

# Australia

In **land** area, Australia is the sixth largest country after Russia, Canada, China, the United States of America and Brazil. It has, however, a relatively small population.

Australia is the largest island and the smallest, flattest continent on Earth. Much of the centre of Australia is flat, but there are numerous ranges (e.g. Macdonnells, Musgrave) and some individual mountains of which Uluru (Ayers Rock) is probably the best known.

The land area of Australia is almost as great as that of the United States of America (excluding Alaska), about 50% greater than Europe (excluding the former USSR) and 32 times greater than the United Kingdom.

The highest point on the mainland, Mount Kosciuszko, is only 2228 metres. Great Dividing Range is the mountainous area on the East of Australia.

The state of Tasmania includes numerous small islands and extends to Macquarie Island which lies approximately 1,470 km south east of the main island. The territories of Australia include the Australian Antarctic Territory, Christmas Island, the Cocos Islands, Heard Island, the McDonald Islands, Norfolk Island, the Coral Sea Islands, Ashmore Island, and Cartier Island. In total there are some 12,000 islands.

Australia is the driest inhabited continent on earth. **The climate** of Australia is extremely dry inland with more temperate conditions along the coast. Its interior has one of the lowest rainfalls in the world and about three-quarters of the land is arid or semi-arid.

## **History**

Before the arrival of European settlers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited most areas of the Australian continent.

The first recorded European contact with Australia was in March 1606, when Dutch explorer Willem Janszoon charted the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland. Over the next two centuries, European explorers and traders continued to map the coastline of Australia, then known as New Holland. In 1770, Captain James Cook, aboard the ship Endeavour, sailed to the South Pacific in order to map the east coast of Australia and claim it for the British Crown.

Britain decided to use its new outpost as a penal colony; the First Fleet of 11 ships carried about 1500 people—half of them convicts. The fleet arrived in Sydney Harbour on 26 January 1788, and it is on this day every year that Australia Day is celebrated.

**The Commonwealth of Australia** was formed in 1901 through the federation of six states under a single constitution. The non-Indigenous population at the time of Federation was 3.8 million. Half of these lived in cities, three-quarters were born in Australia, and the majority were of English, Scottish or Irish descent.

Commonwealth of Australia consists of six States and two Territories. The states are New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. The territories are the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory.

The largest State, Western Australia, is about the same size as Western Europe.

Australia has a Federal Government, six State Governments and two Territories which are largely self-governing. Governor-General represents Queen Elizabeth II of England (also the Queen of Australia),

**The capital** is Canberra, but Sydney is the biggest city with 4.2 million people.

Australia was originally inhabited by Aboriginal tribes. In 1770, Captain Cook claimed the land for Great Britain. In 1788, the first colony was established in New South Wales. Most of the colonists were convicted criminals from Great Britain. Gold was discovered soon thereafter and Australia became a destination for immigrants seeking fortune and a new start in life.

**People** in Australia are called "Australians." The country has a population of just over 20 million, and the population is growing at a rate of 1.1 percent a year. Australians ethnicity is 92 percent European, 6 percent Asian and 2 percent Aboriginal (The final estimated resident Indigenous population of Australia as at 30 June 2006 was 517,000 people, or 2.5% of the total Australian population. )

The greatest population centres are Sydney and Melbourne.

About 70 per cent of the population live in the 10 largest cities. Most of the population is concentrated along the eastern seaboard and the south-eastern corner of the continent.

Today Australia is one of the most cosmopolitan and dynamic societies in the world. Over 200 languages are spoken, with English the common language. Immigration is an important feature of Australian society. Since 1945, over six million people from 200 countries have come to Australia as new settlers. Migrants have made a major contribution to shaping modern Australia. People born overseas make up almost one quarter of the total population.

**Stolen generation:** Approximately 100,000 Aborigines (living and dead) made up Australia's so-called Stolen Generation. It was a policy of "stealing" Aboriginal children, mostly those with some white blood, removing them from their families in an effort to "civilize" them by assimilation into white society. Under this government policy that ran from 1910 to, unbelievably, 1971, as many as 1 in 10 of all Aboriginal children were assimilated into white society. Most were raised in Church or state institutions. Some were fostered or adopted by white parents. Many suffered physical and sexual abuse. Food and living conditions were poor. They received little education, and were expected to go into domestic and farming work. Speaking their languages and practising their ceremonies was forbidden

On 13 February 2008, the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Parliament. This day, when the government said "Sorry-the national apology", is a great day in Australian history. It sent a message to Indigenous Australians that the government, on behalf of the nation, understood the suffering that had been caused to Indigenous people of Australia.

### **Economy**

Australia has had one of the most outstanding economies of the world in recent years. As a high-growth, low-inflation, low interest rate economy, it is more vibrant than ever before. There is an efficient government sector, a flexible labour market and a very competitive business sector.

With its abundant physical resources, Australia has enjoyed a high standard of living since the nineteenth century. It has made a comparatively large investment in social infrastructure, including education, training, health and transport.

The Australian workforce has seen many improvements over the last decade, leading to the surge in productivity in the 1990s. The complex and centralised award based industrial relations system has given way to a more decentralised one with many employees working under workplace agreements tailored to meet enterprise needs.

### **Interesting places**

The first European settlement was founded in the state of New South Wales. One third of all Australian population live in this state which occupies ten per cent of Australia's land mass.

The Blue Mountains is a favourite tourist destination, only 70 km from Sydney. They are called blue because the forests of eucalyptus evaporate eucalyptus oil from the tree leaves under the sunlight.

There are 540 National Parks in Australia. Very famous Kakadu NP in the Northern Territory attracts lots of tourists every year.