



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 2,988,902

Area (sq. km.): 7,741,220

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world. It is just smaller than Brazil and about four-and-a-half times the size of the U.S. state of Alaska. Australia is the only country that occupies a complete continent. It is also the driest inhabited continent in the world. About one-third of its land is desert and another third is composed of poor-quality land. A long chain of mountains, the Great Dividing Range, runs along the Pacific coast. Fertile farmland lies east of the Great Dividing Range, in the southwestern corner of Western Australia, and in the island state of Tasmania. Cattle *stations* (ranches) reach the edge of the barren interior desert. The famed Australian Outback is an undefined region that encompasses all remote, undeveloped areas. The Outback is seen as a mystical heartland or frontier—a symbol of Australia's strength and independence—where the climate is hot, life is hard, and people are tough, independent, and few.

Among Australia's natural wonders is the Great Barrier Reef, a system of coral reefs that extends more than 1,250 miles (2,000 kilometers) near Australia's northeast coast. Regarded as a national treasure, it is the largest coral formation in the world. Australia is also famous for its wildlife: marsupials such as the koala, kangaroo, wallaby, possum, and wombat, as well as other distinctive species such as the platypus, echidna, and dingo. Birds native to Australia

include the emu, cockatoo, and kookaburra. Australia's snakes are among the most venomous in the world.

Summer is December through February, and winter is June through August. The climate varies considerably by region: a tropical climate prevails in the north; the interior is arid and hot, with temperatures routinely above 100°F (38°C) in the summer; the south is more temperate; and snow falls in the southeastern mountains in winter.

History

Origins and Colonization

Indigenous Australians, or Australian Aborigines, inhabited the continent for tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans. They lived in hunter-gatherer communities across Australia, most of them nomadic or semi-nomadic. Once European colonization began, many Aborigines died due to foreign diseases, land loss, and conflicts with settlers.

The Dutch explored parts of Australia in the early 17th century, but most of it was left undisturbed by Europeans until 1770, when Captain James Cook claimed the eastern coast for Britain. On 26 January 1788, the British established a penal colony (a settlement used to exile criminals) at Port Jackson, which later became the city of Sydney. Other penal colonies were founded in what became Hobart and Brisbane. Therefore, many of Australia's early settlers were convicts or soldiers. With the discovery of gold in 1851, the number of free persons immigrating to Australia increased rapidly, and free settlements were established in Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth. In 1868, the practice of transporting convicts to Australia ceased.

Commonwealth of Australia

In 1901, the continent's six British colonies (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia) agreed to federate as the Commonwealth of Australia. Australia's traditional role as a dutiful member of the British Empire, established by supplying troops for British conflicts such as the Boer Wars and World Wars I and II, eventually evolved into a more independent Australian identity. For example, Australian troops' harsh experiences during a World War I campaign in Gallipoli, Turkey, helped create an Australian national consciousness. This transformation of identity has come to be known as the ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) tradition.

The second half of the 20th century brought a transformation in the ethnic makeup of Australia. At the end of World War II in 1945, Australians were almost entirely of Anglo-Celtic descent, with 90 percent born in Australia. During the 1950s and '60s, a large influx of immigrants from Greece, Italy, and other European countries began to shape a more multicultural society. Significant Asian migration began in the 1970s. Today, about a quarter of Australians were born overseas.

Reforms and Elections

Beginning in the 1960s, a series of reforms addressed issues facing Australian Aborigines. In 1962, Aborigines received national voting rights, and in 1970, the government ended a longstanding assimilation policy, which had forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their parents, children who came to be known as the "stolen generations." Australia's High Court ruled in 1992 that Aborigines possessed Australia prior to the arrival of Europeans, rejecting a policy that the continent had been empty. The decision opened the way for legislation that allowed Aborigines to press land claims. Controversy still surrounds the history of relations between Australian Aborigines and Europeans, but Aboriginal culture is increasingly recognized as an integral part of Australia's national heritage. In a historic speech in February 2008, then prime minister Kevin Rudd issued a formal apology for the past mistreatment of Aboriginal people, particularly the stolen generations, on behalf of the Australian government.

Following September 2013 elections, conservative leader Tony Abbot became prime minister after six years of Labor Party rule, which had been characterized by frequent leadership changes and had brought to power Julia Gillard, Australia's first female prime minister.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Offshore resettlement policy:** In July 2013, Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) signed a deal under which asylum-seekers who have reached Australia by boat will be transported to PNG for processing. If they are later given refugee status, they will be resettled in PNG, which will receive investment in its infrastructure from Australia in return.
- **Afghanistan pull-out:** In October 2013, Prime Minister Abbott announced an end to Australia's involvement in the war in Afghanistan. All Australian combat troops will be withdrawn by year's end, though some 400 will stay to fill a number of non-combat roles. Forty Australians were killed and 260 more were injured during the course of the war.
- **Environmental practices:** The Australian government

faced criticism from environmental groups over its treatment of its marine habitats. In February 2014, the government authorized a catch-and-kill program for large sharks after a spike in shark-related deaths. Also in 2014, officials looking to expand a deep-water coal port decided to dredge the port and dump the sediment into the neighboring Great Barrier Reef marine park. Although the sediment will be disposed of away from the actual reef, scientists warned that the move will harm marine life, tourism, and fishing industries.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Population: 22,507,617

Population Growth Rate: 1.09%

Urban Population: 89%

Although the Outback plays an important role in Australia's perception of itself and the country's image abroad, the nation has a predominantly urban and coastal population. The vast majority of Australians live in urban areas, and 85 percent live within 30 miles (50 kilometers) of the coast. Sydney is the largest city, with over four million residents. Melbourne also has more than four million residents, while Brisbane has over two million. Adelaide and Perth each have between one and two million residents. Most urban residents live in a state or territorial capital (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart, or Darwin), often in a sprawling suburb.

About 92 percent of Australians are Caucasian. Seventy-four percent of the population claims Anglo-Celtic heritage. The Asian population has grown to 7 percent. Australian Aborigines comprise less than 1 percent of the population. Because of heavy immigration, Australia is a mosaic of many nationalities, with groups from throughout Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Pacific Islands.

Language

English is the national language and is taught in all schools. Colloquialisms and idioms make Australian English distinct from English spoken elsewhere. For example, *Spot on* means "Right on." A *prang* is a "fender bender." If someone is unwell, he or she is *crook*. A *bloke* is a "guy," and friends (particularly males) may refer to each other as *mate*. Australians, or *Aussies* (pronounced "AH-zeez") as they are often called, also shorten words for everyday conversation. Examples include *uni* (university), *kindy* (kindergarten), *telly* (television), and *footy* (football).

Australia is increasingly becoming a multicultural society, and it is quite common to see immigrants from a vast number of countries, particularly from Asia. As a result, there are many first-generation Australians who are conversant in two languages—Australian English and the tongue of their parents. Immigrant groups often continue to use their native languages at home. People who do not come from an immigrant family tend to be monolingual, although this trend is changing as more Australians are choosing to travel or study abroad. Also, foreign language study is required at the

secondary school level for at least two to three years.

Aborigines once had more than 250 languages, but only about 25 are currently being taught to children. There is now an effort to place more emphasis on Aboriginal languages. Aborigines have their own radio system, more families are speaking traditional languages at home, and many Aboriginal schools delay English instruction for a few years. Australian universities are in the process of recording and documenting Aboriginal languages in an effort to preserve them.

Religion

Generally, religion does not play a strong role in daily life, but many people attend church on special occasions, and public and school holidays are held during Christmas and Easter. Approximately 61 percent of Australians are Christians, divided among Anglican (17 percent), Roman Catholic (25 percent), and other denominations (19 percent), including the Uniting Church (a combination of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational). Evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant faiths are growing. Followers of other religions and nonreligious individuals account for the remaining population. Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism have large numbers of adherents.

Aboriginal beliefs are based on legends of the *dreamtime*, when ancient ancestors sang the land and living things into being. In Aboriginal society, ceremonies and social responsibilities help people maintain connections to each other and the land.

General Attitudes

Australians are proud of their heritage—that a nation of convicts and laborers established a wealthy, educated, and egalitarian society in a harsh and inhospitable land. They value tolerance and fairness (called *a fair go*) and dislike aggressive, ostentatious, or proud behavior. At times, this dislike is manifest in the desire to bring down people of power and influence to the common level. While Australians are generally perceived as laid-back, they also value hard work and have a strong sense of politeness; being prompt is important.

Australians are outgoing and friendly and place a high value on enjoyment. They particularly appreciate material things that allow them to enjoy life (spacious homes, vacations, cars). Australians have a prevailing optimism that things will “be right.” Their sense of humor is often laced with irony, sarcasm, and satire and is frequently self-deprecating.

In recent years, extended drought and fears over climate change have made Australians increasingly conscious of environmental issues. Water resources management and energy conservation often rank high among people's concerns.

Personal Appearance

Australians generally follow European and North American fashion trends, as well as those created by their own native designers. They tend to dress casually but are not sloppy. Australian businessmen commonly wear suits. In hot weather and tropical regions, an open-neck, short-sleeved shirt may be

worn. Women in the workplace wear fairly conservative yet stylish pant suits or blouses and skirts. “Dress-down” days, where jeans are allowed, are increasingly popular, especially among younger employees. People usually dress up to go into the city or for social functions. In the capital cities and on the Gold Coast (on Australia's northeastern coast), it is more common to see people wearing designer fashions on a day-to-day basis. During winter, sweaters (*jumpers*), leather boots, leather hats, long coats, and other cool-weather clothes are necessary in some (particularly southern) regions. Australians rank first in the world in rates of skin cancer and therefore tend to be careful about sun protection; many people wear hats and sunglasses year-round.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Australians greet friends with a casual *Hi* or *G'day* (Good day) and a handshake. Close female friends and friends of the opposite sex might hug and kiss lightly on the right cheek. More formal greetings involve a simple *Hello, how are you?* From a distance, a wave is considered an acceptable greeting. Friends and peers generally are addressed by first name, while elders or superiors are addressed by their title (*Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Miss*) and surname. In the workplace, increased familiarity between a supervisor and employee may result in use of the first name.

Gestures

Rules of basic Western etiquette are strongly adhered to in Australia. When yawning, one covers the mouth and then excuses oneself. Winking at women is typically considered inappropriate. Pointing at someone with the index finger may be perceived as rude. Instead, one may point with an open hand in the person's general direction. It is considered impolite to stand too close to people while conversing. Interrupting a conversation or passing between conversing individuals is also impolite. Australian men generally maintain a strong sense of personal space.

Visiting

Casual visiting in the home is common in Australia. Close friends and relatives may arrive unannounced, but otherwise visits are prearranged. Visits often take place during the early evening. Arriving unannounced at mealtimes is generally inappropriate. Hosts typically serve tea, coffee, or beer, along with a light snack such as cake or *biscuits* (cookies).

Australians enjoy inviting others to dinner. Guests often bring something for the meal (fruit, homemade goods, beer, or a bottle of wine). Hosts greet guests warmly at the door before inviting them to enter the home. After dinner, the company sometimes goes out to a dance club, movie, or sports bar. One popular reason for getting together is the *barbie* (barbecue). It may be informal, where guests bring their own meat and maybe another item, but it is just as common for hosts to provide all the food. Parties and card games are also popular. Many people also meet friends in local pubs after work and on weekends.

Eating

Australians generally eat three meals a day. The evening meal may be the only meal busy families eat together on weekdays. The term *tea* may refer either to afternoon refreshments or the evening meal, which is also called *dinner*. Table etiquette can vary among ethnic groups. However, most Australians eat in the continental style: the fork remains in the left hand and the knife in the right. It is considered impolite to put elbows on the table or use a toothpick at the table. Individuals do not leave the table until everyone has finished. Dinner guests often receive a plate already served rather than serving themselves from various dishes at the table. However, in some homes the host will place all the food on the table for guests and family to serve themselves or be served from. Guests wait for the host to offer second helpings, rather than ask for them. At a restaurant, one places utensils together on the plate to indicate that one is finished and wishes to have the dish cleared away. Tipping is becoming more common as more visitors come from overseas. If the service is good, diners generally leave a small tip (usually around 10 percent of the bill).

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The average family has two or three children, although larger families are not uncommon. The concept of the extended family is not strong in Australia, although among the Aborigines and many immigrant groups, it remains very important. Older children living at home are expected to contribute toward family expenses. There are an increasing number of single-parent homes, stepfamilies, and families in which both father and mother work outside the home.

Gender Roles

Women still carry a lot of the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the family and household, although men are increasingly sharing the workload in terms of household chores and the raising of children. This transformation is more common in urban areas than in the countryside, where it is still more common to see women performing most of the household duties.

About 65 percent of women are in the labor force. It is common to see women employed in all types of work. They generally are considered equal to men, with about the same amount of education, fairly equal wages, and important leadership positions in the private and public sectors. There are many female politicians across the country, including some who are premiers (state governors). In some management roles, however, it is still common to see men being paid more than equally qualified women.

Housing

Exteriors

The typical home is a freestanding single-storey house with a yard. Timber and brick are the most common building materials. Roofs are tiled or made of metal sheeting such as

galvanized iron or painted steel. One popular feature is an “outdoor living” area: a covered patio with a barbecue and dining table used for meals in warm weather. In city centers, apartments and townhouses are popular.

Interiors

A living area, dining area, kitchen, bathroom, and multiple bedrooms are found in an average home. New homes often feature an open-plan combination kitchen, dining, and living area.

Ownership

Home ownership is highly valued; about 70 percent of Australians own their own homes. Many elderly Australians value their independence and live in their own homes or in communities for senior citizens. These homes may be funded by church, government, or community groups, although some are privately owned.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Dating usually begins by age 15, often in small groups. It is common for teenagers to have boyfriends and girlfriends, and parents increasingly allow them to date on their own. The most popular activities are dancing and going to movies, although young couples also spend their time together with other teens or walking in shopping malls. Concerts and dance clubs with live music are very popular locations to meet people.

Marriage in Society

The average age of marriage is 27, though it is increasingly common for people to put off getting married and having children until well into their late thirties. Australians traditionally left home once they became adults, whether they married or not. Although the majority of married couples live independently, an increasing number of younger couples are living with their parents because they cannot afford to rent or buy a place of their own, or because they are saving money for a down payment.

A growing number of couples choose to live together before or instead of marrying. This arrangement is referred to officially as a *de facto* marriage. In some cases, parents will subtly suggest that a marriage should take place, but most people are independent in their choice of marriage partner as well as when they get married.

There are an increasing number of divorces in Australia, although many people remarry. It is common to see weddings take place where both people have children from a previous marriage.

Weddings

Prior to a wedding, it is typical for the groom's friends to throw him a party called *buck's night*. Often they go out and visit nightclubs and bars, and a large amount of alcohol is consumed. Women get together in a similar celebration called *hen's night*.

Church weddings take place regularly; however, it is becoming more common for an official ceremony to be held in a park or garden. Many weddings are even held at home in the backyard of the parents of the bride or groom. A *celebrant* (an official who performs the marriage ceremony) is always present at non-church weddings to formalize the wedding,

although this person is not necessarily a religious official. Wedding banquets are becoming smaller, with 50 to 100 guests attending. Wedding costs depend on the number of guests and what kinds of food, music, and decorations the couple desires. Traditionally, the bride's parents would pay for the majority of the cost of the wedding, but it is increasingly common to see families share the cost, or for the couple to pay for much of the wedding.

Life Cycle

Birth

Companies in Australia offer maternity leave, and it is common for companies to hold open positions for women who are on leave for up to one year. Some companies offer paternity leave but only for a short time. When a woman is expecting a baby, family members and friends usually host a baby shower for her; presents include clothing and other items for the infant and mother. Many couples like to know the gender of the baby before it is born, although there are still some who prefer to wait and find out on the day of the birth.

Children are normally given two names (a first name and a middle name), though in some cases, children are given three names. Children typically take the father's surname, although some are given the mother's surname or a hyphenated combination of both. Close friends and family may come to the hospital to visit the new mother and baby but are careful not to overburden them. Birth celebrations vary from family to family, and while the average person is not a regular churchgoer, many parents still have their babies baptized.

Milestones

Rites of passage for young people include graduating from high school (at age 17 or 18) and obtaining a driver's license (a restricted license at age 18, then a full license at 21). Young people are required to vote and are able to consume alcohol at age 18. Another common milestone is a *debutante ball*, a dance to which high school girls invite a partner and wear a white gown. When a person turns 21, he or she is considered an adult, and friends and family are invited to a large birthday party. These events are sometimes celebrated as formal gatherings in large social halls or informally at people's homes.

Death

Funerals typically consist of a wake, a memorial service, and a procession of cars driving to the cemetery for the burial. Even though Australia is becoming more secular, church funerals are the most common type, and many people still ask a priest or minister to perform a Christian burial service. It is common for family and close friends to offer a few words about the deceased during the funeral. Couples typically choose to be buried side by side in the same plot. Urban cemeteries usually have grounds that are carefully groomed and planted with grass.

It is becoming increasingly popular today for people to choose cremation over burial, and some cemeteries even have special places set aside where ashes may be kept. Some people make a special request to have their ashes scattered in a place that is meaningful to them, such as on a mountain or near the ocean. Among Aborigines, burial remains more

common than cremation.

Diet

Australian cuisine is an evolving blend of European and Asian foods. Popular dishes include steak, roast lamb and lamb chops, sausages (*snags*), french fries (*chips*), seafood, pasta, and meat pies, but stir-fries and other Westernized Asian dishes are common. Dinner may consist of meat, potatoes, vegetables, and salad, followed by dessert (ice cream, fruit salad, pudding) and coffee. As in many countries, however, there is a trend toward eating lighter foods, and salads, seafood, and fresh vegetables are increasing in popularity. Fruits and vegetables are grown year-round. *Take-away* (take-out) and fast-food businesses are popular. Australians often drink domestic wine or beer with their meals.

Recreation

Sports

Physical fitness, exercise, and sportsmanship are important to most Australians. Cricket is the most popular sport. The first official cricket match between Australia and England took place in the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in 1877, and the MCG continues to be a favorite destination for fans of the Australian-rules football grand finale, which is held yearly on the last Saturday in September. Many people enjoy rugby (most popular in New South Wales and Queensland), soccer, basketball, cycling, tennis, lawn bowling, golf, and water sports such as surfing, swimming, and kayaking. Australian-rules football, or *footy*, is particularly popular in Victoria. Many girls learn netball, a game similar to basketball, as early as age five and play it throughout school. Auto racing and horse racing are also popular spectator sports. The Melbourne Cup horse race is a state holiday in Victoria and one of the nation's most popular sporting events. The Australian Open, held in Melbourne in January, is one of the world's four major tennis tournaments.

Leisure

Australians love being outdoors, and on weekends it is common to see people utilizing public parks, where family and friends gather to have a barbecue. Often these barbecues are free to use, although some of them are coin operated. A great number of public parks have enclosures for dogs where they can run around without a leash. Popular outdoor recreational activities include fishing, boating, *bush walking* (hiking), going to the beach, picnicking, and camping. Going to movies is popular, and the Australian film industry is one of the largest and most successful in the world. A number of music festivals take place throughout the year, reflecting Australia's ethnic diversity and joyful approach to life.

Vacation

Australians also enjoy travel, both domestic and international. Nearly all salaried workers receive four weeks of paid vacation each year. Many Australians love to travel to the Gold Coast, on Australia's northeastern coast. Turtle-watching, boating, and fishing are popular activities in that region. Snow skiing is popular in the mountains of Tasmania and in southeastern Australia.

The Arts

For thousands of years, Aboriginal art has portrayed *dreamtime* ancestors, who created life and the landscape. Rock art, paintings, dances, and musical stories called *songlines* focus on these creation legends. The Aboriginal *didgeridoo* is a long wooden musical instrument into which the player blows to produce a distinctive resonating sound.

Australian writers and poets have celebrated the nation's frontier spirit. One poem of the Outback, "Waltzing Matilda" by A. B. "Banjo" Paterson, has become an unofficial national anthem. Painters have also used the Outback as their inspiration, portraying the beauty of the unique Australian landscape. The Sydney Opera House, a national symbol, represents modern Australia's devotion to the fine arts. Dance, theater, and the symphony can be found in all of Australia's major cities. A number of Australian performers, from operatic singers to rock bands, have made their mark internationally.

Holidays

Official national holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.), Australia (National) Day (26 Jan.), Easter (Friday–Monday), Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day (25 Apr.), Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday (second Monday in June), Christmas Day (25 Dec.), and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Labor Day, bank holidays, and holidays for local horse races or cultural festivals vary from state to state.

ANZAC Day

ANZAC Day honors the armed forces and war dead and marks the day of Australia's first battle in World War I. On this day, it is common for current service members and veterans to gather at dawn at a public memorial. Later in the day, there are parades of former soldiers who march wearing their war medals. The parades usually end at a public war memorial, where another service is held, during which a moment of silence is observed to remember those who have died in war.

Christmas

Christmas is a significant holiday for Australians. Beginning well before Christmas, people dress up in Santa Claus outfits in shopping malls, where children line up to see Santa and make a wish for a present. On Christmas Eve, each town or city has a public gathering to sing carols. Children may also leave out some food or drink for Santa Claus, who traditionally visits on Christmas Eve.

Christmas is usually celebrated with immediate or extended family. The family gathering is usually held at home, where a large lunch or dinner is prepared and presents are exchanged. The meal often includes roasted meat (usually turkey, chicken, or ham), stuffing, salads, plum pudding, and *pavlova* (meringue topped with whipped cream and fruit), and many families have a barbecue. People often attend church on Christmas Day, although this number has been declining in recent years. Because Christmas occurs in the summer in Australia, it is popular to go swimming in a pool or at the beach.

Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, comes from a British tradition of giving small boxed gifts to service employees or the poor. It is now simply a day to visit friends and relatives.

Other Holidays

Australia Day commemorates the arrival of the first European settlers to Australia. Show Day, which has no specific date, is celebrated in most cities and towns on one day during the year. It is normally held at a showground, or large public arena, and traditionally was an agricultural fair, where farmers would bring in some of their best livestock or where new machinery would be on display. Some agricultural aspects of the show still remain, but many of these have given way to carnival rides and game stalls where players can win prizes.

SOCIETY

Government

Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II (U.K.)

Head of Government: PM Tony Abbott

Capital: Canberra

Structure

Australia is a federal parliamentary democracy consisting of six federated states, the Australian Capital Territory around Canberra, and the Northern Territory. States have power over all matters, except those reserved to the Commonwealth of Australia in the constitution. The nation remains a member of Britain's Commonwealth of Nations and officially recognizes Queen Elizabeth II as its monarch. The queen is head of state and is represented by a governor-general, who is Australian. The prime minister is head of government. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party or majority coalition in Parliament. The federal Parliament consists of a 76-seat Senate (with twelve members from each of the country's six states and two each from the two territories) and a 150-seat House of Representatives. Members of the Senate who represent the states serve six-year terms and are elected through proportional representation. Members of the Senate who represent the territories and members of the House of Representatives serve a maximum of three years per term and are chosen by voters ranking candidates in order of preference.

Political Landscape

Major political parties include the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Liberal Party of Australia, and the National Party of Australia. The Liberal Party and the National Party form a center-right coalition with two other parties, while the Labor Party is center-left. The Labor Party requires that each gender hold at least 40 percent of party positions. A few other minor parties are represented in Parliament. Power regularly changes hands between the ALP and the Liberal Party (which leads the coalition with the National Party). Both parties have struggled to adequately address issues regarding the treatment of the indigenous Aboriginal community. Australians are also politically divided over whether to Australia should become a republic with a president as head of state rather than a monarch. A 1999 referendum showed a small majority of Australians preferred to remain a constitutional monarchy.

Government and the People

All citizens age 18 and older are required to vote in federal

and state elections. Those who do not vote may be fined, so voter turnout regularly tops 90 percent. Elections are considered free and fair. Australia has one of the lowest levels of corruption in the world. The government respects many freedoms, including religion, speech, press, and assembly, even though some rights are not constitutionally guaranteed.

Economy

GDP (PPP) in billions: \$998.3

GDP (PPP) per capita: \$43,000

Australia has been nicknamed the “lucky country” because of its vast mineral deposits and other resources. Australia exports many minerals, including iron ore, bauxite, diamonds, coal, silver, gold, and copper. Livestock and sheep production are important in Australia, one of the world's leading exporters of beef and wool. Australia also has a large and diversified service sector. Manufacturing and services together now contribute twice as much to exports as farming. Australia's mineral and agricultural exports are sensitive to fluctuations in world-market prices. These fluctuations have sometimes led to periods of recession and restricted economic growth. The country is self-sufficient in food production. About 60 percent of exports go to Asian nations. The currency is the Australian dollar (AUD).

Transportation and Communications

Internet Users (per 100 people): 83

Cellular Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people): 107

Paved Roads: 43%

Australia is among the highest-ranked nations in the world in number of automobiles per capita; many families own two cars. The transportation system also includes taxis, interstate bus lines, railways, and an extensive airline system. Bus systems run smoothly in metropolitan areas. Melbourne has an extensive *tram* (streetcar) system. Sydney has a ferry system. An overnight ferry service travels between Victoria and Tasmania.

Most Australian adults own a cellular phone. Nearly all homes have a landline telephone, and most have an internet connection, usually high-speed broadband. Television broadcasters include two national public networks and three national commercial networks. Access to paid television cable and satellite networks is also common. Many public and commercial radio stations operate. Two national newspapers and numerous local newspapers are published daily.

Education

Adult Literacy: 99%

Mean Years of Schooling: 12.8

Structure and Access

Public education is administered by state governments and financed by federal funds. Seven years of primary education are followed by five years of secondary education (six in New South Wales and Victoria). Schooling is compulsory from ages 6 to 15 (16 in Tasmania). The School of the Air (correspondence instruction originally supplemented by

shortwave radio and now by the internet) reaches children in remote areas. Three-quarters of all students complete their secondary education. Of those who leave school early, many sign up for apprenticeships in the manual trades.

State schools do not limit the number of students attending, but students are expected to attend a school that is in their vicinity. More than one-third of all children attend private schools. Most of these schools have a religious affiliation—Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran being the most common. Costs of private school vary according to location (tuition is higher in the capital) and the reputation of the school. Fewer people are enrolling in teaching courses, and as a result, the average age of teachers in Australia is quite high. It is especially hard to find teachers to take positions in rural communities. Often, a teacher is assigned to a rural post before being eligible to apply for a spot in a large city.

School Life

Uniforms are required for all students, although they vary greatly in style and formality. At private schools, boys are expected to wear a tie, and both boys and girls must wear a blazer and a hat. In Queensland, all students must have a hat, due primarily to concerns about exposure to the sun. With increased numbers of dual-income and single-parent families, many schools offer a supervised care system, where students are dropped off in the morning as early as 6 a.m. and picked up as late as 6 p.m. There, students can do their homework or take part in organized activities. Many schools offer Japanese, Indonesian, and Chinese, in addition to (or sometimes in place of) the traditional European offerings of Spanish, French, Italian, and German.

Higher Education

Following graduation from high school, students can choose from a variety of universities, colleges, or vocational schools, all of which can be found in all states. The most common type of vocational school is TAFE (Technical and Further Education), which is a state-sponsored institution found in most urban areas. Generally, the best universities are found in the capital cities of each state, and each has an area of specialization. Some schools, such as James Cook University, are not based in a capital city but still offer strong educational opportunities.

Health

All Australians are entitled to subsidized basic health services under the national system, which is funded by an income tax. Many Australians also have private insurance. Low- to middle-income individuals receive a tax rebate if they have private insurance, while high-income individuals pay a small penalty tax if they do not have private insurance. About two-thirds of all hospitals are public. The Royal Flying Doctor Service, a non-profit organization, provides emergency and primary health care in the Outback. Quality of health care is one of the reasons that life expectancy for Australians is among the highest in the world. However, the Aboriginal population experiences higher rates of infant mortality and lower life expectancies than the rest of the population.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Australia, 1601 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone (202) 797-3000; web site www.usa.embassy.gov.au. Australian Tourist Commission, web site www.australia.com.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Canberra
Population	22,507,617 (rank=55)
Area (sq. mi.)	2,988,902 (rank=7)
Area (sq. km.)	7,741,220
Human Development Index	2 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	19 of 148 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$43,000
Adult Literacy	99% (male); 99% (female)
Infant Mortality	4 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	80 (male); 84 (female)
Currency	Australian dollar

CultureGrams™

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