

DESTINATION REPORT

YOUR TRAVEL SPECIALIST

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YOUR TRAVEL SNAPSHOT: Destinations included in this guide

Australia

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INTRODUCTION

From the craggy peaks of the Blue Mountains to the lush tropics of Queensland and the coral treasure land of the Great Barrier Reef, Australia has something unusual and something special to offer visitors—even those traveling by tour bus.

The most frequently visited places in Australia's vast "red center" have been tamed and put on a tour, but the Outback hasn't lost its frontier allure. Watching the sunset at Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock) has become something of a circus with the hordes of tour buses, camper vans and motorcycles that crowd the parking lot, but watching the scalloped monolith go from reddish-brown to a haunting burnt-orange against the desert sky is still a magical—some say spiritual—experience.

The same can be said for much of the rest of this country that's also a continent. Sydney may have joined the ranks of the world's top cities, but its architecture, stunning harbor, and electric, manic personality keep it singular: You won't mistake it for anywhere else.

GEOGRAPHY

With approximately 3 million sq mi/7 million sq km, Australia is the world's largest island. It is the only country that is also a continent. Although most of it is barren desert where little rain falls, Australia has a wide range of environments, including tropical rain forests in its northern regions, temperate forests along the east coast and even a few snowy mountains spotting the Great Dividing Range, which runs north to south across almost the entire length of the eastern side of the continent and separates the coastal plains from the drier inland areas. Off the northeast coast is the world's largest coral reef—the Great Barrier Reef (1,200 mi/2,000 km long). While the state of Western Australia occupies the entire western third of the country, much of it desert.

Australia is divided into both states and territories (capital cities for each are in parentheses): Australian Capital Territory (Canberra—also the capital city of Australia), New South Wales (Sydney), Northern Territory (Darwin), Queensland (Brisbane), South Australia (Adelaide), Tasmania (Hobart), Victoria (Melbourne) and Western Australia (Perth).

HISTORY

Early European explorers had been curious about the possible existence of Australia long before they actually found it. During the first 250 years of Pacific exploration by Europeans, a large blank space in the corner of navigators' maps was marked *Terra Australis Incognita*, meaning Unknown Southern Land. In 1770, Captain James Cook reached the southeast coast. He claimed the land for England, named it New South Wales and sailed 2,500 mi/4,000 km along its shores, charting the coast and barrier reef.

The "new" land wasn't empty, however. Cook encountered a dark-skinned race of nomadic hunters and gatherers. The distant ancestors of these people had begun their migration into the land as many as 75,000 years earlier, passing across land bridges and shallow seas connecting Ice Age Asia to present-day Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

England didn't do much with New South Wales until 1787, when the First Fleet was dispatched, transporting convicts from overflowing British prisons to Botany Bay. The fleet anchored there in January 1788 and then headed a few miles/kilometers north to Port Jackson, within a pistol shot of Sydney Cove.

More prisoners were transported and other convict colonies founded. Free settlers soon followed. Slowly, the land was explored and domesticated, in a pattern similar to the opening of the West in the U.S.—settlers in wagons followed pathfinders to make homes in wild country; pioneers and the Aborigines engaged in bloody conflict; great cattle stations (similar to ranches) were founded. Gold was discovered in 1851, and fortunes were made and lost in boomtowns. Then railroads were built along old wagon routes, and paddle wheelers were launched for transport.

This experience, set in a land that for 100 years remained at the ends of the world's transportation and

communication lines, bred a special frontier spirit and independent attitude. It persists today in every Aussie who would "never let a mate down." This spirit of "mateship" became legendary in World War I when Australian troops who had been called on to help fight in Europe experienced major losses in 1915 on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey.

When World War II broke out, Australian troops fought alongside the British in Europe; after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the country shifted its forces homeward. The Australian towns of Darwin and Broome were subsequently bombed before the Japanese were defeated in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

After World War II, millions of immigrants, especially from continental Europe and the U.K., arrived on Australia's shores. In 1974, the government abolished its "white Australia" policy, and thousands more migrants arrived from Asia. Today, Australia is one of the most diverse, multicultural societies in the world.

SNAPSHOT

Some of Australia's main attractions include the Great Barrier Reef, Aboriginal culture and art, Uluru, kangaroos, Tasmania, koalas, the Queensland rain forest, Sydney, beaches, white-water rafting, diving and the Outback.

Almost everyone will love Australia. The only people who should avoid it are those who are made uncomfortable by unrelenting informality.

POTPOURRI

Australia's vineyards produce wine that rivals the best produced in France, but you won't find any champagne there. Because of an agreement with the European Community, Australian-produced bubbly is known as sparkling wine.

Australians are passionate about their football, known as "footy," which comes in three varieties (which bear little resemblance to U.S. football): Rugby League, Rugby Union and Australian Rules. The last is considered "real" Australian football, and the games get pretty wild.

The Australian native macadamia nut is so hard to crack that it was not grown commercially until a machine was invented to open the shell. Identified by Europeans in 1857, it was named after John Macadam, then secretary of the Philosophical Society of Victoria.

The oldest rock art in the world was found in the remote tropics of northwestern Australia. Stone engravings said to be more than 60,000 years old—at least twice as old as ancient cave paintings in Europe—were discovered on a sandstone monolith in the Northern Territory, near the town of Kununurra.

Camels in the beach town of Broome are required to wear taillights. Local camel-ride operators have outfitted the rears of their animals with battery-operated bicycle lights to alert motorists.

Kangaroos may be the national symbol, but they're also a source of protein. Kangaroo meat is a A\$42 million-a-year industry in Australia, and hunters are licensed to kill more than 5 million kangaroos annually.

Australians are prolific nicknamers. Aussies (pronounced *ozzies*) call mosquitoes *mozzies*, surfers *surfies*, swimming costumes *cossies* and barbecues *barbies*. Even the toughest leather-clad, two-wheeled road hog will refer to himself as a *bikie*.

Park officials at Uluru (Ayers Rock) support and encourage the Aboriginal belief that stone fragments taken from the site are cursed. Officials hope that this will help stop visitors from pilfering rock fragments to take home as souvenirs. So far, nearly 900 lbs/400 kg of the "conscience rocks" have been returned to park officials, many accompanied by notes describing the bad luck they caused.

SIGHTSEEING

From Sydney's dazzling blue harbor with its famous opera house and coat-hanger bridge to the vast, dusty plains of the Outback, Australia offers an unequaled diversity of experiences.

The raw magnitude of Australia's setting puts nature at the top of the sightseeing list. A journey through the Red Centre to Uluru to admire the ever-changing faces of Australia's most photographed landmark is just the start. There are also the lush green canopies of the World Heritage-listed Daintree National Park—the world's oldest rain forest—and the snow-capped peaks of Mount Kosciuszko National Park with its limestone caves, yawning gorges and alpine woodlands.

What's more, with almost 31,000 mi/50,000 km of the most amazing, least-crowded and unspoiled coastline in the world, Australia offers plenty of choices when it comes to beach adventures. From swimming with the biggest fish in the world on Ningaloo Reef, to snorkeling on the pristine coral reefs of the Great Barrier Reef, to staking out a patch of sand on iconic Bondi Beach, there's more than one way to get your toes wet.

Nature lovers can get a close-up view of Australia's unique wildlife when in Sydney by visiting Wild Life Sydney Zoo (Darling Harbour) or taking a day trip to Featherdale Wildlife Park. The zoos in Sydney and Melbourne also house a selection of native birds and animals.

For art and culture lovers, take a journey 50,000 years into the past and discover ancient Aboriginal cave painting in Kakadu National Park. Or revel in the moment at the Sydney Opera House, a modern architectural marvel that is home to Opera Australia and the Australian Ballet, and which presents an eclectic mix of theatrical and musical performances.

Lovers of wine and beautiful scenery won't want to miss a drive through the Barossa Valley in South Australia. The valley, just an hour's drive from Adelaide, is dotted with the vineyards of award-winning wineries. Other regions that grow full-bodied wine include the nearby Clare and McLaren valleys, Hunter Valley in New South Wales and the Margaret River region in Western Australia.

RECREATION

Diving is one of Australia's most famous activities. The Great Barrier Reef on the east coast is home to an amazing variety of marine life and top dive sites. The less-famous Ningaloo Reef on the country's west coast, near Exmouth, is also worth a visit. Whale sharks (seasonal) and manta rays are just some of the marine life you'll see there. Turquoise Bay ranks as one of the best drift snorkels in Australia.

Australians have perfected beach culture, and Whitehaven Beach in the Whitsunday Islands ranks as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Bondi Beach in Sydney is littered with the rich, the beautiful and often the famous, while Hyams Beach, south of Sydney in Jervis Bay, is recognized as having the whitest sand in the world by the *Guinness World Records*.

There are sailing opportunities in the beautiful Whitsunday Islands ranging from budget day and overnight trips to luxurious charter vessels and everything in between. Sailing courses are also available.

One of the best-loved fishing sports in Australia is barramundi fishing. Barramundi are found in freshwater and estuaries around the northern coast of Australia. Day trips and safaris are available from Darwin in the Northern Territory.

For the active traveler, Australia boasts scenic hikes through diverse landscapes. The Blue Mountains in New South Wales and Wilson's Promontory in Victoria offer wildlife viewing and spectacular surroundings; the more adventurous can hike to the top of the continent in Mount Kosciuszko National Park in the Snowy Mountains.

SHOPPING

There's no shortage of souvenir shops selling Australia's signature goods. Everything from boomerangs to sheepskins and wool products to Aboriginal handicrafts and didgeridoos can be found just about anywhere. Jewelry stores selling Broome pearls, opals and other gems native to the country, line the streets and shopping malls in larger cities. Australian Geographic shops, which are located in all major cities, carry a unique and attractive range of Australian items.

Melbourne is Australia's shopping mecca. There you can find everything from discounted wares at numerous factory outlets to high-end fashion such as Prada and Armani. For an architecturally interesting experience, visit the historic Block Arcade or Royal Arcade near Little Collins Street. Chapel Street offers an eclectic mix of shops ranging from second-hand stores to Australian designers.

Sydney also offers a wide variety of shopping experiences, including the historic Queen Victoria Building and Strand Arcade. For something different, try the suburbs of Newtown—for young, funky clothes, culture and cafes—or Mosman for an upmarket shopping trip.

One of our favorite shopping experiences is to visit a weekend market. Mostly held in cities, the markets are wonderful places to meet local residents, as well as shop for arts and crafts, unusual gifts, and fresh fruit and produce. In Sydney, canvas tarps billow over vendors selling their wares in the shadow of the Harbour Bridge in The Rocks neighborhood. Paddington Market is also popular. Melbourne's Queen Victoria Market, South Melbourne Market and Prahan Market are chockablock with fresh produce. The markets of Adelaide and Cairns offer local crafts and jewelry, as well as seasonal fruits and vegetables. Australia's most northern capital city, Darwin, is famous for the Mindil Beach Sunset Markets.

Be aware that aboriginal arts and crafts have become such popular souvenirs that the quality and authenticity of some offerings can be questionable. Look for shops that are at least partly owned by aborigines or that have a long-standing relationship with aboriginal artists. Genuine products often come with a certificate of authenticity, including information about the artist.

Shopping Hours: Monday-Saturday 9 am-5 pm. Many shops and department stores in major cities are open on Sunday and until 9 pm one night a week—usually Thursday or Friday.

DINING OVERVIEW

Traditional English fare has given way to more cosmopolitan cuisine, particularly in the country's larger cities. Visitors can thank the post-World War II waves of immigrants from southern Europe, and more recently from Asia, who brought with them spices, garlic and a variety of recipes. Fresh local produce and seafood (no longer coated in heavy batter) are being served almost everywhere. Types of seafood to try include crayfish (lobster), prawns, Sydney rock oysters (raw with a touch of lemon and black pepper), Moreton Bay bugs (a type of lobster), coral trout, coral cod, barramundi (wrapped in plantain leaves), bream, trevally, Tasmanian salmon, mud crabs, mussels and scallops.

The once-maligned "bush tucker" (a stew made of native specialties) has been transformed into native bush-food specialties and is occasionally featured on upmarket menus in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, where there are a handful of bush-food restaurants. Offerings may include crocodile, buffalo, kangaroo, *witchetty* grubs (large white insects), emu, damper (campfire-cooked bread) and desserts flavored with wattleseed.

Do try Vegemite, a yeast spread that has the same standing that peanut butter has in North American cuisine. But it's best to start with a small taste (and we mean *small*).

You'll still find a definite British influence in the heart of blue-collar Australia, however. Steaks (beef), chops (lamb) and snags (sausages) are popular and often cooked on a "barbie" (barbecue grill). The national dish remains the meat pie, a pastry shaped like a small pie and filled with mysterious meat in a dark gravy. (It is best eaten with "tomato sauce," which is Australian for ketchup.)

The two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, have the widest choice of restaurants and some of the best restaurants. Other good restaurants can be found in the wine-growing regions.

Beer still reigns as the national beverage. Every state has its name-brand beer (Swan Lager in Western Australia, Tooheys in New South Wales, XXXX ("fourx") in Queensland, Boags and Cascade in Tasmania) and its loyal drinkers. More recently, boutique breweries such as James Squire and Little Creatures have become more popular. Most beers have an alcohol content of between 3.5% and 5%.

While Australians have a reputation as a nation of beer lovers, wine, once called "plonk," has mounted a strong challenge to beer. So much so, in fact, that today Australia is the fourth-largest wine exporter in the world, sending more than 88 million gallons a year to countries that include traditional Old World wine producers such as France and Italy. Wines from the Hunter Valley, Mudgee, Barossa Valley, Yarra Valley and Swan River Valley are very good, sometimes great. You'll find all the familiar varieties.

ETIQUETTE

Australians view their country as a land of equals, and they dislike pretense. Business interactions tend to be more successful when they tread the fine line between being direct and being overly assertive.

Appointments—Schedule meetings as far in advance as you can, although Australians will often agree to a meeting on relatively short notice. Unannounced visits are not welcome, however. You may find that there are relatively few barriers to meeting officers at the higher levels of a company. Punctuality is expected.

Personal Introductions—A firm handshake is the norm. Women may or may not shake hands; wait to see if she offers her hand. Use your own prerogative about handshakes if you're a woman visiting the country. "Hello" and "How are you?" are appropriate greetings. Use titles and last names until instructed to do otherwise. Don't expect "Australian" to sound like North American English or even the Queen's English.

Negotiating—Some small talk is expected, but business generally comes to the fore quickly. Be brief and to the point, and try to avoid overselling your position. Modesty and self-deprecation tend to get better results than brash behavior. In fact, high-pressure tactics can kill a deal in short order.

Business Entertaining—Follow your host's lead on whether to speak of business during social occasions. If you visit a pub, don't miss your turn to buy a round of drinks.

Body Language—Physical gestures and posture should be kept conservative. Personal space is important, and touching is reserved for close acquaintances.

Gift Giving—Take a small gift, such as flowers, wine or chocolates, when going to the home of an acquaintance. Gift-giving in business is not necessary or expected, but it is appreciated.

Conversation—Social discussions can often turn into informal debates. Don't be afraid to express yourself, but do be diplomatic. It's usually best to ask questions rather than to state opinions during your first encounters. The treatment of Aborigines in Australia is a sensitive subject and one you might better avoid, especially in initial conversations.

Other Information—Australians become informal quite quickly—a trait they share with people from the U.S. It's not unusual to be called "mate" by someone you hardly know.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Australia is generally a safe place to visit. Crime is minimal even in the big cities, but take the usual precautions—secure your valuables and passport and don't leave your belongings unattended at the beach. Traveling and camping with a group in the more remote parts of the Outback are safer than traveling alone. Alice Springs and Coober Pedy have a slightly higher crime rate than the rest of Australia. Use common sense and don't wander around by yourself after dark, especially if you're female.

Be aware that Australia's laws are very intolerant of the use of recreational drugs. Marijuana, cocaine, heroin, crack, ecstasy and designer drugs are illegal, and the law is enforced at every opportunity. Sydney's airport has antidrug measures in place; some flights may be randomly and thoroughly inspected. Australia's drunk driving laws are particularly strict. Don't even think about getting behind the wheel if you've had too much to drink.

For more information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

HEALTH

The sun is the biggest health concern in Australia, which has the world's highest incidence of skin cancer. Be sure to apply plenty of sunscreen and wear a hat when you're at the beach or hiking. Always carry plenty of water and take along insect repellent. Generally, health and sanitation standards in Australia are equal to those in North

America and Europe. Drugstores carry familiar brand-name medicines, and some are open 24 hours and provide delivery service.

Australia has an excellent healthcare system. Out-of-pocket costs are modest and access to emergency care is good. There are both private and public hospitals, with public hospitals jointly funded by federal and state governments and managed on the state level, whereas private hospitals are run as businesses within the private sector.

The public health-care system in Australia is known as Medicare. Instituted in 1984, the universal system ensures that all Australians have access to free or low-cost medical, optometric and hospital care regardless of their income. Travelers from Finland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom are entitled to free reciprocal Medicare assistance for medically necessary treatments during their stay. No reciprocal agreement covers private hospitals.

Larger hotels will have a doctor on call, and there are emergency departments at hospitals in major towns and cities.

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

DOS & DON'TS

Do visit a pub. The people are friendly, and you can usually get a good, inexpensive pub lunch. You'll likely see poker machines adjacent to the bars or eating areas.

Don't think you can see it all in a week. Australia is approximately the same size as the continental U.S.

Do visit sporting clubs (motor, rugby or soccer) that allow nonmembers to sign in. You can enjoy an inexpensive, high-quality lunch or dinner and entertainment on the weekends.

Don't put on airs as if you think you are better than an Australian—there is an expectation of equality, even if it is not entirely realistic.

Don't be surprised by what people wear (or don't wear) on the beaches.

Do have at least one meal in a beach cafe and watch Australia's beach culture in action.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: Citizens of Canada and the U.S. need passports and an Electronic Travel Authority (ETA), which substitutes for a visa. The ETA is free and available through travel agents and airlines. (Most people get their ETA on the inbound flight.) Contact the nearest Australian embassy for more information. Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier before departure.

Population: 21,766,711.

Languages: English (official) and Aboriginal languages.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Anglican, Roman Catholic).

Time Zone: 8-10 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+8 through +10 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is observed in some states from the first Sunday in October to the first Sunday in April.

Voltage Requirements: 220 volts. Most travelers will need an adaptor because the Australian three-prong plug is different from those in most countries.

Telephone Codes: 61, country code;

Currency Exchange

Australia's currency is the Australian dollar, composed of 100 cents. Notes include A\$100, A\$50, A\$20, A\$10 and A\$5. Each note is a different color and size, making each easy to recognize. Coins include A\$2, A\$1, A\$0.50, A\$0.20, A\$0.10 and A\$0.5. Although prices are sometimes labeled with single cents, there are no pennies in circulation and prices are rounded at the till. The Australian dollar is relatively stable. Traveler's checks and foreign currency can be exchanged at all major banks, such as the Commonwealth, National (NAB) or Westpac, as well as at money-exchange kiosks such as Thomas Cook and Travelex.

Major credit cards, including Visa and MasterCard, are widely accepted in hotels and restaurants around the country. EFTPOS is Australia's equivalent of Interac services, allowing you to pay by (local) bank card or credit card. EFTPOS is found at most stores and restaurants. ATMs are situated at convenient locations throughout cities, and more and more often in remote service stations.

Taxes

A 10% goods-and-services tax is applied to most consumer items including hotel accommodation (with the exception of unprocessed foods), and it's almost always included in the stated price. A Tourist Refund Scheme allows for a tax refund on items with a value of A\$300 or more that are carried in hand luggage. The items must be purchased from a single store no more than 30 days before departure, and you must present the original tax invoice. The refund applies only to goods that you wear or carry as hand luggage (unless prohibited by current security regulations). There are TRS booths at the Sydney airport, on the departures level after customs.

Tipping

Tipping traditionally is not required in restaurants or taxis, but the practice is changing. Most Australians tip around 10% of the total bill for good service at a restaurant. Everyone you meet may have a different opinion on the subject, so use your own judgment.

Weather

Australian seasons are the opposite of those in the Northern Hemisphere—when it's summer in the north, it's winter south of the equator (Australian winters are fairly mild but a bit rainy). Our favorite months are October and April, though September-May is all right in most parts of the country. December-February are the hottest months, July and August the coldest.

The Great Barrier Reef is best visited June-October: there's low rainfall, the temperature is comfortable during the day, and the water visibility on the reefs is at its best. Cyclones can disrupt sightseeing plans November-April and dangerous marine stingers congregate in the waters of the far north November-May.

Take a sweater, no matter when or where you're going.

What to Wear

If you're going to Australia on business, take formal attire: suits for men and skirt suits or business dresses worn with high heels (not flats) for women. Dress may be slightly more relaxed in hotter, tropical cities.

If you are going for pleasure only, take (surf)board shorts, singlets (tank tops) and thongs (flip-flops) for the beach, or jeans/long cotton pants, T-shirts and shoes that you can walk in for sightseeing. Throw in a few smart-casual outfits and a light sweater or jacket for the evenings.

Telephone

Local calls cost A\$0.40 from public phones, and there's no time limit. Most phones accept both coins and phone cards, but some accept only cards. You can purchase phone cards at newsstands, post offices and many hotels. International calling cards are a good option for travelers as they can typically be used in hotels and with public phones.

The availability of pay phones in areas outside major cities has decreased. The most likely places to find them are outside major post offices, in gas stations and at shopping malls.

The area code (such as 02 for Sydney or 03 for Melbourne) does not have to be used if making a local call within the same city. For interstate calls, the area code is required. For intrastate calls to smaller towns, include the area code if in doubt.

Australia has good cell-phone coverage in metropolitan areas, but the network uses the European GSM 900 and 1800 standard and is generally not compatible with American or Japanese systems. It is possible to purchase a pre-paid SIM card on arrival in Australia, which, together with a tri-band unlocked GSM cell phone, will allow you to have a local phone number and make calls at local rates. The most popular service providers are Telstra (<http://www.telstra.com.au>); Optus (<http://www.optus.com.au>); Virgin Mobile (<http://www.virginmobile.com.au>); and 3 (<http://www.three.com.au>).

Internet Access

Internet and Wi-Fi availability in Australia varies widely with geographic location. Availability is subject to change in the future as the government comes under pressure to improve services. Costs vary.

Internet and telecommunication centers can be found throughout metropolitan areas. Outside major centers of population, Internet access may be very slow or be available only via satellite or at limited locations.

Wi-Fi services are available in most major hotels around the country and selected shops and cafes in central

business districts. Telstra has expanded its network of wireless hot spots to hundreds of locations across the country. Hot spot locations are also available at selected hotels, Starbucks, McDonalds and Qantas Club Lounges across Australia.

Mail & Package Services

Australia Post offers reliable services at a reasonable cost. Services include Express Courier International, which has an online tracking facility. For details and postage calculators visit <http://www.auspost.com.au>.

For international courier services your best bet is DHL, which has offices in all capitals and major cities around the country. <http://www.dhl.com.au>.

Newspapers & Magazines

Daily newspapers *The Australian* (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au>) and *The Australian Financial Review* (<http://www.afr.com>) are available from newsstands and hotels. Each state also has regional newspapers, including *The Sydney Morning Herald* (<http://www.smh.com.au>) and Melbourne's *The Age* (<http://www.theage.com.au>).

Business journals include *Business Review Weekly* (<http://www.brw.com.au>) and *Time Australia*. Daily and weekly international newspapers are also available from newsstands.

For entertainment listings, you can't beat <http://www.liveguide.com.au>. This handy online guide provides a comprehensive "what's on" listing for music, arts, theater, sports and entertainment events around the country. The weekly arts guide in *The Australian* is also useful, as are the entertainment sections of the major daily newspapers in each state. *Where Magazines Australia* produces visitor publications that are distributed through hotels and information centers in Sydney and Melbourne. <http://www.wheremagazines.com.au>.

You can pick up a copy of *The Big Issue* in most major cities (<http://www.bigissue.org.au>). Proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to the vendors, most of whom are usually homeless people in need of an income.

Transportation

Most international airlines offer service to Australia's major cities. Sydney's Kingford Smith International Airport (SYD), which is 6 mi/10 km southwest of the city, is the country's primary gateway, but international flights also arrive at Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Cairns. Because of the long distances between various parts of the country, the best way to get around is by air—unless you are staying for several weeks or more.

Several airlines offer air passes that allow visitors to stop at several cities for much less than the price of individual tickets. These passes often are sold only overseas (check with your travel agent for more information).

Good rail and bus services also are available, but be aware that travel times are lengthy. The famous *Indian-Pacific* train from Sydney to Perth takes about 65 hours (less if you depart from Adelaide). Other trains include the *Queenslander* (the Cairns-Brisbane run is 32 hours) and the *Ghan* (22 hours between Adelaide and Alice Springs and 43 hours between Adelaide and Darwin). Major bus companies include Firefly Express (between Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne only) and McCafferty's, which took over Greyhound a few years ago to form one major company, often called McCafferty's/Greyhound or Greyhound Australia (<http://www.greyhound.com.au>). Tickets are interchangeable. Bus and rail passes that allow unlimited travel within certain time frames are available.

Because of Australia's size, escorted and hosted tours offer an efficient way to cover a lot of ground. And tours are plentiful—you can spend several days with a group camping in Kakadu National Park, explore the Outback as part of a camel train or cruise the Great Barrier Reef on a sleep-aboard dive boat. If you prefer independent travel, you can always rent a car or a camper van, or you can even charter your own sailboat.

Public transportation within the country's big cities is generally excellent. Some cities have special passes for visitors. The SydneyPass, for example, allows you to visit most attractions using public buses, subway trains and ferries (and you'll definitely want to take a ferry across Sydney's magnificent harbor to one of the outlying beach suburbs or to the zoo).

The legal driving age is 17, although this is under review in some states. To operate a car in Australia, you must carry a valid license (in English) and only drive the same class of vehicle for which your license applies. To rent a car you must be at least 21 years old. For drivers younger than 25, there is usually a young driver surcharge.

For More Information

Tourist Offices

Canada: Tourism Australia, 1920 Yonge St., Suite 272, Toronto, Ontario M4S 3E2. Phone 416-572-7708.

U.K.: Tourism Australia, Australia Centre, Australia House, Sixth Floor, Melbourne Place, The Strand, London WC2B 4LG. Phone 020-7438-4601. Fax 020-7240-6690.

U.S.: Tourism Australia, 6100 Center Drive, Suite 1150, Los Angeles, CA 90045. Phone 310-695-3200. Fax 310-695-3201.

Australia Embassies

Canada: Australia High Commission, Suite 710, 50 O'Connor St., Seventh Floor, Ottawa, ON K1P 6L2. Phone 613-236-0841. Fax 613-216-1321. <http://www.canada.embassy.gov.au>. There are consulates in Toronto and Vancouver.

U.K.: Australia High Commission, Australia House, The Strand, London WC2B 4LA. Phone 020-7379-4334. Fax 020-7240-5333. <http://www.uk.embassy.gov.au>. There is an Australian Honorary Consul in Edinburgh.

U.S.: Embassy of Australia, 1601 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20036-2273. Phone 202-797-3000. Fax 202-797-3168. <http://www.usa.embassy.gov.au>. There are consulates in Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco. For queries on Australian visa, immigration and citizenship issues, contact the Visa and Citizenship Information Service. Phone 613-216-7603. <http://www.immi.gov.au/contacts/forms/americas>.

Embassies in Australia

Canadian High Commission, Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600. Phone 02-6270-4000. Fax 02-6270-4081. <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca>. There are consulates in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

British High Commission, Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600. Phone 02-6270-6666. Fax 02-6273-3236. <http://ukinaustralia.fco.gov.uk>. There are consulates in Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

U.S. Embassy, Moonah Place, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600. Phone 02-6214-5600. <http://canberra.usembassy.gov>. There are consulates in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

Recommended Guidebooks

Australia: The Outdoor Traveler's Guide by Gerry Ellis and Sharon Cohen (Stewart, Tabori & Chang).

Stepping Lightly on Australia: A Traveller's Guide to Ecotourism by Shirley LaPlanche (Globe Pequot).

Sydney's Best Bush, Park and City Walks by Veechi Stuart (Woodslane).

Additional Reading

The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes (Knopf). A superb history of the founding of Australia.

Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Aboriginal Australia by Geoffrey Blainey (Overlook Press).

Kakadu, Looking After the Country—The Gagudju Way by Stanley Breeden and Belinda Wright (Prentice Hall). Provides good insight into Aboriginal history and culture.

The Songlines by Bruce Chatwin (Viking-Penguin). A semifictional journey into the world of the Aborigines and a meditation on the meaning of Dreamtime, the Aboriginal creation myth.

In a Sunburned Country by Bill Bryson (Broadway). Published in Australia under the title *Down Under*, this is a hilarious look at Australia seen through the eyes of this popular U.S. travel writer.

The True History of the Kelly Gang by Peter Carey (Vintage). Tells the story of Australia's most legendary outlaw, Ned Kelly, through a daring novel, steeped in the colonial history of late-19th-century Australia.

The Playmaker by Thomas Keneally (Touchstone). This story by the Australian-born author of *Schindler's List* offers brilliant insight into the early life of convicts in Australia's first penal colony, Sydney Cove, as they prepare to put on the colony's first play in 1789.

A Commonwealth of Thieves: The Improbable Birth of Australia by Thomas Keneally (Anchor).

Gurrumul, His Life and Music by Robert Hillman (Harper Collins). A biography of Australia's greatest living Aboriginal musician, Australia's Stevie Wonder.