

Understand East Coast Australia

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The hot issues up and down the coast: the reef in trouble, the economy and the football. How are the locals holding up?

HISTORY 480

Indigenous Australians, convicts, explorers, gold-diggers, shearers, soldiers, immigrants: the history of the east coast is quite a page-turner...

CLIMATE CHANGE & THE GREAT BARRIER REEF 488

Australia is hotting up, and the gorgeous Great Barrier Reef off the Queensland coast has been badly affected by the change.

FOOD & DRINK 493

Top tips on the best seafood, regional delicacies, wine regions, craft breweries and farmers markets all along the coast.

SPORT 496

Lamentable Olympic performances and up-and-down cricket fortunes aside, the country still punches above its weight.

East Coast Australia Today

When most people think 'Australia', the east coast is what springs to mind: big cities, photogenic beaches, coral reefs and rolling surf. But in reality most of Australia – the 'outback' – is a vast desert. Turning its back on the sun-baked interior, the east coast is a celebration of life on the edge – a long, fertile strip of land where most Aussies live, work and play. In Australia, the east coast is most definitely where it's at.

Best on Film

Australia (Baz Luhrmann; 2008)
Sweeping Aussie epic shot in NSW and Queensland.

Mad Max: Fury Road (George Miller; 2015) No Mel Gibson, but the fourth 'Mad Max' is a postapocalyptic stunner. Partly filmed in Sydney.

Dead Calm (Phillip Noyce; 1989)
Yacht-bound Nicole Kidman gets nervous on the Great Barrier Reef.

Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir; 1975) Schoolgirls go missing in the disquieting Victorian landscape.

Two Hands (Gregor Jordan; 1999)
Vicious humour in Sydney's criminal underworld.

Best in Print

The Bodysurfers (Robert Drewe; 1983) Sexy tales from Sydney's sandy suburbia.

He Died with a Felafel in his Hand (John Birmingham; 1994) Grungy share-house life in Brisbane and beyond.

The Secret River (Kate Grenville; 2005) Story of 19th-century convict life around Sydney.

Johnno (David Malouf; 1975) A coming-of-age tale set in 1940s Brisbane.

Mango Country (John Van Tiggelen; 2003) Gonzo, guffaw-inducing take on the far-out folks of Far North Queensland.

The Reef in Strife

Climate change remains a hot topic (no pun intended) along the east coast, particularly when it comes to Queensland's biggest tourist attraction, the Great Barrier Reef. In 2016 unusually elevated sea temperatures caused a disastrous 'bleaching' event, where sensitive corals failed to cope with the warmer environment and perished en masse. A second bleaching in 2017 struck at the worst time, before the coral had recovered. Similar bleaching events happened in 1998 and 2002, but never to this extent: over 50% of the reef has been affected, and parts of it may be beyond recovery.

If climate change continues at present rates and such bleaching events become more regular – especially in conjunction with the added threats of wave damage from more frequent cyclones, the continued scourge of the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish, and environmentally menacing port-expansion and dredging activities planned along the Queensland coast – some estimates suggest the reef's near-total devastation within the next 50 years. This destruction is unthinkable on many fronts, not least of which are the catastrophic economic consequences: the reef generates an estimated \$4 billion in annual tourism revenue for Australia.

Stability & Desirability

Australia has done comparatively well on the economic front of late. This commodities-powered nation was one of the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations to avoid recession during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Unemployment was expected to reach 8% to 10% during the GFC but didn't hit 6%. But when the economy in China (one of Australia's key export markets) stalled, the mining boom that kept Australia afloat during the GFC came to a screeching halt. A