

# Destination Australia

Cut from the ancient Gondwana continent more than 45 million years ago, Australia's identity, both geographic and cultural, has been forged by millennia of survival and isolation. Vulnerable to violent climatic extremes, this savvy landscape learned to manipulate voracious fires, long droughts and desperate floods to carve some of the world's most dramatic terrain. These origins, harsh, resilient and beautiful, remain emblematic of the diversity of life Australia has created ever since. Leap to the present and you'll discover it in the Australian people – it hides behind the larrikin wit and amicable informality that sucks you in before your eyes can arch in surprise. It's no wonder locals, visitors and admirers from afar are driven to call Australia home.

Australia's greatest enigma is its extremes. The driest and flattest continent on earth is also home to the colossal rainforests of Cape Tribulation, laden with prehistoric and impenetrable flora. Nearby the world's largest coral reef adorns 2300km of coastline. This underwater jungle teems with life and colours unheralded above ground. The diverse coastline that buffers this immense island from the ocean bleeds into thick Australian bush with towering eucalypts and old-growth forests before petering out into the vast ochre outback of the interior. At its heart the iconic Uluru overwhelms visitors with its bulk, rising 348m from the earth and burying almost twice as much of itself beneath. Nearby the domed buttresses of the Olgas huddle close around cut gorges and valleys, and the largest, Mt Olga, soars 1066m above sea level. Decades of crafted marketing and cinematography have paraded images of Kakadu and the Top End on screens of all sizes across the world. But none can invoke the magic of Aboriginal cultures that have lived there for more than 50,000 years, or the 530 plus bird, reptile, fish and mammal species that call it home.

Australians' love for home is matched by an intense curiosity of the foreign and their cities are in a constant state of flux, absorbing fresh influences from far corners of the globe. But this country hates the generic and so its cities remain distinct: Sydney is a luscious tart, Melbourne a subtle glamour puss, Brisbane a blithe playmate, Adelaide a gracious dame and Perth a free spirit. In between are coastal villages and spreads, hinterland towns and outback communities defining their own patch of utopia.

Australians are shameless in their belief that theirs is the lucky country. But pride is served with an equal measure of reality. Just as climate was the dominant influence in Australia's beginnings, so too it remains core to the country's fears and psyche. As the world grapples with climate change, Australians feel it more tangibly than most. Vast regions are enduring a decade-long drought and the need for rain is a burning issue for much of the country. Using water sparingly is now common practice for most Australians and enforced restrictions have adapted behaviours in an effort to cope. Threatened with extinction, the vibrant life on the Great Barrier Reef is dependent on halting global warming. As temperatures rise, bushfires have shifted from a part of summer life to an unfathomable fear. By and large, Australians are eager for environmental policies that will lead the world to tackle this most global of problems. But in the competing market of current affairs and industry lobbying, more immediate needs, in particular the global financial crisis, have taken precedence. When Kevin Rudd swept to victory in the November 2007 election, a

## FAST FACTS

Population: 21,824,140

GDP growth: 1.8%  
(2008), 0% (2009)

Inflation: 2.5%

Unemployment: 5.7%

Average gross weekly  
income (full-time work):  
\$1183

Tourism generates over  
\$8.1 billion annually  
(0.9% of Australia's GDP).

Australia's coastline is  
25,800km long and is  
dusted with over 7000  
beaches.

Australia currently  
exports around 715  
million litres of wine per  
year, with a value of \$2.6  
billion.

Australia has almost  
112,600 surf life savers,  
who collectively spend  
some 1.4 million hours  
patrolling Australian  
beaches, where they  
rescue approximately  
10,000 people per year.

mood of hope and inspiration awakened in parts of the population that had become dormant and numb. He promptly delivered by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol and issuing a public and emotive apology to the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Immigration policies affecting refugees were also addressed and suddenly many Australians found in their Prime Minister a tenacity to embrace the future. But the tendency for politicians to be inhibited by, well politics, is universal, and after racing to victory on a campaign of environmental responsibility, the inevitable reality of a population laden with mortgages and financial uncertainty has taken precedence. Concerns about job security, education and health reign on the street and in the halls of parliament. Despite the polls consistently showing that Australians want strong action on climate change, the government announced a modest target to reduce emissions by five to 15 per cent by 2020. Though interest rates plummeted in the first half of 2009, providing welcome relief to home owners and the promise of a salvaged economy, the reality of economic empires crumbling around the globe has ensured many Australians remain anxious about their future.

But Australians are a hardy lot, and in tough times resilience and compassion dictate the population's behaviour. Personal fears were relegated to obscurity in the aftermath of the tragic Victorian bushfires of February 2009, which claimed more than 170 lives and wiped towns from existence. Within one week this disparate community of 21 million raised over \$100 million in an act of solidarity and sympathy. By the end of week two it had passed \$200 million. And this one example returns us to the beauty and inimitability of Australia. You have only to determine how to take it all in: overload your senses, witness unforgettable imagery, learn from the earliest cultures, dine on the world's most diverse cuisine, mingle with a population that already considers you a mate and ponder it all amid space and isolation you couldn't begin to imagine.

# Getting Started

Australia is so vast and diverse it fulfils the full spectrum of adventure fantasies. A well-developed tourism industry and ample information provides options for travellers on all budgets and enables you to land in any city or well-touristed destination with little more than your first night's accommodation sorted. An intrepid road trip through the outback or tropical Top End requires more investigation and planning. The most important thing to remember is that Australia is big – *really* big – so time is of the essence. Think about what you want to see and how you're going to get there, and then make sure you don't underestimate how long you'll need for your visit.

## WHEN TO GO

Truth be told, any time is a good time to be *somewhere* in Australia. When it's cold down south, it's magnificent in the north and the Centre; when it's too hot and sweaty up north, the southern states are at their natural finest. There are also the numerous festivals and other public spectacles on show every month to lure you.

The seasons in Australia are the antitheses of those in Europe and North America. Summer is December to February; the weather and longer daylight hours are tailor-made for swimming and other outdoor activities across much of the country. Summer is also school-holiday period and consequently high season for most places. Unless you want to compete with hordes of grimly determined local holidaymakers at every turn, avoid Australia's prime destinations during the peaks of school holidays (January) and public holidays. See p1032 for more information. During these times, you're also likely to encounter spontaneous rises in the price of everything from accommodation to petrol.

If weather is your main determinant then the best way to decide when to go is to first decide where you're going in Australia. Check the Geography and Climate headings at the start of regional chapters in this book for more specific information. Winter, from June to August, is officially designated the tourism low season for most of the country, but not the Northern Territory, Queensland and top of Western Australia. Winter in this northern stretch offers respite from the humidity of the wet season (which runs roughly from October to March, with the heaviest rain falling from January onwards; the

See Climate (p1024) for information.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- A willingness to use 'mate', 'no worries' and 'she'll be right' liberally
- An appetite for seafood, steak, beer (other than Fosters), barbecues and fresh fruit
- A travel insurance policy (p1032) covering skydiving, bungee jumping, diving, skiing, abseiling and white-water rafting
- Warm clothes because winter does actually occur in Australia...well, down south anyway
- Extra-strength insect repellent to fend off merciless flies and mosquitoes (p1027)
- Sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat to deflect fierce UV rays (p1078)
- A towel and bathers/togs/swimmers/swimming costume/cossie/trunks/Speedos/budgie smugglers...for the beach
- Good maps for outback meanders and binoculars for the wildlife while you're there

Dry lasts from April to September) and the temperatures are highly agreeable. It's also when roads and tracks are most accessible up north. Autumn (March to May) and spring (September to November) both enjoy a lack of climatic extremes everywhere.

## COSTS & MONEY

Australia is affordable by Western European and American standards, but certainly not a budget destination compared to say Southeast Asia. Your biggest costs will be accommodation and transport.

If you're a midrange traveller hiring a car, seeing the sights, staying in hotels and motels, and enjoying the fabulous food and grog, budget for \$150 per person per day but add \$50 to \$100 for cities and well-touristed areas. In remote areas such as Far North Queensland and the Kimberley bank on spending \$250 to as much as \$500 per day with 4WD hire and petrol. Escalated petrol prices make multiweek, remote road trips in a 4WD an expensive affair, but small, economical 2WDs elsewhere are still wallet-friendly.

Travellers with a demanding brood in tow will find there are many ways to keep kids inexpensively satisfied, including beach and park visits, camping grounds and motels with pools and games rooms, kids' menus and youth/family concessions for attractions. For more information on travelling with children, see p1024.

If you camp or stay in hostels, cook your own meals, restrain your urge for entertainment and move around by public transport, you could probably eke out an existence on \$80 per day; for a budget that realistically enables you to have a good time, aim for \$100 to \$120 per day.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Australia's enormity of social and geographical extremes – from cityscapes to isolation, yuppies to nomads, outback to the reefs – can be hard to wrap your head around. Fortunately, some inspiring, thought-provoking and just plain entertaining books have been written about this country.

Peter Carey demonstrates his art for wit and characters in *Theft: A Love Story* (2006) about the shambling existence of a famous Sydney artist, long since fallen off his perch.

*Burke's Soldier* (2003) by Alan Atwood is a historical account of the Burke and Wills expedition and Australia in the 1860s through the eyes of John King – the sole survivor of the mission.

*Carpentaria* (2006) by indigenous writer Alexis Wright is set on the Gulf of Carpentaria and aptly captures the distance – socially and environmentally – of remote Australia from its cities. It's also highly recommended as an audiobook for long road trips.

Set in Queensland's Darling Downs region, *The White Earth* (2004) by Andrew McGahan is a beautiful and brutal work of fiction about a young boy facing an immense inheritance of land, as well as the bloody history and contemporary racial struggles attached to it.

*A Fraction of the Whole* (2008) by Steve Toltz follows the path of three generations of one family, with criminal and undeniably Australian overtones. It's a confronting, descriptive and excellent read.

*Knockabout Girl* (2007) by Pip Newling is an endearing and humorous account of the author's experience moving to Halls Creek in remote Western Australia at the age of 23.

*The Songlines* (1986) by Bruce Chatwin combines a fictional and nonfictional account of the author's trip to Australia and his research and insights in outback and Indigenous cultures, issues and religion.

### HOW MUCH?

Coffee \$2.80-3.50

Stubby of bottled beer \$3-5

Toasted foccacia or wrap \$7

1L of petrol \$1.15-1.50

Metropolitan train ticket \$3.50-6.50

# TOP PICKS



AUSTRALIA

## MUST-SEE MOVIES

If you're in need of instant inspiration, these quintessential Australian films, which range from intelligent and insightful to uber-cheesy, will fill your head with larrikin wit, breathtaking landscapes and urban Aussie culture. See p48 for some reviews of these and other films.

- **Australia** (2008) Director: Baz Luhrmann
- **Beneath Clouds** (2002) Director: Ivan Sen
- **The Black Balloon** (2008) Director: Elissa Down
- **Gallipoli** (1981) Director: Peter Weir
- **Jindabyne** (2006) Director: Ray Lawrence
- **Rabbit-Proof Fence** (2002) Director: Phillip Noyce
- **The Sound of One Hand Clapping** (1998) Director: Richard Flanagan
- **Ten Canoes** (2006) Director: Rolf de Heer
- **The Year My Voice Broke** (1987) Director: John Duigan

## TOP SOUNDTRACKS

A respectable Australian road trip deserves an authentic soundtrack. Get a head full of these iconic albums before and after you arrive to capture the memories, landscapes, events and characters on your trip. See p51 for more musical inspiration.

- **Chisel** (1991) Cold Chisel
- **Claim** (1989) Not Drowning Waving
- **Diesel & Dust** (1987) Midnight Oil
- **Hourly Daily** (1996) You Am I
- **John Butler** (2000) John Butler
- **Songs from the South: The Best of Paul Kelly** (1997) Paul Kelly
- **Wait Long by the River and the Bodies of Your Enemies Will Float By** (2005) The Drones
- **When the Flood Comes** (2008) The Audreys
- **White Moth** (2007) Xavier Rudd
- **Wide Open Road** (2008) Compilation by some of Australia's best artists

## TOP FESTIVALS

Australians celebrate at the drop of a hat. Music and art feature highly on the festival calendar, but cultural celebrations get plenty of attention too. Joining the following festivities will show visitors Australia's energy and diversity at its finest.

- **Big Day Out** (p1030) In Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and the Gold Coast in January.
- **Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras** (p124) In Sydney in February.
- **Ten Days on the Island** (p647) In Hobart in March.
- **East Coast International Blues & Roots Music Festival** (p198) Held over Easter in Byron Bay.
- **Melbourne International Film Festival** (p516) In July and August in Melbourne.
- **Garma Festival** (p814) In August in Arnhem Land.
- **Alice Desert Festival** (p870) In September in Alice Springs.
- **Woodford Folk Festival** (p356) In December in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.
- **WOMAdelaide** (p735) In Adelaide in March.

*Around Australia in 80 Days* (2004) by Jonathon Green is essential reading for anyone planning to eat/sleep/live out of their vehicle while touring Australia, with 20,000km worth of wit, advice and inspiration.

For comfortably predictable reading, pick up a copy of Bill Bryson's *Down Under* (2001, also titled *In a Sunburned Country*), or Mark Dapin's *Strange Country: Travels In A Very Different Australia* (2008).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Australian Newspapers Online** ([www.nla.gov.au/npapers](http://www.nla.gov.au/npapers)) National Library—maintained listing of Australian newspaper websites.

**Australian Tourist Commission** ([www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)) Official tourism site run by the federal government with nationwide info for visitors.

**Bureau of Meteorology** ([www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)) Great for checking weather anywhere around the country.

**Department of the Environment & Heritage** ([www.environment.gov.au/parks/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/index.html)) Links to info on Australia's national parks and reserves.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Get quick Australian info and inspiration from the 'Destinations' tab, a rundown of guidebooks from the bookshop, accommodation reviews and bookings from 'Hotels and hostels', and travellers trading information on the Thorn Tree.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

**The Surf & Sun Run is 2864km of bare blissful beaches, dense national parks, dizzying theme parks, serious surfing, marine wonders and urban fun. You might do it in a fortnight, but what a waste – take a month or two and chill out.**

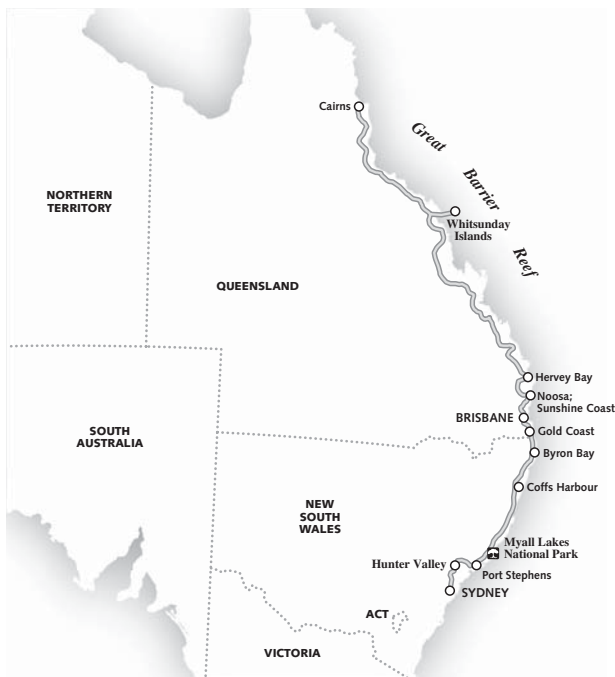
### THE SURF & SUN RUN

**Six to Eight Weeks/Sydney to Cairns**

Lured by sun and surf, both international and domestic travellers hug the east coast between Sydney and Cairns, making it the most well-trodden path in Australia.

Start with the bright lights and glitz of **Sydney** (p98) and then meander north along the Pacific Hwy through central and northern New South Wales (NSW). Hang out in the **Hunter Valley** (p168) for vino-quaffing and national-park tramping, and stop for water sports in family-friendly **Port Stephens** (p174), **Myall Lakes National Park** (p177) and **Coffs Harbour** (p186). Skip up to **Byron Bay** (p195) for New Age indulgences and great beaches, then head over the Queensland border into the honey-hued, surf-addicted **Gold Coast** (p333). Pause in **Brisbane** (p297) and then amble up through **Noosa** (p349) and the glorious **Sunshine Coast** (p344).

The Bruce Hwy wends along the stunning coast into the far north. Nature lovers should visit the whale-watching haven of **Hervey Bay** (p362) and then make their way further north, up to the blissful **Whitsunday Islands** (p408), the coral charms of the **Great Barrier Reef** (p442) and the scuba-diving nexus of **Cairns** (p436).



## BEST OF THE WEST TO THE OUTBACK

Six to Eight Weeks/Perth to  
Alice Springs

This route gives you the best of the country's lush southwest and then takes you through the burnt, bare and beautiful outback. Start in **Perth** (p900) and exhaust all of your urban urges in the great pubs, galleries, bars and restaurants. Then snake your way south via the stunning beaches of Cape Naturaliste, before camping out in **Margaret River** (p938). Go surfing and winery-hopping before continuing south to **Augusta** (p940) and magnificent Cape Leeuwin, where whales drop by. Meander through the giant old-growth forests of the southwest and rest a while in **Albany** (p948) for its historic architecture and world-class diving. Follow the southern coast to **Esperance** (p951) where you can visit seals, penguins and seabirds in the Archipelago of the Recherche.

Bid the coast farewell for a spell and head north to the iconic outback town of **Kalgoorlie-Boulder** (p956). Play 'wild west', succumb to hedonism and buy a miner a beer. Then hit the Eyre Hwy and follow it through to South Australia (SA), past the Nullarbor Plain and into the coastal towns, surfing beaches and fishing hideouts that skirt the Great Southern Bight. Pause in ambient **Port Lincoln** (p789) for fishing expeditions and all things tuna related, and then climb north to **Port Augusta** (p787).

Hit the Stuart Hwy – a must for avid road trippers – and journey up to the opal-tinted dugout town of **Cooper Pedy** (p802). You're now well and truly into an 'outback odyssey' and the obvious route is through the Simpson Desert to awe-inspiring **Uluru (Ayers Rock)** (p887) and the spectacular, vertigo-inducing **Watarrka (Kings Canyon) National Park** (p884). Finish up in the desert oasis of **Alice Springs** (p863), in the heart of the steep-sided **MacDonnell Ranges** (p876).

**Pack a tent, do your homework (p74) and bid the neighbours farewell for a while – this route takes in around 4750km of the best of the southwest and the outback's big empty. Make the most out of the landscape and take a good two months.**





## THE GIANT LOOP

### Six Months/Sydney to Sydney

After bidding *au revoir* to **Sydney** (p98) and following your suntanned nose up the east coast into Queensland (see p26), veer west from **Townsville** (p413) towards the tunnel-threaded Queensland mining town of **Mt Isa** (p392). Settle in for the long, red drive (via **Tennant Creek**; p860) in the red centre, where you can inspect **Alice Springs** (p863) and the awesome splendour of **Uluru (Ayers Rock)** (p887) before dog-legging it up to **Darwin** (p816). Cross into Western Australia (WA) for a pit stop at pretty **Kununurra** (p1014), then negotiate the Great Northern Hwy to the cosmopolitan beachside getaway of **Broome** (p998).

Take a peninsula sidetrack to the snorkel-friendly **Cape Range National Park** (p988) and the marine brilliance of **Ningaloo Reef** (p988), followed by a date with a bottlenose dolphin at **Monkey Mia** (p978). Continue south to the 'life is a beach' city of **Perth** (p900) and the latte-flavoured enclave of **Fremantle** (p920), then wine away the hours at **Margaret River** (p938) until you're ready to tackle the flat immensity of the **Nullarbor Plain** (p962).

In South Australia (SA) bushwalkers can trudge towards the challenging **Flinders Ranges** (p793), while tipplers can refuel their palates in the **Barossa Valley** (p775). Beyond **Adelaide** (p724) it's a shortish trek into Victoria (Vic) to check out surfboard-strewn **Torquay** (p552) and cultured **Melbourne** (p492), from where there's a ferry to **Devonport** (p691), your gateway to the stunning island highlights of **Tasmania** (p629).

Further along the Victorian coast, enjoy the secluded wilderness of **Wilson's Promontory National Park** (p617) and spend a couple of days somewhere along **Ninety Mile Beach** (p621), then cruise around **Narooma** (p236) on the southern NSW coast, bask in idyllic **Jervis Bay** (p233). After you've detoured to the national capital, **Canberra** (p267), return to the bright lights of Sydney.

Experiencing the furthest reaches of the land can mean tallying up over 14,000km of highway, not counting side trips to beaches, forests, mountains, reefs, towns... Where you start and finish is up to your imagination, but allow for around six months of discovery.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### VINEYARDS, RIVERS, MOUNTAINS & GORGES Eight weeks/Adelaide to Rockhampton

This trip shies from the norm but packs in much of Australia's diversity. Start in **Adelaide** (p724) for gracious architecture and uncrowded beaches. Duck down to the vineyards of **McLaren Vale** (p750) before ambling up to those in the **Barossa Valley** (p775). Then hit the Murray and make your way along the Sunraysia Hwy to **Mildura** (p573). Take a paddle boat down the Murray River and an Indigenous tour to **Mungo National Park** (p264). Head into the vast New South Wales (NSW) outback and course the Silver City Hwy to **Broken Hill** (p259), with its rich history of artists, poets and Aboriginal culture, as well as mining.

From here follow the Barrier Hwy east to Dubbo's outstanding **Western Plains Zoo** (p219). Then take the Newell Hwy north onto the Oxley Hwy for a few days of boot scootin' in **Tamworth** (p206). Chart a course for the breathtaking **Waterfall Way** (p210), pop into picturesque **Bellingen** (p211) and then hightail it to the New Age, lush, remote **Far North Coast Hinterland** (p201) and **Byron Bay** (p195).

Carve back inland through the mountainous and woody **Gold Coast Hinterland** (p342) to the Best of All Lookout (it really is?!) in **Springbrook National Park** (p343). Take the inland routes through the **Darling Downs** (p356) for wine tasting, Queensland style. Flit through **Toowoomba** (p358) and drive through the Great Dividing Range to **Roma** (p359) before hiding out in **Carnarvon National Park** (p390) to marvel at the jaw-dropping 30km-long, 200m-high Carnarvon Gorge. Then wrap things up with die-hard country music and the best steak you've ever eaten in **Rockhampton** (p385).

Escape the coast and muddle your way through South Australia's vineyards; Victoria's fertile Murray towns; and New South Wales' amber outback and rich, New Age hinterland. Add two spectacular national parks in Queensland before landing on the coast again. Eight weeks will do this 3700km route justice.



## ACROSS THE CONTINENT

One to Two Months/Cairns to Perth

If you prefer solitude and travelling rough you'll love the Australian outback, which is criss-crossed with roads and tracks, some sealed and others little more than a pair of dirty ruts. There are many potential hazards in heading off the beaten track, so wherever you go, make sure you're well informed and fully prepared – see Extra Precautions for Outback Driving (p88) for more information.

The following is a long, difficult route from the tropics to the Indian Ocean. Start in **Cairns** (p436), gateway to the arduous Mulligan Hwy that (in case you're interested) snakes towards the tip of **Cape York** (p476). Head west from Cairns to **Normanton** (p434), the biggest town in the Gulf of Carpentaria region, then south down the Matilda Hwy to the mining rough house of **Mt Isa** (p392).

To the southwest is the frontier outback town of Urandangi, after which you run into the **Plenty Hwy** (p86), a monotonous – or to some, gloriously desolate – road with plenty of bone-jolting challenges (4WD recommended). Over 500km later you'll hit the Stuart Hwy and then the dead-centre city of **Alice Springs** (p863).

The Lasseter Hwy turn-off takes you to weighty **Uluru (Ayers Rock)** (p887) and the captivating **Kata Tjuta (the Olgas)** (p889) rock formations, beyond which is the beginning of the **Great Central Rd** (p85). This lonely trail, suitable for well-prepared 2WDs and lined with saltbush, spinifex and desert oaks, stretches 750km to the tiny gold-mining town of **Laverton** (p961), from where it's another 400km to the gold-mining concern of **Kalgoorlie-Boulder** (p956). Finally, the ocean beckons from behind the beaches of Scarborough and Cottesloe in **Perth** (p900).

Few roads are less travelled than this monster 4560km trail from the tidal rivers of the Gulf Savannah to the pounding surf at the bottom of Western Australia, with undulating desertscapes in between. Conditions can be unpredictable, so plan on taking up to two months.



## TAILORED TRIPS

### BEST WORLD HERITAGE HIKING & CAMPING

Australia's full of gems. Let's start in the west with the stunning peninsulas, rich marine park and Indigenous cultural tours of **Shark Bay** (p976) and the colossal domes of the **Bungle Bungles** in **Purnululu National Park** (p1013).

The sultry Top End is home to the world-famous **Kakadu National Park** (p842), full of rare species and ancient rock art.

Far North Queensland encompasses the enormous **Wet Tropics World Heritage Area** (p468), sheltering a huge array of flora and fauna. Offshore the wilderness is just as rich beneath the waves along the **Great Barrier Reef** (p410). Potter south and you'll discover **Fraser Island** (p367), the world's largest sand island, brimming with forests, mineral lakes and wildlife.

In the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves in NSW there's **Nightcap** (p203), **Border Ranges** (p204) and **Mt Warning National Parks** (p204); all prime bushwalking territory. New England boasts the dramatic, rugged **Gibraltar Range** and **Washpool National Parks** (p213), **Richmond Range National Park** (p214) and the superb **Dorrigo National Park** (p211).

Then there's the glorious Tasmanian wilderness, with the mighty rivers and snow-capped summits of **Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park** (p709), pristine lakes of **Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park** (p710), glacial landscape of the **Walls of Jerusalem National Park** (p696) and virgin rainforest of **Southwest National Park** (p713).

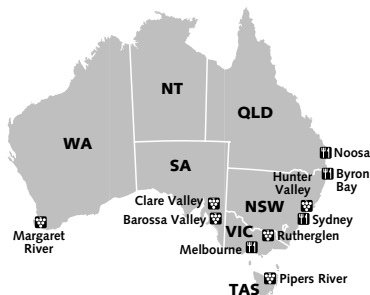


### THE CULINARY CRUSADE

If gastronomic pleasures are your caper then Australia is your Arcadia. In Western Australia (WA) you can mix superlative wines with marinated maron (see p66) in the wineries surrounding **Margaret River** (p938). If nothing appeals to you more than following your bouquet-detecting schnozz, head to the stalwart of the country's internationally praised viticulture scene – South Australia's (SA) **Barossa Valley** (p775), where the 60-plus wineries release more bottled varieties than you can pop a cork at. The roll-call of SA's worthy vine-covered bits continues to the north in the Riesling-proficient **Clare Valley** (p780).

Another prominent wine-making region is the **Hunter Valley** (p168) in NSW, producing outstanding Shiraz and Semillon varieties. The rustic Victorian district **Rutherglen** (p582) specialises in fortified wines like Muscat, Tokay and port that owe a debt to its hot climate. In **Melbourne** (p522), locals rate their need to dine out on an even keel with oxygen, and global flavours and exquisite Mod Oz are up for grabs for every budget. **Sydney** (p131) rivals, of course, but with a vogueish cutting edge. Queensland's **Noosa** (p353) is a breeding ground for culinary inventiveness; and for salt-of-the-earth organic cuisine done with pure class, head to **Byron Bay** (p195).

The region around **Pipers River** (p680) in Tasmania releases many superb vintages that are characterised by their full, fruity flavours.



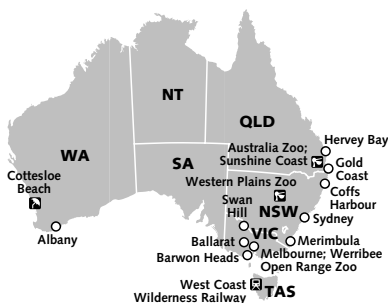
## CAPERS FOR THE KIDS

Australia's smorgasbord of natural and artificial sights makes it one giant playground for kids. Get them giddy on the feisty rides and theme parks of Queensland's **Gold Coast** (p333) and then temper the experience with the bounty of wildlife opportunities: go whale watching in **Albany** (p948) or **Hervey Bay** (p363) and then get them up close and personal with furred, feathered and finned critters from around the globe at Queensland's world-famous **Australia Zoo** (p346), New South Wales' **Western Plains Zoo** (p219) and Victoria's **Werribee Open Range Zoo** (p538).

A refreshing ocean dip must be near the top of everyone's outdoor-activities list, with beaches such as those at **Merimbula** (p237) and **Coffs Harbour** (p187) in NSW, **Cottesloe Beach** (p914) in Western Australia, **Barwon Heads** (p542) in Victoria, and numerous seaside spots on Queensland's **Sunshine Coast** (p344).

In Tasmania, the **West Coast Wilderness Railway** (p707) is an unforgettable ride across some of the west coast's most exhilarating terrain, which lies stretched out between Queenstown and Strahan. There's also stage-managed fun at period places like Swan Hill's **Pioneer Settlement** (p578), with seats up for grabs on a paddle steamer, vintage cars and horse-drawn wagons; or Ballarat's **Sovereign Hill** (p586), with period-dressed gold-digging fun.

Don't forget the urban fun – there is plenty of hands-on exploration to be found at the **Melbourne Museum** (p509) and at the **Art Gallery of NSW** (p114).



## THE FESTIVAL FRENZY

Australians will seize on just about any excuse for a celebration, and while you're visiting this country it only makes sense to follow the light-hearted, self-indulgent lead of its inhabitants. The year gets off to a champagne-swilling start when fireworks explode high above Sydney Harbour on **New Year's Eve** (p124). The new year is also vigorously celebrated further south during the **Hobart Summer Festival** (p646), when Taswegians stuff themselves with food, wine and song.

In late January the streets of Tamworth in NSW are littered with broken guitar strings and broken hearts during its famous **Country Music Festival** (p206), while Sydney vamps itself up in February for the **Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras** (p136).

The exuberant **Adelaide Festival of Arts** (p734) and its eccentric sibling, **Adelaide Fringe** (p734), fill the South Australian capital with culture and idiosyncratic performances in February and March. And in April in Victoria, Melbourne repeatedly smacks its own funny bone with the outstanding **International Comedy Festival** (p515).

In September, the **Brisbane Riverfestival** (p315) captivates the city with 10 days of performance, art and celebrations, and the city gets a musical work out during October's **Livid** (p315) festival.

In the Northern Territory, the **Garma Festival** (p814), held in August, celebrates Indigenous culture in Arnhem Land.



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