

The nation and its people

Australia is a unique land, full of contrasts.

Australia's remote inland areas, often referred to as the 'outback', are an important part of Australia's history and mythology.

Yet more than 75 per cent of Australia's 21 million people live in urban centres, particularly in the capital cities along the fertile eastern coastal plain and the southeastern coast.

Australia is often seen as a 'young' country but its population, like that of many other countries in the world, is ageing as life expectancy continues to improve. The population aged 65 years and over is projected to increase from around 13.1 per cent in 2005 to 25.7 per cent in 2050.

Where Australians live by states and territories

State/Territory	Population (millions)	Capital city	Capital city population (millions)
New South Wales	6.55	Sydney	4.12
Victoria	4.93	Melbourne	3.59
Queensland	3.90	Brisbane	1.76
Western Australia	1.96	Perth	1.45
South Australia	1.51	Adelaide	1.11
Tasmania	0.48	Hobart	0.20
Australian Capital Territory	0.32	Canberra	0.32
Northern Territory	0.19	Darwin	0.11

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Climate

Australia is one of the driest countries in the world. Much of the interior is flat, barren and sparsely populated.

Yet much of northern Australia has a tropical climate. Parts of Queensland, the north of Western Australia and the Northern Territory experience monsoon-type rainfalls during the wet season from January to March.

In fact, Australia is so large that it experiences most climatic conditions, ranging from snow and frost to heat waves.

The coldest areas are in Tasmania and the alpine areas in the south-east highlands of mainland Australia. The hottest areas are in the central west of the continent.



Australia's seasons are the opposite of those of the northern hemisphere. Summer is from December to February, autumn is from March to May, winter is from June to August and spring is from September to November.

July has the coldest average temperature. Average daytime temperatures are between 10 and 20 degrees Celsius (50 and 68 degrees F) in most of southern Australia, and in the high 20s or low 30s degrees Celsius (70s and 80s F) in the northern tropics. Temperatures below freezing are rare near the coast but many inland areas experience light overnight frosts in winter. In alpine areas, temperatures regularly fall below 0 degrees Celsius (32 F) and snow lies above 1500 metres elevation for several months a year.

January and February are the hottest months in southern Australia, whereas in the tropics November and December are hottest. Average daytime temperatures are more than 30 degrees Celsius (80s or 90s F) in most inland areas, and reach near 40 degrees Celsius (104 F) in parts of Western Australia. They are cooler (20s C/70s or 80s F) near southern coasts, in highland areas and in Tasmania.

Information online

- Bureau of Meteorology www.bom.gov.au.

The environment

Australia has a great diversity of landscapes with an unusual array of flora and fauna. We are committed to protecting and conserving its environment and its rich and unique biodiversity.

More than 10 per cent of continental Australia (around 77 million hectares) is protected. Another 65 million hectares of marine areas are also protected, including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park off the North Queensland coast.

Seventeen parts of Australia are on the World Heritage List, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Tasmanian Wilderness, the Wet Tropics of Queensland, Kakadu National Park, Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park in the Northern Territory, the Lord Howe Island Group and the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia.

Information online

- Department of the Environment and Water Resources www.environment.gov.au.

The first Australians

Australia's first inhabitants were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who settled the land at least 40 000 years ago and possibly as far back as 60 000 years ago.

By the time the first European settlers arrived in 1788, it is estimated that around 750 000 Indigenous Australians were living throughout most areas of the Australian continent.

Indigenous Australians had their own unique spiritual beliefs, a reverence for the land, a rich and diverse culture and an ongoing art tradition that is one of the oldest in the world.

Their lifestyles, cultural traditions and languages differed according to where they lived. Around 700 languages and dialects were spoken by Indigenous Australians at the time of European settlement.

Although there was early contact with seafarers and traders, Indigenous Australians were largely left alone until the arrival of the Europeans.

The initial contact between the Europeans and Indigenous Australians disrupted traditional lifestyles and practices and the Indigenous population declined dramatically during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Until the 1960s, little or no recognition was given to Indigenous Australian culture and history or to citizenship rights and responsibilities. For example, the right to vote in federal elections was not extended to all Indigenous Australians until 1965.

However, in 1967 more than 90 per cent of Australians voted in a national referendum to give the Australian Government the power to make laws for Indigenous Australians and to provide for them to be counted in the national Census. The referendum result was the culmination of a strong campaign by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It was widely seen as a strong affirmation of the Australian people's wish to see the Australian Government take direct action to improve the living conditions of Indigenous Australians.

Today, Australia's Indigenous population is estimated at around 483 000 – or 2.3 per cent of the total population. Indigenous cultures are a vital part of Australia's national identity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples contribute significantly across many fields, including the arts, media, academia, sport and business.

The Australian Government oversees programmes and policies aimed at helping Indigenous communities overcome the inequalities that still persist in some areas. These initiatives include efforts to improve health, housing, education and employment opportunities.

The government is also committed to ensuring that Indigenous people can have access to or own land with which they have an ongoing traditional association or which can help with their social, cultural and economic development. About 16 per cent of Australia is either owned or controlled by Indigenous people. The land is predominantly in remote areas.

Information online

- Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs www.facsia.gov.au.
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies www.aiatsis.gov.au.

The first Europeans

From the early 1600s, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish explorers reported sightings of various parts of the coastline of what was then known as *Terra Australis Incognita* (the unknown south land).

In 1770 an Englishman, James Cook, in his ship HM Barque Endeavour, charted the east coast of Australia and claimed it for the British Crown. Britain subsequently decided to use the new outpost as a colony for convicted criminals.

European settlement started with the arrival in Sydney Harbour on 26 January 1788 of a fleet of 11 ships. This First Fleet, commanded by Arthur Phillip, a captain in the Royal Navy, brought an estimated 1500 people, including 750 convicts, to the new colony.

Phillip became the first governor of the 'colony of New South Wales', as mainland Australia was then known.



With short supplies, the early years of settlement were a battle against starvation and famine. Eventually, conditions improved with the arrival of supply ships. By the time Phillip left the colony in 1792, the tents which housed the first arrivals had been replaced by rudimentary buildings and the early outline of Sydney Town had taken shape.

Within a few years, Sydney had become a busy port with ships visiting from as far away as Russia, America and France. The population grew to 5000 people by 1800, as the settlement reached inland to Parramatta.

From 1810 to 1821, the colony was governed by Lachlan Macquarie, one of the most significant leaders of Australia's early history. His period as governor marked a transition from penal colony to a settlement based on free enterprise, supported by convict labour.

By 1820, 30 000 convicts and 4500 free settlers had arrived in the colony. The free settlers set up farms and businesses as the colony continued to prosper. Although the convicts endured many hardships in the early days, many eventually acquired respectability as a result of hard work and the skills many of them had in trades and professions. From 1788 until penal transportation ended in 1868, about 160 000 men and women were brought to Australia as convicts.

In the first years after settlement very little was known about the interior of the continent or its vast coastline. There was increasing pressure to find land for farming and sheep grazing as well as new sources of fresh water and sites for other settlements.

Many explorers undertook difficult and hazardous expeditions north and south along the coast and west into the inland looking for a way across a line of mountains known as the Great Dividing Range. Later, others went into some of Australia's most inhospitable interiors, including the arid Nullarbor Plain and central and north-west Australia. Many lost their lives.

During the next three decades, settlers followed in the footsteps of the inland explorers and spread out across much of the habitable parts of the continent. Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) became a separate colony in 1825 and new settlements were established in what are now Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

The growth of the wool industry and the discovery of gold in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851 resulted in huge increases in the number of free settlers coming to Australia.

Australia's total population trebled from 430 000 in 1851 to 1.7 million in 1871. Most of these new arrivals were British, but they also included people from the Americas, France, Italy, Germany, Poland and Hungary. About 40 000 Chinese also came to Australia in search of gold – the single biggest group after the British.

The birth of a nation

The colony of New South Wales originally occupied almost all of the eastern part of the continent. Gradually, other colonies formed as they separated from the original settlement.

In 1852, self government was given to the new colonies. However, as each colony had its own systems of defence, postage, trade and transport, people increasingly recognised the need for greater cooperation among the settlements. At the same time, there was a growing feeling of nationalism.

By the end of the 19th century, civic pride and economic prosperity abounded. The nation's first railway line was opened in Melbourne, as was the first electric telegraph. Universities were established in Sydney and Melbourne and impressive public buildings were built.

Two other events marked the evolution of Australia into an independent nation. In 1870 the last British troops left the country, 80 years after the landing of the First Fleet. At the same time, the opening of the Suez Canal had reduced the 'tyranny of distance' from Europe, increasing the flow of new arrivals to Australia. By 1880, Australia's population had grown to more than two million people.

The nation's economic prosperity continued until drought and depression struck in the 1890s. For the New South Wales Legislative Assembly Speaker Edmund Barton and others, the economic downturn confirmed their commitment to the idea of a national government which could apply Australia-wide solutions to issues such as trade policy and defence.

Between 1898 and 1900, the people of Australia voted in favour of federation. The Commonwealth of Australia was formed on 1 January 1901 through the federation of the six states under a single constitution. The non-Indigenous population at the time of federation was 3.8 million.

Australia's first Prime Minister was Edmund Barton, who led the movement for federation in New South Wales. The nation's first parliament was opened at the Exhibition Building in Melbourne on 9 May 1901.

The founders of the new nation wanted Australia to be harmonious, cohesive and egalitarian. They had progressive ideas about human rights, the observance of democratic procedures and the value of a secret ballot.

Australia was one of the first countries to give women the right to vote and the right to sit in parliament – South Australia extended these rights to women in 1895. All Australian women won the right to vote and the right to sit in the Commonwealth Parliament in 1902.

Federation ushered in a period of optimism and from 1901 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, considerable progress was made in developing Australia's economy, particularly its agricultural and manufacturing capacities.

The Yass–Canberra region was chosen as the site of the national capital in 1908. Once the site of the new capital was agreed upon, an international competition for its design was launched in 1911. The design, selected from the 137 entries, was submitted by Chicago architect Walter Burley Griffin. Canberra was formally named on 12 March 1913.

A building to serve provisionally as Parliament House was commenced on 28 August 1923 in Canberra on a site immediately below Griffin's proposed site for the permanent Parliament House. The first parliament sitting in Canberra, including the opening ceremony, was on 9 May 1927.



The impact of war

Although Australia had gained independence as a nation, strong sentimental and family links to Britain remained. When Britain declared war on Germany after it invaded Belgium in 1914, Australia was united in its support for Britain.

World War I had a severe impact on Australia. In 1914 the total population of Australia was approximately 4.5 million and therefore the male population was probably considerably less than three million; yet 417 000 Australian men volunteered to fight in the war and more than 330 000 did so. Around 60 000 died and more than 152 000 were wounded by the time the war ended in 1918.

Out of this experience emerged one of Australia's most enduring values: the Anzac ethos of courage, spirit and 'mateship'.

Every year on 25 April, Australia commemorates a brave but ultimately failed battle which was fought in 1915 by the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps – known as the Anzacs – and other allied troops at Gallipoli, in Turkey.

The Anzacs (together with British, French and Indian troops) landed at Gallipoli with the aim of defeating Turkey by forcing a passage through the Dardanelles and bombarding Constantinople. However, the rugged, steep coastline and the staunch defence by Turkish soldiers held them back and the Anzacs withdrew on 20 December 1915. The campaign, which lasted eight months, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 8700 Australians who were killed in action or died of wounds or diseases.

Today, Anzac Day commemorates not only the original Anzacs, but all Australian soldiers who have fought in wars since.

The period between the two world wars (1919–1939) was marked by social and economic instability, particularly during the years of the Great Depression, when many Australian financial institutions failed.

Sharp falls in the prices of wool and wheat (Australia's main exports), the withdrawal of English capital and a fall in other export prices triggered a severe financial crisis. Unemployment rose dramatically by 1933 nearly one third of the workforce was unemployed and the national income declined sharply.

As the nation recovered from the Depression, and a little more than 20 years after 'the war to end all wars', the world was at war again. In 1939, Britain declared war on Germany after it invaded Poland. Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, responded that Australia was also at war.

During World War II, Australian forces made a significant contribution to the Allied victory in Europe and in Asia and the Pacific. Casualties were high with almost 40 000 Australians killed and many others wounded.

The generation that fought in this war and survived emerged with a sense of pride in Australia's capabilities – and a realisation that the conflict had come right to Australia's doorstep with the fall of Singapore, Japanese bombings in Broome, Darwin and Townsville in northern Australia, a submarine attack in Sydney Harbour, and the battle against a Japanese invasion force along the Kokoda Trail in what is now Papua New Guinea.

Like Gallipoli, the battle for Kokoda has come to symbolise the courage and spirit of Australians at war. A total of 625 Australians were killed and 1055 were wounded during a four month battle in appalling conditions to repel a Japanese invasion force which landed on the north coast of Papua with the intention of capturing Port Moresby.

Information online

- Australian War Memorial www.awm.gov.au.

Prosperity and change

Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants arrived in Australia in the immediate post-war period, at a time when there was a shortage of capable workers in Australia's manufacturing sectors.

The economy developed strongly in the 1950s and with relatively full employment, Australians generally prospered. The rate of home ownership rose dramatically from barely 40 per cent in 1947 to more than 70 per cent by the 1960s.

The population increased from around 7.4 million in 1945 to 10.4 million in 1960. The composition of the population started to undergo a significant change, as increasing numbers of non-British migrants arrived.

Australia's trading relationships also changed, with Japan replacing Britain as its major trading partner in the 1970s.

Other developments included the gradual expansion of government social security programmes and the arrival of television in 1956 – the same year that Melbourne hosted the Olympic Games, at the time the biggest international event ever held in Australia.

Since World War II, Australia has been governed by a coalition of the Liberal and Country (now National) parties for periods totaling more than 40 years and by the Australian Labor Party for periods totaling 20 years.

The process of social and economic development continues.

During the past two decades, extensive economic reforms have been implemented and, in recent years, Australia has been one of the best performing developed nations in the world, with economic growth fuelling new employment opportunities and productivity gains underwriting higher living standards for Australians.

Information online

- National Library of Australia www.nla.gov.au
- Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au



The people who call Australia home

Immigration has always been an important element in Australia's nation building. Settlers started arriving in Australia from 1788.

An average of about 50 000 migrants arrived in Australia each year during the gold rush era in the mid-19th century. Migration to Australia continued in subsequent years, reflecting the economic and social conditions in Australia and elsewhere.

Most of the early migrants were from Britain and Ireland and their Anglo-Celtic heritage was the basis of the new nation.

At the end of World War II, millions of people in Europe were displaced from their homelands. At the same time, there was an acute shortage of labour in Australia and a growing belief that significant population growth was essential for the country's future.

These and other factors led to the creation of a federal immigration department in 1945. The department, under various names, has existed continuously since then.

By 1947, an immigration boom was under way with a large and growing number of arrivals, including many who had arrived on government-assisted passages. Most of these migrants were from Europe, due to the 'White Australia' policy, which restricted migration from many parts of the world from Federation in 1901 until the early 1970s.

Many of the 6.5 million people who have come to Australia since 1945 were motivated by a commitment to family, or a desire to escape poverty, war or persecution. They were determined to establish a new life for themselves and their families and were willing to work hard to make the most of their opportunities.

For example, more than 100 000 migrants from 30 countries worked on the Snowy Mountains Scheme, a huge hydro-electric power generating project in Australia's southern alps. The project took 25 years to complete, from 1949 until 1974.

By the mid-1970s, earlier restrictions on the entry of non-Europeans had been progressively removed and since then, Australia's immigration policy has been non-discriminatory. An individual's ethnic origin, sex, race or religion plays no part in determining their eligibility for a visa.

Information online

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship www.immi.gov.au.

Democracy and government

Australia is a representative democracy – a system of parliamentary government in which Australian citizens may participate and have a say.

The system is based on democratic traditions and encourages religious tolerance and freedom of association. The institutions and practices at the heart of Australian national government have many features in common with British and North American traditions.

The Australian Constitution

The Commonwealth of Australia was established as a federal nation when the Australian Constitution came into effect on 1 January 1901. The Australian Constitution establishes the framework for the Australian national government.

The Constitution can be amended, but only with the approval of the electorate at a national referendum conducted in accordance with constitutional requirements. Any amendment must be approved by a double majority – a majority of electors as well as a majority of electors in a majority of the states (at least four out of six).

The Australian federation

The Constitution establishes a federal system of government comprising the Commonwealth (or national) government and the six state governments. In addition, self-governing territories have been established by the Commonwealth Parliament, which operate much like states, and local government bodies have been established by states and territories to deal with some local matters (such as parks, local roads and rubbish collection).

The Australian Constitution lists the subjects about which the Commonwealth Parliament can make laws. These include external affairs, interstate and international trade, defence and immigration. Subject to certain exceptions, the states and territories can make laws about any subject of relevance to the state or territory. However, states and territories cannot make laws that are inconsistent with Commonwealth laws. Examples of areas covered by state and territory laws are education, roads, police, fire and public transport.

Government at both Commonwealth and state levels involve three branches: a legislature (or parliament), an executive government and a judiciary.

The Australian system of government owes much to the tradition of Westminster, named after the Palace of Westminster, where the British Parliament sits. This system of parliamentary government was developed over centuries. Its main features are a head of state who is not the head of government and an executive government which is drawn from and is directly responsible to the parliament. There is 'rule of law' and the judicial system is independent of the parliament.

Parliaments in Australia differ from the Westminster model in that their authority is limited by their state or the Commonwealth Constitution.



The Australian Government

The Commonwealth Parliament, which makes national laws, comprises of two chambers or 'Houses': the House of Representatives and the Senate. The members of both Houses are directly elected by the Australian people at federal elections. The maximum term in the House of Representatives is three years; the maximum in the Senate is six years (federal elections for the House of Representatives are often held concurrently with 'half-senate' elections).

The Senate has 76 senators – 12 from each of the six states and two each from the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. In the House of Representatives the number of seats for each state depends on the size of the state's population. The number of members of the House of Representatives must be twice the number of senators, or as near as practicable. There are currently 150 members in the House, who each represent about 80 000 voters living in one particular area (called an electorate).

The government (usually referred to as the 'Australian Government') is formed by the party or coalition of parties which has a majority in the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister is the parliamentary leader of that party or coalition and is not directly appointed by the people, but by the party holding the balance of power in the House of Representatives. A government does not have to command a majority in the Senate.

To become law, proposed legislation must be agreed by both houses. Legislation may be initiated in either house, except for some financial legislation which must be initiated in the House of Representatives.

Elections

New governments are usually formed following general elections.

The maximum term for an Australian government is three years from the first meeting of a new parliament. However, a Prime Minister can ask the Governor-General to call a general election before the three-year term has been served.

More than 40 elections for the House of Representatives have been held since the first parliament opened on 9 May 1901.

Enrolling and voting

Before anyone can vote in federal, state and most local government elections in Australia, they must be on the electoral role. People can enrol if they are an Australian citizen and 17 years of age or older, and can vote as soon as they turn 18. Enrolment forms are available at Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) Offices, Post Offices and from the AEC website.

If an Australian becomes a resident overseas they need to register as an overseas elector within three years of their departure to remain enrolled to vote at federal elections. Registering enables them to remain on the electoral role for up to six years. If they wish to extend this entitlement they must apply to the AEC, one year at a time.

It is compulsory for all eligible Australian citizens to enrol and vote. Although the penalty for not voting is relatively small, Australia has one of the highest voter participation rates in the world, with more than 90 per cent of voters participating in the electoral process. Australian citizens vote to elect representatives to each of the three spheres of government – Commonwealth, state or territory and local.

Enrolled Australians can vote in federal elections if they are travelling overseas at the time, or vote before they go if the early voting period has commenced.

For federal election purposes the country is divided into electorates. For the House of Representatives, Australian voters choose among the candidates who are standing in their local electorate. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of first choices, the one receiving the fewest votes is excluded and the votes are redistributed to other candidates according to the second preference marked on the ballot by the voter.

This process continues until one candidate has more than 50 per cent of votes.

Preferences are also used for elections to the Senate, where candidates must reach a specified 'quota' of votes in the state or territory for which they are standing.

Most members of parliament in Australia belong to political parties. These parties are essentially made up of groups of people who share similar ideals and philosophies about how the country should be governed.

In Australia it is open to anyone to join a political party and participate in setting goals, determining party policy and helping party candidates in their election campaigns.

To stand for the Australian Parliament, candidates must be Australian citizens and must take all reasonable steps to divest themselves of any other citizenship.

State and territory government

Each state has its own parliament, which is the decision-making body of the relevant state government. All state parliaments except the Queensland Parliament are made up of two Houses.

Representatives elected to state parliaments are generally known as members – Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Members of the House of Assembly (MHA) or Members of the Legislative Council (MLC). The leader of a state government is called the Premier.

The Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory have a different arrangement. Each territory parliament has one House called the Legislative Assembly. The leader of each territory government is called the Chief Minister.

State and territory government responsibilities include law and order, consumer affairs, health, education, forestry, public transport and main roads.



Local government

The decision-making body of local government is usually called the city or shire council. Councils have been established by state governments to look after the particular needs of a city or local community. The people's representatives who form the council are known as aldermen or councillors. The head of the council is the mayor or shire president.

Local government responsibilities include local road maintenance, garbage collection, building regulations and land subdivisions, public health, and recreation facilities such as swimming pools.

Constitutional monarchy

Australia is an independent nation but retains constitutional links with Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, who is Queen of Australia.

The Queen appoints the Governor-General of Australia to represent her, on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Governor-General appoints ministers on the advice of the Prime Minister and, by convention, acts only on the advice of ministers on virtually all matters.

The federal legal system

The Australian legal system reflects the fundamental concepts of procedural justice and equality before the law.

The judiciary in Australia is responsible for interpreting and applying laws. Judges act independently of governments in carrying out this responsibility.

The High Court of Australia is the final court of appeal in all legal disputes. One of the major functions of the High Court is to interpret the Australian Constitution. This Court may rule a law to be unconstitutional – that is, beyond the power of a parliament – and therefore of no effect.

Information online

- Parliament of Australia www.aph.gov.au.
- Australian Electoral Commission www.aec.gov.au.
- High Court of Australia www.hcourt.gov.au.

Australian society today

One of the defining features of Australian society today is the cultural diversity of its people and the extent to which they are united by an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia.

Another defining feature is the egalitarian nature of Australian society. This does not mean that everyone is the same or that everybody has equal wealth or property. It also means that with hard work and commitment, people without high-level connections or influential patrons can succeed.

Within the framework of Australia's laws, all Australians are able to express their culture and beliefs and to participate freely in Australia's national life. Australia holds firmly to the belief that no-one should be disadvantaged on the basis of their country of birth, cultural heritage, language, gender or religious belief.

In order to maintain a stable, peaceful and prosperous community, Australians of all backgrounds are expected to uphold the shared principles and values that underpin Australian society.

See *Australian values and principles* on page 4.

Laws and social customs

Community behaviour in Australia is governed by a combination of formal laws and informal social customs.

All people in Australia must obey the nation's laws or face the possibility of criminal and civil prosecution. People are also expected to generally observe Australian social customs, habits and practices even though they are not normally legally binding.

Australian laws are made by the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory parliaments. The police have the job of keeping peace and order in the community and to bring people they believe have broken the law before courts of law. People in their local communities and neighbourhoods also help each other in the event of trouble and report anything unusual or suspicious to the local police station.

Australia has a national police force called the Australian Federal Police, which investigates crimes against federal laws including drug trafficking, illegal immigration, crimes against national security and crimes against the environment. All states of Australia and the Northern Territory have their own police forces, which deal with crimes under state or territory laws. Policing in the Australian Capital Territory is undertaken by the Australian Federal Police.

Although police officers may arrest people and give evidence in court, they do not make the final decision on whether or not people are guilty of crimes. This is decided by the courts.

Police and the community have good relations in Australia. You can report crimes and seek assistance from the police. If you are questioned by police, remain calm, be polite and cooperative.

Courts and the law

Courts are responsible for administering justice. They decide whether the law has been broken and what should happen to people found guilty of committing a crime.

In some cases, a magistrate will hear the case and deliver a verdict. In other cases, a jury of citizens makes the decision guided by a judge. In all cases the defendant is considered to be innocent until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt. Defendants also have the right to be represented by their lawyers.

In some cases, people who cannot afford lawyers to represent them may be provided with free legal help.

People on certain temporary visas should ensure that they are aware of the consequences or repercussions of a criminal conviction for their continued stay in Australia.



Criminal offences

Serious criminal offences include murder, assault, sexual assault, paedophilia, violence against people or property, armed robbery or theft, dangerous driving of a motor car, possession and use of illegal drugs, fraud or having sexual relations with young people who are aged below the legal age of consent (which varies from state to state in Australia).

Australia values cultural diversity. But nonetheless, all religious and cultural practices must conform to existing Australian laws. For example, state and territory laws prohibit practices involving genital mutilation and violence in the home.

Domestic violence

As in other countries, violence towards another person is illegal in Australia and is regarded very seriously. This includes violence within the home and within marriage, known as domestic or family violence. Domestic violence is regarded as any act by a person that may result in the victim experiencing or fearing physical, sexual or psychological abuse or damage, forced sexual relations, forced isolation or economic deprivation.

Drugs, smoking and drinking alcohol

The penalties for supply or possession of illegal/illicit/unlawful drugs can be very severe. They are even more severe for those found guilty of producing, supplying or selling them. Smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol are not illegal, but there are many restrictions on their public use.

Smoking tobacco is prohibited in a growing number of places, including most government offices, health clinics and workplaces. Smoking in indoor public places, such as restaurants, nightclubs, pubs, schools and shopping centres is also prohibited in most states and territories. Smoking in some outdoor public places is also prohibited in some states and territories. It is an offence for a retailer to sell tobacco products to anyone under 18 years of age.

Drinking alcohol is legal in Australia but only in certain places at certain times. It is against the law for any person to sell or supply alcohol to a person under the age of 18 years. It is also against the law for a person under 18 to drink alcohol except on private property such as a home. For more information in relation to health impacts of alcohol use refer to the Australian Alcohol Guidelines.

Information online

- www.alcohol.gov.au.

Traffic laws

Driving a motor car is regulated by state and territory governments. To drive a car in Australia, residents must have a local driver's licence and the vehicle must be registered. Disobeying or breaking traffic laws can result in large fines, loss of drivers' licences or even imprisonment. It is compulsory for everybody travelling in a car to wear a seat belt (or in the case of young children or babies, approved restraints).

See *Drivers' licences* on page 40.

Traffic laws are particularly strict regarding speed limits and driving after drinking alcohol. It is also illegal to talk on a hand-held mobile phone while driving.

Humane treatment of animals

It is against the law to mistreat or neglect animals. People are expected to treat all animals humanely, whether they are domestic pets or found in the wild. Many native Australian animals are protected and there are strict laws about hunting. It is also forbidden to kill animals within another person's property and there are usually local laws on which domestic animals may be kept in homes. Many Australians care for a dog, a cat or birds at the back of their property (called their backyard).

Guns and other weapons

Carrying weapons such as knives or firearms is against the law in Australia. A person who wishes to own a gun for purposes such as hunting, sports shooting and for use on farms is required to obtain a licence. Being unlicensed and having an unlicensed gun is illegal.

Other laws

There are also laws against littering, polluting or disposing of wastes without permission or creating excessive noise.

There is no death penalty in Australia.

Social customs

There are very few social customs which apply only in Australia. However, in some cases, there are differences in emphasis or approach compared to practices in other countries. If in doubt, the best advice is to ask a friend, a neighbour or work colleague.

For example, most Australians tend to be relatively informal in their relationships with acquaintances and work colleagues. In the workplace and among friends, most Australians tend to call each other by their first names.

However, this informality does not extend to physical contact. When meeting someone for the first time, it is usual to shake the person's right hand with your right hand. People who do not know each other generally do not kiss or hug when meeting.

Polite behaviour

'Please' and 'thank you' are words that are very helpful when dealing with other people, and buying goods or services. When asked if you would like something, like a cup of tea, it is polite to say, 'yes please', or just 'please' if you would like it, or 'no, thank you' if you do not. When you receive something, it is polite to thank the person by saying 'thank you'.

Australians often say, 'excuse me' to get a person's attention and 'sorry' if they bump into them. They also say, 'excuse me' or 'pardon me' if they burp or belch in public or in a person's home.

Australians also queue or line up when waiting to be served in a shop, a bank, a government department, a cinema or anywhere where a number of people are all seeking a service at the same time. Australians generally wait until it is their turn to be served or attended to. It shows respect for others and is the fairest way for everyone to get what they need.



Being on time for meetings and other visits is important. If you realise you are going to be late, try to contact the person to let them know. This is very important for visits to professionals such as doctors, as you may be charged money for being late or if you miss the appointment without letting them know beforehand.

Most Australians blow their noses into a handkerchief or tissue, not onto the footpath. This is also true for spitting. Many people will also say 'bless you' when you sneeze. This phrase has no religious intent.

Personal hygiene

The best way to protect yourself, your family and other people from illness and disease is to have good personal hygiene. Most Australians look after themselves and others by washing their hands before they prepare food, before they eat, after they have coughed or sneezed, after using the toilet, after handling animals or before or after any activity where they might put their health or other's health at risk by passing on germs.

When sharing food with others to prevent the spread of germs, it is usual practice to pick up food using the utensils provided. This might be tongs, a spoon or fork, chopsticks or salad servers.

Clothing

The types of clothing that people wear reflect the diversity in Australian society just as much as the variation in climate. There are no laws or rules on clothing, but you must wear certain clothing for work situations – most workplaces have dress standards.

Outside the work situation, clothing is an individual choice – many people dress for comfort, for the social situation or the weather. Clubs, movie theatres and other places require that you dress in neat, clean clothes and appropriate footwear.

Many Australians live close to the beach and the sea. On hot days, they may wear swimming costumes or little clothing on the beach and surrounds. This does not mean that people who dress to go to the beach or swimming have low moral standards. It means that this is what Australians accept on and near beaches. In some Australian states, there are also a small number of designated 'nudist' beaches where people may swim without any costume or clothing.

People from other countries can choose to wear culturally appropriate dress.

Invitations

If you get an invitation to lunch, dinner, barbecue, party, wedding, birthday, or any type of event, you will usually respond either on the spot or with a letter, phone call or an email. The midday meal is called 'lunch', and the evening meal is usually called 'dinner'. Some Australians also refer to the evening meal as 'tea' and can use the term to mean either dinner or, literally, a cup of tea or 'cuppa'. If invited for tea, the time of the event is a good sign of whether your host means dinner or just a cup of tea. An invitation to tea, any time after 6 pm (1800 hours) usually means dinner.

When you accept an invitation to a meal, it is also usual to tell the host what you cannot eat. You might be asked if you have any special dietary requirements or dietary restrictions. It is perfectly acceptable to say that you are a vegetarian and do not eat meat or that you are Muslim or Jewish and do not eat pork. You are not expected to drink alcohol if you do not wish to, even if your hosts do.

Changing role of families

The traditional Australian family comprises a father, mother and children. Other families come in different forms and sizes. They include many families with single parents, step and blended families, same-sex couples and couples living together and not formally married (de-facto relationships). De-facto relationships are legally recognised in Australia.

The roles within Australian families may also vary. In some families, the mother may be the sole income earner for the family while the father stays at home and cares for the children.

Marriage in Australia may only be entered into if both parties are willing to become married. The minimum age for marriage is 18 years. However, courts can approve marriages in exceptional cases if one of the people involved is aged 16 or 17 years. Having more than one husband or wife at the same time is illegal.

Is there a typical Australian?

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about the Australian identity and whether there is such a thing as a 'typical' Australian, with standard characteristics or traits.

There is no shortage of popular stereotypes and, just to confuse things, sometimes these stereotypes contradict each other.

For example:

- Australians are egalitarian, irreverent people with a deep suspicion of authority – yet they are mostly law-abiding and conformist.
- Australians are people of few words who live mainly in country areas or the Australian bush – yet most of them live a cosmopolitan lifestyle in the cities.
- Whether Australians live in the city or the bush they are open and direct and they say what they mean.
- Australians believe in the principle of giving people a fair go (a definition of a fair go can be read in Australian English). See page 32.
- Australians stand up for their mates (friends), the disadvantaged and the underdog. An underdog is a competitor or rival that is thought to have little chance of winning a sporting game or contest.
- Australians love their sport, both as spectators and participants.

There are also differences of opinion about the extent to which Australians have been influenced by their British heritage or, more recently, by Australia's strong relationship with the United States, or by the millions of migrants who have come to Australia in the post-war era.

Australians are sometimes seen as Europeans trying to come to terms with being geographically located in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet, at the same time, Australia is often seen as a gateway to Asia because of its geographic position and the large number of Australians who speak Asian languages.

The truth, of course, is that Australians, like people everywhere, cannot be easily stereotyped. Many of the popular images have some truth to them and most Australians conform to at least some of these images. However, which ones, and to what extent, depends on the individual.



Some of the qualities so closely associated with Australians, like mateship (friendship) and a fair go, are characteristics shared and valued by many people around the world. Australians obviously do not have exclusivity over compassion, fairness and loyalty to friends.

What is very Australian about these terms is that they have become firmly embedded in Australian history and the Australian psyche.

The concepts of mateship and a fair go grew out of the often tough battle for survival by Australia's early settlers against a strange, harsh and often hostile environment; they were reinforced by later generations of men and women in the Australian bush who relied on and supported each other through floods, fire and drought.

Henry Lawson, who was born in the Grenfell goldfields of New South Wales in 1867, was perhaps Australia's best chronicler of those times, writing with simplicity and compassion about mateship, the dignity of man and the lives of men and women in the Australian bush.

The qualities of mateship and loyalty were further enshrined in the Australian psyche by Australians' experiences in World War I, sometimes called the Great War, and the battle by the Anzacs at Gallipoli.

These and other qualities associated with earlier Australians live on today, tempered and enriched by the influence of millions of later settlers from Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

More recent residents have added richness to Australia's culture and character, and helped to forge new attitudes and traditions. Their contributions have been profound, enriching almost every aspect of Australian life, from business to the arts, from cooking to comedy.

Volunteering – practical mateship

Australians are well-known for their willingness to undertake voluntary social and community work without pay. More than six million Australians over the age of 18 years are active volunteers, helping out in a wide range of areas including emergency services, welfare, environment and conservation, fundraising, management, teaching and administration.

Many of Australia's bushfire fighters and emergency service officers are volunteers.

According to one survey, 47 per cent of people who undertook volunteer work gave their reason for doing so as wanting to be of service to the community. The other 43 per cent did so because it gave them personal satisfaction.

Information online

- Volunteering Australia www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Australian English

While English is Australia's national language, there are certain words and expressions that have become regarded as uniquely Australian through common usage, and some of them might seem strange or confusing to new arrivals.

These colloquial or slang words have many different origins. Some are shortened versions of longer words. Many were expressions already used by migrants who came from the north of England but which have since been adopted as Australian words. Australians also often shorten words, for example football becomes 'footy', television becomes 'telly' and barbecue, 'barbie'.

The use of some of these words, often coupled with an Australian sense of humour that is characterised by irony and irreverence, can sometimes cause confusion.

If you are unsure what an expression means, it is alright to ask the person who said it to explain.

Some common expressions you might hear from time to time are:

Arvo: short for afternoon – 'drop by this arvo', means please come and visit this afternoon.

Barbecue, BBQ, Barbie: outdoor cooking, usually of meat over a grill or hotplate using gas or coals. The host serves the meat with salads and bread rolls. It is common for a guest, when invited to a BBQ, to ask if they should bring anything. A snag is the raw type of sausage usually cooked at a BBQ. They can be made of pork, beef, chicken, vegetables or grains.

Barrack for: support or cheer for (usually a particular sports team).

Bloke: a man. Sometimes if you ask for help, you may get told to 'see that bloke over there'.

Bring a plate: if you are invited to a party or function and asked to 'bring a plate', this means bring a dish of food to share with your host and other guests. This is common for communal gatherings such as for school, work or a club. If you are unsure what to bring, ask the person who invited you.

BYO: if you receive an invitation that says 'BYO', this means bring your own beverages. If you do not drink alcohol, it is acceptable to bring juice, soft drink or soda, or water. Some restaurants are BYO. You can bring your own wine to these, although there is usually a charge for opening bottles, serving and providing and cleaning glasses called 'corkage'.

Cuppa: is a cup of tea or coffee 'drop by this arvo for a cuppa' means please come and visit this afternoon for a cup of tea or coffee.

Digger: an Australian soldier.

Go for your life: yes, go ahead.

G'day: Hello. How are you?

Fair go: equitable treatment. This means that what someone achieves in life should be a product of their talents, work and effort rather than as a result of their birth or favouritism.

Fortnight: this term describes a period of two weeks.

No worries: The task or request will be carried out without fuss or bother.



Ocker: a boorish, uncouth, chauvinistic Australian/or, alternatively, one who displays qualities considered to be typically Australian such as good humour, helpfulness and resourcefulness.

Shout: to buy someone a drink. At a bar or a pub when a group of friends meet, it is usual for each person to 'shout a round', meaning buying everybody a drink. Each person takes a turn at buying a 'round'.

To be crook: to be sick or ill.

There are a number of books on Australian colloquialisms and slang, including the *Macquarie Dictionary Book of Slang*.

Celebrations and holidays

Australians commemorate certain days each year that have particular meaning or national significance.

Most workers in Australia have about 12 national and state/territory public holidays throughout the year, in addition to their annual holidays.

Some of these days are marked by a holiday for everyone and are usually held on the same day in all states and territories. Sometimes they are celebrated nationally through specially organised events. Some local holidays are celebrated only in particular states and territories.

Christmas and **Easter**, two of the most important dates in the Christian calendar, are marked by national public holidays throughout Australia. Christmas Day is on 25 December every year, while Easter can fall in late March or early April.

Boxing Day

Boxing Day is on 26 December and is a public holiday. Some people suggest it was a day on which boxing matches were held; or gifts were given in boxes. Boxing day is considered part of the celebration of Christmas.

New Year's Day, on 1 January every year, is a public holiday. The most common time for people in Australia to take their annual leave is during the period from mid-December to the end of January.

Some other important national dates are:

Australia Day

Australia Day, 26 January, is the day Australians as a people commemorate the founding of the first European settlement in Australia in 1788. It is a national public holiday and new arrivals are especially welcome to join Australia Day events and meet other Australians.

Anzac Day

Anzac Day, 25 April, is the day the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzacs) landed at Gallipoli in Turkey in 1915 during World War I. This day is set aside in memory of those who fought for Australia and those who lost their lives in war. The day is a national public holiday and is commemorated with ceremonies, the laying of wreaths and military parades.

Queen's birthday

The Queen's birthday is celebrated every year on the second Monday in June and is a public holiday in all states and territories except Western Australia, where it is celebrated in September or October.

Australian Citizenship Day

Australian Citizenship Day was established on 17 September 2001 and marks the anniversary of the renaming of the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* to the *Australian Citizenship Act in 1973*. It is an opportunity for all Australians to reflect on the meaning and importance of Australian citizenship and celebrate the values which unite us. It is, however, not a public holiday.

Melbourne Cup Day

Melbourne Cup Day is the first Tuesday in November each year. The Melbourne Cup is a world famous horse race. Most people, whether at work, school or home, stop and watch the race on television. It is a public holiday in metropolitan Melbourne. In other places and mainly in the workplace, many people have a lunch or a party to celebrate the Melbourne Cup.

Sport, recreation and the arts

Many Australians love sport and many have achieved impressive results at the elite level. In the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, Australia ranked fourth overall in the medal tally behind the United States, China and Russia. In the 2006 Football World Cup, Australia reached the final 16.

But it's not just at the top level that Australians enjoy their sport. A recent national survey showed that more than 11 million Australians aged 15 years and over participated at least once a week in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport – a participation rate of almost 70 per cent.

The 10 most popular physical activities are walking, aerobics/fitness, swimming, cycling, tennis, golf, running, bushwalking, soccer and netball.

Other popular sports include cricket, hockey and skiing.

Australians also play – and love to watch – rugby league, rugby union and Australian Rules Football, a uniquely Australian game with roots traceable to early forms of rugby and Gaelic football.

Australia is well suited to activities with an outdoor focus, but there are a few safety rules to remember:

- At the beach, swim only in areas patrolled by surf lifesavers. Always swim between the flags and remember that not all beaches are patrolled by life-savers.
- Avoid swimming or fishing alone, particularly in isolated spots.
- Wear hats, sunglasses, protective clothing (such as a shirt), seek shade and use protective sunscreen on sunny days to avoid sunburn and skin cancer.
- Remember that open fires and barbecues are not allowed on days declared as total fire ban days.

Vibrant arts scene

Australia has a vibrant arts scene that reflects both the nation's Indigenous cultural traditions and its rich mosaic of migrant cultures.

All forms of the visual and performing arts have strong followings, including films, art, theatre and music. According to one survey, almost 13 million or 88 per cent of adult Australians attend a cultural event or performance every year.



Australia has a strong literary tradition, which started with the storytelling of Indigenous Australians and continued with the oral stories of convicts arriving in Australia in the late 18th century.

One Australian has won a Nobel Prize for Literature, with novelist Patrick White receiving the award in 1973. Other popular 20th century Australian novelists are Peter Carey, Bryce Courtney, Colleen McCullough, Morris West and Tim Winton.

Information online

- Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts www.dcita.gov.au.
- Australia Council www.ozco.gov.au.
- Australian Sports Commission www.ausport.gov.au.

Scientific achievers and innovators

Australians have a strong record of scientific achievements and innovations, notably in the fields of medicine, technology, agriculture, mining and manufacturing.

Australia's first innovators were Indigenous Australians, who developed some of the world's first stone tools, the boomerang (a specially shaped throwing stick that returns to its owner when thrown correctly) and the woomera (a spear throwing holder).

More recent innovations include the development of polymer bank notes, which have inbuilt security features and last four times longer than other bank notes, and the discovery of a plant gene which can increase the production of the world's crops. Australians are also leading the way in medical achievements and the development of technology to detect unexploded ammunition and landmines.

Recent medical achievements include the development of Relenza, the world's first anti-influenza drug, a scan which can quickly detect cancerous sunspots and a vaccine for cervical cancer.

Nine Australians have been awarded the Nobel Prize for scientific or medical achievements. The most recent were Professor Barry Marshall and Dr Robin Warren who received the award in 2005 for their discovery of a bacterium which causes stomach ulcers and gastritis. In 1996, Professor Peter Doherty received the prize for his work on immunology.

Each year, on Australia Day, the 'Australian of the Year' is named. Australians of the Year for 2005, 2006 and 2007 have all been scientists. In 2005, the award went to Dr Fiona Wood who developed a revolutionary spray-on skin for burns victims. In 2006, the award went to Professor Ian Frazer who developed the cervical cancer vaccine and in 2007, the recipient was leading environmental scientist, Professor Tim Flannery.

Dr Wood and Professor Frazer are both former British migrants. Professor Frazer's co-inventor was the late Dr Jian Zhou, a former Chinese migrant to Australia, who also became an Australian citizen before his death.

Information online

- Department of Education, Science and Training www.dest.gov.au.
- Backing Australia's Ability www.innovation.gov.au.
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation www.csiro.au.