

## Did You Know?

- Two of Australia's most famous landmarks are in Sydney: the Sydney Harbor Bridge (the world's widest and heaviest arch bridge) and the Sydney Opera House (built with a roof that looks like the sails of a ship).
- Although Australia is better known for ocean sports like surfing and swimming, Australians can also go skiing during winter in the mountains of the southeast.
- Australia has more kangaroos than people.
- The Great Barrier Reef is home to 400 types of coral and 1,500 species of fish, in addition to other marine life. It stretches over 1,400 miles (2,300 km) along the northeastern coast.
- A popular Aboriginal musical instrument is called the *didgeridoo*. It is a long wooden tube that produces a deep sound when you blow into it.
- The Parliament House in Canberra has a grass-covered roof that people can walk on. When viewed from the air, the building looks like two boomerangs connected at the center.
- Several of Sydney's finest early buildings were designed by Francis Greenway, a convict sent to Australia to serve his prison sentence.
- *Dingoes* were once tame dogs that have become wild again. They are found mostly in Australia.

## Flag

The large star on the left stands for the five states and two territories of Australia. Above the star is the flag of Britain. On the right is the *Southern Cross*, a group of stars seen from the Southern Hemisphere.



## National Image

More than 50 species of kangaroo live in Australia. Large kangaroos are more than 6 1/2 feet (2 m) tall and can jump 33 feet (10 m).



## People and Places

### Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 2,988,902  
Area (sq. km.): 7,741,220



Did you know that Australia is the only country that occupies an entire continent? It is also the driest populated continent in the world. The hot, dry, and dusty area called the Outback covers much of the center of the country. Australia is more than twice the size of India, or just slightly smaller than the lower 48 United States. The Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest living organism, runs 1,430 miles (2,300 km) along Australia's northeastern coast and is larger than Great Britain. Australia has rich farmland, beautiful beaches, and tropical forests. It is nicknamed The Land Down Under because it lies in the Southern Hemisphere. Temperatures in the country can vary a lot

depending on elevation and on distance from the coast.

## Population

Population: 22,507,617



Australia is a large country, but relatively few people live there. The United States, which is not much bigger geographically, has more than 316 million. Australians aren't spread evenly across the country. Most people live on the coast in cities, especially in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. The majority of Australians have European ancestors, and a small percentage of the population has Asian ancestry. *Aborigines*, the original inhabitants of Australia, and others make up a small minority and live mostly in the countryside.

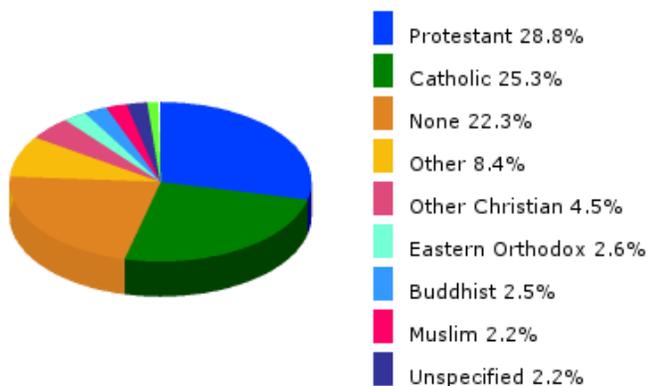
## Language

Australians speak a unique form of English called *Aussie* (pronounced "AH-zee"), with many words and phrases found only in Australia. Words are often shortened in everyday conversation: *breakky* (breakfast), *telly* (television), *footy* (football), and *sunnies* (sunglasses). Other words are simply different from what you might use: *loo* (toilet), *togs* (swimming suit), *biscuit* (cookie), and *petrol* (gasoline). A *tucker bag* is a knapsack that holds your lunch. Some words, like *labor*, use the American spelling rather than the British version, *labour*. There are entire dictionaries for translating *Aussie* phrases into Standard English.

## Can You Say It in Aussie English?

Hello	<i>G'day</i>
What do you think?	<i>What d'ya reckon?</i>
Excuse me?	<i>Ay?</i>
Well done	<i>Good on ya</i>
Let's have a barbecue	<i>Let's have a barbie</i>
You're kidding me	<i>You're having me on</i>

## Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.*

Most Australians are Christians, mainly Protestants, but religion doesn't generally play a strong role in Australian daily life. Many people attend church only on special occasions. Due mostly to immigration, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism have a growing number of followers. *Aborigines* (Australia's original inhabitants) practice an old religion whose beliefs revolve around stories and artwork about the "Dreamtime." They believe that Dreamtime spirits created the world and still live in certain sacred places like Ayers Rock, in central Australia.

## History

### Time Line

40,000 BC		
Circa 40,000 BC	<i>Aborigines</i> (Australia's original inhabitants) first arrive from southeast Asia	
AD 1500		
AD 1500s	Portuguese and Dutch ships first sight the west coast of Australia	
1600		
1600s	European ships first reach the Australian continent	
1688	William Dampier first meets <i>Aborigines</i> in Western Australia	
1700		
1770	Captain James Cook explores and claims the east coast for Britain	
1788	The first fleet of ships with British convicts and officials arrives on 26 January	
1800		
1851	Gold is discovered, beginning a rush that results in increased settlement and a large mining industry	
1868	The practice of shipping convicts to Australia ends	
1880	Legendary bank robber and Australia's most famous outlaw, Ned Kelly, is hanged by authorities in Melbourne	
1900		
1901	The Commonwealth of Australia is formed	
1902	Women are granted the right to vote in federal elections	
1913	Australians begin building a new capital city, to be named Canberra	
1914–18	Australia sends troops to aid Britain in World War I	

1915	Australian and New Zealand troops attack Gallipoli, Turkey, on 25 April, which becomes an important national holiday (Anzac Day)	
1939–45	More than one million Australians fight in World War II	
1956	Melbourne hosts the Olympics	
1967	Laws are removed that discriminate against <i>Aborigines</i>	
1973	Queen Elizabeth attends the opening of the Sydney Opera House	
1975	Color television is introduced; the first black-and-white broadcast had been in 1956	
1999	Australia decides to keep the British queen as the head of state	
2000		
2000	Sydney hosts the Olympics	
2001	Australia celebrates its one-hundred-year anniversary as a nation	
2003	Bush fires rage in Australia's capital, Canberra, destroying over 500 homes	
2007	Australia continues to suffer the effects of a devastating drought, the worst in more than a century	
2008	The government apologizes for its historical mistreatment of the native population of Australia	
2009	Australia announces a massive military budget increase meant to bring its military up to date	
2010	Julia Gillard becomes Australia's first female prime minister	
2011	Floods hit Queensland in the most expensive natural disaster in the history of the country	

2014

A gunman holds several people hostage in a Sydney café during a siege followed by TV viewers around the world; police eventually storm the café; three people die, including the hostage-taker

PRESENT

### Australia's First People

For thousands of years, Australia has been the home of *Aborigines*, wandering peoples who probably came from southern Asia. When the first Europeans arrived in the late 1700s, about 300,000 *Aborigines* lived in Australia. They formed more than one hundred tribal groups and spoke more than two hundred languages. *Aborigines*, who are expert trackers, hunted using weapons like the boomerang and spear. Many *Aborigines* died in battles with European settlers and from European diseases like smallpox, dropping their population to around 60,000.

Today, only about 20 Aboriginal languages are still in use. Up until the late 1960s, it was common for Aboriginal children to be taken from their homes and placed with white families, a practice that no longer takes place. Australia has recently made efforts to help the Aboriginal people by passing laws to help increase their land rights and give them more political power.



### Land of Prisoners

Australia became a possession of Britain in 1770, when Captain James Cook explored its east coast. The British saw Australia as a solution to their overcrowded prisons, and so they loaded prisoners onto ships headed for the new territory. The first prison ships reached Australia in 1788. Over the next 80 years, about 160,000 prisoners (men, women, and children) were sent to prisons in Australia. These prisoners included not only people who had been convicted of serious crimes but also those who disagreed with the government leaders at the time. Many of the prisoners were Irish who had protested British rule in the late 18th century.

Many of these convicts remained in Australia after their release from prison and were granted rights to purchase property and even hold government office, although sometimes there were conflicts between these newly freed convicts and those who had come to Australia as free settlers. Prison guards also often remained and later took jobs mostly as farmers and shepherders.



### Gold Rush

Prisoners weren't the only people who sailed for Australia. As the British began to discover the territory's rich natural resources, they established *free* (nonprisoner) settlements. Then, in 1851, gold was discovered at Summer Hill Creek, in New South Wales. This discovery set off a huge wave of immigration, nearly doubling the population of the country in less than eight years. People went to Australia hoping to make a lot of money digging for gold. The Australian flag made its first appearance when gold miners in a town named Eureka raised the flag as their symbol during a brief fight about mining costs with local government troops.

## A Young Country

By the early 1900s, Australia had several cities connected by roads and railways, but each state built tracks of different widths, which made it difficult to travel from state to state without changing trains several times. Many settlers had become wealthy from mining and ranching. In 1901, Australia's colonies united as an independent nation. However, their ties with Britain remained close. Australia continued to recognize Britain's king and queen as important authorities. During the two world wars, soldiers in the Australian military fought to support the British.



## From Many Lands

Australia has become more diverse in recent decades. Before World War II, immigrants to Australia came mostly from Britain and Ireland, but since then, many immigrants have arrived from Asia, southern Europe, the Middle East, and other places. Today, more than 20 percent of Australia's population was not actually born there. Australians are proud that, from their nation's small beginnings, they have created a wealthy society made up of people from many cultures.



## South Pacific Power

Australia is becoming a more important economic and military force in the southern hemisphere. For a long time its great distance from other countries kept it isolated and less likely to become deeply involved in world affairs. Recently Australia has taken on a greater role in international military efforts and has chosen to increase its military power by purchasing many planes and submarines. Not all Australians are happy about these changes, and some have participated in marches and rallies to protest Australia's increasing involvement in international military conflicts. Australia is also trying to figure out how to handle the many *refugees* (people forced to flee their homes by war) who are looking for safety on its shores.



## Lifestyle

### Games and Sports

Australians love sports. *Cricket* (somewhat like baseball) is the national sport, but *Australian-rules football* and *rugby* (both a little bit like American football) are just as popular. Kids often learn *cricket* using a soft ball and small bat in a game called *rounders*. A sport especially popular with girls is *netball* (like basketball, but with no dribbling). Australians also enjoy soccer and basketball. Surfing is very popular among young men and women, especially along the eastern coast and in Tasmania. Australia consistently produces some of the world's top surfers.



## Holidays

Most children in Australia would say Christmas is their favorite holiday. Kids look forward to their presents from Santa Claus on Christmas morning. They also have family parties, which often include a barbecue dinner. In Australia, December is in the middle of summer, so it is not uncommon in some areas for temperatures to hit 100°F (38°C) on Christmas Day. The day after Christmas is called *Boxing Day* (named for the giving of boxed gifts), which people celebrate by visiting friends and relatives. Anzac Day (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps Day) is celebrated every 25 April to commemorate all those Australians who have died in battle, especially those who fought in the Battle of Gallipoli, in World War I.

## Food

Australians are known for their barbecues, which began with the *Aborigines* (Australia's original inhabitants), who cooked all their food on hot coals. Australians eat all kinds of European, Asian, and American foods. Kids like fast food, but at home they eat meat, potatoes, pasta, and sandwiches. Many Australians also enjoy fresh seafood—shrimp, lobster, crab, and many kinds of fish. Fish and *chips* (french fries), usually wrapped in newspapers, is a popular meal. After dinner (also called *tea*), dessert might include ice cream, fruit salad, or pudding. *Vegemite*, an Australian favorite, is a salty sandwich spread made from yeast.



## Schools

*Adult Literacy: 99%*

About one-fourth of Australian kids go to private schools, and the other three-fourths attend public schools. A small but growing number of students are home schooled. Most students, whether they attend public or private schools, wear uniforms. Because of the warm weather, recess and lunch are almost always outside. Kids start school at age five or six. The first seven years are called *primary* (elementary) school. This is followed by five or six years of *secondary* (high) school. The main classes include math, science, writing, physical education, and history. Breaks between school years typically last about six weeks.



## Life as a Kid

Australian kids go to school about six hours a day. After school, they might go to a friend's house to play, practice for a sport or musical activity, or just head home. Kids like computer and video games, but they also like to play outdoors. They swim, fish, ride bikes, and go *bushwalking* (hiking). Chasing large lizards and exploring nearby forests is popular among some of the younger children. Many join community-run sports clubs where karate, tennis, and boxing are especially popular activities. Parents expect their kids to clean their rooms and help out with basic chores at home.



## Society

### Government

*Capital: Canberra*  
*Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II (U.K.)*  
*Head of Government: PM Tony Abbott*

Australia is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, an organization made up of countries that were once colonies or territories of Britain. Because of this, Australia considers Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as its queen. In practice, though, Australia is independent and is led by an elected prime minister. The role of Governor-General is mostly ceremonial. The Federal Parliament, or *legislature* (lawmaking body), has two houses: a 76-member Senate and a 150-member House of Representatives. The voting age is 18. It is against the law not to vote in federal or state elections, and people who do not vote are *fined*, or charged a sum of money as punishment. As a result, voter turnout is very high. Australia's national capital is in Canberra. The nation is divided up into six states and several territories.



### Money and Economy

*Currency: Australian dollar*

Australia's economy is one of the world's strongest. Natural resources are abundant. Two industries have long been important to Australia: mining and farming. The country *exports* (sells to other countries) minerals like iron, coal, gold, diamonds, and copper as well as petroleum and natural gas. Australia is also one of the world's leading exporters of wool and beef.



### Getting Around

Most Australian families have two cars, but in big cities, many people take public transportation to work rather than fight traffic in their own cars. Drivers use the left side of the road. Melbourne has a system of *tams*, or streetcars, and Sydney has monorail trains. Brisbane and Adelaide provide commuters with light-rail passenger trains. Sydney also has a ferry system to take people across Sydney Harbor. Roads aren't paved in the Outback, so people drive *utes* (pickup trucks) and 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Young people often ride their bicycles to school.



## Culture Facts & Contacts

### Amazing Animals

Australia is famous for its unique animals like the kangaroo, Tasmanian devil, koala, emu, and duck-billed platypus. The koala sleeps 20 hours a day in trees. It is not a bear but a marsupial like the kangaroo. The emu is a giant bird that can't fly but can run as fast as 40 mph (64 km/h). Australia is also home to some dangerous animals: crocodiles, great white sharks, and the world's 10 most poisonous snakes. Six of the world's seven species of sea turtles, including the Leatherback and the Loggerhead, have nesting grounds along the eastern coast of Australia, where they return yearly to lay their eggs.



### Learn More

Contact the Embassy of Australia, 1601 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036-2273; phone (202) 797-3000; web site [www.usa.embassy.gov.au](http://www.usa.embassy.gov.au). Australian Tourist Commission, web site [www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com). Or visit the official government web site [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au).

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# Australia



Covering 2,967,892 square miles (7,686,850 sq km), Australia is the world's sixth largest country.

