

Understand Central Australia

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Central Australia Today

Central Australia is so geographically, socially and climatically diverse, it's little wonder there are all kinds of things causing a ruckus around here at the moment. But despite the ongoing national shame of indigenous welfare and the usual swag of regional political gripes, it's fair to say that the mood here is on the up. GFC concerns linger, but major projects, water in the Murray River and a new, subtle appreciation for the uncrowded wide-open spaces here are keeping locals smiling.

Best in Film

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Director Stephan Elliott; 1994) Sequined Sydney drag queens road-trip to Alice Springs.

Samson & Delilah (Director Warwick Thornton; 2009) A devastating portrait of life in a remote outback indigenous community.

Storm Boy (Director Henri Safran; 1976) A young boy, his dad and a pelican living in the Coorong.

Crocodile Dundee I & II (Directors Peter Faiman/John Cornell; 1986/88) Central Australia hits the cinematic jackpot.

Australia (Director Baz Luhrmann; 2008) Kidman goes to the Kimberley (and Darwin).

Best in Print

Adelaide (Kerry Goldsworthy; 2011) Eccentric, personal biography of Adelaide.

The Dog Fence (James Woodford; 2004) Outback life, people and dingoes.

All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light (Susan Mitchell; 2004) Repressed evils beneath Adelaide's famed piety.

We of the Never Never (Jeannie Gunn; 1908) Autobiographical account of Gunn's 1902 Top End experiences.

Murray River Flows

South Australia – Australia's driest state – is still feeling the flow-on effects from incredible flooding across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria catchments in 2010 and 2011. The mighty River Murray, Australia's version of the Mississippi, is flowing freely again after years of salination and habitat degradation. Riverland irrigators, lower-lakes farmers and environmentalists remain locked in ongoing battles with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, state and federal governments over water allocations within SA and upstream, but it seems Adelaide's water supply is assured for the moment. So confident in the revitalised Murray is the SA government that the \$1.83 billion Adelaide Desalination Plant south of the city, commissioned at the height of the drought and within sight of being fully functional, has been mothballed (for locals, it's a case of 'It's nice to know it's there...').

Darwin on the Rise

International tourism has taken a downturn in Darwin of late (the GFC is still biting into Top End tourism), but Darwin itself is revelling in real boom-town mood. The city's breezy, multicultural vibe has long been a hit with locals (sunset drinks, markets, Asian food, balmy weather – what's not to like?) but add the new Waterfront Precinct to the mix (restaurants, bars, hotels and a wave pool!) and you've got a potent place to be. It seems the locals are having too much fun to worry about tourism, as numerous new high-rent apartment towers crape the sky behind them. The newly elected conservative Country Liberal Party territory government will be praying the current \$34 billion Ichthys export natural gas project continues long-term, firming up the city's economy and cementing its economic ties with Asia.

Outback Indigenous Issues

Substance abuse, domestic violence, suicide and infant mortality rates in indigenous communities – particularly in the Northern Territory which has such a high indigenous population percentage – remain significantly higher than in the non-indigenous Australian community. Furthermore, indigenous Australians can expect to live for around 10 years less than non-indigenous Australians. In the wake of the Howard government's controversial 'intervention' policies of the mid-2000s, the NT government announced measures to help stem juvenile crime in Alice Springs, including the creation of a youth detention centre and 'safe houses' where young people can go. Indeed – and in spite of booming desert arts commerce – Alice Springs is still a town that survives on the Aboriginal services industry. Even with all the social workers and government funding here, Alice is feeling a little sad, with quite a few empty shopfronts along Todd St.

Kangaroo Island Fishing Rights

The South Australian state government has proposed a series of marine parks with 'no-take' fish sanctuary zones around the state's coastline – including four around Kangaroo Island – aimed at preserving fish stocks and, in KI's case, its iconic status as wildlife haven. Claiming a lack of consultation and a devastating impact on the island's large net-fishing economy, the KI council (along with 1500 protestors on Kingscote wharf) are up in arms. The number of spray-painted banners around the island seems inversely proportionate to the actual percentage of ocean that will be covered by the scheme (around 6% of SA's ocean territory). But, as any local businessperson will tell you, island economies are fragile things...

Adelaide Oval Redevelopment

The gorgeous old 1871 Adelaide Oval, oft touted as one of the most picturesque sporting arenas in the world, is undergoing a \$575-million facelift. The idea was to reinvigorate the old dame, bringing AFL football to the venue and linking it more easily to the city via a River Torrens footbridge. Gone are the picturesque old stands, making way for two new sexy, scallop-roofed southern and eastern stands, plus restaurants, bars and a very corporate vibe. Fortunately, the grassy 'hill' area and magnificent old heritage scoreboard have dodged the wrecking ball, and the excellent Don Bradman Museum will return. Pessimists say it just won't be the same, but many locals think 'different' will also mean 'better'.

POPULATION: **1.88 MILLION**

AREA: **2,332,611 SQ KM**

GDP: **\$103.2 BILLION**

GDP GROWTH: **2.4%**

INFLATION: **1.9%**

UNEMPLOYMENT: **4.5%**

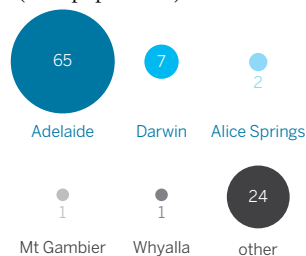
if Central Australia were 100 people



95 would be non-indigenous
5 would be indigenous

where people live

(% of population)



population per sq km



History

In many ways, the history of central Australia, from civilised Adelaide to frontier Darwin, is a distillation of a broader Australian history. Far-reaching indigenous heritage collides with European ambitions, settlements rise and fall, resources and politics intertwine... Presiding over it all, the harsh environment has proved an indomitable force.

For a timely account of central Australian indigenous history, check out the SBS TV series *First Australians* (2008; www.sbs.com.au/firstaustrians), or the accompanying book, edited by Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton.

Aboriginal Settlement

Human contact with Australia began around 60,000 years ago, when Aboriginal people journeyed across the straits from what is now Indonesia and Papua New Guinea – the beginning of the world's longest continuous cultural history.

Within a few thousand years, Aboriginal people populated much of Australia. In South Australia (SA), the earliest known Aboriginal relics are rock carvings near Olary, dated at 43,000 years – around the same era as the paintings in the Cave of El Castillo in northern Spain. In Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory (NT), the oldest rock-art sites date back 20,000 years; further east in Arnhem Land, evidence suggests that rock art was being produced as far back as 60,000 years ago. Central Australia was occupied about 24,000 years ago.

Aboriginal peoples traded goods, items of spiritual significance, songs and dances across central Australia and beyond, using routes that followed the paths of ancestors from the Dreaming, the complex system of country, culture and beliefs that defines indigenous spirituality. An intimate understanding of plant ecology and animal behaviour ensured that food shortages were rare. Even central Australia's hostile deserts were occupied year-round, thanks to scattered permanent wells. Firestick farming was practised in forested areas to the south and north of the deserts, involving the burning of undergrowth and dead grass to encourage new growth, to attract game and reduce the threat of bushfires.

Early Contact

The Chinese eunuch Admiral Cheng Ho (Zheng He) may have been the first non-Aboriginal visitor to northern Australia. He reached Timor in

TIMELINE

60,000 BC

Experts say that Aboriginal people settled in Australia around this time. Evidence suggests the oldest rock-art sites in the NT are 60,000 years old; those in SA date from 43,000 years.

AD 1627

Dutch captain Francois Thijssen, aboard the *Gulden Zeepaard*, is the first European to spy the coast of SA. The French follow in the 1700s, the British in the 1800s.

1836

The Province of South Australia is proclaimed. The first official settlement at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island is soon replaced by Adelaide, on the advice of Colonel William Light.

the 15th century, and some suggest he also made it to Australia. In 1879, a small, carved figure of the Chinese god Shao Lao was found lodged in the roots of a banyan tree in Darwin. That's the clincher, the pro-Zheng camp says: the carving apparently dates from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

There's evidence to suggest that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to sight Australia's northern coast, sometime during the 16th century, followed promptly by the Dutch. Famed Dutch navigator Abel Tasman charted the north coast, from Cape York to the Kimberley in Western Australia, in 1664.

Other 17th-century visitors to the north were Macassan traders from the island of Celebes (today's Sulawesi in Indonesia), who set up seasonal camps to gather *trepang* (sea cucumber). Interracial relationships were common, with some local Aboriginal people journeying to Celebes to live.

Down south, the Dutch ship *Gulden Zeepaard* made the first European sighting of the SA coast in 1627. The French ships *Recherche* and *L'Esperance* followed in 1792, while the first British explorer on the scene was Lieutenant James Grant in 1800. In 1802 Englishman Matthew Flinders charted Fowlers Bay, Spencer and St Vincent Gulfs and Kangaroo Island on his ship the *Investigator*.

Colonel William Light, celebrated planner of Adelaide, died from tuberculosis in 1839, aged 54. Dogged by criticism and character slurs, he passed away before his vision for the city could fully be appreciated.

Europeans Move In

In 1829 Captain Charles Sturt headed inland from Sydney and fell into the Murray River, floating downstream to Lake Alexandrina (in today's SA). His glowing reports inspired the National Colonisation Society to propose a utopian, self-supporting South Australian colony founded on planned immigration with land sales, rather than convict-based grants. The British Parliament then passed the *South Australian Colonisation Act* in 1834, making SA the only Australian colony established entirely by free colonists (a distinction most South Australians happily highlight).

The first official settlement was established in 1836 at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island, before colonial surveyor-general Colonel William Light

WHAT LIES BENEATH

In 2005, making way for the billion-dollar Darwin City Waterfront development, Darwin Harbour was dredged for unexploded Japanese bombs. The harbour was peppered with 60kg bombs during WWII, sinking eight ships and damaging many more. Some estimates placed 160 unexploded bombs lying latent at the bottom of the harbour.

With the developers wringing nervous hands, scans detected 230 metal chunks in the mud. Disposal experts were called in, but turned up little more than a brass fuse, a Chinese jug and some remnants of the sunken ship *MV Neptuna*. No bombs, but we suggest you don't go poking around in the sludge...

1862

John McDouall Stuart makes the first south–north crossing of the continent from SA into the NT, the highlight of his many epic explorations.

1869

After three other NT colonies all fail to take hold, Palmerston (renamed Darwin in 1911) is established by George Goyder, South Australia's Surveyor-General.

1894

South Australian women are the first in the British Empire permitted to vote, and the first in the world eligible to stand for parliament.

1901

With the federation of the disparate Australian colonies, South Australia becomes a state of the Commonwealth of Australia.

During the 1850s gold rush in Victoria, thousands of Chinese miners dodged the Victorian government's \$10-per-head tax by landing at Robe in SA, then walking 400km to Ballarat: 10,000 arrived in 1857 alone. But the loophole closed when the SA government instituted its own tax on the Chinese.

chose Adelaide as the site for the capital. The first governor, Captain John Hindmarsh, landed at present-day Glenelg on 28 December 1836, and proclaimed the Province of South Australia.

In the NT, early European attempts at settlement – on Melville Island in 1824, Raffles Bay in 1829 and the Cobourgh Peninsula in 1838 – all failed in the face of indigenous resistance, disease and climate, until the settlement of Palmerston (renamed Darwin in 1911) was established in 1869.

Conflict marked the arrival of European cattle farmers across central Australia. The Arrernte (*uh-rah-n-da*) people defended their lands and spiritual heritage, spearing cattle for food as farmers had destroyed many of their hunting grounds. In return, those waterholes not already ruined by cattle were poisoned, and reprisal raids saw many massacres.

Immigration & Exploration

The first immigrants to SA were poor, young English, Scots and Irish. About 12,000 landed in the first four years of settlement, followed by 800 German farmers and artisans between 1838 and 1841 – mainly Lutherans fleeing religious persecution. Around 5400 more Germans arrived by 1850; many more followed during the next decade. They settled mainly in the Adelaide Hills and the Barossa Valley, their vineyards forming the beginning of the SA wine industry. Thousands of Cornish people also came to SA following the discovery of copper in the 1840s, many of them jumping ship to Victoria in the 1850s when gold was discovered there.

In the NT, the discovery of gold and copper south of Darwin (then Palmerston) attracted miners, and settlers with cattle moved into the NT from SA and northern Queensland. In 1877 the first Lutheran mission was established at Hermannsburg; Catholic and Methodist missions followed elsewhere.

Successive waves of immigration fuelled the search for new arable land. Between 1839 and 1841 Edward John Eyre made the first traverse of the Flinders Ranges in SA. In 1839, Charles Bonney drove the first herd of cattle from Melbourne to Adelaide via Mt Gambier.

DINNER ON KI

British explorer Matthew Flinders bumped into Kangaroo Island on 2 March 1802. His crew of hungry sailors stormed ashore in search of sustenance – their eyes boggled at the thousands of kangaroos bouncing around on the beach. Flinders described the inevitable feeding frenzy in his journal: 'The whole ship's company was employed this afternoon in the skinning and cleaning of kangaroos. After four months' privation they stewed half a hundred weight of heads, forequarters and tails down into soup for dinner... In gratitude for so seasonable a supply, I named this south land 'Kangaroo Island'.

1942

Darwin is bombed by the Japanese during WWII – 243 people lose their lives in 64 raids. A mass exodus cripples the Top End economy.

1974

Cyclone Tracy tears through Darwin on Christmas Eve, demolishing 70% of the city's buildings and killing 65 people. Much of the city was rebuilt (more strongly) within four years.

1978

The Northern Territory is granted legislative self-government, but remains under the constitutional auspices of the federal government (and does to this day).

1980

The rickety, washout-prone old *Ghan* railway line through the Flinders Ranges and Oodnadatta is replaced by a new, more reliable standard gauge line 160km further west.

Five years later, Charles Sturt set off from Adelaide towing a whaleboat to find the mythical central Australian inland sea, but after 18 months of hardship he abandoned it in a waterless red expanse of stones and sandhills. If nothing else, he had discovered the Simpson Desert.

In 1844 Prussian scientist Ludwig Leichhardt set off from Queensland to blaze an overland route into the NT. The party reached the Gulf of Carpentaria and headed northwest. Leichhardt was afforded hero status for his efforts, but his route was too difficult for regular use and no promising grazing areas were discovered.

The hard-drinking John McDouall Stuart made several epic forays into central Australia between 1858 and 1862. His successful south–north crossing of the continent led to SA wresting governmental control of the NT from NSW in 1863. The Stuart Hwy, from Port Augusta in SA to Darwin, is named in his honour.

Wheat, Sheep, Copper & Gold

By 1865 SA was growing half of Australia's wheat. Overcropping in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula led to more land being opened up in the mid-north and Flinders Ranges. A 'wheat boom' ensued. Enthusiastic trumpeting of 'a rich golden harvest' extending into the NT continued until drought struck in the mid-1880s.

Sheep farmers also helped to open up SA, but a tendency to overestimate carrying capacity led to overstocking, and with no pasture kept in reserve, the 1880s drought ruined many. The SA breeders survived by developing a strain of merino sheep suited to semiarid conditions.

By the 1870s SA had replaced Cornwall as the British Empire's leading copper producer, making many South Australians wealthy and leaving a legacy of fine public buildings in mining towns such as Burra.

The NT was opened up with the discovery of gold at Yam Creek, 160km south of Darwin. The find fired up local prospectors, and it wasn't long before other discoveries at Pine Creek, south of Darwin, sparked a minor rush. The SA government built a railway line in 1883 from Darwin to Pine Creek, but the gold rush was soon over. Subsequent government-backed NT projects such as sugar, tobacco and coffee plantations, peanut farming, pearling and crocodile- and snakeskin trading either failed completely or provided only minimal returns.

Finding Federation

When parliament sprang up in 1856, SA began with the most democratic constitution of any colony. Before that it was governed by representatives from the SA Board of Commissioners and the British government.

Fighting off recession, transport and communications systems grew rigorously in SA. By 1890 railways connected Adelaide with Melbourne,

In 1865 Surveyor-General George Goyder drew an imaginary line across SA: drought-prone land to the north, viable wheat-growing land to the south. Over time, the famed Goyder's Line has proved reliable. But Goyder was pre-climate change: where would he draw the line today?

GOYDER



DODD DAIRAND / GETTY IMAGES

1982

Blaming a dingo, Lindy Chamberlain is jailed for the murder of her baby daughter Azaria at Uluru in 1980. She is finally exonerated in 2012.

1986

Paul Hogan stars as Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee and launches Kakadu National Park (in the NT's Top End) onto the world cinematic stage.

Oodnadatta in the outback, and Cockburn on SA's border with NSW. There were also 3200km of sealed roads and 100-plus steamboats trading on the Murray River. The SA parliament established Australia's first juvenile court in 1890, and granted free education in 1891. In 1894 SA became the first Australian colony to recognise women's right to vote in parliamentary elections, and the first place in the world to allow women to stand for parliament.

With federation in 1901 – the amalgamation of disparate colonies into the states of the Commonwealth of Australia – SA experienced slow but steady growth, but South Australian speculators and investors in the NT were getting cold feet. Soon after federation the South Australian government threw in the towel, offering control of the ugly NT duckling back to the federal government.

Twentieth-Century Trials

After federation, manufacturing and heavy engineering became important in SA. The Port Pirie smelter was enlarged during WWI, and was soon producing 10% of the world's lead, as well as silver and zinc.

WWI was a time of division in SA. Before 1914 the state had many German place names, but in a fit of anti-German zeal many of these were replaced. Most were reinstated during the 1936 centennial celebrations, when the German settlers' huge contribution to SA's development was officially recognised.

The early 1920s brought prosperity across Australia, before a four-year drought led into the Great Depression. All states suffered during this period, but SA fared worst of all: in 1931 more than 70,000 people out of a population of 575,000 were dependent on welfare.

Industrial development in SA quickened during WWII – water-pipeline construction, ship building and coal mining all took off – but people in the NT had more pressing issues to contend with. At 9.57am on 19 February 1942, nearly 200 Japanese aircraft bombed Darwin's harbour and the RAAF base at Larrakeyah. Darwin was attacked 64 times during the war and 243 people lost their lives; it was the only place in Australia to suffer prolonged attacks. In March 1942 the entire NT north of Alice Springs was placed under military control and by December there were 32,000 troops stationed in the Top End.

After WWII, the Australian government launched an ambitious scheme to attract immigrants. Thousands of people from Britain, Greece, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, Malta and Lebanon took up the offer of government-assisted passage. The immigration boom fuelled growth in SA, which shifted from a rural economy to a predominantly industrial one. In the NT the urban areas of Darwin and Alice Springs also grew.

In 1872 Adelaide became the first Australian capital to be connected by telegraph with London, slashing communication times from six months to seven hours.

1995

After 10 noisy years, Adelaide hosts the Australian Formula One Grand Prix for the last time. Bon Jovi closes the show with some raucous, pyrotechnic cock rock.

1998

The NT returns a negative result in a referendum on whether it should become a state rather than federally administered territory. The result surprises many.

1998

Ross Fargher stubs his toe on the world's oldest vertebrate fossil on his Flinders Ranges property in SA. At 560 million years old, it beats the previous oldest find by 30 million years.

2000

Mandatory sentencing laws and zero-tolerance policing in the NT increase the jailing of Aboriginal people for trivial offences, causing national outrage. The laws are repealed in 2001.

LAND RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Britain colonised Australia on the legal principle of 'terra nullius', meaning the country was unoccupied. Early colonists could therefore take land from Aboriginal peoples without signing treaties or providing compensation. This principle remained legally potent until the landmark Mabo High Court decision in 1992, which voided the presumption of terra nullius and officially recognised native title as a traditional connection to or occupation of Australian lands.

Preceding the Mabo decision, in 1966 the South Australian government made the first move of any Australian state to give Aboriginal peoples title to their land. The Aboriginal Lands Trust was created, vesting title to the missions and reserves still operating in South Australia. These lands are leased back to their Aboriginal occupants, who have repeated rights of renewal. The South Australian parliament then passed two pieces of legislation, the *Prohibition of Discrimination Act* and the *Aboriginal Affairs Act*, giving South Australian Aboriginal peoples the right to run their own communities.

In 1981 the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* was drawn, granting freehold title to an area of north-west SA to the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara. Another 76,000 sq km, occupied by the federal government as part of the Maralinga project, was returned to traditional owners in 1984. Land held under Aboriginal freehold title cannot be sold or taken back into public ownership, and no development can begin without permission of traditional owners.

A more convoluted land-rights path has been navigated in the Northern Territory. In 1962 a bark petition was presented to the federal government by the Yolngu peoples of Yirrakala, in northeast Arnhem Land, demanding the government recognise Aboriginal peoples' occupation and ownership of Australia since time immemorial. The petition was ignored, so the Yolngu peoples took the matter to court – and lost.

But the wheels had begun to turn, and under increasing pressure the federal government passed the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* in 1976, establishing three Aboriginal land councils empowered to claim land on behalf of traditional owners.

Under the act, the only claimable land is crown land outside town boundaries that no one else owns or leases – usually semidesert or desert. So when the Anangu, Uluru's traditional owners, claimed ownership of Uluru and Kata Tjuta, their claim was overruled because the land was within a national park. It was only by amending two acts of parliament that Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was handed back to its traditional owners providing it was leased back to the federal government as a national park.

Around half of the NT has been claimed, or is under claim. The native-title process is tedious and can take years to complete, often without success. Many claims are opposed by state and territory governments, and claimants are required to prove they have continuous connection to the land and are responsible for sacred sites under Aboriginal law. If a claim is successful, Aboriginal peoples have the right to negotiate with mining interests and ultimately accept or reject exploration and mining proposals. This right is often opposed by Australia's mining lobby, despite traditional Aboriginal owners in the NT rejecting only about a third of such proposals outright.

2001

The federal government incarcerates asylum seekers at the Baxter Detention Centre in SA's outback. Some Adelaidians display signs 'Asylum seekers welcome here' in their windows; others go to jail for protesting.

2004

After a 70-year wait, the *Ghan* passenger train runs from Adelaide to Darwin, finally linking the Top End with the southern states.

2007

The federal government's 'Intervention' policy in NT indigenous communities is controversially received in both black and white communities.

2007

Causing general public outrage, the NT government introduces speed limits of 130km/h on the Stuart, Victoria, Arnhem and Barkly Highways.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy in 1974, an exodus saw Darwin's population fall from 45,000 to just 11,000. These days it's bounced back to a cosmopolitan 127,500.

The 1960s and '70s were difficult times in SA – economic and population growth were stagnating, and overseas competition heightened a deepening industrial recession. Socially, however, SA premier Don Dunstan's progressive Labor government was kicking goals, passing an act prohibiting racial discrimination (the first in Australia), and creating the South Australian Film Corporation (1972).

The NT was also ailing economically, and the good citizens of Darwin were soon brought to their knees once more. On Christmas Eve 1974, Cyclone Tracy ripped through the city, killing 71 people and destroying more than 70% of Darwin's buildings.

From the late '70s into the 1990s, mining dug a tunnel to economic recovery. In SA, huge deposits of uranium, copper, silver and gold were found at Roxby Downs, plus oil and gas in the Cooper Basin. In the NT, copper and gold were unearthed at Tennant Creek, and oil and gas in the Amadeus Basin. Bauxite was found at Gove, manganese at Groote Eylandt, and uranium at Batchelor and (more controversially) Kakadu.

These Days

Today, mining continues to drive the economies of SA and the NT (and Australia's as a nation), but tourism is the big success story in central Australia. SA has an extremely well-oiled governing tourist body extolling the virtues of the state's diverse regions. In the NT the tourist magnets of Uluru and Kakadu each receive more than half a million visitors per year. At the end of WWII the population of Alice Springs (Uluru's main access point) was around 1000; today it's around 25,000 – a direct result of selling the central Australian outback as 'the real-deal Aussie experience'. The rise in environmental awareness and ecotourism has also boosted Kakadu's popularity.

Across the region, major issues spark and fade and spark again – most notably the aftermath of the 2007 *Northern Territory National Emergency Response* (aka 'The Intervention'), heavily criticised as a backward step in Aboriginal reconciliation; and in SA, the water levels in the Murray River – but in the big cities daily life continues uninterrupted. Adelaide retains its barrage of quality festivals dappling the calendar: this is a city of substance, grace and poise. Shedding its redneck skin (well, mostly), contemporary Darwin is vibrant, multicultural and increasingly urbane. Although legislative self-governance was granted to the NT in 1978, the federal government retains arm's-length control. Is Darwin the teenage city that will never quite leave home?

2011

Cyclone Yasi and monumental rainfalls across Queensland and NSW bring relief to the drought-stricken Murray River in SA.

2012

Coroner deems that a dingo did in fact kill baby Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru in 1980. Lindy Chamberlain states, 'We live in a beautiful country but it is dangerous.'

2012

The NT elects a new conservative Country Liberal Party government. Incoming Chief Minister Terry Mills is thirsty: 'It's waiting in the fridge... so I'm going to finish [his victory speech] shortly.'

2013

2010 Tour de France winner Andy Schleck is announced as a starter in the annual Tour Down Under race in SA (who needs Lance Armstrong...).

Aboriginal Australia

Aboriginal culture has evolved over thousands of years with strong links between the spiritual, economic and social lives of the people. This heritage has been kept alive from one generation to the next by the passing of knowledge and skills through rituals, art, cultural material and language.

Aboriginal Culture

Aborigines originally had an oral tradition, therefore language played an extremely important part in maintaining and preserving Aboriginal cultures through the passing of knowledge. Today there is a national movement to revive Aboriginal languages and there remains a strong Aboriginal art sector. Traditional knowledge is being implemented in science, natural resource management and government programs. Aboriginal culture was never static but evolved with the changing times and environment. New technologies and mediums are now used to tell their stories, and cultural tourism and hospitality ventures, where visitors can experience an Aboriginal perspective, have been established. You can learn all about ancestral beings at particular natural landmarks, look at rock art that is thousands of years old, taste traditional indigenous foods or attend an Aboriginal festival or performance. There are so many opportunities on offer and many activities opened to the public are advertised in both Aboriginal and mainstream media.

Support for cultural programs is sporadic and depends on the political climate at the time. However, Aboriginal people are determined to maintain their links with the past and to also use their cultural knowledge to shape a better future.

Land

Aboriginal land ethic was based on humans fitting into the ecology and not outside of it. Everything was connected and not viewed as just soil and rocks but as a whole environment that sustained the spiritual, economic and cultural lives of the people. In turn, Aboriginal people sustained the land by conducting ceremonies, rituals, songs and stories. This interrelation was

KEY EVENTS

1920s

Anthony Martin Fernando, the first Aboriginal activist to campaign internationally against racial discrimination in Australia, was arrested for protesting outside Australia House in London in 1928. He wore a large overcoat with little skeletons pinned to it. His placard read 'This is all that is left of my people.'

26 Jan 1938

To mark the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the British, The Aborigines Progressive Association held a meeting in the Australia Hall at 150 Elizabeth St, Sydney, called 'A Day of Mourning and Protest'. The meeting was one of the first known civil rights meetings.

15 Aug 1963

A bark petition was presented to the House of Representatives from the people of Yirrikala in the Northern Territory. Written in their own language on a length of stringy bark, the petition objected to mining on their land, which the federal government had approved without consulting the people who lived there.

27 May 1967

A federal referendum allowed the Commonwealth to make laws on Aboriginal issues and include them in the census. They would now have the same rights as other Australians.

12 Jul 1971

The Aboriginal flag first flew on National Aborigines Day in Adelaide. Designed by Central Australian man, Harold Thomas, the flag has become a unifying symbol of identity for Aboriginal people.

The *Koori Mail* is an Aboriginal-owned national newspaper. Set up by several Aboriginal communities in 1991 to give a voice to Aboriginal people, it provides news and information on politics, sport, social and cultural life from communities across Australia. It is published fortnightly and can be purchased at most newsagencies.

developed and practised over thousands of years. For Aboriginal people land is intrinsically connected to identity and spirituality. All land in Australia is reflected in Aboriginal lore but particular places may be significant for religious and cultural beliefs. Some well-known sites are The Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains and Warreen Cave in Tasmania with artefacts dated around 40,000 years old.

Sacred sites can be parts of rocks, hills, trees or water and are associated with an ancestral being or an event that occurred. Often these sites are part of a Dreaming story and link people across areas. The ranges around Alice Springs are part of the caterpillar Dreaming with many sites including Akeyulerre (Billy Goat Hill), Atnelkentyarliweke (Anzac Hill) and rock paintings at Emily Gap. The most well known are Uluru and Kata Tjuta which is the home of the snake, Wanambi. His breath is the wind that blows through the gorge. Pirla Warra Warra, a significant site in the Tanami Desert for Walpiri people, is 435km northwest of Alice and is where several Walpiri Dreaming stories meet.

Cultural tours offer visits to Aboriginal sites, learning about plants and animals, hunting and fishing expeditions and even workshops on bushfood or learning to dance.

Please note that many Aboriginal sites are protected by law and are not to be disturbed in any way.

The Arts

Visual Arts

It is difficult to define Aboriginal art as one style because form and practice vary from one area to another. From the original art forms of rock art, carving and body decoration, a dynamic contemporary art industry has grown into one of the success stories of Aboriginal Australia.

Music

Music was always a vital part of Aboriginal culture. Songs were important for teaching and passing on knowledge and musical instruments were often used in healing, ceremonies and rituals. The most well known instrument is the Yادaki or didgeridoo which was only played by men

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

Aboriginal people had an oral culture so storytelling was an important way to learn. Stories gave meaning to life and were used to teach or translate the messages of the spirit ancestors. Although beliefs and cultural practices vary according to region and language groups, there is a common world-view that these ancestors created the land, the sea and all living things. This is often referred to as the Dreaming and Aboriginal people attribute their origins and existence to these ancestors. Through stories, the knowledge and beliefs are passed on from one generation to another and set out morals and values and rules to live by. They also recall events from the past. Today artists have continued this tradition but are using new mediums like film and writing. The first Aboriginal writer to be published was David Unaipon, a Ngarrindjeri man from South Australia who was a writer, scientist and advocate for his people. Born in 1872, he published *Aboriginal Legends* in 1927 and *Native Legends* in 1929.

Other early writers were Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis. All have works published. Contemporary writers of note are Alexis Wright, Kim Scott, Anita Heiss and Ali Cobby Eckerman. Award-winning novels to read are Kim Scott's *Deadman Dancing* (Picador Australia) and *Benang* (Fremantle Press), Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (Giramando) and Ali Cobby Eckerman's *Little Bit Long Time* (Picaro Press) and *Ruby Moonlight* (Magabala Books).

in northern Australia. Other instruments included clapsticks, rattles and boomerangs and in southern Australia, animal skins were stretched across the lap to make a drumming sound.

This rich musical heritage continues today with a very strong contemporary music industry. Like other art forms, Aboriginal music has developed into a fusion of new ideas and styles mixed with strong cultural identity and a few musicians have been successful in mainstream music. Contemporary artists like Dan Sultan and Jessica Mauboy have crossed over successfully into the mainstream winning major music awards and seen regularly on popular programs and at major music festivals. Aboriginal radio is the best and most accessible way to hear Aboriginal music.

Performing Arts

Dance and theatre are a vital part of social and ceremonial life and important elements in Aboriginal culture. Dances often told stories for passing on knowledge. Styles varied from one nation to the next and depended on whether it was for social or ritual reasons. Imitation of animals, birds and the elements was common across Australia but dance movements like set arm, leg and body movements differed greatly. Ceremonial or ritual dances were highly structured and distinct from the dancing that people did socially at corroborees. Like other art forms, dance has adapted to the modern world and contemporary dance companies and groups have merged traditional forms into a modern interpretation. The most well known dance company is the internationally acclaimed company Bangarra Dance Theatre.

Theatre also draws on the storytelling tradition. Currently there are two major Aboriginal theatre companies, Ilbijerri in Melbourne and Yirra Yakin in Perth. In addition there are several mainstream companies that specialise in Aboriginal stories. These companies have had several successes with productions here and overseas. Australia has a thriving Aboriginal theatre industry and many Aboriginal actors and writers work in or collaborate with mainstream productions. Traditionally drama and dance came together in ceremonies or corroborees and this still occurs in many contemporary productions.

TV, Radio & Film

Aboriginal people have quickly adapted to electronic broadcasting and have developed an extensive media network of radio, print and television services.

There are more than 120 Aboriginal radio stations and programs operating across Australia in cities, rural areas and remote communities. Program formats differ from location to location. Some broadcast only in Aboriginal languages or cater to a specific music taste.

There is a thriving Aboriginal film industry and in the last few years feature films like *The Sapphires*, *Bran Nue Day* and *Samson and Delilah* have had mainstream

26 Jan 1972

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy was set up on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra to oppose the treatment of Aboriginal people and the government's recent rejection of a proposal for Aboriginal Land Rights.

10 Aug 1987

A Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody investigated the high number of Aboriginal deaths in gaols. Aboriginal people are still over represented in the criminal system.

26 Jan 1988

As Australia celebrated its bicentenary, more than 40,000 Aboriginal people and their supporters marched in Sydney to mark the 200-year anniversary of invasion.

3 Jun 1992

The previous legal concept of *terra nullius* was overturned by the Australian High Court in its landmark decision in the Mabo Case, declaring Australia was occupied before British settlement.

28 May 2000

Over 300,000 people walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge to highlight the need for reconciliation between Aboriginal people and other Australians.

21 Jun 2007

The federal government suspended the Racial Discrimination Act to implement a large-scale intervention – the Northern Territory Emergency Response – to address child abuse in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. Extended to 2022 it heavily regulates lives, including mandatory income management.

Most Australians celebrate 26 January as Australia Day in recognition of British settlement but for Aboriginal people it is known as 'Invasion Day,' 'Survival Day' or 'Day of Mourning.'

success. Since the first Aboriginal television channel, NITV, was launched in 2007, there has been a growth in the number of filmmakers wanting to tell their stories.

History of Aboriginal Australia

Before the coming of Europeans to Australia, culture was the common link for Aboriginal people across Australia. There were many aspects that were common to all groups in Australia and it was through these commonalities that Aboriginal people were able to communicate and interact with each other. In post colonial Australia, it is also the shared history that binds Aboriginal people. Here is a brief description of the major events of that history.

First Australians

Although academics believe Aboriginal people came from somewhere else, there has never been enough evidence to verify these claims. Over the years, various theories have been presented but have always been challenged. Scientific evidence places Aboriginal people on the continent at least 40,000 to 50,000 years ago. This means that Aboriginal people were here during the ice age and in the megafauna period.

At the time of European contact the Aboriginal population was grouped into 300 or more different nations with distinct languages and land boundaries. Most Aboriginal people did not have permanent shelters but moved within their territory and followed seasonal patterns of animal migration and plant availability. The diversity of landscapes in Australia meant that each nation varied in their lifestyles and cultures. Although these nations were distinct cultural groups, there were also many common elements. Each nation had several clans or family groups

THE STOLEN GENERATION

When Australia became a Federation in 1901, a set of government policies known as the 'White Australia Policy' was put in place. These were implemented to restrict nonwhite immigration to Australia but the policy also impacted on Aboriginal Australia. Assimilation into the broader society was 'encouraged' by all sectors of government with the intent to eventually fade out the Aboriginal race. A policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was official from 1909 to 1969 although the practice was happening before and after those years. There is no real estimate of how many children were taken as few records remain. It is estimated that around 100,000 Aboriginal children (or one in three children) were taken from their families.

A special government agency, The Aborigines Protection Board, was set up to manage the policy and had the power to remove children without consent from families or without a court order. Many of the children never saw their families again and those that did manage to find their way home often found it difficult to maintain relationships. The generations of children who were taken from their families became known as the stolen generations.

In the 1990s the Australian Human Rights Commission held an inquiry into the practice of removing Aboriginal children. The 'Bring Them Home' report was tabled in parliament in May 1997 and told of the devastating impact that these policies had on the children and their families. Governments, churches and welfare bodies all took part in the forced removal. Sexual and physical abuse and cruelty was common in many of the institutions where children were placed. Today many of the stolen generations still suffer trauma associated with their early lives.

On 13 February 2008, the then prime minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, offered a national apology to the stolen generations. For many Aboriginal people it was the start of a national healing process and today there are a number of programs and organisations working with the stolen generations.

who were responsible for looking after specific areas. For thousands of years Aboriginal people lived within a complex kinship system that tied them to the natural environment. From the desert to the sea Aboriginal people shaped their lives according to their environments and developed different skills and a wide body of knowledge on their territory.

Colonisation

The effects of colonisation started immediately after the Europeans arrived. Right from the start was the appropriation of land and water resources and an epidemic of diseases. Small pox killed around 50% of the Sydney Harbour natives. A period of resistance occurred as Aboriginal people fought back to retain their land and their way of life. As violence and massacres swept the country, many Aboriginal people were pushed further and further away from their traditional lands. In a period of 100 years, the Aboriginal population was decimated by 90%.

In the late 1800s most of the fertile land had been taken and most Aboriginal people were living in poverty on the fringes of settlements or on land unsuitable for settlement. Aboriginal people had to adapt to the new culture but were treated like second-class citizens. Employment opportunities were scarce and most people worked as labourers or domestic staff. This disadvantage has continued and even though successive government policies and programs have been implemented to assist Aboriginal people most have not made much impact on improving lives.

Rights & Reconciliation

The relationship between Aboriginal people and other Australians hasn't always been an easy one. This history of forced resettlement, removal of children and the loss of land and culture cannot be erased, even with governments addressing certain issues. The impact of this discrimination is still evident today. Standards of education, employment status, health and living conditions are still poor compared to the mainstream population. Life expectancy is 10 to 12 years less than other Australians and Aboriginal people are over represented in the criminal justice system. Current policies are focused on 'closing the gap' and centre on better delivery of essential services to improve lives but without real engagement and consultation and a resolution to Aboriginal demand for land and cultural rights, these policies will not succeed.

Aboriginal people have been at the whim of continuous unworkable government policies but have managed to maintain their identity and link to country and culture. Aboriginal struggle for legal and cultural rights continues today and are always at the forefront of politics. Although there is a growing recognition and acceptance of Aboriginal people's place in this country, there is still a long way to go before Aboriginal people are treated the same as other Australians. There is no real political or economic wealth and high unemployment rates. Despite these problems Aboriginal people have never stopped campaigning for their rights. Any gains for Aboriginal people have been hard won and initiated by Aboriginal people themselves in bringing the issues to public notice.

13 Feb 2008

The prime minister Kevin Rudd made a national apology to Aboriginal people for the forced removal of their children and the injustices that occurred.

10 Jul 2010

Aboriginal leader Yagan was put to rest in a Perth park bearing his name. Murdered in 1833, his head was sent to England. Aboriginal people have campaigned for decades to repatriate their peoples' remains.

After many years of lobbying to have their language and culture reflected in the media landscape,

NITV hit the airwaves with the launch in 2007.

The TV channel broadcasts news, views and current affairs but also produces programs for children, documentaries and sports programs. The channel is free to air on the SBS network.

Indigenous Visual Arts

Although there is no word in indigenous Australian languages for ‘art’, visual imagery is a fundamental part of indigenous culture and life: a connection between the past, present and future, and between indigenous people and their traditional homelands. The earliest forms of indigenous visual cultural expression were rock carvings (petroglyphs) and paintings on rock galleries, body painting and ground designs, with the earliest engraved designs known to exist dating back at least 40,000 years, perhaps older.

Rock Art Sites
from NT: Ubirr;
Nourlangie –
Nanguluwur
Gallery; Arnhem
Land/Gunbalanya
(Oenpelli) –
Injalak Hill. From
SA: Yourambulla
Peak; Arkaroo
Rock; Flinders
Ranges: Sacred
Canyon Cultural
Heritage Site.

Visual art, including painting, sculpture and *tjanpi* (weaving) in central Australia has flourished to such a degree that it is now a substantial source of income for many communities. It has also been an important educational tool for children, through which they can learn different aspects of spiritual and ceremonial knowledge. In the past decade or so women have played a huge role in the visual-arts movement, with some of the most innovative work being created by women artists, working equally alongside their male counterparts. More recently, significant efforts have been made to involve youth in cultural maintenance and revival projects, as well as contemporary art production to ensure continuity of art centres and local culture.

Indigenous art, with some notable exceptions, was either largely disregarded by nonindigenous people or viewed in an ethnographic context, with most examples of indigenous material culture placed in natural-history museums, as opposed to fine-art museums. The first exception to this was the acquisition of a work of Aboriginal art by a fine-art museum in 1939, when the Art Gallery of South Australia bought a watercolour by Western Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira (1902–59). Other state galleries followed suit, developing similarly themed collections.

Papunya Tula Art

In 1971 an event took place that would challenge nonindigenous perceptions about indigenous art. At the remote government-established community of Papunya, 240km northwest of Alice Springs, a group of senior men from the community – led by Kaapa Mbitjana Tjampitjinpa (Anmatyerre/Arrernte people; 1925–89), along with Long Jack Phillipus Tjakamarra (Pintupi/Luritja/Warlpiri people) and Billy Stockman Tjapaltjarri (Anmatyerre people), all elders of the community and employed as groundsman at the Papunya school – were encouraged to paint a mural on one of the school’s external walls by art teacher Geoffrey Bardon (1940–2003), who was instrumental in the genesis of the Papunya Tula Artists movement. Shortly after painting commenced, other members of the community became enthused by the project and joined in creating the mural *Honey Ant Dreaming*. Government regulations later saw the mural destroyed, but its effect on the community was profound. Images of spiritual significance had taken on a permanent and very public form. Notwithstanding the debate the mural

caused at Papunya, other members of the community expressed a desire to paint. Initially the paintings were executed on smallish boards, but within a short time larger canvases were used.

Although indigenous artists were working in other regions throughout the country, this fraught beginning in a remote Aboriginal community arguably instigated the commencement of the contemporary indigenous art movement in Australia. That it developed in Papunya is not without irony, since the community was established in 1960 under the auspices of the Australian government's cultural assimilation policy.

In the four decades since the genesis of Papunya Tula Art a diversity of contemporary visual art and culture has blossomed across the Northern Territory and South Australia, with myriad art centres being established to represent the breadth of this creativity, supported by advocacy organisations, state and territory public art museums, and commercial galleries.

With the growing importance of art as both an economic and a cultural activity, an association was formed to help the artists from Papunya community sell their work. Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd in Alice Springs is the longest-running Aboriginal-owned and -directed gallery in the country, and operates from a stylish contemporary gallery space in Todd Mall, Alice Springs.

When in Adelaide, a must-visit venue for people interested in indigenous culture is the Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute. Tandanya comes from the local Kurna people's word for Red Kangaroo Dreaming (Tarndanyangga/Tarndanya).

Rock Art of Arnhem Land & Kakadu

Arnhem Land, in the Top End of the NT, is an area of abundant, diverse artistic and cultural heritage. Recent scientific discoveries have confirmed that rock paintings were being produced as long as 28,000 years

DJAMBABA MARAWILI AM

Djambawa Marawili, a senior leader of the Madarrpa clan, received the Order of Australia medal in 2010 for service to the arts as a sculptor and painter, to the preservation of indigenous culture, to arts administration, and as a mentor of emerging artists. Living at Yilpara, in Arnhem Land's Blue Mud Bay, Djambawa is a lifelong cultural activist and a renowned artist. For him 'the production of art is a small part of a much bigger picture'.

He is a custodian for the spiritual/cultural welfare of his own and other related clans, and is an activist and manager at the metaphorical border between non-indigenous people and the Yolngu (Aboriginal) people of northeast Arnhem Land. Djambawa's visual culture is steeped in the traditions of the Ancestral Stories, including that of Baru, the ancestral crocodile, and the fire that the crocodile carried into the water of Blue Mud Bay. On being awarded the Order of Australia, Djambawa stated:

'...the main thing I'd like Ngapaki (non-indigenous people) to understand is that our art, the beautiful paintings, prints and sculptures people buy or see at galleries around the world – this art is informed by our ancient traditions and culture that is our life... Our homelands and art centres are our universities and art academies, though they have almost no funding for this role. It's where our young people learn our culture, all our songs, clan designs and patterns, dances, kinship, names and stories. Our homelands are where we hold Ngarra, holy ceremonies that honour our spiritual foundation on our land and sea country. These are really big gatherings that bring together people from many clans. It is where we go much more deeply into our sacred places and lands. These ceremonies are what feeds our art, makes it strong and lets it speak of what I am, who we are.

People can feel this in our art. The land cannot talk, but we can speak for it through our artwork and reach across cultures. I hope this award will help to strengthen the support and understanding of our artists, our traditions and our culture and bring all Australians closer together.'

Djambawa Marawili is chairperson of Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA); chairperson of Buku Larrnggay Mulka, Yirrkala; Director of Arnhem Land Region, ANKAAA.

ago, possibly up to 60,000 years, and some of the rock art galleries in the huge sandstone Arnhem Land plateau are at least 18,000 years old.

The rock art (pictographs, petroglyphs, stencils, prints, beeswax and geoglyphs) of Arnhem Land depicts ancestral stories for the many language groups and clans of the region, with stylised designs, often hatched and *rarrk* (cross-hatched), of ancestral beings, spirits, totems, and cultural exchanges with Macassans. The Macassans were Indonesian mariners from Sulawesi who regularly visited the north coast for at least three centuries until their visits were banned by South Australian (as the region was then known as the Northern Territory of South Australia) government regulations in 1906.

The paintings contained in the Arnhem Land rock-art sites constitute one of the world's most significant and fascinating rock-art collections. They provide a wonderful record of changing environments and life-styles over millennia.

In some places they are concentrated in large galleries, with paintings from more recent eras sometimes superimposed over older paintings. Some sites are kept secret – not only to protect them from damage, but also because they are private or sacred to the Aboriginal owners. Some are believed to be inhabited by malevolent spirit beings sometimes known as Namorodo, who must not be approached by those who are ignorant of the indigenous customs of the region. However, two of the finest sites have been opened up to visitors, with access roads, walkways and explanatory signs. These are Ubirr and Nourlangie in Kakadu National Park, although a terrible irony is that the original custodians no longer paint at these sites, though descendants ensure cultural maintenance and management to the sites as part of their ongoing cultural obligations through work at the park.

The rock paintings show how the main styles succeeded each other over time. The earliest hand-prints were followed by a 'naturalistic/figurative' style, with large outlines of people or animals filled in with colour. Some of the animals depicted, such as the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger), have long been extinct on mainland Australia.

After the naturalistic style came the 'dynamic', in which motion was often depicted (a dotted line, for example, to show a spear's path through the air). In this era the first ancestral beings appeared, with human bodies and animal heads.

The next style mainly showed simple human silhouettes, and was followed by the curious 'yam figures', in which people and animals were drawn in the shape of yams. Other painting styles, including the 'X-ray' style, which displays the internal organs and bone structure of animals, also appeared around this time.

By about 1000 years ago many of the salt marshes had turned into freshwater swamps and billabongs. The birds and plants that provided new food sources in this landscape appeared in the art of this time.

From around 400 years ago, indigenous artists also depicted the human newcomers to the region – Macassan traders and, more recently, Europeans and other nonindigenous people – and the things they brought, or their modes of transport such as ships and horses, and species such as cattle and buffalo, which severely impacted upon the environment.

There are a number of cultural tours owned and managed by local traditional custodians, such as Magela Cultural and Heritage Tours in Kakadu National Park. Key visual arts communities across Arnhem Land include Gunbalanya/Oenpelli in western Arnhem Land, Maningrida, Milingimbi and Ramingining in central Arnhem Land, and Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land. The Tiwi Islands of Bathurst and Melville Islands are also home to a number of art centres.

There is a plethora of publications on the market but a key resource is *One sun, one moon: Aboriginal art in Australia* (2007, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Dot Painting

Western Desert painting, also known as 'dot' painting, evolved from 'ground, or sand paintings', which formed the foundation of ceremonial practices. These were made from diverse media including pulped plant material, natural pigments and feathers, with the designs created on the ground and/or body using particles (dots) of this material. Dots, or stippling effects, were also used in other ways: to outline objects in rock paintings and to highlight geographical features or vegetation.

While these paintings may look abstract, they depict ancestral Tjukurpa/Jukurrpa (Dreaming) stories, and can be read in many ways, including as aerial, topographical and underground geographical maps, though not always literally. Many paintings feature the tracks of birds, animals and humans, often identifying key ancestral beings. Subjects may be depicted by the imprint they leave in the sand – a simple arc depicts a sitting person, a *coolamon* (wooden carrying dish) is shown by an oval shape, a digging stick by a single line, a campfire by a circle. Men or women are identified by the objects associated with them – gathering tools and objects for women, hunting tools and objects for men. Concentric circles generally depict ancestral sites, or places where ancestors paused in their journeys.

Although these symbols are widely used, only the artist knows their meaning in each individual painting and the people closely associated with his or her story – either by clan or by the Tjukurpa/Jukurrpa – since different clans apply different interpretations to each painting's subject matter. In this way sacred stories can be publicly portrayed, as the deeper meaning is not revealed to uninitiated viewers, but coded by layers of stippled acrylic paint, literally and metaphorically concealing sacred information from uninitiated people. Many recent works are far more coded in their imagery with few or no figurative symbols, using colour and application to achieve optical effects denoting the power inherent in the stories portrayed.

Bark Painting

It is difficult to establish when bark was first used, partly because it is perishable, so the oldest pieces in existence date from the late 19th century and none of the early works were created in the format that we know today. The paintings were never intended to be permanent records but were painted on the bark shelters in much the same way as the art on rock galleries. Nonindigenous explorers travelling through the region in the early 19th century observed the practice of painting the inside walls of bark shelters, and later in the 19th century and early in the 20th century the trade in examples of bark paintings brought them to the notice of natural history/ethnographic museums around the world.

One of the main features of Arnhem Land bark paintings is the use of *rarrk* designs. These designs identify particular clans, and are based on body paintings handed down through generations. More recently, senior artists are recognised by their specific stylistic signature, while retaining communal clan designs. The paintings can also be broadly categorised by their regional styles. In the region's west the tendency was towards naturalistic and figurative images and plain backgrounds, although many renowned artists from Western and Central Arnhem Land cover the entire surface of the bark or carving in intricate line work to create a sense of power emanating from the imagery depicted. To the east, the use of geometric, abstract designs is more common, with the artists of northeast Arnhem Land renowned for their use of *kaolin* (white) in their ever-innovative paintings and sculpture.

In the 1980s acclaimed Papunya Tula artists were invited to submit works for the new Parliament House in Canberra.

Michael Nelson Jagamarra's *Possum and Wallaby Dreaming* is embedded in the mosaic forecourt: www.papunyaatula.com.au

The art reflects themes from ancestral times that vary by region. In eastern and central Arnhem Land the most prominent ancestral beings are the Djan'kawu Sisters, who travelled the land with their elaborate dillybags (string carry bags) and digging sticks (for making waterholes); and the Wagilag/Wawilak Sisters, who are associated with snakes and waterholes and the creation of the clans of the regions. In western Arnhem Land, the significant being (according to some clans) is Yingarna, the Rainbow Serpent, as is one of her offspring, Ngalyod. Other groups paint Nawura as the principal ancestral being – he travelled through the rocky landscape creating sacred sites and giving people the attributes of culture. Another powerful ancestral being is Namarrkon, the Lightning Man, associated with the monsoon season.

The Mimi spirits are another feature of western Arnhem Land art, on both bark and rock. These mischievous spirits are attributed with having taught the indigenous people of the region many things, including hunting, food-gathering and painting skills. More recently, many of the most senior artists have become renowned for their highly innovative depictions of ancestral stories with works of art held in major national and international public and private collections. The Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, on the gorgeous location of Bullocky Point, Darwin, presents changing displays from its extensive collection of work from communities across the NT.

Contemporary Art

Since the early 1970s there have been burgeoning centres of creativity throughout remote regions, often where clan connections cross government borders, particularly throughout the Anangu/Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, which include parts of SA, NT and WA. In the late 1980s to mid-1990s critical and popular focus centred on artists and work from the communities of Utopia, Haasts Bluff, Papunya and Yuendumu in central Australia, and Ngukurr in southeast Arnhem Land. In the 1990s, work being created in communities across Arnhem Land gained national and international acclaim.

The most significant developments over the past three decades have come from urban and rural-based artists, living in the regions that have experienced the longest impact of colonisation. Their individual and collective contributions challenged the status quo of the time, being that 'authentic' Aboriginal art could only be created by artists from remote communities – those regions that supposedly were more 'traditional'. This misconception overlooked the strong cultural connections held by Aboriginal people whose families and communities had been moved off their customary homelands, had children forcibly removed and placed in government and church-operated institutions, lost access to language and customs, yet who intrinsically retained a sense of indigenous identity, which was represented – overtly or subtly – in the work they created.

Much of this work was created by artists/activists living, studying and working in major metropolitan centres across Australia such as Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. Artist-run initiatives such as Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Sydney in 1987, Dumbartung in Perth (1989), Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Adelaide in 1989, and Campfire Group (later Fireworks Gallery) in Brisbane in 1990, were established as a political response to the exclusive nature of the contemporary mainstream art scene, and the impact of these venues and the artists involved on the uninformed art world continues to resonate nearly three decades later.

Subject matter ranged from identity politics, land and cultural rights, stolen generations and cultural revival, and the media included paintings,

The *art+soul* DVD series (2011, Sydney: ABC Sales & Hibiscus Films) is produced by one of Australia's most respected indigenous curators and educators, Hetti Perkins. The series covers a diversity of artists who have had a significant impact on the development of the contemporary indigenous art scene over the past two decades.

sculpture, textiles, photo-media and film, new media and installation and conceptual work. Works on paper have long been created by artists from all regions across the country – urban, rural and remote – with many art centres producing their own works on paper or working with specialist organisations. Fine art prints are now produced by many artists and communities, assisted by master print-makers and organisations such as Northern Editions at the Charles Darwin University. These works of art are sought after due to their affordability.

Discussion has long surrounded the ‘contemporary’ vs ‘traditional’ debate, but perhaps the biggest change has been the involvement of indigenous curators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art working in artist-run spaces, state and federal public art galleries and museums, which ensures that visual art and culture is presented from an indigenous perspective.

There are many wonderful opportunities to view the latest developments in contemporary Aboriginal art. See the Major Indigenous Art Festivals boxed text, below.

Artefacts & Contemporary Objects

Objects traditionally made for utilitarian or ceremonial practices, such as weapons, hunting and gathering tools and musical instruments, often feature intricate and symbolic decoration. In recent years many communities have also developed nontraditional forms of weavings and objects that have generated cultural revival and pride, employment and income. In central Australia, artists have created idiosyncratic works such as *mu-*

Emily Kame Kngwarreye (c 1910–96), an Anmatyere elder, was an incredibly prolific artist and a supernova on the contemporary art scene. Kngwarreye is represented in every major public collection in Australia and in 1997 she posthumously represented Australia at the Venice Biennale with Yvonne Koolmatrie and Judy Watson.

MAJOR INDIGENOUS ART FESTIVALS

The Telstra

In August each year, the **Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award** (the Telstra; www.artsandmuseums.nt.gov.au/museums/natsiaa) is a major event on the national visual arts calendar. In 2013 it will celebrate its 30th anniversary, making it the longest running indigenous art prize in the country. Held at the Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin, the exhibition showcases contemporary art by indigenous artists from all over Australia. It runs to the end of October each year.

Desert Mob

Smaller than the Telstra, the Desert Mob exhibition packs a whole lot of (he)art and soul into its annual showcase of contemporary work from central Australia. Hosted by the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs, **Desert Mob** (www.desertmob.nt.gov.au) has grown from somewhat humble beginnings to an exciting event involving artists from up to 40 Desert member art centres. Calendar events include a one-day symposium where artists share stories, images and films, and a weekend marketplace where visitors have the chance to meet artists and works can be acquired for incredibly reasonable prices. A central event of the Alice Desert Festival, the exhibition is on from September until late October.

Our Mob

South Australia's **OUR MOB** (www.adelaidefestivalcentre.com.au), held in October, is the new annual exhibition kid on the block. First held in 2005, it's quickly blossomed into an exciting event bringing South Australian indigenous artists and their work together at the Adelaide Festival Centre Gallery on the banks of the Torrens River. Works of all mediums are represented, with art centres from the APY Lands showing alongside artists from the west coast, Riverland and Coorong regions, as well as urban-based artists. The public program includes talks by artists, curators and arts workers. It runs from October until early December.

The depiction of ancestral beings in indigenous art is a signifier of respect and cultural connection to specific regions and language groups. For example, the Nyoongar people's Wagyl (Waugal or Waagal) in southern WA is similar to the Rainbow Serpent Ngalyod or Yingarna in parts of Arnhem Land. Every community and nation has their respective ancestral beings and totemic spirit beings.

kata (beanies or hats), *tjanpi* (woven natural grasses, brightly coloured wool, seeds and beads) objects ranging from birds, animals and humans to the more quirky – the near life-size *Tjanpi Toyota* by Tjanpi Desert Weavers, which won the overall Telstra NATSIAA in 2005 and is on permanent display at the Museum & Art Gallery of the NT in Darwin.

Didgeridoo

The most widespread craft objects seen for sale these days are didgeridoos. There has been a phenomenal boom in their popularity and they can be found in outlets around the country, although not always made by an indigenous artisan. A hollow drone instrument, the didgeridoo is played by a musician who has mastered the art of circular (nonstop) breathing and is now used by indigenous and nonindigenous musicians due to its unique and amazingly diverse sound. It has been used in traditional, crossover, country, rock and classical music.

Although it is often considered a universal Aboriginal musical instrument, the didgeridoo originates from Yolngu culture in northeast Arnhem Land, where it remains a revered cultural object and is known as the *yidaki*. For more information on the cultural protocols for use of the didgeridoo see www.didgefestival.com/about-the-didge.

Buying Aboriginal Art Ethically

The rising interest in Aboriginal art in Australia and overseas over the past decade or so has been accompanied by an increase in unethical actions by individuals who have not always had the rights of the artists and their communities as a priority.

Very few galleries in SA or the NT are owned and directed by indigenous people, but there are many Aboriginal art centres that are governed by Aboriginal people. The best place to buy art is either directly from the communities that have art collectives, or from galleries and outlets that are operated or supported by indigenous arts and advocacy groups. In most major cities and towns there are also commercial galleries that have established long-term relationships with artists and communities. These usually display a notice stating they are a member of the Australian Commercial Galleries Association (ACGA) and/or the Indigenous Art Code.

Art Centres & Advocacy Groups

The following art centres provide useful information on their websites:

- ➔ **Association of Northern, Kimberley & Arnhem Aboriginal Artists** (ANKAAA; www.ankaaa.org.au), based in Darwin, is the peak advocacy and support agency for Aboriginal artists and art centres in Arnhem Land, Tiwi Islands, Darwin/Katherine and the Kimberley in north Western Australia. ANKAAA recently celebrated its 25th anniversary.
- ➔ **Desart Inc** (www.desart.com.au) is the key support agency in Central Australia. Based in Alice Springs, it is the major advocacy agency for at least 45 central Australian art centres across three borders (NT, SA and WA).
- ➔ **Ananguku Arts & Culture Aboriginal Corporation** (www.anangukuarts.com.au), over the border in South Australia, was established in 1997 by women artists at Ernabella to cover the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. Ananguku Arts now provides services to more than 460 artists at seven Aboriginal-owned and -governed art centres in far northwest SA.
- ➔ **Tiwi Art Network** (www.tiwiart.com) is an alliance between the three art centres on the Islands: Munupi Arts & Crafts, Tiwi Design and Jilamara Arts & Crafts.

The Outback Environment

Parts of the Australian outback are among the world's oldest land surfaces. Australia's last great mountain-building events took place more than 300 million years ago, and it's hard to believe that Uluru was once part of a mountain range that would have rivalled the Andes in height. Erosion and the relentless cycle of drought and flood have leached the nutrients away from Australia's ancient soils and prevented the creation of new soils, resulting in the vast sandy plains of the Australian outback.

The Land

The Stuart Hwy passes through some of the lowest, flattest and driest parts of Australia, but there are numerous ranges and individual mountains scattered through the outback. At 1531m, Mt Zeil is not remarkable by world standards, but it is the highest mountain west of the Great Dividing Range. The rocky ranges of the outback provide important refuges for a diverse collection of plants and animals, and are significant in the ancient song lines and *stories* (accounts of the Dreaming that link into the law) of the traditional Aboriginal custodians of these areas.

In the outback you will drive past huge salt or clay pans that rarely fill with water. These may be dry for years, but when there is an abundance of rain they become important arid wetland systems: they hold water long after the surrounding landscape has dried out and are crucial to the survival of many plants and animals, especially those that require inundation during their life cycles.

While spectacular geological formations are characteristics of the south and central deserts, it is the extensive river systems and wetlands that herald your arrival in the Top End. The sandstone escarpment and plateau of western Arnhem Land is a magnificent sight, but the life-sustaining floodplains at its base are just as impressive.

SA's low and unreliable rainfall has resulted in water from the Murray River being piped over long distances to ensure the survival of many communities, including Adelaide. More than 50% of South Australians depend entirely on the Murray for their water supply, and this figure can rise to 90% in drought years.

The Land & Indigenous Peoples

by Dr Irene Watson

The earth is our sacred relative; it is a relationship that is based on nurturing, caring and sharing. From birth we learn of the sacredness of all living things. Every aspect of the natural world is honoured and respected, and we learn to tread lightly on the earth.

The spirit of creation is in all things, for all life forms are related. The philosophy of respect for all living things is an idea central to Aboriginal spirituality and is an idea that nurtured and kept the land in a pristine state prior to colonisation.

WORKING TOGETHER – JOINT MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS

Four national parks in South Australia and 32 in the Northern Territory are managed jointly by traditional owners and state, territory or federal governments. Partnerships have been born out of the recognition of the traditional owners and their ties to country, bringing both parties together to manage land for conservation.

'I spent 10 years working at Nitmiluk and I reckon we led the way with the joint management model that was developed there. Joint management offers employment for the young fellas, economic opportunities for the broader Jawoyn community, and the chance for Jawoyn to get out on their land. I loved being a ranger at Nitmiluk because every day I got to work on my own country. Now, I'm enjoying learning about other people's country up here in the wetlands.'

Greg Peckham, ranger, Wildman Ranger Station, Mary River National Park

The Spirit in the Land

The land is sacred because the essence of our spirituality lies in the earth; our spirit guides are resting in the mountains, in the rocks and in the rivers, and they are everywhere in the land. The land is sacred because it carries the footsteps of our spirit ancestors as they walked every part of it, laying tracks and spiritual songs across the country. The ancestors lie sleeping deep in the earth and we are responsible for the care of their places of rest, for their creative powers are alive and influence all things still in the natural world.

If these spirits are disturbed, so too are the natural order and cycles of life. Where sacred sites are destroyed we believe the ancestors are disturbed and will no longer protect or provide for the people. As a result of damaged or destroyed sacred sites, natural disasters and sickness may occur and afflict communities who have not fulfilled their cultural obligations as custodians. By neglecting our spiritual and cultural obligations we bring disharmony to the country and the community.

The Relationship to the Land

The idea of the land being *terra nullius*, or a vast empty space across which we range sporadically, is a myth. We know the land intimately: every rock and every river has a name and is remembered in the Dreaming, as it is still remembered today.

To own the land as a piece of real estate, as a 'property', is an idea remote to Aboriginal people. Our relationship to the land is considerably more complex. The land cannot be treated as a consumable, which can be traded or sold. We believe the land cannot be sold.

We have always lived as a part of the natural world, and we take from the environment only what is needed to sustain life; we nurture the land as we do ourselves, for we are one.

The land is both nurturer and teacher from which all life forms grow; all life is inseparably linked. The Aboriginal relationship to the land carries with it both obligations and rights. The relationship to land is at once one of traditional owner and of custodian. It is a relationship that is difficult to explain in a foreign language, because the term 'owner' has different meanings across cultures. Ownership is not viewed in relation to ownership of material goods, but is more accurately viewed as in possession of other values: knowledge, culture and law business, a relationship, a problem, a dispute, a ceremony.

The idea of Aboriginal ownership is not exclusive, and it does not define the owned object as a commodity. Instead, that which is owned is defined as the concern of a limited group of people who stand in a

Established in the 1800s, Goyder's Line marks the 250mm rainfall isobar as the recommended northern limit for cropping in SA. With the increase in temperature and reduction in rainfall, there have been suggestions that the line should shift as far south as the Clare Valley.

particular relationship to the owner, and whose various responsibilities depend on that relationship.

Managers & Bosses

There are both managers and bosses for country, and each party has a different responsibility or right. The manager is the custodian and the boss is the owner. Naming the parties a manager or a boss is simply a way of discerning between custodian and owner, although in reality these two roles are not always strictly separate and are often merged to become one.

Some of these responsibilities are made known to the members of an Aboriginal community through songs and ceremonies. For example, there may be a particular obligation not to kill the females of a certain animal, in order to preserve the species.

When traditional custodians and/or owners approach their country they will talk to the spirit ancestor of the place. They will tell them who they are and also who they may have brought with them to the place. When food is taken from the land, thanks are given to the ancestors. Nothing is assumed or taken for granted, not even the next meal. We are always seeking permission from the spirit world for our actions.

The boundaries between different Aboriginal clans or nations are sometimes marked. These boundaries are not straight lines but may be determined by the footsteps and tracks of the ancestors, by bends in the creek or the river, the rain shadow, trees or rocks. Some regions were shared between different Aboriginal peoples and some were restricted, with strict rules for obtaining permission to travel across the country.

Wildlife

The timing of your visit to central Australia will determine the variety and types of wildlife you are likely to see. In January, a flooded wetland in the north will be teeming with wildlife, whereas a searing hot January day in the desert may leave you wondering if anything lives there at all apart from flies and ants.

Feathers & Scales

The rivers and wetlands of both South Australia (SA) and the Northern Territory (NT) are home to an incredible variety of birds, as well as hosting great flocks of migratory birds from other parts of Australia and the world. In Kakadu look out for regal pairs of Jabiru storks and broilgas among the massive flocks of magpie geese.

Away from the wetlands, birdwatchers will need to put in more time and effort, as the birds of the dry desert regions are generally more mobile, only visiting waterholes for a quick drink before disappearing into the void. The waterholes of the MacDonnell Range can teem with colourful and noisy zebra finches and budgerigars only to be abandoned a few minutes later. Keep an eye out for emus near the road around Coober Pedy – even at the hottest time of the day!

A visit to the 200-hectare Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden, on the Stuart Hwy in Port Augusta, is a great way to see a range of different arid-zone plants in one place. Check out the website at www.australian-aridlands-botanic-garden.org.

VOLUNTEERING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Want to get your hands dirty? Conservation Volunteers Australia (p272) is a not-for-profit organisation focusing on practical conservation projects such as tree planting, walking-track construction, and flora and fauna surveys. You'll meet like-minded people and get to visit interesting areas of the country. Most projects are either for a weekend or a week and all food, transport and accommodation is supplied in return for a small contribution to help cover costs.

ABORIGINAL LAND MANAGEMENT

For more than 50,000 years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have occupied the full range of environments within Australia. Indigenous people have successfully utilised and renewed the country, using an accumulated intimate knowledge of the land, and have implemented innovative management regimes with traditional customs to keep the country healthy and productive.

Through this long-term use and occupation, indigenous people developed an intimate understanding of the environment including the flora and fauna, and the environmental conditions. This knowledge was crucial for long-term survival in a land that can be harsh and uninviting at the best of times. The land has always nurtured and provided for indigenous people, through meats like kangaroo and emu or vegetables like yams and sweet potatoes. However, the land means a great deal more than that – it also provides spiritual strength. Through *story* places (where special Dreaming events occurred) and Dreaming tracks throughout the landscape, our attachment to land provides us with our identity – where we come from as Aboriginal people, who we are, where our land is, our languages and our social structure.

The land is all important. However, with invasion many Aboriginal people were denied access to their land – they were killed, dispersed or taken away to Aboriginal missions. This has had a variety of effects on Aboriginal people, including separation from family, loss of identity and the myriad social problems that accompany these things, such as alcohol abuse and unemployment.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal occupation and day-to-day use have been, and in many places continue to be, significant factors in maintaining the landscape. Firestick farming (burning off) is a well-documented technique Aboriginal people used to renew and manage the land. In most areas burning off the country with fire was, and in some areas continues to be, an annual occurrence. In the north of Australia it is carried out at the beginning of the cool Dry season. Firestick farming serves two main purposes. One is to decrease the chance of a bushfire by reducing the vegetation build-up after a wet season. This vegetation could be fuel for a major fire. Secondly, fire is used to clear the country and encourage new growth. This new growth attracts wildlife such as kangaroos and other species, which are drawn to nibble on the soft, new shoots that sprout after the fire.

Although much of the special knowledge of the environment has been lost due to the various impacts upon traditional culture, a great deal still exists. Aboriginal people's special attachment to land is tied to their social, cultural and economic wellbeing. Understanding this attachment can provide a good insight into the way Aboriginal people used and continue to use the land, and their aspirations for looking after their 'country'. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to play a role in managing their country. Since invasion, Australia has lost a large percentage of its native vegetation and many native species are in danger of extinction. For Australia to maintain its unique environmental credentials, it needs Aboriginal people and their knowledge to play a role in environmental management.

Barry Hunter, Indigenous Land Management Facilitator, Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation in Queensland

Early morning and late afternoon are the best times for birdwatching. Some species are rarely seen, while others hang around in flocks so large that you can't possibly miss them. Australia is in fact the perfect place for lazy birdwatchers because many of our birds are noisy and easily identifiable, such as pink cockatoos, red-tailed black cockatoos, sulphur-crested cockatoos, galahs, kookaburras, parrots and corellas. Australia's majestic wedge-tailed eagles are a common sight along the Stuart Hwy and you will often hear a whistling kite before you see it.

WALLABIES

Despite their abundance in central Australia, most reptiles are difficult to observe because many of them are inactive during hot summer days and hibernate during winter. Snakes tend to move around more between October and April, when you may spot a large, active daytime predator such as a large perentie, python or a sand goanna. In southern and central Australia, following an ant trail in the red desert sand may lead you to a small thorny devil taking lunch. The camouflaged, thorny coat of this lizard features a decoy 'head' behind the real head to fool predators.

In the tropical woodlands of the Top End, the well-known frill-necked lizards spend most of their days in trees eating insects and termites. When a 'frilly' is frightened or defending its territory, its defensive strategy is to open its mouth, widen its impressive frill and hiss. This menacing show is all bluff and a frilly will generally run very fast on its two hind legs in the opposite direction when the show is over. In June and July, when many other reptile species are hibernating, Australia's best-known reptiles – the freshwater and estuarine crocodiles – can be seen warming themselves on the banks of Top End rivers.

Marsupials Rule

Of the larger marsupials, you are most likely to see mobs of Australia's unique marsupial macropods, either bounding away from you, grazing quietly with ears twitching or resting in the shade of a tree. Look for a joey poking out from the female's pouch. In southern and central Australia, the most common macropod species is the red kangaroo, the world's largest marsupial. Males are a reddish brown colour and can grow to 2m, while females are smaller with blue grey colouring. Robust euros (or wallaroos) can be seen around Alice Springs and yellow-footed rock wallabies are making a comeback in the Flinders Ranges, thanks in part to a feral-animal eradication program. In the north, the most common macropod species is the agile wallaby, which grows to about 1m and has a distinct white line from the tip of its nose to its eye.

Not all Australian mammals have pouches. You may see the occasional solitary dingo; usually slinking away annoyed at being discovered. But many of Australia's mammals are small, secretive and nocturnal, so you're unlikely to see them in the wild unless you go spotlighting with a knowledgeable guide or visit one of the excellent wildlife parks in Alice Springs and Darwin.

If you stay overnight in Alice Springs, a visit to Simpsons Gap just before dark is your best bet for seeing black-footed rock wallabies in their natural environment.

The Ferals

The introduction of animals from other countries in the last 200 years has contributed significantly to the fragmentation of ecosystems and the extinction of native animals in Australia. Introduced species include foxes, rabbits, cats, pigs, goats, donkeys, horses, camels, starlings, sparrows, cane toads, mosquitofish and carp. They each bring a unique suite of problems as they carve out a niche for themselves in their new environment – some as predators of native animals, others as competitors for the limited resources of food, water and shelter.

JOEY FACTORIES

A kangaroo's breeding cycle will be suspended during periods of severe drought. In a good year, however, a doe may have an unweaned joey on foot, one suckling from inside the pouch and a dormant embryo in the uterus. The embryo is prevented from developing by the suckling of the joey in the pouch, but it's ready for birth within a day of that joey's departure. Each of the offspring feeds only from one teat and each teat supplies a different mix of nutrients depending on the age of the young.

Field Guide to Australian Birds by Michael Morcombe is a well-designed field guide, with beautiful colour illustrations and just the right amount of detail.

Plants & Habitats

There is a great diversity of vegetation between Adelaide and Darwin, reflecting the sweeping range in climate and rainfall. Much of the Top End receives an annual rainfall of around 1600mm, while the desert regions of SA receive less than 150mm (median) of annual rainfall.

Known as wattles in Australia, acacia species dominate the woodlands occupying large areas of the arid zone, with mulga varieties having by far the largest representation. Mulga has varying forms, from a multi-branched shrub of 1m to an erect tree of 7m. Once used by Aboriginal people to make spear throwers and long, narrow shields, the wood is extremely hard and today it is used for turning, craftwork and fence posts. Gidgee is another acacia that covers large areas of central Australia.

Some of the deserts of southern and central Australia are surprisingly well vegetated, usually with tough, dry chenopod shrublands (such as saltbush) and spinifex-dominated hummock grasslands. After heavy rains, seeds that have been lying dormant are triggered into life and the desert is then blanketed in wildflowers. The brightly coloured poached-egg daisy is one of the most abundant and conspicuous wildflowers.

You'll see a wide variety of eucalypt species, from multistemmed mallee to giant, shade-giving river red gums, such as those majestic specimens lining the Todd River in Alice Springs and the creeks of the Flinders Ranges. These massive, spreading trees offer refuge to a variety of wildlife, such as bats, birds, small mammals, lizards and insects. The glossy green leaves and stark white bark of the ghost gum are another common sight in central Australia, and it's around Alice that they've achieved most of their fame, largely through the work of artists such as Albert Namatjira. The impressive river red gums line the creeks of the Flinders Ranges and the dry riverbeds of central Australia.

One of the dominant Top End eucalypts is the Darwin woollybutt, a tall tree that produces large clusters of bright orange flowers (usually from May to August). Whether flowering or not, it is easily recognisable by the 'stocking' of rough, dark-coloured bark on its lower trunk, which is in stark contrast to the smooth, white upper trunk and branches. This is the tree's inbuilt protection from grass fires. Many a termite-eaten woollybutt ends up as a didgeridoo.

Plant Invaders

Weed infestations can destroy wildlife habitats and make pastoral and cropping land unusable – the cost in environmental and economic terms is incalculable.

In northern Australia, weeds such as para grass, mimosa and salvinia have invaded floodplains and choked out native vegetation, while gamba grass has devastated large areas of native woodlands. In the sandy riverbeds of central and southern Australia, buffel grass is threatening entire ecosystems. Add fire to the mix and you have a recipe for disaster for native vegetation, as weeds such as buffel and gamba are highly flammable and recover quickly after being burnt; they are thus able to regenerate faster than the native plants in the area.

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Directory A-Z

Accommodation

As well as the usual slew of hotels, motels, caravan parks and youth hostels, central Australia offers some truly Aussie ways to spend the night. Roll out your swag under the desert stars, park your campervan at a remote cattle station, dream shiraz-coloured dreams in a plush wine region B&B or blow a small fortune on a luxury 'tent' with views of Uluru.

Seasons In southern South Australia (SA), prices peak during summer (December to February) and school and public holidays. Outside these times discounts and lower walk-in rates can be found. Winter is peak season in the Flinders Ranges and outback areas of northern SA. In the Northern Territory (NT) peak season (the Dry) is June to September, plus school and public holidays. April to May and October to November are quieter shoulder seasons up north, and

summer (the Wet in the Top End) is the low season – prices can drop by as much as 30%. Book accommodation in advance in peak periods.

B&Bs

The atmosphere and privacy of B&Bs can be hard to top. Most B&Bs are 'self-catering', meaning breakfast provisions are provided for you to cook. Rates are typically \$100 to \$180, though they can climb higher.

The South Australian Tourist Commission (SATC) publishes a B&B booklet. Online resources include the following:

- ➔ www.babs.com.au
- ➔ www.australianbedandbreakfast.com.au
- ➔ www.ozbedandbreakfast.com
- ➔ www.bandbfsa.com.au

Camping

Bush camping at remote sites or in national parks is

a highlight of any central Australian trip. In the desert, where rain and mosquitoes are often not an issue, you don't even need a tent – just slip into a swag.

Costs Payment is often made into honesty boxes (around \$7 to \$15 per person per night).

Facilities There are plenty of free camping places out here, including roadside rest areas. In national parks camping is usually only permitted in designated areas, where facilities can range from a fireplace and simple pit toilet to hot showers and free gas barbecues.

Caravan Parks

Costs Central Australia's caravan parks are excellent value, charging from \$20 to \$30 for two people camping, slightly more for a powered site. Most have basic cabins with shared facilities (from around \$60) and en-suite cabins with cooking facilities (\$80 to \$140). Book ahead for powered sites and cabins in peak season.

Facilities Most parks have a camp kitchen, laundry, barbecues and a shop or kiosk, and all offer toilets and hot showers. If the gods are smiling there might even be a swimming pool.

Farm & Station Stays

For a true country experience, stay on a farm or working cattle station.

SLEEPING PRICE RANGES

In this book the following price ranges refer to a double room with bathroom in high season. Unless otherwise indicated, unpowered/powered camp site prices are for two people.

\$	less than \$100
\$\$	\$100 to \$200
\$\$\$	more than \$200

Some let you kick back and watch workers raise a sweat; others rope you in to day-to-day chores. Most accommodation is very comfortable – B&B-style in the main homestead (dinner on request), or in self-contained cottages. Some farms also provide budget outbuildings or shearers' quarters. Online, see the following:

- ➔ www.farmstaycampingaustralia.com.au
- ➔ www.stayz.com.au/farm-accommodation
- ➔ www.bandbfsa.com.au
- ➔ www.frabs.com.au

Hostels

Hostels are a highly social and low-cost fixture of the central Australian accommodation scene.

Costs A dormitory bed costs around \$22 to \$30, and most also have comfortable private rooms from around \$60 (\$70 to \$90 with en suite).

Facilities Most hostels have kitchens with fridges, stoves, microwaves and cooking utensils, communal areas with TV, a laundry, internet access (including wi-fi), travellers' noticeboards and tour-booking services.

HOSTEL ORGANISATIONS

There are several Australia-wide backpacker organisations that run hostels around the country (Base, Nomads etc), but in central Australia, your best bet is the ever-reliable **YHA** (☎08-8981 6344; www.yha.com.au) chain, which runs 11 hostels in SA and the NT. A Hostelling International membership costs \$42/80 for one/two years, slightly less if you're younger than 26.

INDEPENDENT HOSTELS

Central Australia (particularly SA) has numerous independent hostels, competition for the backpacker dollar prompting fairly high

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews by Lonely Planet authors, check out <http://hotels.lonelyplanet.com>. You'll find independent reviews, as well as recommendations on the best places to stay. Best of all, you can book online.

standards and enticements such as free breakfasts and courtesy buses. Places range from rundown pubs trying to fill empty rooms, to converted motels where dorm units have a fridge, TV and bathroom. Prices mimic those in the larger hostel organisations.

Motels

For comfortable midrange accommodation, motels are the way to go. They proliferate in cities and smaller towns, and many outback roadhouses also have motel rooms out the back.

Costs Expect to pay at least \$90 for a double and up to \$150 for more upmarket places.

Facilities The average motel is a modern (but anonymous) low-rise affair with parking and tidy rooms that have a bathroom, tea/coffee making facilities, TV, telephone, air-con, a fridge humming in the corner and, if the gods are smiling, a swimming pool.

Hotels

Fancy hotels and resorts are all around SA but are limited to Darwin, Alice Springs, Yulara, Kings Canyon and Kakadu in the NT. Most have fabulous facilities and locations, but more than a few five-star places are clinical and corporate in atmosphere. Although rack rates are high, discounts and deals mean you'll rarely pay full price except in peak season.

Pubs

For the budget traveller, pubs ('hotels' that serve beer) are

cheap, central options. Many pubs were built during boom times, so they're often the largest, most extravagant buildings in town.

Costs Pub singles/doubles with shared facilities start around \$40/60, more if you want a private bathroom. Few have a separate reception area – just ask at the bar.

Facilities Some pubs have been restored as heritage buildings, but generally rooms remain small and old fashioned, with an amble down the hall to the bathroom. If you're a light sleeper, avoid booking a room above the bar, and be aware that pub rooms don't always have air-con.

Rental Accommodation

Serviced apartments and holiday flats resemble motels but usually contain cooking facilities – good value for longer stays. This kind of accommodation is usually found in beachy holiday areas, while you'll find serviced apartments in Darwin and Adelaide. In some holiday accommodation you provide your own sheets and bedding; others are fully equipped.

Customs Regulations

When entering Australia you can bring most articles in free of duty, provided customs is satisfied they're for personal use and that you'll be taking them with you when you leave. Duty-free per-adult quotas:

- ➔ **Alcohol** 2.25L
- ➔ **Cigarettes** 50
- ➔ **Dutiable goods** Up to the value of A\$900

Narcotics, of course, are illegal, and customs inspectors and their highly trained hounds are diligent in sniffing them out. Quarantine regulations are strict, so you must declare all goods of animal or vegetable origin – wooden spoons, straw hats, the lot. Fresh food, particularly meat, cheese, fruit, vegetables and flowers, is also prohibited. There are disposal bins located in the airport where you can dump any questionable items if you don't want to bother with an inspection.

For more information:

- ➔ **Australian Quarantine & Inspection Service** (☎02-6272 3933, 1800 020 504; www.daff.gov.au)
- ➔ **Australian Customs Service** (☎02-9313 3010, 1300 363 263; www.customs.gov.au)

Discount Cards

Seniors Card

The **Seniors Card** (www.seniorscard.com.au) is available to permanent residents over the age of 60, giving discounts on everything from accommodation and tours to car hire and meals (with participating businesses, of course). The card is free; apply online. Even without a card, seniors with proof of age receive a discount on admission to many attractions in central Australia.

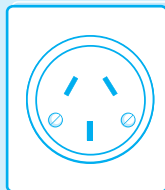
Student Cards

A student card entitles you to a wide range of discounts – from transport and tour charges to admission fees. The most common is the **International Student Identity Card** (ISIC; www.isiccard.com). To get one you need proof of full-time student status.

The same organisation also produces the **International Youth Travel Card** (IYTC) with benefits equivalent to the ISIC, issued to people between 12 and 26 years of age and not full-time students. Another similar card is the **International Teacher Identity Card** (ITIC), available to teaching professionals.

All three cards are issued by student unions, hostelling organisations and student-travel companies.

Electricity



240V/50Hz

Embassies & Consulates

The principal diplomatic representations to Australia are in Canberra in the ACT; some countries also have consular representation in Adelaide and Darwin:

- Canadian Embassy** (☎02-6270 4000; www.australia.gc.ca; Commonwealth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT)
- Chinese Embassy** (☎02-6273 4780; <http://au.china-embassy.org/eng>; 15 Coronation Dr, Yarralumla, ACT)

Dutch Consulate (☎08-8232 3855; www.netherlands.org.au; L1, 147 Frome St, Adelaide, SA)

Dutch Embassy (☎02-6220 9400; www.netherlands.org.au; 120 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla, ACT)

French Embassy (☎02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT)

German Embassy (☎02-6270 1911; www.canberra.diplo.de; 119 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla, ACT)

Indonesian Consulate (☎08-8943 0200; <http://darwin.kemlu.go.id>; 20 Harry Chan Ave, Darwin, NT)

Indonesian Embassy (☎02-6250 8600; www.deplu.go.id/canberra; 8 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla, ACT)

Irish Embassy (☎02-6214 0000; www.embassyofireland.au.com; 20 Arkana St, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT)

Japanese Embassy (☎02-6273 3244; www.au.emb-japan.go.jp; 112 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla, ACT)

Malaysian Embassy (☎02-6120 0300; www.malaysia.org.au; 7 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT)

New Zealand Embassy (☎02-6270 4211; www.nzembassy.com; Commonwealth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT)

Singaporean Embassy (☎02-6271 2000; www.mfa.gov.sg/canberra; 17 Forster Cres, Yarralumla, ACT)

Thai Embassy (☎02-6206 0100; 111 Empire Circuit, Yarralumla, ACT)

UK Consulate (☎08-8941 6130; www.ukinaustralia.fco.gov.uk; 30 The Mall, Darwin, NT)

UK Embassy (☎02-6270 6666; www.ukinaustralia.fco.gov.uk; Commonwealth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT)

US Embassy (☎02-6214 5600; <http://canberra.usembassy.gov>; 1 Moonah Pl, Yarralumla, ACT)

Food

Eating in central Australia can be as pricey or prudent as you like: A roadhouse hamburger can taste just as good as a fine-dining morsel in a haughty winery bistro. For the SA foodie low-down, check out the South Australian Wine & Food chapter (p39).

Gay & Lesbian Travellers

South Australia Attitudes towards homosexuality in SA are fairly relaxed, but as you'd expect, homophobia does rear its ugly head the further you travel into the outback. Adelaide has plenty of gay-friendly venues, and a dedicated annual gay and lesbian cultural festival.

Feast (www.feast.org.au), held over three weeks in November. For info on the G&L scene, pick up a copy of **Blaze** (www.gaynewsnetwork.com.au) magazine, available around Adelaide, or contact the **Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service SA** (☎08-8193 0800; www.glcssa.org.au).

Northern Territory In the NT you'll find active gay and lesbian communities in Alice Springs, though homophobic attitudes do exist beyond the main towns.

Resources For general information, check out the **Gay & Lesbian Tourism Australia** (www.galta.com.au), which has information on gay-friendly businesses, places to stay and nightlife. See also www.gaystayaustralia.com.

Health

by Dr David Millar

Healthwise, Australia is a remarkably safe country in which to travel, considering that such a large portion of it lies in the tropics. Few travellers to central Australia will experience anything

EATING PRICE RANGES

In this book the following price ranges refer to a standard main course:

\$	less than \$15
\$\$	\$15 to \$32
\$\$\$	more than \$32

worse than sunburn or a bad hangover and, if you do fall ill, the standard of hospitals and health care is high.

Vaccinations

◆ Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as 'the yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

◆ If you're entering Australia within six days of having stayed overnight or longer in a yellow fever-infected country, you'll need proof of yellow fever vaccination. For a full list of these countries, visit **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (www.cdc.gov/travel).

◆ The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/wer) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox and polio, as well as hepatitis B, regardless of their destination. The consequences of these diseases can be severe and, while Australia has high levels of childhood vaccination coverage, outbreaks of these diseases do occur.

Availability & Cost of Health Care

Facilities Australia has an excellent health-care system. It's a mixture of privately run medical clinics and hospitals alongside a system of public hospitals funded by the Aus-

tralian government. There are also excellent specialised public-health facilities for women and children in major centres.

Medicare The Medicare system covers Australian residents for some health-care costs. Visitors from countries with which Australia has a reciprocal health-care agreement are eligible for benefits specified under the Medicare program. Agreements are currently in place with Finland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK – check the details before departing these countries. For further details, visit www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/migrants/visitors.

Over-the-counter Medications Widely available at chemists throughout Australia. These include painkillers, antihistamines for allergies, and skincare products.

Prescriptions You may find that medications readily available over the counter in some countries are only available in Australia by prescription. These include the oral contraceptive pill, some medications for asthma and all antibiotics.

Health Care in Remote Areas

Distance In remote central Australian locations, it's possible there'll be a significant delay in emergency services reaching you in the event of a serious accident or illness. Don't underestimate the vast distances between most major outback towns. An increased level of self-

PRACTICALITIES

- ➔ **DVDs** Australian DVDs are encoded for Region 4, which includes Mexico, South America, Central America, New Zealand, the Pacific and the Caribbean.
- ➔ **Newspapers** The main newspapers are the *Advertiser* (SA), the *NT News* (Darwin) and the *Centralian Advocate* (Alice Springs). The *Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Australian* newspapers are readily available.
- ➔ **Radio** Tune in to Triple J (ABC youth radio station) and the multicultural SBS National Radio.
- ➔ **Smoking** Banned on public transport and in pubs, bars and eateries.
- ➔ **TV** On TV you'll find the government-sponsored ABC, the multicultural SBS, Imparja (an Aboriginal-owned station), the three major commercial stations: Seven, Nine and Ten; plus additional digital channels.
- ➔ **Weights & Measures** Australia uses the metric system.

reliance and preparation is essential. The **Royal Flying Doctor Service** (RFDs; www.flyingdoctor.net) provides an important back-up for remote communities.

First Aid Consider taking a wilderness first-aid course, such as those offered by **Wilderness First Aid Consultants** (www.wfac.com.au). Take a comprehensive first-aid kit appropriate for the activities planned.

Communication Ensure you have adequate means of communication. Australia has extensive mobile-phone coverage, but additional radio communication is important for remote areas.

Bites & Stings

MARINE ANIMALS

Stings Stings from jellyfish (box jellyfish, *irukandji*) occur in Australia's tropics, particularly during the Wet season (November to April). Warning signs and stinger nets exist at popular affected beaches. Never dive into water unless you've checked that it's safe. First aid consists of washing the skin with vinegar followed by

transfer to a hospital; antivenin is available.

Spikes & Spines Marine spikes found on sea urchins, stonefish, scorpion fish and stingrays can cause severe local pain. If this occurs, immerse the affected area in hot water (as high a temperature as possible). Keep topping up with hot water until the pain subsides and medical care can be reached. Stonefish antivenin is available.

CROCODILES

The risk of crocodile attack in tropical northern Australia is real but predictable and largely preventable. Discuss the local risk with police or tourist agencies in the area before swimming in rivers, waterholes (even far inland) and in the sea, and always heed warning signs.

SHARKS

Despite extensive media coverage (SA in particular has a bad rep), the risk of shark attack in Australian waters is no greater than in other countries with expansive coastlines. That said, check with

local surf life-saving groups and surfers about risks.

SNAKES

Risks Australian snakes have a fearful reputation, but the actual risk to travellers and locals is low. Snakes are usually quite timid and, in most instances, will move away if disturbed. Prevent bites by wearing protective clothing (such as gaiters) around the lower legs when bushwalking.

Treatment If bitten, prevent the spread of venom by applying pressure to the wound and immobilising the area with a splint or sling before seeking medical attention. Firmly wrap an elastic bandage (or a T-shirt) around the entire limb, but not so tight as to cut off the circulation.

SPIDERS

Australia has several poisonous spiders. In central Australia, redback spider bites cause increasing pain at the site, profuse sweating, muscular weakness and nausea. If bitten, apply ice or cold packs to the bite then transfer to hospital.

Heat Exhaustion, Heatstroke & Dehydration

Heat Exhaustion Heat exhaustion occurs when fluid intake does not keep up with fluid loss. Symptoms include dizziness, fainting, fatigue, nausea or vomiting, and pale, cool and clammy skin. Treatment consists of rest in a cool, shady place and fluid replacement with water or diluted sports drinks.

Heatstroke Heatstroke is a severe form of heat illness that occurs after fluid depletion or extreme heat challenge from heavy exercise. Extreme heatstroke is a true medical emergency, with heating of the brain leading to disorientation, hallucinations and seizures.

Dehydration A number of unprepared travellers die

from dehydration each year in outback Australia – preventable by following these simple rules:

- ➔ Carry sufficient water for any trip, including extra in case of vehicle breakdown.
- ➔ Always let someone, such as the local police, know where you are going and when you expect to arrive.
- ➔ Carry communications equipment.
- ➔ Stay with the vehicle rather than walking for help.

Insect-Borne Illnesses

Various insects can be a source of irritation and, in central Australia, may be the source of specific diseases (eg Ross River fever). Protection from mosquitoes, sandflies, ticks and leeches can be achieved by a combination of the following strategies:

- ➔ Wear light, loose-fitting, long-sleeved clothing.
- ➔ Apply 30% DEET to all exposed skin and repeat every three to four hours.
- ➔ Impregnate clothing with permethrin (an insecticide that kills insects but is believed to be safe for humans).

Sunburn

Ultraviolet (UV) exposure is greatest between 10am and 4pm, so avoid skin exposure during these times. Always use SPF 30+ sunscreen, apply it 30 minutes before going into the sun and repeat application regularly.

Traveller's Diarrhoea

Water Tap water is usually safe in central Australia. All other water should be boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets) to prevent traveller's diarrhoea and giardiasis (giardia).

Treatment If you develop diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids – preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and

sugar. You should also begin taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an antidiarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, seek medical attention.

Medical Checklist

- ➔ antibiotics
- ➔ antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- ➔ acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin
- ➔ anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- ➔ antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- ➔ antibacterial ointment for cuts and abrasions
- ➔ steroid cream or cortisone (for allergic rashes)
- ➔ bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- ➔ adhesive or paper tape
- ➔ scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- ➔ thermometer
- ➔ pocketknife
- ➔ DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- ➔ permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- ➔ sunscreen
- ➔ oral rehydration salts
- ➔ iodine tablets or water filter (for water purification)

Insurance

Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you're already on the road.

Level of Cover A good travel insurance policy covering theft, loss and medical problems is essential. Some policies specifically exclude designated 'dangerous activities' such as scuba diving, motorcycling and even

bushwalking. Make sure the policy you choose fully covers you for your activity of choice.

Health You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than requiring you to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation. Check that the policy covers ambulances and emergency medical evacuations by air.

Car For information on insurance matters relating to cars that are bought or rented, see p280.

Internet Access

Access Points

Libraries Most public libraries have internet access, but generally they're provided for research needs, not for travellers to check their emails – so book ahead or tackle an internet cafe.

Internet Cafes You'll find plenty of these in Adelaide, Darwin, Alice, larger towns and pretty much anywhere that travellers congregate. The cost ranges from less than \$6 an hour to \$10 an hour. Most youth hostels can hook you up, as can many hotels and caravan parks.

Hooking Up

ISPs If you're bringing your palmtop or laptop, check with your Internet Service Provider (ISP) for access numbers you can dial into in central Australia. Most international ISPs have numbers for Adelaide and Darwin. Some major Australian ISPs:

- ➔ **Dodo** (www.dodo.com)
- ➔ **iPrimus** (www.iprimus.com.au)
- ➔ **Optus** (www.optus.com.au)
- ➔ **Telstra BigPond** (www.bigpond.com)

Plugs Australia primarily uses the RJ-45 telephone plugs although you may see Telstra EXL-160 four-pin

plugs – electronics shops such as Tandy and Dick Smith can help.

Wi-fi Wireless connections are increasingly popular throughout Australia, but don't count on wi-fi being available. To find locations visit www.freewifi.com.au.

Modem Keep in mind that your PC-card modem may not work in Australia. The safest option is to buy a reputable 'global' modem before you leave home or buy a local PC-card modem once you get to Australia.

Legal Matters

Most travellers will have no contact with Australia's police or legal system; if you do, it's most likely to be while driving.

Driving There's a significant police presence on central Australian roads; police have the power to stop your car, see your licence (you're required to carry it), check your vehicle for roadworthiness, and insist that you take a breath test for alcohol (and sometimes illicit drugs).

Drugs First-time offenders caught with small amounts of illegal drugs are likely to receive a fine rather than go to jail, but the recording of a conviction against you may affect your visa status.

Visas If you remain in Australia beyond the life of your visa, you'll officially be an 'overstayer' and could face detention and expulsion, then be prevented from returning to Australia for up to three years.

Arrested? It's your right to telephone a friend, lawyer or relative before questioning begins. Legal aid is available only in serious cases; for Legal Aid office info see www.nla.aust.net.au. However, many solicitors do not charge for an initial consultation.

Maps

Touring & 4WD Maps

➤ **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia** (RAA; Map p56; ☎08-8202 4600; www.raa.net; 41 Hindmarsh Sq, Adelaide; ☉8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

➤ **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory** (AANT; ☎08-8925 5901; www.aant.com.au; 79-81 Smith St, Darwin, NT)

➤ **Hema** (☎07-3340 0000; www.hemamaps.com.au)

➤ **Westprint** (☎03-5391 1466; www.westprint.com.au)

Bushwalking Maps

Geoscience Australia (☎1800 800 173; www.ga.gov.au) publishes large-scale topographic sheet maps for bushwalking and 4WD explorations. See also the Map Shop, following.

City Street Guides UBD Gregory's (☎02-9857 3700; www.hardiegrant.com.au) produces Adelaide and Darwin street directories (around \$35).

GPS In SA, GPS systems and topographic maps are available from **Carto Graphics** (☎08-8357 1777; www.cartographics.com.au; 147 Unley Rd, Unley, SA) and the

Map Shop (Map p56; www.mapshop.net.au; 6-10 Peel St; ☉9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat). You can also hire a GPS in Alice Springs at **Central Comms** (☎08-8952 2388; www.centralcomms.com.au; cnr Stuart Hwy & Wills Tce, Alice Springs, NT), or rent one from the major car-hire companies (Darwin and Adelaide only, subject to availability).

Money

Currency

Australia's currency is the Australian dollar, comprising 100 cents. There are 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, \$1 and \$2 coins,

and \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 notes. In this book, unless otherwise stated, prices listed are in Australian dollars.

See p17 for exchange rates and costs.

ATMs & Eftpos

ATMs There are 24-hour ATMs in most substantial towns in SA and the NT (including Yulara at Uluru and Jabiru and Cooina in Kakadu National Park). All accept cards from other Australian banks, and most are linked to international networks. Stuart Hwy roadhouses also have ATMs.

Eftpos Most service stations and supermarkets have Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (Eftpos) facilities allowing you to make purchases and even draw out cash with your credit or debit card.

Credit Cards

Credit cards (especially Visa and MasterCard) are widely accepted throughout central Australia. A credit card is essential if you want to hire a car, and can also be used for cash advances at banks and from ATMs (depending on the card). Diners and AmEx cards are not widely accepted.

Lost credit card contact numbers:

➤ **American Express** (☎1300 132 639)

➤ **Diners Club** (☎1300 360 060)

➤ **MasterCard** (☎1800 120 113)

➤ **Visa** (☎1800 450 346)

Debit Cards

A debit card allows you to draw money directly from your home bank account using ATMs, banks or Eftpos machines. Any card connected to the international banking network – Cirrus, Maestro, Plus and Eurocard – should work with your PIN (Personal Identification Number). Expect substantial fees.

Companies such as Travelex offer debit cards (Travelex calls them 'Cash Passport' cards) with set withdrawal fees and a balance you can top-up from your personal bank account while on the road.

Taxes & Refunds

Goods & Services Tax The GST is a flat 10% tax on all Australian goods and services, with some exceptions such as basic food items (milk, bread, fruit and vegetables etc.). By law, the tax is included in the quoted or shelf prices. All prices in this book are GST inclusive.

GST Refund If you purchase new or secondhand goods with a minimum value of \$300 from any one supplier within 30 days of departure from Australia, you're entitled to a refund of GST paid under the Tourist Refund Scheme (TRS). Contact the **Australian Customs Service** (☎02-9313 3010, 1300 363 263; www.customs.gov.au) for more details.

Tipping

Tipping is far from ingrained in Australian society, and most people in the outback don't bother. The only place where tipping is considered normal is restaurants, where 10% of the bill is reasonable for good service. Taxi drivers also appreciate you rounding up the fare.

Travellers Cheques

➔ The ubiquity and convenience of internationally linked credit and debit card facilities in Australia means that travellers cheques are virtually redundant.

➔ AmEx and Travelex will exchange their associated travellers cheques, and major banks will also change travellers cheques.

➔ In all instances you'll need to present your passport for identification when cashing them.

Opening Hours

Banks 9.30am to 4pm Monday to Thursday; until 5pm on Friday.

Cafes All-day affairs opening from around 7am until around 5pm, or continuing their business into the night.

Petrol stations & road-houses Usually open 8am to 10pm. Some urban service stations open 24 hours.

Post offices 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday; some from 9am to noon on Saturdays. You can also buy stamps from newsagents and delis.

Pubs Usually serving food from noon to 2pm and from 6pm to 8pm. Pubs and bars often open for drinking at lunchtime and continue well into the evening, particularly from Thursday to Saturday.

Restaurants Open around noon for lunch and from 6pm for dinner, typically serving until at least 2pm and 8pm respectively, often later. Adelaide and Darwin eateries keep longer hours.

Shops & businesses 9am to 5pm or 6pm Monday to Friday, until either noon or 5pm on Saturday. In Adelaide and Darwin on Friday, doors stay open until 9pm.

Supermarkets Generally open from 7am until at least 8pm; some open 24 hours. Delis (general stores) also open late.

Public Holidays

National and statewide public holidays observed in SA and the NT:

New Year's Day 1 January

Australia Day 26 January

Easter Good Friday to Easter Monday inclusive; March/April

Anzac Day 25 April

May Day 1st Monday in May (NT only)

Adelaide Cup Day 3rd Monday in May (SA only)

Queen's Birthday 2nd Monday in June

Picnic Day 1st Monday in August (NT only)

Labour Day 1st Monday in October (SA only)

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December (NT only)

Proclamation Day 28 December (SA only)

Safe Travel

Animal Hazards

➔ For around half the year (at least – generally from September to May) you'll have to cope with those two bane of the Australian outdoors: the fly and the mosquito (moszie).

➔ Insect repellents such as Aerogard and Rid deter mosquitoes, and try to keep your arms and legs covered as soon as the sun sets.

➔ See p266 for info on sharks, snakes, spiders, jellyfish, crocodiles and stinging marine animals.

Bushfires

➔ In hot, dry and windy weather, be extremely careful with any naked flame (including cigarette butts) and make sure your fire's out before you decamp.

➔ On Total Fire Ban days it's forbidden even to use a camping stove in the open – penalties are harsh.

➔ Campfires are banned in conservation areas during the Fire Danger Period (FDP), which is usually from 1 November to 31 March (30 April in some places).

➔ Postpone your bushwalk if a Total Fire Ban is in place.

Crime

Central Australia is a relatively safe place to visit but you should still take reasonable precautions:

➔ Lock hotel rooms and cars, and don't leave your

valuable unattended or visible through car windows.

- ➔ Avoid walking alone in unlit areas at night, especially in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.
- ➔ Refuse drinks offered by strangers in bars, and drink bottled alcohol rather than from a glass.

On the Road

- ➔ Road distances are HUGE out here: take regular breaks to avoid fatigue.
- ➔ Avoid outback driving at night: animals straying onto the road are a serious hazard, particularly kangaroos but also livestock and camels.
- ➔ Do some careful planning and preparation before you go: driving on dirt roads can be tricky if you're not used to them, and travellers regularly encounter difficulties in the harsh outback conditions.
- ➔ Always carry plenty of water and tell someone where you're going.

Swimming

- ➔ Popular beaches are patrolled by surf lifesavers; safe areas are marked by red-and-yellow flags.
- ➔ Undertows (or 'rips') at surf beaches are a problem. If you find yourself being carried out by a rip, don't panic or swim against the current – swim parallel to the shore to escape the rip and then make your way

back to the beach. Raise your arm (and yell!) if you need help.

- ➔ A number of people are paralysed every year by diving into waterholes or waves in shallow water and hitting the bottom – look before you leap.

Telephone

Australia's main telecommunications companies:

- ➔ **Telstra** (www.telstra.com.au) The main player – landline and mobile phone services.
- ➔ **Optus** (www.optus.com.au) Telstra's main rival – landline and mobile phone services.
- ➔ **Vodafone** (www.vodafone.com.au) Mobile phone services.
- ➔ **Virgin** (www.virginmobile.com.au) Mobile phone services.

Information & Toll-Free Calls

- ➔ Numbers starting with 190 are usually recorded information services, costing anything from 35c to \$5 or more per minute (more from mobiles and payphones).
- ➔ Many businesses have either a toll-free 1800 number, dialled from anywhere within Australia for free, or a 13 or 1300 number, charged at a local call rate. None of these numbers can be dialled from outside Australia.

- ➔ To make a reverse-charge (collect) call from a public or private phone, dial 1800 738 3773 or 12 550.

International Calls

- ➔ You can make international ISD (International Subscriber Dialling) calls from most phones, but the cheapest deals come through phonecards where calls to the UK and USA can be as low as 5c per minute.
- ➔ To call overseas from Australia, dial the international access code from Australia (0011 or 0018), the country code, the area code (minus the initial '0'), then the local phone number.
- ➔ Dialling Australia from overseas, use the 61 country code, then the state/territory STD area code (minus the initial '0'), then the local phone number.

Local Calls

Local calls cost 50c from public phones; 25c from private phones – there are no time limits. Calls to/from mobile phones cost more and are timed.

Long-distance Calls

Australia uses four Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) area codes for long-distance calls, which can be made from public phones. Long-distance calls are timed; rates vary depending on distance, service provider and time of day – they're cheaper off-peak (usually between 7pm and 7am).

STD AREA CODES

- ➔ New South Wales & ACT 02
- ➔ Victoria & Tasmania 03
- ➔ Queensland 07
- ➔ South Australia, Northern Territory & Western Australia 08

Mobile (Cell) Phones

Numbers Australian mobile-phone numbers have the prefixes 04xx.

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

The following government websites offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots.

- ➔ **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs** (www.smarttraveller.gov.au)
- ➔ **British Foreign Office** (www.fco.gov.uk)
- ➔ **Foreign Affairs & International Trade Canada** (www.voyage.gc.ca)
- ➔ **US State Department** (<http://travel.state.gov>)

Reception Australia's mobile networks service more than 90% of the population but leave vast tracts of the country uncovered. Adelaide, Darwin and most of central Australia's settled areas get good reception, but as the towns thin out, so does the service. Don't rely on coverage in outback areas.

Networks Australia's digital network is compatible with GSM 900 and 1800 (used in Europe), but isn't compatible with the systems used in the USA or Japan.

Providers It's easy and cheap to get connected short term – the main service providers all have prepaid mobile systems.

Phonecards

A range of phonecards (\$10, \$20, \$30 etc) is available from newsagencies and post offices, and can be used with any public or private phone by dialling a toll-free access number and then the PIN on the card. Rates vary from company to company – shop around.

Time

→ SA and the NT are on Central Standard Time, half an hour behind the eastern states (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania), and 1½ hours ahead of Western Australia.

→ Central Standard Time is 9½ hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London), 13½ hours ahead of New York, 15½ hours ahead of LA, 2½ hours ahead of Jakarta and 2½ hours behind Wellington (New Zealand).

→ 'Daylight Savings' does not apply in the NT, Western Australia or Queensland during summer, so from October to March (approximately), most eastern states are 1½ hours ahead of NT time, and SA is one hour ahead of NT time.

Toilets

→ Toilets in central Australia are sit-down western style (...though you mightn't find this prospect too appealing in some remote outback pit-stops).

→ See www.toiletmap.gov.au for public toilet locations.

Tourist Information

Almost every decent-sized central Australian town has a visitor information centre of some description, with a proliferation of brochures and maps. They're usually staffed by volunteers (some with sketchy knowledge of tourism).

South Australian Visitor Information Centre (Map p56; ☎1300 764 227; www.southaustralia.com; 108 North Tce, Adelaide, SA; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Abundantly stocked with info (including fab regional booklets) on Adelaide and SA.

Tourist Australia (www.australia.com) The main government tourism site with visitor info.

Tourist NT (www.travelnt.com) Bountiful info on the Northern Territory outback. Also produces *The Essential NT Drive Guide*, a great booklet with driving distances, national parks, and outback info and advice for 2WD and 4WD travellers.

Tourism Top End (☎08-8980 6000, 1300 138 886; www.tourismtopend.com.au; cnr Smith & Bennett Sts, Darwin, NT; ☎8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun) Hundreds of brochures; books tours and accommodation.

Travellers with Disabilities

Disability awareness in central Australia is pretty high and getting higher. New

accommodation must meet accessibility standards, and discrimination by tourism operators is illegal. Many key attractions provide access for those with limited mobility, and sometimes for those with visual or aural impairments; contact attractions in advance.

Long-distance bus travel isn't viable for wheelchair users, but the *Ghan* train has disabled facilities (book ahead). Some car-rental companies (Avis, Hertz) offer rental cars with hand controls at no extra charge for pick-up at the major airports (advance notice required).

Resources

Deaf CanDo (Royal South Australian Deaf Society; ☎08-8100 8200, TTY 08-8340 1654; www.deafcando.com.au)

Deafness Association of the Northern Territory (☎08-8945 2016; www.connectingup.org/organisation/deafness-association-of-northern-territory-inc)

Disability Information & Resource Centre (DIRC; Map p56; ☎08-8236 0555, 1300 305 558; www.dircsa.org.au; 195 Gilles St; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Info on accommodation, venues and travel for people with disabilities.

Easy Access Australia (www.easypassaustralia.com.au) A publication by Bruce Cameron available from various bookshops. Details accessible transport, accommodation and attraction options.

Guide Dogs SA/NT (☎08-8203 8333; www.guidedogs.org.au)

National Information Communication & Awareness Network (NICAN; www.nican.com.au) Australia-wide directory providing information on access issues, accessible accommodation, sporting and recreational activities, transport and specialist tour operators.

South Australian Royal Society for the Blind

(08-8417 5599; www.rsb.org.au)

Vision Australia (01300 847 466; www.visionaustralia.org.au)

Visas

➤ All visitors to Australia need a visa – only New Zealand nationals are exempt, and even they sheepishly receive a ‘special category’ visa on arrival.

➤ There are several different visas available, depending on your nationality and what kind of visit you’re contemplating.

➤ See the website of the **Department of Immigration & Citizenship** (01318 81; www.immi.gov.au) for info and application forms (also available from Australian diplomatic missions overseas and travel agents), plus details on visa extensions, Working Holiday Visas (417) and Work & Holiday Visas (462).

eVisitor

Many European passport holders will find themselves eligible for a free eVisitor visa, allowing stays in Australia for up to three months within a 12-month period. eVisitor visas must be applied for online (www.immi.gov.au/e_visa/visitor.htm). They are electronically stored and linked to individual passport numbers, so no stamp in your passport is required. It’s advisable to apply at least 14 days prior to the proposed date of travel to Australia.

Electronic Travel Authority (ETA)

Passport holders from eight countries which aren’t part of the eVisitor scheme – Brunei, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and the USA – can apply for either a visitor

or business ETA. ETAs are valid for 12 months, with stays of up to three months on each visit. You can apply for the ETA online (www.eta.immi.gov.au), which attracts a nonrefundable service charge of \$20.

Tourist Visas (676)

If you’re from a country not covered by the eVisitor and ETA, or you want to stay longer than three months, you’ll need to apply for a Tourist Visa. Standard Tourist Visas (AUD\$115) allow one (in some cases multiple) entry, for a stay of up to 12 months, and are valid for use within 12 months of issue. Online, see www.immi.gov.au/e_visa/e676.htm.

Volunteering

Lonely Planet’s *Volunteer: A Traveller’s Guide to Making a Difference Around the World* provides useful information about volunteering.

Australian Volunteers International (AVI; 03-9279 1788, 1800 331 292; www.australianvolunteers.com) The AVI places skilled volunteers into Aboriginal communities in northern and central Australia (mostly long-term placements). There are occasional short-term unskilled opportunities too, helping out at community-run roadhouses.

Conservation Council of SA (08-8223 5155; www.conservationcouncil.org.au) Offers South Australian volunteer opportunities including restoration of swamps, grasslands and other natural habitats, and recovery programs to help threatened bird species.

Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA; 03-5330 2600, 1800 032 501; www.conservationsvolunteers.com.au) A nonprofit organisation that is involved in tree planting, walking-track construction, and flora and fauna surveys.

Nature Conservation Society of South Australia (08-7127 4630; www.ncssa.asn.au) Survey fieldwork volunteer opportunities in SA.

Women Travellers

Travelling in central Australia is generally safe for women, but both sexes should exercise some basic common sense.

➤ Avoid walking alone at night and be wary of stopping for anyone on the highway.

➤ Sexual harassment is rare though some macho (and less enlightened) Aussie males still slip – particularly when they’ve been drinking.

➤ Hitching is not recommended for anyone. Even when travelling in pairs, exercise caution at all times.

➤ Lone women should also be wary of staying in basic pub accommodation unless it looks safe and well managed.

➤ The Adelaide-based **Women’s Information Service** (Map p56; 08-8303 0590, 1800 188 158; www.wis.sa.gov.au; Ground Fl, 91-97 Grenfell St, Chesser House; 10am-4pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) provides information, advice and referrals.

Work

Work Visas If you come to Australia on a tourist visa then you’re not allowed to work for pay: you’ll need a Working Holiday Visa (417) or Work & Holiday Visa (462) – visit www.immi.gov.au for details.

Finding Work Backpacker magazines, newspapers and hostel noticeboards are usually excellent places to help source local work opportunities. In SA, seasonal fruit picking and vineyard work abounds.

Resources

Career One (www.careerone.com.au) General employment site; good for the cities.

Gumtree (www.gumtree.com.au) Classified site with jobs, accommodation and items for sale.

Harvest Trail (www.jobsearch.gov.au/harvesttrail) Harvest jobs around Australia.

MyCareer (www.mycareer.com.au) General employment site; good for metropolitan areas.

National Harvest Labour Information Service (☎1800 062 332) Info on when and where you're likely to pick up harvest work.

Seek (www.seek.com.au) General employment site; good for metropolitan areas.

Travellers at Work (www.taw.com.au) Excellent site for working travellers in Australia.

Workabout Australia (www.workaboutaustralia.com.au) State-by-state breakdown of seasonal work opportunities.

Viterra (www.viterra.com.au) Seasonal grain harvest jobs in Victoria and South Australia (October to January).

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Australia is a long way from just about everywhere – getting there usually means a long-haul flight. If you're short on time on the ground, consider internal flights – they're affordable (compared with petrol and car-hire costs), can usually be carbon offset, and will save you some *looong* days in the saddle. Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at lonelyplanet.com/bookings.

Entering Australia

Provided your visa is in order, arrival in Australia is straightforward, with the usual customs declarations.

Passports

There are no restrictions regarding citizens of foreign

countries entering Australia. If you have a current passport and visa (p272), you should be fine.

Air

Airports & Airlines

Some airlines fly directly into **Adelaide Airport** (ADL; ☎08-8308 9211; www.adelaideairport.com.au) and **Darwin Airport** (www.darwinairport.com.au; Henry Wrigley Dr, Marrara), but most utilise east-coast hubs (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane) from where you can book domestic flights to Adelaide, Darwin and regional centres.

Australia's international carrier **Qantas** (☎13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) has an outstanding safety record (...as Dustin Hoffman said in *Rainman*, 'Qantas never crashed'). Other airlines that fly in and out of Australia include the following:

Air Canada (www.aircanada.com)

Air New Zealand (www.airnewzealand.com)

Air Pacific (www.airpacific.com)

American Airlines (www.aa.com)

British Airways (www.britishairways.com)

Cathay Pacific (www.cathaypacific.com)

Emirates (www.emirates.com)

Garuda Indonesia (www.garuda-indonesia.com)

Japan Airlines (www.jal.com)

Jetstar (www.jetstar.com.au)

KLM (www.klm.com)

Korean Air (www.koreanair.com)

Lufthansa (www.lufthansa.com)

Malaysia Airlines (www.malaysiaairlines.com)

Royal Brunei Airlines (www.brunelair.com)

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Every form of transport that relies on carbon-based fuel generates CO₂, the main cause of human-induced climate change. Modern travel is dependent on aeroplanes, which might use less fuel per kilometre per person than most cars but travel much greater distances. The altitude at which aircraft emit gases (including CO₂) and particles also contributes to their climate change impact. Many websites offer 'carbon calculators' that allow people to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey and, for those who wish to do so, to offset the impact of the greenhouse gases emitted with contributions to portfolios of climate-friendly initiatives throughout the world. Lonely Planet offsets the carbon footprint of all staff and author travel.

Singapore Airlines (www.singaporeair.com.au)

South African Airways (www.flysaa.com)

Thai Airways (www.thaiairways.com)

Tiger Airways (www.tigerairways.com)

United Airlines (www.unitedairlines.com)

Virgin Atlantic (www.virgin-atlantic.com)

Virgin Australia (☎13 67 89; www.virginaustralia.com)

Land

If you're a keen driver, central Australia was made for you! There's not much traffic here, roads are in good condition, and there are plenty of opportunities for off-road exploration.

South Australia Bitumen highways link the huge distances between Adelaide in SA and other Australian cities, including the Stuart Hwy which runs north-south across the entire country to Darwin.

Northern Territory Getting to the NT overland means a lot of travel through empty country, but there's no better way to appreciate Australia's vastness. The nearest state capital to Darwin is Adelaide (a tick over 3000km), while Perth and Sydney are both around 4000km away, about the same distance as New York to Los Angeles and more than 2½ times the drive from London to Rome!

Border Crossings

➔ The main routes into SA include Hwy 1 from Western Australia (across the Nullarbor Plain), and the Stuart Hwy from the NT (via Alice Springs).

➔ From Victoria, there are two main crossings: the Princes Hwy (via Mt Gambier and/or Great Ocean Rd), and the more direct (but more dull) Dukes Hwy (via Bordertown and Victoria's Western Hwy).

INTERSTATE QUARANTINE

Within Australia, there are restrictions on carrying fruit, plants and vegetables across state and territory borders. This is in order to control the movement of disease or pests – such as fruit fly, cucurbit thrips, grape phylloxera and potato cyst nematodes – from one area to another.

Most quarantine control relies on honesty and quarantine posts at the state/territory borders are not always staffed. However, the Western Australia border is permanently manned and sometimes uses dogs to sniff out offending matter. This may seem excessive, but it's taken very seriously. It's prohibited to carry fresh fruit and vegetables, plants, flowers, and even nuts and honey across the Northern Territory–Western Australia border in either direction. The controls with South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland are less strict – there's usually an unmanned honesty bin for disposal. Check at the borders.

➔ Outback 4WD tracks aside, there are three main (sealed) roads into the NT: the Victoria Hwy from WA (via Kununurra), the Barkly Hwy from Queensland (via Mt Isa), and the Stuart Hwy from SA (via Coober Pedy).

Bus

Many travellers prefer to access central Australia by bus because it's one of the best ways to come to grips with the area's size – also the bus companies have far more comprehensive route networks than the railway system (and they have good air-con!). Discounts are available for backpacker associations/international student ID card holders. See p277 for info on bus passes.

Major long-haul operators include the following:

Firefly Express (☎1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au) Buses between Adelaide and Melbourne (from \$65, 11 hours), continuing to Sydney.

Greyhound Australia (☎1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) Services between Adelaide and Melbourne, Sydney and

Alice Springs, connecting to Darwin.

V/Line (☎03-9697 2076, 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) Combined bus/train services between Adelaide and Melbourne (the Melbourne–Bendigo leg is via train).

Car & Motorcycle

See p277 for info on driving (or riding) in central Australia.

Sea

There are no scheduled international passenger-ferry services to/from SA or the NT, but it's possible – with a bit of graft and fortune – to sail to northern Australia from Asia by hitching rides or crewing on yachts. Ask around at harbours, marinas or yacht clubs. Darwin is a good place to try to hitch a ride to Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore. Try contacting the **Darwin Sailing Club** (Map p152; ☎08-8981 1700; www.dwnsail.com.au) at Fannie Bay, or the **Darwin Port Corporation** (☎08-8922 0660; www.darwinport.nt.gov.au).

GETTING AROUND

Air

Airlines in Australia

✦ Flying around Australia is the fastest, safest and often cheapest way to get from state to state or city to city.

✦ The major Australian domestic carriers **Qantas** (☎13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) and **Virgin Australia** (☎13 67 89; www.virginaustralia.com) fly all over Australia, operating flights between Adelaide and Darwin (via Melbourne in Virgin's case) and other centres. Qantas also flies to Alice Springs and Uluru; Virgin flies to Uluru from Sydney.

✦ See regional chapters for scenic flight listings. Other regional A-to-B airline options include:

Airnorth (☎1800 627 474; www.airnorth.com.au) Small NT-based airline with flights from Darwin to Broome and Kununurra in WA, and Mt Isa and Townsville in Queensland. Also connects Darwin with Gove, Maningrida and Groote Eylandt.

Air South (☎1300 247 768; www.airsouth.com.au) Adelaide-based charter flights around SA.

Altitude Aviation (☎1800 747 300; www.altitudeaviation.com.au) Charter flights (including helicopters) to/from pretty much anywhere in central Australia.

Jetstar (☎13 15 38; www.jetstar.com) Services capital cities (including Adelaide and Darwin) and key holiday destinations.

Regional Express (Rex; ☎13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) Flies between Adelaide and Kingscote on Kangaroo Island, Coober Pedy, Ceduna, Mt Gambier, Port Lincoln and Whyalla.

Tiger Airways (☎03-9999 2888; www.tigerairways.com)

Connects Adelaide with Melbourne.

Air Passes

✦ **Qantas** (☎13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) offers a discount-fare **Walkabout**

Air Pass for passengers flying into Australia from overseas with Qantas or American Airlines. The pass allows you to link up around 80 domestic Australian destinations (including Adelaide, Uluru, Alice Springs and Darwin) for less than you'd pay booking flights individually.

Bicycle

South Australia SA is a great place for cycling. There are some excellent bike tracks in Adelaide, thousands of kilometres of quiet, flat country roads, converted railway tracks in wine regions and the **Mawson Trail** (www.southaustraliatrails.com), an 800km mountain-bike track from Adelaide to Parachilna Gorge in the Flinders Ranges.

Northern Territory Darwin also has a network of bike tracks, and Katherine and Alice Springs have plenty of pancake-flat riding opportunities. However, actually using a bicycle as your mode of transport in the NT is another matter. Dehydration and the availability of drinking water are the main concerns. It can be a long way between towns and roadhouses, and those isolated bores, creeks and tanks shown on your map may be dry or undrinkable.

Make sure you've got the necessary spare parts and bike-repair knowledge. Carry a good map and let someone know where you're headed before setting off. Check road conditions and weather forecasts, and make conservative estimates of how long your journey will take. Beware of road trains: if you hear one coming, get right off the road. No matter how fit you are,

take things slowly until you're used to the heat, wear a hat and plenty of sunscreen, and drink lots of water.

Bike Hire

✦ In SA you can hire bikes in Adelaide, McLaren Vale, Victor Harbor, the Barossa and Clare Valleys and the Flinders Ranges.

✦ In the NT you can hire bikes in Darwin, Alice Springs, Yulara and Wauchope.

✦ Costs start at around \$25 per day, usually including helmet, lights and lock.

Buying a Bike

✦ If you want to buy a reliable new road or mountain bike, your absolute bottom-level starting point is \$500 to \$650. Throw in all the requisite on-the-road equipment (panniers, helmet etc), and your starting point becomes \$1500 to \$2000.

✦ Secondhand bikes are worth checking out in the cities, as are the post-Christmas sales and midyear stock takes, when newish bicycles can be heavily discounted.

✦ To sell your bike, try hostel noticeboards or online at www.tradingpost.com.au.

Legalities

✦ Bike helmets are compulsory in all states and territories, as are white front lights and red rear lights for riding at night.

Transport

✦ If you're coming to central Australia specifically to cycle, it makes sense to bring your own bike – check with your airline for costs and the degree of dismantling/packing required.

✦ While you can load your bike onto a bus to skip the boring/difficult bits, bus companies require you to dismantle your bike, and some don't guarantee that it will travel on the same bus as you.

Resources

Bicycle SA (☎08-8168 9999; www.bikesa.asn.au; 111 Franklin St, Adelaide, SA) Information on bike touring around SA, plus the excellent (and free!) Adelaide City Bikes scheme (see p60).

Northern Territory Cycling Association (☎08-8945 6012; www.nt.cycling.org.au) Information and links to local clubs and events.

South Australian Trails (www.southaustraliantrails.com) Detailed SA bike-track info plus links to cycling organisations, clubs and maps.

Boat

South Australia The only passenger ferries in this region of SA are between Cape Jervis and Kangaroo Island, run by **SeaLink** (☎13 13 01; www.sealink.com.au); and across Spencer Gulf between Wallaroo on the Yorke Peninsula and Lucky Bay on the Eyre Peninsula, run by **Sea SA** (☎08-8823 0777; www.seasa.com.au). Both are smooth, efficient operations (if a little pricey).

Northern Territory In the NT passenger ferries operate under the umbrella of **Tiwi Ferry** (☎0499 675 266, 0418 675 266; www.tiwifeerry.com.au), chugging between Darwin and Mandorah and the Tiwi Islands.

Bus

Bus transport in central Australia is regular, safe, efficient and (usually) cost-effective. Regional services within SA and the NT are as follows:

South Australia

➔ In SA, Adelaide's **Central Bus Station** (☎08-8221 5080; www.cityofadelaide.com.au; 85 Franklin St, Adelaide, SA) has ticket offices and terminals for all major statewide and interstate services, including long-distance operators

Greyhound Australia (☎13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au), **Firefly Express** (☎1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au) and **V/Line** (☎03-9697 2076, 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au).

➔ For online bus timetables see www.bussa.com.au.

➔ Within SA the main service provider is **Premier Stateliner** (☎08-8415 5555; www.premierstateliner.com.au), which runs to destinations including McLaren Vale, Victor Harbor, Mt Gambier, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Naracoorte and Penola, among many others.

➔ Other regional SA bus companies include:

Link SA (☎08-8532 2633; www.linksa.com.au) Servicing towns around the lower Murray River (Murray Bridge, Mannum, Berri, Swan Reach), Barossa Valley (Tanunda, Angaston, Nuriootpa) and parts of the Adelaide Hills.

SeaLink (☎13 13 01; www.sealink.com.au) The Kangaroo Island ferry company also runs buses between Adelaide and Cape Jervis, the mainland ferry departure point.

Southlink (☎08-8186 2888; www.southlink.com.au) Services the Fleurieu Peninsula and Adelaide's far northern suburbs, working in conjunction with Adelaide Metro services.

Yorke Peninsula Coaches (☎08-8821 2755; www.ypc.coaches.com.au) Services the Clare Valley, Yorke Peninsula and southern Flinders Ranges towns.

Northern Territory

➔ In Darwin, interstate and intra-NT buses use the **Transit Centre** (www.enjoy-darwin.com/transit-bus.html; 69 Mitchell St).

➔ **Greyhound Australia** (☎1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) runs the major long-distance regional routes in the NT, including Alice Springs to Uluru and

Kings Canyon; Alice to Darwin via Katherine and Tennant Creek; and Darwin to Kakadu.

Bus Passes

If you're planning on doing a lot of travel in central Australia, a **Greyhound Australia** (☎1300 473 946; www.greyhound.com.au) bus pass will save you money. Bus-pass discounts of 10% apply to backpacker- and student-card holders, and children under 14.

Kilometre Passes Under the banner of 'Oz-Flexi Travel', these are the simplest passes, giving you specified amounts of travel starting at 500km (\$108), going up in increments of 1000km to 20,000km (\$2254), with a maximum of 25,000km (\$2600). Passes are valid for 12 months (90 days for 500km and 1000km passes), and you can travel where and in what direction you please, stopping as many times as you like. Use the online kilometre chart to figure out which pass suits you. Phone at least a day ahead to reserve your seat.

Micro Passes In the 'Oz-Choice Travel' pass category, another option are these set-route passes, allowing you to travel a designated route over 10 to 14 days, with a rest stop or two along the way. In central Australia there's the 10-day 'Opal Stopover' (\$226) which runs in either direction between Adelaide and Alice Springs via Coober Pedy; and the 14-day 'Croc Stopover' (\$255) which runs between Alice Springs and Darwin in either direction, with three stops permitted en route.

Car & Motorcycle

The ultimate freedom within central Australia is to have your own wheels. Driving distances are long, but you can take it at your own pace and branch off the main roads

[illegible]

- ➔ A fuel range of 350km will cover fuel stops along the Stuart Hwy.

- The long, open roads are really made for large-capacity machines above 750cc.
- Contact the **Motorcycle Riders Association of SA** (☎0408 607 788; www.mrasa.asn.au) for info.

Exclusions In some cases permits won't be necessary if you stick to recognised public roads that cross Aboriginal territory, but as soon as you leave the main road by more than 50m you

Applications The easiest way to apply for a permit is to download a form from the relevant land council and send it by email. Alternatively you can send it by post or fax. Allow plenty of time: transit permits can be approved within 24 hours, but others can take 10 working days. Keep in mind that your application may be knocked back for a number of reasons, including the risk of interference with sacred sites or disruption of cere-

monial business. Also, some communities simply may not want to be bothered by visitors without good reason.

The following places issue permits:

Northern Land Council

(☎08-8920 5100; www.nlc.org.au) Servicing northern NT, with offices in Darwin, Katherine, Jabiru and Tennant Creek.

Central Land Council

(☎08-8951 6211; www.clc.org.au) Covering the southern half of the NT; main office in Alice Springs.

Tiwi Land Council (☎08-8919 4305; www.tiwilandcouncil.com) Permits for the Tiwi Islands.

Automobile Associations

Official automobile associations offer emergency breakdown services and useful advice on motoring, including road safety, local regulations and buying/selling a car. The following organisations have reciprocal arrangements with similar organisations overseas and interstate.

Royal Automobile Association of South Australia

(RAA; ☎08-8202 4600; www.raa.net; 55 Hindmarsh Sq, Adelaide, SA)

Automobile Association of the Northern Territory

(AANT; ☎08-8925 5901; www.aant.com.au; 79-81 Smith St, Darwin, NT)

Driving Licences

Foreign driving licences are valid in Australia as long as they are in English or are accompanied by a translation. You can also get an **International Driving Permit** from automobile associations in your own country.

Fuel

➔ Unleaded, diesel and LPG fuel are available from urban service stations and highway roadhouses.

➔ Distances between fill-ups can be long in the outback, so check locations and

opening times of service stations and carry spare fuel.

➔ Prices vary from place to place depending on how remote they are, but fuel in outback central Australia is some of the most expensive in the country: at the time of writing unleaded petrol prices were hovering around \$1.45 in Adelaide, \$1.60 in Darwin, and climbing to \$1.80 in remote areas. Regardless, expect to pay 20% more in Darwin than in the east coast capitals, and up to 50% more in small outback towns.

Hire

There are plenty of car-rental companies ready and willing to put you behind the wheel. Competition is fierce so rates vary and special deals pop up and disappear again. The main thing to remember when assessing your options is distance – if you want to travel far, you need unlimited kilometres. The major companies offer this, or 100km a day free plus however many cents per kilometre beyond 100km (make sure you do your sums!).

Age You must be at least 21 years old to hire from most firms – if you're under 25 you may only be able to hire a small car or have to pay a surcharge.

One-way Hire One-way hire into or out of the NT and SA may be subject to a hefty repositioning fee; however, some big rental firms offer good deals from Alice Springs to Adelaide or Adelaide to Melbourne. Ask about this before deciding on one company over another.

Relocations For budget car-hire experience, relocations can often work well: when a rental company requires a certain vehicle to be moved to a certain location, they'll sometimes offer a cheap rate for someone to drive it there. Lucky you! **Relocations2Go** (☎1800 735 627;

www.relocations2go.com) is a good place to look.

Insurance & Excess Most car-rental companies include insurance in the price, but in the event of an accident the hirer is still liable for a sometimes-hefty excess. Most offer an excess-reduction daily rate on top of the base rental rate. Most firms won't let you drive after dark in the outback due to the risk of hitting kangaroos – read the fine print.

Costs Daily rates, including insurance and taxes, are typically about \$40 to \$70 a day for a small car (Toyota Yaris, Hyundai i20), \$70 to \$90 a day for a medium car (Holden Cruze, Toyota Corolla) or \$90 up to \$100 a day for a big car (Holden Commodore, Hyundai i45). Local firms are almost always cheaper than the big boys – sometimes half-price – but cheaper hire often comes with crippling restrictions. It's cheaper if you rent for a week or more and there are often low-season and weekend discounts.

The main players:

Avis (☎13 63 33; www.avis.com.au)

Budget (☎13 27 27; www.budget.com.au)

Europcar (☎1300 131 390; www.europcar.com.au)

Hertz (☎13 30 39; www.hertz.com.au)

Thrifty (☎1300 367 227; www.thrifty.com.au)

CAMPERVANS

Many people find a camper-van is the best way to explore the outback, and it's hard to disagree. From a two-berth to a full-blown family camper, they offer a home on wheels, allowing you to pull up anywhere, save on accommodation costs and crank up the AC/DC as loud as hell! Most have some sort of cooking facilities and there are a few 4WD models. They typically cost from \$90 to \$150 a day.

The following companies have fitted-out vans and 4WDs, offer one-way rental and have offices in the major cities around Australia, including Alice Springs:

Apollo (☎1800 777 779; www.apollocamper.com)

Britz (☎1800 331 454; www.britz.com.au)

Maui (☎1300 363 800; www.maui.com.au)

Mighty Cars & Campers (☎1800 670 232; www.mightycampers.com.au)

Wicked Campers (☎1800 246 869; www.wickedcampers.com.au) Funkily painted backpacker vans (Jimi Hendrix, Alice Cooper, Bob Marley etc).

4WDS

Having a 4WD vehicle is essential for off-the-beaten-track driving into the out-back. And there might even be room to sleep in the back! The major car- and campervan-hire companies also offer 4WDs.

Costs Renting a 4WD vehicle is affordable if a few people get together: something like a Nissan X-Trail (which can get you through most, but not all, tracks) costs around \$100 to \$150 per day; for a Toyota Landcruiser you're looking at around \$150 up to \$200, which should include unlimited kilometres.

Exclusions Check the insurance conditions, especially the excess, as they can be onerous and policies might not cover damage caused when travelling off-road.

Insurance

Excess Rather than risking paying out thousands of dollars if you do have a crash, you can take out comprehensive insurance on the car or pay an additional daily amount to the rental company for an 'insurance excess reduction' policy. This reduces the excess (the amount of money for which you're liable before

the insurance kicks in) from between \$2000 and \$5000 to a few hundred dollars, though it pushes the rental cost up.

Exclusions Be aware that if you're travelling on dirt roads you often won't be covered by insurance unless you have a 4WD – in other words, if you have an accident you'll be liable for all costs involved. Also, most companies' insurance won't cover the cost of damage to glass (including the windscreen) or tyres. Similarly, because of the risk of hitting an animal, most companies void your insurance if you travel outside city limits between dusk and dawn. Always read the small print.

Purchase

Buying your own vehicle to travel around in gives you the freedom to go where and when the mood takes you, and may work out cheaper than renting in the long run. Some dealers will sell you a car with an undertaking to buy it back at an agreed price, but don't accept verbal guarantees – get it in writing. It's your responsibility to ensure the car isn't stolen and that there's no money owing on it: check the car's details with the **Personal Property Securities Register** (☎1300 007 777; www.ppsr.gov.au).

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

It's prudent to have a car checked by an independent expert – automobile associations (p279) offer vehicle checks, and road transport authorities (p281) have lists of licensed garages – but if you're flying solo, things to check include the following:

- ➔ tyre tread
- ➔ number of kilometres
- ➔ rust damage
- ➔ accident damage
- ➔ oil should be translucent and honey-coloured

- ➔ coolant should be clean and not rusty in colour
- ➔ engine condition; check for fumes from engine, smoke from exhaust while engine is running and engines that rattle or cough
- ➔ exhaust system should not be excessively noisy or rattle when engine is running
- ➔ windscreen should be clear with no cracks or chip marks.

When test-driving the car, also check the following:

- ➔ listen for body and suspension noise and changes in engine noise
- ➔ check for oil and petrol smells, leaks and overheating
- ➔ check instruments, lights and controls all work: heating, air-con, brake lights, headlights, indicators, seatbelts and windscreen wipers
- ➔ brakes should pull the car up straight, without pulling, vibrating or making noise
- ➔ gears and steering should be smooth and quiet.

WHERE TO BUY

If buying a second-hand vehicle, keep in mind the hidden costs: stamp duty, registration, transfer fee, insurance and maintenance.

ONLINE

Private and dealer car sales are listed online on websites such as **Car Sales** (www.carsales.com.au) and **Trading Post** (www.tradingpost.com.au).

PRIVATE ADS

Buying privately can be time consuming, and you'll have to travel around to assess your options. But you should expect a lower price than that charged by a licensed dealer. The seller should provide you with a roadworthy certificate (if required in the state you're in), but you won't get a cooling-off period or a statutory warranty.

BACKPACKERS & RIDE-SHARING

Backpackers Hostel noticeboards and online noticeboards such as those on www.taw.com.au and the Thorn Tree travel forum at www.lonelyplanet.com are good places to find vehicles for sale.

Ride-sharing A good way to split costs and environmental impact with other travellers. Hostel noticeboards are good places to find ads, as well as online classified sites like www.catchalift.com and www.needaride.com.au.

DEALERS

Buying from a licensed dealer gives you some protection. They are obliged to guarantee that no money is owing on the car and you're usually allowed a cooling-off period (usually one day). Depending on the age of the car and the kilometres travelled, you may also receive a statutory warranty. You will need to sign an agreement for sale; make sure you understand what it says before you sign.

PAPERWORK

When you buy a vehicle in Australia, you need to transfer the vehicle registration into your own name within 14 days. Each state has slightly different requirements and different organisations to do this. Similarly, when selling a vehicle you need to advise the state or territory road transport authority.

Some considerations:

Transfer of Registration

Form In the NT, you and the seller need to complete and sign this form. In SA there is no form, but you and the seller need to complete and sign the reverse of the registration certificate.

Roadworthy Certificate

In the NT and SA you don't need to provide a roadworthy certificate when selling a vehicle.

Changing State of Registration Note that registering

a vehicle in a different state to the one it was previously registered in can be difficult, time consuming and expensive.

REGISTRATION

'Rego' is usually renewed annually Australia-wide. This generally requires no more than payment of the registration fee, but SA and the NT have some extra considerations to think about:

➔ **SA** You can pay for three, six, nine or 12 months registration.

➔ **NT** Vehicle roadworthy inspections are required once the vehicle is three years old. Vehicles older than three years, but less than 10 years old, require a roadworthy inspection every two years until they reach their 10th year. Vehicles over 10 years old require an annual roadworthy inspection.

ROAD TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES

For more information about processes and costs in central Australia:

Department of Planning, Transport & Infrastructure SA (☎13 10 84; www.dpti.sa.gov.au)

Department of Transport NT (☎1300 654 628; www.transport.nt.gov.au)

Road Conditions, Hazards & Parking

Sealed Roads In SA, all major highways into Adelaide are bitumen in good condition. Further north in the outback, the Stuart Hwy and the main roads into Lyndhurst, Roxby Downs and Wilpena Pound are the only bitumen roads – the rest are unsealed. In the NT, the Stuart Hwy into Darwin is sealed, as is the loop road through Kakadu and the main highways into WA and Queensland.

Unsealed Roads Driving on unsealed roads requires special care, as cars perform

differently when braking and turning on dirt. Conditions vary from well-maintained gravel to rough corrugations, deep sand and dust. Heavy rain will quickly turn some roads into muddy skating rinks, many impassable when wet. If a road is officially closed because of heavy rain, you can be fined up to \$1000 per wheel for travelling on it. Under no circumstances exceed 80km/h on dirt roads; if you go faster you won't have time to respond to a sharp turn, stock on the road or an unmarked gate or cattle grid. Take your time and don't try to break the land-speed record.

Road Condition Reports

For up-to-date SA road conditions, call 1300 361 033 or check www.dpti.sa.gov.au/outbackroads; in the NT call 1800 246 199 or check www.roadreport.nt.gov.au.

Animal Hazards Collisions with kangaroos, cattle, camels, brumbies and emus can be a real hazard. The result of a collision with an animal at high speed in a car can be disastrous. Kangaroos are most active around dawn and dusk, and often travel in groups. If you see one hopping across the road in front of you, slow right down – its friends are probably just behind it. If one hops out right in front of you, hit the brakes and only swerve to avoid the animal if it is safe to do so. If possible, avoid travelling at night on the highway.

Road Trains Road trains are a prime mover truck with two or three trailers stretching for as long as 50m. On dual-lane highways they pose few problems, although you need some distance and plenty of speed to overtake. On single-lane bitumen roads you should get right off the road if one approaches. On dirt roads you also need to pull over, and often stop altogether while you wait for the dust cloud to clear.

Fatigue Driving long distances (particularly in hot weather) can send you to sleep at the wheel. On a long haul, stop and rest every two hours or so – stretch, do some exercise, change drivers or have a coffee.

Hitchers A couple of incidents in recent years have led to warnings against stopping for people, or vehicles, on isolated stretches of road – even if they wave you down.

Parking We've used the parking 'P' icon in this book only for Sleeping listings in Adelaide and Darwin, to indicate where parking is available. Elsewhere it's rarely an issue.

OUTBACK DRIVING

Resources The RAA (RAA; ☎08-8202 4600; www.raa.net; 55 Hindmarsh Sq, Adelaide, SA) and AANT (AANT; ☎08-8925 5901; www.aant.com.au; 79-81 Smith St, Darwin, NT) can advise on preparation, and supply maps and track notes.

Preparations Apart from being well prepared with spare parts and tyres, plenty of water (5L per person per day and extra for the radiator) and a basic knowledge of outback driving (things such as deflating tyres to get through deep sand), an extra safety net is to carry a high-frequency (HF) radio transceiver or satellite phone to contact Royal Flying Doctor Service bases, a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit and/or an emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB). **Central Comms** (☎08-8952 2388; www.centralcomms.com.au; cnr Stuart Hwy & Wills Tce, Alice Springs, NT) in Alice Springs hires out sat phones and EPIRBs for around \$100 a week. The big car-hire companies also hire out GPS units from around \$60 a week.

Seasons It's wise not to attempt tough tracks during the heat of summer

(November to March) when the dust can be severe and water scarce, making a breakdown more dangerous. Travel during the Wet (November to April) in the north may be hindered by flooding and impassable mud.

Tell Someone There are still many unsealed roads in central Australia where the official recommendation is that you report to the police before you leave, and again when you arrive at your destination. If not the police, tell friends, family and/or your car-hire company what you're up to.

In Trouble? If you do run into trouble in the back of beyond, always stay with your car. It's easier to spot a car than a human being from the air, and you wouldn't be able to carry a heavy load of water very far anyway. Police suggest that you carry two spare tyres (for added safety) and, if stranded, set fire to one of them (let the air out first) – the pall of smoke will be seen for miles.

Road Rules

Australians drive on the left-hand side of the road.

Give Way When driving, 'give way to the right', meaning that if an intersection is unmarked (common in the outback, but not in cities), you *must* give way to vehicles entering the intersection from your right.

Speed Limits The general speed limit in built-up areas is 50km/h (25km/h or 40km/h near schools at certain times – look for the signs), and 110km/h on highways in SA. In the NT, the speed limit on the open highway is either 110km/h or 130km/h.

Seat Belts Seat belts must be worn by law.

Drink Driving You must not drive with a blood-alcohol content 0.05% or more.

Mobile Phones Talking on a mobile phone while driving

is illegal in Australia (excluding hands-free technology).

Hitching

Hitching (or picking up hitchhikers) is never entirely safe – we do not recommend it. Hitching to or from SA across the Nullarbor is definitely not advisable as waits of two or three days are common. People looking for travelling companions for the long car journeys interstate often leave notices on boards in hostels and backpacker accommodation: ask around.

Local Transport

In SA, Adelaide has an extensive public bus network, a not-so-extensive public train system and one tram line (which is surprisingly useful). All are run by **Adelaide Metro** (☎1300 311 108; www.adelaidemetro.com.au).

In the NT, Darwin and Alice Springs have handy public bus networks run by the **Department of Transport** (☎08-8924 7666; www.transport.nt.gov.au/public/bus/darwin).

Tours

Backpacker-style and more formal bus tours offer a convenient way to get from A to B and see the sights on the way. Operators include the following:

AAT Kings (☎1300 556 100; www.aatkings.com) Big coach company (popular with the older set) with myriad tours in the NT and SA, including Uluru, Alice Springs, the Barossa Valley and Kangaroo Island.

Adventure Tours Australia (☎1300 654 604; www.adventuretours.com.au) Two- to 24-day tours taking in Uluru, Alice Springs, Darwin and Kakadu in the NT, and Adelaide, Barossa Valley and Kangaroo Island

in SA. A 14-day Adelaide to Darwin trip via Alice Springs costs \$2114; two days taking in Alice Springs and Uluru costs \$490.

Autopia Tours (☎03-9419 8878, 1800 000 507; www.autopiatours.com.au) Small-group, three-day Melbourne–Adelaide tours along Great Ocean Rd (\$425 including dorm accommodation and most meals).

Bookabee Tours (☎08-8235 9954; www.bookabee.com.au) Aboriginal-run, two- to five-day Flinders Ranges explorations, ex-Adelaide.

Groovy Grape (☎1800 661 177; www.groovygrape.com.au) Small-group tours including a three-day trip from Melbourne to Adelaide via the Great Ocean Road (\$425), and seven days from Adelaide to Alice Springs via the Flinders Ranges, Coorber Pedy and Uluru (\$975). Includes meals, camping and national park entry fees. Kangaroo Island and Barossa Valley tours are also available.

Heading Bush (☎1800 639 933; www.headingbush.com) Rugged, small-group, 10-day Adelaide to Alice Springs expeditions are \$1995 all-inclusive. Stops include the Flinders Ranges, Coorber Pedy, Simpson Desert, Aboriginal communities, Uluru and West MacDonnell Ranges. Yorke Peninsula and dedicated Flinders Ranges tours are also available.

Oz Experience (☎1300 300 028; www.ozexperience.com) Hop-on–hop-off backpacker network with frequent buses looping around eastern Australia including Darwin, Adelaide and the east coast. There's a range of passes (valid for 12 months). The Sydney to Darwin 'Fish Hook' pass via Melbourne, Adelaide and Alice Springs costs \$2465.

The Rock Tour (☎1800 246 345; www.therocktour.com.au) Three-day/two-night tours to Uluru, Kata Tjuta and Kings Canyon, departing Alice Springs. Combo tour/transport tickets with Qantas and Greyhound are also available.

Wildlife Tours (☎1300 661 730; www.wildlifetours.com.au) Two- or three-day, small-group Melbourne–Adelaide tours along Great Ocean Rd (from \$239).

Train

The famous *Ghan* train connects Adelaide with Darwin via Alice Springs. From Adelaide there are rail connections with Sydney and Perth on the *Indian Pacific* and Melbourne on the *Overland*. You can also join the *Ghan* at Port Augusta, the connection point on the Sydney–Perth *Indian Pacific* route.

➔ From Adelaide, the *Ghan* departs Adelaide for Alice Springs on Sunday and

Wednesday (18 hours), continuing on to Darwin arriving on Tuesday and Friday (another 24 hours). It returns from Darwin to Alice Springs on Wednesday and Saturday, continuing to Adelaide arriving on Friday and Monday.

➔ From Melbourne, the *Overland* has day trains to Adelaide (10 hours) on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, returning on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

➔ From Sydney, the *Indian Pacific* departs on Wednesday (plus Saturday in September and October) for Adelaide (25 hours, arriving Thursday), continuing to Perth (another 40 hours, arriving Saturday). The return leg chugs out of Perth on Sunday (plus Wednesday in September and October).

Costs & Classes

Classes The *Ghan* and *Indian Pacific* offer 'daynighter' seats and more comfortable sleeper classes; the *Overlander* has two classes of seats. With a daynighter you get a reclining seat in an open carriage, foldaway table and access to a licensed lounge car serving light meals and drinks. Sleeper classes involve cabins with all kinds of foldaway seats and beds. Pricier sleepers have en suites and private restaurant-car dining.

STANDARD ADULT/CHILD TRAIN FARES

JOURNEY	SEAT	STANDARD SLEEPER	1ST-CLASS SLEEPER	MOTORAIL
Adelaide–Alice Springs	\$431/202	\$1190/882	\$2290/2290	\$615
Adelaide–Darwin	\$862/403	\$2290/1582	\$3390/3390	\$800
Adelaide–Perth	\$553/310	\$1750/1202	\$2850/2850	\$615
Darwin–Alice Springs	\$431/202	\$1190/882	\$2290/2290	\$204
Melbourne–Adelaide	from \$116/60	n/a	n/a	\$143
Sydney–Adelaide	\$375/213	\$850/688	\$1350/1350	\$286

Discounts & Passes Booking some months ahead will often secure a discount on the prices listed here (up to 25% off). Backpacker discounts apply to all fares (up to 50% off!). International visitors (only) can take advantage of a **Rail Explorer Pass** (3/6 months \$450/590)

allowing unlimited travel for three or six months in daynighter seat class on all three routes; present your passport to qualify.

Motorail The Motorail service allows you to put your vehicle on the train.

Reservations

Book tickets through **Great Southern Rail** (☎13 21 47; www.gsr.com.au). Advance bookings are recommended in peak season (June to September), especially for Motorail spaces.

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