

# History Michael Cathcart

## INTRUDERS

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 methodically to draw the first European map of Australia's eastern coast. He was mapping the end of Aboriginal supremacy.

Michael Cathcart presents history programs on ABC TV and teaches history at the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne.

## CONVICTS

Eighteen years later, in 1788, the English were back to stay. They numbered 751 ragtag convicts and children, 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. By a small cove, in the idyllic lands of the Eora people, Phillip established a British penal settlement. He renamed the place after the British Home Secretary, Lord Sydney.

Robert Hughes' bestseller, *The Fatal Shore* (1987), depicts convict Australia as a terrifying 'Gulag' where Britain 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, with Phillip's encouragement, many convicts soon earned their 'ticket of leave', a kind of parole that gave them the freedom of the colony and the right to seek work on their own behalf.

It's east to see some ancient Eora Aboriginal rock engravings (p195) north of the beach uphill near the cliffs at the Bondi Golf Club.

However, 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 minor crimes such as stealing. In 1803 English officers established

### 50,000 YEARS BEFORE COOK Ryan Ver Berkmoes

Little is known about how the first people came to Australia. Even the dates are broadly debatable and seem measured more in geological rather than human terms: 50,000 to 70,000 years ago. What is known is that people came to the continent from Asia during times when the earth was much cooler and water levels much lower. This made it possible for them to walk across Torres Strait from New Guinea. Migrations are thought to have occurred at various times since, with the last major one 5000 years ago. By Cook's arrival in 1770, the continent had a rich and varied culture of indigenous communities.

## TIMELINE

60,000 BC

Aborigines settle in Australia, according to most experts.

43,000 BC

A group of original Australians sit down in the Nepean Valley near current-day Sydney and make some stone tools. Archaeological sites like this have been found across Australia.

6,000 BC

Rising water levels due to global warming force many indigenous groups off their fertile flatlands homes along the coasts. Sections of land rivaling today's New South Wales in area are lost.

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

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

## RUM

John Macarthur was also a leading member of the Rum Corps, a clique of powerful officers which bullied successive governors 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. Under Macquarie's administration the major roads of modern-day Sydney were constructed, some fine public buildings built (many designed by talented convict architect Francis Greenway) and the foundations for a more civil society were laid.

Macquarie also championed the rights of freed convicts, granting them land and appointing several to public office. But this tolerance was not shared by the 'exclusives'. These large 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 the 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 transported more and more 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 hot, fertile region attracted free settlers, who were soon busy farming, grazing, logging and mining on Aboriginal land.

## SHEEP

In the cooler grasslands of Tasmania, the sheepmen were also thriving, and they too were hungry for new pastures. 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 that '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 – roughly 100 sq miles) for a crate of blankets,

For some indigenous sites of particular interest on the East Coast, see p45.

Sydney's 1816 Mint and Parliament House (p190) were originally wings of the infamous Rum Hospital, which was built by two Sydney merchants in 1816 in return for a monopoly on the rum trade.

flour, 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.

## LAND

Each year, settlers pushed deeper into the 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. In the USA the conflict between settlers and the indigenous people formed the basis for a rich mythology known as 'the Wild West'. But in Australia the conflict has largely passed from white memory, so white historians now disagree about the extent of the violence. But Aborigines still recount how their water holes were poisoned and their people massacred. Some of the bitterest struggles occurred in the remote mining districts of central Queensland. In Tasmania the impact of settlement was so devastating that today, no 'full blood' Aborigines survive; all of the island's Aborigines are of mixed heritage.

On the mainland many of the squatters reached a truce with the defeated tribes. In remote regions it became common for Aborigines to take low-paid jobs on farms, working on sheep and cattle stations as drovers, rouseabouts, shearers and domestics. In return, those lucky enough to be working on their traditional lands adapted their cultures to the changing circumstances. This arrangement continued in outback pastoral regions until after WWII.

## 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 and central Victoria. The news hit the colonies with the force of a cyclone. From every social class, young men and some adventurous women headed for the diggings. Soon they were caught up in a great rush of prospectors, entertainers, publicans, sly-groggers, 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. But after three years 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 that held them in contempt. Under the leadership of a charismatic Irishman named Peter Lalor, they

'...in 1851 prospectors discovered gold in New South Wales and central Victoria. The news hit the colonies with the force of a cyclone.'

### 3000 BC

The last known large immigration to the continent from Asia occurs (at least until about 1970). Over 250 languages are spoken among the myriad groups living in Australia.

### 1607 AD

Spanish explorer Luis Torres manages to sail between Australia and New Guinea and not discover the rather large continent to the south. The strait bears his name today.

### 1616

Dutch voyager Dirk Hartog lands on the coast of western Australia. Like several of his brethren in the 17th century he doesn't enjoy the local way of life (or probably the food) and promptly leaves.

### 1770

Like Columbus before him, James Cook proves that the spoils of 'discovery' go to the person most adept at self-publicity. He draws the first European map of Australia's eastern coast.

### 1776

The 13 British colonies in the US declare independence, leaving the King's government without a place to ship undesirables and convicts.

### 1788

The Eora people of Bunnabi discover they have new neighbours; 11 ships arrive bearing soldiers and convicts, and drop anchor in what is the new arrivals call Botany Bay.

raised the flag of 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 pre-dawn of Sunday 3 December 1854, a force of troopers attacked the stockade. In 15 terrifying minutes, they slaughtered 30 miners and lost five soldiers. The story of the Eureka Stockade is often told as a battle for nationhood and democracy – as if a 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 Lalor himself became Speaker of the Victorian Parliament.

The gold rush also attracted boatloads of prospectors from China. The Chinese prospectors endured constant 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 developed in the backstreets of Sydney and Melbourne and, by the 1880s, popular literature indulged in tales of Chinese opium dens, dingy gambling parlours and oriental brothels. But many Chinese went on to establish themselves in business and particularly in market gardening. Today the busy Chinatowns of Sydney and Melbourne, and the ubiquitous Chinese restaurants in country towns, are reminders of Chinese vigour.

Gold and wool brought immense investment and gusto to Melbourne, Sydney and a swath of Queensland. By the 1880s they were stylish modern cities, with gaslights in the streets, railways 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.

Meanwhile, the huge expanses of Queensland were remote from the southern centres of political and business power. It was a tough, raw frontier colony, in which money was made by hard labour – in mines, in the forests and on cattle stations. In the coastal sugar industry, southern investors grew rich on a plantation economy that exploited tough Pacific Island labourers (known as ‘Kanakas’), many of whom had been kidnapped from their islands.

Many white Queenslanders still embody the gritty, independent, egalitarian yet racist attitudes that were the key elements of the so-called ‘Australian legend’. The legend reached its classic form at the end of the 19th century, when nationalist writers idealised ‘the bush’, its people and their code of ‘mateship’. The great forum for this bush nationalism was the massively popular *Bulletin* magazine. Its politics were egalitarian, democratic, republican...and white.

But while writers were creating national legends the politicians of Australia were devising the framework for a national constitution.

## NATIONHOOD

On 1 January 1901 Australia became a federation. When the bewhiskered 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 what became known as the White Australia policy. It became a racial tenet of faith in Australia for the next 70 years. For those who were welcome to live in Australia (ie whites), 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 protected Australian wage levels with import tariffs. Its 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 inland, that they called the great dry Lake Eyre ‘the Dead Heart’ of the country. It was a grim image. But one prime minister, the dapper Alfred Deakin, was determined to overcome the tyranny of the climate. Back in the 1880s, Deakin championed a scheme by two Canadian engineers to develop irrigated farming on the Murray River at Mildura. The region developed a prosperous grape and dried-fruit industry. (Today this massively productive region is facing an ecological crisis, as salinity and overuse threaten to kill the Murray River.)

## WAR & THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Living on the edge of this forbidding land, and isolated from the rest of the world, most Australians took comfort from the idea that they were still a part 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 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, but 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 and at Gallipoli for the sad and solemn services of Anzac Day.

Australia careered wildly through the 1920s, continuing to invest in immigration and growth, until the economy collapsed into the abyss of the Great Depression in 1929. Unemployment brought its shame and misery to one in three houses. For those who were wealthy – or who had jobs – the depression was hardly noticed. In fact, the fall in prices actually meant that the purchasing power of their income was enhanced.

## HEROES

In the midst of the hardship, sport brought escape to a nation in love with games and gambling. Champion racehorse Phar Lap won an effortless and

Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra honours the Chicago architect hired to design the new Australian capital in 1912. Much of Griffin’s striking and radical design was never implemented.

Melbourne (p86) and Sydney (p189) have large and impressive memorials to the sacrifices of the 20th century’s two World Wars. There are also scores of others, such as the stoic little memorial at the crossroads in NSW’s Uki (p284).

Wool was the wealth that built Queensland. Today you can still get close to sheep and also learn ranching skills such as shearing at the Woodstock Trail Rides (p426). You can even be a cowpoke and herd cattle.

1791

The ‘Second Fleet’ arrives and nascent Sydney gets an injection of petty criminals and a few Irish. For centuries thereafter, descendants claim as much birthright as those from the First Fleet, although few people buy it.

1808

William Bligh does it again. As governor, he takes on the corrupt ruling military mob of the Rum Corps. They rebel and just like on the *Bounty* in 1789, there’s a mutiny and he loses power.

1813

The natural barrier of the Blue Mountains west of Sydney is finally conquered by a group of what today would be called extreme adventurers.

1835

A group of businessmen led by John Batman ‘purchase’ 240,000 hectares from Aborigines of the Dutigalla clan for flour and trinkets. Melbourne is established on the north bank of the Yarra River.

1844–45

The first guidebook to Australia is written in the form of a journal by Ludwig Leichhardt. It chronicles his party’s exploration from Brisbane almost to Darwin. In 1848, he vanishes without a trace.

1854

Gold miners’ rebellion brutally put down at the Eureka Stockade; most colonies gain self-government soon after.

Phar Lap was stuffed and is an exhibit revered by some and reviled by others at the Melbourne Museum (p87).

graceful victory in the 1930 Melbourne Cup (‘the horse 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 was established of a sporting hero cut down in his prime.

The year 1932 also saw accusations of treachery on the cricket field. The English team, under its aloof captain Douglas Jardine, employed a violent new bowling tactic known as ‘Bodyline’. Jardine’s aim was to unnerve Australia’s star batsman, the devastating Donald Bradman. The bitterness of the tour became part of the Australian legend. And Bradman batted on – achieving the unsurpassed career average of 99.94 runs.

That same year, the radical Premier of NSW, Jack Lang, officiated at the opening of the great Sydney Harbour Bridge. Before anyone knew what was happening, a man in military uniform rode forward on a skittish horse, drew a sabre and cut the ceremonial ribbon in the name of the King. He was Francis de Groot, a member of the fascist New Guard, who accused Lang of being a closet communist. The Bridge survived the controversy to become a great symbol of hope and optimism, uniting a divided city.

## WWII

As the economy began to recover, the whirl of daily life was hardly dampened when Australian servicemen sailed off to Europe for a new war, in 1939. Though Japan was menacing, Australians 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 soon thousands of Australians and other Allied troops were enduring the savagery of Japan’s 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, which came to Australia’s aid. The days of the British alliance were numbered.

## VISIONARY PEACE

As the war 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, Poles, Turks, Lebanese among others. These ‘new Australians’ were expected to assimilate to 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 manufacturing, where companies such as General Motors and Ford operated with generous tariff support. At the same time, there was growing world demand for Australia’s primary products: metals, wool, meat and wheat. In time, Australia even became 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 minister. Menzies had an avuncular charm, but he was also a vigilant opponent of communism. As the Cold War intensified, Australia and New Zealand entered a formal military alliance with the USA – the 1951 Anzus security pact. And when the USA hurled its righteous fury into a civil war in Vietnam, Menzies committed Australian forces to the conflict. The following year Menzies retired, leaving his successors a bitter legacy. The antiwar movement split Australia.

There was a feeling among artists, intellectuals and the young that Menzies’ Australia had become a dull, complacent country, more in love with American popular culture and British high arts than with its own talents and stories. Australia, they said, had ‘an inferiority complex’. In an atmosphere of youth rebellion, and new-found nationalism, Australians began to embrace their own history and culture. The arts blossomed. Universities flourished. A distinctive Australian film industry made iconic movies, mostly funded by government subsidies.

At the same time, increasing numbers of white Australians believed that the Aborigines had endured a great wrong that needed to be put right – and from 1976 until 1992, Aborigines won major victories in their struggle for land rights. Australia’s imports with China and Japan increased – and the White Australia policy became an embarrassment. It was officially abolished in the early 1970s, and Australia became a leader in the campaign against the racist ‘apartheid’ policies of white South Africa.

By the 1970s, over one million migrants had arrived from non-English-speaking countries, filling Australia with new languages, cultures, foods and ideas. At the same time, China and Japan began to outstrip Europe as Australia’s major trading partners. As Asian immigration increased, Vietnamese communities became prominent in Sydney and Melbourne. In both those cities a new spirit of tolerance and diversity known as ‘multiculturalism’ became a particular source of pride.

A powerful dissenting voice in this time of liberal progress was the irascible Joh Bjelke-Petersen, premier of Queensland for 21 years from 1968. Kept in office by a blatant gerrymander (he never won more than 39% of the vote), he was able to impose his policy of development-at-any-price on the state. Forests were felled. Heritage buildings were demolished. Aborigines were cast aside. Protesters were bashed and jailed. But in the late 1980s a series of

To see some of the immigrant faces of today’s Australia, catch the train in Sydney out to Cabramatta, where you can get caught up in a market swirl that could be the heart of Hanoi or Shanghai.

Melbourne’s 1858 Customs House is now the Immigration Museum (p83), which takes a fascinating look at the multitudes of immigrants from the early 19th century onwards.

1871

Aboriginal stockman Jupiter discovers gold in Queensland and the rush is on. Within 10 years Brisbane has made its fortune from both gold and wool.

1880

The first issue of the Republican journal for the masses, the *Bulletin*, is published. Its pages are filled with populist fodder. Notable writers include Henry Lawson and ‘Banjo’ Paterson.

1901

The Australian colonies federate; federal Parliament meets for the first time in Melbourne.

1915

Anzac legend born when Australian troops join Allied invasion of Turkey.

1918

The Great War ends. Out of a country of 4.9 million, 320,000 were sent to war in Europe and almost 20% were killed. Cracks begin to appear in the ties Australians feel to Britain.

1923

Vegemite, a savoury, yeasty breakfast spread is invented in Melbourne. Given it is a byproduct of brewing that had gone to waste, it is a modern marketing triumph.

**SORRY** *Ryan ver Berkmoes*

On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stood up and said 'sorry' to the stolen generation. That it was an emotional moment is one of those trite understatements. Just saying 'sorry' had been debated by various political factions and parties for years, although once the speech was made many were surprised at the pent-up emotions that were released. Even some who had opposed the move as unnecessary pandering were caught up in the moment.

Here's the opening statement of Rudd's speech:

'I move:

That today we honour the indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing culture in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were stolen generations – this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, indigenous and non-indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.'

investigations revealed that Bjelke-Petersen presided over a system that was rotten. His favoured police commissioner was jailed for graft and it became clear that the police force, which Joh had used as a political hit-squad, was largely racist, violent and corrupt. Yet even today there are voters, especially in his old political base among rural white conservatives, who insist that 'Joh was good for Queensland'.

**CHALLENGES**

Today Australia faces new challenges. Since the 1970s the country has been dismantling the protectionist scaffolding that allowed its economy to develop. Wages and working conditions, which used to be fixed by an independent authority, are now much more uncertain. And two centuries of development have placed great strains on the environment – on water supplies, forests, soils, air quality and the oceans. The country is closer than ever to the USA. 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, under popular conservative Prime Minister John Howard there was increasing resistance and discontent over the boatloads of asylum seekers arriving in Australian waters, many living indefinitely in detention camps.

Howard's 11-year reign came to a crashing end in the federal election of 2007 when the Liberal Party was defeated, and Howard lost his own parliamentary seat. Just weeks after taking office, Kevin Rudd's new Labor government delivered an apology to the Aboriginal peoples known as the Stolen Generations (indigenous children removed from their communities and placed with white families during the 19th and 20th century), and ratified the Kyoto Agreement on climate change.

**1927**

Federal Parliament moves to the new national capital in Canberra.

**1941**

The Japanese bomb Townsville. The war in the Pacific is on. Hundreds of thousands of Australian troops pour out to battlefields worldwide. Thousands of American troops pour in and drink a lot of beer.

**1967**

Popular referendum overwhelmingly gives Aborigines the status of full citizens.

**1972**

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy is erected on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra. Over the next decades it serves as a reminder that indigenous peoples have been denied sovereignty to their land.

**1989**

Joh Bjelke-Petersen finishes his run as premier of Queensland, during which time he used the state police as political enforcers and changed tax laws that resulted in the over-development of the Gold Coast.

**2000**

Sydney hosts the Summer Olympics. The city shows off to the world and the trouble-free games help burnish the nation's image as a 'cool' place in the 21st century.

# The Culture

## REGIONAL IDENTITY

Okay, so the East Coast has gorgeous water, great surf, fine diving, beautiful and lush parks, lots of cool little towns and some really big and fascinating ones, but that's about it in the shared attributes department. Sure you'll hear people using 'mate' from Melbourne to Cairns, but as you travel the 4000km of grand and glorious coast covered in this book you'll find more differences than similarities in both the land and the people.

Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, has a stylish European flavour – almost half of Melbourne's population hails from other shores, importing the best cuisine, fashion and culture from their respective nations. It's a city of rich coffee and languid cafés and it can be forgiven if, like second cities everywhere, the locals seem to spend just a tad too much time disparaging Sydney.

Moving up the coast, the misty hills of ferns and dark forests are the backdrop for a rural culture that extends right up into the south of New South Wales (NSW). People here need to be self-sufficient, especially in winter when they have to hunker down against storms blowing up from Antarctica. It's an outpost of individualism, reinforced by it being well and truly off the beaten path.

Somewhere past Jervis Bay, the pace noticeably quickens. It's the Sydney effect and like radiation after an A-bomb blast, the effects are both insidious and widespread. Sydney may be Australia's oldest city, but she's far beyond staid, instead fizzing and popping with sybaritic energy. Sydney loves a party (think Mardi Gras, p200). And with the harbour as a daily reminder that the city is indeed special, who can blame her for wanting to celebrate? Parts of town seem to have more in common with Los Angeles, New York and London than the rest of Australia.

North of Sydney, coastal New South Wales never quite slows down. Well that's not true, everybody slows down because the Pacific Hwy (the main road to Brisbane) is a two-lane coagulation. All the coastal areas see a lot of traffic and in the far north around Byron Bay you find a unique blending of cultures that's rather appealing. Take one part leftover hippy from the hinterlands, add in a dose of surf culture mixed with some urbanism that fell off a passing truck and you have a delightful mix of the creative, laid-back and inventive.

Cross into Queensland and the laid-back goes poof! This land of bland weather (it's pretty much sunny and warm all the time – damn) is Australia's holiday haven. Many people mistake their first glimpse of Surfers Paradise (no one believes in irony here) for Brisbane. As if. It's all glitz and go-go-go right from the Gold Coast to the Sunshine Coast (again, irony not allowed). It's only once you've gotten to the Fraser Coast that things calm down (the lack of a brand-driven regional name here should be a big clue). Here's where you find the Australian cliché of sun, surf and smiles backed by a thick and impenetrable drawl.

When you reach Cairns, you're been in the thick of a place where for some time the men have wrestled crocs and the women have cooked 'em. This land of swaying palms and a certain tropical torpor couldn't be further from the urban frenzy of Sydney or the Continental moods of Melbourne, yet it's all under the same flag.

## LIFESTYLE

Residents of the three states are unified in their suburban desire for the Aussie dream: to own a home, produce an average of 1.7 kids and have a mutt doing

something naughty to the lawn out front. But then that's the story in much of the First World – and the developing world for that matter.

Most Victorians live in Melbourne, enjoying a variety of cultural and sporting events, lush green gardens and parks. In keeping with its vague Old World airs, Melbourne loves tradition, including annual events that see scads of women dress up with big, silly hats. Despite the state's hilariously unpredictable weather, the beach holiday is still a priority for many Vics. Families flock to the coastal regions to follow the sun, or else migrate to Queensland resort areas such as Noosa and the Sunshine Coast when the fickle climate plays up.

In contrast, Sydneysiders see no reason to leave the city limits. The balmy weather, the long stretches of beach, the well-preserved waterfront, the strong, ever-growing economy – all these ingredients make Sydney work for its residents. It's a vibrant urban place with plenty of plastic surgeons to keep things buff and a famously lurid nightlife: it's Australia's gay mecca. When people from Sydney leave, it's often to go just far enough to 'get away from the crowds'.

Ignoring the herbal patch of alternative lifestyles in the far north, the rest of NSW is a pretty hunkered down, down-to-earth place. After all, there's that lawn to mow.

In Queensland, most people live in the coastal suburban sprawl between Coolangatta and Cairns. Inexorable development continues, especially in the densely populated southeast, and, although some in Brisbane might moan about the rising property prices, they're still chuffed that they live in one of the country's fastest-growing regions.

Historically, Queensland has been one of Australia's great bastions of conservatism, and even today that attitude is still hard to shake. Given that the current prime minister is both from Queensland and leader of the left-of-centre Labour Party, there's an element of irony here that most locals would find foreign.

## POPULATION

Australia's population is 20.2 million. NSW, the most populous state, has 6.7 million people, while Victoria has 5 million and Queensland 3.9 million. Sydney (4.1 million) and Melbourne (3.6 million) are the largest Australian cities.

The first immigrants were mostly British, Irish and Scottish, but the Chinese came after the discovery of gold in the 1850s, and many Italians migrated here to work in the NSW and Queensland sugar industry, and on southeastern Victorian farms.

After WWII mass-immigration policies brought more Italians, as well as migrants from New Zealand, the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Vietnam, China and other countries. In 2006 Australia accepted 177,600 immigrants, with 54,900 settling in NSW, 47,200 in Victoria and 33,500 in Queensland.

Although most population growth tends to occur on the Melbourne and Sydney fringes, a lot of movement is occurring north of NSW, making Queensland's east coast the country's fastest-growing region. Development is also rampant on the central coast of NSW. In Queensland, much of the state's population lives within 150km of Brisbane.

An estimated 460,000 (about 2% of Australia's population) identify themselves as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders or of indigenous origin. NSW has Australia's largest indigenous population (around 135,000), with most residing in and around Sydney. Queensland has the country's second-largest indigenous population (126,000), focused in Brisbane but also with large

Crikey ([www.crikey.com.au](http://www.crikey.com.au)), a scurrilous, hugely irreverent indie-news service, was started by former Victorian government aide Stephen Mayne. Motto: 'Taking a long spike to bloated egos.'

Talkback radio is the Australian equivalent of talk radio elsewhere. But you'll hear the same fed-up suburbanites ranting about the government and lefties while right-wing hosts scream outrage. Sydney's two big talkback stations, 2GB and 2UE, can be heard nationwide.

Culture.gov.au is a website of the Australian government with a vast number of articles and links relating to all forms of Australian culture. It's fully up-to-date and searchable.

Andrew McGahan's award-winning novel *Praise* (1991) stuns with its dark take on mismatched love in Brisbane. Sex and drugs attempt to enlighten, but modern life proves exceedingly dull and pointless. Later made into a 1998 film.

populations around Townsville and Cairns. More than half of Australia's 42,000 Torres Strait Islanders, from the islands between Cape York and Papua New Guinea, live in northern Queensland and on the islands of the strait itself.

## INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Around 100,000 Aborigines lived in Victoria before Europeans arrived; by 1860 there were just 2000 left. Now more than half of Victoria's 28,000-strong indigenous population lives in Melbourne. Victorian Koories (Aborigines from southeastern Australia) lived in 38 dialect groups speaking 10 languages; each group was divided into clans and subclans. 'Dispersion' and 'assimilation' policies eradicated the purely traditional lifestyle, but today some Victorian groups are attempting to revive their cultures.

When the British first arrived at Sydney Cove, there were approximately 3000 Aborigines, using three main languages encompassing several dialects and subgroups around what is now Sydney. Today more Aboriginal peoples live in Sydney than in any other Australian city – the region has more than 30,000 indigenous inhabitants, most descended from migratory inland tribes, including a small number of Torres Strait Islanders. The Sydney suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo have large Aboriginal populations.

Indigenous people of many tribes inhabited the area encompassing Queensland for tens of thousands of years before European settlement. By the turn of the 19th century, the Aborigines who had survived the bloody settlement of Queensland had been run off their lands and the white authorities had set up ever-shrinking reserves to contain the survivors. Today Murri is the term used to refer to the indigenous people of Queensland.

The current status of indigenous peoples in Australia is in stark contrast to the rest of the population. A few – depressing – facts for comparison: school drop-out rates are one-third higher, binge-drinking occurs twice as often, and life expectancy is 17 years fewer than for non-Aboriginal Australians (59 for men and 65 for women).

## SPORT

All three East Coast states can stake legitimate claims to the title of Australia's sporting mecca, which should give an indication of just how sports-mad the place is. Passions vary, however. Up north is the gladiatorial arena of rugby ('thugby') while down south is the smouldering cauldron of Aussie Rules football ('aerial ping pong'). Cricket ('watching paint dry') is a nationwide obsession in summer.

Creeping up in popularity is soccer, which is gaining a toehold in all states – the game has progressed from when it was strictly for 'sheilas, wogs and poofers' (as memorably articulated by one prominent soccer identity).

Other popular sports on the coast include basketball, netball, motor sports, driving the porcelain bus, hockey, farnarkling, tennis, elbow bending, horse racing, chundering and surfing. Competitive swimming has a culture all its own.

## Australian Rules Football

Melbourne is the spiritual home of that weird hybrid sport, Australian Rules football (a sort of cross between rugby and Gaelic football), from where the **Australian Football League** (AFL; [www.afl.com.au](http://www.afl.com.au)) administers the national competition. Traditionally, most big games are played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG; p99). During the season (March to September), Victorians go footy-mad, entering tipping competitions, discussing groins and hamstrings and savouring the latest loutish behaviour (on and off the field).

The NSW-based Bangarra Dance Theatre ([www.bangarra.com.au](http://www.bangarra.com.au)) combines 40,000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands performance with contemporary, bold choreography.

The first Australian cricket team to tour England was 100% Victorian Aboriginal – in 1868. The subsequent 'whiteness' of the sport in Australia meant that this achievement was unheralded until recently.

## EXPLORING THE EAST COAST'S INDIGENOUS CULTURE

As you explore the East Coast, you'll find many ways to learn more about the lives of Australia's first residents. Cultural sites and exhibits are many; some highlights include:

- **Krowathunkoolong Keeping Place** (p123) In Victoria's Bairnsdale, this place explores Gunaï (or Kurnai) life from the Dreamtime until after white settlement.
- **Gulaga National Park** (p152) Encompassing the mountain of the same name, this park is jointly managed by the indigenous community and protects a sacred Yuin spot.
- **Canberra** (p157) The capital's large state museums have extensive displays and exhibits on Aboriginal culture and art.
- **Sydney** (p189) Many sights, museums, shops and tours.
- **Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park** (p222) Some 24km from Sydney, the park preserves more than 800 indigenous sites, including rock paintings, middens and cave art.
- **Minjungbal Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (p281) In Tweed Heads, NSW, the displays detail how the Minjungbal people were able to live in harmony with the land.
- **Mt Beerwah** (p336) With neighbouring peaks, this Queensland mountain is an important part of local Aboriginal lore.
- **Scrub Hill Community Farm** (p364) Run by the local Aboriginal community, there are tours, exhibits and feasts.
- **Townsville Cultural Centre** (p426) An interactive Aboriginal dance and interpretive centre in the north of Queensland.
- **Tjapukai** (p453) One of many excellent Aboriginal sights in the far north of Queensland, this is a cultural extravaganza in Cairns.
- **Mossman Gorge Gateway** (p468) A cultural and visitor centre with excellent rainforest walks led by indigenous guides.

## Rugby

In NSW and Queensland, rugby league (the 13-a-side version) is king, and is administered by the **National Rugby League** (NRL; [www.nrl.com](http://www.nrl.com)). Queensland has three teams in the Sydney-dominated competition (p212): the Brisbane Broncos; the North Queensland Cowboys, which plays in Townsville; and the Gold Coast Titans.

The most anticipated event in the league calendar is the State of Origin series held every June/July, when Queensland's Maroons (or Cane Toads) take on arch rivals NSW, known as the Blues (or Cockroaches).

Rugby union (the 15-a-side variant) is almost as popular, especially now that it's turned professional. It's run by the **Australian Rugby Union** ([www.rugby.com.au](http://www.rugby.com.au)). Historically, union was an amateur sport played by posh gits, and its century-long rivalry with rugby league's professional, working-class oiks was a real battle of ideologies.

## Cricket

Despite behaviour that has generated a lot of negative media coverage, Australia's team continues to dominate cricket, as it has done for the better part of a decade. It won its third consecutive World Cup in 2007. The sport is administered by **Cricket Australia** ([www.cricket.com.au](http://www.cricket.com.au)).

## ARTS

Aussies are supposed to be sports-mad and arts-shy, yet statistics tell otherwise: attendance figures for galleries or performing arts are almost double

Russell Crowe spent part of his childhood in Sydney. Today he's part-owner of the Rabbitohs, the 100-year-old South Sydney team in the National Rugby League.

It's said by some cynics that more Australians know cricket legend Don Bradman's Test batting average (99.94) than know the year Captain Cook first bobbed around the coast (1770).

that for all football codes. Cinema is the top pastime, with around two-thirds of the population taking in at least one movie annually. Aussie bookworms cough up around \$1 billion for books each year, around 25% of Australians attend a music concert annually and 21% visit a gallery.

## Cinema

All three major capitals of the East Coast have film production studios feeding Australian TV, producing movies for general release and doing contract work for Hollywood.

The big noise recently in Australian film has been the rather grandly titled *Australia*, a classic epic/action film in which Nicole Kidman plays a English rancher who saves her cows from Japanese bombs during WWII with the help of hunky Hugh Jackman. It was shot on location in NSW and Queensland in 2007. See p423 for more details.

Notable Aussie films made in NSW include Ray Lawrence's *Bliss* (1985), a kooky, sexual romp about Sydney advertising exec Harry Joy, and *Lantana* (director Ray Lawrence; 2001) examines a small suburban community where action breeds reaction, senses are deadened and paranoia is rife. Bruce Beresford's classic *Puberty Blues* (1981), which examines south Sydney's surf culture in all its sordid glory. Some 16 years later, *Bra Boys* is an unflinching documentary about the south Sydney surf gang called – you guessed it – the Bra Boys. Made by the members themselves, it shows a violent world far removed from the mellow surfer cliché.

In Sydney, Fox Studios is at the heart of NSW's healthy film industry, with many American productions drawn there by relatively low costs. Big-budget extravaganzas, financed with overseas money and made for the international market, include *The Matrix* (1999) and *Mission Impossible II* (2000). Sydneysider Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* (2001) was also made there.

Set in Melbourne, *The Home Song Stories* (2007) is a widely acclaimed story about the tribulations that await a single Hong King nightclub singer who moves to Australia with her kids in the 1970s. *Noise* (2007) takes a multifaceted look at the aftermath of a mass killing on a train to the suburb of Sunshine (don't say you weren't warned...). Fifteen years earlier, Russell Crowe exploded onto the screen as a violent Melbourne skinhead in *Romper Stomper* (1992).

Also shot in Victoria, *Romulus, My Father* (2007) is based on the Raimond Gaita book about a immigrant boy's struggle to cope with two deeply flawed parents.

Other notable Victorian features include silly-billy comedy *The Castle* (1997), which pokes mild fun at Aussie stereotypes; the gutsy *Head On* (1998), featuring a gay Greek-Australian as the lead character; and perennial fave *Ned Kelly* (2003). The super-stylised film *Chopper* (2000) presents Melbourne celebrity crim Mark 'Chopper' Read as both victim and exploiter of media hype, with black-as-coal humour.

There's also a gritty short-film scene in Victoria, perhaps the country's best, including Adam Elliot and his Oscar-winning claymation, *Harvie Krumpet* (2003).

Benchmark Victorian films from the 1970s include Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), featuring nubile Anglo schoolgirls mysteriously 'absorbed' into the primitive Aussie landscape; and Dr George Miller's apocalyptic *Mad Max* (1979), starring a raw, prefame Mel Gibson as Max, decimating his enemies in a stylised orgy of violence.

Queensland also has a role in the Australian film industry. Commercial production is based around the Warner Roadshow studios on the Gold

The Australian Film Institute (AFI; [www.afi.org.au](http://www.afi.org.au)) promotes Oz flicks and sponsors annual awards for films and TV shows. Its best film for 2007 was *Romulus, My Father*.

A sighting of Nicole Kidman in Sydney is right up there with sharing a meat pie with Russell Crowe. When she's in town – she grew up here and owns a house in Darling Point with hubby Keith Urban – the tabloids cover her every move.

*Kenny* (2006) is a mockumentary about a battler in the portable toilet business who soldiers on fighting rear guard actions in society's machinery.

Coast, which has produced successful family-orientated films including *Scooby Doo* (2002).

Other titles filmed in the state include *The Thin Red Line* (1998), Terence Malick's critically acclaimed tale of WWII soldiers in the Pacific, and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), the original and many would say the definitive version of Paul Hogan's studies of Queensland societal mores and habits.

Local films include *Gettin' Square* (2003), a funny/dark tale of two low-rent crims; *Swimming Upstream* (2002), about Anthony Fingleton, a Queensland swimmer in the 1960s; and *Blurred* (2002), which follows five teenagers during schoolies (p297) week.

## Literature

Victoria has produced a raft of classic works, including *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910), by Henry Handel (Florence Ethel) Richardson, about a girl's coming of age; *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915), by CJ Dennis, poetic verse about a good Aussie bloke who likes beer, fighting and the love of a good woman; *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927), by Marcus Clarke, a powerful account of Australia's convict era; *My Brother Jack* (1964), by George Johnston, the moving story of two brothers between two world wars; and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), by Joan Lindsay.

Former Victorian Peter Carey is probably the state's best-known contemporary writer; he now lives in New York. He won the Booker Prize in 1988 for *Oscar & Lucinda*, a lush 19th-century tale of a couple who gamble on love and life, culminating in their quest to transport a glass church across the Aussie landscape; and again in 2002 for *True History of the Kelly Gang*, based on the letters of Ned Kelly and controversial (to say the least, given

It's generally agreed that Victoria produced the world's first feature-length fiction film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), a hit with Australian and British audiences. And the first of approximately 3694 filmings of the story.

The Miles Franklin Award is given every year to a novel or play that presents aspects of Australian life. Worth over \$40,000, it was awarded in 2007 to *Carpenteria* by Alexis Wright.

## MUST-SEE AUSSIE TV

Plopped down in the hostel common room or sequestered in your suite, there's plenty to see on Oz TV that may keep you inside longer than you thought. Here are five current hits.

- **Summer Heights High** (ABC) The perils and joy of Australian high school life will be familiar to teenage-years-survivors everywhere. Shot in a fake documentary style, *Summer Heights High* is filled with the sorts of stock characters that have universal familiarity. It's the creation of comedian Chris Lilley.
- **Kath & Kim** (Ch 7) Kath has a sunny disposition, just like the woman who chats to you while you're in the supermarket queue buying milk. Her daughter Kim is the type who always whines in line for a drink at a pub. It's genre-busting, as its awards for both drama and comedy show. One episode was the highest rated program on Oz TV in 2007.
- **Spicks & Specks** (ABC) Hosted by popular comedian Adam Hills, this rollicking musical romp pits two teams of both Australian and international musicians (singers, orchestra conductors etc) against each other in a competition to see who can answer obscure musical questions. There's also a niche offshoot on SBS, *Rockwiz*, which is filmed every Tuesday at the legendary Espy in Melbourne (p97).
- **The Chaser's War on Everything** (ABC) Remember the fake cavalcade that almost made it into George Bush's hotel in Sydney, despite the fact that they were dressed as Osama Bin Laden? Well it was these guys and they have a very popular show that pokes fun at everyone but mostly politicians.
- **Enough Rope** (ABC) Under the premise that everyone has a story, Andrew Denton weaves a fascinating program that breaks out of the vacuous clichés of the chat show. The interviews mix big names (Cate Blanchett, Bill Clinton) with the ordinary (the scone-baking champion was a classic).

John McManus, otherwise known simply as Rove, is a hugely popular TV host who breezily makes the jump between prime-time game shows and an eponymous Melbourne-based chat show in which notables sit down on his couch and, well, chat.

that Kelly is a roguish icon for many) for its suggestion that the Kelly gang were transvestites.

Books with NSW settings include award-winning *The Secret River* (2006) by Kate Grenville, a morality tale of pioneers, compromises and indigenous people. Her *The Idea of Perfection* (1999) is about the ideological clash that occurs when a Sydney museum curator goes to rural NSW to save an old bridge. *Eucalyptus* (1998), by Murray Bail, is a fairy tale set among iconic gum trees. It was going to be a Russell Crowe–Nicole Kidman movie, then it wasn't, then it was, then it wasn't... *The Harp in the South* (1948), by Ruth Park, is an account of an impoverished family's life in Surry Hills when the suburb was a crowded slum.

David Malouf, a Lebanese-Australian who is one of Queensland's most recognised writers, is responsible for evocative, often bitter tales of Brisbane boyhood, including *Johnno* (1975).

His Gold Coast novel, *Fly Away Peter* (1982), tells the story of a returned soldier struggling to come to terms with ordinary life. His 2006 short story collection, *Every Move You Make*, looks at the lives of people from northern Queensland and across the continent.

Thea Astley's work includes *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (1979), set in the rainforests of northern Queensland. More recently, Brissie bad boy John Birmingham has enjoyed success, notably with *He Died with a Felafel in his Hand* (1994), later made into a film by Richard Lowenstein.

Australia's best-known Aboriginal poet and writer is Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), who was born on North Stradbroke Island in 1920. Herb Wharton, an Aboriginal author from Cunnamulla, has written a series of novels and short stories about the lives of the Murri stockmen, including *Unbranded* (1992) and *Cattle Camp* (1994).

Most of the big issues in Aboriginal Australia are covered in contemporary Aboriginal writing. James Miller's *Koori: A Will to Win* (1985), examines the history of European settlement in Australia from a Koori perspective; *My Place* (1987), Sally Morgan's prize-winning autobiography, traces her discovery of her Aboriginal heritage; *The Fringe Dwellers* (1961), by Nene Gare, describes what it's like to be an Aborigine growing up in white society; and Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990) combines science fiction, crime fiction, fantasy, social analysis and historical references, and enjoys a cult following.

## Music

In the East Coast capitals and touristy locales, there are plenty of emcees, DJs and bedroom boffins producing hip-hop, house, techno, drum 'n' bass, breaks, ambient, electro and trance. Melbourne's Avalanches blend hip-hop, sampledelica, breaks, disco, funk and sweaty live performances. Melbourne also boasts a lineage of experimental 'sound design', with leading practitioners including Philip Brophy, Ollie Olsen and David Thruswell.

Melbourne's pub-rock scene in the late '80s/early '90s was superlative, throwing up such true originals as the scarifying Birthday Party, starring Nick ('the Stripper') Cave as a full-blown madman.

More sedate Melbourne-based artists include troubadours Paul Kelly and Stephen Cummings, South Australian expat Dave Graney (the self-styled King of Pop), grunge godfather Kim Salmon and folksy Lisa Miller. Jet, Melbourne's answer to the Strokes, sells millions of songs and indie-rocker band Augie March picks up prizes between hits.

The 'Singing Budgie' herself, Kylie Minogue, no longer lives here. Neither does Mr Cave. Nor do gloom-rock merchants, the violin-led Dirty Three.

In the late 1970s Sydney could also claim a ripper pub-rock scene, when incendiary bands such as Radio Birdman and the Screaming Tribesmen trod

the boards. These days clubs and DJs rule, although there's still some solid rock and pop action to be found. Local performers include long-time faves the Whitlams, whose Sydney-centric tunes have converted into Australia-wide acclaim, and Faker, a popular alt-rock band. Newcastle spawned today's chart-topping rock band Silverchair back in 1992 when they were first called Innocent Criminals.

Avant-jazz trio The Necks were originally based in Sydney, but have since dispersed overseas; their hypnotic, glacial pieces take their sweet time to unfurl and are utterly compelling.

Queensland has produced some outstanding indigenous musicians, including Christine Anu, a Torres Strait Islander from Cairns who blends Creole-style rap, Islander chants and traditional languages with English. Other regional artists include Torres Strait Islander Rita Mills and Maroochy Barambah of the Sunshine Coast.

Brisbane's pub-rock scene from the late '70s produced one of Australia's greatest bands, the rowdy Saints, who went on to bigger things in Sydney and London. More recently, Powderfinger has played a dominant role in the music industry. Alternative Queensland bands with loyal followings include Regurgitator and Custard.

Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane have vibrant classical scenes but most of the state orchestras tour the East Coast's major centres, too.

## Visual Arts

In the 1880s a group of young artists developed the first distinctively Australian style of watercolour painting, capturing the unique qualities of Australian life and the bush. Their work is generally referred to as the Heidelberg School. In Sydney a contemporary movement worked at Sirius Cove.

Both groups were influenced by the French plein-air painters, whose practice of working outdoors to capture the effects of natural light led directly to Impressionism. The main artists were Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin, Louis Abrahams, Charles Conder, Julian Ashton and, later, Walter Withers.

In the 1940s, under the patronage of John and Sunday Reed in suburban Melbourne, a new generation of artists (the Heide movement) redefined the direction of Australian art, including some of Australia's most famous contemporary artists, such as Sir Sidney Nolan and Heide associate Arthur Boyd.

More recently the work of painters such as Fred Williams, John Olsen and Brett Whiteley has made an international impression. Whiteley is certainly Sydney's (and probably Australia's) best-known modern artist; he died in 1992. Other notable Sydney artists include Ian Fairweather, Keith Looby, Ian Grant and Judy Cassab. Sydney painter Del Kathryn Barton won the 2008 Archibald prize, Australia's most prestigious art award. Administered by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, this annual prize for portraiture stirs up strong emotions. (Let's put it this way: the people's choice award and the juried award seldom agree.)

Contemporary Melbourne artists such as Ricky Swallow, Bill Henson, Nick Mangan, Juan Ford and Christian Capurro explore the relationship between reality and representation across multiple disciplines. Patricia Piccinini takes cues from the technological world, exploring ethical dilemmas with often disturbing results.

Queensland is a rich centre of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art. Judy Watson and Gordon Bennett have both won the Moët & Chandon Prize for contemporary artists.

Government-funded Triple J is a national radio station of the ABC (Australia Broadcasting Corporation) that emphasizes new and Australian music. Although its ratings pale compared to screaming commercial stations, its influence on Oz pop music is huge.

The best-selling album ever in Australia is Shania Twain's *Come on Over*, having been bought by over 5% of Australians since it was released in 1997. Meaningful tracks include *Don't Be Stupid* and *Honey I'm Home*.

The Chaser ([www.chaser.com.au](http://www.chaser.com.au)), like America's Onion, utilises 'mockumentary' to undermine mass culture. Warning: 'Not recommended in places that restrict freedom of speech, or Queensland.'

*Jammed* (2007) is a thriller that takes an unflinching look at sex-trafficking in Melbourne. It generated a fair bit of controversy both in and out of the film world.

The surreal, tragicomic work of photographer and filmmaker Tracey Moffatt seeks to understand Aboriginality via a white media lens, and is well worth seeking out.

### Theatre & Dance

Melbourne's main theatre troupe, the **Melbourne Theatre Company** (p98), is Australia's oldest, staging around a dozen annual performances at the Victorian Arts Centre (p98). These include works by the leading contemporary Australian playwright, Sydney-based David Williamson, whose dissection of middle-class rituals began in 1971 with *The Removalists* and *Don's Party*. The city has many more cultural institutions,

Sydney has a vibrant performing arts scene and a glittery venue (the Opera House) and some glittery names to give it flash. The **Sydney Theatre Company** (p212) includes Cate Blanchett among its artistic directors.

Australia's national ballet company, the **Australian Ballet** ([www.australianballet.com.au](http://www.australianballet.com.au)), is among the world's finest. It tours locally and internationally and has a diverse repertoire bolstered by renowned guest choreographers.

Australia's innovative modern-dance scene is typified by the **Sydney Dance Company** ([www.sydneydance.com](http://www.sydneydance.com)) and Melbourne's **Chunky Move** ([www.chunkymove.com](http://www.chunkymove.com)).

'Australia's national ballet company, the Australian Ballet... is among the world's finest.'

# Food & Drink Matthew Evans

Born in convict poverty and raised on a diet heavily influenced by Great Britain, Australian cuisine has come a long way. Australia is now one of the most dynamic places in the world to have a feed, thanks to immigration and a public willing to give anything new and better a go. Sydney and Melbourne can claim to be destinations worthy of touring gourmands from New York to Paris. More importantly, real people, including travellers, feel the effects of a blossoming food culture across the country.

This, however, has only been because of recent history. Australia, despite its world-class dining opportunities, doesn't live to eat. As a nation we're new to the world of good food, of being mesmerised by the latest TV chef, devouring cookbooks and subscribing to foodie magazines in the hundreds of thousands. The eating along the East Coast has never been better, and it's improving by the day. Take a few bites out of the food culture of Byron Bay and its hinterlands and you'll be hooked.

Yet, despite our fascination with tucker, at heart we're still mostly a nation of simple eaters, with the majority of Australians still novices in anything beyond meat and three veg. This is changing, though, as the influx of immigrants (and their cuisine) has found locals trying (and liking) everything from lassi to laksa. This passionate minority has led to a rise in dining standards, better availability of produce and a frenetic buzz about food in general. It's no wonder Australian chefs, cookbooks and food writers are so sought after overseas.

We've coined our own phrase, Modern Australian, to describe our cuisine. If it's a melange of East and West, it's Modern Australian. If it's not authentically French or Italian, it's Modern Australian – our attempt to classify the unclassifiable. Cuisine doesn't alter between regions, but some influences are obvious, such as the Greek migration to Sydney.

Dishes aren't usually too fussy, the flavours often bold and interesting. Spicing ranges from gentle to extreme, coffee is great (though it still reaches its greatest heights in the cities), and the meats are tender, full flavoured and usually reasonably priced.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

The East Coast's best food comes from the sea. Nothing compares to this region's seafood, harnessed from some of the purest waters you'll find anywhere, and usually cooked with care.

Connoisseurs prize Sydney rock oysters (a species living along the New South Wales coast) and sea scallops from Queensland. Rock lobsters are fantastic and fantastically expensive, and mud crabs, despite the name, are a sweet delicacy. Another odd-sounding delicacy is 'bugs' – like shovel-nosed lobsters without a lobster's price tag; try the Balmain and Moreton Bay varieties. Yabbies, the smaller cousins of crayfish, can be found throughout the southeast. The prawns are incredible, particularly the sweet school prawns or the eastern king (Yamba) prawns found along northern NSW.

Add to that countless wild fish species and we've got one of the greatest bounties on earth. In fact, the Sydney Fish Market (p191) trades in several hundred species of seafood every day, second only to Tokyo.

Despite their greatness, not many actual dishes can truly lay claim to being uniquely Australian. Even the humble 'pav' (pavlova), the meringue dessert with cream and passionfruit, may be from New Zealand. Ditto for lamingtons (large cubes of cake dipped in chocolate and rolled in desiccated coconut).

Matthew Evans was originally a chef before crossing to the dark side as food writer and restaurant critic. After five years as chief reviewer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, he has opted out, growing chooks and making Berkshire pork sausages in foodies paradise, Tasmania.

*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.

For a comprehensive list of markets where you can buy the best East Coast produce, see the Australian Farmers' Markets Association website ([www.farmersmarkets.org.au](http://www.farmersmarkets.org.au)).

### AVOIDING PISS ON THE EAST COAST

Slang for beer, piss is what you get when you order beer on the East Coast. Sadly, all too often it's the near-literal truth. Bland, nearly frozen lagers – the Carltons, VBs, XXXXs and Toohey's et al of the world – are too common in the pubs from Cairns to Melbourne. But there is hope. Brewers of quality beer, or craft beers as it's referred to in the industry, are appearing and in many pubs you'll find at least one or two excellent choices, including the following:

- **James Squire** – a Sydney brewer with wide distribution and a range of several craft beers, the IPA is superb.
- **St Arnou** – a micro-micro brewery in NSW, it has an excellent Belgian-style white beer, St Cloud.
- **Northern Rivers Brewing Co** – a full range of craft beers from a small brewery near Byron Bay, Ruby Raspberry is a popular postbeach treat
- **Mountain Goat** – brewed right in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond, the Hightale Ale is an English-style ale that makes a perfect pint
- **Piss** – a beer from Victoria that takes the piss out of piss... (once you're past the puns, it's an excellent, rich lager)

Finally, it's not East Coast-based, but Coopers of Adelaide makes excellent beers that are probably the easiest to find among Australia's quality brews.

Anything another country does, Australia does, too. Vietnamese, Indian, Fijian, Italian – it doesn't 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 their houses are the favourite haunts of their locally raised friends. Yum cha (the classic southern Chinese dumpling feast) has found huge popularity with urban locals in recent years, particularly on weekends.

Almost everything we eat from the land (as opposed to the sea) was introduced. The fact that the country is huge (similar in size to continental USA) and varies so much in climate, from the tropical north to the temperate south, means that there's an enormous variety of produce on offer.

In summer, mangoes are so plentiful that Queenslanders actually get sick of them. Lamb from Victoria's lush Gippsland is highly prized. And there's a brilliant farmhouse cheese movement, hampered by the fact that all the milk must be pasteurised (unlike in Italy and France, home of the world's best cheeses). Despite that, the results can be great.

### DRINKS

The closest region to Sydney, the Hunter Valley (p231) first had vines in the 1830s, and does a lively unwooded Semillon that is best aged. Further inland, there's Canberra, Cowra, Orange and Mudgee. Just out of Melbourne are the Mornington (p104) and Bellarine Peninsulas, Mt Macedon and the Yarra Valley. There's even a wine region in Queensland, though not all of it is good.

Plenty of good wine comes from big producers with economies of scale on their side. However, the most interesting wines are usually made by small wineries where you pay a premium; the gamble means the payoff in terms of flavour is often greater. Much of the cost of wine (nearly 42%) is due to a high taxing programme imposed by the Australian government.

In terms of coffee, Australia is leaping ahead, with Italian-style espresso machines in virtually every café, boutique roasters all the rage and, in urban

A great website for Australian food and wine is [www.campionandcurtis.com](http://www.campionandcurtis.com). It's written by two talented writers who've also trained as chefs. It has reviews, awards and much more.

areas, the qualified *barista* (coffee maker) virtually the norm. Expect the best coffee in Melbourne, decent stuff in most other cities, and a chance of good coffee in many rural areas. Melbourne's café scene rivals the most vibrant in the world; the best way to immerse yourself is by wandering the city centre's café-lined lanes.

Fresh fruit juice is extremely popular along the coast and a healthy way to beat the heat. Fresh-fruit-juice bars that specialise in all sorts of yummy concoctions pepper the landscape, but you can also get good versions at cafés and ice-cream stores.

### CELEBRATIONS

Celebrating in the Australian manner often includes equal amounts of food and alcohol. A birthday could well be a barbecue (barbie) of steak (or prawns), washed down with a beverage or two. Weddings are usually a big slap-up dinner, though the food is often far from memorable. Christenings are more sober, mostly offering home-baked biscuits and a cup of tea.

Many regions and cities now hold food festivals. Melbourne, for instance, has a month-long food and wine festival in March (p91). There are harvest festivals in wine regions, and various communities hold annual events.

For many an event, especially in the warmer months, Australians fill the car with an Esky (an insulated ice chest, to keep everything cool), folding tables and chairs, a cricket set or a 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 often finds the more traditional (in a European sense) baked dinner being replaced by a barbecue, full of seafood and quality steak, in 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.

Various ethnic minorities have their own celebrations. Tongans love an *umu*, where fish and vegetables are buried in an earthen pit and covered with coals; Greeks may hold a spit barbecue; and 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

Oftentimes the best value in cities can be found in simple cafés. What's better is that newer ones are often run by talented young chefs on their way up in the culinary world. Inventive and trend-setting, you can enjoy their fare for a modest fare – at least until the first cookbook comes out.

Typically, a restaurant meal along the East Coast is a relaxed affair. It may take 15 minutes to order, another 15 before the first course arrives, and maybe half an hour between entrées and mains. The upside of this is that any table you've booked in a restaurant is yours for the night, unless you're told otherwise. So sit, linger and live life in the slow lane.

Competitively priced places to eat are clubs or pubs with counter meals. Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) clubs are prolific along the coast, and while the décor can be pretty chintzy, the tucker is normally excellent.

The other species of club you're bound to cross is the Surf Life Saving Club. Most coastal towns have at least one, sometimes up to three. They're similar to RSL clubs, but many now compete with finer restaurants, and their bistros stock inventive fare. Additionally, they're almost always perched on the beachfront so the views tend to be worth a visit alone.

Other clubs to look for are bowls clubs, Irish clubs and sports clubs.

Victoria Bitter (aka VB) is Australia's best-selling beer, even in Queensland, once the domain of strong XXXX beer. Despite the name, it's really just another watery lager and is owned by Foster's.

*The Australian Wine Annual* by Jeremy Oliver is a must-read for those who want the lowdown tittle by tittle, vineyard by vineyard.

Does the winelist in that simple café seem a little too slick? It probably is. Huge liquor merchants such as Foster's supply many eateries with all their wines (most owned or imported by Fosters) and toss in slick, generic winelists.

Solo diners find that cafés and noodle bars are welcoming; good fine-dining restaurants often treat you like a star but, sadly, some midrange places may still make you feel a little ill at ease.

Most restaurants open around noon for lunch and from 6pm or 7pm for dinner. Australians usually eat lunch shortly after noon, and dinner bookings are usually made for 7.30pm or 8pm, though in major cities some restaurants stay open past 10pm.

### Quick Eats

There's not a huge culture of street vending, though you may find a pie or coffee cart in some places. Most quick eats traditionally come from 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, most often made from a form of shark (often called flake; don't worry, it can be delicious) dipped in heavy batter, and eaten at the beach on a Friday night.

American-style fast food has taken over recently, though many Aussies still love a meat pie, often from a milk bar, but also from bakeries, kiosks and some cafés. If you're at an Aussie Rules football match, a beer, a meat pie and a bag of hot chips are as compulsory as wearing your team's colours.

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 oven, thin Neapolitan-style pizza can be found, even in country towns. In the city, Roman-style pizza (buy it by the slice) is becoming more popular, but you can't usually buy the other pizza in anything but whole rounds.

There are some really dodgy mass-produced takeaway foods, bought mostly by famished teenage boys, including the dim sim (a bastardisation of the dim sum dumplings from China) and the Chiko Roll (opposite).

## 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 some of our best restaurants have complete vegetarian 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.

### EATING WITH KIDS

Dining with children is relatively easy. Avoid the flashiest places and children are generally welcomed, particularly at Chinese, Greek or Italian restaurants. Kids are usually more than welcome at cafés; bistros and clubs often see families dining early. Many fine-dining restaurants don't welcome small children (assuming 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, that kind of thing. It can be better to find something on the menu (say a pasta or salad) and have the kitchen adapt it slightly to your children's needs.

The best news for travelling families, weather permitting, is that there are plenty of free or coin-operated barbecues in parks. Beware of weekends and public holidays when fierce battles can erupt over who is next in line for the barbecue.

See p482 for more information about travelling with children.

The Australian Vegetarian Society's website ([www.veg-soc.org](http://www.veg-soc.org)) lists a number of veggie-friendly places to eat around the country.

The number of Australian organic food producers is growing daily; many are based on the East Coast. The Organic Federation of Australia ([www.ofa.org.au](http://www.ofa.org.au)) has details.

## DOS AND DON'TS

### Do...

- show up for restaurant dinner reservations on time. Not only may your table be given to someone else, staggered bookings are designed to make the experience more seamless.
- take a small gift, and/or a bottle of wine to dinner parties.
- offer to wash up or help clear the table after a meal at a friend's house.
- ring or send a note (even an email) the day or so after a dinner party, unless the friends are so close you feel it unnecessary. Even then, thank them the very next time you speak.
- offer to take meat and/or a salad to a barbecue. At the traditional Aussie barbie for a big group, each family is expected to bring part or all of their own tucker.
- shout your group to drinks on arrival at the pub.
- tip (up to 15%) for good service, when in a big group or if your kids have gone crazy and trashed the dining room.

### Don't...

- freak out when the waiter in a restaurant attempts to 'lap' your serviette (napkin) by laying it over your crotch. It's considered to be the height of service. If you don't want them doing this, place your serviette on your lap before they get a chance.
- ever accept a shout unless you intend to make your shout soon after.
- expect a date to pay for you. It's quite common among younger people for a woman to pay her own way.
- expect servile or obsequious service. Professional waiters are intelligent, caring equals whose disdain can perfectly match any diner's attempt at contempt.
- ever tip bad service.

## HABITS & CUSTOMS

At the table, 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, though Americans may be forgiven for using their fork like a shovel. Talking with your mouth full is considered uncouth, and fingers should only be used for food that can't be tackled another way.

'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.

Australians like to linger a bit over coffee. They like to linger a really long time while drinking beer. And they tend to take quite a bit of time if they're out to dinner (as opposed to having takeaway).

Smoking is banned in most eateries in the nation, so sit outside if you love to puff. And never smoke in someone's house unless you ask first. Even then it's usual to smoke outside.

### EAT YOUR WORDS

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, 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 transfer them to your *tinny holder*.

**middy** – a midsized glass of beer (NSW)

**pav** – pavlova, the meringue dessert topped with cream, passionfruit and kiwifruit or other fresh fruit

**pot** – a medium glass of beer (Vic)

**rat coffin** – a meat pie; the traditional ones are made with minced beef. Compulsory eating (with White Crow tomato sauce) at footy matches.

**sanger/sando** – a sandwich

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

**snags** – sausages (aka surprise bags)

**snot block** – a vanilla slice

**Tim Tam** – a commercial chocolate biscuit that lies close to the heart of most Australians. Best consumed as a Tim Tam shooter, where 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. 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* ice cold, nothing to do with a boat

# Environment Tim Flannery

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. 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 to 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 it was discovered that mammals such as the platypus and echidna 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. 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 such as 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. 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.

In recent geological times, on other continents 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 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 was too ancient and thick to be punctured by volcanoes or folded into mountains.

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

Tim Flannery is one of Australia's leading thinkers and writers. A resident of Adelaide, he was the recipient of the Australian of the Year Award in 2007.

The first platypus sent to England for study was dismissed as a hoax. Evidently a critter with a duck's bill and a beaver's tail that also laid eggs yet suckled its young was considered an impossibility.

In *The Weather Makers: How Man Is Changing the Climate and What It Means for Life on Earth*, Tim Flannery shows how humans are both causing global warming and can stop it.

**THE OVERSUBSCRIBED EAST COAST ENVIRONMENT** *Ryan Ver Berkmoes*

When a \$15.7 million house in Byron Bay is bought purely as a tear-down, you know things may be out of hand. Indeed all along the East Coast the desire to be part of this beautiful place is fuelling growth that could well obviate the very appeal that's so attractive. From Melbourne to Cairns, once sleepy coastal towns are dealing with newfound popularity, with locals quick to promise that their town won't become another overdeveloped strip like the hell that is Surfer's Paradise. Still you see signs everywhere. Melbourne is creeping up the southeast coast of Victoria, Sydneysiders are willing to drive for hours to nab a beach cottage, and few timeshare sellers ever go hungry on the Gold or Sunshine Coasts.

How this rapid growth will play out won't be known for decades. Some places have the red carpet out for the money and jobs made possible by development. Other places like Byron Bay have elected left-of-centre councils that try to squelch all development. But this only results in multi-million-dollar tear-downs as the addictive lure of the East Coast continues.

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 extreme 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.

**Birds**

Because of the lack of climate stability, 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. In your travels you're likely to come across kookaburras, magpies and blue wrens, to name just a few. These birds 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 experts realised that conditions in Australia can be so harsh that more than two adult birds are needed to help 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 bird species.

**Marsupials**

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 come across as most are nocturnal. Their lifestyles 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 across a sparse landscape to find meagre feed, such efficiency is a must.

Marsupials are so energy-efficient that their nutritional requirements are one-fifth less than that of equivalent-sized placental mammals (everything from bats to rats, whales and ourselves). However, 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 take up the capacity of their skulls. Instead they have a shrivelled walnut-sized 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 it is now believed that the koala has sacrificed its brain to energy efficiency. Brains cost a lot to run – our brains typically weigh only 2% of our body weight, but use 20% of the energy we consume. Koalas eat gum leaves, which are so toxic to their systems that koalas use 20% of their energy just detoxifying this food. This leaves little energy for brain function, 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 every creature dumb. The koala's nearest relative, the wombat (of which there are three species), has a large brain compared to other marsupials. Wombats 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 (it's far cooler underground), 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 one-third of the food needed by a sheep of equivalent size, yet Australian farmers still keep sheep! At the moment farming wombats 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

Australian icon Steve Irwin died while shooting *Ocean's Deadliest*, a 2007 documentary he produced with Philippe Cousteau, Jr. It features all sorts of deadly critters from Queensland's waters but not the ray that stung Irwin.

The Australia Bush Heritage Fund ([www.bushheritage.asn.au](http://www.bushheritage.asn.au)) and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy ([www.australianwildlife.org](http://www.australianwildlife.org)) are two groups dedicated to preserving Australia's wildlife and habitat.

Koalas make cats look like omnivores when it comes to being finicky eaters. They may reject more than 20 or 30 types of eucalyptus tree before deciding one is just right for a snack.

*Chasing Kangaroos: A Continent, a Scientist, and a Search for the World's Most Extraordinary Creature* is Tim Flannery's 2007 ode to Australia's icon.

During the Pleistocene period ancestors of the kangaroo stood 3m tall.

The Great Barrier Reef is considered one of the world's most endangered treasures due to rising ocean temperatures that cause bleaching. Other threats include overfishing and agricultural pollutant run-offs from land.

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. Snakes are abundant, here and they include some of the most venomous species known. Where the opportunities for them to feed are few and far between, it's best not to give your prey a second chance – the venom is potent for a reason! Around Sydney and other parts of Australia 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 species is the sleepy lizard.

### MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE REEF *Alan Murphy*

The Great Barrier Reef is incredibly fragile and it's worth taking some time to educate yourself on responsible practices while you're here. The following are a few of the more important sustainable practices, but this is by no means an exhaustive list – see the websites later for more comprehensive information.

- Whether on an island or a boat, take all litter with you – even biodegradable material like apple cores – and dispose of it back on the mainland.
- Remember that it is a legal offence to damage or remove coral in the marine park.
- Don't touch or harass marine animals and be aware that if you touch or walk on coral you'll damage it (it can also create some nasty cuts). Never rest or stand on coral.
- If you have a boat be aware of the rules in relation to anchoring around the reef, including 'no anchoring areas'. Be very careful not to damage coral when you let down the anchor.
- If you're diving, check that you are weighted correctly before entering the water and get your buoyancy control well away from the reef. Ensure that equipment such as secondary regulators and gauges aren't dragging over the reef.
- If you're snorkelling (and especially if you are a beginner) practice your technique away from coral until you've mastered control in the water.
- Watch where your fins are – try not to stir up sediment or disturb coral.
- Do not enter the water near a dugong, including when swimming or diving.
- Note that there are limits on the amount and types of shells that you can collect.

If you're a regular user of the reef you can be part of a program that makes a positive contribution towards its future survival. BleachWatch is a community initiative of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and involves regular users of the reef monitoring and reporting signs of coral bleaching. If you'd like to get involved, email [bleachwatch@gbmpa.gov.au](mailto:bleachwatch@gbmpa.gov.au).

If you want a deeper understanding of the issues facing the Reef, as well as information on minimising your impact, try clicking on the following:

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority ([www.gbmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbmpa.gov.au))
- Reef Teach ([www.reefteach.com.au](http://www.reefteach.com.au))
- Cooperative Research Centre for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area ([www.reef.crc.org.au](http://www.reef.crc.org.au))
- Australian Conservation Foundation ([www.acfonline.org.au](http://www.acfonline.org.au))
- Coral Reef Alliance ([www.coralreefalliance.org](http://www.coralreefalliance.org))
- Australian Research Centre (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies ([www.coralcoe.org.au](http://www.coralcoe.org.au))

These 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 leopardlike blotches, can grow to more than 2m long, and are efficient predators of introduced rabbits, feral cats and the like.

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. No one, though, knows why the males have 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!

### Plants

Australia's plants can be irresistibly fascinating. The best flowers grow on the arid and monotonous sand plains, and the blaze of colour produced by the banksias and similar native plants can be dizzying. The sheer variety of flowers is amazing – the 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 one 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.

### WATCHING WILDLIFE

Some regions of Australia offer unique opportunities to see wildlife.

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.

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.

Even if your visit extends only as far as Sydney, You'll still see plenty of 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!

### 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.

Cane toads are the rabbits of the reptile world. This introduced species crowds out native Aussie frogs and deprives the little battlers of food. Even when they've croaked, the toads are a menace: their bodies are poisonous.

Of the 700 varieties of eucalyptus, 95% are native to Australia. Think about that the next time you suck on a cough drop.

Hervey Bay in Queensland is a holiday spot for humpback whales who rest here by the thousands from August to early November before they continue on the long haul to Antarctica.

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.

Websites for national parks authorities in each East Coast state are: New South Wales ([www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)), Queensland ([www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks\\_and\\_forests](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests)) and Victoria ([www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)).

# East Coast Australia Outdoors

Not only can you do a lot to get wet on the East Coast – whether from sweat, surf, sea or otherwise – but you have world-class places to do it. The Great Barrier Reef off Queensland is known worldwide for its diving, Sydney's harbour is a natural for yachties as are the Whitsundays in Queensland, the Blue Mountains team with climbers, huge swaths of the entire coast pound with surf breaks and it's all laced together by a myriad of walking and hiking trails through the bush.

## BOATING

After surfing, boating is the number one activity in many East Coast towns. It has its own distinct marina culture that you'll find in towns with large ports and even its own migratory patterns: during the southern winter boaters and yachties migrate towards the warmer north. (Note: a yachtie can be a boatie but never the other way around, mate.)

There are plenty of opportunities for safe inshore boating and adventurous exploration on the high seas. Always check with the local coast guard and maritime authorities about regional conditions and take note of weather forecasts and warnings broadcast on marine radio.

## New South Wales

For its entire length the NSW coastline is kinked and wrinkled with bays, inlets and estuaries; ideal water for motorboats and yachts alike. Sydney Harbour is, of course, the jewel in the crown, and on weekends it's a swirling kaleidoscope of huge colourful sails moving to and fro. The simplest boating activity would have you resting your bum on a harbour cruise (p200), but this city's greatest natural asset is an ideal setting to learn to sail (p198). Just about every coastal town south and north of Sydney has a small harbour protecting a flotilla of yachts, and a boat ramp that bursts with activity on weekends. Some of the more popular boating areas include Port Stephens (p236), Myall Lakes National Park (p238) and Jervis Bay (p166). In the north, the broad Clarence River Valley (p265) has hundreds of kilometres of lazy waterways you can navigate in rented houseboats, while Ballina is good for boat hire (p268).

## Queensland

Queensland's waters team with seamen and seamwomen of all skills, with some of the most stunning sailing locations in the world. The postcard-perfect Whitsunday Islands (p407) are prime waters and can be accessed by charter craft based in Airlie Beach (p410).

You can also explore the Great Barrier Reef and some of the islands off the Far North Queensland coast on board a chartered boat or cruise from Cairns (p450) or Port Douglas (p465), where the yacht club offers free sailing on Wednesdays.

## Victoria

Victoria's southeast coast boasts a couple of expansive bays and some pretty estuaries where boating is popular. City-based yachties tend to gravitate to the many sailing clubs around Port Phillip Bay. Other popular boating areas

Charterguide Australia ([www.charterguide.com.au](http://www.charterguide.com.au)) has comprehensive links to yachts and boats for rent plus aquatic tours of all kinds.

*100 Magic Miles of the Great Barrier Reef – The Whitsunday Islands*, by David Colfelt, is sometimes referred to as the bible of Whitsunday sailing. It contains charts with descriptions of all boat anchorages as well as articles on the islands, resorts, dive sites and marine life.

include the sprawling Gippsland Lakes (see Metung, p125), and the lovely Mallecoota Inlet (p137) near the NSW border.

## BUSHWALKING

The East Coast of Australia has a smorgasbord of landscapes and coastline that are laced with amazing bushwalks of every length, standard and difficulty imaginable. Vast rural areas outside of the cities are preserved in an easily accessible network of coastal and hinterland national parks and reserves.

Bushwalking is enjoyed year-round along the East Coast. Summer, however, is the most popular time, particularly in the southeast. It is also the most dangerous period for the major hazard of bushfires (see p485 for more information). Regardless of what time of year it is and no matter how short the walk, you should always take plenty of drinking water. It can get very hot over summer, particularly from the Capricorn Coast north, so consider local conditions before you head out. Rescuing bushwalkers – especially travellers caught out woefully unprepared – is a common occupation for volunteers throughout the region. See the safety guidelines (opposite) for more information.

### New South Wales

Opportunities for bushwalking abound in coastal NSW, with a variety of standards, lengths and terrains. In Sydney, try the breathtaking (but hardly wilderness) Bondi to Coogee Coastal Walk, which combines coastal panoramas with opportunities for a surf or a coffee, or the numerous popular bushwalks in the Blue Mountains (p217), Ku-ring-gai Chase (p222) and Royal (p177) National Parks.

For an extended traverse that encompasses the environment around Sydney, the Great North Walk (p222), from Sydney to Newcastle, can be walked in two weeks, or sampled in sections. For superb coastal vistas, wildflowers and short but rugged hikes, the ascents of Pigeon House Mountain (p165), on the NSW south coast, and Mt Warning (p284), on the NSW north coast, can't be beaten. The verdant valleys of Dorriggo National Park (p257) are naturals for walkers and boast many cooling waterfalls.

### HEY! A FAMOUS MARSUPIAL!

Bushwalking on the East Coast means you'll see a lot more than just vast numbers of shrubs. You will very likely get a chance to see many of the iconic species that are the symbols of Australia (and big moneymakers for the plush-toy industry).

Here's some of the critters that may provide thrills – and chills – on your adventure:

- Kookaburra – You'll hear the classic cackling laugh before you see this otherwise small white-and-brown bird, found sitting in gum trees new and old.
- Kangaroo – From the tails of planes to the bumpers of buses to the plates of trendy cafés, the star marsupial seems to be everywhere. Fortunately there are millions in the bush and it is not uncommon to see a batch go bounding by at sunset.
- Koala – Thick in the trees of the East Coast south of the tropical regions, these undeniably adorable-looking marsupials require patience to spot. Not known for their activity, you need to look for sedentary lumps high up in the eucalyptus trees.
- Crocodiles – The nasty character of this bunch and just one of many dangerous reptiles in Australia (see also p508 for information on treating snake bites). Salties (salt-water crocodiles) are literally big in Queensland where the late Steve Irwin built an empire on their leathery backs. Watch for warning signs and listen to the advice of locals when in croc country.

Many of NSW's national parks hold guided walks on the coast and in the bush. See [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov) for details. Or ask rangers at the parks.

## SAFETY GUIDELINES

Before embarking on a bushwalking trip, consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience:

- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable walking for a sustained period.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions along your intended route (eg from park authorities).
- Before tackling a long or remote walk, tell someone responsible about your plans and arrange to contact them when you return.
- Walk only in regions, and on tracks, within your realm of experience.
- Boil all water for 10 minutes before drinking it.
- Be aware that weather conditions and terrain vary significantly from one region, or even from one track, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any track. These differences influence the way walkers dress and the equipment they carry.
- Before you set out, ask about the environmental characteristics that can affect your walk and how local, experienced walkers deal with these considerations.

## Queensland

National parks favoured by bushwalkers include Springbrook (p304) in the Gold Coast hinterland, and D'Aguilar Range National Park (p318), which is a popular escape from the city. More good parks for bushwalking include the Cooloola section of Great Sandy National Park (p352), just north of the Sunshine Coast, and Wooroonooran National Park (p447), south of Cairns, which contains Queensland's highest peak, Mt Bartle Frere (1622m).

The Great Walks of Queensland is a project of the state government to develop iconic walks across the state. They include the Fraser Island Great Walk (p376) which has numerous portions that stretch for a total of 87km across the island's rainforest interior.

In northern Queensland the 32km Thorsborne Trail (p438) on Hinchinbrook Island traverses remote beaches, lush rainforests and crystal-clear creeks. Finally, there are sensational views on Lizard Island (p477).

## Victoria

In Victoria's national parks and state forests, walkers enjoy everything from short walks through cool temperate rainforests to more challenging hikes that climb mountains or trace the wilderness coastline. The infrastructure is usually excellent, with marked trails, camp grounds with fireplaces, toilets and fresh water, and park information centres.

For coastal treks, head down to Wilsons Promontory National Park (p113) in Gippsland, with marked trails from Tidal River and Telegraph Bay that can take anywhere from a few hours to a couple of days. Expect squeaky white sands and clean aquamarine waters, pristine bushland and stunning coastal vistas. Further east, and almost tipping over into NSW, the Croajingolong National Park (p139), near Mallecoota in East Gippsland, offers rugged inland treks and easier coastal walks past historic lighthouses and over sand dunes.

## Resources

There are numerous bushwalking guidebooks that can help you prepare for the bush and choose a trail. Resources include Tyrone Thomas' *50 Walks in North Queensland* (for walks on the beach or through the rainforest areas of the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics), *70 walks in Southern NSW and ACT*,

Queensland publishes some excellent information on walks along the coast, from those aimed at history buffs to full-on outdoor explorers; see the list at [www.epa.qld.gov.au/shop/](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/shop/).

### RESPONSIBLE BUSHWALKING

To help preserve the ecology and beauty of East Coast Australia please consider the following when bushwalking:

- Stay on established trails, avoid cutting corners and taking short cuts (which cause erosion), and stay on hard ground where possible.
- When camping, always use designated camp grounds where provided. When bush camping, look for a natural clearing and avoid camping under large eucalypts, which have a tendency to drop branches without warning.
- Keep your vehicle on existing tracks or roads.
- Pay any fees and possess any permits required by local authorities.
- Do not feed the wildlife as this can lead to animals becoming dependent on hand-outs, and to unbalanced populations and diseases.
- Take all your rubbish out with you – don't burn or bury it.
- Avoid polluting lakes and streams – don't wash yourself or your dishes in them, and keep soap and detergent at least 50m away from waterways.
- Use toilets where provided – otherwise, bury human waste at least 100m away from waterways (taking a hand trowel is a good idea).
- Don't bring dogs or other pets into national parks.
- Take a gas or fuel stove and fuel for cooking.
- Don't light fires unless necessary; if you do need to light a fire, keep the fire small, use only dead fallen wood and ensure you use an existing fireplace. Make sure the fire is completely extinguished before moving on. On total fire ban days, don't (under any circumstances) light a fire.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment.

and *50 Walks: Coffs Harbour & Gold Coast Hinterland* (covering Tamborine Mountain, Springbrook and Lamington National Parks). *Take a Walk in Queensland's National Parks Southern Zone*, by John and Lyn Daly, provides a comprehensive guide to walks across the southern stretch of the state.

One of the best ways to find out about bushwalking areas is to contact a local bushwalking club. To find a local bushwalking club check the websites of the **Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW** ([www.bushwalking.org.au](http://www.bushwalking.org.au)), the **Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs** ([www.vicwalk.org.au](http://www.vicwalk.org.au)) and the **Queensland Federation of Bushwalking Clubs** ([www.geocities.com/qfbwc](http://www.geocities.com/qfbwc)).

### CANOEING, KAYAKING & WHITE-WATER RAFTING

Canoes and kayaks let you paddle into otherwise inaccessible areas, poking in and out of dense mangroves and estuaries, river gorges, secluded island beaches and remote wilderness inlets. Surf kayaking lets you surge ashore in a whirl of foam and spray. White-water rafting, on the other hand, may not give you as much time to look around as you negotiate yet another rapid, but the adrenaline factor is cranked right up.

#### New South Wales

A good place to have your first sea-kayaking adventure is right in Sydney Harbour (p197); although it is busy and can be challenging for a novice, instruction and guiding is easily arranged. Many of the state's numerous rivers are suitable for canoeing and kayaking, with adventurous swift-flowing runs, and long, lazy paddles. Going north, the twin towns of Foster and

Tuncurry (p240) and Coffs Harbour (p260) are good bases for river and ocean adventures. Yamba (p266) is also good and Byron Bay (p273) is great.

In the south, there's plenty of action around Jervis Bay (p167) and Narooma (p151). In Royal National Park (p177), just south of Sydney, you can hire all manner of boats.

#### Queensland

Not surprisingly, the drenched tropical regions boast some renowned white-water rafting locations: the mighty Tully, North Johnstone, Barron and Russell Rivers between Townsville and Cairns top the list. The Tully (p439) is the most popular and has 44 rapids up to grade three to four. You can do day trips from Cairns (p454) to the Tully but avoid the roads and base yourself close by.

Sea kayaking in the warm Queensland waters is understandably very popular, and there are numerous operations that offer expeditions along the sandy southeast coast, through the calm Barrier Reef lagoon, and among the offshore islands. The protected waterways of the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park (p352) and the inviting beaches of North Stradbroke Island (p330) make for ideal kayaking destinations. Way north, glitzy Palm Cove (p461) is also good.

You can rent kayaks and canoes or join tours in several places along the coast, among them Noosa (p347), Mission Beach (p441) and around the Whitsunday Islands (p407).

#### Victoria

Melbourne's Yarra River is popular with paddlers, with its gentle lower reaches suitable for families while more exciting rapids of about grade three can be found in the higher reaches. Keen paddlers hankering for midday trips can try the classic canoe or raft trip down the Snowy River (see boxed text, p134) from MacKillops Bridge to a pull-out point near Buchan. This is some of the best inland canoeing and kayaking in Australia.

### CYCLING

With enough time you could make all your friends jealous by cycling the entire length of the East Coast. Such an adventure is limited only by your endurance and imagination. Fortunately for most, you can still have plenty of shorter rides that will be the envy of others. The East Coast was largely settled on the principle of not having more than a day's horse/coach ride between pubs, so it's possible to tackle lengthy tours or any number of segments and still clean up, fuel up and drink up at the end of each day.

Casual riders can sample the great cycling routes for a day or extended weekend. There are helpful bicycle organisations in each of the East Coast states that have lots of maps and useful tips and advice; see the following sections and p497 for details of these organisations and for further information on planning, regulations, and purchasing and hiring bikes.

Other good cycling organisations ready to offer advice include the excellent web resources **Bicycles Network Australia** ([www.bicycles.net.au](http://www.bicycles.net.au)) and also **Bicycling Federation of Australia** ([www.bfa.asn.au](http://www.bfa.asn.au)), with links to cycling clubs and organisations throughout Australia.

#### Victoria

Melbourne (see p88) has an excellent network of long urban bike trails, and in country areas you'll find thousands of kilometres of diverse cycling terrain, much of it readily accessible by public transport. Highlights include the Great Ocean Road (p105), one of the world's most spectacular coastal

Get the low-down of the thrills when huge breaks meet paddles at [surfkayaks.com.au](http://surfkayaks.com.au).

Bike Paths Safe Escapes ([www.bikepaths.com.au](http://www.bikepaths.com.au)) is a comprehensive guide to Victoria's best cycling tracks, both in the city and in country.

For information on events and courses for canoeing and kayaking in NSW, Queensland and Victoria click onto [www.nswcanoe.org.au](http://www.nswcanoe.org.au), [www.canoeqld.org.au](http://www.canoeqld.org.au) and [www.canoevic.org.au](http://www.canoevic.org.au), respectively.

roads (though a detour from the East Coast); and the popular annual cycling events. Along the southeast coast there are many opportunities for road riding and much more rugged pedalling in the mountains. One place for the latter is Errinundra National Park (see boxed text, p134), where you can have multi-day adventures.

Excellent sources of information include **Bicycle Victoria** (☎ 03-8636 8888; www.bv.com.au) and the **Melbourne Bicycle Touring Club** (☎ 03-9517 4306; www.mbtc.org.au).

### New South Wales & Canberra

Urban bike paths continue to spread through the cities in response to the ever-growing popularity of cycling. Sydney (p197) has an excellent recreational bike-path system and useful bike-hire places. Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin (p159) is another good place for cycling, with a large network of bike paths.

The NSW coast is an obvious choice for cycle touring, with parks, beaches and little towns constantly providing reasons to dismount. Royal National Park (p177) is good as is Byron Bay (p278). The Hunter Valley (see Hunter Valley Cycling, p235) and Blue Mountains (see Velo Nova, p220) provide terrain that is both challenging and beautiful (and at the former you can always drown your saddle-itch at a tasting room).

### Queensland

There are possibilities for some great rides in Queensland but as with bushwalking, the best time is outside of Queensland's hottest months. Basic safety precautions such as taking plenty of water with you are vitally important here lest you end up as road kill.

There are excellent bike trails around Brisbane (p319). The lush and fertile Atherton Tableland is the destination of cycling tours out of Cairns (p454). You can also do some excellent mountain biking in and around Noosa (see Adventure Activities, p347).

Click on to the website of **Bicycling Queensland** (www.bq.org.au) for information on bike shops and rentals, cycling events and other useful information. The **Queensland Department of Transport** (www.transport.qld.gov.au/cycling) has maps and other resources, including information on road rules.

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

For divers around the world, a trip to the Great Barrier Reef is a life goal. And many divers have found that exploring this wonder of the world fills a lifetime. Fortunately both here and elsewhere along the East Coast there are oodles of ways to get a taste of the incredible diving and snorkelling that can only lead to further adventures.

Every major town along the coast has one or more diving schools, but standards vary. Diving professionals are notoriously fickle and good instructors move around from company to company; ask around to see which ones are currently well regarded. **PADI** (Professional Association of Diving Instructors; www.padi.com) open-water courses typically cost \$300 to \$700 for four or five days, depending on how many dives are done from a boat. Note that with all certified PADI courses you'll need to provide a medical certificate, which costs about \$60, and usually you will have to show you can tread water for 10 minutes and swim at least 200m. Dive shops can usually send you off to nearby clinic for your certificate.

Trips and equipment hire are available just about everywhere. You'll need evidence of your qualifications, and some places may also ask to see your log book. Renting gear or going for a day dive generally costs \$60

to \$100. You can also hire a mask, snorkel and fins from a dive shop for around \$30 to \$45.

### New South Wales

There are many good options for shore-based and boat-based dives around Sydney (p198), including the Gordons Bay Underwater Nature Trail, north of Coogee. Elsewhere in NSW, the protected waters of the Cape Byron Marine Park around Byron Bay (p273), the Solitary Islands Marine Park (p264) and Seal Rocks and the waters around Forster-Tuncurry (p240). In the south, Jervis Bay (p167) has good dives off its pristine parks while near Narooma, spectacular Montague Island (p152) offers diving in waters teeming with mammals such as seals.

### Queensland

It's no secret that the Queensland coast has the pick of spectacular dive sites. The Great Barrier Reef provides some of the world's best diving and snorkelling and there are scores of operators vying to teach you or provide you with the ultimate dive experience. There are also some 1600 shipwrecks along the Queensland coast, providing vibrant habitats for marine life. Most cruises to the Great Barrier Reef and through the Whitsunday Islands include free snorkel gear and these are some of the loveliest waters to float in.

During the wet season, usually January to March, floods can wash a lot of mud out into the ocean and visibility for divers and snorkellers is sometimes affected. All water activities, including diving and snorkelling, are affected by the box jellyfish, which line the Queensland coast from the Capricorn Coast up. See p381 for more information on the potentially deadly stingers.

Learning to dive here is fairly inexpensive and you can usually choose to do a good part of your learning in the warm waters of the Great Barrier Reef itself. If you are choosing a course here, look carefully at how much of your open-water experience will be out on the reef. Many of the budget courses only offer a few boat dives. At the other end of the price scale, the most expensive courses tend to be aboard a boat or yacht for several days.

Cairns (p453) and Port Douglas (p465) have plenty of dive companies that operate in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef. Further south, the SS *Yongala* shipwreck, just off Townsville (p432), has been sitting beneath the water for over 90 years and is now home to a teeming marine community. From Airlie Beach (see p407) you can organise dives in the azure waters surrounding the Whitsundays and the Great Barrier Reef.

The spectacular southern Great Barrier Reef has perhaps the best locations of all. Here astraddle the tropic of Capricorn you'll find scores of operators and towns whose symbiosis with the reef is purely one way (reef to land). See p387 for a range of options.

Possibly one of the best locations for low-key (and low-cost) diving instruction in Queensland is the hamlet of Bargara, where there's superb coral viewing (see p372). Rainbow Beach (p359) is another good place to learn about diving and it has some spectacular rock formations that teem with turtles, rays and sharks.

You can snorkel just about everywhere in the warm waters of this state; it requires minimum effort and anyone can do it. Most of the previously mentioned locations are also relevant and popular snorkelling sites. There are coral reefs off some mainland beaches, and not far from Brisbane are the brilliant Tangalooma Wrecks (p332). Backpacker hostels along the coast often provide free use of snorkel gear for their guests.

Whether you're snorkelling or diving on the Great Barrier Reef it's important to remember how vulnerable the ecology is. Most coral damage occurs

*Pedalling Around Southern Queensland*, by Julia Thorn, has tour notes and mud maps for numerous bike rides in the south of the state.

The entire Great Barrier reef is 2000km long and in places is 500m wide.

**SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR DIVING**

Before embarking on a scuba-diving, skin-diving or snorkelling trip, carefully consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience:

- If scuba diving, possess a current diving certification card from a recognised scuba-diving instructional agency.
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable diving.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions at the dive site (eg from a reputable local dive operation).
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about marine life and the environment.
- Dive only at sites within your realm of experience; if available, engage the services of a competent, professionally trained dive instructor or dive master.
- Be aware that underwater conditions vary significantly from one region, or even site, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any site and dive conditions. These differences influence the way divers dress for a dive and what diving techniques they use.
- Ask about the environmental characteristics that can affect your diving and how local trained divers deal with these considerations.

when divers accidentally cut or break it with their fins. Be aware of where your feet are and never stand on the coral; if you need to rest find sand to stand on or use a rest station.

**Victoria**

Plug the holes in your wetsuit as the often chilly waters of Victoria offer excellent diving. Port Phillip Bay, right on Melbourne's doorstep, has several good sites, including pods of dolphins and friendly seals, and most weekends see a legion of beginners learning the ropes at places such as the pier at Portsea on the Mornington Peninsula. Other good bases include Flinders and Sorrento (p104), also on the Mornington Peninsula. Bunurong Marine Park (p110) is a seemingly mellow spot until you get to the teaming waters below. Even less developed, Cape Conran Coastal Park (p135) is a hidden diving gem.

**EXTREME SPORTS**

Maybe it's all that beauty or maybe it's the food or perhaps it's just all those pubs but the East Coast is loaded with places to get your heart pounding and glands working.

**Abseiling, Canyoning & Rock Climbing****NEW SOUTH WALES**

Near Sydney, the Blue Mountains (p217), especially around Katoomba, are fantastic for abseiling and canyoning, with numerous professionals able to set you up with equipment and training.

**VICTORIA**

With a name like Wilsons Promontory you just know there are going to be some rock faces to abseil (see First Track Adventures, p115). Another good place is around the beautiful and legendary Snowy River (see Karoonda Park, p133).

**Bungee Jumping & Skydiving**

There are plenty of opportunities for adrenaline-junkies to get a hit in the big holiday destinations of the East Coast. A bungee jump generally costs around \$100. Prices depend on the height of your jump. Most folk start with

Great Barrier Reef Online ([www.great-barrier-reef.au.com](http://www.great-barrier-reef.au.com)) is a Cairns-based agent representing dozens of tours for landlubbers to diving experts.

Climbing Australia ([www.climbing.com.au](http://www.climbing.com.au)) has excellent info on rock climbing.

a jump of 10,000ft, which provides 35 to 40 seconds of free fall and costs around \$200 to \$300.

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

Tandem skydiving is a popular way to try your first plunge to earth. Byron Bay is a popular place to make your first leap (see Skydive Byron Bay, p274).

**QUEENSLAND**

Something about Queensland makes people want to jump out of air-planes. Caloundra (p338), Hervey Bay (p365), Rainbow Beach (p359), Airlie Beach (p410), Mission Beach (p441) and Cairns (p454) all have skydiving operators.

Surfers Paradise is something of a bungee mecca, offering brave participants a host of creative spins on the original (see p297).

**Hang-gliding, Paragliding & Parasailing**

Hang-gliding and paragliding are popular at many places along the East Coast.

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

Great spots to take to the air include Stanwell Park (p176), south of Sydney, which is also ideal for spectators. As always, there's a lot going on around Byron Bay, especially if you want to hang-glide (p274).

**QUEENSLAND**

Parasailing is a resort staple on the Gold Coast (see p301), Airlie Beach and many other spots in Queensland.

**SURFING**

The southern half of the East Coast is jam-packed with sandy surf beaches and point breaks. North of Agnes Water in Queensland, the waves disappear thanks to the Great Barrier Reef shielding the coast from the ocean swells. Many travellers who come to the East Coast want to learn to surf, and you'll find plenty of good waves, board hire and lessons available all along the coast. Two-hour lessons cost around \$40 to \$60 and five-day courses for the really keen go for around \$180, although for a bit more you can often enjoy a surf camp.

**New South Wales**

It's simply hard to go wrong finding a break in NSW. Those endless beaches are battered by beautiful waves much of the year and there's simply so many places to surf that crowds at all but the trendiest spots are rare. Of course for trendy, there's Sydney's Bondi Beach (p194), which for many worldwide is synonymous with surfing. Less fabled but no less good, Manly Beach (p197) is another prime spot.

Elsewhere in the state, top highlights in the south include Merimbula (p146), Batemans Bay (p155), Booderee National Park (p167) and Wollongong (p173). Going north, Newcastle is a major spot for surfing and is home to champion surfer Mark Richards (see boxed text, p228). From here to Queensland it is easier to name places with no surfing, but consider Crescent Head (p250), Coffs Harbour (p260) and Lennox Head (p270) for starters. Byron Bay (p274) has a surf culture to rival Bondi.

**Queensland**

From a surfer's point of view, Queensland's Great Barrier Reef is one of nature's most tragic mistakes – a 2000km-long breakwater! Mercifully, there

For information on scores of ways to take to the air without a fixed wing, check out the offerings of the Hang Gliding Federation of Australia ([www.hgfa.asn.au](http://www.hgfa.asn.au)).

For definitive surfing information throughout the East Coast, plus surf cams, events and where to learn to stand up on your board, surf, as it were, to [www.surfingaustralia.com](http://www.surfingaustralia.com) or [www.coastalwatch.com](http://www.coastalwatch.com).

*The Atlas of Australian Surfing, Travellers Edition*, by legendary surfer Mark Warren, reveals the biggest waves and the best-kept secret surf in Australia. Features include maps and plenty of practical advice, including warnings about monster waves, sharks and unfriendly locals.

are some great surf beaches in southern Queensland. Starting right at the border, Coolangatta (p290) is a popular surfing haunt, particularly at Kirra Beach. Nearby Burleigh Heads (p292) has a serious right-hand barrel, which rewards those with experience.

Further north, the swanky resort of Noosa (p345) is a popular hang-out for long-boarders. Near Brisbane, North Stradbroke Island (p330) also has good surf beaches, as does Moreton Island. Queensland's most northern surf beaches are at Agnes Water (p380), just south of Gladstone.

### **Victoria**

With its exposure to the relentless Southern Ocean swell, Victoria's rugged southern coastline provides plenty of quality surf, while the southeast coast is a little more gentle. The usually chilly water (even in summer) has the hardest surfer reaching for a wetsuit. A full-length, up-to-7mm-thick wetsuit is the standard for winter.

Eastern Victoria's best surf is at Phillip Island (p106), especially at Woolami Beach. Other good surfing spots include Wilsons Promontory (p115) and at Cape Conran Coastal Park (p135).