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The Best of Australia

Maybe we're biased, but Australia has a lot of bests. It's got some of the wildest natural scenery, the weirdest wildlife, certainly some of the most brilliant scuba diving, the best beaches (shut up, California), the oldest rainforest (110 million years and counting), the world's oldest human civilization (some archaeologists say 40,000 years, some say 120,000), the best wines (stop browsing the Napa and come see what we mean), the world's most laid-back people (when they're not from Melbourne and watching Aussie Rules football), the best weather (ignoring the Wet Season up north), the most innovative East-meets-West-meets-someplace-else cuisine—all lit by the world's most pervasive white sunlight.

“Best” means different things to different people, but scarcely a visitor lands without having the Great Barrier Reef at the top of their “Things to See” list. It really is the Eighth Wonder of the World. Also high on most folks' lists is Ayers Rock. This monolith must have some kind of magnet inside it to attract plane-loads of tourists. We're not saying the Rock isn't special, but we think the Australian desert all around it is even more special. The third attraction on most visitors' lists is Sydney, the Emerald City that glitters in the Antipodean sunshine on—another “best”—the best harbor spanned by the best bridge in the world (sorry, San Francisco).

These “big three” attractions are understandably popular with travelers. What the TV commercials or the travel agent window displays don't show, however, is how much else there is to see. There are the World Heritage wetlands and Aboriginal rock art of Kakadu National Park, the second Great Barrier Reef on the western coast, and the snowy mountain hiking trails of Tasmania. As planes zoom overhead delivering visitors to the Reef, the Rock, and Sydney, Aussies in charming country towns, on far-flung beaches, on rustic sheep stations, in villages, and in mountain lodges shake their heads and say, “They don't know what they're missin'.” You will no doubt find your own “bests” as you travel, as well as ours below, and we would like to hear about them. In the listing 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.

1 The Top Travel Experiences

- **Experiencing Sydney** (NSW): Consistently voted one of the best cities in the world by almost every major travel publication, Sydney is more than just the magnificent Harbour Bridge and Opera House. No other major city has beaches in abundance like Sydney, and few have such a magnificently scenic harbor. My advice: Get aboard a ferry, walk across the bridge, and plan on spending at least a week, because you'll need every minute. See chapter 3.
- **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 6.

- **Exploring the Wet Tropics** (QLD): City folk can't get over the moisture-dripping ferns, the neon blue butterflies, 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 6.
- **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. 312.
- **Exploring the Olgas (Kata Tjuta) and Ayers Rock (Uluru)** (NT): Just why everyone comes thousands of kilometers to see the big red stone of Ayers Rock is a mystery—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 than Uluru. See p. 387.
- **Taking an Aboriginal Culture Tour** (Alice Springs, NT): Eating female wasps, contemplating a hill as a giant resting caterpillar, and seeing in the stars the face of your grandmother smiling down at you

will give you a new perspective on your own culture. See what we mean on a half-day tour from the Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre in Alice Springs. See p. 374.

- **Listening to the "Sounds of Silence"** (Ayers Rock, NT): Billed as a "million star restaurant" because it's outdoors under the Milky Way, this culinary treat is a fabulous way to soak up the desert. Sip champagne to the strains of a didgeridoo as the sun sets, then settle down to a "bush tucker" feast of emu, kangaroo, and crocodile at white-clothed tables in the sand. Then it's lights out, the music stops, and everyone listens to the eerie sound of silence. See p. 391.
- **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 8.
- **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 9.
- **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 9.

- **Drinking in the Barossa Valley (SA):** One of Australia's largest wine-producing areas, this German-speaking region less than an hour's drive from Adelaide is also the prettiest. Adelaide's restaurants are some of the country's best, so test out your wine purchases with the city's terrific food. See "Side Trips from Adelaide" in chapter 10.
- **Following the Great Ocean Road (VIC):** This 106km (65-mile) coastal road carries you past wild and stunning beaches, forests, and dramatic cliff-top scenery—including the Twelve Apostles, 12 pillars of red rock standing in splendid isolation in the foaming Southern Ocean. See "The Great Ocean Road: One of the World's Most Scenic Drives" in chapter 12.
- **Driving Around Tasmania:** The island-state is one of Australia's prettiest, a picturesque Eden of lavender fields, wineries, snow-topped granite tors, whitewater wildernesses, and haunting historic prisons. A bonus is that it's small enough to drive around in a few days. See chapter 14.

2 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Horse Trekking in the Snowy Mountains (NSW):** The film *The Man from Snowy River* alerted travelers to the natural beauty of these ranges, where you can stay in bush lodges or go camping under the stars. See p. 207.
- **Abseiling in the Blue Mountains (NSW):** Careering backwards down a cliff face with the smell of gum trees 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 4.
- **White-Water Rafting on the Tully River (Mission Beach, QLD):** The Grade 3 to 4 rapids of the Tully River swoosh between lush, rainforested banks. The guides are professional, the scenery is pretty, and the rapids are just hair-raising enough to be fun. See p. 277.
- **Canoeing the Top End (NT):** Paddling down the sun-drenched ochre 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" in chapter 8.
- **Surfing in Margaret River (WA):** A surfing lesson with four-time Western Australia champ **Josh Palmateer** (☎ 04/1895 8264) 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. 459.
- **Sea Kayaking with Sea Lions (WA):** Snorkel with sea lions and watch penguins feeding on a sea-kayaking day trip from Perth with **Rivergods** (☎ 08/9259 0749). They also run multi-day 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. 444.
- **Skiing in the Victorian Alps (VIC):** Skiing in Australia? You bet. Where else can you swish down the mountain between gum trees? See "The High Country" in chapter 12.
- **Learning to Surf (NSW):** Head up from Sydney to Byron Bay on a surf safari. Plenty of camping

and lots of beach stops to flex your newfound surfing skills. See p. 194.

- **Hiking Cradle Mountain National Park** (TAS): The 80km (48-mile) Overland Track is known as the best bushwalking

(hiking) trail in Australia. The trek, from Lake St. Clair to Cradle Mountain, takes anywhere from 5 to 10 days, depending on your fitness level. Shorter walks, some lasting just half an hour, are also accessible. See p. 628.

3 The Best Places to View Wildlife

- **Montague Island** (Narooma, NSW): This little island on the south coast is a haven for seabirds, but it's the water around it that's home to the main attractions. Dolphins and fairy penguins are common, and during the whale-watching season you are almost sure to spot humpback and southern right whales, some with their calves. See p. 203.
- **Jervis Bay** (NSW): This is probably the nearest place to Sydney where you are 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 p. 199.
- **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. 232.
- **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. 274.
- **Wait-a-while Rainforest Tours** (Cairns, QLD): Head into the Wet Tropics behind Cairns or Port Douglas with this eco-tour operator to spotlight big-eyed possums, lizards, pythons, the bizarre bats—even a platypus, 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. 290.
- **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. 330.
- **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 they cruise past your legs (see "The Midwest & The Northwest: Where The Outback Meets the Sea" in chapter 9). Even better is a cruise on the *Shotover* catamaran

to see some of the area's 10,000 dugongs (manatees), plus turtles, sea snakes, sharks—and more (p. 467).

- **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. 350.
- **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 6.
- **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. 409.
- **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. 469.
- **Kangaroo Island** (SA): You are sure to see more native animals here—including koalas, wallabies, birds, echidnas, reptiles, seals, and sea lions—than anywhere else in the country. 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 p. 511.

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 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 p. 208.
- **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park** (Ayers Rock, NT): Sure, this magical monolith will enthrall you with its eerie beauty, but the nearby Olgas are more soothing, more interesting, and actually taller than the Rock, so make the time to wander through them, too. Don't go home until you've stood still in all that sand and felt the powerful heartbeat of the desert. See "Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas)" in chapter 7.
- **The MacDonnell Ranges** (NT): The Aborigines say these red rocky hills were formed by the Caterpillar Dreaming that wriggled from the earth and came to rest here. To the west of Alice Springs are dramatic gorges, idyllic (and bloody cold) waterholes,

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and cute wallabies. To the east are Aboriginal rock carvings, and the Ross River Resort, where you can crack a stock whip, throw a boomerang, feast on damper and billy tea, and ride a horse through the bush. See “Road Trips from Alice Springs” in chapter 7.

- **Kings Canyon** (NT): Anyone who saw the cult flick *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* will remember that scene where the transvestites climb a soaring cliff and survey the desert floor. That was Kings Canyon, about 320km (200 miles) from Alice Springs in one direction and

Ayers Rock in the other. Trek the dramatic rim or take the easier shady route along the bottom. Don't forget your lipstick! See “Kings Canyon” in chapter 7.

- **Finke Gorge National Park** (NT): If you like your wilderness scenic and ancient, come here. Finke Gorge is home to “living fossil” palm trees, survivors of the ice ages, and to what scientists think may be the world's oldest river. Camp, hike, and just soak up the timeless bush. Visit for a day from Alice Springs or camp out. Access is by four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicle only. See p. 384.

5 The Best Beaches

- **Palm Beach** (Sydney): At the end of a string of beaches stretching north from Sydney, Palm Beach is long and very white, with some good surfing and a golf course. See chapter 3.
- **Hyams Beach** (Jervis Bay, NSW): This beach in pretty, 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 also squeaks as you walk. See “South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway” in chapter 4.
- **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 chapter 6.
- **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 emu-like 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 6.
- **Whitehaven Beach** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD): It's not a surf beach, but this 6km (3¾-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 6.
- **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 6.

- **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 6.

- **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 9.

6 The Best Affordable Diving & Snorkeling Sites

- **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. 285.
- **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. Divers will like it here, too. See p. 271.
- **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. 271.
- **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. 264.

- **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 6.
- **Rottneet 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 9.

- **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 9.

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. They are all easily reached from Sydney. See p. 168.
- **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 6, except Daydream Island, 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. See “The Whitsunday Coast & Islands” in chapter 6.
- **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. 357.
- **Larapinta Trail (The Red Centre, NT):** Soon you will be able to start at Alice Springs and walk this

entire 220km (138-mile) semi-desert trail that winds through the stark crimson MacDonnell Ranges. The trail is still under construction, but plenty of day-length and overnight sections are ready for your boots now. See p. 378.

- **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 p. 409.
- **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. 455.
- **Freycinet National Park (TAS):** The trek to Wine Glass Bay passes warty pink granite outcrops, with views over an ocean sliced by a crescent of icy sand. It’s prehistorically beautiful. See p. 619.

8 The Best Places to Learn About Aboriginal Culture

- **Native Guide Safari Tours** (Port Douglas, QLD): Hazel Douglas, an Aborigine who was brought up in the 110-million-year-old rain-forest 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. 290.
- **The Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Wallaga Lake, near Narooma, NSW): This center offers boomerang and spear throwing instruction, painting with natural ochres, discussions on Aboriginal culture, and guided walking tours of Aboriginal sacred sites. See p. 203.
- **Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park** (Cairns, QLD): This multi-million-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. 269.
- **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Alice Springs, NT): You'll taste bush food, see traditional houses, throw boomerangs and spears, and learn about Aboriginal family values in a half-day tour of this Aborigine-owned center. Be sure to visit the museum and art gallery where you can take a didgeridoo lesson. See p. 274.
- **Anangu Tours** (Ayers Rock, NT): The Anangu are the owners of Ayers Rock, or Uluru, as it is called in their native tongue. Join them for walks around the Rock as you learn about the legendary poisonous snake-men who fought battles here, pick bush food off the trees, throw spears, visit rock paintings, and watch the sunset over the monolith. Their Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre near the base of the Rock has good displays of cultural and Dreamtime life. See p. 390.
- **Mangarrayi People** (Katherine, NT): Mike Keighley of **Far Out Adventures** (☎ 02/6557 6076 or 04/2715 2288) takes tours to the beautiful Eley 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. 420.
- **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. 463.
- **Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute** (Adelaide, SA): This is a great place to experience Aboriginal life through Aboriginal eyes. You might catch one of the dance or other performances, although there are plenty of other opportunities to find out more about Aboriginal culture. See p. 500.

9 The Best of Small-Town Australia

- **Central Tilba** (NSW): Just inland from Narooma on the south coast, this hamlet is one of the cutest you'll ever see, complete with its

own blacksmiths and leatherwork outlets. The ABC Cheese Factory offers visitors free tastings, and you can spend hours browsing for antiques or admiring the period buildings. See p. 203.

- **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 also the home of the School of the Air—a “classroom” transmitting lessons by radio to isolated communities spread over thousands of kilometers of Outback. You'll also find the eccentric Palace Hotel, featured in the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, as well as colonial mansions and heritage homes. See p. 208.
- **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. 295.
- **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. 471.

- **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 9.
- **Hahndorf** (SA): A group of Lutheran settlers founded this German-style town, located in the Adelaide Hills, just outside Adelaide, in the 1830s. You'll love the churches, the wool factory and crafts shops, and the delicious German food served up in the local cafes, restaurants, and bakeries. See p. 508.
- **Cooper Pedy** (SA): For a *fair dinkum* (that means “genuine”) Outback experience, few places are as weird and wonderful as this opal-mining town in the middle of nowhere. You can visit mines, wacky museums, and stay in a hotel underground—which is not really that unusual considering all the locals live like moles anyway. See p. 522.
- **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 plenty of remnants of Australia's convict days. Spend a couple of days here discovering the town and the local scenery, and splurge a little on a stay in a historic hotel. See p. 621.

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 explore

what it's like to be a sailor. Inside are some fascinating displays relating to Australia's dependence on the oceans. See p. 136.

- **Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (Alice Springs, 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 tapping away, this 1870s settlement is as real as history can get. See p. 376.
- **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. 403.
- **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Kakadu National Park, NT): This circular building was built in the shape of a pignose 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. 413.
- **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. 440.
- **Western Australian Maritime Museum and the adjacent Shipwrecks 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. Anyone who ever dreamed of finding a shipwreck laden with pieces of eight will relish the displays of treasure recovered from the deep. See p. 443.
- **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. 453.
- **Migration Museum** (Adelaide, SA): This fascinating museum gives visitors insight into the people who came to Australia, how and where they settled, and how many suffered getting here. Full of interactive activities and exhibits, the museum gives visitors much more to do than just look and read. See p. 499.
- **Australian War Memorial** (Canberra, ACT): Given its name, you might think this museum is a bleak sort of place, but you'd be wrong. The museum gives important insight into the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) spirit, including an evocative exhibit on the tragic battle of Gallipoli. There's also a pretty good art collection. See p. 596.

11 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

- **Explorers Inn** (☎ 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 “Accommodations You Can Afford” in chapter 5.

- **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. 292.
- **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. 432.

- **North Adelaide Heritage Apartments and Cottages** (Adelaide, SA; ☎ 08/8272 1355): These accommodations actually consist of 21 separate fabulous properties in North Adelaide and Eastwood. The former Friendly Meeting Chapel Hall resembles a small church stocked with Victorian antiques. An especially memorable unit is the George Lowe, Esq. apartment done up in the style of a 19th-century gentleman’s bachelor pad. See p. 495.
- **Macquarie Manor** (Hobart, TAS; ☎ 03/6224 4999): As soon as you walk into this classically colonial-style manor, you’ll know you want to stay. Check out the delightful dining room, and the drawing room complete with old couches and a grand piano. See p. 613.

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 in this fascinating opal-mining town. Rooms are reached by a maze of spacious tunnels dug out of the rock. See p. 212.
- **Whitsunday Wilderness Lodge** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD; ☎ 07/4946 9777): The 10 beach-front 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. 321.
- **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 “The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature” in chapter 6.
- **Emma Gorge Resort** (The Kimberley, WA; ☎ 08/9169 1777): At this spick-and-span settlement on the 1-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. 476.

- **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. 521.

- **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 tracks. The ocean views from the magnificent restaurant and the surrounding balconies are spectacular. See p. 620.

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, a convenience store, pool tables, a movie room, a heated pool, and a sauna—all in the center of Sydney. See p. 110.
- **Holiday Village Backpackers** (Byron Bay, NSW; ☎ 02/6685 8888): For a bohemian kind of place, this Byron Bay lodging is loaded with comforts. You can stay in a dorm room if you want, but for a couple of dollars more you can get a fully self-contained unit with a bedroom, lounge, and kitchen area. There's also a volleyball court, a spa and pool, and a TV and video lounge. Cool. See p. 196.
- **Halse Lodge** (Sunshine Coast, QLD; 1800/242 567 in Australia, or 07/5447 3377): How many backpacker lodges do you know located in Heritage-listed Queensland 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. 342.

- **Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village** (Mission Beach, QLD; ☎ 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. Cassowaries wander out of the dense jungle at the back and come right up to you. See p. 299.
- **The Kimberley Klub** (Broome, WA; ☎ 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. 484.

14 The Best Worth-a-Splurge Restaurants

- **Bambu** (Sydney, NSW; ☎ 02/9247 6044): Housed in the Overseas Passenger Terminal (OPT), Bambu has fantastic views of the Opera House and offers cutting

edge food and a cocktail lounge. It won't break the bank either. See p. 124.

- **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.

- **Zouí Alto** (Townsville, QLD; ☎ 07/4721 4700): Townsville is not a place that springs to mind when compiling a “Best Restaurants” list, but this rooftop venue fully deserves to be here for faultless Mediterranean fare and fab views of the bay. It’s one of the best places to eat on the Queensland coast. See p. 305.
- **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. Booking ahead is essential. See p. 232.
- **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 afterwards to work it off. See p. 435.

- **Newtown House** (Vasse, near Margaret River, WA; ☎ 08/9755 4485): Chef Stephen Reagan makes 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. 460.
- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ☎ 08/8648 4895): Chef Darren (“Bart”) Brooks serves up some very 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. 521.
- **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 consistently delicious food. It’s also relaxed, feeling almost communal on busy nights. See p. 596.

15 The Best Dining Bargains

- **Returned Services League (RSL) Clubs:** RSL clubs, or their equivalent, can be found in most cities and towns in Australia. Just sign in at the door, and you enter a world of cheap drinks and inexpensive meals. You’ll probably find a couple of pool or billiards tables, too, as well as an atmosphere unique to Australia.
- **The Great Aussie Barbecue:** Australian parks are full of public barbecues, often in scenic settings, that are free or cost just a couple of dollars to coin operate. Stock up on meat, veggies, paper plates,

plastic glasses, and cheap cooking utensils you can buy from the supermarket, and get ready to cook up a storm. Hand the utensils on to someone else if you can’t be bothered carrying them in your suitcase.

- **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 in the theater upstairs. See p. 127.
- **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. 541.

- **The Outback Pioneer Barbeque** (Ayers Rock Resort, NT; ☎ 1800/089 622 in Australia, or 08/8956 2170): Forget the expensive eats at Ayers Rock Resort and join the happy throng at this rollicking bar-cum-shearer's mess. Throw your shrimp, steak, or emu sausage on your own barbie, have a beer or two, and you're still looking at a tab of less than A\$28.60 (US\$19). See chapter 7.
- **A Picnic on the Grounds of the Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (Alice Springs, NT): What could be more enjoyable (and affordable) than an alfresco spread on the grounds of this historic site. You'll be surrounded by river red gums, green lawns, and a few historic cottages. Admission to the picnic grounds is free. See chapter 7.
- **Mindil Beach Sunset Markets** (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 box on p. 406.
- **Queen Victoria Market** (Melbourne, VIC): The markets are the heart of this vibrant city, and there's nowhere better to pick up a satisfying snack. The pizzas on sale at Café Bianca are some of the best in Australia, and there are plenty of stalls selling fresh bread and deli produce for a sandwich to take away. See p. 547.
- **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\$5 (US\$3.25). This is where the locals go, so you know it's got to be good—and authentic. See p. 538.