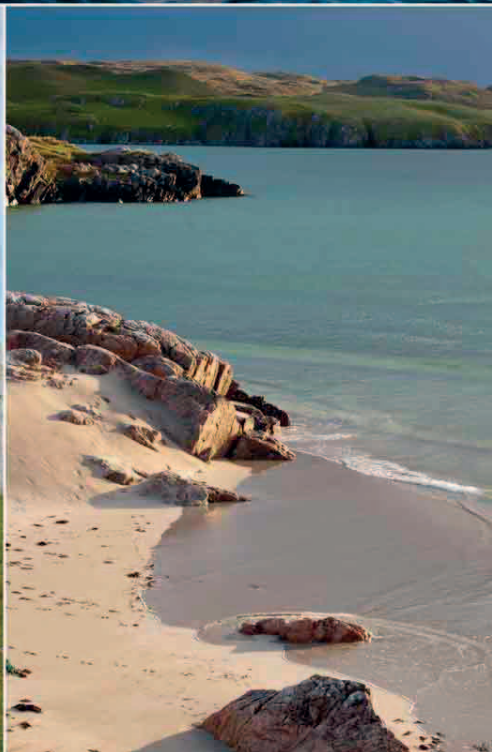
Destinations Berneray (Mon–Sat 5–7 daily; 1hr 10min); Eriskay (Mon–Sat 5–7 daily; 1hr 30min); Lochboisdale (Mon–Sat 7–8 daily; 1hr); Lochmaddy (Mon–Sat 6–7 daily; 30min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Kyles Flodda Kyles Flodda (Caolas Fhlodaigh) 01870 603145, kylesflodda.com. Secluded, picturesque, beautifully converted Victorian B&B halfway down the dead-end road in the northeast corner of the island. Free wi-fi. £80

Nunton House Hostel Nunton 01870 602017, nuntonhousehostel.com. Four small dorm rooms in the former clan chief's house, where Bonnie Prince Charlie dressed up in drag before his escape over the sea to Skye.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP KISIMUL CASTLE (P.522); UIG SANDS (P.511); CALLANISH (CALANAIS) STANDING STONES (P.510) >



Free wi-fi and a free terminal. £20/person

Shell Bay campsite Liniclate (Lionacleit) 01870 602447. Flat grassy field right next to the main school (and museum) on Benbecula – facilities are good (including laundry) though it's not the most romantic of spots. Closed Nov–March. £21/pitch

Stepping Stone Balivanich (Baile a Mhanaich) 01870 603377, steppingstone10.tripod.com. A modern café-restaurant that serves chips with everything during the day (mains £7–8), and more varied dishes in the evening, such as local scallops and lamb burgers (mains £14–17). Mon–Fri 9am–9pm, Sat 11am–9pm, Sun noon–9pm.

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South Uist (Uibhist a Deas)

South Uist is the largest and most varied of the southern chain of islands. The west coast boasts some of the region's finest machair and beaches – a necklace of gold and grey sand strung twenty miles from one end to the other – while the east coast features a ridge of high mountains rising to 2034ft at Beinn Mhòr. The Reformation never took a hold in South Uist (or Barra), and the island remains Roman Catholic, as is evident from the various roadside shrines. The only blot on South Uist's landscape is the Royal Artillery missile range, which dominates the northwest corner of the island.

The north

The northern half of the island contains the best **mountains** and **beaches**. To climb the mountains, you need a detailed 1:25,000 map, to negotiate the island's maze of lochans; to reach the beaches (or even see them), you have to get off the main road and pass through the old crofters' villages that straggle along the west coast.

One of the best places to reach the sandy shoreline is at **HOWMORE** (Tobha Mòr), a pretty little crofting settlement with a number of restored houses, many still thatched, including one distinctively roofed in brown heather. It's an easy walk from the village church across the flower-strewn machair to the gorgeous beach.

ACCOMMODATION — THE NORTH

Howmore (Tobha Mòr) SYHA hostel Howmore (Tobha Mòr) gatliff.org.uk. Simple Gatliff Trust hostel occupying a lovely thatched crofthouse near the village church, and just a short walk from the beach. £10/person

Kinloch Grogarry (Groigearraidh) 01870 620316, kinlochuist.com. A fine, modern B&B sheltered by a little patch of woodland and overlooking freshwater Loch Druidibeg – run by a very keen angler, who will do evening meals on request. £90

Orasay Inn Lochcarnan (Loch a' Charnain) 01870 610298, orasayinn.co.uk. A modern purpose-built hotel off the main road; rooms are pretty standard, but the location is peaceful and the breakfasts good – if you're looking for a bar meal, it's best to book ahead. £85

Lochboisdale (Loch Baghasdail) and around

LOCHBOISDALE occupies a narrow, bumpy promontory on the east coast, but, despite being South Uist's chief settlement and ferry port, has only very limited facilities (there's a bank here, but the nearest supermarket is three miles west in Dalabrog). If you're arriving here late at night on the boat from Oban (or from Barra or Tiree), you should try to book accommodation in advance; otherwise, head for the tourist office.

Kildonan Museum (Taigh-tasgaidh Chill Donnain)

April–Oct daily 10am–5pm • £2 • 01878 710343, kildonanmuseum.co.uk

Five miles south of Howmore lies the **Kildonan Museum** (Taigh-tasgaidh Chill Donnain), which has mock-ups of Hebridean kitchens through the ages, two lovely box beds, which has and an impressive selection of old photos, accompanied by an unsentimental yet poetic text on crofting life in the last two centuries. Pride of place goes to the sixteenth-century **Clanranald Stone**, carved with the arms of the clan who ruled over South Uist from 1370 to 1839. The museum café serves sandwiches and home-made cakes, and has

a choice of historical videos for those really wet and windy days. A little south of the museum, the road passes a cairn that sits amongst the foundations of **Flora MacDonald**'s childhood home (see box, p.588); she was born nearby, but the house no longer stands.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By ferry There's a ferry from Oban to Lochboisdale (Tues, Thurs, Sat & Sun; 5hr 20min–6hr 30min), which goes via Tiree on Thurs and links with Castlebay on Barra.

By bus There's a regular bus service along the spine road (as they call it) to North Uist (Mon–Sat only).

Destinations Balivanich (Mon–Sat 2–5 daily; 1hr); Berneray (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 2hr 50min); Eriskay (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 40min); Lochmaddy (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 1hr 30min).

Tourist office Pier Rd (Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; also open for an hour to meet the ferry; ☎01878 700286).

LOCHBOISDALE AND AROUND

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ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Heron Point Lochboisdale ☎01878 700073, ⓦheronpoint.co.uk. Really tastefully furnished B&B run efficiently by a very friendly host, just a mile up the road from the ferry terminal. £70

Lochboisdale Hotel Lochboisdale ☎01878 700332, ⓦlochboisdale.com. The town's long-established hotel is a convenient place to shelter if you're waiting for a ferry and it does decent bar meals, occasionally featuring local seafood. £80

Polochar Inn Polochar (Poll a' Charra) ☎01878 700215, ⓦpolocharinn.com. One of best places to hole up in, right on the south coast overlooking the Sound of Barra, and with its own sandy beach close by; the rooms all have sea views, and on the ground floor is a genuine pub, serving decent bar meals. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm, Fri & Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30–11pm; food served 12.30–2.30pm & 5.30–9pm. £70

Uist Bunkhouse Daliburgh (Dalabrog) ☎01878 700566, ⓦuistbunkhouse.co.uk. Clean and modern hostel 3 miles from the ferry terminal, offering en suite singles, doubles and family rooms as well as dorms with bunks. £15/person

Eriskay (Eiriosgaigh)

Famous for its patterned jerseys and peculiar breed of pony, originally used for carrying peat and seaweed, the barren, hilly island of **Eriskay** is connected to South Uist by a causeway built in 2001. The island, measuring just over two miles by one, shelters a small fishing community of 150, and makes a great day-trip from South Uist. The island's main beach on the west coast, Prince's Cockle Strand (Coilleag a Phrionnsa), was where **Bonnie Prince Charlie** landed on Scottish soil on July 23, 1745 – the sea bindweed that grows there is said to have sprung from the seeds Charles brought with him from France. The prince, unaccustomed to hardship, spent his first night in a local blackhouse and ate a couple of flounders, though he couldn't take the peat smoke and chose to sleep sitting up rather than endure the damp bed.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By ferry CalMac now runs a small car ferry between Barra (4–5 daily; 40min) and Ardmhor (Àird Mhòr), on the southwest coast of Eriskay.

ERISKAY

By bus There's a regular bus service between Eriskay and Lochboisdale (Mon–Sat 4–6 daily; 40min).

SS POLITICIAN

Eriskay's greatest claim to fame came in 1941 when the 8000-ton **SS Politician** – or "*Polly*" as it's fondly known – sank en route from Liverpool to Jamaica, along with its cargo of bicycle parts, £3 million in Jamaican currency, and 264,000 bottles of whisky, inspiring the book (by Compton MacKenzie) and Ealing comedy *Whisky Galore!* (filmed on Barra in 1948 and released as *Tight Little Island* in the US). The real story was less romantic, especially for the 36 islanders charged with illegal possession by the Customs and Excise officers, 19 of whom were found guilty and imprisoned in Inverness. The ship's stern can still be seen at low tide northwest of Calvay Island in the Sound of Eriskay, and one of the original bottles (and other memorabilia) can be viewed at *Am Politician* (see p.522).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Am Politician Rubha Ban ☎ 01878 720246 The island's purpose-built pub, near the two cemeteries on the west coast, offers an extensive bar menu, as well as home-made cakes and coffee, and great views out to sea from its conservatory. Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 11am–11pm (sometimes later), Sun noon–11pm; Oct–Easter open some weekends 11am–11pm; food served noon–7.45pm.

Oir na Mara ☎ 01878 720216. This plain, modern bungalow B&B is better inside than out. It's situated near Eriskay's pub, around a 15min walk from the Barra–Eriskay ferry terminal. Free wi-fi. £80.

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Barra (Barraigh)

Four miles wide and eight miles long, **Barra** is the Western Isles in miniature: sandy beaches backed by machair, mountains of Lewissian gneiss, prehistoric ruins, Gaelic culture and a laidback, welcoming Catholic population of around 1200. Like some feudal island state, it was ruled over for centuries, with relative benevolence, by the MacNeils. Unfortunately, the family sold the island in 1838 to Colonel Gordon of Cluny, who had also bought Benbecula, South Uist and Eriskay. The colonel deemed the starving crofters "redundant" and offered to turn Barra into a state penal colony. The government declined, so the colonel called in the police and proceeded with some of the most cruel forced Clearances in the Hebrides. In 1937, the 45th chief of the MacNeil clan bought back most of the island, and in 2003 gifted the estate to the Scottish government.

Castlebay (Bàgh a Chaisteil)

The only settlement of any size is **CASTLEBAY** (Bàgh a Chaisteil), which curves around the barren rocky hills of a wide bay on the south side of the island. It's difficult to imagine, but Castlebay was a herring port of some significance back in the nineteenth century, with hundreds of boats in the harbour and curing and packing factories ashore. Barra's religious allegiance is immediately announced by the large Catholic church, Our Lady, Star of the Sea, which overlooks the bay; to underline the point, there's a Madonna and Child on the slopes of **Sheabhal** (1260ft), the largest peak on Barra and a fairly easy hike from the bay.

Kisimul Castle

April–Sept daily 9.30am–noon & 1.30–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • ☎ 01871 810313 • Access by ferry (every 30min), weather permitting

As its name suggests, Castlebay has a castle in its bay, the picturesque medieval islet-fortress of Caisteal Chiosmuil, or **Kisimul Castle**, ancestral home of the MacNeil clan. The castle burnt down in the eighteenth century, but when the 45th MacNeil chief – conveniently enough, a wealthy American and trained architect – bought the island back in 1937, he set about restoring the castle. There's nothing much to see inside, but the whole experience is fun – head down to the slipway at the bottom of Main Street, where the ferryman will take you over.

Dualchas

The Square • March, April & Sept Mon, Wed & Fri 10.30am–4.30pm; May–Aug Mon–Sat same hours • £2 • Ⓦ barraheritage.com

The Barra Heritage Centre, known as **Dualchas**, is on the road that leads west out of town. It's an unpretentious little museum, housing the odd treasure like the monstrance from St Barr's Church in Northbay. There are lots of old newspapers, photo archives and local memoirs to trawl through, plus a handy café.

The north

In the north, Barra is squeezed between two sandy bays: the dune-backed west side taking the full force of the Atlantic breakers, while the east side boasts the crunchy shell

sands of Tràigh Mhòr or **Cockle Strand**. The beach is also famously used as the island's **airport**, with planes landing and taking off according to the tides, since at high tide the beach (and therefore the runway) is covered in water. As its name suggests, the strand is also famous for its cockles and cockleshells, the latter being used to make harling (the rendering used on most Scottish houses).

North of the airport is the scattered settlement of **EOLIGARRY** (Eòlaigearraidh), with several sheltered sandy bays. Here, too, is **St Barr's Church** (Cille-Bharra), burial ground of the MacNeils (and author Compton MacKenzie). The ground lies beside the ruins of a medieval church and two chapels, one of which houses several carved medieval gravestones and a replica of an eleventh-century rune-inscribed cross; the original is in the National Museum of Scotland (p.74).

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — BARRA

By plane Barra airport (☎01871 890212, 🌐hial.oc.uk) has direct flights from and to Glasgow.

By ferry The main ferry terminal on Barra is in Castlebay, where the ferry from Oban arrives: from Eriskay, you arrive at an uninhabited spot on the northeast of the island.

Destinations Coll (Thurs; 4hr); Eriskay (5 daily; 40min); Lochboisdale (Wed, Fri & Sun; 1hr 40min); Oban (1–2 daily except Sat; 5hr); Tiree (Thurs; 2hr 45min).

By bus There's a fairly decent bus service out of Castlebay, which does the rounds of the island.

Destinations Airport (Mon–Sat 4–7 daily; 30min); Eriskay ferry (Mon–Sat 3–5 daily; 25min); Eoligarry (Mon–Sat 3–6 daily; 35min); Vatersay (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 20min).

By car or bike Barra Car Hire (☎01871 890313) will deliver cars to either ferry terminal or the airport, and Barra Cycle Hire (☎01871 810284) will do the same with bikes.

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office Main St, Castlebay, just round from the pier (Easter–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 11am–3pm; Oct same hours Mon–Sat only; Nov & Dec Mon–Sat 9am–1pm & 2–5pm; also open to greet the evening ferry; ☎01871 810336).

Sea-kayaking Available from the *Dunard Hostel*.

ACCOMMODATION

Castlebay Hotel Castlebay ☎01871 810223, 🌐castlebay-hotel.co.uk. The Castlebay is the more welcoming of the town's two hotels – a solid Victorian pile, with spectacular views over the bay from the restaurant and some of the rooms. £105

Dunard Hostel Castlebay ☎01871 810443, 🌐dunardhostel.co.uk. A relaxed, family-run place just west of the ferry terminal in Castlebay, that has twins, dorm beds and a family room; they also offer sea-kayaking. £18/person

Heathbank Hotel Northbay (Bagh a Tuath) ☎01871 890266, 🌐barrahotel.co.uk. Converted mission church now home to a comfortable hotel and unpretentious local watering hole run by the very friendly and experienced local MacLeod family. £96

Northbay House Northbay (Bagh a Tuath) ☎01871 890266, 🌐barraholidays.co.uk. The old schoolhouse in Northbay, originally built in 1888, is now a B&B run by a genuinely friendly couple – breakfast menu includes local smoked haddock and poached egg. £76

Scurrival campsite 3 Eoligarry (Eòlaigearraidh) ☎01871 890292. Very convenient for the Eriskay ferry, this is a lovely, simple site with showers and toilet facilities, overlooking the sea and close to the wide sandy beach of Scurrival (Tràigh Sgurabhal). Closed Nov–March. £5/person

Tigh-na-Mara Castlebay ☎01871 810304, 🌐tighnamara-barra.co.uk. For value and location – just a few mins from the pier in Castlebay – you can't beat this simple Victorian guesthouse overlooking the sea. Free wi-fi. Closed Nov–March. £60

EATING AND DRINKING

★**Café Kisimul Main St** ☎01871 810645, 🌐cafekisimul.co.uk. As well as offering Italian comfort food and great music, the *Kisimul* also cooks up the best curry in northwest Scotland (mains £12–15) – try the unique scallop pakora and book ahead. Daily morning until late.

Castlebay Hotel Castlebay ☎01871 810223, 🌐castlebay-hotel.co.uk. The *Castlebay* has a cosy bar, which regularly has cockles, crabs and scallops on its menu (mains £12–16), and good views out over the bay. Daily noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT

Films are occasionally shown on Saturday evenings at the **local school** – look out for the posters – where there is also a **swimming pool** (Tues–Sun), **library** and **sports centre**, all of which are open to the general public.

Orkney

528 Stromness
531 West Mainland
534 Kirkwall
537 Lamb Holm, Burray and South Ronaldsay
540 Hoy
543 Shapinsay
544 Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre
546 Westray
547 Papa Westray
548 Eday
550 Stronsay
551 Sanday
552 North Ronaldsay

ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL, KIRKWALL

Orkney

Orkney is a captivating and fiercely independent archipelago of seventy or so mostly low-lying islands, with a population of around twenty thousand. The locals tend to refer to themselves first as Orcadians, regarding Scotland as a separate entity, and proudly flying their own flag. For an Orcadian, "the Mainland" invariably means the largest island in Orkney rather than the rest of Scotland, and throughout their distinctive history the islands have been linked to lands much further afield, principally Scandinavia.

Orkney has excellent coastal walking, abundant birdlife and beautiful white-sand beaches. It has two chief settlements: **Stromness**, an attractive old fishing town on the far southwestern shore, and the capital, **Kirkwall**, at the dividing point between East and West Mainland. Relatively heavily populated and farmed throughout, the Mainland is joined by causeways to a string of southern islands, the largest of which is **South Ronaldsay**. The island of **Hoy**, the second largest in the archipelago, south of Mainland, presents a superbly dramatic landscape, with some of the highest sea cliffs in the country. Hoy, however, is atypical: Orkney's smaller, much quieter **northern islands** are low-lying, fertile outcrops of rock and sand, scattered across the ocean.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By plane hial.co.uk Flybe (0871 700 2000, flybe.com) operate direct flights to Kirkwall from Inverness, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Sumburgh in Shetland. Be warned: weather conditions are notoriously changeable, making flights prone to delay and even cancellation.

By ferry Northlink run car ferries daily from Scrabster (with a shuttle bus from Thurso) to Stromness and less frequently from Aberdeen and Lerwick (in Shetland) to Kirkwall; Pentland Ferries run car ferries from Gills Bay (near John O'Groats) to St Margaret's Hope; and John O'Groats Ferries run a small passenger ferry to Burwick. The timetables in the text are summer frequencies – check the internet for the latest sailing schedule and always book ahead.

GETTING AROUND AND TOURS

By plane 01856 872494, loganair.co.uk. Loganair run flights from Kirkwall to most of the outer isles, using an eight-seater plane, with discounted fares to North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray and between the islands if you stay over.

By ferry 01856 872044, orkneyferries.co.uk. Getting to the other islands by ferry from the Mainland isn't difficult, but travel between individual islands isn't straightforward. Ask Orkney Ferries about additional Sunday sailings in summer, which often make useful inter-island connections. Tickets are expensive. Book ahead if you're taking a vehicle.

By bus orkney.gov.uk. The bus service on Orkney Mainland is good during the week, but skeletal on Sundays. Except in Stromness and Kirkwall, there are no scheduled bus stops so just stand at a safe, visible spot and flag the bus down. On the smaller islands, a minibus usually meets the ferry and will take you to your destination.

By bike Cycling is an option if the weather holds, since there are few steep hills and distances are modest, though the wind can make it hard going.

Tours There's a whole range of escorted tours around the Mainland, which are great for those without a vehicle. Wildabout Orkney (01856 877737, wildaboutorkney.com) offer a variety of tours of the Mainland, with departures from Stromness and Kirkwall, and there are several other companies specializing in particular islands, and mentioned in the relevant text.

Orkney festivals p.529
Scapa Flow p.538
North Ronaldsay sheep p.552

MAES HOWE

Highlights

❶ **Maes Howe** Orkney's – and Europe's – finest Neolithic chambered tomb. **See p.531**

❷ **Skara Brae** Mesmerizing Neolithic homes, crammed with domestic detail. **See p.532**

❸ **St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall** Beautiful red sandstone cathedral built by the Vikings. **See p.534**

❹ **Tomb of the Eagles** Fascinating, privately owned Neolithic site on South Ronaldsay. **See p.539**

❺ **Scapa Flow Visitor Centre** Learn about the wartime history of Orkney's great natural harbour and the scuttling of the German Fleet. **See p.542**

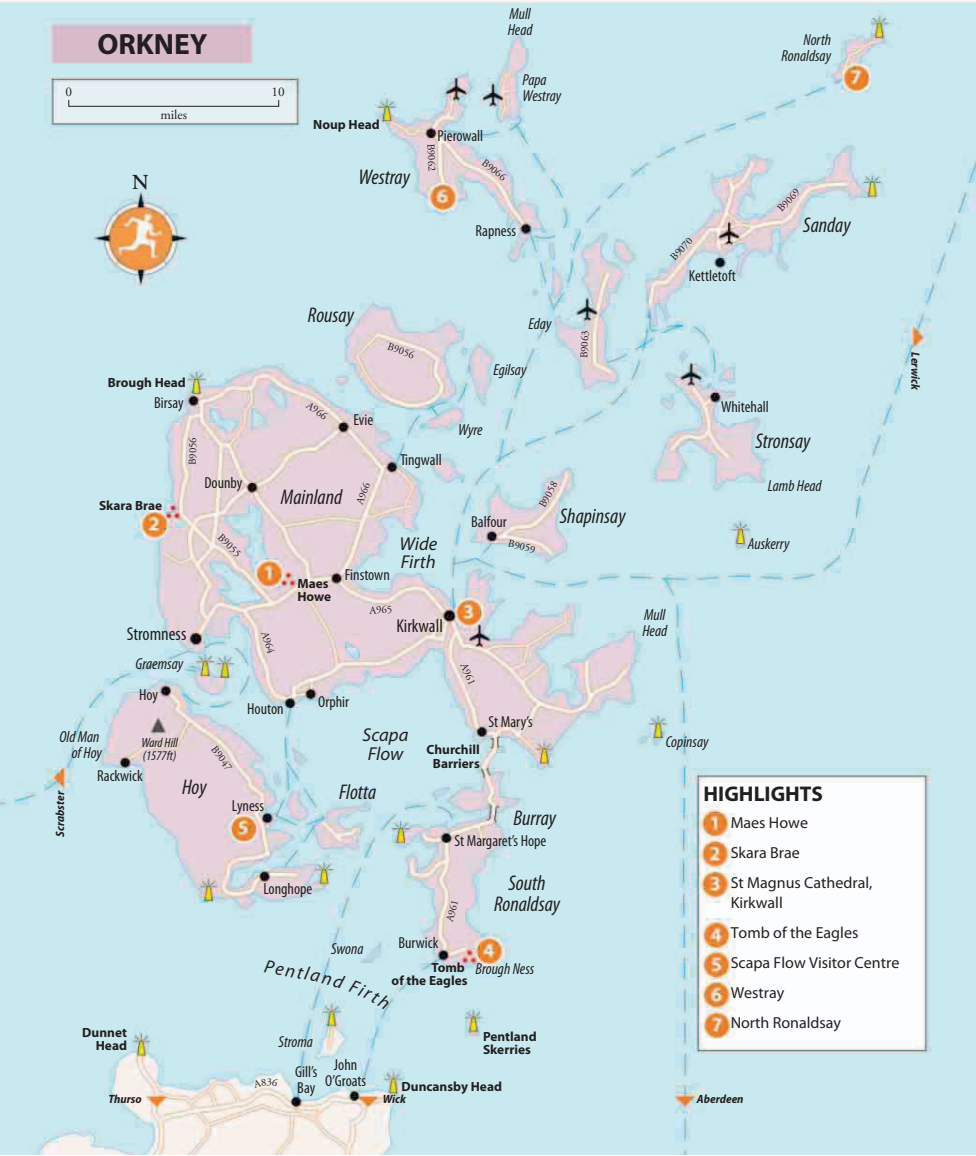
❻ **Westray** Thriving Orkney island with seabird colonies, sandy beaches and a ruined castle. **See p.546**

❼ **North Ronaldsay** Orkney's northernmost island features a bird observatory, seaweed-eating sheep and Britain's tallest land-based lighthouse. **See p.552**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.528

Stromness

STROMNESS is a quite enchanting port at which to arrive by boat, its picturesque waterfront a procession of tiny sandstone jetties and slate roofs nestling below the green hill of Brinkies Brae. Its makes a great introduction to Orkney, and is an excellent base too. Its natural sheltered harbour (known as Hamnavoe) has probably been used for centuries, but the town itself only really took off in the eighteenth century when the Hudson's Bay Company made Stromness its main base from which to make the journey across the North Atlantic. Today Stromness remains an



ORKNEY FESTIVALS

Kirkwall's chief cultural bash is the week-long **St Magnus Festival** (W stmagnusfestival.com), a superb arts festival held in the middle of June, with some events in Stromness. July is peppered with several island regattas and agricultural shows, culminating in the agricultural **County Show** held in Kirkwall in the middle of August.

To find out **what's on** (and the weather forecast), tune in to Radio Orkney on 93.7FM, buy yourself a copy of *The Orcadian*, which comes out on Thursdays, or log on to W orkneynewstoday.co.uk.

important fishing port and ferry terminal, and is the focus of the popular four-day **Orkney Folk Festival**, held in May.

Unlike Kirkwall, the old town of Stromness still hugs the shoreline, its one and only street, a narrow winding affair still paved with great flagstones and fed by a tight network of alleyways or closes. The central section, which begins at the imposing sandstone *Stromness Hotel*, is known as **Victoria Street**, though in fact it takes on several other names as it threads its way southwards. On the east side of the street the houses are gable-end-on to the waterfront, and originally each one would have had its own pier, from which merchants would trade with passing ships.

Pier Arts Centre

Victoria St • Tues–Sat 10.30am–5pm • Free • T 01856 850209, W pierartscentre.com

A warehouse on one of the old jetties on Victoria Street now forms half of the **Pier Arts Centre**; the other half is a modern glass and steel structure framing views of the harbour. The gallery has a remarkable permanent collection of twentieth-century British art, including worth by Scotish sculpter Eduardo Paolozzi, and, most notably by members of the Cornish group such as Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Terry Frost, Patrick Heron and the self-taught Alfred Wallis. There are also contemporary works, many by northern and Scandinavian artists, which continue the marine themes of the original collection.

Stromness Museum

52 Alfred St • April–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 11am–3.30pm • £4.50 • T 01856 850025, W orkneycommunities.co.uk/stromnessmuseum

At the junction of Alfred Street and South End stands the **Stromness Museum**, built in 1858. Highlights include an early inflatable boat like the one used by John Rae, the Stromness-born Arctic explorer, and some barnacle-encrusted crockery from the German High Seas Fleet that was sunk in Scapa Flow in 1919 (see box, p.538).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — STROMNESS

By ferry T 0845/600 0449, W northlinkferries.co.uk. Car ferries arrive in the centre of Stromness from Scrabster (2–3 daily; 1hr 30min), which is connected to nearby Thurso by shuttle bus. The tiny passenger ferry to Moaness Pier on Hoy (via Graemsay) departs from the old harbour in Stromness (Mon–Fri 4–5 daily, Sat & Sun 2 daily; 25min).

By bus T 01856 870555, W stagecoachbus.com. Buses depart from Stromness ferry terminal.

Destinations Houton (Mon–Fri 2 daily; 20min); Kirkwall (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun every 2hr; 30min); Skara Brae (Mon, Thurs & Sat 1 daily; 20min); St Margaret's Hope (10 daily; 1hr 5min).

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

Tourist office Stromness ferry terminal houses the tourist office (March–Oct daily, T 01856 850716, W visitorkney.com).

Orkney Cycle Hire 54 Dundas St T 01856 850255, W orkneycyclehire.co.uk. Bike rental from £7.50 a day.

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ACCOMMODATION

Brinkies Guest House Innertown ☎01856 851881. A substantial double-bay fronted Victorian guesthouse located a 10min walk up from the town. Rooms enjoy fantastic views, the residents' lounge has loads of reading matter and there's free wi-fi. £70

Brown's 47 Victoria St ☎01856 850661, ⓦbrownshostel.co.uk. A family-run place, right in the centre of town, with bunk beds in very small, shared rooms – it's pretty clean, Mrs Brown is friendly and there's free internet access. £18/person

Burnside Farm ☎01856 850723, ⓦburnside-farm.com. A cracking B&B run by a local couple on a working farm about a mile out of town on the road to Kirkwall. The views are great, and the furnishings and facilities are truly top-notch: en-suite wet-rooms and free wi-fi, plus bere bannocks for breakfast. £70

Hamnavoe Hostel 10a North End Rd ☎01856 851202, ⓦhamnavoehostel.co.uk. A good 10min walk from the ferry terminal and no beauty from the outside, but inside it's all spotlessly clean, welcoming and well equipped. £17/person

Miller's House 13 John St ☎01856 851969, ⓦmillershouseorkney.com. Modern pine furnishings predominate in this B&B, housed in the town's oldest property (and a nearby annexe) in the heart of Stromness – great home cooking, too. £65

Point of Ness Campsite ☎01856 873535. Busy campsite in a superb (though extremely exposed) setting a mile south of the ferry terminal at Point of Ness, with great views over to Hoy; facilities include a TV lounge and a washing machine. May to mid-Sept. £7/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

Ferry Inn 10 John St ☎01856 850280, ⓦferryinn.com. Situated opposite the ferry terminal, this is the most popular and welcoming pub in town, serving up classic pub grub as well as local scallops, Grimbister cheese and spicy Orkney crab cakes, all for under £10. Daily 9am–midnight; food served until 9.30pm.

Hamnavoe Restaurant 35 Graham Place ☎01856 850606. Offers the town's most ambitious cooking, concentrating on local produce, such as grilled sole or peppered monkfish – main courses start at around £15 and booking is essential. May–Sept Tues–Sun only.

Julia's Café and Bistro 20 Ferry Rd ☎01856 850904. Daytime café right opposite the ferry terminal, with a sunny conservatory and tables outside if the weather's good enough. It's comfort food for the most part, but you can get a decent fish pie, all for under £10. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

West Mainland

The great bulk of the **West Mainland** – west of Kirkwall, that is – is fertile farmland, fenced off into a patchwork of fields used either to produce crops or for cattle-grazing. Fringed by a spectacular western coastline, West Mainland is littered with some of the island's most impressive prehistoric sites, such as the village of **Skara Brae**, the standing **Stones of Stenness**, the chambered tomb of **Maes Howe** and the **Broch of Gurness**, as well as one of Orkney's best preserved medieval castles at **Birsay**. Despite the intensive farming, some areas are too barren to cultivate, and the high ground and wild coastline include several interesting **wildlife reserves**.

Stenness

The parish of **Stenness**, northeast of Stromness along the main road to Kirkwall, slopes down from Ward Hill (881ft) to the lochs of Stenness and Harray: the first is tidal, the second is a freshwater trout loch. The two lochs are joined by a short causeway that may well have been a narrow isthmus around 3000 BC, when it stood at the heart of Orkney's most important Neolithic ceremonial complex, centred on the burial chamber of **Maes Howe**.

Stones of Stenness

Guided tours June–Aug Mon, Wed & Fri 10am • HS • Free • ☎1856 841732

The most visible part of the complex between lochs Stenness and Harray is the **Stones of Stenness**, originally a circle of twelve rock slabs, now just four, the tallest of which is a real monster at over 16ft, and remarkably slender. A broken tabletop lies within the circle, surrounded by a much-diminished henge (a circular bank of earth and a ditch) with a couple of entrances.

Ring of Brodgar

Guided tours June–Aug daily 1pm • HS • Free • ☎01856 841732

Less than a mile to the northwest of the Stones of Stenness, past the huge **Watch Stone** which stands beside the road at over 18ft in height, you reach another stone circle, the **Ring of Brodgar**, a much wider circle dramatically sited on raised ground. Here there were originally sixty stones, 27 of which now stand; of the henge, only the ditch survives.

Maes Howe

April–Sept daily 9.30am–5pm; June–Aug until 8pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9.45am–4.30pm • £5.50; HS • ☎01856 761606

Maes Howe, one of Europe's most impressive Neolithic burial chambers, lies less than a mile northeast of the Stones of Stenness. Dating from 3000 BC, its excellent state of preservation is partly due its construction from massive slabs of sandstone weighing up to thirty tons. Visitors must first buy a **timed ticket** for a guided tour, in advance or direct from Tormiston Mill by the main road, which houses the **ticket office**, toilets and interpretive display.

You enter the **central chamber** down a low, long passage, one wall of which is comprised of a single immense stone. Inside, you can stand upright and admire the superb masonry of the lofty corbelled roof. Remarkably, the tomb is aligned so that the rays of the winter solstice sun hit the top of the Barnhouse Stone, half a mile away, and reach right down the passage of Maes Howe to the ledge of one of the three cells in the walls of the tomb. When Maes Howe was opened in 1861, it was virtually empty, thanks to the work of generations of grave-robbers, who had left behind only a handful of human bones. The Vikings, however, left copious runic graffiti, cut into the walls of the main chamber, including phrases such as "many a beautiful woman has stooped in here, however pompous she might be" and the more prosaic "Thor and I bedded Helga".

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — STENNESS

By bus Buses from Stromness to Kirkwall (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun every 2hr; 30min) can drop you off at Tormiston Mill by Maes Howe – under a mile from the Stones of Stenness and the same again from the Ring of Brodgar.

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Holland House** 01856 771400, hollandhouseorkney.co.uk. A beautiful, solidly built manse in Harray, set back from the A986. The house is filled with artworks, there's a peat fire and the home cooking, including freshly baked scones for breakfast, is outstanding. **£96**

Mill of Eyrland 01856 850136, millofeyrland.co.uk. Carefully converted former mill in a delightful setting on the A964 to Orphir; it's filled with wonderful antiques and old mill machinery, as well as all mod cons; free wi-fi and enormous breakfasts. **£80**

EATING AND DRINKING

Merkister Hotel Harray Loch 01856 771366, www.merkister.com. Substantial hotel on the northeastern shore of the Loch of Harray, popular with the locals and visiting anglers. The bar's lively and does fairly predictable bar meals such as (local) fish and chips (around £10) but there's a restaurant, too, whose menu features more local seafood (mains £13–20). Food served daily noon–2pm & 6–9pm.

Skara Brae

Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am–4.30pm • £7.10; HS • 01856 761606

The extensive remains of a small Neolithic fishing and farming village, dating from 3000 BC, were discovered at **Skara Brae** in 1850, after a fierce storm ripped off the dunes covering them. The village is amazingly well preserved, its houses huddled together and connected by narrow passages, which would originally have been covered over with turf. The houses themselves comprise a single, spacious living room, filled with domestic detail, including dressers, fireplaces, built-in cupboards, beds and boxes, all ingeniously constructed from slabs of stone.

The **visitor centre** houses an excellent **café/restaurant** and an introductory **exhibition**, with a few replica finds, and some hands-on stuff for kids. Beyond is a full-scale replica of House 7 (the best-preserved house), complete with a fake wood and skin roof. It's all a tad neat and tidy, with fetching uplighting – rather than dark, smoky and smelly – but it gives you the general idea, and makes up for the fact that, at the site itself, you can only look down on the houses from the outer walls.

In the summer months, your ticket to Skara Brae also covers entry to nearby **Skaill House**, built for Bishop George Graham in the 1620s, but much extended since. The house's prize possession is Captain Cook's dinner service from the *Resolution*; it was delivered after Cook's death when the *Resolution* and the *Discovery* sailed into Stromness in 1780.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SKARA BRAE

By bus Services are limited (Mon, Thurs & Sat only), with extra services on schooldays and an Octobus service from Finstown (pre-book only 01856 871536, www.octocic.co.uk). Alternatively, since it's only 7 miles from Stromness, you could just hire a bike.

ACCOMMODATION

Hyval Farm 01856 841522, hyval.co.uk. A working beef cattle farm in Quoyloo within walking distance of Skara Brae, the seaside and Orkney Brewery. There's a guests' lounge, and breakfast is taken in the little conservatory with great views over the Bay of Skaill. April–Oct. £50

EATING AND DRINKING

★ **Orkney Brewery, Quoyloo** 01856 841777, sinclairbreweries.co.uk. The old schoolhouse in Quoyloo has been tastefully converted into a state-of-the-art microbrewery, with tasting tours (£5) and also a great café where local produce is very much to the fore – try the beef and beer sausages – and all dishes are under £10. Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun noon–4.30pm.

Birsay and around

Occupying the northwest corner of the Mainland, the parish of **BIRSAY** was the centre of Norse power in Orkney for several centuries before Kirkwall got its cathedral.

Earl's Palace

Birsay is dominated by the imposing sixteenth-century sandstone ruins of the **Earl's Palace**, built by Robert Stewart, Earl of Orkney, using the forced labour of the islanders, who weren't even given food and drink for their work. By all accounts, it was a "sumptuous and stately dwelling", built in four wings around a central courtyard, its upper rooms decorated with painted ceilings and rich furnishings; surrounding the palace were flower and herb gardens, a bowling green and archery butts. The palace lasted barely a century before falling into rack and ruin; the crumbling walls and turrets retain much of their grandeur, although inside there is little remaining domestic detail.

Brough of Birsay

Accessible 2hr either side of low tide • Tide times available at Stromness and Kirkwall tourist offices and on Radio Orkney (93.7FM; Mon–Fri 7.30–8am) • **St Peter's Church** Mid-June to Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £4.50; HS

Over half a mile northwest of Birsay village is the **Brough of Birsay**, a substantial Pictish settlement on a small tidal island. On the island, there's a small ticket office, where you can see a few artefacts gathered from the site, including an antler pin and a game made from whalebone. The focus of the village was – and still is – the sandstone-built twelfth-century **St Peter's Church**, which is thought to have stood at the centre of a monastic complex – the foundations of a courtyard and outer buildings can be made out to the west. Close by is a large complex of Viking-era buildings, including several houses, a sauna and some sophisticated stone drains.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BIRSAY AND AROUND

By bus Bus services from Kirkwall (Mon, Thurs & Sat only) will get you to Evie, supplemented by the Octobus service from Finstown, (pre-book 24hr before; 01856 871536, octocic.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

Birsay Outdoor Centre 0.5 miles south of the Barony Mills 01856 873535 ext 2415, www.orkney.gov.uk. A large refurbished hostel with a fully equipped kitchen and a drying room; there's also a campsite alongside. Check-in from 6pm. April–Sept. Dorms £16; camping £6.25/pitch

EATING AND DRINKING

Barony Hotel 01856 721327, baronyhotel.com. The only watering hole in Birsay is the bar of the *Barony* overlooking the Loch of Boardhouse, to the southeast of Birsay village. Daily noon–11pm; food served 12.30–2pm & 6.30–8.30pm.

Birsay Tea Room 01856 721399, birsaybaytearoom.co.uk. For light snacks and home-made cake, head for the modern tearoom, at the southern edge of the village, which boasts superb views of the Brough (binoculars provided). Wed–Sun 11am–5pm.

Broch of Gurness

Evie • April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £5.50; HS • T 01856 751414

The best-preserved broch on Orkney is the **Broch of Gurness**, on the north coast, still surrounded by a remarkable complex of later buildings. As at Birsay, the sea has eaten away half the site, but the broch itself, from around 100 BC, still stands, its walls reaching 12ft in places and its inner cells intact. Clustered around the broch, the compact group of homes has survived amazingly well, complete with their original stone shelving and fireplaces. The best view of the site is from the east, where you can make out the "main street" leading towards the broch.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BROCH OF GURNESS

By bus Bus services from Kirkwall get you to Evie (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily; 30min), from which it's a 30min walk to the broch. There's also the Octobus service from Finstown, (pre-book the day before T 01856 871536).

ACCOMMODATION

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Castlehill Evie T 01856 751228, W castlehillorkney.co.uk. This modern crofthouse under Burgar Hill looks nothing special from the outside but it's well decked out inside, with pleasant wooden furnishings and quality bedding. Great views and top-notch home cooking. £85

Eviedale Campsite Evie T 01856 751270, W creviedale.orknet.co.uk. In a sheltered spot by the junction of the road to Dounby, this is a small, simple campsite among a handful of self-catering cottages. Free wi-fi. April–Oct. £7/person

Kirkwall

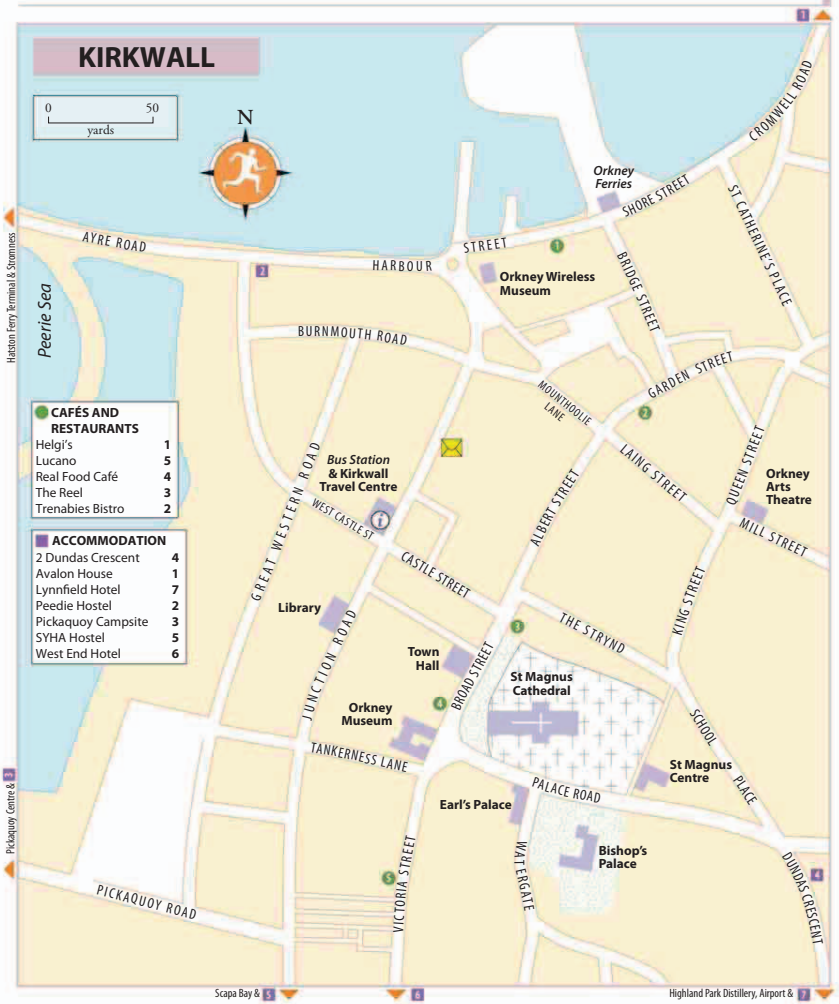
Initial impressions of **KIRKWALL**, Orkney's capital, are not always favourable. It has nothing to match the picturesque harbour of Stromness, and its residential sprawl is far less appealing. However, it does have one great redeeming feature – its sandstone **cathedral**, without doubt the finest medieval building in the north of Scotland. In any case, if you're staying any length of time in Orkney you're more or less bound to find yourself in Kirkwall at some point, as the town is home to the islands' better-stocked shops, and is the ferry terminal for most of Orkney's northern isles.

St Magnus Cathedral

Broad St • April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 2–5pm; Oct–March 9am–1pm & 2–5pm • Free • Guided upper level tours Tues & Thurs 11am & 2pm • £6.85 • T 01856 874894, W stmagnus.org

Standing at the very heart of Kirkwall, **St Magnus Cathedral** is the town's most compelling sight. This beautiful red-sandstone building was begun in 1137 by the Orkney Earl Rögnvald (aka St Ronald), spurred on by the growing cult surrounding the figure of his uncle Magnus, killed by his cousin Håkon in 1117 (see p.545). When Magnus's body was buried in Birsay, a heavenly light was said to have shone overhead, and his grave soon drew pilgrims. When Rögnvald took over the earldom, he moved the centre of religious and secular power from Birsay to Kirkwall, before he himself was murdered.

Today much of the detail in the soft sandstone has worn away – the capitals around the main doors are reduced to artistically gnarled stumps – but it's still an immensely impressive building. Inside, the atmosphere is surprisingly intimate, the bulky sandstone columns drawing your eye up to the exposed brickwork arches, while around the walls is a series of mostly seventeenth-century tombstones, many carved with a skull and crossbones and other emblems of mortality, alongside chilling inscriptions calling on the reader to "remember death waits us all, the hour none knows". In the square pillars on either side of the high altar, the bones of Magnus and Rögnvald are buried. In the southeastern corner of the cathedral lies the tomb of the Stromness-born Arctic explorer John Rae, who tried to find Sir John Franklin's expedition; he is depicted asleep, dressed in moleskins and furs, his rifle and bible by his side. Beside



Rae's tomb is Orkney's own Poets' Corner, with memorials to, among others, George Mackay Brown, Eric Linklater and Edwin Muir.

Bishop's and Earl's Palaces

Palace Rd • April–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm • £4.50; HS • ☎ 01856 871918

South of the cathedral are the ruins of the **Bishop's Palace**, residence of the Bishop of Orkney from the twelfth century. It was here that King Håkon died in 1263 on his return from defeat at the Battle of Largs. Most of what you see, however, dates from the time of Bishop Robert Reid, founder of Edinburgh University, in the mid-sixteenth century. The walls still stand, as does the tall round tower in which the bishop had his private chambers; a narrow spiral staircase takes you to the top for a good view over Kirkwall.

The ticket for the Bishop's Palace covers entry to the neighbouring **Earl's Palace** – better preserved and a lot more fun to explore – built by the infamous Earl Patrick Stewart

around 1600 using forced labour. With its grand entrance, fancy oriel windows, dank dungeons, massive fireplaces and magnificent central hall, it has a confident solidity, and is a fine example of Scottish Renaissance architecture. The roof may be missing, but many domestic details remain, including a set of toilets and the stone shelves used by the clerk for his filing. Earl Patrick enjoyed his palace for only a short time before he was imprisoned and charged with treason. The earl might have been acquitted, but he foolishly ordered his son, Robert, to organize an insurrection. Robert held out four days in the palace against the Earl of Caithness, before being captured, sent to Edinburgh and hanged there, and his father was beheaded at the same place five weeks later.

Orkney Museum

Broad St • Mon–Sat: May–Sept 10.30am–5pm; Oct–April 10.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm • Free • T 01856 873535

Opposite the cathedral stands the sixteenth-century **Tankerness House**, a former home for the clergy, and now home to the **Orkney Museum**. A couple of rooms have been restored as they would have been in 1820, when it was the Baikie family's private home. The rest houses some of the islands' most treasured finds, among the more unusual of which are a witch's spell box and a lovely whalebone plaque from a Viking boat grave discovered on Sanday.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — KIRKWALL

By plane T 01851 707400, W hial.co.uk. Kirkwall airport is 3 miles southeast of town on the A960; take the hourly bus (15min), or a taxi (£5).

Destinations within Orkney Eday (Mon & Wed 1–2 daily; 10–30min); North Ronaldsay (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 2 on Sun; 20–30min); Papa Westray (Mon–Fri 3 daily, Sat & Sun 2 daily; 15–35min); Sanday (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat; 15min); Stronsay (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat; 10–25min); Westray (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 15–25min).

By ferry T 0845 600 0449, W northlinkferries.co.uk. Ferries from Shetland (3 weekly; 5hr 30min) and Aberdeen (3 weekly; 6hr), and all cruise ships, dock at the Hatston terminal, a mile northwest of town; a shuttle bus takes you into Kirkwall (or Stromness if you prefer). Ferries for Orkney's northern isles leave from the town pier in Kirkwall.

Destinations within Orkney Eday (2–3 daily; 1hr 15min–2hr 25min); North Ronaldsay (Tues & Fri; 2hr 40min); Papa Westray (Tues & Fri; 2hr 15min); Sanday (2 daily; 1hr 25min); Shapinsay (4–5 daily; 45min); Stronsay (2 daily; 1hr 40min–2hr); Westray (2–3 daily; 1hr 25min).

By bus T 01856 870555, W stagecoachbus.com. The bus station is behind the Kirkwall Travel Centre, West Castle St.

Destinations Birsay (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 45min); Burwick (2–3 daily; 40min); Evie (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily; 30min); Houton (Mon–Fri 7 daily, 3 on Sat; 35–40min); Kirkwall Airport (Mon–Sat every 30min–hourly, 9 on Sun; 15min); Skara Brae (June–Aug Mon, Thurs & Sat 1 daily; 50min); St Margaret's Hope (Mon–Sat hourly; 30min); Stromness (Mon–Sat hourly, Sun every 2hr; 30min); Tingwall (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily; 25min).

INFORMATION

Tourist office Kirkwall Travel Centre houses the tourist office (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–2pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat only; T 01856 872856, W www.visitorkney.com).

ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS AND B&BS

2 Dundas Crescent T 01856 874805, W twodundas.co.uk. Run by an Orcadian couple and situated just behind the cathedral, this former manse is a grand, and tastefully decorated, Victorian house, with four spacious rooms and period fittings. £75

Avalon House Carness Rd T 01856 876665, W avalon-house.co.uk. Don't judge a B&B by its drab, modern exterior; this is a comfortable, purpose-built guesthouse run efficiently by a very welcoming couple, and situated a pleasant 20min coastal walk from the town centre. £72

Lynnfield Hotel Holm Rd T 01856 872505, W lynnfield.co.uk. Small ten-room hotel in a quiet spot a mile or so out of town near the distillery – the dark wood furnishings make the place seem really quite grand in style and the food is excellent. £115

West End Hotel 14 Main St T 01856 872368, W westendkirkwall.co.uk. Orkney's first hospital is now a good, old-fashioned hotel located in a quiet street, just a few minutes' walk south of the centre. £99

HOSTELS AND CAMPSITES

Peedie Hostel 1 Ayre Houses T 01856 875477, W kirkwallpeediehostel.com. Centrally located

overlooking the old harbour and out to sea, this is a clean and comfortable hostel with just eight beds. Washing machine and tumble dryer available, plus free wi-fi. April–Oct. Dorms £15

Pickaquoy Campsite Ayre Rd 01856 879900, pickaquoy.net. Central and well-equipped, since it is behind (and run by) the local leisure centre, but not exactly picturesque. April–Oct. £7.15/pitch

SYHA Hostel Old Scapa Rd 01856 872243, syha.org.uk. A good 10min walk out of the centre on the road to Orphir – friendly enough, but no beauty outside or in. April–Oct. £17/person

EATING AND DRINKING

Helgi's 14 Harbour St 01856 879293, helgis.co.uk. A popular modern pub on the harbour front which serves nicely presented bar food, from burger/fish and chips to fajitas (all for under £10). Free wi-fi. Mon–Wed 11am–midnight, Thurs–Sat 11am–1am, Sun 12.30pm–midnight.

Lucano 31 Victoria St 01856 875687, lucanokirkwall.com. Busy, bright, modern, authentic Italian – a real find in Kirkwall – offering pizza, pasta and risotto with an Orcadian angle. It's popular so book ahead. Daily 9am–9pm.

Real Food Café 25 Broad St 01856 874225, www.judithglue.com. Cheery cream and sky-blue wood-panelling decor at this small snacky café at the back of Judith Glue's gift shop opposite the cathedral. Try the Westray crab claws and bere bannocks (all dishes under £10). June–Sept daily 9am–10pm; shorter hours in the low season.

★ **The Reel** 6 Broad St 01856 871000, wrigleyandthereel.com. The old customs house near the cathedral is now a fabulous, laidback self-service café, run by the musical Wrigley Sisters, serving great coffee, sandwiches, pizzas and cakes, and offering free wi-fi and regular live music (Wed, Thurs & Sat). Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat 9am–1am; in summer also Sun 10am–5pm.

Trenabies Bistro Albert St 01856 874336, trenabiesfairtrade.co.uk. This cosy, old-fashioned café with booths is a classic Kirkwall institution – order Cajun fries and a panini for around £5. Mon–Sat 8.30am–5.30pm, Sun noon–4pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinema Pickaquoy Centre Pickaquoy Rd 01856 879900, pickaquoy.net. As well as serving as one of the town's main large-scale venues, the "Picky" a short walk west of the town centre, also contains the New Phoenix cinema.

Lamb Holm, Burray and South Ronaldsay

Southeast from Kirkwall, the narrow spur of the **East Mainland** juts out into the North Sea and is joined, thanks to the remarkable Churchill Barriers, to several smaller islands, the largest of which are **Burray** and **South Ronaldsay**. As with the West Mainland, the land here is heavily farmed, but it contains fewer of Orkney's famous sights. That said, the **Tomb of the Eagles** is one of the most enjoyable and memorable of Orkney's prehistoric sites.

Lamb Holm: the Italian Chapel

Daily dawn–dusk • Free

Special camps were built on the uninhabited island of **Lamb Holm**, to accommodate the 1700 men involved in building the Churchill Barriers, 1200 of whom were Italian POWs. The camps have long since disappeared, but the Italians left behind the extraordinary **Italian Chapel**, by the main road (A961). This, the so-called "Miracle of Camp 60", must be one of the greatest adaptations ever, made from two Nissen huts, concrete, barbed wire and parts of a rusting blockship. It has a great false facade, and colourful trompe l'oeil decor, lovingly restored by the chapel's original architect, Domenico Chiocchetti, in 1960.

Burray

The largest of the little islands between the Mainland and South Ronaldsay, **Burray** has a population of around 400. The main village expanded in the nineteenth century

during the boom years of the herring industry, but was badly affected by the sinking of the blockships during World War I. The two-storey warehouse, built in 1860 in order to cure and pack the herring, has since been converted into the *Sands Hotel* (see below).

Orkney Fossil and Heritage Centre

April–Sept daily 10am–4pm • £4 • 01856 731255, orkneyfossilcentre.co.uk

Burray's chief attraction is the **Orkney Fossil and Heritage Centre**, housed in a converted farm on the island's main road. The UV "glow room", where the rocks reveal their iridescent colours, is a particular favourite with kids, though be sure to show them the coprolite (fossilized poo) among the main displays, too. Upstairs, there's a lot of wartime memorabilia and a whole section on the Churchill Barriers – kids can practice building their own – while the ground floor has a community-run café.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — BURRAY

By bus Buses from Kirkwall to St Margaret's Hope call in at Burray village shop (Mon–Sat hourly; 30min).

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ACCOMMODATION, EATING AND DRINKING

Sands Hotel 14 Main St 01856 731298, thesandshotel.co.uk. An imposing former fish warehouse overlooking Burray harbour – now a hotel with simple pine furnishings and a few original features. The bar menu dishes (all under £10) include herring in oatmeal, and mince and tatties; the restaurant serves up local scallops and black pudding (mains £12–16). Food served Mon–Sat noon–2pm & 6–9pm, Sun noon–2pm & 5.30–8.30pm. £99

South Ronaldsay

Low-lying **South Ronaldsay** is the largest of the islands linked to the Mainland by the Churchill Barriers. It was traditionally the chief crossing point to the Scottish mainland, as it's only six miles across the Pentland Firth from Caithness. Today, car **ferries** arrive at St Margaret's Hope, and there's a passenger ferry between John O'Groats and Burwick, on the island's southernmost tip.

St Margaret's Hope

South Ronaldsay's main settlement is **ST MARGARET'S HOPE**, which local tradition says is named after Margaret, Maid of Norway, daughter of the Norwegian king, who is thought to have died here aged eight in 1290. As the granddaughter of Alexander III, Margaret had already been proclaimed queen of Scotland and was en route to marry

SCAPA FLOW

Apart from a few oil tankers, there's very little activity in the great natural harbour of **Scapa Flow**, yet for the first half of the twentieth century, the Flow served as the main base of the Royal Navy, with more than a hundred warships anchored here at any one time. The coastal defences required to make Scapa Flow safe to use as the country's chief naval headquarters were considerable and many are still visible all over Orkney, ranging from half-sunk blockships to the causeways known as the Churchill Barriers and the gun batteries that pepper the coastline.

Scapa Flow's most celebrated moment in naval history, however, was when the entire **German High Seas Fleet** was interned here immediately after World War I and then scuttled on the orders of the commanding officer, Admiral von Reuter, on Midsummer's Day 1919.

To find out more about Scapa Flow's wartime role, visit the museum on Hoy (see p.542). Scapa Flow is one of the world's greatest dive sites and Scapa Scuba (01856 851218, wscapascuba.co.uk), based in Stromness, offer one-to-one scuba-diving tuition for all abilities (from £70). If you don't want to get your feet wet, Dawn Star II (01856 876743, orkneyboattrips.co.uk; May–Sept) will give you a history tour above water; tours begin at St Mary's, by the Churchill Barriers (3hr; £90 for two).

the future Edward II of England, thereby unifying the two countries. Today, St Margaret's Hope – or "The Hope", as it's known locally – is a pleasing little gathering of stone-built houses overlooking a sheltered bay.

Smiddy Museum

Cromarty Square • May–Aug daily 2–4.30pm • Free • T 01856 831440

The village smithy on Cromarty Square has been turned into a **Smiddy Museum**, which is particularly fun for kids, who enjoy getting hands-on with the old tools, drills and giant bellows. There's also a small exhibition on the annual **Boys' Ploughing Match**, in which local boys compete with miniature hand-held ploughs.

Tomb of the Eagles

Daily: March 10am–noon; April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct 9.30am–12.30pm; Nov–Feb by appointment • £7 • T 01856 831339, W tombotheeagles.co.uk

The chambered cairn at the southeastern corner of South Ronaldsay, known as the **Tomb of the Eagles**, was discovered in 1958 and excavated by local farmer, Ronald Simpson of Liddle. This is a proper hands-on museum, so first off, you get to handle some of the artefacts in the family's museum of prehistoric finds. Next there's a guided tour of a nearby Bronze Age **burnt mound**, a Neolithic rubbish dump. Finally, you walk a mile or so out to the **chambered cairn** by the cliff's edge, where human remains were found alongside talons and carcasses of sea eagles. To enter the cairn, you must lie on a trolley and pull yourself in using an overhead rope – something guaranteed to put a smile on every visitor's face.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

SOUTH RONALDSAY

By ferry Pentland ferries (T 01856 831226, W pentlandferries.co.uk) operates car catamarans from Gill's Bay (3 daily; 1hr), near John O'Groats (linked by bus to Wick and Thurso). John O'Groats Ferries (T 01955 611353, W jogferry.co.uk) runs a passenger ferry from John O'Groats to Burwick on South Ronaldsay (May & Sept 2 daily; June–Aug 4 daily; 40min). Its departure is timed to connect with the arrival of the Orkney Bus from Inverness; there's also a free shuttle service from Thurso train station for certain sailings.

By bus There is a regular bus service from Kirkwall to St Margaret's Hope (Mon–Sat hourly; 30min), and a summer-only one to Burwick, which connects with the John O'Groat's ferry (May–Sept 2–3 daily; 40min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

ST MARGARET'S HOPE

The Creel Front Rd T 01856 831311, W thecreel.co.uk. The short and seasonal menu regularly features local beef and seafood, with three-course dinners for around £30. The rooms are beautifully furnished and the breakfasts are among the best on Orkney. Food served April–Oct Tues–Sat 7pm. £110

★ **Roeberry House** T 01856 831228, W roeberryhouse.com. Spacious rooms in a beautiful Victorian mansion in Hoxa. There are dogs, cats, chickens and peacocks, spectacular views and a warm welcome plus a small kitchen for guests' use, a billiard room and free wi-fi. £110

St Margaret's Cottage T 01856 831637, W stmargaretscottage.com. Handsome sandstone house on the edge of The Hope, run by a genuine Orcadian couple; free wi-fi and very handy for the Pentland ferry. £60

St Margaret's Hope Backpackers Hostel Back Rd T 01856 831225, W orkneybackpackers.com. Simple hotel, with a number of small rooms with double bunks – singles, doubles and family rooms available. There's a kitchen/lounge and a nice adjacent café with sofas and free wi-fi. Dorms £15

Wheems T 01856 831556, W wheemsorganic.co.uk. April–Oct. Rambling old crofthouse and organic farm, 1.5 miles east of the main road, with a couple of wooden huts for hire, a sloping field for camping, all the usual facilities, plus a communal yurt. £7/pitch

BURWICK

Eastward Guest House T 01856 831551, W www.eastwardhouse.com. In a converted former church on the main road to Burwick, this B&B has bags of character – reclaimed Maplewood flooring, Gothic windows. They also offer guests themed culinary evenings, specializing in Japanese food (W www.missingbell.com). £90

Skerries Bistro, Banks T 01856 831605, W skerriesbistro.co.uk. Fabulous view over the Pentland Firth and Skerries, with local fish and king scallops as big as steaks (mains around £15), plus delicious home-made puddings and cakes. April–Oct daily 11am–10pm.

Hoy

Hoy, Orkney's second-largest island, rises sharply out of the sea to the southwest of the Mainland. The least typical of the islands, but the most dramatic, its north and west sides are made up of great glacial valleys and mountainous moorland rising to over 1500ft, dropping into the sea off the red-sandstone cliffs of St John's Head, and, to the south, forming the landmark sea stack known as the **Old Man of Hoy**, best accessed from **Rackwick**. Most of Hoy's four hundred residents live on the gentle, fertile land in the southeast, around the villages of **Lyness** and **Longhope**. This part of the island is littered with buildings dating from the two world wars, when Scapa Flow was the Royal Navy's main base.

North Hoy

Much of **North Hoy**'s magnificent landscape is made up of rough grasses and heather, which harbour a cluster of arctic plants (a lot of midges) and a healthy population of mountain hares and birdlife. Facilities are minimal, however, with the nearest shop in Longhope (see p.543), and both the villages – Hoy and Rackwick – are absolutely tiny, with very little in the way of transport. If you're walking to Rackwick from Hoy, take the footpath that goes past Sandy Loch and along the large open valley of **Berriedale** (1hr 30min).

Dwarfie Stane

Halfway along the road from Hoy to Rackwick, duckboards head across the heather to the **Dwarfie Stane**, Orkney's most unusual chambered tomb, cut from a solid block of sandstone and dating back to 3000 BC. Among the copious Victorian graffiti is an inscription on the northern exterior, where Major Mouncey, a former British spy in Persia and a confirmed eccentric who dressed in Persian garb, carved his name backwards in Latin and also carved in Persian the words "I have sat two nights and so learnt patience."

Rackwick

RACKWICK is an old crofting and fishing village squeezed between towering sandstone cliffs on the west coast. These days only a few of Rackwick's houses are inhabited all year round. A building beside the hostel has a tiny **museum** with a brief rundown of Rackwick's rough history, but for a deeper insight into how folk used to live in these parts, head over to the **Craa Nest**, the oldest crofthouse in the village, just up the path to the Old Man; last occupied in 1940, the place still has its box-beds, barn and kiln intact.

The Old Man of Hoy

Despite its isolation, Rackwick has a steady stream of walkers and climbers passing through en route to the **Old Man of Hoy**, a great sandstone stack, 450ft high, perched on an old lava flow that protects it from the erosive power of the sea. It is a popular challenge for rock climbers, and a 1966 ascent, led by Chris Bonington, was the first televised climb in Britain. The well-trodden footpath from Rackwick is an easy three-mile walk (3hr round-trip) – although the great skuas will dive-bomb you during the nesting season (May–Aug). The surrounding cliffs provide ideal rocky ledges for thousands of nesting seabirds, including puffins.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND **NORTH HOY**

By ferry The passenger ferry from Stromness to Moaness pier, by Hoy village (Mon–Fri 4–5 daily, Sat & Sun 2 daily; 25min; ☎01856 850624) also serves the island of Graemsay en route.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP THE OLD MAN OF HOY (ABOVE); SKARA BRAE (P.532); THE ITALIAN CHAPEL ON LAMB HOLM (P.537) >

By bus A minibus usually meets the ferry and will take folk over to Rackwick or further afield. A Hoy Hopper bus service (mid-May to mid-Sept Wed–Fri only), which departs from Kirkwall, also calls at Moaness.

ACCOMMODATION

Burnside Bothy 01856 791316. You can camp in the dry-stone wall field beside this beautiful but basic heather-thatched bothy by the beach – toilets, cold water and a driftwood fire available inside the bothy. Donations box

Hoy Centre 01856 873535 ext 2417. A council-run, SYHA-affiliated hostel in an old school. Situated in Hoy village, this place is large and modern, with a well equipped kitchen, washing and drying facilities and all rooms en suite. £17/person

Rackwick Outdoor Centre 01856 873535 ext 2417. April–Sept. Housed in Rackwick's tiny little former schoolhouse, this simple hostel has just eight beds in two rooms and a small kitchen, but has a great situation in Rackwick village itself – camping permitted. £13.50/person

EATING AND DRINKING

Beneth'ill Café 01856 791119. Friendly, simple café, a short walk from Moaness pier, offering Cullen skink, fresh local crab, home-made puddings and proper coffee – they'll even do you a packed lunch and an evening meal on a Friday. May–Sept daily 10am–6.30pm.

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Lyness

Along the sheltered eastern shore of Hoy, high moorland gives way to a gentler environment. Hoy defines the western boundary of Scapa Flow, and **LYNESS** played a major role for the Royal Navy during both world wars. Many of the old wartime buildings have been cleared away over the last few decades, but the harbour and hills around Lyness are still scarred with the scattered remains of concrete structures that once served as hangars and storehouses during World War II, and are now used as barns and cowsheds. Lyness also has a large **naval cemetery**, where many of the victims of the various disasters that have occurred in the Flow now lie, alongside a handful of German graves.

Scapa Flow Visitor Centre and Museum

May–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–4.30pm, Sun open according to ferry; March, April & Oct Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm • Free • 01856 791300 • scapaflow.co.uk

The old oil pump house, standing opposite Lyness ferry terminal, has been turned into the **Scapa Flow Visitor Centre**, giving a fascinating insight into wartime Orkney – even the **café** has an old NAAFI feel about it. As well as the usual old photos, torpedoes, flags, guns and propellers, there's a paratrooper's folding bicycle, and a whole section devoted to the 1919 scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet and the 1939 sinking of the *Royal Oak*. The pump house also retains much of its old equipment used to pump oil off tankers into sixteen tanks, and into underground reservoirs cut into the neighbouring hillside.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — LYNESS

By ferry The roll-on/roll-off car ferry to/from Houton on the Mainland (Mon–Fri 6 daily, Sat & Sun 2–5 daily; 35min–1hr; 01856 811397), sometimes calls in at the oil terminal island of Flotta, and begins and ends its daily schedule at Longhope.

ACCOMMODATION

★ **Wild Heather B&B** 01856 791098, wildheatherbandb.co.uk. The most outstanding accommodation on Hoy lies just beyond the naval cemetery. It's a converted mill with just two en-suite rooms, both with sea views and a lovely breakfast conservatory; evening meals on request. £65

ENTERTAINMENT

Gable End Theatre hoyorkney.com/getco.html. Established in the old North Walls school buildings, this community-run theatre (with its own wind turbine) shows regular films and puts on the occasional theatre piece and music gig – check their Facebook page for the latest information.

Longhope

A causeway was built during World War II connecting Hoy with **South Walls** (pronounced "Waas"), a fertile tidal island more densely populated with farms and homes than Hoy. Along the north coast is the main settlement of **Longhope**, an important safe anchorage even today.

Hackness Martello Tower

April–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm • HS • £4.50 • ☎ 01856 701727

Longhope's strategic importance during the Napoleonic Wars is evident at the Point of Hackness, where the **Hackness Martello Tower** stands guard over the entrance to the bay, with a matching tower on the opposite promontory of Crockness. Built in 1815, these two circular sandstone Martello towers are the northernmost in Britain, and protected merchant ships from American and French privateers. You enter Hackness Tower via a steep ladder connected to the upper floor, where nine men and one officer shared the circular room.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — LONGHOPE

By ferry The roll-on/roll-off car ferry from Houton on the Mainland to Lyness begins and ends each day at Longhope.

ACCOMMODATION

Stromabank Hotel ☎ 01856 701494, 🌐 stromabank.co.uk. This small, unpretentious hotel is housed in an old schoolhouse on the hill above Longhope, with views over the Pentland Firth. Bar food available in the evening (closed Thurs). **£64**

Shapinsay

Just a few miles northeast of Kirkwall, **Shapinsay** is the most accessible of Orkney's northern isles. A gently undulating grid-plan patchwork of rich farmland, it's a bit like an island suburb of Kirkwall, which is clearly visible across the bay.

Balfour

Shapinsay's only village is **BALFOUR**, named after the family who owned the island, reformed the island's agricultural system and rebuilt the village – previously known as Shoreside – to house their estate workers. The family's grandiose efforts in estate management have left some appealingly eccentric relics around the village. Melodramatic fortifications around the harbour include the huge and ornate **gatehouse**, which now serves as the local pub. There's also a stone-built coal-fired **gasometer**, which once supplied castle and harbour with electricity and, southwest of the pier, the castellated **Douche** or Dishan Tower, a seventeenth-century doocot converted into a Victorian saltwater toilet and shower.

Balfour Castle

Guided tour and tea on Sunday afternoons in August • £22 • ☎ 01856 711282

Shapinsay's chief landmark is **Balfour Castle**, an imposing baronial pile visible as you approach on the ferry and a short walk from the village. Designed by David Bryce, it was completed in 1848 by the Balfour family of Westray, who had made a small fortune in India the previous century. The Balfours died out in 1960 and nowadays the castle is an exclusive-use holiday retreat, but open for guided tours and afternoon teas on Sundays in August.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By ferry Shapinsay is an easy day-trip from Kirkwall (4–5 daily; 30min).

By bus A Dial-a-Bus serves the island (pre-book only 079 1 575162).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Hilton Farmhouse 01856 711239, hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk. This whitewashed farmhouse, less than a mile from Balfour, has just two sunny, south-facing bedrooms (one of which is en suite), and a restaurant in the conservatory (book ahead) and offers optional full board. **£70**

The Smithy 01856 711269. Even if you're just coming for the day, it's worth popping into the wonderfully cosy licensed café below the heritage centre, which serves a simple menu during the day, and delicious, fresh, locally sourced fish and meat dishes in the evening (mains around £15). Evening boat charter from Mainland also available (£7 a head). May–Sept, Mon, Wed & Fri–Sun 9.30am–9pm, Tues & Thurs 9.30am–5pm.

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Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre

The hilly island of **Rousay** is one of the more accessible northern isles as well as being home to a number of intriguing prehistoric sites. The group of a dozen or so houses above the ferry terminal is the only settlement of any size, but a single road runs around the edge of the island, connecting a string of farms that make use of the more cultivable coastal fringes. Many visitors come on a day-trip, as it's easy enough to reach the main points of archeological interest on the south coast by foot from the ferry terminal.

Rousay's diminutive neighbours, **Egilsay** and **Wyre**, contain a few medieval attractions of their own, which can be visited on a day-trip from Rousay itself, or from the Mainland.

Rousay

Despite its long history of settlement, **Rousay** today was one of the few parts of Orkney to suffer Highland-style Clearances. One laird, Lieutenant General Traill-Burroughs, built a wall to force crofters onto a narrow coastal strip and eventually provoked so much distress and anger that a gunboat had to be sent to restore order. You can learn about the history and wildlife of the island from the well-laid-out display room of the **Rousay Heritage Centre** housed in the back of the ferry waiting room.

Trumland House

Gardens May–Oct daily 10am–5pm • £2 • 01856 821322 • trumlandhouse.org

The island's laird, Lieutenant General Traill-Burroughs, built **Trumland House**, the forbidding Jacobean-style pile designed by David Bryce in the 1870s, hidden in the trees half a mile northwest of the ferry terminal. The house is undergoing much-needed restoration, as are the landscaped **gardens**: the rhododendrons have been pushed back and there are now lovely wooded walks and a walled garden.

The three cairns

The road west from Trumland House runs past a trio of intriguing prehistoric cairns, starting with **Taversoe Tuick**. Dating back to 3500 BC, it's remarkable in that it exploits its sloping site by having two storeys, one entered from the upper side and one from the lower.

A little further west is the **Blackhammar Cairn**, which is entered through the roof via a ladder; the long interior is divided into "stalls" by large flagstones.

Finally, there's the **Knowe of Yarso**, another stalled cairn dating from the same period. It's worth the stiff climb up the hill from the road, if only for the magnificent view. The remains of 29 individuals were found inside, with the skulls neatly arranged around the walls.

Midhowe Cairn

The southwestern side of Rousay is home to the island's most significant and impressive archeological remains. Approached from the east, **Midhowe Cairn** comes as something of a surprise, due to its immense size – it's known as "the great ship of death" and measures nearly 100ft in length – and because it's housed within a stone-walled barn with a corrugated roof. You can't explore the roofless communal burial chamber, dating back to 3500 BC, only look down from the overhead walkway. The central corridor, 25yd long, is partitioned with slabs of rock, with twelve compartments on each side, where the remains of 25 people were discovered in a crouched position with their backs to the wall.

Midhowe Broch

A hundred yards beyond Midhowe Cairn is Rousay's finest archeological site, **Midhowe Broch**, whose compact layout suggests that it was originally built as a sort of fortified family house, surrounded by ditches and ramparts. The interior of the broch, entered through an impressive doorway, is divided into two separate rooms, each with its own hearth, water tank and quernstone, all of which date from the final phase of occupation around 150 AD.

Egilsay

Egilsay, the largest of the low-lying islands close to the eastern shore of Rousay, makes for an easy day-trip. The island is dominated by the ruined twelfth-century **St Magnus Church**, with its distinctive round tower. It's possible that it was built as a shrine to Earl (later St) Magnus, who arranged to meet his cousin Håkon here in 1117, only to be treacherously killed on Håkon's orders by his cook, Lifolf. If the weather's fine, walk due east from the ferry terminal to the coast, where there's a beautiful sandy bay overlooking Eday.

Wyre

Wyre, southwest of Egilsay, opposite Rousay's ferry terminal, is another possible day-trip. It's best known for **Cubbie Roo's Castle**, the "fine stone fort" and "really solid stronghold" mentioned in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, and built around 1150 by local farmer Kolbein Hruga. The outer defences have survived on three sides of the castle, which has a central keep, up to 6ft high, with its central water tank still intact. Close by stands the roofless twelfth-century **St Mary's Chapel**. To learn more about Cubbie Roo or any other aspect of Wyre's history, pop into the **Wyre Heritage Centre** near the chapel.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — ROUSAY, EGILSAY AND WYRE

By ferry Rousay makes a good day-trip from the Mainland, with car ferries from Tingwall (5–6 daily; 30min), linked to Kirkwall by bus (Mon–Sat 4–5 daily; 25min). Most ferries call in at Egilsay and Wyre, but some are request journeys and must be booked the day before (☎01856 751360).

By bus A bus runs every Thursday (7am–7pm; book ahead on ☎01856 821360, ⓦaroundrousay.co.uk/bus). Minibus tours are available on demand (☎01856 821234; £30; 5–7hr) from the ferry terminal on Rousay.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

ROUSAY

Accommodation and eating options on Rousay are very limited. If you're coming for the day or self-catering, bring your own provisions, as Marion's Shop, the island's main general store, is in the northeastern corner of the island. Free wi-fi is available throughout the island – phone the Manse (☎01856 821229).

The Pier ☎01856 821359, ⓦpierrestaurantorkney.com. A simple pub, right beside the ferry terminal, that serves bar meals (all under £10) and Orkney beers, and will serve up lobster or make up some fresh crab sandwiches if you phone in advance. May–Sept daily; shorter hours in winter.

The Taversoe ☎01856 821325, ⓦtaversoehotel.co.uk. Three miles west of the ferry terminal, the *Taversoe*

offers unpretentious accommodation in three rooms (two with sea views) and does classic pub meals – fish and chips, scampi or burgers (all under £10). £75

Trumland Farm 01856 821252. Just half a mile west of the ferry terminal, this working organic farm has a couple of dorms and a family room – you can also camp here, and they offer bike rental. Dorms £12; camping £5/person

Westray

Although exposed to the full force of the Atlantic weather in the far northwest of Orkney, **Westray** shelters one of the most tightly knit, prosperous and independent island communities, with a population of six hundred. Fishing, farming and tourism are the mainstays of the economy. The landscape is very varied, with sea cliffs and a trio of hills in the west, and rich low-lying pastureland and sandy bays elsewhere. However, Westray repays a longer stay, especially as there's lots of good accommodation and the locals are extremely welcoming.

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Pierowall

The main village and harbour is **PIEROWALL**, set around a wide bay in the north of the island, eight miles from Rapness ferry terminal on the island's southernmost tip. Pierowall is a place of some considerable size, relatively speaking, with a school, several shops and a bakery (Orkney's only one off the Mainland).

Westray Heritage Centre

May–Sept Mon 11.30am–5pm, Tues–Sat 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sun 1.30–5pm • £2.50 • 01857 677414, westrayheritage.co.uk

The village's **Westray Heritage Centre** is a very welcoming wet-weather retreat, and a great place to gen up on (and with any luck catch a glimpse of) the Westray Wife or **Orkney Venus** – a remarkable, miniature Neolithic female figurine found in 2009 in the dunes to the northwest of Pierowall – along with her incomplete companion, and the recently discovered Grobust Grandad.

Noltland Castle

Pick up the key, which hangs outside the back door of the nearby farm

The island's most impressive ruin is the colossal sandstone hulk of **Noltland Castle**, which stands above the village. This Z-plan castle, pockmarked with over seventy gun loops, was begun around 1560 by Gilbert Balfour, a shady character from Fife, who was Master of the Household to Mary, Queen of Scots, and was implicated in the murder of her husband Lord Darnley in 1567. Balfour was eventually forced to flee to Sweden, where he was found guilty of plotting to murder the Swedish king and executed in 1576.

Noup Head

The northwestern tip of Westray rises up sharply, culminating in the dramatic sea cliffs of **Noup Head**, particularly spectacular when a westerly swell is up. During the summer months the guano-covered rock ledges are packed with over 100,000 nesting guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, fulmars and puffins: a heady sensation of sight, sound and smell. The open ground above the cliffs, grazed by sheep, is superb maritime heath and grassland, carpeted with yellow, white and purple flowers, and a favourite breeding-ground for arctic tern and arctic skua.

Castle o'Burrian

The sea cliffs in the southeast of the island around **Stanger Head** are not that spectacular, but it's here that you'll find **Castle o'Burrian**, a sea stack that is the best

place on Westray at which to see **puffins** nesting – there's even a signpost from the main road.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — WESTRAY

By plane You can fly from Kirkwall (Mon–Fri 2 daily, Sat & Sun 1 daily; 15min) and go on the world's shortest scheduled flight between Westray and Papa Westray (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 2min).

By ferry Westray is served by car ferry from Kirkwall (2–3 daily; 1hr 25min; T 01856 872044) and there's a passenger ferry between Pierowall (Westray) and Papa Westray (Mon–Thurs 6 daily, Fri & Sat 4 daily, 3 on Sun; 25min.

GETTING AROUND

By bus A minibus (May–Sept; at other times phone T 01857 677758) meets the ferry and connects with the Papa Westray ferry at Gill Pier in Pierowall; book a seat for the bus on the ferry.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist information W westraypapawestray.co.uk.

Tours and bike rental Westraak T 01857 677777, W westraak.co.uk. Guided tours of the island by minibus can be arranged with Westraak, who will meet you at the ferry. They also offer bike rental.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

★ **The Barn** T 01857 677214, W thebarnwestray.co.uk. A converted farm hostel at the southern edge of Pierowall; it's luxurious inside, with family rooms and twin bunks available, has a small campsite adjacent to it and a games room and genuinely friendly hosts. Dorms £20; camping £5/person

No. 1 Broughton T 01857 677726, W no1broughton.co.uk. Top-notch, good-value B&B in a renovated mid-nineteenth-century house with views across the bay, a lovely conservatory and even a small sauna. £60

Haf Yok T 01857 677777 Café in a little shed in Pierowall itself (opposite the Lady Kirk) owned by the couple who also run Westraak tour company. Great for soup, toasties and cakes, with a few tables in a south-facing suntrap. Mid-May to Sept Mon–Sat 10.30am–5pm, Sun noon–4pm.

Pierowall Hotel T 01857 677472, W pierowallhotel.co.uk. The social hub of Pierowall itself, is unpretentious and very welcoming – the cheaper rooms have shared facilities. The popular bar has excellent fish and chips, fresh off the boats. £76

Papa Westray

Across Papa Sound from Westray is the island of **Papa Westray**, known locally as "Papay". With a population of around 90, Papay has had to fight hard to keep itself viable over the last couple of decades, helped by a hefty influx of outsiders. With one of Orkney's best-preserved Neolithic settlements, and a large nesting sea-bird population, Papay is worth an overnight stay or a day-trip from its big neighbour. The northern tip of the island around **North Hill** (157ft) is an RSPB reserve, and during the breeding season you're asked to keep to the coastal fringe, where razorbill, guillemot, fulmar, kittiwake and puffin nest, particularly around Fowl Craig on the east coast, where you can also view the rare Scottish primrose, which flowers in May and from July to late September.

Holland House

Central point of the island • Farm buildings always open • Free

Papay's visual focus is **Holland House**, occupying the high central point of the island and once seat of the local lairds, the Traill family. Visitors can explore the old farm buildings, including a kiln, a doocot and a horse-powered threshing mill. An old bothy for single male servants has even been restored and made into a small **museum**, filled with bygone bits and bobs, from a wooden flea trap to a box bed.

Knap of Howar

From Holland House, it's around half a mile to the western shore, where Papay's prime prehistoric site, the **Knap of Howar**, stands overlooking Westray. Dating from around 3500 BC, this Neolithic farm building makes a fair claim to being the oldest standing house in Europe. It's made up of two roofless buildings, linked by a little passageway; one has a hearth and copious stone shelves, and is thought to have been some kind of storehouse.

St Boniface Kirk

St Boniface Kirk is a pre-Reformation church three-quarters of a mile north of the Knap of Howar. Inside, it's beautifully simple, with a bare flagstone floor, dry-stone walls, a little wooden gallery and just a couple of surviving box pews.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PAPA WESTRAY

By plane You can fly direct from Kirkwall to Papa Westray (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily, 1 on Sun; 25min) for £21 if you stay overnight. Papay is also connected to Westray by the world's shortest scheduled flight (Mon–Sat 1 daily) – 2min or less with a following wind.

By ferry The passenger ferry from Gill Pier in Pierowall (3–6 daily; 25min) also takes bicycles.

Car ferries On Tuesdays, the car ferry goes from Kirkwall to Papa Westray via North Ronaldsay, taking over four hours; on Fridays, the car ferry from Kirkwall to Westray continues to Papa Westray; at other times, you must catch a bus to connect with the Papa Westray ferry from Pierowall. The bus should be booked ahead, while on the Westray ferry (☎01857 677758); it accepts a limited number of bicycles.

GETTING AROUND AND INFORMATION

By minibus Papay's Community Co-operative (☎01857 644321) has a minibus, which will take you from the pier to wherever you want on the island on request, and can arrange a "Peedie Package" tour including lunch (Wed & Sat; £30) – you can even do it from Kirkwall as a 12hr day-trip.

Festivals Papay holds a week-long international experimental film, video art, sound art and architecture festival called Papay Gyro Nights (🌐papaygyronights.papawestray.org) around the first full moon in February, plus a more prosaic Fun Weekend in late July.

Tourist information 🌐papawestray.co.uk.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Beltane House ☎01857 644224, 🌐papawestray.co.uk. The island Co-op offers B&B, a two-room, sixteen-bed hostel, a place to camp, and a shop, within the old estate-workers' cottages at Beltane, east of Holland House.

Beltane House opens its "bar cupboard" every Saturday night from 9pm, with bar meals available. Doubles £70; dorms £13.50; camping £5/person

Eday

A long, thin island, **Eday** shares more characteristics with Rousay and Hoy than with its immediate neighbours, dominated as it is by heather-covered upland, with farmland confined to a narrow strip of coastal ground. However, Eday's hills have proved useful in their own way, providing huge quantities of peat that has been exported to the other peatless northern isles for fuel, and was even, for a time, exported to various whisky distillers. Sparsely inhabited, Eday has no main village as such. The ferry terminal is at the south end of the island, whereas the sights (and most of the amenities) are all in the northern half, about four miles away. The island post office, petrol pump and community shop all cluster in Hammerhill.

Eday Heritage Centre and HMS Otter

April–Oct daily 9am–6pm; Nov–March Sun 10am–5pm • Free • ☎01857 622263

Eday Heritage Centre, in an old Baptist chapel a mile north of the island's airport, has historical displays on Eday, with information on the island's tidal energy testing centre

in the Fall of Warness, as well as a café. Perhaps the most unusual attraction, however, is in the former North School, opposite the island shop, where several internal sections of the Cold War-era **submarine** *HMS Otter* have been reassembled in the old school hall – a truly eerie experience.

Eday Heritage Walk: Mill Loch to Red Head

The clearly marked **Eday Heritage Walk** (4hr return) begins at Mill Loch, which is breeding ground of several pairs of **red-throated divers** where a bird hide overlooks the loch. Clearly visible over the road is the 15ft **Stone of Setter**, Orkney's most distinctive standing stone, weathered into three thick, lichen-encrusted fingers. From here, passing the less spectacular Braeside and Huntersquoy chambered cairns en route, you can climb the hill to reach Eday's finest, the **Vinquoy Chambered Cairn**, which has a similar structure to that of Maes Howe. You can crawl into the tomb through the narrow entrance: a skylight inside lets light into the main, beehive chamber but not into the four side cells. From the cairn, you can continue north to the viewpoint on the summit of **Vinquoy Hill** (248ft), and to the very northernmost tip of the island, where lie the dramatic red-sandstone sea cliffs of **Red Head**, where numerous sea birds nest in summer.

Red House Croft Restoration Project

June to mid-Sept Tues–Fri 11am–5pm • Free • ☎ 01857 622217

The **Redhouse Croft Restoration Project**, to the west of Vinquoy Hill gives a chance to explore the evocative remains of a large nineteenth-century farm, complete with kiln, water wheel and byre. There's a tearoom at the foot of the hill, offering soup, sandwiches and home-baked cakes.

Carrick House

East coast of Eday • Mid-June to Aug Sun 2–5pm or by appointment • ☎ 01857 622260

Visible on the east coast is **Carrick House**, the grandest home on Eday. First built by the laird of Eday in 1633, it's best known for its associations with the pirate **John Gow** – on whom Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Pirate* is based – whose ship *The Revenge* ran aground on the Calf of Eday in 1725. He asked for help from the local laird but was taken prisoner in Carrick House, before eventually being sent off to London where he was tortured and executed. The highlight of the tour is the bloodstain on the floor of the living room, where John Gow was detained and stabbed while trying to escape.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION — EDAY

By plane You can make a day-trip by plane from Kirkwall to Eday on Wednesdays (1 on Mon, 2 on Wed; 10min).

By ferry Eday is served by regular car ferry from Kirkwall (2 daily; 1hr 15min–2hr).

Tourist information visiteday.com.

GETTING AROUND AND TOURS

By car, taxi or minibus Car rental, taxis or minibus tours (May–Aug Mon, Wed & Fri; £12) can be organized through J&J by the pier (☎ 01857 622206).

Tours Eday's ferry terminal is at Backaland pier in the south, although you should be able to get a lift with someone off the ferry. The other option is to contact Eday Minibus Tours (May to mid-Sept Mon, Wed & Fri or by appointment; £14; ☎ 01857 622206) who will collect you from the ferry. Eday has a Ranger service, offering weekly guided walks – book ahead on ☎ 07964 149155 or check Eday Scarfs Facebook page.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Blett ☎ 01857 622248. A crofthouse with two rooms, near Carrick House, overlooking the bay. They'll provide packed lunches, and excellent locally sourced evening meals are available on request. **£70**

Eday SYHA Hostel 01857 622283, syha.org.uk. An SYHA-affiliated, community-run hostel, situated in an exposed spot just north of the airport – phone ahead as there's no resident warden. washing machine and dryer, bike hire and internet access, and you can camp there, too. Dorms £15

Roadside Pub 01857 622303. Eday's one and only pub is in a pleasant old building overlooking the ferry terminal, and offers B&B in two en-suite rooms and evening meals on request (mains under £10). £60

Stronsay

A low-lying island, **Stronsay** is strongly agricultural, its interior an almost uninterrupted collage of green pastures. The island features few real sights, but the coastline has enormous appeal: a beguiling combination of sandstone cliffs, interspersed with wide white sands and (in fine weather) turquoise bays. Stronsay (population 350) in the nineteenth century became one of the main Scottish centres for curing herring, until stocks were depleted in the 1930s, and the industry began a long decline.

Whitehall

WHITEHALL, in the north of the island, is the only real village, made up of rows of stone-built fishermen's cottages set between two large piers. Wandering along the tranquil, rather forlorn harbour front today, it's hard to believe that the village once supported a small army of gutters, coopers, coal merchants, butchers, bakers, several Italian ice-cream parlours and a cinema. It was said that, on a Sunday, you could walk across the decks of the boats to **Papa Stronsay**, the tiny island that shelters Whitehall from the north. The old Fish Mart by Whitehall pier houses a small **museum** (ask at the adjacent café for access), with a few photos and artefacts from the herring days.

Papa Stronsay

Ferry The island's monks will take visitors across to (and around) the island by boat, by prior arrangement • 01857 616210, papastronsay.com

Clearly visible from the harbour front at Whitehall is the island of **Papa Stronsay**. which is thought originally to have been a **monastic retreat** and later, during the herring boom, was home to no fewer than five fish-curing stations. In 2000, the island was bought by **Transalpine Redemptorist monks**, who had broken with the Vatican over celebrating Mass in Latin. They built themselves the Golgotha Monastery, complete with its own creamery; they have since been accepted back into the Roman Catholic Church and renamed the **Sons of the Most Holy Redeemer**.

The island features in the *Orkneyinga* Saga as the place where Earl Rognvald Brusason was murdered by Earl Thorfinn Sigurdsson.

Vat of Kirbuster to Burgh Head

Signposts show the way to Orkney's biggest and most dramatic natural arch, the **Vat of Kirbuster**. Before you reach the arch there's a seaweedy, shallow pool in a natural sandstone amphitheatre, where the water is warmed by the sun and kids and adults can safely wallow: close by is a rocky inlet for those who prefer colder, more adventurous swimming. You'll find progressively more nesting sea birds, including a few puffins, as you approach **Burgh Head**, further along down the coast.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — STRONSAY

By plane Flights from Kirkwall (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat; 25min) and from Sanday (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 6min).

By ferry Stronsay is served by a regular car ferry service from Kirkwall to Whitehall (2–3 daily; 1hr 40min–2hr).

By taxi/car There's no bus service, but D.S. Peace (01857 616335) operates taxis and offers car rental.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Storehouse 01857 616263, annemaree.carter@byinternet.com. A good alternative to the *Stronsay Hotel* is this welcoming little B&B in Whitehall, with en-suite rooms, a guest lounge and full board on request. £65

Stronsay Fish Mart 01857 616339, stronsay.org. The old fish market, by the ferry terminal, now serves as a hostel, and should be newly refurbished by the time you read this. A cheap and cheerful café is also run from the same building – check Facebook for the latest opening hours. Dorms £16

Stronsay Hotel 01857 616213, stronsayhotelorkney.co.uk. Stronsay's only hotel, right by the ferry terminal, has modern en-suite rooms, while the hotel bar does good pub food. £80

Sanday

Despite being the largest of the northern isles, **Sanday** is the least substantial, a great low-lying, drifting dune strung out between several rocky points. The island's sweeping aquamarine bays and vast stretches of clean white sand are the finest in Orkney, and in dry, clear weather it's a superb place to spend a day or two. The sandy soil is very fertile, and the island remains predominantly agricultural even today, holding its own agricultural show each year in early August. The coastline offers superb walks, with particularly spectacular sand dunes to the south of the vast, shallow, tidal bay of **Cata Sand**.

Start Point Lighthouse

Accessible only during low tide • **Tours** 01857 600341

The island has a long history as a shipping hazard, with many wrecks smashed against its shores, although the construction of the **Start Point Lighthouse** in 1802 on Sanday's exposed eastern tip reduced the risk for seafarers. Shipwrecks were not an unwelcome sight as the island has no peat, and driftwood was the only source of fuel other than cow dung – it's even said that the locals used to pray for shipwrecks in church. The 82ft-high Stevenson lighthouse, from 1870, sports very natty and unusual vertical black and white stripes and stands on a tidal island, accessible either side of low tide (it takes an hour to walk there and back) and if you phone ahead, you can arrange a tour, allowing you to climb the lighthouse.

Quoyness Chambered Cairn

Sanday is rich in archeology, with hundreds of sites, the most impressive of which is **Quoyness Chambered Cairn**, on the fertile peninsula of Els Ness. The tomb, dating from before 2000 BC, has been partially reconstructed, and rises to a height of around 13ft. The imposing, narrow entrance, flanked by high dry-stone walls, would originally have been roofed for the whole of the way into the 13ft-long main chamber, where bones and skulls were discovered in the six small side cells.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SANDAY

By plane The airfield is in the centre of the island and there are regular flights to Kirkwall (Mon–Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat; 10min) and a daily connection to Sanday (Mon–Fri 1 daily; 6min).

By ferry Ferries from Kirkwall to Sanday (2 daily; 1hr 25min) arrive at Loth Pier, at the southern tip of the island.

By bus All sailings are met by the Sanday Bus (01857 600438), which will take you to most points on Sanday.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist information sanday.co.uk, sandayorkney.co.uk.

Tours The Sanday Ranger (01857 600341, sandayorkney.co.uk) organizes activities and guided walks throughout the summer, as well as regular Sanday Bus Tours (May–Sept Wed; £25).

ACCOMMODATION

Ayre's Rock T01857 600410, W ayres-rock-hostel-orkney.com. If you're on a budget, this is a great place to stay: a well-equipped eight-bed hostel, a caravan, and a small campsite (with several camping huts for hire) overlooking the bay, with washing and laundry facilities, a chip shop (every Sat) and bike rental. £15/person; camping £5/pitch

Braeswick T01857 600708, W braeswick.co.uk. Despite the dour exterior, this B&B is a good choice. Just a couple of miles from the ferry terminal, it has very pleasantly decorated rooms and free wi-fi, and the breakfast room has lovely views over the bay. £70

Newquoy Guest House & Writers Retreat T01857 600284, W newquoy.com. The old school in Burness, in the north of the island, is now a B&B run by an enterprising couple who put on writing courses and storytelling evenings. £70

Retreat Tea & Coffee Shop T01857 600284, W newquoy.com. The owners of *Newquoy* also run a fine café serving soups, toasties and delicious home-baked cakes all served on vintage crockery. May & Sept Tues & Thurs noon–4pm; June–Aug Tues, Thurs & Sat noon–4pm.

15

North Ronaldsay

North Ronaldsay – or "North Ron" as it's fondly known – is Orkney's most northerly island. Separated from Sanday by some treacherous waters, it has an outpost atmosphere, brought about by its extreme isolation. Measuring just three miles by one, and rising only 66ft above sea level, the only features to interrupt the flat horizon are **Holland House** – built by the Traill family, who bought the island in 1727 – and the two lighthouses at **Dennis Head**. North Ronaldsay has been inhabited for centuries, and continues to be heavily farmed, with **seaweed** playing an important role in the local economy.

Bird Observatory

The island's most frequent visitors are ornithologists, who come to clock the rare migrants who land here briefly on their spring and autumn migrations. The peak times of year for migrants are from late March to early June, and from mid-August to early November. However, many breeding species spend the spring and summer here, including gulls, terns, waders, black guillemots, cormorants and even the odd corncrake – the permanent **Bird Observatory**, in the island's southwest corner, can give advice on recent bird sightings.

The Lighthouses and the Wool Mill

Exhibitions May–Aug daily 10am–5pm • Free • **Guided tours**: May–Sept Sun noon–5.30pm; at other times by appointment • £5 or £7 with the Mill • T01857 633297, W northronaldsay.co.uk

The attractive, stone-built **Old Beacon** was first lit in 1789, but the lantern was replaced by the current huge bauble of masonry in 1809. The **New Lighthouse**, designed by Alan Stevenson in 1854 just to the north, is Britain's tallest land-based lighthouse, at

NORTH RONALDSAY SHEEP

The island's **sheep** are a unique, tough, goat-like breed, who feed mostly on seaweed, giving their flesh a dark tone and a rich, gamey taste, and making their thick wool highly prized. A high **dry-stone dyke**, running the thirteen miles around the edge of the island, keeps them off the farmland, except during lambing season. North Ronaldsay sheep are also unusual in that they refuse to be rounded up by sheepdogs like ordinary sheep, but scatter far and wide at some considerable speed. Instead, once a year the islanders herd the sheep communally into a series of **dry-stone punds** near Dennis Head, for clipping and dipping, in what is one of the last acts of communal farming practised in Orkney.

over 100ft. There's an exhibition on the lighthouse in one of the keepers' cottages, as well as an exhibition on the history of life on the island and a café. You can also climb the lighthouse and admire the view – on a clear day you can see Fair Isle, and even Shetland. This can be combined with a tour of the island's **Wool Mill** where they turn the North Ron fleeces into yarn and felt.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

NORTH RONALDSAY

By plane Your best bet is to catch a flight from Kirkwall (Mon–Sat 3 daily, 2 on Sun; 15min): if you stay the night on the island, you're eligible for a bargain £21 return fare.

By ferry The ferry from Kirkwall to North Ronaldsay runs just once a week (usually Fri; 2hr 40min), though there are also summer sailings via Papa Westray (usually Tues; 3hr 10min), and day-trips are possible on occasional Sundays between late May and early September (T 01856 872044).

Tourist information W northronaldsay.com.

GETTING AROUND

By minibus A minibus usually meets the ferries and planes (T 01857 633244) and will take you off to the lighthouse.

Bike rental Contact Mark T 01857 633297, W northronaldsay.com.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Bird Observatory T 01857 633200, W nrbo.co.uk. You can stay (or camp) at the eco-friendly bird observatory, either in an en-suite guest room or in a hostel bunk bed. The *Obscafé* serves decent evening meals (£14 for two courses) –try the mutton, washed down with Dark Island beer. Food served daily noon–2pm & evenings by arrangement. Doubles £72; dorms £16.50; camping £5/pitch

The Lighthouse T 01857 633297, W northronaldsay.co.uk. Great little café in the old lighthouse keepers' cottages serving snacks and evening meals (by arrangement) – sample one of their North Ronaldsay mutton pies. May–Aug daily 10am–5pm; Sept–April phone ahead.

Shetland

559 Lerwick
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563 Scalloway
564 South Mainland
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573 Whalsay
574 Out Skerries
574 The North Isles

JARLSHOF

Shetland

Shetland is a striking contrast from neighbouring Orkney. While the latter is within sight of the Scottish mainland, the archipelago of Shetland lies beyond the horizon, closer to Bergen in Norway than Edinburgh, and to the Arctic Circle than Manchester. With little fertile ground, Shetlanders have traditionally been crofters, often looking to the sea for an uncertain living in fishing and whaling or the naval and merchant services. The 23,000 islanders tend to refer to themselves as Shetlanders first, and, with the Shetland flag widely displayed, they regard Scotland as a separate entity. As in Orkney, the Mainland is the one in their own archipelago, not the Scottish mainland.

The islands' capital, **Lerwick**, is a busy little port and the only town of any size; many parts of Mainland can be reached from here on a day-trip. **South Mainland**, a narrow finger of land that runs 25 miles from Lerwick to **Sumburgh Head**, is an area rich in archeological remains, including the Iron Age **Mousa Broch** and the ancient settlement of **Jarlshof**. A further 25 miles south of Sumburgh Head is the remote but thriving **Fair Isle**, synonymous with knitwear and exceptional birdlife. The **Westside** of Mainland is bleaker and more sparsely inhabited, as is **North Mainland**. A mile off the west coast, **Papa Stour** boasts some spectacular caves and stacks; much further out are the distinctive peaks and precipitous cliffs of the remote island of **Foula**. Shetland's three **North Isles** bring Britain to a dramatic, windswept end: **Yell** has the largest population of otters in Shetland; **Fetlar** is home to the rare red-necked phalarope; north of **Unst**, there's nothing until you reach the North Pole.

Weather has a serious influence in these parts. In winter, gales are routine and even in the summer months it'll often be windy and rainy. The wind-chill factor is not to be taken lightly, and there's often a dampness in the air, even when it's not actually raining. While there are some good spells of dry, sunny weather (often bringing in sea mist) from May to September, it's the **simmer dim**, the twilight which lingers through the small hours at this latitude, which makes Shetland summers so memorable.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By plane hial.co.uk Flybe (0871 7002000, flybe.com) operate direct flights to Sumburgh airport, 25 miles south of Lerwick, from Inverness, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Kirkwall in Orkney, plus summer flights from Bergen in Norway.

By ferry NorthLink runs overnight car ferries daily from Aberdeen to Lerwick, sometimes calling in at Kirkwall in Orkney on the way.

GETTING AROUND AND TOURS

By plane Directflight (01595 840306, directflight.co.uk/shetland) runs flights from Tingwall airport (01595 745745), 5 miles west of Lerwick, to the more remote islands. To reach Tingwall airport, there's a dial-a-ride taxi service (£1.70), which must be booked a day in advance.

By ferry The council-run inter-island ferries (01595 743970, www.shetland.gov.uk/ferries) are excellent and fares are very low.

By bus The bus network (01595 744868, zettrans.org.uk) is pretty good in Shetland, with buses from Lerwick to every corner of Mainland, and even via ferries across to Yell and Unst.

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MOUSA BROCH

Highlights

❶ **Traditional music** Catch some local music at the regular informal sessions in Lerwick, or the annual Shetland Folk Festival. **See p.561**

❷ **Isle of Noss** Guaranteed seals, puffins and dive-bombing "bonxies". **See p.562**

❸ **Mousa** Remote islet with a 2000-year-old broch and nesting storm petrels. **See p.564**

❹ **Jarlshof** Site mingling Iron Age, Bronze Age, Pictish, Viking and medieval settlements. **See p.566**

❺ **Fair Isle** Magical little island halfway between Shetland and Orkney, with a lighthouse at each end and a world-famous bird observatory in the middle. **See p.567**

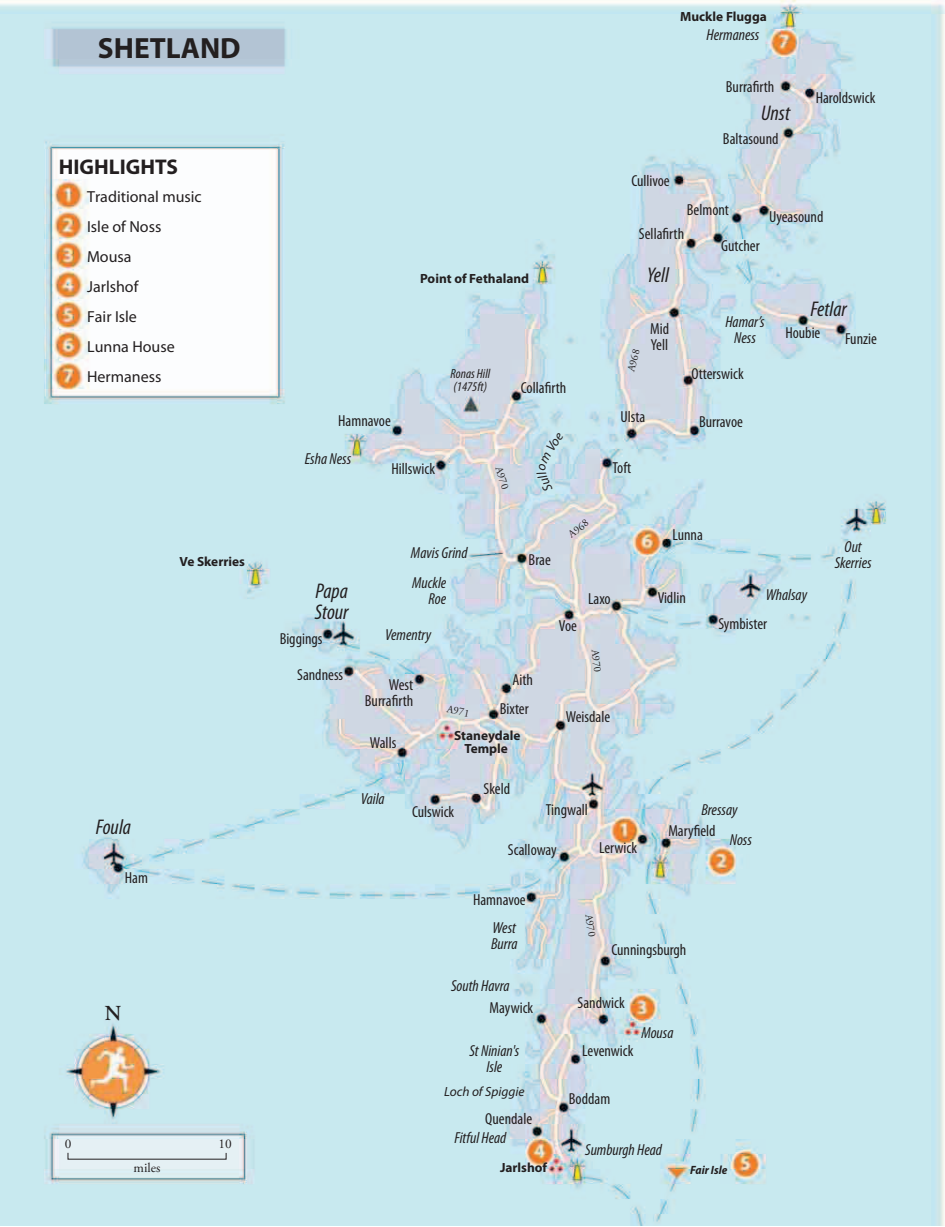
❻ **Lunna House** Superb B&B in an old laird's house that was used as the headquarters of the Norwegian Resistance in World War II. **See p.571**

❼ **Hermaness** More puffins, gannets and "bonxies", and spectacular views out to Muckle Flugga and Britain's most northerly point. **See p.577**

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.558

Car rental It's worth considering car rental once on the islands. Bolts Car Hire (T 01595 693636, W boltscarhire.co.uk) and Star Rent-a-Car (T 01595 692075, W starrentacar.co.uk) have vehicles available at Sumburgh airport and Lerwick.

Tours There's a range of escorted tours and boat trips around the Mainland, great for those without a vehicle. Specific tours are mentioned throughout the text, but Shetland Wildlife (T 01950 422483, W shetlandwildlife.co.uk) offer a variety of tours and boat trips, while the more adventurous might consider Sea Kayak Shetland (T 01595 840272, W seakayakshetland.co.uk).



SHETLAND PONIES

Shetland is famous for its diminutive **ponies**, but it's still a surprise to find so many of them on the islands. A local ninth-century carving shows a hooded priest riding a very small pony, but traditionally they were used as pack animals, and their tails were essential for making fishing nets. During the Industrial Revolution, Shetland ponies were exported to work in the mines in England, being the only animals small enough to cope with the low galleries. Shetlands then became the playthings of the English upper classes (the Queen Mother was patron of the Shetland Pony Stud-Book Society) and they still enjoy the limelight at the Horse of the Year show.

Lerwick

The focus of Shetland's commercial life, **LERWICK** is home to a third of the islands' total population. Its sheltered **harbour** is busy with ferries and fishing boats, and oil-rig supply vessels. In summer, the quayside comes alive with visiting yachts, cruise liners, historic vessels such as the *Swan* and the occasional tall ship. Behind the old harbour is the compact town centre, made up of one long main street, Commercial Street; from here, narrow lanes, known as **closses**, rise westwards to the late Victorian new town.

Leir Vik ("muddy bay") was established for the **Dutch** herring fleet in the seventeenth century. Later, it became a year-round **fishing** centre, and whalers called to pick up crews en route to the northern hunting grounds. Business was conducted from the jetties of buildings known as **lodberries**, several of which survive beyond the *Queen's Hotel*. Lerwick expanded in the Victorian era, and the large houses and grand public buildings established then still dominate, notably the **Town Hall**. Another period of rapid growth began during the oil boom of the 1970s, with the farmland to the southwest disappearing under a suburban sprawl, the town's northern approaches becoming an industrial estate.

Commercial Street

Commercial Street, Lerwick's narrow, winding, flagstone-clad main street, is set back one block from the Esplanade. Although the narrow lanes or closses that connect the Street to Hillhead are now desirable, it was not so long ago that they were regarded as slum-like dens of iniquity, from which the better-off escaped to the Victorian new town laid out on a grid plan to the west.

Fort Charlotte

Commercial St • Daily: June–Sept 9am–10pm; Oct–May 9am–4pm • Free • ⓣ 01856 841815

Commercial Street's northern end is marked by the towering walls of **Fort Charlotte**, which once stood directly above the beach. Begun for Charles II in 1665, the fort was attacked and burnt down by the Dutch in August 1673. In the 1780s it was repaired and named in honour of George III's queen. Since then, it's served as a prison and a Royal Navy training centre; it's now open to the public, except when used by the Territorial Army.

Shetland Museum

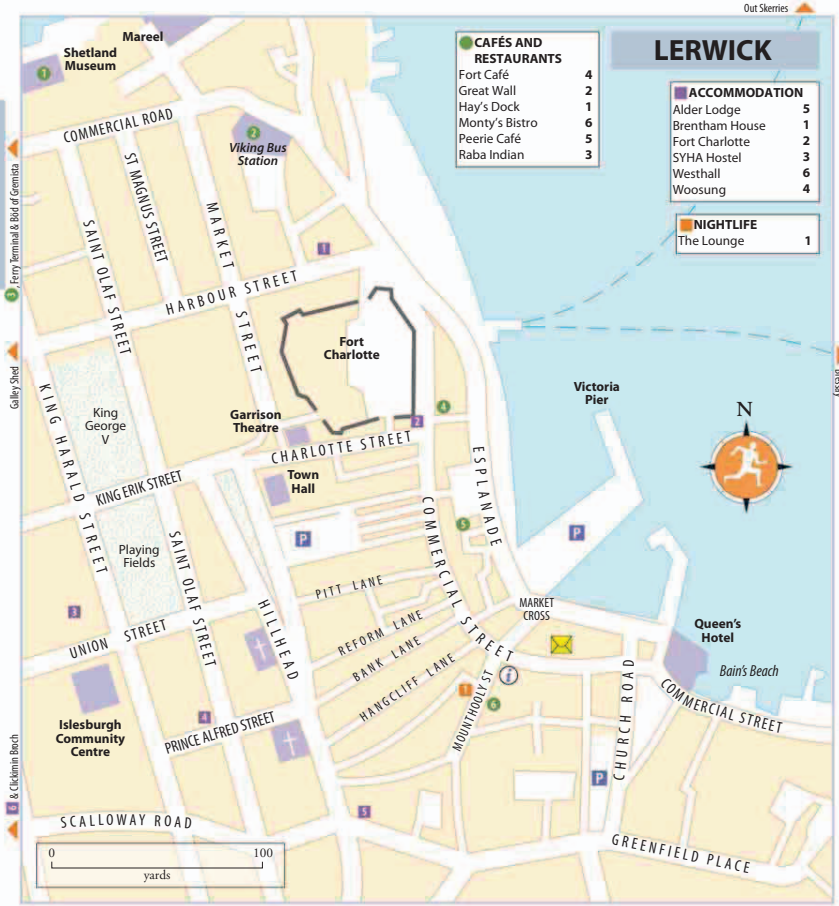
Hay's Dock • Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm • Free • ⓣ 01595 695057, ⓦ shetland-museum.org.uk

Lerwick's chief tourist sight is the **Shetland Museum**, housed in a stylishly modern waterfront building off Commercial Road. The permanent exhibition begins in the Lower Gallery, where you'll find replicas of the hoard of Pictish silver found at St Ninian's Isle (see p.566), the Monks Stone, thought to show the arrival of Christianity in Shetland, and a block of butter, tax payment for the King of Norway, found preserved in a peat bog. Kids can try grinding flour with a quernstone and visit a dark

BÖDS

With only one SYHA hostel in Shetland, it's worth knowing about the islands' unique network of **camping böds** (March–Oct). Traditionally, a böd was a small building beside the shore, where fishermen stored their gear and occasionally slept; the word was also applied to trading posts established by Hanseatic merchants. Today, the tourist board uses the term pretty loosely: the places they run range from stone-built cottages to weatherboarded sail lofts. To stay at a böd, you must **book in advance** with the Shetland Amenity Trust (T 01595 694688, W camping-bods.co.uk), as there are no live-in wardens. The more basic böds have no cooking facilities or electricity, but all have a solid fuel stove, cold water, toilets and bunk beds with mattresses – those with electricity have a meter, for which you need £1 coins. If you're camping, they're a great way to escape the wind and rain.

"trowie knowe". Among the boats, artistically suspended in the Boat Hall, is a sixareen, once used as a Foula mailboat. The Upper Gallery concentrates on the islands' social history, from knitting and whaling to the oil industry. The museum also houses Da Gadderie, which hosts temporary art exhibitions, runs the excellent *Hay's Dock* **café**, puts on events and demonstrations, and shows archive films.



Böd of Gremista

May–Sept Tues–Sat noon–4pm • £2 • T 01595 694386, W shetlandtextilemuseum.wordpress.com

Just beyond Lerwick's main ferry terminal, a mile and a half north of the town centre, stands the **Böd of Gremista**, the birthplace of **Arthur Anderson** (1792–1868), naval seaman, philanthropist, Shetland's first native MP and founder of Shetland's first newspaper, the *Shetland Journal*. The building has been completely restored and now houses the **Shetland Textile Museum** which puts on special exhibitions on the heritage of the islands' knitting culture.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

LERWICK

By plane Flights from outside Shetland land at Sumburgh airport, 25 miles to the south. Flights within Shetland depart from Tingwall airport.

Destinations within Shetland Fair Isle (Mon, Wed & Fri 2 daily, 1 on Sat; 25min); Foula (Mon & Tues 1 daily, Wed & Fri 2 daily; 15min); Out Skerries, calling at Whalsay on request (Mon & Wed 1 daily, Thurs 2 daily; 20min); Papa Stour (Tues 2 daily; 10min).

By ferry See T 0845 600 0449, W northlinkferries.co.uk. Ferries from Aberdeen (daily; 12hr) and Orkney (3–4 weekly; 6hr) arrive at Lerwick's ferry terminal, about a mile north of the town centre. Ferries to other islands within Shetland leave from the town harbour.

Destinations Bressay (every 30min–1hr; 7min); Fair Isle (alternate Thurs; 5hr); Skerries (Tues & Thurs; 2hr 30min).

By bus Buses stop on the Esplanade, close to the old harbour, or at the Viking Bus Station on Commercial Rd, north of the town centre.

Destinations Brae (Mon–Fri 5 daily, 3 on Sat; 45min); Hamnavoe (2–3 daily; 30min); Hillswick (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 1hr 40min); Laxo (Mon–Sat 1 daily; 40min); Levenwick (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily, 4 on Sun; 30min); Scalloway (Mon–Sat hourly, 2 on Sun; 25min); Sumburgh airport (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily, 4 on Sun; 45min); Tingwall (Mon–Fri 7 daily, Sat 4 daily; 10min); Toft (Mon–Sat 3–4 daily; 45–55min); Vidlin (Mon–Sat 2 daily; 45min); Voe (Mon–Fri 5 daily, 3 on Sat; 35min); Walls (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 45min).

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INFORMATION

Tourist office The tourist office is at Cross, Commercial St (April–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; T 01595 693434, W visitshetland.com).

Radio station/newspaper For what's on, listen to BBC Radio Shetland, 92.7 FM (Mon–Fri 5.30pm), visit W shetland-music.com, or buy the *Shetland Times* on Fridays (W shetlandtoday.co.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

Alder Lodge 6 Clairmont Place T 01595 695705, W alderlodgeguesthouse.com. Alder Lodge is a solid, dependable choice, with eleven rooms, all en suite except the single. Breakfasts are good, with local smoked haddock an option and free wi-fi throughout the building. **£70**

Brentham House 7 Harbour St T 01950 460201, W brenthamhouse.com. Spacious, newly furnished rooms in a Victorian, bay-fronted terrace; no reception, and no proper breakfast – you pick the keys up from *Baroc*, the bar a couple of doors down. **£75**

Fort Charlotte Guest House 1 Charlotte St T 01595 692140, W fortcharlotte.co.uk. Small guesthouse with great central location (on the south side of the fort), spacious rooms and a friendly proprietor. **£65**

SYHA hostel Islesburgh House, King Harald St T 01595 692114. Spacious Victorian building offering unusually comfortable surroundings, family rooms, a café, internet and laundry facilities. April–Sept. Dorms **£17.50**

LERWICK'S FESTIVALS

On the last Tuesday in January, Lerwick plays host to **Up Helly-Aa** (W uphellyaa.org), the largest of the winter fire festivals held in Shetland. In late April/early May, the **Shetland Folk Festival** (T 01595 694757, W shetlandfolkfestival.com) features four days of musical mayhem, spread across the archipelago, with everything from local groups to international folk bands; book early as gigs sell out. Held over a week at Mareel, Lerwick, in early August, **Fiddle Frenzy** (T 01595 743843, W shetlandarts.org) shows how fiddling is central to Shetland's musical culture. It's curated by different musicians each year and includes classes for budding fiddlers. The **Shetland Accordion and Fiddle Festival** (T 01595 693162, W shetlandaccordionandfiddle.com) is organized by the local accordion and fiddle club over a long weekend in mid-October.

★ **Westhall** Lower Sound 01595 694247, bedandbreakfastlerwick.co.uk. A splendid Victorian mansion, known as the "Sheriff's Hoose", set in its own grounds a mile southwest of town with fabulous views over to Bressay. Rooms are spacious, the breakfasts are immense and there's free wi-fi. **£110**

Woosung 43 St Olaf St 01595 693687, visit.shetland.org/woosung. Family-run B&B, up on the hill above the harbour, run by a very friendly local landlady. The whole place is kept spotlessly clean, but not all rooms are en suite. Free wi-fi. **£60**

EATING AND DRINKING

Fort Café 2 Commercial St 01595 693125. Lerwick's best fish-and-chip shop, situated below Fort Charlotte: takeaway or eat inside in the small café (closes 8pm). Mon–Fri 11am–10pm, Sat 11am–9pm, Sun 4–10pm.

★ **Hay's Dock** Shetland Museum, Hay's Dock 01595 741569, haysdock.co.uk. Bright, modern, licensed café-restaurant in the museum, with a great view over the north bay. Sandwiches, bagels and simple lunch dishes, from chowder to burgers, are all under £10; the more adventurous evening menu features local salmon and lamb dishes (mains £13–20). Mon–Thurs 10.30am–4.30pm, Fri & Sat 10.30am–4.30pm & 6.30–9pm, Sun noon–4.30pm.

Mareel North Ness 01595 745555, mareel.org. If you've missed breakfast at your B&B, come to the café-bar in Lerwick's new cultural complex. Sandwiches or baked tatties are available until 4pm and houmous or mackerel ciabatta and nachos after that. Mon–Wed & Sun 9am–11pm, Thurs–Sat 9am–1am.

Monty's Bistro 5 Mounthooly St 01595 696555, montys-shetland.co.uk. Unpretentious place serving sandwiches, pasta and spicy curry dishes, and snacks at lunchtimes (under £10); and the likes of pot-roasted local lamb and pan-fried Gressingham duck in the evening (mains £14–22). Tues–Sat noon–2pm & 5–9pm.

Peerie Shop Café Esplanade 01595 692816, peerieshopcafe.com. Designer shop/gallery/café in an old lodberry, with a good range of cakes, soup and sandwiches, and what is probably Britain's northernmost latte. Mon–Sat 9am–6pm.

Raba Indian Restaurant 26 Commercial Rd 01595 690805. Reliably good curry house, with cheerful, efficient service and reasonable prices – try the jalfreezi and mop it up with some garlic nan (mains under £10), or go for the all-day Sunday buffet (£10 per person). Mon–Sat noon–2pm & 5–11pm, Sun 1–10pm.

NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Lounge 4 Mounthooly St 01595 692231. Lerwick's friendliest pub is the upstairs bar where local musicians often gather for a session – Thursday night is quiz night. Daily 11am–1am.

Mareel North Ness 01595 745555, mareel.org. Lerwick's new cultural hub is primarily the local cinema, but also puts on regular gigs. Mon–Wed & Sun 9am–11pm, Thurs–Sat 9am–1am.

Bressay and Noss

Shielding Lerwick from the full force of the North Sea is the island of **Bressay**, dominated at its southern end by the conical Ward Hill (744ft) – "da Wart" – and accessible on an hourly car and passenger ferry from Lerwick (takes 5min). The chief reason for visiting Bressay is the tiny but spectacular island of **Noss**, off the east coast, whose high cliffs support a huge seabird colony in breeding season. If you've time to kill before the ferry back, pop into the **Bressay Heritage Centre**, by the ferry terminal.

Noss

Appropriately enough for an island that slopes gently into the sea at its western end, and plunges vertically 500ft at its eastern end, **Noss** has the dramatic and distinctive outline of a half-sunk ocean liner, while its name means "a point of rock". Inhabited until World War II it's now a nature reserve and sheep farm, managed by Scottish Natural Heritage, who operate a RIB **ferry** from Bressay.

On the island, the old farmhouse contains a small visitor centre, where the warden will give you a quick briefing and a free map. Nearby is a sandy beach, while behind the haa (laird's house) is a **Pony Pund**, a square stone enclosure built for the breeding of

Shetland ponies. The most memorable feature of Noss are its eastern **sea cliffs**, rising to a peak at the massive Noup (500ft), from which can be seen vast colonies of cliff-nesting gannets, puffins, guillemots, shags, razorbills and fulmars: one of the highlights of Shetland. As Noss is only a mile or so wide, it's easy enough to walk to the sea cliffs and back (allow 4hr), but make sure you keep close to the coast, since otherwise the great skuas (locally known as "bonxies") will dive-bomb you.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — BRESSAY AND NOSS

By ferry The car ferry to Bressay departs from the town harbour in Lerwick (every 30min–1hr; 7min; ⓣ01595 743974) and arrives in Maryfield on the west coast. The RIB ferry to Noss (May–Aug Mon & Thurs 11am–5pm; £3 return; before setting out phone ⓣ0800 107 7818, ⓦnature-shetland.co.uk) leaves from the east coast, 3 miles from Maryfield – an easy walk or short journey on a bike, bus or car.

By bus A bus will meet the 9am Bressay ferry (Mon, Wed & Fri) and take you to Noss, but for the return journey it's best to book the Dial-a-Ride service (ⓣ01595 745745) the day before.

By boat Seabirds and Seals run a 3hr sightseeing boat from Lerwick (mid-April to mid-Sept daily 10am & 2pm; £45; ⓣ07595 540224, ⓦseabirds-and-seals.com), allowing you a sea view of the vast bird colonies.

Scalloway

As you approach **SCALLOWAY** from the east, there's a dramatic view over the town and the islands beyond. Once the capital of Shetland, Scalloway's importance waned during the eighteenth century as Lerwick, just six miles to the east, grew in trading success and status. Nowadays, Scalloway is fairly sleepy, though its harbour remains busy enough, with a small fishing fleet and the North Atlantic Fisheries College on the far side.

Scalloway Castle

If the door is locked, get key from Scalloway Museum or Scalloway Hotel • Free; HS

In spite of modern developments nearby, Scalloway is dominated by the imposing shell of **Scalloway Castle**, a classic fortified tower house built with forced labour in 1600 by the infamous Earl Patrick Stewart, and thus seen as a powerful symbol of oppression. Stewart, who'd succeeded to the Lordship of Shetland in 1592, held court here, reputedly increasing his power and wealth by using harsh justice to confiscate assets. He was eventually arrested and imprisoned in 1609 for his aggression toward his fellow landowners; his son, Robert, attempted an insurrection and both were executed in Edinburgh in 1615. The castle fell into disrepair in the following century; what remains is fun to explore.

Scalloway Museum

May–Sept Mon–Sat 11am–4pm, Sun 2–4pm • £3 • ⓣ01595 880734, ⓦscallowaymuseum.org

The **Scalloway Museum** occupies the old knitwear outlet next to the castle, has a café overlooking the ruin and a couple of Shetland ponies in the next door field. The displays range from Neolithic finds to the impact of modern aquaculture, and there's a replica wheelhouse and a longship for the kids to play with, but the most interesting section tells the story of the **Shetland Bus** (see box, p.564). There are models of some of the fishing boats that made the trip across the North Sea, a replica of the Lewis guns that were hidden in oil drums aboard the ships and a miniature radio receiver supplied to the Norwegian Resistance.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SCALLOWAY

By bus There are regular buses to Scalloway from Lerwick (Mon–Sat hourly, 2 on Sun; 25min) and a less frequent service from Scalloway to Trondra and Burra (Mon–Sat 2 daily; 20min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Scalloway Hotel 01595 880444, scallowayhotel.com. Well-established hotel on the harbour front, with plain, slightly cramped rooms and a bar that doubles as the local pub. The menu features lots of local fish and seafood – try the platter for around £15. Food served daily noon–3pm & 5–8.30pm. **£70**

Windward B&B Port Arthur 01595 880769, accommodation-shetland.co.uk. Very comfortable, modern, wood-clad two-room B&B at the far western end of the bay, close to the North Atlantic Fisheries College. Great views from the conservatory and free wi-fi. **£80**

South Mainland

Shetland's **South Mainland** is a long, thin finger of land, only three or four miles wide but 25 miles long, ending in the cliffs of **Sumburgh Head** and **Fitful Head**. It's a beautiful area with wild undulating landscapes, lots of good green farmland, fabulous views out to sea and the mother of all brochs on the island of **Mousa**, just off the east coast. The most concentrated points of interest are the southern end of the peninsula, where you'll find sea bird colonies, a crofting museum, and **Jarlshof**, Shetland's most impressive archeological treasure.

Mousa Broch

Day-trip April to mid-Sept Mon, Tues & Thurs–Sat 1 & 4.15pm, Wed 10am & 1pm, Sun 1.30 & 4.30pm; takes 25min • £16 return • **Storm petrel trip** Mid-May to July Wed & Sat 11pm–12.30am • £20 • 01950 431367, mousa.co.uk

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Accessible by boat from Sandwick, the island of **Mousa** boasts the most amazingly well-preserved broch in the whole of Scotland. Rising to more than 40ft and looking rather like a Stone Age cooling tower, **Mousa Broch** has a remarkable presence and features in both *Egil's Saga* and the *Orkneyinga Saga*, contemporary chronicles of Norse exploration and settlement. To get to the broch, simply head south from the jetty along the western coastline for about half a mile. The low entrance passage leads through two concentric walls to a central courtyard, divided into separate beehive chambers. Between the walls, a rough (very dark) staircase leads to the top parapet; a torch is provided for visitors.

Thousands of **storm petrels** breed around the broch, fishing out at sea during the day and only returning to the nests after dark. The ferry runs special late-night trips, setting

THE SHETLAND BUS

The story of the **Shetland Bus** – the link between Shetland and Norway that helped to sustain the Norwegian Resistance through the years of Nazi occupation – is extraordinary. Under threat of enemy attack, small Norwegian fishing boats ran arms and resistance workers from Shetland into lonely fjords. The trip took 24 hours and on the return journey boats brought back Norwegians wanted by the Gestapo, or volunteers for Norwegian forces fighting with the Allies. For three years, through careful planning, the operation was remarkably successful: cryptic instructions to boats were broadcast by the BBC. Local people knew what was going on, but the secret was well kept. In total, 350 refugees were evacuated, and more than 400 tons of arms, large amounts of explosives and 60 radio transmitters were landed in Norway.

Originally established at **Lunna** in the northeast of the Mainland, the service moved to **Scalloway** in 1942, partly because the village offered good marine engineering facilities at Moore's Shipyard on Main Street, where a plaque records the morale-boosting visit of the Norwegian Crown Prince Olav. Explosives and weapons were stored in the castle and **Kergord House** in Weisdale was used as a safe house and training centre for intelligence personnel and saboteurs. The hazards, tragedies and elations of the exercise are brilliantly described in David Howarth's book, *The Shetland Bus*; their legacy today is a heartfelt closeness between Shetland and Norway.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP ISLE OF NOSS (P.562); LESSER WHITETHROAT, FAIR ISLE (P.567); SHETLAND FOLK FESTIVAL (P.561) >

off in the "simmer dim" twilight. Even if you've no interest in the storm petrels, which appear like bats as they flit about in the half-light, the chance to explore the broch at midnight is worth it alone.

St Ninian's Isle

Halfway down South Mainland, a road leads to **Bigton**, on the west coast. From the village, a signposted track heads down to a spectacular sandy causeway, or **tombolo**, connecting **St Ninian's Isle**. The tombolo – a concave strip of shell sand with Atlantic breakers crashing on either side – is usually exposed so you can walk over to the island, where you'll find the ruins of a medieval church.

Crofthouse Museum

Mid-April to Sept daily 10am–1pm & 2–5pm • Free • 01950 460557, shetlandheritageassociation.com

Housed in a well-to-do thatched croft in Southvoe, built around 1870, the **Crofthouse Museum** re-creates the feel of crofting life, with a peat fire, traditional box beds and so forth. Adjacent to the living quarters is the byre for the cows and tatties, and the kiln for drying the grain. Crofting was mostly done by women in Shetland, while the men went out haaf-net fishing for the laird. Down by the nearby burn, there's also a restored thatched horizontal mill.

16 Old Scatness Broch and Iron Age Villlage

01595 694688, shetlandamenity.org

Extending the airport revealed a vast Iron-Age archaeological site known as **Old Scatness Broch and Iron Age Village**. At the centre of the site are the remains of an Iron Age broch, surrounded by a settlement of interlocking wheelhouses – so called because of their circular ground plan. Two of the wheelhouses have been either partially or wholly reconstructed, but visits currently need to be arranged in advance with Shetland Amenity Trust.

Jarlshof

Daily: April–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm; Oct–March 9.30am to dusk • £5.50; HS

Of all the archeological sites in Shetland, **Jarlshof** is the largest and most impressive. What makes Jarlshof so amazing is the fact that you can walk right into a house built 1600 years ago, which is still intact to above head height. The site is big and confusing, scattered with the ruins of buildings dating from the Bronze Age to the early seventeenth century. The name – misleading, as it is not primarily a Viking site – was coined by Sir Walter Scott, who used the ruins of the Old House in his novel *The Pirate*. However, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Viking settlements you see now were discovered, after a violent storm ripped off the top layer of turf.

The Bronze Age smithy and Iron Age dwellings nearest the entrance are nothing compared with the cells which cluster around the **broch**, close to the sea. Only half of the original broch survives, and its courtyard is now an Iron Age aisled roundhouse, with stone piers. However, it's difficult to distinguish the broch from the later Pictish **wheelhouses** which now surround it. Still, it's all great fun to explore, as you're free to roam around the cells, checking out the in-built stone shelving, water tanks, beds and so on. Inland lies the maze of grass-topped foundations marking out the **Viking longhouses**, from the ninth century AD. Towering over the whole complex are the ruins of the laird's house, built by Robert Stewart, Earl of Orkney and Lord of Shetland, in the late sixteenth century, and the **Old House of Sumburgh**, built by his son, Earl Patrick.

Sumburgh Head

The Mainland comes to a dramatic end at **Sumburgh Head** (262ft), which rises sharply out of the land only to drop vertically into the sea. The clifftop **lighthouse** was built by Robert Stevenson in 1821, and the road up to it is the perfect site for watching nesting sea birds such as kittiwakes, fulmars, shags, razorbills and guillemots, as well as gannets diving for fish. This is also the easiest place in Shetland to get close to **puffins**: during the nesting season (May to early Aug), you simply need to look over the western wall, just before you enter the lighthouse complex, to see them arriving at their burrows a few yards below with beakfuls of sand eels or giving flying lessons to their offspring.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — SOUTH MAINLAND

By plane Sumburgh airport, at the southernmost tip of South Mainland, is Shetland's main airport. There's a bus service to Lerwick (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily, 4 on Sun; 45min) or else it's a £25 taxi ride.

By bus There are regular buses from Lerwick to Levenwick (Mon–Sat 6–8 daily, 4 on Sun; 30min); Sandwick (Mon–Fri 8–10 daily, 6 on Sat, 4 on Sun; 25min); Sumburgh (Mon–Sat 5–6 daily, 4 on Sun; 45min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Betty Mouat's Cottage Scatness 01595 694688, camping-bods.com. Next to an excavated broch and not far from the airport, this stone-built cottage is a camping böd with two bedrooms and a solid fuel stove. April–Oct. £10/person

Levenwick Campsite 01950 422320, levenwick.shetland.co.uk. Small, terraced campsite run by the local community with hot showers, a tennis court and a superb view over the east coast. May–Sept. £6/pitch

★ **Mucklehus** 01950 422370, mucklehus.co.uk. A lovely B&B in a former Master Mariner's house built in 1890 near the beach in Levenwick, 18 miles south of Lerwick; the rooms are small, but stylish and there's free wi-fi. £80

Setterbrae 01950 460468, setterbrae.co.uk. A stone's throw from Spiggie Loch, this comfortable modern B&B has a residents' lounge and conservatory, lots of books on Shetland and free wi-fi. £70

Spiggie Hotel 01950 460409, thespiggiehotel.co.uk. Hotel with a popular bar serving real ales and a restaurant with great views and, if you're lucky, incredible sunsets. Bar meals are priced around £10, or you can have well-presented dishes such as lobster or whatever the local catch is, à la carte in the restaurant (mains £12–18). Food served Mon & Tues 6–10pm, Wed–Sun noon–2.30pm & 6–10pm. £110

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Fair Isle

Marooned in the sea halfway between Shetland and Orkney, **Fair Isle** is very different from both. The weather reflects its isolated position: you can almost guarantee that it'll be windy, though if you're lucky your visit might coincide with fine weather – what the islanders call "a given day". Fair Isle's population had tumbled from 400 to 44 by the 1950s, at which point evacuation was seriously considered. The laird, **George Waterston**, who'd set up a bird observatory in 1948, passed it into the care of the NTS in 1954 and rejuvenation began. Today, Fair Isle supports a community of around seventy.

The north end of the island rises like a wall, while the Sheep Rock, a sculpted stack of rock and grass on the east side, is another dramatic feature. The croft land and the island's scattered white houses are concentrated in the south. Fair Isle has two **lighthouses**, one at either end of the island, both designed by the Stevenson family and erected in 1892.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

April–Oct • Free • 01595 760258, fairislebirdobs.co.uk

The most significant building on Fair Isle is the **Bird Observatory** (FIBO), a large building just above the sandy bay of North Haven where the ferry from Shetland arrives, which houses an exhibition on the island past and present. As well as providing accommodation and food to visitors, it's one of the major European centres for ornithology. As a result, the island is a haven for twitchers, who descend on the island

whenever a major rarity is spotted; for more casual birders, however, there's also plenty of summer resident birdlife to enjoy. The high-pitched screeching that fills the sky above the airstrip comes from hundreds of arctic terns, and arctic skuas can also be seen here. Those in search of puffins should head for the cliffs around Furse, and to find gannets, aim for the spectacular Stacks of Scroo.

George Waterston Museum

Mon 2–4pm, Wed 10.30am–noon, Fri 2–3.30pm • Free • 01595 760244

Fair Isle is, of course, better known for its **knitting** patterns, still produced with great skill by the local knitwear cooperative. There are samples on display at the **George Waterson Museum**, next to the Methodist Chapel. Particularly memorable are stories of shipwrecks; in 1868 the islanders undertook a heroic rescue of all 465 German emigrants aboard the *Lessing*. More famously, *El Gran Grifon*, part of the retreating Spanish Armada, was lost here in 1588 and three hundred Spanish seamen were washed up on the island. Food was in such short supply that fifty died of starvation before help could be summoned from Shetland.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

FAIR ISLE

By plane Directflight (01595 840246, directflight.co.uk) flies from Tingwall to Fair Isle (Mon–Sat 1–3 daily) and from Sumburgh (Sat only).

By ferry The passenger ferry connects Fair Isle with either Lerwick (alternate Thurs; 4–5hr) or Grutness in Sumburgh (Tues, alternate Thurs & Sat; 3hr); since the boat only takes a limited number of passengers, it's advisable to book in advance (01595 760363). The crossing can be rough, so if you're susceptible to seasickness it's worth considering flying.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

If you're thinking of staying over, book accommodation in advance as demand is high in the summer and note that camping is not permitted. Although casual visitors can get something to eat at the observatory, all accommodation is booked on a full-board basis. There is a shop/post office, Stackhoull Stores, in the south of the island (closed Tues & Sat afternoon, and all day Thurs & Sun).

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Lodge 01595 760258, www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk. April–Oct. Full-board accommodation is available at the modern observatory in en-suite doubles/twins and singles; as the island's social hub, the observatory offers self-service tea and coffee, a tuck shop with honesty box; meals by arrangement. £120

South Light House 01595 760355, southlightfairisle.co.uk. B&B at the southernmost tip of the island, not literally in the lighthouse, but in the adjacent keepers' cottages. £100

Upper Leogh 01595 760248, kathycoull.com. You'll be well looked after on this whitewashed crofthouse B&B by spinning and weaving expert, Kathy Coull, who also runs textile courses. £100

The Westside

The western Mainland of Shetland – known as the **Westside** – stretches west from Weisdale and Voe to Sandness. Although there are some important archeological remains and wildlife here, the area's greatest appeal lies in its outstanding **coastal scenery** and walks. Cut by several deep voes, the coastline is very varied; aside from dramatic cliffs, there are intimate coves and some fine beaches, as well as the stunning island of **Papa Stour**.

Walls and around

Once an important fishing port, **WALLS** (pronounced *waas*), appealingly set round its harbour, is now a quiet village which comes alive once a year in the middle of August for the Walls Agricultural Show, the biggest farming bash on the island. If you're just

passing by, you might like to stop by the **bakery and tearoom**, but Walls also has several good **accommodation** options.

Staneydale Temple

Three miles east of Walls lies the finest Neolithic structure in the Westside, dubbed the **Staneydale Temple** by the archeologist who excavated it because it resembled a temple on Malta. Whatever its true function, it was twice as large as the surrounding oval-shaped houses (now in ruins) and was certainly of great importance, perhaps as some kind of community centre. To reach it, follow the black-and-white poles across the moorland for half a mile from the road.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — THE WESTSIDE

By bus There's an infrequent bus service between Lerwick and Skeld (Mon–Sat 2 daily; 1hr), and between Lerwick and Walls (Mon–Sat 4 daily; 45min), with a feeder service from Sandness (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 45min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Baker's Rest ☎01595 809308, 🌐wallsbakery.co.uk. Places to get a cup of tea or coffee, filled bannocks and sandwiches, are few and far between in the Westside, so this simple little tearoom above the bakery in Walls is useful. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm.

★ **Burrastow House** ☎01595 809307, 🌐burrastowhouse.co.uk. Beautifully situated about 3 miles southwest of Walls, parts of the house date back to 1759 and have real character; others are more modern. The cooking is superb. £110

Skeoverick ☎01595 809349, ✉skeoverick@btinternet.com. There are bargain rates at this lovely modern crofthouse B&B a mile or so north of Walls. Residents' lounge and free wi-fi. £50

Voe House Walls ☎01595 694688, 🌐camping-bods.com. This five-bedroom camping böd is Shetland's largest, with its own peat fire. Note that *Voe House* is confusingly, not in Voe but in Walls. April–Oct. £10/person

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Papa Stour

Formed of volcanic lava and ash, the rocky island of **Papa Stour** has been eroded into some of the most impressive coastal scenery in Shetland. In good weather, it makes for a perfect day-trip, but in foul weather or a sea mist it can appear pretty bleak. Its name, meaning "big island of the priests", derives from its early Celtic Christian connections. The land is very fertile, and once supported three hundred inhabitants, but in the early 1970s the population crisis was such that the island had to advertise for incomers. Today, there is no accommodation apart from wild camping, and internal feuding has brought the population down to single figures.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — PAPA STOUR

By plane Directflight (☎01595 840246, 🌐directflight.co.uk) flies from Tingwall twice every Tuesday, so a day-trip is feasible (£60 return).

By ferry The ferry runs from West Burrafirth, 5 miles north of Walls, to Papa Stour (Mon & Sun 1 daily, Wed, Fri & Sat 2 daily; 45min; ☎01955 745804) – book in advance, and reconfirm the day before departure.

WALKING ON PAPA STOUR

Ordnance Survey Explorer map 467

To reach the best of Papa Stour's coastal scenery, head for the west of the island. From **Virda Field** (285ft), the highest point, you can see the treacherous rocks of **Ve Skerries**, where a lighthouse was erected as recently as 1979. The coastline from here southeast to Hamna Voe has some of the island's best stacks, blowholes and natural arches. The most spectacular is **Kirstan's Hole**, a gloup or partly roofed cleft, extending far inland, where shags nest on precipitous ledges. Look out, too, for red-throated divers which regularly breed on inland lochs such as Gorda Water.

Foula

At "the edge of the world", **Foula** is the most isolated inhabited island in the British Isles, separated from the nearest point on Shetland by about fourteen miles of often turbulent ocean. Seen from the Mainland, its distinctive mountainous outline is unforgettable. Its western **cliffs**, the second highest in Britain after those of St Kilda, rise to 1220ft at **The Kame**; a clear day offers a panorama stretching from Unst to Fair Isle. On a bad day, the exposure is complete and the cliffs generate turbulent blasts of wind known as "flans", which rip through the hills with tremendous force.

Arriving on Foula, you can't help but be amazed by the sheer size of the island's immense, bare mountains, whose summits are often hidden in cloud, known as "Foula's hat". The gentler eastern slopes provide good crofting land, and plentiful peat, around which the island's population of around forty is scattered. The only road, running along the island's eastern side, is used by Foula's remarkable fleet of clapped-out vehicles.

Foula's name is derived from the Old Norse for "bird island", and it's home to a quarter of a million **birds**. Arctic terns wheel overhead at the airstrip, red-throated divers can usually be seen on the island's smaller lochs, while fulmars, guillemots, razorbills, puffins and gannets cling to the rock ledges. However, it's the island's colony of **great skuas** or "bonxies" that you can't fail to notice, with an estimated 3000 pairs on Foula, making it the largest colony in the world. During the nesting season (May–Aug), they attack anyone who comes near; the best advice is to hold a stick above your head or stick to the road and the coast.

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ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — FOULA

By plane Directflight (☎01595 840246, ⓦdirectflight.co.uk) flies from Tingwall (Mon 1 daily, Tues, Wed & Fri 2 daily, 15min); tickets cost around £70 return.

By ferry Be sure to book and reconfirm your journey by ferry (Tues, Thurs & Sat; 2hr; ☎01595 5840208, ⓦbkmarine.org), which departs from Walls (Tues, Sat & alternate Thurs; 2hr) or Scalloway (alternate Thurs; 3hr 30min). The ferry arrives at Ham, in the middle of Foula's east coast.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist information Foula has its own resident part-time ranger, who usually greets new arrivals and offers local advice (mid-April–Oct). It's also possible to arrange for guided walks with the ranger (Wed & Fri; ☎01595 753236, ⓦfoulaheritage.org.uk), or you can download self-guided walk leaflets from the website. There's no shop on the island, so bring your own supplies.

Boat trips Day-trips are not possible on the regular ferry, but Cycharters (☎01595 696598, ⓦcycharters.co.uk) do boat trips on Wednesdays from Scalloway.

ACCOMMODATION

Leraback ☎01595 753226, ⓦoriginart.eu/leraback/leraback.html. The only accommodation on Foula is at this B&B near Ham. It's a great place to stay; full board only and they'll collect you from the airstrip or pier. £80

North Mainland

The **North Mainland**, stretching over thirty miles from the central belt around Lerwick, is wilder than much of Shetland, with relentlessly bleak moorland and some rugged and dramatic coastal scenery. It's all but split in two by the isthmus of **Mavis Grind**: to the south lies **Sullom Voe**, Shetland's oil terminal and **Brae**, the area's largest town; to the north is the remote region of **Northmavine**, boasting some of Shetland's most scenic cliffs.

Voe

If you're travelling north, you'll pass by **VOE**, at the main crossroads of the North Mainland. If you stay on the main road, it's easy to miss the picturesque old village, a tight

huddle of homes and workshops down below the road around the pier (and signposted Lower Voe). Set at the head of a deep, sheltered sea loch, Voe has a Scandinavian appearance, helped by the presence of the **Sail Loft**, now a **camping böd** (see p.560).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — VOE

Pierhead Restaurant & Bar 01806 588332. The old butcher's is now a cosy wood-panelled pub with a good bar menu, a longer version of which graces the upstairs restaurant, featuring local scallops and the odd catch from the fishing boats (mains £12–18). Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–10pm, Fri & Sat 11am–1am.

Sail Loft 01595 694688, camping-bods.com. Originally a giant storeroom, this enormous böd is situated right by the loch and has hot showers, a kitchen and a solid fuel fire in the smaller of the rooms. April–Oct. £10/person

Lunnasting

Lunnasting is the area to the northeast of Voe, on the east coast. The main town is **VIDLIN**, departure point for the Out Skerries (see p.574), three miles east of Laxo, the ferry terminal for Whalsay (see p.573).

The Cabin Museum

April–Sept Tues, Thurs, Sat & Sun 1–5pm • Free • 01806 577232

Halfway between Laxo and Vidlin, the B9071 passes **The Cabin Museum**, a modern barn packed to the rafters with wartime memorabilia collected by the late Andy Robertson. You can try on some of the uniforms and caps or pore over the many personal accounts of the war written by locals.

Lunna

The long thin peninsula of Lunna Ness is pinched in the middle at the tiny remote settlement of **LUNNA**. It was here, at **Lunna House**, that the Shetland Bus made its headquarters during World War II (see p.564); originally built in 1660 and set above a sheltered harbour a couple of miles northeast of Vidlin, it's now a great place to stay (see below). Nearby lies the whitewashed **Lunna Kirk**, built in 1753, which has a simple tiny interior including a carved hexagonal pulpit. In the graveyard, several unidentified Norwegian sailors, torpedoed by the Nazis, are buried.

ACCOMMODATION — LUNNA

★ **Lunna House** 01806 577311, www.lunnahouse.co.uk. Lunna House is a wonderful, remote place to stay. The bedrooms, though not en suite, have lovely views and you get a top-class breakfast. £60

Brae

BRAE is, a sprawling settlement that still has the feel of a frontier town, having expanded hastily in the 1970s to accommodate the workforce for the nearby **Sullom Voe Oil Terminal**, the largest of its kind in Europe. During World War II, Sullom Voe was home to the Norwegian Air Force and a base for RAF seaplanes.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — BRAE

★ **Busta House** 01806 522506, bustahouse.com. A laird's house with stepped gables that sits across the bay from Brae. Even if you're not staying the night here, it's worth coming for afternoon tea in the Long Room, for a stroll around the wooded grounds, or for a drink and a bar meal in the hotel's pub-like bar. Free wi-fi. £115

Frankie's 01806 522700, frankiesfishandchips.com. Brae's best food option, aside from *Busta House*, is this very popular fish-and-chip café with great views over Busta Voe. As well as the usuals, you can get smoked haddock and mussels. Mon–Sat 9.30am–8pm, Sun noon–8pm.

Westayre 01806 522368, westayre.shetland.co.uk. A modern crofthouse B&B , *Westayre* is in a tranquil position, overlooking a red sandy bay at the very end of the road on the peaceful island of Muckle Roe, linked to the mainland by a bridge. £70

Northmavine

Northmavine, the northwest peninsula of North Mainland, is unquestionably one of the most picturesque areas of Shetland, with its often rugged scenery, magnificent coastline and wide open spaces. The peninsula begins a mile west of Brae at **Mavis Grind**, a narrow isthmus at which it's said you can throw a stone from the Atlantic to the North Sea, or at least to Sullom Voe.

Hillswick

HILLSWICK was once a centre for deep-sea or haaf fishing, and later a herring station. In 1900, the North of Scotland, Orkney & Shetland Steam Navigation Company built the **St Magnus Hotel** to house their customers, importing it in the form of a timber kit from Norway. It still stands overlooking St Magnus Bay, rather magnificently clad in black timber-framing and white weatherboarding.

Down by the ancient harbour is, **Da Böd,** which was founded by a Hanseatic merchant in 1684, later became Shetland's oldest pub, and is now a seal and wildlife sanctuary and occasional weekend café. The stony beach by the harbour is very sheltered, but the nicest sandiest **beach** is on the west side of the Hillswick isthmus, overlooking Dore Holm, a short walk across the fields from the hotel.

Esha Ness

Just outside Hillswick, a road leads west to the exposed headland of **Esha Ness**, celebrated for its splendid coastline views. Spectacular red-granite **cliffs**, eaten away to form fantastic shapes by the elements, spread out before you as the road climbs away from Hillswick: to the south, out at sea, are the stacks known as **The Drongs**, while in the distance the Westside and Papa Stour are visible. After three miles, you reach Braewick café and campsite, with a great view over the wide bay of Brae Wick, from which several small dead-end roads lead off to the coast.

Tangwick Haa Museum

Easter–Sept daily 11am–5pm • Free • ☎ 01806 503389, 🌐 tangwickhaa.org.uk

One small dead-end road, off the main road, leads south to the **Tangwick Haa Museum**, housed in a seventeenth-century building, which tells the often moving story of this remote corner of Shetland and its role in the dangerous trade of deep-sea fishing and whaling.

Esha Ness Lighthouse

West of Braewick, where the road divides, the northernmost branch ends at **Esha Ness Lighthouse**, a great place to view the red-sandstone cliffs, stacks and blowholes. Beware of the latter, some of which are hidden far inland. The best example is the **Holes of Scraada**, a partly roofed cleft, half a mile north of the lighthouse, where the sea suddenly appears 300yd inland from the cliff line. The incredible power of the sea can be seen in the various giant boulder fields above the cliffs: these **storm beaches** are formed by rocks torn from the cliffs in storms and deposited inland.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING — NORTHMAVINE

HILLSWICK AND AROUND

Almara Urafirth ☎ 01806 503261, 🌐 www.almara.shetland.co.uk. Without a doubt the best B&B in Northmavine, serving up a friendly family welcome, good food, free wi-fi and excellent views. £70

Da Böd ☎ 01806 503348, 🌐 shetlandwildlifesanctuary.com. This eccentric, weekend-only café occupies a rambling ancient building and the proceeds go to the nearby wildlife sanctuary. April–Sept Sat & Sun 11am–5pm.

ESHA NESS

Braewick café and campsite ☎ 01806 503345, 🌐 eshaness.moonfruit.com. Café with great views of the Drongs, serving soup, sandwiches and toasties, plus home-made cakes and scones; phone to check opening times. The campsite is pretty exposed but you can always book one of the four wooden wigwams if the wind gets too much. Food served Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–5pm, Fri & Sat 10am–8pm. Wigwams £40; camping £5/pitch

Johnnie Notions Böd 01595 694688, camping-bods.com. One of the few places to stay in Esha Ness, this tiny böd – the birthplace of a pioneer in smallpox inoculation – is in a remote hamlet of Hamnavoe, north of Braewick. There's no electricity, but there is a solid fuel stove. April–Oct. £8/person

Whalsay

The island of **Whalsay** (population 1000), is in a world of its own, with a dialect even other Shetlanders struggle to fathom. The islands' fishing crews operate a very successful pelagic fleet of immense super-trawlers which can fish far afield in all weathers, catching a wide range of species. The island is extremely fertile, but crofting takes second place to fishing here.

Symbister

The island's chief town is **SYMBISTER**, whose harbour is usually dominated by the presence of several of the island's sophisticated, multi-million-pound purse-netters, some over 180ft long; you'll also see smaller fishing boats and probably a few "fourareens", which the locals race regularly in the summer months.

Pier House

Mon–Sat 9am–1pm & 2–5pm, Sun 2–4pm • Free

Alongside the busy harbour is the tiny grey-granite **Pier House**, the key for which resides in the shop opposite. This picturesque little building, with a hoist built into one side, is thought to have been a Hanseatic merchants' store, and contains displays on how the Germans traded salt, tobacco, spirits and cloth for Whalsay's salted, dried fish from medieval times until the eighteenth century.

Symbister House

Heritage Centre May–Sept Wed & Fri–Sun 2–5pm; Oct–May Wed 7–9pm • Free • 01806 566397, whalsayheritage.co.uk

Overlooking the town is the imposing Georgian mansion of **Symbister House**, built in grey granite and boasting a Neoclassical portico. It was built in the 1830s at great expense by the laird Robert Bruce, reputedly not because he wanted to live on Whalsay but because he wanted to deprive his heirs of his fortune. It's now part of the local school, though you can still see the old doocot behind the house, and various outbuildings in the Midden Court, one of which houses a **heritage centre** on the history of the island.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — WHALSAY

By plane There are also request-only flights from Tingwall (Mon, Wed & Thurs; 01595 840246, directflight.co.uk); day-trips are only possible on Thursdays.

By ferry Car ferries run regularly to Whalsay from Laxo on the Mainland (01806 566259; 30min) – book ahead to take a car. In bad weather, especially southeasterly gales, the service operates from Vidlin instead. Laxo–Symbister (every 45min; 30min).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Grieve House 01595 694688, camping-bods.com. The only accommodation on Whalsay is this camping böd in Sodom, on the edge of Symbister. The house has lovely views overlooking Linga Sound, but is hidden from the road to the Loch of Huxter, so ask for directions. No electricity, but a solid fuel stove. April–Oct. £8/person

Oot Ower Lounge and Campsite 01595 566658. A family-run pub overlooking the Loch of Huxter – this is pretty much the only place to eat and drink on the island (phone ahead to check they're open and serving food), with fish and chips for £10, and somewhere you're welcome to camp. £5/person.

SHOPPING

Shoard (no phone or website). The country's remotest charity shop is in Brough, halfway between Symbister and the golf course; it has limited opening hours, but is a must if you're in the area. Shetland's take on Aladdin's Cave. Wed, Thurs & Sat 2–4pm.

Out Skerries

Lying four miles out to sea, off the northeast tip of Whalsay, the **Out Skerries** consist of three low-lying rocky islands, Housay, Bruray and Grunay, the first two linked by a bridge (population 70). That people live here at all is remarkable, and that it's one of Shetland's most dynamic communities is astonishing, its affluence based on fishing and on salmon farming in a nearby inlet. There are a few prehistoric remains, but the majority of visitors are divers exploring the wreck-strewn coastline, and ornithologists hoping to glimpse rare migrants.

The Skerries' jetty and airstrip are both on the middle island of **Bruray**, which boasts the Skerries' highest point, Bruray Wart (173ft), an easy climb, and home to the islands' ingenious spiral-channel collection system for rainwater, which can become scarce in summer. The easternmost island, **Grunay**, is now uninhabited, though the abandoned lighthouse-keepers' cottages on the island's chief hill remain; despite appearances, the Stevenson-designed lighthouse itself sits on the outlying islet of Bound Skerry. The largest of the Skerries, **Housay**, has the most indented and intriguing coastline, to which you should head if the weather's fine.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE — OUT SKERRIES

By plane There are regular flights from Tingwall (Mon, Wed & Thurs), with day-trips possible on Thursdays.

By ferry Ferries to and from Skerries leave from Vidlin on the Mainland (Mon & Fri–Sun; 1hr 30min) and Lerwick (Tues & Thurs; 2hr 30min), but day-trips are only possible from Vidlin (Fri–Sun). Make sure you book your journey by 5pm the previous evening (☎01806 515226), or the ferry might not run. You can take your car over, but, with less than a mile of road to drive along, it's not worth it.

ACCOMMODATION

Camping is allowed, with permission. There is a shop, and a shower/toilet block by the pier.

Rocklea ☎01806 515228, 🌐rockleaok.co.uk. The only B&B on the islands is a modern crofthouse on Bruray run by the very welcoming Johnsons, who offer optional full board. £64

The North Isles

Many visitors never make it out to Shetland's trio of remote **North Isles**, which is a shame, as the ferry links are frequent and inexpensive, and the roads fast. Much of the scenery is the familiar Shetland landscape of undulating peat moorland, dramatic coastal cliffs and silent glacial voes. However, the spirit of independence and self-sufficiency in the North Isles is much more keenly felt. **Yell** is best known for its vast otter population, but is otherwise often overlooked. **Fetlar**, the smallest, is home to the rare red-necked phalarope, while **Unst** has the widest appeal, as the most northerly land mass in the British Isles, and for its nesting sea-bird population.

Yell

If you keep to the fast main road, which cuts across the island of **Yell**, you'll pass a lot of fairly uninspiring peat moorland. Get onto the minor roads, though, and you'll begin to appreciate the island and have more chance of spotting one of Yell's numerous **otters**.

Burravoe

At **BURRAVOE**, in the southeastern corner of Yell, a whitewashed laird's house dating from 1672 houses the **Old Haa Museum** April–Sept Tues–Thurs & Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 2–5pm; free; ☎01957 702431). Stuffed with artefacts, the museum has lots of material on the history of the local herring and whaling industry and there's a pleasant

wood-panelled café on the ground floor. From May to August, you'll find thousands of **sea birds** (including puffins) nesting in the cliffs above Ladies Hole, less than a mile northeast of the village.

Mid Yell and around

The island's largest village, **MID YELL**, has a couple of shops, a pub and a leisure centre with a swimming pool. A mile northwest of the village, on a hill above the main road, stands the spooky, abandoned eighteenth-century **Windhouse**; skeletons were found under the floor and in its wood-panelled walls, and the house is now believed by many to be haunted (its ghost-free lodge is a camping böd; see p.560).

ARRIVAL AND TOURS — YELL

By ferry ☎01595 745804, ⓦwww.shetland.gov.uk. Ferries to Ulsta (Yell) from Toft on the Mainland are very frequent (every 30min–1hr; 20min), as are ferries from Gutcher across the Bluemull Sound to Belmont (Unst) and Hamar's Ness (Fetlar) – and there's free wi-fi at both ferry terminals.

By bus An integrated bus and ferry service from Lerwick goes all the way to Gutcher (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 2hr 10min). On Yell, buses from Ulsta run to Gutcher (Mon–Sat 2–4 daily; 30min).

Guided tours ☎01806 577358, ⓦshetlandotters.com. Local otter spotter John Campbell takes groups of two or three in search of otters (£125 a day for a couple) – book in advance.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Pinewood House ☎01957 702092, ⓦpinewoodhouseshetland.co.uk. Great option on the east coast of Yell: rooms are plain but comfy, and the guest lounge has a real fire, views over to Fetlar and lots of books on the local area. Full board available. **£70**

Wind Dog Café ☎01957 744321. Quirky café in a prefab at Gutcher, offering soup, baked tatties and filled bannocks, and hosting the odd local event throughout the year. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm.

Windhouse Lodge camping böd ☎01595 694688, ⓦcamping-bods.com; April–Oct. The Windhouse gatehouse, on the main road near Mid Yell, has a wood- and peat-fired heater and hot showers. **£10**/person

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Fetlar

Fetlar is the most fertile of the North Isles, much of it grassy moorland and lush green meadows with masses of summer flowers. It's known as "the garden of Shetland", though that's pushing it a bit, as it's still an unforgiving, treeless landscape. **Sir Arthur Nicolson** cleared much of the island's population at forty days' notice to make room for sheep. Today, Fetlar's population of around sixty lives on the southern and eastern sides of the island.

Houbie and around

At the tiny, main settlement, **HOUBIE**, in the centre of the island, there's the **Fetlar Interpretive Centre** (May–Sept Mon–Sat 11am–3pm, Sun 1–4pm; £2; ☎01957 733206, ⓦfetlar.com), a welcoming museum with information on Fetlar's outstanding birdlife and the archeological excavations that took place near Houbie. For a sandy bay in which to relax, head to the **Sand of Tresta** is less than a mile to the west. Britain's most northerly religious community, the **Society of Our Lady of the Isles**, occupies an Anglican nunnery in the modern lodge on the edge of the cliffs to the east of Houbie.

Loch of Funzie

Fetlar is one of very few places in Britain where you'll see the graceful **red-necked phalarope** (late May–early Aug): the birds are unusual in that the female does the courting and then leaves the male in charge of incubation. A hide has been provided overlooking the marshes (or mires) to the east of the **Loch of Funzie** (pronounced "Finny"); the loch itself is also a good place at which to spot the phalaropes, and is a regular haunt of red-throated divers.

ARRIVAL AND GETTING AROUND — FETLAR

By ferry Ferries to Fetlar (Mon–Sat 7–9 daily; 25–40min) depart regularly from both Gutcher (Yell) and Belmont (Unst), and dock at Hamar's Ness, three miles northwest of Houbie.

By bus There's a Funzie to Fetlar ferry service (Mon–Sat 3 daily), and a dial-a-ride electric minibus service – to use it you must book your journey the day before (☎01595 745745).

By car If you do have your own vehicle, bear in mind that there's no petrol station on Fetlar, so fill up before you come across.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Aithbank Böd ☎01595 694688, ⓦcamping-bods.com. A cosy wood-panelled cottage, a mile east of Houbie, with two rooms, sleeping a total of seven. Hot water, kitchen, solid fuel stove. March–Oct. £10/person

Fetlar Café ☎01957 733227. The island's only café lives inside the island shop/post office in Houbie. Cooked breakfasts (Fridays only), soup and a few light snacks is all you can hope for. Mon–Sat 11am–4pm.

Garths Campsite ☎01957 733227. A simple camping field just to the west of Houbie and a stone's throw from the Sand of Tresta, with toilets, showers and drying facilities. £7/pitch

Gord ☎01957 733227, ✉nicboxall@btinternet.com. The modern house attached to the island shop in Houbie is also a B&B with great sea views from all the rooms. All guests are full board only, and they do meals for non-residents by arrangement. £100

Unst

While much of **Unst** is rolling grassland, the coast is more dramatic: a fringe of cliffs relieved by some beautiful sandy beaches. As Britain's most northerly inhabited island, there is a surfeit of "most northerly" sights. Most visitors head straight for Hermaness to see the sea birds and look out over Muckle Flugga and the northernmost tip of Britain, to the North Pole beyond.

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Muness Castle

On the south coast of the island, not far from **UYEASOUND**, lie the ruins of **Muness Castle**, a diminutive defensive structure, with matching bulging bastions and corbelled turrets at opposite corners. The castle was built in 1598 by the Scots incomer, Laurence Bruce, stepbrother and chief bullyboy of the infamous Earl Robert Stewart. The inscription above the entrance asks visitors "not to hurt this vark aluayis", but the castle was sacked by Danish pirates in 1627 and never really re-roofed.

Baltasound

Unst's main settlement is **BALTASOUND**, five miles north of Uyeasound; its herring industry used to boost the local population to around 10,000 during the fishing season. As you leave Baltasound, heading north, take a look at **Bobby's bus shelter** (ⓦunstbusshelter.shetland.co.uk), an eccentric, fully furnished, award-winning Shetland bus shelter on the edge of the town.

Keen of Hamar

The **Keen of Hamar**, east of Baltasound and clearly signposted from the main road, is one of the largest expanses of serpentine debris in Europe and home to an extraordinary array of plantlife. It's worth taking a walk on this barren, exposed, almost lunar landscape that's thought to resemble what most of northern Europe looked like at the end of the last ice age. Armed with an SNH leaflet (kept in a box by the stile), you can identify some of the area's numerous rare and minuscule plants, including Norwegian sandwort, frog orchid, moonwort and the mouse-eared Edmondston's chickweed, which flowers in June and July and is found nowhere else in the world.

Haroldswick

Near the shore, at **HAROLDSWICK**, you'll find the **Unst Boat Haven** (May–Sept daily 11am–5pm; ☎01957 711809; £3), displaying a beautifully presented collection of historic boats along with many tools of the trade and information on fishing. If you

want to learn about other aspects of Unst's history, head for the nearby **Unst Heritage Centre** (May–Sept daily 11am–5pm; £3; ☎ 01957 711528), housed in the old school building by the main crossroads, where they also put on have-a-go activities such as spinning, knitting and potting.

Saxa Vord RAF base

Just north of Haroldswick is **SAXA VORD** (also, confusingly, the name of the nearby hill), home to the eyesore former **RAF base**, containing a restaurant, bar and hostel, and a **chocolate factory** (Mon–Sat 11.30am–5pm, Sun 1–4pm; free; 🌐foordschocolates.co.uk), where there's also an **exhibition** on the history of the RAF on Unst. The former base is also home to Britain's most northerly brewery, the **Valhalla Brewery**, source of Shetland Ales (visits by appointment; ☎01957 711658, 🌐valhallabrewery.co.uk).

Hermaness Nature Reserve

The road that heads off northwest from Haroldswick leads eventually to the bleak headland of **Hermaness**, home to more than 100,000 nesting sea birds (May–Aug). There's an excellent **visitor centre** in the former lighthouse keepers' shore station, where you can pick up a leaflet showing the marked routes across the reserve. Whatever you do, stick to the path so as to avoid annoying the vast numbers of nesting great skuas. From Hermaness Hill, you can look down over the jagged rocks of the wonderfully named Vesta Skerry, Rumblings, Tipta Skerry and **Muckle Flugga**. There are few more dramatic settings for a lighthouse than Muckle Flugga, and few sites could ever have presented as great a challenge to the builders, who erected it in 1858. Beyond the lighthouse is **Out Stack**, the most northerly bit of Britain. The views from here are marvellous, as is the birdlife; there's a huge gannetry on one of the stacks, and puffins burrow all along the clifftops.

ARRIVAL AND TOURS — UNST

By ferry ☎01595 745804. Ferries shuttle regularly across Bluemull Sound from Gutcher on Yell over to Belmont on Unst (every 30–1hr; 10min).

By bus An integrated bus and ferry service goes from Lerwick to Baltasound on Unst (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 2hr 40min). From Belmont, Unst's ferry terminal, buses run to Uyeasound (Mon–Sat 2–4 daily; 5min), Baltasound (Mon–Sat 2–3 daily; 15min) and Haroldswick (Mon–Sat 1–2 daily; 30min).

Boat trips If your sea legs are better than your walking boots, you can opt to see the great sea-bird colonies of Hermaness with Muckle Flugga Charters (☎01806 522447, 🌐muckleflugga.co.uk), operating out of Baltasound or Burrafirth.

ACCOMMODATION

Gardiesfauld Uyeasound ☎01957 755279, 🌐www.gardiesfauld.shetland.co.uk. A clean and modern hostel near Uyeasound pier which allows camping, and offers bike rental. April–Sept. Dorms **£15**; camping **£6**/person

Prestagaard Uyeasound ☎01957 755234, ✉prestegaard@postmaster.co.uk. This attractive, whitewashed Victorian B&B, with just three rooms, is situated in Uyeasound, and has great sea views. **£60**

EATING AND DRINKING

Baltasound Hotel Baltasound ☎01957 711334, 🌐baltasoundhotel.co.uk. Wherever you stay, it's a good idea to book yourself in for dinner or self-cater – the only other option is the bar food at the *Baltasound Hotel* (mains £10–18). Daily 5–8pm.

Northern Lights Bistro Haroldswick ☎01957 711557. Spacious, modern café, serving soup, sandwiches and toasties, with views across the bay, near the Unst Boat Haven in Haroldswick. April–Sept daily 10am–6pm.

Skibhoul Café & Stores Baltasound. The island's main shop is attached to the local bakery, has the odd chip supper night and will fill your flask – there's also a self-service café and reading corner in the store. Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm.

CELTIC CROSS, KILDALTON

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History

Scotland's colourful and compelling history looms large, not just for visitors to the country, but its inhabitants too. Often the nation's history has been defined either by fierce internecine conflict or epic struggles with England, yet from earliest times the influences of Ireland, Scandinavia and Continental Europe have been as important, particularly in aspects of Scotland's creative and cultural development. This has nurtured a sophistication and ambition in Scots that few associate with the land of warring clans and burning castles, peppering the country's story not just with tragic yet romantic heroes, but also notable fighters, innovators and politicians.

Prehistoric Scotland

Scotland, like the rest of prehistoric Britain, was settled by successive waves of peoples arriving from the east. These first inhabitants were **hunter-gatherers**, whose heaps of animal bones and shells have been excavated, amongst other places, in the caves along the coast near East Wemyss in Fife. Around 4500 BC, **Neolithic farming peoples** from the European mainland began moving into Scotland. To provide themselves with land for their cereal crops and grazing for their livestock, they cleared large areas of upland forest, usually by fire, and in the process created the characteristic moorland landscapes of much of modern Scotland. These early farmers established permanent settlements, some of which, like **Skara Brae** on Orkney, were near the sea, enabling them to supplement their diet by fishing and develop their skills as boat-builders.

Settlement spurred the development of more complex forms of religious belief. The Neolithic peoples built large chambered burial mounds or **cairns**, such as **Maes Howe** in Orkney. This reverence for human remains suggests a belief in some form of afterlife, a concept that the next wave of settlers, the **Beaker people**, certainly believed in. They placed pottery beakers filled with drink in the tombs of their dead to assist the passage of the deceased on their journey to, or their stay in, the next world. They also built the mysterious **stone circles**, thirty of which have been discovered in Scotland, including that of **Callanish** (Calanais) on the Isle of Lewis. The exact function of the circles is still unknown, but many of the stones are aligned with the sun at certain points in its annual cycle, suggesting that the monuments are related to the changing of the seasons.

The Beaker people also brought the **Bronze Age** to Scotland. Bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, was stronger and more flexible than flint, which had long been used for axe-heads and knives. Agricultural needs plus new weaponry resulted in a state of endemic warfare as villagers raided their neighbours to steal livestock and grain. The Bronze Age peoples responded to the danger by developing a range of defences, among them spectacular **hillforts** and **crannogs**, smaller settlements built on artificial islands.

4500 BC	3000 BC	2000 BC
Neolithic people move into Scotland.	Neolithic township of Skara Brae built.	Callanish standing stones erected on Lewis in the Western Isles.

The Celts and the Picts

Conflict in Scotland intensified in the first millennium BC as successive waves of **Celtic** settlers, arriving from the south and using iron, competed for land. These fractious times witnessed the construction of hundreds of **brochs** or fortified towers. Concentrated along the Atlantic coast and in the northern and western isles, the brochs were dry-stone fortifications often over 40ft in height; the best-preserved can be found on the Shetland island of **Mousa**.

At the end of the prehistoric period, immediately before the arrival of the Romans, Scotland was divided among a number of warring Iron Age tribes, who, apart from raiding, were preoccupied with wresting a living from the land, growing barley and oats, rearing sheep, hunting deer and fishing for salmon. The Romans gave them their collective name Picti, or **Picts**, meaning painted people, after their body tattoos.

The Romans

The **Roman conquest** of Britain began in 43 AD. By 80 AD the Roman governor, Agricola, felt secure enough in the south of Britannia (Britain) to begin an invasion of **Caledonia** (Scotland), building a string of forts across the Clyde–Forth line and defeating the Caledonian tribes at the **Battle of Mons Graupius**. The long-term effect of his campaign, however, was slight. Work on a major fort – to be the base for 5000 soldiers – at Inchtuthill, on the Tay, was abandoned and the legions withdrew. In 123 AD **Emperor Hadrian** sealed the frontier against the northern tribes and built **Hadrian's Wall**, which stretched from the Solway Firth to the Tyne and was the first formal division of the island of Britain. Twenty years later, the Romans again ventured north and built the **Antonine Wall** between the Clyde and the Forth. This was manned for about forty years, but the Romans largely gave up their attempt to subjugate the north and instead adopted a policy of containment.

The Romans produced the first **written** accounts of Scotland. Dio Cassius, writing in 197 AD, captures the common Roman contempt of their Pictish neighbours:

They live in huts, go naked and unshod. They mostly have a democratic government, and are much addicted to robbery. They can bear hunger and cold and all manner of hardship; they will retire into their marshes and hold out for days with only their heads above water, and in the forest they will subsist on barks and roots.

The Dark Ages

Following the departure of the Romans, traditionally put at 410 AD, the population of Scotland changed considerably. By 500 the **Picts** occupied the northern isles, and the north and the east as far south as Fife. Today their settlements can be identified by place names with a "Pit" prefix, such as Pitlochry, and by the existence of carved symbol stones, like those found at Aberlemno in Angus. To the west, between Dumbarton and Carlisle, was a population of **Britons**. Many of the Briton leaders had Roman names, suggesting that they were a Romanized Celtic people, possibly a combination of tribes maintained by the Romans as a buffer between Hadrian's Wall and the northern tribes, and peoples pushed west by the Anglo-Saxon invaders landing on the east coast. Both the Britons and the Picts spoke variations of P-Celtic, from which Welsh, Cornish and Breton developed.

100 BC–100 AD	43 AD	83
Fortified Iron Age brochs built across Scotland.	The Roman conquest of Britain begins.	The Romans defeat the British tribes at the Battle of Mons Graupius in northeast Scotland.

THE NORTHERN ISLES

With their sophisticated ships and navigational skills, the **Vikings**, beginning their expansion in the eighth century, soon gained supremacy over the Pictish peoples in Shetland, Orkney, the extreme northeast corner of the mainland and the Western Isles. For the next six centuries the Northern Isles were distinct from the rest of what is now called Scotland, becoming a base for raiding and colonization in Britain and Ireland, and forming links with the Faroes, Iceland, Greenland and, more tenuously, North America. Norse culture flourished, and buildings such as St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney, give some idea of its energy. However, there were bouts of unrest, and finally Shetland was brought under direct rule from Norway at the end of the twelfth century.

When Norway united with Sweden under the Danish Crown in the fourteenth century, **Norse power** began to wane and Scottish influence to increase. In 1469, a marriage was arranged between Margaret, daughter of the Danish King Christian I, and the future King James III of Scotland. Short of cash for her dowry, Christian mortgaged Orkney to Scotland in 1468, followed by Shetland in 1469; neither pledge was ever successfully redeemed. The laws, religion and administration of the Northern Isles became Scottish, though their Norse heritage is still very evident in place names, dialect and culture.

On the west coast, to the north and west of the Britons, lived the **Scotti**, Irish-Celtic invaders who eventually gave their name to the whole country. The first Scotti arrived in the Western Isles from Ireland in the fourth century AD, and about a century later their great king, Fergus Mor, moved his base from Antrim to Dunadd, near Lochgilphead, where he founded the kingdom of Dalriada. The Scotti spoke Q-Celtic, the precursor of modern Gaelic. On the east coast, the Germanic **Anglo-Saxons** had sailed north along the coast to settle around Dunbar in East Lothian. The final addition to the ethnic mix was also non-Celtic; from around 800 AD, **Norse** invaders began to arrive, settling mainly in the Northern Isles and the northeast of the mainland.

Many of the Britons had been **Christians** since Roman times and it was a Briton, St Ninian, who conducted the first missionary work among the Picts at the end of the fourth century. Attempts to convert the Picts were resumed in the sixth century by **St Columba**, one of the Gaelic-speaking Scotti, who established the island of **Iona** as a centre of Christian culture, opening the way for many peaceable contacts between the Picts and Scotti. Intermarriage became commonplace and the Scotti king **Kenneth MacAlpine**, who united Dalriada and Pictland in 843 AD, was the son of a Pictish princess. Similarly, MacAlpine's creation of the united kingdom of **Alba**, later known as **Scotia**, was part of a process of integration rather than outright conquest. Kenneth and his successors gradually expanded their kingdom by marriage and force of arms until, by 1034, almost all of what we now call Scotland was under their rule.

The Middle Ages

The succession of **Malcolm III**, known as Canmore ("Bighead"), in 1057 marked the beginning of a period of fundamental change in Scottish society. Having spent seventeen years at the English court, Malcolm sought to apply to Scotland a range of ideas he had brought back with him. He and his heirs established a secure dynasty based on succession through the male line (as opposed to the female succession

142

The Romans build Antonine Wall between the Firth of Forth and the Firth of Clyde.

162

The Romans withdraw from the Antonine Wall and retreat behind Hadrian's Wall.

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St Ninian establishes the first Christian church north of Hadrian's Wall.

practised by the Picts) and introduced **feudalism** into Scotland, a system that was diametrically opposed to the Gaelic system – the followers of a Gaelic king were his kindred, whereas the followers of a feudal king were vassals bought with land. The Canmores, independent of the local nobility, who remained a military threat, also began to reform the **Church**. This development started with **Margaret**, Malcolm III's English wife, who brought Scottish religious practices into line with those of the rest of Europe. **David I** continued the process by importing monks to found a series of monasteries, principally along the border at Kelso, Melrose, Jedburgh and Dryburgh. Similarly, the dynasty founded a series of **royal burghs**, towns such as Edinburgh, Stirling and Berwick, recognized as centres of trade. Their charters usually granted a measure of self-government and the monarchy hoped this liberality would both encourage loyalty and increase the prosperity of the kingdom. Scotland's Gaelic-speaking clans had little influence within the burghs, and gradually Scots – a northern version of Anglo-Saxon – became the main **language** throughout the Lowlands.

The Wars of Scottish Independence

In 1286 Alexander III died, and a hotly disputed succession gave **Edward I**, King of England, an opportunity to subjugate Scotland. In 1291 Edward presided over a conference where the rival claimants to the Scottish throne presented their cases. Edward chose **John Balliol** over **Robert the Bruce**, his main rival; he obliged Balliol to pay him homage, thus turning Scotland into a vassal kingdom. Bruce refused to accept the decision and in 1295 Balliol renounced his allegiance to Edward and sided with France – beginning what is known as the "**Auld Alliance**". In the ensuing conflict, the Bruce family sided with the English, Balliol was defeated and imprisoned, and Edward seized control of almost all of Scotland.

Edward had shown little mercy during his conquest of Scotland – he had most of the population of Berwick massacred – and his cruelty provoked a truly national resistance. This focused on **William Wallace**, a man of relatively lowly origins who raised an army of peasants, lesser knights and townsmen that was fundamentally different to the armies raised by the nobility. Figures like Balliol, holding lands in England, France and Scotland, were part of an international aristocracy for whom warfare was the means by which they struggled for power. Wallace, by contrast, led proto-nationalist forces determined to expel the English from their country. Probably for that very reason Wallace never received the support of the nobility and, after a bitter ten-year campaign during which he notched up a couple of notable victories over English armies, he was betrayed and executed in London in 1305.

In 1306 Robert the Bruce defied Edward and had himself crowned king of Scotland. Edward died the following year, but the unrest dragged on until 1314, when Bruce decisively defeated a huge English army under Edward II at the **Battle of Bannockburn**. At last Bruce was firmly in control of his kingdom, and in 1320 the Scots asserted their right to independence in a successful petition to the pope, now known as the **Declaration of Arbroath**.

The Stewart dynasty

Following Bruce's death in 1329, the Scottish monarchy gradually declined in influence. The last of the Bruce dynasty died in 1371, to be succeeded by the

563

St Columba founds a monastery on Iona and begins to convert the Picts.

843

Kenneth MacAlpine becomes the first king of the Scots and the Picts.

1286

Death of Alexander III sparks the Wars of Scottish Independence.

FLODDEN FIELD

In 1513, possibly the largest Scots army ever to invade England was decimated by the English at **Flodden Field**, just south of the border. The English king Henry VIII had invaded France and the Scots, under James IV, opted to stand by the Auld Alliance with France and invade England. The Scots army, numbering around 30,000, took several English strongholds before being confronted near Branxton, three miles southeast of Coldstream.

The English artillery was lighter and more manoeuvrable, and forced the Scots to come down off their advantageous position on **Branxton Hill**. The heavily armoured Scottish noblemen got stuck in the mud, and their over-long **pikes** and lances proved no match for the English **bills** (like a hooked halberd). English losses were heavy, but the Scots lost as many as 10,000, including the king himself, his son (an archbishop), nine earls, fourteen lords and numerous Highland clan chiefs, all of whom fought at the head of their troops. After the battle, James's blood-stained surcoat was sent to Henry, but his body was denied burial and no one knows what became of it.

If Bannockburn was Scotland's greatest victory over the English, and Bonnie Prince Charlie's last stand at Culloden their most noble defeat, Flodden was simply an unmitigated disaster. It became the subject of numerous songs and ballads and remains a painful memory for Scots even today. The English, meanwhile, have forgotten all about it.

"Stewards", hence **Stewarts**, but thereafter a succession of Scottish rulers, culminating with James VI in 1567, came to the throne when still children. The power vacuum was filled by the nobility, whose key members exercised control as Scotland's regents. The more vigorous monarchs of the period, notably **James I**, did their best to curb the power of such families, but their efforts were usually nullified at the next regency. **James IV** might have restored the authority of the Crown, but his invasion of England ended in a terrible defeat for the Scots – and his own death – at the **Battle of Flodden Field**.

The reign of **Mary, Queen of Scots** (1542–67), typified the problems of the Scottish monarchy. Mary came to the throne when just one week old, and immediately the English king, Henry VIII, sought to marry her to his 5-year-old son, Edward. Beginning in 1544, the English launched a series of devastating attacks on Scotland, an episode Sir Walter Scott later called the "Rough Wooing", until, in the face of another English invasion in 1548, the Scots – or at least those not supporting Henry – turned to the "Auld Alliance". The French king proposed marriage between Mary and the Dauphin Francis, promising military assistance against the English. The six-year-old queen sailed for France in 1548, leaving her loyal nobles and their French allies in control. When she returned thirteen years later, following the death of Francis, she had to pick her way through the rival ambitions of her nobility and deal with something entirely new – the religious Reformation.

The Reformation

The **Reformation** in Scotland was a complex social process, whose threads are often hard to unravel. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that, by the end of the sixteenth century, the established Church was held in general contempt. Many of the higher clergy

1296	1314	1320
Edward I of England invades Scotland.	Under Robert the Bruce, the Scots defeat the English at the Battle of Bannockburn.	The Declaration of Arbroath, asserting Scottish independence, is sent to the pope.

regarded their relationship with the Church purely in economic terms, and forty percent of known illegitimate births were the product of the "celibate" clergy's liaisons.

Another spur to the Scottish Reformation was the identification of Protestantism with anti-French feeling. In 1554 **Mary of Guise**, the French mother of the absent Queen Mary, had become regent, and her habit of appointing Frenchmen to high office was seen as an attempt to subordinate Scotland's interests to those of France. There was considerable resentment, and in 1560, with English military backing, Protestant nobles succeeded in deposing the French regent. When the Scottish Parliament assembled it asserted the primacy of Protestantism by forbidding the Mass and abolishing the authority of the pope. The nobility proceeded to confiscate two-thirds of Church lands, a huge prize that did much to bolster their new beliefs.

The return of Mary, Queen of Scots

Even without the economic incentives, Protestantism was a highly charged political doctrine. **Luther** had argued that each individual's conscience was capable of discerning God's will. This meant that a hierarchical priesthood, existing to interpret God's will, was unnecessary. This point was made very clearly to Queen Mary by the Protestant reformer **John Knox** at their first meeting on her return in 1561. Subjects, he told her, were not bound to obey an ungodly monarch.

Mary ducked and weaved, trying to avoid an open breach with her Protestant subjects. At the same time, she was engaged in a balancing act between the factions of the Scottish nobility. Her difficulties were exacerbated by her disastrous second marriage to **Lord Darnley**, a cruel and politically inept character, whose jealousy led to his involvement in the murder of Mary's favourite, David Rizzio, who was dragged from the queen's supper room at Holyrood and stabbed 56 times. The incident disturbed the Scottish Protestants, but they were entirely scandalized in 1567 when Darnley himself was murdered and Mary promptly married the **Earl of Bothwell**, widely believed to be the murderer. The Scots rose in rebellion, driving Mary into exile in England at the age of just 25. The queen's illegitimate half-brother, the Earl of Moray, became regent, and her son, the infant James, was left behind to be raised a Protestant prince. Mary, meanwhile, became perceived as such a threat to the English throne that Queen Elizabeth I had her executed in 1587.

Knox could now concentrate on the organization of the reformed Church, or **Kirk**, which he envisaged as a body with power over the daily lives of the people. **Andrew Melville**, another leading reformer, wished to push this theocratic vision further. He proposed the abolition of all traces of the rule of bishops in the Church and that the Kirk should adopt a **Presbyterian** structure, administered by a hierarchy of assemblies, part-elected and part-appointed.

The religious wars

James VI disliked Presbyterianism because its quasi-democratic structure appeared to threaten his authority. He was, however, unable to resist the reformers until, strengthened by his installation as James I of England after Elizabeth's death in 1603, he restored the Scottish bishops in 1610. Raised in Episcopalian England, James's son **Charles I** had little understanding of Scottish reformism. His belief in

1371	1413	1468
Robert II becomes the first of the Stewart (Stuart) kings to rule Scotland.	University of St Andrews is founded.	James III marries Margaret of Denmark and receives Orkney and Shetland as part of her dowry.

the Divine Right of Kings was entirely counter to Protestant thought. In 1637 Charles attempted to impose a new prayer book on the Kirk, laying down forms of worship in line with the High Anglican Church. The reformers denounced these changes as "popery" and organized the **National Covenant**, a religious pledge "to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel as it was established and professed".

Charles declared all the "**Covenanters**" to be rebels, but when he called a General Assembly of the Kirk, it promptly abolished the episcopacy. Charles pronounced the proceedings illegal, but lack of finance stopped him from mounting an effective military campaign – whereas the Covenanters, well financed by the Kirk, assembled a proficient army under Alexander Leslie. In desperation, Charles summoned the English Parliament, the first for eleven years, hoping it would pay for an army. However, Parliament was much keener to criticize his policies than to raise taxes. In response, Charles declared war on Parliament in 1642.

Until 1650, Scotland was ruled by the Covenanters, and the power of the Presbyterian Kirk grew considerably. Laws were passed establishing schools in every parish and, less usefully, banning trade with Catholic countries. The only effective opposition to the theocratic state came from the **Marquis of Montrose**, who had initially supported the Covenant but lined up with the king when war broke out. His army was drawn from the Highlands and Islands, where the Kirk's influence was weakest. Montrose won several notable victories against the Covenanters, but the reluctance of his troops to stay south of the Highland Line made it impossible to capitalize on these successes, and he was eventually captured and executed in 1650.

The Civil War and the Restoration

Montrose's campaigns, however, were a side show to the **Civil War** being waged further south. Here, the Covenanters and the English Parliamentarians faced the same royal enemy and in 1643 formed an uneasy alliance. There was, however, friction between the allies. Many Parliamentarians, including Cromwell, favoured a looser form of doctrinal control within the state Church than the Presbyterians did. They also suspected the Scots of hankering for the return of the monarchy, a suspicion confirmed when, at the invitation of the earl of Argyll, the future Charles II came back to Scotland in 1650. To regain his Scottish kingdom, Charles was obliged to renounce his father and sign the Covenant, two bitter pills taken to impress the population. In the event, the "Presbyterian restoration" was short-lived. Cromwell invaded, defeated the Scots at Dunbar and forced Charles into exile. Until the Restoration of 1660, Scotland was united with England and governed by seven commissioners.

Although the restoration of **Charles II** brought bishops back to the Kirk, they were integrated into an essentially Presbyterian structure of Kirk sessions and presbyteries, and the General Assembly, which had been abolished by Cromwell, was not re-established. More than three hundred clergymen, a third of the Scottish ministry, refused to accept the reinstatement of the bishops and were edged out of the Church, forced to hold open-air services, called **Conventicles**, which Charles attempted to suppress.

Charles II was succeeded by his brother **James VII** (James II of England), whose ardent Catholicism caused a Protestant backlash in England. In 1689, he was forced into exile in France and the throne passed to **Mary**, his Protestant daughter, and her Dutch husband, **William of Orange**. In Scotland there was a brief flurry of opposition to William when

1482	1513	1560
Berwick-upon-Tweed captured by the English.	The Scots are defeated by the English at the Battle of Flodden Field.	The Scottish Church breaks with the Roman Catholic Church.

Graham of Claverhouse, known as "Bonnie Dundee", united the Jacobite clans against the government army at the **Battle of Killiekrankie**, just north of Pitlochry. However, the inspirational Claverhouse was killed on the point of victory, the clans dispersed and the threat passed. In Scotland, William and Mary restored the full Presbyterian structure and abolished bishops, though they chose not to restore the political and legal functions of the Kirk, which remained subject to parliamentary control.

The Union

From 1689 to 1697, William was at war with France, a war partly financed by Scottish taxes and partly fought by Scottish soldiers. Yet many Scots, mindful of the Auld Alliance, disapproved of the war and others suffered financially from the disruption to trade with France. There were other economic irritants too, principally the legally sanctioned monopoly that English merchants had over trade with the English colonies. This monopoly inspired the **Darien Scheme**, a plan to establish a Scottish colony in Panama. The colonists set off in 1698, but the scheme proved a miserable failure. The colony collapsed with the loss of £200,000 – an amount equal to half the value of the entire coinage in Scotland – and an angry Scottish Parliament threatened to refuse the king taxes as rioting broke out in the cities.

The situation in Scotland was further complicated by the question of the succession. Mary died without leaving an heir and, on William's death in 1702, the crown passed to her sister **Anne**, who was also childless. The English Parliament secured the Protestant succession by passing the Act of Settlement, naming the Electress Sophia of Hanover as the next in line to the throne. The Act did not, however, apply in Scotland, and the English feared that the Scots would invite James Edward Stewart back from France to be their king. Consequently, Parliament appointed commissioners charged with the consideration of "proper methods towards attaining a union with Scotland". In response the Scottish Parliament passed the **Act of Security** in 1703, stating that Scotland would not accept a Hanoverian monarch unless they had first received guarantees protecting their religion and their trade.

Nevertheless the Scottish Parliament unexpectedly passed the **Act of Union** by 110 votes to 69 in January 1707. Some historians have explained the vote in terms of bribery and corruption. This certainly played a part (the Duke of Hamilton, for example, switched sides at a key moment and was rewarded with an English dukedom), but there were other factors. Scottish politicians were divided between the Cavaliers – Jacobites (supporters of the Stewarts) and Episcopalians – and the Country party, whose Presbyterian members dreaded the return of the Stewarts more than they disliked the Hanoverians. There were commercial considerations too. In 1705 the English Parliament had passed the Alien Act, which threatened to impose severe penalties on cross-border trade, whereas the Union gave merchants of both countries free access to each other's markets. The Act of Union also guaranteed the Scottish legal system and the Presbyterian Kirk, and offered compensation to those who had lost money in the Darien Scheme.

Under the terms of the Act, both parliaments were to be replaced by a new British Parliament based in London, with the Scots apportioned 45 MPs and 16 peers. There were riots when the terms became known, but no sustained opposition.

1587	1592	1603
Mary, Queen of Scots, is executed on the orders of Queen Elizabeth I.	Presbyterianism becomes the established religion.	James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England.

The Jacobite risings

When James VII (II) was deposed he fled to France, where he planned the reconquest of his kingdom with the support of the French king. In 1702, James's successor, William, died, and the hopes of the Stewarts passed to James, the "Old Pretender" (Pretender in the sense of having pretensions to the throne; Old to distinguish him from his son Charles, the "Young Pretender"). James's followers became known as **Jacobites**, derived from Jacobus, the Latin equivalent of James. The accession to the British throne of the Hanoverian George I, son of Sophia, Electress of Hanover, sparked the **Jacobite uprising of 1715**. Its timing appeared perfect. Scottish opinion was moving against the Union, which had failed to bring Scotland any tangible economic benefits. The English had also been accused of bad faith when, contrary to their pledges, they attempted to impose their legal practices on the Scots. There were also many in England who toasted the "king across the water" and showed no enthusiasm for the new German ruler. In September 1715 the fiercely Jacobite John Erskine, Earl of Mar, raised the Stewart standard at Braemar Castle. Eight days later, he captured Perth, where he gathered an army of more than 10,000 men, drawn mostly from the Episcopalians of northeast Scotland and from the Highlands. Mar's rebellion took the government by surprise. They had only four thousand soldiers in Scotland, under the

THE HIGHLANDS

The country that was united with England in 1707 contained three distinct cultures: in south and east Scotland, they spoke **Scots**; the local dialect in Shetland, Orkney and the far northeast, though Scots-based, contained elements of **Norn** (Old Norse); while the language of the rest of north and west Scotland, including the Hebrides, was **Gaelic**. These linguistic differences were paralleled by different forms of social organization and customs. The people of north and west Scotland were mostly **pastoralists**, moving their sheep and cattle to Highland pastures in the summer and returning to the glens in the winter. They lived in single-room dwellings, heated by a central peat fire and sometimes shared with livestock, and in hard times they subsisted on cakes made from the blood of their live cattle mixed with oatmeal. **Highlanders** supplemented their meagre income by raiding their clan neighbours and the prosperous Lowlands, whose inhabitants regarded their northern compatriots with a mixture of fear and contempt.

However, the institutions of this society had not existed from time immemorial. This is especially true of the "**clan**", a term that only appears in its modern usage in the sixteenth century. In theory, the clan bound together blood relatives who shared a common ancestor, a concept clearly derived from the ancient Gaelic notion of kinship. But in practice many of the clans were of non-Gaelic origin – such as the Frasers, Sinclairs and Stewarts, all of Anglo-Norman descent – and it was the mythology of a common ancestor, rather than the actuality, that cemented the clans together. Furthermore, clans were often made up of people with a variety of surnames, and there is evidence of individuals changing their names when they swapped allegiances.

It was not until the late seventeenth century that certain **tartans** became associated with particular clans. Previously, Highlanders wore a simple belted plaid wrapped around the body. The detailed codification of the tartan was produced by the Victorians, whose romantic vision of Highland life originated with George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822, when he appeared in an elaborate version of Highland dress, complete with flesh-coloured tights.

1638

National Covenant proclaimed by Scottish Presbyterians.

1650

The Scots Royalist army are defeated at the Battle of Dunbar by the English under Oliver Cromwell.

1689

Unsuccessful Jacobite uprising against William of Orange.

command of the Duke of Argyll, but Mar dithered and lost the military advantage. The **Battle of Sheriffmuir** in November was indecisive, but by the time the Old Pretender arrived the following month six thousand veteran Dutch troops had reinforced Argyll. The rebellion disintegrated and James slunk back to exile in France in February 1716.

The **Jacobite uprising of 1745**, led by James's dashing son, Charles Edward Stewart (known as "**Bonnie Prince Charlie**"), had little chance of success. The Hanoverians had consolidated their hold on the English throne and Lowland society was uniformly loyalist. Despite early successes which allowed him to march as far south as Derby, Charles was ultimately forced to retreat and finally met his match at the **Battle of Culloden**, near Inverness, in April 1746, the last set-piece battle on British soil. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Jacobites were swept from the field, with more than

BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE

Prince Charles Edward Stewart – better known as **Bonnie Prince Charlie** or "The Young Pretender" – was born in 1720 in Rome, where his father, "The Old Pretender", claimant to the British throne (as the son of James VII), was living in exile with his Polish wife. At the age of 25, with no knowledge of Gaelic, an imperfect grasp of English and a strong Catholic faith, the prince set out in disguise for Scotland with two French ships. He arrived on the Hebridean island of **Eriskay** (see p.521) on July 23, 1745, with just seven companions, and was immediately implored to return to France by the clan chiefs, who were singularly unimpressed by his lack of army. Charles was unmoved and went on to raise the royal standard at **Glenfinnan** (see p.443), thus signalling the beginning of the **Jacobite uprising**. He only attracted fewer than half of the potential 20,000 clansmen who could have marched with him, and promises of support from the French and English Jacobites failed to materialize. Nevertheless, after a decisive victory over government forces at the **Battle of Prestonpans**, near Edinburgh, Charles made a spectacular advance into England, getting as far as Derby. London was in a state of panic: its shops were closed and the Bank of England, fearing a run on sterling, slowed withdrawals by paying out in sixpences. But Derby was as far as Charles got. On December 6, threatened by superior forces, the Jacobites decided to retreat to Scotland, against Charles's wishes. Pursued back to Scotland by the Duke of Cumberland, he won one last victory, at Falkirk, before the final disaster at **Culloden** (see p.418) in April 1746.

The prince spent the following five months in hiding, with a price of £30,000 on his head, and literally thousands of government troops searching for him. He certainly endured his fair share of cold and hunger whilst on the run, but the real price was paid by the Highlanders themselves, who risked their lives (and often paid for it with them) by aiding and abetting the prince. The most famous of these was 23-year-old **Flora MacDonald**, whom Charles first met on South Uist in June 1746. Flora was persuaded to convey Charles "over the sea to Skye", disguised as an Irish servant girl by the name of Betty Burke. She was arrested just seven days after parting with the prince in Portree, and held in the Tower of London until July 1747.

Charles boarded a ship back to France in September 1746, but, despite his promises – "for all that has happened, Madam, I hope we shall meet in St James's yet" – never returned to Scotland, nor did he ever see Flora again. After a string of mistresses, he eventually got married at the age of 52 to the 19-year-old **Princess Louise of Stolberg-Gedern** in an effort to produce a Stewart heir. They had no children, and she fled from his violent drunkenness; in 1788, a none-too-"bonnie" Prince Charles died in the arms of his illegitimate daughter in Rome. Bonnie Prince Charlie became a romantic legend but the real consequence of 1745 was the virtual annihilation of the Highland way of life.

1692	1695	1698	1707
Glencoe massacre: 38 members of the MacDonald clan murdered by anti-Jacobite Campbells.	Bank of Scotland is established.	1200 Scots leave in order to establish a colony in Panama.	The Act of Union unites the kingdoms of Scotland and England.

1500 men killed or wounded compared to the Duke of Cumberland's 300 or so. After the battle, many of the wounded Jacobites were slaughtered, an atrocity that earned Cumberland the nickname "Butcher".

In the aftermath of the uprising, the wearing of tartan, the bearing of arms and the playing of bagpipes were all banned. Rebel chiefs lost their land and the Highlands were placed under military occupation. Most significantly, the government prohibited the private armies of the chiefs, thereby effectively destroying the clan system.

The Highland Clearances

Once the clan chief was forbidden his own army, he had no need of the large tenantry that had previously been a vital military asset. Conversely, the second half of the eighteenth century saw the Highland population increase dramatically after the introduction of the easy-to-grow and nutritious **potato**. Between 1745 and 1811, the population of the Outer Hebrides, for example, rose from 13,000 to 24,500. The clan chiefs adopted different policies to deal with this. Some encouraged emigration, and as many as six thousand Highlanders left for the Americas between 1800 and 1803. Others developed alternative forms of employment for their tenantry, mainly fishing and gathering kelp (seaweed), while some developed **sheep runs** on the Highland pastures, introducing hardy breeds. But extensive sheep farming proved incompatible with a high peasant population and many landowners decided to clear their estates of tenants, some of whom were forcibly moved to tiny plots of marginal land, where they were to farm as **crofters**.

The pace of these **Highland Clearances** accelerated after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, when the market price for kelp, fish and cattle declined, leaving sheep as the only profitable Highland product. The most notorious Clearances took place on the estates of the countess of Sutherland, who owned a million acres in northern Scotland. Between 1807 and 1821, around 15,000 people were thrown off her land, often with considerable brutality. As the dispossessed Highlanders scratched a living from the acid soils of tiny crofts, they learnt through bitter experience the limitations of the clan. Famine forced large-scale emigration to America and Canada, leaving the huge uninhabited areas found in the region today.

However, not all landowners acted cruelly or insensitively and many settlements around Scotland, from Inveraray in the west to Portsoy in the northeast, owe their existence to so-called "improving landlords", who invested in infrastructure such as fishing harbours, decent housing and communities of sustainable size. They brought economic prosperity to previously disadvantaged areas. Those left crofting, however, still led a precarious existence, often taking seasonal employment away from home. In 1886, in response to the social unrest, Gladstone's Liberal government passed the **Crofters' Holdings Act**, granting three of the crofters' demands: security of tenure, fair rents to be decided independently and the right to pass on crofts by inheritance. But Gladstone did not increase the amount of land available for crofting and shortage of land remained a major problem until the **Land Settlement Act** of 1919 made provision for the creation of new crofts. Nevertheless, the population of the Highlands has continued to decline since then, with many of the region's young people finding life in the city more appealing, and work opportunities there much greater.

1715	1746	1759	1762
Jacobite uprising against the accession of Hanoverian King George I.	Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite army is defeated at the Battle of Culloden.	Scotland's National Poet, Rabbie Burns, is born in Alloway.	Beginning of the Highland Clearances.

Industrialization

Glasgow was the powerhouse of Scotland's **Industrial Revolution**. The passage from Glasgow to the Americas was much shorter than that from rival English ports and a lucrative transatlantic trade in tobacco had developed as early as the seventeenth century. This stimulated Scottish manufacturing, since, under the terms of the Navigation Acts, Americans were not allowed to trade manufactured goods. Scottish-produced linen, paper and wrought iron were exchanged for Virginia tobacco and, when the American War of Independence disrupted trade in the 1770s and 1780s, the Scots successfully turned to trade with the West Indies and, most important of all, to the production of cotton. In 1787, Scotland had only 19 textile mills; by 1840 there were nearly 200.

The growth of the textile industry spurred the development of other industries. In the mid-eighteenth century, the **Carron Ironworks** was founded near Falkirk, producing mainly military munitions. By 1800 it was the largest ironworks in Europe. Scotland's **shipbuilding** industry began as early as 1802, when the steam vessel *Charlotte Dundas* was launched on the Forth and Clyde Canal. The growth of the iron and shipbuilding industries, plus extensive use of steam power, created a massive demand for coal from the coalfields of southern Scotland.

Industrialization led to a concentration of Scotland's **population** in the central Lowlands. In 1840 one-third of the country's industrial workers lived in Lanarkshire, and Glasgow's population grew from 17,000 in the 1740s to more than 200,000 a century later. Such sudden growth created urban overcrowding on a massive scale and, as late as 1861, 64 percent of the entire Scottish population lived in one- or two-room houses. For most Clydesiders, "house" meant a couple of small rooms in a grim tenement building, where many of the poorest families were displaced Highlanders and Irish immigrants; the Irish arrived in Glasgow at the rate of 1000 a week during the potato famine of the 1840s.

By the late nineteenth century a measure of prosperity had emerged from industrialization, and the well-paid Clydeside engineers went to their forges wearing bowler hats and starched collars. They were confident but their optimism was misplaced. Scotland's industries were very much geared to the export market, and after **World War I** conditions were much changed. During the war, when exports had been curtailed by a combination of U-boat activity and war production, new industries had developed in India and Japan, and the eastern market for Scottish goods never recovered. The postwar world also witnessed a contraction of world trade, which hit the shipbuilding industry very hard and, in turn, damaged the steel and coal industries.

These difficulties were compounded by the financial collapse of the early 1930s, and by 1932 28 percent of the Scottish workforce was unemployed. Some 400,000 Scots emigrated between 1921 and 1931, and those who stayed endured some of the worst social conditions in the British Isles. By the late 1930s, Scotland had the highest infant mortality rate in Europe. There was a partial economic recovery in the mid-1930s, but high unemployment remained until the start of **World War II**.

The Labour movement

In the late eighteenth century, conditions for the labouring population varied enormously. Handloom weavers were well paid, whereas the coal miners remained

1843	1846	1886	1890
The Great Disruption: a third of the Church of Scotland leave to form the Free Church of Scotland.	Highland potato famine: 1.7 million Scots emigrate.	Crofters' Holdings Act grants security of tenure in the Highlands and Islands.	Forth Rail Bridge opens, spanning the Firth of Forth.

serfs, bought and sold with the pits they worked in. The 1832 **Scottish Reform Act** extended the franchise to include a large proportion of the middle class, and thereafter political radicalism assumed a more distinctive working-class character. During the next thirty years, as Scotland's economy prospered, skilled workers organized themselves into **craft unions**, such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, to negotiate improvements for their members within the status quo. Politically, the trade unions gave their allegiance to the Liberal Party, but in 1888 **Keir Hardie** left the Liberals to form the Scottish Socialist Party, later merged with the Independent Labour Party, founded in Bradford in 1893. Scottish socialism as represented by the ILP was ethical rather than Marxist in orientation, owing a great deal to the Kirk background of many of its members. But electoral progress was slow, partly because the Roman Catholic priesthood consistently preached against socialism.

Red Clydeside

In the early years of the twentieth century, two small Marxist groups established themselves on what became known as **Red Clydeside**: the **Socialist Labour Party**, which concentrated on workplace militancy, and the party-political **British Socialist Party**. During World War I local organizers of the SLP gained considerable influence by playing on the fears of the skilled workers, who felt their status was undermined by the employment of unskilled workers. After the war, the influence of the shop stewards culminated in a massive campaign for the forty-hour working week. The strikes and demonstrations of the campaign, including one with 100,000 people (and the Red Flag flying) in St George's Square, Glasgow, panicked the government into sending in troops and tanks. The rank and file had little interest in revolution, however, though many of the activists did go on to become leaders within the newly formed **Communist Party of Great Britain**.

The rise of the Labour Party

The ILP, by then an affiliated part of the socialist **Labour Party**, made its electoral breakthrough in 1922, sending 29 Scottish MPs to Westminster. Their high hopes of social progress and reform were dashed, like trade union militancy, by the 1930s Depression. At the 1945 general election, Labour won 40 seats in Scotland and, more recently, the party has dominated Scottish politics. In 1955 the Conservatives had 36 Scottish MPs; by 1997 none at all, though they returned one MP in the 2005 general election and have over a dozen MSPs in the Scottish Parliament.

The ILP MPs of the 1920s combined their socialism with a brand of Scottish nationalism. The Labour Party maintained an official policy of self-government for Scotland, endorsing home rule in 1945 and 1947, but these endorsements were made with less and less enthusiasm. In 1958 Labour abandoned the commitment altogether, adopting a unionist vision of Scotland, much to the chagrin of many Scottish activists.

Towards devolution

The **National Party of Scotland** was formed in 1928, its membership mostly drawn from the non-industrial parts of the country. A mixture of practical politicians and left-leaning eccentrics, such as the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, in 1934 it merged with the

1914–18	1928	1939	1939–45
100,000 Scots lose their lives in World War I.	The National Party of Scotland is formed.	The population of Scotland reaches five million.	34,000 Scottish soldiers lose their lives in World War II; 6000 civilians die in air raids.

right-wing Scottish Party to create the **Scottish National Party**. The SNP achieved its electoral breakthrough in 1967 when Winnie Ewing won Hamilton from Labour in a by-election. The following year the SNP won 34 percent of the vote in local government elections, and both the Labour and Conservative parties, wishing to head off the Nationalists, began to work on schemes to give Scotland a measure of self-government, the term **devolution** becoming common currency.

The Scottish referendum

The situation took a dynamic turn in 1974, when Labour were returned to power with a wafer-thin majority. The SNP held seven seats, which gave them considerable political leverage, and meant that devolution was firmly on the agenda. The SNP had also run an excellent election campaign, concentrating on North Sea oil, now being piped ashore in significant quantities. Their two most popular slogans, "England expects ... Scotland's oil" and "Rich Scots or Poor Britons?", seemed to have caught the mood of Scotland.

In 1979 the Labour government, struggling to hold onto office, put its devolution proposals before the Scottish people in a **referendum**. The "yes" vote gained 33 percent, the "no" vote 31 percent – but the required forty percent threshold wasn't reached. Not for the first time, Scottish opinion had shifted away from home rule; the reluctance to embrace it was based on uncertainty about the consequences, concerns about multi-layered government and, in some areas, a fear that the assembly might be dominated by the Clydeside conurbation.

Scotland under Thatcher

The incoming Conservative government of **Margaret Thatcher** set its face against any form of devolution. It argued that the majority of Scots had voted for parties committed to the Union – Labour, the Liberals and themselves – and that only a minority supported the separation advocated by the SNP. At the same time, the government asserted that any form of devolution would lead inevitably to the break-up of the United Kingdom and that the devolution solutions put forward by other parties would result inescapably in separation.

As the Thatcher years rolled on, growing evidence suggested that few Scottish voters accepted either this reasoning or the implication that Scots did not know what was good for them. The Conservatives' support in Scotland was further eroded by their introduction of the deeply unpopular **Poll Tax**, a form of local taxation that took little account of income. The fact that it was imposed in Scotland a year earlier than in England and Wales was the source of further resentment.

Devolution

Scotland's new political era began with the British general election of 1997, won by Tony Blair's **Labour Party**. Under the stewardship of Scottish Secretary Donald Dewar, the new Labour government swiftly organized a **referendum on devolution** for September. The electorate responded with a clear endorsement: 75 percent voted for a separate Scottish Parliament. The new parliament was given the power to initiate legislation, and to pass bills without consulting Westminster. Within Scotland it controlled education, health and the environment, while Westminster retained control

1961	1979	1996	1999
The US deploy Polaris nuclear missiles in Holy Loch.	Scottish referendum for devolution fails to gain required forty percent.	The Stone of Scone is returned to Scotland.	Labour win the most seats in Scotland's first-ever general election.

over foreign affairs, major economic and tax issues and social security.

Scotland's first-ever **general election** took place in 1999. The form of proportional representation (PR) adopted for the election made it unlikely that any one party would achieve an overall majority in the 129-seat assembly, and the final result left Labour needing to enter into a coalition with the Liberal Democrats to achieve a majority. The SNP won just under 30 percent of the vote, making them the second largest party.

The coalition enjoyed two parliamentary terms, making its mark with important decisions such as abolishing tuition fees for Scottish university students and granting state support for the elderly in care – policies to the left of the Labour programme elsewhere in the UK. Under the commanding leadership of **Alex Salmond**, however, the nationalists took advantage of voter disenchantment with Labour in both Holyrood and Westminster, gaining the largest number of seats in the Scottish Parliament in 2007. Salmond formed a minority administration, and, four years later, in the 2011 election the SNP won an outright parliamentary majority – something the PR system was designed to prevent. The new SNP government immediately kept to their word and organized a **referendum on independence**, to be held in September 2014. With the country pretty evenly split between those opposing and those supporting independence, this one looks set to go down to the wire.

Twenty-first-century Scotland

The Scottish **economy** has benefited from the general prosperity enjoyed in the UK as a whole, but the decline of **heavy industry** has been all but total, and **unemployment** has produced profound social problems in parts of Glasgow, Edinburgh and smaller towns. Meanwhile, in Orkney, Shetland and in northeast Scotland, particularly around Aberdeen, the **oil industry** – although past its boom – continues to underpin an economy which might otherwise have struggled to cope with the uncertainties of agriculture and, especially, fishing.

In spite of encouraging signs of recent progress, the **Highlands and Islands** remain an economically fragile area that needs special measures, distance from markets being a fundamental problem. Increasingly, the local environment is seen as a major asset, and the establishment of a system of National Parks has gone some way to creating a firm framework in which tourism can develop alongside local communities and the interests of the natural world.

One aspect of Scottish life which has remained upbeat in the last decade is its **cultural life**. The appointment of Scots-born Carol Ann Duffy as the first woman Poet Laureate, the works of classical composer James MacMillan and artist Peter Howson, along with a plethora of pop and rock acts from Belle & Sebastian to Emeli Sandé, have given Scotland a substantial presence on the British arts scene. The **Gaelic** language has enjoyed a revival, with old inhibitions about writing in Scots or in Shetland dialect being laid to rest too, and much of the revival of cities such as Glasgow and Dundee is attributed to their focus on the arts. Indeed, contemporary culture is one of the healthiest aspects of Scotland today, and artists have often been able to articulate the richness of Scotland's post-devolution future with more ambition and colour than the country's frequently uninspiring politicians.

2009	2011	2013	2014
Carol Ann Duffy becomes the first Scottish Poet Laureate.	The Scottish National Party win a majority in the Scottish Parliament.	Andy Murray becomes the first Scot to win Wimbledon men's singles title since 1896.	Scotland votes in a referendum on independence.

Books

Scottish writing is alive and well and so prolific that it can be difficult to keep up with it. This selection covers both classic and modern, and titles marked with ★ are particularly recommended.

FICTION

★ **Iain Banks** *The Bridge*, *The Crow Road*, *Espedair Street*, *A Song of Stone*, *The Wasp Factory*, *Dead Air*, *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*. Just a few titles by this astonishingly prolific author, who also wrote sci-fi as Iain M. Banks. His work can be funny, pacy, thought-provoking, imaginative and downright disgusting, but it is never dull. His final novel, *The Quarry*, was published posthumously in 2013.

Christopher Brookmyre *One Fine Day In the Middle of the Night*, *The Sacred Art of Stealing*, *A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil* and *Bedlam*. All very funny, inventive novels that refuse to be categorized – you'll probably find them in the crime section, but they're as much politico-satirical.

John Buchan *The Complete Richard Hannay*. This single volume includes *The 39 Steps, Greenmantle, Mr Standfast, The Three Hostages* and *The Island of Sheep*. Good gung-ho stories with a great feel for the Scottish landscape. Less well known, but better, are Buchan's historical romances such as *Midwinter*, a Jacobite thriller, and *Witchwood* (audio only), a tale of religious strife in the seventeenth century.

Anne Donovan *Hieroglyphics,* her first collection of short stories, and *Budda Da*, her hilarious first novel, were both nominated for major prizes, and rightly so. Her novel *Being Emily* is about growing up in Glasgow.

★ **Lewis Grassic Gibbon** *A Scots Quair*. A landmark trilogy set in northeast Scotland during and after World War I, the events seen through the eyes of Chris Guthrie, torn between her love for the land and her desire to escape a peasant culture.

Alasdair Gray *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*. A postmodern blend of social realism and labyrinthine fantasy. Gray's extraordinary debut as a novelist, featuring his own allegorical illustrations, takes invention and comprehension to their limits.

★ **Neil M. Gunn** *The Silver Darlings*. Probably Gunn's most representative and best-known book, evocatively set on the northeast coast and telling the story of herring fishermen during the great years of the industry.

James Hogg *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Complex, dark mid-nineteenth-century novel dealing with possession, myth and folklore, looking at the confession of an Edinburgh murderer from three different points of view.

Jackie Kay *Trumpet*. The protagonist is dead before the novel begins. He was a black Scottish jazz trumpeter, who left a wife in mourning and a son in deep shock, for the posthumous medical report revealed him to be a woman. Kay is also a poet. *Red Dust Road* is a warm and moving memoir of growing up black, gay and adopted in 1960s Glasgow.

James Kelman *Busconductor Hines*. The wildly funny story of a young Glasgow bus conductor with an intensely boring job and a limitless imagination. *How Late it Was, How Late* is Kelman's Booker Prize-winning and disturbing look at life as seen through the eyes of a foul-mouthed, blind Glaswegian drunk.

★ **A.L. Kennedy** *Looking for the Possible Dance*. This talented writer dissects the difficulties of human relationships on a personal and wider social level. More recent novels *So I Am Glad, Original Bliss* and *Paradise* have the same deft touch, as do her collections of short stories, *Indelible Acts* and *What Becomes*.

Alexander McCall Smith *44 Scotland Street* and *The Sunday Philosophy Club* series. Prolific author of feel-good novels set in middle-class Edinburgh: the *44 Scotland Street* series centres on the occupants of the address and *The Sunday Philosophy Club* novels are gentle detective yarns with a female amateur sleuth.

Naomi Mitchison *The Bull Calves* is set in 1747 and comments on the terrible after-effects of Jacobite rebellion. *Lobster on the Agenda*, written in 1952, closely mirrors contemporary life in Kyntyre where Mitchison lived.

★ **Ian Rankin** *The Hanging Garden*, *The Falls* and *Fleshmarket Close*. Superbly plotted dark stories featuring Rebus, the famous maverick police detective who haunts the bars of Edinburgh. Made into a TV series and the subject of a guided tour in the city. Rebus retired in *Exit Music*, but returned in *Standing in Another Man's Grave*.

Dorothy L. Sayers *Five Red Herrings*. A complicated tale involving railway timetables set in Gatehouse of Fleet in Galloway, but solved by Lord Peter Wimsey.

Sir Walter Scott *The Waverley Novels*. The books that did much to create the romanticized version of Scottish life and history.

Muriel Spark *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Wonderful evocation of middle-class Edinburgh life and aspirations.

Robert Louis Stevenson *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The*

Master of Ballantrae, *Weir of Hermiston*. Nineteenth-century tales of intrigue and adventure.

★ **Alan Warner** *Morvern Callar*. Bleakly humorous story of a supermarket shelf-packer from Oban who finds her boyfriend has committed suicide in her kitchen. It'll grip you. *The Sopranos* is the story of five teenage convent choir girls who go to Edinburgh for a competition, full of an explosive mixture of adolescent sexuality and naivety. Its sequel, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, sees them off on holiday. *The Dead Man's Pedal* is a teenage boy's rite of passage in small town Scotland in the 1970s.

★ **Irvine Welsh** *Irvine Welsh Omnibus*. A compendium including *Trainspotting*, *The Acid House* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, all of which can also be found as separate titles. Welsh trawls through the horrors of drug addiction, sexual fantasy, urban decay and hopeless youth but, thankfully, his unflinching attention is not without humour. His latest, *Skagboys*, is a prequel to *Trainspotting*.

POETRY

Robert Burns *Selected Poems*. Scotland's most famous bard (see p.165). Immensely popular all over the world, his best-known works are his earlier ones, including *Auld Lang Syne* and *My Love Is Like A Red, Red Rose*.

Douglas Dunn *New Selected Poems 1964–2000*. A writer of delicately wrought poetry, ranging from the intensely private to poems involved with Scottish issues.

Kathleen Jamie *The Queen of Sheba*, *Jizzen and The Tree House*. Although often set in Scotland, her work has a wider significance; its tone is strong, almost angry, and its themes both personal and universal. *Findings* is a prose journal of her travels around her native Scotland.

Jackie Kay *The Adoption Papers*, *Other Lovers* and *Life Mask*. Her poetry explores being black, Scottish and gay and deals with personal relationships in an accessibly intimate way. *Fiere* is the poetic counterpoint to her memoir *Red Dust Road*.

★ **Liz Lochhead** *Bagpipe Muzak*. In a strong straightforward style, coupled with shrewd observations, Lochhead speaks with immediacy on personal relationships. Some of her best work is in *The Colour of Black & White: Poems (1984–2003)*.

★ **Norman MacCaig** *Selected Poems*. Justly celebrated for its keen observation of the natural world, MacCaig's work remains intellectually challenging without being arid. His poetry, rooted in the Highlands, uses detail to explore a universal landscape.

Hugh MacDiarmid *Selected Poems*. Immensely influential, not least for his nationalist views and use of Scots, MacDiarmid's poetry is richly challenging. His poem *A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle* is acknowledged as a masterpiece of Scottish literature.

★ **George Mackay Brown** *Collected Poems*. Brown's work is as haunting, beautiful and gritty as the Orkney islands that inspire it. *Travellers*, published posthumously, features work either previously unpublished or which had appeared only in newspapers and periodicals.

Sorley Maclean (Somhairle Macgill-Eain) *From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems*. Written in Gaelic, his poems have been translated in bilingual editions all over the world, and deal with the sorrows of poverty, war and love.

McMillan and Byrne (eds) *Modern Scottish Women Poets*. The work of more than a hundred women writers of the twentieth century, some of whom have sunk into undeserved oblivion.

Edwin Morgan *New Selected Poems*. A love of words and their sounds is evident in Morgan's poems, which are refreshingly varied and often experimental, commenting on the Scottish scene with shrewdness and humour.

Edwin Muir *Collected Poems*. Muir's idyllic childhood on Orkney at the turn of the twentieth century remained with him as a dream of paradise in contrast to his later life in inhospitable Glasgow. His poems are passionately concerned with Scotland.

Don Paterson *God's Gift to Women*, *Landing Light* and *Nil Nil*. A writer whose work increasingly commands respect for its moving honesty.

Iain Crichton Smith *Collected Poems*. Born on the Isle of Lewis, Crichton Smith wrote with feeling and sometimes bitterness, in both Gaelic and English, of the life of the rural communities, the iniquities of the Free Church, the need to revive Gaelic culture and the glory of the Scottish landscape.

HISTORY, POLITICS AND CULTURE

★ **Neal Ascherson** *Stone Voices*. Intelligent, thought-provoking ponderings on the nature of Scotland and the road to devolution, interspersed with personal anecdotes.

Bella Bathurst *The Lighthouse Stevensons*. Straightforward account of the fascinating lives and amazing achievements of Robert Louis Stevenson's family, who built many of the island lighthouses round Scotland.

Colin Bell *Scotland's Century – An Autobiography of the Nation*. Richly illustrated and readable account of the social history of Scotland, based on radio interviews with people from all walks of life.

Tom Devine *The Scottish Nation 1700–2000*. The best post-Union history, from the last Scottish Parliament to the new one.

★ **David Howarth** *The Shetland Bus*. Wonderfully detailed story of the espionage and resistance operations carried out from Shetland by British and Norwegian servicemen, written by someone who was directly involved.

Fitzroy Maclean *Bonnie Prince Charlie*. Very readable and more or less definitive biography of Scotland's most romanticized historical figure, written by the "real" James Bond.

Alistair Moffat *Border Reivers*. A vivid account of nearly 300 years of savage raiding and mayhem which makes us look at the now peaceful area with different eyes.

T.C. Smout *A History of the Scottish People 1560–1830* and *A Century of the Scottish People 1830–1950*. Widely acclaimed books, of particular interest to those keen on social history. Smout combines enormous learning with a clear and entertaining style.

ART, ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC SITES

Jude Burkhauser *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880–1920*. The lively contribution of women to the development of the Glaswegian Art Nouveau movement is recognized in this authoritative account.

Alan Crawford *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*. Part of the World of Art series, describing the major contribution of Scotland's premier architect and designer.

Philip Long and Elizabeth Cumming *The Scottish Colourists 1900–30*. A recognition of the importance of the work of this group of artists; lavishly illustrated.

★ **Duncan MacMillan** *Scottish Art 1460–1990*. Overview of Scottish painting with good sections on landscape, portraiture and the Glasgow Boys. *Scottish Art in the 20th Century 1890–2001* offers a detailed look at modern art.

Steven Parissien *Adam Style*. A well-illustrated account of the birth of the Neoclassical style, named for the two Scottish Adam brothers, Robert and James.

MEMOIRS AND TRAVELOGUES

★ **Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus** *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*. Hugely readable recollections written with wit and perception at the turn of the eighteenth century, charting social changes in Edinburgh, London and Speyside.

Hamish Haswell-Smith *The Scottish Islands*. An exhaustive and impressive gazetteer with maps and absorbing information on all the Scottish islands. Filled with attractive sketches and paintings, the book is breathtaking in its thoroughness and lovingly gathered detail.

★ **Samuel Johnson and James Boswell** *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* and *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*. Lively accounts of a famous journey around the islands taken by the great lexicographer Dr Samuel Johnson and his biographer and friend James Boswell.

John Lister-Kaye *Song of the Rolling Earth*. The author tells what led him to become a passionate naturalist and turn a derelict Highland estate into a field study centre where he encourages others to live in harmony with the natural environment. An inspiring story.

George Mackay Brown *Letters from Hamnavoe*. A selection of writings from a weekly column in *The Orcadian*, chronicling everyday life in Orkney during the early 1970s. Gentle and perceptive.

Alasdair MacLean *Night Falls on Ardnamurchan*. A classic story of the life and death of the Highland community in which the author grew up.

Robert Louis Stevenson *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*. First published in 1879, this is a charming evocation of Stevenson's birthplace – its moods, curiosities and influences on his work.

Betsy Whyte *The Yellow on the Broom*. A fascinating glimpse of childhood in a traveller family between the wars, both on the road and in council housing for part of the year to comply with school attendance. *Red Rowans* and *Wild Honey* continue the story.

Language

Language is a thorny, complex and often highly political issue in Scotland. If you're not from Scotland yourself, you're most likely to be addressed in a variety of English, spoken in a Scottish accent. Even then, you're likely to hear phrases and words that are part of what is known as Scots, now officially recognized as a distinct language in its own right. To a lesser extent, Gaelic, too, remains a living language, particularly in the *Gàidhealtachd* or Gaelic-speaking areas of the northwest Highlands, Western Isles, parts of Skye and a few scattered Hebridean islands. In Orkney and Shetland, the local dialect of Scots contains many words carried over from Norn, the Old Norse language spoken in the Northern Isles from the time of the Vikings until the eighteenth century.

Scots

Scots began life as a northern branch of Anglo-Saxon, emerging as a distinct language in the Middle Ages. From the 1370s until the Union in 1707, it was the country's main literary and documentary language. Since the eighteenth century, however, it has been systematically repressed to give preference to English.

Rabbie Burns is the most obvious literary exponent of the Scots language, but there was a revival in the last century led by poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid. Only recently has Scots enjoyed something of a renaissance, getting itself on the Scottish school curriculum in 1996, and achieving official recognition as a distinct language in 1998. Despite these enormous political achievements, many people (rightly or wrongly) still regard Scots as a dialect of English. For more on the Scots language, visit sco.wikipedia.org.

Gaelic

Scottish **Gaelic** (*Gàidhlig*, pronounced like "garlic") is one of the only four Celtic languages to survive into the modern age (Welsh, Breton and Irish Gaelic are the other three). Manx, the old language of the Isle of Man, died out early last century, while Cornish was finished as a community language in the eighteenth century. Scottish Gaelic is most closely related to Irish Gaelic and Manx – hardly surprising since Gaelic was introduced to Scotland from Ireland around the third century BC. Some folk still argue that Scottish Gaelic is merely a dialect of its parent language, Irish Gaelic, and indeed the two languages remain more or less mutually intelligible. From the fifth to the twelfth centuries, Gaelic enjoyed an expansionist phase, thanks partly to the backing of the Celtic Church in Iona.

Since then Gaelic has been in steady decline. Even before Union with England, power, religious ideology and wealth gradually passed into non-Gaelic hands. The royal court was transferred to Edinburgh and an Anglo-Norman legal system was put in place. The Celtic Church was Romanized by the introduction of foreign clergy, and, most important of all, English and Flemish merchants colonized the new trading towns of the east coast. In addition, the pro-English attitudes held by the Covenanters led to strong anti-Gaelic feeling within the Church of Scotland from its inception.

The two abortive Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 furthered the language's decline, as did the Clearances that took place in the Gaelic-speaking Highlands from

the 1770s to the 1850s, which forced thousands to migrate to central Scotland's new industrial belt or emigrate to North America. Although efforts were made to halt the decline in the first half of the nineteenth century, the 1872 Education Act gave no official recognition to Gaelic, and children were severely punished if they were caught speaking the language in school.

The 2001 census put the number of Gaelic-speakers at under 60,000 (just over one percent of the population), the majority of whom live in the **Gàidhealtachd**, though there is thought to be an extended Gaelic community of perhaps 250,000 who have some understanding of the language. Since the 1980s, great efforts have been made to try and save the language, including the introduction of bilingual primary and nursery schools, and a huge increase in the amount of broadcasting time given to Gaelic-language and Gaelic music programmes, and the establishment of highly successful Gaelic colleges such as Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (ⓦsmo.uhi.ac.uk).

Gaelic grammar and pronunciation

Gaelic is a highly complex tongue, with a fiendish, antiquated **grammar** and, with only eighteen letters, an intimidating system of spelling. **Pronunciation** is easier than it appears at first glance; one general rule to remember is that the stress always falls on the first syllable of a word. The general rule of syntax is that the verb starts the sentence whether it's a question or not, followed by the subject and then the object; adjectives generally follow the word they are describing.

SHORT AND LONG VOWELS

Gaelic has both short and long vowels, the latter being denoted by an acute or grave accent.

a as in c**a**t; before nn and ll, as in cow
à as in b**ar**
e as in p**e**t
é like r**ai**n
i as in s**i**ght
í like fr**ee**
o as in p**o**t
ò like enthr**al**
ó like c**ow**
u like sc**oo**t
ù like l**oo**

VOWEL COMBINATIONS

Gaelic is littered with diphthongs, which, rather like in English, can be pronounced in several different ways depending on the individual word.

ai like c**a**t, or p**e**t; before dh or gh, like str**ee**t
ao like the sound in the middle of colonel
ea like p**e**t, or c**a**t, and sometimes like m**a**te; before ll or nn like c**ow**
èa as in h**ear**
ei like m**a**te
eu like tr**ai**n, or f**ear**
ia like f**ear**
io like f**ear**, or shorter than street
ua like w**oo**er

CONSONANTS

The consonants listed below are those that differ substantially from the English.

b at the beginning of a word like the **b** in big; in the middle/end of a word like the **p** in pair
bh at the beginning of a word like the **v** in van; elsewhere it is silent
c as in cat; after a vowel it has aspiration before it
ch always as in loch, never as in church
cn like the **cr** in crowd
d like the **d** in dog, but with the tongue pressed against the back of the upper teeth; at the beginning of a word or before e or i, like the **j** in jam; in the middle or at the end of a word like the **t** in cat; after i like the **ch** in church
dh before and after a, o or u is an aspirated **g**, rather like a gargle; before e or i like the **y** in yes; elsewhere silent
fh usually silent; sometimes like the **h** in house
g at the beginning of a word as in get; before e like the **y** in yes; in the middle or end of a word like the **ck** in sock; after i like the **ch** in loch

gh at the beginning of a word as in get; before or after a, o or u rather like a gargle; after i sometimes like the **y** in gay, but often silent
l after i and sometimes before e like the **l** in lot; elsewhere a peculiarly Gaelic sound produced by flattening the front of the tongue against the palate
mh like the **v** in van
p at the beginning of a word as in pet; elsewhere it has aspiration before it
rt pronounced as **sht**
s before e or i like the **sh** in ship; otherwise as in English
sh before a, o or u like the **h** in house; before e like the **ch** in loch
t before e or i like the **ch** in church; in the middle or at the end of a word it has - aspiration before it; otherwise as in English
th at the beginning of a word, like the **h** in house; elsewhere, and in the word *thu* (you), silent

GAELIC PHRASES, VOCABULARY AND COURSES

One of the best introductory **teach-yourself Gaelic** courses is *Speaking Our Language* by Richard Cox, based on the TV series, much of which you can watch on YouTube. If you just want to get better at pronouncing Gaelic words, try *Blas na Gàidhlig* by Michael Bauer, or for a phrasebook, your best bet is *Everyday Gaelic* by Morag MacNeill. You can also do some self-learning on the Gaelic section of the BBC website Ⓦ bbc.co.uk.

GREETINGS AND BASIC WORDS

yes	tha
no	chan eil
hello	hallo
how are you?	ciamar a tha thu?
fine	tha gu math
thank you	tapadh leat
welcome	fàilte
come in	thig a-staigh
good day	latha math
goodbye	mar sin leat
goodnight	oidhche mhath
cheers	slàinte
yesterday	an-dé
today	an-diugh
tomorrow	maireach
hotel	taigh-òsda
house	taigh
story	sgeul
song	òran
music	ceòl
book	leabhar
bread	aran
water	uisge
whisky	uisge beatha
post office	post oifis
Edinburgh	Dun Eideann
Glasgow	Glaschu
America	Ameireaga
Ireland	Eire
England	Sasainn
London	Lunnain

GAELIC GEOGRAPHICAL AND PLACE-NAME TERMS

The purpose of this list is to help with place-name derivations from Gaelic and with more detailed map reading.

abhainn	river
ach or auch, from achadh	field
ail, aileach	rock
Alba	Scotland
aonach	ridge
ard, ardan or arden, from àird	a point of land or height
aros	dwelling
ault, from allt	stream
bad	brake or clump of trees
bagh	bay
bal or bally, from baile	town, village
balloch, from bealach	mountain pass
ban	white, fair
bàrr	summit
beg, from beag	small
ben, from beinn	mountain
blair, from blàr	field or battlefield
cairn, from càrn	pile of stones
camas	bay, harbour
cnoc	hill
coll or colly, from coille	wood or forest
corran	a spit or point jutting into the sea
corrie, from coire	round hollow in mountainside, whirlpool
craig, from creag	rock, crag
cruach	bold hill
drum, from druim	ridge
dubh	black
dun or dum, from dùn	fort
eilean	island
ess, from eas	waterfall
fin, from fionn	white
gair or gare, from geàrr	short
garv, from garbh	rough

geodha	cove
glen, from gleann	valley
gower or gour, from gabhar	goat
inch, from innis	meadow or island
inver, from inbhir	river mouth
ken or kin, from ceann	head
knock, from cnoc	hill
kyle, from caolas	narrow strait
lag	hollow
larach	site of an old ruin
liath	grey
loch	lake
meall	round hill
mon, from monadh	hill
more, from mór	large, great
rannoch, from raineach	bracken
ross, from ros	promontory
rubha	promontory
sgeir	sea rock
sgurr	sharp point
sron	nose, prow or promontory
strath, from srath	broad valley
tarbet, from tairbeart	isthmus
tigh	house
tir or tyre, from tìr	land
torr	hill, castle
tràigh	shore
uig	shelter
uisge	water

Norn and Norse terms

Between the tenth and seventeenth centuries, the chief language of Orkney and Shetland was Norn, a Scandinavian tongue close to modern Faroese and Icelandic. After the end of Norse rule, and with the transformation of the Church, the law, commerce and education, Norn gradually lost out to Scots and English, eventually petering out completely in the eighteenth century. Today, Orkney and Shetland have their own **dialects**, and individual islands and communities within each group have local variations. The dialects have a Scots base, with some Old Norse words; however, they don't sound strongly Scottish, with the Orkney accent – which has been likened to the Welsh one – especially distinctive. Listed below are some of the words you're most likely to hear, plus some terms that appear in place names, not just in Orkney and Shetland, but also in parts of the Hebrides.

NORN PHRASES AND VOCABULARY

ayre	beach
bister	farm
böd	fisherman's store
bruck	rubbish
burra	heath rush
crö	sheepfold
eela	rod-fishing from small boats
ferrylouper	incomer (Orkney)
fourareen	four-oared boat
foy	party or festival
geo	coastal inlet
haa	laird's house
hap	hand-knitted shawl
howe	mound
kame	ridge of hills
kishie	basket
mool	headland
moorit	brown
mootie	tiny
muckle	large
noost	hollow place where a boat is drawn up
noup	steep headland
peerie/peedie	small
plantiecrub (or plantiecrö)	small dry-stone enclosure for growing cabbages
quoy	enclosed, cultivated common land
roost	tide race
scattald	common grazing land
scord	gap or pass in a ridge of hills
setter	farm
shaela	dark grey
sixern/sixareen	six-oared boat
soothmoother	incomer (Shetland)
voe	sea inlet

Glossary

Auld Old
Bairn Baby
Ben Hill or mountain
Blackhouse Thick-walled traditional dwelling
Bonnie Pretty
Bothy Primitive cottage, hut or mountain shelter
Brae Slope or hill
Brig Bridge
Broch Circular prehistoric stone fort
Burn Small stream or brook
Byre Shelter for cattle; cottage
Cairn Mound of stones
CalMac Caledonian MacBrayne ferry company
Ceilidh (pronounced "kay-lee") Social gathering involving dancing, drinking, singing and storytelling
Central belt Central Scotland between the Forth and Clyde including Edinburgh and Glasgow
Clan Extended family
Clearances Evictions from the Highlands (see p.589)
Corbett A mountain between 2500ft and 3000ft high
Covenanters Supporters of the Presbyterian Church in the seventeenth century
Crannog Celtic lake or bog dwelling
Croft Small plot of farmland with house, common in the Highlands
Dirk A long dagger
Dolmen Grave chamber
Dram Literally, one-sixteenth of a fluid ounce. Usually refers to any small measure of whisky
Dun Fortified mound
Firth A wide sea inlet or estuary
Gàidhealtachd Gaeldom, Highlands or Gaelic-speaking area
Gillie Personal guide used on hunting or fishing trips
Glen Deep, narrow mountain valley
Harling Limestone and gravel mix used to cover buildings
Hogmanay New Year's Eve
Howff Meeting place; pub
HS Historic Scotland, a government-funded heritage organization
Jacobite Supporter of the Stewart claim to the throne, most famously Bonnie Prince Charlie
Kilt Knee-length tartan skirt worn by Highland men
Kirk Church
Laird Landowner; aristocrat
Law Rounded hill
Links Grassy coastal land; coastal golf course
Loch Lake
Lochan Little loch
Mac/Mc These prefixes in Scottish surnames derive from the Gaelic, meaning "son of". In Scots "Mac" is used for both sexes. In Gaelic "Nic" is used for women: Donnchadh Mac Aoidh is Duncan MacKay, Iseabail Nic Aoidh is Isabel MacKay
Machair Sandy, grassy, lime-rich coastal land, generally used for grazing
Manse Official home of a Presbyterian minister
Mercat Cross lit. Market Cross
Munro A mountain over 3000ft high
Munro-bagging The sport of trying to climb as many Munros as possible
NTS The National Trust for Scotland, a heritage organization
Peel Fortified tower, built to withstand Border raids
Pend Archway or vaulted passage
Presbyterian The form of Church government used in the official (Protestant) Church of Scotland, established by John Knox during the Reformation
RIB Rigid inflatable boat
Runrig A common form of farming in which separate ridges are cultivated by different occupiers under joint agreement
Sassenach Derives from the Gaelic *Sasunnach*, meaning literally "Saxon"; used by Scots to describe the English
Scottish Baronial Style of architecture favoured by the Scottish land-owning class featuring stepped gables and round turrets
Sheila na gig Female fertility symbol, usually a naked woman displaying her vulva
Shinty Stick and ball game played in the Highlands, with similarities to hockey
Smiddy Smithy
SNH Scottish Natural Heritage, a government-funded conservation body
SNP Scottish National Party
Sporran Leather purse worn in front of, or at the side of, a kilt
Tartan Check-patterned woollen cloth
Thane A landowner of high rank; the chief of a clan
Trews Tartan trousers
Wee Small
Wee Frees Followers of the Free Presbyterian or Free Church of Scotland
Wynd Narrow lane
Yett Gate or door

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A ROUGH GUIDE TO ROUGH GUIDES

Published in 1982, the first Rough Guide – to Greece – was a student scheme that became a publishing phenomenon. Mark Ellingham, a recent graduate in English from Bristol University, had been travelling in Greece the previous summer and couldn't find the right guidebook. With a small group of friends he wrote his own guide, combining a highly contemporary, journalistic style with a thoroughly practical approach to travellers' needs.

The immediate success of the book spawned a series that rapidly covered dozens of destinations. And, in addition to impecunious backpackers, Rough Guides soon acquired a much broader readership that relished the guides' wit and inquisitiveness as much as their enthusiastic, critical approach and value-for-money ethos.

These days, Rough Guides include recommendations from budget to luxury and cover more than 120 destinations around the globe, as well as producing an ever-growing range of eBooks.

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Help us update

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that the tenth edition of **The Rough Guide to Scotland** is accurate and up-to-date. However, things change – places get "discovered", opening hours are notoriously fickle, restaurants and rooms raise prices or lower standards. If you feel we've got it wrong or left something out, we'd like to know, and if you can remember the address, the price, the hours, the phone number, so much the better.

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Map symbols

The symbols below are used on maps throughout the book

- International airport
- Domestic airport
- Parking
- Point of interest
- Ruins/archeological site
- Stately home
- Castle
- Museum
- Gardens
- Battlefield
- Campsite
- Tourist office
- Post office
- Whisky distillery
- Skiing
- Golf course
- Swimming Pool
- Bridge
- Peak
- Viewpoint
- Rocks
- Lighthouse
- Waterfall
- Cave
- Cairn(s)
- Hill shading
- Observatory
- Wall
- Cable car
- Ferry route
- Abbey
- Monastery
- Chapel
- Building
- Church
- Cemetery
- Park
- Forest
- Beach
- Pedestrianized area

Listings key

- Accommodation
- Restaurant/café/pub
- Bar/club/music venue
- Shop

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