



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration  
and Citizenship**

# Life in Australia



Life in Australia

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The Interpreter Symbol is a national public information symbol developed by the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs in partnership with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The symbol provides a simple way of indicating where people with limited English proficiency can ask for language assistance when using government services.

You may see the symbol in places that deliver government and community information and services such as public hospitals, police stations, state schools, community centres, housing and employment offices, local councils and migrant resource centres.

The Interpreter Symbol was officially launched in Victoria in May 2006.

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# Introduction



This book is intended for people who are applying for a visa to live in Australia, either permanently or on a temporary basis. It provides an overview of Australia, its history, way of life and the values we share.

As part of the visa application process, many visa applicants must confirm that they will respect Australian values and obey the laws of Australia.

Australian values include respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and secular government, freedom of association, support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, equality under the law, equality of men and women, equality of opportunity and peacefulness. They also include a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces fair play, mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good.

It is also important to understand that English is the national language and is an important unifying element of Australian society.

People who have been living in Australia for some time may also find the book useful, particularly those who work with migrants or who have relatives or friends who have recently arrived in Australia.

The Australian Government encourages new residents to learn as much as they can about Australia, its heritage, language, customs, values and way of life and to apply for Australian citizenship when they become eligible and become an integral part of Australian society as soon as possible.

If you are a new arrival, welcome to Australia. You will be living in a country that is stable, prosperous and democratic.

You will also be joining a culturally diverse but cohesive society made up of Australians of many backgrounds, united by shared values and responsibilities.

## If you want to know more

For more information on specific topics, go to the relevant websites and other sources listed throughout the book.

For guidance on living and working in Australia, go to the Living in Australia section of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's (DIAC) website ([www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)).

For more detailed information on settling in Australia, go to the series of booklets called *Beginning a Life in Australia*, also available on the DIAC website. These booklets are available in English and many other languages and there is a different one for each Australian state and territory. For useful local information and contact details, go to the book dealing with the state or territory where you will be living.

If you are approved under the offshore Humanitarian Programme, you are encouraged to attend an Australian Cultural Orientation Programme (AUSCO) before leaving for Australia. The programme, which provides information about travelling to and settling in Australia, is held in various locations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Additional copies of this book are available from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on request, or from the department's website.

# Australian Values Statements

## Australian Values Statement for provisional and permanent visa applicants

Applicants for provisional, permanent and a small number of temporary visas are required to have read, or had explained to them, material made available by the Australian Government on life in Australia, which is contained in this book. These applicants are also asked to understand what may be required of them if they later apply for Australian citizenship. This statement is included in affected visa application forms and all applicants aged 18 years or over will need to sign the statement.

### Australian Values Statement

You must sign this statement if you are aged 18 years or over.

*I confirm that I have read, or had explained to me, information provided by the Australian Government on Australian society and values.*

*I understand:*

- *Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, commitment to the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, equality of men and women and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good.*
- *Australian society values equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their race, religion or ethnic background.*
- *The English language, as the national language, is an important unifying element of Australian society.*

*I undertake to respect these values of Australian society during my stay in Australia and to obey the laws of Australia.*

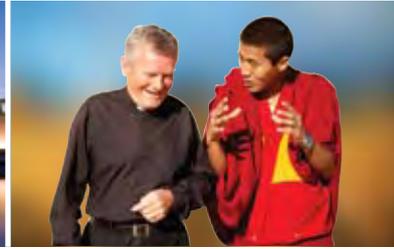
*I understand that, if I should seek to become an Australian citizen:*

- *Australian citizenship is a shared identity, a common bond which unites all Australians while respecting their diversity.*
- *Australian citizenship involves reciprocal rights and responsibilities. The responsibilities of Australian citizenship include obeying Australian laws, including those relating to voting at elections and serving on a jury.*
- *If I meet the legal qualifications for becoming an Australian citizen and my application is approved, I understand that I would have to pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people.*

For internet applications, the main visa applicant will be asked to select a button to indicate either 'yes' or 'no' to the values statement. If the application includes dependants who are aged 18 years or over, there is an extra paragraph in the statement which reads:

*All other persons included in this application, who are aged 18 years or over, have advised me that they have read, or had explained to them, information provided by the Australian Government on Australian society and values and agree with the statement above.*

In these circumstances the applicant is making the statement on behalf of themselves and their dependants.



## Australian Values Statement for temporary visa applicants

Applicants for affected temporary visas must also sign an Australian Values Statement. Their statement is included in the general declaration section of the application, so signing the application form means that the values statement has also been signed. These applicants will not be required to have read this book, but may do so if they wish.

The following Australian Values Statement is included in most temporary visa application forms:

*I will respect Australian values as listed on this form, during my stay in Australia and will obey the laws of Australia.*

For internet applications, the statement is slightly different:

*I will respect Australian values as listed at the beginning of this application, during my stay in Australia and will obey the laws of Australia.*

For internet applications where there are dependants aged 18 years or over, there is an extra paragraph in the statement which reads:

*All other persons included in this application who are aged 18 years or over, have advised me that they also agree with this requirement.*

Applicants will be asked to select a button to indicate either 'yes' or 'no' to the values statement declaration on behalf of themselves and any dependants (if applicable).

# Australian values and principles

To maintain a stable, peaceful and prosperous community, Australians of all backgrounds are expected to uphold the shared principles and values that underpin Australian society.

These values provide the basis for Australia's free and democratic society. They include:

- respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual
- freedom of speech
- freedom of religion and secular government
- freedom of association
- support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law
- equality under the law
- equality of men and women
- equality of opportunity
- peacefulness
- a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion for those in need.

While shared to some extent by many other countries, these values and principles have been adapted to Australia's unique setting, shaped and modernised through the settlement in Australia of millions of people from all over the world. Although they may be expressed differently by different people, their meaning remains the same.

Australia's first inhabitants were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose unique culture and traditions are among the oldest in the world. The first migrants were mostly from Britain and Ireland and this Anglo-Celtic heritage has been a significant and continuing influence on Australia's history, culture and political traditions. Subsequent immigration waves have brought people from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe, all of whom have made their own unique contributions to Australia and its way of life.

This statement of shared values and principles does not seek to make everyone the same with the same beliefs. In fact, respect for the free-thinking individual and the right to be 'different' are foundations of Australian democracy.

The aim is to help new residents understand the basic values that have helped to create a society that is stable but at the same time dynamic; cohesive yet diverse.

In Australia, people have many freedoms. However, in taking advantage of these freedoms, everyone is required to obey Australia's laws, which have been put in place by democratically elected governments to maintain an orderly, free and safe society.

## • Fundamental freedoms

All Australians are entitled to a number of fundamental freedoms (within the bounds of the law), including speaking freely and openly, joining associations, holding meetings, worshipping their chosen religions and moving throughout Australia without restrictions.



## • Respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual

All Australians are free and equal and are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect.

Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability and age in a range of areas of public life under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Age Discrimination Act 2004*. There is a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission which is responsible for handling complaints under these laws.

Australians reject the use of violence, intimidation or humiliation as ways of settling conflict in our society.

### Information online

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [www.hreoc.gov.au](http://www.hreoc.gov.au).

## • Freedom of speech

All Australians are free, within the bounds of the law, to say or write what they think about Australian governments or about any other subject or social issue as long as they do not endanger people, make false allegations or obstruct the free speech of others.

The same applies to Australian newspapers, radio and television and other forms of media. Australians are free to protest the actions of government and to campaign to change laws.

Freedom of speech allows people to express themselves and to discuss ideas. There are laws that protect an individual's good name against false information or lies. There are also laws against inciting hatred against others because of their culture, ethnicity or background.

## • Freedom of religion and secular government

All Australians are free to follow any religion they choose, so long as its practices do not break any Australian law. Australians are also free to not follow a religion. Religious intolerance is not acceptable in Australian society.

Australia has a secular government – it does not have any official or state religion. Governments treat all citizens as equal regardless of religion.

Religious laws have no legal status in Australia and only those laws enacted by parliament apply, for example, in divorce matters. Some religious or cultural practices, such as bigamy (being married to more than one person at the same time) are against the law in Australia.

## • Freedom of association

Subject to the law, Australians are free to gather together and to protest against the government or any other organisation as long as the protest is peaceful and does not damage or injure any people or property. The freedom to associate includes the freedom to join or not to join any organisation or group, provided it is legal. Such organisations and groups include political parties, trade unions and social groups.

- **Support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law**

Australia is a parliamentary democracy, which means that Australian citizens participate in how the country is governed and how Australian society is represented. Governments are accountable to all Australians. Elected parliaments are the only bodies able to make laws in Australia or delegate the authority to make laws.

Everyone in Australia must obey laws established by governments. Equally, all Australians are protected by the rule of law. This means that no-one is exempt from or 'above the law', even people who hold positions of power, like politicians or the police.

- **Equality under the law**

All Australians are equal under the law. This means that nobody should be treated differently from anybody else because of their race, ethnicity or country of origin; because of their age, gender, marital status or disability; or because of their political or religious beliefs. Government agencies and independent courts must treat everyone fairly.

Being treated equally means that getting a job or being promoted must be on the basis of a person's skills, ability and experience, not their cultural background or political beliefs. It also means that people cannot be refused service in a shop or hotel or other service facility because of their race, colour, religion, gender or marital status.

- **Equality of men and women**

Men and women have equal rights in Australia. Jobs and professions are open equally to women and men. Men and women can serve in the military and both can also hold positions in government.

- **Equality of opportunity and a spirit of egalitarianism**

Australians value equality of opportunity and what is often called a 'fair go'. This means that what someone achieves in life should be a product of their talents, work and effort rather than their birth or favouritism.

Australians have a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance and fair play. This does not mean that everyone is the same or that everybody has equal wealth or property. The aim is to ensure there are no formal class distinctions in Australian society.

- **Peacefulness**

Australians are proud of their peaceful society. They believe that change should occur by discussion, peaceful persuasion and the democratic process. They reject violence as a way of changing peoples' minds or the law.



In addition to these values, Australians also pursue the public good and have compassion for those in need.

There is a strong community spirit in Australia and Australians seek to enhance and improve the society in which they live.

Many Australians contribute to the community in their daily lives. They may demonstrate this through caring for the environment, lending a hand and working together in times of need in pursuit of the public good.

Australia has a strong tradition of 'mateship', where people provide help to others voluntarily, especially those in difficulty. A mate is often a friend but can also be a spouse, partner, brother, sister, daughter or son. A mate can also be a total stranger. There is also a strong tradition of community service and volunteering.

The values outlined above have been promoted and discussed by Australians over many years. They have helped Australia to welcome and integrate successfully millions of people from many ethnic groups and cultural traditions.

Australia's cultural diversity is a strength which makes for a dynamic society. Within the framework of Australia's laws, all Australians have the right to express their culture and beliefs.

But at the same time, all Australians are asked to make an overriding commitment to Australia – its laws, its values and its people.

# Australia – a snapshot

## Geography

Australia is one of the world's oldest land masses. It is the earth's biggest inhabited island and the sixth largest country in the world. It is also one of the driest, with just 6 per cent of its land considered suitable for agriculture.

Distances are vast and visitors are often surprised at the size of the country and how long it takes to travel from city to city. Australia stretches about 4000 kilometres from east to west and 3700 kilometres from north to south. It takes about five hours to fly from Sydney to Perth.

In total area, Australia is about the same size as the United States (not including Alaska), more than double the size of India and 32 times the size of the United Kingdom.

## The people

Australia's original inhabitants, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have been living in Australia for at least 40 000 years and possibly up to 60 000 years.

The rest of Australia's people are migrants or descendants of migrants who have come from nearly 200 countries since the start of European settlement of Australia in 1788.

In 1945, Australia's population was about seven million people. Since then, more than 6.5 million migrants, including around 675 000 refugees, have settled in Australia.

Today, Australia has a population of 21 million people, of which 43 per cent were either born overseas or have one parent who was born overseas.

Australians of all religious, racial, ethnic and social backgrounds live together in peace.

## Shared values

Although Australia's migrants have come from many different cultural and religious backgrounds, they have successfully settled in Australia and integrated into the broader community. Australia, in turn, has been enriched by the contributions they have made socially, culturally and economically.

An important feature of Australian society today is not only the cultural diversity of its people, but the extent to which they are united by an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia. Australians put aside their individual differences in the interests of living together as neighbours.

Within the framework of Australia's laws, all Australians have the right to express their culture and beliefs and to participate freely in Australia's national life. At the same time, everyone is expected to uphold the principles and shared values, as outlined in the introduction, that support Australia's way of life.



## Independent nation

Australia is an independent and outward looking nation with a strong economy. Its democratic institutions, cultural diversity and record of constructive international and regional engagement underpin its participation in world affairs.

In a dynamic and challenging international environment, Australia pursues bilateral, regional and multilateral strategies to advance its national interests, within a context of global responsibility.

## Strong economy

Australia has a strong market-based economy that is open, flexible and competitive. It has a stable and modern institutional structure that provides certainty to businesses and a welcoming environment for international investment.

Australia is also a major regional finance centre with reliable domestic and international transport systems, world-class information and telecommunication technology, a multilingual and highly skilled workforce and a system of regulation. The Australian Stock Exchange is the world's eighth largest listed exchange measured by market capitalisation.

Australia is a significant world trader, with its two-way trade in goods and services valued at more than \$400 billion – about 1 per cent of total world trade. Japan is Australia's largest trading partner, followed by China, the United States, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea.

## Information online

- Australian Bureau of Statistics [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au).
- Australian Government information and services [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au).
- Australian Government Recreation and Culture Portal [www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au](http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au).
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [www.dfat.gov.au/geo/australia](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/australia).

## Facts and figures

National capital	Canberra
Surface area	7.74 million square kilometres
Mainland coastline	35 877 kilometres
Coastline including off-shore islands	59 736 kilometres
Percentage of arable land	6 per cent
Population	21 million
Proportion born overseas	Almost 22 per cent
Language	English
Percentage of people who speak a second language at home	15 per cent
Currency	Australian dollars (\$A)
Main trading partners	Japan, China, United States, Singapore, United Kingdom, Republic of Korea
Workforce	10.28 million
Time – Australia has three standard time zones	East: GMT + 10 Central: GMT + 9.5 West: GMT + 8
Daylight saving (standard time + 1)	Daylight saving time is observed by New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia from early to late October to the end of March.
<b>Key dates</b>	
National day – Australia Day	26 January
Easter	Between late March and late April each year
Anzac Day	25 April
Remembrance Day	11 November
Christmas Day	25 December



## National symbols

### Australia's name

The name Australia derives from the Latin word *Australis*, meaning 'of the south'. For centuries, it was legend that there was an unknown great south land – *Terra Australis Incognita*. The description was used in writings about exploration to the region.

The name Australia gained popular use following the publication in 1814 of Matthew Flinders' account of circumnavigation of the continent, *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, in which he used the name Australia. Governor Lachlan Macquarie subsequently used it in his official reports and recommended it be adopted. In 1824, the British Admiralty agreed that the continent be officially named Australia.

### The Australian National Flag

The Australian National Flag was raised for the first time in Melbourne on 3 September 1901. The flag has a dark blue background, with the Union Jack in the upper left corner, acknowledging the history of British settlement of Australia.

The five stars of the Southern Cross constellation represent Australia's geographic position in the southern hemisphere. In 1908, the six-pointed star representing the six states was replaced by a seven-pointed star, the seventh point to represent the two territories.

Each Australian state and territory also has its own flag.

### Commonwealth Coat of Arms



The Commonwealth Coat of Arms, which is used to identify the authority and property of the Commonwealth of Australia, was granted by King George V in 1912. It comprises a shield containing the badges of the six Australian states, symbolising federation. The design also features the golden wattle (Australia's floral emblem), the kangaroo and the emu.

### National colours

Green and gold have been Australia's national colours since April 1984.

### Floral emblem

The golden wattle, *Acacia pycnantha*, has been Australia's floral emblem since August 1988.

### National gemstone

The opal was proclaimed Australia's national gemstone in 1993.

### Animal emblem

Many people regard the kangaroo as Australia's national animal emblem, but it has never been officially proclaimed.

## National day

Australia Day is celebrated every year on 26 January, commemorating the anniversary of the landing of Governor Arthur Phillip at Sydney Cove in 1788.

## National anthem

Advance Australia Fair was composed by Peter Dodds McCormick in 1878 and became the national tune in the late 1970s. It was proclaimed Australia's national anthem in April 1984.

The words are:

*Australians all let us rejoice,  
For we are young and free;  
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;  
Our home is girt by sea;  
Our land abounds in nature's gifts  
Of beauty rich and rare;  
In history's page, let every stage  
Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.*

*Beneath our radiant Southern Cross  
We'll toil with hearts and hands;  
To make this Commonwealth of ours  
Renowned of all the lands;  
For those who've come across the seas  
We've boundless plains to share;  
With courage let us all combine  
To Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.*

## Australian honours and awards

Australia's distinctive honours system started in 1975 with the creation of the Order of Australia, to recognise service to the nation or humanity as well as the Australian Bravery Decorations and the National Medal.

The Australian honours system is free of patronage or political influence. Anyone in the community can nominate an Australian citizen for an honour. An independent council makes the selections.

Honours help define, encourage and reinforce national aspirations, ideals and standards by identifying role models. Australia gives honours to recognise, celebrate, and say thank you to those who make a difference, those who achieve their best and those who serve others.

## Information online

- Australian honours, awards and symbols [www.itsanhonour.gov.au](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au).
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet [www.dpmc.gov.au](http://www.dpmc.gov.au).

