



Sydney & the Central Coast

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Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Muse Kitchen (p119)
- ➔ Messina (p93)

Best Places to Stay

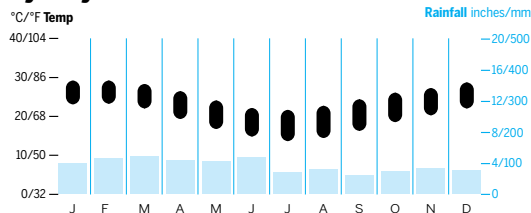
- ➔ Thistle Hill (p119)
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Why Go?

Chances are Sydney will be your introduction to Australia's East Coast and there simply isn't a better one. The city's spectacular harbour setting, sun-kissed beaches and sophisticated sheen make it unique in Australia, and its outdoorsy population endows it with a confident charm that every city yearns for but few achieve.

It would be reasonable to assume that the areas surrounding Sydney would be content to bask in the reflected and undeniably golden glow of the metropolis, but that's not the case. Each has its own delights. The Blue Mountains offers magnificent bush-clad vistas and opportunities to snuggle in front of log fires; Newcastle has surf beaches in profusion; and the Hunter Valley has leafy country roads scattered with producers of fine wine, chocolate and cheese. All three are endowed with world-class restaurants that rival even those in the big smoke.

When to Go Sydney



Jan The year kicks off with a spectacular fireworks display over Sydney Harbour.

Mar Sydney's summer party season culminates with the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras.

Jul Enjoy wood fires, wine and winter menus in the Blue Mountains and Hunter Valley.

Indigenous Culture

When the First Fleet arrived, this part of the coast was home to the Eora, Dharug, Ku-ring-gai, Gundungurra and Awabakal peoples. Each had its own language, laws and identity, and the people lived a semi-nomadic life, moving within their territories to fish, hunt and gather plants.

The land formed the basis for their spiritual life and Dreaming (belief system), which is why its appropriation by the British had such catastrophic consequences. As well as loss of land and disruption to millennia-old ways of life, the local people suffered foreign diseases, kidnappings, incarceration and wholesale massacres.

Ancient Aboriginal rock paintings or engravings can still be seen on the Manly Scenic Walkway and in the Ku-ring-gai Chase, Blue Mountains and Brisbane Waters National Parks. The Australian Museum, Art Gallery of NSW, Museum of Sydney, Rocks Discovery Museum and Kalkari Discovery Centre all have exhibits relating to Aboriginal life and culture.

EcoTreasures (p76), Blue Mountains Walkabout (p107) and Waradah Aboriginal Centre (p106) all provide a hands-on introduction to Aboriginal culture. The Royal Botanic Gardens (p54), Blue Mountains Botanic Garden (p107) and Taronga Zoo (p70) offer Aboriginal-themed tours.

EARLY COLONIAL SITES

The most recent Australian additions to the World Heritage list are 11 places that are collectively known as the **Australian Convict Sites**. Four of these sites are in this part of NSW: Hyde Park Barracks Museum in central Sydney; Cockatoo Island on the Parramatta River; Old Government House in Parramatta; and the Great North Rd, which connects Sydney to the Hunter Valley.

These sites are among many dating back to early colonial times which can be visited. History buffs should consider purchasing a **Ticket Through Time** (www.hht.net.au/visiting/ticket_through_time; adult/child \$30/15), which gives access to 12 Sydney properties managed by the Historic Houses Trust, including Susannah Place, Justice & Police Museum, Government House, Hyde Park Barracks, Museum of Sydney, Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House. The pass is valid for three months and available online or at most properties.

Great Surfing Spots

- ➔ Cronulla, south of Botany Bay, Sydney
- ➔ Dee Why, Northern Beaches, Sydney
- ➔ Narrabeen, Northern Beaches, Sydney
- ➔ Merewether Beach, Newcastle
- ➔ Bar Beach, Newcastle

TOP TIP

MyMulti passes, the Family Funday Sunday pass and Pensioner Excursion passes can save you money when travelling on public transport. Off-peak daily return train tickets also offer good value.

Fast Facts

- ➔ Telephone area code 02
- ➔ Population 5.2 million
- ➔ Number of patrolled surf beaches 70

Advance Planning

- ➔ Check events calendars for regions you'll be visiting.
- ➔ Book accommodation well in advance, particularly for the summer months.
- ➔ It always pays to book ahead for weekend sittings at Sydney restaurants, but top places should be booked weeks in advance.

Resources

- ➔ **New South Wales** (www.visitnsw.com.au)
- ➔ **NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service** (NPWS; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)
- ➔ **City of Sydney** (www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)
- ➔ **Sydney Morning Herald** (www.smh.com.au)
- ➔ **Time Out Sydney** (www.au.timeout.com/sydney)