**AUSTRALIA**

**Australia**, officially the **Commonwealth of Australia**, is a country comprising the mainland of the [Australian continent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia_%28continent%29), the island of [Tasmania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tasmania) and numerous [smaller islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_Australia). It is the world's [sixth-largest country by total area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_dependencies_by_area).

Neighbouring countries include [**Indonesia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia), [**East Timor**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Timor)and[**Papua New Guinea**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua_New_Guinea) to the north; the [**Solomon Islands**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Islands)**,**[**Vanuatu**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu)and [**New Caledonia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Caledonia)to the north-east;and[**New Zealand**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand)to the south-east.

**States and territories**: Australia has six [states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federated_state):

[New South Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_South_Wales) (NSW), [Queensland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queensland) (QLD), [South Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Australia) (SA), [Tasmania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tasmania) (TAS), [Victoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_%28Australia%29)(VIC), and [Western Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Australia) (WA) — and two major [mainland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainland) territories — the [Australian Capital Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Capital_Territory) (ACT) and the[Northern Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Territory) (NT). In most respects these two territories function as states, but the Commonwealth Parliament can override any legislation of their parliaments.

Australia is **a Commonwealth**. The federal powers are mapped somewhat after those in the United States, but no bill of rights exists. Unlike the U.S., the individual territories retain significant authority over their own affairs.

**Geographic size**: 2.97 million square miles

**Capital:** Canberra (The capital is Canberra, but Sydney is the biggest city with 4.2 million people)

**Major cities**: Brisbane, Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, and Adelaide.

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| **Population:** 17.5 million, over 70% of Australians now live in cities or towns. Most of this population lives in the eastern and southern coasts, and around Perth in the west.**Language:** Although Australia has no official language, [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) has always been entrenched as the [*de facto*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_facto) national language. [Australian English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_English) is a major variety of the language with a distinctive accent and lexicon, and differs slightly from other varieties of English in grammar and spelling. The next most common languages spoken at home are Mandarin, Italian, Greek and Vietnaese  |

**Geography**

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| Australia has a very dramatic landscape. Australia is famous for its "outback," the remote lands of the interior.The **desert outback** covers most of the interior. It is too hot, dry and barren to support many people.Eastern Australia has large areas of grasslands, used primarily for sheep and cattle ranches. |
| Australia also has some **mountainous areas** and **plateaus** scattered throughout the country. **The Blue Mountains,** on the south-eastern end of Australia, get their name from the blue haze caused by oil droplets given off from the eucalyptus trees. As an island, Australia also has many beautiful coastal beaches.On the far northern coast, Australia is home to one of the amazing sites in the world. **The** **great barrier reef** is a water enthusiasts dream. With incredible plant life, the reef is world renowned as a diver's paradise. A watchful eye is advised given the presence of the Great White Shark in the area.**Climate**: Much of Australia has a continental climate. The temperatures get hot during the day, then drop considerably at night. Australia is also very arid, getting very little rain.**Economy:** A highly [developed country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developed_country), Australia is the [world's 12th-largest economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28nominal%29) and has the world's [fifth-highest per capita income](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28nominal%29_per_capita). Australia's military expenditure is the [world's 13th-largest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures). With the [second-highest human development index globally](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index), Australia ranks highly in many international comparisons of national performance, such as quality of life, health, education, [economic freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_freedom), and the protection of [civil liberties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_liberties) and political rights. Australia is a member of the [G20](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G-20_major_economies), [OECD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development), [WTO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Organization), [APEC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia-Pacific_Economic_Cooperation), [UN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations), [Commonwealth of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations), [ANZUS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ANZUS) and the [Pacific Islands Forum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Islands_Forum).**Major industries**: Australia's major industries are mining and farming. Mining includes bauxite, coal, copper, gold and iron ore. Most of the land is too dry for planting crops, although some areas do grow sugarcane, grapes and wheat. The grape vineyards help to support a growing wine industry. Australia is probably best known for its sheep farming. Large numbers of sheep are raised for their wool and meat. There is also some cattle ranching to provide meat.**History**: The Native Australians, or Aborigines, have lived in Australia for at least 40,000 years. In 1788, the British founded a **prison colony** on the east coast of Australia, in New South Wales. As more Europeans moved to Australia, the Aborigines were driven from their land. Australia is still part of the British commonwealth. |

**Animals**: Australia is home to many animals not found anywhere else in the world. These include the kangaroos, and koala

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