

# Understand Sydney

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# Sydney Today

With around 4.8 million residents, Sydney is Oceania's biggest and brightest city, and it dominates its home state of New South Wales politically and economically. Australia may have escaped recession during the global economic turmoil of the last decade but much of that was due to a resources boom on the other side of the country. With that boom now a receding echo, Sydneysiders who are already feeling the pinch are bracing themselves for tougher economic times.

## Best on Film

**Finding Nemo** (2003) Animated feature following an adventurous clownfish who finds himself captive in a Sydney aquarium.

**The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert** (1994) Sydney drag queens road-tripping to Alice Springs.  
**Muriel's Wedding** (1994) Both a good laugh and genuinely affecting; Toni Collette's Muriel reinvents her frumpy Abba-tragic self.

**Strictly Ballroom** (1992) Break-through Aussie comedy set in the surreal world of competitive ballroom dancing.

## Best in Print

**The Lieutenant** (Kate Grenville, 2008) The names are changed but Grenville's fascinating chronicle of first contacts with the Eora people rings true.

**Leviathan** (John Birmingham, 1999) A gritty history exploring Sydney's seamier side, written in the tone of an unauthorised biography.

**The Playmaker** (Thomas Keneally, 1987) A fictionalised account of First Fleet life.

**Voss** (Patrick White, 1957) Nobel Prize-winner White contrasts the unforgiving outback with Sydney colonial life.

## The Sydney Seige

On 15 December 2014, what Sydney had long feared appeared to be coming true when a lone gunman took 18 people hostage in the Lindt cafe in Martin Place. Shortly after, a black flag with an Islamic message was held against the window. After a 16-hour stand-off, shots were heard from inside and police stormed the cafe and killed the gunman. Two of the hostages were also killed – one by the gunman and one from the ricochet of a police bullet.

While the siege bore some of the hallmarks of a terrorist attack, it was soon revealed that the gunman was a lone mentally disturbed person with a criminal record, unaligned with any terrorist group.

Sydney's Muslim community roundly condemned the attack and fears of a backlash were dissipated by messages of solidarity from leaders of other faiths and everyday Australians. The hashtag 'illridewithyou' quickly became a Twitter phenomenon, with tens of thousands of non-Muslim Australians offering their support to Muslims who felt nervous of retaliation.

## Housing Woes

If Sydneysiders seem utterly obsessed by real estate, it's for good reason. A 2015 Demographia survey rated Sydney as the third-least-affordable city (behind Vancouver and Hong Kong) in which to buy a house within the English-speaking world. Median house prices (\$812,000) are 9.8 times higher than median household incomes (\$82,800) – a ratio of 3:1 is considered affordable, above 5:1 severely unaffordable.

For those Sydneysiders for whom home ownership seems like an unattainable dream, there's a double whammy to face: renting is increasingly unaffordable too. The median asking price for a house is now \$500 per week (in Melbourne it's \$380) and stories abound of