

The Best of Australia

by Marc Llewellyn & Lee Mylne

Maybe we're biased because we live here, but Australia has a lot of bests—world bests, that is. It has some of the best natural scenery, the weirdest wildlife, the most brilliant scuba diving and snorkeling, the best beaches (shut up, California), the oldest rainforest (110 million years and counting), the oldest human civilization (some archaeologists say 40,000 years, some say 120,000; whatever—it's old), the best wines (come see what we mean), the best weather (give or take the odd Wet season in the north), the most innovative East-meets-West-meets-someplace-else cuisine—all bathed in sunlight that brings everything up in Technicolor.

“Best” means different things to different people, but scarcely a visitor lands on these shores without having the Great Barrier Reef at the top of the “Things to See” list. So they should, because it really is a glorious natural masterpiece. Also high on most folks' lists is Ayers Rock. This monolith must have some kind of magnet inside it designed to attract planeloads of tourists. We're not saying the Rock isn't special, but we think the vast Australian desert all around it is even more so. The third attraction on most visitors' lists is Sydney, the Emerald City that glitters in the antipodean sunshine on—here we go with the “bests” again—the best harbor, spanned by the best bridge in the world (yes it is, San Francisco).

But as planes zoom overhead delivering visitors to the big three attractions, Aussies in charming country towns, on far-flung beaches, on rustic sheep stations, in rainforest villages, and in mountain lodges shake their heads and say sadly, “They don't know what they're missin'.” Well, that's the aim of this chapter—to show you what you're missin'. Read on, and consider taking the road less traveled.

1 The Top Travel Experiences

- **Hitting the Rails on the *Indian Pacific Train*:** This 3-day journey across the Outback regularly makes it onto travel magazines' “Top Rail Journeys in the World” lists. The desert scenery ain't all that magnificent—it's the unspoiled, empty vastness that passengers appreciate. Start in Sydney and end in Perth, or vice versa, or just do a section. Alternatively, you could take the *Ghan*, for a multiday trip from Adelaide in the south all the way up to Darwin in the north. See “Getting Around Australia” in chapter 2.
- **Experiencing Sydney (NSW):** Sydney is more than just the magnificent Harbour Bridge and Opera House. No other city has beaches in such abundance, and few have such a magnificently scenic harbor. Our advice is to board a ferry, walk from one side of the bridge to the other, and try to spend a week here because you're going to need it. See chapter 4, “Sydney.”

Tips A Note on Abbreviations

In the listings below, NSW stands for New South Wales, QLD for Queensland, NT for the Northern Territory, WA for Western Australia, SA for South Australia, VIC for Victoria, TAS for Tasmania, and ACT for the Australian Capital Territory.

- **Discovering the Great Barrier Reef (QLD):** It is hard to believe God would create such a glorious underwater fairyland, a 2,000km (1,250-mile) coral garden with electric colors and bizarre fish life, *and* have the grace to stick it all somewhere with warm water and year-round sunshine. This is what you came to Australia to see. See chapter 7.
- **Exploring the Wet Tropics (QLD):** City folk can't get over the moisture-dripping ferns, the neon blue butterflies, or the primeval peace of this World Heritage patch of rainforest stretching north, south, and west from Cairns. Hike it, 4WD it, or glide over the treetops in the Skyrail gondola from Cairns. See chapter 7.
- **Bareboat Sailing in the Whitsundays (QLD):** Bareboat means unskipped—that's right, even if you think port is just an after-dinner drink, you can charter a yacht, pay for a day's instruction from a skipper, then take over the helm and explore these 74 island gems. Anchor in deserted bays, snorkel over reefs, fish for coral trout from the deck, and feel the wind in your sails. See p. 319.
- **Exploring Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) & Uluru (Ayers Rock) (NT):** Just why everyone comes thousands of miles to see the big red stone of Ayers Rock is a mystery, and that's probably why they come—because the Rock is a mystery. Just 50km (31 miles) from Ayers Rock are the round red heads of the Olgas, a second rock formation more significant to Aborigines and more intriguing to many visitors. See “Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas)” in chapter 8.
- **Taking an Aboriginal Culture Tour (Alice Springs, NT):** Eating female wasps, contemplating a hill as a giant resting caterpillar, and imagining that the stars are your grandmother smiling down at you will give you a new perspective on Aboriginal culture. See what we mean on a half-day tour from the Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre. See p. 387.
- **Exploring Kakadu National Park (NT):** Australia's biggest national park is a wild wonderland of lily-clad wetlands, looming red escarpment, Aboriginal rock art, fern-fringed waterholes, countless birds, big barramundi (that's a fish), and menacing crocs. Cruise it, hike it, 4WD it, fish it. See “Kakadu National Park” in chapter 9.
- **Cruising the Kimberley (WA):** Australia's last frontier, the Kimberley is a cocktail of giant South Sea pearls, red soil, crocodiles, Aboriginal rock art called *Wandjina*, and million-acre farms in a never-ending wilderness. Cross it by 4WD on the Gibb River Road, stay at a cattle station (ranch), base yourself on the beach in Broome, or cruise its dramatic red coastline. See chapter 10.
- **Rolling in Wildflowers (WA):** Imagine Texas three times over and covered in wildflowers. That's what the state of Western Australia looks like every spring from August to mid-November when pink, mauve, red, white, yellow, and blue wildflowers bloom their hearts out. See chapter 10.

- **Drinking in the Barossa Valley (SA):** One of Australia's four largest wine-producing areas, this German-speaking region less than an hour's drive from Adelaide is also the prettiest. Adelaide's restaurants happen to be some of the country's best, too, so test out your wine purchases with the city's terrific food. See "Side Trips from Adelaide" in chapter 11.
- **Getting Dusty in the Desert (SA):** Head inland from Adelaide to the Outback to visit remote pubs and settlements, the craggy ridges of the Flinders Ranges, dry salt lakes, and

deserts. See "Outback South Australia" in chapter 11.

- **Seeing the Sights Along the Great Ocean Road (VIC):** This 106km (66-mile) coastal road carries you past wild and stunning beaches, forests, and dramatic cliff-top scenery—including the Twelve Apostles, a dozen pillars of red rock standing in isolation in the foaming Southern Ocean. (Actually there are now just eleven apostles as one collapsed in July 2005.) See "The Great Ocean Road: One of the World's Most Scenic Drives" in chapter 13.

2 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Horse Trekking in the Snowy Mountains (NSW):** Ride the ranges like the man from Snowy River, staying in bush lodges or camping beneath the stars. See "In the Footsteps of the Man from Snowy River," p. 216, in chapter 5.
- **Abseiling (Rappelling) in the Blue Mountains (NSW):** Careering backward down a cliff face with the smell of eucalyptus in your nostrils is not everyone's idea of fun, but you sure know you're alive. Several operators welcome both novices and the more experienced. See "The Blue Mountains" in chapter 5.
- **White-Water Rafting on the Tully River (Mission Beach, QLD):** The Class III to IV rapids of the Tully River swoosh between lush, rain-forested banks. The guides are professional, the scenery is pretty, and the rapids are just hair-raising enough to be fun. See p. 292.
- **Canoeing the Top End (NT):** Paddling down the sun-drenched ocher walls of Katherine Gorge sharpens the senses, especially when a freshwater crocodile pops its head up! Head downriver with Gecko Canoeing to meet Aboriginal communities, shower

under waterfalls, and camp in swags along the riverbanks. See "Exploring Katherine Gorge (Nitmiluk National Park)" on p. 426.

- **Surfing in Margaret River (WA):** A surfing lesson with four-time Western Australia champ Josh Palmateer is a great introduction to the sport—if only to hear Josh's ripper of an Aussie accent! From July to September, Josh shifts his classes to Cable Beach in Broome. See p. 468.
- **Sea Kayaking with Sea Lions (WA):** Snorkel with sea lions and watch penguins feeding on a sea-kayaking day trip from Perth with Rivergods. They also run multiday sea-kayak expeditions past whales, dolphins, and sharks in Shark Bay, and over the brilliant coral of Ningaloo Reef on the Northwest Cape in Western Australia. See p. 452.
- **Skiing in the Victorian Alps (VIC):** Skiing in Australia? Sure. When you've had enough coral and sand, you can hit the slopes in Victoria. Where else can you swish down the mountain between gum trees—apart from more ski slopes in New South Wales that is? See "The High Country" in chapter 13.

3 The Best Places to View Wildlife

- **Jervis Bay** (NSW): This is probably the closest place to Sydney where you're certain to see kangaroos in the wild—and where you can pet them, too. The national park here is home to hundreds of bird species, including black cockatoos, as well as plenty of possums. See “South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway” in chapter 5.
- **Pebbly Beach** (NSW): The eastern gray kangaroos that inhabit Murramarang National Park, 20 minutes south of Ulladulla on the south coast of New South Wales, tend to congregate along this beach and the adjoining dunes. See “South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway” in chapter 5.
- **Montague Island** (Narooma, NSW): This little island just offshore from the seaside town of Narooma, on the south coast, is a haven for nesting seabirds, but the water around it is home to the main attractions. Dolphins are common; fairy penguins, too. In whale-watching season, you're sure to spot southern right and humpback whales. See “South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway” in chapter 5.
- **Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary** (Brisbane, QLD): Cuddle a koala (and have your photo taken doing it) at this Brisbane park, the world's first and largest koala sanctuary. Lots of other Aussie wildlife—including lizards, frogs, 'roos, wallabies (which you can hand-feed), and colorful parakeets—are on show. See p. 240.
- **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** (Kuranda, near Cairns, QLD): Walk through the biggest butterfly “aviary” in Australia and see some of Australia's most gorgeous butterflies, including the electric-blue Ulysses. See many species of butterfly feed, lay eggs, and mate, and inspect caterpillars and pupae. Wearing pink, red, or white encourages the butterflies to land on you. See p. 290.
- **Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks** (Cairns, QLD): Head into the Wet Tropics behind Cairns or Port Douglas with eco-tour operator Wait-a-while Rainforest Tours to spotlight big-eyed possums, lizards, pythons, the bizarre bats—even platypuses, which are so shy that 95% of Aussies have never seen one in the wild. About once a month on average, one lucky group will spot the rare and bizarre Lumholtz's tree kangaroo. See p. 300.
- **Heron Island** (off Gladstone, QLD): There's wonderful wildlife on this “jewel in the reef” any time of year, but the best time to visit is November to March, when the life cycle of giant green loggerhead and hawksbill turtles is in full swing. From November to January, the turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. From late January to March, the hatchlings emerge and head for the water. You can see it all by just strolling down to the beach, or you can join a university researcher to get the full story. See p. 335.
- **Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary** (The Gold Coast, QLD): Tens of thousands of unbelievably pretty red, blue, green, and yellow rainbow lorikeets have been screeching into this park for generations to be hand-fed by visitors every morning and afternoon. There are 'roos, wombats, crocodiles, and other Australian animals at the sanctuary, too, but the birds steal the show. See p. 360.
- **Lamington National Park** (The Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD): Every day, brilliant black-and-gold Regent bowerbirds, satin bowerbirds, crimson-and-cobalt rosellas, and

loads of other wild birds feed right out of your hand at O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse, located in this mountainous national park a 90-minute drive inland from the Gold Coast. Hike the trails and soak up the cool mountain air while you're here. See "The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature" in chapter 7.

- **Monkey Mia** (WA): There are several places you can see, hand-feed, or swim with wild dolphins Down Under. If you want an almost guaranteed dolphin sighting, head to Monkey Mia on the lonely Outback coast, where the animals cruise past your legs. Even better is a cruise on the *Shotover* catamaran to see some of the area's 10,000 dugongs, plus turtles, sea snakes, sharks—and more. See "The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea" in chapter 10.
- **Kakadu National Park** (NT): One-third of Australia's bird species live in Kakadu; so do dingoes, snakes, frogs, and lots of dangerous saltwater crocs.

A cruise on the Yellow Waters billabong is like a wetlands theme park. It is at its best later in the Dry season around September and October, when wildlife converges around this shrinking water source. See p. 416.

- **Northwest Cape** (WA): Go snorkeling with a whale shark. No one knows where they come from, but these mysterious monsters up to 18m (60 ft.) long surface in these remote waters every March to mid-June. Snorkelers can swim alongside the sharks as they feed (on plankton, not snorkelers). See p. 478.
- **Kangaroo Island** (SA): You're sure to see more native animals here—including koalas, wallabies, birds, echidnas, reptiles, seals, and sea lions—than anywhere else in the country, apart from a wildlife park. Another plus: The distances between major points of interest are not great, so you won't spend half the day just getting from place to place. See "Kangaroo Island" in chapter 11.

4 The Best Places to Experience the Outback

- **Broken Hill** (NSW): There's no better place to experience real Outback life than in Broken Hill. There's the city itself, with its thriving art scene and the Royal Flying Doctor service; a historic ghost town on its outskirts; a national park with Aboriginal wall paintings; an opal mining town nearby; and plenty of kangaroos, emus, and giant wedge-tailed eagles. See "Outback New South Wales" in chapter 5.
- **Lightning Ridge** (NSW): This opal-mining town is as rough and ready as the stones the miners pull out of the ground. Meet amazing characters, share in the eccentricity of the place, and visit opal-rush areas with molehill scenery made by the old sun-bleached

mine tailings. See "Outback New South Wales" in chapter 5.

- **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park** (Ayers Rock, NT): Sure, Ayers Rock will enthrall you with its eerie beauty, but the nearby Olgas are more soothing, more interesting, and taller than the Rock, so make the time to wander through them, too. Hike the Rock's base, burn around it on a Harley-Davidson, saunter up to it on a camel, climb it if you must. Don't go home until you've felt the powerful heartbeat of the desert. See "Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas)" in chapter 8.
- **The MacDonnell Ranges** (NT): The Aborigines say these red rocky hills were formed by the Aboriginal

“Caterpillar Dreaming” that wriggled from the earth here. To the west of Alice Springs are dramatic gorges, idyllic (and bloody cold) water holes, and cute wallabies. To the east are Aboriginal rock carvings. See “Road Trips from Alice Springs” in chapter 8.

- **Kings Canyon (NT):** Anyone who saw the cult flick *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* will remember the scene in which the transvestites climb a soaring orange cliff and survey the desert floor. That was Kings Canyon, about 320km (198 miles) from Alice Springs in one

direction, with Ayers Rock in the other. Trek the dramatic rim or take the easier shady route along the bottom. Don't forget your lipstick, guys. See “Kings Canyon” in chapter 8.

- **Coober Pedy (SA):** It may be hot and dusty, but you'll get a true taste of the Outback when you tag along with the local mail carrier as he makes his rounds to the area's remote cattle stations (ranches). It's a 12-hour, 600km (372-mile) journey along sun-baked dirt roads. See “Outback South Australia” in chapter 11.

5 The Best Beaches

- **Palm Beach (Sydney):** At the end of a string of beaches stretching north from Sydney, Palm Beach is long and white, with good surfing and a golf course. See chapter 4, “Sydney.”
- **Hyams Beach (Jervis Bay, NSW):** This beach in off-the-beaten-path Jervis Bay is said to be the whitest in the world. You need to wear sunblock if you decide to stroll along it because the reflection from the sun, even on a cloudy day, can give you a nasty sunburn. The beach squeaks as you walk. See “South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway” in chapter 5.
- **Four Mile Beach (Port Douglas, QLD):** The sea is turquoise, the sun is warm, the palms sway, and the low-rise hotels starting to line this country beach can't spoil the feeling that it is a million miles from anywhere. But isn't there always a serpent in paradise? The “serpent” in this case is north Queensland's seasonal—and potentially deadly—marine stingers. Come from June to September to avoid them, or swim in the stinger net. See “Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area” in chapter 7.
- **Mission Beach (QLD):** Azure blue sea, islands dotting the horizon, and

lush white sand edged by dense tangled vine forests make this beach a real winner. So does the fact that hardly anyone ever comes here. Cassowaries (giant emulike birds) hide out in the rainforest, and the tiny town of Mission Beach politely makes itself invisible behind the leaves. Visit from June to September to avoid deadly marine stingers. See “The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands” in chapter 7.

- **Whitehaven Beach (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD):** It's not a surf beach, but this 6km (¾-mile) stretch of silica sand on Whitsunday Island is pristine, peaceful, and as white as snow. Bring a book, curl up under the rainforest lining its edge, and fantasize that the cruise boat is going to leave without you. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 7.
- **Main Beach, Noosa (Sunshine Coast, QLD):** The trendy shops of Hastings Street line the white sand and gently rolling surf of this pretty beach. Dust off your designer swimsuit for this one. When you get tired of the scene, you can hike the green walking trails of nearby Noosa

National Park. See “The Sunshine Coast” in chapter 7.

- **Surfers Paradise** (Gold Coast, QLD): All the beaches on the 30km (19-mile) Gold Coast strip in south Queensland are worthy of inclusion. Every one of them has clean sand, great surf, and fresh breezes. Just ignore the tacky high-rises behind you. Surfers will like Kirra and Burleigh Heads. See “The Gold Coast” in chapter 7.

- **Cable Beach** (Broome, WA): Is it the South Sea pearls they pull out of the Indian Ocean, the camels loping along the sand at sunset, the surf, or the red earth that comes down to meet the green water that gives this beach its exotic appeal? Maybe it's the 22km (14 miles) of glorious white sand. June to September is the only time to swim here because of deadly marine stingers. See “The Kimberley: A Far-Flung Wilderness” in chapter 10.

6 The Best Affordable Diving & Snorkeling Sites

- **Yongala wreck** (Off Townsville, QLD): Sunk by a cyclone in 1911, the 120m (394-ft.) SS *Yongala* lies in the Coral Sea off Townsville. Big schools of *trevally*, kingfish, barracuda, and batfish surround the wreckage; giant Queensland grouper live under the bow, lionfish hide under the stern, turtles graze on the hull, and hard and soft corals make their home on her. Extended live-aboard dive trips run from Townsville and Cairns. See p. 272.
- **Green Island** (QLD): This island is made of coral, so you'd expect the snorkeling to be good. Plunge off the beach just about anywhere around the island and marvel at the scenes before you. Come over for the day from Cairns or stay at the island's upscale resort. Scuba divers will like it here, too. See p. 288.
- **Port Douglas** (QLD): Many fabulous dive sites can be found off the shores of Port Douglas, north of Cairns, including Split-Bommie, with its delicate fan corals and schools of colorful fusiliers; Barracuda Pass, with its coral gardens and giant clams; the swim-through coral spires of the Cathedrals; and numerous ribbon reefs renowned for their variety of coral and fish life. See p. 294.
- **Cairns** (QLD): In addition to Green Island (see above), Moore, Norman, Hardy, Saxon, and Arlington reefs and Michaelmas and Upolu cays—all about 90 minutes off Cairns—offer great snorkeling and endless dive sites. Explore on a day trip from Cairns or on a 3-day sailing adventure. See p. 274.
- **The Whitsunday Islands** (QLD): These 74 breathtaking islands offer countless dive sites among the islands themselves and on the Outer Great Barrier Reef 90 minutes away. Bait Reef on the Outer Reef is popular for its cascading drop-offs. The underwater life is as varied and stunning here as anywhere else along the Great Barrier Reef, and when you're not diving or snorkeling, the above-the-water landscape is a beautiful playground. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 7.
- **Rottneest Island** (WA): Just 19km (12 miles) off Perth, excellent snorkeling and more than 100 dive sites await you in the sheltered bays of this former prison island. Wrecks, limestone overhangs, and myriad fish will keep you entertained. There are no cars on the island, so rent a bike and snorkel gear, grab a map of snorkel trails, and find your own private coral

garden. See “Side Trips from Perth” in chapter 10.

- **Ningaloo Reef** (WA): A stunningly well-kept secret is how we’d describe Australia’s second great barrier reef stretching some 260km (163 miles) along the Northwest Cape halfway up Western Australia. Dazzling coral starts right on shore, not 90 minutes

out to sea like at the Great Barrier Reef. You can snorkel or dive with manta rays and dive to see sharks, angelfish, turtles, eels, grouper, potato cod, and much more. See “The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea” in chapter 10.

7 The Best Places to Bushwalk (Hike)

- **Blue Mountains** (NSW): Many bushwalks in the Blue Mountains National Park offer awesome views of valleys, waterfalls, cliffs, and forest. All are easy to reach from Sydney. See “The Blue Mountains” in chapter 5.
- **Whitsunday Islands** (QLD): Most people think of snorkeling and water sports when they come to these 74 tropical islands clad in dense rainforest and bush, but every resort island we recommend in chapter 7 also has hiking trails. Some are flat, some are hilly. Wallabies and butterflies are common sights en route. South Molle has the best network of trails and 360-degree island views from its peak. The Whitsundays Great Walk—one of six Great Walks of Queensland—covers 36km (22 miles) in Conway State Forest and Conway National Park, behind Airlie Beach. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 7.
- **Lamington National Park** (Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD): Few other national parks in Australia have such a well-marked network of trails as this one—160km (100 miles) of them, all up. Revel in dense subtropical rainforest, marvel at mossy 2,000-year-old Antarctic beech trees, watch for blue and white Lamington Spiny Crayfish in the streams, and soak up the cool mountain air 900m (3,000 ft.) above sea level. See p. 363.
- **Larapinta Trail** (The Red Centre, NT): You can start from Alice Springs and walk the entire 250km (155-mile) semidesert trail, which winds through the stark crimson MacDonnell Ranges. You don’t have to walk the entire length—plenty of day-length and multiday sections are possible. This one’s for the cooler months only (Apr–Oct). See “Alice Springs” in chapter 8.
- **Kakadu National Park** (NT): Whether you want a pleasant wetlands stroll or a tough overnight hike, you can find it in this World Heritage-listed park. Hike past red cliffs, cycads straight from a dinosaur movie set, lily-filled lagoons hiding human-eating crocodiles, and what looks like Australia’s entire bird population. There’s some good Aboriginal rock art here, too. See “Kakadu National Park” in chapter 9.
- **Cape-to-Cape** (WA): Rugged sea cliffs, china blue sea, eucalyptus forest, white beaches, and coastal heath are what you will experience hiking between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin, in the southwest corner of Western Australia. Walk a short section or tackle the whole 6-day extravaganza. In season you will see whales and wildflowers. See p. 463.
- **Freycinet National Park** (TAS): The trek to Wine Glass Bay passes pink granite outcrops, with views over an

ocean sliced by a crescent of icy sand. It's prehistorically beautiful. See "Freycinet National Park" in chapter 15.

- **Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair National Park** (TAS): The 80km (50-mile) Overland Track is the best hike in Australia. The trek,

from Lake St. Clair to Cradle Mountain, takes 5 to 10 days, depending on your fitness level. Shorter walks, some lasting just half an hour, are also accessible. See "Cradle Mountain & Lake St. Clair National Park" in chapter 15.

8 The Best Places to Learn About Aboriginal Culture

- **The Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Wallaga Lake, near Narooma, NSW): This center offers boomerang- and spear-throwing instruction, painting with natural ochers, discussions on Aboriginal culture, and guided walking tours of Aboriginal sacred sites. See p. 213.
- **Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park** (Cairns, QLD): This multimillion-dollar center showcases the history of the local Tjapukai people—their Dreamtime creation history and their often harrowing experiences since the white man arrived—using a film, a superb theatrical work, and a dance performance. Its Aboriginal arts and crafts gift shop is one of the country's best. See p. 285.
- **Native Guide Safari Tours** (Port Douglas, QLD): Hazel Douglas, an Aborigine who was brought up in the 110-million-year-old rainforest of the Daintree and Cape Tribulation area, takes you on a full-day 4WD safari to explain Aboriginal legends, point out what different plants are used for, and teach you stuff like how to know when a crocodile is in the water. See p. 302.
- **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Alice Springs, NT): You'll taste bush food, see a dance, throw boomerangs and spears, and learn about Aboriginal family values in one half-day tour of this Aborigine-owned center in Alice Springs. Be sure to hang around

for the 1-hour didgeridoo lesson at the end. See p. 385.

- **Anangu Tours** (Ayers Rock, NT): The Anangu are the owners of Ayers Rock or, in their native tongue, Uluru. Join them for walks around the Rock as you learn about the poisonous "snake men" who fought battles here, pick bush food off the trees, throw spears, visit rock paintings, and watch the sun set over the monolith. Their Cultural Centre near the base of the Rock has displays about the Aboriginal Dreamtime. See p. 397.
- **Mangarrayi People** (Katherine, NT): Mike Keighley of **Far Out Adventures** (☎ 02/6557 6076 or 04/2715 2288) takes tours to the beautiful Elsey Station where you get to visit with the children of the local Mangarrayi people. You'll get to sample bush tucker, learn a little bush medicine, and swim in a vine-clad natural "spa-pool" in the Roper River. See p. 428.
- **Yamatji Bitja Aboriginal Bush Tours** (Kalgoorlie, WA): Geoffrey Stokes, who was brought up living a traditional Aboriginal life out in the bush near Kalgoorlie, takes you out tracking animals, foraging for bush food, and even hunting a 'roo for dinner (with a gun, not a boomerang!). Explore the bush, learn about creation myths, and find out what his childhood was like. See p. 471.
- **Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute** (Adelaide, SA): This is a

great place to experience life through Aboriginal eyes. You might catch one of the dances or other performances,

and you'll have plenty of other opportunities to find out more about Aboriginal culture. See p. 507.

9 The Best of Small-Town Australia

- **Central Tilba** (NSW): Just inland from Narooma on the south coast, this historic hamlet is one of the cutest you'll see, complete with blacksmiths and leatherwork outlets. The ABC Cheese Factory offers free tastings, and you can spend hours browsing antiques stalls or admiring the period buildings. See p. 213.
- **Broken Hill** (NSW): Known for its silver mines, the quirky town of Broken Hill has more pubs per capita than just about anywhere else. It's the home of the School of the Air—a “classroom” that transmits lessons by radio to communities spread over thousands of miles of Outback. Here you'll also find the Palace Hotel, made famous in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, as well as plenty of colonial mansions and heritage homes. See p. 218.
- **Mission Beach** (QLD): You'd never know this tidy village, hidden in lush rainforest off the highway, existed if you weren't a well-informed traveler. Aussies know it's here, but few of them bother to patronize its dazzling beach, cute restaurants, and secluded trails, so you'll have the place all to yourself. There's great white-water rafting on the nearby Tully River, too. See p. 303.
- **Broome** (WA): This romantic pearling port on the far-flung Kimberley coast on the Indian Ocean blends Australian corrugated-iron architecture with red pagoda roofs left by the Chinese pearl divers who settled here. The town combines a sophisticated international ambience with a rough Outback attitude. Beautiful Cable Beach (see “The Best Beaches,” above) is just outside town. This is the place to add to your South Sea pearl collection. See p. 488.
- **Kalgoorlie** (WA): Vibrant Kalgoorlie sits on what used to be the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth ever. Have a drink in one of the 19th-century pubs (especially at night when the miners come on shift), peer into the open-cut gold mine (the world's biggest), descend an old-fashioned mine shaft and pan for riches, and wander the ghost town streets of Coolgardie. See “The Goldfields” in chapter 10.
- **Hahndorf** (SA): A group of Lutheran settlers founded this German-style town in the Adelaide Hills in the 1830s. You'll love the churches, the wool factory and crafts shops, and the delicious German food at the local cafes, restaurants, and bakeries. See p. 516.
- **Coober Pedy** (SA): For an Outback experience that's *fair-dinkum* (genuine), few places are as weird and wonderful as this opal-mining town in the middle of nowhere. Visit mines, see wacky museums, and stay in a hotel underground—not all that unusual, considering that the locals live like moles anyway. See p. 528.
- **Launceston** (TAS): Tasmania's second city is not much larger than your average European or American small town, but it's packed with Victorian and Georgian architecture and remnants of Australia's convict past. Spend a few days and discover the scenery; splurge a little on a stay in a historic hotel. See p. 628.

10 The Best Museums

- **Australian National Maritime Museum** (Sydney, NSW): The best things about this museum are the ships and submarines often docked in the harbor out front. You can climb aboard and experience what it's like to be a sailor. Inside are some fascinating displays relating to Australia's dependence on the oceans. See p. 146.
- **Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (NT): It's not called a museum, but that's what this restored telegraph-repeater station out in the picturesque hills by a spring—Alice Springs—really is. From the hot biscuits turned out of the wood-fired oven to the old telegraph equipment, this 1870s settlement is as real as history can get. See p. 386.
- **Australian Aviation Heritage Centre** (Darwin, NT): The pride of this hangar is a B-52 bomber on permanent loan from the U.S. But there's loads more, not just planes, engines, and aviation paraphernalia, but detailed stories, jokes, and anecdotes associated with the exhibits—put together by enthusiastic members of the Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory. See p. 413.
- **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Kakadu National Park, NT): This circular building was built in the shape of a pig-nose turtle at the direction of the Aboriginal owners. Exhibits about the bush tucker, Dreamtime creation myths, and lifestyles of the local Bininj Aboriginal people are on display. See p. 422.
- **Western Australian Museum** (Perth, WA): Skip the natural history displays and head straight to the country's best display of Aboriginal culture. Evocative photographs, artifacts, and display boards paint a sad and thoughtful portrait of Australia before and after the arrival of Europeans. See p. 448.
- **Western Australian Maritime Museum** (Perth, WA): Housed in a brand new building in the historic port precinct of Fremantle, Perth, this museum tells tales of the harsh Western Australian coastline since the Dutch first bumped into it and abandoned it as useless in the 1600s. You can also tour HMAS *Ovens*, an Oberon-class submarine. See p. 451.
- **York Motor Museum** (York, WA): This multimillion-dollar collection of veteran, vintage, classic, and racing cars is one of the most wide-ranging in the country. If you're a car buff, head for the historic town of York and make a day of it. See p. 461.
- **The Migration Museum** (Adelaide, SA): This museum gives visitors insight into the people who came to Australia, how and where they settled, and how many suffered getting here. Don't expect a lot of musty displays—this museum is full of hands-on activities. See p. 506.
- **Australian War Memorial** (Canberra, ACT): Given its name, you might think this museum is a bleak place, but you'd be wrong. It gives important insight into the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) spirit, including an exhibit on the tragic battle of Gallipoli. There's also a pretty good art collection. See p. 605.
- **National Museum of Australia** (ACT): Using state-of-the-art technology and hands-on exhibits, Australia's newest and most impressive museum concentrates on Australian society and its history since 1788, the interaction of people with the Australian environment, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. See p. 606.

11 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

- **Explorers Inn Hotel** (☎ 1800/623 288 in Australia, or 07/3211 3488) and **Hotel George Williams** (☎ 1800/064 858 in Australia, or 07/3308 0700), both in Brisbane, QLD: These two hotels around the corner from each other in Brizzie are shining examples of what cheap hotels should be—trendy, clean, and bright with useful facilities like electronic keys, and an inexpensive restaurant. See p. 234.
- **Archipelago Studio Apartments** (Port Douglas, QLD; ☎ 07/4099 5387): They may be tiny, but these pretty apartments have a homey atmosphere and are just seconds from spectacular Four Mile Beach. Some units have sea views. The solicitous proprietor is a mine of advice on things to see and do. See p. 296.
- **Miss Maud Swedish Hotel** (Perth, WA; ☎ 1800/998 022 in Australia, or 08/9325 3900): Staying here, in the heart of Perth, is like staying at grandma's—even if your grandma's house doesn't have a somewhat Swedish flavor. Friendly staff members who actually look pleased to see you and great food complete the picture. See p. 441.
- **North Adelaide Heritage Group** (Adelaide, SA; ☎ 08/8272 1355): These accommodations consist of 18 fabulous properties in North Adelaide and Eastwood. The former Friendly Meeting Chapel Hall resembles a small church stocked with Victorian antiques. Another memorable place is the George Lowe Esq. Apartment, done in the style of a 19th-century gentleman's bachelor pad. See p. 503.

12 The Best Alternative Accommodations

- **Underground Motel** (White Cliffs, NSW; ☎ 1800/021 154 in Australia, or 08/8091 6677): All but two of this motel's rooms are underground. Rooms are reached by a maze of spacious tunnels dug out of the rock beneath this opal-mining town. See p. 219.
- **South Long Island Nature Lodge** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD; ☎ 07/4946 9777): The five beachfront cabins are basic, but your vacation at this island retreat will be anything but. Activities include sea kayaking, sailing, snorkeling, hiking trails, dining outside under the Milky Way, and swimming with Myrtle, the pet kangaroo. Considering you won't put your hand in your wallet except for wine and maybe a seaplane trip to the Reef, this is a great value. See p. 325.
- **Binna Burra Mountain Lodge** (☎ 1800/074 260 in Australia, or 07/5533 3622) and **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** (☎ 1800/688 722 in Australia, or 07/5544 0644), both in the Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD: Tucked snugly almost 1,000m (3,280 ft.) up on rainforested ridges behind the Gold Coast, these retreats offer fresh mountain air and instant access to Lamington National Park. At O'Reilly's you can hand-feed brilliantly colored birds every morning. See p. 366 and 367.
- **Emma Gorge Resort** (The Kimberley, WA; ☎ 08/9169 1777): At this spick-and-span settlement on the million-acre El Questro cattle station, guests stay in safari tents with wooden floors and electric lights; eat at a rustic gourmet restaurant; and join in hikes, bird-watching tours, river cruises, and more. A hike up

Emma Gorge takes you to an Edenic swimming hole surrounded by red cliffs. See p. 482.

- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ☎ 08/8648 4844): This remarkable tin-roofed, stone-walled Outback pub in the Flinders Ranges has quaint rooms, a great bar out front where you can meet the locals, and some of the best food in Australia. See p. 527.
- **Freycinet Lodge** (Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay, TAS; ☎ 03/6257 0101): These eco-friendly bush cabins

are right next to one of the nation's best walking trails. The ocean views from the magnificent restaurant and the surrounding balconies are spectacular. See p. 627.

- **Cradle Mountain Lodge** (Cradle Mountain, TAS; ☎ 13 24 69 in Australia, or 03/6492 1303): Just minutes from your comfortable cabin are 1,500-year-old trees, moss forests, craggy mountain ridges, limpid pools and lakes, and hordes of scampering marsupials. See p. 635.

13 The Best Places to Stay on a Shoestring

- **Sydney Central YHA** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9281 9111): One of the biggest, busiest youth hostels in the world, this place has a popular night spot, a bistro selling cheap meals, pool tables, a movie room, a heated pool, and a sauna—all in the center of Sydney. See p. 121.
- **Arts Factory Lodge** (Byron Bay, NSW; ☎ 02/6685 7709): A wacky, alternative place to stay that includes tepees, tents, rooms made from bark strips, and funky indoor “cubes.” Workshops include didgeridoo making, massage, yoga, and even boxing! See p. 204.
- **Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village** (Mission Beach, QLD; ☎ 1800/008 129, or 07/4068 8129): Right across the road from what is arguably the prettiest beach in Australia, this oh-so-pretty campground has freshly painted cabins with little balconies, en-suite bathrooms, cooking facilities, and even separate

bedrooms for you and the kids. Cas-sowaries wander out of the dense jungle at the back and come right up to you. See p. 306.

- **Halse Lodge** (Sunshine Coast, QLD; ☎ 1800/242 567 in Australia, or 07/5447 3377): How many backpacker lodges do you know of located in Heritage-listed Queenslander houses, with neat private rooms, incredibly cheap meals, a wide veranda with attractive furniture and garden views, an atmospheric bar and courtyard, and free surfboards to use at the excellent beach just a stroll away? Well, now you know this one. See p. 346.
- **The Kimberley Klub** (Broome, WA; ☎ 1800/004 345 in Australia, or 08/9192 3233): Low-slung Outback architecture, trendy private rooms, a rustic open-sided bar and restaurant serving great food, and a rock-lined pool make this one of the coolest places to stay in pricey Broome. See p. 490.

14 The Best Worth-a-Splurge Restaurants

- **Quay** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9251 5600): Sydney's best seafood restaurant offers perhaps the loveliest view in town. Gaze through the large windows toward the Opera House, the

city skyline, the North Shore suburbs, and the Harbour Bridge. See p. 134.

- **Fishlips Bar & Bistro** (Cairns, QLD; ☎ 07/4041 1700): Clever ways with fresh seafood and uniquely

Aussie ingredients—such as crocodile—make this cheerful blue beach house on a busy Cairns highway a real winner. This place is the pick of the bunch in Cairns. See p. 284.

- **e'cco bistro** (Brisbane, QLD; ☎ 07/3831 8344): Simple food, elegantly done, has won this small but tasteful bistro a stack of awards, and you'll soon see why. Not least among its titles is Australia's top restaurant award, the Remy Martin Cognac/Gourmet Traveler Restaurant of the Year. Reservations are essential. See p. 240.
- **Fraser's** (Perth, WA; ☎ 08/9481 7100): The city center and Swan River sparkling in the sunshine seem so close that you can almost reach out and touch them from the terrace of this parkland restaurant. Superb mod Oz food turned out with flare and flavor is what you come here for; seafood is a specialty. You can go for a bike ride in Kings Park afterward to work it off. See p. 443.
- **Newtown House** (Vasse, near Margaret River, WA; ☎ 08/9755 4485): Chef Stephen Reagan creates intelligent, flavorsome food that beautifully partners the premium Margaret River wines being made all around him. Stay in his homestead B&B overnight and explore the wineries the next day. See p. 465.
- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ☎ 08/8648 4844): Chef Darren ("Bart") Brooks serves high-class cuisine in the middle of nowhere. His "feral" foods, such as kangaroo tail soup and a mixed grill of emu sausages, camel steak, and kangaroo, is remarkable. See p. 527.
- **The Tryst** (Canberra, ACT; ☎ 02/6239 4422): Canberra has far grander and more expensive restaurants, but this place has found a spot in our hearts for its constantly delicious food. It's also relaxed, feeling almost communal on busy nights. See p. 604.

15 The Best Dining Bargains

- **Phillip's Foote** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9241 1485): In the heart of the historic neighborhood known as The Rocks, this barbecue restaurant serves fish, meat, and poultry. Pick your own protein and throw it on the barbie in the courtyard behind a historic pub. See p. 133.
- **Govindas** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9380 5155): Eat as much as you want at this Hare Krishna vegetarian restaurant in Kings Cross, and then take in a free movie at the theater upstairs. See p. 136.
- **Supreme View Café** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9230 8224): This largely undiscovered restaurant and café is a must for the great value and the absolutely fantastic views reaching over Hyde Park and even to the harbor. See p. 134.
- **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (Darwin, NT): Every Thursday night between May and October, thousands of Darwin folk pack wine and beach blankets and flock to this city beach to feast at food stalls featuring every Asian cuisine you can name, and a few you can't. Eat Vietnamese, Cambodian, Singaporean, Malaysian, Indonesian, and more, and then shop the 200 arts-and-crafts stalls, get a Chinese head massage, or have your tarot cards read. See p. 411.
- **Chinatown** (Melbourne, VIC): Head to this colorful part of town, centered on Little Bourke Street, for super cheap eats. You'll be hard-pressed to

find a lunch costing more than A\$10 (US\$8). This is where the locals go, so you know it has to be good—and authentic. See p. 535.

- **Irish Times** (Melbourne, VIC; ☎ 03/9642 1699): An Irish bar more authentic than most, the Irish Times is a character-filled eatery with unusual dishes. See p. 546.
- **Queen Victoria Market** (Melbourne, VIC; ☎ 03/9269 5835): The markets are the heart of this vibrant city, and there's nowhere better to pick up a satisfying snack. There are plenty of stalls selling fresh bread and deli fare for a picnic. See p. 554.