



Cyclists Directory

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In Australia, it's easy to get a good night's sleep at the end of a hard day's ride, with the country offering everything from the tent-pegged confines of campsites and the communal space of hostels to gourmet breakfasts in guesthouses, chaperoned farmstays and everything-at-your-finger-tips resorts, plus the gamut of hotel and motel lodgings.

In most areas of the country you will find seasonal price variations. During the high season over summer (Dec to Feb) and at other peak times, particularly school and public holidays, prices are usually at their highest, whereas outside these times you will find useful discounts and lower walk-in (or ride-up) rates. One exception is the Top End, where the Wet season (roughly Oct to Mar) is the low season, and prices can drop substantially, even though you will have to content with the weather.

The weekend escape is a notion that figures prominently in the Australian psyche, meaning accommodation from Friday night through to Sunday can be in greater demand and significantly pricier in almost of all the major holiday areas, especially along the coasts.

ACCOMMODATION

Camping & Caravan Parks

Caravan parks are thick on the ground in Australia – you will find one in just about every town (or roadhouse) that imagines itself to have a tourist attraction or three. The nightly cost of camping for two people is usually between \$15 and \$25, slightly more for a powered site. Note that most city campsites lie at least several kilometres from the town centre, so be prepared to jostle with some city traffic to get to them.

Almost all caravan or holiday parks are equipped with hot showers, flushing toilets and laundry facilities, and frequently a pool. Some still have old on-site caravans for rent, and most have on-site cabins. Cabin sizes and facilities vary, but expect to pay \$70 to \$80 for a small cabin with a kitchenette and up to \$130 for a two-bedroom cabin with a fully-equipped kitchen, lounge room, TV and stereo, veranda, and beds for up to six people. Regardless of the vintage or style of cabin, they're generally excellent value if you're on the road for a while, or are cycling in a group. They allow you to be completely self-sufficient and often provide more space than a motel or hotel room.

Caravan parks, which encompass tent sites, caravan sites and cabins, are popular along coastal areas. In summer months and school holidays they're often booked out well in advance.

If you intend on doing a lot of camping, consider joining one of the major chains, such as **Big 4** (www.big4.com.au), which offer discounts at member parks.

On many rides, cyclists have the option of staying at designated campsites in national parks. These normally cost between \$5 and \$9 per person. It is rare for them to have showers. Running water is a rarity but there is almost always a water tank (be sure to treat the water). National park campsites invariably also have better locations than caravan parks.

Bear in mind that camping is best done during winter (ie the Dry season) across the north of Australia, and during summer in the south of the country.



PRACTICALITIES

- *Australian Cyclist* magazine has a strong touring focus. *Bicycling Australia* is geared towards roadies, while *Mountain Biking Australia* gets down and dirty on the singletrack.
- Look for the program *Cycling Central* on television station SBS, focussing on pro racing and a variety of cycling topics.
- Videos you might buy or watch will be based on the PAL system, also used in New Zealand and most of Europe.
- Use a three-pin adaptor (different from British three-pin adaptors) to plug into the electricity supply (240V AC, 50Hz).
- Australia uses the metric system: you will buy your milk and petrol in litres, and you will walk kilometres.
- On the box watch the ad-free ABC, the government-sponsored and multi-cultural SBS, or one of three commercial TV stations; Seven, Nine and Ten.

WILD CAMPING

In areas away from towns and cities there will often be the temptation to camp in undesigned areas, with a flat piece of earth, grass or sand seemingly custom-made to fit your back. Such wild camping should be done with sensitivity to the surrounding environment: don't leave rubbish; bury toilet waste at least 100m from watercourses; avoid using detergents and lighting fires; clean up food waste to prevent possums and the like from scavenging through the night. Ask permission if camping on private property, and never camp beneath red gums – notorious for dropping branches, they are not known as 'widow makers' for nothing.

Guesthouses & B&Bs

B&Bs in Australia might be restored miners' cottages, converted barns, rambling old houses, upmarket country manors, beach-side bungalows or a simple bedroom in a family home (though invariably they will be more floral than the Chelsea Flower Show). Prices are typically around \$100 to \$200 (per double), though in cutesy weekender destinations such as the Blue Mountains and the Great Ocean Road this might just be your deposit. Local tourist offices can usually provide a list of places.

Online resources:

australianbandb.com.au (www.australianbandb.com.au)

babs.com.au (www.babs.com.au)

OZBedandBreakfast.com (www.ozbedandbreakfast.com)

Hostels

Backpacker hostels are exceedingly popular in Australian cities and along coastal tourist trails. In the outback and rural areas you'll be hard pressed to find one. Highly social affairs, they're generally overflowing with 18 to 30 year olds, but some have reinvented themselves to attract other travellers who simply want to sleep for cheap.

Hostels provide varying levels of accommodation, from the austere simplicity of wilderness hostels to city-centre buildings with a cafe-bar and some en suite rooms. Most of the accommodation is in dormitories (bunk rooms), which can range in size from four bunk beds to 60. If you want to spread out your panniers, you might do better searching out hostels that also provide twin rooms and doubles. Typically a dorm bed costs \$19 to \$26 per night and a double (usually without bathroom), \$70 to \$90. Hostels generally have cooking facilities, a communal area with a TV and laundry facilities. Bed linen is often provided; sleeping bags are not welcome due to hygiene concerns and the risk of introducing bed bugs.

Some places will only admit overseas backpackers; this mainly applies to city hostels that have had problems with locals sleeping over and bothering the backpackers. Hostels that discourage or ban Aussies say it's only a rowdy minority that makes trouble, and will often just ask for identification in order to deter potential troublemakers, but it can be annoying and discriminatory for people genuinely