

History

INTRUDERS ARRIVE

By sunrise the storm had passed. Zachary Hicks was keeping sleepy watch on the British ship *Endeavour* when suddenly he was wide awake. He summoned his captain, James Cook, who climbed into the brisk morning air to a miraculous sight. Ahead of them lay an uncharted country of wooded hills and gentle valleys. It was 19 April 1770. In the coming days Cook began to draw the first European map of Australia's eastern coast. He was mapping the end of Aboriginal supremacy.

Two weeks later Cook led a party of men onto a narrow beach. As they waded ashore, two Aboriginal men stepped onto the sand, and challenged the intruders with spears. Cook drove the men off with musket fire. For the rest of that week, the Aborigines and the intruders watched each other warily.

Cook's ship *Endeavour* was a floating annexe of London's leading scientific organisation, the Royal Society. The ship's gentlemen passengers included technical artists, scientists, an astronomer and a wealthy botanist named Joseph Banks. As Banks and his colleagues strode about the Aborigines' territory, they were delighted by the mass of new plants they collected. (The showy banksia flowers, which look like red, white or golden bottlebrushes, are named after Banks.)

The local Aborigines called the place Kurnell, but Cook gave it a foreign name: he called it 'Botany Bay'. The fertile eastern coastline of Australia is now festooned with Cook's place names – including Point Hicks, Hervey Bay (after an English admiral), Endeavour River and Point Solander (after one of the *Endeavour's* scientists).

When the *Endeavour* reached the northern tip of Cape York, blue ocean opened up to the west. Cook and his men could smell the sea-route home. And on a small, hilly island ('Possession Island'), Cook raised the Union Jack. Amid volleys of gunfire, he claimed the eastern half of the continent for King George III.

Cook's intention was not to steal land from the Aborigines. In fact he rather idealised them: 'They are far more happier than we Europeans', he wrote. 'They think themselves provided with all the necessaries of Life and that they have no superfluities.' At most, his patriotic ceremony was intended to contain the territorial ambitions of the French, and of the Dutch, who had visited and mapped much of the western and southern coast over the previous two centuries. Indeed, Cook knew the western half of Australia as 'New Holland'.

CONVICT BEGINNINGS

Eighteen years after Cook's arrival, in 1788, the English were back to stay with a fleet of 11 ships, packed with supplies including weapons, tools, building materials and livestock. The ships also contained 751 ragtag convicts, and around 250 soldiers, officials and their wives. This motley 'First Fleet' was under the command of a humane and diligent naval captain, Arthur Phillip. As his orders dictated, Phillip dropped anchor at Botany Bay. But the paradise that had so delighted Joseph Banks filled Phillip with dismay. The country was marshy, there was little healthy water, and the anchorage was exposed to wind and storm. So Phillip left his floating prison and embarked in a small boat to search for a better location. Just a short way up the coast his heart leapt as he sailed into the finest harbour in the world.

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Tasmania's Aborigines were separated from the mainland when sea levels rose after the last Ice Age.

In remote parts of Australia, many older Aborigines still speak their traditional languages rather than English.

The brilliant classic biography of Cook is JC Beaglehole's *The Life of Captain James Cook* (1974). Beaglehole also edited Cook's journals. There are several biographies online, including the excellent http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Cook.

The website www.portarthur.org.au is a vital guide for the visitor to this powerful historical site, where a tragic massacre occurred in 1996.

A likable observer of the settlement was Watkin Tench. His vivid journal is available as *1788* (edited by Tim Flannery).

There, in a small cove, in the idyllic lands of the Eora people, he established a British penal settlement. He renamed the place after the British Home Secretary, Lord Sydney.

The intruders set about clearing the trees and building shelters and were soon trying to grow crops. Phillip's official instructions urged him to colonise the land without doing violence to the local inhabitants. Among the Aborigines he used as intermediaries was an Eora man named Bennelong, who adopted many of the white man's customs and manners. For many years Bennelong lived in a hut on the finger of land now known as Bennelong Point, the site of the Sydney Opera House. But his people were shattered by the loss of their lands. Hundreds died of smallpox, and many of the survivors, including Bennelong himself, succumbed to alcoholism and despair.

So what kind of society were the British trying to create? Robert Hughes' bestseller, *The Fatal Shore* (1987), depicts convict Australia as a terrifying 'Gulag' where the British authorities tormented rebels, vagrants and criminals. But other historians point out that powerful men in London saw transportation as a scheme for giving prisoners a new and useful life. Indeed, under Governor Phillip's authority, many convicts soon earned their 'ticket of leave', a kind of parole which allowed them to live where they wished and to seek work on their own behalf.

But the convict system could also be savage. Women (who were outnumbered five to one) lived under constant threat of sexual exploitation. Female convicts who offended their gaolers languished in the depressing 'female factories'. Male re-offenders were cruelly flogged and could even be hanged for such crimes as stealing.

In 1803 English officers established a second convict settlement in Van Diemen's Land (later called Tasmania). Soon, re-offenders filled the grim prison at Port Arthur (p649) on the beautiful and wild coast near Hobart. Others endured the senseless agonies of Norfolk Island prison (p225) in the remote Pacific.

So miserable were these convict beginnings, that Australians long regarded them as a period of shame. But things have changed: today most white Australians are inclined to brag a little if they find a convict in their family tree. Indeed, Australians annually celebrate the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788, as 'Australia Day'.

FROM SHACKLES TO FREEDOM

At first, Sydney and the smaller colonies depended on supplies brought in by ship. Anxious to develop productive farms, the government granted land to soldiers, officers and settlers. After 30 years of trial and error, the farms began to flourish. The most irascible and ruthless of these new landholders was John Macarthur. Along with his spirited wife Elizabeth, Macarthur pioneered the breeding of merino sheep on his verdant property near Sydney.

Macarthur was also a leading member of the 'Rum Corps', a clique of powerful officers who bullied successive governors (including William Bligh of *Bounty* fame), and grew rich by controlling much of Sydney's trade, notably rum. But its racketeering was ended in 1810 by a tough new governor named Lachlan Macquarie. Macquarie laid out the major roads of modern-day Sydney, built some fine public buildings (many of which were designed by talented convict-architect Francis Greenway) and helped to lay the foundations for a more civil society.

Macquarie also championed the rights of freed convicts, granting them land and appointing several to public office. But Macquarie's tolerance was not shared by the 'Exclusives'. These landholders, middle-class snobs and senior British officials observed a rigid expatriate class system. They shunned

ex-prisoners, and scoffed at the distinctive accent and easy-going manners of these new Australians.

By now, word was reaching England that Australia offered cheap land and plenty of work, and adventurous migrants took to the oceans in search of their fortunes. At the same time the British government continued to transport prisoners.

In 1825 a party of soldiers and convicts established a penal settlement in the territory of the Yuggera people, close to modern-day Brisbane. Before long this warm, fertile region was attracting free settlers, who were soon busy farming, grazing, logging and mining.

TWO NEW SETTLEMENTS: MELBOURNE & ADELAIDE

In the cooler grasslands of Tasmania, the sheep farmers were also thriving, and they too were hungry for more land. In 1835 an ambitious young squatter named John Batman sailed to Port Phillip Bay on the mainland. On the banks of the Yarra River, he chose the location for Melbourne, famously announcing 'This is the place for a village'. Batman then worked a staggering swindle: he persuaded local Aborigines to 'sell' him their traditional lands (a whopping 250,000 hectares) for a crate of blankets, knives and knick-knacks. Back in Sydney, Governor Burke declared the contract void, not because it was unfair, but because the land officially belonged to the British Crown. Burke proved his point by granting Batman some prime acreage near Geelong.

At the same time, a private British company settled Adelaide in South Australia (SA). Proud to have no links with convicts, these God-fearing folks instituted a scheme under which their company sold land to well-heeled settlers, and used the revenue to assist poor British labourers to emigrate. When these worthies earned enough to buy land from the company, that revenue would in turn pay the fare of another shipload of labourers. This charming theory collapsed in a welter of land speculation and bankruptcy, and in 1842 the South Australian company yielded to government administration. By then miners had found rich deposits of silver, lead and copper at Burra, Kapunda and the Mount Lofty Ranges, and the settlement began to pay its way.

THE SEARCH FOR LAND CONTINUES

Each year, settlers pushed deeper into Aboriginal territories in search of pasture and water for their stock. These men became known as squatters (because they 'squatted' on Aboriginal lands) and many held this territory with a gun. To bring order and regulation to the frontier, from the 1830s, the governments permitted the squatters to stay on these 'Crown lands' for payment of a nominal rent. Aboriginal stories tell of white men poisoning traditional water holes during this time, or slaughtering groups of Aborigines in reprisal for the killing of sheep or settlers. Across the country, people also tell stories of black resistance leaders, including Yagan of Swan River, Pemulwuy of Sydney and Jandamarra, the outlaw-hero of the Kimberley.

In time, many of the squatters reached a compromise with local tribes. Aborigines took low-paid jobs on sheep and cattle stations as drovers and domestics. In return they remained on their traditional lands, adapting their cultures to their changing circumstances. This arrangement continued in outback pastoral regions until after WWII.

The newcomers had fantasised about the wonders waiting to be discovered from the moment they arrived. Before explorers crossed the Blue Mountains west of Sydney in 1813, some credulous souls imagined that China lay on the

The level of frontier violence is disputed in the acrimonious and highly political 'history wars', as detailed in Stuart Macintyre's *The History Wars* (2003).

Acclimatisation societies of the 19th century tried to replace the 'inferior' Australian plants and animals with 'superior' European ones. Such cute 'blessings' as rabbits and foxes date from this time.

other side! Then explorers, surveyors and scientists began trading theories about inland Australia. Some spoke of an Australian Mississippi. Others predicted desert. An obsessive explorer named Charles Sturt (there's a fine statue of him looking lost in Adelaide's Victoria Sq; p708) believed in an almost mystical inland sea.

The explorers' expeditions inland were mostly journeys into disappointment. But Australians made heroes of explorers who died in the wilderness (Leichhardt, and the duo of Burke and Wills are the most striking examples). It was as though the Victorian era believed that a nation could not be born until its men had shed their blood in battle – even if that battle was with the land itself.

GOLD & REBELLION

Transportation of convicts to eastern Australia ceased in the 1840s. This was just as well: in 1851 prospectors discovered gold in New South Wales (NSW) and central Victoria. The news hit the colonies with the force of a cyclone. Young men and some adventurous women from every social class headed for the diggings. Soon they were caught up in a great rush of prospectors, entertainers, publicans, sly-groggers (illicit liquor-sellers), prostitutes and quacks from overseas. In Victoria, the British governor was alarmed – both by the way the Victorian class system had been thrown into disarray, and by the need to finance law and order on the goldfields. His solution was to compel all miners to buy an expensive monthly licence, in the hope that the lower orders would return to their duties in town.

But the lure of gold was too great. In the reckless excitement of the goldfields, the miners initially endured the thuggish troopers who enforced the government licence. After three years, however, the easy gold at Ballarat was gone, and miners were toiling in deep, water-sodden shafts. They were now infuriated by a corrupt and brutal system of law which held them in contempt. Under the leadership of a charismatic Irishman named Peter Lalor, they raised their own flag, the Southern Cross, and swore to defend their rights and liberties. They armed themselves and gathered inside a rough stockade at Eureka, where they waited for the government to make its move.

In the predawn of Sunday 3 December 1854, a force of troopers attacked the stockade. In 15 terrifying minutes, they slaughtered 30 miners and lost five soldiers. But democracy was in the air and public opinion sided with the miners. When 13 of the rebels were tried for their lives, Melbourne juries set them free. Many Australians have found a kind of splendour in these events: the story of the Eureka Stockade is often told as a battle for nationhood and democracy – again illustrating the notion that any 'true' nation must be born out of blood. But these killings were tragically unnecessary. The eastern colonies were already in the process of establishing democratic parliaments, with the full support of the British authorities. In the 1880s Peter Lalor himself became Speaker of the Victorian parliament.

The gold rush had also attracted boatloads of prospectors from China. These Asians endured serious hostility from whites, and were the victims of ugly race riots on the goldfields at Lambing Flat (now called Young) in NSW in 1860–61. Chinese precincts soon developed in the backstreets of Sydney and Melbourne, and popular literature indulged in tales of Chinese opium dens, dingy gambling parlours and brothels. But many Chinese went on to establish themselves in business and, particularly, in market gardening. Today the busy Chinatowns of the capital cities and the presence of Chinese restaurants in towns across the country are reminders of the vigorous role of the Chinese in Australia since the 1850s.

The Goldfields of Victoria website, www.goldfields.org.au, is a fabulous tourist guide. The key attraction is Sovereign Hill at Ballarat.

There's a good Chinese museum in Melbourne; see www.chinesemuseum.com.au.

Gold and wool brought immense investment and gusto to Melbourne and Sydney. By the 1880s they were stylish modern cities, with gaslights in the streets, railways, electricity and that great new invention, the telegraph. In fact, the southern capital became known as 'Marvellous Melbourne', so opulent were its theatres, hotels, galleries and fashions. But the economy was overheating. Many politicians and speculators were engaged in corrupt land deals, while investors poured money into wild and fanciful ventures. It could not last.

MEANWHILE, IN THE WEST...

Western Australia (WA) lagged behind the eastern colonies by about 50 years. Though Perth was settled by genteel colonists back in 1829, their material progress was handicapped by isolation, Aboriginal resistance and the arid climate. It was not until the 1880s that the discovery of remote goldfields promised to gild the fortunes of the isolated colony. At the time, the west was just entering its own period of self-government, and its first premier was a forceful, weather-beaten explorer named John Forrest. He saw that the mining industry would die if the government did not provide a first-class harbour, efficient railways and reliable water supplies. Ignoring the threats of private contractors, he appointed the brilliant engineer CY O'Connor to design and build each of these as government projects. O'Connor's final scheme was a 560km pipeline and a series of mighty pumping stations that would drive water uphill from the coast to the dry goldfields round Kalgoorlie (p931). As the work neared completion, O'Connor was subjected to merciless slander in the capitalist press. In 1902 the tormented man rode into the surf at South Fremantle and shot himself. A lonely statue in the waves marks the spot. His great pipeline continues to pump water into the thirsty gold cities of central WA.

Exploration inspired Patrick White's *Voss* (1957), revered by some as the great Australian novel.

GROWING NATIONALISM

By the end of the 19th century, Australian nationalists tended to idealise 'the bush' and its people. The great forum for this 'bush nationalism' was the massively popular *Bulletin* magazine. Its politics were egalitarian, democratic and republican, and its pages were filled with humour and sentiment about daily life, written by a swag of writers, most notably Henry Lawson and 'Banjo' Paterson.

Central to the *Bulletin's* ethos was the idea of 'mateship'. At its most attractive, mateship was a sense of brotherhood reinforced by a profound egalitarianism. But there was also a deeply chauvinistic side to mateship. This was represented in the pages of the *Bulletin*, where cartoons and stories often portrayed women as sexy maidens or nagging wives. It parodied Aborigines as amiable simpletons and it represented the Chinese as goofballs or schemers. A more bruised and knowing account of women and the bush appeared in the short stories of Barbara Baynton.

The 1890s were also a time of great trauma. As the speculative boom came crashing down, unemployment and hunger dealt cruelly with working-class families in the eastern states. However, Australian workers had developed a fierce sense that they were entitled to share in the country's prosperity. As the depression deepened, trade unions became more militant in their defence of workers' rights. At the same time, activists intent on winning legal reform established the Australian Labor Party.

Some people feared that the nation was about to descend into revolution. But there was a broad liberal consensus in Australia that took democracy and fairness for granted. So the new century was ushered in, not with bombs, but with fireworks.

NATIONHOOD

On 1 January 1901 Australia became a federation. When the bewildered members of the new national parliament met in Melbourne, their first aim was to protect the identity and values of a European Australia from an influx of Asians and Pacific Islanders. Their solution was a law which became known as the White Australia Policy. It became a racial tenet of faith in Australia for the next 70 years.

For those whites who were welcome to live here, this was to be a model society, nestled in the skirts of the British Empire. Just one year later, white women won the right to vote in federal elections. In a series of radical innovations, the government introduced a broad social welfare scheme and it protected Australian wage levels with import tariffs. Its radical mixture of capitalist dynamism and socialist compassion became known as the ‘Australian settlement’.

Meanwhile, most Australians lived on the coastal ‘edge’ of the continent. So forbidding was the arid, desolate inland, that they called the great dry Lake Eyre ‘the Dead Heart’ of the country. It was a grim image – as if the heart muscle, which should pump the water of life through inland Australia, was dead. But one prime minister in particular, the dapper Alfred Deakin, dismissed such talk. He led the ‘boosters’ who were determined to triumph over this tyranny of the climate. Even before Federation, in the 1880s, Deakin championed irrigated farming on the Murray River at Mildura. Soon the district was green with grapevines and orchards. Today, this massively productive region is facing an ecological crisis as the Murray River struggles to meet the great demands made upon its waters; see the boxed text on p762 for more information.

ENTERING THE WORLD STAGE

Living on the edge of a dry and forbidding land, and isolated from the rest of the world, most Australians took comfort in the knowledge that they were a dominion of the British Empire. When war broke out in Europe in 1914, thousands of Australian men rallied to the Empire’s call. They had their first taste of death on 25 April 1915, when the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (the Anzacs) joined thousands of other British and French troops in an assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. It was eight months before the British commanders acknowledged that the tactic had failed. By then 8141 young Australians were dead. Soon the Australian Imperial Force was fighting in the killing fields of Europe. By the time the war ended, 60,000 Australian men had been slaughtered. Ever since, on 25 April, Australians have gathered at war memorials around the country for the sad and solemn services of Anzac Day.

In the 1920s Australia embarked on a decade of chaotic change. Cars began to rival horses on the highway. In the new cinemas, young Australians enjoyed American movies. In an atmosphere of sexual freedom not equalled until the 1960s, young people partied and danced to American jazz. At the same time, popular enthusiasm for the British Empire grew more intense – as if Imperial fervour were an antidote to grief. As radicals and reactionaries clashed, Australia careered wildly through the 1920s until it collapsed into the abyss of the Great Depression in 1929. World prices for wheat and wool plunged. Unemployment brought its shame and misery to one in three households. Once again working people experienced the cruelty of a system which treated them as expendable. For those who were wealthy – or who had jobs – the Depression was hardly noticed. In fact, the extreme deflation of the economy actually meant that the purchasing power of their wages was enhanced.

For more on the painters and writers of the colonial bush legend, see www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/bush.

In the midst of the hardship, sport brought escape to a nation in love with games and gambling. A powerful chestnut horse called Phar Lap won race after race, culminating in an effortless and graceful victory in the 1930 Melbourne Cup (which is still known as ‘the race that stops a nation’). In 1932 the great horse travelled to the racetracks of America, where he mysteriously died. In Australia, the gossips insisted that the horse had been poisoned by envious Americans. And the legend grew of a sporting hero cut down in his prime. Phar Lap was stuffed and is a revered exhibit at the Melbourne Museum.

The year 1932 saw accusations of treachery on the cricket field. The English team, under their captain Douglas Jardine, employed a violent new bowling tactic known as ‘body-line’. His aim was to unnerve Australia’s star batsman, the devastatingly efficient Donald Bradman. The bitterness of the tour provoked a diplomatic crisis with Britain, and became part of Australian legend. And Bradman batted on. When he retired in 1949 he had an unsurpassed career average of 99.94 runs.

WAR WITH JAPAN

After 1933 the economy began to recover. The whirl of daily life was hardly dampened when Hitler hurled Europe into a new war in 1939. Though Australians had long feared Japan, they took it for granted that the British navy would keep them safe. In December 1941, Japan bombed the US Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Weeks later the ‘impregnable’ British naval base in Singapore crumbled, and before long thousands of Australians and other Allied troops were enduring the savagery of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

As the Japanese swept through Southeast Asia and into Papua New Guinea, the British announced that they could not spare any resources to defend Australia. But the legendary US commander General Douglas MacArthur saw that Australia was the perfect base for American operations in the Pacific. In a series of savage battles on sea and land, Allied forces gradually turned back the Japanese advance. Importantly, it was the USA, not the British Empire, who saved Australia. The days of the British alliance were numbered.

VISIONARY PEACE

When WWII ended, a new slogan rang through the land: ‘Populate or Perish!’ The Australian government embarked on an ambitious scheme to attract thousands of immigrants. With government assistance, people flocked from Britain and from non-English speaking countries. They included Greeks, Italians, Slavs, Serbs, Croatians, Dutch and Poles, followed by Turks, Lebanese and many others. These ‘new Australians’ were expected to assimilate into a suburban stereotype known as the ‘Australian way of life’.

This was the great era of the ‘nuclear family’, in which Australians basked in the prosperity of a ‘Long Boom’. Many migrants found jobs in the growing manufacturing sector, under which companies like General Motors and Ford operated with generous tariff support. In addition, the government embarked on audacious public works schemes, notably the mighty Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme in the mountains near Canberra. Today, environmentalists point out the devastation caused by this huge network of tunnels, dams and power stations. But the Snowy scheme was a great expression of optimism and testifies to the cooperation among the men of many nations who laboured on the project. At the same time, there was growing world demand for Australia’s primary products: metals, wool, meat and wheat. In time Australia would even become a major exporter of rice to Japan.

This era of growth and prosperity was dominated by Robert Menzies, the founder of the modern Liberal Party and Australia’s longest-serving prime

Don’t miss Phar Lap himself. This stuffed horse is a seriously odd spectacle. The legend is explored at www.museum.vic.gov.au/pharlap.

The most accessible version of the Anzac legend is Peter Weir’s Australian epic film *Gallipoli* (1981), with a cast that includes a young Mel Gibson.

A wonderful novel set in wartime Brisbane is *Johnno* (1975) by David Malouf, one of Australia’s best writers.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORY: OUR COLLECTIVE CULTURES AND HOPEFUL FUTURES *Steve Kinnane*

From inner city Aboriginal communities in every major Australian capital city, through to rural and remote communities and the islands of the Torres Strait, what binds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is our sense of belonging and respective obligations to our homelands.

We number only 458,520 people, or 2.4% of the Australian population as at 2001. We comprise over 250 languages and our spiritual and cultural practices have been bound to this country for over 40,000 years. Yet, we have only been officially counted as citizens of this Australia since the 1967 Referendum granted indigenous people the right to vote; a period of forty years.

From the official landing of the British at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788 in the lands of the Eora people, indigenous resistance became a common response to the continuing colonial encroachment upon indigenous lands and waters. This invasion and resistance was played out across the nation as Europeans expanded ever further into Aboriginal territories.

Having survived the worst elements of increasing government control and worsening living conditions, indigenous political groups began to form throughout the nation during the 1920s and 1930s. Having suffered under segregation policies, the core aim of many of these groups was equal rights with the majority of the Australian population. On 26 January 1938 (the 150th anniversary of Australia Day), the National Day of Mourning was launched by the Aborigines Progress Association. The national Day of Mourning made clear this statement:

We, representing THE ABORIGINES OF AUSTRALIA, assembled in Conference at the Australian Hall, Sydney, on the 26th day of January, 1938, this being the 150th Anniversary of the whiteman's (sic) seizure of our country, HEREBY MAKE PROTEST against the callous treatment of our people by white-men during the past 150 years, AND WE APPEAL to the Australian Nation of today to make new law for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to FULL CITIZEN STATUS and EQUALITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

The shift from the segregationist policies of the early 20th century, through the assimilatory policies of the '30s, '40s and '50s led to a series of state-based voting trials and movements in the 1960s. Australian community responses to Aboriginal rights movements ranged from outright hostility to a slow, but growing support from some sectors of the Australian community. Operating in the spirit of the Day of Mourning Protest, the Freedom Rides of 1965, instigated collaboratively by Charles Perkins through the Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA), protested over segregation in country towns in New South Wales (NSW). Rolling into towns such as Mooree and Walgett in an old bus, Aboriginal leaders and non-Aboriginal student supporters broke segregationist barriers, attempting to admit Aboriginal children to segregated town baths and staging peaceful protests, often against violent and vocal opposition. The Sydney *Sunday Mirror* of 21 February 1965 reported the state of play in the town of Mooree; 'Mob violence exploded here today as student freedom riders were attacked by a crowd crazed with race hate.' Through these protests the freedom riders brought modern segregation and racial injustice to the national consciousness, highlighting the similarities with similar movements in the United States.

The progression of rights-based political action culminated in a major recognition of indigenous human rights; the federal 1967 Referendum. This referendum led to the changing of the Australian constitution, which had up until this point, excluded indigenous people from the

minister. Menzies was steeped in British history and tradition, and liked to play the part of a sentimental monarchist. He was also a vigilant opponent of communism. The chill of the Cold War was extending across Asia, and Australia and New Zealand entered a formal military alliance with the USA – the 1951 Anzus security pact. When the USA hurled its righteous fury into a civil war in Vietnam, Menzies committed Australian forces to the battle,

census and federal legislative consideration, and therefore from the right to citizenship nationally. The 'Yes' vote was carried by 97% of voters in favour of granting unconditional federal citizenship rights to indigenous peoples. This was a major political shift in Australian history, and is widely seen as the beginning of equality for indigenous Australians. For Aboriginal leaders and the communities they represented, this general equality was not an end in itself, but rather a step toward the greater inherent rights to land that had never been ceded.

Particularly pivotal at this time was the 1966 Wave Hill 'walk-off' by the Gurrinjdi people of the Western Northern Territory (NT). As the pastoral industry expanded across the continent, Aboriginal people increasingly became employed as indentured labourers on pastoral stations in northern and central Australia. For many it was the only employment available that enabled continued connection with the land and maintenance of cultural obligations. Echoing the 1946 Pilbara Pastoral Workers Strike, Gurindji stockmen and families walked off Wave Hill Station, striking for equal wages. While beginning as a call for equality and equal wages, the Gurindji strike became a national call for land rights.

In Sydney and Canberra, southern indigenous responses to the treatment by the Federal Government of indigenous land rights led to the creation of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, erected on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra in 1972. It exists as an embassy of symbolic protest over the lack of real recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty in Australia. The Aboriginal flag of red (representing our lands), black (representing pride in our Aboriginality) and yellow (representing the sun), created by Aboriginal artist Harold Thomas for the 1971 National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC), was raised at the embassy and immediately came to prominence as a flag of Aboriginal Australian unity. 'The Colours' as they have come to be known are flown proudly as a symbol of Aboriginal unity and continuity.

Having received the right to vote in 1967, indigenous Australians endured the creation of our own regional and national representative government body (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission; ATSIC) in 1990, and its eventual destruction by the Federal Liberal Government in 2002. The Reconciliation Movement, instigated in 1990 and aiming for a 'decade of reconciliation', while supported popularly by the Australian people, was not supported by the Liberal Government of Prime Minister John Howard who allowed the promise of this movement to disintegrate. Within this time of promise, Mr Eddie Mabo won the historic Mabo Judgment of 1992, in which he and the Meriam peoples' rights to land on Mer Island in the Torres Strait led to the creation of the 1993 Native Title Act aimed at recognising and supporting native title nationally. Under this act, in 1996, the Wik peoples right to land was found to 'coexist' with those of pastoral leases over their lands on Cape York. This was a high point of indigenous and non-indigenous coexistence in Australia. From this moment, the Howard Government's Ten Point Plan led to the 1998 Amendments to the Native Title Act, eroding what was already a compromise on true land rights and self-determination.

The Federal Liberal Government's policy of 'practical reconciliation' has acted to further reduce indigenous agency over reconciliation and away from positive changes to end welfare dependency in our own communities. However, regardless of this, forty years on from the 1967 Referendum, indigenous Australians live a complex coexistence between our own diverse communities and those of non-indigenous Australians. This coexistence must have at its base a respect for our shared and difficult past, but equally, a hope for a more just and sustainable future that gives action to indigenous visions. As you travel around our countries, it is important to be aware of our history, and in each city and town, from the desert, through freshwater to saltwater country, respect the stories of each place and the people who belong there.

introducing conscription for military service overseas. The following year Menzies retired, leaving his successors a bitter legacy. The antiwar movement split Australia.

There was a feeling too among artists, intellectuals and the young that Menzies' 1960s Australia had become a rather dull, complacent country, more in love with American and British culture than with its own talents and

Two very different, intelligent introductions to Australian history are Stuart Macintyre's *A Concise History of Australia* and Geoffrey Blainey's *A Shorter History of Australia*.

stories. In an atmosphere of youthful rebellion and new-found nationalism, the Labor Party was elected to power in 1972 under the leadership of a brilliant, idealistic lawyer named Gough Whitlam. In just four short years his government transformed the country. He ended conscription and abolished all university fees. He introduced a free universal health scheme, no-fault divorce, the principle of Aboriginal land rights, and equal pay for women. The White Australia Policy had been gradually falling into disuse; under Whitlam it was finally abandoned altogether. By now, around one million migrants had arrived from non-English speaking countries, and they had filled Australia with new languages, cultures, foods and ideas. Under Whitlam this achievement was embraced as 'multiculturalism'.

By 1975, the Whitlam government was rocked by a tempest of inflation and scandal. At the end of 1975 his government was controversially dismissed from office by the governor general. But the general thrust of Whitlam's social reforms was continued by his successors. The principle of Aboriginal land rights was expanded. From the 1970s, Asian immigration increased, and multiculturalism became a new Australian orthodoxy. China and Japan far outstripped Europe as major trading partners – Australia's economic future lay in Asia.

MATERIALISM

Today Australia faces new challenges. Since the 1970s the country has been dismantling its protectionist scaffolding. New efficiency has brought new prosperity. At the same time, wages and working conditions, which used to be protected by an independent authority, are now more vulnerable as egalitarianism gives way to competition. And two centuries of development have placed great strains on the environment – on water supplies, forests, soils, air quality and the oceans (see p59). The country is closer than ever to the USA, as it demonstrated by its commitment to the war in Iraq (2003–). Some say that this alliance protects Australia's independence; others insist that it reduces Australia to a fawning 'client state'.

Though many Australians pride themselves on their tolerance, conservatives have denounced the policy of 'multiculturalism' as a left-wing plot to undermine Australian unity. Under popular conservative prime minister John Howard, the majority of Australians have hardened their hearts to asylum seekers. At the same time, Howard's relations with Aboriginal Australians have been marked by impatience with the slow rate of change. But since his first election in 1996, he has presided over secure economic growth, encouraging an atmosphere in which material self-advancement and self-reliance are the primary measures of what is right.

The Culture

LIFESTYLE

Australians have been sold to the world as outdoorsy, sporty, big-drinking, thigh-slapping country folk, but, despite the stereotypes, most Australians live in cities, watch a lot more sport than they play and wouldn't be seen dead in an Akubra hat. The feature that unites Australians is diversity – it's near impossible to define a typical Australian. Extrapolating from statistics, if you looked into an Australian lounge room you might be surprised by what you found.

The Great Australian Dream of owning an oversized house and carport on a quarter-acre block has meant that sprawling suburbia is endemic in Australian towns and cities. Inside the average middle-class suburban home, you'll probably find a married heterosexual couple, though it is becoming increasingly likely that they will be de facto or in their second marriage. Australian law doesn't recognise gay marriages, but most Australians are open-minded about homosexuality.

Our 'Mum and Dad' will have an average of two children (probably called Jack and Olivia – Australia's names of the moment), although the number of childless couples rose by 30% in the last decade. The average full-time worker increasingly spends more time at work, averaging 41 hours and earning \$1050 gross per week. And while 60 used to be the average age for retirement, four in five Australians intend to retire after 65.

The typical family owns two TV sets and a computer. They'll have a BBQ in the backyard and a pet Labrador. What rubbish the dog doesn't eat is recycled – 99% of Australians recycle their rubbish. Like most Australians, our family probably loves the sun. Australians have the highest rate of skin cancer in the world, with one in two people affected. Our family heads to the beach every holiday, and at weekends they probably watch sport, go to the movies or head to the shops. However, don't get the idea that they're particularly active: Australia's obesity rate more than doubled in the past 20 years, with seven million people overweight.

Our family not only travels domestically, they also love to travel overseas. With over four million overseas trips made annually, figures suggest there's a need to leave Australia in order to understand what Australia is. It's also probably fair to say that Australia has produced some of the most successful travel businesses in the world: Flight Centre, Intrepid and Lonely Planet, to name a few.

A middle-Australia couple likes a few quiet ones down the pub, though, despite the long-held reputation that Australians are boozers, recent figures show they are relatively abstemious, drinking less than 30L a year per person (compared with citizens of the Czech Republic, who have the highest alcohol consumption rate – an awe-inspiring 187L per person).

POPULATION

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the population mid-2007 was around 20.7 million; it's growing faster than that of any other wealthy country, swelling by 250,000 each year. Population density is among the lowest in the world, with an average of 2.5 people per square kilometre – no-one's within cooee in the outback. Most people live along the eastern seaboard, between Melbourne and Brisbane, with a smaller concentration on the coastal region in and around Perth. Despite the extraordinarily low population density, population policy is fiercely debated in Australia.

'The feature that unites Australians is diversity – it's near impossible to define a typical Australian.'

A LONG HARD LOOK IN AN AUSTRALIAN MIRROR

A look at Australia's cultural heroes, at who the public chooses to celebrate, reflects the broader public's ideals, ideas and values. Steve Irwin's death in 2006 sparked a public outpouring of emotion akin to the one that followed the passing of Diana. (For those not from the USA, Steve Irwin was killed by a stingray barb to the heart while snorkelling over the Barrier Reef; for more about his life, see the boxed text, p341) Initially better known in the USA, Irwin had an enthusiastic, khaki-knockabout spirit that struck a chord with Australians. The 'wildlife warrior' was honoured nationwide: the prime minister paid tribute, and the public went to town on intellectual Germaine Greer for criticising Irwin's antics as more entertainment than conservationism. The public continues to rally around Steve's daughter, Bindi, who has her own TV series and kids' fitness DVD, *Bindi Irwin with Steve Irwin & the Croc Men*.

Shane Warne's prowess on the cricket pitch is once-in-lifetime stuff: he's widely regarded as the greatest leg-spin bowler in history. In Australia he's also known for a spot of larrikinism, having been embroiled in various scandals involving smoking cigarettes, slagging off the opposition, lewd text messaging and eating too much pizza. Warne's retirement in 2007 left Australian cricket flat but fuelled interest from gossip mags that continue to speculate on his diet and love life.

The surprise success of local film *Kenny* (by Thunderbox Films) and actor Shane Jacobson alleviated any risk of Australians becoming too earnest. It's over an hour's revelling in toilet humour, delivered with a lisp by overweight everyman Jacobson, who won an Australian Film Institute Award for best lead actor.

Opponents of increased immigration argue that the dry Australian landscape and overcrowded cities can't sustain more people (just one of their arguments); others say that population growth is an economic imperative, particularly considering Australia's declining birth rates.

MULTICULTURALISM

Australia continues to reap the rewards of its multicultural make-up – one of the most diverse in the world – enjoying a wealth of ideas, cuisines and life-style opportunities. It's a harmonious country, seeing no major race-related violence. The federal government recently implemented an Australian values test for aspiring citizens, sparking massive debate about how to quantify and test for such a nebulous notion. Along with funding for community-based assimilation projects, the government launched a blithe ad campaign encouraging Australians to affirm their Australian values and hopes by wearing thongs (the footwear, not the underwear) on Australia Day.

The last census reported that 24% of the population is foreign-born, and over 40% of Australians are of mixed cultural origins. Every four minutes and eight seconds Australia gains another international migrant. Many foreign-born Australians came from Italy and Greece after WWII, but recent immigrants have mostly come from New Zealand and the UK, as well as China, Vietnam, Africa and India, among many other places. Some 2.2% of the population identifies itself as of Aboriginal origin, and most live in the Northern Territory (NT). Australia's other indigenous people, Torres Strait Islanders, are primarily a Melanesian people, living in north Queensland and on the islands of the Torres Strait between Cape York and Papua New Guinea.

RELIGION

Historians and sociologists generally portray Australians as an irreligious bunch. The truth may be more that religion's institutional forms are struggling, but spirituality – usually grounded in place and land – is important to many Australians' being. Australians are relatively shy about their spirituality;

they're less inclined to trumpet spiritual encounters, such as with American televangelists, preferring to keep their faith to themselves. The largest religious affiliations in the country are Catholic (27%), Anglican (21%) and other Christian denominations (21%), with non-Christian religions including Buddhism (2%) and Islam (1.5%) making up another 5% of Australians. Some 16% of Australians described themselves as having no religion in the most recent census. Proponents of New Age spirituality pervade many religious classifications, so you might meet a vegetarian Catholic who meditates, who has more than a few self-help titles on the bookshelf.

Aboriginal Dreaming

Traditional Aboriginal religious beliefs centre on the continuing existence of spirit beings that lived on earth during the creation time (or Dreamtime), which occurred before the arrival of humans. These beings created all the features of the natural world and were the ancestors of all living things. They took different forms but behaved as people do, and as they travelled about they left signs to show where they had passed.

Despite being supernatural, the ancestors were subject to ageing and eventually returned to the sleep from which they'd awakened at the dawn of time. Here their spirits remain as eternal forces that breathe life into the newborn and influence natural events. Each ancestor's spiritual energy flows along the path it travelled during the Dreamtime and is strongest at the points where it left physical evidence of its activities, such as a tree, hill or claypan. These features are called sacred sites. These days the importance of sacred sites is more widely recognised among the non-Aboriginal community, and most state governments have legislated to give these sites a measure of protection.

Every person, animal and plant is believed to have two souls – one mortal and one immortal. The latter is part of a particular ancestral spirit and returns to the sacred sites of that ancestor after death, while the mortal soul simply fades into oblivion. Each person is spiritually bound to the sacred sites that mark the land associated with his or her spirit ancestor. It is the individual's obligation to help care for these sites by performing the necessary rituals and singing the songs that tell of the ancestor's deeds. By doing this, the order created by that ancestor is maintained.

Each person has their own totem, or Dreaming. These totems are the links between the people and their spirit ancestors, and they take many forms, such as trees, snakes, fish and birds. Songs explain how the landscape contains these powerful creator ancestors, who can exert either a benign or a malevolent influence. They also have a practical meaning, telling of the best places and times to hunt, and where to find water in drought years. They can also specify kinship relations and identify correct marriage partners.

SPORT

Australians love the underdog. As a relatively new nation joining a world formidable in the fields of trade, art and politics, it's characteristic that the Aussies should challenge for kudos by saying, 'I'll race you for it'. The country's since held its own against the bigwigs: the USA, Russia and China. Using some creative accounting, on a per capita basis Australia would have come second in the Athens Olympics medal tally. (The Aussies are good, but not *that* good.)

Big international events aside, Australia's everyday heroes are found in the number-one-watched sport: Australian Rules Football. Originally exclusive to Victoria, the Australian Football League (AFL: www.afl.com.au) is over-represented in Melbourne (with nine of the 16 teams), and no teams from

Join the six million plus Australians volunteering around the country annually: from hunkering beneath a dragon's body during Chinese New Year celebrations or assisting disabled kids to ride horses, to bush regeneration and wildlife surveying. Look for opportunities at www.govolunteer.com.au.

Great Australian inventions include the half-car-half-truck ute (utility vehicle), the bionic ear, the black box flight recorder, the notepad and the wine cask.

Tasmania, NT or the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). However, some Victorian-based teams – notably Essendon under coach Kevin Sheedy – recruit indigenous players from the Territory, praising the players' unique vision (kicking into a space for a team-mate to run into). The most spectacular aspects of the game are the long kicking, the high marking and the brutal collisions. Crowd participation is high, with 'C'mon [insert name]' and 'Baaahh: you're joking, umpire' times 50,000 merging into a roar that upsets dogs in suburban backyards for kilometres around.

While Melburnians refuse to acknowledge it (or do so with a scowl akin to that directed at an unfaithful spouse), there are other footballs. The National Rugby League (NRL; www.nrl.com.au) is the most popular sporting competition north of the Murray River. Undoubtedly the highlight of the season is the annual State of Origin series. To see one of these games is to acquire a grim appreciation of Newton's laws of motion: a force travelling in one direction can only be stopped with the application of an equal and opposite force. It's terrifying stuff. If Newton had been hit by a Queensland second-rower rather than an apple, science would have been very much the poorer.

Australians who play rugby union argue that theirs is the dominant code. The national team, the Wallabies, has won the William Webb Ellis trophy (or Rugby World Cup trophy) with sufficient frequency for Australians to refer to it as 'Bill'. That was until (like most Australians) it moved to England for a stint in 2003. The Wallabies will be looking to reacquire themselves with Bill in France in 2007. In between times, the Bledisloe Cup (www.rugby.com.au) games against New Zealand are the most anticipated fixtures and form part of a Tri Nations tournament that also includes South Africa. The same countries also share a club competition, the ever-popular Super 14, which comprises four Australian teams: the Waratahs (Sydney), the Reds (Brisbane), the Brumbies (ACT) and Western Force (a Perth franchise).

The Socceroos finally qualified for the World Cup in 2006 after a 32-year history of almost-but-not-quite getting there. From a participation viewpoint, soccer is one of the growth sports in Australia, and much hope is pinned on the newly established A-League (www.a-league.com.au). For years local soccer floundered as young players chose the better competition and contracts on offer in Europe. The A-League, however, seems to have the dollars and profile to reverse the trend.

Girt by sea and poked with public pools, Australia has fostered a population that can swim (see www.swimming.org.au). But broad shoulders and tiny waists are only the half of it. Add superskintight bodysuits modelled using three-D body scans and water-resistant fabric technology for a truer picture. Australia's greatest ever swimmer is Dawn Fraser, who is known nationally simply as 'Our Dawn'. Current golden girl Jodie Henry actually swims Our Dawn's event, the 100m freestyle, and if she wins gold at two more Olympic Games she will quickly become Our Jodie. Australia's greatest male swimmer is Our Ian (Thorpe; known as Thorpie or the Thorpedo), who retired in 2006 at the age of 24.

The Australian cricket team has dominated both test and one-day cricket, holding the number-one world ranking for the best part of a decade. The lack of competition had many Aussies barracking for Australia's opponents – until early 2007. Now Australian cricket is reeling from its quadruple loss. Joining the hat-trick of players exiting the game in 2007 – once-in-a-lifetime legend Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath and Damien Martyn – was the Mexican wave. Cricket Australia, who instituted the ban, acknowledged that it could be construed as 'the fun police gone wrong' but explained that it was the only way to stop people throwing things. It's yet to be seen whether losing Warney, particularly, puts Australia's top spot on shaky ground.

Come January, tennis shoes melt to the outer courts and games get cancelled for the heat. The Australian Open (www.ausopen.com.au) is one of four tennis Grand Slams, and it attracts more people to Australia than any other sporting event. In a competition last won by an Australian in 1976, Lleyton Hewitt was Australia's great hope after making the finals in 2006. In 2007, people were more focused on his performance as hobby to Aussie starlet Bec Cartwright – the pair dubbed Australia's Posh and Becks. In the women's game, Alicia Molik has been a huge improver, maintaining a place in the top 10.

On the first Tuesday in November the nation stops for a horse race, the Melbourne Cup (www.racingvictoria.net.au). In Melbourne it's cause to have a day off – never mind that it's the only race in the world that has a public holiday. Australia's most famous Cup winner was Phar Lap, who won in 1930 before dying of a mystery illness in America. Phar Lap is now a prize exhibit in the Melbourne Museum (p488). Makybe Diva is the event's most recent star, for winning three in a row before retiring in 2005, but also for being a shining example of that great Australian tradition for 1) stupid racehorse names and 2) taking or jumbling up letters from the owners' names to make a new name ('Makybe Diva' comes from the first two letters of five of the owners' employees: Maureen, Kylie, Belinda, Diane and Vanessa).

Australian netball's biggest rivalry is with New Zealand's Silver Ferns. There are 1.2 million netballers in the country, which makes netball Australia's most popular participation sport (see www.netball.com.au). Women's basketball (www.wnbl.com.au) is also popular, with most Australians believing that our own Lauren Jackson is the best player in the world. In the men's basketball (www.nbl.com.au), McKinnon and Bogut are big names and bigger men. The men's hockey team (www.hockey.org.au) finally won gold at the Athens Olympics. The Bells Beach Surf Classic (www.surfingaustralia.com) is hardly ever held at Bells Beach due to lack of waves, but its origins are honoured in a bell-shaped trophy. The Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race (www.rolexsydneyhobart.com) is on each Boxing Day, and the Formula One Grand Prix (www.grandprix.com.au) takes place in Melbourne every March. Oh, and there's callisthenics – unique to Australia, it's a mix of gymnastics, a beauty contest, modern dance and cheerleading.

NOT SO REGAL REGATTAS *Huw Fowles*

Living on a large island lends itself to a penchant for life on the water, but yacht racing can be an expensive business. This hasn't stopped Aussies finding decidedly more inventive and economical ways of enjoying the odd nautical experience (with the emphasis on the word 'odd').

If necessity is the mother of invention, then look no further than the Henley-on-Todd Regatta (www.henleyontodd.com.au), held in Alice Springs each year. Ironically, Alice has no springs to speak of but instead sits above a large underground lake and next to the Todd River, which is almost always bone dry. But this doesn't stop townsfolk having a regatta every year. The concept is simple really – contestants just pick up their bottomless boats and run with them. This is arguably the only regatta in the world to have been called off due to excessive water on the course.

Not to be outdone, the city of Darwin hosts its own nautical party each year – the Beer Can Regatta (www.beercanregatta.org.au). Following the widespread devastation of Cyclone Tracy in 1974, Darwin saw a large influx of workers, who came to help rebuild the city. Building anything in sweat-soaking Darwin is thirsty work, and as a result the local population of aluminium beer cans exploded. So in 1975 the people of Darwin put the cans to good use and started building and racing boats made entirely of 'tinnies'. Boats 12m long are not unheard of.

On the other side of the island, the people of Adelaide came up with a healthier alternative to alcohol-fuelled boating and launched the Milk Carton Regatta. It's only a matter of time before a town somewhere starts an iPod Regatta.

All those travellers intending to drive around this big land will appreciate lessons from Yuendumu's bush mechanics (www.bushmechanics.com), such as how to fix a flat tyre with a shoelace. The site also has stories, songs and games.

Sport is the most watched TV programming after news and current affairs (which is 15 minutes of general news and 15 minutes of sports news). The field is well propped with financial support too; the federal government kicks in over \$170 million annually. But there's always room to improve, which means Aussies still pass as underdogs – thus giving legitimacy to continued devotion to the proliferation of sport.

ARTS

Australians are conspicuous in their support for sport (it's hard to ignore a green-and-gold mob yelling 'oi oi oi'), but statistics also reveal them to have a quiet love affair with the arts. Australia Council figures show attendance numbers for galleries and performing arts that are almost double those for all codes of football (though of course seasonal factors and TV coverage of sport have an effect on 'attendance'). Cinema is the top pursuit, with 70% of the population lining up for flicks and popcorn annually. Bookworms all over Australia fork out about \$1 billion on books each year, around 25% of Australians attend a music concert annually, and about 20% of Australians gallery-hop.

Cinema

One of the first established in the world, the Australian film industry really kicked off when social upheaval and cultural re-examination in the '60s and '70s led to the establishment of the Australian Film Commission, a cinematic forum for Australians to thrash out issues of identity. *Walkabout*, in the early '70s, was one of the first films to explore indigenous Australia. Other films focused on revisiting colonisation, war and the country's relationship to England; examples are *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant*, which mythologised the gung-ho Aussie male as pawn of the British Empire. *Mad Max* and *Mad Max II* were genre-busters that referenced Australia's car culture, and they were box-office hits that did well overseas – to everyone's surprise.

Government tax incentives in the early '80s introduced investor clout, spurring on a handful of hopefuls desperate to secure the international success of the *Mad Max* movies. Examples include the appalling *Mad Max III*, and *Crocodile Dundee* (still Australia's highest-grossing film) – movies that did nothing to hose down stereotypes of studded Aussie blokes.

In the late '80s and '90s the spotlight was turned home to the suburban quarter-acre block, where the larrikin Aussie battler fought for a 'fair go' in side-splitting satirical celebrations of Australian myths and stereotypes. The best of these were *Muriel's Wedding* and *The Castle*. At the same time powerful films such as *Ghosts of the Civil Dead* (co-written by Nick Cave and John Hillcoat) and Jane Campion's *Sweetie* showed that Australians could do more than take the piss out of themselves.

The presence of Fox Studios Australia (Sydney, New South Wales), Warner Roadshow Studios on the Gold Coast (Queensland) and Central City Studios (Melbourne, Victoria) has attracted big-budget US productions such as *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Ghost Rider* to the country. While the economic benefits are many, the local industry can only dream of the 80% box-office share that US releases claim in Australia. Government quotas regulate the amount of Australian material that's screened locally – without such quotas Australian audiences would see even less home-grown material.

In the last couple of years most films made for an Australian audience have abandoned the worn-out ocker stereotypes and started to explore the country's diversity. Indigenous stories have found a mainstream voice on the big screen, with films such as *The Tracker*, *Beneath Clouds* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* illustrating a nation starting to come to terms with its racist elements.

'*Ghosts of the Civil Dead and Sweetie* showed that Australians could do more than take the piss out of themselves.'

MOVIES OF THE MOMENT

- **Noise** (2007, director Matthew Saville) After a mass killing on a suburban train, *Noise* traces the human aftermath, including the low end of the police investigation via Officer McGahan, who suffers from tinnitus. Intensely beautiful production values provide very particular access to the characters' various states of being.
- **Australia** (2008, director Baz Luhrmann) A grand romance between Nicole Kidman, who plays an uptight English aristocrat, and Hugh Jackman, her stockman, and the northern Australian landscape. Like a road movie, but with horses and open country, the film explores the nature of the country via a long journey driving 2000 head of cattle to Darwin.
- **Romulus, My Father** (2007, director Richard Roxburgh) Based on philosopher Raimond Gaita's memoir, the film tells the story of Romulus Gaita, who fled his Yugoslav home and came to Australia with his young wife and infant child. It stars Eric Bana.
- **Ten Canoes** (2006, director Rolf de Heer) A story within a story, *Ten Canoes* – spoken in the Ganalbingu language of remote Arnhem Land – tells a tragicomic tale spun around ancestry, infidelity and greed. On a hunting expedition for magpie geese, a young man is told the story of his ancestors.
- **Home Song Stories** (2007, director Tony Ayres) Based on a true story, *Home Song Stories* focuses on a glamorous Shanghai nightclub singer and the trials of her life in 1970s Australia rearing two young sons.

Cultural and gender stereotypes continue to erode in a genre of intimate dramas exploring the human condition, such as *Lantana* and *Suburban Mayhem*. And there's still a place for toilet humour, with the flushing success of *Kenny*, a mockumentary about a Melbourne plumber. By staying relevant to contemporary Australians, the industry continues to survive and thrive.

Literature

Stories and ballads in early postcolonial literature mythologised the hardships of pioneers and unjust governments. Nationalism was a driving force, especially in the late 1800s with the celebration of the country's centenary (1888), and at Federation (1901). AB 'Banjo' Paterson was the bush poet of the time, famous for his poems *The Man from Snowy River* and *Clancy of the Overflow*, and the lyrics to *Waltzing Matilda*. Henry Lawson, a contemporary of Paterson's, wrote short stories evoking the era; one of his best, *The Drover's Wife*, is a moving tale of the woman's lot in the settling life. Barbara Baynton wrote first-hand of a woman's perpetual struggle against Australian conditions; her writings are also collected in a book of short stories. All these stories helped establish the motifs of traditional Australian literature: the desert as 'heart' of a nation, the hardworking Aussie 'battler' as soldier against adversity.

By the 1940s a modernist movement known as the Angry Penguins charged onto the scene, headed by Max Harris and his magazine, *Angry Penguins*. It set out to deflower the conservative European-style expression that dominated Australian art and literature, determining a 'mythic sense of geographical and cultural identity'. The inevitable backlash took shape in the famous Ern Malley affair. Two traditionalist poets gleaned lines from disparate sources and submitted them as poems purporting to be the works of a recently deceased poet by the name of Ern Malley. The poems were published in *Angry Penguins* in 1944 and enthusiastically received. The pranksters believed their hoax discredited the modernist movement; however, the publishers stayed firm in their belief the poems had literary merit. Analysis of the hoax continues today, most recently in Peter Carey's

FRESH FICTIONS

- **Underground** (Andrew McGahan) A politically charged thriller set five years into Australia's future, *Underground* is a satire about a country in a permanent state of emergency due to the omnipotent threat of terrorism.
- **The Secret River** (Kate Grenville) Presenting a more shadowy side to the heroic frontier story, *The Secret River* follows the Thornhill family's attempts at a life after being transported to Australia as convicts.
- **The Ballad of Desmond Kale** (Roger McDonald) Set during the first days of British settlement in Australia, this epic novel revolves around the search for an Irish political prisoner who also happens to be an outstanding breeder of sheep.
- **The Garden Book** (Brian Castro) Swan Hay escapes her isolated bush solace by writing poems on fallen leaves, which leads to literary success. Fifty years after her disappearance, a rare-book librarian pieces together her life.
- **Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living** (Carrie Tiffany) The Australian landscape is as major a character as are two lovers who settle in an impoverished area. The heady idealistic cloud around them is challenged by looming war, forcing a confrontation of the meaning of 'development' and its effect on the fragile landscape.

novel *My Life as a Fake*, which beautifully frames the relationship between art and artist, truth and fiction.

In the post-war era Australian writers began to re-evaluate their colonial past. Patrick White, the country's only Nobel Prize winner for Literature (not counting South African-born JM Coetzee, who recently emigrated to Adelaide), helped turn the tables on earlier writers' romanticism with *Voss* (1957) and his deeply despair-inducing *The Tree of Man* (1955). Later novelists such as Booker Prize winner Thomas Keneally keenly felt the devastation and angst of indigenous Australians, as depicted in his excellent novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972; it was also made into an important film).

Australia's literary scene, long dominated by writers of British and Irish descent, has evolved to reflect the country's multicultural make-up. Many indigenous writers focus on coming to terms with identity in often intensely personal autobiographies. Sally Morgan's *My Place* is one of the most popular books ever written by an indigenous Australian, along with Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, a moving autobiography of courage in adversity. *When the Pelican Laughed*, by Alice Nannup, Lauren Marsh and Steve Kinnane (see the boxed text, p40, for Kinnane's summary of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history) is a captivating account of Alice Nannup's life. Kim Scott's excellent *Benang* is a challenging but rewarding read. Malaysian-born Australian Hsu-Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo* took out the Australian/Vogel literary award in 1999, while Hong Kong-born Brian Castro shared the award in 1982. Castro's novels, including *Shanghai Dancing* (2003), often explore issues of diversity and identity.

Other contemporary authors, such as Peter Carey and David Malouf, frequently focus on fictitious reinterpretations of Australian history to examine perceptions of the individual and society. Carey, Australia's best-known novelist and two-time winner of the prestigious Booker Prize, writes knockout books; among his finest are *Oscar & Lucinda* and *True History of the Kelly Gang*. The work of Thea Astley and Tim Winton – winners of Australia's most prestigious literary award, the Miles Franklin – usually focuses on human relations but has a strong sense of the Australian landscape.

For a country founded on crime and convicts it's only fitting that crime is a healthy component of Australian literature. Look for anything by Shane Maloney, Kerry Greenwood, Peter Temple and Garry Disher.

Australian children's literature is popular worldwide. Classics such as Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918) and May Gibbs' *Complete Adventures of Snugglypot and Cuddlepie* (1946) captivated imaginations by bringing the Australian bush to life; Gibbs' *Adventures of Bib & Bub* pits gumnut babies Snugglypot and Cuddlepie against the Australian bogeyman – the bunyip. *Possum Magic* (1983) by Mem Fox reignited an interest in Australian bush creatures after a long hiatus; her picture book *Hattie & the Fox* has also become a modern classic. Jeannie Baker's sublime picture books convey environmental messages through collages; look for *Hidden Forest* and *Belonging*. Pamela Allen's books are frequently shortlisted for Children's Book of the Year awards for early readers, as are Emily Rodda's. Libby Gleeson writes delightful picture books, as well as stories for older readers. For young adults, John Marsden's sci-fi *Tomorrow* series has gained a loyal following. Morris Gleitzman is deservedly popular: *Worm Story* is his 22nd bluntly humorous book. Paul Jennings is an award-winning author for kids whose gross-out books are worthy of your bookshelf. Parents of teen boys have Matthew Reilly to thank for encouraging them to read via his adventure-packed books. Sonya Hartnett's work for teen readers (look for the acclaimed *Thursday's Child* and *Forest*) is also consistently good.

Great for long flights, Australia's bestselling author, Bryce Courtenay, pumps out brick-sized blockbusters, such as *Matthew Flinders' Cat* and his latest, *Sylvia*.

Music

Australian rock was born on the sticky carpet of Australia's pubs in the conservative climate of the flare-wearing '70s. This thriving live-music scene was thrashed out in local watering holes and popularised by the hugely successful *Countdown* (1974–87) – a music-TV show that had the nation's attention every Sunday evening for 13 years, with a parade of one-hit wonders and local music. Eff-off rock legends AC/DC started out in the early '70s; their 1980 album *Back in Black* blitzed, with some 10 million sales in the US alone. Cold Chisel also started out around that time, and their gravely Aussie blokedom and earnest rock was an instant success; *Cold Chisel* and *East* are their best albums. Paul Kelly's first forays into the music scene were in the '70s, too, though his solo album *Post* (1985) put his passionate folk-ballad blend on the map. Midnight Oil's politico-pop peaked at the time of *Diesel and Dust* (1987), while the Go Betweeners – one of Australia's most artistically successful bands – endured the whole decade before splitting in 1989. Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds are among a number of indie performers who came to prominence in the late '70s and left in a diaspora of Aussie talent in the '80s.

By the late '80s – notably, around the time that *Countdown* wound down – Australian popular music began to be dominated by the lucrative ditty-pop market. Enter Kylie Minogue; one-time fluffly-haired nymphet from *Neighbours*, she first hit the music stage with *Locomotion* in 1987, and, as they say, the rest is history. John Farnham released *Whispering Jack* in 1986 and it became the biggest-selling album in Australian history.

Throughout the '90s it seemed that everybody had a box of vinyl and moonlighted as a DJ. This scene was dominated by loungey remixes and electronic beats that followed and reinterpreted overseas trends. The beginning of the millennium saw a backlash of sorts, with a rock revival. Melbourne band Jet led the 'hard' charge, with other bands working the scene at varying

'Australian rock was born on the sticky carpet of Australia's pubs in the conservative climate of the flare-wearing '70s.'

levels of 'hard', like Augie March, Snowman, The Vines, You Am I, Eskimo Joe and Evermore. Recently, trio the Hilltop Hoods have become hip-hop's most commercially successful band; for an overview of the hip-hop scene, see www.ozhiphop.com.

Less affected by trends, Australian country and jazz are ever-popular genres that have developed distinctive qualities. Country ranges from traditional twang, with artists like Keith Urban (brought to popular attention through marriage, as Mr Nicole Kidman), Lee Kernaghan and Kasey Chambers, to alt-country wonders like the Warumpi Band (*Too Much Harmony*), Tex, Don & Charlie and Tim Rogers (kind of alt-country-pop). The term 'jazz' is barely elastic enough to encompass the diverse improvisatory scene. Traditional jazz artists include Don Burrows, James Morrison and Paul Grabowsky, while the Necks stretch the jazz moniker with their ambient noodling.

Contemporary indigenous music is thriving, and the annual Deadly awards (<http://deadlys.vibe.com.au>) are a good place to find out who's setting the pace. Jimmy Little, a country-folk stalwart, began his career in the '50s; the Lifetime Achievement award is named in his honour. Indigenous music finally hit the mainstream in the '90s, thanks largely to the immense popularity of Yothu Yindi and the single 'Treaty', lifted from their excellent album *Tribal Voice*. Archie Roach is best known for albums such as *Sensual Being*, his latest, and *Charcoal Lane*, arguably his best. With fellow singer-songwriter and partner Ruby Hunter, Archie has toured globally and collaborated on various performance projects; check out *Ruby*, a collaboration between the two and jazz great Paul Grabowsky and his Australian Art Orchestra. Compelling singer-storyteller Kev Carmody and the multitalented Christine Anu are worth looking out for; so too are alt-rock band Broken English and the Pigram Brothers (*Under the Mango Tree*).

Local radio stations have a content quota to play at least 15% Australian music, but for a 100% dose, tune into the national youth radio station Triple J (www.triplej.net.au/homeandhosed) for 'Home and Hosed', 9pm to 11pm Monday to Thursday. Also check out Message Stick (www.abc.net.au/message) for 100% indigenous arts and music information. See Festivals & Events in individual state and territory chapters for information about Australia's many fabulous live-music festivals.

HOME-MADE MUSIC

- **Cannot Buy My Soul** (various artists) First-rate Australian musicians cover respected singer/songwriter and Aboriginal ambassador Kev Carmody's tunes in this two-CD collection.
- **Wolfmother** (Wolfmother) This mop-haired Sydney trio's debut album took home a Grammy award for best hard-rock album in 2007. It's head-down air guitar-inducing stuff: rollicking good fun.
- **No Exceptions** (Sam Keevers Nonet) Pianist Sam Keevers always pulls together a big band of big names in Australian jazz. This live recording of mostly original compositions is flavoured with a little bit of Latin.
- **Between Last Night & Us** (The Audreys) Best described as alt-country; expect smoky vocals backed by banjo, double bass, guitars and violin. There's a very 'now' timelessness to this debut album.
- **Runaways** (The Art of Fighting) Melbourne four-piece with achingly beautiful songs, delicate and damn catchy; perfect for long drives and introspection.

Theatre & Dance

Like most art forms in Australia, the country's performing arts were built on European traditions. Over time, both theatre and dance have developed into unique practices that have defined themselves through talented local playwrights, actors, designers, dancers, directors, composers, choreographers and musicians. Australia has a broad range of companies – both fully funded and independent – and an abundance of venues to play out any drama.

Australian theatre has a long association with vaudeville, which flourished in the late 19th century. The bawdy combination of comic skits and music entertained the influx of miners who'd arrived during the gold rush. The theatre scene turned the corner in 1967 when Betty Burstall founded La Mama theatre (p510), which spawned the Australian Performers Group – later known as the Pram Factory. The Pram Factory was dedicated to producing works written by Australians such as David Williamson and Stephen Sewell, set in Australia and using the Australian vernacular. At around the same time Sydney established the Belvoir Street Theatre Company (p132), which also continues to perform outstanding Australian works. And just when things might have been getting too serious, Barry Humphries (aka Dame Edna) stormed Australian stages with his (her) inimitable satire of the Australian housewife, among other characters.

The 1990s hosted a revival in musical theatre, with wildly successful productions such as *Bran Nue Day* (about Australian Aboriginality) and the Peter Allen story *The Boy From Oz*, which recently hit Broadway. The respected Bell Shakespeare Company also formed in the '90s, and it continues to perform Shakespearean and other classically themed works.

These days, artistic merit increasingly holds hands with celebrity. Major theatre companies are using actors with overseas credibility, and not necessarily in acting roles; the Sydney Theatre Company took on new artistic directors in 2006 in Cate Blanchett and husband (and playwright) Andrew Upton.

Australia's exuberant dance scene is well versed in both classical and contemporary styles: check out Australia Dancing (www.austriadancing.org) for up-to-date information on companies and performances. Classically, the Australian Ballet (www.australianballet.com.au), established in 1964, is considered to be among the world's finest companies. Dance has long been influenced by Aboriginal traditions too; this is most accessible through the stellar Sydney-based Bangarra Dance Company (www.bangarra.com.au), which performs stories and characters of the Dreaming. Melbourne's contemporary company Chunky Move (www.chunkymove.com) is enjoying great success. It's been pushing the boundaries since 1998, redefining contemporary dance and popularising the medium with vital choreography, clever concepts firmly anchored in popular culture and extraordinary dancers. The nexus between dance and theatre, Physical Theatre, is best represented by Melbourne company Kage (www.kagephysicaltheatre.com).

The Australia Council funds a number of major state theatre and dance companies. If you add to that the huge number of independent companies and venues that produce works that, collectively, fill the gaps left by the mainstream, you have the vibrant, multilayered landscape of Australia's performing arts.

Visual Arts

Paintings in the early days of colonial Australia depicted the landscape through European eyes. It wasn't until the 1880s, in tune with the growing nationalist movement, that Australian-born artists began to capture the unique qualities of the Australian light and landscape. Members of the group known as the Heidelberg School, artists such as Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton

The site www.cultureand recreation.gov.au is a government index with thousands of links to sites relating to Australian culture and recreation.

created a heroic national iconography from sheep-shearing scenes and visions of a wide brown land that offered opportunity to all. By the 1940s a cultural re-evaluation had taken place with the modernist movement known as the Angry Penguins at the helm. This movement threw romantic Impressionist convention out and introduced a period of modernism; Arthur Boyd, Sir Sidney Nolan (who painted the well-known *Ned Kelly* series), Albert Tucker and Joy Hester were the main players.

Contemporary Australian artists are strongly concerned with an Australian sense of place and are actively engaged in the more universal concerns of our contemporary, globalised world. Artists such as Jeffrey Smart and photographer Bill Henson are well known for their explorations of the urban environment. Other artists comment on the practice of making art and the relationship between the real and the represented. The impact of technology is a common theme of such artists as Patricia Piccinini and Stephen Hunt, who are empowered by the digital world as well as thoughtfully engaged with the ethical dilemmas it generates. Cross-cultural investigations are regularly represented, with artists drawing on a range of personal cultural perspectives to find their own expressive language. Australia sent three representatives to the 2007 Venice Biennale: Susan Norrie, Daniel von Sturmer and Callum Morton. Their innovative mixed-media works all loosely explored the notion of space – geopolitical, physical and emotional.

Indigenous culture has brought huge benefits to Australia's art. Visual imagery is a fundamental part of indigenous life; it's a connection between past and present, the supernatural and the earthly, and the people and the land. The early forms of indigenous artistic expression were rock carvings (petroglyphs), body painting and ground designs (see boxed text on p813 for one such example).

Arnhem Land, in Australia's tropical Top End, is an area of rich artistic heritage. Some of the rock-art galleries in the huge sandstone Arnhem Land plateau are at least 18,000 years old, and range from hand prints to paintings of animals, people, mythological beings and European ships. Two of the finest sites, Ubirr and Nourlangie in Kakadu National Park, are accessible to visitors. The art of the Kimberley is perhaps best known for its images of the Wandjina, a group of ancestral beings who came from the sky and sea and were associated with fertility. The superb galleries at Laura on the Cape York Peninsula, in north Queensland, are also among the finest in the country. Among the many creatures depicted on the walls are the Quinkan spirits.

Painting in central Australia has flourished to such a degree that it is now an important source of income for indigenous communities. It has also been an important educational tool for children, through which they can learn different aspects of religious and ceremonial knowledge. Western Desert painting, also known as 'dot' painting, has partly evolved from 'ground paintings', which formed the centrepiece of dances and songs. These 'paintings' were made from pulped plant material and the designs were made on the ground using dots of this mush. Dot paintings depict Dreaming stories. Bark painting is an integral part of the cultural heritage of Arnhem Land indigenous people, and one of its main features is the use of *rarrk* (cross-hatching) designs. These identify the particular clans and are based on body paintings handed down through generations.

'Contemporary Australian artists are strongly concerned with an Australian sense of place'

Environment

TIM FLANNERY

Tim Flannery is a naturalist, explorer and writer. He is a leading member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, which reports independently to government on sustainability issues. He is also chairman of the South Australian Premier's Science Council and Sustainability Roundtable; a director of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy; and the National Geographic Society's representative in Australasia. Tim Flannery was named Australian of the Year in 2007.

Australia's plants and animals are just about the closest things to alien life you are likely to encounter on Earth. That's because Australia has been isolated from the other continents for a very long time – at least 45 million years. The other habitable continents have been able to exchange various species at different times because they've been linked by land bridges. Just 15,000 years ago it was possible to walk from the southern tip of Africa right through Asia and the Americas to Tierra del Fuego. Not Australia, however. Its birds, mammals, reptiles and plants have taken their own separate and very different evolutionary journey, and the result today is the world's most distinct – and one of its most diverse – natural realms.

The first naturalists to investigate Australia were astonished by what they found. Here the swans were black – to Europeans this was a metaphor for the impossible – while mammals such as the platypus and echidna were discovered to lay eggs. It really was an upside-down world, where many of the larger animals hopped, where each year the trees shed their bark rather than their leaves, and where the 'pears' were made of wood.

If you are visiting Australia for a short time, you might need to go out of your way to experience some of the richness of the environment. That's because Australia is a subtle place, and some of the natural environment – especially around the cities – has been damaged or replaced by trees and creatures from Europe. Places like Sydney, however, have preserved extraordinary fragments of their original environment that are relatively easy to access. Before you enjoy them though, it's worthwhile understanding the basics about how nature operates in Australia. This is important because there's nowhere like Australia, and once you have an insight into its origins and natural rhythms, you will appreciate the place so much more.

A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT

There are two really big factors that go a long way towards explaining nature in Australia: its soils and its climate. Both are unique. Australian soils are the more subtle and difficult to notice of the two, but they have been fundamental in shaping life here. On the other continents, in recent geological times processes such as volcanism, mountain building and glacial activity have been busy creating new soil. Just think of the glacier-derived soils of North America, north Asia and Europe. They feed the world today, and were made by glaciers grinding up rock of differing chemical composition over the last two million years. The rich soils of India and parts of South America were made by rivers eroding mountains, while Java in Indonesia owes its extraordinary richness to volcanoes.

All of these soil-forming processes have been almost absent from Australia in more recent times. Only volcanoes have made a contribution, and they cover less than 2% of the continent's land area. In fact, for the last 90 million

*In *The Weather Makers*, Tim Flannery argues passionately for the urgent need to address – NOW – the implications of a global climate change that is damaging all life on earth and endangering our very survival. It's an accessible read.*

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF; www.acfonline.org.au) is Australia's largest non-government organisation involved in protecting the environment.

years, beginning deep in the age of dinosaurs, Australia has been geologically comatose. It was too flat, warm and dry to attract glaciers, its crust too ancient and thick to be punctured by volcanoes or folded into mountains. Look at Uluru (p862) and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas; p863). They are the stumps of mountains that 350 million years ago were the height of the Andes. Yet for hundreds of millions of years they've been nothing but nubs.

Under such conditions no new soil is created and the old soil is leached of all its goodness by the rain, and is blown and washed away. Even if just 30cm of rain falls each year, that adds up to a column of water 30 million km high passing through the soil over 100 million years, and that can do a great deal of leaching! Almost all of Australia's mountain ranges are more than 90 million years old, so you will see a lot of sand here, and a lot of country where the rocky 'bones' of the land are sticking up through the soil. It is an old, infertile landscape, and life in Australia has been adapting to these conditions for aeons.

Australia's misfortune in respect to soils is echoed in its climate. In most parts of the world outside the wet tropics, life responds to the rhythm of the seasons – summer to winter, or wet to dry. Most of Australia experiences seasons – sometimes very severe ones – yet life does not respond solely to them. This can clearly be seen by the fact that although there's plenty of snow and cold country in Australia, there are almost no trees that shed their leaves in winter, nor do any Australian animals hibernate. Instead there is a far more potent climatic force that Australian life must obey: El Niño.

The cycle of flood and drought that El Niño brings to Australia is profound. Our rivers – even the mighty Murray River, the nation's largest river, which runs through the southeast – can be miles wide one year, yet you can literally step over its flow the next. This is the power of El Niño, and its effect, when combined with Australia's poor soils, manifests itself compellingly. As you might expect from this, relatively few of Australia's birds are seasonal breeders, and few migrate. Instead, they breed when the rain comes, and a large percentage are nomads, following the rain across the breadth of the continent.

So challenging are conditions in Australia that its birds have developed some extraordinary habits. The kookaburras, magpies and blue wrens you are likely to see – to name just a few – have developed a breeding system called 'helpers at the nest'. The helpers are the young adult birds of previous breedings, which stay with their parents to help bring up the new chicks. Just why they should do this was a mystery, until it was realised that conditions in Australia can be so harsh that more than two adult birds are needed to feed the nestlings. This pattern of breeding is very rare in places like Asia, Europe and North America, but it is common in many Australian birds.

Australia is, of course, famous as the home of the kangaroo (roo) and other marsupials. Unless you visit a wildlife park, such creatures are not easy to see as most are nocturnal. Their lifestyles, however, are exquisitely attuned to Australia's harsh conditions. Have you ever wondered why kangaroos, alone among the world's larger mammals, hop? It turns out that hopping is the most efficient way of getting about at medium speeds. This is because the energy of the bounce is stored in the tendons of the legs – much like in a pogo stick – while the intestines bounce up and down like a piston, emptying and filling the lungs without needing to activate the chest muscles. When you travel long distances to find meagre feed, such efficiency is a must.

Marsupials are so energy-efficient that they need to eat one-fifth less food than equivalent-sized placental mammals (everything from bats to rats, whales and ourselves). But some marsupials have taken energy efficiency much further. If you visit a wildlife park or zoo you might notice that faraway

look in a koala's eyes. It seems as if nobody is home – and this in fact is near the truth. Several years ago biologists announced that koalas are the only living creatures that have brains that don't fit their skulls. Instead they have a shrivelled walnut of a brain that rattles around in a fluid-filled cranium. Other researchers have contested this finding, however, pointing out that the brains of the koalas examined for the study may have shrunk because these organs are so soft. Whether soft-brained or empty-headed, there is no doubt that the koala is not the Einstein of the animal world, and we now believe that it has sacrificed its brain to energy efficiency. Brains cost a lot to run – our brains typically weigh 2% of our body weight, but use 20% of the energy we consume. Koalas eat gum leaves, which are so toxic that koalas use 20% of their energy just detoxifying this food. This leaves little energy for the brain, and living in the tree tops where there are so few predators means that they can get by with few wits at all.

The peculiar constraints of the Australian environment have not made everything dumb. The koala's nearest relative, the wombat (of which there are three species), has a large brain for a marsupial. These creatures live in complex burrows and can weigh up to 35kg, making them the largest herbivorous burrowers on Earth. Because their burrows are effectively air-conditioned, they have the neat trick of turning down their metabolic activity when they are in residence. One physiologist, who studied their thyroid hormones, found that biological activity ceased to such an extent in sleeping wombats that, from a hormonal point of view, they appeared to be dead! Wombats can remain underground for a week at a time, and can get by on just a third of the food needed by a sheep of equivalent size. One day, perhaps, efficiency-minded farmers will keep wombats instead of sheep. At the moment, however, that isn't possible; the largest of the wombat species, the northern hairy-nose, is one of the world's rarest creatures, with only around 100 surviving in a remote nature reserve in central Queensland.

Among the more common marsupials you might catch a glimpse of in the national parks around Australia's major cities are the species of antechinus. These nocturnal, rat-sized creatures lead an extraordinary life. The males live for just 11 months, the first 10 of which consist of a concentrated burst of eating and growing. Like teenage males, the day comes when their minds turn to sex, and in the antechinus this becomes an obsession. As they embark on their quest for females they forget to eat and sleep. Instead they gather in logs and woo passing females by serenading them with squeaks. By the end of August – just two weeks after they reach 'puberty' – every male is dead, exhausted by sex and by carrying around swollen testes. This extraordinary life history may also have evolved in response to Australia's trying environmental conditions. It seems likely that if the males survived mating, they would compete with the females as they tried to find enough food to feed their growing young. Basically, antechinus dads are disposable. They do better for antechinus posterity if they go down in a testosterone-fuelled blaze of glory.

One thing you will see lots of in Australia are reptiles (see p1056). Snakes are abundant, and they include some of the most venomous species known. Where the opportunities to feed are few and far between, it's best not to give your prey a second chance, hence the potent venom. Around Sydney and other parts of Australia, however, you are far more likely to encounter a harmless python than a dangerously venomous species. Snakes will usually leave you alone if you don't fool with them. Observe, back quietly away and don't panic, and most of the time you'll be OK.

Some visitors mistake lizards for snakes, and indeed some Australian lizards look bizarre. One of the more abundant is the sleepy lizard. These

Uluru (Ayers Rock) is often thought to be the world's largest monolith. In fact, it only wins second place. The biggest is Mt Augustus (Burringurrah) in Western Australia, which is 2½ times the size.

R Strahan's *The Mammals of Australia* is a complete survey of Australia's somewhat cryptic mammals. Every species is illustrated, and almost everything known about them is covered in the individual species accounts, which have been written by the nation's experts.

H Cogger's *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia* is a bible to those interested in Australia's reptiles, and useful protection for those who are definitely not. This large volume will allow you to identify the species, and you can wield it as a defensive weapon if necessary.

The saltwater crocodile is the world's largest living reptile – males can reach a staggering 6m long.

creatures, which are found throughout the southern arid region, look like animated pine cones. They are the Australian equivalent of tortoises, and are harmless. Other lizards are much larger. Unless you visit the Indonesian island of Komodo you will not see a larger lizard than the desert-dwelling perentie. These beautiful creatures, with their leopard-like blotches, can grow to more than 2m long, and are efficient predators of introduced rabbits, feral cats and the like.

Australia's plants can be irresistibly fascinating. If you happen to be in the Perth area in spring it's well worth taking a wildflower tour. The best flowers grow on the arid and monotonous sand plains, and the blaze of colour produced by the kangaroo paws, banksias and similar native plants can be dizzying. The sheer variety of flowers is amazing, with 4000 species crowded into the southwestern corner of the continent. This diversity of prolific flowering plants has long puzzled botanists. Again, Australia's poor soils seem to be the cause. The sand plain is about the poorest soil in Australia – it's almost pure quartz. This prevents any single fast-growing species from dominating. Instead, thousands of specialist plant species have learned to find a narrow niche, and so coexist. Some live at the foot of the metre-high sand dunes, some on top, some on an east-facing slope, some on the west and so on. Their flowers need to be striking in order to attract pollinators, for nutrients are so lacking in this sandy world that even insects such as bees are rare.

If you do get to walk the wildflower regions of the southwest, keep your eyes open for the sundews. Australia is the centre of diversity for these beautiful, carnivorous plants. They've given up on the soil supplying their nutritional needs and have turned instead to trapping insects with the sweet globs of moisture on their leaves, and digesting them to obtain nitrogen and phosphorus.

If you are very lucky, you might see a honey possum. This tiny marsupial is an enigma. Somehow it gets all of its dietary requirements from nectar and pollen, and in the southwest there are always enough flowers around for it to survive. But no-one knows why the males need sperm larger even than those of the blue whale, or why their testes are so massive. Were humans as well endowed, men would be walking around with the equivalent of a 4kg bag of potatoes between their legs!

CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Headlining the environmental issues facing Australia's fragile landscape at present are climate change, water scarcity, nuclear energy and uranium mining. All are interconnected. For Australia, the warmer temperatures resulting from climate change spell disaster to an already fragile landscape. At the time of research, Australia was suffering its worst drought on record. Dams throughout the country are at record lows and mandatory water restrictions have been imposed. Residents in southeast Queensland are set to drink recycled water by late 2008 because their main water source is at a dismal 20% capacity. A 2°C climb in average temperatures on the globe's driest continent will result in an even drier southern half of the country and greater water scarcity. Scientists also agree that hotter and drier conditions will exacerbate bushfire conditions and increase cyclone intensity, two natural phenomena that have cost lives and a great deal of money to the Australian public (see p417 and p1002).

Australia is a heavy greenhouse gas emitter because it relies on coal and other fossil fuels for its energy supplies. The most prominent and also contentious alternative energy source is nuclear power, which creates less greenhouse gases and relies on uranium, in which Australia is rich. But the

The educational website of the Australian Museum (www.lostkingdoms.com) holds a wealth of info on Australia's animal life from the Cretaceous period till now. Kids will love the online games, fact files and movies.

Ecotourism Australia (www.ecotourism.org.au) has an accreditation system for environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism in Australia. See p994.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

The European colonisation of Australia, commencing in 1788, heralded a period of catastrophic environmental upheaval, with the result that Australians today are struggling with some of the most severe environmental problems to be found anywhere. It may seem strange that a population of just 20 million, living in a continent the size of the USA minus Alaska, could inflict such damage on its environment, but Australia's long isolation, its fragile soils and difficult climate have made it particularly vulnerable to human-induced change.

Damage to Australia's environment has been inflicted in several ways, the most important being the introduction of pest species, destruction of forests, overstocking rangelands, inappropriate agriculture and interference with water flows.

Beginning with the escape of domestic cats into the Australian bush shortly after 1788, a plethora of vermin – from foxes to wild camels and cane toads – have run wild in Australia, causing extinctions in the native fauna. One out of every 10 native mammals living in Australia prior to European colonisation is now extinct, and many more are highly endangered. Extinctions have also affected native plants, birds and amphibians.

The destruction of forests has also had a profound effect on the environment. Most of Australia's rainforests have suffered clearing, while conservationists fight with loggers over the fate of the last unprotected stands of 'old growth'.

Many Australian rangelands have been chronically overstocked for more than a century, the result being the extreme vulnerability of both soils and rural economies to Australia's drought and flood cycle, as well as the extinction of many native species. The development of agriculture has involved land clearance and the provision of irrigation, and here again the effect has been profound.

Clearing of the diverse and spectacular plant communities of the Western Australian wheat belt began just a century ago, yet today up to one-third of that country is degraded by salination of the soils. Between 70kg and 120kg of salt lies below every square metre of the region, and clearing of native vegetation has allowed water to penetrate deep into the soil, dissolving the salt crystals and carrying brine towards the surface.

In terms of financial value, just 1.5% of Australia's land surface provides over 95% of its agricultural yield, and much of this land lies in the irrigated regions of the Murray-Darling Basin. This is Australia's agricultural heartland, yet it too is under severe threat from salting of soils and rivers. Irrigation water penetrates into the sediments laid down in an ancient sea, carrying salt into the catchments and fields. See the boxed text on p60 for more information. The Snowy River in NSW also faces a huge battle for survival: see p248.

Despite the enormity of the biological crisis engulfing Australia, governments and the community have been slow to respond. It was in the 1980s that coordinated action began to take place, but not until the '90s that major steps were taken. The establishment of **Landcare** (www.landcareaustralia.com.au), an organisation enabling people to effectively address local environmental issues, and the expenditure of \$2.5 billion through the **National Heritage Trust Fund** (www.nht.gov.au) have been important national initiatives. Yet so difficult are some of the issues the nation faces that, as yet, little has been achieved in terms of halting the destructive processes.

Individuals are also banding together to help. Groups like the **Australian Bush Heritage Fund** (www.bushheritage.asn.au) and the **Australian Wildlife Conservancy** (AWC; www.australianwildlife.org) allow people to donate funds and time to the conservation of native species. Some such groups have been spectacularly successful; the AWC, for example, already manages many endangered species over its 5260-sq-km holdings.

So severe are Australia's problems that it will take a revolution before they can be overcome, for sustainable practices need to be implemented in every arena of life – from farms to suburbs and city centres. Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and water use lie at the heart of these changes, and Australians are only now developing the road map to sustainability that they so desperately need if they are to have a long-term future on the continent.

radioactive waste created by nuclear power stations can take thousands of years to become harmless. Moreover, uranium is a finite energy (as opposed to yet-cleaner and renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power), and even if Australia were to establish sufficient nuclear power stations now to make a real reduction in coal-dependency, it would be years before the environmental and economic benefits were realised.

Uranium mining itself also produces polarised opinions. Because countries around the world are also looking to nuclear energy, Australia finds itself in a position to increase exports of one of its top-dollar resources. But uranium mining in Australia has been met with fierce opposition for decades, not only because the product is a core ingredient of nuclear weapons, but also because much of Australia's uranium supplies sit beneath sacred indigenous land. Supporters of increased uranium mining and export suggest that the best way to police the use of uranium is to manage its entire life cycle; that is to sell the raw product to international buyers, and then charge a fee to accept the waste and dispose of it. Both major political parties consider an expansion of Australia's \$570 million-a-year uranium export industry to be inevitable for economic reasons.

NATIONAL & STATE PARKS

Australia has more than 500 national parks – nonurban protected wilderness areas of environmental or natural importance. Each state defines and runs its own national parks, but the principle is the same throughout Australia. National parks include rainforests, vast tracts of empty outback, strips of coastal dune land and rugged mountain ranges.

Public access is encouraged as long as safety and conservation regulations are observed. In all parks you're asked to do nothing to damage or alter the natural environment. Camping grounds (often with toilets and showers), walking tracks and information centres are often provided for visitors. In most national parks there are restrictions on bringing in pets.

Some national parks are so isolated, rugged or uninviting that you wouldn't want to go there unless you were an experienced bushwalker or 4WD traveller. Other parks, however, are among Australia's major attractions.

State parks and state forests are other forms of nature reserves; owned by state governments, they have fewer regulations than national parks. Although state forests can be logged, they are often recreational areas with camping grounds, walking trails and signposted forest drives. Some permit horses and dogs.

For the addresses of national and state park authorities, see the National Parks section in each destination chapter.

MALAISE OF THE MURRAY-DARLING

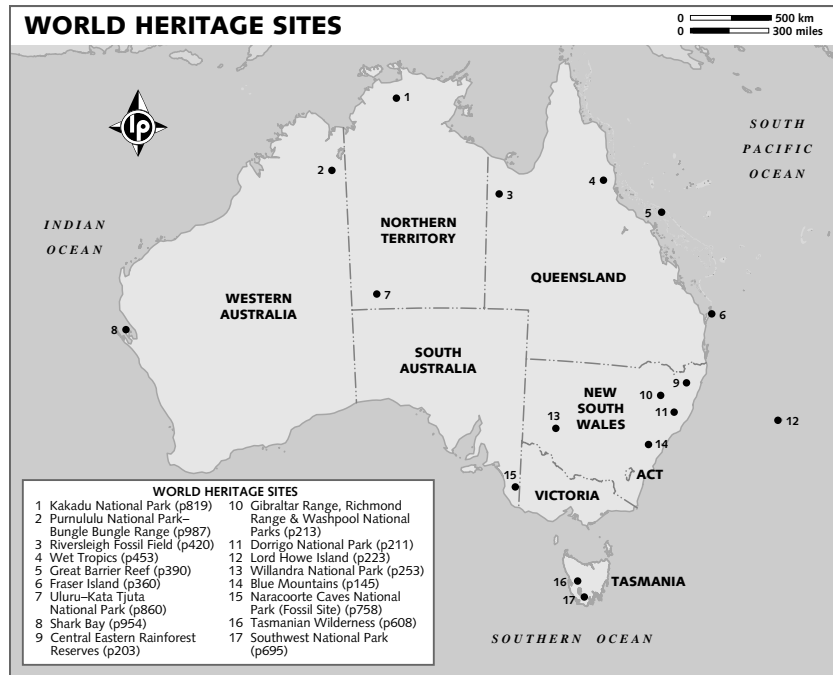
The Murray-Darling is Australia's largest river system. Ranked fifteenth in the world, it flows through South Australia (SA), New South Wales (NSW), the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Queensland, covering an area of 1.05 million sq km – roughly 14% of Australia. Aside from quenching around a third of the country's agricultural and urban thirsts, it also irrigates precious rainforests, wetlands, sub-tropical areas and scorched arid lands. But the Murray-Darling is sick and parched. Leading scientists estimate that unless 1500 gigalitres of water (think Sydney Harbour and then multiply it by three) are returned to the Murray River alone, it won't be able to recover and its water will simply become too salty for use (see the boxed text on p762). Wetland areas around the Darling River that used to flood every five years are now likely to do so every 25 years, and prolific species are threatened with extinction. At the time of writing, the Commonwealth, NSW, Queensland, ACT and SA governments were in the process of defining the Murray-Darling Basement Agreement, a strategy to address the urgency of the situation.

The Climate Project trains ordinary citizens (in the US, Australia and the UK, so far) to become Climate Change Messengers who present the information delivered by Al Gore in the documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. For more, go to www.theclimateproject.org.

Some of Australia's most beautiful national parks are included on the World Heritage Register, a UN register of natural and cultural places of world significance. See <http://whc.unesco.org> for more information about these sites.

TEN GOOD REASONS TO VISIT A NATIONAL PARK

Park Name	Best Time to Visit	Features	Activities	Page Reference
Coorong National Park (SA)	November to March	Wetlands of international importance, evocative dunes, lagoons, freshwater soaks, ephemeral lakes, water birds and pelicans	Canoeing, fishing, swimming, walking and 4WDing	p753
Freycinet National Park (Tasmania)	Year-round	Gorgeous beaches, rocky peaks, stunning Wineglass Bay	Bushwalking, swimming, canoeing, kayaking, camping, fishing, wildlife spotting	p655
Girringun National Park (Queensland)	May to September	The knockout Wallaman Falls (at their fullest from November to February), dense rainforest, endangered cassowaries, open ridges, deep gullies and laden creeks	Camping, bushwalking, overnight hikes, wildlife watching	p410
Grampians National Park (Gariwerd) (Victoria)	Year-round	Wide open vistas, dense forests, abundant native flora and fauna, waterfalls	Bushwalking, sightseeing, rock-climbing, abseiling, camping	p545
Innes National Park (SA)	October to March	Spectacular coastal scenery, indigo waters, sheer cliffs, intimate sandy coves, prolific wildlife	Bushwalking, surfing, fishing, reef-diving	p765
Kakadu National Park (NT)	April to September	Australia's largest national park, World Heritage-listed landscapes, well-preserved indigenous bird-watching, rock-art sites, diverse habitats	Aboriginal tours, stunning bushwalks, bird-watching, 4WDing, camping	p819
Karijini National Park (WA)	August/September	Stunning gorges, spectacular waterfalls and sublime natural and sublime natural swimming pools carved from rocks. Impressive views of four gorges from Oxers Lookout.	Rigorous but breathtaking walks and splendid swimming opportunities	p943
Kosciuszko National Park (NSW)	Year-round	Australia's highest mountain, snow fields in winter, wildflowers in January	Skiing and snowboarding, bushwalking, mountain biking, canoeing, water rafting, abseiling	p241
Mungo National Park (NSW)	May to August	Remote and pristine outback territory, dry Lake Mungo, massive sand dunes concealing ancient remains, Aboriginal heritage	Award-winning eco-tours, 4WDing	p262
Moreton Island National Park (Queensland)	Year-round	Freshwater lagoons, towering sand dunes, wildflowers, ruins of forts, miles of sandy beaches, the Tangalooma Wrecks off Flinders Reef	Superb coastal walks, snorkelling and scuba diving	p326



WATCHING WILDLIFE

Some regions of Australia offer unique opportunities to see wildlife, and one of the most fruitful is Tasmania. The island is jam-packed with wallabies, wombats and possums, principally because foxes, which have decimated marsupial populations on the mainland, were slow to reach the island state (the first fox was found in Tasmania only as recently as 2001!). It is also home to the Tasmanian devil – the Australian hyena, but less than one-third the size of its African ecological counterpart. They're common on the island, and in some national parks you can watch them tear apart road-killed wombats. Their squabbling is fearsome, the shrieks ear splitting. It's the nearest thing Australia can offer to experiencing a lion kill on the Masai Mara. Unfortunately, Tassie devil populations are being decimated by the Devil Facial Tumour Disease; see p678.

For those intrigued by the diversity of tropical rainforests, Queensland's World Heritage sites are well worth visiting. Birds of paradise, cassowaries and a variety of other birds can be seen by day, while at night you can search for tree-kangaroos (yes, some kinds of kangaroo do live in the tree tops). In your nocturnal wanderings you are highly likely to see curious possums, some of which look like skunks, and other marsupials that today are restricted to a small area of northeast Queensland. Fossils from as far afield as western Queensland and southern Victoria indicate that such creatures were once widespread.

Australia's deserts are a real hit-and-miss affair as far as wildlife is concerned. If you're visiting in a drought year, all you might see are dusty plains, the odd mob of kangaroos and emus, and a few struggling trees. Return after big rains, however, and you'll encounter something close to a

The 2007 discovery of the rare Moggridgea tingle spider (which dates back 140 million years) in the Walpole Wilderness Area may alter the entire management of southern Western Australia's karri and tingle forests.

The Wilderness Society focuses on protection of wilderness and forests; visit www.wilderness.org.au.

RESPONSIBLE BUSHWALKING

You can help preserve the ecology and beauty of Australia by keeping in mind the following when you're out hiking:

- Don't pee or poo within 100m of any water sources. Doing so can lead to the transmission of serious diseases, and it also pollutes precious water supplies.
- Wash at least 50m from any water sources, and use a biodegradable detergent.
- It's best not to cut wood for fires in popular bushwalking areas as this can cause rapid deforestation. Instead, use a stove that runs on kerosene, methylated spirits or some other liquid fuel. Avoid stoves powered by disposable butane gas canisters.
- It's important to stick to existing tracks when you're walking, as hillsides and mountain slopes are prone to erosion.

Garden of Eden. Fields of white and gold daisies stretch endlessly into the distance, perfuming the air. The salt lakes fill with fresh water, and millions of water birds – pelicans, stilts, shags and gulls – can be seen feeding on the superabundant fish and insect life of the waters. It all seems like a mirage, and like a mirage it will vanish as the land dries out, only to spring to life again in a few years or a decade's time. For a more reliable bird-watching spectacular, Kakadu (p819) is well worth a look, especially towards the end of the dry season around November.

The largest creatures found in the Australian region are marine mammals such as whales and seals, and there is no better place to see them than South Australia. In springtime southern right whales crowd into the head of the Great Australian Bight. You can observe them near the remote Aboriginal community of Yatala as they mate, frolic and suckle their young. Kangaroo Island (p737), south of Adelaide, is a fantastic place to see seals and sea lions. There are well-developed visitor centres to facilitate the viewing of wildlife, and nightly penguin parades occur at some places where the adult blue penguins make their nest burrows. Kangaroo Island's beaches are magic places, where you're able to stroll among fabulous shells, whale bones and even jewel-like leafy sea dragons amid the sea wrack.

The fantastic diversity of Queensland's Great Barrier Reef is legendary, and a boat trip out to the reef from Cairns or Port Douglas is unforgettable. Just as extraordinary but less well known is the diversity of Australia's southern waters; the Great Australian Bight is home to more kinds of marine creatures than anywhere else on earth. A stroll along any beach, from Cape Leeuwin at the tip of Western Australia to Tasmania, is likely to reveal glimpses of that diversity in the shape of creatures washed up from the depths. The exquisite shells of the paper nautilus are occasionally found on the more remote beaches, where you can walk the white sand for kilometres without seeing another person.

If your visit extends only as far as Sydney, however, don't give up on seeing Australian nature. The Sydney sandstone – which extends approximately 150km around the city – is one of the most diverse and spectacular regions in Australia. In springtime, spectacular red waratahs abound in the region's parks, while the woody pear (a relative of the waratah) that so confounded the early colonists can also be seen, alongside more than 1500 other species of flowering plants. Even in a Sydney backyard you're likely to see more reptile species (mostly skinks) than can be found in all of Great Britain – so keep an eye out!

The whole eastern half of the Northern Territory is designated as the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve. Apart from a few areas, it's not open to independent travellers.

Tim Flannery's *The Future Eaters* is a 'big picture' overview of evolution in Australasia, covering the last 120 million years of history, with thoughts on how the environment has shaped Australasia's human cultures.

Food & Drink

Australian cuisine is an intrinsic feature of the country's diverse culture and is considered a tourist attraction all of its own. Built on the premise of snatching the best global influences and infusing them into an ever-growing pot, it mirrors the population's cheeky and disobedient disposition. It breaks rules and conventions and is impossible to pigeonhole. It is dynamic and constantly surprising. An inquisitive dining public willing to give anything new, and better, a go means that what's hot this morning may be dated by tomorrow – or, more likely, reinvented and improved.

To a large degree immigration has been the key to Australia's culinary bloom. A significant influx of migrants from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and, increasingly, Africa in the last 60 years has introduced new ingredients and new ways to use existing staples. For the vast majority of the country the days of meat and three veg are relegated to history, and increasingly in metropolitan areas Australians live to eat. Laksas, curries and marinara pastas are now old-school 'pub grub'. The phrase Modern Australian (Mod Oz) has been coined to describe the cuisine. If it's a melange of East and West, it's Mod Oz. If it's not authentically French or Italian, it's Mod Oz – the term is an attempt to classify the unclassifiable. As Australians' appetite for diversity and invention grows, so do the avenues of discovery. Cookbooks and foodie magazines are bestsellers, and Australian celebrity chefs – sought overseas – reflect Australia's multiculturalism in their background and dishes.

If all this sounds overwhelming, fear not. You'll find that dishes are characterised by bold and interesting flavours and fresh ingredients rather than fussy or cluttered creations. Spicing ranges from gentle to extreme, coffee is great (though it still reaches its greatest heights in the cities), wine is world renowned, seafood is plentiful, and meats are tender, full flavoured and usually bargain priced. The range of food in Australia is its greatest culinary asset – all palates, be they timid or brave, shy or inquisitive, are well catered for.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Seafood is iconic in Australian cuisine, and little compares to what's hauled from some of the purest waters you'll find anywhere. Despite its abundance it's usually cooked with passion and care.

Connoisseurs prize Sydney rock oysters, a species that actually lives right along the New South Wales (NSW) coast and even in Western Australia (WA). Giving them a run for their money are the oysters grown in seven different regions in South Australia (SA), and Tasmania's Pacific oysters. Tassie is also known for trout, salmon and abalone. There are sea

TALKING STRINE

The opening dish in a three-course meal is called the entrée, the second course (the North American entrée) is called the main course and the sweet bit at the end is called dessert, sweets, afters or pud. In lesser restaurants, of course, it's called desert.

When an Australian invites you over for a baked dinner it might mean a roast lunch. Use the time as a guide – dinner is normally served after 6pm. By 'tea' they could be talking dinner or they could be talking tea. A coffee definitely means coffee, unless it's after a hot date when you're invited up to a prospect's flat.

Australian Gourmet Pages (www.australian-gourmetpages.com.au) is a website devoted to wine, food, restaurants and more in Australia run by a *Vogue* *Entertaining* + *Travel* contributor. Subscription is free.

delicious is a monthly magazine published by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) listing recipes, restaurant reviews, food and wine trends, and foodie-related travel articles.

TASTE OF TRAVEL

Much of Australia's most interesting (if not always most delicious) produce is wild. Some unusual foods you may spy on your travels include wild mushrooms, such as bright-orange pine mushrooms and slippery jacks, so called because they can get quite slimy after rain. There's kangaroo, a deep purple-red meat, which is deliciously sweet. Fillets are so tender and lean they have to be served rare. The tail is often braised in the same way oxtail is cooked. In the north, you may encounter crocodile, a white meat not dissimilar to fish with a texture closer to chicken. In the outback you may be encouraged to try witchetty grubs, which look like giant maggots and taste nutty but have a squishy texture. In the tropics you may find green ants. The way to eat them is to pick them up and bite off their lightly acidic bottoms. Sugar-ant abdomens are full of sweet sap, so again just bite off the tail end.

Much of the native flora has evolved to contain unpalatable chemicals. Despite this, you may enjoy fiery bush pepper, sweetly aromatic lemon myrtle, aniseed myrtle, coffee like flecks of wattle seed, vibrant purple rosella flowers, supersour Davidson plums, lightly acidic bush tomato (*akudjura*) and, of course, macadamia nuts.

The wildest (and most adored) food of all is Vegemite, a frighteningly salty yeast-extract spread with iconic status. Most commonly used on toast, it's also not bad on cheese sandwiches. It's often carried overseas for homesick expats, or licked from fingers by freckle-faced youngsters. It's also a great hangover cure (proven), which may be why most Australians are born with a taste for it (unproven). Outsiders tend to find the flavour coarse, vulgar and completely overwhelming. But what would they know?

scallops from Queensland and estuary scallops from Tasmania and SA. Rock lobsters are fantastic and fantastically expensive, and mud crabs, despite the name, are a sweet delicacy. The crayfish and prawns of Mandurah (WA) are so good that they're shipped to Japan. Another odd-sounding delicacy is 'bugs' – like shovel-nosed lobsters without a lobster's price tag; try the Balmain and Moreton Bay varieties. Marron are prehistoric-looking freshwater crayfish from WA, while their smaller cousins, yabbies, can be found throughout the southeast. Prawns are incredible, particularly sweet school prawns or the eastern king (Yamba) prawns found along the northern NSW coast. Add to that countless wild fish species including prized barramundi from the Northern Territory (NT). Even fish considered run-of-the-mill such as snapper, trevally or whiting tastes fabulous just slapped on a barbecue.

Almost everything eaten from the land was introduced. Even super expensive truffles are harvested in Tasmania and WA. Australia is huge (similar in size to the continental USA) and it varies so much in climate, from the tropical north to the temperate south, that at any time of the year there's an enormous variety of produce on offer. Fruit is a fine example. In summer, fruit bowls overflow with nectarines, peaches and cherries, and mangoes are so plentiful that Queenslanders actually get sick of them. The Murray River gives rise to vast orchards of citrus fruit, grapes, stone fruit and melons. Tasmania's cold climate means its strawberries and stone fruit are sublime. Lamb from Victoria's lush Gippsland is highly prized, the veal of White Rocks in WA is legendary, and the tomatoes of SA are the nation's best. On the topic of vine produce from SA, the state's wine industry is something of a giant and SA reds in particular have made their way to bottle shops the world over.

There's a brilliant and growing farmhouse cheese movement, and the produce is great. Keep an eye out for goat's cheese from Gympie (Queensland), Kytren (WA) and Kervella (WA), cheddar from Pyengana (Tasmania) and the Hunter Valley (NSW), sheep's milk cheese from Highland Farm,

The Sydney Fish Market (p107) trades in several hundred species of seafood every day, second only to Tokyo in variety.

washed rind from Milawa (Victoria), and anything from Woodside Cheesewrights (SA) or Bruny Island (Tasmania), among others. The King Island Dairy (Tasmania) has been wowing Australian taste buds for years with its blue-vein and triple-cream brie (it also comes in the single-cream variety). Tasmania alone now produces 50 cheese varieties.

Anything another country does, Australia does too. Vietnamese, Japanese, Fijian, Italian – no matter where it's from, there's an expat community and interested locals desperate to cook and eat it. Dig deep enough, and you'll find Jamaicans using scotch-bonnet peppers and Tunisians making tagine. And you'll usually find that their houses are the favourite haunts of their locally raised friends.

In cities and urban centres you'll be able to get your hands on any variety of meat, fruit, veg and dairy by popping down to the local supermarket or fresh-food market. Sydney and Melbourne boast the widest variety of markets and produce, owing to their populations, but the metropolitan sprawl along coastal areas provides ample vendors. Seafood is always freshest close to the source, and Australia's an island, so there are plenty.

At home, Australians' taste for the unusual usually kicks in at dinner only, although often for a weekend lunch as well. Most people still eat cereal, toast and fruit for breakfast, or perhaps eggs and bacon at weekends. They devour sandwiches (including panini, focaccias, toasted Turkish bread, and pita wraps), salads and sushi for lunch, and then eat anything and everything in the evening. Yum cha (the classic southern-Chinese dumpling feast) is hugely popular as a lunch option with urban locals, particularly at weekends. Some non-Chinese even have it with the traditional Chinese, first thing in the morning. The barbecue is iconic and virtually mandatory for any home with a garden. In summer it's used frequently at dinner time to grill burgers or rissoles (similar to a burger), sausages, chicken, seafood, veggie or beef skewers, and seafood. Year-round, weather permitting, it's pulled out at weekends for casual Sunday lunches with friends and family.

Australians consume more than 206,000 tonnes of seafood per year. Along the coast, head to a seafood co-op, where you can gorge on a five-star diet for on a one-star budget.

ORGANIC REVOLUTION

Australia is an increasing producer of organic food – that is, food that has been grown or produced without the use of pesticides or chemicals. The health benefits are obvious: you get to enjoy your tomatoes, carrots and apples without fear of swallowing dozens of potentially harmful pesticides with them. But organically grown food is also of huge benefit to the environment. It saves soil and water from years of pesticide contamination and eliminates the need for hazardous waste disposal. In addition, most organic farms are small and independently owned, so the money you spend goes straight back to self-sustainable, environmentally friendly projects. And last, there's the taste – after you've tasted your first organic tomato there's just no going back.

Organic retailers are prevalent in Sydney and Melbourne and increasingly present in cities and towns elsewhere. The NSW North Coast is something of an organic-produce hub, and Byron Bay (p194) is the HQ. Click onto www.organicwine.com.au for information and to purchase organic wine in Australia.

Keep an eye out for the following on your travels:

Iku Wholefoods (p127)

Rainbow Region Organic Markets (see the boxed text, p202)

Lentil as Anything (p504)

Afghan Traders (p849)

Rosehip Café (p675)

Mondo Organics (p316)

Good Life (p722)

DRINKS

No matter what your poison, you're in the right country if you're after a drink. Long recognised as some of the finest in the world, Australian wine is now one of its top exports. In fact, if you're in the country's southern climes, you're probably not far from a wine region right now. As the public develops a more demanding palate, local beers rise to the occasion with a growing wealth of flavours and varieties.

In urban pubs you'll find anything from one to eight boutique beers sidling up to the standard VB, Carlton Draught, Tooheys or XXXX lagers on tap. Microbrewers are popping up as fast as hops after rain. While you're out and about keep an eye out for WA's Little Creatures (a fragrant pale ale sometimes called the Sauvignon Blanc of beer; see p900), or Matilda Bay beers (such as Redback wheat beer). NSW specialties include James Squire amber ale from Sydney and Bluetongue lager from the Hunter Valley (p162). There're also Hazards lager from Hobart and Mountain Goat ale from Melbourne. See the boxed text, p506 for an insight into Victorian microbeers.

Most beers have an alcohol content between 3.5% and 5%. That's less than many European beers but more than most in North America. Light beers contain under 3% alcohol and are finding favour with people observing the stringent drink-driving laws. A recent innovation is Carlton's Pure Blonde – not to be confused with a European wheat beer, it's actually lower in carbohydrates than your average lager.

The terms for ordering beer varies with the state. In NSW you ask for a 'schooner' (425mL) if you're thirsty and a 'middy' (285mL) if you're not quite so dry. In Victoria and Tasmania it's a 'pot' (285mL), and in most of the country you can just ask for a glass of beer and wait to see what turns up. Pints (425mL or 568mL, depending on where you are) aren't as common, though Irish pubs and European-style ale houses tend to offer pints for homesick Poms.

Coffee has become an Australian addiction; there are Italian-style espresso machines in virtually every café, boutique roasters are all the rage and, in urban areas, the qualified barista (coffee maker) is virtually the norm. Sydney and Melbourne have borne a whole generation of coffee snobs (this one self-confessed), but Melbourne easily takes top billing as Australia's coffee capital. The café scene there rivals the most vibrant in the world – the best way to immerse yourself is by wandering the city centre's café-lined lanes. You'll also find decent stuff in most other cities, and there's a 20% chance of good coffee in many rural areas.

CELEBRATIONS

Food and celebration in Australia are strongly linked, with celebrations often including equal amounts of food and alcohol. A birthday could be a barbecue (barbie, BBQ) of steak (or prawns), washed down with a beverage or two. Traditionally, weddings have always been a slap-up dinner affair, although increasingly common are such variations on the norm as cocktail receptions, less formal affairs that dish up hors d'oeuvres, tapas and finger food. Cultural backgrounds are also an influence, and if you've never been to a Greek or Italian wedding you need to start making new mates. Christenings are more sober; they're usually casual affairs with finger food, cake, coffee and tea after the ceremony.

Food tourism and food festivals are hugely popular. Melbourne, for instance, has its own month-long food-and-wine festival in March (p493). There are harvest festivals in wine regions, and various communities, such as the Clare Valley (p750), hold annual events. For more, see the boxed text, p70.

Quaff by Peter Forrestal is the quintessential guide to the best wines available in Australia for \$10, \$15 and over \$15 a bottle, including over 400 local and imported labels.

Around 430 million litres of Australian wine is drunk in Australia annually and almost 670 million litres is exported.

WINE REGIONS

Most Australian states now nurture wine industries. Some are almost 200 years old and some are blossoming babes. Most wineries have small cellar doors where you can taste for free or a minimal fee. If you like the wine, you're generally expected to buy.

Although plenty of good wine comes from big producers with economies of scale on their side, the most interesting wines are usually made by small vigneroni, where you pay a premium; the gamble means the payoff in terms of flavour is often greater. Almost half the cost of wine is due to a high taxing program courtesy of the Australian government.

Chapters on each state go into greater detail, but the following rundown should give you a head start.

SA

Purists will rave about Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon from Coonawarra (p757), Riesling from the Clare Valley (p750), and Shiraz from the Barossa Valley (p743). SA is Australia's vinous heartland (visit the National Wine Centre in Adelaide, p715), but there are many more regions that produce fine wine.

NSW

In NSW the Hunter Valley (p162 and p164) is the oldest wine region in Australia – it first had vines in the 1820s. The lower region is best known for Shiraz and unwooded Semillon, and the Upper Hunter wineries specialise in Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz, with forays into Verdelho and Chardonnay.

Further inland, there are award-winning wineries at Griffith (p252), Mudgee (p220) and Orange (p216).

Victoria

Just out of Melbourne, wineries in Geelong (p514), the Mornington Peninsula (p522) and the Yarra Valley (p521) all produce great Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Wineries in Rutherglen (p560) produce superb fortified wines as well as Shiraz and Durif.

Victoria has over 500 wineries; see the boxed text, p523 for more information.

WA

In WA Margaret River (p912) is synonymous with incredible wine. The competition is stiff and the region has attracted international awards in recent years. The Cabernets and Chardonnays produced here are among the world's best. See the boxed text, p915, for more information.

Tucked into old-growth forest territory, Pemberton (p917) is peppered with wineries specialising in Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc and Shiraz.

Mt Barker (p922) on the South Coast is another budding wine region.

Tasmania & Queensland

In Tassie there are highly regarded wineries in Pipers River (p661) and the Tamar Valley (p669) and a burgeoning wine industry in Richmond (p639). There's even a small wine region in Queensland (see the boxed text, p354), though not all of it is good.

For many an event, especially in the warmer months, Australians fill the car with an Esky (an ice chest, to keep everything cool), tables, chairs and a cricket set or footy, and head off for a barbie by the lake/river/beach. If there's a total fire ban (which occurs increasingly each summer), the food is precooked and the barbie becomes more of a picnic, but the essence remains the same.

Christmas in Australia, in midsummer, is less likely to involve a traditional European baked dinner, and more likely to be replaced by a barbecue, full of seafood and quality steak. It's a response to the warm weather.

Prawn prices skyrocket, chicken may be eaten with champagne at breakfast, and the main meal is usually in the afternoon, after a swim and before a really good, long siesta. If there's an exception to this rule it's Melbourne, which frequently produces winter weather on Christmas Day (regardless if there's a heat wave either side) and consequently facilitates a traditional baked dinner.

Various ethnic groups have their own celebrations. The Indian community brings out all the colour of the old country and the stickiest of sweets during Diwali; Greeks will embrace any chance to hold a spit barbecue; and the Chinese go off during their annual Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) every January or February (it changes with the lunar calendar).

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Typically, a restaurant meal in Australia is a relaxed affair. You'll probably order within 15 minutes, and see the first course in 20 minutes and the main about half an hour later.

A competitively priced place to eat is a club (RSL or Surf Life Saving clubs are good bets), where you order at the kitchen – usually a staple such as a fisherman's basket, steak, or chicken parmigiana – take a number and wait until it's called out over the counter or intercom. You pick up the meal yourself, saving the restaurant on staffing costs and you on your total bill.

Pub meals (often referred to as counter meals, even if you sit at a table) are also good value, and standards such as gourmet sausages and mash, pizza, pasta, and salads go for \$10 to \$15. In cities you'll also find pubs that pride themselves on their food – much like a British gastropub. Prices are higher, but the food is top-notch restaurant quality.

Solo diners will find that cafés and noodle bars are welcoming, and good fine-dining restaurants often treat you like a star.

If a restaurant says it's BYO, you're allowed to bring your own alcohol. If the place also sells alcohol, the BYO bit is usually limited to bottled wine only (no beer, no casks) and a corkage charge is added to your bill. The cost is either per person or per bottle and ranges from nothing to \$15 per bottle in fancy places.

Most restaurants open around noon for lunch and from 6pm for dinner. Australians usually eat lunch shortly after noon, and dinner bookings are usually made between 6.30pm and 8pm, though in major cities some restaurants stay open past 10pm. Cafés tend to be all-day affairs that either close around 5pm or continue into the night. Pubs usually serve food from noon to 2pm and 6pm to 8pm. Pubs and bars often open for drinking at lunchtime and continue well into the evening, particularly from Thursday to Saturday.

Quick Eats

There's not a huge culture of street vending in Australia, though you may find a pie or coffee cart in some places. In cities the variety of quick eats is great; gourmet sandwich bars and delis, globally inspired takeaways, bakeries, and sushi or salad bars. Elsewhere the options are more limited and traditional, like a milk bar, which serves old-fashioned hamburgers (with bacon, egg, pineapple and beetroot if you want) and other takeaway foods. Fish and chips is still hugely popular, the fish most often a form of shark (often called flake; don't worry, it can be delicious) either grilled or dipped in heavy batter and fried, and ideal for eating at the beach on a Friday night.

If you're at a rugby league or Aussie Rules football match, a beer, a meat pie and a bag of hot chips are as compulsory as wearing your team's colours to the game.

Tipping is not expected in Australia, but it is common practice. Around 15% is appreciated, perhaps more if your kids (or fellow adults) have gone crazy and trashed the dining room.

The Cook's Companion by Stephanie Alexander is Australia's single-volume answer to Delia Smith. If it's in here, most Australians have probably seen it or eaten it.

In Australia, a request to 'throw another shrimp on the barbie' may result in the criminal assault of a vertically challenged individual. Try 'throw another prawn on the barbie' to avoid conviction.

TOP FOOD FESTIVALS

Australia has a multitude of festivals to keep gastronomes gambolling year-round.

- Barossa Vintage Festival (SA; p744) Beginning Easter Monday every second year, this festival lasts a whole week.
- Clare Valley Gourmet Weekend (SA; p750) Held on a long weekend in May.
- Festivale (Tasmania; p665) Takes place over three days in February.
- Jazz in the Vines (NSW; p163) A food, wine and jazz combo held in NSW's vino heartland in October.
- Melbourne Food & Wine Festival (Victoria; p493) Melbourne's main gastronomical celebration (and that's a big call) has events throughout the city and is internationally renowned.
- National Festival of Beers (Queensland; p311) A three-day event in mid-September.
- Sardine Festival (WA; p897) A gourmet seafood fiesta held in January.
- Taste of Byron (NSW; p197) A celebration of the Byron region's organic and home-grown produce at the end of October.
- Taste of Tasmania (Tasmania; p623) A week-long event seeing in the New Year.

Pizza has become one of the most popular fast foods; most pizzas that are home delivered are of the American style (thick and with lots of toppings) rather than Italian style. That said, more and more wood-fired, thin, Neapolitan-style pizza can be found, even in country towns.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

You're in luck: most cities have substantial numbers of local vegetarians, which means you're well catered for. Cafés seem to always have vegetarian options, and even the best restaurants may have complete veggie menus. Take care with risotto and soups, though, as meat stock is often used.

Vegans will find the going much tougher, but local Hare Krishna restaurants or Buddhist temples often provide relief, and there are usually dishes that are vegan-adaptable at restaurants.

Both vegetarians and vegans are likely to have difficulty finding a decent meal in remote areas. The rule of thumb is that the greater the resident population the greater your chances of finding good vegetarian or vegan fare.

EATING WITH KIDS

Dining with children in Australia is relatively easy. At all but the flashiest places children are commonly seen. Kids are usually more than welcome at cafés, while bistros and clubs often see families dining early. Many fine-dining restaurants discourage small children (assuming that they're all ill behaved).

Most places that do welcome children don't have separate kids' menus, and those that do usually offer everything straight from the deep fryer – crumbed chicken and chips etc. You might be best finding something on the normal menu (say a pasta or salad) and asking the kitchen to adapt it to your child's needs.

The best news for travelling families is that there are plenty of free or coin-operated barbecues in parks. Note that these will be in high demand at weekends and on public holidays.

The Australian Vegetarian Society (www.veg-soc.org) has a useful website that lists a number of vegetarian and vegetarian-friendly places to eat.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

As a nation, Australians aren't really a fussy lot. And that extends to the way they approach dining; it's usually a casual affair, and even at the finest of restaurants a jacket is virtually never required (but certainly isn't frowned upon). At the table, however, it's good manners to use British knife-and-fork skills, keeping the fork in the left hand, tines down, and the knife in the right. Talking with your mouth full is considered uncouth, and fingers should be used only for food that can't be tackled another way (so in pubs, cafés and other casual eateries it's perfectly acceptable to eat your chips or burger with your hands).

If you're invited to someone's house for dinner, always take a gift. Even if the host downright refuses when asked in advance, take a bottle of wine, some flowers or a box of chocolates.

'Shouting' is a revered custom where people rotate paying for a round of drinks. Just don't leave before it's your turn to buy! At a toast, everyone should touch glasses and look each other in the eye as they clink – failure to do so is reported to end in seven years' bad sex. On the other hand, a firm look may guarantee seven years of mind-blowing sex. Many drinks/cheers and looks may even ensure mind-blowing sex with someone at your table.

Australians like to linger a bit over coffee. They like to linger longer while drinking beer. And they tend to take quite a bit of time if they're out to dinner.

Smoking is banned in most eateries in the nation, so sit outside if you love to puff. And most states and territories are bringing in non-smoking sections in bars, clubs and pubs, too, so it's getting quite unlikely that you'll be able to smoke inside – it's best to never plan on it.

COOKING COURSES

Many good cooking classes are run by food stores such as **Simon Johnson** (☎ 02-9552 2522; 181 Harris St, Pyrmont) in Sydney, and the **Essential Ingredient** (☎ 03-9827 9047; www.theessentialingredient.com.au; Prahran Market, Elizabeth St, Prahran) in Melbourne. Others are run by markets, such as the Sydney Seafood School (p107) or the Queen Victoria Market Cooking School (p484) in Melbourne.

For a more comprehensive list of cooking schools in Australia, click onto www.classic.com.au/wizard/schools.htm.

More courses for culinary inspiration:

Chapel Hill (p732) This McLaren Vale winery, set in a 150-year-old chapel, offers good cooking courses in its new lodge.

Elise Pascoe Cooking School (☎ 02-4236 1666; www.cookingschool.com.au; Jamberoo Valley, NSW) Food writer and remarkable cook Elise Pascoe runs mostly weekend cooking classes in a stunning setting just south of Sydney, near Kiama.

Le Cordon Bleu (☎ 1800 064 802; www.lecordobleu.com.au; Sydney) The original must-do French course is available thanks to a joint venture down under. Courses from 10 weeks to five years (part-time).

Mondo Organics (p316) This much-loved organic restaurant in Brisbane holds cooking courses that attract pupils from all over the city.

EAT YOUR WORDS

For a bit more insight into Australian cuisine, stick your nose into one or more of these books.

Australian Regional Food Guide (www.australianregionalfoodguide.com) By Sally and Gordon Hammond. A great guide to where to buy good food at the source as you travel around.

Cheap Eats The *Age* publishes an annual guide to great meals for under \$30 in and around Melbourne.

When Cyclone Larry devastated banana crops in northern Queensland in 2006, bananas rocketed from around \$1.50 per kilogram to as much as \$16 per kilogram for close to six months.

The Australian Food and Wine Website, www.campionandcurtis.com, run by two food writers who trained as chefs, lists cooking schools, restaurants and cookbooks, plus plenty of their own Mod Oz recipes.

Heart and Soul, by celebrated Australian chef Kylie Kwong, lists her favourite Mod Oz recipes from her experience working in some of NSW's finest restaurants with Australia's top chefs.

Chalk and Cheese by Will Studd contains everything you ever wanted to know about boutique cheese and cheesemakers in Australia's blossoming industry.

Good Food Guide The *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* both put out annual restaurant guides that rate over 400 restaurants in Victoria and NSW respectively.

Penguin's Good Australian Wine Guide By Huon Hooke and Ralph Kyte-Powell. An annual publication with lots of useful information on many readily available wines.

Food Glossary

Australians love to shorten everything, including people's names, so expect many other words to be abbreviated. Some words you might hear:

barbie – a barbecue (BBO), where (traditionally) smoke and overcooked meat are matched with lashings of coleslaw, potato salad and beer

Chiko roll – a fascinating large, spring roll–like pastry for sale in takeaway shops; best used as an item of self-defence rather than eaten

Esky – an insulated ice chest to hold your *tinnies*, before you hold them in your *tinny holder*, may be carried onto your *tinny*, too

middy – a medium-sized glass of beer (NSW)

nummits – delicious, can be an adjective or a noun

pav – pavlova, the meringue dessert topped with cream, passion fruit and kiwi fruit or other fresh fruit

pie floater – a meat pie served floating in thick pea soup (SA)

pot – a medium-sized glass of beer (Victoria, Tasmania)

sanger/sando/sambo – a sandwich

schooner – a big glass of beer (NSW), but not as big as a pint

snag – (aka surprise bag): sausage

snot block – a vanilla slice

Tim Tam – a commercially produced chocolate biscuit that lies close to the heart of most Australians; best consumed as a Tim Tam shooter (also known as a Tim Tam bomb or exploding Tim Tam), where the two diagonally opposite corners of the rectangular biscuit are nibbled off, and a hot drink (tea is the true aficionado's favourite) is sucked through the fast-melting biscuit like a straw – ugly but good

tinny – usually refers to a can of beer, but could also be the small boat you go fishing for mud crabs in (and you'd take a few tinnies in your tinny, in that case)

tinny holder – insulating material that you use to keep the *tinny* (can of beer) ice cold, and nothing to do with a boat

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Driving Australia

With its vast distances, long stretches of road and off-the-beaten-track sights, Australia explored by road guarantees an experience unlike any other.

CHOOSING A VEHICLE

The type of vehicle you choose will depend on the kind of travel you have planned.

4WD

Four-wheel drives are a good choice for outback travel as they can access almost any track you're likely to come across. Their larger size means there is ample room for luggage and perhaps even space to sleep in the back. However, they're not as good for city driving and parking, they have poorer fuel economy and can be noisy, and may be more expensive to hire or buy than you are prepared to pay.

2WD

Depending on where you want to travel, a 2WD vehicle may suffice. Two-wheel drives are cheaper to hire, buy and run than 4WDs and are more readily available. And, most are quite fuel efficient. Common 2WD models will be well-known by mechanics and spare parts will be cheaper. They will also be easier to sell, as the market for standard 2WDs is broad. While 2WDs can be driven down most dirt roads, they can't access as many places as a 4WD. The storage space in a 2WD is also much less than a campervan or 4WD, with no room to sleep.

Campervan

All the creature-comforts are at your fingertips in a campervan; they usually have a sink, fridge, cupboard space, beds, kitchen and general equipment, and provide a space to relax when breaking your journey. This can be a hindrance as anywhere you drive, even short day trips or down to the pub for dinner, you'll be lugging everything including the kitchen sink with you. Campervans are also slower than other means of travel, and use more fuel. They generally can't be taken on dirt roads and are not great for city driving. Hi-tops can be difficult to drive in high winds and even tricky on the open road (pop-top vans are easier to drive). Campervans also feel extremes in temperature: in hot weather they can feel like an oven, and in the cold they can be freezing.

PREPARING YOUR 4WD: TYRES, WATER AND COLD BEER IN THE FRIDGE *Chris Klep*

Apart from booking a major service for your vehicle before departing, you need to ensure your tyres are in near-new condition. Ideally, they should be of the 'All-Terrain (AT)' or 'Mud-Terrain (MT)' varieties. These are far more robust and will handle the rough, unsealed outback roads and tracks better than standard road tyres. Not only does preventing a puncture save you a lot of hassle (and cost), but it could also prevent loss of control and rollover of your vehicle. When it comes to water, extra containers need to be considered if you're heading into dry remote regions. We had 60L on our trailer as well as a 15L container in the car at all times. We also had a 12V fridge with us, which was great in the hot conditions when cold beer is essential. It ran off a second battery in the car. When camping for more than a couple of days in one location we charged the battery via a solar panel.

Motorcycle

Motorcycles can be a unique way to travel and are a great way to avoid congested city traffic. However, Australia is not as bike-friendly as Europe for example in terms of driver awareness, so riders need to be alert and aware at all times. The amount of luggage and supplies you can carry is limited and you are also more exposed to the elements. It is advised that travellers not use this form of transport in Central and Northern Australia during the summer months, due to the extreme heat.

BUYING A VEHICLE

Buying your own vehicle to travel around in gives you the freedom to go where and when the mood takes you. Owning the vehicle you're driving also means you don't have to worry about having to pay excess for any minor damage to the car, as you would with a rental car. And buying a vehicle may work out to be cheaper in the long run.

Always read the fine print when buying a car. See opposite for organisations that can check to ensure the car you're buying is fully paid for and owned by the seller.

The downsides of buying a vehicle include having to deal with confusing and expensive registration, roadworthy certificates and insurance. You'll have to keep the vehicle maintained yourself, and selling the vehicle may be more difficult than expected. Some dealers will sell you a car with an undertaking to buy it back at an agreed price, but don't accept verbal guarantees – get it in writing.

What to look for

If a car has been regularly serviced it should be in reasonable mechanical condition – a good start is with the car's service record. Other things to check include:

- tyre tread
- number of kilometres
- rust damage
- accident damage
- oil should be translucent and honey-coloured
- coolant should be clean and not rusty in colour
- engine condition; check for fumes from engine, smoke from exhaust while engine is running or engines that rattle or cough
- exhaust system should not be excessively noisy or rattle when engine is running
- windscreen should be clear with no cracks or chip marks

When test-driving the car, listen for body noises and changes in engine noise. Check for oil and petrol smells, leaks and overheating. Check the instruments and controls in the car work, including the heating, air-con and windscreen wipers. Check all the seatbelts work. The brakes should pull the car up straight, without pulling, vibrating or making any noise. Gears should change smoothly and quietly. Steering should also be smooth and quiet. If the car bounces and is extremely rough, it may be worth getting the suspension checked. Check that all the brake lights, headlights and indicators work.

It is always best to have the car checked by an independent expert. Auto clubs (p79) offer vehicle checks, and road transport authorities (p77) have lists of licensed garages.

Check the prices of the make, model and year of any vehicle you are considering with online dealers, online papers such as the Trading Post (www.tradingpost.com.au), or in local newspapers to get an idea of the average price for

this type of vehicle. Or look at Red Book Asia Pacific (www.redbookasiapacific.com.au) and the auto club websites.

Where and when to buy

There are a number of options for buying a secondhand vehicle. Keep in mind that it will cost more than the negotiated price as you'll have to factor in extra costs such as stamp duty, registration, transfer fee, insurance and maintenance. Main cities are obviously the best places to look. Cairns is a hotspot; many travellers end a south to north journey and want to sell vehicles along with equipment. And, during Northern Australia's Wet season, there are fewer tourists around and car yards are often full of secondhand vehicles.

PRIVATE ADS

Buying privately can be time-consuming as you will usually have to travel around to look at your options. Given the extra risks and hassles involved when you buy privately, you should expect a lower price than that charged by a licensed dealer.

The seller should provide you with a roadworthy certificate, but you won't get a cooling-off period or a statutory warranty. It'll also be your responsibility to make sure that the car is not stolen and that there's no money owing on it. Contact one of the following organisations to check this officially:

REVS (☎ 133230; www.revs.nsw.gov.au) ACT, NSW and NT.

REVS (☎ 131304; www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au) Queensland; through the Office of Fair Trading.

REVS (☎ 1300 304 024; <https://bizline.docep.wa.gov.au/revs>) WA.

Registration Status Service (☎ 1300 851 225; www.transport.tas.gov.au) Tasmania.

Vehicles Securities Register (☎ 131084; www.ecom.transport.sa.gov.au) SA.

Vehicles Securities Register (☎ 131171; www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) Victoria; through VicRoads.

BACKPACKERS

Accommodation notice boards, especially those in hostels, and online notice boards such as Travellers Contact Point (www.taw.com.au) and the Travel Classifieds section of lonelyplanet.com are good places to find vehicles for sale. Tour desks also often have notice boards.

Ride sharing is also a good way to split costs and environmental impact with other travellers. Notice boards are good places to find ads, as well as online classifieds.

Aussie Carpool (www.aussiecarpool.com)

Catch A Lift (www.catchalift.com)

ecarpool (www.ecarpool.com.au)

lonelyplanet.com (lonelyplanet.com) See the Classifieds section.

Need A Ride (www.needaride.com.au)

DEALERS

Buying from a licensed dealer does give you more protection. They are obliged to guarantee that no money is owing on the car and you're usually allowed a cooling-off period (usually three days). Depending on the age of the car and the kilometres travelled, you may also receive a statutory warranty. You will need to sign an agreement for sale; make sure you understand what is says before you sign.

Some companies offer buyback deals, where they guarantee to buy the vehicle back from you within a set time frame for a fraction of the price you pay. This may be useful if you have trouble selling the car, or getting a roadworthy certificate once you've finished with it. While the dealers are obliged to buy the vehicle back, any damage or out of the ordinary maintenance costs will have to be met by you.

CROSSING THE TROPIC *Catherine Le Nevez*

Carnarvon, early January.

I've just celebrated New Year with backpackers in Kalbarri; giving an English girl, Isabel, a lift to Coral Bay.

We're clearing the sunburnt mango plantations when my phone beeps. A text message from one of the backpacker crew, a guy from Dublin: 'Watch out for the cyclone around Exmouth'. Isabel and I look up at the bright blue summer sky, figuring it's a joke, or at least an overreaction.

Dusty flood-warning signs rise incongruously from the shimmering spinifex flashing past. On the horizon, a cloudbank the colour of squid ink looms, and within minutes, the early afternoon plunges into blackness. I crank the headlights to high beams. The wind roars like a 747 before takeoff; then a downpour drubs the car, like we're being churned through a carwash. There's nowhere to pull over; the roadside ditch is now a fast-flowing creek.

A streak of lightning illuminates the Coral Bay turn-off. Crunch time: the Lyndon River's 25km inside, and if it's risen we'll be trapped. Shooting 217km north for Exmouth's too risky – there's not enough petrol, or anywhere to refuel. Besides, he said Exmouth's where the cyclone's hanging around. And there's no phone reception here. No radio. Nothing.

I turn, the wheels' spin slowing as I drive blindly. More lightning reveals water swirling around the tops of the tyres, twisters rotating like out-of-control spinning tops...and the metal Tropic of Capricorn sign.

The Tropic's 12km north of the river.

We're through. And these are the tropics, for sure.

Don't buy any extras such as extended warranties without doing your research first. Look at what's covered and how that compares to the price of the additional warranty, and then at what could go wrong with the car and how much it will cost to repair it anyway.

TRAVELLERS' MARKETS

Cairns, Sydney, Darwin and Perth (cities where travellers commonly begin or finish their travels) are the best places to buy or sell a vehicle, with Cairns highly regarded as a buyer's market.

Australia's largest backpacker car market is the **Kings Cross Car Market** (☎ 1800 800 188; www.carmarket.com.au; cnr Ward Ave & Elizabeth Bay Rd, Kings Cross) in Sydney. It's likely these cars have been around Australia several times so it can be a risky option.

**Paperwork
REGISTRATION**

When you buy a vehicle in Australia, you need to transfer the vehicle registration into your own name within 14 days. Each state has slightly different requirements and different organisations to do this.

You'll have to make sure you consider the following things when registering your new car:

Compulsory third-party insurance Required in NSW and Queensland. In the ACT, NT, SA, Victoria and WA this is included as part of the registration fee.

Transfer of registration form In NSW, NT, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and WA, you and the seller need to complete and sign this form. In the ACT and SA there is no transfer form, but you and the seller need to fill in and sign the reverse of the current registration certificate.

Roadworthy certificate In the ACT, if the vehicle is more than six years old it will need a roadworthy certificate. In NSW, NT, SA, Tasmania and WA you do not need to provide a roadworthy certificate. In Queensland a safety certificate has replaced the roadworthy certificate and needs to be provided. And in Victoria, a roadworthy certificate is required.

Immobiliser fitting In WA it is compulsory to have an approved immobiliser fitted to most vehicles before transfer of registration will be allowed; this is responsibility of the buyer. (Note that motorcycles are exempt.)

Gas certificate In Queensland if the vehicle runs on gas, a gas certificate (dated less than three months before the date of transfer) must be provided by the seller and shown to transfer the registration.

Registering a vehicle in a different state to the one it was previously registered in can be extremely difficult, time consuming and expensive. A roadworthy certificate or equivalent is required.

Registration is usually renewed annually Australia-wide. This generally requires no more than payment of the registration fee. However, some states have extra requirements:

NSW All vehicles are required to be inspected annually.

NT All vehicles are required to be inspected annually. If run on gas a gas certificate must also be supplied.

SA You can pay for three, six, nine or 12 months registration.

Tasmania You can pay for six or 12 months registration.

For more information about processes and costs, visit the websites or contact the road transport authority in each state/territory:

Rego ACT (☎ 02-6207 7000; www.rego.act.gov.au) ACT.

Roads & Traffic Authority NSW (☎ 132213; www.rta.nsw.gov.au) NSW.

Northern Territory Department of Planning & Infrastructure (☎ 1300 654 628; www.ipe.nt.gov.au) NT.

Queensland Transport (☎ 132380; www.transport.qld.gov.au) Queensland.

Department for Transport, Energy & Infrastructure (☎ 1300 360 067; www.transport.sa.gov.au) SA.

Department of Infrastructure, Energy & Resources (☎ 1300 851 225; www.transport.tas.gov.au) Tasmania.

VicRoads (☎ 131171; www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) Victoria.

Department for Planning & Infrastructure (☎ 131156; www.dpi.wa.gov.au) WA.

ROADWORTHY CERTIFICATES

If the vehicle you are considering does not have a current roadworthy certificate, it is worth having a roadworthy check done or requesting that the seller have one done before you buy. This will cost between \$60 and \$100 (not including repairs) but can save you money on hidden costs. Road transport authorities have lists of licensed vehicle testers. In NSW and the NT, where all vehicles are inspected annually, vehicle inspectors are likely to be more lenient when conducting a roadworthy check, so work to meet the roadworthy requirements may cost less.

On-selling

When selling a vehicle you need to advise the state/territory road transport authority (above) of the change of name. In Queensland before advertising a car for sale you need to obtain and display a safety certificate. In NSW, NT, SA, Tasmania and WA you do not need to provide a roadworthy certificate. In Victoria you are required to provide a roadworthy certificate, or you can remove the plates, cancel the registration, and sell the car without a certificate.

RENTING A VEHICLE

The biggest advantage of hiring is that you avoid the messy problems that come with buying a vehicle such as obtaining roadworthy certificates,

registering and selling it. Larger car rental companies have drop offs in major cities/towns so you don't need to waste time backtracking.

Most companies require the driver to be over the age of 21, though in some cases it may be 18, and in others 25.

While hiring can seem like an easier alternative, it does come with its own set of issues, including overly complex contracts, gaps in insurance cover, hidden fees and fine print. Some suggestions to assist in the process of hiring a car include the following:

- Get a copy of the contract and read it carefully.
- Check what the bond entails. Some companies may require a signed credit card slip, others may actually charge your credit card; if this is the case, find out when you'll get a refund.
- Ask if unlimited kilometres are included and if not, what the extra charge per kilometre is.
- Find out what excess you will pay and if this can be lowered by an extra charge per day. Check if your personal travel insurance covers you for motor vehicle accidents and rental insurance excess.
- Check for any exclusions. Some companies won't cover single vehicle accidents (eg if you hit a kangaroo), accidents occurring while the car is being reversed or damage occurring on unsealed roads. Check whether you are covered on unavoidable unsealed roads, such as gaining access to campgrounds. Some companies also exclude parts of the car from cover, such as the underbelly, tyres, windscreen or water immersion damage.
- At pickup inspect the vehicle for any damage. Make a note of anything on the contract before you sign.
- Ask about procedures in the event of a breakdown or accident.
- If you can, return the vehicle during business hours and insist on an inspection in your presence.
- If you have a complaint, contact the office of consumer affairs of the state or territory you are in.

There are a huge number of rental companies. Two useful sites offering last-minute discounts are **DIY Car Hire** (www.diycarhire.com.au) and **Drive Now** (www.drivenow.com.au).

Relocations

Relocations are a great way to get cheap deals, although they don't allow for much flexibility when it comes to time. Most of the large hire companies offer relocation deals. **Standbycars** (www.standbycars.com.au) and **Drive Now** (www.drivenow.com.au) are recommended companies, advertising a range of deals. It's also worth contacting individual companies, such as **Apollo** (<http://webres.apollocamper.com>) and **Britz** (www.britz.com.au), directly. Shop around to find the best deal and one that suits your travel plans.

DRIVING LICENCE

You must hold a current driving licence that has been issued in English from your home country in order to drive in Australia. If the licence from your home country is not issued in English, you will also need to carry an International Driving Permit, issued in your home country, at all times.

INSURANCE

Basic insurance options in Australia are third-party insurance or more extensive comprehensive insurance. In the ACT, NT, SA, Victoria and WA compulsory third-party insurance is included as part of the vehicle

registration fee. This covers you, or anyone else, for death or injury if your car is involved in an accident. However, it doesn't cover you for damage to your car or anyone else's, which can be very expensive. Additional insurance is a good idea, if you can afford it, and may end up saving you a lot of cash if you do have an accident. See the road transport authorities' (p77) or auto clubs' websites (below) for more information.

AUTO CLUBS

The various automobile clubs in each state are a great resource for travellers when it comes to insurance and state regulations, driving maps and roadside assistance. A membership to one of these clubs at around \$100 to \$150 can save a lot of trouble if things go wrong mechanically. If you are a member of an auto club in your country of residence check to see if reciprocal rights are offered in Australia.

AAA (Australian Automobile Association; ☎ 02-6247 7311; www.aaa.asn.au)

AANT (Automobile Association of the Northern Territory; ☎ 08-89813 837; www.aant.com.au)

NRMA (☎ 131122; www.nyrma.com.au) Primarily NSW but operates Australia-wide.

RAC (Royal Automobile Club of WA; ☎ 131703; www.rac.com.au)

RACQ (Royal Automobile Club of Queensland; ☎ 131905; www.racq.com.au)

RACT (Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania; ☎ 132722; www.ract.com.au)

RACV (Royal Automobile Club of Victoria; ☎ 137228; www.racv.com.au)

ROAD RULES

Australian authorities are regarded as some of the strictest when it comes to enforcing road laws. Some basic rules:

- Motorists drive on the left-hand side of the road.
- Seatbelts must be worn by all occupants at all times.
- In built-up areas the speed limit is usually 60km/h, and in residential areas it's 50km/h. At certain times school zones are 40km/h as signed. On freeways the limit is generally 100km/h and on highways 100km/h or 110km/h; in the NT some highways don't have speed limits. Refer to signs if in doubt.
- The blood alcohol limit is 0.05 for fully licensed drivers.
- Talking on a mobile phone while driving is illegal.

For more information, see the rules and regulations sections of the road transport authorities' websites (p77) and the information provided in the Transport chapter, p1034.

BIG DRIVES WITH KIDS – AND EMPTY-NESTERS *Chris Klep*

Western Australia is huge to say the least, making the Northern Territory feel compact, and that's scary. Travelling with the kids (a seven-year-old and a four-year-old) was very rewarding but also demanding. We did all our own cooking, rarely eating out (not a great selection of places, and having two kids in tow meant the better establishments weren't really practical). Having the kids with us certainly opened up a number of doors though – whenever there were other families with kids, they drew together like magnets. And in general they were a hit with the 'grey nomads'. I was really surprised to see how many people over 55 were on the road.

A highlight was ten days camped on the edge of the **Ningaloo Reef** (p965) in Cape Range National Park. Just 50m from our camp we could jump in and snorkel on the reef, or fish. The lack of people here was refreshing, with only a small number of sites in the camping ground. The kids had a ball, swimming and snorkelling day after day. You could only stay in the park 28 days and it was surprising to come across a number of people that were planning to stay this length of time.

Australian police operate mobile and roadside speed cameras. If you are caught speeding you will be heavily fined. The police also operate breathalyser and drug check-points on Australian roads and penalties for being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while driving are severe. Police can randomly pull any driver over for a breathalyser or drug test.

DANGERS, PRECAUTIONS & PRACTICALITIES

Australia is a huge country, with large distances between populated areas. When driving in rural areas:

- Be wary of driver fatigue; a break at least every two hours or so is recommended.
- Carry a mobile phone if possible, but be aware that there isn't always coverage in country areas.
- Always carry plenty of spare water, and extra fuel if possible.
- Look out for potholes and rough surfaces, roads changing surfaces without notice, soft and broken edges and single-lane bridges.
- Watch out for wildlife on the roads; the most dangerous times are dawn, dusk and at night. Also look out for livestock on the road.
- Be careful overtaking road trains; you'll need distance and plenty of speed. On single-lane roads you'll need to get right off the road when one approaches to avoid collision.

Maintenance & Running Costs

Maintenance and running costs will depend on the age and condition of the car. It's a good idea to check the oil and water regularly (in older cars every day). Also check the tyre pressure regularly (including the spare tyre). The manufacturer should specify what the ideal pressure is (often detailed on the inside of the driver's door). Vehicles should be serviced every six months or 10,000km; a basic service will cost \$100 to \$150. Keep water and/or coolant on hand. Note that you should *never* try to open the radiator cap while the engine is hot as the boiling water may burst up, burning you badly. (Newer cars usually have a coolant reservoir avoiding the need to check the water level via the radiator.)

What to take

Make sure to always carry plenty of water, a first aid kit, a good set of maps, and a torch and spare batteries. Also carry essential tools, a spare tyre (two if possible), a tyre pressure gauge and an air pump. It's a good idea to take basic parts specific to your car, such as a spare fan belt and radiator hose.

In addition, when travelling in the outback, take a compass, a shovel for if you get bogged, an off-road jack, and a snatchem strap for quick, easy extraction when you're stuck (only useful as long as there's another vehicle to pull you out).

Resources

Australian Bureau of Meteorology (www.bom.gov.au) Up-to-date weather reports.

ExplorOz (www.exploroz.com.au) Has a number of relevant topics such as an Australia-wide off-road conditions index, fuel prices index, free camping spots list and information on travelling by car, 4WD and campervan, and travelling with kids.

Motorcycle Riders Association of Australia Inc (MRAA; ☎ 03-9794 5504; <http://mraa.org.au>) Non-profit organisation. Its website has useful information on motorcycle travel in Australia.

NT Road Conditions Hotline (☎ 1800 246 199; www.roadreport.nt.gov.au)

Ozmotorcycles.com (www.ozmotorcycles.com) Information on motorcycle travel in Australia.

South Australia Road Conditions Hotline (☎ 1300 361 033)

EXTRA PRECAUTIONS FOR OUTBACK DRIVING

You need to be particularly organised and vigilant when travelling in the outback, due to the scorching temperatures, long distances between fuel stops and remoteness. The previous hints apply as well as the following suggestions:

- Have your vehicle serviced and checked before you leave. It is a good idea to inflate your tyres to the recommended levels for the terrain you're travelling on.
- Report your route and schedule to the police or a friend or relative.
- Load your vehicle evenly, with heavy items inside and light items on the roof rack.
- Check road conditions before travelling. Roads that are passable in the Dry season (March to November) can disappear beneath water during the Wet.
- Check the weather conditions ahead – heavy rain will make many of the roads impassable when wet.
- Check locations and opening times of service stations and carry spare fuel and provisions – fill-ups can be infrequent.
- Mobile phones are often out of range and useless in the outback. An extra safety net is to hire a satellite phone, high frequency (HF) radio or EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon).
- Reduce speed on unsealed roads as traction is decreased and braking distances increase. Dirt roads are often corrugated. The best way to deal with this is to keep an even speed.
- Dust on outback roads can obscure your vision. Stop and wait for it to settle.
- Take note of the water level markers at creek crossings to gauge the water's depth before you proceed. Do not attempt to cross flooded bridges or causeways unless you are sure of the depth and any road damage.
- If your vehicle is struggling through deep sand, deflating your tyres a bit will help. If you do get stuck, don't attempt to get out by revving the engine as this will cause the wheels to dig in deeper.
- In an emergency, stay with your vehicle – it's easier to spot than you are. But don't sit inside it as it will become an oven.

Queensland Road Condition Reporting Service (☎ 1300 130 595; www.racq.com.au)

Information is under Travel/Rd Touring/Rd Conditions.

WA Road Conditions Hotline (☎ 13 81 38; www.mainroads.wa.gov.au)

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

A few simple actions can help minimise the impact your journey has on the environment.

- Ensure your vehicle is properly serviced and tuned.
- Travel as light as you can.
- Drive slowly; your vehicle uses 25% more fuel at 110km/h than at 90km/h.
- Avoid hard acceleration and heavy braking.
- Use air conditioning only when absolutely necessary.
- Stay on designated roads and vehicle off-road tracks. Do not drive on walking tracks, and where possible, avoid driving on vegetation.
- Drive in the middle of tracks to minimise track widening and damage.
- Avoid shining high beams or spotlights on wildlife.
- Cross creeks at designated areas.
- Consider ride sharing where possible (p75).

For more information, see www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au.

Carbon offsets

Various organisations use ‘carbon calculators’ that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions. Australian-based organisations include **Elementree** (www.elementree.com.au), **CarbonNeutral** (www.carbonneutral.com.au), **Greenfleet** (www.greenfleet.com.au) and **Carbon Planet** (www.carbonplanet.com). See the boxed text, p1020 for more information.

GLOSSARY

bogged – stuck in mud, gravel, sand, or clay

cooling-off period – the amount of time a buyer is legally allowed to withdraw from a contract of sale

extended warranty – a policy protecting the car owner against mechanical failure and breakdowns

hi-top – a variety of campervan

pop-top – a caravan with a roof that can be raised for headroom and ventilation

registration – the annual fee payable to register a vehicle with the official government body; required to keep a vehicle on the road

relocation – a deal offered by some car-hire companies whereby the driver can pick up a vehicle at one point and drop off at another

road trains – trucks with trailers; can be up to 50m long

roadworthy certificate – a document issued by licensed operators specifying that a vehicle meets certain requirements

safety certificate – equivalent of a roadworthy certificate in Queensland

snatchem strap – a recovery tool for quick, easy extraction when you’re stuck, made of thick seat-belt-webbing type material, usually 10m to 15m long, with a reinforced loop at each end

stamp duty – government tax, which is added on to the sale of motor vehicles

statutory warranty – legal obligation requiring licensed dealers to fix certain problems occurring in a vehicle for up to three months after the sale of the vehicle

transfer fee – the charge for changing the ownership details of a vehicle

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