

Welcome to Australia

Australia – the sixth-largest country on this lonely planet – is dazzlingly diverse: a sing-along medley of mountains, deserts, reefs, forests, beaches and multicultural melting-pot cities.

Hip Cities

Most Australians live along the coast, and most of these folks live in cities. In fact, Australia is the 18th-most urbanised country in the world: it follows that cities here are a lot of fun! Sydney is a glamorous collusion of beaches, boutiques and bars. Melbourne is all arts, alleyways and Australian Rules football. Brisbane is a subtropical town on the way up; Adelaide has festive grace and pubby poise. Boomtown Perth breathes west-coast optimism; Canberra transcends political agendas. And the tropical northern frontier town of Darwin and chilly southern sandstone city of Hobart couldn't be more different.

Arts & Culture

No matter which city you're wheeling into, you'll never go wanting for an offbeat theatre production, a rockin' live band, lofty art-gallery opening, movie launch or music festival mosh-pit. This was once a country where 'cultural cringe' held sway – the notion that anything locally produced simply wasn't up to scratch. But these days the tables have turned (and, if anything, Australian pride is a tad over-inflated). Aboriginal arts – particularly painting and dance – seem immune to such fluctuations and remain timelessly captivating.

Food & Drink

Australia plates up a multicultural fusion of European techniques and fresh Pacific-rim ingredients – aka 'Mod Oz' (Modern Australian). Seafood plays a starring role – from succulent Moreton Bay Bugs to delicate King George Whiting, there's variety in the ocean's bounty. And of course, beer in hand, you'll still find beef, lamb and chicken at Aussie barbecues. Don't drink beer? Australian wines are world-renowned: Barossa Valley shiraz, Hunter Valley semillon and Tasmanian sauvignon blanc. Need a caffeine hit? You'll find cafes everywhere, coffee machines in pubs and petrol stations, and baristas in downtown coffee carts.

It's a Wide Open Road

There's a heckuva lot of tarmac across this wide brown land. From Margaret River to Cooktown, Jabiru to Dover, the best way to appreciate Australia is to hit the road. Car hire is relatively affordable, road conditions are generally good, and outside of the big cities there's not much traffic. If you're driving a campervan, you'll find well-appointed caravan parks in most sizable towns. If you're feeling more adventurous, hire a 4WD and go off-road: Australia's national parks and secluded corners are custom-made for camping trips down the dirt road.



Why We Love Australia

By Charles Rawlings-Way and Meg Worby, Authors

We've both been living on this great southern land for 30-something years, and there are still places here that we haven't explored. This isn't to say that we've been sitting at home eating popcorn and watching David Attenborough – we're travel writers! It's just that Australia is so damn big. Even if we spent the next 30-something years on an endless round-Australia road trip, there'd still be surprises out there. And that, for a couple of restless road-addicts, is a very comforting reality.

For more about our authors, see p1112.