

History

Michael Cathcart

TWO WORLDS MEET

On the beaches and rocky outcrops of Sydney Harbour, the Eora people and their neighbours hunted and fished for thousands of years. In fact, someone travelling around the harbour in Aboriginal times would have encountered several different peoples. Each group maintained its own distinct set of spiritual beliefs, or 'Dreaming'. And each spoke their own language – these included Dharug, Dharawal, Gundungurra and Kuringgai. This linguistic diversity existed across New South Wales (NSW) – indeed, across the entire continent.

The Aborigines' world was challenged on 19 April 1770, when Lieutenant James Cook of the British Navy climbed onto the deck of his ship *Endeavour* and saw a miraculous sight. In the gentle light of dawn, a vast uncharted country of wooded hills and gentle valleys had appeared across the ocean.

Ten days later, he dropped anchor in a bay and went ashore, where he was met warily by the local people. The ship's scientists were so excited by the unfamiliar plants they found there that Cook named the place 'Botany Bay'. But the Aborigines were alarmed by the intrusion. As Cook noted in his journal, 'All they seemed to want was for us to be gone.'

A COLONY OF THIEVES

But 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 diligent naval captain named Arthur Phillip. Unimpressed by Cook's marshy Botany Bay, Phillip was delighted to discover a magnificent harbour just a few miles up the coast. There, on a small cove, in the land of the Eora people, Phillip established a British penal settlement. He renamed the place after the British Home Secretary, Lord Sydney. The date of the landing was 26 January 1788, an occasion remembered each year with a public holiday known as 'Australia Day'.

The fact that a national holiday commemorates the arrival of a party of prisoners may seem inglorious – but it helps explain both the egalitarianism and the sense of irony that sometimes accompany expressions of nationalism in Australia.

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 their freedom throughout the colony and the right to seek work on their own behalf.

But the convict system could 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'. As the Eora people saw, to their horror, male convict re-offenders were cruelly flogged or even hanged. (Just six weeks after the landing, Phillip hanged a 17-year-old boy named John Barrett on the shores of Sydney Cove, for stealing food.)

The British government had instructed Governor Phillip to treat the local Aborigines 'with amity and kindness'. But he could do nothing to stop the

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For more on the indigenous history of Sydney see www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/barani and www.gadigal.org.au.

The most vivid eyewitness account of the First Fleet is *1788* by Watkin Tench (edited by Tim Flannery).

lethal impact of European diseases, including syphilis, smallpox and the 'flu, on the local populations. Alcohol and the poor British diet also took their toll. His attempts to befriend Aborigines, notably an adventurous man named Bennelong, ended sadly, with Bennelong himself dying of alcoholism and loneliness. The Sydney Opera House stands on a tongue of land that bears his name, Bennelong Point.

MACQUARIE

By the early 1800s, Sydney was a bustling port. A space in the bush had been cleared for vegetable gardens, new houses, warehouses and streets – and windmills seemed to occupy the top of every hill. But Phillip's plans to create a vigorous new society in Australia had come adrift. His successors at Government House had lost control to a caste of corrupt, self-serving military officers. Members of this infamous 'Rum Corps' were busily enriching themselves by controlling trade and land, and treating the convicts as their own private labour force. But in 1809 they met their match when the British government dispatched Governor Lachlan Macquarie to restore the rule of law.

An autocratic British governor may seem an unlikely hero for Australians. In fact, Macquarie transformed Sydney into a well-planned colony graced with fine civic architecture. Many of his buildings, including several designed by the convict-architect Francis Greenway, survive to this day – notably the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney's Macquarie St, where you can see Macquarie's name painted on the façade (see Macquarie Street Area, p57, and Windsor, p117).

Macquarie was a man of progressive and civic-minded social attitudes. He championed the cause of convicts who had served their time (the 'Emancipists'), promoting many of them to significant public offices and welcoming them to his circle at Government House. This policy outraged the 'Exclusives' – those members of the wealthy classes who maintained rigid British manners and accents, and old-world notions of class.

By then, many of the white children in the colony were speaking with a new, assertively Australian accent. Distinctively Australian attitudes and manners were taking shape in the streets of Sydney. In fact, the convicts of Sydney gave white Australians an important part of their mythology. For generations afterwards, Australians disowned any suggestion that there was a 'convict stain' on the pages of their own family history. Yet, there was also a deep sympathy for the convicts. Throughout the 20th century, school children learned how Britain's Industrial Revolution had been brutal to the poor and the working class, and how convicts were often transported to Australia for such crimes as 'stealing a loaf of bread' to feed their starving children. It is a powerful image – and one that convinced generations of colonists that Australia might just prove to be a fairer place than the old country that had dealt so harshly with its underclass.

FRONTIER

The colonists were partitioned from the inland by the formidable cliffs and canyons of the 'Blue Mountains'. While some simple folk thought China lay on the other side, the sheep graziers and cattlemen dreamt of rolling farmlands in the mysterious hinterland. In 1813, when Sydney was in the grip of a drought, three graziers found a route across the barrier and discovered that the great Aboriginal territories beyond were indeed rich in grasslands.

This discovery unleashed the ambitions of the so-called 'squatters'. These were men of capital who took their flocks ever deeper into the Aboriginal territories in search of pastures and water. In many areas, Aborigines

fought against the advance, and history remembers leaders of the Aboriginal resistance such as Pemulwuy and Mosquito. At the same time, the government was anxious to monitor the activities of the squatters on the frontier, and determined to enforce the principle that the government – and no-one else – actually owned the land. To assert its authority, it dispatched expeditions of explorers, including John Oxley, Charles Sturt and Thomas Mitchell, to discover what mysteries and resources lay in the Aboriginal territories.

The Blue Mountains are part of an elevation that runs the length of eastern Australia, known, rather grandly, as the Great Dividing Range. The rivers on the gentle, western side of the range flow inland, and the early explorers were tantalised by the mystery of where they went. As they pondered this 'riddle of the rivers', some predicted they would find a mighty Mississippi-type river, which would become the highway for Australian development. A few believed there was a wide inland sea – a sort of Sea of Galilee – in the heart of the country. But the inland journeys of the explorers and squatters often took them into increasingly dry and arid territory. The comparison with the United States was harsh. In America, the explorers had discovered a bountiful land, which they interpreted as an expression of God's blessing – a sign of white America's 'manifest destiny'. The Australians' journey westward was, by contrast, a journey into disappointment.

Nevertheless, the sheep flourished, and the government filled its coffers by leasing the Aboriginal territories to the squatters. The colony's income was boosted by the discovery of massive goldfields at Ophir (near Orange, p238) in 1851. The possibility of instant wealth attracted a flood of youthful miners from Europe, America and China.

DEMOCRACY & GROWTH

At the same time, the colonists' agitation for a more democratic form of government reached sympathetic ears in London, and the colonists began to debate the constitution under which a parliament should operate. But the squatters were uneasy. They were now the de facto aristocracy of the colony and were determined to hang onto their political power. This division between the urban democrats and landed conservatives was reflected in the structure of the new Parliament of New South Wales, which adopted a radical form of manhood suffrage in the lower house, while the practice of appointing the upper chamber allowed it to function as the conservative 'squatters house'.

Australia was developing an export economy based on primary production. The sheep industry expanded into the west of the state in the 1890s with the discovery of massive reserves of artesian water. At the same time, wheat, dairying and sugar were developing as major industries. NSW became an exporter of brown coal, and mining fed the smelters and industries that were developing in Newcastle and Wollongong to the immediate north and south, respectively, of Sydney.

The rapid expansion of the NSW economy since 1788 had created a continual demand for labour. Whereas England and Ireland were burdened with the misery and poverty of a 'surplus population', Australian colonists were actively encouraging migration. This single fact gave the workforce a bargaining power undreamt of in Britain. Good wages, social mobility and increasingly strong unions fed the belief that Australia might become 'the working man's paradise'. Employers, on the other hand, notably the squatters, were anxious to keep wage costs low, and the appeal of cheap Asian or Islander labour was irresistible.

For the counter-argument to Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*, see *The Europeans in Australia: A History, Volume 1* by Alan Atkinson (1998).

The early history of the city is well told at the Museum of Sydney. Visit www.hht.net.au/museums/mos/main for more information.

For information on the history and attractions of the Blue Mountains see www.bluemts.com.au.

The classic work on frontier violence is Henry Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1986). In the bitter 'history wars', Keith Windschuttle's self-published *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (2002) has fuelled right-wing scepticism about the extent of such violence.

You can visit charming Parliament House (known as 'the Bear Pit'). See details and lots of historical information at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au.

NATIONALISM

Against this background, popular Sydney magazine the *Bulletin* (founded in 1880) began to champion a version of Australian nationalism that was working class, male, white and republican. Known as 'the bushman's bible', the *Bulletin* popularised a view of the archetypal Australian as a laconic, un-intellectual but resourceful bushman who was independent, contemptuous of authority and loyal to his mates. Of all the *Bulletin* writers, two in particular have an enduring place in the Australian imagination. Henry Lawson was a Sydney socialist with a flair for revolutionary verse and comic short stories. Lawson visited the outback of northern NSW during a merciless drought, and returned to the city convinced that the bush was a zone of silence, stoic mateship and human comedy based on hopelessness. 'Banjo' Paterson, on the other hand, was a bushman to his very soul. He celebrated the wide spaces of Australia as 'sunlit' and 'glorious', most notably in his classic ballad, 'Clancy of the Overflow', and in Australia's most famous poem, 'The Man from Snowy River'.

Read 'The Man from Snowy River' and other works by 'Banjo' Paterson at <http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors.html>.

LABOUR IN ACTION

During the 1890s, a cruel depression brought the curse of unemployment and hunger to cities and towns throughout NSW. But the working people – particularly the unionised shearers, timber cutters and waterside workers – were fierce in their resistance to bosses who attempted to cut their wages or replace them with cheaper nonunionised workers. As the colony threatened to become a powder keg of industrial violence, the Labor Party was formed to give a legitimate political voice to the demands of the workers. At the same time, various states responded to the suffering and unrest by using the law to protect the wages and living standards of the poorest workers, setting a pattern that was to endure in Australia for the next 100 years.

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

FEDERATION & WAR

On 1 January 1901, NSW and the other colonies federated to form the nation of Australia. This was not a declaration of independence. This new Australia was a dominion of the British Empire. It was as citizens of the Empire that thousands of Australian men volunteered to fight in the Australian Imperial Force when WWI broke out in 1914. They fought in Turkey, Sinai and Europe – notably on the Somme. More than 200,000 of them were killed or wounded over the four terrible years of the war. Today, in every city and town across the state, you will see war memorials that commemorate their service. The Returned Services League (RSL) was formed in the immediate aftermath of the war to represent the aspirations and interests of the ex-soldiers. A visitor to NSW is certain, somewhere along the way, to encounter one of the enormous RSL clubs, which began as the League's meeting halls. With the legalisation of poker machines in 1956, these clubs began to swell into the gaudy gambling, dining and entertainment centres that today provide a major alternative to the local pub – especially in regional parts of the state.

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

A DIVIDED SOCIETY

By 1929, the promise that the soldiers would return to a land fit for heroes had proved, for many, to be a cruel lie. That year, the cold wind of the Great Depression blew through the farms and factories of the state. Around one in five Australian breadwinners was out of work. Poverty and hunger divided the unemployed from the majority of the population who continued to work and put dinner on the table.

The politics of the period were dominated by the inflammatory rhetoric and policies of 'Big' Jack Lang, the larger-than-life Labor premier of NSW. The federal government and all the states had borrowed heavily from London, to pay for the war and to finance social projects such as roads and hospitals. Lang announced that he would default on his loan repayments. Rather than line the pockets of international bankers, he said, he would feed the hungry of NSW. This defiant rhetoric divided the state. Supporters hailed Lang as a 'new Lenin'. But the mass of middle-Australians saw him as a demagogue whose policies would ruin Australia's financial credibility. Normally sober conservatives began to form paramilitary groups, preparing to meet the revolution they believed Lang was inciting.

In the midst of this bitterness, the great Sydney Harbour Bridge was rising like a steel rainbow in the heart of the city, uniting its northern and southern regions. The bridge became a great symbol of hope and accomplishment, and Lang was determined to bask in its glory when the day came for its opening in 1932. But as the crowds waited expectantly, he was beaten to the ribbon by a member of the paramilitary New Guard. A horseman named Francis De Groot cut the ceremonial ribbon with a sabre and declared the bridge open, in the name of the decent citizens of NSW. Weeks later, Lang was forced to an election, and soundly defeated.

WAR & NEW HORIZONS

In 1939 Australians were once again fighting a war alongside the British, this time against Hitler in WWII. But the military situation changed radically in December 1941 when the Japanese bombed the American Fleet at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor. The Japanese swept through Southeast Asia and, within weeks, were threatening Australia. It was not the British, but the Americans, who came to Australia's aid. As thousands of Australian soldiers were taken prisoner and suffered in the brutal Japanese POW camps, Sydney was among the Australian cities that opened its arms to US servicemen. This experience laid the foundations for the US–Australia alliance that remains so strong, and so bitterly controversial, today.

After the war, Australia was convinced it had to increase its population if it were to fend off another Asian attack – a conviction that was made all the stronger by the rise of communist China. The government embarked on a massive immigration program, attracting migrants from Britain and mainland Europe. These 'new Australians' made a huge impact on NSW, especially in the irrigation farms of the Riverina, in the building of the great Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme, in the large industrial centres and in Sydney itself. No-one anticipated how profoundly these newcomers would transform the country. By the 1970s, Australia had abolished its old policies of racial discrimination and declared itself to be a multicultural country.

TODAY

Sydney is now a confident world city. The pace of life is fast. The cost of living is high. And people keep coming. In 2000, Sydney welcomed the new millennium by hosting a spectacularly successful Olympic Games, during which fans and athletes flooded into the harbour city from all over the world.

Today, Australia is a wealthy country with a vigorous economy. New free-market policies have stripped away the sense of job security most Australians once regarded as their birthright. In a globalised economy, Australian workers have lost their protection against the cheap labour of Asia – and the demands of the workplace are becoming more and more overwhelming.

For more on this famous, little-understood man see Andrew Moore's brilliant *Francis De Groot: Irish Fascist Australian Legend* (2005).

For a fascinating exploration of the relationship between Australia and Japan see the Australian War Memorial's project at <http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/AJRP/AJRP2.nsf>.

At the same time, Australians are once again debating their attitudes to race and cultural diversity. Ugly race riots on Sydney's Cronulla Beach in 2005 laid bare the tensions between some old and new Australians. Prime Minister John Howard prefers to emphasise unity over diversity, having no truck with the ideas of a pluralist or multicultural society. But the voices of tolerance and diversity remain strong in Australia. The country's immigration policies attract immigrants from all over the world, particularly from Asia. And the general friendliness of Australians – and their openness to travellers – is evidence that many Australians still maintain a profound and enduring culture of goodwill and good sense.

The Culture

REGIONAL IDENTITY

Australia has an ancient past and culture, enriched by at least 50,000 years of Aboriginal heritage, but its modern identity is still in its infancy, and New South Wales (NSW) is where it all began. This is a country whose recent past, present and future is tied inexorably to the trials and tribulations of immigration. The British were the most influential participants in this process. For them, the seminal times of the colony of NSW were characterised by extreme hardship, resentment at being sent so far with so little, and an incalculable sense of loss of loved ones and homes left behind. For pioneers pushing beyond Sydney's adolescent urban limits, the struggle against nature and tyranny intensified. To cope, they forged a culture based on the principles of a 'fair go' and congratulatory back slaps for challenges to authority, and told stories of the Aussie 'battler' that were passed down through generations. Mateship became a code that transcended official law.

Although visitors to NSW will still encounter this sense of anti-establishment, decades of prosperity have watered it down to larrikin cheek. But the struggle to forge a new existence in an alien landscape is still palpable, owing to Australia's consistent relationship with immigration. Waves of newcomers have brought their own stories, cultures and myths to meld with those already in place. Many migrants have come with a huge sense of hope and expectancy, to start life afresh. Many have arrived as refugees, and their ordeals and courage add to the ethos of the colonial 'battler'.

Colonial history has been revisited through art, literature and cinema. There's also a long-overdue acknowledgment that the original Aboriginal inhabitants of this country are fundamental to a true definition of Australian culture today. Australians enjoy a sophisticated, modern society with immense variety, a global focus, if not a regional one, and a sense of optimism even though it's tempered by world events.

Although there's some truth in the stereotypes that Australians are open-minded, down-to-earth, big-hearted, laconic, larrikin-minded, egalitarian and honest, these definitions are largely one-dimensional. Australian culture is much richer for its indigenous heritage and multicultural mix. While on your travels here, you may hear 'g'day' from an Akubra-wearing, laconic, whiskery, bush larrikin, his voice will be but one among many. This exciting time of redefinition for multicultural Australia will throw unexpected people and experiences in your path. It's a young culture melding with the oldest culture in the world; and the incredibly rich opportunities are only starting to be realised.

LIFESTYLE

Australians have been sold to the world as outdoorsy, sporty, Fosters-guzzling, croc-wrestling folk. In reality, most have never wrestled a small lizard and would drink Fosters only as a last resort. This is particularly true in NSW, where the beer is fine (see p46).

But the Australian dream to own an overgrown house on a quarter-acre block is rife in NSW. The average home is middle class and inside it you'll find a married heterosexual couple, though it is becoming increasingly likely they will be de facto, or in their second marriage. Gay marriage is not sanctioned by law in Australia, but most urban Australians are open-minded about homosexuality, especially in the gay mecca, Sydney. The more remote the location however, the less accepting you'll find this attitude.

The Lady Bushranger: The Life of Elizabeth Jessie Hickman (by Pat Studdy-Clift) relays the circus career, cattle duffing (stealing) and fugitive life of a female bushranger in and around Wollemi National Park.

Crikey (www.crikey.com.au) is an unforgiving indie news service that peels back the layers of truth commercial media won't go near.

Similarly, sexism is not tolerated in urban areas, but women may experience varying degrees (mostly in the form of appreciative glances and throw-away comments) in rural and remote areas.

'Mum and Dad' will have married around the age of 30, and are now proud parents to a whopping mortgage and 1.7 kids, probably called Jack, Lachlan, Olivia or Charlotte (Kylie's been bumped out of the top ten). The average weekly gross income for the household will be \$1200; more in Sydney, where salaries and the cost of living are higher.

Our typical family drags a caravan off to the beach every holiday, and on weekends they watch sport, go to the movies or head to the shops. And our couple likes a few quiet ones up the pub, though despite the long-held reputation that Australians are boozers, recent figures show they drink less than Brits. Today wine is the number-one drink of choice.

Around 55% of women and 70% of men will be employed. Though the glass ceiling is becoming a thing of the past, the average male income is about a third higher than the average female income.

ECONOMY

NSW has a robust and growing economy. Any road trip along the coast will reveal an ever-increasing suburban sprawl as Sydney struggles to contain its property boom. This has been augmented by the federal government handing out a grant to all first home owners and the NSW government's absorption of some property taxes. Generally, people in NSW are in a frenzy of making money and spending it just as quickly. This manic consumption, along with an inordinately high addiction to credit-card debt, prompts frequent interest rate hikes to slow the pace of spending and inflation. The result is a fairly stable Aussie dollar – see p15 for more information about the cost of travelling in NSW.

POPULATION

NSW is Australia's most populace state and a third of the country lives here. Sydney alone boasts more than 4 million residents – two thirds of the state's population.

The remaining third lives largely in coastal areas. The least populated areas are inland, where many of the small towns experience little or negative growth. Regions like the NSW far west have one of the lowest population

Kings in Grass Houses (by Mary Durack) details the great overland trek of the Duracks and Costellos in 1876. Having escaped the potato famine in Ireland, they drove cattle from Goulburn to the Kimberleys in WA.

The Birth of Sydney (by Tim Flannery) follows the growth of Australia's largest city – from conception, to crime to cosmopolitan chaos. Voices chiming in include indigenous people, European immigrants and Charles Darwin.

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL NSW

It's weird, it's wonderful and it's oh so NSW. There is a bevy of oddities in this state to keep the eccentric entertained.

Haven't found your unique talent yet? Perhaps you need to test your cherry-pip-spitting skills at Young's Cherry Festival (p247). Alternatively head to **Stroud** (p155) for a brick-throwing competition, and if that proves too taxing any (male) mug has a shot at the title at the beard-growing competition at Beardies Festival in **Glen Innes** (p223).

Elvis has left the building – we know because he rocks up to Parkes (p243) every year for the Elvis Revival Festival.

Tired of losing money on the nags? Maybe have a flutter at the National Guinea Pig Races in **Grenfell** (p246), the sheep races in **Hay** (p288) or the goat races in **Lightning Ridge** (p256).

Not to be outdone, the town folk of **Nundle** (p226) dress up as Chinese people for the Go for Gold Festival, and in **Eden** (p341), locals form teams to run back and forth with buckets of seawater to keep a mock whale alive during the Whale Festival. But no town has it sorted like **Nimbin** (p200), which celebrates – the annual Mardi Grass festival with the hemp olympix and a massive scoob-fest.

densities in the world. As employment opportunities become increasingly centralised in urban areas, this trend looks set to continue.

Like the rest of Australia, NSW is multicultural. A quarter of its residents were born overseas, many arriving from Italy and Greece after WWII, but recent immigrants hail from New Zealand, the UK, China, Vietnam, Africa, the Pacific, the Middle East and India among many other places. Some 2.1% of the NSW population identify as being of Aboriginal origin.

Almost half of Australia's recent population growth is due to immigration, with NSW attracting the majority (38%) of newcomers.

SPORT

In NSW, National Rugby League (NRL) games (www.nrl.com.au) are the spectator sport of choice. NRL players represent their states (NSW or Queensland) in the annual State of Origin series. To see one of these games is to acquire a terrifying appreciation of Newton's law of motion: a force travelling in one direction can only be stopped with the application of an equal and opposite force.

Historically, rugby union was an amateur sport played by the upper class, and its century-long rivalry with professional rugby league was the closest thing sport had to a clash of ideologies. In 1995, however, rugby turned professional and union is now mainstream.

The Wallabies is the national team. Apart from the Rugby World Cup, Bledisloe Cup matches against New Zealand are the most anticipated fixtures and form part of the Tri-Nations tournament that also includes South Africa.

Slowly but surely, Sydneysiders are also warming to Australian Football League (AFL) games, thanks in no small part to the Sydney Swans who won the Grand Final in 2005 and were runners up in 2006.

And then there's cricket. Anyone remotely familiar with this sport will know how seriously Australians take it. Having dominated the international stage for around 15 years, the Australians were knocked unceremoniously off their perch by England during the 2005 Ashes series. Shane Warne, the world's most successful bowler, and one of Australia's deadliest weapons, sought vengeance by conquering as many fair maidens from the mother country as possible.

For many Australians, the thought of watching an entire test match (five days) is tantamount to watching carpet grow. But the cricket is as much about beer, food, and sunshine as it is about winning. You will see cricket grounds throughout NSW, attracting local clubs and spectators of varying skills and professionalism.

ARTS

NSW has a thriving arts scene anchored by the big money of Sydney. Towns up and down the coast and in the mountains also attract their share of artists and as you explore the state, you'll encounter many fine galleries and studios. Australia's most famous annual arts event, the Archibald Prize, debuted in 1921 at the National Art Gallery of New South Wales (now the Art Gallery of New South Wales). Now a nationwide obsession, it celebrates the best of Australian portrait artists, as well as landscapes, photography and murals.

Sydney, by virtue of its population and stature, has a thriving music scene. Much of the action is around rock and pop. Local performers of note include long-time favourites the Whitlams, whose Sydney-centric material has managed to translate into popularity Australia-wide, and the rowdy punk energy of Frenzal Rhomb, whose live appeal to thrashing teenagers has to be seen to be believed. Grunge rockers-turned-orchestral maestros Silverchair hail from Newcastle. Grinspoon, one of the country's most successful acts, formed in

Australia's state funding of professional sports is among the highest proportionally in the world.

Look for the CD *All You Mob*, a compilation of indigenous sounds assembled in Sydney. Notable is the song 'Down River' in which young Aborigines rap about their lives.

Lismore in 1995. Other acts are the hard-to-define Machine Gun Fellatio; the talented Gelbison; Bondi-based noise-merchants Cog; and the most-hyped local act of the new millennium, the Vines. You can pretty much find any other musical genre you can imagine in and around the city.

Elsewhere in NSW, you'll likely here a lot of traditional rock with a lot of country and western as well (local popularity of the latter is proportional to the dryness of the landscape). Each year Tamworth's festival (p215) draws hundreds of thousands. Aboriginal artists often merge their traditional music with rock, hip-hop and other styles. Look for Yothu Yindi or Christine Anu.

Cinema

Most people need little introduction to Australia's vibrant movie industry, one of the first established in the world and playground for screen great Errol Flynn. A host of talent has followed in his footsteps, including the likes of Nicole Kidman, Naomi Watts, Russell Crowe (born in New Zealand, but who's trifling over details?), Cate Blanchett, Heath Ledger, Toni Collette and Rachel Griffiths.

Construction of Fox Studios Australia in Sydney cemented the already healthy industry, which in addition to producing its own films has become a location of choice for many American productions drawn by Sydney's talent pool and – depending on exchange rates – relatively low costs. Big-budget extravaganzas, financed with overseas money and made for the overseas market, include *The Matrix* trilogy (featuring numerous Sydney skyscrapers) *Star Wars* Episodes I, II and III, *Mission Impossible 2* and *Superman Returns*. Sydneysider Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* was also made there, and starred 'our' Nicole.

Films from the 1990s such as *Strictly Ballroom*, *Muriel's Wedding*, and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* consolidated Australia's reputation as a producer of quirky comedies about local misfits. In recent years most films made for an Australian audience have abandoned the worn-out ocker stereotypes and started to explore the country's diversity. Indigenous stories have found a mainstream voice on the big screen, with films such as *The Tracker*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Australian Rules* and *Ten Canoes* – illustrations of a nation starting to come to terms with its racist past and present. Cultural and gender stereotypes continue to erode in a genre of intimate dramas exploring the human dimension, such as *Somersault*, *Jindabyne*, *Japanese Story*, and *Head On*, the latter featuring a gay Greek-Australian as the lead character. By staying relevant to contemporary Australians, the industry continues to survive and thrive.

Notable Australian films in or about NSW:

Lantana (2001, director Ray Lawrence) Touted as a 'mystery for grown-ups', this is an extraordinary ensemble piece and deeply moving meditation on life, love, truth and grief.

Looking for Alibrandi (2000, director Kate Woods) A charming story of what it's like to grow up Italian in modern Sydney.

Little Fish (2005, director Rowan Woods) The story of a former heroin addict struggling to escape her past, backdropped by the wider cultural issues surrounding Sydney's 'Little Saigon' – Cabramatta.

Muriel's Wedding (1994, director PJ Hogan) Life in suburban NSW is less than dull for Muriel. Things pick up after a tropical holiday, a name change and more.

Somersault (2004, director Cate Shortland) A grittier coming-of-age story, touching on peer pressure and the marked difference between sex and love.

The Dish (2000, director Rob Sitch) Australia's role in the *Apollo 11* moon mission is explored in this warm-hearted film set in the satellite station at Parkes (p243).

The Man Who Sued God (2001, director Mark Joffe) A dry comedy with a philosophical twist, filmed in Bermagui (p337).

Check out www.sydneymfestival.org.au, the website for the Sydney Festival, held annually in January.

In the decade from 1996–2006, Australians won 13 Academy Awards for acting, cinematography, art design, animation, costume design, sound and visual effects.

The website for the NSW Film and Television Office, www.fto.nsw.gov.au, gives you the lowdown on what's being shot and where in the state.

The Year My Voice Broke (1987, director John Duigan) A classic look at NSW country life in 1962 Braidwood (p303). A coming-of-age story based on the triangular relationship of three adolescents learning to deal with the perceptions and prejudices of their townsfolk.

Two Hands (1999, director Gregor Jordan) A humorous look at Sydney's surprisingly daggy criminal underworld.

Literature

In the late 19th century, an Australian literary flavour began to develop through the Bulletin School (named after the magazine of the same name that is still available in Sydney), with authors such as Henry Lawson (1867–1922), AB 'Banjo' Patterson (1864–1941) and Miles Franklin (1879–1954), whose novel *My Brilliant Career* (1901) caused a sensation, especially when it was revealed that Miles was a woman.

The aftereffects of the Bulletin School's romantic vernacular tradition lasted many years, and it wasn't until the 1970s (a time of renewed interest in Australian writing) that images of the bush, Australian ideas of mateship and the chauvinism of Australian culture were fully questioned by readers and writers and a new voice began to make itself heard. This voice was more urban, and reflected the concerns of an increasingly confident Australia. Questions about the past were asked and assumed literary styles were found wanting; a uniquely Australian voice began to emerge. A rather quirky strain of 'magic realism' can be found in many recent Australian novels – an interesting quality, given the reputation of Australians for straightforwardness.

Australian writers of international stature include: Patrick White (winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 1973), Thomas Keneally (Booker Prize-winner 1982), Peter Carey (Booker Prize-winner 1988 and 2001), David Malouf (International Impac Dublin Literary Award 1996), Murray Bail (Commonwealth Writers Prize 1999), Tim Winton (Miles Franklin Award-winner 1992), and Kate Grenville (Orange Prize 2001).

Here are just a few excellent books with NSW settings:

Matthew Flinders' Cat (Bryce Courtenay) A tale of unfortunate hardships and unlikely friendships in Sydney's very unsavoury underworld.

The Bodysurfers (Robert Drewe) Seductive stories from the northern beaches.

The Harp in the South (Ruth Park) Accounts of an impoverished family's life in Surry Hills when the suburb was a crowded slum. In the 1980s this book was turned into a popular TV miniseries.

The Idea of Perfection (Kate Grenville) Ideas and cultures clash when a Sydney museum curator goes to rural NSW to save an old bridge and meets a reticent engineer charged with destroying it.

The Showgirl & the Brumby (Lucy Lehman) Modern-day rural life in NSW is the focus of this novel about two girls and dreams lived and refused. Perfect context for your drives through fields of cotton and sheep.

Voss (Patrick White) Written in 1957, this novel contrasts the harsh and unforgiving outback with colonial life in Sydney. In the 1980s *Voss* was transformed into an opera, with a libretto by David Malouf.

Australia, An Ecotraveler's Guide (by Hannah Robinson) steers travellers to the country's best wildlifest haunts and national parks, with hundreds of photos and descriptive information on birds, mammals and other creatures.

Environment

'Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and water use lie at the heart of the changes Australians must make – from farms, to suburbs, to the city centre.' *Tim Flannery*

THE LAND

There are four main geographical areas of New South Wales (NSW).

The strip of land between the sea and the Great Dividing Range runs from Tweed Heads on the Queensland border to Cape Howe on the Victorian border. The coast is lined with superb beaches and there are many bays, lakes and meandering estuaries.

The Great Dividing Range runs like a spine along the length of Australia's East Coast. In the south of NSW, the range rears up to form the Snowy Mountains, with Australia's highest peak, Mt Kosciuszko (2228m). The enormous Kosciuszko National Park (p295) protects much of the Snowy Mountains, or 'Snowies'. The eastern side of the range tends to form a steep escarpment and is mostly heavily forested. Most of the ancient range's peaks have been worn down to a series of plateaus or tablelands, the largest ones being the New England tableland, the Blue Mountains, the Southern Highlands and the Monaro tableland. Short and swift rivers rise in the Great Dividing Range and flow east to the sea. In the north of the state, these eastward-flowing rivers have large coastal deltas and are mighty watercourses.

The western side of the Great Dividing Range is less steep than the eastern and dwindles into a series of foothills and valleys, which provide some of the most fertile farmland in the country. Also rising in the Great Dividing Range, but meandering westward across the dry plains to reach the sea in South Australia, are the Darling and the Murray Rivers, and their significant tributaries such as the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee. These rivers have often changed their sluggish courses, and the Murray-Darling Basin takes in nearly all of the state west of the Great Dividing Range. The plains are riddled with creeks, swamps and lakes.

The western plains begin about 300km inland, and from here westward the state is almost entirely flat. On the western edge of NSW, Broken Hill (p266) sits at the end of a long, low range that juts into the state from South Australia (SA) and is rich with minerals. North of the Darling River, which cuts diagonally across the plains, the country takes on the red soil of the outback.

WILDLIFE

Most of Australia's many unusual types of wildlife can be abundant in NSW. The one real notable missing star is the deadly box jellyfish – so no loss there. Native animals you're most likely to see in the wild are wallabies and kangaroos, possums and koalas. However, there's a huge range of small, mainly nocturnal, animals going about their business unobserved.

Australia's most distinctive fauna are the marsupials and monotremes. Marsupials such as kangaroos and koalas give birth to partially developed young, which they suckle in a pouch. Monotremes – platypuses and echidnas – lay eggs but also suckle their young. Over 700 species of plants and animals are listed as endangered under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act*.

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

NSW has three United Nations World Heritage Sites (<http://whc.unesco.org/heritage.htm>): the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves (p196), the Blue Mountains (p119) and Willandra Lakes (p287).

Animals BIRDS

The only bird larger than the Australian emu is the African ostrich, also flightless. The emu is a shaggy-feathered bird with an often curious nature. After the female emu lays the eggs, the male hatches them and raises the young. Emus are common in the Riverina (p287) and the far west (p257).

There's an amazing variety of parrots and cockatoos. The common pink and grey galahs are noisy, although the sulphur-crested cockatoos are even louder. Rainbow lorikeets have brilliant colour schemes and in some parks accept a free feed from visitors.

A member of the kingfisher family, the kookaburra is heard as much as it is seen – you can't miss its loud, cackling laugh, usually at dawn and sunset. Kookaburras are common near the coast, particularly in the southeast.

The lyrebird, found in moist forest areas, is famous for its vocal abilities and its beauty. Lyrebirds are highly skilled mimics that copy segments of other birds' songs to create unique hybrid compositions. During the courting season, with his colourful fernlike tail feathers spread like a fan, the male puts on a sensational song-and-dance routine to impress potential partners.

The black-and-white magpie (no relation to the European bird of the same name) has a distinctive and beautiful warbling call.

DINGOES

Australia's native dog, the dingo is thought to have arrived in Australia around 6000 years ago. It was domesticated by the Aborigines, but after the Europeans arrived and Aborigines could no longer hunt freely, the dingo again became 'wild'. By preying on sheep (but mainly rabbits, rats and mice), dingoes earned the wrath of graziers. These sensitive, intelligent dogs are legally considered to be vermin. Some are still found in the high country.

KANGAROOS

The extraordinary breeding cycle of the kangaroo is well adapted to Australia's harsh, unpredictable environment.

The young kangaroo, or joey, just millimetres long at birth, claws its way unaided to the mother's pouch where it attaches itself to a nipple that expands inside its mouth. A day or two later the mother mates again, but the new embryo doesn't begin to develop until the first joey has left the pouch permanently.

At this point the mother produces two types of milk – one formula to feed the joey at heel, the other for the baby in her pouch. If environmental conditions are right, the mother then mates again. If food or water is scarce, however, the breeding cycle is interrupted until conditions improve.

As well as many species of wallabies (some endangered), there are two main species of kangaroos in NSW: the grey kangaroo and the majestic red kangaroo, which is common in the far west and can stand 2m tall. The non-sensense reds have been known to disembowel dogs that bother them.

Kangaroos have an affinity for golf courses. You can spot them in more natural settings in national parks such as Murramarang National Park (p332) and Blue Mountains National Park (p119).

KOALAS

Distantly related to the wombat, koalas are found along the eastern seaboard and inland in places like Gunnedah (p252). Their cuddly appearance belies an irritable nature, and they'll scratch and bite if sufficiently provoked. However, most of the time they resemble an inert fur bag asleep in high branches of trees.

Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight's *Field Guide to Birds of Australia* (edited by Peter Menkhorst, seventh edition 2003) is an indispensable guide for bird-watchers, and anyone else even peripherally interested in Australia's feathered tribes. Knight's illustrations are both beautiful and helpful in identification.

Koalas initially carry their babies in pouches, but later the larger young cling to their mothers' backs. They feed only on the leaves of certain types of eucalypt (found mainly in the forests of the Great Dividing Range) and are particularly sensitive to changes to their habitat.

PLATYPUSES & ECHIDNAS

The platypus and the echidna are the only living representatives of the monotremes, the most primitive group of mammals. Both lay eggs, as reptiles do, but have mammary glands and suckle their young.

The amphibious platypus has a duck-like bill, webbed feet and a beaverlike body. Males have poisonous spurs on their hind feet. The platypus is able to sense electric currents in the water and uses this ability to track its prey. Platypuses are shy creatures, but they occur in many rivers. Bombala, in the state's southeast, is a good place for platypus-spotting.

The echidna is a spiny anteater that hides from predators by digging vertically into the ground and covering itself with dirt, or by rolling itself into a ball and raising its sharp quills.

POSSUMS

There's a wide range of possums – they seem to have adapted to all sorts of conditions, including those of the city, where you'll find them in parks, especially around dusk. Some large species are found in suburban roofs; they eat cultivated plants and food scraps.

REPTILES

There are many species of snake in NSW, all protected. Many are poisonous, some deadly, but few are aggressive and they'll usually get out of your way before you realise that they're there. See *Dangers & Annoyances* (p371) for ways to avoid being bitten and what to do in the unlikely event that you are.

There's a wide variety of lizards, from tiny skinks to prehistoric-looking goannas which can grow up to 2.5m long, although most species in NSW are much smaller. Goannas can run very fast and when threatened use their big claws to climb the nearest tree – or perhaps the nearest leg!

Bluetongue lizards are slow-moving and stumpy. Their even slower and stumper relations, shinglebacks, are common in the outback.

WOMBATS

The wombat is a slow, solid, powerfully built marsupial with a broad head and short, stumpy legs. These fairly placid, easily tamed creatures are legally killed by farmers, who object to the damage done to paddocks by wombats digging large burrows and tunnelling under fences. Like other nocturnal animals, they tend to lumber across roads at night and are difficult to see.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The yellow-footed rock wallaby was thought to be extinct until a group was found in western NSW in the 1960s. National parks were created to protect them and local farmers agreed to protect them on their properties. But the wallabies can't compete with feral goats for food and shelter and their numbers are decreasing. They can still be seen in Mutawintji National Park (p266) northeast of Broken Hill.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

The Acclimatisation Society was a bunch of do-gooders in the Victorian era who devoted themselves to 'improving' the countries of the British Empire by introducing plants and animals. On the whole, their work was disastrous.

Exotic animals thriving in NSW include rabbits, cats (big, bad feral versions of the domestic moggie), pigs (now bristly black razorbacks with long tusks) and goats. In the Snowy Mountains and towards the Queensland border you might see wild horses (brumbies). These have all been disastrous for native animals, as predators and as competitors for food and water.

Probably the biggest change to the ecosystem has been caused by sheep. To make room for sheep, the bush was cleared and the plains planted with exotic grasses. Many small marsupials became extinct.

Plants

Australia has a huge diversity of plant species – more than Europe and Asia combined.

The eucalyptus – often called the gum tree – is everywhere except in the deepest rainforests and the most arid regions. Of the 700 species of the genus *Eucalyptus*, 95% occur naturally in Australia.

Gum trees vary in form and height. Species commonly found in NSW include the tall, straight river red gum; the stunted, twisted snow gum with its colourful trunk striations; the spotted gum common on the coast; and the scribbly gum, which has scribbly insect tracks on its bark. Eucalyptus oil is distilled from certain types of gum trees and used for pharmaceutical and perfumed products.

Around 600 species of wattle are found in Australia. Most species flower during late winter and spring, when the country is ablaze with the bright yellow flowers and the reason for the choice of green and gold as the national colours is obvious. The golden wattle is Australia's floral emblem.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

The majestic Norfolk Island pine, naturally enough a native of Norfolk Island, lines the foreshores of many coastal towns in NSW. There are many other introduced species – most, such as oaks and willows, brought in by homesick settlers to replicate their homeland. One of the most outstanding introduced trees in NSW is the jacaranda. In spring and summer, its vivid mauve or blue flowers bring a splash of colour to many towns around the coast and the ranges.

Some introduced plants have also caused major problems by choking out native flora and pastures. Noxious weeds such as Paterson's curse can be found growing wild in many parts of the state.

NATIONAL PARKS

There are close to 200 national parks and protected areas in NSW, covering about four million hectares and protecting environments as diverse as the peaks of the Snowy Mountains, the subtropical rainforest of the Border Ranges and the vast arid plains of the outback. Some parks include designated wilderness areas that offer outstanding remote-area walking.

The **National Parks & Wildlife Service** (NPWS; ☎ 1300 361 967; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) does a good job, and many national parks have visitors centres where you can learn about the area, as well as camp sites and often walking tracks. Where there isn't a visitors centre, visit the nearest NPWS office for information. Bush camping (ie heading into the bush and camping where you please) is allowed in many national parks, but not all – check before you go.

There are car entry fees for 44 of the more popular national parks: generally around \$3 to \$11 per car (\$16 to \$27 per car per day, depending on the time of year, for Kosciuszko National Park, p295). Camping fees are about \$3 to \$10 per person, and sometimes free for bush camping with limited facilities.

The wedge-tailed eagle is found in NSW's open wooded areas. Its wingspan of 2.5m makes it the largest bird of prey in Australia.

The official take on environmental issues comes from the Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage, see www.deh.gov.au.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) is the largest nongovernment organisation involved in protecting the environment, see www.acfonline.org.au.

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

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

Almost two million hectares of park land is protected wilderness area, close to 2% of NSW. Such areas are considered largely untouched by modern human activity.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES *Tim Flannery*

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

Damage to Australia's environment has been inflicted in several ways, the most important being the introduction of pest species, destruction of forests, overstocking rangelands, inappropriate agriculture and interference with water flows. Beginning with the escape of domestic cats into the Australian bush shortly after 1788, a plethora of vermin – from foxes to wild camels and cane toads – has run wild in Australia, causing extinctions in the native fauna. One out of every 10 native mammals living in Australia prior to European colonisation is now extinct, and many more are highly endangered. Extinctions have also affected native plants, birds and amphibians.

The destruction of forests has also had a profound effect. Most of Australia's rainforests have suffered clearing, while conservationists fight with loggers over the fate of the last unprotected stands of 'old growth'. Many Australian rangelands have been chronically overstocked for more than a century, the result being extreme vulnerability of both soils and rural economies to Australia's drought and flood cycle, as well as extinction of many native species. The development of agriculture has involved land clearance and the provision of irrigation, and here again the effect has been profound. Clearing of the diverse and spectacular plant communities of the Western Australian wheatbelt began just a century ago, yet today up to one-third of that country is degraded by salination of the soils. Between 70kg and 120kg of salt lies below every square metre of the region, and clearing of native vegetation has allowed water to penetrate deep into the soil, dissolving the salt crystals and carrying brine towards the surface.

In terms of financial value, just 1.5% of Australia's land surface provides over 95% of agricultural yield, and much of this land lies in the irrigated regions of the Murray-Darling Basin. This is Australia's agricultural heartland, yet it too is under severe threat from salting of soils and rivers. Irrigation water penetrates into the sediments laid down in an ancient sea, carrying salt into the catchments and fields. If nothing is done, the lower Murray River will become too salty to drink in a decade or two, threatening the water supply of Adelaide, a city of over a million people.

Despite the enormity of the biological crisis engulfing Australia, governments and the community have been slow to respond. It was in the 1980s that coordinated action began to take place, but not until the '90s that major steps were taken. The establishment of Landcare (an organisation enabling people to effectively address local environmental issues; www.landcare.australia.com.au) and the expenditure of \$2.5 billion through the National Heritage Trust Fund have been important national initiatives. Yet so difficult are some of the issues the nation faces that, as yet, little has been achieved in terms of halting the destructive processes. Individuals are also banding together to help. Groups such as the Australian Bush Heritage Fund (www.bushheritage.asn.au) and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC; www.australianwildlife.org) allow people to donate funds and time to the conservation of native species. Some such groups have been spectacularly successful; the AWC, for example, already manages many endangered species over its 1.3 million acre holdings.

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

Tim Flannery is one of Australia's leading thinkers and writers. Formerly director of the South Australian Museum, Tim is chairman of the South Australian Premier's Science Council and Sustainability Roundtable. He was the recipient of the prestigious Australian of the Year award in 2007.

The NPWS is also responsible for some other reserves. State recreation areas often contain bushland, but the quality of the forest might not be as good as in national parks. Many are centred on lakes or large dams where water sports are popular, so they can be crowded in summer. There's often commercial accommodation (usually a caravan park), and bush camping is usually not permitted. There are exceptions to this, however, and this book will identify where camping is possible in the beautiful wilderness of NSW.

Nature reserves are generally smaller reserves, usually with day-use facilities, protecting specific ecosystems.

Historic sites protect areas of historical significance, such as the ghost town of Hill End (p234) near Bathurst and Aboriginal rock-art sites.

STATE FORESTS

State forests, used for timber harvesting, conservation purposes and public recreation, cover around three million hectares. Bush camping (free) is allowed in most state forests, as are trail bikes, 4WDs, horses and pets. Often there are designated walking tracks.

Brochures and maps are available from the **State Forests Information Centre** (☎ 02-9980 4100; www.forest.nsw.gov.au). These forests are administered by State Forests of NSW, which has regional offices and forest centres around the state.

If you're going to visit a lot of national parks in NSW, consider an annual pass to cover the cost of entering the 44 parks that charge daily vehicle entry fees. There are four options ranging from \$22 for any one designated park (excluding Kosciuszko National Park) to \$190 for access to all parks.

TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit institutions working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

New South Wales Outdoors

Boasting a beguiling landscape and a diverse terrain and climate, New South Wales (NSW) is an activity-addict's playground. The variety of pursuits will tempt even hardened exercise-phobes to get a little more intimate with the beaches, rocks, wilderness trails, mountains, slopes and hills. Below is a handful of what's on offer, but for more information see Activities, p369.

Local professionals can set you up with equipment and training. Climbing Australia has excellent info on rock climbing in NSW. See www.climbing.com.au.

ABSEILING & ROCK CLIMBING

There is fantastic rock climbing and abseiling in the Blue Mountains, especially around Katoomba (p123). Climbing Bald Rock (p225), the largest granite rock in the southern hemisphere, is a challenge that rewards with great views.

In the Southeast, there are abseiling tours in the Bungonia State Conservation Area (p312).

CANOEING, KAYAKING & RAFTING

There's lovely canoeing by day or night on the Bellingen River (p171) and in Oxley Wild Rivers National Park (p218), although you need your own gear for the latter. Further north you can go ocean kayaking with dolphin- and whale-spotting thrown in around Ballina (p185) and in the Cape Byron Marine Park (p189). Adrenalin junkies can get stuck into white-water rafting on the Nymboida River near Coffs Harbour (p175).

BUSHWALKING

Encompassing 1400km of coastline and a smorgasbord of landscapes, NSW is riddled with stunning bushwalks with a variety of standards, lengths and terrains to suit all levels of experience. In most instances sturdy walking shoes, plenty of water as well as a hat and sunscreen are mandatory.

In Sydney, try the jaw-droppingly beautiful Bondi to Coozee Walk (p66) with ocean views and Aboriginal rock carvings, or the Manly Scenic Walkway (p66), which takes in vast harbour views and rugged bushland.

Near Sydney, Katoomba (p125) is the best spot to base yourself for must-do walks in the Blue Mountains, which you can do solo or on a tour (p125). Experienced hikers can tackle Royal National Park's 28km Coastal Walking Trail (p109), and picnicking day-trippers can take in short trails through Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (p112).

The hiking and walking in and around Barrington Tops National Park (p156), a World Heritage site in the Hunter Valley, is superb. There are

NSW's national parks hold discovery walks and tours with an eco-bent for kids during school holidays. Click onto www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au or call ☎ 1300 361 967 for details.

PUBLIC LIABILITY

The huge cost of public-liability insurance in Australia has forced the closure or scaling back of numerous tours and organised outdoor activities such as horse riding and rock climbing, and threatened the viability of many small businesses.

The exorbitant insurance costs faced by small businesses and volunteer organisations have been blamed on a vast range of issues: the collapse of several major Australian insurance companies; insurance industry greed; some ridiculously high legal payouts awarded to people for minor incidents; a growing culture of litigation; low safety standards by some outfits; and ambulance-chasing lawyers seeking the biggest possible compensation.

Federal, state and territory representatives have met several times to discuss the problem, but at the time of writing many businesses were feeling the strain and more may have gone to the wall by the time you read this book.

NSW NATIONAL PARKS

NSW has over 600 national parks and reserves that capture its rich diversity of landscapes and wildlife. From the outback's lunar plains and dunes to the moss-cloaked northern rainforests, these conservation areas provide exquisite playgrounds for nature lovers. For comprehensive listings, grab a copy of the free *NSW National Parks Guide*, available from National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) offices and many visitors centres.

Having trekked, climbed, driven and camped through as many of the parks as possible, our authors reckon this list is the best of the best.

- **Kosciuszko National Park** (p295) NSW's largest national park; Australia's highest mountain. Serene camping spots, wildlife, overland bushwalks, glacial lakes and year-round activities.
- **Dharug National Park** (p116) Wilderness area on the north bank of the Hawkesbury River; home to the Dharug people and 10,000 year-old rock carvings.
- **Dorrigo National Park** (p173) World Heritage-listed rainforest, walking tracks for all fitness levels, waterfalls and astonishing views.
- **Morton National Park** (p134 and p331) Unruly wilderness, towering sandstone cliffs, wild-flowers, divine waterfalls, and panoramic views from the summit of Pigeon House Mountain.
- **Mt Kaputar National Park** (p254) Exquisite ecologies that shift elaborately with the drive to the summit of a 21 million year-old volcano; bushwalking, rock climbing, mountain-biking and camping.
- **Mungo National Park** (p273) Remote and beautiful park encompassing the Willandra Lakes World Heritage area, shimmering sand dunes, moon-landscapes and camping.
- **Nightcap National Park** (p199) Diverse subtropical rainforest, endangered wildlife, ambling to difficult walks, emerald forests, dramatic lookouts and steep waterfalls.
- **Royal National Park** (p109) The world's oldest national park, with vertiginous cliffs, secluded beaches, lush rainforest and isolated seaside communities.
- **Sydney Harbour National Park** (p52) Scattered pockets of harbourside bushland, magical walking tracks, Aboriginal engravings, quirky islands and historical sights.
- **Warrumbungle National Park** (p252) Remnant volcanic landforms shaped by the Warrumbungle eruption some 17 million years ago. Excellent walking, serene camping and cosy cabins.

Responsible Travel

As with all conservation areas, the best way to maintain their health is to tread lightly and limit your footprint as much as possible. Keep the following in mind whenever you're in a national park:

- Always take out what you took in – don't burn, bury or leave any rubbish behind.
- Never veer off walking tracks, even if it's muddy or dusty.
- Only camp in designated areas.
- If cooking, use a fuel stove, they're quicker cleaner and better for the bush.
- Respect traditional Aboriginal owners by leaving the area as you found it – don't take artefacts as 'souvenirs' with you.

Bushfires are a very real danger in NSW. As a general rule in national parks (and beyond), always check fire restrictions before lighting a fire, only use fires for cooking, only light fires in the fireplaces provided and keep fires small to conserve wood. Listen to local radio for news of total fire bans or contact the nearest NPWS office if you're unsure of what is permitted. See p372 for more on bushfires.

In many of the outback national parks, it's prohibited to drive after heavy rains due to the damage tyres cause to the roads. You risk hefty fines or getting stuck in the middle of nowhere (a far worse scenario) if you tempt fate.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE BUSHWALKING

Please consider the following when hiking, to help preserve the ecology and beauty of Australia.

- Do not urinate or defecate within 100m (320ft) of any water sources. Doing so can lead to the transmission of serious diseases and pollutes precious water supplies.
- Use biodegradable detergents and wash at least 50m (160ft) from any water sources.
- Avoid cutting wood for fires in popular bushwalking areas as this can cause rapid deforestation. Use a stove that runs on kerosene, methylated spirits or some other liquid fuel, rather than stoves powered by disposable butane gas canisters.
- Hillsides and mountain slopes are prone to erosion; it's important to stick to existing tracks.

numerous walks in Kosciuszko National Park (p295), including the 21km glacial lakes walk or an 18km trek to the summit of Australia's highest mountain. On the South Coast, you can feast your eyes on sublime views from the top of Pigeon House Mountain (p331), but the climb is not for the faint of heart.

In the North Coast hinterland you can take your pick of 7km to 10km walks in the World Heritage-listed Dorrigo National Park (p173) or spend a couple of dawn hours scaling the heights of Mt Warning (p210).

In the northwest, there are many good walks around Warrumbungle National Park (p252).

Longer routes include the 250km Great North Walk (p138) from Sydney to Newcastle, which can be walked in sections, or covered in a two-week trek. Alternatively you could follow in the footsteps of historic explorers on the 440km Hume and Hovell Walking Track (p309), which passes beautiful high country between Yass and Albury.

MOUNTAIN-BIKING & CYCLING

Those who cycle for fun have access to great cycling routes and touring country for day, weekend or even multi-week trips, while very experienced pedallers can consider trips through the outback or a tour of the coast. Sydney (p64) has a recreational bike-path system, peaceful (and car-less) tracks through Centennial Park, and an abundance of bike-hire places. Canberra (p354) has one of the best cycle-path networks in Australia and tracks lead all the way to the Murrumbidgee River. There are bike hire, information and tour companies based here.

Longer-distance rides in NSW are limited only by your endurance and imagination. In the Southeast, Tumut State Forest (p309) is becoming increasingly popular with avid mountain bikers and has constructed tracks. Nearby, serious cyclists can challenge themselves on the Cannonball Run near Thredbo – see p300.

There are also opportunities to mountain-bike through national park bushland in Botany Bay National Park (p109) and Royal National Park (p109). There's more rugged mountain-biking in the Blue Mountains National Park (p119), and the *Cycle the Hunter* brochure details suggested circuits throughout the Hunter Valley.

On the North Coast, Ballina (p185) is known for its ambling cycling paths and there are plenty of hire outfits in town. Mountain-biking tours are an eco-friendly way to explore the nearby hinterland with outfits like Mountain Bike Tours (p190).

The northwest and west to the outback are notable for their open roads. In the more moderate months, you can enjoy long-distance rural rides on roads relatively untravellered. Bike hire in Sydney, Canberra and main urban

Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* provides detailed information about bushwalking.

Outdoor stockists are good sources of bushwalking information. Alternatively, the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW maintains a large website (www.bushwalking.org.au) with lots of useful information.

and tourist centres will set you back around \$20 to \$50 per day. See the Transport chapter p387 for information about bike purchase and hire, and about road regulations.

Some good cycling organisations include the following.

Bicycling Australia (☎ 02-4274 4884; www.bicyclingaustralia.com) National organisation with advice, forums, destination suggestions and bike-related classifieds.

Bicycle Federation of Australia (☎ 02-6249 6761; www.bfa.asn.au) Australia's national cycling organisation.

Bicycle New South Wales (☎ 02-9218 5400; www.bicyclensw.org.au; Level 5, 822 George St, Sydney) Excellent organisation; a stop by the office for advice, maps and books is worthwhile.

Pedal Power ACT (www.pedalpower.org.au)

SAILING & CRUISES

Sydney Harbour is one of the world's great – and most photogenic – sailing locations. There are plenty of sailing schools offering lessons and cruises; Darling Harbour and Rushcutters Bay are good spots to head. Notable schools include **EastSail Sailing School** (www.eastsail.com.au) and **Sydney by Sail** (www.sydneybysail.com.au). Prices vary from \$95 for beginner lessons to \$475 for yachtmaster courses. See p65 for more information.

Of course if you're just interested in the sailing experience without the effort there are plenty of Sydney Harbour cruises to choose from, ranging from cocktail cruises with **Matilda Cruises** (www.matilda.com.au) to hop-on hop-off ferries. See p68 for details.

Just north of Sydney you can charter a boat to meander through the waterways of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (p112) or coast up the mighty Hawkesbury from Brooklyn (p114). The Central Coast offers some beautiful sailing opportunities and there are good charter outfits and cruises in Terrigal and The Entrance; see p139. Climbing even further north you can rent a boat to cruise Port Macquarie's pretty marina (p165) or hire anything from a tinnie to a catamaran in Ballina (p185). There's great fishing to be done right up north and you can cast a line on a fishing charter from Tweed Heads (p195).

On the South Coast you can hire runabouts or take a cruise from Bate-mans Bay (p332).

Elsewhere in NSW, the best places for charters, lessons and information are the local sailing clubs.

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

NSW has an enthusiastic but short ski season running from about mid-June to early September. Snowfalls are unpredictable, but hotspots like Thredbo have snowmaking machines to cover for Mother Nature.

The aptly named Snowy Mountains in and around Kosciuszko National Park (p295) hold the top places to ski: resorts such as Charlotte Pass, Perisher Blue, Selwyn and Thredbo, which tend to get crowded on weekends. During winter heavy penalties apply if drivers don't carry snow chains – even if there's no snow.

Cross-country skiing is popular and most resorts offer lessons and hire out equipment. Kosciuszko National Park includes some of the country's best trails, and often old cattle-herders' huts are the only form of accommodation, apart from your tent.

SURFING

In Australia, surfing isn't just an activity, it's a spiritual pursuit. Folk start young and by their teens, spend whole summers searching out the next new swell. Practically any coastal town in NSW will have good surf nearby.

Bicycles Network Australia (www.bicycles.net.au) is an excellent omnibus website for cyclists, listing information about second-hand sales, hire, cycling destinations and news.

Sydney Boat Share (www.sydneyboatshare.com.au) is a boat share organisation for avid sailors keen to own their own boat without the spare dosh.

The Skiing Australia website (www.skiingaustralia.org.au) has links to major resorts and race clubs.

Click onto www.wannasurf.com.au for a full roundup of the best waves in NSW.

Board hire will set you back around \$40 per day. If you're planning to learn from scratch, a few lessons are mandatory. They'll equip you with the basic moves, but far more importantly you'll learn how to identify dangerous rips and swells – a skill which could save your life. You'll also learn some important surf etiquette – a skill which could save your dignity.

Sydney hotspots include Bondi, Tamarama and Cronulla in the south, and Manly, Palm Beach and Curl Curl in the north. There are ample schools and board hire; see p65. The Central Coast has less-crowded beaches than Sydney, and is a good spot to learn – see the 'Watertainment' boxed text on p139 for instructors. Terrigal, Avoca and Umina beaches have the best waves, although you should be careful of strong currents at these places.

Experienced surfers can test their mettle on the Acids Reef Break at Wollongong's North Beach (p323), but there are also kinder breaks here and at Wollongong City Beach. The South Coast also has some good swells, particularly around Narooma at Potato Point and Mystery Bay – see p335.

The North Coast is peppered with surfing secrets and mythical breaks. In Newcastle there are surf schools and competition-attracting breaks at Bar Beach, Dixon Park Beach and Merewether (p142). Crescent Head (p167) has kept the legacy of the longboard alive owing to the perfectly suited swell of Little Nobby's Junction. Diggers Beach is the best for surf at Coffs Harbour (p175) and the strong rips at Angourie (p183) lure hardened surfers. But the most celebrated waves tumble further north. Lennox Head (p186) has a peeling right hander, which obliges experienced surfers and kite-surfers. Byron Bay's roots are surfing and the peeling rights of Clarks Beach (p187) are suitable for most levels. Byron is also home to a number of excellent surf schools including **Mojosurf Adventures** (www.mojosurf.com.au) and **Samudra** (www.samudra.com.au), which offer five-day camps combined with yoga.

WILDLIFE-WATCHING

Migrating southern right and humpback whales pass close to Australia's southern coast between the Antarctic and warmer waters, and whale-watching cruises allow you to get close to these magnificent creatures. Good spots are Eden (p341) on the South Coast, and further north in Port Macquarie (p165), Coffs Harbour (p175) and Ballina (p185).

Dolphins can be seen year-round at many places along the coast, such as Jervis Bay (p328), Port Stephens (p158) and Byron Bay (p189).

Montague Island (p335), on the South Coast, is a nature reserve home to penguins, fur seals and sea birds. For the warm and fuzzy variety, you'll find plenty of wallabies, kangaroos and possums in the Blue Mountains, hundreds of tame kangaroos in Pambula (p341) and roving koalas in Port Macquarie (p163).

For more surfing information, news, surf cams and photos, look up www.coastalwatch.com.

Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife: Australia* is a great companion for spotting and identifying wildlife in any pocket of NSW wilderness.

Food & Drink

Born in convict poverty and raised on a diet heavily influenced by Great Britain, Australian cuisine has come a long way. This is now one of the most dynamic places in the world to have a meal, thanks to immigration and a dining public willing to give anything new, and better, a go. Sydney can claim to be a dining destination worthy of touring gourmands from New York to Paris. More importantly real people, including travellers, will feel the effects of New South Wales' (NSW) ever-blossoming food culture.

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 even coined our own phrase, Modern Australian (Mod Oz), 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. Mod Oz is our attempt to classify the unclassifiable.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Nothing compares to Australia's seafood, harnessed from some of the purest waters you'll find anywhere, and usually cooked with care. Oyster connoisseurs salivate over Sydney's rock oysters, and those found further south in Pambula and Merimbula. Rock lobsters are fantastic and fantastically expensive, and mud crabs, despite the name, are a sweet delicacy. Another odd-sounding delicacy are 'bugs' – like shovel-nosed lobsters without a lobster's price tag. Yabbies (freshwater crayfish) can be found throughout the region.

Prawns are incredible, particularly sweet school prawns or the eastern king (Yamba) prawns found along northern NSW. Add to that countless wild fish species and you've got one of the greatest bounties on earth.

Almost everything grown from the land was introduced to Australia. The sheer size and diversity of climates in Australia means that there's an enormous variety of produce on offer in NSW.

Most Australians stick to cereal and toast for breakfast, indulging perhaps in a slap up bacon-and-egg-feast on weekends. For lunch they still devour sandwiches, although the humble ham-and-cheese-on-white has relinquished its reign to focaccias, pita wraps, and toasted Turkish bread combos filled with everything from tandoori chicken to organic tofu (or ham and cheese). At night, Australians eat anything and everything. On weekends, particularly in urban areas, you'll also find many folk indulging

Seafood co-ops along the NSW coast are a great option for fresh seafood – gorge on a five-star diet on a one-star budget.

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

ORGANIC REVOLUTION

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

in a long pub lunch or *yum cha* (the classic southern Chinese dumpling feast).

DRINKS

You're in the right country if you're after a drink. Once a nation of tea-and-beer-swillers, Oz is now turning its attention to coffee and wine. You're probably not far from a wine region right now.

The closest region to Sydney, the Hunter Valley, first had vines planted in the 1830s, and is noted for big-bodied reds such as shiraz. Further inland, there are vineyards at Canberra, Cowra, Orange and Mudgee.

Plenty of good wine comes from big producers with economies of scale on their side, but the most interesting wines are usually made by small vignerons where you pay a premium – but 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 program courtesy of the Australian government.

Beer, for years, has been of the bland, chilled-so-you-can-barely-taste-it variety. Now microbrewers and boutique breweries are filtering through – see the boxed text Liquid Gold below for hot tips.

In terms of coffee, Australia is leaping ahead, with Italian-style espresso machines in virtually every café. As well, boutique roasters are all the rage and, in urban areas, the qualified *barista* (coffee maker) can be found virtually everywhere.

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 big slap-up dinners.

Many regions of NSW hold food festivals. There are harvest festivals in wine regions, and various communities, such as the town of Orange (p239) hold annual events. Look for weekly markets like the Byron Farmers Market (p193) where a variety of producers – many organic – sell an array of interesting produce and foods.

For many an event, especially in the warmer months, many Australians fill the car with an Esky (a portable, insulated ice chest to keep everything cool), tables, 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, increasingly, occurs each

LIQUID GOLD

Given that beer consumption is a recognised pastime in Australia (and in some areas it's a competitive sport), it's surprising that the choice of local brews remained so limited for so long. But the country has entered the age of the microbrewery, and these gems of industry are turning the watery schooner of draught on its head.

A microbrewery is defined as a brewery that produces under 15,000 barrels of beer annually, a production rate that enables the breweries to focus on taste and quality. Any beer drinker worth their wheat would be mad to miss the following microbreweries:

- **Wig & Pen** (p360) A range of 10 beers brewed on-site, including superb ales.
- **Potters Hotel & Brewery** (p148) Kolsch, lager, bock and ginger beer with bite.
- **Five Islands Brewing Company** (p324) Nine draughts including 'Parkyns Shark Oil' (an Indian Pale Ale) to the 'Bulli Black' (dark ale brewed with chocolate).
- **Malt Shovel Brewery** (Map p86; ☎ 8594 0200; www.malt-shovel.com.au; 99 Pyrmont Bridge, Camperdown, Sydney) Brews the renowned James Squire series.

Quaff (2007) by Peter Forrestal is the quintessential guide to the best wines available in Australia for under \$15 a bottle, including over 400 local and imported labels.

An annual publication with lots of useful information on many readily available wines is the *Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide*, by Huon Hooke and Ralph Kyte-Powell.

COFFEE CULTURE

Australians love their coffee and whether you hanker for a short mach, soy latte, skinny cap, double espresso or flat white, you'll find *baristas* willing to prove their worth just about anywhere. Our authors reckon there are a few standouts worthy of a mention though:

- **Argent St Café & Restaurant** (p271)
- **Bar Coluzzi** (p96)
- **Classique Café Restaurant** (p282)
- **Estobar** (p145)
- **My Café** (p359)
- **Simon's Coffee Lounge** (p117)
- **Succulent Cafe** (p192)
- **Ziegler's** (p233)

summer), the food is precooked and the barbie becomes more of a picnic, but the essence remains the same.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Typically, a restaurant meal in Australia 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 outside of Sydney (where time and a table is money), 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.

A competitively priced place to eat is in a club or pub that offers a counter meal. This is where you order your meal (usually staples such as a fisherman's basket, steak or chicken parma) at the kitchen, take a number, and wait until it's called out or displayed on a screen. Plenty of clubs have now revolutionised the system using technology so you may get a table 'beeper' to notify you. Many pubs now have dedicated 'steak nights', where you can tuck into a T-bone or porterhouse for around \$10.

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.

One of the most interesting features of the dining scene is the Bring Your Own (BYO), a restaurant that allows you to bring your own alcohol. If the restaurant also sells alcohol, the BYO bit is usually limited to bottled wine only and a corkage charge is added to your bill. The cost is either per person or per bottle, and ranges from nothing to \$15 per bottle in fancy places. Some fine restaurants may not allow BYO at all.

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

Quick Eats

There's not a huge culture of street vending in NSW, though you may find a pie or coffee cart in some places. In Sydney and other urban and well-touristed spots like Wollongong, Newcastle and Byron Bay, quick eats are easy to find, most commonly in the form of sushi shops, Indian, Thai or Vietnamese takeaways, kebab shops or sandwich bars. In rural areas options

Bill Granger, the undisputed king of breakfast in Sydney, specialises in low-fuss, maximum-taste dishes. You can too with one of his cookbooks; *Bills Sydney Food* (2001), *Bills Food* (2002) and *Simply Bill* (2005).

A Tim Tam Shooter is where the two diagonally opposite corners of this rectangular chocolate biscuit are nibbled off, and a hot drink (tea is the true aficionado's favourite) is sucked through the fast-melting biscuit as if through a straw.

are generally limited to a milk bar, which serves traditional hamburgers (with bacon, egg, pineapple and beetroot if you want) and that Aussie icon – the small-town bakery. It may sound humble, but these pride themselves on their homemade pies, sausage rolls, pasties, sweet slices and, of course, just-baked bread. Fish and chips is still hugely popular, most often eaten at the beach on a Friday night. American-style fast food is also (unfortunately) abundant in urban areas.

Pizza has become one of the most popular fast foods; most home-delivered pizzas are American-style (thick and with lots of toppings) rather than Italian-style. That said, wood-fired, thin Neapolitan-style pizza is often available, even in country towns. In Sydney, Roman-style pizza (buy it by the slice) is becoming more popular, but you can't usually buy American-style pizza in anything but whole rounds.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

In NSW's cities vegetarians will be well catered for. Cafés seem to always have vegetarian options, and even the best restaurants may 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 there are usually dishes that are vegan-adaptable at restaurants. The Australian Vegetarian Society's useful website (www.veg-soc.org) lists vegetarian-friendly places to eat throughout NSW.

EATING WITH KIDS

Dining with children in NSW is relatively easy. Avoid the flashiest places and children are generally welcomed, particularly at Chinese, Greek or Italian restaurants. Kids are usually welcome at cafés; bistros and clubs often see families dining early. Many fine-dining restaurants don't welcome small children. Most places that do welcome children don't have separate kids menus, and those that do usually offer everything straight from the deep fryer – such as crumbed chicken and chips. It is 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 barbie. For more on travelling with children, see p370.

AUTHORS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The team of authors who wrote this edition also have an eclectic list of favourite places for a bite in NSW:

- **Wildrice** (p93) in Sydney
- **Papadino's Pizzeria** (p131) in Lithgow
- **Balcony Bar & Restaurant** (p192) in Byron Bay
- **Cipriani** (p359) in Canberra
- **Betty & Muriel's** (p280) in Junee
- **Broken Earth Café & Restaurant** (p271) in Broken Hill
- **Selkirks** (p239) in Orange
- **Red Grapevine Restaurant & Bar** (p221) in Armidale
- **Pelicans** (p335) in Narooma
- **Silo** (p145) in Newcastle

www.eatlocal.com.au is a nifty website for reviews, photos, and sometimes even menus for restaurants in the Hunter Valley and Central Coast.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* puts out an annual restaurant guide, the *Good Food Guide*, that rates over 400 restaurants in NSW.

BILLS & TIPPING

The total at the bottom of a restaurant bill is all you really need to pay. It should include Goods and Services Tax (GST), as should menu prices, and there is no 'optional' service charge added. Waiters are paid a reasonable salary, so they don't rely on tips to survive. Often, though, especially in cities, people tip a little in a café, while the tip for excellent service can go as high as 15% in whizz-bang establishments.

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 you can be forgiven for using your 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 any other way.

If you're lucky enough to be invited over for dinner at someone's house, always take a gift such as a bottle of wine, flowers or a box of chocolates.

'Shouting' is a revered custom where people rotate paying for a round of drinks. Just don't leave before it's your turn to buy! At a toast, everyone should touch glasses and look at one another.

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.

In NSW, smoking is banned in restaurants, cafés and other eateries where food is consumed indoors, including pubs, so sit outside if you love to puff.

COOKING COURSES

Many good cooking classes are run by food stores such as **Simon Johnson's** (☎ 1800 655 522, 02-8244 8288; www.simonjohnson.com) *Talk Eat Drink* series in Sydney. Others are run by markets, such as the **Sydney Seafood School** (☎ 02-9004 1111; www.sydneyfishmarket.com.au).

Some longer courses for the inspired include the following.

Elise Pascoe Cooking School (☎ 02-4236 1666; www.cookingschool.com.au; Jamboree Valley) Food writer and renowned cook Elise Pascoe runs mostly weekend cooking classes in a stunning setting two hours south of Sydney.

Le Cordon Bleu (☎ 1800 064 802; www.lecordonbleu.com.au; Sydney) The original must-do French cooking course, from 10 weeks to five years (part-time).

Nan Tien Buddhist Temple (p321) Vegetarian cooking classes seasoned with t'ai chi and meditation.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Some essential culinary lingo:

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

Esky – a portable, insulated ice chest to hold your tinnies, before you pop them in your tinny holder. May be carried onto your *tinny*, too.

middy – a mid-sized glass of beer

nummits – delicious, can be an adjective or noun

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

sanger/sando/sambo – a sandwich

schooner – a big glass of beer; but not as big as a pint

snags – (aka surprise bags); sausages

Tim Tam – a commercial chocolate biscuit that lies close to the heart of most Australians

tinny – usually refers to a can of beer; also a small boat you go fishing in

Australians consume more than 206,000 tonnes of seafood per year.

The Australian Food & Wine website, run by two food writers who trained as chefs, has information on cooking schools, restaurants, cook books plus plenty of their own Modern Australian recipes. They'll email a monthly newsletter, too, www.campionandcurtis.com.

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