



Canberra & Around

POPULATION: 352,200

AREA: 2366 SQ KM

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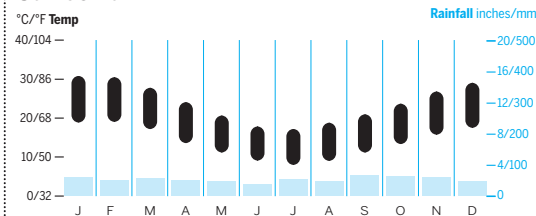
Why Go?

The city of Canberra is a monument to the young country's aspirations, its urban landscape designed to show off the nation's democratic and cultural institutions. The city is an excellent destination for museum addicts, with wonderful fine-art and historical collections. Canberra is the nation's political heart – its restaurants buzz with power-lunchers, while at the city's bars political reporters hang about hoping for a bit of gossip or a wine-fuelled indiscretion. Canberrans are richer and better educated than the national average, and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is known for its liberal politics, becoming the first jurisdiction to vote a woman its head of government and enacting progressive legislation on everything from gay unions and women's rights to porn and marijuana.

The hyper-planned city is cradled by hilly wilderness, beyond which are several charming villages and a growing number of cold-climate wineries. Half of the territory is protected as national park or reserve, with plenty to attract hikers, campers and nature lovers of all kinds.

When to Go

Canberra



Feb-Mar (except Easter) Sun's still shining and kids are back at school.

May-Nov Spot whales along the coast.

Dec Enjoy Christmas Aussie-style on the coast – seafood for lunch and beach cricket.

POP 347,000

A tranquil artificial lake, an enormous flag flying above and huge avenues fanning out from its centre: Canberra, like other purpose-built capitals, can seem big on architectural symbolism and low on spontaneity. But behind its slightly sterile exterior the city has plenty going on. Apart from its world-class museums and galleries – which alone justify a visit – the city boasts a lively bar scene (if only from Thursday to Saturday), and a vibrant live-music culture fuelled by the city's university students. Canberra's museums host gaggles of school kids, bussed in from all over the country to pay homage to the nation's icons, while the fine permanent collection and frequent international blockbuster exhibitions at the National Gallery draw visitors from around Australia. During parliamentary-sitting weeks the town hums with the business of national politics, but it can feel a bit dead during university holidays, especially around Christmas and New Year.

History

The Ngunnawal people called this place Kanberra, believed to mean 'meeting place' – a name the area may have earned for the huge intertribal gatherings that happened each year in Bogong moth season.

Like most of the first Australians, the Ngunnawal suffered a violent disruption to their way of life following European settlement around 1820, but they've survived to increase their profile and numbers in recent decades.

In 1901 Australia's separate colonies were federated and became states. The fierce rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne meant neither could become the new nation's capital, so a small chunk was carved out of New South Wales' Limestone Plains somewhere between the two cities. By 1927 Canberra was established enough to take over from Melbourne as the seat of national government, but the city's expansion really got under way in the decade following WWII, when the population trebled to 39,000.

Sights

Canberra's significant edifices, museums and galleries are dotted around Lake Burley Griffin. Wheelchair-bound visitors will find that most sights are fully accessible.

Those keen on visiting Questacon, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and

Cockington Green (p265) should pick up a **3-in-1 Ticket** (adult/child/concession/family \$47.50/27/33/128.50), which gives access to all three attractions; buy it at any of the sites or the visitors centre.

Lake Burley Griffin

LANDMARK

Named after Canberra's architect, the lake (Map p254) was filled by damming the Molonglo River in 1963 with the 33m-high Scrivener Dam. Around its 35km-long shore are many places of interest.

Built in 1970 to mark the bicentenary of Cook's landfall, the **Captain Cook Memorial Water Jet** (Map p254; ☀10am-noon & 2-4pm, also 7-9pm daylight-saving months) flings a 6-tonne column of water up to 147m into the air, and sometimes gives free showers, despite its automatic switch-off in strong winds. There is a skeleton globe at nearby **Regatta Point** on which Cook's three great voyages are traced; also close is the **National Capital Exhibition** (Map p254; ☎02-6257 1068; Barrine Dr; admission free; ☀9am-5pm), displaying the city's history. Further east is the stone-and-slab **Blundells' Cottage** (Map p254; ☎02-6257 1068; Wendouree Dr; adult/child/family \$7/5/15; ☀11am-4pm), built in 1860 to house workers on the surrounding estate and now a reminder of the area's early farming history.

On Aspen Island is the 50m-high **National Carillon** (Map p254; ☎02-6257 1068), a gift from Britain on Canberra's 50th anniversary in 1963. The tower has 55 bronze bells, weighing from 7kg to 6 tonnes each, making it one of the world's largest musical instruments. Daily recitals are held – call ahead or check www.nationalcapital.gov.au then hit 'visiting' to download the latest schedule.

On the northern shore fronting Old Parliament House is **Reconciliation Place** (Map p254), where artwork represents the nation's commitment to the cause of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

National Museum of Australia

MUSEUM

(Map p254; ☎1800 026 132, 02-6208 5000; www.nma.gov.au; Lawson Cres, Acton Peninsula; admission free; ☀9am-5pm) This museum is one big abstract Australian storybook. Using creativity, controversy, humour and self-contradiction, the National Museum dismantles national identity and in the process provokes visitors to come up with ideas of their own. There are lots of attendants on hand to help you navigate exhibitions on environmental change, Indigenous culture,